while regiment headquarters were setting up in any more or less suitable ravine or patch of woods. Thus it was extremely difficult to locate them quickly and destroy them in the course of a battle. Because of this, the commando teams of Abwehr Kommando 204 went more deeply behind the Soviet lines, into the rear of Kriuchenkin's army, beyond Prokhorovka and toward Korocha, and once there they reconnoitered, launched diversionary attacks against targets of opportunity, and killed senior command staff.

Emphasis was also placed on mass propaganda with the aim of undermining the morale of the Soviet troops, targeting chiefly the sergeants and privates who were shouldering the main burden of the war. Back in May 1943, on the basis of OKW Order No.13 from 21 April 1943107 "On the military servicemen of the Red Army who have voluntarily come over to the German side", the Wehrmacht began to execute Operation "Silver Ribbon", which was supposed to stimulate desertions, and accordingly reduce the fighting spirit of the Red Army's combat units. For this purpose, in the course of the next three months the Soviet tactical rear area was strewn with a variety of leaflets, which described the "heavenly" conditions of prisoners-of-war to the Red Army soldiers in a language that was rather awkward, but fully understandable. According to the data of V.G. Krysko, in May 1943 alone German aircraft dropped more than 32,000,000 copies of leaflets over the area of the Kursk salient.108 This method of undermining the combat capabilities of the Soviet formation was actively used not only in the period of lull, but also directly in the full swing of the Battle of Kursk, including actively on the Korocha direction as well. A number of operational documents testify to this. For example, in the summaries of the headquarters of the 305th Rifle Division for 8 July (at 0200 and 1400), it is reported: "Enemy aircraft are conducting separate flights over the division's sector and scattering leaflets, which the units and specialized elements are collecting and burning."109

However, let's return to the Melikhovo – Dal'niaia Igumenka area on the morning of 8 July. At this time Major General von Hünersdorff's 6th Panzer Division had been reinforced with StuG Battalion 228 (minus one battery), III/Nebelwerfer Regiment 54, a company of the Heavy Panzer Battalion 503, and the Separate Artillery Battalion 857 of 210mm mortars, while Major General G. Schmidt's 19th Panzer Division as before had the 168th Infantry Division's Infantry Regiment 442, Nebelwerfer Regiment 54 (minus III Battalion), a Tiger company of the Separate Heavy Panzer Battalion 503, and II/Artillery Regiment 71 (150mm howitzers). Panzerkampfgruppe Westhofen had attached to it only one battalion of Panzergrenadier Regiment 74, and two battalions of Nebelwerfers and howitzers. The rest of the division (troops of Panzergrenadier Regiments 73 and 74, Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion 19, a panzer company, 6 flame-throwing tanks of the 6th Panzer Division, the main forces of artillery and so forth) were to continue to attack the 81st Guards Rifle Division's lines in the Blizhniaia Igumenka – hamlet of the Machine Tractor Station sector.

Initially, the attack toward Melikhovo was set for 0700, but the heavy mortar battalion was late moving into its firing positions so von Hünersdorff, who had personally driven in his command armored car out to the area of jumping-off positions of von Oppeln-Bronikowski's panzerkampfgruppe, postponed the attack by an hour. Three hours before this moment, the 6th Panzer Division had conducted an hour-long reconnaissance-in-force in the direction of Melikhovo with up to a battalion of panzergrenadiers and 30 armored vehicles. It demonstrated that the village couldn't be taken with a frontal attack because of heavy harassing artillery fire out of the Kalinin – Sheino

109 TsAMO RF, f. 48 sk, op. 1, d. 17, l. 27.
area and artificial obstacles on the approaches to Melikhovo, which were being covered by intense infantry fire. Thus, it was decided to take Kalinin first.

At 1000 (Moscow time) after a strong artillery barrage on the positions of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment (initially on the left flank, and then in the depth of the combat positions), in which all of the artillery of the 6th Panzer Division and the attached heavy mortar battalion took part, the panzergrenadiers and assault guns of StuG Battalion 228 moved out on the attack toward the hamlet. From the daily report of the 6th Panzer Division's headquarters:

The start of the attack set for 0700 (Moscow time) was postponed to 1000 (Moscow time), because only by this time could the supporting mortar battalion be ready in their firing positions. The formation at the start of the attack:

On the right, Kampfgruppe Bieberstein, which was supposed to jump off from the western slope of a branch of the Razumnaia River, and attack through Kalinin toward Melikhovo.

Further to the left, Kampfgruppe Unrein
Between it and the panzers of the 19th Panzer Division -- von Oppeln's panzer regiment

The attack of the grenadiers launched later at 1100 was stopped by an anti-tank ditch that was located on a hill on the northern outskirts of Kalinin. After collapsing the walls with demolition charges in order to get across, it was necessary to sweep two belts of mines that were located one after the other. Kampfgruppe Bieberstein advanced to a point near Kalinin, but still couldn't take the hamlet because of heavy flanking fire from the direction of the northern portion of Miasoedovo [the 94th Guards Rifle Division] and the hills to the east of it.110

Simultaneously Westhofen's panzerkampfgruppe of the 19th Panzer Division went on the attack toward Dal'niaia Igumenka. Panzergrenadier Regiment 74 that was attached to it had already taken heavy losses, so the panzerkampfgruppe was acutely short of supporting panzergrenadiers. Thus, aware of the presence of the anti-tank ditch and minefields, which would naturally be covered by fire, Westhofen was forced to issue an order: until special instructions otherwise arrived, to escort the tanks only with combat engineers. Meanwhile, Richter's panzergrenadiers (Panzergrenadier Regiment 73 of the 19th Panzer Division) were supposed to drive the Russians out of the patches of woods east and southeast of Postnikov and thereby screen the left flank of the panzerkampfgruppe. Just like in its neighbor's sector, the start of the attack by the 19th Panzer Division was preceded by heavy artillery fire on Postnikov and Dal'niaia Igumenka, which shifted into the depth of the 92nd Guards Rifle Division's defenses several minutes before the panzers appeared on the battlefield. Let's take a glance at this attack through the eyes of staff officers of the 47th Separate Heavy Tank Regiment:

At 0800 on 8.7.1943 up to 60 enemy tanks went on the attack toward Dal'niaia Igumenka out of the area east of Postnikov. By this time the fifth Churchill tank of our regiment had arrived in Dal'niaia Igumenka, which was being held by our regiment at the directive of Guards Major Leonenko. The German tanks, unsupported by infantry, were moving in the combat formation of a wedge with great depth. Enemy mortars and artillery at 0800 opened up concentrated fire, striving to disrupt the staying power of our defense and ensure the breakthrough of tanks into the village. Despite the lack of means of reinforcement and the enemy's large advantage in tanks (60 against 5), the fascists' attack was beaten back.111

110 NARA US, rg. 242, t. 314, r. 197, f. 001204.
111 TsAMO RF, f. 2 gv. Ttk, op. 1, d. 24, l. 203.
The desire of the officers to confirm their crews' tenacity with the given figures is understandable, but it is impossible to take them seriously given an analysis of the operational situation in this area. Westhofen's *panzerkampfgruppe* was stopped not by five Churchill tanks, but primarily by a deep anti-tank ditch and the broad minefields in front of them and on the approaches to Dal'niaia Igumenka, and by the intense fire of 193rd Cannon Artillery Regiment out of Dal'niaia Igumenka and two battalions of Katiusha rocket launchers of the 97th Guards Mortar Regiment firing out of Melikhovo.

As I've already noted, information on the number of operational tanks in the III Panzer Corps prior to 9 July hasn't yet been found in archival sources. Prior to 9 July, the summaries of the divisions that contained such information were sent to the corps headquarters only once every 24 hours, but they are missing. Only after a special directive was released on the morning of 9 July that stated "... in these decisive days of combat, it has been ordered to submit reports on the status of tanks twice a day for keeping the higher command informed; staff officers are responsible for the accurate submission of these reports over the radio" did summaries appear with relatively complete information about the condition of the tank pool. According to the information from the Soviet side, in the triangular (excl.) Postnikov - (excl.) Dal'niaia Igumenka - (excl.) Kalinin area, up to 220 German tanks, assault guns and halftracks were spotted on the morning of 8 July, though only a total of 160 armored vehicles took direct part in the initial morning attacks toward Kalinin and Dal'niaia Igumenka. The concentration of such a significant force of tanks was quickly reported to Voronezh Front headquarters. A transcript of the discussions between corps commander S.G. Goriachev and the Front headquarters' deputy chief of operations Colonel F.I. Gorlachev at 0940 on 8 July have been preserved, in which he also reported the start of the attack by III Panzer Corps' group of armor:

**S.G. Goriachev:** ... 93rd Guards Rifle Division with two rifle regiments has taken over two-thirds of Burdeinyi's sector [of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps] while one rifle regiment has taken position directly west and southwest of Gostischevo. The enemy today is showing no activity in its sector. The 92nd Guards Rifle Division upon moving out to the indicated area with one rifle regiment since 1900 yesterday evening has been engaged in combat on the hills 2 kilometers east of Melikhovo. The enemy's combined attack has been repulsed. The remaining two regiments of the 92nd Guards Rifle Division reached the indicated area and linked up with the 81st Guards Rifle Division ... I've been searching all night and still haven't found the 96th Separate Tank Brigade and the Churchill tanks. I've now received information from [garbled in text] that a group of approximately 50 tanks, having encountered stubborn resistance from Truninsky's regiment [280th Guards Rifle Regiment] at Melikhovo pivoted toward Dal'niaia Igumenka; we are taking measures to repel the attack. I request that you compel Burdeinyi to carry out the boss's [N.F. Vatutin's] order and to occupy Khokhlovo and Dal'niaia Igumenka. Over.

**F.I. Gorlachev:** At what time did Burdeinyi leave the old place and do you know where he is now? Today at 0600 the enemy resumed the offensive out of the Luchki, Bol'shie Maiachki, Pokrovka, Krasnaia Dubrava area in the general Kochetovka - Sukhoso-Solomino direction. Altogether up to 200 tanks are operating in this sector; in other sectors, the enemy isn't conducting active operations.

**S.G. Goriachev:** I'm speaking myself from the new place, I left yesterday at 2200. I request that you urgently report the situation to Ivanov [the Front's chief of staff], since the movement of the group of tanks toward Dal'niaia Igumenka creates a definite threat.

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112 TsAMO RF, f. 203, op. 2843, d. 461, l. 38.
As we see, even the senior commanders of the Red Army had large problems not only with performance discipline, but also with elementary knowledge of their duties and understanding the significance of operational information for higher headquarters, especially in stressful moments. Five Churchills of the 47th Guards Breakthrough Heavy Tank Regiment were already at dawn standing in Dal'niaia Igumenka next to the positions of Lieutenant Colonel N.I. Novikov's 280th Guards Rifle Regiment. Both regiments were awaiting the Germans' tank attack while being totally unaware of each other's presence. Meanwhile, one lieutenant colonel (Shevchenko), who had arrived in the sector didn't get around to setting up an observation post or doing reconnaissance as the field manual demanded, or bother to report to his superior, the commander of the 35th Guards Rifle Corps, while a second lieutenant colonel (Novikov) had already spent a day and night in this sector, having never established contact or cooperation with neighbors, nor to mention report to the division about the arrival of tanks on his right flank. Thus even though the 47th Guards Breakthrough Heavy Tank Regiment was in fact positioned on the defense at 0530, no one knew about this but the tankers' themselves and perhaps the artillerymen of the 1500th Destroyer Anti-tank Artillery Regiment. Meanwhile Lieutenant General S.G. Goriachev had been searching all night for the tankers, who had been standing close beside him, and was rebuking the commander of the 2nd Guards Tank Corps Colonel A.S. Burdeinyi for irresponsibility. This episode testifies again to the fact that the command of the 35th Guards Rifle Corps, which I'll remind had just been formed in April 1943, hadn't yet managed to forge an effective chain of command over the troops. As a result, it more than once would cause a failure in the course of the intense fighting on the Korocha axis.

As for the 96th Separate Tank Brigade, the situation here isn't quite clear. Prior to the evening of 7 July it had been located under the control of the 6th Guards Army and had been operationally subordinate to the commander of the 375th Rifle Division. The order from the Front Commander-in-Chief about transferring it to the 35th Guards Rifle Corps arrived in the headquarters of Chistiakov's army at 1750 on 7 July. Why it didn't reach the tank brigade until almost a day later isn't clear.

The report about the start of an attack by an enemy tank group at the boundary between the 6th Guards and 7th Guards Armies alarmed N.F. Vatutin. At this moment on the Oboian' highway, the Germans were also advancing with significant amounts of armor to the north and under their onslaught the 6th Guards Army and 1st Tank Army had begun to fall back slowly. In the morning hours the Front headquarters assessed the situation here in a report sent over the Baudot device to the communications hub of the 7th Guards Army by the deputy Front commander General of the Army I.P. Apanasenko:

I am reporting: at 1000 the enemy in strength of up to 220 tanks with infantry from the Lukhanino – Oboian' highway (2 kilometers southeast of Krasnaia Dubrava) is attacking in the direction of Verkhopen'e. Up to 40 tanks at 1030 neared the southern outskirts of Syrtsevo, lying 6 kilometers south of Verkhopen'e. Up to 120 tanks with infantry were attacking, and of them, 50 tanks broke through to the Veselyi area (3 kilometers west of Griaznoe). As a result of the combat, the tanks suffered losses and fell back to the Griaznoe area. The enemy's
situation and the actions of our troops — of the tank group on the Teterewino — Visloe front [the Front’s counterattack grouping] is being ascertained.114

From a report from the Front’s chief of staff Lieutenant General S.P. Ivanov, who was at the headquarters of the 69th Army in Korocha, N.F. Vatutin knew that the tank corps that had been designated for the counterattack from the Prokhorovka direction had already assembled (although this wasn’t actually the case), and accordingly would be introduced into the battle as had been planned. Thus the General of the Army wasn’t especially concerned about the start of the counterattack. However, the defense on the Front’s left flank was weak, and it was in need of urgent reinforcement. Between 1000 and 1130 N.F. Vatutin reached a number of important decisions and sent orders to the commander of the 69th Army over the Baudot apparatus, in which he gave him several important tasks. First, he was to reinforce quickly the vulnerable Melikhovo — Dal’niaia Igumenka sector with anti-tank means and groups of mine-laying engineers. Second, he was to form a second echelon on the axis of Army Detachment Kempf’s main attack by moving up two of his army’s divisions to take position behind the 92nd Guards Rifle Division.

From a coded telegram of the Front’s Commander-in-Chief General of the Army Vatutin sent at 1030:

... Pass this quickly to Lieutenant General V.D. Kriuchenkin, with copies to Generals M.S. Shumilov and S.G. Goriachev.

The enemy began an offensive on Shumilov’s front at 0800 on 8.7.1943, launching the main attack in the Sevriukovo, Melikhovo direction. For today, this direction is the most important. Goriachev is late.

I am ordering you to allocate a portion of the means of struggle against tanks and infantry and deliver them on trucks to the Melikhovo area for Goriachev. Inform Goriachev and Shumilov about this. Always keep a mobile anti-tank reserve.115

For V.D. Kriuchenkin, the order from the Front Commander-in-Chief was difficult to carry out. At that moment, he had hardly any anti-tank means in reserve. The only thing he could do quickly to carry out the order was to send Captain Bogachev’s 122nd Anti-tank Rifle Battalion, which consisted of 107 anti-tank rifle crews, aboard one-and-a-half ton trucks to the Melikhovo — Shliakhovoe area. So that is what he did.

At 1118 a new order arrived from the Voronezh Front headquarters. It was addressed to the same generals, but this time a copy went to the Red Army’s Chief of the General Staff:

1. 305th Rifle Division is to move immediately into the line previously prepared by us: Sabynino, Melikhovo, Sheino, Ushakovo.
2. Tie right flank of the 107th Rifle Division in with the left flank of the 305th Rifle Division at Ushakovo. A rifle regiment of the 305th Rifle Division with its left flank is in the Krivtsovo area.

While information about the start of tank attacks toward Melikhovo and Dal’niaia Igumenka was traveling up the chain of command and decisions were being reached about creating a second echelon on the axis of the enemy’s attack, division commanders Morozov, Trunin and Russkikh,
as well as corps commander Goriachev, were trying to strengthen their lines by shifting remnants of reserves and forces from quieter sectors. The command post of the 94th Guards Rifle Division was located on the southern outskirts of Sheino, while its observation post was to the southwest, in the combat positions of the second-echelon 288th Guards Rifle Regiment. From the morning, the division commander had been located at his command post. On the basis of arriving intelligence and the reports of observers, he was following how things were going on the front of his neighbor on the right, the 92nd Guards Rifle Division. In the middle of the battle, he drove out to his observation post, and having made a quick assessment of the strength of the forces that the Germans had committed against the elements of the 92nd Guards Rifle Division that were positioned in front of his right-flank 283rd Guards Rifle Regiment in the direction of Kalinin, he decided to reinforce his right flank. At 1030 he issued an order to L.A-M. Lifits to move up his 148th Separate Tank Regiment (minus the 3rd Tank Company) to Sheino, and to be ready to repulse an enemy attack toward Sheino and in the direction of Melikhovo. Then Russkikh issued preliminary instructions to bring up the 100th Separate Destroyer Anti-tank Artillery Battalion to the division's right flank in order to join the artillery battalion of the 199th Guards Artillery Regiment that was positioned here. At this moment Lieutenant General S.G. Goriachev arrived to see him in his observation post. After getting a short briefing from I.G. Russkikh, he announced that V.F. Trunin's situation was very difficult and that he was being attacked by large German forces. He then ordered the division commander to send an anti-tank rifle company of the 100th Separate Destroyer Anti-tank Artillery Battalion and a submachine company of the 288th Guards Rifle Regiment aboard trucks to a hill 2 kilometers east of Melikhovo, in order to block the path to Shliakhovoe in the event that the Germans took Melikhovo.

While the pioneers were making passages across the anti-tank ditches and through the minefields at Kalinin, Hünersdorff was receiving reconnaissance reports and briefings from the commanders of his kampfgruppen and analyzing the current situation. He then got in touch with Breith and offered him a detailed proposal for continuing the offensive. It consisted of four points. First, the general decided to take personal command over the forces that were fighting their way toward Melikhovo. Second, he planned to combine Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein and Kampfgruppe von Oppeln-Bronikowski into a single fist, and to place the commander of Panzer Regiment 11 in command over the composite group. Third, Hünersdorff requested authorization to transfer Kampfgruppe Unrein to Westhofen's panzerkampfgruppe (of the 19th Panzer Division) and to direct it as well toward Melikhovo. Meanwhile Richter's panzergrenadiers (of the 19th Panzer Division) were to continue to attack in the direction of Postnikov with the support of Panzergrenadier Regiment 74's artillery; simultaneously one Nebelwefer battery would continue to pound the revealed Soviet positions in Postnikov and on the outskirts of Dal'niaia Igumenka. After both panzer wedges neared Melikhovo, Kampfgruppe Westhofen was to reach the Dal'niaia Igumenka – Shliakhovoe road and outflank the former village with its main forces from the northeast, while Unrein's attached panzergrenadiers struck the northeastern outskirts of Dal'niaia Igumenka. The panzer crews had no previous opportunity to deploy near this village, because the approaches to it from the south and the east were blocked by a swampy ravine. Finally, Hünersdorff planned to assemble all of the available artillery for a barrage on a narrow sector directly in front of von Oppeln-Bronikowski's and Westhofen's panzerkampfgruppen, in order to flatten the artificial obstacles and blow up the minefields in the course of an hour with strongly concentrated fire, before shifting it to the flanks of the breakthrough and on to Melikhovo itself. Thus, the general was intending to create a dead zone that extended up to 3.5 kilometers. Breith approved the scheme and feverish work to implement it got underway.

From the moment that the 6th Panzer Division's offensive temporarily halted (at 1000) and for the ensuing three to four hours, the entire sector of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment was subjected to a heavy barrage from artillery and Nebelwerfers, and only after 1200 did the Germans begin
BREITH'S III PANZER CORPS REACHES LINE OF 69TH ARMY 381

to test the Soviet lines with a reconnaissance-in-force. Thus in the majority of Soviet operational documents, it is difficult to determine the precise time when Colonel von Oppeln-Bronikowski's *panzerkampfgruppe* launched its decisive attack toward Melikhovo. Only in the 35th Guards Rifle Corps' account is there a rather detailed description of this moment. The information in this source is similar to the information found in other documents, so I believe that it describes the main stages of the battle for this major strongpoint rather accurately:

At 1400 in strength of up to two battalions of motorized infantry with the support of 60 tanks, the enemy launched an attack toward Melikhovo, and by 1700 at the cost of heavy losses (40 tanks knocked-out) the Germans entered the village, and reached its northeastern outskirts by 1800. The surviving elements of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment made a fighting withdrawal to Shliakhovoe, and together with the training battalion, the reconnaissance company, a submachine gun company of the 282nd Guards Rifle Regiment and the 122nd Separate Anti-tank Rifle Battalion by 2100 took up a defense on the Machine Tractor Station - Shliakhovoe - Orlov ravine line, preventing the enemy from expanding to the north in the direction of Shliakhovoe.117

For approximately the first two hours, the artillery of the 92nd Guards Rifle Division, 1/93rd Cannon Artillery Regiment, and crews of the 47th Guards Separate Tank Regiment played the main role in resisting the massed attack by two panzer regiments. In addition, rocket launchers of the 97th Guards Mortar Regiment offered fire support out of Melikhovo both prior to the attack and during it. However, the Germans' numerical superiority made itself known, and approximately after one hour, the forward edge of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment began to crack. German armor broke into the Guardsmen's positions and combat began to heat up with new intensity now in the depth of their lines.

After 1600, tankers took on the main burden of struggle against the enemy. When the Germans began to work over the positions of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment with artillery, S.G. Goriachev, who was as before at the 94th Guards Rifle Division's observation post, deciphered the Germans' intentions and issued an order to I.G. Russkikh to block the approaches to Shliakhovoe from the direction of Melikhovo with the 20 tanks of the 148th Separate Tank Regiment; in other words, to take up a defense in the path of the 6th Panzer Division in the event it made a breakthrough. At 1530, N.F. Vatutin's instructions finally reached the 96th Separate Tank Brigade (46 T-34 and 5 T-70)118 as well. The brigade commander Major General V.G. Lebedev received an order to counterattack the enemy between Melikhovo and Dal'niaia Igumenka (the 19th Panzer Division), and to hold the latter place until the rifle units arrived. Accordingly, by approximately 1600 the path of von Oppeln-Bronikowski's and Westhofen's panzer regiments was to be blocked by the 74 tanks of the 148th Separate Tank Regiment and 96th Separate Tank Brigade. If we add the five Churchill tanks of the 47th Guards Separate Breakthrough Heavy Tank Regiment and the five batteries of the 1500th Destroyer Anti-tank Artillery Regiment (in the Dal'niaia Igumenka area), as well as the Katiusha rocket launchers and the 1/93rd Cannon Artillery Regiment, augmented by the numerous artificial obstacles, then the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment had real chances to hold its positions in Melikhovo. However, unfortunately the tankers were late in arriving and began to approach this area at a time when a portion of Novikov's 280th Guards Rifle Regiment had already been driven back from the main line and were falling back to the northeast and east under the pressure of superior forces. The first to join battle (approximately 40 minutes after receiving

117 TsAMO RF, f. 35 gv. sk, op. 1, d. 44, l. 5.
118 TsAMO RF, f. 96 otbr, op. 1, d. 3, l. 15obr.
the order) with Westhofen's left-flank units (his anti-tank screen) were the crews of Lebedev's tank brigade. The main forces of Kampfgruppe Westhofen had been drawn into the village, and were engaged in street fighting in its center, but had exposed their left flank to an attack by the 96th Separate Tank Brigade. By this time von Oppeln-Bronikowski's panzers had reached the southern outskirts of Melikhovo and were attempting to break through to the large village of Shliakhovoe that was located nearby.

Brigade commander Lebedev launched the first attack at 1610 with the forces of Captain Kul'kov's 228th Tank Battalion (24 T-34), which attacked in the direction of Point 217.4 and the woods west of Melikhovo, striving to pin down the enemy's forces (Westhofen's panzer regiment) between Melikhovo and Dal'niaia Igumenka. Meanwhile Captain Shcheglov's 331st Tank Battalion moved up into the positions previously occupied by the brigade in the Shishino area (west of Dal'niaia Igumenka) with the aim of creating a threat to the 19th Panzer Division's flank, and at a suitable moment attack in the direction of Postnikov and Blizhniaia Igumenka. When passing over Hill 217.4 Kul'kov's tank battalion deployed into a wedge-shaped combat formation and moved off in two directions, since at that moment a report arrived that the Germans were not only fighting in Melikhovo, but had also already broken into the eastern outskirts of Dal'niaia Igumenka and were even approaching Postnikov. From the report by the 96th Separate Tank Brigade's headquarters:

3/228th Tank Battalion went on the attack toward the woods west of Melikhovo, and having broken the resistance of a deployed blocking force [Westhofen], reached the vicinity of the woods south of the village. During the attack, the company destroyed or damaged 8 tanks, 6 guns, 7 vehicles and up to a company of infantry. 2/228th Tank Battalion at this time drove back an attack by enemy infantry from the eastern outskirts of Dal'niaia Igumenka and reached the hamlet of Postnikov, thereby securing the arrival and deployment of the 331st Tank Battalion for the counterattack. 1/228th Tank Battalion supported the actions of the attacking tank companies with fire from fixed positions.

The enemy [von Oppeln-Bronikowski], becoming aware of the flank attack, halted the offensive toward Shliakhovoe and was forced to return, in order to take Dal'niaia Igumenka. He committed up to 50 tanks, 12 self-propelled guns and up to a regiment of infantry in order to take the village.

The 228th Tank Battalion was forced to fall back from the woods south of Melikhovo in the direction of Dal'niaia Igumenka and take up a defense along the eastern fringe of the woods at Hill 217.4. The enemy from the march attempted to take Dal'niaia Igumenka, but was stopped by the fire of our tanks and forced to stop in the patch of woods west of Melikhovo.119

The flank attack by the tank battalions of the 96th Separate Tank Brigade was swift and unexpected for the enemy, although the tanks weren't properly supported by artillery fire or accompanied by infantry, which was one of the reasons they failed to carry out the assignment.120 As to why Westhofen left behind such an insignificant force in order to cover his left flank, it is clear that he overlooked the approach of enemy tanks from this direction. Incidentally, the German aerial reconnaissance was also not reporting anything threatening. Here is an intercepted radio message from a reconnaissance aircraft of VIII Fliegerkorps:

119 TsAMO RF, f. 203, op. 2851, d. 24, II. 4210br, 422.
120 TsAMO RF, f. 96 obr, op. 1, d. 14, l. 51.
1045: 2 enemy tanks on the southern outskirts of Dal'naja Igumenka, moving to the west.
Along the road from Dal'naja Igumenka to the northwest, 30-40 wagons. From Dal'naja
Igumenka to the southwest, an enemy motorized column.
1300: On the eastern outskirts of Melikhovo, 120 enemy soldiers are dug in. Anti-tank
ditches to the south of Melikhovo; no tanks observed.
1510: 5 tanks and 2 guns [the 148th Separate Tank Regiment] on the Melikhovo – Mazikino
road. Our panzers are 1.5 kilometers southeast of Dal'naja Igumenka. On the southern
outskirts of Melikhovo, 5 enemy tanks and 2 enemy guns.
1825: 8 enemy tanks presumably in Shliakhovoe. Our panzers are in Melikhovo.
1850: At the crossroads west of Melikhovo, our panzers are engaged in combat with enemy
tanks.121

Between 1900 and 2000 the organized resistance by the units of the 92nd Guards Rifle Division
and the 96th Separate Tank Brigade in the center of Melikhovo and on its northern and north-eastern
outskirts collapsed. Soldiers and officers of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment began to
retreat in groups and alone in the direction of Shliakhovoe and Sabynino. Corps commander
S.G. Goriachev wound up in a precarious situation. On the axis of the enemy panzer group's
main attack, a 4-kilometer gap had been torn into the corps' defenses. Moreover, to the northeast
beyond Melikhovo in the direction of Sabynino, there was still no line being occupied by Soviet
troops; the 305th and 107th Rifle Divisions had just moved out of their previous areas of defense.
There was only one promising thing – two tactically-important strongpoints on the shoulders
of the breach, Dal'naja Igumenka and Shliakhovoe, remained in our hands, but each had few
troops holding them. For some time, they would be unable to pose a serious threat to the flanks of
the enemy penetration. Relying on the tanks of the 148th Separate Tank Regiment, the battered
units of the 280th Guards Rifle Regiment might be able to defend Shliakhovoe for some time,
albeit with difficulty. Dal'naja Igumenka was being held by a wing and a prayer and the heroism
of the tankers of the 96th Separate Tank Brigade, the 47th Separate Breakthrough Heavy Tank
Regiment and the crews of the 93rd Cannon Artillery Regiment. There was little infantry in the
village.

Goriachev was running out of reserves and it was impossible to weaken the line of the 94th
Guards Rifle Division further; the 7th Panzer Division was operating in front of its left flank and
center, and the regiment that had been sent to reinforce his right flank was already engaged in
heavy combat in Kalinin. It was possible to consider the shifting one of the regiments of the 92nd
Guards Rifle Division that had been transferred to the 81st Guards Rifle Division's control to the
Dal'naja Igumenka – Shliakhovoe sector as an option. However, the enemy was also exerting
strong pressure in the Staryi Gorod – Blizhniaia Igumenka area, so with no other alternative Major
General I.K. Morozov had been forced at 2000 to bring up the 282nd Guards Rifle Regiment to
his left flank in order to reinforce the (excl.) Blizhniaia Igumenka – Postnikov sector.

Fearing that the enemy might try to break through to Sabynino on the boot heels of the retreating
infantry, S.G. Goriachev at 2030 issued an order to tank brigade commander Lebedev through
the headquarters of the commander of the 35th Guards Rifle Corps' Armored and Mechanized
Forces to withdraw the 331st Tank Battalion, the motorized rifle battalion and the destroyer anti-
tank artillery battalion to Hill 211.5 (on the road from the Shliakhovoe Machine Tractor Station
to Sabynino) and to the woods east of Sabynino with the task to prevent an enemy tank break-
through to Sabynino. Just 30 minutes later the corps commander issued an order for all of the
corps' 76mm guns to be deployed to fire over open sights at enemy tanks. However, unfortunately

121 TsAMO RF, f. 203, op. 2843, d. 452, l. 61.
there was little sense in this order, because by evening the rifle and artillery units were experiencing an acute ammunition shortage. Trunin’s and Russkikh’s divisions had been moved out to the line hastily and had joined combat from the march 24 hours earlier, so the division commanders hadn’t had the physical possibility to bring up ammunition. In Special Combat Order No.5 signed at 2100, Goriachev had demanded: “Throughout the night, using all motorized transport available, right down to the prime movers of guns, organize the delivery of ammunition, bringing up the bullets for soldiers and the artillery shells to a single standard combat load.”

The main thing that S.G. Goriachev had been able to achieve by launching the counterattack with the 96th Separate Tank Brigade was the splitting of the III Panzer Corps’ shock wedge. Westhofen’s panzerkampfgruppe had been forced to turn toward Dal’niaia Igumenka, and without its assistance it had been beyond the strength of von Oppeln-Bronikowski’s panzerkampfgruppe to break through to Shliakhovoe, while on the penetration’s right flank problems had arisen. First, the 148th Separate Tank Regiment had appeared in its path, and units of the 94th Guards Rifle Division (the anti-tank rifle company and submachine gun company) had been moved up by the division commander even before midday. From the combat diary of Lifits’ 148th Separate Tank Regiment:

Upon the regiment commander’s arrival at the command post of the 94th Guards Rifle Division in Shliakhovoe, the regiment had been given an assignment by division commander Colonel Russkikh to prevent enemy tanks from reaching Shliakhovoe. By 1700 the regiment had assembled in Shliakhovoe with 17 T-34 and 5 T-70, but didn’t have time to take up a defense, and thus met the advancing enemy tanks from the march. By 1700 enemy infantry supported by 60 tanks had already gone on the offensive toward Melikhovo, and having seized the latter attempted to exploit the success toward Shliakhovoe. However, the enemy’s tank attack was repulsed, after which a portion of the enemy armor began moving in the northeastern direction, while up to 15 tanks turned back to Melikhovo.

Secondly, approximately at this same time, somewhere after 1700, when von Oppeln-Bronikowski’s panzers had begun to advance from Melikhovo toward Shliakhovoe, Kampfgruppe von Bieberstein (of the 6th Panzer Division) had driven the Guardsmen out of Kalinin. Having received a report about this, I.G. Russkikh got in touch with commander of the 283rd Guards Rifle Regiment Major A.A. Ignat’ev and demanded that he quickly retake the hamlet. Approximately three hours later, the 1st and 2nd Rifle Battalions with the fire support of an artillery battalion of the 199th Guards Artillery Regiment launched a counterattack, and took the hamlet after a hard fight by 2200, having thrown the enemy back 1 kilometer to the west. By the end of the day, the division’s chief of staff Lieutenant Colonel G.N. Shostatsky reported that over the day, the division had lost 35 killed and 215 wounded, while enemy tank fire had knocked out 10 76mm guns and 4 vehicles. In addition to the assault on the hamlet of Kalinin, units of the 94th Guards Rifle Division on this same day had taken part in repulsing several strong attacks by the 7th Panzer Division against the Miasoedovo—Hill 206.9 line. According to Operational Summary No. 0101 for 1500 8 July, by this time the division had suffered 7 killed and 46 wounded. Thus, the recapture of Kalinin had cost the division a total of 294 soldiers and officers, including 25 killed and 269 wounded, which is evidence of the stiff resistance put up by the Germans.

122 TsAMO RF, f. 35 gV. sk, op. 1, d. 26, l. 81.
123 TsAMO RF, f. 148 otp, op. 661360, d. 3, l. 78, 79.
124 TsAMO RF, f. 148 otp, op. 661360, d. 3, l. 78.