Soviet Offensive Military Theory on the Eve of the Manchurian Offensive

5

Just as Soviet force structure evolved, so, too, did operational art and tactics. The spirit of the offensive, born in the period of Marshal Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky and reflected in the field regulations and doctrinal debates of the 1930s, pervaded Soviet military thought throughout the war years.[1] Ironically, that spirit dominated even when Soviet military fortunes were at their lowest ebb. This fixation on the offensive and preoccupation with the conduct of deep operations inhibited development of sound defensive theory and reinforced Soviet unwillingness to go on the defensive. Thus, when the Germans overwhelmed the Soviets in 1941, the Soviets responded by trying to apply the offensive principles of the 1930s. One problem was that the military purges of the late 1930s deprived the Soviet Army of the leadership necessary to implement doctrine artfully and thus to stem the German tide. In general, the survivors of these purges could not imaginatively adapt Tukhachevsky's theories to the reality of a surprise attack employing massed armor and bold maneuver. In the anxious aftermath of the purges, a natural hesitancy to suggest innovation also inhibited Soviet commanders in their adjustment to the deadly, quick-developing German threat. In addition, Soviet industry, also hard hit by the purges, was unable to produce the weaponry needed to equip the massive new Soviet force structure.

While a new generation of confident and capable commanders emerged during the campaigns of 1941, 1942, and 1943, the spirit of the offensive was carried to the extreme, often with disastrous consequences. The usual pattern was that of the grasp exceeding the reach, of expectations surpassing realities; and the result was more often than not defeat or costly limited victory. This pattern occurred during the commitment of the fledgling mechanized corps in the border battles of 1941, in the counterattacks around Moscow in the winter of 1941—42, at Kharkov in May 1942, at Voronezh in June 1942, and in the campaigns of December 1942 to March 1943, when the Soviets sought to convert the major victory at Stalingrad into a total German rout. The reverses the Soviets suffered in the winter of 1942 and the spring of 1943 at the Chir River, at Tatsinskaya, and at Kharkov occurred at least within the context of a battlefront that was inexorably moving westward.

It was early 1943 when the Soviets applied a degree of restraint to their offensive operations, thereby allowing those operations to reap a major harvest. The decision to draw the Germans into the costly and disastrous attack at Kursk in July 1943 attested to the increased maturity of Soviet military art. At Kursk, Soviet use of a sophisticated defense as a prelude to a powerful counteroffensive yielded rich results. The Soviet offensives of July and August 1943 at Orel and Belgorod-Kharkov marked a turning point in Soviet offensive operations. The two counteroffensives occurred after an extremely short preparation period. The Orel offensive took place while the German assault at Kursk was developing to a climax. The Belgorod-Kharkov offensive occurred three weeks after the German offensive tide broke against the Soviet defenses.

At Belgorod-Kharkov—for the first time since Stalingrad—Soviet forces penetrated more than 100 kilometers deep before German mobile reserves halted them. Unlike the situation at Stalingrad, the Soviets were engaging only German troops and not the combined might of Germany and its east European partners. The five-day meeting engagement south of Bogodukhov and at Aktyrka, west of Kharkov, saw Soviet mobile forces duel German panzer divisions to a standstill. Soviet tactical education, begun in the difficult days of 1941 and characterized by crude experimentation in 1942, now, in 1943, began to pay real dividends. After August 1943 Soviet operational and tactical techniques matured as theory and practice converged. In late 1943, in 1944, and in 1945, the Soviets slowly realized the hopes and aspirations of Tukhachevsky. Operations were of grander scope, coordination of all arms more thorough, results more impressive. The Belorussian offensive of 1944, the Iassy-Kishenev offensive of 1944, and the Vistula-Oder offensive of 1945 exemplified this new maturity. Such offensives ended only when supply lines became overstretched and forces overextended. They resumed after units had been resupplied, depots replenished, and forces consolidated.

The Manchurian operation proved to be a logical climax to these developments. In Manchuria, the theories developed in Europe would be put to the test in a region whose geographical features would challenge the most capable planner, and under time constraints that would call for the greatest application of imagination and initiative.

In 1945, the basic Soviet guide for the conduct of offensive operations was the *Field Regulation* of 1944 and companion documents such as the *Regulation for the Breakthrough of Fortified Areas.*[2] These regulations, descendants in their offensive form of the regulations of 1936, 1939, and 1941, were more detailed than their predecessors. The Regulations of 1944 set forth the basic principles of offensive combat and delineated how the Soviets should conduct operations within a wide range of geographical conditions and tactical situations.

The 1944 field regulations reaffirmed the preeminence of the offense as the sole source of military victory, declaring that contemporary tactical actions were mobile in character and that achievement of success in combat required maximum reliance upon maneuver. As such, maneuver needed to be simple in concept, secret in execution, rapid, and unexpected. The regulations rejected the validity of the "shock-and-holding groups" concept of earlier regulations, whereby the shock group conducted offensive action, while holding groups protected the adjacent sectors and flanks. That method wasted precious combat power. In effect the new regulations called for active use of all forces on the offensive.

Clearly emphasizing the combined arms nature of combat, the 1944 regulations characterized contemporary combat as mass participation of all arms. Thus, the commander should seek to achieve the "maximum and simultaneous participation in battle of infantry and fire weapons from the beginning of battle to the end."[3] In order to bring all combat power to bear on the enemy, forces should be echeloned in depth with each echelon receiving a distinct mission. Normally, forces deployed in two echelons. The first echelon led in the offensive. The second echelon did not simply reinforce: it developed success. Small reserves at each level repelled counterattacks while consolidating and exploiting success.

The regulations declared surprise to be a key to victory. Surprise was achieved by secrecy in planning and execution, by confusing the enemy, by attacking unexpectedly, and by the use of new combat formations. A display of initiative on the part of commanders at all levels was also a key to success, as long as they exercised that initiative in consonance with the overall desires of the superior commander.

The regulations accorded to the infantry the primary combat role in the achievement of victory. Application of infantry power was the basic means of defeating the enemy. The regulations recognized artillery, armor, and air power as basic elements of the combat team, but their purpose was to compensate for the use—and hence loss—of manpower. Tanks had the specific function of battling enemy infantry instead of enemy tanks. Artillery and antitank weapons were to engage enemy tanks. Soviet tanks battled enemy tanks only if the Soviets possessed clear superiority. The principal mission of tank units was to support the infantry and to exploit success. In fulfilling those missions, tank unit commanders were to avoid fragmenting their units for any purpose at any level.

The regulations articulated specific constraints on the operations of tank units. Army commanders attached their separate tank brigades and tank regiments to the rifle divisions. At the rifle division level, the tank brigades and tank regiments coordinated closely with the infantry in destroying enemy infantry. Army commanders used heavy tank units to assault strongly fortified enemy positions in conjunction with infantry and engineers. The regulations forbade commanders to fragment tank brigades or tank

regiments. Tank corps were strategic tactical units subordinate to front or army. Their missions were to exploit success, to act against enemy flanks, to pursue the enemy, and to counterattack against mobile enemy units. Unlike smaller tank units, they could operate as separate brigades in support of infantry, should the need arise. Mechanized corps were also strategic tactical units subordinate to front or army. They were heavier in motorized infantry than the tank corps. Hence, they had the expanded missions of exploiting success, operating against enemy flanks, pursuing the enemy, holding captured positions in the strategic depth, executing a counterattack, and conducting independent operations. The regulations specifically prohibited breaking up a mechanized corps.

In the special case of offensive operations against a hasty enemy defense, tank corps and mechanized corps reinforced with artillery and engineers could carry out an independent mission involving penetration to the depths of the defense. Under no circumstances, however, could they attack fortified zones. Although not specifically mentioned in the 1944 regulations, the tank army was subordinate to the front. With the missions of completing a penetration and exploiting success, the tank army was the principal exploitation force at front level. Before August 1945, the Soviets seldom used a tank army in the first echelon of a front during the initial phases of an offensive operation.[4]

Because the artful use of a variety of tactical combat formations was one way to achieve surprise and hence victory, the 1944 regulations accorded considerable space to that subject. Although the regulations described typical formations, the assumption was that commanders could use different tactical formations either in accordance with concrete conditions the unit faced or to help deceive the enemy. Use of a standard or typical combat formation, however, facilitated swift concentration of forces in a decisive direction and enabled a force to shift the weight of an attack. The standard combat formation promoted effective use of all types of forces and facilitated the exploitation of terrain and the defense of vulnerable flanks.

At front level, forces could deploy in one or two echelons depending on the nature of the terrain, the strength of the enemy, and the desired speed of advance in the operation. In general, success in an attack against a strong defense required two echelons. Against a hasty defense deployed along a broad front in limited depth, a single echelon formation offered better chances for success, especially if an attacking unit sought a quick penetration and a rapid advance.

The army echeloned its forces in generally the same manner as the front (see fig. 1). On occasion it could deploy in three echelons, if enemy defenses were extremely strong and the sector of attack narrow. Normally, however, the army deployed in two echelons supported by artillery groups and tank and antitank reserve groups. The first echelon of the army contained about 60 percent of the force, usually two rifle corps abreast. The

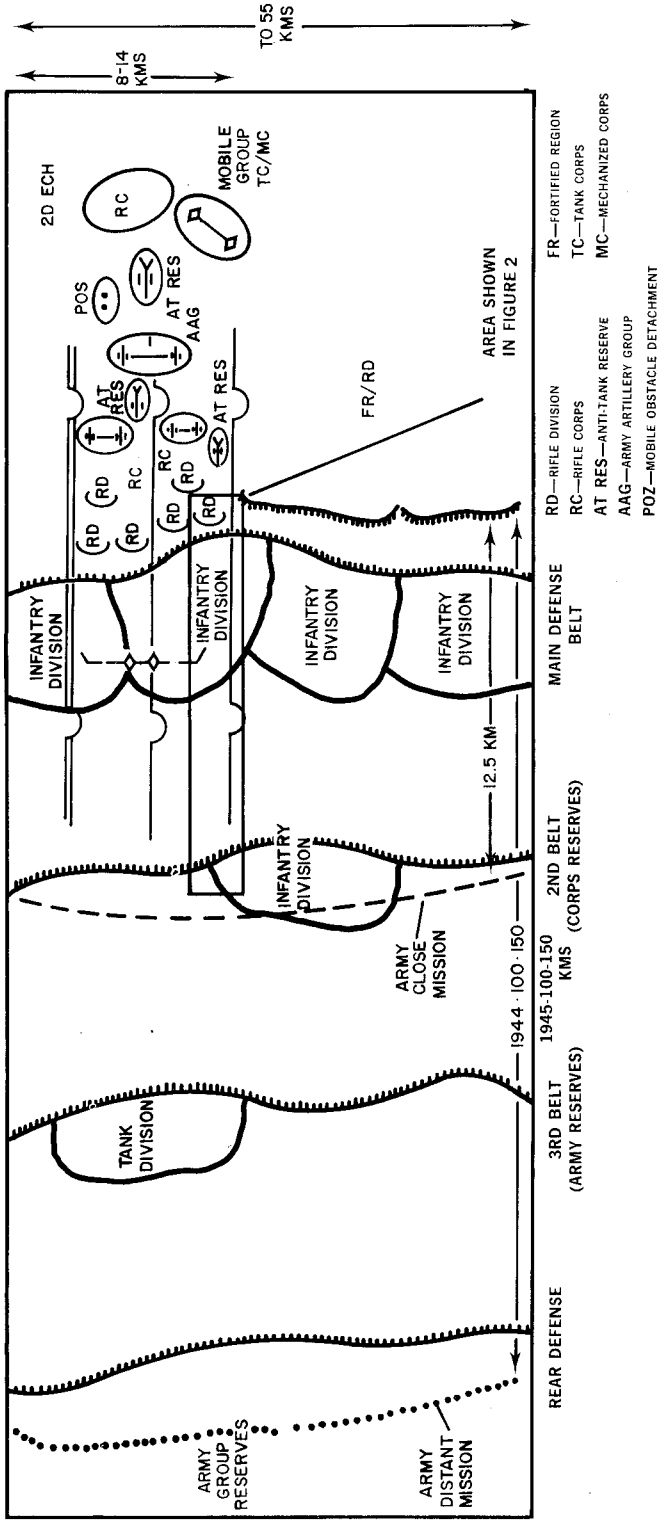


Figure 1. Soviet Typical Offensive Combat Formation: Combined Arms Army

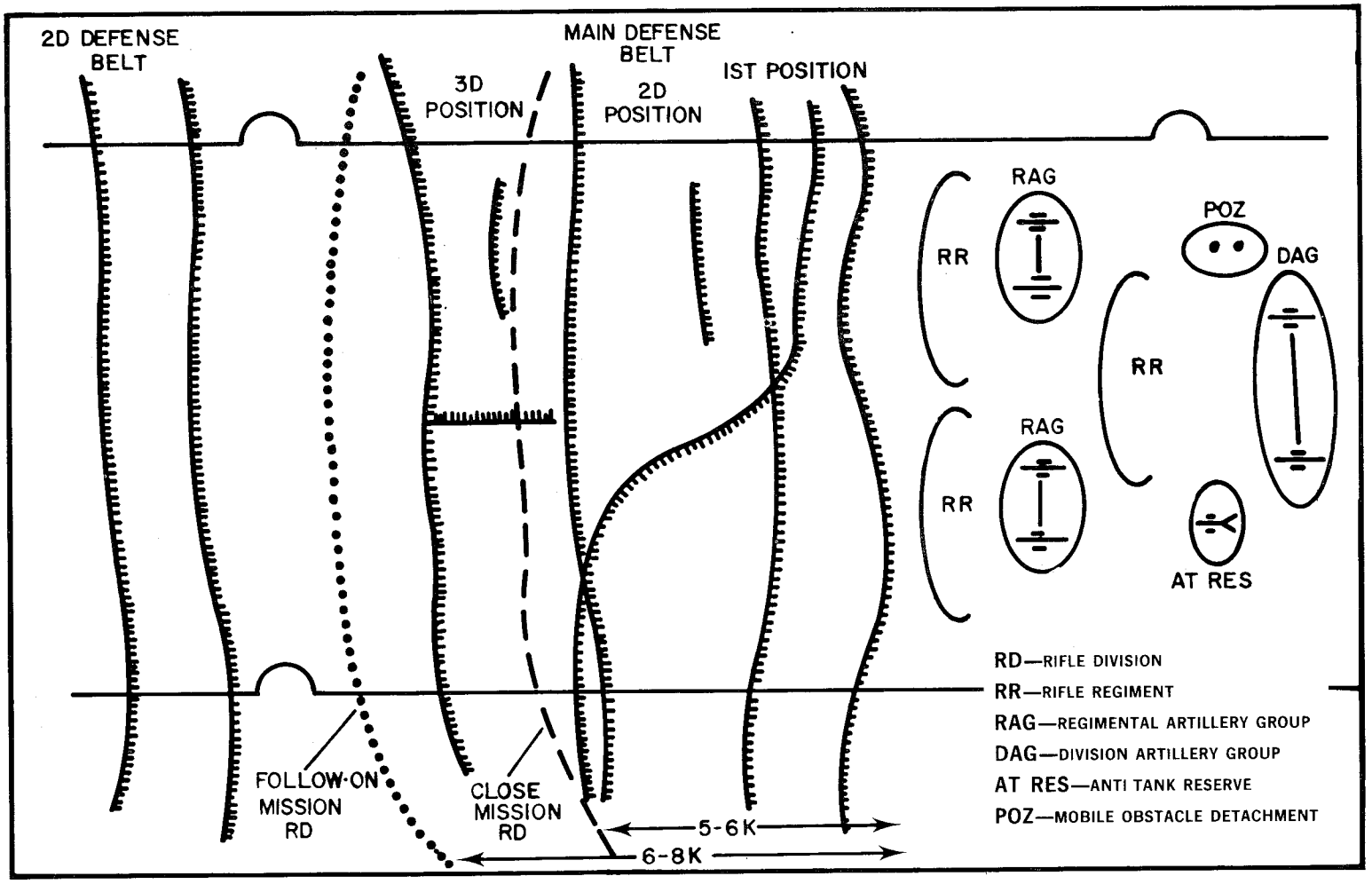


Figure 2. Soviet Typical Offensive Combat Formation: Rifle Division

second echelon, with 40 percent of the forces, normally included one rifle corps and mechanized forces functioning as the mobile group of the army. The second echelon increased the power and sustainability of the attacking force, added depth to the combat formation, and performed the missions of exploiting the penetration, consolidating gains, and maintaining the continuity of the attack. In general, the attacking force on a main direction (attack axis) was stronger and deeper and deployed on a narrower front than a force operating on a secondary attack axis. The rifle division normally deployed in two echelons of regiments, while a rifle brigade deployed in one echelon of battalions in either staggered or angled formation (see fig. 2).

Artillery groups, tank reserve groups, and antitank reserve groups provided support to tactical maneuver units. These task-organized armor and artillery assets existed at every level of command to fulfill specific missions. Within the rifle division, regimental artillery groups comprising division artillery assets provided artillery support to each rifle regiment. Divisional long-range artillery groups created from organic division artillery assets provided general fire support to the division. Corps and armies formed their high-powered and heavy howitzer artillery into long-range artillery groups and destruction artillery groups. These groups provided long-range fire for corps and armies or fire necessary to destroy those fortified enemy positions that disrupted the progress of offensive operations. Tank reserve groups and antitank reserve groups at division level and at virtually every echelon above division were a source of extra offensive power available to repel enemy counterattacks.

Just as the combat formation was important for the achievement of offensive aims, so also was the organization of the march formation. As Soviet offensive successes mounted in 1944 and 1945, the exploitation and pursuit phases of combat became more prevalent and important. Success in exploitation and pursuit depended to a great degree on the utility of the march formation and on the ability of the marching unit to react quickly to changing conditions. Ideally, proper march formation permitted rapid concentration of forces, efficient force deployment, successful maneuver, and sound defense of the march column when necessary. Good march formations improved a unit's chances for victory in a meeting engagement or when advancing to attack a hastily prepared defense that could be attacked from the march. The most rudimentary consideration of the march was the number of routes a unit used. Armies and corps, because of their large size, marched on several routes. Divisions used from one to three routes, depending on the width of the zone of eventual commitment and the nature of the terrain. Regiments marched on one route.

March formations consisted of distinct functional groupings, each with a particular mission. In order of march, these included the reconnaissance group, detachment, or patrol; the advanced party; the forward detachment; the advanced guard; the main body; and the flank guards or march out-

posts. The reconnaissance group, detachment, or patrol and the advanced party conducted reconnaissance and provided security for the march column. By 1945, the forward detachment had become a key element of the march formation. Its mission was to disrupt enemy dispositions, to secure terrain, and to assist the deployment of the advanced guard. Only units of brigade size and larger formed forward detachments. The advanced guard would attack and crush the enemy. If unable to overcome the enemy, it would cover the deployment of the main force. The basic fighting unit of the formation was the main force, which was supposed to use maneuver to engage and crush the enemy, if possible. Gun, antiaircraft, and antitank artillery was dispersed throughout the various subgroups of the march column or formation. Tanks operated together at the front or rear of columns or as separate columns. Tanks usually reinforced forward detachments and advanced guards.

Having emphasized the offensive as the sole source of military victory, the 1944 field regulations described in detail the purpose of the offensive and the methods of its conduct. Simply stated, offensive battle aimed to smash the enemy and to attack to the depths of the enemy defense. The three basic forms of offensive action were frontal attack, close envelopment, and wide envelopment. Frontal attack, the most frequently used, most costly, and hence the least preferred form of offensive action, sought penetration of the enemy defense. Close envelopment, preferred over the frontal attack, occurred either as a result of a frontal attack or after breaching enemy defenses. Its aim was ultimate encirclement of a portion of the enemy's forces. Wide envelopment, the most mobile form of offensive action, involved deep offensive operations against an enemy's flank or flanks, sometimes in concert with a frontal attack. It sought to encircle and destroy major portions of an enemy force.

The frontal attack required heavy concentration of forces in a narrow sector, hence artful task organization and coordination of forces. Requiring only limited maneuver, it was the simpler and thus the safer form of attack. The envelopment, particularly the wide envelopment, demanded careful organization and coordination of mobile forces before and during the attack. It also required mutual support by all types of forces to the depth of the enemy defense, a feat not easily achieved. It was risky in the sense that a successful wide envelopment could yield a great victory, yet a poorly executed one could result in disastrous defeat.

The 1944 field regulations described in detail the role of the various arms in the conduct of the frontal attack, the manner in which the frontal attack developed, and the prerequisites for its successful conduct. The force conducting the attack required superiority over the enemy, particularly on the main axis of attack. Infantry and tank units working closely together penetrated the defensive lines of the enemy. During the penetration, artillery and aircraft supported attacking forces to the depth of the defense. Tank and mechanized units operating as mobile groups of the army or front then

broke out from the initial penetration to conduct the exploitation. During the exploitation phase, the mobile groups and follow-on rifle units sought to break up enemy combat formations and to destroy them piecemeal. Throughout all phases of the frontal attack, various types of forces (airborne, deep reconnaissance, and partisan) would conduct diversionary operations in the enemy rear to sow confusion, to disrupt enemy command and control, and to block the movement of enemy reserves.

The form of the frontal attack varied. It could involve attack in one sector and subsequent development of the offensive in that sector, or attack in several sectors with simultaneous development in all sectors or in timed sequence sector by sector. The army or corps on the main direction of attack normally deployed in two echelons of rifle divisions. First echelon divisions led the attack, with main attack sectors from three to four kilometers in width (narrower than in earlier years). Second echelon divisions received a distinct combat mission and deployed at a depth of seven to twelve kilometers behind the first echelon divisions. During the attack, action was continuous and involved close coordination of infantry, artillery, tanks, and engineers.

The most difficult form of frontal attack was that designed to penetrate a fortified zone. Such an operation required detailed planning to destroy or neutralize enemy strongpoints, to effect penetration, and to develop exploitation. Regulations spelled out the necessary steps. Detailed reconnaissance was necessary up to the very hour of attack in order to permit planned operations against each enemy position. A thorough time-phased artillery preparation to the depths of the defense preceded the attack. Usually consisting of very heavy rolling barrages or fire on successive concentrations, the artillery preparation lasted one to four hours. While the preparation was in progress, assault detachments from first echelon infantry units led the attack against forward enemy positions. Reserve rifle battalions of first echelon rifle regiments provided the assault detachments in order to maintain the strength and structural integrity of first echelon battalions of those regiments. The assault detachments included infantry, machine gunners, and engineers and regimental artillery pieces, antitank guns, one or two heavy tanks, and flamethrowers. These carefully tailored assault detachments ranged in strength from platoon to reinforced company, depending on the strength of the positions they assaulted. Each assault detachment thoroughly rehearsed the attack on terrain models of the enemy position reconstructed on the basis of detailed reconnaissance.

Tanks, organized in two echelons, followed the assault groups. The first echelon of heavy tanks (or heavy self-propelled guns) from separate tank brigades or regiments accompanied the assault groups to destroy fortifications by direct fire, to support the infantry with covering fire and to help consolidate gains. The second echelon of medium tanks followed the assault groups (sometimes with the advanced rifle battalions of the rifle regiments)

to further consolidate the position and to repulse local enemy counterattacks. Lead rifle regiments followed the assault detachments in battalion formation with two rifle battalions in first echelon, each with three rifle companies on line, and one rifle battalion in second echelon. Artillery units continuously supported the attack.

Penetration of a hasty defense required different techniques. Above all, the attacking forces had to employ the proper march formation to allow for quick reaction to enemy deployments. Attacking forces had to act quickly and precisely in close coordination with neighboring units. Initiative was critical for success. In the attack on a hasty defense, offensive forces moved in march column, employing reconnaissance units to determine exact enemy dispositions and to cover the advance. When approaching the enemy positions, the army commander narrowed both his front and the zones of individual first echelon rifle divisions. Divisional artillery units accompanied the rifle regiments they were to support. The army (or corps) forward detachment engaged and disrupted enemy dispositions and secured terrain to ease the deployment of the advanced guard. The advanced guard of each lead rifle division engaged the enemy force to defeat it, if possible, and failing that, to facilitate deployment and maneuver of the main force. Employing maneuver to a maximum, the main force attacked the enemy main force and defeated it.

By virtue of their firepower and mobility, large tank and mechanized units were especially suited for use in a frontal attack against a hasty defense. Usually, a tank unit (brigade or battalion) formed the nucleus of a forward detachment. In addition, advanced guards received some tank support. Army commanders often committed their mobile groups (tank and mechanized corps) early against a hasty defense to complete the disruption begun by the forward detachments, advanced guards, and main forces. After penetrating the hasty defense, mobile groups would initiate the exploitation and pursuit.

The pursuit phase of the offensive operation followed the penetration achieved by frontal attack or envelopment. The field regulations of 1944 emphasized that pursuit must be relentless in order to forestall further enemy regrouping of forces. Commanders at every level made preparations for the pursuit before the actual penetration was achieved in order to insure that operations would be continuous. Initially, tank units and motorized infantry, reinforced by engineers and supported by long-range artillery, conducted the pursuit.

The most decisive pursuit would occur along routes parallel to the axis of withdrawal of enemy units on one or both of the enemy flanks. Large tank units and motorized units operated deep in the enemy rear to secure key road junctions or terrain in order to cut off and destroy the retreating enemy units piecemeal. Pursuing rifle divisions and rifle regiments performed deep missions as well. During the period 1942—43, the major Soviet

problem in conducting the pursuit had been keeping the advancing infantry and artillery within supporting distance of deeply operating tank and mechanized units. By 1944 the provision of adequate motorized infantry and mobile artillery to the tank and mechanized units had solved this problem.

Another basic variation of offensive combat that the field regulations of 1944 addressed was the meeting engagement, the most fluid form of combat and thus the form requiring the greatest initiative on the part of commanders. The meeting engagement normally occurred during the pursuit phase of an offensive operation, although the regulations admitted it could also occur at the initiation of hostilities. Simply stated, the meeting engagement occurred when two forces advanced on one another in march formation. The first force able to deploy and to hit the other before it fully deployed could achieve victory and rout the unprepared enemy. Thus, the meeting engagement involved preemption at a tactical level, which required efficient march formations, rapid deployment, and skillful maneuver.

When commanders anticipated a meeting engagement, regulations recommended they subdivide their march column into four segments, each with a precise composition and mission. The forward detachment spearheaded the formation (at brigade, division, or higher level). The forward detachment made up of tanks, artillery, and motorized rifle units disrupted enemy dispositions, secured key terrain, and assisted deployment of the advanced guard. Before the enemy could successfully deploy, the advanced guard (one battalion of a regiment, one regiment of a division, or one division of a corps), with the next higher level commander in attendance, attacked and crushed the enemy and then covered deployment of the main force. After deploying, the main force attacked the already disorganized enemy force and defeated it in detail, if possible by maneuver. Mobile groups extended the depth of the operation usually by conducting a deeper envelopment. Regulations stressed that a vigorous pursuit must follow the meeting engagement. Like the pursuit operation, the meeting engagement had taken on greater significance by 1944.

Having covered the offense in general, the regulations turned to the conduct of offensive battle under special climatic and geographical conditions. Derived from the experience of four years of war, these sections had considerable applicability to operations in Manchuria's varied terrain.

Night battle offered distinct advantages to the side that was capable of waging it and willing to conduct it. Night offensive action contributed to the achievement of surprise, and regulations admonished commanders to use it whenever possible in order to deny respite to a pressured enemy. In order for night battle to succeed, operational plans had to be simple. Units had to have limited missions and had to attack on straight, short attack axes. Night precluded the use of complicated maneuvers. Infantry played the chief role in the attack, and in order to guarantee surprise, commanders usually avoided artillery preparations. Tank units could operate at night

only on suitable terrain, although tank units sometimes formed an integral part of the infantry formation. The chief problem involved in the safe use of tanks and infantry was keeping the tanks and infantry separate without violating the requirements of mutual support.

The Soviets in World War II had to address the difficult problem of fighting in inhabited areas. By 1944, they had gained enough experience for concrete doctrine to emerge. Regulations advised units to bypass inhabited areas by maneuver whenever possible and to avoid frontal attack on such areas. If reduction of an inhabited area proved necessary, commanders were to tailor assault units from all types of forces and organize them for mutual support. Strong reserves at all levels were necessary to insure the continued effectiveness of the assault groups.

Offensive action in forested or marshy regions involved certain specific techniques. In such terrain, balanced combined arms forces usually attacked on separate axes. In order to insure necessary mobility, forward detachments led on each axis to preempt enemy deployment and to secure key terrain, in this case usually road junctions. Route control performed by traffic control units was critical as a means of preventing confusion among advancing units. Heavy engineer support was necessary to guarantee continued trafficability of march routes and, in some cases, to construct roads.

Combat in mountainous regions involved careful task organization and specific tactical techniques to achieve mobility. Spearheaded by forward detachments, attacking units advanced along valley floors and mountain defiles. Speed was essential to preempt the establishment of strong enemy bottlenecks or more extensive defenses. Forward detachments paved the way for the advance of larger mobile tank and mechanized units. Balanced forward detachments concentrated sufficient power to overcome small enemy detachments, to move rapidly, and to operate deep in enemy areas. Larger mobile tank and mechanized units followed to develop deep penetrations and to envelop wide areas. Forces operating in valleys used envelopment as the basic form of maneuver to secure ridge and mountain crests. In the wake of these mobile forces, follow-on forces secured important road junctions and key terrain in the rear. All units operating in mountainous terrain were task organized with strong artillery, engineer, and tank support.

Desert operations offered the prospect of deep operations, significant advance, greater freedom of maneuver, and attacks on enemy flanks. Units conducted desert operations on multiple axes with each force tailored to permit greater independence of action and survivability. With their inherent mobility, tank and motorized units were key to the success of maneuver. Yet all units required considerable artillery and engineer support. Of particular importance were logistical considerations, for sustained operations depended on water, fuel, ammunition, and food. Regulations emphasized that

logistical planning "must be detailed and accurate." Because logistical requirements remained the central focus of commanders throughout desert operations, water sources became key terrain features in those operations.

The 1944 regulations provided the tactical guidance for Soviet forces operating in Manchuria. The requirements the Manchurian region imposed on Soviet forces insured that virtually every operation discussed in the regulations would have to be performed. During the course of those operations, the Soviets essentially would follow the general guidance of the regulations, but would modify and adjust the guidance to changing conditions and the requirements of the Manchurian area of operations.

Conduct of the Offensive: Far East Command Plan

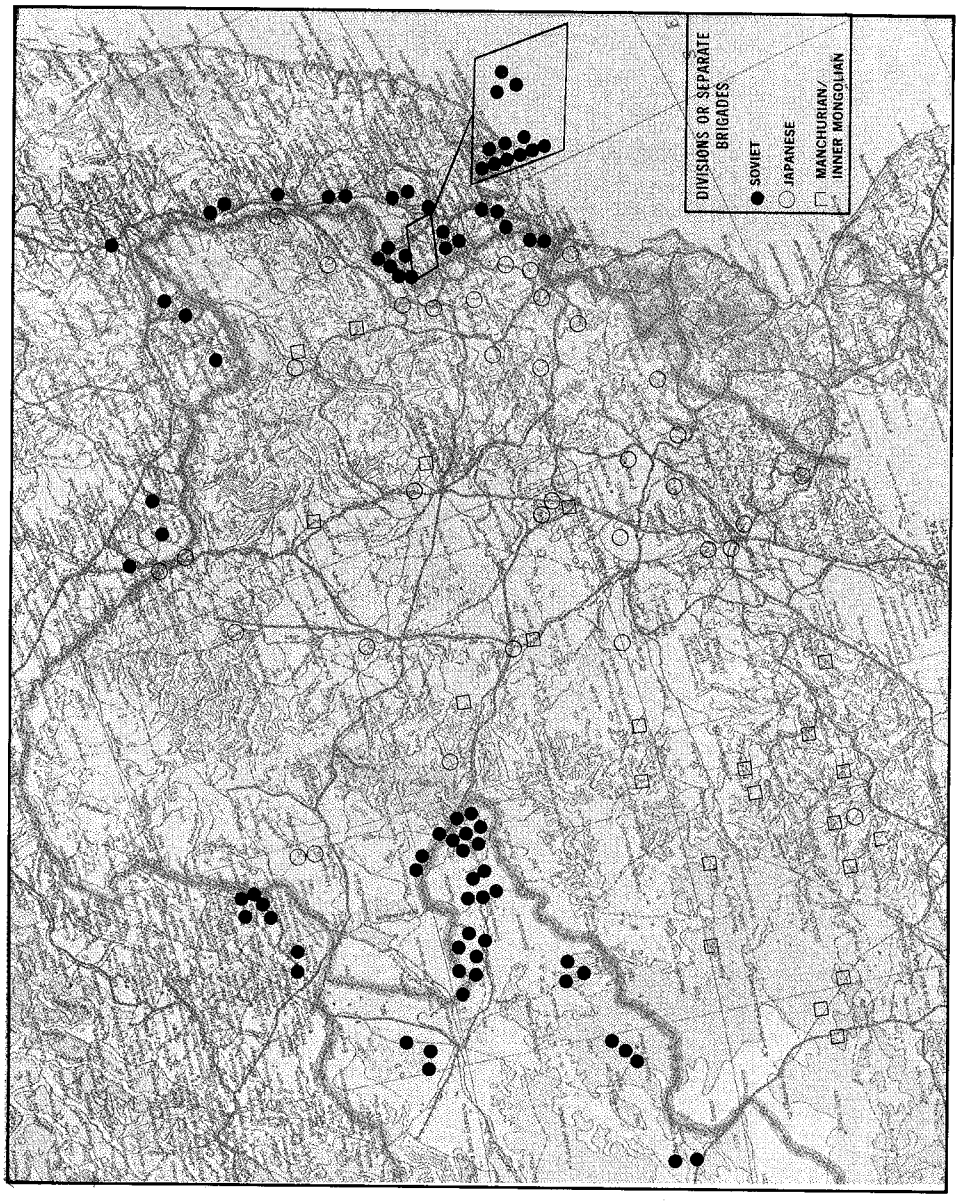
6

The Far East Command plan for the conquest of Manchuria was simple in concept, but grand in scale and in expectations. Labeled a strategic cannae[1] by Soviet historians, the plan called for a strategic double envelopment conducted by Soviet forces along three axes. The objective was to secure Manchuria and to destroy a large portion of the Japanese Kwantung Army (see maps 16—17).

The Trans-Baikal Front would attack eastward into western Manchuria, while the 1st Far Eastern Front would attack westward into eastern Manchuria. These two attacks would converge in the Mukden, Changchun, Harbin, and Kirin areas of south central Manchuria. The 2d Far Eastern Front would conduct a supporting attack into northern Manchuria, driving southward to Harbin and Tsitsihar. Timing of on-order operations against southern Sakhalin Island and the Kuriles would depend on the progress of the main attacks.

Planning reflected the need for swift operations that would preempt Japanese defense plans, avoid a protracted war, and insure Soviet control over Manchuria before the Japanese surrendered to Allied powers in the Far East. Although the Far East Command had ordered units to be ready to attack by 25 July 1945, it made the final decision on the timing of the attack and the form it should take on 7 August, only two days before it launched the attack.[2] At that time the Far East Command decided to commit the Trans-Baikal and the 1st Far Eastern Fronts to a simultaneous attack. Earlier plans had the Trans-Baikal Front attacking before the 1st Far Eastern Front attacked, an arrangement objected to by several front commanders. Perhaps detonation of the atomic bomb on 6 August prompted the hasty decision and the short two-day period between the decision and the attack.[3]

The Far East Command accorded a major attack role to the Trans-Baikal Front, whose mission, as the first pincer of the strategic envelopment, was to secure objectives 350 kilometers into Manchuria by the tenth to the fifteenth day of the operation.[4] Two combined arms armies (17th and 39th) and one tank army (6th Guards) in front first echelon would



Map 16. Opposing Force Densities and Distribution

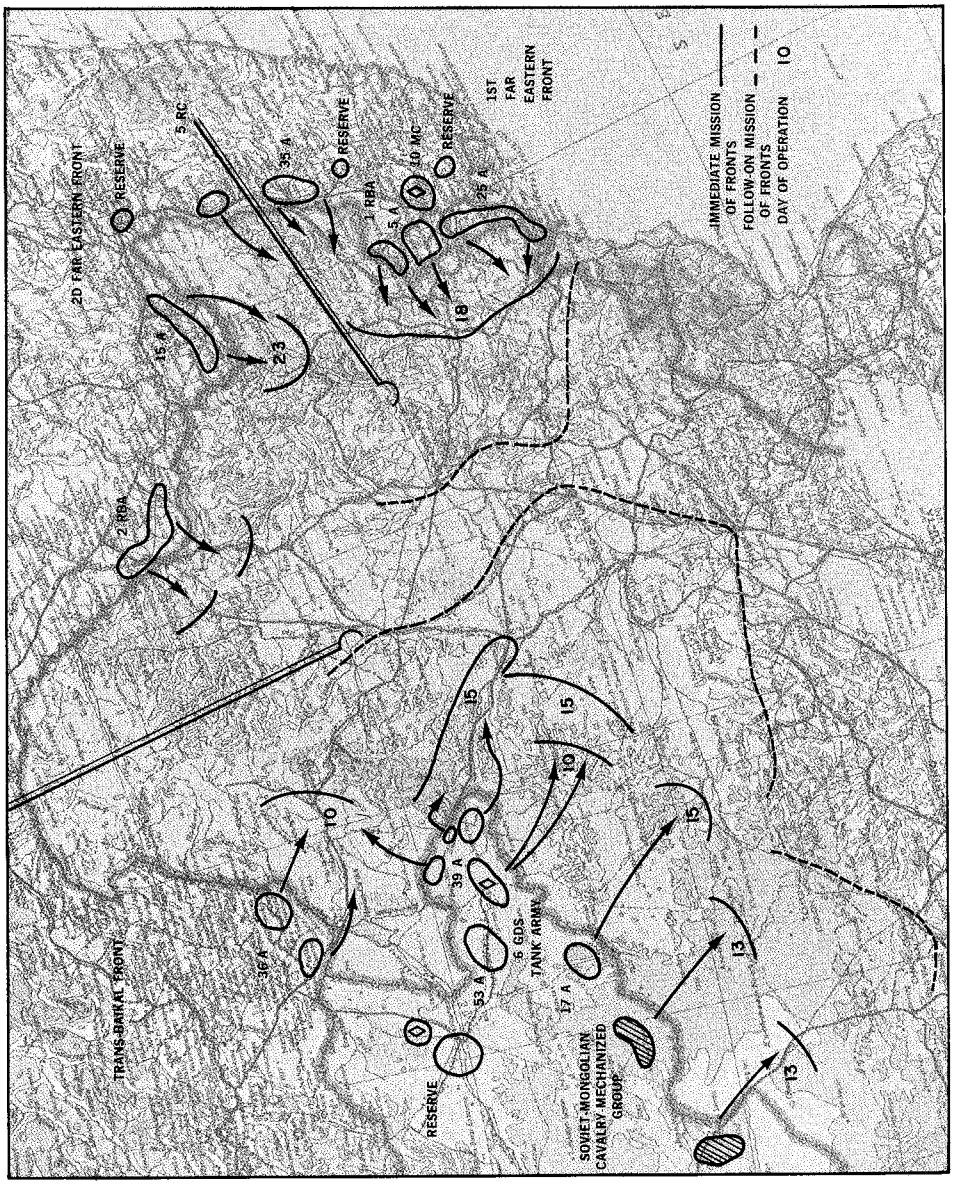
launch the main attack of the Trans-Baikal Front, bypass the Halung-Arshaan Fortified Region to the south, and advance toward Changchun. The immediate objectives of these forces were to crush the enemy in the border regions, to cross the Grand Khingan Mountains, and to occupy positions in the central Manchurian plain from Lupei to Solun by the tenth to the fifteenth day of the operation. Spearheading the front advance, the 6th Guards Tank Army was to cross the deserts of Inner Mongolia, secure the passes in the Grand Khingan Mountains, and occupy Lupei by the fifth day of the operation, a distance of 350 kilometers. Subsequently, the front would secure objectives along a line from Chihfeng through Mukden to Changchun in the heart of central Manchuria.

Two forces were to make supporting attacks on separate axes in the Trans-Baikal Front sector. The Soviet-Mongolian Cavalry-Mechanized Group was to attack across the Inner Mongolian desert and southern Grand Khingan Mountains to Kalgan and Dolonnor. The 36th Army was to attack from Duroy and Staro-Tsurukaytuy across the Argun River in order to secure Hailar by the tenth day of the operation and to prevent Japanese withdrawal through the Grand Khingan Mountains from northwestern Manchuria. Because of rough terrain and lack of contact between the two fronts, the Far East Command drew no demarcation line to separate the Trans-Baikal Front from the 2d Far Eastern Front on its left.

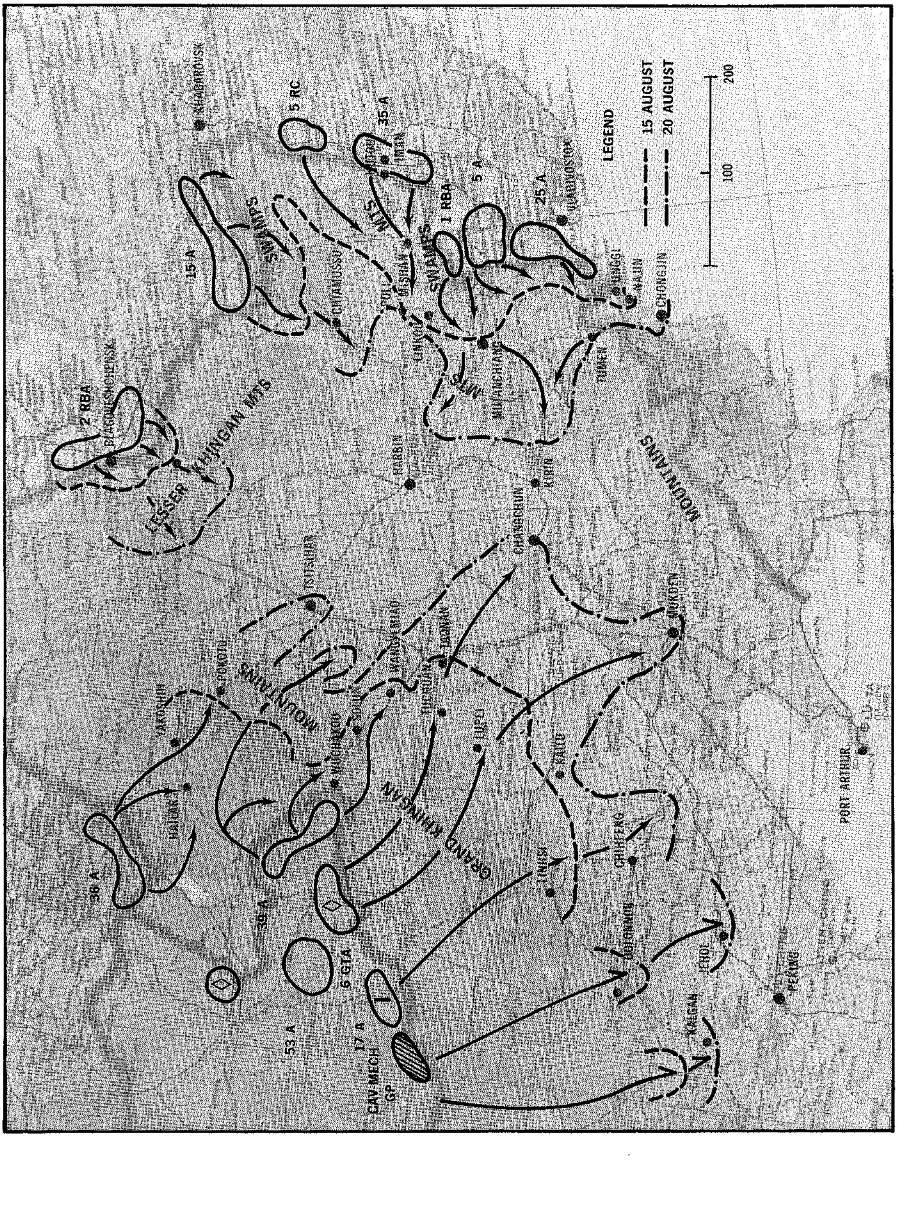
The second echelon of the Trans-Baikal Front consisted of the 53d Army, whose mission was to follow the 6th Guards Tank Army and, after crossing the Grand Khingan Mountains, to move into front first echelon. The front reserve comprised two rifle divisions (317th and 227th), one tank division (111th), and one tank brigade (201st).

The success of the Trans-Baikal Front operation depended on speed, surprise, and mobile forces in virtually every sector in order to preempt effective Japanese defense. For swiftness and surprise, tank formations operated in the first echelon of units at every level of command. The operation also called for tank-heavy forward detachments at every level of command, so the 6th Guards Tank Army would spearhead the front effort. A tank division would lead the advance of the 39th Army, as would tank brigades for first echelon corps and divisions. Planned rates of advance for the operation were high, twenty-three kilometers per day for combined arms units and seventy kilometers for tank units.

The operation involved risks. If Japanese units reacted quickly to the Soviet attack and if even nominal forces occupied positions in the Grand Khingan mountain passes, the Soviet advance could be severely slowed. In addition, the operation relied heavily on the ability of logistical units to supply the fast moving columns deep in Manchuria. The Soviets confidently took both risks.



Map 17. Soviet Far East Command Plan (left) and Operations (right)


LEGEND
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100
200
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5 RC
35 A
15 A
SWAMPS
MTS
1 RBA
5 A
25 A
VLADIVOSTOK
UNGGI
NAJIN
CHONGJIN
CHIAMUSSU
MISHAN
LINKOU
MUTANCHIANG
TUMEN
2 RBA
BLAGOVESHCHENSK
LESSER
KHINGAN MTS
HARBIN
KIRIN
CHANGCHUN
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CHIHFENG
KAILU
LUPEI
DOLONNOR
JEHOL
KALGAN
PEKING
PORT ARTHUR

The 1st Far Eastern Front was the second pincer of the strategic envelopment. The front's mission was to penetrate or to bypass Japanese frontier fortifications, to rout Japanese forces, and, by the fifteenth to eighteenth day of the operation, to secure objectives along a line running from Poli through Mutanchiang to Wangching.[5] Two combined arms armies (1st Red Banner and 5th) and one mechanized corps (10th) would launch the main attack of the front from the Grodekova area northwest of Vladivostok and advance toward Mutanchiang. The two armies and the mechanized corps were then to exploit and secure the subsequent objectives of Kirin, Changchun, and Harbin while linking up with Soviet forces from the Trans-Baikal Front.

Two armies were to launch attacks in support of the front's main effort. The 35th Army was to attack from the Lesozavodsk-Iman area north of Lake Khanka in order to occupy Mishan, Linkou, and Poli. The 25th Army was to attack from northwest of Ussurysk to secure the Tungning, Wangching, and Yenchi areas. The Army would then cut Japanese escape routes into Korea and exploit southward into the Korean peninsula.

The 1st Far Eastern Front deployed in single echelon formation to bring maximum pressure to bear on all Japanese positions in eastern Manchuria. The 10th Mechanized Corps, as the mobile group of the front, deployed for commitment in the 5th Army's zone. The front reserve consisted of the 87th Rifle Corps, the 88th Rifle Corps, and the 84th Cavalry Division. Despite dense Japanese defensive positions, the planned rate of advance for the front was eight to ten kilometers per day toward the immediate front objectives of Mutanchiang and Wangching.

After the 1st Far Eastern Front and the Trans-Baikal Front joined forces in the Changchun area, they would advance together to crush final Japanese resistance on the Liaotung Peninsula and to secure Port Arthur, the key naval base at the southern tip of the peninsula.

The 2d Far Eastern Front was to advance on a broad front across the Amur and Ussuri rivers from Blagoveshchensk to south of Khabarovsk. It was to bring maximum pressure to bear on Japanese forces in northern Manchuria in order to destroy them or to prevent their orderly withdrawal south to assist Japanese forces resisting the main Soviet attacks.[6] One combined arms army (15th), would launch the front's main attack across the Amur River in the Leninskoye area and would advance southward into the Sungari and Ruhe river regions. The 15th Army's immediate mission was to isolate or to crush the enemy fortified zones along the Amur and Sungari rivers and to clear the enemy from the salient formed by the Sungari, Amur, and Ussuri rivers. The 15th Army would then advance to secure the subsequent objective of Sansing and Harbin, where it would unite with forces of the 1st Far Eastern Front.

Two secondary attacks would support the front's main effort. The 2d Red Banner Army would attack on order across the Amur River from the Blagoveshchensk area to Sunwu and then exploit southward to Tsitsihar. The 5th Separate Rifle Corps, deployed along the Ussuri River south of Khabarovsk, would attack from Bikin to secure the immediate objective, Paoching. Then the corps would advance to Poli, there joining forces with units of the 1st Far Eastern Front.

The multifront plan of operation sought complete destruction of Kwantung Army units in Manchuria with maximum speed. Japanese troops would quickly be cut off from reinforcements from northern China or from Korea. The Soviets would force the Japanese to defend in all sectors by attacking in all sectors. These constant mobile attacks on the broadest of fronts would prevent the Japanese from shifting forces and lead to the utter collapse and piecemeal defeat of the Japanese.

The Far East Command launched the offensive on the morning of 9 August 1945. The ensuing campaign exceeded the expectations of Soviet planners. In the first phase of operations, first echelon armies of the three fronts penetrated Japanese defenses, destroyed first echelon Japanese units, and by 15 August had introduced forces into the central region of Manchuria. The second phase of the operation began on 15 August and was barely underway when Japanese forces capitulated.