

**THE CAMPAIGN FOR KHARKOV:
OCTOBER 1941**

**A CHAIN OF COMMAND PINT SIZED
CAMPAIGN**

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Sample file

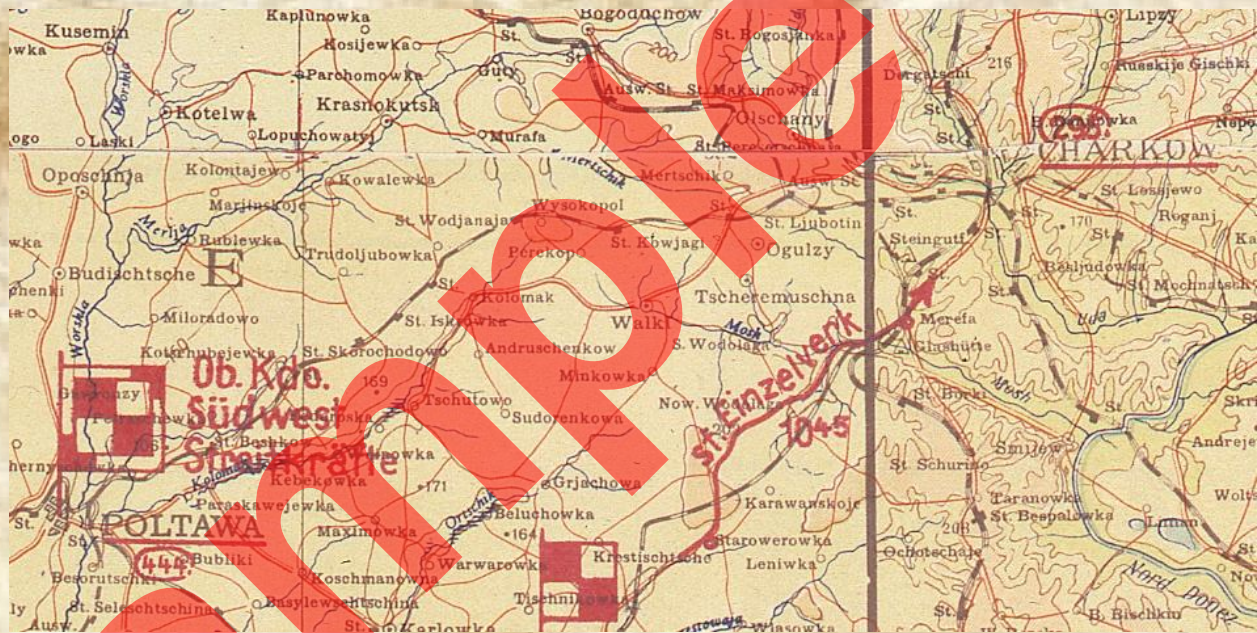
Battle of Kharkov October 1941

A Chain of Command Campaign

BACKGROUND

The battle for Kharkov was initiated by the Germans to secure the widening gap between the 4th Panzer Group and the 17th Army. In addition to its location between their two forces, the city was the third most important industrial center in the Soviet Union. It had a population of close to 900,000 civilians. Its industry was vital to the Soviet war machine.

The Soviets needed to defend the city long enough to withdraw all of the factory assets from the city and move them east. In the end, both sides achieved their objectives. The attack on Kharkov began on October 22nd, as the 101st Leichte-Division approached the city from the north. To the South, the 57th Infanterie Division also made its approaches.



The map above is a selection taken from the September situation map as found on http://www.wvii-photos-maps.com/home_page_019.htm From the Lage Ost 1941 link.

Defending the city was the newly reconstituted 216th Rifle Division. The division had previously been destroyed in Kiev and was in the process of being rebuilt at Kharkov. The divisions task was hold the Germans back until the factories could be withdrawn. The armor available to the defenders of Kharkov is hard to pin down. One

source lists them as having up to thirty KhtZ-16 self-propelled vehicles. This was an improvised tank destroyer mounting a 45mm anti-tank gun that was placed on a tractor frame. It had a tall profile, was under armored and slow to move. In addition, these were fielded with out of date T-27

tanks and possibly four T-35s and five T-26s of various models.

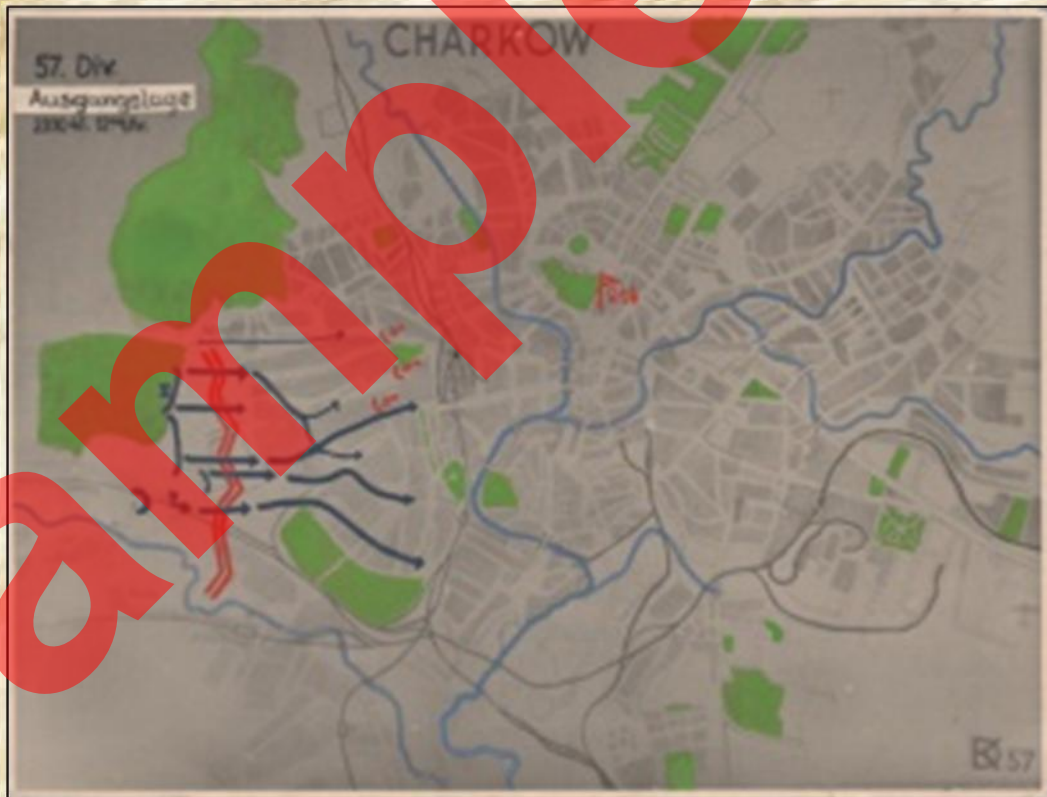
The city was a very important industrial center. Kharkov was instrumental in the development of the T-34 tank. The primary development for this iconic vehicle was made in the Kharkov Tractor Factory. In addition there were other munitions and material factories present that were vital to the Soviet war effort. Within the city there was at least one aircraft plant, a turbine plant and another factory that supplied the NKVD.

It was clear to the Soviets that Kharkov would be a likely target of the German advance. Its large rail center ensured it would become a vital logistical hub for the German advance. In September, the Soviets began a massive

undertaking to relocate the vital factories in Kharkov to safer areas in the rear.

The Soviets dedicated three hundred and twenty trains to the evacuation of the seventy factories in Kharkov. By October 20th, the evacuation was largely completed. The 216th Soviet Division was largely a delaying force. The factories had been evacuated before the German attacks began.

The town was secured by the 24th of October. The Germans were more than four days late to secure any of the factory materials but they did secure their lines of advance across the expanse of the Ukraine.



Map used with permission from http://www.57id.de/index.php?title=Feldzug_April_1941_-_Dezember_1941_-_mit_der_Einnahme_Charkows

CAMPAIGN HISTORY

The campaign is interesting to examine. By September of 1941, both sides were weary from combat. The Soviets had taken unimaginable losses. Entire Corps disintegrated under the German attack. Surviving troops were gathered together into new formations. Civilians were pressed into uniform to man the line. German reports tell of encountering battalions of Soviet troops that were men in their forties and fifties. The most telling was the reorganizations that the Red Army went through to provide manpower and equipment for the war.

Toward the end of July, they revised the order of battle for their infantry divisions. These became much leaner units. The platoon lost its light mortar and a smaller battery was placed at the company headquarters. The company itself was reduced to just two platoons of three squads each instead of three platoons of four squads each. Armor was revised as well. Moving away from the large Mechanized Corps, the Soviets adopted Armored Brigades consisting of one or two Armored Regiments with a motorized infantry battalion for support. The heavy KV tanks were not present in these armored brigades. Instead, each battalion within the armored regiment was to be equipped with a company of seven T-34 tanks. It is unclear if these paper changes made their way to the front line units. The T-34s were backed up with three companies of light tanks. They would be made up of whatever vehicles happened to be on hand.

The Germans were not faring much better. The months of constant combat from June to September had taken its toll. The 57th Infantry Division had taken 3,893 casualties from June 22nd to the end of September. Of these there were 888 killed, 2,937 wounded and another 68 missing. Yet they still drove forward. The STuG Battalion 197 suffered heavy losses. Several of the companies were reduced to a point of being combat ineffective due to casualties and broken or

destroyed vehicles. The 197th pressed some captured T-34 tanks into service as spare vehicles during the advance on Kharkov to supplement their losses they had taken.

The lead elements of the 197th were a mere three kilometers from the outskirts of Kharkov. Three vehicles arrived that were low on fuel, ammunition and rations.

The 57th Infantry Division reached the Udy River on the 20th. They established a bridgehead at Guki to the west of Kharkov. The advanced elements of the 57th were under the command of Major Ballerstedt. With him was the 1st battalion of the 199th Regiment. They were accompanied by a company of Panzerjager Battalion 157 and a battery of Artillery Regiment 157.

On the 21st of October, the 101st Light Division was just six kilometers to the west of Kharkov. They would continue to inch forward to their jump off points throughout the day.

The 197th received reinforcements on the 21st. The 57th Infantry Division enlarged their bridgehead across the Udy River.

The Soviet defenders launched an attack on the 22nd of October against the approaching elements of the 101st Light Division. The Soviet infantry battalion was supported by tanks. Two of the tanks were knocked out and the attack was repulsed. The types of vehicles that participated in the attack are not listed but it is probably a light tank or improvised vehicle.

The division carried out a reconnaissance of the outskirts of town, which revealed that the Soviet 216th Rifle Division had dug in. The approaches were covered by machine gun nests, mortar pits and mine fields.

The 228 Regiment received the attack orders for Kharkov in the evening. They were moved to their ready positions by 2am the next morning.

The 228 Regiment received their objectives for the assault. The first objective was the rail road embankment. The second was to reach the Lopany River. The third was to reach the main road to Belgorod. Fourth was the Kharkow River. The fifth objective, which ended up being bypassed, was the crossroads at Bridge 212. The last objective was the eastern Edge of the city at the Kharkov-Stary road.

The 57th infantry Division was also attacked by the Soviets. Of the six tanks that attacked their positions on the Udy, five were left behind.

The 57th received their orders on this day as well. They were to be supported by the Stug IIIs of Sturm Battalion 197 and heavy weapons.

The 197th was in the suburbs outside of Kharkov on the 22nd. It is here that they finally receive additional fuel, ammunition and rations to be able to continue the attack with the 57th Infantry Division.

Their first objective was to press into the city and seize the rail line below the main train station.

The Soviet 216th Rifle Division was headquartered in the north-eastern corner of the city. They had forward positions dug into the outskirts of the city that had been built by the civilian population. Anti-tank ditches, minefields and reinforced positions were ready to greet the German attack.

On the 23rd, the Germans initiated their attacks. The Germans sent the second and third battalions of the 228th Light Regiment. Each was supported by two guns of the 85th Artillery Regiment and a company of engineers. The Third battalion was also provided with a single 88mm Anti-Aircraft gun. The AA gun had not arrived by the time the attack commenced. The first battalion was kept as the reserve and covered the left flank of the attacking groups.

The initial jump off point was at 1100 hours. However, the artillery was not ready and the attack

was postponed until 1500 hours. In that time, the Anti-Tank company of the 101st Division was able to make its way through the mud to reach the front. Each battalion was also provided with a platoon of 37mm Anti-Tank guns for support.

The 228th Infantry Regiment did not advance until 1510 hours. Artillery was called on to shield their advance with smoke as the infantry approached the Soviet forward positions. They encountered entrenched tanks that were used as pillboxes. Among these were some T-34s. The III/228 had to halt while its officers directed artillery fire against these positions. Once cleared, they were able to advance. They crossed barbed wire, Anti-Tank Ditches in order to enter the city. They broke through by 1525 hours.

The III/228 was positioned to the south of the II/228. They moved rapidly and reached the rail line north of the main train station by 1645 hours. This initial push through the city netted the division some 345 prisoners. The 228th Regiment took defensive positions for the evening.

To the south, the 57th Infantry Division was supported by two batteries of Sturmgeschutz-Abteilung 197 for their assault. The two regiments leading the advance were the 217th and 199th. The I/217 crossed the Udy River and deployed on the main road into Kharkov. The III/217 deployed to the right of the river. The I/199 was north of the main road and the III/199 was in the woods west of Soloty-Jar.

The attack to the south launched on time at 1200 hours. Both regiments of the 57th ID were covered by artillery fire against enemy positions in the Party Headquarters Building and the Barracks. They encountered hard fighting from the start at the wooded fringe before the city.

The 217th Regiment proceeded to the barracks while the 199th moved to the party building and the neighboring apartment complex.