


PM

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Tanks Spearhead Nazi Offensive

The writer of this article is a Soviet war correspondent and author of Russians Don't Surrender, recently published here.

By ALEXANDER POLIAKOV

 MOSCOW, July 11.—Tank battles are being fought on an ever bigger scale and a colossal tank battle is now in progress on a plain spotted with dells and glades. The enemy has thrown more than 1000 tanks into the action, as well as many motorized and infantry divisions. Intensified bombing of the Soviet main line and communications by big bomber formations preceded the offensive.

The German tanks are meeting with stiff resistance. The enemy is trying to cover every tank of his shock tank groups by a plane. For their break-throughs, the Germans irrevocably sacrifice mobile artillery, trench mortar units and hundreds of dive bombers. Wherever they break through, they swiftly press reserves into the gap. a vanguard of 20 to 30 tanks rushes forward without leaving cover. There have been cases when small enemy tank groups managed to push far ahead, but the net result usually was that due to lack of fuel, the tanks lost their mobility and their crews finding, themselves encircled, surrendered.

Last year the Germans hugged the main highways. Now, taking advantage of the dry July weather and favorable terrain, they are moving in columns of 50 to 60 tanks along all the more or less suitable country roads.

Bearing in mind the experience of last year, the enemy tank troops as a rule approach the initial positions for attack not only with tank-borne sub-machine-gunners but also big groups of motorized infantry. The sub-machine-gunners go into action in the vanguard, but more frequently by skirting the flanks. Their task is to clear a passage for the tanks.

Soviet tanks—particularly the heavy tanks—remain the most dangerous weapon for the German tanks. To parry their blows, German tank units this year have taken the field with light artillery regiments and motor cycle companies armed with anti-tank

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rifles. Mounted and attached to the motorcycle handle bar, the anti-tank rifles thus become mobile. Soviet light tanks are most effective in combating them. Attacking the motorcyclists from ambush the light tanks disable or crush them with their caterpillars and thus guard the heavy tanks against surprise blows.

Soviet tank ambushades are being practiced on an increasingly wide scale. Small, well organized ambushades are the most effective. For instance, one tank unit going into ambush in four places damaged or burned 52 enemy tanks, destroyed 15 guns, wiped out perhaps 600 infantrymen and captured trophies. Soviet losses were only six tanks.

Engagements of tank troops with from 50 to 150 tanks participating on each side are very frequent. On July 4, the enemy pressed 300 tanks into line on one of the sectors where he planned to break through. A similar number of Soviet tanks went out to meet him. Allowing the German tanks to come within close range, Soviet tanks and artillery opened up heavy frontal and flank fire. In the ensuing momentary confusion among the enemy tank columns, a whole mass of Soviet tanks preceded by heavy tanks surged forward from a nearby hollow and small brushwood. The battle proceeded at furious pace, often at point-blank range—20 to 25 feet. Aircraft could not operate, for the tanks of both sides were intermingled.

At dawn the Soviet tank units pressed back the enemy. The Germans, losing more than 100 tanks and thousands of motorized infantry men, were hurled back several kilometers.

The gigantic tank battle is continuing with large technical means and troops involved. The most violent battles, however, are still ahead.

