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## **„Operations of German 3rd Army in the Polish Campaign 1939”**

### **Summary**

The doctoral thesis describes the preparations and military operations of the German 3<sup>rd</sup> Army in Poland in the scope of the operational art of war. This military formation was one of the shortest existing in the German Army during World War Two, which gives a chance to encompass its whole lifespan.

This topic was chosen because of several reasons. First of all, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army operated in a completely different operational situation than the other German formations. This was definitely a more difficult situation – this army operated from the separated area of East Prussia, which – because of its location – was peculiar and caused concerns in the German military command. This difference was not only because of the location. Even the structure of the troops differed from the ones in the rest of the Reich. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, along with the 10<sup>th</sup> Army, was the biggest formation of this level, participating in the Invasion of Poland.

The need for research in this topic comes from the fact that none of the German armies participating in the Polish Campaign was an object of historical studies, in Poland nor in Germany. This situation is in contrast to the state of research on the Polish armies, which of almost every one has at least one monography. This work intends to fill this gap, presenting the military operations in September and October 1939 from the German perspective.

The thesis includes also an analysis of the Polish situation, but the main focus is on the German side, because it was the one with initiative in the conflict. It has a big impact on the construction of the work in the part about the fights. The Polish historiography shows the 1939 campaign mainly from a Polish perspective. Unfortunately, this often leads to only a rough, loose analysis of the opponent's situation. Most of the Polish works lack a wider perspective from the operational level. This level gives an opportunity to encompass the cause and effect chain, it allows to understand the reason why given troops were in specific places in specific time.

The thesis is mainly based on archival sources. The main research problem is to reconstruct the structure of the chain of command and processes of decision-making in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army command and the distribution of tasks between the sub-formations (Army Corps and Groups), simultaneously describing the implementation of these tasks. The commander's intentions, formed in cooperation with the chief of staff and the operational division resulted in a specific force deployment and its structure. The ordered manoeuvres and concentrations were decisive for the outcome of the fights. The results of this analysis answer the question about the level of independence and self-reliance with making decisions in the army headquarters as well as present the flexibility of the German command on this level.

Another interesting research topic is the mutual relations between the cadres on particular levels of the chain of command, especially when comparing it to the Polish armies. The thesis includes a very precise list of names linked with an Order of Battle, which allows to deanonymize the German troops and its commanders and in the future may simplify the further research on this topic in family heritages. It is also useful for researching the topic of losses of German officer corps in the Polish Campaign. The losses of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army became an additional research topic during the preparations of this thesis, as the author tried to answer the question if the losses had any influence on the troops' military readiness and its cohesion.

To fulfill the presented goals the author decided to analyse a wide and diversified group of sources, both Polish and German. The most of it are German-language documents, which was another complication in the research due to the necessity of translating the texts. Also, the German wartime documents are very specific, which leads to the necessity of reconstructing the whole process of preparing the documentation (needed to understand the chain of document production). It is highly recommended to keep in mind, that most of the sources were produced abreast and only for temporary use, which makes them very reliable and valuable.

The most important group of these documents were microfilmed in the so-named Alexandria – Collection. These are mainly the documents of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and some of its Army Corps, all together 49 archival units. Some of them are in Warsaw, in the Archiwum Akt Nowych, others can be found in the German Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv in Freiburg. In the latter, there are also 75 archival units not microfilmed and concerning the presented topic. The Author visited those archives and researched their stock during the preparation of this thesis. A small group of documentation was digitalised and presented online by the Central Archive of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense.

The chosen methods were selected to create a comprehensive thesis encompassing the operational activities of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army. The leading role was taken by the philological method, important with text-based documents, especially when they are in a foreign language. The remaining methods were auxiliary to it and simplified the presentation of collected data.

The work's first chapter encompasses the III Reich's war preparations, with a more precise scope on the situation in East Prussia and the supreme commands's plans for the troops in that province. The description of creation of the operational plan is followed by the genesis of the establishment of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's headquarters, outlining the differences of its background in comparison to other formations. The next part presents the tasks given to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army with their distribution to sub-formations.

Second chapter covers the topic of army troops' mobilisation, preceded by an overall presentation of German preparations to war from the organisational side and Hitler's armament policy. The analysis resulted in a very interesting and non-uniform image of the mobilised divisions and their sub-units, which stays in contrary to the general state of knowledge about German army in 1939. A very interesting side topic, also presented in the thesis, is the case of reinforcing the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army by troops from other parts of the German Reich, which were sent via Baltic Sea. In general, this chapter presents the overall military effort of a specific province in the war preparations period, giving quite precise numbers of troops and their equipment gathered in the structures of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army.

The thesis' third part was divided in four parts corresponding with the chronological division of combats in September and October 1939. In every key battle the author also included short analyses of the tactical situation in the places where Germans achieved operational breakthroughs. A very interesting result was achieved while analysing the events on 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1939, when due to the international situation Adolf Hitler postponed the invasion, which is a great field for further research.

The most important topic being analysed is the activity of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army headquarters and it effected in very interesting results. Some of them disprove the image of the German Army as a perfectly prepared war machine, whose cadres had a wide freedom in decision making.

The Author managed to recreate the creation and implementation of the operational orders and the way in which the army headquarters informed the sub-formations about its intentions. The analysis of the time needed to implement the intentions as orders is very fruitful.

Key results appeared in the analysis of attempts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's commander and chief of staff to make some ad-hoc changes to the operational plan – such a situation happened three

times in September 1939. Each time such changes were abrogated or deeply modified by the supervisors from Army Group "Nord".

Those three situations and other analysis results denote, that the key figure in the northern part of the front during the German invasion of Poland was general Fedor von Bock, who not only watched over the proper implementation of the operational plan, but also consistently tried to enforce his own vision of the operational plan against Poland. In the Author's opinion it is von Bock's consistence and his readiness to take the risk of operating with open flanks were key factors allowing Germans to achieve success in this part of the front.

Trying to evaluate the self-reliance and independence of general von Küchler and general von Böckmann, the result is negative, however it was not their fault but was caused by the activity of their supervisor. Also, their way of leading the army probably was influenced by the fact, that before the war they commanded a corps, not an army. Both generals lacked experience in the level of operational art of war.

The research's results indicate that the German commands also experienced problems and chaos in the implementation of orders, and in some cases they were lucky because the Polish command was conducting the warfare in an even more chaotic way.

The overall analysis allows to present a quite precise number of casualties in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army's units. Those casualties couldn't influence the troops' readiness, nor their cohesion. However, another category of losses is important to underline: the number of armoured combat vehicles (tanks and armoured cars) – the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army lost around 1/3 of its initial armoured potential, twice it resulted in the need of withdrawal of Panzer-Division "Kempf" from the first line.

This analysis will become more valuable when other army commands will be analysed in such a way. The role of the Army Corps as a link in the chain command is also worth underlining. Archival research may lead to revealing even more important sources, especially in the family collections of German officers. Their journals and diaries can allow a wider and more complete analysis of the relations between the cadres and its influence on the decisions and their implementations, as well as the outcome of combats.

26 sierpnia 1939 r.