

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

7

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

MS # D-183

OPERATIONS OF THE 255th INFANTRY DIVISION IN RUSSIA

22 JUNE 1941 to NOVEMBER 1941

DRAFT TRANSLATION

Originally prepared for Headquarters European Command,  
Office of the Chief Historian

Restricted Classification  
Removed Per  
Executive Order 10501

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-1-

I. Introduction

In April 1941 the 255th Infantry Division was stationed in the vicinity of Schweidnitz, Waldenburg, and Reichenbach in Silesia. At the outbreak of the war the division had been formed as part of the fourth wave  $\overline{}$ divisions formed in 1939 $\overline{}$  from replacement units (1st and 2d Replacement Battalions of the 10th Infantry Regiment and the 52d Infantry Replacement Regiment). In 1940 the division had participated in the Western campaign with great success and light casualties. In the fall of 1940 approximately one third of the division's units had been assigned to newly organized formations. Recruits constituted the replacements. During the winter of 1940-41 the division underwent systematic and uninterrupted training at the Atlantic coast. Before training of company size units could get under way the division moved to Silesia in February 1941. Training was now continued and included regimental and division exercises.

On 21 April 1941 the division moved to the training center at Radom in Poland, ostensibly to relieve the units stationed in that area. The division's northern column marched via Landsberg, Welun, and Petrikau, and arrived at the Radom training center, which had just been completed, in early May. The men were adequately billeted in wooden barracks. The men's clothing and equipment which had deteriorated because of rainy weather during the march was repaired or replaced during the division's

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-2-

three weeks' stay at the training center. Combat exercises had been conducted during the march.

In early May only the outer edges of the training center could be used because of wet ground and the lack of roads. Later, training of battalion and regimental size units could be conducted; simulated combat practice firing took place on a larger scale. One division field exercise was also held. The regimental commanders were told only later that this exercise had corresponded to the planned commitment of the division across the Bug.

The training at Radom had greatly improved the division's tactical know-how.

Toward the end of May the division continued its march along three different routes to the area on both sides and west of Wlodawa on the Bug. The northernmost column marched via Deblin and Kolk to Parczew, arrived there about 10 May, and was billeted in crowded quarters. The troops were gradually moved closer to the Bug, but always in such a manner that they could not be observed from the east. The vehicles were carefully camouflaged. The men were allowed to leave their billets only after dusk. Training was conducted in the forests or in the evening. The display of unit insignia had already been prohibited since April. The units were given code names. Flies were already quite a nuisance at this time of the year.

Forward, at the Bug, one division had been deployed as a covering force on a wide front. This security task was assumed shortly before

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-3-

22 June by the 255th Division. All customs of the old division, including its methods for relieving front-line patrols were strictly adhered to.

The roads toward the front had to be repaired. Road construction was already hampered by the lack of stones in this area. Long corduroy roads had to be constructed, and bridges had to be reinforced.

Wherever there were Ukrainian civilians, they did not display a hostile attitude.

The most diverse rumors circulated among the troops about the High Command's intentions. Possibly these rumors were launched by German propaganda agencies. According to one rumor Stalin would pretend to protest, but would permit the German troops to march through the Ukraine and the Caucasus for an attack in Iraq and Iran.

The regimental and independent unit commanders were informed of the impending campaign only a few days prior to 22 June. Very careful reconnaissance was now conducted; the men were disguised as local inhabitants. During daytime nobody was permitted to approach the Bug. Aerial photographs covering an area 10 km. east of the Bug were distributed.

The equipment of the men in the infantry divisions did not meet the requirements of a campaign in the East. The supply vehicles were too heavy. Each regiment had been provided with a column of light, one-horse vehicles of the type commonly used in the East (Panje carts). but this was not enough. The handcarts which accompanied the infantry could be moved only with difficulty over the sandy paths. They should have been replaced from the very beginning by Panje vehicles.

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-4-

The German 105-mm. howitzer was too heavy. It was difficult to move the medium artillery battalions without prime movers. The cold-blooded horses required much care and were difficult to feed; in time they became the meat reserve of the East.

The fact that the units participating in this campaign had been equipped exclusively with German motor vehicles was clearly an advantage. However, there were too many different types of vehicles. Many civilian passenger cars with limited road clearance were still used as combat vehicles; this impeded operations.

A decision to use mainly motorized units would have made command of the troops much easier, in view of the road conditions. Furthermore, during lulls in the battle, a motorized unit does not require more supplies than a division with horse-drawn vehicles. On the other hand, in a campaign in the East, no unit can get along without the proper number of the locally used (Panje) vehicles. Heavy rains, the muddy season in the spring and fall, and the winter with its deep and lasting blanket of snow make Panje horses indispensable for supply tasks. At the proper time sleds are also essential.

Troop morale was very good. They believed in the superiority of the German Army over the armies across the border. Through their training the men had gained confidence that they could cope with all situations. The caliber of the men was above average.

The organization of the infantry divisions was similar but not identical. The 225th Division was organized as shown in Appendix I.

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-5-

As a result of losses during the march the actual strength of the division at the time was only 5 percent below authorized strength.

II. Action

Just before 22 June the Bug River had fallen to a level which seemed to permit use of the fording sites shown on Sketch 1. The division's entire equipment of pneumatic floats had been issued to the infantry units. However, only one rifle squad per company could cross the river with the first wave. Ropes strung across the river were supposed to expedite the crossing. The artillery and the most important vehicles of the other arms and services were to be ferried across the Bug near Wlodawa. A bridge construction battalion was to build a bridge near Wlodawa.

The division had been divided into four groups for the attack (see Sketch 1). The planned attack had previously been discussed with the unit commanders as a map exercise. The 455th Infantry was to advance south of Wlodawa, the 475th Infantry near Wlodawa. The 2d and 3d Battalions of the 465th Infantry were to attack in the direction of Priborovo, while the reinforced 1st Battalion of the 465th Infantry was to attack near Dolhobrody. This battalion was moving forward as a separate unit since otherwise too big a gap would have existed between the 255th Division and the 1st Cavalry Division, where the latter was attacking near Slawatycze with its southernmost elements. A staff officer of the 255th Division had been attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. To the south there was a

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

--6--

gap of approximately 40 km. to Army Group South, up to the railroad line Chelm - Kovel.

The division's initial objective was a penetration of 12 - 15 km. The division had the over-all mission of protecting the southern flank of XXIV Panzer Corps which was attacking in the north; a difficult assignment. Prior to and during the Bug crossing the division was subordinate to XXIV Panzer Corps, under General Geyr von Schweppenburg.

The machine gun companies of the 267th Division moved up to the front in order to pave the way for the crossing, but were not allowed to cross the river.

Until the very end nothing unusual occurred on the enemy-held bank of the river. Only the high, wooden observation towers were manned by Russian guards. No ground fortifications were in evidence.

During the night of 20-21 June the units moved up to assembly areas located in the woods and to houses 2-3 km. behind the Bug. In the afternoon the men played soccer at Wlodawa in order to deceive the enemy. In the evening of 21 June the men were told of the impending mission; however, they had no knowledge of its political significance. As soldiers they were being called to battle and they believed the reasons which were given fully justified the impending campaign.

Under cover of darkness the men were taken to the jump-off positions. Talking and the displaying of light were prohibited. The attack was to begin at 0300, 22 June, preceded by a 20-minute artillery preparation. Artillery fire was also to be directed against enemy-held sectors which

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-7-

were not under attack. The men had dug in at the jump-off positions.

With the opening of artillery fire our units crossed the Bug. It was already light. The artillery fire was well-aimed. Smoke shells were accurately fired, accounting for the direction of the wind. However, while the infantry advanced rapidly, the artillery had completed its concentration before the nearest villages on the far bank of the river had been reached by our men. This was partly caused by the fact that the river was quite deep at some points -- something which was not apparent in the aerial photographs. The infantry continued to advance in spite of all obstacles. There were no enemy outposts around the villages. For the most part the infantry was fired on just outside the villages; this resistance was overcome by fire and movement. Frontier security guards and customs officials offered some resistance in the villages, while there was no sign of enemy artillery. These villages were soon in our hands except for some enemy strong points. Already at this early stage in the fighting we encountered the toughness of the Russians; they continued to fight even when the situation was hopeless. One strong point, a heavily fortified field fortification at Przyborowo, held out until 23 June; however, this did not affect the general scope of the advance. Our initial casualties were minor.

The remainder of the division, following behind the attacking infantry, was now able to cross the river without enemy interference. Had the enemy offered resistance sooner and closer to the river, the crossing by the rear elements would have been more difficult, despite the fact that

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-8-

the river's west bank was higher than the east bank. We had achieved our goal, surprise. Once we were beyond the range where enemy fire was effective, we finally found the fording sites. Mounts and the horses pulling heavy infantry weapons now were able to cross the river.

The artillery, heavy combat vehicles, communications vehicles, and field kitchens were ferried across the river on improvised rafts, according to an exact schedule.

After the north to south highway, 3 - 4 kilometers east of Wlodawa, had been captured, the units were reorganized and the rear elements ordered to close up. Patrols of the mounted platoons reconnoitered the terrain to a depth of 5 - 8 kilometers. Bicycle patrols of the division reconnaissance battalion could only advance along the road to Oltush. Enemy resistance was encountered in the vicinity of Oltush.

The replacement battalion relieved elements of the 455th Infantry near Koshary, where it opposed enemy pressure from the south.

Our next objectives were the rail line near Maloryta and the road Maloryta - Kobryn. This road was of particular importance, considering the small number of hard surface roads in the East.

A supplementary order was issued at noon, 22 June 1941, to all units. The leading elements of the regiments were to reach a general north-to-south line, running through Oltush, by midnight. Although the men had previously familiarized themselves with the terrain with the help of aerial photographs, they now found it difficult to find their way. The few maps available at the time were inadequate. Some roads came to an

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-9-

end in the middle of nowhere. Much of the soil was sandy, and soon it was very hot and dusty. Our plan to let the men drink only boiled water to prevent disease could not be carried out.

By early morning of 23 June our troops had reached the sector around Oltush. Finally, the rations arrived. Motor vehicles needed for combat were still being ferried across the Bug.

The reconnaissance battalion was sent ahead on the same day by way of Chocislav toward Mokransy; this village was to be captured.

The 465th Infantry was supposed to follow the reconnaissance battalion in the direction of Lachovce; the 475th Infantry was ordered to take Maloryta. Here the regiment encountered elements of the 1st Cavalry Division and was able to get a foothold in the village by nightfall. Enemy units which had occupied the village withdrew to the south and southeast.

In its advance toward Chocislav the 465th Infantry encountered a road which defies description; it completely disappeared into sand resembling dunes. Most of the vehicles had to be left behind the guards, even before Chocislav was reached. Subsequently, they were moved up in groups with two teams of horses pulling them. The troops found their way by using compasses and sighting church steeples. The flat-topped wooden houses frequently made the villages visible only from a close distance.

The 255th Reconnaissance Battalion encountered the enemy at Mielniki. A Russian motorized battalion with light armored reconnaissance cars was driven from the village; two enemy vehicles were destroyed with antitank rifles. The edge of the woods beyond the village was held by the enemy.

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

--10--

The 465th Infantry gave the 255th Reconnaissance Battalion time to reorganize its units and began to mop up farther east. The regiment then infiltrated under cover of darkness before the enemy could bring up reinforcements. The division ordered the regiment not to advance farther during the night because the situation was not clear. This order failed to reach the 3d Battalion in time. By 2300 the battalion seized Lachovce in a surprise move and held the village. On the following day enemy troops deployed in the woods north of the village found their route of withdrawal blocked by this move.

On the morning of 24 June the enemy tried to break out of the woods west of Lachovce to the east and southeast but was recognized in time by our artillery, then moving up, and it opened fire immediately. Infantry units following the artillery were now committed and the artillery moved farther to the northeast. The 255th Reconnaissance Battalion followed the 465th Infantry and advanced on Mokraný.

The enemy artillery in the woods -- consisting mainly of heavy mortars -- was in a difficult position. We finally succeeded in driving the enemy from the open terrain around Lachovce.

On the same day, LIII Corps assumed command by order of Fourth Army. The woods were to be cleared of the enemy as quickly as possible in order to secure the highway from Maloryta to the northeast. Carrying out this order, in the evening the 465th Infantry attacked with its 3d Battalion from Lachovce westward, while the 455th Infantry attacked a village east of Maloryta from the southeast with one battalion.

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-11-

This attack by the battalion of the 455th Infantry was successful, and the village was taken. The attack of the 3d Battalion of the 465th Infantry came to a halt after some initial success had been achieved. However, the enemy was now hemmed in even more. The road junction approximately 12 kilometers northeast of Maloryta was now likewise blocked in the north by the 475th Infantry and in the northeast by the 455th Infantry (minus one battalion).

In the evening of 25 June the enemy broke through this encirclement in the direction of Mielniki and surprised two batteries of the 267th Division, which had moved into the area west of Mielniki. The gun crews were almost without exception slain during the ensuing bayonet fighting. Individual corpses were found to have been bayoneted up to seventeen times. The village of Mielniki, which had been occupied by the 2d Medical Company and supply units, was now surrounded by the enemy, and our units were not relieved for 36 hours.

Northwest of Mokransy our units had repulsed several enemy breakthrough attempts. An order previously issued by higher headquarters was now carried out: to disrupt by demolition all roads which led from the southeast toward the division's perimeter.

On 26 June, when the enemy's resistance seemed to weaken, the 1st Battalion of the 465th Infantry advanced along a wide front from Lachovce to comb the woods to the north. In the center of the forest the battalion was suddenly fired on from all directions. The Russians had climbed into

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-12-

the trees and had permitted the battalion's leading elements to pass. The members of the battalion were momentarily stunned and the battalion again withdrew from the forest. It reported about 75 casualties, including 20 missing.

On 27 June the forest was once more subjected to systematic artillery fire, and the entire 475th Infantry advanced from north to south behind the artillery barrage. This time enemy resistance was weak. This was due to the fact that, on 26 June, part of the enemy force had broken through to the northeast. In the center of the forest the regiment found the twenty missing members of the 465th Infantry; all of them had been shot through the neck and killed. This atrocity made our men extremely indignant.

In this manner the difficult fighting around Maloryta came to a conclusion. We had learned some bitter lessons. There could be no repetition of losses like those suffered by one battalion of the 465th Infantry right at the outset of the campaign. The Russians, fighting in terrain with which they were familiar, had turned out to be an extremely tough enemy who was not afraid to die. On the other hand, the division had destroyed two-thirds of an enemy infantry division; several thousand prisoners had been taken, and many vehicles and a number of guns captured.

Local reconnaissance no longer encountered any enemy forces. The enemy units which had broken through seemed to have vanished into thin air; however, during the next few days individual marching units were still fired upon, especially toward nightfall. Our supply columns moved in convoy

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-13-

whenever possible. They had to learn how to protect themselves, as the infantry had other duties to perform.

In the course of this fighting, the 267th Division, previously in the rear, had overtaken the 255th Division. On 28 June the 255th Division continued its advance to the northeast via Kobryn, mainly on the one serviceable road. Leaving the road meant a quick reduction of the efficiency of men and horses, as well as damage to the axles and springs of motor vehicles. Vehicles with cross-country mobility were lacking. Because of dust and heat the men marched mostly at night.

The march route ran via Bereza Kartuska and Slutsk toward Bobruysk. On a few occasions the enemy dropped bombs on traffic centers. Where railway engineer troops were at work they had to perform their duties with their weapons handy and dared not work in small groups. Supply bases were being established.

Bothersome insects and lack of facilities for cleanliness in the particular part of Russia interfered with the troops' rest after foot marches.

In daytime, German transport planes regularly flew over the march route at low altitude in order to supply the armored units spearheading the advance. The debris of battle could be seen along the road; for the most part it was Russian motor vehicles and guns. They could be easily recognized by their light construction, which made for greater mobility.

On 11 July a corps order instructed the 3d Battalion of the 465th Infantry Regiment -- the regiment was marching in second place with the

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-14-

artillery battalion -- to move ahead on trucks to Teluzka, in order to protect our bridgehead at Bobruysk (see Sketch 2). Farther south the 267th Division was already engaging enemy forces attacking from the southeast. Elements of the 167th Division, which had approached from the west via Osipovichi also participated in the ensuing fighting, until this division was later committed farther east from Bobruysk via Chigirinka.

About the same time a Kampfgruppe [improvised unit] of the 1st Cavalry Division was fighting enemy units which were pushing northward near Parichi, on the west bank of the Beresina. The enemy force comprised one Russian cavalry corps. The Kampfgruppe of the 1st Cavalry Division was relieved by an improvised motorized unit of the 255th Division with plenty of antitank weapons, under the command of the division personnel officer (G-1). The 1st Cavalry Division advanced by way of Star Bychov, in order to link up with the armored units which had already crossed the Dnepr north of that locality.

During the night of 12 - 13 July 1941 the bulk of the 255th Division crossed the Beresina. The Russian rivers, which reach their highest level in springtime and sometimes have very strong currents, are <sup>mostly</sup> spanned by high wooden bridges of a special construction. These bridges frequently could not be repaired by our combat engineers without special technical advice. Low bridges last only a short time, since they are subjected too much to the prevailing weather conditions.

The highway and railroad bridges across the Beresina had been demolished. An auxiliary bridge, capable of carrying heavy weapons, had been

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-15-

constructed. The division was now ordered by LIII Corps to advance north-eastward on the Bobruysk-Mogilev highway. When it became known that Russian forces had advanced westward and crossed the Dnepr near and south of Rogachev, the division was ordered to proceed in the direction of Rogachev. Its mission was to drive the enemy back across the Dnepr.

The leading battalions of the division engaged the enemy on 13 July, while the 475th Infantry participated in the battle on 14 July on both sides of the Hollbahn [designated main axis of motorized transportation] to Rogachev. The 455th Infantry, farther south, saw action along the line Zabolote - Chapany and southwest of the line. Division headquarters was initially set up at Loskovskaya. The 2d Battalion of the 465th Infantry was committed west of Bobolovo, facing southward, to protect the route of advance. The 1st Battalion of the 465th Infantry reached Loskovskaya at 0200, 14 July.

When it became evident on 14 July that units of the division were advancing too rapidly in the sector north of Rogachev, the reserve battalion of the division (1st Battalion of 465th Infantry) was attached to the 475th Infantry to be committed on its left flank. By noon, 15 July, we had succeeded in relieving the two other battalions of the 465th Infantry from their security mission. They were moved, in part, on trucks. The 3d Battalion of the 465th Infantry was relieved by motorized units of the 497th Infantry, 267th Division. The 2d Battalion, 465th Infantry near Ostrov was relieved by the 339th Infantry, 167th Division. The 465th Infantry was

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-16-

ordered to attack at 1500, 15 July and to seize the terrain on both sides of Bronnoye in order to counter increasing enemy pressure on our northern flank. During the ensuing action the villages of Chapany and Bronnoye changed hands several times. The 407th Infantry of the 267th Division was attached to the division until the evening of 15 July and was then ordered to advance toward Tikhinichi. During an engagement with the enemy this unit found it difficult to hold the village. During the night 15-16 July our reconnaissance discovered that the enemy was withdrawing in the sector facing 465th Infantry. It was now decided that the division's left wing should advance to the Dnepr on 16 July. However, this order had to be rescinded because enemy units were advancing southward in the direction of 407th Infantry -- thus threatening the division's left flank from the rear.

The division now held a front with a width of 25 kilometers. The enemy force was Marshal Timoshenko's army, who attacked on a wide front with more than twenty divisions and advanced to Rogachev and Zhlobin. The enemy's artillery near Rogachev had been reinforced by numerous heavy guns with ample ammunition. Among other units, the enemy committed the Moscow Artillery School near Rogachev; these artillery troops were well-trained. The 255th Division thus suffered numerous casualties.

At noon, 17 July, the northern flank of the division was relieved by an attack of the 55th Division. This attack, directed from northwest to southeast, touched Tikhinichi and Bronnoye with its right flank. Bronnoye

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-17-

remained immediately behind the front. However, even this force was not strong enough to drive the enemy from the important city Rogachev.

The 407th Infantry was now returned to the 267th Division. The 465th Infantry was given one day of rest at Liski and was again committed in the afternoon of 19 July southeast of Uchvatovka. Its forward line was near Kelayev Grud and Kobanovka; contact was established with the 267th Division to the southwest. This enabled us to concentrate on the 455th Infantry in the center of the division and to move this unit farther north; the 475th Infantry, which had suffered heavy casualties in the fighting, was able to reduce its sector. The boundary between the 255th and the 55th Divisions was south of the Rollbahn to Rogachev.

In the subsequent weeks the division with its shortened front was strong enough to repulse continuing Russian attacks. At this time fighting for several villages, including Kaleyev Grud and Zabolote was still in progress. The Russians had thus succeeded in holding a position which prevented the German units from observing the terrain along the Dnepr.

East of Star Bychov elements of the German XII Corps had exploited the successes of the armored units and gained a foothold on the east bank of the Dnepr. We had thus won a jump-off position for the operations which were to follow during August.

The division now had also proved its worth in major operations. However, the individual units still required constant supervision during combat; a careful check had to be made that reconnaissance and

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-18-

observation of enemy positions, as well as collaboration between infantry and artillery were not neglected. Overlapping fields of observation by the individual artillery observation posts, occupation of two observation posts by a battery, selection of these observation posts, and collaboration with the heavy infantry weapons required constant supervision. Exchange of information between the various components of the division was operating smoothly. The regimental commanders had shown themselves capable of performing their duty; the battalion commanders, unfortunately, were only average. In early August the strength of some companies was for the first time reduced to less than 100 men.

The appearance of the enemy air force had only a harrassing effect on their targets. The Russian artillery at the time mainly fired upon villages which it could observe; however, long-distance artillery fire was directed against road junctions. During this first phase of the campaign the Russians still had not learned how to locate our batteries quickly with their fire. Consequently they mostly distributed their fire over a large area.

Toward the end of July it became apparent that the Russians intended to seal off Bobruysk from the west. A cavalry corps advanced across the Rollbahn west of Bobruysk near Glusha. Rear elements of LIII Corps were taken by surprise. Russian units which had made their escape from the Minsk pocket --- approximately 12,000 men under Marshal Kulik --- were moving eastward via Osipovich. Bobruysk, where the headquarters of LIII

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-19-

and XLI Corps were situated, had to be screened toward the west by elements of the 167th Division and, for a time, also by a regiment of the 131st Division.

Probably as the result of the operations of two divisions of XLI Corps working their way through the swamps around Pinsk via Shazilki, the Russian cavalry units again withdrew to the south. Marshal Kulik's units continued their advance to the northeast through wooded terrain. German forces were not sufficient to encircle and destroy them. As the area around Rogachev remained a hotbed of unrest throughout the war. During these tense days it became difficult to supply the division.

By mid-August higher headquarters completed preparations for the decisive defeat of the enemy force west and east of the Dnepr, with Gomel as the objective. The right flank of the 255th Division was committed against Zhlobin. The main effort of the 267th Division to our right was at its left flank, held by the 467th Infantry. It was difficult to find weak spots in the enemy's line which would assure speedy and certain penetration in the direction of the proposed thrust. Even in this terrain there were swamps ahead of us which became impassable after a downpour. Finally it was determined that there were only two points in the division's sector which were suitable as jump-off positions, near Kaleyev Grud and near Kavanovka.

Shortly before dawn on 14 August the attack began after an artillery concentration against the enemy positions. The 465th Infantry succeeded

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-20-

in penetrating the enemy's defense line east of Kaleyev Grud and advanced to the hills along the Dnepr. Around noon the division reserves were committed at this point; elements of 455th Infantry adjoining to the left also participated in this attack. The 467th Infantry on our right, gained ground toward Zhlobin.

A crisis arose during the afternoon, when the enemy committed his tanks against the point under attack by the 255th Division, which did not have any tanks. However, this crisis was overcome by a renewed artillery concentration against the hills along the Dnepr. Enemy tanks, infantry, and artillery, which was already changing position, were unable to coordinate their action. By the morning of 15 August the main body of the division had reached the Dnepr. Zhlobin had been taken with only minor resistance. The second phase of the operation had been considerably facilitated by the advance of XII Corps east of the Dnepr. Many prisoners, vehicles, and guns were taken.

We were now confronted by the problem of crossing the Dnepr. The river had a strong current and was 150 - 200 meters wide, thus making it a greater obstacle than the Bug. Finally, with air support, we managed to gain a foothold at weakly held points on the far bank of the river with the division's limited means for crossing rivers. Weak enemy artillery fire was directed against our positions on the west bank of the river until the afternoon of 15 August. Then enemy resistance also collapsed on the east bank on 15 August, in the face of pressure from all directions. The enemy

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-21-

had set up his immobilized tanks at clearings and road junctions, where they formed strong-points. However, he had not succeeded in establishing an organized defensive system. Our troops now began to mop up the pocket east of the river in the direction of Gomel. Local fighting still continued, but our men were now more experienced in forest fighting, and thousands of prisoners were taken by the 465th and 475th Infantry, heading the division's advance. A large number of guns and vehicles fell into our hands.

At the beginning of this attack the men had already been exhausted by the strain of the preceding position warfare in trenches which had offered little protection. The division now enjoyed several days of rest. For the first time in weeks the men were again able to wash and clean themselves. About 20 August the division marched northeast and advanced via Gadilovichi - Propoisk - Krichev - Mstislavi - Grinevo toward Smolensk. The first elements of the 255th Division arrived at Smolensk on 1 September.

While marching through Smolensk on three different streets, the division's three march units were under close traffic control. They had to cross the city within a limited time, in order to keep the roads open for supplies moving toward the front. The division then continued its advance along one road, made a short stop south of Duchovshchina, and then continued to Fomina to the southeast. (See Sketch 3) The division, which so far had been held in reserve by army group, now was assigned to VIII Corps committed near Yartsevo. It had rained ever since the

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-22-

division had marched through Smolensk. The only road to Duchovshchina was a sea of mud. Under these conditions the men required one hour to march one kilometer. Of the vehicles, only the heavy prime movers and full-track vehicles did not bog down. Traffic going in the opposite direction had to be allowed passage because it consisted mainly of the corps' supply vehicles taking care of the requirements of the front. The road was also repeatedly attacked by Russian fighters. Corps headquarters had to realize that it would be impossible to commit the division in the afternoon of 3 September for the attack north of Yartsevo. The division commander refused to attack without artillery support. The division was ordered to move up its regiments as soon as possible to a point close behind the front under heavy enemy pressure.

Just the leading motorized elements of the Fourth Panzer Army had occupied a defensive position along the Vop River on both sides of Yartsevo in order to enable the infantry units to catch up with them and repair their vehicles and equipment. The position, located for the most part on gradually descending slopes behind the river, was ideal.

During late August the Russians counterattacked and concentrated their main effort at this point. The enemy penetrated our lines by skilfully exploiting the few weak links in the defense line and pushed the motorized units back about 10 kilometers. The front wavered, then held. The divisions in this sector committed every man at their disposal.

~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-23-

The area around Yartsevo along the Rollbahn was one of the main objectives. The few large roads were of considerable importance in the fighting. Here break-throughs by armored units could lead to large gains and decisive success. Subsequently we flew over the battlefield in a German liaison plane and saw that the terrain was littered with destroyed tanks, mostly Russian. Both sides had recognized the importance of this main effort.

We now tried to push the enemy back across the Vop River or, at least, across a little stream to the west, the Tsarevich. If successful we could continue to hold the position without great losses and, also, give the motorized units the time they needed for rehabilitation before starting their new mission.

The 255th Division was to attack eastward in the sector of the 14th (motorized) Division, on both sides and especially north of Tshista. The attack was to begin at 0900, 4 September; subsequently, the time was changed to 1200 as the artillery was not yet ready. Even then the division artillery was not ready, making it necessary for the division to attack with artillery support from other units. Coordination with these artillery forces was inadequate for the operation. The attack took a course similar to that of other counterattacks in the preceding days. Initially, our men made good gains. Suddenly enemy tanks appeared from hidden, wooded defiles and raked the infantry with their fire at the time our heavy weapons were changing their positions. These tanks were supported by strong artillery amply equipped with ammunition. The enemy's artillery fire now seemed better coordinated than before. They located our battery emplacements faster and

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-24-

zeroed in on our radio transmitters within half an hour after radio messages had been sent. Clearings, though unoccupied, were primary targets for the unpredictable enemy fire concentrations.

The division's recommendation that a panzer division be committed to regain the lost ground was disapproved; possibly the fighting around Yartsevo had been too costly.

The division sustained heavy casualties in the fighting. After two more days the men were too exhausted to continue their advance; however, the front held. During the following weeks the Russian attacks diminished, but lively artillery fire continued. There were but few hours in the daytime during which we did not expect sudden fire. Enemy artillery fired deep into our rear, much of its fire was directed against roads and defiles.

During the latter part of September it became evident that the High Command planned to launch another major offensive with Fourth and Ninth Armies. The troops felt that this had to be the last operation before the early Russian winter; otherwise, the ground would freeze too hard for digging-in. Consideration also had to be given to the fact that the muddy season would delay our operations.

The front was expanded in the center so that strong flanks could be established from which an attack could be launched. The 255th Division was located exactly in the center of the attack zone. The 28th (?) Division attacked on the right, the 87th Division on the left. The date of the attack was announced four days ahead of time in order to give the regiments time to

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-25-

complete their difficult reorganization. These regiments had been in action in recent weeks with hardly any reserves. The 255th Division was to jump off when the 87th Division had seized a certain sector. The artillery no longer had to adjust its fire since it had already obtained sufficient firing data in its daily commitments. The artillery only probed certain parts of the front to see whether they contained mine fields.

In order to prevent the enemy's withdrawal, the division had to push his advance elements back across the Tsarevich and Vop Rivers; thus it had to conduct an attack with a limited objective as part of the large-scale offensive.

The attack of the 255th Division began at 1530. The command posts of the infantry regiments were located close behind the front. "German infantry troops attack" is what an observer would have thought watching the men jump-off close behind the artillery concentration. Since it had been impossible to withdraw the infantry from its position for a rest prior to the attack, the men advanced in a weary condition and, in some cases, with swollen feet. The attack was a complete success. On 2 October the 475th Infantry entered Shista. The 455th Infantry seized the terrain to the south while the 465th Infantry took ground to the north. Shista fell on 3 October. Local Russian counterattacks -- this time without tank support -- were repulsed. On 4 October enemy resistance collapsed at this part of the front. Our men crossed the Tsarevich River while it was still under well-aimed enemy artillery fire. The division was now approaching the Vop River. The Russians initially made a stand at the east bank of the Vop. We now

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-26-

attempted to form a bridgehead on the opposite bank with the weak units at our disposal, but this bridgehead was not decisive for the success of the operation. The formation of a larger bridgehead would have required much more time and a reorganization of the units.

During the night 4 - 5 September the enemy made a large-scale withdrawal to the east. The division followed on 5 September, moving south-east approximately to the area near the Rollbahn east of Yartsevo. Individual enemy strong points still offered resistance. The division then halted because other divisions took over its sector when the Vyazma pocket was being formed. After several days of rest the division was given special missions. Together with various task forces it had to mop up the enemy in forests off the main roads, partly a very strenuous task. Innumerable prisoners and booty fell into the division's hands; unfortunately the division had also incurred considerable losses. Appendix 2 contains the strength report of an infantry regiment on 19 October 1941.

About 10 October 1941 the division was ordered to restore order in an area which exceeded the size of Saxony. This area included Vyazma, Gshatsk, Beloy, and Duchsovshchina. The reinforced 475th Infantry was near Vyazma, where division headquarters was also located. The 455th Infantry was deployed around Kholm and south of that town, while the 465th Infantry occupied the sector from Beloy to Duchovshchina.

Under conditions prevailing in Russia signal communications were very difficult to maintain. Use was made of permanent telephone cables to the greatest possible extent. Frequently contact could be maintained

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-27-

only by radio. Assigned signal detachments arrived at the regiments belatedly because the muddy season had started.

This muddy season in the autumn made the roads so impassable that all movement came to a halt. During this time supplies could reach the troops only by air or by rail. The division itself had to depend in a large part of its sector on small stocks of supplies which the divisions at the front had left behind, but they were soon exhausted. The men had to bake their own bread. Distances were too great and roads too uncertain to permit the regular shipment of supplies to the troops. The men supplemented their rations by fishing in the streams. There was a strict rule against unauthorized taking of civilian property. The horses lost their strength; areas for grazing could not be found; and the hay had been consumed. There was a shortage of drugs. Materials needed for repairs failed to arrive.

This situation improved to some extent in early November with the first frost. The troops were so dispersed, however, that they could not be regularly supplied.

The units now began to devote their time entirely to combatting partisans. Small detachments, including those of other divisions, were combined into larger units because they had been repeatedly attacked by partisans. Because of this situation much precious time was lost by the armies at the front. Meanwhile, the Russians had been able to bring up reinforcements from Moscow by rail.

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-28-

Toward the end of November another attack was to be launched in the direction of Moscow, but so late in the year this decision was very risky. As a precautionary measure, the 255th Division was now concentrated in the Vyazma area. The Russian population, afraid of the partisans, now feared for their safety in areas vacated by the troops.

The units had received only a few replacements. Their combat strength was low, particularly among the infantry. Horses and vehicles were no longer in the same condition as they had been at the outset of the campaign. On the other hand, the men had been hardened by their combat experiences, and the division was still advancing eastward as a part of a conqueror's army.

III. Conclusion

During the campaign in the summer and autumn of 1941 a well-trained army which was ready to make sacrifices had beaten a strong enemy despite deficiencies in its equipment; the men had done their best to execute the will of their leaders.

During World War II the Russians were a tough enemy with Spartan discipline. Perhaps propaganda was partly responsible for the fact that the Russians continued to hold out even when their situation was hopeless. Russian propaganda had alleged that all prisoners taken by the Germans would be shot. Beyond that, however, there were also many fanatics in the Russian ranks who had fully absorbed the Bolshevist ideology. The Russians had been different during World War I; then they had given up more easily in difficult situations.

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-29-

Whenever necessary the Russians did not spare their own soil. Smolensk is an example; this city was almost entirely destroyed by Russian artillery fire after it was taken by the Germans.

It would have been reasonable to assume that due to the numerous purges the Russian Army would be lacking in capable leadership; in fact, the intermediate command remained weak. The higher commands, however, became increasingly efficient. This was reflected very soon in the concentration of large artillery units and the formation of points of main effort.

Already in the autumn we began to feel the truth of the Clausewitz' rule about the constantly diminishing force of the attack. The combat strength of the German units could no longer be considered adequate for new, major operations.

In order to be able to cope with the road and climatic conditions in Russia at all times, the combat units must be equipped with track-laying vehicles, while the supply columns must have at least half-track vehicles. All vehicles require considerable road clearance.

Even if the German campaign in Yugoslavia had not delayed the beginning of the Russian campaign, in view of the climate, operations in the East prior to early June would not have been advisable. However, had motorized units been committed in the place of the infantry divisions, all units of the German armies would have reached the Dnepr about ten days sooner. The units then would not have been restricted to the few hard surface roads. A much strong<sup>er</sup> assault force would thus have been formed earlier along the Dnepr, and the four-week delay in operations along this river would have

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-30-

been avoided. Here we would have gained the time which was subsequently lacking in the battle of Moscow.

DRAFT TRANSLATION

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-31-

APPENDIX 1

Order of Battle, 255th Infantry Division

Combat Units

Headquarters, 255th Division

255th Map Section

255th Military Police Detachment

455th Infantry	)	Each with regimental headquarters, engineer platoon, signal platoon, mounted platoon, infantry howitzer company with 6 light and 2 heavy infantry howitzers, antitank company (partly motorized) with twelve 37-mm. antitank guns, and three battalions each, consisting of three infantry companies and one machine gun company.
465th Infantry	)	
475th Infantry	)	

255th Artillery Regiment

Regimental headquarters

1st Battalion	)	Battalion headquarters plus three batteries with 4 guns each (1st - 3d Battalions with light, 4th Battalion with medium artillery).
2d Battalion	)	
3d Battalion	)	
4th (medium) Battalion	)	

255th Reconnaissance Battalion	)	Headquarters, 2 bicycle companies, one heavy reconnaissance company.
	)	

Engineer Battalion) Headquarters and 3 companies (3d Company motorized).

255th Antitank Battalion (motorized)	)	Headquarters and 3 companies, mostly 35-mm., German antitank guns and several platoons of 47-mm. antitank guns (French).
--------------------------------------	---	--

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-32-

Supply Units

Commander, division supply troops

Vehicle column 1 - 6

Light column 7 - 9, previously with the infantry regiments and independent units, now includes Panje column.

Motor vehicle company 1 and 2

Supply company

Administrative Units

Division ration office

Bakery company

Butcher company

Medical Units

1st Medical Company (horse-drawn)

2d Medical Company (motorized)

Field Hospital (motorized)

Ambulance platoons 1 and 2 (motorized)

Veterinary Company

Maintenance Company

Army Post Office

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~



~~RESTRICTED~~  
~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~

D-183

-33-

APPENDIX 2

1 Infantry Regiment - 19 October 1941

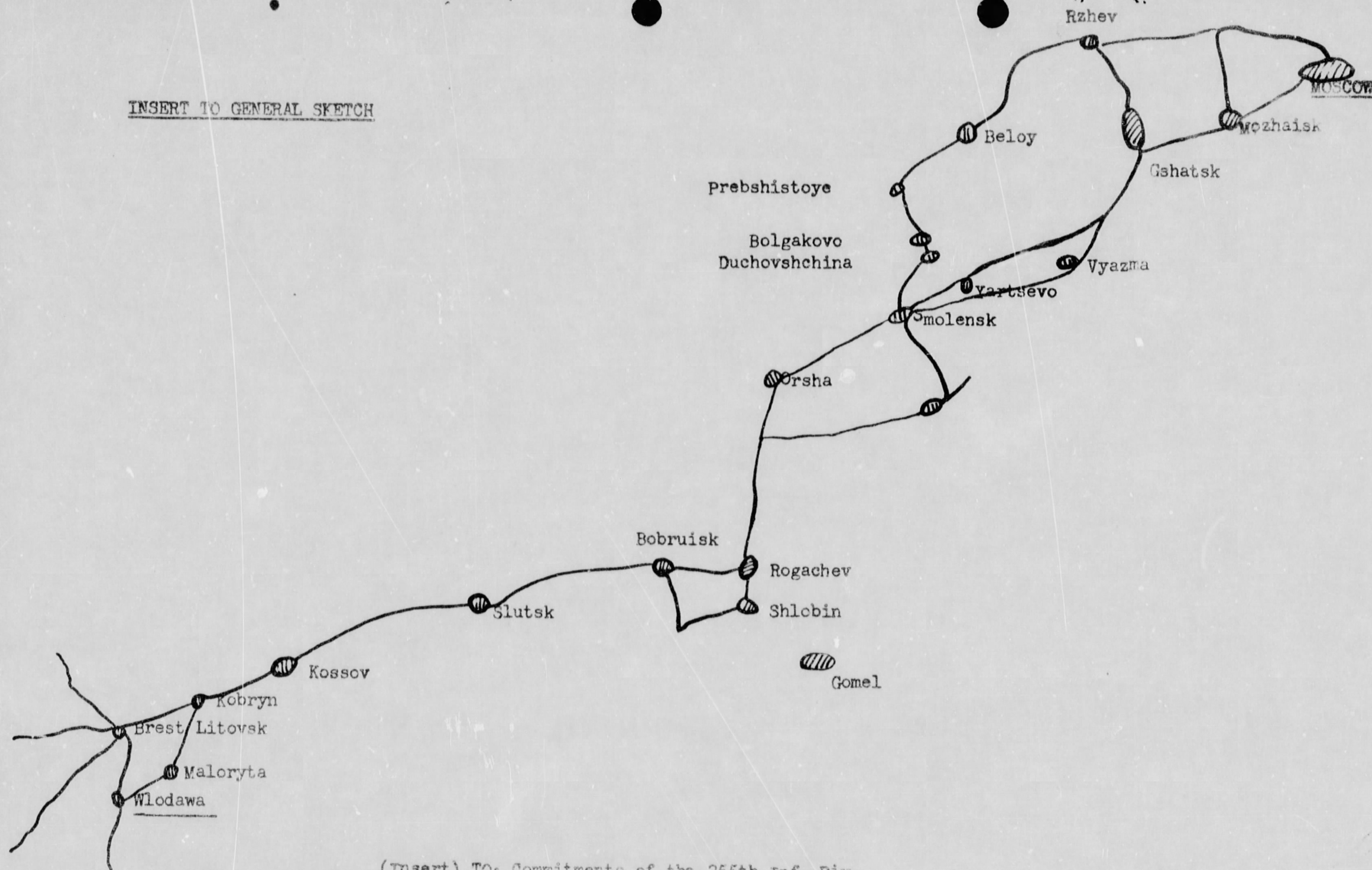
Strength Report of Enlisted Personnel

	<u>Infantry</u>
Authorized Strength	3068
Actual Strength on 22 June 1941	2877
 <u>Losses</u>	
From 22 June 1941 to 15 October 1941	killed 306
	wounded 783
(This regiment did not sustain the heaviest casualties in the division.)	missing 60
	sick 313
	other 103
	<u>Total Losses 1565</u>
Strength after deduction of Losses	1312
 <u>Gains</u>	
Replacements arriving after 22 June	478
Expected replacements (March battalions)	---
Convalescents returned to their organization	107
Other	<u>95</u>
	<u>Total Gains 680</u>
 Actual Strength on 15 October 1941	 1992

~~SECURITY INFORMATION~~  
~~RESTRICTED~~

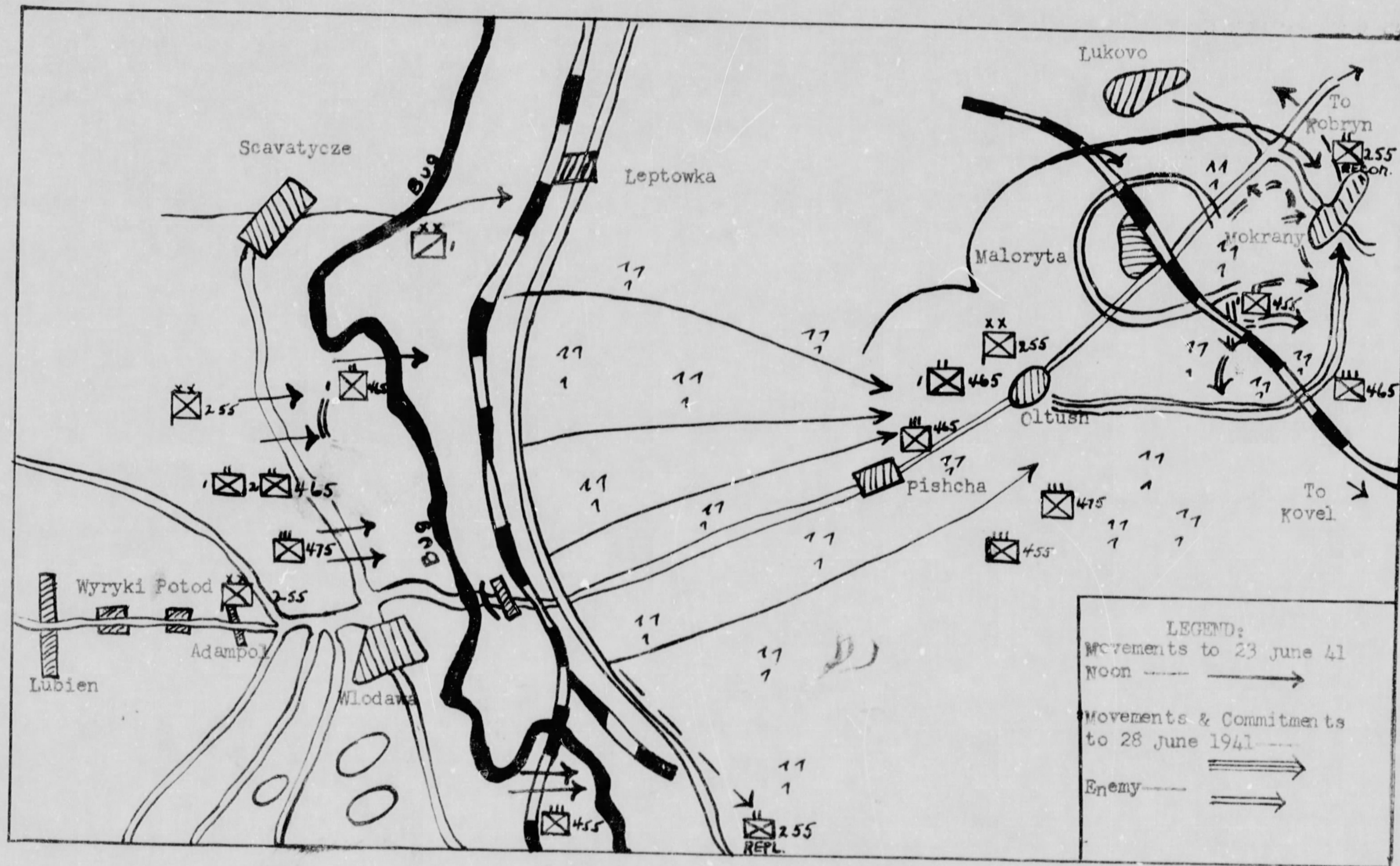


INSERT TO GENERAL SKETCH



(Insert) TO: Commitments of the 255th Inf. Div.  
From 22 June - 28 June 1941 near  
and east of Wlodawa, see Sketch 1

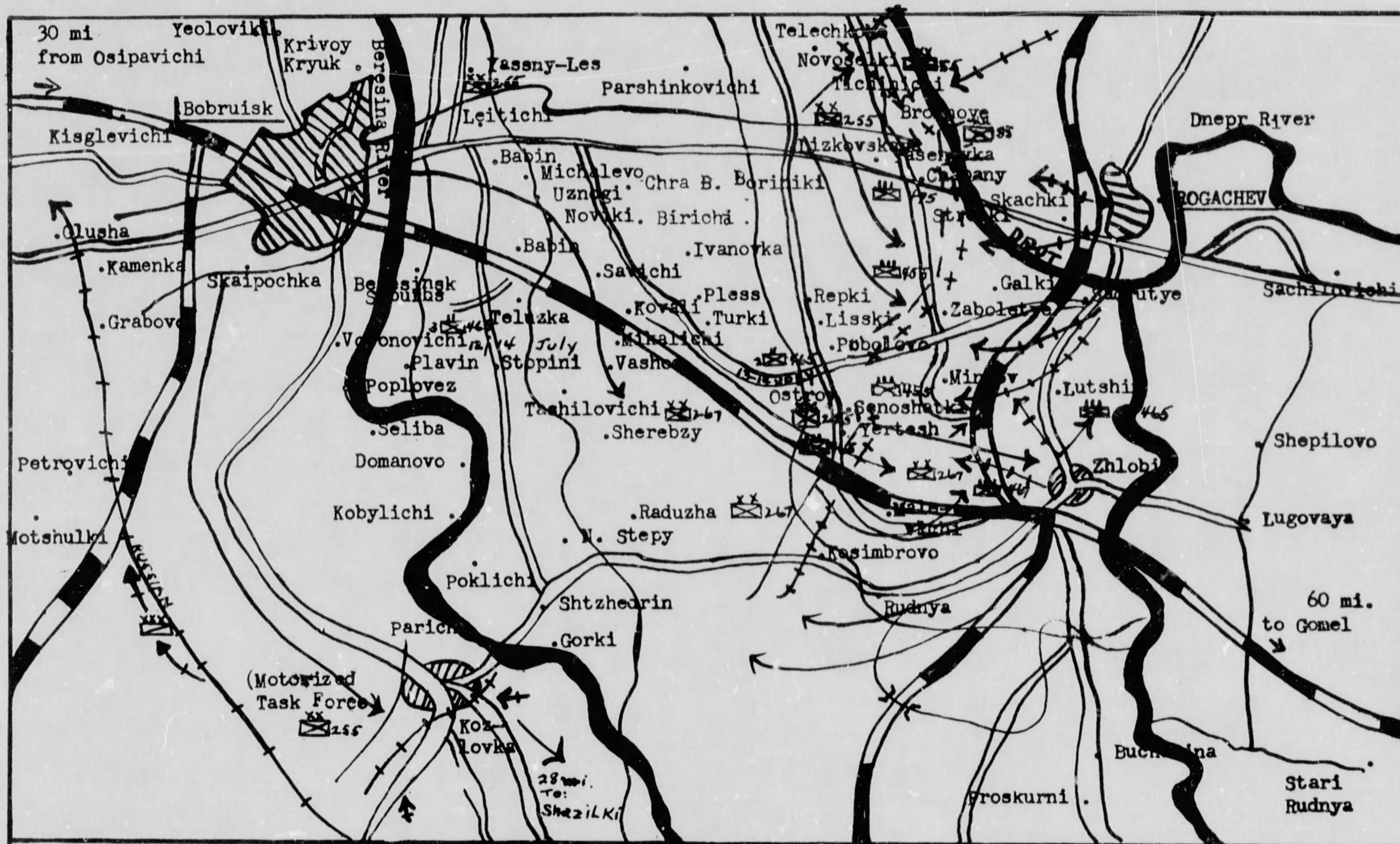




Commitments of the 255th Inf. Div.  
 From 22 June - 28 June 1941 near  
 east of Wlodaya

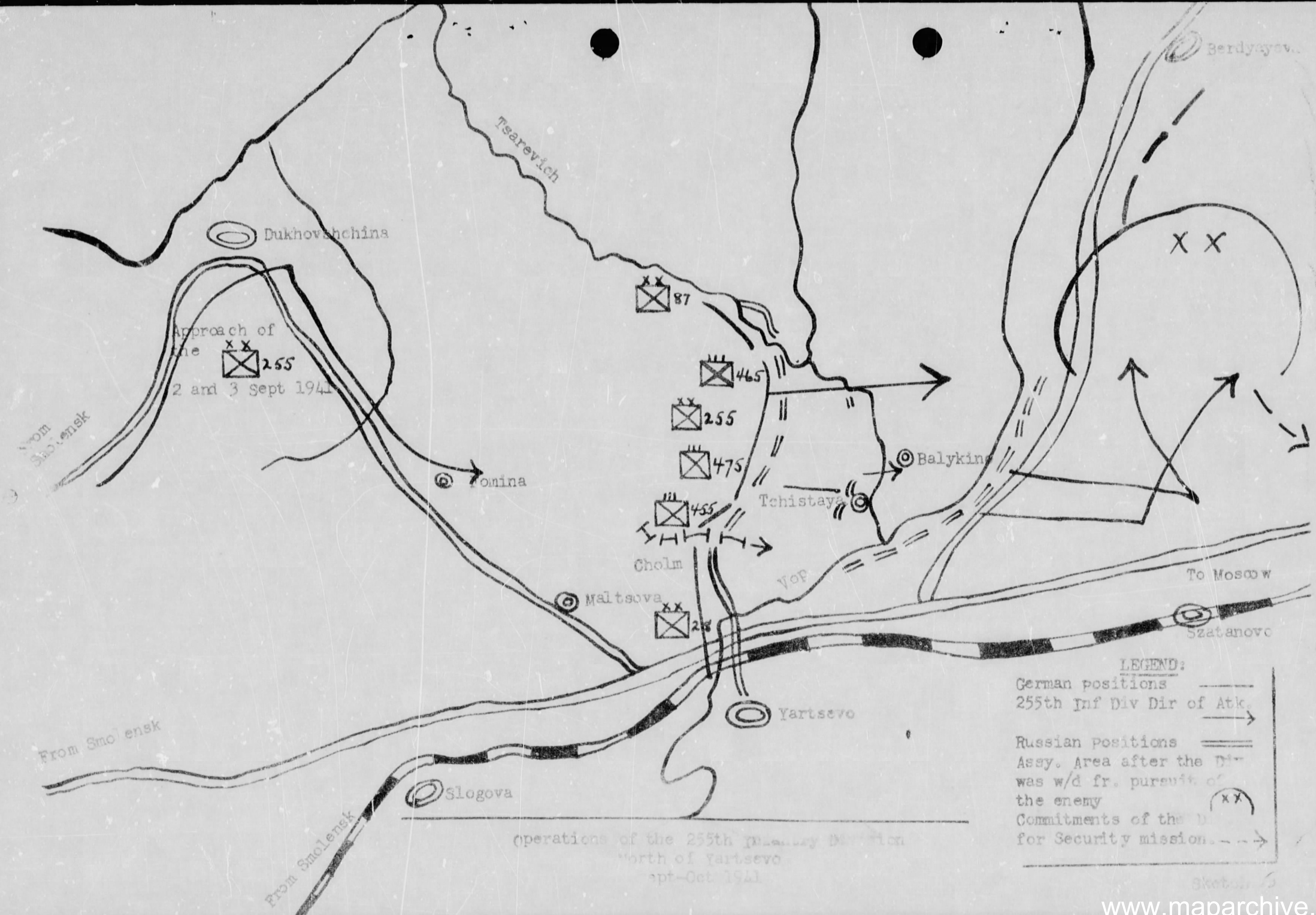
Sketch





Sketch 2





operations of the 255th Infantry Division  
north of Yartsevo  
Sept-Oct 1941

**LEGEND:**  
 German positions ———  
 255th Inf Div Dir of Atk. →  
 Russian positions = = =  
 Assy. Area after the Div was w/d fr. pursuit of the enemy (XX)  
 Commitments of the Div for Security mission. - - - →

Sketch 5