

Division Advance in Heavily Wooded Mountains

2



Terrain

Among the most rugged terrain sectors that Soviet forces had to traverse in their offensive into eastern Manchuria was the mountainous, wooded area dominating the border from north of Suifenho to Lake Khanka (see map 1—1). From Lake Khanka westward for forty kilometers, the land is open and rolling, although occasionally cut by gulleys and streams. Farther west, heights called *Gora Propast* (Mount Precipice) rise sharply from the plain. For eighty kilometers west of *Gora Propast* stretch the *Pogranichnii* (Border) Mountains, covered by dense forest growth and rising in places to almost 1,000 meters. Continuing southwest to east of Mutanchiang and Wangching, this range connects to the even higher craggy peaks along the northern Korean border. At the eighty-kilometer mark, however, the border, which follows the crest of the mountains westward, turns sharply south toward Suifenho, Tungning, and the sea.

Missions and Tasks

Into this mountainous salient, Marshal Meretskov, the 1st Far Eastern Front commander, placed the 1st Red Banner Army. This army, commanded by General A. P. Beloborodov, would fill the gap between 5th Army, operating against the principal Japanese fortified regions, and 35th Army, attacking in a sector north of Lake Khanka against the Mishan and Hutou Fortified Regions. The 1st Red Banner Army would lend major support to the 5th Army and secondary support to the 35th Army.

It was clear from the start that the main barrier to achieving success was the terrain, especially that on the army's left, immediately adjacent to the 5th Army sector. General Beloborodov said of the terrain:

The particular features of the terrain over which we were to advance, for us, old Far Easterners, were generally known since the taiga was the same on both sides of the frontier. Mountain ranges with elevations running up to 1000 meters like a barrier separated the Soviet Maritime from the Central Manchurian Plain. The mountains were covered solid by virgin forests. Large oaks, cedar, pine, linden and birch overgrown with liana and

wild grape alternated with creeping brush and subbrush. **Thickets** filled the spaces between trees, covering the ground like carpets with spines as long as one's finger and strong and sharp as a sewing needle. For an inexperienced person, these naturally created obstacles [that] in the literal sense could strip one in several minutes, cutting into your flesh and piercing the thick soles of your footwear. Here it would have been difficult even for experienced infantry. Along the foothills for many kilometers there stretched narrow also overgrown valleys which are called ravines or creek valleys. Through them flowed streams and creeks that were so swampy that even such a powerful and maneuverable tank as the T-34 became stuck. The swamps were found not only in low-lying areas but also in the hills. If you fought your way to the top of a hill you would be stuck in weak crumbling dirt. These were the particular features of the mountain taiga here.¹

Marshal Meretskov, on 8 July, ordered 1st Red Banner Army to conduct, in coordination with 5th Army, the main attack of the front across this terrain in the direction of Pamientung, due west. Beloborodov's forces were to penetrate to a depth of thirty kilometers by the end of the third day of operations, thus clearing the mountainous taiga confronting them. On the eighth day the army would use strong mobile forces to capture Pamientung and the city of Linkou. Thereafter, the army would reach the Mutan River north of Mutanchiang (on the eighteenth day) and cooperate with 5th Army in reducing Japanese forces around that city. Simultaneously, the right wing of 1st Red Banner Army would attack northward, west of Lake Khanka, against the southern flank of the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region to assist 35th Army in securing that major defensive zone.²

Thus, 1st Red Banner Army was to advance to a depth of 150—180 kilometers in eighteen days, at an average rate of advance of eight to ten kilometers per day, indicative of the difficult terrain.* The most difficult period would be during the initial attack through the first eighteen to twenty kilometers of forest adjacent to the border. Although this region was sparsely populated (only scattered huts), it contained a few Japanese border posts connected by "mountain paths through which it would be difficult for even two persons to pass" and through which, General Beloborodov noted, "We were to move . . . with six rifle and antiaircraft artillery divisions, more than 400 tanks and self-propelled guns, a heavy artillery brigade, two combat engineer brigades and thousands of motor vehicles with freight."³ For their part, the Japanese had left this sector lightly defended, scarcely suspecting that any force beyond light infantry could traverse it.

Japanese Defenses

The Japanese 126th Infantry Division, commanded by Lt. Gen. Kazuhiko Nomizo and headquartered at Pamientung, was responsible for defending the sector facing the Border Mountains. The defense posture of the 126th

*In good terrain, Soviets expected advance rates of up to one hundred kilometers per day.

Infantry Division resembled that of the 124th Infantry Division and consisted of a series of defensive positions from the immediate border to a depth of eighty to one hundred kilometers. The forward defenses were located on a line 120 kilometers long, some thirty to thirty-five kilometers from the border, with smaller outposts along the border. The forward defenses formed two distinct sectors, one covering the city of Pingyang, the other the city of Pamientung. The heavier defenses, running seventy kilometers, from Shangchihtun, north of *Gora Propast*, to Hsiaolutai, covered a sector the Japanese considered a likely secondary avenue of operations for Soviet forces. This line tied in to the southern defenses of the 135th Infantry Division at Mishan. Farther to the southwest was a second defensive line covering the approaches to Pamientung. This defensive line ran forty kilometers, from Chingkulingmiao to Jumonji Pass, across a sector the Japanese considered too rough and heavily wooded for major operations, and consequently, in need of only light defenses.

Major field fortifications at Shangchihtun, Panchiehho, Nanshan, and Hsiaolutai, together with smaller advanced posts, formed the Pingyang defense sector. Although one to two battalions were to defend each position, on 9 August only platoon- or company-size units garrisoned most positions. The Pamientung defensive line, for example, consisted of fortified positions at Chingkulingmiao, Lishan, and Jumonji Pass, each occupied by a platoon- to company-size force, with advanced outposts on the border.⁴

The mission of Japanese forces defending Pingyang was to delay the enemy for as long as possible in front of the forward defensive positions, then to conduct a fighting withdrawal through Pingyang and Lishuchen to other defensive positions to the rear. The garrison unit at Hsiaolutai, together with individual posts on the border, had the unrealistic mission of defending that position "to the last man."⁵ Japanese units in the Pamientung sector would defend in their positions and, if the positions fell, were expected to conduct guerrilla warfare in the enemy's rear. Any withdrawing Japanese forces would destroy all roads, bridges, and barracks in order to slow the enemy advance.

An intermediate Japanese defensive line located just east of the cities of Pamientung and Lishuchen covered the important bridges over the Muleng River. A third defensive line, near Tzuhsingtun, ran north to south in the hills between Mutanchiang and Pamientung, where prepared field positions of 126th, 135th, and 124th Infantry Divisions presented a solid defensive front covering Mutanchiang from attack.

At the outbreak of war, the 126th Infantry Division consisted of the following units (see table 2-1):

**Table 2—1. Japanese 126th Infantry Division
Composition**

277th Infantry Regiment
278th Infantry Regiment
279th Infantry Regiment
126th Field Artillery Regiment
126th Engineer Battalion
126th Transport Regiment
126th Signal Unit
Raiding battalion
20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (1 battery)
31st Independent Antitank Battalion (1 battery)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 246—47.

Table 2—2. Japanese 126th Infantry Division Disposition

Place	Strength
<i>Pingyang Sector</i>	
Shangchihtun	1 platoon
Erhjenpan	1 squad
Panchiehho	1 battalion (-) (2d Battalion, 278th Infantry Regiment)
Nanshan	1 platoon
Hsiaolutai	1 company
Hsiangchushan	1 company (reinforced by two machine gun platoons)
<i>Pamientung Sector</i>	
Chingkulingmiao	1 company
Lishan	1 company (reinforced with one machine gun platoon and a regimental gun)
Chiupikou	1 squad
Jumonji Pass	1 platoon
Pamientung	2 companies, 1 company of the raiding battalion (1st Battalion, 277th Infantry Regiment)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 247, 250—53.

Of these forces, approximately two battalions defended the border. A battalion and a company of the 278th Infantry Regiment occupied positions at Pingyang, and a battalion (minus one company) of the 277th Infantry Regiment defended the Pamientung sector (see table 2—2).

The division headquarters was at Pamientung, but main elements of the division to the rear at Tzuhsingtun constructed fortifications and conducted field exercises. Thus, the Japanese deployed their forces to take maximum advantage of the difficult terrain. Small units located well forward would buy the time necessary for the division to redeploy and to occupy more formidable defensive positions to the rear. The main question was whether these small forces would be sufficient to accomplish their mission.

Operational Planning

General Beloborodov planned his attack after receiving his army's mission from Marshal Meretskov. Beloborodov's major problem was to conduct deep operations with a very large force over very restrictive terrain (see table 2—3). The complete absence of roads in his sector meant that any force crossing it would have to build and maintain its own road network. Yet these makeshift roads could transport only a limited force before the very weight of traffic made them impassable. So, Beloborodov ruled out a deep echelonment attack over a few routes, and chose instead a single echelon formation spread over many routes. In so doing, however, he ran the risk that small Japanese forces could use the terrain to slow or stop the multiple, but dispersed and therefore weakened, Soviet columns. Reducing that danger required careful task organization of forces, in particular the proper positioning of tank units and allocation of engineer support to sustain the advance. On 12 July, General Beloborodov visited the Maritime Group of Forces headquartered at Voroshilov-Ussuriiskii and tried to convince Marshal Meretskov of the correctness of his plan. Meretskov's earlier instructions had specifically directed 1st Red Banner Army to deploy in two echelons with three divisions forward. Beloborodov, however, argued for a single echelon configuration with four divisions leading the attack. Marshal Meretskov eventually approved General Beloborodov's plan.⁶

On 24 July, two days after 1st Red Banner Army forces had assembled in their waiting areas, General Beloborodov issued his combat orders.⁷ On his right wing, from Lake Khanka to the Pogranichnii Mountains opposite the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region, he placed the 112th Fortified Region and 6th Field Fortified Region* (five machine gun and artillery/machine gun battalions) to protect the army's right flank, to prevent a counterthrust from Mishan along the west shore of Lake Khanka, and to conduct limited offensive operations, if the opportunity arose. Farther to the west, in the

*A field fortified region was more mobile than a regular fortified region and thus was more capable of conducting offensive combat.

Table 2—3. Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Composition

1st Red Banner Army: Col. Gen. A. P. Beloborodov
 26th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. A. V. Skvortsov
 22d Rifle Division
 59th Rifle Division
 300th Rifle Division
 59th Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. A. S. Ksenofontov to c12/8/45—
 Lt. Gen. Khetagurov
 39th Rifle Division
 231st Rifle Division
 365th Rifle Division
 6th Fortified Region
 112th Fortified Region
 75th Tank Brigade
 77th Tank Brigade
 257th Tank Brigade
 48th Separate Tank Regiment
 335th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
 338th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
 339th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment
 213th Gun Artillery Brigade
 216th Corps Artillery Brigade
 217th Corps Artillery Brigade
 60th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
 52d Mortar Brigade
 33d Guards Mortar Regiment
 54th Guards Mortar Regiment
 33d Antiaircraft Artillery Division
 1378th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 1710th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 1715th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 1718th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 115th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 455th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 721st Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 12th Engineer Sapper Brigade
 27th Engineer Sapper Brigade

Weapons: 402 tanks and self-propelled guns

mountains facing the Japanese Pingyang defenses, Beloborodov positioned the 397th Rifle Regiment of 59th Rifle Corps. Its mission was similar to that of the fortified regions. General A. M. Maksimov, Beloborodov's deputy, commanded the broad 120-kilometer right wing of the 1st Red Banner Army. An antitank reserve of two heavy self-propelled artillery regiments and the 60th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade backed General Maksimov's force.

The main attack of 1st Red Banner Army would take place in a narrow sixteen-kilometer sector on the army's left. There the 26th Rifle Corps of General A. V. Skvortsov and the 59th Rifle Corps of General A. S. Ksenofontov, each with two rifle divisions abreast in first echelon, would penetrate Japanese defenses and advance separately and simultaneously toward Pamientung and Lishuchen in order to capture these important rail and dirt road junctions on the Muleng River. Thereafter, the two corps would advance on widely divergent axes to secure Linkou and the northern approach to Mutanchiang in a three-stage attack:

- four to five days to capture Muleng, Lishuchen, and Linkou;
- six to eight days to bring Soviet troops to the northern outskirts of Mutanchiang; and
- four to six days for 1st Red Banner Army together with 35th and 5th Armies to destroy Japanese forces at Mishan and Mutanchiang.

Combat and Combat Service Support

His initial planning completed, General Beloborodov then considered the important question of support for the operation. Artillery support was particularly difficult because of the terrain and the lack of roads on the Soviet side of the border. Just bringing the artillery into its initial firing positions became a tremendous feat. The rugged terrain and paucity of Japanese troops resulted in a decision to fire no artillery preparation.⁸ By the night of the attack, however, 50 percent of army artillery was in position to provide necessary supporting fires. The 9th Air Army would support the attack with sorties against Japanese headquarters, communications facilities, and fortified positions.

Attaining enough speed to overcome the terrain impediments, to secure the objectives, and to sustain the drive along numerous separate axes of advance required mobile fire support. So the 1st Far Eastern Front reinforced each army with separate tank brigades and separate self-propelled artillery regiments. The 1st Red Banner Army received three tank brigades, three heavy self-propelled artillery regiments, and a heavy tank regiment in addition to its six organic self-propelled artillery battalions in the rifle divisions (a total of 410 tanks and self-propelled guns).⁹ General Beloborodov attached two tank brigades and one heavy self-propelled artillery regiment

to the rifle corps. After their passage through the mountainous wooded terrain belt along the border, they would be used as forward detachments to lead the advance.

Front headquarters also provided heavy engineer support to 1st Red Banner Army, both to prepare army jumping-off positions and to help build and maintain roads for the advance. Engineer units opened trails twenty meters wide, crisscrossing the initial army positions along the border. They also constructed firing points for infantry and artillery, observation posts, and two major radial roads leading to the border, over which units could deploy forward. Engineers also established survey markers and directional aids on hills in order to orient Soviet forces moving forward through the forests.¹⁰

Following Beloborodov's orders, his rifle corps commanders deployed two divisions in first echelon and one in second echelon (see fig. 2—1). Tank and self-propelled artillery units assembled close behind the first echelon so that they could move out quickly to exploit the success of the initial attack. Each first echelon rifle division would advance on two or three axes along roads that the engineers would construct as the units moved forward.

Soviet 1st Red Banner Army Echelonment					
Army	1st Echelon	26RC		59RC	
	2d Echelon				
	Reserve				
Corps	1st Echelon	300RD	22RD	39RD	231RD
	2d Echelon	59RD		365RD	
	Reserve				

Figure 2—1

The experience of the 300th Rifle Division, 26th Rifle Corps, illustrates in microcosm the detail required in the planning and conduct of the operation (see table 2—4). The 300th Rifle Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. K. G. Cherepanov, deployed in first echelon on a 2.5-kilometer front left of the other (22d) first echelon rifle division.¹¹ The 300th received as

reinforcements the 45th Howitzer Artillery Regiment, one tank company of the 257th Tank Brigade, and the 156th Sapper Battalion. Its mission was to attack in the direction of Mount Tiershiyihao-Chishengshan-Pamientung, to cross the heavily wooded region west of the border, to secure the western slope of Mount Tiershiyihao (the immediate mission), to secure crossing sites over the Shitouho River by the end of 9 August, and to prepare to advance on the follow-on objective of Pamientung. The depth of the immediate mission was three kilometers; the day's mission requirement was five kilometers. Hindering terrain limited the depth of these missions and forced road construction as the Soviet forces advanced.

**Table 2—4. Soviet 300th Rifle Division
Composition**

1049th Rifle Regiment 1051st Rifle Regiment 1053d Rifle Regiment 822d Artillery Regiment 336th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion 459th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion 756th Separate Signal Battalion 591st Separate Sapper Battalion Training battalion

Source: V. Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia divisiia v boiakh na mudan'tszianskom napravlenii" [The 300th Rifle Division in combat on the Mutanchiang direction], *Voенно-Istoricheskii Zhurnal* [Military history journal], August 1978:50.

To cross the mountainous taiga region in march column configuration along two routes, General Cherepanov formed his division into two echelons, with the main body on the left flank. The 1049th Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. K. V. Panin, on the right, and the 1051st Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. M. F. Buzhak, on the left, would painstakingly advance through the forests to the Shitouho River. Upon crossing the river, units would deploy in combat formation to continue the advance toward Pamientung. The 1053d Rifle Regiment was in the division second echelon, while the division training battalion was in reserve. The division's forward detachment, consisting of two machine gun companies, a squad of sappers from the 1053d Rifle Regiment, and two SU-76 guns, supported by fire of the 45th Howitzer Artillery Regiment, would move in column formation behind the 1st Rifle Battalion, 1051st Rifle Regiment. The forward detachment's mission was to capture Hill 748.8 and to support seizure of bridgeheads over the Shitouho River by elements of the division's main body. Divisional artillery would support the action of the forward detachment against Hill 748.8. After reaching the Shitouho River, a tank company of the 257th Tank Brigade would reinforce the forward detachment, enabling the forward detachment to push rapidly westward toward Pamientung.

To overcome the isolated Japanese units in fortified positions facing the 300th Rifle Division, the division commander organized small assault groups in the lead rifle companies. Each group consisted of a rifle platoon, one or two sapper squads, one or two tanks or self-propelled guns, a squad of antitank rifles, and one or two teams of manpacked flamethrowers. For weeks before the operation began, personnel of the 300th Rifle Division, division staff, and the assault groups had conducted exercises and training over similar terrain, specifically learning how to prepare roads and to conduct operations over such ground.

1st Red Banner Army Attack

At 1800 on 8 August, men of the 300th Rifle Division and other 1st Red Banner Army units moved forward and occupied jumping-off positions. As in other sectors of the 1st Far Eastern Front, as nightfall arrived so did the rains, causing apprehension among commanders across the front. General Beloborodov floridly recalled the scene:

Lightning flashed unexpectedly. Dazzling streaks split the darkening sky in half. Thunder sounded, becoming yet louder. The taiga sounded still more menacing. The downpours approached. Already the first drops resounded on the leaves. We entered the dugouts—and glanced at our watches. There remained sixty minutes until the attack. Should we delay the attack? No, under no circumstances! Indeed the rain will hinder not only us but also the enemy.

How slowly the time passes. But now approaches the long-awaited moment. Without artillery preparation the forward detachments start forward. It was at 0100 far eastern time 9 August 1945. The forces of the army crossed the state boundary.¹²

Marshal Meretskov, awaiting the beginning of the attack with General Beloborodov at the command post of 1st Red Banner Army, also recorded his more pragmatic thoughts:

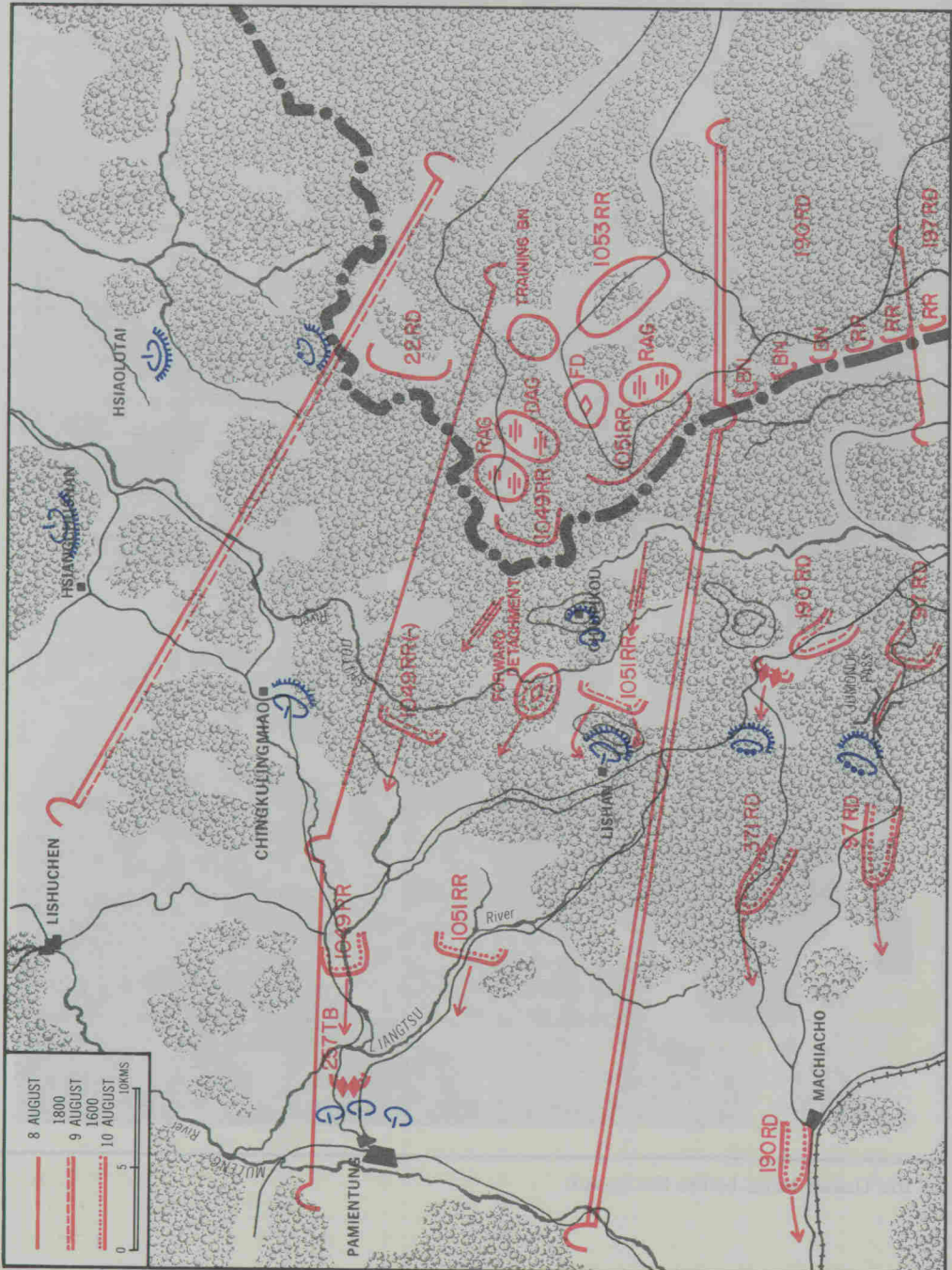
The assault group of the 1st Far Eastern Front consisting of the 1st Red Banner and 5th Armies was to assault the Japanese after a powerful artillery barrage. But a sudden tropical rainstorm overturned our plans. Torrents of water lashed the troops waiting for the signal to attack. Our artillery was silent. As in the Berlin Operation we intended to begin the attack in the middle of the night in the blinding light of searchlights. And now the driving rain had spoilt everything and a way out had to be found.

It was already 0100 hours. We could wait no longer. At the time I was at General Beloborodov's Command Post. A word of command and the mass of men and equipment would go into action. Should I order the gunners to open fire? It was too late to ask for weather forecasts or to gather any other additional information. I had to decide and decide immediately, taking into account the objective data at my disposal. That meant that not a second was to be lost in deliberations. I gave the command and troops lunged forward without an artillery barrage. Advance units gained control of road centres and broke into villages sowing panic among the Japanese. The surprise factor played its part. Taking advantage of the downpour and the pitch-dark night our troops broke into the fortified areas catching the Japanese unawares. Nothing could stop our men now.¹³



In the Ussuri taiga before the attack

At 0100 on 9 August forces of the 1st Red Banner Army attacked into the forests with first echelon divisions advancing in column formation, each column led by the task-organized regimental forward detachment (see map 2—1). In the 300th Rifle Division sector, each of the two regimental columns



Map 2-1. 1st Red Banner Army Operations, 9-10 August 1945

was led by a rifle battalion with five T-34 tanks, two automatic weapons companies for security, and a platoon of sappers. The tanks, placed at the head of each column, knocked down trees and saplings as they advanced. The infantry, in turn, gathered the trees, and the sappers worked them into a crude, though serviceable, corduroy road five meters wide. Follow-on units widened the path to seven meters and ultimately improved it enough for two-way traffic. The four engineer battalions of the army road detachment improved the road, built bridges as necessary in each division's sector, regulated traffic, and directed the forward movement of the army's second echelon.

Three to five kilometers behind the regimental forward detachments marched the first segment of the regimental main column consisting of rifle, engineer, artillery, and specialized units task-organized for mutual support. Other segments followed at intervals of four to five and one-half kilometers. Each succeeding segment further improved the road and evacuated vehicles that had bogged down in the mud and undergrowth. Altogether the 300th Rifle Division constructed more than eleven kilometers of tree, brush, and twig corduroy road as it marched.¹⁴ Other first echelon divisions of 1st Red Banner Army accomplished similar feats over slightly shorter distances.

During the darkness of early morning hours, the two regimental columns slowly edged their way through the heavy forest, virtually undetected by the sole Japanese outpost at Chiupikou. By dawn, the main regimental force followed under gray, rain-laden skies. Shortly after dawn, elements of the 1051st Rifle Regiment surprised and overpowered the small Japanese outpost at Chiupikou. The remainder of the column moved westward, literally chopping its way toward the Shitouho River. By day's end, the 1051st Rifle Regiment had secured crossings on the Shitouho just southwest of Hill 748.8, and the 1049th Rifle Regiment had advanced across the slope of Mount Tiershiyihao and had put two rifle battalions across the Shitouho River. The 3d Battalion of the 1049th Rifle Regiment, on the order of Lieutenant Colonel Panin, remained in the rear to help construct a road over which the regimental artillery and rear services would advance. Both regiments thus advanced four to five kilometers on the first day of the offensive, liquidating the token Japanese force along the immediate border.

But if Japanese resistance was nil, the taiga was another matter. Despite elaborately planned road construction efforts, soil, vegetation, and rain combined to plague the 300th Rifle Division. Division artillery, division supply trains, and attached units stuck fast in the mud the first day of the advance. To solve this serious problem, General Cherepanov ordered the 1053d Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. K. A. Malkov, the training battalion, the 3d Battalion, 1049th Rifle Regiment, and two sapper battalions to improve the road so that it could be used for transporting artillery and vital supplies forward. These efforts to improve road communications paid off. By the morning of the tenth, the division's forward detachment, the 257th Tank

Brigade, moved into position on the west bank of the Shitouho River, waiting to receive the expected order to begin the exploitation to Pamientung. Other division units prepared to follow.

For the Japanese, events on 9 August were as dreary as the weather. The chief of staff of the 126th Infantry Division, Col. Masashi Tanaka, wrote from his fortified position at Panchiehho:

The night of 8—9 August, moonless and drizzling without a letup, was filled with an air of ghastliness at Panchiehho, when all of a sudden at midnight a strange light was seen and the drone of aircraft heard to the south. Soon thereafter enemy aircraft were sighted crossing the Soviet-Manchurian border. At about the same time several shots were heard from the direction of our border lookout positions; telephone communication with them was completely disrupted.¹⁵

The Japanese garrison commander at Panchiehho reported the incidents to the division intelligence liaison officer at Pingyang and learned of other Soviet attacks along the entire 126th Infantry Division front. At division headquarters in Pamientung, the division intelligence officer awoke at midnight to the sound of enemy aircraft. Shortly thereafter, both the Pingyang and Pamientung sectors reported attacks by an "overwhelmingly superior enemy."¹⁶ The intelligence officer transmitted this information to 5th Army headquarters and to his division commander, who was at the commanders' conference at army headquarters. In the Pamientung sector the commander of the 1st Battalion, 277th Regiment, sighted enemy aircraft flying westward shortly before dawn and immediately ordered his forces to prepare their defenses, destroy bridges, and barricade roads. At 1000 on 9 August the Lishan garrison notified the battalion commander that the Chiupikou unit (twenty men) had been annihilated by the enemy just before daybreak. The enemy, though, had not yet reached Lishan.¹⁷

By 0300 on 9 August, 5th Army, aware that an attack was in progress, issued orders to subordinate divisions. The 126th Infantry Division was to

occupy established positions extending from Jumonji Pass to Shangchihtun (through Lishan and Panchiehho) in an effort to delay the enemy advance and to facilitate the movement of the 135th Division toward Linkou. The main force will hold established positions in the vicinity of Tzuhsingtun, west of Pamientung and will destroy the enemy fighting power by resisting in our defensive positions disposed in depth.¹⁸

At that time Japanese 5th Army attached one battery of the 31st Independent Antitank Battalion and one battery of the 20th Heavy Field Artillery Battalion to the 126th Infantry Division.¹⁹ Upon receiving his orders, the 126th Division commander left Yehho by motor car for Pamientung.

By the evening of the ninth, reports to 126th Infantry Division headquarters were painting a fragmented, but gloomy picture. In the Pingyang sector, the Chiungshan observation unit had been annihilated in the early morning hours, as was a similar position at Heilingshan. By nightfall Soviet troops were massing east of Panchiehho in estimated division strength. In view of the threat to his position, the garrison commander evacuated his forces at midnight and withdrew to Pingyangchen, arriving there at 0900 on the tenth. Instead of finding relief and regrouping at Pingyangchen, the Japanese commander confronted two Soviet columns, one following him from Panchiehho and one advancing from Hsiaolutai toward the west side of Pingyangchen.²⁰

In the Pamientung sector on the evening of 9 August, the garrisons at Chingkungmiao and Lishan reported no Soviet activity, though men and machines could be heard approaching their positions from the east and southeast. What the Japanese heard were the advancing forces of the 300th Rifle Division, then completing their movement through the forests adjacent to the Shitouho River.

On the right flank, the 22d Rifle Division slowly pushed toward Chingkungmiao, while farther east, divisions of the 59th Rifle Corps advanced into the heart of the Pingyang defense zone. At 0500 on the tenth, lead elements of the 1049th and 1051st Rifle Regiments emerged from their bridgeheads on the Shitouho River and entered the final eight to ten kilometers of forest separating them from the more open country east of Pamientung. Japanese opposition was still not yet apparent. To hasten the advance, the forward detachment of the division (257th Tank Brigade of Lt. Col. G. S. Anishchik) moved into the vanguard and led the movement forward, hoping to bypass Japanese strongpoints. To help it accomplish its mission as forward detachment of the 26th Rifle Corps, General Beloborodov reinforced the brigade's twenty-five tanks with a battery of self-propelled guns, an automatic weapons company, and a sapper platoon.²¹ During the morning, the reinforced 257th Tank Brigade moved westward north of Hill 748.8 into the valley of the Liangtzu Ho and then proceeded northwest along the river toward Pamientung. The 1052d Rifle Regiment followed in its wake and engaged the Japanese strongpoint at Lishan at 0800. To the north, the 1049th Rifle Regiment moved westward out of the Shitouho Valley, south of the Japanese positions at Chingkungmiao—positions the 22d Rifle Division now confronted in its advance westward. Farther south, the Soviet 5th Army's 190th Rifle Division of 5th Army, on its march toward Machiacho Station, ran into the Japanese platoon (of the 277th Infantry Regiment) holding the encampment at Jumonji Pass. The Soviets set fire to the Japanese barracks at 1000, but the fire spread into the brush and temporarily halted the Soviet advance. Eventually, Soviet infantry outflanked and assaulted the Japanese positions under the cover of tank fire. After suffering heavy losses, the Japanese commander, Second Lieutenant Kawakami, withdrew his platoon northwest, through the forests, toward Pamientung.²² At the same time, the 1051st Rifle Regiment began a careful

reduction of the Japanese reinforced company at Lishan. The Soviets first infiltrated and surrounded the garrison and then poured on heavy observed artillery fire. In the afternoon, the 1051st Rifle Regiment assaulted Japanese defensive field positions. By evening almost all the Japanese, including the commander, were dead, and the position was in Soviet hands.²³

Throughout 10 August, the Japanese company at Chingkulingmiao successfully defended its positions (well disposed over difficult terrain), against lead elements of the Soviet 22d Rifle Division. Late in the day, however, Soviet troops from the 1049th Rifle Regiment of the 300th Rifle Division threatened Japanese withdrawal routes from the south, and 22d Rifle Division forces began infiltrating the Japanese position. The Japanese garrison commander withdrew his company on a mountain path back to positions east of Pamientung, where it arrived on the eleventh and there rejoined the rest of the battalion.²⁴



Tank advance with mounted infantry

Meanwhile, the 257th Tank Brigade (reinforced) rapidly drove on toward Pamientung, leaving Soviet infantry to deal with bypassed Japanese positions. At 1600, four kilometers northeast of the city, the tank brigade encountered prepared Japanese positions defended by two companies of the 1st Battalion, 277th Regiment, plus one company of the 126th Infantry Division's Raiding Battalion. Lacking antitank weapons, the Japanese

desperately resorted to suicide tactics: raiding company troops threw themselves bodily at the Soviet tanks. "Each individual of the main body of the 1st Company of the Raiding Battalion armed himself with explosives and rushed the enemy tanks. Although minor damage was inflicted on a majority of them [the tanks], the explosives were not of sufficient strength (three to seven kilograms) to halt the tanks."²⁵

The Soviet 257th Tank Brigade commander had support from the 78th Assault Aviation Regiment. While aircraft pounded Japanese troop and artillery positions, Soviet artillery and tanks added their direct fire. By 2000 on 10 August, lead elements of the 300th Rifle Division and 22d Rifle Division of 26th Rifle Corps arrived to support the 257th Tank Brigade in its attack. Soviet forces now engaged the Japanese forces on three sides, and Japanese units began withdrawing across the bridge westward toward the division main defensive line at Tzuhsingtun. Pressuring the Japanese, the 257th Tank Brigade, reinforced by the 1051st Rifle Regiment of 300th Rifle Division, attacked the northern defenses of the city at 2100, broke through, and secured the bridge over the Muleng River and the railroad station in the northern sector of Pamientung. Early on the morning of 11 August, a simultaneous attack by Soviet forces on the eastern and southern defenses of the city finally crushed Japanese defenses. By noon, the Japanese garrison had been destroyed, with 400 Japanese killed in the struggle. Though the hard, lengthy fighting undoubtedly claimed significant Soviet casualties as well, the Japanese claim of only two Soviet tanks destroyed and seven disabled illustrates the Japanese inability to check Soviet armor advances.²⁶ On the morning of 11 August, while the final battle for Pamientung was in progress, General Beloborodov dispatched the 257th Tank Brigade westward to pursue Japanese forces.

The success of the 26th Rifle Corps, in general, and the 300th Rifle Division, in particular, was paralleled by similar successes in other sectors. While the 257th Tank Brigade led 26th Rifle Corps toward Pamientung, the 75th Tank Brigade performed a similar mission for 59th Rifle Corps, advancing to secure first Lishuchen and then Linkou. General Maksimov's forces on the right wing of 1st Red Banner Army overcame Japanese defensive positions west of Lake Khanka and threatened the Japanese Mishan Fortified Region from the south.

Conclusions

The operations of 1st Red Banner Army and, especially, the 300th Rifle Division were notable, although not necessarily because of the armed resistance they overcame. In fact, Japanese resistance throughout the sector was slight and disorganized. The Soviet achievement resulted from the Japanese assessment that the likelihood of a major Soviet attack in the seemingly impassable terrain of the region was minimal. Thus, the Japanese placed the bulk of their defenses along the conventional avenues of

approach, in the more trafficable area west of Lake Khanka. Elsewhere in the area, the Japanese deployed small outposts to detect and block the light Soviet forces they expected to meet. What distinguished the Soviet effort was the successful introduction of large forces through such a region. The Soviets succeeded by careful operational planning, by tailoring their forces, and by enormous engineering feats, feats the light and immobile Japanese outpost defenses were powerless to prevent.

General Beloborodov's decision to attack in a single echelon brought maximum pressure to bear along the entire Japanese front. The Soviets used every possible axis of advance and where axes did not exist, they built new ones. Lacking depth, the Japanese defense fell victim to that single echelon Soviet attack. Attacked everywhere simultaneously, the Japanese could defend nowhere successfully. Once the Soviets pierced the thin Japanese defensive crust, victory was assured. Mobile forward detachments began active pursuit, which the Japanese failed to halt until the Soviets were on the outskirts of Mutanchiang.

The Soviets achieved victory by close coordination (*vzaimodeistvie*) of forces at the lowest levels and by carefully tailoring units. The cooperation of tanks, infantry, and sappers down to company level was essential in order to build the vital roads stretching through the forests along the border. This close cooperation of tanks, infantry, and artillery in the forward detachments permitted those units to begin exploitation early and to sustain the exploitation to great depths. Detailed planning and implementation of signal procedures and unit movement control insured that each march element of the advancing army had a proper mixture of combat elements.

As in other areas of Manchuria, a major factor in the achievement of Soviet victory was the basic Japanese tendency to underestimate Soviet military capabilities. As a result, in just fifty hours of battle, 1st Red Banner Army secured the line of the Muleng River by overcoming defenses that Japanese planners had expected to hold much longer. The stage was set for the army's advance toward the main Japanese defensive position and the critical city of Mutanchiang.

Notes

1. A. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii" [In the hills of Manchuria], *VIZh*, December 1980:30.
2. *IVMV*, 2:203.
3. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 30.
4. Japanese defenses described in *JM* 154, 250—53.
5. *Ibid.*, 251.
6. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 31—33; Beloborodov, *Skvoz ogon i taigu* [Through the fire and taiga] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1969), 14—16.
7. Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," 34—35.

8. *IVMV*, 2:205; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 107, states that 1st Red Banner Army planned no artillery preparation. Meretskov in *Serving the People* implies that the army was going to use searchlights to supplement an artillery preparation (as in the Berlin operation). No other accounts support this claim.
9. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 92, gives tank and SP gun strength as 410. V. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primeneniye," 78, claims that strength was 402.
10. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 129.
11. Details on the 300th Rifle Division operations found in V. Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia diviziia v boyakh na Mudan'tsyanskom napravlenii" [The 300th Rifle Division in Battles on the Mutanchiang direction], *VIZh*, August 1978:50—55.
12. Beloborodov, *Skvoz*, 21.
13. Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 15—16.
14. Khrenov, "Wartime Operations," 87—88; *IVMV*, 2:227—28; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 205—7, all describe the road-building feat.
15. *JM* 154, 253—54.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 257.
18. *Ibid.*, 182.
19. *Ibid.*, 183.
20. *Ibid.*, 255—56. In heavy fighting at Pingyangchen on the tenth, the Japanese battalion commander and most of his officers were killed. After dark the remnants of the force broke through Soviet lines and scattered westward and northward into the hills. Of the 850 Japanese engaged at Pingyangchen, 650 were killed or wounded.
21. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216.
22. *JM* 154, 257—58.
23. *Ibid.*, 186, 258; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216.
24. *JM* 154, 258—59.
25. *Ibid.*, 259; Timofeev, "300-ia strelkovaia," 53; Beloborodov, "Na sopkakh Man'chzhurii," *VIZh*, January 1981:45; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 216—17.
26. *JM* 154, 259, claims Japanese losses were 700, of which 500 were killed. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 217, states that 400 Japanese died in the action.

