

DNIAPRO-BUG CANAL DEFENCE OF 1944

Authors: **Litvin, A. M.**

Dnia'pro-'Bug Ca'nal De'fence

Defence by the commands of the Brest and Pinsk Partisan formations of the Dniapro-Bug Canal in February — March 1944 during the Great Patriotic War.

In January 1944, as a result of the successful offensive by the troops of the Belarusian and right flank of the 1st Ukrainian fronts in the Kovel-Brest direction, by February 1944, the front line had approached the southern areas of Brest Voblast, where a large group of partisan forces which contained the territory between the Prypiac River and the Dniapro-Bug Canal was located. The command of the German Army Group Centre was afraid of merging of the Red Army advanced units with the partisans and their access to the Dniapro-Bug Canal, railway and the Luniniec — Brest highway, and decided to mop the area with partisans up, restore, immobilised by partisans, navigation along the canal, prevent new sabotage on communications and organise defence lines on the Prypiac and Stahod rivers. For this purpose, the enemy began to withdraw large army forces to the Brest — Kobryn — Pinsk area. By the beginning of February, Hitlerites had invaded all settlements adjacent to the canal from the north, including the villages of Sielishcha, Liahavichy, Kublik, Bielin, Adamova of Dragichyn Rajon, Zhuravok and other communities of Ivanava Rajon, and began to prepare for the attack on Dzivin village to capture the airfield in Svaryn village of Dzivin Rajon and destroy partisan forces.

According to the Directive of the Belarusian Headquarters of Partisan Movement, in February 1944, a temporary group of partisan forces of the Southern Zone which numbered about 6,000 partisans was organised in the southern areas of Brest Voblast to fight against the punitive forces. The group included the J. V. Stalin, “Za Radzimu” (for the Motherland) A. K. Flegontov, 150th F. M. Jazykovich brigades, the M. A. Shchors and G. I. Kotovskij Independent Partisan detachments (commander V. F. Guzhewski); the V. M. Molotov Brigade of the Pinsk Partisan Formation was also transferred for operational subordination of the group. The overall leadership of the partisan forces was conducted by commissioner of the headquarters of the Brest Partisan Formation, major P. M. Kavałski.

The right flank of the defence (from the rural community of Lyubiaz, Volyn Oblast, to the Bielaazierski Canal) along the southern bank of the Dniapro-Bug Canal was contained by the V. M. Molotov Brigade. To its right, along the canal and the Pina River, the Pinsk Partisan Brigade held defence. To the left along the channel from Bashnia village, Ivanava Rajon, to Sielishcha village, Dragichyn Rajon, was defended by the 150th F. M. Jazykovich and “Za Radzimu” A. K. Flegontov brigades, the independent M. A. Shchors and G. I. Kotovskij detachments. The approach routes to partisan defence from the side of the Dzivina were held by the J. V. Stalin Brigade. The partisan defence line on the key

areas of the 50-kilometre front was equipped with earth-and-timber emplacements, dugouts, and communication trenches.

On February 21, 1944, the Hitlerites, with a superiority in manpower and equipment, pushed back small blocking partisan detachments with a battle, reached the border of the Dniapro-Bug Canal in the area of the villages of Zarechka and Bielin of Dragichyn Rajon, and conduct an offensive on the defence lines of the V. M. Molotov Brigade. Partisans exploded the crossings and met the Hitlerites with fire from earth-and-timber emplacements which had been built in advance on the southern bank of the Dniapro-Bug Canal to the east of its junction point with the Bielaazierski Canal. By daybreak, under the cover of artillery and mortar fire, the enemy had forced in crossing the canal in the area of the villages of Zarechka, Liahavichy, and Kublik of Dragichyn Rajon and moved towards Hidry village, Dragichyn Rajon, to divided the defence of the V. M. Molotov brigades into 3 parts and cut it off from other forces.

For three days, the V. M. Molotov Partisan brigades repelled the Hitlerites attacks. The enemy was forced to retreat and start forming defensive structures on the northern bank of the canal.

After a strong artillery raid on February 23, the Hitlerites went on the offensive, tried to force in crossing the canal and the Pina River in the defence area of the Pinsk Partisan Brigade. As a result of prolonged battles, the partisans ran out of ammunition. The Pinsk Brigade could not withstand the onslaught and was forced to retreat thereby exposing the right flank of the V. M. Molotov Brigade, which had to withdraw its detachments and transfer them to Adryzhyn village, Ivanava Rajon. On February 26, the Hitlerites invaded the villages of Dolsk and Shlapan of Volyn Oblast, Mahro village of Ivanava Rajon. The Pinsk Partisan Brigade retreated to the Prypiac, joined the units of the Red Army, and took up defence in the area of villages of Nobiel and Buchyn of Rivne Oblast. The enemy forced in crossing the Prypiac and invaded Liubiaz intending to unite with the garrison of Kamien-Kashirsk (now Kamin-Kashyrskiy), Volyn Oblast. The left flank of the Hitlerites led to the rear of the V. M. Molotov Partisan Brigade and formed a threat of encirclement.

Due to the complicated situation, by the Order of major P. M. Kavalski, the 150th F. M. Jazykovich Brigade and the M. V. Frunze Detachment of the J. V. Stalin Brigade were withdrawn to the Dolsk — Shlapany area. As a result of the taken measures, the enemy's advance was stalled at the border of the villages of Glinna and Adryzhyn of Ivanava Rajon, Grachyshcha of Volyn Oblast. It was decided to hold positions until the last capability, at the same time to intensify the actions of flying detachments and reconnaissance groups behind enemy lines. Along the entire line of defence, the partisans made obstructions, minefields, penetrated the enemy's rear at night, mined access roads and terrain areas. Many enemy soldiers and officers, wagons, motor vehicles, and cannons were mined by the partisans. On March 13, the troops of the 2nd Belarusian Front (160th Rifle and 38th Guards divisions of the 70th Army) went on the offensive on the 40-kilometre stretch of Lyubeshiv-Borovne. By March 17, they had advanced to a depth of 60 km and reached

the border of the Tur Canal where they were detained by enemy reserves that had arrived there.

The enemy began its new offensive was on March 17 along the entire defence line. Zarechka witnessed fierce battles. In three places, the Nazis forced in crossing the Dniapro-Bug Canal and pursued their offensive onwards the villages of Hidry, Vialiki Lies of Dragichyn Rajon and along the Bielaazierski Canal. The enemy invaded Liahavichy and Hidry khutars (isolated farmsteads) and wedged itself into the front defensive line of the M. A. Shchors Partisan Detachment. The partisans regained their position with counterattacks and strikes from the flanks. Tough battles took place on March 26–30 along the entire line of partisan defence. Partisans received ammunition from the Red Army units which had approached the borders of the Prypiac.

On March 26, the Hitlerites resumed their offensive on the defence line of the V. M. Molotov Brigade which, under the pressure of much larger enemy forces, retreated to the second defensive line. The right flank of the brigade took up defence on March 28 on the eastern skirts of Viatly village, Volyn Oblast, where it interacted with the Red Army units.

By March 29, the Hitlerites had managed to regroup their forces, under the cover of artillery and mortar fire, they forced in crossing the canal and began their offensive deep into the partisan defence. Towards the end of the day, the enemy had reached the Mukoshyn — Luka Lake — Radastava line pushing the partisans and units of the Red Army back to the Prypiac.

By March 31, 1944, the main forces of the partisans had joined the units of the Red Army.

For more than a month, the partisans were battling an unequal battle against a large group of the enemy. They skillfully used guerrilla tactics, combined defensive battles with night raids, sabotage, used the subversive activities of flying detachments and groups behind the enemy's rear, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, and provided tangible help to the Red Army which was pursuing its offensive.

In Zarechka, Dragichyn Rajon, in 1966, a monument was raised in honour of the feat of Belarusian partisans.

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