

PART TWO

OPERATIONS IN 1941

Chapter 3

The Initial Operations (22 June–31 July 1941)

D Day

The German invasion of Russia began at 0300 on 22 June 1941. The Germans achieved complete tactical surprise. In some places the Russians were caught asleep in their billets, and in many instances Russian commanders proved helpless before the onslaught. In general, however, the Russian troops recovered quickly and offered strong local resistance.

The Situation on 30 June 1941

In the Army Group South area, the First Panzer Group had fought its way into the area east of Rovno, its advance having been repeatedly held up by counterattacks of skillfully led Russian units. Farther to the south the Seventeenth Army advance had progressed to the area around and especially south of Lvov but against strong resistance. The general impression was that the Russians facing Army Group South had recovered from their initial shock and, having realized the seriousness of the situation, were showing considerable skill in blocking the advance. Developments in the southern part of the theater were therefore not up to expectation.

In the Army Group Center area, the ring of encirclement around the Russian forces west of Minsk had been completely closed. The Second and Third Panzer Groups had linked up near Minsk according to plan. The Russians had been unable to prevent this maneuver or coordinate any countermoves. By the end of June the encircled units made uncoordinated efforts to break out of the pocket. Eventually, some 20 Russian divisions were destroyed in the Minsk pocket, and the Germans captured 290,000 prisoners, 2,500 tanks, and 1,400 guns. The situation in this area was so satisfactory that Hitler considered diverting forces to Army Group South to intercept and destroy the Red Army reserves being brought up from the rear.

In the Army Group North area the situation developed according to plan. The Dvina had been crossed at Dvinsk and Yekabpils, and

the crucial step toward implementing the army group plan had thus been taken. In Lithuania and Latvia, the Russians were offering strong resistance in a series of delaying actions. By this time 12 to 15 Russian divisions had virtually been wiped out during the fighting west of the Dvina.

In general, the Germans had every reason to be satisfied with the progress of the first nine days. The Luftwaffe had gained complete air supremacy. The Russians had been forced to give battle on all fronts. An organized withdrawal opposite Army Groups Center and North was no longer to be feared, whereas in the Army Group South area the Russians could still evade the German envelopment. In view of the heavy losses suffered by the Soviet forces, the overall success of the German operation seemed assured. In a conference on 29 June Hitler stated that, instead of driving straight toward Moscow, he would prefer to divert forces for a thrust on Leningrad. The capture of Leningrad would drive the Russians from the Baltic and thus secure German shipments of ore across that body of water, enable the Finns to seize the initiative, and disengage the German left for a thrust on Moscow. Jodl interjected that the detour to Moscow via Leningrad would be beyond the capabilities of the panzer formations. After some discussion it was decided that the question would be re-examined at a later date.

Developments in Early July 1941

In a diary entry of 3 July General Halder expressed the justifiable optimism, shared at that time by most Germany military leaders, that the mission of destroying the Red Army west of the Dvina and Dnepr had been accomplished. He did not doubt the word of a captured Russian corps commander that east of these two rivers the Germans would encounter only isolated forces whose strength would be insufficient to hamper operations decisively. It therefore seemed to him no exaggeration to state that the Russian campaign had been won in less than two weeks. Of course, this did not imply that the campaign was completely terminated. It would take many more weeks to occupy the vast Russian theater and overcome the stubbornness with which the Soviets would continue to offer resistance.

Hitler's opinion on the same subject, as expressed on 4 July, ran as follows: "I constantly try to put myself in the enemy's position. For all practical purposes the enemy has lost this campaign. It is a good thing that we have destroyed the Russian armored and air forces right at the beginning. The Russians will be unable to replace them." At the same time the Fuehrer was preoccupied with the question of what was to happen after crossing the Dnepr-Dvina line. "Are we to turn north or south? This will probably be the most difficult de-

cision of the entire campaign." He obviously did not consider driving straight on to Moscow.

The next day Jodl asked Halder to submit his plans and ideas for the continuation of the offensive to Hitler. In Jodl's opinion the significance of the next movements of the panzer groups was so great that Halder should consult Hitler before definitely committing these forces. Jodl added that two important questions preoccupied Hitler:

1. Would Army Group North be sufficiently strong to accomplish its mission singlehandedly or would the Third Panzer Group have to lend its assistance? In the latter case, should this panzer group be diverted northeastward immediately after crossing the Dnepr-Dvina line?

2. Should Second Panzer Group be diverted southward immediately after having crossed the Dnepr?

Brauchitsch and Halder reported to Hitler on 8 July. They indicated that out of 164 Russian rifle divisions so far identified by the Germans, 89 had been destroyed, 46 were still capable of commitment, 18 were employed in secondary theaters such as Finland, and the whereabouts of 11 divisions were unknown.

Brauchitsch then suggested that First Panzer Group immediately turn southward for a close-in envelopment and that a protective screen be built up west of Kiev. Hitler, however, preferred to capture Kiev first and then launch a wide envelopment along the east bank of the Dnepr with the assistance of strong Army Group Center forces. Brauchitsch objected to this plan, indicating that the logistical problems it involved seemed insuperable at that time. He did advocate, however, that the wide envelopment be carried out after the close-in one had met with success. No immediate decision was taken.

At that time the Army Group South operations hinged upon the progress made by Sixth Army and First Panzer Group. To achieve a decisive success the latter would have to penetrate the Red Army defenses that blocked the German axis of advance in the direction of Vinnitsa and Korosten. The mounting pressure, exerted by the Russian *Fifth Army* which was threatening the German north flank from the Pripyat Marshes, had to be eliminated at the same time. Moreover, the Eleventh Army would have to join the offensive and move northeastward toward Vinnitsa, where—despite its relative weakness—it was to assist First Panzer Group. This maneuver might pave the way to the encirclement of Russian forces southwest of Berdichev.

The next objective of Army Group Center was to bring about the collapse of the Russian defensive triangle anchored on Orsha, Smolensk, and Vitebsk. There, between the Dnepr and the Dvina, was the corridor that was vital for the continuation of the German thrust on Moscow. The Russians were apparently preparing an all-

out defense along this same corridor, using not only whatever forces had escaped from the Minsk pocket but also fresh ones then being moved up. Another Soviet concentration was being built up near Velikiye Luki for future commitment against Army Group Center or Army Group North.

To accomplish its next mission Army Group Center would have to make a sweeping double envelopment in the course of which Second Panzer Group was to advance in the general direction of Bobruysk-Roslavl and Third Panzer Group along the upper Dvina via Polotsk and Vitebsk. The infantry divisions of the Fourth and Ninth Armies would have to close up and constantly support the armor if the Orsha corridor was to be enveloped.

Army Group North was to drive toward Lake Ilmen, with Fourth Panzer Group in the lead, and then turn northward in the direction of Leningrad. Strong Russian resistance was to be expected at the former Russian-Estonian border, and Estonia proper would have to be mopped up by infantry divisions brought up in the rear.

At this stage the crucial problem confronting all three army groups was to keep the infantry from falling too far behind the armor. The infantry divisions with their horse-drawn vehicles could not help being delayed whenever they were engaged in completing encirclements or in mopping up pockets. To overextend the distance between the on-rushing armor and the temporarily stalled infantry meant courting danger. The Army's low strength in motorized infantry divisions (because of the constant POL and materiel shortage, Germany had but 14 such divisions) proved to be a handicap. It is true that this deficiency was somewhat compensated for by the almost unbelievable march performances of the infantry divisions, which time and again succeeded in closing up even though they were denied the use of the few good roads reserved for the motorized units.

The question of determining the proper size for a ring of encirclement also preoccupied the Army. The lesson learned from the battle that had raged between Bialystok and Minsk was that it was unsound to try to envelop too much at one time; if the ring of encirclement was too large it would not be sufficiently strong to prevent a breakout of Russian forces.

For the time being, supply was no problem since the precautionary measures of establishing forward depots and new base sections guaranteed a satisfactory support of the projected operations.

The railroads functioned surprisingly well. By 3 July, for instance, the tracks from Brest Litovsk half-way to Minsk had been converted to European gauge, with the remaining section being reopened two days later for trains using captured Russian rolling stock. A few days later this section also had to be converted because the Germans

had not captured any Russian tank cars. Fleets of German tank cars moved up the large quantities of POL needed to feed the offensive.

The Luftwaffe had achieved air superiority despite the surprising numerical strength of the Russian Air Force. An Armed Forces High Command communiqué, issued on 12 July, mentioned that 6,233 Russian planes had been destroyed against very minor Luftwaffe losses. Soviet communiqués covering the same period spoke of 1,900 Russian planes lost against 2,300 German planes destroyed—300 more than the total number of German planes committed in the Russian theater. Even though these figures are obviously exaggerated and differ so greatly, they do convey an idea of the impact of the initial air battles.

The Mid-July Estimate

On 14 July Hitler mentioned that Moscow would have to be bombed from the air if the center of Communist resistance was to be hit and the orderly evacuation of the Soviet Government prevented.

Three days later Hitler considered once again the diversion of Hoth's Third Panzer Group to the northeast and Guderian's Second Panzer Group to the southeast. For the latter maneuver, to be initiated immediately after the liquidation of the Smolensk pocket, Guderian's panzer forces were to be reinforced by strong infantry units of the Second Army.

In the Army Group South area, the efforts of Sixth Army and First Panzer Group were in danger of being dissipated. The pressure exerted by the Russian *Fifth Army* from the Pripyat Marshes against the army group's flank diverted more and more Sixth Army troops from their original mission. [See map 7.] Armored elements were arriving in the vicinity of Kiev where they protected the flank of the First Panzer Group. The latter was thrusting southeastward toward Uman in an attempt to envelop the Russian forces in front of Seventeenth Army. Despite stubborn Russian resistance and unexpectedly heavy rainfall, the Seventeenth Army had meanwhile penetrated into the Vinnitsa area, while the Eleventh Army had advanced as far as the Dnestr. Some German elements had pushed to Kishinev for the purpose of getting the Romanians started on the road to Odessa.

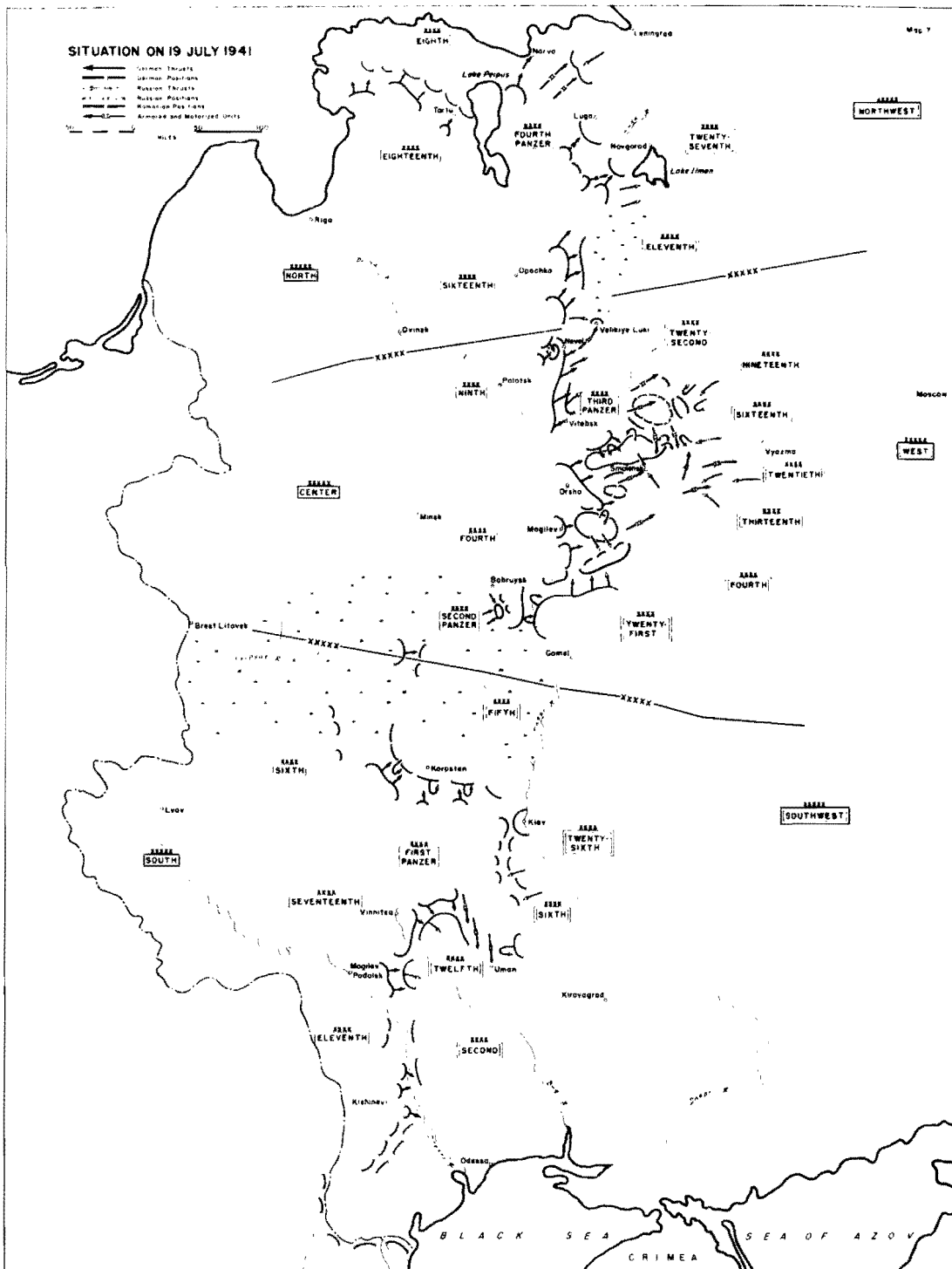
The Russians opposing Army Group South continued to fight a stubborn and skillful delaying action, meanwhile avoiding most German enveloping maneuvers. Marshal Semen Budyenny who commanded the Russian *Army Group Southwest* was Rundstedt's opponent.

Brauchitsch, Halder, and Rundstedt agreed that First Panzer Group would have to launch a wider envelopment than originally intended. The thrust toward Uman no longer complied with the

SITUATION ON 19 JULY 1941

- German Thrusts
- German Positions
- Russian Thrusts
- Russian Positions
- Romanian Positions
- Romanian Panzer
- American and Motorized Units

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 MILES



Map 7. Situation on 19 July 1941.

existing situation, and the armored forces were therefore to drive deeper into the Dnepr bend and attempt to establish a bridgehead south of Kiev. At the same time Rundstedt stressed the necessity for offensive action to eliminate Russian forces threatening his left flank from the Pripyat region. While Halder agreed in principle, he did not believe that combing out the Pripyat Marshes could be accomplished effectively without employing the proper forces. He felt that it would be more expedient to cut the lines of communication of the Russian *Fifth Army* between the Pripyat and the Dnepr and let the army perish in the swamps.

The situation of Army Group Center was far more favorable. The Orsha-Smolensk-Vitebsk barrier had been pried open and the ring of encirclement near Smolensk closed. Another 100,000 prisoners, 2,000 tanks, and 1,900 guns had fallen into German hands. Russian attempts to build up a new front and to extend it to the north and south had failed. The Russians, although split into isolated and more or less encircled groups, continued to stubbornly resist east of Mogilev, between Orsha and Smolensk, northeast of Vitebsk, and near Nevel.

There was a certain amount of Russian pressure from the Gomel area, but in general the Red Army had been badly shaken; two weeks would be needed for mopping-up operations. Marshal Semen Timoshenko's *Army Group West* was receiving a constant flow of reinforcements, improvised units were arriving from Moscow, and the Soviet Government was obviously using every possible means to stop the German advance on the Russian capital.

In the Army Group North area Sixteenth Army had fought its way eastward against stubborn resistance in the difficult terrain east of Opochna, while Fourth Panzer Group had turned northward, advancing between Lakes Ilmen and Peipus toward Leningrad. Marshal Klementi Voroshilov, who commanded *Army Group Northwest*, was strongly resisting this German drive. The two armored corps of Fourth Panzer Group became separated during the course of their advance. While the corps on the right was driving toward Novgorod to isolate Leningrad from the east, the other corps moved up the east shore of Lake Peipus, because the more direct route to Leningrad via Luga led through extremely difficult terrain that was unsuitable for armor. The latter corps was to capture Narva, thereby closing the corridor between Lake Peipus and the Baltic, and then resume the advance on Leningrad from the west. The splitting of this armored force was a totally undesirable development since the Army High Command had planned to keep the Fourth Panzer Group intact until it reached the area southeast of Leningrad. The city would thus be cut off from the east, and the way paved for the advance of the

Finns approaching along the shores of Lake Ladoga. Leeb was reminded of the necessity of implementing this plan and was given specific instructions to move up infantry forces behind the panzer corps which had turned northward.

For the first time in the campaign the flow of supplies became unsatisfactory. Delays occurred in the Army Group Center area and to some extent also in the north. Increasing difficulties in rail transportation affected operations accordingly.

Directive No. 33 (19 July 1941)

The introductory paragraph of this directive, which carried the subtitle "Continuation of the Russian Campaign," enumerated the successes hitherto achieved. It also mentioned that Army Group Center would need some time to mop up the remaining Russian pockets and that the progress of Army Group South was hampered by Fortress Kiev in front and the Russian *Fifth Army* in the rear.

The twofold objective of future operations was to prevent the withdrawal of strong Soviet forces and to annihilate them. The measures to be taken for this purpose were as follows:

a. South. A concentric attack on the Russian *Twelfth* and *Sixth Armies* was to lead to their destruction west of the Dnepr. [See map 7.] The Russian *Fifth Army* was also to be destroyed through a joint effort of Army Group South and Center forces. The Second Panzer Group and strong infantry forces of Army Group Center were to be diverted to the southeast to cut off those Russian units trying to escape across the river.

b. Center. Army Group Center was to mop up the numerous pockets in its area and then continue its advance on Moscow with a force exclusively composed of infantry divisions. The Third Panzer Group was to thrust northeastward to cut the communications between Moscow and Leningrad and simultaneously protect the right flank of Army Group North during its advance on Leningrad.

c. North. The drive on Leningrad was to continue as soon as the infantry divisions of Eighteenth Army had closed with Fourth Panzer Group and the Sixteenth Army had made contact with Third Panzer Group.

d. Finland. The Finnish forces in the south, reinforced by the German 163d Infantry Division, were to place their main effort east of Lake Ladoga and coordinate their offensive with Army Group North. This mission of the German units committed in northern Finland remained unchanged.

e. Air Support. The Luftwaffe was to support the diversion to the southeast with all its available forces. The Second Air Force, temporarily reinforced by the transfer of forces from the West, was to

bomb Moscow as retribution for Soviet air attacks on Bucharest and Helsinki.

f. Naval Support. The Navy was to safeguard supply convoys and prevent the escape of Russian naval units to neutral ports in Sweden. After the Baltic had been cleared of the Soviet forces, some elements of the German Baltic Fleet were to be transferred to the Mediterranean. A few submarines were to be dispatched to the Norwegian Sea to support the operations in Finland.

The last paragraph of the directive dealt with the redistribution of forces in western and northern Europe.

Two days after signing the directive Hitler visited Army Group North headquarters, where he discussed the implications of his orders with Leeb and his staff. He pointed out that the capture of Leningrad—a symbol of Bolshevism since 1917—might lead to a complete collapse of the already badly shaken Soviet regime. Because of the significance of the city it was to be expected that the advancing German troops would encounter strong resistance. The Third Panzer Group was still engaged in liquidating the pockets near Smolensk, but the decision would have to be made within the next five days whether this force was to be diverted from the drive on Moscow. Despite having issued the directive, Hitler was still undecided as to its implementation. During the conference Hitler also stated that, to him, Moscow was simply a place name.

On 23 July Hitler attended a conference at Army High Command headquarters. General Halder reported the most recent information on Russian and German strength figures, as follows:

Estimate of Russian Strength (23 July 1941)

Russian Strength	Divisions			
	Total	Rifle	Armored	Cavalry
Totals.....	93	78	13	2
Opposite German Army Group:				
North.....	23½	20	3½	-----
Center.....	35½	32	3½	-----
South.....	34	26	6	2

After one month of fighting, the effective strength of the German infantry divisions had been reduced by approximately 20 percent and that of the panzer and motorized infantry divisions by 50 percent.

For future planning, Halder estimated that Army Group South would be able to cross the Dnepr by the middle of August, but that Army Group Center could not possibly resume its advance before 5

August. The pockets would have to be mopped up, supplies moved up and distributed, etc. Very strong resistance was to be expected west of Moscow where the Russians were building up strength, including a formidable antiaircraft defense system. The Army Group North forces would probably have to be regrouped before the final drive on Leningrad could be launched.

Hitler emphasized that the basic principle in conducting the operations was to destroy enemy forces wherever they were encountered. In addition the three principal objectives to be attained were as follows:

1. The Leningrad region because of its industrial, naval, and political importance;
2. The Moscow area because of its war production facilities; and
3. The Ukraine because of its natural resources and industry. He repeated that after the fighting around Smolensk had subsided the Second and Third Panzer Groups would have to turn right and left respectively to support the adjoining army groups. Army Group Center would have to carry out its advance on Moscow without armored support.

As a result of this conference the Supplement to Directive No. 33 was issued on 23 July. This order specified the scope of future operations as follows:

a. South. All enemy forces remaining west of the Dnepr were to be defeated and destroyed. As soon as circumstances permitted, First and Second Panzer Groups were to be put under the command of Fourth Army and assembled west of the Dnepr. Reinforced by infantry and mountain divisions, this army was to seize the industrial region of Kharkov, cross the Don, and drive into the Caucasus.

b. Center. After having mopped up around Smolensk and stabilized the situation along its southern flank, Army Group Center was to defeat the Russian forces still remaining between Smolensk and Moscow and seize their capital, "using the infantry units of its two armies, which were sufficiently strong for this purpose."

The Third Panzer Group was to be temporarily attached to Army Group North, but would revert to Army Group Center as soon as its mission was accomplished. The armored forces would then take part in the subsequent drive from Moscow to the Volga River.

c. North. Receiving the support of Third Panzer Group, Army Group North would be able to commit its infantry in a direct assault on Leningrad while the mobile units would attempt enveloping maneuvers.

d. Redeployment. The Army High Command was to plan organizational measures for the transfer and reassignment of Army Group North forces after their mission to seize Leningrad had been accomplished.

The last two paragraphs of the Supplement dealt with air and naval reinforcements for the Finnish theater and with rear area security measures in occupied Russian territories. Greater security was to be achieved by "applying appropriate Draconian measures, not by requesting more security forces."

The Army vigorously protested against the contents of the Supplement to Directive No. 33, and Brauchitsch claimed that for the time being its implementation was impossible, particularly in the Army Group Center area. On 23 July he asked Keitel, who had signed the Supplement, to defer its application until current operations had been brought to a more conclusive point. After Keitel refused this request, Brauchitsch asked for another conference with Hitler, this time on the subject of the contents of the Supplement.

This conference apparently took place on the same day. Hitler listened to Brauchitsch's objections, then stressed that certain lessons on the conduct of mobile operations could be learned from the experience of the five weeks'-old Russian campaign. Because of the Soviet forces' stiff resistance, operations with far-reaching objectives would have to be deferred until the Russians no longer had the strength to counterattack. Close-in envelopments would have to be attempted instead, thus giving the infantry divisions an opportunity to directly support the spearhead units, which in turn would become available for their proper mission.

The Army's Letter to the Armed Forces High Command

The Army's ideas on the further conduct of operations were explained in a letter drafted by the Operations Division of the Army High Command and approved by Halder on 30 June. The letter was never sent because its contents were partly superseded by Directive No. 33 and because the entire Armed Forces High Command—with the possible exception of Keitel—seemed to share the Army's point of view.

After dealing with secondary problems in the initial paragraphs, the letter stated the Army's case as follows:

a. The Offensive against Moscow. After the transfer of the forces that were to be diverted to the north and south, the two remaining armies of Army Group Center would be composed of 20–22 divisions, including all reserves in rear areas. These forces would have to suffice for launching an offensive along an approximately 150-mile front against an estimated force of 19 Soviet divisions, of which 3 were armored and 2 motorized. The Russians could probably move up reinforcements from the immediate vicinity of Moscow.

The German attack forces would have to penetrate a fortified position behind which there would surely be some additional field forti-

fications. Such a maze of defensive positions could be overcome only by a proper massing of forces. The forces for the main effort in the south would have to be assembled near Yelnya, those in the north around Bely. The southern axis of advance would have to run somewhere between the Roslavl-Moscow and Smolensk-Moscow roads, and the northern one would lead from Bely via Rzhev to Moscow.

No quick advance toward Moscow could be expected without armored forces. On the contrary, the operation would certainly be costly and painstaking, and it might bog down altogether.

b. Critique.

1. According to present plans Army Group Center would be composed of three different forces. The Second Panzer Group would attack in the direction of Gomel and the Third Panzer Group northeastward to the Valdai Hills; by eliminating any possible threat to the flanks these two movements would pave the way for a third force thrusting toward Moscow.
2. A decisive offensive against Moscow could not get under way before the beginning of September, when the two panzer groups would become available to participate in the drive.
3. The Russians would thus have one extra month to organize and strengthen their defenses while warding off the weak German attacks launched with insufficient forces. They would have achieved their objective of splitting up the German forces by continually jabbing at their flanks. At the same time the immediate danger to Moscow would subside for several weeks. Aside from the political significance of this success, the Soviets would benefit from remaining in control of the industrial and communications facilities of their capital.
4. The effectiveness of air attacks on Moscow remained doubtful because of the long distance separating the German airfields from the target area. No immediate improvement was in sight.

c. General Suggestions. A reexamination of the plans regarding the redistribution of the Army Group Center forces therefore seemed warranted. Being unable to evaluate the political and economic factors that might have motivated the decisions of the Armed Forces High Command, the Army could base its suggestions only on military factors. These were as follows:

1. The Russians would probably try to build up a defense line between the Baltic and Black Seas, along which they would attempt to stop the German advance before the onset of winter. They would no doubt try to establish this line west of their major industrial centers. If the present war of movement developed into position warfare, the Russians would probably

be able to organize and train strong units by next spring. This in turn would force the Germans to divert even more forces to the Russian theater. Such a course of events would, however, be contrary to the military objective of the Russian campaign, which was to quickly knock out one adversary and then turn all the power against the other one—Great Britain.

2. To forestall the Russian intentions, the Germans would have to keep their adversaries off balance. This could best be achieved by smashing the Russian resistance by a direct thrust on Moscow. Since possession of the Russian capital was vital from a military, political, and economic standpoint, the Soviet leaders would commit every available soldier to defend the city. By attacking Moscow the German Army could therefore destroy the bulk of the Red Army, split the Russian theater in two parts, and seriously impair the Soviet unity of command.
3. All secondary operations, having as the objective the destruction of individual Russian groupings, would have to be abandoned unless such operations could be integrated into the overall plan for a powerful offensive against Moscow.

d. Specific Suggestions.

1. Two armies composed of infantry divisions would launch a frontal attack on Moscow. The axis of advance of the southern army would be the Roslavl-Moscow road, that of the northern the line Bely-Rzhev-Dmitrov.
2. On the right of these two armies Second Panzer Group would thrust into the area south of Moscow, cut the railroads leading to the capital from the south, and support the right wing of the southern army. On the left Third Panzer Group would drive in the direction of Kalinin, cut the lines of communications between Moscow and Leningrad, seize the area north of Moscow, and support the left wing of the northern army.
3. Another army composed of infantry divisions would move up behind the Second Panzer Group, dislodge the Russian forces north of Gomel, and establish flank security along the line Bryansk-Pogost.
4. The offensive could probably begin on 12 August after the rehabilitation of the armored and motorized units. If the operations proceeded at all well, it could be assumed that Moscow would be reached by the beginning of September.
5. The essential difference between this and the previous plans was that the Russian forces around Gomel would not be encircled and destroyed by the Second Panzer Group but simply

driven southeastward by an infantry army. Moreover, the Third Panzer Group would not be diverted to Army Group North; on the other hand, the principal mission it was supposed to accomplish during its temporary attachment to Army Group North—that of cutting the lines of communications between Moscow and Leningrad—would also be achieved according to this plan.

6. By assembling Second Panzer Group west of Roslavl and Third Panzer Group southwest of Bely, this or any alternate plan could be carried out without delay.
7. The decision on which the plan of operation for Army Group Center was to be adopted would not have to be made until 4 August; this delay would make it possible to take into account any further developments in the enemy situation.

This letter expressed the Army's anxiety over Hitler's plans, the implementation of which would be the first step toward dissipating the momentum of the powerful German offensive. Involvement in a series of local operations would eventually lead to a loss of initiative. Instead of applying the principles of grand strategy, the Army would be using grand tactics; and attempts to eliminate a local threat here and close a gap there, without considering strategic factors, would inevitably lead to position warfare.

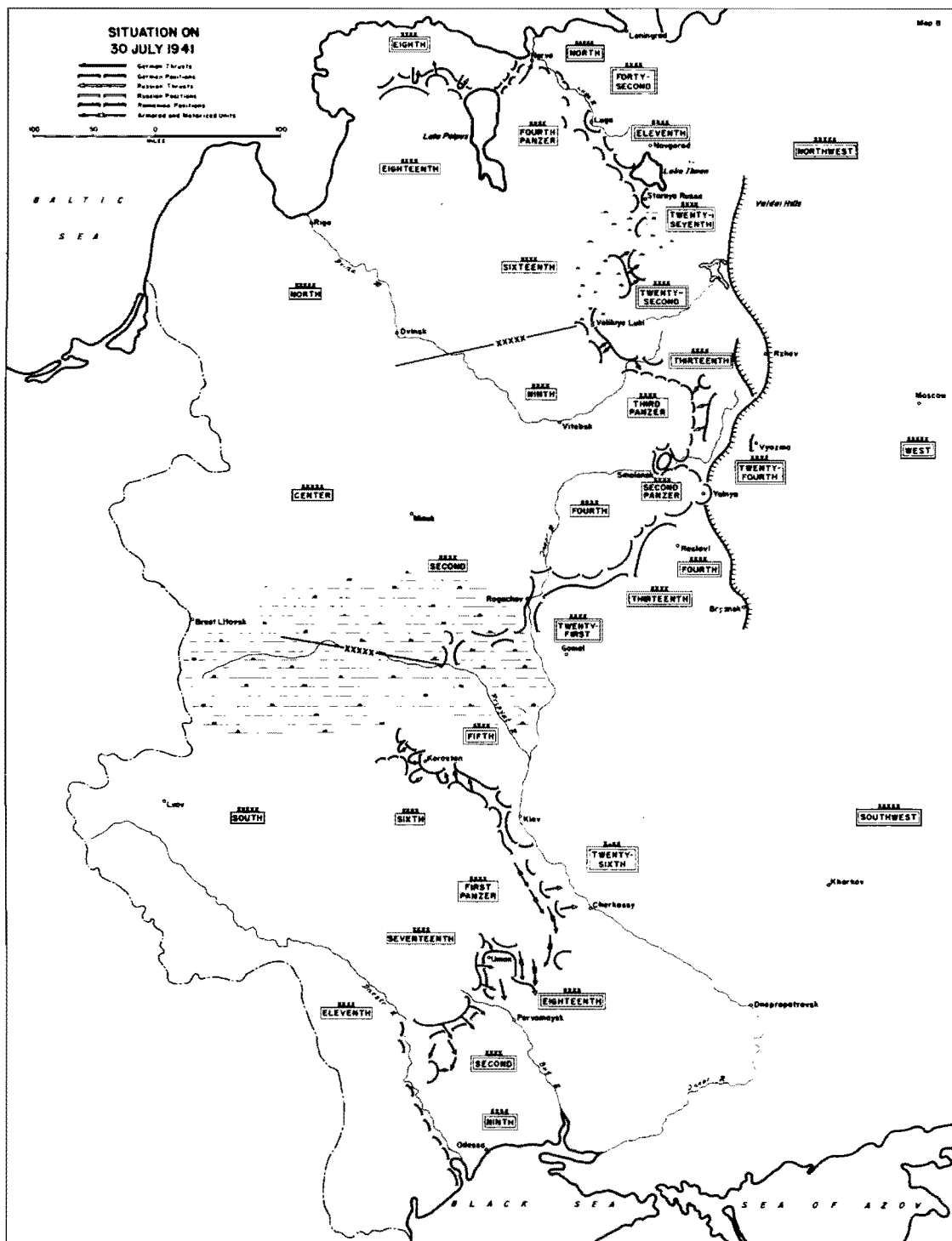
During a visit to Army Group Center headquarters on 25 July, Keitel explained Hitler's contrasting viewpoint as follows: Instead of the sweeping enveloping maneuvers that had been successful during the preceding campaigns, the Germans would have to conduct small-scale battles of annihilation leading to the complete destruction of the encircled forces. In Russia the execution of too far-reaching envelopments had invariably resulted in the escape of major Soviet elements, which eventually were reintegrated into the opposing forces. This tactic also had the disadvantage that the precious armor was being decimated by Russian flank attacks. The distance between the armored and infantry units would have to be shortened, both to protect the armor and to tighten the rings of encirclement. The latter improvement was all the more necessary because air reconnaissance reports indicated that streams of Russian columns had been escaping for days from the Smolensk pocket through a gap on the eastern side. Keitel continued by enumerating Hitler's plans for future operations which corresponded to the contents of the Supplement to Directive No. 33.

On 27 July Jodl asked Hitler to reconsider his plans. The drive on Moscow ought to be envisaged after all, he stated, not because the city was the Soviet capital, but because the Russians would scrape together their last forces for the defense of Moscow. Moreover, the

**SITUATION ON
30 JULY 1941**

————— German Troops
 - - - - - German Positions
 - - - - - Russian Troops
 - - - - - Russian Positions
 - - - - - German Positions
 - - - - - Armored and Motorized Units

100 50 0 100
MILES



Map 8. Situation on 30 July 1941.

plan to attack Moscow was in conformity with Hitler's own concept of destroying the main Soviet forces. Hitler replied that the Germans would have to seize the Donets Basin as soon as possible to deprive the Russians of their armament production facilities and cut off their oil supplies. The next day Hitler gave another reason for his refusal to drive straight toward the Soviet capital—that the industrial region around Kharkov was more important to him than Moscow. Finally, on 29 July, he suddenly explained that the successes hitherto attained in Russia went far beyond his most optimistic expectations, so far as both territorial acquisitions and the destruction of Russian forces were concerned. He had believed that the question of diverting the two panzer groups from the drive on Moscow would arise much sooner in the campaign. In the case of Army Group North, for instance, he had thought that the first major delay would occur along the Dvina and that the Third Panzer Group would have to be diverted at that time. By this last utterance Hitler made it obvious that the idea of diverting forces from the center to the wings went back to the early planning stage and had found expression in the first changes to Directive No. 21, Operation BARBAROSSA, made on 17 December 1940.

The Situation Toward the End of July 1941

No radical changes in the situation occurred during the second half of July. In the Army Group South area, First Panzer Group had finally succeeded in breaking through the Russian front and driving to Pervomaysk. [See map 8.] It was therefore to be hoped that large Soviet forces would eventually be encircled in the Uman area.

On the other hand, Sixth Army was still unable to make headway against the Russian *Fifth Army* in the Pripyat Marshes and was stalled west of Kiev. It was to be assumed, however, that the threat to the army group flank would be eliminated as soon as all the elements of Sixth Army had closed up. Then, a main effort could be built on the army's right and the Russians could be driven out of the Dnepr area. Bad weather marked by cloudbursts and torrential rains hampered all movements. Although the Russians continued to defend stubbornly, the general impression was that they were weakening.

Army Group Center had practically completed the mopping up of the numerous pockets with the exception of one near Smolensk. The disposition of forces was revised so that the armored divisions could be pulled out and sent to the rear for rehabilitation. The Russians continued to exert considerable pressure against both army group wings, from the area north of Gomel on the right and from the region northeast of Vitebsk on the left. Opposite the central portion of the army group front the Russians made strenuous efforts to build up a

new defense line, moving up a steady flow of reinforcements via Moscow.

Army Group North had made progress on the right, while most of the infantry divisions had succeeded in closing with the two panzer corps along the Luga River and near Novogorod. Taking advantage of the delay in the German advance, the Russians had worked feverishly at strengthening the defenses of Leningrad.

Offensive operations had meanwhile also begun in Finland. The northernmost attack force of the Army of Norway had occupied Petsamo, but had bogged down near the Litsa River upon encountering superior Russian opposition during its advance on Murmansk. The other forces which were driving toward the Murmansk railroad made very slow progress in the primeval forests and swamps of central Finland. In the southern part of the theater of operations, which was under the Finnish Army High Command, the Karelian Army, advancing along the eastern shore of Lake Ladoga, had reached the pre-1940 Russo-Finnish border. However, the Finns were unable to comply with a German request to resume their advance in the direction of the Svir River without delay, because Russian forces massed in the Lake Onega area threatened their flank. The Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus launched their offensive against Viipuri on 31 July, after the Russian contingents in that area had been weakened by the withdrawal of units needed for the defense of Leningrad.

The supply situation of Army Group Center, far from having improved, began to hamper the progress of current operations.

Chapter 4

Planning for Future Operations

The conflict over the continuation of operations became acute when Hitler overrode all his advisers—except Keitel—and imposed Directive No. 33 and the Supplement upon the Army. Once Hitler made a decision, its execution was mandatory: therefore on 28 July the Army High Command issued an order implementing the Fuehrer's directives. By that time, however, Hitler apparently felt less sure of himself and drafted another directive which was actually a compromise between his viewpoint and that of his military advisers. Whereas in the Supplement to Directive No. 33, dated 23 July, Hitler had envisaged drives into the Caucasus and beyond Moscow to the Volga River, in Directive No. 34, issued seven days later, he set aside these operations with their distant objectives. Actually, these were secondary issues compared with the basic problem: was the drive on Moscow to be continued or not?

At this moment Hitler was at the zenith of his military triumphs. Starting with the remilitarization of the Rhineland in 1935, an uninterrupted series of successes seemed to have vindicated his intuition whenever he had come into conflict with his military advisers. More than logic or strength of character was needed to make a successful stand against a man who had been so consistently lucky.

If on this occasion Hitler was vacillating and inclined to adopt some of the Army's suggestions, this would simply imply that he realized the importance of his decisions for the future course of the Russian campaign. The following steps, reconstructed and juxtaposed, led to Hitler's final decision.

The Army's Order of 28 July 1941

In the first part of this order the Operations Division of the Army General Staff analyzed the Russian capabilities, arriving at the conclusion that the bulk of the regular Red Army forces had been destroyed. The Russians were trying to obstruct the German advance by throwing in strong reinforcements and even improperly trained personnel, but it was believed that their military strength would prove insufficient. In continuing the operation, the Germans would have to take advantage of every opportunity for isolating and destroying

individual Soviet groupings. These tactics were to be employed to (1) prevent the Russians from building up a continuous defense line; (2) safeguard the German forces' freedom of maneuver; and (3) seize the Soviet armament production centers.

All plans for conducting far-reaching operations would have to be abandoned. The immediate objective was to destroy the Russian forces west of the Dnepr, north of Gomel, and south of Leningrad. In addition, Army Group South would employ the armored and infantry forces that were to be transferred from Army Group Center for a thrust into the Donetsk Basin. Army Group Center was to commit its remaining forces for an advance in the direction of Moscow; and Army Group North was to encircle Leningrad, establish contact with the Finns, and occupy the remainder of the coastal areas of the Baltic States.

The contents of the order then defined the mission of each army group, outlining such details as assembly areas, direction of attack, coordination with adjacent units, etc. Because of the Russian combat methods, particular attention was drawn to forming points of main effort, protecting flanks by mine fields, and maintaining contact between armored and infantry units. Rear areas and the lines of communications leading through them would have to be properly secured.

Attached to this order was an intelligence summary dated 27 July. The 150 infantry, 25 armored, and 5 cavalry divisions identified along the German front to date were estimated to have suffered an average reduction in strength of 50 per cent. The 25 newly organized Soviet divisions were understrength and were short of artillery and heavy weapons. Their personnel were barely trained and the shortage of cadre, drivers, and radio operators was particularly noticeable. Because of the inadequacy of the corps commanders, the Soviet army group staffs had to rely more and more on army command staffs composed of a nucleus of trustworthy and experienced individuals.

The estimate of Russian strength given in this report differed with the figures of 23 July only insofar as it mentioned the presence of 10 newly formed divisions in the area around Moscow. Another major body of troops stood west of Vyazma where 10 divisions blocked the road to Moscow. A Soviet force of 9 infantry and 2 armored divisions was attacking the southern flank of Army Group Center northwest of Gomel. Out of 20 divisions defending Leningrad, 6 were facing the Finns and 14 stood opposite Army Group North.

In summary, the Red Army command was making every effort to stabilize the situation. Russian morale was far from broken, and no signs of internal disintegration had so far appeared.

Directive No. 34 (30 July 1941)

In this new directive Hitler stated that the distant objectives designated in Directive No. 33 of 19 July and in the Supplement, dated 23 July, would be temporarily set aside because of recent developments: the appearance of strong Soviet forces in front of and along the flanks of Army Group Center, the precarious supply situation, and the panzer groups' urgent need for rehabilitation, which would take about 10 days. Instead he ordered:

a. *Army Group North* to continue its offensive against Leningrad while taking the necessary precautions to protect its flank south of Lake Ilmen.

b. *Army Group Center* to switch to the defensive so that its two panzer groups could be withdrawn and rehabilitated; the Third Panzer Group thrust toward the Valdai Hills to be deferred for the time being.

c. *Army Group South* to receive no additional forces for accomplishing its previously designated missions of destroying the Russian forces west of the Dnepr, establishing bridgeheads near Kiev, and neutralizing the Russian *Fifth Army*.

d. In *Finland* the German attack in the direction of Kandalaksha to be stopped, but attempts to sever the Murmansk railroad to be continued, especially at Loukhi.

e. *Air Support*: The Luftwaffe to shift its main effort from Army Group Center to Army Group North by 6 August at the latest; bombing attacks on Moscow to continue; essential air support to be given to ground operations in all other parts of the theater.

On 31 July the Army issued an order implementing Directive No. 34, in which special emphasis was put on the rehabilitation of Second and Third Panzer Groups and their eventual commitment in the direction of Gomel and the Valdai Hills respectively.

Hitler's Vacillation Over Strategy

Directive No. 33, the Supplement, and Directive No. 34 may be considered as manifestations of Hitler's hesitancy with regard to the continuation of operations. Feeling none too sure about the advisability of diverting forces from Army Group Center, Hitler made strenuous efforts to inform himself on the subject by personal visits to two army group headquarters. The first of these conferences took place on 4 August, when Hitler and his staff visited Army Group Center headquarters. The Army group commander, Field Marshal von Bock, began the conference by reporting on personnel and equipment matters. Then both Generals Guderian and Hoth, his subordi-

nate panzer group commanders, emphasized that major operations would be feasible only if an adequate number of spare engines could be delivered in time to replace the wornout ones.

Hitler replied that the bulk of the current production of tank engines was needed for equipping newly formed armored divisions. Nevertheless, 400 new engines might be made available to the two panzer groups. Guderian immediately objected that this number would prove unsatisfactory because he alone needed 300 engines for the Second Panzer Group. Hitler thereupon quickly changed the subject to the future conduct of operations. Going into great detail, he reemphasized how important it would be to capture Leningrad, the Donets Basin, and the Crimea. To him, all these objectives had priority over Moscow.

Before the conference was brought to a conclusion, Guderian and Hoth stated that, if withdrawn from the line by 8 August, their panzer groups would be operational by 15 and 18 August respectively. Whether they would be capable of executing far-reaching maneuvers or only operations with limited objectives would depend on the number of tank engines that could meanwhile be made available.

In concluding Hitler stated that the Soviets rated the Moscow area third in importance after Leningrad and the industrial regions of the south. Reports by experts on Russian weather tended to prove the soundness of his plans, since in southern Russia the rainy period in autumn usually started in mid-September, whereas in the Moscow area it did not begin until one month later. Hitler continued that he had also "briefly considered" the possibility of a limited thrust toward Moscow. Bock interjected that such an offensive could have decisive results, if it were properly staged and supported. But Hitler needed more time to arrive at a definite decision.

On 6 August during a conference at Army Group South headquarters Rundstedt emphasized the significance of the possession of Moscow in achieving a quick victory over the Soviet Union. Hitler, however, refused to listen to his arguments, enumerating the most important objectives of the campaign in their former priority: Leningrad, eastern Ukraine, and Moscow.

On the next day Halder asked Jodl whether Hitler's primary objective was to defeat the Soviet Union or to acquire economic assets in the Ukraine and the Caucasus. Jodl expressed the opinion that Hitler was attempting to attain both objectives simultaneously. Halder then stated that Leningrad could be seized without diverting any forces from Army Group Center that would be needed for the drive on Moscow. If the Russians were to be defeated by autumn, the offensives against Moscow and the Ukraine would have to be conducted simultaneously.

Halder also stressed that German strategy should not be influenced by Russian tactics. By trying to eliminate threats to their flanks the Germans would dissipate forces instead of concentrating them for decisive operations. Jodl seemed impressed by these arguments and submitted them to Hitler on 10 August in an Armed Forces Operations Staff memorandum.

This document restated that according to all available intelligence the bulk of the Russian forces were massed in front of Moscow. Their destruction and the seizure of the Russian capital were therefore the primary objectives for the German Army. Tempting diversions to the north or south would have to be ignored for the time being. On the other hand, the flanks of Army Group Center would have to be secured by limited-objective attacks—some of which were already underway—before the army group committed its forces to an all-out drive on Moscow.

If the maneuvers to secure the flanks could be successfully concluded within the next two weeks, the Moscow offensive could be launched by the end of August. During the initial stage of the offensive Army Groups South and North would have to get along as best they could, but would be certain of support from Army Group Center as soon as the latter launched its pursuit.

The memorandum continued by outlining the missions of the different armies operating in the north and south of the theater and stressed that the VIII Air Corps would support Army Group North only until around 20 August, by which time the forces of Army Group Center would be concentrated.

In summarizing, the Armed Forces Operations Staff recommended that Army Group Center prepare an offensive against Moscow for the end of August. Once the advance had reached the pursuit stage, Guderian's panzer forces could be diverted southeastward in the direction of the Don bend.

Halder noted in his diary on 11 August that the Germans had reckoned with 200 Russian divisions at the start of the campaign, but that by 10 August 360 divisions had already been identified. Even though these divisions were not as well organized, equipped, and led as the German ones, they nevertheless existed and had to be defeated. Each time the Germans destroyed a dozen of them, the Soviets simply moved up 12 more. The German frontline was overextended, and there were no reserves. As a result, German troops were exposed to Russian counterattacks, some of which were successful because the Germans were unable to close all the gaps in their lines in so vast a theater of operations.

The Supplement to Directive No. 34 (12 August 1941)

The effect of the Armed Forces Operations Staff memorandum and the personal impressions gathered by Hitler during his visits in the field were reflected in the contents of the Supplement to Directive No. 34, issued on 12 August. The latter defined the missions of Army Group South as follows:

1. To prevent the establishment of a continuous Russian defense line along the Dnepr;
2. To seize the Crimea; and
3. To capture the Donets region and the industrial area around Kharkov.

The attack on the city of Kiev proper was to be stopped; instead the city was to be annihilated by fire bombs and artillery shells as soon as a sufficient quantity of these means of destruction would become available. The Luftwaffe was to give every possible support to the ground forces.

Army Group Center's primary mission was to eliminate the Russian salients that were protruding far into its flanks. After this had been successfully accomplished and the armored groups had been rehabilitated, the army group forces were to jump off for the Moscow offensive on a wide front. However, the operation against Leningrad had to be brought to a conclusion and VIII Air Corps had to revert to Second Air Force before the offensive against Moscow could be undertaken.

The current attacks in the Army Group North area were to lead to the encirclement of Leningrad and a link-up with the Finnish forces. Air support units were to pinpoint their missions on selected targets to achieve maximum effectiveness.

The Supplement did not mention any diversion of Army Group Center forces to the south and made only a very indefinite reference to shifting of divisions to strengthen Army Group North. On the other hand, even though the Supplement authorized an offensive against Moscow, the launching of the offensive was to be contingent upon the success of the Leningrad drive.

This priority was even more clearly expressed in a conference note signed by Jodl and dated 15 August. It referred to Brauchitsch's verbal report of the same date, following which Hitler had ordered that all further attacks in the direction of Moscow be stopped. Army Group Center was to switch to the defensive and hold the line without major air support. The Army Group North attacks would have to be brought to a successful conclusion with a minimum of delay. As many Third Panzer Group divisions as could be employed and supplied by Army Group North were to be transferred from Army Group Center to eliminate the threat to Army Group North's flank. Moreover, a

breakthrough achieved by several Russian divisions south of Staraya Russa prompted Hitler to issue a direct order for the transfer of one armored corps to Army Group North.

Developments to Mid-August 1941

During the first half of August Army Group South partially succeeded in destroying the Russian forces that were left west of the Dnepr. By 5 August, First Panzer and Seventeenth Armies encircled 16 to 20 Russian divisions near Uman and destroyed them despite repeated delays caused by bad weather. Subsequently, the entire Dnepr bend was cleared of Russian forces, their remnants withdrawing across the river wherever they were able to do so. The Sixth Army was in a less favorable situation, since it had been unable to seize Kiev or score a decisive success against the Russian *Fifth Army*. On the contrary, several relatively strong Russian counterattacks had led to critical situations, particularly around Kiev and south of that city.

On the whole, Army Group South had concluded the initial phase of the operation without fully attaining its objective. The weather had seriously hampered operations. Rundstedt next intended to establish bridgeheads at Dnepropetrovsk, Kremenchug, and Cherkassy.

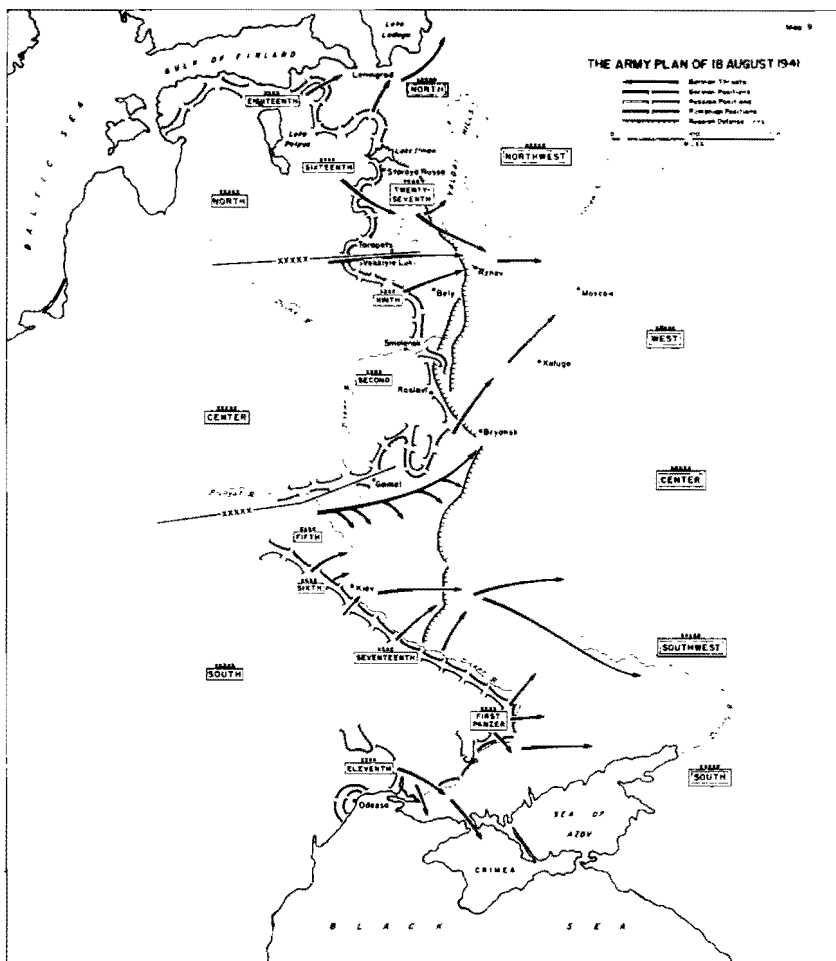
In the Army Group Center area the first days of August were characterized by furious Russian local attacks. Strong Soviet counter-thrusts near Yelnya were held off during heavy fighting lasting until 8 August. At the same time German local attacks near Rogachev and Roslavl eliminated immediate threats and relieved the pressure against the southern flank of the army group and against Yelnya. The entire Second Panzer Group was pulled out of the line by 8 August, and the Third Panzer Group followed two days later. It was anticipated that the rehabilitation of these armored units would be completed between 15 and 20 August.

Up to 8 August the Russians seemed intent upon forcing a withdrawal of Army Group Center; at that time they apparently decided to switch to the defensive with the intention of preparing the line Bryansk-Vyazma-Rzhev for an all-out defense.

The Army Group North drive began on 10 August with a three-pronged attack on Leningrad. One force thrust northward from Lake Ilmen, a second one from the Luga area, and a third one approached Leningrad from the west. All three forces encountered stubborn resistance, and their progress was therefore slow.

The Army Memorandum of 18 August 1941

On 18 August General Halder sent Hitler a memorandum that presented the viewpoint of the Army as follows:



Map 9. The Army Plan of 18 August 1941.

a. Summary of the Enemy Situation. The Russians were massing their forces opposite Army Group Center in anticipation of a German drive on Moscow. They were exploring every possible method of strengthening the Moscow sector. Russian forces then stationed in salients protruding into the German lines, such as those near Gomel, would probably be withdrawn to shorten the lines in view of the noticeable shortage of Soviet units. [See map 9.]

b. The Next Objective. Whereas the objective of a German offensive in the north or south would be either to eliminate the Russian Baltic Fleet or to seize important industrial areas in the Donets Basin, an offensive in the center would lead to the destruction of strong Soviet forces and the laceration of the Russian front. That in turn would

result in the German seizure of Moscow which, together with the losses suffered in the north and south, would prevent the Soviets from offering any further coordinated resistance.

The decision of selecting Moscow as the next objective of Army Group Center was based on the following considerations:

- (1) *The Time Element.* Because of Russian weather conditions the offensive against Moscow would have to be carried out during September and October. In view of the distances to be covered and the strong resistance the Russians were bound to offer, two months would be the minimum time requirement for executing the operation.
- (2) *Combat Efficiency.* After emergency rehabilitation, the armored and motorized infantry units would be capable of covering only limited distances. Because of their reduced combat efficiency, these units would have to be reserved for decisive actions exclusively.
- (3) *Massing of Forces.* The offensive against Moscow could meet with success only if the forces of Army Group Center were properly massed to attain this one objective to which all other operations would have to be subordinated. Otherwise, Army Group Center could not achieve a decisive success during the current year. In any event, the two other army groups would be sufficiently strong to accomplish their missions without outside assistance.

c. Plan of Operations. The main effort should be placed on both extremities of the Army Group Center front. There, strong forces would carry out enveloping attacks while the center of the front tied down the opposing forces. The southern attack force would advance via Bryansk and Roslavl toward Kaluga, and the northern one from southwest of Bely and west of Toropez via Rzhev to the east. An entire army—including some motorized units capable of smashing any threat from enemy forces without delay—would have to cover the south flank of Army Group Center. A similar flank cover would be provided for the northern force once the situation south of Lake Ilman had been cleared up. Both attack forces would have to break through the Russian defense lines because any effort to envelop the Russian positions would involve too great a detour. Whether the attack groups were to continue their advance north and south of Moscow or initiate enveloping maneuvers immediately after having broken through would depend on the situation and the punch they would be able to deliver at that time.

d. Distribution of Forces. For the execution of the operation Army Group Center would have 42 infantry, 1 cavalry, and 12½ armored and/or motorized infantry divisions. After both army group flanks

had been secured by preliminary operations, the Red Army forces opposing the German drive would number approximately 42 divisions to which should be added about 20 divisions that were in the process of activation. Russian numerical superiority would be outmatched by German combat efficiency and excellence of equipment. The suggested distribution of forces was as follows:

- (1) *Southern Attack Force.* This force would be composed of 12 infantry and 6 armored and/or motorized infantry divisions deployed along an 80-mile front extending from Bryansk to Roslavl.
- (2) *Central Front.* East of Smolensk, 10 infantry divisions would cover a defensive sector 95 miles wide.
- (3) *Northern Attack Force.* This force would consist of a southern group composed of 6 infantry and 2 armored and/or motorized infantry divisions jumping off from the area southwest of Bely and a northern group assembled west of Toropez and composed of 7 infantry and 2 armored and/or motorized infantry divisions. The latter group would have to eliminate the Russian salient around Velikye Luki in a preliminary move.
- (4) *Flank Protection Army.* An army consisting of 1 cavalry, 5 infantry, and 2 armored and/or motorized infantry divisions would advance into the area east of Gomel and leave 2 additional divisions to cover the Pripyat flank.

e. Assembly of Forces.

- (1) The assembly of the southern attack force by the beginning of September would present no major difficulties, if the fighting around Gomel were brought to a successful conclusion by 23 August.
- (2) The attack group assembling west of Toropez would also be ready to jump off by the beginning of September if the attack on Velikye Luki started no later than 21 August.
- (3) Regrouping of the other army group forces could also be accomplished by the beginning of September.
- (4) The armored and/or motorized infantry divisions assigned to the attack forces would be rehabilitated by the end of August at the latest. The two divisions that might not be ready in time could be used for flank protection.

f. Projected Course of Events

- (1) Army Group Center would be ready to jump off at the beginning of September to carry out the operations outlined above.
- (2) Army Group South would begin its attack against the Russian *Fifth Army* by 23 August. By early September ele-

ments of Sixth Army were to reach the Dnepr north of Kiev and Seventeenth Army was to force river crossings farther to the south. With these operations in full swing, it would be unlikely that the Russians could shift forces to the north.

- (3) Army Group North was to complete the encirclement of Leningrad by the end of August, and its forces would then attempt to establish contact with the Finns. The Army group forces south of Lake Ilmen were to eliminate the Russian penetration south of Staraya Russa and start their advance to the Valdai Hills simultaneous with the offensive of Army Group Center. If these forces could advance far enough toward the southeast, it might be possible to integrate their advance into the drive of the northern attack force.

The operations of all three army groups would therefore be coordinated. To assure the success of the offensive, the necessary orders would have to be issued without delay.

On 18 August General Warlimont wrote an Armed Forces Operations Staff estimate that fully endorsed the Army memorandum of the same date. He stated that to attain the objectives of the Russian campaign before the outbreak of winter the forces operating in the north had only 8 weeks at their disposal and those in the south just 13. Because of the long distances, the relatively short time, and the high attrition of automotive vehicles, the operations conducted during the coming months would have to be driven straight toward the primary objective without any deviation. In determining whether the Army Group Center forces—less the panzer corps recently transferred to Army Group North—were to be kept together for the thrust on Moscow or whether the Second Panzer Group was to be diverted to the southeast to take advantage of the very favorable opportunities in that area, Warlimont arrived at the same conclusion as the Army: Army Groups North and South were sufficiently strong to accomplish their missions with their own forces while Army Group Center conducted the offensive against Moscow. In summarizing he restated that, to guarantee the success of the latter operation, no forces should be diverted to such secondary operations as the southeastern thrust of Second Panzer Group. Moreover, if necessary, critical situations along the flanks or in the rear should be ignored so that the attack forces could concentrate on the essential drive toward Moscow.

Hitler's Decision (20 August 1941)

On 20 August Hitler declared that he disagreed with the contents of the Army memorandum. He was not interested in Moscow and the forces assembled in the vicinity of the Soviet capital. His ideas found their expression in an order issued to the Commander in Chief

of the Army on 21 August which ended the controversy over the continuation of the operations. Among the significant points were the following:

a. The most important objective was not the capture of Moscow; top priority was to be given to seizing the Crimea and the industrial region in the Donets Basin, to cutting off the Russian oil supply from the Caucasus in the south, and to encircling Leningrad and linking up with the Finnish forces in the north.

b. The situation was favorable for a concentric attack executed by the contiguous fronts of Army Groups South and Center against the Russian *Fifth Army* to prevent the latter from withdrawing. Regardless of subsequent operations Army Group Center was to assign to this mission all the forces necessary for the destruction of the Russian *Fifth Army*, because the liquidation of this force was the only means of assuring that Army Group South could resume its advance toward Rostov and Kharkov.

c. The seizure of the Crimea was of utmost importance for safeguarding the German oil supply from Romania against air attacks. A rapid advance into the Caucasus would be desirable to exercise pressure on Iran.

d. Only after *a* and *b* had been accomplished would the necessary forces be available to attack and defeat the Russians defending Moscow in accordance with the instructions issued in the Supplement to Directive No. 34.

General Guderian, the commander of Second Panzer Group, made one last attempt to change Hitler's mind by explaining the difficulties involved in pivoting his force southeastward. His arguments failed to impress the Fuehrer, and the Army High Command was forced to implement Hitler's order.

A Russian general, captured by the Germans in the spring of 1942, stated that the German failure to drive home the offensive against Moscow in the early fall of 1941 impressed the Soviet High Command as being a second "miracle of the Marne," which saved the Soviet capital in 1941 in much the same way the first one had spared Paris in 1914.

Chapter 5

The Diversion and Reassembly

The Personnel Situation (End of August 1941)

The German Army suffered a total of 409,998 losses, or 11.05 per cent of the average strength figure of 3.78 million men employed in the Russian theater, from 22 June-31 August 1941. These losses were broken down as follows:

German Army Losses	(22 June-31 August 1941)		
	Total	Officers	EM
Totals.....	409,998	14,457	395,541
Killed in Action.....	87,489	4,006	83,483
Wounded in Action.....	302,821	10,080	292,741
Missing in Action.....	19,688	371	19,317

To compensate for these losses, the Army High Command assigned 317,000 replacements from the Zone of Interior to the Russian theater, distributing them as follows:

Replacements Transferred to the Russian Theater				
Period	Army Groups			
	Total	South	Center	North
Totals.....	317,000	119,000	131,000	67,000
22 Jun-25 Aug 41.....	146,000	52,000	66,000	28,000
25-31 Aug.....	71,000	27,000	25,000	19,000
Expected to arrive after 31 Aug.....	100,000	40,000	40,000	20,000

As of 31 August, however, only 217,000 men had arrived in the Russian theater to compensate for the 409,998 losses, and the personnel shortage in the theater therefore amounted to about 193,000 men.

A total of 21 out of 24 divisions, constituting the Army High Command reserves at the beginning of the campaign, had reached the front by the end of August and had been distributed as follows:

Distribution of Forces, September 1941

Type	Total Divisions	Divisions assigned to Army Groups		
		South	Center	North
Totals.....	21	10	8	3
Infantry.....	20	9	8	3
Motorized Infantry.....	1	1		

Only three divisions were left in the hands of the Army High Command.

Increasing Logistical Difficulties (Early September 1941)

POL

The POL shortage was serious except in the Army Group North area. Stock piles were exhausted and newly arriving shipments were immediately distributed to the front-line units, particularly those of Army Group South, where occasional shortages hampered operations. In calculating the requirements for the offensive in the direction of Moscow the planners found that the daily rate of POL trains arriving in the theater would have to be stepped up from 22 to 27 for the period 17 September to 2 October and to 29 as of 3 October.

Track-Laying and Wheeled Vehicles

On 4 September the following breakdown of tank strength in the Russian theater was given by the Army High Command:

Available for employment.....	47 percent
Deadlined for repair.....	23 percent
Disabled.....	30 percent

Compared with the tank status report of 4 August, the percentage of disabled tanks had increased from 20 to 30 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of deadlined vehicles had been reduced from 30 to 23 percent because of the arrival of spare parts and the possibility of allocating time for maintenance and repair. However, the repair facilities were inadequate and the shortage of tank engines continued. Moreover, the repaired tanks had been so overtaxed by previous employment that their future usefulness was bound to be short. It was estimated that the percentage of tanks available for employment at the start of the Moscow offensive could be increased to 60.5 of T/E strength if all new tanks then in the hands of the Army High Command were distributed to the field forces.

The number of trucks in operating condition had dropped to 77.65 percent of T/E strength, that of prime movers to 67.90 percent, includ-

ing repaired vehicles. Only emergency repairs were being performed so that the complete loss of the vehicles after 200-250 additional miles had to be anticipated. The combat efficiency and mobility of the ground forces would therefore be greatly reduced at the decisive moment of the offensive—when they were approaching Moscow.

Halder suggested that all newly produced tanks and trucks be allocated to the Russian theater as replacements, instead of being used to equip new divisions. He believed that under such conditions the situation could be remedied. Immediate steps would have to be taken since the arrival of the vehicles could not be expected before three to four weeks. All possible disadvantages that might result from this suggestion would be of far less consequence than a sudden bogging down of the Moscow offensive at the beginning of winter.

Developments to Mid-September 1941

The implementation of the order issued by Hitler on 20 August resulted in the following developments:

Army Group South had succeeded in carrying out its enveloping maneuver with the assistance of Second Army and Second Panzer Group, even though the pivoting movement of the latter had encountered some difficulty. Several Russian armies, among them the *Fifth* which had finally been forced to withdraw to the east bank of the Dnepr, were facing annihilation east of Kiev. [See *map 10*.] When this gigantic pocket was finally mopped up, the Germans took 665,000 prisoners and a tremendous amount of booty. The original strategic objective in the Army Group South area had thus been attained, but only by diverting strong forces from Army Group Center. In any event, the way was open for a sustained eastward drive in the southern part of the Russian theater. At the same time the advance in the direction of the Crimea had made good progress and German forces were approaching the gateway to the peninsula.

In early September Army Group Center had been engaged in heavy defensive battles during which a number of critical situations had arisen in the central sector of the army group front. At the same time, the northern attack force of Army Group Center operating in conjunction with Army Group North had penetrated into the area east of Toropets. Bock was greatly weakened by heavy transfers of forces to the adjoining army groups. His front was overextended, and he had almost no reserves.

Army Group North had completed the encirclement of Leningrad. A direct attack on the city proper was expressly forbidden by Hitler, who wanted to avoid the heavy casualties of house-to-house fighting and who refused to assume the responsibility for feeding the city's

millions. He considered throwing a ring around the city sufficient. One of the difficulties in carrying out this plan was that the flank protection forces along the Volkhov were very weak. South of Lake Ilmen, the Sixteenth Army was spread over a wide area in the difficult terrain at the foot of the Valdai Hills and was making little headway.

For the time being, Army Group North could not continue to advance into the area east of Lake Ladoga since it was forced to employ large bodies of troops to close the ring of encirclement around Leningrad. The planned linkup between German and Finnish forces east of Lake Ladoga could therefore not be realized. This in turn compelled the Finns to commit sizeable forces on the Karelian Isthmus so that Leningrad could be sealed off from the north.

In the north the war of movement had degenerated into position warfare. The Army of Norway, stopped or bogged down in all three attack zones, had failed to reach its objectives. At the request of its government, the Finnish High Command had limited the advance of its troops to a line approximating the Russo-Finnish border of 1939 on the Karelian Isthmus, and to the Svir River east of Lake Ladoga. The uncertainty regarding further developments around Leningrad induced Finnish political leaders to prosecute the war against Russia with restraint.

Directive No. 35 (6 September 1941)

On 6 September Hitler issued a new directive based on recommendations made by the Army High Command. The prerequisites for a decisive offensive existed in the Army Group Center area now that Leningrad was encircled and the early destruction of the Russian forces facing Army Group South could be anticipated. The plan called for the envelopment of the Soviet units west of Vyazma by a pincers attack that was to be launched at the end of September. For this purpose two armored forces were to be concentrated near Roslavl and east of Velizh. Only after the bulk of Timoshenko's forces had been annihilated were the attack forces to launch a pursuit in the direction of Moscow along a front extending from the Oka River on the right to the upper Volga on the left. Army Group South was to conclude the battle east of Kiev as soon as possible so that Second Panzer Group and Second Army would revert to Army Group Center without delay. Similarly, as soon as Leningrad had been cut off from the east, Army Group North was to return those air force and armored units which had previously been detached from Army Group Center. The Navy was to concentrate a sizeable fleet near the Aaland Islands to prevent the Russian Baltic Fleet from escaping. Mine fields were to be laid in the Gulf of Finland.

The directive conformed to the recommendations of the Army High Command, except for the deadline. The Army felt doubtful whether the mobile elements of Second Panzer Group could be moved up by the end of September. To avoid any delay, it was decided that the armored force whose assembly was near Roslavl would be controlled by Fourth Panzer Group headquarters, which was to be transferred from Army Group North. This attack force was to consist of the 10th Panzer Division, in the Roslavl area, the 2d and 5th Panzer Divisions, to be transferred from the Army High Command reserve, the 11th Panzer Division, to be transferred from Army Group South, and the 19th and 20th Panzer Divisions, to be transferred from Army Group North.

The armored force, to be concentrated near Velizh, was to be led by Third Panzer Group, whose headquarters had already been established in the area. This force was to be composed of the 7th Panzer Division, in the Velizh area, and the 1st and 6th Panzer Divisions, to be transferred from Army Group North.

Many difficulties were encountered in performing the lateral displacements necessitated by the assembly of the Third and Fourth Panzer Groups, some elements of which had to be moved several hundred miles.

As soon as it reverted to Army Group Center, Guderian's Second Panzer Group, composed of the 3d, 4th, 9th, 17th, and 18th Panzer Divisions, was to make a wide enveloping sweep from Glukhov toward Orel. If this maneuver proved successful, the Second Panzer Group would be well placed to continue its advance in the direction of Moscow.

To the uninitiated, the halt and diversion of strength, imposed upon Army Group Center at a decisive moment, appeared of little significance. In reality, however, and entirely apart from the time consumed in shifting the armored units, the Germans had lost six precious weeks, and this loss could be decisive in view of the advanced season. The Second Panzer Group had to march 400 miles before it could reestablish contact with Army Group Center. Its equipment was heavily overtaxed, and it was doubtful that it could withstand the wear and tear of another 300-mile thrust before reaching Moscow.

The mission of Army Group South was clear cut: after the battle at Kiev, it was to advance toward Rostov and Kharkov. During this drive the northern wing had to be so strengthened that it could provide flank protection for the advancing Army Group Center.

Army Group North was to tighten its grip on Leningrad and at the same time reinforce its flank along the Volkhov River and south of Lake Ilmen. The latter flank was particularly important in that its reinforcement provided simultaneous protection for Army Group Center.

The Situation at the End of September 1941

Army Group South continued its operations according to plan. On 26 September a breakthrough into the Crimea was attempted across the Perekop Isthmus. Toward the end of the month the armies that had participated in the battle of Kiev resumed their drives in the direction of Rostov and Kharkov respectively. The mopping up of the various pockets east of Kiev had caused considerable delay. Behind the army group front Odessa alone remained in Russian hands, and German forces had to be moved up to assist the Romanians besieging the city.

On 20 September Second Panzer Group began to regroup its forces for their next mission, the thrust on Orel. After overcoming the manifold difficulties involved in turning its axis of advance almost 180°, the panzer group jumped off 10 days later.

An estimate of the Russian intentions indicated that in the southern part of the theater the Russians were improvising a new defense line and moving up reinforcements, particularly west of the Donets salient and around Kharkov. The supply situation of Army Group South was considered serious because all railroad bridges across the Dnepr had been demolished.

Army Group Center had to overcome many obstacles in preparing for the new offensive. In order to meet the deadline, the Army High Command had to assume control over the movement of those armored divisions that were to be transferred from Army Group North. Deceptive measures were to conceal the shifting of ground and air force units. Whenever possible, movements were to take place during the hours of darkness.

West of Moscow the Russians were strengthening their defensive preparations, channeling reinforcements through their capital and building one defensive position behind another. Partisan activities against the road and rail nets in the rear areas became more and more effective, forcing the Germans to divert a large number of troops to security missions. The German supply situation was becoming precarious, but Bock's chief of supply was able to issue fairly adequate quantities of gasoline and ammunition to the spearhead divisions. It was evident, however, that the consumption of large quantities of POL would create a serious problem and lead to drastic rationing in other parts of the theater.

After Army Group North had transferred the armored forces, its offensive slowly ground to a halt. Having attained his immediate objective, Leeb had only to tighten the ring around Leningrad, strengthen his eastern flank near the Valdai Hills and along the Volkhov River, and close in on Leningrad by a series of local attacks. An attack via Tikhvin, for the purpose of linking up with the Finnish

forces east of Lake Ladoga, was planned for a later date. By mid-September the first bad-weather period set in, hampering all operations.

The Russians appeared to be moving reinforcements into the Valdai Hills and toward the Volkhov River with the obvious intention of relieving Leningrad in the near future. It was therefore to be expected that they would exert pressure in these two areas, where relatively weak German forces were thinly spread and critical situations might easily arise. This threat had to be watched the more carefully because it could develop into an acute danger for the left flank of Army Group Center as the latter gradually became exposed during the eastward drive on Moscow. The Valdai Hills region therefore assumed a primary strategic importance and was kept under constant observation by the Army High Command.

To the rear, the struggle for the islands in the Gulf of Riga continued. Despite local shortages caused by the high rate of ammunition expenditure in the fighting around Leningrad, the overall supply situation of Army Group North was satisfactory.

In general, however, the German lines of communications had become very strained during the first three months of the campaign. Despite considerable effort less than 10,000 of the 15,000 miles of rail lines in use had been converted to normal European gauge. Army Group North was in the most favorable position because it also received supplies via Baltic sea transport.

In summary, no major surprise had occurred during the month of September. An analysis of Russian combat methods revealed that the Red Army continued to offer strong resistance and exploit every opportunity to counterattack. What did astound the Germans was the strength still displayed by the Russians, their ability to improvise quickly in any given situation, the apparently inexhaustible flow of new divisions arriving at the front, and the absence of any true symptoms of disintegration.

Despite the tremendous losses it had suffered, the Red Army was still a powerful adversary. The early collapse expected by the German military leaders had not materialized, and the elements of space and time thus assumed increasing strategic significance. Whether the Germans would be able to reach their objectives before the onset of winter remained to be seen.

Military-Economic Survey (2 October 1941)

On 2 October General Thomas submitted a survey of the military-economic situation of the Soviet Union for the following four hypothetical cases:

Map 11. Situation on 6 October 1941.

1. If all territory west of the line Crimea-Dnepr-Kharkov-Tula-Moscow-Leningrad-Kandalaksha (including the cities proper) were seized by the Germans, the Soviets would lose approximately two-thirds of their steel and aluminum production facilities. Such a loss would preclude any increase in the industrial capacity still available to the Soviet Government, probably making its full utilization impossible. As a result, the Red Army would be incapable of fully equipping its forces during a winter lull in operations; the Russians might, however, be able to produce the most urgently needed equipment, enabling them to continue resistance in the spring of 1942.

2. If, in addition, the Soviet Union lost the Maikop oil fields and the Donets Basin, its economic potential would be so greatly impaired that by the summer of 1942 the Red Army would lack the necessary equipment to resume the struggle west of the Urals.

3. Assuming that the USSR would suffer the above losses plus that of the industrial area of Gorki, the effect would be the almost complete stoppage of truck and passenger vehicle production. The aircraft industry would lose one of its key fuselage construction plants which in turn would lead to a further reduction in airplane output. In general, however, the military-economic situation would be no worse than predicted in Case 2.

4. In the event that all territory west of the Volga was seized by the Germans, the Soviet armament potential would be greatly weakened without necessarily collapsing. A complete economic breakdown of the Soviet system was not to be expected unless the industrial area of the Urals was occupied by the Germans.

In General Thomas' opinion the military-economic potential of the Soviet Union had not been decisively affected by the German operations conducted up to the end of September. Moreover, his analysis indicated that the seizure of Moscow and Leningrad, even if achieved before the onset of winter, would by no means guarantee the collapse of Soviet resistance. Hitler and his military advisers failed to draw the proper conclusions from this survey.

The Muddy Period and Its Effect on Operations (October 1941)

In compliance with Directive No. 35 Bock launched the Army Group Center offensive on 30 September when Second Panzer Group jumped off, followed two days later by the two enveloping forces from Roslavl and Velizh. By the beginning of October Bock attained his immediate tactical objective. The rings of encirclement around the Russian forces southwest of Moscow were closed near Vyazma and Bryansk. [See map 11.] The liquidation of these two pockets was time-consuming (but it yielded another 658,000 prisoners) and Bock grew anxious to prevent his armored forces from losing their mo-

mentum or getting bogged down. To this end it was important that Second Panzer Army (First and Second Panzer Groups had been redesignated panzer armies as of 5 October), whose lead elements were approaching Mtsensk against light opposition, advance rapidly toward Tula in order to break through to Moscow from the southwest. The Third Panzer Group was to cut off the main railroad connecting Moscow with Leningrad, drive to the Volga River, and thence descend upon the capital from the northwest. These two enveloping drives would simultaneously protect the flanks of those army group elements which were to launch the secondary frontal attack in the center. Army Group North was to support the offensive by seizing the area east of Ostashkov, while Army Group South was to assist by advancing into the region west of Voronezh.

Moscow, the final objective, seemed close at hand. Then, on 7 October, the autumn rains began turning the ground into a sea of mud. While it handicapped every movement in the Army Group Center area and slowed down Guderian's vital thrust, some of the latter's forces were able to push eastward. By 20 October Fourth Army and Fourth Panzer Group reached the area east of Kaluga and Mozhaysk, and Ninth Army and elements of Third Panzer Group captured Kalinin and Staritsa; but Guderian's Second Panzer Army remained bogged down. Closing with Second Panzer was Second Army whose mission it was to provide flank protection along the upper Don River and maintain contact with Army Group South.

In general, the period from 7 to 20 October was marked by heavy fighting; hot pursuit of a defeated enemy gradually turned into a desperate effort to make headway in rain, snow, and mud. Realizing the imminent threat to their capital the Soviet leaders threw all available resources into the battle.

Up to the beginning of November the situation was generally unchanged. Only Second Panzer Army had gained some ground and, advancing into the Tula area, had reached its designated jump off area for the thrust on Moscow. Its exposed east flank practically invited counterattack, if the Russians were still strong enough to make one. For the time being there was no indication that such an attack was being prepared by the Soviets. The other elements of Army Group Center had made a few local gains; the area west of Kalinin seemed sufficiently secure, and the northern flank thus appeared protected.

During October Army Group South steadily gained ground in the direction of Rostov. Encountering only sporadic Soviet resistance, First Panzer Army had advanced into the Taganrog area by 20 October. Stronger Russian resistance, coupled with the effects of the mud, delayed Seventeenth Army and, even more, Sixth Army. In the

Crimea, the struggle to force the Perekop Isthmus went on, the weak German forces meeting stubborn resistance. By 8 November the Russian defenders were split into two groups and thrown back toward Sevastopol and the Kerch Peninsula. At the same time First Panzer Army reached the western edge of the industrial Donets Basin, Seventeenth Army stood astride the Donets River at Izyum, and Sixth Army captured Kharkov and Belgorod. Sixth Army reported a particularly high materiel attrition rate and a lowering of its combat efficiency.

During the same period Army Group North had succeeded in establishing contact with Army Group Center at Ostashkov as planned. The ring around Leningrad had been strengthened and the islands in the Gulf of Riga had been seized by the Germans. By 20 October, all preparations were made for a thrust on Tikhvin. There, German forces were to link up with the Finns, who by the beginning of September had reached the Svir River east of Lake Ladoga. Tikhvin was also important to the Germans because of the bauxite deposits located in the vicinity. The attack, started on 21 October, led through difficult terrain where there was but a single road. On 8 November, after overcoming great difficulties, the German forces penetrated into the Tikhvin area.

In summary, the muddy season of October 1941 did more than deprive the Germans of the fruits of victory after the battle of Vyazma. The change in ground conditions eventually proved to be one of the major reasons for the German failure to capture Moscow.

Hitler's Plan for the Seizure of Moscow (12 October 1941)

Hitler's ideas on the future destiny of Moscow and its population were explained in an order issued on 12 October. According to this order the capitulation of Moscow was not to be accepted if the Russians decided to surrender the city. Time bombs and booby traps had endangered German lives during the seizure of Kiev, and no risks were to be taken at Moscow or Leningrad. Another reason for caution was the serious danger of epidemics that might break out in these two cities. The lives of German soldiers were not to be sacrificed for the sake of preserving Russian cities. For these reasons no German soldier was to enter Moscow or Leningrad.

Russian civilians trying to escape toward the German lines were to be turned back with fire. Their mass migration into the interior of Russia was considered desirable. No Russian civilians were to be fed at the expense of the German economy. As a general rule, Russian cities under siege were to be softened up by artillery fire and air attacks, and their civilian population was to be put to flight. The greater the chaos in unoccupied Russia, the easier the exploitation of German-occupied territories.

In the letter of transmittal to Army Group Center, the Army High Command added that every effort was to be made to close the ring around Moscow without delay.

Four days later, on 16 October, the Operations Branch of the Army High Command sent to the three army groups a memorandum containing an estimate of the situation. Apparently, a certain number of sources seemed to indicate that the Russians had decided to make a large-scale withdrawal preceded by thorough destruction of industrial facilities. According to this information the Soviets planned to withdraw the maximum number of their remaining units in order to use them as cadres for new divisions that were to be activated during the winter, thus improving their chances for successfully continuing the war in the spring of 1942.

In addition to their previously designated missions the three army groups were to tie down as many Soviet units as possible and destroy them. Wherever Russian units attempted to retreat, improvised pursuit forces—amply provided with gasoline—would have to follow and envelop them. The rest of the memorandum defined specific missions based on the above premises.

The contents of this memorandum indicated that the German estimate of Soviet strength and intentions was faulty at the crucial moment, when decisions regarding the continuation of the Moscow offensive had to be made.

Chapter 6

The German Attack on Moscow

Strategic Factors

At the beginning of November 1941 the question of whether the offensive on Moscow was to be resumed at the close of the muddy season was submitted to a thorough examination. The principal arguments against such an offensive were as follows:

1. *Weather Conditions.* A relatively short period of suitable weather with only light frosts could be expected immediately after the muddy season. The Russian winter was close at hand. Around Moscow it usually set in by mid-December at the latest, and its full impact would make itself felt by the end of the year. By then the German forces would have to be redistributed and billeted in such a manner that they could withstand the rigors of winter.

2. *The Condition of the Combat Forces.* The combat efficiency of the infantry divisions had dropped by 35 percent, that of the armored divisions by 40 to 50 percent. The tank attrition rate varied from 65 to 75 percent. The high percentage of officer losses—1 to 25—was striking. Approximately one-third of the officer casualties had been killed in action. On the basis of the above figures it was estimated that the real combat value of the 136 divisions employed in the Russian theater was equivalent to that of only 83 full-strength divisions.

3. *The Rail Transport and Supply Situation.* The flow of supplies was disrupted and only the most urgently needed rations, ammunition, and gasoline could be moved forward, and then only with difficulty. The situation could hardly be expected to improve soon. It would require considerable time to overcome the obstacles caused by the destruction of rail lines and installations, to change the gauge of the tracks, and to repair the damage resulting from various causes. Meanwhile, the German forces would have to live a hand-to-mouth existence that was not conducive to launching an all-out offensive. Because of the transportation difficulties practically no winter clothing and equipment for Army units would become available for distribution before early January.

4. *Flank Protection.* The southeast flank of Army Group Center in the area east of Kursk and Orel was very exposed. Here weak

forces of Second Army were scattered over a wide area, having only occasional contact with Army Group South. If the Russians were still capable of exploiting such an opportunity, this latent threat might develop into an acute danger.

5. *Change in Tactics.* All the forces of Army Group Center were deployed along the front without any units being held in reserve. Any major reverse could have disastrous consequences, and launching an offensive under such circumstances would be a desperate gamble. Far more promising would be a temporary switch to elastic defensive tactics allowing even for major withdrawals, if necessary. By adopting such tactics, the front line could be held with relatively small forces. Meanwhile, such strong reserves of manpower and materiel would gradually be built up that a decisive offensive could be launched as soon as there was a favorable opportunity.

By contrast, the proponents of the offensive advanced the following arguments:

1. *Russian Exhaustion.* The Russians had apparently exhausted their strength. The Soviet Government was scraping together every man and machine and throwing them into the defense of Moscow. The Red Army had uncovered wide sectors of the front and, having run short of trained combat troops, was using hastily improvised units on a large scale.

2. *The Knock-Out Blow.* There seemed a good chance that an all-out effort before the winter would knock the Soviets out of the war. On the other hand, if the attack was postponed until spring, the Russians would be given time to reorganize their forces.

3. *The Missed Chance.* This last offensive would have to be risked, if only because one could not possibly give up within sight of the goal. In any event the German mistake at the Marne in 1914, when victory was conceded although the battle was far from lost, was not to be repeated.

4. *The Closeness of the Objective.* Moscow was but 40 miles away. Thus, even though there were only a few weeks of relatively favorable weather ahead, the objective was so close that it seemed within reach. Under these circumstances there was no doubt that the troops would once again make every effort to take Moscow.

5. *Political Significance.* The political effect would be resounding if the German Army succeeded in capturing Moscow despite all obstacles.

After carefully weighing the pros and cons, the Army High Command decided that the offensive had to be risked. However justified this decision may have been on the basis of the estimate of the situation and available intelligence, it did not take into account the demands which the offensive would make upon the German troops and

the shortage of manpower and equipment that beset Army Group Center. To make matters worse, more and more fresh and well-trained Russian divisions were arriving at the front from Siberia, apparently unobserved by German air or ground reconnaissance.

Before the decision to launch the offensive was made, Gen. Friedrich Fromm, Commander, Replacement Army, suggested to Brauchitsch that a peace offer be extended to the Soviets. Since the plan "to crush the Soviet Union in a lightning campaign" had not materialized, he urged that the opportunity of extricating Germany from the risk of a two-front war be exploited—now that the fortunes of the Wehrmacht looked most promising and the threat of losing Moscow loomed large before the Soviet Government. Whether such a peace proposal would have had any chance of success will have to remain a point of conjecture. There is little doubt, however, that Hitler would have sharply rejected such a recommendation.

Last-Minute Planning and Operations to 13 November 1941

The offensive was to start with another attempt at double envelopment as soon as the weather and the supply situation permitted. The immediate objectives were to be the Moskva River and the Volga Canal, and the continuation of the operation would depend upon the prevailing situation. Second Panzer Army was to drive northward from Tula, enveloping Moscow from the southwest. The enemy situation in front of Guderian's armor was obscure, but it seemed probable that the Germans would eventually be faced by strong Russian forces. Guderian's right flank grew longer and longer so that more and more forces had to be diverted from the main thrust to cover the flank. The frontal attack from the west was to be delivered by Fourth Panzer Group as well as by Fourth and Ninth Armies, and the enveloping thrust from the northwest by Third Panzer Group. With its left anchored on the Volga River, the latter was to drive on Moscow from the north. Fierce resistance, mostly by improvised units, could be expected.

On 13 November General Halder presided over a meeting of the chiefs of the army group and army staffs which was held at Orsha. The discussions covered intelligence information, organization matters, and tactical and logistical problems on the theater and army group level. A review of current operations showed that the situation had meanwhile developed as follows:

Army Group South: In the Crimea, the Kerch Peninsula had been almost cleared of Soviet forces. First Panzer Army was slowly closing in on Rostov. Seventeenth Army had consolidated its front along the Donets, while Sixth Army, despite repeated orders to do so, was unable to resume its advance. This delay was particularly inopport-

tune because Russian intentions at the army group boundary were obscure; in this area the Soviets appeared to be withdrawing forces to bolster the defense of Moscow.

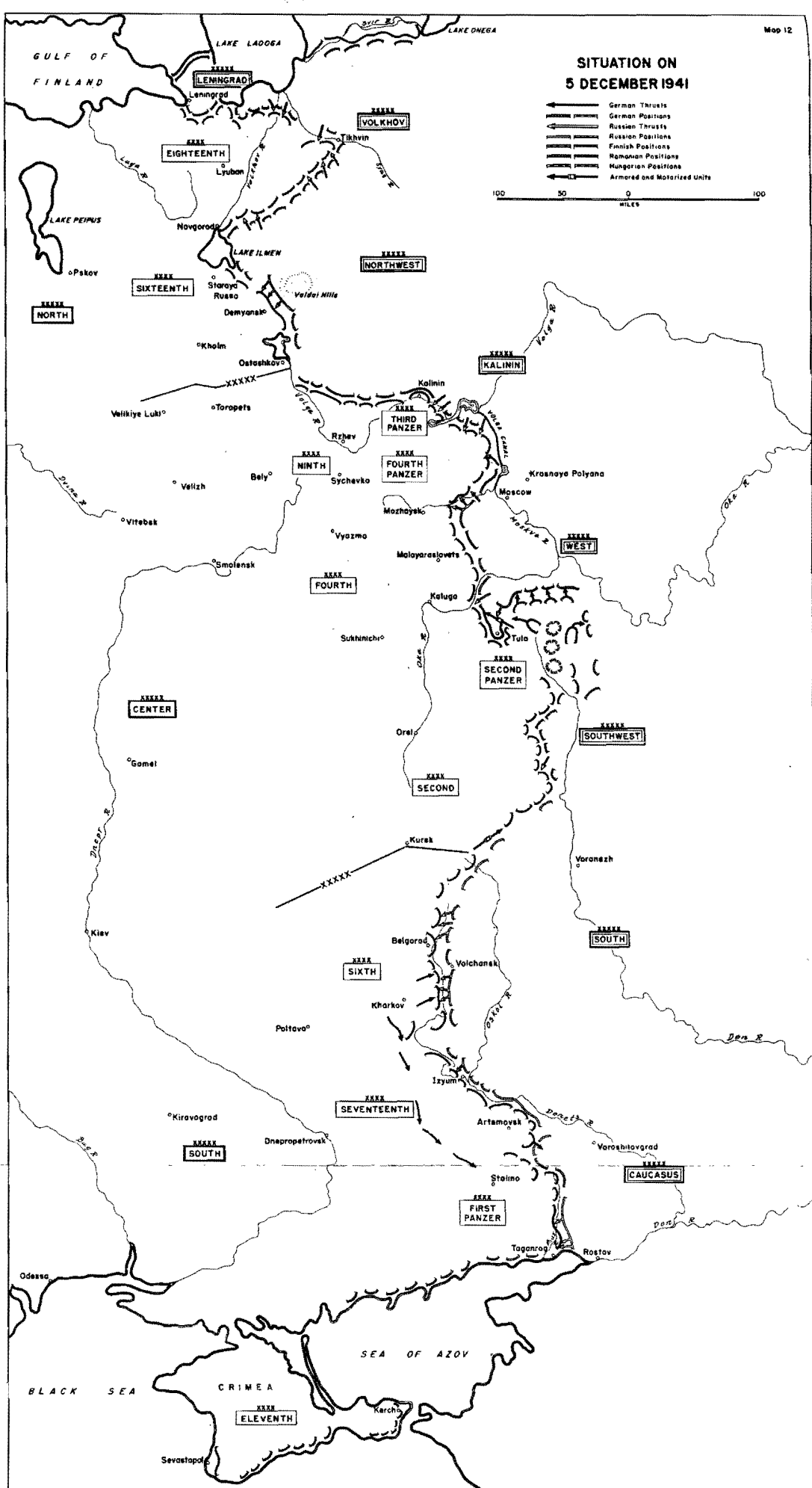
Army Group Center: Few changes had occurred on the Second Army front, which extended over a wide area between Kursk and Orel. Here, too, the Russian intentions were unclear. Major troop movements in the direction of the Soviet capital were apparently under way. Seven concentric rings of antiaircraft defenses, established two to three miles from one another, surrounded Moscow and made the city almost invulnerable from the air. For the first time since the early days of the invasion the Soviet Air Force intervened actively.

Army Group North: Tikhvin was captured on 11 November after a hard struggle; at the same time other forces drove a wedge across the Volkhov River toward Lake Ladoga. The Finns were expected to exploit the German thrust on Tikhvin by launching an offensive during which the Karelian Army was to link up with Army Group North. But this hope was not fulfilled because political considerations modified the Finnish military plans. One German division, reinforced by Finnish troops, attempted to advance on Tikhvin from the lower course of the Svir River, but was stopped by numerically superior Russian forces.

The Course of the Offensive (14 November–5 December 1941)

The three weeks from 14 November to 5 December 1941 marked the turning point in the Russian campaign. The German offensive ground to a halt along the entire front. At the same time the Russians began to seize the initiative.

The first warning came in the south, where Kleist's First Panzer Army attempted to seize Rostov by a *coup de main* and succeeded in entering that city from the east on 20 November. [See map 12.] The German propaganda agencies celebrated this success in such enthusiastic terms that Kleist felt obliged to hold Rostov despite mounting Russian pressure. His position, however, became so precarious that Rundstedt requested the authorization for Kleist's evacuation of Rostov. When Hitler refused, Rundstedt asked to be relieved of his command. His successor, Field Marshal Walter von Reichenau, was forced to abandon Rostov, when the Soviet forces began to assault the city from three sides on 28 November. (Halder noted in his diary that the people at the Fuehrer's headquarters had no idea of the true condition of the German troops, their plans being conceived in a vacuum.) On 1 December Hitler finally agreed to a withdrawal to the Mius, where the German troops were able to dig in. They had to summon all their strength to stop the Russian counterattack and stabilize the front. The other sectors of Army Group South remained



Map 12. Situation on 5 December 1941.

quiet during this period, but it became obvious that the Russians were ready to stop any German advance toward the Caucasus or Stalingrad with every means in their power, and that they had concentrated strong forces for this purpose.

In the Army Group North area no gains could be made beyond Tikhvin or in the direction of Lake Ladoga. Here, too, the Russians were pouring in reinforcements for a series of counterattacks which started in early December. Along the front south of Lake Ilmen the Soviet forces had been counterattacking intermittently since the end of November. Similar attacks were also launched by the Leningrad garrison in an attempt to relieve the pressure on the Moscow front.

In the all-important zone of Army Group Center, Third Panzer Group and Ninth Army had jumped off on 15 November, with Second Panzer Army following shortly afterward. While the Russians offered stubborn resistance in front of Ninth Army, they seemed to give way opposite Guderian's forces in the south. This also appeared to be the case in front of Second Army whose eastward drive began to gain momentum, thereby removing any immediate threat to the exposed right flank of the army group. The Russians apparently lacked the strength to exploit their opportunity for a counterthrust. On the central portion of the army group front, however, the Russians began to launch heavy attacks as early as 16 November, thus preventing Fourth Army from joining the offensive.

Despite these inauspicious developments the Army High Command and Bock, feeling confident that the greater stamina of the Germans would carry the day, agreed that the offensive had to be continued. By the end of November the two enveloping forces had scored further successes, even though they advanced but slowly against stiff opposition. The Fourth Army, however, was engaged in a defensive see-saw battle which greatly sapped its strength. Newly organized and freshly equipped Russian forces, such as an armored brigade almost exclusively equipped with British tanks, appeared unexpectedly all along the army group front. Not until 1 December could the divisions forming the center of Fourth Army switch to the offensive, and then they scored only local gains. From 1 to 5 December the entire offensive gradually bogged down. Winter came suddenly with temperatures down to -40° F. The German troops were in a state of almost complete exhaustion. Orders to halt the offensive had to be issued—first to Fourth Army, then to the spearhead units. The Fourth Panzer Group came to within 25 miles of Moscow when it was stopped at Krasnaya Polyana. Frostbite casualties were more numerous than those resulting from enemy action. To continue was beyond human endurance. Thus the last German all-out effort to force a decision in 1941 ended in failure.

The Personnel Situation (End of November 1941)

At the end of November the German ground forces in the Russian theater were short 340,000 replacements. With infantry companies at half strength, the average number of men available for combat duty varied from 50 to 60 per company. Day-to-day losses were about equal to the number of convalescents returning to duty. The shortage of replacements could not be compensated for by transfers from the Zone of Interior, where only 33,000 trained replacements were available. The only possible solution was to disband a number of units and use their personnel as replacements. Hitler, however, refused any such suggestion.

The official casualty reports as of 26 November 1941 read as follows:

Casualties	German Losses (From German Sources)	Russian Losses (From Russian Sources)
Totals.....	*743, 112	2, 122, 000
Killed in Action.....	156, 475	490, 000
Wounded in Action.....	555, 685	1, 112, 000
Missing in Action.....	30, 952	**520, 000

*23.5 per cent of the average strength (3.2 million men) employed in the Russian theater from 22 June to 26 November 1941.

**Against 3,006,867 prisoners of war claimed by the Germans as of 1 December 1941.

Critique

The German objectives for the Russian campaign in 1941 had not been attained. The Soviet military forces had not been destroyed and the Communist government had not collapsed. The danger of another two-front war loomed larger than ever. Instead of eliminating this threat, the invasion of Russia had actually brought it about.

Some of the basic mistakes that caused the German failure seemed to be the following:

a. Political Mistakes. Hitler had underestimated the internal political stability of the Communist regime. The average citizen's innate readiness to defend Mother Russia against any invader was stronger than his assumed aversion to the Communist dictatorship. Moreover, German failure to formulate and apply a satisfactory policy in the occupied territories, particularly in the Ukraine and the Baltic States, had intensified the spirit of resistance.

b. Underestimation of Russian Strength. The Soviet Union's economic foundations were more solid than Hitler had anticipated. The Germans were surprised by the Russians' ability to transfer and decentralize war plants. As to the Soviet armed forces, their unwavering determination, their unwillingness to admit defeat, and their capa-

bility to improvise astounded the Germans. Time and again these qualities compensated for the ineptitude of the Russian intermediate command.

c. *Faulty Strategy.* The change in German strategy decided upon in August 1941, when the main effort was shifted from Army Group Center to Army Group South and—to some extent—to Army Group North, was a crucial mistake. By making this decision the Germans may have lost their opportunity of knocking the Russians out of the war by a direct thrust on Moscow. There is, however, no way of proving the validity of this hypothesis, especially since a number of other, equally fundamental mistakes have to be considered in this connection.

d. *Inadequate Mobility.* The German Army did not have sufficient motor vehicles, planes, and POL reserves for operations in so vast a theater as European Russia. Instead of being able to take full advantage of their maneuverability, the panzer divisions were forced to halt time and again to permit the infantry to close up. Moreover, the inadequacy of the roads and the shortage of suitable air fields made the logistical support almost completely dependent on the damaged railroads, the operation of which was so difficult in Russia.

e. *Wrong Space Calculations.* During the planning stage the vastness of the Russian theater had not been fully taken into consideration. When the German Army failed to destroy the Russian armed forces in the initial onslaught, the space factor gave rise to problems which the Germans with their limited resources were not able to master.

f. *Bad Timing.* The time element became an increasingly important factor once the operation got under way. The initial delay in launching the offensive, the month lost in vacillating over the continuation of the offensive, and finally the diversion of forces to the south and north cost the Germans dearly.

g. *The "Russian" Weather.* The Germans did not make proper use of the information on Russian weather conditions that was available to them. The effect of the weather on the conduct of military operations in Russia was no secret, and the German military leaders should not have been surprised by muddy terrain in the autumn or low temperatures in the winter. It seems almost inconceivable that the German troops in Russia were caught unprepared by the sudden outbreak of winter. The explanation is that Hitler and his military advisers were convinced that the campaign would end before the onset of bad weather; winter clothing had been ordered for only those 60 divisions that were to remain in Russia and form the military occupation force after Germany's victory.

h. Erroneous Air Warfare Concepts. The faulty concept of a short war was also the reason why the Luftwaffe's mission was mainly to lend tactical ground support. Strategic bombing was to be envisaged only after the war of movement had been brought to its conclusion, i. e. after the campaign in European Russia had been won. Hitler and his military advisers deemed it unnecessary to smash the Soviet armament potential or even interfere with production schedules. Nor was it considered important to disrupt rail communications to the Urals and Central Asia, a course of action that might have prevented the subsequent evacuation of Soviet war industries and the moving up of reinforcements.

The fact that the Luftwaffe had no specific strategic air force probably contributed to these crucial decisions. Whatever strategic air units the Germans had left after the Battle of Britain were eventually dissipated in tactical fighting, probably because both strategic and tactical units operated under the same tactical headquarters.

i. Lack of Self-Restraint. As stated in the various plans prepared for the invasion of Russia, German strategy was based on the assumption that the bulk of the Red Army would be destroyed in western Russia. The decisive initial blows were to be delivered west of the Dnepr-Dvina line. The pursuit to the Volga, which was to be launched during the following phases, was to be contingent upon the successful accomplishment of the initial maneuvers.

In their attempt to implement those plans, the Germans realized by the end of July that they had been unable to destroy the bulk of the Red Army in western Russia. They had captured a great number of prisoners and booty, but the Soviets had been able to withdraw sufficient forces to continue active resistance. Instead of revising their plans, the Germans plunged into the depth of the Russian theater as if the prerequisites for the initial phase had been entirely fulfilled. It was therefore not really surprising that in December 1941 the Red Army succeeded in stopping the Germans short of their principal objectives—Moscow and Leningrad.