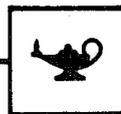


Army Operations in Arid Mountains

6



Situation in Western Manchuria

Japanese defensive planning in Manchuria recognized geographical realities and combat experiences in the region. Accordingly, Japanese force deployment in western Manchuria reflected a terrain assessment and regional history. The major geographical feature in western Manchuria is the Grand Khingan Mountain range, the traditional barrier to invasion of Manchuria from the west. A second feature, the vast expanse of desert and steppe land west of the Grand Khingans, reinforces the defensive value of the Grand Khingans themselves. Any force invading from the west would first have to cross this extensive desert waste, then traverse the formidable Grand Khingan Mountains.

Japanese consideration of these geographical factors, as well as analysis of the historical record, led them to two conclusions. First, the Grand Khingan Mountains, though of moderate height and ruggedness, formed an imposing barrier: because of the waterless expanses lying before the mountain range, the only feasible avenues of advance through the mountains were the passes parallel to the rail lines that crossed the mountains from Halung-Arshaan to Solun and from Yakoshih to Pokotu. Second, Japanese experience in the 1930s in general, and the battle of Khalkhin-Gol (Japanese name, Nomonhan) in particular, indicated roughly the size force the Soviets could deploy against western Manchuria. During the so-called Khalkhin-Gol incident in August 1939 the Soviets had deployed more than 50,000 men into eastern Mongolia, about the maximum number that the water resources and transportation network of the region could sustain. In 1945 the Japanese believed the Soviets could deploy about the same number into eastern Mongolia. They conceded that the Soviets could field a greater force into areas adjacent to the Trans-Siberian Railroad (against northwestern Manchuria), perhaps as many as 150,000 men. This total invasion force of 150,000 to 200,000 men would require, however, the total use of the terrain and the transportation network adjacent to northwestern Manchuria. But, as previously noted, the Japanese had concluded that invading forces could only operate along two major avenues of approach.

Japanese forces deployed accordingly. They constructed strong fortifications along the two major avenues of approach through the Grand Khingan Mountains and stationed at least one infantry division in each of the fortified regions. They expected these forces to delay and perhaps even successfully defend for an extended period against the postulated Soviet threat. Since the Japanese strategy depended on the attrition of Soviet forces, that attrition should have been greatest in the easily defensible regions of western Manchuria.

As they had in 1939, the Japanese again in 1945 underestimated Soviet logistical and combat capabilities. The Soviets ultimately deployed more than 350,000 men into eastern Mongolia and unleashed them against the Japanese along ten axes of advance. Thus, a defense that the Japanese perceived as adequate became in essence an open flank and the real Achilles' heel of the overall Japanese defensive network in Manchuria.

In the eyes of Soviet planners the most critical sector of operations against western Manchuria was extreme eastern Mongolia, the salient around Tamsag-Bulag that pointed like a dagger toward the interior of Manchuria. The eastern end of the salient was the closest point to central Manchuria where Soviet forces could deploy. The salient, however, directly faced one of the two heavily defended avenues of approach through the Grand Khingan Mountains, the route from Halung-Arshaan to Solun. Into this sector the Soviets deployed three armies. Two of the armies (6th Guards Tank Army and 39th Army), acting as a shock group, would spearhead the advance. These two armies would advance rapidly, bypass the Japanese permanent defenses, and penetrate quickly into central Manchuria before the surprised Japanese could halt them. Surprise was paramount and would more than compensate for potential Japanese resistance and the hindrances of the rugged terrain. Surprise plus a rapid advance in the west would secure victory for the Soviets in Manchuria as a whole.

Missions and Tasks

The Soviet Far East Command assigned responsibility for operations against western Manchuria to the Trans-Baikal Front of Marshal Rodion Ya. Malinovsky. A High Command directive of 5 July 1945 ordered the front to "strike the main blow with a force of three combined arms armies and one tank army to envelop the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region from the south in the general direction of Changchun."¹ The immediate mission of the front was to smash the defending enemy, cross the Grand Khingan Mountains, and then to secure with main front forces a line from Dabanshan through Lupei to Solun by the fifteenth day of the operation. By the tenth day of the operation, the 6th Guards Tank Army, operating in the general direction of Changchun, would force the Grand Khingan Mountains, defend the passes through the mountains, and hold them

against enemy reserves until the arrival of the follow-on combined arms armies. Then, the main forces of the front would secure the Chihfeng-Mukden-Shantoiakou-Changchun-Chalantun line.

Marshal Malinovsky's concept of the operation required

an impetuous approach to the mountains, rapid seizure of the passes and exit from the mountains by tank and motorized infantry who would forestall the possibility of enemy reserves approaching the Khingans from the depths of Manchuria and facilitate the advance of our infantry. Success in the operation demanded surprise and great swiftness of action.²

Malinovsky designated the 39th, 53d, and 17th Armies and the 6th Guards Tank Army to make the front main attack. The 39th Army, 17th Army, and 6th Guards Tank Army would be in first echelon; the 53d Army, in second echelon. The 39th Army and 6th Guards Tank Army would attack from the Mongolian salient east of Tamsag-Bulag. In a visit to 39th Army headquarters on 12 July, Malinovsky spelled out the specific task of 39th Army. It was to

deliver its main attack from the region southwest of Halung-Arshaan in the general direction of Solun. Having enveloped the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region from the south, the army had the immediate mission of arriving on the line of the Uurlengui-Gol River [Urgen Gol—a depth of 60 kilometers]. Subsequently, by decisive blows, [it was to] cut the path of retreat to the southeast of the enemy Solun troop concentration and, by the 15th day of the operation, secure the Solun region [a depth of 300—350 kilometers].³

In addition, the army would attack with a force of not less than two rifle divisions on a secondary axis toward Hailar and would cooperate with 36th Army to prevent Japanese forces at Hailar from supporting those at Solun. A third force of one rifle division would attack the right (northern) flank of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region. To accomplish this mission, the 39th Army commander, General I. I. Lyudnikov had three rifle corps of nine rifle divisions, two tank brigades, one tank division, and numerous attached supporting units. The army mustered a total strength of 502 tanks and self-propelled guns and 2,708 guns and mortars (see table 6—1).⁴

General Lyudnikov's 39th Army occupied the easternmost portion of the Outer Mongolian Tamsag-Bulag salient. Directly to the east of his forces loomed the central sector of the Grand Khingan Mountains and the pass through the mountains running northwest to southeast from Handagai to Wuchakou. South of the pass, the mountains ranged in heights of from 1,200 to 1,400 meters, 200 to 300 meters above the elevation from which the army launched its attack. These mountains, which extended to a depth of 100 kilometers east to west, offered good visibility, because trees existed only near springs and in the valleys that traversed the mountains. North of the main pass, the mountains rose higher (1,800 meters) and the mountainous region was wider (200 kilometers). Soil conditions and scattered

wooded areas made movement in this sector, especially during rainy periods, virtually impossible. Gullies, narrow valleys, and defiles intersected the entire mountain massif.

Table 6—1. Soviet 39th Army Composition

39th Army: Col. Gen. I. I. Lyudnikov
 5th Guards Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. I. S. Bezugly
 17th Guards Rifle Division
 19th Guards Rifle Division
 91st Guards Rifle Division
 94th Rifle Corps: Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov
 124th Rifle Division
 221st Rifle Division
 358th Rifle Division
 113th Rifle Corps: Lt. Gen. N. N. Oleshev
 192d Rifle Division
 262d Rifle Division
 338th Rifle Division
 61st Tank Division
 44th Tank Brigade
 206th Tank Brigade
 735th SP Artillery Regiment
 927th SP Artillery Regiment
 1197th SP Artillery Regiment
 5th Artillery Breakthrough Corps: Maj. Gen. L. N. Alekseev
 3d Guards Artillery Breakthrough Division
 8th Guards Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 22d Guards Gun Artillery Brigade
 99th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 43d Mortar Brigade
 50th Heavy Mortar Brigade
 14th Guards Mortar Brigade
 6th Guards Artillery Breakthrough Division
 29th Guards Gun Artillery Brigade
 69th Light Artillery Brigade
 87th Heavy Howitzer Brigade
 134th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 4th Mortar Brigade
 10th Guards Mortar Brigade
 139th Gun Artillery Brigade
 55th Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade
 390th Gun Artillery Regiment
 1142d Gun Artillery Regiment
 1143d Gun Artillery Regiment
 629th Artillery Regiment
 610th Tank Destroyer Regiment

555th Mortar Regiment
 24th Guards Mortar Brigade
 34th Guards Mortar Regiment
 46th Guards Mortar Regiment
 64th Guards Mortar Regiment
 14th Antiaircraft Artillery Division
 715th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 718th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 721st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 2013th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 621st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 63d Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 32d Engineer Sapper Brigade

Weapons:

502 tanks and SP guns
 2,708 guns and mortars

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 399—400.

Japanese Defenses

The narrow pass from Handagai to Wuchakou was traversed by a rail line and a road that ran throughout its length. The Taoerh Ho flowed through the pass, forming an obstacle to lateral movement, especially in flood stage. The only road in the entire region suitable to support military operations was the Handagai-Wuchakou-Solun road. Formidable as these natural obstacles were, the primary obstacles to movement through the pass were numerous and substantial fortifications and defensive field positions the Japanese had erected. Around Iruse, Arshaan, and Wuchakou, the Japanese constructed defensive emplacements consisting of pillboxes, earthen dugouts, trenches, and, in the Wuchakou area, reinforced concrete field fortifications. A line of entrenchments covered the railroad toward south of Arshaan, and additional field works covered the road junction south of Handagai. West of the road in the hills adjacent to the border, the Japanese built observation posts and occasional field works manned by units ranging in size from squad to full battalion. A second line of field positions to the west of Wangyemiao was incomplete in August 1945. In short, an extensive and elaborate fortification system defended the main avenue of approach into central Manchuria from Outer Mongolia.

The Japanese 107th Infantry Division of Lt. Gen. Abe Koichi, with headquarters at Wuchakou, manned these fortifications and positions along the rail line to Wangyemiao (see table 6—2). The 107th Infantry Division was

subordinate to 44th Army, whose mission was to cover enemy invasion routes into western Manchuria from Handagai to the south. To accomplish its mission, the 44th Army deployed its 107th Infantry Division in the Handagai-Wangyemiao sector, its 117th Infantry Division farther to the rear at Paichengtzu, and its 63d Infantry Division to the south at Tungliao. The 2d Raiding Battalion stationed at Wangyemiao would support the 107th Infantry Division.⁵

**Table 6—2. Japanese 107th Infantry
Division Composition**

107th Infantry Division

90th Infantry Regiment
177th Infantry Regiment
178th Infantry Regiment
107th Artillery Regiment
107th Engineer Regiment
107th Transportation Regiment
107th Signal Regiment
107th Reconnaissance Company

Source: Ōta Hisaō, *Dai 107 shidan shi: Saigō made tatakatta Kantōgun* [The history of the 107th Division: The Kwantung Army that resisted to the last] (Tokyo: Taiseidō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1979), 14, 24, 26, 72, 76—79.

Soviet Operational Planning

By July 1945, the 44th Army had completed its plans that called for conduct of a defense by small units in the border regions and a slow, delaying operation by army main forces into central Manchuria. Ultimately, army forces would withdraw into the defenses of the redoubt area around Tunghua in southeastern Manchuria. The 44th Army specifically ordered the 107th Infantry Division to

secure the prepared positions in the vicinities of Wuchakou and Hsingan (Wangyemiao), and the rest of the commands will secure the key traffic points along the Ssupingchieh-Taonan Railroad and the Liaoyuan-Tungliao Railroad and check the enemy advance at these positions. Positions will be organized at key traffic points; guerrilla warfare will be carried out with these positions as the bases of areas of approximately 20 kilometers radius. If the enemy detours around these positions, he will be attacked in the rear.⁶

The 107th Infantry Division placed two regiments (90th and 177th) in positions to defend the critical route from Handagai to Wuchakou. The 1st Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended Iruse, with its outposts

covering Handagai and the areas west of Iruse along the Mongolian border. The 2d Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended a string of company-size outposts west of Arshaan and manned fortifications around Arshaan proper and the railroad tunnel to the south. The 3d Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, and the three battalions of the 177th Infantry Regiment defended positions ringing Wuchakou and the heavily fortified emplacements in the immediate vicinity of the city. The raiding battalion of the 107th Infantry Division, formed only in July, was also stationed at Wuchakou. The 178th Infantry Regiment occupied positions at Solun, Wangyemiao, and other points along the rail line between those major towns.⁷ The 44th Army's 2d Raiding Battalion at Wangyemiao and the Manchurian 2d Cavalry Division, headquartered at Solun, provided additional support for the 107th Infantry Division.

Although the 107th Infantry Division had adequate manpower, its weaponry was deficient. In June 1945 Imperial General Headquarters had requisitioned half of its antitank guns for use in the defense of Japan and had also reduced the equipment of the artillery regiment. Yet, given the nature of fixed defenses in the region adjacent to the Mongolian border and Japanese faith in terrain as an effective barrier to Soviet attack, the Japanese 44th Army felt its position to be relatively secure in August 1945. As one staff officer stated, "In the immediate vicinity of the 44th Army border, there were absolutely no indications of a large concentration of troops even immediately prior to Soviet Russia's entry into the war."⁸

Having received his army's mission from Marshal Malinovsky, General Lyudnikov planned his operations in light of the terrain and Japanese deployments. Lyudnikov's ultimate aim was to attack swiftly in order to deny the Japanese the opportunity to regroup and construct a broader defensive line. He also wanted to avoid a costly direct attack on the heavily fortified Japanese defenses in the Grand Khingan passes. To accomplish these ambitious goals, 39th Army would attempt to sustain an advance of fifty to sixty kilometers per day, which would enable the army to move forward in tandem with 6th Guards Tank Army advancing on its right. Such a pace would insure that on the seventh day of the operation the 39th Army would be around the defended pass and able to secure a line from Solun to Hailahai.

The final 39th Army plan called for a two-stage army operation of six to seven days' duration to accomplish the missions spelled out in the Trans-Baikal Front plan.⁹ During the first stage, 39th Army would bypass the forward Japanese defenses and cross the Grand Khingan Mountains. The main attack force would march south and east via Dzurkin Harul and Boto Nela to reach a line of Tiikhonera-Kakusupera, while the secondary attack force would reach Ulan Koragan, Bain Chaumiao, and Tappi Bancha. The first stage was scheduled to last four days. In the second stage, the Army would attack Solun and Hailar to destroy Japanese forces in those regions. The second stage would last two to three days.

General Lyudnikov's army operational formation was designed to achieve these objectives rapidly. The army formed in a single echelon of three rifle corps abreast. On the main attack axis (against Solun), the 61st Tank Division led the attack as the mobile group of the army. The 113th Rifle Corps of Lt. Gen. N. N. Oleshev and 5th Guards Rifle Corps of Lt. Gen. I. S. Bezugly followed the tank division on a front forty-five kilometers wide. Each of the corps had a reinforced tank brigade attached for use as a corps forward detachment. A divisional forward detachment consisting of



Trans-Baikal Front troops move forward into jumping-off positions

a rifle battalion on trucks, a self-propelled artillery battalion, an antitank battalion, an artillery battalion, and two guards mortar battalions* led the advance of each first echelon rifle division. The division forward detachments led the offensive, followed by the tank brigades (corps forward detachments) and the two rifle divisions (in corps first echelon). The remaining rifle division in each corps second echelon brought up the rear. All units of the army advanced in march column formation.¹⁰

*Soviet term for multiple rocket launcher units.

On the secondary attack axis (against Hailar), the 94th Rifle Corps of Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov placed both of its rifle divisions in first echelon. The 124th Rifle Division of 94th Rifle Corps, in army reserve, deployed directly against the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region to support the army's main attack.

The Trans-Baikal Front provided considerable armor and artillery support to 39th Army so that it could advance rapidly yet simultaneously provide the firepower necessary to reduce Japanese defensive strongholds. The 39th Army routinely deployed its armored units in the first echelon at virtually every level of command. Soviet forces were bypassing the major Japanese defenses, so the army did not need to mass its artillery fires or create regimental, division, or corps artillery groups. Instead, it allocated artillery to the corps and divisions on the basis of one artillery penetration division and one guards mortar regiment per each corps on the main attack axis, a concentration of more than 2,000 guns and mortars in the main attack sector.¹¹

Most of the artillery moved in column formation, integrated within and following the division and corps march columns. The difficult terrain restricted column movement, especially of heavy equipment, and much of the artillery lagged well behind the advancing tanks and infantry. This meant that the army would conduct no systematic artillery preparation preceding the attack. Instead the artillery would be used to fire on-call missions to support the forward movement of the corps' forward detachments.

One fighter aviation division, minus one regiment, of the 12th Air Army would provide air support for 39th Army. On the first day of the operation, aviation would bomb Solun, Hailar, and the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region and Japanese airfields.¹² Each corps also received heavy engineer support in order to prepare and maintain the almost nonexistent road network, to overcome the Grand Khingan Mountains and water obstacles east of the mountains, and to assist in reducing Japanese fortified positions (see table 6—3).

On 2 August, Marshal Malinovsky visited 39th Army headquarters, approved General Lyudnikov's plan, and ordered 39th Army to move forward into its concentration area. That evening, army units began the 120—130-kilometer march. The 113th Rifle Corps, with its attached units, marched forward in two columns and deployed at 0600 on 4 August near Ara Bulagin Obo. The 5th Guards Rifle Corps marched in three columns and occupied its concentration area east of the 113th Rifle Corps at 0600 on 5 August. The 94th Rifle Corps (minus the 124th Rifle Division) concentrated in the region of Herempte Nur at 0600 on 3 August, while the 124th Rifle Division deployed into positions near Derkin Tragan Obo at

0600 on 5 August. Other army units completed their redeployment by nightfall on 6 August. All units used their time during the long march forward to conduct training and to practice water discipline.¹³

Table 6—3. Allocation of Support Units to 39th Army Subordinate Units

113th Rifle Corps
 206th Tank Brigade
 69th Light Artillery Brigade
 134th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 87th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 29th Gun Artillery Brigade
 4th Mortar Brigade
 10th Guards Mortar Brigade
 One regiment light antiaircraft artillery
 203d Engineer-Sapper Battalion
 TOTAL: 860 guns and mortars
 112 tanks and self-propelled guns

5th Guards Rifle Corps
 44th Tank Brigade
 8th Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 99th Heavy Howitzer Artillery Brigade
 22d Gun Artillery Brigade
 50th Heavy Mortar Brigade
 43d Mortar Brigade
 14th Guards Mortar Brigade
 65th Guards Mortar Regiment
 One regiment light antiaircraft artillery
 230th Engineer-Sapper Battalion
 TOTAL: 830 guns and mortars
 119 tanks and self-propelled guns

61st Tank Division
 164 tanks

94th Rifle Corps
 1142d Gun Artillery Regiment
 390th Gun Artillery Regiment
 629th Gun Artillery Regiment
 610th Antitank Regiment
 46th Guards Mortar Regiment
 228th Engineer-Sapper Battalion
 TOTAL: 508 guns and mortars
 47 tanks and self-propelled guns

Army Artillery Group

139th Army Gun Artillery Brigade
 1143d Gun Artillery Regiment
 55th Antitank Brigade (minus one regiment)
 621st Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 63d Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion

TOTAL: 224 guns and mortars

Artillery Reserve

164 guns and mortars

Tank Reserve

13 tanks and self-propelled guns

Engineer Reserve

One pontoon bridge battalion
 One engineer-sapper battalion

TOTAL: 2,586 guns and mortars
 455 tanks and self-propelled guns

Source: I. I. Lyudnikov, *Cherez bol'shoi khingan* [Across the Grand Khingan] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1967), 51—52; I. I. Lyudnikov, *Doroga dlinoiu v zhizn* [The long road in life] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1969), 168.

Late on the evening of 8 August all units occupied jumping-off positions along the border in readiness for the attack. The advance across the border would occur two hours after the receipt from front headquarters of the code word *Molnii* (lightning). At 2100 on 8 August Gen. M. V. Zakharov, chief of staff of the Trans-Baikal Front, notified 39th Army of the H-hour for the attack and gave precise instructions concerning the initial hours of the attack. The 39th Army units would initiate the attack with a time-phased commitment of its units. Reconnaissance detachments and forward detachments of rifle divisions and road regulators* would cross the border at 0005 on 9 August. The main force of the army would begin its advance toward the border at 0430, and aviation units would begin flying their missions at 0530. Radio networks would go on the air at daylight, but only if other means of communication were unavailable. Subunits were to report their progress to army and front every four hours, beginning at 0600 on the ninth.¹⁴

*Used to control vehicle and march column flow.

On the night of 8 August, latest reconnaissance indicated only small Japanese outposts on the border; Japanese units appeared unaware of impending hostilities. Unlike other areas of Manchuria, in the 39th Army sector the weather was clear, and conditions for opening the attack were excellent.



Soviet units cross the Manchurian border (probably 39th Army)

39th Army Attack

At H-hour, without any artillery or aviation preparation, the forces of 39th Army crossed the border into Manchuria (see map 6—1). The army forward detachment (61st Tank Division) and corps forward detachments preceded the main advance by twenty to thirty kilometers. Reconnaissance units and forward detachments from each first echelon rifle division moved fifteen to thirty kilometers in front of the advancing rifle corps. A rifle regiment led the march column of each rifle division as a divisional advanced guard. Attached artillery marched in parallel columns, ready to provide artillery support for the infantry columns. Simultaneously with the advance of the main force, aviation units struck Japanese military facilities at Solun, Wangyemiao, and Hailar.

Despite the difficult terrain and general lack of roads, progress on the first day of the attack was spectacular. The complete absence of Japanese resistance and clear weather compensated for the problems terrain imposed on the columns. General Lyudnikov noted:

The day turned out sunny and clear. From the observation point on Mount Salkhit we could distinctly see how the tank division and tank brigades moved forward decisively. We could see the command posts of corps commanders Bezugly and Oleshev and their deployed forces. For more than an hour I watched the columns of the forces. Soldiers, tanks, and guns passed through the hills hidden in the thick and high grass, again appearing on the slopes. And then the sun rose. Figures of people, military vehicles, and the contours of the hills opened before us as if on morning maneuvers.¹⁵

Throughout the first day, virtually all units moved in march column, covering more territory by the end of the day than the original plan envisioned. On the Solun axis the 61st Tank Division covered 100 kilometers and, by day's end, had secured crossing sites over the Urgen Gol at Boto Nela. The forward detachments of the 113th Rifle Corps and 5th Guards Rifle Corps advanced seventy-five kilometers to the Sel'dzin Gol, near Dzurkin Harul, and to the west bank of the Urgen Gol, north of Boto Nela. The lead elements of both rifle corps trailed twenty-five kilometers behind the forward detachments.

Despite the good weather, terrain and weather conditions forced some adjustments in the combat formation by the end of the first day. In the rough terrain the tracked vehicles of the rifle divisions' forward detachments far outstripped the march rate of the wheeled vehicles, which carried supplies and ammunition. The heat of day and rough terrain took their toll on fuel consumption. To correct the problem, corps commanders tried to create new divisional forward detachments made up of the three self-propelled artillery battalions from the corps' rifle divisions. Fuel shortages in the divisions, however, stymied this innovation. Finally, by pooling all available fuel, a second forward detachment was formed from one self-propelled battery taken from each rifle division.¹⁶ The men of the advancing divisions also suffered from the elements, according to General Lyudnikov:

Under the blazing sun the soldiers went from hill to hill, rejoicing at the breath of each breeze. Upwards and downwards—to them the hills were without end, and they concealed the distances. On topographical maps the contours of every height and depression were absent. The corps commanders, Generals Bezugly and Oleshev, reported that the forces moved forward as planned, without delay. This was affirmed by every vehicle speedometer. 50 kilometers on the speedometer—as many as the infantry covered in a day. And it was still distant to the planned objective line on the map. Thus we shortened our rest stops. We began to regard as special the “Manchurian” kilometer.

The soldiers went on. On the march we scattered separated combat groups of Japanese covering the ravines and passes and destroyed fortified points of the enemy. The sun burned unmercifully. The temperature during the day reached 35 degrees [centigrade]. The doctors became alarmed lest heat stroke occur. There was little water. Life-giving moisture was dear to every throat. The soldiers knew that as soon as you snatched at the water

bottle, your thirst was stronger. The soldiers endured. The vehicles could not stand it—boiling water seethed in the radiators, motors overheated. That was why we had a reserve of water—primarily for equipment.

Finally, before the columns of forces loomed the Grand Khingans. In the mountains there was silence. By every sign we reached them before the Japanese. We must immediately storm them.¹⁷



Soviet tanks crossing the Grand Khingans

Events confirmed the fears of Soviet doctors. Despite the intensive training that the army had conducted in desert operations during its long march across eastern Mongolia into assembly and jumping-off positions, the sun took its toll. Each day between thirty and forty men in each division suffered heat stroke. The water bottles the men carried were inadequate for such harsh conditions, for they were too fragile and liable to break under any blow. Eventually, 30 to 40 percent of the troops lacked necessary water reserves.¹⁸ In spite of these handicaps, the 113th and 5th Guards Rifle Corps reached the Grand Khingan Mountains by the end of the first day. Japanese resistance was negligible. One more day's march and the mountains would be behind them; the Japanese fortified regions would be bypassed.

While the main body of 39th Army struggled across the Grand Khingan Mountains south of Wuchakou, the 94th Rifle Corps, on the morning of 9 August, advanced northeastward into Manchuria, past the 1939 Khalkhin-Gol battlefield. The 221st and 358th Rifle Divisions, marching in column formation, covered more than forty kilometers, while their forward detachments overcame small Japanese machine gun units and Manchurian cavalry units and secured crossings over the Hui Gol, 100 kilometers southwest of Hailar.¹⁹ As the 94th Rifle Corps marched towards Hailar, the 124th Rifle Division simultaneously took up positions south of the Khalkhin-Gol and prepared to strike the northern portion of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region on the following day. Reconnaissance patrols from the division crossed the border and engaged the Japanese at several points along the border west of Arshaan and Wuchakou.

First word of the Soviet attack came to 44th Army at 0200 on 9 August, when Japanese Third Area Army reported the bombing of major cities, including Hailar and Wangyemiao. The 44th Army declared a state of emergency and at 0300 implemented the wartime defense plan. At 0500 a telephone report from the chief of staff of the 107th Infantry Division confirmed the Soviet attack and indicated that the 107th Infantry Division realized the dilemma it faced:

The enemy strength on the Arshaan Front is approximately one rifle division with tanks, and is gradually increasing. Scores of enemy tanks are crossing the border in the sector south of Sankuoshan and are making a detour around the rear of the division. The enemy radio, located in front of our positions, transmitted an order to attack and advance as soon as preparations are completed. The division considers this to be an earnest attack by the Soviet Army and will smash the enemy in front of its position.²⁰

This was an accurate assessment of both the intention of the Soviet 124th Rifle Division to attack the main Japanese fortified positions and the Soviet intent to bypass with the bulk of its forces the fortified region to the south. The problem for the Japanese was how to defend against this multiple threat. The 44th Army ordered its divisions in the rear area (117th and 63d) to undertake defensive measures, but could do little to assist the beleaguered 107th Infantry Division. The following day, in accordance with Third Area Army instructions, 44th Army ordered the 107th Infantry Division to:

check the enemy advance at its [the 107th's] present position, then destroy the Paichengtzu-Arshaan Line, Hsinganling Tunnel and other technical objects to obstruct his advance, and then redeploy to the vicinity of Hsinking [Changchun] as soon as possible [to] be placed under the command of the Thirtieth Army commander.²¹

Late on the tenth, the Soviets cut telephone communications between the 107th Infantry Division and 44th Army, and henceforth the 107th's activities were unclear to higher headquarters. What is clear from Soviet

accounts is that the 107th Infantry Division resisted vigorously in the fortified region and along the rail line to Solun and Wangyemiao. The bulk of the division disengaged after those battles and fought delaying, harassing actions against the Soviets well after the other Japanese forces had capitulated.

From 10 to 12 August, Soviet columns struggled across the Grand Khingan Mountains south of Wuchakou, meeting little armed resistance but considerable geographical resistance in the region. At least the weather cooperated with Soviet forces during the first few days of the offensive. Only on 9 August was the heat a burden. The 35° C of that day gave way to temperatures between 19° and 22° C on subsequent days. From 9 to 12 August it was generally clear, with only short periods of drizzle. Only after the fifteenth, when heavy rains began, did severe weather dramatically interfere with Soviet operations. During their passage of the Grand Khingans, Soviet forces moved in multiple columns along valleys or ravines. Dry soil conditions in the mountains permitted fairly rapid movement along four or five parallel tracks. After having crossed the mountains, units faced a virgin black soil region where similar column movement was impossible without sapper support. Sappers built and maintained roads by laying thick beds of gravel over the soft black soil, but it was a very time- and labor-consuming task.²²

Water barriers also proved to be a problem. The Sel'zhin Gol and Siaburutan Gol rivers, west of the Grand Khingans, were totally dry and passable by August, although dry swamps on their banks proved difficult for wheeled vehicles to negotiate. The bed of the Urgan Gol was half full of water (8 meters wide, 2.1 meters deep) and required the engineers to build six bridges across it.

Passage of the Grand Khingans required enormous fuel consumption. As mentioned, heat was a factor as vehicles and tanks used 50 percent more fuel than usual. More important were the detours, false starts, and general difficulty involved in finding and staying on the proper route. Maps proved particularly unreliable, according to General Lyudnikov:

Roads in these regions . . . were few in number and even unmarked, gorges and swamps were incorrect [on maps]. All of this to a considerable degree hindered the orientation and movement of the columns. Thus in one of our divisions the route of movement was determined by a map. In the end the unit ended up in a labyrinth of blind mountain valleys which were not shown on the map. Then an officer from the army staff in a PO-2 aircraft found the division and put it on the correct route.²³

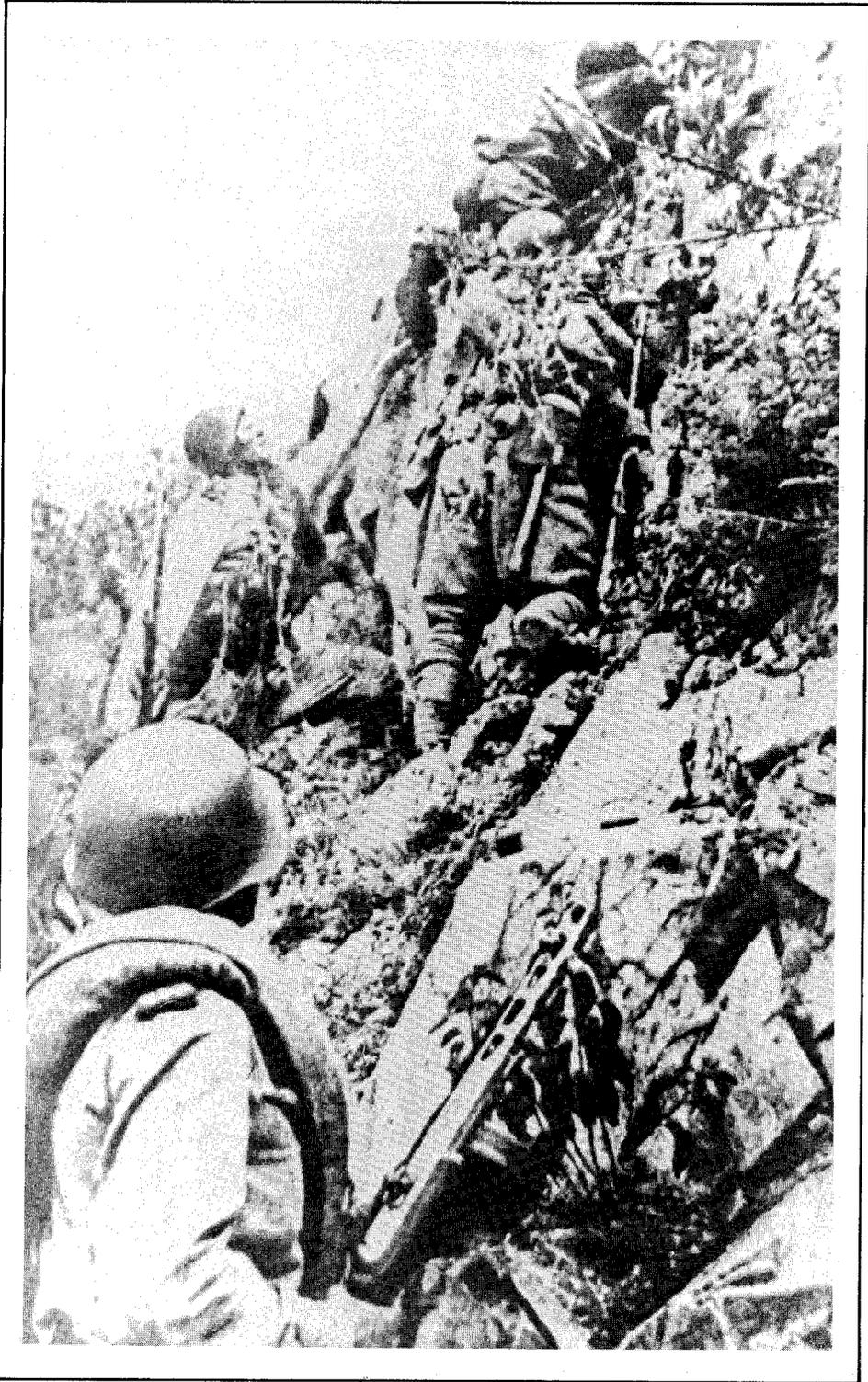
The division to which General Lyudnikov referred was Maj. Gen. L. G. Basanets's 192d Rifle Division, which had been lost in the rugged mountains for two days during the crossing. It obviously ended up in second echelon.

For all of the difficulties entailed in crossing the tractless mountains, Soviet 5th Guards and 113th Rifle Corps, with the 61st Tank Division in the vanguard, had gained the Japanese flank and rear by 12 August. The road to Solun and Wangyemiao was open, and the Japanese, with no combat troops available, could do very little to counter the threat. The Japanese 107th Infantry Division riveted its attention to its front and right flank, where the 124th Rifle Division and elements of 94th Rifle Corps were increasing their pressure on Japanese positions.

With the assistant commander of 39th Army, Lt. Gen. G. K. Kozlov, present, the 94th Rifle Corps brushed aside small Japanese border detachments and pushed on towards Hailar. By the evening of the eleventh, the main body of the corps had arrived just south of Bualuto (twelve kilometers northeast of Dunda-Khana), while the forward detachment had penetrated to the southern approaches to Hailar. With Hailar firmly invested and bypassed by 36th Army, the services of the 94th Rifle Corps were no longer needed, so the two divisions of the corps received new missions.²⁴ Maj. Gen. V. N. Kushnarenko's 221st Rifle Division was to sweep eastward through minor passes in the Grand Khingans through the valleys of the Taehrssu and Taehrchi rivers and across the Tagan-Dabe Pass toward Lusun Tsihi. The division would then turn south along the Choer Ho to cut communications linking Japanese forces at Hailar, Pokotu, and Wangyemiao. The 358th Rifle Division would turn south towards the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region to assist the 124th Rifle Division in reducing the primary Japanese fortified region.

While 39th Army forces carried out its envelopment of the Japanese fortified region, the 124th Rifle Division plunged directly into the fortified region on 10 August and engaged elements of the Japanese 90th Infantry Regiment, 107th Infantry Division. That morning Col. D. M. Lelekov's 622d Rifle Regiment crossed the Khalkhin-Gol between Handagai and Iruse and attacked Japanese outposts north of the river.

The following small unit action offers a good example of Soviet tactics. A Japanese position, manned by nine men from the 1st Company, 1st Battalion, 90th Infantry Regiment, defended a four-embrasure machine gun pillbox northwest of Mount Mana Ula. The pillbox, located on a hilltop, had external machine gun positions and external trenches around the hilltop and was encircled by barbed wire. The Japanese defenders were armed with two machine guns, grenades, and nine rifles. Colonel Lelekov enveloped the outpost with a battalion on the northwest and one on the southeast. While direct fire artillery (three 76-mm and 45-mm guns) engaged the outpost from the southeast, a group of submachine gunners with grenades formed an assault group to strike the pillbox from the front. Every fifth man carried an overcoat and cloak-tent in order to surmount the barbed wire. In addition, the regiment's antitank rifle company used direct fire on the pillboxes in order to permit the assault group to get into position. The guns opened fire from the south and southeast to distract the



Troops climbing a spur of the Grand Khingans

Japanese defenders and to allow the assault group to attack from the southwest with minimum casualties. A salvo from the guns was the signal to storm the pillbox. The assault group advanced, firing its weapons as the Japanese turned their attention to the artillery fire. When the assault group moved through the barbed wire and approached the trenches, the Japanese turned their fire on them—but too late. The assault group took the position in hand-to-hand fighting, an example of subsequent actions in the fortified region. The Japanese fought to the last man, while the Soviets claimed a loss of only four wounded.²⁵ The Soviets' emphasis on firepower and movement to conserve manpower was typical of their reduction of Japanese positions.

Throughout 10 and 11 August, the 124th Rifle Division penetrated deeper into the fortified region, systematically reducing Japanese outposts one after the other. After briefly turning north to sweep the Japanese out of Handagai, the division pushed on to Iruse and Arshaan on 12 August. That evening the Japanese counterattacked from the northeast and southeast of Arshaan, but the 124th Rifle Division drove them off and continued southeast towards Wuchakou. The overall Soviet objective was to catch the Japanese 107th Infantry Division between the advancing pincers of the 124th Infantry Division and elements of the 5th Guards Rifle Corps about to move into Solun from the southwest.

On 12 August the lead elements of the Soviet 5th Guards Rifle Corps and 113th Rifle Corps completed their eastward march, north of and along the Wulan Ho, and emerged from the hills just southwest of Solun and Tepossi. An advance element of 5th Guards Rifle Corps struck the railroad at Hailahai and met and destroyed a train traveling south from Solun and carrying a battalion of Japanese troops. Though the path to Solun was open, unforeseen terrain difficulties forced the 5th Guards Rifle Corps to regroup in order to concentrate enough forces to take the city. The valley of the Wulan Ho and other rivers covering the approaches to both Solun and the rail line proved more difficult to traverse than the valleys of the Grand Khingans. Vehicles sank into the swampy valley floors, and rocky crags along the valley sides often restricted movement. These conditions slowed units and forced them into single columns. Overworked sappers fell behind in their road labor, so whole combat units had to join in the task of laying gravel roads capable of supporting the weight of the vehicles. The Soviets used all sorts of improvised means to create roads. Guards mortar units even used their launching ramps as road surface. Tractor teams combined to tow the guns and heavy equipment through the muck. Groups of tractors were left at each bottleneck to facilitate movement of the next unit. Even the repaired roads, however, deteriorated after supporting only the passage of the lead elements of each unit. Subsequent units had to build new bypasses. This stretched the length of march columns to tens of kilometers. Artillery units, in particular, suffered because they had to detach their vehicles to assist the advancing infantry.²⁶

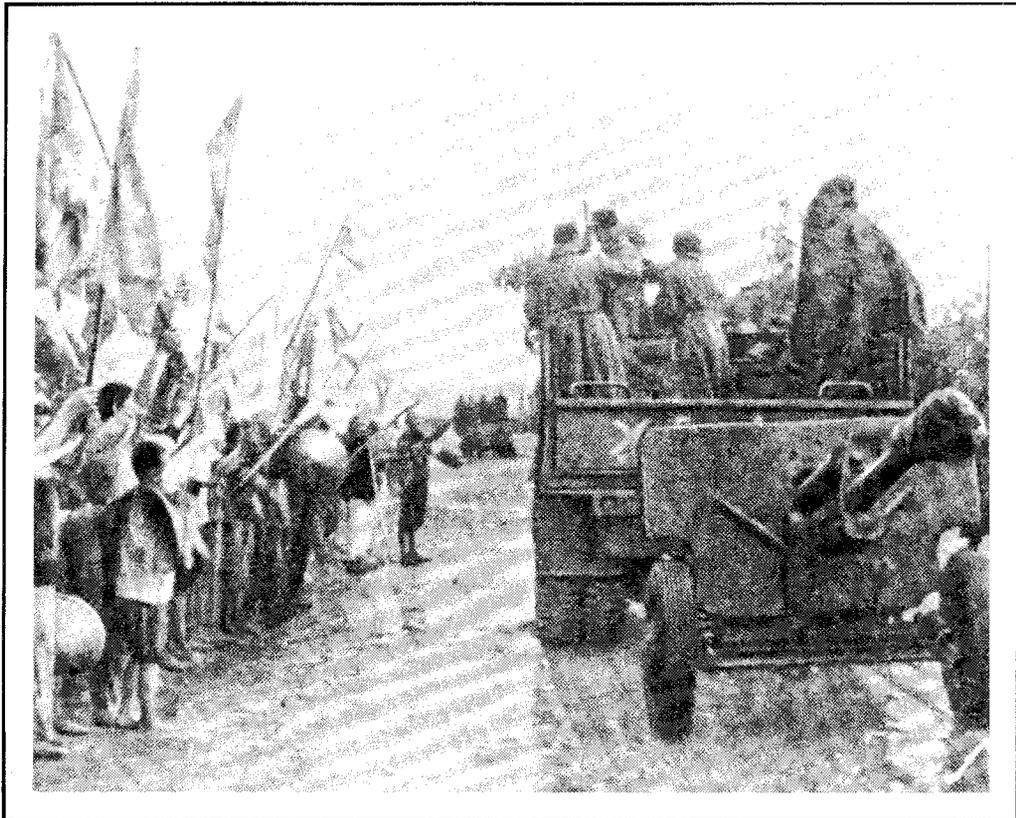
Nevertheless, forward elements still maintained an advance rate of forty kilometers per day. Tank units and tractors carrying infantry managed rates of from fifty to eighty kilometers per day.

On the afternoon of 12 August, 5th Guards Rifle Corps consolidated its position southwest of Solun and moved on the city with one of its corps forward detachments (44th Tank Brigade) and its lead rifle divisions (19th and 17th). The 19th Rifle Division sought to cut the rail line west of Solun, while the 44th Tank Brigade and the 17th Rifle Division struck at Solun and the stretch of rail line to the south. That evening, after an artillery and aviation preparation, 5th Guards Rifle Corps troops occupied a major portion of the city. Japanese units from the 107th Infantry Division (probably the 178th Infantry Regiment) and the 2d Manchurian Cavalry Division launched repeated, unsuccessful counterattacks on the evening of the twelfth and into the thirteenth before both units fell back into the hills northeast of the city.²⁷ On the thirteenth, Soviet forces moved south from Solun along the rail line to Tepossi.

On the same day, the second 5th Guards Rifle Corps forward detachment, the 735th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment with the 45th Artillery Regiment (one battalion), the 7th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and the 508th Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion approached Tepossi from the west. As they entered the town, they intercepted a Japanese vehicular column withdrawing from Solun, drove off the Japanese, and captured sorely needed fuel supplies.²⁸ After joining Soviet troops arriving from Solun, the 735th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment continued its pursuit south along the rail line from Tepossi.

While 5th Guards Rifle Corps units cleared Tepossi, the 44th Tank Brigade and 17th Rifle Division finished securing Solun by taking the railroad station at 1000 on 13 August. The 19th Guards Rifle Division, led by the 61st Guards Rifle Regiment and 508th Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, advanced westward from Solun toward Chinyinkou station. En route they engaged yet another unit of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division and forced it to retreat north of the rail line.²⁹ Now Japanese units along the railroad were caught in a pincer between the 19th Rifle Division of 5th Guards Rifle Corps west of Solun and the Soviet 124th Rifle Division near Wuchakou. The 124th Rifle Division on 12 and 13 August passed through Wuchakou, bypassed and encircled the Japanese fortified positions outside the city, and advanced eastward along the railroad to Hsikou. Threatened from east and west after two days of heavy fighting, remaining units of the Japanese 90th and 177th Infantry Regiments, 107th Infantry Division, on 15 August withdrew northeast into the mountains, where they regrouped and, for a time, counterattacked against the Soviet forces.

While the 5th Guards Rifle Corps took Solun and cut off the Japanese 107th Infantry Division, the 61st Tank Division and 113th Rifle Corps continued their march eastward along the Wulan Ho Valley through Hailahai and Kueiliuho toward Wangyemiao. A fuel shortage and very poor road conditions forced 39th Army to rely increasingly on forward detachments to maintain the forward momentum of the army. Main army forces lagged far behind. To insure close control over operations, General Lyudnikov ordered the commanders and staff of corps, divisions, and regiments to stay within ten kilometers of their forces' main bodies.³⁰



Soviet 39th Army troops entering Wangyemiao

On the fourteenth, the 44th Tank Brigade, with elements of the 17th Rifle Division, repelled yet another Japanese counterattack six kilometers northwest of Solun, and other 5th Guards Rifle Corps units repulsed similar counterattacks south of Solun. The pincer of the 124th Rifle Division and 19th Rifle Division continued closing the corridor on the railroad west of Solun, while lead elements of the 61st Tank Division and 113th Rifle Corps engaged Japanese units northwest of Wangyemiao. By the fifteenth,

advanced elements of 39th Army had secured Wangyemiao. During the next two days, the main forces of 5th Guards Rifle Corps and 113th Rifle Corps entered the city.³¹

With Solun and Wangyemiao in Soviet hands, the envelopment of the Japanese Halung-Arshaan-Wuchakou Fortified Region was complete. The Soviets cut the withdrawal routes of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division and prevented them from joining other Japanese forces in central Manchuria. The pressure of the 124th Rifle Division advancing directly against the fortified region combined with the effects of the envelopment to force the 107th Infantry Division to withdraw slowly northeastward across the mountains, where it ultimately ran into Soviet forces of the 221st Rifle Division emerging from their long trek through the Grand Khingans.

While the main force of 39th Army completed the envelopment of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division, the 94th Rifle Corps continued operations along two divergent axes. Before splitting his forces, Maj. Gen. I. I. Popov, the corps commander, received the surrender of General Houlin, commander of the Manchukuoan 10th Military District, along with 1,000 Manchukuoan cavalymen.³² The Soviet 36th Army had driven General Houlin's force out of Hailar, and the retreating Manchurians had run into the 94th Rifle Corps advancing from the south.

Next, the 358th Rifle Division of 94th Rifle Corps headed due south towards the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region, where it arrived on 14 August to assist the 124th Rifle Division in reducing remaining Japanese strongpoints. The 221st Rifle Division passed eastward over the Grand Khingan Mountains, then turned south along the valley of the Choer Ho. After the fifteenth, the division cut the route of withdrawal of the 107th Infantry Division and, ultimately, on 30 August, accepted the surrender of the Japanese 107th Infantry Division at Chailai, fifty kilometers southwest of Tsitsihar.³³

Conclusions

By 15 August, 39th Army had enveloped, bypassed, and reduced the mighty Halung-Arshaan Fortified Zone and secured Wangyemiao. It accomplished in six days what planners had expected to take nearly three times as long. Concentration alone for the attack required prodigious feats in order to overcome significant logistical and terrain problems. The attack plan itself was imaginative because it played upon the erroneous assumptions of Japanese planners that the Soviets must directly overcome Japanese defenses on the only "feasible" avenue of approach into western Manchuria. In fact, however, the 39th Army gave only passing attention to that approach, assigning the task of mastering it to only one rifle division. The bulk of 39th Army created its own avenues of approach by crossing the tractless region south of the Japanese fortified region and by sending a smaller force circling to the north and east of the fortified region. This

successful, though difficult, maneuver left the Japanese 107th Infantry Division dangling in mid-air, isolated from supporting Japanese units, and unable to conduct an orderly withdrawal to main Japanese defensive positions to the rear. Finally, 107th Infantry Division withdrew northeast to wage a lone, futile struggle with peripheral Soviet units.

The attack of 39th Army was somewhat similar to that of 6th Guards Tank Army. Though its objectives were not as deep, it did cross terrain similar to that traversed by 6th Guards Tank Army. As did 6th Guards Tank Army, it relied on armor to spearhead its advance and to impart momentum to the advance of the entire army. Like 6th Guards Tank Army, it ultimately experienced fuel problems and had to rely on small task-organized forward detachments to maintain the momentum of the advance. Unlike 6th Guards Tank Army, 39th Army was encumbered with a preponderance of infantry units and, thus, constantly faced the problem of coordinating rates of advance between tanks and infantry. The 39th Army used a variety of innovations to maintain a proper balance of the two ingredients, at least in its forward elements. Also unlike the unopposed advance of 6th Guards Tank Army, the advance of 39th Army encountered fierce Japanese resistance. Artful maneuver, however, and an ability to project significant forces into the rear area of the Japanese defenses overcame that opposition without significant Soviet losses. In its battles with Japanese units and in its reduction of Japanese fortified points, the army stressed use of firepower rather than manpower to achieve success.

While the deep advance of 39th Army achieved success, it also encountered significant problems. Navigation across the Grand Khingan Mountains was difficult because of inadequate maps and an absence of good reconnaissance, the latter having been sacrificed to maintain surprise. Hence, the 192d Rifle Division was lost in the mountains from 11 to 13 August. The army used artillery with good effect only in the reduction of the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region. Artillery accompanying the main force of the army had difficulty traversing the mountainous region and swampy valleys and, therefore, fell well behind other units. The Army, therefore, could not bring to bear on the Japanese the full weight of its artillery. Also, tank units consumed far more fuel than anticipated in crossing the mountains, so from 12 August on, the army experienced constant fuel shortage. Only the capture of Japanese aviation fuel at Tepossi and fuel delivery by air permitted continuous operations to Wangyemiao.*

The two engineer brigades provided by army were insufficient to handle engineering tasks. The brigade attached to army only at the beginning of operations lagged behind advancing units throughout the operation. Both brigades had insufficient vehicular transport and simply were not able to conduct the extensive engineer reconnaissance necessary in such a region.

*6th Guards Tank Army also used aircraft extensively to deliver fuel.

The broad front of army operations and the great depth of operations also severely taxed the communications system. Lack of transport hindered installation of ground communications lines, and the long distances made radio communication erratic, although army use of aircraft to relay or deliver messages alleviated some of the communications problems.

These difficulties were, in reality, a product of the audacity of the plan itself. Despite the problems, the army, as a whole, achieved a forty-kilometer-per-day rate of advance. The achievements of 39th Army along with those of 6th Guards Tank Army ultimately destroyed Japanese hopes for a successful defense in western Manchuria.

Notes

1. *IVMV*, 2:199.
2. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 85.
3. *IVMV*, 2:202.
4. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 88; Sidorov, "Boevoe," 14.
5. *JM* 155, 82—84.
6. *Ibid.*, 86.
7. Ōta Hisaō, *Dai 107 shidan shi: Saigō made tatakatta Kantōgun* [The history of the 107th Division: The Kwantung Army that resisted to the last] (Tokyo: Taiseidō Shoten Shuppanbu, 1979), 14, 24, 26, 72, 76—79.
8. *JM* 155, 100.
9. I. I. Lyudnikov, *Cherez bol'shoi khingan* [Across the Grand Khingan] (Moskva: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1967), 48—49.
10. *Ibid.*, 49.
11. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 104; Sidorov, "Boevoe," 14; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 51.
12. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 113; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 41.
13. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 53—54.
14. *Ibid.*, 55; Lyudnikov, "39-ia armii v Khingano-Mukdenskoi operatsii" [The 39th Army in the Khingan-Mukden Operation], *VIZh*, October 1965:71; Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 171.
15. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 171.
16. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 176—77.
17. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 172.
18. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 58—59.
19. *Ibid.*, 68—69.
20. *JM* 155, 101—2.
21. *Ibid.*, 104.
22. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 61.
23. Lyudnikov, "39-ia armii," 73; Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 173.
24. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 69.
25. *Ibid.*, 68—76.

26. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 59—60.
27. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 195; Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiiia," 72—73.
28. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 196; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 63—67.
29. Lyudnikov, "39-ia armiiia," 73; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 67.
30. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 68.
31. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 196—97.
32. Lyudnikov, *Doroga*, 173; Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 69—70.
33. Lyudnikov, *Cherez*, 101.

