

PANZERS **ON THE** **EASTERN FRONT**

**General Erhard Raus and His Panzer
Divisions in Russia 1941-1945**



Edited by Peter Tsouras



**PANZERS
ON THE
EASTERN FRONT**

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Edited by
Peter G. Tsouras

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*For Captain Lincoln D. Leibner, US Army,
who showed at the Pentagon on 11 September 2001
that we still have men of courage among us.*

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KEY TO MAPS			
	German movements		Russian positions
	German armor		105mm howitzer battery
	German mechanized infantry		150mm heavy field howitzer battery (long barreled)
	German positions		Light infantry howitzer platoon
	Russian movements		Light mortar
	Russian armor		Heavy machine gun
	Russian mechanized infantry		

Preface

by Franz Halder

Chief of the German Army General Staff, 1938–1942

Retired General E. Raus's portrayals of extraordinary personal experiences during the Russian campaign are both exciting and instructive. The author's tactical lessons after the description of each event are to the point. Besides the study's teaching value explained in the topic leader's preliminary remarks to individual examples, its psychological value deserves to be emphasized. It becomes very clear that a strong military leader with great power of motivation is the most important factor for success.

Generaloberst (ret.) Franz Halder

Introduction

The new main-attack army, which had been detached from the troops besieging Stalingrad and had been reinforced by reserves from the eastern bank of the Volga River, assembled in the northern hills and in the valley east of Bolshaya-Vasilevka for an all-out attack against the 6th Panzer Division. Thousands of Russians filled the snowfields, slopes, and depressions of the endless steppe. No soldier had ever seen such multitudes advance on him. Their leading waves were thrown to the ground by a hail of high-explosive shells, but more and more waves followed. Any attempt on the part of the Russian masses to reach the German lines was thwarted by the fire of machine guns and guns. The frontal attack was blocked.

A few hours later, however, the Russians poured into the village from the east like a stream of lava, pushing the flank of the 4th Panzergrenadier Regiment back some 100 meters. A short time later, they pushed through the gap to the 23rd Panzer Division and rolled forward toward the rear of the troops in the bridgehead. The eastern part of the village and the vicinity of the cemetery were lost. But the division stood unshaken like a rock in the surging sea. It was only when the encirclement of the division seemed on the point of becoming complete that the Russian masses were mowed down by a sudden thunderous concentration of the German artillery and were at the same time caught in the flank by 150 tanks coming from the village, and in the rear by 42 assault guns. As a result, they were overwhelmed. Even the strongest nerves of the enemy were unequal to this eruption of fire and steel. The Russians threw their weapons away and tried like madmen to escape the infernal crossfire and the deadly armored envelopment. This was a thing which rarely happened in World War II. In mobs of several hundreds, shelled even by their own artillery and their own rocket launchers, they ran west toward the only open spot and surrendered to the German covering parties stationed there.

—Generaloberst Erhard Raus
To Liberate Stalingrad, November 1952

I first came across writings of Generaloberst Erhard Raus in early 1971 while serving as a young armor officer with the United States Army in Germany. Published as Department of the Army pamphlets, they had lain untouched in my company commander's office for ages, it seemed, from all the dust I disturbed when I pulled them out of the bookcase. Being something of a Germanophile at the time, I was fascinated by these little gems of history. As I read on, it was obvious that the distilled experiences of German generals on the Russian Front were of such immediacy to our present mission—the victors of Stalingrad, the 8th Guards Army, were just 40 kilometers east of us—that I wondered why they were so little known. After all, the Soviet Armed Forces were in the full flood

of expansion, preparing for the great Theater Strategic Operation (TSO) meant to carry them to the Channel and the Pyrenees.

I was also struck by the anonymity of the authors of these pamphlets. The Army had given a brief résumé, but also added the statement that the author wished to remain anonymous. It was only years later, when I found the bible behind the pamphlets at the Army Library in the Pentagon—the *Guide to Foreign Military Studies*¹—that I was able to unravel this mystery. This was the story of the US Army's program to capture the experience of the senior German officers (see Appendix 2 for the story of the Foreign Studies Program). Now I knew the name of the author—Erhard Raus—but, in all my reading of Eastern Front operations, the name had not stuck in my memory. Who was he? Who was this man who had so many dramatic and breathtaking stories at his fingertips?

The more I looked, the more impressed I became with one of the great unsung commanders of the twentieth century—a man who led the spearhead of the relief force that drove for the trapped Sixth Army in Stalingrad, the man who had commanded the brilliant defense in the Fourth Battle of Kharkov, the man who had led three panzer armies with distinction, and the man who was such a master of the art of war and leadership that his men coined a phrase for the saving effects of those qualities: “*Raus zieht heraus !*” (Raus pulls you through!). For a long time, the pantheon of German commanders on the Eastern Front was a murky thing at best for the Western audience. Those commanders who had fought against the Western Allies were well known—for example, Rommel and Kesselring. We had heard of Eastern Front commanders who had also gained reputations in the West—Guderian, von Manstein, von Mellenthin and von Manteuffel—and their reputations rested not a little on the books they were able to write. But Raus wrote no book and passed away quietly in 1956.

Twenty-three years after I first blew the dust off his pamphlets, I set out to bring the writings of Erhard Raus to the attention of English-speaking readers. In 1994 Greenhill Books published the first collection of the DA Pamphlets under the title of *The Anvil of War: German Generalship in Defense on the Eastern Front*. Two of the three pamphlets included in it were Raus' *Military Improvisations During the Russian Campaign* (DA Pam 20-201, 1951) and *German Defense Tactics Against Russian Breakthroughs* (DA Pam 20-233, 1951). In 1995 Greenhill published the second volume based upon the DA Pamphlets under the title *Fighting in Hell: The German Ordeal on the Eastern Front*. Two of the four pamphlets included in it were Raus' *Russian Combat Methods* (DA Pam 20-230, 1950) and *The Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia* (DA Pam 20-291, 1952). Fortunately, both books have been well received, helping to bring Raus's role and reputation into their proper place.

The Foreign Military Studies collection of manuscripts, however, contained even more of Raus's writings—which, if anything, were more fascinating than his published

¹ *Guide to Foreign Military Studies* (Historical Division, Headquarters, United States Army Europe, 1954) p. 248.

works. These manuscripts make up this book and include *The Pomeranian Battle and the Command in the East* (D-189, 1947) and *Small Unit Tactics—Unusual Situations* (P-060g, Part I [1952], Part II [1952], Part III [1953], and Part IV [1954]).

The original purpose as devised by then Colonel S. L. A. Marshall, Army Historical Section, was simple. In order to write the history of the US Army in the European Theater of Operations, the Army needed to know what was going on “on the other side of the hill.” A new purpose emerged as the Cold War heated up and finally exploded in Korea—to exploit the German lessons learned in fighting the Soviets.

This, then, is the story of the German Army in adversity. Although the Army was ultimately doomed to defeat, its retreat from Russia was conducted with skill and heroism against incredible odds. Upon his return to Moscow by car after the Potsdam Conference, a senior American diplomat noted that his route followed the retreat of one of the main German armies and was littered with the debris of war. But repeatedly he would see the same scene—one or two burnt-out German tanks in defensive positions with arcs of twenty to thirty destroyed Soviet tanks arrayed around them. The author fought through this very ground. Only in 1990, in the full glare of *glasnost*, did the Soviet General Staff announce its true military losses of the war—an incredible 8,668,400 dead and eighteen million wounded, grim testimony to the achievements of the German soldier in both the offense and defense.²

However, it was not the purpose of the US Army to write the history of the German Army. Most of the German studies covered the events after Stalingrad when the Soviets had become the hammer and the Germans the anvil, a parallel the US Army was seeing as a very real possibility for itself. Accordingly, the manuscripts were not written with an orderly history in mind; they were written to impart lessons learned. Threading these lessons together chronologically, though, does create an historical narrative of incredible power.

Raus’s works incorporated into *The Anvil of War* and *Fighting in Hell* were thematic treatments on various subjects of interest to the US Army, although historical narratives were interspersed throughout. Raus’s works in this current book, *Panzers on the Eastern Front*, are straight combat narratives that each tell the story of a particular military operation. Together, they tell much of Raus’s experience from the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 through August 1943 when he brilliantly led the defense of Kharkov. They add remarkably to the historical record and are first-rate military historical prose.

In a letter of 4 February 1951, Raus discusses the collaboration that led to the manuscripts in this book. Addressed to the chief of the Operational History Branch, Lieutenant-Colonel Nawrocky, Raus explains:

According to your wish and my letter of 8 January 1951 I pictured as first example unusual small events out of my experience in the Eastern Campaign . . . The events I want to

² General M. A. Moiseyev, Chief of the General Staff, *Voyenno-istoricheskij zhurnal*, No 3, March 1990.

describe took place in the entire eastern area through all the years of war and during all seasons. Each example will be different from the other and therefore has its own particular features.³

Chapter 1, “Barbarossa Begins,” covers the 6th Panzer Division in the opening battles on the frontier with Army Group North. Chapter 2, “Raus Pulls Them Through,” continues the story of the incredible series of bold actions by the 6th Panzer Division in the drive on Leningrad. The narrative then takes the division to the desperate situations in early 1942 in the face of the Russian winter and the Soviet Moscow Offensive operation that nearly doomed the German Army. Chapter 3, “To Liberate Stalingrad!” is the high drama of the attempted relief of the trapped 6th Army in Stalingrad by the 6th Panzer Division rushed from the comfort of France to face echeloned Soviet armies, not to mention the enemy’s camel corps, determined not to give up their prize in the beleaguered city. Chapter 4, “Struggle Along the Donets,” tells of aspects of the desperate and tenacious defense of Kharkov after the German retreat following the battle of Kursk. Finally, Chapter 5, “The Pomeranian Battle and the Command in the East,” offers one of the most telling glimpses into history of any of the German manuscripts – the detailed and revealing conversations with Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler on the military situation in February 1945 and Raus’s catastrophic briefing with Hitler himself. The author uses his opportunity to expound on the nature of modern war and the tactical and leadership concepts of the German Army in the introduction to Chapter 1:

Proper combat education and training for officers and soldiers are of vital importance to victory. The increase of their skill and efficiency to a maximum is the objective of peacetime training. This aim may be considered reached if every soldier completely masters his weapons in times of emergency and if every commander masters the tasks with which he is faced. The less commanders and soldiers have to learn in actual combat, the better has been their training for war.

Here, as at most fronts, it was also a question of dealing with new weapons and a mass commitment of enemy troops and equipment which threatened to crush everything. These events, which first appeared in the later course of the war, placed commanders and troops in unusual situations where tactical measures had to be taken which were neither prescribed in regulations nor taught. Nothing but an officer corps educated to take full responsibility and to act independently, plus the resolve of courageous soldiers, made it possible for solutions to be found to all unusual problems. An army relying on mass drilling and mass effect alone would have failed under such conditions or would have suffered heavy losses.

Chapters 1–4 comprise the four manuscripts in *Small Unit Tactics—Unusual Situations* (P-060g, Parts I–IV); Chapter 5 is *The Pomeranian Battle and the Command in the East* (D-189,

³ Letter from Erhard Raus to Lt-Col M. Nawrocky dated 4 February 1951, contained in the documents associated with MS # 060g, “Small Unit Actions—Unusual Situations,” Foreign Military Studies, National Archives, College Park, MD.

1947). In order to provide the reader with sufficient background, I have added Appendix 1: “The 6th Panzer Division: Its History and Order of Battle.” The story of the Foreign Military Studies Program is at Appendix 2 and has been revised from the introduction to *The Anvil of War*. Additionally, I have significantly expanded the original modest notes in the manuscripts to provide the necessary context. As an illustration, the notes in Chapter 3 provide the reader with a correction to the faulty Soviet order of battle upon which Raus had to rely at Stalingrad from German intelligence, and give an accurate picture of what he faced: for example, Raus persisted in believing that he faced only the 3rd Tank Army when, in actuality, he faced the strongly reinforced 2nd Guards and 51st Armies.

I also have found it necessary to change the American military terminology in the translation back into the original German terms to describe German military organizations and concepts where those terms are more familiar to the English-speaking readership interested in German military affairs. This provides a much more precise military lexicon, bestows a sense of authenticity and accuracy, and is thoroughly explained in the notes as well. For example, the manuscript’s “4th Infantry Regiment,” although a direct translation of *Schützenregiment*, is somewhat misleading since the formation was motorized; the more common and descriptive term for this in English would be “4th Motorized Infantry Regiment.” This term in German went out of use in July 1942 when all such regiments in panzer divisions were redesignated *Panzergrenadier*—hence the “4th Panzergrenadier Regiment.” Similarly, while “battle group” is a literal translation of the German *Kampfgruppe*, it lacks the punch and imagery of the German. A particularly crude translation of the word for the average German infantrymen was “Doughboy”! I have replaced it with the correct term, *Landser*. If I have been inconsistent, it has been for the sake of clarity and usage. I have also left German ranks in the original form; translations all too often confuse the issue. For example, *Generalmajor* in German means “brigadier-

TABLE OF EQUIVALENT SENIOR RANKS

German Army	Red Army	US Army
Generalfeldmarschall	Marshal of the Soviet Union	General of the Army
Generaloberst	General of the Army	General
General der Infanterie	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
General der Kavallerie	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
General der Artillerie	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
General der Pioniere	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
General der Panzertruppen	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
General der Nachrichtentruppen	General-Colonel	Lieutenant-General
Generalleutnant	General-Lieutenant	Major-General
Generalmajor	General-Major	Brigadier-General
Oberst	Colonel	Colonel

general” in English and is often mistranslated as “major-general.” Finally, for clarity, all Soviet units have been italicized.

The reader will notice a variation in the spelling of the author’s name in a number of historical works. The correct spelling is “Raus,” seemingly a simple name, but one which is consistently misspelled by both Germans and Americans as “Rauss,” to include this editor in *The Anvil of War* and *Fighting in Hell*. I humbly beg the reader’s pardon for the error. I have been in good company, however, since all of the German generals—von Manstein, von Mellenthin, and Guderian—who referred to him in their books and knew him personally misspelled it as well.

I would like to express my appreciation to Jayne C. Shelton for her invaluable assistance in preparing such a clean and accurate transcript of these chapters from the often barely legible originals.

Erhard Raus

The right appreciation of their opponents . . . the audacity to leave for a short space of time, a small force only before them, energy in forced marches, boldness in sudden attacks, the intensified activity which great souls acquire in the moment of danger—these are the ground of such victories.

Clausewitz surely would have recognized Erhard Raus in his description of a great captain in his masterpiece *On War*.⁴

Erhard Franz-Josef Raus was born on 8 January 1889 at Wolfamitz in Austria. After his education at the Brünn Cadet School (in what is now Brno in Slovakia) in 1905–09, he received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Austrian Army on 1 May 1912. In World War I he served on the Russian and Italian fronts and commanded mountain troops. After the war, until 1937 he served in a number of assignments in Vienna, especially as an instructor in the military school system. On 1 December 1936 he was promoted to Colonel (Oberst). In 1938 he served as Austria’s military attaché in Rome.⁵

In his formative experiences as a junior and field grade officer can be seen the great general of World War II. Like Rommel’s, his service with mountain troops demanded the most of independence, initiative, innovation, and leadership. Mountain operations are by their nature independent, where the skills and abilities—especially the quick-thinking, aggressiveness, and boldness of the junior leader—are vital. Secondly, his extensive experience as an instructor developed one of the traits that must be second nature to a great general—that of teacher and trainer.

Upon the annexation of Austria in 1938, the Austrian Army was incorporated directly into the German Army, and, as with the rest of the Austrian officer corps, Raus, as a professional officer, simply changed uniforms. He was obviously well thought of

⁴ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁵ Brief biography of Erhard Raus contained in the documents associated with MS # 060g, “Small Unit Actions—Unusual Situations”.

enough to be appointed commander of Military Area XVII, which included Vienna, the ancient Hapsburg capital, and served there from 1939 to 1940. From 1939 to 1940 he served as chief of staff of XVII Corps.

In 1939 he began a long and distinguished association with the division with which he was to serve through some of the most dramatic moments of the war when he received command of the 4th Motorized Infantry Regiment (Schützenregiment 4), 1st Light Division (1st Leichte Division, later converted to 6th Panzer Division—see Appendix 1 for the history of the 6th Panzer Division). He commanded the regiment in the 1940 campaign in the West in which the 6th Panzer Division was commanded by Generalmajor (Brigadier General) Werner Kempf. The division, for the first time, was subordinated to XLI Panzer Corps commanded by Generaloberst (General) Georg Hans Reinhardt as part of Panzer Group Von Kleist, the vanguard of Army Group A. Raus's regiment was part of the great mass of panzer divisions that closed on the British pocket at Dunkirk from the south. A victorious 6th Panzer Division returned to garrison duty in East Prussia, now subordinated to the Eighteenth Army. In 1941 Raus received command of the 6th Motorized Brigade (Schützenbrigade 6) which included his old regiment, the newly added 114th Motorized Infantry Regiment, and the 6th Motorcycle Battalion (Kradschutz Abteilung 6).

The invasion of the Soviet Union in Operation “Barbarossa,” on 22 June 1941, passed without enemy contact for the 6th Panzer Division and Colonel Raus. Only on the morning of the next day did things change. “Far to the front, clouds of dust appeared on the horizon. ‘The enemy after all,’ many a man thought, and speed picked up.” Fighting its way through ambushes and delaying efforts of Soviet units, the Kampfgruppe led by Raus seized the bridge over the Dubysa River. The Soviets counterattacked with tanks, including the first appearance of the huge KV-1 and KV-2 models, the existence of which the Germans were completely ignorant of. Their 50mm antitank guns were useless, and the infantry were suddenly at great risk. It was here that Raus's quick thinking dominated the situation. Instinctively he employed combined arms. He wrote: “All branches of the combat arms were brought forward to participate in the antitank defense. The rumor of the invincibility of the superheavy enemy tanks had already been destroyed . . .” He also understood that German success in the face of technological surprise was simply not in a specific tactic.

As always in critical situations, in this case also: the iron discipline of the soldiers, and the spirit and morale of the battle-ried, well-trained commanders and subordinate commanders decided the issue. They were not dependent on outmoded rules and instructions but knew how to act in a situation unprovided for by regulations and personal experience. Their success confirmed the suitability of the measures taken. The troops lived through this experience with unbroken courage and few losses, and again proved their excellent spirit in the engagements which followed. (Chapter 1).

In the drive on Leningrad, Kampfgruppe Raus was always one step ahead of the enemy. On 6 July it was the first German unit to break through the three-kilometer deep

belt of fortifications of the Stalin Line just across the Dvina River. On 11 July the XLI Corps commander personally ordered Raus to seize the two bridges over the Luga River. Three days later he did just that, seizing both bridges intact in a daring *coup de main*, assisted by a special operations detachment from the Brandenberger Lehr Regiment. For the next week, Raus held both bridgeheads against heavy and repeated counterattacks by Soviet forces frantic to wipe out this German foothold so near to Leningrad. His Kampfgruppe numbered barely 1,500 men and was completely surrounded by up to two Soviet divisions, yet by means of skilled mobile defense and high-quality personal leadership he defeated every Soviet attempt to crush his force. Raus identified the reasons for German success in such a difficult tactical position against such odds: psychological factors, high-training, the personal presence of commanders in a crisis, and combined arms.

The intelligent German soldier wanted to know what he was fighting for and what significance the mission of his respective unit had; only then was he capable of doing his utmost. He was an independent, individualistic fighter and felt far superior to the Russian soldier, who was trained for mass commitment. It is therefore important to make sure that these and similar psychological influences not be overlooked, even during the soldier's peacetime education and training. It is absolutely essential to imbue each man with an awareness of surpassing skill and self-confidence, and the extent of this feeling depended on how well he had been trained in the use of weapons and the utilization of terrain. To earn the confidence of the troops required exemplary conduct, sound knowledge and education and concern for the welfare of men on the part of their superior. Furthermore, it was important for each commander to appear at crucial points so as to be able to offer advice and assistance or make immediate decisions. It was his implicit duty to be present in critical situations. Of great importance, too, was the bond of comradeship which existed between the various arms and which considerably facilitated the coordination of all weapons. (Chapter 2).

Raus's ability was recognized by a promotion to Generalmajor (Brigadier-General) on 1 September. That ability would again be tested almost immediately as XLI Panzer Corps approached the outer defenses of Leningrad—the Leningrad Line—early that same month. These defenses were six miles in depth and consisted of sophisticated system of antitank ditches, earth and concrete bunkers, pillboxes with armored cupolas with machine guns and cannon that could be raised and lowered. Immediately south of the Leningrad Line, the area of Krasnogvardyesk had been converted into an outlying fortress complex and had successfully held up several German infantry corps. The 6th Panzer Division attacked from the west, penetrating the Leningrad Line and getting into the rear of Krasnogvardyesk, triggering a mass withdrawal of Soviet forces which the Germans savaged. They also broke a tank counterattack. Still, the fortress of Krasnogvardyesk had to be reduced. Raus's panzergrenadiers attacked the bunker system from the rear, engaging in savage fighting in subterranean chambers to root out the defenders. With the fall of the complex, the last major defenses of Leningrad had fallen. As Raus recounted, "Within a week, the 6th Panzer had to break through and roll

up twelve positions, repel several counterattacks, and take more than 300 heavily fortified bunkers.”⁶

Having broken every barrier, and having overcome every attempt at defense, the 6th Panzer Division had Leningrad in its grasp. Then they lost it. Shortly after the victory at Krasnogvardyesk, Hitler ordered XLI Panzer Corps south to assist Army Group Center in the drive on Moscow. In Operation “Typhoon” on 10 October, the 6th Panzer Division made the initial deep penetration in Russian lines that led to the encirclement of 600,000 Soviet troops at Vyazma.

On 25 November Raus assumed command of the 6th Panzer Division as the drive to Moscow took the division almost to the suburbs of the Soviet capital. But the frost had preceded him on the night of the 6th/7th. Two days after Raus took over, the division was directly north of Moscow near Yakroma when the temperature plunged to -40°C . The offensive slowed as Moscow seemed barely a hand’s grasp away. Then the Soviets unleashed their Moscow counteroffensive fueled by fresh Siberian divisions. Now Raus found himself with the task of saving an exhausted division. He lost his last tank on 10 December. Hitler ordered the army to stand fast and fight it out in the freezing cold. By early January, without armored vehicles, with a skyrocketing frostbite rate, and in the face of a savage Soviet counterattack, the 6th Panzer Division faced destruction. Raus saved it. He ordered emplacements blown out of the frozen ground, covered with lumber, and heated with wood fires; the frostbite rate fell. He intercepted stragglers, formed reaction teams, and kept the shrunken division in the line. It was here that Raus acquired his epithet among the troops. According to Generalmajor Hellmuth Reinhardt, “Although the author at the end of the war was an army group commander, he attained that rank because of his reputation as a fighting commander of smaller units. He was especially skillful in extricating troops from desperate situations, and thus acquired the sobriquet ‘*Raus zieht heraus*,’ roughly translated as ‘Raus pulls them through.’” (Chapter 2).

Raus found himself holding the vital Rzhev–Vyazma road, upon which the German Ninth Army depended for its survival. But the Soviets were still dangerously close to that road. His only solution was to assume the offensive, despite the enemy’s superiority. He counterattacked at the beginning of February in what he called the “Snail Offensive,” a rolling series of small-unit actions aimed at driving the Russians from one village after another until he had pushed them back 10–20 miles and appropriated their vital winter quarters for his own men. The following month he initiated the “Scorpion Offensive.” Once again, Raus’s ability as a tactician and leader became critical.

The available forces and material were still inadequate for an offensive in the conventional manner, and once again it became necessary to improvise tactics. Only successive surprise attacks with limited objectives plus close coordination of all arms had any chance of success. Free choice of time and place for each intended thrust was another prerequisite

⁶ Erhard Rauss, Hans von Greiffenberg and Waldemar Erfurth, *Fighting in Hell: The German Ordeal on the Eastern Front*, edited by Peter G. Tsouras (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), pp. 78–82. For an explanation of the inconsistent spelling of Raus’s name, see above, p. 16.

since the issue would be in doubt if the enemy recognized the Germans' intentions and took countermeasures. Whenever the element of surprise was lost, the objective had to be changed and the blow delivered at some distant vulnerable point. All this had to be achieved with a relatively weak striking force which was to be shifted to a different sector of the front immediately after every thrust. The tactics to be employed thus consisted of a well-coordinated but flexible system of limited objective attacks. They could best be compared to a series of paralyzing stings a scorpion would inflict in a life-and-death struggle against a physically superior opponent.⁷

Again the Red Army staggered back from the blows that Raus delivered. In the grim early months of 1942, Raus's abilities had been crucial in not only stabilizing a tottering front but in improving its situation and seizing the initiative from the enemy.

In April, the 6th Panzer Division was pulled out of Russia and transferred to the cozy warmth of northern France to be rebuilt. It was in July that an important fighting team was formed when Colonel Walter von Hünersdorff was assigned as commander of the 11th Panzer Regiment. If the survivors of "Barbarossa" and the replacements thought France would be a easy tour, they were quickly disabused. Raus trained the 6th Panzer Division hard for the next six months. Then, in early November, the Eastern Front beckoned again: the German Sixth Army had been encircled at Stalingrad, and Hitler ordered 6th Panzer east to joint the relief attempt.

Raus's hard training paid off immediately. As his forward regiment was unloading from its train at Kotelnikovo near the front, it was suddenly attacked by Soviet cavalry. The Germans instinctively counterattacked and smashed the enemy's 81st Cavalry Division, driving it from the town. This was only the first in a series of punishing blows Raus would rain down on the Soviet *51st Army* whose duty it was to form the outer ring of the forces encircling Stalingrad. In the next few days, Raus savaged the *4th Cavalry Corps* attempts to take Kotelnikovo and crushed it at Pokhlebin. (Chapter 3).

Assigned to LVII Panzer Corps, Raus's division formed its most powerful element. The ensuing attempt to break into the Stalingrad pocket would be the task of the 6th Panzer Division. On 12 December Raus attacked and breached the first barrier of the Aksay River. He hammered the *51st Army* back, kilometer after kilometer, leaving a trail of wrecked Soviet tanks in his wake. He had a masterful subordinate in von Hünersdorff, and the two of them thrust the division closer and closer to the pocket, grinding up every Soviet reserve thrown in their path. The situation had become so desperate for the Soviets that Stalin himself was personally involved in the attempt to stop Raus. Stalin called from Moscow to his front commanders, "You will hold out—we are getting reserves down to you," he commanded menacingly. "I'm sending you the *Second Guards Army*—the best unit I've left."⁸

Even the *2nd Guards* were not enough. Raus broke them in a final battle on 20 December. Having exhausted their armor, they resorted to mass infantry attacks:

⁷ Erhard Rauss and Oldwig von Natzmer, *The Anvil of War: German Generalship in Defense on the Eastern Front*, edited by Peter G. Tsouras (London: Greenhill Books, 1994), p. 40.

⁸ Paul Carrell, *Hitler Moves East, 1941–1943* (London and Boston, 1963) p. 605.

The Red riflemen surged forward in multitudes never before encountered. Attack wave followed attack wave without regard for losses. Each was annihilated by a terrific hail of fire without gaining so much as a foot of ground. Therefore, the Russians went around the two flanks of the German division in order to encircle it. In the course of this maneuver they came between the German artillery position and the panzer regiment. Firing from all barrels, 150 tanks and self-propelled assault guns attacked the Russian masses from the rear when they tried to escape the fire from the artillery. In their desperate situation many Russians threw down their weapons and surrendered. Succeeding elements flowed back . . . The Russian mass assault had collapsed.⁹

Barely 35 kilometers remained on the way to Stalingrad. The men of the 6th Panzer Division could even hear the sound of gunfire from the beleaguered Sixth Army, but its commander would not defy Hitler and order a breakout. Had he done that, the chances are that Raus would have been able to meet his forces halfway. That was not to be. The Sixth Army stayed put, and the Soviets attacked elsewhere, throwing the front into crisis. Raus' division was pulled out of its bridgehead and ordered north to put out the new fire.

The Army Group Commander, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, was later to write:

The very versatility of our armour and the superiority of our tank crews were brilliantly demonstrated in this period, as were the bravery of the panzergrenadiers and the skill of our anti-tank units. At the same time it was seen what an experienced old armoured division like 6 Panzer could achieve under its admirable commander General Raus [sic] . . . when it went into action with its full complement of armoured vehicles and assault guns.¹⁰

After the Soviets frustrated the relief of the Sixth Army, they launched a major attack westwards to drive the Germans further out of reach of the doomed forces in Stalingrad. The spearhead of the *1st Tank Army* overran the great supply and communications centre at Tatsinskaya, a bare 130 kilometers from Rostov; if it should lunge that much further the whole German position in the southern Soviet Union would collapse. Raus and the 6th Panzer rode to the rescue and snapped the spearhead of the *1st Tank Army*, destroying its lead corps and recovering Tatsinskaya. Paul Carrell describes Raus's night attack:

And now General Raus opened the nocturnal tank battle between Maryevka and Romanov. The enemy, held up frontally, was attacked from both flanks and in the rear. The Russians were taken by surprise and reacted confusedly and nervously. Raus, on the other hand, calmly conducted the battle like a game of chess.¹¹

It was no accident that Raus was promoted to Generalleutnant (Major-General) on 1 January 1943.

In the confusion of the collapse of the German front after Stalingrad fell in January and Kharkov in early February, Manstein became desperate for talented senior officers.

⁹ Raus, *Fighting in Hell*, pp. 86–7.

¹⁰ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories* (London and New York, 1958; London and Novato, CA, 1982) p. 330.

¹¹ Paul Carrell, *Scorched Earth: The Russian-German War, 1943–1945* (Boston, 1966) pp. 118–123. UK title: *Hitler's War on Russia* (London, 1966).

On 6 February 1943, he reassigned Raus to command what became known as Provisional Corps Raus—three infantry divisions, Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland, and the Führer Escort Brigade. His mission was to stop the drive of the *3rd Tank Army* toward the bend of the Dnieper and cover the arrival of a panzer reserve. Once the reserve had arrived, Raus's corps formed the left flank of the attack by 1st SS Panzer Corps on Kharkov, smashing or driving away every Soviet unit in his path. In its attacks north of Kharkov, Grossdeutschland achieved a first:

It was in this action that Tiger tanks engaged the Russian T-34s for the first time; the results were more than gratifying for the Germans. For instance, two Tigers, acting as an armored point, destroyed a pack of T-34s. Normally the Russian tanks would stand in ambush at the hitherto safe distance of 1,350 yards and wait for the German tanks to expose themselves upon their exit from a village. They would then take the German tanks under fire while the Panthers [*sic*; "Tigers" is meant] were still outranged. Until now, these tactics had been foolproof. This time, however, the Russians had miscalculated. Instead of leaving the village, the Tigers took up well-camouflaged positions and made full use of their longer range. Within a short time they knocked out sixteen T-34s which were sitting in open terrain and, when the others turned about, the Tigers pursued the fleeing Russians and destroyed eighteen more tanks. It was observed that the 88-mm armor-piercing shells had such terrific impact that they ripped off the turrets of the T-34s and hurled them several yards. The German soldiers' immediate reaction was to coin the phrase, "The T-34 raises its hat whenever it meets a Tiger." The performance of the new German tanks was a great morale-booster.¹²

After the recapture of Kharkov, Provisional Corps Raus was redesignated XI Corps with four infantry divisions, and Raus was promoted to General der Panzertruppen (Lieutenant-General) on 1 May. By this time, he was training his corps for the upcoming Operation "Citadel," the Battle of Kursk. Raus paid particular attention to the problem of crossing the dense Russian minefields. His divisions were rotated to the rear for intensive training in how to identify the emplacement of enemy mines. They were also taught how to survive tanks running over their foxholes. The Luftwaffe's 7th Flak Division was attached to XI Corps because it would have the mission of protecting the flank of Army Group Kempf's main attack force, III Panzer Corps (which contained Raus's old division, the 6th Panzer).

In the 5 July German assault, the infantry of his corps penetrated the minefields with almost no loss and roved several miles into the Soviet defenses. Raus skillfully improvised tactics for the flak division to support the attack of his infantry which was fighting its way through the enemy's dense field fortifications with hand grenades and bayonets. He also quickly organized the flak to crush serious tank counterattacks that penetrated his infantry defenses, utterly destroying two tank brigades.¹³

As the Germans retreated after Kursk, the role of fighting the tough delaying actions was left to Raus and XI Corps. In the grim fighting around Belgorod in early August

¹² Raus, *The Anvil of War*, p. 139.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–9.

1943, during which he successfully employed the technique of delay on successive positions, he offered a self-portrait, during the crisis of the battle when Soviet penetrations had begun to panic XI Corps:

Every experienced commander is familiar with this sort of panic which, in a critical situation, may seize an entire body of troops. Mass hysteria of this type can be overcome only by energetic actions and a display of perfect composure. The example set by a true leader can have miraculous effects. He must stay with his troops, remain cool, issue precise orders, and inspire confidence by his behavior. Good soldiers never desert such a leader. News of the presence of high-ranking commanders up front travels like wildfire along the entire front line, bolstering everyone's morale. It means a sudden change from gloom to hope, from imminent defeat to victory. . . . This is exactly what happened.¹⁴

Shortly after Belgorod, Raus found himself in another desperate defensive operation as he withdrew to the Donets River north of Kharkov for the epic struggle that would be called the 4th Battle of Kharkov. With originally five divisions spread in an arc around that city, XI Corps was attacked by four Soviet armies, including the *5th Guards Tank Army* fresh from its triumphs at Kursk. For eight days Raus slowly fell back to the outer defenses of Kharkov, in a dogged delaying action in the scorching late Russian summer. His old 6th Panzer Division had become detached from its corps and retreated through Raus's front. Raus immediately put it under his command and placed it on his open left flank.

A new crisis emerged when it was discovered that the 168th Infantry Division had disappeared from the line. The 6th Panzer extended its line to fill the gap while Raus personally hunted down the missing division to find it 40 kilometers in the rear, where the commander had taken it after suffering a loss of nerve. Raus dealt with the commander and plugged the division back into line. Then the Soviets penetrated the Donets line and threw a tank force into Kharkov. Raus ordered the 6th Panzer to clean it up while he looked to the main blow that was building.

While holding off the *53th*, *67th*, and *7th Guards Armies* to the north with his depleted infantry divisions, he had to face an open left flank. It was here that the *5th Guards Tank Army*, commanded by the redoubtable Pavel Rotmistrov, the victor of Prokhorovka, struck at the bottleneck of the German salient around Kharkov. But Raus was quicker—and luckier.¹⁵ He concentrated the tanks from the attached 3rd Panzer Division and 2nd

¹⁴ Rauss, *The Anvil of War*, p. 192.

¹⁵ Carrell, *Scored Earth*, pp. 305–6. Raus was also lucky. *The 5th Guards Tank Army* ran into the German Army Group South supply dump at Feski northwest of Kharkov crammed with two months' supply of everything necessary to support two armies for three months. That included liquor. At Feski was an entire year's production of the French spirits industry as well as liquor looted from all of conquered Europe. There was so much vodka that it was stored in carboys. The German quartermaster threw open the dumps to any German unit that had transportation. Within two days it had been cleaned out except for the vodka. None was touched: with French cognac, Spanish port, and Italian Chianti to choose from, who would want vodka? It was then that the *5th Guards Tank Army* overran Feski—and did not move for three days. When the Russians had drunk the last carboy dry and recovered from their hangovers, they discovered that SS Panzer Division Wiking had reinforced Raus's defense and occupied the high ground in front of them.

SS Panzer Division “Das Reich” just at that point. Repeated hammer blows of the *5th Guards* eventually shattered on the anvil of XI Corps’ defense in a dramatic night battle:

Many tanks and several farm buildings went up in flames. The plateau on which this great night tank duel was fought was illuminated by their pale light. This made it possible to recognize the contours of Red tanks at a distance of more than 100 yards, and to shell them. The thunderous roll turned into a din like the crescendo of kettledrums as the two main tank forces clashed. Gun flashes from all around ripped the darkness of the night throughout the extensive area. For miles, armor-piercing projectiles whizzed into the night in all directions. Gradually the pandemonium of the tank battle shifted to the north. However, flashes also appeared farther and farther behind the German front, and fiery torches stood out against the night sky. Not until two or three hours later was calm restored in the depth of the German front.

The *5th Guards Tank Army* lost 420 tanks in three days’ fighting. Raus had left it a burnt-out husk. It was the second drubbing Raus had delivered to Rotmistrov, having bled his *7th Tank Corps* white outside of Stalingrad.¹⁶

Although Kharkov was eventually ordered to be abandoned by higher headquarters, Raus had covered himself with renown. The day before the city was abandoned, Hitler awarded Raus the Oak Leaves to the Knight’s Cross, the 280th such award of 890 given out in the war. With his brilliant defensive operations at Belgorod and Kharkov, Raus had saved Army Group South from one disaster after another. The Army Group South commander, General Erich von Manstein, showed his regard for Raus by bringing him on his own initiative to a conference called by Hitler at Vinnitsa in late August. He proved himself the right man in a crisis. And suddenly a great new crisis fell upon the Germans. The Soviets had torn open the front west of Kiev in November and were preparing to exploit the opening and conduct a major envelopment of major parts of the army group. The disaster was the result of Hitler’s decisions, but he needed a scapegoat and he relieved Generaloberst Hoth, commander of the Fourth Panzer Army. Raus, who had served briefly as commander of XLVII Panzer Corps (4–25 November), seemed the ideal man to take over the 4th Panzer.

It was just in time. He assumed command on 26 November 1943 near Ternopol. Within a week of his assumption of command, Raus seized the initiative. He said that “the situation demanded immediate action” and launched a major spoiling attack with the three panzer divisions of XLVIII Panzer Corps against the *1st Ukrainian Front*. The Soviets were taken completely by surprise, and the front’s artillery completely was overrun and lost. It was a classic operation that employed deception and imagination. After savaging the *1st Ukrainian Front*, Raus restored the German front with infantry and withdrew XLVIII Panzer Corps into reserve, ready for the next blow. Raus’s spoiling attack

... achieved the dual purpose of relieving an encircled corps and enabling the Germans to build up a continuous front where previously there had been a wide gap. The

¹⁶ Rauss, *Fighting in Hell*, pp. 69–1.

annihilation of strong enemy forces was an incidental, though important, result of this operation.

The enemy's strategy had been dealt a severe setback, and his losses had been severe—200 tanks destroyed and 800 guns captured.¹⁷

Shortly thereafter Raus employed a different technique—delaying and blocking actions—to blunt the Soviet Christmas offensive west of Kiev. The Soviet armies thrust and hammered at the Fourth Panzer Army to break through, but succeeded only in moving it about 100 kilometers west in five weeks of sustained operations despite a superiority in tanks of 1,200 to 200. Generalleutnant F. W. von Mellenthin, XLVIII Corps Chief of Staff in these battles, was to write:

The calm and able leadership of Colonel General Rauss [*sic*], the commander of Fourth Panzer Army, had succeeded in overcoming a dangerous crisis. It is true that the Russians captured Zhitomir on 31 December, and on 3 January had the satisfaction of crossing the 1939 frontier of Poland. But in fact their offensive power had been worn down, the German front in Western Ukraine was still relatively intact, and the fighting spirit of our troops remained unbroken.¹⁸

Raus continued to command the Fourth Panzer Army through the fighting retreat of Army Group North from the Ukraine to the Carpathian Mountains. In April of 1944, he conducted a masterful zone defense against a major Soviet breakthrough attempt in the area of Lvov, in western Ukraine. He then launched sharp attack into the flank of the opposing Soviet forces that allowed the First Panzer Army trapped behind Soviet lines to break out.

On 18 May Raus succeeded the brilliant Generaloberst Hans Hube as commander of the First Panzer Army (Army Group South) after the latter had been killed in an air crash on his way to receive the Diamonds to the Knight's Cross personally from Hitler. On 15 August Raus was promoted to Generaloberst (General). On 16 August 1944 he was transferred to Army Group Center and command of the Third Panzer Army, badly mauled in the catastrophe of the destruction of Army Group Center in June. He commanded this army in the long, nightmarish retreat through Lithuania, East Prussia, and Pomerania. In East Prussia in December 1944, he was able to repeat the success of the zone defense against a Russian breakthrough for an entire month. In this operation, the Third Panzer Army consisted of nine weak divisions with 50 tanks, 400 guns, and insignificant air support; the Soviet front opposed to it consisted of the *3rd Belorussian Front's* 44 divisions with 800 tanks, 3000 guns, and strong air support.¹⁹

Building on the experiences in the zone defense operations around Lvov, Raus constructed a defensive system 50 miles in depth in East Prussia: "Everyone, from corps commander to private, made strenuous efforts to improve the defense system." With the fine touch of a master, Raus had constructed the forward positions with their sudden

¹⁷ Rauss, *The Anvil of War*, p. 145–9.

¹⁸ F. W. von Mellenthin, *Panzer Battles* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press, 1971) pp. 269–70.

¹⁹ Rauss, *The Anvil of War*, pp. 164.