

## CHAPTER 5

# Spetsnaz Engineers in the Great Patriotic War: An Overview

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The doctrinal lineage of modern *spetsnaz* has many roots. Most famous among its ancestors are the special designation forces of Soviet state security (NKVD/KGB) and military intelligence (GRU) which saw action in the Russian Civil War, the 1920 Russo-Polish War, the Spanish Civil War, and the Great Patriotic War (World War II). Often overlooked is the strong strain of combat assault engineering in the *spetsnaz* bloodline.

Rear area engineer *razvedka* (reconnaissance) and demolition operations at the tactical and operational levels of war are longstanding aspects of Soviet military doctrine and practice.<sup>1</sup> Such activities are part of the Soviet Army's long history of innovation and specialization to meet battlefield engineering demands. Faced with unique engineering requirements, the Soviets have often tailored existing organizations or created entirely new formations as the situation dictated.

In the late 1920s, for example, the Ukrainian Military District organized a special partisan task force charged with the demolition of critical facilities and commodities along the border with Poland and Rumania as a wartime contingency. According to one of the members of this force, Ilya Grigorevich Starinov,<sup>2</sup> the task force was responsible for development of demolition technology (possibly including some form of barrier penetration study), establishing contingency caches of explosives, and training special teams to carry out demolition tasks. Primary targets of

these teams were the key points and rolling stock of the Soviet rail system, their objective being to deny use of this system to an invading enemy.

According to Starinov, more than sixty such demolition teams with an average strength of twenty-three persons each (including some females) were trained, involving approximately 1,400 personnel. Every demolitions expert (*miner*) was also a parachutist, radio operator, and master of camouflage (*maskirovka*).<sup>3</sup> In fall 1932 Starinov and some of his personnel jumped into the Leningrad Military District on an exercise to demonstrate their skill in operations in the enemy rear. Their mission was to

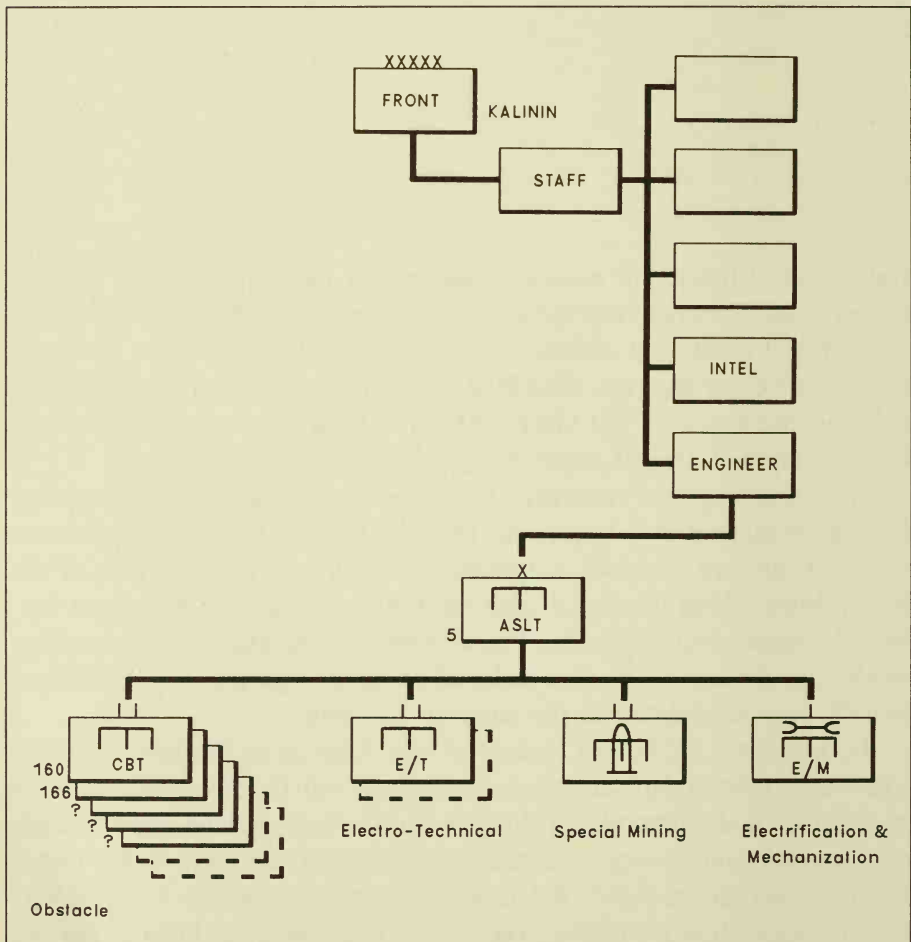


Figure 1. Possible organization and subordination of the 5th Separate Spetsnaz Engineer Brigade.

capture a headquarters and destroy transportation facilities. They placed ten mines on a ten-kilometer stretch of track (one mine blew up under the wheels of a commuter train before they could remove it), caused a panic in a village with the detonation of three incendiary practice mines, and generally created a stir in the exercise headquarters. At one point, Starinov was personally ejected from the exercise, but he was subsequently reinstated.<sup>4</sup>

Although primarily an engineering effort, this program was closely related to the GRU's creation of special partisan cadre who would conduct "stay behind" operations in the enemy rear in the event of invasion. Gradually, however, the threat of foreign invasion subsided, conventional "deep battle" theorists replaced the advocates of partisan warfare as primary defense of the Russian Revolution, and Starinov and his fellow demolitionists were absorbed into the Red Army. However, the partisan program was destroyed, and most of the personnel associated with it were killed, during Stalin's purges in the late 1930s,<sup>5</sup> possibly because Stalin feared the program was a threat to his own regime.

## Engineer Spetsnaz in Combat

Nonetheless, Starinov (as a Military Engineer, 3rd class) and others with backgrounds in special operations demolitions did see action during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, when their skills were employed in the 14th Special Corps and its predecessor units. The Soviets made good use of the combat engineer skills of veterans of the 14th. In July 1941, shortly after the outbreak of war with Germany, Colonel Starinov and other Spanish Civil War *spetsnaz* combat engineering veterans established and ran the GRU's Operations Training Center of the Western Front, a main GRU sabotage school. In April 1942, Starinov and other Spanish Civil War veterans were also instrumental in creating the first major *spetsnaz* engineer unit of the war, the 5th Separate Spetsnaz Engineer Brigade.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the war, *spetsnaz* combat engineer units made significant contributions to delaying and blocking enemy advances, defeating fortified enemy positions, disrupting the movement of enemy reserves, and diverting front-line troops to rear area security through missions conducted in enemy rear areas. Most were committed at the operational level to improving defensive belts around critical terrain features and population centers

during the German offensives at the beginning of the war, and in penetrating and clearing enemy fortified zones when the Soviets went on the counteroffensive. The 5th Brigade and similar units made use of such advanced demolition and barrier technology as remote-controlled and command-detonated mine fields, electrified wire barriers, and the like.<sup>7</sup> According to Col. A. A. Soskov, depending on their size, these *spetsnaz* engineer brigades could emplace between twenty thousand and thirty-five thousand antitank mines, or open 135 to 190 pathways through enemy mixed mine fields, in twelve hours.<sup>8</sup>

At the outset of World War II, small groups of *miners* (demolition experts) were created from standing engineer units for reconnaissance and "diversionary" activities against fortifications and lines of communication (LOCs) in the enemy rear.<sup>9</sup> By mid-1942, such units were active on all Soviet fronts. In the offensive in the Moscow area, reconnaissance-*miner* detachments of three to five men each were created in all combat engineer and engineer battalions. These detachments were sent into enemy rear areas on missions lasting several days, demolishing bridges and roadbeds on highways and railroads, destroying enemy equipment, killing enemy soldiers, and collecting engineer information and other intelligence. In February 1942, for example, *miners* of the Western Front destroyed five bridges and planted 720 mines in the enemy rear.

In June 1942, the 160th and 166th Engineer Obstacle Battalions of the 5th Brigade, then commanded by Col. F. B. Ab, were assigned activities in the enemy rear on the Kalinin Front. In all, 159 teams from the 160th and 166th were sent into the enemy rear, where they blew up thirty-two enemy trains, five railroad and highway bridges, thirty-two automobiles, and an ammunition dump, and killed more than six hundred enemy soldiers.

## Guards Miners

Soviet effectiveness in reconnaissance and diversion against enemy LOCs and fortifications increased with the August 1942 creation by edict of the People's Commissariat of Defense of the USSR of specially trained separate guards battalions of *miners* (*otdelnyy gvardeyskiy batal'on minerov*, abbreviated OGBM). By October 1942, there was one such battalion in every operational Front and one brigade in Stavka reserve.<sup>10</sup> The utilization of such battalions in the enemy rear was controlled from

the headquarters of the chief of engineer troops of each Front, which closely coordinated such activities with the headquarters of the partisans of the *oblast* (republic) on whose territory the Front was operating. In the years 1943–1944, guards *miners* derailed five hundred seventy-six trains and five armored trains, blew up approximately three hundred tanks and self-propelled guns, six hundred fifty wheeled vehicles and armored cars, more than three hundred rail and highway bridges, and killed or wounded thousands of enemy soldiers.<sup>11</sup>

OGBM troops were selected on the basis of devotion to the Motherland (political reliability), moral courage, valor, and physical endurance. Most, if not all, OGBM troops were Communists or Komsomolists, aged eighteen to thirty years, and sportsmen or hunters. Enlisted troops were trained in the use of Soviet and German demolitions. OGBM troops were also trained in parachuting, the use of a map and compass, and terrain orientation.

The main mode of employment of OGBM assets was to infiltrate small groups into several sectors of the enemy rear for simultaneous strikes on enemy LOCs in support of offensive action by conventional Soviet formations. Once given their mission, these groups would normally cross the front lines at night, through gaps and junctions of enemy units. Sometimes, they were delivered to the enemy rear by transport aircraft, the chosen landing zone being about fifteen kilometers from the objective.

OGBM *miners* usually operated with partisans. They trained the partisans in demolitions and targeting, and gave them demolition supplies. The partisans, in turn, provided the *miners* with area and target intelligence, and information and guidance for the approach to targets. Occasionally, partisans provided security for the *miners* when they were placing their charges.

Most OGBM demolitions were emplaced at night. Delayed action mines (*mina zamedlennogo deystviya*, or MZD) were often used, because of their strong psychological impact on the enemy. According to S. Kh. Aganov,<sup>12</sup> these mines were often used to deny enemy use of several sections of a rail line, and to force the enemy to build bypasses.

In preparation for the Smolensk offensive at the end of July 1943, nine groups totalling 316 men from the 5th Brigade and the 10th OGBM were inserted by airplane into the enemy rear to simultaneously destroy enemy rail lines to a depth of three hundred kilometers on order from the commander of the Kalinin Front. After the order was given, the *miners* blew up more than 3,500 rails with an aggregate length of seven hundred kilo-

meters, seriously disrupting the movement of enemy reserves and significantly aiding the Soviet offensive.

On the night of 11 March 1943, a twenty-three-man platoon of the 9th OGBM of the Northwestern Front, commanded by Lt. I. P. Kovalev, was parachuted into the enemy rear in an area thirty kilometers northwest of Novorzhev. On the ground, the *miners* made contact with the 1st Partisan Regiment of the 3rd Partisan Brigade. The *miners* and partisans went into action on 17 March, conducting four demolition operations on railroads and highways on that day. Over the next seven months, until 16 October, the *miners* derailed sixteen military trainloads of men and equipment, and destroyed seventeen bridges, more than eight thousand linear meters of track bed, nearly fifteen hundred meters of telephone wire, several dozen motor vehicles, two tanks, an armored car, eight truckloads of ammunition, and, with the partisans, killed approximately five hundred enemy soldiers. In one of the operations with the partisans providing security, the OGBM troops on 24 August destroyed the fifty-six-meter-long railroad bridge across the Keb' River with four fifty-kilogram explosive charges placed under the bridge piers, cutting that rail line for several days. For his actions in this period, Kovalev was named Hero of the Soviet Union, and all soldiers and sergeants in his platoon were awarded the Order of the Patriotic War or the Red Star.

OGBM troops were also used as tank destroyers on LOCs in the immediate enemy rear. In the July 1943 fighting in the Kursk Salient, for example, the 1st Guards Special Purpose Engineer Brigade was credited with destroying 140 German tanks and self-propelled guns, and inflicting up to 2,500 German casualties.<sup>13</sup> The 13th OGBM operated this way in the vicinity of Bogodukhov and Akhturka in August 1943. During the Kiev operation, forty-seven tank destroyer teams of the 13th operated in the enemy rear. In two years of combat, the teams of the 13th destroyed 93 tanks, 11 self-propelled guns, 214 automobiles, 9 large trains, and 4 bridges and killed more than 2,000 Germans.<sup>14</sup>

## Petsamo-Kirkenes

During the preparatory period of the October 7 to 30, 1944, Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation to clear the Germans from the approaches to Murmansk, the headquarters of engineer troops of the Karelian Front planned operations in the enemy rear by three detachments from the 6th OGBM

and the 222d Motorized Assault Combat Engineer Battalion of the 20th Motorized Assault Combat Engineer Brigade (one of five motorized engineer brigades under the chiefs of the engineer troops of the various Fronts). The first detachment, 133 men from the 6th OGBM in two companies, went into the enemy rear on 18 September. The two remaining detachments, 108 men from the 222d, and 49 men from the 6th OGBM, went in on 2 October. Several hours before the beginning of the offensive, the detachments received the order by radio to go into action. Over the course of fifteen days, the detachments conducted reconnaissance and demolition operations, destroying 20.6 kilometers of telephone wire, eleven bridges and several score trucks, killing 452 Germans and capturing forty-five, and suffering only eight wounded in action. In Aganov's estimation, these *spetsnaz* engineer activities made the success of the 14th Army possible. About half of the men who operated in the enemy rear were decorated with awards and medals for their exemplary fulfillment of their mission.

## The Far East

As the war with Germany drew to a close, *spetsnaz* engineers were redeployed to the Far East in preparation for the Manchurian campaign against the Japanese.<sup>15</sup> Among the units transferred was the 20th Brigade, which was assigned to the 1st Far Eastern Front. The first operational combat mission of the 20th was the seizure and neutralization of the defenses of a complex of three railroad tunnels near Suifenho. The tunnels were located one to three kilometers from the Sino-Soviet border, were on the avenue of advance of the 5th Army, and could not be bypassed.

The Japanese defenses were attacked in the predawn hours of 9 August by two detachments of the 20th. Each detachment comprised one assault battalion, one company of flame throwers, two platoons of submachine-gunners, and a group of artillery observers. These detachments were also supported by an armored train and two battalions of Front artillery. By morning on 9 August, the detachments had defeated the Japanese defenses, permitting the forward detachment of the 187th Rifle Division to capture the tunnels intact and secure entry of the 5th Army into the Manchurian heartland.

Subsequent to the Suifenho operation, and after the Japanese capitulation, special detachments of the 20th were airlanded more than 250 kilo-

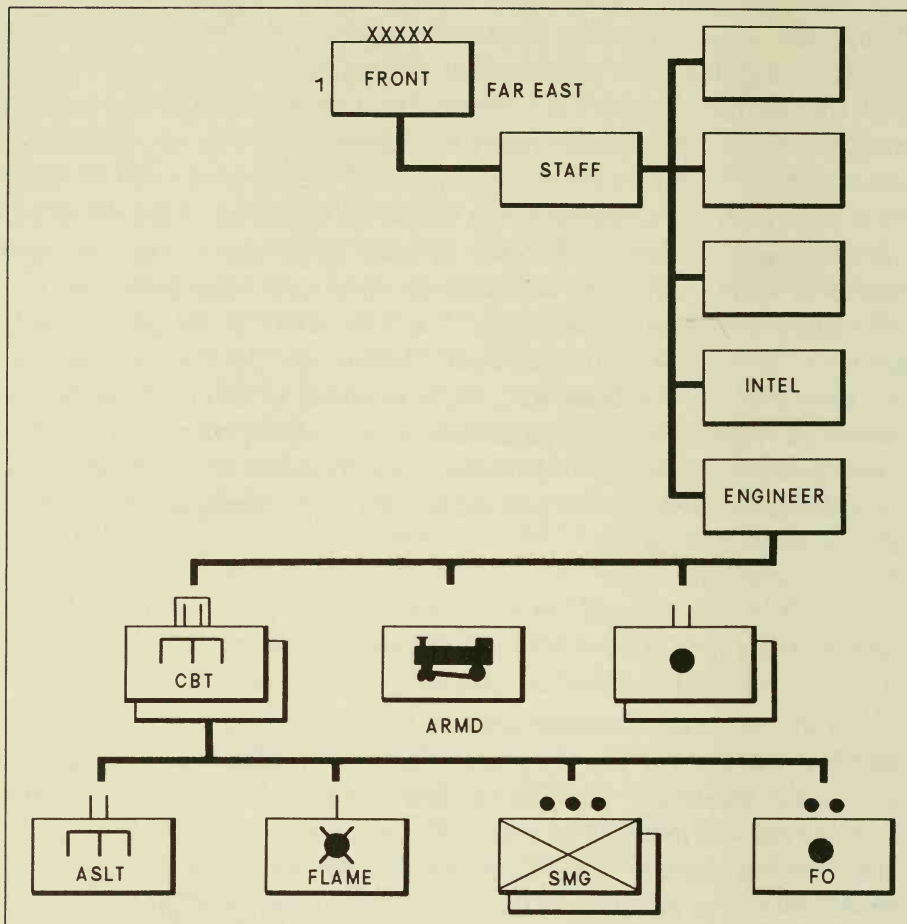


Figure 2. Possible organization and subordination of the Suifenho tunnels *spetsnaz* detachments.

meters into hostile territory at Harbin (120 men on 18 August) and Kirin (150 men on 19 August) to accompany Front plenipotentiaries who negotiated the surrender of Japanese garrisons there. These detachments, for the most part made up of men who had fought in the Suifenho operation, took the Japanese defenders by surprise. On landing, as negotiations progressed, they quickly captured key bridges, rail yards, radio stations, telephone and telegraph offices, banks and other critical installations to prevent destruction or removal by the Japanese. The assault force landing



at Harbin also captured Kwantung Army chief of staff General Hata and several other senior Japanese officers.

## Conclusions

*Spetsnaz* combat engineer capabilities as they existed over forty years ago played an important role in the theory and practice of deep battle against the Germans. Moreover, the spirit of this capability remains, as seen in the continued Soviet emphasis at operational and tactical levels on engineer *razvedka* and direct action to help commanders see and shape the battlefield.

Based on their past performance, it can be argued that current Soviet engineer units at operational echelons may present at least a latent *spetsnaz* "deep operation" capability that has been largely overlooked. It could mean that the Soviet Army has the potential, through augmentation and supplementary selection and training, to rapidly reform ostensibly conventional, frontline units into forces for deep raiding and reconnaissance. If so, this would represent an economical and operationally secure way for the Soviets to quickly expand and modify their *spetsnaz* capabilities to meet specific contingencies. Whether or not it is the Soviet intent to maintain a latent engineer *spetsnaz* capability, the deep operation potential of Soviet combat engineer units must be recognized.

## Notes

1. See Col. David M. Glantz, *Soviet Operational Intelligence in the Kursk Operation (July 1943)* (Fort Leavenworth KS: Soviet Army Studies Office, August 1988): 6, 7, 18, 21, 22, 28, 31.
2. Information about Starinov is derived from Ilya Grigorevich Starinov, *Miny zhut svoego chasa* (The Mines Await Their Hour) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1964): 76, trans. Owen A. Lock and James F. Gebhardt.
3. *Ibid.*, 34.
4. *Ibid.*, 41–42.
5. *Ibid.*, 157.
6. Col. A. A. Soskov, "Sovershenstvovanie organizatsionnoy struktury inzhenernykh voysk v gody velikoy otechestvennoy" (Improvements in the Organization of Engineering Troops During World War II), *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 12/1985, 66 and 68 (table), trans. Owen A. Lock.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Most of the information in this chapter on *miners* is derived from the following translations by James F. Gebhardt: S. Kh. Aganov, ed., *Inzhenernyye voyska sovetskoy armii 1918–1945* (Engineer Troops of the Soviet Army 1918–1945) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985): 459–463; Arkadii F. Khrenov, *Mostu k pobede* (Bridges to Victory) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982): 336–344; V. F. Margelov, et al., *Sovetskie vozdušno-desantnye: voенно-istoricheskii ocherk* (Soviet Airborne Assault Forces: A Military-Historical Outline) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986): 296–299; Kirill A. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narody* (In Service to the People) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983): 391, 411, 413; and N. P. Suntsov et al., *Krasnoznamennyi dal 'nevostochnui: istoriia krasnoznamennogo dal 'nevostochnogo voennogo okruga* (Red Banner Far East: The History of the Red Banner Far East Military District) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985): 202.
10. *Sovetskaia voennaia entsiklopedia* (Soviet Military Encyclopedia) 5 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978): 290.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Aganov, 460.
13. Lt. Gen. M. Kushnikov, "Toilers in the War," *Voennii Vestik*, 5/1985, 78–81 (undated English translation).
14. Aganov, 462.
15. Information on engineer *spetsnaz* activities in the Far East is derived from Khrenov, Meretskov, Margelov, and Suntsov, *ops. cit.*

## CHAPTER 6

# The Far North Origin of Naval Spetsnaz<sup>1</sup>

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William H. Burgess III

There is a large body of historical materials on the World War II special operations in two of the four Soviet fleets (the Northern and the Pacific): contemporary Soviet press accounts, German war diary entries, postwar memoirs, official histories, monographs, and many other secondary sources. Using as many of these sources as are available, this chapter explores the development of *spetsnaz* in the Northern Fleet and describes the repertoire of their actions against the Germans in the Far North from 1941 to 1944. It concludes with an analytical summary establishing these forces as a legitimate precursor of present-day Soviet naval *spetsnaz*.

The Soviets have a long history of clandestine and covert special operations in the Far North countries of Finland, Sweden, and Norway. The beginning of the current Soviet special operations capabilities in the area may have been in short-range submarine reconnaissance operations believed to have been undertaken along the Barents Sea coasts of Finland and Norway during the mid-1930s, and similar reconnaissance conducted in the Baltic Sea by then, if not earlier, against Sweden and Finland.<sup>2</sup> Although not clearly established, ground reconnaissance and/or the dropping off or recovery of agents may have occurred on at least some of these voyages.

The alleged first wartime employment of the Soviet *spetsnaz* in the Far North occurred during the 1939 to 1940 Winter War with Finland, at a point when such capabilities were relatively primitive. During the

war, the Finns feared the threat of fifth column traitors (which, to Stalin's dismay, never materialized) and occasional enemy agents. The Finns also allege that the Soviets parachuted "descanti" (*desanti*), or assault teams of Finnish-speaking Soviet Inkeris (a tribe from near Leningrad) behind Finnish lines. The effect of such operations was limited, although rumor of them did cause Field Marshal Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim to consent to the presence of a small personal bodyguard at his headquarters.<sup>3</sup> It is also alleged that Gen. Khadzhi-Umar Mamsurov, a distinguished GRU officer with substantial special operations experience in the Spanish Civil War, brought a *spetsnaz* unit of about fifty men to the front in an effort to capture Finnish soldiers for intelligence purposes. Mamsurov's operation apparently also failed.<sup>4</sup>

## Early Development in the Northern Fleet

At the very beginning of the Soviet-German war, Fleet Admiral A. G. Golovko, Commander of the Northern Fleet, urgently needed immediate intelligence on German land forces in northern Norway and Finland. Starting only ninety kilometers west of the fleet main base at Poliarnyi (north of Murmansk) a German corps-sized force had begun a land offensive on 29 June 1941 to capture Murmansk, the principal Soviet industrial and port city in the region.<sup>5</sup> Admiral Golovko was concerned lest an element split off from the offensive to attack his naval base overland, from the west. He was not sure that Soviet Army ground forces defending Murmansk could halt the Germans, nor did he believe he could depend on Army intelligence sources for his daily estimates of enemy locations, capabilities, and intentions.

The Northern Fleet also had a forward base on the northern side of Srednyi Peninsula, only thirty kilometers by sea from the German-controlled port of Petsamo. Although Soviet naval ground forces blocked the landward approaches to this base at the narrow Srednyi Isthmus, there was a possibility that the Germans would launch amphibious operations against Srednyi or Rybachii peninsulas, or against Soviet territory farther to the east. Such operations could be launched from Vardo and Vadso on the nearby Varanger Peninsula, as well as from Kirkenes or Petsamo. German air units based at Kirkenes and two forward airfields were also within striking range of Poliarnyi and Murmansk. Thus, Golovko needed his own ground reconnaissance force.

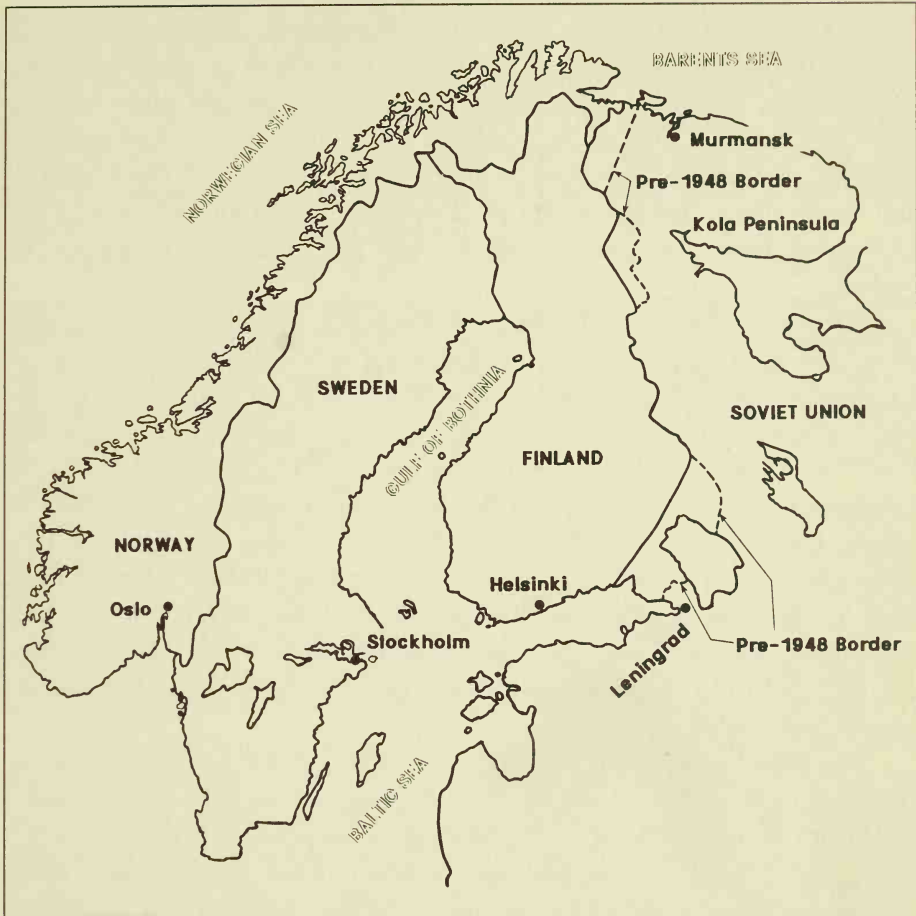


Figure 1. The countries of the Far North.

With these problems in mind, in the first days of the German offensive Golovko met with his intelligence staff and assigned tasks which they worked into a collection plan.<sup>6</sup> The area of most immediate concern was the coastline on the left flank of the German offensive. The second area of interest was the German corps rear area, particularly headquarters and lines of communication (LOCs). The third area of interest was Finnish and Norwegian ports where the Germans could be gathering the forces necessary for amphibious operations.

The chief of the intelligence section of the Fleet was Captain 3rd Rank (0-4 equivalent) P. A. Vizgin, who had served in the same capacity under

Golovko when the latter commanded the Amur River Flotilla.<sup>7</sup> Among Vizgin's subordinates were a major, four lieutenants, and an undisclosed number of enlisted men, all too few for the immediate assigned tasks. As all incoming personnel were being assigned to ships and other combat units, the decision was made to recruit volunteers from several sources, including the commercial fleet in Murmansk, civilian and Fleet athletic and sports clubs, and the group of Norwegian Communists living in the Murmansk area who had fled the 9 April 1940 German occupation of Norway.

The Fleet Chief of Staff, Admiral Kucherov, approved the collection plan, and on 5 July 1941 Admiral Golovko authorized the formation of a ground reconnaissance detachment with an initial fill of sixty-five to seventy.<sup>8</sup> The detachment's first complement was recruited from among the Fleet's athletes. To aid in the selection process, Vizgin and Major L. V. Dobrotin (Vizgin's deputy and a decorated cavalryman in World War I) sought the assistance of the Fleet physical training director, Captain Domozhirov, who personally knew all the leading athletes. They emphasized to him that they needed two platoons of men, seventy in all, and particularly wanted Communists and Komsomolists. At the urging of Vizgin and Dobrotin, Domozhirov joined the detachment and became its trainer and leader.

The detachment's first barracks was with the submarine brigade in Poliarnyi, where they would be "cut off from unnecessary eyes."<sup>9</sup> Training began immediately, with the urgency of impending combat deployment. The detachment was assigned its first combat mission just a week later, to reconnoiter the coastline east of Srednyi Isthmus and determine if the Germans had occupied positions along the southern shore of Motovskii Bay. The detachment departed Poliarnyi in two wooden fishing boats at 2300 on 13 July. Some wore army uniforms, some had gymnastic accessories, riding breeches or bell bottoms, quilted sweaters, and rucksacks on their backs. Most had helmets, but many kept their sailor caps on instead. Most of them had semiautomatic rifles and carried pouches with ammunition and grenades. As would become characteristic of Soviet *spetsnaz* operational security (OPSEC), the group was told that it was going on a special mission for the Fleet, but that they would not be told where they were going and what they would be doing until they got to the target.<sup>10</sup>

The detachment split into two groups, one-third and two-thirds. Both groups went ashore and penetrated into their assigned sectors. Senior

Lieutenant Lebedev's men found the road leading east from Titovka flanked by overhead telephone wires. After observing the road for three hours and seeing nothing, they pulled down the wire, pushed over several poles, and left, covering a total distance of fifty kilometers. Both groups were picked up and returned to base on 16 July. They reported to Golovko that the Germans were only sending small reconnaissance parties to the north of Titovka Road, and then only two to three kilometers.

The detachment quickly reached its initial strength goal of seventy men, and acquired a *zampolit* (political officer). The new deputy commander was Intendant 3rd Rank N. A. Inzartsev, who was previously the chief of the athletic department of the Fleet submarine force.<sup>11</sup> Among the personnel recruited to the detachment during this period were Viktor N. Leonov, who would later become its commander,<sup>12</sup> and Olga Paraeva, a female medic and Finnish interpreter.<sup>13</sup>

While this force trained for and conducted operations in the German tactical depth, Vizgin's staff prepared other smaller groups for deeper penetrations. Vizgin reported to Golovko the readiness of a group of seven men to reconnoiter the Kirkenes area, and Arctic Ocean Highway (German *Eismeerstrasse*, the road from Rovaniemi to Petsamo). He also had a group of eighteen Norwegians training for operations in Norway.<sup>14</sup>

In the detachment's second operation, on 19 July, twenty-five men landed from a single boat near the mouth of the Litsa River.<sup>15</sup> Part of the group was to reconnoiter the German encampment at Titovka, while the remainder was to attack a strongpoint and capture a prisoner. Both groups were to return to the landing site in three days. Twenty men moved off to the northwest where several hours later they engaged a German outpost, killed more than a dozen Germans, and searched the rucksacks and pockets of the dead. Three men in the group were killed and others wounded, but they returned to the shore with a prisoner. The five-man patrol to Titovka returned late, reporting that they did not reach their objective because of German activity.

Several more such operations followed and after these initial successes, the detachment suffered a major defeat in August. While returning from a successful raid on a Finnish army position near Cape Pikshuev,<sup>16</sup> the detachment was caught in the open sea and strafed by six German fighters. Eight men were killed and thirty wounded, over half the detachment's total strength including some of its most experienced leaders.<sup>17</sup> With Admiral Golovko's support, however, the detachment was reconstituted by mid-August. Among the new personnel was one Lieutenant F.

Nikolaev, who had served in a ski detachment during the 1939–1940 Winter War against Finland. Nikolaev, an accomplished skier, was ordered to establish a ski training program for the detachment and was sent to Leningrad to recruit other skiers and obtain the needed special equipment.<sup>18</sup>

Training of the newly-arrived personnel included day and night movement techniques in the peculiar terrain of the area, camouflage and concealment skills, the crossing of water obstacles, weapons handling, cross-country skiing, parachuting,<sup>19</sup> and reconnaissance-related skills. The approach of winter necessitated a search for clothing and footwear appropriate for the harsh climate. The items finally adopted reflected careful consultations with local reindeer herders and cross-country ski clubs. These items were light, warm, durable, and would protect not only men on the move, but also wounded personnel being carried in litters or on sleds.

In late August to early September the detachment attempted to mount an operation in cooperation with an Army reconnaissance element against the German airfield at Luostari. The Army reconnaissance force was as poorly prepared as the naval force was well prepared: The Army detachment had been organized less than a week. Men had been taken from jails in Murmansk, and promised exculpation of their guilt for participation in this mission. There were only two Communists and seven Kom-somolists among the more than eighty men. Operations security was very poor within the Army group, and their physical conditioning was not adequate for the task. Despite all these problems, the joint force managed to reach pre-positioned supplies, penetrate on foot into the objective area, and was only eight to ten kilometers from the airfield when one of the Army personnel deserted. Having lost the element of surprise, the commander of the composite force ordered withdrawal and return to base.<sup>20</sup> Although not all joint operations conducted with Army or naval infantry forces ended in this manner, henceforth the Fleet reconnaissance detachment preferred to operate independently.

The German offensive was still moving southeastward and by the end of August had penetrated to within forty-five kilometers of Murmansk and only fifty kilometers due west of Poliarnyi.<sup>21</sup> In response to this immediate threat, Admiral Golovko committed his untested 12th Naval Infantry Brigade. To fill some of the lower-level leadership positions with combat-experienced personnel, Golovko ordered Vizgin to provide eighty to ninety of his men. Vizgin was able to hold back only his ski detachments and the groups being prepared for insertion into Norway.<sup>22</sup>



As the German offensive spent itself against hastily formed and committed Soviet formations, Golovko and Vizgin planned the subsequent operations of the reconnaissance detachment. In September Golovko acquired a renewed interest in German activities in their Norwegian bases. Although the men who had been siphoned off to the naval infantry did not return, the detachment was reconstituted a second time and readied for new missions. Golovko promised Vizgin a pair of dedicated patrol torpedo boats for insertions and extractions, and also ordered Vizgin to develop a relationship with air units which would provide aircraft for jumping, and for delivering food and ammunition. Vizgin requested and received permission to plan also for the use of submarines.<sup>23</sup>

In September two small reconnaissance groups went out to determine the utility of land routes into and out of Norway should bad weather prevent the use of sea routes. One group, including three Norwegians, was inserted by an amphibious aircraft onto a lake from where they walked into the area between Nikel and Luostari and back out again. Their journey lasted ten days and covered three hundred kilometers. The other group reconnoitered the zone closer to the seacoast, marching nearly two hundred kilometers in a week.

The first insertion of Soviet special operations forces into the Varanger Peninsula occurred in late September 1941.<sup>24</sup> This force had two missions: (1) to determine the location, strength, and activities of German garrisons between Vardo and Vadso,<sup>25</sup> and (2) to establish contact with the Norwegian resistance as part of a plan of regional intelligence activities.<sup>26</sup> Although led by a Soviet lieutenant, half of the eighteen-man group were Norwegians. They boarded a submarine in Poliarnyi and proceeded toward their landing site at Langbunes, twenty kilometers south of Vardo. On 26 September, the group went ashore by rubber boat without incident, and remained in the German rear area until 15 November, continuously moving about the eastern portion of Varanger Peninsula to gain information and avoid capture. They reported their positions and activities by radio, made numerous contacts with Norwegian civilians, and on more than one occasion had to shoot their way clear of danger. Tight German population control measures prevented them from establishing contacts with the resistance, but they did learn much about the several small local German garrisons. Part of the group returned to Soviet control by fishing boat on 22 October, and the remainder were resupplied by air after that and picked up by a submarine on 15 November.

## Long-Range Reconnaissance in Norway

A conclusion drawn from the September-November 1941 operation on Varanger Peninsula was that a protracted, Soviet-sponsored partisan struggle there was not feasible. There was little cover or concealment, all the populated areas were concentrated along the coastline where the Germans could maintain tight observation and control, and the population base was too small to absorb strangers. The alternative to a partisan effort was special operations in the form of small groups of two or three men inserted into the Varanger Peninsula to monitor and report on German naval traffic. Targeting data thus obtained would then be used to vector naval air and submarine forces.<sup>27</sup>

The Soviets were aided by the presence in Murmansk of many Norwegian refugees who had fled the German occupation of their country in 1940. Many, but not all, of these Norwegians were communists and were thus politically reliable. Many were also experienced watermen who knew the coastal areas of Varanger Peninsula and other areas very well: From the small fishing village of Kiberg alone, forty-eight men went to the Soviet Union during the war. Many Norwegians came back to their home areas during the war as part of the Soviet coastwatching effort. For example, in October 1943 the Soviet submarine S-55 (skipped by Capt. 3rd Rank L. M. Sushkin) put ashore a three-man team at the foot of Hesten Cliff, just north of Bakfjord. The team was comprised of two Russians, Pavel Bogdanov and radioman Nikolai Sisov, and was led by Norwegian Arnulf Mathisen, a native of Kiberg. The team made daily contact with their Poliarnyi base, reporting on the ships coming through Rolvsøy Sound. They were extracted by an unidentified submarine in February 1944, but this did not end Soviet contact with the region: In 1948 Sisov returned to Bakfjord in a small boat to take Selmer Nilsen (subsequently arrested as a Soviet spy in connection with the May 1960 shooting down of Francis Gary Powers' U2) by force to the Soviet Union for espionage training.<sup>28</sup>

Late in 1941, Captain 3rd Rank Vizgin reported the preparation of five teams, each consisting of two Norwegians and one Soviet radio operator.<sup>29</sup> The commander of this group was Senior Lieutenant P. G. Sutiagin, and his political officer was a female, Krymova.<sup>30</sup> It was planned to deploy the first team in late December or early January, and the second team a few weeks later. Although the initial deployment areas were along the north coast of the Varanger Peninsula, Vizgin hoped to be placing

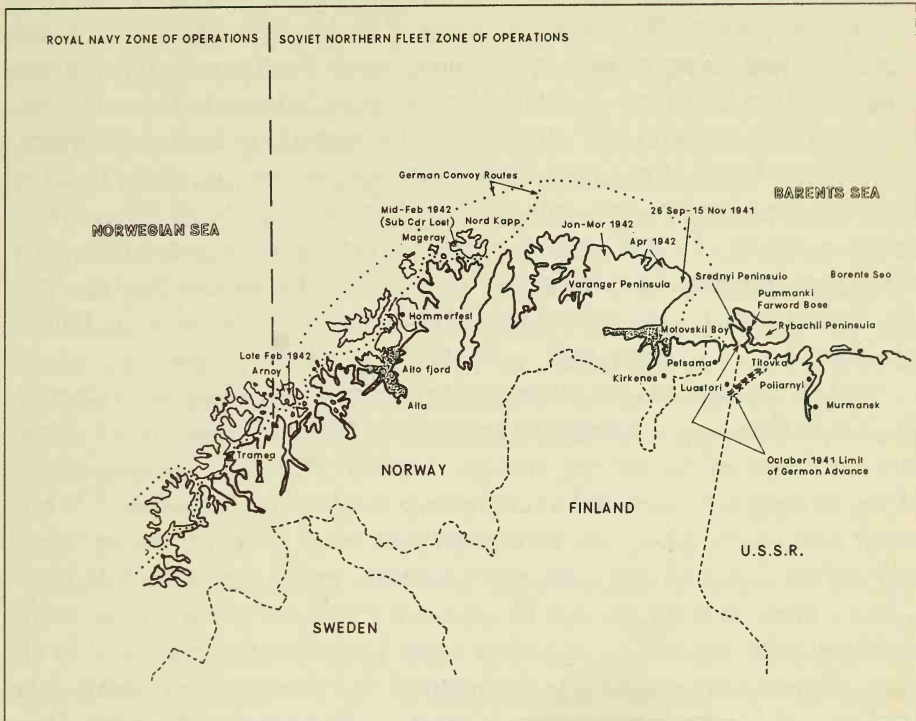


Figure 2. Naval *spetsnaz* operational areas in Norway, 1941-1942.

teams near Nordkapp (North Cape) and Tromsø in February. Thus, the Fleet intelligence staff could monitor German shipping along its entire route from the west coast of Norway into and out of Kirkenes, the main logistics base for German ground forces in the Murmansk area. In order to assure reliable radio communications, Vizgin requested from the Fleet Chief of Staff the establishment of a separate communications center, manned around the clock, for monitoring operations of these groups. The Chief of Staff also assured Vizgin of close air support, and the placing of reconnaissance specialists on ships.<sup>31</sup> The latter resulted in the inclusion in submarine crews of personnel specially trained for inserting and extracting reconnaissance teams by rubber boat, operations often accompanied by the platoon leader.

In early January 1942 the first team was inserted into the northern coast of Varanger Peninsula by submarine S-101, near Cape Nalneset (between Tanafjord and Kongsofjord).<sup>32</sup> This group operated in the area

between Berlevag and Cape Nalneset for two and a half months, reporting on German naval traffic and the activities of the local garrison. They maintained limited contacts with sympathetic local Norwegians from whom they obtained information about German population control measures, local military construction, and Soviet air operations against Kirkenes. They communicated regularly with their base, sometimes three times in a twenty-four-hour period, and listened to reports given by other coast-watching teams. By the end of March, however, their provisions were exhausted and they were in danger of exposure due to lengthening days. On 29 March they were alerted that a submarine was enroute to pick them up, and a few days later they were delivered to their base.

Not all attempts to land reconnaissance teams in Norway were successful. On 14 February, a submarine approached Mageroy Island (ten kilometers southwest of Nordkapp) and after careful periscope reconnaissance of the landing area surfaced to commence the landing operation.<sup>33</sup> While small boats were taking the reconnaissance team to shore, strong winds and currents pushed the submarine inshore, endangering it. The commander made another attempt to approach the shore to put off the team's supplies, without success. For three nights the submarine remained in the area, while a storm raged. On the night of 18 February it returned to the landing area, on the surface, only to discover German patrol vessels. During the ensuing crash dive, the submarine commander was left wounded on the conning tower, and was later believed to have been captured alive by the Germans. On shore, meanwhile, three men of the reconnaissance team and two sailors were left without food, special winter clothing, and other items of equipment necessary for their mission.<sup>34</sup>

Three days later, another team was lost in a similar incident.<sup>35</sup> A submarine was inserting them into Arnoy Island, northeast of Tromsø, on 21 February 1942. Encountering problems with high seas and winds, it managed to land the two Norwegians, but not the Soviet radio operator. Although some weeks later these two Norwegians linked up with another team on the Varanger Peninsula, the two incidents together clearly indicated the need for better training of submarine crews and reconnaissance teams in small boat handling.

The next reported insertion of a team into Norway was on 4 April 1942, just a day after the extraction of the team from Nalneset. Submarine M-173 landed three men on the southeast shore of Syltefjord.<sup>36</sup> This team ranged east and west along the coast between Kiberg and Hamningberg, maintaining limited contacts with Norwegian sympathizers. In early

May the two Norwegians who had been stranded on Arnoy in February joined them and passed all the information they had gathered about German activities in the Tromso area to their base by radio. The group remained in this area until sometime in the early autumn of 1942, resupplied periodically by air. Soviet sources credit them with providing information that led to the sinking of nine German transports.<sup>37</sup>

Although the insertions of these three-man reconnaissance teams continued through the remainder of 1942 and 1943,<sup>38</sup> the only reference to another specific operation in Soviet sources is in the early spring of 1944.<sup>39</sup> A three-man team parachuted into Varanger and survived nine months on the run, enduring the elements, hunger, and German patrols vectored by radio direction-finding teams. They were extracted by submarine from Varanger in the fall of 1944, with a German dog-equipped patrol in hot pursuit.

## Raids Into the Enemy Tactical and Operational Depth

By late September 1941 the front had stabilized in the vicinity of the Litsa River, some forty-five to fifty kilometers northwest of Murmansk. Vizgin used this time to build up the strength of his reconnaissance detachment and to train them. Intendant 3rd Rank Inzartsev had been promoted to captain and made commander of the detachment. Responding to requests for assistance from the 14th Army, Golovko authorized Vizgin to conduct a joint raid on German positions in the Titovka area.<sup>40</sup> On the night of 24 October a composite force of over one hundred men landed from small subchasers along the south shore of Motovskii Bay. They found a German garrison near the Titovka settlement and attacked it, setting fire to a number of vehicles, a gasoline storage tank, and ammunition stocks.<sup>41</sup> They returned to the pickup point on the morning of 25 October where four small boats extracted them.

During the winter of 1941-1942, the detachment made several unsuccessful attempts to go ashore from submarines between Rybachii Peninsula and Kirkenes.<sup>42</sup> The Germans had too many shore batteries, listening posts, and searchlight positions. Frequent winter storms and rough seas further complicated the Soviet effort. Unable to approach German installations from seaward, the detachment went to ground.

In November 1941 another attempt was made to reconnoiter the Luostari airfield, this time by the detachment's ski teams.<sup>43</sup> They were to

examine the approaches to the airfield, and discern the nature of its defensive system. If all went well, the ground force would initiate an attack, followed by airstrikes by Fleet aviation units.<sup>44</sup> The ski group was accompanied in the initial leg of its march by reindeer pulling sleds carrying ammunition, heavy machine guns, and extra provisions. On 11 November they left Soviet lines, and a few days later crossed the Titovka River south of Lake Chapr. On 14 November they reached the target and conducted detailed reconnaissance, including the drawing of sketches of airfield defenses and installations. On 15 November they began the seven-day trek back to friendly lines, carrying one of their men who had suffered an acute attack of appendicitis. It was probably this circumstance that caused the cancellation of the joint air and ground attack.

While the ski troops were reconnoitering the airfield, Captain Inzartsev led a platoon-strength group on a mission to locate a German strongpoint overlooking the mouth of the Litsa River.<sup>45</sup> The group landed from two small subchasers, moved up into the snow-covered hills, and after some hours of movement, followed a telephone wire to a German guardpost. Without carefully observing the surrounding landscape, they attacked the guard and an adjacent shelter. Several other Germans returned fire from nearby positions, forcing Inzartsev and his men to make a hasty retreat to the shore. They had located the German position, but at the price of four dead.

Some time later, the Army informed them of a captured Finnish lieutenant who was willing to lead a patrol to an unoccupied "winterized" German strongpoint.<sup>46</sup> Vizgin sent seventy men on two boats from Poliarnyi to Cape Pikshuev, accompanied by an Army detachment with the Finnish officer and an interpreter. Delayed by a winter storm, the composite detachment arrived at their target area on the second day and moved directly from shore to the strongpoint. There, buried under the snow, they found two small antitank guns with over three hundred shells, other weapons and ammunition, and over seven kilometers of telephone wire in rolls. They moved all the captured materiel to shore, and then to their base. The detachment now had enemy guns and ammunition for use in operations behind German lines.<sup>47</sup>

In January 1942 a group of twenty-five men attempted to penetrate into the Nikel area, the site of an important mine and airfield, seventy kilometers behind the frontline and over fifty kilometers from the coast.<sup>48</sup> Golovko was not eager to permit an operation so far inland, but allowed it to go ahead only because the Army requested assistance. The mission

was to determine how much ore was being extracted, and by what routes, means, and schedule it was being taken to Kirkenes for loading onto ships. The one-way distance to the objective area was over one hundred fifty kilometers on extremely difficult terrain, in the coldest month of winter. Accompanied by reindeer pulling sleds, the group departed Soviet lines on 4 January in temperatures below  $-30$  degrees C ( $-22$  degrees F). To avoid observation by German aircraft, they at first planned to move only at night. But the patrol leader soon discovered that the men could not lie still for long periods of time without suffering from frostbite, and so they moved during the day as well. It was during one of these daylight movements that a flight of German aircraft observed and strafed them, wounding ten men. The group was forced to return to base.

Also in January, another group from the detachment made an unobserved approach to a German position north of the Litsa River. Although the Soviets were numerically inferior to the German force, they had the element of surprise. Captain Inzartsev was unable, however, to convince the senior officer, a member of Vizgin's staff, to permit an attack or even an attempt to capture a prisoner. In the after-action review that followed, Admiral Golovko expressed strong displeasure with the planning and leadership of both. At his direction, younger and more experienced political officers were sought to accompany future patrols, and Vizgin's staff officer was reprimanded and prohibited from participation in subsequent missions.

In late January several unsuccessful attempts were made to insert two patrols along the coast between Petsamofjord and Kirkenes.<sup>49</sup> These groups contained both experienced and new personnel, some armed with German weapons. But they were unable to get ashore, being driven off either by high seas or alert German shore battery crews.

At the end of February 1942, nearly three months had passed since the detachment had taken a detailed inventory of German activity on the south shore of Motovskii Bay. On 3 March three small subchasers departed Poliarnyi, arriving in the landing area near Cape Pikshuev late that night.<sup>50</sup> One platoon went ashore to clear the immediate area, while the remainder of the force waited on the boats. When the lead platoon reached the rocky plateau above the landing site, it made contact with a German outpost of undetermined strength. The Soviet force quickly put the Germans to flight, while another platoon rushed from the boat to their aid. The Soviets quickly gathered up the documents from several German bodies, and took with them back to the boat a wounded German soldier, who

soon died. Vizgin was himself present on one of the subchasers, and after consultation with the platoon leaders decided not to continue the operation. The element of surprise had been lost, and pursuit of the small German force could result in unnecessary casualties.

Another patrol of one to two platoons went to the same area on 13 March on two subchasers.<sup>51</sup> Sometime after midnight one group was put ashore south of Cape Pikshuev. Another dozen men were landed at Cape Mogil'nyi, to the west. A storm quickly obscured the entire area, preventing any kind of signal communications between the forces ashore and the boats. The leader of the smaller of the two forces, moving by dead reckoning in a blinding snowstorm, halted his men in what he believed would be a safe shelter. At dawn, however, with the storm subsided, the group found themselves in the middle of a German position that contained approximately ten shelters.

The Soviet scouts lay in the snow the entire day observing the activities of this heretofore unknown German position. German aircraft enroute to bomb the Rybachii Peninsula flew low overhead twice. German soldiers were constructing fortifications with rocks, apparently developing the position into a strongpoint. After dark, the naval scouts quietly moved back toward their landing site, pulling behind them on a makeshift sled one of their men who had suffered frostbite. After waiting some three hours, they were picked up. Unable to find the other patrol, at dawn the boat commander returned to base.

Several unsuccessful attempts were made over the next five days to extract the remaining patrol, some being turned back by stormy seas, and another by German shelling and strafing. Golovko ordered Vizgin personally to lead the search. On the sixth recovery sortie, late on the evening of 19 March, Vizgin with two boats and naval air support extracted the patrol. Five of the men were taken straight from the dock to the hospital with serious frostbite. The group had for six days contended with the weather, German ground troops, and periodic air searches. Their provisions ran out on 15 March, but they found a large codfish on the shore and ate it. Late on 18 March they observed a thirty-five-man German search party, and the next morning German artillery began to fire methodically into the area. German ground forces, supported by aircraft, were closing in on them from two directions. As they were about to be overrun, Soviet aircraft arrived on the scene and suppressed the German pursuers. The exhausted patrol was safely extracted.

The next major combat activity of the detachment was a landing in



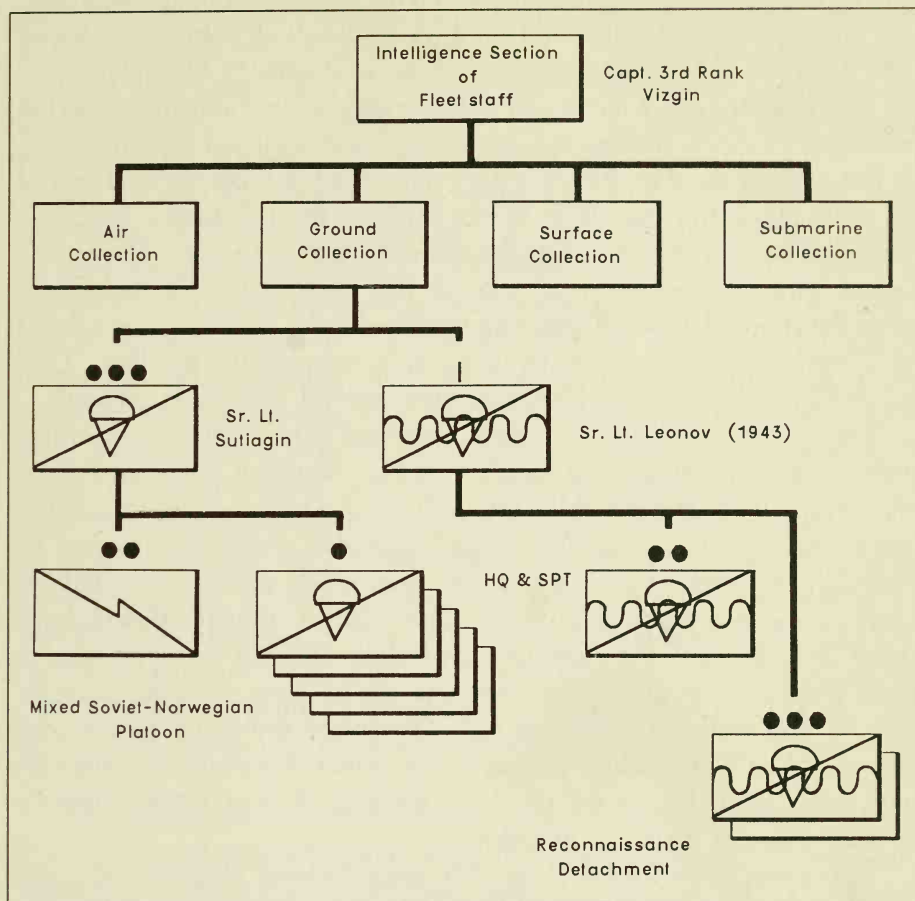


Figure 3. Organization for ground reconnaissance, Headquarters Northern Fleet, 1942-44.

support of the Soviet spring offensive, 28 April to 13 May 1942.<sup>52</sup> On 26 April, the reconnaissance detachment was subordinated to the commander, 12th Naval Infantry Brigade, to support his unit's landing on the German-held coast west of Cape Pikshuev. The mission of the detachment was to attack and seize a German outpost on Hill 415.3, and hold it until receipt of further orders.<sup>53</sup> Their landing was purposely timed to distract the attention of the German defenders for the main landing area of the larger brigade to the east. To Captain 2d Rank Inzartsev's regret, all the planning for this operation had been done in the headquarters of the naval

infantry brigade without consultation with the reconnaissance detachment. The brigade communications officer gave Inzartsev an abbreviated list of code words to be used in communications with brigade headquarters.

Two platoons and a command group boarded small subchasers on the evening of 27 April, landing at Cape Mogil'nyi at midnight. German mortar fire greeted them at the shoreline, one round passing through one of the boats above the waterline. Soviet artillery from Rybachii Peninsula conducted counterfires, enabling the detachment to get ashore. They made contact with German troops as soon as they moved into the rocky hills above the shore. Attacking from opposite flanks, the Soviet platoons drove the German company-size force back, and occupied the position. They had already suffered casualties, and were behind their time schedule.

The Soviets continued to move southeastward, while the German infantry followed them on a parallel course. Fourteen hours later, they were within sight of their objective, Hill 415.3. Outmaneuvering another attack, the naval scouts arrived at their objective which was manned by a handful of Germans with a machine gun. They quickly occupied the position, and awaited further orders. The German company that had followed them invested the slopes of the hilltop, looking for some way to attack the Soviet position. The Germans set up three machine guns for support, and began to climb the hill. The scouts drove them back with their own rifle and machine-gun fire. The remainder of the day and that night were quiet. But in the morning, the size of the German force on the slopes below them had doubled.

To the east of this action, the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade had come ashore unopposed, having found an undefended approach to the German defensive positions. By the morning of 29 April, a naval infantry battalion was in position three to four kilometers southwest of the reconnaissance detachment, on a lower hill. Inzartsev could observe Germans encircling the naval infantry, but he was unable to contact either the battalion or brigade headquarters. The German force around his own position continued to grow, now reaching battalion strength. If the scouts were going to help the naval infantry battalion break encirclement, they would first have to break out themselves.

Meanwhile, the scouts began to suffer from the cold. Their boots and clothing were still wet from the landing, and the temperature hovered around freezing. There was no cover on the hilltop from the cold wind. The Germans continued to probe the Soviet defenses from all sides, seeking a way to the top. Twelve separate attacks were beaten back. For

another night Inzartsev and his men sat on the hilltop, still without communication with brigade headquarters. On 30 April he ordered his men to conserve ammunition. A third night passed. Their water consumed, the men began to eat snow, which fell intermittently. Between snow squalls, the sun shone brightly, causing snow blindness.

On the fifth day, Inzartsev sent Viktor Leonov with two men to establish contact with the naval infantry battalion and seek their fire support for an attempt to break through the German encirclement. The battalion commander received permission from his brigade to send a rifle and a mortar platoon over to Hill 415.3 to reinforce the scouts, but a breakout maneuver was forbidden. With the help of these reinforcements, the reconnaissance detachment held Hill 415.3 until 4 May, when they finally were ordered to withdraw. Of the seventy men who landed ashore on 27 April, ten were healthy, two were dead, two were wounded, and the remainder were suffering from frostbite and/or snow blindness.

In early summer 1942, the detachment conducted another patrol to the Luostari airfield to observe German activity there and determine the nature of its defenses.<sup>54</sup> The four-hundred-kilometer round trip was figured to take three weeks. Each of the fifty men carried his own supplies, and also common items such as extra ammunition discs, radios, and batteries. Five radio operators accompanied this patrol, far more than normal.

The detachment walked for several days, crossed the Titovka and Petsamo rivers, photographed and noted locations of suitable fording sites. When they finally arrived at an observation position near the airfield, they drew sketches of it and took more photographs. Six days later the scouts crossed back into Soviet positions where they reorganized for a brief excursion to Lake Chapr. Part of the detachment took all the remaining supplies for the new mission, and the remainder returned to base.

The patrol to Lake Chapr was brief, lasting three to four days. The group found evidence of German patrolling activity, but no positions or forces until they reached Hill 374 (Bolshoi Karikvaivash). There they noted a German observation position of at least half a dozen men. This patrol also returned safely.

Several changes greeted them. Their barracks had been bombed, and several men killed or wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Dobrotin and Captain Inzartsev were leaving for new assignments. Their new commander was immediately unpopular with the men. A few scouts were taken to the naval infantry, several men were transferred out due to their injuries or wounds,

and three others went away to attend short courses. Another wave of new volunteers arrived.

In September 1942 the detachment was once again subordinated to a naval infantry force for an operation.<sup>55</sup> Two platoons, fifty men in all, were to accompany two companies of naval infantry and a platoon of sappers from the Rybachii Peninsula to the south shore of Motovskii Bay, lead them to the German strongpoint at Cape Mogil'nyi, then return to shore. The mission did not appear difficult, and many of the scouts knew the terrain in that area well from earlier operations. At dawn the composite force was to return to Rybachii.

At midnight, as the boats carrying the reconnaissance detachment approached the shore west of Cape Pikshuev, machine-gun and mortar fire fell around them. The boat commanders returned fire and put the force ashore. A short distance away the naval infantry also disembarked. Coordination between the two forces was poor. Two hours after landing, with no orders from the naval infantry company commander, the reconnaissance detachment commander decided to press on to the objective. After an hour of marching they made contact with the captain commanding the naval infantry and one company, the other company having become lost.

Behind schedule, the naval infantry captain ordered the composite detachment to move forward, scouts leading, without an advance guard. At sunrise, they were still moving. The scouts separated from the main body again to attack the objective from another flank. As they approached the German strongpoint through a defile, the reconnaissance detachment fell under heavy machine-gun and mortar fire. Several men were wounded or pinned down in the first volleys, and the detachment was split into small groups. Part of the detachment moved back to shore, carrying their wounded commander, and other men reached the shore singly or in small groups. Led by Leonov, by skillful maneuver the remaining fifteen scouts consolidated and organized a defense, vainly waiting for help from the naval infantry. Soviet artillery from Rybachii Peninsula fired over four hundred shells, but none landed on the Germans. One of the scouts lost his nerve and blew himself up with a grenade. A German aircraft flew overhead, but the scouts did not fire at it.

At nightfall, Leonov prepared his group to break out. Leaving seven dead and carrying their wounded, they moved by rushes toward the shore, covering themselves with small arms fire and grenades. By dawn they reached the point where they had landed but found no boats. Falling snow obscured their view of the sea. Twice boats approached their position and

then turned away. Finally two boats approached, one laid a smoke screen, and the other rushed in to extract the scouts. Other members of the detachment, pulled off the shore at other points, were already on board. The boats returned them to Poliarnyi.

At the ensuing after-action review by the Fleet military council, it was revealed that the naval infantry captain had led his unit in headlong flight to the shore as soon as the first shot was fired by the Germans. The military council delivered him over to a tribunal. A few days later, Admiral Nikolaev decorated several men of the reconnaissance detachment and at the same ceremony appointed Leonov a junior lieutenant.<sup>56</sup>

## Raids on Varanger

In the spring of 1943, the reconnaissance detachment moved to the Solovetskii Islands in the White Sea to train for combat actions on the Varanger Peninsula.<sup>57</sup> The organizer and supervisor of this training was Lieutenant Sutiagin, the platoon leader of the mixed Norwegian-Soviet platoon. The recent infusion of many new personnel into the detachment necessitated training in landing operations in addition to instruction on the language, customs, and terrain of the new area of operations.

The first operation into Varanger was a futile effort to execute a night ambush on the coast road between Vardo and Vadso.<sup>58</sup> There was no vehicular or foot traffic, and the detachment returned to base empty-handed. Vizgin relieved the detachment commander and appointed Leonov, by this time the *zampolit*, as the new commander. He gave Leonov and Sutiagin three days to prepare for another landing. Together the two leaders planned a different approach to the task.

In a preliminary raid, Leonov and six men went ashore on the small island of Lille Ekkeroya, twenty kilometers east of Vadso, and captured the lighthouse operator.<sup>59</sup> Returning to base, Sutiagin interrogated him and learned the pattern of German traffic along the road. Several days later, about half the detachment returned to the peninsula and landed just after nightfall. Deployed along the road in three groups, they ambushed a column of German vehicles, destroying many by small arms fire and grenades. Three prisoners were captured and taken back to base.

Other successful raids into Varanger followed. In December 1943, the detachment landed near Cape Kvalneset, thirty kilometers southwest of Vardo.<sup>60</sup> They climbed up the steep coastal escarpment to the road

above, and came out near a small cottage. Here they killed two German guards and captured six others who were inside drinking. Later interrogation of these Germans revealed information concerning an incident involving a Soviet submarine that had entered Batsfjord.

In February 1944 the detachment conducted a raid on a German shore battery guarding Batsfjord, located midway along the northern shore of Varanger Peninsula.<sup>61</sup> Although the plan was to land in Makkaursandfjord to the southeast and attack the German position from the rear, the patrol torpedo boat was turned back by the fire, and then signal-light interrogation of a German shore observation post. Leonov and Shabalin, the boat commander, agreed upon another approach, and turned the vessel to the west, toward Batsfjord. Ignoring the signals of the German observation post, the torpedo boat slipped quietly into the fjord and landed the detachment on a deserted shore, less than two kilometers from the small settlement of Batsfjord. Leonov divided his detachment into an assault group and a support group, and moved to the village to capture prisoners. Shabalin followed them with his boat, hugging the shoreline. The scouts returned to the waiting boat with two German sailors bound and gagged. Shabalin guided his torpedo boat out into the open sea, and by dawn returned the detachment with its prisoners to base.

Another similar raid was less successful. A group on two patrol torpedo boats approached a Norwegian fjord entrance during a storm, and made its way past the German light post by imitative deception.<sup>62</sup> When the two boats reached the landing site, Leonov and his main force moved to the shore in small boats without difficulty. The support group and communications cell on the other torpedo boat, however, did not organize themselves properly for a rapid landing. As a result, one of the assault team leaders was left on the shoreline with the radio operators, while the main force was executing the raid on the nearby small German garrison. The stranded team leader moved forward alone, seeking to rejoin his unit. The main force completed its mission, called the boats forward to pick them up, and the entire force departed the area. The team leader was lost, not only because he had sought to catch up to his men, but also because his absence was not reported prior to departure from the area.

Occasionally, a raiding force was not able to reach the objective area because of action at sea enroute. In one such occurrence, Shabalin with two patrol torpedo boats was delivering Leonov to the Varanger Peninsula.<sup>63</sup> They came upon a well-escorted German convoy, and in the ensuing sea battle one of Leonov's men was killed. Although the Germans

lost two ships to Soviet torpedoes, the reconnaissance mission was scrubbed and Shabalin returned to the forward base at Pummanki.

In another similar incident, the detachment was returning from a successful raid on Varanger when it encountered a German convoy.<sup>64</sup> The smoke-discharging apparatus on the deck of one of the patrol torpedo boats was struck by a shell, igniting the device and threatening the safety of the boat. Two nearby scouts, risking their own lives, were able to tear the apparatus away from its mountings and push it overboard. One of the men later died as a result of the burns he received, and the other had to be transferred to the Black Sea Fleet, away from the cold northern climate. Despite these occasional setbacks, the detachment conducted several more raids along the Varanger coastline through the spring of 1944, each time returning with extra "passengers,"<sup>65</sup> and concluded major operations in the Far North with two strike operations in the October 1944 Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation.

Just two days after the Soviet capture of Kirkenes, Leonov's detachment conducted its final operation in Norway.<sup>66</sup> A reconnaissance party of ten men parachuted into the hills southwest of Vardo on the night of 27 October, but was scattered by strong winds. Radio contact with that group was immediately lost. On 29 October three survivors of the ill-fated jump reached Soviet-controlled ports by motorboat. On the night of 30 October, the remainder of Leonov's detachment went ashore at Cape Langbunes, twenty kilometers southwest of Vardo. They quickly established contact with the survivors of the parachute jump, and through conversations with civilians determined that the Germans had already fled the area. On the basis of this information, plans for a full-scale landing were cancelled. Leonov moved his group to Vardo by boat. Although the Germans had destroyed much of the port and its facilities, they also had abandoned large stocks of food and other materiel, including small arms. The detachment turned these supplies over to the Norwegians, and returned to their base at Poliarnyi on 2 November.

## Analysis and Conclusions

As the German forces closed on the approaches to Murmansk in the latter half of 1941, the Soviet Northern Fleet was against the wall. The Fleet base was threatened, and there was no alternative base to move to. Apprehensive about the threat of a German amphibious operation around

the northern flank that would turn the Soviet defense and lead to the fall of Murmansk, the Soviets discovered a serious gap in their intelligence collection capabilities. Out of dire necessity, the Fleet developed a naval commando force capable of intelligence collection and, as a follow-on, direct action to operational depths in the enemy rear.

The process was evolutionary, with tactical reconnaissance patrolling and clandestine agent operations providing the conceptual basis. The path was full of hard lessons, including those relating to political reliability and physical fitness of personnel, and the dangers of daylight movement in areas of high enemy air threat. The Soviets also tried to find a balance, in the use of this new capability, between collecting intelligence without making enemy contact and engaging in deliberate attacks to throw the enemy off balance and/or support conventional operations. The result, a reconnaissance detachment and a closely related agent platoon, was a special operations force. Analysis of several aspects of their organization, personnel, and combat operations establishes this force as an historical precursor of modern Soviet naval *spetsnaz*.

The name of the reconnaissance detachment is instructive: According to Makar A. Babikov, long-term veteran of the detachment, the Northern Fleet detachment's first official unit designation was 4th Special Volunteer Detachment of Sailors,<sup>67</sup> which in August 1941 changed to 4th Reconnaissance Detachment of Headquarters, Fleet,<sup>68</sup> and ultimately became the 181st Special Reconnaissance Detachment (*osobogo razvedyvatel'nogo otriada*).<sup>69</sup> In current Soviet sources, the organization is referred to by a number of descriptive titles: "Reconnaissance Detachment (Northern Fleet),"<sup>70</sup> "Reconnaissance Detachment of Naval Scouts,"<sup>71</sup> and "Special Purpose Reconnaissance Detachment of the Northern Fleet."<sup>72</sup> The most common elements in these titles are "reconnaissance," and "special purpose" (*osobogo naznacheniya*).

Evolution and subordination of the force provide other indicators: A compartmented force of clandestine agents and commandos, each with overlapping but not identical capabilities for reconnaissance and direct action, was directly subordinated to the intelligence department of the Fleet staff. The force had the full attention of the Fleet commander, Admiral Golovko, who was frequently personally involved in the day-to-day activities of the detachment. Leonov makes several references to personal meetings with Golovko to discuss operational issues. The detachment was also accompanied on many missions by senior staff officers, further emphasizing Command interest. On rare occasions, the recon-



naissance detachment was placed under the operational control of a naval infantry unit, but this was only for specific missions and was not a habitual relationship. They always returned to control of the Fleet Headquarters, and were always barracked at the Fleet main base in Poliarnyi, not at the forward base at Pummanki (which was much closer to their area of operations).

Unusual selection, training and intelligence and security practices provide further indicators. Personnel selection stressed political reliability and physical fitness: Leonov, Babikov, and others repeatedly emphasize the high percentage of detachment personnel who were members of the Kom-somol or Communist Party, many of whom had participated in underground operations. Both the larger detachment and the mixed Norwegian-Soviet platoon had political officers, whose principal responsibility was to foster and maintain loyalty of the men to the Soviet state, the Communist Party, and most immediately, to the unit and mission. The reconnaissance detachment political officer participated in all combat operations behind German lines. The experience of the joint operation with an Army reconnaissance unit, where a soldier deserted to the Germans near the objective area, reinforced the need for political screening and indoctrination.

Several members of the detachment were superior athletes in their sport, be it cross-country skiing, swimming, boxing, or martial arts. Vladimir Oliashev, for example, was a Champion of the Soviet Union and Merited Master of Sport in skiing.<sup>73</sup> Inzartsev, the physical training director of the Fleet submarine brigade and later commander of the detachment, was the Fleet weight-lifting champion in his class.<sup>74</sup> Ivan Lysenko, a radio operator, was a wrestling champion.<sup>75</sup> Ivan Guznenkov, the detachment political officer in 1944-45, was a competitive rock climber and martial arts fighter.<sup>76</sup> These and other examples illustrate that athletic prowess was an important selection criterion,<sup>77</sup> and gives credence to the belief that Soviet special operations forces recruit among superior (even Olympic-class) athletes.

Another distinctive feature is that the force was exceptionally versatile, and could be flexibly employed by the Fleet staff for rear area conventional and unconventional operations of great military, political and economic significance for which few other conventional forces were capable. Such operations included long-range dismounted patrolling, acquisition and surveillance of critical enemy installations, coast-watching, snatch and field interrogation of prisoners, and direct-action raids as directed by the Fleet staff.

Operational security was stringent, with operators often being briefed on the specifics of a mission only after reaching the immediate proximity of their objective. The reconnaissance detachment also had an unofficial credo that they would not surrender to the enemy alive, or return if they did not accomplish their mission: Some did in fact save their last bullet or grenade for themselves when capture was imminent.<sup>78</sup>

The force also had on-the-ground language capabilities for immediate exploitation of prisoners, documents, and, on at least one occasion, enemy telephone communications. Many of the Russians spoke German, and a few spoke Finnish or Norwegian. The employment of foreign nationals, however, is most significant in this regard: Norwegian communists fleeing the German occupation brought with them a knowledge of the terrain, locales, and customs that few Soviet citizens could possess.

On the conventional side were many of the small-scale reconnaissance and raid operations against German small unit positions and strongpoints along the left (coastal) flank of the German corps facing Murmansk and Poliarnyi. The detachment conducted some of these raids alone, and others in conjunction with naval infantry forces. All were directed toward the detection, disruption, or destruction of German tactical units.

The several attempts to reconnoiter the German airfield at Luostari, the unsuccessful effort to reach the mines at Nikel, and all the raids by the larger detachment along the Varanger Peninsula were unconventional operations. These penetrations went deep into the German corps rear area where the German combat support and logistic infrastructure lay. Luostari airfield was fifty kilometers from the coastline, but since its aircraft were used to bomb Northern Fleet bases, Admiral Golovko authorized its reconnaissance. The mines at Nikel were producing strategic ores for the German munitions factories. Though the attempt to reach this area with a ground reconnaissance element failed, the fact that it was considered a proper target is significant per se. In raids on Varanger, Leonov's men attacked vehicular convoys and isolated shore installations, captured prisoners and destroyed war materiel. Information gained by these frequent penetrations into Norwegian bases kept Golovko apprised of German capabilities for near-term major land and naval operations.

The mixed Soviet-Norwegian coast-watching platoon was used to conduct operational and strategic-depth reconnaissance. Early in the war, the Norwegian subtheater of operations was divided between the British Royal Navy and the Soviet Northern Fleet just to the west of Altafjord, a German naval and air forward operations base. The area north and west of Alta-

fjord was the responsibility of the Northern Fleet, while the Royal Navy had everything south and west.

The Soviets conducted operations to the depth of their area of operations: Arnoy Island, north of Tromso where two Norwegians were put ashore in February 1942 without a radio operator, is about four hundred fifty kilometers straight-line distance from Poliarnyi (twice as far by sea) and almost on the border between the British and Soviet fleets. Information gained by observing German naval traffic along Norway's west coast was used by Golovko for his own Fleet's missions, and was also important to Royal Navy escorts of British and American convoys to Soviet northern ports. It is also likely that the activities of the mixed Soviet-Norwegian platoon were closely monitored by Soviet intelligence organs in Moscow.<sup>79</sup>

Infiltration, resupply, and extraction support for such missions were also out of the ordinary, utilizing submarines, float planes, bombers, parachutes, a variety of small surface ships, motor vehicles, reindeer sleds, skis and feet. In terms of frequency, fast boats (generally torpedo boats but occasionally other small coastal craft) were probably used most often. Leonov's detachment developed a close association with two boat commanders in particular, Senior Lieutenant B. M. Liakh, who commanded a small subchaser (MO-423), and Captain Lieutenant A. O. Shabalin, who commanded a patrol torpedo boat detachment. Some of Leonov's men also jumped into Varanger in October 1944, and one of the three-man teams jumped there in the spring of 1944. Submarines were used, in particular, in conjunction with the three-man teams in Norway: In the course of the war, Soviet submarines alone made fifty insertions of special reconnaissance teams. Thirty-nine of these were conducted in the Far North, mostly in Norwegian territory.<sup>80</sup>

The true measure of the impact of these operations on contemporary Soviet special operations doctrine and force structure, however, may rest with the post-war careers of the key personnel, and the writings they have left in their wake. Twice Hero of the Soviet Union Viktor N. Leonov attended Kirov Caspian Naval School in 1950, and in 1956 was an instructor at the Voroshilov Naval Academy. He retired from active service in July 1956, just before his fortieth birthday. Leonov is known to have played a role in the establishment of Soviet ground forces' *spetsnaz* in the early 1960s.<sup>81</sup> As of this writing, he is seventy-three years old and still living in Moscow.

Hero of the Soviet Union Makar A. Babikov left active service in

1946, and returned to his native Komi region. There he was secretary of a city Party Committee, and then deputy to a member of the autonomous republic's Council of Ministers. After serving in state security, Babikov worked for a time in the bureaucracy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and subsequently for the Council of Ministers of RSFSR. His photograph recently appeared in *Morskoi sbornik* (Naval Proceedings), on the occasion of a veterans' conference.<sup>82</sup> Of the other officers, it is known only that in the mid-1950s, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Dobrotin was out of the Navy and living in Moscow, while Inzartsev still served in the Northern Fleet.<sup>83</sup>

Between them, Leonov and Babikov have written about 1,100 pages of memoirs which are freely exploitable by anyone in the West who reads Russian. Much more information in the form of unit records, after-action reports, classified studies, oral histories, and debriefings have likely been used by Soviet analysts to develop contemporary special operations theoretical, doctrinal, and organizational models. Some of these data are accessible to Western analysts, and much more will become available as *glasnost* progresses. Given the direct correlation between past, present and future capabilities, these are invaluable keys to unlocking the questions about Soviet naval *spetsnaz*.

## Notes

1. Major portions of this chapter are derived from James F. Gebhardt, "Soviet Naval Special Operations Forces Origins and Operations In World War II," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4, September 1989, and are used with permission.
2. Robert C. Suggs, "Soviet Subs in Scandinavia: 1930 to 1945," *Proceedings*, March 1986, 100–106.
3. Allen F. Chew, *The White Death* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1971): 13–14; P. H. Vigor, *Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983): 55.
4. John J. Dziak, *Chekisty: A History of the KGB* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988): 115.
5. The best description of German operations in this theater throughout the entire war is in Department of the Army Pamphlet 20–271, *The German Northern Theater of Operations 1940–1945*, by Earl F. Ziemke (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959).
6. Golovko's meeting with Vizgin is described in Makar A. Babikov, *Letom sorok pervogo* (The summer of '41) (Moscow: "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1980): 67–68, and Vizgin's meeting with his subordinates on 69–70.
7. Babikov, 69. Vizgin is mentioned in a recent article as one of the "leaders and chiefs of intelligence organs" in the Soviet Navy during World War II. See Iu. Kviatkovskii, "Bespokoinaia vakhta razvedki VMF" (Troubled Watch of Naval Intelligence), *Morskoi sbornik* (Naval Proceedings), 10/1988, 13–14.
8. Babikov, 110.
9. *Ibid.*, 111.
10. Babikov, *Otriad osobogo naznacheniya* (Special Purpose Detachment) (Moscow: "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1986): 135–147.
11. Babikov, *Letom*, 199. According to Babikov, the rank "Intendant" was frequently given to accomplished athletes. Historically, however, holders of this rank generally served in rear support elements. Leonov briefly describes Inzartsev in *Litsom k litsu* (Face to Face) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1957): 15.
12. Leonov describes his recruitment in *Litsom*, 4–5.
13. Leonov mentions her in *Litsom*, 21; see also Babikov, *Letom*, 204.
14. Babikov, *Letom*, 200.
15. This mission is described in Babikov, *Letom*, 186–194 and Leonov, 10–14. A German document dated July 24, 1941 briefly mentions this raid, fixing the date of the actual attack as July 22. See *Kriegstagebuch* (War Diary) Nr. 1, AOK 20 (Headquarters, 20th German Army), "Aktennotiz" (Memorandum), microfilm series T-312, roll 1647, frame 001173, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington DC.

16. The actual raid is described in Babikov, *Letom*, chapter 22, and Leonov, 22–27.
17. Babikov, *Letom*, 219–223.
18. Leonov, already an experienced skier, spent some time at the ski base while recovering from his wounds. Leonov, 32–33. According to Babikov, Leonov was responsible at this time for procurement of the detachment's special winter clothing. Babikov, *Letom*, 253.
19. Babikov mentions parachute training in connection with the Norwegians who were being prepared for coast-watching duty in Norway. Babikov, *Otriad*, 105. As for the personnel of the larger reconnaissance detachment, Leonov clearly indicates that day and night parachute jumping was part of the regular training regime. Leonov, *Gotov'sia k podvigu* (Prepare for An Heroic Deed) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo DOSAAF, 1985): 25–26.
20. Babikov, *Letom*, 254–74. This action is recorded in German records as follows: "Yesterday evening a deserter appeared south of Luostari Airfield, who declared himself to be a member of a reconnaissance and partisan detachment which was advancing south of Luostari Airfield, and had the mission to attack the airfield and destroy everything." KTB Nr. 1, AOK 20, "Fernspruch Gebirgs Korps Norwegen" (Telephone Message Mountain Corps Norway) Ic 1.9.1941 1745 hours, microfilm series T-312, roll 1013, frame 9209088, NARA. Based on this incident, and the interrogation of the deserter, a reconnaissance detachment was added to Soviet order of battle by German intelligence analysts: "Aufklarungs Abteilung: (Partisanen-Abt.) Gesamtstärke etwa 300 Mann, davon etwa 200 Matrosen." [Reconnaissance Detachment: (Partisan det.) total strength about 300 men, of which approximately 200 are sailors.] KTB 1, AOK 20, "Vermutliche Feindkräfte vor Gesamttraum des A.O.K. Norwegen Stand 5.9.1941" (Probable Enemy Strength in the Operating Area of AOK Norway as of 5.9.1941), microfilm series T-312, roll 1013, frame 9207906, NARA.
21. DA Pamphlet 20–271, chapter 8, contains a good account of this period in English. For a Soviet perspective, see Nikolai M. Rumiantsev, "Oboronitel'nye deistviia 14-i armii v Zapoliar'e v 1941 godu (Defensive Operations of the 14th Army in the Transpolar in 1941)," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 12/1980, 21–33, and Rumiantsev, *Razgrom vraga v Zapoliar'e (1941–1944 gg.)* [Defeat of the Enemy in the Transpolar] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963): chapter 3.
22. Babikov, *Letom*, 305.
23. Babikov, *Otriad*, 6.
24. The account of this operation begins in Babikov, *Otriad*, chapter 5, and concludes in chapter 8.
25. *Ibid.*, 37.

26. *Ibid.*, 32. Babikov makes a veiled reference to “colleagues in Murmansk,” implying that another organization besides the Northern Fleet had an interest in this operation. On page 58, Babikov indicates that the planned landing of a follow-on force was cancelled.
27. *Ibid.*, 102.
28. Paul Einar Vatne, *Jeg Var Russisk Spion—Historien om Selmer Nilsen (I Was a Russian Spy—The Story of Selmer Nilsen)* (Oslo: H. Aschenhoug & Co., 1981): 28–29; letter from Robert C. Suggs, March 30, 1989.
29. At least one of the radio operators was involved in an operation with the larger reconnaissance detachment in November, 1941, suggesting some personnel mobility between the two elements. The designation of a platoon commander, a deputy commander for political affairs, a separate communications staff and facility, and the distinct nature of their mission led these authors to conclude that by January 1942 this platoon was not a subset of the larger reconnaissance detachment, but a separate element under the fleet staff intelligence section. A German intelligence assessment from February 1943 supports this analysis. The document describes the “Kundschafter (und Ablenkungs-) Abteilung der Nordmeerflotte” [Intelligence (and Diversionary) Detachment of the Northern Fleet] as containing two separate elements, one for operations in rear areas, the other only for operations in Norway. This document also correctly identifies Vizgin as the chief of the intelligence section of the Fleet and Dobrotin as his deputy. Anlage 3, “Bandentatigkeit und Organisation vor (Geb.) A.O.K. 20” (Band Activities and Organization in Front of 20th Mountain Army), to A.O.K. 20 Nr. 810/43, dated 22.2.1943, microfilm series T-312, roll 1649, frames 001328–29, NARA.
30. Babikov, *Otriad*, 104. According to Babikov, Krymova was a language and area specialist who had lived in Sweden and Norway before the war. She was fluent in all the Scandinavian languages, plus English, French, and German. Leonov, *Litsom*, 82, indicates that Sutiagin also spoke Norwegian.
31. Babikov, *Otriad*, 103–05.
32. *Ibid.*, chapter 25.
33. *Ibid.*, chapter 28.
34. The account of this incident concludes in Babikov, *Otriad*, chapter 21, with no definitive statement of the fate of these men.
35. *Ibid.*, beginning in chapter 18 and concluding in chapter 21.
36. *Ibid.*, chapter 21.
37. *Ibid.*, 171.
38. A German document dated September 27, 1942 notes that two Russian agents with a transmitter were inserted by submarine north of Tromsø and subsequently captured. See “Befehl für den Schutz von Wehrwirtschaftsbetrieben” (Order for the Defense of Military-Industrial Facilities), Annex 1, microfilm series T-312, roll 1648, frame 000903, NARA. Another document, dated

November 19, 1943, describes the mixed Soviet-Norwegian platoon and their activities. It names Capt. 2d Rank Vizgin, as well as several of the Norwegian Communists who belonged to the group. See KTB 2, AOK 20, "Sowjetrus-sische Spionagetatigkeit im Varanger-Raum" (Soviet-Russian Espionage Activity in the Varanger Area), microfilm series T-312, roll 1651, frames 000682-89, NARA.

39. Babikov, *Morskie razvedchiki* (Naval Scouts) (Syktyvkar: Komi knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1966), 12-14. According to Leonov, this team was inserted by parachute and extracted by patrol torpedo boat. See Leonov, *Gotov'sia*, 17-19.
40. Babikov, *Otriad*, chapter 9. Leonov, *Gotov'sia*, 84-88, indicates that this mission was conducted on the night of November 6-7, with a naval infantry reconnaissance company.
41. Several German documents describe this raid, and establish the time of the attack as 0200 hours October 25. See KTB 1, AOK 20, morning reports, evening reports, and teletype messages, series T-312, microfilm roll 1013, frames 9208536-38, 9208836, 9208852, -54, -57, and 59-60, NARA.
42. Babikov, *Otriad*, 83.
43. *Ibid.*, chapter 11.
44. *Ibid.*, 84.
45. *Ibid.*, chapter 12.
46. *Ibid.*, chapter 13.
47. According to a German report, "Russian reconnaissance troops have been repeatedly identified in German uniforms and with German weapons . . . In one action on the Litsa Front, the enemy took the uniforms off of German prisoners and casualties for the purpose of equipping partisans (*banden*)."  
See Annex 5 to Activity Report for November 1942, "Feindnachrichtenblatt" (Enemy Information Report) Nr. 24, 14 November 1942, microfilm series T-312, roll 1649, frame 000201, NARA.
48. Babikov, *Otriad*, chapter 16.
49. *Ibid.*, chapter 17.
50. *Ibid.*, chapter 19.
51. *Ibid.*, chapter 20.
52. *Ibid.*, chapter 22. A detailed description of this offensive from the Soviet perspective is contained in Rumiantsev, *Razgrom vraga*, chapter 3; and from the German perspective in DA Pamphlet 20-271, 223-28.
53. DA Pamphlet 20-271, map 19, shows the axis of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade but not the reconnaissance detachment. A better map can be found in Rumiantsev, *Razgrom vraga*, 69. Babikov discusses this action in *Otriad*, chapter 22, and Leonov in *Litsom*, 36-48.
54. Babikov, *Otriad*, chapter 23.
55. *Ibid.*, chapter 24; *id.*, *Morskie*, 14-16; Leonov, *Litsom*, 60-74.



56. Leonov describes this ceremony in *Litsom*, 75–77.
57. Ibid., 82. Leonov does not identify the location, but Babikov does in *Na vostochnom beregu* (On the Eastern Shore) (Moscow: “Sovetskaia Rossiia,” 1969): 7. The historical record of the detachment between October 1942 and October 1944 is not well defined. Both Leonov and Babikov wrote about this period, but with less specificity as to dates and locations of combat actions.
58. Neither Leonov nor Babikov indicates when the detachment returned from the training base in the White Sea to their deployment base in Poliarnyi. Leonov discusses these initial operations in *Litsom*, beginning on 82, and in *Gotov’sia*, 57–58.
59. For the German account of this raid, see “Fernschreiben” (Teleprinter) 1.1.1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1650, frame 000462, NARA. According to the German report, the lighthouse operator was abducted on December 15, and the road ambush was executed against four Luftwaffe vehicles on December 21, 1943.
60. Leonov, *Litsom*, beginning on 87.
61. Ibid., beginning on 90.
62. Id., *Gotov’sia*, 53–55.
63. Ibid., 68–70.
64. Babikov, *Morskie*, 17–18.
65. Leonov, *Litsom*, 94.
66. See ibid., 128–31; id., “Vperedsmotriashchie,” 174–78; and Babikov, *Morskie*, 20–40.
67. Babikov, *Morskie*, 4; in Russian *4-i Osobyi dobrovol’cheskii otriad moriakov*.
68. Babikov, *Letom*, 251.
69. I. A. Kozlov and V. S. Shlomin, *Krasnoznamennyi severnyi flot* (Red Banner Northern Fleet) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983): 272.
70. *Geroi sovetskogo soiuza: kratkii biograficheskii slovar’*, 27, entry for S. M. Agafonov.
71. Ibid., 862, entry for V. N. Leonov.
72. In Russian: *razvedotriad osobogo naznacheniya Severnogo flota*, in V. Sadvoskii, “Komandir ‘chernykh d’iavolov’” (Commander of the ‘Black Devils’), *Sovetskii voin* (Soviet Soldier), 3/1985, 36–37.
73. Leonov, *Gotov’sia*, 46; Merited Master of Sport in Russian: *zasluzhennyi master sporta*.
74. Leonov, *Litsom*, 15.
75. Ibid., 79.
76. Ibid., 102.
77. The recruitment of athletes was also important for special operations units of Soviet ground forces during World War II. See F. L. Kurlat and L. A. Studnikov, “Brigada osobogo naznacheniya” (Special Purpose Brigade), *Voprosy istorii* (Questions of History), September 1982, 95–104; and S. Kh. Aganov,

- ed., *Inzhenernye voiska sovetskoi armii 1918–1945* (Engineer Troops of the Soviet Army 1918–1945) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985): 459–63, a section that discusses engineer units employed for special operations behind German lines.
78. Leonov, *Gotov'sia*, 36 and 71; id., *Lotsom*, 39 and 68.
  79. However, a careful search of the British official history, Capt. S. W. Roskill, *The War At Sea 1939–1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1954 and 1956), vols. I and II, does not reveal any sharing of intelligence data.
  80. Suggs, "Soviet Subs," 102.
  81. Interview with a former Soviet soldier, summer 1987.
  82. A. Danilin, "Ne stareiut dyshoi veterany" (The Veterans Are Not Aging in Spirit), *Morskoi sbornik* (Naval Proceedings), 5/1988, 16–18.
  83. Leonov, *Litsom*, 150.

## CHAPTER 7

# The Arctic: Petsamo-Kirkenes, 7 to 30 October 1944

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James F. Gebhardt

A typical example of Soviet employment of special purpose forces during World War II is found in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation. On 7 October 1944, a Soviet combined arms force of nearly one hundred thousand men launched an offensive against the fifty-seven thousand German troops of XIX Mountain Corps, who were defending prepared positions on Soviet territory northwest of Murmansk. The battlefield was in an obscure sector of the Eastern Front that had seen only local and long-range reconnaissance activities, small-unit actions to achieve local objectives,<sup>1</sup> and one failed Soviet counteroffensive (spring 1942) since the German offensive to seize Murmansk was blunted in October 1941. Despite its limited scope when compared to larger operations on the main front in Eastern Europe, the Soviets nonetheless consider this battle to be one of the ten strategic blows struck against the Germans in 1944. This chapter outlines the use of ground and naval special purpose forces in this battle as described from Soviet sources and corroborated in several aspects by German war diary reports.

### The Area of Operations

During World War II, the Murmansk-Kirkenes region had strategic importance to both the Germans and the Soviets. During the three years

of the German occupation, from late 1941 to late 1944, German mining engineers and forced laborers extracted ten thousand tons of high-grade nickel ore annually from the mine at Nikel for their armaments industry.<sup>2</sup> The German navy also used the airfields and harbors of northern Norway to interdict and harass Allied convoys carrying Lend-Lease materiel from the United States and Great Britain to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. The area was important to the Soviets in that the base of the Northern Fleet was located at Poliarnyi, just north of Murmansk, and Murmansk itself was a vital receiving port for war materiel.

The Petsamo-Kirkenes battleground lies on the southern shore of the Barents Sea, between sixty-nine and seventy degrees north latitude, about two hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. The climate in October is cold and moist, with prevailing winds blown inland from the unfrozen Barents Sea and a normal temperature range of between plus and minus five degrees centigrade. The weather in October is characterized by frequent precipitation as snow or as a mixture of rain and snow, and frequent heavy fog. At this time of year, the sun traverses a low arc across the southern sky, and hours of daylight decrease from 13.5 on 1 October to 10 on 30 October.

Along the coast, the terrain is primarily tundra interspersed with hills of barren rock covered with moss and lichen. Farther inland, steep rock-strewn hills rise to elevations of up to 1,900 feet above sea level. Hundreds of streams flow into scores of swamps and lakes which are drained by northeast-flowing rivers. There are numerous ravines and gullies throughout the region. Vegetation is mostly scrub trees and low bushes. Few trees in the area are thicker than a man's forearm, or taller than twenty-five feet. In October, all deciduous trees are leafless. The ground is not frozen, and cannot support vehicular traffic except on roads. The road net in 1944 was poorly developed, and roads were the focus of combat actions by Soviet special purpose and conventional forces during the battle.

## Enemy Dispositions

In October 1944, forces of the German XIX Mountain Corps, commanded by Gen. Ferdinand Jodl, were deployed in three defensive belts. The first belt extended eastward along the Barents Sea coastline, across the Isthmus of Srednyi Peninsula, along the shore of Motovskii Bay to the mouth of the Western Litsa River, then west-southwest to Lake Chapr, and

from there across Hill 373 to Hill 237.1. This belt was manned by Divisional Group Van der Hoop in the north, 6th Mountain Division in the center, and 2d Mountain Division in the south. Its density varied according to the terrains from four to six kilometers deep, with fifteen to twenty permanent fortifications per linear kilometer of front. These bunkers were organized into company strongpoints which in turn made up battalion centers of resistance. All strongpoints had trench systems, engineer-prepared minefields, obstacles and barbed-wire, overhead cover bunkers, and provisions of food, water, and ammunition. They were sited for 360-degree observation and fire.<sup>3</sup> General Jodl did not have adequate forces at his disposal to construct a continuous line.

Direct and indirect fire, engineer obstacles, minefields, and patrols with dogs covered the low ground between these company strongpoints and battalion centers of resistance. At night and during periods of limited visibility, guard posts were also used. These sectors between strongpoints

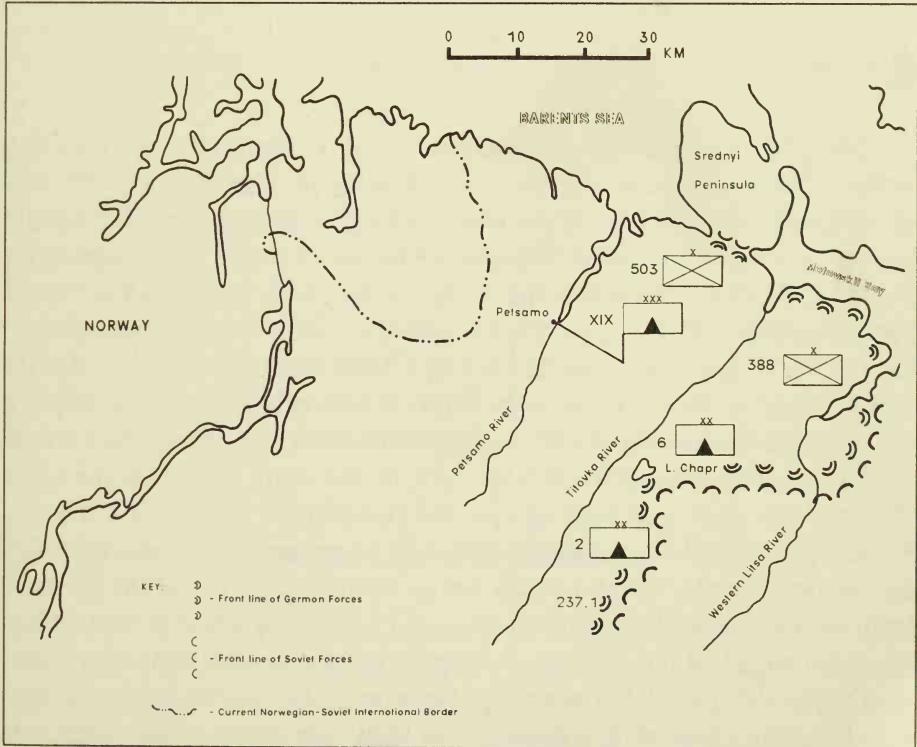


Figure 1. Enemy dispositions at the outset of operations.

varied in width to as much as two to four kilometers, and constituted a major weakness in the first defensive belt.

The second defensive belt lay along the Titovka River, ten to twenty kilometers behind the first belt, and consisted of separate strongpoints and centers of resistance covering approaches to the river. The rear defensive belt lay twenty to twenty-five kilometers farther west along the Petsamo River. Its strongest positions guarded the approaches to Petsamo and Luostari. Additional defensive positions were prepared to guard the approaches to the settlements at Kolosjoki (Nikel), Akhamalakhti, and Kirkenes, the latter being a supply base of the 20th Mountain Army and the principal port in the region. The German right flank positions, south of the Lake Chapr region to Hill 237.1, trailed off into terrain which the Germans considered unsuitable for military operations, even of a limited nature. The nearest German troop positions were some 250 kilometers to the south. The mission of XIX Mountain Corps was to defend in sector until excess supplies stockpiled at Petsamo, Kirkenes and other locations were removed, and then to conduct an orderly withdrawal.

## The Plan

The plan prepared by Army General Kirill A. Meretskov, the Karelian Front commander, and approved by Stavka in late September,<sup>4</sup> was straightforward. The 14th Army was to attack with the main effort on the left against the 2d Mountain Division, in the sector from Lake Chapr south to Hill 237.1. The mission of the forces on this axis was to defeat the 2d Mountain Division and seize the Petsamo-Luostari area by frontal attack. To their left, the 126th and 127th Light Rifle Corps would conduct an envelopment of the German right flank in two echelons. Their mission was to lodge themselves on the road junction west of Luostari, to prevent retreat and reinforcement. To the right of the main attack, from Lake Chapr to the north and east, against the German 6th Mountain Division, Soviet forces would continue to defend in an economy of force role. On the Soviet far right, naval infantry forces would attack across the Srednyj Isthmus and along the coastline west of it, with the mission to envelop the German left flank, cutting their path of retreat and reinforcement.

On the main axis, the attacking force was arranged in two echelons, with two rifle corps of five divisions, a light rifle corps of two brigades, tank and artillery units in the first echelon. The second echelon consisted

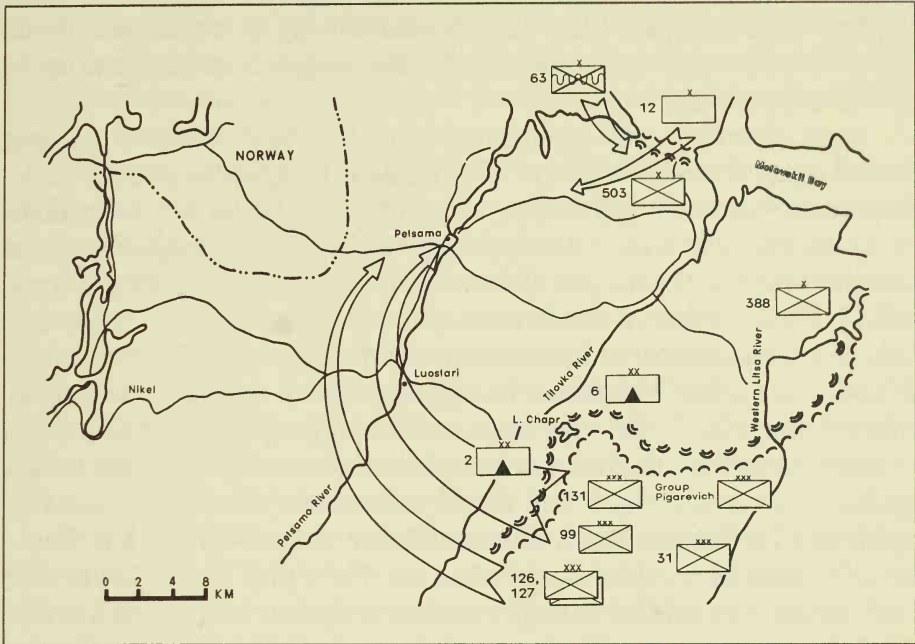


Figure 2. The initial Soviet plan of attack.

of one rifle corps of two divisions, and one light rifle corps of two brigades. The economy of force mission on the Soviet right flank was to be executed by one rifle division, one rifle brigade, and one fortified zone.<sup>5</sup> The Northern Fleet commander would employ one naval infantry brigade to attack across the Srednyi Isthmus, and another naval infantry brigade in amphibious assault to the west of the isthmus. On 6 October, the attack was set to commence at 1035 hours 7 October, to be preceded by an artillery barrage lasting two hours and thirty-five minutes.

## Ground Forces Spetsnaz Employment

In July 1944 the Front Commander, General Meretskov, ordered preparation of several *spetsnaz* detachments from an assault combat engineer brigade for operations deep in the German rear.<sup>6</sup> The men came from various engineer units, including the 6th Separate Guards Battalion of *Miners* (OGBM), the 64th and 222d Motorized Assault Combat

Engineer battalions, and the 168th Army Engineer Battalion.<sup>7</sup> Once formed, all detachments were subordinated directly to the Karelian Front engineer staff, which was responsible for their support, training, and operational deployment.

After selection and designation, *spetsnaz* detachments lived and trained apart from other units.<sup>8</sup> The training program was designed to prepare the men both physically and psychologically for combat actions in the enemy rear area.<sup>9</sup> Training cadre included experienced engineer *spetsnaz*, such as Lieutenant Colonel D. S. Krutskikh. Training themes included "the conduct of platoon and company-size ambushes," "organization of a battalion march in mountain and swamp terrain," and "actions of a reconnaissance detachment in the encirclement and destruction of an enemy strongpoint." The men also received training in the coordination of actions between sub-units, how to conduct reconnaissance, demolitions against roads and bridges, and terrain orientation. Men experienced in operations behind German lines were chosen to be the Party and Kom-somol leaders in companies and platoons. Their task was to insure that each soldier was psychologically prepared to operate away from friendly forces, to endure physical and mental stress, and to be prepared for any sacrifice in order to accomplish the mission. Physical conditioning emphasized heavy load carrying and hand-to-hand combat skills. All training exercises attempted to foster teamwork and comradeship among the soldiers. In early September, Meretskov met with his Chief of Engineer Troops, General Khrenov, and approved a plan for the utilization of *spetsnaz* detachments in support of the 14th Army's offensive.<sup>10</sup>

The plan called for the insertion of three detachments into the German rear area before the launching of the offensive. The detachments had several missions. They were to reconnoiter the route of the follow-on light rifle corps, conduct uninterrupted reconnaissance of the enemy and terrain, and gain control over the road net. Upon initiation of the offensive, *spetsnaz* troops would assist the main attack by disrupting enemy command, control, and communications, destroying men and equipment, mining roads, and demolishing bridges. General Khrenov personally approved the combat operations plan of each detachment.<sup>11</sup>

The first detachment to deploy was the 6th Separate Guards Battalion of *Miners*, minus one company, commanded by Guards Major A. F. Popov.<sup>12</sup> Most of the 133 men carried submachine guns, with four basic loads (600 rounds) of ammunition, and hand grenades. The detachment additionally carried three light machine guns, three sniper rifles with 600



rounds for each, explosives and fuses, 130 antitank mines, ten delayed action mines, two radios with two supplies of batteries for each, flare guns, medical supplies, and individual rations for seventeen days. The average equipment load of soldiers in the detachment was forty-two kilograms (ninety-two pounds).

The Popov detachment departed their assembly area behind the Soviet left flank at 1400 hours on 18 September, and began the long walk around the German right flank. Major Popov used a reinforced platoon for his advance guard, a squad per company for flank guards, and a platoon for rear guard. He and his command group marched at the front of the main body. Communication between companies was maintained by runners and light signals, within companies and platoons by voice and flags. The formation moved at a speed of two kilometers per hour over the extremely difficult terrain, halting for ten minutes each hour to rest. Until they reached the Titovka River, the men moved during the day and rested at night.

On the fourth day, at 1300 hours on 21 September, the detachment crossed the Titovka River. Moving now at night to avoid detection, Popov and his men waded across the icy cold, chest-deep, fifty-meters-wide Petsamo River. On the night of 23–24 September, they reached the Luostari-Nikel Road, along which flowed a steady stream of German traffic. At 0400 hours on 24 September, the detachment crossed this dangerous obstacle in a rapid rush, and moved quickly away to the north. Popov led his men to a small stream in a wooded area near the Norwegian border, arriving on the morning of 25 September. He reported their arrival to Front headquarters.

From this position, Major Popov's men conducted reconnaissance patrols as far out as twenty-five kilometers, principally to the Petsamo-Tarnet Road, the Luostari-Nikel Road, and the Luostari-Akhamalakhti Road. His men studied traffic patterns, and selected targets and ambush sites for subsequent combat operations. In the base camp, strict noise and light discipline was enforced. Not long after arrival, Major Popov cut rations in half to conserve them. The frequent rain and snow showers kept the men wet and cold, leading also to concern about their health.

While the Popov detachment executed its reconnaissance mission, the remaining company of the 6th Guards Battalion of *Miners* departed its assembly area on 2 October and moved toward its objective area northeast of Nikel. Led by Major Popov's deputy, Captain A. P. Kononenko, the forty-nine-man detachment reached its operating base on the night of 7–8 October, and established communications with the battalion main force.

A third detachment, 108 men of the 222d Motorized Assault Combat Engineer Battalion, commanded by Major G. A. Gradov, also departed its assembly area on 2 October, and on 6 October reached its objective area in the rear of the 2d Mountain Division, between Luostari and the Titovka River. This detachment, which comprised five platoons, deployed along Lanweg and the road between Petsamo and Titovka (Russian Road).

Several hours before the attack on 7 October, all three *spetsnaz* detachments received orders by radio to begin combat operations. A platoon of Major Gradov's 222d Battalion struck the first blow. A German regimental after-action report contains an entry describing an attack on an outpost at 1900 hours on 6 October, fourteen kilometers east of Luostari on Lanweg.<sup>13</sup>

Major Popov's detachment also went into action quickly. His first priority was to destroy the wire communications between the German rear area and front line units, to force enemy units to use the radio, and under the intense pressure of combat use clear text. His second priority was to destroy bridges on all three roads controlled by his battalion. During the night of 6-7 October, Popov's detachment went out in three groups, one

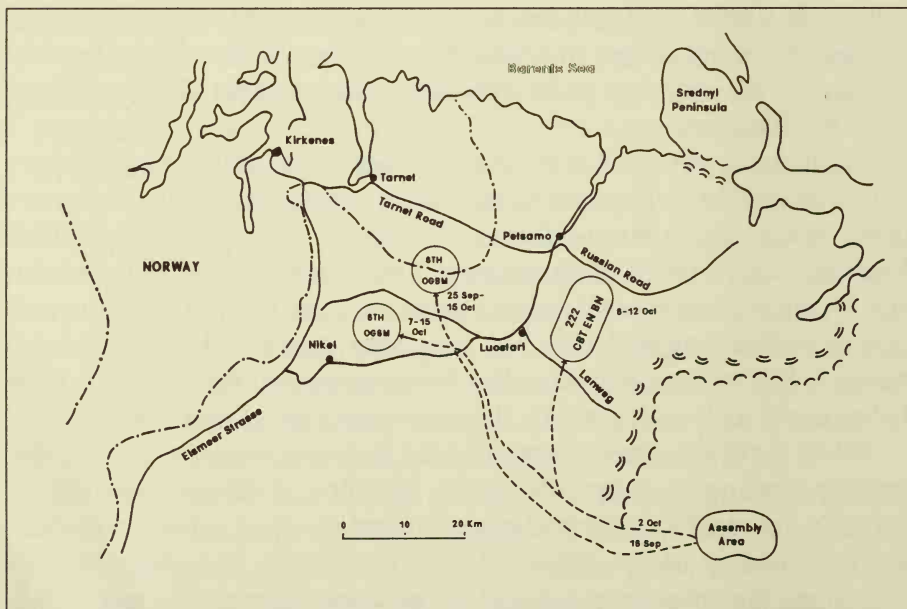


Figure 3. Ground force special operations map.

to each road, and destroyed communications wire, blew up bridges, and planted mines. After all three groups returned to base by dawn on 7 October, Major Popov reported to Front headquarters, then moved his base camp several kilometers to the west.

The weather and terrain were extracting a heavy toll on Popov's men. Forty of them were so weakened by exhaustion, hunger, and cold that they could no longer fight. Popov sent them back toward Soviet lines under the charge of a Captain Vasil'ev. The remaining ninety-plus men continued their nightly raids. The 20th Army morning report for 8 October states that a sabotage group blew up the bridge at Kilometer 28 of Tarnet Road, destroying one truck. The same document reports damage to a bridge and destruction of several powerline poles at Kilometer 486 of the Arctic Ocean Highway (this location is west of Luostari, before the road fork).<sup>14</sup>

Captain Kononenko's men made their first raid on the night of 7-8 October, along the road several kilometers east of Nikel. In this attack his troops took out several hundred meters of telephone line, and planted mines which later destroyed two German fuel trucks. By 10 October, the 20th Army knew the general location of Major Popov's battalion, as well as its identification. A war diary document reports "employment of a 150-200-man element with a sabotage mission in the area between the Eismeer Strasse (Arctic Ocean Highway) and the Tarnet-Kirkenes Road." This group, according to the report, did succeed in disrupting traffic along the main supply routes in the area. The document later specifically identifies one sabotage group as an element of the "6th Independent Guards Detachment (Sabotage)."<sup>15</sup>

Major Gradov and his five platoons of the 222d Battalion continued to attack isolated German units and positions in front of the advancing 99th and 131st Rifle corps, rejoining the main force on 12 October, the day Luostari was captured. According to one Soviet source, Gradov's men conducted six separate attacks, destroyed 3,600 meters of telephone line, blew up two bridges, and killed over 150 German soldiers while suffering only three lightly wounded.<sup>16</sup>

Major Popov's 6th Separate Guards Battalion of *Miners* continued their operations against German columns, mostly now in retreat. On the night of 11 October, a low-flying aircraft (probably a Po-2 night bomber) delivered urgently needed supplies of food, ammunition, and warm clothing to his men. Additional deliveries followed on the next three nights. As the encirclement of the German right flank and the capture of Luostari

on 12 October began to force the Germans to withdraw into Norway toward Tarnet, Popov increased his attacks against that road. His men were able to stop traffic at numerous defiles and streams with mines and demolitions, and on more than one occasion they directed air strikes against concentrations of German units. In his report of 5 November 1944, General Jodl wrote that on 13 October the 6th Mountain Division had to deploy combat elements against the Soviet 6th Guards Special Engineer Detachment, which had occupied a sector of road.<sup>17</sup>

After a final successful attack along Tarnet road, in which his troops expended all remaining ammunition, on 15 October Major Popov led his entire force back into Soviet positions, which were by then west of Petsamo-Luostari Road. In eight days of active combat, Popov's battalion destroyed more than eleven kilometers of telephone wire, four bridges, and large amounts of German equipment and troops. His battalion's losses were only four wounded and two missing in action.<sup>18</sup>

In analyzing the employment of *spetsnaz* units by the Karelian Front, several important points emerge. The first is that the use of sabotage troops behind German lines was nothing new or extraordinary. Soviet troops had been conducting raids and reconnaissance in German rear areas since the first weeks of the war back in 1941. By mid-1944 the war in the German rear area was a well-oiled machine which played a significant role in all major Soviet Offensive operations. This employment of *spetsnaz* detachments differed from all the rest in three significant aspects, however. The weather and terrain were much more severe, the terrain provided much less cover and concealment, and there was no indigenous population to provide logistic, intelligence, or partisan support.

Concerning the forces designated and trained for this specific operation, the 6th Separate Guards *Miners* Battalion, the 222d Motorized Assault Combat Engineer Battalion, and others, their combat experience in special operations prior to autumn 1944 is unknown. That they were engineer-based units is, however, significant. They were primarily trained to strike enemy troops and installations. Engineer troops were more likely to have the individual and collective skills necessary for demolitions work, as well as the equipment. Ordinary engineer units could provide a plentiful supply of trained manpower for selection into special purpose units. Reconnaissance skills were important, but mainly for acquiring targets for immediate destruction. These units reported to the Front Chief of Engineer Troops, not the intelligence staff.

Several aspects of the deployment plan deserve attention. The method

of insertion—walking—although slow, was probably the most secure, and it served the additional purpose of reconnoitering a route for an important follow-on force, the 126th Light Rifle Corps. The selection of an operating base adjacent to Norwegian territory, and continuous reconnaissance and combat activities on Norwegian territory *prior to* 18 October, when Meretskoy received permission to send conventional forces across the border into Norway, indicates that military requirements for special operations took precedence over political sensitivities. It cannot be determined from available sources if Karelian Front had to gain approval from Stavka to deploy *spetsnaz* forces onto Norwegian territory.

Disregarding the time required for the deepest penetrating detachment to reach its position (Major Popov's group), the Soviet *spetsnaz* force was functioning forty to fifty kilometers deep in German-occupied territory for twelve days before the main offensive. Although the Soviet troops moved about only at night and hid during the day, they reported their actions to Front headquarters by regular radio transmissions, two per day before 7 October, and every two hours thereafter. To avoid German detection for such a long period of time, in terrain known for lack of cover, says as much for Soviet camouflage and movement security as for poor German rear area security. To be willing to place one hundred thirty-three men so deep behind enemy lines almost two weeks before an offensive speaks volumes about the Front headquarter's confidence in their military skills and, just as important for *spetsnaz* soldiers, their political reliability.

Finally, in terms of space, the *spetsnaz* detachments operated in a broad zone, extending from regimental rear to corps rear, from eight to fifty kilometers behind the front line. Their reconnaissance and combat activities were directed more at communications and transportation facilities and targets than at combat forces. If they came upon an unsecured artillery battery, though, the *spetsnaz* units did not hesitate to attack. They also, on a few occasions, occupied a piece of key terrain, and then repulsed a German unit which sought use of the same terrain without first conducting reconnaissance.

The *spetsnaz* were effective. In terms of their mission, they did reconnoiter the route for 126th Light Rifle Corps and conduct continuous reconnaissance of the enemy and terrain. Their control of the road net was never total, but certainly adequate. There is not sufficient evidence in German war diary documents to validate or refute the claims made in Soviet sources of quantities of German troops, equipment, and installations destroyed, but that reports of *spetsnaz* actions appear at all in 20th Army

records testifies to the concern of the German command for this unanticipated and unwelcome battle in their rear area.

The two Soviet commanders gave high praise to the *spetsnaz* units in their memoirs. Colonel General of Engineer Troops Khrenov wrote the following in 1982:

Of course, these forms of struggle behind the front line did not determine the success of the offensive. But I have considered it my duty to write about the sapper scouts, in order to more fully expose this little known type of activity of engineer troops, which demanded special moral-combat qualities, and permitted the inflicting on the enemy of great losses with small forces.<sup>19</sup>

Marshal Meretskov expressed similar thoughts in his 1983 memoir:

From these detachments was gained valuable information which kept the command informed of changes which were occurring in the enemy's defenses. In addition, the sappers controlled the roads, blew up bridges and destroyed telephone lines, causing disorder in the work of German rear services. Finally, on more than one occasion they directed our close air and bomber aviation to concentrations of enemy troops.<sup>20</sup>

## Naval Special Operations

During the planning for Northern Fleet support to the ground offensive of 14th Army, naval headquarters in Moscow ordered Admiral Golovko to reestablish a Soviet naval base at Petsamo.<sup>21</sup> Pursuant to this order, Golovko's staff began to plan an amphibious landing at Linakhamari, the small port that lay north of Petsamo on the west shore of Petsamo Bay. Entrance to Petsamo Bay was controlled by a battery of four German 150mm guns, which were positioned on the northern shore of Cape Krestovyi. These guns had to be neutralized in order for the main landing force to succeed.

To accomplish this task the fleet assembled a composite force of sailors and naval infantrymen consisting of the reconnaissance detachment of the Northern Defensive Region, commanded by Captain I. P. Barchenko-Emel'ianov, and the reconnaissance detachment of Headquarters, Northern

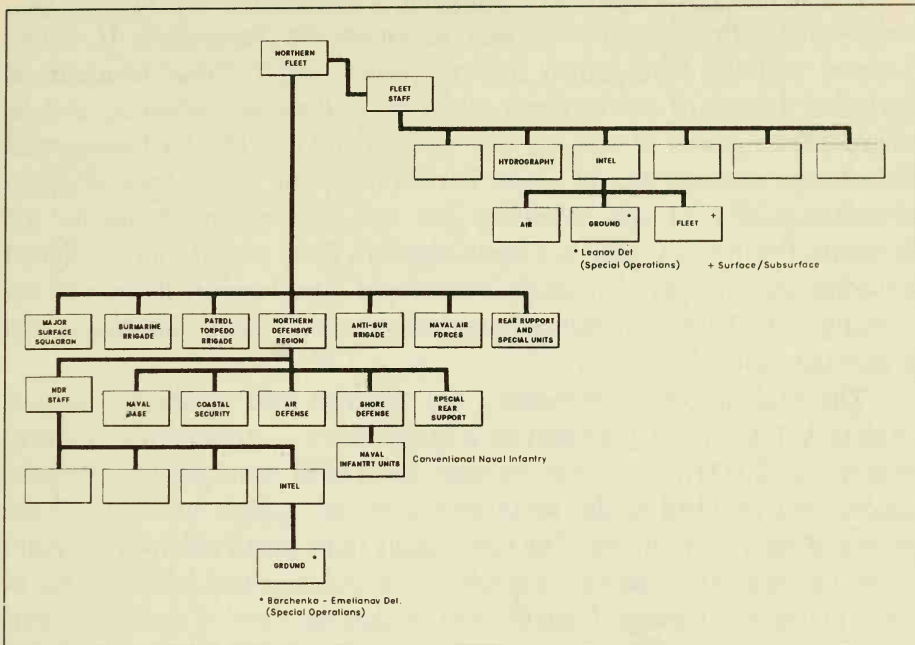


Figure 4. Organization of the Soviet Northern Fleet, showing subordination of the Leonov and Barchenko-Emel'ianov detachments.

Fleet, commanded by Sr. Lt. Viktor N. Leonov. Barchenko-Emel'ianov was an experienced naval infantryman, who had served in reconnaissance units of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade in the Murmansk area since November 1941. In June 1943 he took command of the Northern Defensive Region reconnaissance detachment, a collection of naval infantrymen who were veteran scouts of many reconnaissance and raid actions against German units and positions along the coast of occupied Finnish and Soviet territory.<sup>22</sup>

Leonov, on the other hand, and most of his detachment were sailors, volunteers from the several surface and submarine units of the Northern Fleet. The detachment had a distinguished combat record dating back to its creation in July 1941 by Admiral Golovko, having participated in many operations behind German lines, on Soviet, Finnish, and Norwegian territory. Leonov, himself a veteran of submarine service, came to the detachment in the late summer of 1941. Courage and leadership displayed in battle earned him promotion to officer rank in late 1942, and to command of the detachment in late 1943.

Barchenko-Emel'ianov, as commander of the composite detachment, received his first specific mission statement on September 11, when Leonov and his men joined the composite unit.<sup>23</sup> Other attachments included a team of artillerymen, a group of combat engineers, and an unspecified number of medics and radio operators. The total composite detachment strength was 195 men. For the next four weeks, the composite detachment trained and rehearsed for the mission on terrain on the Rybachii Peninsula similar to Cape Krestovyi. Final preparations included coordination with naval aviators who would later support them. On the evening of 9 October, the detachment boarded two small subchasers and a torpedo cutter.

The raiding party approached the German-held southern shore of Malaia Volokovaia Bay as part of a larger force of approximately thirty vessels and 2,800 men. While the main force 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade landed and attacked to the south and west, the raiders would land and march off to the southwest. The three small ships broke off from the main force and reached Cape Punainenniemi, their designated landing area, at 0100 hours 10 October. Under cover of darkness and a smoke screen, despite enemy shore battery fire aided by searchlights, the detachments got ashore with no casualties and the loss of one of five radios. Once established ashore, they reported their status to fleet headquarters and began their cross-country march.

The terrain in this region is sparsely vegetated, rocky, mountainous, and interspersed with streams and lakes. Elevations of over 1,000 feet are found two to three kilometers inland from the Barents Sea. On 10 October, 1944, the temperature hovered around freezing, with a strong wind blowing from the sea. The group moved inland that night in a snowstorm which turned to rain in the morning. The men removed their white camouflage smocks in order to blend in with the grey-brown surroundings.

All day on 10 October the men hid in rock caves and only moved again at dusk. At daybreak, 11 October, Capt. Barchenko-Emel'ianov hid his men in a growth of bushes at the southern end of Lake Sisajarvi. In eighteen hours, they had marched over fifteen kilometers. After a rest period, at twilight they continued to move. By nightfall they reached a spur on Petsamo Bay, from which they could view the silhouette of their target, Cape Krestovyi. Beyond the cape they could see the port of Linakhamari across the bay. The men were standing at the top of a vertical cliff from which their descent took six hours.

The plan for the assault on the objective was simple. Leonov's group



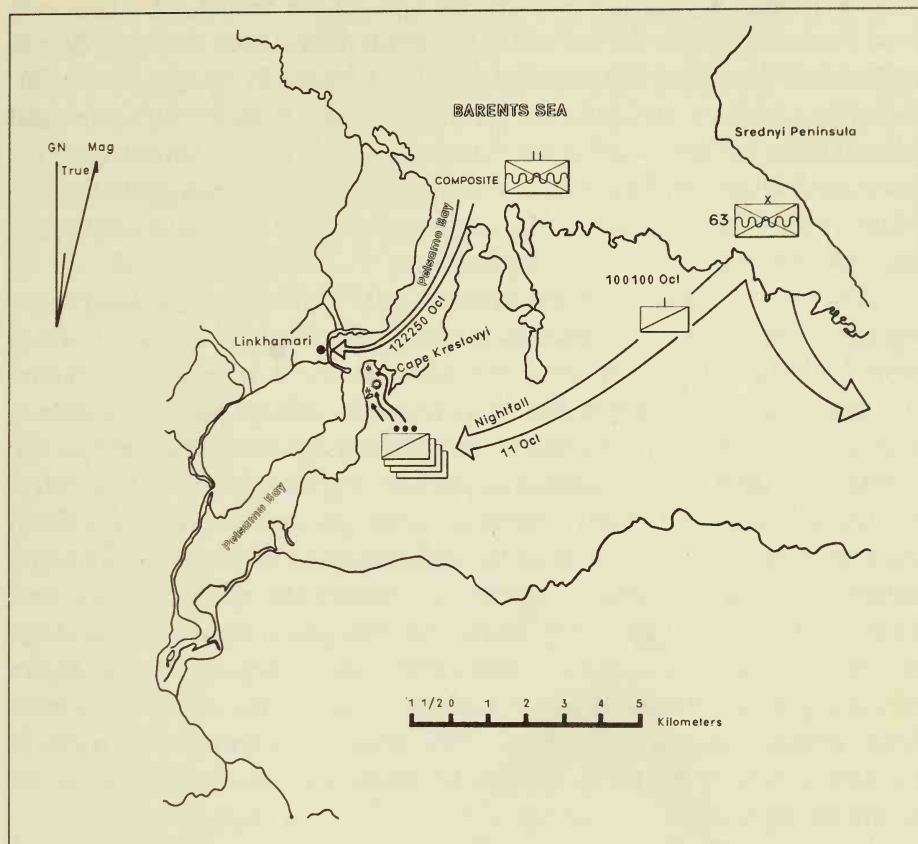


Figure 5. Naval *osnaz* plan of attack.

of ninety-five men would assault the battery of four 88mm antiaircraft guns sited on a gentle slope on the southern portion of the cape. The attached artillerymen went with this group. Barchenko-Emel'ianov ordered two of his own platoons to attack and seize the strongpoint located 300 meters north of the flak battery. This position, in the center of the cape, guarded the landward approaches to the 150mm coastal battery. His remaining platoon would storm this four-gun battery which was located at the water's edge on the northernmost shore of the cape.

After a brief leaders' orientation, which included an oral order, the three elements moved off in the darkness to await the signal for the start of the attack. It is unclear whether the signal rocket that triggered the attack was fired by the attackers or by the startled German defenders.<sup>24</sup>

In either case, the element of surprise was on the Soviet side. Leonov's men were crawling in the barbed wire forty to fifty meters from the 88mm guns when the rocket went up. It was soon followed by German-fired illumination. Leonov and his men quickly breached the barbed wire and assaulted the bunkers, and in hand-to-hand combat killed or drove off the crews and seized the four-gun battery. Leonov's detachment spent the rest of the night fending off numerous German counterattacks, and employing the captured guns against enemy bunkers.

The platoons of Lieutenants Kubarev and Pivovarov also quickly overwhelmed the German defenders in the strongpoint. German survivors from both the flak battery and strongpoint positions withdrew singly and in groups northward along the cape into the 150mm battery positions. While Barchenko-Emel'ianov was establishing his command post in the strongpoint position, his remaining platoon was assaulting the now fully-alerted 150mm shore battery position. Attempts to take the battery from the landward side were repulsed by well dug-in Germans in bunkers and trenches behind barbed wire. The Soviets sent an element around the west flank to attack along the rocky shore, but this group was driven back by the incoming tide. According to one source, the besieged Germans began to destroy their own guns, while Leonov contends that these guns were firing against his men in support of a German counterattack.<sup>25</sup> Unable to capture or destroy the guns, Barchenko-Emel'ianov reported the situation to his headquarters.

At dawn on 12 October, the Germans remaining on the cape regrouped and launched a counterattack. According to German war diary entries, as well as Soviet sources, these counterattacks were supported by German troops sent across the harbor in assault boats.<sup>26</sup> All available German indirect fire support assets were also directed against the Soviet raiders, causing serious casualties. Outnumbered and unable to hold the flak battery positions, Leonov withdrew his men to a nearby hill. The artillerymen removed and took with them the breech blocks of the 88mm guns.

As the counterattacking Germans were approaching the strongpoint position where Barchenko-Emel'ianov and his detachment were holding out, on-call Soviet aviation assets came in and restored the situation. According to the account of Admiral Golovko, his pilots delivered ten airstrikes and dropped several parachute containers of ammunition and provisions in the course of four hours.<sup>27</sup> Soviet ground artillery from Srednyi

Peninsula conducted counterbattery fire throughout the day, helping to defeat several German counterattacks.

By midday 12 October, the Soviet positions in the center of the cape were secure enough that Barchenko-Emel'ianov gave Leonov one platoon plus two squads to bolster his position overlooking the flak battery. With these reinforcements, Leonov and his men counterattacked. By dusk they had retaken the position and the adjacent shore, depriving the Germans of the ability to reinforce on that flank.<sup>28</sup> Some isolated groups of Germans were captured, while others found their way northward to the shore battery position. By nightfall the area was quiet, except for an occasional outburst of gunfire.

At about 2000 hours, Barchenko-Emel'ianov was informed by radio that an amphibious landing force would assault the Linakhamari harbor in three hours. The landing was carried out between 2250 and 2400 hours, 12 October. Approximately six hundred men landed in three waves from eight torpedo cutters and six subchasers.<sup>29</sup> By all accounts, this landing force was detected, illuminated, and fired upon by several German shore batteries. The key battery on Cape Krestovyi did not engage the amphibious landing force, either because of the destruction of the guns or the preoccupation of the crews with Barchenko-Emel'ianov's assaults. All Soviet accounts credit the actions of the raiders for the subsequent success of the landings in the harbor.

During the night of 12-13 October, the raiders were reinforced by a company from the 63rd Naval Infantry Brigade, which had participated in the landing on the night of 9-10 October. These men came in overland from the east. An additional platoon came ashore from a disabled cutter. Before dawn on 13 October, Barchenko-Emel'ianov selected a German officer from among his prisoners and sent him into the shore battery position with a surrender ultimatum. After some delay, the garrison of seventy-eight officers and men surrendered.

The day of 13 October was spent looking after the prisoners and captured equipment. That night the entire detachment was taken across the bay into Linakhamari to assist in mopping up operations which were completed by midday on 14 October. In three days of battle for Krestovyi and Linakhamari, the detachments of Senior Lieutenant Leonov and Captain Barchenko-Emel'ianov lost fifty-three men killed and wounded, or 27 percent of their 195-man force. Barchenko-Emel'ianov, Leonov, and two enlisted men were awarded the gold star and title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

## Conclusion

The naval special operation in some ways resembled the ground force's *spetsnaz* operation. The raid on Cape Krestovyi was not the first, but rather the last in a long list of attacks on German installations behind the front line. Concerning the two detachments that combined to execute the raid, by far the most is known about Leonov and his men. But both organizations had extensive combat experience, and this raid fell well within the repertoire of their individual and collective skills.

The insertion of the force onto enemy shores was cleverly masked by the much larger brigade-sized landing to the east. Once ashore, the composite detachment walked the extremely difficult route to the objective area. Although physically demanding and time consuming, it was the only way to reach the target and maintain the advantage of surprise. The naval special operations also employed close air support, both for combat and logistic support.

There were differences in the two operations, as well. From start to finish, the naval special operation lasted only four to five days, compared to the *spetsnaz* operation of twenty-nine days. The chain of command for the naval special operation was not as direct. Leonov was subordinated to Barchenko-Emel'ianov, who reported to the commander of Northern Defensive Region, Maj. Gen. E. T. Dubovtsev. Dubovtsev's immediate superior was Admiral Golovko, commander of the Northern Fleet. The naval special operation was a surgical strike without preliminary, or supplementary, reconnaissance functions.

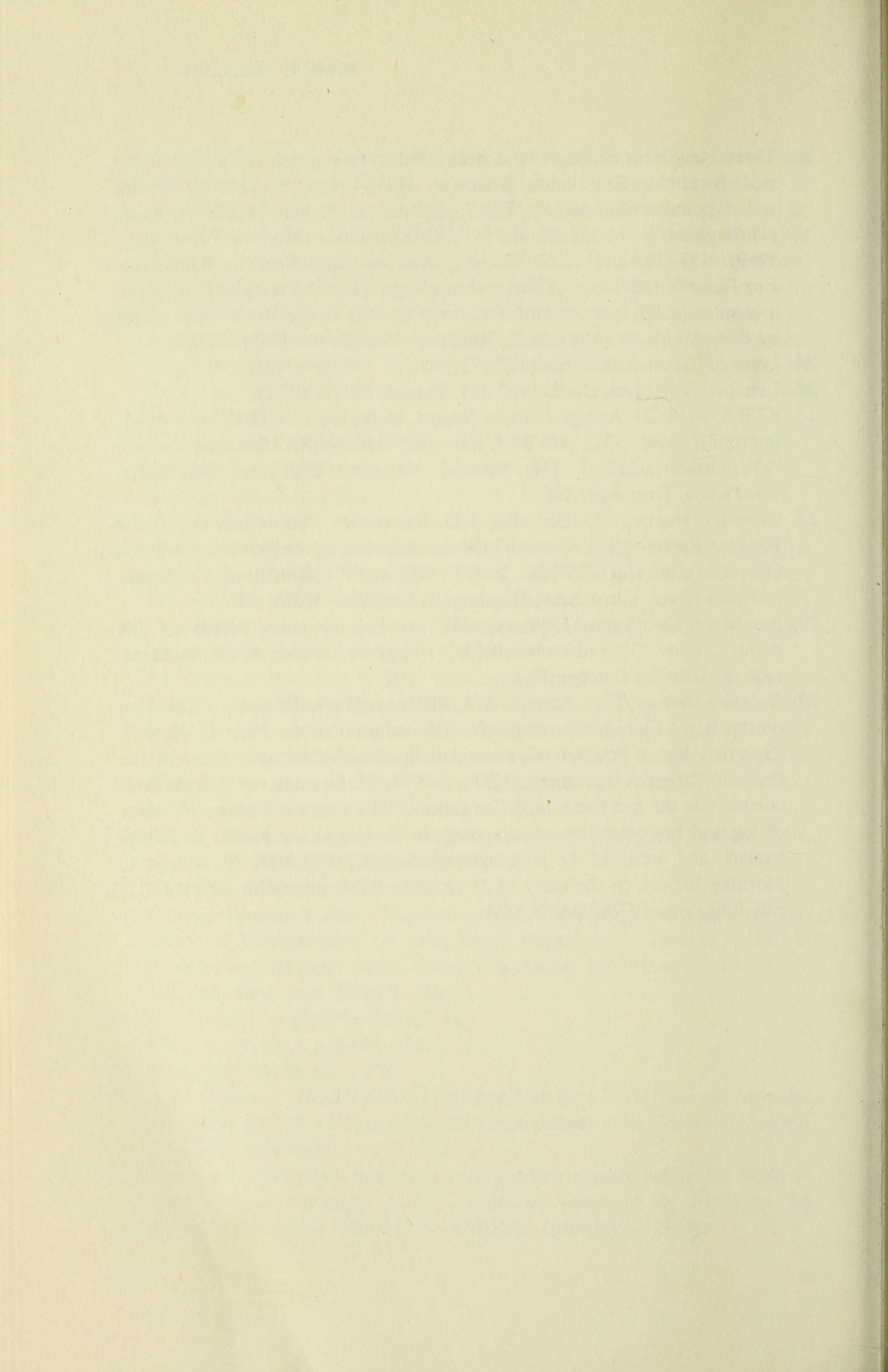
Taken together, these two examples show a high level of maturity and specialization in Soviet planning, training, organization, and execution of special operations in the later stages of World War II. The Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation was a Soviet success. By the end of October 1944, Soviet troops had cleared all German forces in the area from Soviet territory, and were occupying defensive positions twenty kilometers west of the major Norwegian port of the region, Kirkenes. Lieutenant Colonel Krutskikh and many of his men, and Senior Lieutenant Leonov and over forty of his men, were transferred to the Far East in the late spring of 1945, where in August of that year they conducted special operations against the Japanese forces in Manchuria, discussed at length in Chapter 8.

## Notes

1. See Department of the Army Pamphlet 20-269, *Small Unit Actions During the German Campaign in Russia* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953), chapter 4, for a sampling of German actions.
2. Waldemar Erfurth, *The Last Finnish War (1941-1944)*, MS # C-073, Historical Division European Command, Foreign Military Studies Branch, 1952. Published in German under the title *Der Finnische Krieg, 1941-1944* (Wiesbaden/Munich: Limes-Verlag, 1977).
3. Information in this section pertaining to German initial defensive positions is from Nikolai M. Rumiantsev, *Razgrom vraga v zapoliar'e* (The Defeat of the Enemy in the Transpolar) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963): 129-137; 2d Mountain Division defensive dispositions are discussed in detail in that unit's war diary records. See KTB 1, 2nd Mountain Division, Folder 77563 (Combat Reports, Attack of the Russians Against the German Defense Line), microfilm series T-315, roll 109, NARA.
4. The document was published in "Osvobozhdenie sovetskogo Zapoliar'ia" (Liberation of the Soviet Polar Region), compiled by I. V. Iaroshenko and L. I. Smirnova, *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* (Military Historical Journal) (*VIZh*) 6/1985, 33-34.
5. The Russian term is *ukreplennyi raion*, and has two meanings in Soviet military parlance. The applicable definition in this case is "a TO&E troop formation, which is designated for the fulfillment of a defensive mission." Such a formation routinely consisted of several artillery battalions, and units of support and service. See, *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia* 8 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1980): 185.
6. K.A. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narodu* (In Service to the People) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983), 376. He briefly mentions these detachments, calling them "not simple scouts, but detachments of sappers." Their designation as *spetsnaz* units comes from Maj. Gen. D. S. Krutskikh in "Udary po tylam" (Strikes in the Rear Area), in the book *Eto byla na krainem severe* (It Was In the Far North), (Murmansk: Knizhno Izatdatel'stvo, 1965): 203. Krutskikh was an engineer lieutenant colonel in the Karelian Front engineer staff in 1944, responsible for training the detachments. G. Emel'ianov calls them "detachments of sappers-demolitions men" in "V glubokom tylu vraga" (In the Deep Enemy Rear Area), *VIZh*, October 1974, 55-59. A. F. Khrenov, who in 1944 was Karelian Front Chief of Engineer Troops and Krutskikh's superior, uses the label "sappers of reconnaissance-diversionary detachments" in his memoir, *Mosty k pobedy* (Bridges to Victory) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982): 318.

7. Krutskikh, "Udari po tylam," 203. The 6th Guards Battalion of *Miners* was an extraordinary engineer unit. According to a recently published history of Soviet engineer troops, each Front had such a battalion by October 1942. See S. Kh. Aganov, ed., *Inzhenernye voiska Sovetskoi Armii 1918-1945* (Engineer Troops of the Soviet Army, 1918-1945) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985): 459-63. According to this source, all guards *miners* battalions were specially trained and equipped for reconnaissance and diversionary actions in German rear areas. The Soviets were not alone in using combat engineers as special purpose forces. The first British commandos, organized to raid the Atlantic coast after the German conquest of mainland Europe, were also from combat engineer units.
8. Khrenov, *Mosty k pobede*, 319.
9. Emel'ianov, "V glubokom tylu," 55.
10. Khrenov, *Mosty k pobede*, 317.
11. *Ibid.*, 320.
12. The detailed descriptions which follow came from Krutskikh, "Udari po tylam"; Emel'ianov, "V glubokom tylu"; and Khrenov, *Mosty k pobede*, 319-337. Beginning on 320, Khrenov quotes from written recollections of Guards Major A. F. Popov, who commanded the 6th Separate Guards Battalion of *Miners* in the operation.
13. 2d Mountain Division, KTB 1, "Gebirgsjagerregiment 137, Gefechtsbericht uber die Kampfhandlungen am 7.u.8.10.44 im Abschnitt Isar" (Mountain Rifle Regiment 137, Action Report on the Defensive Battle on 7 and 8 October 1944 in the Isar Sector), microfilm series T-315, roll 109, frame 1089, NARA.
14. KTB 5, 20th Army, Anlage 4, Morning Report, to the entry of 8 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, NARA.
15. KTB 5, 20th Army, Anlage 1, Daily Report, to the entry of 10 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, NARA.
16. Krutskikh, "Udari po tylam," 206.
17. General Ferdinand Jodl, "Kursbericht uber die Kampfhandlungen im Petsamo und Varangerraum" (A Short Report Regarding the Combat Actions in Petsamo and Varanger Area), dated 5 November 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1069, item 75034/1, NARA.
18. Emel'ianov, "V glubokom tylu," 59.
19. Khrenov, *Mosty k pobede*, 324.
20. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe*, 376.
21. A. G. Golovko, *Vmeste s flotom* (Together With the Fleet) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1979), 227; N. G. Kuznetsov, *Kursom k pobede* (The Course to Victory) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976), 423.
22. Barchenko-Emel'ianov finished a brief memoir shortly before his death in January 1984, *Frontovye budnyi rybach'ego* (Days at the Front on the Rybachii Peninsula) (Murmansk: Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1984).

23. Three eyewitness accounts have been used to reconstruct the events of the raid: Barchenko-Emel'ianov, *Frontovye*, 138–54; Leonov, *Litsom*, 106–26, and “Vperedsmotriashchie” (The Lookouts), a chapter in *Cherez fiordy* (Through the Fjords), compiled by V. G. Korshunov (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1969): 157–78; and A. N. Sintsov, who was an officer in Barchenko-Emel'ianov's detachment, “Shturm krestovogo” (The Storming of Krestovyi), a chapter in *Eto bylo na krainem severe* (It Was in the Far North), edited by S. K. Chirkova (Murmansk: Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1965): 215–21.
24. Leonov, “Vperedsmotriashchie,” 172; Sintsov, “Shturm,” 219.
25. Leonov, “Vperedsmotriashchie,” 173; Sintsov, “Shturm,” 219.
26. KTB 5, AOK 20, Anlage 2, Daily Report, to the entry of 12 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, frame 9265168, NARA. See also, Leonov, “Vperedsmotriashchie,” 174; Sintsov, “Shturm,” 220; and Barchenko-Emel'ianov, *Frontovye*, 146.
27. Golovko, *Vmeste*, 235. See also, I. G. Inozemtsev, “Sovetskaia aviatsiia v Petsamo-Kirkenesskoi operatsii” (Soviet Aviation in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation), *Istoriia SSSR*, No. 2, 1975, 107; and P. I. Khokhlov, *Nad tremia moriami* (Over Three Seas) (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988): 223.
28. Barchenko-Emel'ianov, *Frontovyi*, 147, provides the most details on this point; Leonov, “Vperedsmotriashchie,” 174, gives the time of the counterattack as dawn on October 13.
29. Golovko, *Vmeste*, 236; Admiral V. I. Platanov, “Pravoflangovye” (The Men on the Right Flank), *Cherez fiordy*, 106; Admiral of the Fleet G. Egorov, “Severnyi flot v Petsamo Kirkenesskoi operatsii” (Northern Fleet in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation), *VIZh*, 10/1974, 23. German war diary entries corroborate the fact that at night on October 12 an enemy force under cover of fog and low visibility made a surprise landing in the harbor at Linakhamari, and occupied the port and city. See, KTB 5, AOK 20, Anlage 4, Morning Report, to the entry of 13 October 1944, microfilm series T-312, roll 1063, frame 9265184, NARA.





## CHAPTER 8

# Manchuria, 1945

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The Manchurian Campaign of August 1945 was the last great Soviet offensive of World War II. In eleven days of often fierce combat, Soviet combined arms forces conquered an area of approximately 1.5 million square kilometers, an area roughly equivalent in size to the state of Alaska.<sup>1</sup>

The area of operations<sup>2</sup> for the campaign was bordered on the east and north by the Soviet Maritime Territory and the Soviet provinces of Khabarovsk and Chita, on the west by Outer Mongolia and the Chinese provinces of Inner Mongolia and Jehol, and on the south by the Bay of Liaotung, the Kwantung Pantao Peninsula, and Korea. At the time of the offensive, a well-developed regional road and rail network connected the major industrial cities of Mukden (Shenyang), Changchun (Ch'angch'un), Harbin (Haerphin) and Tsitsihar (Ch'ich'ihaerh). Cultivated areas predominated in the central valley.

The Soviets fought the Japanese Kwantung Army in numerous border incidents in the years preceding the Soviet invasion, most notably at Lake Khasan in 1938 and Khalkhin-Gol (Nomonhan) in 1939.<sup>3</sup> Tensions were eased somewhat by the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact of April 1941, though the Soviets maintained a force of approximately 1.3 million men, including forty to sixty rifle division equivalents, on the Manchurian border from December 1941 to May 1945.<sup>4</sup>

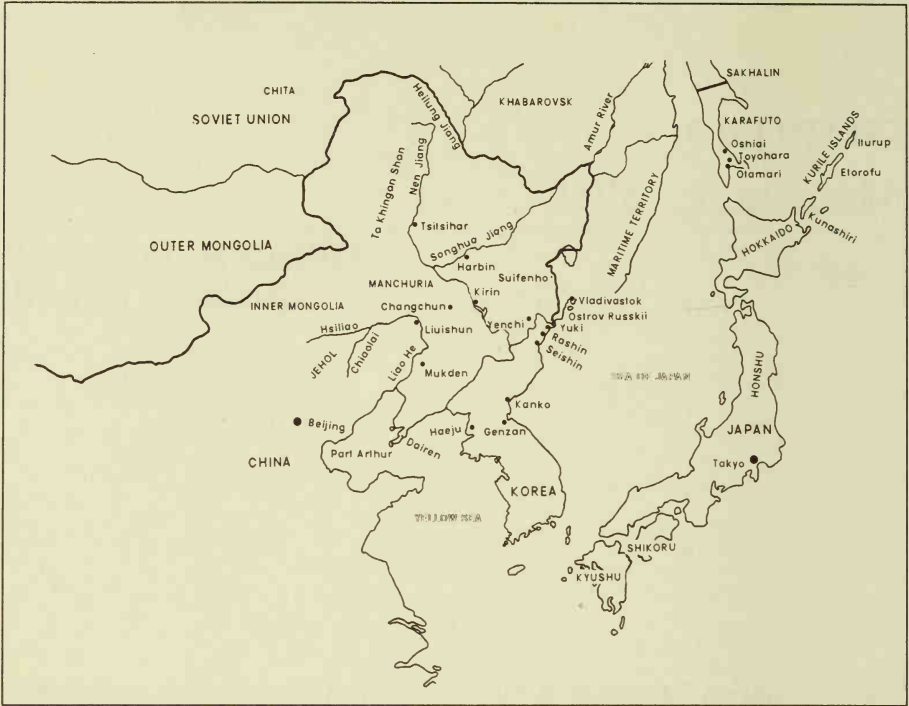


Figure 1. Area of operations of the Manchurian Campaign.

As long as Germany was undefeated, Stalin refused to declare war on Japan.<sup>5</sup> At the February 1945 Yalta Conference, however, Stalin promised that the Soviet Union would assist the Allies in the war against Japan within three months of Germany's surrender.<sup>6</sup> Stalin conditioned the promise on the successful conclusion of a treaty with China, as Soviet troops would operate on Japanese-occupied Chinese territory, and sought Western recognition of Soviet territorial claims in the Kurile Islands, the southern half of Sakhalin Island, and the old Russian bases at Port Arthur (Lüshun or Ryojun) and Dairen (Dalian). In April 1945, preparations for the Far East campaign began in earnest, the Red Army General Staff estimating the campaign would take two to three months. The Soviets planned to launch their campaign in late summer–early autumn to clear the Japanese from Manchuria before winter set in, but their hand was forced on 6 August when the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima.<sup>7</sup> On 9 August, the Soviets crossed the Manchurian frontier.

The Soviets employed a variety of special operations (not all involving *spetsnaz*) to support their campaign and, after Japanese capitulation, to consolidate their conquest.<sup>8</sup> Soviet forces conducted approximately twenty airlanding assaults and as many amphibious landings in the Manchurian campaign. Based on information carefully gleaned from open sources, some can be accurately categorized as special operations. This chapter presents detailed and documented evidence of several such operations. Some occurred during the first week of the offensive, and were important to its success. Others were conducted after 19 August, and served to hasten the surrender of already defeated forces. All were important to overall success of the Soviet offensive at the operational and strategic levels.

## Strategic Setting

Preparations<sup>9</sup> for the invasion were actually begun the previous autumn, though formal planning did not begin until February 1945.<sup>10</sup> From December 1944 to the end of March 1945, the Soviets sent 410 million rounds of small-arms ammunition and 3.2 million artillery shells to the Far East. From April 1945 until 25 July 1945, the Soviets shipped two fronts, two field armies, one tank army, and associated war materiel 10,000 miles from Europe to the Far East via the Trans-Siberian Railroad in 136,000 rail cars and as many as thirty trains a day. During the period of strategic redeployment, the Soviets regrouped two front and four army command and control systems, fifteen headquarters of rifle, artillery, tank and mechanized corps, thirty-six rifle, artillery and antiaircraft artillery divisions, fifty-three brigades of basic types of ground forces, and two fortified regions, altogether comprising thirty division equivalents.<sup>11</sup>

This redeployment and regrouping was under conditions of great secrecy and deception.<sup>12</sup> Key personnel traveled in disguise and many units moved only at night (staying camouflaged during the day) on their approach march to the Far East. Soviet troops on the frontier built extensive defensive works in an effort to deceive the Japanese into believing that Soviet reinforcements sent to the area were intended to man these fortifications. Regrouping of forces into the 1st Far Eastern Front, the 2d Far Eastern Front and the Transbaikal Front occurred in May to July 1945.<sup>13</sup> On 30 July, the Soviets created the Far East Command under Marshal of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Mikhailovich Vasilevskii.<sup>14</sup>

By August, the Far East Command had just under 1.6 million personnel (1.06 million combat and .5 million rear services), 27,000 guns and mortars, 1,200 multiple rocket launchers, 5,600 tanks and self-propelled guns, 3,700 aircraft, and 86,000 vehicles along a 5,000-km frontage. All forces were tailored down to battalion level for specific tasks.<sup>15</sup> At 1700 hours 8 August (2300 Tokyo time), Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov told the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow that a state of war existed between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> Seventy minutes later, at ten minutes past midnight, Soviet forces crossed the Manchurian frontier.

## Enemy Dispositions

The Kwantung Army of August 1945, commanded by Gen. Yamata Otozo and headquartered at Changchun, was organized into two area armies (army groups) and a separate combined army. It was supported by one air army and the Sungari Naval Flotilla. Including forces in Korea, the Soviets estimated in August 1945 that the Kwantung Army comprised thirty-one infantry divisions, nine infantry brigades, two tank brigades and one special purpose brigade. These forces had an aggregate 1,155 tanks, 5,360 guns, and 1,800 aircraft. The army of the puppet state of Manchukuo had an additional eight infantry divisions and seven cavalry divisions with fourteen brigades. The Japanese also had three infantry divisions and one infantry brigade on southern Sakhalin Island. The strength of the Japanese in Manchuria, Korea, southern Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands numbered about 1.2 million, of whom about 1 million were Japanese.<sup>17</sup>

The Kwantung Army at the time of the Soviet attack was a shell of its former self.<sup>18</sup> Although it occupied good defensive terrain and maintained many strongly fortified zones, its better troops had long before been transferred to other theaters. Only six of its divisions had existed prior to January 1945. Its troops were generally of low quality and lacked significant quantities of automatic weapons, antiarmor weapons and artillery. The Japanese 37mm antitank gun was ineffective against Soviet T-34 tanks. Japanese tanks had only 57mm guns and less armor than their Soviet counterparts. The Japanese considered none of the Kwantung divisions to be combat ready, and considered some divisions to be only 15 percent ready.<sup>19</sup>

When the offensive began, the Soviets had a favorable effective

strength ratio over the Japanese of approximately 2.2:1 in personnel, 4.8:1 in tanks and artillery, and 2:1 in aviation assets (which increased to total air superiority when the Japanese ordered its air force out of Manchuria at the outbreak of fighting).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Japanese failed to assess the Soviet threat correctly, did not believe that the Soviets would be able to attack before September 1945, and were in the process of a strategic reorientation of their forces when the blow fell.

The Soviet concept of the offensive was a strategic double envelopment conducted on three axes simultaneously, with the objectives of securing Manchuria and destroying the Kwantung Army.<sup>21</sup> The Transbaikalian Front, based in Chita and commanded by Marshal Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky (formerly commander of the 2d Ukrainian Front), would attack eastward into western Manchuria, delivering its main blow across a four-hundred-kilometer sector. The 1st Far Eastern Front, based in Khabarovsk and under the command of Marshal Kirill Afsans'evich Meretskov (formerly commander of the Karelian Front) would attack westward into eastern Manchuria. The two attacks would converge in the Mukden-Changchun-Harbin-Kirin area. The 2d Far Eastern Front, based in Vladivostok and commanded by General M. A. Purkayev, would conduct a supporting attack into northern Manchuria toward Harbin and Changchun. On-order operations were also planned against southern Sakhalin Island and the Kuriles. The Pacific Fleet under Admiral I. S. Yumashev was ordered to undertake operations against Korean ports and to assist the ground forces on Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands.<sup>22</sup>

## Special Operations in Support of the Offensive

The first special operation of the Manchurian offensive was the seizure of three key railroad tunnels in the early morning hours of 9 August by elements of the 1st Far Eastern Front on the eve of that Front's thrust into eastern Manchuria.<sup>23</sup> The heavily defended tunnels were one to three kilometers from the Soviet border on the avenue of advance of the 5th Army, with no possibility of bypass. The action was assigned to two detachments of the 20th "Svirsk" Motorized Assault Combat Engineer Brigade.

The 20th Brigade came to the 1st Far Eastern Front from the Karelian Front, where in October 1944 it provided *spetsnaz* detachments for the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation. The detachments for the tunnel operation

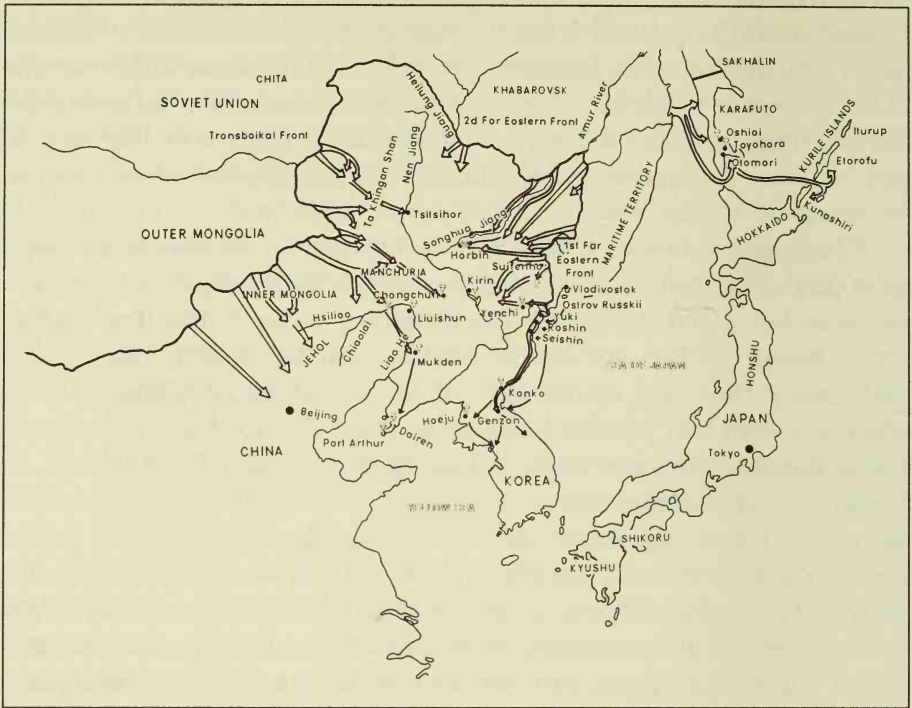


Figure 2. The Manchurian Campaign. From V. I Achksov, ed., *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoy voyny 1939–1945* (History of the Second World War) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1980) 256–257.

were deliberately taken from the 20th Brigade because the men in the brigade “were not sappers in the ordinary sense of the word—they were prepared to conduct all types of combat in the most difficult and unusual situations, and to destroy complex engineer obstacles at the front or in the enemy rear.”<sup>24</sup>

Each detachment comprised an assault battalion, a company of flame throwers, two platoons of submachine gunners, and a group of artillery observers. These detachments also had the support of an armored train and two battalions from the artillery brigade in Front reserve. Major V. I. Gurin commanded one detachment and Major Iu. Ia. Iankevich commanded the other. Prior to the operation, both commanders trained their detachments against Soviet tunnels on similar terrain. *Razvedchik*<sup>25</sup> Lt. Col. D. A. Krutskikh, the same engineer officer who organized and

trained the ground force *spetsnaz* detachments used in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation, actively participated in the preparation of the two detachments.<sup>26</sup>

At 2400 hours on 8 August, sappers began cutting through the barbed wire barriers along the border, and ten minutes later Marshal Meretskov ordered the offensive to begin.<sup>27</sup> The two *spetsnaz* engineer detachments infiltrated into the Japanese defenses under cover of darkness in a driving rainstorm. While one detachment assaulted the tunnels from multiple axes, the other detachment attacked the barracks of the guard force. Supported by well-adjusted artillery fire, they defeated the Japanese forces guarding the tunnel exits, and captured the important road junction between the tunnels and the fortified village and railroad station at Suifenho.<sup>28</sup> With the Japanese tunnel defenses thus neutralized, the forward detachment from the 187th Rifle Division<sup>29</sup> was able to capture all three tunnels intact, and on the morning of 9 August Col. Gen. N. I. Krylov, commander of the 5th Army, committed his main forces into battle.

### “Operation Bridge”

All three Fronts experienced stunning successes against the Japanese, and advanced at rates faster than the most optimistic Soviet estimates. On 17 August, General Yamata, Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army, sent a radio message to Vasilevskii requesting the initiation of discussions concerning a cease fire. At the same time, Yamata directed his forces to cease military operations and lay down their arms. Consequently, Vasilevskii sent a message back to Yamata with an ultimatum: The Japanese were to cease military operations by 1200 hours on 20 August, lay down their arms, and surrender; when Japanese forces began to give up their weapons, the Soviet forces would cease military operations.<sup>30</sup> Yamata accepted Vasilevskii's conditions of capitulation on the morning of 18 August, and once again ordered his forces to stop fighting and surrender.<sup>31</sup> During the early evening of 18 August, Vasilevskii ordered his three Front commanders to commit mobile detachments and airborne assault forces (which Vasilevskii had ordered formed sometime prior to the 18th) for the seizure of important cities, bases, railroad crossings, and stations.<sup>32</sup>

The cities of Harbin and Kirin lay within the operational zone of the

1st Far Eastern Front. According to his memoir, General A. F. Khrenov, Chief of Engineer Troops of the 1st Far Eastern Front, approached Meretskov with the idea of airlanding operations to seize the airfields at those cities.<sup>33</sup> After first rejecting the suggestion, citing lack of airborne regiments, Meretskov summoned Khrenov back two days later and approved the concept. Khrenov, apparently confident of Meretskov's approval, had already begun the preparation of two detachments under the command of Lt. Col. Ivan Nikolaevich Zabelin and Lieutenant Colonel Krutskikh.

One source describes these detachments as "specially trained and prepared ahead of time in a special course of tactical preparation and parachute training."<sup>34</sup> The approximately 150 troops who made up each detachment were drawn from the 20th "Svirsk" Engineer Brigade, and for the most part were the same men, according to Khrenov, who had participated in the capture of the three railroad tunnels.<sup>35</sup> The detachments had several missions: capture key bridges, airfields, and other important installations and thus prevent their destruction by the Japanese, while special plenipotentiaries of the Front commander negotiated the surrender of Japanese forces and garrisons.<sup>36</sup> The operation was code-named "Bridge."

Officers from the Front intelligence staff and translators briefed the assault forces, considering all possible contingencies. Particular attention was given to working out the communications plan.<sup>37</sup> Meretskov appointed Maj. Gen. G. A. Shalakhov, the Front deputy chief of staff, as his special plenipotentiary to accompany the Harbin detachment, which was commanded by Lt. Col. Zabelin. Guards Col. V. I. Lebedev was named special plenipotentiary to accompany the Kirin detachment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Krutskikh. The engineer soldiers were organized into combat teams, assigned specific tasks, and armed with sub-machine guns, machine guns, grenades, and demolitions. Each man had 500 to 600 rounds for his submachine gun and four to five grenades. Detachment training included the study of the layout of the target cities, and routes to and from the airfield and objectives.

In accordance with an order from the highest Soviet commander in the theater, Marshal Vasilevskii,<sup>38</sup> on 18 August the detachments went into action. In the early evening, seven Il-2 and C-47 transport aircraft flew into Harbin from Khorol airfield with (approximately) a 120-man assault detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Zabelin.<sup>39</sup> The transports flew across the front line and landed 250 kilometers beyond it in the enemy rear. The detachment's arrival completely surprised the Japanese. Before



the aircraft had cut their engines and finished taxiing, the assault force got out and moved toward their objectives. The detachment immediately occupied the hangars, the repair shop, and some stone buildings in the vicinity of the airfield. A short time later, the assault force captured the Japanese legation and took Kwantung Army Chief of Staff General Hata, several generals and other officers, prisoner.<sup>40</sup> General Hata was brought to the Soviet consulate, where Major General Shalakhov gave him an ultimatum to either surrender or Soviet aircraft circling overhead would bomb the immediate area. By this time, Zabelin's men had already captured key bridges, and were moving toward their other objectives. By 2300, the Soviets had occupied the railroad yards, telegraph facility, police headquarters, post office, electric power station, and other critical facilities. On the morning of the 19th, the detachment was reinforced with 158 more men and 800 kilograms of cargo.<sup>41</sup>

That same morning, General Hata and his staff were taken by Soviet transport plane to the command post of the 1st Far Eastern Front, where General Hata agreed to order Japanese forces in Manchuria to cease combat operations not later than 1200 hours on 20 August.<sup>42</sup> On the 20th, an additional 213 men were flown in, and that morning the Red Banner Amur Flotilla arrived in Harbin with an assault force of the 15th Army, which accepted the surrender of the Sungari Flotilla and the Japanese garrison in the city.

The *spetsnaz* assault on Kirin<sup>43</sup> was also scheduled for 18 August, but was delayed because of bad weather. At 1200 hours on 19 August, the 154-man assault detachment of Lieutenant Colonel Krutskikh landed in seven Il-2 and C-47 aircraft. With these troops flew the Front special plenipotentiary Colonel Lebedev. The assault troops deplaned, defeated the airfield defenses in a brief skirmish, and occupied defensive positions around the airfield. At 1800 the detachment organized a reconnaissance into the city using captured trucks. The assault force seized key bridges across the Sungari River, the armory, train station, telephone and telegraph office, radio station, post office, bank, dam, and power station. A Japanese lieutenant colonel, a colonel from the headquarters of the Manchurian forces, and the Japanese brigade located in the city were delivered to the airfield and given the Soviet terms of capitulation. The Japanese officers declared that they did not have the capitulation orders from their higher headquarters. On 20 August, the forward detachment of the 10th Mechanized Corps linked up with the assault force in Kirin.

Similar airlandings took place in many other locations, though the evi-

dence suggests the forces used were of conventional origin. The Transbaikalian Front staged an air assault on Mukden on the 19th.<sup>44</sup> The assault force was a 225-man detachment led by Front Plenipotentiary Major General A. D. Pritula. After landing at 1300 hours, the detachment seized the airfield, where they captured the Emperor of Manchukuo, Pu Yi, who was waiting for a special plane to fly him back to Japan. On the same day, the Soviets freed a large number of American and British prisoners of war from a nearby camp. On the second day after the landing, the forward detachment of the 5th Guards Tank Army arrived and the Soviets accepted the surrender of Japanese forces.

The Transbaikalian Front mounted several other such operations. For example, at dawn and after a two-hour flight on 19 August the Front Plenipotentiary Colonel I. T. Artemenko<sup>45</sup> landed at Changchun airfield to accept the surrender of the 15,000-man Japanese garrison and other forces in the area. As the plane headed for its destination, Marshal Vasilevskii sent a radiotelegram to General Yamata, Commander in Chief of the Kwantung Army, informing him of the nature of the flight and ordering safe passage for it. One hour after the parliamentary mission took off, an assault force of approximately two hundred fifty soldiers drawn from the 30th Guards Mechanized Brigade, 6th Guards Tank Army, commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union and Guards Major Peter Nikitovich Avramenko,<sup>46</sup> took off on a course for Changchun. Air Force bombers were also launched toward the city. Escorting Artemenko's party of five officers and six privates were several fighters. The assault force landed at 1100 hours, captured the airfield security force, established all-around defense, and disarmed the Changchun garrison. At 1410 hours, General Yamata signed the document of capitulation that had been prepared by the Soviets beforehand. General Yamata and Manchukuo's prime minister, Go Chzhan Tszin-hue, were required to go on the radio and announce the terms of the Japanese capitulation.

On 22 August, the Soviets continued this pattern with airlanded detachments at Liuishun (Liaoyuan) (200 men),<sup>47</sup> Dairen (250 men),<sup>48</sup> and Port Arthur (250 men). There is no available evidence to suggest that any of these were *spetsnaz* forces. At Port Arthur,<sup>49</sup> a 200-man air assault force drawn from the 6th Guards Tank Army, commanded by Major I. I. Belodeda, landed with Lieutenant General V. D. Ivanov, Transbaikalian Front plenipotentiary. The assault force was to seize all important objectives as negotiations went on. The assault troops quickly disarmed several units of the nearby garrison and captured approximately two hun-

dred Japanese soldiers and naval infantry. Part of the assault force was dispatched on captured trucks to the western sector of the city, where a large Japanese garrison force was located. At the same time, another part of the assault force occupied telephone and telegraph facilities, the train station, and the port (which still contained many Japanese ships). On 23 August, a tank brigade of the 6th Guards Tank Army arrived in the city. On 25 August, sailors arrived by air to organize the port. In what may have been the last such operations of the war, the Soviets staged air assaults along their now-familiar pattern at Yenchi (238 men) on 23 August, and on 24 August at the Korean cities of Haeju<sup>50</sup> and the rail hub Kanko (Hamhung).<sup>51</sup>

Several important points are apparent in an analysis of these Soviet ground force *spetsnaz* operations: Experienced forces were brought into the theater from the Soviet-German front. In the tunnel operation, the forces were employed in a tactical mission with operational significance. The three tunnels were on the main axis of the 5th Army, which was the Front main axis. Krutskikh, formerly an organizer and trainer, became the commander in the Kirin operation, signifying the importance of the operation, its political-military nature, and the confidence that Meretskov and Khrenov had in him.<sup>52</sup>

Special detachments played a major role in war termination. The Soviet military high command had no confidence in the ability or willingness of the Japanese high command to control its forces at the operational and tactical levels. Their solution was to supplant Japanese military-political authority with Soviet authority, via plenipotentiaries accompanied by special operations forces. Such an approach to the deep insertion of Soviet authority was used, to one degree or another, in the *initial* phase of the invasions of Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979). This could also be a model for termination of war in Western Europe.

## Naval Special Operations

The Soviet Pacific Fleet, commanded by Admiral I. S. Yumashev, conducted a series of amphibious operations to seize the Korean ports of Yuki (Unggi), Rashin (Najin), Seishin (Ch'ongjin), and Genzan (Wonsan), as well as the southern half of Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands.<sup>53</sup> Several separate naval infantry battalions, the 13th Naval Infantry Brigade, and the 335th Rifle Division provided the assault forces for these land-

ings.<sup>54</sup> Of particular interest, however, are the special operations conducted by naval forces. These were of two types: airlanding operations on Southern Sakhalin and Iturup islands, and amphibious landing operations by the *spetsnaz* 140th Reconnaissance Detachment of Headquarters, Pacific Fleet.

Military operations against Japanese forces on Southern Sakhalin Island began with a ground offensive on 11 August, supported by amphibious landings on the western and southern shores of the island on August 16, 17, and 19. By 21 August, the Japanese defenders had been driven to the southeast part of the island, into the area around Toyohara. Three assault landings by groups of thirty-five men each were airlanded on Japanese airfields in this area:<sup>55</sup> On 23 August at Oshiai, on 24 August at Toyohara, and on 25 August at Otomari.<sup>56</sup> Little is known about the origin of these small detachments. Some Soviet sources identify them as coming from the Northern Pacific Ocean Flotilla.<sup>57</sup> Another indicates that the men were from a submachine-gun battalion of an airfield supporting unit.<sup>58</sup> In either case, their mission was to prevent the Japanese forces, who by this time had capitulated, from destroying the airfields, aircraft, and other materiel.<sup>59</sup> Even less is known about the airlanding operation on Iturup (Etorofu), a large island in the southern Kurile Islands chain. A force of 130 men from South Sakhalin Island landed on Iturup on 28 August, several days after the Japanese surrender.<sup>60</sup> Although these airlandings resemble similar operations conducted on the mainland, further study is needed before significant lessons can be drawn.

The most significant special operations conducted by forces of the Fleet were the landings along the northern Korean coastline by the 140th Reconnaissance Detachment. The 140th was the Fleet's long-range asset for ground tactical and operational intelligence collection, and was often employed in "reconnaissance by battle" where the situation was uncertain. It was subordinated to the commander, Pacific Fleet, through the intelligence department of the Fleet staff. In August 1945, it was composed of approximately 130 men, one-third of whom were "northerners" transferred from Poliarnyi, Headquarters of the Northern Fleet near Murmansk, in the third week of May 1945. All of the northerners were combat veterans, while the "easterners" had no combat experience and typically had only twelve to eighteen months in service.<sup>61</sup>

The 140th Reconnaissance Detachment was commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union Sr. Lt. Viktor N. Leonov, who had previously commanded the Reconnaissance Detachment of Headquarters, Northern Fleet, and dis-

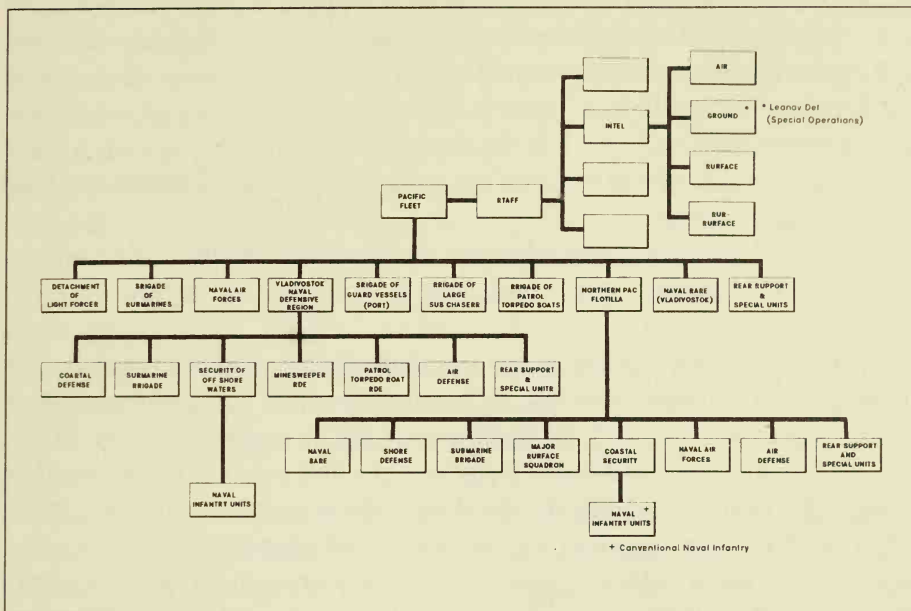


Figure 3. Organization of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, 1945. Rear Adm. G. Iargin, "Sovershenstvovanie organizatsionnoi struktury Voenno-Morskogo Flota," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, October 1978, 43-52.

tinguished himself in the Petsamo-Kirkenes Operation. Leonov organized the Pacific Fleet detachment into two line platoons of four squads each and a headquarters/support platoon about half the size of a line platoon. He appointed trusted Northern Fleet combat veterans to all leadership positions and distributed the remainder evenly throughout the squads to teach the "easterners." The headquarters/support platoon contained the command group, communications, medical, and supply personnel, an armorer, bootmaker, cook, drivers, and runners. All support personnel trained together with the line platoons. Many support personnel were former scouts who had been wounded but wanted to remain with the unit, and they participated fully in subsequent combat operations.<sup>62</sup> The majority of the northerners and about half of the easterners were members of the Communist Party.

On 19 June 1945, the 140th moved from Vladivostok to Novik on Ostrov Russkii (Russian Island) and set up a training base. Their training tasks included:<sup>63</sup>

- local topography, especially coastal terrain
- audio signatures of enemy weapons
- employment of enemy small arms
- visual recognition of enemy uniforms
- amphibious landing techniques
- ground movement techniques, with emphasis on distance and load
- urban combat
- use of aerial photographs and topographical maps
- physical conditioning

The intelligence department gave the detachment written materials pertaining to the Korean coastline, including layouts of some of their subsequent objectives, without disclosing their exact names or locations.<sup>64</sup>

The 140th Reconnaissance Detachment's first mission was to conduct a daylight landing directly on the docks of the northern Korean city of Yuki, ascertain the situation, and seize and hold a beachhead on the enemy shore. If the enemy offered resistance, the detachment was to hold on until the arrival of reinforcements. On shore, the detachment was to determine enemy strength and intentions, and report this information to Fleet Headquarters.<sup>65</sup> For this operation, the detachment included interpreters from

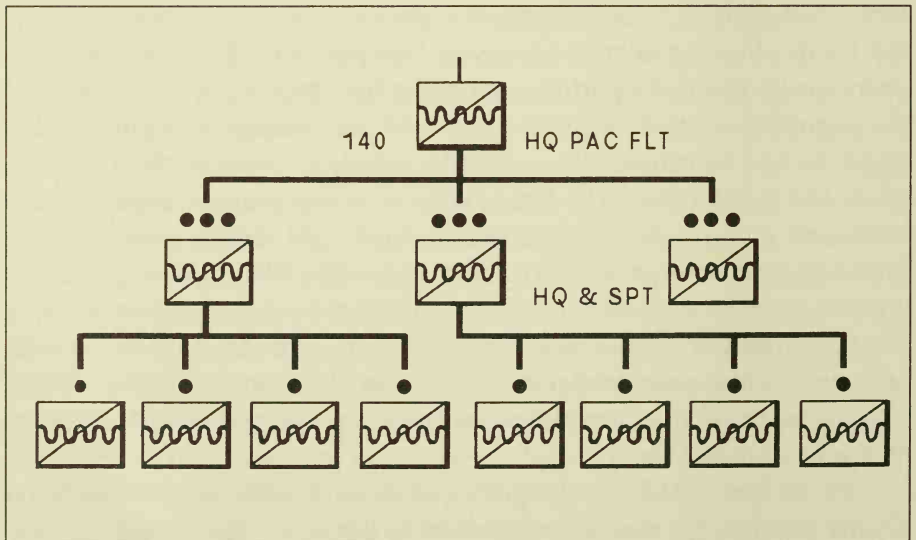


Figure 4. Organization of the Pacific Fleet's 140th Reconnaissance Detachment.

Vladivostok.<sup>66</sup> When Leonov expressed concern over landing on enemy docks in daylight, the Fleet's response was that the enemy would not expect such audacity. Night landings on unfamiliar shores were difficult and more dangerous. Such a deep raid and landing would paralyze the enemy, disrupt his command and control, and induce disorganization and panic, permitting the capture of the port intact.<sup>67</sup>

Leonov and his political officer, Senior Lieutenant Guznenkov, received their orders in person at Vladivostok on 10 August, returned to base, briefed the members of the detachment on the docks, and put to sea during hours of darkness. Two hours later, a second group of 170 machine gunners of the 390th Separate Naval Infantry battalion under the command of Sr. Lt. K. N. Deviatov set out. At sea was a fog, the wind was blowing at force 5, and the waves reached force 4, slowing the ships' progress.<sup>68</sup>

The landing of Leonov's detachment, reinforced by a company of naval infantry submachine gunners, began at approximately 1910 on 11 August, after two days of strikes by aircraft and torpedo boats on the city and the enemy's ships in the port. The landing was unopposed, the Japanese having abandoned the city several hours before the arrival of the assault force. The detachment secured the port, established communications with the 393rd Rifle Division advancing along the coast, and awaited the landing of the main assault force (75th Battalion, 13th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade) the next day.<sup>69</sup> While in Yuki, Leonov and Guznenkov left the detachment for more than an hour to meet with a Soviet agent who had been inserted into Yuki before the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>70</sup> At 0500 hours on 12 August, a column of the 393rd Rifle Division, 1st Far Eastern Front, entered the city from the north.<sup>71</sup> Later that morning, the 140th departed Yuki by boat. Leonov informed his men that their next target would be Rashin, a few miles south of Yuki.<sup>72</sup>

The detachment's role at Rashin was the same—to operate as the forward detachment of the main landing force. Their mission was to land in the port, determine the strength and intentions of the enemy, and seize a beachhead for the follow-on forces.<sup>73</sup> Just as at Yuki, Soviet naval aviation and torpedo boats softened up the harbor with several attacks on the previous day. Leonov's force landed on the docks unopposed at 0900 hours on 12 August, followed two hours later by a company of naval infantry submachine gunners.<sup>74</sup>

The Japanese defenders had abandoned the city, but left behind small groups of rearguards for the destruction of warehouses and the burning

of buildings. Leonov's men moved quickly into the city toward their objectives: the railroad station, the military barracks, and an industrial complex. Resistance was light and quickly overcome.<sup>75</sup> An attempt to expand the beachhead along the road south of the city was turned back by Japanese forces.<sup>76</sup> The main assault force, the 358th Naval Infantry Battalion, landed at 0600 hours on 13 August and within a few hours had occupied the entire city and two offshore islands.<sup>77</sup>

Late on 12 August, prior to the final battle at Rashin, the 140th departed that city on torpedo boats. Enroute, one of their boats struck a mine allegedly sown before the battle by an American plane, resulting in the death of two detachment members and a torpedo boat crewman.<sup>78</sup> The detachment reached their base at 2000 hours, where most of the men slept that night on the docks.<sup>79</sup> At 0500 hours on 13 August, the detachment awoke to the news of another mission, this time an amphibious assault on the harbor of Seishin.<sup>80</sup> At 0700 hours the detachment embarked and departed.<sup>81</sup>

Seishin was a large industrial port city, and the most important Japanese naval base in northern Korea. Its rail and harbor facilities were vital to the movement of Japanese troops and materiel. Consequently, the Japanese had four thousand troops garrisoned there and had constructed defensive fortifications facing both landward and seaward.<sup>82</sup> As in the previous two landings, air and surface attacks were used to soften the Japanese defenses. Also, as before, Leonov's detachment was reinforced by a company of naval infantry submachine gunners.

The composite detachment of approximately one hundred eighty men was commanded by chief of the intelligence department of the Fleet staff, Colonel A. Z. Denisin. Acting as forward detachment for the main landing force, their mission was to conduct reconnaissance by combat, determine the strength and intentions of the enemy, and capture a beachhead and hold it until the arrival of the main force.<sup>83</sup> While Leonov's men were making the three-hour crossing from their base to Seishin, a small force of torpedo boats went into the harbor. An eleven-man reconnaissance party (probably sailors from the torpedo boats) went ashore, met resistance from the armed Koreans guarding warehouses, and returned to their boats.<sup>84</sup> The torpedo boats continued their reconnaissance along the shoreline, then went to sea to meet the invasion fleet. These activities may have alerted the Japanese that a landing was imminent.

Despite these activities, however, Leonov and his 140th Reconnaissance Detachment and the company of naval infantry submachine gunners



landed unopposed in the harbor a few hours later at 1300 hours on 13 August. Moving on diverging axes, the two forces quickly occupied the docks, but met strong resistance as they began to penetrate into the industrial and commercial areas of the city. Over the next eighteen hours, Leonov and his men fought pitched battles against Japanese forces, and were forced to move several times to avoid encirclement. Due to bad weather, the Soviets had to fight without any air or naval gunfire support.

It was during this period of desperate close-in fighting that the true purpose of Colonel Denisin's presence was revealed. After nightfall on 13 August, taking one of Leonov's platoon leaders and two men with him, Denisin disappeared into the dock area. He reappeared approximately ninety minutes later, having met with clandestine agents he had sent into Seishin some days earlier.<sup>85</sup>

At 0500 hours on 14 August, the first echelon of the main assault force, the 355th Naval Infantry Battalion, landed in the east sector of the harbor, some distance from Leonov's beleaguered detachment. Unable to physically join together, the two Soviet forces defeated all Japanese attempts to drive them back into the sea and held onto a narrow strip of land along the docks until reinforcements arrived just after midnight on 15 August.<sup>86</sup> Two Soviet surface vessels, a frigate and a minesweeper, came into the harbor and approached the docks where Leonov's men were defending. With gunfire support from these ships, the forward detachment held on until the arrival of the 13th Naval Infantry Brigade at 0500 hours on 15 August.<sup>87</sup>

Landing in the beachhead secured by Leonov's detachment and the naval infantry battalion, the 13th Brigade quickly moved into the city. Aided by close air support, which resumed at midday, and attacks by forces of the 25th Army advancing along the coast from the north, enemy resistance was defeated by 1400 hours on 16 August.<sup>88</sup> Despite the intensity of the combat, in which Leonov and one of his platoon leaders earned the title Hero of the Soviet Union, the detachment suffered only three killed and seven wounded.<sup>89</sup> Shortly after the action, the detachment was ordered back to base near Vladivostok by Fleet Headquarters for a well-deserved rest.<sup>90</sup>

On the morning of 19 August, Leonov's detachment departed their base by torpedo boat and returned to Seishin, to the headquarters of the Southern Defensive Region.<sup>91</sup> Its commander, Lt. Gen. S. I. Kabanov, was organizing a major landing operation to seize the port of Genzan (Wonsan). The mission of the landing force was to move quickly and

unobtrusively to this Japanese naval base, enter the harbor, capture the port, occupy the city, disarm and intern the large enemy garrison there, capture the nearby airfield, and prevent the departure of enemy vessels from the harbor.<sup>92</sup> On the evening of the 20th, the detachment departed Seishin as part of a 1,800-man assault force bound for Wonsan.

Once again, the 140th was the forward detachment, this time subordinated to the 13th Naval Infantry Brigade. Accompanying Leonov on this mission were two officers from the Fleet intelligence section, the senior of them Lt. Col. N. A. Inzartsev,<sup>93</sup> who in 1941 was Leonov's commander in the Northern Fleet Reconnaissance Detachment. The second officer was the deputy chief of the intelligence section of the Fleet, Capt. 3rd Rank G. P. Koliubakin.<sup>94</sup> Leonov's detachment, this time reinforced with engineer troops equipped with mine detectors, went ashore in the harbor at 0900 hours on 21 August, several hours ahead of the main body.

Meeting no resistance, the detachment split into three groups and headed toward their objectives: the Japanese garrison, the railroad station, post office and telegraph office, and other important facilities. Over the course of the next several hours, Leonov and his men moved back and forth across the city, while the large Japanese garrison force remained in its barracks. Leonov and Inzartsev both conducted negotiations with senior Japanese officers, including an admiral, who were reluctant to give any kind of order to their subordinates.<sup>95</sup> At 1500 hours, both the landing force and the ground force commanders came into the harbor and waited at the docks with Leonov and Inzartsev for the Japanese response to the Soviet surrender demand. The troops of the landing force remained aboard their ship just outside the harbor.

When the Japanese commanders did not appear at the appointed time, Leonov and his men went back into the city and brought them out to the dock, and then aboard ship. While negotiations continued aboard ship, some of Leonov's men went south of the city by patrol torpedo boat and destroyed a rail line the Japanese were using to move troops toward the city. During the night, Leonov's men remained ashore, providing local security for the Soviet vessels tied up at the docks. At first light, Japanese troops began to move out of their garrison, apparently in response to a prearranged plan of their now hostage leaders. Leonov and his men, supported by naval gunfire, forced them to retreat. The detachment was quickly replaced by naval infantrymen, and returned to the dock.

Leonov's next task was to secure the Japanese airfield and disarm its garrison. Accompanied by his political officer and Lieutenant Colonel

Inzartsev, Leonov marched his detachment to the airfield headquarters and demanded its surrender. The Japanese colonel in charge at first refused to negotiate with so junior an officer as Leonov, but finally capitulated under threat of air and naval gunfire bombardment. On 23 August, the detachment landed on one of the offshore islands and accepted the surrender of the shore batteries there. Sometime after 24 August, Leonov and his men sailed back to their base on a Japanese prize vessel, which they crewed themselves. Enroute to Vladivostok, they received word over the radio that they had been designated "Guards" status.<sup>96</sup>

The combat record of the 140th Guards Reconnaissance Detachment of Headquarters, Pacific Fleet, is remarkable given that Leonov had only eight weeks from his arrival in theater in mid-June to the outbreak of hostilities in mid-August to organize and train his force. The detachment's high level of tactical proficiency was clearly demonstrated in the Seishin landing, where it seized and held a beachhead against overwhelming odds, but suffered remarkably low casualties.

The 140th was more than a forward detachment for a naval infantry brigade. It was also entrusted with highly sensitive intelligence-gathering tasks, such as meetings with clandestine agents in Yuki and Seishin. Equally significant was the political-military role of the detachment, and of Leonov personally, in securing the surrender of the garrison at Genzan. Leonov acted much like a Front plenipotentiary, but on behalf of and with the authority of Admiral Yumashev, commander of the Pacific Fleet.

## Conclusion

The lack of either sufficient airlift or standing airborne regiments may have forced the Soviets to make greater use of smaller and more specialized forces against critical targets than Soviet planners might have preferred. Similarly, the lack of a viable Soviet-allied fifth column among the Manchurian and Korean populations may have precluded the using of proxies to transform latent incipient resistance to the Japanese into a war of movement prior to the Soviet invasion. Regardless, the record of Soviet special operations during the Manchurian campaign is impressive.

The role of these ground and naval special purpose forces in the Manchurian offensive can be analyzed from several perspectives. At the strategic level, special purpose forces were used for the political-military task of war termination. At the operational level, they captured key terrain

which permitted the commitment to battle of larger follow-on forces. At the tactical level they executed the type of combat actions that any commando-type unit would be expected to perform. Just as in Europe, special purpose units were comprised of highly-trained personnel commanded by known special operators with extensive combat experience. These units were subordinated to Front and Fleet staffs, and tailored to accomplish specific tasks. Linguists accompanied the units where appropriate. Organizations and combat techniques that had been developed and proven against the Germans were transferred to the Far East and revalidated.

In the same way that these special operations reflected the past, they also predicted the future. The insertion of special purpose forces by air into Eastern Europe and Afghanistan in our own time reflects this late World War II experience. This linkage of the past with the present is not accidental. A thorough analysis of the postwar careers of the key personnel, were it possible, would probably explain much of Soviet special operations theory and organization in subsequent years. For example, twice Hero of the Soviet Union Viktor Leonov attended the Kirov Caspian Naval School in 1950 and in 1956 was an instructor at the Voroshilov Naval Academy. He retired from active service in July 1956, just before his fortieth birthday. But in the early 1960s, he is known to have played a role in the reestablishment of Soviet ground forces' special purpose forces.<sup>97</sup> The role that others, such as Krutskikh, Babikov, and Inzartsev, may have played in postwar Soviet special purpose force development is unknown at this time, but the rich combat experience of these and other men surely has not been ignored.

## Notes

1. Most place names used in this chapter are from the 1945 National Geographic Society Map of China, and the *National Geographic Atlas of the World*, 4th ed. (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 1975): 133, 140.
2. LTC David M. Glantz, *August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, February 1983): 5–24.
3. *Ibid.*, 25.
4. D. F. Ustinov, et al., *Istoriia vtoroi mirovoi voiny 1939–1945* (History of the Second World War 1939–1945), vol. 11 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1980): 183–184; B. V. Sokolov, “O sootnoshenii poter’ v liudiakh i boevoi tekhnike na sovetsko-germanskome fronte v khode velikoi otechestvennoi voiny” (Concerning the Correlation of Personnel and Combat Equipment Losses On the Soviet-German Front During the Great Patriotic War), *Voprosy istorii*, 6/1988, 120. See also, MAJ Claude R. Sasso, *Soviet Night Operations in World War II*, Leavenworth Papers No. 6 (Leavenworth, KS: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, December 1982): 25; Edgar O’Ballance, *The Red Army* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964): 186.
5. O’Ballance, 187.
6. Malcolm Mackintosh, *Juggernaut: A History of the Soviet Armed Forces* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967): 260.
7. O’Ballance, 187.
8. P. H. Vigor, *Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983): 115.
9. Ustinov, 187; see also, Sasso, 25–27.
10. Glantz, 1.
11. Ustinov, 193.
12. Sasso, 26–28; Vigor, 105–106.
13. Glantz, 1.
14. *Ibid.*, 3.
15. *Ibid.*, 39–47; Sasso, 26.
16. Vigor, 104.
17. Glantz, 26–34; Vigor, 113; Mackintosh, 261.
18. Sasso, 26.
19. Glantz, 32.
20. *Ibid.*, 33–34; Vigor, 102, 114.
21. Glantz, 73–79; Sasso, 28; Mackintosh, 262.
22. Vigor, 114–115.
23. Arkadii F. Khrenov, *Mostu k pobede* (Bridges to Victory) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982): 336–339.

24. Khrenov, 337–338.
25. A *razvedchik* is a scout or intelligence soldier, from *razvedka*, all-source intelligence.
26. Lt. Col. Krutskikh also subsequently commanded the air assault detachment that seized Kirin on August 19. See Khrenov, 337; V. F. Margelov, et al., *Sovetskie vozdušno-desantnye: voenno-istoricheskii ocherk* (Soviet Airborne Assault Forces: A Military-Historical Outline) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1986): 297; Leonid N. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda dal'nem vostoke* (Victory in the Far East) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971): 284. From the available evidence, it is clear that Krutskikh was an important figure in *spetsnaz* operations during World War II.
27. Glantz, 141–142.
28. N. P. Suntsov, et al., *Krasnoznamennyi dal'nevostochnyi: istoriia krasnoznamenного dal'nevostochnogo voennogo okruga* (Red Banner Far East: The History of the Red Banner Far East Military District) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985): 202; Khrenov, 339.
29. N. I. Krylov, N. I. Alekseev, I. G. Dragan, *Navstrechu pobede: Boevoi put' 5-i armii* (Meeting Victory: The Battle Path of the 5th Army) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1970): 438.
30. A partial text of this message is contained in Vasilevskii's memoir, *Delo vsei zhizni* (A Life-Long Cause) (Moscow: Politizdat, 1983): 521.
31. Kirill A. Meretskov, *Na sluzhbe narody* (In Service to the People) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983): 411; Ustinov, 247–248.
32. Vasilevskii, 521; P. N. Pospelov, et al., *Istoriia velikoi otechestvennoi voiny sovetskogo soiuzа 1941–1945* (History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941–1945), vol. 5 (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963): 578–579.
33. Khrenov, 342–344.
34. Vnotchenko, 283–284.
35. Khrenov, 343.
36. Margelov, 296.
37. Khrenov, 343.
38. Vasilevskii, 521.
39. Margelov, 296.
40. Vasilevskii, 522.
41. Margelov, 283–284.
42. Margelov, 296; Meretskov, 413.
43. Margelov, 297; Vnotchenko, 283–284.
44. Vasilevskii, 522; Margelov, 297; Vnotchenko, 281; Meretskov, 411.
45. An excellent description of the planning and preparation of this mission is contained in Artemenko's memoir, *Ot pervogo do poslednego dnia* (From the First to the Last Day) (Khar'kov: "Prapor," 1987): 151–67.

46. There is no evidence to suggest that Avramenko or his unit had any *spetsnaz* connection. He gained his Hero of the Soviet Union award in fighting with conventional forces in Rumania in August 1944. See *Geroi sovetskogo soiuz*a (Heroes of the Soviet Union) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1987): 1:25.
47. Col. O. K. Frantsev, "Primenenie aviatsii v Man'chzhurskoi operatsii" (The Utilization of Aviation in the Manchurian Operations), *Voенно-Istoricheskii Zhurnal*, 8/1985, 23.
48. Vnotchenko, 281.
49. Margelov, 298; Vnotchenko, 281; Pospelov, 578–579.
50. Margelov, 299.
51. Ibid.
52. Krutskikh later rose to the rank of Colonel General, and held the position of chief of staff of civil defense of the Russian Federated Republic. Khrenov, 337n.
53. Khafiz Khayrutdinovich Kamalov, *Morskaya pekhota v boyakh za roдинu* (Naval Infantry in combat for the Motherland), 2d ed. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983) (JPRS-UMA-84-011-L trans. chapter six, "Assault Landing Operations of Pacific Naval Fleet Infantry," 151).
54. Vnotchenko, 270.
55. Margelov, 299; V. N. Bagrov, *Iuzhno-Sakhalinskaia i Kuril'skaia operatsii – Avgust 1945* (The Southern Sakhalin and Kuriles Operations—August 1945) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1959): 80; S. E. Zakharov, et al., *Krasnoznamennyi tikhookeanskii flot* (Red Banner Pacific Fleet), 2d ed. (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1973): 229; R. Ia. Malinovskii, *Final* (Final) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1966): 330.
56. Chris Chant, "Eastern Europe," *Airborne Operations* (New York: Crescent Books, 1978): 158.
57. Bagrov and Zakharov.
58. Malinovskii, 330.
59. Margelov, 299.
60. Ustinov, 256.
61. M. A. Babikov, *Na vostochnom berugu* (On the Eastern Shore) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1969): 6, 18.
62. Ibid., 20, 24.
63. Ibid., 26–27.
64. Ibid., 28.
65. Ibid., 37.
66. Ibid., 47.
67. Ibid., 38.
68. Zakharov, 278–279.
69. Vnotchenko, 270; Kamalov, 151; Zakharov, 178.
70. Babikov, 52.

71. Ibid., 58.
72. Ibid., 62.
73. Ibid., 62.
74. Zakharov, 179–180.
75. Babikov, 67.
76. Vnotchenko, 271.
77. Zakharov, 179–181.
78. According to the Soviets, from July 12 to August 11, the American air force delivered 780 proximity (influence) mines into the ports of Rashin, Seishin, and Genzan (Wonsan), but did not inform the Soviets until August 21. This “complicated” Soviet operations against these ports. Zakharov, 180; Ustinov, 278.
79. Babikov, 91.
80. The most detailed account of the Seishin operation is in Babikov, 92–192.
81. Ibid., 77–96.
82. Ustinov, 278; Pospelov, 574.
83. Babikov, 97.
84. Zakharov, 184.
85. Babikov, 97–127.
86. Zakharov, 185–191.
87. Ustinov, 280; Zakharov, 191.
88. Pospelov, 574–575.
89. This was Leonov’s second award. The second one went to Makar Babikov. Babikov, 166.
90. Ibid., 167.
91. Zakharov, 197. The Southern Defensive Region was a naval ground command similar to the Northern Defensive Region on the Rybachii Peninsula under the Northern Fleet.
92. Babikov, 195; Pospelov, 578–579.
93. For more information on Inzartsev, see Babikov, *Otriad osobogo naznacheniya* (Special Purpose Detachment) (Moscow: “Sovetskaia Rossiia,” 1986).
94. Babikov, *Letom sorok pervogo*, 194.
95. Ibid., 200–203.
96. Ibid., 233.
97. Interview with former Soviet soldier, summer of 1987. As of this writing, Leonov is 73 years old and living in Moscow.