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The Second Encirclement of BRODY

by

No. 407

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18 June 1947

THE SECOND ENCIRCLEMENT OF B R O D Y

JULY 1944

-1- A. The Unrevealed Battle

BRODY, a small town in Galicia, formerly a border garrison of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, gave this battle its name. The town itself, although inside the Russian encirclement, was not the center of action during the actual battles, but it is the only locality of any importance in the area.

The battle, in July 1944, was hardly or not at all known to the German public, and I assume, the world. This certainly was not due to the fact that by comparison with other, thoroughly publicized encirclements, it was less important as far as the number of troops involved was concerned; achievements of officers and men and especially their deeds of heroism certainly do not rank below those of similar battles; ultimately its tactical effect was of extreme importance.

There were other reasons why at the time this battle was not publicized by the press and by propaganda agencies. After the encirclement of CHERKASSY had been reported in such detail, it was soon realized that further repetition of such set-backs would necessarily shake the morale of the German public, despite great emphasis in such reports on the alleged tactical reasons and on heroism displayed by the troops. In reality, such encirclements were absolute defeats which every reasoning individual had to blame on the German leadership.

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The (passive) encirclement battle had finally lost its appeal even in the eyes of the leading propagandists. Moreover, the decisive phase of the -2- battle coincided with [the attempt to assassinate Hitler on] 20 July, which rightfully monopolized the attention of the German public. It is a matter of conjecture whether the modesty of the combat units and the reserved tone of Fourth Army reports contributed to it; they did not even request mention of the battle in High Command communiques or in orders of the day even though the Commanding General of XIII Corps (General der Infanterie Hauffe) died a hero's death together with his entire staff, shile Generalmajor Lindemann died in action and Generalmajor Netwig was wounded and fell into Russian hands; only two generals were able to escape unscathed.

B. Events Preceding the Battle; Participating Units

In the spring of 1944, XIII Corps had retired from the DUBNO to the BRODY area, hard pressed by the enemy. A continuous front did not exist; large gaps allowed repeated Russian break-throughs and envelopments which reached their climax in the beginning of April, when the Russians were able to reach the city limits of BRODY. They came very close to the main road directly south of BRODY and finally even reached the road north of SUCHODOLY, crossed it, and so for the first time closed the ring around BRODY at HLUSZYN - PONIKOWICA. During this period communication with the rear area and a scanty flow of supplies could only be maintained at night, by committing the 8th Panzer Division (Colonel Friebe) along the BUSK -- OLESKO -- BRODY highway; each night the road had to be cleared of the enemy, and that involved heavy losses.

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In fierce and critical fighting -- it may be called the first battle of the BRODY pocket -- the encirclement with a radius of five to six kilometers could finally be forced open. In it were Korpsabteilung C,* containing remnants -3- of the 454th Security Division (Colonel Wagner) and of one Police Division (Generalleutnant [Police] Brenner); and the 360th (?) Infantry Division (Generalleutnant Freiherr von Schleinitz). Finally, through an attack by the 364th (?) Infantry Division (Generalleutnant Lasch), a unit of XLVIII Panzer Corps, from the area east of ZLOVZOW, a continuous, though thinly manned front could again be formed. The front line generally ran as follows: ZALOZCE -- CZERNIKA -- SUCHOWOLA -- edge of the woods east and north of BORDY.

Improvement of this line from May to July included the construction of positions in depth. Due to the heavy losses, a limited replacement program was effected at the same time. The lack of local and large reserves seemed to have been remedied with the arrival of the 14th Galician SS Volunteer Division, commanded by SS Brigadefuehrer Freytag; that division had been brought up in order to complete its training and to accustom the men to front line conditions.

At this point several matters must be mentioned concerning that unit, since it decisively influenced the impending battle. The small cadre was exclusively German or Austrian; their morale was high and they did the best they could. I received excellent co-operation from the division staff at all times. Noncommissioned officers and men were almost exclusively young Galicians, mostly sons of World War I soldiers who had served in the Austro-Hungarian

*Author's Note: A division organized by merging several battered divisions.

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army. Their fresh and youthful appearance pleasantly contrasted with that of the German soldiers who had suffered the hardships of past battles. Their weapons and equipment were excellent and could only create envy among the army units; nothing was missing. However, the lack of discipline was apparent among these young troops. It began with the theft of cherries and finally went so far that young Galician soldiers forcibly prevented supply troops of other divisions from requisitioning cattle for the needs of the troops, so that this live-stock could be retained by the local population, in some cases the soldiers' relatives. From this it becomes apparent how debatable it was to commit the division, especially in the defense of its homeland. In many other respects, too, the commitment of that division was an unfortunate choice. The units were deployed in the rear in order to improve positions and to function as reserve in case of an enemy break-through. The men were to get used to front line and combat conditions. This conception was wrong. In rear positions, during quiet periods, no unit can become accustomed to combat conditions; yet it would suddenly be exposed to extremely difficult conditions, if an enemy break-through should occur. These considerations, which had been discussed in great detail with the commanding officer of the Galician Volunteer Division, were fully confirmed later on.

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The remaining units participating in the battle, Korpsabteilung C, the 346th, and the 360th Infantry Division (since the end of May under General Lindemann), were battle-hardened Eastern Front divisions or else newly organized units with so many veterans of the Eastern Front that they were equal in combat value. Only the 454th Security Division, now under the command of General Netwig, was slightly inferior to the other infantry divisions in

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organization, armament, and equipment. No German motorized or armored unit was in the area that was encircled later on. Several assault guns and captured tanks were available.

C. XIII Corps Before the Battle

In the beginning of July the front line of XIII Corps ran approximately as follows: ZALOZCE -- about 2 km. west of CZERNICA (346th Infantry Division, prior to the battle under XLVIII Panzer Corps) -- Hill 405 east of BORATYN -- Hill 294 east of SZALASKA -- the woods east of BRODY (Korpsabteilung C); the line then continued along the northeastern and northern edge of the woods northeast of BRODY and then shifted generally to the northwest (360th Infantry Division). The 454th Security Division adjoined the 360th Infantry Division in the west; however, the division or at least large elements may have been taken out of the line for rehabilitation at that time. Further west was the 340th Infantry Division (General Ehrig or his successor) which was later transferred to the adjoining corps on the left. XIII Corps CP was located in the forest south of SOKOLOWKA, headquarters of the 346th Infantry Division was in a woods east of SASOW; headquarters of Korpsabteilung C remained in HOLOSKOWICE for several weeks, then moved to a group of buildings southwest of WOLOCHY, and finally was established in the woods south of that village; headquarters of the 360th Infantry Division was located at the edge of the woods southwest of BRODY.

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The idea of developing BRODY into a "fortress", favored by higher headquarters in spring, had been abandoned. The front directly southeast of BRODY seemed especially threatened. Open, softly rolling terrain prevailed there, which offered no obstacles to large-scale tank attacks. BRODY, therefore, was especially threatened by encirclement from the south, a situation similar to

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the first encirclement. In addition, the bare valleys from NETREBA to DUBIE and PIENIAKI to PODHORCE were suitable for Russian penetrations. Artillery and antitank weapons were deployed accordingly, local reserves put on an alert basis and rear positions (antitank defenses, artillery positions, etc.) were improved. The wooded mountains between positions, for instance near BORATYN, were turned into strong points. The division supply dumps were located in the area of BUSK, ZLOCZOW, OLESKO, and SOKOLOWKA; the road from LWOW to BUSK, from there to ZLOCZOW, and via OZYDOW and OLESKO to BRODY, was of greatest importance. Every man worked feverishly on construction. In the course of local, but very stubborn fighting Hill 294, northeast of SZALASKA, fell into Russian hands several times, but we were always able to retake it. Korpsabteilung C was master of the situation at all times. For weeks there were only clashes between patrols, except for one Russian attempt at reconnaissance in force in the open terrain southeast of BRODY, staged perhaps for deception; it was promptly repelled.

-6- In the beginning of July the Russians failed to utilize the favorable open terrain for a concentrated attack on BRODY. Instead, as they had done many times before, they forced a penetration in difficult terrain in the center and the right wing of the 346th Infantry Division. In an operation described in the following section, the Russian attacked from ZLOCZOW towards BUSK.

D. Forming of the Pocket and Its Strategic Meaning

The formation of the pocket by the Russians proceeded slowly. The operation lasted several days or even weeks, and its purpose became clear to the defenders. In the beginning of July, the enemy penetrated deeply on a

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wide front the line of the adjacent corps and the 340th Infantry Division on the left, through RADZIECHOW toward KAMIONKA STRUMILOWA, west of BRODY. Between 10 and 12 July, the penetration of the 346th Infantry Division front began in the MARKOPOL area through ZLOCZOW toward BUSK. Thus, on 15 July the envelopment was completed, although for the present only with weak forces.

This last operation was conducted with extraordinary audacity. The Russians, unable to widen the penetration appreciably, drove a 50 to 60 km. deep wedge into the breach. Initially the German command was justified in hoping to achieve a tactical success by attacking the flanks and cutting off the spearhead, in order to prevent encirclement from the east. The penetration could be narrowed down to 5 to 10 km. at several points. Only during the general breakout through ZLOCZOW to BUSK on 22 July was it possible to cut off the spearhead for a short time. Two panzer divisions, which were apprently understrength or poorly led, attacked from the south but failed to capture the all important ZLOCZOW - LWOW road.

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Although no records are available to permit a final estimate of the tactical situation, the following point may be raised at this time: Approximately between 12 to 16 July a careful estimate led to the conclusion that it would be impossible to cut the spearhead and hold the BRODY area; was it then justified and necessary to allow the situation to culminate in the final formation of the pocket? In my opinion, the fact that our forces were insufficient to turn the tide of battle in our favor should have been realized some time prior to the final encirclement, or at least a short time later. The formation of the pocket finally led to the annihilation of five divisions, while realitively few enemy units were temporarily tied down. The importance of the battle to the over-all tactical situation could hardly have justified

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such a heavy sacrifice. A timely and cleverly executed withdrawal probably would have inflicted just as much damage upon the enemy as did the battle; the withdrawal would have saved the strength of our own divisions and later would have favorably influenced the continuation of operations in the LWOW area. The morale factor in this obvious defeat must also be taken into consideration. The supposition that army and army group could not act on their own can hardly be excluded; the order to hold the position at any cost undoubtedly came from Hitler who too often influenced tactics and strategy in all theaters of operations with detrimental results.

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E. Initial Engagement of Korpsabteilung C

Initially Korpsabteilung C did not participate in the battles which developed in the beginning of July along the front of the 346th Infantry Division, then attached to XIII Corps. In order to release elements of this division, Korpsabteilung C took over a quiet battalion sector on the right (south), in the forest southwest of NETREBA. Measures were taken to protect the deep southern flank in the valley at PODHORGE and PIENIAKI. Finally, the left regiment of the 364th Infantry Division, still in its original position, but without contact to the right nor with division headquarters, was temporarily attached to Korpsabteilung C. When the enemy had penetrated the woods west of PIENIAKI, counterattacks were executed with insufficient forces by Korpsabteilung C and later by the Galician SS Volunteer Division; these had some success, but failed to establish contact with the 346th Infantry Division which was to attack from the south. On 15 July the pocket was closed near BUSK; weak engineer units, committed to regain the road near BUSK, were unable to break the encirclement.

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More and more elements of the Galician SS Volunteer Division entered the battles in the difficult wooded terrain east of SASOW, where they quickly disintegrated. As anticipated, the division and its officers were not equal to the demands of such engagements. The threat to the deep right flank of the Korpsabteilung prompted corps to order an extensive withdrawal to positions approximately on the line WOLOCHY - SUCHODOLY - HOLOSKOWICE - WYSOCKO, even though no attack had taken place on the Korpsabteilung's front; the 360th Infantry Division was to take up adjacent positions. The Korpsabteilung CP was moved to the woods northwest of KONTY about 17 or 18 July. The enemy pursued cautiously. The pocket had become critically small.

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F. Attack of Korpsabteilung C to the South on 20 and 21 July

While the commander of Korpsabteilung C, who was poorly informed about the over-all situation, made plans for a possible breakout toward west, north of BUSK, corps ordered the Korpsabteilung to execute an attack toward south. The Korpsabteilung was relieved on the northeast front by elements of the Galician SS Volunteer Division and the 360th Infantry Division, and assembled for the attack in the area south of OZYDOW. Exact timing, details of organization, daily objectives etc. can no longer be recalled. However, during the night of 19/20 July two infantry regiments were to cross the BUG in the direction of BUZEK, BIALY KAMIEN, CZEREMOSZNIA. On the first day Korpsabteilung C was to reach the line KNIAZE - CHILCZYCE, possibly the LACKIE - ZCOCZOW road, and the height directly south of it; however, neither the written corps order nor verbal directions indicated that the attack of 20 July was to be a breakout and that the Korpsabteilung was to make contact with the panzer divisions advancing from the south. Such a task would have been completely out of proportion to our relatively weak forces, terrain conditions, and enemy strength.

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The terrain was distinguished by steep and moninating heights east of the OZYDOW - BIALY KAMIEN - POCZAFY road, especially hill 372, in our possession, which afforded excellent observation of the hostile area and hill 366, which later became the focal point of the Russian defense. The terrain west of the road was generally flat, observation was impaired by patches of woods, and movement was impeded by expansive marshes. The BUG presented no serious obstacle to the infantry. Estimates of enemy strength were not available before or during the attack. The 346th Infantry Division, the adjacent unit
-10- on the left (east), was to join in the attack to the south; however, this attack was executed without liaison and did not influence the operations of the Korpsabteilung. Therefore, Korpsabteilung C had to attack without support.

At this point, the general conditions prevailing in the pocket should be discussed in more detail. Prior to the attack to the south, the pocket had a diameter of about 15 to 20 km. Its center was near OLESKO; the road junction just east of OZYDOW was another traffic center. In addition to the combat elements of the five above-mentioned divisions and the corps staff, numerous supply installations and especially overtaxed medical clearing stations were located inside the pocket. There was no lack of rations, and the ammunition supply appeared to be adequate. Traffic conditions, however, impeded the execution of our plans extensively. Corps enforced strict traffic control. However, when Korpsabteilung C moved from its northeastern defense positions to the south for the attack, interruptions and delays became unavoidable. Everyone was dependant on the OZYDOW road leading southward. It was almost impossible to move anywhere except on this road because of the steep slopes in the east and the marshes in the west. Between the scheduled units, large

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elements of the Galician SS Volunteer Division, disorganized and mostly without officers, instinctively swarmed southward, a move which was stopped by the enemy near BIALY KAMIEN. There the superior equipment of the Galician SS Volunteer Division, compared with that of the army units, became quite evident. The German units immediately took this opportunity to supplement their mediocre armament and equipment, which the Galicians gladly relinquished. The road as well as the surrounding areas looked more like a large parking lot instead of the main approach route to the assembly area of a division about to launch a surprise attack. Low-flying Russian planes, which became more numerous and effective day and night, found ample targets. These conditions, typical in

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an encirclement, temporarily improved during the morning of 20 July, only to worsen again in the POCZAPY area in the afternoon of that day and on 21 July. In the face of such conditions even the strictest military measures seem to be of little effect, because orders can no longer reach all elements and because military police are not available in sufficient numbers to enforce traffic discipline; other troops, untrained for this task, are more valuable for combat than for military police duties. Veteran combat troops can adjust themselves to such conditions and know how to cope with them, even though they may suffer heavy losses. Less experienced units disintegrate completely.

On the morning of 20 July, after overcoming tremendous difficulties, Korpsabteilung C had completed its assembly somewhat behind schedule. On 19 July, the CP had been established near the forest ranger's house in the woods directly east of hill 372. Contrary to expectations, the attack gained ground during the morning. The BUG was crossed, heavy resistance near hill 366 was broken, and POCZAPY and some terrain south of it could be taken. In the afternoon the CP was moved to a forest directly southeast of BIALY KAMIEN.

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Repeated strafing and bombing attacks on the CP, together with the above-mentioned traffic difficulties, prevented the Korpsabteilung staff from gaining a clear picture of the situation; signal communications largely broke down. In the early morning hours of 21 July the staff proceeded to the front. It made its way forward west of the completely blocked road, and finally reached POCZAPY from the northwest in broad daylight. After studying the terrain and conferring with several officers, the commander gained a somewhat clearer picture of the situation. The attack had only advanced a little beyond POCZAPY. A few readily available units were committed immediately to continue the attack to the south. All efforts were exerted to effect communication with the other units. Due to heavy fire and the concentration of

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troops, POCZAPY became untenable as Korpsabteilung CP. For that day it was established in a forest east of BELZEC. Telephone communication existed to corps, located slightly to the north. Here the Korpsabteilung received the order for the final breakout from the pocket. During the day all efforts were directed toward obtaining a clear picture of the entire situation. Near ZULICE, the reconnaissance battalion was engaged in a heavy see-saw battle which appeared to threaten the eastern flank of the Korpsabteilung from time to time, since no communications existed with the 346th Infantry Division. CHILCZYCE, as well as the woods north of KNIAZE and part of that village seemed to be in our hands. In other words no extensive gains were made on 21 July. At any rate, our own situation was clarified to a certain degree; however, several units could not be located. In retrospect, as far as an accelerated and therefore simplified breakout is concerned, the day (21 July) had been spent uselessly. Whether the corps and division staff, knowing the over-all situation, would have been able to effect a break-through with all units on 21 July remains a matter of opinion; I am inclined to answer this question in the negative.

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G. The Actual Breakout

Up to the evening of 21 July, the Commanding General of XIII Corps, who had remained in the pocket with his immediate staff, was able to control his units. I do not remember details of the corps order for the breakout, nor its exact time of issue, which must have been around noon on 21 July. The underlying idea of the order was a breakout to the south into an area which seemed to be secured by the then still existing front of the adjacent Corps Balk (XLVIII) on the right, southeast of ZLOCZOW. The breakout, however, took place twenty-four to forty-eight hours too late; this was a tactical error which became fatal, since the divisions were not informed that Corps Balk had in the meantime withdrawn; details will be discussed later. The break-through was to be accomplished by assault groups during
-13- the morning of 22 July, with Korpsabteilung C on the right (west) advancing via LACKIE to JASINOWCE, and then southward into the assembly area GOLOGORY - WISNIOWCZYK; the 346th Infantry division to the left (east) with its right flank advancing via ZLOCZOW; the 454th Security Division and the 360th Infantry Division were to fight delaying action to cover the rear. Being in an advanced stage of disinitegration, the Galician SS Volunteer Division received no mission. Individuals and scattered groups of this division joined elements of other divisions. Two panzer divisions (8th Panzer and 20th Panzer Grenadier Division ?) were to open the pocket from the outside, that is to say from southeast. However, this operation failed, probably due to the withdrawal of the Corps Balk; advance elements had reached the heights west of ZLOCZOW, but this had been accomplished already on 20 July; on 21 July and even more on 22 July they were repelled, and only a few units of the Korpsabteilung, which had broken out prematurely during the night of 20/21 July, made contact with the panzer divisions.

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The breakout order of the Korpsabteilung provided for three assault groups: The group on the right (west) from ZKWARZAWA to the west of LACKIE on the GOLOGORY; the center group via KNIAZE, LACKIE; the left group via BONISCYE, JASIONOWCE southward. With the capture of SLOCZOW by the 346th Infantry Division, it was expected that the vehicles could be evacuated from the pocket on the POCZAPY - ZLOCZOW road, and later, pending the development of the situation, could move from there to the west or south. In spite of almost complete lack of signal communications, orders were transmitted to all units of the Korpsabteilung, except for a few which could not be located; it developed later that one to three battalions had already broken out in the morning of 21 July. The Korpsabteilung staff intended to join the assault group in the center. At dusk it left the last CP in BELCEC, after conferences with the corps commander and Brig. Gen. Netwig, and reached BONISCYE towards midnight. The corps commander had not yet decided which assault group he would join; it was too late anyway; apprently he was unable to tear himself away from his car and perished.

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Since the southern part of KNIAZE was heavily occupied by the Russians, some regrouping during the night was deemed necessary. Thus, the main body of the center assault group joined the left group, where less resistance was anticipated. The left assault group was weaker than planned without the battalions which had broken out; the group had shifted to the right (west), while the 361th Infantry Division did not pass through ZLOCZOW with its right wing, but to the west of it with its main body. ZLOCZOW, and with it the only serviceable road for vehicles, thus remained firmly in the hands of the enemy. Nothing was ever heard of the right assault group of Korpsabteilung C. The heavy concentration of troops in the assembly area of the left assault group around BONISCYE gave the break-through attack a great deal of power,

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but it was limited to a very narrow area. The forward movement of the supporting artillery, as well as that of an assault gun battalion had been prearranged; but they were not able to render effective support. Only one light howitzer battery (two guns) fired courageously on the edge of the woods at the slope from their positions in the village of BONISCYE. The others probably failed to find suitable positions because of darkness and the marshy terrain off the few roads. The assault gun battalion had started to destroy its guns before the attack got under way without waiting for orders. Thus it not only deserted the infantry units in their most difficult battle, but also endangered them by demolishing the guns near the approach road to the infantry assembly area and by starting large fires in parts of BONISCYE, which illuminated the infantry units, making them visible to the Russian defenders.

Battalion Pacher, which the Korpsabteilung staff had joined, became the core for the break-through thrust of the Korpsabteilung. The deployment of the battalion near the slope was delayed until early morning. The immediate staff of the Korpsabteilung, dismounted and carrying small arms, at the time
-15- was on the southern edge of BONISCYE. The staff repeatedly urged acceleration of the preparations and the early execution of an attack during darkness, in order to avoid heavy losses during daylight. Suddenly a shout was heard; flares went up and murderous Russian small-arms and machine-gun fire set in. The Korpsabteilung staff was forced to take cover and finally was dispersed while advancing through the marshes south of BONISCYE. Some elements began to gain ground to the south. The commanding officer and his assistant urged all men who were still hesitating inside the buildings of BONISCYE, to attack and took them along. Beginning at darkness, continuing through dusk, and finally in broad daylight, an unsupported infantry mass attack took place, which crossed the road and railroad bed, and stormed the bare hill. Wave after wave the troops swarmed forward, massed in a manner remembered from

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paintings of battles of the nineteenth century and perhaps of World War I. Disregarding the fire of Russian machine guns from the front and flanks, penetrations of enemy tanks along the ZLOCZOW - LACKIE road, and finally the artillery fire from the front and rear, men, officers, and generals stormed the 1500 to 2000 meter long bare slope; they encouraged each other with loud "hurrahs", and finally vanished, completely exhausted, into the forest. There were no roads, paths, and hardly any tracks in the direction of the advance; the slope was so steep that it was necessary to hold on to trees and branches to climb up. The few horses which had negotiated the BONISCYE marshes and the battlefield covered with dead and wounded, were barely able to climb the steep, pathless, and thickly wooded slope. Vehicles and heavy weapons which might have crossed the marshes on both sides of BONISCYE would have definitely

-16- bogged down there.

The scene showed barren fields on the hill top, a mass of soldiers pressing southward, and the village of ZALESIE in the background. The order to reorganize the disintegrated units on top of the hill, to form a line, and to integrate all stragglers could not be carried out. Everyone was convinced that the worst was over, and after a short rest proceeded to the well in the village, and then into the forest for safety.

That moment will live forever in my memory as the most sublime of my military career. In a motley group of soldiers I proceeded on a rescued, tired horse (my own two horses had been killed) toward the edge of the forest; approaching, I noticed a group of soldiers resting in the shade. I greeted them with a word of appreciation. Suddenly Maj. Gen. Lasch, the Commanding General of the 364th Infantry Division, appeared and took my hand. At this very moment one of the men voiced a cheer for their generals, in which the standing and reclining masses of disorganized soldiers of several divisions

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enthusiastically joined. Truely a sign of a close bond between officers and men.

Quickly the troops were separated according to divisions, and the southward movement through woods and across fields was resumed. A small engagement again separated me from my operations officer (my aide had been killed earlier), and I personally took command of the group furthest to the west. Our hopes that we had completely broken through the Russian encirclement were soon shattered. Further serious engagements during the morning were avoided by timely reconnaissance and withdrawal under the cover afforded by the dense growth and the uneven terrain. Without interference we passed through MAJDAN toward a

-17- wooded high point (hill 428) and there again met other strong units; we used the cover to reorganize our units and rested to await other stragglers. A rumor had it, that Brig. Gen. Lindemann, Commanding General of the 360th Infantry Division, was on his way here. As we found out later, much valuable time was lost which we would not have squandered, had we known the over-all situation, and specifically the withdrawl of Corps Balk.

For the continuation of the march I personally commanded the remaining 600 to 700 men and organized them into an advance guard (Lt. Col. Simons), a main body, and a rear guard. In the afternoon, we proceeded in a southerly direction; only a few 1:300,000 maps were left. The advance guard had hardly been assembled when wild shooting indicated a renewed clash with the enemy who had apparently waited in ambush. The intelligence officer and a few NCO's and men of the Korpsabteilung staff were with me; signal communications were no longer available. Heavy small arms fire pinned us to the ground. Personal contact with the advance guard and reconnaissance revealed that it was impossible to proceed into the open terrain; possibly, a movement toward the right through the forest might lead to success. The advance guard commander

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could not be located in the dense underbrush. As far as possible I switched all troops to the right, encountered a small body of men led by Major Thilo, and under the protection of the forest turned right in a wide sweep. The opposite edge of the woods distinctly revealed Russians who with plain gestures asked us to surrender. We soon encountered enemy forces in the forest and heavy fire temporarily pinned down the new advance guard. I advanced and the troops started to move again. Determined to the utmost, we overran the Russian troops (company to battalion strength), who fought almost to the last man. Our own losses were also heavy. My intelligence officer, 1st Lieutenant

-18- Hoermann, who was wounded at my side, committed suicide to avoid capture by the Russians. We proceeded past the edge of a village through fields and woods. The composition of my assault group changed constantly. Its strength diminished because of heavy losses, and elements became separated, while other small groups, which were accidentally encountered on the way, joined.

The hot, clear summer day neared its end; during the night it rained; we felt hunger, thirst, and exhaustion; the situation was completely obscure. A rest period on top of a cold and wet wooded hill east of ZASZKOW was utilized to conduct reconnaissance. It resulted in pinpointing our position, and produced a local guide who was willing to show us a safe route of retreat. We continued to the edge of WISNIOWCZYK which had been burned to the ground by the Russians. Our guide, so necessary in this situation, deliberately vanished during darkness and probably announced our whereabouts to the Russians. We had no choice but to leave the road which led into the village and sneak around its eastern rim. Hand-to-hand fighting suddenly developed, in which the courageous advance guard commander, Major Thilo, probably was killed. With rifle, hand grenade, and mortar fire, we stormed through the village to gain

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the hills on the other side as quickly as possible. During this action, Colonel Koenig was wounded and we were forced to leave this unfortunate man behind. Only walking wounded could keep up; we continuously moved cross-country under utmost exertion and during complete darkness. Daybreak (23 July) forced us to quicken our advance and we were able to reach the protection of the forest in time.

Reconnaissance during the assembly and rest period led to the impression that we were still far behind the enemy line and we decided to proceed through patches of woods in a southeastern direction. The only other officer in this greatly reduced group was Lieutenant Heinemann of the engineer battalion. We proceeded during daylight, mostly through woods, but could not entirely avoid -19- crossing open terrain. At noon we rested in the dense forest off the road. We tried in vain to ascertain the course of the front line by observing air activity, artillery flashes and explosions, or other indicative signs. It became clear that we were on the same level or somewhat to the rear of the Russian artillery and mortar positions. Somehow, we attracted the attention of the Russians. A clash and hand-to-hand fighting developed in the dense forest. Evasion was impossible and with loud shouts, which were both the signal for the departure and the direction, we took off toward the southeast; while crossing a road (PRZEMYSLANY - CIEMIERZYNCE?), we destroyed some vehicles, killed horses and men, knocked out a mortar position, cut every visible telephone wire, and, shooting in all directions, kept running as fast as our lungs and legs would hold out. Within a short time we had extricated ourselves from this situation and continued at a more moderate pace.

Again exhaustion and thirst became more acute on this hot day. Everyone was famished, for the last meal had been consumed on the afternoon of 21 July; an occasional beet or berry had to serve as a substitute. My feet developed

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sores, since I was not conditioned for long cross-country marches. The percentage of wounded, who dragged themselves along, increased steadily. Altogether, we had melted down to a group of less than one hundred men. The burning thirst could not be quenched.

Suddenly, new hope! Fire of a nearby battery was "undisputably" identified by an artillery sergeant as that of a German light howitzer battery. We proceeded toward it, reached a group of horses, parked vehicles, and a civilian who was to lead us. Suddenly shooting started again in the forest. The Russian battery had discovered us and took up pursuit with small arms. With the small number of men fit for battle and despite the lack of arms and ammunition, I organized a rear guard which repeatedly had to ward off the the closely pursuing Russians, while the main body, completely exhausted, proceeded through the forests. Finally the Russians gave up their pursuit, and after we felt reasonably safe, there was a much needed rest period and renewed reconnaissance.

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Due to my complete physical exhaustion, I was in doubt whether I would be able to continue; I was afraid to become a burden to the group, now reduced to thirty men, twenty of whom were wounded. My operations NCO, Master Sergeant Perl, who had fought so bravely in these last battles, had stayed behind, dead or wounded. Two artillery NCO's, whom Major Thilo had assigned to me as body guards and aides when I encountered his group on the previous day, had served me with complete selflessness and devotion; one of them was wounded and stayed behind, the other grew weak. Our reconnaissance party returned and reported that our own troops, not directly in contact with the enemy, were located approximately 1 1/2 km. from our present area. A sigh of relief came from the ranks and with our last ounce of strength we

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stumbled more than walked, without another incident, into an artillery alert unit which had been committed as infantry. It momentarily expected orders for a further withdrawal (evacuation of a bridgehead across the ZLOTA LIPA river, northwest of DUNAJOW?). Our wounded were able to ride on their vehicles, while I took the horses of an artillery officer; thus, the paltry remnants of my group, still under Russian artillery fire, reached the far bank of the river, where I dismissed the men to the nearest medical aid station, after expressing to them my appreciation. I reached the CP of the 357th Infantry Division which was about to move to the rear.

Most of the men of all divisions, who escaped from the pocket, were spared the difficult battles of 22 and 23 July, after the actual breakthrough west of ZLOCZOW. These groups had remained further east; thinking mostly of their own safety, they proceeded without delay and reached our own troops in the -21- ZUKOW area already on 22 July. Others, mostly small groups, wandered around much longer in the enemy rear area -- some even for weeks -- until they finally reached the German lines. Untold heroism was displayed here, and the true soldier had proved his mettle. Returned furlough personnel and service troops, as for instance the ordnance company, which had remained outside the pocket, finally gave Korpsabteilung C a strength of about six thousand men again; corps strength may have run between fifteen and twenty thousand men.

H. The Squandering of Highest Moral Values

The second encirclement of BRODY had come to an end unnoticed by history and without public acclaim. However, anyone who experienced how ragged soldiers, mostly barefoot, famished, and thirsty, singly and in small or large groups, together with their dismounted officers recognized their battle-weary division

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commander on their way to the Carpathian passes, and how both officers and men greeted eachother, often with tears in their eyes, expressing the joy over the salvation of the other, has truly found inner satisfaction, regardless on which side he fought; that is worth more than any material remuneration. Pride in one's own achievement bolstered the morale.

Lack of recognition of these highest values by the High Command, and tragic circumstances allowed this unit to be desolved a short time later.

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