

First attack at Korotoyak

The attack against the town started on the morning of 7 August. Parts of the Hungarian Armoured Division attempted to invade from the west, where the Soviet 174th Rifle Division, led by Colonel S. I. Karapetian, defended the town. Corporal József Móker, radio operator of the adjutant's tank in the Staff Squadron, gave a detailed description of the fight of the attacking 30/II. Tank Battalion in his diary:

'At 7 a. m. we had a short break then we set out. 1st Lieutenant Halmos (*1st Lieutenant dr. Gyula Halmos, Battalion-Adjutant and tank commander - Cs. B.*) said that we would face only the infantry's resistance. I set my radio because we were approaching the line of attack.

We attacked first with the 4th Squadron (...) and reached the outskirts of Korotoyak at 11am. I should have reported it but I lost contact. Battalion-Commander Árpád Bokor ordered the 4th Squadron to push ahead. It was the last time we heard his voice. At 11.30 I got a signal from the commanding tank: the 'Master' disabled. I couldn't believe my ears and asked back. But it was true: the tank of the battalion-commander was knocked out (*Lieutenant Colonel Árpád Bokor, Commander of the 30/II. Tank Battalion killed in action - Cs. B.*).

I peeped out. We proceeded among ruins. The Russian resistance was very strong (...) I could see an anti-tank gun's barrel turned towards us from the right about 150 meters away. ... But 1st Lieutenant Halmos came before it with a fragmentation shell. ... He saved our lives.

The air was hot in the tank and filled with gunpowder smoke. My shirt stuck to me and the smoke or the anxiety made me breath with difficulty. (...) Suddenly we collided with one of our tanks. I fell on the ground but the leather helmet protected my head. Thank God neither the vehicles nor the men were injured.

I was so occupied with the radio that I could rarely peep out. The fight was in full rage. The artillery impacts ploughed up the ground in front of us. It was to 1st Lieutenant Halmos's credit that we got some fresh air as he opened the roof. He sent a fragmentation shell into a house where they were about to throw a bunch of hand-grenades on us. The Soviets exploded together with their grenades. (...)

I could see hardly anything from the smoke when an anti-tank rifle appeared in front of us. We were ten meters from each other. Driving directly on it, 1st Lieutenant Halmos crushed the dangerous weapon with our tank. (...)

All of a sudden our tank gave a great jerk. We must have fallen into a bigger ditch. Our driver tried his best to move but all in vain: though the engine was struggling the tracks were unable to move the tank. As time flew the situation got critical for we became a perfect target for the enemy's artillery. We must have done something but I didn't know what. 1st Lieutenant Halmos

ordered us to put fog-candles out. Right in time, because a shell had just missed us. The fog-candles protected us with their smoke for a while but how long? The driver calmed down by now and kept on trying. Finally, the twelve cylinders slowly moved the ten-ton vehicle. The tracks were creaking and cracking but removed us from the pit. As soon as we got started again one of our tanks opened fire on us from a side road. Fortunately, they were also nervous and missed the target.

The Armoured Division managed to seize the western part of the town, but the 12th Light Division's tired soldiers, who just arrived in the morning after a 1000 km march(!), couldn't cope really with the stout Soviet defence in their baptism of fire, during the very intensive street fight. Three Hungarian T-38s were knocked out, and five T-38s and two Pz. IV tanks were also temporarily disabled. Captain Péter Luksch, Commander of the Staff Squadron of the 30/II. Tank Battalion, assumed the place of Lieutenant Colonel Árpád Bokor, who was killed in action. The Soviet casualties amounted to 300 dead, 140 prisoners, and at least three aeroplanes destroyed.

At the bridgehead the Hungarian troops captured a Soviet light tank, but they had to face the fire of twelve T-34s from the opposite bank.

The Reconnaissance Battalion of the Armoured Division took part in the fight in the Uryw area and two soldiers of that unit, Sergeant József Gátmezei and Corporal Ferenc Dalos, were awarded the Hungarian Gold Medal of Bravery for their performance on that day.

Next day the Soviets managed to send two dozen tanks to the Korotoyak area, but in a heavy fight the Hungarians knocked out four of them.

On the same day the Soviet 291st ShAD (Assault Aviation Division) bombed the Hungarian tanks heavily. Nevertheless, the Hungarian IInd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Group shot down some of the armoured Il-2 ground-attack planes and repulsed them.

On 9th August the fighting continued at Korotoyak against the Soviet 174th Rifle Division and 73rd Guards Rifle Regiment. Senior Corporal József Behányi from the 1. Motorized Infantry Battalion of the Division was awarded posthumously the Hungarian Gold Medal for Bravery for his self-sacrificing feat on that day. The Soviet defence remained desperate and the situation at the Uryw-bridgehead became critical and the 7th Light Division suffered very serious losses. Therefore the Hungarian High Command decided to redeploy most of the Armoured Division here. The Reconnaissance Battalion and a platoon of the 3rd Squadron of the 30/I. Tank Battalion went into action on the same day at Uryw, where the reconnaissance unit lost one of its Csaba armoured cars. On the next day, 10 August 1942, the Soviets were well prepared and waiting for the Hungarians.