

Thursday, March 18, 1943

Russians Stop Nazi Advance Below Kharkov Hold Newly Won Positions Against Six Counterattacks

By EDWARD SCHRIFTGIESSER

The Russians today apparently had stopped the German advance beyond Kharkov and had even regained the initiative on some sectors of the Donets.

The turn of the tide came at Chuguyev, a town on the Donets River some 20 miles southeast of Kharkov. Yesterday the German radio said that Russian forces "encircled" there had failed in attempts to break out. Today, however, Moscow's early communique reported that the Red Army had driven the enemy back, had occupied favorable positions on the west side of the river, and had held them despite Nazi counterattacks.

Bloody fighting has been going on all along the Donets from Kharkov to below Izyum. Chuguyev was one of several bridgeheads on the west bank which the Russians have retained; Izyum is another, and is being strongly defended against persistent enemy assaults.

Nearly 2000 Germans died in the six attacks they threw against the new Russian positions near Chuguyev. Russia's hastily-summoned reserve troops and guns have been massed along the river, and according to Moscow dispatches, have been taking a terrible toll of the German shock troops.

Advance on Smolensk

The Germans have been reporting other Russian counterattacks north of Kharkov, particularly in the area west of Belgorod, but there is no confirmation of Nazi claims to advances there. The Russian communique did report cavalry attacks on German infantry west of Sevsk, farther north in the Kursk region. There, they said, the Germans suffered heavy losses, and in withdrawing left dozens of wrecked tanks behind.

On what the Russian communiqués term the "western front"—the Smolensk sector—the Red Army gained further ground and a number of nameless hamlets. At one point, after a wild battle along the upper Dnieper, they forced their way across the river and took some more villages.

There is no fixed front in this region. Guerillas are operating far behind the German lines, and Red Army advance units have knifed through Nazi defenses for several miles in scattered areas. The guerillas have done a particularly effective job of blowing up German railroad lines and bridges; they have wrecked nine trains in the last few days.

Timoshenko Gains

The railroad town of Durovo is believed practically in Russian hands. Yesterday they took Vskhods, eight miles west of the Vyazma-Bryansk line, and Ugoryevskoe, north of Durovo.

Above Smolensk, the immediate Russian objective is Yartsevo. Russian forces at last reports were converging on this strong point from east and north.

In the dense forests south of Lake Ilmen, Timoshenko's advance toward Staraya Russa continues to make small gains. Yesterday they crossed a small stream, occupied 10 strongly-fortified villages, killed 500 Nazis. There has been very large scale air fighting on this front, and today's report spoke of the destruction of 24 German airplanes in a single day.