

# ICEBREAKER

Who Started the  
Second World War?

*Viktor Suvorov*

*Translated by Thomas B. Beattie*



HAMISH HAMILTON

London

## For my brother

Hamish Hamilton Ltd

Published by the Penguin Group

27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Viking Penguin Inc., 40 West 23rd Street, New York, New York 10011, USA Penguin Books Australia

Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 2801 John Street, Markham, Ontario, Canada L3R 9B4 Penguin Books (NZ)

Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 1, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England First published in

France by Editions Olivier Orban 1988

First published in Great Britain by Hamish Hamilton Ltd 1990

Copyright (C) Viktor Suvorov, 1990 1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

Filmset in Linotron Bembo at The Spartan Press Ltd, Lymington, Hants. Printed in Great Britain

by Richard Clay Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-241-126223

*By the same author*

THE LIBERATORS  
INSIDE THE SOVIET ARMY  
SOVIET MILITARY INTELLIGENCE  
AQUARIUM  
SPETSNAZ

## List of Maps

|       |                                                 |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------|
| MAP 1 | Destruction of the Red Army's Defensive System  |
| MAP 2 | First Strategic Echelon of the Red Army         |
| MAP 3 | Preparations to Destroy the Rumanian Oil-fields |

## List of Illustrations

|                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Icebreaker in Action                                                 |
| Soviet Tanks                                                         |
| Soviet Parachutists                                                  |
| In Training                                                          |
| Winged Tank KT/A-40                                                  |
| Invasion Preparations                                                |
| BT Soviet Tanks                                                      |
| Exercises in Bridge-building                                         |
| Marshal Timonshenko and Marshal Zhukov Troops Ready for an Offensive |
| KV-1 Tank                                                            |
| GULAG Prisoner                                                       |

## Contents

|                              |                                                        |     |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>List of Maps</i>          |                                                        | vii |
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> |                                                        | ix  |
| <i>To the Reader</i>         |                                                        | xv  |
| <i>Maps</i>                  |                                                        | xix |
| CHAPTER 1                    | The Road to Happiness                                  | 1   |
| CHAPTER 2                    | The Main Enemy                                         | 8   |
| CHAPTER 3                    | Why Arms for the Communists?                           | 14  |
| CHAPTER 4                    | Why Stalin Partitioned Poland                          | 25  |
| CHAPTER 5                    | The Pact and its Results                               | 31  |
| CHAPTER 6                    | When Did the Soviet Union Enter World War II?          | 37  |
| CHAPTER 7                    | 'Extending the Foundations of War'                     | 47  |
| CHAPTER 8                    | Why Howitzer Artillery for the Chekists?               | 58  |
| CHAPTER 9                    | Why the Security Zone was Dismantled on the Eve of War | 67  |
| CHAPTER 10                   | Why Stalin Abolished the Stalin Line                   | 82  |
| CHAPTER 11                   | Partisans or Saboteurs?                                | 100 |
| CHAPTER 12                   | Why Did Stalin Need Ten Airborne Assault Corps?        | 107 |
| CHAPTER 13                   | The Winged Tank                                        | 115 |
| CHAPTER 14                   | On to Berlin                                           | 121 |
| CHAPTER 15                   | The Marine Infantry in the Forests of Byelorussia      | 131 |
| CHAPTER 16                   | What are 'Armies of Covering Forces'?                  | 135 |
| CHAPTER 17                   | Mountain Divisions on the Steppes of the Ukraine       | 151 |
| CHAPTER 18                   | The Purpose of the First Strategic Echelon             | 163 |
| CHAPTER 19                   | Stalin in May                                          | 166 |
| CHAPTER 20                   | Words and Actions                                      | 182 |
| CHAPTER 21                   | Living Peaceably with Sharp Teeth                      | 188 |
| CHAPTER 22                   | The TASS Report                                        | 195 |

|              |                                             |     |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER 23   | The Military Districts                      | 226 |
| CHAPTER 24   | The Black Divisions                         | 234 |
| CHAPTER 25   | The <i>Kombrigs</i> and the <i>Komdivs</i>  | 242 |
| CHAPTER 26   | Why the Second Strategic Echelon was Formed | 248 |
| CHAPTER 27   | Undeclared War                              | 265 |
| CHAPTER 28   | Why Stalin Deployed the Fronts              | 275 |
| CHAPTER 29   | Why Stalin Did Not Trust Churchill          | 302 |
| CHAPTER 30   | Why Stalin Did Not Trust Richard Sorge      | 313 |
| CHAPTER 31   | How Hitler Frustrated Stalin's War          | 325 |
| CHAPTER 32   | Did Stalin Have a War Plan?                 | 336 |
| CHAPTER 33   | The War Which Never Was                     | 344 |
| <i>Index</i> |                                             | 354 |

*The West, with its imperialist ogres, has  
become a centre of darkness and slavery.  
The task is to destroy this centre, to the joy  
and relief of the workers.*

STALIN, *Zhizn Narsional' nosti*,  
No. 6 (1918)

## To the Reader

Who started the Second World War? There is no single answer to this question. The Soviet government, for example, has repeatedly changed its official line on the issue.

On 18 September 1939, they stated in an official note that the government of Poland was the instigator of the war. On 30 November 1939, however, Stalin named other culprits in the newspaper, *Pravda*: 'France and Britain . . . attacked Germany, thereby taking upon themselves the responsibility for the present war,' he wrote. By 5 May 1941, the story had changed again : in a secret speech to graduates of military academies, Stalin laid the responsibility on Germany.

After the war had ended, this circle of 'culprits' grew. Stalin announced that the most blood-stained war in the history of humanity had been started by all the capitalist countries in the world – in other words, all the sovereign states in the world including Sweden and Switzerland, but excluding the Soviet Union.

Stalin's view has long been established in communist mythology. During the times of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and as recently as Andropov and Chernenko, these accusations against the rest of the world were frequently repeated. Under Gorbachev, much is changing in the Soviet Union, but Stalin's view about who started the war remains unchallenged. Lieutenant-General P. A. Zhilin, chief historian of the Soviet Army, repeated during the Gorbachev era that 'the perpetrators of the war were not only the imperialists of Germany, but of the whole world'. (*Red Star*, 24 September 1985)

I would like to suggest that, from the beginning of the war, the Soviet communists made accusations against every country in the world with the deliberate intention of concealing their own role as its instigators.

After the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles deprived Germany of the right to a strong army and offensive weapons, including tanks, military aircraft, heavy artillery and submarines. German commanders were unable to use German territory to train for the waging of offensive wars. So they began to make their preparations in the Soviet Union. Everything possible was done, on Stalin's orders, to enable German commanders to carry out military training on Soviet territory. They were given training classes, artillery and shooting ranges, as well as tanks, heavy artillery and military aircraft which, under the terms of the Treaty,



they had no right to receive. Similarly, German commanders were given access to Soviet tank-manufacturing plants, the most powerful in the world. *Look, remember and copy.* From the 1920s on, sparing neither resources nor effort, nor indeed time, Stalin revived the strike power of German militarism. Certainly not against himself. For what purpose? There is only one answer – so that war would be declared on the rest of Europe.

Stalin understood that a powerful, aggressive army does not start a war by itself. A mad, fanatical leader is also needed. Stalin did a great deal to see that just such a leader should appear at the head of the German nation. Once the fascists had come to power, Stalin persistently and doggedly pushed towards war. The high point of these efforts was the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact. In this pact, Stalin guaranteed Hitler freedom of action in Europe and, in effect, opened the floodgates of the Second World War.

Even before the Nazis came to power, the Soviet leaders had given Hitler the unofficial name of 'Icebreaker for the Revolution'. The name is both apt and fitting. The communists understood that Europe would be vulnerable only in the event of war and that the Icebreaker for the Revolution could make it vulnerable. Unaware of this, Adolf Hitler cleared the way for world communism by his actions. With his *Blitzkrieg* wars, Hitler crushed the Western democracies, scattering and dispersing his forces from Norway to Libya. This suited Stalin admirably. The Icebreaker committed the greatest crimes against the world and humanity, and, in doing so, placed in

Stalin's hands the moral right to declare himself the liberator of Europe at any time he chose – while changing the concentration camps from brown to red.

Stalin understood better than Hitler that a war is won by the side which enters it last and not by the one which goes into it first. Stalin granted Hitler the doubtful honour of being the first, while he himself prepared for his unavoidable entry into the war after 'all the capitalists (will) have fought amongst themselves'. (*Stalin*, Vol. 6, p. 158)

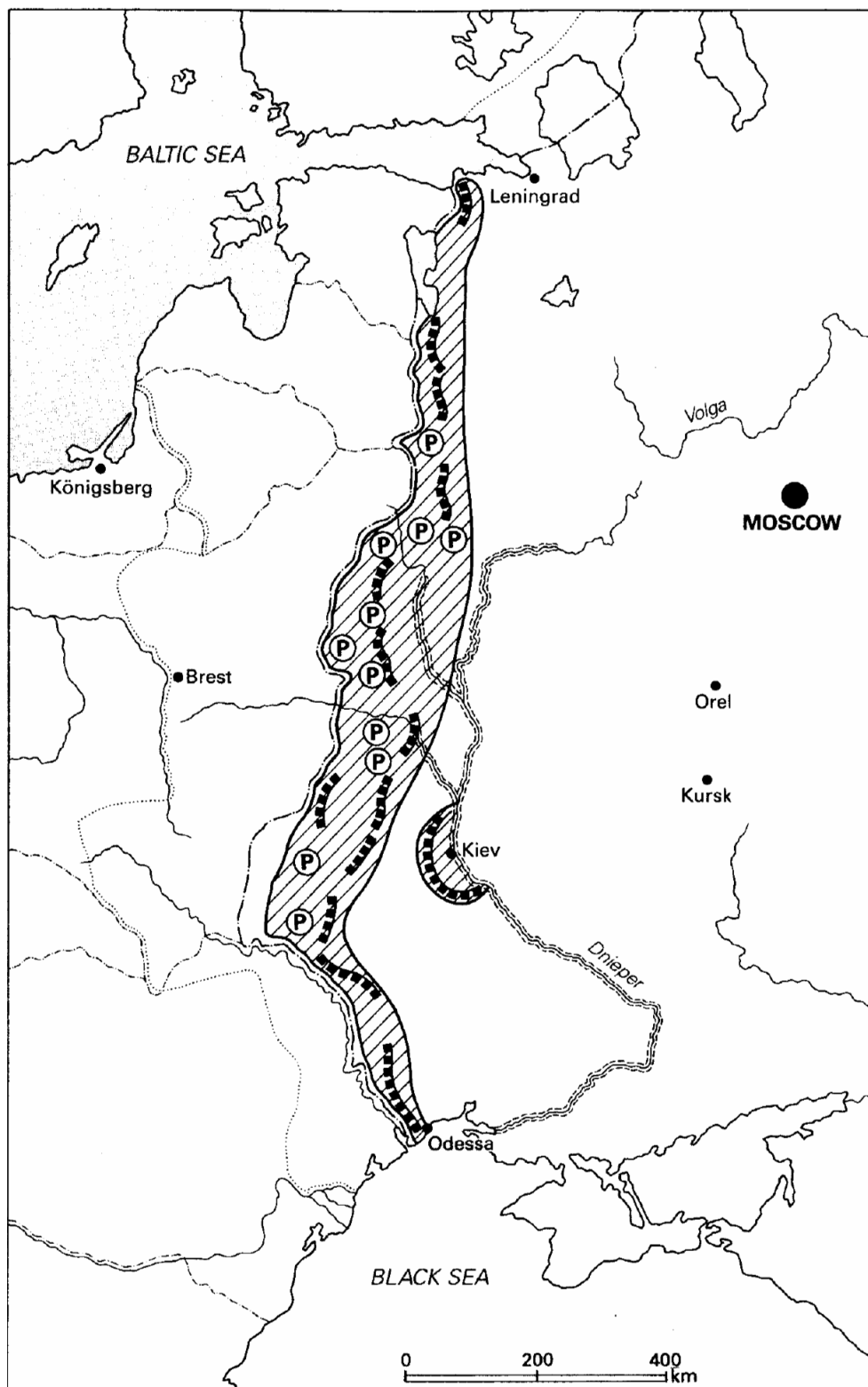
Much has been done to uncover the crimes of Nazism and find the butchers who perpetrated atrocities in its name. This work must be continued and stepped up. But while unmasking fascists, one must also expose the Soviet communists who encouraged the Nazis to commit their crimes, so that they could avail themselves of the results of these crimes.

The communists weeded their archives thoroughly a long time ago, but what still remains preserved there is almost inaccessible to researchers. I was fortunate enough to work briefly in the archives of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, but quite intentionally I am making little use of secret archival material. Overt Soviet publications are my main source. Even these are quite sufficient to place Soviet communists in the dock with Nazis.

My chief witnesses are Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and all the Soviet wartime marshals and many leading generals. The Soviet communists admit that they used Hitler to unleash a war in Europe, and prepared a sudden blow at Hitler himself in order to seize a Europe which had been destroyed by him. The value of my sources lies in the fact that it is the criminals themselves who speak of their own crimes.

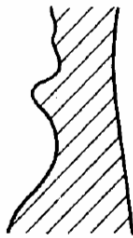
I know that on the communist side there are many apologists. I took the communists at their word, so let us allow them to defend themselves independently.

Viktor Suvorov



## MAP I

**As soon as Britain and France declared war on Germany, the Red Army began to destroy its own defensive systems. The Soviet Command was no longer interested in defending its own territory.**



The 'death' zone is a security zone against a surprise attack from the West. Inside this zone, all transport, communications and water supply systems and industrial installations were made ready for demolition. Minefields and other engineered obstacles were set up to a depth of up to 150 kilometres. The zone was completely cleared of mines in the autumn of 1939.



Partisan detachments and bases had been set up in peacetime. They were dissolved in September 1939.



In the fortified regions of the 'Stalin Line', the work of demilitarization and destruction began in autumn 1939.



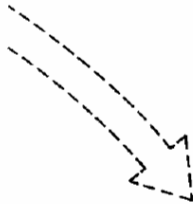
The combat operations zone of the Dnieper Naval Flotilla. The Flotilla was disbanded in June 1940.

## MAP 2

### The First Strategic Echelon of the Red Army.



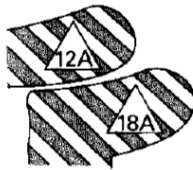
The Soviet invasion armies of the First Strategic Echelon. Behind them, another seven Soviet armies were making their way to the frontier.



The deployment of the First Strategic Echelon rendered the defence of the Soviet Union almost impossible. Even a very low-powered strike by the enemy in this direction would have led immediately to the loss of five Soviet armies, including the 9th, which was the most powerful in the world, and the loss of vast material wealth, highly fertile lands, the undefended bases of the Black Sea fleet, and strategic air bases. It was precisely such a strike which the First German Tank Group delivered in June 1941 . . .



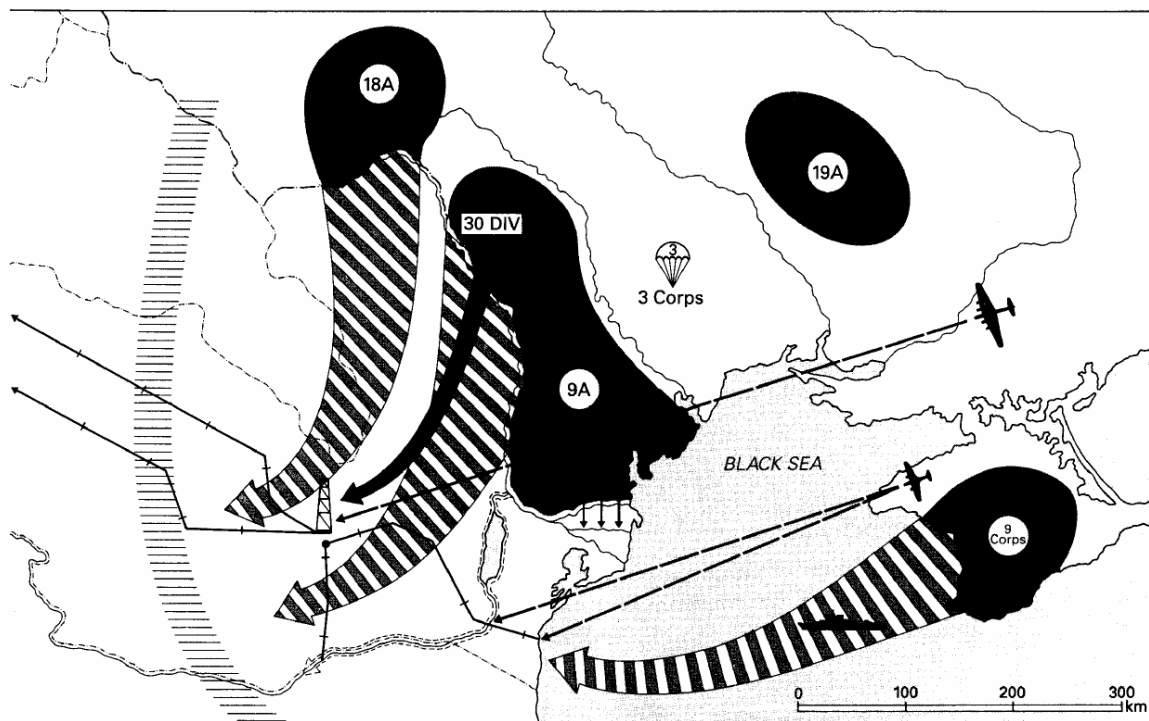
The 9th Army was concentrated not on the German border, but on the frontier with Rumania. A 9th Army strike at Rumania would be a strike at the undefended oil 'heart' of Germany.



The mountain invasion armies. This was the only possible direction in which they could have moved, along undefended ridges. They would have made it possible both to cut Germany's oil 'jugular' and to prevent the movement of German reserves into Rumania.

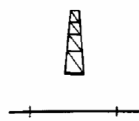


The 'first wave' airborne corps. Another five airborne corps were secretly being formed deep inside the Soviet Union.



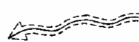
## MAP 3

### How the Red Army was prepared to seize and destroy the Rumanian oil-fields.

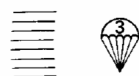


The Ploesti oil-fields, Germany's chief source of oil.

The main pipelines for supplying oil to Germany and for loading it on to river- and sea-going tankers.



The Soviet Danube Naval Flotilla and the only possible way of using it in an offensive war. In a defensive war, the Flotilla would be unnecessary.



The Third Airborne Corps and the zone of its possible operational use. The Corps was set up in April 1941.

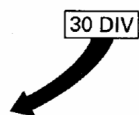


The 9th Army was secretly deployed on 14 June 1941, as TASS stated that the Soviet Union was not preparing for war.



The combat task of the 9th Army, according to the evidence of Air Marshal A. Pokryshkin.

The assault crossing of the Danube by divisions of the 9th Army's 14th Rifle Corps. Previously prepared and carried out in the first days of the war.



The 30th Mountain Rifle Division, part of the 9th Army, and the only place where it could be used for its intended purpose.



The 18th (Mountain) Army, secretly deployed on 13 June 1941, and the only possible direction which its operations could have taken. There are no other mountains in this region.



The 19th Army, the most powerful in the Second Strategic Echelon, was transferred from the Northern Caucasus. It contained mountain rifle divisions which could only have been used in Rumania.



The 9th Special Rifle Corps, in collaboration with the Black Sea Fleet, began intensive training in carrying out a naval assault landing operation on an enemy shore.

And overleaf



The Black Sea Fleet subjected the principal Rumanian oil port of Constanza to an artillery bombardment in the first days of the war.



The 4th Long Range Bomber Corps had Ploesti as its principal target in the event of war.



The 63rd Air Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet was specially trained to raid targets in the oil producing industry including, in the first days of the war, Constanza and the strategic pipelines which cross the Danube.

## CHAPTER I

# The Road to Happiness

*We are the Party of the class which is on the  
way to  
the conquest of the world.*  
FRUNZE (Report to the military  
delegates sent to the XI  
Congress of the RKP (b) (1922))

Marx and Engels foretold a world war and lengthy international conflicts which would last 'fifteen, twenty, fifty years'. The prospect did not frighten them. The authors of *The Communist Manifesto* did not call on the proletariat to prevent war; on the contrary, they saw it as desirable. War was mother to the revolution. The result of a world war, in Engels' words, would be 'general exhaustion and the creation of conditions for the final victory of the working class'. (Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Works*, Ch. 21, p. 351)

Marx and Engels did not live to see the world war, but a successor in their cause was found for them in Lenin. From the earliest days of the First World War, Lenin's party came out in favour of the government of their own country being defeated, so that the 'imperialist war might be changed into a civil war'.

Lenin calculated that left-wing parties in other countries would also come out against the governments of their own countries and the imperialist world war would be transmuted into a world civil war. This did not happen. Without abandoning hopes for a world revolution, as early as autumn 1914 Lenin adopted a minimum programme. If world revolution were not to result from world war, everything possible had to be done to make a revolution happen in at least one country; it did not matter which one. 'When the proletariat has conquered that country, it will stand against all the rest of the world,' fomenting disorders and uprisings



in other countries, 'or coming out against them directly with armed force.' (*About the Slogan of the ' United States of Europe'*)

For Lenin, as for Marx, world revolution remained the guiding star, and he did not lose sight of this goal. But according to the minimum programme, the First World War would only facilitate a revolution in one country. How, then, would the world revolution take place thereafter? Lenin gave a clear-cut answer to this question in 1916: as a result of the second imperialist war. (*The Military Programme for the Proletarian Revolution*})

Perhaps I am mistaken, but having read much of what Hitler wrote, I have certainly found no indications that in 1916 Adolf Schickelgruber was dreaming of the Second World War. But Lenin was. What is more, he was laying down the need for such a war as the theoretical base for the building of socialism throughout the world.

Events developed apace. The revolution in Russia occurred the following year. Lenin hastened there from exile. In the maelstrom of confusion and a total absence of authority, he and his party, small but militarily organized, seized power in a *coup d'etat*. In March 1918, he concluded the Brest-Litovsk peace agreement with Germany and its allies. At that time Germany's position was already hopeless. Lenin of course understood this. The peace he signed therefore freed his hands to strengthen, through civil conflict, the communist dictatorship inside Russia, and gave Germany considerable resources and reserves to continue the war in the West, which was exhausting both Germany and the Western allies.

By concluding a separate deal -with the enemy, Lenin betrayed Russia's allies. But Lenin also betrayed Russia itself. At the beginning of 1918, the victory of France, Britain, Russia, the United States and other countries over Germany and its allies was already inevitable. Russia had lost millions of soldiers and was fully entitled to be numbered among the victors, alongside her western allies. But Lenin did not need such a victory. He needed world revolution. Lenin recognized that the Brest-Litovsk peace had been concluded not in the interests of Russia, but in the interests of world revolution, in the interests of establishing communism in Russia and other countries. Lenin admitted that he had placed worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat and world revolution 'above all national sacrifices'. (Central Committee report on the VIII Congress of the RKP (b) (1919)) He even gave away to Germany, without a fight, a million square kilometres of the most fertile lands and the richest industrial regions of Russia's western territories, and paid out a war indemnity in gold. Why?

The reason is that the Brest-Litovsk 'peace' rendered millions of Russian soldiers unnecessary. No longer under the control of any authority, these millions went back to their homes, breaking the foundations of the state system and the newly born democracy on the way. Brest-Litovsk marked the beginning of the ferocious civil war; while brother fought brother, the communists strengthened and extended their power until, after a few years, the entire country was under their control.

Brest-Litovsk was directed not only against the national interests of Russia, but against Germany as well, and in both its sense and spirit it served as a prototype of the Molotov— Ribbentrop pact. Lenin's calculation in 1918 was exactly the same as Stalin's in 1939. Let Germany fight in the West, let Germany and the Western allies exhaust themselves one after the other to the greatest extent possible; we ourselves shall help Germany at any price to exhaust herself to the very limit, and then act.

While the peace agreement with Germany was being signed on Lenin's orders in Brest-Litovsk, intensive work was being undertaken in Petrograd to prepare the overthrow of the German Government. At that time, the communist German-language newspaper, *Die Fackel*, with a circulation of 500,000, was being published in Petrograd. SPARTAK, the German communist group, had been set up in Petrograd in January 1918, even before the Brest-Litovsk agreement was signed. Two other newspapers, *Die Weltrevolution* and *Die Rote Fahne*, also saw the light of day, not in Germany, but in communist Russia, again on the orders of Lenin who had signed the 'peace' with Germany. In the twenties, communism was striking deep roots in Germany. Indeed, Lenin set his hand to this precisely at the time when Germany was losing the war in the West and he had extracted a 'peace' agreement from her at her most vulnerable.

Lenin's calculation was exact. The German Empire would not be able to withstand the colossal pressure of a war of attrition; in fact it led to the downfall of the empire - and revolution. Lenin immediately annulled the treaty. Communist states strikingly similar to Lenin's Bolshevik regime arose from the ruins of empires in war-torn Europe. 'We are on the threshold of world revolution!' Lenin exulted. He then threw away his minimum programme. He no longer spoke of the need for a Second World War, as he now believed that world revolution could be accomplished as a result of the First.

Lenin set up the Comintern to be, in the definition of its own name, the world communist party, and gave it the objective of setting up a world Soviet socialist republic.

But world revolution did not follow. Communist regimes in Bavaria, Bremen, Slovakia and Hungary proved to be weak and unviable. When it came to seizing and wielding power, left-wing parties in Western countries displayed fickleness and vacillation, and Lenin could only give them moral support. The entire might of the Bolsheviks was thrown on to the home fronts and into the battle against the peoples of Russia who did not want communism. It took Lenin until 1920 to strengthen his position sufficiently inside Russia. It was only then that Europe became the arena targeted for revolution.

The favourable moment in Germany had already passed. Even so, Germany in 1920 represented an eminently suitable field for waging class battles. She had been destroyed and humbled. All her ideals had been desecrated and humiliated. A ferocious economic crisis raged throughout the land. In March, she was shaken by a general strike in which, according to some sources, more than twelve million people took part. Germany was a powder keg and only one spark was needed to set it off.

The official march of the Red Army (Budennyi's March<sup>1</sup>) includes the words 'Let's take Warsaw! Then Berlin!' Nikolai Bukharin, the Soviet communists' theoretician, proclaimed a more determined slogan in the newspaper, *Pravda*: 'Straight to the walls of Paris and London!'

In the path of the Red legions, however, lay Poland. There was no common frontier between the Soviet Union and Germany; in order to ignite revolution it was essential to destroy the barrier dividing them. This was free, independent Poland. Unfortunately for the communists, at the head of the Soviet troops was M. N. Tukhachevsky, a commander who did not understand the essence of strategy. Tukhachevsky's armies were defeated before reaching Warsaw and shamefully retreated. At a critical moment, Tukhachevsky found himself without any strategic reserve and this ensured that the outcome was a spectacular defeat.

Tukhachevsky's defeat did not happen by chance. Six months before the Soviet 'liberation campaign' set out for Warsaw and Berlin, Tukhachevsky had laid down, as a 'theoretical base', that strategic reserves were unnecessary in war. Strategy has simple but inexorable laws. Its main principle is concentration. At the decisive moment and in the decisive place, *overwhelming power* must be concentrated against the enemy's most vulnerable point. In order to concentrate power in this way, it is necessary to have it in reserve.

---

<sup>1</sup> \*Originally, the song was dedicated to Simion Budennyi, legendary hero of the civil war and later Marshal of the Soviet Union.

Tukhachevsky, did not understand this, and paid the price. As a result, the revolution in Germany had to be put off until 1923.

The rout of Tukhachevsky's hordes in Poland had very unpleasant consequences for the Bolsheviks. Russia suddenly rose up in a desperate effort to throw off the communist dictatorship. The workers, of Petrograd, the cradle of the revolution, went on strike; they demanded bread, they demanded their promised liberty. The Bolsheviks put down their demonstrations, but a squadron of the Baltic Fleet came out on their side. The sailors from Kronstadt (the principal Soviet naval base, near Petrograd), the same ones who presented power to Lenin and Trotsky, demanded that the communists be thrown out of the Soviets, or councils. A wave of peasant demonstrations swept the country; and in the woods of Tambov, a group of peasants formed an anti-communist army which was powerful and well organized, but badly armed.

Tukhachevsky's brutality at Kronstadt became legendary. The monstrous shooting of peasants in Tambov Province is one of the most horrifying pages in history. The author of this page is Tukhachevsky. The twentieth century has known quite a few villains such as Yezhov, Himmler and Pol Pot. By the amount of blood he has spilt, Tukhachevsky has fully earned his place alongside them, for in his time Tukhachevsky was the forerunner of most of these scoundrels!

In 1921 Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy, or NEP. There was nothing new in this plan, which boiled down to little more than good old capitalism. It is accepted that Kronstadt and Tambov were important reasons impelling Lenin to introduce elements of free-marketeering and to loosen the ideological running knot on the neck of society. One must seek more deep for other reasons.

In 1921 Lenin understood that the First World War had not led to world revolution. According to Trotsky's advice, it was, necessary to go over to permanent revolution, dealing blow after blow at the weak links in free society and, at the same time, prepare for the Second World War, which would bring final 'liberation'. Before the actual introduction of the NEP in December 1920, Lenin claimed that 'such a new war is unavoidable . . .' (A speech to the Moscow Council on the first anniversary of the Comintern, 1920) 'We have ended one phase of wars and we must prepare ourselves for the next.' (A speech to the VIII Congress of the Soviets, 1920) For

this purpose NEP was introduced. Peace is a breathing space for war. So says Lenin, so said Stalin and so said *Pravda*. The communists had put their lands in order to strengthen and consolidate power, develop an exceptionally strong war industry, and to prepare the populace for future wars, battles and 'liberation campaigns'.

The introduction of elements of free-marketeering in no way signified that preparations for world revolution and the Second World War had been repudiated. By the following year the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - the USSR - had been formed. The declaration that accompanied the formation of the USSR itemized four republics; it was intended to go on increasing this number until the whole world formed part of it.

The declaration accompanying the formation of the USSR was a *dear and direct declaration of war on the rest of the world*. This declaration is still in force. Nobody has revoked it. Between this declaration and that contained in *Mein Kampf*, there is a difference. Hitler wrote his book later and it represents the view of one individual. *Mein Kampf* literally means *my* struggle. The declaration behind the formation of the USSR is an official document on the principal objective of a vast state, which is to destroy and subjugate all other states in the world.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Main Enemy

*If there is one place where a start can be made to  
arouse Europe to revolution, that place is  
Germany . . . and victory of the revolution in  
Germany will guarantee the victory of world  
revolution.*

STALIN (*Sochineniya*, Vol. 6, p. 267)

In 1923, Germany was again on the brink of revolution. Lenin was no longer taking part either in governing the USSR or directing the Comintern. Stalin had seized almost all the reins of government, although the fact that he had done so had not yet been grasped by the country, the world, or even by his rivals.

This is how Stalin himself described his role in the preparations which were being made for revolution in Germany in 1923 : 'The German Commission of the Comintern, consisting of Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin, Trotsky, Radek and a number of German comrades, took a series of specific decisions that direct assistance be given to the German comrades to enable them to seize power.' (Speech to the Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the VKP (b), 1 August 1927)

Boris Bazhanov, Stalin's private secretary, gave a more detailed description of these preparations. The resources which were allotted to them were enormous. The Politburo decided at a secret meeting that nothing would be spared. All communists of German extraction living in the Soviet Union were prepared for action, as were all communists who spoke German. They were sent to Germany to do clandestine work. It was not just rank-and-file communists who were moved into Germany. Top-ranking Soviet leaders, including Vassily Schmidt, a Soviet People's Commissar, Joseph Unschlikht, deputy chairman of the GRU<sup>2</sup> and future head of military intelligence, and Karl Radek and G. L. Pyatakov, then members of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, were all sent to Germany as well. N. Krestinsky, the plenipotentiary representative, or ambassador in Germany, set to work with feverish intensity. The Soviet Embassy in its entirety became the nerve centre for organizing the revolution: instructions from Moscow, a flood of money which was immediately spent on mounds of communist literature, and an avalanche of arms and

---

<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Secret Police frequently changed its initials; this was another variation of the NKVD or the KGB.

ammunition all flowed through the Embassy. 'Unschlikht was given responsibility for recruiting, equipping and organizing the armed insurrectionist detachments which would carry out the *coup d'etat*. He was given the added responsibility of organizing a German secret-police force and of exterminating the bourgeoisie and the enemies of the revolution after the *coup* had taken place.' (B. Bazhanov, *Memoirs*, Paris 1980; p. 67)

The Soviet Politburo worked out the blueprint for the *coup* in detail and ratified it. The date on which it was to take place was fixed for 9 November 1923. But the revolution did not happen. The reasons for this were many.

First, the great bulk of the German populace chose the golden mean. They favoured the Social Democrats. The Communist Party did not have the support it needed among the masses. What is more, the Party was split into two factions, and as Lenin and Trotsky saw it, the Party leaders were not displaying sufficient determination. Secondly, Germany and the Soviet Union did not share a common frontier. As they had found four years previously, Poland lay between their two countries. Had there been a common frontier, then the Red Army would have been in a position to help the German Communist Party and its indecisive leaders.

The third and perhaps most important reason was that Lenin was dying, and for some time previously had ceased either to govern the Soviet Union or lead the world revolution. Lenin's heirs were many - Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and Bukharin. Alongside these obvious rivals worked the modest Stalin, whom no one saw as an aspirant to power, but who, in Lenin's words, had already 'concentrated unlimited power in his own hands'. (*Political Will*, 1923)

The 1923 German revolution was directed from the Kremlin, but a fierce fight over who should control the world revolution was already under way. Not one of the evident claimants for power wanted to see his opponent in the role of leader of the German and therefore the European revolution. They jostled one another at the helm, issuing conflicting instructions to their subordinates. No one in such circumstances would end as victor. Wisely, Stalin did not join the helmsmen in their scramble for power. Instead, he decided first of all to devote his entire attention to consolidating his personal authority beyond all dispute.

In the years which immediately followed, Stalin demoted from the highest level of the Party all those who aspired to the post of leader, pushing them down to increasing depths until they ended up in the cellars of the Lubyanka jail. Once he had seized power, Stalin removed all obstacles standing in the way of the German revolution. He brought order to the German Communist Party and compelled it to carry out Moscow's instructions without question. He established a common frontier with Germany. He annihilated German social democracy. His position was both simple and based upon principles: it was necessary to fight against the Social Democrats and the pacifists, who were distracting the proletariat from revolution and war. On 7 November 1927, Stalin launched a slogan which said, 'It is impossible to finish with capitalism without first finishing with social democratism in the workers' movement.' (*Pravda*, No. 255, 6/7 Nov 1927) The following year Stalin declared that the communists' main task was to fight against social demo-

cracy : 'first of all, the struggle with social democratism along all lines, including and following from this the exposure of bourgeois pacifism'. (Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. 11, p. 202) Stalin's attitude towards those who openly favoured war with, for example, the German Nazis, was just as simple and understandable. The Nazis had to be supported: leave it to the Nazis to eliminate the Social Democrats and the pacifists; let the Nazis start another war and destroy every state in Europe, every political party, every parliament, every army and every trade union. In 1927 Stalin already foresaw that the Nazis would come to power and he considered that this would be a positive event. 'It is precisely this fact which will lead to an exacerbation of the internal situation in the capitalist countries and to the workers coming out in favour of revolution.' (Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. 10, p. 49)

Stalin supported the Nazis. Zealous Stalinists, such as Herman Remmele, who was a member of the Politburo of the German Communist Party, was quite open in his support of the Nazis, then eager for power. The part which Stalin played in the Nazis' seizure of power in Germany was considerable. As Leon Trotsky said in 1936: 'Without Stalin there would have been no Hitler, there would have been no Gestapo!' (*Bulletin of the Opposition (BO)*, Nos. 52-53, October 1936) Another statement he made in November 1938 reveals Trotsky's shrewdness and his knowledge of the point at issue. 'Stalin finally untied Hitler's hands, as well as those of his enemies, and thereby pushed Europe towards war.' He said this at a time when Chamberlain was rejoicing that there would be no war, Mussolini was regarding himself as a peacemaker and Hitler still had no intention of issuing a directive to attack Poland, even less France. At the moment when Europe was heaving a sigh of relief in the belief that there would be no war, Trotsky already knew both that war would quickly come and who would be to blame for it.

On 21 June 1939, intensive negotiations directed against Germany were then taking place between Britain, France and the Soviet Union. There was nothing to indicate that any surprises or complications might possibly be in store. 'The Soviet Union,' Trotsky said at the time, 'will move up to the German frontiers in all its massed strength just at the moment when the Third Reich becomes involved in the conflict for a new repartition of the world.' And indeed it was to happen precisely like that. Germany would fight in France, while Stalin, 'with all his massed strength', would crush the neutral countries on his western frontiers, thereby bringing himself nearer to the German border. On that same day of 21 June 1939 Trotsky made an even more extraordinary prophecy — that in autumn 1939 Poland would be occupied and that Germany intended to attack the Soviet Union in autumn 1941.

Trotsky made one minor error in being only a few months out as to when the war would begin against the Soviet Union. We shall see later that Stalin also made the same mistake.

Today, when we read some fifty years later the general pronouncements and predictions which Trotsky made, we can appreciate their accuracy. But this raises the question, how did he know all this? There is nothing secret about Trotsky. He had been one of the leaders of the communist *coup d'etat*. He was the creator of the Red Army and its leader. He had been the Soviet representative at the



negotiations in Brest-Litovsk. He was the first head of Soviet diplomacy. He was, along with Lenin, a recognized leader of the Soviet Union and leader of the world revolution. So he already knew very well what communism was, what the Red Army was and who Stalin was. Trotsky said that all his predictions were based on overt Soviet publications and in particular on the statements of George Dimitrov, the secretary of the Comintern.

Trotsky was the first person to understand Stalin's game, which was not understood by Western leaders, nor in the beginning even by Hitler. The game was quite simple. Trotsky himself became its victim and for that reason understood it. Working in league with Zinoviev and Kamenev, Stalin, creating a new group to activate prejudice against his fellow-revolutionary, removed Trotsky from power. Next, working in league with Bukharin, Stalin removed Zinoviev and Kamenev. Then Stalin kicked out Bukharin as well. Stalin followed this up by using Henrik Yagoda to remove Felix Dzerzhinsky's generation of Chekists. Then, using Nikolai Yezhov as leverage, he discarded Henrik Yagoda and his generation in their turn. With the help of Lavrenty Beria, Stalin finally ousted Yezhov and his generation. Stalin continued to play the same game in the international arena and Trotsky saw this too. For Stalin, German Nazism was an instrument which would break a path for the revolution through the solid ice - an icebreaker. German Nazism could begin the war and the war would lead to revolution. Let the icebreaker break Europe! Hitler could do what it did not suit Stalin to do. Stalin stated in 1927 that the second imperialist war was quite unavoidable, just as unavoidable, in fact, as the entry of the Soviet Union into that war. However, he did not want to take part in it himself from the first day. 'We shall move, but we shall be the last to move, in order to throw our weight on to the scales and tip the balance.' (Stalin, Vol. 7, p. 14)

In Europe Stalin needed crises, wars, destruction and hunger. Hitler could achieve all this for him. The more crimes Hitler committed in Europe, the better it would be for Stalin and the more reason he would have one day to send the Red Army into Europe as her liberator. Trotsky understood all this before the Second World War began and before Hitler became Chancellor. 'Let them come to power,' said Trotsky in 1932, explaining what Stalin's attitude was to the German Nazis, 'let them compromise themselves, and then ...'

From 1927 onwards, Stalin made every effort to support the Nazis who were then striving for power, although he did not of course do so publicly. After 1933, Stalin would do everything possible to push the Nazis towards war. When they entered the war, Stalin would order communists living in democratic countries temporarily to become pacifists, to demoralize the armed forces of the Western countries, to open the way for the Nazis and to capitulate to them with demands that the 'imperialist war' should be stopped, while at the same time undermining the war effort of their own countries and governments.

When he moved his icebreaker - German Nazism - against democratic Europe, Stalin had already passed the death sentence on it. Stalin had been planning to liquidate the Nazis for five years before they took over in Germany. 'Smash fascism, overthrow capitalism, establish Soviet power and free the colonies from slavery.' (Stalin, *Sochineniya*, Vol. n, p. 202)

Fascism was the hangman of Europe. Stalin supported the hangman, but even before the hangman had begun his work, Stalin had prepared the same fate for the hangman as awaited the hangman's victims.

## CHAPTER 3

### Why Arms for the Communists?

*The people perish for want of steel.*

Gounod's *Faust*

In 1933, the German colonel (later general) Heinz Guderian visited a Soviet locomotive engineering works at Kharkov. Guderian saw that, in addition to locomotives, the yard was producing tanks as a side product. The tanks were being produced at the rate of 22 a day.

When assessing the output of side products at one Soviet plant in peacetime, it must be remembered that in 1933 Germany was producing no tanks at all. In 1939, Hitler came into the Second World War with 3,195 tanks, that is, less than the Kharkov locomotive engineering works, working on a peacetime footing, produced in six months. When assessing the significance of an output of 22 tanks a day, it must also be borne in mind that in 1940, even after the Second World War had begun, the United States had *in all* only about 400 tanks.

What of the quality of the tanks which Guderian saw at the Kharkov engineering works? They were tanks which had been created by that American tank genius, J. W. Christie. Nobody, apart from the Soviet tank makers, appreciated Christie's achievements. One of Christie's American tanks was bought in the United States and sent to the Soviet Union under false documentation; the tank was described as an agricultural tractor. The 'tractor' was then produced in large numbers in the Soviet Union as a Mark BT - initials for the Russian words 'high-speed tank'. The first Mark BTs had a speed of 100 kilometres per hour. In the present day, there is not a tank crew anywhere which would not envy such a speed.

The shape of the hull of the Mark BT tank was simple and efficient. No tank at that time, not even those being produced for the United States Army, had a similar form of armament. The best tank in operation during the Second World War was the T34, a direct descendant of the Mark BT. The shape of its hull was a further development of the ideas of the great American tank builder. The principle of mounting its front armour plating in a sloping position was used, after the T34, on the German Panzer tank and then on all other tanks subsequently produced elsewhere in the world.

In the 1930s, practically all tanks in all tank-producing countries were designed and produced with the engine at the rear and the transmission system at the front. The Mark BT was an exception to this rule. The engine and the transmission system were both in the rear. It would take another quarter-century before the rest of the world understood the advantages of this structure.

The Mark BT tanks were continuously being improved. Their radius of action on one fuelling was increased to 700 kilometres. Fifty years later this is still a dream for the majority of tank crews. In 1936, Mark BT tanks produced in series were fording deep rivers underwater and along the river beds. Even now, at the end of the twentieth century, not all tanks used by the probable enemies of the Soviet Union have the same capability. Installation of diesel engines on the Mark BT tanks began in 1938. This was done elsewhere only ten or twenty years later. Finally, the Mark BT tank carried a weapons system which was very powerful for that time.

Having said so many positive things about the numbers and quality of Soviet tanks, one must note one minor drawback. It was impossible to use these tanks on Soviet territory.

The basic characteristic of the Mark BT tank was its speed. The quality so dominated all its other characteristics that it was even used in the name it was given.

The Mark BT is an aggressor tank. In all its characteristics, it is remarkably similar to the small but completely mobile cavalry warrior who emerged from the countless hordes of Genghis Khan. This great world conqueror vanquished all his enemies by delivering lightning strikes with great masses of exclusively mobile troops. Genghis Khan destroyed his enemies not, in the main, by force of arms, but by swift manoeuvre in depth. Genghis Khan did not need slow, sluggish knights, but hordes of light, fast-moving troops, capable of covering vast distances, fording rivers and moving deep into the rear of enemy territory.

That was just what the Mark BT tanks were like. By 1 September 1939, more of them had been produced than any other tank of any other type by any other country anywhere else in the world. The mobility, speed and radius of action were bought at the price of lighter and less thick, though still efficient armour. Mark BT tanks could only be used in an aggressive war, only in the rear of the enemy and only in a swift offensive operation, in which masses of tanks suddenly burst into enemy territory, bypassing his centres of resistance and racing into the depth of his heartland, where there were no enemy troops, but where his towns, bridges, factories, aerodromes, ports, depots, command posts and communications centres were situated.

The strikingly belligerent qualities of the Mark BT tank were also achieved by means of using a unique system of tracks and suspension. On unmade roads, the Mark BT operated on heavy caterpillar tracks, but once on a good road, the tracks were discarded and it then shot ahead on wheels, like a racing car. It is, however, well known that speed is not compatible with crosscountry performance. The choice is therefore between, on the one hand, a high-speed car which will go only on good roads, or on the other, a

slow-moving tractor, which will go anywhere. The Soviet marshals favoured the high-speed car. Thus, the Mark BT tanks were quite powerless on Soviet territory. When Hitler began Operation Barbarossa, practically all the Mark BT tanks were cast aside. It was almost impossible to use them off the roads, even with caterpillar tracks. They were never used on wheels. The potential of these tanks was never realized, but it certainly could never have been realized on Soviet territory. The Mark BT was created to operate on foreign territory only and, what is more, only on territory where there were good roads, as already observed.

Let us glance at the Soviet Union's neighbours. Then, as now, there were no good roads in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Mongolia, Manchuria, or Northern Korea. Zhukov used Mark BT tanks in Mongolia, where the terrain is as flat as a billiard table. However, he used them only with caterpillar tracks and was dissatisfied with them. Off the roads, the tank tracks often raced round without gripping the surface, while the wheels, because of the comparatively great pressure they had to bear, whether they were off the road or even on unmade roads, simply spun round and sank into the earth while the tank remained stationary.

To the question, where could the enormous potential of these Mark B T tanks be successfully realized, there is only one answer: in central and southern Europe. The only territories where tanks could be used, *after* their caterpillar tracks were removed, were Germany, France and Belgium. To the question as to which is more important for the Mark BT tanks, the wheels or the caterpillar tracks, Soviet textbooks of that period give a clear-cut answer: the wheels. The most important characteristic of the MarkBT, speed, is attained on wheels. Caterpillar tracks are only a means for reaching foreign territory. For instance, Poland could be crossed on caterpillar tracks which, once the German auto-bahns had been reached, could then be discarded in favour of wheels, on which operations would then proceed. Caterpillar tracks were regarded as an auxiliary device which was supposed to be used only once in war, then to be discarded and forgotten. It is exactly like the parachutist who uses his parachute for the sole purpose of landing in enemy territory. Once there, he throws the parachute away so that he can operate without being burdened by a heavy load which he no longer needs. It was precisely this attitude which was adopted towards caterpillar tracks. Those Soviet divisions and army corps which were equipped with Mark BT tanks did not have on their complement any vehicles whose purpose it was to recover the caterpillar tracks which had been thrown away and bring them back. After the Mark BT tanks had discarded their tracks, they had to finish the war on wheels.

Some types of Soviet tanks were named after communist leaders, like the 'KV', for Klim Voroshilov,<sup>3</sup> and the 'JS', for Joseph Stalin. Most Soviet tanks, however, were given a designation which contained the index letter 'T'. Sometimes, in addition to 'T', the index

---

<sup>3</sup> Voroshilov was first a Marshal of the Soviet Union, one of Stalin's closest allies; he later became Chairman of the Supreme Soviet.

included the letter 'O' (which stands for the Russian word for 'flame-throwing'), 'B' (the initial letter of the Russian word for 'high speed') or 'P' (indicating 'amphibious'<sup>4</sup>).

Then in 1938, the Soviet Union began to work intensively on the production of a tank which bore the highly unusual index number of A-2O. What does 'A' mean? There is not one Soviet textbook which gives the answer to this question and to date it remains undeciphered by many experts. For a long time I sought an answer and finally found it at Factory No. 183. This plant produced locomotives, but had other, less 'peaceful' production on the go at the same time. People with great experience at this plant say that the original meaning of the index letter 'A' in this case stood for '*Autostradnyi*' — motorway. Personally I find this explanation convincing. The Mark A-20 tank was the latest development in the Mark BT family. The main characteristic of the Mark BT figured in its name, so why should the main characteristic of the Mark A-2O not be expressed in the same way? The purpose, I suggest, of the Mark A-20 was to reach the motorways on its caterpillar tracks and, once there, to discard the tracks, and convert itself into the king of speed.

At the end of the twentieth century the Soviet Union does not have one kilometre of highway which can be even remotely described as a motorway. Fifty years ago, and for long after that, there were no motorways in Soviet territory. Nor were there motorways in any of the countries which bordered the Soviet Union in 1938. One year later, however, in 1939, Stalin partitioned Poland under the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and thereby established a common frontier with a country which *did* have motorways. That country was Germany.

It is said that Stalin's tanks were not ready for war. That was not so. They were not ready for a *defensive* war on their own territory. They were, however, designed to wage war on others.

As it was for Soviet tanks, so it was for Soviet aircraft in both quality and numbers. Communist falsifiers of the facts say nowadays that the Soviet Union did of course have many aircraft, but the majority were inferior. They were obsolete planes and they therefore could be disregarded. Let us consider only the contemporary Soviet aircraft - the MIG-3, the Y A K-1, the PE-2, the IL-2; in doing so we shall in no way find ourselves discussing antiquated flying machines.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Soviet Union was the only country in the world which produced amphibious tanks in massive numbers. In a defensive war, there is no need for a tank to pass over water. Therefore, when Hitler set Operation Barbarossa in motion, Soviet amphibious tanks had to be discarded because they were unsuitable for defensive warfare. Their production, like the production of the Mark BT tanks, stopped immediately.

Alfred Price was a British airman who, throughout his lifetime, flew 45 types of aircraft and logged more than 4,000 flying hours. This is what he thought of these 'antiquated flying machines':

The most heavily armed fighter in service in September 1939 was the Russian Polikarpov I-16, a progressive development of an aircraft which had first entered service in 1934 and fought in the Spanish Civil War ... In terms of armament. . . it had never been surpassed. The I-16 Type 17, which appeared in 1938, carried two synchronized 7.62 ShKAS machine guns on top of the engine cowling and two 20mm ShVAK cannon in the wings. The ShKAS had a rate of fire of 1,600 rounds per minute after synchronization and a muzzle velocity of 2,700 feet per second; the ShVAK had a rate of fire of 800 rounds per minute and a muzzle velocity of 2,600 feet per second. In both cases these figures were better than those for any comparable weapon and they conferred upon the Type 17 a weight of fire of more than double that of the Messerschmitt 109E-I and nearly three times that of the Spitfire. The hefty punch of this tubby Russian fighter was years ahead of its time . . . Those who believe that the Russians were backward peasants prior to the Second World War and advanced after it only because they were able to make use of German expertise might care to ponder these points. (Alfred Price, *World War II Fighter Conflict*, London 1975; pp. 18-21)

To this it must be added that in August 1939, Soviet fighters were the first aircraft in the world to use rockets as armaments in combat conditions. What is more, Soviet aircraft builders had created a plane, unique in the world, which had an armoured fuselage. The IL-2 was virtually a flying tank, with super-high-powered weaponry by any standard, including eight heavy rocket shells.

What does all this mean? Why was it that from the very first day of the war the Soviet Air Force yielded mastery in the air to the enemy? The answer is simple. Most Soviet pilots, including fighter pilots, had not been trained to fight air battles. So what had they been trained to do? They had been trained to strike at ground targets. The regulations of the Soviet fighter and bomber Air Force (BUIA-40 and BUBA-40) pointed Soviet pilots towards staging one grandiose, lightning offensive operation, in which the air force would catch the enemy air force napping with one blow and seize supremacy of the air. Even in 1929, the Soviet magazine, *War and Revolution*, published a basic article entitled 'The Initial Period of War'. This drew the conclusion, to be repeated in Soviet Air Force regulations, including those of 1940 and 1941, that 'it is highly advantageous to take the initiative and be first to attack the enemy. Once the air force has taken the initiative in attacking the airfields and hangars of the enemy, it can then count upon having supremacy in the air.' (*War and Revolution*, No. 9, pp. 19-20 (1929)) The Soviet air theoreticians did not have in mind some general enemy, but a clearly defined one. Alexander Lapchinsky, the chief Soviet air strategist, illustrated his books with very detailed maps of standard bombing targets. These included the railway junction at Leipzig, at the Friedrichstrasse in Berlin and its railway station, and other

such places. In explaining how Soviet territory had to be defended, Lapchinsky said 'a determined ground attack attracts enemy air forces towards itself like a magnet and serves as the best means of defending the country from them. The air defence of the country is not a manoeuvre from depth, but a manoeuvre into depth.' (*Vozdushnaya Armiya*, Alexander Lapchinsky, Moscow 1939; pp. 176-7) It was precisely for this purpose in 1941 that the entire Soviet Air Force was concentrated on the very frontiers of the country. For example, the field aerodrome of the 123rd Fighter Regiment was only two kilometres from the German frontier. In battle conditions an aircraft, in order to save fuel, takes off towards the enemy. Aircraft of the 123rd Regiment, like many others, were thus compelled to gain height after takeoff by flying over German territory.

Both during the war and after it, the Soviet Union built quite a few aircraft which were, at the same time, excellent and surprisingly simple. The greatest achievements of the Soviet Air Force, however, were not in building aircraft which would destroy enemy planes in the air. They lay in the building of aircraft which would destroy planes and other enemy targets on the ground. The IL-2 was in just such a category. Airfields were its most important targets. When he had created this aggressor aircraft, Sergei Ilyushin stipulated one minor defensive detail. The first model of the IL-2 had two seats. From one, the pilot flew the aircraft and attacked his targets, while seated behind him in the other the air gunner protected the rear of the aircraft from enemy fighter attack. Stalin personally telephoned Ilyushin and ordered him to discard the rear gunner and his machine gun, and to produce the IL-2 as a one-seater aircraft. Stalin, it seemed, needed the IL-2 for a situation in which not one enemy fighter would succeed in taking off. After Operation Barbarossa had been launched, Stalin rang up Ilyushin again and ordered him to produce the IL-2 as a two-seater aircraft, as before. In a defensive war even aggressor aircraft need to have some defensive armaments.

1927 was the year when Stalin took his place, finally and permanently, at the summit of power. From then onwards, he concentrated his attention not only on consolidating his dictatorship, but also on the problems of the whole communist movement and world revolution.

1927 was the year in which Stalin finally drew the conclusion that the Second World War was inevitable; that there had to be a decisive conflict with social democratic pacifism which was delaying its start; and that the Nazis, striving for power, had first to be supported and then destroyed.

The same year also marked the beginning of the industrialization of the Soviet Union. This was done through a series of five-year plans, the first of which began in 1927.



When the first five-year plan began, the Red Army had 92 tanks. When the plan was completed, it had more than 4,000. Even so, the military bias in the first five-year plan was not very noticeable. Most attention was paid to the industrial base which was to be created and which would subsequently produce arms, rather than to arms *per se*.

The second five-year plan continued the development of the industrial base. It produced coke ovens and open-hearth furnaces, great electrical power stations and oxygen plants, rolling and blooming mills, mines and pits. The production of arms was not yet the important issue. Even so, Stalin was not losing sight of it. 24,708 military aircraft were produced during the first two five-year plans.

Then came the third five-year plan, which should have been completed in 1942. This was the plan to turn out actual military products in enormous quantities and of very high quality.

Industrialization was bought at a high price, however. Stalin let the standard of living of the populace fall to a very low level. Vast reserves of gold, platinum and diamonds were sold to foreign markets. Churches and monasteries, imperial repositories and museums, were pillaged. Icons and valuable books were put on the foreign market. Paintings by the great masters of the Renaissance, collections of cut diamonds, and treasures from museums and libraries were all given over to export. Similarly, Stalin forced timber and coal, nickel and manganese, oil, cotton, caviar, furs, grain and much more on to the export market.

Then, in 1930, he began his notorious collectivization programme. The peasants were driven by force into collective farms, so that all their crops could be taken from them without payment. In communist jargon this was called 'transferring resources from agriculture to heavy industry'. The result of collectivization and the hunger which followed it was ten to sixteen million dead. Stalin, meanwhile, went on, throughout this period, selling five million tons of grain every year abroad.

Why was collectivization needed? For industrialization. Why industrialization? Not, in any way, to raise the standard of living of the nation. Life during the NEP, and before industrialization and collectivization, had been perfectly tolerable. Had Stalin been interested in the standard of living of the people, then he needed neither industrialization nor collectivization. He needed simply to preserve the NEP. Living standards now, however, reached an awesomely low level. Robert Conquest has recently published a book, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (1987), on these fearsome five-year plans, complete with pictures showing skeleton-like children. They portray a situation as bad as, if not worse than, those we have witnessed in communist Ethiopia or Pol Pot's Cambodia in recent times.

Industrialization and collectivization were intended to produce arms in vast quantities. Why did the communists want arms? To defend the people? The answer is no. If Stalin had sold only four million tons of grain a year instead of five for his motorway tanks, parachute silk and Western military technology, millions of children would not have died. Weapons are used in all countries to defend the population from appalling calamities - above all, their children, who are a nation's future. In the Soviet Union, it was the other way

round. In order to obtain arms, the populace, children included, were subjected to fearful disaster. Just one statistic will serve to underline its scale. In World War I Russia lost in all 2.3 million people. In *peacetime*, however, Stalin was responsible for the destruction of approximately five to seven times more people for the sake of acquiring motorway tanks and offensive aircraft. The communist turned out to be many times more terrible than the imperialist war.

The growth in Soviet military might was in no way dictated by an external threat, for it began before Hitler came to power. The annihilation of millions of children for the sake of obtaining armaments was going on whilst Stalin was making strenuous efforts to suppress western pacifists and at the same time raising up the Nazis. It may be objected that while Stalin sacrificed millions of people, he nevertheless created arms to defend the survivors. This is not valid. We have already seen, and shall see again, that the arms created were in no way suitable for the defence of his territory nor the protection of his people; indeed, he would be compelled either to use them in a way for which they were not intended, or to discard them altogether.

For precisely what, then, were these vast arsenals of arms intended, if not for the defence of the Soviet territory or populace?

## CHAPTER 4

# Why Stalin Partitioned Poland

*We are doing something which, if it succeeds, will  
overturn the whole world and liberate the entire  
working class.*

STALIN (*Sochineniya*, Vol. 13, p. 41)

On 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany suddenly attacked the Soviet Union. That is a historical fact. It is, however, a very strange fact. Before the Second World War, Germany did not have a common frontier with the Soviet Union. Consequently, Germany could not then have *made* an attack, still less a sudden one.

Germany and the Soviet Union had been separated by an uninterrupted buffer of neutral states. Before a Soviet—German war could take place, one condition above all others was necessary. The buffer of neutral states had to be destroyed. But who exactly destroyed this buffer; and why?

The buffer between Germany and the Soviet Union consisted for most of its length of at least two countries. Only at one point was it formed by one country: Poland. Poland was the shortest, most direct, most level and most convenient route lying between the Soviet Union and Germany. It was the narrowest part of the dividing wall. It is not hard to understand that it is precisely through here that any potential aggressor, intent on a Soviet—German war, would have to try to force a corridor. On the other hand, if either the Soviet Union or Germany did not want such a war, they would have to use all the strength of their armed forces, all of their national wisdom and all the force of their international authority to keep the enemy off Polish territory. If the worst came to the worst, war would have to be waged in Poland itself, so as to prevent an approach towards either frontier.

Hitler had declared his warlike intentions quite openly. Stalin was quick to call him publicly, a cannibal. Hitler of course could not attack Stalin, since they did not share a common frontier. So Hitler proposed to

Stalin that they make a joint effort to breach the wall that divided them. Stalin accepted this proposal with delight. He knocked down the Polish wall with enormous enthusiasm and forced a corridor in Hitler's direction. Hitler's motives towards Poland, as laid out in *Mein Kampf*, are understandable. But how can Stalin's actions be explained?

The first explanation, according to Soviet propagandists, is that, after having torn Poland to pieces and drowned it in blood, USSR moved her frontier westwards, that is, strengthened her security. This is a strange explanation. The Soviet frontier was indeed moved westwards by 200-300 kilometres, but at the same time Germany moved its frontier some 300-400 kilometres eastwards. As a result of this, the security of the Soviet Union was not enhanced; on the contrary, it was diminished. But this apart, there was an entirely new factor. This was the common Soviet-German frontier and hence the direct possibility of war, including a war of surprise attack.

The second explanation is that by stabbing Poland in the back at a time when she was engaged in a desperate struggle with the Nazis, USSR tried to *delay* the outbreak of the Soviet—German war. This is like saying that USSR started a fire in her neighbour's house in the expectation that it would not spread to hers.

The third explanation is that the unwillingness of France and Britain to sign a treaty with the USSR left Stalin with no option but to come to terms with Hitler. But why should France and Britain defend the Soviet Union, when the Soviet Union had proclaimed that its main aim was to overthrow democracy everywhere, including in France and Britain? The West did not care whether Hitler went east or not. The countries of Eastern Europe certainly did. If Hitler turned eastwards, they would be his first victims. Therefore the Eastern European countries were the natural allies of the Soviet Union. An alliance should be sought with them against Hitler. But Stalin did not seek such alliances. In cases where treaties did exist, the Soviet Union did not carry out her obligations. Stalin could have remained neutral, but chose instead to stab in the back those countries engaged in a struggle with fascism.

Once he had forced a corridor through the dividing wall, Hitler thought that he had done enough. He then turned his attentions to Western Europe, Africa, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. What ought Stalin to

have done, faced as he was with a breach in the wall some 570 kilometres wide and time in hand? He should have hastily reinforced his defences. The old frontier was a powerful line of fortified regions. It should have been strengthened and improved without delay. In addition to this, a second line of defence should have been built, and a third, and a fifth, and more. Mines should have been laid at once on roads, on bridges and in fields. Anti-tank ditches should have been dug and given anti-tank artillery cover. But none of this happened. Some time later, in 1943, the Red Army was preparing to repel an enemy attack in the Kursk Salient. Within a short period of time, Soviet troops succeeded in creating six continuous defensive strips - one behind the other - on a vast front, to a total depth of 250-300 kilometres. Each kilometre was saturated with trenches, dugouts, communication trenches, concealment shelters and gun positions. The average density of anti-tank and anti-infantry mines per kilometre was as high as 7,000, while the density of anti-tank weaponry reached the exceptionally high level of 41 guns in every kilometre, not counting field and anti-aircraft artillery, and tanks, dug into the ground. Thus a truly impenetrable defence was set up from scratch in a very short space of time in the open field.

In 1939 conditions which favoured defence were considerably better than in 1943. There were impassable forests, rivers and marshes. There were few roads and a lot of time. Nevertheless, at that moment the Soviet Union stopped producing anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. Instead of rendering the area impassable, it was immediately made more passable. Roads and bridges were built in it, and the railway network was extended, strengthened and improved. Previously existing fortifications were demolished and covered with earth.

Ilya Starinov, a GRU colonel involved in this process, described what he saw:

The situation was becoming absurd. When we were faced by weak armies of comparatively small countries, our frontiers were really well and truly safe. When Nazi Germany became our neighbour the defensive installations put up by the engineers along the former frontier were abandoned and even partially dismantled. (I. Starinov, *Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, p. 186)

The military engineering directorate of the Red Army indented for 120,000 delayed-action railway mines. In the event of an invasion by the German Army, this quantity would have been quite sufficient to paralyse the

entire railway network behind enemy lines, upon which the Germans would have been totally dependent. But instead of the number of mines ordered, only 120 arrived. (Starinov, *op. cit.*) Yet the mine is a very simple, very cheap and very effective weapon. The production of mines in the Soviet Union was enormous, but it was curtailed after the passage had been forced through the wall.

One breach in the wall was enough for Hitler. It was not enough for Stalin. Hitler, with Stalin's help, destroyed the authority of the state in only one country forming part of the dividing buffer. Stalin, without anybody's help, achieved this in three other countries, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, attempted to do the same in a fourth, Finland, and actively prepared to repeat the performance in a fifth country, Romania, after having seized a vast tract of Romanian territory. Only ten months after the 'non-aggression' pact was signed and by Stalin's own efforts, the dividing buffer from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea had been completely shattered. There no longer remained any neutral countries between Stalin and Hitler and thereby the conditions needed for attack were created.

During this short space of time, all of Stalin's western neighbours had become his victims. The appearance of Soviet troops in Lithuania meant that they had moved on to the real German frontier. Previously, the Soviet-German border passed through Polish-occupied territory. Now, Soviet troops had moved on to the frontier with East Prussia.

Communist historians have tried, though without any success, to devise answers to the question as to why Stalin agreed to help Hitler force a corridor through Poland. The question as to why Stalin smashed the entire buffer is one which they prefer not to raise. But Stalin himself gave a clear and precise answer to *that* unasked question:

History states [wrote Stalin] that when one country wants to go to war with another, even one which is not a neighbour, then it begins to seek frontiers across which it would be able to reach the frontiers of the countries it wishes to attack. (*Pravda*, 5 March 1936)

Did the Red Army intend to stop on the borders once it had reached them?

Here is S. K. Timoshenko, Marshal of the Soviet Union, on the subject:

In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the power of the landowners and capitalists, so hateful to the workers, has been abolished. The Soviet Union has grown significantly and has moved its frontiers westwards. The capitalist world has been compelled to yield and give ground. But it is not for us fighters of the Red Army to give ourselves airs or rest on our laurels! (*Order of the People's Commissar of Defence*, No. 400, 7 November 1940)

This is neither a speech nor a Tass report. It is an order of the Red Army. To the west of the Soviet borders lay only Germany and countries allied to her. Could the frontiers be moved further westward, at the expense of Germany?

## CHAPTER 5

### The Pact and its Results

*Stalin was more cunning than Hitler, more cunning  
and more perfidious.*

ANTON ANTONOV-OVSEENKO

*(The Portrait of a Tyrant, New York 1980; p.  
296)*

Outwardly everything seemed equitable, a part of Poland for Hitler and a part for Stalin. However, just one week after the signing of the Pact, Stalin played his first dirty trick. Hitler began the war against Poland, while Stalin stated that his troops were not yet ready. He could have told Ribbentrop that before the Pact was signed, but he did not do so.<sup>5</sup> Hitler began the war and found himself on his own. The result? He, and he alone, was branded the perpetrator of the Second World War.

Once he had begun the war against Poland, Hitler immediately found himself at war with France, that is, at war on two fronts. Every German schoolboy knew how a war on two fronts would turn out in the end for Germany.

Britain at once declared war on Germany. France could be dealt with, but Britain was an island. In order to reach it, long and serious preparations were necessary. A powerful fleet, roughly equal in strength to the Royal Navy, was also needed, as well as supremacy in the air. The war was thus already changing into what would become a long, drawn-out conflict.

Standing behind Britain was the United States which could, as it did in World War I, throw its inexhaustible power on to the scales at the most vital moment. The whole of the West became Hitler's enemy.

---

<sup>5</sup> Known as the 'Non-Aggression Pact', which, by dividing Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany, was instrumental in the start of World War II.



Hitler could count on Stalin's friendship only so long as he was in a position of strength. In a protracted war against the West, Stalin would, of course, be obliged to dissipate this strength.

As far as Stalin was concerned, Poland had been partitioned, not in the Chancellery in Berlin, but in the Kremlin in Moscow. In effect, Stalin got the war he wanted, with a western nation destroying others around it, while Stalin remained neutral, biding his time. When, later, he got into serious difficulties, Stalin at once received help from the West.

In the end, however, Poland, for whose liberty the West had gone to war, ended up with none at all. On the contrary, she was handed over to Stalin, along with the whole of Eastern Europe, including a part of Germany. Even so, there are some people in the West who continue to believe that the West won the Second World War.

Hitler committed suicide; Stalin became the absolute ruler of a vast empire hostile to the West, which had been created with the *help* of the West. For all that, Stalin was able to preserve his reputation as naive and trusting, while Hitler went down in history as the ultimate aggressor. A multitude of books have been published in the West based on the idea that Stalin was not ready for war while Hitler was. In my view, the man who is ready for war is not the one who loudly proclaims himself prepared for it, but the man who wins it — by dividing his enemies and knocking their heads together.

Did Stalin intend to observe the Pact? Let Stalin speak:

The question of conflict must not be considered from the point of view of justice, but from the point of view of the demands of the political factor, from the point of view of the political demands of the Party at any given moment. (Speech to a session of the executive committee of the Comintern, 22 January 1926)

War can turn each and every agreement upside down. (Pravda, 15 September 1927)

The Party, in congresses at which Stalin spoke, correctly understood its leaders and gave them the appropriate, full authority:

The Congress stresses in particular that the Central Committee is given full powers at any moment to break all alliances and peace treaties with imperialist and bourgeois states and equally to declare war on them. (Resolution of the 7th Party Congress)

Incidentally, this Party decision has never been rescinded.

According to Stalin, 'A great deal depends upon whether we succeed in delaying the war, which is unavoidable, with the capitalist world, until that moment when the capitalists start fighting among themselves.' (*Sochineniya*, Vol. 10, p. 288) And: "The decisive battle can be considered imminent when all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled with each other, when they are fighting sufficiently with each other, and when they have weakened each other sufficiently for the conflict to be beyond their strength.' (*Sochineniya*, Vol. 6, P- 158)

Stalin needed a situation in which 'the capitalists will fight each other like dogs'. (*Pravda*, 14 May 1939) The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact created just that situation. Quotations like these could be glimpsed in *Pravda*: 'Not only must they be taken by the throat, they must be destroyed.' (Marx, Vol. 2, p. 343) *Pravda* was transported with delight. The foundations of the earth are trembling,' it wrote. 'The ground slips from under the feet of peoples and nations. Glows are afire in the sky and the thunder of guns shakes seas and continents. Powers and states are blown away just like chaff in the wind. How excellent it is, how extraordinarily wonderful, when the world is shaken to its very foundations, when powers perish and greatness falls.' (*Pravda*, 4 August 1940) 'Every such war brings us closer to that happy time when murders among the people will no longer happen. (*Pravda*, 18 August 1940)

These sentiments spread from the very top down through the ranks of the Red Army and the Party. Lieutenant-General S. Krivoshein described a conversation he had with Peter Latyshev, his deputy. Krivoshein was commanding the 25th Mechanized Corps at the time. Shortly before, he had been in charge, along with

General Guderian, of the joint Nazi-Soviet parade in Brest-Litovsk to mark the partition of Poland. 'We have concluded a treaty with the Germans', he said, 'but this means nothing. Now is the most wonderful time to solve all world problems once and for all, and in a constructive way.' (*Ratnaya ByV*, Molodaya Gvardiya, 1962, p. 8) Krivoshein turned everything into a joke after the event. It is interesting that jokes of this kind were circulating in his Corps and indeed throughout the Red Army. Nobody seriously discussed whether the Corps and the entire Red Army had been prepared for defence.

Leonid Brezhnev himself has spoken of the way in which Soviet communists believed in the Non-Aggression Pact and the manner in which they intended to observe it. He described a meeting of Party agitators which was held in Dnepropetrovsk in 1940:

'Comrade Brezhnev, we have to interpret non-aggression and say that it has to be taken seriously, and that anyone who does not believe in it is talking provocation. But people have little faith in it. So what are we to do? Do we go on interpreting it or not?'

It was quite a delicate moment. There were 400 people sitting in the hall, all waiting for me to answer. I had very little time to think.

'You have got to go on interpreting it,' I said, 'and we shall go on interpreting it until not one stone of Nazi Germany remains upon another.' (Leonid Brezhnev, *Malaya Zemlya*, Moscow, 1978, p. 16)

It occurred to Stalin that the situation in which 'not one stone of Nazi Germany remains upon another' would come about in 1942. But the rapid fall of France and Hitler's refusal to land in Britain (Soviet military intelligence knew about this at the end of 1940) rearranged all the cards which Stalin held in his hand. The liberation of Europe was brought forward from the summer of 1942 to the summer of 1941. The new year of 1941 was therefore greeted with the slogan, 'Let us increase the numbers of republics in the Soviet Union!'

Wielding our spades, in Forty-One, we'll find  
The wealth of Earth, which lies in virgin layers;  
Uranium, by cyclatron enlivened,

Becomes a simple fuel for every day.  
Each year for us is victory, a battle,  
For coal, for sweeps of metallurgy galore,  
To sixteen coats of arms, perhaps, are added,  
New coats of arms-of these will have still more . . .  
(*Pravda*, 1 January 1941)

They were not thinking about defence. They were not preparing for it, nor had they any intention of preparing for it. They were fully aware that Germany was already at war in the West and for that reason would not begin a war in the East. They knew full well that war on two fronts would be suicide for Hitler.

On no occasion before the war did *Pravda* ever call on the Soviet people to strengthen its *defences*. Indeed, *Pravda's* tone was quite different:

Our country is large; the globe must revolve for nine hours before the whole of our vast Soviet land can enter the new year of our victories. The time will come when not nine hours, but all the twenty-four hours on the clock will be needed for this to happen . . . Who knows where we shall be greeting the new year in five or ten years' time - in what latitude, on what new Soviet meridian? (*Pravda*, 1 January 1941)

The nearer the date of the Soviet invasion of Europe approached - July 1941 - the more explicit *Pravda* became:

Divide our enemies, meet the demands of each of them temporarily and then destroy them one at a time, giving them no opportunity to unite. (*Pravda*, 4 March 1941)

Hitler decided that it was not worth his while waiting any longer. He was the first to go, without waiting for the blow of the 'liberating' dagger to stab him in the back. He had begun the war in the most favourable

conditions which could possibly have existed for an aggressor; but given the nature of Stalin's grand plan, he could never have won it. Even in the most unfavourable conditions, the Red Army was able to 'liberate' half of Europe and has held it in subjugation to this day. We must wonder how would it have turned out had the best German forces left the Continent in the early stages of the war to go off to Africa and the British Isles, leaving the Red Army to move in behind their backs to destroy Germany's only source of oil.

## CHAPTER 6

### When Did the Soviet Union Enter World War II?

*In the event of a general conflict, only one country  
can win. That country is the Soviet Union.*

HITLER, 1937 (In conversation  
with Lord Halifax, Obersalzberg,  
19 November 1937)

Everything in the Soviet Union relating to the beginning of World War II is concealed by the impenetrable darkness of state secrecy. Among the many secrets is one which is especially well kept: the date on which the Soviet Union entered the war.

In order to conceal the truth, communist propaganda has put about the false date of 22 June 1941. Communist writers have thought up a multitude of legends about 22 June. I have even heard it said that the USSR was bent on a 'peaceful' life when it was set upon. If the inventions of Soviet propaganda are to be believed, the Soviet Union did not enter World War II of its own volition, but was forcibly dragged into it.

In order to make this sound plausible, Soviet propaganda has been compelled to buttress this date with special props. On the one hand, the 'pre-war period' was devised to include the two years preceding 22 June, while on the other, we have the invented figure of '1,418 days of war'. Counting back from the day when the war in Europe ended, one inevitably comes to rest, according to forged Soviet computations, on 'that fateful Sunday'.

It is, however, easy to debunk the myth of 22 June. All that is needed to do this is to tap gently on one of the supports, that of the 'pre-war period', for example, for the entire structure to collapse, along with that 'fateful' date and the 1,418 days of the 'great motherland war'.

The 'pre-war period' never existed. It was invented. Suffice it to recall that during this period all the European neighbours of the Soviet Union fell victims to Soviet aggression. Moreover, the Red Army certainly had no intention of restricting or stopping its 'liberation campaigns' into the West at that point (Order No.

400, dated 7 February 1940, of the People's Commissar for the Defence of the USSR) although by then only Germany lay to the west of the Soviet Union.

In September 1939, the Soviet Union declared itself neutral and, during the 'pre-war period', seized territories with populations totalling 23 million people - not bad going for a neutral state.

The Red Army and the NKVD perpetrated fearful crimes in these captured territories. Soviet concentration camps were crammed with imprisoned soldiers and officers from a number of European countries. Officer prisoners, and not only the Poles, were shot in their thousands. This is not the action of a neutral state.

Here is a strange state of affairs. Germany attacked Poland, which means that Germany was the instigator of, and participant in, the European and then the World War. The Soviet Union did the same thing in the same month, but it does not judge itself to have been an instigator of the war. Nor does it consider itself even to have then been a participant in the war.

A Polish soldier killed in battle on Polish territory against the Red Army is considered a participant in World War II, as well as its victim, while the Soviet soldier who killed him is regarded as 'neutral'. If in the same battle a Soviet soldier is killed, then it is judged that he has been killed not in wartime but in peacetime -in the 'pre-war period'.

Germany seized Denmark and this was an act of war, even although no great battles were fought. The Soviet Union also seized, without firing a shot, three Baltic states markedly similar to Denmark in geographical position, in size of population, in culture and in traditions. But the actions of the Soviet Union are not judged to be acts of war.

Germany seized Norway. This was a further act of aggression. But before this happened, the Soviet Union had carved up neighbouring Finland. The list of crimes committed by Germany in the war begins on 1 September 1939, while the list of the Red Army's crimes begins for some reason only on 22 June 1941. Why?

During the 'pre-war period', the Red Army lost hundreds of thousands of its soldiers in bitter battles. German Army losses in the same period were considerably less. If one judges from losses alone, Germany had more grounds than the Soviet Union for considering itself neutral in 1939 and 1940.

The official formula used to give a name to these actions of the Soviet Army in the 'pre-war period' is 'strengthening of western frontier security'. This is not true. The frontiers were secure, at a time when the neighbours of the Soviet Union were the neutral states of Europe, while there were no common frontiers with Germany, and when Hitler in consequence was totally unable to launch a general attack, and certainly not a surprise attack, on the Soviet Union. Stalin, however, systematically destroyed several neutral states of Europe, thereby establishing a common frontier with Germany. This was not a way of enhancing the security of the Soviet frontiers.

If we use the formula 'strengthening of western frontier security' to describe aggression against six neutral European states — Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania - why do we not use the same formula in relation to Hitler? Did he not enhance the security of his frontiers by occupying neighbouring countries?

It might be objected that in the 'pre-war period' the Soviet Union did not wage one continuous war, but a series of wars and invasions separated by intervals. But Hitler also waged a series of wars separated by intervals. Why do we use other criteria when judging him?

It is alleged that the Soviet Union did not formally declare war on anybody in the 'pre-war period', therefore it cannot be considered a participant in the war. But Hitler did not always formally declare war. According to the statements made by Soviet propaganda, nobody formally declared war on anybody on 22 June 1941 either. So why is this date accepted as the divide between war and peace?

Soviet propaganda begins its history of the war from the moment when foreign troops appeared on Soviet territory and thus presents the Soviet Union as an innocent victim. Let us stop imagining it as an innocent victim. Let us remember instead those who were really innocent, and who perished in the 'prewar period' on the bayonets of the army of 'liberators'. Let the history of the war be written, not from 22 June, but from the moment when the communist hordes, without any declaration of war, took belligerent action in an already weakened Poland, whose army was trying in a heroic but unequal struggle to stop Hitler's drive to the east. Let the history of the war be written, not just from that day, but from the day on which Stalin himself took the decision to start it.



At dawn on 1 September 1939, the German Army entered Poland. In the twentieth century, war in Europe automatically means world war. So the war in fact quickly laid hold upon both Europe and almost the whole of the rest of the world.

By a strange confluence of circumstances, it was precisely on that very same day of 1 September that the Fourth Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a law establishing general liability for military service. Throughout the whole of the Soviet Union's history, there had never been such a law. While Hitler was frightening children (and grown-ups), and was looked upon as a monster and an ogre, the Soviet government had in fact got by without any general military-service liability law. Yet as soon as the Non-Aggression Pact was signed, an act was needed to establish a general obligation to perform military service. September 1939 was the beginning of the phoney war in the West. In the same month, a no less phoney peace began in the East.

Why did the Soviet Union need to impose the general obligation to military service? The communists will answer with one voice that it was needed because the Second World War began that day; they did not want to take part in it, but were simply taking precautionary measures. Marshal of the Soviet Union, K. A. Meretskov, was one of the many who asserted that the law was of great significance and was passed 'in the conditions of World War II which had already begun'. (*Na Sluzhbe Narodu*, IPL, Moscow, 1968 p. 181)

Let us imagine the Polish-German frontier on that tragic morning - darkness, mist, shooting and the roar of engines. There were few in Poland who understood what was happening, whether it was a provocation or an unauthorized clash which had somehow been self-generated. But at the same moment, the deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR - including shepherds from the mountainous pastures high above the cloud level and distinguished reindeer breeders from nomad camps in the Arctic - were assembled in Moscow. *They* already knew that it was neither provocation, nor a clash, nor a Polish-German war, nor even a European war, but the beginning of the Second World War; and they immediately met in emergency session to pass the appropriate laws. Yet how can it be explained why these same deputies did not react with identical swiftness when a similar thing happened on the Soviet-German frontier in 1941?

On that morning of 1 September, it was not only the Polish government and the governments of western countries who did not know that a new world war had begun. Hitler himself did not know it. He began the war against Poland in the hope that it would only be a local action, like the seizure of Czechoslovakia had been. This is not just Goebbels' propaganda. Soviet sources say the same thing: 'Hitler was convinced,' wrote Air Colonel-General A. S. Yakovlev, who was a personal adviser of Stalin's at the time, 'that Britain and France would not go to war over Poland.' (*Tsel' Zhizni*, IPL, Moscow, 1968, p. 212)

Thus Hitler did not know that he was beginning World War II; the comrades in the Kremlin knew it all too well. But it is, of course, a long -way to Moscow. Some deputies needed a week, others as much as twelve days to reach the capital. This means that, in order to discuss the war which had begun in Europe, someone gave the signal to the deputies to gather in the Kremlin *before the war began*. Indeed, I believe that someone gave this signal *even before the Molotov—Ribbentrop pact was signed*.

An attempt to establish the *exact* date on which the Second World War began, and the time when the Soviet Union came into it, inescapably leads us, in fact, to the date of 19 August 1939.

Previously, Stalin had often spoken at secret meetings about his plan to 'liberate' Europe. This was first to involve Europe in war, while he himself remained neutral. Then, when the adversaries had exhausted each other, he would throw the whole power of the Red Army into the balance. (Stalin, Vol. 6, p. 158; Vol. 7, p. 14) The final decision to carry this plan in effect was taken at a session of the Politburo held on 19 August 1939. News about this Politburo meeting and what it had decided reached the Western press immediately. Havas, the French news agency, published a report on the proceedings. Yet how could a record of them fall into the hands of the Western press?

There is no sure answer. It *might* have passed along one of several paths. One of the more probable is this: one or more Politburo members, frightened by Stalin's plans, decided to stop him. They could not protest openly. The only way, therefore, of compelling Stalin to renounce his plans might have been to publish his plans in the West. Members of the Politburo, especially those who controlled the Red Army, the war industry, military intelligence, the NKVD, propaganda and the Comintern, were perfectly able to do it.

Such a scenario is not as fantastic as it might first appear. Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were, in 1917, members of the Politburo, published the plans of Lenin and Trotsky in the bourgeois press in order to disrupt

the October Coup. We still do not know how the document found its way to the West, but there were a variety of ways it could have got there.

Stalin reacted to the Havas agency message with lightning speed and in a highly unusual manner. He published a denial in *Pravda*. It is a serious document and must be read in full:

### THE FALSE REPORT ISSUED BY THE HAVAS AGENCY

The editor of *Pravda* has put the following question to Comrade Stalin. What is Comrade Stalin's attitude to the message issued by the Havas agency on 'Stalin's speech', allegedly made by him 'in the Politburo of 19 August', at which ideas were supposedly advanced to the effect that 'the war must be continued for as long as is needed to exhaust the belligerent countries'?

Comrade Stalin has sent the following answer:

'This report issued by the Havas agency, like many more of its messages, is nonsense. I of course cannot know in precisely which nightclub these lies were fabricated. But no matter how many lies the gentlemen of the Havas agency might tell, they cannot deny that

- a) it was not Germany which attacked France and Britain, but France and Britain which attacked Germany, thereby taking upon themselves the responsibility for the present war;
- b) after hostilities began, Germany made peace proposals to France and Britain, while the Soviet Union openly supported these German peace proposals, for it considered, and continues to consider, that only as early an end to the war as possible can bring relief in a fundamental way to the condition of all countries and all peoples;
- c) the ruling circles in Britain and France rejected out of hand both the German peace proposals and the Soviet Union's efforts to end the war as quickly as possible.

Such are the facts. What can the nightclub politicians of the Havas agency provide to counter these facts?' J. STALIN (*Pravda*, 30 November 1939)

Let the reader make up his own mind as to whether the Havas agency report or Stalin's denial is nonsense. Stalin himself, in my view, would hardly have wished to repeat this in his own words in a subsequent period. It is interesting to note that copies of the Pravda issue of 30 November 1939 practically no longer exist in the Soviet Union. I was astonished to discover that there was no copy to be found in the special repository of the GRU archives. It had long since been destroyed. I succeeded in finding a copy only in the West.

The unconcealed mendacity of Stalin's refutation, and his uncharacteristic loss of composure, support the Havas agency version. In this case a nerve of unusual sensitivity was touched and this is why there was such a response to it. During the decades of Soviet power, the Western press wrote a great deal about the Soviet Union and Stalin personally. The Bolsheviki and Stalin himself were accused of every mortal sin. It wrote that Stalin had been an *agent provocateur* for the police, that he had murdered his wife, that he was a despot, a sadist, a dictator, an ogre, a butcher and much more besides. But not once did Stalin become involved in controversy with the 'bourgeois hack writers'. Why then, on only this one occasion, did the normally taciturn and composed Stalin lower himself to indulge in cheap insults? There can only be one answer. The Havas agency had revealed some of Stalin's best-kept secrets. It did not matter to him what future generations might think about his refutation. (They do not, incidentally, think anything of it at all.) What was important to Stalin at that particular moment was that he should keep his plan secret for the next two or three years until the countries of Europe had become weak through involving themselves in a mutually destructive war.

If we are to accept Stalin's arguments and if the Havas agency report did simply consist of lies 'fabricated' in a 'nightclub', we must express our admiration for the Havas agency journalists. If they really did invent their report, then they did so on the basis of a deep knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, of Stalin's character, and of a detailed, scientific analysis of the military and political situation in Europe; indeed, they understood the situation far better than Hitler and the leaders of the Western democracies. If the report *was* invented, then this was an occasion when an invention corresponded entirely to the facts.

Many years later, when the Havas agency report and Stalin's refutation of it had long been forgotten, thirteen volumes of Stalin's essays were published in the Soviet Union. These works include his speeches made at secret sessions of the Central Committee. In 1939 the Havas agency journalists did not have any access to these speeches. But the publication of Stalin's works confirmed that Stalin's plan was simple and one of genius, and that it was exactly as the French journalists had described it. As early as 1927, Stalin

expressed the view at a closed session of the Central Committee that in the event of war it would be essential to remain neutral until the 'warring sides have exhausted each other in a mutual conflict which is beyond their strength to sustain'. This view was often repeated subsequently at closed sessions. Stalin considered that in the event of a war breaking out in Europe, the Soviet Union had to become a participant in it, but it must be the last to enter, right at the end of the game in which the adversary had already been weakened to the point of exhaustion.

Although they both had different attitudes towards Stalin, two of his successors, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, interestingly both confirmed that it had been Stalin's intention to exhaust Europe in war, while preserving his own neutrality, and *then* to 'liberate' it. Stalin's predecessors said the same thing. When he was laying the foundations of his plan in the narrow circle of his comrades in arms, Stalin simply quoted Lenin and emphasized that it was Lenin's idea. But Lenin had not been original either. He in his turn scooped his ideas from the inexhaustible supply of ideas provided by Marx. There is an interesting letter written by Friedrich Engels on 12 June 1883 to Edouard Bernstein: 'All these layabouts of various kinds,' he wrote, 'must first of all fight like dogs among themselves, destroy and compromise each other, and in that way they will be preparing the ground for us.'

Stalin differed from both his predecessors and successors in that he spoke less than they, but acted more.

It would be very important to know, were it possible, what Stalin actually said in the Politburo meeting of 19 August 1939. Even although we cannot know the words he spoke, we see his actions and these show far more clearly what he had in mind. It was only four days after this meeting that the Molotov— Ribbentrop pact was signed in the Kremlin. The most outstanding achievement ever attained by Soviet diplomacy, it was Stalin's most brilliant victory in his extraordinary career. 'I have deceived him. I have deceived Hitler,' cried Stalin joyfully after the Pact had been signed. (Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs*, Chasidze Publications, 1981) Stalin had indeed deceived Hitler in a way that nobody had deceived anyone else throughout the whole of the twentieth century. Only a week and a half after the Pact had been signed Hitler had a war on two fronts. That is to say, from the very outset of hostilities Germany fell into a situation in which it could only lose the war; or, to put it

another way, on 23 August 1939, the day the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed, Stalin had won the Second World War even before Hitler came into it.

It was only in the summer of 1940 that Hitler realized that he had been taken in. He tried to take on Stalin again, but it was too late. Hitler could hope for brilliant tactical victories only, but Germany's strategic position was catastrophic. Germany again found itself between two millstones. On the one side there was Britain on her inaccessible island, with the United States behind her. On the other side was Stalin. Hitler turned his face to the west, realizing that Stalin was quite clearly preparing an attack and that he could cut Germany's oil artery in Romania at one blow, paralysing the whole of German industry, and the entire German Army, Air Force and Navy. Turning his face to the east, Hitler first got strategic air raids and then invasion from the west.

It is said that Stalin won only thanks to the help and cooperation given by Britain and the United States, and herein lay his greatness; while being the West's most virulent enemy, Stalin knew how to use it in order to protect and reinforce his own dictatorship. Stalin's genius, as we've seen, lay in knowing how to divide his adversaries and then knock their heads together. Even in 1939, the free press in the West was already sounding a warning about such a course of events, when Stalin was playing a game of neutrality in words whilst, in deed, playing a very much more dangerous one.

## CHAPTER 7

### 'Extending the Foundations of War'

*The national liberation of Germany lies in  
the proletarian revolution seizing Central and Western  
Europe, and uniting it with Eastern Europe in  
the form of the Soviet United States.*

TROTSKY (BO, No. 24, p. 9)

After Napoleon had been expelled from Russia, the victorious Russian Army entered Paris. Not finding Napoleon there, the Russian Army went home, singing songs on its way. For Russia the aim of the war had been to rout the armies of the enemy. If no one else was threatening Moscow, then the Russian Army had nothing further to do in Western Europe.

The difference between Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union lies in their respective war aims. In 1923 Mikhail Tukhachevsky, who had already gained renown for his monstrous brutality in mass exterminations in central Russia, northern Caucasus, the Urals, Siberia and Poland, was formulating the theoretical basis for the aim of war. According to Tukhachevsky, the aim of war was 'to guarantee for oneself the free use of violence and for this purpose it is necessary in the first instance to wipe out the forces of the enemy'. (*Revolutsia i voina*, Moscow 1923, *Collected Works* No. 22, p. 188) The rout of the enemy armies and their general destruction do not mark the end of war and coercion, but only the creation of conditions for 'the free use of violence'. 'Every territory occupied by us becomes Soviet territory after its occupation, where the power of the workers and peasants will be established.' (Marshal of the Soviet Union M. Tukhachev-sky, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya*, Moscow Voenizdat 1964, Vol. I, p. 258)

In his work, *Questions of Modern Strategy*, Tukhachevsky draws attention to the fact that Soviet military staff must give timely instructions to the political administration and other appropriate agencies to prepare revolutionary committees and other local administrative machinery for these or other regions'. (*op. cit.*, p. 196) In other words, Soviet military staff were to prepare 'liberation' operations in great secrecy, but while they

were doing this they were also to alert the political commissars and the 'appropriate agencies' that they should prepare in good time the communist administrative machinery for the 'liberated' regions. The Red Army would bring freedom to its neighbours on its bayonets, along with ready-made organs of local authority.

To this process of Sovietizing all seized territories as rapidly as possible by methods of unrestrained coercion and terror, together with the barbaric exploitation of all resources needed to continue aggression, Tukhachevsky gave a 'scientific' name: he called it 'extension of the basis of war'. Tukhachevsky even inserted this term into the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. (*Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, Moscow 1928, Vol. 12, pp. 276-277)

In a speech on 30 March 1941, Adolf Hitler proclaimed to his generals what the objective of the war in the East was to be. It was to defeat the enemy armed forces, to wipe out the communist dictatorship, to establish 'real socialism' and to make out of Russia a base for continuing the war. Were Tukhachevsky's aims any different? Was he not promulgating the same ideas in 1923?

When he was preparing a military operation, Hitler took care to set up administrative machinery for new territories even before they had been invaded; Tukhachevsky too proposed to do exactly the same thing.

Tukhachevsky would have made a good *Gauleiter*, but he was no strategist. A scrutiny of his 'battering-ram' strategy reveals its complete lack of substance. It is the method adopted by a chessplayer who concentrates his attention on destroying all his opponent's pieces *en masse*, beginning with the pawns. Carried away by his theory, Tukhachevsky quickly and inevitably found himself without reserves in any serious clash. His defeat on the Vistula certainly did not happen by chance. All his life he tried, with dim-witted obstinacy, to improve his method, fallacious in principle, by using a theoretical base to shore up his ignorance. Communist historians assure us that, once he had liquidated Tukhachevsky, Stalin completely rejected his methods. This was not the case. Stalin only spurned Tukhachevsky's unacceptable strategic method, which was known to lead to defeat, but he retained his ideas about 'the extension of the basis of war' and allowed others to develop them further.



Apart from Tukhachevsky and others like him, Stalin did have real strategists. The first and most brilliant of these was undoubtedly Vladimir Triandafillov, the father of operational art.<sup>6</sup> It was in 1926 that, in a book entitled *Range of Operations in Modern Armies*, he expounded the first approximate formulation of the 'operations in depth' theory. Triandafillov developed his ideas further in a subsequent book entitled *Character of Operations in Modern Armies*. Even today these books remain the foundation of the Soviet art of war. Triandafillov found people who understood his strategic ideas, which were truly ones of genius, and promoted them to the General Staff. Among these was A. M. Vasilevsky, the future marshal of the Soviet Union. G. K. Zhukov put Triandafillov's ideas into practice in all his operations, beginning with Khalkhin-Gol.

Triandafillov understandably could not easily relate to Tukhachevsky, even although Tukhachevsky was his immediate superior. Triandafillov was not afraid of Tukhachevsky and he exposed the poverty of the 'battering-ram' strategy by showing that a good chessplayer must not devote all his attention to destroying pawns. The good chessplayer delivers a blow 'in depth', thereby rendering his opponent's pawns useless. A good chessplayer will create a threat not in one but in at least two sectors, thereby compelling his opponent to divide his attention and reserves, while the player himself strikes a blow at another sector, where his opponent has no reserves at all.

When he rejected Tukhachevsky's military method, Triandafillov fully accepted and developed his theory on forcible and rapid Sovietization of 'liberated' territories; 'the Sovietization of entire states must be dealt with within a short period of two to three weeks. Where larger countries are concerned, Sovietization of very large areas must be managed in three to four weeks . . . When organizing revolutionary committees, it will be very difficult to count on local forces. Only a part of the technical apparatus and only the more junior executive officials will be available on the spot. All executive officials and even some of the technical personnel will have to be brought in along with the Army . . . The number of such officials needed to carry on Sovietization in recaptured areas will be enormous.' (*Kharakter Operatsii Sovremennykh Armii*, V. K. Triandafillov, Moscow 1929, pp. 177-8)

Triandafillov drew attention to the fact that it would be mistaken to divert Red Army fighting units to tasks of 'Sovietization'. It would be no bad thing to have special units for this. The Red Army does battle with the

---

<sup>6</sup> Until the early twentieth century, all military art was divided into two levels: strategy and tactics. Soviet military thinking then developed an intermediate level and called it 'operational art'. Half a century later, Western military thinkers now accept this term.

enemy and inflicts defeat upon him, while these special units go to work in the rear establishing power, and a happy life for the workers and peasants. Hitler latterly took the same viewpoint. The Wehrmacht would crush the enemy, while the S S would set up the New Order. Of course, in critical situations — and war consists of these — the Wehrmacht divisions were thrown into the battle to suppress the partisan movement, while the SS divisions were thrown into tank battles on the forward edge of the battle area. That, however, was not what either the Wehrmacht or the SS was built for.

Triandafilov understood the art of war in terms of the exact sciences, in which by means of mathematical calculation he worked out simple formulae for offensive operations involving armies of millions operating in great depth. The formulae covered every stage of an offensive. They even included a calculation as to how many Soviet political leaders would be needed for every administrative unit in captured territories. They are formulae as sharp and elegant as any geometric theorem.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact opened the gates to Sovietization. Stalin had everything ready and not only in theory. Soviet staff had worked out operations in great secrecy, but they did not neglect to give instructions to the political commissars and the 'appropriate organs' that they be fully prepared for Sovietization.

On the night of 16-17 September 1939 I. A. Bogdanov, a brigade commander in the NKVD, issued an order to the Chekists in which he said that 'at dawn on 17 September 1939, the armies of the Byelorussian Front will go over to the offensive. Their task will be to help the workers and peasants of Byelorussia who have risen in rebellion.' Thus the revolution in Poland had begun; the workers and peasants would be up to dealing with it themselves, while the Red Army and the NKVD would only render them assistance. The results are well known. The massacre of Polish officers at Katyn also comes into this category of assistance'.

Stalin was not afraid of Hitler, as the communists try to make it appear. If Stalin had feared Hitler, he would have kept the Polish officers safe and, when the German invasion took place, thrown them into battle at the head of tens of thousands of troops to fight as partisans on Polish soil. Defence against Hitler, however, did not enter into Stalin's plans. Stalin not only did not use this Polish potential, he even dissolved his own partisan detachments which had been formed earlier to be used in the event of war.

The Sovietization of Finland was prepared in even greater detail. At the very moment when 'the Finnish militarists began their armed provocations', Stalin already had up his sleeve a Finnish communist 'president', a 'prime minister' and an entire 'government', including a leading Chekist, for a 'free democratic Finland'. 'People's representatives' also turned up in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bessarabia and in Bukovina, all demanding that these countries be annexed to the 'fraternal family of nations'. Chairmen of revolutionary committees, people's jurors, deputies and many more were all found with surprising speed.

Sovietization thus gathered strength, while Stalin added to his reserves of Party administrators for new campaigns. On 13 March 1940, the Politburo took a decision to entrust the People's Commissariat for Defence with the practical task of grading the entire *nomenklatura*, or governing establishment of the Party, and of giving them military ranks. The entire Party changed from being semi-military into a purely military one. 'Officials of Party committees,' it was decided, 'would be obliged systematically to undergo military retraining so that, whenever they might be called into the RKKA [*Rabache-Krest' yanskaya Krasnaya Armiya* - the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army] or the RKKF [*Rabache-Krest'yanskii Krasny Plot* - the Workers' and Peasants' Red Navy], they would be able to devote themselves to duties appropriate to their qualifications.' (Politburo Decree, dated 13 March 1940, 'Military Retraining and Regrading of Party Committee Officials and the Procedure to be Followed on their Mobilization into the RKKA') The words, 'devote themselves to duties appropriate to their qualifications', are of particular interest. What qualification does a big shot in the Party have, apart from being qualified to act as secretary of a Party regional committee? Yet here we had plans being made to use them as secretaries of regional committees (and town committees and district committees), even after they had been called up to the Army.

From May 1940 until February 1941, 99,000 political workers in the reserve, who included '63,000 senior workers of Party committees', were regraded, that is they had to sit examinations and appear before boards. The retraining of the Party establishment went ahead at an intensified pace. And retraining was not all. On 17 June 1941 another decree was issued. Yet another 3,700 of the Party *nomenklatura* received orders to place themselves at the Army's disposal. Were preparations under way for a new Sovietization?

Not only did the Party bosses Sovietize the Baltic states, the western Ukraine, western Byelorussia, Bessarabia and Bukovina, but they also had a hand in the 'appropriate organs'. Working behind the backs of the 'people's representatives' and the 'servants of the people', the NKVD assisted the workers and peasants, who had risen in rebellion 'to reinforce the power of the proletariat', as it is put in Soviet propaganda parlance.

The frontier guards of the NKVD were the first to cross the borders. 'Operating in small groups, they seized and held river crossings and road junctions.' (*VIZH*\* 1970, No. 7, p. 85) In the 1939-40 Winter War against Finland, a detachment of NKVD frontier guards infiltrated secretly into Finnish territory, made a dash through the tundra and, in a surprise attack, seized the town of Petsamo and its harbour. In the war with Japan some five years later, using frontier guards, '320 assault detachments were formed, each consisting of between 30 and 75 men armed with machine guns, sub-machine guns, rifles and grenades. Separate detachments had a strength of between 100 and 150 men . . . The training which was carried out was based upon previously worked out and precisely defined plans of surprise attack . . . The surprise element in the operations was to play a paramount role in the attainment of success.' (*VIZH*<sup>7</sup> 1965, No. 8, p. 12)

The NKVD frontier troops operated in exactly the same way in the war with Germany. In those places where German troops had not crossed the border, Soviet frontier troops went over it on their own initiative. They had been prepared. An example of this method of operating occurred on 26 June 1941. Soviet frontier motor-launches made a landing in the area of the town of Kiliya on the Romanian frontier. The landing established a bridgehead, on which the members of the assault landing-force gave fire support to the members of the NKVD reconnaissance patrol who had preceded them with a landing on the bank. (*Chasovye Sovetskikh granits*, Moscow 1983; p. 141) Interestingly ; at the time of the *German attack* these elite and highly trained NKVD troops, stationed on bridges at the frontier, had made no preparations either to repel an attack or defend the bridges. They yielded them to the enemy almost without a fight. When they had to capture the western part of a frontier bridge, however, these frontier troops revealed excellent training, and displayed both courage and bravery, all in the spirit of the Romanian assault described above. When they had to defend the eastern part of the bridge, these same soldiers showed a total *lack* of preparedness. It was simply that no one had trained them to do this. No one had ever put them through any defensive exercises.

---

<sup>7</sup> An official military-historical magazine from the Ministry of Defence.

In 1940, the volume of NKVD operations exceeded that of 1944 and 1945, and of many subsequent years. 1940 was, of course, the year of Katyn. Polish officers were also exterminated in at least two other places, where the victims were no fewer than in Katyn. Lithuanian officers were exterminated at the same time, as were Latvian and Estonian officers; and not only officers. There were teachers, priests, policemen, writers, lawyers, journalists, peasants, entrepreneurs and people from all strata of society, exactly as in the Red Terror against the Russian people. The scale of the NKVD operations grew; but suddenly something changed. From February 1941, the NKVD's military sub-units covertly began a secret build-up near the state frontiers.

The chief strength of the NKVD, however, did not lie in its frontier troops. Apart from them, the NKVD consisted of a great number of regiments and divisions of operational, convoy and security troops. All of these worked very hard at destroying 'hostile elements' and at 'purging the territory'. In the Soviet -Finnish war of 1939-40, there were eight NKVD regiments engaged in this activity, as well as individual battalions, companies and formations of frontier troops. An operation carried out in 1944 in the rear of the Byelorussian Front may serve to illustrate the scale of these 'purges' of the area behind the front. Five NKVD frontier regiments, seven NKVD regiments of operational troops, four cavalry regiments, detached battalions and reconnaissance aircraft all took part in the operation. The total strength involved was 50,000 troops. The area covered was 30,000 square kilometres. (*Ibid*,p. 181) The NKVD operated on no less a scale even before Hitler attacked, though information on operations carried out in 1940 in the Baltic states, the western Ukraine, Byelorussia, Bukovina and Bessarabia has never been published.

Communist professors are now doing their best to play down the Red Army's power at the outset of World War II, and to overstate the strength of the Wehrmacht. This is done by manipulating statistics; while they take into account all divisions of the Wehrmacht and the SS in Germany, in the Soviet Union only the divisions of the Red Army are counted. The elite, highly trained, fully equipped and armed NKVD divisions, however, are conveniently left out of the calculation. The communists have proclaimed that 47 ground and six naval

frontier detachments, each with a complement of about one regiment, and n regiments of NKVD operational troops, totalling about 100,000 men, were stationed close to the frontiers. This is the truth. But not all the truth. When the Germans invaded, not only NKVD regiments, but separate NKVD battalions of impressive strength, as well as entire NKVD divisions, were stationed directly on the frontiers. For example, the 4th NKVD Division, commanded by Colonel F. M. Mazharin, was on the Romanian frontier, while sub-units of the 57th NKVD Regiment of this division were stationed directly at frontier bridges. The 8th NKVD Motor Rifle Division was close to the frontier. The 10th NKVD Division was in the Rava-Russkaya region, while the 16th NKVD Cavalry Regiment, which formed part of this division, was directly dispersed among posts along the frontier. The 21st NKVD Motor Rifle Division was on the Finnish frontier. The 1st NKVD Division, commanded by Colonel S. I. Donskov, was there as well. The 22nd NKVD Motor Rifle Division first appears in German operational summaries on the seventh day of the invasion of Lithuania.

Some of these NKVD units were incredibly close to the borders; sometimes literally only a few metres away from the frontier itself. For example, the 132nd NKVD Independent Battalion was in the Tiraspol fortification of the Brest-Litovsk fortress, though not for defensive purposes; the fortress had not been prepared for war. It had been intended, in the event of war, to leave only one infantry battalion there with ordinary troops. Sitting alongside, in the same barracks, for defensive purposes was the Fifth Frontier Detachment (a regiment); the 132nd NKVD Battalion was not in fact a frontier battalion at all, but a *convoy* battalion. This had been used to deport 'enemies' from western Byelorussia and here it was now stationed on the western bank of the river Bug. The battalion was doing nothing for the time being. It was a long, hard road back to the Soviet Union. First the river Bug had to be crossed to the old citadel in the boats of the Chekist officials. Then there was a multitude of gates to pass through, and minor bridges and ditches to cross. Next came the river Mukhavets, but once over that, there were even more ditches, banks and barriers. There were no enemies in the fortress and it was therefore a long way to town, so the battalion was resting - for the time being. In the other direction was the Tiraspol fortification, a fortress island on Polish territory, or rather, to be more exact, on German, as it was no longer part of Poland. And all the battalion had to do to reach German territory was to cross a small bridge.

On a wall in the barracks of the 132nd Independent Battalion someone wrote an inscription: 'I am dying, but I shall not surrender. Farewell, Motherland! 20. VII. 1941.' These 'heroes' had good reason not to

surrender. The SS would have already worked out who the Cheka officials intended to deport from the other side of the state frontier.

I found, as we have seen, NKVD convoy battalions and regiments, and indeed convoy divisions, right on the frontier. The 4th NKVD Division straddled the frontier bridges across the river Prut. Was it there perhaps to blow them up, should the situation become exacerbated? By no means. The bridges were mined. Afterwards the mines were removed and an NKVD division was placed alongside the same bridges. According to one piece of information, the 4th NKVD Division was a kind of security division: by making an analogy with the SS, the meaning of the word 'security' becomes altogether more sinister in this context. Other information, however, indicates that the 4th NKVD Division operated like a convoy division. Indeed Colonel Mazharin, who commanded the division, was an old GULAG wolf, who spent all his career in convoy work. But whom did the Gulag security intend to escort across the frontier bridges?

## CHAPTER 8

### Why Howitzer Artillery for the Chekists?

*We shall destroy the beast in his lair.*

L. BERIA

(Commissar General for  
State Security, People's  
Commissar for Internal  
Affairs, February 1941)

The communist punitive machine had two principal mechanisms, the organs and the troops. What is understood here by 'troops' is not, of course, Red Army troops, but special formations of the VChK (*Vserossiiskaya Chrezvychainaya Komissiya* -the All-Russian Special Commission, or Cheka), the OGPU (*Ob'edinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie*) and the NKVD.

While the Red Army fought on external fronts, these special divisions waged war on internal fronts. At the time when the communist dictatorship was being established, the punitive troops played an incomparably more important role than the punitive organs. Equipped with armoured cars, armoured trains, three-inch cannon and machine guns, they waged a real war against their own people.

In 1923, the Chief Directorate was set up to co-ordinate the operations carried out by all punitive troops. Although the punitive machine changed its name from time to time as easily as a snake changes its skin, the name of the Chief Directorate remained unchanged. This organization, and the troops under

its command, perpetrated fearful atrocities against the Russian and indeed all other nations who populate the Soviet Union. In the times of collectivization alone, the punitive troops exterminated millions of people, and handed over more than ten million of them to that other directorate of the NKVD, the GULAG, responsible for prisons and labour camps.



As the communist dictatorship grew in strength, the organs came to occupy an increasingly important place in relation to that held by the punitive troops. The informer's pen, the interrogator's thumbscrew and the executioner's Nagan revolver became the main weapons of terror. Of course, the numbers of the punitive troops did not grow any less, but their role became largely a secondary one, involving round-ups, searches, arrests, deportations, and the protection of punitive and 'correctional' establishments. The punitive troops also protected leaders, the national frontiers and communications. The image of the punitive fighter also changed. It was then no longer a sailor with the face of a criminal in an armoured car, but a soldier wearing a sheepskin coat, his face turned into the Arctic wind, rifle in hand and with his faithful dog at his side. The punitive soldiery no longer had armoured cars. They were no longer needed.

1937 was not, as the communists assure us, the beginning of the terror, but rather the year when it reached its peak. A year later, it had undergone a change in character, in that it had changed from being a general terror into a selective terror. It was during 1937 and 1938 that the terror even spread to the communist leaders themselves. By the time that stage had been reached, the Chekists no longer needed their machine guns. The communists, who had by then come under the blows of the axe of terror, did not offer any particular resistance.

After the Great Purge had been successfully concluded in December 1938, the terror within the country abated sharply; many prisoners were released by the GULAG, and preparations were made to release many more. In this situation, what was to happen to the troops of the NKVD and the Chief Directorate which co-ordinated their activities?

Any doubts as to whether they would in fact be abolished were quickly dispelled. The Soviet Union had embarked upon a new phase of its existence, for immediately after the Great Purge had ended and Nikolai Yezhov had been removed from power, the Chief Directorate controlling the NKVD frontier and interior troops ceased to exist under a decree issued on 2 February 1939 by the Council of People's Commissars.

On the same day, no fewer than six independent chief directorates were created inside the NKVD to take charge of the troops and deal with military matters. These were:

The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Frontier Troops

The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Security Troops  
The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Convoy Troops  
The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Railway Troops  
The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Military Supply  
The Chief Directorate (GU) of NKVD  
Military Construction, given the  
acronym of *Glavvoenstroï* of the NKVD.

The Soviet punitive machine then underwent a sharp change in character as the Government decided that the punitive troops should be given a position of primacy over the organs. The beginning of 1939 marked the start of a breathtaking increase in the punitive troops' power. Once again their armament included armoured trains, the latest BA-10 armoured cars, howitzers, and finally tanks and aircraft.

Punitive troops of all types and functions began to grow rapidly in numbers. The NKVD troops became so numerous that a special post had to be created to control them, and Lieutenant-General I. I. Maslennikov was appointed Deputy People's Commissar for Troops.

The strange thing, however, was that punitive troops were no longer needed on Soviet territory. There were clearly no plans for another purge in the Soviet Union in 1939, as the country had been brought to its knees and was by then totally subjected to Stalin.

The NKVD troops developed in many directions, one of which was the formation of their retreat-blocking service in 1939. The task of retreat-blocking detachments is to bolster the resolve of troops in battle, particularly an offensive battle. Having deployed behind the troops, the retreat-blocking detachment encourages the advancing soldiery with bursts of machine-gun fire directed at the backs of their heads, delays

the troops if they are retreating, returns the obedient soldiers to the battle and shoots the disobedient ones on the spot.

Such detachments had been used during the Civil War. Indeed, quite a few rascals who distinguished themselves in this field were cited in Soviet publications as 'heroes of the Civil War'. Here is a typical example: 'Vypov, I. P.—leader of a machine-gun team of the retreat-blocking detachment of the 38th Infantry Division' (*VIZH*, 1976, No. 12, p. 76) The retreat-blocking soldiers' life is not one of service, but a holiday. Enemy artillery does not worry them. They fight not against a stray enemy, but against their own demoralized men. Decorations shower upon them from the horn of plenty. Our hero has two Orders of the Red Banner.

As part of the secret build-up of Soviet forces in the country's western regions before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, a detached motorized infantry regiment of the NKVD became an integral part of each army. This regiment consisted not of battalions, but of retreat-blocking detachments.

Apart from the regiments which made up the armies, there were also detached NKVD motorized rifle regiments which formed part of the fronts. For example, in June 1941, there were nine regiments, an independent detachment and a detached battalion of the NKVD behind the Southern Front alone. (*VIZH*, 1983, No. 9)

In addition to NKVD motorized rifle regiments, independent retreat-blocking detachments of the NKVD were also created. These immediately became part of the corps and armies which were then being formed. One of these, for example, was the 241st Detached Retreat-Blocking Detachment, which became part of the 19th Army.

Major-General P. V. Sevast'yanov has stated that the NKVD's retreat-blocking service worked with great precision and sureness of touch. In order to perform their allotted service of stopping any retreat, the NKVD troops always took up position behind the fighting troops in every situation. 'Companies of frontier troops immediately deployed behind us' (*Volga-Neman-Dunai*, Moscow Voenizdat, 1961, p. 82) In General Sevast'yanov's words, his infantry were having to fight German troops without tanks, while the Chekists, who did have tanks, stood behind them.

We can find quite a few indications in Soviet sources which show that the NKVD's retreat-blocking service was active from the very first hours of the war, which means that it had been deployed even before the

Germans invaded. Their presence is acknowledged in Colonel-General Leonid Mikhailovich Sandalov's account of June 1941: 'I shall leave the Army retreat-blocking detachment here,' he writes. 'The Army retreat-blocking detachments were stopping them and sending them to the nearest units of the 28th Rifle Corps.' (*Perezhito*e, Moscow, 1966)

That the NKVD's retreat-blocking service was revived before the German attack and indeed before the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is direct evidence that the war had been decided upon in the Kremlin long before it actually began.

The NKVD expanded its operations in other directions as well. From the beginning of 1939, the strength of the NKVD frontier troops sharply increased. Since Lenin's time, the Soviet Union had had six frontier districts. Now their number increased to eighteen, while at the same time the military strength in each new district grew in relation to what it had been in the old districts. We have already had occasion to observe the aggressive tendencies of the Soviet frontier troops, which always served as the basis on which the OSNAZ (*Osobogo Naznacheniya* - special purpose) formations were set up.

In August 1939, before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, a rapid growth occurred in the number of NKVD OSNAZ troops. OSNAZ formations were the most aggressive strike formations in the Soviet punitive machine. In the Civil War OSNAZ units were notorious for their brutality, which was extreme even by Cheka standards. After the Civil War had ended, OSNAZ was sharply cut back so that only one NKVD OSNAZ division remained in the Moscow region. This division was under the command of NKVD Kombrig<sup>8</sup> Pavel Artem'ev.

At the beginning of August 1939, G. K. Zhukov was preparing his surprise strike against the Japanese. A detached OSNAZ battalion of the NKVD numbering 502 men was placed at Zhukov's command. Although the battalion was small, it consisted of specially picked stranglers whose hands were more than accustomed to murder. The main task of this OSNAZ battalion was 'to purge that area of the rear which lay closest to the

---

<sup>8</sup> Brigade-Commander - term used before 1940. *Kombrig* and similar terms were abandoned after 1940, and the English equivalent rankings were used.

front'. (*Chasovye Sovetskikh Granits*, IPL, Moscow 1983, p. 106) OSNAZ did its work splendidly and Zhukov was highly satisfied.

Immediately after this, the formation of OSNAZ battalions began on the Polish frontier. A dispatch from the political department of the frontier troops in the Kiev district, dated 17 September 1939, mentions that OSNAZ battalions had already been set up.

During the 'liberation' of Poland, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland, the OSNAZ battalions were the first to cross the frontiers. Their task was first to knock out enemy frontier posts by surprise attack, and then, by operating ahead of the advancing troops, to capture bridges, cut communications, wipe out small groups of the enemy and terrorize the population. Once the Red Army units had caught up with the OSNAZ battalions, these then turned to the tasks of purging the territory and of exterminating undesirable elements. We can find mention of the NKVD's OSNAZ battalions in the same official history of the frontier troops. (Documents Nos. 185 and 193) Here are the fruits of their work: 'About 600 prisoners were escorted across the frontier; these included officers, landowners, priests, gendarmes and policemen . . .' (Document No. 196) In a contemporary version of this document this sentence comes to an abrupt halt at its semi-colon, and we are not told who were taken as 'prisoners'. A document dated 19 September 1939 describes the situation at one particular small NKVD frontier post. It was the third day of the 'liberation campaign' in Poland. This liberation is explained nowadays as a Soviet attempt to secure its borders against Hitler. Why then drive 'landowners and priests' across the frontier into the Soviet Union and declare them prisoners? These 600 prisoners formed only one drop in a very great stream which poured not simply through one frontier post, but through all of them, having begun its flow on the very first day of liberation'.

It was foreseen that, after the new frontier with Germany had been established, new usurpations would follow. Far from dissolving the previously created OSNAZ battalions of the NKVD, Stalin set up new battalions, and not only battalions. He created regiments, divisions, and even an NKVD OSNAZ corps under the command of NKVD Komdiv<sup>9</sup> Shmyrev, Commissar Chumakov, and Chief of Staff NKVD Colonel

---

<sup>9</sup> See previous page.

Vinogradov. References to this top secret corps may sometimes be found in official Soviet documents. (*Pogranichnye Voiska SSSR 1939-41*, Nauka, 1970, Document No. 39).

The movement of all types of NKVD troops towards the Soviet Union's western frontier in February 1941 cannot be explained as a defence against German invasion. Had it been so, then surely the formation of new punitive battalions, regiments and divisions should have been halted in favour of something more appropriate to defence, such as the formation of a corps of sappers to mine the entire western territory of the Soviet Union or cover it with anti-tank ditches and trenches.

But Stalin was not engaged in anything like this. Stalin needed punitive troops, not sappers. That is why one more military chief directorate was set up in the NKVD at the beginning of 1941. This time it was a purely military one, the Chief Directorate of Operational Troops of the NKVD. At its head, Stalin placed Pavel Artem'ev, an OSNAZ veteran who had commanded the 1st OSNAZ Division of the NKVD, and who had already risen to the rank of NKVD lieutenant-general.

The new chief directorate immediately set in motion a vast deployment of troops. The basic military unit was an NKVD motor-rifle division consisting of a tank regiment (or battalion), two or three motor-rifle regiments, a howitzer artillery battalion, and other sub-units. The total strength of each division was more than 10,000 Chekists.

The NKVD motor rifle divisions spread immediately to the western border of the Soviet Union. NKVD punitive divisions armed with tanks, howitzers and other heavy weapons were simply not needed on Soviet territory. Neither were they required in the territories which had recently been seized. Here the NKVD's terror machine got by without tanks, although in extreme cases they sought help from the Red Army.

The NKVD divisions were intended to be used in the rear in wartime, not in the front. That these divisions had heavy weapons indicates that it was planned to use these divisions against a strong enemy. But there was no strong enemy, nor could there be one, in the rear of the Red Army on Soviet territory.

A strong enemy could only appear in the rear of the Red Army in the event of the Red Army crossing the frontier and driving forward. Hitler did not allow this to happen. He struck the first blow, and thus rendered

all the NKVD's Soviet rifle divisions redundant. The NKVD's Chief Directorate of Operational Troops proved to be quite unnecessary in the defensive war which followed. Four days after the war had begun, Stalin moved NKVD General Artem'ev from the Chief Directorate of Operational Troops, leaving it without a leader. No more NKVD motor-rifle divisions were formed after 1941, and the existing divisions were re-formed as ordinary rifle divisions of the Red Army. The NKVD's 21 st Motor Rifle Division, for instance, under NKVD Colonel M. D. Panchenko, was changed into the 101st Rifle Division of the Red Army; the NKVD's 13th Motor Rifle Division became the 95th Rifle Division of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (and later the 75th Guards Division); and the NKVD's 8th Motor Rifle Division became the 63rd Rifle Division of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army (later the 52nd Guards Division). In all, 29 divisions were transferred from the NKVD to the Red Army. (Major-General V. Nekrasov, *VIZH*, 1985, No. 9) In the defensive war that had been forced upon him, Stalin needed ordinary infantry, not punitive troops.

In 1944 the Red Army, with the NKVD in its wake, arrived in Central Europe and established workers' and peasants' power, social justice and other blessings. But even in 1939 Stalin was already setting up the machinery for establishing that happy life. Hitler simply prevented this machinery being used until 1944.

The Soviet terror machine was enormous and was intended not just for Eastern Europe but Europe in its entirety. It had to be sharply reduced in size after Hitler invaded because it no longer served any immediate purpose.

The creation of machinery with which to Sovietize Europe began before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Pact was signed after a final decision had been taken to establish a happy life in Europe. The Pact was only a tactical move which would allow Europe to be brought down to the levels which had existed there in 1918, thereby opening the gates to the OSNAZ formations and the motor-rifle divisions of the NKVD.

## CHAPTER 9

# Why the Security Zone was Dismantled on the Eve of War

*Mines are a powerful thing, but this is a resource  
for the weak, for those who are defending themselves.  
We do not need mines as much as we need  
the means of clearing them.*  
Marshal of the Soviet Union  
GRIGORY IVANOVICH KULIK,  
early June 1941

A country which is preparing its defence deploys its army deep inside its own territory, and not on its very frontier. The object is to prevent the enemy from destroying the main defending forces with one surprise attack. A defending side will normally build a security zone in the frontier areas in plenty of time; a zone where the terrain has been saturated with traps, engineered defences, obstacles and minefields. The defending side will deliberately avoid constructing anything related to industry or transport in this zone; nor will it keep any heavy military formations or large quantities of supplies there. On the contrary, timely preparations will have been made to blow up all bridges, tunnels and roads in this zone.

Once inside the security zone, the aggressor loses speed of movement, and his troops sustain losses before they even encounter the main forces of the defender. Only small but highly mobile detachments of the defending side operate in the security zone. These detachments spring ambushes, launch surprise attacks and then quickly withdraw to previously prepared positions. Light detachments create the impression that they are the main force, compelling the aggressor to stop, deploy his forces and waste his shells on areas where there is nothing to hit. The light detachments, meanwhile, secretly withdraw to prepare new ambushes.

While the aggressor is waging an exhausting battle with the light detachments of the covering force, the main defending forces have time to prepare themselves to confront the aggressor from positions which favour defence.



The deeper the security zone is, the better. As he breaks into a deep security zone, an aggressor involuntarily reveals the main direction of his thrust, and loses the advantage of surprise. Since he does not know how deep the security zone is, he cannot predict when he will encounter the defender's main forces; thus, the initiative has passed to the defending forces.

Throughout the centuries, and indeed the millennia, Slavonic tribes have created powerful security zones of enormous length and vast depth. Among the many defence obstacles they employed, the most important and effective was the forest barrier. This consisted of a strip through the forest in which the trees were felled at a point in the trunk just higher than a man's height, in such a way that the felled part of the tree stayed attached to the stump. The tops of the trees were then piled in a criss-cross manner on the side from which the enemy was expected to approach, and were pressed to the ground with stakes. The thin branches were chopped off, and the thick ones sharpened. At those places where it was unlikely that the enemy would appear, the barrier was usually only a few dozen metres deep. But on the routes along which the enemy would probably approach, the depth of the forest barrier could amount to forty to sixty kilometres of impassable obstacles reinforced by palisades, stakes, concealed pits, terrible traps capable of breaking the legs of a horse, and snares of the most ingenious construction.

Forest barriers in Old Russia stretched for hundreds of kilometres; the Great Forest Barrier Line, constructed in the sixteenth century, was more than 1,500 kilometres long.

Fortresses and citadels were built behind these lines, which were carefully protected by light mobile detachments. As the enemy tried to penetrate the barrier, these detachments would launch surprise attacks before withdrawing along secret passages. Every attempt to pursue them ended badly for the enemy. False passages were made through the barriers, and these led the enemy into a zone of traps and ambushes.

It is interesting to note that, when the frontiers of Tsarist Russia moved southwards, the old barriers were not destroyed, but were fully preserved and fortified, while a new line of fortifications, fortresses, and fortified towns was constructed, and in front of them a new forest barrier was built. By the end of the seventeenth century, any enemy who tried to attack Moscow from the south would have had to overcome eight of these forest barriers, which had been made to a total depth of 800 kilometres. This was beyond the capability of any one army to penetrate. But even if anyone had decided to try to overcome all these barriers, he would never have been able to make a surprise attack. The aggressor would have been worn down by enormous effort and

by constant raids effected by light mobile detachments. Even supposing that he overcame all this, he would find the Russian Army, fully mobilized, fresh and ready for battle, awaiting him at the end of the road.

Security zones still retain their importance in the twentieth century. The Red Army understood full well what a security zone was, having had enormous experience of operating in them. During the 1920 campaign to 'liberate' Warsaw and Berlin, the Red Army found itself in a security zone prepared by the Polish Army. Chief Marshal of Artillery N. N. Voronov noted how

the Polish troops destroyed everything in the wake of their withdrawal, railway stations, railway lines, and bridges. They burned villages, crops, and haystacks. We moved forward with great difficulty. We had to ford every small river by wading or by improvised means. Having to carry our ammunition made our progress even more difficult. (*Na Sluzhbe Voennoi*, Voenizdat 1963, p. 34)

After such an experience, the Red Army itself created strong security zones on its own frontiers, particularly its western borders. Special government commissions inspected the country's western regions and determined which zones an enemy would find easiest to cross, and which would afford him most difficulty. Teams of bridge-protection guards, trained in demolition work, were made ready to blow up all the bridges in the western regions. The 60-metre long railway bridge at Olev, for example, could have been blown up by the duplicated explosion system in two and a half minutes. (I. Starinov, *Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, Moscow Voenizdat 1964, p. 24)

Heavy pipe-lines, depots, water pumps, water towers, high embankments and deep cuttings were all prepared to be blown up. (*Ibid*, p. 18) By the end of 1929, 60 teams of demolition sappers, totalling 1,400 men, had been trained in the Kiev Military District alone. These had at their disposal '1,640 fully prepared sophisticated charges and tens of thousands of safety-fuse detonator sets, which were ready literally for instant use.' (*Ibid*, p. 22) Similar activity was also going on in other military districts.

In addition to the teams of demolition sappers which had been set up in the western regions of the country, railway-blocking battalions were formed. One of their tasks was to destroy the main railway junctions in the

event of a retreat and to create defence obstacles on the main arterial routes by destroying roads and laying delayed-action land mines lest the enemy should try to rebuild the roads. There were four such battalions in the Ukraine in 1932. (*Ibid*, p. 175)

Railway points crossings, communications equipment, telegraph wires and in some cases even the rails were got ready to be removed. (M. Tukhachevsky, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya*, Moscow Voenizdat 1964, Vol. i pp. 65-67)

The Soviet security zone underwent continuous improvements. The number of targets prepared for demolition steadily grew. New defence obstacles were created: forest barriers; artificial reservoirs in front of defensive constructions; preparations were even made to flood some areas.

In the autumn of 1939, the Soviet Union had a great stroke of luck. Under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, it annexed new territories between 200 and 300 kilometres deep. The security zone that had already been set up thus grew considerably in depth. Nature herself could have created these new territories for the express purpose of equipping it as a security zone. They had forests, hills, bogs, deep rivers with marshy banks and, in the western Ukraine, fast-flowing mountain rivers between steep banks. In short 'the terrain favoured defence and the creation of defence obstacles.' (Marshal of the Soviet Union A. Eremenko, *V Nachale Voiny*, Moscow Nauka 1964, p. 71) As if that were not enough, the network of roads was still at a primitive stage of development. Of 6,696 miles of railway lines, only 2,008 had double tracks, but the capacity of even these was limited. It would have been quite easy, were the need to arise, to make these railway lines quite unusable.

It was at this point that the Red Army had spectacular confirmation of the value of security zones to a defending side. In the autumn of that year, the Soviet Union invaded Finland. The attack was no surprise, however, for the Finnish forces were far from the frontier behind their own security zone when it arrived.

The failures of the Red Army on this occasion were not simply the results of miscalculations by the Soviet command. More important was the fact that the Finnish Army was prepared for defence, and ready to make sacrifices. The Finns had erected their security zone in front of their main line of defence. This zone -some 40-60 kilometres deep (*Sovetskaya Voennaya Entsiklopediya*, Vol. 6, p. 504) - was strewn with minefields and defence obstacles. Snipers, sappers and light mobile detachments were extremely active.

The result was that it took the Red Army 25 days to overcome the security zone. They emerged from it facing the main line of defence having suffered great losses, with low morale and without ammunition, fuel or supplies. Space for manoeuvre was severely restricted. One step off the road might be the last one would ever take. The rear units fell behind and found themselves under constant threat of repeated raids by Finnish light detachments, who knew the locality extremely well and who had secret paths through the minefields.

All the Soviet commanders who fought there expressed their admiration of the Finnish security zone. Foremost among them was K. Meretskov, who commanded the yth Army. (*Na Sluzhbe Narodu*, Moscow IPL 1968, p. 184) After he had finally overcome the Finnish security zone and had assessed its worth, Meretskov was appointed Chief of the General Staff. So how did he make use of his experience in order to reinforce the Soviet security zone which had been set up along the Soviet Union's western frontiers?

Meretskov ordered that:

1. The security zone which had previously been constructed along the Soviet Union's western frontiers should be dismantled, the teams of demolition sappers disbanded, the explosive charges removed, the mines rendered harmless, and the defence obstacles razed to the ground;
2. No security zone should be set up in the new lands;
3. The main forces of the Red Army should be moved right up to the frontiers, without a security zone to protect them;
4. The strategic resources of the Red Army should be brought from the heart of the country and concentrated directly on the frontier;
5. A vast works programme should begin at once to build a network of roads and airfields in western Byelorussia and in the western Ukraine: single-lane roads were to be made into dual-lane roads, the capacity of the roads was to be increased; and new roads leading directly to the German border were to be built.

The results of this ludicrous policy became clear when Poland was partitioned in 1939. Bridges across what were now frontier rivers remained intact, even though nobody used them. There were six such bridges in the zone of the Soviet 4th Army alone. For understandable reasons, the Germans never raised the issue of destroying them, although no one needed them in peacetime. But the Soviet leaders did not raise the issue of destroying them either. The moment the war began, all these bridges were captured by the Germans, allowing a great number of German troops to cross them and catch the Soviet 4th Army napping. This army suffered a crushing defeat, opening the way into the rear of the powerful 10th Army, which suffered a quite unprecedented rout as a result. Encountering no further obstacles in his path, Guderian began his drive for Minsk.

'Why, in particular, were so many bridges across the Bug left intact in the 4th Army zone?' enquires L. Sandalov, former chief of staff of the 4th Army. (*Perezhitoe*, Voenizdat 1966, p. 99) Why indeed? The German command hoped to use the bridges in an aggressive war, so it was clearly not in their interests to destroy them. But what was the Soviet Command hoping for?

The decision to leave the bridges intact is usually explained as a piece of incompetence on the part of the Soviet commanders. But it was Sandalov, whose most striking quality was his exceptional prudence and attention to detail, who was responsible for these bridges. It is interesting that no one has blamed him for doing nothing about these bridges, nor has anyone put him up against a wall for it. On the contrary, in June 1941 he began his rapid rise in rank from colonel to colonel-general, and distinguished himself in many operations.

The German troops advanced further without encountering difficulties, capturing bridges across the Dvina, the Berezin, the Niemen, the Pripyat' and even the Dnieper. A failure to prepare these bridges for demolition could be judged as criminal negligence. But the matter is more serious. They had been prepared for demolition, but were cleared of mines after the common Soviet—German frontier had been established. The mines were cleared everywhere. This means that it happened not because of a whim of individual idiots, but because it was state *policy*. 'Our country,' wrote Colonel Ilya Starinov, 'was now directly adjoined to the West, which contained the powerful military machine of Nazi Germany.'

The threat of invasion hung over England . . . When I learnt that preparations were being made to dismantle the defence obstacles in the frontier zone, I was simply stunned. Even everything which we had succeeded in setting up in the years 1926-33 was in fact eliminated. There were no longer any stores with already prepared charges sited near important bridges and other objectives. It was not only that there were no brigades. There were no special battalions either . . . The Ul'yanovsk School of Special Engineering, which was the only training institution which turned out highly qualified commanders for sub-units equipped with radio-controlled mines, was made into a communications school. (I. Starinov, *op. cit.* p. 175)

The element of surprise - so advantageous to the Germans in June 1941 - could have been reduced had the main Soviet forces been kept away from the actual frontiers. Empty territory, even without any technical defence installations, would have served as a security zone after its own fashion, by allowing the main forces time to get ready for action. But, according to the official Soviet account,

The armies . . . were to deploy directly along the state frontier ... in spite of the fact that its geographical outline was entirely disadvantageous to defence. Even those security /ones stipulated in our pre-war directives had not been technically prepared, (*htoriya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiny*, Voenizdat 1961, Vol. 2, p. 49)

Thus Meretskov was acting against Soviet military interests. So why did Stalin not dismiss him? He did; but not because Meretskov had eliminated the security zone and failed to create a new one, but because Meretskov had not been active enough in building roads, bridges, and airfields in the new regions.

On 1 February 1941, Meretskov's place as Chief of General Staff was taken by General G. K. Zhukov. The work then intensified on a truly Zhukovian scale. Prior to this, there had been five railway brigades in the Red Army. Zhukov immediately increased this number to thirteen. Each brigade consisted of one regiment, two detached battalions and back-up sub-units. Almost all the railway troops were concentrated in the western frontier regions, where they worked intensively at modernizing old railway tracks and laying new ones leading

right up to the frontier itself. (*Red Star*, 15 September 1984) The construction of these lines suggests that the Soviet leadership was looking upon the frontier zone not as a battle zone but as its *rear area* to which, in the event of a rapid advance into the west, it would be essential to send millions of new reservists, millions of tons of ammunition, fuel and other items of supply.

The construction of railways was accompanied by the building of motor highways running directly to the frontier towns of Peremyshl', Brest-Litovsk and Yavarov. When preparations are being made for a defensive war, 'belt' roads are built running parallel with the front, so that troops may be moved from passive sectors to those under threat. These 'belt' roads are built deep in the rear; the frontier regions themselves are left as far as possible without roads or bridges. But the Red Army built both railways and motor highways running from east to west, directly to the front. This is done when preparations are being made to advance, so that reserves can be transferred rapidly from within the country to the state frontier, and so that the troops can subsequently be supplied when they have crossed the frontier.

'The network of motor highways in western Byelorussia and the western Ukraine,' recalls Marshal Zhukov, 'was in a very bad condition. Many bridges were unable to bear the weight of medium tanks or artillery.' (*Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, p. 207) The situation should have delighted Zhukov: the supports of these rickety bridges could have been knocked down; anti-tank mines could have been laid on the banks, snipers posted in the undergrowth, and anti-tank guns put in place. Instead, Zhukov was furiously building roads, and replacing old bridges with new ones, so that tanks and artillery could use them.

The NK VD and Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria in person gave the Red Army enormous help in this mighty work. The term 'the construction organizations of the NK VD' is often encountered in Soviet sources. (Air Chief Marshal A. A. Novikov, *V Nebe Leningrada*, Nauka 1970, p. 65) But we now know whom the NKVD used as manpower. Why else were so many labour-camp prisoners held in the frontier zone, particularly on the eve of the war?

Meanwhile war was clearly approaching. The official *History of the Kiev Military District* (Voenizdat 1972, p. 147) states that 'at the beginning of 1941 the Nazis set about building bridges, railway branch lines and field aerodromes'. These were clear signs that an invasion was being prepared. Yet this is what the Soviet railway troops were doing at exactly the same time. (*Ibid*, P. 143)

The railway brigades which Zhukov had set up accomplished a vast amount of work on Soviet territory. Their main purpose, however, was to operate on enemy territory in the wake of the advancing troops by rapidly overcoming the enemy's security zone, by rebuilding roads and bridges and by altering the narrow Western European gauge on the main railway lines to make it correspond to the broader Soviet standard. After the war began, these brigades were used to put up defence obstacles, but this was not what they had been brought into existence to do.

On the eve of the war, the Soviet railway troops did not prepare the rails for removal or demolition. They did not transport their supplies away from the frontier zones. On the contrary, they stockpiled rails, collapsible bridges, building material and coal in considerable quantities directly on the frontier. It was right there that the German Army captured all these stocks. German documents give evidence of this, as indeed do Soviet sources. Starinov, who was head of the Department for Defence Obstacles and Mining in the Engineering Directorate of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, described the Brest-Litovsk frontier railway station on 21 June 1941. 'Near the railway tracks,' he wrote, 'the sun shone down upon mountains of coal and heaps of brand-new rails beside the tracks. The rails sparkled in the sunshine. Everything breathed tranquillity.' (*Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, p. 190)

Everyone knows that rails very quickly become covered with a thin coating of rust. The point here is that the rails had just been delivered straight to the frontier on the day before the war began. Why?

'Ah, if only Stalin had not eliminated Tukhachevsky, everything would have been different,' was the thought which was constantly hammered into our heads. Tukhachevsky had distinguished himself by his brutality in the shootings of both the peasants in Tambov Province and also of the Kronstad sailors who had been taken prisoner; faced with a real war, he had been defeated by the Polish Army. In all remaining respects he was no different from any other Soviet marshal. 'When preparing an operation,' he wrote, 'it is absolutely essential to make a stockpile of wooden bridges, and to concentrate railway reconstruction units in the necessary sectors . . . when the narrow gauge is being adjusted to a wide one.' (Marshal M. Tukhachevsky, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya*, Voenizdat 1964, Vol. I, pp. 62-63)

Practically all the Soviet engineering and railway troops were gathered on the western frontiers. Sapper units and units belonging to those divisions, corps and armies which were concentrated on the frontier itself,



as well as other units from other formations which had begun to move up to the border, were all operating in the frontier zone before the war began. The Soviet sappers were busy

preparing the departure positions from which the offensive would begin; laying down roads for columns to move along; surmounting and erecting engineered defences, creating tactical and strategic camouflage, ensuring that the infantry and tanks which formed part of the assault groups interacted properly; protecting forced river crossings . . . (*Sovietskie Vooruzhennye Sily*, Voenizdat 1978, p. 255)

Let not the words 'erecting engineered defences' mislead the reader. By the time that the decisive attack on the Finnish Mannerheim Line began, Soviet sappers had also built several sectors consisting of engineered defence obstacles similar to the Finnish ones. Before going into battle, the newly arrived Soviet troops were put through these defences, which had been put there for training purposes. After that, they went over to the real attack.

With all due respect to the German Army, it must be admitted that it was catastrophically unprepared for a serious war. The impression is given that the German General Staff simply did not know that winter occurs on occasions in Russia, or that the roads were somewhat different from German ones. The oil used to lubricate German weapons congealed in the intense cold, and consequently they did not work. The German *Blitzkrieg* was unable to move with the same rapidity over Russian roads as it had over French ones. Hitler knew that he had to make war in Russia; if German industry was producing arms which were only suitable for use in Western Europe and Africa, who can say that Germany was ready for war with the USSR?

Hitler was lucky, however: Zhukov, Meretskov and Beria had obligingly compensated for the defects in German military planning by building roads and laying down great stockpiles of rails, collapsible bridges and building materials just where the enemy could capture them. What would have happened to Hitler's army had a powerful programme of self-defence been put into effect, with bridges blown up, rolling stock and rails

evacuated, all stores destroyed and the roads wrecked, flooded, turned into marshes and mined? The German *Blitzkrieg* would have skidded to a halt long before it reached Moscow.

It was not, of course, for Hitler's benefit that Meretskov, Zhukov and Beria had built roads and railways and stockpiled supplies. It was to let the Soviet 'liberation' army loose on Europe, with speed and with nothing in its path, and to keep it supplied in the course of its surprise offensive. On the eve of the war, no one in the Red Army was thinking about defensive obstacles. Everyone had his mind on overcoming such obstacles on enemy territory. That is why, under cover of a TASS announcement of 13 June 1939, some Soviet marshals and leading experts on obstacle *clearing* made their secret appearance on the western frontier.

Marshal of the Soviet Union G. Kulik, who had secretly arrived in Byelorussia, discussed the situation with Colonel Starinov. 'Let's have mine-detectors, sappers and trawl equipment!' he demanded (*Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, p. 179) The Marshal was thinking about German territory. All the mines on Soviet territory had already been rendered harmless, and all the obstacles dismantled. 'You have not named your branch correctly,' the Marshal went on to tell him. 'To be in accordance with our doctrine you should call it the branch for the clearance of obstacles and mines. Once we would have thought otherwise, and harped on defence, defence . . . but enough of that!' (*Ibid*, quoted by Starinov) The same problem worried General of the Army Dimitri Grigoryevich Pavlov, the commander of the Special Western Military District. He noted angrily that insufficient attention was being paid to obstacle removal. The Red Army had learnt from its experience in the Finnish security zone, and was carefully preparing itself to surmount the German defences. If only the Soviet marshals had known that the war would begin for them on 21 June, and not as planned in July, then no resources for dismantling mines would have been needed at all.

The German Army broke its own rules and did exactly the same thing. It removed the mines, razed the defences to the ground and concentrated its troops directly on a frontier which had no defensive zone whatever. At the beginning of June, German troops began to remove the barbed wire from the frontier. Marshal of the Soviet Union Kirill Sirnionovich Moskalenko considered this incontrovertible evidence that they would soon begin an aggression. (*Ha Yugo-Zapadnom Napravleny*, Nauka 1960, p. 24)

But of course the Red Army did the same thing very shortly afterwards. The full flower of military engineering thought, including Professor Dimitri Mikhailovich Karbyshev - then a lieutenant-general of engineering troops — came from Moscow to meet on the western frontier. As he left Moscow at the beginning

of June, he told his friends that the war had already begun and arranged to meet them in the 'place of victory.' Once he had arrived on the western frontier, he became feverishly busy. He attended exercises in fording water-defence obstacles, and in surmounting anti-tank obstacles with the latest T-34 tanks, neither of which are needed in defensive warfare. On 21 June, he went over to the 10th Army. But 'before this,' his biographer tells us, 'Karbyshev, accompanied by V. I. Kuznetsov, officer commanding the 3rd Army and Colonel N. A. Ivanov, commandant of the Grodnensk UR [*Ukreplyonnyi Raion* - fortified region] visited the frontier detachment. On the Augustow-Seino road along the frontier, our barbed-wire entanglements were still in place in the morning, but by the time they passed them again on their return journey, the barriers appeared to have been removed.' (E. Reshin, *General Karbyshev*, Izd. DOSAAF 1971, p. 204)

Interestingly, neither the officer commanding the 3rd Army, who had to wage war there, nor the commandant of the fortified zone which in theory was intended for defence, nor the most senior expert from Moscow, who knew that the war had already begun, reacted in the slightest to these measures. On the contrary, the removal of the obstacles coincided with their visit.

Can we imagine the commander of a Soviet frontier sub-unit, an NKVD lieutenant, removing the barbed wire on his own volition? If he were to give such an order, would not his subordinates regard the order as 'clearly criminal'? The lieutenant did give such an order, though, and his subordinates carried it out at the gallop; evidently an order had been received from Lieutenant-General I. A. Bogdanov, the head of the NKVD frontier troops in Byelorussia. Bogdanov clearly realized that war was approaching; on 18 June he took the decision to evacuate the families of servicemen. (*Dozornye Zapadnykh Rubezhei*, Izd. Polit Literatury Ukrainy, Kiev 1972, p. 101)

It is hardly possible that Bogdanov could have decided to evacuate frontier troops' families and, at the same time, to cut the wire, without the knowledge of Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria, the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs and General Commissar for State Security. It is hardly possible that Beria could have made this decision by himself either. Nor did he do so. Beria worked in full co-operation with Zhukov. Above them, Stalin must have co-ordinated the actions of the army and the NKVD. The military and the Chekists were acting in coordination. What is more, they were all in full agreement on essentials, on places and on times.

We are assured that the Red Army suffered its first defeats because it was unprepared for war. This is nonsense. If it had not prepared itself for war, then the barbed wire would have been left intact, if only on the

frontier. This would at least have gained a little time for the army sub-units to bring their weaponry to readiness, and may have averted the fearful catastrophes that followed.

The Chekists certainly did not remove the barbed wire on the frontier in order to allow the German Army to take advantage of the gaps they had opened up. The barbed wire was taken away for other purposes. Try to imagine a situation where, for whatever reason, the German assault had been delayed. What would the Chekists on the frontier have done? Would they have eliminated the frontier barriers, kept the frontier open, and begun again to erect defensive obstacles? Certainly not. There can be only one alternative to this thesis. The Chekists cut the wire in order to allow the 'liberation army' to pass over the enemy's territory, without hindrance, in exactly the same way as they had done before the 'liberation' of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Bessarabia and Bukovina. Now Germany's turn had come.

## CHAPTER 10

### Why Stalin Abolished the Stalin Line

*Only naive people believe that the chief task of fortified zones is defence. This is not so. Fortified zones are built so that an offensive may be prepared in greater security. They must also securely conceal the deployment of groupings of shock troops, repel any enemy attempt to disrupt their deployment, and support our troops with all possible fire power when they go over to the offensive.*

Major-General PIOTR GRIGORENKO  
(Memoirs, New York 1981, p. 141)

In the 1930s, thirteen fortified regions, or URs, were built along the Soviet Union's western frontier, in a strip of territory which was unofficially called the Stalin Line.

Each fortified region was in fact a military formation equivalent to a brigade in numerical strength, but equal to a corps in fire-power. Every region was made up of a command and a headquarters, between two and eight machine-gun and artillery battalions, one artillery regiment, several batteries of heavy caponier artillery, a tank battalion, a communications company or battalion, a sapper engineering battalion and other sub-units. Each region covered an area of 100-180 kilometres along the front, to a depth of 30-50 kilometres. A complex system of combat and supply installations, armoured and built of reinforced concrete, was constructed in the zone; there were also underground premises, built of reinforced concrete, to serve as storage depots, electrical power stations, hospitals, command points and communications centres. The underground installations were linked by a complicated system of tunnels, galleries and overlapping communication trenches. Each UR was capable of waging warfare independently and over a long period in conditions of complete isolation.

The basic element of the fortified regions was the DOT, or permanent fire position. In its issue of 25 February 1983, the newspaper *Red Star* gave a description of DOT No. 112 in the 53rd UR, situated in the Mogilev-Podolsk region. This was one of the completely standard DOTs in the Stalin Line.

It consisted of complex tunnelled fortification defences, which contained communication trenches, caponiers, compartments and filtration systems. It also had armouries, ammunition stores, food supplies, a medical unit, a mess room, water supply (which incidentally is still functioning), a recreation and reading room, and observation and command posts. The armament of the DOT consisted of machine-gun positions with three firing embrasures. In these posts there were three 'maxims' mounted on special turrets and two single-gun caponiers with a ydmrn cannon in each one.

One may take this DOT to be an average one. Besides the DOTs, thousands of small combat structures were built, along with enormous fortification ensembles. General P. Grigorenko describes one of them in his memoirs. Built in the same UR in Mogilev-Podolsk, it had eight powerful DOTs, all interlinked by underground galleries. Colonel P. G. Umansky also took part in building the Stalin Line, and in his memoirs he mentions the underground installations in the Kiev fortified region, where they stretched over a distance of many kilometres (Colonel P. G. Umansky, *Na boevykh mbezkhakh*, Voenizdat 1960, p. 35) Colonel-General A. I. Shebunin, another participant in that mighty work of construction, tells us that in the Proskurov UR alone, more than one thousand reinforced concrete defence-works were constructed in just three years. Many of these were concealed by artificial water defences (Colonel-General A. I. Shebunin, *Skol'ko namiproideno*, Moscow Voenizdat 1971, p. 58)

The construction of the Stalin Line was not advertised like the building of the Maginot Line. The Stalin Line was erected in the total darkness of state secrecy. As every strongpoint was being built, the NKVD 'closed' some parts of it 'to prevent some horrible bird flying around there'. (P. Grigorenko, *Memoirs*) Construction work proceeded in all sectors at the same time, but only in one of the sectors was it genuine - in the other cases it was simply a false front. Both the local inhabitants and many of those who were involved in the building at the time had a mistaken idea of what was being built, and where.

There were many differences between the Soviet Union's Stalin Line and the French Maginot Line. It was impossible to pass round the extreme ends of the Stalin Line, as its flanks rested upon the Baltic at one end and the Black Sea on the other. The Stalin Line was built not just for defence against infantry attack, but primarily for defence against enemy tanks. In addition, it had powerful air-defence cover. The Stalin Line also had greater depth than the French system. Apart from the reinforced concrete which was used to build the Stalin Line, large quantities of armoured steel and granite from Zaporozh'e and Cherkassy were employed.

An important difference between the two lines was that the Stalin Line was built deep inside Soviet territory, and not up against the actual frontier; it was protected by a security zone which would have slowed the enemy's advance and worn him down. It also would have acted like a fog at sea which conceals a chain of icebergs behind it. The fortified zones were camouflaged in such a way that, when the attacking troops came up against Stalin's forts, they would have received an unpleasant surprise.

Unlike the Maginot Line, the Stalin Line was not a continuous whole. The fortified regions were separated by wide gaps. When the need arose, these gaps could have been covered with minefields, artificial defences of all kinds, and field defence involving ordinary troops. They could also have been left open, as if to offer the aggressor the choice of not attacking the fortified regions head on, but of trying to pass between them. If the enemy took the opportunity offered, then the mass of advancing troops would be split up into several isolated lines, each one of which would then have to move forward along a corridor which was under fire on both sides, while its flanks, rear, and lines of communication would be under constant and very serious threat.

We shall see later that the corridors which separated these fortified regions had yet another, altogether different purpose.

The 13 fortified regions of the Stalin Line were built by enormous effort and at vast expense during the first two five-year plans. In 1938, it was decided to reinforce all thirteen fortified regions by building heavy artillery caponiers in them. In addition, the construction of eight more fortified regions began. More than one thousand combat installations were concreted into the new fortified regions in the period of one year.

At that very moment, however, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. The Pact marked the beginning of World War II. It also meant that there was no longer a dividing barrier between the Soviet Union and Germany - they now shared a common frontier.

Stalin could have done a great deal in this very menacing situation to improve the security of the Soviet Union's western frontiers and to guarantee Soviet neutrality in the course of a war. He could, for instance, have ordered that the garrisons on the Stalin Line be strengthened; that the factories producing armaments for the fortified regions should step up their output; that plants which were producing defensive weapons should give priority to anti-tank guns and anti-tank rifles; that the entire construction engineering capability of the country, and its entire resources, be mobilized so that the construction of the Stalin Line be accelerated appreciably; that a start be made on building a second, even stronger defensive system in front of the Stalin Line; that in addition to these two powerful defensive systems, a third belt of fortified zones be built behind the Stalin Line, for example along the eastern bank of the Dnieper; and finally that the troops of the Red Army dig thousands of kilometres of trenches, anti-tank ditches, pits and communication trenches from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

In Autumn 1939, however, when World War II began and a common frontier with Germany was established, all construction work on the Stalin Line was stopped. (V. Anfilov: *Bessmertnyi Podvig*, Moscow Nauka 1971, p. 35) The garrisons in the fortified regions of the Stalin Line were first reduced in size and then disbanded completely. Soviet factories stopped producing armament and special equipment destined for fortification installations. The existing fortified regions were dismantled, and their armament, ammunition and all observation, communications and fire-control equipment were put into storage. (VIZH 1961 No. 9, p. 120) The process of eliminating the Stalin Line gathered speed. Some of the military buildings were handed over to collective farms to be used for storing vegetables; but most of the military installations were covered with earth.

Apart from armaments for the fortified regions, Soviet industry ceased producing many other defensive systems as well. Production of anti-tank guns and 76mm regiment and division guns, which could also have been used as anti-tank guns, was completely stopped. (VIZH 1961 No. 7, p. 101; VIZH 1963 No. 2, p. 12) The anti-tank guns which had already been issued to the troops were not used for the purpose for which they had been intended, but for knocking out enemy firing positions when Soviet troops were on the attack. (Lieu-



tenant-General I. P. Roslyi: *Posledny Prival v Berline*, Moscow Voenizdat 1983, p. 27) Anti-tank rifles were not only taken out of production; they even ceased to be part of the Red Army's armament. (*VIZH* 1961, No. 7, p. 101) Everything connected with defence was mercilessly destroyed and obliterated.

In fairness, however, it must be said that in the summer of 1940, construction began of a belt of fortified regions directly on the new Soviet-German frontier. It was never completed. The Soviet General Staff, not without a certain degree of irony, gave these new fortified regions the unofficial title of the Molotov Line. The decision to embark upon its construction was taken on 26 June 1940. (V. Anfilov, *op. cit.*, p. 162) Construction proceeded very slowly on the new frontier, although the destruction of the old defences went ahead with surprising speed.

The tragedy of the Stalin Line reached its apotheosis in the spring of 1941:

I do not know how future historians will explain this crime against our people. Present-day historians pass over this event in complete silence, and I do not know why. The Soviet government fleeced its people of many billions of roubles (no less than 120 billion, according to my calculations) in order to build fortifications, impregnable to any enemy, along the entire western frontier, from sea to sea, from the grey Baltic to the azure Black Sea. Yet just before war broke out, in spring 1941, powerful explosions thundered along the 1,200-kilometre-long stretch of fortifications. Strong double and single caponiers built of reinforced concrete, firing positions with one, two and three embrasures, command posts, observation posts, and tens of thousands of permanent defensive installations were all blown up on Stalin's personal orders. (Major-General P. G. Grigorenko, *VPodpol'eMozhno Vstretit' Tol'ko Krys*, New York 1981, p. 141)

Thus, the Stalin Line on the old frontier had already been obliterated, while the Molotov Line on the new frontier had still to be built. After the war, and after Stalin died, Soviet generals and marshals chorused their indignation. Chief Marshal of Artillery N. N. Voronov had this to say: 'How could our leadership, having failed

to build the necessary defensive zones on the new western frontier in 1939, take the decision to abolish and disarm the fortified regions on the former borders?' (*Na sluzhbe Voennoi*, Moscow Voenizdat 1963, p. 172)

The Marshal's indignation is false, however. He scolds 'our leadership', but he himself was Colonel-General of Artillery, one of the most senior posts in the Red Army command, at the time. Can it really be that the anti-tank and caponier guns were withdrawn from production without his knowledge? Did he really not know that the Artillery caponiers in the Stalin Line were being stripped of armament and obliterated? Voronov deliberately asks the wrong question in order to distract the reader's attention from the essence of the problem. He seems to think that the Molotov Line should have been built first, and then the Stalin Line broken up afterwards. In putting the question this way, Voronov tacitly justifies the destruction of the Stalin Line; his criticism is not that it was done at all, but only that it was done prematurely.

But why not ask another question - why break up the Stalin Line at all? The events of 1940 had confirmed twice over that two defensive strips are better than one. In 1940 the Red Army paid a high price in blood to break through the Mannerheim Line, compelling Finland to concede to Stalin's demands. Later that year, the German Army passed round the side of the French Maginot Line, broke out on to a broad expanse of territory where it could operate without restriction, and that was the end of the war for France. It is unfortunate that neither France nor Finland had a second line, deep in their heartlands; in that case it is unlikely that either invasion would have succeeded.

Stalin had just such a second line – and then assiduously broke it up. Over the years, Soviet apologists have devised a great number of explanations for this apparent act of folly. One of these is that there was insufficient armament to equip the new fortified regions, so that equipment had to be taken from the Stalin Line. This argument fails on several counts, however. Firstly, if the Molotov Line was short of armament, why were the ordnance plants not ordered to step up production? Not only was no such order given, but the production of standard armaments was actually stopped.

Secondly, the demolition of the Stalin Line began in the autumn of 1939. The arms removed from it were put into storage, because the Molotov Line did not then exist. Indeed, the decision to erect it was not taken until 26 June 1940. So it turns out that first of all the Stalin Line was demilitarized, while later, nearly a year later, the reason, the need and the requirement to do so arose.

Thirdly, the Molotov Line, in comparison to the Stalin Line, was a comparatively weak series of light fortifications, and did not need such a large quantity of armament. In the Western Special Military District of Byelorussia, for instance, 193 combat installations were built on the new frontier, while before that on the old frontier, 876 more powerful combat installations had been disarmed. The ratio of newly built installations to those which had been previously disarmed was still more striking in other military districts. In order to have armed the Molotov Line, therefore, it would have been sufficient to take only *part* of the armament, and a minor part of that, from the Stalin Line. Why then was the armament removed in its entirety from the Stalin Line?

Casement weaponry, machine guns, ammunition, periscopes, communications equipment and gas filters are portable; reinforced concrete installations are not. Even the smallest DOT, with a machine gun and one embrasure, is a reinforced concrete monolith weighing 350 tons, dug into the earth with blocks of granite piled on top of it and covered over with earth, which even had trees growing on it to afford extra defence and camouflage. It was surrounded by ditches and artificial ponds. Could all this have been dragged 200 kilometres westwards?

Even if we accept that the Stalin Line had to be stripped of its armament to equip the new frontier, why blow up its installations? The ordinary foot soldier, armed with his rifle and shovel, can dig a trench to make it difficult and sometimes impossible for the enemy to cross the Line. If you put the same soldier, armed with his rifle or even a light machine gun, not into a mud-hole in the middle of a field, but into even the most simple dismantled DOT, then his tenacity and firmness will increase tenfold. He will have at least one metre of reinforced ferroconcrete over his head, a metre and a half of it in front of him and a metre on each side, all carefully camouflaged from the enquiring gaze of the enemy. If 170 first-echelon Soviet divisions were put into these albeit dismantled boxes, it would have been no simple matter to break through their defences. Defending troops always need something to hold on to: the dismantled forts at Verdun; the bastions at Brest-Litovsk; the walls at Stalingrad; or the trenches in the Kursk salient, which had been abandoned two years previously. Once they have such a foothold, the infantry will dig in in such a way that nothing will smoke them out of their lairs and burrows. They will turn the ruins of a factory, a nineteenth-century bastion or a thirteenth-century citadel into an unassailable fortress.

Even when completely dismantled, the Stalin Line could have provided a line of defence on which the Red Army could have stopped the enemy from reaching the heart of the country. Then the dismantled DOTs, the underground command posts, the excellent hospitals, the concrete-protected store depots, to say nothing of the underground galleries and tunnels, lines of communication and control lines, electrical power stations and water-supply systems, could all have come in useful. But after destroying the Stalin Line, the First Strategic Echelon of the Red Army was moved to the other side of the pre-war frontier. Under cover of the TASS report of 13 June 1941, troops belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon were transferred, in total secrecy, in seven armies to the western areas of the Soviet Union. These armies too were sent beyond the old frontier, and beyond the now dismantled, abandoned and obliterated Stalin Line.

Every soldier knows that defence must be constantly improved; it is one of the most basic requirements laid down by military textbooks. No matter how strong the defences might appear, every soldier will go on doggedly digging up the ground, making the anti-tank ditches wider and deeper, adding a second, third, fourth, and fifth trench to the first one. There is no such thing as an 'adequate' state of defence; if ten anti-tank ditches have been dug, then dig an eleventh.

Soldiers of every army have known this simple truth for many thousands of years now. That is why new defences are built to strengthen and reinforce existing defences, not to replace them. A study of any castle will show that no defence is ever obsolete. An eleventh-century tower will be surrounded by thirteenth-century walls. Around them is a ring of seventeenth-century bastions, which in their turn are ringed by nineteenth-century forts, reinforced by twentieth-century DOTs. According to this basic and universally accepted military principle, the Molotov Line could have served as a complement to the Stalin Line, but never as a replacement for it.

The Molotov Line, however, was created neither as an addition to the Stalin Line nor as a replacement for it, and differed sharply from its predecessor both in concept and in detail. Unlike the Stalin Line, it was built in such a way that it could be seen by the enemy. It was set up in second-grade military sectors, and was not shielded by a security zone, by minefields or other engineered defences. The builders of the Molotov Line did not make use of the many opportunities available to reinforce it, nor were they in any hurry to build it.

The construction of the Molotov Line is just as much an enigma in Soviet history as is the destruction of the Stalin Line. Strange things happened when the new fortified zones were being built. In 1941, vast masses of

Soviet troops were concentrated in the Lvov salient in the Ukraine; a smaller force was concentrated in the Bialystok salient in Byelorussia. Soviet marshals explain that they were expecting the main attack to be made in the Ukraine, and a subsidiary one to be launched in Byelorussia. The main effort made in building the Molotov Line should therefore have been concentrated in the Ukraine, with a secondary drive in Byelorussia. But it had been planned to expend half of all the resources allotted to the construction of the Molotov Line in the Baltic area, a second-grade military sector well away from the expected attack. A quarter of the resources were allocated for Byelorussia, with only nine per cent going to the Ukraine, where according to the assurances of the Soviet marshals 'the main attack was expected.' (Anfilov, *op. tit.*, p. 164)

The fortifications in the Molotov Line were built in second-grade military sectors. For example, six road and railway bridges across the river which formed the frontier in the region of Brest-Litovsk were severed immediately. The main strategic thrust of a war would follow a line running from Warsaw through Brest-Litovsk, Minsk, Smolensk and on to Moscow. These Brest-Litovsk bridges were therefore of the highest strategic importance. A new fortified zone *had* been erected near Brest-Litovsk; but it was far out of the way of the crucial bridges.

The fortified regions of the Molotov Line were built right up against the frontier. They were not protected by a security zone, and in the event of a surprise attack the garrisons would no longer have time to occupy their combat installations and bring their weaponry to full readiness. Unlike those along the Stalin Line, the fortified regions of the Molotov Line were not very deep. Everything which could have been built on the frontier itself, was in fact built there. Defence positions were not built in the rear, nor was it ever planned to build any. (Lieutenant-General V. F. Zotov, *Na Severo-Zapadnom Fronte*, Moscow Nauka 1969, p. 175)

The fortifications were not sited on positions which would favour defence, but followed every bend and twist of the state frontier. The new combat installations were not protected by barbed wire, mines, ditches, stakes, hedgehog entanglements or anti-tank tetrahedrons, nor were any engineered defences erected in the area of construction. Neither were the new installations camouflaged. For example, in the fortified region of Vladimir-Volynsk, 'out of 97 combat installations, 5-7 were covered with earth, while the remainder were virtually de-camouflaged'. (*VIZH* 1976, No. 5, p. 91)

If the reader were to cross the Soviet frontier in the region of Brest-Litovsk, let him turn his attention to the grey concrete boxes which stand almost on the bank itself. These are DOTs which belonged to the southern

tip of the Brest-Litovsk fortified region. They were not covered over with earth at the time, and so remain exposed to this day. The DOTs on the Stalin Line were built in secret, far from the frontier, so that the enemy could not know where the fortifications were, where the gaps between them lay, or indeed whether there were any such gaps at all. Now the enemy could see the entire construction from his side, and learn exactly where the fortifications were. He could make out each separate installation with such accuracy that he could even establish what the line of fire would be from each embrasure. On the basis of this he could determine the entire fire plan and, choosing those strips of land which were not covered by fire, infiltrate himself towards the uncamouflaged DOTs and block the embrasures with sandbags; which is exactly what the Germans did on 22 June 1941.

Marshal Zhukov testified that

the fortified zones were built too close to the frontier and had an extremely unfavourable operational configuration, especially in the area of the Bialystok salient. This enabled the enemy to attack the rear of our entire Bialystok grouping from the area of Brest-Litovsk and Suwalki. In addition, because they lacked sufficient depth, the fortified zones were unable to hold out for long, since they were shot through by artillery. (*Vospominaniya i Razmyshleniya*, APH 1969, p. 194)

Since the Brest-Litovsk and Suwalki areas were so vulnerable to enemy attack, why was use not made of the old, abandoned Russian border fortresses of Brest-Litovsk, Osovets, Grodno Peremyshl' or Kaunas? None of these fortresses is in any way inferior in strength to Verdun, and each could have been turned into an impregnable bastion, thereby raising the stability of the whole defence system. In addition to these fortresses, the regions possessed some old and less powerful fortifications, such as double caponiers, each one intended for a rifle company. The walls and ceilings were of reinforced concrete three metres thick. Colonel Starinov recalled that the head of the GVIU (the Chief Military Engineering Board of the Red Army) 'proposed that use be made of the old Tsarist fortresses near the frontier and set up zones of engineered obstacles. This proposal was never accepted. It was said that it would have served no purpose.' (*Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, Moscow Voenizdat 19, p. 177)

In February 1941, Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov became Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army. No other marshal or general this century has occupied such a senior post without having suffered even one military defeat. Thus Zhukov, whose greatness had already been proved by his lightning rout of the Japanese 6th Army, held virtually supreme military authority, and might have been expected to bring order to the Molotov Line. Zhukov's arrival, however, did nothing to improve the situation. On the contrary, construction work in the Brest-Litovsk region was given a lower priority. (Anfilov, *op. cit.*, p. 166) The meaning of the words 'lower priority construction' need not be explained to the reader who is acquainted with Soviet reality. In practice, it means that construction is almost completely frozen. But even this coin has another side to it. Captured documents of the German 48th Motorized Corps show that the German High Command had formed an altogether different impression. The German troops saw intensive construction work going on day and night; what was more, at night the work took place under floodlights.

What is one to make of this? Were the Soviets really such idiots as to betray their construction sites on the frontier by floodlighting them every night? How can one reconcile 'lower priority construction' with this frenetic burst of floodlit building? One is drawn to the inevitable conclusion that the Molotov Line was built, as Marshal of the Soviet Union I. Kh. Bagramyan put it, as a 'deliberate display'. In his memoirs, Colonel-General Sandalov records a conversation with Mikhail Ivanovich Puzyrev, the commandant of the Brest-Litovsk fortified zone. 'I brought the fortified zone right up to the frontier itself,' Puzyrev told him. 'It was very unusual. Before, we had always built the DOTs a certain distance from the frontier. But there was nothing to be done about it here. We had to be guided by political, and not only by military considerations.' (*Perezhitoe*, Moscow Voenizdat 1966, p. 64)

This presents us with another enigma. The Soviet troops were concealed in the woods, forbidden to show themselves 'so as not to provoke a war'. But at the same time, as a result of political considerations unknown to us, they were importunately displaying to the enemy their intensive preparations for defence, without fear of provoking any diplomatic or military complications.

How can one reconcile all these conflicting facts? As usual, the apparent inconsistency of Soviet military planning is put down to sheer stupidity. I should have accepted this explanation but for one snag. The Stalin Line and the Molotov Line were the work of the same man, Professor D. Karbyshev, lieutenant-general of the engineering troops. On the Stalin Line he did everything right, well up to the level of world standards and

higher. He provided for everything: the careful camouflaging of every DOT, the great depth of every fortified region, the engineered defences, the security zone and much else.

But then the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed and one of the world's most brilliant military engineers suddenly became stupid, and everything he did had been wrong. Above Karbyshev stood the great Zhukov. Everything he did was right, both earlier and later. But suddenly, in the first half of 1941, Zhukov changed into an idiot and had begun to issue idiotic orders. It was just at the time of Zhukov's arrival at the General Staff that 'the fortified zones on the old frontiers were disarmed to their previous state, while construction on the new frontiers went ahead at a snail's pace'. (Starinov, *op. tit.*, p. 178)

The story about stupid Stalin, stupid Zhukov and the idiot Karbyshev will not hold water, for the reason that at that very same time Adolf Hitler and the German generals were doing exactly the same thing. They took exactly the same decisions, but no one considered what they did to be idiotic.

Between 1932 and 1937, particularly strong fortifications had been built on the banks of the Oder to protect Germany from attacks from the east. They were first-class combat installations which blended into the surrounding terrain and were very well camouflaged, and rank among the highest achievements of military engineering in the first half of our century.

Once the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, the German army moved east and these splendid fortifications were abandoned, *never again* to be occupied by troops. Many combat installations were used to satisfy other needs. In the Hochwald region, for example, there was a powerful fortification complex containing 22 four-storey combat installations, connected by a 30-kilometre underground tunnel. All this was handed over to the aircraft industry to house a plant which produced aircraft engines. Having moved out to meet the Red Army in the middle of Poland, the German troops began to build a new line of fortified regions. They were built in secondary sectors, right up against the Soviet frontier. Neither minefields nor engineered defences were put down in front of the new fortified regions.

Work went on day and night. The Soviet frontier guards saw what was going on, and reported it 'to the proper quarters'. (*Pogranichnye Voiska SSSR 1939 — iyun' 1941, Sbornik doku-mentov i materialov*, Moscow Nauka 1970, Document Nos. 344 and 287) Construction work went ahead intensively until May 1941, after which,



as Soviet jargon would have it, the defences were 'regraded to the category of non-first priority'. Of 80 combat installations planned to be built on the banks of the frontier river San, only 17 were completed. All of these were inadequately camouflaged. In comparison with the defences on the old German frontier, these were light installations. The walls and ceilings were each 1½ metres thick, and the armoured component parts 200mm. each. On the old frontier on the Oder line, the armoured component parts had been much stronger, with thicknesses up to 350mm.

Exactly the same thing was being done on the Soviet side. On the Stalin Line there were strong armoured cupolas and very heavy armoured parts; in the building of the Molotov Line on the banks of the same river San, Soviet engineers used comparatively thin armoured parts of a thickness of up to 200mm. When I was a Soviet officer, one frequently saw German and Soviet DOTs on opposite sides of the same small river. If photographs of the DOTs were shown to an expert, and he were asked to say where the German and Soviet DOTs were, he would not be able to tell the difference.

Why did the German commanders fail to erect as many strong fortifications on their new frontiers as they had done on their previous border? Because they had no intention of defending themselves for a long period in that place.

A defensive fortification is one thing and an offensive fortification is another. Before launching an attack every general must act in accordance with one of the main principles of strategy and concentrate great masses of troops in very narrow sectors; thus the German troops were concentrated in two salients in the Suwalki and Lyublin areas, while Soviet troops were concentrated in two salients in the areas of Lvov and Bialystok. In order to assemble these shock groupings in the main sectors, the secondary sectors would have to be denuded of their resources, even if nerve were needed to do this. These sectors should have previously constructed fortified zones, so that they should not be left completely exposed. The fire-power and combat installations in these zones would enable fighting troops there to be released for battle.

An offensive fortified zone should be placed to one side of the main axis; your troops will advance over the frontier bridges. Fortifications are not needed here. But, on the side where there are no bridges, your troops must be withdrawn and you must erect a fortified zone in their stead. This will allow a comparatively small garrison to control fairly wide expanses of territory. Offensive fortified zones do not need to have depth. You do not intend to defend yourself here for long. There is no need to put down minefields round about; all the

gaps will be used by your own troops when they move on to enemy territory. The best approach is to move up the DOTs to the frontier river itself, so that when the offensive begins they can be used to give fire support to the advancing troops. There is, of course, no need to build positions in the rear, for by doing so you condemn a part of your garrisons and caponier armament to inactivity. It is better to bring them all up to the frontier itself. Your defensive construction works should not be camouflaged; let the enemy see your defensive building, and let them conclude that you are preparing only for defence.

That was exactly what the German generals did. Not long before, in August 1939, Zhukov had operated precisely in this way at Khalkhin-Gol: 'By these measures, we strove to give the enemy the impression that there was a total absence of preparatory measures of an offensive nature on our side, and to show that we were carrying out extensive works, the purpose of which was to organize defence, and only defence.' (Zhukov, *op. cit.*, p. 161) The Japanese were successfully deceived. They took Zhukov's 'defensive' works at face value, and paid the price when they fell to his crushing lightning strike.

After that, Zhukov did the same thing on the German frontier, although on a much larger scale. But he did not succeed in taking in the German generals; they were familiar with this strategy, having used it themselves. On 22 August 1939, just two days after Zhukov dealt his surprise strike at Khalkin-Gol and while the Molotov—Ribbentrop negotiations were in progress, the German Army was preparing to go into Poland. General Guderian was ordered to take over the 'Fortification Headquarters Pomerania'; the aim was to lull the Poles by making purely defensive preparations. At the same time, he quickly constructed some comparatively light fortifications in secondary sectors, so that a few more fighting troops might be released to take part in the main attack.

Guderian was again building defences in the spring and summer of 1941, but this time it was on the Soviet frontier. If Guderian was building concrete pillboxes on the bank of a river on the frontier, it in no way meant that he was thinking about defending himself. It signified the exact opposite. And if Zhukov was ostentatiously building exactly the same kind of boxes on the bank of the same river, what could that mean?

The Stalin Line was multi-purpose. It could be used to defend the country or serve as a springboard for attack. Wide corridors were therefore left between the fortified regions to allow the mass of Soviet troops to pass through on their way to the west. After the frontier had been moved a couple of hundred kilometres to the west, the Stalin Line completely lost its importance as a fortified springboard for further aggression; and once the Molotov—Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, Stalin no longer had any intention of thinking in terms of defence. This is why the Line was dismantled and then broken up. It was in the way of that great mass of troops who had their sights secretly fixed upon the German frontier. It would also hinder the process of supplying the Red Army with the millions of tons of ammunition, food supplies and fuel it would need on its victorious 'liberation' campaign. The corridors between the fortified zones were perfectly adequate for both military and economic needs in peacetime, but in the course of a war, rivers of consignments of supplies would have to be split up into thousands of little streams, so that they would be invulnerable to enemy counter-action. The fortified regions squeezed transport columns into comparatively narrow corridors. That sealed the fate of the already redundant Line.

Exactly the same situation existed in Germany, on both its eastern and western frontiers. Ever since the Franco—Prussian War, German attacks on France had been traditionally planned to come from the north. The Siegfried Line was built in the 1930s, to the south of this sector; that is, in a secondary sector. The German Army passed far to the west in 1940, and the Siegfried Line turned out to be unnecessary. Since it never occurred to Hitler at the time that four years later he would have to defend himself on his own borders, the Siegfried Line was abandoned. It was turned to account in a very original way. Its combat installations were handed over to farmers for storing potatoes. Some installations, which were fitted with impregnable armoured doors, were simply locked up. When the need arose to open them again, no one could find the keys. (K. Mallory and A. Ottar, *Architecture of Aggression*, Architectural Press, 1973, p. 123)

One may, of course, call outstanding Soviet and German generals idiots, but there was no idiocy here. They were simply aggressors. Both thought in terms of attack, and when their fortifications could no longer be used for the purposes of attack, they were either demolished to make way for their advancing troops or, if the opportunity arose, their combat casements were handed over to farmers for storing potatoes.

## CHAPTER 12

### Partisans or Saboteurs?

*Hitler will attack the West, with his main forces,  
while Moscow will wish to take full advantage of  
its position.*

TROTSKY (BO, Nos. 79-80, 21 June 1939)

After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, the Soviet Union began the systematic destruction of the neutral countries, so that it could 'move up in all its mass to the German frontier just at that time when the Third Reich had become involved in a conflict to carve up the world'. The 'liberation campaigns' proceeded apace, but in Finland a pause occurred. As we have already seen, the Red Army was caught in the Finnish security zone.

Here is a classic situation. A Soviet column of tanks, motorized infantry and artillery is moving along a road through the forest. No one can step off the road, either to the right or to the left, because there are mines there. There is a bridge ahead. The sappers have checked it has not been mined. The leading tanks roll on to the bridge, and the tanks, along with the bridge, go up in the air. Explosive charges had been placed inside the supports of the bridge when it was built. It is not so easy to detect that this has been done, and even if the charges were detected, any attempt to remove them would result in an explosion. Thus the Soviet column, winding like a huge snake across many kilometres, comes to a halt on the road. Now comes the turn of the Finnish snipers. They are in no hurry – crack, crack. Silence descends on the forest. Then crack, crack again. The snipers are firing from somewhere in the distance. They hit only the Soviet commanders. Crack, crack. And commissars as well. It is impossible to comb the woods. We have not forgotten that on either side of the road are impassable minefields. Any attempt by Soviet sappers to approach the blown-up bridge or to defuse the mines on both sides of the road will be ended by a single shot from a Finnish sniper. Crack! The Soviet 44th Rifle Division, which was bottled up on three parallel roads by three blown-up bridges, lost its entire

command staff in one day of fighting. At night the Soviet column is raked by rifle mortar fire from somewhere in the depths of the forest. Sometimes long bursts of machine-gun fire hit the helpless column from somewhere behind the undergrowth. Then all falls silent again.

It is said that the Red Army did not show itself at its best in Finland. That could not be more true. But what would any other army have done in its place? Pull the column back? But the heavy artillery tractors with their great howitzers on tow would not have been able to push their trailers backwards, as these weigh many tons. The snipers now hit the tractor drivers — crack, crack. Finding itself in trouble, half the column goes into reverse and moves backwards. But behind it meanwhile, another bridge has been blown up. The column is now trapped. All the approaches to this bridge have been mined as well, and here too the snipers can take their time. They fire at the commanders, the commissars, the sappers, the drivers — crack, crack. Ahead lies the almost inaccessible line of Finnish reinforced-concrete fortifications, the Mannerheim Line. It is impossible to break through it without artillery and without thousands of tons of ammunition. When the Soviet troops came up against the Finnish fortifications, their heavy artillery was far behind, lying immobilized on roads through the forests, between minefields and blown-up bridges, under sniper fire.

Having been taught such a lesson in Finland, the Soviet commanders must surely have drawn the appropriate conclusions? Surely light partisan detachments would have been set up even in peacetime in the western parts of the USSR to face a possible enemy invasion? Nature herself could have created the western regions of the Soviet Union expressly for partisan warfare on the communications of any aggressor moving eastwards.

Stalin did indeed form such detachments as far back as the 1920s. In Byelorussia alone, there were in peacetime six partisan detachments, each with a strength of between 300 and 500 men. If these numbers seem small, one must bear in mind that the detachments were composed only of commanders, organizers, and specialists of the highest quality. Every peacetime partisan detachment was a nucleus around which powerful formations of several thousand men could be formed at the outbreak of war.

Secret bases for peacetime partisan formations were set up in impassable forests and on little islands in the boundless marshes. Underground shelters, hospitals, storage depots and underground workshops for producing arms and ammunition were all built in peacetime. In Byelorussia alone, arms, ammunition and equipment sufficient for 50,000 partisans were placed in underground caches for use in a possible war.

Secret schools were set up to train these partisan leaders, organizers and instructors. Secret scientific research centres worked on developing resources for use in partisan warfare, including special equipment, arms and communications equipment. The partisans went on periodic training courses, on which the OSNAZ divisions of the NKVD usually assumed the role of the enemy.

In addition to these partisan formations, small underground groups were trained, but not to take to the forests when the enemy struck. Their purpose was to remain behind in towns and villages in order to help the enemy and be of service to him, while all the time gaining his trust . . .

Work of this type was not only going on in Byelorussia, but also in the Ukraine, the Crimea and the Leningrad District, among other places. Alongside the activities of the secret police, Soviet military intelligence, in parallel with the NKVD but completely independently of it, was engaged in exactly the same work, equipping secret bases, shelters, secret billets and rallying points, and equipping lines for clandestine communications. The military intelligence had its own secret schools, its own organizers, its own instructors.

The Communist Party was also training many of its leaders in the western parts of the country, with a view to their going underground in the event of the territory falling into enemy hands. With their long-standing criminal traditions, the communists knew how to keep their secrets. These traditions went back to their underground activities of the 1920s and 1930s; where the need to arise, many Party organizations could again become deeply conspiratorial centres of secret conflict.

These partisan detachments were set up in what was termed the Death Zone — the Soviet security zone where, in the event of Soviet troops being withdrawn, all bridges had to be blown up, tunnels demolished, railway junctions rendered completely unusable, railway points, crossings and even rails and telephone cables lifted and carried off to the interior. The partisans remained behind only to ensure that the targets which had been destroyed were not restored. The partisans were virtually invulnerable; their leaders knew the ways through the vast minefields, and could shake off any pursuit by heading for the mined forests and marshes, into which the enemy had no means of finding a way.

All this constituted an excellent system of defence: the Stalin Line; the vast security zone in front of it with its boundless minefields; and the partisan detachments, ready to operate from the first minute of war. But in 1939, Hitler found himself in a very troublesome strategic situation, where he had to wage war in the west,

not the east. From that moment onwards, Stalin's defensive systems were no longer needed. The Soviet partisan movement was abolished at the same time as the Stalin Line and the security zone. Partisan detachments were disbanded, arms, ammunition and explosives removed, the secret dug-outs and store depots covered with earth, and the partisan bases laid waste. All this happened in the autumn of 1939. But as autumn drew to its close, the Red Army began its 'liberation' of Finland, and there it encountered all those elements of self-defence which until recently had existed in the Soviet Union: the line of reinforced-concrete fortifications, the security zone in front of it, and the light partisan-like detachments operating in this zone. After he had been taught a severe lesson in Finland, did Stalin perhaps then change his mind and set up new partisan formations in the western regions of the Soviet Union? He did not.

On 22 June 1941, numerous improvisations were set in motion, including the formation of a partisan movement. Set up at the last minute, it only grew to its full power in 1943-44. Had Stalin not abolished it in 1939, it would have attained its full strength in the first days of the war, and would then have been many times more effective.

As the war progressed, the partisans had to pay a high price in blood for every bridge they detonated. Before a bridge could be blown up, it had first to be captured, and then guarded while the surrounding trees were felled and the adjacent ground mined. But where were the partisans to find explosives? If any could be found, how much could the partisan group carry along with it? While the detonation was being prepared, the charges had to be hastily put in place, not in the bridge supports but *on* the spans. The enemy could quickly repair such a bridge once it had been blown up, and then the partisans would have to start all over again from the beginning. While the enemy was repairing one bridge, the other bridges would still be functioning, so the enemy could regulate his flow of transport.

Previously, however, everything had been made ready to blow up *all* the bridges, in such a way that no partisan blood would have been spilt. To blow them up by simply pressing a button in a secret partisan bunker, and then, from the far side of impassable minefields, to pick off the officers, the sappers and the drivers with snipers' rifles. The German Army was exceptionally vulnerable on the roads. The *Blitzkrieg* could be slowed down considerably by the complete absence of bridges, by hundreds, thousands and indeed millions of partisans' mines on the roads, by ambushes, and by sniper terror from the first hours of the invasion.

Who then abolished the Soviet partisan movement at the very moment that World War II began, and why? GRU Colonel Professor I. Starinov, one of the fathers of Soviet military terrorism, commanded a secret school in those years which trained partisan groups which were under the command of Soviet military intelligence. In his excellent memoirs, the Colonel names the culprit: 'Arms and explosives which had been safely hidden in the ground were waiting for their time to come. But before that hour struck, the concealed partisan bases were laid waste, unconditionally, knowingly and, for certain, on Stalin's direct orders.' (*Miny Zhdut Svoego Chasa*, p. 40)

KGB Colonel S. Vaupshas, one of the veterans of Soviet political terrorism, was at that time commanding an NKVD partisan detachment in Byelorussia. He explains the reason why the partisan formations were abolished: 'In those menacing pre-war years, the doctrine of war on foreign territory was in the ascendancy. It was of a clearly pronounced offensive nature.' (*Na Trevozhnykh Perekrestkakh*, Moscow, IPL, p. 203)

One may agree with the KGB colonel, or one may dispute what he said. No one else, however, has yet offered any other reason why these partisan bases and formations were eliminated.

Once Stalin had done away with the partisan formations in 1939, he did not dismiss the partisan leaders. After the war had ended, much material was published in the Soviet Union on the war and the period which preceded it. I have collected the case histories of dozens of people who were being trained in 1939 to fight in partisan formations in the western parts of the Soviet Union. After 1939, the fate of these people was identical. They were either sent off to OSNAZ formations of the NKVD, or else they found themselves joining very small groups near the Soviet Union's western frontier, for some unclear purpose.

Take the two colonels we have already met, Starinov and Vaupshas; two veterans, one from military intelligence, the other from the secret police. On 21 June 1941, Colonel Starinov found himself in the frontier town of Brest-Litovsk, in an area of railway lines leading to the bridges across the frontier. He did not go there to blow up the bridges. He had left Moscow a few days earlier, he was told, on an exercise. But when he arrived at the frontier, he was told that there would not be any exercises. So this experienced saboteur sat down at the frontier to await further orders. Here is an interesting detail which we shall require later. A



soldier named Schleger worked for Starinov as his driver from the day the war began. He was a German national.

The war came to the Chekist S. Vaupshas, not in the frontier area, but on enemy territory. Vaupshas had a surprising life history. For many years, up to and including 1926, he fought in a Soviet partisan detachment on Polish territory and killed people in order to further the world revolution. After that he became one of the managers of the great GULAG building sites. Later, in the course of the civil war in Spain, he protected and controlled the Politburo of the Spanish Communist Party and the Spanish Security Service. After that, Vaupshas became leader of a partisan detachment in Byelorussia. After the partisan detachments earmarked for a defensive war had been abolished, Vaupshas, having been given the command of an OSNAZ battalion of the NKVD, set off to 'liberate' Finland. Finally, in 1941, this terrorist, this GULAG overseer and scourge, was transferred to the territory of the probable enemy' in order to carry out some secret mission there.

Perhaps he was sent there for some defensive purpose? No: because as soon as the defensive war began, he immediately returned to Moscow.

## CHAPTER 12

# Why Did Stalin Need Ten Airborne Assault Corps?

*In the battles to come, we shall operate on the territory of the enemy. That is prescribed by our rules. We are military people, and we live according to these rules.*

COLONEL A. I. RODIMTSEV  
(from his speech at the 18th Congress  
of the Party, 1939)

Airborne assault troops are intended for attack. Countries concerned only with their defence did not need them. Before World War II, there were two exceptions. Hitler was getting ready for aggressive wars, and in 1936 he created his airborne assault troops. By the time that World War II began, the parachutists among these troops numbered 4,000. Stalin was the other exception. He established his airborne assault troops in 1930. By the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union had *more than one million* trained paratroopers - 200 times more than all other countries in the world put together, including Germany.

The Soviet Union was the first country in the world to create airborne assault troops. When Hitler came to power, Stalin already had several airborne assault brigades. A parachute psychosis was already raging in the Soviet Union. The older generation can remember the time when no municipal park could get by without a parachute tower, and the parachutist's brevet became an indispensable symbol of macho masculinity for every young man. It was not at all easy to obtain such a brevet; they were only given to those who had made real parachute jumps from an aircraft, and the only persons who were allowed to make such jumps were those who had previously passed tests in running, swimming, shooting, grenade-throwing (both long-distance and precision), in surmounting obstacles, in the use of anti-chemical defensive resources and in many other skills indispensable in war. Parachute-jumping was in effect the concluding stage of the individual training given to future soldiers of the airborne infantry.

In order to appreciate the seriousness of Stalin's intentions, it must not be forgotten that the parachute psychosis reigned in the Soviet Union at the same time as did the terrible famine. Throughout the country, the bellies of children were swollen with hunger, but Comrade Stalin was selling grain abroad in order to buy parachute technology, to build great silk-producing complexes and parachute factories, to cover the country with a network of airfields and aero clubs, to put up parachute towers in every municipal park, to train thousands of instructors, to build drying rooms and storage depots for parachutes, to train one million well-fed parachutists and to buy the arms, equipment and parachutes they needed.

Parachutists are not needed in a defensive war. To use a parachutist as ordinary infantry in defensive warfare would be a ridiculous waste of resources. Sub-units of paratroopers do not have to carry the same heavy weaponry as the ordinary infantry do, and therefore their stability in defensive battle is considerably lower.

The cost of training of one million Soviet parachutists was dear, and Stalin paid for the training of these parachutists and for their parachutes with the lives of Soviet children in great numbers. For what purpose were these parachutists trained? Certainly not to protect these children who were dying of hunger. People in our village in the Ukraine still remember the young woman who killed her own daughter and devoured her body. Everyone remembers it because she killed *her own* daughter. They do not remember those who killed the daughters of others. In my village people ate belts and boots. They ate acorns in the bedraggled wood nearby. The reason for all this was that Comrade Stalin was preparing for war. He was preparing as no one had ever before prepared. True, all these preparations turned out to be unnecessary when the defensive war came.

Airborne assault troops are not necessary in a defensive war. There is no point in throwing them into the rear of the enemy in such a conflict; it is much simpler to leave partisan detachments behind in the forests as you withdraw.

It could be argued that these million Stalinist parachutists were simply material from which combat sub-units - battalions, regiments, brigades - would be established. Sub-units had to be set up and given intensive training.

In the 1930s, the western regions of the country were repeatedly shaken by very large-scale manoeuvres. These manoeuvres had only one theme. That was the operation in depth, a surprise attack launched by a vast number of massed tanks striking to a great depth. The scenario was always simple, but formidable. In the course of each exercise, the surprise attack by the land troops would be preceded by a no less unexpected and no less crushing strike by the Soviet Air Force against 'enemy' airfields. This would be followed by a parachute assault landing with the purpose of capturing the airfields. This first wave of parachutists would be followed by a second wave of paratroopers carrying heavy weapons, who would land by plane and then disembark on the captured airfields.

In the course of the manoeuvres held in Kiev in 1935, a parachute assault force of 1,200 men was dropped, immediately followed by an air-landed assault force of 2,500 men armed with heavy weaponry including artillery, armoured cars and tanks.

In Byelorussia in 1936, in the course of practising the same offensive theme, a parachute assault force of 1,800 men was dropped. They were followed by an air-landed assault force of 5,700 men armed with heavy weaponry. In the same year, the full complement of the 84th Rifle Division made an air-landed assault in the course of offensive manoeuvres in the Moscow Military Division.

In 1938, as he could see the 'liberation campaigns' coming, Stalin established a further six airborne brigades with a strength of 18,000 parachutists. In 1939, Stalin abolished the partisan bases and formations which had been intended to operate on their own territory, and established new assault landing sub-units, regiments and detached battalions. In the Moscow Military District, for example, three regiments, each made up of three battalions, were set up along with several detached battalions, each one with a strength of between 500 and 700 men. (*Ordena Lenina Moskovsky Voennyi Oknig*, Moscow 1985, P. 177)

Soviet assault landing brigades made their first parachute landings in combat conditions in June 1940. The 201st and 204th Brigades landed in Romania, and the 214th in Lithuania, near its frontier with East Prussia. Both assault landings seriously worried Hitler, especially the landing in Romania. The entire German Army was concentrated in France at the time, and Romania was the source of its oil supplies. Had Soviet transport aircraft gone 200 kilometres further before discharging their loads, Germany would have been left without oil, the very life-blood of war.

In 1940, Stalin crushed all the neutral countries dividing the Soviet Union from Germany, so that the two powers now shared a common frontier. Stalin ought then, it would seem, to have reduced his airborne units; all that lay to the west was Germany and its allies, with whom the Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact.

But Stalin did not disband his airborne units. On the contrary, in April 1941 five airborne corps were secretly deployed in the Soviet Union. All five were set up in the western regions of the country. In order to appreciate the magnitude of this development, it must be remembered that even today there is not one formation in existence any where which has the full right to bear the title of airborne corps. A corps is too large and too expensive to maintain in peacetime.

In addition to the usual assault landing infantry, the airborne corps had fairly powerful artillery and even battalions of light amphibious tanks. All the corps were given intensive training for airborne assault warfare. They were concentrated in woods far from the gaze of outsiders. They were all established sufficiently close to the frontier for them to be dropped on target countries without further redeployment to more forward bases. The 4th and 5th Corps were aimed at Germany, the 3rd at Romania, and the 1st and 2nd at both Czechoslovakia and Austria. One of their missions was to cut the oil pipe-lines in the mountainous areas through which they passed on their way from Romania to Germany.

The Directorate of Airborne Troops was set up in the Red Army on 12 June 1941, followed by another five new airborne corps in August. This second series of airborne corps was not intended as a response to the German invasion, for it is quite impossible to use paratroopers in such massive numbers in a defensive war. Of all the corps of the second series, not one fought in the war in its proper function. Of all the corps in the first series, only one corps was used as intended and on only one occasion, in the course of a counter-offensive in front of Moscow. A third series of airborne corps came later, and one of these corps made an air assault landing in 1943.

The five corps of the second series are a good example of the Red Army developing through inertia. The decision to establish these corps was taken before the German invasion, and was never countermanded. In any event, the parachutes, the weaponry and even the paratroopers in the airborne corps of the second series were all prepared before the German invasion.

Apart from the airborne corps, brigades and regiments, there were also a great number of airborne battalions in the ordinary Soviet infantry. Marshal Bagramyan states that in early June 1941, in the 55th Rifle Corps which was then deployed on the Romanian frontier, intensive training was being given to several parachute assault landing battalions. Judging from Bagramyan's description, as well as from other sources, it seems that the 55th Rifle Corps (there were in all 62 rifle corps in the Red Army) was more the rule than the exception.

Apart from purely parachute sub-units, some ordinary rifle divisions were trained to make air-landed assaults in the rear of the enemy. On 21 June 1941, for example, a specially trained division mounted an air-landed assault in the rear of the 'enemy' in the course of exercises being held in the Siberian Military District. Until then, all Soviet experiments in airborne assault landings were carried out in the western regions of the country. So why should such experiments suddenly be taking place in Siberia? Because at that point in time all the troops in the Siberian Military District had already been secretly combined into the 24th Army which was about to turn up on the German frontier. The 24th Army was carrying out its final exercises before boarding the westbound trains. No comment is called for on the objectives at which this training was directed.

No country in history, or indeed all countries in the world put together, including the Soviet Union, has ever had so many paratroopers and air assault landing sub-units as Stalin had in 1941. If one counts up all the airborne troops in the world, including the Soviet airborne troops in existence at the end of the twentieth century, the total comes to only thirteen divisions, of which eight are Soviet. The reasons which impelled Stalin to establish airborne troops in such numbers, and especially the furious pace at which these extremely powerful airborne corps were set up in 1941, have still to be studied and explained.

While gathering material on Soviet airborne troops, I turned my attention to an interesting detail. Each Soviet commander with the rank of colonel or major-general who at that time either belonged to the airborne forces or was preparing to join them, had sergeants and soldiers of German extraction in his immediate entourage. One commander had a German working for him as his personal driver. Another had a German batman, while a third had a German orderly. Each of these Soviet commanders speaks of it as though it were an amusing

detail of no importance. They say, of course, that the Germans began the war, and here am I with a driver who is a German. But he is a good lad, of course, disciplined and devoted. Colonel K. Stein, who commanded the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Airborne Corps had a soldier of German origin as his batman. Colonel A. Rodimtsev, the commander of the 5th Brigade of the 3rd Airborne Corps had a German driver. This, incidentally, is the same Rodimtsev who proclaimed at the Party Congress that the Red Army would fight only on enemy territory.

I happened to hear Rodimtsev make a speech when he had become a colonel-general. He was very eloquent. He said that in 1942 his guardsmen were holding the very last houses right on the Volga in Stalingrad. His brigade, like everyone else, had to be re-cast into ordinary rifle divisions, and so they had had their parachutes taken from them. They were given defensive weapons instead, and they acquitted themselves not at all badly in the fighting. But in 1941 neither Rodimtsev nor his subordinates had any thought for defence. They had no defensive weaponry, nor had they studied defensive tactics. But they had studied offensive tactics, and they did have parachutes.

At the beginning of 1941, Stalin needed paratroopers, more paratroopers and still more paratroopers. Many Soviet generals and senior officers hastened to change the branches in which they were serving. A particularly high number of commanders got ready to leave the cavalry, which had outlived its time, in order to become paratroopers, including Rodimtsev himself. To do this, an ability to speak German was essential. Cavalry general Lev Dovator's widow, writing in the newspaper *Red Star*, recalled the beginning of 1941: 'There was one German in our regiment. So Lev Mikhailovich brought him home pretty well every day. They practised, you see, in conversation. And by the time the war started, he could already speak German fluently.' (*Red Star*, 17 February 1983)

The Red Army's links with the German communists were close and long-standing. When he came to the Soviet Union, Ernst Telmann himself was in no way shy about appearing in Soviet military uniform. Walter Ulbricht was enrolled as a soldier in the 4th German Proletariat Rifle Division. That was done for effect, but there were other less obvious things going on. As early as 1918, the Special School for German Red Commanders was set up in the Soviet Union. It was run by Oscar Obert, a German communist. The school changed its name more than once, first becoming secret, then overt, then secret again. The school turned out quite a few combat commanders of German nationality. Some of the graduates from the school attained the

rank of general in the Red Army. At the beginning of 1941, many graduates of this and other similar schools aspired to march under the combat banners of the Soviet airborne corps.

A study of publications on the Soviet airborne corps which were formed in 1941 leads us to the conclusion that the number of officers, NCOs and soldiers bearing clearly German surnames was, not to put too fine a point on it, higher than normal.



## CHAPTER 13

### The Winged Tank

*The air force must be rendered ineffective and destroyed on the airfields . . . Success in putting the air forces out of action on the ground depends on the surprise element in the action taken. It is important to catch the air forces on the airfields.*

Marshall. S. KONEV (VIZH, 1976,  
No. 7, p. 75)

Training hundreds of thousands of paratroopers and providing parachutes for their use was only part of the task. Military transport planes and gliders were also required. The Soviet leaders understood this very well. That is why the parachute psychosis of the 1930s was also accompanied by a glider psychosis. Soviet glider pilots and their gliders were well up to world standards, and indeed higher. By the beginning of the Second World War, out of eighteen world gliding records, thirteen were held by the Soviet Union.

The best builders of Soviet military aircraft were sometimes deflected from their main work in order to make glider planes. Even Sergei Korolev, who was later to create the first sputnik, was set to work on developing gliders, which he did with great success. If builders of war planes and ballistic missiles were put to work on making gliders, the purpose was obviously not simply to win world records. Had Stalin been interested in breaking records, why did he not put the best minds to work on creating new racing bicycles?

That Soviet gliding was heading in a military direction is beyond dispute. Even before Hitler came to power, the Soviet Union had seen the creation of the first airborne cargo glider in the world, the 6-63, made by the plane builder Boris Dmitriyevich Uralpov. Heavy gliders were invented which were capable of lifting a freight-carrying vehicle. P. Gorokhovskiy even created an inflatable rubber glider; after they had been used behind enemy lines, they could be loaded on to a transport aircraft and returned to their own territory to be used again.

The Soviet generals were dreaming of throwing not only hundreds of thousands of airborne infantrymen into the West, but hundreds and possibly thousands of tanks as well. Soviet aircraft designers were looking hard for a way in which to realize this dream by the most simple and least expensive means. Oleg Antonov, who was later to design the largest military transport aircraft in the world, suggested that the ordinary tank, produced in series, should be fitted with wings and a tail unit, and its hull used as the framework for the whole of this surprisingly simple construction. This system was given the initials KT, which stood for the Russian words for 'winged tank'. The switchgear for the air vanes was fixed on to the tank cannon. The tank crew controlled the flight from inside the tank by means of turning the turret and raising the barrel of the cannon. The entire construction was astonishingly simple. Of course, the risks involved in flying in a tank were unusually high, but then human life was cheap.

The KT flew in 1942. There is a unique photograph of a tank, complete with wings and tailpiece, flying through the air, in a book (*Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War Two*, 1984) published by Stephen Saloga, a prominent Western tank expert.

Just before landing, the tank engine started up and its caterpillar tracks began revolving at maximum speed. The KT then landed on its own tracks and gradually braked. The wings and tailpiece were then discarded, and the KT became an ordinary tank again.

Oleg Antonov missed the beginning of the war with his winged tank; hostilities did not begin as Stalin had planned, and this extraordinary machine turned out to be just as unnecessary as the million parachutists.

The Soviet plane designers had their mistakes and failures, their frustrations and defeats. But their successes were beyond doubt. The Soviet Union entered the war with many times more gliders and glider pilots than the rest of the world put together. In 1939 alone, the Soviet Union had 30,000 trainees simultaneously under instruction in glider-flying. Piloting skills often attained a very high standard. In 1940, for example, a demonstration was given in the Soviet Union of a flight of eleven gliders being towed by one aircraft.

Stalin did everything to ensure that there were enough gliders available for his pilots. It was not single-seater sports gliders that he had in mind, of course, but multi-seater ones built for airborne assault. The end of the 1930s saw intensive competition between more than ten Soviet aircraft design offices to see who could

create the best airborne assault glider. Apart from the winged tank, Oleg Antonov also designed the multi-seater A-y airborne assault glider; V. Gribovsky invented the excellent G-II airborne assault glider; D. N. Kolesnikov designed a glider, the KZ-20, which could carry twenty soldiers; while G. Korbula was working on the design of a jumbo glider.

In January 1940, the Central Committee (that is to say Stalin) ordered that a Directorate for the Production of Airborne Assault Transport Gliders be set up under the Peoples' Commissariat for the Aviation Industry. 1940 was taken up with intensive preparatory work, but from spring 1941 onwards, mass production of airborne assault gliders began in the plants operating under this new directorate.

This burst of glider production has interesting implications. The gliders produced in the spring of 1941 would have to have been used in the summer of that year, or by early autumn at the latest, since it would have been impossible to keep them safe until 1942. All the hangars, and there were not very many of them, had long been crammed full of the gliders which had already been produced. It would have been simply out of the question to keep a great airborne assault glider in the open air for any length of time, exposed to the rains and winds of autumn, to frosts and to heavy snowfalls weighing many tons.

The mass production of airborne assault transport gliders in 1941 meant that they were intended to be used in 1941. If Stalin had intended to throw hundreds of thousands of his paratroopers into Western Europe in 1942, then the mass production of gliders would have had to be planned for 1942.

The glider is a means of delivering cargoes and groups of paratroopers without parachutes. Paratroopers equipped with parachutes are conveyed into the areas behind enemy lines by military transport aircraft. The best military transport plane in the world at the outbreak of war was the legendary American C-47 or 'Dakota'. This excellent aircraft, albeit under another name, formed the base upon which Soviet military transport aviation was built. For some reason or other, the United States government sold Stalin the licence to produce it before the war, along with the highly complex equipment which it needed. Stalin took full advantage of this opportunity. So many of these C-47s were produced in the Soviet Union that some American

experts believe that, when the war began, the Soviet Union had more of these aircraft than the United States did.

In addition to the C-47s, the Soviet Union also had several hundred obsolete TB-3 bombers, which had been down-graded to military transport aircraft. All the large-scale airdrops which took place in the 1930s were made from TB-3 aircraft. Stalin had enough of them to airlift several thousand parachutists and heavy weapons, including light tanks, armoured cars and artillery, simultaneously.

No matter how many military transport aircraft Stalin built, he would have had to use them intensively, day and night, over a period of weeks or months if he wanted to carry a great body of Soviet paratroopers into the enemy hinterland, and then keep them in supplies. This gave rise to the problem of how to keep the aircraft undamaged on their first trip, so that they could make subsequent runs. The losses of aircraft, gliders and paratroopers on the first trip could be enormous; on the second, they would be even greater, because the element of surprise would have been lost.

The Soviet generals understood this very well. It was obvious that a massive drop of paratroopers could only be achieved if the Soviet Union had absolute supremacy in the air. The newspaper *Red Star* stated quite categorically on 27 September 1940 that it was impossible to land these great numbers of parachutists successfully without air supremacy.

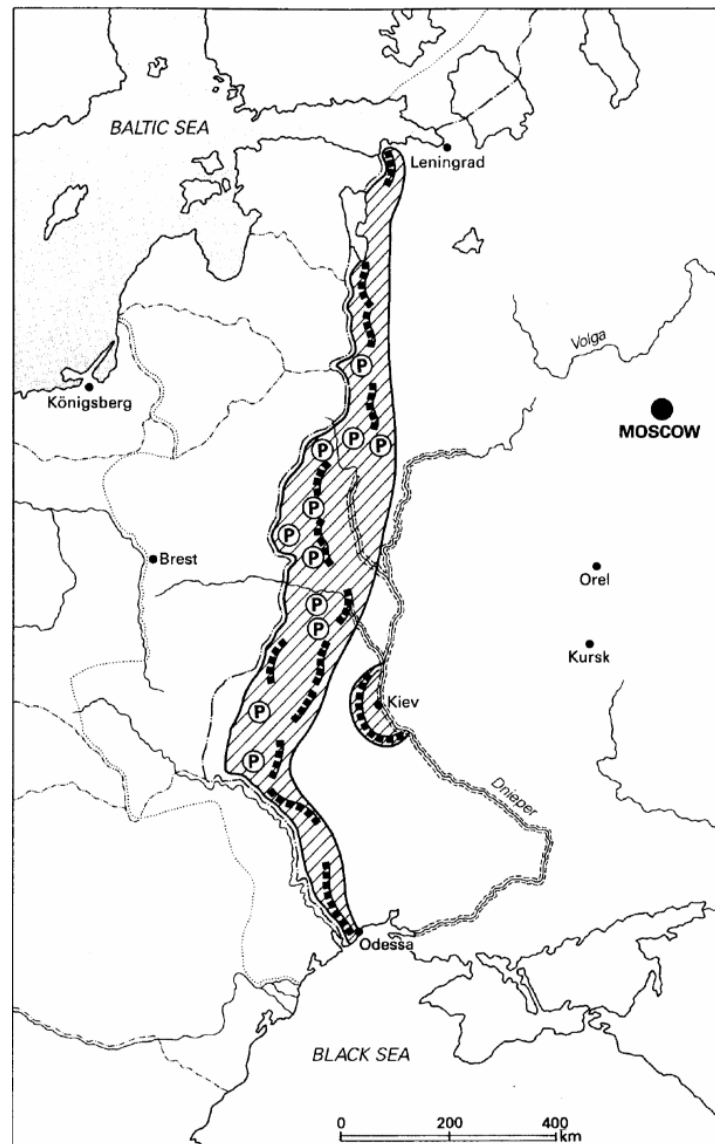
The *Field Service Regulations* is the basic document, graded top secret, which lays down the procedures for Red Army operations in war. The issue which was in force at the time was *Field Service Regulations 1939*, known as PU-39. It lays down simply and clearly that an 'operation in depth' in general, and a mass drop of parachutists in particular, can only be carried out in conditions where the Soviet Air Force has supremacy in the air. The *Field Service Regulations*, as well as the *Operational Air Force Regulations* and the *Instructions on the Independent Use of Air Force* all envisaged a vast strategic operation to be carried out in the initial period of the war, with the purpose of knocking out the enemy's air power. According to the design of the Soviet Command, air arms from various fronts and fleets, the air arm of the High Command and even the fighter arm of the Anti-Aircraft Defences (PVO) all had to take part in that operation. These regulations considered that the element of surprise was the main guarantee of the success of the operation. The surprise operation to knock out enemy air power had to be carried out 'in the interests of the war as a whole'. In other words, the

surprise strike at the airfields had to be so powerful that the enemy air force would not be able to recover from it before the war ended.

In December 1940, at a secret meeting attended by Stalin and members of the Politburo, a senior commander of the Red Army discussed the details of such operations. These were called, in Soviet jargon, 'special operations in the initial period of war'. General Pavel Rychagov, the officer commanding the Soviet Air Force, insisted on the necessity of camouflaging the Soviet Air Force's preparations in order to 'catch the whole of the enemy air force on the ground'.

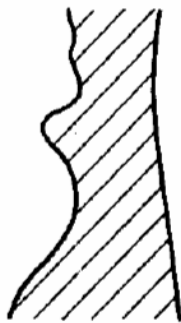
It is quite obvious that it is not possible 'to catch the whole of the enemy air force on the ground' in time of war. It is only possible to do so in peacetime, when the enemy does not suspect the danger.

Stalin created so many airborne troops that they could only be used in one situation: after a surprise attack by the Soviet Air Force on the airfields of its enemy. It would be simply impossible to use hundreds of thousands of airborne troops and thousands of transport aircraft and gliders in any other situation.



# MAP I

**As soon as Britain and France declared war on Germany, the Red Army began to destroy its own defensive systems. The Soviet Command was no longer interested in defending its own territory.**



The 'death' zone is a security zone against a surprise attack from the West. Inside this zone, all transport, communications and water supply systems and industrial installations were made ready for demolition. Minefields and other engineered obstacles were set up to a depth of up to 150 kilometres. The zone was completely cleared of mines in the autumn of 1939.



Partisan detachments and bases had been set up in peacetime. They were dissolved in September 1939.



In the fortified regions of the 'Stalin Line', the work of demilitarization and destruction began in autumn 1939.



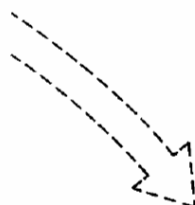
The combat operations zone of the Dnieper Naval Flotilla. The Flotilla was disbanded in June 1940.

## MAP 2

### The First Strategic Echelon of the Red Army.



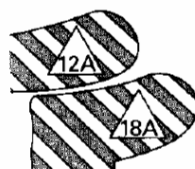
The Soviet invasion armies of the First Strategic Echelon. Behind them, another seven Soviet armies were making their way to the frontier.



The deployment of the First Strategic Echelon rendered the defence of the Soviet Union almost impossible. Even a very low-powered strike by the enemy in this direction would have led immediately to the loss of five Soviet armies, including the 9th, which was the most powerful in the world, and the loss of vast material wealth, highly fertile lands, the undefended bases of the Black Sea fleet, and strategic air bases. It was precisely such a strike which the First German Tank Group delivered in June 1941 . . .



The 9th Army was concentrated not on the German border, but on the frontier with Rumania. A 9th Army strike at Rumania would be a strike at the undefended oil 'heart' of Germany.

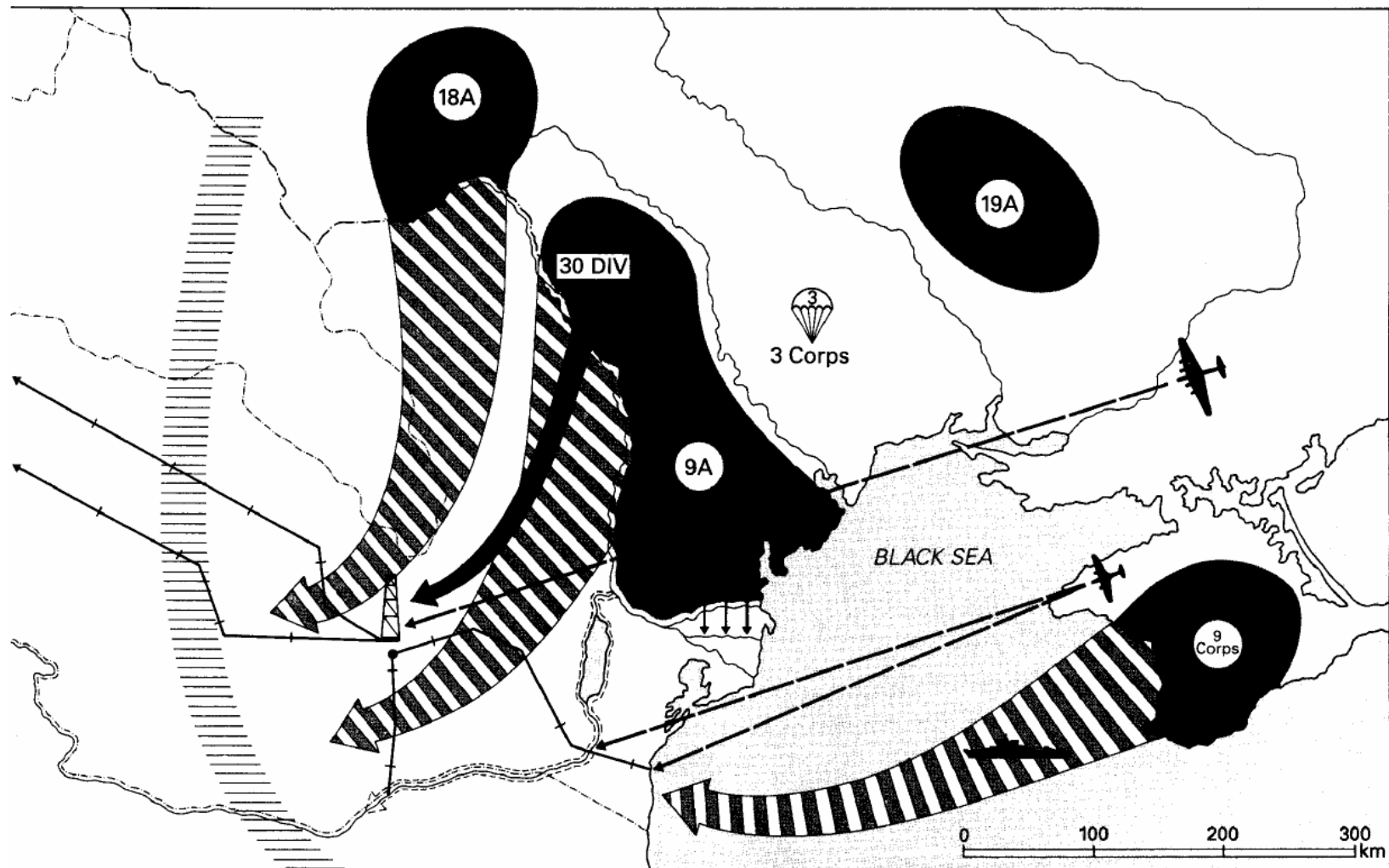


The mountain invasion armies. This was the only possible direction in which they could have moved, along undefended ridges. They would have made it possible both to cut Germany's oil 'jugular' and to prevent the movement of German reserves into Rumania.



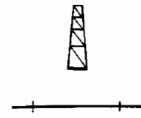
The 'first wave' airborne corps. Another five airborne corps were secretly being formed deep inside the Soviet Union.





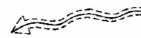
## MAP 3

### How the Red Army was prepared to seize and destroy the Rumanian oil-fields.

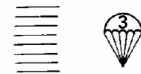


The Ploesti oil-fields, Germany's chief source of oil.

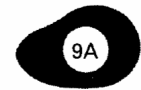
The main pipelines for supplying oil to Germany and for loading it on to river- and sea-going tankers.



The Soviet Danube Naval Flotilla and the only possible way of using it in an offensive war. In a defensive war, the Flotilla would be unnecessary.



The Third Airborne Corps and the zone of its possible operational use. The Corps was set up in April 1941.

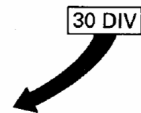


The 9th Army was secretly deployed on 14 June 1941, as TASS stated that the Soviet Union was not preparing for war.



The combat task of the 9th Army, according to the evidence of Air Marshal A. Pokryshkin.

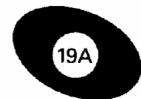
The assault crossing of the Danube by divisions of the 9th Army's 14th Rifle Corps. Previously prepared and carried out in the first days of the war.



The 30th Mountain Rifle Division, part of the 9th Army, and the only place where it could be used for its intended purpose.



The 18th (Mountain) Army, secretly deployed on 13 June 1941, and the only possible direction which its operations could have taken. There are no other mountains in this region.



The 19th Army, the most powerful in the Second Strategic Echelon, was transferred from the Northern Caucasus. It contained mountain rifle divisions which could only have been used in Rumania.



The 9th Special Rifle Corps, in collaboration with the Black Sea Fleet, began intensive training in carrying out a naval assault landing operation on an enemy shore.

And overleaf



The Black Sea Fleet subjected the principal Rumanian oil port of Constanza to an artillery bombardment in the first days of the war.



The 4th Long Range Bomber Corps had Ploesti as its principal target in the event of war.



The 63rd Air Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet was specially trained to raid targets in the oil producing industry including, in the first days of the war, Constanza and the strategic pipelines which cross the Danube.

## CHAPTER 14

### On to Berlin

*Of all the aggressive armies which have ever existed in the past, the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army will be the most aggressive.*

(Field Service Regulations of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, 1939, p. 9)

Among the many defensive systems which the Soviet Union possessed was the Dnieper Naval Flotilla. The great Dnieper river bars the road for any aggressor bent on moving into the heart of Soviet territory from the west. All the bridges across the Dnieper were mined before 1939, and they could have been blown up in such a way that nothing could have been done to repair them. In all their previous campaigns, German troops had never before had to ford a water barrier as formidable as the Dnieper. In a defensive war, the German thrusts could have been brought to a complete halt, at least in the middle and lower reaches of the river, simply by pressing a few buttons.

It was in order to prevent the fording of the river and the placing of temporary crossings over it that the Dnieper Naval Flotilla was set up in the 1930s. By the beginning of the Second World War, the Flotilla consisted of 120 naval vessels and launches, including eight powerful monitors, each with a displacement of 2,000 tons, armour in excess of 100mm, and 152mm cannons. The Dnieper Flotilla also had its own air arm, as well as shore and anti-aircraft batteries. The left bank of the Dnieper is eminently suitable for action by naval river vessels. A multitude of islands, channels, backwaters and inlets enable even the largest naval vessels to take cover and launch surprise attacks to forestall any attempt to ford the river.

The formidable barrier formed by the Dnieper, the bridges ready to be detonated, and the river Flotilla working in cooperation with the field troops, artillery and air force, could have safely barred the way to the industrial regions of the southern Ukraine and the Soviet bases on the Black Sea. The German *Blitzkrieg* could have been stopped on the river-banks, or at least held up there for several months. Had that happened,

the war would have taken an entirely different course. But as soon as Hitler turned his back on him, Stalin ordered that the mines be cleared from the Dnieper bridges, and that the Flotilla be disbanded. The Dnieper Flotilla could be used only on Soviet territory, and only in a defensive war. Since Stalin was not anticipating a defensive war, he had no need for the Flotilla.

Instead of one defensive flotilla, Stalin then created two new ones, the Danube Flotilla and the Pinsk Flotilla. The Soviet Danube Flotilla was formed before the Soviet Union acquired an outlet to the Danube. In the course of Zhukov's 'liberation campaign' in the Romanian frontier regions, Stalin took Bukovina and Bessarabia from Romania. Right at the mouth of the Danube, a sector of the eastern bank of the river, some dozens of kilometres long, passed into the possession of the Soviet Union. The Danube Flotilla, which had already been set up in expectation of this event, was moved there immediately. To transfer ships there from the Dnieper was no easy matter. A few vessels were transported across by rail, while the larger ones were brought through the Black Sea when the weather was calm.

The Danube Naval Flotilla included about 70 naval river vessels and launches, sub-units of the fighter air force, and anti-aircraft and shore artillery. The conditions where the base had to be built were frightful. The Soviet bank of the Danube Delta was barren and exposed. The vessels had to moor at open berths, with Romanian troops sometimes only 300 metres away.

In the event of a defensive war, the entire Danube Flotilla would have fallen into a trap the moment hostilities began. The enemy could simply rake the Soviet vessels with machine-gun fire, preventing them from raising anchor and casting off. In a defensive war, moreover, the Danube Naval Flotilla would have had no useful function. Given its location, there were simply no defensive tasks for it to fulfil. The Danube Delta consists of hundreds of lakes, impassable swamps and hundreds of square kilometres of reed marshes. It is the last place through which an enemy would choose to attack the Soviet Union.

There was only one way to explain the siting of the Danube Flotilla; its purpose was to carry out combat operations upstream while Red Army troops were making a general advance. If you gather 70 river vessels in the delta of a great river, they have nowhere to go except upstream. This meant that they would have to operate on the territory of Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany.

The Danube Flotilla was of no use to anyone in a defensive war, and it was condemned to be destroyed immediately in its open moorings on a bank raked by enemy gunfire. In an offensive war, however, the Danube Flotilla would be a mortal danger to Germany. It only had to move 130 kilometres upstream for the strategic bridge at Chernavada to come under fire from its guns. That in its turn would mean that the flow of oil from Ploesti to the port of Constanza would be cut off. Another 200 kilometres upstream and the entire German war machine would come to a halt simply because German tanks, aircraft and submarines would have been left without fuel.

It is interesting that the Danube Naval Flotilla had several mobile shore batteries, equipped with 130mm and 152mm cannons. If the Soviet High Command had really concluded that someone would attack the Soviet Union through the Danube Delta, then it ought to have had the shore batteries dig in immediately, and build reinforced concrete caponiers for them at the first opportunity. Yet no one built any caponiers; the guns were mobile and remained mobile. There was only one way to make use of their mobility, and only one direction in which they could be moved. In offensive operations, mobile batteries accompany a flotilla, moving along the bank and giving fire support to the combat vessels.

The reaction of the commanders of the Danube Naval Flotilla to the beginning of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany was interesting. To the Soviet commanders, the word 'war' did not mean defence, but advance. As soon as they learnt that the war had begun, the Soviet commanders put the finishing touches to their preparations to launch an assault landing operation. The action to be taken by the Soviet Flotilla commanders, and also by the commanders of the 14th Rifle Corps, whose divisions were concentrated in the Danube Delta area, and by the commanders of the 79th Frontier Detachment of the NKVD, had been previously planned and worked out with great care. On 25 June 1941, the Danube Flotilla vessels, under cover of fire from the shore batteries and artillery of the 14th Rifle Corps, landed reconnaissance and sabotage sub-units of the NKVD on the Romanian bank. Regiments of the 51st Rifle Division of the 14th Rifle Corps were next to be landed. Members of the Soviet assault landing force acted swiftly and decisively. A complex operation involving river vessels, aircraft, field, shore and shipborne artillery, and sub-units of the Red Army and the NKVD had been successfully executed with clockwork precision. Everything had been prepared, co-ordinated, agreed and checked many times over. On the morning of 26 June 1941, the red flag was hoisted over the cathedral in the Romanian town of Kilia. A powerful springboard on Romanian territory 70 kilometres

long had fallen into the hands of Soviet troops. The Danube Flotilla prepared for further offensive action higher up the river. It only had to sail another 130 kilometres upstream to cut the oil supplies. In the absence of any resistance, and there was hardly any of that, it could have taken no more than one night to get there. The 3rd Airborne Corps, stationed in the Odessa region, could be dropped to help the Flotilla.

The Danube Flotilla was perfectly capable of moving a few dozen kilometres upstream. It proved this later. Formed a second time in 1944, though without aircraft or heavy monitors, the Danube Naval Flotilla fought its way 2,000 kilometres up the Danube and ended the war in Vienna. In 1941 the Danube Flotilla had considerably more strength and was faced by considerably less resistance from the enemy than was the case in 1944-

Both Hitler and Stalin fully understood the meaning of the expression 'oil is the life-blood of war'. Colonel-General Alfred Jodl quotes Hitler, in an argument with Guderian, as saying 'You want to advance without oil — all right, we shall see what will come of it.' As early as 1927, Stalin was seriously occupying himself with matters related to the approaching World War. For Stalin, the central strategic issue was oil. On 3 December of that year, he declared that 'It is impossible to wage war without oil, and the side which has an advantage in oil has a good chance of victory in the coming war.'

The importance of the oil supply must be borne in mind when trying to decide who was responsible for beginning the war between the Soviet Union and Germany. In June 1940, when no one was threatening the Soviet Union, dozens of Soviet combat river vessels appeared in the Danube Delta. This step was of no defensive significance. It was, however, a threat to the Romanian oil pipelines, which were totally unprotected. It was also to become a mortal threat to the whole of Germany. In July 1940, Hitler held detailed consultations with his generals, and reached the depressing conclusion that it would be no simple matter to defend Romania. If Germany attempted to do so, the supply-lines would be overstretched and would have to pass through mountainous areas. If a large number of troops were to be thrown into the defence of Romania, then western Poland and eastern Germany, along with Berlin itself, would be open to a Soviet attack. Nor would it help to concentrate a great number of troops in Romania and support her at any price; the oilfields could be destroyed by the fires which would break out if Romania became an arena for fighting.

In July 1940 Hitler first expressed the thought that the Soviet Union could be dangerous, especially if German troops were to leave the Continent for the British Isles or for Africa. In a conversation with Molotov on

12 November 1940, Hitler explained that it was essential to keep many German troops in Romania, clearly alluding, for Molotov's benefit, to the Soviet military threat to Romanian oil. Molotov let the allusion pass over his head. That is why Hitler, having thought everything over after Molotov had departed, gave the order in December that Operation Barbarossa should go ahead.

In June 1940, while the German Army was fighting in France, Zhukov, acting on Stalin's orders and without any prior consultations with their German allies, occupied Bessarabia, which was then a part of Romania, and introduced river vessels into the Danube Delta. Were Hitler to take one more step westwards towards Britain, where was the guarantee that Zhukov, again acting on Stalin's orders, would not make another move, of just another 100 kilometres, to deal a fatal blow to the Romanian oilfields?

Hitler asked the head of the Soviet government to remove the Soviet threat to what, in terms of oil, was in effect the heart of Germany. Stalin and Molotov did not remove the threat, thus provoking Hitler to take reciprocal action. B. H. Liddell-Hart, the British military historian who has made a detailed study of this subject, has established that the German plan in June 1940 was very simple. In order to defend Romania from Soviet aggression, a German attack had to be delivered in some other place, in order to draw the Red Army's attention away from the oilfields. In the course of sorting out the options, it was recognized that the blow would have to be both powerful and sudden. The numbers of troops earmarked for such an attack gradually grew, until finally, and this was not recognized at the time, practically all German land forces and a large part of the German Air Force were down to take part in it.

Hitler's calculation was justified. By striking elsewhere, Hitler compelled the Soviet troops to be withdrawn all along the front. The Danube Naval Flotilla was cut off from its troops with no way to escape. Most of its vessels had to be scuttled, while enormous quantities of stores, which had been intended to supply the Flotilla as it moved upstream in the Danube, were simply thrown away.

Hitler's attack was powerful, but not fatal. Macchiavelli observed that a powerful attack which is not fatal entails the death of its deliverer. Stalin recovered from the surprise blow, although he did so with difficulty. He formed new armies and flotillas to take the place of those which had been lost in the early days of the war, and he cut Germany's oil jugular, admittedly several years later than planned.



The reason for Stalin's seizure of Bessarabia in June 1940 is explained in a telegram dated 7 July 1941, which Stalin sent to General of the Army I. Tyulenev, the commander of the Southern Front. Stalin demanded that Bessarabia should be held at all costs, 'in view of the fact that we need Bessarabian territory as a springboard for attack to organize an offensive'. Although Hitler had launched his surprise attack, Stalin was still not thinking about defence. His chief concern was organizing an advance from Bessarabia. An advance from Bessarabia, however, was an advance on the Romanian oilfields.

Stalin made few mistakes in his career. One of the few, but his most important one, was to seize Bessarabia in 1940. He should either have seized Bessarabia and then moved immediately on Ploesti; or else he should have waited until Hitler had landed in Britain, and then seized Bessarabia and the whole of Romania. Either course of action would have marked the end of the 'thousand-year Reich'. Stalin had already taken one step in the direction of the oil, and had captured a springboard for a future offensive. He then stopped to bide his time. By doing this, he revealed his interest in Romanian oil and scared Hitler, who until that moment had been waging war in the west, south, and north, without turning any of his attention to the 'neutral' Stalin.

The Soviet seizure of Bessarabia and the concentration there of powerful aggressive forces, including an airborne assault corps and the Danube Flotilla, compelled Hitler to look at the strategic situation from an altogether different viewpoint and to take the appropriate preventive measures. But it was already too late. Even the Wehrmacht's surprise attack on the Soviet Union could no longer save Hitler and his empire. Hitler understood where the greatest danger was coming from, but it was already too late. He should have thought about it before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed.

In Marshal Zhukov's memoirs there is a map showing the location of Soviet naval bases in the first six months of 1941. Among these bases is one near the town of Pinsk in Byelorussia, no less than 500 kilometres from the nearest sea. A naval base in the marshes of Byelorussia is reminiscent of the old Russian childhood joke about a submarine in the steppes of the Ukraine. But there was nothing very funny about this.

After the Dnieper Naval Flotilla had been disbanded, some of its vessels were transferred to the Danube Delta, while others were taken upstream to a tributary of the Dnieper, the river Pripyat'. Far upstream, at a point where the river narrowed to a width of 50 metres, a base was built for the new flotilla.

The Pinsk Naval Flotilla was hardly inferior in strength to the Danube Flotilla. It had no fewer than four large monitors, and some two dozen other vessels, an air squadron, companies of marines and other sub-units. The Pinsk Naval Flotilla could not be used in defensive action. The monitors which had gone there could not even be turned round. If the vessels were needed for defence, they would simply have to return to the Dnieper, for there was absolutely nothing for them to do on the quiet forest river Pripyat', for the enemy could hardly make his way into these impenetrable woods and swampy marshes.

The purpose of the Pinsk Naval Flotilla would have remained incomprehensible were it not for the Dnieper-Bug Canal. Immediately after western Byelorussia was 'liberated', the Red Army began to dig a canal 127 kilometres long from the town of Pinsk to Kobrin. Its construction went on in summer and in winter. Taking part in the building work were sappers belonging to units of the 4th Army, and 'construction organizations of the NKVD', that is, thousands of GULAG prisoners. The fact that Colonel (subsequently Marshal) of Engineering Troops Aleksei Proshlyakov was in charge of the building of the canal indicates that its purpose was purely military. The conditions under which the canal was built were appalling. The equipment sank into the swamps, which left only one way to complete the canal within the time laid down by Stalin. That was to do everything by hand. The canal was built. How much it cost in human lives, scarcely anyone knows. But who "was counting?

The canal linked the Dnieper river basin with the basin of the river Bug. Why? To trade with Germany? But trade went through the Baltic and by rail. It was not possible for cargo ships of any commercial freight-carrying capacity to pass each other in the canal. The journey would be a long one; from the Dnieper to the Pripyat', from the Pripyat' through the canal to Mukhavets, and from there to the Bug (which at that time carried no commercial shipping), and then from the Bug finally to emerge on the Vistula. No, the canal was manifestly not built for trade; its purpose was purely military.

Nor could this military purpose have been the defence of the Bug. The Soviet Union possesses only one small stretch of the Bug near Brest-Litovsk, where the river makes a sharp turn towards Warsaw. No

defensive preparations were being made in these regions. Even the Brest-Litovsk fortress was to have no more than one battalion in the event of war, and that was not for defence, but for garrison duties.

The only purpose of the canal was to let ships pass through to the Vistula basin and thence further westwards. Once the Soviet Union found itself in a defensive war, it had to be blown up to prevent German river vessels from the Vistula from reaching the basin of the Dnieper. All the vessels of the Pinsk Flotilla were blown up as well.

A flotilla was again formed on the Dnieper at the end of 1943. Once again it sailed up the Pripyat', and once again the Soviet sappers built a canal from the Pripyat' to the minor river Mukhavets, which led to the Bug. Admiral V. Grigor'ev, who took over the new flotilla near Kiev in 1943, recalls a conversation with Marshal Zhukov:

'By following the Pripyat' you will reach the western Bug, the Narev and the Vistula leading to Warsaw, and further on to cross into the rivers of Germany, perhaps leading, who knows, even to Berlin itself!' He turned round sharply, looked at me searchingly, and repeated, stressing every word 'To Berlin itself, yes?' (*VIZH*, No. 7, 1984, p. 68)

Admiral Grigor'ev eventually got to Berlin with his flotilla. In *The Marine Infantry in the Forests of Byelorussia* any book on the history of the Soviet Navy, we shall find the symbolic snapshot showing the flag of the Soviet Navy with the Reichstag in the background.

The way things turned out, Stalin arrived in Berlin through responding to Hitler's attack. But this happened in a way which Stalin did not foresee. Had he believed in the possibility of a German attack, he would have put millions of GULAG prisoners to work on digging anti-tank ditches along the frontier. However, Stalin intended to get to Berlin, not in response to an attack, but on his own initiative. That is why the GULAG prisoners and the Red Army sappers were not digging anti-tank ditches, but filling them in and building a canal from east to west.

Let us not forget these GULAG prisoners whom Stalin destroyed in the quagmire of the swamps in 1940, so that the communist flag could one day fly over the capital of the Third Reich.

## CHAPTER 15

### The Marine Infantry in the Forests of Byelorussia

*We have been taught that wars no longer begin  
with the chivalrous calls of 'I'm coming after you'.*

Admiral N. KUZNETSOV,  
(*Nakanune*, Moscow 1966, p. 306)

Prior to 1940, the Red Army did not have any marine infantry. It was cheaper and simpler to use ordinary infantry for land battles, and landings on distant shores had not yet entered Stalin's plans.

But then Hitler burst westwards, and turned his unprotected back to Stalin. This imprudent move brought in its train the most radical structural changes inside the Red Army, did away with what remained of defence and sharply reinforced the strike force. In June 1940, while Hitler was invading France, the Soviet marine infantry was born.

At that time, the Soviet armed forces contained two oceangoing fleets, two sea-going fleets and two river flotillas on the Amur and on the Dnieper. The ocean-going fleet was not given any marine infantry; the Pacific and Arctic Oceans for the time being did not interest Stalin. The Amur Flotilla, which protected the Soviet Far East, was not given any marine infantry either. The Dnieper Naval Flotilla, as we have already seen, was divided into two offensive flotillas. Of these, the Pinsk Flotilla, which was deployed in the forests of Byelorussia, was given a company of marine infantry. It is interesting that marine infantry were stationed in the Byelorussian marshes, although there were none on the high seas. A conclusion can be drawn from this as to where Stalin was preparing his defences, and where he was preparing for an offensive.

The Soviet Baltic Fleet, whose only possible enemy could be Germany and its allies, was given a brigade of marine infantry with a strength of several thousand men.

The Soviet marine infantry was given its baptism on 22 June 1941 defending the Liepaja naval base. The base was less than 100 kilometres from the German frontier. It had no land defences and had not been prepared for defence. But according to the testimony of Soviet admirals and of German captured documents,

Soviet submarines were crammed into Liepaja 'like herring in a barrel'. The official history of the Soviet Naval Fleet published by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR openly admits that Liepaja had been prepared as a forward base for the Soviet Fleet to fight an offensive war at sea. (*Plot V Velikoi Orechestvernoi Voiny*, Moscow Nauka 1980, p. 138) The marine infantry in Liepaja were so close to the German frontier that they were taking part in defensive fighting even on the first day of the war, although they certainly had not been formed for this purpose. Ordinary infantry are better for defensive fighting than the marine infantry.

The Danube Naval Flotilla had two companies of land troops, but these are not officially recorded as marine infantry. This, however, is not evidence of a great love for peace. We already know that, even before Germany invaded, at least two Soviet rifle divisions, the 25th Chapaev and the 51st Perekop, which were deployed near the Danube Delta, were trained (and very well trained) to go into action as marine infantry.

The Black Sea Fleet had even more powerful forces. Officially it did not possess any marine infantry, but in early June 1941 the 9th Special Rifle Corps under Lieutenant-General Pavel Batov

was secretly transferred from the Caucasus to the Crimea. This corps was unusual in its composition, its armament, and in the direction which its combat training had been given. On 18 and 19 June 1941, the Black Sea Fleet carried out large-scale exercises on an offensive theme. In the course of these exercises, one of the divisions belonging to the 9th Special Rifle Corps was put aboard warships and carried out an assault landing on the 'enemy' coast. This kind of assault landing had never been practised by the Red Army before.

Moscow attached particular importance to the fleet and the 9th Special Rifle Corps having joint exercises. These exercises took place under the observation of high-ranking commanders who had come specially from Moscow to attend them. One of these officers was Vice-Admiral Ilya Ilyich Azarov. He later recalled how all those taking part felt that the exercises were being held for an ulterior motive, and that they would soon have to put their newly-acquired skills into practice in a real war, which would not, of course, be fought on their own territory. (I. I. Azarov, *Osazhdennaya Odessa*, Moscow Voeniz-dat 1962, pp. 3-8)

If war broke out and the Soviet High Command used the 9th Special Rifle Corps in a way appropriate to its type and the training it had been given, where could it be landed? In theory, there were only three possibilities: Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. But wherever the corps was landed, it would have to be supplied at once. In order to do this, either more troops would have to be landed, or else Soviet troops would have to hasten to join up with the 9th Special Rifle Corps. In any case, the supplies would have to come through Romania.

By a strange coincidence, the 3rd Airborne Assault Corps was also in the Crimea at the time. They were carrying out large-scale exercises, in which the corps headquarters and staff were airdropped along with brigade staffs.

Soviet historians never link these events together — the exercises of the 14th Rifle Corps in making assault landings from ships of the Danube Flotilla; the 3rd Airborne Assault Corps making assault landings from aircraft and gliders; and the 9th Special Rifle Corps making assault landings from the warships of the Black Sea Fleet. But these events are all connected in place, time, and purpose. They were preparations for aggression on a massive scale; preparations in their final stages.

## CHAPTER 16

### What are 'Armies of Covering Forces'?

*The basic and dominant strategic operational idea behind the modern 'army of covering forces' is active surprise invasion. It is clear from this that the modern defensive term 'army of covering forces' is a screen to conceal a surprise offensive blow to be dealt by the 'invading army'.*

*(Problems of Strategic Deployment,  
Frunze Military Academy, 1935)*

In the European part of the Soviet Union there were five military districts which shared common frontiers with foreign countries. The First Strategic Echelon was made up of troops from these five frontier districts and three fleets. These frontier and indeed all other districts had divisions and corps in their structure, but no armies.

Armies had existed in the Civil War, but they were disbanded after it had ended. An army is too large a formation to be maintained in peacetime. The only exception was the Special Army of the Red Banner. We cannot take it into account here, however, since this body included all the Soviet troops in the Far East and Trans-Baikal, and also the air force, naval forces, military settlements, and other elements. This vast shapeless creation embraced collective farms and even had its own concentration camps. The unusual nature of this formation was highlighted by the fact that it bore no number, while at the head of its huge organization stood a Marshal of the Soviet Union.

In 1938, for the first time ever in peacetime, two armies, the 1st and the 2nd, were formed in the Far East. It was entirely understandable that the Soviet government should take this step. Relations with Japan were very bad and prolonged periods of hostility frequently overflowed into real fighting in which great numbers of troops were used.



Up until this point, there had never been any armies in the European part of the country since the time of the Civil War. Hitler's coming to power, the economic, political and military crisis in Europe, the direct clash between Soviet communists and the fascists in Spain, the German *Anschluss* in Austria and its seizure of Czechoslovakia; none of these events caused Soviet armies to be set up in the western part of the country.

At the beginning of 1939, the Soviet Union, with the Great Purge behind it, was entering a new era of its existence. Its beginning was marked at the 18th Party Congress by a speech by Stalin, which in Ribbentrop's words was 'accepted with understanding' in Berlin. Soviet foreign policy was rapidly changing course: Britain and France were openly called warmongers, and if Stalin was not actually offering Hitler the hand of friendship, Soviet diplomats were clearly letting Hitler know that if he were to extend his hand, then it would be accepted.

That was the outward face of this new era. In 1939, however, the Soviet Union began to form armies in the European part of its territories. For geographical reasons alone, it would have been impossible to use these armies against the 'warmongers' of Britain and France. Against whom then? Surely not against Hitler, with whom negotiations about *rapprochement* were being held with such enthusiasm behind the scenes?

Thus while Soviet diplomats were 'seeking the road to peace', armies secretly appeared on the western frontiers, suddenly and in whole series: the 3rd and 4th Armies in Byelorussia, the 5th and 6th in the Ukraine, and the 7th, 8th and 9th on the Finnish frontier. These armies were growing in strength, and new armies were being added to them: the 10th and 11th in Byelorussia, and the 12th in the Ukraine.

Communist propaganda sometimes tries to present the matter in such a way as to suggest that the Soviet Union began to form its armies only after the Second World War began. But it was not like this. There is sufficient evidence to prove that Stalin decided to form the armies *before* the war broke out. Even according to official Soviet sources, the armies were set up before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The 4th and 6th Armies are known to have been already in existence in August 1939. There is also knowledge of the existence of the 5th Army in July. The 10th and 12th Armies were set up 'before the Second World War began', that is before 1 September 1939. (*Soviet Military Encyclopaedia*) Of the remaining armies, they are also known to have been set up in the areas of forthcoming conflicts, and that these conflicts subsequently broke out there.

Shortly after they had been formed, each of these armies got down to its real task. All seven armies deployed on the Polish frontier were involved in the 'liberation' of Poland, while the three armies on the Finnish border 'helped the Finnish people throw off the yoke of the oppressors'. Three armies were not enough here, so new ones, the 13th, 14th and 15th, were added.

When the Winter War in Finland ended, four Soviet armies on the Finnish frontier appeared to withdraw into the shadows and dissolve. Shortly afterwards the 15th Army appeared in the Far East, the 8th was seen on the frontiers with the Baltic states, while the 9th turned up on the Romanian frontier. 'Requests from the workers' in these countries to come and liberate them were soon forthcoming. And the valiant Soviet armies then liberated Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. After this, the 9th Army again withdrew into the shadows. Like the 11th Army, it was ready to make an appearance again at any moment. And as we shall see, it did just that.

After the 'liberation' campaigns had been completed, not one of these armies was disbanded, in spite of the vast expenditure needed to maintain them. This was unprecedented in the whole of Soviet history. Until this point, armies had only been formed during wartime, and only in order to fight in war. Now there was no one else left in Europe to 'liberate' — except Germany. It was just at this point that the process of forming new armies was appreciably stepped up.

Two armies, the 16th and the 17th, were established in Trans-Baikal in June 1940. The 16th was set up and deployed in such a way that it could be transferred westwards at any moment. But it is not this army which interests us. The 17th Army is the one which compels our attention. During the Civil War, at the most dramatic moment in the blood-stained conflict to preserve the communist dictatorship, the highest number used in the designation of an army was 16. Throughout Soviet history the number 17 had never been used to designate an army. The appearance of an army bearing such a number meant that the Soviet Union, while at peace and not expecting an attack from outside, had surpassed the highest number ever reached. (Previously this number had been reached on one occasion only, for a brief period in the course of a very bitter war.)

The Soviet leaders clearly understood that in setting up a 17th Army, they were crossing a Rubicon which was not visible to the uninitiated. Even two years previously, the state could not allow itself to maintain even one formation which could have been described by the military term 'army'. Now more armies were being formed than had ever been established in the past. A critical degree in the Soviet Union's power had now been

exceeded. From then onwards, the development of the country would proceed in entirely new conditions of a kind that had never before been encountered.

The creation of the 17th Army was clearly a most highly protected state secret, and Stalin did his best to ensure that it remained a secret both within the country and abroad. The 16th and 17th Armies were formed in such a way that it was almost impossible for them to be seen by outside observers. Extra measures were taken to scotch rumours about growing Soviet military might. The order to set up the 17th Army was signed by Marshal of the Soviet Union K. S. Timoshenko on 21 June 1940. (*Order of the Peoples' Commissariat for Defence*, No. 4, point 3) The next day, Soviet radio broadcast a TASS report. Schulenberg, the German ambassador, unerringly deduced that Stalin had written it himself, and told Molotov, who did not consider it necessary to refute the suggestion.

In the TASS report, Stalin resorted to his favourite device of attributing to his opponents words which they did not use, thus allowing himself easily to 'unmask a lie':

There are rumours circulating to the effect that not just 100, not even 150 Soviet divisions are concentrated on the Lithuanian—German frontier . . .

This is pure invention by Stalin. I have checked British, French and American newspapers, which Stalin exposes here as the slanderers, and there is not one newspaper which quotes such fantastic figures. Having attributed to the Western press something it did not write, Stalin easily refuted this non-existent slander before passing on to his main point:

It is considered in responsible Soviet circles that those who are spreading these ridiculous rumours are pursuing the special aim of casting a shadow over Soviet-German relations. These gentlemen, however, are simply expressing their suppressed desires as reality. They are apparently incapable of understanding the obvious fact that the good neighbourly relations which have been established between the Soviet Union and

Germany as a result of the conclusion of the non-aggression pact cannot be shaken by any rumours or petty propaganda. (*Pravda*, 23 June 1940)

There is some truth in this report. Stalin was quite correct in saying that Soviet troops were not being concentrated on the frontier. But he passed over in silence the fact that, far from inquisitive eyes in the depth of the country, powerful formations were being set up which would one day turn up on the German frontier, also under the cover of another and equally false TASS report.

It is quite obvious that, in their mobility, their technical equipment, and their fire, strike and fighting power, the armies of the 'pre-war period' were immeasurably superior to the armies which fought in the Civil War. But this was not the only difference. Whereas the armies were then dispersed in six different directions, they were now mustered into only two. Against Japan, with whom conflicts were unceasing, there were five armies; while facing Germany and its allies, with whom peace had been signed, there were twelve.

Nor did the rapid process of setting up armies stop there. Yet another army, the 26th, was formed on July 1940 on the German border.

In the Red Army, the sequence of numbers had always been rigorously observed. The next number in the sequence should have been 18. So why was the sequence broken?

Neither Soviet marshals nor eminent communist historians give us the answer to this question. But if a close study is made of the way in which these armies were created, history itself will suggest the answer. The sequence of numbering armies had not in fact been broken; in the summer of 1940 the Soviet leadership set up another *eleven* armies, one directed at Japan, ten at Germany.

The 26th Army was formed on the German border as part of this long series, and its formation preceded that of the others. But all the other armies in the same series were in the process of being set up; at the very least, the decision had been taken to set them up. The formation of these armies was completed somewhat later than that of the 26th Army, but *before* the German invasion began.

The 23rd and 24th Armies made their secret appearances in the western military districts in May 1941. The same month, the phantom army already known to us, the 1st, came floating out of the mists. A few weeks later, another similar army, the 9th, changed from being a vague mirage into a solid reality. On 13 June 1941, the day the TASS report was transmitted, all the other phantoms came into view: the 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 24th, 25th (against Japan) and the 28th, thus completing the uninterrupted series of numbers.

Officially the formation of all these armies was completed in the first half of 1941. This, however, was only the end of the process. But where was its beginning? Communist historians conceal this, and they do so with good reason. The creation of these armies betrays Stalin's craftiness - while Hitler was the enemy, there were no armies; while Poland was being partitioned, while Soviet and German troops were facing each other, it was sufficient for Stalin to have seven to twelve armies in the west of the Soviet Union. Then Hitler turned away from Stalin, and threw the Wehrmacht into Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland and France, with the clear intention of landing in Britain. Hardly any German troops were left on the Soviet frontiers. It was precisely at this moment that the Soviet Union began secretly to set up an enormous number of armies, among them the 26th. The further the German divisions moved to the west, to the north, and to the south, the more Soviet armies were created against Germany. Supposing that Hitler had gone even further, and had landed his troops in Britain, had seized Gibraltar, Africa and the Near East, how many armies would Stalin have then formed on the undefended German border? And for what purpose?

The basis of Soviet strategy was the 'operation in depth' theory: the delivery of surprise strikes in great depth at the enemy's most vulnerable places. The theory of the shock army was born at the same time as the 'operation in depth' theory. The shock army was to be the instrument used to deliver those strikes in depth. Set up purely to solve offensive tasks (*Soviet Military Encyclopaedia*, Vol. I, p. 256), these shock armies had on their complement a considerable quantity of artillery and infantry whose purpose it was to break the enemy's defence, and one or two mechanized corps with 500 tanks each, which would deliver a heavy shock attack in depth.

The German *Blitzkrieg* and the Soviet operation in depth are strikingly similar in both concept and detail. Tank groups were the special instrument which had been created to carry out the *Blitzkrieg*. Three such groups were used in the invasion of France, and four in the invasion of the Soviet Union. Each one usually had between 600 and 1,000 tanks, and on occasions as many as 1,250 tanks, along with a considerable number of infantry and artillery whose purpose it was to break a way through for the tanks.

One difference between the Soviet and German war machines was that in Germany everything was called by its own name, so that the tank groups bore their own numerical designations, while the field armies had theirs. In the Soviet Union shock armies existed only in theory; and although that theory was soon turned into substance, they still did not formally bear the title of shock army. This name was officially introduced only after the Germans had invaded. Before this, all Soviet armies had a single numerical designation, and bore no distinguishing name. This was misleading then, and is misleading now. In Germany we can see the engines of aggression, the tank groups, clearly called by their own names. In the Red Army, we do not see them quite so distinctly. This is not evidence of great peaceableness, however, but rather of excessive secretiveness.

At first sight, Soviet armies are like soldiers in a row. They all look the same. If one takes a closer look, however, the differences quickly emerge. For some months before the 'Finnish aggression' occurred, several armies intended for the 'liberation' of Finland were deployed on Soviet territory. This is how they were made up in December 1939, in the order in which they were deployed from north to south:

14th Army — no corps, two rifle divisions

9th Army — no corps, three rifle divisions

8th Army — no corps, four rifle divisions

7th Army — 10th Tank Corps (660 tanks); three tank brigades (each with 330 tanks); the 10th, 19th, 34th and 50th Rifle Corps (each with three rifle divisions); a detached brigade: eleven detached artillery regiments, apart from those which form part of the complement of the corps and divisions of this army; several detached tank and artillery battalions; and the army's air arm.

We can therefore see that although the 7th Army did not differ in name from its neighbours, it had several times more tanks and artillery than the three other armies put together. In addition, the 7th Army was commanded by K. A. Meretskov, the commander of the Leningrad Military District. A favourite of Stalin's,

Meretskov was shortly to be appointed Chief of the General Staff and later promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union. Nor was he the only future marshal in the 7th Army. This army was staffed by the most promising officers, who had held senior appointments already and who were to rise even higher in future. L. A. Govorov, for example, the Chief of the Artillery Staff of the 7th Army, also went on to become Marshal of the Soviet Union. The other armies, on the other hand, were led by commanders who had not been prominent in the past, nor would they become so in the future.

The position of the 7th (shock) Army was interesting. The Finnish 'militarists' began their armed 'provocations' precisely in that area where the Soviet High Command, a few months earlier, had deployed the 7th Army, which was thus able to deliver a blow in response. For some curious reason, the Finnish 'militarists' did not stage any provocations in those areas where weak Soviet armies had been deployed.

Soviet organization was extremely flexible. Any army could become a shock army at any time, simply by adding a corps or more to its complement, and translated just as quickly back to its normal state. From being the strongest army in 1940, the 7th Army had by 1941 become the weakest; it no longer had any corps, and consisted of four rifle divisions only.

In order to understand what had been taking place on the Soviet-German frontier, we must make a clear definition of which were shock armies and which were ordinary ones. Officially all armies were the same, and none was called a shock army. Yet some armies had hardly any tanks, while other armies had hundreds of them. In order to identify shock armies, we should make an elementary comparison of the strike power of the Soviet armies with the German tank groups, and with the Soviet pre-war criteria used to define what a shock army was. The element needed to change an ordinary army into a shock one was a mechanized corps organized in a new way, with an establishment of 1,031 tanks. When one such corps was included in an ordinary army, its strike power would become comparable to that of any German tank group, or even exceed it.

Here is a striking revelation. On 21 June 1941, *all* the Soviet armies on the German and Romanian borders, as well as the 23rd Army on the Finnish frontier, were of shock army standard, although, as we have already seen, they were not called such. They were, from north to south, the 23rd, 8th, 11th, 3rd, 10th, 4th, 5th, 6th, 26th, 12th, 18th and 9th. The 16th Army was then added to them. This was a typical shock army, with more than 1,000 tanks on its complement. (Central Archives of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR, Archive No.

208, list 2511, item 20, p. 128) The 19th, 20th, and 21st Armies, which had been secretly moved up to the German border, had already been fully brought up to this standard.

Germany had a powerful engine for aggression in its tank groups. The Soviet Union had a similar engine. The difference lay in their designations and in their numbers. Hitler had four tank groups, while Stalin had sixteen shock armies.

Not all mechanized corps were made up entirely of tanks. But to appreciate Stalin's intentions fully, account must be taken both of what he achieved, and also of what he was prevented from achieving. The German attack caught the Soviet Union in the process of setting up a great number of shock armies. First came the framework for these enormous structures, which was then filled in, completed, and finally put into working order. Not all armies reached the levels planned for them, but this work was proceeding when Hitler interrupted it. He had enough sense not to wait until they were all ready to be turned loose.

Soviet experts at one time used the term 'invasion army'. This term did not have a particularly diplomatic ring, especially for the neighbouring countries with whom Soviet diplomats were doing their best to have 'normal relations'. In the 1930s, this excessively frank term was replaced by the happier-sounding expression 'shock army'. Soviet sources, however, stress that these are one and the same thing. (*VIZH*, 1963, No. 10, p. 31)

But even the term 'shock army', for purposes of disguise, was not used until the war began, even though the greater part of the Soviet Army deserved this title. The Soviet generals then introduced the term 'cover army' to conceal their designs. There are other such terms in communist double-speak. Soviet expressions like 'liberation campaign', 'counter-attack', 'seize the strategic initiative' mean respectively aggression, attack, and beginning a surprise war without declaring it. It is a great pity that some historians, either through ignorance or design, use Soviet military terms without explaining their true meaning to their readers.

The true purpose of a Soviet 'cover army' was to conceal that, in the initial period of a war, the Red Army was fully mobilizing its main forces, deploying them, and then entering the war. 'Cover', however, in no way



meant defence. As early as 20 April 1932 the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR laid down that powerful mobile invasion groups should be kept near state borders in peacetime, to enable them to cross the frontier immediately war broke out, in order to disrupt the enemy's mobilization and seize strategic reserves and important areas. In the view of the Soviet Union's top military and political leaders, these actions would be the best cover for Soviet mobilization. It was precisely in this sense that the armies in frontier areas were called 'cover armies'.

July 1939 was the time when theory was put into practice, and the creation of 'cover armies' began on the Soviet western frontiers. Stalin was using the Molotov—Ribbentrop Pact to push Hitler into a war with the West, to establish a common frontier with Germany, and to form an increasing number of these 'cover armies'.

Among the ordinary Soviet invasion armies, which usually consisted of one mechanized corps, two rifle corps, and some detached divisions, were some armies that did not conform to the general pattern. There were three of them, the 6th, 9th and 10th. These armies together had not three corps, but six. Two were mechanized, one was cavalry, and three were rifle. Each of these armies was moved as close as possible to the frontier, so that if a large salient developed on the enemy side, the special armies would find themselves precisely in these salients. Each army was equipped with the latest weaponry. The 6th Mechanized Corps of the 10th Army, for instance, was armed with 452 of the latest T-34 and KV tanks. The 4th Mechanized Corps of the 6th Army, had 460 of the latest T-34 and KV tanks, besides others. The air divisions of these armies had hundreds of the latest planes, including the YAK-1, MIG-3, IL-2, and PE-2.

After each army had been fully equipped, it must have had 2,350 tanks, 698 armoured vehicles, over 4,000 guns and mortars and more than 250,000 soldiers and officers. In addition to their basic complements, these armies were given ten to twelve heavy artillery regiments, NKVD units and much else besides.

I do not know what to call these out-of-the-ordinary armies. If we use their official names, the 6th Army, the 9th, and the 10th, then we involuntarily fall into the trap which was set as long ago as 1939 by the Soviet General Staff. We lose our awareness and begin to think of these armies as ordinary shock armies, or ordinary invasion armies. They were completely out of the ordinary; each one of these armies, with more than 2,000 tanks each, was equal to or even exceeded one half of the entire German Wehrmacht, while in quality the superiority of the Soviet tanks was astonishing.

If we call the German tank groups, each with between 600 and 1,000 tanks, engines of aggression, what then are we to call the 6th, 9th, and 10th Soviet Armies?

That was not all, however. The Soviet High Command had a fair number of corps at its disposal which did not belong to these armies, but which were deployed quite close to the frontier. Any ordinary army could be changed into a shock one just by including corps in its complement, and any shock army could be changed into a heavy shock one without changing either its name or number.

Of the three heavy shock armies, it is the most powerful of them, the 9th, which attracts our attention. Not very long before, in the Winter War against Finland, the 9th Army was simply a rifle corps consisting of three rifle divisions with a fine-sounding name. After the Winter War, the 9th Army dissolved into the mists, appeared elsewhere, was dissolved once again, only to turn up yet again under cover of the TASS report of 13 June 1941. It had not yet been brought up to full strength, but was still the unfinished shell for the most powerful army in the world. It had six corps, two of which were mechanized, and one cavalry.

On 21 June 1941, the 9th Army had 17 divisions in all, including two air, four tank, two motorized, two cavalry and seven rifle. It was very similar to other heavy shock armies, but it was planned to add to the 9th Army yet another mechanized corps, the 2yth, commanded by Major-General I. E. Petrov. This corps was established in the Turkestan Military District, and was secretly transferred westwards before its formation had been fully completed. After it had been included, the Army's complement consisted of 20 divisions, including six tank. At full strength, the seven corps of the 9th Army had 3,341 tanks. This was roughly the same number as the Wehrmacht had; in quality, they were superior. According to Colonel-General P. Belov (at that time he was a major-general, commander of the 2nd Cavalry Corps of the 9th Army), it was intended to give T-34 tanks even to the cavalry of this army. (*VIZH*, 1959, No. u, p. 66)

The 9th Army had so far had undistinguished commanders. Then everything changed. The 9th Army was given a colonel-general as its commander. It was an exceptionally high rank at the time. There were only eight colonel-generals in the whole of the armed forces of the Soviet Union, while the tank troops had none, the air arms had none, and the NKVD had none. Thirty Soviet armies were led by major-generals and lieutenant-generals. The 9th Army was the only exception. In addition, some very bright generals and officers had joined this exceptional army, including three future marshals of the Soviet Union, R. Ya Malinovsky, M. V. Zakharov, and N. I. Krylov; A. Poryshkin, a future air marshal and three times Hero of the Soviet Union; and I. E. Petrov,

I. G. Pavlovsky, P. N. Lashchenko, all future full generals of the Army. Many other talented and aggressive commanders, who had already distinguished themselves in battle, joined, including the 28-year-old Air Major-General A. Osipnenko. There is no escaping the impression that somebody's solicitous hand was selecting everything which was best and most promising for this unusual army.

Here we come to a small but significant discovery. The most powerful army in the world was set up in the Soviet Union in the first half of June 1941. It was not set up on the German frontier, but on the border of Romania. After its first disappearance, the 9th Army had suddenly turned up in June 1940 on the Romanian frontier. By this stage, it had already assumed its new capacity as a real shock army. It was soon to participate in the 'liberation' of Bessarabia; Soviet sources indicate that 'the 9th Army was created specially to solve this important problem'. (*VIZH*, 1972, No. 10, p. 83)

The training of the army had been accomplished by the most aggressive of Soviet commanders, K. K. Rokossovsky, who by then had been released from prison. The 9th Army became part of the Southern Front as the key lead army, playing the same role as the 7th Army had done in Finland. The Front was under Zhukov's personal command.

After the brief 'liberation campaign', the 9th Army disappeared again. Then, under cover of the TASS report of 13 June 1941, it turned up again in the same place. By now, though, it was no longer simply a shock invasion army. It had become a heavy shock army, and was on the way to becoming the most powerful army in the world. Its purpose can hardly have been defensive, for there were very few troops on the Romanian side of the frontier. Even if there had been, no aggressor would have delivered his main strike through Romania, for the most elementary geographical reasons. Another 'liberation campaign' by the 9th Army into Romania, however, could have changed the entire strategic balance in Europe and in the world. Romania was Germany's basic source of oil. A strike at Romania would ground all Germany's aircraft, and bring all its tanks, machines, ships, industry and transport to a halt.

That is why the most promising commanders were to be found there. The 9th Army suddenly appeared on the Romanian frontier in the middle of June 1941. But this suddenness was only for the benefit of outside observers; in fact, the 9th Army had never left the area since 'liberating' Bessarabia in the middle of 1940. It was simply that its name had not been used officially for some time, and orders had gone directly to the corps from the headquarters of the Military District. The headquarters of the 9th Army and the headquarters of the

Odessa Military District (established in October 1939) simply merged into one entity and then equally simply separated again on 13 June.

Experience shows that, after a shock army appears on the borders of a small country, an order to 'liberate' the neighbour's territory is sure to follow within the month. Irrespective of how events might have unfolded had Soviet troops invaded Germany (which incidentally was just as unprepared for defence as the Soviet Union was), the outcome of the war could have been decided far from the main battlefields. Stalin was clearly counting on this. That was why the 9th Army was the strongest. That was why, as early as March 1941, at a time when the 9th Army officially still did not exist, there arrived there a youngish, highly audacious major-general named Radion Yakovlevich Malinovsky. This was the same Malinovsky who four years later was to astonish the world with the tremendous strike he delivered across hills and wilderness into the vast heartland of Manchuria.

In 1941 the task facing Malinovsky and his colleagues in the 9th Army was a fairly simple one. They were faced with a distance of only 180 kilometres to traverse, as opposed to 810 kilometres in Manchuria; not across hills and wilderness, but across a plain with really good roads. The attack had to be made, not against the Japanese Army, but against the considerably weaker Romanian one. What is more, it was planned to give the 9th Army three times more tanks than the 6th Guards Tank Army would have in 1945.

Hitler allowed none of this to happen. A German government statement handed over to the Soviet government on the outbreak of war in the East gives the reasons for Germany's action. One of these reasons was that Soviet troops were being concentrated unjustifiably on the frontier with Romania, and that this represented a mortal danger for Germany. None of this has been invented by Goebbels's propaganda. The 9th (heavy shock) Army had been established exclusively as an offensive army. According to evidence from Colonel-General P. Belov, the 9th Army usually 'regarded every defensive problem as short-term, even after German operations had begun on Soviet territory'. (*VIZH*, 1959, No. n, p. 65) But then this was the trouble with not just the 9th Army, but with all the other armies as well.

Three times Hero of the Soviet Union, Marshal of the Air Force A. I. Pokryshkin (then a senior lieutenant and deputy commander of a fighter squadron belonging to the 9th Army) sheds an interesting light on the 9th Army's mood. Here is his conversation with a 'filthy bourgeois', whose shop had been confiscated by his 'liberators'. The scene takes place in the spring of 1941, in 'liberated' Bessarabia:

'Ah, Bucharest! You should see what a fine city it is.'

'I'll certainly see it sometime,' I answered with conviction.

The shop-owner opened his eyes wide, waiting for me to go on. I had to change the subject.

(A. I. Pokryshkin: *Nebo voiny*, Novosibirsk ZSKI, 1968, p. 10)

We have a natural reluctance to believe Hitler's explanation that he launched Operation Barbarossa to defend Germany from a treacherous attack by Soviet troops on Bucharest and Ploesti. But the other side says the same thing; even the Soviet lieutenants knew that they would shortly be in Romania. A Soviet officer is not entitled to wander across frontiers as a tourist. In what capacity could Pokryshkin get there except as a 'liberator'? Hitler did everything he could to prevent this, but all he succeeded in doing was briefly to delay the inevitable.

## CHAPTER 17

# Mountain Divisions on the Steppes of the Ukraine

*Airborne assault landings will be effective in mountainous battle areas. Since troops, headquarters and organs which operate in the rear are particularly reliant on roads, it is possible to use air assaults to capture enemy troops operating in the rear, to attack his communications and roads, commanding heights, ravines, passes, railway junctions and so on, and this can produce exceptionally important results. In general terms, the dropping of an assault landing force will hardly be expedient outside the framework of an offensive operation.*

*(Voennyi Vestnik, 1940, No. 4, pp. 76-77)*

A study of the Soviet armies in the First Strategic Echelon reveals a surprising picture of the Soviet Union preparing itself painstakingly and tirelessly for war. We may be surprised to discover that each army had its own unique structure, its own peculiarities, and its own character. Each 'cover' army was established to deal with a clearly defined task in the forthcoming war of 'liberation'.

Sufficient material has been published to provide for a separate study to be written on each of the 30 Soviet armies. If a study in depth were to be made of the structure, disposition, officer corps and the direction given to the training in only one Soviet army, and it does not really matter which one, then the aggressive tendency inherent in all the Soviet preparations would become quite obvious.

As there is no space available to describe all 30 armies, I shall allow myself to dwell briefly upon one of them. Officially it was called the 12th Army. It had one mechanized and two rifle corps and other units. It had

nine divisions in all including two tank and one motorized. It was indistinguishable in number, name and composition from other similar invasion armies. Its history is the usual one. It was set up when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. A few weeks after it was formed, it set to work, and 'liberated' Poland. It then had a tank corps, two detached tank brigades, two cavalry corps, and three rifle divisions. It was not without purpose that it had little artillery and infantry. There was no need here to break through a powerful defence. But on the other hand there were mobile troops. 'The I2th Army . . . is in essence a front-line mobile group.' (SVE, Vol. 8, p. 181)

Its subsequent history was also normal. It completed the 'liberation' campaign in Poland, but then for some reason or other the army was not disbanded, and it stayed on the German border. For what purpose? It is said that Stalin was naive and believed Hitler. Why then did he not disband his armies, which had been set up for the event of war?

Later the 12th Army underwent the same transformation as all the adjacent invasion armies. Its main strike engine was no longer called a tank corps, but a mechanized corps. This was so that the leaders of neighbouring friendly countries should not become uneasy. The change of name, it is true, was followed by an increase rather than a decrease in the number of tanks in the army. The cavalry was taken away from it. Its capacity for disrupting the enemy's defences was increased. The number of rifle divisions was doubled, as was the amount of artillery in each division. In addition to these, one artillery brigade and four detached artillery regiments were added to the army's complement. The capability to counter the enemy's engineered defences also increased when a detached regiment of engineers was brought into the army.

What was unusual about the I2th Army was its national composition. When he was preparing to invade Poland in 1939, Stalin filled the I2th Army with Ukrainians, apparently bearing in mind the long-standing animosity between the Poles and the Ukrainians. The army was headed by S. K. Timoshenko, and we find a multitude of commanders of Ukrainian origin alongside him. The army was formed in the Ukraine. It follows that the reservists were also drawn from there, and they formed a solid majority in the I2th Army.

After Poland had been 'liberated', a slow and almost imperceptible change in the I2th Army's national composition began. Far-reaching changes had already taken place in 1940. In order that this army's unusual national composition did not become too apparent, ethnic Russians were appointed to key posts. The greater part of the army, however, was neither Ukrainian nor Russian. It had become Caucasian. There were

Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis in other armies, but their presence was particularly strong in the I2th. There were hundreds of officers' surnames like Partsvaniya, Grigoryan, Kabalava, Gusein-zade and Sarkoshyan. Such officers were not only to be found at command level in companies and battalions. General Zhukov, who commanded the Military District, sought out Colonel I. Kh. Bagramyan, another Armenian who was a friend of long standing, from his job as a military academy lecturer, and appointed him Chief of the Operations Branch (War Planning), not of any old headquarters, but to none other than the headquarters of the I2th Army. Not only the colonels, but quite a few generals, such as Bagrat Arashunyan, the army's chief of staff, now came from the Caucasus.

Zhukov was a frequent visitor to the I2th Army, and it was not without purpose that he was gathering natives of the Caucasus into its ranks. The I2th was being secretly but steadily changed into a mountain army. Zhukov personally demanded of its command that the I2th should have a thorough knowledge of the Carpathian passes, not just on paper, but from practical experience. In 1940, he ordered that 'specially reinforced groups, made up of various combat vehicles and means of transport, should be sent through the passes in autumn along all more or less passable routes, in order to be convinced they could be surmounted in practical conditions by tanks, motor vehicles, tractors, animal-drawn transport and beasts of burden.' (Marshal I. Kh. Bagramyan, *VIZH* 1967, No. I, p. 54)

Hitler was waging war in France, with Germany's back exposed to the Soviet Union. Yet here was Zhukov carrying out experiments in how to master mountain passes. Zhukov was, of course, unaware that the German generals had only recently been carrying out exactly the same experiments in order to reassure themselves that troops, tanks, artillery tractors and transport could pass through the Ardennes. But it was not defence that Zhukov had in mind when preparing the I2th Army. Bagramyan, who was responsible for the war plans, recalled that 'When I was studying the operational plans, I was struck by the following fact - our frontier army had neither a deployment nor cover plan for the frontier.' (*VIZH*, 1967, No. I, p. 52)

'When I was studying the operational plans' means that the safe of the operations branch of the I2th Army was not empty. There were plans inside it. They were not there simply to be familiarized with in a cursory manner. They were complex documents which had to be studied. Yet among these war plans there were none for defence.



There is an interesting description of the 12th Army exercises, which Zhukov attended in person. The problems were all offensive in character, and on the maps the war took place on German territory. The war game was being played against the real enemy, and not some fictitious one, using real top-secret intelligence information; and it began with Soviet troops fording the frontier river San. Differences arose between Zhukov and Parusinov, the officer commanding the army. These were not as to whether to advance or to stand and put up a defence. 'We must do our best,' insisted Parusinov, 'to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy with our first strike.' The wise Zhukov understood that these were good intentions, but a strike had to be made, not on a wide front, but on a very narrow one. That was what the argument was about.

Having demolished the army's commanding officer in military theory, Zhukov did not stop there. Parusinov was shortly afterwards removed from the command of the army, and his place was taken by Zhukov's old friend, General P. G. Ponedelin.

After these changes, the experiments in how to master the mountain passes continued. They were conducted by Bagramyan in person. It was during these experiments that he supervised an 'obvious display of defensive works'; in other words, the construction, in clear view of the enemy, of reinforced concrete fortifications right on the bank of the frontier river.

Zhukov's interest in the passes is highly significant. If his purpose had been to render them impassable to the enemy, he would have thrown his troops into the mountains, dug up all mountain paths and roads, and built reinforced concrete fortifications near the passes, instead of right alongside the river. It would have been more economical, the enemy would not have observed the construction work, and would have been unable to cross the passes. But would anyone really attack the Soviet Union across mountain ranges when there were open spaces in abundance? Mountains were of exceptional importance to the Soviet command. Germany, on the other hand, was separated from its main source of oil by a double barrier of mountains, in Czechoslovakia and Romania. A Soviet strike across the passes in Czechoslovakia and Romania would effectively cut the oil artery.

According to Marshal Zhukov, 'Germany's weak point was oil supply, but it made up for this to some extent by importing oil from Romania.' (G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, Moscow APN, 1969, p. 224) Everything was simple, but of genius. That Zhukov never suffered one defeat in his whole life was due to his invariably following one simple principle -find the enemy's weak spot, and then hit it with a sudden strike.

The reason why these experiments were going on in the mountains was because Zhukov knew Germany's weak spot. The capabilities of troops of all kinds, and every type of combat and transport vehicle operating in the conditions which prevailed in the Carpathian mountain passes, were subjected to a scientific study. Standards were established and carefully checked, and guidance was compiled for the troops. The time taken by the various types of vehicle to negotiate these mountain passes was carefully recorded and analysed. All this was very necessary for the planning of offensive operations; especially lightning operations. Just as in planning a bank robbery, it was essential to take into account every tiny detail, and to calculate everything with the greatest accuracy. All of this, it should be noted, was totally unnecessary for defence. If the Carpathian passes had to be defended from the enemy, then speed was not needed; all the soldiers had to be told was to stay where they were and not let the enemy pass.

Events went on apace. Zhukov was promoted, as was Bagramyan in his wake. But neither of them forgot the 12th Army. Slowly and unceasingly, its structure was changing under their orders.

As we have already noted, in the 12th Army, as in all other Soviet armies, things were not called by their names at this time. At the beginning of June 1941, four rifle divisions (the 44th, 58th, 60th, and 96th) were converted into mountain rifle divisions. In addition, the recently formed 192nd Mountain Rifle Division was secretly transferred from Turkestan and added to the complement of the 12th Army. What does one call a corps which has two divisions, each of them mountain rifle? What does one call another corps, in which, of its four divisions, three are mountain rifle? What does one call an army which, out of its three corps, has two which are in essence mountain rifle corps, and in which the mountain rifle divisions are in a solid majority? I should call the corps mountain rifle, and the army a mountain army. The Soviet High Command, however, had reasons for not doing this. The corps went on being called, as before, the 13th and 17th Rifle Corps, while the army was simply called the 12th Army.

Here we see only the final results of the reorganization; how it was done is hidden from us. We only know that the mountain rifle divisions were given their official name on 1 June 1941, while the order was issued on 26 April; and that the transformation of the divisions from rifle into mountain rifle divisions was going on as

early as autumn 1940, even before Bagramyan had begun his experiments. Not only was it changed into a mountain army, the 12th also had an influence on adjacent armies. The 72nd Mountain Rifle Division, under the command of Major-General P. I. Abramidze, had been trained in the 12th Army, and was now transferred to the adjacent 26th Army.

Lieutenant-General I. S. Konev's 19th Army, which was being transferred from the northern Caucasus, was then secretly deployed behind the 12th and 26th Armies. We also find mountain rifle divisions on its complement, for instance the 28th Division under the command of Colonel K. I. Novik. It was at this time, again under cover of the T ASS report of 13 June 1941, that deployment began in the area between the 12th (mountain) and 9th (heavy shock) Armies in the eastern Carpathians, of yet another army, the 18th. Hitler did not allow its deployment to be completed, however, and we are unable to establish with any degree of accuracy the shape which the Soviet High Command wanted it to take. Hitler threw all the Soviet plans into disarray and then something quite unimaginable began. But even so, there are sufficient documents to enable the conclusion to be drawn that the original idea was that the 18th Army should be a carbon copy of the 12th (Mountain) Army, although like the 12th, it did not bear this name. Any researcher who studies the archives of the 12th and 18th Armies will be surprised by their absolute similarity in structure. It is a most unusual example of twin armies. The similarity went as far as the same Caucasian general running the headquarters of both the 18th and the 12th Armies in a completely even-handed way. He was Major-General (later full General of the Army) V. Ya. Kolpakchi.

Just before the war began, a school for mountain training was opened in the Caucasus. It trained the best Soviet mountain climbers to be instructors. Once fully trained, these instructors were sent to the Soviet western frontier, since it was precisely here, and not in the Caucasus or Turkestan, that in June 1941 a great number of mountain rifle troops were concentrated. A short article about the school appeared in the newspaper *Red Star* on 1 November 1941, under the heading 'Trained to Fight in the Mountains'.

It is now time to ask the question-in *which* mountains? There is only one comparatively small mountain range on the Soviet western frontiers. This is the eastern Carpathian mass, the heights of which are more like gently sloping hills than mountains. There would have been no point in having a powerful defence in the Carpathians in 1941, for the following reasons:

1. That area of the Carpathians would not favour an aggressor coming from west to east. The enemy would come down from the mountains on to the plain, and so his army would have to be supplied across the whole of the Carpathians, the Tatry mountains, the Ruda and Sudety hills and the Alps. All this is highly unfavourable and dangerous for an aggressor.
2. The eastern Carpathians form a blunt wedge on the enemy's side of the frontier. If many Soviet troops were to be concentrated here, for defensive purposes, even in peacetime they would be surrounded by the enemy on three sides. By making use of the plains further to the south, and especially more to the north of the eastern Carpathians, the enemy could strike at any time at the rest of the troops which had dug themselves in on the mountains, thereby cutting their supply-lines.
3. In 1941, there were insufficient enemy troops in the Carpathians to carry out an aggression, and the Soviet High Command was fully aware of this. (See for example Lieutenant-General Bagrat Arushunyan, VIZH 1973, No. 6, p. 61)

All these factors, which render the eastern Carpathians unfavourable for an aggressive action moving from west to east, make them suitable for an aggression which moves in the opposite direction:

1. As the troops move ahead into the mountains, their supply-lines remain on Soviet territory, mainly lying across very flat terrain.
2. The eastern Carpathians form a blunt salient which juts far out into the west, thereby cutting the enemy grouping in two. This is a natural springboard which, if heavy forces are built up in it even in peacetime, places them as though they were in the enemy's rear. All they then have to do is to continue to move forward, threatening the enemy's rear and thus compelling him to withdraw along the whole front.
3. Only negligible enemy forces were located in the Carpathians. The Soviet High Command knew this, and it was precisely for this reason that they had concentrated two armies there.

The two armies could not stay on the spot; there was no room for them. They were not needed for defence, nor were they adapted to it. There was only one way of using these armies in war, and that was to move them forward. Two mountain ridges spread from the eastern Carpathians. One goes westwards to Czechoslovakia, the other southwards to Romania. Two directions, two armies; it is entirely logical. Each direction was equally

important, for each led to the main oil pipelines. If only one of the armies succeeded, it would still be fatal for Germany. Even in the event of both armies failing, their operations would lessen the flow of German reserves into Romania.

Apart from the two strikes over the mountains at the arteries, there was also the 9th (heavy shock) Army, which was ready to deliver a blow to the heart of the oilfields. Its operations were covered by two main mountain ranges. In order to defend Romania from the Soviet 9th Army, German troops would have had to take these ranges, with an entire Soviet army on each one.

We may disagree over the purposes of the mountain rifle divisions which made up the 12th and 18th Armies, yet these armies were in the Carpathians. But we cannot argue about the purpose of a similar division in the 9th (heavy shock) Army. The 9th was stationed near Odessa, but on the orders of General Zhukov, who bore personal responsibility for both the South and South-Western Fronts, a mountain rifle division was set up as part of the 9th Army. What sort of mountains are to be found near Odessa? The 30th Irkutsk, Order of Lenin, Triple Order of the Red Banner, Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR Mountain Rifle Division of the 9th Army could only have been used for its primary purpose in Romania. It was certainly not by chance that this division, commanded by Major-General S. G. Galaktionov, found itself in the 48th Rifle Corps of General P. Ya. Malinovsky. First of all, Malinovsky was the most aggressive corps commander not just in the 9th Army but on the whole of the Southern Front. On the other hand, the 48th Rifle Corps was on the extreme right flank of the 9th Army. This was of no significance on Soviet territory. But if the 9th Army was moved into Romania, it would be wholly on the plain, and its right flank would be rubbing against the mountain range. It was therefore eminently reasonable to have one mountain rifle division on the extreme right flank.

That was not all. The 21st Mountain Cavalry Division, commanded by Colonel Ya. K. Kuliev, was secretly moved out of Turkestan in military trains. Hitler's attack upset everything, however, and it then became necessary to throw all the forces which had been destined for the south into Byelorussia, including the 19th Army with its mountain rifle divisions. The 21st Mountain Cavalry Division also found itself there. Nobody there needed it; it was not adapted to fighting in the marshlands, and there it ingloriously perished. But it was not for Byelorussia that it had been intended.

The concentration of two Soviet armies in the eastern Carpathians had catastrophic consequences. No one, of course, would have attacked these armies head-on. But the 1st German Tank Group's attack at Rovno put

the Soviet command in a dilemma. They either had to leave the two armies in the Carpathians, where they would perish without ammunition and provisions, or else to withdraw them at once from this mousetrap. The second of these choices was adopted. The two mountain armies, which were unadapted for fighting on the plains, carrying light armament and a mass of equipment which was now redundant, fled from the mountains and immediately came under attack from the spearhead of German tanks. The 1st Tank Group easily routed the fleeing mountain armies and then drove forward to catch the 9th (heavy shock) Army in the rear.

Once again, let Bagramyan speak:

Knowledge of the Eastern Carpathians led to a more clear understanding of how absolutely essential it was to reform as quickly as possible those heavy unwieldy rifle divisions, which were unsuited for action in the mountains, into light mountain rifle units. When I recall this now, I catch myself thinking of how unintentionally mistaken I had been. At the outbreak of war, these divisions in the main had to fight their battles in the conditions prevailing on the plains, so their reformation into mountain divisions only served to weaken them. (Marshal Bagramyan, *VIZH*, 1976, No. I, p. 55)

Once the German troops had dealt with these armies, the road opened out before them to the totally undefended bases of the Soviet Fleet, to the Don Basin, Khar'kov, Zaporozh'e and Dniepropetrovsk. These were industrial regions of the utmost importance; once they were lost to the Germans, the Soviet Union succeeded in producing only 100,000 tanks for the rest of the war years. This was much more than was produced in Germany, but had these regions not been lost, Soviet tank, artillery, aircraft and naval production could have been several times higher than their already record levels.

When the Germans broke through to the south of the Ukraine it put the Soviet troops around Kiev in a very serious position and opened the road for Germany to the Caucasus - the heart of the Soviet Union's oil-production.

Communist propaganda has it that the Red Army was not preparing itself for war, and that this was the cause of all its subsequent troubles. This is not true. Let us retrace, if only through the examples offered by the 12th Army and its carbon copy, the 18th, what *could* have happened if the Soviet Union had really been unprepared for war:

1. There would have been enormous savings of those resources which were simply wasted on setting up two mountain armies and many detached mountain rifle divisions. If only part of these resources had been used to establish anti-tank divisions, the war would have taken a different course.
2. There would not have been two armies in the Carpathians; they would not have had to be extricated in a panic from this mousetrap; nor would they have fallen under the blow from the German spearhead as they were withdrawing.
3. The German massed tanks to the north of the Carpathians would have met with heavyweight divisions adapted to fighting on the plains and equipped with anti-tank guns and many other types of powerful artillery, instead of the light divisions they actually encountered fleeing from the mountains.
4. If the German tank spearhead had broken through the defences of these divisions which were not fleeing anywhere, the consequences would not have been catastrophic, for the enormous build-up of troops on the Romanian frontier would not have been there, and the German strike would have simply landed in an empty space, instead of into the rear area of these troops.

If the Red Army had not been preparing for war, everything would have been different. But it was preparing itself, and very assiduously at that.

## CHAPTER 18

### The Purpose of the First Strategic Echelon

*It has to be borne in mind that it is possible simultaneously to carry out two or even three offensive operations on different fronts in a theatre of military actions, with the intention of strategically rocking the enemy's defensive capability on the widest possible scale.*

Marshal S. K. TIMOSHENKO,  
People's Commissar for Defence of  
the USSR, 31 December 1940

We have dwelt very briefly on some of the armies belonging to the First Strategic Echelon. We saw the most powerful of these armies on the Romanian frontier. We saw the mountain armies destined to cut off Romania — and its oil — from Germany. We saw five airborne assault corps and a special corps for amphibious assault operations. The First Strategic Echelon of the Red Army had in all sixteen armies and several dozen detached corps. There was a total of 170 divisions in this strategic echelon.

Interestingly, Soviet marshals were discussing the role of this echelon *before* the war. Marshal A. I. Egorov considered that the forthcoming war would be one in which millions, and indeed tens of millions of soldiers would take part. But he propounded that an offensive should be embarked upon without waiting until full mobilization had been carried through. It was his opinion that in peacetime it was essential to maintain 'invasion groups' in frontier districts, so that these groups could cross the state frontier on the first day of the war, thus disrupting the enemy's mobilization while at the same time covering that of the Soviets. (Report of the Chief of Staff of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army to the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR, 20 April 1932)



Marshal M. N. Tukhachevsky did not agree with this. In his view, what was needed was not 'invasion groups' but 'invasion armies'. Tukhachevsky insisted that

the opportunity to cross the border immediately, along with the declaration of mobilization, must in the first instance dictate the composition of the forward army and the disposition of its troops . . . Mechanized corps must be stationed some 50-70 kilometres from the frontiers, so as to be able to cross the border from the first day of mobilization. (M. N. Tukhachevsky: *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya*, Moscow Voenizdat 1964, Vol. 2, p. 219)

Tukhachevsky and Egorov were of course mistaken. They had to be shot, and the authoritative, inflexible and invincible General G. K. Zhukov rose to the summit of military power. Least of all was he disposed to abstract thought. He was a practical man who had never lost a military battle in his entire lifetime. In August 1939, Zhukov carried out an operation, staggering in its suddenness and daring, to inflict a crushing defeat on the Japanese 6th Army. (This same method was later to be adapted against the German 6th Army at Stalingrad.) This lightning rout of the Japanese was the prologue to World War II. When Stalin had received Zhukov's telegram of 19 August 1939 reporting that he had achieved his main objective of preparing an attack without the Japanese even suspecting that he had done so, Stalin gave his agreement to the establishment of a common frontier with Germany. It was after this that the destruction of the western defences began, and the large shock formations began to be set up. The Kiev Military District, which was the most important and most powerful of all Soviet military districts, was placed under Zhukov's command. Zhukov was then promoted even higher, to the post of Chief of the General Staff. It was at this point that the General Staff reached a theoretical conclusion of exceptional importance: *'It is necessary to place the execution of the invasion armies' tasks on the whole of the First Strategic Echelon.'* (VIZH 1963, No. 10, p. 31) Thus all sixteen armies of the first Echelon, which contained 170 divisions, were earmarked for invasion.

Not only had the First Strategic Echelon been given the task of carrying out invasion action, but it had actually begun to carry it out. Covered yet again by the TASS report of 13 June 1941, the entire First Strategic Echelon had moved up to the German and Romanian frontiers. Although at this stage there were

only about three million soldiers and officers, the power of the First Strategic Echelon grew swiftly. Marshal S. K. Kurkotkin remembered that 'military units which had left for the state frontier before the war, had taken away with them emergency reserve supplies of uniforms and footwear'. (*Tyl SVS V Velikoi Orechestvennoi Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1977, p. 216) The Marshal states that practically no uniforms or footwear remained in the reserves at the centre. This means that divisions, corps and armies took with them clothing and footwear for millions of reservists. What calculation did they have in mind, apart from an immediate call-up of millions of men?

When speaking of the power of the First Strategic Echelon, mention must not be confined only to how many soldiers it had. A thought must also be spared for the millions whom Hitler did not allow to be called up, clothed and shod close to the frontiers. It was not planned that this awesomely powerful movement of the First Strategic Echelon should come to a halt near the German frontier. That was why Soviet units of the NKVD began to cut the barbed wire on the frontiers on 20 June 1941. The German Army, however, had begun to cut its wire the week before.

## CHAPTER 19

### Stalin in May

*In the fields of foreign policy, Stalin has set himself an objective of the utmost importance, which he hopes to attain by his own efforts.*

Count VON DER SCHULENBURG (secret  
dispatch dated 12 May 1941)

In order to understand what happened in June 1941, we must inevitably look back to the month of May. It is the most mysterious month in the whole of Soviet history. Every day, every hour of that month is filled with events, the meaning of which can still only be guessed at. Even those events which took place in the full view of a watching world have still not been fully explained by anyone.

On 6 May 1941, Stalin became the head of the Soviet government. This move puzzled many people. We know, for example, from captured German documents that the German leaders were likewise unable to find a satisfactory explanation for this event. For the first time in Soviet history, the supreme authority of the Party and that of the government had been officially placed in the same hands. This did not mean that Stalin's personal dictatorship had been strengthened in any way; if sonorous titles were a measure of power, then Stalin would have been entitled to a magnificent collection of them some ten years earlier. But he chose quite consciously not to take this course, and after he had taken over the post of General Secretary of the Party in 1922, he declined all state and government posts.

Stalin raised his command post *above* the government and *above* the state. He controlled everything, but officially was responsible for nothing.

As early as 1931, Leon Trotsky described the mechanism to be used for preparing the communist *coup* in Germany:

Should the new policy succeed, then all the Manuilskys and all the Remmeles would be given full credit, but the initiative would still have been Stalin's. But in the event of its failure, however, Stalin had kept the way completely clear for himself to find someone to blame. This was the quintessence of his strategy. Stalin was strong in this field. (BO, No. 24, p. 12)

The *coup* did not take place and Stalin did indeed find people to blame, and gave them exemplary punishment. He ruled the internal affairs of the Soviet Union in the same way. The victory of the *kolkhoz* system belonged to Stalin's genius, while millions of victims of the same system perished because of its many enemies and the careerist hangers-on who had distorted the Party line. It made the heads of some of these comrades at regional level swim from their successes. Stalin had no connection at all with the great purges - they were Yezhov's fault! Nor did Stalin sign the Pact with Hitler. The Pact passed into history bearing the names of Molotov and Ribbentrop. In Germany it was Hitler, the Chancellor, more than Ribbentrop who bore the official responsibility for this Pact, although he was not present when the Pact was signed. Stalin, who did attend the signing, did not at that time hold any governmental or state appointments; he attended simply as citizen Joseph Stalin, who had not been invested with any state, governmental, military or diplomatic powers, and consequently was not responsible for what was taking place.

It was in exactly the same way that the treaty with Japan was signed on 13 April 1941. Stalin was present, but he did not bear any responsibility for what was taking place. When Stalin later stabbed Japan in the back, at a critical moment when the country was worn out by war, his conscience was clear; *he* had not signed the Pact.

On 6 May 1941, however, Stalin officially took upon himself the burden of state responsibility. For Stalin, the new title did not strengthen his authority, but restricted it; from that moment onwards, he not only took all the most important decisions but official responsibility for them as well. Stalin's power had been restricted until then only by the Soviet Union's external borders, and not always even then. What could have compelled him *voluntarily* to take upon his shoulders the heavy responsibility for his own actions, if he could have remained at the peak of infallibility, while leaving it to others to make the mistakes?

This entire circumstance somehow reminds me of Khrushchev's famous elk hunt. While the animal was still far off, Nikita shouted at the hunters and chuckled at his guest Fidel Castro, who was not having much success. Khrushchev himself was not in the shoot and did not even have a gun in his hands. But when the animal was being driven towards the hunters and there was no way anyone could possibly miss the mark, Nikita picked up a gun ...

Stalin had never taken the levers of state power into his hands in seventeen years. Why should he do so now? According to evidence given by Admiral of the Soviet Fleet N. G. Kuznetsov, 'when Stalin assumed the chairmanship of the Council of People's Commissars, in practice the system of leadership in no way changed'. (VIZH 1965, No. 9, p. 66)

Von der Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, reported to his government that 'I do not know of a single problem related to the internal situation in the Soviet Union which was so serious as to induce Stalin to take such a step. But I venture to assert with considerable confidence that the reasons for Stalin's deciding to take over the highest state post are to be sought in foreign policy.' Soviet marshals agree that Stalin's appointment was connected with external problems. (Marshal of the Soviet Union I. Kh. Bagramyan, *Tak nachinalas' voina*, Voenizdat 1971, p. 62)

So what were the external problems which could have impelled Stalin to take such a step? In May 1941, many European states had been crushed by Germany. Problems concerning Soviet relations with France, for instance, simply could not exist. Britain, which had preserved its independence, offered Stalin the hand of friendship in a letter from Churchill sent on 1 July 1940. Roosevelt's attitude to Stalin was more than friendly, and American technology was already flowing like a great river into the Soviet Union. There were only two potential enemies. But Japan, which had been given a performance of Soviet military might in August 1939, had just signed a treaty with the Soviet Union and was turning its gaze in the opposite direction. Thus Germany alone must have provided the reason for Stalin to take that apparently incomprehensible step.

What could Stalin do in relation to Germany by making use of his new official title of head of state? He had only three options. He could have established a lasting and inviolable peace. He could have declared himself official leader of a future armed conflict on the part of the Soviet Union to repel German aggression. Or he could have officially declared an armed conflict on the part of the Soviet Union in order to wage an aggressive war against Germany.

The first option falls down at once. Peace with Germany had already been signed by Molotov's hand. After he took over Molotov's place as head of state, Stalin did absolutely nothing to meet Hitler and begin negotiations with him. Stalin went on using Molotov for peace talks as before. Molotov was known to have tried to meet the German leaders even on 21 June, but Stalin made no such efforts. This means that, whatever his purpose in taking over this official post, it was not to conduct peace negotiations.

Communist propaganda emphasizes the second option: that Stalin saw the German attack coming, and decided personally and officially to place himself at the head of the country's defence. But Germany's onslaught was manifestly unexpected. On 22 June, the head of the government was obliged to address the nation and break the terrible news. But Stalin avoided meeting his direct obligations, which were fulfilled by Molotov, his deputy. Why was it necessary for him to sit in Molotov's chair in May, but to hide behind his broad back in June?

On the evening of 22 June, the Soviet High Command issued a directive to the troops. It is Marshal G. K. Zhukov who speaks:

General N. F. Vatutin said that J. V. Stalin had approved draft directive No. 3 and ordered that my signature be placed on it ... 'All right,' I said. 'Put my signature down on it.' (G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, APN 1969, P- 251)

We learn from official history that this directive emerged bearing the signatures of Marshal S. K. Timoshenko, People's Commissar for Defence, G. M. Malenkov, member of the council of the secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU and General Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff. (*History of the Second World War*, Vol. 4, p. 38) Stalin thus compelled others to sign the order, while avoiding any personal responsibility for it himself. So why did he take on the responsibility in May? The directive went out to the armed forces to rout the invading enemy. It is a document of the utmost importance. What had the 'member of the council of the secretary' got to do with it?

The following day the composition of the Stavka, the supreme organ of military leadership in the Soviet Union, was announced. The word is untranslatable, but the Stavka consisted of Stalin and a handful of his most trusted colleagues. Stalin categorically refused to head it, agreeing to join this supreme body of military leadership with the rights of an ordinary member only. This gave rise to a somewhat anomalous situation:

Under the existing arrangements, there was no way in which S. K. Timoshenko, People's Commissar for Defence, could act independently and take policy decisions without Stalin. The result was that there were two commanders-in-chief. One was People's Commissar Timoshenko, who was the commander according to the law and statutes. The other was J. V. Stalin, who was commander-in-chief in fact. (*Ibid*)

In a defensive war, Stalin adapted his well-tried method of leadership. He took all the policy decisions, while responsibility for them was borne by the Molotovs, the Malenkovs, the Timoshenkos and the Zhukovs. It took the members of the Politburo one month to compel Stalin to take over the post of People's Commissar for Defence, and, on 8 August, the post of Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Had it really been worth Stalin's while to assume responsibility when the defensive war had been foreseen, in order to do everything he could to avoid responsibility as soon as that war began?

We are compelled to confine ourselves to the third option: that Stalin had exploited Hitler to crush Europe, and was at that point preparing a surprise attack at Germany's back. Stalin intended to head the 'liberation' of Europe in person, and as head of the Soviet government.

The Communist Party had conditioned the Soviet people and army to believe that the order to launch a war of 'liberation' in Europe would be given by Stalin himself. Communist orthodoxy now claims that the Red Army was preparing 'counterattacks'. Nobody was talking about counter-attacks at the time. The Soviet people knew that the war would begin on Stalin's orders, and not as a result of an attack by some enemy or other:

And when Marshal of the Revolution Comrade Stalin gives the signal, hundreds of thousands of pilots, navigators and parachutists will rain down upon the heads of the enemy with the full force of their arms, the arms of socialist justice. The Soviet armies of the air will bring happiness to humanity! (*Pravda*, 18 August 1940)

In his post as Secretary-General of the Party, Stalin could give any order, and that order would be instantly and exactly obeyed. But any order given by Stalin was unofficial, and therein lay Stalin's invulnerability and infallibility. But now this situation no longer satisfied him; he had to give an order, the most important of his life, in such a way that it would be *officially* his.

According to the evidence of Marshal of the Soviet Union K. K. Rokossovski (*Soldatsky dolg*, Moscow 1968, p. n), each Soviet commander held a 'special secret operations envelope' in his safe. This 'letter M red envelope', as it was known, could only be opened on the orders of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (until 5 May 1941 this was Vyacheslav Molotov), or of the People's Commissar for Defence, Marshal of the Soviet Union, S. K. Timoshenko. But according to Marshal Zhukov, Timoshenko 'could not take any policy decisions without Stalin'. So Stalin took Molotov's post so that the Prime Order should come from Stalin, and not from Molotov.

A red envelope lay in the safe of every commander, but on 22 June 1941 Stalin issued no order that they be opened. Rokossovski has told us that several commanders took their heads in their hands and opened their envelopes. (The 58th Article laid down that anyone opening a red envelope without authorization would be shot.) But they did not discover in them anything needed for defence.

Of course, we had detailed plans and instructions on what to do on M-Day . . . Everything was written down minutely and in detail . . . All these plans existed. Unfortunately, however, they said nothing about what to do should the enemy suddenly go over to the offensive. (Major-General M. Gretsov, *VIZH* 1965, No. 9, p. 84)



So although the Soviet commanders did have war plans, they had no plans for a *defensive* war. The top Soviet leaders were aware of this; in the first minutes and hours of the war, they resorted to improvisation, composing new directives for the troops instead of sending a short message ordering the envelopes to be opened. In a defensive war, all these envelopes, and everything that had been 'written down minutely and in detail', were no longer needed.

Nor, by the way, did the first directives issued by the top Soviet leaders orientate the troops towards digging themselves in. These were neither defensive nor even counter-offensive directives. They were in essence purely offensive directives. The Soviet leaders went on thinking and planning only on these lines even after the defensive war had been thrust upon them. The content of the red envelopes was quite definite in nature. In an obscure situation the offensive urge of the troops had to be held back somewhat until it had become quite clear what was happening. That is why the first directives were aggressive in character, but their tone was restraining - advance, but not in the way it is written in the red envelopes!

Stalin did not want to take risks in an obscure situation. That is why Stalin's signature does not appear on the most important directives of the 'Great Motherland War'; he had prepared himself to carry out the honoured duty of launching a mission to liberate the peoples of the world, and not to fight a defensive war which had been forced upon him.

Hitler read Schulenburg's telegrams and understood that Stalin was hoping 'to attain an objective of the utmost importance by his own efforts in the field of foreign policy'. Hitler appreciated the danger he was in, and deprived Stalin of the opportunity to give the Prime Order, for which he had assumed the mantle of head of state.

On taking up his duties, each head of government announces a policy programme. On 5 May 1941, when Stalin's appointment had been pre-determined, he made a speech in the Kremlin at a reception held in honour of graduates of military academies. Stalin spoke for 40 minutes. Bearing in mind his impressive ability to keep silent, 40 minutes was a staggeringly long time.

Stalin spoke of something of the utmost importance. His speech was *never* published, and this is a one thousand per cent guarantee of its importance. Stalin spoke about international relations, and about war. Soviet official publications contain quite a few references to this speech:

J. V. Stalin, the Secretary-General of the CPSU (b), in the course of a speech he made at a reception for graduates of military academies on 5 May 1941, gave it clearly to be understood that the German Army was the most probable enemy. (*VIZH* No. 4 1978, p. 85)

*The History of the Second World War* (Vol. 3, p. 439) confirms this account. Marshal Zhukov, however, who is a much more authoritative source, relates some more interesting details. In Zhukov's words, Stalin adopted his usual manner of asking rhetorical questions, which he then answered himself. 'Was the German Army invincible?' he asked:

The Germans mistakenly consider that their army is perfect and invincible . . . Germany will never have success fighting under the slogans of aggressive wars of conquest, under slogans of subjugating other countries, or of forcing other countries and states into submission. (G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, p. 236)

So the speech was about war with Germany. Why then did it remain secret? It is understandable that it could not be published before the war, but it is less easy to understand why the speech was not made public once war had broken out. Even if it had not been possible to publish it in its entirety, Stalin could have referred to it in the speech he made on 6 November 1941, for example: 'Did I not warn you all! I was even talking about war with Germany as early as 5 May!'

But Stalin did not say this, and there can only be one reason for this silence. On 5 May, he spoke of the inevitable war, and named Germany as the main enemy, but said not one word about the possibility of a German attack. Had he done so, he or his aides would have recalled it afterwards as confirmation of his

genius and sagacity. But they did not. Throughout Stalin's lifetime and even after his death, the speech remained a Soviet state secret. Collections of Stalin's works contain not just his speeches, but even the notes he made in the margins of books written by others, yet this highly important speech was never published. What is more, much has been done to make sure that it was forgotten for ever. Immediately after the war had ended, Stalin's book *The Great Motherland War* was published in editions of millions of copies in many languages. The book begins with Stalin's radio broadcast on 3 July 1941. The purpose of the book was clear. It was to hammer the idea into our heads that Stalin first began to speak about the Soviet—German war only after Germany had invaded the Soviet Union, and that he spoke only about defence. Stalin in fact began to talk about the war before the German invasion, not after it, and he spoke not about defence but about something else. If the speech had been about defence, then why keep it secret, particularly after the Germans had invaded?

We have already seen how, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, Zhukov and Meretskov, two prominent Soviet military leaders, and Lavrenty Beria, the most outstanding chief of police of all times and of all nations, did a great deal to destroy everything connected with the defence of Soviet territory. Then Stalin began to talk about war with Germany. He spoke at a secret gathering, but in such a way that he was heard by all the marshals, all the generals, and all the graduates from the military academies. What would Zhukov, Meretskov and Beria do in this situation? Surely they would begin to lay down mines in the frontier areas and, erect barbed wire, and mine bridges? No, they did just the opposite :

At the beginning of May 1941, following Stalin's speech at the reception for military academy graduates, the brake was applied even more strongly to all the work that was being done to build engineered defences and to lay down mines. (I. Stari-nov, *op. cit.*, p. 186)

If we do not believe Colonel Starinov, we may turn to the German archives to find exactly the same thing there. German intelligence apparently never obtained the full text of Stalin's speech, but there are many direct and indirect signs which indicate that German intelligence believed that Stalin's speech of 5 May 1941 was about war with Germany. The same German intelligence observed that Soviet minefields and other engineered defence obstacles were being removed in May and June 1941.

May 1941 marked a sharp turning-point for the whole of Soviet propaganda. Before that, communist newspapers had glorified war and rejoiced that Germany was destroying an increasing number of countries, governments, armies and political parties.

The Soviet leaders were delighted with 'modern war in all its terrible beauty!' (*Pravda*, 19 August 1940), and rubbed their hands gleefully over the sight of Europe reduced to 'a putrid scrap-heap, a pornographic spectacle where jackal eats jackal'. (*Pravda*, 25 December 1939) A friendly greetings telegram from Stalin 'To the Head of the German State, Herr Adolf Hitler' appears on the same page. The words jackal eats jackal' appeared directly under this token of friendship.

Then suddenly everything changed. The day after Stalin's secret speech, *Pravda* adopted a very different tone:

The fire of the Second Imperialist War blazes beyond the frontiers of our Motherland. The whole weight of its incalculable misfortunes is laid on the shoulders of the workers. The people do not want war. Their gazes are fixed on the countries of socialism which are reaping the fruits of peaceful labour. They see with every justification a solid bastion for peace in the armed forces of our Motherland, in the Red Army and Navy. In the present complex international situation it is necessary to be ready for surprises of all kinds . . . (*Pravda*, 6 May 1941, leading article)

In March 1939, Stalin had accused Britain and France of wanting to drive Europe into war, while they remained aloof so that they could later 'step on to the stage .with fresh forces, in the "interests of peace", of

course, and dictate their conditions to the weakened participants in the war'. (Stalin, Report, 10 March 1939) But only one leader was present at the signing of the pact which was the key to the war, and that was Stalin. Neither Japanese, American, British nor French leaders attended the signing of the pact which began the war. Even the German Chancellor was absent. But Stalin was there, and it was Stalin who for the time being stood aside from the war.

Shortly afterwards, on 17 September 1939, the Red Army delivered its surprise attack on Poland. Next day the Soviet Union announced its reasons by radio:

Poland has become a convenient springboard for hazards and surprises of all kinds which could constitute a threat to the Soviet Union . . . the Soviet government can no longer remain indifferent towards these facts ... in view of such circumstances, the Soviet government has directed the High Command of the Red Army to order its troops to cross the frontier and to take into its protection the lives and property of the populace . . . (*Pravda*, 18 September 1939)

But who, it might be asked, turned Poland into a 'convenient springboard for hazards of all kinds?' Molotov's and Stalin's cynicism and effrontery knew no bounds. Hitler went into Poland in order 'to extend *Lebensraum* for the Germans'. Molotov had a different purpose: 'in order to help the Polish people out of an ill-starred war into which they have been driven by foolish leaders, and to give them the opportunity to lead a peaceful life'. (*Ibid.*)

But Soviet communists even to the present day have not changed their view on the nature of these events. The official collection of documents on the History of Soviet Frontier Troops (*Pogranichnye voiska SSSR 1939-41*, Moscow Nauka) was published in 1970. Document No. 192 states that the aim of Soviet operations in September 1939 was to 'help the Polish people to leave the war'.

The Soviet Union has always helped everyone altruistically to find the way to peace. Molotov signed a neutrality pact with Japan on 13 April 1941

to uphold peaceful and friendly relations, and mutually to respect territorial integrity and inviolability ... in the event of one of the Parties to the treaty becoming the object of hostilities on the part of one or several third powers, the other Party to the treaty will remain neutral throughout the whole of the conflict.

When Stalin was on the verge of being destroyed, Japan kept its word. But when Japan was on the verge of destruction, the Red Army delivered a crushing surprise attack on her. Afterwards the Soviet government explained that such a policy is the only means capable of bringing peace nearer, of freeing the peoples from further sacrifices and sufferings and to give the Japanese people the opportunity to save itself from further dangers and destruction . . . (Soviet government statement, 8 August 1945)

It must be noted that the declaration was formally made on 8 August, while the Soviet troops delivered their blow on 9 August. In practice, there was a time-gap. The attack was made at local Far East time. The announcement was actually made several hours later at Moscow time.

In military language this is called 'preparation and delivery of a surprise first strike with the opening of a new strategic front'. (General S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi Period Viony*, Moscow Voen-izdat 1974, p. 281) In political language it is called 'a just and humane act by the USSR'. (Colonel A. S. Savin, *VIZH* 1985, No. 8, p. 56)

After the first crushing strike had been delivered, Marshal of the Soviet Union P. Ya Malinovsky addressed his troops, saying that

The Soviet people cannot live and work in peace while the Japanese imperialists are rattling their arms on our far eastern frontiers while awaiting the right time to attack our Motherland. (*Kommunist*, No. 12, 1985, p. 85)

Malinovsky gave this speech on 10 August 1945, just four days after Hiroshima had disappeared. Did the 'Japanese imperialists' really have nothing to do but sit and wait for 'the right time'?

Modern Soviet publications still insist that 'the Soviet Union was pursuing the aim of saving the peoples of Asia, the Japanese people included, from further sacrifices and suffering'. (VIZH 1985, No. 8)

In May 1941 the Soviet press suddenly began to talk about how the peoples of Europe wanted peace and were looking with hope to the Red Army. These were the same words and tone which were invariably used before every communist 'liberation'.

The Great Purge in the Soviet Union was completed at the end of 1938. A new stage began. There were new times, new aims and new slogans. It was in March 1939 that Stalin first began to talk about the need to be ready for some 'surprises', not inside the country but in the international arena. In August 1939 Stalin presented the first surprise, the first 'unexpected event' for which the whole of the Soviet people and indeed the whole world were sighing - the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Thereupon German troops, quickly followed by Soviet troops, invaded Poland. The official Soviet explanation is that 'Poland had been converted into a field of various unexpected events'. Once this threat had been removed by the unselfish action of the Soviet government, the Red Army and the NKVD, Stalin began calling for readiness to meet 'new unexpected events', since 'the international situation is becoming increasingly complicated'.

It would seem that there was nothing more simple; peace had been signed with Germany, so where was the complexity in the situation? But Stalin went on repeating his warning not to have faith in the apparent lack of complications, to be ready to face unexpected events and any sharp turns and changes.

May 1941 was the month when the slogan 'Be ready for unexpected events' suddenly sounded throughout the country like an alarm bell. It sounded on the first day of May from the front page of *Pravda* and was repeated a thousand times over by all other newspapers, and by hundreds of thousands of voices of commissars, political workers, and propagandists, all interpreting Stalin's slogan for the masses. The call 'to be ready for unexpected events' resounded in the order No. 191 of the People's Commissar for Defence issued to 'all companies, batteries, squadrons, air squadrons and on ships'.

Was Stalin perhaps warning the country and army of the possibility of a sudden German attack? No; the German attack came as a complete surprise to Stalin himself; and he could hardly have given warnings about dangers which he did not foresee. All talk about unexpected events ceased on 22 June 1941, and this slogan was never repeated again. Contemporary Soviet publications contain no mention at all of the slogan 'prepare for unexpected events', although this was one of the most strident motifs of Soviet propaganda during the 'pre-war period'.

At first glance it is surprising that Stalin himself never subsequently remembered his slogan. He could have said somewhere, 'Hitler has suddenly attacked us - I warned you to be ready for unexpected events!' But Stalin never said this. 'Remember Order No. 191?' Marshal Timoshenko could have recollected on occasion after the war. 'I even warned you about it in that order!' Soviet historians and Party bureaucrats could have explained what a wise Party we had even without naming Stalin and Timoshenko. The pages of its main newspaper carried calls almost every day to be ready for unexpected events. But neither Stalin, nor Timoshenko, nor anyone else ever recalled that alarm cry of May and June 1941. Why was that? Because what was understood by the slogan 'prepare for unexpected events' was not the German invasion, but something quite the opposite. Under this slogan the Chekists were removing minefields on the frontiers, not laying them down, and they knew that this was preparation for the Central Unexpected Event of the twentieth century.

In order to have an idea of the true meaning of this slogan, we must without fail look at the first page of *Pravda* of 1 May 1941. It was this page which set the tone for a great choir of many voices, which simply repeated *Pravda's* statement. On the main front page of the newspaper, two quotations stand out. Both are Stalin's. The first, which comes right at the beginning of the leading article, states that 'what has been accomplished in the USSR can also be accomplished in other countries'. The second is in an order from the People's Commissar for Defence about the need to be ready to face up to hazards and 'tricks' on the part of our foreign enemies.

Everything else on the front page is about the brutal war gripping Europe, the sufferings of the workers, their longing for peace and the hopes they place in the Red Army. Much is said about Soviet efforts to preserve peace. Japan (whose hour had not yet struck) is given as an example of a neighbour, with whom good relations had finally been established; Germany, however, is not numbered among the good friends.



Since the enemy is cunning and perfidious, the argument runs, we must reply to his machinations not simply by defending our own territory but by liberating the peoples of Europe from the disasters of a blood-letting war.

After five days of this noisy, orchestrated press campaign, Stalin took over the post of head of the government and made his secret speech in which he named Germany as the main enemy. Having thus assumed state responsibility for foreseeing 'unexpected events', Stalin was suddenly faced with Hitler's onslaught in June. This was such an 'unexpected event' that it compelled Stalin to do everything possible to avoid assuming responsibility for any state decisions at all. Evidently Stalin had been preparing, not for a German invasion, but for 'unexpected events' of quite the opposite kind.

## CHAPTER 20

### Words and Actions

*Words do not always match actions.*

MOLOTOV (in conversation with Hitler, 13  
November 1940)

In the best-known fragment of his secret speech of 5 May 1941, Stalin said that 'the war with Germany will not begin before 1942'. From the vantage point of what we know today, Stalin's mistake is obvious.

But let us not be too quick to mock Stalin's errors. If the speech was secret, then Stalin surely wanted to conceal its contents from the enemy. In the Kremlin, however, Stalin was heard by all the lecturers and graduates from all the military academies, as well as by the country's highest political leaders and the most senior Red Army officers. What is more, the content of his speech was passed on to all Soviet generals and colonels. 'In the middle of May 1941,' wrote Major-General B. Tramm,

Air Force Major-General P. P. Kobelev, chairman of the Central Council of OSOAVIAKHIM (Society for the Defence of the Soviet Union and for the Development of its Aviation and Chemical Industries), gathered together the senior staff of the Council, and reported to us the basic points of the speech made by J. V. Stalin at the government reception held in the Kremlin in honour of graduates from the military academies. (*VIZH* 1980, No. 6, p. 52)

Despite the supposed secrecy of Stalin's speech, thousands of people knew its content. Is there an explanation for such a paradox? Indeed there is. We know from the memoirs of Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union I. G. Kuznetsov that after Zhukov had been appointed Chief of the General Staff, a very important directive was written which 'aimed the attention of the general officers commanding military

districts and fleets at Germany as the most probable enemy in the forthcoming war'. (*Nakanune*, Moscow Voenizdat 1966, p. 313)

The directive lay in the General Staff building for two months, and on 5 May 1941 it was passed on to the headquarters of the frontier military districts for action. There is much to indicate that it was received by the headquarters on the day it had been sent. Marshal Bagramyan, for instance, has spoken about it. In fact Soviet marshals often talk about this highly secret directive, although they never make quotations from it. In the course of half a century, only one single sentence from this top secret document has ever got into the press, and this was 'to be ready, on the orders of the High Command, to deliver swift blows utterly to destroy the enemy, to carry out combat operations over his territory and seize important positions'. (V. A. *Anfilov*, *Bessermertnyii podvig*, Moscow Nauka 1971, p. 171)

Had there been one word about defence in that directive, the marshals and the communist historians would not have failed to quote it. The whole of the remaining text of the 5 May directive is not, however, suitable for quotation. The directive is to remain top secret even half a century after the war has ended.

Soviet censorship let slip only one sentence, but this was enough to reveal fully the sense of this carefully concealed document. In a defensive war, a soldier does not wait for orders. For hundreds of years the Russian soldier has gone in to do battle with aggressors without waiting for orders from above. When the enemy crosses the river marking the frontier, that means to the ordinary soldier that the war has begun. The frontiers of Russia have been crossed by great armies of terrifying conquerors. Every time that this has happened, the Russian soldier, like the soldier of any other country and nation, has known from time immemorial that when the enemy crosses the frontier it means war, and he goes into action without awaiting orders to do so. Guard-duty service has been devised in such a way that it frequently places every soldier in a situation where he has to make his own independent decision as to when he should use his weapons. The right and duty of a soldier is to kill anyone who tries to reach the target he is protecting. Soviet law especially preserves the right of each soldier to use his weapons independently. The same law severely punishes any soldier who does not use his arms when the situation demands that he do so.

A soldier on a state frontier is a soldier at an action station. In a defensive war he needs neither orders nor directives.

A defensive war would usually begin like this. A soldier who has been freezing all night is getting ready to wrap himself up in his greatcoat and stand down. He gives his relief a wakening prod with his foot, but suddenly rubs his eyes - enemy soldiers are crossing the river. The soldier opens rapid fire, killing the leading enemy soldiers and warning his own comrades. The commander of the detachment wakes up, swears while still half-awake and, grasping what is happening, chases his other soldiers into the trenches. By then, fighting has flared up along thousands of kilometres of frontier. The platoon commander comes on the scene. He co-ordinates the fire of his detachments. Then other commanders of more senior rank turn up. The fighting becomes more organized. A report flies off to regimental headquarters, and from there to the divisional headquarters.

That is how a defensive war begins. Yet the top-secret directive of 5 May 1941 provided for millions of Red Army soldiers to enter the war in response to a single order which was to be received from the Soviet High Command. A half-asleep soldier on the frontier can see the enemy making an attack, but how can the comrades in the Kremlin know that a war has started? Unless, perhaps, they themselves had fixed the date on which it was to begin.

The first to enter a defensive war is the private soldier, followed by the sergeant, and then the platoon commander. In an offensive war, everything is the other way round. The first to enter it is the Commander-in-Chief, and then the Chief of the General Staff, followed by the commanders of the fronts, the navies and the armies. The ordinary soldier is the last to know that an aggressive war has begun. Millions of soldiers enter a defensive war individually, while they all enter an aggressive war as one man.

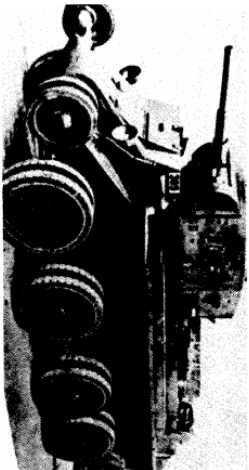
Hitler's soldiers entered enemy territory as one man, minute by minute, hour by hour. Stalin's soldiers also did the same thing in Finland, in Mongolia and in Bessarabia. That was the way in which they were to have gone to war with Germany.

The 5 May directive was issued, but the date when the war was due to begin was kept a close secret. Await the signal and be ready at any moment, the directive told the Soviet generals. Once he had issued this directive, Stalin immediately took over the post of head of the Soviet government so that he personally would give the signal for the directive to be carried into effect.

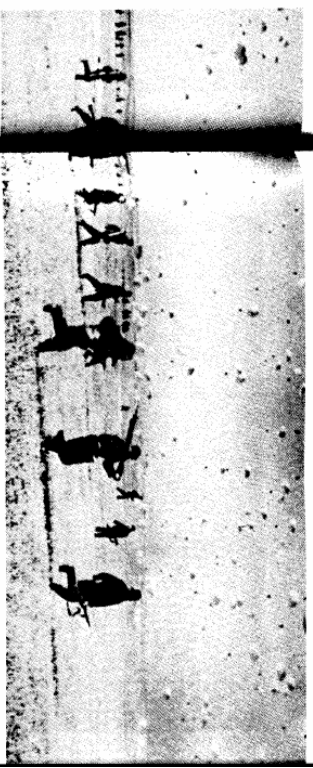
Hitler gave his own troops the order to carry out a similar directive a little earlier . . .



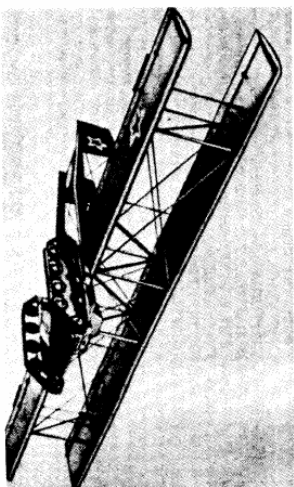
Icebreaker in action: the Germans destroyed Poland, but the flower of victory was gathered by the Soviets.



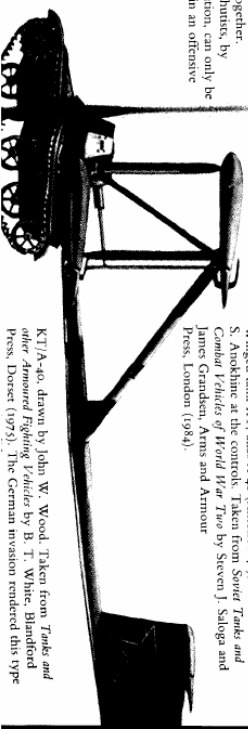
These Soviet tanks, with removable external tracks, were designed for use on the German *autobahn*. They were of no use on Soviet territory thus equipped.



The vast sums of money spent on training and equipping Soviet paratroopers during the thirties should have been used to feed Soviet children.



Winged tank KT, alias A-40 (Antonov-40), in the air. Pilot S. Anokhin at the controls. Taken from *Soviet Tanks and Combat Vehicles of World War Two* by Steven J. Zaloga and James Grandsen, Arms and Armour Press, London (1984).

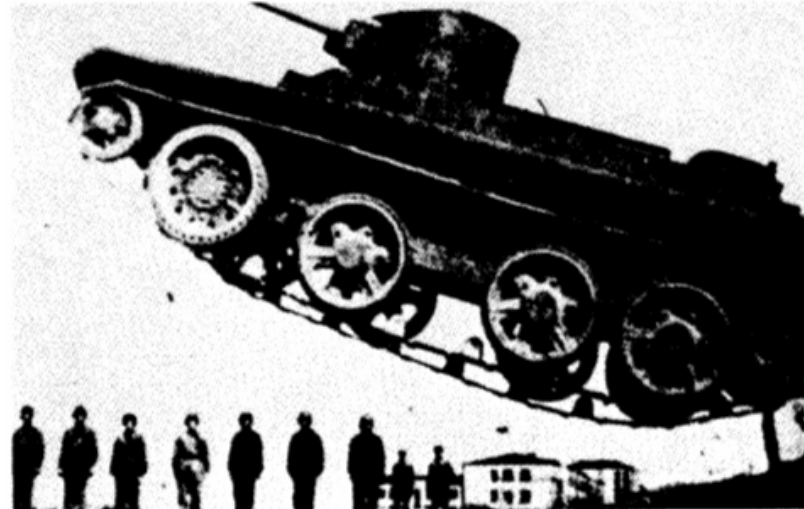


KT/A-40, drawn by John W. Wood. Taken from *Tanks and other Armoured Fighting Vehicles* by B. T. White, Blandford Press, Dorset (1975). The German invasion rendered this type

At the start of the Second World War, Stalin had more paratroopers than all the other countries put together. Paratroopers, by definition, can only be used in an offensive war.



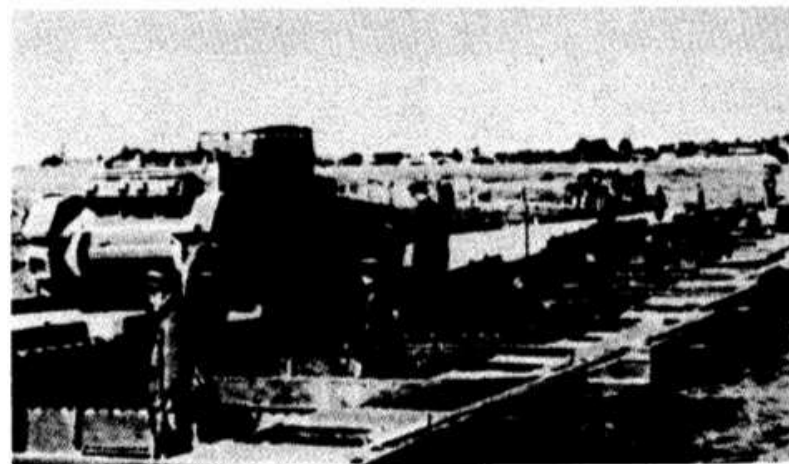
Invasion preparations. The two-seater plane R-5 could also carry sixteen parachutists.



Genghis Khan conquered the world with huge numbers of scantily armed troops and brilliant manoeuvres, rather than with powerful weapons. The BT Soviet tanks were based on similar principles: they were produced in vast quantities with reduced armour, and were capable of exceptional speed.



Переправа тяжелого орудия на учениях. Ленинградский военный округ, 1940 г.



Переправа танков на тактических занятиях. 1940 г.

In 1940–41 Stalin created 63 tank divisions, each with bridge-building capabilities, but without the engineers, trained to blow up bridges, who are necessary in a defensive war. *Top:* Crossing a river. Exercise in Leningrad military region. *Bottom:* Tanks crossing a river. Tactical exercise.





Final preparations:  
Marshal Timonshenko  
and Marshal Zhukov  
on the German  
border.

In a defensive war,  
troops are scattered  
and camouflaged.  
When the Germans  
came to Soviet  
territory, they found  
an incredible  
concentration of  
Soviet troops ready  
for an offensive.







The KV-1, the most powerful tank of the time. It sometimes took thirty or forty direct hits for German shells to make an impact. But like the majority of Soviet armed vehicles and equipment, these tanks were moving secretly by rail to the German borders and were powerless when attacked.

Before Hitler attacked, Stalin took hundreds of thousands of GULAG prisoners and secretly moved them towards the German borders. To what purpose?





We do not know, and apparently we shall never find out, what the top-secret directive of 5 May 1941 contained. It is clear, however, that it was a directive about a war with Germany, but a war which was not to be started by a German invasion, but by some other means. If the directive had had several alternative versions, and one of those had covered the contingency of Germany starting the war, then all the Soviet leaders in the Kremlin need then have done on 22 June 1941 was to telephone the officers commanding the frontier military districts and tell them, 'Open your safes, take out the directive dated 5 May and carry out what it says.'

If the 5 May directive had contained several alternative sets of orders, and one of them had been defensive, then the officer commanding the frontier military district could have been told, 'Put a line through the first nine versions, but carry out the tenth, the final one.' *But there were no defensive versions in the directive.*

That is why the directive of 5 May was never put into effect. The Soviet directive completely lost its point the moment the Germans invaded. It became instantly outdated, in the same way that all Soviet motorway tanks became obsolete.

Since the directive was now useless, the Soviet leaders in the Kremlin were compelled to improvise. Timoshenko and Malenkov were obliged to waste time composing a completely new directive. Then more time had to be wasted enciphering it, transmitting it, receiving it, and deciphering it. The 22 June directive, incidentally, was a thoroughly aggressive document. But it slightly dampened down the offensive urge of the Soviet troops.

It must not be thought that all the copies of the 5 May directives had simply lain in the safes, waiting for the hour to come to use them. The directive had been issued to be executed, and in accordance with its instructions, troops were regrouped on a grand scale on the borders. In the frontier areas, hundreds of kilometres of barbed-wire entanglements and thousands of mines were removed. Hundreds of thousands

of tons of ammunition were moved right up to the frontier and stockpiled in the open. Hundreds of thousands of tons of stores of all kinds, needed for a swift and unavoidable war, were brought into the frontier areas.

On 15 June 1941, the time came for the generals in command of armies, corps and divisions to learn more about the Soviet leaders' intentions. That day, the headquarters of the five frontier military districts issued combat orders which had been written on the basis of the top-secret 5 May directive. The circle of the initiated now extended to several hundred men. The orders issued on 15 June 1941 to middle-rank commanders in the Red Army also remained top secret, but there were several of these, so they are quoted more fully and more often. The operative sentence from the order issued on 15 June 1941 by the headquarters of the Baltic Special Military District to the officers commanding its armies and corps is well known to historians: 'We must be ready at any time to carry out the combat mission.'

Now let us return to Stalin's secret speech of 5 May 1941. In a *secret* speech to a full auditorium, Stalin spoke of the aggressive war against Germany, which would begin in 1942. On the very same day, in a *top secret* directive, the officers commanding the frontier military districts were instructed to be ready for aggression at any moment.

There is another coincidence. On 13 June 1941, TASS transmitted a report which said that the Soviet Union did not intend to attack Germany. It was moving troops up to the German borders solely for exercise purposes. Yet two days later, on 15 June, the Soviet generals in the frontier military districts received an order which was strictly for their eyes alone — to be ready at any moment to seize positions on foreign territory.

By May and June of 1941, Stalin knew that it was no longer possible to hide the preparations which the Soviet Union was making to 'liberate' Europe. That was why he 'naively' declared to the whole world in the TASS report that the Soviet Union was not preparing to make an attack. Naturally, German intelligence did not believe such a crudely forged document, and it was with this in mind that Stalin 'secretly' informed thousands of his officers, and German intelligence at the same time, that the Soviet Union would attack Germany in 1942.

Although it was no longer possible for Stalin to conceal his intentions, it *was* possible to conceal the date. This is just what Stalin's 'secret' speech was calculated to achieve. If Hitler did not believe Stalin's overt statements, the theory went, then maybe he would fall for his 'secret' one. Hitler had enough sense to believe neither.

## CHAPTER 21

### Living Peaceably with Sharp Teeth

*The enemy must be caught unawares, and the time  
chosen when his troops are scattered.*

STALIN (Vol. 6, p. 158)

On 8 May 1941, two days after Stalin's 'secret' speech, TASS broadcast a vigorous denial of a Japanese press-agency report of massive Soviet troop movements:

Japanese newspapers are publishing reports issued by the Domei Tsusin Agency in which it states that the Soviet Union is concentrating strong military forces on its western frontiers ... In this connection, passenger traffic along the Trans-Siberian Railway has been stopped, so that troops from the Far East can be transferred mainly to its western frontiers. Strong military forces are also being transferred there from central Asia ... A military mission headed by Kuznetsov has left Moscow for Tehran. The purpose of the mission, the Agency notes, is connected with the granting of airfields to the Soviet Union in central and western areas of Iran.

TASS is authorized to state that this suspiciously strident Domei Tsusin report, borrowed from some unknown United Press correspondent, is the fruit of the sick imagination of its authors . . . There is no 'concentration of strong military forces on the western frontiers of the USSR, nor are any envisaged. The Domei Tsusin report contained one grain of truth, which moreover is given out in a crudely distorted form, and this is that one rifle division is being transferred from the Irkutsk area to near Novosibirsk, because there are better billeting conditions in Novosibirsk. Everything else contained in the Domei Tsusin report is sheer fantasy.

Through their American sources, the Japanese newspapers accurately forecast events. Three months later, Soviet troops went into Iran and built not only airfields, but much else besides. Domei Tsusin's reference to 'troop concentrations on an exceptionally large scale' was correct: in addition to other forces, Stalin concentrated 20 mechanized corps and five airborne assault corps on the borders with Germany.

TASS spoke of one rifle division being sent 'from Irkutsk to Novosibirsk'. Let us hear other witnesses. Lieutenant-General G. Shelakhov was a major-general at the time, and Chief of Staff of the 1st Army of the Red Banner on the Eastern Front. 'According to a directive from the People's Commissariat for Defence of 16 April 1941,' he wrote, 'the headquarters of the 18th and 3rd Rifle Corps, the 21st and 66th Rifle Divisions, the 21st and the 212th Airborne Assault Brigades and several special purpose units were moved from the complement of the Far Eastern Front to the west of the country.' (*VIZH*, 1969, No. 3, p. 56)

The transfer of airborne assault brigades to reinforce the five already in the western areas of the country is evidence that an offensive operation on a massive scale was being prepared. The bogus TASS 'denial' lent secrecy to the operation, in order that it would take the enemy by surprise.

The 212nd Airborne Assault Brigade was Marshal Zhukov's favourite. In August 1939, it was serving along with the OSN AZ battalion of the NK VD in Zhukov's personal reserve; when he launched his crushing surprise attack against the Japanese, the brigade was used as crack infantry in the strike which hit at the rear of the Japanese 6th Army.

Zhukov then secretly transferred this, the best brigade in the Red Army, from the Far East to join the complement of the 3rd Airborne Assault Corps on the Romanian frontier. Hitler did not allow this brigade — or any of the massive concentration of Soviet troops on the western border—to be used for their intended purposes. Operation Barbarossa forced the Soviet Union onto the defensive, and the 3rd Airborne Assault Corps was no longer needed. It was then re-formed into the 87th Rifle Division (later to become the 13th Guards Division), and distinguished itself in defensive fighting.

We can follow the secret movement of these troops from the Far East through many sources. Both Marshals Zhukov and I. Kh. Bagramyan confirm that the 31st Rifle Corps arrived in the Kiev Special Military District on 25 May 1941. This means that when the TASS 'denial' was issued, the 31st Rifle Corps was somewhere on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Colonel-General I. Lyudnikov states that, after he had set up, mobilized and then



taken over command of the 200th Rifle Division, he was ordered to join the complement of the 31st Rifle Corps. Then, like all its numerous brothers-in-arms, this corps was secretly moved right up to the German frontier. But Hitler did not allow the 31st Rifle Corps to complete the journey which it had begun.

Anyone who wishes to do so may re-trace the routes which these other corps, divisions and brigades took when they were secretly transferred from the Far East, by referring to the many recollections published by Soviet marshals and generals; to evidence from Soviet soldiers who were transferred from the Far East and who, on finding themselves on the German and Romanian borders on 22 July, became prisoners of war; to German intelligence reports, and to many other sources.

The TASS denial mentioned a rifle division which was transferred from Irkutsk to Novosibirsk because the billeting conditions there were better. For many years now I have been unsuccessfully searching for some trace of this mysterious division. I have found nothing; but in the process, I have turned up a mass of information about other divisions; in Irkutsk and Novosibirsk, in Chita and Ulan Ude, in Blagoveshchensk and Spassk, in Iman and Barabash, in Khabarovsk and Voroshilov. All of them entrained, not simply to off-load in a neighbouring town a few hundred kilometres up the line, but to disembark at the western frontiers. An official history, which was in fact published in Irkutsk (*Zabailkal'sky voennyi okrug*, Irkutsk 1972), tells of many divisions being loaded on trains, all headed for the western borders. The 57th Tank Division, commanded by Colonel V. A. Mishulin, secretly entrained here in April. Mishulin had no idea for what purpose. From Irkutsk it was conveyed to the Kiev Special Military District, and was ordered to off-load near Shepetovka.

Meanwhile the flow of troops along the Trans-Siberian Railway (and along all other main lines) was growing. We know that corps from the Far East began to de-train in the Ukraine on 25 May 1941: the 31st Rifle Corps, for example, off-loaded near Zhitomir. The following day, the officer commanding the Urals Military District was ordered to transfer two rifle divisions to the Baltic. (Major-General A. Grylev and Professor V. Khvostov, *Kommunist*, 1968, No. 12, p. 67) That same day, the Trans-Baikal Military District and the Far Eastern Front were ordered to prepare to send a further nine divisions, including three tank divisions, to the western part of the country. (*Ibid*) The 16th Army was already on the Trans-Siberian Railway; the 22nd and the 24th Armies were heading towards it.

The greatest falsehood in the TASS 'denial' was not about 'billeting conditions', however, but about the concentration of troops on the western border. 'There is no concentration,' it stated, '*and none is foreseen.*' That was the most important point. First, the concentration was there, and the German invasion confirmed that it exceeded even the most daring forecasts. Secondly, while all these brigades, divisions and corps were being transferred, plans were being laid for an even greater and truly unprecedented railway operation, namely the transfer by rail of the Second Strategic Echelon of the Red Army. The directive ordering the officers commanding the troops to begin the transfer of this echelon was given on 13 May. The TASS 'denial' was published while this was being set up.

Major-General A. A. Lobachev, who was a member of the Military Council of the 16th Army at the time, recalled the events of 26 May 1941:

The Chief of Staff reported that an important enciphered message concerning the 16th Army had arrived from Moscow . . . this order required that the 16th Army be redeployed to a new location. M. F. Lukin had to report immediately to the General Staff to be given instructions, while Colonel M. A. Shalin and myself had to arrange to send off the military trains.

'Where to?' I asked Kurochkin.

'Westwards.'

We took advice and decided to send the tank crews first, then the 152nd Division and the remaining formations, and finally the army headquarters and the units appended to it.

'Send the trains by night. No one must know that the army is leaving,' the Officer Commanding warned.

By the time the trains carrying the tanks had left, Kurochkin and Zimin arrived, gathered together the command personnel of the 5th Corps, and expressed the wish to General Alekseenko and to all the commanders that they would not let down the Trans-Baikal traditions . . . The men listened to these warm parting words, and everybody thought not so much about military training, but that the subject might

shortly become one of military action. (General A. A. Lobachev, *Tmdnymi Dorogami*, Moscow Voenizdat 1960, p. 123)

General Lobachev was to relate some surprising things later. General Lukin, the officer commanding the 16th Army, Lobachev himself, and Colonel M. A. Shalin, the 16th Army Chief of Staff and future head of the GRU, all knew that the 16th Army was being transferred westwards, but they did not know exactly where. All the other generals in the 16th Army were 'secretly' informed that the army's destination was the Iranian frontier. The less senior officers on the command staff were told that the purpose of the displacement was training exercises, while the wives of the officers were told that the army was off to camp.

In a defensive war, there is no need to deceive the generals in this way. In the German Army, the same thing was being done at the same time, when disinformation was being spread about Operation Sea Lion. It is a sure sign that a surprise attack is in preparation when the troops are deliberately deceived about where operations are going to take place. In order to dissemble from the enemy, one must also dissemble from one's own troops. Aggressors have always done this: Hitler did it, and so did Stalin.

It is interesting that in April 1941, everybody broadly understood that the 16th Army was going off to war:

'Are you going off to fight,' Lobachev's wife asked him point-blank.

'Where did you get that from?'

'Come off it! I read the papers, don't I?'

*(Ibid)*

This was a highly interesting psychological moment. I have questioned hundreds of people who belonged to that generation, and they all had a presentiment that war was coming. I was amazed, and asked where these presentiments had come from. From the newspapers, they all replied.

We, people of today, seldom find direct evidence of an imminent and unavoidable war when we scan the yellowing newspaper pages of those years. Yet the people of that generation knew, by reading between the lines, that war was unavoidably approaching. Those people in Siberia could not have known about the preparations which Hitler was making; their feeling that war could not be avoided must have been based on Soviet preparations.

General Lobachev recalls the incredible degree of secrecy in which the army was transferred: the military trains only moving by night; trains which stopped at neither important stations nor at medium-sized ones; the transfer of the 16th Army headquarters in goods wagons with their doors and windows completely closed; the small stations where the trains halted, with no one allowed to leave the wagons. In those days a passenger train took more than eleven days and nights to cross the Trans-Siberian Railway, while goods trains took longer. Officers and men can be transported in completely closed wagons. But here we are talking about an army headquarters. Such a degree of secrecy is unusual even by Soviet standards. In 1945 a stream of troops was to flow back along the Trans-Siberian Railway in the opposite direction to take part in the surprise strike against Japanese troops in Manchuria and China. For purposes of concealment, all generals travelled in officers' uniforms which had far fewer stars on their shoulder-straps than their ranks entitled them to wear, but even so, they travelled in passenger wagons. Yet in 1941 the generals had travelled in goods wagons. Why?

## CHAPTER 22

# The TASS Report

*Stalin was not one of those figures whose  
real intentions were ever openly declared.*

ROBERT CONQUEST

*(The Great Terror, London, 1968)*

On 13 June 1941, Moscow Radio broadcast an unusual and puzzling report from TASS. It claimed that 'like the Soviet Union, Germany is also steadfastly observing the conditions of the Soviet—German non-aggression pact . . .' and that 'these rumours [of a German attack on the Soviet Union] are propaganda clumsily concocted by forces which are hostile to the Soviet Union and Germany, and which are interested in further extending and developing the war . . .' The main Soviet newspapers published this report the next day. Yet within the week, Germany had attacked the Soviet Union.

Everybody knew who had written the TASS report. Stalin's characteristic style was recognized by generals serving in the various Soviet headquarters, by GULAG prisoners, and by Western experts. Although Stalin purged TASS after the war, none of the leading figures in this institution were ever accused of having spread reports which could have been considered 'manifestly harmful'. Stalin could also have put the blame for broadcasting the TASS report onto any member of the Politburo, but he did not do this either; he took the entire responsibility for it himself.

Much has been written about this TASS report in both the foreign and the Soviet press. Everyone who has dealt with the subject has laughed at Stalin's touching naivety. The TASS report, however, is not so much amusing as mysterious and incomprehensible. Only one thing is clear: the identity of its author. All the rest is an enigma.

The TASS report appears to contradict everything we know about Stalin's character. Boris Bazhanov, who was Stalin's personal secretary and knew him better than anyone, describes him as 'secretive and cunning in

the extreme . . . He possessed the gift of silence to a high degree, and in this he was unique in a country where everyone talks too much.'

Many writers have testified to Stalin's taciturnity: 'He was an irreconcilable enemy of verbal inflation, or garrulousness,' wrote Abdurachman Avtokhranov. 'Don't say what you think, and don't think what you say, could be another motto for his life.' Robert Conquest, a prominent researcher into the Stalin period, has observed that 'we still have to peer through the darkness of Stalin's exceptional secretiveness', and that 'Stalin never said what was on his mind, even when speaking about his political aims'. (*The Great Terror*)

The ability to keep silent, in Dale Carnegie's apt words, is the most rarely found talent of all in human beings. From this viewpoint Stalin was a genius. Nor was this only a very strong trait in his character; it also served as a very strong weapon in dispute. He lulled his enemies with his silence, so that the suddenness of his blows made them irresistible. Why then did Stalin suddenly publicize his thoughts about relations with Germany in a Radio Moscow broadcast? Where was his secretiveness and cunning then? If Stalin had any thoughts about how future events would develop, why did he not discuss them in the close circle of his comrades-in-arms? Who passes important messages to his army through the radio station of the capital and the main newspapers? The army, navy, secret police, concentration camps, industry, transport, agriculture, and the entire population of the Soviet Union formed part of the state system. They were all subordinated, not to newspaper reports, but to their superiors, who in turn received orders through special, often secret channels from their chiefs. Stalin's empire was centralized like no other and, particularly after the Great Purge, the mechanism of state government was built in such a way that any order was immediately transmitted from the highest level down to the lowest functionaries, who rigorously carried it out. The large-scale operations in 1939 involving the arrest and elimination of Yezhov's supporters, and the actual replacement of the entire directorate of the secret police, were carried out quickly and effectively, in such a way that no one outside ever decoded the signal to begin the operations, or knew how or when Stalin gave the signal to set them in motion.

If Stalin, in June 1941, had had ideas to put before millions of functionaries without delay, why did he not avail himself of that smooth machine of government, which would transmit any order immediately and without distortion? If it were a statement of some gravity, it could be duplicated on secret channels. The TASS report, according to Marshal of the Soviet Union A. M. Vasilevsky, 'was not followed by any new policy

instructions about the armed forces, or by any review of previously taken decisions'. (A. M. Vasilevsky: *Delo Vsei Zhizni*, Moscow IPL 1973, p. 120). The Marshal goes on to say that it changed nothing in the work of the General Staffer of the People's Commissariat for Defence. Indeed, 'it was essential that nothing should change'.

No confirmation of the TASS report was sent along secret military channels. On the contrary, there are documents which show that, at the same time as the TASS report was published, an order was given to the troops in the military districts, including the Baltic Special Military District, which in both sense and spirit was directly contrary to the TASS report. (Archiv MO SSSR, Archive 344, schedule 2459, item n, p. 31) The material published in military newspapers, especially those which are unavailable to outsiders, was also in direct conflict to the content of the TASS report. (See for example Vice-Admiral I. I. Azarov; *Osazhdennaya Odessa*, Moscow Voenizdat)

The TASS report was not only out of keeping with Stalin's character; it did not tally with the central idea of all communist mythology. Throughout his entire life, any communist tyrant, and especially Stalin, constantly repeats a simple and eminently comprehensible sentence: 'The enemy is watching.' This magic sentence explains the absence of meat in the shops, the 'liberation campaigns', censorship, torture, mass purges and closed frontiers. Phrases like 'the enemy is on the watch' and 'we are surrounded by enemies' are not just ideology; they are the sharpest weapon the Party has. This weapon destroyed all forms of opposition. Yet once, and only once in the history of all communist regimes, the head of the most powerful of them all told the whole world that the threat of aggression did not exist.

13 June 1941 was one of the most important dates in Soviet history. Its significance is considerably greater than that of 22 June 1941, and Soviet generals, admirals and marshals describe this date in their memoirs in far more detail. 'On 13 June 1941,' wrote Lieutenant-General N. I. Biryukov, who at the time was a major-general in command of the 186th Rifle Division belonging to the 62nd Rifle Corps in the Urals Military District, 'the Military District headquarters sent us a directive of special importance, which ordered the division to leave for a "new camp". The address of the new quartering was not even communicated to me, the

commander of the division. I only learnt on a trip to Moscow that our division was to be concentrated in the woods to the west of Idritsa.' ( *VIZH* 1962, No. 4, p. 80)

In peacetime, a division holds secret and sometimes top-secret documents. A document graded 'of special importance', however, can be sent to a division only in wartime, and only in exceptional circumstances where operations of extreme importance are being planned. Many Soviet divisions passed through the war without ever holding even one document with this highest secrecy grading. The fact that Biryukov chose to put inverted commas around the words 'new camp' is also significant.

The 186th Division was not the only one in the Urals Military District which received this order: *all* the divisions in the district received it. The official history of the district (*Krasnoznamennyi Ural'sky*, Moscow Voenizdat 1983, p. 104) records how 'the loading began of the 112th Rifle Division. The military train left the small railway station on the morning of 13 June . . . Other military trains followed. Then the entrainment began of units belonging to the 98th, 153rd, and 186th Rifle Divisions.' The 170th and 174th Rifle Divisions, along with artillery, sapper, anti-aircraft and other units were got ready for departure. Headquarters of the two corps were set up to handle the Urals divisions. These headquarters in turn came under the command of the headquarters of the new 22nd Army, whose commanding officer was Lieutenant-General F. A. Ershakov. Covered by the soothing TASS report, this great mass of headquarters and troops moved off secretly for the forests of Byelorussia.

The 22nd Army was not the only one on the move: 'Just before the war began, additional forces were assembled for posting in the strictest secrecy to the frontier districts. Five armies were moved westwards from the heart of the country.' (General S. M. Shtemenko, *General'nyi shtab v Gody Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1968, p. 26)

General S. P. Ivanov adds that 'while this move was in progress, a further three armies were prepared for redeployment'. (*Nachal'nyi Period Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974, p. 211)

The question now arises as to why all eight armies did not move at the same time. The answer is simple. The large-scale secret transfer of Soviet troops westwards took place in March, April and May. The country's entire railway transport was involved in this vast secret operation. It was completed on time, but tens of thousands of wagons had to be sent back across thousands of kilometres of railway. Therefore on 13 June,



when another secret large-scale transfer of troops began, the armies found that there were not enough railway wagons available.

It is almost impossible to give the scale of these troop movements, as we do not have exact figures. Some idea of the size of the operation can be gathered from published accounts, however:

In May and early June, the transport system of the USSR had to move about 800,000 reservists . . . these movements had to take place secretly. (I. V. Kovalev, formerly Deputy People's Commissar for State Control, *Transport v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, Moscow Nauka 1981, p. 41)

In May ... an airborne assault corps was concentrated near Zhitomir and in the forests to the south-west of it. (Colonel-General I. I. Lyudnikov, *VIZH* 1961, No. 9, p. 66)

Marshal Bagramyan, based in the Kiev Special Military District at the time, later recalled how

The headquarters of the 31st Rifle Corps from the Far East was to arrive on 25 May to join the troop complement here ... in the second half of May the General Staff sent us a directive instructing us to accept the headquarters of the 34th Rifle Corps, four divisions, each with a strength of 12,000 and one mountain rifle division, all coming from the Northern Caucasus Military District . . . Almost a whole army had to be billeted in a very short space of time ... at the end of May, one military train after another began to arrive in the district. The operations branch changed into something resembling a movements office, into which all information flowed about the arriving troops. (*VIZH* 1967, No. I, p. 62)

The situation was very similar on 13 June, when another secret re-grouping of troops began. These were to form the Second Strategic Echelon of the Red Army. I now have information about 77 divisions and a very great number of regiments and battalions who had secretly begun to move westwards under cover of the TASS report.

Lieutenant-General of Artillery G. D. Plaskov, who was a colonel at the time, has given a vivid description of the events of that day:

The 53rd Division, in which I was officer in command of artillery, was deployed on the Volga. Our senior Command Staff were summoned to the headquarters of our 63rd Corps.

V. F. Gerasimenko, the commander of the District, came to the meeting. The arrival of the top brass put everyone on his guard, for it meant that something important was in the offing. A. G. Petrovsky, the corps commander, who was usually a quiet unruffled man, was noticeably agitated.

'Comrades,' he said. 'The corps has been ordered to mobilize fully. We must bring our units up to their full war-establishment strength, for which emergency reserves are to be used. We must call up our remaining reserve complement immediately. Major-General V. S. Bensky, the chief of staff of the corps, will give you the plan with the loading rota, the military trains available, and times of departure.'

The meeting did not last long. Everything was clear. And although General Gerasimenko hinted that we were going off on an exercise, everyone knew that the matter was much more serious than that. A full complement of combat equipment had never before been taken off on a training exercise. Nor were people called up from the reserve . . . (*Pod Grokhot Kanonady*, Moscow Voenizdat 1969, p. 125)

The First Strategic Echelon, meanwhile, which had entrained for the frontier regions earlier in the year, was being moved right up to the frontier itself. On 14 June the military council of the Odessa Military District was ordered to establish the headquarters of the 9th Army in Tiraspol (*VIZH* 1978, No. 4, p. 86), and the Military Council of the Baltic Special Military District ratified a plan to redeploy a number of divisions and detached regiments in the frontier area. (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Moscow, Vol. 6, p. 517)

General S. P. Ivanov recalls that

while troops were being moved from the depth of the country, a covert regrouping began of formations inside the military districts on the frontier. Formations were moved nearer the frontier, under the guise of changing the locations of summer camps . . . Most formations were moved at night . . . (*Nachal'nyi Period Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974, p. 211)

Many other officers corroborate his account of these events. Major-General S. Iovlev, who was then commander of the 64th Rifle Division of the 1st Army's 44th Rifle Corps, wrote that 'on 15 June 1941 General D. G. Pavlov, the officer commanding the Western Special Military District, ordered the divisions in our corps to prepare to redeploy in full complement . . . We were not told where our destination was . . .' (*VIZH* 1960, No. 9, p. 56)

According to Colonel-General L. M. Sandalov, who was then a colonel and chief of staff of the 4th Army of the Western Special Military District, 'a new division, the 75th Rifle, appeared on the southern wing of the 4th Army. It had been moved up from Mozyr' and had put up heavily camouflaged tent encampments in the forests. (*Perezhitoe*, Moscow Voenizdat 1966, p. 71)

The official history of the Kiev Military District states that on 14 June, 'Major-General F. F. Alyabushev's 87th Rifle Division was moved up to the state frontier under the guise of exercises.' (*Kievsky Krasnoznamennyi*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974, p. 162)

The method of moving troops up to the frontier under the guise of exercises is not adopted on local initiative. Marshal Zhukov's recollections make it clear that the order came from above:

S. K. Timoshenko, the People's Commissar for Defence, recommended to the officers commanding the troops in the military districts that they have their formations carry out tactical exercises beside the state frontier so that, in accordance with the plan for cover, troops could be moved up nearer to their areas of deployment. The districts carried out this recommendation from the People's Commissar but with one vital

proviso - a significant part of the artillery did not take part in these movements. (G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*, Moscow APN 1969, p. 242)

Marshal of the Soviet Union K. K. Rokossovsky, then commander of the 9th Mechanized Corps, explains why the troops had moved up to the state frontier without artillery; the artillery had been ordered up to the frontier a short time before. (*Soldatsky Dolg*, Moscow Voenizdat 1968, p. 8)

According to Marshal Kirill Meretskov, then a general and Deputy People's Commissar for Defence, 'an exercise of the mechanized corps was carried out on my orders. The corps was brought up to the frontier area in training order, and it stayed there. I then said to Zakharov that Major-General R. Ya. Mali-novsky's corps was also in the district, and that it too had to be brought up to the frontier area during the exercises.' (*Na Slyzhbe Narodu*, Moscow IPL 1968, p. 204)

Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, then a major-general in command of the 48th Rifle Corps of the Odessa Military District, confirms that this order was carried out. 'As early as 7 June, the corps had left the Kirovograd area for Bel'tsy, and it was already in place by 14 June. This displacement was carried out under the guise of large-scale exercises.' (*VIZH* 1961, No. 6, p. 6)

Marshal Bagramyan has said that 'we had to prepare all the operational documentation needed for moving five rifle and four mechanized corps out of the areas where they were stationed permanently into the frontier zone'. (*Tak Nachinalas' Voina*, Moscow Voenizdat 1971, p. 64) 'On 15 June we were ordered to begin moving all five rifle corps to the frontier . . . They took with them everything necessary for combat operations. For the purposes of secrecy, these movements took place only at night.' (*Ibid*, p. 77)

Colonel-General I. I. Lyudnikov, then a colonel in command of the 200th Rifle Division of the 31st Rifle Corps, was one of those who carried out this order. 'The Military District's directive,' he recalled, 'which arrived in divisional headquarters on 16 June 1941, gave the order to set out on the march . . . with full complement . . . and to concentrate in the forest some 10-15 kilometres to the north-east of the frontier town of Kovel'. The order was that the move should be carried out covertly, and only by night, through forest-covered terrain.' (*Skvoz' Grozy*, Donetsk, Donbass, 1973, p. 24)

It was not only armies, corps and divisions that were moved to the state frontiers. There are hundreds of pieces of evidence to show that much smaller sub-units were also transferred there.

Lieutenant-General V. F. Zotov, for example, then a major-general and chief of the SZF (North-Western Front) engineering troops, reported that 'the sapper battalions were fully mobilized on a wartime footing . . . ten battalions which had come from the Far East were armed to the full'. (*Na Severo-Zapadnom Fronte*, Moscow Nauka 1969, p. 172)

Colonel S. F. Khvalei, then deputy commander of the 202nd Motorized Division of the 8th Army's I2th Mechanized Corps, stated that 'on the night of 18 June 1941, our division set out on field exercises'. (*Na Severo-Zapadnom Fronte*, Moscow Nauka 1969, p. 310) The colonel adds that by the time the war began, the sub-units of the divisions found themselves directly behind the frontier security detachments, in the immediate proximity of the state frontier.

A brief excerpt from the operational order issued on 18 June 1941 to Colonel I. D. Chernyakhovsky has been published in the Soviet Union. Chernyakhovsky, who was later to become a general of the army, was then the commander of the tank division of the same I2th Mechanized Corps.

On receipt of this order the Commander of the 28th Tank Division Colonel Chernyakhovsky is to bring all units to a state of combat preparedness in accordance with the battle alert plans, but the alert itself is not to be declared. Everything is to be carried out quickly, but noiselessly, without panic or careless talk, and the prescribed levels must be attained in both individual portable reserves and transportable reserves which will be needed for physical sustenance and battle . . . (*VIZH* 1986, No. 6, p. 75)

It is a great pity that the whole order was not published. It remains just as much a secret as it was half a century ago. According to captured German documents, their first encounter with the 28th Tank Division took place near Shaulya. But that division had been given the task of moving right up to the frontier itself.

Marshal of Armoured Tank Troops P. P. Polyboyarov, then a colonel and chief of the motorized armoured tank headquarters of the North-Western Front, stated that

'the division (the 28th Tank) had to leave Riga for a position on the Soviet—German frontier.' (*Na Severo-Zapadnom Fronte*, Moscow Nauka 1969, p. 114) The German invasion simply caught this division, like many others, on the way to the frontier.

In my private library there are sufficient documents on the movements of troops towards the frontiers to fill several voluminous books. Let us try to bear in mind the overall picture that emerges from this mass of detail. The First Strategic Echelon had in all 170 divisions, either tank, motorized, cavalry or rifle; 56 of these were stationed right up against the state frontiers.

The remaining 114 divisions of the First Strategic Echelon were lying inside the territory of the western frontier districts, within moving distance of the frontier. One question interests us - how many of these 114 divisions began to move towards the frontiers under cover of that soothing TASS report? The answer is that they all did. 'Between 12 and 15 June, the western military districts were ordered to move all divisions in the interior of the country into positions closer to the state frontiers.' (V. Khvostov, Major-General A. Grylev, *Kommunist* 1968, No. 12, p. 68) To these 114 divisions of the First Strategic Echelon we may add the 77 divisions of the Second Strategic Echelon which, as we already know, had either begun to move westwards, or else were preparing to do so.

The 13 June 1941, therefore, marks the beginning of the greatest displacement of troops in the history of civilization. The TASS report, published on the same day, speaks not only about German intentions, but also about Soviet plans:

Rumours to the effect that the Soviet Union is preparing for war with Germany are false and provocative . . . the summer training courses now being held for Red Army reservists, as well as the impending manoeuvres, have as their purpose nothing more than the training of reservists and testing how the railway system

works. It is general knowledge that they are held every year, and it is therefore absurd, to say the least, to portray these measures as hostile to Germany.

When this declaration is compared with what in fact was actually happening, we discover that the words used do not always tally with the facts.

The TASS report attempts to explain these troop movements as 'testing the railway system'. Let us beg leave to doubt this. The Soviet troop movements began in February. They were stepped up in March, reached enormous proportions in April and May, and became truly all-embracing in June. These movements involved those divisions which had already been moved up close to the German frontier; those which were preparing to invade Iran; and those which had remained in the Far East. The full build-up of Soviet troops on the German frontier was planned to have been completed by July. (General of the Army S. P. Ivanov, *Nachalnyi Period Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974, p. 211) The railways, which were the country's principal means of transport, were paralysed for almost six months by these secret military movements. In the first half of 1941, all the indices in the State Plan were disrupted, except the military ones. The principal reason for this was transport. The second was the covert mobilization of the male population into the new armies which were then being formed. It is surely not quite right to use the term 'testing' to describe such widespread disruption of the State Plan.

The TASS Report describes these manoeuvres as 'the usual exercises', but the accounts of Soviet marshals, generals and admirals refute this. Major-General S. Iovlev, for example, recalled how 'these call-ups for training were so unusual, and had not been provided for in military training plans, that they put people on their guard'. (*VIZH* 1960, No. 9, p. 56)

Vice-Admiral Ilya Azarov has pointed out that 'as a rule, training exercises were held nearer to autumn, and here they were beginning in the middle of the summer'. (*VIZH* 1962, No. 6, p. 77) Colonel-General I. Lyudnikov backs this up: 'Reservists are usually called up after the harvest has been gathered in ... This rule was broken in 1941.' (*VIZH* 1966 No. 9, p. 66)

General Mikhail Kazakov was in the General Staff at the time and personally met Lieutenant-General Mikhail Ferdorovich Lukin and other commanders who had been secretly sent to the Soviet western frontier.

He is quite categoric that, 'it was clear that it was not manoeuvres they were going on'. (*Nad Kartoi Bylykh Srazheny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1971, p. 64)

Let us note that all these marshals and generals use the term 'under the guise of exercises'. The pretence that these movements were exercises simply concealed the true purpose of this regrouping and build-up of Soviet troops. But nobody has ever said what this true purpose was. Four decades after the war ended, the true aim of these troop movements still remains a Soviet state secret.

At this point the reader might suggest that the reason for all this was that Stalin perhaps sensed that something hostile was afoot, and concentrated these troops there for defensive purposes. But these preparations had nothing to do with defensive measures. Troops who are preparing for defence dig themselves in. This is an inviolable rule, which every Soviet non-commissioned officer has taken to heart ever since the Russo-Japanese War, and all the wars which followed it. The first thing which troops who are preparing for defence do is to cover the widest fields over which the enemy will advance, cover the roads, put up barbed-wire entanglements, dig anti-tank ditches, and erect defensive and cover installations behind water defences. But the Red Army did nothing like this. As we have seen, the Soviet divisions, armies and corps pulled down the defensive installations which had been erected previously. The troops were not concentrated *behind* the water defences, as is done to aid defence, but *in front* of them, which can only aid attack. Soviet troops did not intercept these wide fields which would suit an enemy advance. They hid in the forests instead, just as those German troops were doing as they themselves prepared to attack.

But were not all these measures perhaps just a display of power? Of course not; to be effective, such a display must have been visible to the enemy. The Red Army was not giving a display but, quite the reverse, was trying to conceal its preparations. The TASS report was not written to frighten the enemy, but to set his mind at rest.

It is striking how the German Army was doing exactly the same thing in those days. It moved up to the border and hid in the forests, but these movements were very difficult to hide. Soviet reconnaissance aircraft flew over German territory 'by mistake'. But no one shot them down. Nor was it only ordinary pilots who flew over German territory. Commanders of much more senior rank made these flights as well. Air Major-General G. N. Zakharov, who commanded the 43rd Fighter Division of the Western Special Military District, looked down upon German troops from above and said 'one had the impression that there was being generated, in



the depth of this vast territory, movement which came to a halt at the frontier, pushing against it as against some invisible barrier, and ready at any moment to pour over the top'. (*Povest' ob Istrebitelyakh*, Moscow, Izd DOSAAF 1977, p. 43)

Interestingly, German pilots also flew over Soviet territory 'in error', and nobody shot them down either. I have found in old captured archives impressions given by a German pilot who describes the Soviet troops in exactly the same words. The accounts of Soviet officers are fully corroborated by German military intelligence: prior to 22 June 1941, the Red Army was moving towards the frontier in a massive tide.

Many other independent sources say the same thing. Georgy Alexandrovich Ozerov was one of the deputies to Andrei Nikolaiyevich Tupolev, the aircraft designer. In June 1941, he was in prison along with Tupolev and his entire design team. Ozerov later wrote a book that was distributed in the Soviet Union in *samizdat* form, by-passing the usual censorship. From there it reached the West, where it was published in Germany. Ozerov's account captures the awesome rhythm of the Red Army's massive movement towards its western border, which made itself felt even in Soviet prisons. 'People living in houses on the roads of Byelorussia and Windau,' he wrote, 'are complaining that they cannot sleep at night for the noise of trains laden with tanks and guns rumbling past.' (*Tupolevskaya Sharaga*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Posev, 1973, p. 90)

After my first articles on this subject were published, I received many letters which give a picture of the enormous movement westwards of Soviet troops. People of the most varied nationalities and types wrote to me: Estonians, Jews, Poles, Moldavians, Russians, Latvians, Germans, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Romanians. All of them for a variety of reasons were in the 'liberated' territories at the time. The war was later to scatter these people to the four corners of the earth. Their letters come from Australia, the United States, France, Germany, Argentina, West Germany, and even from the Soviet Union. I received a letter from someone in Canada who had been a soldier in the Russian Liberation Army. He was in the Red Army in 1941, was sent to the frontier, and was hiding with his regiment in the forests in the border area when he was caught by the war. He was taken prisoner, joined the Russian Liberation Movement, was taken prisoner again, and escaped to spend a long life under strange names in strange lands. The soldier showed me several books written by former commanders and troops of the Russian Liberation Army (ROA), who miraculously survived after the war. Interestingly, they all begin their books from the moment when Soviet troops began to move towards the border.

Many other witnesses, and people who knew them well, have written to scientific journals, and on occasions some of these letters are published. James Rushbrook, a British citizen, draws attention to a book entitled *The Promise Which Hitler Kept*, written in 1944 by Stefan Stsende, and published in 1945 in Sweden. The author is a Polish Jew who was in L'vov in 1941. Here is his impression of these days which preceded 22 June:

Military trains crammed full of troops and military equipment passed with increasing frequency through L'vov heading westwards. Motorized units drove through the main streets of the town, and at the railway station all traffic was purely military. (RUSI, June 1986, p. 88)

I am grateful to all those who write to me and to journals, as they keep adding new fragments to the picture of the Red Army's general movement westwards. In addition, there are thousands of documents preserved in Soviet archives which bear out what I say. Very few people have access to these archives, and the most interesting documents have long since been destroyed. Traces of this destruction are all too apparent; sometimes as many as a hundred pages may be missing from a document. (Even so, I ask those who work in the archives to pay heed to the enormous amount of confirmation which exists there of these Soviet troop displacements westwards. I do not ask you to publish the corroboration you find, but simply that you yourselves bear it in mind, for your own personal interest.) In addition to secret archives, there is an ample supply of overt official publications, including the histories of the Soviet military districts, armies, corps and divisions. Anyone interested in this subject can quickly find thousands of statements like this one:

Even before the war began, on the instructions of the General Staff of the Red Army some formations of the Western Special Military District began to move up to the state frontier. (*Krasnoznamennyi Byelorussky Voennyyi Okrug*, Moscow Voenizdat 1983, p. 88)

Should anyone consider all these sources to be unreliable, there is one corroboration which it is impossible to refute: the subsequent history of the war itself. After the Germans had routed the First Strategic Echelon and broken its defences, their advance units suddenly came up against new divisions, corps and armies - such as the 16th Army near Shepetovka - whose existence the German commanders had not even suspected. The whole *Blitzkrieg* plan had been built on the calculation that the Soviet troops stationed right on the frontier would be routed by a lightning strike. But once it had successfully carried that plan into effect, the German Army then discovered itself up against another wall of armies which had moved up from beyond the Volga, the Northern Caucasus, the Urals, Siberia, Trans-Baikal and the Far East. Thousands of railway wagons were needed for one army alone. They had to be brought up to the stations for loading, and then the troops, heavy armament, vehicles and supplies all had to be put on the trains and then transported across thousands of kilometres. If the German troops encountered Siberian, Urals and Trans-Baikal armies at the end of June, this means that their transfer to the west must have begun, not on 22 June, but earlier.

While this was going on Soviet naval forces were also on the move. The official Estonian history of the war states that the Soviet Baltic Fleet left the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland on the eve of hostilities. (*Estonian People and the Great Patriotic War*, Tallinn Eesti Raamat 1973, Vol. I, p. 143) Let us look at the map. If the fleet emerged from the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland it had only one direction to go in, westwards. It was certainly not sailing on an exercise; its task 'was actively to work on the enemy's sea communications'. (*Ibid*) The war had not yet begun, Stalin still did not know that Hitler was going to attack him, yet a Soviet fleet had already left its base with the combat task of active offensive operations!

At the same time, transfers from one air base to another were proceeding at an intensive rate in the air forces. Whole air divisions and regiments, flying at night and in small groups in the guise of carrying out exercises, redeployed to airfields, some of which were less than 10 kilometres from the frontier. It was not just combat sub-units of the air force which were being sent westwards. There were also, in increasing numbers, the latest types of aircraft which had not yet been given to any regiments or divisions. Colonel-General L. M. Sandalov recalled that 'We began to receive new operational technical armament from 15 June onwards. The Korbin and the Pruzhan fighter regiments were given Yak-1 fighters armed with cannon; the ground-attack

regiment was given 11-2 aircraft, and the bomber regiment Pe-2s.' (*Na Moskovskom Napravleny*, Moscow Nauka 1970, p. 63)

At that time fighter regiments each had 62 fighter aircraft, 63 ground-attack aircraft and 60 bombers each. One division alone (the 10th Mixed Aircraft Division) expected to be given 247 of the latest aircraft. Sandalov also states that when the division began receiving the new aircraft, the old ones were not phased out. In this way the division was turned into a great fighting machine numbering several hundred aircraft. Archival documents show that this process was going on everywhere. The 9th Mixed Aircraft Division, for instance, which was located alongside and had also been moved up close to the frontier, had 409 aircraft, including 176 of the latest MIG-3s and also a few dozen Pe-2s and I1-2S. But new aircraft kept on coming.

On the morning of 22 June, the same Western Front was ordered to accept 99 MIG-3 aircraft at Orsha airfield. (*Komando-vanie i Shtab VVS v VO V*, Moscow Nauka 1977, p. 41) If they were ordered to accept them on the morning of 22 June, then obviously the aircraft were ready for sending on the evening of 21 June. Chief Air Marshal A. A. Novikov has stated that on 21 June, the Northern Front (where he was then Officer Commanding VVS<sup>10</sup> with the rank of air major-general) was given an echelon of MIG-3 fighters. (VIZH1969, No. 1, P. 61)

In addition to the fighter aircraft, there was a solid flow of tanks, artillery, ammunition and fuel: 'A military train carrying a heavy artillery regiment arrived for off-loading at the Shaulyai station at dawn on 22 June.' (*Bitva za Leningrad*, Moscow Voenizdat 1964, p. 22) Not just one military train, of course, and not only with guns: 'By the end of June 1941, there were 1,320 trains laden with motor vehicles standing on the railways.' (VIZH 1975, No. I, p. 81) The standard weight for a military train at that time was 900 tons (45 wagons each weighing 20 tons). Assuming that there was one vehicle to every wagon, this would mean that at least 59,400 vehicles were expected to be offloaded. However, it often happened that, in conditions where an enemy attack has not been foreseen (and this one was not foreseen), the vehicles were loaded 'like a snake', that is with the front wheels of each vehicle placed on the body of the one in front. In this way an increased number of vehicles can be loaded onto one train.

---

<sup>10</sup> Soviet Air Force.

Someone must have gathered together this great quantity of railway wagons and motor vehicles, loaded the vehicles on to the wagons, and conveyed them across a vast distance to the western frontier. This process clearly began before the war started. Yet no one succeeded in unloading these vehicles. Meanwhile, military trains carrying ammunition kept arriving one after the other in a never-ending stream. The *Red Star* newspaper wrote on 28 April 1985 that 'on the evening of 21 June 1941, the manager of that sector of railway lines controlled by the Liepaja station was told to "accept a special train. It's carrying ammunition. It has to be sent on to its destination at the first opportunity."' At that time Liepaja was very close to the frontier. The train was in transit, and there was nowhere it could have been bound for except the frontier itself.

Ammunition was held in great quantities in railway wagons on all fronts. This is usually done before preparing for an offensive in great depth. It is simpler, more reliable and cheap in a defensive war to keep ammunition in previously prepared defensive positions. When they have used up the ammunition at one defensive position, the troops can easily and quickly withdraw to the second position with its previously prepared supply of ammunition, and then to a third position and so on. But before an offensive, ammunition is stored on mobile transport, which is a very expensive and dangerous thing to do. 'At the small railway station of Kalinovka alone, the South-West Front had 1,500 wagons laden with ammunition.' (*Sovetskie Zheleznodorozhniki v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voyny*, Izd. AN. SSSRI963, p. 36)

I have much material showing how military trains laden with ammunition were saved in 1941. It did not of course prove possible to save them all. Artillery Colonel-General Ivan Ivanovich Volkotrbenko relates that in 1941 the Western Front alone lost 4,216 wagons carrying ammunition. ( *VIZH*, No. 5, 1980, p. 71) But there was not just one front, but five, and the Western Front was not alone in losing ammunition wagons. Let us try to imagine the amount of ammunition on all five fronts which fell into enemy hands, and the amount which was able to be saved. In the middle of June, under cover of the TASS statement, all this ammunition was rolling in closed wagons straight for the German frontier.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Simion Konstantinovich Kur-kotkin reports that at the beginning of June, 'on a proposal from the General Staff, the Soviet government approved a plan to shift 100,000 tons of fuel from the interior regions of the country'. (*Tyl Vooruzhennykh Sil SSR v VOV*, Moscow Voenizdat 1977, p. 59) Other decisions similar to this one were apparently also being taken. 'About 8,500 railway cistern wagons, all containing fuel, piled up at railway junctions and even at halts between stations.' (*Ibid*, p. 173) Assuming that

only the smallest 20-ton cistern wagons were used, then we are not just speaking about 100,000 tons, but of a much greater quantity. The usual cistern wagon in use in 1940 was not of 20 tons, but of 62 tons. Consequently we can see that there were huge quantities of fuel involved here. But these 8,500 were only those cistern wagons which were standing at stations in the early days of the war, waiting to be off-loaded. We must also take into account what had already been destroyed at railway stations by the enemy air force as the war was breaking out. Colonel-General Ivan Vassilyevich Boldin, then a lieutenant-general and deputy officer commanding the Western Front, later remarked that the 16th Army, the most powerful in his front, had sufficient reserves of fuel in storage tanks and in railway cistern wagons, but that all this was lost in the first minutes and hours of the war. (*Stranitsy zhizni*, Moscow Voenizdat 1961, p. 92)

On the eve of war, this great mass of cistern tanks, along with trains laden with troops, technical equipment, arms and ammunition, was moving up to the frontier.

When we speak of the reasons for the Red Army's defeats in the initial period of the war, we sometimes forget the main reason, which is that the Red Army was in railway wagons at the time. General of the Army, Simion Pavlovich Ivanov, then a colonel in charge of the operations branch of the 13th Army headquarters, describes how Biryuzov's 132nd Rifle Division was caught unprepared:

The enemy suddenly attacked the train, in which part of the strength of the division, along with its headquarters, was bound for the frontier. They had to go into battle straight from the wagons and the railway platforms. (*Red Star*, 21 August 1984)

Marshal Biryuzov, then a major-general recalled the chaos that ensued:

We were added to the complement of the 20th Mechanized Corps at the very last minute. I could not find either the commander or the chief of staff of the corps, in fact I did not even know where their command post was. The 137th Rifle Division, under the command of Colonel I. T. Grishin, was operating to the left of us. It had come from Gor'kii . . . Our neighbour on our right was thrown into battle as we were, straight from the railway wagons, even before all their military trains had reached their off-loading points. (*Kogda Gremeli Pushki*, Moscow Voenizdat 1962, p. 21)

General of the Army, Sergei Shtemenko, then a colonel in the operations headquarters of the General Staff, reported that

troop trains were moving west and south-west in an uninterrupted stream. First one of us, then another went to the offloading stations. The ever-changing situation and its complexity often compelled the off-loading to be stopped and the trains to be sent on to some other station. It happened on occasions that the divisional command and its headquarters were off-loaded in one place, and the regiments in another, or even in several places all some considerable distance apart. (*General'nyi Shtab v Gody Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1968, P. 30)

Soviet publications contain thousands of accounts of how the German attack found the Red Army in transit and unprepared for such an onslaught. Colonel-General A. S. Klemin recalled how, in early July 'there were 47,000 wagons carrying military loads moving on the railways'. (*VIZH* 1985, No. 3, p. 67)

'Many rail junctions were almost completely paralysed by this great accumulation of wagons. At most stations only one track was left free to allow other trains to pass through.' (I. V. Kovalev: *Transport v VO V*, Moscow Nauka 1981, p. 59)

It might be suggested that this vast mass of troops and equipment had been put on the trains after 22 June and then sent to the fronts. This is a mistaken proposition. After 22 June, the fronts needed empty wagons

only, to remove the vast reserves of arms, ammunition, fuel and other military supplies which had already been stockpiled at the border.

In order to realize the tragedy of the situation, one must remember General Lukin. He was already fighting near Shepetovka as officer commanding his army while the headquarters of his army was still in Trans-Baikal. The trains carrying his army were thousands of kilometres apart. Then the headquarters arrived, but its communications battalion was still somewhere on the way. Situations like this were occurring everywhere. Headquarters without troops were off-loaded at some stations, while troops without headquarters were off-loaded at others. It was worse when a train stopped in the open country instead of at a station. A tank battalion is a great force, but it is completely defenceless on a train. If the fighting caught a train laden with heavy technical armament at a place where there was nowhere to unload it, then the train either had to be destroyed or abandoned. The losses in military trains were enormous.

But even those divisions which were in the First Strategic Echelon and were making their own way to the frontier were in no better a position. A division marching in columns is an excellent target for any air force. The entire Red Army had made an excellent target of itself.

Many people saw the transfer of Soviet troops taking place, but each individual saw only a part of it. Few could have imagined its true scale. German military intelligence had assessed that a great build-up of fighting strength was taking place, but all it saw was the First Strategic Echelon, never suspecting that there was a second, and indeed a third, which we shall come to in another book. I believe that many Soviet marshals and generals, with the exception of the most eminent, or those who were directly involved in these troop transfers, likewise had no idea of their true dimensions, and consequently, of their significance. That is why many of them talk about them in so serene a manner. Their ignorance about the general situation and the true extent of the build-up of Soviet troops was in no way fortuitous. Stalin took draconian measures to cover it up. His TASS report was one of these measures. It was clearly impossible to conceal the actual fact that troop transfers were taking place. But amazingly Stalin succeeded in concealing both the dimensions of these transfers and their purpose from the entire country, from German intelligence and even from future generations.



Air Colonel-General Alexander Sergeiyeovich Yakovlev, who was a personal aide to Stalin at the time, bears witness that 'at the end of May or beginning of June' a meeting was held in the Kremlin to discuss matters related to camouflage and deception. (*TseV Zhizni*, Moscow IPL 1968, p. 252)

An incident recounted by Marshal Matvei Vassilyevich Zakharov reveals the degree of secrecy surrounding these troop movements:

At the beginning of June, Colonel P. I. Rumyantsev, the chief of VOSO<sup>11</sup> of the Odessa Military District, came round to see me in my office when I was chief of staff of the Odessa Military District and told me in secret that over the past few days 'Annushkas' had been passing through the Znamenka railway station from the Rostov direction and would be off-loaded near Cherkassy.' Annushka' is a term which is used in the VOSO to mean a division. Two days later, I received an enciphered message from Cherkassy, signed by M. A. Reiter, deputy officer commanding the troops in the Northern Caucasus Military District, in which he asked permission to take over some clothing-storage hutments in our district for storing the belongings of troops which had just arrived in this area from the Northern Caucasus. As the headquarters of the Odessa Military District had not been informed about any concentration of troops here, I rang the operations headquarters of the General Staff on the VCh.<sup>12</sup> A. F. Anisov, the deputy chief of the headquarters came to the telephone. I told him about the enciphered message I had received from M. A. Reiter, and asked him to explain what it was all about. Anisov replied that I must destroy Reiter's message at once, that he (Reiter) would be given the necessary instructions from the General Staff, and that the Military District headquarters was not to interfere in this matter. (*Voprosy Istory*, 1970, No. 5, p. 42)

Marshal Zakharov also states that Colonel-General Yakov Timofeyevich Cherevichenko, who was commanding the troops in the Odessa Military District, likewise knew nothing about the 'Annushkas'. It may be argued that when Soviet troop movements take place, precautionary measures are always taken, and that Soviet troops always keep their intentions secret. This is quite true. But everything has a limit. An officer

---

<sup>11</sup> Central Office of Military Railway Communications.

<sup>12</sup> High-Frequency Governmental Communications.

commanding a military district in the Soviet Union - particularly one who commands a military district on the frontier - and his chief of staff are persons who have been invested with special plenary powers and authority. They take full responsibility for everything which takes place on the territory which is under their control. Even in the case where the commander of the Odessa military district learnt by chance that a concentration of outside troops was taking place on his territory, the General Staff, which was commanded by G. K. Zhukov, ordered him to forget the information he had been sent, and to destroy the secret enciphered message which had been intended only to be read by the military district chief of staff. This enciphered message represented a danger even as it lay in the chief of staff's safe.

Lieutenant-General M. A. Reiter's behaviour was interesting. Max Reiter was a disciplined German. He had been a colonel in the Russian Army in World War I, an old hand of Prussian stock. He knew very well how to keep a secret. But even he regarded it as perfectly natural, when he turned up with his 'Annushkas' on the territory of another military district, to get in touch with his counterpart and ask his permission (in personal coded message of course!) to do something. The General Staff quickly set his thinking straight, and he did not write a cipher message like that again.

Molotov summoned the German ambassador on 13 June and handed him the text of the TASS report. (V. Khvostov and Major-General A. Grilev, *Kommunist*, No. 12, 1968, p. 68) This stated that Germany did not wish to attack the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union did not wish to attack Germany, but that 'forces hostile to the Soviet Union and Germany which were interested in developing and extending the war' were trying to cause trouble between them by spreading provocative rumours that war was near. The report names these 'hostile forces' as Sir Stafford Cripps (the British ambassador in Moscow), London and the British press.

It would be reasonable to suppose that a meeting also took place that day in London between Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, and Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London. Imagine the scene: Maisky throws the TASS report on the table, stamps his foot and demands that ambassador Cripps be withdrawn from Moscow, that the sowing of dissention between the good friends Stalin and Hitler should stop, and that provocative rumours about war between the Soviet Union and Germany should cease.

On 13 June 1941 a meeting did in fact take place between Maisky and Eden. Maisky did not hand over a copy of the TASS report to the British government, he did not stamp his foot, and the meeting passed off in a friendly atmosphere. The discussion was concerned with what measures the British government could take to help the Red Army 'should war break out between the Soviet Union and Germany in the near future'. Specific measures included direct combat operations by the Royal Air Force to help the Red Army, military supplies, and co-ordination of operations undertaken by the military commands of the two countries. (*Istoriya Vtovoï Mirovoi Voïny*, Vol. 3, p. 352)

On 13 June, Stalin's diplomats were laying the foundations of what would soon be called the Anti-Hitler Coalition. There was nothing wrong with this from the British side. Britain was at war with Germany. The Soviet Union, however, was playing a dirty game. It had concluded a non-aggression pact with Germany and, immediately after this, a treaty of friendship. If the Soviet government had decided that these documents were no longer relevant to a situation which had really become very complex, they should have abrogated them. But Stalin did not do this. He went on assuring Hitler of his ardent friendship and claimed in the TASS report that it was the British politicians who wanted to extend the war.

The neutral diplomatic tone concealed some highly serious matters. Soviet diplomats had quite recently held negotiations with Germany over Poland 'should changes occur on the territory of the Polish state'. The time had now come when Soviet diplomats were striking a similar tone about Germany behind her back. It is surprising that, in the negotiations in London, both sides used the phrase 'if war begins', instead of saying 'if Germany attacks'; to put it another way, the interlocutors were not in any way excluding the possibility that a war could begin, not as a result of German aggression, but in some other way. It is interesting that at the negotiations in London, the Soviet Union put itself down first — 'if war breaks out between the USSR and Germany'. The TASS report too, speaks of 'rumours that war is near between the USSR and Germany'. If Germany was considered the most likely aggressor, why not put it the other way round?

Someone may perhaps argue that the Soviet ambassador was holding these negotiations without Stalin's knowledge, exceeding his authority as did those Soviet generals who assembled their troops on the borders 'without notifying Stalin'. But Maisky himself has emphasized that when he was leaving for London in 1932, he had a meeting with M. M. Litvinov. Litvinov, who was People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, warned Maisky that while *en paste* he would be carrying out instructions, not from Litvinov, but 'from higher

instances'. Only Molotov, who was head of the government of which Litvinov was a member, and Stalin were 'higher' at that time. In 1941, Litvinov had already been dismissed, so there remained only two 'higher instances', Molotov and Stalin. Maisky survived the purges, and remained in his post for a very long time. His head remained on his shoulders only because he did not infringe any of the instructions sent him by the 'higher instances'.

In order to have a clear understanding of Comrade Maisky and Soviet diplomats generally, it must be added that after he returned to Moscow after having served in London for eleven years, he accompanied Stalin to conferences with Churchill and Roosevelt, in order to ask that aid be increased. He then wrote a book entitled *Who Helped Hitler? (Kto Pomogal Gitleru, Moscow IML 1962)* We learn from this book that Hitler could not have begun World War II by himself, and that Britain and France helped him to do so. The Soviet ambassador then went on to lay the blame for 'suffering and sacrifices without number' on the shoulders of the country which offered Stalin military and economic help as far back as 13 June 1941.

The purpose of the TASS report was to put an end to rumours that war between the Soviet Union and Germany was inevitable. Stalin waged determined warfare on these rumours. On the night of 13-14 June, there was a sudden outburst of terror in Moscow. Heads came off, including some very eminent ones.

Hitler had the same problem. War preparations are difficult to conceal. People see them, and express all sorts of suppositions about them. On 24 April, the German naval attache sent an anxious report to Berlin that he was having to counter 'clearly absurd rumours about a forthcoming German-Soviet war'. On 2 May, ambassador Von der Schulenberg reported that he was having to counter rumours, but all German officials who were arriving from Germany were bringing 'not only rumours, but facts to back them up'. On 24 May, Karl Bohmer, head of the foreign press department of the German Ministry of Propaganda, got into a drunken state and said something indiscreet about relations with the Soviet Union. He was immediately arrested. Hitler took up the matter personally, and in Goebbels's words 'attached too serious a significance' to it. On 13 June, the day the TASS report was given out, Karl Bohmer stood before a people's court (how staggering - a people's court, just as in the Soviet Union) and declared that what he had said had been drunken gibberish.

This did not save the unfortunate Bohmer from heavy punishment, which served as a good lesson for all Germany – there would be no war! There would be no war! There would be no war! And just so that nobody abroad should have any doubts about it, Ribbentrop sent top-secret telegrams to his ambassadors on 15 June, saying that it was planned to hold highly important negotiations with Moscow. The ambassadors had to relay this information to certain people in the strictest secrecy. For instance, the counsellor at the German Embassy in Budapest had to convey the news to the Hungarian president as a special secret.

The principles of disinformation are the same for everyone. If you do not want the enemy to learn the secret, then keep it away from your friends as well! On 8 May 1940, German radio announced that Britain intended to invade the Netherlands. There then followed the most interesting part of the announcement, which was that information to the effect that two German armies had been moved up to the border with Holland was 'absurd rumour' put into circulation by 'British warmongers'. What happened thereafter is common knowledge. These two announcements, one from German radio and the other from the Soviet agency T A S S, repeat one another almost word for word.

Following the appearance of my first publications, Soviet historians exclaimed that yes, Soviet troop movements had taken place, but that Soviet sources had long ago given a satisfactory (that is, a defence-related) explanation of what had occurred. This is very far from the truth. It was the absence of such an explanation which attracted my attention in the first place. Not one Soviet marshal or general has ever given the exact number of the divisions which took part in these vast movements. As we have seen, it was 191, but not one of them has ever given even an approximate figure. But can we really expect a satisfactory explanation from a general if he does not know, or is concealing the true dimensions of everything which took place?

The memoirs of the generals and marshals who had either directed or taken part in these troop movements display a surprising flexibility on the part of Soviet historical science. Colonel-General Ya. T. Cherevichenko, officer commanding the troops of the Odessa Military District, was in the Crimea between 9 and 12 June, where he received the troops of the 9th Special Rifle Corps. We learn this from Marshal M. V. Zakharov.

(*Voprosy Istory*, 1970, No. 5, p. 44) We shall return to this corps later. It was a most unusual one, and it was not for nothing that it was officially named 'special'. But for some reason or other, General Cherevichenko passes it over in silence. This, incidentally, is the same Cherevichenko who was unaware that an entire army under the command of Lieutenant-General I. S. Konev and his deputy Lieutenant-General Max Reiter was secretly being concentrated on the territory of his own military district.

I. S. Konev became a marshal of the Soviet Union during the war, and I picked up his book in the hope of finding some explanation as to how he found himself with his 'Annushkas' in somebody else's military district, and why. Surprisingly, the gallant marshal has simply omitted the entire initial period of the war. He preferred to write about 1945, and so he entitled his book *Forty-Five*. I then picked up the memoirs of General of the Army P. I. Batov. It was his corps which Cherevichenko was meeting in the Crimea, but alas, Batov simply leaves out the facts. Batov was the deputy of the officer commanding the Trans-Caucasian Military District. What was he doing in the Crimea at the head of a corps on the eve of the war? Which divisions belonged to this corps? Why was the corps called 'special'? Who was the deputy commander of the corps, and who was its chief of staff? Why was the corps trained to board ships, land on a hostile coast, and destroy oil derricks? We can find answers to all these questions, after prolonged research, from many different sources, but these do not include the memoirs of Batov, who simply omits the entire period.

Having failed to find the explanations there, I then raised my sights. But neither Stalin nor any of the members of the Politburo wrote any memoirs. The only really senior figure to leave an account of his wartime experiences was Marshal Zhukov. He was Chief of the General Staff at the time, and was personally responsible for the deployment, garrisoning and movements of troops. Without his official stamp, it would have been impossible to move even one battalion, let alone regiments and divisions. What was more, the VOSO service, that is, everything related to the military use of the railways, was directly subordinated to him.

Zhukov admits that troop movements did in fact take place, and that they were of monumental dimensions. But instead of giving figures and explaining them from the height of his position as Chief of the General Staff, the three pages Zhukov devotes to the troop movements simply quote his friend I. Kh. Bagramyan, who was a colonel at the time. Listen to what Bagramyan thinks about this — Bagramyan who had no access to state secrets! Listen to Bagramyan, who was in the First Strategic Echelon where he only carried out orders sent by

Moscow, who only accepted one military train after another without being given any explanations as to what they were needed for.

Dear Georgy Konstantinovich, comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union! If we want to find out Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan's opinions, we shall simply open his excellent books and read them. But we are interested in finding out from your memoirs your point of view, your figures and your explanations. We want to see the situation from the dizzy height of your position and not from Ivan Khristoforovich's parochial post. He speaks well and at length. He possesses shining erudition, a fine analytical mind, an excellent memory and great knowledge of the situation. But he played no part in the troop movements, nor did he direct them. The troop movements were directed by you. Zhukov's sharp manoeuvre behind Bagramyan's back, and the lack of exact figures and explanations only strengthen the suspicion that not everything was straightforward, that not everything had been said, and that there was something here which, then as now, was not for publication.

## CHAPTER 23

### The Military Districts

*There is a long-established procedure in the Red Army whereby the command leaves for the place where the operations are to take place before the troops arrive there.*

Marshal K. ROKOSSOVSKY  
(*Soldarsky dolg*, Moscow 1968, p.  
166)

As the Soviet general moves up the promotional ladder, he passes in turn through the posts of commander of a division, commander of a corps, and then of officer commanding an army. The next post, officer commanding a military district, is not just a step upwards. It is a sharp quantum leap. The fact is that an officer commanding a military district is not simply a very high-ranking military chief; he is in his way the military governor of great territories where millions and indeed tens of millions of people live. He is not only responsible for the troops and their military training, but also for preparing the population, industry, transport and agriculture to fight a war. He is responsible for protecting the communist regime in the territories entrusted to him and, should the need arise, to resort to armed force to defend that regime.

Before World War II, the territory of the Soviet Union was divided into sixteen military districts. Eight of them had common frontiers with foreign states. The remaining eight had no frontiers and were therefore considered internal military districts. Each district, of course, was important in its own way. It was in the internal districts that vast industrial potential, transport arteries and great human resources were concentrated.

On 13 May 1941, the officers commanding seven of these internal military districts (the exception was the Moscow District) were given a directive of 'special importance'. The headquarters of the military districts were to be converted into army headquarters. The officers commanding the military districts were to head these armies personally; they were to take along with them all the corps and all the divisions which made up the



complement of their districts. Within exactly one month, on 13 June 1941, they were ordered to begin a secret regrouping in the western part of the country.

On 13 June 1941, under cover of the TASS report, all the divisions which belonged to the Urals Military District began to move secretly westwards. The divisions were combined into corps, and the corps were in turn combined into the 22nd Army. Lieutenant-General Filipp Ershakov, the officer commanding the Urals Military District, personally stood at the head of this army. Dimitri Sergeyevich Leonov, corps commissar and member of the Military Council of the District, and Major-General Georgy Ferdorovich Zakharov, Chief of Staff of the District, became respectively members of the Military Council and Chief of Staff in the emergent army. Officers in charge of artillery, engineers, the rear, communications and all the rest, took all those under their command into the 22nd Army, and put them aboard military trains which then moved off heading west.

Who then was to remain behind in the Urals? The Urals contained (and continue to contain) the world's largest steel, tank and shell production complexes. The Urals meant lines of communication of the utmost importance. The Urals also meant concentration camps, with hundreds of thousands and, quite possibly, millions of prisoners. Would it not be too dangerous to leave all these territories without a military governor? It might be suggested that every commander has a deputy who stands in for him during his absences. But the trouble here was that Lieutenant-General M. F. Lukin, the deputy officer commanding the Urals Military District, had already been given orders to leave for Trans-Baikal. He had set up the 16th Army there, and at the time when the TASS report was issued, his army was secretly moving westwards. After all the Command Staff had departed, therefore, the completely unknown Major-General A. B. Katkov was left in charge of the Urals Military District, with practically no staff to support him.

The same thing happened in the Khar'kov Military District. We know that the 18th Army was formed on the eve of the war on the Romanian frontier. The command and headquarters of this army was the command and headquarters of the Khar'kov Military District. Lieutenant-General A. K. Smirnov, the officer commanding the district, Major-General V. Ya. Kolpachki, its chief of staff, Major-General S. K. Goryunov, its air commander, and everyone under their command, were transferred to the 18th Army on the Romanian frontier, thereby leaving their military district without any leaders at all.

The 19th Army was formed from the troops and headquarters of the Northern Caucasian Military District. Lieutenant-General I. S. Konev, officer commanding the district, combined all the troops of his district into

the 19th Army, stood at its head and moved it westwards in secret, thereby leaving the district without any military control whatever. In theory Major-General Max Reiter, the German communist and Konev's deputy, should have taken his place, but as we are already aware, he was not in the Caucasus at the time, but in Cherkassy, where the military trains of the 19th Army were arriving.

Let us glance at the command staff of the Air Force (the V VS) in the North Caucasus Military District. The officer commanding the VVS was Air Major-General E. M. Nikolaenko, the VVS Chief of Staff was Colonel N. V. Korneev, the commander of the Fighter Air Division was Air Major-General E. M. Beletsky. We find them in exactly the same posts after the TASS report was published, but no longer in this military district. They were in the 19th Army, which was secretly being moved into the Ukraine.

The 20th Army, likewise, was simply the officers and troops of the Orel Military District under another name. Lieutenant-General F. N. Remezov, the officer commanding this district, combined all his troops with those of the Moscow Military District under his command. He turned the district headquarters into the headquarters of the 20th Army and moved secretly westwards, thereby leaving the heart of Russia at the mercy of fate and without any military control.

The 21st Army was the Volga Military District. The officer commanding the district, Lieutenant-General V. G. Gerasimenko, became officer commanding 21st Army, General V. N. Gordov, chief of staff in the district became 21st Army Chief of Staff. Commanders of all sorts of troops and services, and hundreds of other commanders, simply changed the words in their titles from 'Volga Military District' to '21st Army'. If for instance you were to learn that Air Chief Marshal G. A. Vorozheikin was head of the air forces in the Volga Military District at the beginning of June 1941 (with a lower rank at that time, of course), you could be absolutely sure without looking up the records that after 13 June he became Air Chief in the 21st Army and then moved to the German frontier. If you knew that Colonel-General Yu. V. Bordzilovsky, who commanded the engineering troops in the district, although of course with a lower rank, was serving at the same time and in the same place in the engineering branch, then you could say without fear of contradiction that after the TASS report came out, he served in the engineering branch of the 21st Army.

The 24th Army was formed in the Siberian Military District, whose commanding officer was Lieutenant-General S. A. Kalinin, while the 28th Army was formed from the Arkhangelsk Military District, under the command of Lieutenant-General V. Ya. Kachalov.

On 13 June 1941, the very same day that strange reports were being broadcast by Soviet radio, the established order of military and territorial government which had been in force in the vast territories of central Russia, Northern Caucasus, Siberia, the Urals from Arkhangelsk to Kuban' and from Orel to Chita to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. If a revolt had erupted, there was nothing there to suppress it. All divisions had gone off to the German frontier. What was more, there was nobody left to take a decision to put down a revolt. Practically all the generals had also gone off secretly to the western part of the country. Revolts were usually put down by the NKVD, but a very serious one would have been too much for the NKVD troops alone to handle. The army would have been needed.

The question now arises - what was going on? Did Stalin perhaps not trust his officers commanding in the internal military districts and decided to replace them all at the same time? No, it was not like that. Stalin took the precaution of shooting all those whom he did not trust, and replaced them with others in whom he had confidence. It is essential to realize that practically no one was left behind to take the places of the generals who had left. After Lieutenant-General S. A. Kalinin, the officer commanding the Siberian Military District, converted all his troops and his headquarters into the 24th Army, which he then secretly transported westwards, no new general arrived in Siberia until 1942. (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, p. 338) In all other internal military districts, new commanding officers did not arrive for several months, or else those who came were third-rate generals who, either before or afterwards, were never given the honour of commanding a military district or an army. Major-General Matvei Timofeyevich Popov in the Volga Military District is a striking example of this.

It only remains for us to suppose that all commanders and their troops had gone off to do something more serious than protecting Soviet authority in the country's internal areas. If it had been contemplated that they should do something less important than this, they would of course all have stayed where they were.

Moscow was the exception among the eight internal military districts. This is understandable, as the capital lay within it. In contrast to all other internal military districts, it was commanded not by a lieutenant-general, nor even by a colonel-general, but by General of the Army Ivan Tyulenev. But even the exceptional position of the Moscow Military District did not save it from being denuded of its headquarters and troops. All its troops were sent to reinforce the First Strategic Echelon and the 20th Army of the Second Strategic Echelon. All reserves of arms, ammunition and property were sent from the Moscow Military District to the western

frontiers. Then came the turn of the command. At that time General I. V. Tyulenev held a very high rank, as well as enjoying Stalin's special trust; too high a rank for someone who was just to command an army. The Politburo therefore decided in Stalin's presence to appoint Tyulenev officer commanding the Southern Front. When he left for there, he took with him the Moscow Military District's entire headquarters, which was headed by Major-General Gavril Shishenin.

The decision to re-form the command and headquarters of the Moscow Military District into the command of the Southern Front and transfer them to Vinnitsa was taken on 21 June 1941, but there is sufficient evidence to show that this decision came as no surprise to the officers in the headquarters. Many branches of the headquarters were already on the move; Major-General A. S. Osipenko, for example, deputy officer commanding the air force of the Moscow Military District, was already on the Romanian frontier at the beginning of June 1941.

The command and headquarters left for Vinnitsa, effectively abandoning the military district of the capital city without handing over their duties to anyone, since nobody had been appointed to take the places of the departing commanders. Lieutenant-General P. A. Artem'ev did not take over its command until 26 June, *after* Germany had attacked. (*Ordena Lenina Moskovsky Voennyi Okrug*, Moscow, Moskovsky Rabochy 1985, p. 204) Artem'ev, moreover, was not a soldier but a Chekist. The post which he went on holding and brought along with him to the Moscow Military District was that of head of the Directorate of Operational Troops of the NKVD. Then in July, Stalin appointed K. F. Telegin, who was a divisional commissar for NKVD troops, and who later became a lieutenant-general, to be a member of the Military Council of the Moscow Military District. He also was a pure-blooded Chekist, who had previously served in OSNAZ units. During the Great Purge, he was political commissar for the NKVD internal troops of the Moscow District, and following that he held some responsible position inside the central apparatus of the NKVD.

Even during the Great Purge, the military districts had remained military. Now, in time of war, there was no difference between the Moscow Military District and the Moscow NKVD District. The Moscow Military District did exist in theory, but there were no Red Army military units in Moscow. There were only two NKVD divisions and 25 detached fighter battalions, also of the NKVD.

Lieutenant-General Konstantin Ferdorovich Telegin recalls that when these 'new people', that is the Chekists, first arrived in the Moscow Military District headquarters, many branches in the headquarters lost

much of their staff. The two most important branches, operations and intelligence, had completely ceased to exist. The new people had little understanding of the inherent characteristics of military matters, and they had to 'waste no small amount of time and effort learning about the state of the district and its problems and capacities'. (*VIZH*, 1962, No. I, p. 36)

Thus, under the cover of the TASS statement, the most high-ranking military commanders at the head of armies, and including even one who commanded a front, were secretly transferred to the German frontier, thereby leaving all the internal military districts at the mercy of fortune and the NKVD. It is beyond dispute that nothing like this has ever happened in Soviet history either before or since. It is also indisputable that these movements were connected with a war which, for the Soviet Union, was quite unavoidable. If there had been the slightest doubt that war might possibly be avoided, at least some commanders here and there would have remained at their posts.

Nor were these actions in any way preparations for a defensive war. In a lengthy defensive war, not all the commanders are sent off to the enemy frontier. Somebody stays behind in those territories where the enemy might suddenly appear. It is also absolutely essential in a prolonged defensive war that generals and real soldiers, and not policemen, remain in the most important industrial areas and transport centres, in order both to defend them and to ensure that the full potential of these great territories in the heartland of the country is fully and properly used to meet the needs of war.

There is only one circumstance in which the generals would have nothing to do in these industrial centres. That would be where the Soviet High Command was planning a sudden war on enemy territory, relying on reserves which had been mobilized before the war began, rather than on armaments to be produced in the course of it. In that event, their place would be on the enemy frontier.

Lieutenant-General K. F. Telegin himself makes the position quite clear: 'Insofar as it was supposed that the war would be fought on that enemy territory which, in the pre-war period, bordered the district, stockpiles of mobilized reserves of arms, equipment and ammunition were transferred to the military districts on the frontier.' (K. F. Telegin, *op. cit.*)

## CHAPTER 24

### The Black Divisions

*Stalin does not hesitate to use force on  
an unprecedented scale.*

TROTSKY

(BO, Nos. 79-80, 1939.)

The main similarity between the First and Second Strategic Echelons was that the most powerful armies in their complements were deployed not against Germany but against the Romanian oilfields. The main difference between them was the colour of their uniforms. The colour of the First Strategic Echelon was the khaki of the tunics worn by millions of soldiers. Khaki was the dominating colour in the Second Strategic Echelon as well, but it had an abundant admixture of black.

I once had occasion to be present at a meeting with the retired General F. N. Remezov, who headed the 20th Army. A conversation was going on among members of his circle. No outsiders were present, so it was fairly frank. His listeners were officers and generals of the district headquarters, who knew their subject very well. They began to argue. At the height of the argument, a bold colonel with a sharp tongue put the question directly to General Remezov: 'Why do the Germans call the 69th Rifle Corps of your 20th Army the "black corps" in their documents?' General Remezov did not give an instructive reply. He deflected everything at the 56th Army, which he was later to command, saying that because of a shortage of grey military greatcoats, some of its divisions had to wear black railway overcoats. That did happen, but in December.

Remezov clearly evaded giving an answer. He was being asked about June 1941, when there were no shortages, and when it would have been too hot for soldiers in battle to run about in a greatcoat. Many soldiers in the 69th Rifle Corps wore black uniforms *in summer*. There were sufficient numbers of these soldiers to draw the attention of German military intelligence, who then unofficially called the 69th Corps the 'black corps'.

This was not the only corps of its kind. The 63rd Rifle Corps of the 2nd Army is also referred to in German documents as a 'black corps'. Komkor Leonid Grigoryevich Petrovsky, who commanded the 63rd Rifle Corps, was an outstanding military leader by any standards. He took part in the storming of the Winter Palace when he was fifteen, went through the entire Civil War and was seriously wounded three times. He finished the war as a commander of a regiment at the age of eighteen. When he was twenty, he passed out from the Academy of the General Staff in brilliant fashion. He commanded the best units in the Red Army, including the 1st Moscow Proletariat Rifle Division. At the age of 35 he was deputy officer commanding the Moscow Military District.

In battle, Komkor Petrovsky showed himself to be a military leader of strategic dimensions. He was given the rank of lieutenant-general in August 1941 and was appointed to command the 2nd Army. At that moment, the 63rd Rifle Corps, after much fierce fighting, found itself surrounded. Stalin ordered him to leave the corps and to take command of the army immediately. Petrovsky requested that this order be delayed for a few days, and sent back the aircraft sent to collect him full of wounded soldiers. Petrovsky extracted his black corps from its encirclement, and having done that, he went back into the enemy rear area to bring out another division from the encirclement. This was the 154th Rifle Division, under the command of Kombrig Ya. S. Fokanov. While he was breaking out, Petrovsky was fatally wounded. The German troops who found Petrovsky's body on the field of battle were ordered by their High Command to bury the Soviet general with full military honours. A large cross was erected over his grave bearing the inscription in German, 'Lieutenant-General Petrovsky, Commander of the Black Corps'.

Soviet sources confirm this unusual gesture. The operations of the 63rd black corps may be read about in detail in the *Military Historical Journal* (VIZH 1966, No. 6, p. 66) The *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* (Vol. 6, p. 314) confirms the accuracy of that article. References to Petrovsky's black corps may be found in Lieutenant-General of Artillery G. D. Plaskov's book, *Pod Grokhot Kanonady* (Voenizdat 1969, p. 163)

German intelligence also noticed the unusual black uniforms in other armies belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon. When these uniforms began to predominate over the usual green ones, regiments, divisions, and sometimes entire corps were referred to as 'black'. The 24th Army of the Second Strategic Echelon, which had secretly been moved from Siberia, was no exception. The Germans gave the name 'black' to some of its regiments and divisions during the fighting. But even before the divisions and corps of this

army joined in battle, some very interesting things were happening. At the end of June, the 24th Army was on the move across thousands of kilometres of railway track. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant-General Stepan Andreyevich Kalinin, was already in Moscow trying to solve the problem of how to feed it. He later recalled how he was received by the secretary of the Moscow Municipal Committee of the Party:

The secretary of the Moscow Municipal Committee rang up the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

'The comrade with whom I have just been talking,' explained the Municipal Committee secretary, when he had hung up, 'had considerable experience in organizing food catering. He was doing this type of work for a long time when the Volga-Moscow Canal was being built. He will help you.'

About twenty minutes later the tall stately figure of a commander of the NKVD troops came into the secretary's office. He wore three diamond-shaped badges on the collar of his soldier's blouse, which was pulled in round the waist by a tight belt. We quickly came to an agreement with him about everything. (*Razmyshleniya o Minuvshem*, Moscow Voenizdat 1963, pp. 132-133)

It is a pity that General Kalinin is shy about naming the secretary of the Moscow Municipal Council and the smart, tightly belted visitor with the three diamond-shaped badges.

After the very first battles, the 24th Army fell into the right hands. Its command was taken over by NKVD Major-General Konstantin Rakutin. And Lieutenant-General S. A. Kalinin returned to Siberia on Stalin's personal orders. Not to command the Military District, which was still abandoned, but to form ten new divisions.

The formations were to be set up in places where there had never been any units at all before. I had visited these places and got down to work.



My first excursion was to one of the Siberian towns. Some years before the war, a small town of hutments for lumberjacks had been built there in the backwoods of the forests. This was used to billet units of the formation which was being set up.

Impassable taiga surrounded the town almost on all sides. (*Ibid*, p. 182)

Everything one needs to know about 'the small town of hutments for lumberjacks' is contained in the three volumes of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *GULAG Archipelago*. Ten new divisions (more than 130,000 men) were set up in the Siberian Military District, not in places where military units had been previously, but in these 'small towns of hutments'. It may be argued that concentration-camp prisoners were not, of course, being turned into soldiers. General Kalinin was simply using the empty hutments to quarter the reservists who were arriving, and here they would be trained and turned into soldiers. Very well, let us accept that. Where then did the 'lumberjacks' go in that case? Why was the small town (and there was not just one) empty? The simple answer is that General Kalinin filled the ranks of the 24th Army with 'lumberjacks' *before the war* and prepared it in secret to be sent off westwards. That is why the regiments and divisions in this army, and in all other armies of the Second Strategic Echelon, wore black. The 'lumberjacks' were frequently not even re-clothed in military uniform. That is why the army which Kalinin secretly transferred to the western part of the Soviet Union was maintained by the Chief Directorate of Camps, or GULAG, of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, and not by the Board for Organization of the Rear of the General Staff of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. That is why Stalin placed Rakutin, a pure-blooded Chekist at the head of the 24th Army instead of the half-Chekist Kalinin. He was the one who knew best how to deal with 'lumberjacks'.

Stalin is widely known to have cleared out the GULAG during the war, by sending everyone who was capable of carrying arms to the front. Sometimes, due to lack of time or shortage of uniforms, the labour-camp prisoners were sent to fight at the front wearing their own clothes. In theory, there was no great difference: the same imitation leather boots, the same ear-flapped fake sealskin hat for winter, and a jacket, which only differed from the soldier's in its colour.

A belief persists, although nobody knows where it came from, that when Hitler attacked, Stalin sent the labour-camp prisoners to the front to 'expiate their guilt'.

Meanwhile, the German troops first encountered the black divisions and corps at the beginning of July 1941. These had begun their movements to the western frontiers of the country on 13 June 1941. The formation of the armies of the Second Strategic Echelon, which embraced all these black divisions and corps, began in June 1940, when Hitler turned away from the Soviet Union by removing almost all his divisions from the Soviet frontier.

Each army belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon was formed with the special idea that they would then make a sudden appearance on the western frontier. Each army was formed on the route of the greatest arterial railway line. Each one was set up in the area of concentration camps. The inmates of these camps were trained to observe order, they led an undemanding existence, and it was easier to pick them up from the camps than from the villages. So they were all rounded up and organized into brigades. But the main thing was that had the men in the villages been taken, it would not have been possible to avoid rumours about mobilization and war. It was precisely to avoid such rumours that the TASS statement was written.

Many years later, books are still being written and songs composed about that period. Here is a fragment by Vladimir Vysotsky:

The gates, new prisoners arriving,  
The glass-framed epitaph is blunt,  
When to our memory proclaiming  
They all went off to fight the front.

Mikhail Demin, the former criminal, wrote that 'almost the whole of Rokossovsky's army consisted of inmates of the labour camps'. (*Blatnoi 'Rusika'*, New York 1981, p. 26)

Rokossovsky commanded only one army, the 16th, in his lifetime. He forgot to say in his memoirs of what it consisted. This forgetfulness is typical of him. He begins his memoirs with the words, 'In the spring of 1940, I was in Sochi [a famous Black Sea resort] with my family,' forgetting to say that before that he had been in the GULAG. Later in the book, Rokossovsky says in passing that 'life has convinced me that one can even trust a man who at some time has allowed himself to break the law. Give such a man the chance to atone for his guilt and you will see that the good in him will come to the surface, and love for the Motherland, for his

people, and his longing to return their trust at whatever the cost, will make a courageous fighter of him.' (Marshal of the Soviet Union K. K. Rokossovsky: *Soldatsky Dolg*, Moscow Voenizdat 1968, p. 136)

This is a tacit admission that Rokossovsky had had sufficient opportunity to become convinced that a soldier could be made out of a labour-camp prisoner. But that is not the main point. What is important is that Stalin gave the labour-camp prisoners 'the opportunity to atone for their guilt' and 'become courageous fighters' *before Hitler attacked*. Armies specially adapted to recruit labour-camp prisoners into their ranks as cannon fodder were being raised even before the planned Operation Barbarossa was heard of. The 16th Army, which was the precursor of the Second Strategic Echelon, was formed on the Trans-Siberian Railway for the purpose of rapid transportation westward; and in Trans-Baikal because there was an adequate number of labour-camp inmates available. A penal army had existed there even before Rokossovsky arrived in August 1941. Before he arrived it was run by another general who had also been a victim of the Great Terror. This was Mikhail Fedorovich Lukin, who was to distinguish himself in heavy fighting at Smolensk. Gravely wounded, he was taken prisoner, and had a leg amputated. When he refused to co-operate with the Germans, he suffered four appalling years in German concentration camps. After being liberated from the German camps, he was sent once again to the GULAG.

The German High Command's encounter with Lukin's 16th Army at the end of June 1941 came as a complete surprise, as did the existence of the entire Second Strategic Echelon. It is for that reason that so many documents about this encounter have been preserved in German records. Anyone who so wishes can find many hundreds of photographs in these archives of Soviet soldiers from the Second Strategic Echelon being captured. There, among all the young lads, one may glimpse now and again the face of a man who has clearly been hardened by life, a man wearing semi-military uniform. Sometimes he is wearing a green military jacket without any badges of rank. But even the green military jacket does not make him look like a soldier. Each one of these men has strong calloused hands, a shaven head and emaciation in his face. These men had not yet passed through the *German* concentration camps. Senior officers such as Rokossovsky came into the army from the GULAG having taken the precaution to fatten themselves up in Sochi; but Sochi passed these poor fellows by.

Given that the German Army came across divisions and corps made up of labour-camp prisoners at the beginning of July, and if these divisions and corps formed part of armies which came from distant provinces

in the Urals, Siberia and Trans-Baikal, it means that Stalin put arms into the hands of labour-camp prisoners before 22 June 1941.

I do not now what German military intelligence knew in the first half of June, but let us assume that it knew very little — no more than the fragments which are known to us today:

1. Some armies were secretly moving towards the western frontiers of the Soviet Union.
2. These armies consisted of a fixed number of soldiers, sometimes entire division, each with a complement of some 15,000 men, and even entire corps, each with more than 50,000 men clad in unusual black uniforms similar to those worn in prison.
3. At least one of these armies was completely fed and maintained by the GULAG of the NKVD.
4. The Soviet government publicly and categorically denied in the TASS statement that there was anything unusual in these troop movements or in their mass character, speaking simply of 'normal training exercises'.

How was the head of German military intelligence to interpret the facts before him? There was, of course, only one interpretation: they must attack Stalin, otherwise they would be his victims.

## CHAPTER 25

### The *Kombrigs* and the *Komdivs*

*Only he who has first conquered his own  
people can overcome a strong enemy.*

SHAN VAN, 5th century B.C.

We began the story about the black divisions and corps with the 63rd Rifle Corps of the 21st Army. Mention was made there of Komkor Petrovsky and Kombrig Fokanov. Why were they not generals? The answer is simple. In the black corps and divisions it was not just the soldiers and officers, but also the senior commanders, who were veterans of the 'small towns of hutments for lumberjacks'.

The military ranks of *kombrig*, *komdiv*, *komkor* and *koman-darm* were in use in the Red Army for senior command staff officers before 1940. Diamond-shaped badges on uniform collar tabs were used to distinguish the different ranks — one badge for a *kombrig*, two for a *komvid*, three for a *komkor*, and four for a *komandarm*. In May 1940, when Stalin was putting his senior command staff in order, he gave new titles of rank in the generals' series, ordered that generals' uniform trousers should have side stripes and, as insignia, that they should wear stars instead of diamond-shaped badges. The new ranks of major-general, lieutenant-general, colonel-general and general of the army were in no way connected with old military ranks. A Government Commission carried out a complete re-grading of the entire senior command staff, in the course of which many *kombrigs* became colonels, so that they were in effect demoted

to the level they were at several years before. Some *kombrigs* became major-generals, and Kombrig I. N. Muzychenko became a lieutenant-general. Many *komandarms* became colonel-generals, although some were demoted to lieutenant-general. But Komkor G. K. Zhukov was given the highest general's rank, that of general of the army. One little known fact, incidentally, is that Zhukov was the first officer of the Red Army to be given the rank of general. In all, 1056 senior commanders were given the military ranks of general and admiral in June 1940.

The introduction of these generals' titles was Stalin's offering of honey-cake after the great thrashings of 1937 and 1938. Why was Comrade Stalin being so kind? Because he was planning to set them to practise their trade in the foreseeable future. Had it been otherwise, he would have been in no hurry with the honey-cake.

But one thousand generals was not enough for Stalin. Divisions were being raised in increasing numbers, corps and armies were being formed. Colonels were being put into generals' posts. At one point there were no fewer than one hundred colonels holding generals' posts, commanding divisions; we have already encountered Colonel I. I. Fedyuninsky in the post of commander of the 15th Rifle Corps of the 5th Army.

There were not enough commanders either. As long as Hitler stood facing him, Stalin could get by with available personnel. But as Hitler turned his face westwards, then Stalin found himself in great need of commanders of senior rank. That explains why the prison wagons were speeding towards Moscow. After arrival, former commanders who had passed through the GULAG were met with politeness in Lubyanka jail, where it was explained that there had been a mistake. Criminal proceedings would be stopped, and previous convictions expunged. The commanders then hastened to Sochi, and from there to the colours.

Not every commander was treated with the same respect. Some were given a general's rank, including Major-General Rokossovsky, the future Marshal of the Soviet Union. But most of those who were released from prison were left with their old military rank of *kombrig*, *komdiv* or *komkor*. This brought about a strange situation in the Red Army. There were two parallel systems of military ranks for the senior command staff, two systems of badges of rank, and two different forms of dress. Some commanders went about proudly wearing their stars, striped pants and smart dress uniforms while others, doing exactly the same work, wore only their modest little diamond-shaped badges.

One method used by the Chekists in Kiev during the Red Terror has been described by the Russian historian, S. P. Mel'gunov, and confirmed by documents. A prisoner who refused to answer questions would without further ado be placed in a coffin and buried. He would then be dug up, and the interrogation would continue.

Stalin did much the same thing in the 'pre-war period'. Thousands of commanders fell into the hands of the GULAG during the years of the Great Purge. Some of them had been condemned to death, others given

lengthy prison sentences which they were serving at Kolyma. According to many witnesses (for example, *Kolyma Stories*, 1978, by V. Shalamov) life there was by no means preferable to being shot. And now here were people who had already said goodbye to life, being transported in comfortable railway carriages, being fed and fattened in health centres reserved for members of the government, being given back their former authority and allowed an opportunity to 'expiate their guilt'. However, the rank of general was not conferred permanently, and carried no guarantees . . . Can we imagine how all these *kombrigs* and *komdivs* were bursting to get down to work?

Stalin's calculation was correct. Many of those who were released were bursting to go into action and prove that they were worthy of trust. These included Komdiv Grigory Alexeyevich Vorozheikin, who was put in charge of the air arm of the 21st Army of the Second Strategic Echelon. He distinguished himself in the initial battles in July 1941 and was granted the rank of air major-general. By August he had become Chief of Staff of the Air Forces of the Red Army. He attained a new rank every year until he became a marshal in 1944.

Kombrig Alexander Gorbатов, released in March 1941, was given the post of deputy commander of the 25th Rifle Corps of the 19th Army, which formed part of the Second Strategic Echelon. He rose to the rank of general and to the post of officer commanding the airborne assault troops of the Soviet Army.

This is how he describes his release:

My wife had been to the NK VD, and was on wings when she left there. She said that they had received her very well, spoke politely, were interested in how she was managing to live, did she need help with money . . .

On the night of 5 March 1941 at two o'clock in the morning, an investigator drove me in a small car to friends of mine in Komsomorskaya Square. He dropped me and politely took his leave.

'Here is my telephone number. If you need anything, ring me at any time. You can count on me to help you.'

Like a relic, I was carrying along a bag containing clothes, galoshes and sugar lumps which were black as coal, and dried biscuits which I had kept should I fall ill. (*Gody i Voiny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1965, pp. 168-169)

Kombrig Gorbatov, like many others, was released on a carefully calculated timetable: a month's leave in a health centre before acceptance for duty. By the time the TASS report was published, the gallant *kombrig* was secretly on his way westwards with his 'Annushkas'.

As a true labour-camp prisoner, Gorbatov collected 'souvenirs' of the GULAG. Luckily for him, he did not need them again. Others were not so fortunate. Kombrig I. F. Dashichev put his snow boots on for the second time. He was released in March 1941, only to be imprisoned again in October. He remained in the GULAG until at least 1953.

*Kombrigs*, *komdivs* and *komkors* were also used to reinforce the First Strategic Echelon. Kombrig M. S. Tkachev, for example, was posted to the 109th Rifle Division of the 9th Special Rifle Corps; Kombrig I. P. Ivanov was appointed Chief of Staff of the 6th Army; Komdiv A. D. Sokolov, Commander of the 16th Mechanized Corps of the 12th Army; Komdiv G. A. Burichenkov, officer commanding the southern zone of the anti-aircraft defences; Komdiv P. G. Alekseev, officer commanding air forces, 13th Army; Kombrig S. S. Krushin was made Chief of Staff for the Air Force in the North West Front; Kombrig A. S. Titov, head of artillery in the 18th Army, and many more.

In addition, *kombrigs* and *komdivs* were used to fill the gaps left in the hierarchies of the military districts when the Second Strategic Echelon moved off to the western border. Kombrig N. I. Khristofanov became military commissar for the Stavropol' Region; and Kombrig M. V. Khripunov, a chief of branch in the Moscow Military District. The headquarters, as we saw, had been occupied by Chekists with little understanding of military matters after all the commanders had left for the Romanian frontier. So poor old Khripunov was summoned from the GULAG to help them.

But even so, most of the *komdivs*, *kombrigs* and *komkors* were earmarked for the Second Strategic Echelon. It is here we find Komkor Petrovsky. We remember that his last post had been deputy officer commanding the Moscow Military District. After this he was imprisoned. He was released in November 1940 and ordered to form the 63rd Rifle Corps. This is where the black corps began. Of the three divisions in the corps, two were commanded by Kombrigs Ya. S. Fokanov and V. S. Rakovsky. Colonel N. A. Prishchepa commanded the third



division. He was not a *kombrig*, although he had also been a prisoner. There were majors, captains and lieutenants too.

The neighbouring 67th Corps of the same army was full of *kombrigs*. There was even a *kombrig* at the head of the corps, F. F. Zhmachenko, who later became a colonel-general. Look at any of these armies being secretly moved from the depth of the country, and everywhere you will see hordes of *kombrigs* who had just been released. There were two corps in the 22nd Army with a *kombrig* in each - Povetkin of the 51st Corps and I. P. Karmanov, of the 62nd. The chiefs of staff, of artillery, of engineers, and of any other service, were all officers just released from prison. Two divisions in this army consisted predominantly of 'lumberjacks', with commanders from the same milieu - Kombrig Ya. S. Adamson of the H2nd Rifle and Kombrig A. I. Zygin of the I74th.

The process of releasing *kombrigs*, *komdivs* and *komkors* was begun before Operation Barbarossa was known about, and peaked at the moment when German troops left for France. Having forced a corridor through the neutral states which stood between him and Germany, Stalin now offered a 'second birth' to an enormous number of commanders who had been condemned to a rapid or slow death in the camps. These people had once held arms and great power, but every one of them had become a prisoner under sentence of death and was now burning with a desire to get back to the heights from which Stalin had toppled them. While Stalin officially reassured Germany that nothing important was happening, these officers - at the head of vast armies of fellow ex-convicts - were secretly heading for the frontier.

## CHAPTER 26

# Why the Second Strategic Echelon was Formed

*Mobilization is war, and we do not contemplate any other interpretation.*

Marshal B. M. SHAPOSHNIKOV

*(Vospominaniya M., Voenizdat 1974, p. 558)*

Shortly after the first German troops began to invade the Soviet Union, General I. V. Tyulenev was having a conversation in the Kremlin with Zhukov. 'I reported it to Stalin', Zhukov said, 'but at first he didn't believe it, and thought it was a provocation by some German generals.' (*Cherez Tri Voiny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1960, p. 141) This creates a serious contradiction for communist historians who argue that Stalin carried out the largest regrouping of troops in history because he sensed that a German attack was imminent. Even *after* the attack had actually begun, Stalin refused to believe that it was happening.

Moving the Second Strategic Echelon was not a reaction to what Hitler was doing. This vast railway operation needed long and detailed preparation and accurate preparatory planning. Marshal of the Soviet Union S. K. Kurkotkin states that the General Staff passed all the necessary documents on the troop transfers to the People's Commissariat for railways on 21 February 1941. (*Tyl Sovetskoykh Vooruzhenykh Sil v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, Moscow Voenizdat 1977, p. 33) But the General Staff was asked for more time to prepare these documents with due thoroughness. They would have to tell the railwaymen what transport to provide, how to camouflage the loads and the movements, what routes to take, and where to prepare for massive troop disembarkations. In order to have all this ready, the General Staff would have had to have known the details of troop movements in advance. It means we must go further back to find the decision to set up the Second Strategic Echelon, and where the planning began for its transfer and for its combat use.

In fact, the process was set in motion by a Politburo decision, and began on 19 August 1939 - before Hitler had invaded Poland or gone to war with Britain and France. At no time did it falter, but gradually gathered

momentum. Let us take just one Military District, the Urals, as an example. Two new divisions were formed there in September 1939, the 85th and the 159th. On 21 June 1941, we find the 85th right on the German frontier near Augustow, in a sector where the NK VD was cutting down the barbed wire. We also find the 159th Division right on the frontier in Rava-Russkaya, where it was part of the 6th (heavy shock) Army. The 110th, 125th, and 128th Rifle Divisions were formed in the same Urals Military District at the end of 1939, and later we find each one of them on the German border. Not only that, Soviet sources tell us that the 125th was 'directly on the frontier' of East Prussia. The Urals District raised many more regiments and divisions, and they were all moved quietly and without fuss nearer to the borders.

While the Second Strategic Echelon still did not officially exist, the senior Soviet military leadership was working out methods by which the troops of the First and Second Strategic Echelons could co-operate. In the second half of 1940, General D. G. Pavlov held a meeting with the officers commanding the armies and the chiefs of staff in the Western Special Military District. Among all the thousands of Soviet generals and admirals, D. G. Pavlov was fourth highest in seniority.

The Western Special Military District was making grandiose plans to hold command-staff exercises. Plans of action were worked out for commanders, headquarters, and communications systems to be used in the initial period of war. In the course of the exercises, the Soviet headquarters had to move to the west in exactly the same way as they would prepare to do as war began. 'But these headquarters which are right on the frontier?' Colonel-General Sandalov, Chief of Staff of the 4th Army, asked perplexedly. 'Where will they move to?' (L. M. Sandalov, *Perezhito*, Moscow Voenizdat 1966, p. 65) Nobody keeps headquarters 'right on the frontier' when preparing for a defensive war, but Soviet headquarters had been moved there, and stayed there, immediately after the common border with Germany had been established. The reaction of this chief of staff of an army on the frontier is also interesting. In his mind the order to move was only associated with the concepts of 'move to the west', and 'move across the frontier'; it did not occur to him that in a war the headquarters could be moved elsewhere.

In addition to the commanders of the First Strategic Echelon, the meeting was also attended by highly-placed guests from the Second Strategic Echelon, led by General I. V. Tyulenev, officer commanding the Moscow Military District. Taking advantage of Tyulenev's presence, General D. G. Pavlov explained to

Lieutenant-General V. I. Chuikov, the officer commanding 4th Army and a future Marshal of the Soviet Union, the objectives of the Second Strategic Echelon:

'When the troops get here from the internal military districts,' said Pavlov, 'and when a density has been achieved in your army's zone of seven and a half kilometres per division, then there can be movement forward without any doubts about success.' (*Ibid*)

The presence of General Tyulenev at this meeting is very significant. He already knew in 1940 what his role would be in the initial period of war. This was to report with his headquarters to the frontier military district, when the First Strategic Echelon would cross the state frontier. This Soviet plan was changed in February 1941 under pressure from Zhukov, who had by then taken over the General Staff. In the changed version, instead of going to the German frontier, General Tyulenev and his headquarters had to move secretly to the Romanian frontier, for that was where the main efforts of the Red Army were to be concentrated.

The troop density of seven and a half kilometres per division which the Soviet generals were using is the standard one for an offensive. At that time a division would have been allocated a stretch of terrain some three to four times greater for defensive operations. This same meeting also discussed how the movement of Soviet troops to the frontier could be camouflaged. 'Movements . . . of new divisions,' the meeting decided, 'can be carried out under the guise of training refresher courses.'

By 13 June 1941, 77 divisions from the internal military districts were headed for the Soviet western frontiers 'under the guise of training refresher courses'. In that situation, Hitler did not sit back and wait. While the Soviet generals were establishing 'the regulation density of seven and a half kilometres per division', he struck the first blow.

After Germany had begun its preventive war, the Second Strategic Echelon, like the First, was used for defence. But this in no way means that this was the purpose for which it had been created. General Mikhail Ilyich Kazakov said of the Second Echelon that 'after the war began, cardinal changes had to be made in the plan governing its use'. (VIZH1972, No. 12, p. 46)

Major-General Vassily Ivanovich Zemskov expressed himself more exactly: 'We were compelled to use these reserves for defence, and not in accordance with the plan for an offensive.' (VIZH 1971, No. 10, p. 13)

General of the Army Simion Pavlovich Ivanov outlines the original plan behind the formation of the Second Strategic Echelon:

If the troops of the First Strategic Echelon were to succeed ... in carrying military operations on to enemy territory even before the main forces had been deployed, the Second Strategic Echelon would have to augment the efforts of the First Echelon by developing a response attack as laid down by the general strategic plan. (*Nachal'nyi Period Voiny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974, p. 206)

The reader must not be misled by the term 'response attack' in this sentence. Its meaning, as used here, may be understood by glancing at the Winter War with Finland. Almost 50 years later, the Soviet version is still that Finland attacked, and that the Red Army only delivered a 'response attack'.

Lieutenant-General S. A. Kalinin tells of the mood which prevailed then in the Second Strategic Echelon. Before the secret troop movements began, he was training troops in the Siberian Military District for operational action. During the exercises, the general heard this opinion expressed by a very junior officer: 'Those fortifications there will not be used, that's for sure. We're getting ready not for defence but attack, you see. We'll hit the enemy on his own territory.' (*Razmyshleniya o Minuvshem*, Moscow 1963, p. 124) General Kalinin relayed the young officer's words with a certain irony: how naive can one be, he implied. But he did not say from where the young officer had got such ideas. If the young officer was wrong, General Kalinin should have corrected him, and then pointed out to all the commanders that there was something which the junior officers were failing to understand, and that was that the orientation of the training was not quite right. He then should have immediately questioned the commanders in the adjacent battalions, regiments and divisions, and if he then found that this 'incorrect' opinion was being repeated, he should have issued a stern command throughout the 24th Army ordering that the orientation of the training be corrected. But General Kalinin did not do this, and the troops continued to be trained 'to fight on enemy territory'.

It was not the fault of the young commanders that they were not being trained for defence. It was not even the fault of General Kalinin. He was only the officer commanding one army, when all armies were being trained to fight 'on enemy territory'. He reveals his own attitude to the issue in an interesting anecdote. After

he had handed over the command of the 24th Army to General K. Rakutin, Kalinin returned to Siberia, where he trained ten new divisions 'in the small towns of hutments for lumberjacks'. 'From where do I begin?' he asked himself.

On what has the main attention of the troops to be concentrated when they do their training, on defence or attack? The position at the fronts was still tense. Red Army troops were continuing to fight heavy defensive battles.

Experience gained in the fighting showed that we were far from adept on occasions when constructing our defence. Defensive positions were frequently ill-equipped in the engineering sense. Sometimes there was not even a trench system at the first position. The battle formation of the defenders often consisted of only one echelon and a small reserve, which diminished the troops' resistance. In many cases the men were badly trained in anti-tank defence, and the notorious tankophobia, or fear of tanks, was present among the troops.

But at the same time the thought occurred - 'We shall not always be defending ourselves. Attack - that's the compulsory thing . . .

'What is more, defence is not considered, nor has it ever been, to be the main form of military action . . . this means that the troops must be trained for offensive fighting . . .' I shared this view with the commanders. We all came to the same conclusion. The principal efforts in training must be directed at carefully working through offensive action. (*Ibid*, pp. 182-183)

The first duty of the state and its army at the time was to stop the enemy, if only at the walls of Moscow. Yet it was obvious to everyone that the Red Army was not ready for defence - it was not even preparing for it.

Even after the German attack, when the Wehrmacht was threatening the very existence of the communist regime, General Kalinin was going on training his troops only to attack. What had he been training them to do before the German invasion began?

As a result of German preventive action, the Second Strategic Echelon had to be used for defence, and not for its intended purpose. I have sufficient documentation to establish the role which had been assigned to it by the Soviet war plans. Here, as in the First Echelon, each army had its own unique individuality, and its own personality and character. Most armies travelled light, like a strong frame which had to be filled in after it had arrived in the forests in the western parts of the country and been deployed there. The standard complement of the armies in the Second Strategic Echelon was two rifle corps, each with three rifle divisions. This was not a shock army, but an ordinary one with a reduced complement.

On arrival in the western areas of the country, each army immediately set about completing its mobilization and supplementing its divisions and corps. It was quite logical that most of the armies in the Second Strategic Echelon did not have mechanized corps with large numbers of tanks. First, such corps were set up mainly in the western parts of the country. If the need arose, they did not have to be moved westwards from provinces deep in the Urals and Siberia. It would be more simple to reinforce them where they already were by light armies arriving from these distant provinces. There was an even better alternative. This was to use by far the greater part of the mechanized corps in the first surprise strike, in order to make it an extraordinarily powerful one; then to throw the Second Strategic Echelon into battle, and transfer to its light armies all the tanks which had survived the first operations.

There was, however, an exception among the armies of the Second Echelon. The 16th was manifestly a shock army. Its complement included a full-strength mechanized corps which had over 1,000 tanks. In addition, the detached 57th Tank Division, under the command of Colonel V. A. Mishulin, was moved westwards along with this army. The 57th Tank Division was under the operational command of the officer commanding the 16th Army. Taking this division into account, the 16th Army had more than 1,200 tanks, and on full complement this figure must have exceeded 1,340.

The 19th Army was even more powerful. This had been moved secretly from the Northern Caucasus. Its complement included four corps, including the 26th Mechanized Corps. There is sufficient evidence to show that the 25th Mechanized Corps, under the command of Major-General Simion Krivoshein, had also been earmarked for the 19th Army. This clearly was a heavy shock army. Even its rifle corps were organized in an unusual way and were headed by very high-ranking commanders. The 34th Rifle Corps, under Lieutenant-

General R. P. Khmel'nitsky, for example, had four rifle and one mountain rifle divisions on its complement, as well as several heavy artillery regiments.

The presence of the mountain rifle divisions in these armies was not accidental. The 19th Army, the most powerful in the Second Strategic Echelon, was secretly deployed, but not against Germany. The whole Soviet grand design is revealed here- the most powerful army in the First Strategic Echelon was deployed against Romania; and the most powerful army in the Second Strategic Echelon, right at its back, against Romania as well.

The 16th Army, the second most powerful in the Second Strategic Echelon, was deployed alongside. It could also have been used against Romania and its vital oilfields, but it was more probable that the plan was to use it against Hungary alongside the 26th (shock) and the 12th (mountain shock) Armies, cutting off the oil from its users.

Hitler disrupted this deployment with his invasion. The 16th and 19th Armies had to move immediately to Smolensk, thereby putting back the 'liberation' of Romania and Hungary by several years.

Immediately after the partition of Poland in the autumn of 1939, a great number of Soviet troops were transferred from permanent garrisons on to the new frontier. The new territories, however, had not been adapted to the stationing of large numbers of troops, especially modern troops equipped with a great deal of weapons and technical equipment.

The official *History of the Second World War* records how 'the troops in the western frontier districts experienced great difficulties. Everything had to be built and equipped anew, bases and supply points, airfields, the road network, junctions and lines of communication . . .' (1973-77, Vol. 4, p. 27)

The official *History of the Byelorussian Military District* paints a similar picture:



The displacement of formations and units of the District to the western areas of Byelorussia gave rise to not inconsiderable difficulties . . . The personnel of the 3rd, 4th and 10th Armies had to build and repair barracks, depots and camps, and equip training grounds, firing ranges and tank training areas. The troops were under great strain. (KBVO, Moscow Voenizdat 1983, p. 84)

General Sandalov says that in 1939-40, depots, wooden huts and any buildings at all were used for billeting troops. But the troops kept on coming. 'There was a great pile-up of troops in Brest-Litovsk . . . four-tiered bunks were fitted up in the lower floors of barrack buildings.' (*Na Moskovskom Napravlenii*, Moscow Nauka 1970, p. 41)

Lieutenant-General V. N. Kurdyumov, head of the Combat Training Directorate of the Red Army said at a command staff meeting in December 1940 that the troops in the new regions were often compelled to do domestic work instead of doing combat training. At the same meeting, Lieutenant-General Ya. N. Fedorenko said that almost all his tank units had moved their deployment garrisons three or four times towards the border during 1939-40. The result was that more than half of the units who had gone to new locations had not had any ranges to train on.

In 1939 and 1940, at the cost of strenuous effort, the enormous number of troops belonging to the First Strategic Echelon accommodated and quartered. But then, in February 1941, slowly at first and then at an ever increasing speed, the transfer began of the huge numbers of troops in the Second Strategic Echelon.

At that point, a change of considerable importance took place. *Soviet troops ceased to concern themselves about how they would spend the following winter.* All the troops of the First Strategic Echelon left their dug-outs and partially built barracks and moved directly onto the frontier. (Marshal I. Kh. Bagramyan, *VIZH* 1976, No. I, p. 62) The troops in the Second Strategic Echelon who were being moved from the interior of the country did not use the uncompleted barracks and small military centres which the First Echelon had left behind. The arriving troops did not mean to spend the winter in these places, and were in no way preparing themselves for winter. They no longer made dug-outs, they did not build training grounds or firing ranges; they did not even dig trenches.

There are many official documents and memoirs by generals and marshals to show that the troops were now quartered only under canvas. In the early spring of 1941, the 188th Rifle Division of the 11th Army's 16th Rifle Corps was being formed in the Baltic area. It took in reservists in May. The division struck a temporary summer encampment under canvas near Kozlovo-Rua, some 45-50 kilometres from the state frontier. Under cover of the TASS report, the division abandoned this encampment and moved to the frontier. Any attempt to find even a hint of preparations for winter would be bound to fail. It was the same story with the 28th Tank Division, which was being deployed nearby.

Marshal of the Soviet Union K. S. Moskalenko, who was then a brigade commander with the rank of major-general, recalls the orders given to him by Major-General M. I. Potapov, officer commanding the 5th Army:

'The formation of your brigade has begun here . . . You will take that section of forest, and build a camp . . . ' This powerful, full-strength brigade, with a complement of more than 6,000 men armed with more than one hundred heavy guns of a calibre of up to 107mm, had the camp working in three days. After this, the intensive combat training began. It went on for eight to ten hours daily, and this did not include night work, homework, arms maintenance, and weapons training. (*Na Yugo — Zapadnom Napravleny*, Moscow Nauka 1969, p. 18)

If the Soviet troops had been preparing for defence, they would have had to dig in and make a continuous line of trenches stretching from the Arctic to the mouth of the Danube. But they did not do this. If they had intended to spend another winter in peace and quiet, then, from the beginning of April, they should have been building. They did not do this either. Some divisions had left half-built barracks somewhere behind. But many divisions formed in the spring of 1941 had neither barracks nor hutments, yet they were not even making dug-outs. So where did they intend to spend the winter, if not in central and southern Europe?

Major-General A. Zaporozhchenko has left us a remarkable description of the movements of troops towards the frontier:

The concealed movement of the shock groupings up to the areas from where the offensive would begin was the concluding phase of the strategic deployment. This movement was carried out over several nights prior to the attack. The covering action for the movement was organized by forces of reinforced battalions which had been previously moved up to the frontier, and which were controlling those sectors of the front which had been allotted to the divisions, until the main forces arrived.

The redeployment of air force units to other bases began in the last days of May and was concluded by 18 June. At the same time fighter and military aircraft were concentrated at airfields up to 40 kilometres from the frontier, while bombers were put on airfields no more than 180 kilometres from the border. ( *VIZH* 1984, No. 4, p. 42)

The only surprising thing about this description is the date -18 June. The Soviet air forces did not complete their redeployment to other bases on that day - they had only began it on 13 June under cover of the TASS report. So why does the general talk about 18 June? The fact is that he was speaking not about the Red Army, but about the German Wehrmacht. The same thing was happening in Germany: troops were being moved up to the frontier at night. Reinforced battalions were being sent ahead. The arriving divisions were occupying the departure areas for the offensive, or to put it more simply, they were hiding in the forests. The actions of one colossal army were the mirror image of the actions of the other. The only respect in which they failed to coincide was time. At first the Soviet troops were ahead. Then Hitler went into the lead by two weeks. He had fewer troops and had to move them over very short distances. Interestingly, at the beginning of June the German Army was in a most disadvantageous position. A great number of the troops were in military trains. The guns were in one train, the shells in another. Combat battalions were disembarked in places where there were no headquarters; and headquarters were set down in places where there were no troops. There were no communications, so that for security reasons radio stations were simply forbidden to operate until military action began. The German troops did not make dug-outs either, nor did they build ranges. The greatest similarity, however, was the massive quantity of supplies, troops, aircraft hospitals, headquarters and aerodromes, all up against the Soviet frontiers. Few people knew what was planned; that was the most closely guarded secret of the German High Command.

Everything that we have seen in the Red Army, and have taken for foolishness and idiocy, had in fact been done two weeks before in the German Army. It was neither foolishness nor idiocy, but preparation for a massive offensive.

What should have happened following the full build-up of troops belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon in the western parts of the country? The answer to this question was given long before World War II began, by the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army, General V. Sikorsky: 'A strategic wait cannot be continued after all forces have been mobilized and their build-up completed.' (*Budushchaya Voina*, Moscow Voenizdat 1936, p. 240). The Soviet General Staff decided that his book should be published in Moscow for the benefit of Soviet commanders. It corroborated Soviet military thought, which was firmly convinced that 'the worst thing in modern conditions is the urge to stick to waiting tactics in the initial period of war'. (*Voina i Revolyutsiya* 1931, Book 8, p. n)

Marshal of the Soviet Union Boris Mikhailovich Shaposhni-kov, Chief of the Soviet General Staff, held firm views about this.

If reservists who have been called up have to spend a long time under the colours without any prospect of war in view, the result can be a negative effect on their morale. Their combat readiness deteriorates instead of improving . . . In a word, no matter what the command, and even more what the diplomats might wish, once mobilization has been declared, the guns might start firing on their own for purely military reasons.

Thus the proposition must be considered doubtful that it is possible in modern conditions of warfare for mobilized armies to remain for a long period in a state of military peace without going over to active fighting. (*Mozg Army*, Vol. 3, GIZ, 1929)

Soviet military thinking considered then, as it does now, that 'mobilization, concentration, operational deployment and mounting the first operations are all parts of one and the same single uninterrupted process'.

(VIZH 1986, No. I, p. 15) Having begun to mobilize and thereby to concentrate troops and deploy them operationally, the Soviet command could no longer stop this process, or even slow it down. It is roughly the same thing as thrusting one's arm sharply downwards, unfastening the holster, pulling out the revolver, pointing it at the enemy and cocking the trigger all in one movement. After that, whether you like it or not, firing is inevitable, for as soon as your hand is thrust downwards, your opponent is doing the same thing just as quickly, or even more so.

In trying to answer the question of who started the Soviet -German war in 1941, communist historians apply the criterion that the guilty party was the one who fired the first shot. But why should we not apply another criterion? Why should we not turn our attention to the one who was first to begin mobilization, to concentrate his troops and to deploy them operationally? Who first reached for his pistol?

Soviet apologists argue that while Shaposhnikov - and modern Soviet strategists, for that matter - understood that the movement of troops was war, Zhukov did not. This was very far from the case. In order to understand the determination being shown by the Soviet High Command in what it was doing, we must go back to 1932, to the 4th Cavalry Division. This was not just the best division of Soviet cavalry; it was the best in the whole of the Red Army. Until 1931, this division was quartered in the Leningrad Military District in places where the Imperial Horseguards had once been. The conditions in which this division lived and trained for battle can easily be imagined. Their living conditions were nothing less than magnificent. In 1932, for urgent operational reasons, this division was moved to another, this time totally unprepared, base. Marshal Zhukov wrote that

this division was compelled to spend eighteen months building itself barracks, stables, a headquarters, living quarters, depots and an entire training base. The result was that this brilliantly trained division was turned into a bad, unskilled military unit. A shortage of building materials, wet weather and other unfavourable conditions prevented the building being completed by the time winter came. This had an extremely bad effect on the general condition of the division and its combat preparedness. Discipline became slack . . . (*Vospominaniya iRazmyshleniya*, Moscow, APN 1969, p. 118)

In spring, the best division in the Red Army was 'in a state of rapid collapse' and 'was unfit for battle'. The divisional commander was held to be chiefly to blame for this and suffered the consequences. A new commander was then sought for the division, and G. K. Zhukov was appointed to the post. It was from here

that his ascent began. Zhukov's work was closely followed by S. K. Timoshenko, the corps commander, and even by the People's Commissar for Defence himself, K. E. Voroshilov. The division bore his name and was considered to be the best. Voroshilov expected Zhukov to restore past glories to the 4th Cavalry Division. Zhukov achieved this by draconian measures, proving that he could be entrusted with any theoretically impracticable task.

By 1941, all the characters in this story had risen considerably in rank. K. E. Voroshilov was a member of the Politburo, a Marshal of the Soviet Union and chairman of the Defence Committee; S. K. Timoshenko was a Marshal of the Soviet Union and People's Commissar for Defence; and Zhukov was a full general, deputy People's Commissar for Defence and Chief of the General Staff. These three together directed the secret Soviet troop movements towards the German frontier. They knew better than we did, and not from theoretical deduction, that not even one division could be left to spend the winter in the open forest. A soldier can spend the winter in any conditions, but that was not the problem. The problem was that on the Soviet western frontiers there were no firing ranges, training grounds, tank training areas, training centres, or conditions needed for combat training. If the troops were not put into battle immediately, there would be an inevitable deterioration in their combat readiness. They knew that not even one division could be left for the winter in a place which had not been prepared in any way. They knew that culprits would be found, and they also knew what happened to culprits. But even so, they moved practically the entire Red Army to places where there was nowhere to do combat training.

The war did not begin as Stalin wanted and therefore it did not end as he had wanted either. Stalin got only half of Europe. But in order to understand what Stalin intended, let us for a moment envisage a situation in which Hitler did not attack the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, but decided to postpone Operation Barbarossa and capture Gibraltar, for example, instead.

What would Stalin have done in that situation? He could not have turned back his massive armies. Many of the armies and corps which were set up in the first half of 1941 had nowhere to go back to, apart from the 'small towns of hutments for lumberjacks'. It would have taken many months to move the troops back, paralysed the railways and brought on an economic catastrophe. What would have been the sense of spending six months concentrating troops in secret, and then spending another six months dispersing them?

But even if a total dispersal had immediately followed the total concentration, it would have been quite impossible to complete this process before winter set in.

Nor could Stalin have left his vast armies to winter in the forests of the frontier area. An army quickly loses its fighting capability without intensive combat training. In addition, the process by which the armies of the Second Strategic Echelon were raised and moved westwards was kept, for whatever reason, a close secret by Stalin. For how long could he have been sure of preserving that secret had he left these armies with their countless troops on the border for even a few weeks?

This is the central question of this book: if the Red Army could not go back, but could not stay long in the border area either, what was left for it to do? It is a question which all communist historians are afraid to answer. But we need look no further than the opinion of a general who 'was a deputy chief of the operations headquarters in the General Staff from May 1940 onwards, and who worked on the operational part of the plan for the strategic deployment of the Soviet armed forces in the north, north-west, and western sectors'. (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 27) Everything was correct in his planning. That was why he became a Marshal of the Soviet Union only eighteen months after beginning the war as a major-general. He was one of those who was closest to Stalin. It was he, and not Zhukov, who controlled the Red Army in the last years of Stalin's life, and who fell from high rank when Stalin died.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Alexander Mikhailovich Vasi-levsky was perfectly frank in his appraisal of the situation: 'The fears that the allegedly aggressive intentions of the USSR might cause a clamour in the West had to be thrown overboard. We had then reached . . . the Rubicon of war, and had to take a firm step forward.' ( *VIZH* 1978, No. 2, p. 68)

In every grandiose scheme, there comes a critical point after which events become irreversible. For the Soviet Union that point was the date of 13 June 1941. After that day, war for Stalin not only became inevitable: it became inevitable in the summer of 1941, no matter how Hitler might act.

## CHAPTER 27

### Undeclared War

*In conditions where we are surrounded by enemies, a sudden attack from us, an unexpected manoeuvre and speed will decide everything.*

STALIN (Vol. 5, p. 225, 1923)

The Soviet Union had five military districts on its borders where troops were assembling unremittingly and in secret. All eight internal military districts had been entirely abandoned by the Soviet High Command. All armies, corps and divisions, and almost all generals and their staffs had left these internal military districts in secret for the Soviet western frontiers.

In addition to the five western frontier and the eight internal military districts, there were the Far East Front and three eastern frontier military districts: the Transcaucasian, the Central Asian and the Trans-Baikal districts.

In spite of the TASS denial of 9 May 1941, intensive preparations had been going on in the Central Asian and Transcaucasian military districts for the 'liberation' of Iran. The Central Asian district had been allotted the main role, while the Transcaucasian had been given an auxiliary part to play. As was usual, the final touch to the preparations was a large-scale exercise to be attended by the senior command staff of the Red Army. General Zhukov and his deputy Lieu-tenant-General N. F. Vatutin were to attend these exercises in May.

General Shtemenko, who was then a colonel in the Chief Operations Directorate of the General Staff, recalled the uneasy atmosphere surrounding these preparations:

The main staff of our branch set off for Tiflis at the end of May. We were reinforced by other branches . . . Just before we left, it was explained that neither the Chief of the General Staff nor his deputy could come,



and that the exercises -would be conducted by the officers commanding the troops, D. T. Kozlov in the Transcaucasian Military District and S. G. Trofimenko in the Central Asian Military District. However, the day after we reached Tiflis, Lieutenant-General Kozlov was urgently summoned to Moscow. There was a feeling that there was something out of the ordinary going on in Moscow. (General S. M. Shtemenko, *General'ny Shtab v Gody Voyny*, 1968, p. 20)

So the Transcaucasian Military District, which was a frontier one, was left without a commanding officer right on the eve of the 'liberation' of Iran. It may be argued that General Kozlov's deputy, Lieutenant-General P. M. Batov, could have taken over the command of the district. Batov, however, was otherwise engaged. Using the best troops in the Transcaucasian Military District, Batov set up the 9th Special Rifle Corps. He then transferred it to the Crimea where, in co-operation with the Black Sea Fleet, it was given intensive training in naval assault landing operations. The Black Sea Fleet also trained a division from this corps in making assault landings from warships.

The Transcaucasian Military District remained without its commanding officer and his deputy until August 1941, when General Kozlov returned to carry out the 'liberation' of Iran. Here too, Hitler had upset Stalin's plans. Because of Hitler's unforeseen actions, the 'liberation' of Iran had to be postponed for a few months. When it did take place, it had to be done with reduced forces, so the 'liberation' had to do without the planned 'radical socio-political reforms'.

General S. G. Trofimenko, the officer commanding the Central Asian Military District, had been summoned to Moscow by Stalin, and the district's headquarters had been seriously weakened and 'dispossessed like kulaks'. In March 1941, Colonel N. M. Khlebnikov was called to Moscow from the headquarters of the Central Asian Military District and appointed Commander of Artillery in the 2yth Army in the Baltic area. The 2yth Army made its first official appearance in the western part of the country in May 1941, but cadres allotted to it had gathered along the frontiers considerably earlier. Major-General M. I. Kazakov, who was chief of staff in the district and later became a full general, was also called to Moscow in the wake of Khlebnikov and many other colonels and generals. He later wrote that he had observed from the aircraft an enormous number of military trains carrying troops and war material out of Central Asia. (*Nad Kartoi Bylykh Srazheny*, Moscow Voeniz-dat 1971)

General A. A. Luchinsky (then a colonel commanding the 83rd Mountain Rifle Division) was travelling in one of these trains. He shared a compartment with Major-General (later General) Ivan Efimovich Petrov. Luchinsky's recollections of Petrov are invaluable. 'We had been summoned to the People's Commissariat for Defence. We were travelling together in the same compartment when a radio announcement proclaimed that Nazi Germany had attacked our country.' Luchinsky does not tell us why he had been summoned to Moscow, but he says of his friend General Petrov that 'He was appointed Commander of the 192nd Rifle Division not long before the war, and then of the 27th Mechanized Corps, at the head of which he too left for the front.' (VIZHI976, No. 9, pp. 121-122)

Petrov converted the 192nd Rifle Division into a mountain rifle division; both it and the 27th Mechanized Corps secretly moved to the Romanian frontier. Petrov, meanwhile, went to Moscow to be given his combat mission. We come across this procedure on more than one occasion: the 16th Army, for example, was secretly moved to the Romanian frontier, while Lieutenant-General M. Lukin, its commanding officer, was in Moscow being given his combat instructions.

Luchinsky's brief article about General Petrov paints an apparently uneventful picture. But let us look at the order in which events occurred. First of all, Petrov set up the 27<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, loaded it on to military trains, and sent it off to the front. Then, when he was already on the train, he heard the announcement that Germany had started the war. The most interesting thing, however, happened several days later: the 27th Mechanized Corps was disbanded while it was travelling. In a defensive war, such purely offensive formations are simply not needed. In July 1941, all the other mechanized corps were disbanded as well. There were 29 of them in all.

This situation seems quite absurd. The 27th Mechanized Corps was on its way to war *before* Hitler attacked. But as soon as Hitler began the war the 27th Corps was disbanded even before it had encountered the enemy. This is not as absurd as it seems, however. For the 27th Mechanized Corps was being transferred from Central Asia to the Romanian frontier in order to fight, not in the war which Hitler had just begun, but in a war which should have been started by some other means.

The inescapable conclusion is that, had Hitler not attacked, the 27th Mechanized Corps would still have taken part in a war. It was precisely to do so that it was travelling to the front. By launching Operation

Barbarossa when he did, Hitler averted the war for which the 27th Mechanized Corps and 28 of its fellow corps, each with an estimated 1,000 tanks, had been created.

Travelling on trains from Central Asia along with Petrov and Luchinsky were quite a few famous commanders, and others who were destined to become so. Among them was Major-General Alexei Simionovich Zhadov, who had been commanding a mountain cavalry division in Central Asia. On the eve of the war, he was made commander of the 4th Airborne Assault Corps, and reached the front at the height of hostilities. (*VIZH* 1971, No. 3, p. 124)

If anyone tries to prove to you that Stalin gathered his generals on the Soviet western frontiers in order to repel German aggression or to launch 'counter attacks', then remind him of General Zhadov, who changed a mountain cavalry division in Central Asia for an airborne assault corps in Byelorussia. Are airborne assault corps really intended for making counterattacks or repelling aggression?

The Trans-Baikal Military District was abandoned, even though its troops were not just on Soviet territory, but in Mongolia where quite recently there had been a real war involving hundreds of tanks and aircraft, thousands of guns and tens of thousands of soldiers.

Of all the internal military districts and frontier districts in the east, the Trans-Baikal was the only one to have armies on its complement. There were two of them, the 16th and the 17th. The 17th Army was stationed in Mongolia, but in 1940 it had been 'lightened' to such an extent that the post of deputy officer commanding the army was occupied by a colonel, P. P. Polu-boyarov, because of a shortage of generals. As we already know, he too was summoned to Moscow and then posted to the North-West Front.

The other army in the Trans-Baikal Military District, the 16th, had left secretly, travelling westwards. Although rumours about the Iranian frontier were spread among the wives who had remained behind, the 16th Army commanders knew that they were going to wage war, and they also knew against whom.

When the 16th Army left, the headquarters of the Trans-Baikal Military District was also 'lightened' when many of its officers and generals were transferred to the divisions and corps of the 16th Army. Major-General

Petr Chernyshev, for instance, who commanded the 16th Army's 152nd Rifle Division, was promoted and appointed commander of the combat training branch of the Trans-Baikal Military District. But, 'when the army left, Petr Nikolaevich stated that he would "go to fight with his division", and fixed it so that he was sent back to the 152nd'. (Major-General A. A. Lobachev, *Trudnymi Doro-gami*, Moscow Voenizdat 1960, p. 147)

It was not only second-rate colonels and generals who were raked in from Trans-Baikal. Some truly great commanders were gathered from here. Among the greatest were the officers commanding the district. Although only one officer commanded the district at any one time, the post was rotated with surprising frequency. In 1940, the Trans-Baikal District was commanded by Lieutenant-General F. N. Remezov. He was then sent off to take charge of the Orel Military District, where he secretly formed the 20th Army and, under cover of the TASS report, moved it to the German frontier. After Remezov, the Trans-Baikal District was fleetingly commanded by Lieutenant-General I. S. Konev. He was then transferred from there to the Northern Caucasus Military District, where he secretly formed the 19th Army and, again under cover of the TASS report, posted it to the Romanian frontier. At this point Lieutenant-General P. A. Kurochkin (who later became a full general) took over command of the Trans-Baikal District. Before the TASS report, Kurochkin sent the 16th Army off, wishing its commanders and soldiers success in carrying out 'any order given by the Motherland'. The 16th Army had the longest road to travel. That was why it set off early, so that it could appear on the Soviet western borders at the same time as all the other armies of the Second Strategic Echelon.

And what of Lieutenant-General P. A. Kurochkin? It is no easy matter to send a whole army off in military trains in such a way that nobody finds out about it. Kurochkin completed his mission and heaved a sigh of relief. On 13 June, when the TASS report was being given out, Kurochkin was ordered to leave the Trans-Baikal District immediately for Moscow, to be given a new post. The *Red Star* newspaper of 26 May 1984 testifies that on 22 June 1941 Kurochkin was in a compartment of an express train then approaching Irkutsk . . . The Trans-Baikal Military District had been abandoned and left without a commander. The *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* (Vol. 3, p. 357) states that it was September 1941 before another commander appeared in Trans-Baikal.

Generals and officers were being transferred to the German and Romanian frontiers not only from the internal and semi-front military districts, but from a real front. A war was already taking place in the Far East. Armed skirmishes frequently grew into serious clashes, with hundreds of tanks and aircraft taking part on both sides. A full-scale war between Japan and the Soviet Union appeared to be entirely possible at the time; indeed some foreign observers regarded it as inevitable. That was why there was no military district in the Far East, but a front consisting of three armies.

At the end of 1940, the secret transfer westwards of generals and troops, in entire divisions and corps, began. Many senior commanders left the Far East Front without being replaced, or at least without worthy successors. Major-General P. T. Kotov, the chief of operations in the front headquarters, was transferred secretly westwards in this way.

Major-General P. G. Grigorenko, who was a lieutenant-colonel at the Far Eastern Front headquarters at the time, recalls that 'Ivan Stepanovich Konev, Markian Mikhailovich Popov, Vasily Ivanovich Chuikov, and many other senior military commanders were called westwards even before Shtern was.' (*Memoirs: Detinets*, New York 1981, p. 246) Popov (later to become a full general) commanded the 1st Army, while Konev (subsequently Marshal of the Soviet Union) commanded the 2nd Army. I totally reject any idea that these generals were being transferred because a German invasion had been foreseen. The war found Popov in the post of officer commanding the Northern Front on the Finnish border, while Konev moved up to the Romanian frontier at the head of his heavy shock army.

General Konev took an interesting path from his position as officer commanding an army in the Far East to a similar post in an army on the Romanian border. Konev did not travel in a straight line. He dodged and weaved. Having given up the command of the 2nd Army in the Far East in April 1941 (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, p. 409), he then assumed command of the Trans-Baikal Military District. Having made his mark here, he then quietly made an unadvertised appearance in Rostov, and took command of the Northern Caucasus Military District. It was here that Konev completed the formation of the 19th Army and became its commanding officer. At the end of May 1941, in what General S. M. Shtemenko described as 'conditions of the strictest secrecy', he began to move the divisions and corps of his army up to the Romanian frontier. He held four posts in a short space of time. These stretched from the easternmost frontiers to the most western ones. Stalin always hid his best generals and marshals before every offensive operation (but

never before a defensive one). This particularly applied to Zhukov, Vasilevsky, Konev, Rokossovsky and Meretskov. In spring 1941, as always happened before all the most important offensives, Konev was covering up his tracks in such a way that even his closest friends would never know where he had gone.

Konev was not the only one who was covering up his tracks. Konev and other commanders temporarily held a number of posts as a blind; the same 'decoy' posting would often be passed from one officer to another. Colonel-General F. I. Kuznetsov gave up the command of the General Staff Academy to take over the Northern Caucasus Military District. He handed this over to Konev and then appeared on the East Prussian border, holding the post of officer commanding the North-West Front.

After General Konev had secretly disappeared from the Far East, the 2nd Army was left in the hands of General M. F. Terekhin, who was no substitute for a man of Konev's abilities. The situation was even more interesting in the 1st Army of the Far Eastern Front. After General Popov had left for the Northern Front, a worthy replacement, in the person of Lieutenant-General Andrei Ivanovich Eremenko (later Marshal of the Soviet Union) took his place. But Eremenko did not remain in charge for long. On 19 June 1941 he was ordered to hand over the 1st Army and report immediately to Moscow for another appointment. After the German invasion had begun, Eremenko became officer commanding the Western Front instead of General D. G. Pavlov. That was not the purpose of his visit to Moscow, however. On 19 June, such a turn of events had not been foreseen. Pavlov was firmly seated in his post of officer commanding the Western Front. Stalin must have called on Eremenko to fulfil some other mission which remains unknown, and possibly also unfulfilled.

I had the opportunity to meet Eremenko after he became a Marshal of the Soviet Union. I tried to sound him out on this subject without arousing his suspicions. My impression was that Eremenko was not dissimulating, but that he really did not know what Stalin needed him for on 19 June 1941. I pointed out to the Marshal that he had not been the only one in this position. I said that Sivkov, Kurdyumov, Zhadov, Petrov and Luchinsky had all been travelling on trains towards Moscow at the same time. The Marshal was very interested in all this. I regretted that I was not a Western historian with a passport of some democratic country in my pocket, for I was simply unable to take the conversation with the Marshal any further.

Eremenko was interested, and suggested another couple of generals who were moved from the Far East. Major-General N. E. Berzarin was deputy officer commanding the 1st Army. Eremenko told me something which he had left out of his memoirs. When he left the Far East, he handed over the command of the army to

his deputy Berzarin. Yet at the end of May, Berzarin was summoned by Stalin to Moscow and secretly appointed to command the 27th Army, then in the Baltic area not far from the German frontier.

Major-General Vassily Andreyevich Glazunov (later Lieutenant-General and officer commanding the Red Army airborne assault troops) was at the beginning of 1941 commanding the 59th Rifle Division in the 1st Army on the Far Eastern Front. Eremenko was very attached to the 1st Army, and did not want to see it left without a commander and at the mercy of Shelakhov, the 'headquarters rat'. But Stalin had already picked Eremenko's deputy, as well as the corps commanders, and the experienced divisional commanders had long since been transferred westwards. In the 59th Division there was only the experienced, martial clear-sighted General Glazunov. Eremenko told me that he immediately sent an enciphered message to the General Staff proposing that General Glazunov should be given the 1st Army. It was a big jump to go straight from a division to an army. But what else was there to be done when there were no more operational commanders left in the Far East?

Moscow immediately agreed that Glazunov was indeed a worthy commander, and in the enciphered reply ordered Glazunov to give up command of the division immediately, and instead take over command of the 3rd Airborne Assault Corps on the Romanian frontier.

At the beginning of June 1941, Stalin ordered that all Soviet airborne assault troops, including those which had recently been transferred from the Far East, should be concentrated on the western frontiers. Then at the last moment he assembled infantry and cavalry generals from distant frontiers and made them into commanders of airborne assault corps. This applied not only to Generals Glazunov and Zhadov, but to Generals M. A. Usenko, F. M. Kharitonov, and I. S. Bezuglyi as well.

The urgent transformation of infantry and cavalry generals into airborne assault officers is not a preparation for defence. It is not even a preparation for a counter-offensive. It is a sign of aggression in preparation; aggression which is inevitable, imminent, and on a vast scale.

## CHAPTER 28

# Why Stalin Deployed the Fronts

*The war of the poor against the rich will be the most bloody war which has ever been waged between people.*

F. ENGELS (*Works*, Vol. 2, p. 504,  
Berlin 1959)

A 'front' is an operational-strategic grouping of armed forces. It includes several armies, air force formations, anti-aircraft defence, back-up units and formations, and rear units. Fronts do not exist in peacetime; military districts exist in their stead. A front is usually only created when war begins. (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, p. 332)

The Far Eastern Front was set up within the Red Army in response to worsening relations with Japan in 1938. It consisted of the 1st and 2nd Armies, a tactical air force and reinforcement units. On 13 April 1941, a neutrality pact was signed with Japan. The Far Eastern Front, however, remained a front, and was not turned into a military district.

Fronts were established for short periods in 1939 and 1940 on the Soviet western frontiers in order to serve the 'liberation campaigns' into Poland, Romania and Finland. Once these campaigns had ended, the fronts were immediately disbanded and military districts were set up again to replace them. Historians have reproached Stalin for entering into pacts with both Germany and Japan, while maintaining a front only against Japan. This does indeed seem inconsistent at first glance; but Hitler was doing exactly the same thing. While he was deploying headquarters with impressive names against Britain, he was secretly moving his best generals up to the Soviet frontier. That is how a surprise strike is prepared.

Stalin had set up a front in the Far East, but the troops and the generals were secretly leaving it. Officially, the western frontiers still consisted of military districts, but here a build-up of troops was going on. Any comparison of the power of the Far East Front and that of any western military district would certainly not come down in favour of the front. While the Far East Front had three armies, all of them ordinary, the



Western Special Military District had four armies, including three shock and one heavy shock. Then three more armies belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon arrived on Western Special Military District territory. No one, on the other hand, was going to the Far Eastern Front; divisions and corps were being taken away from it. There was only one mechanized corps on the Far Eastern Front, while in the Western District there were six. There were no airborne assault troops on the Far Eastern Front, while in the Western District there was an entire corps. The Western Special Military District, moreover, was not the most powerful. The Kiev District was much more so.

The Far Eastern Front was not so much a front as a screen intended to show the whole world that war here was possible. But the five western military districts were also screens designed to show that no war was expected there. But the strike power concentrated in these districts after 1939 was rarely equalled by any Soviet front even during the heaviest battles of the war.

The front in the Far East was set up in such a way that everybody knew about it. In the western part of the Soviet Union, however, not one, but five fronts had been established in such a way that nobody knew about them. The Northern, North-West, Western, South-West and Southern Fronts were officially brought into being only after the German invasion. From February 1941, however, these names were already appearing in strictly secret Soviet documents. This security grading was later removed from a number of these documents, and they were put into academic circulation. I quote from one of them: 'In February 1941 the military councils in the frontier districts were sent instructions . . . that they should immediately equip the front command posts.' (*VIZH* 1978, No.4, p. 86)

Officially there were five military districts on the Soviet western borders. Unofficially, each military district was already preparing a front command post. Alongside the usual military-territorial structures, purely military ones were being created -the kind of structures which only spring up in time of war to lead the troops into battle.

Pro-Soviet historians assure us that peace existed between the Soviet Union and Germany until 22 June 1941, when this peace was allegedly violated by Germany. This hypothesis is not borne out by facts. The facts speak of the opposite. By deploying, command posts of the fronts in February 1941, the Soviet Union entered the war against Germany, although it did not officially declare it.

In peacetime the officer commanding a military district has a dual role. On the one hand, he is a purely military commander, with several divisions, sometimes several corps and even on occasions several armies under his command. On the other, he controls a strictly defined territory, and carries out the role of a military governor.

In the event of war, a military district on the frontier becomes a front. When this happens, three situations can arise. The first of these is where the front wages war in the territories of the former military districts. In this case the officer commanding the front continues to function both as a military commander and as a governor of the territories entrusted to him.

The second situation is where the front is forced to retreat under enemy pressure. In that event, the officer commanding the front will remain combat commander, and as he withdraws he will take along with him the organs of local government of his territory.

In the third scenario, the front moves forward on to enemy territory. It is only when this situation has been foreseen that the functions of the officer commanding are divided. He becomes a purely military commander and leads his troops forward. Some one of inferior rank must remain behind on the territory of the district to carry out the functions of military governor.

In February 1941, an event occurred which has so far been overlooked by modern historians. A new post for another deputy to the officer commanding was created in the Western Special Military District. What did this mean? Surely General D. G. Pavlov had enough deputies without yet another one! For several months this extra post of deputy remained vacant. Then Lieutenant-General Vladimir Nikolayevich Kurdumov arrived to take it up.

The significance of this event was considerable. In peacetime, General Pavlov, his deputy, Lieutenant-General I. V. Boldin, and Chief of Staff Major-General V. E. Klimovskikh were all to be found in Minsk. On mobilization, however, Pavlov was earmarked to become the officer commanding the Western Front,

Klimovskikh chief of staff of the Western Front, and Boldin the officer commanding the mobile group in the Western Front.

If the Western Front was meant to fight in Byelorussia, where it had been situated until the war began, there would have been no need to make any structural changes. But the Western Front was preparing to move on to enemy territory. It was for just such a circumstance that Lieutenant-General Kurdumov was brought in. Pavlov was to concentrate on purely military problems, while his new deputy would deal with territorial ones. When Pavlov led the Western Front into enemy territory, General Kurdumov would stay behind in Minsk to act as a purely territorial military governor, protecting the local authorities and lines of communication, controlling industry and transport, carrying out additional mobilization and preparing reserves for the front, which by then would have moved far ahead.

Kurdumov had commanded the Combat Training Directorate of the Red Army before being appointed to Minsk. From the viewpoint of the war of 'liberation', it was a splendid decision to have such an experienced general sitting in a place through which more and more young reservists would pass on their way westwards. He, better than anyone, would be able to give them their final instructions before going into battle.

Four armies, ten detached corps and ten air divisions then stationed on the territory of the Kiev Special Military District were also preparing to leave for enemy territory. They would be led by Colonel-General Mikhail Petrovich Kirponos, the officer commanding the South-West Front. With this in view, it became essential to split the two functions of the commanding officer. Here too an extra deputy's post was created, and Lieutenant-General V. F. Yakovlev was appointed to it. Kirponos would advance with his troops, while Yakovlev would remain in Kiev.

From the beginning of February onwards, the division of the two functions became increasingly evident. A secret command post was set up in Tarnopol. This was the centre of the military structure. The headquarters was kept on in Kiev to function as the centre of the territorial structure. A heavily reinforced underground command post for directing the territorial system was set up in Brovary, in the Kiev region. A command post of a very light type, consisting of dug-outs with one timber platform, was built in Tarnopol. This was entirely logical; why put up concrete casements when the military structure was not intended to remain in the Ukraine for long?

The structure was also divided in the Baltic Special Military District. The senior command staff moved to Panivejis, which from then onwards was to be the secret centre of the purely military structure of the North-West Front. A second-rate general, E. P. Safronov, was left behind in Riga to exercise military-territorial control after the main mass of Soviet troops had moved off westwards.

There was a slight difference in the Odessa Military District. Here it was not the headquarters of the front which was split off from the military district headquarters, but the headquarters for the 9th Army. Most officers belonging to the Odessa Military District headquarters, with its chief of staff Major-General M. V. Zakharov at their head, were secretly transferred to the headquarters of the 9th Army. Marshal of the Soviet Union I. S. Konev testifies that on 20 June the 9th Army headquarters were raised by a stand-to alert and secretly moved out of Odessa to the field command post. (*VIZH* 1968, No. 7, p. 42) Colonel-General Ya. T. Cherevichenko, officer commanding the Odessa Military District, had not been in Odessa for some time. He had secretly been in the Crimea, where he had taken command of the 9th Special Rifle Corps, which had arrived secretly from the Caucasus. Then, passing through Odessa by train, he went to the secret command post of the 9th Army, which had been entrusted to his command. Marshal of the Soviet Union M. V. Zakharov has stated that Cherevichenko was on a train when the German invasion began. (*Voprosy Istory*, 1970, No. 5, p. 46) Another general, N. E. Chibisov, appeared in Odessa *before* the German invasion began; his job was to remain behind to exercise military-territorial control after the 9th Army had left.

The Leningrad Military District was an exception. As in the other districts, a front - the Northern - was secretly set up, but in this case the structure was not divided. This was also logical. The Northern Front had until then made no preparations to advance far from Karelian territory, so two separate structures were not necessary. No extra deputy was appointed. Control of both military operations and of the territory would be exercised from the same centre, the headquarters of the Northern Front.

On 13 June, the day the TASS report was broadcast, these divisions in the control structures of all the western military districts - except Leningrad - were completed. On the same day, the People's Commissariat for Defence ordered all headquarters of the fronts to move to the field command posts.

From that point onwards there were two independent military systems of command in Byelorussia: the secretly created Western Front, commanded by General Pavlov with its command post in the forest near the Lesno railway station, and the Western Special Military District, under Lieutenant-General Kurdumov, with headquarters in Minsk. Two independent military control structures also came into being in the Ukraine, the South-West Front and the Kiev Special Military District. According to Marshal Bagramyan, Zhukov sent a special enciphered message that this development 'must be kept most strictly secret, and the headquarters personnel of the district must be warned to keep it so'. (*Tak Nachalas' Voina*, p. 83)

Lieutenant-General of Communications Troops P. M. Kur-ochkin, who at that time was a major-general and Chief of Communications of the North-West Front, describes the same situation in the Baltic:

Command elements and branches from headquarters began to arrive in the region of Panivejis. The district command was in fact turned into a front command although officially it went on being called a district command until the war began. A group of generals and officers, who had been given the job of running the district, was left behind in Riga. (*Na SZF*, p. 196, 1969)

The creation of two independent systems of control inevitably led to the creation of two independent systems of communications. Major-General Kurochkin personally ran the North-West Front communications, while Colonel N. P. Aki-mov, his former deputy, managed the independent communications system in the district.

General Kurochkin worked hard at setting up the front communication system. In order not to alert the enemy with a sudden upsurge in conversations on the new military channels, civilian communication lines were used. But the word 'civilian' must be placed between inverted commas. No such thing existed in the Soviet Union. The state communications system had been put on a complete war footing in 1939 and placed at the service of the army. The People's Commissariat (or Ministry) of Communications was placed directly under the orders of the People's Commissariat for Defence. In any normal country the military communications system is a component part of the general state communications system, but the reverse is the case in the Soviet Union. General state communications are a component part of military

communications; Ivan Terentievich Peresypkin, the People's Commissar for Communications of the USSR was officially a deputy to the chief of communications in the Red Army.

When the command of the North-West Front left for the field command post, the wartime communications system had been laid down beforehand:

All documents with the frequency plan, call-signs, and authentication signals were kept in the headquarters, for distribution to the troops in the event of war. There were several thousand radio stations in the district. Consequently at least a week was needed to put the work on a war footing. It proved impossible to do everything required in time. (Lieu-tenant-General P. M. Kurochkin, *Pozyvnye Fronta*, Moscow Voenizdat 1969, p. 115)

The entire procedure for changing over from a peacetime communications system to a wartime one was based on the assumption that a preliminary signal would come from Moscow at a time to be determined by Moscow. In other words, the plan was not drawn up to meet the conditions of a defensive war. It was drawn up to meet the conditions of a war which was offensive, aggressive and provided for a period of secret preparations.

The time for these final preparations to invade had now arrived. On 19 June Lieutenant-General P. S. Klenov, Chief of Staff of the North-West Front, issued an order to Kurochkin:

'Take action in accordance with the big plan. Do you understand what I'm talking about?'

'Yes, I understand everything,' I reported. (Kurochkin, *Na SZF*, p. 195)

It is a pity that we do not understand everything about the 'big plan'; no Soviet general has ever explained what it was. But we do understand that something connected with the 'big plan' should have happened in the

next few days. But, by taking the action he did, Hitler prevented the 'big plan' from being put into effect, and compelled the Soviet generals to improvise instead.

This is how General Kurochkin tried to ensure that the 'big plan' would be carried out:

The district communications branch sent documents dealing with the organization of radio communications ... to the headquarters of the armies and of formations under district command. All these documents, duly revised, had to pass along a channel leading through the corps, divisions, regiments, battalions and companies until they finally reached the operating team at every radio station. That would have taken, as I have said already, no less than a week. (*Ibid*, p. 118)

Top-secret information thus reached thousands of radio operators. It was an irreversible process. It was no longer possible to retrieve the secrets and hide them in the safes again. As soon as the material had left these safes, war had become quite unavoidable. Preparing an aggressive war is something like hatching a *coup d'etat*. A very small group of people make the plan. They do not trust the thousands who will take part in it with even a fragment of information. As soon as the leaders of the conspiracy reveal even the tiniest part of the plan to the thousands who will have a role in it, it then becomes totally unavoidable that the *coup* will happen. If they do not do this, the plotters lose their advantage of surprise, which is their greatest trump, and enable the enemy to respond with emergency measures.

But perhaps it was because Lieutenant-General Klenov anticipated German aggression that he ordered that elements of the 'big plan' should be revealed to these thousands who were to carry it out? Klenov, however, was quite categorical in his belief that a German invasion was not possible. He refused to believe it even after it had begun, and did nothing at all to repel the aggression after it had started. At the December 1940 meeting of the senior command staff, Klenov had suggested that only aggressive wars should be fought, and that these should be started by surprise attacks by the Red Army. He exceeded even the bold Zhukov in aggressiveness, and had the courage to argue with Zhukov in Stalin's presence about how a surprise attack should be made. Like Andrei Andreyevich Zhdanov, his protector in the Politburo, and indeed like many other Soviet military

and political leaders at the time including Stalin himself, he simply excluded the possibility that anyone else could make a surprise attack on the Soviet Union.

In the days which followed the publication of the TASS report on 13 June 1941, all the engines of war in the Soviet Union went into action. The deployment on the Soviet fronts had gone so far that thousands involved had already been let into secrets of extraordinary importance. The Soviet Union passed the point of no return in the middle of June 1941. After that, war was inevitable. If Hitler had decided to launch Operation Barbarossa a few weeks later, the Red Army would have reached Berlin much earlier than 1945.

When a large-scale offensive takes place, several fronts are engaged in operational action at the same time. This action has to be co-ordinated, and this co-ordination is done by the Representatives of the High Command.

These Representatives can help make the strategic leadership considerably more flexible in wartime. They have almost unlimited power in the field of combat. On the one hand, the Representative is a member of the supreme military leadership, and as such knows plans which the officer commanding a front does not have the right to know. On the other, he directs combat operations not from some office in Moscow but directly from the command post of a front or an army, where he presents himself just before the operation begins. The Representative is free from the daily routine work of the officer commanding the front and can devote all his attention to the most important issues. At a critical moment, he might find himself alongside the Supreme Commander in Chief, giving him essential advice; or else he might find himself sent by the Supreme Commander to the most critical sector where the fate of the war is being decided.

These Representatives were the best military minds in the country. Their appearance always meant that great events were about to happen.

The day the TASS report was published, many inexplicable events took place. My own information is fragmentary, inadequate, and at times contradictory. On the basis of the little information which can be



checked, however, the secret visit of the Representatives of the Soviet High Command to the western frontiers was clearly the main business of the day.

Among these Representatives was Lieutenant-General Pavel Rychagov, deputy People's Commissar for Defence. He was a favourite of Stalin and a personal friend of Zhukov. Although still only 29, he had already distinguished himself in air warfare in Spain, China, Khasan and at Khalkhin-Gol. He had commanded the 1st Army's air force in the Far East, and then the 9th Army's air force in the 'liberation' of Finland. On Stalin's personal orders, Rychagov always appeared where the Red Army was about to launch a surprise attack. His promotion was rapid. In 1940 Stalin appointed him a deputy chief of the Red Army Air Force; then in the same year first deputy chief; and in August of the same year the head of the Chief Directorate of the air force of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.

In December 1940, a meeting was held of the Red Army's senior command staff to discuss the subject of war against Germany. It was attended by Stalin and the principal political leaders. Zhukov's proposal was to put the German Air Force out of action by delivering surprise attacks on German airfields, and then immediately launching powerful attacks by the land troops. (*Istoriya Sovetskoi Voennoi Mysli*, Izdanie Akademii Nauk SSR, Moscow 1980, p. 173) Pavel Rychagov warmly supported Zhukov's proposal. Even before Zhukov, he had recast the training of Soviet airmen in such a way that it almost totally excluded the training of pilots to fight air battles. Instead, they were trained to make sudden concentrated air strikes at enemy airfields. In his memoirs, Zhukov recalled the impassioned speech which Rychagov made at the meeting: 'General P. V. Rychagov, the chief of the air force of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, talked a lot of sense.' (*Vospominaniya I Razmyshleniya*, 1969, p. 194) It is only a pity that Rychagov's sensible speech still remains a Soviet state secret half a century after it was made.

Zhukov and Rychagov's arguments apparently convinced Stalin. In the course of the meeting and in the series of strategic map games which followed it, Stalin dismissed the Chief of the General Staff and appointed Zhukov to the post. A few days later Pavel Rychagov was also promoted. In spite of his comparatively modest rank, Lieutenant-General Rychagov was given an extremely high appointment, that of deputy to the People's Commissar for Defence. Stalin appointed Lieutenant-General P. F. Zhigarev to take over command of the air force from Rychagov. Freed from daily routine, Rychagov became a High Command Representative; it was a very high post with access to state secrets, and with no responsibility for day-to-day minor matters. Rychagov

became in his way a sort of minister without portfolio among the senior Soviet military leaders. He continued to work hard on his ideas of surprise, speed, and concentration, and on how to clear the skies for Soviet aircraft with several hours of concentrated bombing raids on enemy airfields. Zhukov and Rychagov, in fact, were preparing to do what Hitler did on 22 June 1941. As General Ivanov put it, 'The Nazi command simply succeeded in forestalling our troops in the two weeks preceding the outbreak of war.' (General of the Army S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyi Period Voyny*, Moscow 1974, p. 212)

In the spring of 1941, Rychagov was permanently on standby, awaiting Stalin's orders to go anywhere that fateful decisions on the war had to be made. Now the hour had arrived. On 13 June 1941, under cover of the TASS report, Rychagov went secretly to the German frontier. Falsifiers of history explain Rychagov's appearance there in quite simple terms. Stalin was worried that the Germans might possibly attack, and so he sent Rychagov to the border to improve the defences there.

If Stalin had been anxious about defence, he should have pulled back the Soviet Air Force from the frontiers and re-based it in the depths of the country. The air force would have been quite capable of covering the frontier areas from the interior of the country, while the few hundred kilometres which lay between the airfields and the frontiers would have deprived the enemy of an ability to make a surprise attack on Soviet airfields. But General Rychagov's visit to the frontier did not coincide with the re-basing of Soviet aircraft in the depths of the country. On the contrary, it coincided with aircraft from the depths of the country being re-based right on the frontiers. In terms of defence, concentrating an air force on the frontiers is tantamount to suicide. But when an offensive is being prepared, it is absolutely essential to concentrate aircraft near the frontiers, so that they can be used over enemy territory to the full extent of their operating radius.

The German generals, incidentally, were doing the same thing, although they were some two weeks ahead, and were sparing no effort to re-base their air force close to the Soviet border. Had Stalin been the first to strike, we would now regard the German generals as madmen. But re-basing an air force near a frontier is madness only from a defensive viewpoint. In terms of an offensive, the German generals were doing everything right, as were their Soviet colleagues.

We can only guess why Rychagov went to the Soviet western border. After Operation Barbarossa began, Rychagov was arrested and executed on Stalin's orders. Why he was executed also remains a mystery. It could not have been for losing a vast number of Soviet aircraft on airfields near the frontier; Pavel Rychagov

had ceased to be responsible for the safety of Soviet aircraft in February 1941. Responsibility for that now lay with Lieutenant-General P. F. Zhigarev. Stalin did not shoot Zhigarev for having lost the aircraft. He did not even reproach him for it. On the contrary, the lieutenant-general rose to the rank of Air Chief Marshal and survived Stalin by ten years. If Stalin did not shoot Zhigarev, who bore the personal, direct and immediate responsibility for the basing of the air force and its security, why then shoot Rychagov, who did not have this responsibility?

It is my opinion that Rychagov went to the Soviet frontier on some crucial mission entirely unconnected with the security of the Soviet Air Force. For failing to complete that crucial mission, of which we know nothing, Stalin shot the youngest deputy to the People's Commissar for Defence that the Red Army ever had.

Colonel-General A. D. Loktionov, candidate member of the Central Committee, held the post of deputy to the People's Commissariat of Defence as early as 1937. Loktionov commanded the Soviet Air Force until 1940, when in the summer of that year Stalin for some reason gave Loktionov the opportunity to make a very detailed study of the frontier with East Prussia. He sent Loktionov off to command the Baltic Military District, which embraced the territories of the recently 'liberated' Baltic states. In February and March 1941 Stalin began secretly to assemble the Supreme Command Staff in Moscow. Loktionov handed over command of the Baltic Military District (the North -West Front) to Colonel-General F. I. Kuznetsov, and set off for Moscow 'for medical treatment'. By 13 June, all Loktionov's illnesses were cured and he secretly returned to the frontier with East Prussia.

We know that Lieutenant-General of Engineering Troops D. Karbyshev had visited the Soviet western border even before this. One of Karbyshev's pupils, Lieutenant-General of Engineering Troops E. Leoshenya, has stated that 'Karbyshev was on a mission for the General Staff in the area of the western state frontier.' (*VIZH* 1980, No. 10, p.96) Karbyshev was not just another of those professors from the military academies who were gathering on the frontier, but one of the Soviet High Command Representatives. He was actively and energetically preparing an offensive operation. It was in Karbyshev's presence that Soviet frontier guards were pulling down the frontier barriers, in order to clear the way for an extra-high-power and very swift Soviet operation. It was Karbyshev who was teaching the crews of the latest T-34 Soviet tanks how to overcome enemy defences and to ford frontier rivers. In addition, along with commanders from the fronts and the armies, Karbyshev was making reconnaissance trips.

Before taking even one step forward, a commander will inspect the terrain which lies before him. Much information will, of course, have been gathered in advance by reconnaissance. Although the commander will certainly trust his reconnaissance, he will always want to inspect the whole terrain personally. This is no empty ritual. Before moving his troops forward, a commander must get the feel of the land. There's a hollow here—would the tanks get bogged down in the mud? There's a small bridge there. Haven't the supports been sawn through? And a counter-attack could come from that wood there . . .

If the commander cannot pass over the whole of the terrain in his imagination, if he is unable to assess all the difficulties which his soldiers will have to face, the price he will pay will be defeat. That is why, before an offensive battle, every commander, irrespective of rank, will put on a soldier's uniform and crawl on his stomach in the mud alongside the state frontier or forward area; and why, if he is in a forward area, he will spend many hours inspecting the terrain in front of him, as he tries to foresee and envisage before the battle all the difficulties which might be awaiting him tomorrow.

This visual study of the enemy and the terrain by the commander is called reconnaissance. It is not the most agreeable surprise when enemy reconnaissance groups turn up on your frontier. It is not too bad if it is only a tank division commander spending long hours watching you through binoculars from the other side of the border. But imagine the officer commanding a Soviet military district appearing on your frontier, not alone, but accompanied by a member of the Politburo, and spending not hours, but weeks at the frontier posts! What would you think then?

It was like that before every 'liberation'. In January 1939, K. A. Meretskov, the officer commanding the Leningrad Military District, accompanied by A. A. Zhdanov, shortly to become a Politburo member, drove up and down the whole of the Finnish frontier in a motor car. Their trips went on throughout spring, summer and autumn. They finished their expeditions as autumn was drawing to a close and returned to Leningrad. The next thing was that the 'Finnish militarist clique provoked war'.

From early 1941, German officers and generals began, gradually at first and then with increasing intensity, to reconnoitre the German side of the frontier. There is a famous photograph on my table showing General

Guderian with officers from his headquarters carrying out the final reconnaissance near Brest-Litovsk on the night of 22 June 1941. The German generals are looking at Soviet territory through binoculars. As Operation Barbarossa approached, Soviet generals and marshals noticed an increasing number of German reconnaissance groups on the border. (*Glavnyi Marshal Aviatsy A. A. No-vikov v Nebe Leningrada*, Moscow Nauka 1970, p. 41) The German reconnaissance groups camouflaged what they were doing by every possible means. They donned the uniforms of frontier guards and ordinary soldiers, but an experienced eye could of course distinguish between a reconnaissance group and a frontier patrol. Reports began to flow from the Soviet border that German officers were carrying out intensive reconnaissance. This was a clear sign that war was approaching. Marshal of the Soviet Union M. V. Zakharov, then a major-general and 9th Army chief of staff, has said that from April 1941 onwards, a 'new situation arose'. It took the form of groups of officers dressed in German and Romanian Army uniforms appearing on the river Prut. All the signs were that they were carrying out reconnaissance. (*Voprosy Istory* 1970, No. 5, p. 43)

Reconnaissance is preparation for an offensive. What were the Soviet commanders doing? Why did they not take immediate measures to repel the coming aggression, the inevitability of which was being confirmed by the presence of the enemy reconnaissance groups? The Soviet generals did not react to what they saw for one simple reason: the Soviet generals were busy carrying out their own reconnaissance.

Major-General Petr Vassilyevich Sevast'yanov was then head of the political branch of the 5th Czechoslovak Proletariat Vitebsk Red Banner Rifle Division of the 16th Rifle Corps of the 1st Army of the North-West Front. He recalled how, 'observing the German frontier guards from a distance of something like 20—30 paces, and exchanging glances with them, we never gave the appearance of realizing that they were there, or that we were in the slightest degree interested in them'. (*Neman-Volga-Dunai*, Moscow Voenizdat 1961, p. 7)

General Sevast'yanov's account shows that he observed the German frontier guards on more than one occasion. In fact it happened regularly. So here is a question: Comrade General, what precisely were you doing so close to the frontier? If you were disturbed at the thought that the Germans might invade, then you should have ordered five or six fences of barbed wire to be stretched out along the frontier, so that nobody could slip through. You should have laid the mined traps more densely. Then you should have laid a real minefield about three kilometres deep behind the barbed-wire entanglements, then dug anti-tank ditches behind the minefields and covered them with static flame-throwers, and behind these, another 20-30

stretches of barbed-wire entanglements, this time on metal stakes, or better still, steel rails set in concrete. Further back still, another minefield - a false one, with the real minefield behind it. Then dig another anti-tank ditch. Then behind all this, construct forest traps, and so on indefinitely.

If the general had really been preparing for defence, there would have been no need for him to stare at the German frontier guards. He would have had to study not foreign territory but his own, and the more deeply he did it, the better. Near the frontier he could have kept small mobile detachments which, in the event of an attack, could easily have withdrawn through secret gaps in the engineered defences zone, mining the path as it went.

This was Finland's exemplary approach when it was preparing to defend itself. The Finnish generals had certainly no need to stand on the border and scrutinize foreign territory. The Soviet Army, however, did not put up any engineered defences on its frontiers, and Soviet generals, like their German colleagues, ended up spending weeks and months just a few paces from the state frontier.

Colonel D. I. Kochetkov recalls that the commander of the Soviet tank division in Brest-Litovsk, Major-General Puganov, selected both the site for his divisional headquarters, and the position of his office in it, so that he could 'sit in the divisional commander's office with Colonel Commissar A. A. Illarionov and look out of the window through binoculars at the German soldiers on the opposite bank of the Western Bug.' (*Zakrytyimi Lyukami*, Moscow Voenizdat 1962, p. 8)

Idiocy, we cry in indignation. Once the war had begun, it would be a simple matter to fire an automatic weapon from the opposite bank at the divisional commander's window, or better still, fire a cannon at it. The divisional headquarters was a sitting target. But let us not be too indignant. Seen from the viewpoint of attack, everything falls into place. Guderian was doing exactly the same thing on the opposite bank. His German tank group on the other side had also been moved right up to the river, and *he* was looking out of *his* window through binoculars at the Soviet side. Sometimes Guderian, hiding his identity, would appear with his binoculars at the river's edge. Just before Operation Barbarossa began, he even stopped trying to disguise himself. There he stood in his general's uniform, along with his officers, looking through binoculars, just like his Soviet enemies. Let us not call the Soviet generals idiots, for we do not see anything idiotic in what the German generals were doing. It was simply the normal preparation for an offensive. It is always done like that, in all armies including both the Soviet and the German. The only difference was that the Soviet Union was

preparing its operation on an incomparably greater scale than the German Operation Barbarossa. That is why the Soviet commanders began their reconnaissance activities considerably earlier than the German commanders, although they did not intend to complete them until July 1941.

In July 1940, on the orders of General K. A. Meretskov, the entire western frontier was reconnoitred. Thousands of Soviet commanders of all ranks took part in it, including generals and marshals holding the most senior posts. Meretskov himself, who had recently surveyed the Finnish frontier, now did the same thing on the Romanian and German frontiers. Then, accompanied by Colonel-General M. P. Kirponos, the officer commanding the South-West Front, Meretskov repeated the reconnaissance along the whole sector of the Kiev Special Military District. 'From Kiev', he recalled, 'I went to Odessa, where I met Major-General M. V. Zakharov, the District Chief of Staff. I went with him to the Romanian cordon. We looked across to the other bank, and saw some military figures looking at us.' (*Na Sluzhbe Narodu*) This same General Zakharov had said in April 1941 that the reconnaissance being done by groups of German generals had brought about a 'new situation'. It is interesting to speculate whether it occurred to him or his fellow officers that the German reconnaissance activities which began in April 1941 were simply a response to the concentrated Soviet reconnaissance which had been going on since July 1940?

Meretskov then hastened from the Odessa Military District to Byelorussia, where he joined General D. G. Pavlov in carefully reconnoitring the Soviet-German frontier and the territory behind it. After a brief visit to Moscow, Meretskov went again to the Northern Front. He said in passing that he had not found the officer commanding the North-West Front in his headquarters, because he was now spending a great deal of time on the frontier. Lieutenant-General M. M. Popov, the officer commanding the Northern Front, was not at his headquarters either. He too was on the frontier.

In 1945 Stalin and his generals launched a brilliant surprise strike at Japanese troops, and seized Manchuria, northern Korea and several Chinese provinces. The preparations to deliver this surprise attack were made in exactly the same way as the preparations had been made to attack Germany in 1941. The same Meretskov turned up on the frontier. He was by then a Marshal of the Soviet Union. He appeared secretly on the Manchurian frontier under the pseudonym of 'Colonel-General Maksimov'. Reconnaissance was one of the main elements in his preparations. 'He went all over every sector in a cross-country vehicle and even on

horseback in places.' (*Red Star*, 7 June 1987) All Soviet generals and marshals did the same before every offensive. Their opposite numbers in the Wehrmacht, Guderian, Manstein, Rommel and Kleist, did the same.

Commanders of Soviet divisions and corps stationed in the depths of Soviet territory were frequent visitors to the frontier. Marshal Rokossovsky (then a major-general commanding a mechanized corps some way back from the frontier) recalls that he often visited I. I. Fedyuninsky, whose corps was directly on the frontier. General Fedyuninsky recalls in his memoirs that his colleagues, including Rokossovsky, did indeed pay frequent visits. The memoirs of Soviet marshals and generals contain hundreds, even thousands, of such instances.

Marshal of the Soviet Union K. S. Moskalenko (then a major-general of artillery and commander of the 1st Anti-Tank Brigade of the High Command Reserve, the RGK) makes a direct connection between the TASS report and the sharply increased involvement of Soviet commanders in reconnaissance. When Major-General of Tank Troops M. I. Potanov, the officer commanding the 5th Army, discussed the TASS report with General Moskalenko, he told him to pick 'some good people who are literate in the military sense and go off to the frontier. Let them do some reconnaissance in the area and observe the Germans and what they are doing. You too will find it useful.' (*Na Yugo-Zapadnom Napravleny*, Moscow Nauka 1961, p.21)

In a defensive operation there is nothing for an anti-tank brigade to do in a forward area. The commanding officer of an army will throw an anti-tank brigade into battle only in a really critical situation, when the enemy has already broken through the defences of the battalions, the regiments, the brigades, the divisions and the corps, when a crisis of army proportions has arisen, and when the direction of the enemy's main thrust is quite clear. This, however, could only happen far in the depths of the Soviet defences.

General Moskalenko's brigade, however, was neither an army nor a front brigade. It was a brigade of the RGK, the High Command Reserve. In defensive action, it would be held in reserve for an even more serious situation, where the army and even the whole front had been broken, and a crisis on a strategic scale had arisen. In order to solve the strategic crisis, the brigade would have to be situated not on the frontier, but dozens or even hundreds of kilometres from it, in the place where the actual strategic crisis had arisen. When defensive operations are in preparation, the commander of an RGK anti-tank brigade has absolutely no reason to be anywhere near a frontier.



But if a grand-scale Soviet offensive were being set up to move from the L'vov salient into the heart of enemy territory, then the left flank of the most powerful grouping of troops ever seen would be covered by the Carpathians (and the mountain armies who were turning up there), while the right flank would have to be covered by an extra-high-power anti-tank formation right on the frontier. That was where the brigade was, and where General Moskalenko in person set off on General Potanov's orders to reconnoitre enemy territory.

If someone should attempt to explain this Soviet grand-scale reconnaissance by saying that the Soviet Union was preparing for defence, I would remind him that there were very many sappers, including some of the best, in the Soviet reconnaissance groups. If defences are being set up, there is no point in having a sapper look at enemy terrain. He has enough work to do on his own ground. The deeper he moves into his own territory, the more work the sapper will have to do. But Soviet sappers for some reason were spending long hours examining enemy territory.

If these grandiose reconnaissance operations had a defensive purpose, then they should not have been performed on the frontier. Positions suitable for defending should have been selected and reconnoitred some hundred kilometres inside the country. Then they should have been thoroughly prepared for defensive battles. That done, the entire senior command staff should have fallen back to the old frontier lines to reconnoitre these old abandoned positions, and then deeper still into Soviet territory, to the Dnieper line for example, to prepare still more defences.

Reconnaissance from frontier posts is reconnaissance for aggression.

The Politburo held a secret session on 21 June 1941. According to the Soviet historian V. Anfilov, 'Communist Party leaders and members of the Soviet government were in the Kremlin throughout the day of 21 June, and resolved some state and military problems of the utmost importance.' (*Bessmertnyi Podvig*, Moscow Nauka 1971, p. 185)

Only four of the problems under discussion at this meeting are public knowledge. It is not known how many other problems were discussed that day. The first of the decisions which we know about was to arm the Red

Army with a BM-13 salvo-fire mobile installation; to begin production in series of BM-13 installations and M-13 rocket missiles; and also to begin forming rocket artillery units. The BM-13 was given its unofficial name of Katyusha in the weeks which followed.

The second Politburo decision was to set up front formations based on the western frontier military districts. (Lieutenant-General P. A. Zhilin, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, *Velikaya Otechestfennaya Voina*, Moscow I PL 1973, p. 64) The fronts of course existed before then; the Politburo was merely formalizing decisions which had already been taken. Nevertheless, the decision of 21 June is supremely important because it provides official confirmation of the fact that five fronts were set up and formalized in secret *before* the German invasion, not after it.

The Politburo session lasted all day and continued far into the night. A few hours later, Zhukov rang Stalin and tried to convince him that something unusual was going on on the frontier. Many eyewitnesses and historians have described that moment. There is no doubt that not only Stalin but Molotov, Zhdanov and Beria all refused to believe that a German invasion was possible. Their unwillingness to believe this is confirmed by everything the Red Army did: anti-aircraft guns did not fire on German aircraft; Soviet fighters were forbidden to shoot down German planes; troops in the First Echelon had their ammunition taken from them; and draconian orders not to give in to provocation flowed from the General Staff. It is clear from this that the fronts were set up not to repel a German invasion – which the Soviet High Command did not believe was possible -but for some other purpose.

The third decision taken by the Politburo that day was to set up a group of armies of the High Command Reserve (RGK). Marshal of the Soviet Union S. M. Budennyi, first deputy to the People's Commissariat for Defence, was appointed its commanding officer. Major-General A. P. Pokrovsky (later a colonel-general) became the group's chief of staff. Seven armies of the Second Strategic Echelon, which had been moved secretly into the western areas of the country, joined the new army group.

In his memoirs, Colonel-General Pokrovsky called the new formation 'the group of troops of the Stavka Reserve'. (VIZH 1978, No. 4, p. 64) This name indicates the nature of the fourth decision made at this meeting: to set up a Supreme Command Stavka, the supreme body which controls the armed forces in war.

It is quite possible that the decisions to set up the group of armies and the Supreme Command Stavka had been taken previously and were merely ratified at the Politburo meeting of June 21. Evidence of this is provided by repeated indications that the German invasion found Major-General A. P. Pokrovsky already at his battle post in the western part of the country. (F/ZHi978, No. n, p. 126)

The fact is that before the German invasion occurred, the Second Strategic Echelon was not just seven different armies but a fighting machine with one single leadership. Why was this done? In a defensive war, a single leadership for the armies of the Second Strategic Echelon would have been entirely unnecessary. (It was in fact dissolved even before the Second Strategic Echelon came up against the enemy.) In peacetime the Second Strategic Echelon was not needed at all. Nor was there anywhere for it to train or quarter in the European part of the country.

The Politburo meeting gave the overall leadership of the South-West and Southern Fronts to Zhukov, and of the Northern Front to Meretskov. (General S. P. Ivanov and Major-General N. Shekhovtsev, *VIZH* 1981, No. 9, p. 11) Meretskov had commanded an army in the 'liberation' of Finland not long before. He was now sent back there as High Command Representative. Zhukov had recently been in command of the Southern Front when the eastern areas of Romania were 'liberated'. He was now sent back there as High Command Representative to co-ordinate the operations of the two fronts.

Meretskov left immediately. Zhukov delayed leaving Moscow for a few hours, and Operation Barbarossa caught him in the General Staff building. But that was chance. Had Barbarossa begun a few hours later, then Zhukov himself would have become part of that raging torrent flowing towards the western borders of the country, carrying along with it generals from the General Staff, *kombriks* from the GULAG, labour-camp prisoners and their guards, commanders from the reserve, and military academy students and their teachers from far and wide.

Soviet historians say of the German commanders that 'right up to the time of the invasion of the USSR in June, von Brauchitsch and Halter made one journey after another to visit the troops'. (Anfilov, *Bessmertny Podvig*, 1923, p. 65) Were Zhukov and Meretskov behaving any differently?

The operations of the two armies were strikingly similar. As the one did not know what the other was going to do, the Wehrmacht and the Red Army copied each other down to the last detail. The Soviet commanders

moved their command posts nearer the frontier, like their German colleagues; the Red Army concentrated two extra-high-power groupings on the flanks in frontier salients just as the German Army had done. Soviet aircraft were concentrated right on the frontier, just like the German aircraft. Soviet pilots were forbidden to shoot down German aircraft until a specific moment, just as German pilots were forbidden to shoot down Soviet planes, so as not to set off the conflict before its time, and so that the attack when it came should be a complete surprise. Hitler's command post was near Rastenburg in East Prussia, while the Soviet Chief Forward Command Post (GPKP) was near Vilnius. They are exactly the same distance from the frontier; if the Soviet and German chief command posts were marked on a map, and the map was then folded along the frontier, the two marks would come together.

After the Politburo meeting on 21 June had ended, many of its members dispersed immediately to their war posts. Zhdanov, who had controlled Finland's 'liberation', got ready to go to Leningrad on 23 June. Khrushchev, who had controlled the 'liberation' of the eastern provinces of Poland and Romania, set off for Kiev, and possibly for Tiraspol' as well. Andreev, who was responsible in the Politburo for war transportation (General A. A. Epishev, *Partiya i Artniya*, Moscow IPL 1980, p. 176) sped along the Trans-Siberian Railway in order to accelerate the movement of the Second Strategic Echelon armies. He was seen next day in Novosibirsk. (Lieutenant-General S. A. Kalinin, *Razmyshleniya o Minuvshem*, Moscow Voenizdat 1963, p. 131)

The Politburo's secret decision to deploy the five fronts on the Soviet western frontiers inescapably committed the Soviet Union to beginning active operations. Each of the Soviet fronts were consuming, among other things, up to 60,000 head of cattle per month. (Marshal S. K. Kurkotkin, *Tyl SVSvVO V*, Moscow Voenizdat 1977, p. 325) By the following year, more than three million head of cattle would be needed to feed these five fronts. In addition to these, the seven armies of the Second Strategic Echelon and three NKVD armies which had been deployed behind them all had to be fed, as well as four fleets, the Soviet troops who were preparing to 'liberate' Iran, the air force, the troops of the anti-aircraft defences and, above all, the war industry.

The Soviet General Staff were clearly concerned:

In spite of the great successes in the sphere of agricultural development on the eve of war, the grain problem has not been solved because of a number of reasons. State deliveries and purchases of grain did not meet all the country's needs for bread. (*VIZH* 1961, No. 7, p. 102)

A. G. Zverev, the Stalinist People's Commissar for Finances and member of the Central Committee, claimed that 'by the beginning of 1941 the number of head of cattle we had was below the level in 1916'. (*Zapiski Ministra*, Moscow IPL 1973, p. 188) It must be borne in mind that the level of 1916 was not the normal level for Russia, but the level to which the country's agriculture had sunk after two ruinous years of war. There were less head of cattle in the Soviet Union in 'peacetime' than there had been in Russia at the height of World War I. At these catastrophic levels, disorders can break out, the normal social structure can break down and crowds can take to the streets.

Having themselves been carried to power on a wave of disorders, the communists did not improve the country's food situation. They worsened it to the point where the country was still trying after a quarter of a century to reach the very low level to which the economy had sunk as a result of the Great War. Stalin created a colossal army and a colossal war industry, but for this he sacrificed the nation's patrimony which had been accumulated over the centuries, and also the nation's standard of living which he lowered to below the level at which people were living during the Great War.

From the beginning of 1939, Stalin began to transfer the resources of a catastrophically weakened agriculture to the army and war industry. The army and industry swiftly put on weight, while agriculture became horrifying thin. The process gathered speed. The 1,320 military trains laden with motor vehicles on the Soviet western frontier came not from the war industry but from the collective farms. In May 1941, 800,000 reservists were secretly mobilized into the Red Army. They came not only from the labour camps, as we have seen, but also from the collective farms. There were reserved occupations in industry, but not in agriculture. Thus the mobilization added to the number of mouths to feed, while reducing the number of agricultural labourers to feed them.

The existence of five voracious fronts, and the secret mobilization of peasants and technicians before the harvest had been gathered, would have led inevitably to a famine in 1942, even without any intervention by

the Germans. Once the all-consuming fronts had been deployed, there was no option but to send them into action the same year. If they stayed where they were, they would quite simply have nothing left to eat. A surprise attack by the Red Army in 1941, on the other hand, held the promise of new rich territories with abundant reserves of food. Even if these supplies proved inadequate, it would not matter too much; a famine in the middle of a war is understandable and can always be explained away.

The only Soviet marshal whom Stalin trusted completely was B. M. Shaposhnikov. As early as 1929, Shaposhnikov had expressed the categorical opinion that it was impossible to mobilize hundreds of thousands and millions of people and keep them in prolonged inactivity in the frontier area. (*Mozg Army*, Vol. 3, GIZ, 1929) It is much easier to control an army in the course of a war than millions of armed and hungry men boiling over with frustration and resentment against their leaders.

When he set up the fronts, Stalin destroyed the already unstable balance between his huge armies and the country's exhausted, ruined agriculture. It was all or nothing, and Stalin could no longer wait until 1942 to launch an offensive.

## CHAPTER 29

### Why Stalin Did Not Trust Churchill

Between June 1940 and the German invasion of the Soviet Union a year later, an interesting correspondence took place between Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin. The letters which the embattled British leader addressed to the Soviet head of state have assumed an almost legendary quality, and are known to history as 'Churchill's Warning'. It is widely believed that in these letters Churchill warned Stalin of the impending German attack on the Soviet Union. Much energy has been expended in speculating why Stalin failed to heed this friendly and obviously well-informed advice.

Perhaps we should be asking, why *should* Stalin have trusted Churchill? After all, Churchill had been an implacable opponent of communism since 1918, when he had proposed an alliance with Germany against the newly-formed Soviet state. Lenin himself had described Churchill as 'the worst hater of Soviet Russia'. (PSS, Moscow, Vol. 14, p. 350) Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising if Stalin treated any message from Churchill with a considerable degree of scepticism.

One must also bear in mind the political background to World War II. Germany was most disadvantageously placed in the diplomatic war of the 1930s. Situated in the heart of Europe, it was at the centre of all conflicts. Whatever war might begin in Europe, Germany would almost inevitably be involved in it. Therefore the diplomatic strategy of many countries in the 1930s boiled down to this attitude - you go to war with Germany, and I shall try to stay out of it. The Munich agreement of 1938 was a striking model of this philosophy.

Stalin and Molotov won the diplomatic war of the 1930s. With the Molotov—Ribbentrop Pact, Stalin gave the green light for World War II, of which he remained a 'neutral' observer, while training a million parachutists as a contingency against 'any surprises'.

Britain and France lost the diplomatic war and were then compelled to fight a real war, from which France made a rapid exit. Where did Britain's political interest lie? Looking at the situation through the eyes of the

Kremlin, Churchill could have only one political aspiration – to find a lightning-conductor for the German *Blitzkrieg* and deflect the German attack to anywhere else other than Britain. In the second half of 1940, only the Soviet Union could be such a lightning-conductor.

Put more simply, Britain (in Stalin's opinion, which he openly expressed on 10 March 1939) wanted a clash between the Soviet Union and Germany, while it stood aside from the fight. I do not know whether that was Churchill's intention or not, but that is exactly how Stalin would have seen every move made by the British government and its diplomats. As Admiral of the Fleet N. G. Kuznetsov put it, 'Stalin of course had more than enough grounds for thinking that England and America were seeking to have us collide head-on with Germany.' (*Nakanune*, 1966, p. 321)

The strategic situation in Europe also influenced Stalin's response. The concentration of power against weakness is the main principle of strategy. Germany was unable to apply this principle in World War I because it was fighting on two fronts. Attempts to concentrate great efforts on one front automatically led to the weakening of the other front and the enemy immediately exploited it. As a result, Germany had to renounce a strategy of destruction in favour of the only other alternative, a strategy of attrition. But Germany's resources were limited, while the resources of its enemies were unlimited. A war of attrition for Germany therefore could only end in catastrophe.

Both the German General Staff and Hitler himself understood that a war on two fronts would be catastrophic for Germany. In 1939-40, Germany always had in effect only one front. The German General Staff therefore was able to apply the concentration principle, and it did so brilliantly, concentrating the enormous German military power first against one enemy, then against the other.

The main problem facing German strategy was to prevent war breaking out on a second front. As long as the Germans were fighting on one front only, they won brilliant victories. Speaking at a meeting with High Command staff of the German armed forces on 23 November 1939, Hitler said that a war against the Soviet Union could begin only after the war in the West had ended.

Now supposing that someone had told you in 1940 that Hitler intended to renounce that great principle of strategy, and instead of concentration was preparing to disperse his forces. Someone keeps on whispering in your ear that Hitler quite intentionally wants to repeat the biggest mistake Germany made in World War I.



Every schoolboy knows that war on two fronts is suicide for Germany. World War II was to prove this rule once again, and also that, for Hitler personally, war on two fronts would be suicide in the purest sense of the word.

If Soviet Military Intelligence had reported anything like this, I should have advised General Golikov, the head of the GRU, to give up his post, go back to his academy and make another study of the reasons for the German defeat in World War I. If some neutral person from outside had told me about this suicidal war, I should have replied that Hitler was not an idiot, but that you, dear friend, certainly are one if you think that Hitler will begin a war on two fronts of his own free will.

Churchill was more interested than anyone else in the world in Hitler having not one, but two fronts. In such a situation, Churchill had too great a vested interest for Stalin to believe what he said.

Apart from the purely strategic and political situations, account must also be taken of the environment in which Churchill wrote his messages and Stalin read them.

France fell on 21 June 1940. The piracy of German U-boats increased sharply on the sea-routes. There hung over Britain, an island nation with close trade links with the rest of the world, the threat of a naval blockade and the most acute crisis in trade, industry and finance. Worse still, the German military machine, which at that point seemed invincible to many, was making intensive preparations to land on the British Isles.

It was in this environment that Churchill wrote to Stalin on 25 June. On 30 June, the German armed forces captured Guernsey in the Channel Islands. In a thousand years of British history, there have been few occasions when an enemy has landed on the British Isles. What was to follow? A landing on mainland Britain? Guernsey was taken without resistance. For how long would Britain resist?

Stalin received Churchill's message the day after Germany had seized Guernsey.

Where did Churchill's interest lie, one may ask? Did he want to save the dictatorship in the Soviet Union, or save the British Empire? I believe that it was the interests of Britain which made Churchill write his letter. If

we can understand this, surely Stalin must have understood it as well? For Stalin, Churchill was not an unbiased observer who out of friendly sentiments was giving warning of danger, but a man in serious difficulties, needing help and allies in a conflict against a fearful enemy. Stalin therefore was very cautious towards Churchill's letters.

Churchill wrote several letters to Stalin. But unluckily they all reached Stalin at times when Churchill was in great difficulties. The best-known letter in this series reached Stalin on 19 April 1941. It has attracted considerable interest from historians, all of whom agree that it was a serious warning to Stalin. But let us consider Churchill's position rather than the text of the letter. The German Army took Belgrade on 12 April. Rommel reached the Egyptian frontier on 13 April. Yugoslavia surrendered to Germany on 14 April, and St Paul's Cathedral in London was damaged in an air raid on 16 April. Greece was on the point of surrender and British troops there were in a catastrophic situation; it had become a question of whether or not they could be evacuated.

Stalin might have suspected not only Churchill's motives, but also his sources of information. Churchill wrote the letters in June 1940. Why did Churchill not send similar letters to the French government and to his own troops on the Continent in May of that year?

Churchill had written to Stalin in April 1941, a month after the German armed forces executed a brilliant operation to capture Crete. Why was British intelligence, Stalin might have thought, working so well in the interests of the Soviet Union, while it was doing nothing in British interests?

Finally, there is a more serious reason why Stalin did not trust Churchill's 'warnings': contrary to popular belief, Churchill was not warning Stalin about a German invasion.

Communist propaganda has done much to build up the myth about Churchill's 'warnings'. Khrushchev used to quote Churchill's message of 18 April 1941 to Stalin in order to do this. V. Anfilov, that prominent Soviet military historian and highly refined falsifier of history, quotes the message in all his books. Zhukov gives the message in full, and General S. P. Ivanov does the same. The official *History of the Great Motherland*

*War* constantly hammers Churchill's warnings into our heads and quotes his 18 April message in full. The text of Churchill's message can be found in hundreds of Soviet books and articles:

I have received reliable information from a trustworthy source that the Germans, after deciding that Yugoslavia had fallen into their clutches, that is on 20 March, began to transfer three armoured divisions, of the five stationed in Romania, into the southern part of Poland. As soon as they learnt of the Serbian revolution, this transfer was cancelled. Your excellency will easily appreciate the significance of these facts.

All Soviet sources publish Churchill's message in this form, insisting and assuring that it was a 'warning'. I personally see no warning here. Churchill is talking about three tank divisions. This is many by Churchill's standards. By Stalin's, it is not a great deal. Stalin himself at the time was secretly setting up 63 tank divisions, each one of which was stronger than a German division both in number and quality of tanks. If we consider that a report about three tank divisions amounted to a 'warning' that aggression was in preparation, we need not in that case accuse Hitler of aggressive intentions. German intelligence had already submitted reports to Hitler about dozens of Soviet tank divisions which were grouping on the borders of Germany and Romania.

Churchill suggested that Stalin assess 'the significance of these facts'. How could they be assessed? Poland historically has always been the gate through which all aggressors have passed from Europe to Russia. Hitler wanted to transfer tanks to Poland, but he changed his mind.

Compared to Poland, Romania was a very bad springboard for aggression. German troops would be harder to supply there than in Poland. In an attack from Romania the road to the vital heartland of Russia would be longer and harder for an aggressor, who would have to overcome a multitude of barriers, including the lower reaches of the river Dnieper.

Had Stalin been preparing himself for defence, and had he believed Churchill's 'warning', he should have heaved a sigh of relief and relaxed his military preparations. In addition, Churchill gave the reason why the

German troops were staying in Romania instead of being transferred to Poland: the Germans had problems in Yugoslavia, particularly in Serbia.

Britain at that time was waging very intensive diplomatic and military activity throughout the entire Mediterranean basin, particularly in Greece and Yugoslavia. Churchill's telegram was of enormous importance, but it could in no way be regarded as a warning. It was to a much greater degree an invitation to Stalin. The Germans wanted to transfer divisions to Poland, but have been forced to divert them elsewhere. You have nothing to fear, more so since these divisions in Romania have their backs turned to you. Assess these facts and act!

When Stalin got into a critical situation in the war, he too sent similar messages to Churchill and Roosevelt: Germany is concentrating its main forces against me, with its back turned to you. This is the best time for you — open the second front quickly! Then again came the turn of the western allies. When they got into serious difficulties after opening the second front, the western leaders sent the same message to Stalin in January 1945 : can't you hit harder?

We are not justified in regarding Churchill's letters as a warning. Churchill wrote his first long letter to Stalin on 25 June 1940 before the Barbarossa plan even existed. Churchill's letters are founded on sober calculation rather than on knowledge of German plans. He was simply drawing Stalin's attention to the situation in Europe: Britain has problems with Hitler today, and the Soviet Union will surely have them tomorrow. Churchill was calling on Stalin to come into the war on the side of Britain.

Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, the prominent British military historian, made a brilliant analysis of the strategic situation of that time as seen from Hitler's standpoint. According to General Jodl, to whom Liddell-Hart refers, Hitler repeatedly told his generals that Britain's only hope was a Soviet invasion of Europe. (B. H. Liddell-Hart, *History of the Second World War*, Pan, London 1978, p. 151) Churchill himself wrote on 22 April 1941 that 'the Soviet government knows full well . . . that we stand in need of its help'. (L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, p. 611) What help was Churchill expecting from Stalin, and how could Stalin give it, except by striking at Germany?

Stalin had sufficient grounds for not trusting Churchill. But even Stalin must have understood that had Britain fallen, he would have been left to face Germany alone. In his reply to Churchill's 25 June message, he says that 'the policy of the Soviet Union is to avoid war with Germany. But Germany might attack the Soviet Union in spring of 1941, if Britain has lost the war by then.' (R. Goralski, *World War II Almanac: 1931-1945*, Hamish Hamilton, London, p. 24)

It transpires from Stalin's answer that he intended to live in peace while patiently waiting for Britain to fall, and if he had been left alone face to face with Hitler, to wait for Germany to invade. Ah, how stupid Stalin was, some historians say indignantly. But let us not share their indignation. That message was addressed not to Churchill, but to Hitler! On 13 July 1940, Molotov was ordered by Stalin to hand over to Count von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador, the written record of Stalin's conversation with Sir Stafford Cripps, the British Ambassador. Was it not a strange thing to do, to have negotiations with Churchill through Sir Stafford Cripps, and then secretly pass the minutes of these negotiations to Hitler through his ambassador von der Schulenburg?

But Stalin did not pass the original memorandum to Hitler, only a carefully edited copy in which a mass of unnecessary detail was retained, but key sentences were completely altered. When the diplomatic veneer is stripped away, this is what the document was telling Hitler:

'Adolf, fight, and don't worry about your rear. Advance and don't look back, you have behind you your good friend Josef Stalin who only wants peace and who will never attack you under any circumstances.

'There have been negotiations here in Moscow with the British Ambassador. Don't worry, these negotiations are not directed against you. You see, I'm even sending you the secret minutes of my talks with Cripps. And I've sent Churchill to hell!' (In fact he had not).

Could the sweet siren songs from the Kremlin be believed? Many historians do believe them. But Hitler did not, and after thinking long and hard about the 'copy' of Stalin's conversation with Cripps, he issued the order on 21 July 1940 that a start should be made on the plan for Operation Barbarossa. In other words, Hitler decided to fight on two fronts. This decision seems inexplicable to many people. Many German generals and field-marshal did not understand it either, and they declined to approve such a truly suicidal decision. But Hitler had no choice.

He had gone increasingly further west, north and south, while Stalin stood back with his axe singing sweet songs of peace.

Hitler's one irremediable mistake was made, not on 21 July 1940, but on 19 August 1939. Once he had agreed to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Hitler was faced with an inevitable war against the West, while the 'neutral' Stalin stood behind him. From that moment onwards, Hitler had two fronts. His decision to set up Operation Barbarossa in the east without waiting for victory in the west was not a fatal error, but only an attempt to put right the fatal error he had already made. But by then it was too late. The war already had two fronts, and it was already impossible to win it. Even the capture of Moscow would not have solved Hitler's problem; beyond Moscow there still lay another 10,000 kilometres of boundless territory, vast centres of industrial power, inexhaustible natural and human resources. It is always easy to begin a war with Russia, but not so easy to finish it. It was certainly easy for Hitler to fight in the European part of the Soviet Union; the territory is limited, there are many good roads, and the winters are mild. Was Hitler ready to fight in Siberia in the unrestricted limitless expanse, where there were no roads and where the brutality of the frost is close to the brutality of Stalin's regime?

Stalin knew that war on two fronts would be suicide for Hitler. Stalin calculated that Hitler would not commit suicide, and that he would not begin a war in the east without having first ended the war in the west. Stalin was patiently waiting for the German tank corps to land in Britain. He was not alone in looking upon the brilliant airborne assault on Crete as a final rehearsal for landing in Britain. At the same time Stalin did everything possible to convince Hitler of his peaceableness. That was why Soviet anti-aircraft guns were not firing on German aircraft, while Soviet newspapers and TASS proclaimed that there would be no war between the Soviet Union and Germany.

Had Stalin succeeded in convincing Hitler that the Soviet Union was a neutral country, then the German tank corps without any doubt would have landed on the British Isles. And then a truly unprecedented situation would have arisen. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, France, Greece and Albania no longer had armies, governments, parliaments or political parties.

Millions of people had been driven into Nazi concentration camps and the whole of Europe was awaiting its liberation. All that remained on the European continent was the regiment of Hitler's personal guards, the guards of the Nazi concentration camps, German rear units, military schools and . . . five Soviet airborne assault corps, tens of thousands of fast tanks built specially for moving along motorways; tens of thousands of aircraft; pilots who had not been trained for fighting in the air, but who had been taught how to make air strikes on ground targets; divisions and whole armies of the NKVD; armies made up of prisoners from the Soviet labour camps; extra-high-power formations of the Glider Air Force to make rapid landings on enemy territory; mountain divisions trained to make swift thrusts into the mountain passes over which flowed oil, the life- blood of war.

Has anyone in history ever been in such a favourable position to 'liberate' Europe? And this situation did not come about by itself. Stalin, working long, persistently and in sustained fashion, had made a subtle mosaic from the smallest of fragments. It was Stalin who helped to bring Hitler to power, and made Hitler, in Stalin's phrase, a real icebreaker for the revolution. It was Stalin who encouraged the icebreaker to move into Europe. It was Stalin who demanded of the French and other communists that they should not prevent the icebreaker from breaking up Europe. It was Stalin who supplied the icebreaker with everything it needed for its victorious advance. It was Stalin who closed his eyes to all the crimes being committed by the Nazis and rejoiced in the pages of *Pravda* 'when the world was shaken to its foundations, when powers perished and greatness fell'.

But Hitler guessed Stalin's design. That was why World War II ended catastrophically for Stalin. He only got half of Europe, and some places here and there in Asia.

One final question. If Churchill did not warn Stalin that an invasion was being prepared, why do the communists hold on so tenaciously to the legend that he did? To show to the Soviet people that Churchill was a good man? Or to prove that the Western leaders were to be trusted? It was not, of course, for either purpose.

The communists need the legend of Churchill's warnings to justify their own preparations for war. The 'warnings' bolster the orthodox view that the 'big plan' for which such elaborate preparations had been made

was simply intended to forestall German aggression. 'We knew that Hitler was going to attack,' they say. 'It was Churchill who warned us . . .'



## CHAPTER 30

### Why Stalin Did Not Trust Richard Sorge

Stalin prepared himself very seriously for war. He showed particular concern for Soviet military intelligence which is known today as the GRU. It is sufficient to read through the list of all the GRU chiefs since the institution was set up prior to 1940 to appreciate Stalin's touching concern for his valiant intelligence officers:

|           |                                                                                                         |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aralov    | — arrested, spent several years under investigation, in which 'measures of physical coercion' were used |
| Stigga    | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Nikonov   | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Berzin    | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Unshlikht | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Uritsky   | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Yezhov    | — liquidated                                                                                            |
| Proskurov | — liquidated                                                                                            |

It goes without saying that when the military intelligence chiefs were liquidated, their first deputies, their deputies, advisers and directors of their services boards and departments were liquidated as well. And when the heads of departments were liquidated, a shadow invariably fell over the executive officers and agents whom they were directing. The liquidation of the heads of military intelligence, therefore, meant the liquidation of the entire military intelligence.

It is said that this regular blood-letting had disastrous consequences for the intelligence service. This was not the case. Before, during and after World War II, the GRU was, and remains, the most powerful and effective intelligence service in the world. The GRU produces less secret information than its great opponent and competitor, the Ch.K. or KGB (the Soviet secret police), but the quality of its information is considerably

higher. The constant purging in no way weakened the power of Soviet military intelligence. On the contrary, as each generation succeeded its predecessor, it became more aggressive. This succession of generations is like the way in which a shark renews its teeth. The new teeth appear in complete rows, forcing out the old ones, while more and more rows of new teeth can already be seen behind them. The bigger the creature grows, the more teeth it has; the more often they are replaced, the longer and sharper they become.

Intelligence officers who were by Soviet standards innocent, frequently, indeed very frequently, perished in the rapid succession of generations. Strangely, however, the Soviet shark never ended up toothless because of it. Hitler exterminated a large number of ardent Nazis who belonged to the SA, one of the great mass Nazi organizations, without weakening his regime in any way.

The difference between Hitler and Stalin was that Stalin took his preparations for war very seriously. Stalin arranged nights of the long knives not just against his own communist storm-troopers, but against generals, marshals, designers and intelligence officers. Stalin believed that it was very important to accept briefcases crammed full of documents from his intelligence service. But he considered it even more important not to accept a briefcase from his intelligence service with a bomb in it. His thinking on this proceeded not only from considerations of his own personal safety, but from considerations of the state as well. The stability of the leadership in critical situations is one of the most vital factors in the preparations which any state makes for war.

Nobody ever pushed a bomb under Stalin's desk at a critical moment, and it was not just chance that this never happened. Through his sustained, single-minded terror against the GRU, Stalin not only obtained secret intelligence of high quality, but also guaranteed the supreme leadership of the country against 'unexpected events of all kinds' at times of crisis.

Richard Sorge was a spy from the row of teeth which Stalin, as a precaution, ordered to be pulled out on 29 July 1938. He was stationed in Tokyo, where he worked as a journalist under the alias 'Ramsay'. Soviet military intelligence was not so stupid as to publish Sorge's most interesting reports. But even the few which have been published lead us into an impasse:

January 1940: I am grateful for your greetings and wishes about my leave. If I go on leave however it will immediately reduce the information.

May 1940: It goes without saying that we are postponing the date of our return home because of the present military situation. May we assure you once again that this is not the time to raise this question.

October 1940: May I count on coming home after the end of the war?

This is a very odd correspondence. Every intelligence officer knows that he will be allowed to return home after a war. Yet Sorge puts the question again and again, listing the numerous services he has rendered to the Soviet regime. Every transmission in unbroken code from his clandestine radio station put Sorge's entire espionage organization at risk. Had his radio station—intended for agent-running and top-secret codes — really been created to enable Sorge to ask such questions?

A multitude of books and articles have been written about Sorge in the Soviet Union. Some of them ring with strange praise of him. He was such a great intelligence officer, such a true communist that he even spent his own money, which he had earned in his difficult work as a journalist, on his illegal work. What nonsense! Were the labour-camp prisoners in Kolyma no longer digging up gold? Had the GRU become so impoverished that Sorge had to dip into his own pocket? The weekly magazine *Ogonek* (No. 17, 1965), published an interesting report that Sorge was holding very important documents, but was unable to send them to the centre, because the centre had not sent a courier. *Ogonek* did not say why the centre had not sent a courier, adding another puzzling question to the case.

But the explanation was quite simple. While all this was going on, Yan Berzin, the brilliant chief of Soviet military intelligence who had recruited Richard Sorge, was liquidated after suffering appalling torture. Solomon Uritsky, another GRU chief who had personally given Sorge his instructions, was also liquidated. Gorev, the Soviet illegal resident who had fixed Sorge's passage from Germany, was in jail. (*Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, 8 October 1964) Aina Kuusinen, a secret collaborator of Sorge's who was married to a deputy head of the GRU who was both the President of the Finnish Democratic Republic and future member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU, was also in jail. Ekaterina Maksimova, Sorge's wife, had been arrested,

admitted having links with enemies, and was liquidated. Karl Ramm, the illegal GRU resident in Shanghai and former deputy of Sorge's, was summoned back to Moscow 'on leave' and liquidated.

Then Sorge received the order to come back on leave. Soviet sources do not conceal the fact that 'Sorge refused to travel to the Soviet Union.' A good deal of material on this subject was published during the Khrushchev era, including the frank admission that 'Undoubtedly Sorge guessed what was awaiting him in Moscow.'

Not wishing to return to a certain death, Sorge continued to work for the communists, but now no longer in the role of a secret collaborator (*seksot* for short), but rather as an amateur informer, for his own satisfaction. Sorge had calculated carefully; I shan't go now, but after the war they will understand that I spoke only the truth. They can pardon, and appreciate. That was why he was paying agents out of his own pocket, and why there were no couriers speeding towards him. The centre did not lose contact with him until the end. It accepted his telegrams, but apparently only to reply 'Come home, come home, come home.' To which Ramsay replied 'Too busy, too busy, too busy . . .'

Stalin, therefore, did not trust Richard Sorge because he was a defector, with at least two capital sentences hanging over his head. One was due to his co-workers, who had denounced him in 1938 and put his name on the 'general list'. The other was added later for malicious defection. Comrade Sorge himself did not greatly trust Comrade Stalin, which is why he would not go back. How could Comrade Stalin trust someone who did not trust him?

Someone has made up the legend that Richard Sorge supposedly submitted highly important information about the German invasion to the GRU, but nobody believed him. Sorge was a very able intelligence officer, but he told Moscow nothing of significance about the German invasion. What is more, he fell victim to disinformation and fed the GRU with false reports. On 11 April 1941, he telegraphed Moscow that: 'The representative of the [German] General Staff in Tokyo has stated that war against the Soviet Union will begin immediately after the war in Europe ends.'

Hitler knew that it had already become impossible to conceal his preparations to invade the Soviet Union. He therefore said in secret, in a way that all should hear, 'Yes, I want to attack Stalin . . . after I have finished the war in the west.' We already know that exactly one month later, Stalin would do the same thing in his 'secret' speech when he said, 'Yes, I want to attack Hitler ... in 1942.'

If Sorge's telegram of 11 April (and other telegrams like it) were to be believed, there was no need to worry. The war in the west would continue, alternately dying down and flaring up with new force. But when the end of that war came, it would be obvious. It would then be possible to concentrate all the efforts of the German war machine on the east. In other words, said Sorge, Hitler intended to fight on one front only.

The GRU did not need Sorge to tell them this. After making a profound study of all the economic, political and military aspects of the situation, the GRU drew two conclusions: firstly, that Germany could not win a war on two fronts; and secondly, that Hitler would not begin a war in the east without first finishing the war in the west. The first conclusion proved correct. The second did not. Sometimes a war is started without any prospects of winning it.

Even before Sorge's 'warnings', Lieutenant-General Filip Ivanovich Golikov, the new head of the GRU, submitted a detailed report to Stalin on 20 March 1941, which concluded that 'the earliest possible date on which operations against the USSR may begin is the moment following victory over England or after an honourable peace for Germany has been concluded with her'.

But Stalin knew this simple truth without Golikov having to tell him. That is why Stalin replied to Churchill's letter of 25 June 1940 that Hitler might begin a war against the Soviet Union in 1941, *on condition* that Britain had ceased to resist by that time.

But Hitler, whom Stalin had driven into a strategic impasse with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, suddenly realized that he had nothing to lose and that inevitably Germany had two fronts. He began to fight on two fronts. Neither Stalin nor Golikov expected this. It was a suicidal decision, but Hitler had no choice. Stalin simply could not understand that having found himself in a strategic impasse, Hitler would take such a suicidal step. General Golikov, the head of the GRU, had not contemplated this either. Sorge simply confirmed this view with the false information in his telegrams.

Later, on 15 June, Sorge correctly named the date of the German invasion as 22 June. But which Richard Sorge was to be believed? The one who said that Hitler would not fight on two fronts, or the one who said he would? Sorge's two reports cancel each other out. That apart, Sorge's reports were only reports. The GRU, quite rightly, does not believe any reports; what it requires is reports with proof.

Sorge was a great intelligence officer, and fully deserved his posthumously-awarded title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Sorge's greatness, however, was brought to bear not on Germany, but on Japan. S. Uritsky, when still head of the GRU, personally gave Sorge his mission: 'the point of your work in Tokyo is to deflect the possibility of a war between Japan and the USSR. Your main target is the Germany embassy.' (*Ogonek*, 1965, No. 14, p. 23) The German embassy was only a cover, to be used by Sorge to fulfil his main mission. His brief was not to warn about preparations for German invasion, but to deflect Japanese aggression onto another course.

Sorge is widely known to have told Stalin in autumn 1941 that Japan would not come into the war against the Soviet Union. Stalin used this extremely important information to withdraw dozens of Soviet divisions from the Far Eastern frontiers and to throw them into the fighting near Moscow, thereby changing the strategic situation in his favour.

What is less well known is the reason why Stalin believed Sorge on this occasion: he believed him because Sorge gave him proof. Soviet historians prefer to pass over this proof in silence, and that is understandable. If Sorge said that Japan would not move against the Soviet Union, he could only prove it by indicating another enemy, against whom Japan was in fact preparing a surprise attack.

As he followed his GRU brief, Sorge did not just forecast events. He directed them on a number of occasions. In August 1951 the United States Congress was examining the Sorge affair. In the course of the hearings it was proved beyond all shadow of doubt that, through the person of Ramsay, its illegal resident in Tokyo, Soviet Military Intelligence did a vast amount to ensure that Japan began an aggressive war in the Pacific, and that this aggression was directed against the United States. (*Hearings on American Aspects of the Richard*

*Sorge Spy Case*, House of Representatives 82nd Congress, First Session, 19, 22 and 23 August, Washington 1951)

Intelligence is the most thankless work in the world. It is the ones who fail who become famous, the ones who get hanged - like Sorge, for example. Stalin also had military intelligence officers whose achievements were truly outstanding; but, precisely because they were so successful, they remain entirely unknown to us. One Soviet intelligence officer had access to some of Hitler's real secrets. According to Marshal of the Soviet Union A. A. Gretchko, 'eleven days after Hitler accepted the final plan for the war against the Soviet Union (18 December 1940), this fact and the basic details of the decision taken by the German High Command became known to our intelligence organs'. (*VIZH* 1966, No. 6, p. 8)

We shall probably never learn the name of the great intelligence officer who performed this feat. It cannot be excluded that it was the same GRU resident who obtained the plan for Operation Citadel in 1943. But that is only my suggestion.

In December 1940, Lieutenant-General F. I. Golikov, the GRU chief, reported to Stalin that he had confirmed reports which indicated that Hitler had decided to fight on two fronts, that is, to attack the Soviet Union without waiting for the war in the west to end.

This highly important document was discussed in Stalin's presence in early January in a very restricted circle in the Soviet High Command. Stalin did not believe it, saying that any document could be forged. Stalin demanded of Golikov that he organize Soviet military intelligence in such a way that it would know at any moment whether Hitler was really preparing for war or just bluffing. Golikov reported that he had already done this. The GRU was attentively following a whole range of aspects of German military preparations, and from these the GRU would accurately identify the moment when preparations for invasion would begin. Stalin asked Golikov to explain how he could know this. Golikov answered that he could only tell Stalin personally and not anyone else. Subsequently, Golikov regularly reported to Stalin personally, and each time he told him that the preparations for invasion had not yet begun.

At the Politburo meeting held on 21 June 1941, Golikov reported on a massive concentration of German troops on the Soviet border, on enormous reserves of ammunition, on the regrouping of the German Air Force, on German deserters, and about other matters. Golikov knew the numbers of nearly all the German divisions, the names of their commanders, and where they were stationed. He knew many important secrets, including the name of Operation Barbarossa and the time of its inception. After giving his report, however, Golikov said that preparations for invasion had not yet begun, and without these preparations it was not possible for Germany to begin the war. In the course of the meeting Golikov was asked whether he could guarantee what he was saying. Golikov replied that he would answer for his information with his head, and if he were mistaken, then the Politburo would have the right to do to him what had been done to all his predecessors.

Some ten to twelve hours after he had said this, Operation Barbarossa began. What did Stalin do to Golikov? Do not fear, it was nothing bad. On 8 July Stalin entrusted Golikov with a trip to Britain and the United States, and briefed him personally. The visits were a success, and Golikov was then put in command of armies and fronts. In 1943 Stalin appointed him to the vitally important post of deputy to the People's Commissar for Defence, that is deputy to Stalin himself, to deal with cadre matters. Stalin allowed only his most trusted men to handle the delicate task of selecting and placing cadres. Beria, for instance, was never allowed to do this.

Golikov continued to rise in rank after Stalin died, and eventually became a Marshal of the Soviet Union. It is understandable that he should not say one word in his memoirs about how he covered German preparations for war, how he remained alive, or why he had such swift advancement after Operation Barbarossa.

If one recalls what happened to all his predecessors, to whom nothing resembling a German invasion ever happened, and compares their fate with what happened to Golikov, then one's bewilderment knows no bounds. The mystery of Golikov had been worrying me personally for a long time when I found the answer I was seeking in the Academy of the GRU. Later, when I was working in the central organization of the GRU, I found confirmation of this answer.

Golikov used to report to Stalin that Hitler was not preparing for war against the Soviet Union. It turned out that Golikov was reporting the truth to Stalin, for in reality Hitler was not making such preparations. Golikov knew that Stalin did not trust documents. Golikov did not trust them himself. He therefore looked for some



other indicators which would unerringly signal the moment when Hitler began his preparations for war with the Soviet Union. All the GRU residents in Europe were ordered to infiltrate organizations directly or indirectly connected with sheep farming. Over a period of months, intelligence was gathered and carefully processed on the numbers of sheep in Europe, on the main sheep-breeding centres and slaughterhouses. Golikov was informed twice a day about mutton prices in Europe.

In addition Soviet intelligence began to hunt for dirty cloths and oil-stained pieces of paper left behind by soldiers cleaning their weapons. There were many German troops in Europe. The troops were stationed in field conditions. Each soldier cleaned his weapon at least once a day. Cloths and paper which have been used for weapon cleaning are usually either burned or buried, but of course this rule was not always obeyed. The GRU had ample opportunity to collect an enormous quantity of dirty cloths.

Large amounts of these cloths were sent across the frontier, wrapped around various iron implements, so as not to arouse suspicion. Should any complications have arisen, the police would concentrate their attention on the inoffensive iron object, but not on the dirty cloth in which it was wrapped. In addition, considerably larger amounts than usual of kerosene lamps, gas stoves, primus stoves, lamps and lighters were sent across the border by both legal and illegal means. All this was analysed by hundreds of Soviet experts, and the results reported immediately to Golikov. He immediately informed Stalin that Hitler had not yet begun his preparations to invade the Soviet Union, so there was no need to pay heed to every build-up of German troops or German General Staff documents.

Golikov had good grounds for believing that very serious preparation was required for a war against the Soviet Union. One of the vital things which Germany would need if it were to be ready to fight such a war was sheepskin coats; no less than six million of them. As soon as Hitler decided to attack the Soviet Union, the General Staff would have to order industry to begin producing millions of sheepskin coats. This would be reflected immediately on the European markets. In spite of the war, mutton prices would fall because of the simultaneous slaughter of millions of animals, while sheepskin prices rise sharply.

Golikov also calculated that, if the German Army was going to fight in the Soviet Union, it would have to use a new type of lubricating oil for its weaponry. The German oil usually used on weapons would congeal in the frost, component parts would freeze together and the weapons would not work. Golikov waited for the German Army to change the type of oil it used in weapon-cleaning. Soviet expertise in dirty cloths showed that the

German Army was still using its usual oil, and there were no signs of a change over to a new type. Soviet experts also watched motor fuel. In heavy frost the normal German fuel broke down into incombustible particles. Golikov knew that if Hitler decided to open a second front, he would have to order the mass production of a fuel which would not disintegrate in heavy frost. It was samples of German liquid fuel which Soviet intelligence was sending over the border in lighters and lamps.

The GRU had many other ploys like these which would have served as warning signals. They proved useless for the simple reason that Hitler set Operation Barbarossa in motion without making any preparations at all. Why Hitler acted like this will surely remain a mystery. The German Army was built for war in western Europe, but Hitler did nothing to prepare his army for war in Russia.

Stalin therefore had no reason to punish Golikov, who had done everything humanly possible to discover German preparations for an invasion. He told Stalin that no preparations were taking place, and this was the simple truth. There had only been a great build-up of German troops. Golikov gave instructions that not all German divisions should be targets of attention, but only those which were ready to invade; those divisions, that is, which each had 15,000 sheepskin coats in its storage depots. There were simply no such divisions ready for war throughout the entire Wehrmacht. Golikov could hardly be blamed for not seeing any preparations for invasion when no serious preparations existed.

## CHAPTER 31

### How Hitler Frustrated Stalin's War

*We have been fully prepared for an aggressive war.  
It was not our fault that we were not the ones to  
carry out the aggression.*

Major-General P. GRIGORENKO  
(*Memoirs: 'Dentinez'*, New York 1981,  
P. 138)

On 17 June 1945, a group of Soviet military investigators were interrogating some senior Nazi military leaders. In the course of his interrogation, Field-Marshal Keitel maintained that

all the preparatory measures we took before spring 1941 were defensive measures against the contingency of a possible attack by the Red Army. Thus the entire war in the East, to a known degree, may be termed a preventive war . . . We decided ...to forestall an attack by Soviet Russia and to destroy its armed forces with a surprise attack. By spring 1941, I had formed the definite opinion that the heavy buildup of Russian troops, and their attack on Germany which would follow, would place us, in both economic and strategic terms, in an exceptionally critical situation . . . Our attack was the immediate consequence of this threat . . .

Colonel-General Alfred Jodl, the main author of the German military plans, adopted the same stance. The Soviet investigators did their best to force Keitel and Jodl out of their postures, but did not succeed. Keitel and Jodl did not change their testimony and, along with the principal war criminals, were sentenced to be hanged by the international tribunal at Nuremberg. One of the main accusations against them was 'the unleashing of an unprovoked aggressive war' against the Soviet Union.

Twenty years went by and new evidence appeared. Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union N. G. Kuznetsov was, in 1941, an admiral, People's Commissar for the Navy, member of the Central Committee of the Party, member of Stavka from the time it was set up. In the 19603, he shed some startling new light on the matter:

For me there is one thing beyond all argument - J. V. Stalin not only did not exclude the possibility of war with Hitler's Germany, on the contrary, he considered such a war . . . inevitable . . . J. V. Stalin made preparations for war . . . wide and varied preparations - beginning on dates . . . which he himself had selected. Hitler upset his calculations. (*Nakunune*, Moscow Voenizdat 1966, p. 321)

The admiral is telling us quite clearly and openly that Stalin considered war inevitable and prepared himself seriously to enter it at a time of his own choosing. In other words, Stalin was preparing to strike the first blow, that is to commit aggression against Germany; but Hitler dealt a preventive blow first and thereby frustrated all Stalin's plans.

Admiral Kuznetsov is a witness of the highest rank. In 1941, he was even more highly placed in the Soviet military-political hierarchy than Zhukov. Kuznetsov was a People's Commissar; Zhukov was a deputy People's Commissar. Kuznetsov was a member of the Central Committee; Zhukov was only a candidate member. Not one of those who have written their memoirs was as highly placed as Kuznetsov in 1941, and no one was closer to Stalin than he.

What Kuznetsov says after the war, incidentally, is in full accord with what he said before the war, for instance at the 18th Party Congress in 1939. This was the Congress which marked out a new path: to reduce the terror inside the country and to transfer it to the Soviet Union's neighbours. At this Congress, Kuznetsov's speech was perhaps the most aggressive. It was for this speech that Kuznetsov was made a member of the Central Committee at the end of the Congress, passing over the candidate-member level, and given the post of People's Commissar.

Everything which Kuznetsov said openly had been said many years before by Stalin in his secret speeches. Everything which Kuznetsov said has been borne out by what the Red Army and Fleet actually did. Finally,

Admiral Kuznetsov has to be believed in this case, because his book has been read by all friends and enemies alike; it has been read by political and military leaders in the Soviet Union; it has been read by marshals, diplomats, historians, generals and admirals; it has been read by paid friends of the Soviet Union abroad, and nobody has ever tried to deny Kuznetsov's words.

Let us compare Keitel's words with those of Kuznetsov. Field-Marshal Keitel said that Germany was not preparing an aggression against the Soviet Union; it was the Soviet Union which was preparing the aggression. Germany was simply using a preventive attack to defend itself from an unavoidable aggression. Kuznetsov says the same thing — yes, the Soviet Union was preparing for war and would inevitably have entered into it, but Hitler disrupted these plans with his attack. What I cannot understand is why Keitel was hanged, and Kuznetsov was not.

Soviet marshals and generals do not hide their intentions. General S. P. Ivanov, Chief of the General Staff Academy of the Armed Forces of the USSR, along with a group of leading Soviet historians, wrote a scientific paper entitled *The Initial Period of War (Nachal'nyi Period Voyny*, Moscow Voenizdat 1974), in which he not only admits that Hitler launched a preventive attack, but also puts a time to it: 'the Nazi command succeeded in forestalling our troops literally in the last two weeks before the war began', (p. 212)

Another open declaration of Soviet intentions in 1941 can be found in the *Military Historical Journal (VIZH* 1984, No. 4) The journal is the official publication of the Soviet Ministry of Defence, and cannot be published without the stamp of the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff. (At the time these were, respectively, Marshals of the Soviet Union S. Sokolov and S. Akhromeev). The *Military Historical Journal* explained why such great stockpiled reserves of ammunition, liquid fuel and provisions were built up so close to the frontier. The explanation was simple: they were for offensive operations, (p. 34) It is stated quite openly on the same page that the German attack disrupted the Soviet plans.

Had the Red Army been preparing for defence or even a counter-attack, it would have been no simple matter to disrupt its plans. Quite the contrary, for a German invasion would have served as a signal to Soviet troops to act according to plans which had already been drawn up. Only if the Red Army had intended to

attack could the German invasion have disrupted its plans. Soviet troops would then be compelled to defend themselves, that is to improvise, and act in a situation which had not been envisaged.

On 6 June 1941, German intelligence received information that the Soviets intended to transfer their seat of government to Sverdlovsk. Only Hitler and those closest to him were informed about it. Dr Goebbels noted in his diary that he had received such a report, and spoke very unflatteringly about the Soviet government's intention to run away further to the east.

Only now, several decades later, can we evaluate the report on its merits. We now know that a *decoy command post* had been built in Sverdlovsk. It was only during the war that it turned out that it was not Sverdlovsk which was to be the emergency capital, but Kuibyshev. Even Kuibyshev, however, was not the whole truth, but only half of it. The institutions which were set up in Kuibyshev were those whose loss did not affect the stability of the country's top military and political leadership, such as the Supreme Soviet with 'President' Kalinin, unimportant people's commissariats, and embassies.

All the important bodies were located nearby, not in Kuibyshev itself, but in great underground tunnels hewn out of the Zhiguli rocks. Before the war the construction of this giant had been disguised by the building of the Kuibyshev hydro-electric power station. Thousands of labour-camp prisoners, thousands of tons of construction materials and building machinery were sent there and everybody knew why. It was to build the hydroelectric power station. After the war the entire gigantic edifice was moved higher upriver on the Volga, and the hydro-electric station arose on a new site. The original site had been selected in a place where a power station should not have been built but which was an eminently suitable place for an underground command post.

I found no mention in pre-war German archives of Kuibyshev as the emergency capital, or of the underground command post in Zhiguli. German intelligence only had information about the transfer of the Soviet government to a command post in Sverdlovsk. But a government cannot move to a command post which does not exist. Who was spreading these reports about the transfer to a fictitious command post? This could only have been done by the person who invented the bogus command post in the first place, that is the

Soviet government, or more exactly, the head of that government, Stalin. That bogus command post was created so that the enemy should find out about it one day. That day came, and German intelligence acquired the secret which had been specially manufactured for it.

If German intelligence obtained a false report about Soviet government intentions, it meant that the Soviet government itself must have been trying to conceal something at the time. It is not difficult to guess what. If the Soviet leaders were spreading false information about their intention to move eastwards, it meant without any doubt that they were going to do the opposite.

The subtlety was that, in addition to the powerful Zhiguli command post, whose location was difficult though not impossible to establish, there was another government command post. It was a railway train. In the event of war, this command post, under cover of several armoured trains of the NKVD and accompanied by three trains belonging to the People's Commissariat for Communications, could go at any time to any area where hostilities were in progress. This capability to move alongside an area where the main events of the war were taking place was reflected in the name of the train-the PGKP, or Main Forward Command Post. Several carefully hidden, camouflaged stations were built expressly for this command post. Government telegraph lines were led into these stations before the war, and all the trains had to do was to plug into them with their own communications equipment.

There is no need to explain that the mobile command post was intended for an offensive war; in a situation where the troops are rapidly pressing forward, the command, with its cumbersome paraphernalia of control and communications, must keep up with them. In a defensive war, on the other hand, it is simpler, more reliable and safer to exercise direction from an office in the Kremlin, from an underground station in the Moscow Metro, or even from the tunnels of Zhiguli.

Were we to gather up all available snippets of information and put them together, we should be able to conclude with a fair degree of certainty that a very high-calibre command post had been established, or must have been established nearer to Vilnius, on the Minsk-Vilnius main railway line. Several days after the German leaders received their 'secret' report about the Soviet government's transfer eastwards, the Soviet government began its secret move towards the Soviet western frontier near Minsk and Vilnius.

Every military man knows how a large headquarters is moved in exercises or in a combat situation. The operations branch selects the site for the future headquarters, the senior commander approves the site and then authorizes the move there. The forest where the headquarters will be located is cordoned off, in order to keep out unauthorized persons. Then sappers and signallers appear to build shelters and a communications system. Then the head of communications turns up and personally checks that the communications are functioning reliably. Finally, when that has been done, the headquarters itself arrives. All its officers have to do is to plug in their telephones and enciphering machines.

In 1941, the Red Army was functioning like a single well-oiled machine. Dozens of officers in charge of signals in rifle and mechanized corps appeared in the forests near the border. The secret deployment of the command posts of these corps followed in their wake. Immediately after this, the signals chiefs of the armies turned up in other forests. Their appearance was a sign that army headquarters would shortly arrive. Sure enough, the headquarters did indeed turn up. It was exactly on the day that the TASS report was published that the signals chiefs of the fronts appeared in secluded corners of these prohibited, well guarded woods. After the communications had been checked, the front headquarters secretly moved their columns to their new positions.

The moment then arrived for the most important signals chief of all to appear, 150 kilometres from the East Prussian frontier. I. T. Peresypkin, People's Commissar for Communications, secretly moved to Vilnius. Can we guess for whom Peresypkin was going to check communications there? People's Commissar Peresypkin has only one direct superior, and that is the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Comrade J. V. Stalin himself.

The People's Commissar for Communications went to the East Prussian frontier in such a way that no one could know about it. He travelled in an ordinary train running to the regular timetable but with an additional special wagon, for Peresypkin and his deputy, coupled on to it. The journey of the People's Commissar for Communications was a total secret. He even received encoded messages from Moscow signed in his own name, so that the cipher clerks should believe that Peresypkin was still in Moscow.

Peresypkin's own account of his journey is revealing:



Literally on the eve of war, J. V. Stalin sent me to the Baltic republics. I somehow mentally linked this crucial mission with approaching military events. On the evening of 21 June 1941, I travelled to Vilnius along with a group of executives from the People's Commissariat for Communications. The war broke out while we were on the way . . . (*Svyazisty v Gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi*, Moscow Svyaz' 1972, p. 17)

On the morning of 22 June, while he was at the Orsha railway station, Peresypkin received a telegram from Moscow: IN CONNECTION WITH CHANGE IN SITUATION DO YOU NOT THINK IT NECESSARY TO RETURN MOSCOW? PERESYPKIN. (*Ibid*, pp. 32-33)

Peresypkin was travelling on a railway system which not only had been completely turned over to the military, but which had been ordered a few days before to place itself on a war footing and to be ready to work under conditions of war. (V. Anfilov, *Bessmertnyi Podvig*, 1971, p. 184) Having been ordered to take with him 'only what is necessary for life and battle', Peresypkin went to an area where troops were being secretly concentrated in vast numbers on the frontier, and where a government command post was being secretly set up. Travelling on Stalin's personal orders, Peresypkin knew that his journey 'was connected with approaching military events'.

But as soon as Hitler attacked, Peresypkin abandoned his secret railway wagon and rushed back to Moscow on a lorry which happened to come to hand. Had Hitler not attacked, then Comrade Peresypkin, People's Commissar for Communications, would have gone to the secret command post near Vilnius to co-ordinate the military, governmental and state communications systems during the war. The German attack constituted such a serious change in the situation that it caused the Soviet government to abandon many of its most important measures and compelled it to improvise, even to the extent of a People's Commissar having to return to Moscow on the back of the first lorry he could lay his hands on.

It had been planned that leading figures in the People's Commissariat for Defence, the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for State Control, and other important Soviet governing bodies, should move into the

western areas that same night, travelling along the same Moscow—Minsk railway line. The purpose of that journey was war. Among the leaders of the Stalinist empire who were getting ready that night to make the secret journey to the western borders were the People's Commissar for the Interior, candidate member of the Politburo and Commissar General for State Security, L. P. Beria; member of the Central Committee, People's Commissar for State Control, Grade I Army Commissar L. Z. Mekhlis; and candidate member of the Central Committee, People's Commissar for Defence, Marshal of the Soviet Union S. K. Timoshenko. It cannot be excluded that even Stalin was also preparing himself to make that secret journey westwards.

Mixed groups were then formed consisting of the most senior executives from those People's Commissariats which would be most important in wartime. Each of these groups was then allotted to a leader. By the morning of 21 June the formation of these operational groups was completed, and all their members knew that they were going to war.

Surprisingly, however, nobody, including the group leaders then sitting in the Kremlin, even suspected that a German invasion was then in preparation. Even more surprisingly, when reports that an invasion was under way came flooding in that evening, the top Soviet leaders refused to believe them. Then directives and shouts down the telephone poured out to the frontier from the Kremlin, from the People's Commissariat for Defence, and from the General Staff: 'Don't give in to provocation!'

If the Soviet leaders did not believe that a German invasion was possible, for what war were they preparing themselves? There can be only one answer. They were preparing themselves for a war which would begin *without the German invasion*.

The groups who were to accompany the leaders spent many weary hours waiting before being told at 6 o'clock in the morning of 22 June that their trains to the western frontier had been cancelled, since Hitler had started the war. If it had been the intention of the Soviet leaders to travel to the western borders to man the secret command posts in order to contain a German invasion, they would have hurried westwards as soon as they had received a signal that such an invasion had begun. Instead, they cancelled their trains which were to have taken them to war. They were ready to turn up on the frontier and direct a war, but one which began as part of a Soviet scenario, and not a German one. Hitler deprived them of this satisfaction.

On 21 June 1941, Dmitri Ortenberg was head of the organizational instructors department of the People's Commissariat for State Control. He himself described his job as 'dealing with military ideas - a sort of chief of staff. His account vividly evokes the events of that night:

Sometimes they would ask me, 'When did you leave for the war?'

'Twenty first of June.'

'What?!'

Yes, it was like this ... In the morning I was called into the People's Commissariat for Defence and told that a group of officials from the Commissariat headed by Marshal S. K. Timoshenko was leaving for Minsk. I was notified that I was to go with it. They suggested that I should go back home, put on military uniform and report back to the Commissariat . . . The waiting-room of the People's Commissar for Defence was choc-a-bloc full of military people, carrying files and maps, and obviously excited. They spoke in whispers. Timoshenko had gone to the Kremlin . . . The Commissar got back from the Kremlin about five o'clock in the morning of 22 June. He called me:

'The Germans have started the war. Our trip to Minsk has been cancelled.' (Ortenberg, *lyun' Dekabr' Sorok Pervogo*, Sovetsky Pisatel' 1984, pp. 5-6)

Nobody knows where the legend has come from that on 22 June 1941 Hitler began the war in the east, almost having to drag the Soviet Union into it by force. If we listen to those officers - from Kuznetzov to Ortenberg — who were right alongside the most important Soviet leaders in those minutes, hours and days, everything appears quite differently. On 22 June 1941 Hitler spoilt the war by carrying it on to the territory where it had been planned on 19 August 1939. Hitler did not allow the Soviet leaders to wage the war as they had intended. He forced them to improvise and do something for which they were unprepared: to defend their own territory.

## CHAPTER 32

### Did Stalin Have a War Plan?

*Since Stalin never explained or expounded his points of view or his plans, many people thought that he did not have any. This was a typical error made by talkative intellectuals.*

ROBERT CONQUEST  
*(The Great Terror)*

'Strategic defence was an involuntary form of combat operations, it had not been planned beforehand.' That is what the Soviet military textbooks say. We do not need the textbooks, though, to tell us that in the summer of 1941, the Red Army's defensive operations were pure improvisation. Before the war, the Red Army had not been preparing itself for defence, nor had it ever held any exercises to practise defensive subjects. Soviet regulations contain not one word about defence on a strategic scale. Even in the purely theoretical field, problems of how to conduct defensive operations had never been worked out. What is more, neither the Soviet people nor its army had even been prepared psychologically for defence. People and army alike had been trained to do defensive things by using offensive methods: 'It is precisely the interests of defence which demand that the USSR should conduct extensive offensive operations on enemy territory, and this in no way contradicts the nature of a defensive war.' (*Pravda*, 19 August 1939)

In the first hours following the beginning of the German invasion, the Red Army kept on trying to go over to the offensive. Modern textbooks call what the Red Army was doing counter-strikes and counter-offensives. But it was pure improvisation. The problem of counter-strikes had never been worked through in any pre-war exercises, nor indeed had it ever been considered in theoretical terms: 'the subject of counter-offensive . . . had never been raised before the Great Motherland War'. (*IVOSS* (the official history of the 'Great Patriotic War'), Vol. i, p. 441)

Before the war, therefore, Soviet military staffs did not work out any plans for defence, nor did they work out any for a counter-offensive either. Yet they were working very hard on war plans. According to Marshal of the Soviet Union A. M. Vasi-levsky, in the year preceding the war, the officers and generals of the General Staff, the headquarters of the Military Districts and the naval fleets were working fifteen to seventeen hours a day, with no holidays or days off. Marshals Bagramyan and Sokol-ovsky, Generals Shtemenko, Kurasov, Malandin and many others say the same thing. General Anisov reportedly worked a 20-hour day, and the same was said of General Smorodinov.

General Zhukov became chief of the General Staff in February 1941. The General Staff in effect went on to a war footing from that moment. Zhukov himself worked assiduously and did not allow anyone else to slacken. In the summer of 1939, Zhukov, still holding his rank of *komkor*, had appeared in Khalkhin-Gol. He personally got to know the situation, quickly drew up plans, and began to carry them out with a vengeance. The slightest carelessness on the part of any subordinate meant immediate death. In the course of a few days Zhukov put seventeen officers on trial, demanding that they be sentenced to death. The tribunal immediately passed death sentences on all of them. Of the seventeen, one was saved on the intervention of the senior command, and the rest were shot. By February 1941, Zhukov had risen to great heights. His authority had increased several fold, and there was nobody who could save any poor unfortunate from his anger. General Staff veterans recall Zhukov's rule as the most terrible period in history, even more terrible than that of the Great Purge. At that time the General Staff, and all other staffs, were working under inhuman pressure.

So how could it have happened that the Red Army went into the war without plans? There is something else which cannot be understood. If the Red Army went to war without any plans, then why did Stalin not shoot Zhukov, and all those who should have been helping to make the plans, as soon as he learnt about it? That did not happen. On the contrary, those involved in making the Soviet plans, such as Vasilevsky, Sokolovsky, Vatutin, Malandin, Bagramyan, Shtemenko and Kurasov, who had all begun the war as major-generals or even colonels, ended it, if not as marshals, then at least as four-star generals. They all showed themselves to be brilliant strategists in the course of the war. They were all conscientious and even pedantic staff officers, who could not conceive of life without a plan. So how could it come about that the Red Army was compelled to improvise in the first months of the war? And why did Stalin not even reproach Zhukov and his planners, let alone shoot them?

When asked the straight question as to whether the Soviet command had any war plans, Zhukov replied categorically that it did have such plans. Then another question arises: if there were plans, why did the Red Army operate in an uncontrolled mass, without any plans at all? Zhukov has never answered this question. But here the answer suggests itself. If Soviet staffs were working very hard to make war plans, and these were neither defensive plans or plans for counter-offensive, then what kind of plans were they? Purely offensive plans.

Stalin did not shoot Zhukov and the other war-planners for one very simple reason. They had never been given the job of working out plans for a *defensive* war. Of what then could they be accused? Stalin gave the task of making plans of some other kind to Zhukov, Vasilevsky, Sokolovsky and other outstanding strategists. These were very good plans, but the moment the defensive war began they became unnecessary, just like the motorway tanks and the airborne assault corps.

Murder will out. The Soviet High Command took measures to destroy everything related to Soviet pre-war war plans. But these plans were held by all the fronts, all fleets, dozens of armies, more than one hundred corps, all warships, hundreds of divisions, and thousands of regiments and battalions. Something must have survived.

Research carried out by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR has shown that before the war the operational mission of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet was to undertake 'active hostilities against enemy ships and transport near the Bosphorus and in the approaches to enemy bases, and also to co-operate with land troops as they move along the Black Sea Coast'. (*Plot v VO V*, Moscow Nauka 1980, p. 117)

Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergei Georgiyevich Gorshkov has said that, as well as the Black Sea Fleet, the Baltic and Arctic Fleets had been given purely defensive missions, but it was planned that these missions should be carried out by purely offensive methods. This was standard Soviet thinking before the war, and was expressed both at secret meetings in the Soviet command, and openly in *Pravda*: 'To wage a defensive war in no way means to stand on the borders of one's own country. The best form of defence is a swift advance until the enemy has been completely destroyed on his own territory.' (14 August 1939)

Operations of the Soviet fleets in the first minutes, hours and days of the war show sufficiently clearly that they did have plans, but that these were not plans for defence. On 22 June 1941, Soviet submarines of the Black Sea Fleet immediately put to sea and headed for the coasts of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The same day submarines of the Baltic Fleet set sail for the coasts of Germany, with a mission to 'sink all enemy ships and vessels, in accordance with the rights of unrestricted submarine warfare'. (Order of Officer Commanding Baltic Fleet, 22 June 1941, *Plot v Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voine*, Moscow Nauka 1980, p. 279) The order did not even make an exception for hospital ships flying the Red Cross flag.

Beginning on 22 June, the air arm of the Black Sea Fleet carried out active combat operations in support of the Danube Naval Flotilla with the objective of opening a way upstream for the flotilla. On 25—26 June, surface warships of the Black Sea Fleet appeared off the Romanian port of Constanza and began an intensive artillery bombardment with the obvious intention of making a naval assault landing. At the same time the Danube Naval Flotilla began to carry out assault landing operations in the Danube Delta.

On 22 June, the garrison at the naval base at Hanko, on Finnish territory, instead of going over to a stonewall defence, initiated some sustained assault landing operations, and held nineteen Finnish islands for several days. On 25 June, in spite of the enormous losses which the Soviet Air Forces had sustained in the first hours of the war, 487 aircraft belonging to the Baltic and Arctic Fleets launched a surprise strike at Finnish airfields. Again in spite of these enormous losses, the Soviet air forces conducted themselves with exceptional valour and aggression. On 22 June the 1st Air Corps made a concentrated raid on military objectives in Königsberg.

None of this was improvisation. At 6.44 am on 22 June the Soviet Air Force was given the mission of operating in accordance with its plans, and for a few days it tried to do this. On 26 June, the 4th Air Corps began bombing raids on the Ploesti oilfields in Romania. During the few days' duration of these raids, oil output in Romania fell almost by half. Even in conditions where practically the whole of the Soviet Air Force had been destroyed on the ground, it still found sufficient strength to wreak great damage on the Romanian oilfields. In any other situation the Soviet Air Force would have been even more dangerous, and could have paralysed completely Germany's military, industrial and transport power with its operations against these oil-producing areas. Hitler understood this threat only too well, and considered that his only defence was to invade the Soviet Union.

On 22 June 1941, the 41st Rifle Division of the 6th Army's 6th Rifle Corps, without waiting for orders from above, crossed the state frontier near Raval-Russkaya. That same morning, and without waiting for orders from Moscow, Colonel-General F. I. Kuznetsov, officer commanding the North-West Front, ordered his troops to launch an attack towards Tilsit in East Prussia. This decision came as no surprise either to the headquarters staff of the North-West Front or to the officers commanding the armies and their staffs, for a version of the attack on Tilsit had been played out in headquarters exercises held a few days previously, 'and it was very familiar to the commanders of the formations and their headquarters'. (*Bor'ba za Sovetskuyu Pribaltiku*, Eesti Raamat, Tallinn 1980, Vol. i, p. 67) Colonel-General Kuznetsov simply put the pre-war plan into action. On the evening of the same day, the Soviet High Command, still unaware of General Kuznetsov's operations, ordered him to do precisely what he was doing already, that is, to attack Tilsit. The High Command gave the adjacent Western Front the task of launching an extra-high-power attack in the direction of the Polish town of Suwalki. And that came as no surprise either to General D. G. Pavlov, the officer commanding the Western Front. He himself knew what his front had to do, and had already given the order to advance on Suwalki long before the directive to do so arrived from Moscow. To advance was hardly the best thing to do, however, when the German Air Force had not been destroyed on the ground as planned, and the Soviet Western Front had itself lost 73 8 aircraft in the first hours of the war.

This operational mission had been spelt out to all Soviet commanders. Of course, the commanders at tactical level were not entitled to know what their tasks would be, but in the senior headquarters, these tasks had been exactly defined and formulated, placed under seal in secret envelopes, and kept in the safe in every headquarters, up to and including the level of battalion. For instance, the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 27th Rifle Division, concentrated close to the frontier near the town of Augustow, was preparing to carry out combat reconnaissance in the direction of Suwalki. (Arkhiv MO SSSR, Archive 181, list 1631, item i, p. 128) The task of the Reconnaissance Battalion was to ensure the swift advance of the entire 27th Division from near Augustow to Suwalki. We know even more about this from overt sources than we do from pre-war archives. Enormous Soviet forces were concentrated near Augustow. That was the place where the Soviet frontier guards had been cutting the barbed wire on their frontier. That was the place where Lieutenant-General V. I. Kuznetsov, officer commanding the 3rd Army, and High Command Representative Lieutenant-General of Engineering Troops, D. Karbyshev, had spent long hours surveying German territory from frontier



posts. That was the very place where General Karbyshev had been training assault groups to cut off and neutralize the enemy's reinforced-concrete defensive installations.

Enormous numbers of Soviet troops had been assembled near Augustow long before the war. Right on the frontier and flowing parallel with it on Soviet territory is the Augustow Canal. If defence had been in preparation, the troops would have deployed behind the canal, using it as an impassable anti-tank ditch. But the Soviet troops crossed over to the western bank of the canal and deployed on the narrow stretch of terrain between the canal and the frontier, from which all barbed wire had been removed. At dawn on 22 June, thousands of Soviet soldiers were wiped out by sudden destructive fire. The troops, with the canal behind them, had nowhere to go to retreat.

Is not this perhaps just the usual Russian stupidity? Not at all. German troops had also been assembled in great numbers right up against the frontier, from which they also had removed their barbed wire. Had the Red Army attacked the day before, the losses on the other side would have been no less. Deployment of troops right on the frontier is exceptionally dangerous in the event of the enemy launching a surprise attack, but a deployment of that nature is eminently suitable for launching such an attack. Both armies were doing the same thing.

Soviet generals never concealed that it was offensive tasks which they had been given. General K. Galitsky, when speaking of the concentration of Soviet troops near Augustow, insists that the Soviet High Command did not believe that a German offensive was possible, while the Soviet troops were preparing to carry out an offensive operation. And since the Soviet fronts facing East Prussia and Poland were preparing only for an offensive, it follows that the fronts concentrated against Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia must also have long been preparing themselves only for an offensive as well. Major-General A. I. Mikhalev frankly admits that the Soviet High Command did not plan to use either the Southern or South-West Fronts for defensive or counter-offensive operations: 'it was intended that the strategic aims should be to have the troops of the fronts go over to decisive offensive'. (*VIZH* 1986, No. 5, P- 49)

Whether we believe the Soviet publications or not, the Red Army operations in the first days of the war are the best evidence of Soviet intentions. Zhukov, who co-ordinated the operations of the Southern and South-West Fronts aimed at Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, went on insisting on offensives until 30 June 1941, and demanded nothing but offensives from the officers commanding the fronts. It was only in

July that he and his colleagues came to the conclusion that the Red Army would no longer find it all that easy to advance.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the enormous strength and vast resources of Stalin's war machine. Despite its grievous losses, it had enough strength to withdraw and gather new strength to reach Berlin. How far would it have gone had it not sustained that massive blow on 22 June, if hundreds of aircraft and thousands of tanks had not been lost, had it been the Red Army and not the Wehrmacht which struck the first blow? Did the German Army have the territorial expanse behind it for withdrawal? Did it have the inexhaustible human resources, and the time, to restore its army after the first Soviet surprise attack? Did the German generals have any defensive plans?

## CHAPTER 33

# The War Which Never Was

*The Russian High Command knows its job better  
than the High Command of any other army.*

General V. F. Von MELLENTIN  
(*PanzerBattles*, London 1977, p. 353)

Hitler considered that a Soviet invasion was inevitable, but he did not expect it to happen in the very near future. German troops were diverted to activities of secondary importance, and the beginning of Operation Barbarossa was postponed. The operation finally began on 22 June 1941. Hitler himself clearly did not realize what a tremendous stroke of luck he had had. If Operation Barbarossa had been put off again, say from 22 June to 22 July, Hitler would have had to do away with himself considerably earlier than in 1945.

There are quite a few indications that the date for the beginning of the Soviet Operation Groza ('Thunderstorm') was fixed for 6 July 1941. Memoirs of Soviet marshals, generals and admirals, archival documents, the mathematical analysis of information or the movements of thousands of Soviet military railway trains all point to 10 July as the date on which the full concentration of the Second Strategic Echelon of the Red Army would be achieved on the Soviet western borders. Soviet military theory, however, lays down that the move over to a decisive offensive should not follow *but precede* the full concentration of troops. In that event, a number of those military trains belonging to the Second Strategic Echelon could have been off-loaded directly on enemy territory, for its troops to go directly into battle.

Zhukov and Stalin liked to deliver their surprise strikes on Sunday mornings, and 6 July 1941 was the last Sunday before the concentration of Soviet troops was complete. General Ivanov's statement directly points to this date: 'The German troops succeeded in forestalling us literally by two weeks.'

Let us suppose that Hitler had once again put back the date on which Barbarossa was to be launched by three to four weeks. Let us try to imagine what would have happened then. We do not need to exert our imagination. It is sufficient to look at the groupings of Soviet troops, at the unprecedented concentration of troops, at the airfields right up against the frontier, at the airborne assault corps and the motorway tanks, at the accumulation of submarines in frontier ports or at air assault gliders at forward airfields. It is sufficient for us to open Soviet pre-war military-regulation books, textbooks of Soviet military academies and schools, and the newspapers *Red Star* and *Pravda*.

The German troops are making intensive preparations for the invasion, which is fixed for . . . 22 *July* 1941. The concentration of troops is proceeding: military trains are off-loading at stations and halts; the forests near the borders are full of troops; at night groups of aircraft from distant airfields fly over the field aerodromes located right on the frontier; and there is feverish building of new roads and bridges. In a word, everything is just as it is in the Red Army. On the other side, the Red Army does not seem to be reacting at all to the German preparations.

At 3.30 am Moscow time on 6 July 1941, tens of thousands of Soviet guns shatter the silence, announcing to the world that the great 'liberation' campaign of the Red Army has begun. The Red Army's artillery is superior both in quality and quantity to any in the world. There are vast reserves of ammunition stockpiled on the Soviet frontiers. The rate of Soviet artillery fire swiftly increases until it becomes an infernal thunder roaring along the thousands of kilometres of front stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The first artillery salvo coincides to the minute with the arrival of a thousand Soviet aircraft flying across the state frontier. The German airfields have been extremely badly sited right on the border, and the German pilots do not have the time to get their aircraft airborne. There is a great number of aircraft assembled on the German airfields. They are standing wing-tip to wing-tip, and when one burns the fire spreads to the others like a fire in a matchbox.

Black columns of smoke rise above the airfields. These black columns act as beacons for Soviet aircraft, which come on in wave upon wave. Very few planes have been able to take off from the German airfields. German aircrews have been categorically forbidden to open fire on Soviet aircraft, but in spite of the ban imposed by the command, several pilots go into battle, shoot down Soviet aircraft, and when they have used up all their ammunition, they crash head-on into an enemy aircraft in a final suicidal attack. Losses in Soviet

aircraft are enormous, but the advantages of surprise remain. Any army, whether the Soviet, the German, or the Japanese, would have felt no happier under a similar surprise attack.

The artillery preparation grows in power. On the frontier, the Soviet regiments and battalions who have been raised by the alert are given vodka. The thunderous *ura*, the battle-cry of the troops, rolls through the frontier forests. The order of Comrade Stalin, the supreme commander-in-chief, is being read to the troops: 'The hour of reckoning has come! Soviet intelligence has exposed Hitler's perfidy and the time has come to settle accounts with him for all his evil deeds and crimes! Glorious warriors, the world is looking to you and awaits liberation!'

Infringing all established standards and prohibitions, the soldiers are told the numbers of Soviet troops, tanks, artillery, aircraft, and submarines which will take part in the liberation campaign. The rolling *ura* again rumbles out across the wooded glades and forest cuttings. Endless columns of tanks darken the horizon with clouds of dust as they move along roads through field and forest on their way to the frontier. 'Don't spare your fire, you deaf-eared lot!' the tank crews shout through clenched teeth at the deafened artillery troops.

The rumble of artillery fire grows, reaches a critical level, then suddenly stops. Then ringing silence oppresses the ears, and immediately the fields fill with masses of tanks and infantry, the

clank of armour and the fierce hoarse roar of the Soviet troops. The powdery smoke and the poisonous fumes from the tank diesel engines mix with the delicate smell of field flowers, while overhead wave upon wave of Soviet aircraft fly westwards. The artillery, having fallen silent for a minute, restarts, as though unwillingly, its powerful conversation. The artillery goes over from preparation to accompanying support. The batteries have opened up again, concentrating their fire on distant targets. Slowly but inexorably, the firing is stepped up again, and more and more artillery regiments join the battle.

Avoiding becoming involved in protracted battles with scattered enemy groups, the Soviet troops drive forward. The frontier bridges in Brest-Litovsk have been captured by Colonel Starinov's saboteurs. The Soviet saboteurs are astonished that the German bridges have not even been mined. How can one possibly explain such a scandalous degree of unreadiness for war?

The suddenness of the attack has a stunning effect, bringing a whole chain of catastrophes in its wake, each one of which, in its turn, brings on others. The destruction of the air force on the ground renders the

troops vulnerable from the air, and since they have neither trenches nor ditches in the frontier area, they are compelled to withdraw. Withdrawal means that thousands of tons of ammunition and fuel are abandoned at the border. Withdrawal means that airfields are left behind, and the enemy immediately destroys the remaining aircraft there. Withdrawal without ammunition and fuel means inescapable destruction. Withdrawal means that the command has lost control. The command does not know what is happening with the troops and is therefore unable to take any expedient decisions, while the troops are given no orders at all, or they are given orders which are completely out of keeping with the situation which has come about.

At the same time, Soviet saboteurs, who crossed the frontiers with time in hand, are active everywhere on the lines of communication. They either cut the communication lines, or plug into them and transmit false signals and orders to the enemy troops. The enemy's operations become separate, unco-ordinated battles. The German commanders ask Berlin what they should do. It is a serious question, because the Wehrmacht has not prepared itself for defence. What do we do? Advance? Operate in accordance with the pre-war Barbarossa plan? Without an air force? Without air supremacy?

The 3rd Soviet Army delivers a surprise strike at Suwalki. The 8th Army from the Baltic Military District goes to meet it. From the very beginning there are blood-letting engagements with great losses in Soviet troops. But they have one advantage: the Soviet troops have the latest KV tank, the armour of which the German anti-tank guns cannot penetrate. The Soviet Air Force rages overhead. The 5th Airborne Assault Corps has landed behind the German forces. The Soviet 8th, 9th, and 3rd Armies have become bogged down in long drawn-out bloody battles with the extra-high-power German forces in East Prussia, but behind this titanic battle, the extra-high-power Soviet 10th Army, having broken through the almost nonexistent defences, drives on to the Baltic Sea, thereby cutting off three German armies, two tank groups and Hitler's command post from the rest of the German troops.

From near L'vov, the most powerful Soviet front launches an attack on Cracow and a secondary attack on Lublin. The right flank of the extra-high-power Soviet grouping is covered by hills. On the left flank, a great battle flares up in which the Red Army loses thousands of tanks, aircraft and guns, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Under cover of this battle, two Soviet mountain armies, the 12th and the 18th, launch attacks along the mountain ridges, thereby cutting off Germany from its sources of oil. Soviet airborne assault

corps have landed in the hills. They capture and hold the passes, and prevent reserves being transferred to Romania.

The main events of the war are not taking place in either Poland or Germany. In the first hour of war, operating along with the air arm of the 9th Army and the Black Sea Fleet, the 4th Soviet Air Corps delivers a heavy shock strike at the Ploesti oilfields, turning them into a sea of fire. Bombing raids on Ploesti continue round the clock. The glow from the oil fires is visible at night for many kilometres, while by day columns of black smoke hide the *horizon*. The 3rd Airborne Assault Corps has landed in the hills to the north of Ploesti. Operating in small elusive groups, it is destroying everything connected with the production, transportation and the refining of oil. Lieutenant-General Batov's 9th Special Rifle Corps has landed in the port of Constanza and to the south of it. Its objectives are the same: pipelines, oil storage tanks, and refineries. The most powerful of all Soviet armies, the 9th, has burst out onto the Romanian plains.

The Soviet 10th Army has not been able to break out to the Baltic Sea. It has suffered fearful losses. The Soviet 3rd and 8th Armies have been completely wiped out and their heavy KV tanks destroyed by German anti-aircraft guns. The Soviet 5th, 6th and 26th Armies have lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers, having been stopped on the approaches to Cracow and Lublin. At this moment, the Soviet High Command throws the Second Strategic Echelon into the battle. The difference is that the Wehrmacht has only one echelon and insignificant reserves, while the Red Army had two strategic echelons and three N K V D armies behind them. In addition, mobilization was declared in the Soviet Union as soon as the war began. This had given the Soviet High Command five million reservists in the first week of the war. These will replace Soviet losses, and over the months which follow will be formed into more than three hundred new divisions who will enable the war to continue.

Five Soviet airborne assault corps are completely destroyed, but their headquarters and rear sub-units remain on Soviet territory. These immediately take in tens of thousands of reservists to make up their losses, and in addition to this, five new airborne assault corps are formed. Both Soviet tank troops and air force suffer enormous losses in the initial battles, but Soviet war industry is not destroyed by the enemy air force, nor does it fall into enemy hands. The biggest tank-producing plants in the world, in Khar'kov, Stalingrad, and Leningrad do not stop their production of tanks, but considerably increase it. But even that is not the most important thing.

The German Army still has tanks, but no fuel for them. The infantry still has armoured personnel carriers, and the artillery still has tractors, but no petrol for them. There are still aircraft, but no fuel for them. Germany has a powerful naval fleet, but it is not in the Baltic. Even if it were to appear there, there would be no fuel for active operations. The German Army has thousands of wounded who have to be evacuated to the rear. There are ambulances, but no fuel for them. The German Army has a great number of motor vehicles and motorcycles for moving troops about, to keep them supplied, and for reconnaissance, but there is no fuel for them either.

The fuel is in Romania, which has proved impossible to defend by the usual methods. Stalin knew this, and so did Zhukov. Hitler also knew this all too well.

In August 1941, the Second Strategic Echelon completes the Vistula-Oder operation by capturing bridges and springboards on the Oder. A new operation in great depth is begun from here. The troops cross the Oder in a continuous stream of artillery, tanks and infantry. There are heaps of caterpillar tracks, covered by a light film of rust, lying at the roadsides; as soon as they join German roads, the high-speed tanks discard their tracks and forge swiftly ahead.

The troops meet endless columns of prisoners. Dust rises on the horizon. There they are, the oppressors of the people -shopkeepers, bourgeois doctors and architects, farmers and bank employees. The Chekists' work will be hard. Prisoners are cursorily interrogated at every stopping place. Then the NK VD investigates each one in detail, and establishes the degree of his guilt before the working people. But by now it has become necessary to expose the most dangerous of the millions of prisoners: the former Social Democrats, pacifists, socialists and National Socialists, former officers, policemen and ministers of religion.

Millions of prisoners have to be sent far away to the east and the north, in order to give them the opportunity, through honest labour, to expiate their guilt before the people. But the railways are not conveying prisoners. The railways are working for victory. The railways are carrying thousands of military trains laden with ammunition, fuel and reinforcements.

Where are the prisoners to go? The 4th Mechanized Corps has captured a concentration camp near Auschwitz. It was reported to higher authority, and permission was awaited to use it for its intended purpose.



Permission was refused; it was ordered that a museum be made of Auschwitz. New concentration camps must be built nearby.

More and more columns move westwards. The commissars take a few men from each of the passing columns, and take them to Auschwitz and show them around saying, 'Take a good look, and then go back and tell your comrades.'

The soldiers are then driven back to their battalions in political department cars, and they talk.

'Well, what was it like in Auschwitz, pal?'

'Nothing much, really.' The worldly-wise soldier in his black jacket shrugs his shoulders. 'Just like at home. Only their climate is better.'

The battalion drinks raw vodka before going into battle. The news is good. There's permission to take trophies, there's permission to pillage. The commissar is shouting. He has become hoarse. He's quoting Ilya Erenburg - let's break the pride of the arrogant German people!

The black jackets laugh. How shall we break their pride, with mass rape?

So none of this happened? Indeed it did happen - not in 1941, it is true, but in 1945. Then the Soviet soldier was permitted to plunder, though the term used for it was 'collecting trophies'. And they were also ordered to 'break German pride'. Millions of people fell into the clutches of the Soviet secret police. And they were driven off in endless columns to distant places. Not everyone returned.

There are few who remember that the slogan about liberating Europe and the whole world first rang out, not in 1945, but at the end of 1938. As he was completing the Great Purge in the Soviet Union, Stalin rewrote the entire history of communism and set it new goals in his book *History of the CPS U(b): A Short Course*. This became the principal handbook for all Soviet communists and all communists throughout the world. It concludes with a chapter on how the Soviet Union is encircled by capitalism. Stalin set the great goal, which

was to replace capitalist encirclement with socialist encirclement. The fight against capitalist encirclement had to go on until the last country in the world had become a 'republic' forming part of the Soviet Union.

'The USSR in capitalist encirclement' became the main subject of political studies in the Red Army. Propagandists, commissars, political workers, and commanders all united to lead every soldier in the Red Army to Stalin's simple and logical answers to problems. And over the iron battalions of the Red Army there thundered forth the song about the war of liberation which would begin on the order from Stalin:

With spitting fire and gleaming steel now flashing  
Machines set forth, their fierce crusade alight,  
When Comrade Stalin sends us into battle,  
And our First Marshal leads us in the fight.

This is how a Soviet air general described the future war in *Pravda*:

What joy and happiness will shine in the faces of those who will receive here in the Great Kremlin Palace the *last* republic into the brotherhood of nations of the whole world! I envisage clearly the bomber planes destroying the enemy's factories, railway junctions, bridges, depots and positions; low-flying assault aircraft attacking columns of troops and artillery positions with a hail of gunfire; and assault landing ships putting their divisions ashore in the heart of the enemy's dispositions. The powerful and formidable air force of the Land of the Soviets, along with the infantry and tank and artillery troops will do their sacred duty and will help the enslaved peoples to escape from their executioners. (*Pravda*, Georgi Baidukov, 18 August 1940)

It is characteristic that, in the course of his lengthy article on the forthcoming war, the air general did not once call the war 'defensive', just as he did not once mention fighter aircraft which fight battles in the air. As

far as the general was concerned, only bomber planes, low-flying assault aircraft and assault landing aircraft would be needed in the war of 'liberation'.

Enough statements like this were published to fill many volumes. Wanda Vasilevskaya, the Polish communist who was given the rank of colonel-commissar in the Red Army, proclaimed in the pages of *Pravda* (9 November 1940) that not for long would the butchers go on drinking blood, not for long need the slaves go on rattling their chains - we'll liberate them all!

The Soviet communists declared their main objective quite openly - to liberate the whole world, and Europe first of all. This plan was actively pursued; in the course of 1940 alone, while Germany was fighting in the west, five new 'republics' were annexed into the Soviet Union. After this, it was openly declared that 'liberation' campaigns would continue, and enormous forces were created for this purpose. The next victim of 'liberation' could only have been Germany, or Romania; for Germany this would have meant immediate defeat.