

March offensive of the 38th and 6th Armies of the South-Western Front

March, 1942

Usually it is written about this time period something like: forces of the Red Army were exhausted, offensive operations were stopped, preparations for the May offensive near Kharkov were begun. But in fact this is not quite so.

On March 7, 1942, a joint operation of the two armies began, according to which, the German "bridgehead" in the Chuguev area was to be cut off. If this operation would be ended successfully, the encirclement of the Soviet troops during the May offensive might have been avoided. First, German side would launch an offensive in much more inconvenient conditions on the northern face of the Barvenkovo ledge. And the Soviet troops would have been much closer to Kharkov, and the Barvenkovo ledge itself would not have such an obvious "isthmus" that was cut in reality. It was Andreevka - from which the German offensive began from the north in May that was the first target of the elements of 6A.

The offensive was started in two converging directions: 6A struck from south to north in the Andreevka and Balakleya area, and 38A struck from north to south in the area of Staryy Saltov (there was no reservoir lake there back then and the river could be easily crossed). The ultimate goal of both directions was Chuguev. In this place Seversky Donets River makes a bend to the west, and two German infantry divisions - 297th and 44th took defense on the resulting ledge. 294ID took defensive positions to the north, in the Staryy Saltov area. Actually they became the main opponents of the Red Army troops. The Wehrmacht reserve was 3TD, which supported the infantry divisions as it could. For example, in the middle of March, a composite tank company with 5 tanks was transferred to 294ID, which will take role in operations.

The attack from the south by forces of 6A, as well as by the forces of the left flank of 38A in the Andreevka and Balakleya area gave practically no results, the Germans managed to keep these two villages.

38A had 8 RDs, two tank brigades, which were used by battalion basis, as well as various artillery, ski and cavalry units. Combat operations of units of this army on the right flank, in the Staryy Saltov area will be examined. The Red Army achieved success, albeit short-lived, in overcoming the German defense in this location. Forward units of the 226th, 227th, and 124th RDs captured a number of settlements on the bank of the Seversky Donets River, secured crossing across the river, and by mid-March reached the line of the Babka River and in some places even overcame this river on a wide front. Some rifle regiments managed to reach the svfm Stepanki and village Chervonaya Roganka (these are outskirts of modern Kharkov).

On one hand, this offensive made it possible to obtain a bridgehead for the northern group for the May 1942 offensive on Kharkov (the 22nd Tank Corps attacked exactly from this place in May). On the other hand, the objectives of the operation were not achieved and the elements of German 294ID managed to stabilize the front along the Ternovaya-Nepokrytaya-Zarozhnoe line.

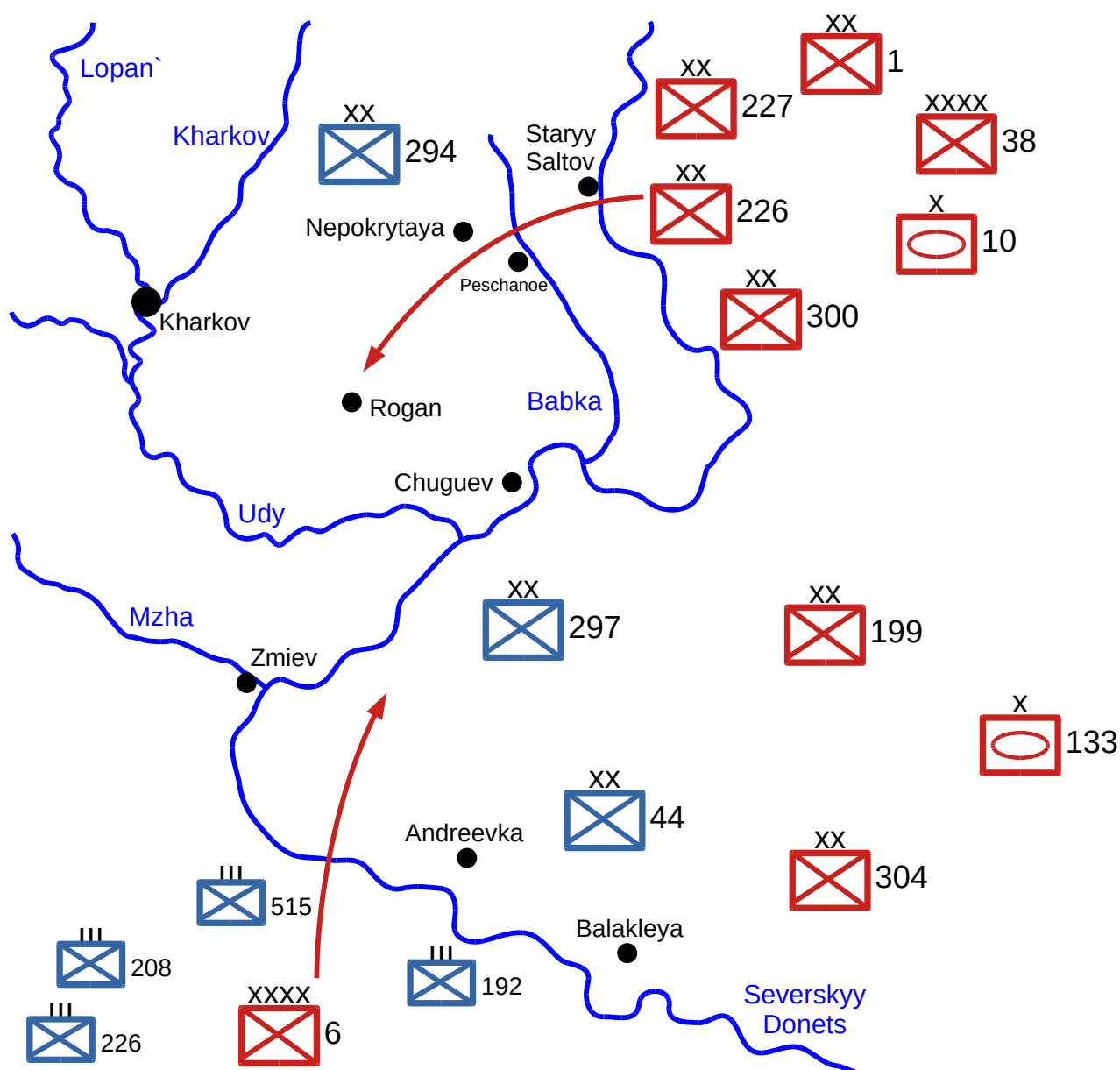
Features of operations at this time include the following: massive use of "old" tanks and use of tank destroyers instead of tanks; use of construction battalions as front line troops and 10 and 15 cm guns as first line AT.

Operation plan

The plan of the 38A's March operation assumed encirclement and destruction of the enemy group in the Chuguev-Andreevka area, south-east of Kharkov. For this purpose it was intended to deliver two converging concentric strikes: 38A from the north in the direction of Rogan and Chuguev, and from the south (with the forces of 6A) in the Andreevka area in the general direction to Chuguev (see pic.1).

At the beginning of March, the operation developed quite successfully, 38A units crossed the Seversky Donets River on a broad front. Liberated settlements are: Staryy Saltov, Verkhniy Saltov, Rubezhnoe, Pisarevka, Petrovskoe, Bayrak, and reached Babka River in multiple locations. The enemy was retreating, abandoning weapons and vehicles. 227RD liberated Bayrak and reached Kupyevakha. 226RD dislodged I/514IR units from Staryy Saltov and conducts the attack in the Fedorovka direction. 124RD conducts combat for Molodovoe. 1051RR 300RD captured the eastern outskirts of Bolshaya Babka.

In battles from the Soviet side, it will take 6 gds TBde, 10 and 133 Tbdes, 34 and 32 MRs, 226 and 169 RDs. From German side - 294 ID (514 IR), 530 IR, 521 AT bn and lot of support units. T-26 and BT-5 tanks of various modifications will be used en masse (including double-turret). BT-2, KhT-26 tanks will also appear. The action will unfold near the settlements of Fedorovka, Nepokrytaya and Peschanoe.



Pic.1 – Operation plan of March offensive of the 38th and 6th Armies

A encrypted tale about how the three Sons did housekeeping with Mammoths and Segments.
(from 38A documents)

By 10:30 the Segment occupied the position: one Son in the Staritsa area, 2nd Son - forestry, 3rd Son - western edge of the forest. The enemy provides rare MG-mortar fire. In the morning, Orgun occupied the position: 1st Son - south-west of Bayrak, 2nd Son at western outskirts of Bayrak, 3rd Son with a ski company in Vitknina. Kazbek with two Sons with the Gutman Boxes are conducting combat near the Church of Verkhniy Saltov. The 3rd Son with Boxes supports from the east. Since 8:00 6 Boxes are operating against 2 battalions of the enemy infantry in front of Household. Coast - right Son continuing to occupy the eastern outskirts of Petrovskoe, the 2nd Son is on the move to the 3rd Son, who is delivering combat in the southern outskirts of Molodovoe.

Mammoth - continues battle for Big Grandmother, blocking the pig farm. The right-hand Son capturing Art Selyanin, is preparing to capture Big Grandmother. The middle Son captured Pyatnitskoe. The Son of the left-hand Household, exposed to a heavy enemy artillery fire from the area of north outskirts of Pechenega, withdrew to the southern edge of the forest north of Pechenega. The School moved out to block an enemy pocket of resistance in the area of hgt. 173.3. The Younger Son passed by Pisarevka at 13:00.

Transmitted by Owl

Deciphering:

*Segment - 1 gds RD, Orgun - 227 RD, Kazbek - 226 RD, Coast - 124 RD, Mammoth - 300 RD
Box – Tank, Son – Regiment, Household – Division, Big Grandmother - Bolshaya Babka (Bolo Babka in German). What is Younger Son and School is not specified*



Pic.2 – BT and T-26 tanks from 10TBde in Kharkov area