



MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE OSOBLAHA REGION IN SPRING 1945

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In 1945, Osoblaha region (Osoblažsko) belonged to these territories of Czech Lands that were harshly damaged due to events of the Second World War. Osoblaha region was also a territory whose inhabitants were of German origin and thus expelled in 1946 and 1947 making the region to be an area without 'shared memory'. Its result was the fact that there is still only a little known about the course of the military campaign during the Second World War in the territory of the Osoblaha region.

The aim of this study is to describe the course of war events with regard both of German and Soviet armed forces, but with special focus on German Defence Force (Wehrmacht) and its units of Army Group 'Middle'. Its aim is also to examine operational plans of belligerents and significance that belonged to the Osoblaha region among these plans.

Key words: *Upper-Silesian Offensive; Osoblaha region; 1945; military operation; Army Group 'Middle'; Second World War.*

“From February 24, when the Lower-Silesian Operation ended, until April 16, when the Berlin Operation began, the First Ukrainian Front had what is referred to as a break.”¹ These are the words of the Soviet Union Marshal Ivan Stepanovich Konev, the Commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front. Nonetheless, during those 51 days of a ‘break’ at the turn of winter and spring of 1945, neither Soviet nor German forces rested. Besides the ongoing fires and exploratory attacks carried out between March 15 and 31, 1945, the 1st Ukrainian Front also handled the Upper-Silesian Operation on its left wing.

This operation also has its place in Czech history as significant combat related to having taken place on the Czech territory, specifically in the area of Osoblaha, known in German as Hotzenplotz (Bruntál County). During these encounters, the first village in Czech territory was liberated. However, as an ‘expulsion’ area, the Osoblaha vicinity did not represent a significant ‘place of memory’ by which our understanding of the war remains fragmentary to this day.

The goal of this study is to bridge this gap with a particular focus on the German armed forces. It includes the period from the launch of the Upper-Silesian Operation, during which the combat moved to the Osoblaha region, until the end of the Second World War. Additionally, the study also aims to reconstruct the operational intents of both fighting parties in order to discover within a wider operational context the degree of significance seen in the Osoblaha battles.

Sources and Literature

The study is based on the documentation from the German Military Archives (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, BA-MA). In the first place, among its material three funds from the provenience of the command of the Army Group ‘Middle’ (Heeresgruppe ‘Mitte’) are particularly significant.

The most important among them are Headquarters Staff Maps. These are generally geographic maps in the 1 : 300 000 scale upon which the situation was drawn day by day, covering the course of the front line and location of the individual formations and com-

1 Иван Степанович КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый* [Forty-Fifths], Москва 1966, p. 74. See also Czech translation Ivan Stěpanovič KONĚV, *Čtyřicátý pátý*, Praha 1985, p. 85.





mands.² In some cases, the most significant attacks and their directions are also recorded. In the case of military formations, the maps enable their precise identification all the way to the level of division and, in exceptional cases, to the level of regiment. Given that the maps identify the situation day by day, they provide detailed information regarding the movement of the front line, particularly because the map sequence is complete in the period from March 15 to 31, 1945, when the Upper-Silesian Operation took place.

During April of 1945 there are gaps in the sequence and the last map is dated April 30, 1945. Thus, the study of the combat situation during May of 1945 is missing. However, as will be detailed later, the front line extended across the Osoblaha region at the time. Nonetheless, the difficulties with studying these maps arises from the fact that the combat recorded on them does not always correspond with the dates. In urgent situations, the staff of the Army Group 'Middle' acquired the practice of recording current development of the war situation into older maps, usually from the previous day. In this regard, date-assignment must be approached with particular care.

The gap in the last eight days of the Second World War is particularly notable because it is not supplemented by other sources. The war diary of the Army Group 'Middle' was maintained until April 7, 1945 and although its records are rather brief, they set the war situation into a wider tactical and operational context.³ Additionally, the collection of morning and evening reports, also maintained until April 7, 1945, provide considerably larger volume of factual information, as they record the development of the war situation all the way to the level of army corps, possibly even divisions.⁴

The only archival source recording the events continually until the end of the Second World War are telegraph reports of the Army Group 'Middle' sent to the 6th Air Fleet, particularly the materials for the war diary of the 6th Air Fleet (Luftflotte 6).⁵ In the case of telegraph reports, the last record is dated May 7, 1945 and, in the case of the materials for the war diary, a day earlier.⁶ On the other hand, their use for the purpose of studying the combat in the Osoblaha region is rather supplementary, as these records do not provide a sufficient level of detail.

The source used among the Czech archives was the collection of the 'Provincial Study Institute' which is deposited in the Moravian Provincial Archive in Brno (Moravský zemský archiv v Brně; MZA).⁷ Among their records, it is mostly an overview map that was created after the end of the Second World War at the institute, recording the levels of war damage in Moravian and Silesian villages.

As is suggested in the introduction section of this study, certain complication arise from the use of secondary sources in researching the course of combat within the Upper-Silesian Operation, or specifically Osoblaha. Relevant information may be exclusively found in Russian-language literature, and its respective translations into Czech.

First, the memoir of I. S. Konev 'Forty-Fifth' must be mentioned, as it devoted a separate chapter to the Upper-Silesian Operation.⁸ Kirill Semyonovich Moskalenko, the commander of the 38th Army that was the left-side neighbour to the formation leading the

2 BA-MA, Reichsheer-Heer (Reich's Army-Land Forces; RH) 2-Ost.

3 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/20 – War Diary of Army Group 'Middle' (November 1, 1944 to April 7, 1945).

4 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning and evening report of Army Group 'Middle' (March 22 to April 7, 1945).

5 BA-MA, RH 7-6/20 to 30 – Contribution to war diary of 6th Air Fleet (1945).

6 BA-MA, RH 7-6/31 – Contribution to war diary of 6th Air Fleet (1945).

7 MZA Brno, Zemský studijní ústav [Provincial Study Institute; B 97], carton (cart). 131, inventory number. (inv. no.) 277 – Municipalities and towns damaged by war in Moravia-Silesia.

8 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 74–86.



Operation, only mentions the significance of the Upper-Silesian Operation indirectly.⁹ The Soviet twelve-volume ‘History of the Second World War’ also uses Konev’s recollections, and are available in a Czech edition.¹⁰ Among the works in Russian, the ‘Berlin in 1945’ publication by Alexei Valeryevich Isaev (from 2007) is mentioned, as it contains a chapter specifically focused on the Upper-Silesian Operation.¹¹

This attention is in direct contrast with both Czech and German literature. It could be said about Czech, or rather Czechoslovak, historiography that the subject was covered neither within its military history, nor by regional literature. Notably, ‘Dearly Paid-for Freedom’ (*Draze zaplacená svoboda*) from 2009, the last synthesis regarding combat of the Second World War on the Czechoslovak territory, focuses in regard to the Silesian territory solely on the Ostrava Operation, although it otherwise sets it within the wider operational context.¹² The same could be said in case of the latest overview of modern and contemporary history of Silesia from 2003.

But this complaint must also turn to older works, namely two synthesis works with contributions by Břetislav Tvarůžek – the second volume of the diptych ‘Liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army 1944–1945’ (*Osvobození Československa Rudou armádou 1944–1945*) from 1965 that ignored the operation entirely,¹³ and ‘Operation Goal Ostrava’ (*Operační cíl Ostrava*) from 1973.¹⁴ In the latter, the Upper-Silesian Operation is mentioned at most by a few paragraphs.

The approach of the German side may be illustrated on two works. In the ten-volume synthesis ‘German Reich and the Second World War,’ the information regarding the Upper-Silesian Operation is limited to an indirect mention.¹⁵ In the book ‘History of German Panzer Warfare 1916–1945’ by Walther Nehring, the mention of this operation is missing entirely, even though he was a general of the panzer army who personally experienced the Upper-Silesian Operation as the commander of the XXIV Panzer Corps.¹⁶

The Osoblaha Region and its Terrain

The Osoblaha region covers an area measuring approximately 230 km² and belongs to the present-day Bruntál County. Prior to the Second World War, it consisted of 33 mu-

9 Available also in Czech translation: Kirill Semjonovič MOSKALENKO, *Na jihozápadním směru. Kniha 1* [On South-West Direction. Book 1], Praha 1966, p. 519.

10 *Dějiny druhé světové války 1939–1945. Svazek 10* [The History of the Second World War 1939–1945. Volume 10], Praha 1981, pp. 150–154.

11 Алексей Валерьевич ИСАЕВ, *Берлин 45-г. Сражения в логове зверя, Яуза* [Berlin in 1945. The Battles in the Den of the Beast], Яуза – Москва 2007, pp. 213–243. Available on-line: http://militera.lib.ru/h/isaev_av7/index.html, [March 1, 2019].

12 Jaroslav HRBEK – Vít SMETANA et al., *Draze zaplacená svoboda. Svazek II* [Dearly Paid-for Freedom. Volume II], Praha 2009, pp. 149–159, 207–226.

13 Břetislav TVARŮŽEK et al., *Osvobození Československa Rudou armádou 1944–1945. Svazek druhý*, [Liberation of Czechoslovakia by Red Army 1944–1945. Second volume], Praha 1965.

14 B. TVARŮŽEK, *Operační cíl Ostrava* [Operation Goal Ostrava], Ostrava 1973, pp. 123–124.

15 *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 10. Erster Halbband* [The Third Reich and the Second World War. Volume 10. First Half-Volume], München 2008, p. 587.

16 Walther K. NEHRING, *Die Geschichte der deutschen Panzerwaffe 1916–1945* [The History of the German Panzer Weapons], Stuttgart 2000.

municipalities.¹⁷ In 1945, within the German administration of the Reich district of Sudetenland, the area became a part of the Krnov (Jägerndorf) County.¹⁸

To understand wartime events in the Osoblaha region there is necessary to note its geographic character. The Osoblaha region, specifically the Osoblaha Hook (Osoblažský výběžek), forms a territory that is approximately 25 km from west to east, and not even 20 km from north to south. This land slopes in an east-northeast direction. The easternmost part of the Osoblaha region belongs to the geomorphological system of Central-Polish Lowlands, known as Silesian Lowlands, with a characteristically gently rolling terrain. The city of Osoblaha is located 220 meters above sea level and Slezské Pavlovice, which is located a few kilometres north, reaches to 213 meters above sea level.¹⁹

Towards south and west, the terrain rises and changes in character. Only 4 km southwest of Osoblaha is a hill named Červenice, with an elevation of 285 meters. Southwest of the connection between the municipalities of Hlinka and Osoblaha the system of lowlands transits into the Czech Massif (Český masív), specifically to the Zlatohorská Highlands (Zlatohorská vrchovina). The altitude slowly increases, and the terrain becomes hilly with more notably cut valleys. The municipality of Třemešná, located in the Western part of the region, is at an altitude of 365 meters, while in the western part of the region, the highest peaks reach over 600 meters. Petrovice, the highest-located municipality that is simultaneously the westernmost municipality of the Osoblaha region, lies at an altitude of 470 m and the hills within its vicinity reach nearly 900 meters in elevation (i.e. Solná hora 868 m or Kutný vrch 869 m).²⁰

There are few rivers and larger streams in the Osoblaha region that flows all in north-east direction. The name of the largest one is eponymous for the region, Osoblaha, river that runs over the vast part of the region eastwards through e.g. Petrovice, Jindřichov, Dolní Povelice, and Osoblaha Town and near Studnice leaves region for present-day Po-

17 In 1945, the territory of Osoblaha Region was composed of following municipalities. Part of so called judicial-county Osoblaha was these 25 municipalities: Bučávka (Bušovec) Butschafka; Fulštejn (today Bohušov; Füllstein), part of the municipality was hamlet Ostrá Hora (Schärfenberg); Dívčí Hrad (Maidelberg); Dolní Povelice (Nieder Paulowitz), part of the municipality was hamlet Grundek (Grundeck); Hlinka (Glemkau); Horní Povelice (Ober Paulowitz), part of the municipality was hamlet Nové Povelice (Neu Paulowitz); Hrozová (Grosse); Karlov (Karlsdorf); Kašnicberg (today Kašnice; Kaschnitzberg); Koberno (Kawarn), part of the municipality was hamlet Antonsberg (today Antonínov); Liptál (today Liptaň; Liebenthal); Matějovice (Matzdorf); Městys Rudoltice (today Slezské Rudoltice; Markt Roßwald); Neuwald (today Nový Les); Osoblaha (Hotzenplotz); Německé (today Slezské) Pavlovice (Deutsch Pawlowitz); Nová Véska (today Nová Ves; Neudörfel); Piskořov (Peischdorf); Poruba (today Pelhřimovy; Mährisch Pilgersdorf); Rusín (Rausen); Sádek (Zottig); Studnice (Stubendorf); Ves Rudoltice (Dorf Roßwald), part of the municipality was hamlet Amalienfeld (today Amalín); Víno (Weine); Životice (Seitendorf). Part of judicial-county Jindřichov, then, was these eight municipalities: Arnultovice (Arnsdorf); Bartultovice (Batzdorf/Bartelsdorf); Janov (Johannestal); Jindřichov (Hennersdorf); Petrovice (Petersdorf); Pitárné (Pitarn); Třemešná (Röwersdorf), parts of the municipality were hamlets Damašek (Damasko), Erdmannsgrund (Artmanov); Vysoká (Weissak). *Obyvatelstvo Slezska a Hlučínska v několika důležitějších směrech na základě sčítání lidu ze dne 15. února 1921 se zvláštním ohledem na předešlá sčítání lidu* [Inhabitants of Silesia and Hlučín Region in some Important Respects according to Census of February 15, 1921, with Special Regard to Previous Census], Opava 1924, pp. 104–105, 116–118.

18 Historical borders of Osoblaha matched counties Jindřichov and Osoblaha of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Dan GAWRECKI et al., *Dějiny Českého Slezska. I., II.* [History of Czech Silesia], Opava 2003, pp. 180–184, 306–310, 370–375.

19 Geomorphologic map of Czech Lands is available on web side of Czech Geodetical and Cadastral Office (Český úřad zeměměřičský a katastrální): <https://geoportal.cuzk.cz/Geoprohlizec/default.aspx?wm-cid=9590>, [July 6, 2019].

20 Ibidem.

land. It has number of tributaries; from left it is the Prudnik River that intersect the region near Slezské Pavlovice and Studnice; from right it is for example Svinný Brook flowing into Osoblaha River near Jindřichov, Mušlov that enrich its stream near Pitárné, and Trója River; the last one forms part of southern border of the region and near Bohušov merges with Osoblaha River. These streams are not large enough to form barrier against advancement of military units; on the other hand, they form valleys and as such alongside their flow the movement is easier, but in crosswise direction it is much more harder.

All these above-mentioned dispositions caused that the Osoblaha region is geographically divided from the Czech Lands. This was one of the reasons why the railroad connection between Třemešná and Osoblaha was laid in the narrow-gauge profile.²¹ The main transport hubs of the historic Osoblaha region were Třemešná, Jindřichov, as well as Albrechtice ve Slezsku (Olbersdorf), which itself, however, is not considered part of the historic region. In northeast direction there is a divided network of roads that subsequently converge in Osoblaha.

This geographic separation from Czech Lands as well as from Czech Silesia was the reason its population continually declined after the end of the 19th century. As a result, the Osoblaha region was below average in terms of population. According to the first Czechoslovak census, the region had 18,079 residents, while density reached a below-average 78 residents per km². The Osoblaha region also consisted predominantly of small villages. The dominant category of its 24 settlements were villages up to 500 residents. There were only five settlements over a thousand inhabitants – Osoblaha (2,521), Jindřichov (2,220), Třemešná (1,625), Liptaň (1,225), and Janov (1,073).²²

Situation in the Eastern Front

The German military situation in the Eastern Front began to dramatically worsen and inevitably lead to defeat after January 12, 1945, when the individual Soviet Fronts, i.e. army groups, gradually moved to a general offensive. The quickly moving 1st Ukrainian Front, maintaining a tempo of progress up to several tens of kilometres per day, came to define the situation in the Upper Silesia. Meanwhile, its formations had already crossed the Odra River near the cities of Oława (Ohlau) and Opole (Oppeln) on January 23, 1945 and launched the battle for Wrocław (Breslau). Decisive manoeuvre, however, belonged to its northern neighbour, 1st Belarussian Front of famous Georgy Zhukov. The army group concentrated decisive force of ten armies including two guards tank armies. With this power, 1st Belarussian Front managed to break through the German defence on January 14, 1945, and the same day to advance some 30 kilometres and in two days capture Polish capital, Warsaw. More important was, nevertheless, the fact that Soviets managed to destroy most of German 9th Army. Soon after that the Red Army entered Łódź (Litzmannstadt), besieged Poznań (Posen) that was converted into fortress (so called “Festung”) and reached the Oder River on February 2, 1945.

Soviet offensive finally stopped in the beginning of February 1945 when the Red Army got exhausted by nearly 500 kilometres-long advancement. It meant that it managed to overcome its original aims and expectation and wan a bridgehead on the western bank of the Odra River near Kostrzyn and Odra (Küstrin); in next few weeks it would be of key significance when the Red Army launched its Berlin Offensive. By that moment, the course of Eastern front formed a spike that narrowed from west to east. Over the fol-

21 Richard HRČEK, *100 let úzkorozchodné dráhy Třemešná ve Slezsku – Osoblaha. 1898–1998. Historie a současnost* [100 Years of the Narrow-Gauge Rail Třemešná in Silesia-Osoblaha. 1898–1998. History and Present-Day], Třemešná ve Slezsku 1998, pp. 1–10.

22 *Obyvatelstvo Slezska a Hlučínska*, pp. 104–105, 116–118.

lowing weeks, the Soviet command attempted to secure both its wings and create suitable conditions to approach the German capital. This was the purpose behind the 1st Ukrainian Front launching its Lower-Silesian Operation.²³

The goal of the Lower-Silesian Operation that took place between February 8 and 24, 1945, was to secure the Soviet position in front of Berlin and create the platform for an entry into Saxony. The city of Wrocław was surrounded by a pincer movement during the Soviet offensive that headed westward towards Nysa Łużycka. Upon completing the advancement of the Red Army, the front line in the segment of the 1st Ukrainian Front passed in the west along the bank of the Nysa Łużycka River and, in the south, followed the foothills of the Czech borderline mountains.²⁴

Preparation of the Upper-Silesian Operation

The only area where Germans threatened the positions of the Red Army in any significant manner was Upper Silesia, specifically the frontline projection towards Opole. This potentially endangered the left wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front. The German 17th Army that relied on the Odra River, could form a north-west attack from here. To eliminate this threat, the Soviet command created a plan of operation that was later named the Upper-Silesian Operation. Created by the military council of the 1st Ukrainian Front on February 28, 1945, it was approved by the chief Soviet command on March 1, 1945.

Its goal was to crush German formations located south of Opole and in the area of Racibórz (Ratibor), meaning the VIII Army Corps, the LVI Panzer Corps²⁵ of the 17th Army, and the XI Army Corps of the 1st Panzer Army (the Army Group 'Heinrici').²⁶ All these commands and formations were subordinate to the command of the German Army Group 'Middle'. The Red Army aimed to reach the connecting line of the cities Strzelin (Strehlen), Paczków (Patschkau) and Opava. Securing the left wing of the front line was also a condition for subsequent Soviet advancement within the Berlin Operation.²⁷

Two combat groups were formed to execute the operation within the 1st Ukrainian Front. The 'North' group, also referred to as the 'Opole' group, would attack in the area east of the city of Grodków (Grottkau) southward towards the cities of Nysa (Neisse) and Prudnik (Neustadt). The 'South' or 'Racibórz' group would attempt an attack out of the area southward of the city of Koźle (Cosel), westward towards Głubczyce (Leobschütz) and south-west towards Opava. Both groups were to meet in the area of Prudnik, specifically Osoblaha.

This tactical move was to besiege both the German army corps. The main force of the 'North' group consisted of the Soviet 21st and 4th Tank Armies, 4th Guards Tank Corps and the 34th Guards Rifle Corps that was subordinate to the 5th Guards Army. The 'South' group consisted of the 59th and 60th Armies, and in support they received the 93rd Guards Rifle, 7th Guards Mechanized and 31st Tank Corps, as well as the 152nd Independent Tank Brigade. Air support to both groups was provided by the 2nd Air Army.

23 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 3–54; Georgij Konstantinovič ŽUKOV, *Vzpomínky a úvahy* [Memoirs and Considerations], Praha 1971, pp. 528–560; *Das Deutsche Reich. Bd. 10*, pp. 491–530; *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, pp. 70–87.

24 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 55–73; *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, pp. 146–149.

25 Study accepts of German practice to mark the army corps by roman figures.

26 BA-MA, RH 2 KART/6542 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 15, 1945).

27 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 72–73; *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, p. 150.

To achieve this goal, the Red Army undertook a significant concentration of combat power in areas of intended breakthrough by focusing up to 90% of all armoured support of the deployed troops in these locations.²⁸

The Soviet attack was expected to be supported by an attack carried out by the 4th Ukrainian Front, directed in general towards the area of Olomouc. Its launch was scheduled by the chief command of Soviet armed forces for March 10, 1945. This attack, originally a supportive one, and later became known as the *Ostrava Operation*.²⁹

While launching the Upper-Silesian Operation, the front line was active in the segments of the German VIII Army Corps, LVI Tank Corps and IX Army Corps as described below, from northwest to southwest. The segment of the VIII Army Corps began in the area south of the village of Wilczkowice (Wolfskirch), located approximately 10 km east of Sobótka (Zobten). This segment then stretched across Karczyn (Karzen), the area north of Strzelin and south of Grodków, all the way to the right bank of the Nysa Kłodzka; a total distance exceeding 60 km. Additional German divisions in the composition included 254th Infantry Division on the left wing that covered a relatively small section of the front line up to the village of Radzików (Rudelsdorf), 100th Jäger Division in the centre of the formation, and the 45th Volksgrenadier Division on the right wing, meaning the line beginning northeast of Strzelin and ending at the banks of the Nysa Kłodzka.

Right-flank support of the VIII Army Corps was LVI Panzer Corps, specifically the 'Silesia' ('Schlesien') combat group, as it was named until March 15, 1945. This corps was in charge of protecting the front line leading from Nysa Kłodzka through Opole (with its side on the left bank of the Odra River being held by the Germans and the right bank area by the Red Army), as well as subsequently along the Odra River all the way to the area north of the municipality of Mechnica (Mechnitz); in total this segment was approximately 75 km long. Within its command there were the 20th Grenadier Division of the SS forces, formed by Estonian recruits that defended the area between Nysa Kłodzka and Opole, as well as the 168th Infantry Division that leaned against the bank of Odra.

The segment of the front line from the area of Mechnica up to Piece (Pietze), approximately 10 km west of the city of Rybnik was in charge of the XI Army Corps; the position of the corps covered approximately 55 km in width. This corps also commanded five formations; the 344th Infantry Division was deployed at the left wing, reaching to the area of the Polska Cerekiew (Groß Neukirch/Polnisch Neukirch) municipality; this is also where smaller segments were covered by the 18th Artillery Regiment of SS Panzer Grenadiers and the 371st Infantry Division; 97th Jäger Division was located further southeast all the way to the municipality of Czerwiecice (Czerwentzütz); the remaining part of the right wing belonged to the 1st Ski Division.³⁰

The interpretation of the division distribution may suggest that the German command expected the attack generally in the segment of the VIII Army Corps, however, they were not sure in which direction it would point. This is also evident from the fact that a numerous reserve was located behind the front-line divisions. Additionally, none of the first-line divisions were present in full numbers; three battalions were removed from the 254th Infantry Division, one regiment from the Jäger Division and the 45th Volksgrenadier Division, then, was organized as combat groups (Kampfgruppe); forming combat groups was a common practice for the division that experienced high losses and required to reduce a number of its components within its organization.

28 *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, pp. 150–151. Russian historian A. V. Isajev do not mention neither 93th Rifle Corps, nor 152th Independent Tank Brigade. А. В. ИСАЕВ, *Берлин 45-г*, pp. 213–243.

29 *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, p. 150.

30 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6537 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 14, 1945).

The more significant combat force of the VIII Army Corps was removed and re-deployed, particularly between the cities of Strzelin and Grodków. This area included the 19th Panzer Division and the 10th Panzergrenadier Division, as well as one regiment of the Jäger Division and one battalion of the 45th Infantry Division. The fact that the German command was not even aware of the date of the Soviet attack is evident from the essentially unchanged composition in this segment over the course of at least five days prior to the launch of the Upper-Silesian Operation on March 10, 1945.³¹

In terms of the Osoblaha region, this means that the front line was approximately 35 km far from it. It was closest to the front line in an eastward direction, where the Soviet bridgehead crossed the Odra River in the area of the Polska Cerekiew municipality. To the contrary, to the north, the front lines were over 60 km away, where another Soviet bridgehead was formed near the city of Grodków.

German documents provide only sparse evidence regarding the form of order of battle of the Red Army. There were multiple reasons the Germans had no precise information regarding the Soviet formations. Aside from being less numerous compared to German and thus covering a smaller segment of the front line, the reason lay in the low performance of German military intelligence towards the end of the war, which was only able to identify enemy formations after several days of delay.³²

The following could be said about the Red Army troops. The 21st Soviet Army that had at its disposal the 55th Rifle, 117th Rifle and 118th Rifle Corps was deployed in the area of the city of Brzeg (Brieg). They faced the German 19th Panzer Division in whose front line there were the 291st Artillery, 58th Guards Rifle and 15th Guards Rifle Divisions. The Soviet 128th Rifle, 229th Rifle and 285th Rifle Divisions were deployed in positions across from the German 10th Panzer and 45th Volksgrenadier Divisions. In the segment between Nysa Kłodzka and Opole, opposing the 20th Grenadier Division of the SS force there was the Soviet 225th Rifle Division. Finally, the 80th Rifle Division was stationed across from the German 168th Infantry Division.

The command of the Soviet 4th Panzer Army was located southeast of Brzeg; its main combat force was the 6th Guards Panzer Corps and the 10th Guards Mechanized Corps; however, these formations remained deployed in the secondary sequence.

The front-line segment of the 'South' group began in the area of the city of Koźle where the operational space of the 59th Army was located; here, the 13th Rifle Division was deployed against the German 344th Infantry Division. Further south, meaning opposing the German 344th Infantry and 371st Infantry and 97th Jäger Divisions were Rifle Divisions – 314th, 92nd, 98th, 135th, 302nd, and 322nd; the front line also included 152nd Tank Brigade. The above-mentioned divisions were apparently subordinate to the 125th Rifle and 43rd Rifle Corps. Their tank support was provided by the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps, the command of which was located in the area east of Koźle.

Southeast of the 152nd Tank Brigade there was the operational zone of the 60th Army. Its front-line deployed Rifle Divisions 107th, 322nd, 336th, 148th, 246th, 302nd, 304th, 100th, and 9th. These held positions against German 1st Ski Division. These divisions were incor-

31 Ibidem.

32 This could be proven on example of Czechoslovak Army. While 1st Czechoslovak Independent Tank Brigade was removed from composition of 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in turn of January and February 1945, the German military intelligence found out that piece of information on March 26, 1945, i.e. the third day of the second phase of the Battle of Moravian-Ostrava. BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6566 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 26, 1945).

porated into the formation of the 15th Rifle, 28th Rifle and 106th Rifle Corps.³³ Tank support was ensured by the 31st Tank Corps.³⁴

Regarding the overall force of the participating armies, it is true for both parties that their combat formations were considerably weakened. Given that specific data is not available, at least a qualified estimate may be carried out for the moment of launching the operation. It is known that in the second half of February 1945, the rifle divisions of the 4th Ukrainian Front had on average 3,000 to 4,000 men,³⁵ and that the average count of the 60th Army in mid-April 1945 was 4,070 men in the rifle division.³⁶ It is reasonable to expect that the situation of the 1st Ukrainian Front was similar, with the consideration that during the preparation of the operation, the initial count of the division was increased possibly up to 5,000 men.

The Soviets deployed 25 divisions to the front line, along with one brigade, thus, very roughly, 127,000 men. Additionally, there was one Rifle Corps (34th Guards) and five tank or mechanized corps. In case of the Rifle Corps consisting of three Rifle Divisions, this could have totalled 15,000 men. The tank corps were formed by three tank and one mechanized brigade, according to tables estimated to just under 10,000 men. However, if the rifle formations were in half their numbers, the same could also be true about the armoured formations. This would mean another 25,000 men. Therefore, the overall force of the Red Army could be estimated to approximately 167,000 persons. Given the fact that with highest likeliness German military intelligence was unable to identify all Soviet formations, this number would represent the bottom of the estimate range.

The armoured support was ensured at least by 529 tanks and 119 self-propelled guns; of which 369 tanks and 119 self-propelled guns³⁷ were included in the formation of the 4th Tank Army, while the formation of the 'South' group had at least 160 tanks.³⁸

The estimate of the numbers of German forces is complicated by the fact that the battle-grounds included six types of divisions; infantry divisions (referred to as type 45) had listed numbers of just under 12,000 men, Jäger divisions 13,000, Volksgrenadier divisions 11,200, Waffen SS approximately 14,000, Panzer grenadiers also 14,000, and Panzer divisions 14,700.³⁹ Most divisions were in below-average numbers, although not to such a significant degree as was the case of the Red Army. Estimating that they were at two thirds of their stipulated numbers,⁴⁰ this would amount to approximately 85,000 men, or 87,000 including one regiment of the SS forces.

33 By April 15, 1945; with respect to fact that the organisation of rifle corps did not underwent changes, it is possible that assumption apply also on organisation of divisions. František ŠVÁBENICKÝ, *Bis zum bitteren Ende* [Until the Bitter End], in: IDEM et al., Troppau 1945. Opava v roce nula [Troppau 1945. Opava in Year Zero], Opava 2017, p. 115.

34 German sources identify only five rifle division, i.e. 107th, 245th, 335th, 304th, and 148th. BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6537 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 14, 1945).

35 Average number of personnel of rifle division of 38th Army was 2,800 to 3,100 members; of 1st Guards Army, then, 3,300 to 4,800. A[ndrej] A[jntonovič] GREČKO, *Přes Karpaty* [Over the Carpathians], Praha 1971, p. 427.

36 F. ŠVÁBENICKÝ, *Bis zum bitteren Ende*, p. 115.

37 A. B. ИСАЕВ, *Берлин 45-г*, pp. 213–243.

38 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 21, 1945).

39 Tadeusz SAWICKY, *Niemieckie wojska lądowe na froncie wschodnim. Czerwiec 1944 – maj 1945 (struktura)* [German Land Forces on the Eastern Front. June 1944 to May 1945 (Structure)], Warsaw 1987, pp. 56–98.

40 BA-MA, RH 10/153 – 16th Tank Division; BA-MA, RH 10/154 – 17th Tank Division; BA-MA, RH 10/156 – 19th Tank Division; BA-MA, RH 10/180 – 10th Panzergrenadier Division; BA-MA, RH 10/204 – 715th In-

As of April 15, 1945, the above mentioned formations amounted to 44 tanks and 78 self-propelled guns,⁴¹ as well as another 60 self-propelled guns as a part of stand-alone brigades of assault artillery.⁴² Given that towards the end of the war the numbers of armoured technology decreased, this information may be considered minimal.

Despite the fact these are only estimates, the data shows unequivocally the significant Soviet superiority in numbers; in case of infantry 2.0 to 1, in case of armoured technology even 3.6 to 1.

War Events in the Osoblaha Region During the First Phase of the Upper-Silesian Operation

The Upper-Silesian Operation was launched on March 15, 1945 at 7:00 a.m. (Moscow time) with an artillery preparation. This lasted until approximately 8:40 a.m., when the infantry, supported by tanks, charged forward. Within the first day, the armies of the 'Northern' group penetrated the German defence by approximately 8 km, on the second day another 6 km, reaching the municipality of Pakosławice (Bösdorf), being 8 km from the River Nysa.

The 'Southern' group progressed similarly rapidly. On their first day, it reached nearly 6 km and on the second day 8 km, to the area of the Grudynia Wielka (Gross Grauden), meaning with 12 km from Głubczyce.⁴³ This success that was still only a partial success given the intent of the operation and came at the cost of high losses on part of the Red Army. For example, the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps had written off a quarter of their tanks in a single day and the 31st Tank Corps an entire third.⁴⁴

The battlefield situation became particularly critical for the Germans on the third day of the Soviet offensive, despite the fact that on March 16, 1945, backup arrived, i.e. the 'Hermann Göring' Division, 254th Infantry, 16th Panzer and 20th Panzer Divisions. It is worth mentioning that the latter had reinforced German defence by 30 additional tanks and 25 self-propelled guns.⁴⁵ The 16th Panzer Division took over the defence of the area of Głubczyce and 254th Infantry Division secured a position on the right of the 344th Infantry Division.

Despite this, the Red Army was able both to reach the immediate vicinity of Głubczyce and use particularly focused pressure to create a gap approximately 7 km wide between the 254th Infantry and 16th Panzer Division in the area north of Głubczyce, along the road to Głogówek (Oberglöggau).⁴⁶

The situation in the area covered by the 'North' group developed similarly. Here, the Red Army moved forward by approximately another 5 km, reaching the village of Regulice (Rieglitz) near the Nysa, while at the same time pressing forward southwest and breaking through the defence in the contact points of the VIII Army Corps and LVI Panzer Corps. An approximately 13 km gap formed between the municipalities of Rusocin (Rie-

fantry Division.

41 Tomáš JAKL, *Květnové vítězství. Konec skupiny armád Střed* [May Victory. The End of Army Group 'Middle'], Praha 2005, pp. 142–151.

42 It was the Assault Artillery Brigade of Land Forces 236 and the Brigade of Assault Artillery 301 and 311. BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6540 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 15, 1945).

43 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6540 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 15, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6543 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 16, 1945).

44 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 80–81. See also: *Dějiny druhé světové války. Sv. 10*, p. 151.

45 А. В. ИСАЕВ, *Берлин 45-г*, pp. 213–243.

46 Among them municipalities Klisino (Gläsen) and Królowe (Königsdorf). BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6545 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 17, 1945).

mertsheide) and Wielkie Łąki (Hillersdorf) northwest of the Nysa River. One of the reasons for the Soviet success was the fact that the two newly arrived divisions ('Hermann Göring' and 20th Panzer) were unable to immediately be deployed to the front line, but remained in the second position.⁴⁷ At this time, both proverbial prongs of the Soviet pincers were only approximately 30 km apart.

The decision that was approaching in the previous days took place on March 18, 1945. On this day, the forces of the Soviet 21st Army, specifically its 10th Guards Tank Corps, met with the 59th Army in the area of Prudnik.⁴⁸ However, the meeting of both commands did not mean that the Red Army was able to create a continuous front line. Rather, it had the character of a penetration of assault formations without adequate troop support to enable actual control of the territory gained. Nonetheless, it resulted in the German defence falling apart into several points. Very notable was the exposure of the right wing of the VIII Army Corps, as a gap measuring approximately 15 km formed between Wierzbicice (Oppersdorf) and Głuchołazy (Ziegenhals) south of the Nysa. However, the greatest benefit for the Soviets was the formation of a pocket south of Opole where the LVI Panzer Corps and its 20th Grenadier Division of SS forces, as well as the 168th Infantry and 344th Infantry Divisions, along with the remnants of the SS regiment, remained cut off from the majority of German forces.⁴⁹

It took another two days before the German formations were able to fight their way out of that encirclement, join with other units and re-establish a continuous German defence line.⁵⁰ XXIV Panzer Corps had its share in freeing the encircled formations. Its command arrived on the battlefield on March 17, 1945 and a day later took over the defence of the connection line between the cities of Głuchołazy, Osoblaha and the space southwest of Głubczyce near Bernacice (Wernersdorf). Its main assault force initially relied on the 16th Panzer Division, later on two infantry formations – the 254th Infantry and the 78th 'Volks-Sturm' Divisions.

The Soviet penetration deep into the German defence and the encirclement of the forces south of Opole taking place on March 18, 1945 was also a period when the front line moved to the Osoblaha region. On this day, the first two municipalities in the Czech Lands – Pavlovice (a.k.a. Německé Pavlovice) and Studnice – fell to Soviet control.⁵¹

The Osoblaha region thus belonged to the German operational space of the XXIV Panzer Corps. The western part of the region was defended by a formation known as blocking formation (Sperrverband) led by Col. Walter Birkenbihl, the remaining part east of Osoblaha by the 16th Panzer Division. The prepared defence line cut through the Osoblaha region in its northernmost point, in a line north of Hlinka over the northern edge of Osoblaha.⁵²

The XXIV Panzer Corps appears multiple times in Czech history. Back in 1944, it handled the main Soviet pressure during the Battle of Dukla Pass, where it posed as the key opposing force to the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. Later it was deployed in defence combat within the Battle of Moravian Ostrava, as well as against the Soviet forces that conducted Bratislava-Brno Operation. Until March 19, 1945, it was headed by Gener-

47 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6545 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 17, 1945).

48 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, p. 83.

49 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6548 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 14, 1945).

50 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6548 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 14, 1945).

51 Inhabitants of both municipalities were predominantly of German nationality, thus was probably evacuated. Before the Second World War, German inhabitants composed 97,9% of population of Slezské Pavlovice, and 83,2% of Studnice. *Obyvatelstvo Slezska a Hlučínska*, pp. 116–119.

52 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6548 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 18, 1945).

al W. Nehring, hence referred to as the 'Nehring Group', later headed by Lieutenant General Hans Källner and finally, from April 18, 1945, by the Artillery General Walter Hartmann.⁵³ The staff of the corps was first located in Město Albrechtice (Olbersdorf), until March 19, 1945 when it relocated to a now-vanished chateau. On March 25, 1945 it moved to Hošťálkovy (Grottschdorf), on March 27, 1945, to Lichnov (Lichten), and finally latest by April 8, 1945, to Karlovice (Karlsthal).⁵⁴

The blocking formation subordinate to this corps, that carried the name of its commander, was an ad-hoc established military unit. Given that the name Col. W. Birkenbihl appears in relation to corps of engineers,⁵⁵ it is possible that the core of this blocking formation was created by engineer units of the 1st Panzer Army.⁵⁶

The 16th Panzer Division, the right-flank of the blocking formation, was nearly completely destroyed in the beginning of 1945, but reinforced by other components during February of 1945. As a result, the division had the following assault force available. Its core was formed by a Panzer Regiment 2, consisting of two tank battalions and a total of five tank platoons, Motorized Regiment 64 and Panzer Grenadier Regiment 'Jütteborg'; both latter regiments only had two infantry battalions each. On the level of regiments, there was also a regiment of armoured artillery consisting of three troops. Aside from the rear, service and administrative units, the division also included a tank-destroyer troop, armoured reconnaissance troops and anti-aircraft troop.⁵⁷ In the head of division there was in charge Col. Theodor Kretschmer by appointment, from April 19, 1945, regularly by Col. Kurt Treuhaupt.⁵⁸

The next day, on March 19, 1945, the Red Army attempted to further develop the success achieved upon penetrating into the area of Prudnik and Osoblaha, launching a large number of attacks along the entire length of the front line. The most serious attempt was related to a deep penetration into the German-controlled territory by formations under the command of the 10th Guards Tank Corps. One attack was directed southward from Prudnik, where the Red Army was able to reach all the way to the area west of Bartultovice. However, at this point it was repelled and forced to retreat approximately 6 km back north. Another attack was launched in the area of Krzyżkowic (Kröschendorf), located

53 Georg TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Vierter Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 15–30* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Fourth Volume. The Land Combat Formations 15–30], Frankfurt am Main 1970, pp. 207–208; <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/KorpsPz/XX-IVPzKorps-R.htm>, [July 6, 2019].

54 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6550 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 19, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6563 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 25, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6567 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 27, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6582 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 8, 1945).

55 On the staff of 1st Panzer Army Col. W. Birkenbihl was in position of commander of pioneer units (Armeepionierführer). BA-MA, RH 11-III/329 – Telegraph report (February 9, 1945). This information is supported by the fact that before the Second World War, in the rank of lieutenant colonel, he commanded over Pioneer Battalion 45. Jason D. MARK, *Island of Fire. The Battle for the Barricade Gun Factory in Stalingrad*, Guilford 2006, p. 489.

56 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen. Bd. IV*, p. 207.

57 BA-MA, RH 2/1120b – 16. Panzer-Division. These data are not supposed to be exact. Original of the document is inaccessible, and microfilm that is available is of very poor quality.

58 Available online: <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/Panzerdivisionen/16PD-R.htm>, [June 7, 2019]. Col. K. Treuhaupt took command over the division when it was deployed in Brno. J. HR-BEK – V. SMETANA et al., *Draze zaplacená svoboda. Sv. II*, p. 225.

in the immediate vicinity of the Hlinka municipality, however, no result was achieved. Other Soviet attempts ended similarly.⁵⁹

To the contrary, the German command attempted to form a defensive line along the Osoblaha River, particularly in its segment from Studnice to Głogówek, approximately 10 km long. The encircled 254th Infantry Division was supposed to move behind it. This intent was fulfilled and on the same day, it took its place on the right flank of the blocking formation. However, the re-grouping did not go without partial losses, because the municipality of Hlinka fell into Soviet hands.⁶⁰

The 254th Infantry Division became the third German formation involved in combat in the Osoblaha region. In spring 1945, its major combat force consisted of three infantry regiments, that were nonetheless already referred to as Grenadier Regiments (454, 474 and 484), each consisting of two battalions, as well as an Artillery Regiment 254 with three troops, and one troop of Artillery Regiment 52, Fusilier Battalion 254 (meaning reconnaissance troops) and another division unit. Its commander during the Upper-Silesian Operation was Major-General Richard Schmidt.⁶¹ It is also of interest that this division entered Czech military history in January through March 1945, where it participated in battles in Slovakia, fighting against the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps. Additionally, its previous commander was Major-General Friedrich Köchling, who served in 1938 as a military appointee to Konrad Henlein in the command of the Sudetendeutsches Freikorps (Sudeten-German Free Corps).⁶²

The 344th Infantry Division followed the 254th Infantry Division and most likely used the same route through Głogówek and Osoblaha. On March 20, 1945 it joined the core of the German forces and subsequently it was deployed in the second position in the area of the Jindřichov (Hennersdorf). Nonetheless, this division suffered high losses while fighting its way from encirclement, as the following day it was reorganized into a 'combat group'.⁶³

Unfortunately, the archives provide no information regarding the structure of the 344th Infantry Division once it was reorganized. According to the prevailing practice, it is very likely that its power was reduced to a single infantry regiment, several artillery troops and possibly some other units, such as reconnaissance battalion.⁶⁴ Yet the entire division was, upon its destruction in the western front, re-established relatively shortly before the end of 1944. Subsequently it consisted of Grenadier Regiments 1057 and 1058, each with three battalions, as well as Grenadier Regiment 857 with two battalions, Artillery

59 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6548 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 18, 1945).

60 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6550 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 19, 1945).

61 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Achter Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 201–280* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Eight Volume. The Land Combat Formations 201–280], Osnabrück 1973, pp. 229–230.

62 Aleš BINAR, Hodnocení operačního nasazení Sudetoněmeckého dobrovolnického sboru v písemnostech německé branné moci [The Assessment of Operational Deployment of Sudeten German Free Corps in Documents of German Wehrmacht], *Sborník prací Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity v Brně. Řada společenských věd* 32, 2018, no. 2, p. 88.

63 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6553 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 20, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 21, 1945).

64 See: Veit SCHERZER, *Formationgeschichte des Heeres und des Ersatzheeres 1939 bis 1945. Teilband 1A* [Formation History of Land Forces and Reserve Forces 1939 to 1945. First Half-Volume 1A], Ranis – Jena 2007, pp. 73–75.

Regiment 344 with four troops and other rear units.⁶⁵ The division was commanded by Lieutenant General Erwin Jollasse.⁶⁶

Both divisions of the LVI Panzer Corps fought their way out of encirclement along with the divisions of the XI Army Corps. Therefore, it is not true (as maintained by Marshal I. S. Konev in his memoirs) that on March 20, 1945 the encircled German forces were destroyed by the forces of the Soviet 21st Army. It is also very unlikely that the enumeration of the encircled Germans would amount to 45,000 of which 30,000 were captured.⁶⁷ The argument is the development of the battle situation as captured by German maps, but, particularly, the mere fact that the encircled formation did not have such forces available. A maximum of 27,000 men could have been encircled, but definitely not all of them were captured.

A regrouping of corps on the left flank of the XXIV Panzer Corps took place on the same day that the 344th Infantry Division fought its way out of the encirclement. The 'blocking formation of Col. W. Birkenbihl was replaced by a detachment of the same purpose named by Colonel-General Josef Prinner.⁶⁸ Again, we can only estimate the composition of this formation. It is not apparent, whether the formation had been changed or whether the composition had been changed. In the latter case, we may consider that given the fact that Colonel-General J. Prinner headed the Higher Artillery Command 311 (Höherer Artillerie-Kommandeur; Harko 311) of the 1st Panzer Army, he may have been primarily commanding artillery formations.⁶⁹

As soon as the encircled formations managed to re-join with the majority of their army, the two subsequent days, March 20 and 21, 1945, were occupied with the XXIV Panzer Corps command's efforts to create a continual defence line. This was only partly successful, because a gap covered by no forces formed in the segment of the front line of the 254th Infantry Division between Trzebina (Kunzendorf) and the space south of Hlinka. The cause was probably the need to concentrate combat forces to execute a counterattack that took place on March 21, 1945. The 254th Infantry Division was put into charge of launching the attack along its entire right flank, meaning in the segment between Hlinka and Osoblaha.

However, the attack along the road from Hlinka to Slezské Pavlovice was stopped on the crossroad with the road to Osoblaha and Krzyżkowice, respectively. The attack in direction from Osoblaha to Slezské Pavlovice was repulsed south of Slezské Pavlovice in the area of the Pavlovice pond. Another two attacks were launched along to road from Osoblaha towards Studnice, one on each side of the road, but these remained unsuccessful. The force of the attacks is not apparent, nonetheless, given the fact that each of them

65 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Neunter Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 281–370* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Ninth Volume. The Land Combat Formations 281–370], Osnabrück 1974, pp. 233–234.

66 <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Personenregister/J/JollasseE-R.htm>, [July 7, 2019].

67 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 82–84. This interpretation, i.e. encirclement and destruction of the majority of German forces was used also in Soviet maps. *Дějiny druhé světové války, 10*, map no. 6. On the other hand, in war diary of Army Group 'Middle' there is in this context only concise mention that "[...] there was isolation of German forces in space of South-East of Opole]" ("[...] die im Raume SW Oppeln stehenden deutschen Kräfte abzuschneiden."). BA-MA, RH 19-VI/20 – War diary of Army Group 'Middle' (March 18, 1945).

68 Available online: <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Personenregister/P/PrinnerJosef.htm>, [June 8, 2019].

69 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6553 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 20, 1945).

was limited exclusively to the area of a single road, we may consider that they were carried out by a company or possibly a battalion in each direction.⁷⁰

War Events in the Osoblaha Region During the Second Phase of the Upper-Silesian Operation

The final phase of the Upper-Silesian Operation was commenced on March 22, 1945, when the Soviet command launched another offensive. On this day, the weather cleared and thus the Soviet forces were backed by air-support.⁷¹ The attacks in this phase of the combat were launched along the entire width of the deployed armies, thus affecting the right flank of the 17th and the left flank of the 1st Panzer Army; where the positions of the XXXX Panzer Corps that replaced LVI Panzer Corps, as well as of the XXIV Panzer Corps and XI Army Corps were located.

The core of the Soviet attack was located within the 'South' group that proceeded in the direction of Krnov, in the contact points with the XXIV Panzer Corps and XI Army Corps.⁷² This is also where the Red Army scored their largest success and on March 24, 1945, it penetrated 5 km south of Krnov near Chróstno (Saliswalde).⁷³

The renewal of the offensive notably also touched the Osoblaha region. Despite the fact that, at night or early morning hours, the German army was able to grab Hlinka from the Red Army's control,⁷⁴ shortly thereafter, the situation changed dramatically, when the Soviet forces launched a strong artillery preparation. The 60th Army (likely its 31st Rifle Core supported by the 152nd Tank Brigade) launched an attack in the segment between Ściborzyce Małe (Steubendorf) located northwest of Matějovice, and Głubczyce.

The 59th Army supported by the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps launched an attack in the area between the municipality of Ściborzyce Małe and Prudnik. The Germans were only able to surely identify the 43rd Rifle Corps and its three rifle divisions (80th, 13th and 314th) and later the 397th Rifle Division, among the composition of the 59th Army.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, it is very likely that the German command expected the attack, because it undertook regrouping of the forces immediately prior. The combat group of the 344th Infantry Division replaced Colonel-General J. Prinner's blocking formation in defending their line. The blocking formation itself took the position between road leading to Zlaté Hory (Cukmantl; Zuckmantel) and Prudnik on the west and the area south of Hlinka. The 16th Tank Division and the 254th Infantry Division that created a joint combat formation were located further west. Further regrouping took place on the left-flank of the XXIV Panzer Corps.⁷⁶

There were three, more precisely four, attacks pointed towards the Osoblaha region. The first was launched by the 397th Rifle Division and pointed in the same direction as earlier, southward from Prudnik, into the space covered by the 344th Infantry Division. Although the Red Army's force of two battalions was able to penetrate all the way to Bartultovice, it was later repelled. At least the penetration gained several kilometres of land

70 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6553 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 20, 1945).

71 И. С. КОНЕВ, *Сорок пятый*, pp. 84–85.

72 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 21, 1945).

73 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6561 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 24, 1945).

74 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning report of Army Group 'Middle' (March 22, 1945)

75 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 21, 1945).

76 *Ibidem*.

as a result. Newly the front line moved to the northern edge of the Trzebina municipality, approximately two to three kilometres from the Czech border.⁷⁷

The Red Army launched three attacks in the segment of the 16th Tank and 254th Infantry Divisions. The attack of the 391st Rifle Division was directed south along the road to Hlinka and another two attacks were launched as a pincer movement. The right one of these pincer attacks was most likely launched by the 239th Rifle Division,⁷⁸ directed south towards Osoblaha. Upon conquering it, the division turned southwest, crossed the Osoblaha River and continued partly towards Bohušov and partly towards Dobrogostów (Karlsberg). The 98th Rifle Division that delivered the left assault,⁷⁹ launched its penetration from the space between Ściborzyce Małe and Kietlice (Kittelwitz), meaning approximately 7 km east of Osoblaha, and directed it south to the area of the Dobrogostów municipality where both divisions joined. The vigor of the Soviet offensive is also evident from the German sources reporting that it was supported by 45 tanks; 20 of which attacked Osoblaha, another 25 the municipalities of Nowa Wieś (Neu Wiendorf) and Pomorzowiczki (Alt Wiendorf). Twenty-five of these tanks were supposed to have been destroyed, another source suggests even 31, although it is highly likely that these are exaggerated numbers.

As a consequence of the Soviet pressure, Germans were forced to vacate other municipalities in the Osoblaha region, specifically Hlinka, Osoblaha, Bohušov (the fights for which continued until early hours of the next day),⁸⁰ Kašnice and Matějovice; also the neighbouring villages of Nowa Wieś and Pomorzowiczki fell into Soviet hands.⁸¹ Therefore, the Osoblaha region front line was newly drawn south of Hlinka and south of Osoblaha, forming a several kilometres deep protrusion into the space between both municipalities that reached to the Osoblaha forest. Subsequently, the front line led south through the area west of Bohušov and Rusín.⁸²

The German command explained the attack as an effort to create an entry space,⁸³ expecting that the success of the Red Army would only continue to develop until the moment their forces reached the foothills of the mountains.⁸⁴ The subsequent development was supposed to prove the accuracy of this expectation.

On March 23, 1945 German formations again faced Soviet pressure. One attack was launched from the area southwest of Głubczyce, supported by 30 tanks, and from the area of Matějovice, supported by nine tanks. The goal was Rusín, which the Red Army reached for a short period until it was repelled by a German counterattack. Another attack was

77 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 21, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6556 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945).

78 Attendance of 239th Rifle Division was confirmed by evidence of prisoner-of-war. BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945).

79 Attendance of 98th Rifle Division was confirmed by evidence of prisoner-of-war. Ibidem.

80 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 23, 1945).

81 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6555 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 21, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6556 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945).

82 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6556 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945).

83 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 22, 1945).

84 “Starke Inf.-Zuführungen von Hotzenplotz nach SW lassen in Zusammenhang mit den heute schon dort erfolgten starken Inf.-Angriffen Fortführung von hauptsächlich Inf.-Angriffen in diesem Raum bei Erreichen der Gebirgsausläufe erwarten.” BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 24, 1945).

directed from Osoblaha towards Bohušov and Koberno. In this case, the Red Army also entered both villages but was gradually pushed back. Similarly, in the direction from Osoblaha to Dolní Povelice, two unsuccessful attacks were directed, carried out by a force of approximately 200 men.⁸⁵

On the same day, the right wing of the XXIV Panzer Corps strategically pulled back to a new defence line, although at the same time it had to face Soviet pressure. This regarded three divisions – 16th Panzer, 254th Infantry and 78th ‘Volks-Sturm’ Divisions that defended the area southwest of Głubczyce. All three divisions improved their tactical positions by aligning their front line, despite losing Karlov and Koberno. The front line then newly continued in the south-southeast direction, from the area east of Sádek through Dolní Povelice to the area southwest do Koberno and all the way to the north edge of Hrozová.⁸⁶

If the German command counted on stopping the Soviet advancement at a new defence line, these intents were not fulfilled, particularly on the right flank, where the main Soviet pressure continued. For this reason, the 254th Infantry and 16th Panzer Divisions were forced to retreat again on March 24, 1945, under attacks from the 314th Rifle and 302nd Rifle Divisions. The first goal of the Red Army became the village of Dolní Povelice, where two attacks from Karlov were directed. However, these attacks were repelled, similarly to another attack north of Životice.⁸⁷ On the same day, apparently during the afternoon, the 16th Tank Division vacated both Rudoltice, i.e. Městys and Ves, where an attack of infantry supported by five tanks was directed.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the northern part of the Osoblaha region, defended by the 254th Infantry Division, also saw a high level of combat activity that day. The Red Army launched several attacks between Karlov and Wierzbiec (Wackenau), generally with strength ranging from company to battalion. They reached Sádek and Životice with the loss of four tanks from an original seven.⁸⁹ Another attack on the position of the 344th Infantry Division was launched by the 239th Rifle and 98th Rifle Divisions.⁹⁰

The situation in Upper Silesia was fundamentally affected by an offensive launched by the 4th Ukrainian Front on March 24, 1945, that commenced the second phase of the Battle of Moravian Ostrava. Given that the attack of its 38th Army was directed westward, roughly at the connecting line between cities of Žory (Sorau) and Wodzisław Śląski (Loslau), German formations located in the Racibórz area faced the threat of being encircled. For this reason, the focus on both Soviet and German commands shifted to the Racibórz segment of the front line. This resulted in the actual combat activity in the Osoblaha region being reduced to solely its southwest part in the following days. The only success of the Red Army in the Osoblaha region was the capture of the municipality of Víno, which fell into their hands on March 25, 1945.⁹¹

At this moment, the progress of the Red Army through the Osoblaha was essentially stopped until the end of the war. Subsequently, there were only minor changes to the course of the front line. In essence, the German expectation that the goal of the Soviet advancement was to reach the foothills of the Jeseníky Mountains (Gesénke) was correct. In the meantime, the Red Army took control of the flat part of the Osoblaha region

85 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 23, 1945).

86 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6558 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 23, 1945).

87 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 24, 1945).

88 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 24, 1945).

89 Ibidem.

90 BA-MA, RH 2 KART/6561 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 24, 1945).

91 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 25, 1945).



(see The Osoblaha Region chapter for comparison). This fact also affected the character of combat activity in the segment between Głubczyce and Prudnik, from where the tank forces were subsequently removed, and further combat was carried out exclusively by infantry.⁹²

The perimeter around Dívčí Hrad and Dolní Povelice showed itself to be a good defence line for the German side. They relied on the minor hillock that stretches southeast with the Osoblaha River at its foot, as well as a forest covering the area south of Dolní Povelice.⁹³ The Soviet attack in the area of both parts of Rudoltice and Dolní Povelice on March 26, 1945, was repelled from here without much effort,⁹⁴ while the German counter attack (with the force of either a company or more likely a regiment) recaptured Pelhřimovy and Víno.⁹⁵ On the next day, the Soviet attack was directed northwest from Městys Rudoltice, into the area of Dolní Povelice, however to no avail.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the German command shortened the defence segment on March 29, 1945, by retreating from the hillock to a new line indicated by the connecting line between the eastern edges of Dívčí Hrad and Dolní Povelice.⁹⁷ The reason was apparently an effort to shorten the front line.

Nonetheless, combat activity did not cease. Soviet attacks were renewed on March 28, 1945, while the main pressure was directed along the road from Hrozová to Pelhřimovy into the positions of the 16th Panzer Division. However, the 98th Rifle Division that carried them out was unable to break through the German defence.⁹⁸

The final attack by the Red Army on March 30, 1945, during which Racibórz was seized among other locations, did not affect the Osoblaha region. The weight of the attack was directed towards Krnov, meaning southeast of Pelhřimov,⁹⁹ where the 16th Panzer Division was deployed. Upon repelling the attack, the tank force disconnected from the enemy and on March 31, 1945 commenced a move in the southwest direction.¹⁰⁰

As of the day of ending the Upper-Silesian Operation, the course of the front line in the Osoblaha region was as follows; beginning in the area north of Bartultovice, where it relied on the forested hillocks – one located west of the village, another east of it. At the Hill 368 east of the village, the front line turned southeast and near Životice it directly entered the Osoblaha territory. Here it cut through the village of Sádek, leading northeast of Dívčí Hrad. Near Horní Povelice, the front line then turned southward, cut through the space between the villages of Nový Les and Víno, and left the Osoblaha region west of Pelhřimov, continuing towards the Krnov region. The entire segment was under the command of the XXIV Panzer Corps and its remaining two divisions. The first one, 344th Infantry Division, was located in the segment west of Sádek, the second one,

92 Ibidem.

93 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6566 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 26, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6567 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 27, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6569 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 28, 1945).

94 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 26, 1945).

95 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 26, 1945).

96 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Morning report of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 27, 1945).

97 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6571 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 29, 1945).

98 Ibidem.

99 Ibidem.

100 BA-MA, RH 2 KART/6574 – Staff map of Army Group ‘Middle’ (March 31, 1945).



254th Infantry Division, east of it. Facing German formations from the northeast were the 80th Rifle, 13th Rifle, 391st Rifle, and 98th Rifle Divisions.¹⁰¹

As of the last day of March, the main goals of the Upper-Silesian Operation were essentially reached, although, another 12 km was necessary for the Red Army to reach the city of Opava. Nonetheless, it is not apparent from a detailed review of the maps why the Soviets resigned and left the road connecting Město Albrechtice and Třemešná and further the municipalities Jindřichov and Vysoká, in German hands. This road was the only route enabling the German armed forces both to control the remaining part of the Osoblaha region and the area south of Prudník. It cannot be clearly determined whether Soviet command was unaware of this or changed its priorities, although the latter appears as a more likely explanation.

War Events in the Osoblaha Region in April and Early May 1945

The course of war events in April of 1945 in the Osoblaha region was less dramatic compared to the previous month. As of April 1, 1945, the front line continued stalled in the same positions and the composition of both German and Soviet formations remained unchanged.¹⁰² Combat activity was reduced to essentially small attacks that had no effect on the overall situation. Among those worth mentioning are unsuccessful attacks by the Red Army on April 1, 1945 with the combat force of a company near Horní Povelice and Dívčí Hrad.¹⁰³

A minor change of front-line took place between April 8 and 12, 1945 when the dividing line between both German divisions moved. The segment covered by the 344th Infantry Division was shortened by approximately 4 km northwest, the dividing line with the 254th Infantry Division led north of Životice, approximately in the area of the state border.¹⁰⁴

German defence was reinforced in preparation for launching the third phase of the battle of Moravian Ostrava, specifically in the segment of the expected Soviet attack in the area of Opava. This took place between April 12 and 15, 1945. The German 17th Panzer and 19th Panzer Divisions were incorporated to the composition of the XI Army Corps that already had the 1st Ski, 97th Jäger, 371st Infantry, and 68th Infantry Divisions available. The segment covered by this corps had to be broadened in order to absorb the new formations, at the expense of the XXIV Panzer Corps that moved its zone further north-northwest.¹⁰⁵

The segment of the 344th Infantry Division was also shortened in relation to this change, establishing a new dividing line north of Bartultovice. The 254th Infantry Division took over the defence east and southeast of there and its segment then ended near Nový Les. Further south and southeast there was the zone covered by the 78th 'Volks-Sturm' Division. Along with this, a regrouping took place on the Soviet side, where the 391st Rifle and 98th Rifle Divisions were replaced by 239th Rifle Division. The source of this information is German military intelligence, meaning that this regrouping could have taken place in previous days.¹⁰⁶

101 Ibidem.

102 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6576 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 1, 1945).

103 BA-MA, RH 19-VI/21 – Evening report of Army Group 'Middle' (April 1, 1945).

104 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6584 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (March 12, 1945).

105 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6586 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 14, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6587 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 15, 1945).

106 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6586 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 14, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6587 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 15, 1945).

Another German formation that entered the Osoblaha region, in this case on April 15, 1945, was the 78th 'Volks-Sturm' Division¹⁰⁷ commanded by proxy by Col. Gerhard Mathias. The division was formed as the 78th Infantry Division, but upon its destruction during the Belorussian Operation in the summer of 1944, it was re-organized with a different name. Its name, additionally and incorrectly evoking the presence of Volkssturm units, i.e. 'People's Storm', form of reserve army, had a purely propagandist purpose. According to its organizational structure, it was an infantry division. It was composed of Regiments 14, 195 and 215, in which each had two battalions,¹⁰⁸ an Artillery Regiment 178 with four troops, 78th Infantry Battalion, and other division units.¹⁰⁹

Yet another change took place the following day. The 344th Infantry Division became subordinated to the German 4th Panzer Army and moved in the direction of Berlin to the area of Spremberg.¹¹⁰ Its position was taken over by the 254th Infantry Division. Therefore, the German forces in the Osoblaha region were weakened. Nonetheless, German intelligence on the Soviet side newly identified the presence of 391st Rifle Division in the area south of Prudnik and 314th Rifle Division in the space around Koberno,¹¹¹ meaning the presence of a total of five divisions between Prudnik and Koberno. However, as will be detailed below, the arrival of new formations did not necessarily signal a preparation for an attack or an expectation of more intensive combat. After all, three days later only one Soviet division, the 391st Rifle Division, remained in the region.¹¹²

April 16, 1945 was significant for the German side for a different and more serious reason. On this day, the XXIV Panzer Corps was sent to South Moravia where it established its command in Dambořice. Its subordinate 254th Infantry and 78th 'Volks-Sturm' Divisions were included in the composition of the LXXII Army Corps.¹¹³ The commander of the corps was apparently Lieutenant-General Werner Schmidt-Hammer¹¹⁴ whose staff settled in the space of his predecessor. Given that this formation's 60 km long segment was only covered by two divisions makes it evident that German command did not expect any major combat activity in this area. This fact is further evident from the mentions of the Osoblaha segment in the reports of the Army Group 'Middle'.¹¹⁵

Another change occurred immediately on April 17, 1945. On this day, the LXXII Army Corps was divided from the composition of the 1st Panzer Army and subordinated to the command of the 17th Army. The 17th Army held positions in the south of Silesia, headed by the Infantry General Wilhelm Hasse;¹¹⁶ compared to its neighbors, the 1st Panzer and the 4th Panzer Army, its segment was considerably more peaceful, which may

107 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6587 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 15, 1945).

108 Its regiments were marked as 'assault' (Sturmregiment) despite the fact that these were infantry regiments.

109 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Sechster Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 71–130* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Sixth Volume. The Land Combat Formations 71–130], Osnabrück 1972, pp. 40–42.

110 Here, there was marked as 'Group Jollasse' (Gruppe Jollasse). BA-MA, RH 7-6/31 – Contribution to war diary of 6th Air Fleet (April 20, 1945).

111 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6588 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 16, 1945).

112 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6592 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 19, 1945).

113 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6588 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 16, 1945).

114 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen. Bd. VI*, p. 8; Available online: <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/Korps/LXXIIKorps.htm>, [July 6, 2019].

115 E.g.: BA-MA, RH 7-6/25 – Telegraph report of Army Group 'Middle' (April 21 to 25, 1945).

116 Available online: <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/Armeen/17Armee.htm>, [July 6, 2019].

explain the reason for the change. As a new dividing line between the 17th and 1st Panzer Army was chosen, the same one that was dividing LXXII Army Corps and XI Army Corps near the village of Bliszczyce (Bleischwitz), west of Krnov.¹¹⁷

A few days later both divisions of the LXXII Army Corps were also replaced. In both case a certain 'swap' was carried out. Both in cases of the 78th 'Volks-Sturm' and 254th Infantry Division, the formations were relocated to the battlefield of Moravian Ostrava, while the formations replacing them came from there. First, between April 23 and 25, 1945, the 78th 'Volks-Sturm' Division was replaced by 68th Infantry Division.¹¹⁸ It was commanded by Colonel-General Paul Scheuerpflug and composed of the following formations – Grenadier Regiments 169, 188 and 196, each of two battalions, the Artillery Regiment 168 consisting of four troops, the Infantry Battalion 68 and other rear, administration and service units.¹¹⁹

The 254th Infantry Division was later replaced by the 1st Ski Division, sometime between April 26 and 28, 1945.¹²⁰ The 1st Ski Division experienced major losses shortly before while defending Opava, altogether perhaps 70%.¹²¹ At the time it was transferred to the Osoblaha region, it was commanded by Colonel Bruno Weiler, and its main combat force were Ski Regiments 1 and 2, where each had three battalions, as well as the Artillery Regiment 152 consisting of three troops and one battalion of rocket launchers, the Ski Infantry Battalion and an Anti-Tank Troop 152.¹²² While the above mentioned organization of the division seemed impressive, a question remains to which degree the individual components maintained their combat ability.

Along with this regrouping, the XXXX Panzer Corps of General Siegfried Hermann Heinrici¹²³ took the command over the 1st Ski and 68th Infantry Divisions, while the staff of the LXXII Army Corps was sent to South Moravia with the assignment to protect the area of Uherské Hradiště.¹²⁴ At the same time, this change is the last documented regrouping of German military forces in the Osoblaha region, recorded in German sources.¹²⁵

However, as is apparent from sources deposited in the Czech Military Archives, both divisions defended their positions in an unchanged composition along the same front line in the beginning of May and all the way to very end of the war.¹²⁶ They were unable to

117 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6589 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 17, 1945).

118 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6593 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 22, 1945); BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6594 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 25, 1945).

119 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Fünfter Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 31–70* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Fifth Volume. The Land Combat Formations 31–70], Frankfurt am Main 1971, pp. 278–280; Available online: <http://www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/Infanteriedivisionen/68ID.htm>, [July 6, 2019].

120 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6595 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 28, 1945).

121 Michal PLAVEC, *Smrt generálporučíka Gustava Hundta* [The Death of Colonel General Gustav Hundt], in: *Troppau 1945*, pp. 105–109; IDEM, *Bis zum bitteren Ende*, in: *Ibidem*, pp. 111–141.

122 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1945. Zweiter Band. Die Landstreitkräfte 1–5* [Units and Formation of German Armed Forces and Waffen SS in the Second World War 1939–1945. Second Volume. The Land Combat Formations 1–5], Frankfurt am Main 1965, p. 25.

123 T. JAKL, *Květnové vítězství*, p. 101.

124 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6596 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 30, 1945).

125 BA-MA, RH 2-OST/6595 – Staff map of Army Group 'Middle' (April 28, 1945).

126 T. JAKL, *Květnové vítězství*, pp. 100–101.



escape Soviet capture and apparently did not even commence a westward move. For example, the 68th Infantry Division was captured in the location of its last activity.¹²⁷

Consequences

Knowledge of the development of the situation in the Osoblaha region explains why the war damage in its territory was unevenly spaced and why some villages were heavily damaged by war while some practically untouched. According to the post-war investigation of the Provincial Study Institute, the situation was as follows.¹²⁸

The most damaged municipalities, expressed as a ratio from 90 to 100%, were Dívčí Hrad, Dolní Povelice, Fulštejn, Karlov, Pelhřimovy, Sádek, Víno and Životice. Hlinka, Městys Rudoltice and Osoblaha were considered to be 80 to 90% damaged. Two villages, Hrozová and Kašnice, were evaluated in the 70 to 80% category. Horní Povelice was damaged between 60 to 70% and Koberno 50 to 60%.¹²⁹

Other municipalities were better off. Nová Ves was included in the 30 to 40% damage category, while Bartultovice, Jindřichov, Liptaň, Nový Les, Pitárné, Rusín, Slezské Pavlovice, Ves Rudoltice and Vysoká were considered 20 to 30% damaged. Arnultovice was assigned to the 10 to 20% category and finally Bučávka, Matějovice and Třemešná to the less than 10% group. Remaining villages showed no damage. Likewise in other areas of Moravia and Silesia, it is evident that they were practically untouched by the war at all.¹³⁰

Regarding the distribution of the damage level on the settlements, it is indicative that fifteen of most affected municipalities (over 50% damage) are located in the central part of the Osoblaha region, east of the connection line between the villages of Sádek, Životice, Dívčí Hrad, Horní Povelice, Nový Les, Víno and Pelhřimovy. A part of the war damage falls into the period when the Osoblaha region combat had large operational significance and were handled with considerable intensity, meaning in the days between March 18 and 24, 1945.

At that time, the German command attempted to stabilize the war fronts, while the Soviet command focused on completing the pincer manoeuvre. Another part of the war damage was caused after March 24, 1945. As the combat in the Osoblaha region lost its significance, its intensity decreased, yet, on the other hand, the factual halt of the war front meant that the municipalities in the front-line zone were exposed to war events for nearly a month and a half. After all, demarking the area with the largest level of damage overlaps the course of the war front, as it stopped on April 24 and 25, 1945.

Conclusion

Combat that took place in the Osoblaha region during the Second World War went through changes between April 18, 1945 when the war front affected the region and May 8, 1945 when the war ended. The character of the combat depended on the strategic significance assigned to the Osoblaha region. The most intense attacks took place on April 18 through 21, 1945. At the time, the Red Army completed its pincer movement, while the German Army consolidated its defence and successfully guided its corps from the encirclement in the area south of Opole. Given this disposition, the Osoblaha region belonged to a zone that was critical for both sides. It was particularly essential for the

127 G. TESSIN, *Verbände und Truppen. Bd. V*, p. 279.

128 MZA Brno, B 97, inv. no. 277, no. cart. 131 – Municipalities and towns damaged by war in Moravia-Silesia.

129 Ibidem.

130 Ibidem.





German side as the location through which their formations moved on their way from the encirclement.

On April 22 through 24, 1945 combat activity in the Osoblaha region was renewed, while the Wehrmacht was forced to vacate several more municipalities. Subsequently, on April 25, 1945, the Soviet advancement became exhausted, among other reasons due to a change in priorities. The Red Army in the Osoblaha region reached the foothills of the Jeseníky Mountains and shifted the core of its effort in the direction of Krnov, to the areas of Racibórz and Moravian Ostrava. On the other hand, the disposition of the terrain did not enable the Germans to form a larger concentration of forces and thus lead an offensive combat activity. All these factors caused the war front to stop and remain immobile until the very end of the Second World War.

Frequent changes of formations in this area and changes in command that particularly took place on the German side, as a telling witness account to the efforts of moving forces according to the development of the combat situation. Particularly from mid-April 1945, the Osoblaha segment of the front-line functions as some reservoir of forces. From here, the formations were move to more exposed battlefields, which at the time were around Moravian Ostrava, as well as Brno. To the contrary, divisions that have been significantly weakened in previous combat were sent to the Osoblaha region. This fact is also an evidence that the Osoblaha segment of the front was not considered particularly relevant and that no intensive combat took place here.

The knowledge of the course of war events in the Osoblaha region and its wider regions is critical for understanding the degree of war damage and their geographic distribution. The halting of the Soviet offensive explains why the most severely damaged municipalities are those in the eastern part of the region and why, to the contrary, several western municipalities remained completely untouched by the war.

Válečné události na Osoblažsku roku 1945 (Shrnutí)

Osoblažsko se na konci zimy a na jaře roku 1945 stalo bojištěm druhé světové války. Válka je přitom těžce poznamenala, přičemž mírou poškození náleželo k nejhůře postiženým oblastem českých zemí. Jeho autochtonní obyvatelstvo, které bylo německé národnosti, bylo po skončení druhé světové války vyhnáno, čímž region zůstal tzv. místem bez „paměti“. I to je důvod, proč poznání průběhu bojů na Osoblažsku během druhé světové války dosud chybí.

Studie usiluje o překonání této mezery, a to především na základě materiálu německého vojenského archivu (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv). Využívá přitom písemnosti z provenience velení skupiny armád „Střed“ a vzdušné flotily 6; první zmíněný vojenský svaz byl pověřen obranou českého prostoru, v tom též Osoblažska, druhý uvedený pak jemu zajišťoval vzdušnou podporu. Ve studii se uplatňuje rovněž regionální přístup k problematice, a to konkrétně v úsilí nalézt odpověď na otázku, jak bojová činnost ovlivnila rozložení míry válečného poškození v regionu. V tomto směru se využívá fond Zemský studijní ústav, který je uložen v Moravském zemském archivu v Brně.

Válečná fronta se na Osoblažsko přesunula ve druhé polovině března 1945, kdy vojska 1. ukrajinského frontu rozvíjela hornoslezskou operaci; ta trvala od 15. do 31. března 1945 a jejím cílem bylo zničit německá vojska v prostoru jižně od Opolí a zatlačit německou obranou na spojnici měst Strzelin, Paczków a Opava. Za tím se skrýval záměr sovětského velení zabezpečit levé křídlo na tzv. hlavním strategickém směru a uvolnit si tím své síly pro berlínskou operaci.

Průnik sovětských vojsk na Osoblažsko je spjat s dramatickým zvratem na bojišti, totiž rozpadem německé obrany a obklíčení části LVI. tankového a XI. armádního sboru, k čemuž došlo 18. března 1945. Vojska 4. ukrajinského frontu totiž své údery zasazovala ve vstřícném směru, jeden z prostoru Nysy, druhý od řeky Odry ve směru na Hlubčice, přičemž v okolí Prudniku se oba pomyslné hroty setkaly. Přimo na Osoblažsku čelil sovětskému nástupu XXIV. tankový sbor, jemuž velel generál tankového vojska Walther Nehring.

Pod Nehringovým velením se nacházely čtyři vojenské svazky na divizní úrovni. Prvním bezprostředním úkolem XXIV. tankového svazu bylo obnovení souvislé frontové linie, čímž byl pověřen tzv. uzavírací svaz „Birkenbihl“, respektive později útvar obdobného určení s názvem „Prinner“, a 16. tanková divize. Zbývající dva svazky, tedy 254. pěší a 344. pěší divize se dostaly do sovětského obklíčení a byly nuceny se z něj vybojo-





vat. Postupovaly přitom jihozápadním směrem, tedy na Osoblažsko. K jejich spojení s jádrem německých vojsk došlo ve dnech 19. a 20. března 1945.

Dne 22. března 1945 obnovil 1. ukrajinský front své ofenzivní úsilí, které dopadlo na celou šířku pásma XXIV. tankového sboru. Jeho velení reagovalo stažením se na novou obrannou linii. Nicméně ani zde se svazky tankového sboru neudržely a 24. března 1945 byly nuceny ustoupit dále směrem na jihozápad. Avšak v okamžiku, kdy sousední 4. ukrajinský front spustil druhou fázi moravskoostravské operace, tedy 24. března 1945, zaměřil se 1. ukrajinský front přednostně na své pravé křídlo, tedy do oblasti Hlubčicka. To také znamenalo pokles bojové aktivity na Osoblažsku; ta v omezené míře probíhala i nadále, mj. v prostoru Dolních Povelic, avšak bez reálného operačního významu.

Po skončení hornoslezské operace probíhala tedy válečná fronta napříč územím Osoblažska. Přenesením těžiště sovětské pozornosti jednak na berlínský směr, jednak k Moravské Ostravě došlo k tomu, že intenzita bojů během dubna a na počátku května 1945 významně poklesla. Ve svém důsledku to znamenalo, že frontová linie se ustálila a bez významnějších změn zůstala na týchž pozicích fakticky až do samotného závěru války. Osoblažský úsek fronty si nicméně uchovával svůj význam i nadále, obzvláště poté, co 4. ukrajinský front zahájil třetí fázi moravskoostravské operace. Skutečnost, že zde nedocházelo k relevantním bojům, totiž německé velení využívalo k tomu, aby odtud uvolňovalo svazky k posílení obrany Moravské Ostravy anebo Brna. Ty byly vystřídány útvary, které mezitím utrpěly zničující ztráty, mezi nimi 1. lyžařská divize, která předtím bránila Opavu.

Výše uvedený přehled bojové činnosti vysvětluje, proč byla míra poškození sídel na Osoblažsku tak vysoká, a především proč byla rozprostřena nerovnoměrně. Nejvíce postiženými obcemi byly jednak ty, o které byly svedeny boje zejména ve dnech 18. až 24. března 1945, jednak ty, která se nacházely na frontové linii v dubnu a na počátku května 1945; v prvním případě lze rozsah škod vysvětlit úporností a tvrdostí bojů, ve druhém pak jejich délkou, neboť ty probíhaly v zásadě ve stejných místech po dobu více než jednoho měsíce.