

# *Reduction of a Fortified Region*

5



## **Hutou: Strategic Significance**

Hutou was an isolated, but strategically important, link in Japanese defenses in eastern Manchuria. Its high ground provided good observation points from which to watch rail traffic on the Soviet Far Eastern Railroad. Because this rail line was the only one between Khabarovsk and Vladivostok, it would assume critical strategic importance in the event hostilities should erupt in the Far East. Moreover, the high ground just north of Hutou City controlled access to the only east-west railroad and road capable of handling heavy vehicle and rail traffic on the northern approaches to Mishan. Whoever controlled these heights controlled the avenues of approach in eastern Manchuria, because the surrounding terrain was mainly swamp and bog.

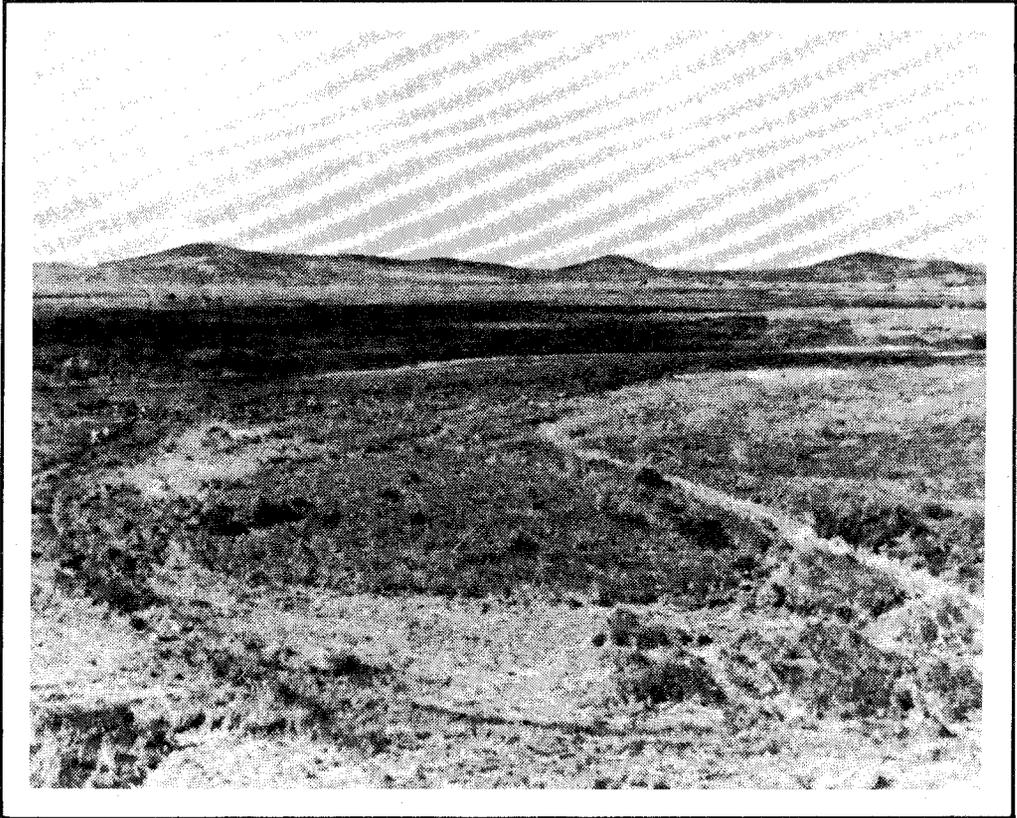
## **Japanese Forces**

The Japanese had begun construction of fortified positions at Hutou in 1933, in part because the Soviets had erected fortifications of their own at Iman, across the Ussuri River from Hutou (see map 5—1). To man the fortifications, the Japanese assigned the 4th Border Guard Unit (BGU), which had about 7,000 personnel organized into four infantry battalions of three rifle companies each; one artillery regiment consisting of two batteries of twenty-four guns; and one engineer battalion.

In accordance with the Kwantung Army's fortification policy for border defense, construction units and conscripted native labor built the permanent ferro-concrete emplacements along the high ground dominating the strategic avenues of approach.<sup>1</sup> The Kwantung Army's strategic assessment of terrain dictated the Hutou fortress's isolated and exposed position, so army planners tried to insure that the fortress itself would be almost impregnable. They designated Hutou a "special" category of fortress.<sup>2</sup> This meant that it had concrete walls and roofs up to three meters thick, was impervious to artillery fire, and was able to withstand a direct hit by a one-ton bomb.\*

\*The only other Japanese fortifications to enjoy a "special" designation were sections of the Hailar positions in western Manchuria.

The Japanese constructed the Hutou complex without dead space. They designed the fire pattern to blanket the 300 meters ahead of defensive obstacles and relied on oblique and flanking fire from adjacent units rather than on frontal fire to cover the dead spaces. One battalion or, in special cases, one company manned individual fortified positions. A company's frontage and depth was 600 to 1,000 meters. Battalion sectors were generally 1,200 to 2,000 meters in width and depth.<sup>3</sup>

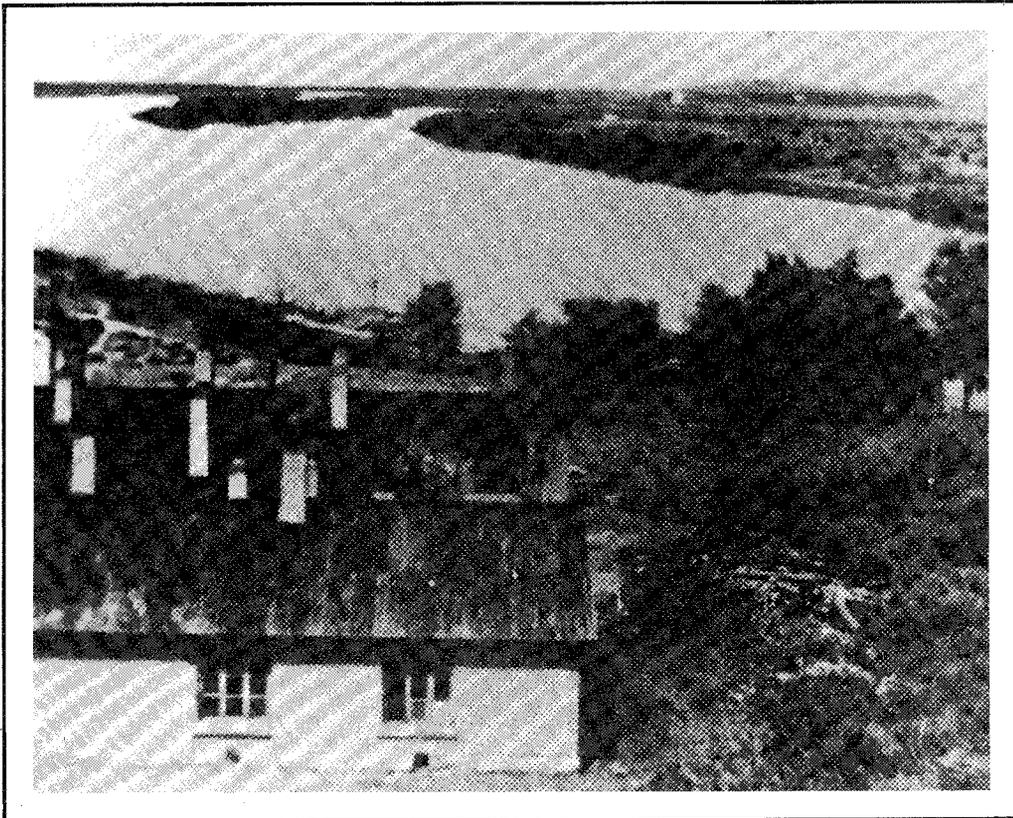


Hutou Fortified Region from the south

The completed Hutou forts had above-ground entrances, exits, observation posts, artillery and machine gun apertures, sally ports for local counter-attacks, and weather observation posts. Underground were the communications system, living quarters, baths, water and supplies, generators, a communications room, and provisions. As mentioned, three-meter-thick concrete protected the key sections.

This fortress and the extensive Japanese fortification system in eastern Manchuria resembled a Manchurian Maginot Line. Like the Maginot Line planners, the Japanese did not expect the forts to hold back an enemy attack. Instead, the defenders would hold their positions and subsequently

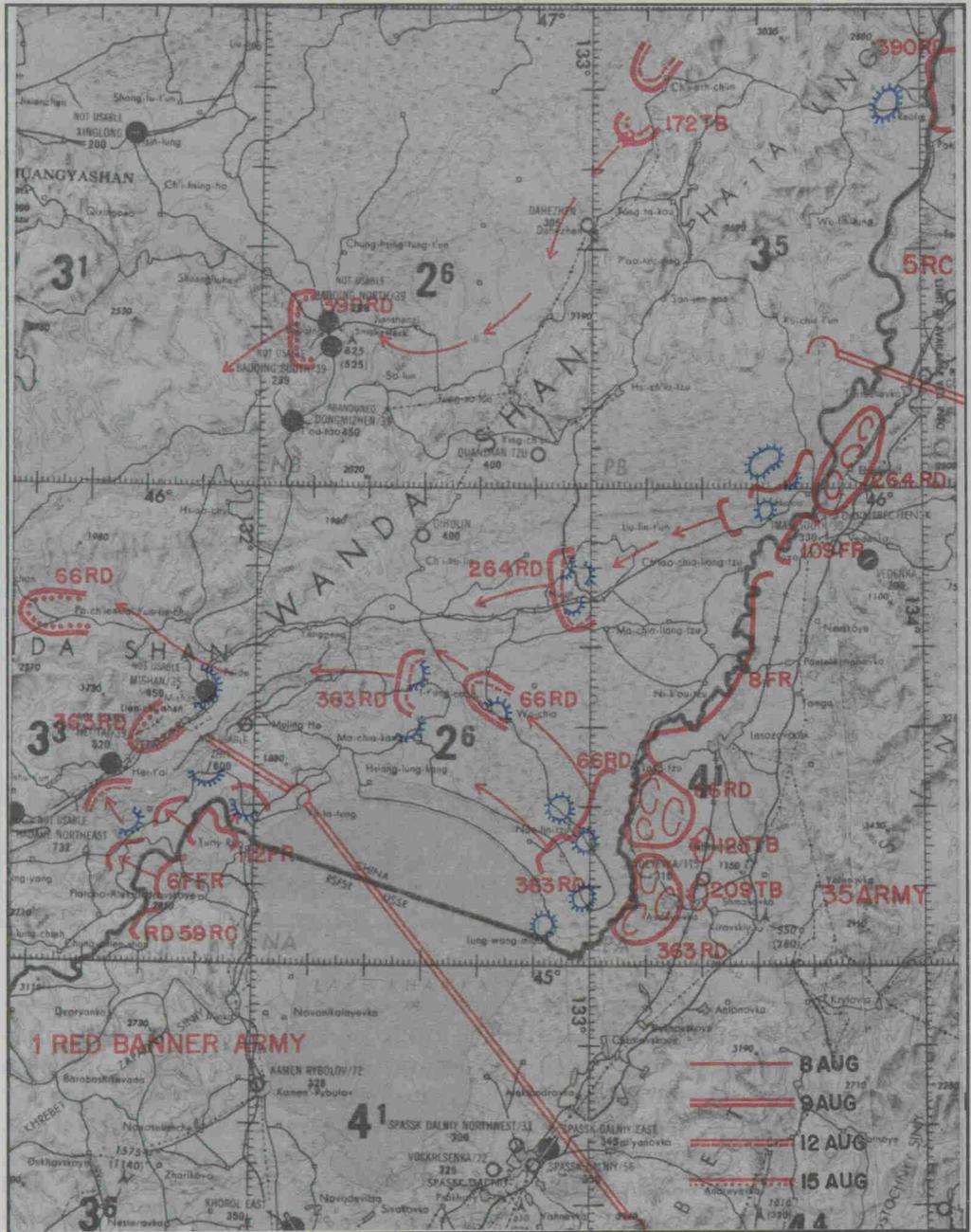
threaten the rear of the hostile invader, while friendly mobile forces prepared to counterattack. Also like the Maginot Line concept, the Japanese Manchurian defense designers assumed that certain types of terrain were impassable by large numbers of troops and equipment. Such thinking characterized Japanese defensive concepts.



Looking northeast from Hutou

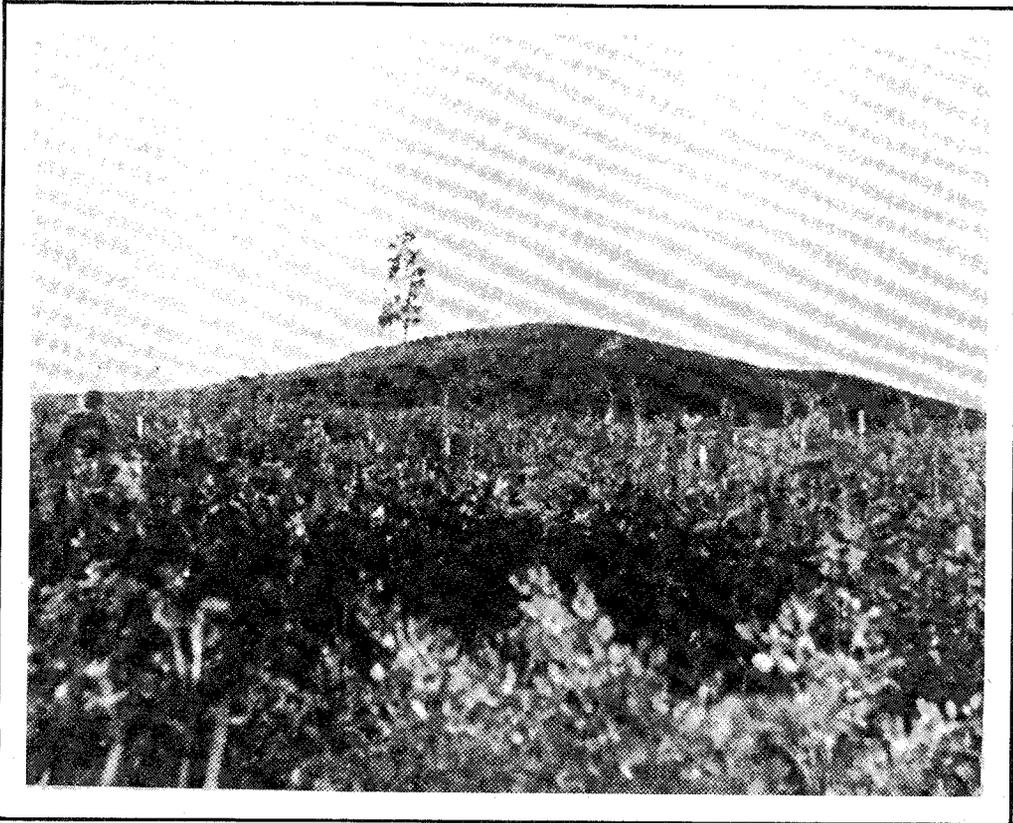
The Hutou fortifications were on an approximately 8,000-meter frontage and a 6,000-meter depth. The 4th BGU Table of Equipment and Organization (TO&E) meshed perfectly with the assigned defensive frontages. Although the unit had only one engineer company, it compensated for this deficiency with two additional artillery companies, which were assigned directly to the garrison. The Japanese had a total of fifty-nine artillery pieces at Hutou, in addition to their eight medium mortars, eighteen anti-aircraft guns, and ten anti-aircraft machine guns. They divided the fortress into three districts for defensive responsibilities, each garrisoned by four infantry companies and an artillery unit, respectively.

Although the Hutou garrison enjoyed a surplus of men and equipment in relation to its mission, garrison life there was especially hard. The physical isolation and severe climatic conditions made life bleak. High humidity in



Map 5-1. Japanese and Soviet Positions on the Eve of the Attack

the underground forts rusted weapons, spoiled food, and proved unhealthy for the troops stationed there. The forts lacked soundproofing, so every noise reverberated throughout the fortress. There was no air circulation equipment, although vents and exhausts for gases and human waste did exist. The Kwantung Army declared the fortress a restricted area and identification was required to enter the zone, which began just north of Hutou City. When local trains neared Hutou, conductors or guards pulled curtains over the windows so the passengers could not see the fortifications. From 1941 on, local authorities censored all mail and photographs. Hutou was a bleak tour of duty.



Looking west from the Hutou Fortified Region

The Japanese were unable to maintain the high personnel and equipment standards of the 4th BGU because of vast personnel transfers as units in Manchuria were transferred to the Pacific fighting fronts. In February 1945, 4th BGU personnel served as cadre and fillers for the newly organized 122d Infantry Division. Their equipment was also shifted, in particular anti-aircraft artillery and anti-aircraft machine guns. In order to maintain this strategically important fortification system (not to mention justifying the huge sum of money expended in constructing the forts) the Kwantung Army, on 20 July 1945, used the remaining members of the disbanded 4th

BGU as a nucleus for the new 15th BGU, supplemented by 600 additional troops who had been called up during the July 1945 general mobilization. The 15th BGU had approximately 1,400 officers and men (see table 5—1).

Authorized TO&E	Actual TO&E	Frontage/Depth
12 infantry companies 3 artillery batteries 4 artillery companies 1 engineer company	4 infantry companies 2 artillery companies 1 engineer platoon (4)	8,000/6,000 meters

Even these units were not up to authorized TO&E strength. One infantry support company was equipped with obsolete 37-mm antitank guns, and there were thirteen artillery pieces in the artillery companies. Also attached to the fortress were noncombatants like the Hutou Army Hospital, commanded by a major with a staff of 40—50 attached military personnel, 500 Japanese civilians and dependents, and 200 Koreans. In short, the 15th BGU was hopelessly understrength and had only twenty days to prepare itself before the Soviet forces struck it.

Like the other fortified areas along the eastern Manchurian border, the Hutou garrison, as an advanced unit, would use its defenses to check the Soviet advance and thus allow the 135th Infantry Division time to conduct its retrograde movement to the redoubt area. Volunteers would also raid enemy rear areas to disrupt the Soviet advance.<sup>5</sup> A second mission assigned to the garrison units was the destruction of the key railway bridges of the Soviet Far Eastern Railway, which spanned tributaries of the Ussuri River just north of Iman.

The original Soviet bridge, about 7,500 meters from Hutou, fell easily within the 12,750-meter range of the Japanese Type 30 centimeter (cm) howitzer. Aware of the Japanese construction efforts around Hutou in the late 1930s, the Soviets, in turn, built a detour rail line and a new steel bridge some 17,000 meters from Hutou. In January 1942, to foil the Soviet attempt to prevent artillery interdiction of the key rail artery, the Japanese secretly deployed a monstrous Type 40 cm howitzer capable of hurling a 1,000-kilogram shell more than 21,000 meters. The gun was never test-fired because the Japanese did not want to reveal its presence to the Soviets. Its mission was simple: destroy the Soviet new steel bridge with the first few rounds it fired. This doctrine was consistent with Japanese field artillery practices. In 1943 a 24-cm locomotive gun with a range of more than fifty kilometers also arrived at Hutou. In summary, the Hutou fortress had the twin missions of delaying and interdicting the enemy.

## Soviet Forces

Lt. Gen. N. D. Zakhvatayev, commander of the Soviet 35th Army, controlled Soviet forces opposite Hutou. The 35th Army's mission was to use a portion of its forces to cover the lateral railroad and highway in the area of Guberovo and Spassk and to make the main thrust from the region of Pavlo-Fedorovka on the army's left flank in order to isolate, bypass, and reduce Hutou, while covering the right flank of the 1st Far Eastern Front's main attack farther south (see map 5—2).

The Soviets regarded Hutou as a considerable strongpoint, and they correctly estimated that the Japanese had positioned themselves in a narrow section of the most vulnerable Iman sector and had echeloned their units in great depth along the railroad and highway running from Hutou to Mishan and thence into the interior of Manchuria.<sup>6</sup> The entire Soviet strategy for the Manchurian campaign depended on speed to prevent the Japanese from regrouping or consolidating their forces. For that reason, the Soviets could not afford to get bogged down in a contest for Hutou. Instead, Soviet mobile units would bypass the main Japanese defenses, and specially tasked units would stay behind to reduce the fortress. The Soviets calculated the garrison at Hutou at 3,000 effectives, about double what the Japanese actually had available.

Zakhvatayev concluded that an attack across swampy terrain west of Pavlo-Fedorovka would find the point of weakest Japanese resistance. His main forces would strike from there towards Hulin to cut the railroad between Hulin and Mishan. Subsequently, the 264th Rifle Division and 109th Fortified Region, opposite Hutou, would make an auxiliary thrust to the south of Hutou to destroy the Hutou-Hulin grouping, and then, in cooperation with other units of the 1st Red Banner Army, they would attempt to rout enemy forces at Mishan.<sup>7</sup>

Soviet fortified region units and border guards detachments complemented Soviet 35th Army forces. Opposite Hutou was the 109th Fortified Region, approximately a regiment-size grouping. This fortified region was one of fourteen such entities in the 1st Far Eastern Front area of operations. The unit had the mission of defending about fifty kilometers along the Ussuri River, from about twenty-five kilometers south of Hutou to approximately fifteen kilometers north of the Japanese strongpoint. A comprehensive defensive network of Soviet barbed wire obstacles, antitank ditches, field emplacements, pillboxes, and observation posts dotted the otherwise drab terrain. Broken terrain, cut by numerous sloughs and pockets of marshy ground, characterized the area near both banks of the Ussuri.

Iman City, seven kilometers southeast of Hutou City, was the headquarters of the 57th Border Guards Detachment. According to Japanese records, the 57th had about 2,300 personnel and six gunboats, which their river patrol guards used.



Members of the fortified regions and the border guards detachments had remained in the Soviet Far East throughout the Soviet-German War (22 June 1941—7 May 1945). They had the detailed knowledge of the region that only comes with years of personal observation and experience. Their expertise would greatly benefit the Soviet forces when they crossed the Soviet-Manchurian border, because border guards units would make the initial crossing of the Ussuri and destroy the Japanese outposts that they had watched for so many years. Fortified region and border guards troops would also serve as guides to help the regular Soviet units through otherwise unfamiliar terrain.

### Soviet 35th Army Attack

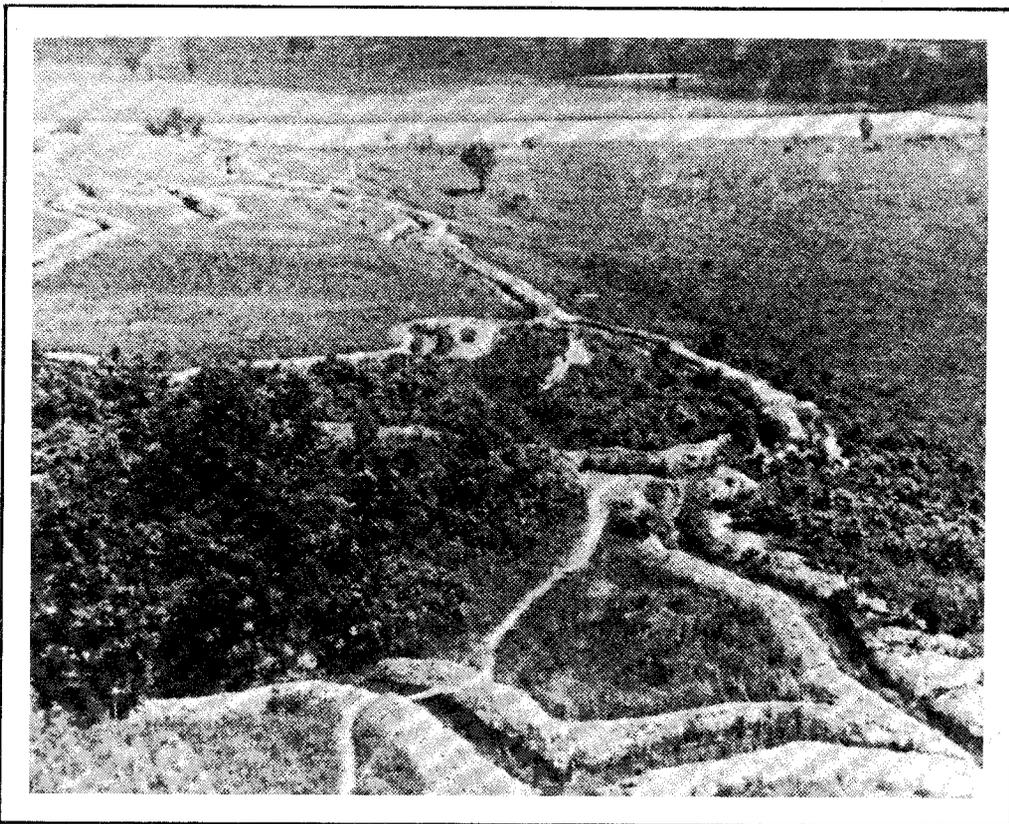
On the evening of the Soviet attack, members of the 15th BGU were conducting routine patrol and observation duties. The unit commander, Col. Nishiwaki Takeshi, was at Yehho, about 320 kilometers southeast of Hutou, attending a 5th Army Headquarters briefing for division, brigade, and associated unit commanders.<sup>8</sup> There had been local indicators of Soviet activity, but higher headquarters dismissed such warnings, apparently because they did not coincide with the Kwantung Army's estimate that a Soviet attack before September was unlikely.

On 5 and 6 August, for example, small Soviet patrols crossed the border about forty kilometers south of Hutou,<sup>9</sup> and on 6 August the BGU headquarters intelligence unit at Hutou reported intercepting a Soviet signal to the effect that the Soviets would soon attack Manchuria.<sup>10</sup> On the afternoon of 8 August, troops patrolling around Hutou's northernmost outpost, about thirty kilometers north of the main defenses, discovered pontoon rafts in the Ussuri River. They assumed that the rafts were debris from a Soviet summer military exercise.

Even after Soviet artillery began to rain down upon the Japanese on 9 August, no one at headquarters believed that they were under attack. They could of course hear the artillery barrage, but the Japanese thought that it was associated with night exercises the Soviets occasionally conducted. Indeed, during June and July 1945, battalions, regiments, and divisions assigned to 35th Army had conducted such exercises on terrain similar to the area of their forthcoming operations.<sup>11</sup>

Exactly when the Soviets opened artillery fire on the Japanese remains uncertain. The Japanese claim that the barrage began shortly after midnight on 9 August, while Soviet accounts set the time at 0100 that day.<sup>12</sup> Thunderstorms had erupted throughout the Maritime Provinces during the evening of 8 August, so the front commander decided to break through the Japanese fortified positions without a prolonged artillery preparation, relying instead on the cover of darkness and the heavy downpour to gain offensive surprise. Artillery preparation was conducted only in the zone of the 35th Army.<sup>13</sup>

Japanese casualties from the shelling were negligible, but the bombardment cut the road, railroad, and communications networks around Hutou in several places. Outposts were unable to contact their headquarters to report Soviet crossings of the Ussuri. At 0100, under the cover of a short artillery preparation, Soviet border guards troops of the 57th Border Detachment in platoon to company strength crossed the Ussuri on cutters with muffled motors or other types of boats throughout the 35th Army zone. In the Hutou area, one such detachment landed north of Hutou and overran and scattered the eighteen Japanese defenders there. At 0200, again under cover of Soviet artillery, the lead elements of the 1058th Rifle Regiment's advanced battalion crossed the Ussuri and, south of Hutou City, annihilated a Japanese outpost that had been covering the southern approaches to the main road and railway to Mishan.<sup>14</sup>



Looking south from Hutou

At 0500 the Soviet artillery fire lifted. The Japanese took advantage of the lull to issue an emergency assembly order and to gather up several hundred dependents near Hutou and take them into the fortress for shelter. One hour later the Soviet artillery bombardment resumed; the temporary respite was a Soviet tactic to confuse the defenders into thinking an attack was imminent, thus forcing them into the open to repulse it. This time

small caliber guns firing from positions on the Ussuri's east bank joined the barrage. Fire was accurate enough to keep Japanese heads down, but casualties were slight. Damage to open field fortifications, unreinforced positions, and roads, however, was extensive.

About 0800 approximately two battalions of Soviet riflemen from the 1056th Rifle Regiment started to cross the Ussuri south of Hutou City, while smaller, diversionary crossings occurred east of the city. By 1100 the Soviets had succeeded in establishing a firm bridgehead north and south of the city, despite suffering heavy casualties from two Japanese mortar crews.\*<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Soviets had avoided a costly frontal attack on Hutou by moving to outflank the main fortress and to envelop the position.

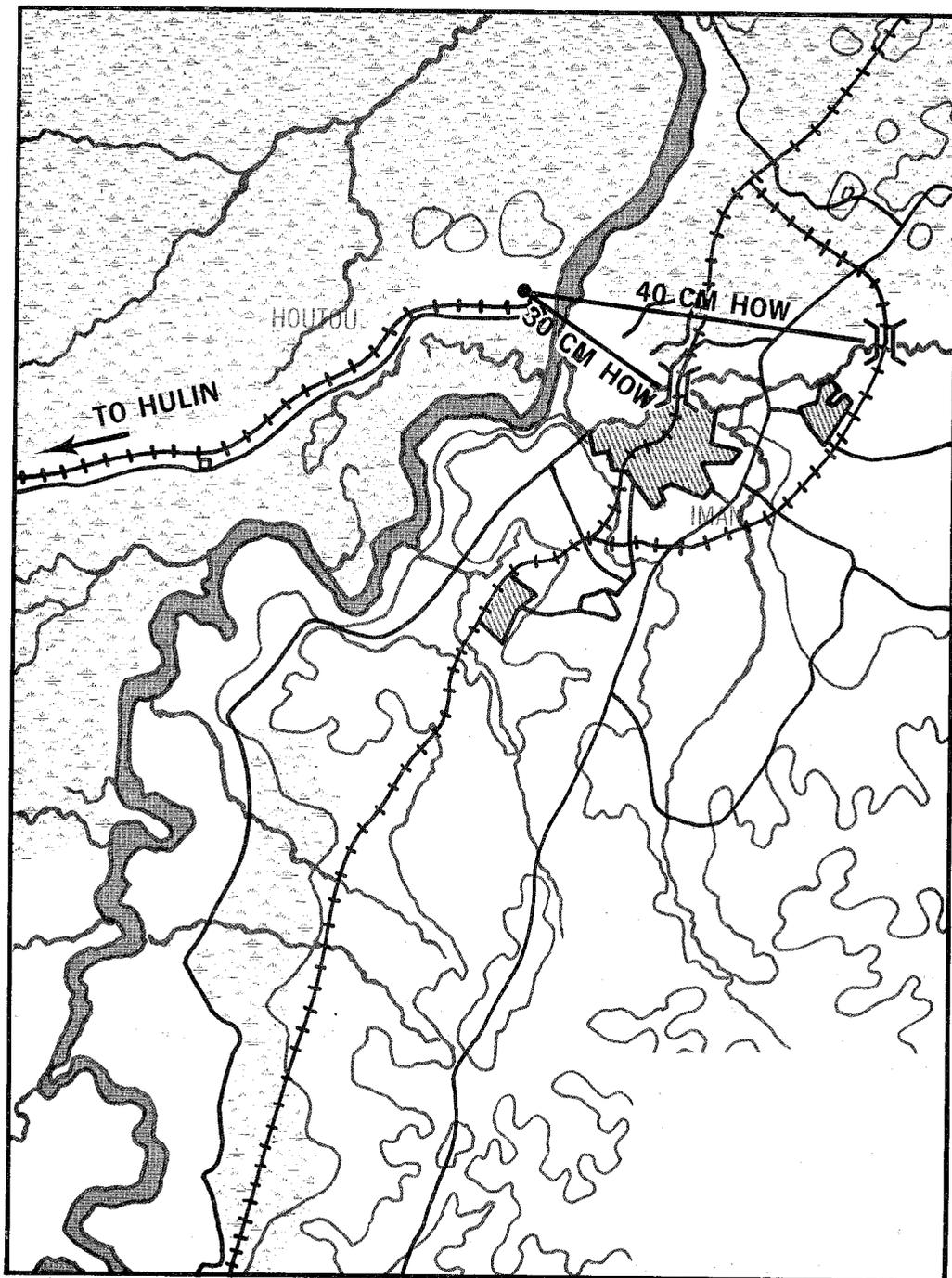
During this entire time, the Japanese artillery had remained silent and had not returned Soviet fire. The Japanese had heavy artillery available, but a lack of trained artillerymen hampered getting the guns into action. Moreover, the artillery commander, Capt. Oki Masao, had to do double duty as fortress commander. The guns consequently were not used to best effect during the early stage of the battle. Because the railway gun had not fired a single shot in anger against the Soviets, 5th Army Headquarters ordered it pulled back to Mishan shortly after dawn.

Captain Oki did not know whether this was a localized Soviet attack or the vanguard of a Soviet invasion, because communications with other friendly units had been disrupted, and the fortress commander was absent and unable to provide any guidance. Oki was not alone in his confusion: Kwantung Army Headquarters waited until 0600 on 9 August (five to six hours after the commencement of the Soviet invasion) before issuing orders to its subordinate units to destroy the invaders in accordance with respective operational plans.<sup>16</sup>

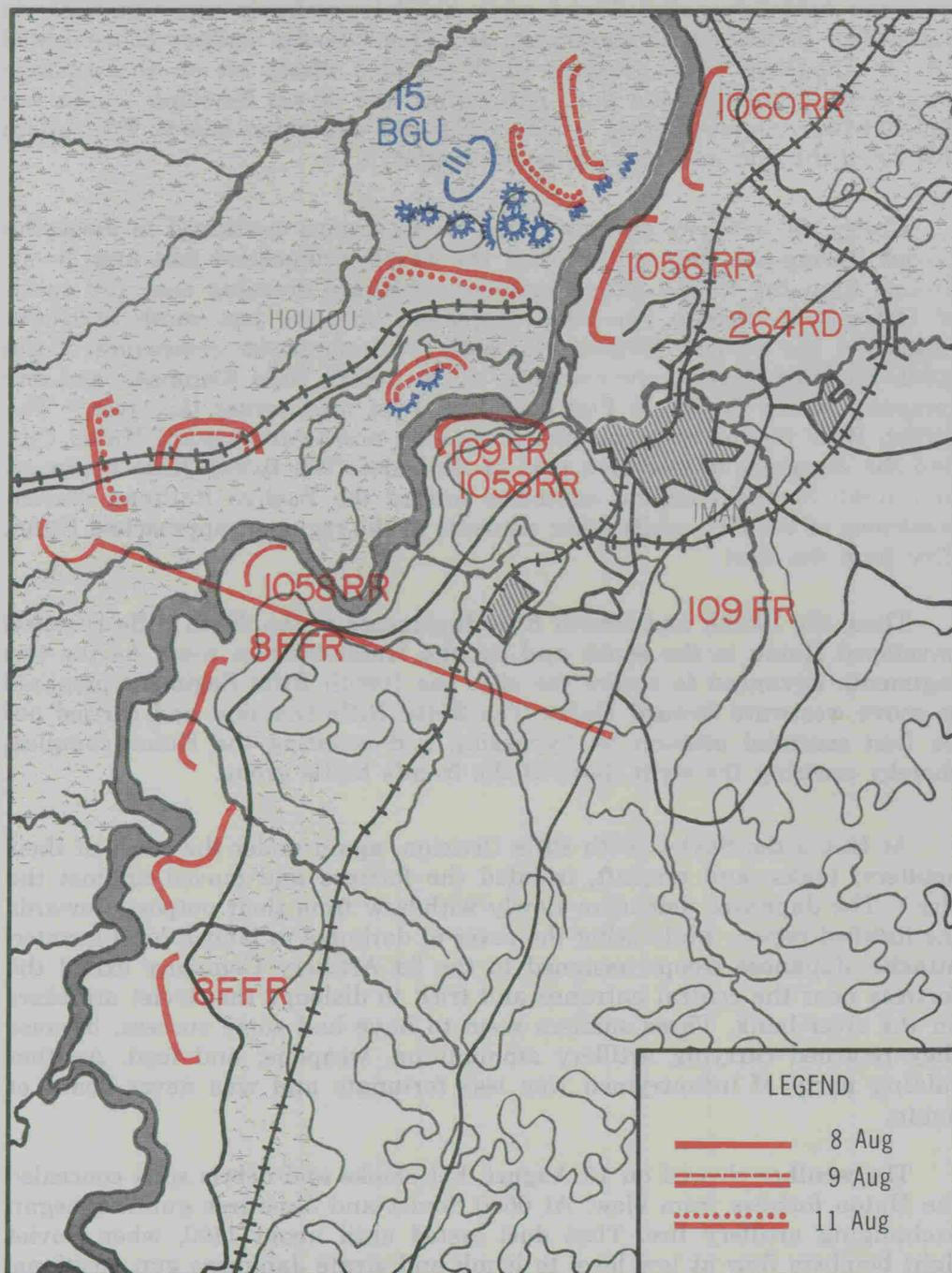
Not until 1100 did the acting commander of the 15th BGU authorize his artillery to return Soviet fire. At that time he ordered BGU forces to counterattack Soviet troops on the Ussuri's west bank and his artillery to suppress Soviet positions and artillery batteries.<sup>17</sup> The 40-cm howitzer then fired at the Iman railway bridge, while the 15-cm guns hit at Soviet artillery batteries opposite Hutou Station (see map 5—3). These specific targets had long been plotted on firing tables and had their meteorological data computed, so the initial rounds were very accurate. The one-ton projectiles hit the Iman bridge and, according to Japanese sources, temporarily closed it to rail traffic.<sup>18</sup>

The Soviets retaliated with a renewed artillery barrage directed against the now revealed Japanese artillery positions. An aviation force consisting of forty-nine IL-14 bombers, provided cover by fifty fighters, mounted a two-hour bombing raid on the defensive works, particularly the Japanese

\*According to Soviet accounts, one battalion made the river crossing.



Map 5-3. Japanese Artillery Coverage at Hutou



Map 5-4. Soviet Attack on Hutou

artillery batteries. Russian artillery fire was especially violent because there were ten battalions of a Soviet army artillery group in place in order to destroy the permanent emplacements at Hutou.<sup>19</sup> Soviet artillery concentrated on the Japanese 40-cm howitzer and scored a direct hit on the concrete embrasure protecting the gun. Altogether, the 40-cm howitzer would fire seventy-four rounds before a direct hit and explosion inside the cupola destroyed the gun and its crew on 12 August.

Under the artillery and air cover, Soviet troops continued to cross the Ussuri during the day and expand the Soviet bridgehead (see map 5—4). Troops from the 1056th Rifle Regiment continued crossing east and south of Hutou and overran two small Japanese outposts just south of Hutou (called by the Soviets *Krepost* [fortress]). Two composite companies of the 109th Fortified Region, one company of the 1058th Rifle Regiment, and one company of the 8th Field Fortified Area were also across the river.<sup>20</sup> The 1056th Rifle Regiment began slowly moving northward toward Hutou City and the Japanese observation post at Rinkodai. The 1058th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region advanced toward the Yuehya Railroad Station southwest of the city, while other elements of the regiment approached Hutou City from the west.

Thus, the 1058th and 1056th Rifle Regiments of the 264th Rifle Division enveloped Hutou to the south and cut the Hutou-Mishan road. As the two regiments advanced to secure the city, the 1060th Rifle Regiment prepared to move westward toward Hulin. The 264th Rifle Division had carried out its first essential mission by bypassing and isolating the Hutou complex, thereby securing the right flank of the front's battle group.

At Hutou the Soviet 264th Rifle Division, again under the cover of their artillery, tanks, and aircraft, isolated the fortress and moved against the city.<sup>21</sup> The Japanese defenders slowly withdrew from their outposts towards the fortified region, while using the cover of darkness to launch local counterattacks. Japanese troops assigned to the 2d Artillery Company exited the fortress near the central entrance and tried to dislodge the Soviet attackers on the river bank. These soldiers seem to have had some success, because they returned carrying artillery ammunition, weapons, and food. Another raiding party of infantrymen was less fortunate and was never heard of again.

The weather cleared on 10 August, but smoke and debris soon concealed the Hutou fortress from view. At 0630 Soviet and Japanese gunners began exchanging artillery fire. That duel lasted until about 1100, when Soviet light bombers flew at low level to bomb and strafe Japanese gun positions. Soviet bombers did inflict heavy casualties and destroyed one Japanese artillery piece. The aircraft were able to bomb with impunity because the Japanese had no antiaircraft artillery or machine guns to defend themselves against air attack.

The Soviets launched the main attack against Hutou City from the south, with diversionary attacks to the north and center of the fortress. The intent was to secure the city and thrust into the Japanese fortified zone north of Hutou. The 1056th Rifle Regiment and machine gun battalions of the 109th Fortified Region engaged in heavy fighting to capture the Hutou piers just east of the town.<sup>22</sup> The 1058th Rifle Regiment attacked the southern suburbs in an attempt to sweep through the city to the north and split the defenders



Hutou dock area

in two. Soviet troops managed to reach the defenses of 1st Company, 15th BGU, before a Japanese counterattack and hand-to-hand fighting drove them back south. By nightfall the Soviets, in spite of two Japanese counterattacks, had been able to seize the town of Hutou. They had less success against the fortifications adjacent to the city.<sup>23</sup> Indicative of the hard fighting, a captured Soviet lieutenant told the Japanese that he had had almost no sleep for three days and nights.<sup>24</sup>

To reduce the Japanese fortifications the Soviets formed assault groups from the attached combat engineer battalion and the forward rifle companies of the division's first echelon battalions (see map 5—5). These assault groups would infiltrate and reduce the Japanese positions. The division assault groups consisted of a rifle platoon with a field engineer and an antitank squad, one or two tanks or self-propelled artillery mounts, two machine gun squads, and two manpack flamethrower crews.\* Obstacle clearing groups included three or four machine gunners and three or four combat engineers equipped with mine detectors, prodders, two bangalore torpedoes, clippers, and compasses. Each first echelon rifle company had two such groups.<sup>25</sup> One Japanese account refers to "infiltration attacks," which were probably the Soviet assault and obstacle clearing groups working themselves into position for night attacks.

That evening, after the Soviet capture of Hutou City, a fierce Soviet artillery barrage raked the Japanese defenders in the fortified areas. The Soviets followed up the bombardment with a three-pronged attack by units from the 1056th Rifle Regiment, 1058th Rifle Regiment, and 109th Fortified Region. In this situation the Soviets relied on the forward battalions to penetrate the fortified areas. Taking advantage of darkness to conceal their movements and to attain surprise, they tried to seal off or destroy key strongpoints within the fortified areas by dawn.<sup>26</sup> The direct assaults on the night of the tenth failed.

After their failure to cut the fortress in half with a single offensive thrust, the Soviets became more cautious. The 35th Army commander ordered the 1056th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region to destroy "methodically individual fortifications."<sup>27</sup> The 1058th Rifle Regiment joined the 1060th in the army advance toward Hulin and Mishan. Soviet artillery and bombers pulverized the Japanese positions. This bombardment was so terrifying that the Japanese could not leave their underground positions to fight back. On the morning of this saturation fire, Soviet rifle units, accompanied by tanks (probably assault guns), again infiltrated Japanese defenses.

Assault groups overran the observation post for the central Japanese defenses. After destroying that pocket of resistance, they attempted to identify and bypass the strongest centers of Japanese defenses, leaving those for the rifle regiments to reduce.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, other Soviet units swung northwest around the fortifications.

At mid-morning two Soviet rifle companies working their way from the south to the north stormed Hill 119 and annihilated a platoon-size Japanese force defending that high ground. About the same time, a Japanese outpost manned by eighteen soldiers and flanking the southern approaches to Hutou from Hill 90 was overrun and the defenders listed as missing in action.

\*A Soviet rifle division contained a separate self-propelled (SP) artillery battalion (thirteen SU-76s).



These small unit actions were characteristic of the Soviets' systematic isolation and reduction of the fortress. They were not spectacular operations, but they achieved their purpose of dividing the fortress and blinding its eyes.

That afternoon the 2d Artillery Company's 30-cm gun position, located just south of Hill 103, came under attack by approximately three rifle companies. The Japanese managed to destroy their own guns before they had to withdraw. Matters got worse for the Japanese. Following up the capture of Hill 119, the Soviets surrounded the heights and cut off all contact between 2d Company, 15th BGU, and the main fortress. The 2d Infantry Company existed in isolation and would fight on until 26 August before succumbing to the Soviet onslaught.

The Soviets spent 12 August consolidating their gains and using their newly won high ground to spot for their artillery. Soviet forward observers atop Hills 90 and 119 called down accurate artillery fire on the Japanese defenders. Japanese artillery was unable to return the fire because the Soviet spotters were adjacent to them in dead spaces. As their artillery pummeled the Japanese, the Soviets made preparations for their next major assault on the fortress.

On 13 August Soviet artillery, tanks, and infantry launched a concentrated assault on the very center of the Hutou fortress and on the only Japanese observation post (Rinkodai) remaining on the high ground overlooking the Ussuri. With assault groups leading the way, Soviet riflemen and tanks struck the fortress from the west, or rear, approach. First, they overran a Japanese outpost on the northeast side of the fortress and then sent infantry and tanks to drive a wedge from the west. Simultaneously, to the east, Soviet troops took the summits in the 3d Infantry Company, 15th BGU, defensive sector, despite Japanese counterattacks and hand grenade battles. From this high ground the Soviets dispatched assault groups to infiltrate the Japanese fortifications. After locating the exhaust vents of the fortress, Soviet combat engineers poured gasoline into the vents and ignited the fuel. Garrison members sheltered underground were asphyxiated. This practice became a standard Soviet tactic to drive the Japanese to the surface.

During this fighting, one of the Soviet tanks supporting the infantry apparently scored a direct hit on a 15-cm gun belonging to the nearby 2d Battery of the 2d Artillery Company. Assault teams and heavy artillery destroyed thirty Japanese weapons emplacements in a single day, probably 13 August.<sup>29</sup> The 109th Fortified Region units conducted many of these combined arms attacks.

The Japanese platoon occupying the summit at Rinkodai, the high ground just above the fortress observation post, had been waging a bitter four-day struggle. The fifty men had been fighting since the evening of 9

August. Finally on the thirteenth, the Soviets dislodged the defenders, but the Japanese regrouped and attacked up the slope. Their counterattack surprised the Soviets and swept them from the heights. The Soviets, in turn, drove the Japanese from the high ground, and the positions changed hands several times as nearby Japanese observers with binoculars witnessed grenade exchanges and hand-to-hand combat. Soviet numbers spelled victory, and waving a huge red flag, Soviet infantrymen stormed the heights and drove away the Japanese. That night, however, a twenty-two-year-old probational officer led a final sword-swinging counterattack against the Soviets. He was killed by a hand grenade, and the rest of his men perished. The central outpost was now completely in Soviet hands.

The Soviets continued to proceed methodically. After a rainstorm on 14 August, a Soviet infantry battalion surrounded the remaining Japanese outpost near Hill 103, called Ostraiia (Sharp) by the Soviets. The Japanese defenders slipped away during the night and contacted friendly units. With the fall of the last Japanese observation post, the Soviets had effectively blinded Japanese artillery. The surviving artillerymen were therefore divided into antitank suicide squads and "special" (read "suicide") attack units.<sup>30</sup>

The Japanese defenders never received word of the emperor's radio broadcast ending hostilities, and the fighting continued as it had on previous days. Under overcast skies and rain, the Soviets tried to overrun the remaining Japanese 15-cm artillery piece in the 2d Artillery Company's sector. Grenades and point-blank artillery fire forced the Soviet attackers to withdraw. That night about fifteen Soviet medium tanks attacked the Japanese outpost protecting the entrance to the main underground fortress just north of Hill 103. The tanks shelled the entrance for about one hour before withdrawing.\*

In a downpour on 16 August, the struggle for the central heights, Ostraiia, continued. Farther west, Soviet tanks appeared that day, and about thirty attacked the 2d Infantry Company atop Hill 145. The company commander, a second lieutenant, had about 180 men—100 infantry and the rest a 37-mm antitank squad. The 37-mm was obsolete and worthless against Soviet T-34 tanks, as shells just ricocheted off the Soviet armor plating. The Japanese second lieutenant led repeated counterattacks against the Soviet tanks, but the net result was to get himself and most of his men killed in the hopeless struggle. By the end of the sixteenth, after a three-day struggle, the Soviets secured Ostraiia, but only after the central heights had changed

\*These tanks may have come from the 3d Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade, which had originally tried to spearhead the Soviet advance across the swampy Sungacha Valley. Finding it impossible to move in the marshes, this brigade and the 209th Tank Brigade were pulled back into reserve on 10 August. The 125th, less the 3d Battalion, later appeared at Mishan.<sup>31</sup> The apparent lack of coordinated effort in support of the 15 August night attack supports the theory that these tanks came from units not originally attached to the 264th Rifle Division or to the 109th Fortified Region. These two units seem to have operated together, probably because of the extensive training they had undergone just before the invasion.

hands nine times.<sup>32</sup> The hilltop did hold out for another eleven days, but the Soviets surrounded and occupied the hill above the underground fort on 20 August. The Japanese survivors, after a last-ditch attempt to break out on 26 August, committed suicide with hand grenades and explosives near the underground entrance.<sup>33</sup>

The defense was now degenerating into a cat-and-mouse game. Soviet engineers and infantrymen held most of the ground underneath which the Japanese tenaciously held scattered fortified points. The Soviets searched for exhaust vents, and if they discovered one, poured gasoline into it and ignited the fluid. Carbon monoxide levels in the underground vaults reached dangerous proportions, and some garrison members and their dependents became violently ill.

As desperate as their situation was, the Japanese had no intention of giving up. They demonstrated this dramatically on 17 August when the Soviets sent a five-man delegation comprising captured Japanese into the fortress under a white flag. The delegation reported in bright sunlight to a Japanese first lieutenant and informed him that Japan had surrendered unconditionally two days earlier. The officer departed; when he returned, he told the delegation that Japanese soldiers could never surrender.\* To punctuate his point, he suddenly drew his sword and beheaded one member of the surrender delegation.

The Soviets immediately pounded the Japanese positions with artillery and bomber attacks. Then Soviet assault groups led rifle companies in an attack against Hill 114, occupied by the 3d Infantry Company. Heavy fighting developed over the control of this summit. By nightfall the Soviets had already occupied the highest ground around Hill 114 and had brought in field artillery to fire directly into Japanese defensive positions. The Japanese counterattacked and once even seized the Soviet gun pits, but the superior Soviet strength drove the desperate defenders back. The Soviets then positioned self-propelled guns, rocket launchers, and other weapons previously unobserved by the Japanese near the slope of Hill 114. Their combined artillery bombardment, again coupled with air strikes, made it impossible for the Japanese defenders to leave their underground positions to defend the heights. Under this massive covering fire, Soviet riflemen took all of Hill 114 and then repositioned their own artillery weapons on the summit.<sup>34</sup>

That same day, the 4th Infantry Company, 15th BGU, defending the northernmost sector of the fortress and protecting the northern flank of the 2d Artillery Company's gun positions, was overrun. The 4th had held what the Soviets called Severnyi Gorodok (Northern Village) against Soviet attacks on 13 and 14 August. These company- and platoon-size Soviet attacks were

\*According to the revised 1941 version of the Japanese Articles of War, troops who surrendered uninjured risked court-martial punishment. The Soviets were also impressed by the incident and later described it as a wholesale massacre in which "prisoners were chopped up by the sabres of Japanese officers."<sup>35</sup>

most likely probes designed to fix the Japanese defenders and defenses for the main attack. With only about half his original 150 effectives still alive, the Japanese company commander had to abandon the northern salient and lead his survivors to the main Japanese fortifications. Most of the men, however, were killed or captured during their attempted escape. The company commander later died during captivity in the USSR.<sup>36</sup>

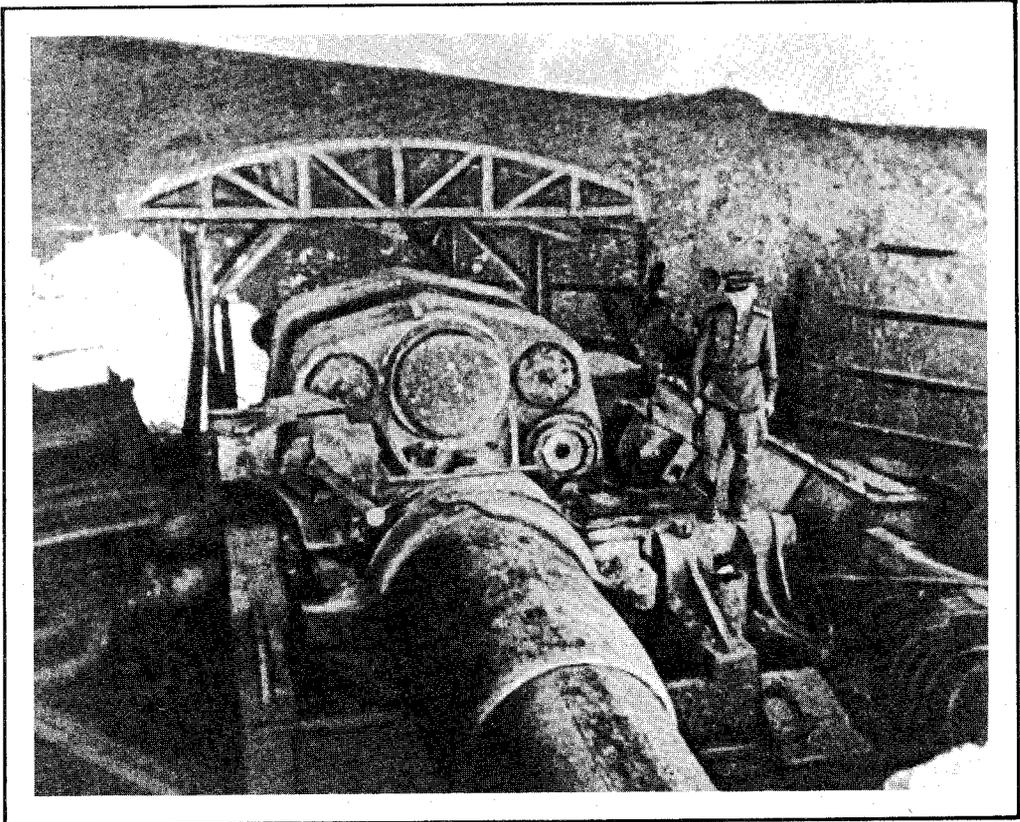
Around 2200 on 17 August, the Soviets succeeded in surrounding the 2d Artillery Company's positions. During this fighting, one Japanese 15-cm cannon gun turret was destroyed when its companion gun accidentally hit it while attempting to fire point-blank into the Soviet attackers. At dawn on 18 August, the Soviets launched a large-scale assault on the positions of the 2d Artillery. A Soviet rifle battalion, probably from the 1056th Rifle Regiment, supported by self-propelled guns, tanks, and the 97th Separate Artillery Battalion of the 109th Fortified Region, resumed its attack on the positions. Covered by the tank and self-propelled direct fire, as well as by the direct fire of the 97th's guns, Soviet infantrymen tried to break into the underground vaults and destroy the gun turrets within. A vicious struggle ensued in which the Japanese were reduced to firing blank cartridges into the onrushing Soviet troops. Not willing to squander manpower to achieve the inevitable, the Soviets withdrew. During the seventeenth the Soviets brought up two batteries of 203-mm guns to help reduce the fortified positions by direct fire. In all, thirty-four high powered guns joined in the reduction effort.<sup>37</sup>

The next day the Soviets continued their attacks, but the Japanese judged that Soviet losses on the eighteenth must have been considerable, because the Soviets did not press their attacks with any great enthusiasm. Artillery and aircraft pounded the remaining Japanese pockets of resistance, and "heavy tanks" (probably assault guns) reached the main entrance to the underground complex, where Soviet riflemen and machine gunners exchanged grenades and small arms fire with the Japanese defenders. Enemy shelling finally destroyed a portion of the thick concrete roof between the 2d Artillery Company and the command post. Communications were severed, and the passageway turned into a small lake because of a steady down-pour through the gaping hole in the roof. The Soviets now controlled all the top ground, and the Japanese scurried below, trying to strike back at their tormentors.

The fighting, for all intents, was over. On the night of the nineteenth, after Soviet probes against the central Japanese positions, several Japanese blew themselves to pieces to avoid the disgrace of being captured alive. Others were cut down by Soviet machine gunners as they tried to escape what had been transformed into a big underground tomb.

A few Japanese survivors watched as the Soviets collected Soviet dead in broad daylight on 20 August, apparently unconcerned that the Japanese were still prowling in the bowels of the forts. That night small parties of Japanese tried to escape. Some were successful, but most were not.

The Soviets proceeded methodically to finish off the Japanese still underground, including 600 noncombatants. The Japanese allege that the Soviets used some form of gas to eliminate these last pockets of resistance. Only on 22 August, following still more air strikes and artillery barrages, did the 109th Fortified Region finally declare that it had seized the center of Japanese resistance.<sup>38</sup>



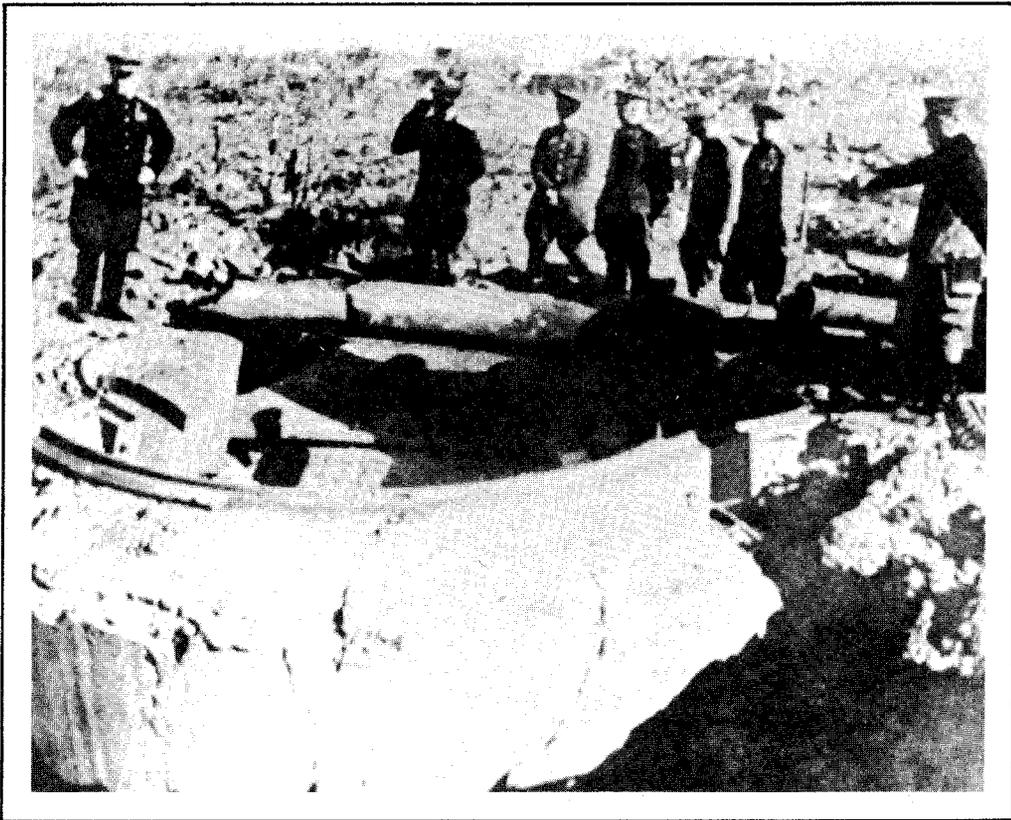
Captured Japanese heavy artillery piece at Hutou

## Conclusions

The Japanese garrison at Hutou fought with stoic valor, but, despite their efforts, the result was a foregone conclusion. What the Soviets did, reducing the Hutou fortress, is not therefore the paramount consideration. How the Soviets took the fortress is important. The battle at Hutou provides an insight into Soviet tactics against a fortified strongpoint, and there is every reason to believe that they would employ similar tactics, should the need arise in a conventional war.

The Soviet troops who participated in the reduction of the Hutou fortress complex were well trained and thoroughly rehearsed for the operation. Their training exercises conducted just before the invasion conditioned the

Japanese defenders to the sound of Soviet artillery fire. When that artillery fire was turned on the Japanese, they were uncertain whether it was the start of a shooting war or of an overexuberant local Soviet commander showing off. That initial confusion added to the Soviets' tactical surprise.



Marshal Meretskov examines a Japanese strongpoint at Hutou

While the Soviet troops may have been well rehearsed, that did not mean their operations were stereotyped. Flexibility existed throughout the Manchurian operations. The use of artillery, for instance, illustrates how the Soviets tailored their forces to meet operational requirements. The Hutou attackers received more artillery support than the southern wing of 35th Army, because Hutou was a fortified area. Conversely, they received less armor support than other 35th Army sectors, because they were not expected to make a rapid advance. Theirs was to be a systematic destruction of an enemy position fortified in width and depth. At Hutou the artillery performed its job by disrupting and isolating the Japanese defenders and covering Soviet assault groups. The assault groups represent another aspect of Soviet task organization, which tailored specific units for specific missions. Throughout the Hutou fighting, Soviet tactics were highly refined and characteristic of Soviet tactics employed during the entire Manchurian campaign.

There were no massed frontal assaults or wave-type attacks. Soviet infantrymen flanked, enveloped, encircled, isolated, and then destroyed Japanese strongpoints. The Soviets were extremely frugal with their own lives, but lavish with artillery and air support for their Hutou operation. Sheer Soviet manpower did not take Hutou. Soviet combined arms forces worked well together during the fighting. As soon as the infantry identified significant Japanese targets, Soviet air, artillery, or self-propelled assault guns would bring fire to bear on those targets. The infantry also showed its initiative by skillful infiltration tactics, usually conducted at night, which isolated Japanese strongpoints at a cost of minimum Soviet casualties. The infiltrators also became spotters and observers to identify lucrative targets for their other combined arms to overcome. The Soviets also took advantage of the cover of darkness to position troops and weapons for early morning surprise assaults against Japanese fortifications. It is true that the Japanese opposition was inferior in every respect to its Soviet opponents. But the Soviets were able to accomplish all their objectives at Hutou in a relatively rapid manner without expending vast quantities of human lives. Soviet commanders appear to have judged the Japanese military situation accurately and conducted their operations with the skill and precision that only years of command instill.

## Notes

1. U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Studies on Manchuria, vol. 11, pt. 2: *Small Wars and Border Problems* (Tokyo, 1956), 21.
2. Ibid. See also Yamanishi Sakae, "Tōmanshu Kōtō yōsai no gekitō" [Eastern Manchuria: The fierce battle of the Hutou Fortress], *Rekishi to Jinbutsu*, August 1979:99–100. In August 1945, Yamanishi was a second lieutenant in command of an outpost of the Hutou fortress.
3. Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 102.
4. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 122. Also see Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 100.
5. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 122.
6. Pechenko, "Armeiskaia," 42.
7. Ibid.; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94.
8. Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjō Senshishitsu [Japan Self Defense Forces, National Defense College Military History Department], ed., *Senshi sōsho: Kantōgun* (2) [Military history series: The Kwantung Army, vol. 2] (Tokyo: Asagumo shinbunsha, 1974), 482.
9. Kusachi Teigō, *Sonohi, Kantōgun wa* [That day, the Kwantung Army] (Tokyo: Miyakawa shobo, 1967), 97.
10. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 148.
11. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 137–42.
12. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 137, 152.
13. Pechenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
14. Ibid., 46; *SoMan kōkkyō*.
15. Pechenko, "Armeiskaia," 46; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 99.
16. Bōeichō, *Senshi Sōsho*, 395.
17. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 167; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 101–2.

18. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 139; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 204.
19. *IVMV*, 232.
20. Pechenko, "Armeiskaia," 46.
21. Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 102.
22. *IVMV*, 25.
23. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213.
24. *SoMan kōkkyō*.
25. I. Tret'iak, "Organizatsiia i vedenie nastupatel'nogo boia" [The organization and conduct of offensive battle], *VIZh*, July 1980:2.
26. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *IVMV*, 232.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *SoMan kōkkyō*.
31. Pechenko, "Armeiskaia," 47, nn. 12 and 13.
32. *SoMan kōkkyō*; Yamanishi, "Kōtō yōsai," 106–7.
33. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 253.
34. *Ibid.*, 285.
35. *Ibid.*, 263.
36. *SoMan kōkkyō*, 174.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *IVMV*, 252.

