Leavenworth Papers

No. 2

Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939

by Edward J. Drea

Combat Studies Institute
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
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JANUARY 1981

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FOREWORD

Military history is the peacetime laboratory for the professional soldier. As duPicq reminds us, "only study of the past can give us a sense of reality and show us how the soldier will fight in the future." Serious study of our profession helps narrow the gap between training and battle. Publication and dissemination of tactical battle studies is the central focus of the Combat Studies Institute and the *Leavenworth Paper* series.

At first glance, the study of the Imperial Japanese Army fighting the Soviet Red Army would appear to have little pertinence to the current doctrinal concerns of the U.S. Army. The great advances in weapons technology seem to relegate the Nomonhan fighting to antiquarian status as remote as the Outer-Mongolian border where the battle occurred. However, Dr. Edward J. Drea's, *Nomonhan: Japanese-Soviet Tactical Combat, 1939,* which is the second publication in the *Leavenworth Paper* series, goes beyond the mere narration of a remote combat engagement.

At its most basic level, this study provides an insight into how two foreign armies conducted field operations in the days just before World War II. Of particular interest is the manner in which Japanese stereotypes of Soviet tactics and doctrine adversely influenced the Japanese operations. At an intermediate level, this essay describes the Imperial Japanese Army's formulation of operational doctrine and the application of that doctrine against the Red Army. It clearly reveals that doctrine must be dynamic in *both* formulation and application; the theoretical must be relevant to the reality of the battlefield. Finally, the paper makes us aware of the human factor in combat. Outnumbered, outgunned, and outmaneuvered, the Japanese officers and men of the 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, held their positions until they received orders to withdraw. Tradition, unit esprit, training, and doctrine all contributed to this exceptional display of courage in the face of awesome enemy superiority.

Today the U.S. Army stresses the concept of fighting outnumbered and winning. To achieve that difficult feat of arms will require thorough preparation and intensive, realistic training before the first battle of the next war. This account of how the Imperial Japanese Army prepared for its "first battle" should help us profit from the Japanese experience against a formidable Soviet enemy. While it points out errors, it also identifies several Japanese strengths which almost prevailed against the greatest concentration of armor and mechanized forces then known.

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INTRODUCTION

"A Strange War," observed a 20 July 1939 New York *Times* editorial about the fighting between the Soviet Red Army and the Imperial Japanese Army on the Mongolian steppes. The *Times* derided both combatants' claims as exaggerated but inadvertently touched on the distinctive feature of the fighting when it described the battle as "raging in a thoroughly out-of-the-way corner of the world where it cannot attract a great deal of attention."[1] Geography, the combatants' compulsive secrecy, and the subsequent outbreak of World War II in September 1939 all combined to overshadow the most massive use of tanks theretofore recorded. The Soviets used over 1,000 tanks during the fighting and, under the command of General Georgi K. Zhukov, evidenced skill and sophistication at mechanized warfare. The Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), essentially an infantry force, fared poorly, and fell victim to a Soviet double envelopment.

While this "Strange War" may be all but forgotten in the West, the Soviets continue to regard it as a brilliant example of the proper manner in which to fight a limited border war. During the time of border clashes with the Peoples' Republic of China in 1968 and 1969, it was no coincidence that several articles about the 1939 border war appeared in Soviet military journals. At least a dozen such articles have appeared in Soviet military literature in the 1970s. Soviet experience gained in 1939 apparently still carries great weight today.

Similarly, IJA staff officers subsequently examined the Japanese Army's performance at Nomonhan in minute detail, and even today the battle serves as a case study at the advanced tactical schools of the Japanese Ground Self Defense Forces. The interest of an ally and of a potential adversary suggests that it would be beneficial for the U.S. Army to know what happened at Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol in the summer of 1939.

Yet little on the subject has appeared in English.[2] Furthermore, Japanese studies and the few accurate English language accounts tend to focus on affairs at the division level or above. The purpose of this paper is to examine the battalion and company level tactics that Japanese infantrymen used to fight the Soviets and the degree of success those tactics achieved.

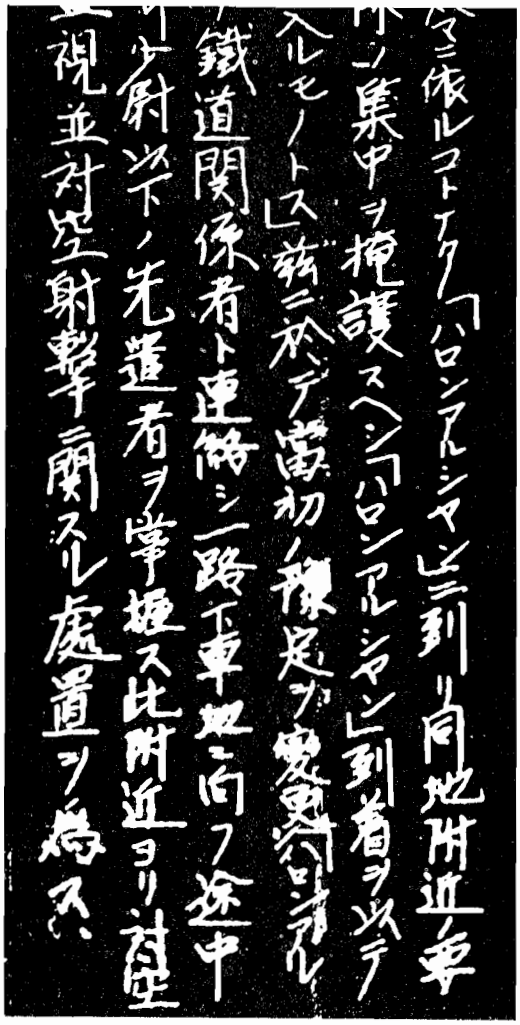
All modern armies have a tactical doctrine, the officially approved method for their various units to fight on the battlefield. The IJA invested much

time, talent, and treasure to formulate a tactical doctrine that would be successful against their potential enemy, the Soviets, who were superior to the IJA in manpower and materiel. This essay briefly describes the evolution of that IJA tactical doctrine, and then presents a detailed examination of how a particular Japanese infantry battalion applied that tactical doctrine in combat against the Soviets in 1939.

Looking at a small unit in combat allows the historian the chance to analyze and to scrutinize doctrine in the test of battle. Such an approach, in turn, surfaces questions about the flexibility, applicability, and effectiveness of doctrine which should concern all armies.

The day-by-day account of a single Japanese battalion in battle is not, however, a comprehensive treatment of the entire Nomonhan fighting. Ordinary Japanese combat infantrymen, like those of any army, did not have the time to reflect on whether or not their fighting techniques followed official IJA doctrine. The Japanese private, clinging to a sand dune during an enemy artillery barrage, could not have a clear grasp of the overall battle, the so-called "Big Picture," which retrospect provides. He received orders and carried out those orders based on his previous training. His was a limited but unique view of land warfare. Here an overview of the Nomonhan campaign is provided, but the theme is small unit tactics and the focus is the battalion, the microcosm, not the division or the army.

The IJA's 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division (2/28th Infantry), serves as the vehicle for this study. There are several reasons for the selection of this particular unit. First, the 2/28th Infantry's report of the fighting (hereafter referred to as War Diary) is available and provides detailed information on its day-to-day



Excerpt from 2/28th Infantry War Diary.

operations against the Red Army at Nomonhan. Second, the battalion operated as an independent unit attached to different task force commanders for different missions. Third, it is neither so small that its activities were overshadowed by a parent unit nor too large for the study of small unit tactics. Finally, the battalion participated in

both offensive and defensive operations against the Red Army, providing an insight into IJA tactics for each situation.

The primary documents used in this study are in the IJA archives, which are open to the general public. One collection is available on microfilm in the U.S. Library of Congress. The original documents are kept at the National Defense College Archives in Tokyo, Japan. These IJA documents were originally classified materials, and I have included the original military classification when citing the documents to allow the reader to have a sense of the importance that the IJA attached to these papers. Throughout this study all Japanese personal names are given in the Japanese manner, surname preceding given name.

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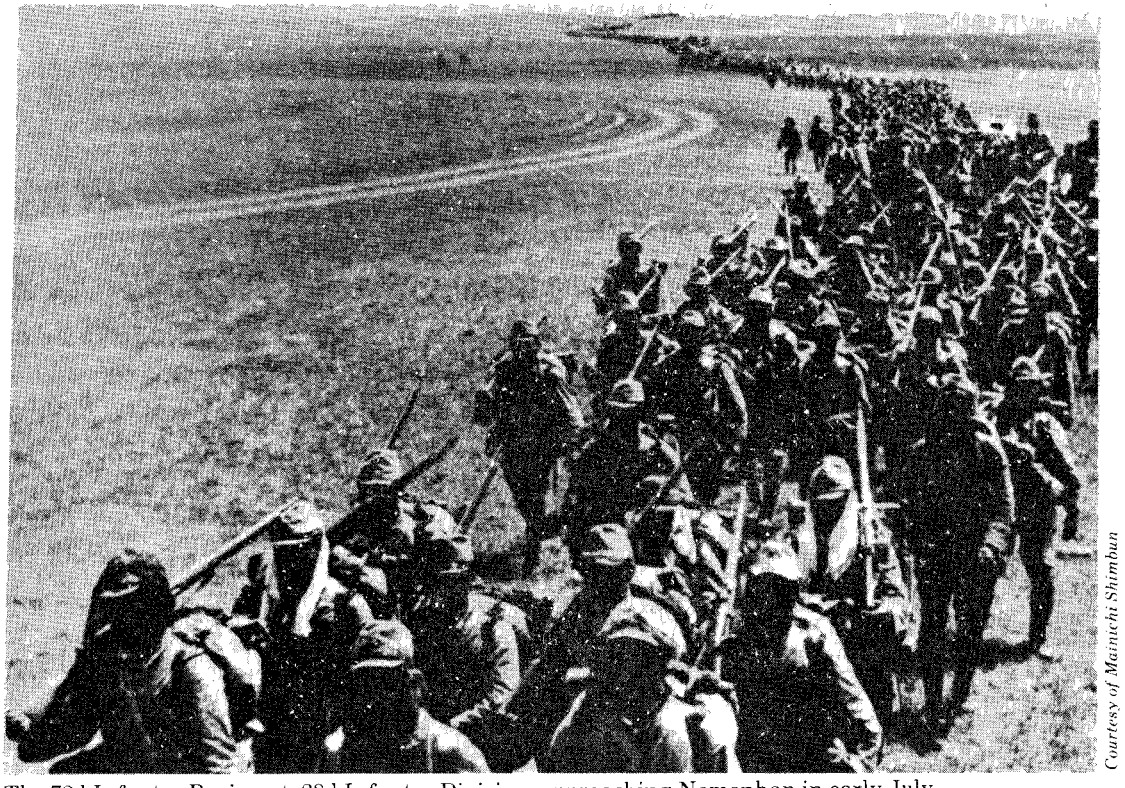
The Nomonhan Campaign (May—September 1939): A Summary

1

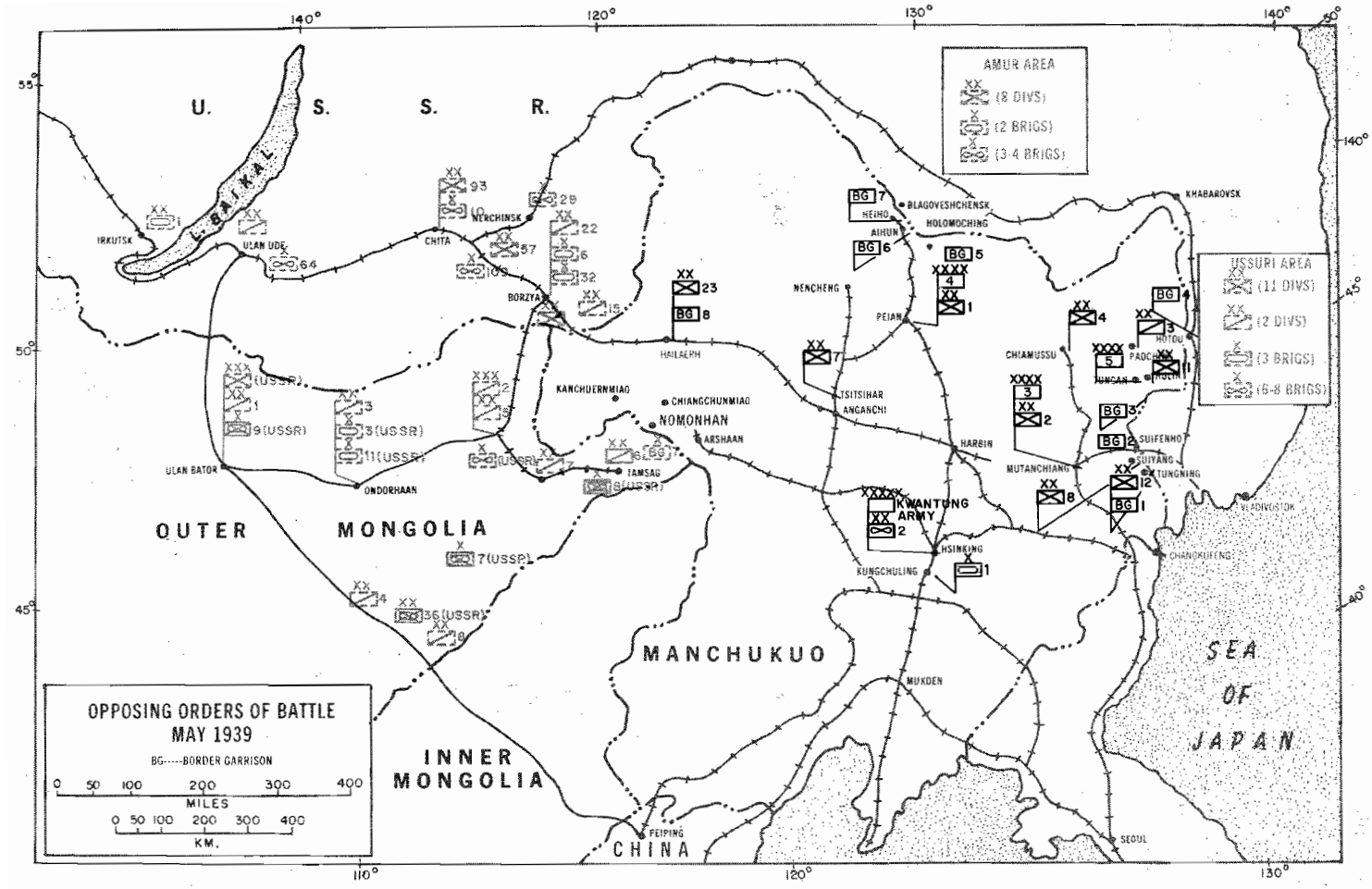
Japanese Initiatives

The Imperial Japanese Army's takeover of Manchuria in 1931 brought Japanese and Soviet armed forces eyeball to eyeball along a 3,000-mile border. Numerous border skirmishes and disputes characterized the next several years as both sides reinforced their respective forces. In 1936 the Soviets signed a mutual assistance treaty with Outer Mongolia, and in January 1937 the Soviet High Command organized the 57th Special Rifle Corps consisting of the 36th Motorized Rifle Division, 6th Cavalry Brigade, 11th Tank Brigade, and 7th, 8th, and 9th Armored Car brigades. These units moved into Outer Mongolia in 1938.[1]



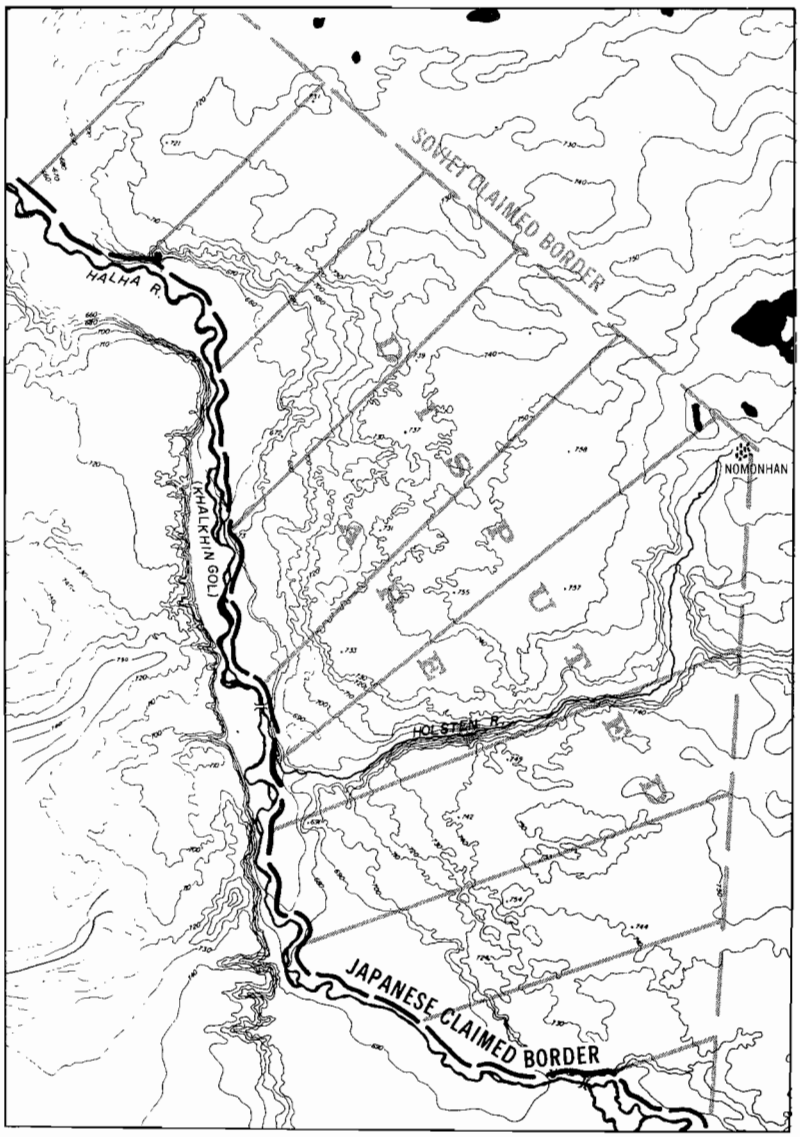
Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

The 72d Infantry Regiment, 23d Infantry Division, approaching Nomonhan in early July.



Map 1. Opposing orders of battle.

An especially bloody affray at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan in 1938 resulted in over 2,500 casualties on both sides. It also seemed to stiffen Soviet resolve because the following year, Joseph Stalin, speaking before the Eighteenth Soviet Party Congress in March 1939, warned that any acts of aggression against the inviolable Soviet frontiers would be met by twice the force of any invader. Two months later, a handful of Soviet allied Outer Mongolian cavalry troops wandered into a disputed border area between the Halha River (Soviet name, Khalkhin Gol) and the tiny village of Nomonhan. The Japanese claimed that the boundary followed the river, but the Soviets maintained that it passed just east of the village of Nomonhan.



Map 2. Disputed border area between Nomonhan and Khalkhin Gol in 1939.

On 11 May 1939 Japanese sponsored Manchukuoan* cavalrymen drove the Outer Mongolians back across the Halha River. Two days later, however, the Outer Mongolian cavalry forces returned to the same location, but the Manchukuoan troops were unable to evict them. The Japanese Kwantung Army, the designation for Japanese forces stationed in Manchukuo, then stepped into the act. Its 23d Infantry Division was responsible for border security in the region where the skirmishes had occurred. The commander of the 23d Division ordered its 64th Infantry Regiment (minus two companies) and its reconnaissance element to drive the Mongolians from the Japanese claimed border area.

LTC Azuma Yaozo on 14 May led the reconnaissance element into the disputed territory, but the Outer Mongolian troops refused to fight and retreated across the Halha. A Soviet and Outer Mongolian build-up, however, continued in the area, and Azuma returned one week later to oust the intruders. This time the enemy surrounded and annihilated Azuma's force. Despite this bloody setback, the Kwantung Army wanted to drop the matter, but more and more Soviet troops poured into the area. (See Map 3.)

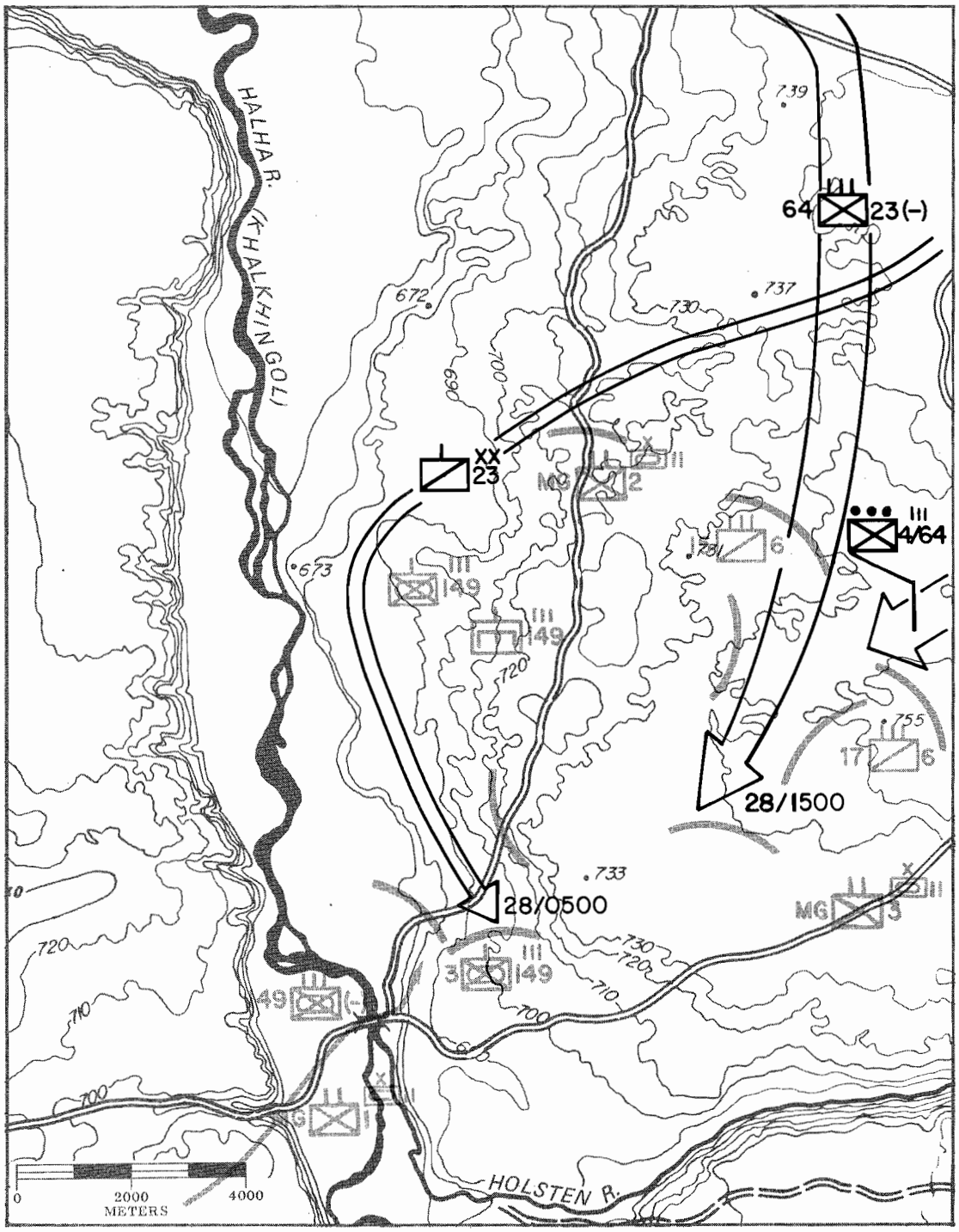
The Kwantung Army decided that a division size attack was needed to oust the Soviets and their allies. This operation began on 1 July when the 23d Division's 71st and 72d Infantry Regiments seized the high ground overlooking the Halha about eighteen kilometers north of its confluence with the Holsten River. On 2 July this force crossed the Halha and drove Soviet units from Baintsagan Heights. Simultaneously, an armored task force consisting of the 3d and 4th Tank Regiments (seventy-three tanks total), the 64th Infantry Regiment, and the 2d Battalion, 28th Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, attacked Soviet positions on the Halha's east bank. (See Map 4.)

Although initially successful, the Japanese drive on the Halha's west bank stalled by dusk of 3 July. General Zhukov, realizing the Japanese threat to his artillery on the west bank, committed his 11th Tank Brigade (minus one battalion), 7th Motorized Armored Brigade, and the 24th Motorized Rifle Regiment of the 36th Motorized Rifle Division, including approximately 186 tanks and 266 armored cars, against the Japanese forces on the west bank. Zhukov accepted the risk of sending

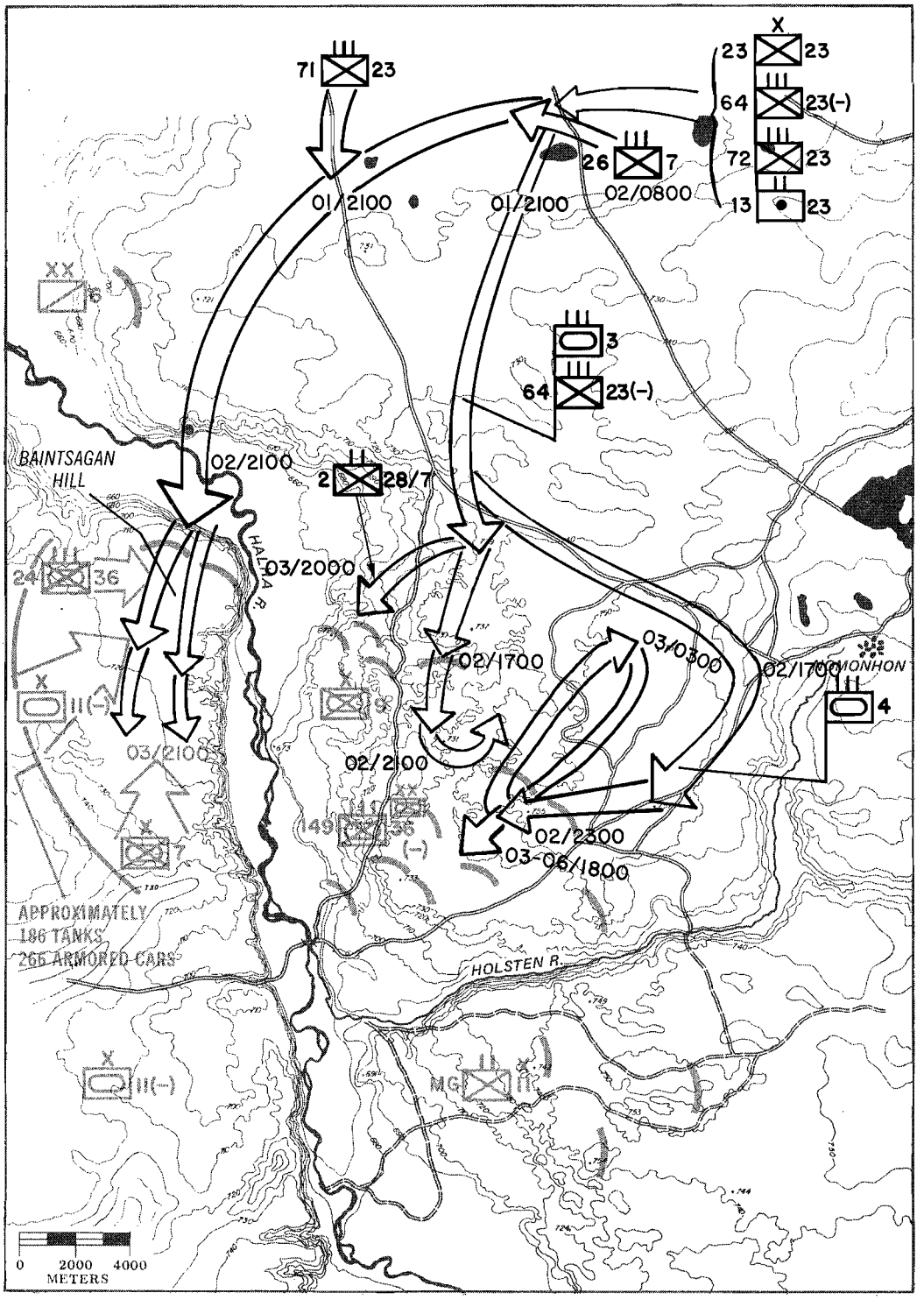
**The Japanese established a puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932 in the Chinese provinces known collectively as Manchuria.*

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Japanese infantry with heavy machine gun operating on west bank of Halha probably on 3 July. Note two Soviet armored cars.



Map 3. Destruction of Lieutenant Colonel Azuma's reconnaissance unit 28 May 1939.



Map 4. Japanese general offensive 1—4 July 1939.

armor unsupported by infantry against the Japanese soldiers because his own infantry formations still had not appeared at the front, and he believed that to await their arrival would squander an opportunity to destroy the Japanese.

The unsupported Soviet tanks and armored cars rolled forward and did blunt the Japanese offensive. The cost, however, to both sides was high. Japanese troops destroyed at least 120 Soviet tanks or armored cars with Molotov cocktails, 37-mm antitank guns, and antitank mines. The Japanese, in turn, lost several hundred troops killed or wounded. Moreover, the Japanese forces depended for resupply on one pontoon bridge across the Halha, the rest of the Japanese bridging equipment having been diverted to the China front. This single bridge proved unable to handle the amount of ammunition and equipment required if the Japanese were to continue the battle. Over the next two days, consequently, the Japanese withdrew to the east bank of the Halha.

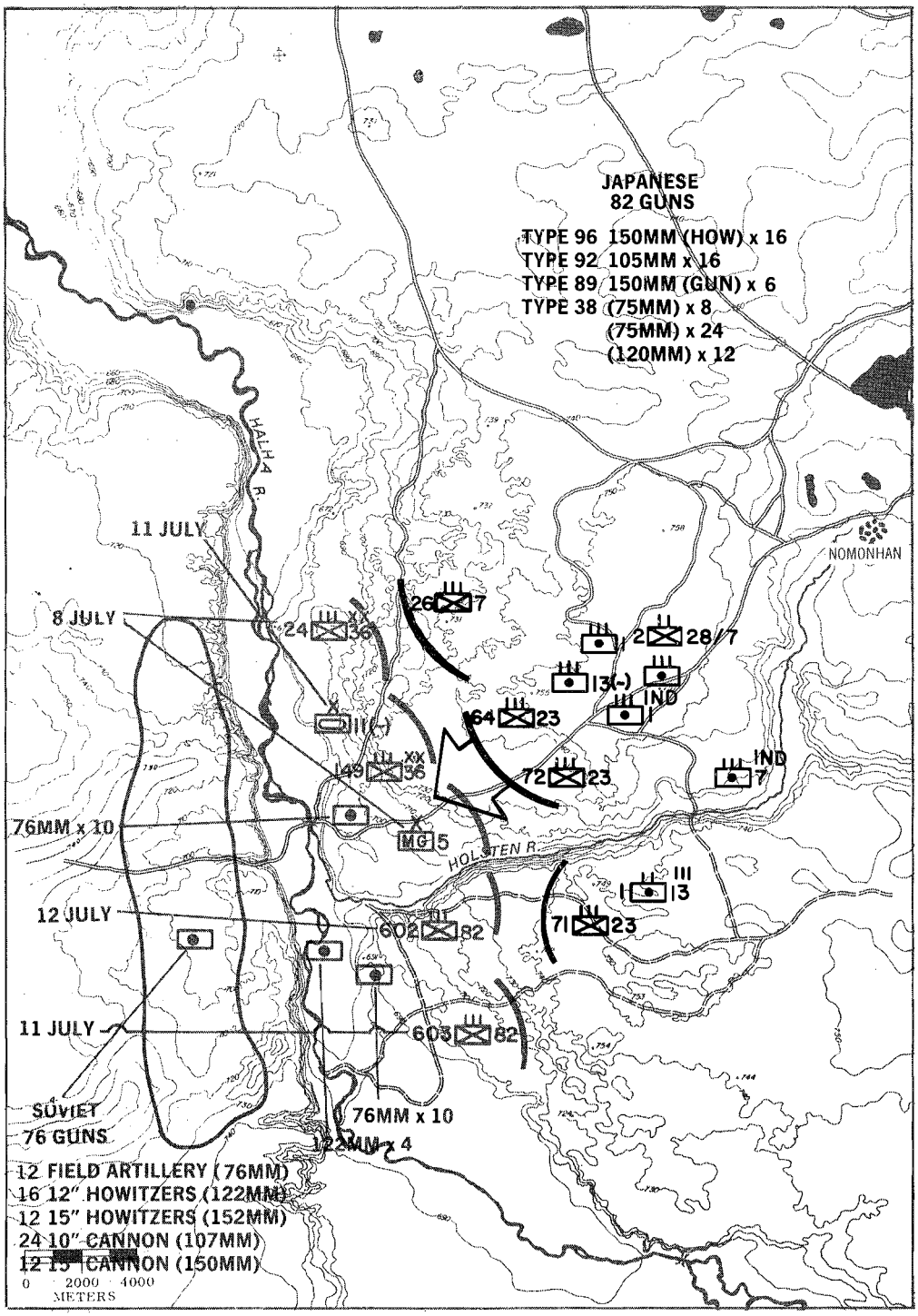
Meanwhile both Japanese tank regiments operating on the east bank had failed to break through Soviet defenses despite the loss of half their armor. The 64th Infantry and 2/28 Infantry also could not penetrate Soviet lines. After the repulse of this two-pronged attack, the battle centered on Japanese attempts to wrest Hill 733 from the Soviets.

From 7 through 22 July, a four-kilometer wide front stretching from the Holsten River to just north of Hill 733 was the location of the heaviest fighting. The Soviets continued to reinforce their positions, as the 24th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 11th Tank Brigade, 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 5th Machine Gun Brigade, and 602d and 603d Rifle Regiments of the 82d Rifle Division established themselves on the Halha's east bank.

Unable to evict the Soviets from the east bank, the Japanese moved in more artillery guns to prepare for a late-July general offensive. The Soviets also increased their artillery, placing twenty-four artillery pieces on the east bank and another seventy-six on the west. By shipping artillery units to Manchukuo from Japan, the Japanese managed to accumulate eighty-two artillery weapons. (See Map 5.)

On 23 July the 64th and 72d Infantry Regiments launched a frontal attack against elements of the 11th Tank Brigade, 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, and 5th Machine Gun Brigade. The Japanese had expected that their intense artillery preparation would silence the Soviet artillery batteries and allow the Japanese infantry to drive the Soviet infantry back across the Halha. Soviet gunners quickly disabused them of that erroneous notion. Even though Japanese artillery pieces fired over 25,000 rounds from 23 to 25 July, the Soviets responded with a greater volume of counterfire. While the Japanese did succeed in pushing the Soviets back, Japanese casualties continued to be heavy. More than 5,000 Japanese troops had been killed or wounded from late May through 25 July.

After the limited Japanese gains, both sides settled down to a war of attrition along a thirty-kilometer front. North of the Holsten River, a Japanese reconnaissance unit guarded the northern flank from Hill 721. About twelve kilometers south, the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, and the 64th



Map 5. Japanese general offensive 23—25 July 1939.

and 72d Infantry Regiments held the line. The Soviet 36th Motorized Rifle Division and 5th Machine Gun Brigade opposed these forces. South of the Holsten, the 8th Border Guards Regiment, 2/28th Infantry Battalion, and 71st Infantry Regiment held a fifteen-kilometer front. The Soviet 82d Rifle Division opposed them.

The Soviet Offensive

Throughout early August, probing attacks and occasional battalion-sized assaults by the Soviets characterized the activity on the battleground. Soviet artillery gained superiority and daily pounded Japanese positions. At the same time General Zhukov built up his forces in preparation for a great Soviet offensive. The Soviets completed these preparations in complete secrecy, concealing the movement and disposition of their forces.

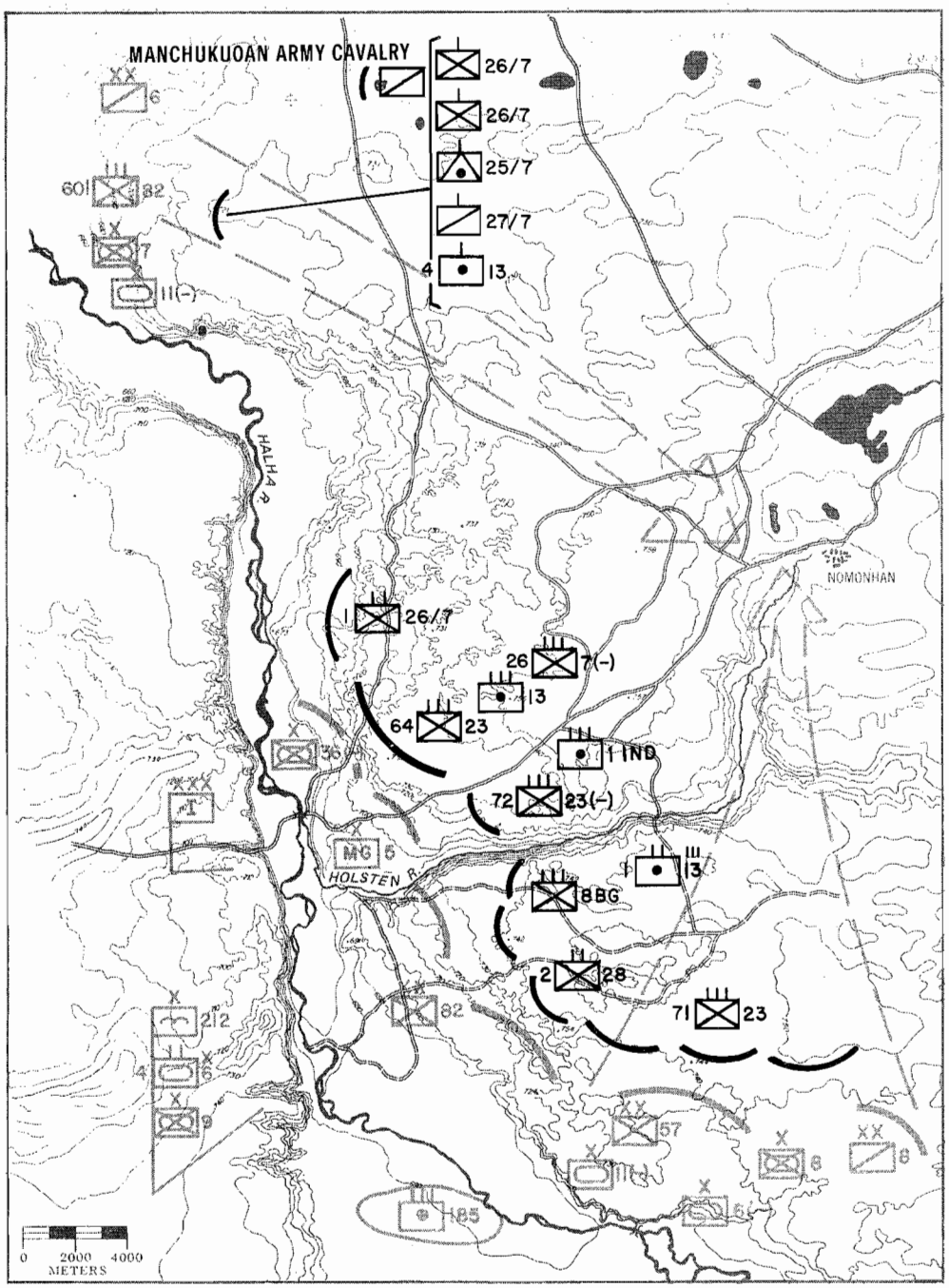
Zhukov launched his offensive along a thirty-kilometer front and caught the Japanese defenders offguard. He concentrated two rifle divisions, two cavalry divisions, a motorized rifle division, a machine gun brigade, two tank brigades, and two motorized armored brigades against slightly more than two Japanese infantry divisions. (See Map 6.)

	Soviet	*Japanese*
Manpower	57,000	30,000
Infantry Battalions	35	18
Tanks	498	--
Armored Cars	346	--

Fighting was savage. The 7th Motorized Armored Brigade and 601st Rifle Regiment stormed Hill 721 but failed to take the heights. In the center, Soviet units had the responsibility to engage as many Japanese forces as possible so that the Japanese would be unable to reinforce their flanks. The southern front was where Zhukov concentrated his armor, over 320 tanks plus an armored car brigade. Supported by an infantry division, the armor quickly turned the Japanese left flank and drove north toward Nomonhan.

Due to the ferocity of the fighting on Hill 721, the commander of the 23d Division mistakenly believed that the main Soviet thrust was directed against his right flank. As he sent reinforcements to the north, the strong Soviet armor units to the south cracked through Japanese defenses and isolated the 8th Border Guards Regiment and 2/28th Infantry Battalion. Four days of bitter fighting broke the Japanese defense of Hill 721, and the Soviet northern pincer then rushed south to complete the encirclement of the 23d Division.

The Soviets apparently were content with driving Japanese units east of Nomonhan, but they also may have lacked the resources in manpower and materiel to conduct a vigorous pursuit. As the Soviet offensive halted and Soviet troops dug in, a new blitzkrieg style of warfare unveiled itself on the plains of Poland. Faced with the drastically new situation in Europe, the antagonists at Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol suspended major military operations. The tempo of diplomatic negotiations already underway between Japan and the Soviet Union quickened and the fighting diminished in early September. A cease-fire was declared on 16 September. Japanese losses in the four months of fighting were extremely heavy: over 17,000, including 8,440



Map 6. Soviet plan of operations 20 August 1939.

killed and 8,766 wounded. Soviet casualties were given as 9,284 killed and wounded.

With this brief outline of the fighting at Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol as background, a detailed examination of the action of the Imperial Japanese Army's 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, will illustrate the types of problems and the difficulties Japanese infantry encountered when fighting the Soviets. It will also illuminate Japanese and Soviet small unit tactics and doctrine of that period and give the reader the opportunity to gain an appreciation of why an outnumbered and weary Japanese battalion continued to fight against enormous odds.

2

Men, Doctrine, Weapons

Manchuria in the Middle

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Imperial Japanese Army regarded Czarist Russia and later the Soviet Union as its primary potential opponent. Japanese successes in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) temporarily removed the Russian threat and placed IJA units on permanent garrison duty in Manchuria, the main battleground of that war. Following the creation in 1905 of a governor-general's office (directed by an IJA general) to oversee Japanese interests along the South Manchurian Railroad, troops from two IJA divisions remained in Manchuria to protect Japanese lives and property. These units were eventually rotated back to Japan, and by 1910 six battalions composed of reservists formed the independent garrison unit and thereafter assumed responsibility for the defense of Japanese interests in Manchuria. IJA regulars replaced the reservists in 1916, and in 1919 Army Order Number Twelve established Headquarters Kwantung Army to control IJA garrison units in Manchuria. The Japanese contingent mustered about 10,000 troops.

Kwantung Army headquarters staff officers regarded themselves as the guardians of Japan's frontiers, in Manchuria's case a frontier for which over 160,000 Japanese casualties in the Russo-Japanese War had paid in blood. They came to believe that the War Ministry and General Staff officers in Tokyo did not fully realize the dangers posed by the Soviet Union to Japanese holdings in Manchuria. To meet this threat, Kwantung Army officers took unilateral action to manufacture a casus belli between Japan and a Manchurian warlord that ultimately enabled Kwantung Army units to extend their control throughout Manchuria.[1] Following this so-called Manchurian Incident of 1931, Kwantung Army staff officers quickly forced the creation in early 1932 of a puppet state called Manchukuo.

Although the Kwantung Army had rapidly conquered Manchuria and with equal speed created a satellite state, its ultimate success could not be assured as long as the Soviet Union threatened the new Japanese possession on three sides. Kwantung Army officers and, eventually after accepting the fait accompli, their counterparts on the general staff in Tokyo viewed the creation of Manchukuo as an intermediate step in Japanese preparations for a war with the Soviets. The IJA, by exploiting the rich natural resources of Manchukuo, could renovate and modernize itself for the impending struggle. In 1937, however, the Japanese found

themselves fighting an unplanned war against China—a classic case of the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time against the wrong enemy.

As casualty lists from the China theater mounted (100,000 Japanese troops killed or wounded by December 1937), War Ministry and General Staff officers tried to bring hostilities to a rapid conclusion. In general terms, these officers may be divided into expansionists and anti-expansionists. The expansionists believed that any show of weakness by the Japanese would only encourage Chinese resistance. Only smashing military force would convince the Chinese of their errors. The anti-expansionists viewed the China War as a debilitating effort that was bleeding the IJA white while the main enemy, the USSR, continued a military build-up in the Soviet Far East and menaced Japan and Manchuria from the north. A common denominator between the two groups was that both accepted the premise that the Soviets were indeed Japan's number one foe. The expansionists preferred to eliminate by military force any potential Chinese threat to the Japanese flank in operations against the USSR. The anti-expansionists opted to end the senseless drain on IJA resources in order to use such resources to prepare for war with the USSR. Yet Japan's military and civilian leaders discovered no solution to stop the fighting, and by 1939 the IJA had twenty-five infantry divisions, and about one million men total, committed on the endless China front.

Since the Kwantung Army's mission, the protection of Manchukuo from Soviet aggression, remained unchanged, its main forces were not engaged in the China fighting. The IJA continued to strengthen and to expand forces assigned to the Kwantung Army, whose size almost doubled from five infantry divisions in 1937 to nine infantry divisions by 1939 while that of the IJA rose from twenty-four to forty-one divisions. Nor was it difficult for the Kwantung Army to justify such troop augmentations. Increasing numbers of incidents—border violations, shootings, kidnappings—led in turn to increases in border security—pillboxes, barbed wire obstacles, new border guard units—all along the 3,000-mile Soviet Manchukuoan border.[2] As early as 1936 clashes between Soviet and IJA units involving mechanized forces and aircraft had occurred.

It became a vicious circle. As the Kwantung Army grew, so did the Red Army, from six rifle divisions in 1931 to twenty in 1936 with more than 1,000 tanks and a like number of aircraft. The Special Far Eastern Army became too large and loomed as a threat to Stalin. Consequently, in 1935 it lost its westerly elements with the creation of the Trans-Baikal Military District. After the Lake Khasan Incident in 1938, Stalin abolished the Special Far Eastern Army and established the 1st and 2d Special Red Banner Armies, responsible for the Ussuri and Amur areas respectively, both directly subordinate to the Defense Commissariat. Also in 1938 the 57th Special Rifle Corps moved into Outer Mongolia.[3]

In 1938 the IJA's 19th Infantry Division engaged in a bloody twelve-day struggle with the Red Army in midsummer heat at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan on Korea's northern border with the USSR.[4] Although the 19th Division was able to hold the ground until it had initially seized against fierce Soviet counterattacks, it suffered heavy losses. Over 500 Japanese troops were

killed and more than 900 wounded. Soviet losses amounted to 236 killed and 611 wounded.[5] In the view of the IJA staff, however, the Soviets did not display innovative ground tactics or skillful troop deployments, thus confirming Kwantung Army observations that the ongoing purges of the Red Army had seriously impaired its battlefield efficiency. As a result, in early 1939 Kwantung Army headquarters adopted a more aggressive series of rules of engagement designed to crush any future Soviet encroachments on Manchukuoan territory.

Preliminary Skirmishes

In April 1939 the Kwantung Army drafted a new operations order called "Principles for the Settlement of Soviet Manchurian Border Disputes." Later that month the Kwantung Army commander, General Ueda Kenkichi, explained these new guidelines at a corps commanders' meeting.[6] Henceforth, according to Operations Order Number 1488, Kwantung Army units could prevent both the frequency and escalation of border incidents by decisively punishing illegal Soviet violations. The same order authorized Japanese troops to invade Soviet or Outer Mongolian territory as required to achieve their objectives. In such cases, all Japanese dead and wounded would be collected from the battlefield and, along with enemy corpses or prisoners of war, would be returned to Manchukuoan territory. Locally, aggressive patrolling was expected and commanders had the right, in cases where the border was unclear, to determine the boundary for themselves.[7] Empowered with such sweeping authority, IJA division commanders who were responsible for specific sectors of the long, unstable border would be expected to use it.

On 11 May, about two weeks after the promulgation of the new operations order, about seventy to eighty Outer Mongolian cavalry troops armed with heavy and light machine guns crossed the Halha River into Manchukuoan-claimed territory in search of grazing land and water for their horses. Near the village of Nomonhan they attacked a small Manchukuoan security force. A battalion-size Manchukuoan force in turn counterattacked the Outer Mongolians and succeeded in driving them back across the Halha River. The Mongolians abandoned five bodies, four horses, and considerable small arms and ammunition in their flight. The next day a like number of Outer Mongolian troops appeared southwest of Nomonhan but a 13 May counterattack against them by Manchukuoan troops proved unsuccessful. Such were the beginnings of what the Japanese called the Nomonhan Incident and the Soviets, Khalkhin Gol.[8]

To LTG Komatsubara Michitaro, commander of the IJA's 23d Infantry Division, which was stationed at Hailaerh, and in whose area of operations the incident had occurred, this latest border skirmish seemed to be typical. He believed that rapid application of sufficient force would quickly resolve the incident. Initial reports, wildly exaggerated, indicated that approximately 700 Outer Mongolian troops had transgressed the boundary. Komatsubara ordered a quick reaction force composed of the 23d Division's reconnaissance element (one cavalry company, one heavy armored car company, and a headquarters element—593 men total) and the 1st Battalion, 64th Infan-

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

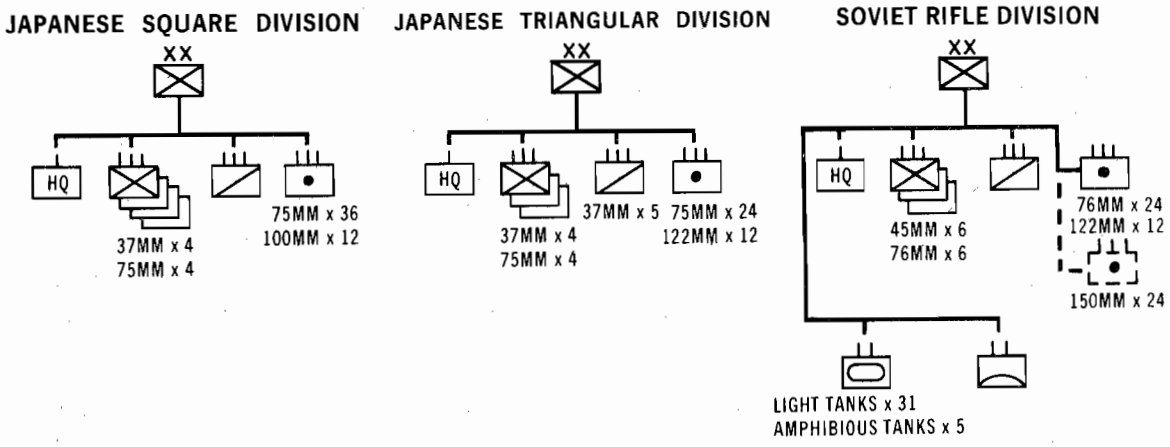
LTG Komatsubara Michitaro, Commander, 23d Infantry Division at Nomonhan.

try Regiment (minus two companies) with a platoon of 37-mm rapid fire guns attached, along with 100 automobiles into the area.[9] Japanese staff officers were having great difficulty even locating Nomonhan on their operational maps, so there seemed no reason to believe that additional force might be required to resolve the affray. Confident in their training and tactics, officers and men of the 23d Division eagerly anticipated putting their long months of preparation to use in battle.

The 23d Division was a relatively new division activated in July 1938 and sent to Manchuria for training one month later. Most of its enlisted troops were first- or second-year soldiers conscripted from the southern Japanese cities of Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Hiroshima, and Oita. Traditionally troops from these recruiting districts proved to be able fighters, particularly in offensive operations. Imperial General Headquarters (IGHQ) had originally organized the division expecting to use it to garrison occupied areas in China. However, given the additional requirement to strengthen the Kwantung Army, IGHQ finally assigned the 23d Division responsibility for the defense of Heilungkiang Province in northwest Manchukuo.[10] Despite the quality of its fighting men, Kwantung Army headquarters staff officers regarded the division as organizationally deficient to meet a major Soviet threat.

The maneuver elements of a triangular division like the 23d had one infantry brigade with three infantry regiments attached to it. Regular pre-1937 Kwantung Army divisions, like the 7th Division, to which the 2/28th Infantry was attached, were square—two brigades of two regiments each with three battalions per regiment. The triangular division had 12,000 men while the square division had 15,000. Furthermore, the triangular divisions lacked the artillery power needed to combat a first-line Soviet division. The 23d Division, for instance, had only sixty-five artillery pieces, including seventeen 37-mm guns, in its Table of Equipment compared to sixty-four artillery guns and sixteen 37-mm guns organic to the 7th Infantry Division.[11]

TOE STRENGTHS FOR JAPANESE AND SOVIET INFANTRY DIVISIONS, 1939



Weapons and Doctrine

Debates had raged within IJA for a decade over whether or not the triangular division should be adopted as the main combat division organization. The decisive factor in the adoption of the triangular division was the realization among IJA planners that the triangular infantry division offered a quick way to increase the number of IJA divisions. Otherwise, by maintaining the square division, Japan lacked the resources and the IJA lacked the military budget required to expand the army. It was more economical to build triangular divisions. The army reorganization in 1936, by adopting the triangular plan, squeezed six new infantry divisions from the IJA's standing force of seventeen divisions.[12] The money saved by creating such "new" divisions was spent on tank and aircraft development. Operations during the China War also favored a light division since the Nationalist Chinese armies seldom used armor effectively and the Chinese Communists had none to use.

Within either type of division, the battalion was the IJA's smallest single tactical unit capable of conducting independent combat operations.[13] Ideally the battalion consisted of a headquarters and four rifle companies of 194 men each, a heavy weapons company with eight 7.7-mm heavy machine guns, and a battalion artillery platoon of two 70-mm howitzers designed to support advancing infantry by destroying enemy machine gun nests. Each company had three rifle platoons, which in turn had three rifle squads each. A rifle squad had eleven riflemen and a 6.5-mm light machine gun crew, and each weapons squad had eleven more riflemen and three grenadiers carrying 50-mm grenade dischargers, often incorrectly referred to as knee mortars. There was, however, no battalion staff organization, so the battalion commander and his aide-de-camp had to coordinate all staff functions like logistics, intelligence, operations, and communications.

BATTALION WEAPONS

Weapon	Model	Caliber	Weight	Range meters MAX	Range meters EFF	Rate of fire	Number of weapons per battalion
Rifle	Meiji 38 (1905)	6.6-mm	9¼ lbs	3,700	2,850	10 rpm	686
Heavy Machine gun	Type 92 (1932)	7.7-mm	61 lbs (122 with tripod)	4,500	3,300	200-250 rpm	8
Light Machine gun	Type 96 (1936)	6.5-mm	20 lbs	3,700	2,850	150 rpm	25
Battalion howitzer	Model 92 (1932)	70-mm	468 lbs	*3,700		10 rpm	2
Grenade discharger	Type 89 (1929)	50-mm	10¼ lbs	666 **40.5		‡10 rpm ‡‡20 rpm	22

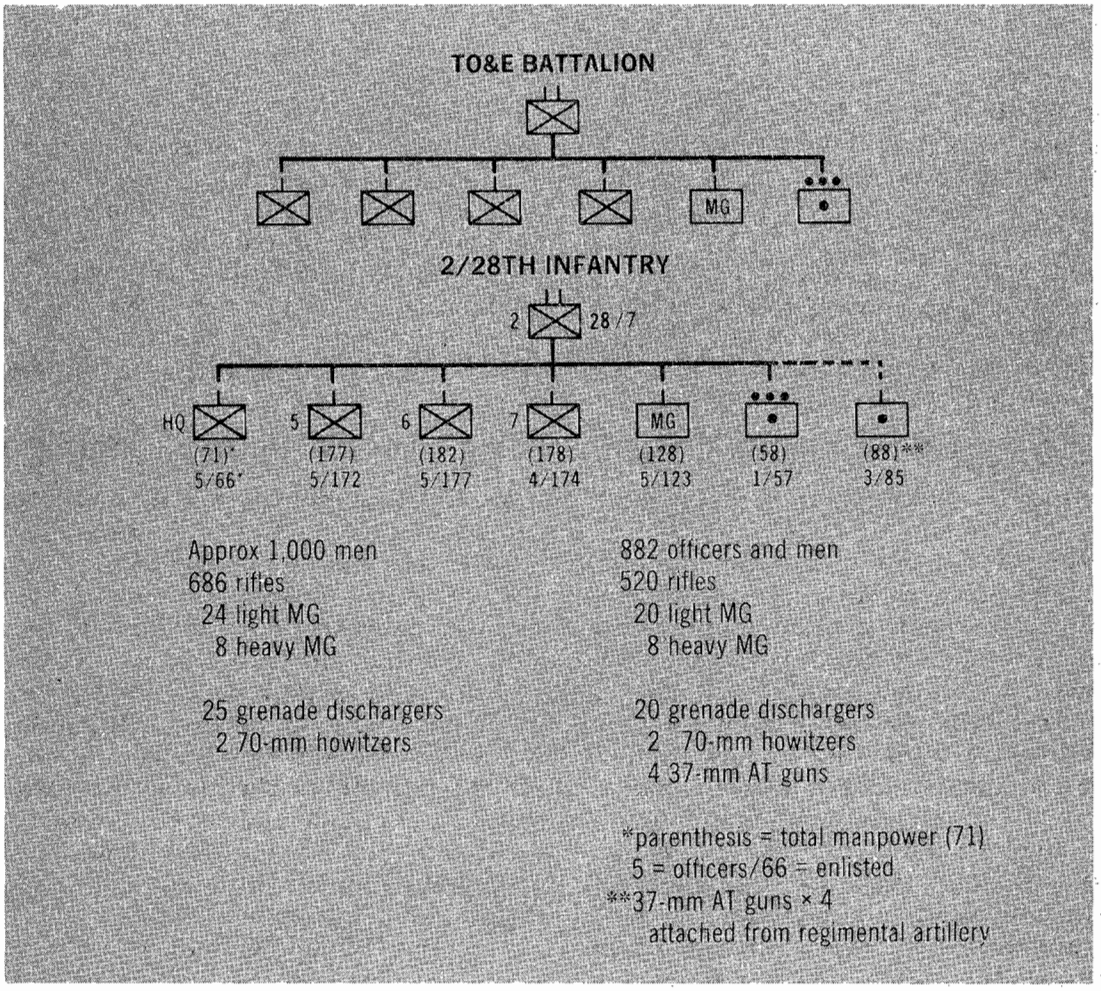
*Maximum effective range
**Minimum effective range
‡Fired by one man
‡‡Fired by two men

Source: CINCPAC. CINCPOA Bulletin #55-45, 15 March 1945, *Japanese Infantry Weapons.* Originally restricted, downgraded to unclassified.

While this ideal battalion enrolled about 1,000 men, a comparison with the 2/28th Infantry at the time of the Nomonhan fighting shows that unit at about 80 percent strength.[14]

IJA units attached to the Kwantung Army, whether regular infantry divisions like the 7th or new divisions like the 23d, spent most of their time in Manchukuo undergoing rigorous training to prepare them to meet the Red Army. For the 7th Division, training exercises focused on infantry combat, hand-to-hand combat, infantry tactics as opposed to combined arms tactics, and spiritual training. Spiritual training emphasized a certainty in victory, loyalty and patriotic devotion to duty, military tradition, and esprit de corps all premised on instilling the spirit of the offensive into every soldier.[15]

Every Japanese infantry training and drill manual from 1909 through 1945 stressed the importance of the role of the offensive in combat operations.[16] The deadly new weaponry of the Russo-Japanese War and the staggering Japanese losses necessitated a new combat doctrine that would compel the infantryman to continue the fight even after he saw his friends killed or wounded. Based on the lessons of that war, the 1909 field manual emphasized the need to inculcate spiritual factors, such as the soldier's belief in his inevitable triumph and an unflagging offensive spirit, throughout the entire IJA.[17] This reliance on the intangibles of battle re-



quired each soldier to possess an even higher morale and an aggressive spirit based on a zealous patriotism and esprit de corps. Morale, already at a high level during the Russo-Japanese War, received such increased emphasis that Japanese commanders came to rely on these intangibles to compensate for materiel and technological deficiencies on the battlefield. Such doctrine pervaded the IJA to the extent that by 1932 the manual advised division commanders that if the enemy forced them unavoidably to take the defensive, they still had to look for the opportunity to deliver the "enemy a decisive blow by attacking."[18]

The IJA founded its battle doctrine on bold offensive operations. Thus it had to devise tactics suitable to apply such doctrine against its main enemy, the Red Army. Both the Russo-Japanese War and World War I had demonstrated that massed infantry formations on the battlefield were deadly anachronisms. The IJA, however, relied on the infantry as its main battle force, a force whose objective was to attack the enemy and destroy him in

hand-to-hand combat.[19] IJA tacticians had to guarantee that the attacking Japanese infantry reached the enemy positions with a minimum of friendly losses. Thus, the 1920s and the early 1930s became times of significant doctrinal ferment within the IJA.

By 1920 IJA tacticians realized the need to disperse infantry formations in order to reduce losses when attacking a defender who possessed the lethal firepower of modern weapons. The revised 1925 edition of the *Infantry Manual* emphasized tactics designed to allow the attacker to reach the enemy defender's position. These included infantry cooperation with other combat arms, improved communications for command and control, night fighting and maneuver, coordination of infantry firepower with hand-to-hand combat, and increased reliance on the independent decision making ability of junior officers and non-commissioned officers.[20]

Reliance on junior officers' leadership ability was central to the new tactics but it required high-quality, well-trained junior officers who were concerned about their troops' welfare and who matured by continual service with their regiments. In peacetime when an average Military Academy class might have 300—350 graduates and NCOs might be given commissions to leaven the junior officer force, the development of aggressive, independent junior officers was possible. However, junior officer attrition during the China fighting, abbreviated academy graduating classes each of more than 500 cadets, and officer training schools producing still more subalterns diluted officer quality. Furthermore, outstanding company grade officers achieved rapid promotion to field grade rank in order to alleviate the acute shortage of majors and lieutenant colonels caused by the IJA's rapid wartime expansion. By 1941 only 36 percent of all IJA officers were Academy graduates and the percentage was even lower for company grade ranks.[21] At the same time, the new revisions to the *Infantry Manual* required junior officers capable of exhibiting imaginative leadership and initiative.

The 1928 revised edition of *Infantry Manual* placed great emphasis on the use of cover and concealment to protect advancing infantry and reduced the distance to be covered in one dash by an infantry under enemy fire from fifty to thirty meters. Most of the revisions, however, stressed night combat and the requirement for night combat and maneuver training.[22] Day and night dispersal tactics also required new weapons, and the revised manual paid particular attention to the use of the light machine gun and the grenade discharger.[23] Despite these alterations, the basic IJA reliance on offensive operations which culminated in hand-to-hand combat never changed.

By the 1930s, IJA planners realized more than ever that the Japanese army could not fight a war of attrition against the ever-growing might of the Soviet Union. Consequently, they designed and refined their tactics to wage a short war fought to a quick and decisive conclusion of hostilities *(sokusen sokketsu).* The goal of *sokusen sokketsu* was to encircle the enemy and then destroy him. The tactics employed to achieve that end relied on unit mobility, initiative, concentration of forces, night attack and night movement, and close cooperation between artillery and infantry.[24] Coupled with the spiritual or psychological values of offensive spirit and the belief in the absolute supremacy of Japanese arms, such tac-

tics produced one of the finest infantry armies in the world. It was, however, still an infantry army whose emphasis on the value of intangibles like morale or Japanese fighting spirit on the battlefield perhaps resulted from its status as an army poor in the weapons of modern warfare.[25] It was an army, in short, that tried to use doctrine to compensate for materiel deficiencies.

By 1939 battlefield experiences in China and against the Soviets seemed to confirm the validity of the Japanese way of warfare. In China time and time again numerically inferior Japanese forces routed Chinese troops. Against the Soviets at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan the decision was not so clear cut, but since that engagement also served to "prove" the efficacy of Japanese tactics, particularly night combat and hand-to-hand fighting, it merits closer attention.

The engagement that would provide a battle test for staff planners' theories began in the early morning hours of 31 July 1938. Members of the 1st Battalion, 75th Infantry, 19th Infantry Division launched a night attack against Soviet troops occupying an approximately 150-meter high ridgeline at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan. The attackers carried the position and, after fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the darkness, the Soviet troops fled in disorder.[26] The Japanese troops held their gains despite heavy losses during the next twelve days. More important, because this action was the first IJA night attack against the Red Army, tacticians regarded it as a brilliant success which strengthened their faith in the tactic of night attack.[27] Paradoxically, although all proponents of the offensive, these same tacticians paid greater attention to the defensive lessons of Changkufeng, particularly that a division in a strong natural or fortified position could resist successfully a three-division frontal assault.[28] Simultaneously, the IJA chose to overlook the superior firepower of the Soviet infantry and artillery and continued to stress the other intangible factors on the battlefield. To paraphrase the official Japanese history of Nomonhan, clearly a Japanese lack of firepower was the main reason for the emphasis on spiritual training, but contributing to the intangible factors was an absolute faith in night combat, especially a night attack that culminated in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy.[29]

As the new conscripts of the 7th Division underwent their advanced infantry training on the dusty plains near Tsitsihar, its members concentrated on the three cardinal drills of the IJA: bayonet practice, firing practice, and maneuver. They learned, as did others before them, that a charge which carried them face-to-face to the enemy to kill him was the climax of infantry combat. Most of the riflemen were just completing their first year of company training, a year that contained thirty-eight weeks of night combat instruction averaging about ten hours per week. The men studied night attacks in various echelons, obstacle clearing, concealment, noise prevention, orientation at night, patrolling, and security.[30] Their officers taught them that night attacks exploited the unique Japanese characteristics of bravery, tenacity, shrewdness, and audacity.[31] In May 1939 the men of the 7th Division perhaps were jealous that their comrades in the 23d Division were about to get the first crack at the Red Army at Nomonhan.

On 14 May 1939 the 23d Division's previously dispatched reconnaissance detachment, consisting of an armored car company and a cavalry squadron commanded by LTC Azuma Yaozo, arrived in the vicinity of Nomonhan. The following day Azuma, hoping to trap the Outer Mongolian troops on the east side of the Halha River, launched a two-pronged enveloping movement in conjunction with 150 Manchukuoan cavalrymen also from Hailaerh. The attack began at 1300, but the Outer Mongolian troops slipped through the closing pincers of the attempted encirclement and escaped to the western side of the Halha. Three squadrons of IJA aircraft bombed and strafed the area causing some damage to about twenty Mongol yurts. Since the Mongols had fled back across the border, Lieutenant General Komatsubara considered the incident closed and ordered the Azuma unit to return to Hailaerh.[32]

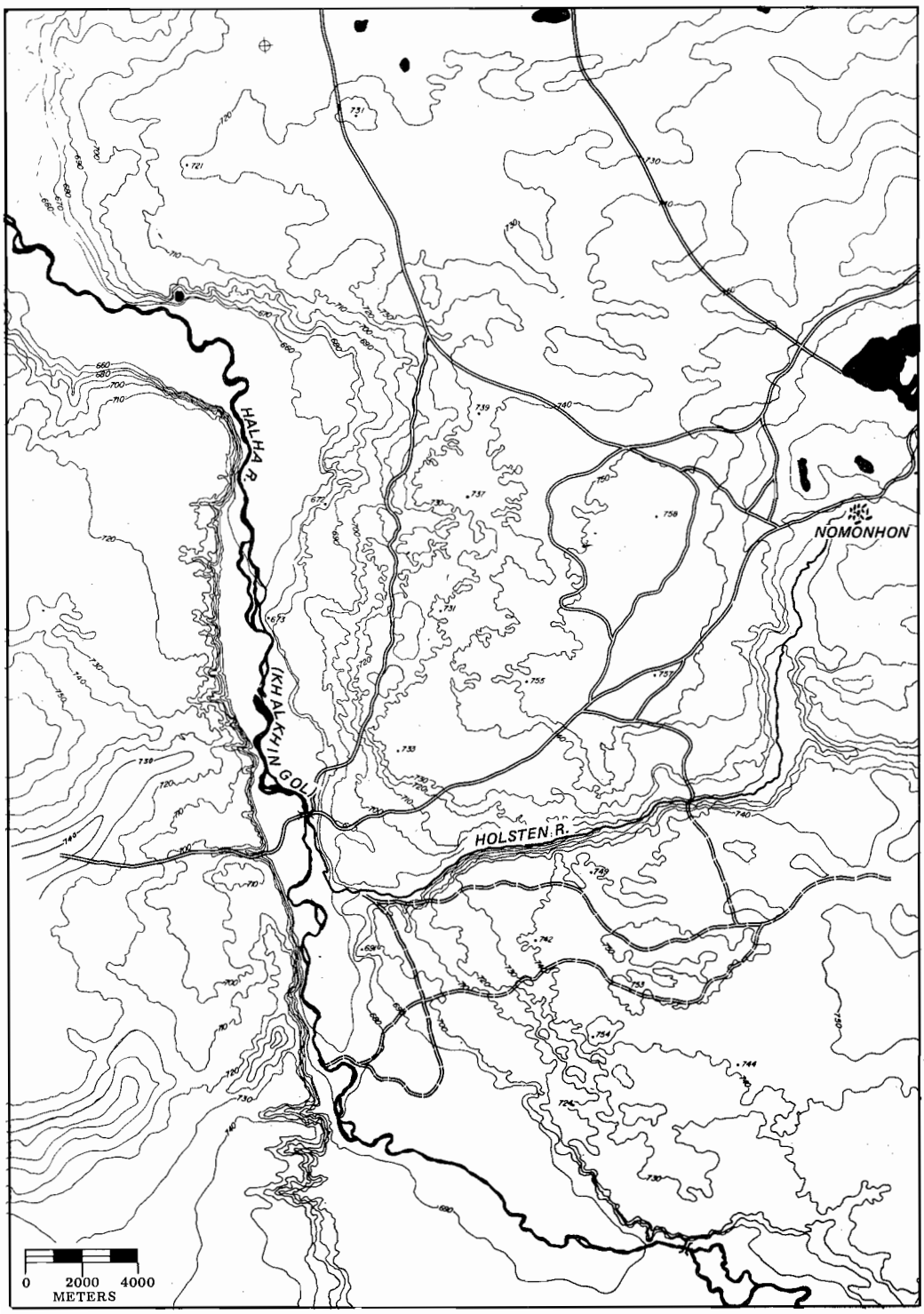
A few days later, aerial reconnaissance and Manchukuoan cavalry reports revealed that about sixty Outer Mongolian troops had again crossed the Halha south of its confluence with the Holsten River. By 21 May, an estimated 300 to 400 enemy troops with at least two cannon and light tanks were busily constructing fortified positions both north and south of the Holsten River. That same day Lieutenant General Komatsubara ordered a task force headed by COL Yamagata Takemitsu, commander of the 64th Infantry Regiment, 23d Division, to move into the area and destroy Outer Mongolian forces. The 64th Infantry (minus two battalions), Lieutenant Colonel Azuma's reconnaissance element, a wireless communications platoon, transportation, and a field sanitation unit composed the task force. They set out to track down and destroy an elusive foe in the barren desert steppes around Nomonhan.

Terrain

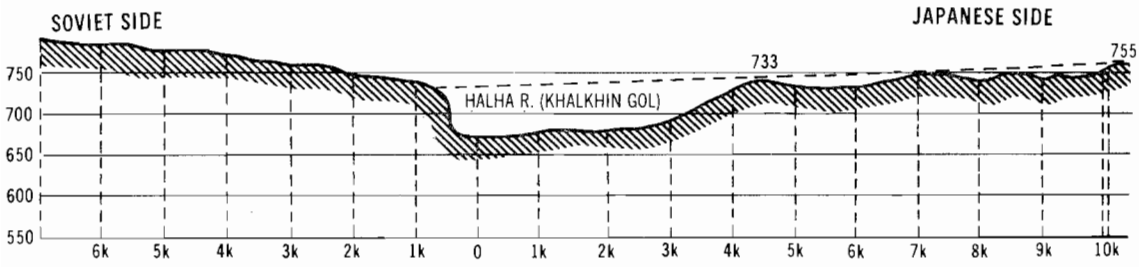
A fine sand, in places as much as ten centimeters (four inches) thick, covered the ground around Nomonhan. Underneath this sandy covering, the desert surface was generally firm enough to support wheeled transport. South of the Holsten River eucalyptus trees grew, but north of the river only shrubs or stubby one-meter (3 1/3 feet) high pines appeared. Short, coarse grass and wild flowers added a touch of color to the desert landscape but the lack of natural landmarks and the sameness of the sand dunes made map reading difficult. The infantryman found it extremely difficult to select readily identifiable reference points or to maintain his sense of direction.

Along the east, or Japanese, side of the Halha River ran a region of hillocks about forty kilometers (twenty-five miles) north and south and fifty kilometers (thirty miles) east and west. Elevation was about 700 meters above sea level. The terrain was desert characterized by rolling, undulating sand dunes twenty to forty meters high with ten-to-forty meter depressions. These features provided good cover and shelter for small infantry units but presented little obstacle for armor. Although roads in the area were often blocked by drifting sand, there was virtually no hindering terrain in the area of operations.[33] The Halha's west, or Soviet, side was a wasteland desert plain. (See Map 7.)

From the village of Nomonhan Japanese troops descended to the Halha over ground shaped like a basin the center of which was the confluence of



Map 7. Terrain features and roads near Nomonhan in 1939.



Terrain profile bordering Halha River (Khalkhin Gol).

the Halha and Holsten Rivers. The Holsten was between three and four meters wide and presented no impediment to military operations. It was, however, the sole source of potable under water in the region. The swamp lands resulting from flash floods were almost all saline. There were many wells in the vicinity, but salt water also had contaminated most of these.

The tactically significant river was the Halha. It was an obstacle 100 to 150 meters wide with a sand bottom and a current of one to two meters per second. A band of intermittent swampland extended one or two kilometers away from the river on either side. The Japanese east bank had a 15° to 30° incline while the Soviet west bank rose steeply at a 75° pitch. At the Halha's confluence with the Holsten or where the Halha was fifty to sixty meters wide, the Japanese judged that individual troops could ford it but that entire units would have great difficulty crossing it. Moreover, the west bank of the Halha was higher than the east, thus exposing Japanese troops operating east of the river to enemy observation and to direct enemy fire.

Nomonhan's temperature range and climate were as harsh as its landscape. Beginning in June there were hot days but chilly, almost winterlike nights. Temperatures during July and August would be 30° to 40° C (86°—104° F) but fell precipitously to 17° or 18° C (58°—60° F) at night. These months were also the peak rainfall season and the combination of rain-soaked uniforms and cold night air made soldiers miserable. Mosquitoes whose appetites surprised even seasoned veterans plagued the men during the day and crickets screeched at them during the night. Mornings usually meant dawn fogs but a south or east wind would dissipate these quickly. In June there were more than sixteen hours of daylight, in July, fifteen and one-half hours, and in August, thirteen to fifteen hours.[34]

Approximately one hour of dawn allowed Japanese infantrymen to see very close targets completely, but at 700 to 1,000 meters, the mid-ranges where enemy heavy machine guns and light artillery were found, observation was exceedingly difficult.[35]

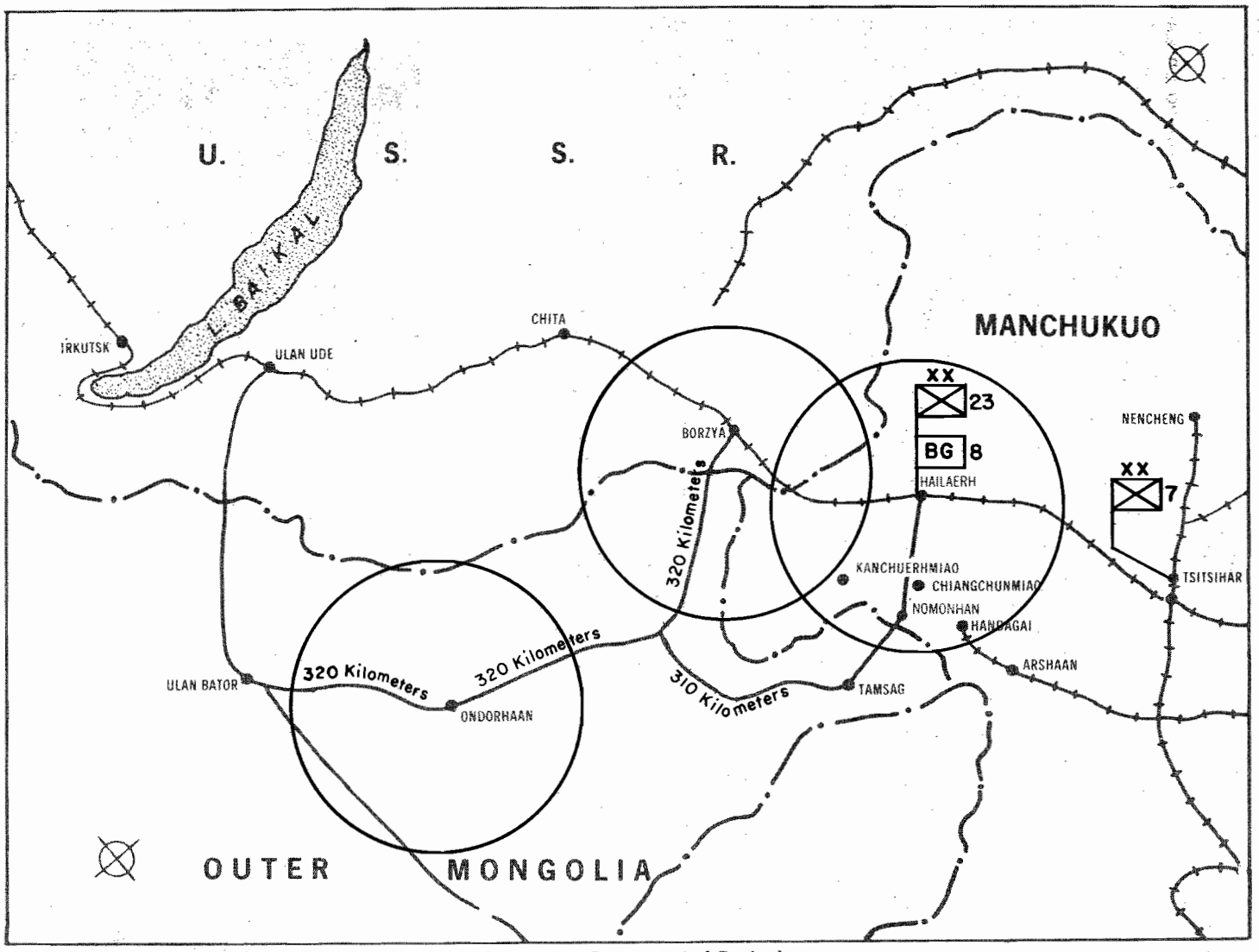
	Sunrise	Sunset	Dawn
May	0400—0430	1900—2000	
June	0400—or before	2000—2030	
July	0500—0530	2030—2100	64—48 minutes
Aug	0530—0630	2030—1930	48—39 minutes

The desolation of the region affected basic strategy, logistics, and the selection of lines of communications. IJA operations hinged on railroads as conventional IJA thought held that multi-division operations could not be conducted outside of a 200- to 250-kilometer zone from a major resupply base situated on a rail line. (See Map 8.) Nomonhan was aproximately 200 kilometers south of the IJA base at Hailaerh, but it was about 750 kilometers from the nearest Soviet bases of operations at Borzya, USSR, and Ondorhann, Outer Mongolia, respectively. Looking at their maps, Kwantung Army planners estimated that large scale Soviet operations around Nomonhan would be impossible. They thought that the great distances from the nearest Soviet railhead insured that the Red Army could never concentrate large armor and infantry forces at Nomonhan. This meant, in turn, that the only Soviet troops around Nomonhan would be those assigned to the 7th Border Guard Brigade. The 23d Division expected to encounter only Outer Mongolian and second-rate Soviet troops. Based on assumed Soviet capabilities, a single IJA division would suffice to handle this latest border flare-up.[36]

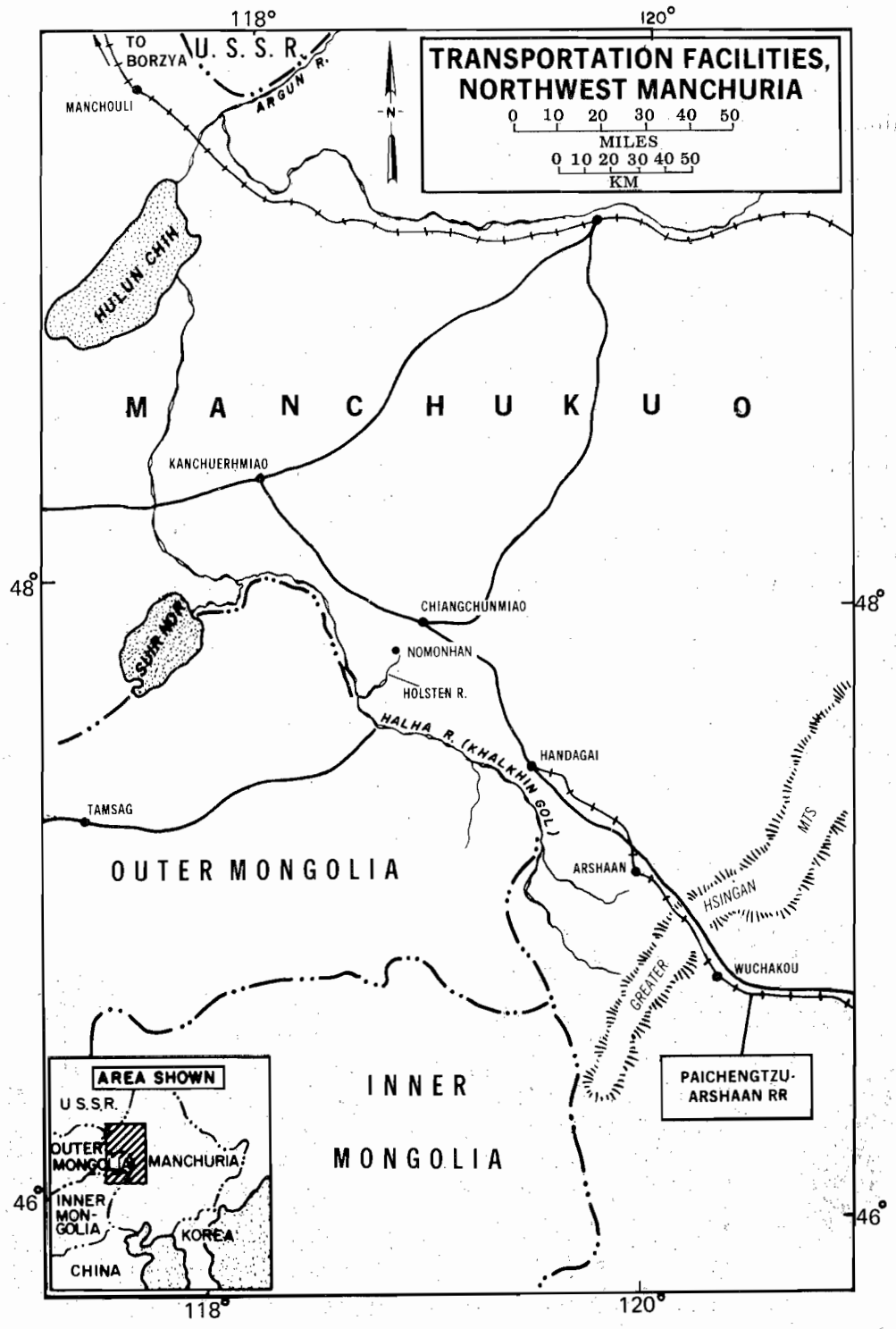
Roads from the Japanese railheads approached Nomanhan from the north and south. (See Map 9.) One northern approach from Hailaerh to Chiangchunmiao, the IJA staging area ten kilometers northeast of Nomonhan, was unimproved sand or grass road suitable for wheeled vehicles. It was also completely exposed to aerial reconnaissance and attack. An alternate route from Hailaerh via Kanchuerhmiao (approximately eighty-five kilometers northwest of Chiangchunmiao) could also handle wheeled traffic and was similarly exposed to aerial haz-

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Near Arshaan troops of Yasuoka Detachment pulling a truck bogged down in swamp on



Map 8. The 250-kilometer radius of operations from major Japanese and Soviet bases.



Map 9. Transportation facilities.

ards. Additionally, there was no water between Kanchuerhmiao and Chiangchunmiao. From the south, the sixty-five kilometer road running from the railhead at Handagai to Chiangchunmiao became a bog in late June with the onset of the rainy season. While light repairs corduroying the road would allow trucks passage, about two-thirds or forty kilometers of the road were subject to flooding and rapidly could turn into a quagmire in which trucks sank to their undercarriages. The IJA employed the logistics route that ran from Hailaerh via Kanchuerhmiao which was used as a stopover and sorting point.[37]

After supply convoys reached Chiangchunmiao, they could proceed southwest on the so-called Nomonhan Road, really little more than a track but capable of supporting trucks and tanks. The unimproved strip ran southwest through Nomonhan and north of the Holsten River to the Kawamata Bridge spanning the Halha. No significant roads existed south of the Holsten although numerous tracks and trails crisscrossed the area both north and south of that river. It was into this hostile region that Colonel Yamagata led his 1,000-man task force.

Yamagata hoped to envelop what he estimated to be a few hundred Soviet border guards and Mongolian cavalrymen occupying the Halha's east bank just north of the Holsten River. While a company-size diversionary attack fixed enemy attention to the front, the battalion would hit the enemy's northern flank. Lieutenant Colonel Azuma, as a separate force moving parallel to Yamagata's route, would advance ahead of the main force in order to block the Kawamata Bridge, the sole avenue of enemy escape. Lieutenant Colonel Azuma was so confident that the enemy troops would panic when Japanese regulars appeared, that he neglected to bring his 37-mm antitank guns for the operations. The Japanese expected to encounter light infantry and cavalry, not regular Soviet tank and motorized units.

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

The 4th Transport Regiment carrying troops over the unimproved road from Handagai to Nomonhan on 2 July. From Nomonhan to the Halha River, trucks moved only at night and without headlights.

First Japanese Defeat

By dawn 28 May the 220 officers and men of Azuma's force were about two kilometers from their objective when Soviet and Mongolian infantrymen and ten tanks attacked their flanks. Soviet artillery from the Halha's west bank also began pounding the Japanese. Lacking both artillery to return fire and entrenching tools to dig in, Azuma's men hastily scooped holes out of the desert sand with their helmets as they sought protection from the barrage. Simultaneously, Soviet and Mongolian forces attacked Yamagata's battalion, preventing it from assisting the beleaguered Azuma unit which by nightfall had exhausted its ammunition. To make matters worse, almost all the members of two ammunition resupply squads from the Yamagata force who tried to reach Azuma's position under the cover of darkness were killed.

On 29 May 400 enemy infantrymen, supported by ten tanks and under the protection of an artillery barrage, again assaulted the Azuma unit. Surrounded and outnumbered, with casualties mounting, Azuma led seventy men in a last ditch attempt to break the enemy encirclement. Some did escape, but Azuma was not among them, for a Soviet infantryman shot him through the heart.

In the two days of fighting, the Azuma detachment lost eight officers and ninety-seven men killed and one officer and thirty-three men wounded, or 63 percent casualties. The next night, 30 May, Japanese troops, without any hostile interference, recovered the bodies of their slain comrades. Lieutenant General Komatsubara on the basis of wireless reports then ordered the task force to return to Hailaerh.[38]

The severity of the fighting seemed to catch the Japanese off guard. Japanese troops were surprised, for instance, that the pockets of abandoned Mongolian corpses contained neither food nor cigarettes, but were stuffed full of hand grenades and small arms ammunition.[39] Lieutenant General Komatsubara and Kwantung Army Headquarters regarded the battle as a draw and accepted that verdict because they believed that the Nomonhan desert was worth no more Japanese blood.[40] Throughout early June, however, reports of Soviet and Outer Mongolian activity near Nomonhan made it difficult to ignore the barren place. By mid-June Japanese intelligence indicated a buildup of Soviet and Outer Mongolian combined arms forces on both sides of the Halha. Additionally, Soviet aircraft flew daily reconnaissance sorties in the vicinity and also provided air cover for small-scale combined arms attacks on isolated Manchukuoan units.[41] Faced with these repeated incidents, Lieutenant General Komatsubara, whose 23d Division had operational responsibility for the area, requested of the Kwantung Army permission "to expel the invaders."[42]

Headquarters authorized Komatsubara's request chiefly because staff officers believed that the Soviets understood only force. The 23d Division's initial showing had not achieved success, so two tank regiments (seventy-three tanks and nineteen armored cars total) and the 2/28th Infantry, 7th Division, were attached to Komatsubara's command. There were staff officers such as MAJ Tsuji Masanobu who felt that overall operational control should be given to the 7th Division, the elite IJA

division in Manchuria. The difficulty with that concept was that removing Komatsubara from command would have been tantamount to relieving him, a very rare occurrence in the IJA.[43] Instead, with the entire 23d Division plus armor and artillery support, Komatsubara would have the forces necessary to fight a short war to a quick and decisive conclusion, the *sokusen sokketsu* of IJA military theorists.

Mobilization of the 2/28th Infantry

The 2/28th Infantry which joined the 23d Division was regarded as an excellent unit. Its officers and men came from northern Hokkaido and southern Sakhalin, areas which had been thought to produce tenacious and phlegmatic fighters. In June 1939, when the battalion received its orders for Nomonhan, it had been in Manchuria about sixteen months. MAJ Kajikawa Tomiji, the battalion commander, was a Military Academy graduate and a *Kendo* (swordsmanship) expert. He was also a seasoned veteran who in 1932 had commanded the 9th Company, 2/28th Infantry, in North China. Indicative of the strain of the China fighting, only four of the battalion's other officers were Academy men while six were officer candidate school graduates and twelve others were reserve officers recalled to active duty.[44] Most of the enlisted ranks were first- or second-year soldiers who were undergoing training and were learning the proud tradition of the battalion which dated from its participation in the Russo-Japanese War.

Five minutes past midnight on 20 June, members of the 2/28th Infantry were awakened in their barracks at Tsitsihar to an emergency assembly order. The men learned that they would serve as a covering force for an armored task force being sent to Nomonhan. That morning they proceeded to the railroad station where (in universal military fashion) they waited about two hours for their train to leave. There was an undercurrent of excitement during the move to Arshaan as officers checked on air raid precautions. The initial deployment ended uneventfully at Arshaan just before noon the next day. There the 2/28th linked up with the Yasuoka Task Force (64th Infantry, 3d and 4th Armored Regiments).

Following a briefing on the enemy situation, the entire task force left Arshaan around 0220 on 23 June, using the darkness to conceal their departure. Although some motorization had occurred within the IJA, it still moved essentially by horse, relying on pack animals to transport a unit's supplies, ammunition, and artillery weapons.

The heavy June rains had turned the road to Handagai into a bog and made the march an exhausting one. The Japanese infantryman was burdened with a sixty-five pound pack filled with his spare clothing, rations, and tools. He also carried a 9½-pound rifle, sixty cartridges, two hand grenades, a canteen, and a gas mask.[45] The already heavily burdened foot soldier also had to help push and pull vehicles and horses wallowing in the muck.

The 2/28th Infantry took twenty-four hours to cover the sixty-four kilometers in the pouring rain. Not a single man dropped out of the march even though the troops were not allowed to eat their field rations because the march had not been expected to take so

long. After complaining to their battalion officers, the men were allowed to chew on a type of hardtack, but this only made them thirsty and they guzzled water at every break.

Despite the exhausting, backbreaking drudgery in the cold rain and mud, morale among Japanese troops was exceptionally high.[46] As they slogged through the mud, they were confident that they would make short work of the Red Army.

According to IJA psychologists' investigations after the action, almost all the Japanese troops mobilized in June eagerly looked forward to meeting the Red Army in combat but they had only vague notions of the potential consequences. Since most held the Red Army in low regard, the IJA's very presence near Nomonhan meant to them that the incident was as good as finished. The Japanese approach march then resembled more a peacetime maneuver than the deadly stalking of warfare. One popular rationalization among the troops was that unlike the mauled Yamagata task force, "We have a lot of artillery so nothing like before should happen."[47] Such wishful thinking resulted from the mental baggage which the Japanese soldier carried, that is, his understanding of the Soviet mentality.

Japanese Stereotypes of the Soviets

Japanese officers got their impression of the Soviet mind from a short, classified manual titled *How to Fight the Soviets*, which appeared in 1933 under the imprimatur of the IJA Chief of Staff, Prince Kanin. The purpose of this forty-nine-page, handwritten manual was to serve as a guide for Japanese officers in planning their operations against the Red Army. The first chapter, on which the subsequent discussions of tactics were based, analyzed the characteristics of the Soviet

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

The 72d Infantry Regiment, 23d Infantry Division, on its approach march to Nomonhan.

people and army. According to the manual, the Soviet people were submissive, docile, and prone to blind obedience. Subjected to outside pressure, however, they quickly fell victim to dispair and depression. Likewise, since the Soviet soldier shared these national characteristics, he was capable merely of following orders and showing little, if any, initiative in his dull-witted, stolid manner.[48] The recent fighting at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan only demonstrated in the minds of Japanese officers the accuracy of these general observations.[49]

The Japanese further felt that these Soviet national characteristics, in turn, created the Red Army's greatest flaw, the inability of Soviet units to cooperate with one another in encirclements or flanking maneuvers. The manual acknowledged that the Soviet soldier could defend a front with tenacity because of his lack of imagination and initiative. An attack against the Soviet flank that threatened their supply lines would assure that the Soviet forces quickly fell into disorder. In short, this influential manual proposed taking advantage of the Soviet's racial defects in order to deliver a decisive blow that would destroy the Red Army. It seems an unlikely coincidence that such a stereotype could have developed independently of the tactical doctrine of *sokusen sokketsu.* Both concepts merged in *How to Fight the Soviets* because a lightning engagement with the Red Army followed by a decisive IJA victory would lead to the breakdown of Soviet morale.[50] So while the Japanese infantryman preparing to meet his Soviet counterpart could be in high spirits, his misunderstanding and misconceptions about the Red Army were about to exact a terrible price.

The Imperial Japanese Army's July Offensives

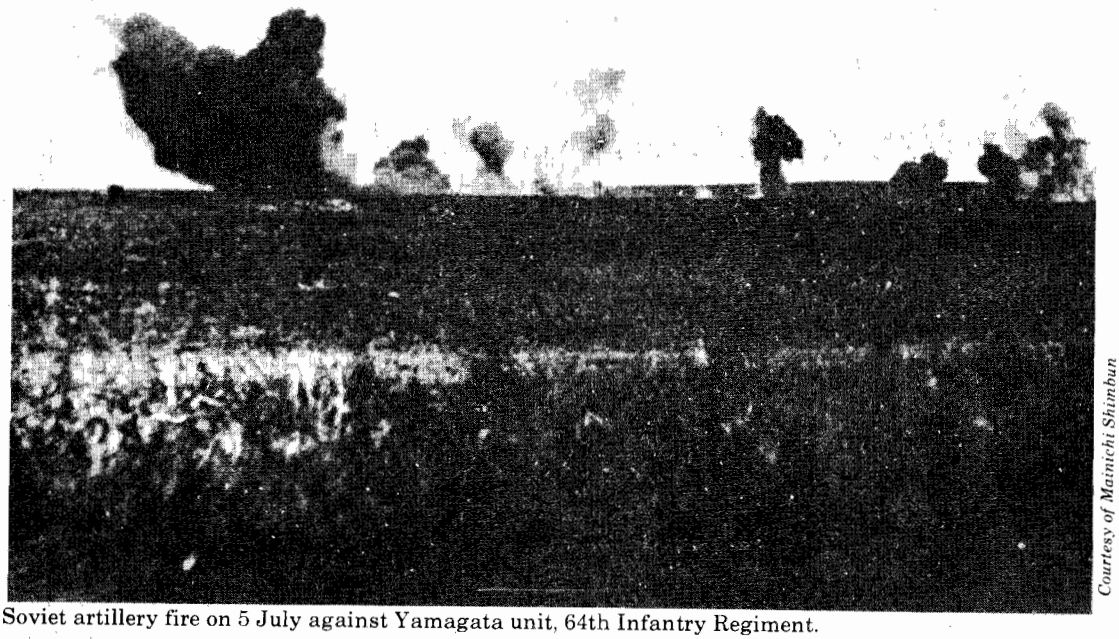
3

Overview

The major fighting at Nomonhan in July and August may be conveniently divided into two phases. During the first phase, roughly the month of July, the IJA launched two major offensives against the Red Army but ultimately failed to dislodge the superior Soviet forces. IJA losses in men and equipment resulting from the failed offensives forced the IJA on to the defensive from late July through the remainder of the battle.

Based on the advice of Kwantung Army Headquarters staff officers MAJ Tsuji Masanobu and LTC Hattori Takushiro, Lieutenant General Komatsubara decided on an enveloping attack.[1] His main force (71st and 72d Infantry Regiments, 23d Division, 13th Field Artillery Regiment and 23d Engineer Regiment with the 26th Infantry Regiment, 7th Division, in reserve) would eliminate Soviet forces around Hill 721, then cross the Halha River and drive south to the Kawamata Bridge, destroying Soviet artillery batteries and supply dumps along the west bank. Simultaneously, the Yasuoka Task Force (64th Infantry, 2/28th Infantry, 3d and 4th Armored Regiments, 1st Independent Field Artillery Regiment and 24th Independent Engineer Regiment) would attack Soviet forces on the Halha's east bank, north of the Holsten River. The link-up of the two pincer columns would first encircle the Soviet forces and then squeeze them to death. The plan differed from Colonel Yamagata's earlier abortive one in two respects. First, the Japanese believed that their flanking movement would force the Soviets to withdraw from the Halha's east bank. Second, the Japanese maneuver would violate the international border that the Japanese themselves maintained was the boundary between Manchukuo and Outer Mongolia.

The northern Japanese force seized Hill 721 on 2 July according to plan and that night crossed the Halha. The attacking Japanese forces had initial success storming Baintsagan Hill and then pushing south along that ridgeline for almost six kilometers. Farther south, however, superior Soviet artillery fired from Dungar-Obo Hill down on the advancing Japanese. Then Soviet counterattacks from three sides involving more than 450 tanks and armored cars blunted the spearhead of the Japanese attack. The heavy fighting on the west bank rapidly reduced Japanese equipment, ammunition, and personnel. The single pontoon bridge which the Japanese threw across the Halha could not sustain the major resupply effort that the embattled IJA



Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Soviet artillery fire on 5 July against Yamagata unit, 64th Infantry Regiment.

units required to continue the battle.[2] Facing encirclement, the Japanese withdrew to the east bank, accomplishing that retrograde movement by 5 July. During the same three days, the Yasuoka Task Force had been fighting an equally determined Soviet foe on the Halha's east bank.

LTG Yasuoka Masaomi, commander of Japanese units operating on the east side of the Halha, had the mission to drive Soviet troops back from the Halha's east bank. Yasuoka detailed the 2/28th Infantry to cover his right flank and designated his two armor regiments to commence pursuit operations against an enemy who, based on erroneous intelligence,[3] he mistakenly thought was in full retreat. Yasuoka ordered a hurried pursuit operation. He sacrificed planning time for speed, but in the process he also sacrificed coordination among his infantry, artillery, and armor units.

According to Japanese armor doctrine tanks were infantry support vehicles that destroyed enemy heavy weapons and crushed obstacles and barbed wire entanglements to clear a path for the advancing foot soldiers.[4] In pursuit operations Japanese tanks were supposed to chase the retreating foe to disorganize any attempts to regroup. This pursuit operation was somewhat different because terrain dictated that the Soviet artillery positioned on the west bank could easily pour effective observed fire on Japanese tanks as they tried to advance down the basinlike slopes toward the Halha's east bank. A daylight attack would be murderous, but in a night attack the tanks had a chance of breaking into the enemy lines and reaching the Kawamata Bridge. However, the darkness also made coordination among advancing Japanese units difficult, moreso because the Japanese lacked sufficient wireless equipment, flares, and obser-

vation devices. The tankers, moreover, had only a vague idea of the enemy's location, the enemy's strength, or the type of terrain to be crossed to reach the foe. They expected that the pursuit, by keeping Japanese troops close to the retreating Soviets, would exert "psychological pressure" and disrupt the enemy.[5] Thus, on the night of 2—3 July there began a wild night attack characterized by individual units conducting independent battles in a driving rainstorm and resulting in the loss of about half the Japanese armor.

Meeting Engagement

In the predawn darkness of 3 July, troops of the 28th Infantry made preparations for their own dawn attack while listening to the artillery and rifle fire emanating from the scattered engagements of the Yasuoka Detachment. The 2/28th had moved from Chiangchunmiao into position on Hill 726 during the night of 2 July under orders to follow rapidly the already departed Yasuoka Force. The battalion's mission was to provide right flank security for the main Yasuoka forces and to conduct a reconniassance probe of enemy dispositions on the Halha's east bank. Large scale maps of the Nomonhan area were lacking, so the probe would also serve the double purpose of reconnoitering terrain for future combat operations. For protection against Soviet tanks, regimental headquarters temporarily attached a 37-mm antitank artillery company to the battalion's command. At 0600 on 3 July, the 2/28th Infantry, in the words in its unit history, "determined to join the battle, moved toward the sound of the guns."[6]

The battalion advanced according to the manual. Rifle squads, whose members camouflaged themselves with branches of scrub willow, provided flank and forward security as the battalion's three rifle companies advanced, two companies forward with one in reserve. On the left flank, 6th Company, under Captain Tsuji, reinforced with two heavy machine guns, moved in a southeast direction while 5th Company, commanded by Captain Aoyagi, also reinforced with two heavy machine guns, followed a parallel course on the right flank. A platoon from 5th Company secured the western, or right flank of the advance. First Lieutenant Saito led 7th Company, which brought up the rear. Battalion artillery and the antitank company remained close to the lead companies ready to deploy in order to suppress hostile fire, should the occasion arise.

As the untested infantrymen moved nervously along ridgelines or trails toward the Halha River, they saw Japanese fighters protect infantrymen from about twenty Soviet aircraft which were trying to bomb and strafe the ground troops at low level. When one Soviet aircraft exploded and crashed, the rest fled across the Halha. Encouraged by this successful conclusion to the first clash of arms they had ever witnessed, the troops picked up their pace and covered the ground along the ridgelines more rapidly despite scattered sniper fire. The hot desert sun and 34° C (94° F) temperatures were proving to be a greater enemy than the Soviets.

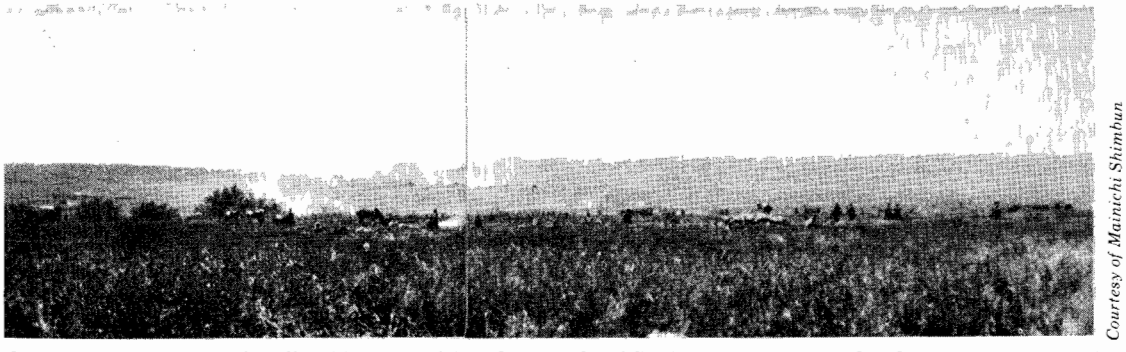
Despite the sweltering heat, the 2/28th Infantry had to move quickly because moving at night over unfamiliar terrain had delayed its arrival time at the line of departure. Consequently the unit had deployed for its attack preparations several hours later than

Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Japanese troops in paddy near Halha River. Note field periscope binoculars.

the armored force and began to advance twelve hours after the tanks had rolled forward. This lag became more and more important as the hours passed because the Yasuoka Force depended on the 2/28th Infantry's probe of suspected enemy left flank positions to provide intelligence information for the conduct of future operations. Lacking communication with the 64th Infantry, which was the right wing of the Yasuoka Force, the 2/28th Infantry could not provide this crucial battlefield intelligence when the attacking Yasuoka Force most needed it.[7]

Later that day when isolated enemy machine guns or pockets of two or three riflemen tried to impede the sweep, the battalion's heavy machine guns and 70-mm artillery crews deployed just as the training manual prescribed and suppressed the hostile fire, allowing the infantry's advance to continue. Officers attributed this light resistance, probably by the machine gun battalion of the 9th Motorized Armored Brigade, to the enemy's concentrating all his artillery on the 23d Division, which was pushing down from the north.



Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Japanese troops east of Halha River watching dust trails of Soviet armor on west bank.

After a day spent chasing individual Soviet troops, the battalion formed its night defensive position with all three companies on line forming an arc-like perimeter. Tents were pitched. Rifle squads on the flanks and rear served as security with the heavy machine gun company, battalion, artillery, and headquarters at the center of the defensive position. According to Japanese firing diagrams, the battalion believed that at dusk of 3 July it faced about two companies of Soviet infantry supported by five or six tanks.

Major Kajikawa then sent scouts to locate the Yasuoka Detachment. The scouts accomplished their mission and established contact with 8th Company, 64th Infantry, the right flank of the Yasuoka Detachment. Thus 4 July began well and improved as by mid-morning the battalion had already pushed another 1,000 meters south from their overnight encampment without opposition. Even the sudden appearance of a Soviet fighter aircraft roaring in at low level to strafe the troops while they were eating their mid-day rations did not interfere with operations. After the Japanese picked themselves up off the ground and found no one hurt, they joked about the inept Soviet pilots, which boosted their morale.

That afternoon their advance continued as sharpshooters and machine gunners of the two lead Japanese companies, assisted by the 70-mm howitzers, scattered the already retreating Soviet infantrymen. The sun proved a greater enemy than the Soviets. The Japanese battled the scorching 40° C (102° F) heat, thirst, and fatigue as a few of their comrades fought scattered running gun battles over sand dunes throughout the day against a Soviet rear guard force. That day the Japanese collected eight Soviet corpses and took a prisoner. They also discovered five destroyed trucks and one smashed 45-mm antitank gun. Water, however, was becoming short as the heat, dust, and anxiety of a combat operation combined to dry both mouths and canteens.

Soviet resistance seemed extremely weak. The enemy showed little inclination to stand and to fight. Major Kajikawa and his aide-de-camp, First Lieutenant Muranaka, attributed this ineffectual enemy performance to the results of the combined 23d Division and Yasuoka Detachment attacks which, they decided, must have uncovered the weakness in the enemy defenses and thus thrown the Soviets into confusion. To add to the disorder, that night Kajikawa sent raiding parties behind Soviet lines to destroy the Kawamata Bridge, the lifeline of Soviet troops on the Halha's east bank.

The patrol comprised two groups of three men each. Captain Aoyagi, commander of 5th Company, led two of his men and Sergeant Hirai led two second class privates from 7th Company. Near the bridge Sergeant Hirai discovered a Soviet heavy machine gun platoon and the other group found Soviet tanks and armored cars. Unable to get through such heavy security forces, and with dawn approaching, Hirai's group crawled to within fifty meters of the Soviet position and planted two land mines along the road leading east from the bridge. Shortly afterwards Soviet tanks clanked across the bridge and moved east in parallel columns. As the patrol watched, the lead tank passed over their mines and exploded violently. The Soviet machine gun post came alive, blasting wildly into the early dawn light.[8] Taking advantage of the

poor light, the three Japanese dashed for some shrubs near the river bank and there used their helmets to scoop out a hole large enough to conceal themselves beneath the sparse foliage. They spent the entire day listening to Soviet patrols crisscrossing the area. That night the three made their way back to their lines.[9]

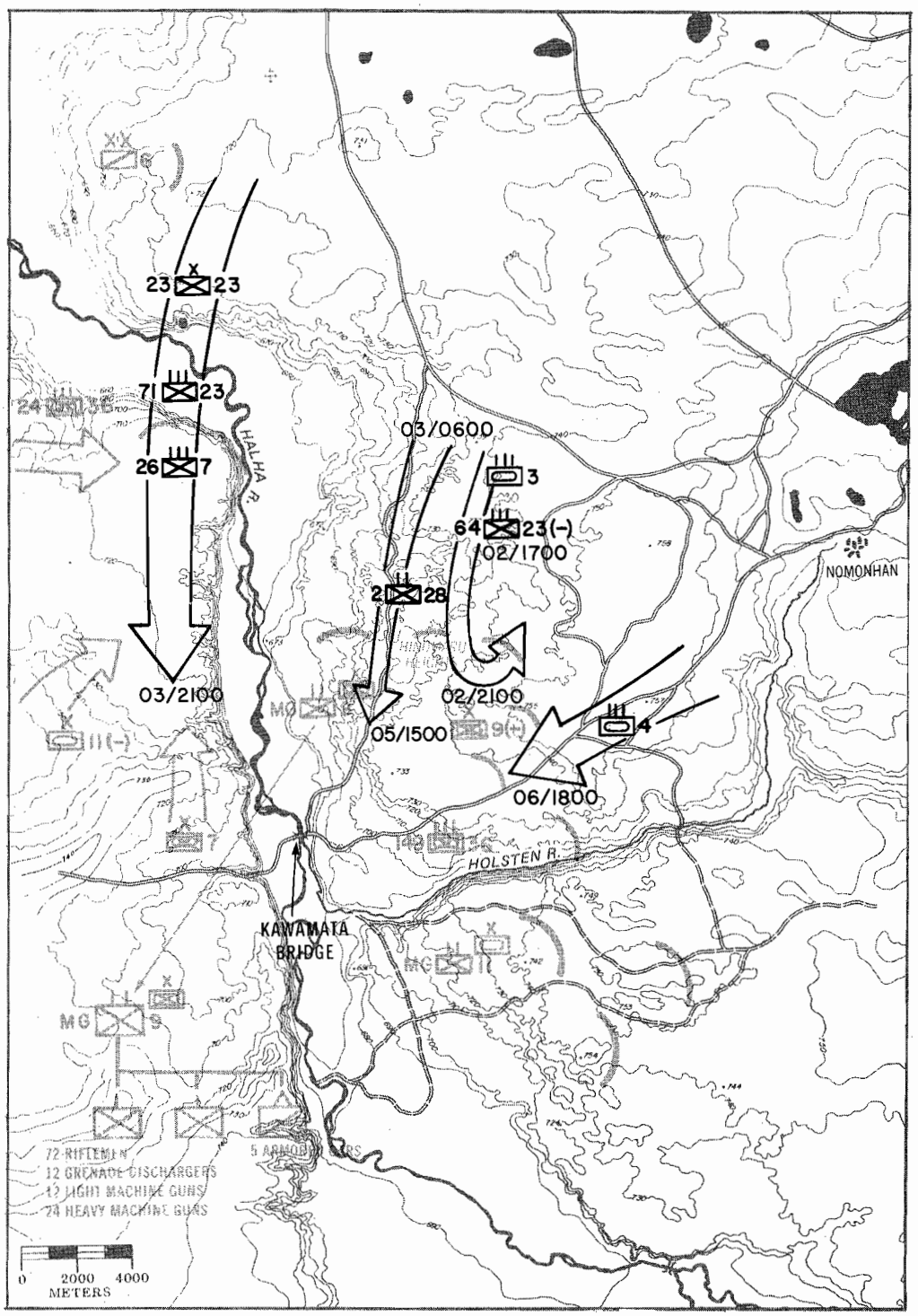
Meanwhile, other officer-led patrols on the night of 4—5 July reported to battalion that the approaches to the Kawamata Bridge seemed lightly defended. The Soviets apparently relied on wire entanglements, dubbed "piano wire" by the Japanese, to protect the bridge. This thin, almost invisible wire, lay coiled in grass or in shallow depressions to ensnare the unwary infantryman's ankles or, if he were crawling, his shoulders and torso. Despite having encountered a similar impediment at Changkufeng almost a year earlier, the IJA apparently had devised no adequate countermeasures to hasten troop passage through this time-consuming and painful obstacle.

Based on this intelligence, Major Kajikawa ordered a dawn attack for 5 July. In poor visibility because of a light rain at dawn, Kajikawa sent his 5th and 7th Companies forward. Maneuvering against an estimated three companies of enemy soldiers supported by fifteen tanks, 7th Company soon made contact with company-size elements of the 64th Infantry on its left flank. Kajikawa, mounted on horseback for greater mobility, then assumed direct command of the 7th company to supervise the attack and to maintain liaison with the 64th Infantry.

Taking advantage of folds in the ground, sand dunes, and depressions for cover, 5th and 7th Companies employed fire and movement tactics to advance about 1,500 meters. Riflemen would dash forward to the next suitable ground concealment and from there fire at enemy strongpoints to keep Soviet weapons crews pinned down so that other Japanese infantrymen could rush forward. (See Map 10.)

Nothing of the previous two days' fighting prepared the Japanese soldiers for the action of 5 July. On this day the Soviets fought with skill and determination. As 5th Company tried to turn the enemy's left flank about 2,000 meters north of the Kawamata Bridge, heavy artillery fire ripped into their ranks. Soviet tanks also appeared and began directing cannon and machine gun fire at the Japanese attackers. The 7th Company, on the Soviet right, supported by heavy machine guns, managed to break through two lines of the Soviets' outer defenses, but the increasing crescendo of artillery and tank fire took a heavy toll on the attacking force.

Enemy shelling continued to increase, especially fire from the Halha's higher west bank which enfiladed the 2/28th's axis of attack. So savage was the barrage that it had already stopped the Yasuoka Detachment at its morning line of departure. The 2/28th continued its leap-frog advance, finally arriving about 1,800 meters from the vital bridge but, by that time, Japanese casualties from Soviet artillery fire were heavy. Second Lieutenant Nishinome, commander of 2d Platoon, 6th Company, had been killed by machine gun fire as he led his platoon into a Soviet trench. Moreover, the men were exhausted physically by the extreme 34° C heat, which, together with the blazing sun and swirling sand and



Map 10. Japanese offensive 3—5 July 1939.

dust thrown up by artillery bursts, produced an agonizing thirst that they were unable to slake as both sides fought a punishing battle of attrition.

On 5 July the 2/28th Infantry experienced the full fury of Soviet defensive combat as discrepancies between doctrine and tactical reality became apparent. In the case of Changkufeng, Japanese infantrymen broke through a thinly held linear hilltop position to seize their objective. Now at Nomonhan there was no single line of Soviet defense. The Japanese infantryman found defenses in depth. Breaking the enemy's outer lines guaranteed no success because the Soviets fell back into prepared defensive positions covered by interlocking automatic weapons fire. Soviet artillery preregistered on the vacated position could then blast the Japanese attackers and swell their casualty list.

After the Japanese broke into the Soviet outer defense lines, enemy resistance increased as reinforcements, probably from the 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, 36th Motorized Rifle Division, bolstered the Soviet defenders. Fifteen enemy tanks counterattacked 5th Company, but the battalion's attached 37-mm company, firing at long range, scored a lucky hit on one tank which burst into flames. A combination of extreme heat, volatile gasoline fuel, and exposed engines on the Soviet tanks accounted for significant losses of Soviet tanks in the early stages of the battle. The remaining tanks veered away but there was no respite for the Japanese infantry as Soviet artillery fired shell after shell upon them. Having regrouped out of the four 37-mm guns' range, Soviet tanks added their cannon and machine gun fire to the barrage that exacted a mounting toll of Japanese soldiers.

More serious perhaps, was the fact that the 2/28th was using its ammunition at a rate that would soon exhaust it. The battalion's normal basic load, carried by its horse transport, was five days' ammunition and supplies. For this engagement, the 2/28th had only half of its basic load because its baggage trains had been delayed four days earlier by the mud-clogged road running between Arshaan and Nomonhan and had not reached the battalion.[10] Food and potable water were also in short supply. A Soviet counterattack threatened to annihilate the overextended 2/28th forces. The battalion aide-de-camp recorded that, "Even if we could advance, it was a situation of fighting an enemy on both our flanks and to our front."[11]

In order to conserve 37-mm armor-piercing ammunition, the battalion's two 70-mm howitzers were ordered to fire on the Soviet tanks that were shelling Japanese lines, but their high explosive rounds had no effect on the armor. Seeing all this, front-line infantrymen of 5th and 7th Companies fixed bayonets partially in expectation of hand-to-hand combat and partially because sand and swirling dust had jammed many rifles and rendered one of every five light machine guns inoperable.[12]

The Soviet tanks did not make another attack but stopped about 1,400 or 1,500 meters from the Japanese positions. From partial defilade, exposing only their turrets, Soviet BT tanks continued pounding the forward Japanese positions. Coupled with the mounting volume of artillery fire, Japanese troops fell dead or wounded one after another. Contact with the 64th Infantry was lost as Soviet infantry now threatened both flanks of the battalion.

At 1200, however, Yasuoka Detachment Headquarters ordered the battalion to hold its exposed positions through the day and to prepare to move to better cover at night. Even as the order was being received, Japanese front-line infantrymen reported that Soviet tanks and infantry were attacking under a heavy rolling barrage.

The main Soviet counterattack fell on the 5th Company, which was defending the battalion's left flank. A platoon from the 6th Company reserve rushed forward to protect the 5th's exposed left flank as numerically superior enemy infantry, estimated at more than 500 men, moved to attack it. Passing among the tanks that were providing covering fire, Soviet infantrymen pressed determined attacks against the Japanese, who hurriedly entrenched themselves in the loose sand for protection against the hail of Soviet fire. Making use of depressions and other natural cover, the Soviet infantry reached the Japanese lines and only vicious close combat with bayonets, swords, and fists prevented individual Japanese squads from being overrun.

While 5th and 7th Companies struggled with Soviet infantrymen on the blistering sands, Soviet armor resumed its assault. Japanese 37-mm guns, disregarding the "approved solution" of "one round, one hit," fired their remaining armor-piercing rounds at Soviet tanks as fast as the gunners could load, fire, and reload. The concentrated fire from the four guns smashed into the Soviet armor, sending smoke and flames spewing from two tanks and damaging a third which ground to a halt. While this setback temporarily stalled the main Soviet attack, several tanks, showing skillful use of the rolling terrain to mask their movement, circled around the Japanese front and appeared on 7th Company's left flank. A close attack squad[13] from the 7th tried to get close enough to the tanks to detonate their Molotov cocktails or explosive mines against the hulls, but a Soviet machine gun crew cut down the Japanese attackers. Soviet tanks rolled toward the open flank. Just then several Japanese aircraft roared in and bombed the advancing armor. That fortuitous support stopped the attempted encirclement as Soviet tankers turned away, followed by Soviet infantrymen who began to pull back as they saw the armor turn towards the south. The 7th had held, but barely.

The 5th Company, whose ranks were already depleted by its morning attack, continued the unequal struggle against Soviet armor and infantry. Captain Aoyagi, the company commander, was killed while he directed the defense. Still more enemy reinforcements moved across the Halha River and about 100 of them, supported by tanks, tried to turn the Japanese right flank by rolling up the 6th Company platoon that was providing flank security. This new threat, the increasing disparity in troops and weapons, and crashing Soviet artillery placed the 5th in danger of being overrun.

The Japanese survivors of 5th Company had to pull back. After collecting their dead and wounded, 5th Company began to withdraw, covered by the battalion's 37-mm guns firing high explosive shells and its heavy machine guns. At 1940 hours, without any determined, aggressive hostile pursuit, 6th and 7th Companies also pulled back to reorganize and consolidate at a night defensive position about 300 meters north of Hill 731. The battalion was back to its 3 July start line.

Around 2330 on 5 July rain began to fall. The Japanese troops collected rainwater in helmets, canteens, canvas tenting, or anything else available. In the chill night air their soaked clothing added to their general discomfort from a shortage of rations and the galling failure of their attack. Occasional Soviet flares or illumination rounds temporarily lit up the dark landscape and revealed charred tank hulks, animal carcasses, and bloated human corpses covered with swarming flies. Major Kajikawa spoke to the assembled troops at 0130 on 6 July and emphasized that the disengagement was a tactic to insure the accomplishment of the overall mission. He encouraged both officers and men to be confident of victory in the glorious tradition of the 28th Infantry.

These morale-building "pep talks" were expected from Japanese field commanders. A good officer, to Japanese thinking, made a good unit. Men fought well because officers led them well. An officer led twenty-four hours a day, shared the same hardships as his troops, and the soldiers expected his encouragement. A good commander, like Kajikawa, kept his men informed of the overall plan of maneuver, at least to the degree that he understood it, given the wretched state of Japanese communications equipment. If such qualities were lacking, a unit under constant stress of combat would quickly disintegrate. The unit commander was the heart that pumped life into a combat unit.[14]

The battalion, in three days of combat, had acquitted itself well against the Red Army. It estimated that 300 enemy personnel had been killed or wounded, four tanks destroyed (scouts would report two more in the morning) or damaged, two heavy and three light machine guns, plus half a dozen rifles captured. Doctrine and training were paying off and the Japanese preconception of how their Soviet foe would fight also seemed accurate.

The Soviets, for example, had employed their armor in direct support of their infantry exactly as the Japanese translation of the 1936 Soviet tactics manual said they would, small numbers of tanks dispersed at company level to advance in front of infantry who in turn covered the tanks with their firepower. Tanks also maneuvered rapidly to reduce losses. The Japanese expected the Soviet tanks to lead infantry assaults and their expectations were realized.[15] Soviet artillery fire had been heavy, but artillery was known to be the backbone of the Soviet Army.[16] The Soviet private soldier had exhibited tenacity but little individual initiative, confirming Japanese stereotypes of the stolid nature of the Russian people. Still the Japanese had suffered heavy casualties, many perhaps the direct result of deficiencies within the battalion itself.[17]

Reassessing the battle to date, battalion officers candidly acknowledged that there had been no coordination among regimental artillery and individual infantry units.[18] Moreover, the individual infantry units fought mainly isolated engagements without mutual support from adjacent friendly units. In the case of the 2/28th, once battle was joined, they quickly lost all coordination with the 64th Infantry on their left flank and thus exposed themselves to a tank attack that almost overran the battalion. The lack of modern communications equipment meant that there simply was no fast and accurate way for Kajikawa's troops to commun-

icate with Lieutenant General Yasuoka's forces. Battalion runners, while daring under fire, could not be depended on to coordinate maneuvers in the timely fashion demanded by a fluid battle.

If command and control procedures proved ineffectual for modern combined arms warfare, so too did the Japanese Army's logistics system. Half the 2/28th's basic load had been mired in the muddy roads leading to Nomonhan. Division resupply was also unable to keep pace with regimental artillery's unexpectedly heavy consumption of shells.[19] Troops also suffered the physical discomfort of hunger because rations failed to reach them and dysentery from drinking brackish water because that was all that was available. Finally, there was the gnawing fear that they would soon exhaust their ammunition.

Tactically the Soviet artillery positioned on the high ground of the Halha's west bank loomed ever more important because as soon as the Japanese exposed a firing position it was subjected to retaliatory artillery fire. Nevertheless, the 23d Division headquarters ordered renewed offensive operations the following day, 6 July.

Three factors probably influenced the decision to continue the offensive. First, lower echelon intelligence was inadequate and did not permit an accurate divisional staff assessment of battlefield conditions. Second, the Kwantung Army Headquarters' operations officers like MAJ Tsuji Masanobu or Lieutenant Colonel Hattori were pressing for an offensive and the Kwantung Army Intelligence Section had almost no voice in planning compared to the Operations Section.[20] Third, the Japanese believed that the Soviets would be unable to sustain the volume of firepower, particularly artillery, that characterized the initial fighting.

At dawn on 6 July the battalion again pushed southward from Hill 731 towards the Kawamata Bridge. The 7th Company remained in reserve with the 37-mm guns while the 6th Company led the advance flanked by 5th Company survivors. Accurate enemy artillery fire quickly engaged the Japanese. The Japanese thought that the Soviet gunners had simply guessed right, but then they saw the Soviet aircraft buzzing overhead, apparently spotting for the artillery. The contrast between the Japanese infantryman and the Soviet airman symbolized the fundamental difference between the opposing forces. The Japanese relied on men to accomplish a mission, the Soviets also relied on men but added machines to help the men accomplish a mission.

After advancing about 1,000 meters, the point squad discovered that Soviet troops were fortifying new positions about 2,000 meters to their front. Field telephone wire had been strung from the reserve position as the units advanced so that this day the 2/28th could coordinate its limited organic artillery support and its heavy machine gun company's firepower to disrupt the enemy's work. The improved Soviet defenses, however, made further advance impossible, indeed it had been difficult to advance the initial 1,000 meters.[21]

The battalion spent the remainder of the day along the ridgeline from which it had discovered the enemy troops. Soviet tanks seemed to be attempting to turn the battalion's flanks, but, lacking contact with the 64th Reg-

iment, no one knew for sure. Soviet artillery backed by tank cannon fire continued to hammer the battalion line. At dusk the two advance companies dug in for the night.

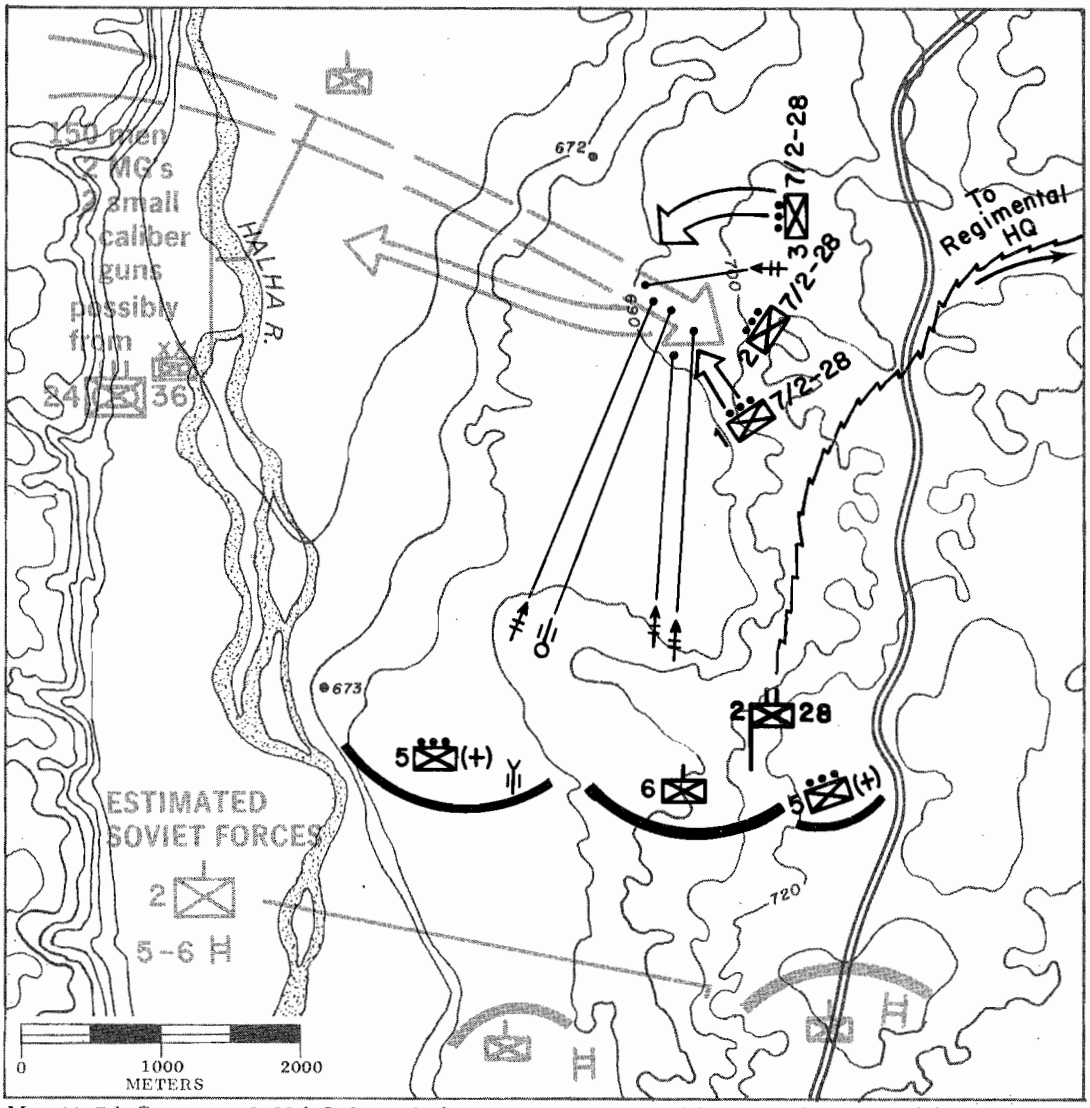
The next day, 7 July, the Kajikawa unit continued to prepare for another attack on the Soviets. During the hot, humid afternoon, outposts reported that about 150 enemy troops with two machine guns and two artillery pieces were trying to infiltrate battalion lines after fording the Halha. First Lieutenant Saito, 7th Company commander, reacted quickly by swinging his 1st and 2d Platoons around to meet this attack upon his rear. The 3d Platoon was held in reserve to act as a covering force. (See Map 11.)

His troops skillfully concealed from the approaching enemy, Saito used a field telephone to coordinate the shift of heavy machine guns and battalion artillery to the north and then called in their fire on the infiltrators' right flank. Stunned by the sudden burst of fire, which destroyed one watercooled machine gun, the Soviets scattered for cover. In the meantime 1st Platoon, led by Sergeant Nakaharu, maneuvered closer to the enemy troops who were still pinned down under heavy Japanese fire. As Saito lifted the covering fire, 1st Platoon charged into the still disorganized enemy and bayoneted or shot to death those Soviets who stood and fought and routed the remainder. The 3d Platoon Commander, Second Lieutenant Suzuki, was killed by sniper fire as he led his men trying to cut off the enemy's escape route. The company gained a measure of revenge when its grenade discharger squad, under Sergeant Iwaki, bombarded the fleeing enemy troops, making the Soviet debacle complete. Altogether 102 enemy bodies littered the sand, and the Japanese collected twenty rifles, two machine guns, and two artillery pieces.

The battalion remained on alert the rest of the day and watched enemy vehicle traffic on the Halha's west bank. Soviet artillery fire gradually increased as the day wore on and Japanese scouts reported that the enemy seemed very busy repairing wire entanglements around his lines. Furthermore, reinforcements seemed to be strengthening Soviet forces. Heavy rain began to fall. Following the unsuccessful Soviet infiltration attempt, Japanese patrols scouted near the Halha and reported that its rising level would make it difficult for troops to ford but not for tanks. An outpost was left around Hill 673 to watch for any more attempted Soviet crossings.

About one-half hour before the discovery of the enemy infiltrators, Major Kajikawa had issued orders to prepare for a twilight attack, the objective of which would be to seize and to hold the banks of the confluence of the two rivers. According to an enemy prisoner taken that afternoon, the Soviets were planning an attack of their own to take the Kajikawa lines. When Kajikawa learned of the impending Soviet attack, he accordingly amended his original orders at 2000 to cancel the attack and instead ordered the troops to use the remaining twilight to complete night defensive trenches and foxholes.[22]

The night passed uneventfully, although the cold rain made the troops miserable. The battalion stayed on alert into mid-morning of 8 July. Then, at 1000, Lieutenant General Yasuoka, by field telephone, told Major Kajikawa that the enemy was retreating across the Kawamata Bridge and ordered the



Map 11. 7th Company, 2/28th Infantry's destruction of attempted Soviet infiltration 7 July 1939.

battalion to pursue vigorously to cut off the enemy retreat. First Lieutenant Sawada, 5th Company Weapons Platoon Commander, led the advance with one platoon and 6th Company. Two heavy machine gun crews, two 37-mm and two 70-mm guns provided the muscle for the pursuit operation.

At 1100 Sawada began his advance but soon discovered that contrary to the general's information, the enemy was not retreating but clearly was receiving strong reinforcements. Sawada's reports only confirmed Kajikawa's personal observation of the advance. Receiving heavy enemy artillery fire, Sawada halted his men after advancing about 2,000 meters, occupying Hinomaru Heights, and scattering an enemy outpost perched there.[23] The battalion estimated enemy strength to be 300 infantrymen, five tanks, and a dozen artillery guns, probably of the machine gun battalion and the 149th Rifle Regiment whom the Japanese had been fighting for the past week.

Night Attack I and Soviet Retaliation:

Sheltering in hastily excavated foxholes, behind sand dunes, and in folds in the ground, Sawada's men endured an afternoon of Soviet artillery fire. Sawada himself saw an advantage to his exposed position because it was close enough to the enemy to strike in a night raid. He informed Kajikawa by runner of his intentions. Apprised of these plans, the battalion commander in turn decided to launch a battalion-size night attack to chop off the enemy flank.

Once again, however, the dynamics of the battle forced a hurried improvisation. Around 2230, Sawada's outposts reported about two companies of enemy infantry moving through the darkness to attack Hinomaru Heights. Sawada's troops, already on line and prepared for their own night attack, quickly adapted to meet the enemy probe. Sawada positioned his 5th Company platoon and heavy machine guns along Hinomaru crest and moved the 6th Company around and down to the east slope of the hill to enfilade the advancing enemy soldiers.

Starting up the slope, the Soviets opened covering fire with their heavy and light machine guns and popped flares to guide their assault troops. The Japanese gunners promptly returned an even heavier fire that cut a swath through the startled attackers, who thought they had achieved tactical surprise. With the Soviet attack momentarily stalled, First Lieutenant Sawada led 6th Company's charge into the exposed right flank of the enemy attackers, and sent them reeling in disorder.

Sawada pursued the fleeing enemy troops into their own lines. This sort of night fighting was the soul of the IJA and the Japanese chased the Soviets with a vengeance. Although a subsequent IJA study on small unit tactics praised the operation for its bold improvisation and daring offensive spirit, the night attack itself more closely resembled a confused brawl in the dark, punctuated by staccato machine gun bursts and illuminated by Soviet flares, tracers, and star clusters.

The 2/28th Infantry's troops, many of whom were beginning their second full year of intensive night combat training, were still not able to exploit effectively the opportunity the ill-fated Soviet attack provided them.[24] Their

difficulties were characteristic of what all Japanese infantrymen at Nomonhan encountered or indeed of the peculiar hazards of night combat. Maintaining their sense of direction in a landscape with few easily recognizable terrain features became an exhausting and nerve-racking business. The 6th Company was fairly disorganized by the time it reached the Soviets' outposts. Infantrymen bunched up to maintain contact, but this made them vulnerable to enemy hand grenades. Fortunately for the Japanese attackers, most of the Soviet small-arms fire passed harmlessly over their heads, but a high proportion of the raiders suffered grenade fragment wounds.[25]

After action debriefings revealed that when a few wildly thrown Soviet grenades landed anywhere near Japanese troops, they would stop advancing and bunch up for a false sense of protection. Enemy rifle fire, though most sailed high, had a similar effect. There were few Japanese soldiers like the courageous Platoon Sergeant Iwakoshi who personally accounted for twelve enemy soldiers with his bayonet before another intended victim shot him in the chest. Sawada had to regroup and to redirect his troops constantly. It required close personal and continual leadership.

In the blackness, enemy foxholes and communications trenches obstructed any attempt at coordinated troop movement. Hastily organized squad formations broke down within the Soviet fortifications as some troops sprained ankles or broke limbs after unexpected falls into enemy trenches. Moreover, after the initial attack, that is, the seizure of the first Soviet line, no clear objective existed for the troops.

After the battle, Japanese army psychologists isolated four elements of combat that most affected the morale of attacking shock troops: the distance to the objective, the clarity of it in troops' minds, any sudden change in the objective, and unexpected losses when taking the objective.[26] In the case of the 6th Company's action, after the ambush of the attacking Soviet troops their objective suddenly changed, but it was not completely clear what they were to do when they reached the Soviet lines. The Japanese also lost about one-third of their attacking force, a high price in any engagement. These combined factors sobered 6th Company ranks about the success of the raid, in which an estimated 150 Soviets were killed.

From the Kajikawa perimeter, Sawada's attack seemed to touch off a fireworks display in the Soviet lines. Soviet machine gun crews fired tracer rounds into the night and other enemy defenders shot dozens of illumination rounds and flare after flare. Shaking off their fascination with the multicolored explosions and glaring light of flares, the remainder of the Kajikawa Battalion moved forward to protect Sawada's right flank. About 0300 on 9 July, Sawada's exhausted raiders returned to Hinomaru Heights. They carried most of their thirty dead and wounded.

Survivors of 6th Company, less than two platoons, and a depleted platoon of 5th Company supported by battalion artillery and heavy machine guns dug in to defend Hinomaru Heights. Meanwhile, Major Kajikawa had used the distraction caused by Sawada's raid into the Soviet lines and the cover of darkness to move this 7th Company and a 5th Company platoon

about 750 meters south to form a flank to defend Hinomaru Heights.

Apparently stung by their losses of the previous night, the Soviets launched a major counterattack against the battalion on 9 July. About 300 enemy infantrymen, supported by five tanks, advanced against the Japanese lines under a rolling artillery barrage. They reached the base of Hinomaru Heights and brought up heavy machine guns to cover riflemen who were digging in there. As these frontline skirmishers finished their foxholes, the tanks, each accompanied by five or six infantrymen, including a couple of sharpshooters, laid down protective fire as the rest of the infantry dug foxholes.[27] Only 7th Company managed to keep the Soviet attackers on their right flank at bay about 700 meters from the company's front lines.

At Hinomaru Heights, however, after completing their temporary rifle and machine gun pits, half of the Soviet infantrymen began to advance up the slope line in short dashes while the remaining riflemen, machine gunners, and tanks provided covering fire. About thirty meters away the enemy hurled grenades but otherwise showed little stomach for hand-to-hand combat. Lurking in depressions or behind some shrubs, snipers also peppered the Japanese ridgeline picking off careless soldiers. The Japanese drove the Soviets from cover with hand grenades or the more deadly grenade dischargers and then back down the hill. But the enemy troops regrouped and attacked again. The Soviet troops probably hoped to take advantage of the weakened condition of their opponents and thus repeatedly stormed the hill. To insure that there were no Soviet slackers, GPU* agents oversaw the performance of the Soviet infantrymen and promptly shot any soldier who did not unquestioningly obey any order.[28] By nightfall, about 100 Soviet dead dotted the slope and two charred tank hulks were near the bottom of the hill. But the Japanese defenders on Hinomaru Heights were equally exhausted having been barely able to hold off the repeated Soviet attacks.

Redeployment

Earlier that day, Major Kajikawa received word informing him that the Yasuoka Task Force was being dissolved and henceforth Kajikawa would operate under the orders of COL Sumi Shinichiro, Commander, 26th Infantry, 7th Division,[29] whose unit replaced the battered Yasuoka force on the 2/28th Infantry's left flank. As ordered, 6th Company scouts linked up with the Machine Gun Company of the 1st/26th Infantry that afternoon.

The defeat of the Yasuoka Detachment, of which the 2/28th was a part, affected Japanese operational planning for the remainder of the battle. But perhaps its influence in Lieutenant General Komatsubara's case was even more malignant. As he surveyed the battlefield he saw only corpses and dead horses littering it. Shells were falling and hissing overhead and a pall of black smoke hung over everything. It reminded Komatsubara of an oil painting of the Battle of Moscow he had once seen in a museum and he confided in his diary, "The battlefield is a place of misery."[30] His mood, although hardly one expected from a general officer,

**The GPU or Main Political Directorate was the Red Army's offshoot of the KGB, the Committee of State Security.*

matched the new atmosphere among the Japanese private soldiers. After early July, Japanese troops no longer looked forward to combat with the Soviets. They would fight hard and well as ordered, but their previous optimism and confidence, like the tanks of the Yasuoka Detachment, lay smashed and broken on the desert dunes.[31]

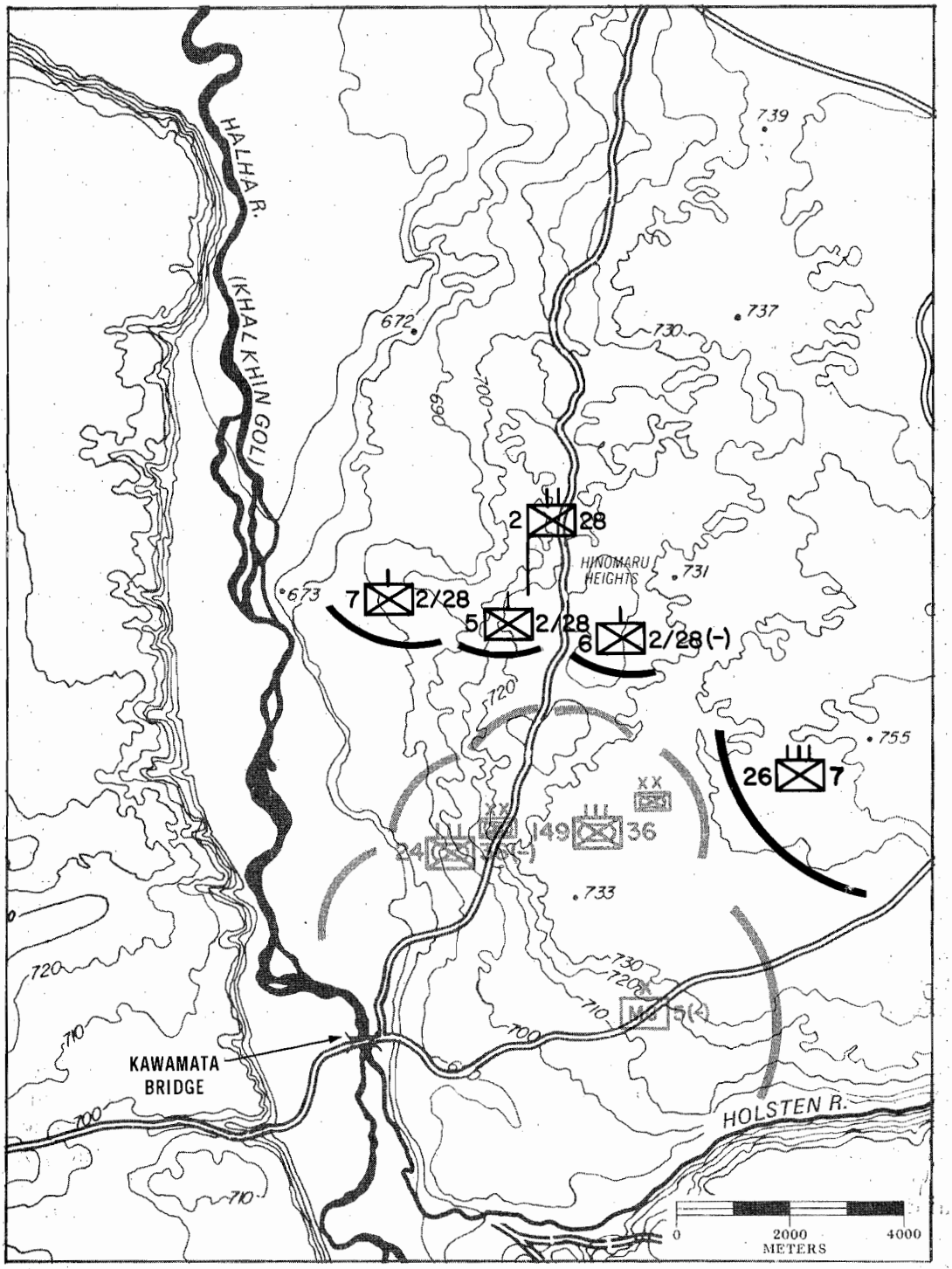
All through the hot dusty day of 10 July, Soviet artillery bombarded 2/28th Infantry lines. The 6th Company, holding precariously to Hinomaru Heights, managed to beat back several Soviet infantry probing attacks by using machine gun, 37-mm, and 70-mm fire. The Soviet position resembled a salient jutting out from Kawamata Bridge into the battalion's lines. With Japanese units on the sides of the salient, the Soviet seizure of Hinomaru Heights would split the Japanese forces in two and pin the 2/28th Infantry to the Halha's bank. The Japanese had to hold to Hinomaru Heights against superior Soviet forces or withdraw. (See Map 12.)

In order to redress his lines for better mutual fire support, Kajikawa ordered a night attack for 10 July against Soviet troops remaining near Japanese lines. Coordinating fire support with 1st/26th Infantry's Machine Gun Company, Kajikawa ordered an advance to a line 2,000 meters north of the Kawamata Bridge. Covered by darkness and a smokescreen because of the moonlight, the battalion's right flank (7th Company) advanced and met no enemy resistance. The company also managed to get reinforcements and ammunition to the beleaguered forces on Hinomaru Heights. It took about two hours to cover the 700 meters.

By dawn on 11 July, the reorganized battalion positions had 6th Company with 37-mm and heavy machine gun crews on the right flank, 7th Company with 37-mm guns on the left, and a platoon of 5th Company providing left flank security. The remainder of 5th Company was about 200 meters to the rear with battalion headquarters.

As Soviet troops began to improve their machine gun nests and entrench in front of the Japanese, the battalion's heavy machine guns and artillery opened fire, destroyed one Soviet machine gun, and scattered the enemy troops. Almost immediately Soviet artillery shells began crashing into the battalion positions but the battalion's 70-mm howitzers replied with effective counterbattery fire and the Soviet shelling soon stopped. Throughout the day, Soviet tanks and infantry remained active in front of the battalion and Soviet artillery fired occasional volleys to let the Japanese know they were still there.

Both sides worked that night to strengthen their lines. The Japanese covered their foxholes with canvas and vegetation served as camouflage. The next morning, 12 July, beginning around 0900, Soviet artillery slammed into Japanese lines for one hour. Battalion artillery again returned fire, although its volume could not match the Soviets. Battalion machine gun crews fired on Soviet artillery weapons, probably 45-mm guns, located forward with Soviet infantry. Firing died down after 1000 and the remainder of the day was spent repairing damage to the positions caused by enemy shelling and reorganizing the defense. That afternoon, 2d Platoon, 5th Company, under Second Lieutenant Sano, scouted Halha River fords near Hill 673. They saw



Map 12. 2/28th Infantry's situation 10 July 1939.

no sign of enemy activity but did report that the 1.33-meter high water level made it very difficult for infantry to cross the river and that tanks also would have problems. During the night of 12—13 July, the battalion adjusted its lines slightly, mainly to avoid being zeroed in by enemy gunners.

Once again at 0900 artillery began a brisk pounding of Japanese lines. When the barrage lifted, riflemen on opposing crests exchanged shots at long range. The distance between the lines varied from 450 to 1,000 meters and riflemen were probably conducting a reconnaissance by fire to discover whether or not the opposing forces had pulled back under cover of the barrage.

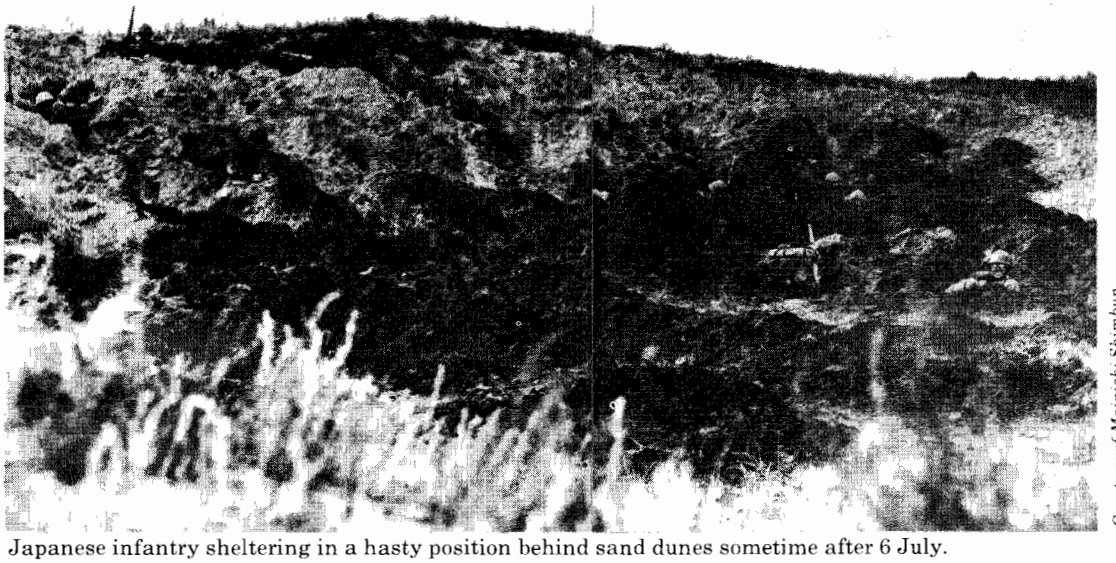
Major Kajikawa met with Colonel Sumi at noon and was ordered to shift his positions northeast to near Hill 731, in effect, to pull back from Hinomaru Heights. Lieutenant General Komatsubara decided on the withdrawal following the heavy fighting of the night of 11 July and early morning of 12 July. The 64th Infantry lost 77 killed, 29 missing, and 160 wounded and, according to Komatsubara, its offensive spirit. On 12 July, the general's diary entry noted, "The battlefield situation does not permit optimism."[32]

Heavy rain in the afternoon helped to obscure the battalion's preparations for its move. At dusk the battalion opened fire on the enemy lines, but no return fire was received. Taking advantage of this lull, the battalion disengaged from its hard won and stubbornly held positions around Hinomaru Heights and moved at night to an intermediary position. Enemy artillery on 14 July made any movement difficult during daylight hours, so the battalion waited behind sand dunes and in depressions for nightfall to mask their movements.

Then a battalion runner returning from regimental headquarters reported that Colonel Sumi planned a night attack against the Kawamata Bridge because the Japanese believed that the Soviets were retreating to the Halha's right bank and only small rear guard units remained. This belief probably stemmed from an incident on 12 July. The Soviet 603d Rifle Regiment, 82d Rifle Division, moved to the Halha's eastern bank on that day. The regiment was activated in early July, so this was the regiment's first combat experience. Under heavy Japanese artillery fire, the men panicked, but the regimental commander and political commissar were able to restore a semblance of order. That night the 603d went into reserve on the Halha's western side where it received more thorough combat training.

Sumi hoped to take advantage of that disorder to advance to the Halha and to destroy the Soviet troops still on the east bank. The Kajikawa unit would serve as a reserve force for the 26th Infantry, retrace its steps to Hinomaru Heights, and occupy it.[33] The move back was difficult and by dawn the battalion still had not reached its objective. Major Kajikawa sent scouts to reconnoiter Hinomaru Heights, but they failed to return.[34]

With the scouts long overdue and the sun rising, Kajikawa ordered his battalion to move towards Hinomaru Heights. About one hour later, a forward security guard squad met retreating units of the Sumi Regiment. Informed that contrary to previous reports the Soviets were not retreating but were digging in, Komatsubara, in



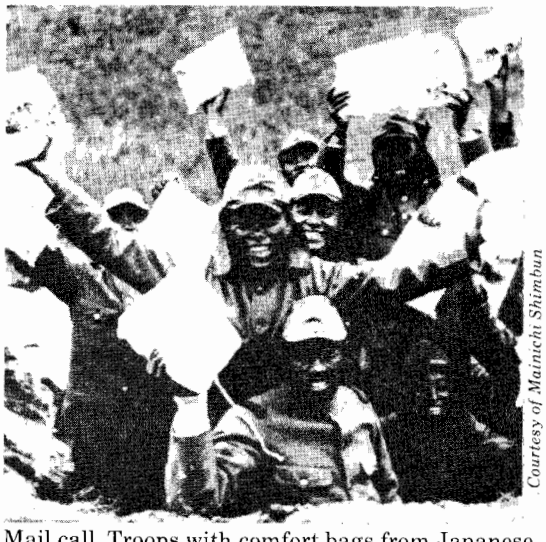
Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Japanese infantry sheltering in a hasty position behind sand dunes sometime after 6 July.

consultation with Kwantung Army Headquarters staff officers, decided to call off the attack. He would build up his heavy artillery forces before resuming the offensive. Colonel Sumi was withdrawing to shorten his lines and to resupply his troops for the subsequent offensive. Kajikawa realized the acute danger that a Soviet counterattack might isolate his unit on Hinomaru Heights, and so he requested and received a change of orders.[35]

That night the battalion spread out behind sand dunes between Hill 731 and Hinomaru Heights to avoid enemy observation and fire. On 15 July the battalion conducted a dawn reconnaissance and by early afternoon laagered behind sand dunes northeast of Hinomaru Heights.

They remained there on 16 July when a resupply column brought Lieutenant General Komatsubara's orders for the battalion to go into reserve. The respite was welcome, but the battle-worn, weary, and disheveled infantrymen were more interested in "comfort bags" prepared by the Japan Society of Hailaerh. The bags, containing sundries like soap, hand towels, toilet paper, toothbrushes, sugar cubes, and chocolate, were distributed one per five men. The truly lucky soldier was the one who opened the bag to discover that his favorite cabaret hostess had packed it complete with pin-ups and rather suggestive letters.[36]



Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Mail call. Troops with comfort bags from Japanese civilians.

During the night of 17 July, the battalion moved to its new positions on Hill 731, completing the move in the early morning hours of 18 July. The next two days were spent fortifying the hill and dodging the incessant Soviet artillery fire. Division then ordered the 2/28th Infantry to act as a reserve for the impending Japanese offensive so it moved again. On the morning of 20 July, the 2/28th arrived at 23d Division headquarters tired and wet after marching most of the night in a driving rainstorm. The battalion remained in reserve from 20 through 27 July, during the entire IJA offensive which commenced on 23 July.

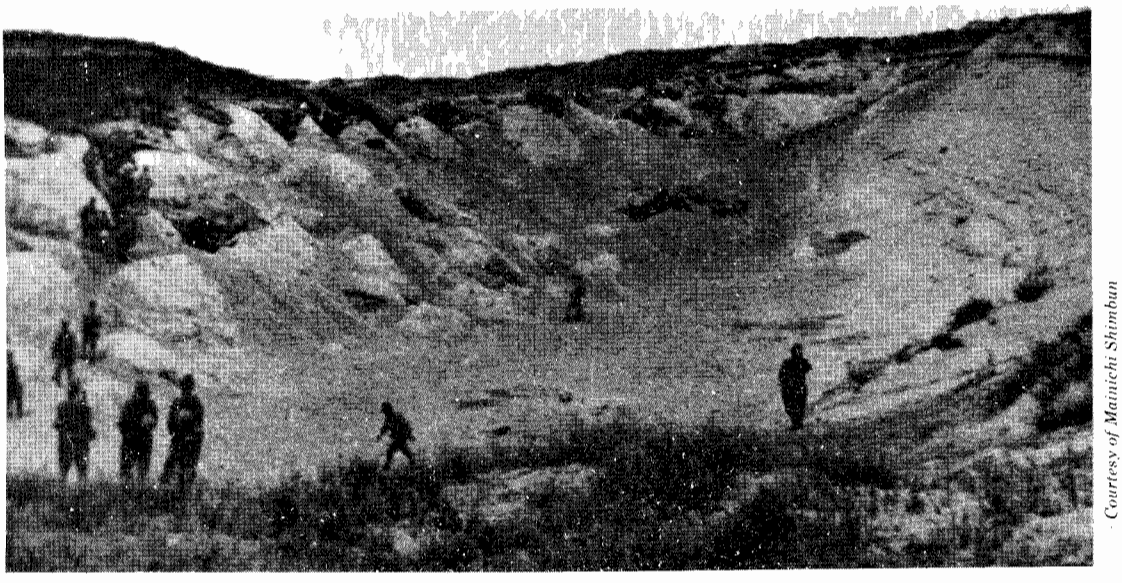
4

Stalemate and Attrition

Hills 742 and 754

The 64th and 72d Infantry regiments spearheaded the Japanese frontal assault on the Kawamata Bridge defenses that began on 23 July. In support of the operation, additional artillery units from Japan and from the artillery training school at Hailaerh were mobilized in an attempt to overwhelm the Soviets by a massive artillery barrage. Japanese guns fired 15,000 rounds at the Soviets on 23 July, but the Soviets responded with an even heavier counterbarrage and counterbattery fire.[1] From 23 July through 25 July, Japanese field artillery guns consumed half their doubled ten-day load and their inability to replenish ammunition stocks was a main reason for calling off the general offensive on 25 July.[2]

Lieutenant General Komatsubara ordered his forces to entrench after they failed to drive the Soviets from the Halha's eastern bank. He planned first to repulse an anticipated Soviet attack against the Japanese lines and second to counterattack and destroy the demoralized enemy. The 72d and 64th Infantry Regiments dug in on a line from



Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

The 72d Infantry Regiment preparing artillery firing positions on lip of crater in August 1939.

about two kilometers north of Hill 733 south of the Holsten River. This terrain overlooked the Halha River's eastern bank north of the Holsten and allowed the Japanese to observe Soviet troops in that area.

In order to protect the exposed southern flank of the 72d and 64th Regiments, Komatsubara also ordered COL Nagano Eizo's 71st Infantry Regiment to occupy the high ground of Noro Heights which dominated the area south of the Holsten. Komatsubara then decided that additional Japanese troops should fortify the commanding terrain south of Noro Heights, particularly Hills 754 and 742.

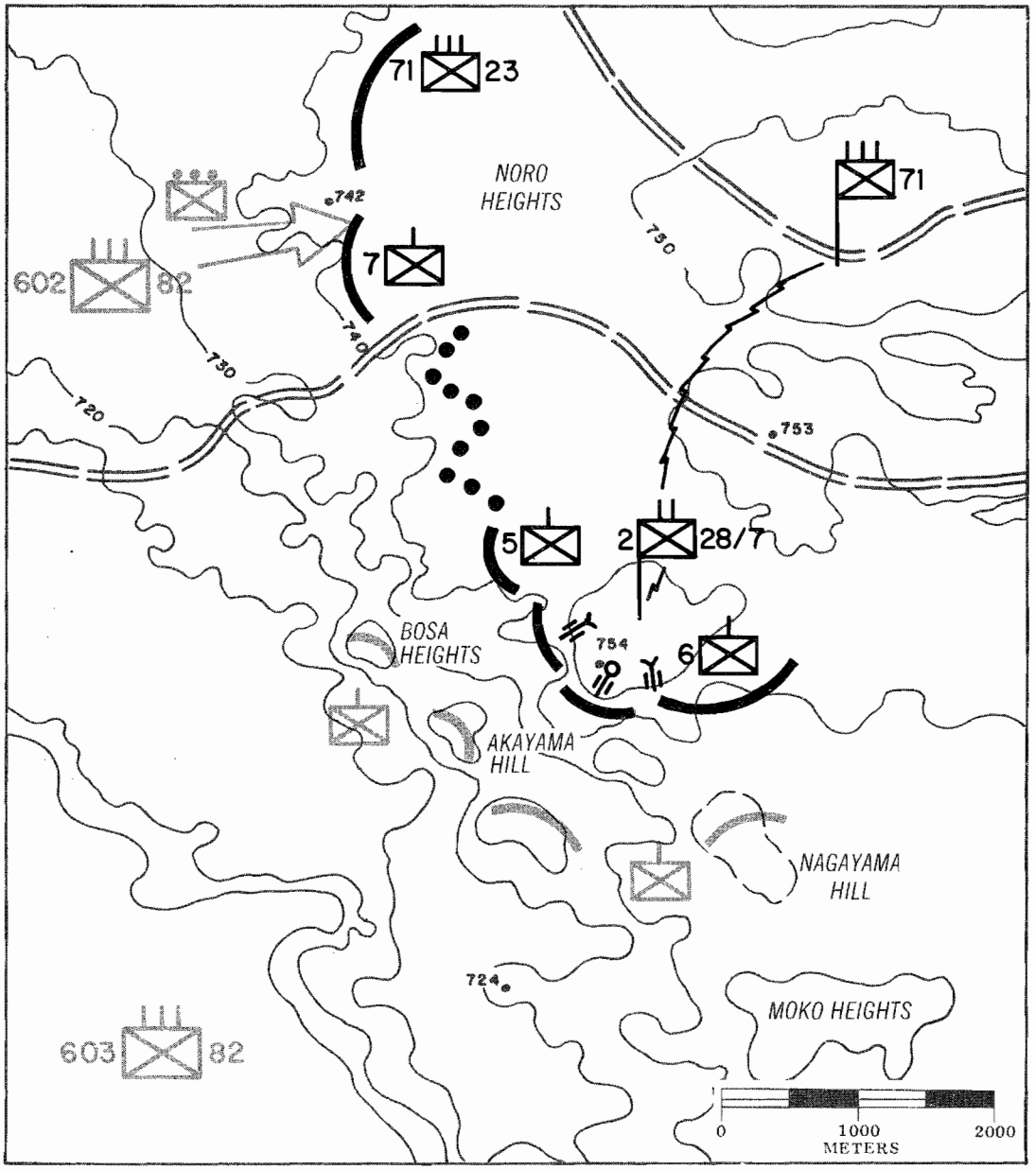
Following the unsuccessful IJA offensive, 23d Division Headquarters, in turn, ordered the Kajikawa unit, with forty new replacements assigned to the battered 5th Company, to reinforce the left flank of the Nagano Detachment (71st Infantry, 1st Battalion, 13th Field Artillery Regiment) defending Noro Heights and the key terrain around Hill 742. On 28 July the battalion moved by truck from Irigin via Nomonhan and on the Honmatsu Road to within 2,500 meters of their objective. Dismounting from the trucks on the hot, shimmering sand, the battalion took positions on the east or reverse slope of the heights for protection.

Scouts reconnoitered enemy dispositions and the new terrain that the battalion would have to defend. They also established contact with the Nagano Detachment. After the scouts reported to Major Kajikawa that Colonel Nagano wanted the battalion to relocate, battalion officers moved the men forward to a departure line closer to their new positions. Kajikawa decided to wait until twilight for the final approach and around dusk the battalion rushed forward en masse to its new lines. This tactic was used to mislead the enemy about battalion strength and to reduce Japanese losses from enemy artillery fire. Scattered artillery shells did fall among the running troops, but there were no casualties. They reached the position and quickly established a battalion command post and perimeter defense. Three hours later, in the total darkness, three supply trucks arrived carrying the battalion's food, water, and standard ammunition loads.

About this time the Soviet infantrymen, probably from the newly organized (June 1939) 82d Rifle Division, attacked the right flank of the Nagano Detachment and Kajikawa's troops could hear clearly the reports of friendly and enemy rifle fire. The 7th Company near Hill 742 actually helped to repel the assault. The 5th and 6th Companies, meanwhile, estimated that about 200 enemy troops were very active just 250 meters from their perimeter around Hill 754, about 2,000 meters south of 742. These Soviet troops probably were also members of the 82d Division. (See Map 13.)

The rest of the night, however, passed without incident. Signal squad members laid field phone wire within the defensive arc of the 5th and 6th Companies and between battalion headquarters and the Nagano Detachment Headquarters. The Japanese estimated that they faced perhaps 300 enemy infantrymen supported by four heavy machine guns, two tanks, and four field guns plus two howitzers.

After daybreak on 29 July, the battalion reorganized and reinforced its new lines. An enemy light machine gun peppered the ridgeline around Hill



Map 13. 2/28th Infantry redeployment south of the Holsten River 28 July 1939.

754 and artillery batteries exchanged fire as each side felt the other out. The next day, 30 July, was hot and humid, but the build-up continued. Troops worked and cursed as they scavenged for scrap lumber or wood to reinforce their loose-sand foxholes and trenches. Soviet artillery bombarded the 5th and 6th Companies for about an hour during the day and at dusk Second Lieutenant Takashima's 2d Platoon of 7th Company atop Hill 742 was also struck by enemy artillery. Japanese casualties were described as light.

Hill 742 was the linchpin of the Japanese defenses south of the Holsten River. Both Major Kajikawa and Colonel Nagano recognized that this key terrain had to be defended at all costs. Even if strongly fortified, however, the frontage that the 2/28th Infantry Battalion had to cover was more than 4,000 meters, approximately twice that prescribed by the manual. Dangerous gaps, which Soviet infiltrators or attackers could use to isolate the Japanese, detracted from the overall Japanese defense. The three companies, whose ranks were already depleted from battle casualties, would be stretched beyond the breaking point to cover all the openings. Rather than fragment their forces, Kajikawa and Lieutenant Colonel Azuma, acting commander of the 71st Infantry north of Hill 742, agreed to share in the defense of the critical key terrain, one company per battalion occupying Hill 742. During daylight hours, the Japanese would use their firepower to cover gaps between positions and at night small patrols would cover them. This solution was an expedient as the battalion chronicler acknowledged, "We are short of the troops required to carry out this mission as thoroughly as we would like."[3]

The first day of August dawned clear and hot. The troops sweated as they dug entrenchments in the dazzling sun. Dugouts to the depth of the average man were prepared with walls shored up by empty ammunition boxes and roofs made of boards from the boxes. Later in the day, strong northwesterly winds began to blow, marking the transition to autumn.[4] The troops took some solace in their knowledge that the weather would be cooler in about two more weeks.

Japanese troops sweeping the ground between them and the Halha to the east and then south with their binoculars could detect no change in Soviet dispositions. Scattered artillery fire was exchanged during the day but no major flare-ups of fighting occurred. The night of 1—2 August, however, about fifty enemy riflemen silently made their way up Hill 742. While one group provided covering fire with rifle and automatic weapons, about thirty of the enemy, lobbing hand grenades ahead of them, rushed Second Lieutenant Takashima's platoon of 7th Company. Takashima's men responded with fire from their light machine guns, grenade dischargers, and hand grenades to keep the Soviets from reaching their trenches. The Japanese defenders drove off the attacking Soviets, killed thirty enemy soldiers, and described their casualties as "insignificant," introducing a euphemism that they would repeat many, many times in the next few weeks.

The Soviets also realized that Hill 742 was the key to the Japanese defenses. The next day, 2 August, enemy infantry probes kept the Takashima Platoon alert. Second Lieutenant Takashima called in battalion 70-mm artillery fire to silence the irritating, and

sometimes fatal, Soviet small arms and light machine gun fire, but the Soviets replied with a fierce counterbarrage. Japanese losses were again described as "insignificant."[5]

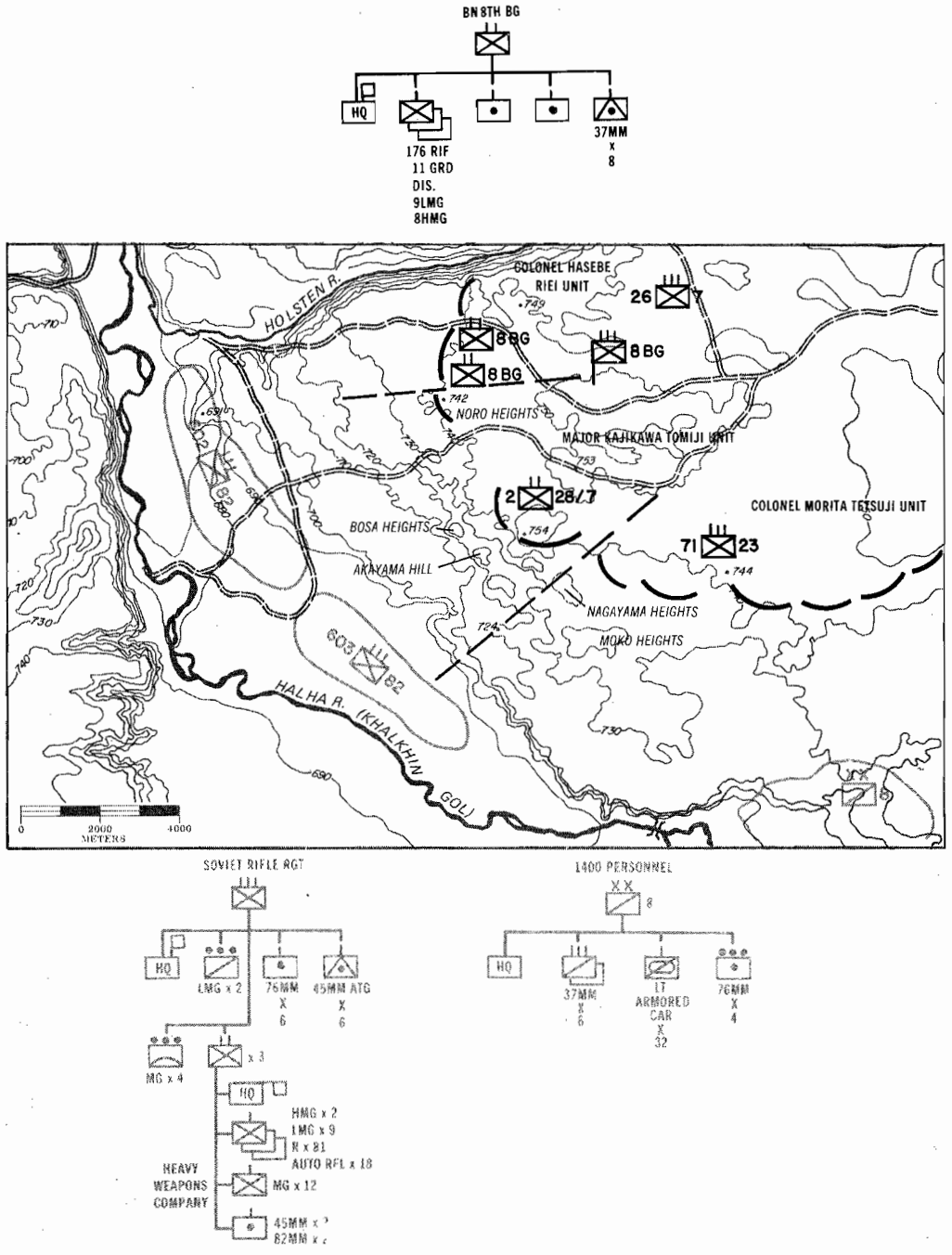
A deadly routine for the Japanese began to appear. Each day the Soviets were firing nearly 2,000 rounds of artillery, a standard of consumption undreamed of by the Japanese.[6] However, by early August the enemy began using iron shells, probably because his promiscuous use of artillery fire had surpassed the bounds of Soviet productive capability.[7] Instead of matching that Soviet profligacy, Japanese artillery commanders appealed to regimental and battalion commanders to be frugal with scarce ammunition. Yet the frontline infantry officers told Kwantung Army commander General Ueda during his 29 July frontline tour that what they most wanted was a vast increase in artillery weapons and shells.[8] More significantly, the Soviets were forcing the Japanese to fight a protracted battle of attrition that the Japanese could not win. As long as the Japanese infantrymen were digging static defense lines and not following their offensive doctrine the Soviets were winning the battle at Nomonhan.

Over the next two days, 3—4 August, the 2/28th Infantry consolidated its defensive positions and dug communications trenches between 5th and 6th Companies' position and Hill 742. On 4 August enemy infiltrators again probed Hill 742, but the Takashima Platoon used grenade dischargers to cover dead spaces and drove off the attack. That same day the battalion received orders placing it under the operational command of the Hasebe Unit whose defensive sector stretched from Hill 742 north to the Holsten. (See Map 14.) Members of the battalion signals squad laid wire from battalion headquarters on Hill 754 to Hasebe's headquarters northeast of Hill 742. Also that afternoon Japanese field sanitation details cremated their dead in funeral pyres whose smoke darkened the sky and whose stench stuck in men's nostrils.

Meanwhile, the Soviets were also busy digging in for extended combat operations. On 5 August they began fortifying Moko Heights, about 1,200 meters south of the 2/28th Battalion's left flank. The battalion's 70-mm guns temporarily interrupted their labor, but the Soviets returned after dark to finish entrenching. Major Kajikawa, adjusting to this new threat, placed one platoon of 5th Company in reserve and used one platoon of 6th Company to reinforce his left flank. While the Japanese could detect no great change in the Soviet situation, the enemy was very active and it "seemed that they were up to something."[10]

Intelligence information, probably from intercepted Soviet signals, confirmed these suspicions. According to this information, the Soviets were planning a large-scale attack to commemorate the first anniversary of the Changkufeng fighting. Thus 6 August was a tense day with the Japanese "standing to" throughout the day.

The day started oddly. The shrill whine of Soviet artillery was absent. No enemy aircraft were seen in the clear skies. Japanese re-supply truck convoys operated freely during the afternoon and brought in much needed ammunition and provisions. But to the frontline troops the lull was disquieting.[11]



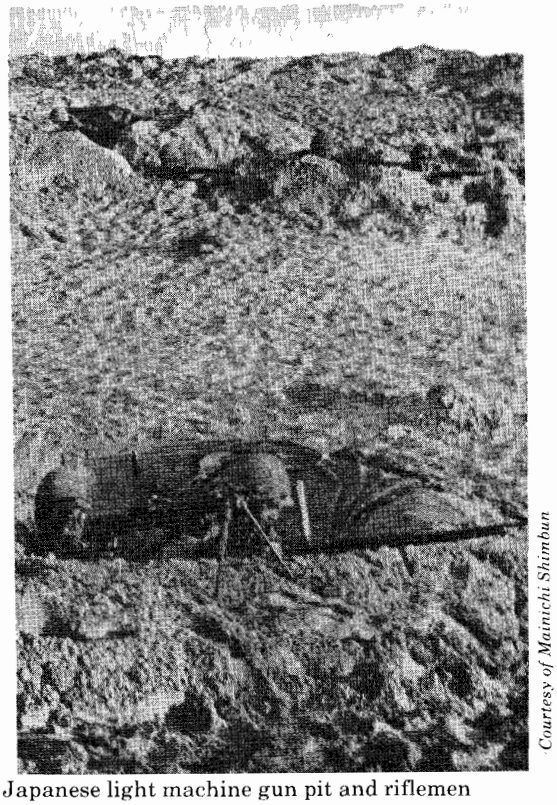
Map 14. General situation south of the Holsten River early August 1939.

Soviet Tactics

The troops' disquietude was a sound instinct because the Soviets indeed "were up to something." At 0400 on 7 August a violent Soviet artillery bombardment fell on the Hasebe unit's lines followed by a strong enemy infantry attack. Although not directly engaged in the fighting, Major Kajikawa sent his reserve platoon to reinforce his right flank on Hill 742. As Soviet illumination rounds hung over Japanese foxholes, enemy infantrymen surged forward adding their yells and screams to the general din heard by the battalion. At dawn, however, the Soviets suddenly broke off the attack.

Soviet infantrymen made several diversionary probes against the platoon of 7th Company on Hill 742 during the day. Kajikawa and his battalion aide-de-camp officer concluded that these attacks were designed to cover a major enemy attack on 5th and 6th Company lines.[12]

At 1830 on 7 August, the crescendo of a Soviet barrage exploded on the 2/28th Infantry's main lines around Hill 754. The next two hours Soviet field artillery, tank cannon, and 45-mm fire methodically pulverized the Japanese positions. For the Japanese infantryman, crouching in terror or resignation in his foxhole, it seemed endless. Direct hits obliterated machine gun positions and rifle firing pits. After the first few minutes of deadly pounding, flimsy shelters or sand foxholes not reinforced with wood shoring collapsed from near misses, in some cases suffocating their occupants under a crush of gravel and dirt. Those dazed soldiers lucky enough to scramble out from under a falling wall of sand faced the unhappy prospect of either moving under the barrage to a new shelter or scooping out a shallow cavity in the sand and hoping no Soviet shell fell close by. Accurate Soviet 45-mm guns, firing high explosive shells from about 800 meters, blew apart the canvas-covered Japanese machine gun pits and made them unusable during the subsequent enemy infantry assault. Japanese casualties would have been even higher, but about 20 percent of the Soviet shells were duds, and the sand mitigated the blast and shrapnel effects of the bursting projectiles. There were cases of Japanese troops surviving unscathed from artillery bursts a few meters away.[13]



Courtesy of Mainichi Shimbun

Japanese light machine gun pit and riflemen (probably early July).

At 2030 the enemy lengthened his artillery fire beyond the first-line Japanese defenses and used the extended artillery fire as a steel curtain to cordon off the front to prevent Japanese reinforcements from reaching the badly mauled first-line defenders. Then an estimated 500 Soviet infantry and five tanks advanced slowly on 5th and 6th Company lines. As a signal flare burst above Hill 754, the Soviet tanks opened a covering fire and the infantry closed to within forty meters of the Japanese lines and began throwing hand grenades.[14] The Japanese were still trying to repair their smashed trenches and this necessary labor reduced the number of men available for the firing line. Moreover, most of the light machine guns were either knocked out by the Soviet barrage or else fouled with dirt and sand the barrage had thrown up as it walked through the Japanese lines. Japanese riflemen had to shoot down exposed Soviet attackers or use their grenade dischargers to force the Soviets out from concealment. The first Soviet attack wave, really a twenty-man probe, fell back.

The main Soviet attack of about three infantry companies then began making its way up the slopes towards the Japanese lines. Again about forty meters away the Soviets began to hurl hand grenades at the Japanese defenders atop the ridgelines. Stunned literally by grenade concussion, and figuratively by the seemingly limitless abundance of Soviet hand grenades, the Japanese fought back as best they could with grenade dischargers, blasting Soviet troops regrouping in dead spaces in front of the Japanese perimeter. The enemy apparently had great respect for that weapon because the Japanese saw several Soviet infantrymen drop their weapons and flee when they heard the dreaded sound of a grenade being fired. The 5th Company's opponents showed little inclination to move any closer to the Japanese trenches and combat degenerated into a grenade-throwing contest. Such unwillingness to take the last leap to hand-to-hand combat was, as the Japanese infantryman saw it, characteristic of his Soviet counterpart.

At that moment, 6th Company's 1st Platoon would have disagreed. There Soviet infantrymen broke into the Japanese trenches and deadly close-in fighting went back and forth as the position changed hands several times. If the Soviets were driven back, more Soviet troops appeared to repulse the Japanese counterattackers. Each Soviet soldier seemed to have an assigned job, which he carried out without exhibiting any initiative even when the situation demanded it.[15] Sheer numbers and Soviet persistence exemplified by attacking the same trench again and again were wearing down the Japanese defenders. Finally, the 6th Company commander called for the battalion's 70-mm artillery guns to fire at point-blank range into the Soviet troops. That fire finally broke the Soviet attack and forced the enemy to retreat. Around 1st Platoon, 6th Company, sixty enemy bodies lay contorted in death. The enemy, however, did not panic. They conducted an orderly retreat under cover of Soviet artillery and automatic weapons fire and managed to police the battlefield as they withdrew, collecting an estimated 300 dead and wounded.

The battered defenders of 5th and 6th Companies tried to regroup and reorganize their positions. Japanese regimental artillery had been noticeable by its absence during the Soviet attack, perhaps because this was the first Jap-

anese exposure to a massive Soviet frontal assault employing combined arms tactics.[16] The battalion's survivors also knew that the Soviets were wearing down their ability to fight.

Major Kajikawa, who expected a follow-up Soviet attack, placed his entire battalion on alert. Scouts from 5th and 6th Companies crawled through the lines to reconnoiter enemy positions and attack preparations but discovered that the Soviets had pulled back about 500 meters. Apparently they feared a Japanese night counterattack, and wanted to put distance between themselves and the Japanese while they regrouped.

About the same time, a company of Soviet infantry attacked the 7th Company south of Hill 742 but was driven off with heavy losses. In retrospect, that attack may have been a diversion to cover the infiltration of an artillery fire control and observation team reinforced with riflemen for security. First Lieutenant Saito, commander of 7th Company, first detected the infiltrators and reported their move to headquarters, which sent a platoon to reinforce the company.

Position Defense

Farther south, 5th and 6th Companies pulled themselves together despite enemy sniper fire. "Between 0900 and 1600 there was sporadic enemy shelling." That simple entry in the battalion's war diary masked the horrible reality of Nomonhan. After a week of sustained combat and under repeated shelling, the Japanese were exhausted. Apathy began to set in as all that the soldiers could think of was eating white rice again and washing it down with fresh, clean water. In fact, the battalion collected rainwater in oil drums or helmets, but since their move to Noro Heights there had only been one day of rain. The troops, desperate for any water, drank from stagnant, discolored pools and got amoebic dysentery. The two battalion doctors were overwhelmed by the wounded and by the sick and only the most seriously ill could receive immediate attention. Cases of thirty or more bloody bowel movements a day might not be considered serious enough to be sent to a rear area field hospital. Even typhus cases were reported. The continual Soviet shelling left the suffering troops no choice but to defecate in their foxholes, adding to the stench of rotting carcasses and bloated corpses. Soviet artillery became so deadly the Japanese troops lived like moles and Japanese officers forbade cooking fires for fear of betraying their positions. At times, the soldiers were reduced to eating grass.[17].

Nevertheless, the 2/28th Infantry remained in its position as a unit. They stayed because they were ordered to stay, and even in their exhausted condition their morale remained high. Both officers and men shared a strong, common sense of unit identity because the Japanese regimental system of recruiting drew men from the same towns and villages into a unit, providing homogeneity within a battalion or company. They were, in effect, extended neighbors as civilians and as soldiers they cared about each other and shared hardship and triumph together.[18] Their commanding officer and junior officers bonded the unit together. Lastly, although subject to daily Soviet shelling and the galling spectacle of impertinent Soviet soldiers bathing in the Halha River while they lacked drinking water, the 2/28th Infantry could see other Japanese units on both flanks

and knew that it was part of a comprehensive defense plan.

Against that backdrop of misery, resupply and replacements became major events. On 8 August a first lieutenant, detached from another of the regiment's battalions, led eight enlisted troops to the 2/28th Infantry's lines. The desperately ill could then be sent to the rear. But re-supplying and replacing troops under Soviet observation were a deadly business.

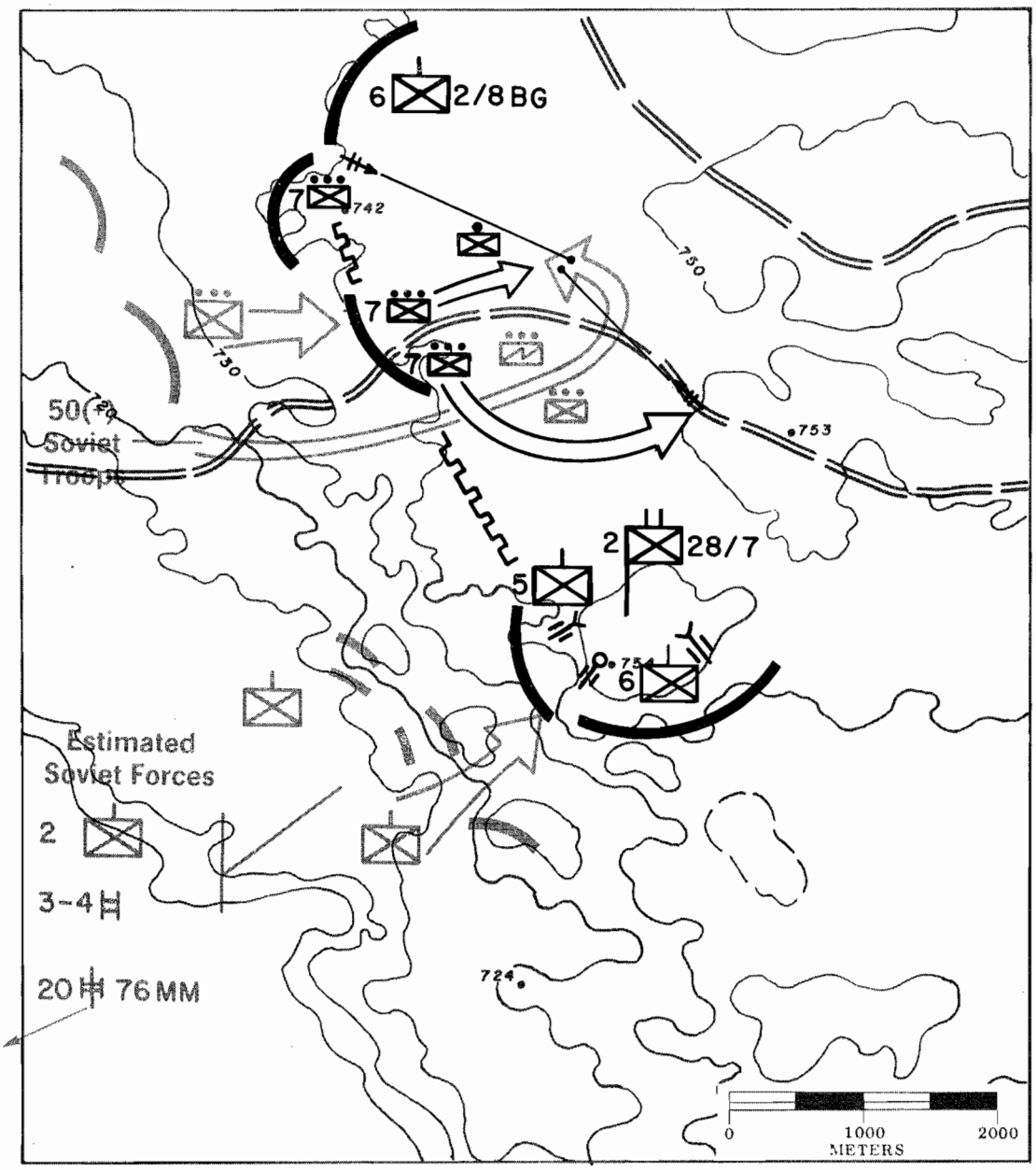
Most replenishment was accomplished at night. Infantrymen moving forward as replacements knew enough to be quiet and teamsters could be told to maintain silence. On the poor trails leading to the battalion lines, however, momentarily frightened horses (and horse-drawn transport or pack animals carried the bulk of frontline re-supply) could rear and neigh revealing the supply column's approach and bringing Soviet artillery down on it. These resupply columns, toiling in darkness, performed their vital logistics functions in anonymity and suffered their casualties without fanfare. By battle's end, one of every four of these service troops would be dead or wounded.

Unit morale remained high, according to the Japanese perception, because of the skillful leadership exhibited by battalion officers. The Japanese, moreover, were able to punish their foes and to inflict more damage than they suffered. That very afternoon 5th Company patrols turned back about fifteen enemy soldiers probing their defenses. Furthermore, the Japanese were able to strike deadly reprisals against Soviet troops. The 7th Company engaged in such a killer operation on 8 August.

Scouts from 7th Company shadowed the would-be Soviet infiltrators first detected by First Lieutenant Saito. They appeared to be an artillery observation squad with an infantry security platoon. Officers rapidly maneuvered their tired soldiers in predawn darkness to surround the Soviet force. One Japanese heavy machine gun on Hill 742 was pointed west and trained on the north Soviet flank while another machine gun 800 meters away enfiladed the exposed Soviet south flank. The neighboring Sugitani Battalion[19] provided standby fire support and a platoon of 7th Company moved to attack positions just south of the sand dunes behind which the Soviets thought they were securely hiding. (See Map 15.)

The Soviets' first realization that something was terribly wrong came when Japanese machine gun bullets began to rip into their perimeter from both flanks. Battalion artillery slammed high explosive shells one after the other into the bunched enemy troops. Fire lifted only when thirteen Japanese troops rushed the Soviet position and finished off the survivors with swords and bayonets. More than fifty Soviet bodies were counted and the Japanese took only a single prisoner. While unit accounts maintain that the Soviets resisted to the last man, it seems more likely that a platoon of 7th Company repaid some old scores in cold blood and steel that morning.

Sweeping the killing ground, Japanese troops recovered twenty rifles, three light machine guns, a sniper rifle, and twenty pieces of various field telephone equipment suggesting that about one-third of the Soviets were unarmed or were not combat infantrymen. They were all killed just the same.



Map 15. Annihilation of Soviet infiltration attempt 8 August 1939.

Speed and surprise were the hallmarks of this action. The Japanese viewed it as proof of their doctrine of attack and exemplary of the spirit of attack inculcated in platoon leaders' ranks and below. It came to be regarded as a classic example of plugging infiltration gaps on an extended front.[20]

Both combatants having spent and bloodied themselves, they spent 9 August in comparative tranquility. Soviet troops kept active strengthening fortifications around Moko Heights and sending in more reinforcements. Atop Hill 754 Japanese officers scanning the area with binoculars felt that the Soviets were moving sizable forces south into position against Colonel Morita's 71st Infantry, the extreme left flank of all Japanese positions south of the Holsten.

At dusk 200 replacements arrived to fill the battalion's losses caused by combat and sickness. As the newcomers exchanged news and gossip with the tired veterans, battalion headquarters divided up the replacements and formed a battalion reserve. Besides the fairly peaceful day and the reinforcements, rain provided more fresh water. That night battalion morale was uniformly high.

On 10 August Soviet artillery was active throughout the day, but the previous intensity was lacking. It was harassing fire which indeed did make existence miserable for the Japanese. The comparative lull also gave higher headquarters time to decide new dispositions for the 2/28th Infantry.

The 3d Platoon, 5th Company, was assigned to general reserve for the Hasebe Unit and left the battalion's control. Around Hill 742, Second Lieutenant Takashima's platoon of 7th Company and the Sugitani Battalion attempted to harden their defenses on that vital hill. The separation of battalion sectors of responsibility just north of 742 was proving detrimental to the overall Japanese defense because neither unit had the authority to overrule the other. To try to remedy matters, Colonel Hasebe ordered both units to coordinate their artillery fire plans, to clear firing lanes for mutual defense, and to produce an integrated firing plan linked to fire support from antitank, battalion, and regimental artillery. After the harrowing experience of 7 August, more effort went into constructing fortifications. Working parties were sent back to Chiangchunmiao to cut trees and to get logs that would be used to reinforce trench fortifications.

The fine weather of 11 August lifted the troops' spirits, but higher headquarters quickly lowered them by ordering the battalion's attached 37-mm company to return to the 71st Infantry. This loss, the only antitank weapons the battalion possessed, was serious in itself, but the manner in which the orders had to be carried out must have made the infantryman wonder who, if anybody, on the staff knew the real frontline situation.

Major Kajikawa reluctantly told the 37-mm crews to prepare to move that night. Regimental headquarters called again and, with orders described as "unfortunate" in the unit history, prescribed that the guns be shifted as quickly as possible. Kajikawa realized that if the Soviets detected the daylight move of the 37-mm guns, it would jeopardize his defenses. His fears were confirmed when Soviet artillery began shelling the gun crews who were trying to limber their weapons for transfer.

One of the defender's sharpest claws had been pulled by his own headquarters.

There were other worries too. Enemy 45-mm guns newly situated on Moko Heights announced their presence with sporadic registration shelling the battalion's south flank until nightfall. To the north, 2d Platoon, 7th Company, beat back yet another enemy probe near their lines atop Hill 742. Japanese casualties for the day-long skirmish again were recorded as "insignificant." That word, "insignificant," appears more and more frequently after mid-August.

Numerically, "insignificant" may have meant 3 or 4 percent casualties. Certainly these were not crippling losses, but as a staff officer observed shortly after the battle, after one month of such warfare of attrition, the entire Japanese force would have been annihilated.[21] An analysis of battle casualties showed that slightly over half the Japanese killed and wounded (51 and 53 percent respectively) fell to artillery fire. A year before at Changkufeng, about 37 percent of Japanese casualties resulted from Soviet artillery.[22]

Constant shelling not only whittled away Japanese strength. Shelling and patrolling also helped to distract Japanese attention by drowning out sounds of Soviet troop movement, all of which were accomplished at night. Almost daily Soviet patrols poked and probed for weaknesses in the Japanese defenses. On 13 August, for example, at 0200 a squad of fifteen enemy crept to within fifty meters of 6th Company's front lines before grenade dischargers drove them off. This was another nuisance probe that interrupted a night's sleep. Hill 742 also remained active as 2d Platoon, 7th Company, pushed back about ten enemy infiltrators. These infiltration attempts, in turn, highlighted the difficulties of an understrength company trying to defend a 1,000-meter front.[23]

It was cloudy on 13 August. Strong northwest winds blew sand into foxholes and faces making it almost impossible to see anything. Then it rained, which at least provided fresh water. Regimental artillery blasted at suspected Soviet positions on and off throughout the day. The 2/28th Infantry's heavy machine gun crews tried to disrupt movement in the enemy's communication trenches, but with little success. The Japanese also deliberately fired on Soviet lines when they thought the enemy troops would be eating. An interrupted meal was payment for interrupted sleep. And every day another 3 or 4 percent of the Japanese soldiers became casualties in this battle of attrition.

In the early morning rain of 14 August, Soviet artillery gunners began to shell the battalion's lines in a comparatively deliberate, almost leisurely manner. Section by section a methodical box barrage walked over the battalion's position. Infantrymen crouching in foxholes or machine gun crews in unreinforced shelters could only wait for the methodical shelling to pass over their holes to the next section.

While no change in the enemy situation was apparent to Major Kajikawa and his company commanders, they did notice frequent enemy truck traffic on the Halha's west bank and, on a more ominous note, a great deal of enemy movement south of the battalion's left flank. This activity may have been part of the Soviet deception effort

designed to condition the Japanese to the sound of armor and the sight of moving vehicles. Ten days or so before the Soviet offensive, a number of Soviet trucks without mufflers were driven along the entire front.[24]

Next morning, 15 August, in the mist and falling rain, the Soviets first used mortars against the 2/28th Infantry. At 1000 mortar shells began exploding on the 6th and 7th Company positions as Soviet crews calibrated their weapons. Grenadiers from 6th Company returned the enemy fire and silenced the mortars temporarily, but around noon enemy 45-mm guns near Moko Heights began shelling 6th Company lines. Later during the cloudy, rainy day enemy mortars resumed pounding 5th and 6th Companies. The battalion's 70-mm guns responded but the Soviets seemed to have at least eight mortars in action against the battalion.

Rain changed to a cold drizzle during the night and Japanese troops shivered in their trenches. At 0900 on 16 August enemy mortar fire erupted from Moko Heights and slammed into 2d Platoon, 6th Company, lines. The company commander called for battalion artillery support and directed the two howitzers' fire against the mortars. At noon Soviet 45-mm guns on Moko Heights began firing on 6th Company positions. Again battalion artillery received a hurried call for support. This time they claimed that counterbattery fire destroyed an enemy gun. At 1600 enemy mortars again fired from the same location, but Japanese battalion artillery managed to destroy an enemy observation post and possibly a mortar gun crew.

That night Second Lieutenant Tahara of 5th Company led NCO scouts from 6th Company to reconnoiter Soviet positions around Moko Heights, source of the most effective enemy artillery fire. Tahara discovered a reinforced platoon of about sixty Soviets fortifying the heights, but the enemy outposts and sentries were extremely alert and reacted to the slightest sound or movement, something previously not seen in Soviet night defense positions.

During Tahara's absence, another fifty replacements arrived at battalion headquarters. These men filled the depleted ranks as "normal wastage," to use the World War I euphemism, continued to feed the insatiable maw of this battle of attrition. Morale, however, was still high, possibly because according to battalion rumors the unit would return to its base by mid-September.[25]

On 17 August Soviet troops tried to fortify the rises between 7th Company on Hill 742 and 5th Company on Hill 754. At 0900 a battalion artillery forward observer serving with 6th Company detected an enemy mortar squad trying to set up their weapon about 500 meters west of 5th Company lines. Battalion artillery fire forced the enemy quickly to withdraw. In the afternoon battalion artillery smashed an enemy observation post atop a rise about 600 meters west of 7th Company's positions. That prompted Soviet retaliatory artillery fire and both sides exchanged barrages. The Japanese, almost predictably, suffered "light casualties."

Night Attack II

The enemy was also active around Bosa Heights, approximately 200 meters from 6th Company's front line. To

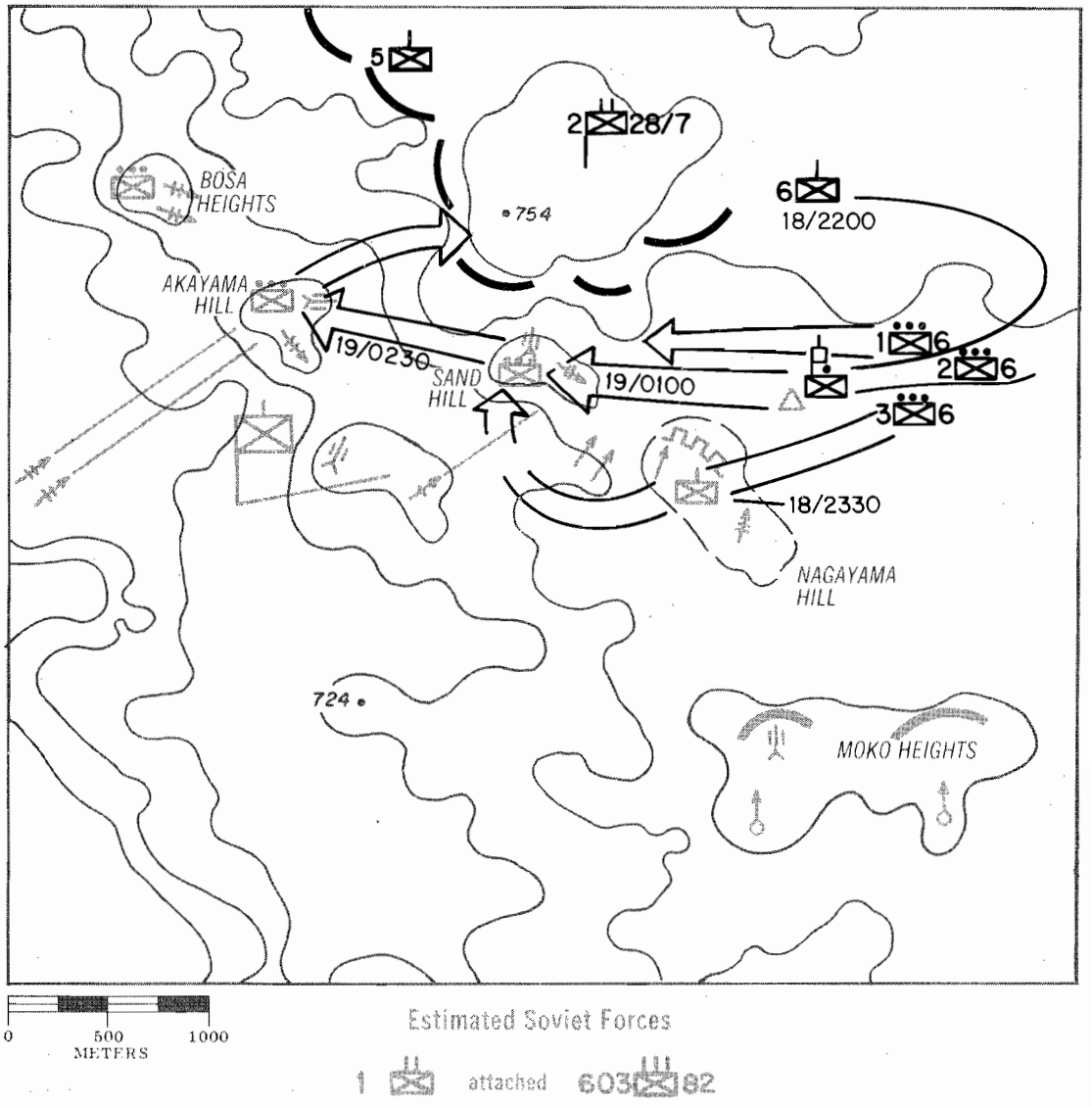
determine the enemy strength, Captain Tsuji, the company commander, sent a patrol out after dark to scout that area but again Soviet security and vigilance prevented a thorough, close-in reconnaissance of the position. The scouts did report that at the very least the enemy had established a skirmish line atop Bosa Heights and enemy forces probably were positioned in depth.

These scouts were discovering, although they could not know it, the signs of another shift in Soviet tactics. The enemy forward line was the weakest point of a position defended in width and depth. Japanese attackers could easily reach and break through that defense, but then they would encounter hardened defenses with interlocking bands of fire. Soviet artillery had also pre-registered its fire on this outpost line and as soon as the Japanese occupied the outpost line the Soviets would commence firing on them.[26] Japanese scouts also overheard the sounds of hammers, picks, saws, and other construction tools indicating that the Soviets were building new fortifications. According to Soviet accounts, powerful transmitters capable of emitting sound effects imitating construction noises were part of their deception efforts.[27] The purpose remained unclear to the Japanese, but the enemy was planning something.

Based on scouts' information, on 18 August Captain Tsuji informed Major Kajikawa that the enemy seemed to be preparing for some new action. To foil this plan, to reduce meaningless Japanese casualties, and thereby to enhance combat capability for future operations, he requested Kajikawa's permission to launch a night spoiling raid on the Soviet positions. Authorization was granted and Tsuji spent the day making preparations to lead the night attack. Troops wrapped their hobnail boots in cloth or straw or discarded them in favor of web-toed rubber soled socks to muffle sounds. They stuffed their ammunition pouches with paper, filled their canteens, and sharpened their bayonets. Tsuji donned a crossed white belt over his shoulders for the troops to guide on. His platoon leaders wore a single sash for recognition.[28] At 2200, further concealed by falling rain, Tsuji led the company through its front lines along with elements from the rest of the battalion augmenting the raiding force. Tsuji was in the point squad followed by 1st and 3d Platoons in column with 2d Platoon as reserve bringing up the rear. (See Map 16.)

Advancing slowly in the darkness, the point squad unexpectedly bumped into an enemy outpost where none was thought to be. As became clear during the action, the Soviets had adjusted their positions during the thirty-six hour lag between the Japanese reconnaissance and night attack. Soviet riflemen fired several rounds in the general direction of the raiders and the price for the delay between the reconnaissance and the actual operation was paid.

Tsuji, still hoping to capitalize on the little element of surprise still his, ordered 3d Platoon to assault the skirmish line on Nagayama Hill. Instantly 3d Platoon went on line and charged the hill. Soviet heavy and light machine guns opened an ear-shattering volume of fire. But since the Japanese attackers continued up the hill in silence, most of the Soviet automatic weapons fire sailed well over the crouching attackers' heads. As Japanese infantrymen reached the crest of Nagayama, a hailstorm of Soviet hand



Map 16. 6th Company, 2/28th Infantry, night attack on Soviet positions 18—19 August 1939.

grenades greeted them and concussion, blast, and fragments caused more casualties than the automatic weapons fire. The Soviets had reacted too late as the Japanese infantrymen leaped into the trenches and shot or bayoneted those enemy soldiers who did not hastily withdraw.

Captain Tsuji, meanwhile, was trying to execute his original plan. He ordered 2d Platoon to seize enemy machine gun and 45-mm antitank gun positions on a sand mound about 400 meters to his north. As 2d Platoon assaulted the enemy's left flank, 3d Platoon swung around from Nagayama and hit the enemy's right. Again the Soviets opened a violent storm of automatic weapons and heavy machine gun fire and flung grenades at flickering shadows. Both Japanese platoons again withheld any counterfire and continued to advance silently, guiding on their platoon leaders' backs. When they had closed to within a few meters of the Soviet frontline, with a half scream, half battle cry, they leaped into the enemy trenches slashing and bayoneting the Soviet defenders there.

But Soviet defenses were no longer linear like those encountered at Changkufeng/Lake Khasan. Instead the enemy placed his automatic weapons in depths 500 to 1000 meters behind the initial defensive line. This enabled the Soviets to provide punishing covering fire in lanes while Soviet troops withdrew to new fighting positions. Moreover, physically and psychologically drained by the experience of hand-to-hand combat at the Soviet first line, the Japanese attackers had great difficulty regrouping and pressing on against the next line of Soviet defenses. The Japanese concentrated grenade discharger fire to suppress enemy automatic weapons fire just before a dash forward. This tactic was an expedient, but effective, one.

Tsuji then used the exhausted survivors of 3d Platoon's two attacks as a security force to cover yet another attack by the 1st and 2d Platoons against Akayama Hill, about 300 meters north of the recently taken Sand Hill. Soviet troops just evicted from Sand Hill, however, regrouped on Akayama and added their numbers to the defense to make a combined strength of perhaps 300 enemy troops.

The company fired all its grenade dischargers simultaneously to blast the Soviet trenches and especially to disrupt Soviet troops who might be entrenched on the reverse slope. Flares and tracer rounds from Soviet lines lit up the night sky as a platoon led by Captain Tsuji tried to capitalize on the shock of the grenade dischargers by turning the enemy flank. With this diversion, the main Japanese attack fell on the weakly held Soviet front. Swords and bayonets plunged into flesh and bone and the surviving enemy troops retreated into their prepared defenses. There the Soviets fought tenaciously, making the Japanese pay for the initial success.

Second Lieutenant Nakano, leading 1st Platoon into the prepared enemy defenses, used his sword to slash at enemy defenders, but a Soviet rifleman ducked underneath it and bayoneted the lieutenant, mortally wounding him. Tsuji was the only Japanese officer standing as both 2d and 3d Platoon leaders also fell wounded. Soviet artillery fired to the Japanese rear to try to isolate the raiders in no-man's land until dawn. Finally, the Soviets withdrew into the darkness and Japanese scouts

sent in pursuit reported that the enemy apparently had fled.

It was about 0230 when Tsuji ordered the weary troops to regroup, police the battlefield, and prepare to withdraw to company lines. Collection of the seven dead and twenty-two wounded Japanese was especially difficult because the use of flares to illuminate shadows and depressions where wounded crawled to escape enemy fire brought Soviet artillery fire down on the Japanese. As the battalion aide-de-camp pointed out, "As distasteful and agonizing as it was, the collection of our dead and wounded had to be accomplished," because leaving the bodies of comrades in arms to rot on the battlefield would have a very adverse influence on morale.[29] In addition reassembling the scattered Japanese security patrols and casualty collection teams proved difficult because any signal to indicate reassembly points immediately provoked Soviet artillery fire.

Back inside company lines, the raiders assessed their night's work. At least eighty soldiers had been killed and ten rifles, three light and two heavy machine guns captured. Overall the raid was deemed a success, indeed it was later touted as a model of night attack based on offensive spirit.[30] But battalion officers felt, in retrospect, that it would have been better for the entire company in one concentrated attack to destroy completely one enemy strongpoint than for the three fragmented platoons to conduct separate attacks.

It was still raining the morning of 19 August but even in the cold rain the troops were in high spirits. They had struck a hard blow at the Soviets, so hard that the day passed quietly.[31] Only a few isolated firefights marred the tranquility. Around dusk platoons of 7th Company fired with grenade dischargers and light machine guns on about 100 enemy troops who were moving toward the battalion's lines. The enemy quickly dispersed. Later, around 2300, Soviet troops suddenly fired long, loud bursts of machine gun rounds into a depression that was well forward of 6th Company's lines. Then hand grenades began to explode in front of the Soviet positions. Members of 6th Company atop Hill 754 watched in fascination and then realized that the jittery Soviet troops thought the Japanese were attacking them and were in fact firing at shadows. That provoked prolonged laughter among the Japanese infantrymen. On 20 August, the next morning, the Soviets would have their turn.

Unable to dislodge the Soviets, the Kwantung Army could not disengage from the battle without seriously damaging its credibility as a deterrent force to Soviet expansion in northeastern Asia. In that sense, Kwantung Army Headquarters had to commit Lieutenant General Komatsubara's forces to a battle of attrition. During the first three weeks of August, the 2/28th Infantry's experiences typified those of the Japanese forces around Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol. They dug in, fought, and died. They were, as the laconic War Diary entry put it, "in contact with the enemy."

Soviet Style Blitzkrieg

5

Japanese Intelligence Failures

At 0630 on 20 August a "large formation" of enemy aircraft bombed and strafed the 2/28th Infantry's artillery positions. The aircraft were part of as many as 250 Soviet aircraft (144 according to Soviet sources), including 150 bombers, that dramatically announced the beginning of the long-awaited Soviet general offensive.[1]

From the end of July, Japanese intelligence intercepted Soviet messages relating to a general offensive. Details on the scale and timing, however, remained unclear.[2] Soviet attacks had occurred on 1 and 2 August as well as 7 and 8 August and some intelligence analysts believed these were the sum of the Soviet August offensives. In fact, the Soviets' first echelon massed two rifle divisions, two motorized armored brigades, seven artillery regiments, and three cavalry divisions. Their second echelon forces consisted of another rifle division plus five motorized armored or tank brigades. These forces were spread over a fifty-kilometer front and were about double what Japanese intelligence credited them.[3]

Soviet logistics efforts must take a great deal of the credit for the Soviet success in achieving tactical surprise. Japanese staff officers refused to believe that the Soviets could mass the forces that they did because the great length of the Soviet logistics "tail" precluded such a commitment. Trucks enabled the Red Army to supply its troops around Nomonhan. The 1st Front Army (organized during the Nomonhan fighting) had over 2,600 trucks on hand, including 1,000 fuel trucks. The 750-kilometer logistics route from Borzya to Nomonhan, however, required almost 5,000 trucks to supply adequately the Soviet field forces. In mid-August, General Zhukov received another 1,625 trucks from European Russia and these additions enabled him to transport barely enough material for his 20 August offensive. These numbers of trucks were beyond the comprehension of Japanese planners.

Poor weather and low visibility hampered Japanese aerial reconnaissance for about two weeks before the Soviet offensive. From 12 August on, there had been but one day of clear weather. On 19 August, Japanese pilots did spot a concentration of Soviet vehicles on the Halha's west bank, but their reports were still being evaluated at higher headquarters on 20 August.[4] Potentially significant intelligence data gathered by lower echelon units like squads or platoons was not expeditiously reported

to higher headquarters, most likely because there was no battalion intelligence officer to evaluate or to disseminate such information.

Japanese operational planning to meet such an offensive envisioned the destruction of Soviet forces in front of the Japanese lines followed by an army level counterattack that would envelop both Soviet flanks. Thus they believed that they could smash any Soviet offensive and then resume their offensive operations against the weakened Soviet forces.[5]

Soviet Fixing Attacks

After an hour of unopposed Soviet aircraft bombing,[6] an estimated fourteen Soviet field artillery pieces blasted the 2/28th's positions. The first few shells cut fieldphone land lines, isolating battalion units and the battalion from higher headquarters. In the absence of any cooperation between the battalion and regimental artillery, the Soviet artillery could concentrate its fire on the Japanese front lines "almost destroying them" without fear of counterbattery fire.[7] The 3½-hour bombardment collapsed Japanese fortifications and buried their occupants in sand, dirt, and debris.

During intervals in the enemy shelling, Soviet infantrymen probed Japanese positions. At 0900 enemy infantry from the 602d Rifle Regiment advanced against Hill 742, but Sergeant Matsushita's heavy machine gun crew, Second Lieutenant Takashima's direction of the light machine gun fire, and a sergeant who fired grenades from an observation post stopped the enemy progress about 100 meters in front of the Japanese lines. The Japanese cheered as the Soviets dumped their heavy Maxim machine gun and fled. But a split second later a high explosive round from a Soviet tank disintegrated the observation post, severely wounding the sergeant and leaving his grenade discharger a twisted pile of junk.[8]

From the south, under cover of the barrage, twelve Soviet tanks began to advance on Japanese lines from the direction of Moko Heights and threatened to turn 6th Company's flank. Battalion artillery had to brave the Soviet artillery shells in order to fire on the tanks to prevent an encirclement of the battalion's left flank. The tanks retreated but the Soviet artillery barrage continued with growing intensity. An estimated 700 enemy infantrymen backed by fifteen tanks, and seventy-five artillery weapons faced the 2/28th Infantry.

Later that afternoon, 6th Company's left platoon, anchoring the entire battalion's left flank, coordinated its fire with that of Sergeant Tanimura's machine gun platoon to pin down enemy troops who had reached a defile about 500 meters from the platoon's lines.

At 1700 four enemy tanks attacked 6th Company's lines. A Japanese antitank squad, under cover of battalion machine guns, managed to move close enough to the tanks, which had no infantry support, to set one ablaze with hand grenades. The remaining three tanks promptly withdrew toward Moko Heights. Four hours later, however, the three tanks reappeared to tow away the burned tank. Japanese rifle grenade fire hindered, but did not prevent, the salvage effort.

The enemy also probed the main battalion positions around Hill 754. At noon, about twenty enemy soldiers of

the 603d Rifle Regiment advanced on 5th Company's right flank, but Japanese grenade dischargers and ultimately hand grenades drove them back. About 1320 another thirty Soviet infantrymen probed the company's left flank coming within thirty meters of the company's lines before more Japanese hand grenades forced them back.

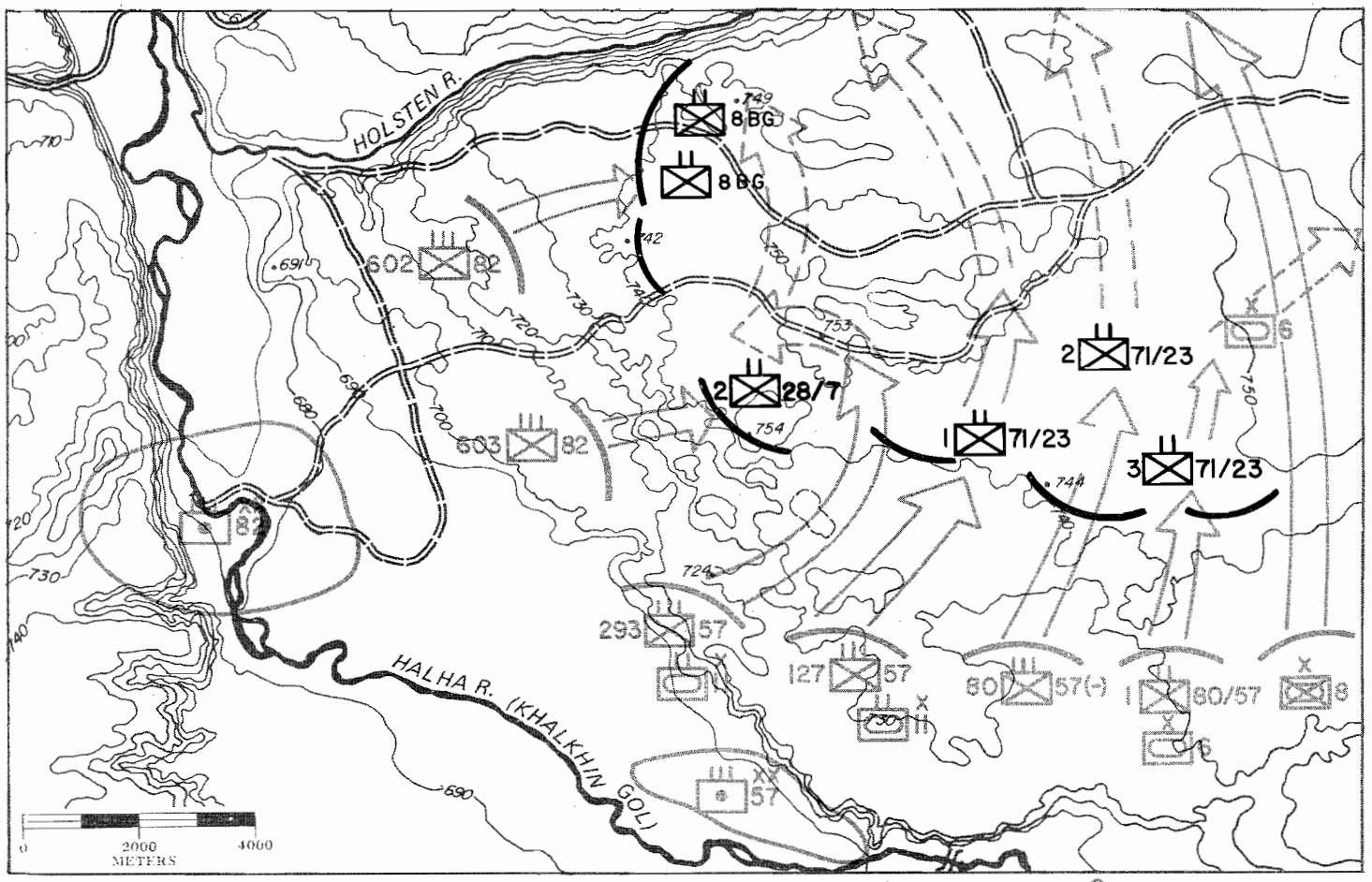
To the north about 100 Soviet infantryman tried to move through the 1,000-meter gap separating 7th and 5th Companies. Second Lieutenant Takashima's Platoon on the high ground of Hill 742 used its light machine guns and grenade dischargers to scatter the enemy below and break up his attempt to divide the battalion's perimeter.

The Japanese had repulsed successfully these Soviet infantry probes, but the Soviets had accomplished their mission of "fixing" the Japanese center in place for the Soviet armor to encircle. Unknown numbers of enemy tanks from the 6th and 11th Tank Brigades and the 8th Motorized Armored Brigade had swung southeast past the left flank of the Japanese forces during the extended Soviet artillery barrage and then turned northeast to sever Japanese supply lines. Ominously, the War Diary author recorded, "Re-supply of ammunition, provisions, and water will be extremely difficult."[9] (See Map 17.)

Around 1600 Major Kajikawa assessed the situation for his company and platoon commanders. He believed that the enemy used conventional Red Army offensive tactics, so the enemy's frontal attacks and rapid withdrawals were temporary fixing attacks designed to cover the movement of other Soviet units. That meant in turn the Soviets would withdraw under cover of darkness or use the night to move troops to new positions providing the chance for a Japanese counterstroke. Scouts were dispatched to reconnoiter the area in preparation for a Japanese counterattack.

When the scouts returned, their news was grim. They saw a vast concentration of more than 1,000 enemy trucks and as many as 500 enemy tanks and armored cars moving all along the battalion's left flank. Furthermore, 6th Company atop Hill 754 had been watching the neighboring 71st Infantry pull back in the face of the massive Soviet onslaught. The 127th and 80th Rifle Regiments of the 57th Rifle Division and the 6th Tank Brigade combined against the IJA's 71st Regiment. Soviet armor proved especially effective because modifications of Soviet tanks made them less susceptible to conflagration. Soviet tankers, for example, used a heavier, lower grade fuel and placed wire netting or bricks over their engines to negate the potential effects of Molotov cocktails, the main Japanese antitank weapon. These changes and the cooler late August temperatures made it increasingly difficult for the Japanese to destroy Soviet tanks as easily as they had in early July. The withdrawal of the 71st Infantry left the 2/28th Infantry's left flank undefended. Instead of retreating, clearly the Soviets were readying a full-scale offensive that promised hard fighting.

On 21 August the Soviet artillery barrage opened at 0800. Although the fire was not so concentrated as the previous day, it was violent.[10] The Soviets also varied their tactics to confuse the Japanese defenders. On 20 August, the Soviet gunners fired all along the Japanese front but on 21 August they shelled Japanese strong points identified by the previous day's probing at-



Map 17. Soviet offensive south of Holsten River 20—31 August 1939.

tacks. As artillery fire smashed into these key positions splintering wood and bone, Soviet infantrymen silently infiltrated into the Japanese lines.

The 7th Company experienced one such attack. During the morning barrage against Hill 742, Second Lieutenant Takashima crouched in the front-line trench and waited for the barrage to lift. Suddenly an enemy grenade sailed over his head and a flurry of grenades followed. The enemy was already inside Japanese lines. Takashima rallied his surprised troops and began a deadly hunt to kill the Soviet troops hiding in defiles, depressions, and dead spaces.[11]

The Japanese lobbed hand grenades into their own trenches and then rushed dazed enemy troops, finishing them off with bayonets. The fighting continued through the morning and the Japanese predeliction for hand-to-hand combat won out. Japanese infantrymen felt that their Soviet counterparts had no idea how to use the bayonet properly and that a single Japanese soldier was worth five Soviets.[12]

If the Soviet soldier did not impress his Japanese counterpart very much, the coordination and cooperation between Soviet artillery and infantry did. The artillery covered the infantry's advance and opened holes in the Japanese line for the infantry to exploit.

The Soviet tanks operating in the battalion rear had effectively cut Japanese supply lines, so that frontline Japanese infantry could not use their grenade dischargers to best effect because of a shortage of ammunition. Men were also in short supply as by 21 August a majority of the battalion's troops were dead or wounded.

According to intelligence reports from the 71st Infantry, the 23d Division launched a counterattack against the Soviets in the direction of Hill 752, about sixteen kilometers northeast of the 2/28th Infantry's position.[13] Major Kajikawa then devised a plan to break through the Soviet encirclement and link up with the 23d Division. He sent scouts to reconnoiter a route and to check on enemy positions around Moko Heights. The effort was wasted because no Japanese offensive occurred on 21 August.

That day the 23d Division, however, did order Colonel Hasebe's detachment (8th Border Guards and 2/28th Infantry) "to maintain contact with COL Morita Tetsuji's 71st Infantry Regiment and hold its present position."[14] Staff officer Major Ito personally told Hasebe to hold out until 24 August in order to allow the 23d Division and 6th Army to prepare a counteroffensive against the Soviets. After that, Ito continued, Hasebe was free to shift his position to Hill 749.

Another massive artillery bombardment fell on the battalion beginning at 0800 on 22 August. As the hot sun rose higher in the clear sky, some troops went mad amidst the choking dust hurled up by the shellfire, the screams of maimed comrades, and scorching heat. One private on Hill 742 stood up in the trench giggling hysterically and babbling for water. A corpsman who rose up to help the poor wretch caught a shell splinter in the throat.[15] It was indicative of the battalion's fate should their discipline break down completely.

The Soviets meanwhile repeated the previous day's tactics, advancing under cover of, or through, artillery barrages to reach the Japanese front lines. Tank

fire and automatic weapons fire covered the Soviet troops as they moved up the slopes towards the Japanese lines. Soviet attackers showed increased determination and only hand-to-hand fighting broke their attacks at several places along the battalion's front. Battalion artillerymen and heavy machine gunners carefully selected targets in order to conserve their scarce ammunition and drove back the rest of the attackers. However, if the first Soviet assault was repulsed, the attackers regrouped and repeated the attack according to the original plan. Such tactics were stolid, but they wore down the Japanese defenders. That night the enemy dug trenches within 100 meters of 5th and 6th Companies' lines, forming an arc parallel to the Japanese perimeter and threatening to surround the Japanese. In the north, enemy troops tried to turn the left flank of 7th Company and, although repulsed, they also entrenched about 150 meters from Japanese lines.

The most serious threat remained the Soviet armor, now sweeping behind the battalion's lines. All day long battalion officers watched through binoculars the unequal struggle between Soviet armor and the 71st Infantry, whose inevitable retreat meant more Soviet armor could be expected on the 2/28th battalion's left flank. One platoon from 5th Company was detached to provide security on the exposed left flank. At 2100 about thirty enemy troops moved up the slope to 5th Company's lines but they were driven off after a hand grenade exchange and hand-to-hand combat. By this time, the Japanese estimated that 1,000 Soviet infantrymen with twenty-five tanks and thirty artillery guns were opposing them.

Enemy howitzers lobbed shells from defilade behind Moko Heights and added to the cacophony of bursting artillery rounds on 23 August. The shellfire from Moko was especially effective and Japanese casualties continued to rise. Psychologically the seemingly limitless supply of Soviet ammunition, tanks, aircraft, and troops began to grind down Japanese morale. Although the War Diary maintained that the 2/28th Infantry's morale remained high, Japanese psychologists later found the troops discouraged and depressed by their inability to respond in kind to the Soviet onslaught.[16] A medical officer serving adjacent to the 7th Company wondered, "What are our tanks and aircraft doing? I can't see the shape of a single friendly tank or plane."[17]

Again the Soviet infantry advanced under cover of the barrage. At 0730, taking advantage of ground fog, 150 troops with two heavy machine guns and supported by five tanks tried to break through the center of 6th Company lines. With the platoon officer wounded, NCOs took charge of the defenses and drove back the enemy attackers with machine gun fire and bayonets and swords. Battalion artillery fired point blank into the enemy, propelling their retreat down the sandy slope. Although two heavy and two light machine guns were abandoned by the retreating Soviets, Japanese battalion artillery had fired almost all its ammunition. Only a handful of rounds remained to withstand future attacks. Additionally, the 2/28th Infantry reported that the Soviets seemed to be getting reinforcements and new units had entered the fighting, bringing the enemy infantry strength to 1200 men.[18]

The attacks continued on Japanese lines. Both 5th and 6th Companies spent the day ducking enemy artillery shells then jumping up to drive away enemy infantry probes. At 1300 enemy mortar shells started to plunge down on the beleaguered companies' lines and more Japanese were killed and wounded. Battalion artillery remained silent, too low on ammunition to fire counterbattery rounds at the Soviet mortar positions.

Perhaps even more aggravating than the shortage of ammunition was the lack of water. Japanese troops became automatons, forgetting about food and sleep, and just fighting to survive a few more hours. Major Kajikawa tried to set an example by walking through company lines in the midst of heavy shelling. His presence as shells whistled overhead or crashed loudly nearby did help lift the troops' spirits even though they expected it. "It was important for officers to do this sort of thing."[19]

Yet even morale could not replace bullets. On the night of 23—24 August, five enemy tanks with a platoon of thirty infantrymen again tried to crack through the center of 6th Company's lines. Only desperate hand-to-hand fighting drove off enemy infantry who preceeded the tanks apparently trying to open a breach for the armor to penetrate. More Soviet tanks and infantry assailed the 5th Company platoon, which was guarding the battalion's left flank and rear, and overran the weakly held position. The disorganized Japanese survivors withdrew southeastward into the battalion's main lines while the Soviet armor continued to roll northward. From the clank of tracks and roar of engines, the Japanese concluded that nearly a score of enemy tanks were encircling the battalion that night. Enemy artillery fire had torn up fieldphone lines so this information could not be rapidly transmitted to regiment or division headquarters.

All night flares and illumination rounds lit up the battlefield as Soviet aircraft bombed suspected Japanese fortifications and Soviet artillery blasted away at anything that moved. The firing continued throughout the night.

Encirclement of the 2/28th Infantry

On the next morning, 24 August, Major Kajikawa discovered that the 71st Infantry had again pulled back without notifying him. Perhaps runners dispatched from the 71st had been killed or wounded in their attempts to bring the information, but the 2/28th Infantry's lack of coordination with adjacent friendly units resulted from a lack of communications equipment and the lack of a battalion staff to plan and to coordinate moves among units. A more immediate problem was the enemy howitzers lobbing shells from defilade behind Moko Heights. They extracted a steady toll of Japanese casualties, including a second lieutenant who was killed by a direct hit while observing for a machine gun crew.

More Soviet tanks appeared near the battalion front, perhaps as many as thirty altogether. Again using the concealment afforded by morning mist, Soviet infantrymen, following behind an officer waving a red flag, rushed the 5th Company's lines. Heaving grenades as they came up the slope, they grappled with the Japanese defenders who used swords and bayonets to push the attackers back down the hill.

More dangerous were the Soviet tanks that broke through the company's north flank. First Lieutenant Sadakaji, swinging his sword over his head, led several members of his machine gun company in a desperation counterattack on the tanks. According to the battalion War Diary,

> Their ability to damage the enemy tanks was nil, but the attack probably panicked the tank crews who abruptly retreated. The tanks were probably part of a probe for artillery survey and registration as well as an armed reconnaissance of our positions.[20]

From all directions, 5th Company saw only doom. To the battalion rear, seven enemy tanks fired into a Japanese supply dump, and set it afire. As the black smoke rose high in the blue sky, Soviet armored cars lurched toward 5th Company's rear and infantrymen jumped from their improvised transport to rush up the slope. Sergeant Matsushita's heavy machine gun crew mowed down those attackers and provided a momentary respite.[21]

The Soviets then resumed their concentrated artillery shelling. Between 1200 and 1400 the fire was "especially heavy." After that pounding, enemy light and heavy machine gun crews raked the crest of battalion positions. Soviet field artillery also joined in to cover yet another infantry attack, this time on 6th Company.

Enemy troops advanced to grenade-throwing range where they lobbed several hand grenades at the Japanese. Hand-to-hand combat expelled those enemy soldiers who climbed over the crest, but they regrouped and again came over the crest, repeating the same tactics against 6th Company's trenches. Each time they were hurled back, but the Japanese could no longer afford the casualties involved in such vicious close-in combat.

There was no Japanese reserve left so all members of the battalion headquarters from Major Kajikawa down grabbed rifles and joined the desperate defense of 6th Company's perimeter. Everyone was absorbed in the wild melee as Japanese and Soviets killed and maimed each other face-to-face. Rifle fire and hand grenades drove lurking Soviet troops from cover so that the Japanese could kill them. Enemy tanks moved up the hill to support the infantry, but Japanese tank killer squads armed with Molotov cocktails drove them away. Hand-to-hand fighting raged back and forth across 1st Platoon, 6th Company's position and ceased only when the entire platoon lay dead or wounded. Similarly, the machine gun platoon, whose deadly fire had been so instrumental in stopping previous Soviet attacks, was wiped out. Kajikawa himself suffered a head wound, and finally had no choice but to abandon the position.

Battalion artillery fired its last rounds of observed fire into the Soviet troops now occupying the 6th Company's left flank and temporarily sealed off the enemy penetration. Enemy tanks, however, moved into the captured position, forcing Kajikawa to move east and reassemble his battered survivors in a nearby depression. After digging shallow foxholes around their perimeter, the battalion's baggage was burned to deny it to the enemy. Around 1700 a sergeant and forty men sent by Colonel Morita appeared as reinforcements. Six hours later, during a lull in the fighting, Kajikawa was still attempting to consolidate whatever troops remained in battalion lines and ordered Warrant Officer Takada's platoon, at-

tached to 7th Company units just south of Hill 742, to battalion headquarters.

During the 800-meter move, Takada's men accidentally ran into a lone Soviet tank which had apparently lost its way and blundered to the west of the Japanese lines. Creeping in the darkness, Takada led his men close enough to the tank so that he could explode a hand grenade on its turret and set it aflame.

Such isolated successes were small consolation because a majority of the 2/28th officers and men were dead or wounded. The survivors' ammunition was almost exhausted. Moreover, enemy troops, using the captured 6th Company position as a jumping off point, were infiltrating behind the battalion and tightening the noose of encirclement.

Before the noose was closed the battalion signals platoon managed to avoid Soviet patrols and tanks and to lay fieldphone wire to 71st Infantry Headquarters. Major Kajikawa reported his desperate situation, but was ordered to hold his positions at all costs. Kajikawa then tried to adjust his lines to make contact with 7th Company to the north. The enemy tanks and soldiers in the battalion rear, however, made that plan impossible.

The rest of the cold night passed with sporadic shelling while the Soviets apparently regrouped and prepared for the next day's offensive. At 0600 the Soviet artillery began a crossfire barrage on 5th and 6th Company positions and tanks began to clank around the Japanese left flank. Kajikawa requested regimental artillery fire on the advancing Soviet armor, but this was denied because regimental artillery had no ammunition.

When two more hours of Soviet shelling created so much dust and smoke that it was difficult even to breathe, another enemy attack began. Infantrymen, covered by light and heavy machine gun fire sweeping the Japanese ridge line, climbed the slope and, waving a red flag, tried to rush the Japanese trenches. The scattered pockets of Japanese resistance fought back savagely against the attackers. Second Lieutenant Tahara of 5th Company charged into the Soviet infantrymen and chopped down three of them with his sword. A burst of Soviet automatic weapons fire hit Tahara in the side, sending him sprawling. Gravely wounded but still alive, he shouted, "Long live the Emperor," and then killed himself with a pistol in order to avoid capture.[22]

Hand grenades only slowed the Soviet wave as more and more troops poured over the ridgeline. The battalion's few survivors tried to organize a circular defense around the two remaining grenade dischargers but from all around came Japanese cries of "Pull back! Pull out!" Soviet troops overran the battalion artillery and machine gun units, killing both Japanese commanders. By 1500 the Japanese exhausted their grenade discharger ammunition, but Soviet mortar shells still fell among the remaining Japanese, killing more of them. At 1600 Soviet armor sealed off the position and enemy artillery began pounding the almost helpless Japanese.

Again Soviet infantrymen clawed their way over the ridgeline and again the Japanese met them with fixed bayonets. By this time, the Japanese ranks were so depleted that seriously wounded troops had to be left where they fell. Many died from lack of medical attention. Those wounded Japanese who man-

aged to reach cover were given grenades by the battalion doctors and ordered to stand their ground against the enemy attack.

Almost all the battalion headquarters members were wounded or dead. Major Kajikawa called on his remaining effectives to fight with him to the last. Armed with hand grenades, rifle butts, bayonets, and rocks, the Japanese somehow managed to hold out until darkness.

A handful of able-bodied, unwounded Japanese remained with no ammunition, food, or water. Even these toughest and luckiest men of 5th and 7th Companies were exhausted and unable to function in combat any longer. The survivors decided to break through the enemy ring that threatened to squeeze them to death.

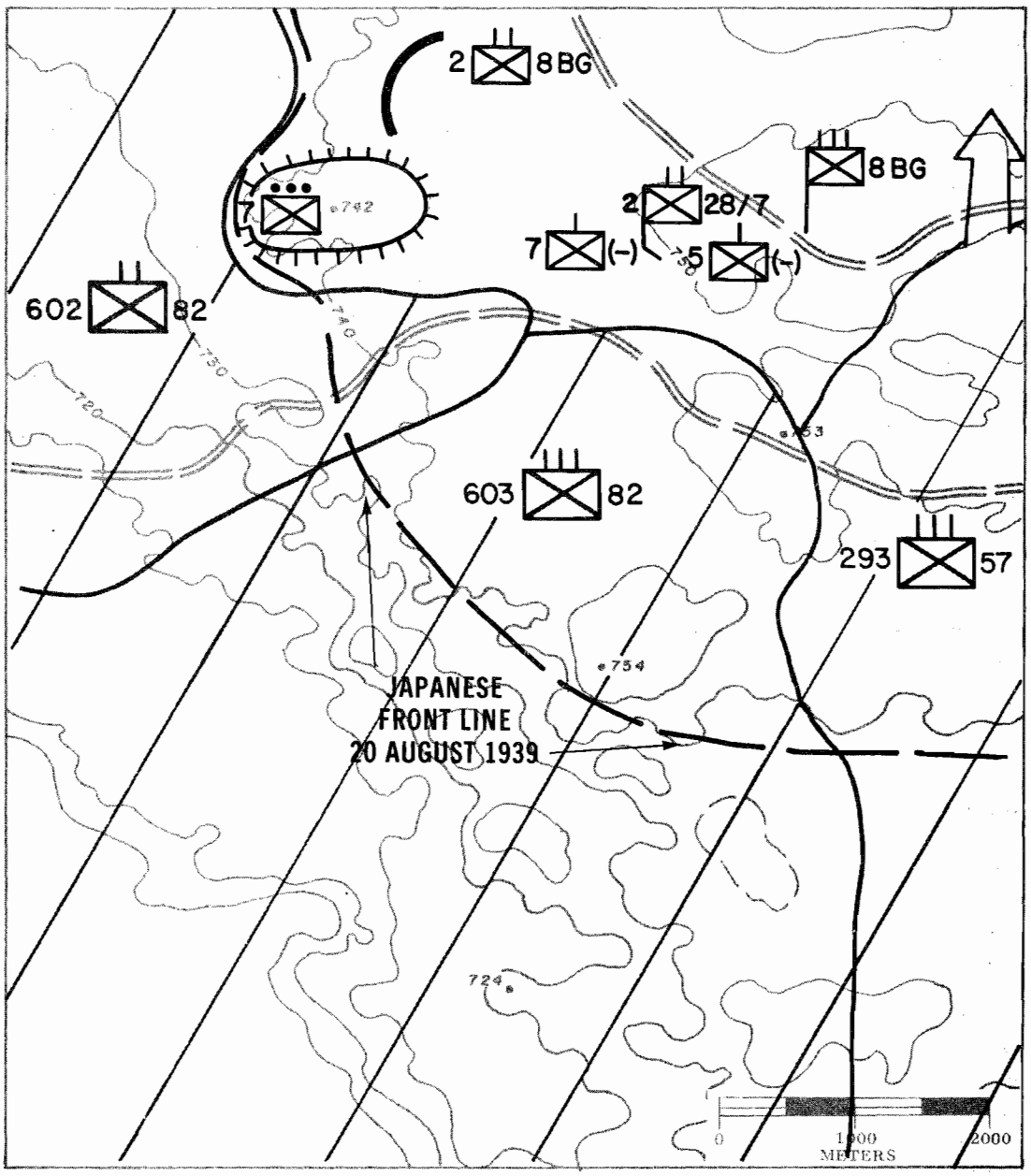
At 2100 the battalion survivors and ambulatory wounded assembled for the breakout. They hoped to use the communications trench that ran to Noro Heights and Second Lieutenant Takashima's 7th Company platoon. With only a few wounded men, 5th Company moved quickly but just as rapidly outdistanced the rest of the battalion and ran into enemy troops. Attempting to move around the enemy's left flank, 5th Company became completely separated from the battalion.

Major Kajikawa ordered a runner to try to contact 5th Company. No more was ever heard of that soldier or of a second runner given the same task. Kajikawa then ordered the men to move from the communications trench northeast to link up with Second Lieutenant Takashima's unit. Kajikawa and six NCOs took the point but in the darkness they bumped into about thirty enemy troops. In the confusion and firing, Second Lieutenant Saito's rear guard platoon became separated from the other Japanese, drifted farther east and managed to break through the enemy ring to reach what they thought was Second Lieutenant Takashima's position. However, Takashima's men apparently had vanished and Saito could not contact anyone.[23]

Stragglers from 5th Company, after wandering about 500 meters east in the darkness, managed to infiltrate past about twenty enemy troops and make their way north to Colonel Hasebe's headquarters. A few survivors of 6th Company, also working east, were less fortunate because they ran into enemy tanks and were annihilated. Major Kajikawa led the remainder of his men west around the enemy's right flank and continued north 350 meters to 7th Company's main line. About two hours later, 0200 on 26 August Kajikawa met First Lieutenant Sawada at Hasebe's headquarters and learned that 5th Company had arrived around midnight.[24]

The breakout from the south was only a first step. An 8th Border Guards officer told Kajikawa that Soviet troops had begun infiltrating the Hasebe detachment's left flank and that enemy artillery and mortar fire made any movement within their perimeter dangerous. The detachment itself was planning a breakout from the encirclement. At this time, the 2/28th Infantry could muster only fifty-five men, one heavy and two light machine guns, and one grenade discharger.[25] (See Map 18.)

While the survivors of 5th and 7th Companies made their way into the Hasebe's unit lines, Second Lieutenant Takashima faced a new enemy push on



Map 18. Soviet gains to 26 August 1939.

Hill 742. It was deathly still, no artillery fire or flares lit the night but like a dark wave black shapes moved up the hill to within fifty meters of the Japanese. Using a captured Soviet machine gun, the Japanese randomly sprayed the attackers, who pulled back in the same eerie silence in which they had come.

On the morning of 26 August Second Lieutenant Takashima scanned the Soviet lines below Hill 742 with his binoculars and spotted a Soviet lieutenant about 250 meters away. Superior Private Narita promptly shot him to death. That brought a Soviet mortar bombardment which bracketed the two men and culminated when a shell landed in their trench, shaking them but otherwise leaving them unharmed.[26]

On the detachment's south flank 100 enemy infantrymen with four tanks tried to overrun the newly established battalion positions. The Hasebe Detachment's artillery fire damaged one tank and the others pulled back. Combined infantry and artillery attacks against 7th Company positions marked the day, but the heaviest attack came in the evening.

Around 1930 a large number of enemy soldiers crawled through the evening fog to Takashima's lines. A flurry of Soviet hand grenades exploded on the Japanese trenches. Swords and bayonets met the enemy troops as they grappled within Japanese lines. More enemy infantrymen appeared south of the platoon and a superior private manning a heavy machine gun and screaming "Bastards" at the top of his lungs shot them down until a bullet in the head killed him. Dead and wounded Japanese fell everywhere. Only the support of the Hasebe unit's four artillery guns firing point blank broke the enemy attack.[27]

The battalion was ordered to defend its lines to the death. After all stragglers had been collected near Hill 742 and contact had been established with Second Lieutenant Takashima, only 124 men were left to defend a 2,000-meter front.[28] Ammunition, food, and water were gone and all that the trapped Japanese could do was dig in and hope to take a few of the enemy with them. Mutual fire support was impossible and each pocket of Japanese troops had to fight its own lonely last stand. Wounded soldiers also were ordered to fight to the finish. Then the battalion got a reprieve. Hasebe, recalling Major Ito's injunction to hold until 24 August, believed that he could not accomplish his duty by allowing his troops to be annihilated. Thus at 2100 he issued the order to pull back.

Colonel Hasebe, by fieldphone, ordered Kajikawa to withdraw. The night was perfect for such an escape because there were no stars or moonlight and patches of fog covered the banks of the Holsten River, which the battalion had to cross to reach safety.

Joining forces with elements of the Hasebe Unit, the battalion moved out at 0100 on 27 August in an extended column formation. Second Lieutenant Takashima and twelve men preceded the column by 100 meters as point while 5th Company acted as rear guard 300 meters behind the column. During the move there was no enemy pursuit or opposition, but the point element, a medical platoon, and a company of field artillery got lost in the black, featureless desert. The battalion aide-de-camp, First Lieutenant Muranaka, also disappeared in the blackness.

Second Lieutenant Takashima and his point squad stumbled into a Soviet picket line. He tried to bluff his way through by answering a sentry's challenge in Russian, but got small arms fire in reply. The point then scattered and only a few rejoined the main column.

Most of the column reached Komu Heights, about 3,500 meters northeast of Hill 742, but found it occupied by enemy troops. A brief skirmish broke out around 0600, further disrupting the column, and contact with Major Kajikawa was lost. By luck the main column and its stragglers both turned west and soon joined forces. During the move the Japanese met a Soviet patrol but drove them off and even took a prisoner.

A superior private who had taken cover in a shell hole looked up to see a Soviet soldier peering over the crater's lip. The quick-witted Japanese trooper grabbed his surprised opponent's collar and pulled him into the shell hole where he pummeled him into unconsciousness. He then used his canteen straps to tie the prisoner's hands and dragged his quarry back to the Japanese positions.[29]

Using ground contours and depressions to avoid detection, the battalion moved near Hill 739 by noon and about two hours later Japanese scouts found elements of the 71st Infantry. Waving a Japanese flag for recognition, the battalion crossed into their lines. But Soviet armor had also outflanked that unit so Kajikawa's men had to make yet another escape.

A reconnaissance patrol reported hearing gunfire near the pontoon bridge across the Holsten where the unit hoped to cross the river. Scouts sent to investigate the firing were never heard from again. Similarly, a point squad, a machine gun crew, and the remaining battalion artillerymen were trapped and annihilated by Soviet armor that guarded the pontoon bridge. Fully aware by then of the attempted Japanese breakout, enemy artillery shelled their positions, killing and wounding several.

His position completely untenable, Major Kajikawa led his men in another breakout that night. The troops moved in three ranks with Kajikawa in the van. About 2200 the Japanese happened upon a broken-down Soviet supply truck and shot to death four enemy soldiers guarding it. The truck held canned meat and biscuits so the famished troops had nourishment for their continuing withdrawal.[30]

When the Japanese reached the south bank of the Holsten, the Soviet tanks and infantry seemed to be everywhere. They spent precious time trying to find a gap in the enemy patrols but failed. By 0130 on 28 August enemy tanks had surrounded them and sporadic firing was directed their way. Waiting for daylight would mean annihilation so Kajikawa ordered the men to move toward the river.

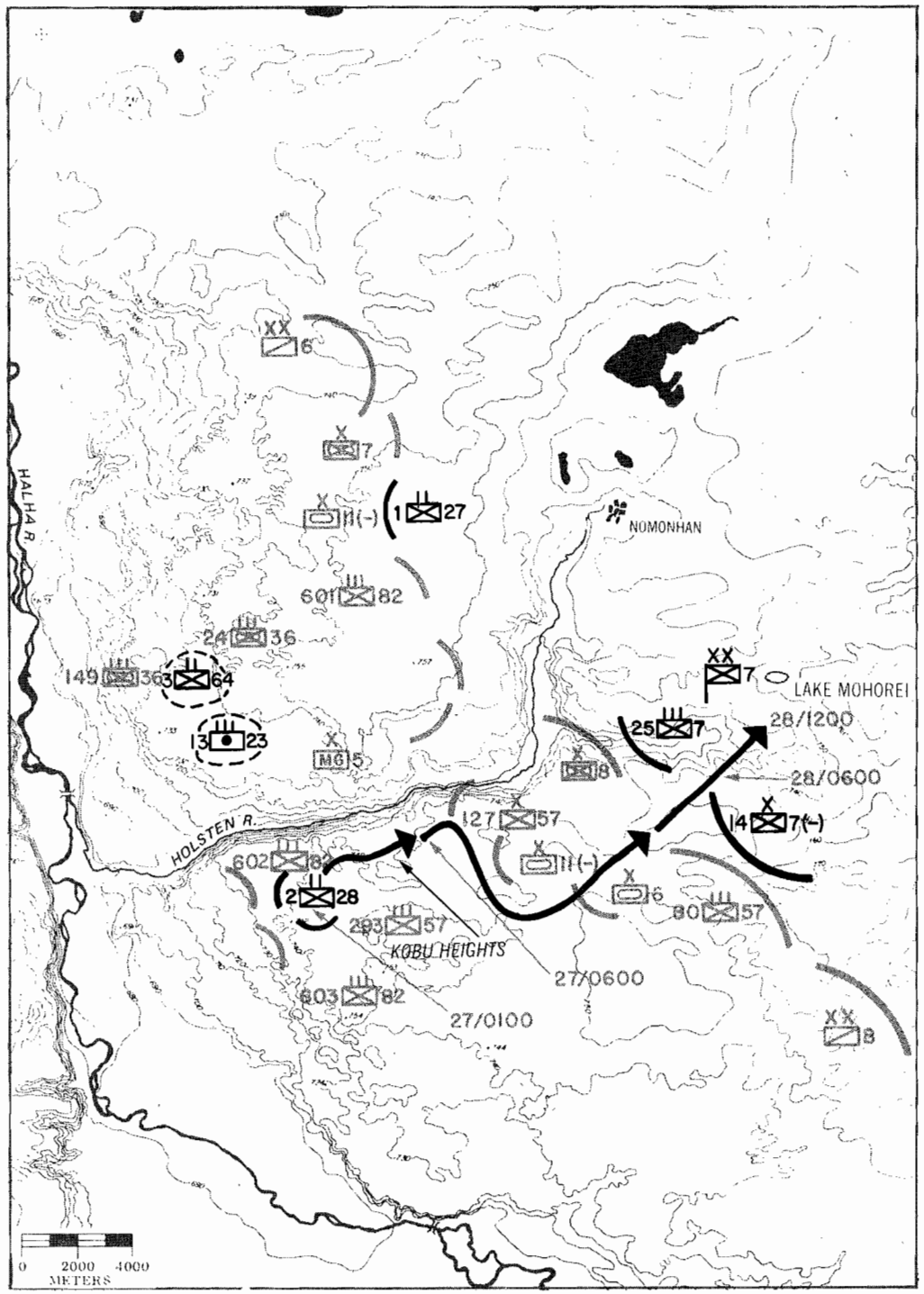
Enemy tanks on both sides of the Japanese detected the movement and along with Soviet riflemen fired wildly in the darkness hoping to hit something. Using the North Star for a guide, the Japanese quite by chance filtered through a gap in the enemy line and pushed farther east. Under the impression that they had crossed the river (they apparently skirted the swamp and marsh bordering the south bank of the Holsten), the battalion's luck continued as they met a Japanese truck convoy attached to the 25th Infantry. They had

finally broken the Soviet encirclement. (See Map 19.)

Major Kajikawa, leaving his exhausted but lucky survivors in 25th Infantry lines, reported to LTG Ogisu Rippei, commander of the 6th Army.[31] Of 28 officers and 854 enlisted men, 13 officers and 264 soldiers had been killed in action. Among the wounded were 11 officers and 367 men and 47 enlisted men were missing.[32] Of the battalion's original 24 officers, 17 were dead or wounded, both battalion artillery officers were dead, and 4 junior officers from other 28th Infantry companies who served in the battalion were dead or wounded.[33]

The 2/28th Infantry was in no condition to perform any mission. The 6th Army's needs were so great, however, that the 2/28th was designated a second echelon unit, resupplied and reequipped for a general offensive.

Although about ten kilometers from the Soviet lines, enemy artillery fire forced the battalion to move to safer positions on 30 and 31 August. Through early September the men prepared for a new offensive, but on 16 September a cease-fire agreement went into effect. The War Diary tersely concluded, "We terminated our combat operations and are awaiting orders."[34] Ironically, the 2/28th Infantry's next combat orders were for Guadalcanal where the battalion would be destroyed.



Map 19. Breakout of 2/28th and situation as of 28 August 1939.

Conclusion

6

Outcome

The Soviet armored attack, skillfully directed by General Georgi K. Zhukov of later World War II fame, rapidly turned the southern flank of the IJA's 23d Division. To the north, progress was slower, but after vicious fighting on Fui Heights, where flame-throwing Soviet tanks finally dislodged and routed the Japanese defenders, the "Red juggernaut" rolled up the Japanese right flank. At the village of Nomonhan, the Soviet armored columns met and sealed off the 23d Division. It seems certain that if the Soviets had pressed their pursuit operations, 6th Army would have been routed. However, the Soviets halted at the boundary line that they maintained was the border and began digging positions.[1] Diplomatic negotiations already in progress between Japan and the Soviet Union were accelerated as the fighting slackened in early September. Finally, a cease-fire went into effect on 16 September.[2]

It may be argued that the mobile warfare at Nomonhan was the "first battle" of Japan's anticipated "next war" against the Soviet Union. The Changkufeng battle one year earlier was not a true test of Japanese tactical doctrine because of its relatively small scale and the terrain limitations on each side's ability to maneuver. The manifestation of Soviet combined arms doctrine, which, after all, was what the IJA had designed its tactical doctrine to counter, occurred then on Mongolian steppes in the summer of 1939. Even though the IJA lost its "first battle," the defeat had little impact on Japanese tactical doctrine.

Doctrine

The Japanese had designed a tactical doctrine to meet a specific Soviet combined arms threat. This doctrine relied heavily on the intangibles of battle—morale, fighting spirit, leadership—to compensate for the relative lack of Japanese materiel compared to the Soviets. Doctrine substituted for the heavy divisions that the Japanese could have used against the Soviet armor-heavy formations.

Like all doctrine, the IJA's would capitalize on national values and strengths to defeat a foe. It also contained specific assumptions about the capabilities of the potential enemy. The concept of a short war fought to a quick, decisive conclusion *(sokusen sokketsu)*, for instance, merely expressed the IJA's realization that it lacked the manpower and materiel resources to fight a protracted war against the Soviets. The tactics to com-

plement that goal, particularly flanking maneuvers to disrupt and demoralize superior Soviet forces, were an attempt to avoid a costly head-on battle of attrition. Furthermore, the IJA did adopt doctrine to exploit qualities like extreme courage and audacity, which it identified as being uniquely Japanese. Such doctrine was unquestionably valuable against enemy infantry.

Japanese doctrine also contained certain premises about the Soviet foe. The Japanese did not underestimate the Soviet's materiel advantages, but they believed that Japanese "spiritual power"—the intangibles of the battlefield—would offset the deficiency. Soviet doctrine, they felt, was too inflexible and the Russian character too rigid to adapt quickly to Japanese tactics which stressed surprise and maneuver. If national strengths and enemy capabilities may be described as dynamics whose interaction produces doctrine, a brief review of the Nomonhan fighting will illustrate the effect of battle on such forces.

Japanese infantry doctrine presumed imaginative leadership that could adapt itself to a changing battlefield. Yet after the failure of the 23d Division's July offensives, this leadership, at least at the division and army levels, accepted a defensive role in positional warfare that ran counter to all Japanese Army doctrine. The Japanese found themselves fighting the Soviets' kind of war. Thus, the Japanese not only lacked effective materiel countermeasures against Soviet artillery and air power, but also exhibited little flexibility.

In July the Japanese offensives against the Soviet forces testified to the first psychological basis of Japanese morale which did not waver during the hard fighting. The IJA's materiel basis, however, was inadequate for the demands of modern warfare. Doctrine could carry it only so far when there were too few Japanese tanks and too few artillery pieces to influence decisively the outcome of the battle. This left the Japanese infantrymen armed with gasoline-filled bottles to face counterattacks by Soviet tanks and infantry supported by artillery. It meant that Japanese attackers could not reach their objective, which was the enemy infantry.

Stereotypes of their Soviet opponents also hindered Japanese operations. Japanese commanders refused to believe that the Soviets could concentrate large combined arms forces so far from a railhead. They rejected the notion that the Soviets could adapt themselves to defeat Japanese tactics. At the IJA division level this meant that commanders were astounded when their unprecedented artillery preparation for the 23 July offensive provoked an even heavier Soviet counterbattery fire. At the battalion level this meant that Japanese soldiers suffered through the daily Soviet artillery bombardments because their own artillery was quantitatively incapable of silencing the Soviet guns.

The Japanese, then, underestimated their enemy. Lieutenant Colonel Azuma led his reconnaissance element into a trap because he treated his foe lightly. Similarly, the 7th Division marched to Nomonhan confident of an easy victory. Such preconceptions made defeat even more stunning. For whatever reasons, the Soviets took the Japanese very seriously and were willing to commit all the men and materiel necessary to defeat them.

While on the defensive in August, the Japanese had to fight in a doctrinal vacuum. One defended a position only in order to prepare for a counterattack. Little wonder Japanese troops erected flimsy shelters initially because they believed that they would soon be out of those positions and on the offensive again. After Soviet artillery pounded those shelters to rubble, the Japanese dug deeper. The doctrinal void also affected intelligence. Japanese doctrine, based on maneuver and surprise, presumed an enemy off-balance and forced to react to Japanese initiatives. It was not so much that the Japanese at all levels ignored intelligence indicators of a forthcoming Soviet offensive. They failed to evaluate these indicators properly. One reason was that the Japanese were so preoccupied with the notion of counterattacking the Soviets that they neglected the possibility that a large-scale Soviet offensive might not present them with the chance to counterattack.

One Japanese misconception led to another. Since the Soviets were inflexible, their tactics were too rigid to break the Japanese defenses. Any Soviet offensive would soon collapse and then the Japanese could counterattack and destroy the Soviets. And so it went, except that the Soviets showed adaptability—especially in protecting their light tanks—while the Japanese displayed inflexibility.

But never is a battle so clear-cut. Many of the Soviet troops who initially opposed the 2/28th Infantry were of low caliber. The Soviet 82d and 57th Rifle Divisions were poorly trained, hastily organized territorial militia. They made mistakes and the 603d Rifle Regiment, 82d Rifle Division, broke and ran its first time under fire. Soviet tactics were repetitious, like their unimaginative frontal assaults or their repeated infiltration attempts despite disastrous results. Such errors reinforced Japanese preconceptions of the Soviets and may have lulled the Japanese into a false sense of security. Soviet strength was, however, composite, depending on the combined arms mass and not the single unit.

Japanese strength, conversely, lay in small units and the epitome of Japanese doctrine was embodied in small unit tactics. Night attacks at platoon or company level and the willingness to engage in hand-to-hand combat were hallmarks of the Japanese infantryman. Indeed such tactics were very successful against individual Soviet infantry units.

Imagination and daring were prime ingredients in the 2/28th's night attacks. Officers welcomed the risks of hand-to-hand combat and counted on surprise and shock action to offset superior numbers of enemy troops. Courage and tenacity were readily apparent throughout the 2/28th's combat operations at Nomonhan. But such courage and shock tactics had only limited value against Soviet tanks and artillery. No matter how much battle-courage the men possessed, no matter how competent their officers, they could not get through the zone of Soviet artillery fire protecting the Soviet infantry. The Japanese soldier could not get close enough to his Soviet foe to use his courage and daring to best advantage. While a Japanese squad might charge headlong into a Soviet infantry platoon with a good chance for success, the same squad would be shot to pieces if they tried to rush Soviet tanks.

Battlefield courage also influenced the force structure. There was no bat-

talion staff to coordinate logistics, intelligence, operations, and personnel. Battalion commanders and their aides-de-camp had to assume these burdens. But the primary role for Japanese commanders was to inspire battlefield courage by their exemplary leadership. Leadership had precedence over the conduct of battalion affairs.

It was a system that made great demands on officers' courage and pushed officers to the limits of their abilities. The system also required junior officers with courage and initiative. It is apparent that the 2/28th Infantry had such young officers, but even their élan could not defeat Soviet tanks. The price, moreover, of such aggressive leadership was prohibitive.

The Cost of Courage

The 2/28th Infantry suffered almost 86 percent casualties, a percentage substantially higher than the staggering 73 percent overall Japanese losses. Yet the men held together as a unit. Significantly, Japanese doctrine made leadership like that displayed by Major Kajikawa* the norm, not the exception. Even had Kajikawa been killed or otherwise incapacitated, it has been argued that the surviving junior officers and NCOs would have held the unit together and perhaps even exhibited better leadership.[3] It is a moot point, but one worth noting, that the 71st Infantry, for example, went through four commanding officers during the fighting, and its performance suffered accordingly.[4] Doctrine assumed all officers could lead equally well, but the experience of the battlefield showed some led more equally than others.

Faced with devastating casualties and unimaginable hardships, the 2/28th did manage to function as a combat unit throughout the battle. The unit never enjoyed sustained logistic support. Ammunition, replacements, and supplies arrived sporadically, despite the determination and risks of the service troops. The Japanese never had the logistic support they required, but in part this resulted from the low priority assigned to logistics. The overworked battalion commander could ask higher headquarters for more artillery and more ammunition, and higher headquarters could reply that more aggressive leadership was the solution. The aggressive, at times inspired, leadership of junior officers was, in large measure, responsible for unit cohesion. As the price for such daring leadership, the battalion lost more officers in terms of percentage than their counterparts' loss rate overall. Moreover, their bitter experience undermined the survivors' faith in the higher echelons of command.[5] The 7th Division Headquarters reported, for example, that Japanese officers and men suffered so greatly during the fighting against the Soviets that it would be difficult to restore their previous high morale.[6] Morale, however, was central to Japanese tactical doctrine.

Individual bravery and leadership could not overcome doctrinal and materiel deficiencies. In fact, the Japanese emphasis on the spirit and on leadership qualities probably exacerbated Japanese losses. Attrition rates at Nomonhan were significantly higher than in previous Japanese wars.[7] The Japanese regarded such spiritual power as the soul of tactics and as fundamental

**Kajikawa died of illness on 1 February 1941 in a field hospital in Northern Manchuria.*

for modern warfare. Spiritual power was viewed as the great equalizer. Leadership qualities flowed from those tactical considerations rather than being the source of them.

Doctrinal Implications for the IJA

While the overwhelming Soviet qualitative and quantitative materiel superiority ultimately defeated the Japanese at Nomonhan, the defeat cannot be ascribed to materiel deficiencies alone. A tactical doctrine designed for infantrymen that stressed offensive action to achieve a quick victory was pitted against a doctrine which emphasized combined arms and protracted warfare. The Japanese decision to fight a war of attrition against the superior Soviet Red Army was, in retrospect, a mistake. It should be remembered that the Kwantung Army based its decision on its perception of how the Soviets would fight. In other words, the dynamism between Japanese values and assumed enemy capabilities produced a Japanese tactical doctrine that was neutralized when the Soviets did not fight according to Japanese expectations. Only the decision of a battle exposes what later generations regard as self-evident truths.

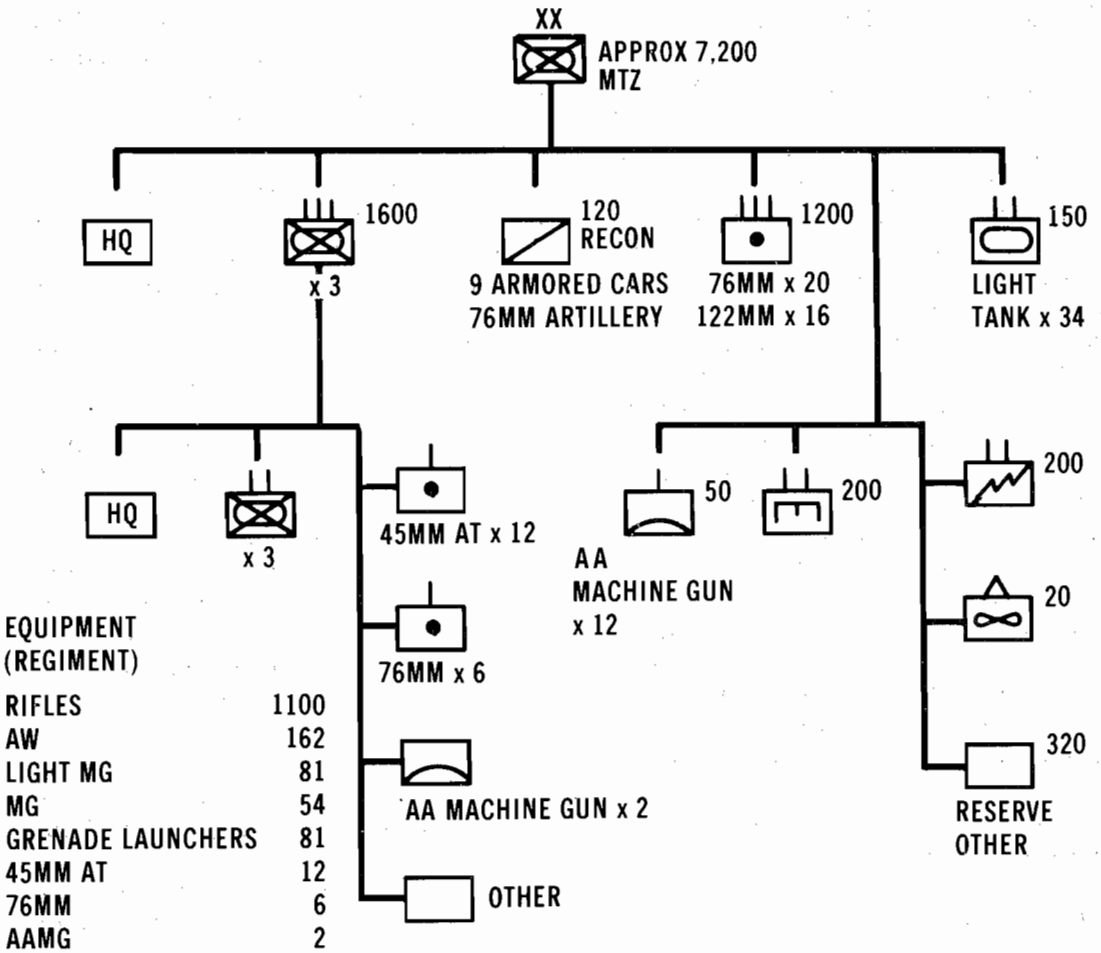
First Lieutenant Sadakaji, with his sword attacking Soviet tanks, personified the dilemma of doctrine and force structure which impaled the Japanese. A paucity of resources and money dictated a light infantry force structure. A tactical doctrine to complement this force structure emerged after decades of painstaking analysis and heated arguments. To alter drastically IJA tactical doctrine was, in effect, to pull the props from under Japanese spirit—the intangibles of battle—to deny the martial values themselves. Perhaps it could have been done, and the end result would have been an army with a glittering array of weaponry, but no soul.

For that reason it should not be strange that a major lesson IJA staff officers drew from Nomonhan was the value of the intangibles on the battlefield exemplified by the courage to defend a position to the death. Be it Second Lieutenant Tahara committing suicide to avoid capture, Captain Tsuji urging his tried men to press forward in a vicious night attack, or the nameless hundreds of enlisted soldiers fighting to the death, one cannot discard overnight the training and doctrine that produced such exceptional valor.

The IJA remained an infantry-heavy force. It always lacked sufficient armor because armor was unaffordable. Japanese strategic thought opted for the aircraft. Beyond that basic force structure decision (made three years before Nomonhan) the IJA never did solve the dilemma of a judicious balance of traditional martial values and modern weaponry.

Despite the numerous postmortems by field units and higher headquarters, the IJA's basic conclusion was that the greatest lesson from the Nomonhan experience was the magnificent display of traditional spiritual power as the basis of modern warfare.[8] Naturally, firepower would have to be increased to complement this spiritual power, but the Japanese continued to rely on intangible factors to win battles. As infantry they were excellent, but as soldiers fighting a modern war they were an anachronism, as the Pacific War would ultimately demonstrate.

36TH SOVIET MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION (1939)*

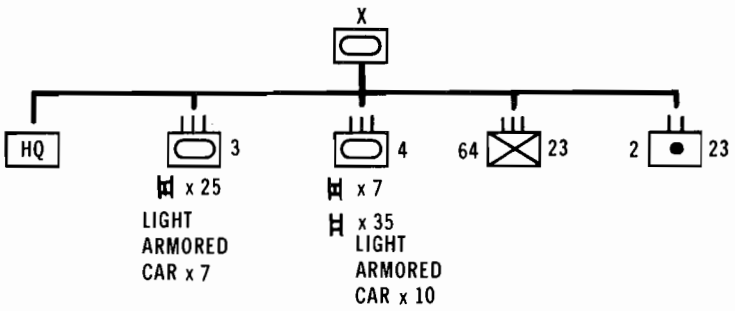


EQUIPMENT (REGIMENT)	
RIFLES	1100
AW	162
LIGHT MG	81
MG	54
GRENADE LAUNCHERS	81
45MM AT	12
76MM	6
AAMG	2

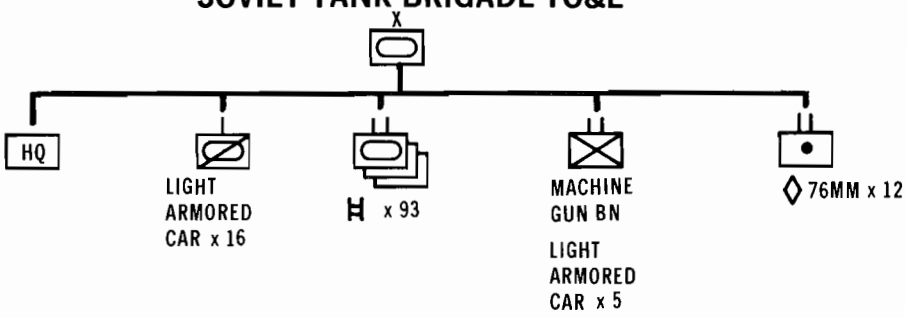
* 36TH DIVISION STRENGTH IS AT VARIANCE WITH THE 1939 TO&E OF A SOVIET MOTORIZED RIFLE DIVISION WHICH SHOWS 37 LIGHT TANKS, 58 ARMORED CARS, AND AA AND AT BATTALIONS.

SOURCE KG, 160.

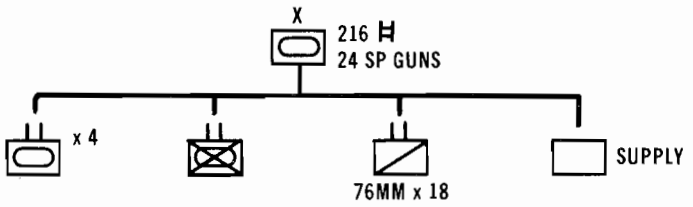
YASUOKA DETACHMENT



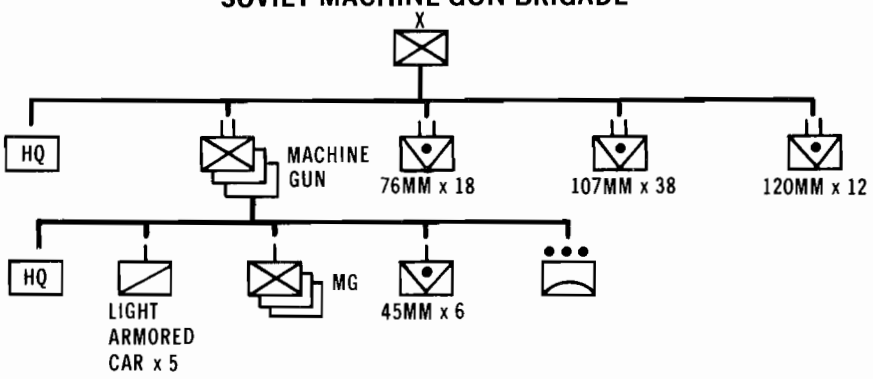
JAPANESE ESTIMATE OF 1939 SOVIET TANK BRIGADE TO&E



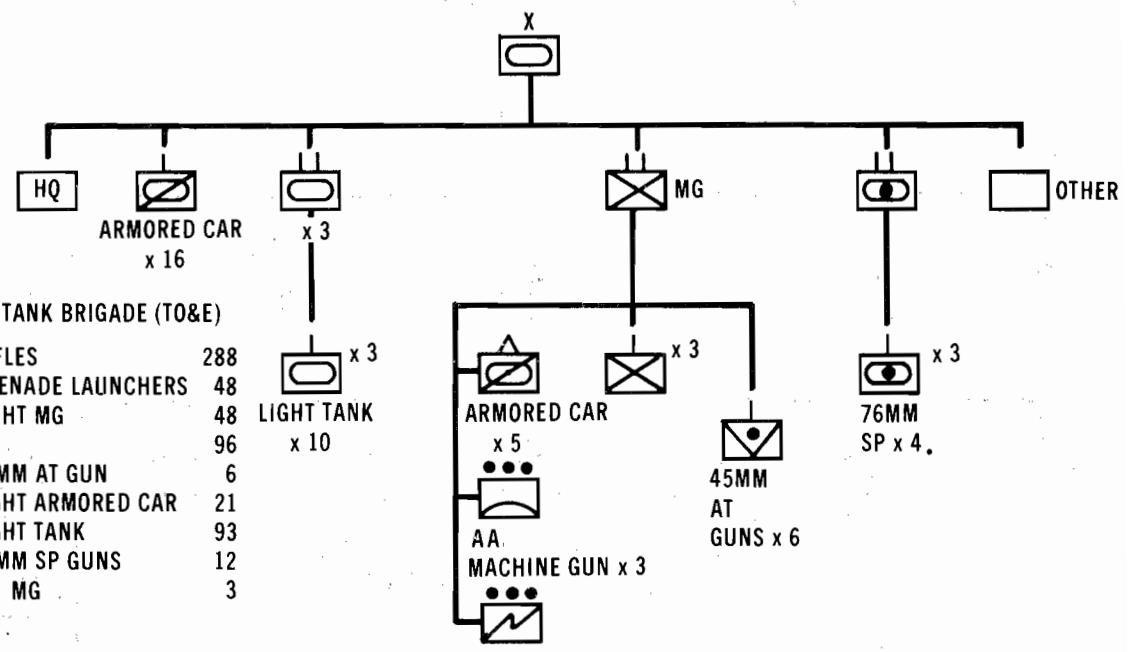
STANDARD SOVIET TANK BRIGADE TO&E (1939)



SOVIET MACHINE GUN BRIGADE



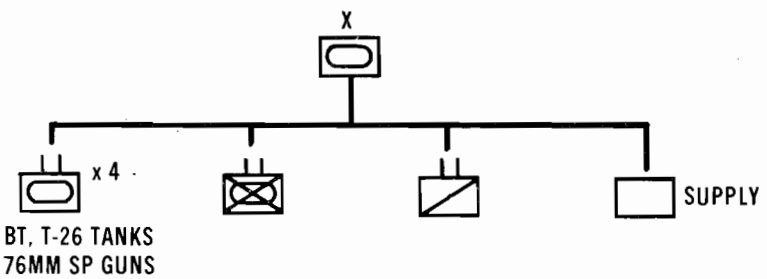
SOVIET TANK BRIGADE*



TANK BRIGADE (TO&E)

RIFLES	288
GRENADE LAUNCHERS	48
LIGHT MG	48
MG	96
45MM AT GUN	6
LIGHT ARMORED CAR	21
LIGHT TANK	93
76MM SP GUNS	12
AA MG	3

SOVIET LIGHT TANK BRIGADE (1938 TO&E)



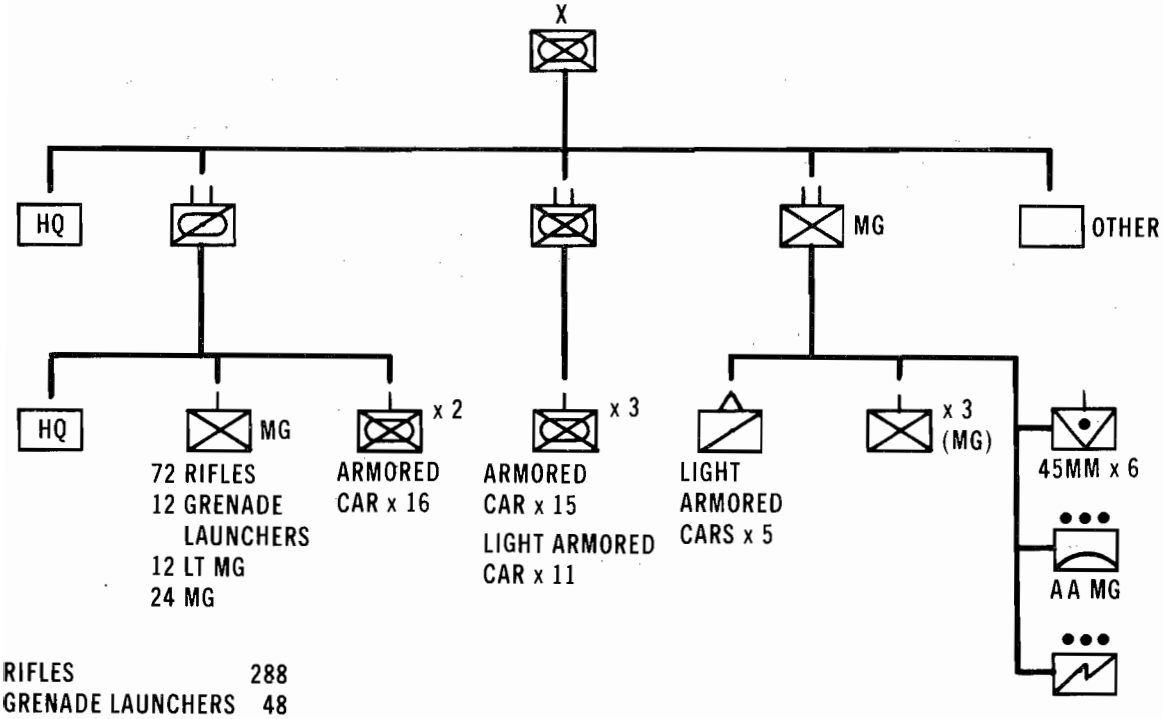
54 x BT, T-26 TANKS
6 x 76MM SP GUNS

TOTAL 216 LIGHT TANKS
24 SP GUNS

* THIS TO&E IS SIMILIAR TO THE 1935 SOVIET SEPARATE MECHANIZED BRIGADE, SOMETIMES CALLED AN ARMORED INFANTRY BRIGADE, WHICH SUPPOSEDLY MERGED INTO A TANK BRIGADE IN 1938.

SOURCE: KURONO, "YUKEITEKI SENTO . . ."

SOVIET MOTORIZED ARMORED BRIGADE



RIFLES	288
GRENADE LAUNCHERS	48
LT MG	48
MG	96
45MM	6
ARMORED CAR	80
LIGHT ARMORED CAR	38

SOURCE: KURONO, "YUKEITEKI SENTO . . ." AND KG, 161.

Appendix 2. Japanese officers cited in text

Name	*Rank*	*Position*	*Status*
Aoyagi Kinichiro	CPT	Commander, 5th Company, 2/28th Battalion	KIA
Azuma Shuji	LTC	Acting Commander, 71st Infantry Regiment	KIA
Azuma Yaozo	LTC	Commander, Reconnaissance Element, 23d Division	KIA
Hasebe Riei	COL	Commander, 8th Border Guards	Suicide
Hattori Takushiro	LTC	Staff Officer, Kwantung Army	Relieved
Kajikawa Tomiji	MAJ	Commander, 2/28th Battalion	WIA
Komatsubara Michitaro	LTG	Commander, 23d Infantry Division	Relieved
Morita Tetsuji	COL	Commander, 71st Infantry Regiment	KIA
Muranaka Shoichi	1LT	Aide-de-camp, Commander, 2/28th Battalion	WIA
Nagano Eizo	COL	Commander, 71st Infantry Regiment	WIA
Nakano Tomizo	2LT	Commander, 1st Platoon, 6th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Nishinome Shogoro	2LT	Commander, 2d Platoon, 6th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Ogisu Rippei	LTG	Commander, 6th Army	Relieved
Sadakaji Tetsuo	1LT	Commander, Machine Gun Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Saito Kiyokichi	1LT	Commander, 7th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Sano Shoji	2LT	Commander, 2d Platoon, 5th Company, 2/28th Bn	WIA
Sawada Tetsuro	1LT	Commander, Weapons Platoon, 5th Company, 2/28th	WIA
Sumi Shinichiro	COL	Commander, 26th Infantry Regiment	Relieved
Suzuki Katsushi	2LT	Commander, 3d Platoon, 7th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Tahara Tamotsu	2LT	Commander, 1st Platoon, 5th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Takashima Masao	2LT	Commander, 2d Platoon, 7th Company, 2/28th Bn	
Tsuji Kiichi	CPT	Commander, 6th Company, 2/28th Bn	KIA
Tsuji Masanobu	MAJ	Staff Officer, Kwantung Army	Relieved
Ueda Kenkichi	GEN	Commander, Kwantung Army	Relieved
Yamagata Takemitsu	COL	Commander, 64th Infantry Regiment	Suicide
Yasuoka Masaomi	LTG	Commander, Yasuoka Task Force	Relieved

Appendix 3. Japanese casualties by branch and weapons type.

I. Japanese Army Attrition by Branch (Percentage)

	Russo-Japanese War (1904-05)	Changkufeng (1938)	Nomonhan (1939)
Infantry	14.4	24.7	70.6
Cavalry	1.7	10.7	51.2
Artillery	4.1	7.7	65.0
Engineers	0.2	14.7	50.0
Transport	0.2		25.4
Sanitation	1.8	12.6	33.7

II. Japanese Wounds by Weapons Type (Percentage)

	Rifle	Artillery	Other
Russo-Japanese War			
a) non-seige warfare	81.0	13.7	5.3
b) seige warfare	60.5	22.9	16.6
Changkufeng	35.4	36.9	28.7
Nomonhan			
WIA	35.9	53.0	11.1
KIA	37.3	51.2	11.5

Notes

Abbreviations Used in Notes

Archives—Archives of the Imperial Army, Navy, and Other Government Agencies, 1868—1945.
KG—Kantōgun
NJS—Nomonhan jikenshi: Dai 23 shidan no sentō.
SC—"Senjō shinri chōsa hōkoku: Senjō shinri chōsa ni motozuku shoken."
SWABP—Small Wars and Border Problems.
War Diary—Hohei dai 28 rentai dai 2 daitai, Kōanhōku-sho shin bakuko sayō-kuki fukin Nomonhan fukin sentō shōhō.

Preface

1. New York *Times*, 20 July 1939, p. 18.
2. The most comprehensive treatment in English is U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, Japanese Research Division, Military History Section, Headquarters U.S. Army Forces Far East, *Small Wars and Border Problems*, vol. 11, pt. 3, Book B and Book C, *The Nomonhan Incident (1939)* (1956) (hereafter cited as *SWABP*). The re-appearance of IJA archival materials previously believed destroyed dates these studies. A comprehensive treatment of the Kwantung Army including an extensive examination of the Nomonhan fighting will soon be available as Alvin Coox's *The Rise and Fall of the Kwantung Army: From Portsmouth 1905 to Nomonhan 1939*, forthcoming.

Chapter 1

1. This overview is based on Bōeichō Bōeikenshūjō senshibu [Headquarters Self Defense Forces, Self Defense Forces National Defense College, Military History Department], ed., *Soren gawa shiryō kara mita Nomonhan jiken Soren no kokkyō funsō taisho* [The Nomonhan Incident viewed from Soviet documents: coping with disputes on the Soviet border], (1978), passim.

Chapter 2

1. For an excellent description of Japanese ambition and actions in Manchuria see Mark R. Peattie, *Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton University Press, 1975).
2. Hata Ikuhikō, "The Japanese-Soviet Confrontation, 1935—1939," translated with an introduction by Alvin D. Coox in James W. Morley, ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR 1935—1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 115.

3. John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 55—56. By 1937 the Soviets had about 15,000 tanks and produced about 3,000 annually. By 1940 the Japanese a total of 573 tanks. More than 80 percent of the Soviet tanks used in the August 1939 offensive were light tanks.
4. The most comprehensive treatment of the Changkufeng Incident is Alvin D. Coox, *The Anatomy of a Small War: The Soviet-Japanese Struggle for Changkufeng/Khasan, 1938* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977).
5. Rikujō Jieitai kanbugakkō shūshinkai, [Ground Self Defense Forces Command and General Staff College], ed., *Kindai Nihon sensōshi gaisetsu* [An outline of modern Japanese war history] (Tokyo: Rikujō Jieitai kanbugakkō shūshinkai, 1968), p. 180.
6. Hata, "Japanese-Soviet Confrontation," p. 159.
7. Kantōgun shireikan [Kwantung Army Headquarters], "Kansakurei dai 1488 gō bessatsu. Man 'So' kokkyō funsō shori yōkō" [Principles for the settlement of Manchurian-Soviet border disputes], cited in Tsunoda Jun, ed., *Gendaishi shiryō,* vol. 10, *Nitchū Sensō,* pt. 3 [Documents on modern history, vol. 10, The Sino-Japanese War, pt. 3] (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1964), pp. 106—7 (hereafter cited as *GDSSR* 10).
8. Bōeichō senshishitsu [Ground Self Defense Forces Military History Room] ed., *Nomonhan jikenshi: Dai 23 shidan no sentō* [A history of the Nomonhan Incident: the battle of the 23d Division], (1977) special study prepared for the use of students at the Japan Command and General Staff College, p. 24 (hereafter cited as *NJS*).
9. "Kohon sanden 194 sono 1—5" [Komatsubara headquarters staff transmission 194, pts. 1—5], 13 May 1939, *GDSSR* 10, pp. 107—8. Originally classified secret.
10. *NJS,* pp. 14—15.
11. *NJS,* p. 15. For a comparison of IJA square and triangular divisions see Bōeichō bōeikenshūjō senshishitsu, ed., *Senshi sōsho Kantōgun* (1) *Tai So senbi Nomonhan jiken* [Official war history series: the Kwantung Army, vol. 1, Preparations for the war against the USSR and the Nomonhan Incident] (Tokyo: Asagumo shimbunsha, 1969), pp. 166—69 (hereafter cited as *KG*).
12. *KG,* p. 145.
13. U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, Japanese Research Division, Military History Section, Headquarters U.S. Army Forces Far East, and Eighth U.S. Army (Rear), ed., *Japanese Studies on Manchuria,* vol. 5, *Infantry Operations,* 1956, p. 24.
14. *KG,* p. 167; Hohei dai 28 rentai dai 2 daitai [Second Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment], *Kōanhōku-sho shin bakuko sayokuki fukin Nomonhan fukin sentō shōhō* [Detailed report of fighting in general area of Nomonhan in Hsing-an North Province], 20 June—16 September 1939, in Library of Congress, comp., *Archives of the Imperial Army, Navy, and Other Government Agencies, 1868—1945,* Reel 133 (hereafter cited as *Archives*). The war diary compiled by the 2/28th Infantry during the Nomonhan fighting was originally classified top secret (hereafter cited as War Diary).
15. Shirokawa Yoshinori Rikugun daijin [War Minister Shirokawa Yoshinori], *Sentō kōyō* [Manual of combat principles] (Tokyo: War Ministry, 1932; reprint ed., Tokyo: Ikeda shobō, 1977), pp. 1—2. Also see *Infantry Operations,* pp. 78—81.
16. See the parallels not only in doctrine but even in wording in Rikugun kyōiku kanbu [Inspector General of Military Education], ed., *Meiji 42 nen Hohei sōten* [Infantry drill manual, 1909 edition] (Tokyo: Rikugun insatsubu, 1909), pp. 2—6; Rikugun kyōiku kanbu, ed., *Hohei sentō kyōren hensan yoshi* [Outline of the editing of the drill manual for infantry combat] (Tokyo: Rikugun insatsubu, 1945), p. 1.
17. Fujiwara Akira, *Gunjishi* [Military history] (Tokyo: Tōyō keizai shinpōsha, 1961), pp. 109—10.
18. *Sentō kōyō,* p. 12.
19. *KG,* p. 28.
20. Ibid., p. 34.
21. Fujiwara, *Gunjishi,* pp. 188-89. The number of Military Academy graduates for 1929 to 1941 was as follows:

1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
239	218	227	315	337	338	330	388	471	466	506	635	1719

22. *Rikugun kyōiku kanbu,* ed., *Hohei sōten kaisei riyusho* [Written reasons for revision of the infantry manual] (Tokyo: Rikugun insatsubu, 1928), p. 31 ff.
23. Ibid., pp. 27, 33—34.
24. *KG,* p. 36.
25. Ibid., p. 174.
26. For a detailed treatment of this fighting see Coox, *Anatomy of a Small War,* passim.
27. *KG,* p. 177.
28. Kantōgun heibi kenkyū chōsa iinchō [Chairman of the committee for the research and investigation of the Kwangtung Army's military preparations], *Nomonhan jiken kenkyū hōkoku* [Research report on the Nomonhan Incident], 27 November 1939, *Archives,* Reel 109. Originally classified military secret.
29. *KG,* p. 533.
30. U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, Japanese Research Division, Military History Section, Headquarters U.S. Army Forces Far East, *Japanese Night Combat,* pt. 1, *Principles of Night Combat* (1955), charts 1-a—d, 2-a—f, and 3-a—e, respectively. A comparison of these charts with the ones in the original Japanese language study *Kyū Nihon rikugun no yakan sentō* [Night combat of the former Japanese Army] written in 1954 for the Historical Section, Headquarters, U.S. Forces Far East, reveals slight differences in the training schedule.
31. *KG,* p. 176.
32. *KG,* pp. 441—43; *NJS,* pp. 24—28.
33. John G. Campbell, Major, U.S. Army, "The Khalkhin-Gol or Nomonhan Incident," (Research paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 15 May 1980), pp. 10-11.
34. Terrain and climate conditions adapted from *NJS,* pp. 19—23; *KG,* p. 536.
35. *KG,* p. 536.
36. *KG,* p. 429.
37. *NJS,* pp. 21—22; *KG,* p. 493.
38. *NJS,* pp. 30—42; *KG,* pp. 447—62. Total Japanese losses amounted to 159 killed and 119 wounded. The Japanese claimed 440 Soviet or Mongolian troops killed and 21 tanks or armored cars destroyed.
39. Tsuji Masanobu, *Nomonhan* (reprint ed., Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1975), p. 95.
40. *NJS,* p. 47.
41. Ibid., p. 47; *KG,* pp. 468—69.
42. *NJS,* pp. 48—49. Tsuji, *Nomonhan,* pp. 99—100, cites Komatsubara's report.
43. *NJS,* p. 51; *KG,* pp. 469—70. Tsuji later wrote bitterly, "If I were Komatsubara, I would have slit my guts." Tsuji, *Nomonhan,* p. 104.
44. "Dai 7 shidan shōkō kōtō bunkan shokuinhyō" [A list of officers and high ranking military officials of the 7th Division], 20 March 1939. Originally classified secret. I am indebted to Mr. Arima Seiichi for providing me a copy of this list.
45. The description is adapted from Coox, *Anatomy,* p. 142.
46. "Senjō shinri chōsa hōkoku: Senjō shinri chōsa ni motozuku shoken." [Report of investigation of battlefield psychology: observation based on investigations of battlefield psychology], n.d., but clearly written in late 1939. Originally classified secret (hereafter cited as *SC*).
47. Ibid.
48. "Tai So sentō yōkō" [How to fight the Soviets], 1933, pp. 3—5. Originally classified restricted. A much abbreviated form of this manual appears in *KG,* pp. 182—85.
49. According to Alvin Coox, the Japanese judged the Soviet troops at Changkufeng as generally dull-witted or stolid soldiers who lacked an aggressive sense of responsibility. Occasionally, the Soviets were capable of obstinate resistance. See Coox, *Anatomy,* p. 171. One reason for the poor Soviet showing was the presence at Changkufeng of Lev Mekhlis, senior Army Commissar and Deputy Defense Commissar. According to John Erickson, Mekhlis "showed an almost criminal predilection for frontal assaults; the Soviet troops were charging Japanese machine guns on the heights." Erickson, *Road,* p. 22.
50. "Tai So," pp. 14—15.

Chapter 3

1. Tsuji and Hattori reconnoitered Soviet west bank positions in a light aircraft and then devised their plan.
2. The Kwantung Army had already transferred almost all of its bridging equipment to the China Front, so Japanese combat engineers had to use bridging equipment previously used for unit training exercises to throw a single pontoon bridge across the Halha.
3. Around 1940 on 2 July a Japanese reconnaissance pilot dropped a message to Yasuoka's headquarters. The message indicated that the Soviet forces were pulling back across the Halha and that rapid pursuit was necessary to trap them. However, the pilot's visibility and accuracy were affected by clouds and rain. See *KG*, p. 504.
4. *KG*, p. 505.
5. Yasuoka shitai 'Nomonhan' jiken shiryō (Shōwa 14-7-1—14-7-10) [Documents of the Yasuoka Detachment during the Nomonhan Incident, 1 July 1939—10 July 1939], "Kimitsu sakusen nikki (an)" [Operations diary (draft)], entry for 2 July 1939 originally classified secret.
6. War Diary, entry for 3 July 1939.
7. Yasuoka shitai, "Ji 7 gatsu futsuka itaru 7 gatsu toka Sentō yōhō" [Report of combat operations from 2 July to 10 July], entries for 3 and 4 July.
8. Mita Naohirō, ed., *Shichi shidan senki Nomonhan no shitō* [Battle record of the 7th Division: the death struggle at Nomonhan], n.d., p. 172. This material originally appeared in serialized form in the Hokkaido *Taimusu* from February through November 1963. A copy of the compilation is available at the Japan National Defense College Archive.
9. Rikujō Jieitai dai 28 futsūka rentai, ed., *Hohei dai 28 rentai gaishi* [A general history of the 28th Regular Infantry Regiment] (Hakodate, 1969), p. 173.
10. *KG*, p. 493.
11. War Diary, 5 July entry.
12. Ibid.
13. Close attack squad was a euphemism for what amounted to an almost suicidal tank killing squad. These three-man teams, armed with Molotov cocktails and antitank mines, were expected to maneuver close enough to enemy tanks to be able to detonate their weapons against the hull or tracks of the tank. As regular Japanese infantry battalions had no organic antitank weapons, these teams constituted the main form of Japanese light infantry antitank defense.
14. *SC*, p. 162.
15. See Sanbō honbuyaku [Translation section, General Staff Headquarters], *Sekigun tokuhon* [Red Army handbook] (Tokyo: Kaikōsha, 1936), pp. 169—76. This source, originally classified restricted officers use only, is a translation of A. I. Sedyakin's 1935 tactics manual and was designed as "a reference material for military education to acquaint officers with the character of Soviet tactics."
16. Kaikōsha, ed., *Sekigun yagai kyōrei* [Red Army field training regulations], 1936 ed. (Tokyo: Kaikōsha, 1937), pp. 50—51. This translation originally was classified restricted.
17. Actual casualties are not specified in this section of the War Diary. However, frequent references to soldiers "falling one after the other" suggest significant losses.
18. Rikujō bakuryōbu [Ground Self Defenses Staff] ed., *Nomonhan jiken no hōheisen* [Artillery combat during the Nomonhan Incident], 1965, pp. 53—59, blames this deficiency on lack of battlefield experience among artillery officers and crews, incomplete unit training, unrealistic training, failure of artillery tacticians to keep pace with technology, artillery training cadres' being transferred to the China Front, and conservative firing instructions based on the ideal of "one-shot, one hit."
19. See *Nomonhan jiken no hōheisen,* p. 68. Logistics were not given sufficient consideration because army or division level commanders had little idea of supply tonnages or ammunition requirements.
20. *Nomonhan jiken kenkyū hōkoku*; Kotani Etsuji, *Rekishi to tomo ni arukunda Watukushi no zenhansei* [Walking with history: the first half of my life], 1963, p. 9.
21. *Kajikawa butai sentō kōdō gaisetsu* [Outline of combat operations for the Kajikawa Unit], n.d., probably 1939. Originally secret.
22. The orders are available as attachments 13 and 14 to the War Diary.

23. The following description of the 8 July fighting draws on the War Diary and *Kyōiku sōkanbu* [Inspector General of Military Education], ed., *Nomonhan Jiken shōsen reishū* [Collected examples of skirmishes during the Nomonhan Incident] (Tokyo: 1940), fig. 16. This figure contains firing diagrams and an analysis of the skirmish. Where minor discrepancies exist, I have provided the version offered in the War Diary. See also *Kajikawa butai sentō kōdō gaisetsu.*
24. Critique taken from War Diary.
25. According to Daihon'ei Rikugunbu 'Nomonhan' jiken kenkyūkai iinkai [Imperial General Headquarters, Army Department, research subcommittee on the Nomonhan Incident], *'Nomonhan' jiken kenkyū hōkoku* [Research report on the Nomonhan Incident], 10 January 1940, originally classified military secret, less than 5 percent of Japanese battle casualties at Nomonhan were victims of enemy grenades.
26. *SC.*
27. Rikugun gijutsuteki honbu dai 1 bu dai 3 ka [First Bureau, Third Section, Army Technical Headquarters], *Heiki tōkyūkai kiji (Nomonhan jiken)* [Study of weapons and munitions in light of the Nomonhan Incident], 1939, *Archives,* Reel 133. Originally classified secret.
28. Ibid.
29. The 26th Infantry had participated in the west bank fighting of early July and fought the rearguard action as the Japanese retreated across the Halha. The unit was the last to leave the west bank. On 9 July (minus one battalion and two companies) it joined the fighting on the east bank.
30. Cited in *KG,* p. 539. Komatsubara's diary entry for 9 July 1939.
31. *SC.*
32. *KG,* pp. 555-56. Komatsubara's diary entry for 12 and 13 July.
33. See attachments 18 and 19 of the War Diary for copies of these orders.
34. This was a fairly common occurrence. Japanese scouts, unaccustomed to the expanses of the desert and the lack of landmarks, became easily disoriented or walked right into skillfully camouflaged Soviet fortifications. *SC,* passim.
35. The 26th Infantry was pulling back to reorganize for the 23 July general offensive.
36. Mita, *Shichi shidan,* p. 230.

Chapter 4

1. Cited in Hata, "Japanese-Soviet," p. 167.
2. *Nomonhan jiken no hōheisen,* pp. 70—71. The standard five-day loads for artillery batteries were as follows:

Battery		*Per Gun Per Day*
38 Type Field Artillery	12,000	100 rounds
12 Type Howitzer	3,600	60 rounds
90 Type Howitzer	4,000	100 rounds
10 Type Cannon	800	60 rounds
15 Type Howitzer	4,000	50 rounds
15 Type Cannon	900	30 rounds

Source: *KG,* p. 561.

3. War Diary, entry for 31 July.
4. *SWABP,* C, pp. 520, 525.

5. Shimanuki Takeji, Major, IJA, "Sakusen yōheijo yori mitaru 'Nomonhan' jiken no kyōjun" [Lessons of the Nomonhan Incident seen from operational handling of troops], 30 September 1939. Originally classified top secret.

Japanese casualties to 25 July were:	By August they were:
KIA 1,377 (96 officers)	KIA 1,860 (110 officers)
WIA 3,044 (115 officers)	WIA 4,275 (133 officers)
MIA 36 (3 officers)	MIA 87 (8 officers)
ill 828 (4 officers)	ill 1,128 (4 officers)

KG, pp. 582, 609, 613.

6. Komatsubara's diary, *KG*, p. 571.
7. *SWABP*, C, p. 522.
8. *Nomonhan jiken no hōheisen*, p. 69.
9. Col Hasebe Riei commanded the unit which had 4 infantry battalions, 1 artillery regiment (2 battalins of 24 guns), and 1 engineer battalion (2 companies), a total of about 7,000 men.
10. War Diary, entry for 5 August 1939.
11. Ōki Shigeru, *Nomonhan sansen nikki* [Diary of Nomonhan fighting] (privately published), entry for 6 August 1939. Assigned to the 1st Division (depot), Ōki was a doctor who served with its 37-mm gun crews on Noro Heights.
12. This deduction apparently was also based on signals intelligence.
13. *Heiki tōkyūkai.*
14. Description of Soviet tactics adapted from *NJS*, p. 119.
15. *Heiki tōkyūkai.*
16. War Diary, entry for 7 August 1939. See *Nomonhan jiken no hōheisen* for a more critical assessment of Japanese artillery.
17. *NJS*, pp. 137—38.
18. The *SC* study provides an outline of these criteria of unit morale. The regimental system could also work to a unit's disadvantage. A battalion assigned to operate with another regiment could develop a sense of isolation and independence versus cohesiveness and interdependence.
19. Lieutenant Colonel Sugitani commanded the infantry battalion attached to the 1st Sector, 8th Border Guards.
20. *Shōsen reishū*, fig. 21.
21. Shimanuki, "Sakusen yōhei."
22. Konuma Haruō, Lieutenant Colonel, IJA, " 'Nomonhan' jiken yori kansatsu seru tai 'So' kindaisen no jissō" [Observations from the Nomonhan Incident on the realities of Soviet modern warfare], February 1940. Originally classified top secret. See appendix for percentage breakdown of casualties for Japan's major wars.
23. Standard company frontage was 600 meters.
24. *SWABP*, C, p. 594.
25. Ōki, *Nomonhan*, p. 59.
26. *Nomonhan jiken kenkyū hōkoku.*
27. *SWABP*, C, p. 594.
28. Description based on Coox, *Anatomy*, pp. 142—43, Japanese night combat at Changkufeng, and adapted to Nomonhan.
29. War Diary, entry for 18 August 1939.
30. *Shōsen reishū*, fig. 2.
31. The Soviets probably were standing down in anticipation of their 20 August general offensive.

Chapter 5

1. *NJS*, p. 148.
2. *KG*, p. 588.

3. Shimazaki, *Sakusen yōhei* and *NJS*, pp. 152—53. The 2/28th Infantry's estimate of enemy strength was 500 men, 5 tanks, and 20 guns on 16 August; 700 men, 16 tanks, and 25 guns on 20 August; and 1,200 men, 30 tanks, and 30 guns on 22 August.
4. *NJS*, pp. 152—53.
5. The Soviets deployed 35 infantry battalions (twice the Japanese), 216 artillery guns (three times the Japanese), 500 tanks, and 346 armored cars (to none for the Japanese). See Hayashi Saburō, *Kantōgun to kyōkutō Sorengun* [The Kwantung Army and the Soviet Far Eastern Army] (Tokyo: Fūyō shobō, 1974), p. 177.
6. The Soviets gained air superiority through a battle of attrition in which they eventually wore down the outnumbered Japanese pilots. See Bōei kenshūjō senshibu ed., *Nomonhan jiken kōkūsakusen no kyōsatsu* [Considerations of air operations during the Nomonhan incident] (1975), passim.
7. War Diary, entry for 21 August 1939.
8. Mita, *Shichi shidan*, p. 389.
9. War Diary, entry for 20 August 1939.
10. Ōki, *Nomonhan*, p. 62.
11. Mita, *Shichi shidan*, pp. 389—90.
12. War Diary, lessons learned section.
13. The information was incorrect. The 23d Division itself was fighting for survival north of the Holsten.
14. *NJS*, p. 158.
15. Mita, *Shichi shidan*, p. 390.
16. *SC*.
17. Ōki, *Nomonhan*, entry for 22 August 1939, p. 64.
18. Soviet sources make no mention of new units employed against Japanese units south of the Holsten on 23 August. However, that day the 7th Motorized Armored Brigade and 212th Airborne Brigade joined the fighting north of the Holsten at Fui Heights (Hill 721).
19. War Diary, entry for 23 August 1939.
20. War Diary, entry for 24 August 1939.
21. Mita, *Shichi shidan*, p. 391.
22. Ibid., p. 392. Similar instances of Soviet junior officers' committing suicide to avoid capture occurred at Nomonhan.
23. Without the battalion's knowing of his action, Colonel Hasebe had ordered Second Lieutenant Takashima to attach his platoon to the 8th Border Guards.
24. *Shōsen reishū*, fig. 25.
25. The breakdown does not include Second Lieutenant Takashima's platoon.

Battalion headquarters	12 men
5th Company	15
6th Company	6
7th Company	3
Machine Gun Company	6
Battalion Artillery	13
Total	55 men

26. Mita, *Shichi shidan*, p. 393.
27. Ibid., p. 394.
28. Breakdown:

Battalion headquarters	18 men
5th Company	32
6th Company	0
7th Company	63
Machine Gun Company	11
Battalion Artillery	12
Total	124 men

29. Mita, *Shichi Shidan*, p. 397.
30. Ibid., pp. 397—98.
31. 6th Army was organized on 4 August 1939 to conduct overall Japanese defense at Nomonhan.
32. Forty-six were later listed as killed in action.
33. All four were second lieutenants from the 2d, 9th, 10th, and headquarters companies respectively.
34. War Diary, entry for 16 September 1939.

Chapter 6

1. Hata, "Japanese-Soviet," p. 170.
2. Ibid., pp. 170—75, narrates the de-escalation process at Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol. In July 1940 the Japanese agreed almost in toto with the Soviet border claims.
3. Correspondence with Mr. Arima Seiichi and discussions with COL Matsumura Tsutomu, Japanese liaison officer at U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.
4. COL Ōkamoto Tokuzō was wounded in action and later murdered in the 1st Field Hospital by a fellow Military Academy classmate who held Okamoto responsible for the 71st's defeat. His successor, COL Nakano Eizō, was also wounded. COL Morita Tetsuji was killed in action as was LTC Azuma Shūji during the Soviet August offensive. *SC* regarded the loss of an officer-leader as the most deleterious influence on unit cohesion and morale.
5. Interview with Mr. Arima Seiichi and Mr. Itō Tsuneo.
6. Dai 7 shidan shireibu [Headquarters, 7th Division], *Sentō kōdō hōkoku* [Report of combat operations], 1939. Originally classified secret.
7. *Nomonhan jiken kenkyūkai hōkoku.* See appendix for attrition rates.
8. See, for example, the Kwantung Army's assessment appearing in *Nomonhan jihen kenkyū hōkoku,* and in IGHQ's *Nomonhan jiken kenkyū hōkoku.*

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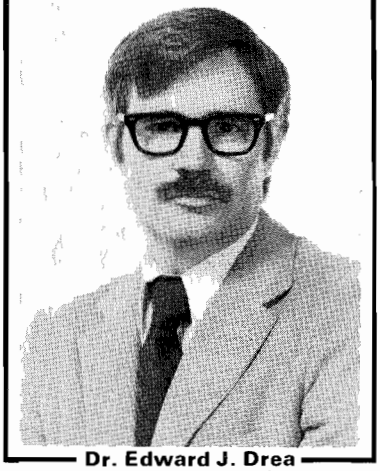

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Dr. Edward J. Drea is currently a research fellow with the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A graduate of Canisius College, he received his master's in history from Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan, and his doctorate in history from the University of Kansas. He lived and studied in Japan for six years. His Air Force service included tours in Japan and Vietnam. He is the author of *The 1942 Japanese General Election: Political Mobilization in Wartime Japan* (1979) and "Yokusan seiji no jissō," in *Nihon no 1930 nendai* (Tokyo, 1980). His book reviews appear regularly in *Military Review*.

COMBAT STUDIES INSTITUTE

Mission

The Combat Studies Institute was established on 18 June 1979 as a separate, department-level activity within the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, for the purpose of accomplishing the following missions:

1. Conduct original, interpretive research on historical topics pertinent to the current doctrinal concerns of the U.S. Army in accordance with priorities established by the Commander, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and to publish the results of such research in a variety of useful formats.
2. Prepare and present instruction in military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and to assist other College departments in integrating applicable military history materials into their instruction.
3. Act as the proponent agency for development and coordination of an integrated, progressive program of military history instruction in the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command service school system.

SYNOPSIS OF LEAVENWORTH PAPER 2

Before World War II, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) developed an offensive tactical doctrine designed to allow its infantry forces to fight successfully against a superior foe, the Soviet Union. A battle test of that doctrine's effectiveness occurred from June through August 1939 along the Outer Mongolian-Manchurian border. This essay follows the daily combat operations of the IJA's 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, for a two-month period. During that time, the 2/28th Infantry was in constant contact with Soviet combined arms forces.

In July the battalion participated in offensive operations against Soviet units commanded by General Georgi K. Zhukov. When Japanese tactical doctrine failed against a Soviet combined arms force, the Japanese went on the defensive. Japanese officers, however, regarded defensive doctrine as transitional in nature and adopted it only to gain time to prepare for a counterattack. Defensive doctrine dictated that terrain be held until the resumption of offensive operations that would destroy the enemy. A lack of flexibility doomed the Japanese defensive effort. General Zhukov secretly marshalled his forces and in mid-August used his armor columns to spearhead a double envelopment of the static Japanese units in a position defense. The Soviets encircled the Japanese units, including the 2/28th Infantry, and the Japanese survivors had to fight their way back to friendly lines.

The 2/28th Infantry's War Diary provides a vivid day by day account of its combat operations. This in turn allows the examination of how the Japanese applied their tactical doctrine on the battlefield. The Japanese tried to use an aggressive tactical doctrine to compensate for materiel and equipment deficiencies in their army. Such an approach was successful as long as the Japanese could conduct bold offensive operations. When they were forced to adopt a defensive posture, however, discrepancies between tactical doctrine and battlefield reality became apparent. These problems, applicable to any army, highlight fundamental difficulties of force structure, preconceptions of potential enemy capabilities, and the role of doctrine in a combat environment. An examination of small unit tactics is particularly useful to illustrate the dynamics of doctrine as expressed on the battlefield.