Military and historical aspects of the Kyiv defensive operation (24.02.2022–02.04.2022)

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Abstract. Three years ago, the russian federation unleashed a war of aggression against Ukraine aimed at destroying Ukrainian statehood and our national identity. The large-scale armed aggression has become a new period of the russian-ukrainian war, which russia started against our country in 2014.

The Kyiv Defence Operation, which lasted 38 days, from 24 February to 2 April 2022, was part of the First Strategic Defence Operation and was conducted by a group of the Ukrainian Defence Forces in the North-Western Operational Zone in the Polissia and Siverskyi operational areas. According to contemporary scholars in the field of military history, it was strategic in nature. This is due to the fact that Ukrainian forces were defending the political, economic, transport, cultural, historical and religious centres of Ukraine. The enemy's quick capture of our capital could have led to a change of power in Ukraine to a pro-russian puppet "government" and, most importantly, to the loss of our country's independence. However, these insidious plans of the enemy failed. The strategic level of the operation is also confirmed by the fact that all components of Defence Forces were involved and strategic command of the troops was provided. As a result of the Kyiv Defence Operation, the Ukrainian Defence Forces defeated russian troops and forced them to retreat from Kyiv and Zhytomyr, and later from Chernihiv and Sumy regions.

The Ukrainian Defence Forces conducted such a large-scale defence operation for the first time since Ukraine's independence, so the historical experience of its conduct, preparation and planning is extremely relevant and requires comprehensive analysis and study. In view of the above, the purpose of the article is to recreate the course of events by highlighting a number of operations of the military groups conducted on the Kyiv direction in February–April 2022 as part of this operation. The methodology is based on the use of historical research methods: historical-systemic, problematic-chronological, historical-comparative, historical-genetic; general scientific methods – analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, analogy, abstraction, generalisation, etc. The materials of the article may be useful for the heads of military command and control bodies of the Defence Forces of Ukraine, commanders (chiefs) of military units, institutions and organisations, as well as for scholars and researchers in the field of military history.

Keywords: Kyiv Defence Operation, repulsion of a large-scale invasion, Ukrainian Defence Forces, defenders, defenders, territorial defence, russian troops, invaders, occupiers.

> *"The Kyiv defensive operation and subsequent offensive actions were indeed crucial, primarily in psychological terms. It was the beginning of the liberation of Ukraine, our troops seized the operational initiative" – O. Syrskyi*

Introduction

The actions of russian troops at the beginning of the large-scale invasion of Ukraine suggest that the primary task set by the military and political leadership of the aggressor country was to capture our capital city of Kyiv. To defend the capital, the leadership of the Ukrainian Defence

Forces launched a defensive operation. Its main efforts were focused on repelling the invasion of the russian invaders, who were moving along the main routes and highways mainly as part of mixed columns in four directions: Chornobyl, Chernihiv, Konotop and Sumy.

The Kyiv defence operation took place in the form of tactical actions by units and military units through active manoeuvring actions in manoeuvre defence. The total width of the operation's battlefield reached up to 550 km, and the depth (depending on the direction) from the state border of Ukraine to the capital ranged from 130 km (in the Kyiv direction) to over 400 km (in the Sumy direction).

Ukrainian defenders showed extraordinary courage, will, bravery and selflessness in the fight against the russian enemy, defending our country's right to freedom and independence.

On the way to Kyiv, hundreds of our cities and towns faced the enemy, and they became symbols of the indomitable Ukrainian spirit, and their courageous defenders became true national legends. Among them are hero cities: Bucha, Gostomel, Irpin, Okhtyrka, and Chernihiv. In late March and early April 2022, the Defence Forces forced the russian occupiers to leave the territory of Ukraine.

The success of the Kyiv defence operation became a solid springboard for on the success and achieving further victories over the enemy.

In order not to go beyond the scope of the material provided for this scientific article, the authors of this study focused in more detail on Kyiv's preparations for defence and repulsing the russian invaders' offensive in the Polissya operational area, which was the main direction of the russian armed forces' offensive on the capital.

Literature review

After the beginning of russia's large-scale invasion of our country, domestic scholars began to study the history of the new stage of the russian-Ukrainian war. To date, their research on this issue is partially presented in the collective works of scholars of the National Defence University of Ukraine [1] and the Centre for Military History Research of the Armed Forces of Ukraine [2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Noteworthy are the following A. Haruk [7], who made an attempt to reconstruct the events of the defence of the Gostomel and Vasylkiv airfields. In his turn, M. Zhyrokhov examined the chronology of events of the russian-Ukrainian war on the Chernihiv direction [8]. However, the most thorough studies of the Kyiv Defence Operation were the individual works of scientists from the National Defence University of Ukraine V. Hrytsiuk, V. Kydon, M. Koval, P. Shchypansky, [9], as well as R. Pyliavets, S. Sydorov [10]. In their view, the Kyiv Defence Operation should be considered a strategic operation in terms of its purpose, main indicators, results and consequences. According to the nature of the hostilities and the results of the operation, they identified three stages of its conduct, which differ in dates. It is quite clear that the number of stages and timeframe of the operation can be established more precisely only after the archival materials are put into scientific circulation. The memoirs of participants in the events, who were directly involved in the support and conduct of the Kyiv Defence operation [11–22].

Having examined the source base on the events of the russian-Ukrainian war, the authors have attempted to identify insufficiently researched aspects of the Kyiv Defence Operation of 2022 that are of significant theoretical and practical importance and actualise areas for further research.

Results and Discussions

Before the start of the large-scale invasion, the russian military command amassed more than 175,000 troops on the borders of Ukraine with russia and Belarus. To fulfil the strategic task of capturing the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, powerful groups of russian troops were created on the

territory of these states. They acted in several directions within two operational areas (hereinafter – OR) – Polissya and Siverskiy.

In the Polesie OR, the most combat-ready and well-equipped units under the command of the Eastern Military District were concentrated in the Gomel region of Belarus. To conduct an offensive operation in the Polessye direction, the occupiers created a grouping consisting of military units from the 29th, 35th, 36th Combined Arms Armies of the Eastern , the Pacific Fleet and the russian Airborne Forces with up to fifteen battalion tactical groups (hereinafter – BTGr) [2].

According to the plan of the russian military leadership, the troops of this group were to advance from Belarus in the direction of: Chornobyl – Kyiv, along the right bank of the Dnipro River, to capture the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant, gain control of the M06 Kyiv – Chop motorway and move towards the Fastiv railway junction to launch an offensive on the capital from the west and southwest. The enemy's advanced units were to cross this road near Stoyanka at 14.00 on the first day of the invasion. Another day was planned to bypass the capital from the south from Makariv to Vasylkiv and create an external front to surround the capital [9, p. 9].

At the same time, the enemy planned to land at the Gostomel and Vasylkiv airfields to block the city, communications, and command and control channels, seize ammunition arsenals, sow panic among the population, and create conditions for special forces units to seize telecentres and government buildings – the Office of the President of Ukraine, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, etc. The russian leadership believed that the capital would be defended only by small forces that would be disoriented by the political chaos, and that the "Kyiv authorities" would flee. The goal was to install the russian flag over all state institutions in Ukraine on the 3rd day of the invasion (26 February). After that, it was planned to announce the overthrow of the "anti-people regime" and the establishment of a Kremlin-controlled puppet "new government". Then, the Rosgvardia units were to enter the country to conduct repressive operations among the civilian population [4, p. 194].

On the other side of the Dnipro, on the territory of the Bryansk and Kursk regions of the russian federation (Severskyi OR), a second grouping of troops was concentrated, consisting of units of the 36th and 41st Combined Arms Armies, numbering up to thirteen armoured battalions. This grouping was reinforced by units of the 90th Tank Division of the 2nd Combined Arms Army. It was supposed to move simultaneously with the first grouping, which was concentrated in Belarus, to the Brovary-Boryspil line and block Kyiv from the east and northeast [2, 5].

The adversary also created a network of informants in advance, who were located near Ukraine's critical infrastructure and military units, taking photos and placing "beacons". Suspicious persons were repeatedly spotted on international highways tracking the movement of Ukrainian Armed Forces equipment [23].

It should be noted that preparations for the defence of the Kyiv agglomeration began well in advance, with the receipt of intelligence on the enemy's plans. The day before, from 10 to February 20, 2022, the aggressor country conducted unscheduled exercises "Allied Resolve-2022" in Belarus, where it created a strike group with a significant number of weapons, equipment and personnel. It was likely that this powerful contingent would remain near the Belarusian-Ukrainian border after the exercise and threaten our country. Therefore, in accordance with the order of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine of 12 February 2022, a headquarters for the defence of Kyiv was established, and the Kyiv Defence Plan was updated to reflect the current situation. Colonel-General Oleksandr Syrskyi, Commander of the Land Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, was 4 appointed as the head of the capital's defence. Since then, systematic work has begun on planning and conducting future defence operations [11, 12].

Firstly, the area where the enemy was expected to invade was reconnoitered and two defence lines were set up/

The outer border was along the lines of (exclusively) Demydiv, Huta-Mezhyhirska, Horenka, (exclusively) Irpin, Bilohorodka, Bobrytsia and Rusaniv, Hoholiv, Kalynivka, Pukhivka, Khotyanivka.

The internal frontier included the administrative boundaries of the city of Kyiv. Based on the experience of its defence in 1941, the city was divided into sectors. To ensure effective work in the sectors, the relevant headquarters were deployed, staffed mainly by military personnel from the officers of the National Defence University of Ukraine and other higher military educational institutions and educational (training) centres (units). These military educational institutions, in accordance with the order of the Kyiv Defence Commander, created combat units [9, p. 12; 11].

The external defence line was 150 km long and the internal defence line was 88 km long. Based on the availability of forces and means, the defence was occupied only from the northern and western directions. At the same time, the inner defensive line still had to be equipped in a very short time, and air defence systems, aircraft, helicopters, and artillery had to be protected from the enemy's first air strike. It was planned to create an outer ring as far away from the inner ring as possible to protect the central part of the city from shelling and prevent russian troops from fighting on the outskirts of Kyiv. Under these circumstances, the enemy had to be within range of Ukrainian artillery. As time has shown, this plan proved to be justified [21].

Secondly, the day before the alleged russian invasion, Colonel General O. Syrskyi held a coordination meeting with the leadership of the Ukrainian Defence Forces, whose forces and assets were deployed to defend the capital, the Kyiv City State Administration and the heads of district state administrations. The meeting explained the concept of the defence operation, the procedure for its conduct, the organisation of interaction and the recommended composition of sector heads. At that time, the composition of the Kyiv Defence Council was also determined, which later included the region. All this played an important role in the defence of the capital, which began the next day [12].

Thirdly, the planning of the operation took into account natural obstacles that could hinder the enemy's advance, as well as certain elements of the Kyiv fortification of the Second World War [9, p. 13].

Fourthly, several ground groups were created before the enemy invaded, and after the start of the russian offensive, they were built up: from the northern direction – the grouping of forces and means of defence of Kyiv, from the north-western direction – the operational grouping "Volyn", from the north-eastern direction – "Siversk" [9, p. 11].

Colonel-General O. Syrskyi, who was responsible for this, moved part of Kyiv's defence forces to positions in advance in the directions where the enemy's attack was expected: north-east and north-west, i.e. from the areas of Chornobyl and Chernihiv. The 72nd Separate Mechanised Brigade named after the Black Cossacks formed the basis of the grouping of Kyiv's defence forces and means on the outer border. On 21 February, the brigade's units moved to the Kyiv direction to defend the capital. The main attack of russian troops was expected to come from the Chernihiv direction, so the brigade's main forces were deployed there. On the other flank, on the right bank of the Dnipro, there were only infantry units. At the same time, the forces and means of this brigade were insufficient, covering only a quarter of the minimum defence needs. for defence. Therefore, the Kyiv Defence Commander decided to create consolidated rifle battalions from personnel of higher military educational institutions and training military units (centres). The defence of the capital was also reinforced by the 101st Separate Security Brigade of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine named after Colonel General Gennadiy Vorobyov, the 214th Separate Assault Battalion of OPFOR and two armoured personnel carrier groups from the 169th Training Centre named after Prince Yaroslav the Wise. The combined units were trained in combat 5 coordination in the course of performing combat missions. With the beginning of the large-scale

invasion of russia, the composition of this grouping was gradually reinforced by the 112th and 114th separate territorial defence brigades (hereinafter – TrD), as well as combat units of the Defence Forces of Ukraine [9, p. 11; 11; 12].

However, the defenders of the capital were severely short of artillery, which was concentrated mainly in eastern Ukraine at the time. The chief of artillery of the Ukrainian Army had only a consolidated artillery group at his disposal. To reinforce the city's defence, artillery systems that were usually used in the training process were delivered from the training centres, as well as 9 heavy long-range artillery pieces 2C7 "Peon" from the 43rd separate artillery brigade named after Hetman Taras Tryasyl, which formed a combined division. The artillerymen were ordered to take up defensive positions outside the capital, to the north-east and north-west of the city, in areas where russian troops were likely to advance. To move to the designated positions, the units of this brigade marched 120- 140 km on their own on 24 February [9, p. 11; 11].

On the internal frontier, all available forces were deployed to defend the capital: units of the National Guard of Ukraine, the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, the National Police, and the TRO units, which were just completing their formation on 24 February. There were a lot of people willing to defend their country, and there were enough people with relevant combat experience among them.

Fifth, almost a week before the russian invasion, all command posts of the Kyiv defenders were moved to the likely directions of the russian armed forces' offensive. Air cover for the capital was planned to be provided by the Air Force group within the overall air defence system in cooperation with Kyiv's defence forces and means. To this end, the locations of air defence assets were changed and aircraft were moved to alternate airfields. Military transport aircraft were moved in advance to partner bases abroad. Preparations for the defence of the capital were carried out in a rather secretive manner. Even a senior US Department of Defence official noted that Washington was more aware of the russian invasion plan than the Ukrainian defence plan [19, 23].

3 From 04.30 to 05.00 am on 24 February 2022, the enemy launched missile attacks on Boryspil airport, the Special Operations Command in Brovary, the positions of the of the 96th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of Kyiv, as well as the anti-aircraft missile battery of the 39th separate anti-aircraft missile regiment in Mezhyhiria, the headquarters and the joint communications centre the 1st Presidential Operational Brigade named after Hetman Petro Doroshenko of the National Guard of Ukraine in Novi Petrivtsi. In total, 160 cruise missiles of various types were used across Ukraine in the first hours. The enemy ground forces began to advance in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy directions from the initial areas of battalion tactical groups. As expected, the main direction of the russian armed forces' ground offensive on Kyiv was Polissya [19].

At the same time, the enemy launched an airborne operation. At 11.00 a.m. on 24 February 2022, 34 helicopters of the russian Armed Forces approached the Gostomel airfield. The russian paratroopers tried to take control of the runway and the flight control tower to ensure the further landing of their main forces, which were to arrive on IL-76 transport aircraft. At the time of the attack, the defenders of the airfield consisted mainly of units of the 4th separate brigade of operational purpose named after the Hero of Ukraine, Sergeant Serhiy Mykhalchuk, of the National Guard of Ukraine and a special forces unit of the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine. The Ukrainian defenders had anti-aircraft missiles, two anti-aircraft gun crews and two crews with Igla man-portable air defence systems. The locations of the Ukrainian air defence systems were changed the day before the invasion, and they remained unknown to the russians. It was these systems that fired effectively at enemy aircraft. Intense fighting continued throughout the day. As a result, 6 enemy helicopters were destroyed (Ka-52 – 3 units, Mi-8 – 3 units).

The defenders of the airfield began to run out of ammunition and retreated, and by 19.00, control of the airfield was lost. After the National Guard withdrew, Ukrainian artillery and aviation

shelled the runway, rendering it unusable. This made it unusable for the enemy to use 18 IL-76 transport aircraft 6 transport aircraft with the 76th Airborne Division's troops, which were already in the sky over the territory of Belarus. Due to the decisive actions of the Ukrainian defenders, this landing force was forced to march to Gostomel on its own in armoured vehicles through the Chornobyl zone [4, p. 196; 7, p. 143, 144].

Understanding the critical importance of preventing the enemy from seizing Gostomel airfield, the Kyiv Defence Commander decided to regain control of the airfield by landing our tactical troops (using the airborne reserve). Three Ukrainian Mi-8 helicopters took off from Zhytomyr-Smokivka airport and landed Ukrainian paratroopers, who engaged in a counter-attack with the enemy. As a result of a fierce battle, our paratroopers regained control of the facility as of 21.00 and continued fighting in the forests beyond. Later, at around 14.00 on 25 February, under the pressure of the superior forces of the invaders, Ukrainian paratroopers and the National Guard were ordered to retreat, but were tasked with blocking the airfield with available forces and means and adjusting artillery fire on the enemy. As a result of the use of Ukrainian artillery on 27 February, the airfield's runway became completely unusable for the enemy. Thus, the courage of the defenders of the Gostomel airfield, as well as the skilful coordination of the actions of a limited number of available units of the Ukrainian Defence Forces, allowed the aggressor to thwart the plans to quickly capture the airfield in a usable condition. During the defence of the Gostomel airfield, about 70 russian special forces were killed from the 45th Separate Airborne Forces and paratroopers from the 31st Separate Air Assault Air Assault Brigade (hereinafter – the Air Assault Brigade) [2; 7, p. 144].

Having failed in Gostomel, the enemy set its sights on Vasylkiv airfield. On the night of 26 February, russian paratroopers attempted to seize the airfield's runway. However, soldiers of the 40th Tactical Aviation Brigade based in Vasylkiv, together with other units of the with other units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the National Guard of Ukraine were able to repel the invaders' attacks. The fierce battle lasted until the morning of 27 February and ended with the destruction of the russian landing party and the liberation of the airport. On the same day, enemy landing parties were also destroyed near the villages of Plesetske and Krushynka, north of Vasylkiv, and in the area of Tomylivka, near Bila Tserkva. Apparently, the russian command considered the use of the airfield in Vasylkiv as a backup option to ensure the landing of its troops by transport aircraft to create a bridgehead for the enemy to surround the capital in the south-western direction. However, after unsuccessful attempts, the enemy abandoned these intentions [4, p. 198; 7, p. 146].

Let's turn to the ground offensive of russian troops. It was conducted from three directions: north and north-west (Polissya OR) and north-east (Seversky OR). In the Polissya operational area, the enemy used an unexpected direction from Belarus - the territory of the Chornobyl Radiation and Environmental Reserve. As a result of the absence of significant resistance on the way to Chornobyl and Prypiat, the enemy managed to capture the Chornobyl NPP, where it set up control points and warehouses. In cases of resistance on the approach to district centres, russian columns blocked them, bypassed them and continued to move. In the afternoon of 24 February, the main force of russian troops that had entered through the Chornobyl zone split. One of the columns began to move towards Gostomel, trying to break through to the airfield to help its encircled troops. The second – was heading for Ivankiv, where the main routes to the capital in the north pass. The enemy column, which had entered the Vilcha checkpoint in the morning, was also heading for this important settlement [4, p. 197].

The hottest spot where Ukrainian defenders clashed with the occupiers was the ring road near Ivankiv. Ukrainian units from the 95th Separate Brigade and the 14th Brigade held the defence in the areas of Dymer and Ivankiv and managed to briefly stop the enemy's superior forces at the Teteriv River, the bridges across which were destroyed on the outskirts of Ivankiv and near

Kukhary. However, having a significant advantage in personnel and equipment, the enemy broke through our defences and continued the offensive [2].

Meanwhile, the enemy was building up its grouping in the Polissya operational area. The russian command was trying to make the most of all possible logistical routes to Kyiv in order to move as many of its troops as possible to our capital to surround it from the west. Having figured out the enemy's plans, Ukrainian forces took control of the bridges across the Irpin River, which was a natural barrier to the movement of russian troops.

For example, one of his columns intended to break through the Gostomel Bridge to Gorenka, and from there – through Pushcha-Vodytsia to Shevchenko Square in Obolon. This was the area of responsibility of Sector 1 of our forces. Major General Anatoliy Bargylevych, who was then in charge of the Territorial Defence Forces of Ukraine, was appointed to lead this important sector. He immediately arrived in the village of Horenka on 24 February to organise defensive lines. This area was of strategic importance due to the location of an important transport hub near the Gostomel Bridge, where three roads converge – from Gostomel, Bucha, and Irpin. The area was defended by units of the 72nd Brigade, the Army, the National Guard, and the Zhytomyr Military Institute named after S.P. Korolyov. After assessing the situation, the sector leader realised: "the defences on this bridge need to be slightly rebuilt, as they were built rather chaotically at the time". Due to the fact that the defenders' forces were insufficient for long-term defence and stopping the enemy's advance, in the evening of the same day, it was also decided to blow up the bridge over the Irpin River near Hostomel, for which purpose explosives were placed under the bridge [4, p. 197; 17].

At 04.00 on 25 February, Major General A. Bargylevych personally went with a driver to conduct reconnaissance and further investigate the enemy's intentions in the areas of Bucha and Gostomel. Subsequently, it became clear that russian troops would advance on Kyiv through the Gostomel Bridge. Thus, at 08.35, a column of russian military equipment in the amount of about 200 units approached the bridge. When the main equipment reached the 138-metre bridge, it was attacked by strikes at the head and tail of the column. As a result, the russian armoured vehicles stopped and became a target for our defenders. The enemy began to shoot back. The situation remained extremely tense: our forces were insufficient to hold the line for a long time. The sector commander inspired the future officers - cadets of the Military Academy to defend their positions to prevent the russian invaders from reaching the outskirts of Kyiv. They demonstrated exceptional resilience and determination and survived! After the first battle, the Ukrainian defenders blew up the Gostomel bridge and took over the defence line from the Warsaw highway to the outskirts of Horenka in the direction of Moshchun. On 25 and 26 February, bridges across Irpin were also blown up - on the Zhytomyr (near Stoyanka) and Irpin roads, as well as in Romanivka and Demydiv. This allowed us to gain time and organise the defence of the capital's suburbs. Thus, in order to prevent a possible breakthrough of enemy forces to Kyiv in the threatening direction through Pushcha-Vodytsia or along the Warsaw highway, the 131st Troop began preparing a second line of defence around the crossroads, the so-called "ball", which led directly to the Sviatoshynskyi and Obolonskyi districts of the capital [18].

Meanwhile, the Kyiv Defence Headquarters under the leadership of Colonel-General O. Syrskyi persistently and continuously managed the defence of the capital. It addressed many urgent issues, ranging from logistical support for the army and defence to the conditions of functioning of the capital of millions: curfew, air raids, unification of passes, rules for moving around Kyiv, especially across bridges, evacuation of the population and many other unprecedented challenges. Volunteer Oleksandr Dmitriev with the call sign Tikhokhod, one of those who worked at the Kyiv defence headquarters for a month, recalled: "There was a fighting spirit in the headquarters – we will survive, we must win. It united everyone and was very morally supportive. Syrsky, who calmly, without emotion, set tasks, communicated with different people, created this

atmosphere. And everything worked like clockwork. There was both iron discipline and team spirit. There was mutual respect. And everyone had great respect for Syrsky" [15].

However, despite the fierce resistance of the Ukrainian defenders, the enemy's ground forces moved towards Kyiv at a high rate on the roads during the first two to three days of the offensive, setting up checkpoints and capturing individual settlements. The average daily rate of advance was 8 up to 40 kilometres, which made it possible to penetrate to a depth of 100–120 kilometres from the state border of Ukraine. However, on the outskirts of the capital, the enemy was stopped at defensive lines [9, p. 14; 10].

Continuing the offensive on Kyiv, one of the enemy columns of more than 100 armoured vehicles of the so-called "elite Pskov" 76th Airborne Division moved from Bucha to Irpin in the morning, where Ukrainian defenders, consisting of a unit of the 80th Airborne Brigade and local volunteers, ambushed them near the Zhyraf shopping centre. They burned 11 russian BMD-2s and forced the enemy to retreat back to Bucha. Subsequently, an artillery strike on the enemy convoy returning to Bucha destroyed up to 29 armoured fighting vehicles and a fuel tanker. The images of Bucha, with its Vokzalna Street literally packed with burned enemy armoured vehicles, were broadcast around the world. In the days that followed, Ukrainian defenders in this city finished off the enemy and replenished their forces with trophy vehicles. On 3 March, Ukrainian forces entered Bucha, but a day later, under pressure from the superior forces, they retreated from the city with fighting [4, 22].

All enemy attempts to advance towards Kyiv in this direction failed. In total, on 3–4 March, in the battles for Gostomel, combined units of the Ukrainian Defence Forces killed at least 50 russians from the occupiers' 31st Separate Mechanised Brigade and burned 20 russian troop carriers. Until 5 March, Ukrainian defenders steadfastly defended Gostomel, inflicting significant losses on the elite troops of the aggressor country, until the town came under temporary occupation [24].

The Battle of Irpin, one of the key suburbs northwest of Kyiv, was another crucial chapter in the defence of the capital. After the capture of neighbouring Bucha and Hostomel, full control of the city would have allowed the occupiers not only to get closer to the outskirts of Kyiv, but also significantly increased the risk of artillery shelling of the capital. However, russian troops failed to capture Irpin in its entirety. The invaders occupied only about a third of the city. The enemy did not advance further towards our capital in this direction. In fact, it is a triangle: Irpin – Bucha – Gostomel became an unbreakable outpost of Kyiv – the fighting here lasted for a month [2].

The village of Makariv stood in the way of the enemy's advance southwest of the capital, and its capture would open up operational space for the invaders and enable them to use the Zhytomyr highway to reach Kyiv. Unable to capture the village on the spot, the occupiers laid siege to it on 27 February. On 2 March 2022, units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from the 14th Brigade, 95th Air Assault Brigade and Special Forces broke through the enemy encirclement and gained a foothold in Makariv, where, together with local volunteers, they defeated the occupiers' columns trying to break into the village. In particular, on 8 March, during the breakthrough of an enemy column through the village, three tank crews of the 14th Brigade destroyed 6 units of enemy equipment and a significant amount of enemy manpower. In this area, by 9 March, Ukrainian defenders managed to stop the enemy at the Yasnohorodok-Horenychi line and successfully held off the occupiers for more than two weeks. The availability of artillery did not allow the invaders to set up pontoons and cross to the right bank of the Irpin River with access to the outskirts of the Sviatoshynskyi district of Kyiv. Thus, the Irpin River remained the main barrier that Kyiv's defenders relied on on the right bank [25].

After unsuccessful attempts to encircle Kyiv from the north-western and western directions, the enemy focused its efforts on breaking through the Ukrainian defences in the Moshchun area.

This was a promising direction for the enemy, as if successful, the occupiers would immediately go through Horenka to the outskirts of Kyiv's Obolon district. The invading forces of the russian Armed Forces in the Vyshhorod direction were reinforced by two armoured personnel carriers from the 155th Separate Marine Brigade of the Pacific Fleet and special forces units, which on the night of 6 March, with a small part of the forces under the cover of their artillery, managed to set up pontoons, cross the Irpin River and enter the village. Reinforcements from the 72nd Brigade arrived to help the defenders, and heavy fighting ensued. Having concentrated up to 200 armoured vehicles and up to 5,000 personnel on the left bank of Irpin, the occupiers sent their best marines and paratroopers to the right bank on 6–7 March. The Ukrainian forces, which had previously retreated to the centre of the village to regroup, went on the offensive 9 on the offensive and engaged the invaders with decisive action. Ukrainian artillery began to strike at the accumulation of enemy equipment on the left bank and the crossing [4, p. 200].

Thus began weeks of heavy fighting for control of Moshchun. The enemy captured several bridgeheads on our right bank of the Irpin River, and sent up to a company of well-equipped marines and paratroopers to each of them. The enemy was constantly attacking. As a result of the enemy's use of electronic warfare, our aerial reconnaissance capabilities using UAVs were severely limited. In addition, we lost contact with some Ukrainian defenders. It should be noted that in this difficult situation, the Commander of the Kyiv Defence, Colonel-General O. Syrskyi, personally directed the actions of our units from the command and observation post of the 72nd Brigade. The defenders of Moshchun still managed to inflict serious losses on the attacking forces of the occupiers: both in contact battles on the streets of the village and thanks to our artillery strikes on the concentrations of enemy equipment hidden in the forests on the other bank of Irpin [11, 12].

To complicate the enemy's ability to cross the Irpin River, on 8 March, the dam of the Irpin water pumping station near the village of Kozarovychi, upstream, was blown up. As a result, the water level in Irpin began to rise daily by an average of 0.5–0.7 metres, and the river subsequently spread by 2–3 kilometres. As a result, the enemy units that had already crossed the Irpin River were sandwiched between the river and Ukrainian forces and cut off from the main forces of their grouping.

On 11 March, the invaders launched a massive assault on Moshchun from all sides. Under the influence of the enemy's "firewall", the Ukrainian defenders were forced to gradually retreat to the outskirts of the village, with their main forces taking up defensive positions in the forest near the village. On 12 March, the invaders, with the support of artillery, made another unsuccessful attempt to transfer their units from the Chornobyl direction to the Moshchun area. On the same day, near Rakivka, russian Armed Forces units broke through the defences of the 72nd Brigade and crossed the Irpin River, seizing a bridgehead on the left bank of the river. However, the pontoon ferry was destroyed by the artillery of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and our Special Forces isolated and neutralised the occupiers' units. Over the next two days, the enemy continued active offensive actions under the cover of its aviation and artillery strikes from the Moshchun area in the direction of Vyshhorod [4, p. 203; 12; 14].

The success of Ukrainian defenders in the Moshchun area determined the fate of Kyiv. Subsequently, the Ukrainian command brought in additional forces to repel the russian offensive. Having received reinforcements, the units of the 72nd Brigade together with the National Guard blocked the village from the flanks and began firing heavy artillery at the crossing points and concentrations of russian troops. Gradually, Ukrainian defenders pushed the enemy back to the city of Irpin, and on 21 March completely liberated Moshchun from the russian invaders. The defeat of the russian group in Moshchun was one of the turning points in the struggle for the capital of Ukraine [16]

A striking combat episode in the Kyiv defence operation was the defeat of a column of a russian tank regiment (6th tank division of the 90th Tank Division) that broke through in the Siverskyi OR on the Chernihiv-Kyiv road near Skybyn, aiming to capture Brovary and create a springboard for an offensive on Kyiv. Here, the invaders were ambushed by units of the 72nd Brigade, the National Guard, and the Troops. The units located at the forefront of the defence let the column pass as much as possible and began to attack the flanks, while Ukrainian artillery began to strike the enemy. The skilful use of UAVs provided reconnaissance and fire adjustment. An hour later, the enemy tried to repeat the attack, suffered losses and retreated. The surviving remnants of the broken column dispersed in nearby villages and in the Zalissia National Park. As a result of the battle, up to 30 pieces of enemy equipment were destroyed or damaged [8, p. 46; 12].

In the days that followed, the enemy made several unsuccessful attempts to resume the attack on Brovary, but all of them failed. The city was not captured, but the invaders dispersed among the villages of the Brovary district, occupying, in particular, Bohdanivka, Zalissia, and Velyka Dymerka. 10 The invaders' unsuccessful attempts to attack Kyiv lasted until 19 March. From then on, russian troops in all directions went on the defensive and began digging in. The Ukrainian military command managed to stabilise the situation and prevent russian troops from approaching within 25 km of the capital, the range of effective field artillery fire. However, the enemy continued rocket attacks and air strikes [4, 204].

To push the occupiers back from Kyiv, mobile units consisting of mountain assault, airborne and mechanised units were formed to conduct counter-offensive operations. On the left bank of the Dnipro River, mountain assault troops moved to the border of Lukianivka – Birky – Velykyi Krupil villages, which lie on the border of Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, where they blocked the Kyiv-Sumy highway. Our artillery began striking at the outskirts of Ivanivka, southeast of Chernihiv, at the assembly points of russian military columns [11].

Meanwhile, Ukrainian paratroopers cut off the supply routes of the russian 90th Division. Having launched attacks on the enemy group from the flanks, they gradually pulled its forces into an operational "bag". The withdrawal of russian troops from the encirclement turned into a panic flight and took place with significant losses [12].

On 21 March, the village of Makariv was liberated from the russian invaders in the Right Bank of Kyiv region as a result of the decisive actions of Ukrainian defenders against the russian invaders. The liberation of this town cut off the russian invaders from the Zhytomyr highway and exposed the rear of the enemy troops closest to Kyiv. Meanwhile, Ukrainian units of the combined brigade of the 169th National Centre, advancing in the north-western direction, entered the enemy-controlled territory and took up positions near the village of Zabuchchya, south-west of Irpin. Shortly after, on 23 March, the first reports of the encirclement of the russian group in Bucha and Irpin appeared – Ukrainian troops pushed the occupiers back to Borodyanka and reached the outskirts of the Warsaw Highway, which was the main supply line for the russian group. Here, Ukrainian artillery and mobile groups of our defenders cut off the enemy's supply routes for ammunition, fuel and lubricants, and other supplies. Over the next few days, the military operation around Irpin continued, and it had to be liberated with fighting. The heaviest final battles took place in the area of the Gostomel highway and a military hospital on the northern outskirts of the city. The official announcement of the liberation of Irpin appeared on 28 March [3, p. 44; 26].

At the same time, on 25 March, National Guard units moved to the Motyzhyn – Severinovka – Berezivka – Buzova – Lyubymivka line and launched a counter-offensive. During fierce battles with the enemy, Ukrainian defenders liberated the settlements of Yasnohorodka, Motyzhyn, Gorenichi, Kopyliv, Berezivka, Buzova over the next three days and pushed the russian occupiers beyond the Zhytomyr highway, taking it under control. Later, one of the last large-scale

battles in the Kyiv region took place north of the Zhytomyr road in the village of Dmytrivka on 30 March, where the enemy lost about 18 pieces of heavy equipment. Two of our tank crews demonstrated their skills and destroyed about 14 units of armoured vehicles of the russian invaders. The enemy did not expect us to return. Under pressure from Ukrainian defenders On 30 March 2022, the occupiers also began to retreat from Brovary. Their forces in the area failed to connect with the group advancing from the Chernihiv and were stopped there. They also suffered from problems with the supply of their group and their own mistakes [12].

In order to recognise the feat, mass heroism and resilience of citizens displayed in the defence of their cities during the repulsion of the armed aggression of the russian federation against Ukraine, the cities of Gostomel, Bucha, Irpin, Okhtyrka and Chernihiv were awarded the honorary title of "Hero City of Ukraine" by the decrees of the President of Ukraine in March 2022. The heroic defence of these cities played a decisive role in the battle for Kyiv. In this heroic struggle against the russian invaders, Ukrainian air defence and missile units proved to be effective. In general, due to the early withdrawal of aviation, control points of anti- 11 aircraft missile and radio-technical troops from enemy attacks and manoeuvres, as well as the widespread use of portable foreign-made anti-aircraft missile systems in the Polissya OR, it was possible to shoot down more than 35% of the missiles launched, prevent enemy air dominance, in particular by destroying up to 45% of its combat aircraft and helicopters, and provide cover for important facilities [9, p. 15].

Having quickly recovered from the missile strikes in the morning of 24 February, Ukrainian pilots were the first to launch a powerful and unexpected strike against the enemy, flying from backup airfields. At that time, russian planes and helicopters were already in the sky. On average, the air-to-air confrontation was 2.5:1 in our favour. However, the defenders of Ukrainian skies demonstrated not only extraordinary skill but also exceptional heroism. It was unusual to see junior officers, such as first lieutenants and captains, flying our aircraft, and they proved to be quite capable. Ukrainian fighters and bombers played a key role in stopping the russian offensive on the capital [19].

In addition to the aviation of the Air Force of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, helicopters of the Army Aviation of the Land Forces also carried out effective strikes on the accumulation of equipment, logistics depots, pontoon crossings, enemy control points near the settlements of Makariv, Borodyanka, Gostomel and others. At the same time, taking into account the considerable rapidity of hostilities, which led to abrupt changes in the situation, the army aviation performed tasks only when called upon [9, p. 17].

Conclusion

The main achievement of the Kyiv defence operation was the disruption of the insidious plans of the military and political leadership of the russian federation to seize our capital, install a pro-russian puppet "government", deprive Ukraine of its independence and turn it into a satellite of the Kremlin.

The victory of Ukrainian forces in the Kyiv defence operation allowed the liberation of the territories of Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions. The transition of the Ukrainian Defence Forces to a counter-offensive was crucial, primarily in psychological terms: the liberation of Ukraine began and our troops seized the operational initiative. No less important was the fact that it was thanks to the successful defence of Kyiv that world leaders believed in the strength of the Ukrainian people and the power of its army and began to actively help us with weapons, military equipment and all the necessary supplies.

The Kyiv defence operation took place in the form of tactical actions by units and military units. The retention of the borders, districts, positions, and objects around Kyiv was ensured

through positional defence combined with manoeuvrable actions of the troops. In an attempt to reach Kyiv as quickly as possible, the enemy moved in dense armoured columns without the support of infantry and aviation, and thus became a target for mobile groups of Ukrainian defenders. The priority task of the Ukrainian Defence Forces, especially at the beginning of the large-scale invasion, was to limit the mobility of the enemy forces by increasing natural obstacles through the destruction of transport infrastructure, including bridges and crossings.

It became apparent that the airborne troops of the russian federation failed to fulfil their intended purpose in their intended mission and were used as light mechanised units in the course of the hostilities. Instead, Ukrainian forces proved to be quite good at repelling enemy troops.

In the Kyiv Defence Operation, the russian Armed Forces suffered a strategic defeat. They paid dearly for their intentions to capture the capital of Ukraine – Kyiv. Their losses were enormous. According to rough estimates by military historians, the enemy suffered devastating losses in the Kyiv defensive operation: about 10,000 irrecoverable losses in personnel, up to 350 tanks and 1,000 armoured combat vehicles, 150 artillery systems, 50 multiple launch rocket systems, up to 100 aircraft, and 80–90 combat helicopters. The so-called "elite" russian paratroopers and special forces units from the Pskov 76th Airborne Division, Kostroma 98th Airborne Division, which shot at 12 Ukrainian forces near Ilovaisk in August 2014, the 45th Airborne Division, 155th Infantry Division, 31st Airmobile Brigade and others met an ignominious end near Kyiv.

Recommendations

The results of the reconstruction of the events of the Kyiv Defence Operation presented in this article are only interim. The history of the Battle of Kyiv and its individual episodes still requires further detailed research, the search for new sources and their introduction into scientific circulation. Prospects for further military history research may also include a more detailed study of the battles that took place in the Siverskyi OR.

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