

Army Operations in Swampy Lowlands

3



Terrain

Among the most unpleasant realities Soviet planners faced in contemplating operations in eastern Manchuria was the fact that avenues of approach into the region not obstructed by mountains were obstructed instead by swamps and marshes. Indeed, it seemed as if all solid land rose and fell precipitously, while all flat ground consumed in its watery depths any men or equipment that attempted to cross it.

Missions and Tasks

Such was the case in the region immediately north of Lake Khanka, a region extending about 200 kilometers from north to south, over which the 1st Far Eastern Front directed 35th Army to operate. In concept, the task assigned to 35th Army was simple: advance westward north of Lake Khanka in order to secure the Japanese fortified region at Mishan, isolate and destroy the fortified region at Hutou, and ultimately, advance on Poli, thus protecting the right flank of the 1st Far Eastern Front. The problem in the execution of that assigned task rested in the adverse geographical conditions 35th Army would have to encounter.

Geographically, the area over which 35th Army would operate was primarily swamps and marshy lowlands, punctuated in places by low hills protruding from the marshes. This region was bounded on the south by Lake Khanka, on the east by the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers, and on the north by the Wanta Shan (mountains), running from northeast to southwest along the right flank of the army sector. In the eastern portion of the spongy region, a few sparsely wooded hills rose fifty to eighty meters above the swamps, while in the west, similar hills proliferated in number and reached heights of 400 meters. The Muleng River, running from southwest to northeast into the Ussuri River, drained the region. In the western portion of the region, one could exit from the lowlands and travel up the valley of the Muleng via Chihsi and Linkou into the eastern Manchurian hills, or northwest across the Wanta Shan from Mishan to Poli. Swamps hindered movement in places along both of these exit routes.

Japanese Defenses

The Japanese had constructed two major fortified regions to defend the area and to prevent Soviet passage through it. The Hutou Fortified Region rested on the hills scattered north of the confluence of the Muleng and Ussuri rivers. The reinforced concrete positions at and north of Hutou were a formidable obstacle, blocking the road from the Ussuri via Hulin to Mishan. The guns in these positions also threatened the Soviet Trans-Siberian railroad line running parallel across the Ussuri River at Iman. The second fortified region extended south and east of Mishan on the hills north of Lake Khanka. The combination of natural and man-made obstacles made the task of 35th Army challenging. Marshal Meretskov noted, "It is hard to say what was more difficult for 35th Army: to assault fortified areas or to negotiate places where there was more water than land and where the men waded waist-deep for tens of kilometers at a stretch."¹

The Japanese 5th Army assigned responsibility for the defense of the region to the 135th Infantry Division of General Yoichi Hitomi, with headquarters at Tungan, and to the 15th Border Guard Unit at Hutou. Because of the extensive area it had to defend, the subordinate units of the 135th Infantry Division were widely scattered (see table 3-1).

Table 3-1. Japanese 135th Infantry Division Composition

368th Infantry Regiment
369th Infantry Regiment
370th Infantry Regiment
135th Artillery Regiment
135th Engineer Battalion
Raiding battalion
20th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (1 battery)

Source: U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 154: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Army on Eastern Front (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 275-76.

The 368th Infantry Regiment, with headquarters at Hulin, had two battalions there and two others working on fortifications in the Chihsing main line of resistance, north of Mutanchiang. The 369th Infantry Regiment had its headquarters and main body at Tungan, one battalion at Chihsing, two companies at Paoching, and a smaller element at Jaoho on the Ussuri River north of the Wanta Shan. The main body of the 370th Infantry Regiment and its headquarters were at Linkou, while one battalion was at Chihsing. The support units of the division were at Tungan, except for the engineer battalion and two batteries of the artillery regiment, which were preparing field works at Chihsing, and the raiding battalion located near Linkou.²

The 135th Infantry Division manned scattered outposts on the border, in sectors north and south of Hutou and adjacent to the northwestern shores of Lake Khanka. North of Hutou, a company-size element of the 369th Infantry Regiment manned fortified positions at Jaoho, on the Ussuri River, while a platoon-size force from the 368th Infantry Regiment occupied Tumuho, upriver from Jaoho. South of Hutou a platoon of the 368th Infantry Regiment covered a seventy-kilometer expanse of the Ussuri and Sungacha rivers. East of Lake Khanka, a company of the 368th Infantry Regiment garrisoned a series of four small fortified outposts at, and south of, Tachiao. These outposts consisted of five to ten log emplacements, firing trenches, and communication trenches. Farther to the rear, the division had constructed a forward defensive line at Mashan, twenty kilometers east of Linkou. The division's main defensive position, at Chihsing, formed the northern sector of the 5th Army main line of resistance.³

The 15th Border Guard Unit, numbering four infantry companies, two artillery companies, and one engineer platoon, totaling about 1,500 men, defended the Hutou Fortified Region, one of the strongest Japanese fortified regions in Manchuria. Seven kilometers long and ten kilometers deep, the region consisted of nineteen reinforced concrete fortifications and eight log forts, numerous armored firing positions, minefields, barbed wire entanglements, and an obstacle network. Armament of the region consisted of a 410-mm howitzer, 100-mm guns, and automatic weapons.⁴

Other permanent fortified regions in the 135th Infantry Division zone were at Hulin and Mishan. The smaller Hulin Fortified Region comprised twenty-three permanent fortified positions, defending the Hutou-Mishan road fifty kilometers from the border. The larger Mishan Fortified Region surrounded the town of Mishan and had outer works extending southwards toward Lake Khanka.

The operational plan of the 135th Infantry Division, in the event of war with the Soviet Union, followed the directives of Japanese 5th Army. The division would establish an advanced position at Mashan and a main defensive line at Chihsing, with emphasis on defense in depth along the Linkou-Chihsing road. One infantry battalion, an artillery battery, and an engineer element would occupy the Mashan position. These forces would inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy without becoming decisively engaged. Manning the Chihsing line, eight infantry battalions, with artillery and engineer support, would constitute the division's main body. Three battalions of Manchurian troops at Mashan would constitute the division reserve. Border garrisons would hold their positions, if possible, to exact as high a toll as they could on the Soviets. Failing in that, they would try to exhaust the enemy strength by guerrilla warfare.⁵

The approximately 20,000 men of the 135th Infantry Division and 15th Border Guard Unit, with Manchurian assistance, defended the border to a considerable depth, with forces concentrated in a narrow strip along the

Hutou-Mishan-Linkou road, the main trafficable artery and high speed avenue of approach. Additional reinforcements for the Japanese theoretically could come from the 1st Manchurian Infantry Division at Poli, though that unit was of questionable political and military reliability (an accurate assessment, as events would prove).

Operational Planning

The task of the Soviet 35th Army was to overcome this Japanese force in prepared positions at Hutou and Mishan and to prevent the Japanese 135th Infantry Division from interfering with the advance of 1st Red Banner Army on 35th Army's left flank. The exact mission Marshal Meretskov assigned to General N. D. Zakhvatayev, 35th Army commander, was:

To cover the railroad and highway in the sector Guberovo-Spassk with part of the forces; with the main force, make the main thrust from the region southwest of Lesozavodsk into the flank and rear of the Hutou Fortified Region and secure it. Subsequently, develop the offensive in the direction of Poli and, in cooperation with 1st Red Banner Army, destroy enemy defensive groups and secure from the north the operations of the main shock group of the front.⁶

Specifically, the front commander directed General Zakhvatayev to envelop Hutou from the south in order to isolate it completely.

To accomplish the mission, 35th Army had under its operational control three rifle divisions (264th, 66th, and 363d) and two fortified regions (109th and 8th Field). The 1st Far Eastern Front provided artillery, tank, and engineer support suited to the 35th Army's mission and the terrain over which it would operate. Because much of the terrain was not well suited for armor operations, the army received in attachment only those tanks necessary for infantry support, a total of two tank brigades. The necessity to reduce several heavily fortified regions, however, prompted 1st Far Eastern Front to attach heavy artillery support to 35th Army in the form of ten artillery battalions. This created an army artillery group to reduce Hutou, three tank destroyer battalions to form a tank destroyer artillery group, and two guards mortar battalions to form a rocket artillery group (see table 3—2).⁷ An additional engineer battalion supplemented divisional engineer units to help cope with problems of passage through marshy regions and to provide sapper units to assist in reducing the fortified regions.

The final plan of General Zakhvatayev echoed the mission Marshal Meretskov had assigned him.⁸ He deployed his army in single echelon formation and arranged to take advantage of the weakest portion of the Japanese defenses, the region across the Sungacha River from Pavlo-Federovka. Here, he deployed the 363d Rifle Division under command of Col. S. D. Pechenko and the 66th Rifle Division of Col. F. K. Nesterov,

each supported by one tank brigade (the 125th and 209th Tank Brigades, respectively) to conduct the main attack. The 215th Army Gun Artillery Brigade, the 54th Mortar Brigade, and the 62d Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade would support the two divisions. Using a two-echelon formation, each division would attack across the Sungacha River in approximately eight- to ten-kilometer sectors. The actual crossing of each division would occur on two regimental axes of advance, each in a zone of three kilometers. Reconnaissance groups from the division reconnaissance battalions would reconnoiter crossing sites, and border guard detachments and advanced battalions from each first echelon rifle regiment would secure them. In order to cross the major water obstacle (forty to sixty meters wide and seven to eight meters deep), each division received twenty-five A-3 boats to supplement handmade rafts used by each soldier. The 31st Pontoon Bridge Battalion would later install twelve- and thirty-ton bridges to allow heavier equipment to cross.

Table 3—2. Soviet 35th Army Composition

264th Rifle Division
 66th Rifle Division
 363d Rifle Division
 109th Fortified Region
 8th Field Fortified Region
 125th Tank Brigade
 209th Tank Brigade
 215th Army Gun Artillery Brigade
 224th High Powered Howitzer Artillery Brigade, 4 battalions (24 x 203mm)
 62d Tank Destroyer Artillery Brigade, 3 regiments (6 batteries)
 54th Mortar Brigade (division support)
 67th Guards Mortar Regiment
 13th Separate Armored Train Regiment (2 trains)
 9th Separate Armored Train Regiment (2 trains)
 1647th Antiaircraft Artillery Regiment
 43d Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 110th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 355th Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion
 280th Separate Engineer Battalion

Weapons:

205 tanks and self-propelled guns
 955 guns and mortars

Source: M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iaponiy v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401.

Adjacent to the winding, unfordable river were extensive swampy regions stretching twelve to fifteen kilometers inland on both banks. Dense vines covered the river banks and the many inlets and channels that criss-crossed the approaches to the river. Therefore, before the attack, engineers prepared crossing sites by putting down fascine matting and building gravel roads over the swampy terrain throughout the army sector.⁹

Regimental and divisional artillery groups would support the ground forces with a three-stage artillery operation. Before the river crossing, a fifteen-minute artillery preparation would soften up Japanese defenses on the far bank. While the crossing was in progress, artillery would fire consecutive concentrations during a one-hour preparation. For six to nine hours after the crossing, artillery would fire in support of the infantry as it penetrated deeper into the Japanese defenses. An army long-range artillery group and a guards mortar (rocket artillery) group would reinforce the preparation.¹⁰

Having forced the Sungacha River barrier, the two rifle divisions would then clear Japanese units from the western bank of the river and advance on a Tachiao-Peilingtsi-Paishihshen axis, ultimately to cut the road and rail line between Hulin and Mishan. Then the divisions would join with the 264th Rifle Division advancing from Hutou in order to destroy the Japanese at Mishan.

Simultaneously with the operations of the main attack group, the 264th Rifle Division of Maj. Gen. V. L. Vinogradov and the 109th Fortified Region would cross the Ussuri River in a two-kilometer sector west of Iman to isolate (and then reduce) the Hutou Fortified Region and to advance down the Hutou-Hulin road to join forces with the main attack group. An army artillery group, including subgroups for destruction missions and counter-battery fire, would support the 264th Rifle Division's attack. The artillery destruction group contained the 224th High Powered Howitzer Artillery Brigade armed with twenty-four 203-mm howitzers.¹¹ As in the case of the main attack group, advanced battalions would initiate the attack. To insure maximum surprise, the advanced battalions of both the main and supporting attack groups would commence their operations during darkness.

The 35th Army prepared for the attack with the utmost secrecy. Engineers worked on the jumping-off positions during darkness, often hindered by summer rains and high water. Nevertheless, by the end of July, they had constructed more than forty-six kilometers of trenches and had built nine command and observation posts and 100 artillery firing emplacements. Two corduroy roads, on which troops could deploy forward, were laid for twenty kilometers across the swamp. To conceal the work from Japanese eyes, engineers built screening fences and placed overhead camouflage nets over open areas.¹²

Throughout the preparation period, reconnaissance was carried out only from specially equipped hidden observation points. All units except border guards and fortified regions maintained complete radio silence. During the last three days before the attack, regimental, battalion, and company commanders personally reconnoitered the forward area. On the evening of 8 August, on an oral order from General Zakhvatayev and his representatives in other sectors of the front, 35th Army forces marched through pouring rain in order to occupy jumping-off positions and to prepare for the river crossing.

Late that evening, the three divisions of 35th Army settled into their jumping-off positions and awaited the order to advance. The 363d Rifle Division, on the army's left flank, deployed on a six-kilometer front with the 404th Rifle Regiment of Maj. G. N. Golub on the right and the 395th Rifle Regiment of Lt. Col. N. A. Martynov on the left.¹³ Across the river in the darkness lay the 363d Rifle Division's objectives, the four fortified villages of Tachiao, Maly Huangkang, Maly Nangan, and Taiyangkang. The first three villages ran north to south across the 363d Rifle Division's front. The fourth was between Maly Nangan and the eastern shore of Lake Khanka. Each village contained five to ten log bunkers, machine gun positions, and barbed wire. In addition, Maly Huangkang had a thirty-six-meter high observation tower topped with an armored cupola. A company of the Japanese 368th Infantry Regiment stationed at Tachiao had squad- and platoon-size elements in each of the fortified villages.

The 404th Rifle Regiment would cross the Sungacha River with its 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions in first echelon, traverse the swamps to capture Maly Huangkang, and take Tachiao by the end of the day. The 2d Rifle Battalion, advancing behind the first echelon battalions, would prepare to flank the strongholds, if that proved necessary. The 395th Rifle Regiment would cross the river on the 404th Rifle Regiment's left to secure Maly Nangan and take Taiyangkang by the end of the day. The 488th Rifle Regiment of Maj. M. L. Grudinin would follow behind the 404th Rifle Regiment and prepare for employment on the right flank of the 404th in order to exploit success northwest of Tachiao.

The 66th Rifle Division, in a six-kilometer sector on the right flank of the 363d Rifle Division, deployed the 341st Rifle Regiment of Lieutenant Colonel Pavlenko on the left and the 33d Rifle Regiment of Major Tsarev on the right, with its third rifle regiment in second echelon.¹⁴ The 66th Rifle Division would advance across the Sungacha River, reduce Japanese border posts, and advance on Tachiao from the east in coordination with the 404th Rifle Regiment of the 363d Rifle Division. After securing Tachiao, the division would advance north toward Peilingtsi and begin the exploitation to cut the Hulin-Mishan road. The 125th and 209th Tank Brigades assembled in the rear area in order to follow the rifle divisions after means for crossing the Sungacha had become available.

35th Army Attack

As midnight passed, the troops sat in their jumping-off positions in a heavy downpour (see map 3—1). At 0100 on 9 August, small groups from the 57th Border Guards Detachment forced the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers on boats and cutters equipped with muffled motors. As the artillery preparation began, they seized the small Japanese border posts along the river, securing the last post by 0200.¹⁵

Reconnaissance teams from the rifle divisions followed hard on the heels of the border troops. Two reconnaissance groups from the 118th Separate Reconnaissance Company of the 363d Rifle Division pushed inland to reconnoiter the Japanese positions at Maly Huangkang. At 0215, after artillery fire had lifted, the four advanced battalions of the two rifle divisions secured bridgeheads on the western bank of the river. The Japanese did not resist. The army engineers then installed pontoon bridges, and between 0700 and 0800, the men and equipment of the first echelon rifle regiments completed troop concentrations on the western bank of the Sungacha and prepared to move across the swamps toward the Japanese strongpoints. Steady rains made movement through the swamps almost impossible. So, the army commander formed detachments to build trails for column routes forward: three engineer battalions and three rifle battalions prepared trails in the 363d Rifle Division sector; one engineer battalion and two rifle battalions did likewise in the 66th Rifle Division sector.¹⁶

Taking advantage of the work of these trail detachments, the 341st Rifle Regiment and 33d Rifle Regiment of Colonel Nesterov's 66th Rifle Division made good progress. Meeting no enemy resistance, they traversed the swamps and, at 2000 on 9 August, reached a line two kilometers northeast of Tachiao. After digging in to await the arrival of the 363d Rifle Division, they dispatched reconnaissance units toward Peilingtsi. While the 66th Rifle Division moved forward unhindered by the Japanese, the 363d Rifle Division ran into heavy opposition.

Throughout the morning, the 363d Rifle Division's first echelon regiments pushed westward through waist-deep swamps, laboriously carrying machine guns and mortars on their backs in order to keep them dry. Soviet artillery pounded Japanese positions to their front. By late morning the sun appeared, and the weather became hot and humid, thus adding to the misery of the troops. About noon the 1st Rifle Battalion, 404th Rifle Regiment, under Capt. N. I. Vodolazkin reached solid ground just east of Maly Huangkang and deployed to attack the strongpoint there. The 2d Rifle Battalion of Capt. I. G. Lyalyikin provided support for the attack. Five pillboxes connected by trenches and covered by barbed wire defended Maly Huangkang. The armored tower dominated the low-lying landscape.¹⁷

At 1300, as Soviet artillery lifted its fire to avoid hitting its own troops, Captain Vodolazkin's battalion began the assault with two companies on line. Japanese small arms and machine gun fire pinned down the advancing infantry, and fire from the elevated armored cupola and pillboxes drove the Soviet troops back. It was apparent to Vodolazkin that only direct fire artillery could reduce the strongpoint. Regimental and divisional artillery, however, was mired in the swamps to the rear, and only the efforts of infantrymen pulling the guns brought the necessary artillery forward to support the attack. By 1500 on 9 August, four 76-mm guns of the 501st Artillery Regiment and a battery of the 187th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion were in position to shell the Japanese fortifications. The 404th Rifle Regiment flamethrower company assembled, ready to support the 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions when they resumed their attacks. After a fifteen-minute indirect fire artillery preparation from concealed positions, the Soviet infantry advanced. The artillery preparation, however, had done little damage to the steel and concrete Japanese emplacements, and once again the infantry assault failed. Now the Soviet artillery relocated and took the emplacements under direct fire from open positions. The bombardment continued from 1500 to 1800. Finally, a gun crew of the 501st Artillery Regiment destroyed the tower and armored cupola with an armor-piercing shell. By 1800, fire had slackened, and the Soviets destroyed Japanese emplacements one by one. The 1st and 3d Rifle Battalions inched forward under cover of the artillery fire, and when that fire halted, they rushed the Japanese positions from three sides. By 1900, Maly Huangkang had fallen into the 404th Rifle Regiment's hands. Meanwhile, the 395th Rifle Regiment to the south had secured Maly Nangan and had advanced westward toward Taiyangkang.

By dusk on 9 August, the 404th Rifle Regiment, with the 468th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion and the 501st Artillery Regiment, had advanced to a position two to three kilometers south and southwest of Tachiao. The 395th Rifle Regiment, with the 472d Mortar Regiment and 187th Separate Tank Destroyer Battalion, had cleared Taiyangkang of Japanese and had reached positions three kilometers northwest of that village. Ten tanks of the 125th Tank Brigade had reached Maly Huangkang, and the remainder of the unit had begun crossing the Sungacha River.¹⁸ By the evening of the ninth, the 66th Rifle Division and 363d Rifle Division had overcome both the swamps and Japanese resistance to secure all of their objectives except Tachiao, which they nevertheless still threatened from the south and northeast.

Farther north, the 264th Rifle Division, 109th Fortified Region, and 8th Field Fortified Region opened their attack on Hutou at 0100. The Soviets began with a fifteen-minute artillery strike on Hutou, followed by a methodical fire on the Hutou fortified positions. The Japanese responded with "a hurricane of fire" on Soviet positions at Iman and at the important

Trans-Siberian Railroad bridge over a tributary of the Ussuri, just northeast of Iman. The Soviets answered by sending forty-nine IL-4 bombers, escorted by fifty fighters, in a two-hour air strike against Japanese positions at Hutou.¹⁹

Under cover of the artillery fire, the 1056th Rifle Regiment and the 1060th Rifle Regiment of the 264th Rifle Division sent advanced battalions across the Ussuri River opposite Iman. By 1100 on 9 August, the advanced battalion of the 1060th Rifle Regiment had secured a lodgment on the west bank of the river north of Hutou, while the 1056th Rifle Regiment advanced battalion had secured a lodgment just south of Hutou. By nightfall, regimental main forces had advanced to secure Japanese positions at *Krepost'* (fortress), south of Hutou. Farther south, the 5th Rifle Company of the 1058th Rifle Regiment, with two companies of the 109th Fortified Region and one company of the 8th Field Fortified Region, had crossed the river and had advanced to the Youeya railroad station southwest of Hutou, thus cutting the Hutou-Hulin rail line.²⁰

On 10 August, Soviet 35th Army forces continued to advance in both sectors. The 264th Rifle Division engaged in particularly hard fighting for Hutou. While the 1058th Rifle Regiment struggled for the southern approaches to the city, the 1056th Rifle Regiment, with units of the 109th Fortified Region, battled for the wharf and riverside section just east of Hutou city. After repelling several Japanese counterattacks, the 1058th and 1056th Rifle Regiments launched a coordinated assault on the city from three sides. By evening on 10 August, the wharf area and city proper were in Soviet hands. Still, the Hutou Fortified Region north and northwest of the city and several Japanese strongpoints south of the city continued to offer strong resistance, whereupon General Zakhvatayev ordered the 1056th Rifle Regiment and 109th Fortified Region, with heavy artillery support, to isolate and reduce the fortified positions, while the remaining forces of 35th Army began an advance westward toward Hulin (see case study 5, "Reduction of a Fortified Region").

On the tenth, while the 264th Rifle Division fought for possession of Hutou, the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions attempted to develop the offensive toward Mishan via Tachiao and Peilingtsi. The forward detachment that the army had formed to lead the advance consisted of the 3d Tank Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade, with machine gunners riding on the tanks, the 473d Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, and a rifle battalion from the 33d Rifle Regiment of the 66th Rifle Division. This forward detachment's mission was to cut the Hulin-Mishan rail line by the evening of 11 August. The remainder of the 125th Tank Brigade, with the 468th Separate Self-Propelled Artillery Battalion, was supposed to lead the advance of the 363d Rifle Division.²¹

Though the Japanese retreated rapidly along what few roads there were, and offered little resistance, the swampy terrain in the region created tremendous problems for advancing Soviet units, particularly because the trails and roads could not support heavy equipment. On General Zakhvatayev's orders, each rifle regiment formed a road and bridge construction detachment to build and improve routes of advance. Each detachment consisted of a rifle battalion and one to three engineer battalions. In addition, army detailed the 11th Pontoon Bridge Brigade and an engineer battalion to work with the lead regiment of 66th Rifle Division. It also assigned the 50th Separate Engineer Battalion to work with the 488th Rifle Regiment, leading the advance of the 363d Rifle Division. Units of both the 209th and 125th Tank Brigades (minus the 3d Battalion, 125th Tank Brigade) also became involved with road work.

This road work and the poor trafficability in the region caused not only a delay in operations but also an acute army-wide fuel shortage. On 9 August the army overcame the deficiency by shipping fuel forward ten kilometers in jerry cans. The next day, tractors towed fuel-laden pontoon sections across the swamp.²² The combination of the fuel shortage and terrain difficulties ultimately forced the 35th to curtail the use of tanks in the 66th Rifle Division and 363d Rifle Division sectors. Even without the tanks, by the evening of 10 August, advanced units of the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions were approaching Peilingtsi, although slightly behind schedule.

The Soviet attack on 9 August had clearly caught the Japanese by surprise. Lieutenant General Hitomi, 135th Infantry Division commander, and Col. Takeshi Nishiwaki, commander of the 15th Border Guard Unit, received word of the attack at 5th Army headquarters at Yehho at 0300. General Hitomi initially ordered his troops to delay the Soviets along the border in order to buy time to establish a defense at Chihsing on the 5th Army's main line of resistance and at Mashan. These positions were to cover withdrawal of 135th Infantry Division units from the forward area. After telephoning the orders to division headquarters at Tungan, the two commanders departed at 0600 by rail to rejoin their units.²³

Reaching Tungan twelve hours later, General Hitomi reviewed the tactical situation and found that all border posts along the Sungacha and Ussuri rivers were under attack and that communications with most units had been lost. Because the Soviet attack had also isolated Hutou, Colonel Nishiwaki could not rejoin his command. General Hitomi then issued new orders calling for all units in the division that could do so to withdraw to the Chihsing and Mashan areas. The 15th Border Guard Unit would hold its positions in accordance with 5th Army orders. At midnight, General Hitomi and his headquarters departed by vehicle toward Poli, arriving there fourteen hours later.²⁴ From this point on, General Hitomi concerned himself with the division's withdrawal to Chihsing and, ultimately, to Mutanchiang.

Units remaining on the border were left to their own devices. Elements of the 368th Infantry Regiment withdrew from Hulin at midnight on the ninth and traveled on foot across the Wanta Shan, ultimately to Linkou. Forces at Tungan and Feite retreated on the ninth to Poli.²⁵ Units on the immediate border that had not already been annihilated in fighting on 9 August continued resisting the Soviet advance. Actually, only these forces and remnants of the Japanese force at Hulin and Tungan offered any further resistance to the subsequent advance of the Soviet 35th Army.

On 11 August, Soviet 35th Army forces continued their advance against slackened Japanese resistance. Now the terrain posed the paramount difficulty for the advancing units. At 1100 on 11 August, the army forward detachment captured Peilingsi, at which point the fuel shortage halted its advance. That fuel shortage and impassable terrain forced the 35th Army commander to withdraw the bulk of his tank forces. The 209th Tank Brigade reverted to front reserve at 2000 on 10 August, while the 125th Tank Brigade (less one battalion) returned to Pavlo-Federovka. The 35th Army loaded the 125th Tank Brigade on rail cars and shipped it from Shmakovka Station to Mishchurin Rog. The brigade then traveled by road to rejoin the 363d Rifle Division at Mishan.²⁶ Meanwhile, on the morning of 12 August, the 363d Rifle Division, having captured Paishihshan the previous day, was redirected northward to Hulin to join the 264th Rifle Division advancing from Hutou. At 1300 on 12 August, lead elements of 35th Army's forward detachment, with four tanks and six self-propelled guns, entered Mishan, even though their main force elements were still thirty to thirty-five kilometers to the rear. Late on the thirteenth, elements of 66th Rifle Division entered Tungan and the next day, in coordination with the 363d Rifle Division, occupied the Mishan Fortified Region, now largely abandoned by the Japanese. The 35th Army thus accomplished its primary mission. The 1058th Rifle Regiment of the 264th Rifle Division, with the 109th Fortified Region, later continued the reduction of Hutou, while the 66th and 363d Rifle Divisions continued their pursuit of Japanese forces to Poli and Linkou.

Conclusions

Because the Japanese offered little resistance after the small Japanese border posts had fallen, 35th Army's operations were more notable for overcoming major terrain obstacles, such as the swamps and flooded ground west of the Sungacha River, than for overcoming Japanese defenses, except in the Hutou area. The operation demonstrated that forces with artillery and limited armor support could operate in such a region if those forces had adequate engineer support and if they were properly trained and task organized. The 35th Army had attached significant engineer support to each subordinate rifle division and had required each division to devote a considerable proportion of its strength to road building and maintenance. Soviet unit commanders imaginatively used field expedients to help

overcome the fuel shortage and terrain problems. Yet, even careful planning and imaginative execution could not forestall the 35th Army commander's decision to abandon the use of the two tank brigades in such terrain. Ultimately, the geographical barriers so impeded Soviet operations that the army's main force was a day late in cutting the road from Hulin to Mishan, although it met no significant Japanese resistance. But even that delay was academic, because the Japanese had already withdrawn from the area, and by 10 August, 264th Rifle Division operations had already isolated Hutou. The 35th Army accomplished its overall mission and, in doing so, left as an operational legacy a series of lessons learned about operations in swampy, flooded terrain.

Notes

1. Meretskov, *Serving the People*, 344.
2. JM 154, 275—76, 183; U.S. Army Forces Far East, Military History Section, Japanese Monograph no. 155: *Record of Operations Against Soviet Russia - on Northern and Western Fronts of Manchuria and in Northern Korea (August 1945)* (Tokyo, 1954), 266 (hereafter cited as JM 155). The 135th Infantry Division strength was 14,228 men.
3. JM 154, 276, 281.
4. S. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia nastupatel'naia operatsiia v usloviakh dal'nevostochnogo teatra voennykh deistvii" [An army offensive operation in the conditions of the Far Eastern Theater of Military Operations], *VIZh*, August 1978:44; JM 155, 266; Zenkoku Kōtōkai [National Hutou Society], ed., *SoMan kōkkyō Kōtō yōsai no senki* [The Soviet Manchurian border: The battle record of the Hutou Fortress] (Tokyo: Zenkoku Kōtōkai jimukyōku, 1977) (hereafter cited as *SoMan kōkkyō*).
5. JM 154, 276—77.
6. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94.
7. M. V. Zakharov, ed., *Final: istoriko-memuarny ocherk o razgrome imperialisticheskoi iapony v 1945 godu* [Finale: A historical memoir survey about the rout of imperialistic Japan in 1945] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1969), 401. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 94, states that 15th Army tank and SP gun strength was 166. Ezhakov, "Boevoe primenenie," 79, places it at 205. The Vnotchenko figure does not include the 209th Tank Brigade transferred in the middle of the operation to front control.
8. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 44—45; Pechenenko, "363-ia strelkovaia diviziia v boyakh na Mishan'skom napravlenii" [The 363d Rifle Division in battles on the Mishan direction], *VIZh*, July 1975:41.
9. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
10. Sidorov, "Boevoe," 16; Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45; Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 107.
11. Sidorov, "Boevoe," 20.
12. Pechenenko, "363-ia," 41.
13. Details of 363d Rifle Division deployment and operations from Pechenenko, "363-ia," 39—46.
14. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 45.
15. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 203.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 204; Pechenenko, "363-ia," 43—44.
18. Pechenenko, "363-ia," 44.

19. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 204.
20. Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 46.
21. Ibid., 47.
22. Vnotchenko, *Pobeda*, 213—14.
23. JM 154, 181—82, 285.
24. Ibid., 284—89.
25. Ibid., 301.
26. Krupchenko, *Sovetskie*, 321; Pechenenko, "Armeiskaia," 47.