

How Soviets Fought in U.S. Shermans

By Dmitry Loza (Translated by James F. Gebhardt)

© 1996, Univ. of Nebraska Press

Translator's Note

*In May, 1993, I came into possession of a manuscript entitled *Stories of the Sherman Tank*. It was written, in Russian, by a Red Army veteran of World War II, Hero of the Soviet Union Dmitry Loza. From November 1943 until the end of the war in August 1945, Loza was assigned to, and then commanded, a Soviet tank battalion equipped with the M4A2 Sherman tank (diesel engines, 76-mm gun). These tanks were sent to the USSR through the Lend-Lease Program. Loza's unit fought in Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. At the completion of hostilities in the West, his unit moved to Mongolia by rail, where they were issued a new set of Shermans. They then drove across the Grand Khingan Mountains into Manchuria to fight the Japanese Army.*

In the twenty years that I have followed this topic, Dmitry Loza's first-person account is the most detailed description I have seen of the employment of American military equipment by the Red Army. His story is a collection of anecdotes that speak to the life of a junior Red Army tank officer at the small-unit level. Some are humorous, some will put a lump in the reader's throat.

The Soviets received approximately 1,200 light and 5,000 medium tanks from the USA during World War II. The first tanks shipped to the Soviet Union in 1941-42 were the M3A1 General Lee and the M3A5 General Grant, equipped with gasoline-powered engines. Stalin complained openly to Roosevelt about these early American tanks in his personal correspondence, writing, "...U.S. tanks catch fire very easily when hit from behind or from the side..." The Americans responded by ceasing delivery of gasoline-powered tanks and sending instead the M4A2.

The First Difficult Trials

1943. The largest battle of World War II thundered on at Kursk in July and August. By November, the enemy had been thrown back to the right-bank Ukraine. With each day, the front line inexorably receded westward. Germany and its satellites were forced to go over to the defensive. Occasionally, the enemy made vain attempts to retake the strategic initiative from the hands of the Red Army.

Thus, at the end of November and the beginning of December, the German command launched a powerful attack northward from the area south of Belaya Tserkov (80 km south of Kiev), with the intent to liquidate the Soviet forces' bridgehead on the west bank of the Dnepr River. Although hurriedly occupying defensive positions, our infantry forces were unable to withstand the powerful enemy thrust. The German attack threatened Belaya Tserkov, the capture of which would put them on the near approaches to Kiev, the Ukrainian capital.

Units of 5th Mechanized Corps were in their second month of reconstitution in the forests north and west of Narofominsk [sixty-five kilometers southwest of Moscow]. Seven hours were set aside each day for rest, and the remaining time was spent in study of the equipment, gunnery at a range complex, and tactical field exercises. The following method was employed in our 233d Brigade to accelerate the mastery of the equipment. Permission was given to one crew in each battalion to disassemble almost completely one Sherman tank. The design and function of each instrument, component, system, and the armaments were studied. We had the full opportunity, as they say, to put our hands on a piece of "live" equipment. Ten days were spent in this exercise, after which the tank was reassembled by its crew. The deputy battalion commander for maintenance, together with the chief mechanic, monitored the assembly process, and the battalion armorer inspected the main gun and machine guns. A new group of "students" arrived, and studied the "American" by the same method. De-

tailed posters on the design and function of all the Sherman's systems and armaments had been issued in early October, and a good study guide had been published. Previous training methods were quickly abandoned...

I want immediately to say a good word about the manufacturer of the Shermans. Their representative was continuously available at the headquarters of 5th Mechanized Corps. He scrupulously collected and studied all incident reports pertaining to the "Emcha"¹ during its fielding. I can't recall his last name. It was categorically forbidden to conduct any kind of note taking on the front-line. But I remember we all called him Misha. Even now, at veterans' gatherings, we fondly recall how Misha, having observed a driver-mechanic attempting to twist something in the engine compartment, for example, with a key or a screwdriver, sternly spoke up: "This is factory sealed — tinkering is not permitted!" And the would-be tinkerer immediately lost the urge to turn and tighten screws. The *Emchisti* [*Emcha* tankers] later became convinced that these machines worked like a good chronometer with just normal maintenance resources.

"Hunting With Borzois"

I do not know who first used hunting terms to describe the means developed by *Emchisti* for combating heavy German tanks. It was not for a lark that we had to resort to this tactic in the Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy Operation (January-February 1944).

The tanks of the two sides were far from equal in firepower. The Tiger and Panther were equipped with long-barreled 88-mm and 75-mm cannon. The Shermans also had a long gun, but of lesser caliber — 76.2 mm. The 85- to 100-millimeter frontal and turret armor of the enemy tanks made them practically invulnerable to the *Emcha's* projectiles at those points. However, they did burn, and could be immobilized in place by our precision shooting.

The Korsun-Shevchenkovskiy Operation of two Ukrainian Fronts began on 26 January 1944. The recently created

6th Tank Army, to which the 5th Mechanized Corps belonged, was attacking in the southeastward direction toward Zvenigorodka from the area north of Tynovka. 5th Guards Tank Army of the adjacent First Ukrainian Front was attacking from the opposite direction to converge with it. In coordination with infantry formations, these tank armies were to encircle significant enemy forces in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy bulge.

Beginning on the morning of 27 January, 233d Tank Brigade — the backbone of the corps forward detachment — received the mission not to become engaged in protracted battles for isolated enemy strongpoints, but to penetrate into Zvenigorodka, where it was to close the ring of encirclement.

At midday, the brigade's 1st Tank Battalion, with *tankodesantniki*² aboard, reached the outskirts of a large and important — in the operational-tactical sense — inhabited area, Lysyanka [135 kilometers south of Kiev]. The enemy, realizing the key significance of this strongpoint, had concentrated up to a battalion of infantry, reinforced by five Tiger tanks, to hold it.

Lysyanka — a small regional town — stretched out in a deep hollow. Its houses could be seen only from a close vantage point. The Germans had dug in on the heights that framed this inhabited locale. They were covering the road and heights adjoining it with dense interlocking fires from all weapons. The defenders paid almost no attention to the gullies and ravines. They believed that their bottoms and side slopes, deteriorated from the bad weather, were unsuitable for deploying tanks.

We had to seize Lysyanka as rapidly as possible. The most important targets in its defenses were the tanks. They had to be knocked out in the first assault. It would then be much easier to deal with the infantry. The accomplishment of this task was further complicated by the worsening weather—the rain was growing heavier. Captain Nikolay Maslyukov, the battalion commander, made the following decision: two tank platoons were to attack the enemy along the highway (demonstration group), and the platoon of Junior Lieutenant Mikhail Prikhod'ko, moving along the side of one of the broad gullies, was to reach the flank of the Tigers and attack them with armor-piercing rounds on their hulls. This concept followed the model of "hunting with

Borzois" — the dogs tantalize the wolf from the front, while several hounds come at him from the flanks to take him down.

Our tanks maintained radio silence to achieve surprise in this unusual attack. Only the radios of the battalion commander and the two platoons attacking along the road were left on. Nikolay Maslyukov quietly orchestrated the actions of the demonstration and flanking groups.

Attentively studying the surrounding terrain, Prikhod'ko noticed nothing except dripping wet shrubbery and the occasional modest tree. The *Emchas* of his platoon crept forward on idling motors, avoiding movement along the same track. There was the possibility of getting bogged down in the soggy chernozem.³ As before, visibility was poor. A meeting wind hurled large raindrops into their faces, and carried the noise of their laboring engines from their sterns into the endless steppe. This encouraged the tankers, because it provided additional security to their actions. It would have been worse for the wind to be blowing toward the enemy. "Today, the weather is our friend," the platoon commander said encouragingly to his crew.

Hundreds of meters of a difficult path lay behind. Prikhod'ko understood that his tanks could encounter the enemy at any moment, and he was not wrong. Up ahead, Mikhail noticed a mound — a small ground sheet hung suspended above the ground. It was motionless. Out from under the tarpaulin crawled a German soldier, who stared at the lead tank, clearly not knowing if it was his or ours. Without hesitation, the driver-mechanic veered his Sherman toward the enemy position and ground the soldier and his covered machine gun into the earth. The enemy's security outpost had been destroyed without a sound. This did not happen often. "The defender's main forces are somewhere nearby," the platoon commander concluded to himself. A sheet of heavy rain hid the horizon from view. The enemy position was somewhere up ahead, but it could not be discerned.

Prikhod'ko reported his engagement with the enemy outpost to the battalion commander, and received the order to stop. The demonstration group along the road began its spirited "teasing" attack, trying to attract the defenders' attention completely to itself. By doing this, it simplified for Prikhod'ko's crews the accomplishment of their mis-

sion. The Shermans of the flanking group froze in place, their motors quietly idling. The commands of the officers of the tanks attacking frontally sounded crisply in the headphones. Frequent machine gun bursts and the noise of motors were reported. The main part of the concept of "hunting with Borzois" had been accomplished successfully. At this time, somewhere in the heights a strong gust of wind dispersed the heavy curtain of clouds, and a broad patch of sky shone through. The rain halted. Would it hold off long? A moment! A fortuitous moment! Prikhod'ko fixed his glance at the unfolding view. Some seventy meters ahead loomed two immense black-crossed tanks. Their main guns "patrolled" the road, prepared at any moment to greet our tanks attacking from the front with deadly fire.

Two Shermans of Prikhod'ko's platoon, moving in echelon, had stopped at the same time. This enabled them to open fire quickly, without interfering with each other. Their main guns had long ago been loaded with armor-piercing rounds. "The right Tiger is yours, the left one is mine. Fire!" commanded Mikhail.

Main gun fires ripped through the damp cold air. The engine compartment of the right "beast" was enveloped in flames. The left Tiger shook from the strike of the solid shot, but did not catch fire. Prikhod'ko shouted to the gunner, "Finish him off!" The second armor-piercing round did its work — the clumsy target belched black smoke. The German tankers began to jump out of their vehicle. Accurate machine gun fires found their mark.

The *Emchas* attacked forcefully along the road, conducting intensive main gun and machine gun fires. Prikhod'ko's platoon also did not spare their ammunition. Having been attacked from two sides, the enemy began to withdraw under fire to the south. Minutes later, the lead tanks of Maslyukov's battalion, in coordination with their *desantniki*, burst upon the enemy positions. Lysyanka stretched out below.

The *Emchisti* participating in the defeat of enemy attempts to break out of the Korsun-Shevchenkivskiy ring" employed a different method of combat with the enemy's heavy tanks. Two Shermans were designated in each platoon for each single attacking Tiger. One tank fired armor-piercing shells at

one or the other track, the other tank awaited the moment when the undamaged track had driven the German tank into a 90-degree turn, exposing its entire flank. Then it delivered a solid shot into the fuel cell. As a rule, attacking enemy tanks were permitted to close to 400 to 500 meters. It was difficult to break a track at greater ranges.

A "Psychological" Attack

Each officer at the front had his own moment in the sun, a specific day (or days) and a defined place. For Captain Nikolay Maslyukov, this was Lysyanka. This, indeed, was the peak of his command talent. Without a doubt, new aspects of the gifted battalion commander clearly would shine forth in other battles. But the time of his death was near. Maslyukov perished at 1300 on 28 January 1944 in Zvenigorodka. We were doggedly fighting our way there.

The wildly fluctuating weather continued. The brief pause was sufficient only for the capture of the important heights on the approaches to Lysyanka. Even more heavy rain fell later and, with the coming of dawn, abundant wet snow. Like it or not, this enemy strong-point had to be taken at night.

Nikolay Maslyukov assembled the company and tank commanders and explained the developing situation. At this time the crews replenished their *Emchas'* ammunition supply. A stubborn fight in a built-up area lay ahead, at night. Nikolay Nikolaevich listened to the opinions of his company commanders and several platoon commanders. All arrived at the same conclusion: Attack Lysyanka without delay, bringing all the firepower of their Shermans to bear on the enemy, and, as before, not sparing main gun rounds or machine gun bullets.

The captain agreed with his subordinates' opinion. He himself added: "We will augment the strength of our fire attack by turning on our lights and blowing our sirens at full power. We will conduct a 'psychological' attack!"

The *Emchas* had modest headlights, with a sufficiently powerful beam, and a "wailing" signaling device — a siren. When it was turned on, even the tankers, who knew its voice, experienced tingling in their spines. How would it affect someone who was hearing it for the first time? And at full power? Could he keep his nerve?

Then came Captain Maslyukov's terse command: "Turn on lights and sirens! Forward!" Though years have passed, the picture of this unusual attack is clear in my mind in all its detail. The piercing light of the headlamps pulled the road out of the darkness, along with the adjacent fields, houses, and trees. It blinded the enemy infantry and artillery gun crew. The powerful howl of the sirens ripped into the night. It assaulted the eardrums and placed a heavy load on the brain. The enemy fire, initially somewhat dense, began to weaken. The "psychological" attack bore fruit. "Any means is good in battle: blind the enemy, destroy him with the tank!"

From the first moment of the attack, the Sherman crews conducted intense main gun and machine gun fires. When the enemy's resistance had noticeably weakened, Maslyukov sternly ordered: "Conserve ammunition! Use your tracks!"

Each platoon and tank commander, emerging partially from his hatch, could easily see the enemy in the illuminated surroundings. Using their intercom systems, they gave commands to the driver-mechanic, directing their *Emchas* toward observed targets. Assault troops carrying submachine guns ran nearby, shielding "their" Sherman from panzerfaust gunners. The armor plate of antitank guns cracked. The multi-ton mass of the "American" easily overran the defenders' mortars and machine guns. The soft wet earth received the debris into its cold embrace without resistance. Maslyukov's battalion and the submachinegunners of the brigade commander's reserve captured Lysyanka without losses.

Early April, 1945. Formations of 6th Guards Army had seized the cities Shopron and Sombatkhey in northwest Hungary. Vienna was about sixty kilometers away. We had to interfere with the Germans' efforts to mine and destroy historical monuments and bridges, to move industrial equipment and cultural treasures out of Austria's capital. The army commander, Colonel-General A. G. Kravchenko, made the decision to send a detachment to Vienna. This detachment consisted of 1st Tank Battalion, 46th Guards Tank Brigade (eighteen Shermans), three SAU-152-mm guns, and a company of airborne troops — eighty men from the 1st Airborne Battalion of the 304th Airborne Regiment, commanded by



Guards Lieutenant Nikolay Georgievich Petukhov. The detachment was ordered to function as a raiding detachment in the enemy's rear area, hurriedly reach Vienna, penetrate into the city center from the south, and seize key objectives: the parliament building, art history museum, opera house, Belvedere Palace, and Academy of Sciences. We were to hold the captured buildings and surrounding blocks until the arrival of the main body of 9th Guards Mechanized Corps. The crews were briefed that they would be operating in the enemy's backyard for twenty-four hours, possibly even longer.

The army commander cleverly included in the detachment the high maneuverability and firepower of tanks and self-propelled guns with the practiced ability of airborne troops to fight fierce and prolonged battles in the enemy's rear. It was ever so strictly ordered: "Except in the most extreme case, do not become engaged in combat on the way to the Austrian capital!"

As the detachment commander, I shared a single thought and emotion with each tanker — get to Vienna quickly. Two circumstances dictated such operations. First, the objectives designated for capture were located a significant distance from the front line. Their defense might still not be well organized. Second, the Germans were unlikely to conceive of the idea that the Russian command would take this unbelievably risky step — inserting tanks and infantry into such a large metropolitan area.

The southeastern sector of Vienna had several less dense built-up areas near the Danube canal. However, honestly speaking, we did not have full confidence that the approach of Russian tanks to the city was not known here also. That is, on the new axis (if we went that way), we might not be able to achieve the necessary movement security. One thing was sure. If we continued on our present course, we would suffer more losses. We studied the layout of the southwestern sector of the Austrian capital. We were looking for a route through Meydling to the city center. There were substantial obstacles — hilly terrain covered by a forest, and a winding road. The enemy would not

need substantial forces to delay us. We decided upon a variant — bypass Vienna from the southwest and break into the city in the sector of the Hutteldorf-Linz highway. Austria's main highways were in excellent condition. The fires of war had not yet touched them. They were lined with tall, leafy trees. Their inter-arching green borders camouflaged the detachment well from the most dangerous threat in this situation — enemy aviation.

Darkness was approaching when the battalion reached the bridge west of Hutteldorf. Barricades blocked the streets and approaches to the bridge. Antitank fire struck the tank of Guards Senior Lieutenant Grigoriy Danil'chenko, commander of 1st Tank Company. We were forced to withdraw a bit. We maneuvered to the right and reached Hacking. Our mission was growing more difficult as time passed! Here a solid fortress wall of some length blocked our path. We could not go around it. Time was slipping away. We had to ram it with a tank. Guards Sergeant Nikolay Oseledkin, a driver-mechanic, executed this task masterfully. First he made a small breach. With several strikes of the tank's bow, he enlarged the breach until a Sherman could drive through it. The guards tankers christened this breach the "triumphal arch." Tanks with paratroopers clinging to them hurried along the railroad embankment toward the western station. The city was going about its normal daily life — buses were plying the streets, trolley cars were clanging, and the Viennese people were scurrying about with their business. Traffic policemen signaled our column forward without delay at three intersections. But this atmosphere did not last long. Soon the situation changed radically. They recognized us. One after the other, the canal bridges on our battalion's route of march went up in smoke. There were a lot of them.

Each *Emcha* commander had a map of the city. This permitted the detachment to continue closing on our designated objectives along multiple routes.

At 2300 on 9 April, I reported to the brigade commander by radio: "We have reached the center of Vienna!" And so, the first part of our combat mission was accomplished. The second — no less difficult — was to hold the captured area until the arrival of our own forces.

The principal concern of a commander in such situations is the organi-

zation in the briefest time of a defense and, in particular, its most important element — a system of fire. The tankers and paratroopers were arrayed so that each street, intersection, and passageway was under our constant observation. If an enemy appeared, he was destroyed by concentrated fires of all systems. The SAU-152s comprised our reserve, for reinforcing the threatened axis or sector in the course of the battle.

On my order, Guards Lieutenant Nikolay Petukhov's paratroopers carefully began clearing the blocks adjoining the area occupied by our force. Their task was to clean out enemy soldiers. The fact that the electricity remained functioning in central Vienna until 0200 initially facilitated the accomplishment of this mission. As soon as the enemy realized the situation, he turned out the lights.

The night was uneasy. Knowing the city well, the Germans made several reconnaissance forays. They threw grenades at our tanks from the roofs and upper floors of houses. We had to park our Shermans under the archways of buildings. The paratroopers quickly liquidated this danger from above. The crews did not sleep. All were at their battle stations, prepared to defeat an enemy attack. Only near morning did the driver-mechanics and gun commanders manage to snatch a bit of rest. No one doubted that at dawn the enemy would launch his attack. And we were not mistaken. The enemy made his first strong attack in the morning.

Not long before this, the Germans had begun to fire with an antitank gun at an *Emcha* parked under an arch. During the night, they had dragged it to the upper floor of one of the houses north of Ratush'. The enemy managed to damage the track on two tanks. We quickly had to take appropriate measures to prevent the majority of our vehicles east of Ratush', the University, and Parliament from being damaged. We wanted to leave them in those positions, because from there they could better engage an attacking enemy.

I called the commander of the SAU-152 battery, and ordered him immediately to suppress the enemy firing point. The self-propelled gun, sliding along the asphalt on its broad tracks, took a position on one of the streets on the southeastern side of the square. All of us were curious. We wanted to watch the self-propelled gun blow the German gunners and their cannon to

pieces. The tankers and paratroopers poured out into the street and began to wait. Now, recalling those minutes, I cannot excuse myself. As an inexperienced commander, I committed a serious error. At the time, I permitted these "spectators" to line the street. We paid a high price.

The Viennese lanes that ran in various directions from the central square were not wide. Beautiful houses with Venetian blinds on their windows rose up on both sides of these lanes. Each soldier and officer would learn to his misfortune that these windows would end up on the street.

The shot of the self-propelled gun's large-caliber cannon roared forth. The air itself shook. One and one-half floors of the house, together with the enemy antitank gun and its crew, crashed to the ground. And in our own position? With a crash, the powerful shock wave of the shot broke the thin window glass in the houses near the self-propelled gun. Heavy shards of glass poured down on the heads of our "spectators." The result was lamentable: scores of wounded arms and backs, and two broken collar bones. Thankfully, the tankers were wearing their headgear, and the paratroopers their helmets. Their heads remained intact. What now! We were fighting our tanks inside a large city for the first time. Bad experience is experience, just the same!

There was no time to moan or complain. Enemy tanks were already moving along several streets toward the University and the Parliament. Infantry were attacking behind them, using the tanks for cover. The enemy was beginning an attack on a broad front. Very well, then, the hour had come to "cross swords" — armor with armor, fire with fire! We had the advantage. The battalion was deployed in combat formation. The Sherman fired more accurately from a stationary position.

A Panther, the thick armor of its turret and hull forming a shield, was leading the attackers on every street. The long range cannons of the heavy tanks that stopped outside the direct fire range of our Shermans' 76-mm main guns enabled them to strike our combat vehicles from a significant distance. In this unfavorable situation, the *Emcha* crews, on general command, employed a minor, but important, deception. They backed their tanks deeper into the archways. They remained ready to reoc-

cupy their position, on command, and spray the enemy with machinegun fire.

Battles are decided in seconds. The driver-mechanic of Guards Junior Lieutenant Bessol'tsev's tank tarried a bit too long, and was unable to reposition his vehicle immediately. This small lapse turned out to be fatal. The *Emcha* was hit. The commander and assistant driver-mechanic were wounded, but the main gun was undamaged. The crew bandaged themselves, and remained at their stations on order of the junior lieutenant. The immobile Sherman was prepared for an unequal duel, with an antitank round loaded in the main gun. The radio operator prepared a smoke pot; its dark gray screen at the right moment would effectively conceal the tank position. The rapid disappearance of our tanks, it seems, somewhat discouraged the enemy crews. The Panthers stopped. They hesitated, then slowly moved forward. One of the Panthers turned toward Bessol'tsev's tank, in all probability intending quickly to close the range in order to fire the killing shot. The junior lieutenant understood the enemy tank commander's intention. He ordered the radio operator to throw the smoke pot forward.

The thick cloud of smoke began to obscure the archway and the street in front of it. Now let the enemy try to find the target.

At this time, assistance sent by the company commander, Guards Senior Lieutenant Ionov, came to Bessol'tsev by the rear courtyards. Knocking down the intervening fence, the Sherman of Lieutenant Abib Bakuridze approached Bessol'tsev's tank from the rear, quickly hooked a tow cable onto it, and towed it to a safe place.

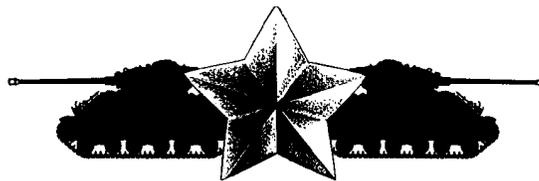
The Panthers did finally reach the line where they could be destroyed by the fires of the *Emchas'* 76.2-mm guns. The command went out over the radio: "Take your positions! Ten seconds later, the archways of the houses on the eastern edge of the central square were bristling with the Shermans' long barrels. A cannon duel commenced at close range.

Combat in cities is a great number of violent isolated engagements, in which success depends on the quickness of actions, the coolness of commanders of all ranks, the mastery of each crew member, and the skill of the infantry support troops. Guards Lieutenant Konstantin Drozdovskiy's tank was in a very good position. The archway en-

trance into the courtyard was ten meters from the corner of the building. Adjoining the house was a small square. Earlier, Konstantin had prepared a good route for maneuver out from under the archway into the square and back. And not in vain.

Up to one and one-half platoons of enemy submachinegunners were advancing on Drozdovskiy's position. Behind them were two Panthers. The forces were unequal. But the Guards *Emchisti* did not flinch. They skillfully engaged in a one-on-one fire fight. The lieutenant ordered the full weight of his main gun to rain upon the infantry, who represented a great danger to the tank. And then immediately to change positions. Volley fire with high-explosive rounds cut through the enemy submachinegunners very well. Those who survived immediately turned back and took cover behind the tank and in a house. The sector of observation and fire was better from the new position. Konstantin saw two armored vehicles approaching the square. They were almost in one line, in places shielding their vehicles behind house walls. There was deep thought shown in this combat formation. The Germans correctly figured that our tank could simultaneously knock out both targets with a single shot. An intact Panther managed to detect and hit an *Emcha* before the Sherman's crew was able to reload their main gun. In this single method, the enemy tank commanders demonstrated that they were not novices on the battlefield. Drozdovskiy accepted the enemy's challenge, and turned out to be more clever than the Germans. The first antitank round struck the right flank Panther on its left track. The intact right track drove this tank to the left, pressing the adjacent tank into a wall. Both enemy tanks froze in place. At the same instant, a smokepot flew from the turret of Drozdovskiy's tank. The thick cloud of smoke filled the square and street, depriving the Germans of any possibility of conducting aimed fire. Konstantin again changed his position. When the whitish shroud of smoke dissipated somewhat, the guards spotted a backward-moving Panther. A precision-fired antitank round forced it to stop in the middle of the street.

My command observation post was in the opera house. My reserve, the SAU-152 battery, was nearby. Radio reports were coming in from the company



commanders. I was monitoring the conversations of platoon leaders with their subordinates, describing the axis of the enemy's main attack from a position north of Ratush' and the University to Belvedere Palace. The enemy's intentions were manifestly obvious: to divide our detachment's combat formation into two parts, press the larger (eastern) portion toward the Danube canal, and destroy it.

As a result of an almost forty-minute fight, the attacking tanks and infantry were halted at the approaches to the central square, three Panthers were destroyed, and we lost two Shermans. Not less than fifty enemy submachinegunners were killed or wounded. Our method of combating tanks — "hunting with Borzois" — that we had tested in past battles, was not used in beating off the Germans' attack. Although I reminded everyone about it before the battle, I did not require its employment during our first encounter with the enemy. Drozdovskiy made one unsuccessful attempt, from out of a narrow alley. Not one Panther presented its flank to him, therefore he did not engage them. The damaged track of a heavy tank can be repaired in a short time. Meanwhile, this "armored pill-box" is capable of conducting powerful fire with its long-range gun. The enemy, gathering up his forces, could once again launch his attack with the support of the immobilized Panther.

I had to turn the developing situation in our favor. And the quicker, the better for our subsequent presence in Vienna. Our self-propelled guns were an effective means at my disposal. I discussed a plan of action with Senior Lieutenant Yakov Petrukhin, the battery commander of the big SAUs. We agreed on the following: The self-propelled guns, employing the long range and firepower of their 152-mm guns, would strike first at the mobile Panthers. Their second priority was to fire on vehicles that had already been hit. This method would minimize the expenditure of ammunition. We faced many hours of combat before the arrival of our own troops. The battery commander would pay special attention to the concealment of the movement of his self-propelled guns into firing positions. The Sherman crews would try at this time to distract the attention of the enemy

tankers, conducting fire in order to blind them.

Yakov Petrukhin reported that he had selected two very suitable firing positions: they had good cover in front to defend the hull of his vehicles from enemy armor-piercing shells.

The firing intensity increased from our side along the entire eastern line. The *Emchisti* were attempting to solve two problems at once: to prevent the Germans from spilling out onto the central square by blocking them up in the surrounding streets, and to cover the movement of the self-propelled guns to firing positions.

How slowly time passes when one awaits the decisive moments in a fight with the enemy. There was no doubt — the turning point was near. The long-awaited time had arrived. Two thundering shots assaulted our eardrums, blowing the glass out of the windows of nearby houses, and rattling other windows some distance away. “Pardon us, beautiful city, that we cause you to tremble, and at times, we destroy parts of you! The laws of war are ruthless!” I wanted to cry out loudly, seeing the destruction we were causing.

The “second Viennese spectacle” turned out to be no less impressive. The strike of a large-caliber projectile (Yakov had ordered a concrete-breaking round loaded, for greater effect) knocked the turret off one of the Panthers that had already almost crawled into the square. The second heavy tank blazed up in an enormous fire. The SAU-152 immediately abandoned its position. It was as if they had poured boiling water on the enemy. The awkward armored vehicles hurriedly began to withdraw rearward. The enemy infantry, now lacking tank support, ran away through courtyards and alleys. And so, the enemy’s first attempt to divide the raiding detachment suffered defeat. The Shermans and paratroopers stubbornly held the center of Vienna. I reported the battalion’s situation to the brigade commander. He informed me that corps units were conducting a successful attack on the southern approaches to the Austrian capital.

Dinner in Vienna

The detachment’s personnel had not eaten hot food in more than a day. They were eating dry rations. If my memory serves me correctly, in the

center of Vienna was a restaurant that went by the name “Astoria.” I decided to order dinner for 180 people at this establishment. I delegated the battalion chief of staff, Guards Senior Lieutenant Nikolay Bogdanov (who spoke German fluently) to reach an agreement with the restaurant owner. The desired meal time was 1200 (Moscow time). We had foreign currency — dollars, pounds sterling, and shillings — to pay for the dinner. There was no doubt that the enemy’s morning attempt to attack our positions would not be his last. Taking advantage of the coming lull, I headed for the area of the art history museum with a group of officers. It was possible that the Germans would again throw themselves at us from the Ottakring or Funfhaus sectors. We had to inspect the organization of the defenses on the approach to the museum, and make some adjustments to the system of fire based on the experience of the enemy attack we had just defeated. I repositioned the SAU-152 battery to an area south of the Parliament.

After conducting the necessary work with the units, I decided to take a quick glance at the museum, to see its displays. We entered the building, and were stunned. The halls were completely empty of paintings or sculptures. The walls showed only various sized dark rectangular and oval patches, signs that canvasses hung here at one time. During the war years, each of us had seen the fascists’ crimes more than once. And here was their latest crime: the theft of the artworks and historical artifacts of the state property of Austria.

Passing through the labyrinth of large and small halls, we found ourselves in a cellar area. Immense joy flooded over us: here were stacked hundreds of latticed, reinforced crates. As it became clear, these crates contained the museum’s displays — paintings, sculptures, and so on. It was obvious to everyone that the Germans were preparing to ship them. The hurried entrance of our raiding detachment into Vienna had disrupted the enemy’s plans. These priceless treasures had not disappeared!

I returned to my command observation post in the left wing of the Parliament. Nikolay Bogdanov and the restaurant owner were waiting there. The Austrian wanted to confirm one important detail of the upcoming meal. What kind of alcoholic beverages should be served? I thought about it for several seconds. This was not a minor issue.



So I decided to allow the *Emchisti* and the paratroopers to drink a limited amount. They had earned it. “And what does the proprietor of the Astoria have?” I asked Bogdanov. “Cognac.” I calculated that the troops had gone more than a day without sleep or rest. How strong a “potion” would not harm our mission? “And what else does he have, besides cognac?” “French champagne!” The restaurateur raised the thumb of his right hand and pronounced, “Gut!”

Who would have believed it! Where, and when, would we dirty-covered tankers get a chance to drink such “nectar”! I ordered champagne for the tables, one bottle for every two men. “Does the manager have an adequate supply?” I turned to Bogdanov.

The Austrian made a mental calculation and replied affirmatively, “Ninety



bottles is nothing!” We agreed on this quantity.

Thirty minutes before the appointed meal hour, the restaurant owner invited the battalion command to the covered tables. The table appointments were beyond criticism: snow-white table linens, nickel-plated utensils, and beautiful porcelain ware. In sum, everything was high class. Without a word from us, the owner and the chef walked around all the tables and sampled each prepared dish. This in itself guaranteed the quality of the meal.

The command went out to all the units: leave half the crews and paratroopers in the positions, and the remainder come to the Astoria for dinner! Thirty minutes was allocated for the meal, followed by a changeover of the personnel. Departure from and return to the positions were to be conducted with

the strictest observation of security measures.

The tankers, artillerymen, and paratroopers liked dinner. Yes! This was their first such feast along their wartime roads (for some, thousands of kilometers). No doubt, they would remember it for the rest of their lives.

My deputies, chiefs of services, and I (seven persons altogether) began to discuss how much money to pay for this fare, and with what currency. I will openly admit that we all were total novices in these matters. We made a “Solomonic” decision, to let the restaurateur himself present us with a bill for the meal and specify the currency of payment.

The battalion chief of finance services placed three stacks of currency on the table: dollars, pounds sterling, and Austrian shillings. We called over the

owner of the Astoria. Nikolay Bogdanov explained what was required of him. He hesitated a bit with his answer, and then expressed a preference for “greenbacks.” He named a sum. I took the stack of dollars, the bank seal still affixed, and, saying “Bitte!” handed it to the Austrian.

With a slight tilt of his head, he accepted the money and immediately secreted it in the inside pocket of his jacket. After several seconds, he pulled the money out of that location and hurriedly thrust it into his pants pocket, not releasing it from his hand. With some trepidation in his eyes, he threw a hurried glance in our direction. The pupils of his eyes (I wasn’t the only one who noticed) were greatly enlarged. What was bothering him? Unfortunately, we never found out. My tank commander, Guards Lieutenant Ivan Filin, came running in and exclaimed,

"The Germans are attacking again!" We flew out from behind the table like the wind. Everyone hurried to his combat post.

We defeated this German attack, from the Funfhaus area in the direction of the art history museum and the opera house, easily and quickly. Having lost one tank and perhaps thirty soldiers and officers, the enemy withdrew to his starting positions. We had six wounded and two killed.

By the evening of 10 April, attacking units of 9th Guards Mechanized Corps broke through toward the center of Vienna through Meydling. The Shermans filled the streets and lanes of the Austrian capital. Our raiding detachment had accomplished its difficult combat mission! The battalion had fought in the enemy's rear, separated from the brigade and corps main bodies for twenty-four hours. The enemy had lost four tanks, two antitank guns, and approximately 100 soldiers and officers. Our ranks were also depleted: four *Emchas* were destroyed, ten men were killed, and fifteen were wounded. In these most difficult conditions, the detachment's soldiers and commanders displayed exceptional endurance, courage, and determination. They had mastered their experience of combat in a large city.

All the enlisted personnel of 1st Tank Battalion, 46th Guards Brigade, the paratroopers, and the artillerymen were recommended for decorations. Later, I was awarded the esteemed rank of Hero of the Soviet Union.

On 13 April 1945, after stubborn street battles, our forces took full control of the city. Vienna. Many of our troops were awarded the medal "For the Capture of Vienna."

The first anniversary of Victory Day was being celebrated in our unit on 9 May 1946. At a ceremonial dinner on the occasion of this holiday, one of the officers said, "Hey, this is not even half the dinner we had in Vienna!" Those commanders who understood what he was talking about began to laugh. "What did you expect?"

I immediately questioned the chief of finance, "How much did we pay the owner of the Astoria for our meal?"

"Comrade commander, do you remember the denomination of the bills in that packet of money?" "I think they were \$100 bills." "Yes. And there were

fifty of them." "Damn!" "We paid that hospitable Viennese \$5,000 for that dinner."

That's what we thought at the time. Sometime not too long ago, I had a conversation with one of our Russian embassy officials. I told him about those long-ago April days of 1945. And about the dinner in Vienna, and our settlement with the restaurateur. He corrected me. "There were not 50, but 100 \$100 bills in that packet. This was the traditional bank packet!" This is why the Austrian's eyes got so big. It turns out that we, simple Russian soldiers, paid him generously! Probably no one had ever settled their bill so lavishly in this restaurant. So much so, that it left him speechless.

East to Mongolia

The formations of 6th Guards Tank Army completed their rail journey from Czechoslovakia to Mongolia at the end of June 1945. 9th Guards Mechanized Corps detained at Choybolsan station. Its 46th Tank Brigade was concentrated fifteen kilometers northeast of the city. The army's forces had arrived in the Far East without combat vehicles or transport. They were to receive this equipment in their new operational area. Units were at full strength in tank crews, gun and mortar crews, and truck drivers. The headquarters of all troop formations were fully manned with enlisted personnel and had a sufficient number of buses. This permitted them to be included immediately in the enormous effort to prepare the forces for the upcoming combat activities.

The Mongolian steppe was as flat as a table top, all the way to the horizon. Abundant rains had recently fallen. The sun's rays had not yet burned the tall green grasses. Everywhere one looked were large herds of sheep. Cattle herders migrated here from the southeastern regions of the country.

For us "westerners," everything was a marvel: unbearably hot days and somewhat cool nights. We became acquainted with the charms of the sharply continental climate during our first days in Mongolia. Added to this was the absence of roads and clearly visible landmarks.

The brigade's units were prepared for battle from the moment they received their equipment. The Shermans were fully manned by crews battle-tested in the West. These were soldiers, sergeants, and officers who knew how to

"drive with the wind and cut down the enemy with precision fire."

All around us was the vast "sea" of the steppe, covered with thick grass. There was nothing on it to catch a person's glance. The only salvation in such a boundless landscape was the ability to move on an azimuth. Day and night. For great distances. Without "His Majesty the Azimuth," one could not move a step in these regions! We had some semblance of "western" experience in moving by azimuth with the aid of the tank gyrocompass that was mounted on each Sherman. We were required to sharpen our previously acquired skills and adapt them to new and unusual conditions. Crew training was divided into two phases: the first was movement on an azimuth on a "dismounted tank;" the second was practice in this same task, but mounted on the vehicles. We planned parallel exercises on the design and function of the gyrocompass and how to use it.

Before their departure to start positions, the Soviet and Mongolian forces were concentrated principally in the northern part of the Mongolian People's Republic. Formations of 6th Guards Tank Army were positioned west, south, and southeast of the city Choybolsan, not far from the Kerulen River. In these areas were a small number of nomadic herders with all sorts of herbivorous small and large livestock. The staff officers joked, "There were never such densities of tanks, guns, cattle, sheep, and horses before a single operation in the West!"

We "westerners" understood that this "Mongolian phenomenon" was possibly due to several factors. The recent victory over Fascist Germany had radically changed the world situation. The fate of Japan — the Third Reich's last ally — had been sealed. The removal of the Mongolian peasant herders from areas of succulent grasses would cause significant damage to the Mongolian civilian economy. The grass in the western and southern areas of the country had all been consumed, and what remained had been dried out by the merciless hot sun.

Thus, we, tankers and herdsman, lived as good neighbors until the beginning of the August offensive.

At the same time, an order arrived on the conduct of a march and the occupation of a start position for the offensive in the area of Tamsag-Bulag. The 9th

Guards Mechanized Corps commander, General-Lieutenant Mikhail Volkov, planned for the wheeled vehicles to complete the movement in two legs, and the tanks in three. To avoid overheating the engines of the tracked vehicles, units were to move mainly at night. During the day, the troops rested and conducted maintenance.

For brigade and battalion commanders, crews, and engineer-maintenance personnel, the forced march to the border became its own form of "dress rehearsal" for the upcoming operation. Experience was gained in movement in extremely dusty conditions and in rapidly servicing vehicles at nighttime halts. The chiefs of the engineering-maintenance services came to the conclusion that in the desert and steppe terrain, the Shermans required replacement of track shoes every 300 to 400 kilometers, and complete rebuild of the track with replacement, for example, of one-third of its track shoes every 500 to 600 kilometers. The necessity of more frequent and careful checks of the lubrication, charging, cooling, and especially air filtration systems was emphasized.

By the morning of 8 August, forces of 6th Guards Tank Army were occupying their forward assembly areas for the offensive. We did not realize that only twenty-four hours remained until the start of combat activities.

On the Eve

The Manchurian strategic offensive operation (8 August to 2 September 1945) was one of the largest operations in the concluding stage of World War II. It is unequalled in a number of operational norms and characteristics. The combat actions were projected to unfold on the broadest scale: troops occupied start positions along a 5,000-kilometer line; the forces of three fronts were concentrated in a zone of 280 to 300 kilometers, which comprised 7 percent of the front as a whole.

The concept of the conduct of the operation against Japan envisioned forces of the Transbaikal First and Second Far East Fronts executing a rapid penetration into the heart of Manchuria on three strategic axes. The main attacks were planned to be launched from the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic to the east and from the area of the Soviet Primorya [that portion of the USSR bordering Manchuria on the east, basically south of Khabarovsk] to

the west. These two meeting attacks were separated one from the other (measured along the international boundary) by a distance of not less than 2500 kilometers. The forces had to capture important military-political and economic objectives in central Manchuria — Mukden, Chan'chun, Harbin, and Gerin — as rapidly as possible. This was to be accomplished by the division of the Kwantung Army's main forces into isolated pieces, with their subsequent encirclement and destruction in northern and central Manchuria. Transbaikal and First Far East Fronts were given a leading role in the operation. Forces of the Second Far East Front were launching a supporting attack from the Blagoveshchensk area in the general direction of Harbin. They were to assist in breaking up the enemy grouping and destroying it in detail. The three fronts had a total of eleven combined arms, one tank, and three air armies, and an operational group. These formations included eighty divisions (of these, six cavalry, two tank, and two motorized rifle), four tank and mechanized corps, six rifle and thirty separate brigades, and the garrisons of fortified regions [primarily artillery and machine gun units]. Of the 63 tank and mechanized formations deployed in the three fronts, 29 — more than 16 percent — were in the Transbaikal Front. This was on the axis of the most complex natural conditions, which the Japanese command considered insurmountable and unsuitable for use by large masses of forces and combat equipment.

Altogether, 1,566,725 personnel; 26,137 guns and mortars; 5,556 tanks and SAUs [self-propelled guns]; and more than 3,800 combat aircraft were concentrated in the Far Eastern grouping of Soviet forces. The overall superiority over the enemy was 1.2:1 in troops, 4.8:1 in tanks and artillery, and 3.6:1 in aircraft. On the axis of the main attacks, the Soviet command sought to create a decisive superiority in forces and means. Thus, on the Transbaikal Front, the correlation of Soviet forces to Japanese forces was 1.7:1 in infantry, 8.6:1 in guns and mortars, and 5:1 in tanks and SAUs.

Let's take the Berlin strategic offensive operation (26 April to 8 May 1945) for comparison. It was also conducted by the forces of three fronts. Sixteen combined arms and four tank armies, nine tank and mechanized and four cavalry corps, and four air armies



were allocated for the breakthrough of the enemy defenses. A total of 2.5 million men participated in this concluding operation for the defeat of Fascist Germany. 41,600 guns and mortars; 6,250 tanks and SAUs; 7,650 aircraft, and a portion of the forces of Baltic Fleet and Dnepr Flotilla were employed. And all these forces and means were deployed, in contrast to the Manchurian operation, on a continuous front in a zone of not more than 300 kilometers.

On the Central Manchurian Plain

Dropping down out of the mountains, the tankers rejoiced that they finally had broken loose from the "mouth of the dragon." They could see farther and breathe easier on the plain. As we later learned, our joy was somewhat premature. Our difficulties were not yet over. In comparison with our previous trials, they were twice or even three times worse. In other words, the severe testing of the Shermans and the verifying of their crews' endurance and courage would continue. On the first day of our movement toward Tunlyao, the soldiers expressed their attitude toward the developing situation with the words: "You are a broad valley, but we hate you!"

During the course of the march, each kilometer cost us immense effort, and twice the norm of fuel. The rains stopped briefly, permitting us to admire the limitless crops of succulent grasses, then again pelted our faces with torrents of water. The road surface became a thick porridge-like mash. In places, the tanks created a muddy bow wave ahead of them. We had to take the 160-kilometer distance to Tunlyao "by storm" over the course of more than two days. No consideration was given to maneuvering around difficult sectors of the route or increasing speed. For "everywhere one looked, it was swampy fields and, on the road, a meter of fermenting mud!" The *Emchas'* motors were stressed to the limit. They withstood the enormous strain well; not one broke down. Having crossed the Silyaokhe River by bridge, the brigade's units drew up to the western outskirts of Tunlyao on the morning of 19 August. This was the second large city on our route. It became, in its own

right, the jumping off point for an unusual and most difficult march.

Something unbelievable happened here. The roads leading from Tunlyao to the southeast were unsuitable even for the movement of tanks. The several days of pouring rain had turned the broad central Manchurian plain into a kind of artificial lake. In this critical situation, when each hour was precious, a uniquely practicable decision was made — to cross this submerged terrain on the narrow embankment of the railroad bed, from Tunlyao to Chzhan"u and beyond to Mukden. The total length of this "cross-tie road" was approximately 250 kilometers.

I remember that day well. When the chain of command's decision was announced, several of us veteran officers were somewhat alarmed. We understood too well that such a risky step was not taken on a whim. Two corps (5th Tank and 9th Mechanized) would be moving along a single slender thread. "He who has not fought in war does not know what risk is!" This is true. We wondered: How many "hidden boulders" were on this lifesaving, and dangerous, route.

It would be twice as difficult for the army's second echelon units, that is to say, for us, the "*inomarochniki*" [foreign-vehicle tankers], to move along the fairly well broken up railroad embankment. We had no doubts about this whatsoever. The rugged track system of the 32-ton T-34 had left the embankment in just such a condition. The Sherman was four tons heavier than the Soviet tank. This had to be taken into account.

The brigade's tanks drove up onto the railroad embankment south of Tunlyao. We began the march across the railroad cross ties. This continued for two days. All sorts of things occurred along this route. From the first meters, we felt the "charm" of the sole dry strip of ground. The ends of the ties were heavily splintered. Deep gouges remained from the tracks of 5th Tank Corps' T-34 tanks. The T-34, with a somewhat narrower track block than a Sherman (500 versus 584 millimeters), moved with the rails between its tracks. The *Emchas* were not able to do this. We had to drive with one track between the rails, and the other on the gravel ballast of the ties. In doing this, the tank leaned significantly to the side. We had to move more than 100 kilometers in this "lopsided" attitude. In addition, the vehicles vibrated on the ties, like they were in

convulsions. It was especially difficult when we encountered bridges. We had to go around them. In order to do so, we had to prepare dismounting and mounting points to get down off of and back onto the embankment. And all of this with the efforts of our crews and *desantniki*. True, we had all the brigade's units.

At 1700 on 19 August, my 1st Battalion — the lead unit in the column — reached Bakhuta siding. Here stood one modest brick building. The rain had stopped a short time earlier. The *Emchisti* and *tankodesantniki* were removing their wet clothing. As before, the water was all around us. An unusual engagement occurred at this point along our route of march.

Observers loudly shouted out: "Air!" The gun commanders in the crews rushed to their covered anti-aircraft machine guns. For several days now, we had protected them from the heavy precipitation. During the brief interludes between rains, they remained in the travel position. Prior to this, enemy aircraft had never bothered us. Now, six spots had appeared on the horizon, fighter bombers hurriedly approaching from the south. Our "westerners" had mastered well the tactics of German pilots. Before they dropped their bombs, they circled over the target. They selected the aiming point, and only after this, the leader turned his aircraft into a dive. But here, everything unfolded according to a different scenario. Events developed so rapidly that we did not even have time to bring our machine guns into action. How did this unusual Japanese attack conclude?

The first aircraft raced toward the battalion's lead tank at low altitude. And at full speed, it plowed into the tank's hull. Pieces of the fuselage flew off in all directions. The airplane's engine buried itself under the tank's tracks. Tongues of flame licked around the Sherman's hull. The driver-mechanic, Guards Sergeant Nikolay Zuev, received numerous cuts and bruises.

The *desantniki* from the first three tanks ran into the brick building in order to seek cover. The second Japanese pilot guided his aircraft into this structure. Crashing through the roof, it lodged itself in the attic. None of our soldiers were injured. It immediately became clear: kamikaze were attacking our battalion.

The third pilot did not repeat the mistake of his comrades. He dropped

sharply toward the ground and flew his aircraft toward a window of the building. He also was unable to reach his target. His wing caught a telegraph pole, and the fighter bomber crashed into the ground. It quickly burst into flames.

The fourth aircraft dived on the column. It crashed into a truck belonging to the battalion aid station, setting it on fire. The last two kamikaze directed their attack at the column's trailing tanks, and were met by a dense curtain of anti-aircraft fire. Struck by machine gun bursts, both aircraft crashed into the water not far from the railroad embankment. The air attack had lasted several brief moments. Six fighter bombers were turned into shapeless heaps of metal, with six dead pilots. What really surprised us, however, were the female corpses in the cockpits of two of the aircraft. In all likelihood, these were fiancées of the kamikaze pilots, who had decided to share the dismal fate of their selected ones. Our losses were insignificant: one truck burned, a gouged turret on the lead Sherman, and one driver-mechanic disabled. We quickly pushed the truck off into the water, sat the assistant driver-mechanic behind the controls of the tank, and continued the march.

By the middle of the day, the brigade's units had reached Chzhan"u. Here, to the great joy of the tankers and *desantniki*, we abandoned the railway and drove along the concrete. We immediately increased our speed to the maximum — just under fifty kilometers per hour. Even the "lame" tanks did not fall behind. Ninety minutes later, the column was once again forced to straddle the hated railroad tracks. It was sixty "vibrating" kilometers to Mukden.

The tankers had experienced much on the long journey from the forward assembly area: they scorched in the heat, bogged down in the desert sands, forced a track through the mountains (every minute risking a rollover), ate dust for several consecutive days, and washed it down with torrents of rain. It would seem that everyone had been driven to the brink. But no! A new problem arose — another obstacle. We had to cross the Lyaokhe River on a railroad bridge. This would be no simple matter. The "listing" Shermans did not fit between the [low] sides of the bridge structure. We had to "streamline" the vehicle. I thought about it, and the company commanders and bat-

talion staff sought a solution. We discussed various ideas. The best of these was to load the *Emchas* on platform cars and move them to the opposite bank.

We had to find platform cars, even just two or three. And a steam engine. We created two groups of scouts to go out and find the necessary equipment. One group was sent back to the station we had recently passed through, the second to the next station ahead. After about an hour, discomfiting news reached us. Platform cars of only sixteen tons capacity had been found, but no locomotives.

There was one way out: we had to push these loaded platform cars across the bridge by hand. A herculean task, for sure. We constructed a loading platform out of various makeshift materials, and maneuvered a single tank onto two platform cars. A team of twenty men was assigned to each platform. Their strength was sufficient to push, and to hold the valuable "cargo" on grades. The first shuttle was successful, but it took almost four hours. The axle boxes smoked from the inordinate overloading. We took various measures, such as pouring diesel fuel and oil on the bearings. And again we put them under the load.

The sweat poured off of our arms. Our hands bled from pushing and dragging all the Shermans to the opposite bank of the Lyaokhe River. We breathed a sigh of relief, then moved off toward Mukden. On the morning of 21 August, we reached its northwestern outskirts. The order came down to halt in the city.

Mukden

How long would we be in Mukden? At the time we still did not know that this was the final stop on the offensive advance by units of 9th Guards Mechanized Corps. 5th Guards Tank Corps continued to advance to Port Arthur and Dal'nya.

When the battalion had been in Mukden for about two hours, we were alerted. We received the mission to disarm a Japanese tank unit in a nearby sector of the city. The five-kilometer roadmarch required little time. We reached the objective: a military garrison of a Japanese tank brigade. We encircled it with our Shermans, their main guns and machine guns loaded. We were ordered to open fire on the garrison at the slightest sign of resistance.

The Japanese officer — a captain, with anger in his voice, reported to me in perfect Russian that they had received an order from their own command to surrender their arms. "What procedure do you wish us to follow?" he asked me.

We gave the following instructions to the Japanese officer: to surrender all small arms; where to drive and park the tanks and other combat vehicles; and where, after this had been accomplished, to assemble all the soldiers. Bogdanov also drew him a sketch indicating the locations of these points. The Japanese captain indicated his understanding of the instructions and returned to his unit. We worriedly waited the fulfillment of our requirements. Brigade and corps staff officers arrived to observe the activity, and I briefed them on the situation.

About an hour passed in waiting. As before, all was quiet in the compound. The *emchisti* were ready for anything. Suddenly, it was as if the Japanese were preparing for their last engagement. Inside the compound we heard the racing of tank engines. A light truck quickly appeared in the gates. Behind it followed several staff buses, and then the tanks. It was a brigade column. The lead tank came up to my Sherman and stopped. I was handed the TOE [table of organization and equipment] for the brigade, in Russian. This was a great surprise to us. It was clearly the work of the captain-negotiator.

The commanding officers of the units were the first to lay down their weapons. They immediately were seated in two light vehicles and taken to corps headquarters under guard.

For almost the remainder of the day we accepted the capitulation of the Japanese tankers. Fairness requires me to note that even in this difficult, disgraceful period, the officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers carried out every instruction regarding surrender of their weapons and equipment. Military discipline was maintained to the last fateful moment, when all of the more than 1,000 assigned soldiers of the brigade became prisoners of war. The final command was issued in Japanese and the former tankers, under heavy guard, marched off into Mukden, to a prisoner-of-war collection point.

I turned to the captain who had negotiated for the Japanese command with a question. "Captain, where did you learn



Russian so well?" Standing quietly for a moment, he replied, with some assertiveness in his voice, "It was my duty."

"Captain, how did you intend to fight against Soviet T-34s and American Shermans with such tanks as these?" I asked the Japanese captain-parliamentarian. Not concealing his enormous hatred toward us, the Japanese officer responded, "Captain, had there been a confrontation, had we seen your five thousand tanks, we would have found twelve thousand soldiers willing to sacrifice themselves."

The Japanese forces moved rapidly toward their fate. Garrison after garrison, position upon position laid down their arms. The Kwantung Army, like snow before the sun, melted away by the day, by the hour.

Notes

¹"Emcha" is a Russian nickname, a shortening of "M4." - Editor

²Tankodesantniki: a Russian term for accompanying infantry who rode on the tank's hull.

³Chernozem: the blacksoil typical of the Ukraine.

This article adopted with permission from *Commanding the Red Army's Sherman Tanks*, by Dmitry Loza, translated and edited by James F. Gebhardt, to be published in December. © by the University of Nebraska Press.

Major James F. Gebhardt (Ret.) is a former Armor officer and Soviet Foreign Area Officer. Prior to retirement in 1992, he was the author of *Leavenworth Papers No. 17*, a study of Soviet Arctic combat. He now operates *Russian Military Translations in Leavenworth, Kan.*, which has produced several recent translations of Soviet military memoirs, with three due to be published this fall. He has also translated Soviet small arms instruction booklets on the Makarov pistol, recently published, and several others in production.