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Chapter III

KALUGA AND THE 80-km. GAP

1.) Conditions in and around KALUGA

At the end of October I travelled from SPAS DEMENSKOJE by truck on rails from the supply route to KALUGA by way of SANOSNAJA-SUCHINITSCI. The railroad had not yet been completed, signals and switches were still missing. There was a migration of Russian civilians in progress along the railroad from east to west and vice versa, although trespassing on the right-of-way was prohibited. It was noticeable in Russia that a Russian never moves across country alone. There are never less than two.

KALUGA was a nice city, situated on the 200-meter wide OKA River. From the emergency bridge, which lay close to the water level, a steep path led up to the market place. From other sides, too, the city gave the impression of rising from the valley to a highly situated central part. This gave it a friendly appearance. The city itself was well preserved. It served as a center for all rear area forces to the right wing of the army. That wing was advancing on TULA via MAKAROWO. Farther north on the OKA, at ALEKSIN, lay the XIII Corps; left of it, at TARUSSA, the XII Corps. They did not cross the wide OKA.

Located in the city were a regional military government office, a military government detachment, a delousing company, an ambulance station, a large hospital, and medical units. At the eastern exit there was a PW camp with 5000 Russians and an officer's camp with 700 Soviet officers. In the vicinity of this camp, there was also a large Russian ammunition

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depot. Otherwise the city gave a peaceful impression, but all trade had ceased. The fisheries in the OKA were no longer in operation for lack of nets. At the piers, I saw half-sunk or damaged ships which had formerly been in service to the VOIGA.

After my arrival the mayor came to me and poured forth his tale of woe. All freedom of movement had been revoked, the town was out of supplies, soon hunger would set in. Firewood, too, was lacking since permission to go into the woods had been withheld. He requested my permission for freedom of movement in the immediate vicinity and for the release of a large grain depot that was burning on the outskirts of the city. I granted this, and on the very next morning the bulk of the population could be seen moving into the country and the woods to supply themselves for the winter.

When I returned in November, the mayor appeared and thanked me in the name of the city. He said enough provisions had been secured to last until the end of February. I was, however, requested to concern myself about provisions from March on. I promised this, but was never able to do it. I attempted to get business started up again: tanneries, very large wood-working mills, a coal mine. There was sufficient labor. Within a short time operations began. I was just about to start turning out a newspaper for KALUGA and the vicinity, to be printed in a well-preserved newspaper plant, but shortly before the opening, the Russians came. In order to get paper, I started operations at the paper mills at SAWOD and KONDROWO, north of KALUGA, where work began at once.

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KALUGA was very difficult to reach by automobile. From MJATLEWO, on the main supply route, the road was good to SAWOD. From there on, although 40-m. wide, it became terrible. I put local inhabitants, prisoners, German engineer troops, and the O.T. to work and had them build a road just east of the original road. This was kept cleared of snow in winter. Although it was never anything better than a poor and dangerous makeshift, it was later on the salvation of the right wing of the army.

The problem of evacuating prisoners from KALUGA presented great difficulties because of the lack of personnel. I started it however, especially the evacuation of the officers. The Russian ammunition depot could not be utilized because of the lack of transportation. But neither was I able to blow it up because the blast would have endangered the city of KALUGA. In consequence it fell subsequently into the hands of the Russians undamaged, along with many prisoners who had not been evacuated.

The road which led to the main supply depot at MJATLEWO on the supply route, became more and more perilous in the course of time, not only because of the snow drifts and the deep furrows with icy ridges, but especially because of the partisans who would appear in civilian clothes. KALUGA remained the center of my attention within my entire area.

Soon after the unfortunate order of the Fuhrer, prohibiting any retreat and directing that positions be held for the winter, I received, in mid-December, the order of the army commander to put KALUGA in a state of defense. This was easily ordered but difficult to execute. The wide OKA, major obstacle against an enemy attack froze over. Even at that date

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men were able to cross the ice; soon vehicular traffic across the ice would be possible. There were no combatant troops available. I designated the delousing company stationed in KALUGA as guards. I took every soldier I could find. I had the guns which had been left behind, taken to the southern slope of KALUGA. But there was a shortage of everything.

The army even asked whether I could hold KALUGA for one month if the troops in front were pushed back. They said I could count on support. I rejected the idea as impossible. The only result of such an attempt would be the rapid destruction of KALUGA. I stated that any evacuation of the population during such cold weather and under such road conditions would be out of the question. I delegated what necessary measures were to be taken to the senior military government officers and to an artillery colonel whom I had just met. I myself returned to my place of work, the JUCHNOW FOREST camp.

On 16 December, the army commander came to me and brought me the news that the Second Panzer Army had withdrawn from the neighboring area. The operation against TULA had failed. Between the right wing of the Fourth Army and the left wing of the Second Panzer Army (BELEW-ODOLEW) there now yawned a big gap. Into this gap strong Soviet forces were now pouring. They were already reported to have reached SHANINO, midway on the railroad line from TULA to KOSELSK. The grave question now arose whether the Soviet forces would advance further along the axis KOSELSK - SUCHINITSCHI, or whether they would swing south against the left wing of the Second Panzer Army, or lastly whether they might even possibly attack the right wing of

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the Fourth Army and envelop it. KALUGA would from now on be of increasing importance for the defense. I was told I should go there that very day and that no reconnaissance units were available. He informed me he had no planes, and that with this icy wind they could see nothing anyhow. Anything could be expected. In his opinion, it seemed impossible to hold the right wing of the army.

I said in this connection that in case of doubt the important city of KALUGA would be the main point of attraction for the Soviets since in this way the enemy could push into the rear of the Fourth Army. That very same day I went to KALUGA with 30 military police. I was accompanied by the quartermaster, adjutant, aide and two interpreters. The veterinary corps major, who took my place, the judge advocate and an interpreter remained in JUCHNOW to do the work there.

On 17 December, I drove with seven military policemen by truck from KALUGA for a reconnaissance trip in the direction of SHANINO. We were equipped with shovels, axes, picks, snow chains, ropes and boards. It was -35° C. The storm, coming from the east, drove ice into our faces with cutting force. The roads were terrible with slippery ice topped by snowdrifts. We called on the villages for aid and, by dint of much pushing and pulling, and even by hitching horses up to the trucks, we moved ahead. The air-line distance to SHANINO was only 40 km. but it took 10 hours of hard work and great hardships. However, I was able to ascertain that the Soviets were still in SHANINO. Scouting around with the aid of cigarettes, chocolate and brandy, I found out that the Soviet troops had come from TULA and were to march to KALUGA tomorrow.

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Early on 18 December I was able to report this situation to the army commander. He ordered me to notify our Commanding General at MAKAROWO. I was to work in close co-ordination with him. The latter - General Heinrici - told me during my visit that he would have to retreat in spite of Hitler's order, otherwise his corps would be taken in flank and annihilated. It was probable that the enemy would be in KALUGA before him. For the security of his right flank he wanted to commit the Division "General Bergmann" which had already been withdrawn.

2.) The 80-km. Gap on Both Sides of LICHWIN.

When I returned to KALUGA, I received orders from the Field Marshal on 18 December to take over the defense of the gap to the Second Panzer Army also. This gap was 80-km. wide though and the enemy was already approaching KALUGA from the south with his advance columns. The bad roads had held him up, otherwise he would already have been in KALUGA, for the OKA was frozen so hard that it had ceased to constitute an obstacle at KALUGA - and south of KALUGA there wasn't a soldier. The XXXXIII Corps Heinrici knew what the situation in KALUGA was and already a few units had appeared for its defense in order to keep it open for the retreat of this corps as well as that of the XIII.

As for myself, I was now faced with the question whether to take over the defense of KALUGA or that of the 80-km. gap. My sick quartermaster was in no condition to take care of the latter strenuous task, so I had to go there myself. Consequently I delegated the defense of KALUGA to an artillery colonel of the XIII Corps who had helped in the preparations and knew the conditions. My staff was detailed to him.

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To my inquiry, the army commander replied he could give me no troops for the defense of the 80-km. gap. However, it might be possible that five construction companies were still located at LICHWIN; they had worked on the bridge there. He said I could possibly find some stragglers and that it would be important to hold up the enemy as long as possible, as otherwise the right wing of the Fourth Army would be lost. An advance of the enemy via KALUGA to MEDYN or JUCHNOW could prove fatal to the entire Fourth Army.

I prepared my move to LICHWIN. I had already reconnoitered the road from KALUGA west of the OKA to PEREMYSCHL and found it unusable. The only thing left for me to do was to take the road to PEREMYSCHL east of the OKA via ANDREJEWSKOJE. I had to reckon on the possibility that this road was already blocked by Soviet troops.

At 0500 on 19 December 1941, with temperatures at -50° C. we started out from KALUGA. I took three trucks and a total of 30 military policemen, my aide (a young merchant from FURTH) and an interpreter (a district judge from POSEN, who had not served in that position as yet). A company of Landesschützenⁿ on 6 trucks under the command of a reserve captain (a painter from MUNICH) followed behind me. My instructions were that fire was to be opened only in case of an enemy attack or if I myself opened fire from the cab of the leading truck. We crossed the ice of the OKA and proceeded fast on the wide road through the forest. ANDREJEWSKOJE had already been occupied by the enemy, but the outposts had permitted us to pass through because they did not recognize us in the grey of the dawn.

*Editor's note: By Landesschützen are meant mediocre troops not fit for combat duty and normally used to guard rear area installations.

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Only the last two trucks of the Landeschutzen received fire. One truck was knocked out. The last one, with all the men of the two trucks aboard, returned to KALUGA.

During my first reconnaissance toward SHANINO I had noted a village east of PEREMYSCHL situated on an elevation which controlled the road over which the Soviet forces would advance from the south. I put the rest of the Landeschutzen company in position there with machine guns and ordered the captain to delay the approaching enemy as long as possible. In case he was attacked in some force, he was to fall back across the OKA in the direction of PEREMYSCHL, then north in the direction of WOROTYNSK, southwest of KALUGA. They were to seek contact with the Fourth Army. The company delayed the enemy 2 1/2 days, was then attacked, escaped and offered considerable resistance on the west bank of the OKA in the course of their retreat. The trucks were burned.

Against the warnings of the Russian ferryman not to cross there because the OKA still showed open water in some places, with my 3 trucks and 30 military policemen, I crossed the OKA near the ferring point. In PEREMYSCHL, I found an agriculture officer** with a few soldiers whom I employed for the defense of PEREMYSCHL. For my 30 men and myself there now began an excruciating trip or, more correctly speaking, a pushing across the SHISDRA south in the direction of LICHWIN. On the

**Editor's notes: An officer of the Special Branch responsible for food and agriculture in occupied territory.

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heights between our road and the OKA a few skiers appeared in the afternoon; later they increased and came in whole squads. My military policemen were overjoyed; they thought the troops of LICHWIN were coming to aid them. They were Russians, however, who were following us and watching our laborious efforts. Toward 2300 hours, we finally reached LICHWIN. The city was still alive. Construction soldiers came back to the town. When asked why, their answers were that the enemy was attacking and they wanted to return to their quarters here in LICHWIN. I established my headquarters in the eastern end of the city where I had a clear view over the fields of snow to the east. I established a guard there and had several construction officers that I could reach, report to me. The situation was as follows

Five construction companies, with two weeks service, equipped with Norwegian and Dutch rifles with about 20 rounds each, had advanced to TSCHEREPOT to establish an outpost. They reported that the enemy had chased them out and was following. According to their report two Landesschutz companies were still standing guard on the railroad bridge south of LICHWIN. The construction companies were under the command of a lieutenant colonel of railway engineers.

On the morning of 20 December, I posted my five construction companies in defensive positions around LICHWIN. I fully realized their ignorance of military matters. The sole purpose of the entire maneuver was to deceive the enemy. In case they could not check an attack, they were to withdraw to KOSELSK. On both sides of the railroad from LICHWIN to KOSELSK there was a forest which was occupied by

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3,000 partisans. Any retrograde movement, therefore was to use the northern edge of this forest.

I sent the two companies of Landeschutzen that were guarding the bridge, to PEREMYSCHL by sleds, because there they were more important. They were attacked on the way, had to abandon the sleds, but were able to get through.

I had ordered a military police company to come by rail from ROSSLAWL via SUCHINITSCI. It arrived on 23 December after a stormy trip through the partisan occupied forest, with the locomotive and three cattle cars riddled with bullets. They constituted the mainstay of my mission but were not equipped for any such task.

After posting my construction soldiers and encouraging them, I took some sleds to which I harnessed horses of the construction company. With these sleds, occupied by my 30 military policemen, I travelled around in the gap, day after day, from morning to night, with the thermometer steadily at -50° C. and with a cutting east wind, telling the villages that they would have to quarter troops. Nearly always I was accompanied by Soviet ski troops on the hills who went into the villages after I had left and asked what my message had been. I pretended I had a large staff.

In the south, my field of activity was limited since the area about 50 km. south of LICHWIN was blocked by strong partisan groups. However, I had the pleasure on one of these trips of finding 130 stragglers who were floundering through the woods off the roads, carrying 30 machine guns. I hauled them in by sled and, after a short period

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of rest in LICHWIN, sent them to PEREMYSCHL, since I recognized my position to be hopeless. I wanted to save as many men as possible for maintaining contact along the front.

I sent the military police company forward on sleds for a reconnaissance via TSCHEREPOT in the direction of SHANINO. They stayed in TSCHEREPOT overnight but were surprised and attacked at night by ski troops. The entire company was scattered. From the captain down they arrived, first singly and then in groups throughout the dawn, each claiming to be the last of the company. I was able to reassure them and did not have such a pessimistic outlook. As usual, the entire company returned, only the first sergeant was missing. He, too, returned after 8 weeks, having fled from Russian captivity; his condition, however, was wretched. The result of the reconnaissance was a map captured from a Russian officer and a list from which I could see that I faced three Russian divisions, that the main Russian forces were still pinned down, that their front faced toward LICHWIN and that they, therefore, had not been employed in the main thrust toward KALUGA.

The right wing of the Fourth Army had been pursued by strong forces from MAKOROWO, but only advanced troops of no great strength had been committed up till now against the flank and the rear of the Fourth Army. Thus the right wing of the army was able to effect a very difficult withdrawal from this situation. Any chance for envelopment or complete encirclement by the Soviets, which had seemed very probable, had now passed.

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I brought my men a little closer to LICHWIN. On the night of 28 December, despite the fact that the snow lay deep on the wires, the telephone from KALUGA was still in working order, although the connection was somewhat unclear. Over this line, at midnight 28/29 December, the order reached me from the army commander that my mission had been accomplished. The construction companies and my military police company were to be transferred to the Second Panzer Army which had taken over this sector. If it were possible for me to leave now, I was to return to my post at JUCHNOW as quickly as possible. He thanked me heartily for my help in the emergency. Enemy mortars were just firing on the eastern outskirts of LICHWIN, but I noticed that they were firing short because they had not crossed the ice of the OKA.

I returned the construction companies to their commander, Lt. Col. Siebert, on the morning of 29 December, and discussed the situation and an early withdrawal to KOSELSK with him. I sent my M. P. company south through the forests to the Second Panzer Army. With my 30 military policemen, I opened a road through the meter-high snow to the railroad station. I had detailed men who were expert craftsmen to repair the riddled locomotive, and with dry wood we got up steam. Toward noon we were ready and risked the trip with the three riddled cattle cars through the partisan infested forest, although reports said that the rail line had been destroyed. We were well armed, ready for a fight to the finish. We burned the trucks. We got through with everything shot up and riddled. The mines blew up behind our

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speeding train.

The construction companies, too, returned to KOSELSK several days later after tiring marches with several casualties and their commander wounded, and then returned to SUCHINITSCHI by rail. They had done their job very well. When we saw each other again later, faces brightened, hands were waved and the call "LICHWIN" reminded us of our experiences in common. The military police company, too, was returned to me by the Second Panzer Army after eight weeks.

I arrived in SANOSNAJA with 30 military policemen on 29 December about 2300 hours, ordered cars and drove in the cold winter night forward to JUCHOW, where I arrived about 0300 on the morning of 30 December 1941. The G - 4 of the army was sleeping on my straw sack. He revealed to me that the army was moving to the rear, that the right wing had been saved and that my headquarters would be at SPAS DEMENSKOJE. At daybreak I drove there, where my officers and soldiers from KALUGA also arrived. The entire staff of Korück 339 ["][Hq. army rear area] was beaming, especially when the thanks of the army arrived during the New Year's Eve party. ["]Korück had saved the army's right wing from envelopment and destruction.

There were several medals issued. On my 65th birthday I myself received from the ["]Führer the clasps to the Iron Crosses I had already earned in 1914. The name "Korück" now was a name of honor, whereas the frontline soldier heretofore had looked upon the men of the rear as not quite full fighting men.

[signed] von Unruh
General of Infantry

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