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308<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment

## **“Passwort Freiheit, Ziel Lysyanka, 2300 Stunden”**

This famous quote of Field Marshal von Manstein might never have been given without the fearless counter attack of the 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in February 1944 in the Cherkassy Pocket along with the III Panzer Corp.

Hauptman Georg Grossjohann (a Battalion commander in the 308<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment, in his book Five Years, Four Fronts), comments on the Russian actions that caused the Korsun-Cherkassy pocket situation early in 1944 and the subsequent counter attacks made by his regiment. The 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was in charge of a section of the thin German line that up to that point held back the tide of the Soviet forces, along with the 88<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to the north East and the 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to the south West (the front ran south west to north east at this point due to a rapid advance by the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Army through December and January 43-44). Early in January the 6<sup>th</sup> Soviet Tank Army and 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Armies (Elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Army) moved through the lines of the 198<sup>th</sup> (three regiments composed of the 308<sup>th</sup>, 305<sup>th</sup>, and 326<sup>th</sup>) Infantry Division. Hauptman Georg Grossjohann was a Battalion commander in the 308<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment.

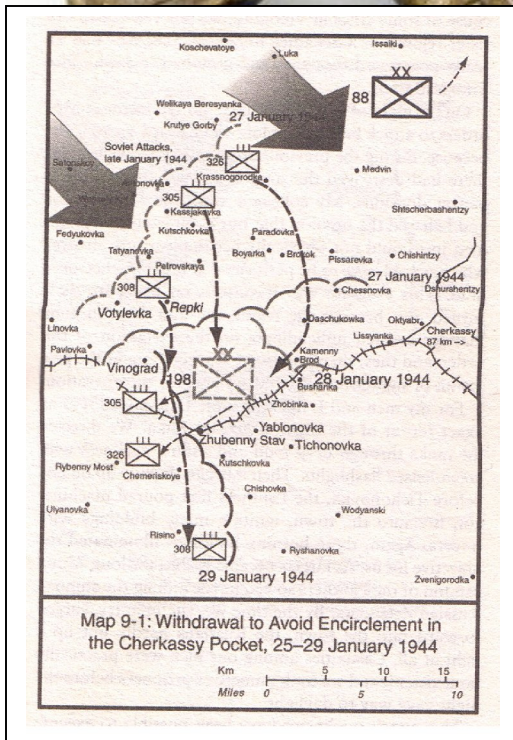
“Late in the evening of 25 January, I visited the soldiers of the 6<sup>th</sup> company, who were hunkered down in foxholes they had hastily scratched out in the open field. The Company Commander, Lieutenant Ottowitz, a young officer with congenial manners of a well-educated Austrian, reported brisk action by the opponent right after dusk.” Hauptman Grossjohann goes on to describe how they listened together in the dark to the typical clanking noises of tanks, their roaring engines, and even the voices of their opponent. He remembers how close they seemed in the dry cold night air. Around Midnight Hauptman Grossjohann returned to his command post to get a rest and went quickly to sleep.

“At 4:40 A.M., on 26 January, a tremendous Barrage came down on Vitylevka, not only in our area, but on a sector more than 30 kilometers in width. The Russians must have employed hundreds of batteries in the artillery preparation for their attack. Artillery Shells of all calibers crashed into our positions. Waves of 122mm rockets added their howling cacophony, too, before slamming into the earth around us.” He reports, “At 6:00 A.M. sharp, exactly 80 minutes later the *devastating barrage* stopped suddenly. . . . Dead Silence Prevailed!”

Two days passed and the Russians failed to push on Grossjohann’s position, perhaps believing there would be nothing left when in reality his pioneer company was still at its full strength prior to the bombardment. He commented that the focus of the attack was more concentrated to the north where the 198<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> infantry Division connected

driving them (the 88<sup>th</sup>) north into the Cherkassy Pocket causing an encirclement from which the 198<sup>th</sup> was spared as they were pushed south.

“As a result of the massive attacks, on 28 January 1944, the Russians closed their encirclement of our XI and LXII Corps in a pocket around Cherkassy.” “To meet the new challenges we executed an almost exact turn of 180 degrees, so that our front was again facing east. It now ran between Risiono and Vinograd with the 308<sup>th</sup> defending on the right flank instead of the left.” (See map) “Only on 11 February did the costly attack to break out through to the encircled troops begin.” The 198<sup>th</sup> attacked on the night of February 11<sup>th</sup> along with the support of the III Panzer Corp. “We directed the tanks through deep mud and stifling darkness with green-lensed flashlights. Then it began.” Grossjohan describes how the tanks pulled up to the town of Tichnovka, first pouring MG tracer rounds into the buildings setting them ablaze which in turn illuminated the objectives. This gave light to the main gunners who then opened up with ferocity on the main objectives which, “sped havoc among the Russian defenders. By the time we, the infantry, surged forward into the town, the Russians hardly put up a fight at all.” The regiment went onto take several prisoners that evening and casualties were almost non-existent.



The Battle of the Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket took place from 24 January 1944 until 16 February 1944. During the 16th of February 1944, Field Marshal von Manstein, without waiting for a decision by Hitler, sent a radio message to Stemmermann to authorize the breakout. It said simply:

*“Password Freedom, objective Lysyanka, 2300 hours.”*

It was actions like these by the III panzer corp and the disciplined counter attacks of the 198<sup>th</sup> infantry division in February that ultimately saved 25,000 men trapped in the Cherkassy pocket. Grossjohan comments that, “Some 20,000 to 25,000 of our soldiers were finally saved behind the security lines we formed.”

The force composition is meant to represent the 308<sup>th</sup>  
Pioneer Regiment with support from the III Panzer Corp at  
the Breakout attempt at the Cherkassy-Korsun Pocket

(The same list will be used for all five scenarios)

1 Company HQ

1 HQ Section

2 Panzerfaust

1 Panzerschreck team

1 Sniper team

3X Pioneer Platoon (Meant to represent platoons from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion)

1 HQ Section

1 Panzerfaust

3 Pioneer Section (full strength) with supporting pioneer wagons

1 Goliath

1 Artillery Battery (10<sup>th</sup> Battery, 235<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment)

4x 10.5 cm guns

1 Heavy Anti-aircraft Gun Platoon w large crews

1 Heavy Tank Platoon (Support from III Panzer Corp)

1 Königstiger

Total List Cost: 1750 points

**Fortifications for the round one game include:** 2 AT Bunkers, 7 sections of Razor Wire, 4 sections of Mine fields, 4 sections of Trench. (This assumes use of two infantry platoons at the start of the battle and the 88's in an Ambush and additional fortifications afforded by the trucks. The limited fortifications allows for 2 AT bunkers, 2 sections of mines, and one section of wire.)

References

GrossJohan, Georg (1999). *Five Years, Four Fronts: A German Officer's World War II Combat Memoir*. Ballantine Press.

Zetterling, N. & Frankson, A. (2008). *The Korsun Pocket: The Encirclement and Breakout of German Army in the East, 1944*. Casemate.