

**Viktor Suvorov**

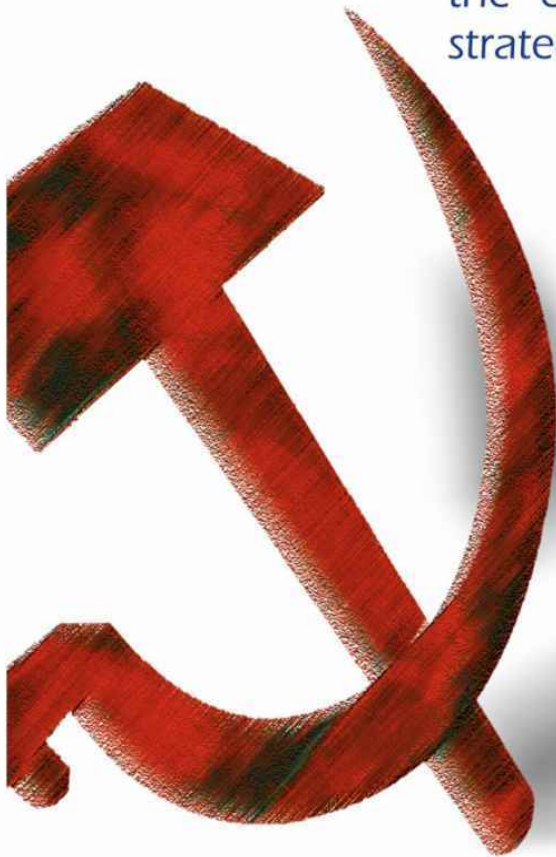
# **ICEBREAKER**

**WHO STARTED THE SECOND WORLD WAR?**

Translated by Hans-Udo Kurr

“... Icebreaker is the most original work of history it has been my privilege to read. ...The book’s significance lies in its phenomenological approach, which uncovers the essence of totalitarianism – strategic deception..”

The Times  
5 may 1990



**EXPANDED AND  
UPDATED EDITION**

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VIKTOR SUVOROV

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Who Started World War II

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Viktor Suvorov is the pseudonym of Vladimir Bogdanovich Rezun, a former Soviet spy (GRU) who broke with Moscow and sought refuge in the United Kingdom in 1979. He made his name writing books about the history of The Second World War and in 1988 published *Icebreaker*, the book that shook the very foundation of how the people of the Soviet Union perceived the Soviet Government and Stalin in particular. Needless to say *Icebreaker* caused controversy among historians and the general public alike. Twelve million copies were sold in the former USSR and millions more in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Germany. In 1990 the book was published in English, however, the limited release made it hard for English-language readers to find a copy. This new translation also faithfully conveys the writer's very personal style. The images used in this publication illustrate the very facts uncovered by Viktor Suvorov during his extensive archive work while researching the material for this book and WWII in general.

## FORWARD

It is safe to assume that if you have not read Viktor Suvorov's *Icebreaker* (or, at least, are not familiar with his ideas), you don't understand the last 100 years of world history.

Viktor Suvorov was trained as a military intelligence officer at a time when Soviet military intelligence was the best in the world (and probably still is). In 1978 Suvorov defected to England, where he wrote several books about Soviet army and intelligence. By all accounts (from friends and enemies alike), Viktor Suvorov possesses an encyclopaedic knowledge of military theory and history, particularly the history of World War II. His knowledge and analytical ability are astounding.

First published in the eighties, *Icebreaker* was the first in Suvorov's series of historical books. By the year 2000, it had been translated into 27 languages and published more than 100 times. *Icebreaker* is a book about communist preparation and execution (however poorly, but not for the lack of trying) of the biggest crime in the history of mankind, World War II. Because of that, in addition to its historical value of showing communist conspiracy as a true cause of WWII, *Icebreaker* is probably the best, most convincing anti-communist book ever written. Suvorov neither uncovers any secrets, nor does he simply catalogue the crimes. He analyzes the communists' own words and innumerable well-known facts to show communism as the darkest, most evil episode in the human history.

Before you start reading this book, however, keep in mind several important things. Firstly, this relatively small book is an overview of many very complex political, historical, and military events. The most important of the ideas had been expanded by the author in his later books. The sheer number of dogmas and controversies Suvorov takes head on is mind-boggling, and this is why the author must occasionally abbreviate his arguments. As a result, the book may seem cursory to unprepared readers.

Secondly, *Icebreaker* was written in Russian and intended for an Eastern European readership. In order to be immediately understood, the book does assume a certain cultural background, i.e., familiarity with the history and cannibalistic rituals of communist regimes. I am not implying that western readers will not understand the book; to the contrary, I think

that an interested western reader will benefit enormously from reading this book.

Thirdly, *Icebreaker*, when it became available, was an instant tremendous success in the former USSR and all Eastern Bloc countries. In Eastern Europe, *Icebreaker* became a de facto 20th century European history textbook and the basis of common popular understanding of the events leading to WWII and its immediate aftermath. It would be foolish to disregard the opinion of people who actually lived through the events.

Some reviewers accuse Victor Suvorov of being a "Hitler apologist." This preposterous statement was fabricated by the Soviet special services for western use. In Russia the KGB mostly emphasized Suvorov's disloyalty to the regime and, therefore, his general untrustworthiness and never mentioned "his love of Nazis" as a critical argument. They knew it would never fly in Russia because Russian readers never sensed even a whiff of sympathy toward Nazis in the book. (The majority of people, by the way, doesn't realize how much perception of German fascists in the United States and England differs from that in Europe and Russia). I personally don't see how Suvorov's argument that Stalin killed more people than Hitler (and intended to kill a lot more) makes Hitler a hero. Generations of western intellectuals made careers out of spreading KGB lies, but, unless, of course, you hope to secure a tenured position, there is no need for you to repeat this nonsense. It is shameful. Please, don't do it.

Some reviewers seem to view *Icebreaker* as full of technical information, and some details may be proven inaccurate by further research. This "bait and switch" trick is used to make people judge the whole book by comparing widths of tank treads. Please remember that this book is not about military technology, although it is described in great detail and used often to prove author's position.

There are at least five other successful history books written by Viktor Suvorov where he greatly expands and clarifies some of the main themes of *Icebreaker*:

1. *Day "M": When did WWII begin?* - A detailed account of Soviet preparations for the war.
2. *The Cleansing* - A very convincing explanation for the events known as "senseless decimation of Red Army officer corps before the war".
3. *The Suicide* - An interesting exploration of Hitler as military leader and the myth of German readiness for the war in the East.



4. *The Last Republic* - Indepth analysis of the geopolitical plans and intentions of the Soviets between the World Wars.

5. *The Shadow of Victory* - Documents Marshall Zhukov as the monstrous war criminal he really was.

As of now, I have not been able to find any indication of these books being published in English.

Currently there is only one used copy of Icebreaker available for \$450, and none of Suvorov's other history books are available in English translation. The content of Icebreaker alone is not sufficient to explain this virtual prohibition of the book, which is a very unusual and extraordinary measure for a modern western society. There is no question that Icebreaker is a controversial book: whole libraries of western historical analysis of WWII are shown as garbage. Still, this is not enough. The explanation may be that the book gives a detailed description of the process used by professionals to analyze political and historical events using widely available, open-source information: Icebreaker is written as an intelligence report and presents a clear application of the intelligence analytical process. This book may teach you how to think.

*Arcadiy Dubovoy*

## Why “Icebreaker” Matters. Translator’s Perspective

Stalin’s unsubtle 1918 call to smash the West opens this documentary. The Russian-German phrase book issued to his juggernaut on May 29, 1941 closes it. Only a Stalin deathbed confession could be harder still than the evidence packed between these red flags of aggression. Emblematic is Chief of the General Staff Academy General Ivanov’s explicit admission Stalin planned to strike *first* to “liberate” Europe. Mere hours here let you unlock an ironclad dossier decades in the making.

Viktor Suvorov, having seen for himself the white-washed fraud of official Soviet archives, instead chose to focus on mining memoirs from then-lieutenants right on up to marshals. Patiently connecting dot after damning dot, he lets the authors convict themselves. They prove that by mid-1941 Stalin had obliterated Soviet defensive barriers and camped vast forces in forward positions so extreme they made sense only as springboards for imminent aggression. Suvorov thus shatters the myth, cultivated to this day, of an innocent, peace-loving Soviet Union suddenly forced into World War II.

What first triggered my own interest in the subject was a 1951 peek through barbed wire at Stalin’s westernmost trophy prison colony, the “German Democratic Republic.” History professors in 1960’s America told me “surprise” explains early German gains in the East, making me wonder how a brilliant Zhukov could miss Hitler’s massing millions of men. Twelve months inside the Berlin Wall (1970/71) made me hate prisons even more, but did not answer the Zhukov Question. “Icebreaker” did, when a Russian fellow-interpreter at the United Nations slipped me his copy in 1991. A 1993 visit to Moscow, “Red-Brown Plague” placards and pro-democracy demonstrators seared by Stalin’s and Hitler’s twin holocausts, took me from familiarity with the cause to wanting to help.

Working on “Icebreaker,” I strove to make sure message and tone of the original Russian would reach English-language readers unadulterated. Discussing a number of choices with him reinforced my admiration for his strength of conviction as well as my determination to “Let Suvorov be Suvorov!”

Truth-telling matters. Victor Suvorov tells the truth and nothing but. I only hope I have managed to give his truly noble cause the English voice

it so richly deserves.

*Hans-Udo Kurr*

### **Icebreaker**

...The West, with its imperialist cannibals, has become the den of darkness and slavery. This den must be smashed to bring joy and consolation to the toiling masses of all countries.

*J. Stalin, 1918*

### **WHO STARTED WORLD WAR II?**

The answer you get depends on whom you ask. There is no unanimity. The Soviet government, for instance, has changed its own take repeatedly.

On September 18, 1939 an official Soviet government note blamed the war on Poland.

On November 30, 1939, through Party organ “Pravda,” Stalin named more “guilty parties”: “England and France have ganged up on Germany, assuming responsibility for the present war.”

On May 5, 1941, secretly addressing military academy graduates, Stalin named yet another perpetrator – Germany.

After the War the circle of “culprits” widened. Stalin pinned World War II on capitalist countries worldwide. By Stalin’s reckoning, before the War all sovereign states but the USSR had been capitalist. If you believe him, the bloodiest war in human history was the fault of the governments of all countries – Sweden and Switzerland included – except for his own.

Stalin’s assignment of blame to all but the USSR long stayed a staple of Communist mythology. While Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko were in power, accusations kept being flung at the whole world. Gorbachov’s tenure changed much in the Soviet Union, yet left untouched the Stalinist spin on those behind the War. With Gorbachov in place, Soviet Army Chief Historian Lieutenant-General Zhilin thus echoes: “To blame for the War were not only the imperialists of Germany, but those of the entire world” (“Red Star,” September 24, 1985).

In short, Soviet Communists have been blaming everyone for having ignited World War II. Would it be possible, however, to find the real arsonist? This book is an attempt to do so.

Let us remember that after World War One Germany lost the right to a powerful army as well as to offensive armament, including tanks, heavy artillery and combat aircraft. At home, German commanders had been stripped of any chance to gear up for waging aggression. For some time, German commanders did not break the ban and refrained from preparing for aggression on proving grounds of their own. Instead, they did it...on Soviet territory. Stalin gave German commanders everything they had no right to have: tanks, heavy artillery, combat aircraft. He granted them classrooms, test sites, firing ranges. He let them inside his tank factories, world leaders in output capacity: “Look, learn, clone!”

Had Stalin wanted peace, he would have done his best to thwart the resurgence of German militarism, deny it offensive might – and keep Germany a military midget. In addition, Europe would have featured Britain, with weak ground forces, France, with virtually its whole military budget poured into an utterly defensive border bulwark reminiscent of China’s Great Wall, as well as other, militarily and economically weaker countries. That would have made it much harder to set Europe aflame... Some purpose, though, drove Stalin to spare neither means nor time nor effort on reviving German offensive might. What for? Against whom? Certainly not himself! Whom, then? The one answer: the rest of Europe.

Reviving German military might plus an industrial powerhouse to match was only half the job, however. Even the world’s most aggressive military will not by itself start wars. Besides all that you need a fanatical, mad leader ready to pull the trigger. Stalin indeed worked hard to make sure Germany would get precisely such a leader. How Stalin created Hitler, helped him seize, then hold on to power is a separate major subject for later discussion. For now, we will recall only that once the Nazis had won power Stalin kept insistently and persistently prodding them towards war. The culmination of his efforts: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. With it, Stalin gave Hitler carte blanche in Europe and essentially opened the sluice-gates to the Second World War. When we curse the mongrel that sank his teeth into half of Europe, let us not forget about Stalin: He raised that mongrel, then let him loose.

Even before Hitler came to power Soviet leaders had secretly dubbed him “Icebreaker of the Revolution.” The label fits...and speaks volumes. Stalin understood that only war could make Europe vulnerable – and that

the Icebreaker of the Revolution could bring about both. Adolf Hitler was unwittingly clearing the way for world communism. Hitler's blitzkrieg crushed western democracies. In the process he scattered and dissipated his own forces from Norway to Libya. The Icebreaker of the Revolution perpetrated evil immeasurable against the world and humankind. His deeds handed Stalin ready moral cover for proclaiming himself Liberator of Europe, replacing brown concentration camps with red.

Stalin understood wars are won not by the one who enters them first, but by whoever enters last. He graciously let Hitler win infamy for having triggered war, patiently waiting until "the capitalists would be tearing one another apart" (Stalin speech, December 3, 1927).

I consider Hitler criminal and vile. For me he is a Continental-scale cannibal. If Hitler was a cannibal, however, that in no way means Stalin was a vegetarian. Quite a bit has been done to expose Nazi crimes and track down the butchers who committed them. Those efforts have to be pursued, even intensified. While exposing Fascists, however, we must also unmask Soviet Communists: They incited the Nazis to crime with the intent of seizing the spoils.

Soviet archives have long since been thoroughly sanitized. To the remnants, however, researchers have almost no access. I had the good fortune of a brief stint in the archives of the Soviet Ministry of Defense. Still, I quite consciously make almost no use of what I found there. I have stacks of material from German military archives, but use practically none of that, either. Readily available Soviet publications are my main source. Even just this is quite enough to cover Soviet Communists with shame and put them in the dock – side by side with German Fascists, if not indeed ahead of them.

My main witnesses: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, all Soviet wartime marshals and many leading generals. Communists themselves admit they used Hitler to plunge Europe into war. They themselves acknowledge they were preparing for a sudden attack on Hitler himself to capture a Europe he had destroyed. What makes my sources so invaluable is precisely that the criminals talk about their crimes themselves.

I know many will rush to the Communists' defense. Ladies and gentlemen, I have shown how their own words convict them. Let us let them do their own defending.

Victor SUVOROV  
December 1987, Bristol

## Chapter 1. THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS

We are the Party of the class out to conquer the world.

*M. Frunze*

### 1

Marx and Engels predicted a world war and prolonged international conflict “lasting 15, 20, 50 years.” Such prospects they did not find frightening. The authors of the “Communist Manifesto” did not call on the proletariat to prevent war. On the contrary, Marx and Engels wanted the world war in the making. War is the mother of revolution, a world war, the mother of world revolution. World war, Engels felt, would lead to “universal exhaustion” and set the stage for “the ultimate victory of the working class.”

Marx and Engels did not live to see world war. Someone did step forward to pick up the torch, however: Lenin. At the very beginning of World War One, his party came out in favor of defeat for their own country. Never mind that the enemy would wreck and impoverish the country, overthrow the government and trample on national shrines: Proletarians, as everyone knows, have no homeland. In a destitute, defeated country it is so much easier “to turn an imperialist war into a civil war.” So, let the storm rage: the fiercer, the better!

In other countries, too, Lenin was hoping to see real Marxists emerge, capable of rising “above narrowly defined national interests” to fight against their own governments for the sake of turning world war into global civil war. Elsewhere, however, none did come to the fore, so the prospects for world revolution slipped away into never-never land. Very well, if we can’t have world revolution now, let’s at least take the first step in that direction. In the fall of 1914, Lenin adopts a sort of bare bones program: If World War One doesn’t usher in world revolution, let’s then at least *start* tearing up the social fabric. Can’t rip it to shreds worldwide? Let’s, then, leave in tatters at least *one* country. No matter which. First grab one country, then use it as a base for starting a new world war and revolutions in other countries. “The victorious proletariat of that country will rise up against the whole rest of the world,” sparking unrest and uprisings in other countries “or resorting to outright use of armed force against them” (Lenin’s thesis on the slogan “United States of Europe”).



Promoting his ‘minimum program of seizing power in one country, Lenin still does not lose sight of the ultimate prize. For Lenin, as for Marx, world revolution remains the lodestar. According to the minimum program adopted in the wake of World War I, however, revolution is possible in just one country. So how, then, will world revolution come about? What will be the trigger? In 1916, Lenin unambiguously answers the question: It will be a SECOND IMPERIALIST WAR (“War Program of the Proletarian Revolution”). Lenin was already making the theoretical case, arguing such a war was needed for building socialism the world over.

Developments race ahead. A year later, a revolution breaks out in Russia. Lenin, then abroad, rushes home. There, midst a maelstrom of free-for-all confusion, he and his party – small, but organized, military-style – seize power in a sudden putsch. Lenin’s moves are simple, but cunning. Right when the communist state is founded Lenin promulgates his “Decree on Peace.” For propaganda, not bad at all. Lenin, however needs peace not for its own sake, but for staying in power.

The Decree sent millions of armed soldiers rushing home from the front. With the Decree on “Peace,” Lenin turned an imperialist war into civil war and plunged the country into chaos. He tightened the Communists’ grip on power, gradually subjecting more and more territory to their rule. The soldiers who had stampeded from the front played the role of icebreaker, shattering Russia. The Civil War made Marx’s old wish for “universal exhaustion” come true, letting Lenin hang on and entrench his rule.

Lenin maneuvers no less craftily in foreign policy. Here, too, he applies the same principle: “Do fight each other, I’ll enjoy it all from the sidelines, and once you’ve knocked one another out, then...”

In March of 1918 Lenin enters into the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and its allies. Germany’s situation then is already hopeless. Does Lenin grasp that? Of course.. That is precisely why he signs a treaty which..

- ..leaves him unfettered for the fight to consolidate Communist dictatorship at home and..

- ..hands Germany significant resources and reserves for pursuing the war in the west, exhausting both Germany and the Western Allies.

By making a separate deal with the enemy Lenin betrays Russia’s allies. Lenin, however, betrays Russia as well. At the start of 1918, the

victory of France, Great Britain, Russia, the USA and other countries over Germany and its allies is as imminent as it is inevitable. Russia has lost millions of men in the war and has every right to stand among the victors side by side with its western allies. Lenin, however, has no use for that kind of peace: He needs a world revolution. Lenin acknowledges he entered into the Brest “Peace” not with the best interests of Russia at heart, but with those of world revolution, with a view to establishing communism in Russia and in other countries. Lenin admits he “placed worldwide dictatorship of the proletariat and world revolution ahead of any national sacrifices ” (Central Committee Report, 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Russian Communist Party [of Bolsheviks]).

Germany is about to be defeated, yet Lenin enters into a “peace” that has Russia foregoing its entitlement to a victor’s role. Worse yet, Lenin meekly cedes to Germany nearly four hundred thousand square miles of the country’s most fertile agricultural and richest industrial areas. He even pays tribute in gold. Why?!

Here is why: The Brest “Peace” meant millions of Russian soldiers were needed no longer. Answering to no one’s command, they all went home, in essence smashing the foundations of the Russian state and its newborn democracy. The Brest “Peace” triggered all-out civil war, bloodier and more brutal than the First World War. While brother was fighting brother, the Communists solidified and expanded their rule. Within a few years they subjugated the entire country.

The Brest “Peace” took aim not only at the national interests of Russia, but also at Germany. In logic and spirit the Brest “Peace” was a blueprint for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Lenin’s calculation in 1918 was identical to that of Stalin in 1939: “Let Germany fight in the west, simultaneously wearing out itself and the Western Allies. We’ll do whatever it takes to help Germany get utterly exhausted, and then...”

In Brest, “peace” is inked with Germany, on Lenin’s orders. In Petrograd, intensive work is underway to overthrow the German government, with half a million German-language copies of “Torch” (“Die Fackel”) being churned out. In January 1918, even before the Brest “Peace” is signed, Petrograd is the venue for creation of the German Communist “Spartak” group. The newspapers “World Revolution” (“Die Weltrevolution”) and “Red Flag” (“Die Rote Fahne”) also are born not in Germany, but instead in Communist Russia – on the orders of the same

Lenin who signs “peace” with Germany. In the ‘20’s, communism strikes deep roots inside Germany. Let us not forget Lenin’s hand in that, either, nor that while Germany is locked in a grueling, hopeless war in the west, he has a “peace” treaty with the German government.

## 2

Lenin had it right: Drained, the German Empire could not sustain the strains of war. War ends with the collapse of the Empire and revolution. Lenin immediately abrogates the treaty. Europe, devastated, sees rising from the rubble of empires communist states amazingly akin to the Leninist-Bolshevist regime. Lenin leaps for joy: “We are on the threshold of world revolution!” He jettisons his minimum program. No longer does he speak of any need for a World War Two, believing it possible already to bring about world revolution in the wake of World War One.

Lenin creates the Comintern, self-defined as the Worldwide Communist Party, and sets himself the goal of establishing a World Soviet Socialist Republic.

World revolution, however, did not follow. The communist regimes in Bavaria, Bremen, Slovakia and Hungary proved to be sickly and abortive, left-wing parties in the western countries too weak and indecisive to seize and hold power. Then, Lenin could do no more than back them morally: The Bolsheviks had their hands full on various fronts at home, fighting against people across Russia who wanted no part of communism.

In 1920, however, once Lenin has become sure enough of where he stands inside Russia, he immediately launches a massive drive abroad to push Europe into revolution.

The window of opportunity in Germany has already closed. Still, 1920 Germany is very much fertile ground for class warfare. Germany is in a shambles, on its knees. Ideals are cursed, spat upon. The country’s economy is in dire straits: In March of the same year, the nation is shaken by a general strike that, some say, has over 12 million participating. Germany is a powder keg. All it needs is one spark... The official Red Army Marching Song (“Budyonny’s March”) features the words: “Give us Warsaw, next, Berlin!” Through the Party paper “Pravda” Soviet Communist theoretician Nikolai Bukharin trumps even that with a resounding: “Straight to the walls of Paris and London!”

First, though, the Red legions have to get past Warsaw. Between Soviet Russia and Germany there is no common border. To ignite the blaze

of revolution you have to knock down a partition – free, independent Poland. Unfortunately for the Communists, Soviet forces happen to have a commander who has not mastered Strategy 101 – Tukhachevsky. Near Warsaw, his armies are trounced and flee in disgrace. At the crucial moment Tukhachevsky comes up short on strategic reserves, deciding the outcome of that epic battle. The revolution in Germany has to be put off until 1923...

### 3

The rout of Tukhachevsky's hordes in Poland has very unpleasant consequences for the Bolsheviks: Russia, which the Bolsheviks seem to have utterly drowned in blood and brought to heel, suddenly rouses itself in a desperate attempt to shake off the communist yoke. Workers go on strike in St. Petersburg, cradle of the Revolution. They demand food. They demand freedom. The Bolsheviks crack down on the workers' demonstrations, but suddenly a squadron of the Baltic Fleet enters the fray on the side of the workers. The Kronshtadt sailors, the very same who handed power to Lenin and Trotsky, call for sweeping the Soviets (the ruling councils) clean of communists. A wave of demonstrations by peasants surges across the country. In the forests of Tambov Province peasants set up a well-organized, but poorly armed anti-communist army.

Well, Tukhachevsky, go clean up the mess you've made!

Tukhachevsky obliges, washing away the stain of his own strategic fiasco with the blood of others. His savagery in Kronshtadt is legendary. The monstrous mass murder of peasants in Tambov Province becomes one of the most horrific pages in the annals of human history. Here, too, the author is Tukhachevsky. The Twentieth Century spawned more than a few evil men: Yezhov (head of the NKVD, 1936-38), Himmler, Pol Pot. In blood spilt, Tukhachevsky fully deserves equal ranking. As to timing, he came in ahead.

### 4

In 1921, Lenin introduces his New Economic Policy ("NEP"). There is nothing "new" about the policy: just good old-fashioned capitalism. To hold on to power, the communists are putting up with whatever loosening of the strings seems necessary, even bringing in bits and pieces of a free market. Conventional wisdom has Kronshtadt and Tambov as the major factors behind Lenin's bringing in fragments of a free market and relaxing his ideological stranglehold on society. I think you have to dig deeper: By

1921, it has dawned on Lenin that World War One has not sparked world revolution. Trotsky advises switching to permanent revolution: hammer away relentlessly at a free society's weakest links and simultaneously keep working towards a World War Two that will, in fact, once and for all deliver "liberation." In December of 1920, before Lenin actually inaugurates NEP, he talks about world war: "Another war of precisely that kind is inevitable."

In 1920 no one made public statements about the inevitability or desirability of a World War Two. Here, though, a contemporary quote from Lenin: "We have gone through one series of wars and must get ready for a second." This, actually, is why NEP is enacted. Peace means resting up for the next war. That is Lenin's line, it is Stalin's, it is the line followed by Party organ "Pravda." NEP is a short breather as you gird for wars ahead. The communists have to straighten things out at home, reinforce and consolidate their rule, develop a super-strong military-industrial complex and ready the population for the fighting to come, for the wars and "liberation crusades." That, indeed, is what they are busy doing.

Instituting free-market features by no means signaled abandoning work on bringing about world revolution and a World War Two to spawn such a revolution. The next year already saw the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – USSR. The Founding Declaration announced the USSR as just the first resolute step towards creating a World-Wide Soviet Socialist Republic: The plan it outlined was to keep raising the number of republics until the whole world would be part of the USSR.

That Founding Declaration was an undisguised and unambiguous **DECLARATION OF WAR ON THE REST OF THE WHOLE WORLD.** The Declaration remained in force until the very collapse of the Soviet Union. No one had ever retracted it. Between Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and the Declaration there is a difference: Hitler wrote his book later; it also is the viewpoint of just one individual – "MY struggle." The Founding Declaration of the USSR, an official document, sets forth the paramount goal of a gargantuan state: to eliminate and subjugate all other states worldwide.

## Chapter 2. ENEMY NUMBER ONE

If a revolutionary shake-up of Europe starts anywhere, it will be in Germany...and victory for the Revolution in Germany will ensure its victory world-wide.

*J. Stalin*

### 1

In 1923, Germany once again teeters on the brink of revolution. Lenin has already let go of the reins. Stalin has seized all but total control, though Russia, the world and even his Party rivals have yet to catch on.

Here is how Stalin describes his role in preparing for the German revolution of 1923: "...The Comintern Commission for German Affairs, made up of Zinoviev, Bukharin, Stalin, Trotsky, Radek and a number of German comrades, took a number of decisions on how specifically to help German comrades seize power" (August 1, 1927, speech at Plenary meeting of the Central Committee and the Oversight Committee of the All-Union Communist Party [of Bolsheviks])

Stalin's private secretary Boris Bazhanov elaborates on those preparations. He says the resources initially released for the German revolution were already enormous, but that a follow-up decision simply issued a blank check. The Soviet Union mobilized all German-born and German-speaking communists, then trained and dispatched them to Germany for work underground. Sent to Germany were not just rank-and-file communists, but even highest-ranking cadres, including People's Commissar Schmidt, Deputy Chairman of the State Political Directorate Unschrift, Soviet Central Committee members Radek and Pyatakov, along with others.

Soviet Ambassador to Germany Krestinsky developed a powerful network of undercover agents. The Soviet Embassy in Germany became the center for masterminding the revolution. Through the embassy flowed Moscow's instructions and cash, both quickly turned into mountains of incendiary literature and an avalanche of weapons as well as ammunition. "Unschrift was given responsibility for recruiting, organizing and arming brigades for mounting an insurrection and bringing down the government. He was also expected to form a German Cheka (Secret Police) to eliminate the bourgeoisie and enemies of the revolution in the wake of the putsch"

(Bazhanov, “Stalin’s Former Secretary Remembers,” p. 67). The Soviet Politburo devised and adopted a blueprint for the putsch and set a date: November 9, 1923.

The revolution, however, did not happen.

The reasons were many:

First: Most people opted for the golden mean, flocking not to the Communists, but rather the Social Democrats. The German Communist Party lacked the mass support needed for seizing power. It also split in two, with the leaders of neither faction showing Lenin- or Trotsky-style resolve.

Second: The Soviet Union and Germany lacked a common border. Poland, just as it had three years earlier, stood between them. Had there been a shared frontier, the Red Army could have helped the German Communist Party and stiffened the backs of its leaders...

Third and, if you will, most important: Lenin had long since quit running the Soviet Union or world revolution. He was dying – with heirs standing in line: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and Bukharin. Aside from the obvious contenders there was Stalin, shunning the limelight, working away, nobody thinking of him as lusting for power, yet, to quote Lenin, already “having concentrated vast power in his hands.”

The 1923 German Revolution was run out of the Kremlin, but around the helm of the world revolution a no-holds-barred battle raged. None of the declared pretenders to power wanted a rival to call the shots for revolution in Germany and, consequently, across Europe. Multiple masters were jostling each other at the wheel, peppering subordinates with contradictory instructions. That could not possibly yield a recipe for victory.

Stalin was smart enough to stay out of the jostling. Single-mindedly, he decided first to finish consolidating his one-man rule. Dealing with all other problems could wait, world revolution included.

Over the next few years Stalin would take all challengers for power down a peg, then keep moving them lower and lower still – right down to the dungeons beneath Lubyanka. With power firmly in his grasp, Stalin would then sweep away all barriers to revolution in Germany:

- setting the German Communist Party’s house in order and compelling it unquestioningly to carry out orders from Moscow;
- establishing common borders with Germany;
- decimating German Social Democrats.

He would not, of course, personally do away with Social Democrats. Did Stalin *ever* kill anyone with his own hands?

## 2

According to Marx and Lenin, revolution is sired by war. War exacerbates contradictions and bankrupts the economy, driving nations and states beyond a fateful precipice, shattering their conventions, their way of life. Stalin, a true Marxist-Leninist, held a position of principle in matters of war and peace: if Social Democrat pacifism was drawing the proletariat away from revolution – and from wars spawning revolution – then declare war to the finish on Social Democrats. On November 7, 1927, Stalin issued the battle-cry: “To put an end to capitalism we must first do away with social-democracy” (“Pravda,” № 255, November 6-7, 1927). The following year, Stalin proclaimed battling Social Democrats to be Mission № 1 for Communists: “First, pursuing relentless struggle with social-democracy in every arena...henceforth including the unmasking of bourgeois pacifism” (Stalin, complete works, Vol. 11, p. 202).

In dealing with those lusting after revenge and war – German fascists, for instance – Stalin’s position is just as straightforward and principled: support them. Let the fascists do away with the pacifists and Social Democrats. Let the fascists start a new war. Everybody knows what comes after a big war... In 1927, Stalin foresees the fascists’ coming to power in Germany and sees such a turn of events as desirable: “The very fact capitalist countries are going fascist is precisely what will exacerbate their domestic situation and lead to workers’ coming out for revolution” (speech at joint Central Committee and Oversight Committee Plenary meeting on August 1, 1927, first published only 25 years later – Stalin, Essays, Vol. 10, p. 49). To the Hitler Regime Stalin applied the label “terrorist dictatorship,” emphasizing that “the revolutionary crisis will spiral all the faster, the more the bourgeoisie becomes enmeshed in its own schemes and the more often it resorts to terrorist methods.” In his report to the XVII Party Congress he stressed, “I am speaking not about fascism per se, but above all about the German variety.”

Support the fascists Stalin surely does. Fanatical Stalinists such as, for example, German Communist Party Politburo member Hermann Remmele, quite openly back the German fascists’ drive to seize power. Stalin was a larger-than-life actor in that drive. For now, I will cite just Lev Trotsky’s comment of 1936: “Without Stalin there would have been neither



Hitler nor any Gestapo!” How sharp-eyed Trotsky was and how deeply familiar with the issue speaks through another observation he made, in November of 1938: “Stalin has irrevocably given Hitler free rein, done the same for his enemies and pushed Europe towards war.” He says it while Churchill is rejoicing war will not come, Mussolini thinks himself a peacemaker and Hitler has not yet ordered preparations for an attack on Poland, much less France.

While Europe is heaving a sigh of relief, believing war staved off, Trotsky already knows it will come – and soon. He even knows who will start it. To dispel any lingering doubts about Trotsky’s credibility, let us listen to one more of his prophetic statements, this one from June 21, 1939. At that very time, Great Britain, France and the USSR are involved in intensive negotiations targeting Germany. No one is flagging possible surprises and complications. Trotsky, however, says: “The USSR will move its entire colossus bodily towards Germany’s borders at precisely the time the Third Reich will be embroiled in driving towards a New World Order.” Germany will be fighting in France, while Stalin will be using his “entire colossus” to crush neutral countries on his western borders as he keeps moving closer to the German frontier.

Reading Trotsky’s deductions and predictions 50 years later, our question is: How on earth could he know all that? Trotsky did not keep things to himself. He had been architect of the communist putsch, father of the Red Army, Soviet representative at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, first dean of Soviet diplomacy, commander of the Red Army, former top dog in the USSR and one-time helmsman for the World Revolution. If anybody had the inside story on communism, the Red Army and Stalin, he surely did. Trotsky said all his predictions were based on readily available Soviet publications and, in particular, on Comintern Secretary Dimitrov’s statements.

Earlier than anyone else in the world, Trotsky saw through Stalin’s game, which western leaders failed to grasp and which, initially, duped Hitler, too.

Actually, that game was altogether uncomplicated. Trotsky understood it because he himself was one of its victims. Trotsky, Stalin removed from power by pacting with Zinoviev and Kamenev. Zinoviev and Kamenev he pushed out by banding together with Bukharin. Stalin then got rid of Bukharin as well. Genrikh Yagoda was Stalin’s tool for

toppling Dzerzhinsky and his Cheka types. Next, he used Yezhov to oust Yagoda and his coterie, then Beria to dethrone Yezhov and so on. Stalin expands his game to the international arena – and Trotsky catches on. For Stalin, German fascism is one more cat's-paw.

German fascism is the Icebreaker of the Revolution. German fascism can start a war, but the war will usher in the Revolution. By all means let the Icebreaker crack Europe into pieces! For Stalin, Hitler is the thunderstorm needed to clear the air across the Continent. Might as well have Hitler do what Stalin himself finds inconvenient.

In 1927, Stalin declared a Second Imperialist War absolutely inescapable and the Soviet Union's entry into that war no less inevitable. Stalin, however, is too smart to want to start the war and participate from day one: "Step forward we will, but be the last to do it, so we can throw onto the scales a weight capable of tipping them" (Vol. 7, p. 14).

Stalin needs a Europe racked by crises, wars, devastation and famine. All this Hitler can provide. The more criminal havoc Hitler wreaks across Europe, the better it will be for Stalin, the more justification he will have for one day sending Red Army forces into Europe – as liberators. Trotsky connects all these dots before World War Two ever begins, even before Hitler comes to power. In 1932, Trotsky explains Stalin's dealings with the German fascists: "Let them take over, compromise themselves, and then..."

Starting in 1927, Stalin bends every effort (not publicly, mind you) towards supporting the fascists' drive for power. Once they have it, Stalin does all he possibly can to push them towards war. Once they have gone to war, Stalin orders communists in the democratic countries temporarily to turn pacifist and sap Western armies, demanding an end to "imperialist war" and undermining the war effort of their nations.

While prodding the Icebreaker to ram democratic Europe, however, Stalin has already doomed the vessel. Five years before the fascists take power in Germany Stalin is already planning their annihilation: "...smash fascism, bring down capitalism, hoist the hammer & sickle and liberate the colonies from slavery" (Vol. 11, p. 202).

Fascism is the butcher of Europe. Stalin backs the butcher, but before that butcher ever starts swinging his axe Stalin has already prepared for him the very fate readied for his victims.

## Chapter 3. WHY THE COMMUNISTS WANT WEAPONS

People will die for metal...

### 1

In 1933, German colonel Heinz Guderian tours a steam-engine factory in Kharkov. As Guderian watches, a secondary assembly line is churning out...tanks – 22 a day.

For realistic perspective on this SIDELINE, PEACETIME output of a SINGLE Soviet factory, you have to remember that in 1933 Germany was producing no tanks whatsoever. In 1939, Hitler started World War II with all of 3,195 of them – meaning, with fewer than that Kharkov steam-engine factory was able to roll out in half a year on a peacetime schedule.

To let you gauge what 22 tanks a day really means, you have to recall that even with World War II already underway – in 1940, that is – the United States had a TOTAL of just about 400 tanks.

A word now about the caliber of the tanks Guderian saw at that Kharkov steam-engine factory: They were a creation of American tank genius J. Walter Christie. Christie's achievements went unappreciated everywhere – except among Soviet designers. The American tank was bought, then channeled to the Soviet Union using fake documents carrying it as an agricultural tractor. In the Soviet Union the “tractor” was produced in huge quantities under the label “BT” – the Russian acronym for “fast(-moving) tank.” The first BT's reached 62.5 mph. Sixty years later, that speed would still be the envy of any tanker. Soviet sources usually quote a figure of just under 54 mph, in places as low as just shy of 44 mph (70 kmh). No mystery there: On Soviet roads the over-muscled engine would blow the transmission, hence a power governor had to be installed. Operating on superhighways you could simply dispense with the governor... Leading Western experts believe BT's were able to reach top speeds not of 70 kilometers, but 70 *miles* an hour.

The BT hull had a spare and streamlined look. No other tank of its day, including those made for the U.S. Army, had armor of like shape. The best WWII tank, the T-34, traced its lineage directly to the BT. Its hull design reflected refinement of the thinking of the great American tank builder. The principle embodied in the T-34's sloped frontal armor-plating

would eventually be integrated into the German “Panther,” then into all other tanks world-wide.

In the 1930’s tanks virtually everywhere on earth reflected the same basic design: engine in the back, transmission up front. Only the BT had both engine and transmission in the rear. It took the rest of the world another 25 years to catch on to the superiority of the BT configuration.

BT’s kept being perfected. Their range was pushed to nearly 440 miles – something most tankers still can just dream about even today. In 1936, run-of-the-mill BT’s were conquering deep rivers, hugging bed and bottom on the way across. Even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, not all tanks of presumable adversaries of the former Soviet Union have that capability. In 1938, diesel engines began to be installed on BT’s. The rest of the world would start making that move 10-20 years later. Lastly, by the standards of their day BT’s packed impressive firepower.

Having mentioned all these plusses in terms of the number and caliber of Soviet tanks, fairness dictates not sloughing over one minor minus: These tanks were IMPOSSIBLE TO USE ON SOVIET TERRITORY.

## 2

The BT’s main advantage was speed. That feature so overshadowed all others, it actually became part and parcel of the tank’s designation: fast.

BT’s were meant to attack. Everything about them recalled the small but supremely mobile mounted warriors massed in Genghis Khan’s hordes. The great conqueror of nations vanquished all his enemies by using extremely fast-moving forces in huge numbers. Genghis crushed his foes not really by force of arms, but rather by maneuvering at break-neck speed. He had no use for knights hobbled by heavy armor, relying instead on giant swarms of nimble fighters traveling light, able to move fast and cover enormous ground, sweeping across rivers and knifing deep into the enemy’s rear.

The portrait fits BT’s to a tee. By September 1, 1939, the Red Army had more BT’s than ALL countries around the world put together had tanks of WHATEVER type. The BT was suitable only for a war of aggression, only in enemy rear areas and only in a lightning-fast offensive operation where tank hordes would suddenly storm enemy territory, bypassing pockets of resistance, and plunge deep, beyond the enemy’s forces and instead to his cities, bridges, factories, air bases, ports and depots as well as his centers of command and control.

Also key to the stunning BT offensive profile was their unique drivetrain. Over dirt roads BT's ran on tracks. Once on quality roads, however, they shed the clunky tracks and sped ahead on wheels like race cars. Well-known, though, is that speed is inversely proportional to the ability to go cross-country: You either get a fast car fit for good roads only or a lumbering tractor ready to run anywhere. Soviet marshals opted for the fast car – making BT's all but sitting ducks on Soviet Russia's poor roads. When Hitler launched Operation "Barbarossa," virtually all BT's were abandoned. Even on tracks they were of almost no use off-road. On wheels, they were not used in the war against Germany EVEN ONCE. The potential of the great BT's went unrealized, but realizing it WAS NOT POSSIBLE ANYWAY ON SOVIET TERRITORY.

The BT was made for operations abroad only, and even there only where roads were good. Let us take a look at the Soviet Union's neighbors: Then, as now, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Mongolia, Manchuria and North Korea did not have any good roads. BT's were used in Mongolia, but ran into multiple problems: tracks often came off and, without them, relatively high pressure on the wheels bogged the tanks down, wheels spinning, off-road as well as even on unpaved roads.

The question of where, in fact, "Fast Tank" potential could have come to life has just one answer: in Central and Southern Europe. Once the BT had shed its tracks it could successfully operate only on the territory of Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy.

To the question of whether wheels or tracks mattered more to the BT, Soviet text books of the day give a clear-cut answer: wheels. The BT's stand-out feature was speed – reached on wheels. Tracks were no more than a means for reaching foreign territory, the idea being to use them to get through, for example, Poland, then to drop them and switch to wheels as soon as you hit the German autobahns. In war, tracks were seen as a crutch to be used just once, then ditched and forgotten. Paratroopers use their chute exactly the same way: drop with it into enemy territory, ditch it there and do your job in the rear without lugging around what you no longer need.

### 3

Now let us remember that even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Soviet Union did not have a single mile of road deserving of the term superhighway. Nearly 70 years earlier, the same was true, only much more

so. No contiguous country had any superhighways in 1938, either. Then, the following year, Stalin used the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to break Poland in two and establish common borders with a country that did have superhighways – Germany.

We are told Stalin's tanks were not ready for war. Not so! What they were not ready for was a defensive war on their home ground. They had been prepared for warfare elsewhere only.

The Soviet Union was the sole country anywhere on earth mass-producing amphibious tanks. In a war of defense a tank does not have to float anywhere. For exactly that reason, when Hitler launched Operation "Barbarossa" Soviet amphibious tanks had to be scuttled. Unsited as they were to defensive warfare, they were taken out of production forthwith, right along with BT's.

#### 4

Soviet aircraft were on a par with Soviet tanks in both quantity and quality. Communist myth merchants now say: Sure, lots of planes there were, but they weren't any good, obsolete. No point even paying any attention to them, so let's just count the most sophisticated Soviet models: MiG-3, Yak-1, Pe-2, Il-2 and others. Those made in the last few prewar years, we'll just forget about: junk.

Here, though, is how this "junk" looks to British pilot Alfred Price, a veteran of over 4,000 hours in the air, with experience aboard forty types of aircraft. His take on one "outdated" Soviet fighter: "The most powerfully armed among the world's production model fighter planes in September 1939 was the Russian I-16 designed by Polikarpov..."

"In terms of firepower the I-16 surpassed the 'Messerschmidt-109E' by 2:1, the 'Spitfire-1' by nearly 3:1. Unique among all prewar fighters, the I-16 surrounded the pilot with armor-plating. Those who think the Russians were backward peasants, prior to World War II, who then made progress only by drawing on German insights, have to recall the facts" (A. Price, "World War II Fighter Conflict, pp. 18-21).

We have to add that in August of 1939 Soviet fighters became the world's first to use rockets in battle. Moreover, Soviet designers were already working on the world's only plane with an armor-plated airframe, the Il-2 – a genuine flying tank packing firepower enormous by any standard, including 8 rockets.

What, then, went wrong? Why on earth, right from the start of the War, did the Soviets concede air superiority? Easy: Most Soviet aviators, including fighter pilots, WERE UNPREPARED FOR DOGFIGHTS. What *had* they been taught? How to hit ground targets. Soviet fighter and bomber fleet training manuals had pilots concentrate on conducting a single monumental surprise attack, whereby Soviet aircraft would at one fell swoop catch all enemy airpower parked on base, thus taking control of the air. As early as 1929, a major policy piece entitled “Start-up Phase of War” and published in the Soviet magazine “War and Revolution” drew a conclusion subsequently echoed in Soviet air force manuals, including those of 1940 and ’41: “In our view, there is much to be gained from taking the initiative and launching a preemptive strike against your enemy. Whoever is first to strike enemy airfields and hangars can expect to win air superiority.”

Soviet airpower theoreticians had in mind not just some generic enemy, but a very specific one. Chief Soviet airpower strategic thinker Lapchinsky illustrated his books with extremely detailed maps of typical bombing targets – such as the Leipzig railway junction, Berlin’s Friedrichstrasse and train stations, and the like. Lapchinsky explained how best to defend Soviet territory: “Like a magnet, a decisive ground offensive attracts hostile forces overhead and serves as a country’s best shield from enemy air attack... You do not provide air cover for a country by flying from behind your borders, but rather by flying far beyond them.”

That is precisely why in 1941 Soviet airpower was massed right on the borders: 123<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Regiment, for example, had its field base little more than a mile from the German frontier. In combat, that saves you fuel as your planes take off, bound for the enemy. In the case of the 123<sup>rd</sup>, as that of many other such regiments, as you were climbing you were already supposed to be above German territory.

Before and during the War, the Soviet Union created quite a few superb, yet also amazingly uncomplicated planes. Soviet aviation reached its greatest heights, however, not with planes made to knock enemy aircraft out of the sky, but rather with those meant to destroy enemy airpower and other targets on the ground. Soviet aviation technological achievement of that period reached its apogee with the Il-2, intended to defeat the enemy down below. Airbases were its prime target. When designer Ilyushin created this attack aircraft, he envisaged a minor defensive feature: the

initial Il-2 was a two-seater, the pilot flying the plane and destroying targets, a gunner behind him covering against enemy fighter attack from the rear. Stalin personally called Ilyushin and ordered removal of the machine-gunner: bring out the Il-2 as a one-seater! Stalin needed the Il-2 for a situation where not a single enemy fighter would manage to take wing...

Once “Barbarossa” had begun to roll Stalin called Ilyushin back and ordered producing the Il-2 as a two-seater: in a defensive war even an attack plane has to be armed to defend itself.

## 5

1927 was the year Stalin finally and solidly secured his place at the apex of power. From then on, Stalin focused his full attention not only on reinforcing his dictatorship but also on problems in the way of the communist movement and of world revolution.

1927 was the very year Stalin decided once and for all that World War Two was inevitable, that Social-Democrat pacifism must resolutely be fought as a force delaying the onset of war and that the fascists must first be backed in their drive for power, then annihilated.

1927 marked the start of industrialization of the USSR. Superindustrialization. Megaindustrialization. It was planned over five-year periods, the first of which, in fact, began in 1927. What five-year terms were needed for you can infer from a fact such as this: Going into the first Five-Year Plan, the Red Army had all of 92 tanks, by the end – over 4,000. Even so, in those first five years the military thrust was not yet all that noticeable. Attention was not primarily centered on arms production, but rather on creating an industrial base which would then manufacture arms.

The Second Five-Year Plan pursues development of the industrial infrastructure. It means setting up coke-oven batteries and Martin furnaces, giant power stations and oxygen plants, rolling presses and blooming mills, coal and ore mines. For now, arms production still is not job one. Not that it is not on Comrade Stalin’s mind: Over the first two five-year periods the production tally is 24,708 combat planes.

The third Five-Year Plan, though, supposed to end in 1942, was all about ramping up output – military output, on a gigantic scale and at a very high level of quality.

Industrialization came at a high price. Stalin paid for it with people’s living standards, driving them right through the floor. Stalin sold abroad



prodigious reserves of gold, platinum and diamonds. In a few short years Stalin sold off what the nation had built up over centuries. Stalin plundered churches and monasteries, imperial storehouses and museums. Icons and priceless books went the same way. Shipped abroad were canvases by the great masters of the Renaissance, collections of jewels, museum and library treasures. Stalin shoveled onto foreign markets timber and coal, nickel and manganese, oil and cotton, caviar, furs, grain and much, much more. It still was not enough. In 1930, then, Stalin launched a bloody collectivization drive. People working the land were herded into kolkhozes, their grain then confiscated. All the grain. In communist-speak it came out as “siphoning resources from agriculture into heavy industry.”

The result of collectivization and ensuing famine: 10-16 million murdered, tortured, perished in camps. A specter, in all its hideous enormity, came to loom over the entire country: cannibalism. No matter, throughout that horrific epoch Stalin was selling abroad some 5 million tons of grain every single year.

Collectivization for what? Industrialization. And what was industrialization for? To raise people’s standard of living? Not in the least. Before industrialization and collectivization, during the “NEP” interval, life was quite tolerable. Had people’s living standard been of interest to Comrade Stalin, he needed neither industrialization nor collectivization: All he had to do was keep NEP.

Industrialization and collectivization were in no way meant to lift people’s living standard. On the contrary, the latter sank to depths more appalling than anything reached even during the time of Genghis Khan. Robert Conquest published a horrifying book about those blood-drenched five-year periods, complete with harrowing pictures of children reduced to skeletons. It was worse than anything seen in communist Ethiopia or Pol Pot’s communist Cambodia.

In short, industrialization and collectivization were carried out not to raise living standards, but to churn out arms in colossal quantities. What did the communists need weapons for? To defend people? Once again, no. Had Stalin paid for autobahn-ready tanks and western military technology not with five million tons of grain a year, but just four, millions of children would have stayed alive. In all countries arms are meant to protect people, first and foremost children – the nation’s future – from dreadful calamities.

The Soviet Union stood things on their head: Calamities were inflicted on the population, children very much included, for the sake of getting arms.

The First World War was a carefree picnic compared to Stalin's industrialization. Over four years, all the countries involved in that war together lost 10 million dead, 2.3 million of them in Russia. In PEACETIME, however, for the sake of autobahn-cruising tanks and attack planes Stalin butchered many times that number of people. COMMUNIST PEACE PROVED FAR MORE HORRENDOUS THAN IMPERIALIST WAR.

The build-up of Soviet military might was in no way dictated by any external threat: It had begun BEFORE Hitler came to power. Mass-murder of children to churn out arms coincided with Stalin's huge drive to crush western pacifists and build up fascists.

Some may retort, yes, Stalin sacrificed people by the millions, but also did turn out arms to protect those left behind. No! We have already had occasion to see – and will again, repeatedly – how utterly unsuited the arms made were to defending his own territory and shielding his own people, how they had either to be pressed into roles not scripted for them or simply junked.

If the communists were creating giant weapons arsenals for something other than defending their own territory and their own people, what, then, *were* they for?

Comrades, the floor is yours.

## Chapter 4. WHY STALIN SPLIT POLAND

Ours is a cause which, if successful, will turn the world upside down and liberate the entire working class.

*J. Stalin*

### 1

On June 22, 1941 Germany suddenly and treacherously fell upon the Soviet Union. That is an historic fact – but a really bizarre one. Until World War Two, Germany did not share any border with the Soviet Union and therefore could not attack it directly, much less suddenly.

Germany and the Soviet Union were separated by a solid wall of neutral countries. To make Soviet-German war even possible, you first had to create the requisite common Soviet-German borders.

Before cursing Hitler and accusing him of treachery, anyone who finds June 22, 1941 a date worth thinking about must first, at least privately, give an honest answer to two questions:

- Who razed the wall of neutral countries that separated Germany and the Soviet Union?
- What for?

### 2

The wall between Germany and the USSR was a double row – except in one place: Poland was the sole country to border on both the Soviet Union and Germany. Through Poland runs the shortest, most direct, most convenient route between the USSR and Germany. You can see why a potential aggressor wanting Soviet-German war had to try to carve a corridor not just anywhere, but here.

By contrast, a country not wanting Soviet-German war had to bring to bear all its armed might, all its wisdom of state and every ounce of its international authority to keep its enemy from even entering Polish territory or, if absolutely necessary, go to war while that foe was still in Poland, to keep him from its own borders.

Now imagine, on the far side of the wall you have living a cannibal who has blared out how he is looking forward to wolfing you down. Satisfied you have gotten the message loud and clear, he starts knocking down the partition. How will you react? Imagine, next, the cannibal finds breaking the wall a bit difficult and asks you to make his tough job easier.

Without your help he will not manage to breach the wall, will not then be able to feast on you. How are you going to react to that kind of invitation?

Hitler made absolutely no bones about his intentions. Stalin publicly labeled him a cannibal. Hitler, though, could not attack Stalin: There were no common borders.

Hitler put to Stalin a bid for jointly punching through the partition. Stalin, ecstatic, accepted and with boundless enthusiasm smashed the Polish wall, carving out a corridor in Hitler's direction. Hitler's motives are understandable. What, though, explains Stalin's moves?

Communist historians have dreamt up explanations for what the Soviet Union did.

The first: Tearing Poland apart and drowning it in blood, we shifted our borders westward, meaning, we made ourselves more secure. Strange explanation. Soviet borders, yes, were pushed out some 125 to nearly 190 miles. Germany, though, at the same time advanced 190-odd to 250 miles eastward. That did not make the Soviet Union more, but instead less secure. More than that, though, a wholly new factor came into play: a joint Soviet-German frontier, opening the door to war, including Blitzkrieg.

Second explanation: Sinking an axe into Poland's back just when it was locked in desperate battle against the fascists, we tried to stave off the start of Soviet-German war... This is a yarn right out of the psycho-ward: We lit a fire next door, so our house would burn later than the neighbor's.

The third: France and Great Britain did not want to sign a treaty with us, so... What rubbish! Why should France and Great Britain defend the Soviet Union, if the Soviet Union has proclaimed it intends to overthrow democracy everywhere, France and Great Britain included? The West could not care less whether Hitler went east or not. East European countries, by contrast, very much did care. If Hitler headed east, they would be the first victims. East European countries therefore were the USSR's natural allies. They were the ones you had to enlist against Hitler. That sort of alliance, however, Stalin was not after, and in those cases where treaties did exist, the Soviet Union failed to live up to its obligations as an ally. Stalin could have stayed neutral, but instead slammed an axe into the back of those fighting fascism.

Explanations as to why Stalin did what he did communist historians have churned out by the bushel. Each of these explanations, though, is doubly, fatally flawed:

- It is an after-the-fact attempt.
- It totally ignores the position Soviet leaders took, though they set out their stance more clearly and understandably than Hitler stated his own in his writings and speeches.

### 3

Hitler, content to have driven a corridor through the partition, turned to his West European, African, Mediterranean and Atlantic problems.

What should Stalin have done, faced with a breach nearly 360 miles wide and some time to spare? Right you are: He should have rushed to reinforce his defensive shield in precisely that area. Along the old borders a powerful line of fortified sectors was already in place. It needed to be made stronger and more sophisticated – and fast. He also needed to set up a second such line, a third... a fifth. He had to move quickly to mine roads, bridges and fields, dig anti-tank ditches, cover them with anti-tank artillery... A little later, in 1943, the Red Army prepared at the Kursk salient to repulse an enemy offensive. In a short time and along a vast front, Soviet forces threw up six impregnable defensive belts, each over several hundred miles long and on average 160-190 miles deep. Each mile was packed to bursting with infantry entrenchments, ditches, connecting trenches, foxholes and gun emplacements. Mining reached an average per-mile density of 11,200 anti-tank and anti-personnel devices. Anti-tank defenses were ratcheted to monstrous levels: nearly 66 canons per each and every mile, not even counting field and anti-aircraft artillery as well as tanks dug into the ground. Wide-open fields were thus very quickly turned into a truly insurmountable defensive barrier.

In 1939, conditions for defending were better by far: woods, rivers, swamps. Few roads and tons of time. Soviet forces could have raised a formidable barrier on the new Soviet-German frontier: Fortunately, the breach was not wide.

At that point, however, the Soviet Union stopped producing anti-tank and anti-aircraft cannons. Instead of making the area impassable, they rushed to ease passage. Roads and bridges were built there, the railway net expanded, reinforced and perfected. Pre-existing fortifications were demolished and plowed under.

One of those directly involved, Soviet Military Intelligence Colonel Starinov, describes it quite bluntly: “A stupid situation was created: When we shared a common frontier with the weak armies of rather small

countries, our borders really were locked down tight. When our neighbor became fascist Germany, however, fortifications expertly built along the former borders were allowed to go to seed, even partly dismantled” (“Mines Awaiting Their Moment,” p. 176) Red Army Engineering Command sent up a requisition for 120,000 delayed-action devices for mining the railways. In the event of invasion by the German Army that would have been enough to paralyze all its rear-area railway lines, on which it was utterly dependent. Instead of the amount requested, what they got was... 120 mines” (ibid., p. 186) --- never mind that mines are the simplest, cheapest and among the most effective of weapons.

Mine production in the Soviet Union had been prodigious, but once a gateway had been cut through the wall, their output was slashed... What was Stalin attending to, other than wrecking his own defenses? He was busy razing the wall of neutral countries. Hitler was satisfied with one gap in the wall. Stalin was not. Hitler (aided and abetted by Stalin) did away with the government in just one of the countries making up that partition. Stalin (with no third-party assist) did the same in three countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), tried it in a fourth (Finland) and was hard at work gearing up for it in a fifth (Romania), having already wrested a huge chunk of territory from the latter. Hitler wanted to punch just one hole through the wall, Stalin...to flatten it whole.

Stalin, in fact, got what he wanted. Within a mere ten months after the “Non-Aggression” Pact had been signed, Stalin’s efforts smashed the partition from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea. Not one neutral state still separated Stalin from Hitler, setting the stage for attack.

Over that short span, all of Stalin’s western neighbors fell victim to him. Aside from the countries that shared borders with the Soviet Union, Stalin also enslaved Lithuania, which earlier had not had any common borders with the USSR. The appearance of Soviet forces in Lithuania meant they had now moved right up to the actual borders of Germany. Earlier, the Soviet-German frontier had run through conquered Polish territory. Now, Soviet forces had gone right up to the border with Eastern Prussia. Here, you really no longer have any way of saying Hitler the Cannibal was cutting corridors to the east, with sappy Stalin making it easy for him. No, Stalin himself was cutting westbound corridors without anyone else lending a hand.

Why did Stalin agree to help Hitler cut a rather narrow corridor through Poland? This is a question to which communist historians have been straining to dream up answers – without any success. The even more vexing question about why Stalin leveled the whole wall, though, they prefer not even to raise. Let's not rack our own brains, either. Let's give Stalin the floor. He alone answered that question clearly and precisely: "History tells us that when any state wants to go to war with any other, it will start by looking for borders across which it can reach the borders of the country it wants to attack" ("Pravda," March 5, 1936).

Question: Did the Red Army intend to stop at the frontier already reached?

Marshal of the Soviet Union Timoshenko answers: "What has been destroyed in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia is the power structure of working-class-hating landowners and capitalists. The Soviet Union has grown significantly and pushed its borders westward. The capitalist world has had no choice but to put up with being slightly squeezed. We, as Red Army fighters, though, will not now thump our chests and rest on our laurels!" (People's Commissar for Defense Order № 400, November 7, 1940).

This is no speech, no TASS report. This is a Red Army order. Beyond the Soviet Union's western borders, however, there is only Germany or countries allied with Germany. Move the borders farther west? At Germany's expense? But, a pact has been signed with that country...

## Chapter 5. THE PACT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Stalin was shrewder than Hitler. Shrewder and more underhanded.

*A. Antonov-Ovseyenko*

### 1

On the surface, it all seems fifty-fifty: half of Poland to Hitler, half to Stalin. Just a week after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, however, Stalin already played his first dirty trick. Hitler had launched war against Poland – Stalin declared his forces were not yet ready. He could have told Ribbentrop about it before the agreement was signed. He did not. Hitler started the war – and found himself alone.

There you have the first fall-out for Hitler: He, and he alone, bears blame for World War II.

No sooner had Hitler begun the war against Poland than he got war against France – meaning, two-front war. Every German schoolboy knew how, ultimately, a two-front war for Germany would end.

Great Britain also immediately declared war on Germany. France you could handle, Great Britain, though, meant islands. Just to reach it would be costly in time and hard work getting ready, a powerful fleet roughly matching the British, plus air superiority. It all spelt drawn-out war. Everyone knows how wars that drag on end for countries short on resources.

Behind Great Britain stood the United States, capable at the most critical moment – just as in World War One – of throwing its truly inexhaustible might onto the scales. The entire West became Hitler's enemy. Stalin's friendship, on the other hand, Hitler could count on only so long as he was a force to be reckoned with. In a protracted war with the West he would have to spread himself thin, and then...

Here, by contrast, is how things stood for Stalin:

Poland had been divided up not in the Reich Chancellery, but in the Kremlin. Hitler had not even been there, Stalin had. It is on Hitler, though, blame is pinned for starting the war, not on Stalin. Stalin is a blameless victim, the Liberator of Eastern Europe.

Stalin's forces perpetrated within Poland crimes of equal, if not greater magnitude, yet for some reason the West did not declare war on



him.

Stalin got the war he wanted: People of the West were killing each other, destroying each other's cities and factories, while Stalin stayed neutral, biding his time.

Still, the moment Stalin got into trouble, the West bailed him out.

In the final analysis, Poland, for whose liberty the West had entered the war, liberty did not get: It was instead handed to Stalin to enslave, together with all of Eastern Europe as well as a part of Germany. Notwithstanding all that, some in the West to this day believe they were victors in World War II.

As things turned out, Hitler ended up killing himself, Stalin became sole ruler over a gigantic anti-Western empire built with Western help. Throughout it all, Stalin managed to keep intact the reputation of a naïve, gullible simpleton, Hitler entered history as a scheming villain. In the West, a host of books has sold the message: Stalin was not ready for war, Hitler was. As I see it, ready for war is not the one who trumpets his readiness, but the one who wins it, having divided his enemies and bashed their heads together.

## 2

Did Stalin have any intention of living up to the Pact?

Stalin has the floor: "The matter of pursuing our struggle...needs to be seen not in terms of fairness, but rather of the dictates of the political moment and the political needs of the Party at any given moment" (speech at Comintern Executive Committee meeting, January 22, 1926). "War can upend any and all agreements" (Joseph Stalin, "Pravda," September 15, 1927).

The Party, whose congresses Stalin was addressing, correctly understood its leaders and empowered them accordingly: "The Congress stresses in particular that the Central Committee is being given full power to move at any moment to dissolve all alliances and peace treaties with imperialist and bourgeois states as well as to declare war on them" (Resolution of the VII Party Congress). That Party decision, incidentally, has never been repealed.

When, in fact, was that moment to come?

Stalin: "A great deal depends on whether we succeed in staving off war with the capitalist world, inevitable as it is...until the capitalists are fighting it out amongst themselves ..." (Vol. 10, p. 288). "You may judge the time

ripe for the decisive battle, once all class forces hostile to us have been drained enough by a struggle beyond their ability to cope” (Vol. 6, p. 158).

Stalin needed a situation where “the capitalists are like dogs at each other’s throats” (“Pravda,” May 14, 1939).

That was precisely the situation the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact created. “Pravda” was fairly bursting with rhapsody: “The pillars of the world are trembling, the ground slipping out from under people and whole nations. Blazes are raging, the thunder of cannons shaking oceans and continents alike. Like mere feathers gone with the wind, countries and powers are disintegrating... How gloriously, wondrously beautiful it is when the whole world is being rocked to its very foundations, when the mighty are crumbling, the great crashing to the ground” (“Pravda,” August 4, 1940). “Each war like this brings us closer to that happy day when people will be killing people no more” (“Pravda,” August 18, 1940).

Right from the very top, sentiments of this kind were being circulated around the Red Army and the Party. Lieutenant-General Krivosheyn describes a conversation with his deputy Latyshev (Krivosheyn then was commanding 25<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps and, just a bit earlier, had together with General Guderian been in charge of a joint Soviet-Fascist parade in Brest on the occasion of the bloody partition of Poland):

“- We pacted with the Germans, but that means nothing... Right now is absolutely *the* perfect time finally and constructively to resolve all world problems...” (“A Soldier’s True Story,” p. 8). Krivosheyn (after the fact) treats it all as a joke. Interesting, how his corps, indeed the whole Red Army, was circulating nothing but such...jokes. How the corps and the entire Red Army were being trained for defense was a subject nobody seriously discussed nor even joked about.

How much Soviet communists believed in the non-aggression pact and intended to live up to it Marshal of the Soviet Union Brezhnev tells us. He portrays a 1940 gathering of Party propagandists in Dnepropetrovsk:

“Comrade Brezhnev, we are supposed to explain non-aggression, that it is for real, that whoever does not believe it is carrying on provocative conversations. Still, ordinary folks don’t believe it much. What should we do: Explain it or not explain it?”

In those days you were faced with quite a few knotty issues, around the Hall four hundred people all were waiting for my answer, the luxury of time for

reflection I did not have.

“Explain it, absolutely!” I said. “We’ll keep right on explaining it, until in fascists Germany there won’t be even one stone left standing atop another” (Brezhnev, “Speck of Land,” p. 16).

The situation where “in Germany there won’t be even one stone left standing atop another” Stalin had envisaged for 1942. France’s swift collapse, however, plus Hitler’s giving up on a landing in Great Britain (which Soviet military intelligence learned about at the end of 1940) reshuffled all the cards for Stalin. The liberation of Europe was moved up from the summer of 1942 to the summer of 1941. New Year’s Eve 1941 therefore was rung in with the slogan “Let’s raise the number of republics within the USSR!”

In ’41 new treasures we’ll unearth,  
Our shovels hitting layers rich in worth.  
Uranium may turn into just plain fuel,  
Unleashed by cyclotrons, become the rule.  
Each year we fight for coal, to make more steel,  
Each year we’ve won – and surely win we will!  
Our list of sixteen stars, it may expand  
With stars to join the row and grow our land...

*(“Pravda,” January 1, 1941)*

No! What they had on their minds was not defense. They were not preparing for that nor had any intention of preparing. They knew very well that Germany, already fighting in the west, would not start a war in the east. They knew very well two-front war spelt suicide for Hitler. It did indeed. Hitler, nonetheless, aware of what was happening behind his back, had to start war on a second front, even though, sure enough, for him it did end in suicide.

Before the war “Pravda” in no way called on the Soviet people to build a stronger defense. The tenor at “Pravda” was different: Pact is pact, but soon the whole world will be ours. “Great is our country: Earth herself has to keep turning for nine hours to let all our vast Soviet land enter a new year of fresh victories. The time will come when she will need not nine hours, but all night and all day... And who knows where we will find ourselves toasting the New five years, ten years hence: at what latitude, along which new Soviet meridian?” (“Pravda,” January 1, 1941).

The closer the date set for the Soviet invasion of Europe (July 1941), the more candid “Pravda” became: “Divide your enemies, temporarily meet the demands of each, then crush them one by one, giving them no chance to close ranks” (“Pravda,” March 4, 1941).

Hitler decided he could afford to sit by no more. He struck first, not waiting for the liberating axe to land in his back. However, even though he started the war under the most auspicious circumstances an attacker ever had, this was a war he could not win. Even against the worst of odds the Red Army managed to “liberate” and lord it over half of Europe for half a century. How might things have turned out, you have to wonder, had the elite of German forces left the Continent for Africa and the British Isles, while behind their back the Red Army eliminated Germany’s sole source of oil in Romania?

## Chapter 6. WHEN DID THE SOVIET UNION ENTER WORLD WAR II?

In the event of global conflict only one country – Soviet Russia – can win.

*Hitler, November 19, 1937*

### 1

In the Soviet Union, everything related to the start of the Second World War is shrouded in the impenetrable murk of state secrecy. Among the many dread secrets of war there is one kept under especially tight wrap: the date of the USSR's entry into World War II.

To cloak the truth, the communists put into circulation a decoy date – June 22, 1941. Communist hacks concocted piles of June 22 legends. I have heard even this one: “We were living the quiet life, then they pounced on us...” If you buy communist fairy tales, it means the Soviet Union did not begin World War Two of its own accord, but had to be virtually dragooned into it.

To give their June 22<sup>nd</sup> version a veneer of credibility, Soviet propaganda buttressed it with special props: For one, they cooked up a “prewar period” comprising the two years leading up to June 22<sup>nd</sup>; for another, the figure 1,418 as the number of days the war lasted. The latter was insurance against having some curious sort decide for himself to figure out when the war began. Working back from the day the war ended in Europe, he would thus necessarily (Soviet spinmeisters calculated) end up running into “that fateful Sunday.”

Debunking the June 22<sup>nd</sup> myth, however, is child's play. Just rap, ever so lightly, one of the props – the “prewar period,” for instance – and you will see the whole construct come crashing down, the “fateful” date and 1,418 days of “Great Patriotic War” included.

A “prewar period” there never was. It is an invention, period. Suffice it to remember how during that “prewar period” ALL the USSR's European neighbors became victims of Soviet aggression. The Red Army had no intention whatsoever of stopping there or ending its westbound “liberation crusades” - - - and west of the USSR then lay just Germany (USSR People's Commissar of Defense Order № 400, November 7, 1940).

In September of 1939, the USSR declared itself neutral, then during the “prewar period” gobbled up territory that was home to over 23 million people. Is that not a bit much for a neutral country?

In the territories seized the Red Army and the NKVD went on a grisly spree of atrocities. Soviet concentration camps were filled to overflowing with soldiers and officers from European countries. Officers taken prisoner (and not just from Poland) were massacred by the thousands. Would a neutral country massacre imprisoned officers? Besides, how does a neutral country even end up with thousands of imprisoned officers, let alone during a “prewar period”?

Curious, how things turn out: Germany attacked Poland, so Germany was the instigator of and participant in a European and subsequently a world war. The Soviet Union did exactly the same thing, the very same month – yet is not counted as an instigator of the war. More than that, the Soviet Union’s involvement in the world war is dated only from June 22, 1941. Why, though?

A Polish soldier killed in battle against the Red Army is deemed a participant in World War Two and one of its victims. The Soviet soldier who killed him, however, is seen as “neutral.” If during the same battle on Polish soil a Soviet soldier was killed, he is considered to have been killed not in war, but in peacetime, during the “prewar period.”

Germany seized Denmark – an act of war, though there were, in fact, no major engagements. The Soviet Union, also without a fight, seized three Baltic countries very much akin to Denmark in terms of geography, population size, culture and traditions. What the USSR did, however, is not viewed as an act of war.

Germany took over Norway in further pursuit of aggression. The Soviet Union then had already spilt rivers of blood in neighboring Finland. Still, Germany’s bloody list of war crimes starts September 1, 1939, while for some reason the list of Red Army crimes in World War Two runs only from June 22, 1941. Why?

Over the “prewar period” battles of boundless savagery cost the Red Army hundreds of thousands of soldiers. The German Army over the same time suffered far fewer losses. If you use casualties as the criterion, Germany has more solid grounds for being classified as neutral in 1939 and 1940.

Red Army operations during the “prewar period” carry the official label “strengthening security on the western frontier.” Not true. That frontier was secure when the neighbors of the USSR were neutral countries, when there were no common borders with Germany and, as a corollary, Hitler could not attack the USSR at all, much less suddenly. Stalin, though, systematically eliminated neutral European states, creating a common border with Germany. The consequence for Soviet borders could not possibly be to make them *more* secure.

Even if, however, we do label aggression against six European neutral states “strengthening border security,” why on earth then do we not apply the self-same term in talking about Hitler? Did he not, by taking over neighboring countries, also boost security for his own borders?

Some retort: During the “prewar period” the Soviet Union was not waging any one war non-stop. It was a series of wars and invasions, with breaks in between. Hitler, however, also was engaged in serial warfare, with interruptions. Why, then, do we apply different standards to him?

People claim the Soviet Union during the “prewar period” did not formally declare war on anyone, hence must not be seen as a participant in war. Don’t mind my telling you, but Hitler also did not always formally declare war. As Soviet propaganda would have it, on June 22, 1941, too, no one formally declared war on anyone else. Why, then, is that date deemed the divide between war and peace?

June 22<sup>nd</sup> is simply the day the armed forces of one country attacked another, with a war already in progress in which both countries had long since been involved.

A captured criminal will tell you only what happened from the time someone slugged him in the mug, leaving out that right up until then he himself had been robbing and killing people on the street. Red propaganda, like the nabbed criminal, starts its account of the history of the War from the moment foreign troops appeared on Soviet territory, making the Soviet Union out to be an innocent victim. Enough: Stop this masquerade!

Let us remember the truly innocent who perished during the “prewar period” under the bayonets of a “liberating” army. Let us write the history of the war not from June 22<sup>nd</sup>, but rather from the time communist hordes, with no declaration of war, stabbed in the back a bleeding Poland whose heroic army was trying in an unequal struggle to stop Hitler from moving

east. Let's write history not from June 22<sup>nd</sup>, but from the day, when Stalin decided to start the war.

## 2

On September 1, 1939, at dawn, the German Army went to war against Poland. War in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, automatically meant world war. The war indeed quickly did engulf Europe and nearly the whole world.

By an odd coincidence, on precisely that day – September 1, 1939 – the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR enacted universal conscription. The prior history of the USSR had seen no such law.

Amazing, but true: All the while they were using Hitler to scare children (and their elders), calling Hitler a monster and a cannibal...they got by without the draft. No sooner had the ink dried on the non-aggression pact, though, than they decided they had to have the draft – and fast.

September 1939 marked the start of the “phony war” in the west. In the east, that same month began no less phony a peace.

What, in fact, did the Soviet Union need universal conscription for? The communists answer in unison: That day World War Two began, we did not want to take part in it, but we did take precautionary measures. Marshal of the Soviet Union Meretskov is one of many asserting that law was extremely significant, adopted “under circumstances where the Second World War had already begun” (“In the Service of the Nation,” p. 181).

Let us call to mind images of the Polish-German border that tragic morning: gloom, fog, gunfire, engines roaring. Few in Poland understand what really is going on: a provocation? unsanctioned hostilities spontaneously ignited? Deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (shepherds on high-mountain pastures and eminent reindeer herders on high-latitude ranges), by contrast, already are in the know: It is no provocation, no conflict, no German-Polish nor even European war, but rather the start of world war. This calls for us – deputies – urgently to meet in Moscow (for a Special Session!) and indeed to adopt corresponding legislation. The only mystery is why the same deputies were not as quick to react when something similar happened on the Soviet-German frontier in 1941...

The morning of September 1<sup>st</sup>, not just the Polish government nor only the governments of the western countries were unaware a new world



war had begun: Even Hitler himself did not know it.

He went to war against Poland, hoping it would be a localized move, as had been swallowing Czechoslovakia. That, in fact, is not Göbbels propaganda. Soviet sources make the same point.

Air Force Colonel-General Yakovlev (then Stalin's personal aide): "Hitler was sure England and France would not fight for Poland" ("My Mission in Life," p. 212).

Turns out, Hitler does not know he is starting World War Two, yet, lo and behold, the comrades in the Kremlin do – and *how* well! There's more, though: Moscow is not exactly next door. Some deputies need 7-10 days to get there, some up to 12. The point is, for them to be able to discuss a war that has broken out in Europe, somebody had to alert them *before* the war got underway about assembling in the Kremlin. I'll be more blunt: That signal had to go out even before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed.

Any attempt to fix a date certain for the onset of the Second World War and the time the USSR entered it...inescapably leads us to August 19, 1939.

Repeatedly, including at earlier secret huddles, Stalin had put forward his plan for "liberating" Europe: drag Europe into war, stay on the sidelines yourself and let the antagonists exhaust one another, then throw onto the scales the full might of the Red Army (Vol. 6, p. 158; Vol. 7, p. 14).

On August 19, 1939, the Politburo met to adopt the irrevocable decision to implement that plan.

Word of the Politburo meeting and what was decided there almost immediately ended up in print in the West. The French news agency Havas published a report featuring the decisions adopted.

How could a top-secret Politburo protocol fall into the hands of the Western press? I do not know. There might, however, have been several ways. One of the most likely: One or several Politburo members, fearful of Stalin's plans, resolved to stop him. Open protest was not an option. The only path to forcing Stalin to abandon his plans: air them in the West. Politburo members, especially those in charge of the Red Army, the military-industrial complex, military intelligence, the NKVD, propaganda and the Comintern certainly had the opportunity. This is a version not as farfetched as it may seem at first glance.

In 1917, to torpedo the October putsch, Central Committee members Zinoviev and Kamenev made public Lenin's and Trotsky's plans through

the “bourgeois” press. I do not, let me repeat, know how the document made its way to the West. I am merely emphasizing there were channels available for getting it there.

Stalin’s reaction to the Havas report was lightning-fast and quite extraordinary. Through the Party paper “Pravda” he issued a denial. Stalin’s denial is a document very much to be taken seriously. It needs to be read in its entirety. Here it is:

### **ABOUT THE FALSE REPORT BY AGENCE HAVAS**

The editor of “Pravda” contacted Comr. Stalin to ask how C. Stalin views Agence Havas’s report about a “Stalin speech” allegedly delivered by him “within the Politburo on August 19<sup>th</sup>,” supposedly putting forward the idea that “war must be prolonged as much as possible, to exhaust the warring parties.”

Comr. Stalin sent us the following reply:

“This Agence Havas report, as indeed much of its other reporting, is a cocktail of lies. I, of course, have no way of knowing in what particular ‘café-chantant’ these lies were concocted. No matter how much the messieurs at Agence Havas may lie, however, they cannot deny that:

- a) Germany did not attack France and England, whereas France and England did gang up on Germany, assuming responsibility for the present war;
- b) After the opening of hostilities, Germany approached France and England with peace proposals. The Soviet Union openly supported Germany’s peace proposals, as it held and continues to hold the view that ending the war at the earliest possible moment would mean enormous relief for all countries and peoples;
- c) The ruling circles of England and France rudely rejected Germany’s peace proposals as well as the attempts of the Soviet Union to bring the war to an end at the earliest possible moment.

Such are the facts.

With what can the ‘café-chantant’ politicians of Agence Havas counter these facts?” *J. Stalin* (“Pravda,” November 30, 1939).

Let the reader decide: What is a “cocktail of lies” – the Agence Havas report or Stalin’s denial? I think Stalin himself, a short while later, would hardly have repeated his own rhetoric.

The transparent falsehood of Stalin’s denial and the, for him, unprecedented loss of composure argue in favor of Agence Havas. In this

case, an extremely raw nerve was touched, hence the knee-jerk response. Over the decades of Soviet rule the Soviet Union and Stalin personally drew copious coverage in the Western press. The Bolsheviks and Stalin himself were accused of all Seven Deadly Sins. About Stalin they wrote that he was a police stoolpigeon, that he killed his wife, that he was a despot, a sadist, a dictator, a cannibal, a butcher...on and on. Notwithstanding all that, Stalin usually did not let himself get drawn into polemics with “bourgeois scribblers.” What, then, made a tight-lipped, unflappable Stalin stoop to vulgar abuse and low-grade insult? Only one answer makes sense: Agence Havas had laid bare Stalin’s most closely guarded intentions. Precisely that is why Stalin’s reaction is so out of character. He could not care less what future generations might think about his denial (they are, by the way, not thinking about it at all). What does matter to him, right then and there, is keeping under wraps his plans for the next 2-3 years, until European countries have knocked one another out in a war to the finish.

Let us for just a few minutes go along with Stalin’s contentions: Yes, the Havas report is nothing but “cabaret-concocted lies.” If that be so, we must take our hats off to the Agence Havas journalists. If they really dreamt up their reportage, then it was done on the basis of in-depth familiarity with Marxism-Leninism and Stalin’s character as well as thorough scientific analysis of the military-political situation in Europe. Agence Havas journalists, of course, did have far better a grasp of the situation than did Hitler and the leaders of the Western democracies. If the Agence Havas report was mere concoction, then it is that one instance where fabrication fits fact to perfection.

Many years later, when everyone had long since forgotten about the Agence Havas report as well as Stalin’s denial, thirteen volumes of Stalin’s writings were published in the Soviet Union. Among Stalin’s works you find his speeches at secret Central Committee sessions. In 1939, Agence Havas journalists had no access to these speeches. Stalin’s published writings, however, confirm that Stalin’s plan was uncomplicated, ingenious – and a carbon-copy of what the French journalists had described. In 1927 already, at a closed Central Committee session, Stalin put forward the idea that in the event of war neutrality had to be preserved until “the warring parties have exhausted one another in an internecine struggle beyond their ability to cope.” This idea was then repeated at closed sessions, time and

again. Stalin took the view that if war broke out in Europe the Soviet Union would inevitably become involved, but had to be last to enter, right towards the end of the game, with fresh forces to take on all those spent from the struggle.

Even Stalin's predecessors, however, had addressed the same topic. When Stalin made the case for his plan within the tight-knit circle of his comrades-in-arms, he simply quoted Lenin, stressing that it was Lenin's idea. Even Lenin, though, had been borrowing. He, in turn, draws concepts from the bottomless well of Marxism. Interesting in that connection is a June 12, 1883 letter from Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein: "All these various sorts of ne'er-do-wells must first tear one another apart, grind one another to dust and compromise one another, thus paving the way for us." What set Stalin apart from those who came before and after him was that he talked less and did more.

### 3

It is very important to know what Stalin said at the August 19, 1939 Politburo meeting. Even if we did not know what he said there, though, we see what he did – and that sheds far more light on his designs. Just four days after the Politburo's Kremlin session the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, the greatest coup Soviet diplomacy ever scored and the most brilliant triumph for Stalin throughout his extraordinary career. After the agreement had been signed, Stalin exulted: "Fooled 'im! I've fooled Hitler!" Stalin had, in fact, pulled on Hitler the biggest swindle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. No more than a week and a half after the ink had dried on the Pact, Hitler had a two-front war. Right from the start, Germany thus fell into a trap that meant it could only lose the war (and lose it did).

In other words, as early as August 23, 1939 Stalin had won World War Two – even before Hitler entered it.

It took Hitler until the summer of 1940 to wake up to having been duped. He tried to outmaneuver Stalin, but it was too late. Hitler could hope for no more than brilliant tactical victories. Germany's strategic situation was disastrous. She once again found herself being ground up from two sides: On the one hand, there was Great Britain, ensconced on its inaccessible isles (and backed by the USA), on the other, Stalin. Hitler turned westward, but knew full well Stalin was gearing up for attack and could at one fell swoop sever the Romanian oil aorta, paralyzing Germany's

entire industry, army, air force and fleet. Turning east, Hitler got strategic bombing and ultimately invasion from the west.

Some say Stalin won only thanks to help and cooperation from Great Britain and the USA. Gospel truth indeed! It goes to the heart of what made Stalin such a towering figure: He, the West's Enemy Number One, managed to exploit the West to defend, even add muscle to his dictatorship. It also sums up his genius: He succeeded in dividing his enemies and bashing their heads together. That was the very turn of events the free Western press had warned about as early as 1939, when Stalin feigned neutrality, while actually the prime and most insidious instigator of and participant in war.

## Chapter 7. “EXPANDING THE WAR BASE”

Key to nationwide liberation of Germany: a proletarian revolution across Central and Western Europe for unification with Eastern Europe in the form of the Soviet United States.

*L. Trotsky*

### 1

Having chased Bonaparte out of Russia, the victorious Russian Army pressed on to Paris. Not finding him there, it went home, singing. For Russia, the point of the war had been to rout the enemy army. If no one was threatening Moscow anymore, the Russian Army’s job in Western Europe was done.

The difference between Russia and the Soviet Union lay in their war aims. In 1923, Tukhachevsky, already bathed in the glory of having mass-murdered civilians across Central Russia, the Northern Caucasus, the Urals, Siberia and Poland, laid out the theoretical rationale for war aims: “To guarantee yourself freedom to use brute force you must first and foremost annihilate the enemy’s armed forces” (“War and Revolution,” *Collected Works*, № 22, p. 188). Smashing the enemy army and “butchering it to the last man” does not bring war and violence to an end. It is just a preparatory phase, only the first step toward “unfettered use of brute force.” “Once we have seized land, it is Soviet territory and will be subject to workers’ and peasants’ rule” (Marshal of the Soviet Union Tukhachevsky, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 258).

In his work, “Questions of Modern Strategy,” Tukhachevsky draws attention to the need for Soviet military headquarters “to issue timely instructions to the political directorate and corresponding bodies on setting up Revolutionary Committees and other local administrative machinery for all the various areas” (*ibid.*, p. 196). In other words, those military authorities prepare “liberation” operations in utter secrecy, meanwhile alerting commissars and “corresponding bodies” to assemble communist administrative apparatus for “liberated” areas: Red Army bayonets will bring our neighbors a happy life, complete with ready-made local government.

To sovietization of captured territories through “unfettered use of brute force” and exploitation of “liberated” areas’ resources for “liberations” still ahead Tukhachevsky gave a “scientific” label – “expanding the basis of war.” He even had it inserted into the 1928 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (V. 12, pp. 276-277).

Adolf Hitler, in a March 30, 1941 speech, spelled out for his generals the aims for war in the East: smash the enemy’s armed forces, eliminate the communist dictatorship, establish true socialism and turn Russia into a base for pursuing the war. Between Hitler and Tukhachevsky there is virtually no difference. Both are socialists, both fantasize about taking over the world, both plan on using conquered territories to “expand the basis of war.” When Hitler prepared to invade, he set up the administrative apparatus for his new territories in advance. Tukhachevsky proposed doing the same, only he did it as early as 1923.

Identical ideas – except that Soviet socialists expressed them long before Adolf Hitler. Tukhachevsky would have made a fine “Gauleiter” (Provincial Governor). A strategist he was not.

Analysis of Tukhachevsky’s “battering-ram strategy,” even in strictly theoretical terms, bares its utter bankruptcy. His was the method of a chess player bent on capturing as many empty squares as he can, leaving the matter of knocking off enemy pieces for later. Give the Tukhachevsky approach a try on the chess board – the most primitive miniature of war, with two tiny armies not clamoring for food or pay, while dutifully carrying out your every order, even if suicidal. How will it turn out? Well, just exactly as it did for Tukhachevsky on the Vistula near Warsaw back in 1920.

The communists assure us that once Stalin had gotten rid of Tukhachevsky, he also totally repudiated his methods. Not so. Stalin scrapped only Tukhachevsky’s untenable strategic approach, a veritable prescription for defeat. He kept and let others refine the notion of “expanding the basis of war.”

## 2

Aside from Tukhachevsky and his ilk Stalin did have true strategists. First and most brilliant among them was Vladimir Triandafillov – the father of operational doctrine. It was he, in fact, who in 1926 first formulated an approximation of the theory of “operations in depth” in his book “Scope of

Modern Army Operations.” Later, in “Nature of Modern Army Operations,” Triandafillov amplified on his ideas. These works to this day remain the foundation of Soviet military doctrine. Triandafillov found people who understood his thinking and lofted them into the General Staff. His disciples included future Chief of the General Staff Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky.

It stands to reason Triandafillov would find it impossible to get along with the “brilliant” Tukhachevsky. Triandafillov openly ridiculed “yesteryear strategy” as worthless, pointing out how Tukhachevsky’s approach to military doctrine exposed him as a quack and complete military ignoramus. You can only marvel at Triandafillov’s mettle: Tukhachevsky was his direct and immediate superior. The indomitable theoretician knew he was inescapably bound to his boss and could not but draw the latter’s jealousy, hatred and revenge..

While rejecting Tukhachevsky’s military methodology, Triandafillov did embrace and build on his ideas about rapid sovietization of “liberated” territories. “...We must manage quickly (2-3 weeks) to sovietize whole countries or, when dealing with larger states, do so over 3 to 4 weeks with extremely large districts.” “When organizing Revolutionary Committees it will be very difficult to find local forces to count on. Only some of the technical personnel and the lowest-ranking staff will we be able to come by locally. All higher-ranking cadres and even some support personnel we will have to bring with us... The number of staff members needed to carry out sovietization of newly conquered areas will be enormous” (“Nature of Modern Army Operations,” pp. 177-178).

Triandafillov pointed out it would be a mistake to divert Red Army units from combat into sovietization. For that, he argued, it might be a good idea to have special-purpose units of some sort. Let the Red Army defeat the enemy, then in its wake the specialized units move into the areas seized to set up true socialism.

Hitler, true enough, later came to see it the same way: The Wehrmacht crushes the enemy, the “SS” puts in place the “New Order.”

Triandafillov raised military doctrine to the level of an exact science. To calculate the requirements for offense vast in depth and involving millions of soldiers he devised formulae as elegant as the theorems of geometry. He worked them up for all stages of offensive operations,



including even for computing how many Soviet political leaders would be needed for each administrative unit in captured territories.

Triandafilov figures out, for example, the administrative manning table for the five Polish “voivodships” from the Soviet border to the river San – the very portion swallowed by the Soviet Union under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. For the purpose of sovietization he recommends using expatriate communists living in the USSR: With land-grabs planned right to the Atlantic, Soviet communists alone just won’t do.

Communist historians would have us believe Stalin split Poland because he feared Hitler, wanted peace, etc., etc. Communists “forget,” however, that *before* there was any Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or any Hitler in power Soviet military headquarters had honed with mathematical precision plans for sovietizing Europe. More than that, the Polish territory to the river San was seen as no more than a small illustration of how to pursue sovietization of Europe.

### 3

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact opened the gates to sovietization. Stalin had it all worked out – and not just in theory. Plans were being drafted at Soviet military headquarters in utmost secrecy. Not neglected either, however, was instructing political commissars and “corresponding bodies” to be ready to move on sovietization at a moment’s notice.

The night before September 17, 1939 NKVD Brigade Commander Bogdanov gave the order to his secret police units: “At dawn on September 17, 1939 Byelorussian front armies will go on the offensive to support the insurgent workers and peasants of Byelorussia...” In sum, revolution in Poland is underway, the workers and peasants are managing nicely, the Red Army and NKVD will just be helping things along... We know what actually happened: Katyn Forest (**site of the massacre of thousands of Polish soldiers, priests, doctors, and intellectuals, long attributed to the Nazis and acknowledged by Moscow as a Soviet atrocity only in April of 1990 – the single such official admission thus far!**) was part of the “support” program. Stalin, incidentally, did not fear Hitler nearly as much as communists try to make out. Had he feared him, he would have kept Polish officers around and, in the event of a German invasion, thrown them into battle in command of tens of thousands of Polish soldiers to fight as partisans on their home ground. Defending against Hitler, however, was not

part of Stalin's plan. He not only did not tap Polish potential but actually disbanded their partisan detachments, set up in advance for a possible war.

Sovietization of Finland was prepared even more thoroughly. The moment "Finnish military adventurists started armed provocations" Stalin already had ready and waiting a Finnish Communist "president" and "prime minister," complete with their entire "government" which included a top secret-police officer for a "free democratic Finland." In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bessarabia and Bukovina he also managed to find "people's representatives" demanding unification with the "fraternal family," and succeeded (with amazing speed) in turning up revolutionary committee representatives, people's assistant judges, legislators, etc., etc.

As sovietization gathers momentum, Stalin swells the ranks of his reserves of Party administrators for crusades to come. On March 13, 1940 the Politburo decides to evaluate all highest-ranking members of the Party establishment, confer military rank upon each and thus turn the whole Party from para- into purely military. The People's Commissar for Defense gets the job of actually grading and commissioning the "Nomenklatura." The decision is that all "Party Committee cadres shall go through systematic military retraining, so that whenever they may be called into the Workers' & Peasants' Red Army or Fleet they will be able to perform in positions appropriate to their qualifications" (Politburo decree "On Military Retraining and Regrading of Party Committee Cadres and the Conditions for their Mobilization into the WPRA," March 13, 1940). Let us take a closer look at the words "perform in positions appropriate to their qualifications." What *are* Party big shots qualified for, other than Borough Secretary? Well, they are, in fact, picked to be secretaries at the borough, city-wide, district and other such levels, even after call-up into the Army.

From May 1940 to February 1941, reevaluation (involving exams and commission reviews) affects 99,000 reserve political cadres, including 63,000 leading "Party committee cadres." Nomenklatura retraining is underway, double-time – and not just retraining. Draft notices are going out. On June 17, 1941, another 3,700 Nomenklatura-level Party types are ordered into uniform.

Getting ready for more sovietization?

#### 4

Party bosses were not the only ones sovietizing Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Western Ukraine and Western Byelorussia, Bessarabia and

Bukovina. Also lending a hand were “corresponding bodies.” The NKVD, backing up “people’s representatives” and “servants of the people,” was “helping the insurgent workers and peasants entrench the power of the proletariat.”

First to cross the border were NKVD border guards. “Operating in small groups, they would seize and hold river crossings and highway junctions” (Journal of Military History, 1970, № 7, p. 85). During the Winter War, an NKVD detachment clandestinely infiltrated Finland, made a dash across the tundra, then suddenly struck and captured the city and port of Petsamo. Five years later, in the war against Japan, border guard troops were the pool for formation of “320 attack units, each 30 to 75 strong, carrying light and heavy machine-guns, rifles as well as grenades. Isolated detachments numbered 100-150 men each.” “Drills were run on the basis of surprise attack plans worked out and refined in advance... Most important to achieving success was supposed to be the element of surprise” (ВИЖ. 1965. N 8. С. 12).

Even in the war with Germany, though, NKVD border troops operated the same way. Where German forces did not cross the border, Soviet border troops violated the international boundary on their own initiative: For *that* they *were* prepared. An example: June 25, 1941, on the Romanian border, Soviet border cutters ferried assault forces across in the vicinity of the city of Kilia. The rangers seized a staging-area, with covering fire provided by NKVD scouts that had landed on the river bank earlier (“Guarding Soviet Borders,” p. 141).

Interesting: NKVD border guards just as hand-picked and superbly trained as these stood on boundary-line bridges when Germany struck --- and proved unprepared to repulse attack or defend those bridges, surrendering them almost without a fight. When the western half of a border bridge had to be captured, they displayed the utmost in proficiency, daring and bravery. When the eastern half of the bridge had to be defended, the same people showed utter lack of preparation: They had simply never been taught nor had anyone assigned them anything to defend.

## 5

Still, the primary source of NKVD power was not its border guards. The NKVD also had a large number of regiments and divisions of rapid-response, security escort and guard forces. They all were extremely active in eradicating “hostile elements” and “cleansing territory.” In the Winter

War that was the job of eight NKVD regiments, working with additional separate battalions, companies and border guard formations. You can get some idea of the scope of NKVD “rear-areas cleansing” in light of an operation carried out in 1944 behind the First Byelorussian Front. It involved five NKVD border regiments, seven NKVD rapid-response regiments, four cavalry regiments as well as individual battalions and spotter planes. Grand total: some 50,000 men. The “area to be combed”: nearly 12,000 square miles (ibid., p. 181). Even before Hitler’s attack, though, NKVD was at work on no less vast a scale – except that data on operations carried out in 1940 in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Western Ukraine and Byelorussia, Bukovina and Bessarabia are not published anywhere. Scarce though published material is on the butchers, is it really in short supply on their victims?

The furious pace of NKVD activity in 1940 exceeded even that of ‘44, ‘45 and many a subsequent year. Suffice it to recall that 1940 was the Year of Katyn. Polish officers were not murdered in Katyn Forest alone, though, but also in at least two other places – each with no fewer victims. Moreover, Lithuanian officers, after all, were also being slaughtered back then, along with their Latvian and Estonian counterparts. The executioners did not target just officers, either: Teachers, clergy, police, writers, jurists, journalists, hard-working farmers, entrepreneurs and all other population strata suffered exactly the same fate the Red Terror visited on the Russian people. NKVD operations kept growing bigger...until, suddenly, something changed: In February 1941, in stealth and escalating numbers, NKVD combat units started massing along the international frontier...

## 6

Communist professors now do their utmost to downplay the might of the Red Army, exaggerating that of the Wehrmacht. In the process they resort to the crudest of fabrications and falsifications. In Germany, they count all divisions: Wehrmacht and SS. In the Soviet Union, all they count are Red Army divisions, simply “forgetting” those of the NKVD – crack formations superbly trained, fully equipped and armed to the teeth. The communists have let it be known that up against the borders the NKVD had 47 ground and 6 naval border detachments (roughly a regiment strong each) as well as 11 regiments of rapid-response forces totaling some 100,000 men. That is the truth – just not the whole truth. When the Germans invaded, not only NKVD regiments, but individual battalions of impressive

size, not to mention entire NKVD divisions also were there. To illustrate: NKVD 4th Division (Commander: NKVD Colonel Mazhirin) was on the Romanian border, with some detachments of NKVD 57<sup>th</sup> Regiment – part of that same division – right on the frontier bridges. Close to the border you had NKVD 8<sup>th</sup> Motorized Rifle Division. Deployed in the Rava-Russkaya area was NKVD 10<sup>th</sup> Division, its 16<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment concentrated at various frontier outposts. NKVD 21<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Division was on the Finnish border. NKVD 1<sup>st</sup> Division (NKVD Colonel Donskov) was right in the same place. NKVD 22<sup>nd</sup> Motorized Rifle Division appears in German dispatches on day 7 of the push into Lithuania.

NKVD units had been moved unbelievably close to the borders. Some were literally just a few yards away. Example: NKVD 132<sup>nd</sup> (stand-alone) Battalion occupied the Tiraspol stronghold, part of the Brest Fortress. To defend it? No: Defense was not the focus of Fortress preparations. In the event of war, plans called for leaving just one rifle battalion of regular troops there. Ah, then maybe the NKVD battalion was meant to guard the frontier? No, no: For that, right next to it and in the same barracks, they had 17<sup>th</sup> Border Detachment (a regiment). NKVD 132<sup>nd</sup> Battalion also was not border guard: It was SECURITY ESCORT, something the Fortress defense museum as well as official sources will tell you (“Great Patriotic War Encyclopedia,” Moscow, Soviet Encyclopedia, 1985, p. 138).

NKVD 132<sup>nd</sup> Security Escort Battalion’s job: convoy “enemies” from Western Byelorussia. Well, guess where they put it? On the WESTERN bank of the western arm of the river Bug! For now, the battalion is idle. Making your way back to the Soviet Union is very tough: Your secret-police types have to be ferried across the Bug to the old citadel, there you have to keep navigating gates and little bridges, cross ditches, ford the river Mukhavyets...then come ditches, berms and bastions all over again. No enemies inside the Fortress, town not exactly next door. So, for the time being, the battalion is relaxing. The Tiraspol stronghold (a frontier island) is, when you get right down to it, already Polish – back then, to be more precise, German – territory, and to get to Germany...you just cross a bit of a bridge.

Waiting for any researcher is a treasure trove of discoveries, provided only you are truly willing to pore over the composition and deployment patterns of NKVD forces on the eve of the German invasion. We, though,

shall quickly move on: no time to linger, given material enough here for tons of tomes. I will add just this: 132<sup>nd</sup> Security Escort Battalion was not alone.

I have unearthed data showing the very border was bustling not just with NKVD escort battalions and regiments, but even whole such divisions. Take a look, for instance, at how 4<sup>th</sup> Division – mentioned earlier – was straddling Prut River border bridges. Probably to blow them in case things heated up? Not on your life. Yes, the bridges were mined, but then they demined them and planted an NKVD division alongside. Some sources say 4<sup>th</sup> Division supposedly was pulling guard duty (by analogy to the SS, try figuring out what “guard” here means). Many others, though (for example, JMH, 1973, № 10, p. 46), have NKVD 4<sup>th</sup> Division come across as a security escort formation. Indeed, Division Commander Colonel Mazhirin was an old GULAG warhorse, who served in convoys his entire career.

Whom do you suppose GULAG guards were planning to run across border bridges?

## Chapter 8. WHY DID THE SECRET POLICE NEED HOWITZERS?

We shall crush the Beast in its own den.

*L. Beria,  
Commissar-General  
For State Security,  
February 1941*

### 1

The communists ran their killing machine on two tracks: the State “Security” agencies and uniformed troops. The latter, of course, did not mean Red Army, but “Cheka”-GPU-NKVD (short for “Extraordinary Commission – State Political Directorate – People’s Commission Of Internal Affairs) special forces. The Red Army fought external foes. The uniformed death squads made war on the enemy within, hence were called “internal.”

Back when the communist dictatorship was being entrenched, the uniformed death squads played a more important role than did the plain-clothes liquidation agencies. During those glory days the killers’ chief weapons were armored cars, three-inch canons and machine-guns. Neither the savagery with which they waged war at home against their own people nor the number of their victims differed in any way from a typical war of conquest. To coordinate the operations of all killers in uniform a Chief Directorate was set up. From time to time, just as smoothly as a snake slips out of old skin while remaining the same old snake, the killing machine underwent name changes. Throughout, the body coordinating the operations of the death squads stayed the same – the Chief Directorate. Together with the forces under its command it perpetrated horrific atrocities against all ethnic communities living within the Soviet Union.

As the communist dictatorship kept tightening its grip, the liquidation agencies moved more and more to center stage. The terror campaign’s weapons of choice now become the informer’s squeaking pen, the interrogator’s file for grinding down teeth, the executioner’s “Nagan” revolver. The death squads do not thin out their ranks. They do morph into support troops for searches, raids, arrests and convoying as well as for guarding death camps and “corrective” facilities. In addition, squads now provide protection for Soviet leaders and communications lines as well as along

international borders. The image of the warrior-killer, once a criminal in sailor's striped vest, has given way to that of a guard in sheepskin coat, braving a polar gale, bayonet mounted, trusty dog by his side. No longer do the killers have armored cars: They do not need them anymore.

The terror campaign rises to fever pitch, subsides, flares anew...then comes 1937. The communists would have us believe '37 marked the onset of Terror, capital "T." Not so. It began in '17, peaked in '30. The simple fact is that terror, following its own logic, in 1937 reached the very top: Communists, too, fell under the axe – the reason they do remember that year. Earlier, they had seen no terror in the Yakirs' and Tukhachevskys' drowning of whole provinces in blood. No, 1937 did not mark the start of the Terror, only its triumphant finale. Another year later, purges would go from sweeping to narrowly targeted. During that phase the killers apparently did not find even machine-guns to be much of a must-have item anymore: Those of their colleagues felled in the internecine bloodbath did not offer too much resistance.

Once the Great Purge has been successfully wound up, the terror campaign heads into steep decline. Jails and camps release some of their inmates, plans call for freeing still more. What should such a situation mean for the death squads and the Chief Directorate from which they take their orders? Right you are: Time to disband the CD. That, in fact, is what happens: the cleansing stops at the end of 1938. With the start of the new year Yezhov vanishes and, presto, on February 2, 1939, by decree of the Council of People's Commissars (Russian acronym: "SNK") the Chief Directorate of Border and Internal Forces of the NKVD of the USSR is dissolved.

It would make sense to assume some sort of new, if slightly scaled-back body would be created to take over the mission of the liquidated CD. Logic would suggest as much. In this situation, however, what actually happened defied logic.

On February 2, 1939 the former single Chief Directorate was replaced by SIX independent NKVD CD's, each with its own troops and responsible for military matters:

- the CD of NKVD Frontier Troops
- the CD of NKVD Security Forces
- the CD of NKVD Convoy Troops
- the CD of NKVD Railway Troops



the CD of NKVD Military Supply Troops  
the CD of NKVD Military Construction

After the Great Purge, not only did the death squads grow explosively, they also made a qualitative quantum leap: The Soviet government decided once again to move them front and center, downgrading the liquidation agencies to being auxiliaries. Completion of the Great Purge ushered in unprecedented expansion of the squads' firepower. Once more included in their arsenal were armored trains, latest-generation armored cars (BA-10), howitzers and, finally, tanks as well as aircraft.

We now see a swelling of the ranks of uniformed killers of all sorts and missions. Such, in fact, was the number of forces assigned to the NKVD that a special post was introduced to manage them all: Deputy People's Commissar for Armed Forces (NKVD Lieutenant-General Maslennikov).

Something strange was afoot: ON SOVIET SOIL DEATH SQUADS WERE NO LONGER NEEDED! In 1939, a new purge inside the USSR quite plainly was not in the offing: Forced to its knees, the country was utterly subservient to Stalin. Even if yet another purge had been planned, revolvers, files, whips and thongs would have been enough. For what, then, did the Chekists need howitzers?

## 2

NKVD force expansion proceeds along multiple lines. In 1939, an NKVD "blocking" service is created. Some may retort such "blocking" squads were set up only in July 1942 by virtue of People's Commissariat of Defense Order №227. Studying readily accessible Soviet sources, however, leads us to one simple conclusion: Comrades Trotsky, Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Yegorov and many others never even imagined war without "blocking" forces and during the Civil War years made widespread, constant use of them. Their job: stiffen the resolve of troops in combat, especially when these are on the offensive. Deployed behind their comrades-in-arms, blocking squads "stealed the backs" of attacking frontline units with bursts of machine-gun fire into the ranks, stopped any unauthorized falling-back, executed insubordinates on the spot. Detachments of the sort obviously are not needed in peacetime. Right after the Civil War, they were recast as death squads, guards and security escorts.

Then, lo and behold, in July 1939, blocking squads stage a secret comeback.

A well-known fact is that even before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed the Soviet Union began stealth formation of armies in the country's western reaches. An integral component of each army was a stand-alone NKVD motorized rifle regiment, composed not of battalions, but rather of blocking squads.

Aside from the regiments integrated into the armies there were separate NKVD motorized rifle regiments assigned to theaters of operation. For instance, in June 1941, behind Southern Front alone there were nine such regiments, a separate squad and a stand-alone NKVD battalion (JMH, 1983, № 9, p. 31).

Alongside the NKVD motorized rifle regiments, individual NKVD blocking squads were created and immediately incorporated into newly assembled corps and armies.

Soviet sources are replete with indications pointing to just how active the blocking squads were – and not just starting July 1942, but from the very first hours of the war. Here you have quotes quite typical of its first three days. Colonel-General Sandalov: “Am putting an army blocking squad there”...and...”They were stopped by blocking squads” (“Overcome,” pp. 108, 143).

Amazing: Germany's attack we did not expect, yet setting up and deploying blocking squads right along our borders we did not forget!

### 3

Beginning in early 1939, NKVD border troop numbers soar. From Lenin's time until then, the Soviet Union has six military border districts. Now, that number leaps to eighteen, with manpower in each new such district dwarfing the troop strength assigned to their predecessors. Every country has border troops – a defensive phenomenon – but the Soviet Union is no garden-variety country and we have already seen its border guards acting out their yen for aggression.

USSR border troops were not just capable of waging offensive war on their own, but also – and here is the crux – always served as the pool for the formation of SpecOpsForces (SOF). Look at any frontier outpost you like: caps green, conscience clean, four-legged friends yapping, border sealed, wisp of smoke rising, soulful strains wafting your way. All is just as it should be. Uniforms claim “border guards.” Inside them, though: SOF.

SOF were the most aggressive strike formations in the Soviet killing machine. During the Civil War they were notorious for their brutality – even by secret-police standards. Subsequently, their numbers were slashed, leaving just a single such division near Moscow (1<sup>st</sup> NKVD SOF Division, under NKVD Brigade Commander Pavel Artyomyev).

In early August 1939, though, Zhukov is getting ready to pounce on the Japanese. Put under his command is a stand-alone battalion of NKVD Special Forces, 502 men strong: not much – but then these are cream-of-the-crop bruisers, killers with hands-on experience galore. Their prime mission: “sweep out the immediate vicinity of the front” (“Guarding Soviet Borders,” p. 106). They perform splendidly, Zhukov is pleased.

That battalion evidently was a harbinger. In its wake came freshly spawned SOF in droves. Hordes of them, the hand-picked best the border guards had to offer, showed up precisely where the next “liberation” would soon be ready to roll, where “radical socio-political transformations” were about to be launched. A report filed on September 17, 1939 by the political section of the Kiev Military District border guards, for example, tells us SpecOps battalions had just been assembled and were awaiting orders.

SOF battalions were the first to cross the borders when Poland, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland were “liberated.” Their job: surprise and knock out enemy border posts, then advance ahead of the invasion wave to seize bridges, cut communications, eliminate minor enemy concentrations, terrorize area inhabitants. Once Red Army units have overtaken the SOF battalions, the latter turn to territorial cleansing, culling out and liquidating undesirables. SOF battalions are cited in the border troops’ official history (Documents № 185 & 193). Here you have some of their accomplishments: “Roughly 600 prisoners were convoyed across the border, including officers, landowners, clerics, gendarmes, police...” (ibid., document № 196). The contemporary publication breaks that sentence off in mid-stride, leaving us to wonder what sort of other “prisoners” there were. (“Clerics” and “landowners” Soviet censorship did not shrink from keeping on the list of “prisoners,” but some unspecified others had to be cut, lest they shatter the heroic halo ‘round the green cap of the chap with the dog by his side.) Fact is, the document dating from September 19, 1939 portrays the situation at only one small NKVD border post, on day three of the Soviet “liberation crusade” push into Poland. (These days, that liberation is being sold as an

effort to secure our borders against Hitler. If so, the least we could have done was not turn the folks living there against us. What point was there to running “landowners” and “clerics” across the borders into the USSR branded as “prisoners”? The SOF, by the way, kept most of their “prisoners,” not turning them over to any GULAG. The index of the camp for Estonian officers whom SOF units seized carries the “SOF” tag. That alone makes abundantly clear: Comrade Stalin had no plans for ever letting any of these people out alive.)

Let’s go back, though...to September 19, 1939 and the Polish border: Six hundred “prisoners” were just a drop in a deluge, surging through not just one border crossing, but through *every* one of them, raging from the first day of that “liberation” and relentlessly swelling. That SOF flood crested on June 14, 1941. On that dreadful day they deported civilians living in near-border areas. Most of them never again saw the sun rise over their native land. That very day, TASS put out an innocent-sounding, soporific report concluding there would be no war. On the other side of the border, incidentally, the SS carried out exactly the same sort of operation, resettling those living in the near-border belt. Each aggressor first moves out people living close to the borders before he moves his troops in. Since the German invasion was timed two weeks earlier than its Soviet counterpart, the resettlement operation on the western side of the border fell not on the 14<sup>th</sup>, but rather the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June.

After June 14<sup>th</sup> something happened historians shrink from explaining: NKVD SOF death squads “cleaned out” the entire belt along the border, then STAYED PUT. What for? It makes sense to keep killers where more work for them might turn up. Stands to reason Hitlerite killers would hover by the borders: getting ready for cleansing in Russia. What, though, about our own home-grown Soviet killers? What are *they* doing in that belt? Once this book had hit the stands, the communists came up with the after-the-fact line that Stalin had massed killers along the borders for defense. If so, would it not have been better to keep regular infantry in that corridor? If we did not have enough regulars, why not then morph the killers into infantry? Stalin, instead of disbanding preassembled NKVD SOF battalions, actually sets up more, even entire regiments. Lo and behold, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division SOF appears, then a whole NKVD SOF corps (under NKVD Division Commander Shmyryev, with Chumakov its Commissar and NKVD Colonel Vinogradov the Chief of Staff).

Comrade Stalin, what other territories had you decided to “cleanse”? Westbound, there was nobody but Germany and its allies. You don’t mean it was *Germany*?

4

During the latter half of 1941, compelled by circumstance, Stalin created not just sapper battalions and regiments, not even mere brigades, no, TEN SAPPER ARMIES that trenched the country from sea to sea, raising barriers and obstacles no army in the world could surmount. The first half of that same year Comrade Stalin had been busy with other problems, putting together forces for everything *but* defense.

During those first six months of ’41, yet another Chief Directorate was set up within the NKVD, this time of purely military thrust: the CD of NKVD Rapid-Response Forces. Command of the CDRF Stalin gave to SOF veteran Pavel Artyomyev, formerly in charge of the most feral of SOF divisions. By 1941 he had already clawed his way to NKVD Lieutenant-General. The new CD immediately went into Stalinist overdrive. Troops were deployed. The basic combat unit under CDRF command: the NKVD motorized rifle division (MRD). Their numbers climbed into the dozens, their manpower into the hundreds of thousands. Each MRD comprised a tank regiment (or battalion), two-three motorized rifle regiments, a howitzer regiment, plus other units. Each NKVD MRD numbered over 10,000 men. Every single newly formed was redeployed to the border – west-bound only. Could it have been for...defense? No. If a tennis player is expecting his opponent to attack, he had best not wait right by the net, but hang back instead, the better to see where the blast is meant to go, plus to have time enough to parry. The same applies to a mobile task force: To repulse an attack you have to keep your distance from the frontier, giving yourself time and room for defensive maneuvering. If a tennis player rushes the net – or a motorized rifle division the border – it most certainly is not to defend. Right by the net is the ideal position for firing off an ace, but the absolute worst for returning one from your opponent.

Corroborating the Chekists’ aggressive plans are the howitzer regiments among NKVD forces. The trajectory of small- and medium-caliber canon fire is flat to low-angle – good for defenders: That sort of trajectory forces our enemy to stop, lie down and dig in. When we switch roles, though, and attack, our enemy hunkers down in his trenches. Those canons then do not do us much good: Their low-angle trajectories send our ordinance flying

over the enemy's trenches without hurting him. Attackers need howitzers: What sets them apart from canons is their steep firing trajectory. Howitzers are good at smoking defending enemy troops out of their ditches and trenches. If we are gearing up for a war of offense, let us manufacture howitzers, if for a defensive one, then canons. Last but not least, if we are anticipating a war of defense, let us by all means give those canons to combat troops, not death squads.

On Soviet territory, there was no need for killer divisions with heavy offensive arms: Mutinies and insurrections had been put down long ago, no Makhno and no Antonov were threatening Russia-wide conflagration. In the territories just seized pursuant to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a terror campaign was in its second year. There, too, though, neither tanks nor howitzers were needed, save for extreme cases where the Red Army would be called in. I venture to submit that in the first half of 1941 NKVD motorized rifle divisions were being created to invade Germany. They were to deal there with a situation where Red Army troops would be racing ahead, dodging drawn-out battles and leaving behind enemy garrisons still intact, units of a powerful foe not fully vanquished. Against those, powerful and well-armed terminator divisions would indeed be needed. If others see it differently, I am ready to hear them out, then rebut. Please do not bother with defense-based versions. In a war of defense there is absolutely no point to having strong, mobile, painstakingly equipped and superbly armed NKVD motorized rifle divisions. SS killer divisions became just as useless at the end of the war, once the Red Army had entered German territory. When Hitler invaded on June 22, 1941 he put Beria's tankers, motorized riflemen and gunners out of business. The Chief Directorate of NKVD rapid-reaction forces proved to be altogether useless for defensive warfare. It withered like a pretty flower set in the wrong soil. Only four days into the war (some say, just two), Stalin plucked Artyomyev out of the CDRF, leaving its headquarters headless. Past 1941, no further NKVD motorized rifle divisions were created. Those already assembled were reconfigured into standard Red Army rifle divisions. Thus, 8<sup>th</sup> NKVD MRD is turned into 63<sup>rd</sup> WPRA RD (later 52<sup>nd</sup> Guards), 13<sup>th</sup> NKVD MRD becomes 95<sup>th</sup> WPRA RD (subsequently 75<sup>th</sup> Guards), 21<sup>st</sup> NKVD MRD is morphed into 109<sup>th</sup> WPRA RD. All told, 29 NKVD divisions were transferred from the NKVD to the WPRA (Major-General Nekrasov, JMH,

1985, № 9, p. 29). In a war of defense you need plain infantry, not the killer kind.

In 1944, though, the Red Army and, right on its heels, the NKVD finally did show up in Central Europe, instituting workers' and peasants' rule, social justice and other blessings. Don't think for even a moment the machinery for making life happy was built and fine-tuned only that year. Certainly not: Stalin had set it up before the German invasion. Adolf Hitler just did not let Joseph Stalin put that machinery to use any earlier than '44. In fact, Hitler pounded it so hard, Stalin managed to bring a happy life to just a few European countries – nowhere near the most important nor forever.

## Chapter 9. WHY THE SECURITY CORRIDOR WAS LEVELED ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

Mines are powerful things, yet tools for the weak and defense-minded. We do not need mines as much as we do demining.

*Marshal of the Soviet Union G.I. Kulik*

### 1

A country preparing for defense deploys its army not right on the border, but deep inside its territory. That keeps the enemy from using surprise attack to smash defending main-force elements at one fell swoop. Defenders near the border create a security corridor, meaning a belt saturated with traps, barriers, obstacles and mine fields. Within it, defenders deliberately put up neither industrial nor transportation facilities. They neither station major military formations nor store any sizeable supplies there. On the contrary, throughout the corridor they get ready in advance to dynamite all existing bridges, tunnels and highways.

A security corridor is a sort of shield with which defenders confront an aggressor. Once inside, the aggressor loses forward momentum and his troops suffer casualties before they can even engage core defense forces. Only small, but highly mobile squads of defenders range up and down that belt. Lying in ambush, these squads suddenly swoop, then retreat just as swiftly to yet another nook waiting for them. Nimble, the squads try to pose as main-force elements. The aggressor is forced to stop, fan out and fire shells into nowhere, all the while the squads already have quickly and quietly left the scene to get ready for the next ambush from somewhere else.

Once inside the corridor, the attacker has lost his key advantage – surprise. His exhausting efforts to cope with those fleet-footed squads running interference give core defense forces the time to achieve full readiness and take him on where it best suits them.

The deeper the security corridor, the better: This is one good thing you can't have too much of! As the enemy fights his way through a deep-enough belt, like it or not he ends up revealing where his thrust is actually aimed. Once that edge of suddenness has stopped working for the attacker, he himself falls victim to it: How deep the corridor is, *he* does not know.



His encounter with defending main-force elements therefore comes as a surprise to him, but not the defenders.

For centuries, even millennia, all the way from prehistoric times Slavic tribes would set up formidable security corridors of colossal length and enormous depth. They used a whole range of methods for erecting barriers. Stand-out amongst them was a wall of felled trees. It involved a forest belt where trees were lopped off above a good-sized man's head, leaving the trunk on the stump. Downed tree tops were criss-crossed on the side facing the enemy and made to hug the ground with stakes. Twigs were chopped off, hefty branches sharpened. Wherever there was virtually no chance an enemy would actually turn up, the barriers would measure a hundred or more feet across. Along likely enemy approach routes, by contrast, tree hurdles would reach monstrous dimensions: impassable logjams 25 to 40-odd miles in diameter, reinforced with palisades, dragon's teeth, wolf pits, forbidding mantraps that could break horses' legs and the most ingeniously built snares. Russia's felled-tree belts stretched for hundreds of miles. The 16<sup>th</sup>-century Great Tree Barrier, in fact, approached a thousand. Behind those belts fortresses and fortified towns were built. The barriers themselves were closely watched by highly mobile guard units that would suddenly descend on an enemy, then quickly vanish into one or another of multiple labyrinths rather than battle it out at length. Attempts to pursue them cost aggressors dearly: Passages left open here and there were of use only to those who had designed them, whereas labyrinths would lead the uninitiated into ambushes and traps.

In barrier areas there was a ban on felling trees as well as on laying down roads. As Russia kept moving its borders southward, it did not level old belts, but rather kept and even reinforced them. On the new frontier it erected an additional line of fortifications, fortresses and fortified towns, ahead of which it put up yet another chopped-tree belt. Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an enemy intent on attacking Moscow from the south would have had to surmount one after another of eight such belts over a total depth of some 500 miles: mission impossible for any, even a modern army. Even if an enemy had managed the entire nearly 500-mile course, the attack would in any case have come as no surprise: Any army would have had to pour too much time and effort into cutting and slashing through, while also losing too many men to the sudden assaults of fast-moving squads of defenders. However, even if a foe had succeeded in overcoming

all that, at the end of the trail of tears a fully mobilized, fresh and battle-ready Russian Army would have been waiting for him.

Security corridors had not become irrelevant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have not in the 21<sup>st</sup>. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>, a line of fortified sectors and barriers known as the “Belt of Steel” was raised along the border with China. It runs for a few thousand miles and is from around a mile to 12 and more miles deep. The built-in know-how ranges from what has been around for thousands of years all the way up to nuclear landmines.

In the lead-up to World War Two Red Army commanders understood full well what a security corridor means, having learned from bitter first-hand experience. One illustration: In 1920, the Red Army landed in such a belt, prepared by Polish forces. This is top Artillery Marshal Voronov’s portrayal: “Retreating, Polish troops destroyed all railway stations, tracks and bridges in their path, burned villages, crops and haystacks. For us, it was extremely hard to make headway. Every little creek we had to fight our way across by wading or improvising. Ammunition became harder and harder to get” (“Serving in the War,” p. 34).

This lesson learned, the Red Army itself set up massive security corridors along its borders, especially in the west. Special government commissions inspected western sectors, identifying areas most and others least vulnerable to enemy penetration. ALL bridges in the country’s western areas then were rigged with dynamite. Guard commanders were trained in how to mine their bridges and send them sky-high. For example, a railway bridge near Odessa with a fail-safe system installed could be readied for dynamiting in just two and a half minutes (Starinov, “Mines Awaiting Their Moment,” p. 24). Also rigged for dynamiting were major pipes, depots, pumping stations, water towers, high earthen dams and deep pits (ibid., p. 18). As early as the end of 1929, in Kiev Military District alone 60 demolition teams were readied for action, totaling some 1,400 members. Prepared for their use were “1,640 fully operable units of complex explosives, along with tens of thousands of detonators ready for use literally in an instant” (ibid., p. 22). Similar work also went on in other military districts.

In addition to demolition teams, the western reaches of the country saw the formation of railway guard battalions whose mission in case of a retreat included totally wrecking key junctions as well as making main lines impassable by sabotaging tracks and placing powerful time bombs to guard

against an enemy attempt to restore the lines. In 1932 already, there were four such battalions in the Ukraine (*ibid.*, p. 175).

Readied for removal, moreover, were railway switch assemblies, communications facilities, telegraph lines and, in some instances, even tracks.

The Soviet security corridor was constantly being perfected. The number of assets readied for dynamiting or removal kept growing. New, formidable obstacles and barriers were set up, including tree walls and man-made basins in front of defense facilities, while steps were taken to prepare for flooding terrain or creating marshland.

In the fall of 1939 the Soviet Union scored a coup: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact added land 125 to nearly 190 miles across. The security belt already in place widened considerably. Nature itself had designed the new territories for setting up such a corridor: forests, hills, bogs, mighty rivers with muddy banks and, in Western Ukraine, steeply banked mountain torrents. “The area favored defenders and facilitated setting up barriers” (“When the War Began,” Yeremyenko, p. 71).

As a bonus, the railway net was poorly developed. Out of 4,185 total miles of track only 1,255 were two-way – and even the latter could handle only limited traffic. If the need arose, it would have been quite easy to shut them down entirely.

The Red Army immediately got an object lesson in how putting up a security corridor can greatly lighten the defender’s load. In the fall the Soviet Union perpetrated aggression against Finland, but failed to surprise its target: Finnish main-force elements were far from the border, buffered by a security belt...where the Red Army promptly found itself caught. It has to be pointed out that the Red Army’s misfortunes were not just a reflection of Soviet command miscalculations. More important were the Finnish Army’s defense readiness and its willingness to take casualties. One of the facets of its preparedness was the security belt ahead of the primary defense perimeter. That belt covered a depth of 25 to nearly 40 miles (*Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, p. 504), saturated with mine fields and studded with barriers. Snipers were hyper-active, along with sappers and light mobile detachments. Result: The Red Army was virtually road-bound, any step to either side potentially the last. Getting through this corridor and reaching the main defense perimeter cost 25 days, enormous casualties, rock-bottom morale as well as depleted ammunition,

fuel and food. Supply columns had fallen behind, constantly jeopardized by raids staged again and again by fleet-footed Finnish units perfectly familiar with the area and privy to secret passageways through the mine fields. The Finnish security corridor awed all Soviet commanders who fought there, first and foremost 7<sup>th</sup> Army Commander Meretskov (“In the Service of the Nation,” p. 184).

Having mastered that sort of corridor and seen its real value, Meretskov was named Chief of the General Staff. How did he put to use his experience to reinforce the Soviet security corridor created along the western borders?

Meretskov’s orders:

1. Do away with the belt already set up along the western borders, disband demolition teams, pull dynamite, deactivate mines and level barriers.
2. Create no such belts on newly gained territory.
3. Deploy Red Army main-force elements right along the border without any security corridor to cover them.
4. Move all strategic Red Army supplies from deep within country right up against the border.
5. Launch high-priority development of a huge air base and transportation network in Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine, turn one-way into two-way lines, boost carrying capacity everywhere and lay new tracks right up to the German frontier.

## 2

Here are the dividends this policy paid:

In 1939 Poland had been split up. Several rivers had ended up on the frontier, crossed by inactive bridges. Soviet 4<sup>th</sup> Army’s sector alone, for instance, had four such bridges. For understandable reasons, the Germans had not called for their destruction, though in peacetime they were of no use. The Soviets, however, also had not made eliminating them an issue. When the war began, German troops seized them all, moving enormous numbers of troops across, catching 4<sup>th</sup> Army asleep and crushing it. Having smashed 4<sup>th</sup> Army let them get to superpowerful 10<sup>th</sup> Army from the rear. That army, too, suffered a trouncing of unprecedented proportions. Guderian, his path cleared, raced for Minsk.

Former 4<sup>th</sup> Army Chief of Staff Sandalov wants to know: “Why did 4<sup>th</sup> Army’s sector have that many bridges across the Bug, anyway?”

(“Overcome,” p. 99). Why, indeed? The German High Command had hopes of using the bridges for offensive warfare, so it did not bring up doing away with them. What, though, was its Soviet counterpart hoping for?

Historians have dreamt up a would-be catchall: Soviet commanders were idiots. To Sandalov, however, the man responsible for those bridges, that explanation simply does not apply. Interesting, how nobody blamed him, how he was not put up against a wall. Quite the opposite: From Colonel in June '41 he rocketed to Colonel-General, winning distinction in a whole series of operations. His stand-out character trait: leaving nothing to chance, paying attention to every last detail. My own personal impression: an uncommonly crafty fellow. What, then, happened to him in June of '41?

### 3

German forces had no trouble rolling on, capturing bridges across the Daugave, Berezina, Neman, Pripyat, even the Dnepr. Had they not been rigged with dynamite, we might call it criminal negligence. At issue here, though, is something more serious: They *had* been set to blow, but were de-mined after the creation of a common Soviet-German frontier. The de-mining went on everywhere, meaning, it was not the whim of an idiot here, another there: It was government policy. “In the west, our country already found itself face to face with fascist Germany’s powerful military machine... The threat of invasion loomed over England... Familiar with preparations for mounting barriers in areas close to the border, I was simply stunned: Even what we had succeeded in putting up from 1926-1933 had been virtually leveled. No longer were there any ready-to-use charges being stored near major bridges and other assets. Not only were there no brigades, there were not even any special battalions... The Ulyanovsk Institute – our only academy for turning out highly competent commanders to head detachments equipped with radio-controlled mines – had been converted into a communications training facility” (Starinov, p. 175).

The impact of surprise could have been drastically reduced --- if only main-force elements had not been stationed right at the borders. Empty space, even without rigging of any kind, still would have served as a sort of security corridor, guarding against surprise attack. Alerted by frontline units, main-force elements would have had a little time to crank up their weaponry. But! “The armies...had to deploy right along the international

borders, never mind how hard the configuration of that frontier made it to defend. Our prewar regulations notwithstanding, not even a security corridor was set up” (“History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-45,” Vol. 2, p. 49).

Chief of Staff Meretskov thus is violating regulations. Stalin didn't fail to fire him, did he? Fire him he did. The reason, though, was not that Meretskov had razed the security corridor and had not put up a new one. It was that he had not moved fast enough in building transportation lines, bridges and air bases in the new areas.

On January 13, 1941 Meretskov was replaced as Chief of the General Staff by General Zhukov. Sure enough, construction work intensified to truly frenetic Zhukov trademark levels. Until then, the Red Army had had five railway brigades. Zhukov immediately raised the number to 13. (Each brigade comprised one regiment, two stand-alone battalions and support units.) Nearly all railway troops were massed in western border areas and worked intensively on modernizing old as well as on laying down new lines to the very frontier (“Red Star,” September 15, 1984). Here a few of the new lines: Proskurov-Ternopol-Lvov, Lvov-Yavorov-international border, Lvov-Peremyshl, Timkovichi-Baranovichi, Byelovezha-Oranitsa. The very name of each railway terminus says the Soviet leadership saw the border belt not as a battlefield, but rather as a staging-area for behind-the-front logistics. In the event of rapid progress westward, it figured, millions of fresh reservists as well as millions of tons of ammunition, fuel and other supply items would have to be delivered there.

While track was being laid, intensive work was underway also on building highways in the country's western reaches. Here some of those: Orsha-Lepel, Lvov-Peremyshl, Byelaya Tserkov-Kazatin, Minsk-Brest. While gearing up for defensive warfare you put down lateral highways, laid out parallel to the front and designed to let you move reserves from sectors where defenders are idle to those where they are in jeopardy. More than that, those lateral roads you do not build near the frontier, but deep within your territory instead, insofar as possible leaving near-border areas bereft of roads and bridges altogether. The Red Army, by contrast, was laying rails as well as highways from east to west – something you do when you are getting ready to attack. You can then quickly redeploy reserves from deep within country to the international frontier – and keep supplying them once

they have crossed it. New highways led right to border cities: Peremyshl, Brest, Yavorov.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov remembers: “The highway grid in Western Byelorussia and Western Ukraine was in bad shape. Many bridges could not take the weight of an average tank or of artillery” (“Recollections and Reflections,” p. 207).

Now that should have made Zhukov cheer: You could have filed the piers of those anemic bridges down a bit more, could have studded the banks with antitank mines, planted snipers, even anti-tank canons behind the bushes! No sirree! Zhukov has them knocking themselves out building more roads, replacing old bridges with new ones that can handle any tank and artillery to boot!

Of enormous help to the Red Army in this epic project was the NKVD and its boss Beria, personally. In Soviet sources you keep seeing “NKVD work crews” mentioned (Chief Marshal of the Air Force Novikov, “In the skies over Leningrad,” p. 65). We, though, know whom the NKVD was using as slave laborers. Question is: Why keep so many GULAG inmates by the border and, more than that, on the eve of war?

War, after all, was already visible on the horizon. The official “History of Red-Banner-Winner Kiev Military District, 1919-1972” (p. 147) tells us: “In early 1941, the Hitlerites proceeded to build bridges, railway spur lines and air strips.” All these are tell-tale signs of preparations for an invasion. Here, though, is what Soviet troops were doing at the very same time. Quoting from the same book (p. 143): “Railway forces in Western Ukraine were working on expanding and reinforcing the grid.”

The railroad brigades Zhukov had created were doing an enormous job on Soviet territory. Their № 1 mission, however, still ahead, was operating on enemy territory, moving in on the heels of invasion forces quickly to overcome the enemy’s security corridor, restoring bridges as well as tracks and converting main lines from West European narrow-gauge to Soviet-standard wide. After the outbreak of war these brigades were put to use building barriers. That, though, was improvisation, not what their creator had had in mind, making it “tough and unfamiliar work” (“Soviet Railway Forces,” p. 98). These brigades had no defense-oriented battalions. They did, by contrast, have battalions geared to patching up tracks (“Soviet Armed Forces,” p. 242).

With war about to start, Soviet railway forces were getting ready neither to haul any track to safety nor to blow it up. They also were not shipping supplies out of border areas. On the contrary, right along the borders they were stockpiling track, portable bridges, construction material and coal. Right there, in fact, is where they fell into the hands of German forces. Not just German documents attest to it, Soviet records do as well. Starinov, head of the WPRRA Engineering Command division responsible for barriers and mining, describes a border station on June 21, 1941: "The sun lit up mountains of coal along the railways, piles of brand-new track. The tracks were glistening. All was oozing tranquility" ("Mines Awaiting Their Moment," p. 190).

It is common knowledge that rails quickly take on a thin coating of rust. The point: Right on the eve of war, this was track freshly delivered... to the border. Why?

They keep hammering into our heads: "Oh, if only Stalin hadn't eliminated Tukhachevsky, everything would've gone differently!" Rubbish. What set Tukhachevsky apart was his monstrous cruelty in butchering peasants in Tambov Province, just as in massacring the Kronshtadt sailors. In a real war, he was beaten by the Polish Army. Except for that, he differed in no way from other Soviet marshals: "In preparing for operations steps absolutely must be taken to ready wood bridges and concentrate railway patch-up crews along indispensable lines.. While converting narrow-gauge track to wide.." and so on and so forth (Marshal of the Soviet Union Tukhachevsky, Selected Works, Vol. 1, pp. 62-63).

Aside from railway troops, virtually all Soviet engineering forces were pulled together on the western borders. Operating in the border belt before the war were not only the sapper units and details belonging to divisions, corps and armies themselves massed right there, but also those included in formations then only starting to move out towards the German frontier. Here's what was keeping the Soviet sappers busy: "Preparing launch positions for offense, trail-blazing, putting up and overcoming barriers, operational and tactical camouflaging, organizing how to work in concert with assault-force infantry and tanks, supporting forces fighting their way across rivers.." ("Soviet Armed Forces, p. 255). Let the reader not be misled by "putting up barriers": Before the decisive assault on the "Mannerheim Line" Soviet sappers also put up some Finnish-style obstacle



belts. Warming up for battle, Soviet forces went through these training belts, then launched their actual attack.

#### 4

With all due respect for the German Army, what has to be acknowledged is that it was catastrophically far from ready for serious war. You get the impression that a blithely untroubled German General Staff simply did not know that in Russia you do sometimes get winter and that the roads there are somewhat different from those in Germany. The grease in German weaponry congealed at subfreezing temperatures, silencing the guns. Some blame the cold. Wrong. Just bad grease, period. More accurately, the General Staff had done a bad job, failing to order grease fit for actual field conditions. Some claim the Blitzkrieg fizzled for lack of good roads. A lie. Hitler knew he would have to fight in Russia. Why did he not order arms and technology that *would* work there? If German industry turned out arms useable just in Western Europe and Africa, but not in Russia, could you call Germany ready for war?

Hitler, though, got lucky. On the very eve of war, the western areas of the USSR saw expansion and modernization of the road and track network on a gigantic scale. Even that, of course, still was not enough for the German Army. What, though, would have happened to it, if Zhukov, Meretskov and Beria had not built up that grid right before the war? If enormous stockpiles of rails, portable bridges and building materials had not been amassed? If a powerful system of self-defense had been set up, with all bridges blown, all rolling stock and track hauled to safety, all stockpiles destroyed, roads and tracks wrecked, flooded, swamped or mined? There is only one answer: The German Blitzkrieg would have bogged down far, far from the gates of Moscow.

Responsible for the German Army's making it all the way to the heart of the country were Meretskov, Zhukov and Beria. Did Stalin order them shot? No, they all shot up to marshal's rank in short order. Why have them shot? Yes, Hitler took advantage of their labors, but their transport lines and stockpiles were not, of course, meant for him. They were supposed to let a liberating army transit smoothly and quickly into Europe, supplying it while it delivered an offensive blow – devastating, lightning and treacherous.

On the eve of war, no one in the Red Army was giving any thought to walling themselves off: Everyone thought only about scaling barriers on

enemy territory..

Here is Marshal of the Soviet Union Kulik talking to Colonel Starinov, then in charge of the WPRA Engineering Command division for barriers and mining: “Sapper, get me mine pickers, mine sweepers – and be quick about it!” (“Mines Awaiting Their Moment,” p. 179). Ah, but the Marshal is talking about German territory: On the Soviet side, all mines have already been defused, all barriers lifted. Here is what else the Marshal had to say: “Misnamed, that’s what your division is. In tune with our doctrine they should’ve called it Breaching & Demining Division. Then their thinking would’ve also come ‘round. Instead, they’ve kept harping on defense, defense.. Enough already!” (ibid., emphasis Starinov’s own). The same issue is Topic A at Army General D. Pavlov’s Western Special Military District Headquarters (already secretly renamed Western Front). Angrily, the General points out breaching is not getting its due. Hmmm: In defensive warfare there is zero need even to think about taking barriers down. You have to keep raising more, use them to wear down the enemy, then quickly fall back to your next preset line of obstructions.

Surmounting the Finnish security corridor had been a learning experience for the Red Army. That was why, its mistakes there taken to heart, it was now very thoroughly gearing up for overcoming the German barrier belt. Ah, if only Soviet marshals had known! Had they planned on going to war not in July, but on June 21<sup>st</sup>, they could have skipped breaching altogether: The German Army, breaking its own rules just like its counterpart, also was taking out mines, leveling obstructions and massing troops right along the border, with no defensive corridor whatsoever!

In early June, German troops start taking down barbed wire on the very border, irrefutable proof, in Marshal of the Soviet Union Moskalyenko’s view, that they are about to launch aggression (“On the Southwestern Front,” p. 24).

The Red Army, though, is doing exactly the same, even if, truth be told, with a bit of a lag. Trooping from Moscow to the western border are the country’s brightest combat engineers, including Corps of Engineers Lieutenant-General Professor Karbyshev. Arriving from the capital at the beginning of June, he declares to his friends the war is already on and arranges a get-together after the victory – not in Moscow, but “on the scene of victory.” Once at the western border, he sets a hectic pace for himself, attending exercises that drill fighting your way across wet gaps

(not a challenge defenders face) and having latest-generation T-34 tanks overcome anti-tank barriers (another hurdle not confronting defenders). On June 21<sup>st</sup>, he leaves for 10<sup>th</sup> Army. First, though, “Karbyshev, accompanied by 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Commander Kuznyetsov and Grodno Fortified Sector Commandant Ivanov, visited a border post by the Augustovo-Seino highway. That morning, our barbed-wire barriers were still up, but by the time they drove by there once more, those barriers had already been taken down” (Peshin, “General Karbyshev,” p. 204).

*Can we really picture the scene: Chekists taking down barbed wire on the frontier?! Communist historians have explained the rout that followed by labeling all Soviet marshals and generals idiots. Left unclear is only why Hitler then did not wipe them all out. Let’s just go along, though: Military types are all idiots. Still, how can you make sense of what *Chekist* stalwarts were doing? The same secret-police types who had only just wound up the Great Purge? The very same who had sealed the border tighter than a drum? The self-same who had wrapped barbed wire ‘round the country? Why *are* they taking down their own Chekist mesh on the very border?! Do they deliberately want to turn the frontier into a sieve for in-bound German spies or for outbound runaways from their own comrades?*

Right on the border, after all, there are colossal concentrations of Soviet officers and rank-and-file anxious to make a break for it, no matter where. The border belt is also just swarming with Gulag inmates.

Makes you wonder why neither the commander of 3<sup>rd</sup> Army about to face battle there nor the fortified sector commandant ostensibly sent to defend (actually, to attack) nor the top-flight expert from Moscow aware that war is already under way...reacts in any way to such goings-on. Stranger still, barriers are taken down at the very time of their visit to the border post. Again, you have to ask: What, in fact, *brings* them there?

Can we really imagine a Soviet border post commander, an NKVD first lieutenant, starting to take barbed wire down on some personal whim? If he gave an order like that, would his subordinates not see it as “obviously criminal”? The first lieutenant, though, did give the order – and those under his command hurried to obey. Clearly, this could not have happened without a directive from NKVD Byelorussia Border Troops Chief Lieutenant-General Bogdanov. Maybe Bogdanov has not caught on that war is ‘round the corner? No, he has. “On June 18, 1941, NKVD

Byelorussia Border Troops Chief Lieutenant-General Bogdanov decided to have servicemen's families evacuated" ("Patrolling the Western Frontier," p. 101).

Could Bogdanov, simultaneously and on his own, decide to evacuate border troop families and cut wire...without letting People's Commissar for Internal Affairs & Commissar-General for State Security Beria in on it? He could not. Even Beria himself would hardly have taken such a risk. In fact, he did not.

Beria is acting in full concert with Zhukov, meaning, someone higher up is doing the job (and quite a good one) of coordinating Army and NKVD moves. Military and secret-police types are completely synchronized as to what, where and when. That coordinator could be none other than Comrade Stalin.

We are led to believe the Red Army's initial defeats showed it had not gotten ready for war. Rubbish! If it had not been gearing up for war, the barbed wire would have stayed in one piece – at least on the border. Army units then would have had at least a little time to crank up their weapons. There would then not have been such terrible debacles.

The Chekists were not, of course, taking the barbed wire down on the frontier to let the German Army take advantage of the openings. They had other goals. Let us just imagine what might have happened, if the German attack had been delayed for whatever reasons. Would the Chekists on the frontier, having eliminated border obstructions, having kept the border open...then have started building new barriers? Of course not! That leaves just one other option: The Chekists were cutting wire to let the Liberating Army move into enemy territory. Chekists did exactly the same wire-cutting in the lead-up to "liberation" of Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Bessarabia and Bukovina. Next in line, the summer of 1941, was Germany...

We are told Stalin wanted to attack Hitler in 1942. Yes, there was such a plan, but the timing was moved up.

Had Stalin's target for "liberation" been 1942, the border mesh could have been cut that year.

At the very last moment.

## Chapter 10. WHY STALIN RAZED THE “STALIN LINE”

Only the naïve see defense as the prime mission for fortified sectors. No, we build fortified sectors the better to prepare for offense! They are meant to provide effective cover for deploying our strike forces, repel any enemy attempt at disrupting that deployment and, once our troops go on the offensive, back them up with withering fire.

*Major-General P.G. Grigoryenko,  
Among those who built the “Stalin Line”*

### 1

The 1930's saw thirteen fortified sectors (FS) rise along the USSR's western borders. Unofficially, that cordon of fortifications was tagged “Stalin Line.”

Each FS was a military formation, with men enough to equal a brigade, yet firepower enough to match a corps. Each FS had its own command and staff, from two to eight machinegun-and-artillery battalions, an artillery regiment, several separate batteries of heavy revetted artillery, a tank battalion, a communications company or battalion, an engineer battalion and other subunits. Each FS spanned some 60 to 110 miles across and some 20-30 miles deep. The sector was equipped with a complex system of reinforced-concrete and armored combat and support facilities. Within the FS, underground reinforced-concrete compartments were created for depots, power stations, field hospitals, command centers and communications hubs. A complex web of tunnels, walkways and covered connecting trenches linked the underground facilities. Each FS was able by itself to fight for extended periods, even while cut off from the rest.

An FS comprised defensive sites, each in turn able to fire in any direction and independently to stand off the enemy even while completely surrounded, forcing him to divert significant resources. The military unit key to each FS was the pillbox. “Red Star” (February 25, 1983) describes one of these perfectly ordinary “Stalin Line” gun emplacements – pillbox Nr. 112, FS 53, in the Mogilev-Podolsk sector: “It was a complex fortification, an underground facility consisting of connecting trenches, revetments, bunkers and filtration devices. Housing depots for weaponry,

ammunition, food and medical supplies, it also had a mess, a rally room - patriotically decorated & used for Party pep talks – as well as observational and command posts. Plumbing (in working order, by the way, to this day) was another feature. As for armament, the pillbox had a triple-port emplacement holding three fixed-pedestal ‘Maxima’ machine-guns, plus two semi-revetments, with a 76-mm cannon mounted in each.”

Call it your average pillbox. Besides these, thousands of small, one-two machine-gun nests were set up, while giant fortified complexes also were built.

General Grigoryenko describes in his memoirs one of the latter, erected in the very same Mogilev-Podolsk FS: eight firepower-packed pillboxes joined by subsurface tunnels. Colonel Umanski, who also helped build the “Stalin Line,” in his book recalls the miles-long underground facilities of the Kiev FS (“On the frontlines”, p. 35).

Yet another participant in the construction project, Colonel-General Shebunin, informs us that in three years, in the Proskurovsk FS alone, over a thousand reinforced-concrete defense installations went up, many of them shielded by artificial water barriers (“Toughed-out Together”, p. 58).

No fanfare accompanied the “Stalin Line” project, in contrast to its French “Maginot” counterpart. Construction of the “Stalin Line” was a closely guarded state secret.

While each defense installation was going up, the NKVD (Stalin’s secret police) “sealed” a number of sites so tightly, “not even an unbidden sparrow could get through.” Construction went on simultaneously at all sites, but the real project was underway at only a few, mock activity at most. Not just the locals, but even those on the job had distorted notions as to what was being built and where.

The Soviet “Stalin” and the French “Maginot” lines differed in many respects: There was no way to outflank the “Stalin Line,” anchored at one end in the Baltic, at the other in the Black Sea. Raised not just against infantry, the “Stalin Line” was meant chiefly to stop enemy tanks and had powerful anti-aircraft cover. The “Stalin Line” had far greater depth. Aside from reinforced concrete, the “Stalin Line” used a great deal of steel armor, along with top-grade granite from the Ukraine’s Zaporozhye and Cherkassy deposits. In distinction from the “Maginot,” the “Stalin Line” was built not right up against the border, but deep inside Soviet territory.

A line of such recessed fortifications means the enemy's first artillery strike will land not on military installations, but out in the middle of nowhere. In case of a sudden attack, that translates into at least several days for garrisons to man their battle stations and get their weapons and emplacements to peak readiness. Fortifications far from the border mean that before the enemy can mount an assault on them he will first have to cross some 10, 20 to as many as 60, even 90 and more miles of fields studded with mines and other unpleasant surprises. The aggressor, it means, will have to fight his way across dozens of rivers and brooks littered with blown-up bridges. For the enemy that spells massive casualties along the way, from hundreds, even thousands of hit-and-run attacks, before he ever even gets a chance to charge those fortifications. The security corridor spread before the "Stalin Line" not only slowed and wore down the enemy, but also served as something like fog at sea concealing a range of icebergs. Unaware of exactly where to expect the outer perimeter of the "Stalin Line," the enemy might suddenly - for him - find himself within range of murderous fire from Soviet guns. Arraying the "Stalin Line" deep inside Soviet territory, behind that security corridor, made it possible to offset sudden offense with sudden defense: Fortifications were so well camouflaged and tucked away that in most cases the clash of aggressor forces with Stalin's fortresses would have proven a rude surprise for the invader. Under certain circumstances that confrontation might have recalled the collision of the "Titanic" with a giant iceberg hidden in the fog.

What also distinguished the "Stalin" from the "Maginot" line was that the "Stalin Line" was no solid wall: Between fortified sectors room was left for rather wide passageways. If necessary, these thoroughfares could quickly be shut off with mine fields, barriers of all sorts rigged by expert sappers as well as with regular troops mounting field defense. The passageways could also be left open, however, inviting the aggressor, as it were, not to assault fortifications frontally, but rather to try to squeeze through in between. If the enemy actually did choose that option tendered to him, the onrushing flood of his troops would be reduced to a trickle whose component droplets, while dribbling through the narrows, would be subject to being wiped out from both sides, constantly and very seriously jeopardizing his flanks, rear and lines of communication.

Further on, we will see that the passageways between one FS and the next served yet another purpose.

Thirteen FS along the “Stalin Line” spelt titanic effort and gargantuan outlays over the first two Five-Year Plans. In 1938, the decision was taken to reinforce all thirteen FS by enhancing them with heavy artillery revetments. Moreover, construction began on yet another eight FS along the “Stalin Line.” Within a year, over a thousand combat stations within the new FS had been encased in concrete, and then....right then, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed!

The Pact signaled the start of World War Two. That very pact meant there would no longer be any buffer separating the USSR and Germany: Now there would be a common border.

Against so foreboding a backdrop Stalin could have done much to make the USSR’s western frontier safer and to guarantee its neutrality as war unfolded. Stalin could, for example, have

- ordered beefing up the garrisons in the fortified sectors along the “Stalin Line”;
- directed factories making arms for the FS sharply to raise their output;
- ordered the same for factories making defensive weapons: anti-tank cannons and anti-tank rifles;
- mobilized the entire state-owned fleet of construction machinery and all other resources so as to put into overdrive work on the “Stalin Line”;
- seen to it that once the “Stalin Line” had been completed and combat-readied work would have begun on a second, identical (or even more formidable) defensive array ahead of the “Stalin Line”;
- seen to having a third belt of fortified sectors to complement the existing double defensive shield, to go behind the “Stalin Line” along, for instance, the eastern banks of the Dnepr River;
- ordered Red Army troops to dig 600-plus miles of trenches, anti-tank pits, foxholes and connecting trenches from the Baltic to the Black Sea, intertwining troops deployed for field defense with belts of fortified sectors, while using the latter as the steel bracing for a defense impossible for the enemy to pierce.

Stalin *could* have taken that tack --- but he did *not*... In the fall of 1939, the moment World War Two had begun, the moment common borders



had been established with Germany, all construction on the “Stalin Line” was halted (V.A. Anfilov, “Immortal Feat”, p. 35). Initially, garrisons in the fortified sectors along the “Stalin Line” were thinned out, then totally disbanded. Soviet factories stopped making arms and special equipment for the fortifications. Existing FS were stripped of their weaponry; arms, ammunition, devices for observation, communications and fire control were moth-balled (Journal of Military History, 1961, No. 9, p. 120). The process of razing the “Stalin Line” continued gathering momentum. Some military structures were turned over to kolkhozes for vegetable storage. Most of them were buried. After World War Two had begun, aside from halting the production of arms for the FS Soviet industry stopped manufacturing many other defensive weapons systems. The assembly lines stopped for anti-tank cannons as well as for 76-mm regimental and divisional cannons that might have been used against tanks (JMH, 1961, No. 7, p. 101; JMH, 1963, No. 2, p. 12). Anti-tank cannons already issued to the troops began to be used not as initially intended, but rather for other missions such as suppressing enemy fire during Soviet ground assaults (Lieutenant-General Rosly, “Last rest stop — Berlin,” p. 27). Anti-tank rifles not only were taken out of production, but even out of the Red Army’s arsenal (JMH, 1961, No. 7, p. 101).

Any- and everything tied to defense was ruthlessly wrecked and razed.

Fairness dictates pointing out that in the summer of 1940, right along the new Soviet-German frontier, work did begin on a cordon of fortifications, though it never actually saw completion. At Soviet Staff Headquarters, “Molotov Line” was the unofficial label pinned, with some irony, on these new fortified sectors. The decision to launch construction was taken on June 26, 1940 (Anfilov, “Immortal Feat,” p. 162).

While work on raising defenses on the new borders limped along, razing them along the old border sprinted ahead amazingly fast.

In the spring of 1941 the “Stalin Line” tragedy reached its apogee. “I don’t know how future historians will explain this crime against our people. Those now writing are burying the event in utter silence. I don’t know how to explain it. For billions and billions of rubles (by my calculations, no less than 120) the Soviet government fleeced our people to build fortifications no enemy could pierce, along our entire western border – from sea to sea, from the gray Baltic to the azure Black Sea. Then, on the

very eve of war – in the spring of 1941 – enormous blasts thundered along the entire 750-mile line of fortifications. Massive reinforced-concrete revetments and semi-revetments, three-, two- and single-port weapons emplacements, command and observation posts, tens of thousands of pillboxes...all were blown sky-high on personal orders from Stalin” (Major-General Grigoryenko, “Nothing but rats underground,” p. 141).

### 3

Result: On the old border, the “Stalin Line” was already smashed, on the new, the “Molotov Line” was not yet built. After the War and once Stalin was dead and buried, Soviet generals and marshals rose as one to voice their outrage. Here is Artillery Commander-in-Chief N.N. Voronov: “How could our leadership, not having put up needed defense cordons on the new 1939 border, take the decision to disarm and liquidate the fortified sectors on the former frontier?” (“Serving In The War,” p. 172)

Marshal Voronov’s outrage is off-key. He denounces “our leadership.” At the very time the “Stalin Line” was obliterated, however, wasn’t he holding top command positions in the Red Army? Didn’t he himself then hold the rank of colonel-general in the artillery? Were anti-tank and revetted cannons taken out of production without his knowledge? Wasn’t he aware artillery revetments on the “Stalin Line” were stripped of armaments, then leveled? Voronov’s very phrasing of the question is false, designed to distract from the core issue. In Voronovspeak, “Why did they raze one line before they had raised the other?” Voronov’s very question justifies what “our leadership” did, berating it not for having obliterated the “Stalin Line,” but only for having done it entirely too soon. As Voronov’s version would have it, first, the “Molotov Line” should have been built, only then the “Stalin Line” smashed. Why, though, not pose a different question: Why smash the “Stalin Line” at all? For what? Aren’t two lines better than one? In defense, do you really ever have too many defensive posts, too many trenches, fortresses and battle stations, too many mine fields and barbed-wire barriers? The year 1940 twice confirmed that two such cordons are better than one: In 1940, the Red Army had to pay with rivers of blood, but break through the Finnish “Mannerheim Line” it did, forcing Finland to negotiate with Stalin and yield to his demands. Let’s just imagine, however, behind the “Mannerheim,” deeper inside Finnish territory, there had been yet another line! In 1940, the German Army bypassed the French “Maginot Line,” in one stroke won room to maneuver

--- and, for France, the war was over. Let's imagine, though, one more line, deep inside French territory and impossible to outflank. Neither France nor Finland, alas, then had a second line deep inside. Stalin, by contrast, did...yet in those very days bent every effort to smashing it!

Communists have concocted all sorts of explanations for what happened. Here's one: The new border was short on arms, so those arms had to be taken from the "Stalin Line"... Communist propagandists may find that explanation satisfactory, normal people, though, will counter: If the "Molotov Line" was short on arms, why not then direct artillery factories to make more? No one, however, gave such an order. Quite to the contrary, the opposite was issued: cut back on FS arms production or cut it off, period (Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov, "Historical Issues," 1970, No. 5, p. 33)!

For Communists, it's all quite simple: The new frontier lacked specialized FS armaments, so you just had to take that necessary next step – pull them from the "Stalin Line." An imperative need, so they say. Let's remember, though, pulling weaponry from the "Stalin Line" started the fall of 1939. What is more, the weaponry taken away was moth-balled. Right then, no one could conceive of any other way to put specialized FS armaments to use, because on the new western border no fortifications were being built, the "Molotov Line" did not exist and no decision had even been taken to build one. That decision the Soviet government took only much later – on June 26, 1940. It thus turns out that, first, weaponry was pulled from the "Stalin," whereas reason, want and need for building the "Molotov" arose only later, almost a year further on. No, comrade historians, we cannot buy your Communist spin: Consequence cannot precede cause. Think harder to come up with a cause. One more reason why we cannot accept the explanation about redeployment of arms from the "Stalin Line" to the "Molotov" is that in contrast to the "Stalin" the "Molotov" was a fluid string of rather light fortifications not requiring much weaponry. To illustrate, in the Western Special Military District, i.e., in Belarus, 193 combat facilities were built on the new border, whereas 876 facilities of comparatively greater firepower had by then already been stripped of their weaponry. In other military districts the ratio of newly built facilities to those earlier disarmed was even more striking. In the Odessa Military District three FS of massive firepower were disarmed on the old border, while no construction had yet begun on the new:

Preparatory work was under way... To arm the “Molotov Line” it would have sufficed to pull from the “Stalin Line” just some of its weaponry, indeed only a minor portion. Why, for goodness’ sake, then, did they strip the “Stalin Line” of all its armaments?

Even *if*, however, throwing common sense overboard, we actually believe the Communists, our question as to why they stripped the “Stalin Line” of its armaments will yield just an unsatisfactory answer, fodder for fools. Nothing at all, though, not even a sham reply, do we get in response to asking why on earth they razed it.

Battle-station equipment, machine-guns, ammunition, periscopes, communications equipment and gas filters you can take from the “Stalin Line” and redeploy to the “Molotov Line.” Can you, however, redeploy reinforced-concrete structures from one line to the other? Even the smallest one-port machine-gun emplacement was a 350-ton reinforced-concrete monolith, dug “up to the eyeballs” into the ground, granite slabs piled atop (to make shells explode prematurely), all of it sod-covered, with trees already growing there for additional protection and camouflage, plus moats and man-made ponds all around. Could you drag all that 125 miles westward? Impossible. The bigger facilities, meanwhile, were 1,000-ton behemoths deep underground. Could you haul them to the “Molotov Line”? Again, impossible. Now, if we transfer furniture from one fine solid home to another, is that really reason enough to dynamite the first?

“Disarm - we just had to do it!” Alright, let’s let that stand. *Dynamite*, though? What for? Look at me, living in Great Britain. I roam around the hill country. Here and there, all around me are WWII-vintage reinforced-concrete pillboxes. After the War, they did strip them of weapons, but it’s never even occurred to anybody to dynamite these marvelous structures, works of beauty for any normal pair of eyes. Let them keep standing right where they are. They’re not looking for a handout. Let them stay there: Maybe some day they will render good service once more. Disarmed pillboxes can be rearmed. At the very least, old pillboxes can accommodate regular infantry, making them useful in battles to come, just as they were during the days of the last war.

Defending infantry, armed with rifles and shovels, can dig foxholes, turning them into a line the enemy will find hard, sometimes impossible to cross. Take those same soldiers carrying rifles (or light machine-guns), put them into the simplest of pillboxes – even if disarmed – instead of into a

mud hole out in the middle of a field, and you will see an exponential increase in their ability to hang on and survive: They will have at least a yard of tough reinforced concrete above their heads, another five feet in front and about three on their flanks, all of it camouflaged in advance and concealed from the probing eyes of the enemy. Now if you take boxes like these, even if disarmed, and put one hundred seventy Soviet First Echelon divisions in there, breaking through their defensive perimeter would be anything but easy. Defending troops always have to have *something* to hold on to - Verdun's forts stripped of armaments, Brest's bastions unprepared for defense, Stalingrad's walls, even the Kursk Salient's trenches abandoned two years earlier. Give them even just a toehold, though, and they dig in so nothing can smoke them out of their dens and burrows. The infantry will turn even the ruins of a factory, a nineteenth-century bastion or a thirteenth-century citadel into an impregnable fortress. The "Stalin Line," even bereft of all armaments, could have been the bracing to enable the Red Army hang on, letting it create a defensive line that would have kept the enemy from penetrating deep into the country. Useful for the purpose would have been even disarmed pillboxes, underground command centers, field hospitals, cement-hardened depots, underground passage-ways and tunnels, communications and control lines, power stations and water-distribution systems... The Red Army's First Strategic Echelon, however, having razed the "Stalin Line," was moved beyond the USSR's pre-WWII international borders. On June 13, 1941 TASS put out a cover story that announced the beginning of redeployment to the western areas of the USSR of the Second Strategic Echelon. Its armies, however, also were moved out beyond the country's old borders, past the limits of the disarmed, discarded and destroyed "Stalin Line."

#### 4

Defenses must constantly be perfected – as military regulations require. Each soldier knows that requirement and knows what it means: No matter how formidable defenses may be, each soldier has to spend a minimum of ten hours a day relentlessly digging ground. Whether a soldier is pulling defensive duty for a day or a year does not change the situation: He will shovel and keep on shoveling, expanding and deepening anti-tank ditches, complementing an initial trench with a second, a third, a fifth. Regulations call for constant, intensive perfecting of defenses, meaning,

there is not and cannot be any “good enough.” If ten anti-tank ditches have been dug, one after another, well, dig an eleventh one!

You cannot have too many nor any obsolete defense barriers: This simple fact the soldiers of all armies have known for by now thousands and thousands of years. Any new defensive structures are therefore set up not to replace those built earlier, but rather to reinforce and complement them. Just look at any castle: At the center you see a tenth-century tower, around it walls from the thirteenth century, ringed by a belt of seventeenth-century bastions, surrounded, in turn, by nineteenth-century parapets and reinforced by twentieth-century pillboxes. The “Molotov Line” could have served as a complement to, not a replacement of the “Stalin Line.” The “Molotov,” however, was created neither to complement the “Stalin” nor even to replace it. It differed sharply from the “Stalin,” in both design and detail. There are at the very least four major differences between the fortifications they were smashing on the old borders and the ones they were setting up on the new:

- The “Molotov Line” was built SO THE ENEMY WOULD SEE IT;
- the “Molotov Line” was created IN PERIPHERAL AREAS;
- the “Molotov Line” was not covered by a security corridor nor by mine fields or any other barriers rigged by expert sappers;
- the builders made no use of many possible reinforcements for the “Molotov Line” and were in no rush to build it.

Construction of the “Molotov Line” is a riddle of Soviet history, just as much as the destruction of the “Stalin Line.” Strange things went on where the new fortified sectors were being built... In 1941, Soviet forces in colossal numbers were massing in the Lvov salient in Ukraine. Their second most powerful concentration was in the Byelostok salient in Byelorussia. Soviet marshals’ explanation: We anticipated the main thrust in Ukraine, the supporting attack in Byelorussia. If so, “Molotov Line” construction should have focused on Ukraine, work in Byelorussia assigned secondary status --- yet the plan was to pour half of all “Molotov” resources into...the Baltics! The *Baltics*? They, after all, were on the periphery. Byelorussia was to get a quarter of the allocations, Ukraine, where, as Soviet marshals claim, “the main thrust was anticipated,” a mere 9% (Anfilov, *ibid.*, p. 164). Not just in strategic, but also in tactical terms “Molotov Line” fortifications went up in peripheral areas. Example: Near Brest no fewer than six reinforced-concrete bridges for motorized vehicles

crossed the river marking the border. Warsaw-Brest-Minsk-Smolensk-Moscow is a key strategic axis of war. Brest's bridges are of utmost strategic value. Around Brest a new FS was being built...but not where the bridges were, no: far off to the side, where there weren't *any* bridges!

"Molotov Line" fortified sectors were pushed right up against the border. These FS were thus no longer shielded by any security corridor, which meant a sudden attack would now leave the garrisons no time to man their battle stations and gear up their weaponry. In distinction from the "Stalin Line" the FS on the "Molotov Line" did not have much depth at all. Along the "Molotov," everything you possibly *could* build on the very border *was* built there. Rear defense perimeters were not put up nor even planned (Lieutenant-General Zotov, "On the Northwestern Front," Collected Works, p. 175). The new fortifications were raised not along lines tactically advantageous for defense, but along the international boundary, following its every twist and turn. No barbed wire, mines, ditches, dragon's teeth, hedgehogs or tetrahedrons gave cover to the new combat facilities nor did sappers throw up barriers around the construction area. The new facilities WERE NOT CAMOUFLAGED. In the Vladimir-Volynsk FS "out of 97 combat facilities 5-7 were sod-covered, the rest were actually left plain to see (JMH, 1976, No. 5, p. 91). If, dear reader, you have occasion to cross the present Byelorussian border in the area around Brest, then do turn your eyes toward those gray cement boxes right on the river banks: They are pillboxes at the southern tip of the Brest FS. They were not covered with sod back then and, to this day, still stand there as naked as ever. Earlier, "Stalin Line" pillboxes were secretly built far from the borders, and the enemy had no way of knowing where fortifications were, where passage-ways between them ran or whether there even were any such passage-ways. Now, the enemy was able from his own side not only to see all of the construction and know exactly where fortifications were, but could pinpoint each individual facility, even determine the firing direction for each gun port. That allowed him to map out the entire system for directing fire. Knowing what sectors were subject to shelling the enemy could pick out vectors the shells could not reach, get through to the exposed pillboxes and shut the gun ports with sandbags --- precisely what the enemy in fact did on June 22, 1941.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov bears witness: "The fortified sectors are being built too close to the border, in a pattern that,

operationally, leaves us at an extreme disadvantage, especially in the Byelostok salient. From around Brest and Suwalka this lets the enemy strike at the rear of our Byelostok group of forces. The FS, moreover, given their limited depth, cannot sustain battle for long, since enemy artillery can shell them through and through.” (“Recollections and Reflections,” p. 194).

If the enemy can strike from around Brest and Suwalka, why, then, not use the discarded old Russian border fortresses at Brest, Osovets, Grodno, Peremyshl and Kaunas? None of these was less than a match for Verdun. Each of them, had Soviet forces included them in their defensive array, could have been turned into an impregnable bastion, hardening the entire shield. Alongside the old fortresses in these areas there were other, less powerful veteran fortifications: revetments, each designed for a rifle company, with walls and head cover of nearly eight-foot-thick reinforced concrete. Not all that much, you say? Agreed. Better than nothing, though! If anyone thought them too thin, he could have added heft. So, where did the Red Army’s Military Engineers’ Branch Headquarters (MEBH) have its eyes turned? “The MEBH Commander proposed taking advantage of old Russian border fortresses and creating barrier zones. That proposal never was, in fact, accepted: ‘Pointless,’ so they said” (Starinov, “Mines Awaiting their Moment,” p. 177).

In February of 1941 Zhukov held the position of Commander of the Red Army’s General Staff. Zhukov, Communist propaganda claims, was the greatest military leader of the 20th Century. He took upon himself all but supreme military command. Surely he would set things straight on the “Molotov Line”! Hold on, not so fast: He didn’t. After Zhukov had come along, construction on the “Molotov Line” did not improve in any way. To the contrary, work on several fortified sectors – the one around Brest, for instance – was actually relegated to secondary status (Anfilof, “Immortal Feat,” p. 166). Readers familiar with real-world Soviet Russia don’t need an explanation of “secondary status.” In practice, it meant construction almost ground to a halt. There is, however, another side to that coin. About that very fortified sector around Brest we know more than we do about others. From captured German 48th Motorized Corps documents, for example, we know the German command got a totally different impression: German forces saw intensive round-the-clock work, and at night, in fact, “the Russians using flood-lights while building their pillboxes.”



What can you make of that? Could they have been idiots enough to pour light on construction sites right on the border, laying them bare that way every night?! How, also, can you tie “secondary-status construction” to “day and night, with flood-lighting”? Could it have been a sham? Precisely! We will have more than one occasion to come back to the “Molotov Line,” which Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan characterized as an “intentional sham.”

Colonel-General Sandalov in his memoirs (“Overcome,” p. 64) tells us how Brest FS Commander Major-General Puzyryev put it: “Perching the fortified sector on the very border was not business as usual. Earlier, we always built pillboxes some distance from the border. Here, though, we had no choice. We had to go by not just military, but also political considerations...”

So, we have one more puzzle: Soviet forces they hide in the woods, order them to stay out of sight. Why? “Not to provoke war.” Simultaneously, for political reasons we do not know, for days and nights on end, they relentlessly throw their preparations for defense in the enemy’s face, with no concern about triggering any diplomatic or military complications. How, then, do we unravel all these riddles? What single explanation links all these contradictory facts? Here is the version some serve up for us: “Fools, these Red commanders, idiots! Stupidity, that’s what’s behind it all!” I might buy that explanation...but here is my problem: Behind the “Stalin” and the “Molotov” line stood one and the same “papa” – Military Engineers Lieutenant-General and Professor Karbyshev. On the “Stalin Line” he got it *all* right – world-class or better. On the “Stalin Line” he provided for everything: thorough camouflaging for every pillbox, enormous depth for every FS, barriers rigged, a security corridor and much, much more. The moment the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, though, suddenly one of the world’s greatest military engineers went gaga and made a mess of everything. What is more, above Karbyshev stood Zhukov who, before, had never slipped up even once and, after, never did again. All of a sudden, though, in the first half of 1941, Zhukov turned into an idiot and issued idiotic orders. After all, once Zhukov had joined the General Staff “the fortified sectors on the old borders went right on being stripped of armaments, while construction on the new borders was held to a snail’s pace” (Starinov, p. 178).

The story about stupid Soviet commanders will not stand up, not least because at the very same time German generals were doing the exact same thing. They were taking precisely the same sort of decisions – and no one condemns what they did.

From 1932 to 1937 the banks of the Oder saw the construction of fortifications packing massive firepower, covering Germany against attacks from the East. These were first-class combat facilities contoured to blend into their surroundings and masterfully camouflaged. I will not detail it all. Trust me, dear readers, they certainly did reflect trademark German precision, painstaking care and industry. The fortified sectors between the rivers Oder and Warta illustrate the ultimate in military-engineering insights as of the first half of the 20th century.

Then, though, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed in Moscow, the German Army headed East...and there, German commanders started making all the same “stupid moves” as their Soviet counterparts. Magnificent fortifications on the old German border were discarded, NEVER again to be manned by troops. Many combat facilities were used to meet other needs: A powerful array of fortifications in the Hochwald area, for example, with two four-story combat structures linked by a tunnel some 19 miles long, was turned into an aircraft factory. Once German forces had advanced enough to meet up with the Red Army, half-way through Poland, they began setting up a new line of fortified sectors. These were built IN PERIPHERAL AREAS and pushed right up against the Soviet borders. Ahead of the new fortified sectors no mine fields were created, no barriers set up. Work went on day and night, in plain view of Soviet border guards who sent their reports “where needed” (USSR Border Guards, 1939-June 1941; Collected documents & material; Documents No. 344 & 287). Until May 1941, construction was intensive, thereafter, in Soviet-speak, it was “transferred to non-priority status.” Out of eighty combat facilities planned for the banks of the border river San, only seventeen were finished – all of them inadequately camouflaged. By comparison to those on the old German border, each of these facilities ranks as light: roughly 5-foot walls and head cover, approximately 8-inch armor-plating. On the old border, along the Oder Line, far more powerful armor-plating was used, ranging up to nearly 14 inches.

Exactly the same was being done on the Soviet side. The “Stalin Line” featured powerful armored gun turrets and super-heavy armor-

plating, whereas at “Molotov Line” construction sites on the banks of the same River San, Soviet engineers were using relatively thin, roughly 8-inch armor-plating. Back when I used to be a Soviet officer, I had occasion to see German and Soviet pillboxes on opposite banks of one and the same little creek. If you show pictures of those pillboxes to an expert, he will not be able to pick out which are German and which Soviet: They are twins.

While the neighbor was a weak Poland, German forces raised on their borders fortifications of massive firepower. No sooner had they crushed Poland and established a common frontier with the Soviet Union, however, than they abandoned the old fortifications and, on the new borders, put up no more than rather light defensive facilities – and even those at a snail’s pace. Just like the Red Army, all of it! They hadn’t really gone gaga, though, those German generals – had they? No, gone gaga they had not. Right there, on those new borders, they just had not planned on staying very long.

Fortifications can be defensive, but just as well offensive. If you are getting ready to attack, then while setting up fortified sectors you go by the following rules:

- gather strike-force groups along the main axes, not hesitating to strip peripheral areas and covering those PERIPHERAL sectors with fortifications;
- don’t try to camouflage your fortifications: let the enemy think you are preparing for defense;
- give the FS no real depth, deploy everything you possibly can right on the banks of border rivers, so once you have gone on the offensive the pillboxes perched on the border will provide your assault with covering fire, whereas any rear-defense pillbox will be doomed to sitting idle;
- don’t cover your pillboxes with mine fields and barbed-wire barriers: those would only hamstring your own attacking forces;
- don’t waste a lot of cement and steel on raising FS: you’re not, after all, about to sit around for long to defend.

Precisely these were the rules guiding German generals. Precisely this was what their Soviet opposite numbers were also doing. Just a bit earlier, in August of 1939, at Khalkhyn-Gol, Zhukov had brilliantly applied all these rules: “With these measures we strove to lead the enemy to believe there was a total absence on our side of preparations for offense,

making a show of engaging in wide-ranging work on setting up defenses, and nothing but defenses” (Zhukov, p. 161). The Japanese fell for the ruse, believed in the “defensive” nature of Zhukov’s projects --- and promptly paid the price when he crushed them with a surprise attack. Afterward, only on far larger a scale, Zhukov had exactly the same work done on the German border. The German generals, however, he failed to fool. The fact is, they had gone through an identical experience of their own. At Khalkhyn-Gol, Zhukov launched his surprise attack on August 20, 1939. On August 22<sup>nd</sup> of the same year, with the Molotov-Ribbentrop talks under way and the German Army intensively gearing up for the move into Polish territory, General Guderian received an order to head “Pomerania Fortifications Headquarters.” The goal: reassure the Poles with purely defensive preparations, while simultaneously speeding ahead with construction of rather light fortifications in peripheral areas to free up some more field units for the main assault. In spring and summer of 1941, Guderian once again was busy building defenses, this time already on the Soviet border.

Guderian’s building cement boxes on the banks of border rivers, however, hardly signals any intention to defend himself. No, it signals something quite the opposite. Zhukov’s demonstratively setting up the very same boxes on the banks of the very same rivers...now what might *that* signal?

## 6

The “Stalin Line” was versatile, capable of being used to defend the country or launch an offensive. Broad passageways had been left between the FS precisely to let massive assault forces head west. Once the border had been shifted well over a hundred miles westward, the “Stalin Line” lost all value as a fortified staging-area for further aggression. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, however, Stalin was no longer intent on defending himself. That, then, was why they began by stripping the line of armaments and subsequently smashed it: It interfered with the secret massing of Soviet forces and would hamstring supplying the Red Army with millions of tons of ammunition, food and fuel in the course of a victorious liberation crusade. In peacetime, the passageways between the FS were ample for meeting both military and economic needs. Once war was underway, however, you had to disperse the flow of freight across thousands of little creeks to make it invulnerable to enemy countermoves.

The fortified sectors would become, as it were, rather narrow bottlenecks through which that transportation stream would have to squeeze. That, in fact, sealed the fate of an already unwanted “Stalin Line.”

Moreover, there is yet another, more important factor. In each modern city we can find abandoned buildings, their windows and doors bricked up. If they are not, these hulks turn into places difficult or even impossible for local authorities and police to control, becoming outlaw territory. That is why the authorities block the entrances to white elephants, underground facilities, caves, catacombs and the like. The “Stalin Line,” though, involved not just abandoned buildings, but premises specially adapted to letting people live in and defend from them for extended periods, complete with impregnable head cover, sewage systems and plumbing as well as underground walkways. Stalin knew how much the Soviet people loved his regime. Stalin remembered how hard it had been to put down the people’s resistance. In the event of new uprisings against the Communists, those discarded “Stalin Line” forts might become unassailable bastions giving shelter to bands of anti-communists.

In any case, whatever the reasons behind the destruction of the “Stalin Line,” we must remember what mattered most: Stalin had no intention of hunkering down on his territory. Once Germany had gotten bogged down in the war against Great Britain, Stalin no longer needed fortified sectors deep inside Soviet territory.

Hitler had the same, not only on his eastern, but also his western borders. In the ‘30’s, the “Siegfried Line” had been raised along the latter. Ever since the Franco-Prussian War Germany had traditionally launched attacks against France in the north. The “Siegfried Line” was built south of that axis, in a peripheral area and according to the principle “along the main axis we attack, peripheral sectors we cover.” In 1940, the German Army ranged far out to the west – leaving the “Siegfried Line” bereft of a mission. It did not then even occur to Hitler that within four years he would be back to defending on his own borders. The “Siegfried Line” was abandoned, put to use in really singular ways: Combat structures they turned over to farmers for storing potatoes, some combat facilities with impenetrable armored doors they locked from inside... When they had to unlock them, they couldn’t find the keys... (Mallory and Ottar; *Architecture of Aggression*. (p. 123).

You can, of course, call the greatest Soviet and German generals idiots. This, though, was no case of stupidity. The point simply is, both sides were aggressors. Both thought in terms of offense, so when fortifications no longer could be used for offensive ends, they razed them to open the way for their strike forces or, if possible, gave battle stations away to potato farmers...

## Chapter 11. PARTISANS AT HOME OR COMMANDOS ABROAD?

“Hitler...will have his main force strike the West, and Moscow will want to exploit its positional advantage.”

*L. Trotsky, June 21, 1939*

### 1

Once the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, the Soviet Union started systematically to do away with neutral countries. The goal: Take the Soviet Union and “move the colossus bodily up to Germany’s borders, precisely while the Third Reich was embroiled in driving towards a New World Order.” The “liberation crusades” roll along just fine, until in Finland they hit a snag. As we already know, the Red Army ran into the Finnish security corridor. Here, very typically, is how: A Soviet column of tanks, motorized infantry and artillery heads down a forest road. No venturing left or right: mines. Straight ahead: a bridge. Engineers’ report: no mines. The first tanks move onto the bridge...and, together with the bridge, fly sky-high: Explosives were lodged inside the pillars during construction, discovering them is not easy...and even if you do, any attempt to extract sets them off. Result: The Soviet column, miles long like some enormous snake, sits there, blocked. Now starts an attack by a line of Finnish snipers. They are in no rush: pop, pop...and all is quiet again in the forest. Then it’s more pop, pop. The snipers are striking from somewhere far off. Snipers hit only Soviet commanders: pop, pop. Commissars, too. Combing the forest is out: Bear in mind that impassable mine fields flank the road. Any attempt by Soviet sappers to approach the blown-up bridge or to disable mines along the shoulders of the road ends in a single shot from a Finnish sniper: pop! Locked in on three parallel roads at three exploded bridges, Soviet 44<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division lost its entire leadership in one day. The picture is identical in other divisions, too: columns paralyzed, no way forward, none back. Then, at night, here and there along those Soviet columns: a mortar attack from somewhere deep in the woods. Now and again at night, up and down the helpless columns: a prolonged machine-gun blast from behind the bushes...and all’s quiet once more.

They say the Red Army did not turn in its best performance in Finland. Certainly true. Let us, however, put in place of a Soviet division one from any other army. What *do* you do in such a situation? Pull the column back? Trouble is, heavy artillery tractors hauling huge howitzers cannot push their multi-ton trailers backwards. The snipers, meanwhile, zero in on tractor drivers: pop, pop. Struggling, the column inches its way back...only to have yet another bridge dynamited – in the rear. The column is frozen in place. The approaches to that other bridge also are mined. There, too, the snipers are in no hurry. Commanders, commissars, sappers, drivers: pop, pop. Far ahead is an almost impenetrable line of reinforced-concrete fortifications – the “Mannerheim Line.” Breaking through, minus artillery and without thousands of tons of ammunition, is impossible. Soviet troops ran into the Finnish fortifications with their heavy artillery trailing far behind, right there on those forest roads, between mine fields and blown-up bridges, with snipers pop-popping away...

Surely, having been taught that kind of lesson in Finland, Soviet commanders drew appropriate conclusions? Surely, in their country’s western areas they created light guerrilla units to meet any possible enemy invasion? Nature itself designed the western areas of the Soviet Union for waging guerrilla warfare against the lines of communication of any eastbound aggressor. Did Stalin set up light mobile units? Did he preposition them in the forests in case of a German attack? Yes, Stalin did create such units. They were set up as early as the 1920’s. In Byelorussia alone, in peacetime, there were six partisan detachments with 300 to 500 men each. Don’t stumble over the small numbers: They reflect commanders, organizers and specialists, no more. Each peacetime partisan detachment was a kind of nucleus around which, the moment war began, would rally a powerful formation several thousand strong.

Set up in peacetime for the partisan formations were secret bases, out in impassable forests, on islets in the middle of vast swamps. Also built in peacetime were underground refuges, field hospitals, depots and subterranean work shops for making arms and ammunition. Preparing for possible guerrilla warfare, weapons, munitions and gear were stashed in underground caches for 50,000 partisans in Byelorussia alone.

Secret schools were set up to train leaders, organizers and instructors for guerrilla operations. Clandestine R&D labs devised tools specifically for guerrilla warfare, along with special gear, weaponry and



communications equipment. Partisans went through regular mandatory exercises, usually with NKVD Special Operations divisions posing as the enemy.

Alongside partisan formations small covert-operations groups were readied. Instead of slipping away into the forests in the event of an invasion, these would stay behind in towns and villages, their mission being to “gain the enemy’s trust” and “render him support,” but once having won that trust...

The same work was underway not just in Byelorussia, but also in the Ukraine, the Crimea, the Leningrad District and other areas. Alongside what the secret police was doing went parallel efforts pursued by Soviet military intelligence, quite independently of the NKVD: preparations like setting up secret bases, hiding-places, clandestine apartments, safe houses and undercover lines of communication, plus much, much more. Soviet military intelligence had its own secret schools, organizers and instructors.

Side by side with the NKVD and military intelligence, the Communist Party trained some of its own leaders in the western areas of the country to go underground in case the territory fell into enemy hands. The Communists had criminal traditions of long standing and knew how to keep secrets. Having kept alive their underworld traditions of the ‘20’s and ‘30’s, Party organizations could, if necessary, revert to acting as deep-undercover cells to wage a clandestine struggle.

Partisan detachments, let us not forget, were set up inside the so-called “death zone,” i.e., the Soviet security corridor, where retreating Soviet forces were supposed to mine all bridges, backfill all tunnels, make all rail hubs totally unusable, dismantle and remove all switches as well as even rails and telephone cables. Left for partisans was just keeping already destroyed facilities from being restored. Partisans were all but invulnerable: Their leaders knew where you could cross the huge mine fields, the enemy did not. Whenever pursued, partisans would therefore have no trouble slipping away into mined forests and swamps inaccessible to the enemy.

Yes, there was all of that. The “Stalin Line,” the security corridor ahead of it, plus partisan units ready to move into action immediately inside the belt laid waste, together represented a magnificent self-defense system for the Soviet Union. In 1939, however, Hitler landed in a most unpleasant strategic situation, forcing him to fight in the west. From that moment on,

Stalin had no further use for defensive arrays. The “Stalin Line” and its security corridor were liquidated, simultaneously with the Soviet partisan movement: Partisan units were disbanded, arms, ammunition and explosives taken away, secret hiding-places and depots dug under, partisan bases gutted.

All this is happening the fall of 1939. The very end of autumn, however, the Red Army starts its “liberation” of Finland – and there finds itself up against all the same components of self-defense the Soviet Union so recently also still had: lines of reinforced-concrete fortifications plus, ahead of these, a security corridor with light guerrilla-type detachments operating inside. Maybe Stalin, handed a harsh lesson in Finland, changed his mind and resurrected partisan formations in the western reaches of the Soviet Union? No, he did not change it. No, he did not resurrect them.

June 22, 1941 set off multiple improvisations, including the creation of a partisan movement. Yes, created it was, deployed, too. Still, they managed to bring it to full strength and deployment only in 1943-44. Had it not been done away with in 1939, it would have been fully up and running within the first few days of the war. It could have been far more effective. Over the course of the war partisans had to pay in blood, and dearly, for every single bridge blown up. To dynamite a bridge, you first have to seize it, but...you have to contend with guards, trees cut down all around, mines sown. Besides, where are the partisans supposed to get explosives? If, in fact, there are any, can a group of partisans carry all that much? Setting the charge meant having to move fast, not inserting it into the pillars, but attaching it to the superstructure. Once past the explosion, the enemy was able quickly to restore a bridge like that – and the partisans had to start all over. While the enemy is repairing one bridge, the others are in operation, so the enemy can adjust the flow of transportation.

Fact is, though, all was set for blowing up ALL the bridges. Blowing them up such that there would be nothing to restore. Blowing them up without wasting a drop of partisan blood. They could have been sent sky-high by simply pushing a button inside a secret partisan bunker. Afterward, sniper’s rifles firing from impassable mine fields could just have picked off officers, sappers and drivers. Roads were the German Army’s very lifeline. With no bridges at all, millions of partisan mines studding the roads, plus ambushes and snipers unleashing terror before the invasion had

gone past its first few hours, the German Blitzkrieg might have been slowed to a crawl.

Who, then, abolished the Soviet partisan movement THE MOMENT WORLD WAR II BEGAN – and why?

One of the fathers of Soviet military terrorism, Military Intelligence Colonel Professor Starinov, during those years was in charge of a secret school for training partisan groups subordinate to Soviet military intelligence. In his memoirs the Colonel names the culprit: “Safely hidden in the ground, arms and explosives were awaiting their moment. Before it had come, though, hidden partisan bases were gutted, unquestionably with the full knowledge and probably on the direct order of Stalin.” (“Mines Awaiting Their Moment,” p. 40).

One of the veterans of Soviet political terrorism, KGB Colonel Vaupshas, at that time held command of an NKVD detachment of partisans in Byelorussia. He explains why the partisan formations were abolished: “Against the menacing backdrop of those prewar years the prevalent doctrine was to fight a war on enemy territory... a doctrine decidedly offensive in nature.” (“Tense Times at the Cross-Roads,” p. 203).

You can agree with the KGB Colonel, you can argue with him. No one, however, has yet named any other reason for abolishing the partisan formations.

## 2

We have let both colonels have their say. Now, though, let us take a look at what they themselves were doing at the beginning of June 1941. Turns out, they were doing precisely the same as the rest of the partisan leaders and fighters. After the disbanding of the partisan units meant to operate on their own territory, former partisans were free to go one of three ways:

- with paratrooper units, precisely then off to sudden explosive growth
- with NKVD SpecOp penal units;
- with small clandestine groups, for some sort of purpose being pulled together at the borders of Germany and its allies or actually being deployed across the frontier even before the first shots were fired.

Military intelligence officer Colonel Ilya Starinov was among the last-named. Let the humble rank of colonel not distract the reader. This was a special kind of colonel, professor of a singular sort of science. Colonel Starinov was to go into action from the very first days of the war,

in his pocket written orders from People's Commissar for Defense Marshal Timoshenko, subordinate to him alone. Soon he would take the post of deputy to the Partisan Movement Supreme Commander for Strategic Disruptive Operations, thus becoming the Red Army's Commando № 1. In 1943, "Operation Concert" and "Rail War" would be carried out, each planned and led by Starinov, each with the simultaneous participation of over a hundred thousand partisans and commandos. It was by no means an accident that Starinov would come to head such a gigantic army of Soviet commandos: He had the requisite background and a record bristling with hands-on experience. This, then, is the dyed-in-the-wool Super-Commando who on June 21, 1941 surfaces around those very same Brest sector bridges so critical to the defense of Soviet territory. What luck! A couple of hours' work on the bridges is all this man needs to let you just push a button in case of German aggression... Preparing for defense, however, is of no interest to Starinov, any more than it is to higher-ranking commanders. For what, then, *did* they send him to the border? Officially: a maneuver.

Having arrived in Brest, however, Starinov finds out the maneuver was a pretext only. The maneuver has been canceled (or none may ever have been planned at all). If neither to train nor prepare for defense, then for what *is* so high-ranking a commando right on the border? He never did find out what had prompted his visit to Brest. That night the German invasion began – and Colonel Starinov did, after all, have to come to grips essentially with *defense*... There is one more stroke to add to this portrait: Throughout the war Starinov had by his side a faithful, reliable, adroit driver. His name: Schläger, an ethnic German. It had suddenly become fashionable among Soviet commanders – especially paratroopers, intelligence types and commandos – to have a real German as their orderly, servant and driver. That particular fashion first emerged in February of 1941. We will have occasion to come back to it.

Secret police type Vaupshas was no less noteworthy a personality, his life no less violent: Officially, war with Poland had long since ended, yet until 1926 he fought on in the forests there with Soviet "partisan units" made up of cut-throats from the "Cheka" (secret police) and the "State Political Directorate" (subordinate to the secret police), continuing to murder people in the name of World Revolution. Once back, Vaupshas became a senior manager for major GULAG construction projects. Thousands of starving convicts were digging Stalin's canals, secret police

were running the projects. Vaupshas was among those in charge. Later, our hero was managing not GULAG convicts, but rather fellow-communists on the Politburo in Spain, directing counter-intelligence and saboteur formations for the Republican side. Later still came Byelorussia and training Soviet partisans in dealing with possible enemy invasion of Soviet soil. Then, though, the Pact is signed. Partisans are no longer needed. Vaupshas finds himself in the NKVD's SpecOps formations, tackling the noble task of “cleansing territory of hostile elements” in the course of “liberation crusades.” When June 22, 1941 dawned, however, he was not on the border, but BEYOND the border, on the territory of “the probable enemy,” in his pocket a diplomatic passport. Why was this killer, this terrorist, this GULAG diplomat sent across the border? Could it have been to enhance the country’s security in anticipation of defensive warfare”? No, in a war of defense he was not needed there at all. As soon as that kind of war had started, they expedited him back to the Soviet Union, to Byelorussia, to set up the recently abolished partisan movement, starting from scratch...

If they had been gearing up for defensive warfare, why, then, this masquerade with changing disguises? Would it not be easier to keep this man (and thousands more like him) right there in areas likely to be occupied, ready to counter an aggressor from the very first hours of any war? Ah, but “the prevalent doctrine was to fight a war on enemy territory.” These are not just the words of a KGB colonel. This is a fact of history, corroborated by what happened to the author of these words as well as to thousands of others just like him...

## Chapter 12. WHAT DID STALIN WANT WITH PARATROOPERS TEN CORPS STRONG?

We will be waging the battles to come on enemy  
territory. That is what our regulations dictate.

*Colonel A I. Rodimtsev  
speech at XVIII Party Congress, 1939*

### 1

Paratroops are designed for offense. This is an axiom, requiring no proof. Before World War Two, few were plotting aggression, which is why in many countries the airborne arm was left undeveloped.

There were two exceptions. Wars of aggression were indeed what Hitler was preparing for – and in 1936 he created an airborne assault arm. By the time WWII began these paratrooper forces numbered 4,000. The other exception was Stalin. He created an airborne assault arm in 1930. By the start of WWII the Soviet Union had OVER ONE MILLION superbly trained paratroopers.

Add up all military parajumpers the world over at the beginning of WWII...and you will see the Soviet Union had roughly TWO HUNDRED TIMES MORE trained paratroopers than all the countries of the world put together, including Germany.

The Soviet Union was the world's first country to have created an airborne arm. When Hitler came to power, Stalin already had several airborne brigades, and the country was in the grips of parachuting hysteria.

The older generation will recall a time when not a single city park was without its own parachute tower, when for every young man a parajumper badge had become an absolutely indispensable symbol of masculinity. Getting the badge, however, was anything but easy. It was awarded for actual jumps from an aircraft, and only those were allowed to jump who had made the grade in running, swimming, shooting, grenade-throwing for both distance and accuracy, scaling obstacles, using anti-chemical protection devices and many other skills needed in war. In essence, jumping from a plane capped the individual training of an airborne combat infantryman.

To gauge just how serious Stalin's intentions were, you have to remember parachuting hysteria in the Soviet Union coincided with dire

famine: Children's bellies around the country are bloated from starvation, yet Comrade Stalin is selling grain abroad to let him buy parachute technology, build giant silk works and parachute factories, span the country with a network of air bases and aeroclubs, raise barebones parachute towers in every city park, train thousands of instructors, build parachute kilns and warehouses, train a million well-fed parajumpers and ready the weaponry, gear and parachutes they needed.

Defensive warfare has no use for paratroopers. Using paratroopers as regular infantry is like building houses with reinforcing bars not of steel but of gold: Gold is softer than steel.

Airborne units do not have the kind of heavy and powerful weaponry the regular infantry has. That explains why they can stand their ground in defense far less well than just plain infantry. Prodigal indeed is the use of gold versus steel. Training a million Soviet parajumpers, however, was costlier even than gold. To ready parajumpers and parachutes Stalin paid with the lives of enormous numbers of Soviet children. What were they training parajumpers *for*? Most likely it was not to defend children dying from starvation.

The Communists would have us believe Stalin was not gearing up for war. In our village in the Ukraine, however, people will remember a young woman who killed and devoured her own little daughter. They will remember her because she killed her own little girl. Those who were killing children elsewhere, you don't recall. In my village, people ate up all the belts and boots, ate up the acorns in a nearby scraggy stand of trees. The reason for it all: Comrade Stalin was getting ready for war. Getting ready for it as no one before had ever done. Of course, in a war of defense all this preparing was a waste.

When waging a war of defense you don't need to drop paratroopers to the enemy's rear: It's easier to leave behind partisan detachments as you're retreating into the forests.

## 2

The retort may be that Stalin's million-strong paratroopers on the eve of World War Two were merely raw material for building combat units. Those units you have to muster, then run through intensive training. Does Stalin stop to think about that? Indeed he does.

In the '30's maneuvers were repeatedly staged on a stunningly massive scale. Every single one of them drilled one and the same theme:

“operations in depth,” connoting sudden assault by tanks in vast numbers and deep into enemy territory.

The scenario was always simple, yet menacing.

Sudden attack by ground forces in the course of every maneuver is preceded by no less sudden, no less crushing a Soviet air strike against “enemy” airbases, followed by dropping airborne assault troops to seize the airfields, then by air-landing a second wave of paratroopers complete with heavy weaponry.

In the famed 1935 Kiev maneuvers, one epic operation involved dropping 1,200 airborne rangers, immediately followed by the air-landing of 2,500 men equipped with heavy armament, including artillery, armored cars and tanks.

In Byelorussia, 1936 saw the drilling of the same offensive theme, as 1,800 men were air-dropped, with another 5,700 plus heavy armament air-landed on their heels. That same year, in the course of Moscow Military District offensive maneuvers the entire 84<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was air-landed intact.

In 1938, envisaging “liberation crusades,” Stalin creates six airborne brigades numbering 18,000 paratroopers. In 1939, Stalin levels partisan bases, abolishes partisan formations designed to operate on their own territory and instead sets up new airborne units: regiments and stand-alone battalions.

Within Moscow Military District, for instance, three regiments of three battalions each were set up, along with several stand-alone battalions, each numbering 500-700 paratroopers (“Order of Lenin Moscow Military District,” p. 177).

In 1940, Stalin crushed all neutral countries in the way of his move forward, wherever possible, to the very borders of Germany. Next, it would seem Stalin should scale back his airborne units: Still farther west, only Germany and its allies are left – and with Germany, after all, a pact has been signed.

Stalin, though, does not disband his airborne units. On the contrary, in April of 1941 FIVE AIRBORNE CORPS are secretly deployed. All the corps are established in the western reaches of the Soviet Union.

Airborne corps, paralleling regular airborne infantry, had rather powerful artillery back-up as well as even light amphibious tanks. All airborne corps were set up close enough to the border to let them be



dropped on the enemy's territory without further redeployment. All the corps were conducting intensive training for an impending airlift. All were clustered in the woods, far from eyes not meant to see. Moreover, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> could without redeployment be used against Germany, 3<sup>rd</sup> against Romania, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> without redeployment against either Germany or Romania, but also against Czechoslovakia or Austria to cut the oil pipelines running through the mountains from Romania to Germany.

On June 12, 1941 the Red Army creates Airborne Forces Command, comprising yet another five airborne corps. Note that this second set of airborne corps was no response to German invasion.

In defensive warfare you cannot use paratroopers in such huge numbers. During the war, not one of the second-set corps fought consistent with its primary mission. Out of the first set, just one corps fought in line with its primary mission – and even that just once, during a counter-offensive near Moscow. We have to add that there was yet a third set of airborne corps, one of which was air-lifted in 1943.

The five second-set corps were a case of the Red Army's rolling along on auto-pilot: The decision to deploy them had been taken prior to the German invasion, then, after Hitler had attacked, people had so much on their mind, they simply forgot to cancel it. In any case, the parachutes, armament and the paratroopers themselves were readied BEFORE the German invasion.

Along with the airborne corps, brigades and regiments attached to the regular Soviet infantry, quite a number of stand-alone airborne battalions were set up. Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan reports, for example, that at the beginning of 1941 and in the immediate vicinity of the Romanian border 55<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps was putting several airborne battalions through intensive training. From Bagramyan's portrayal as well from other sources it follows that 55<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps (right then, the Red Army had a total of 62 just like it) was not an exception, but the rule.

Aside from setting up purely airborne units to be dropped or air-landed on enemy territory, steps were taken to ready what at first blush would have seemed several rifle divisions. For instance: On June 21, 1941, in the course of maneuvers in Siberian Military District, an entire rifle division was air-landed in the rear of a hypothetical enemy. The question immediately arises: Why were such trial runs and maneuvers, earlier confined to the European parts of the country, suddenly conducted in

Siberia? No mystery, really: Forces within Siberian Military District have already been secretly transformed into 24<sup>th</sup> Army and are getting ready for redeployment to the German border. Before boarding the train 24<sup>th</sup> Army runs the troops through one last maneuver. If 24<sup>th</sup> is preparing for defense, then training a division in how to land in the enemy's rear makes no sense. In defensive warfare, you do not run into problems with dropping troops behind enemy lines. On the contrary: As attacking enemy tanks surge ahead in wedge formations, severing troops from the main body of your forces by the tens and hundreds of thousands, the problem facing your defenders is not that of somehow hurling one more division to the enemy's rear. It is instead how to evacuate from territory the enemy has seized at least a few of your own generals and indeed the standards of one or another of your divisions.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 1941, however, Soviet army commanders were not thinking about defensive warfare: Their mega-maneuvers were readying their divisions for a different war altogether.

Communist historians use up paper by the hundreds of thousands of tons on their tomes, yet not one Communist volume explains why in 1941 Stalin set up ten airborne corps.

### 3

Amassing material about the Soviet airborne forces deployed in the first half of 1941 and readied for deployment in the second half of the same year, an interesting detail caught my eye: Each Soviet paratrooper commander, especially colonels and generals, had in his immediate entourage a private or sergeant of German background. The same picture we see in the Soviet cavalry. Incidentally – and we will see this again later – there was a direct link between airborne troops and the cavalry: Paratroopers and cavalrymen were marked for decisive offensive action, daring raids and sudden strikes in the enemy's rear. Both types of forces need commanders ready to take initiatives, capable of independent action when cut off from friendly forces, headquarters and support services. The cavalry was atrophying, its cadres metamorphosing into tankers and paratroopers. The very same was happening in Germany, too.

Senior paratroop commanders or those getting ready to go airborne out of the cavalry, thus suddenly took aboard Soviet Germans-in-uniform. One would have a German driver, another, an orderly, a third, a radio operator. Each former Soviet paratroop commander (or cavalryman)

reports it as though a funny bit of trivia, saying things like “There a war starts, with the Germans, and my personal radio operator – who’d have thought it? – is...a German! Of course, the little guy is a fine fellow, disciplined, tried-and-true.” Colonel Stein, commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Corps thus has a German private among his orderlies, Colonel Rodimtsev, Commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Corps had a German attached as driver. This, by the way, is the same Rodimtsev who at a 1939 Party congress loudly proclaimed that Red Army regulations dictate fighting on enemy territory alone! I had occasion to hear Rodimtsev when he was colonel no more, but already a Colonel-General: a very sharp general, not given to spouting drivel, nothing like a windbag. In 1941, his airborne brigade had to undergo a lightning make-over into regular infantry, be stripped of parachutes and (as applied to all other brigades) be given armament a bit more defensive instead. In the final analysis, his boys, having lost many a buddy and under enemy fire, shed old skills in favor of defensive new ones and really turned in a quite a good performance fighting defense. With his 42<sup>nd</sup> Guards he was the one who held the very last few houses in Stalingrad on the very banks of the Volga. Back in early June 1941, however, Rodimtsev and his boys were not thinking defense. They were suiting up in parachutes and, in fact, learning languages – first and foremost German.

Airborne forces are ballooning, more and more cavalry officers and generals spend evenings cramming German while waiting for paratrooper assignments. Our hero Comrade Rodimtsev, by the way, has just left the cavalry. Cavalry Colonel (subsequently Major-General) Lev Dovator still has not gone airborne, yet the fashionable turn to German and a German toy soldier has not passed him by, either. The General’s widow reminisces about early 1941: “In our regiment there was one German. Now Lev Mikhailovich, you see, brought him over to our home every day, so they would keep practicing, and by the time the war started he already spoke fluent German” (“Red Star,” February 17, 1983). You see how farsighted a fellow he turned out to be: spent a lifetime without languages, yet with war approaching suddenly felt drawn to them, and indeed wasn’t alone.

The Red Army’s ties to German Communists were close and of long standing. Thälmann himself was not afraid to come to the Soviet Union dressed in Soviet military garb. Walter Ulbricht was on the roster of 4<sup>th</sup> “German Proletariat” Rifle Division. That you might call the visible

spectrum, but there was also another, less noticeable one. As early as 1918, Lenin, having signed with Germany the Brest-Litovsk "Peace" Treaty, had an academy created for training commanders for a future German Red Army. It was called "Special School for German Red Commanders." Its first rector was Oskar Obert. The school went through name changes, turned covert, then overt, then back again. It graduated quite a few commanders, but absent a German Red Army they had to serve in the Soviet one. Some of them rose to general's rank. At the start of 1941, the bulk of its graduates and of those of similar schools felt the pull of the battle standards of the Soviet airborne forces.

Poring over publications covering the Soviet airborne corps set up in 1941 leads us to conclude the number of privates, sergeants and officers in these formations with manifestly German last names was, to put it mildly, above average.

## Chapter 13. STORY OF THE WINGED TANK

Airpower must be crushed and eliminated on the ground. Success in crushing airpower on the ground hinges on the element of surprise. What matters is catching aircraft at their bases.

*Marshal of the Soviet Union I.S. Konyev*

### 1

Readying hundreds of thousands of paratroopers and parachutes for them is only half the battle: You need, in addition, military transport planes and gliders. Soviet leaders understood this perfectly, which is why the '30's parachuting hysteria went hand in hand with glider mania. Soviet glider pilots and their craft most certainly were a match for the best the world had to offer. Suffice it to recall that by the beginning of World War Two the Soviet Union held 13 out of 18 world gliding records.

The best Soviet combat aircraft builders were at times pulled from their primary job to create gliders. Even the future father of the first-ever satellite, Serguey Korolyov, was pressed into glider design. Incidentally, he was absolutely brilliant at it. The creators of combat planes and missiles, it seems clear, were told to come up with blueprints of gliders not just to win world records. If Stalin had been interested in records, then why not throw the brightest minds into creating new sports bikes?

The military thrust of Soviet glider activity is beyond dispute. Even before Hitler came to power the Soviet Union had created the world's first cargo-landing glider, the G-63, engineered by Uralpov. Subsequently, it was the Soviet Union where heavy gliders that could carry trucks were designed. Designer Gorokhovsky developed an inflatable rubber glider. Once several such gliders had been dropped to the rear of the enemy they could be loaded aboard a transport plane, brought home and reused.

Soviet generals were dreaming about dropping into Western Europe not just hundreds of thousands of air infantrymen, but also hundreds, possibly even thousands of tanks. Engineers were intensively pursuing the simplest and cheapest way to make that dream come true. Oleg Antonov – the very same who would go on to develop the world's biggest military transport planes – proposed mounting wings and aerodynamic stabilizers on standard mass-production tanks, using the tank body as the framework for

the whole design. This system was designated TW – Tank Wings. The actuating arms for the aerodynamic rudders were fastened to the tank's cannon. The crew did the piloting from inside the tank by rotating the turret and raising or lowering the barrel of the canon. TW embodied stunning simplicity. Of course, to say the least, flying in a tank went with above-average risk. In the Soviet Union, however, human life was cheaper even than tank-mounted wings.

In 1942, TW took to the air.

The tank engine would be started prior to landing, with the tracks brought to top-speed rotation. TW would be set down onto its own tracks, then gradually apply the brakes. Next, the wings and stabilizers would be jettisoned, as the tank reverted from winged to standard.

Oleg Antonov did not manage to build the winged tank in time for the start of the war. The war, of course, did not start the way Stalin had planned it, either. Result: There was no further need for winged tanks any more than for a million paratroopers.

## 2

Slip-ups and setbacks, frustrations and failures did affect the work done by those who created Soviet gliders. Beyond question, however, are the successes. The Soviet Union entered World War Two with an armada of gliders and glider pilots many times greater than that of the entire rest of the world. In the USSR in 1939 alone, 30,000 people were learning how to fly a glider. Piloting techniques often reached lofty levels, with a 1940 demonstration, for instance, involving 11 Soviet gliders towed by a single plane.

Stalin did all he could to ensure his glider pilots had enough gliders. Here, of course, we are talking not about single-seat sports gliders, but rather multi-seaters for paratroopers.

At the end of the '30's, the Soviet Union had about a dozen R&D labs locked in fierce competition to come up with the best troop-carrying glider. Oleg Antonov, aside from the winged tank, also designed the A-7 multi-seat troop-carrying glider. Gribovsky came up with the superb G-11 carrier-glider. Kolesnikov developed the KT-20, while Korbula was working on creating a mammoth glider.

In January of 1940, the Central Committee (that is, Stalin) decided to set up within the People's Commissariat for Aviation Industry an office responsible for turning out troop-carrying gliders. 1940 was a year full of

intensive preparations, and starting in the spring of 1941 the factories run from this office launched mass production of precisely such gliders.

Here, now, we have come to a rather interesting point. The gliders manufactured in the spring of 1941 could have been used that summer, certainly no later than the fall. Keeping troop-carrying gliders around until 1942 was already beyond the realm of possibility. Hangars – of which the Soviet Union did not have that many – long since had been packed with earlier-production gliders and you could not keep huge numbers of troop-carrying gliders out in the open, subject to fall winds and rain, then winter cold and tons of snow.

Mass production of troop-carrying gliders in 1941 meant you were planning to use them in 1941.

Had Stalin intended to drop hundreds of thousands of his paratroopers into Western Europe in 1942, mass production of gliders would have had to be scheduled for the spring of 1942.

### 3

Gliders let you deliver cargo and assault force groups without chutes. Chute-equipped paratroopers you ferry to the enemy's rear via troop-transporting planes.

The world's best troop-transporting plane at the start of World War II was the legendary American C-47. A reasonable assumption would be that if the world's best troop-transporting plane was made in the USA, then in that category the Soviet Union entered the war not in first, but at best second place.

Such an assumption is false. The point is, the American C-47 – to be sure, under a different name (PS-84, a.k.a. LI-2) – was the backbone of the Soviet troop-transporter fleet. Prior to the war, the U.S. government had for some reason sold Stalin a license for manufacturing the plane and needed quantities of the most sophisticated instrumentation. Stalin took full advantage of the opportunity he had been given.

Aside from C-47s, the Soviet Union had several hundred outdated TB-3 strategic bombers converted into troop carriers.

All the mega-airdrops of paratroops in the '30's were carried out with TB-3's. There were enough of them to let you simultaneously airlift several thousand paratroopers as well as heavy armament, including light tanks, armored cars and artillery.

### 4

No matter how many air-transport planes Stalin built, they would, in any case, have had to be put to intensive use: round-the-clock for several weeks or even months, so multiple missions first would move Soviet airborne to the enemy's rear en masse, then supply them there. That would trigger a problem: How do you keep your transport fleet intact on the first mission? How do you continue doing that for the second and subsequent sorties? Losses in planes, gliders and paratroopers on the first might be monstrous. Second-sortie losses could be greater still, absent the element of surprise.

Soviet generals understood all that perfectly. Plain as day was that a million paratroopers could be airdropped only given absolute Soviet control of the air. "Red Star" on September 27, 1940 minces no words when it says landing such huge numbers of paratroops without air supremacy is impossible.

The basic document governing Red Army action in war was the Field Manual. In effect at the time was FM-39, the 1939 edition. The Manual clearly and unambiguously spells out that conducting a "deep-penetration operation" of any kind, especially a mass airdrop of paratroopers, was feasible only given Soviet air supremacy. The Field Manual, but also Air Force Combat Regulations as well as the "Operational Directives for Independent Use of Aircraft," envisaged that war would initially involve an enormous strategic operation designed to crush enemy airpower. According to the game plan devised by Soviet decision-makers, such an operation had to bring into play aircraft across a number of fronts, plus naval and High Command aviation as well as even Air Defense fighters.

Soviet regulations saw the success of the operation as hinging above all else on the extent to which it achieved surprise. A lightning strike to smash enemy airpower had to be carried out "to realize overall war aims." In other words, enemy air bases had to be hit suddenly and hard enough to keep enemy airpower from recovering for the balance of the entire war.

In December of 1940, in the presence of Stalin and members of the Politburo, top Red Army commanders discussed in detail precisely such operations. In Soviet-speak they were called "special operations during the opening phase of war." Commander of the Soviet Air Force General Rychagov stressed how indispensable it was to veil Soviet preparations for using airpower to deliver a lightning strike, so as to "catch all enemy aircraft at their bases."



Quite obvious is that you cannot “catch enemy aircraft on base” in wartime. You can do it only in peacetime, with an unsuspecting enemy. You cannot start a war and *then* suddenly strike most airfields, hoping to catch all aircraft while parked. You can, however, deliver a peacetime strike which will start the war.

Stalin mustered legions of paratroopers, but they could be used for only one scenario: **THE RED ARMY SUDDENLY AND TREACHEROUSLY STARTS THE WAR WITH AN AIR STRIKE AGAINST ENEMY AIR BASES.** Any other situation would make using hundreds of thousands of paratroopers and thousands of transport planes and gliders simply impossible.

## Chapter 14. ALL THE WAY TO BERLIN!

The Workers' & Peasants' Red Army shall be the most aggressive of all the armies that have ever attacked.

*WPRA Field Manual, 1939*

### 1

Hitler has his back turned to Stalin as he hurls his divisions against France. Stalin, meanwhile, is pushing a crash program of razing defenses and adding muscle to the Red Army's offensive punch.

One of the Soviet Union's many defensive systems was the Dnepr River Naval Flotilla. The great Dnepr bars the path of an eastbound aggressor intent on plunging deep into Soviet territory. All bridges across the Dnepr had been mined prior to 1939. They could all have been blown such as to leave nothing to restore. Never had German armed forces in any previous campaign had to attempt a contested crossing comparable to what the Dnepr held in store. A few buttons pushed could have stopped the German tank spearheads dead in their tracks, at least along the river's middle and lower reaches. To keep them from fighting their way across and from putting up temporary bridges, the early '30's witnessed creation on the Dnepr of a naval flotilla. By the time World War Two began it numbered 120 diverse combat vessels, including eight powerful patrol boats, each displacing up to 2,000 tons, with 4-inch armor-plating and 6-inch canons. What is more, the Dnepr Flotilla had its own air support as well as anti-aircraft batteries and heavy guns along the banks. Especially well suited to naval operations were areas near the Dnepr's left bank: islands, channels, backwaters and forks in abundance let even the largest combat craft hide there from the enemy, ready to pounce and cut off attempts at getting across.

The formidable Dnepr water barrier, complete with bridges ready to be dynamited as well as a river flotilla operating in concert with field troops, artillery and aircraft, could be counted on to bar the way to centers of industry in southern Ukraine and to USSR Black Sea bases..

On the banks of the Dnepr the German Blitzkrieg could have been stopped or at least held up for several months. That would have changed

the entire course of the war. But... The moment Hitler turned his back to Stalin, Stalin ordered the Dnepr bridges demined, the Flotilla disbanded.

The Dnepr Flotilla you could use only on Soviet territory and only in a defensive war. Stands to reason Stalin had no use for a flotilla like that.

## 2

In place of the defensive flotilla, Stalin creates two new ones: one for the Danube, the other for the Pina. Were they for defense? Why don't we take a look:

In the summer of 1940 Stalin swaggered into Bukovina and Bessarabia, grabbing them from Romania in a "liberation crusade." A couple of dozen square miles of territory along the east bank of the Danube, down in the very delta, were ceded to the Soviet Union. A Danube Flotilla, created in advance for the occasion, was moved in immediately. Redeploying its vessels from the Dnepr was not easy: Small craft they hauled in by rail, the big ones they took special care convoying in calm weather across the Black Sea.

The Danube Naval Flotilla comprised about seventy diverse combat vessels, fighter aircraft units as well as anti-aircraft batteries and artillery along the banks. Deployment conditions were appalling. The banks on the Soviet side of the delta were treeless and exposed, with Romanian forces right nearby, sometimes as close as a thousand feet from Soviet vessels.

From the very start of a war of defense the Danube Flotilla would find itself trapped: With the Black Sea to its rear, it had no way to escape from the delta, no room to maneuver. An attacking enemy could simply rake Soviet vessels with machine-guns, not giving them any chance to lift anchor and cast off. Their deployment profile would not just keep them from tackling the job of defending: Given the Flotilla's location, defense could not even become an issue! Hundreds of lakes, impassible swamps and reeds spread over hundreds of square miles make up the Danube Delta. Surely no enemy would invade the Soviet Union *there!*

The Danube Flotilla had just one operational option: Fight its way upstream as a sweeping Red Army offensive unfolds. If you have assembled seventy river craft in that great delta, upstream is their only destination, period. Heading upriver, though, means having to operate on the territory of Romania, Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany.

In a war of defense the Danube Flotilla was of no use to anyone, doomed to immediate annihilation at its exposed berths along banks the enemy could rake at will. In a war of offense, by contrast, the Danube Flotilla posed a lethal threat to Germany: Making it just 80 miles upstream would let its canons shell the strategic bridge at Cernovoda, disrupting oil supplies from Ploeshti to the port of Constance. Another 125 miles up would grind the entire German war machine to a halt – for the simple reason that German tanks, planes and warships would stop getting fuel...

An interesting detail: The Danube Flotilla included several mobile batteries set up on the banks, armed with 5- and 6-inch cannons. Had the Soviet command really concluded someone might attack the USSR through the delta of the Danube, those heavy guns needed to be dug into the ground immediately, covered with reinforced-concrete revetments as soon as possible. Nobody, though, built any revetments. Those mobile canons stayed mobile. There was only one way you could take advantage of their mobility, only one way for them to go: offensive operations, escorting the Flotilla, moving along the banks and giving the combat vessels fire cover.

### 3

Surprising, the reaction of Danube Naval Flotilla Command to word of the start of the Soviet-German war: To Soviet commanders, the word “war” means not defense, but offense... Once notified the war has started, Soviet commanders make last-minute preparations for an amphibious assault operation. The steps taken by Soviet Flotilla commanders, 14<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps Command divisions massed in the Danube Delta sector, as well as 79<sup>th</sup> NKVD Border Guard Detachment all have been planned in advance, drilled exhaustively. On June 25, 1941, Danube Flotilla warships ferry NKVD ranger units to the Romanian side of the river, covered by heavy guns on the banks as well as by rifle corps artillery and rifle corps divisions. On their heels, 51<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division 14<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps regiments disembark. The Soviet assault forces move with resolve, daring and speed. Involving river craft, airpower, field-based, river bank- and shipboard artillery as well as Red Army and NKVD units, the complex operation has been drilled to near perfection. Everything has been worked out, synchronized, coordinated, tested and retested many times over. The morning of June 26, 1941 the red flag is raised above the central cathedral in the Romanian city of Kilia. Soviet forces now hold a nearly 45-mile stretch of Romanian territory, a major springboard. The Flotilla is getting

ready to fight its way up the Danube. It will have just over 80 miles more to get through. Absent resistance (and there is virtually none), that may take one night. In support of the Flotilla 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Corps may be airlifted from bases in the Odessa area.

Getting through a few more dozen miles was something of which the Danube Flotilla was quite capable. Later on, it proved the point. Assembled for a second time in 1944, with neither aircraft nor heavy patrol boats, the Danube Flotilla made its hard-fought way some 1,250 miles upriver to end the war in Vienna. In 1941, the Danube Flotilla was far more powerful and faced much less resistance from the enemy.

#### 4

Hitler and Stalin both clearly grasped the meaning of the dictum “oil is the lifeblood of war.” Colonel-General Jodl tells us that in an argument with Guderian Hitler said: “You want to attack without oil? Fine, let’s see what will come of that.” Back in 1927, Stalin took a hard look at questions raised by a Second World War on the horizon. For him, the pivotal strategic issue was the matter of oil. Here is how he put it on December 3, 1927: “War cannot be fought without oil, and whoever has the upper hand in terms of oil, has the best chances of winning the war to come.”

Mindful of both these viewpoints, let us try to identify who is to blame for the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. In June of 1940, with no one threatening the Soviet Union, dozens of Soviet river warships showed up in the Danube Delta. That move had absolutely no defensive implications. It did, however, jeopardize undefended Romanian oil pipelines and therefore posed a lethal threat to all of Germany. In July of 1940, Hitler huddles with his generals and reaches the bleak conclusion that defending Romania is far from easy: extended supply lines running through mountains. Throwing forces en masse into the defense of Romania will mean exposing Western Poland as well as East Germany and Berlin to a Soviet strike. Even massing forces in Romania and holding it no matter the cost will not help, though: While we may be able to hold the territory, shelling and bombing will send the oil fields up in flames anyway.

In July 1940, Hitler first voices the idea that the Soviet Union may pose a great danger, especially if German forces leave the continent for the British Isles and Africa. In a conversation with Molotov on November 12, 1940, Hitler points to the need to keep sizeable German forces in Romania, patently hinting at the Soviet military threat to Romanian oil. Molotov

ignores the hint. That is why, once Molotov has left, Hitler, having thought it over yet again, in December orders preparations for Operation “Barbarossa.”

In June 1940, with the German Army fighting in France, on orders from Stalin and with no consultations with their German allies, Zhukov grabs a piece of Romania – Bessarabia – and brings vessels into the Danube Delta. If Hitler moves farther westward, into Britain, where is the guarantee Zhukov will not get an order from Stalin to move deeper into Romania, where just another 60-odd miles will sound the death knell for Germany?

Hitler asked the head of the Soviet government to withdraw the Soviet dagger poised near the heart pumping oil for Germany. Stalin and Molotov did not. Who, then, is to blame for starting the war? Who threatened whom? Who provoked whom to retaliate?

The great British war historian Liddell-Hart, having exhaustively researched this very question, determined the German plan in July of 1940 to have been very simple: To defend Romania in case of Soviet aggression you had to launch a German strike elsewhere, diverting the Red Army from the oil fields.

As those sorting out the options saw it, a diversionary strike could succeed only if powerful and sudden. The number of troops to take part in such a strike they kept gradually ratcheting up, until finally they held the attack would have to involve virtually all German ground forces and most of the air force.

Hitler’s calculation was proven right: Attacked elsewhere, the Soviet military was forced to retreat along the entire front. The Danube Naval Flotilla was cut off from its troops, unable to retreat. Most of its vessels had to be blown up and sunk. Huge stockpiles, meant to feed and fuel the Flotilla on its way up the Danube, simply had to be dumped.

Hitler’s blow was powerful, yet not lethal. As Machiavelli had already noted, a powerful but less than lethal blow spells death for whomever delivers it. Stalin managed, though with difficulty, to recover from the blow. Stalin created new armies and flotillas to replace those lost in the first few days of the war. Germany’s oil aorta he did sever, after all, even if, yes, it came a few years later than he had planned...

Stalin's rationale for seizing Bessarabia from Romania in June 1940 is spelled out in a July 7, 1941 telegram he sent to Southern Front Commander Army General Tulenyev. Stalin demands Bessarabia be held no matter what, "bearing in mind that we need Bessarabian territory as a staging area for organizing our offensive." Hitler has already delivered his lightning strike, yet Stalin is not thinking defense. His main concern is organizing an offensive from Bessarabia. An offensive from Bessarabia, however, means an attack on Romania's oil fields.

Stalin's track record features few false moves. One of the few, but the most serious of all, was seizing Bessarabia in 1940. He either had to take Bessarabia and keep right on going to Ploeshti – triggering Germany's collapse – or wait until Hitler landed in Britain, then take Bessarabia and the rest of Romania – also marking the end of the "Thousand-Year Reich." Stalin, though, took one step towards the oil by grabbing a springboard for future attack, then stopped...marking time. The interest he thus betrayed in Romanian oil set off alarm bells: Until then, Hitler had been waging war in the West, the North and the South, paying no attention to a "neutral" Stalin.

When the Soviet Union seized Bessarabia, massing powerful forces there for aggression, including an airborne corps and the Danube Flotilla, it forced Hitler to take a fresh and completely different look at the strategic situation and take preventive steps in response. It was, however, already too late. Even the Wehrmacht's sudden strike at the Soviet Union no longer could save Hitler and his empire... Hitler did figure out the source of the greatest danger, but belatedly. He should have thought about it before signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

## 6

A map in Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov's book depicts deployment of Soviet naval bases in the first half of 1941. One of these was lodged near the city of Pinsk in Byelorussia – no less than 300-plus miles from the nearest sea. A naval base amidst Byelorussian marshes is a close cousin to a childhood joke about "a submarine in the steppes of Ukraine." In this case, though, there was not much to laugh about.

After the strictly defense-oriented Dnepr Naval Flotilla had been disbanded, some of its vessels were redeployed to the Danube Delta. The others were sent far upriver into a Dnepr tributary, the Pripyat. Not far from the source of the latter, at a point where the river measured barely 160 feet across, they built port facilities for a new flotilla.

In firepower the Pinsk Naval Flotilla was almost on a par with its Danube counterpart: It comprised no fewer than four enormous patrol boats plus some twenty other vessels, a squadron of aircraft, a company of marine infantry and other units. The Pinsk Flotilla could not be used for defense: The patrol boats sent there had their prows all facing west – and turning each around would be quite an operation. Had they been needed for defense, they should simply have been returned to the Dnepr. On the quiet, forest-bound Pripyat they were, in that case, without a mission: An enemy would hardly venture into these impenetrable forests, this quagmire.

What the Pinsk Flotilla was supposed to do will remain puzzling – until you recall the Dnepr-Bug Canal. Right after the “liberation” of Western Byelorussia the Red Army got down to digging a nearly 80-mile canal from the city of Pinsk to Kobrin. Work on the canal went ahead winter and summer, involving 4<sup>th</sup> Army combat engineers as well as “NKVD construction units,” meaning, thousands of GULAG prisoners. All by itself giving away the canal’s purely military mission was that Colonel (later, Corps of Engineers Marshal) Aleksey Proshlyakov ran construction. The conditions under which the canal was carved out were truly horrendous. Bottomless bogs swallowed machines and equipment, leaving just one way of finishing the canal by the deadline Stalin had set: doing it all by hand. Build the canal they did. Probably no one knows how high a price was paid in human lives. Who, after all, bothered to keep a body count? The canal linked the Dnepr basin to that of the Bug. What for? Trading with Germany? Trade, in fact, moved across the Baltic Sea and by rail. Heavy-tonnage merchant vessels could not pass through the canal. It also stretched the trip: from the Dnepr to the Pripyat, from the Pripyat via canal to the Mukhavyets, from there to the Bug – which, by the way, in those days carried no commercial traffic – which opened the way to the Visla. No, plainly the rationale was not trade. This was a purely military canal. Meant for defensive action on the Bug? The Soviet Union, though, owned just a tiny part of the Bug around Brest, beyond which the Bug veers sharply towards Warsaw. No defense was mounted in this sector. In case of war, even the Brest Fortress had just a single battalion allocated to it – and even that was not for defense, but garrison duty.

The only mission for the canal was to let ships reach the Visla basin and points west. No other mission is conceivable. Fighting a defensive war forced dynamiting the canal, lest German river craft gain access to the



Dnepr basin via that of the Visla. Fighting a defensive war meant the Pinsk Flotilla's every vessel had to be blown up and abandoned.

At the end of 1943, though, lo and behold, once again a flotilla was created on the Dnepr. Once again it went up the Pripyat, once again Soviet combat engineers ran a canal from the Pripyat into a little creek called Mukhavyets which flows into the Bug. Admiral Grigoryev, who in 1943 took command of the new flotilla in the Kiev area, recalls the words of Marshall Zhukov:

“The Pripyat will let you cross over to the Western Bug, the Naryev and the Visla, on the way to Warsaw, and from there transit to the rivers of Germany... Who knows, maybe all the way to Berlin!’ He wheeled around, fixed me with a searching gaze and repeated, stressing every word, ‘All-the-way-to-Berlin! Eh?’” (JMH, 1984, Nr. 7, p. 68).

Admiral Grigoryev and his flotilla did go all the way to Berlin. Open any book on Soviet naval history and you will find an emblematic snapshot of the Soviet Navy ensign against the backdrop of the Reichstag.

As it happened, Stalin answered Hitler's attack by going as far as Berlin. That, however, was not the way Stalin had envisioned things would turn out. If he believed a German attack possible, he should have thrown millions of prisoners into digging antitank ditches along the borders. Stalin did intend to get to Berlin, though not in response to an attack, but rather on his own initiative. That is why Soviet prisoners and Red Army combat engineers were not digging antitank ditches, but backfilling those already dug, and, for good measure, laboriously laying an east-west canal.

Let us please also not forget those prisoners whom Stalin doomed in 1940 to dying in the swamps, so the Communists could raise their banner over the capital of the Third Reich.

## Chapter 15. MARINES IN THE FORESTS OF BYELORUSSIA

We were taught wars now start without any chivalrous  
“formalities.”

*Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union*

*N.G.Kuznyetsov*

### 1

Marine infantry the Red Army did not have. For battles on land it was simpler and cheaper to use regular infantry. Landing on distant shores did not yet figure into planning.

Then, however, Hitler struck out westward, his back exposed to Stalin. Hitler's heedless move set in train radical structural changes within the Red Army: Swept away were remnant defensive shields, massively magnified the mailed offensive fist. 1940 was the year Soviet marine infantry was born. Its birthday came in June, the same month Hitler crushed France. Back then, Soviet armed forces included two blue-water and two home-seas fleets, plus two river flotillas, one on the Amur, the other on the Dnepr. No marine infantry was assigned to the blue-water navy: The Pacific and Arctic Oceans didn't yet interest Stalin. The Amur Naval Flotilla, guarding the Soviet Far Eastern frontier, got no marine infantry, either. Its Dnepr counterpart, as we already know, was split into two offensive flotillas, its Pinsk component, deployed in the forests of Byelorussia, assigned a company of marine infantry. Makes you wonder, of course: no marine infantry on the high seas, yet there they are in the marshes of Byelorussia. It lets you infer where Stalin is preparing to defend, and where to attack.

The Baltic Fleet, whose only potential adversary was Germany with its allies, was expanded by a marine infantry brigade several thousand-strong. On June 22, 1941, the Soviet Marine Infantry saw its baptism of fire, defending Liepaya Naval Base in Latvia. Though the base sat less than 65 miles from Germany's borders, it had no defensive ground forces and was not preparing for defense. According to Soviet admirals as well as captured German documents, Soviet submarines were packed into Liepaya like “sardines in a box.” The official History of the Soviet Navy, published by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, openly acknowledges that Liepaya was being primed as a forward base for Soviet Navy maritime

offensive warfare (“The Fleet in the Great Patriotic War,” 1941-1945, p. 138).

The marine infantry in Liepaya was so close to the German frontier, it took part in defensive action the very first day of the war. Of course, it hadn’t been set up for that purpose at all. Simple infantry is better suited to defensive fighting than are marines.

## 2

The Danube Naval Flotilla did have two companies of ground forces. The fact that, officially, they were not counted as marines isn’t synonymous with any devotion to peace, however. We already know that even before the German invasion at least two Soviet rifle divisions - 25<sup>th</sup> Chapayev and 51<sup>st</sup> Perekop, both part of 14<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps – in the Danube Delta sector were getting ready (and being well trained) for action as marines.

Still more powerful forces were at the command of Black Sea Fleet. Officially, it had no marine infantry, yet at the start of June 1941 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Batov, was secretly redeployed from the Trans-Caucasus to the Crimea. The corps was anything but standard in terms of configuration, armament and focus of its combat training. On June 18-19, Black Sea Fleet conducted maneuvers sweeping in scale and offensive in thrust. In fact, one of the divisions of 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps was ferried aboard war ships, then carried out an amphibious assault on an “enemy” shore. Until then, the Red Army had never practiced the amphibious landing of an entire division from combat vessels.

The joint maneuvers of the fleet with 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps enjoyed Moscow’s fullest attention. High-ranking commanders came down from Moscow especially to observe them.

One of these, Vice-Admiral Azarov, candidly tells us: Everyone involved in the maneuvers felt they weren’t staged out of the blue, that soon the time would come for the skills acquired to be put to use in war, not on their own territory, of course (“Odessa Under Siege,” pp. 3-8).

If war breaks out and the Soviet command uses 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps in keeping with its configuration and the thrust of its training, what shore, then, could they have it storm? Make an amphibious landing from the sea on *Soviet* territory? Hardly! Then where? Theoretically, there are just three options: Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. No matter where the corps would be landed, though, it would need supplies immediately. For

that purpose they would either have to land additional troops or Soviet forces would have to make haste to link up with the 9<sup>th</sup>, taking them, in any event, through Romania.

By some strange coincidence, on the very same days and also on the Crimea, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Assault Corps ran mega-maneuvers where the Corps command was airdropped, together with Corps and brigade staffs.

Soviet historians never have linked these events: training 14<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps to land from Danube Flotilla vessels, 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Assault Corps from planes and gliders, 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps from warships of the Black Sea Fleet. Linked, however, they were – in place, time and purpose. They meant preparation of aggression on a gigantic scale. They signaled H-hour had all but struck.

## Chapter 16. WHAT A “COVERING ARMY” IS

In modern parlance “covering army” embodies the prevailing strategic operations concept of dynamic sudden invasion. The current defense term “covering army” thus clearly serves, if anything, to cloak an “invasion army” designed for a sudden offensive.

*Strategic deployment issues.*

*publ. 1935, Frunze Military Academy, WPRA*

*(emphasis the authors')*

### 1

The European part of the Soviet Union comprised five military districts sharing borders with foreign countries. Forces in the five border districts, together with three fleets, constituted the First Strategic Echelon. Border and all other such districts encompassed divisions and corps, but no armies.

Armies did exist in the Civil War, but were disbanded afterwards. Armies are formations too big to be maintained in peacetime. The sole exception was the Special Red Flag Army. It we can leave aside, though, since the name was understood to refer to all Soviet forces in the Far East and beyond Lake Baikal, together with airpower, naval forces, military compounds and so on. This huge amorphous entity encompassed even kolkhozes and its own concentration camps. Not having a numeral identifier emphasized its unusual nature. Atop this giant organization stood a Marshal of the Soviet Union.

In 1938, the Soviet Far East saw the first-ever peacetime formation of two armies – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. It made perfectly good sense for the Soviet government to take this step: Relations with Japan were very poor, with prolonged periods of hostility repeatedly spilling over into outright clashes and combat involving huge numbers of troops.

In the European part of the country, there had been no armies since Civil War days. Hitler’s coming to power, economic, political and military crises in Europe, the direct clash of Soviet Communists with Fascists in Spain, Germany’s swallowing of Austria and seizing of Czechoslovakia – all this and much else did not trigger creation of Soviet armies in Europe.

Starting in 1939, however, lo and behold, the Soviet Union enters a new era. Signaling its beginning is Stalin's address to the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, said by Ribbentrop to have been "received sympathetically" in Berlin. Soviet foreign policy veers sharply: Great Britain and France are openly labeled warmongers. Stalin does not extend the hand of friendship to Hitler, but Soviet diplomacy clearly signals that if Hitler does, clasped it will be. Incidentally, it was not Stalin who grasped Hitler's outstretched hand, but his faithful servant Molotov. That, however, is just the visible side of what marked the start of the new era. Here is what did not meet the eye: In 1939, the Soviet Union began creating armies in the European part of its territory. Don't mind our being curious, but...against whom? Against the "warmongers" – France and Great Britain – you cannot use ground forces for simple geographic reasons. Against whom, then? Could it possibly be against Hitler, with whom intensive negotiations are underway behind the scenes about a rapprochement?

In sum, Soviet diplomacy "seeks a road to peace," while armies are appearing on Soviet western borders, suddenly and serially: 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armies in Byelorussia, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in the Ukraine, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> on the Finnish frontier. The armies become increasingly powerful, all the while new ones keep joining them: 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in Byelorussia, 12<sup>th</sup> in the Ukraine.

Communist propaganda tries, from time to time, to portray things as though the beginning of World War Two had prompted the Soviet Union to start forming its armies. That, however, was not the way it went. There is proof enough that Stalin's decision to form the armies came first, the outbreak of wars and conflicts only later. Even according to official Soviet sources the process of creating armies preceded the Molotov-Ribbentrop conspiracy. About 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Armies we know that they already existed in August of 1939. There is intelligence to the effect that 5<sup>th</sup> Army existed in July. 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> were created "before the start of WWII," that is, prior to September 1, 1939. About the rest we also know they were set up in areas of conflict to come, and that conflict then erupted there.

Each of these armies saw real action shortly after its creation: All seven armies deployed on the Polish border "liberated" Poland, while the three armies on the Finnish frontier "helped the Finnish people cast off the oppressors' yoke." Three armies there were not enough – so, presto, new ones showed up: 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>.

After the Winter War four of the Soviet armies on Finland's borders slipped out of sight, as it were, and dissolved. 15<sup>th</sup> soon resurfaced – in the Far East. 8<sup>th</sup> appeared on the borders of the Baltic Countries. 9<sup>th</sup> showed up on the Romanian frontier. Next, the “toiling masses appealed” to be liberated. Sure enough, Soviet armies gallantly “liberated” Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. After that, 9<sup>th</sup> once again fades into the shadows. Just like 13<sup>th</sup>, though, it is ready to reappear at any moment – and reappear it will.

Once the fighting, the “liberation” crusades were over, not a single army was disbanded. Nothing like it had ever happened before in the entire history of the USSR. Until then, armies would be formed only in wartime and for war alone. The USSR, however, had now “liberated” everyone it possibly could. There was nobody left in Europe to liberate. Only Germany. Still, precisely then the process of forming new armies sharply accelerated.

## 2

In June of 1940, two armies are formed in the Trans-Baikal region: 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. 16<sup>th</sup> was created and so positioned as to let it quickly be redeployed to the west. It, however, is not our focus. 17<sup>th</sup> is. Creation of Army № 17 marks a moment of special importance: During the Civil War, even at the very height of the Communist dictatorship's bloody struggle for survival, army designations never went higher than 16<sup>th</sup>. Never in the history of the Soviet Union had there been a № 17. The appearance of an army with so high a numeral meant the Soviet Union, in peacetime and without expecting invasion from abroad, had exceeded its previous maximum total of combined-arms formations, a high reached only once before, just briefly and only with all-out war raging.

Soviet leaders understood quite clearly that in creating a 17<sup>th</sup> army the Soviet Union had crossed a Rubicon, albeit invisible to outsiders. Just two years earlier, the country had not been able to afford even one formation of the kind that could be called a military standard – an army. Now, more of them were set up than had ever existed before, even back when every last man and woman was being mobilized, every last drop of potential extracted from the country's economy, the society's every psychological and physical resource strained to the breaking-point. The Soviet Union had surpassed a critical threshold of power. From then on, the country evolved under completely new circumstances, never before encountered.

Obviously, creation of 17<sup>th</sup> Army was a state secret of the highest order, and Stalin did his utmost to ensure no one outside or even inside the country would find out. 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Armies were so set up as to make them all but invisible to outside eyes. For good measure, additional steps were taken to quash rumors about mushrooming Soviet military might. Marshal Timoshenko signed the order establishing 17<sup>th</sup> Army on June 21, 1940 (People's Commissariat of Defense Decree № 4, Para. 3). The following day, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Soviet radio broadcast a TASS report authored, as always, by Stalin himself. German Ambassador Schulenburg accurately identified the author and immediately told Molotov what he had found. Molotov saw no reason to contest Schulenburg's "assumption"...

In the TASS bulletin Stalin uses his favorite tactic: First, he attributes to his adversaries statements they have not made, then he makes quick work of unmasking the fabrication. "There are rumors abroad that on the Lithuanian-German border 100, if not 150 Soviet divisions are massed..." A concoction, Stalin-style. I checked newspapers in Great Britain, France and the USA, whose slander Stalin unmasks: Not a single paper cites such fantasy figures. Having attributed to Western papers what they had not printed, Stalin easily rebuts this phantom slander, then comes to his main point:

"Responsible Soviet circles take the view that those spreading these wild rumors know exactly what they want: cast a shadow on Soviet-German relations. These gentlemen, however, are passing off as fact their own unavowed wishful thinking. They evidently cannot grasp the obvious fact that the good-neighborly relations that have developed between the USSR and Germany as a result of the non-aggression pact cannot be rocked by gratuitous rumors and pathetic propaganda." ("Pravda," June 23, 1940).

What Stalin puts out does contain a grain of truth: Soviet forces are not being set up on the border itself. Stalin makes the point. He says nothing, however, about the fact that deep inside the country, far from prying eyes, formations of enormous firepower are being created. Veiled by yet another (equally misleading) TASS Statement, one fine day these formations will appear on the German border.

### 3

Quite obvious is that in terms of maneuverability, equipment, firepower, offensive punch and combat capability the "prewar period" armies eclipsed their Civil War predecessors by orders of magnitude. The



difference, however, did not end there. Back then, the armies were scattered over six disparate sectors. Now, they were massed in only two and not at all in equal measure: Engaged in constant clashes with Japan were five armies, squared off against Germany, with whom a peace pact had been signed, and its allies were twelve.

The headlong rush to build armies did not end there: In July of 1940 yet another is set up on the German border – 26<sup>th</sup>.

What kind of number is that? What does it mean? Never had the Red Army seen such numbers – and they were assigned in strict sequence. Next in line should have been 18. Why “26<sup>th</sup>”? Why break the sequence?

Soviet marshals and celebrity Communist historians will not give us the answer to that question. If we scrutinize the whole process of creating armies, however, history itself will suggest the answer. There was no break in 1940 in the sequence of numbering armies. The simple fact is that numbers 18 through 28 then had already been assigned. Having deployed five armies against Japan and twelve against Germany and its allies, in the summer of 1940 the Soviet leadership decides to create yet another eleven armies – one against Japan, ten against Germany.

As part of this mega-series, 26<sup>th</sup> was perched on the very border, its formation completed ahead of the rest. All the other armies in the series were also being put together or had at least been sanctioned for formation. Formation of the other armies in the series lagged slightly behind that of 26<sup>th</sup>, but all were unquestionably created BEFORE the German invasion.

23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Armies secretly appeared in the western military districts in May of 1941. That same month, a specter army already familiar to us surfaced from obscurity – 13<sup>th</sup>. A few weeks later, another such army – 9<sup>th</sup> – turned from mirage into reality. On June 13, 1941, the day TASS put out its story, all the other specters materialized as well: 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> (against Japan) and 28<sup>th</sup>, constituting a single unbroken numeral series.

Yes. All these armies officially completed their formation in the first half of 1941. That, however, was just the end of a process. Where, then, did it start? *That* Communist historians hide from us – and with reason. Creation of these armies makes too obvious Stalin’s underhandedness: While Hitler was an enemy, there weren’t any armies. While they were dividing up Poland and while Soviet and German forces were facing each other, Stalin was content to have 7 to 12 armies in the west. Then, however,

Hitler turned his back to Stalin and threw the Wehrmacht against Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and France, clearly intent on landing in Great Britain, too. German forces all but disappeared from Soviet borders – and precisely then the Soviet Union starts clandestinely creating armies en masse, including 26<sup>th</sup>. The farther German forces ranged west, north and south, the more Soviet armies were fielded against Germany. Just imagine, shall we, Hitler had gone farther still, put his forces ashore in Great Britain and seized Gibraltar, Africa and the Near East...how many armies would Stalin have created on a defenseless German frontier then? And for what?

Stalin, in fact, deployed armies before Churchill's famous "warnings" and even before the "Barbarossa" Plan came into being.

#### 4

Soviet strategy was based on the theory of "operations in depth." The image involved is that of sudden blows ultra-deep into the enemy's territory, hitting his Achilles' heel. The theory of "operations in depth" was born together with that of a "strike army," the instrument for delivering such blows. Strike armies were created to carry out exclusively offensive missions (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 1, p. 256). They comprised artillery and infantry in numbers significant enough to smash through enemy defenses together with a powerful tank spearhead – 1 to 2 mechanized corps, 500 tanks each – to deal crushing blows deep into enemy territory.

The German "Blitzkrieg" and the Soviet "operations in depth" theories reflect amazing similarities not just in spirit, but right down to detail. A special tool was created for waging "Blitzkrieg," too – tanks operating in groups. Three such groups were used to invade France, four for the USSR. Each had 600-1,000 and sometimes up to 1,250 tanks, along with significant infantry and artillery forces designed to force breaches for the tanks to exploit.

The difference between the Soviet and the German war machinery was that in Germany everything was named for what it was. In the process, tank groups were numbered, as were armies in the field. In the Soviet Union strike armies existed in theory, were then actually created, yet did not formally carry the title "strike army." That label was officially introduced once the German invasion had already taken place. Till then, all Soviet armies were uniformly numbered, with no distinctions in terms of how each was labeled. It was as deceptive then as it is today: In Germany, all we see

is machinery unambiguously marked for aggression: tank groups. In the Red Army we see it less well defined. That, however, is not synonymous with more love for peace, only with more stealth.

Soviet armies, at first glance, resemble soldiers in formation – all lined up uniformly. If we take a closer look, though, as we should – we will see the differences very quickly. For instance, several armies were deployed on Soviet territory for the purpose of “liberating” Finland – a few months before the “Finnish aggression.” Here is their profile in December of 1939 (armies listed from north to south):

14<sup>th</sup> Army – no corps, two rifle division;

9<sup>th</sup> Army – no corps, three rifle;

8<sup>th</sup> Army – no corps, four rifle divisions;

7<sup>th</sup> Army – 10<sup>th</sup> Tank Corps (660 tanks); three tank brigades (330 tanks each); 10<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps (three rifle divisions each); a stand-alone brigade; eleven separate artillery regiments alongside those integrated into the corps and divisions of this army; several separate tank battalions and artillery divisions; an air component.

We see 7<sup>th</sup> Army, though not at all distinct from its neighbors in name, is several times bigger than all three other armies put together in terms of the number of tanks and artillery it has. Moreover, 7<sup>th</sup> Army is under the command of Meretskov – a Stalin favorite and Leningrad Military District Commander. He was soon to be named to head the General Staff, then to be elevated to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union. At 7<sup>th</sup> Army he was not alone. The Army features the most promising of commanders, all already having held high position and soon to rise higher still, such as, for example, Govorov, head of 7<sup>th</sup> Army’s Artillery Staff and a future Marshal of the Soviet Union. The other armies, by contrast, are headed by commanders with utterly undistinguished past and subsequent records.

Thought-provoking is the location of 7<sup>th</sup> (Strike) Army. Precisely where the Soviet command had deployed this army “Finnish militarists” would within a few months start “armed provocations” and draw a “retaliatory strike.” Where, by contrast, there were weak Soviet armies – actually, not armies, but merely corps – “Finnish militarists” for some reason did not mount any provocations.

Flexibility was a distinguishing feature of Soviet management. By merely adding some corps any army could at any moment be converted into

a strike force. It could just as quickly be returned to its usual profile. A striking example: the self-same 7<sup>th</sup>. The most powerful in 1940, it was the weakest in 1941, with no corps and four divisions – all rifle.

To make sense of developments on the Soviet-German frontier, we have to pinpoint which armies are quintessentially offensive vs. which are standard. In formal terms, all armies are alike, not one of them labeled “strike.” Certain armies, though, have virtually no tanks, others hundreds. To identify the strike armies, we use elementary criteria for comparing the offensive punch of Soviet armies to that of German tank groups as well as against Soviet pre-war standards stipulating what a strike army is. What turns a standard army into a strike force is the latter-day version of a mechanized corps, authorized to have 1,031 tanks. Add such a corps to a standard army – and its offensive punch equals or exceeds that of any German tank group.

This now hands us an amazing discovery: By June 21, 1941 ALL Soviet armies on the German and Romanian borders, plus 23<sup>rd</sup> on the Finnish frontier, fully met the standards set for strike armies, although, I repeat, not formally so labeled. I will tick them off from north to south: 23<sup>rd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Ferried in for good measure was 16<sup>th</sup> Army – a typical strike force with over 1,000 tanks (Central Archives, USSR Ministry of Defense, Section 208, Register 2511, File 20, p. 128). Also fully meeting that standard were 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Armies, secretly moved up to the German frontier.

Germany had powerful machinery for aggression – tank groups. The Soviet Union, in principle, had identical machinery. The difference lay in names and numbers: Hitler had four tank groups, Stalin sixteen strike armies.

Not all strike armies were at full strength in terms of tanks. True enough. Still, fully to gauge Stalin’s intentions you have to take into account not just what he did achieve, but also what he was not allowed to finish. The German invasion caught the Soviet Union at work on creating strike armies in unprecedented numbers. The chassis for each of these monstrous pieces of machinery had been built. The process of completing, debugging and fine-tuning them was moving along. It did not prove possible to bring all armies up to the level planned, but the effort was underway. Hitler cut it short, having sense enough not to wait until the juggernaut was fully assembled, wheels greased and ready to roll.

In the '20's, Soviet experts used the term "invasion armies." Let us agree the term did not sound especially diplomatic, especially for neighboring countries, with which Soviet diplomacy was doing its utmost to establish "normal relations." In the '30's, the all too obvious term was replaced by the better-sounding "strike armies." The snake, its old skin shed, stayed a snake in the new. As Soviet sources stress, names had changed without touching substance: "Invasion armies" and "strike armies" were one and the same (JMH, 1963, № 10, p. 31). Even the blander "strike army," however, was not in use before the war, as we have seen, never mind that most Soviet armies fully deserved it. To strip the terminology of all remnant jarring notes, Soviet experts introduced yet a third rendering of the same concept: "covering army." Privately, Communists made no bones about the term's artful intent. Communist jargon is replete with concepts of the kind. "Liberation crusade," "counter-strike" and "seizing the strategic initiative" spell, respectively, aggression, strike and sudden attack on a neighbor without declaring war. Each of these terms resembles a double-bottomed suitcase, its visible contents meant only to hide what is stowed away. It is most regrettable that some historians, either intentionally or unwittingly, use Soviet military terminology without explaining to their readers what it actually means.

"Covering armies" were assigned the task of indeed covering the full mobilization of Red Army main-force elements. The "cover," however, was supposed to be provided not by defending the homeland, but by invading the territory of the enemy. It was precisely sudden invasion that was deemed the best possible cover for letting WPRO main-force elements mobilize undisturbed and enter in orderly fashion. As early as April 20, 1932 the USSR Revolutionary Military Council decreed cover would be effected through invasion. Precisely with that in mind armies near the border were called "covering armies." Soviet planners felt it would be wrong to think Soviet invasion groups and armies would cross the border right after the outbreak of war. Not so, in their view: Soviet invasion groups and armies would first cross the border and their very move would start the war.

It was in July 1939 that theory began to be turned into reality. The Soviet Union started massive deployment of "covering armies" on its borders. The farther Hitler heads west, the more Soviet diplomats talk

about peace...and the more “covering armies” are set up on the Soviet Union’s western borders.

To keep us from falling into the trap set by Soviet rhetoric, we have to put quotes around “covering,” clarify for the reader each time that invasion was the planned method for achieving “cover” or simply use the truly appropriate term – “invasion army.”

## 6

Among the ordinary Soviet invasion armies (one mechanized and two rifle corps, plus several separate divisions) we also find some not so ordinary ones – three, in fact: 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armies. Each includes not three, but six corps: two mechanized, one cavalry and three rifle. Each has been moved as close to the border as at all possible, to the point that wherever the border features land jutting into enemy territory, the unusual invasion army is deployed precisely on such a promontory. Each of the three carries the latest available weaponry: 6<sup>th</sup> Mechcorps, 10<sup>th</sup> Army has, inter alia, 452 of the latest T-34 and KV tanks, while 4<sup>th</sup> Mechcorps, 6<sup>th</sup> Army features, inter alia, 460 T-34’s and KV’s. The air divisions of these armies had hundreds of fresh-off-the-line Yak-1’s, Mig-3’s, Il-2’s and Pe-2’s.

Plans called for each of these three armies, at full strength, to have 2,350 tanks, 698 armored vehicles as well as more than 4,000 heavy guns and grenade launchers for over 250,000 soldiers and officers. Aside from its cadre strength each of the three was to receive another 10-12 heavy-artillery regiments, NKVD units and much more.

I do not know what to call these armies. If we use their formal 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Army designations, however, we fall into the trap set by the Soviet General Staff as early as 1939: In that case, we let our guard down and look at them as just the most ordinary of invasion armies. Trouble is, they were anything but ordinary! Neither in Germany nor anywhere else on earth was there anything like them. Each of them not only equaled roughly half the Wehrmacht in terms of the sheer number of tanks, but also trounced it in qualitative terms. Even that isn’t all, however. The Soviet command had at its disposal ample numbers of mechanized corps not assigned to *any* army but deployed close to the borders. Merge just one separate mech-corps with a standard army – and, presto, it becomes a strike army. Bring a second such corps into the strike army – and it turns into a super-strike force (or however else you might label it). All this without changing the

army's name and number. Add to the body of a super-strike army yet a third mech-corps – and the number of tanks in one single army surpasses the whole Wehrmacht... What should we call that kind of army? And if we label “machinery of aggression” a German tank group with 600-1,000 tanks, what then do we call armies with two to three thousand tanks each?

7

The three super-strike armies are exceptional among all the other invasion armies. Among these three exceptionally powerful armies, however, one truly stands out – 9<sup>th</sup>. Only a little earlier, in the Winter War, 9<sup>th</sup> Army was no more than a pompously named rifle corps (three rifle divisions). After the Winter War, 9<sup>th</sup> Army melted away. Then, wrapped in a June 13, 1941 TASS cover story, it suddenly reappeared from out of nowhere. Not yet at full strength, it was like the skeleton of a skyscraper: Though incomplete, its enormous hulk already blocks out the sun. In June 1941, 9<sup>th</sup> Army was the not yet fully fleshed-out skeleton for the most powerful army in the world. It comprised six corps, two of them mechanized, one cavalry. By June 21, 1941, 9<sup>th</sup> Army all by itself accounts for seventeen divisions, comprising two air divisions, four tank, two motorized, two cavalry and seven rifle. It is very much like the other super-strike armies, except that plans call for integrating into 9<sup>th</sup> Army yet another mechanized corps, Major General Petrov's 27<sup>th</sup>. Created in Turkestan Military District, the corps is secretly redeployed westward even before being fully assembled. Once integrated, 9<sup>th</sup> Army would number twenty divisions, six of them tank. At full strength, the seven corps would have 3,341 tanks.

Quantitatively, this about matches, qualitatively, beats the entire Wehrmacht. Colonel-General Byelov (then Major General, Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Corps, 9<sup>th</sup> Army) tells us even this army's cavalry units were to get T-34 tanks (JMH, 1959, № 11m o, 66).

Only a short while earlier, 9<sup>th</sup> Army had commanders with utterly undistinguished careers both before and after. Now, everything has changed. Commanding 9<sup>th</sup> Army is a Colonel-General. Back then, they were few and far between. The armed forces of the USSR all told had just eight colonel-generals. Moreover, the absolutely massive Soviet tank forces did not have any, nor did the air force or NKVD. Thirty Soviet armies were headed by major- and lieutenant-generals. 9<sup>th</sup> Army was the sole exception. In addition, gathered in this exceptional army were highly

promising junior and senior officers, including three future Marshals of the Soviet Union: Malinovsky, Zakharov and Krylov, a future Air Force Marshal Pstygo as well as future army generals Petrov, Pavlovsky and Lashchenko. It also featured many other talented and aggressive commanders, some already having proven their mettle in battle, such as 28-year-old Air Force Major-General Osipyenko, others showing great promise (in most instances brilliantly fulfilled). The impression you get is that of an unseen caring hand having carefully selected all the best and brightest rising stars to put into this uncommon army. Where, then, was it deployed..?

This, now, has brought us to a minor, but telling revelation: In the first half of June 1941 the Soviet Union was assembling the most powerful army in the world – but was assembling it NOT ON THE GERMAN BORDER.

This is an astounding fact (at least for me personally) and proof enough that the colossal build-up of military might on the western border, in general, and within the First Strategic Echelon, in particular, was triggered not by a German threat, but rather by different considerations. Deployment of 9<sup>th</sup> Army points straight at those considerations: It was unfolding ON THE ROMANIAN BORDER.

Following 9<sup>th</sup> Army's first disappearance, it suddenly surfaces in June 1940 on the Romanian border, no longer in any secondary status, but now in its new incarnation as a genuine strike army. Just ahead was a "liberation crusade" into Bessarabia, with Soviet historians pointing out that "9<sup>th</sup> Army was specifically created to handle this important mission" (JMH, 1972, № 10, p. 83). The most aggressive of Soviet commanders ran the army through its preparatory paces. Rokossovsky, just released from prison, inspected it on the eve of the "liberation crusade." The critical lead role 9<sup>th</sup> Army played in Southern Front emulated that of 7<sup>th</sup> Army in Finland. Front Commander was Zhukov himself. After the brief "liberation crusade" 9<sup>th</sup> Army once again vanishes. Then, on June 13, 1941, TASS suddenly puts out a cover story with 9<sup>th</sup> Army reappearing in exactly the same place where a year earlier it had carried out "liberation." Now, it is no longer just an invasion strike army: It is a super-strike force getting ready to become the most powerful army in the world. For what? Defense? But, pardon me, on the Romanian side troops are especially scarce. In fact, even if there were many, not a single aggressor would ever direct his main assault



through Romania, simply for the most elementary of geographical reasons. The new 9<sup>th</sup> Army “liberation crusade” could, however, now change the whole strategic situation in Europe and the world. Romania is Germany’s prime source for oil. Striking at Romania spells death for Germany, means grinding to a halt all tanks and planes, all vehicles, vessels, industries and transportation. Oil is the lifeblood of war, but Germany’s heart – oddly enough – was located in Romania. Attacking Romania meant striking directly at the heart of Germany.

This is why the most up-and-coming of commanders were precisely there. 9<sup>th</sup> Army suddenly showed up in the middle of June 1941. This, however, was a surprise only to the uninitiated. 9<sup>th</sup> Army had always been here, at least from mid-1940 on. Though its name had for some time not been officially used, orders went from military district headquarters straight to the corps. Headquarters 9<sup>th</sup> Army and Headquarters Odessa Military District (created, incidentally, in October of 1939) would at one point simply be merged, then just as easily split up at another. What occurred on June 13, 1941 was precisely such a partition.

Demonstrably, after a strike army appears on the border of a small country, no more than a month goes by before the order comes down to “liberate” the neighboring territory. Quite apart from how things might have gone after Soviet forces had stormed into Germany (which, by the way, just like the Soviet Union, was not gearing up for defense), the outcome of the war might be decided far from the main battle fields. That was what Stalin manifestly was counting on. It is why 9<sup>th</sup> Army was indeed the most powerful. It is why right in March of 1941, when 9<sup>th</sup> Army officially still did not even exist, there appeared Major-General Malinovsky, relatively young, but exceptionally daring. Four years later, the very same Malinovsky would amaze the world with his stunning dash through desert and mountains deep down into the vastness of Manchuria.

Facing Malinovsky and his 9<sup>th</sup> Army comrades-in-arms was a task far from challenging. They would have to cross not 506 miles, as in Manchuria, but just 112; not through desert and mountains, but across plains and on perfectly good roads. The blow would have to be struck not against the Japanese Army, but a far weaker one, that of Romania. In addition, plans called for giving 9<sup>th</sup> Army three times more tanks than 6<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army ended up getting in 1945.

All this Hitler kept from coming to pass. Why Germany moved against the Soviet Union is set out in the declaration the German government transmitted to the Soviet government when war began. Included is the unwarranted massing of Soviet troops on the borders of Romania, posing a lethal threat to Germany. All this was no “Göbbels propaganda” fabrication. 9th Army, a super-strike force, was being assembled to attack, period. Colonel-General Byelov tells us that even after German operations on Soviet territory had begun, 9th Army “tended to see every defensive assignment as temporary” (JMH, 1959, № 11, p. 65). That, incidentally, was something that hurt not just 9th, but also all other Soviet armies.

We get far more intriguing an insight into the range of moods within 9th Army from three-time Hero of the Soviet Union Air Force Marshal Pokryshkin (then a First Lieutenant and deputy to the commander of a 9th Army fighter squadron). Here is his conversation with a “half-butchered bourgeois” whose store the liberators had confiscated. It all happens on the territory of “liberated” Bessarabia in the spring of 1941.

“O Bucharest! If only you could see what a city it is!

- Someday, I *will!*” said I, with conviction.

- The owner, eyes wide-open now, waited for me to say more.

It was time to change the subject.” (Pokryshkin, “War in the Skies,” p. 10)

We are reluctant to believe Hitler when he says his “Barbarossa” Plan was meant to defend Germany from treacherous attack by Soviet troops on Bucharest and Ploeshti.

That being so, why not go ahead and believe the other side?! The other side, though, says exactly the same: Yes, even lieutenants knew they would soon be in Romania. Soviet officers were not allowed to take tourist excursions abroad. The Soviet Union was no Russian Empire with its rights and freedoms. In what capacity, then, could Pokryshkin get to Romania – other than as a “liberator”? The young officer was not bragging in the least: After the War, Big Brother Comrade Pokryshkin did spend some time in “liberated” Bucharest. Hitler did everything he could to prevent it. Prevent it he could not. All he did manage was to stave off for a while the inevitable “liberation.”

## Chapter 17. MOUNTAIN DIVISIONS IN UKRAINIAN STEPPES

Airlifted forces will achieve impact in mountain theaters of war. There, with troops, headquarters and logistics especially dependent on roads, airborne assault forces can be used to seize commanding high ground, gorges, passes, junctions and the like along the enemy's rear communications and supply lines. The ultimate effect can be extremely significant... Outside the context of an offensive operation air-dropping forces hardly serves any useful purpose at all.

*"Military Gazette", 1940, №4, pp. 76-77*

### 1

Even just a superficial look at Soviet First Strategic Echelon armies unveils before our eyes an amazing scene of painstaking preparations for war. We discover that each army had its own unique structure, nature and purpose. Each “covering” army was created to carry out a clearly defined mission designed for it alone in the impending war of “liberation.”

Material enough is extant for a riveting paper on each of the thirty Soviet armies in existence in the first half of 1941. Study the structure, the deployment pattern and the thrust of the combat training of just a single Soviet army (no matter which): That the objective of Soviet preparations was “liberation” will be plain to see.

There isn't room here to describe all the armies. I shall therefore now take the liberty of dwelling just very briefly on one of them. Officially designated 12<sup>th</sup> Army, it comprises one mechanized and two rifle corps as well as other units, twelve divisions in all, including two tank, one motorized. At first blush, just your standard invasion army. Neither numeral nor name nor make-up let you distinguish it from other, identical invasion armies. Its history, too, is typical: formed at the time the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. A few weeks after its creation it saw action: “liberating” Poland. Back then, it featured a tank corps, two separate tank brigades, two cavalry corps and three rifle divisions. That it did not have much infantry nor artillery was no accident: no need here to smash through powerful defenses. By contrast, mobile forces en masse. “12<sup>th</sup> Army... was essentially a front-line mobile group” (SME, Vol. 8, p. 181).

Typical also was what became of this army later: The “liberation crusade” in Poland ends, yet for some reason the army is not disbanded and stays on the German frontier anyway. What for? Stalin, they say, naively believes Hitler. Why, then, doesn’t he disband his armies, created only to guard against war?

Later, 12<sup>th</sup> Army undergoes the same transformation as all neighboring invasion armies. Its main strike force now is called not a tank corps, but a mechanized one. The point is to keep the leaders of a contiguous friendly country from fretting. The name change, mind you, entails no cutback on the army’s tanks – quite the opposite. Cavalry is taken out. Its potential for breaking through enemy defenses is built up: Rifle divisions are doubled, each division also gets twice as much artillery. Additionally, we see integrated into the Army an artillery brigade, plus four separate artillery regiments. Its ability to surmount enemy sappers’ barriers also grows: It gets a separate regiment of combat engineers.

What, then, does make this army atypical? All invasion armies developed along roughly the same lines. What is atypical here is the Army’s ethnic make-up: In 1939, getting ready to invade Poland, Stalin filled 12th Army with Ukrainians, patently counting on long-standing Polish-Ukrainian animosity. We find the Army replete with commanders of Ukrainian background. The Army was created in the Ukraine. For the same reason reservists were also called up from there, and in 12th Army they invariably represented the majority.

After the “liberation” a slow and all but imperceptible process of altering the ethnic composition of 12<sup>th</sup> Army ensues. In 1940 we already see profound changes. To keep the peculiar ethnic cast of this army from becoming all too conspicuous, at the top and in certain key positions you find Russians. For the most part, however, the Army already is neither Ukrainian nor Russian. Most of its members come from the Caucasus. Yes, in other armies you also run into Georgians, Armenians and Azeris. In 12<sup>th</sup> Army, however, their presence really hits you in the face. We come across dozens, even hundreds of officers’ last names like Partsvaniya, Grigoryan, Kabalava, Guseyn-Zadye and Sarkoshyan. It does not stop at the level of company and battalion commanders, either. Military District Commander General Zhukov hand-picked from among military academy instructors his old Armenian friend Colonel Bagramyan and put him in charge of the operations division (war planning) at the headquarters of not

just any, but specifically 12<sup>th</sup> Army. It was not, however, just colonels from the Caucasus who were there, but also quite a few generals.

The Army's Chief of Staff himself, General Bagrat Arushunyan also hailed from there.

Military District Commander Zhukov often visits this army, and chance has nothing to do with his concentrating in it natives of the Caucasus: Stealthily but steadily, it is turning into a mountain army. Zhukov personally demands that 12<sup>th</sup> Army command steep itself in Carpathian passes – and not just on paper, but in practice as well. He orders the command, “in the fall and over all more or less navigable routes, to send across mountain passes specially outfitted task forces made up of a variety of combat craft and means of transport, to let all involved see for themselves the practical possibility of surmounting them with their tanks, motor vehicles, tractors, tracked transporters and pack animals” (Marshal of the Soviet Union, Bagramyan, JMH, 1967, № 1, p. 54).

We are talking here about the year 1940. Hitler is fighting in France, his back turned to the Soviet Union, while Zhukov is staging exercises in mastering mountain passes. Zhukov did not know, of course, that only a bit earlier German generals had secretly gone through exactly the same trial runs to make sure troops, tanks, artillery tractors and transporters could make it across the Ardennes.

Could it be, though, Zhukov is preparing 12<sup>th</sup> Army for defense? No. Bagramyan, responsible for planning the war, tells us: “As I was studying the operational plans, what astonished me was the following fact: Our army, positioned close to the border, has no plan for moving out and covering the border.” “Studying plans” means the safe at 12<sup>th</sup> Army's Operational Division was not empty. There were plans there. You could not just skim them. These were complex documents you had to study. Still, finding plans for defense among the war plans proved impossible.

Food for thought is the description of 12<sup>th</sup> Army maneuvers for which Zhukov personally arrives. Drilled are offensive missions only. The maps, moreover, reflect war underway on German territory. The very first phase of the run-through has Soviet forces fight their way across the border river San. The war games involve not some mythical adversary, but the real one, using top-secret intelligence data. Between Zhukov and the commander of the Army arguments erupt: No, no, attacking vs. defending is not the point. Army Commander Parusinov insists: “We have to make every effort to

inflict maximum damage on the enemy already with our very first strike.” Zhukov understands, these are good intentions, the blow does have to be struck, just not across a broad front but instead in a narrowly concentrated sector. That, in fact, is the nub of the dispute.

Having demolished the Army Commander in terms of theory, Zhukov doesn't stop there. Parusinov soon is removed from command of the Army, replaced by an old friend of Zhukov's, General Ponedyelin.

Thereafter, exercises to practice mastering mountain passes go on, with Bagramyan personally in charge. As they unfold, he is positioned on the international boundary, where he observes “an obvious display of defense-oriented work” – reinforced-concrete fortifications being built on the very banks of the border river, to give the enemy a good look.

A surprising item: Zhukov is interested in mountain passes and how well you can cross them – but not at all with defense in mind. Had Zhukov's imperative been to keep the enemy from getting through those passes, he would have had to send troops into the mountains to dig ditches across all paths and roadways. He also needed to put up reinforced-concrete fortifications, not in the valley right by the river, but in the vicinity of these same passes! First, it's cheaper, second, the enemy won't detect the project underway, third, he won't be able to cross the passes. Besides, will anybody really attack the Soviet Union across mountain ridges, with open space in abundance available anyway? Ah, but to the Soviet Command the mountains are of extreme value: Germany and its chief supplier of oil are separated by a double barrier of mountains: in Czechoslovakia and within Romania itself. For Germany, an assault by Soviet forces through the mountains is deadly.

Going through their own mountain passes and seizing the passes in Czechoslovakia or Romania means the same as severing the oil aorta. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov: “Germany's weak spot was oil production, but it was to some extent offset by imports of Romanian oil” (“Recollections and Reflections,” p. 224). All genius is simplicity. Zhukov always followed a very simple principle: find the enemy's weak spot and suddenly strike there.

Zhukov knows Germany's weak spot: That is why the mountain exercises are continuing. The capabilities of each service branch as well as of each type of combat and transport vehicle, under the conditions encountered in and around Carpathian mountain passes, are subjected to

scientific analysis. Standards are set and exhaustively tested, instructions for the troops fine-tuned and drilled to perfection. The time various types of vehicles need to cross Carpathian passes is meticulously recorded and analyzed. All this, of course, is essential for planning offensive operations, especially lightning strikes. Here, as when rehearsing a bank robbery, you have to take into account every last little detail and run your calculations with the utmost in precision. This is exactly what Bagramyan is doing at the passes: Stopwatch in hand, he makes sure planning relies on absolutely real-world experience. It needs to be pointed out, by the way, that for defensive purposes all this is a total waste. If Carpathian passes needed defending from an enemy, there is no need to clock speeds. You do have to tell the troops: “Sit here, and don’t let the enemy get by. Sit for a year, for two. Sit, even if it’s until victory or death itself!”

## 2

Events move along at breakneck speed. Zhukov is promoted, after him Bagramyan as well. Neither one, though, forgets singular indeed 12<sup>th</sup> Army. Under their watchful eyes and pursuant to their orders, revamping of its structure proceeds slowly, but relentlessly.

Within 12<sup>th</sup> Army, as in all other Soviet armies, spades are not called spades. At the beginning of June 1941, four rifle divisions (44<sup>th</sup>, 58<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup>) are converted into mountain rangers. What is more, simultaneously, a division only just assembled is secretly redeployed from Turkestan: 192<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Rangers. What do you call a corps with two divisions – and both of them mountain rangers? What do you call another corps, three of whose four divisions are mountain rangers? What, then, do you call an army, two of whose corps are essentially mountain rangers, with mountain rangers the clear majority? I would call the corps “mountain ranger,” the army “mountain.” The Soviet Command, however, has its reasons for not doing so. The corps keep being labeled 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Rifle, the Army quite simply 12<sup>th</sup>.

Here we are seeing merely the end result of the transformations. About the process itself, though, we are kept in the dark. All we know is that the mountain divisions were officially designated on June 1, 1941. The order, however, had been issued on April 26<sup>th</sup>, while the make-over of the division had been underway as early as the fall of 1940, even before Bagramyan began his trial runs. The 12<sup>th</sup> is not only itself turned into a mountain army, but influences nearby armies as well. Major-General

Abramidze's 72<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Division, trained within 12<sup>th</sup> Army, is handed off to neighboring 26<sup>th</sup> Army.

Lieutenant-General Konyev's 19<sup>th</sup> Army, brought in from the Northern Caucasus, secretly deploys behind 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Armies. We find it also includes mountain divisions such as, for example, 28<sup>th</sup> (commanded by Colonel Novik). Right then, under the cover of the June 13, 1941 TASS release, the deployment of yet another army – 18<sup>th</sup> – gets underway in the Eastern Carpathians, between 12<sup>th</sup> (Mountain) and 9<sup>th</sup> (Super-Strike) Armies. Hitler cut its deployment short, so we cannot be absolutely sure about the look the Soviet Command had ultimately designed for it. Hitler crossed all Soviet plans, setting in train undreamt-of developments. Still, documentary back-up amply supports the conclusion that 18<sup>th</sup> Army had initially been cast as a clone of 12<sup>th</sup> (Mountain) Army, though the latter also was not so designated. Studying 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Army archives will stun every researcher with their absolute structural similarity, a most unusual case of twin armies. The kinship even includes the fact that headquarters at both 18<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Army – unlike at any other – is run by a general from the Caucasus. Here, it is Major-General (subsequently four-star general) Kolpakchi.

The process of converting to a mountain profile was solidly grounded. Mountain ranger divisions were manned with specially selected and trained soldiers. Revamping of these divisions produced distinct features in organization and materiel, sharply contrasting against those of regular rifle divisions and comprising special weaponry and munitions.

Set up in the Caucasus on the eve of war was a mountain ranger training school to turn the best of Soviet mountaineers into instructors. The moment they had completed training they were expedited to the western border: In June 1941, it was right there, not in the Caucasus or in Turkestan, that mountain rangers were being massed in enormous numbers. The school is featured in a short little article in "Red Star" (November 1, 1986) whose headline makes that very point: "Bound for battle in the mountains"!

This, then, is the time to ask: *which* mountains?

On the western borders of the Soviet Union there is just the relatively minor East Carpathian Range, mostly less mountains than gently sloping hills. Setting up powerful defenses in the Carpathians in 1941 was pointless for the following reasons:



1. The Carpathians did not lend themselves to west-east attack in that location. The enemy would be coming down into the plains, yet be forced to supply his armies across all the Carpathian, Tatra, Erz, Sudeten and Alpine ranges – very hard to manage and dangerous for the aggressor.
2. The East Carpathians are a blunt wedge into the enemy's side. If you mass Soviet forces there for defense, then even in peacetime they will already be surrounded by the enemy on three sides. Using plains south and especially north of the East Carpathians, the enemy will be able at any time to strike into the rear of the forces hunkered down in the mountains, cutting off their supply lines.
3. In 1941 in the Carpathians there were not enemy forces enough for aggression – and the Soviet High Command was well aware of the fact (Lieutenant-General Arushunian, JMH, 1973, № 6, p. 61).

The concentration of two Soviet armies in the East Carpathians had disastrous consequences. No one, of course, frontally attacked these armies. The blow 1<sup>st</sup> German Panzer Group struck at Rovno, however, faced the Soviet High Command with a dilemma: leaving the two armies to perish in the Carpathians for lack of ammunition and food supplies or quickly evacuating them from that mousetrap. The second option was chosen: Two armies, not adapted to fighting in the plains, lightly armed and loaded with gear out of place down there, ran from the mountains only to have the German Panzer spearhead drive into them from the side. Having made short work of smashing the Soviet armies fleeing down-slope, 1<sup>st</sup> Panzer Group raced ahead, outflanking 9<sup>th</sup> (Super-Strike) Army to hit it from behind. Its fate: woeful. The road ahead was now clear for German forces, all the way to the undefended bases of the Soviet fleet, the Donbass, Kharkov, Zaporozhye and Dnepropetrovsk – industrial areas of enormous significance. Having lost them, the Soviet Union managed over the duration of the war to produce just 100,000 tanks. It was, of course, far more than did Germany, but without the loss of these areas Soviet output of tanks (but also of artillery, aircraft, warships, etc.) could have been several times greater.

The break-out of German forces into southern Ukraine made things very tough for Soviet forces around Kiev, while it also opened the way for Germany to the Caucasus – the oil heart of the Soviet Union – as well as to Stalingrad – its oil aorta.

Let's once again see what Bagramyan has to say: "Knowing the Eastern Carpathians helped gain a clearer understanding of how acutely necessary it was to move with utmost speed to turn lumbering rifle divisions, hardly nimble and ill-adapted to operations in high terrain, into slimmed-down mountain ranger formations. Recalling it now, I suddenly find myself thinking about the unwitting mistake I made. At the beginning of the war, after all, these divisions were forced to fight on level ground: Reconfiguration mountain-style had weakened them" (JMH, 1976, № 1, p. 55).

I repeat: For defending in the Carpathians in 1941 two armies were absolutely unnecessary. If, however, the idea of using them for defense had even occurred to anyone, then even in that case he should not have turned heavy rifle divisions into light mountain ranger formations. Experience gained during World War One, including in Russia, showed that heavy infantry divisions handle defense in gently sloping hills better than light mountain troops. Once dug into the ground, with passes, ridge lines, peaks and heights in their hands, regular infantry would have held them until the end of the war. There were, in fact, no military reasons why that defense could not have been kept up for many more years. Aware of that fact, the Soviet Command nonetheless reconfigured rifle divisions into mountain ranger, mostly of use in offense. In Soviet divisions groups of men appeared specially trained in scaling high mountains. In the Eastern Carpathians, however, there was nothing for them to do. To put them to use in action, Soviet forces had to be moved westward – hundreds of miles, in fact.

The very same factors making the Eastern Carpathians ill-suited to eastbound aggression, however, make them suitable for aggression from east to west:

1. Troops advance into mountains, yet their supply lines stay on Soviet territory and essentially on very level ground.
2. Like a blunt wedge, the Eastern Carpathians project far to the west, splitting enemy forces in two. They are a natural springboard for concentrating your forces and for, as it were, letting you position them behind enemy lines. All that remains is to move even farther forward, forcing your foe to pull back along the entire front.
3. In the Carpathians the enemy had only token forces, the Soviet Command knew it – and for that very reason massed two armies

there.

Sitting in place was not an option for the two armies: no room there for both, no need for them in terms of defense, no real defense capability in either. The only way to use these armies in war: move them forward. If you assume a mountain army is created for action in the mountains, determining where it is headed is as easy as can be. Two ranges thrust out from the Eastern Carpathians: One points west – into Czechoslovakia, the other south – into Romania. No other directions for mountain army action are available. Two directions, two armies: Makes perfectly good sense. Each direction is equally important, as each leads to the main oil arteries. These arteries are best severed in two places, to make absolutely sure. The success of even just one army will mean death for Germany. Even if both armies fall short, though, their operations up in the two mountain ranges will slow the flow of German reserves into Romania. While they deliver their mountain-based one-two aorta punch, let us not forget 9<sup>th</sup> (Super-Strike) Army also stands ready to hit the heart. Its operations have two mountain ranges for cover. To defend Romania from 9<sup>th</sup> Army, German forces will have to cross both in succession, running into a whole Soviet army atop each.

Top priority for the Soviet mountain armies: operate with suddenness and speed. If they manage to swoop down and seize the passes, regular ground forces will have a hard time dislodging them. To lock the passes down tight, not all divisions in the Soviet mountain armies undergo a mountain make-over. For good measure, the armies have tank and motorized divisions, plus heavy anti-tank brigades. One sudden forward dash – and Germany will be left without oil... That is why Bagramyan drills tankers on passes with stopwatch in hand. Zhukov, meanwhile, follows the dry runs with the keenest attention.

The mission assigned to 12<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Army mountain ranger divisions we can argue about, though the armies were in the Carpathians. The mission of such a division within 9<sup>th</sup> (Super-Strike) Army, however, is beyond debate: 9<sup>th</sup> Army was near Odessa, yet on the order of Zhukov, personally responsible for Southwestern and Southern Fronts, it, too, had a mountain ranger division added. What mountains are there near Odessa? There was only one strictly mission-consistent place where you could use a multiply decorated formation like 30<sup>th</sup> Irkutsk Mountain Ranger Division: in Romania. Not at all by accident is this division (commanded by Major-

General Galaktionov) part of General Malinovsky's 48<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps. First, this is the most aggressive corps commander not just in 9<sup>th</sup> Army, but throughout Southern Front. Secondly, 48<sup>th</sup> Corps is on 9<sup>th</sup> Army's extreme right flank. On Soviet territory this means nothing at all. If, however, you send 9th Super-Strike Army into Romania, all of it will be in the plains – except for the right flank, which will scrape up against a mountain range. Stands to reason to have a mountain ranger division handle this situation – and precisely on the extreme right flank.

In addition, secretly rolling in by troop train from Turkestan is Colonel Kuliev's 21<sup>st</sup> Mountain Cavalry Division. Hitler derails it all with his attack. Everything meant to head south, even 19<sup>th</sup> Army with its mountain ranger divisions, has to be thrown into Byelorussia. That, in fact, is where 21<sup>st</sup> Mountain ends up: Of no use to anyone there, unfit for fighting in marshland, it meets an ignominious end. After all, it was not meant for Byelorussia.

### 3

Communist propaganda claims the Red Army was not preparing for war, hence all the calamities. Not true. Why don't we rewind, at least for 12<sup>th</sup> Army and its clone, 18<sup>th</sup>, to see what might have happened, had the Soviet Union really not been preparing for war.

1. Enormous resources would have been saved, not utterly wasted on creating two mountain armies as well as many separate mountain ranger divisions in standard invasion armies. Had just some of these means gone into setting up anti-tank divisions, the war would have taken a different course.
2. The Carpathians would not have seen two armies, these would not have had to be panic-pulled out of their mousetrap there and they would not have run into the German spearhead just as they left those mountains.
3. North of the Carpathians German panzer packs would have encountered not slimmed-down divisions fleeing headlong down-slope, but instead heavy armor suited to warfare on level ground and bristling with artillery firepower, including anti-tank cannons.
4. Even if the German tank spearhead had pierced defenses mounted by divisions not running anywhere, the consequences still would not have been disastrous: On the Romanian border, instead of massed

forces to hit from behind it would have run into nothing but empty space.

Had the Red Army not been getting ready to make war, everything would have gone differently.

It was, however, getting ready – relentlessly and as fast as it could.

## Chapter 18. FIRST STRATEGIC ECHELON'S MISSION

... In the theater of operations you must aim at being able simultaneously to pursue two, if not three offensive operations on several fronts to overwhelm enemy defense capability over the widest area possible.

*People's Commissar of Defense*

*Marshal of the Soviet Union*

*S.K. Timoshenko*

*December 31, 1940*

### 1

Let us take another brief summary look at First Strategic Echelon: sixteen armies; several dozen corps, both army-integrated and stand-alone; division total – 170. The most powerful army is on the Romanian border. The two mountain armies among the sixteen are poised to sever Romania and its oil from Germany. Five airborne-assault, one amphibious and several mountain ranger.

What, in fact, was First Strategic Echelon's mission? What was it intended for? My own view I will not express. I will let Soviet marshals speak for themselves.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Yegorov's opinion was that the war would involve tens of millions of soldiers you would have to mobilize. He proposed not waiting until mobilization had run its course, but rather launching an invasion of enemy territory the moment mobilization was announced. Towards that end, as he saw it, First Strategic Echelon had to have standing peacetime "invasion groups." Their job: cross the border the moment mobilization has begun, disrupting the enemy's mobilization and covering the Red Army's own, while letting main force bodies deploy and enter the war under the most advantageous conditions (WPRA Revolutionary Council of the USSR Chief of Staff's Report, April 20, 1932)

Marshal of the Soviet Union Tukhachevsky disagreed. You did have to invade immediately, just not with invasion groups, but entire invasion armies. The latter you have to create already in peacetime and keep right at the borders as part of WPRA's First Strategic Echelon. "The make-up and positioning of front-line armies must first and foremost be geared toward making it possible to cross the borders the moment mobilization is

announced” and “mechanized corps have to be placed 30-40 miles from the frontier, to cross the border the very first day of mobilization” (Tukhachevsky, Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 219).

Tukhachevsky and Yegorov were, of course, mistaken. They had to be shot, lifting to the top of the military ladder the imperious, brutal and unbending Zhukov. The last thing on his mind was abstractions. He was a practical man. In August of 1939, Zhukov led an operation of stunning suddenness, speed and daring to smash Japan’s 6<sup>th</sup> Army. The blitzing of 6<sup>th</sup> Army was prologue to the Second World War. Once Zhukov had sent in his August 19, 1939 telegram reporting the main mission accomplished – that is, the Japanese have no idea an attack is coming – Stalin gave the go-ahead for establishing common borders with Germany.

Set to Zhukov’s foreboding background music, the Molotov-Ribbentrop bargain took shape. Zhukov accomplished in Mongolia what no one else had managed: crushing a whole Japanese army. That very event set off destruction of everything meant for defense along the western borders, right along with creation of colossal strike formations. Zhukov was given command of the single most important and most powerful military district – Kiev. Next, he rose higher still – to Chief of the General Staff. Right then and there, the General Staff came to a theoretical conclusion of the utmost significance: “Accomplishing the mission of the invasion armies is to be the responsibility of First Strategic Echelon” (JMH, 1963, № 10, p. 31). Thus it was that all sixteen First Echelon armies, comprising 170 divisions, were marked specifically for invasion.

Most interesting of all: First Strategic Echelon did not just get the mission of invading, but got right down to carrying it out! With the June 13, 1941 TASS story as cover, First Strategic Echelon moved en masse towards the borders of Germany and Romania.

True, First Strategic Echelon only numbered some three million officers and men. Even an avalanche, however, starts with just a single snowflake. First Strategic Echelon’s firepower kept growing by leaps and bounds.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Kurkotkin: “Military units that had set out for the international border before the war...carried with them all their reserves of clothing and footwear” (Soviet Armed Forces Logistics in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-45, p. 216). The Marshal goes on to explain central stockpiles had virtually no clothing and footgear left. The point is,

divisions, corps and armies were themselves hauling around clothing and footwear for millions of reservists.

What were they expecting, if not an immediate multi-million call-up?

On the subject of First Strategic Echelon firepower you cannot talk about just the millions of soldiers it actually had. You also have to recall the millions more Hitler made it impossible to call in, dress and put boots on close to the borders. Moving out First Strategic Echelon forces reflected elaborate advance planning in concert with the operation of the NKVD killing machine. The final forward deployment decision came on May 13, 1941. The next day, May 14<sup>th</sup>, it was decided forcibly to relocate inhabitants in western near-border areas. Both plans were carried out exactly one month later: On June 13<sup>th</sup> troops headed out towards the borders, on the 14<sup>th</sup> resettlement began of people living in a belt close to those borders. By the time troops started reaching frontier areas a few days later, the former inhabitants were already gone. First Strategic Echelon troops were not supposed to come to a halt as they approached the international boundaries – which is why Soviet border guards cleared the passageways of all obstructions, right down to boundary posts and stones.



## Chapter 19. STALIN IN MAY

Stalin has set himself a foreign policy goal of enormous importance, one he hopes to reach on his own.

*Graf von Schulenburg.*

*Secret report, May 12, 1941*

### 1

To grasp what happened in June 1941 we have only one choice: go back to May. May 1941 is the most mystery-masked month in all of Russian Communist history. Every day, every hour of that month was packed with events we have yet really to figure out. No one yet has fully explained even what unfolded right before the eyes of the whole world.

On May 5, 1941 Stalin became head of the Soviet Government. That move has mystified many. From captured documents we know, for instance, the German leadership could not come up with any satisfactory explanation for this development. For the first time in Soviet history, ultimate Party and State power were **officially** concentrated in one and the same hands. Did it spell a tightening of Stalin's personal dictatorial grip? Certainly not: Had he not by then in fact already amassed all power in his hands? Were power measured by the number of impressive-sounding titles, Stalin could even ten years earlier have managed a glittering collection. Quite consciously, however, he had refrained. Starting in 1922, once he had taken the post of General Secretary, Stalin passed up all state and government posts. Stalin raised his command perch **above** government, **above** state. He controlled everything, yet was officially responsible for nothing. As early as 1931, Trotsky described how a communist overthrow in Germany was designed to work out: "If the new policy succeeded, all the Manuels and Remmels would have proclaimed it to have been Stalin's initiative. If, instead, it failed, Stalin still had every opportunity to find himself a scapegoat. This, after all, is the quintessence of his strategy. This is an arena where he excels" ("Opposition Bulletin," Vol. 24, p. 12).

No putsch did come about, Stalin did, in fact, find scapegoats – and made an example of them. It paralleled the way he ruled at home: For every success Stalin took credit, for every failure he blamed enemies, opportunists and careerists deviating from the Party line. "The triumph of

the kolkhoz system” was a product of Stalinist ingenuity, the millions who perished in the process showed how some comrades running things at the district level let success go to their head. Successive great purges did not involve Stalin whatsoever: Yezhov and his ilk did it all! Even the Pact with Hitler Stalin did not sign: It entered the annals bearing the names of Molotov and Ribbentrop. Assuming official responsibility for that pact within Germany was not so much Ribbentrop as it was Adolf Hitler, the Chancellor, though Hitler had not even been at the signing. Citizen Joseph Stalin, by contrast, invested with no state, government, military or diplomatic powers, bore no responsibility for the event.

Identical circumstances surround the April 13, 1941 signing of a treaty with Japan: Stalin is on the scene, yet takes no responsibility. Outcome: With war-drained Japan in dire straits, Stalin strikes his neighbor in the back. His conscience is clear: He did not sign the treaty.

Then, however, something or other happened (or was *supposed* to happen): In May 1941 Stalin officially takes upon himself state responsibility. The new title brings Stalin no extra power, only a limitation on that power. More accurately, he chooses to circumscribe it himself. From then on, he takes only the most important of decisions, but also assumes official responsibility for them. Until then, Stalin’s power had been hemmed in only by the Soviet Union’s external boundaries – and not even that always applied. Since he could perfectly well have kept to the high ground of infallibility, leaving to others the possibility of making mistakes, what could possibly have driven him voluntarily to shoulder the heavy burden of responsibility for his actions?

The whole situation somehow reminds me of Khrushchev’s famous moose hunt. With game still nowhere in sight, Nikita shouted at hunters, even made fun of his rather hapless guest Fidel Castro – while himself neither firing nor even holding a shotgun. Once game had been driven the hunters’ way, however, and there was no way you could miss, Nikita up and grabbed a gun... For 19 years, Stalin had not personally wielded the levers of state power, then, all of a sudden... What for?

Admiral of the Soviet Fleet Kuznetsov (then an admiral attached to the People’s Commissar commanding the Soviet Navy) tells us: “When Stalin took charge of the chairmanship of the Council of People’s Commissars, the management system remained virtually unchanged” (JMH, 1965, Vol. 9, p. 66). If it all stays practically the same, what does Stalin

need the title for? Don't forget, "every Stalin move, his every act and crime served a purpose, made sense, was strictly in line with his own code" (Avtorkhanov, "Enigma of Stalin's Death," p. 132).

How, then, *do* you make sense of what Stalin did *here*?

"I do not know of any Soviet domestic issue serious enough to prompt Stalin to take such a step. I could claim greater assurance in saying you have to look to foreign policy to explain why Stalin chose to take the highest post in government." That is how Germany's Moscow ambassador von Schulenburg reported back to his authorities. Soviet marshals put it differently, but make the same point: Stalin's appointment was tied to foreign issues (Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan, "Thus the War Began," p. 62). Even without help, though, we have no trouble seeing how wrestling with internal problems is far easier for Stalin, if he does not overburden himself with responsibility. *What* external issues can force him to take so big a step?

In May 1941, Germany crushed a whole number of European states. A problem involving relations with France, for example, simply could not even exist. Great Britain, having preserved its independence, extended to Stalin the hand of friendship (Churchill letter sent to Stalin July 1, 1940). Roosevelt was more than just friendly to him, flagging dangers, even pouring American technology into the USSR. Likely foes there were just two. Japan, though, after a taste of Soviet military might in August 1939, now had just signed a treaty with the Soviet Union, its sights set and efforts focused 180 degrees away from Soviet borders. It boils down to this: Germany alone forced Stalin to take this at first blush incomprehensible step. What initiative, then, could Stalin launch regarding Germany by virtue of his new, official title of head of state?

There are just three possibilities:

- establish lasting, inviolable peace;
- officially lead the Soviet Union in fighting German aggression by force of arms;
- officially lead the Soviet Union in a war of aggression against Germany.

The first interpretation is a non-starter: Molotov had already signed peace with Germany. Once Stalin had replaced Molotov as head of state he neither took decisive steps to meet with Hitler nor to open a dialogue with

him. Stalin kept using Molotov for peace talks. It is common knowledge that as late as June 21<sup>st</sup> Molotov tried to meet with the German leadership. Stalin made no such attempts. The point: He had not taken the official post to talk peace.

Communist propaganda pushes option two: Anticipating a German invasion, Stalin decided personally and officially to take command of the country's defense. The comrades' farce, however, flops: For Stalin, Germany's attack came as a surprise, something he had not expected. Their version would have Stalin taking on responsibility in anticipation of events he actually had not anticipated.

Let us take another look at how Stalin behaved over the first few days of the war. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the head of government was duty-bound to address the nation to break terrible news. Stalin instead shirked his primary responsibilities, leaving them to his deputy Molotov.

What, then, made Stalin settle into Molotov's chair in May...only to hide behind his back in June?

The evening of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Soviet Command dispatched a directive to the troops.

Marshal Zhukov, the floor is yours:

“General Vatutin said Stalin endorsed draft directive № 3 and ordered my signature to be affixed... ‘Fine,’ said I, ‘put my signature there’” (Zhukov, “Recollections and Reflections,” p. 251).

Through the official history we know that directive was issued over the signatures of “the People's Commissar of Defense Marshal Timoshenko, the Communist Party Central Committee Secretariat Council Member Malenkov and the Chief of the General Staff General Zhukov” (“History of the Second World War [1939-1945], Vol. 4, p. 38).

It turns out Stalin forces others to sign the order, shrinking from personal responsibility. Why, then, *did* he take it in May? The armed forces are ordered to smash the enemy that has invaded: a document of the utmost importance. What does a “member of the Secretariat Council” have to do with it?

The following day the membership of General Headquarters was announced. Stalin had turned down command, agreeing to join this ultimate military leadership body as no more than another member. “Given the existing hierarchy, Timoshenko could take no fundamental decisions anyway, not independently, not without Stalin. Effectively, there were two

Supreme Commanders: *de jure*, by virtue of a decree, People's Commissar Timoshenko and *de facto*, Stalin" (Zhukov, *ibid.*). In this war of defense Stalin applied his tried and true leadership technique: Crucial decisions he made himself, while the Molotovs, Malenkovs, Timoshenkos and Zhukovs bore official responsibility. Only a month later did the members of the Politburo bring Stalin to take on the official position of People's Commissar of Defense, then on August 8th that of Commander-in-Chief. Did it gain Stalin anything to shoulder responsibility "in anticipation of a war of defense"...only to do all he could to dodge it the moment such a war had begun? Knowing how Stalin ran things the first month of the war of defense, on the eve of that war it would have made sense for him to shun all titles and liabilities, filling decorative posts with second-tier marionettes whose strings he held in hand. The second explanation therefore cannot satisfy us, either. Inevitably, we have to embrace the third – which no one has yet managed to refute: By Hitler's hand Stalin has crushed Europe, he is now getting ready suddenly to stab Germany in the back and he intends personally to lead the "liberation crusade" as head of the Soviet Government.

The Communist Party had prepared the Soviet people and Army to having Stalin himself give the order to launch a war of liberation in Europe. Communist spinmeisters have put into circulation the notion that the Red Army was gearing up for "counter-strikes." Back then, though, no one was talking about striking back. The Soviet people knew a decision to go to war would be taken in the Kremlin. War would start not with an attack by whatever enemy, but instead with a decree from Stalin: "Then, when Marshal of the Revolution Comrade Stalin so signals, hundreds of thousands of pilots, navigators and paratroopers will swoop down on the enemy, crushing his head with full might of arms, the arms of socialist justice. Soviet air legions will bring happiness to humankind!" So went the line, at a time when the Red Army had already bumped up against the German frontier ("Pravda," August 18, 1940), when it could deliver happiness to mankind only through German territory, when the heads it could come crashing down on with the might of socialist justice were first and foremost German.

Holding the post of General Secretary, Stalin was able to issue any order whatsoever. That order would have been carried out immediately and to the letter. No matter the order, though, it would have been un-official: That,

after all, was the very essence of Stalin's invulnerability and infallibility. Now, that status no longer suits him. He has an order to give (THE order of his lifetime), but it has to come from him, officially.

As Marshal of the Soviet Union Rokossovsky tells us ("A Soldier's Duty," p. 11), each Soviet commander had in his safe a "special secret operational packet" – "Red Packet Letter M." Opening the Red Packet was permissible only on the order of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (until May 5, 1941: Vyacheslav Molotov) or of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR (Marshal of the Soviet Union Timoshenko). Still, as Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov attests, Timoshenko "could take no fundamental decisions anyway, not without Stalin." There you have it, then: Stalin took Molotov's post so THE Order would come not from Molotov, but from Stalin himself.

The Red Packets are lying in each commander's safe...but on June 22, 1941 Stalin does not give any order to open them. Per Rokossovsky's account, though under Article 58 unauthorized breaking of the Red Packet seal meant a firing squad, at their own risk and peril some commanders did open theirs. Trouble was, they found nothing of any use for defense. "We did, of course, have detailed plans and instructions as to what to do on "M"-Day...all of it timed down to the minute, the last detail... All those plans were on hand. Unfortunately, nothing in them addressed what to do, if the enemy suddenly went on the offensive" (Major-General Gretsov, JMH, 1965, p. 84).

Summing up, war plans Soviet commanders do have, just none for a *defensive* war – and top Soviet leaders know it. That is why, during the first minutes and hours of the war, instead of issuing a one-line "Open your packets!" the leadership improvises, making up new directives to the troops. Given defensive warfare, all their plans, all their packets, all "timed down to the minute, the last detail," no longer is of any use.

Nonetheless, initial orders from the top still do not direct the troops to dig in. Aimed at neither defense nor counterstrike, they are purely *offensive*. Soviet leaders' thinking and planning move along these lines only, even after starting to fight *defense* has been forced on them. The Red Packets ring with supreme resolution. Given the murky situation, however, troops dying to charge need a bit of bridling, at least until the smoke has really cleared. The first few directives therefore still favor offense, but are

designed to hold those horses: Attack, yes, but *not* as described in the Red Packets!

As frontline smoke has not yet cleared, Stalin does not want to gamble. That explains why the most pivotal directives of the “Great Patriotic War” – those giving the orders for *going* to war – carry no Stalin signature. He had been getting ready for discharging the honorific duty of signing orders of a different kind, under different circumstances – for signing orders not for a defensive war thrust on him, but rather for launching the mission of liberating people the world over.

Hitler read the savvy Schulenburg’s telegrams. Very likely he, too, grasped the fact that Stalin was “hoping on his own to reach a foreign policy goal of enormous importance.” Hitler understood how great a threat that posed – and robbed Stalin of that chance. Result: On the first set of orders for an unexpected war of defense forced on Stalin you see the signature of a “Member of the Secretariat Council.”

## 2

When taking office, every head of government announces what he plans to do, his program. Well, did Stalin? He certainly did. However, the one Stalin speech you could call “program-oriented,” though delivered, was not released to the public in its day. Even when it ultimately was published, in 1998, it was tucked away in an anthology (“The Year 1941. 2<sup>nd</sup> Volume,” Moscow Democracy Fund, pp. 158-162).

The decision to appoint Stalin head of the Soviet Government, meaning, to the post of Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars, was taken on May 4, 1941 and signed by Stalin himself. The top-secret protocol of that Politburo decree, too, was released only much later, also in 1998. On May 5, 1941 Kalinin, the nominal head of state, confirmed that decision with his own signature, purely for public consumption.

That same day, Stalin addresses military academy graduates at a Kremlin reception. He speaks for 40 minutes. Taking into account Stalin’s talent for holding his tongue, 40 minutes is unusually long – stunning, actually. Stalin’s appearance before military academy graduates was anything but annual. In fact, the record shows it happened just twice. The first came in 1935: Kirov had been killed a few months earlier, the country was under the butcher’s axe, preparations were secretly under way for the Great Purge – and Comrade Stalin told the military academy grads “the cadres have the last word.” At the time, there was hardly anyone capable of

plumbing the real meaning behind his words. The scheme Stalin had hatched, though, involved no more and no less than replacing virtually every last cadre member: Most of those in Stalin's audience met a bloody end.

In May 1941, however, Stalin once again has something important to tell military academy grads. In the works now is more serious, murkier business – which is why this time Stalin's speech is secret. Throughout the Soviet Union's existence the speech stayed that way – further proof of its importance. Stalin spoke about war: war with Germany. References to that speech found their way into Soviet sources with a lag of 30-40 years. “General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party J.V. Stalin, addressing a reception for military academy graduates on May 5, 1941, made it clear that the German Army was the most likely adversary” (JMH, 1978, № 4, p. 85). “History of the Second World War” (Vol. 3, p. 439) confirms that Stalin spoke about war and, in fact, war with Germany, in particular. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov goes a bit further: He reports that Stalin, as was his wont, raised questions, then answered them. Among other such questions, Stalin asked whether the German Army was invincible – and said no. Stalin said Germany was attacking, seizing and subjugating other countries and their people, predicting Germany's policy would not prove successful (“Recollections and Reflections,” p. 236).

Words worth their weight in gold. Why, though, keep them under wraps? No trouble seeing why in May 1941 it was awkward for Stalin to be calling his neighbor an aggressor out to conquer and subjugate. Still, just a month and a half later Hitler fell upon the USSR: That May speech should have been rushed into print. Stalin should have appeared before the nation to say: “Brothers and sisters, as a matter of fact I saw this turn of events coming, which is why I warned my officers behind the scenes as early as May 5<sup>th</sup>. Sitting in the audience together with the military academy graduates was the country's entire top military and political leadership. Each of them can confirm it. Here you have a transcript of my speech..”

Ah, but no: Stalin did not hark back to his speech, did not call forward those who had been there, live, to hear it. The War over, Stalin is lofted to the rank of “Generalissimo,” proclaimed the most brilliant of strategists. Right there would have been an opportunity for Stalin's lackeys to recall the May 1941 speech: “He warned us already back in May,” they would have said. “Oh, if only we had been worthy of our great teacher!”



No one, however, did call to mind the speech while Stalin was still alive. Later, there was much about which they reminisced, but, no, the speech they did not get 'round to publishing. There is just one reason: On May 5, 1941 Stalin did talk about war against Germany, but the possibility of a German invasion he did NOT raise. Stalin pictured war against Germany WITHOUT any German invasion of the USSR, with a start scripted differently.

Stalin's writings to this day are № 1 worldwide in terms of the number of volumes published. Much has been made public, right down to annotations he made in the books of others: All these are priceless well-springs of profound insight, yet the speech about war with Germany stayed secret for decades on end all the same. As if that were not enough, special care was taken to try to consign it to oblivion. Right after the War, Stalin's "The Great Patriotic War" was put out – millions of copies in many different languages. The book begins with Stalin's radio address of July 3, 1941. No doubt about what the book was meant to accomplish: Knock into our heads the notion that Stalin started to talk about Soviet-German war only *after* the German invasion and spoke about nothing but defense. Fact is, though, Stalin started talking about war not *after* the German invasion, but *before* – and spoke not about *defense*, but something else.

Now, what might *that* have been?

### 3

We already know that once the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed pre-eminent Soviet commanders Zhukov and Meretskov as well as the all-time greatest top cop any people ever had, Lavrenty Beria, bent every effort to destroying everything tied to defending Soviet territory. Then, though, Stalin started talking about war with Germany. He launched into it at a secret assembly, but made sure all military academy graduates, every general and every marshal would hear him. Given that situation, what, in fact, would Zhukov, Meretskov and Beria do? On the borders they would probably at least start sowing mines, stringing barbed wire, mining bridges? No! Quite the opposite, actually. "In early May 1941, after Stalin had addressed the reception for military academy graduates, all barrier-building and mine-laying was curtailed even more" (Starinov, p. 186).

If we do not believe Soviet Military Intelligence Colonel Starinov and his truly superb book, we can turn to German archives and find the same

thing there: German intelligence in all likelihood never got its hands on the full text of Stalin's speech, but felt, judging from a wealth of direct and indirect indications, that in his May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941 address he had spoken about war with Germany. In May and June 1941, it also observed the removal of Soviet mine fields and other barriers.

Pulling up border barriers is an indispensable last-minute step in priming for war – not the defensive kind, of course...

#### 4

May 1941 marked an abrupt about-face in Soviet propaganda. Until then, communist papers had been raving over the war, cheering on Germany's elimination of more and more states, governments, armies and political parties. The Soviet leadership was simply in raptures: "Modern war in all its terrible beauty!" ("Pravda," August 19, 1940).

Here is another sample, portraying Europe in the throes of war: "a dumping-ground for corpses, a pornographic spectacle, with jackals tearing one another apart" ("Pravda," December 25, 1939). The very same page featured a friendly telegram from Stalin to Hitler. Communists try to sell us that 25 December telegram as "proof" of the notion that Stalin believed Hitler, wanted friendship with him: "To the Head of State of Germany Herr Adolf Hitler" it reads. Ah, but...right below Stalin's message of friendship you have "jackals tearing one another apart." That, after all, applies to Hitler, too! What *other* jackals are ripping one another to shreds on the dumping-ground for corpses that is Europe?

And then, suddenly, everything changed.

Tune in to the tenor of "Pravda" the day after Stalin's secret speech: "Raging just beyond the borders of our Motherland is the conflagration of a Second Imperialist War. The full weight of its woes is pressing down on the shoulders of the toiling masses. People everywhere want no part of war. Their gaze is fixed on the land of socialism, reaping the fruits of peaceful labor. They rightly see the armed forces of our Motherland – the Red Army and our Navy – as the tried and true bulwark for peace... Given the current complex international situation you have to be prepared for all kinds of surprises..." ("Pravda," May 6, 1941 editorial).

Heady stuff! First, with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Stalin opens the sluice-gates to World War II and delights in watching "jackals tearing one another apart." Now, though, he also recalls people everywhere longing for peace, their hopeful eyes turned towards the Red Army!

Stalin himself in March 1939 had accused Great Britain and France of wanting to plunge Europe into war while staying on the sidelines, then “stepping in with fresh forces, stepping in, of course, ‘in the interests of peace’ to dictate their terms to the exhausted warring parties” (Stalin, March 10, 1939 Report).

What the “imperialists” were up to back then, I do not know. Present at the signing of the pact that opened the doors to war, though, there was just one leader: Stalin. When the pact was signed about when to start the war, not a single Japanese, American, British or French leader was on hand. Even the German Chancellor was absent, even he. Stalin, though, *was* there. Stalin, of all people, for some time then watched the war from the sidelines...and now becomes the very man to start talking up the Red Army as the force capable of putting an end to bloodshed!

Only a short time earlier, on September 17, 1939, the Red Army had suddenly struck Poland. The following day Soviet government radio announced why: “Poland has become a convenient staging-area for all kinds of accidents and surprises that might threaten the USSR... The Soviet Government can no longer remain neutral in the face of these facts... In view of this situation the Soviet Government has notified Red Army General Headquarters to order troops to cross the border and place the lives and property of the population under their protection” (“Pravda,” September 18, 1939).

Right there, it would be high time to ask, “Who on earth turned Poland into ‘a convenient staging-area for all kinds of accidents’”? That, though, is the subject of a book to come.

Molotov’s (and Stalin’s) cynicism knows no bounds. Hitler entered Poland “to create more Lebensraum for Germans.” Molotov’s goal, instead, was “to pull the Polish people out of a disastrous war into which unwise leaders plunged it and to give them the chance to settle down to a peaceful life” (ibid.).

Even now, however, Soviet communists still haven’t changed their view on the nature of what happened back then. The year 1970 saw publication of an official anthology of documents on the history of Soviet border troops (“Border Troops of the USSR. 1939 to June 1941). Document № 192, for instance, claims steps taken by the USSR in September 1939 were designed to “help the Polish people get out of the war.”

The Soviet Union was always and everywhere “unselfishly” helping people find the path to peace. On April 13, 1941, for example, Molotov signs a neutrality pact with Japan “to further peaceful and friendly relations as well as mutual respect for territorial integrity and inviolability...in the event one of the Parties to the pact is the target of military operations from one or several third powers, the other Party to the pact shall observe neutrality throughout the entire conflict.”

When Stalin was on the verge of disaster, Japan kept its word. When Japan, however, finds itself in the same dire straits, the Red Army strikes, suddenly and with devastating force. The Soviet Government follows up with this announcement: “This policy is the only instrument capable of bringing closer the advent of peace, freeing the people involved from further sacrifice and suffering, while letting the Japanese people put danger and destruction behind them...” (Soviet Government statement, 8 August 1945). It must be pointed out that, officially, the statement was issued on August 8<sup>th</sup> and Soviet troops attacked on the 9<sup>th</sup>. In actual fact, the attack came first, Far Eastern local time, while the statement was released in Moscow a few hours later, Moscow time.

Military-speak calls it “preparations for and launching of a sudden first strike, together with the opening of a new strategic front” (General Ivanov, “Opening Phase of the War,” p. 281).

Political jargon has it “a just and humane act of the USSR” (Colonel Savin, JMH, 1985, № 8, p. 56).

After the first crushing blow, Marshal of the Soviet Union Malinovsky addressed his troops: “The Soviet people cannot live and work in peace and quiet, while Japanese militarists are saber-rattling at our Far Eastern borders, looking for a good opportunity to attack our Motherland” (“Communist,” 1985, № 12, p. 85). Soviet marshals live in constant fear someone may pounce on them. Malinovsky spoke these words on August 10, 1945. Hiroshima no longer exists – and Malinovsky knows it. After Hiroshima, did “Japanese imperialists” really have nothing better to do than to “look for a good opportunity”?

Latter-day Soviet publications (JMH’s 1985 № 8, for example) insist “the USSR’s entry into the war with Japan was in the best interests of the Japanese people, too...” “The USSR was pursuing the goal of sparing people across Asia, including the Japanese people, further sacrifice and suffering...”

In May 1941, the Soviet press suddenly started talking about how people throughout Europe wanted peace and were looking with hopeful eyes at the Red Army. The tenor and the text were identical to what was said prior to every communist “liberation.”

## 5

Late 1938 marked the end to the Great Purge in the Soviet Union. A new phase began: a new day, new goals, new slogans. In March 1939, Stalin first started saying people needed to get ready for “surprises” of some sort – not at home, but abroad. In August 1939, Stalin serves up the first “surprise,” enough to make people gasp not just throughout the Soviet Union, but ‘round the world: the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In short order German, then, on their heels, Soviet troops, too, enter Poland. The official Soviet line: “Poland has become a staging-area for all sorts of surprises.” Well now, that threat is disposed of by virtue of unselfish action taken by the Soviet Government, the Red Army and the NKVD. Stalin, however, calls for readiness to deal with “new surprises,” since the “international situation is getting more and more entangled.”

You would think, how simple can it get: Given a peace treaty with Germany, what on earth makes the situation so entangled? Stalin, though, insistently keeps warning people surface simplicity can be deceiving, to be prepared for surprises, for abrupt switches and changes of some sort.

May 1941 was the month when “be prepared for surprises” suddenly became a shrill alarm sounded nationwide. On May 1<sup>st</sup> already, it leapt out at readers from the front page of “Pravda,” to be echoed a thousand-fold by all other papers, hundreds of thousands of commissars, political operatives and propagandists, all interpreting Stalin’s slogan for the masses. The appeal to “be prepared for surprises” rang out in People’s Commissar for Defense Order № 191, promulgated at the level of “every company, Army, Air Force and Navy squadron as well as aboard all ships.”

Maybe Stalin is warning civilians and the military around the country about the possibility of sudden German attack? Of course not. For Stalin himself, the German attack was a complete surprise. He could hardly be warning of surprises he himself had not anticipated!

On June 22, 1941, all talk of surprises stopped: That slogan was never to be repeated. Latter-day Soviet publications, in fact, feature no reminders whatsoever of the “get ready for surprises” slogan. And yet, it

had been one of *the* most resounding of Soviet propaganda themes during the “pre-war period.”

You might first think it surprising Stalin himself never again reminded people of his own slogan. He could, after all, at some point have said: Hitler suddenly attacked, but I had, in fact, warned we needed to be ready for surprises! That, though, Stalin never did say. Marshal Timoshenko might at some point after the War have reminded people: “Remember Order № 191? Even in that order I warned you!” Latter-day Soviet historians and Party bureaucrats (without mentioning Stalin and Timoshenko by name) could have explained: “See what a wise Party we have here! Hardly a day went by without our flagship paper featuring an appeal to be ready for surprises!” And yet, neither Stalin nor Timoshenko nor anyone else called to mind the alarm bells rung in May and June of 1941. Why *didn't* they? The reason, of course, was that “get ready for surprises” was understood to refer not to a German invasion, but rather to something like its inverse. Heeding that call to arms, Chekists were not sowing mines on the borders, but pulling them, aware that very step *meant* getting ready for The Surprise of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Soviet press, calling on the military and civilians alike to be prepared for surprises, never even once tied that appeal to the possibility of foreign invasion, of fighting a defensive war on its own territory.

To get an idea of what the slogan really meant you have to look at “Pravda”'s front page on May 1, 1941. That very page set the tone for a whole chorus, many voices strong and dutifully chiming in with the “Pravda” solo.

Well, here it is: “Pravda” edition 120 (8528), dated May 1, 1941. The lead page, full of windy rhetoric, carried just two quotations – both from Stalin.

The first, in fact, keynotes the editorial: “What has been achieved in the USSR can be achieved in other countries as well” (Stalin).

The second is in the People’s Commissar for Defense order about preparedness for surprises and the “tricks” of our foreign enemies (also Stalin).

The rest of the front page deals with the savage war that has engulfed Europe, the sufferings of the toiling masses, their yearning for peace and the hopes they are pinning on the Red Army. Against that backdrop, the second quote builds on the first.

A great deal comes through that first page about Soviet efforts to keep the peace. The illustration it uses of a neighbor with whom relations have at last been normalized is that of Japan (its time, for now, still has not come). From the list of good friends, by contrast, Germany has already vanished.

Naturally, according to “Pravda,” the enemy is shrewd and underhanded. Foil his schemes we will. That, however, is not to say we will defend our own territory, but rather that we will liberate people across Europe from the scourges of war and massive bloodshed.

Now, anticipating such surprises, five days into this high-volume campaign waged through all Soviet papers Stalin took the post of Head of Government and delivered the secret address naming Germany as Enemy Number One.

In May 1941 Stalin took on responsibilities of state in anticipation of “surprises.” In June, Hitler attacked – but that was a “surprise” that forced Stalin to work hard and fast to run from precisely those responsibilities.

Crystal-clear is this: Stalin had been getting ready – not for a German invasion, but for “surprises” of the opposite kind.

## Chapter 20. WORDS – AND DEEDS

Words do not always match deeds.

*V. Molotov  
from a conversation with  
Hitler, November 13, 1940*

### 1

From the recollections of Soviet Admiral Kuznetsov we know that once Zhukov had become Chief of the General Staff “a very important directive was prepared, targeting Germany for military district and fleet commanders as the most likely enemy in a future war” (“On the Eve,” p. 313).

For two months the directive lay at General Staff, then, on May 6, 1941, it was transmitted for action to the headquarters of military districts on the border. From many indications we know those command centers got it the same day. One such source, for instance, is Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan. Soviet marshals often talk about this top-secret directive – though they never quote it. Over more than half a century only part of a single sentence has leaked out: “..be prepared on a signal from General Headquarters to launch lightning strikes to rout the enemy, move military operations to his territory and seize key objectives” (Anfilov, “Immortal Feat,” p. 171).

If that directive contained even one word about defense, marshals and communist historians would be quick to cite it. The problem: None of the rest of the text of the May 5<sup>th</sup> directive is at all suitable for quotation. It remains top secret even more than half a century after the end of the War.

Soviet censorship has let just one sentence pass. Even all by itself, though, it tears to shreds the veil so carefully woven around this document. The point: In a war of *defense*, a soldier joins battle, no orders needed. For centuries, Russian soldiers had entered action against aggressors without waiting for commands from on high. For them, the enemy fording a border river had signaled the start of war. Russian borders were crossed by enormous armies out for conquest, and from time immemorial those fighting for Russia, as indeed soldiers of any other country, never waited for orders: They took action, knowing the enemy’s stepping over that border meant war. Guard duty by its very nature often forces each soldier to



decide on his own when to use his weapon. It is the soldier's right and duty to kill anyone trying to get to whatever objective he is guarding. Soviet law specifically protects each soldier's right independently to resort to arms – and severely punishes any who failed to shoot when circumstances demanded it.

A soldier on an international border holds a combat position. In a war of defense he needs no orders, no directives.

A war of defense normally starts with such a soldier: After a bone-chilling night he prepares at last to curl up in his greatcoat to doze off, but suddenly, rubbing his eyes, spies enemy troops crossing the river. He rakes them with bursts of fire. The noise of the volleys raises the alarm. The detachment commander wakes up, cursing, still groggy. Realizing what is happening, he sends all the rest of his soldiers racing into the trenches. Gunfire, meanwhile, has already erupted along the entire border. The company commander has appeared and coordinates the fire of his detachments. Other, more senior commanders show up. The fighting starts to get more organized. A report is flashed to regimental headquarters, then up to division HQ...

That is how a war of defense is supposed to start. The top-secret May 5, 1941 directive, by contrast, envisaged millions of Red Army soldiers entering action on a single order from Soviet General Headquarters. A border guard, still half-asleep, can see an enemy on the attack. How, though, can the comrades in the Kremlin possibly know war has broken out?

Unless, of course, they themselves set the date.

A war of *defense* starts with soldiers, then sergeants, then company commanders entering battle. A war of offense reverses the order: The Commander-in-Chief initiates it, followed by the Chief of the General Staff, then front, fleet and army commanders. The rank-and-file are the very last to find out about a war of aggression. Into a war of defense millions of soldiers each go on their own, a war of aggression they all enter as one.

Hitler's soldiery all moved into enemy territory as one, hour by hour, minute by minute. Stalin's had always done the same, whether it was Finland, Mongolia, Bessarabia... It was precisely the way they were supposed to go to war also with Germany.

A directive did go out on May 5<sup>th</sup>. The target date for starting the war, however, remains deeply shrouded in secrecy. Wait for the signal, be

ready at any moment says the directive to Soviet generals. Having sent it out on May 5<sup>th</sup>, Stalin immediately took the post of Head of the Soviet Government, so he could personally give the signal to follow through.

Hitler ordered his troops to act on **his** directive a bit sooner...

## 2

We do not know and, in all likelihood, never will learn the contents of the top-secret May 5, 1941 directive. Clear is, the directive addressed war with Germany. The war was to begin, however, not with a German invasion, but in some other way. If among the various scenarios envisaged there had also been one where Germany starts the war, then on June 22, 1941 Soviet leaders in the Kremlin could simply have picked up the phone, without even encoding their message, or used any other, including the most primitive means to tell border district commanders: “Open your safes, take out the May 5<sup>th</sup> directive and take action in accordance with its text.”

Had the May 5<sup>th</sup> directive contained several different scenarios, including one geared to defense, a border district commander could have been told on the phone just this: “The first nine options strike out, the last, № 10, carry out!” The directive, however, did not feature any defensive scenarios. That is why the May 5<sup>th</sup> directive was never implemented. From the first moment of the German invasion the Soviet directive stopped making any sense, became instantly obsolete – just as surely as did all Soviet super-highway tanks, including even those that had rolled off the assembly lines on June 21, 1941.

Instead of following through on the directive lying in each commander’s safe, from the opening shot of the war Kremlin leaders were forced to improvise. They had to drop the script in the hands of every border district commander. Rather than play by that directive Timoshenko and Malenkov were compelled to spend time writing up a new one. Next, time had to be spent on encoding, transmission, reception and decoding. The directive issued on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, by the way, also reeks of aggression, though it does put some brakes on Soviet troops dying to charge.

## 3

Don’t think the May 5, 1941 top-secret directive just landed in those safes, to rest there until it was time. Not at all: The message it carried was “For action!” Act the border district commanders did, on a massive scale: The directive triggered an epic redeployment of Soviet forces to the borders as well as the removal there of hundreds of miles of barbed-wire barriers

and mines. It meant moving up to the very frontier hundreds of thousands of tons of ammunition, right along with hundreds of thousands more of all sorts of supplies essential to fighting a war for which H-hour was coming, rapidly and inexorably.

On June 15, 1941, it was time for generals at army, corps and division level to learn a bit more about the intentions of top Soviet leadership. That day, the headquarters of five military border districts dispatched combat orders building on the top-secret May 5<sup>th</sup> directive.

The circle of those allowed to know widened to several hundred. The orders disseminated on June 15, 1941 among mid-level Red Army commanders also remain top-secret. Still, there were several such orders, which is why they are cited more often and more extensively. Here you have a line from one of them, by now familiar to historians. It was sent on June 15<sup>th</sup> by Baltic Region Special Military District Headquarters to army and corps commanders district-wide: “We must be ready at any moment to carry out our combat mission.”

On June 13, 1941 TASS reports the Soviet Union is not about to attack Germany and is redeploying troops to the German frontier for maneuvers – yet on June 15<sup>th</sup> Soviet generals in military districts near that frontier get a “for-your-eyes-only” order telling them to be prepared at any moment to seize objectives on foreign territory.

## Chapter 21. LOVE FOR PEACE...WITH SHARK'S TEETH

You have to catch the enemy unawares, pick a time when he has scattered his forces.

*J. Stalin*

### 1

On May 8, 1941, two days after Stalin's "secret" address, TASS broadcasts a Refutation. A month later, on June 13<sup>th</sup>, TASS circulates a very odd report. (Standard practice is to date the latter "June 14<sup>th</sup>" – but Soviet radio actually put it out on June 13, 1941). To grasp the import of the June 13<sup>th</sup> TASS Report we have to parse it carefully, while trying to understand the May 8<sup>th</sup> Refutation.

Here now the Refutation:

"Japanese newspapers are publishing a Domei Tsushin news agency dispatch saying...the Soviet Union is massing military forces on its western borders...a concentration of immense proportions. Passenger traffic has accordingly been halted along the Siberian railway, to allow for redeployment of troops from the Far East to the western frontier. Large-scale force redeployment to the same area is underway also from Central Asia... A military mission headed by Kusnetsov has left Moscow for Teheran. Its aim, the Agency notes, is to have air bases granted to the Soviet Union in central and western parts of Iran. TASS is authorized to state that this suspiciously sensationalist Domei Tshushin report, lifted from an unnamed United Press correspondent, is a product of the delusions of its author...as no 'large-scale concentration of military forces' exists and none is being envisaged. The grain of truth the Domei Tsushin report does embody – and crudely distorts – is that availability of better quarters in Novosibirsk has indeed prompted redeployment from around Irkutsk of a single rifle division. Everything else in the Domei Tsushin dispatch is pure fantasy."

Now, though, let's see who actually *was* telling the truth: Domei Tsushin and United Press or TASS.

Domei Tsushin talks about a Soviet mission to Iran, TASS issues a denial. Three months later, Soviet troops entered Iran and really did build air bases for themselves (and not just air bases, but a whole lot else). Your

guess is as good as mine as to which particular Kuznetsov was involved: The number of Kuznetsovs we have falls just a little short of our Ivanovs – not that that’s the point here. What matters is the invasion did take place. Japanese newspapers, drawing on American sources, accurately predicted what would happen. From that perspective it is already apparent the TASS denial is a lie.

Domei Tsushin: “a concentration of immense proportions.” True. Stalin massed on the German frontier, among other things, twenty mechanized and five airborne-assault corps. Who else, before or after, in the history of all civilizations, ever amassed purely offensive forces in such numbers against a single foe?

TASS talks about a single rifle division “from Irkutsk to Novosibirsk.” Let’s sound out other witnesses: Lieutenant-General Shelakhov (then a Major-General in charge of 1<sup>st</sup> Order of the Red Banner Army on the Far Eastern Front) tells us, “In accordance with an April 16, 1941 People’s Commissar of Defense order 18<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> rifle corps command components were reassigned from the Far Eastern Front to the west, along with 21<sup>st</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> rifle divisions, 211<sup>th</sup> and 212<sup>th</sup> airborne-assault brigades and a number of special-forces units” (JMH, 1969, № 3, p. 56). Redeployment of airborne-assault troops is a sure sign preparations are underway for an offensive. The redeployment of airborne-assault brigades to supplement the five airborne-assault corps already set up in the western areas of the country testifies to priming for monster offensive operations never before recorded in history and, Lord willing, never to be staged in times yet to come. TASS’s mendacious “refutation,” covering up the redeployment of forces, including even airborne-assault troops, attests to the absolute secrecy that cloaked preparations for the offensive operation and was meant to make it an utter surprise for the enemy. Schemes of the sort were a Zhukov trademark. Incidentally, 212<sup>th</sup> Airborne-Assault Brigade was a Zhukov favorite. In August 1939, it was part of his personal reserve, together with an NKVD Special Forces battalion, and was used for a devastating surprise attack on Japanese forces. The Brigade was used again to mop up in the rear of Japan’s 6<sup>th</sup> Army.

Now Zhukov is clandestinely transferring this brigade, the Red Army’s best, from the Far East to integrate it into 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne-Assault Corps on the Romanian border. Hitler let neither the brigade nor any other part of 3<sup>rd</sup> (or, for that matter, any other) Corps carry out its primary

mission. Once “Barbarossa” had begun to roll, 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne-Assault Corps – of no use in a war of defense – was reconfigured into 87<sup>th</sup> Rifle (later 13<sup>th</sup> Guard) Division and as such did achieve distinction in defensive fighting. If Stalin was getting ready for defense, why didn’t he from the start assemble regular rifle divisions instead of airborne-assault brigades and corps?

The secret relocation of Far Eastern troops we can trace from many sources. Marshals of the Soviet Union Zhukov and Bagramyan confirm the May 25, 1941 arrival in Kiev Special Military District of 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Corps, formerly stationed in the Far East. That tells you the Corps was somewhere along the trans-Siberian mainline at the very time the “refutation” was put out. Colonel-General Lyudnikov tells us that once he had deployed, fully mobilized and taken command of 200<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, he was ordered to integrate with 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Corps. Subsequently, the Corps (along with all others just like it) headed straight for the German frontier. Hitler did not let 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Corps finish the trip.

Anyone interested in tracking the movement of the five corps as well as the divisions and brigades secretly redeployed from the Far East can turn to the memoirs of a host of Soviet generals and marshals, testimony from captured Soviet veterans of Far East service whom June 22<sup>nd</sup> found along the German and Romanian borders, German intelligence dispatches and multiple other sources.

## 2

TASS talks about a single rifle division being relocated from Irkutsk to Novosibirsk “to better living-quarters.” For many years now I have been searching in vain for any trace of that mystery division. I ask anyone who calls TASS reports stupid and naïve as well as all those who don’t buy into that touching naiveté to help me out, to dig up even the sparest mention of a division unloaded in Novosibirsk in the spring of 1941.

Instead of any such information I am coming up with tons of other data: In Irkutsk and Novosibirsk, Chita and Ulan-Ude, Blagoveshchensk and Spassk, Iman and Barabash, Khabarovsk and Voroshilov...all divisions did was *load*. *Unloading* for them came not a few hundred miles away in some neighboring city – but instead on the western frontier. There even is a book, published, of all places, in Irkutsk (Trans-Baikal Military District), that talks about a peculiar boom in divisions being shipped out – every last

one bound for the western border. In April, for instance, Colonel Mishulin's 57<sup>th</sup> Tank Division is packed up, headed he doesn't know where.

57<sup>th</sup> Tank Division lands in Kiev Special Military District and is ordered to start unloading in the Shepetovka area.

Meanwhile, the tide of troops rolling down the Trans-Siberian mainline (and all other major arteries) is rising. On May 25, 1941, we know, Far East corps start pouring into Ukraine (illustration: 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Corps in the Zhitomir sector). The next day, the Urals Military District commander is ordered to redeploy two rifle divisions to the Baltics (Major-General Grylev and Professor Khvostov, "Communist," 1968, № 12, p. 67). That very same day, Trans-Baikal Military District and Far Eastern Front are told to get ready to dispatch to the west another nine – including three tank – divisions (*ibid.*). At the same time, the Trans-Siberian Railway is already seeing 16<sup>th</sup> Army stepping aboard, with 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Armies about to follow suit.

### 3

The cardinal lie in the TASS "refutation" doesn't even concern "living-quarters." "No large-scale concentration of combat forces exists and none is being envisaged": *That* is the lie of lies. First, that concentration *did* exist: The German invasion confirmed the Soviets had massed forces to a degree topping even the boldest predictions. Second, while all those brigades and corps were being redeployed, plans already called for even more massive a railway operation, truly unprecedented in world history: the redeployment of the Red Army's Second Strategic Echelon.

The directive to start relocating Second Strategic Echelon came down on May 13<sup>th</sup>. The TASS "refutation," in fact, was put out precisely with a view to that impending redeployment. Exactly one month later, Second Strategic Echelon did begin moving out – and TASS promptly reissued its Report claiming nothing is going on in the Soviet Union more serious than routine transfers of reservists headed for maneuvers.

Let TASS declaim about garden-variety reservists. We'll tune in to other first-hand accounts.

Major-General Lobachov then was a member of 16<sup>th</sup> Army's combat operations council. Here he is, talking about May 26, 1941: "The Chief of Staff told us an important encoded message had come down from Moscow concerning 16<sup>th</sup> Army... The order from Moscow called for relocating 16<sup>th</sup>

Army. Lukin had to report forthwith to General Headquarters for instructions, Colonel Shalin and I were to organize the dispatching of the troop trains.

- Where to?" - I asked Kurochkin.

- Westbound. -

We consulted and decided tankers would be sent on their way first, followed by 152<sup>nd</sup> Division and the rest of our forces, with Army HQ and attached units bringing up the rear.

- Send the trains out at night. No one is to know our Army is leaving. - the commander warned...

With the trains carrying our tanks about to pull out, Kurochkin and Zimin arrived, called a meeting of senior 5<sup>th</sup> Corps officers and said they hoped General Alekseyenko and all his commanders would do their Trans-Baikal predecessors proud...

Hearing the warm send-off, everybody thought it sure sounded as though we soon would be talking not about gearing up for combat, but about real action" ("Tough Row To Hoe," p. 123).

General Lobachov goes on to recount astonishing things. Army Commander General Lukin, Lobachov himself and 16<sup>th</sup> Army Chief of Staff Colonel Shalin (future Soviet Military Intelligence Commander – *V.S.*) know 16<sup>th</sup> is being redeployed westward, but not exactly where. All other 16<sup>th</sup> Army generals are "secretly" told the Army is bound for the Iranian border, lower-ranking commanders are advised the relocation involves maneuvers, commanders' wives hear the Army is headed for camp.

In a war of defense at least generals don't need to be hoodwinked as to where their army is supposed to end up operating. In 16<sup>th</sup> Army's case, though, the three top commanders know about the western borders, whereas all other generals get deliberately deceitful talk about Iran.

Simultaneously, the very same was happening in the German Army, where a very credible-sounding lie about operation "Sea Lion" was being spread. Deliberate deception of the troops about the thrust of operations always is a sure sign a surprise attack is in the works. To hide it from the enemy, you have to hide it even from your own forces. It's the way aggressors have always done it. Hitler did. So did Stalin.

Interesting, but in April 1941 everybody understands 16<sup>th</sup> Army, at the end of the day, is headed for war. Here is Lobachov's wife asking him straight-out:



- Going off to war, are you? -
- Where'd you get *that* from? -
- Come now.. Think I don't read the papers, or what? -

Here you have a very thought-provoking psychological dimension that bears a second look. I have polled hundreds of people of that generation: Every single one of them could feel war coming on. I tell them I'm surprised: Where, pray tell, did you all get those premonitions from? The unanimous answer: The papers, of course!

People like us, in this day and age, rarely ever find in the yellowed pages from those years any direct signals pointing to imminent and inevitable war. Those who lived through that era, by contrast, reading between the lines, knew war was bound to come, was staring them in the face: Living in Siberia, they had no way of knowing about Hitler's preparations. Could it be Soviet preparations let them feel war was inevitable?

We have let ourselves get sidetracked, though. Let's get back to General Lobachov's narration. He reminisces about the sheer incredible level of secrecy that shrouded the redeployment of his army: Troop trains were sent on their way at night only; trains stopped at neither major nor mid-sized stations; 16<sup>th</sup> Army headquarters was transferred in freight cars, with all doors and windows sealed; at minor stations where the trains did stop no one was allowed to step off the cars. Back then, passenger trains took over 11 days to cover the Trans-Siberian route, freight trains were even slower. Now, you can transport officers and men in totally sealed cars. Here, though, we are talking about an army headquarters. That level of secrecy was extraordinary even by Soviet standards. In 1945, the flow of troops along the Trans-Siberian mainline was in the opposite direction, bound for a sudden assault on Japanese forces in Manchuria and China. To mask the operation generals traveled in uniforms sporting officer's insignia far less impressive than what they had earned, yet they all did travel in passenger cars. In 1941, by contrast, generals were trundled off by freight car. Why?

## Chapter 22. ONE MORE TIME...THAT TASS STATEMENT

...Stalin was not one to trumpet his intentions.”

*Robert Conquest*

### 1

On June 13, 1941 Moscow Radio broadcast a not exactly routine TASS Statement: It asserted “Germany is abiding by the terms of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact as unswervingly as the Soviet Union..” and added that “these rumors (i.e., about preparations underway for a German invasion of the USSR – *V.S.*) are clumsy propaganda concocted by forces hostile to the USSR and Germany, keen on unleashing war on a still wider scale..” The next day, the leading Soviet papers carried the Statement. Another week later, Germany did attack the USSR.

Who the actual author of the TASS Statement was, everyone knows. Generals at Soviet headquarters, camp inmates and Western experts all recognized Stalin’s signature style.

Worth at least a moment’s reflection is that while Stalin purged TASS after the War, the charges brought against its leadership did not include having spread a statement that might well have been called “obvious proof” of what “wreckers” were wont to do. Stalin could have pinned blame for broadcasting it on any member of the Politburo (at any time of his choosing). That, however, he also did not do, thus going down in history as himself taking full personal responsibility.

The Soviet press as well as its foreign counterparts spilled a great deal of ink on that TASS Statement. Everyone who took up the topic ridiculed Stalin. The Statement is sometimes seen as all but proving his short-sightedness. All that notwithstanding, the June 13, 1941 TASS Statement contains much more that is enigmatic and obscure than it does anything laughable. Clear is only who wrote it. All else is mystery.

For Stalin, the TASS Statement was simply and totally out of character.

Someone who knew Stalin better than did anybody else – his personal secretary Boris Bazhanov – characterized him as “secretive and cunning in the extreme,” as a man “with a highly developed gift for holding his tongue, making him unique in a country where everyone talked too much.”

Here you have still other personality sketches: “He was dead set against turgid talk, a loose tongue: Don’t say what’s on your mind..” (A. Avtorkhanov).

“For Stalin, at critical moments, action trumped talk” (*A. Antonov-Ovseyenko*).

Robert Conquest, a towering figure among those who have researched the Stalin era, singles out Stalin’s taciturn and secretive nature as among the key features of his personality: “supremely self-contained and secretive,” “we are still trying to peer through the gloom of Stalin’s extraordinary secretiveness” and “Stalin never talked about what was on his mind, even regarding political goals.”

The ability to remain silent, as Dale Carnegie succinctly put it, you run into far more rarely among people than any other talents. In that sense Stalin was a genius: He did have that ability. That, in fact, was not only his stand-out character trait, but also armed him superbly for battle. His silence lulled his adversaries: The blows he struck always came as a complete surprise, giving foes no chance to mount a defense.

Why, then, does Stalin open up, making sure, in fact, all will hear him? Where has his secretiveness gone? His cunning? What has happened to action trumping words? If Stalin has some notions as to the turn events will take, why not discuss them within the tight-knit circle of his comrades-in-arms? Why not, in the final analysis, just keep quiet some more? Who is Stalin’s target audience? The Red Army? Who on earth sends his army important messages (addressing issues of war and peace, life and death) via nation-wide radio and the major papers? The Army, the Navy, the secret police, the concentration camps, industry, transportation, agriculture and people of greater or lesser rank all are part of one and the same state-run system. All of them bow not to reports they read in the papers, but rather to their bosses who, in turn, get their orders through special (often secret) channels from their own superiors.

Stalin’s empire was centralized as no other. Especially after the Great Purge, the state-run management machinery was humming so well, any order was immediately passed from the highest level down to the absolutely lowest on the totem pole for execution to the letter and without delay. Sweeping operations such as the arrest and elimination of Yezhov supporters as well as the virtual replacement of the entire top echelon of the secret police were carried out so fast and so well, not only did no one

outside the inner circle manage to decode the signal sparking the operation, but no one knew even when and how Stalin gave the nod for such an enormous undertaking.

If in June 1941 Stalin had any kind of brainstorm that had to be made known to millions of minions, why not use honed-to-perfection management machinery ready to pass on any command without delay or distortion? If the message had involved a serious issue, all secret channels would have repeated every single word.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky tells us public release of the statement was “followed by no fundamentally new instructions regarding the Armed Forces nor any revision of decisions already adopted” (“Life-long Cause,” p. 120). Further on, the Marshal says nothing changed in the way the General Staff did its job and “nothing was supposed to change.”

Via military channels, the Statement did more than merely fail to win ratification. Quite the opposite: We have documented proof that simultaneous with the TASS Statement an order came down to the forces in military districts – for instance, in Baltic Area Special Military District – in tenor and spirit directly contradicting that TASS Statement (USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, Collection 344, Catalogue 2459, Dossier 11, Page 31)

What was published in military newspapers (especially those not available to outsiders) also flatly contradicted the contents of the TASS Statement. (For an illustration, turn to Vice-Admiral Azarov, “Odessa Under Siege,” p. 16.)

The TASS Statement not only does not square in any way with Stalin’s character, but flies in the face of the core concept behind all of communist mythology. Take any communist tyrant (but particularly Stalin) and you will find him spending a lifetime repeating one and the same simple, easy-to-grasp dictum: “The enemy never sleeps.” That magic rallying cry lets you explain anything from meatless butcher shops to “liberation crusades” to censorship, torture, mass purges, closed borders... you name it. “The enemy never sleeps” and “Enemies are all around us” are more than ideological dicta: They are ultra-sharp Party weapons, used to destroy any and all opposition, build and buttress all communist dictatorships... Yet, lo and behold, once and only once in the history of all communist regimes, the head of the most powerful of all these regimes declares for all the world to hear that the threat of aggression is non-existent.

Let's please *not* rate that TASS Statement dumb, ridiculous or naïve. Let's see it as bizarre, inscrutable, unfathomable. Let's take a stab at understanding what it does mean.

## 2

June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941 is one of *the* most important dates in Soviet history, unquestionably dwarfing June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941. Soviet generals, admirals and marshals describe it in far greater detail than June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Here now a perfectly typical portrayal:

Lieutenant-General Biryukov (then Major-General, Commander of 186<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 62<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Corps, Urals Military District): “June 13, 1941 we received from military district headquarters a directive of special importance, in accordance with which the division was to move to a ‘new camp.’ Where the new quarters would be was not divulged even to me, as division commander. In fact, only while passing through Moscow did I learn our division was to be massed in the forests west of Idritsa” (JMH, 1962, № 4, p. 80).

Let's remind the reader that in peacetime a division has “secret,” sometimes “top-secret” documents. A document of “special importance” can show up at division level only in wartime and only under exceptional circumstances, in the lead-up to an extremely important operation. Over the four years of war, many Soviet divisions never even once received a document of that highest of all levels of secrecy. Let's also take note of the quotes General Biryukov puts around “new camp.”

In Urals Military District 186<sup>th</sup> Division was not the only one to get such an order. ALL district divisions did.

The official military district history (“Red Banner Order Urals,” p. 104) pinpoints this date: “First to load was 112<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. On the morning of June 13<sup>th</sup> the troop train got underway from a small railway station... Others followed. Then began the send-off for units of 98<sup>th</sup>, 153<sup>rd</sup> and 166<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions.” Getting ready to ship out were 170<sup>th</sup> and 174<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions, artillery, sapper, anti-aircraft and other units. To command the Urals divisions two corps were set up, in turn subject to the headquarters of newly created 22<sup>nd</sup> Army (with Lieutenant-General Yershakov in charge).

Under cover of the soothing TASS Statement this entire behemoth of headquarters and troops secretly moved into the Byelorussian woods.

22<sup>nd</sup> Army was not alone.

General Shtemyenko: “Before the War actually began and in utmost secrecy additional forces were massed in border military districts. From deep inside the country five armies were redeployed westward” (“General Staff during the War Years,” p. 26).

General Ivanov adds: “Simultaneous with this restationing another three armies were being readied (“Opening Phase of the War,” p. 211).

The question arises: Why didn’t all eight armies start moving at the same time? The answer is simple: March, April and May had seen Soviet troops in epic numbers secretly deployed westward. The country’s entire railway grid had been pulled into that colossal clandestine operation. It was completed on time, but tens of thousands of wagons had to backtrack thousands of miles. Result: On June 13<sup>th</sup>, when yet another enormous secret troop redeployment got underway, all eight armies just could not come up with enough wagons.

The scale of the preceding redeployment is almost beyond imagining. Exact figures we don’t have. Here, though, a few fragments of evidence:

Former Deputy People’s Commissar for State Financial Auditing Kovalyov: “From May through early June the USSR transport system had to transship some 800,000 reservists... These transport operations had to be conducted under cover...” (“Transport During the Great Patriotic War,” p. 41).

Colonel-General Lyudnikov: “In May... an air-borne corps was massed in the Zhitomir area and forests to the southwest” (JMH, 1966, № 9, p. 66).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan describes May in Kiev Special Military District: “May 25<sup>th</sup> our forces welcomed the command of 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division from the Far East... During the latter half of May an order came down from General Staff directing us to take in from North Caucasus Military District the command of 34<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, four 12-thousand-strong divisions and one mountain ranger division... In short order we had to find room for virtually an entire army... At the end of May one after another troop train started pulling into the district. Ops turned into something like a dispatch center flooded by information about arriving troops” (JMH, 1967, № 1, p. 62).

Such was the situation in May. Against precisely that backdrop, June 13<sup>th</sup> launched yet another unprecedented secret regrouping of forces meant to form the Red Army’s Second Strategic Echelon.

In my earlier publications on this issue I put the numerical strength of Second Strategic Echelon at 69 tank, motorized and rifle divisions, not counting dozens of stand-alone regiments and hundreds of separate battalions. Further research has shown I was wrong. I now have data for 77 divisions and a large number of regiments and battalions that began secretly to head west under cover of the TASS Statement.

Here you have one of dozens of relevant accounts:

Artillery Lieutenant-General (then Colonel) Plaskov: “53<sup>rd</sup> Division, where I commanded the artillery, was stationed on the Volga. Senior command personnel were called into our 63<sup>rd</sup> Corps headquarters. Military District Commander Gerasimyenko came to the staff meeting. The arrival of top brass made us a bit edgy: Meant something major was up. Corps Commander Petrovsky, normally calm and unflappable, became noticeably agitated.

“Comrades,” said he, “we’ve been ordered to get the corps fully mobilized. Our units will have to be geared up to wartime strength, using our iron reserves. We’ll have to call in immediately all assigned personnel not yet drafted. The schedule for loading, boarding and dispatching troop trains you’ll get from Corps Chief of Staff Major-General Bensky.”

The meeting was quite short. Everything was clear. Though General Gerasimyenko hinted we were moving out on maneuvers, everyone understood this was far more serious business. Not once had we ever gone on maneuvers with our full complement of live ordnance. We hadn’t called in reservists, either” (“With Canons Thundering” p. 125).

Now we’ll take a look at what was happening within First Strategic Echelon right while Soviet radio was putting out such seemingly naïve statements:

“On June 14<sup>th</sup> the Odessa Military District Military Council was ordered to create an army command in Tiraspol” (JMH, 1978, № 4, p. 86). The subject: 9<sup>th</sup> Army. “On June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Baltics Area Special Military District Military Council signed on to a plan for redeploying a number of divisions and separate regiments into a belt along the border” (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, p. 517).

“Simultaneous with moving forces forward from deep within country an undercover regrouping of formations began within the military districts near the border. In the guise of shifting the location of summer encampments units were pulled closer to the frontier... Most

redeployments took place at night..." (General Ivanov, "Opening Phase of the War," p. 211).

Here now a few absolutely typical accounts of those days:

Major-General Iovlyev (then commanding 64<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 44<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 13<sup>th</sup> Army): "On June 15<sup>th</sup> 1941 Western Special Military District Commander Army General Pavlov directed divisions in our Corps to prepare for full-strength redeployment... The destination we were not told..." (JMH, 1960, № 9, p. 56).

Colonel-General Sandalov (then Colonel, Chief of Staff of 4<sup>th</sup> Army, Western Special Military District): "On 4<sup>th</sup> Army's southern flank a new division appeared – 75<sup>th</sup> Rifle. It had pulled up out of Mozyr and in the woods set up a carefully camouflaged tent city" ("Overcome," p. 71).

The official history of Kiev Military District: "On June 14<sup>th</sup>, under the guise of maneuvers, Major-General Alyabushev's 87<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division was moved up to the international frontier" (Red Banner Order Kiev, History of the Red Banner Order Kiev Military District, 1919-1972, p. 162). Masking the moving of troops up to the border as maneuvers was no localized maverick method.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov (then a four-star general, Chief of the General Staff): "People's Commissar of Defense Timoshenko recommended to military district troop commanders to have formations conduct tactical maneuvers towards the international frontier, to pull forces closer to areas designated for covering deployment. The districts carried out that recommendation, albeit with one major qualification: A significant part of the artillery stayed put" ("Recollections and Reflections," p. 242).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Rokossovsky (then Major-General, commanding 9<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps) clarifies the simple rationale behind the move of the troops up to the border minus the artillery: "The order to send the artillery towards the borders had been given somewhat earlier ("A Soldier's Duty," p. 8).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Meretskov (then four-star general and Deputy People's Commissar of Defense): "On my order the mechanized corps conducted maneuvers. In the context of training the corps was moved into the border area and indeed left there. I then told Zakharov Major-General Malinovsky's corps was in the district and was also to be moved out into the border area during the maneuvers" ("In the Service of the Nation," p. 204).



Marshal of the Soviet Union Malinovsky (then Major-General, commanding 48<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, Odessa Military District) confirms the order was carried out: “Already on June 7<sup>th</sup> the Corps pulled out of the Kirovograd area into Beltsy and was in place as of June 14<sup>th</sup>. That repositioning was masked as major maneuvers” (JMH, 1961, № 6, p. 6).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov (then Major-General, Chief of Staff of Odessa Military District): “On June 15<sup>th</sup>, under the guise of maneuvers, the command of 48<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps as well as of 74<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions was concentrated in the forests a few miles east of the town of Beltsy” (“Historical Issues,” 1970, № 5, p. 45). The Marshal notes that corps command, corps units as well as 74<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division were put on combat alert. He says the “maneuvers” then also involved 16<sup>th</sup> Tank Division.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan (then Colonel, Chief of Operations, Kiev Military District): “We had to prepare all operational documentation linked to moving five rifle and four mechanized corps from permanent base areas forward into the border zone” (“Thus the War Began,” p. 64). “On June 15<sup>th</sup>, we received the order to begin...moving the five rifle corps towards the border... They took along all requisites for combat operations. To cover the move it was carried out only at night” (ibid., p. 77).

Colonel-General Lyudnikov (then Colonel, commanding 200<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 31<sup>st</sup> Rifle Corps) was among those carrying out the order.

“The district order that came down to Division Headquarters on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1941 directed us to move out...at full strength...and mass in the woods some 6-9 miles to the northeast of the border town of Kovel. The move was to be made in secrecy, at night only and in wooded areas (“Through the Eye of the Storm,” p. 24).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Moskalyenko (then Major-General, artillery, commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Antitank Brigade): “Troop trains kept arriving, bringing men and combat materiel” (“In the Southwestern Sector: Recollections of an Army Commander,” p. 19).

Marshal of the Soviet Union Yeremyenko (then Lieutenant-General, commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Army): “On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters was ordered to relocate command of Western Military District from Mogilev to Novogrudok” (“When the War Began,” p. 109).

Shifted towards the international frontier were not just armies, corps and divisions. We find hundreds of accounts attesting to the redeployment also of far smaller units. One illustration:

Lieutenant-General Zotov (then Major-General and Chief, Corps of Engineers, Northwestern Front): “Sapper battalions were brought to full wartime readiness... Ten battalions, fresh from the Far East, were fully armed” (“On the Northwestern Front [1941-1943], Collected Essays of Combat Veterans, p. 172).

My collections feature not only the recollections of generals and marshals. Lower-ranking officers cover the same topics.

Colonel Khvaley (then Deputy Commander, 202<sup>nd</sup> Motorized Division, 12<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, 8<sup>th</sup> Army): “During the night of June 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 1941 our division moved out on field maneuvers” (“On the Northwestern Front [1941-1942],” p. 310). In the same place, the Colonel tells us “thus it turned out” Division units ended up right past border posts, i.e., in the immediate vicinity of the international frontier.

A matter of public record is a small fragment of the field order Colonel (later, four-star general) Chernyakhovsky, tank division commander in the same 12<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, received that same June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1941: “...Upon receipt of this order 28<sup>th</sup> Tank Division Commander Colonel Chernyakhovsky is to bring to combat readiness all units in accordance with plans to initiate a combat alert without, however, sounding that alert. All is to be done quickly, quietly, calmly and discreetly, with proper amounts of supplies to be carried by hand or vehicle as needed for sustenance and battle...” (JMH, 1986, № 6, p. 75). It is most regrettable the order has not been fully released. It remains as secret as it was over half a century ago. According to captured German documents the first encounter with 28<sup>th</sup> Tank Division took place near Shaulya. The Division had, however, been directed to move up to the very border.

Marshal of Armored Forces Poluboyarov (then Colonel, Chief of Northwestern Front Mechanized Forces Command): “The Division (28<sup>th</sup> Tank) was supposed to move out of Riga, bound for the Soviet-German frontier” (“On the Northwestern Front [1941-1943], p. 114). The German invasion simply caught this division – as it did many others – in mid-stride, which is why the division just could not get to the border itself.

Here now the recollections of Major Khizyenko (“Pages Come to Life”). The first chapter title is “We’re border-bound.” At issue is 80<sup>th</sup>

Rifle Division, 37<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps. “The evening of June 16<sup>th</sup>, General Prokhorov (Major-General Prokhorov, Commander, 80<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 37<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps – *V.S.*) called a staff meeting. He announced an order from the commander of Kiev Special Military to have our division move to and mass in a new area... Talk has it the upcoming march won’t be routine...”

This is a list you can extend at will. My personal library has enough documentation on forces moved to the borders to fill several hefty tomes on that subject alone. Let’s not wear out the reader with names of generals and marshals as well as the designations of armies, corps and divisions. Let’s try to see the big picture here:

All told, First Strategic Echelon numbered 170 tank, motorized, cavalry and rifle divisions. Of these, 56 were pressed up against the international frontier, for the time being with no place to go. Even here, though, anything that could be moved to the very border was moved and tucked away in the woods there.

General of the Army Fedyunsky (then Colonel, commanding 15<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 5<sup>th</sup> Army) tells us he took four regiments out of 45<sup>th</sup> and 62<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Divisions, moving them “into the woods closer to the border” (“Called to Battle,” p. 12).

The remaining 114 divisions of First Strategic Echelon were farther back in the territory of the western military districts and could be moved up to the border. The question of interest to us: How many, in fact, of these 114 divisions started moving towards the frontier under the cover of that soothing TASS Statement? The answer: ALL OF THEM! “From 12 through 15 June western military districts were ordered to move all divisions deployed deep in-country closer to the international borders” (Grylev and Khvostov – “Communist,” 1968, № 12, p. 68). To these 114 First Strategic Echelon divisions we add 77 from the Second Strategic Echelon which, as we already know, also began heading west or were getting ready to move.

June 13, 1941 thus marks the beginning of the biggest troop transfer any civilization in history has ever seen. This, now, is the right time for us once more to pick up the TASS Statement of the same date and take a hard look. The Statement does not talk just about Germany’s intentions (historians for some reason focus on that introductory portion), but also about steps taken by the Soviet Union (a part of the Statement historians don’t deem thought-provoking):

“Rumors to the effect that the USSR is preparing for war with Germany are lies and provocations... The ongoing summer call-up of Red Army reservists and impending maneuvers are aimed at nothing other than training reservists and testing the functionality of the railway grid. Since it is common knowledge that these are steps taken every year, portraying them as hostile to Germany is nothing less than ludicrous.”

Contrasting this declaration against what was actually happening, we expose a certain discrepancy between words and deeds.

The TASS Statement includes talk of “testing the railway grid.” That is something we shall take the liberty of challenging:

The redeployment of Soviet troops began in February, intensified in March, reached epic proportions in April-May, but in June became truly all-encompassing. On the move were not just those divisions pushed bodily up to the borders, those gearing up for invading Iran and those left behind in the Far East. Plans called for completion of the massing of Soviet forces on the German by July 10<sup>th</sup> (General Ivanov, “Opening Phase of the War,” p. 211). For nearly half a year, rail transport (the country’s mainstay) was monopolized by clandestine military traffic. The first six months of 1941 made a shambles of the State Plan by every measure but military. Chiefly responsible was the transport sector, next in line came the secret mobilization of males to man newly created armies. The label “testing,” in short, just doesn’t quite do justice to scuttling the State Plan. This, of course, was no test.

The TASS Statement also mentions “routine maneuvers.” Soviet marshals, generals and admirals refute the claim:

Major-General Yovlyev: “Extraordinary as the call-up was, beyond anything military preparedness plans envisaged, it put people on edge” (JMH, 1960, № 9, p. 56).

Vice-Admiral Azarov: “As a rule, maneuvers were held closer to fall, yet here they were launched in mid-summer” (JMH, 1962, № 6, p. 77).

Colonel-General Lyudnikov: “Usually reservists are called up after the harvest has been brought in... In 1941, that rule was broken” (JMH, 1966, № 9, p. 66). At that moment, General Kazakov was at General Staff HQ and met personally with Lieutenant-General Lukin and other commanders secretly on the way to the western border. General Kazakov minced no words: “No doubt about it: They were not going on maneuvers” (“Battles of Yesteryear in Review,” p. 64).

Let's not overlook that all marshals and generals use the turn of phrase "in the guise of maneuvers." Maneuvers were just a pretext, meant to cloak the true aim repositioning and massing of Soviet forces pursued. The real reason no one gives. **Over six decades past the end of the War the actual point of that redeployment nonetheless remains a USSR state secret.**

Here, the reader may ask: Well, maybe Stalin did have a premonition of trouble brewing, so he massed troops for defense? Problem is, everything we are talking about involves non-defensive measures. Troops getting ready to defend dig in. That iron rule has been second nature to every corporal from the days of the Russo-Japanese War on up through every war since. Troops hunkering down for defense first and foremost block the most wide-open terrain favorable to enemy attack, cut off roads, throw up barbed wire, dig anti-tank trenches and prepare fortified positions as well as cover behind water barriers. The Red Army, however, did nothing of the kind. Soviet divisions, armies and corps leveled all defensive installations put up earlier. Barbed wire and mine fields already in place were not reinforced, but removed. Troops did not mass behind water barriers (the place to be for defending), but rather in front (the position from which to attack).

Soviet forces did not bar wide-open plains favoring an enemy thrust, but instead hid in the woods, just as their German counterparts getting ready to attack.

Might all these moves have been just a show of force? Of course not. If you are going to flex your muscles, the enemy has to be able to see you. The Red Army, on the contrary, was not out to display anything: It tried to veil its preparations. That very TASS Statement, in fact, was designed not to alarm, but to lull the enemy.

Striking is that during those days the German Army was doing the same: moving up to the borders and lying low in the forests. Its movements, however, were hard to hide. Soviet reconnaissance planes "strayed" over German territory. No one shot them down. Overflying German territory were not just junior pilots, but also officers far higher up the chain. The commander of 43<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Division, Western Special Military District, Air Force Major-General Zakharov, for instance, gets a bird's-eye view of German troops: "The impression you gained was that from far back in that enormous territory things were on the move, had been

slowed down here, at the very border, had bumped up against it as if it were an invisible barrier, and were ready at any moment to burst that dam” (“Fighter Planes: Their Story Told,” p. 43).

Interesting is that German pilots were also flying over Soviet territory – also “by mistake,” also with no one shooting them down, seeing exactly the same scene! In old captured archives I found reflected the impression Soviet forces made on a German pilot: The picture he paints uses precisely the same verbiage!

German war historians have done more than anyone else in an effort to decipher the events that unfolded in June 1941. I deliberately don’t quote German documents, lest I repeat what has already been said in Germany. I do want just to emphasize that the words of Soviet line officers, generals and marshals are confirmed in every respect by what German intelligence was saying even before June 22, 1941: Like a gigantic tidal wave, the Red Army was sweeping towards its western borders.

There is a wealth of independent sources – and they all say the same. At the time, one of aircraft designer Tupolev’s deputies, Ozerov, together with Tupolev himself and his whole design team, was sitting in jail. Ozerov’s book was written in the Soviet Union, but circulated only through the underground press, bypassing the censor. Through those channels it was eventually funneled abroad and published in West Germany. Even behind bars in the USSR, it turns out, you could sense the frenetic pace of the Red Army’s colossal move to the western borders. “The folks living along Byelorussian and Vindava lines are complaining: Can’t sleep at night, with all the troop trains being run through, loaded with tanks and canons!” (“Tupolev & Co. Behind Bars,” p. 90).

Once my first articles on this topic had come out, I had a ton of letters come in. Someday, I shall have them published in a book all by themselves. Even without any commentary they paint the picture of a monstrous westward move of Soviet forces. Letters reached me from people of the most diverse ethnic background, including Estonians, Jews, Poles, Moldavians, Russians, Latvians, Germans, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Romanians. At that time and for a variety of reasons, they all found themselves in “liberated” territory. The War then scattered them around the whole world. The letters came in from Argentina, Australia, East Germany, France, the United States, West Germany and even...the Soviet Union. I received a letter from Canada, written by a former soldier

in the Russian Liberation Army (Cyrillic acronym: *ROA*). In 1941, he was in the Red Army, then moved towards the border, hid with his regiment in the woods near there – and had the war suddenly descend on him there. Next, he was a POW, then a member of the Russian Liberation Movement, then a POW once more, then a fugitive spending many years abroad under assumed names. The soldier pointed me towards a few books by former *ROA* fighters and commanders who had miraculously survived after the war. Thought-provoking, how all these authors start their accounts from the moment that clandestine move towards the border began.

Aside from the letters addressed to me personally, a number of eyewitnesses or their intimates wrote letters to scientific journals, some of which were published. Here is one such letter, from Great Britain. British citizen James Rushbrook draws attention to Stefan Stsende's "The Promise Hitler Kept," a book written in 1944 and published in Sweden a year later. In 1941, the author, a Polish Jew, was in Lvov. Here are his impressions of the days leading up to June 22<sup>nd</sup>: "Trains packed with troops and military equipment are coming through Lvov more and more often, heading west. Motorized units are going down the city's main streets. At the railway station, meanwhile, traffic is all military" (p. 88). I thank everyone who has written to me and the journals, adding more and more fresh pieces to the mosaic of the Red Army's westward sweep.

In addition to secret archives there is no shortage of readily accessible official publications, including the histories of Soviet military districts, armies, corps and divisions

Anyone interested in this topic can very quickly find hundreds, even thousands of reports such as this: "Before the war itself began, in accordance with Red Army General Staff instructions, a number of Western Special Military District formations started heading out to the international frontier" (Byelorussian Order of the Red Banner Military District, p. 88). If anyone, however, thinks these sources less than entirely credible, there is incontrovertible corroboration: the history of the war itself. Having smashed First Strategic Echelon and punched through its defense lines, German spearhead units suddenly ran into new divisions, corps and armies (16<sup>th</sup> Army, for instance, near Shepetovka, at the end of June) which German commanders had no idea even existed. The whole "Blitzkrieg" concept rested on the assumption Soviet forces right on the borders would be swiftly smashed. However, having carried out that plan the German

Army suddenly found itself facing a new wall of armies being moved up from around the Volga, the Northern Caucasus, the Urals, Siberia, the Trans-Baikal region and the Far East. Even for just one army you need thousands of wagons. You have to dispatch them to the boarding stations, load up the army, heavy armament, vehicles, supplies and all, then haul them to points thousands of miles away. If at the end of June German troops encountered armies from Siberia, the Urals and beyond Lake Baikal, the westbound transfer of those armies had gotten underway not on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, but before.

### 3

In concert with huge numbers of Soviet troops the Soviet Fleet also went on the move. “The Soviet Baltic Fleet set out from the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland on the eve of the war” (“The Estonian People in the Soviet Union’s Great Fatherland War, 1941-45,” Vol. 1, p. 43). Let’s look at the map: If the Fleet left the eastern portion of the Gulf, it had just one way to go – west. The Fleet was not, of course, bound for maneuvers: “The Fleet’s mission was to move into action against the enemy’s marine lines of communication” (ibid.). Amazing: There still is no war on, Stalin still does not know Hitler will attack him, yet the Soviet Fleet has already left port on a combat mission calling for offensive operations!

Simultaneously with troop redeployment an intensive process of moving air power to new bases was underway. Feigning maneuvers, air force divisions and regiments were sent in small clusters and under cover of darkness to bases in some cases under 6 miles from the frontier.

Colonel-General Sandalov: “Beginning 15 June, we start to get new combat equipment. The Kobrinsky and the Pruzhansky Air Regiments take in cannon-carrying Yak-1 fighters, the assault regiment Il-2 aircraft, the bomber regiment Pe-2’s” (“Assignment: Moscow,” p. 63). We remind the reader that fighter regiments in those days each had 62 planes, assault regiments 63 each and bomber regiments 60. It follows that one division alone (10<sup>th</sup> Combined Aviation) was then awaiting delivery of 247 latest-vintage planes. The General goes on to report the division did indeed start getting new technology, while keeping its old aircraft. The division thus turned into a giant combat formation several hundred aircraft strong. Archival documents show the same process was underway up and down the line. For example, 9<sup>th</sup> Combined – nearby and also forward-based in



proximity to the frontier – had 176 of the latest MiG-3's, but also several dozen Pe-2's and Il-2's. Still, new equipment just kept on coming..

The morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, that same Western Front was ordered to take delivery of 99 MiG-3's at Orsha Airbase (“Soviet Army Command and Staff in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945,” p. 41). If they got the “you will take delivery” order the morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the evening of June 21<sup>st</sup> the planes were presumably ready to be shipped.

Air Chief Marshal Novikov tells us that on June 21<sup>st</sup> Northern Front (where at the time he was air force commander, holding the rank of Major-General) took in a trainload of MiG-3 fighters (JMH, 1969, № 1, p. 61).

In addition to fighters, however, tanks, artillery, ammunition and fuel never stopped streaming in. “At dawn on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, a train filled with heavy regimental artillery reached Shaulya Station” (“Battle for Leningrad, 1941-1944” – p. 22). There was not just one trainload, of course, nor did only canons arrive. Here is an item on automobiles: “Towards the end of June 1941, tracks were jammed with 1,320 car-hauling trains, all marking time. Military freight trains back then normally weighed 900 tons (45 20-ton wagons). Assuming each of the latter carried one car, it means 59,400 cars were waiting to be unloaded. However, when enemy attack was not expected (and it was not), the practice often was to load cars “snake-style”: stacked successively with their front wheels atop the chassis of the car ahead. That way, saving space, each train could haul more cars. Prior to the war, somebody had pulled together wagons and cars on that sort of scale, loaded the cars aboard the wagons and delivered the lot to the western borders. The process had obviously gotten underway *before* the war began. Trouble was, they ran out of time before they could *unload*... Rolling alongside it all was an endless chain of trains carrying ordnance. The April 28, 1985 edition of “Red Star” tells us: “The evening of June 21, 1941 a directive reached the Liepaya railway station commandant: ‘Take in special train carrying ordnance. Redispatch to destination on priority basis.’” At the time, Liepaya was very close to the border, yet this military transport was just transiting, i.e., heading for the border itself.

Up and down all fronts, ammunition was aboard railway cars, a move typical of the lead-up to a thrust deep into enemy territory. In *defensive* warfare it's easier, more reliable and cheaper to preposition ammunition. Having exhausted supplies at one such site, unburdened troops can quickly fall back to the next, then the third and so on... When gearing up for

invasion, on the other hand, you haul your ordnance with you: very costly and high-risk. “At just Kalinovka, a minor station, Southwestern Front had 1,500 wagons carrying ordnance” (Kumanyov, “Soviet Railway Forces during the Great Patriotic War Years (1941-1945),” p. 36).

I have stacks of material about how ordnance-carrying trains were salvaged in 1941. Not all of them, of course, could be saved.

Artillery Colonel-General Volkotrubnyenko reports that in 1941 Western Front alone lost 4,216 ammunition wagons (JMH, 1980, № 5, p. 71). There was not just one front, though, but five. Not only Western Front lost ammunition wagons. Let’s try to visualize how much ordnance, on all fronts, fell into the hands of the enemy vs. how much could be salvaged. In mid-June and under cover of that TASS Statement, sealed wagons were hurtling it all right up to the German frontier.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Kurkotkin informs us that in early June, “as proposed by the General Staff, the Soviet Government approved a plan for transferring 100,000 tons of fuel from the country’s interior” (“Soviet Armed Forces Logistics in the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945,” p. 59). In all likelihood that decision was one of many more just like it: “At railway junctions and even between stations some 8,500 tank wagons piled up, loaded with fuel” (ibid., p. 173). Even if just 20-ton tankers were used – the smallest – we are talking here not about 100,000 tons, but more. Standard, at the time, however, were not 20-, but rather 62-tonners. Still, even those 8,500 tank cars were only what was sitting at stations, waiting to be unloaded during the opening days of the war. You further have to factor in what enemy air power had destroyed at railway stations already during the war’s first few minutes and hours.

Colonel-General Boldin (then Lieutenant-General and Deputy Commander, Western Front) tells us 10<sup>th</sup> Army (Western Front’s most powerful) had ample supplies of fuel at depots and aboard railway tank cars – and was stripped of it all during those first few minutes and hours of the war (“Pages Out Of My Life,” p. 92).

On the eve of the war, this huge mass of tank cars was headed for the frontier, together with troops, equipment, arms, ammunition...

#### 4

When we talk about why the Red Army suffered defeat after defeat during the initial part of the War, we somehow forget *the* reason: The Red

Army sat aboard railway cars. Anyone doing research can come up with thousands of pieces of testimony like these:

“When war began half of 64<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division’s troop trains were en route” (JMH, 1960, № 9, p. 56).

“War caught the bulk of 21<sup>st</sup> Army’s formations on trains stretched out over a huge swath from the Volga to the Dnepr” (“On the Motherland’s Orders: Where Combat Took 6<sup>th</sup> Guards Army in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945,” p. 5).

“War surprised 63<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps en route. Only the first few trains managed on 21 June to reach the stations at Dobrush and Novo-Belitsa, close to their offloading destinations. Those behind them approached in no more than extremely piecemeal fashion, reaching various stations near Gomel by the first few days in July. A number of Corps units, however – such as all 53<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Division regiments – did not even reach Gomel, but were shunted northward instead” (JMH, 1966, № 6, p. 17).

General Ivanov (then Colonel, Ops Commander, 13<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters) talks about Major-General Biryuzov’s 132<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division: “The enemy suddenly attacked the train some of the Division’s forces and its headquarters contingent were using to get to the front, forcing them to join battle right from their wagons and platforms” (“Red Star,” August 21, 1984).

Years later, now Marshal of the Soviet Union Biryuzov remembers: “At the very last moment we were integrated into 20<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps. Neither a Corps commander nor a chief of staff did I see nor, incidentally, did I even know where its command center was. Conducting operations to our left was Colonel Grishina’s 137<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division. It had arrived from Gorky... Our neighbor on the right was thrown into battle right aboard its railcars, just as we were, with not all troop trains yet at their unloading destinations” (“With Canons Rumbling,” p. 21).

General Shtemyenko (then Colonel, Ops Section, General Staff): “A steady stream of troop trains flowed west and southwest. Now one, now another among us was dispatched to unloading stations. Trying and constantly changing circumstances frequently forced us to stop the offloading and send trains on to some other station. Division command and staff sometimes got off one place, regiments elsewhere or even at several different points quite far apart” (“General Staff During The War Years,” p. 30).

“Enemy aviation systematically hit railway stations and tracks, disrupting transport schedules. Rather often, unloading took place not at the stations intended, but elsewhere. On occasion, units landed in neighboring armies and were pulled into battle there” (Anfilov, “Blitzkrieg Bust,” p. 463).

“20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Army divisions were en route. Massing of General Konyev’s 19<sup>th</sup> and General Lukin’s 16<sup>th</sup> Army was incomplete” (“History of the Second World War [1939-1945],” Vol. 4, p. 47).

“A colossal pile-up of wagons had many junctions all but totally paralyzed. At most stations just a single track stayed open to let trains through” (Kovalyov, “Transport During the Great Patriotic War,” p. 59).

Colonel-General Klemin talks about early July: “Sitting on the tracks were 47,000 wagons carrying war materiel” (JMH, 1985, № 3, p. 67).

You might assume all this was loaded after June 22<sup>nd</sup> and sent to the frontlines. You would be wrong. After June 22<sup>nd</sup> the call from the front was for nothing but empty wagons to haul stockpiles of weapons, ordnance, fuel and other war supplies already concentrated along the borders.

To get an idea of just how tragic the situation was, we should again recall at least General Lukin. As an army commander, he was already fighting near Shepetovka while his headquarters contingent was still out beyond Lake Baikal. Trains carrying his troops spanned thousands of miles. His headquarters people then did arrive, but the communications battalion was still en route. Similar situations were commonplace: Headquarters contingents detrained at stations with no troops around, elsewhere it was just the opposite. Things were even worse when troop trains stopped not at a station, but out in the middle of nowhere. A tank battalion packs enormous punch. While aboard a train, though, it is defenseless. If war descended on a train hauling heavy equipment where there was no place to offload, the train either had to be destroyed or abandoned.

Those First Strategic Echelon divisions on the move toward the frontier under their own power, however, also were vulnerable: Divisions marching in columns made ideal targets for strafing aircraft. The whole Red Army was one giant sitting duck.

## 5

Many saw the Soviet force redeployment unfold, each, though, caught sight of just a part. Hardly anyone can picture its true dimensions. German

military intelligence felt a gigantic build-up of military might was underway, yet even it saw just the First Strategic Echelon, with not a clue that there was a Second (and indeed a Third we will be talking about further on). I think many Soviet generals and marshals, except for a select few or those directly involved in that redeployment, also have no grasp of how sweeping it was or, therefore, of what it truly meant. Precisely that is why many of them are so low-key in talking about it. Ignorance of the big picture and the actual scale on which Soviet forces were being massed was far from accidental. Stalin took draconian steps to cloak the whole operation. His TASS Statement was among them.

The reality of the force redeployment itself could not be covered up. Crucially, though, Stalin did succeed in concealing the dimensions and purpose of that deployment from the entire country, German intelligence and even generations then still unborn.

Air Force Colonel-General Yakovlev (then Stalin's personal aide) attests to the fact that "at the end of May or the beginning of June" a meeting was convened at the Kremlin to deal with concealment and deception ("My Mission in Life: Memoirs of an Aircraft Designer," p. 252).

We have already seen a number of steps Soviet generals took towards that end: They told their troops they would be going on maneuvers, though top commanders understood no maneuvers were involved. In other words, they were deliberately deceiving their own forces. The German High Command, at that very time, was doing exactly the same: Rumors were rife among soldiers about a landing in Great Britain, many even knew the operation had been dubbed "Sea Lion," translators and interpreters of English showed up in the ranks, and so on..

It's instructive to recall that you mislead your own troops only in the lead-up to *offensive* operations, to keep the enemy in the dark about your intentions, especially as to exactly when and primarily where you will attack. In a war of defense or before such a war breaks out there is no need to fool your own forces: Officers right along with the rank-and-file have a simple, easy-to-understand mission: "This is your line in the sand, to be held no matter what! If it's the last thing you do, don't let the enemy cross!"

The fact that Soviet soldiers and commanders were being hoodwinked is itself evidence that offensive action was in the works. Had plans called

for a defensive operation, why, then, wouldn't the troops have been told? "Men, it's true, things are tense, anything is liable to happen, so let's dig trenches and hunker down!" If the troops really are moving out to dig in, it doesn't matter much whether you let them know the point of the move after they've arrived or while they're leaving. Such information, however, Soviet officers and the men under them got neither at sending nor at receiving stations. They were given a different job, hidden from them both then and now.

To let you get an idea of how thick a veil of secrecy hung over this force redeployment, I will let Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov give you just one of many illustrations:

"In early June, Colonel Rummyantsev, in charge of military liaison with railway lines serving Odessa Military District, stopped by my office – I was then District Chief of Staff – secretly to inform me that Znamyanka Station had in recent days seen 'annushkas' passing through, coming from the Rostov area and bound for offloading in the Cherkassy sector. 'Annushka' had become the military liaison people's moniker for 'division.' Two days later, I received from Cherkassy an encrypted message asking for permission to take over a few of our district's depots for storing the belongings of troops coming into the area from the Northern Caucasus. Since our District Headquarters had not been advised any troops were to be massed here, I used a secure line to call the Ops Section at General Staff. Ops Deputy Chief Anisov came to the phone. I told him about the encoded message I had gotten and asked for clarification. Anisov answered that cable was to be shredded forthwith, that Cherkassy would receive necessary instructions from General Staff and that District Headquarters was not to get involved." ("Historical Issues," 1970, № 5, p. 42).

Marshal Zakharov further informs us Odessa Military District troop commander Lieutenant-General Cherevichenko also knew nothing about "annushkas." True, security always covered Soviet troop redeployments, Soviet forces always veiled their intentions – but you can reasonably go just so far. In the Soviet Union, military district commanders and their chiefs of staff, especially when close to the border, were people invested with enormous authority and power. They had to answer for absolutely all that happened within the area under their control. Show me even one other instance when neither of them knew somebody else's forces were being massed inside their own district! Even when Odessa Military District

Command happens to find out about some sort of force concentration on their turf, the General Staff (run by Zhukov) demands they forget what they have learned and shred the secret encoded cable meant for the eyes of the district chief of staff only. Even inside his safe that cable poses a threat! Incidentally, earlier I was saying Soviet archives hold many an interesting document about this era. The most worthwhile, however, were either never archived or destroyed.

Tell-tale traces of destruction mark the archives: A sentence will start on one page, for example, with the next page, sometimes even the next few hundred...missing. Shredded into oblivion, that Odessa Military District cable is just one more corroboration of what I am telling you.

Here now illustrations somewhat different in kind:

Colonel-General Sandalov, inspecting defense installations going up right on the border near Brest, is surprised to discover pillboxes being built close enough to the frontier for the Germans to see them. Baffled, he questions Chuikov, a wily fellow bound for fame at Stalingrad. With a sigh (mock only, mind you), Chuikov says it's a pity, but, yes, the Germans certainly are noticing the defense works we're putting up ("Assignment: Moscow," p. 53). Guderian, who launched the war right from the other side of the same border river, records he did indeed get a good look at it all: pillboxes being built day and night, the latter, in fact, under bright lights. Amazing: Neither Sandalov himself nor Chuikov nor anyone else ever orders the work stopped, shifted a couple of miles to the rear to keep the enemy from pinpointing gun emplacement lay-out and gun port direction, from easily figuring how and where fire would be directed.

In 1940 and in another military district, Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan takes in the same scene: A fortified sector (FS) is under construction "in plain view of the Germans." Construction sites are fenced off with some boards: "To me, this bit of board fencing was reminiscent of fig leaves on antique statues."

"What do you think?" I asked the man in charge at one of the sites. "Can the Germans guess what your crews are putting up here, on the banks of a border river, behind these little boards?"

"No question about it!" answered he, without hesitation. "It would be hard not to figure out what sort of building we're doing."

It occurred to me, what those tactically ignorant enough to have picked these construction sites had done you could easily call sabotage.

The same thing evidently had happened earlier, too.” (JMH, 1976; № 1, p. 54).

Yes. In 1938, having done something like that would have gotten someone shot. In 1940-41, though, fortifications were for some reason being built precisely that way in every single military district along the western border – with no one afraid of anything, no NKVD butting in, no one being arrested and no one shot. Why? “An obvious sham of working on defense” is how Bagramyan defines the construction activity, quickly adding “higher authority had approved the project plans.” Personally responsible for the fortified sectors was the military district commander. Who, then, was the idiot who had signed off on such a plan? Right then, it was Zhukov – the very same who had just come back from Mongolia where he had made a show of throwing up defenses, then suddenly hit Japan’s 6<sup>th</sup> Army. It was the same Zhukov who a few months later would rise to Chief of the General Staff, radically tighten the mantle of security around troop relocations....and continue, even sharply intensify the “obvious sham of working on defense” along the border.

Worth pondering also is Bagramyan’s behavior here: Bagramyan was one of the shrewdest foxes humankind ever brought forth. Over the course of the War his star rose faster than any other in the entire Red Army: He started it as an army colonel and ended it as a four-star general, holding a position entitling him to elevation to Marshal of the Soviet Union, a rank he indeed did attain. Here now, Bagramyan is doing Zhukov’s personal bidding, acting as both his subordinate and personal friend. Should Bagramyan not have bellowed a halt to the in-their-face construction? He did not, though. Once back with Zhukov, should he not have said, “Woe, Georgy Konstantinovich! The idiots are putting up the fortifications right on the border: They’re costing our country millions, yet artillery will level them in the first hour of the war, since the enemy knows where every single pillbox is! What’s more, you’ll face a firing-squad for it and so will I!” Bagramyan, however, did not scream nor stamp his feet. June 22<sup>nd</sup> brought precisely the outcome just described: The fortifications were blasted away, yet Stalin not only did not touch Bagramyan or Zhukov, much less have them shot: He promoted them. It follows that construction work the enemy was meant to see, and see well, was neither idiocy nor ignorance...but something a bit different.



Friends of the Soviet Union have declared Soviet troops were not digging in because Stalin was doing his utmost to keep from accidentally triggering war. Garden-variety trenching, though, cannot be compared in any way to reinforced-concrete fortifications. Here, Stalin is making a show of throwing up a gigantic defense belt, unafraid that it will serve as grounds for a German attack. Why, then, *not* order the troops to dig in? By contrast to a new line of reinforced-concrete fortifications there is no way trenches can sour the situation politically. Ah, but no: Incoming troops are not ordered to dig in. They are tucked away in the woods. What fits the defensive profile, we intentionally show our foe. Arriving troops, though, let's have no one see. The message is, these are troops whose mission is not defense...but something else.

What an odd mismatch: in-their-face defensive displays right on the borders vs. shredding of an encrypted cable at military district headquarters. Both, however, are just two sides of the same coin. Zhukov had run this play before. He would never stop repeating: intensified defensive preparations as eyewash for the enemy, simultaneous secret massing of incoming troops in the woods for a sudden strike.

Whenever Zhukov struck, it was always this sudden...

## 6

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, Molotov summoned the German ambassador and handed him the text of the TASS Statement (Khvostov and Major-General Grylev – “Communist,” 1968, № 12, p. 68). In the Statement it says Germany does not want to attack the USSR, the USSR does not want to attack Germany, yet “forces hostile to the USSR and Germany, interested in unleashing and widening war,” are trying to pit them against each other by spreading provocative rumors that war is imminent. The Statement names “these hostile forces”: “British Ambassador to Moscow Cripps,” “London” and the “English press.”

Our research will be incomplete if we don't spend some time in the London of June 13, 1941.

It makes sense to assume a meeting took place on June 13<sup>th</sup> between Soviet Ambassador Maisky and British Foreign Secretary Eden. When they meet, Maisky flings the TASS Statement on the table, pounds his fist, stamps his feet, demands Ambassador Cripps be recalled and further demands an end to trying to drive a wedge between good friends, between Stalin and Hitler, as well as to provocative rumor-mongering about war

between the USSR and Germany. You think that is how this meeting went? You are wrong. Things stood quite differently.

Maisky and Eden did indeed meet on June 13, 1941. Maisky did not hand the British Government the TASS Statement, did not stamp his feet and did not pound his fist. A friendly atmosphere marked the meeting. What was discussed was serious business: the steps Great Britain would take to help the Red Army “if in the near future war breaks out between the USSR and Germany.” Among the specifics: direct use of British air power in combat operations to support the Red Army, military supplies as well as military command coordination between the two countries (History of the Second World War [1939-1945], Vol. 3, p. 352).

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, Stalin’s diplomats lay the groundwork for what soon will be called the “Anti-Hitler Coalition.” Nothing wrong with that on the British side: Great Britain is waging war against Hitler. The Soviet Union, by contrast, is playing dirty. It has signed a non-aggression pact with Germany, then a Friendship Treaty. If the Soviet Government now feels these documents no longer reflect the real situation on the ground, it has to abrogate them. Stalin, however, does not, instead assuring Hitler they are fast friends and using the TASS Statement to unmask those “who want to widen the war.” At the same time, talks are being held in London about a military alliance with one of Germany’s enemies, including specific military moves against Germany --- amazingly enough *before* Hitler has attacked the USSR!

Neutral diplomatic tones shroud really serious matters. Not much earlier, Soviet diplomats had been huddling with Germany about Poland: “If changes occur on Polish state territory...” Now, Soviet emissaries are plotting behind Germany’s back, and in similar tones. Startling, how both sides at the London talks use the phrase “if war breaks out,” not “if Germany attacks”! Neither party at the table, in other words, is ruling out that not German aggression, but something else might trigger war. You wonder why at those London talks the USSR is mentioned first: “If war breaks out between the USSR and Germany” is precisely the sequence used in the TASS Statement, which reads “rumors about war between the USSR and Germany being imminent.” Why not put it the other way ‘round: between Germany and the USSR...if you do assume Germany will be the aggressor?

Here, too, some may object: Might not the Soviet ambassador be negotiating without Stalin's knowledge, exceeding his authority, just like those Soviet generals who are packing their forces into near-border areas "without having made Stalin aware"? No. In this instance that is a non-starter. Maisky himself emphasizes that when he was getting ready to go to London, in 1932, he met with People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Litvinov, who warned him the instructions he would be acting on would be coming not from Litvinov himself, but from "higher authorities." "Higher-up" back then were only Molotov (head of the government of which Litvinov was a member) and Stalin. By 1941 Litvinov had already been kicked out, leaving as "higher authorities" just Molotov and Stalin. Maisky himself survived the purges, saving his neck and managing to keep his job for a very long time only because he did exactly as told by "higher authorities."

The final detail you need for Comrade Maisky's profile is that once he had gone back to Moscow, after 11 years' work in London, he accompanied Stalin to meetings with Churchill and Roosevelt, calling for stepped-up aid. He then penned "Who Helped Hitler."

From that book we learn Hitler would have been unable to start World War Two by himself: Great Britain and France helped him. Further on, the Soviet ambassador shifts blame for "countless victims and sufferings" to the shoulders of the country that offered Stalin military and economic aid as early as June 13, 1941.

## 7

The TASS Statement is meant to quash rumors about an inevitable war between the USSR and Germany. Stalin confronted these rumors head-on. Early June saw a sudden terror spike in Moscow: Heads rolled, some of them very high-profile.

Hitler was facing the same problem. War preparations are hard to hide. Seeing them, people come out with all sorts of suppositions. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, in a red-flag message to Berlin, the German naval attaché wired he was trying to quell "obviously wild rumors about an impending German-Soviet war." On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, Ambassador Schulenburg reported he was grappling with the rumors, but that staff members were bringing back from Germany "not just rumors, but corroborating facts."

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, head of the Foreign Press Department of Germany's Propaganda Ministry Karl Böhmer let an intoxicated tongue wag about

relations with the Soviet Union. He was immediately arrested. Hitler personally dealt with the case, “overrating” it, as Göbbels put it. On June 13, 1941, the day TASS put out its “there will be no war” Statement, Karl Böhmer stood before a People’s Tribunal (stunning: a people’s tribunal, exactly as in the Soviet Union) and labeled his utterances drunken ravings: Of course, there’ll be no war between Germany and the Soviet Union! It didn’t spare poor Böhmer harsh punishment, an object lesson for all of Germany: There will be no war! There will be no war! There will be no war! To make sure no one would be left in doubt abroad, either, on June 15<sup>th</sup> Ribbentrop circulated top-secret cables among his ambassadors: projecting top-level negotiations with Moscow. The ambassadors were to report the same in strictest confidence to designated parties. An aide to the German ambassador in Budapest, for example, had to convey this news as a special secret to the president of Hungary

The principles of disinformation apply equally everywhere: If you want to keep something secret from your enemy, hide it from your friends as well! Here, then, the day after the TASS Statement Germany launches deliberate disinformation of its own diplomatic corps and military allies. We know the Soviet High Command was doing the same vis-à-vis Soviet forces.

Peering through the murk of the history of socialism German- and socialism Soviet-style, we find a striking kinship not just in slogans, songs and ideology, but even in historic milestones. Marking the history of National Socialism are events quite similar to what the TASS Statement reflects. May 8, 1940 German radio announced Great Britain was planning to invade the Netherlands. After that came the most intriguing part: Reports alleging two German armies were being moved up to the Dutch borders were “ridiculous rumors” sown by “British warmongers.” What happened next most of us know: That German radio report and its Soviet counterpart echo each other virtually word for word. The leitmotif: We are not redeploying troops, “British warmongers” have concocted that story. Comparisons, I know, prove nothing. In this instance, though, the two reports are not just similar, they are all but identical.

## 8

Once my first publications had come out, Soviet historians screamed: Yes, Soviet troops were moved up, but we already satisfactorily explained

that move (as defensive) long ago, so there's no need to look for any other rationale: It's all plain as day as it is.

Whoa, buddies! It's not *all* as clear as all that. In fact, no one inside the Soviet Union ever gave a satisfactory explanation. The very absence of any such explanation of those moves was what drew my attention. Soviet generals and marshals not only *don't* have any explanation, not one of them ever named the true number of divisions involved in that enormous move: 191! Not a one ever gave a figure even close. Can we expect a satisfactory rationale from generals who either do not know or are consciously concealing the real magnitude of what was happening?

One Soviet expert on the beginning of the War, Anfilov, talks about Western Special Military District: "In accordance with the People's Commissar of Defense directive ten rifle divisions from areas within country were moved forward to the west" ("Immortal Feat," p. 189). In the same breath he addresses adjoining Baltic Area Special Military District: "Shifted closer to the border were four rifle divisions (23<sup>rd</sup>, 48<sup>th</sup>, 126<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup>)."

All true, this is, and we will find plenty to corroborate it. Does he really mean to say, though, Baltic Area Special Military District did not *also* see 11<sup>th</sup> and 183<sup>rd</sup> Rifle moved up to the border? Did all tank and motorized divisions at the time really just stay put?

Some Soviet marshals, including Zhukov, say 28 rifle divisions were brought up from deep within country. Narrowly put, that *is* the truth...just not the whole truth. Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky stresses the 28 divisions merely "initiated implementation of the force concentration plan" ("Life-long Cause," p. 119): 28 divisions just for starters. We know there certainly was a sequel, many times greater. Marshal Vasilyevsky, though, those few words spoken, falls silent --- and gives us no precise figures.

To interpret a phenomenon you first must accurately define its dimensions. We cannot take seriously any researcher purporting to make sense of the forward redeployment of Soviet troops and the TASS Statement meant to cloak this move until he tries at least to come close to summing up all that is known and readily available in print on the subject.

Not having found satisfactory what explanations I got on this score from the experts, I turned to the memoirs of generals and marshals who participated in that move or directed it. There, in fact, I did discover the

amazing deftness with which Soviet historiography and Soviet memoir writers dodged my questions.

Here some illustrations:

Odessa Military District Troop Commander Colonel-General Cherevitchenko spent 9-12 June in the Crimea, taking charge of 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps troops. That we learn from Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov (“Historical Issues,” 1970, Vol. 5, p. 44). This corps we will have occasion to revisit. It was a most uncommon corps, not for nothing officially called “special.” Just try, though, to dig up even a single line about that event in General Cherevitchenko’s writings. For some reason the General utters not a word about it. This, incidentally, is the same Cherevitchenko who takes in an arriving corps, yet has no idea that within his military district a whole army under Lieutenant-General Konyev and his deputy Lieutenant-General Reiter is secretly being pulled together.

Konyev rode the War to Marshal of the Soviet Union, so we pick up his book hoping to learn how and why he and his “annushkas” landed in another military district. To our surprise we discover the Marshal simply passed over the whole start-up phase of the War, preferring to write about 1945. “Forty-five” is, in fact, what he named his book. We pick up General of the Army Batov’s memoirs – it was his corps General Cherevitchenko encountered in the Crimea. Alas, all the really interesting material Batov left out of his book. Back then, Batov was deputy commander of Transcaucasus Military District...begging a number of questions: How and why was he in the Crimea, in charge of an elite corps? Why *was* his corps called “special”? Why were corps units and formations being drilled in quickly getting troops and combat equipment aboard Black Sea Fleet combat vessels and in landing them on foreign shores, then having them seize and destroy oil wells and derricks? Why, even by Red Army standards, did “liberation war on aggressor territory” indoctrination inside Batov’s special corps reach unprecedented heights? Why was this indoctrination run by top-level representatives of the Chief Directorate of Political Propaganda, sent down from Moscow for that very purpose? Why, on June 13, 1941, did every member of 9<sup>th</sup> Special Corps, right down to the rank-and-file, get a Russian-Romanian pocket phrase-book? Answers to all these questions we do get...by digging and digging through other sources, just not in the memoirs of General Batov, the commander of this truly uncommon corps. Batov purely and simply skipped the entire period.

Having come up short here, we go looking for answers higher up the ladder. However, out of those privy to even the most closely guarded secrets – Stalin, Molotov, Malenkov, Beria, Timoshenko and Zhukov – the only one to have penned memoirs was Zhukov. Oh well, even that's no pittance. As head of the General Staff, Zhukov was personally responsible for deciding where to put as well as for redeploying troops. Moving even a single battalion required his approval. Zhukov also personally ran the military liaison with railway lines, meaning, he determined how the trains would be used for military ends: Without Zhukov's say-so not one rail car ferrying military freight would budge even an inch. Lastly, any TASS Statement mentioning the Red Army was drafted at General Staff, meaning, in Zhukov's office.

Zhukov was the one eyewitness involved in every facet of the topic at hand. In his memoirs he was duty-bound either to shoulder responsibility for the fact that TASS broadcast disinformation or to disavow its Statement. He could have said his various irresponsible civilian comrades there had been ringing alarm bells, then over every channel available aired an absolutely idiotic TASS lullaby, neither knowing the real situation nor having asked the General Staff whether troops were being redeployed or not.

In short, Zhukov's memoirs should answer all the questions raised. Trembling with anticipation we open the hefty gray tome, "Recollections and Reflections" --- and discover neither recollections nor reflections. Zhukov evades answers. His book is written as though for mentally stunted readers. "Yes," says Zhukov, "troop redeployment did take place." What for, however, he doesn't tell us. Troop numbers Zhukov also buries in silence. He forgets to say who decided to redeploy and when. Unclear remains why the force redeployment coincided with release of a TASS Statement designed to spike rumors of such redeployment. Two government agencies out of sync...or, on the contrary, synchronous coordination of their every move?

Rather than give us figures and insights Zhukov treats us to a three-page portrayal of the troop redeployment. There is guile, however, in the fact that Zhukov doesn't describe it in the first person, but instead quotes his friend Bagramyan --- whose access to state secrets in those days was nil. "Listen to Bagramyan"...who back then was just a colonel! "Hear Bagramyan"...then attached to First Strategic Echelon, with no entitlement

to knowing the make-up of Second Strategic Echelon nor its mission or the ultimate destinations to which it was being sent. As a First Strategic Echelon man, Bagramyan was able to glimpse just a small number of the incoming troops...yet it is his very sketch Zhukov exploits to run from having to tell the truth.

In this case, Zhukov's quoting Bagramyan is something like seeing an astronaut who *has* been on the moon describing where he was by virtue of bits and pieces from the novels of Jules Verne and Herbert Wells, neither of whom managed to make it up there.

What did Zhukov take his readers for? If we want to find out Ivan Khristoforovich Bagramyan's views, we will open his books and read them for ourselves. Without question Bagramyan is prolific and writes well, bringing great erudition, subtle analysis and near-photographic recall to the task. Still, he did not plan nor did he direct the Second Strategic Echelon move. Plan and direct it Zhukov did --- and from Zhukov's book we would like to learn his own opinion, would like to see the situation from the dizzying heights of his own station in life...not from the belfry of one Ivan Khristoforovich.

Zhukov's suddenly ducking behind Bagramyan's back, a clumsy attempt at evading answers, confirms not all here is neat or clean, proves there is something that had to be hidden back then, just as it still needs hiding even nearly seven decades later.

Many talk about the TASS Statement and what happened the day of its release. Doing all the talking, however, are people with no access to the Second Strategic Echelon secret. Those who, by contrast, did know where the troops being redeployed were heading, either will not talk or cite outsiders.

They do have something to keep quiet about.

Let us now sum up June 13, 1941:

What they *say*...would have us believe "British warmongers" drove the USSR and Germany to clash. What they *did*...included clandestine Soviet talks with those very "warmongers" about a military alliance against Germany.

They *said*..."We are not redeploying troops." They *did*...redeploy them, though – more, in fact, than anyone ever had.

They *said*..."maneuvers." They *meant*...something a bit more serious.



## Chapter 23. ORPHANED MILITARY DISTRICTS

Such is the time-honored Red Army way: The troops still have not all shown up, yet the command is already moving out to where action lies ahead.

*Marshal of the Soviet Union*

*K.K. Rokossovsky*

### 1

A Soviet general on the rise moves from running a division to heading a corps, then an army... Next is duty as military district commander: Far from one more step, this is a leap up. A district commander is a senior military leader. In addition, he is a sort of military governor over hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of square miles with a population in the millions, even tens of millions. As military district commander he is responsible not just for troops, but, when a war must be prosecuted, also for pooling population, industry, transportation, communications networks, agriculture and natural resources.

Before the War the Soviet Union was divided up into sixteen military districts. Eight of these had international borders, the remaining did not and were considered interior. All were important in their own way, some for their many troops, others, with fewer soldiers, because of the might of their industry and their mobilization potential.

On May 13, 1941 the commanders of seven of the interior military districts (the exception: Moscow District) received a critically important directive: Deploy one new army in each of the seven, engaging all district headquarters staff and troops in the formation of these armies, personally head the new armies and in precisely one month, on June 13, 1941, begin moving westward. The seven interior district commanders thus turned army commanders. Seven generals, however, will not do. Each army commander needs deputies, headquarters people, officers in charge of artillery, combat engineers, communications and supplies. Where do you get that many generals? No problem. With Stalin, every "i" was dotted, nothing left to chance. I started discussing the troop redeployment with the Urals Military District divisions. Let's use them also to explain Stalin's decision: Within Urals Military District 22<sup>nd</sup> Army was created, personally headed by District Commander Lieutenant-General Yershakov. District

Military Council Member Leonov joined 22<sup>nd</sup> Army's military council. District Chief of Staff Major-General Zakharov became 22<sup>nd</sup> Army Chief of Staff, District Headquarters morphed into his Army's HQ. The district officers responsible for artillery, corps of engineers, communications and intelligence as well as all district detachment and office chiefs filled corresponding 22<sup>nd</sup> Army positions. They took along all their deputies and subordinates, boarded troop trains and moved out.

Question: Whom do you leave behind in the Urals? "Urals" was short for the cities of Magnitka and Uralmash. It included then-unknown, but up and coming Tankograd. It also meant a belt of steel welding Europe and Asia into an inseparable monolith. Urals spelt resources, factories – and slave labor camps.

Is it not risky to leave all these territories bereft of military governors? Some will say, "Come now, commanders all have deputies precisely so they can step into the breach when the boss is away!" That, though, is exactly what I am getting at when I point out that even earlier Urals Military Deputy District Commander Lieutenant-General Lukin had been ordered to head out to the Transbaikal area. There he assembled 16<sup>th</sup> Army, then moved it westward the moment the TASS Statement had gone out. Result: Once the Urals Military District command structure had left – lock, stock and barrel – utterly unknown Major-General Katkov ended up in charge...minus virtually any headquarters staff.

The same happened in Kharkov Military District. On the eve of the War, we know 18<sup>th</sup> Army was assembled on the Romanian border. That army's command and staff as well as those of Kharkov District were one and the same. District Commander Lieutenant-General Smirnov, Chief of Staff Major-General Kolpakchi, District Aviation Chief Major-General Goryunov, plus every one of their subordinates, all were redeployed to the Romanian frontier and integrated into newly minted 18<sup>th</sup> Army --- totally decapitating the district.

Nineteenth Army, meanwhile, was synonymous with all of North Caucasus Military District's troops and headquarters staff. District Commander Lieutenant-General Konev merged all his forces into 19<sup>th</sup> Army, took charge of that army and secretly headed west, leaving the district militarily orphaned. In theory, he should have left behind his deputy, German communist Major-General Max Reiter. We already know, however, he, too, was then not in the Caucasus, but in the Ukraine – more

specifically, at Cherkassy, the destination for 19<sup>th</sup> Army troop trains. That Reiter was in the Ukraine we know not just from the memoirs of Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov, but also from many other sources such as the memoirs of Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan (“Thus the War Began,” p. 63

Let’s take a look at the leadership of the air power component of Northern Caucasus Military District: Air Force Major-General Nikolayenko in charge, Colonel Korneyev the chief of staff and Air Force Major-General Beletsky commander of the fighter division. Once TASS had issued its Statement we see them holding the same posts – only not at District level, but instead within 19<sup>th</sup> Army, clandestinely being redeployed into the Ukraine.

Say 20<sup>th</sup> Army and you mean Orlov Military District. Lieutenant-General Remezov, in charge of the District, pulled together under his command both his own and Moscow Military District troops, gathered up his District HQ – now turned 20<sup>th</sup> Army Headquarters – and under cover moved it westward, thus stripping the Russian heartland of military supervision and abandoning it to the whims of fate.

Naming 21<sup>st</sup> Army means pointing at Volga Military District. District Commander Lieutenant-General Gerasimiyenko morphed into 21<sup>st</sup> Army Commander, District Chief of Staff General Gordov got the same post in 21<sup>st</sup> Army. Those heading the various service branches and duty stations, along with hundreds of others in positions of command kept their titles, merely substituting “21<sup>st</sup> Army” for “Volga Military District.” If, for instance, you run across information to the effect that in early 1941 Chief Air Force Marshal Vorozheykin (then, of course, holding lesser rank) controlled District air power, you won’t need to consult archives to be able to assert that post-June 13<sup>th</sup> he took over command of 21<sup>st</sup> Army aviation and under cover moved out towards the German frontier. Once you know Corps of Engineers Colonel-General Bordzilovsky served in the Engineers Section at that very time and in the same district, then, never fear, you can go ahead and assert that after publication of the TASS Statement he served in that same section in 21<sup>st</sup> Army.

Formation of 24<sup>th</sup> Army took place in Siberian Military District (commander: Lieutenant-General Kalinin), that of 28<sup>th</sup> Army in its Archangelsk counterpart (Lieutenant-General Kachalov).

On one single day, June 13, 1941, while Soviet radio was airing strange statements, all across the vast reaches of Central Russia, the Northern Caucasus, Siberia and the Urals, from Archangelsk in the north North to Kuban in the south and from Oryol in the west to Chita in the east the old military-territorial order virtually vanished. Had an insurrection broken out, there would have been nothing with which to put it down: ALL divisions had left for the German frontier. Besides, no one was on hand anymore even to decide to suppress it: Practically all generals had also secretly gone westward. Stamping out an uprising is NKVD work, yet its forces cannot by themselves cope with anything really serious: For that, you need the army. Incidentally, within NKVD ranks at the time things no less strange were afoot...but we will get to those later.

Arises the question: What on earth is happening? Stalin does not trust his commanders and has gone for a clean sweep? No, not so. Stalin, taking no chances, *had* done away with all he did not trust, replacing them with those he did. Bear in mind, often no one was left behind to replace the generals who had gone off. Stalin did not name a new general for every district commander who packed up deputies, chief of staff, all of headquarters and snuck away, westbound. Siberian Military District Commander Lieutenant-General Kalinin, for example, morphed all his troops plus headquarters into 24<sup>th</sup> Army, then spirited it westward, whereas a new general arrived in Siberia only in 1942 (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, p. 33). In all other interior military districts, new commanders either took several months to show up or were third-tier generals never before nor ever after favored with district or army command. A striking illustration: Major-General Popov, Volga Military District.

It leaves us with just one hypothesis: All those commanders and troops were about to have to take on something more serious than keeping the Soviet system intact deep inside the Soviet Union. If what was brewing had mattered a bit less, they all would have been left in place.

## 2

Moscow Military District stood out among the eight within country. It figures: Moscow! There, in distinction from all other interior districts, no two- nor even a three-star, but four-star General Tulenyev was in charge.

Still, under cover of the TASS Statement, Soviet generals, headquarters staff and troops abandon interior military districts. Notwithstanding Moscow's unique status its district isn't spared: All its forces are turned over to beef up First Strategic Echelon as well as Second Strategic Echelon's 20<sup>th</sup> Army. All its stockpiles of arms, ammunition and equipment are dispatched to the western borders. Senior officers come next. General Tulenyev, of course, then holds so high a rank (and enjoys Stalin's confidence to such a degree), he cannot be sent to run just an army. In Stalin's presence the Politburo decides to name Tulenyev Commander, Southern Front. Heading out for his new assignment, he takes along the entire Moscow Military District headquarters complement run by Major-General Shishenin. We are already familiar with Southern Front configuration: 9<sup>th</sup> (super-strike) and 18<sup>th</sup> (mountain strike) Armies, 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle and 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Assault Corps, plus airpower.

The decision to morph Moscow Military District (MMD) command and staff into Southern Front Command as well as to redeploy them to Vinnitsa (Ukraine) was taken on June 21, 1941. We have quite enough proof, though, that for headquarters officers the decision not only came as no surprise, but that by then many headquarters sections had already reached the Romanian border. Already there in early June 1941, for instance, was Major-General Osipyenko, MMD Air Force Deputy Commander.

The MMD command and staff move to Vinnitsa essentially left the capital city district in the lurch: The reins were not handed over, no one was named to replace the commanders gone south.

Can even Moscow Military District have been left headless? Yes indeed! True, on June 26, 1941 – after Germany has already attacked – Lieutenant-General Artyomyev does take over MMD command (“Order of Lenin Moscow Military District,” p. 204). On paper, someone now is there. Actually, though, no one is! Artyomyev, no military man, is with the secret police. The job title with which he came to Moscow Military District was head of NKVD Tactical Forces Command. In July Stalin also appointed a member of MMD's Military Council: NKVD Forces Divisional Commissar (and subsequent Lieutenant-General) Telyegin – another full-blooded Chekist and SpecOps veteran who during the Great Purge served with NKVD Interior Forces as MMD Political Commissar, then held a key position at NKVD headquarters.

Amazing to behold: Even during the days of the Great Purge military districts stayed military, yet now, NKVD's Moscow District has become synonymous with Moscow Military District. In theory, MMD exists, but while the capital is home to two NKVD divisions and twenty-five stand-alone NKVD extermination battalions, it no longer has any Red Army combat units.

Lieutenant-General Telyegin recalls that when “new people” – Chekists, that is – arrived at MMD headquarters, many of its sections were all but crippled. In fact, the tactical and intelligence sections essential to even having a military district disappeared outright. The “new people” had a poor grasp of things military and had to “spend quite a bit of time and effort getting to know the District's make-up, mission and potential.”

Summing up: Under cover of the TASS Statement top-level military commanders in charge of armies, one of them even of a front headquarters, secretly are moved to the German frontier, abandoning to the whims of fate (and of the NKVD) ALL interior military districts. Unarguably, this is without parallel in all of Soviet history. Just as undeniable is that the redeployment was directly tied to a war which for the Soviet Union was quite imminent and utterly ineluctable. Had there been the slightest doubt as to its imminence, at least here or there commanders would have stayed put.

There is one big BUT: The Soviet Command was *not* gearing up for a war of defense. In any prolonged war of defense not all commanders are dispatched to the enemy frontier: Some are left behind in areas where the enemy may suddenly drop in. In such a war, moreover, you absolutely have to have not just police, but the real military, generals included, guarding the country's vital industrial centers and transport hubs as well as making sure the heartland is properly and fully engaged in supporting the war effort.

In fact, only if the Soviet Command is planning a surprise lightning strike and a war on enemy territory, counting more on supplies prepositioned for Mobilization Day than on materiel to be churned out as the war unfolds, will there be nothing for its generals to do around industrial centers and will their proper place be on the enemy frontier.

Are we not venturing too far with this argument? No, not far at all. Lieutenant-General Telyegin, you have the floor: “Inasmuch as the assumption was the war would be fought on enemy territory, the pre-war depots of in-country military districts – with M-Day reserves of arms,

equipment and ordnance – were moved up into districts near the border (JMH, 1962, № 1, p. 36).

Making any of this up myself, am I?

## Chapter 24. THE BLACK DIVISIONS

Stalin will not shrink from using violence on an unprecedented scale.

*Lev Trotsky*  
*June 21, 1939*

### 1

First and Second Strategic Echelon were most alike in that their most powerful armies targeted not Germany, but Romania's oil fields. First and Second differed primarily in color. You read right: Color set them apart. First Strategic Echelon was dressed in green and grey-green (khaki, as they say in the army), the color of millions of soldier's blouses. Khaki was dominant in Second Strategic Echelon, too, but...was shaded there by a strong dose of black.

I once had occasion to be at a get-together with retired General Remezov. In 1941, under cover of the TASS Statement, he abandoned Orlov Military District, merged all its troops with those of Moscow Military District to form 20<sup>th</sup> Army, took command and clandestinely took 20<sup>th</sup> westward. As the conversation was limited to members of his own entourage, it was correspondingly frank. It involved District Headquarters officers, up to star-rank, whose knowledge of the issue at hand stemmed not just from the memoirs of retired generals. Arguments broke out. In the heat of the back-and-forth a feisty colonel directly challenged General Remezov: "Why *do* German documents call your 20<sup>th</sup> Army's 69<sup>th</sup> Rifle a 'black corps'?" A clear-cut answer General Remezov never did give. He kept changing the subject to 56<sup>th</sup> Army, which he commanded subsequently and some of whose divisions were dressed in railway forces' black greatcoats for lack of enough army-gray. That, however, came in December.

Remezov was obviously dodging the issue. He was asked about June 1941, when there still were no shortages, when soldiers were not dashing off into battle in greatcoats – too warm. Many 69<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corpsmen, though, *did* wear black uniforms – in summer. There were enough of them for German operational reconnaissance to notice and informally dub 69<sup>th</sup> Corps "black."



It was not unique: 63<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps, part of Second Strategic Echelon's 21<sup>st</sup> Army, pops up in German documents as another "black corps." Corps Commander Petrovsky was an outstanding leader by any reckoning: At only 15, he joins the assault on the Winter Palace, takes part in the Civil War from start to finish, is seriously wounded three times, commands a regiment by war's end at age 18, graduates with distinction from General Staff Academy at age 20, takes charge of some of the Red Army's best units, including 1<sup>st</sup> Moscow Proletarian Rifle Division, at 35 rises to Deputy Commander, Moscow Military District.

In combat, Corps Commander Petrovsky won renown as a military leader of strategic dimensions: In August 1941, he pins on a Lieutenant-General's second star and takes command of 21<sup>st</sup> Army. At that point, after fierce fighting, 63<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps finds itself surrounded. Stalin orders him to abandon the Corps and immediately take over command of 21<sup>st</sup> Army. Petrovsky requests suspending the order for a few days and turns around the plane dispatched for him --- sending back wounded soldiers instead.

Petrovsky extracts his "black corps" from encirclement...only to plunge once again into the enemy's rear to spring yet another division – 154<sup>th</sup> Rifle (commanded by Brigade Commander Fokanov). Breaking out, Petrovsky is mortally wounded. German soldiers, discovering and recognizing the body in the field, bury the Soviet general with full military honors on higher headquarters orders. A huge cross is erected on his grave, bearing the German inscription: "Lieutenant-General Petrovsky, Commander, 'Black Corps.'"

Soviet sources corroborate this uncommon gesture the German Command accorded a Soviet general. You can read in greater detail about 63<sup>rd</sup> "Black Corps" operations in the Journal of Military History (1966, № 6). The Soviet Military Encyclopedia (Vol. 6, p. 314) confirms the veracity of that account. You will also find Petrovsky's "Black Corps" mentioned in Artillery Lieutenant-General Plaskov's "With Canons Thundering" (p. 163).

German intelligence noted oddly black uniforms in other Second Strategic Echelon armies as well. Whenever this garb predominated over the usual green, "black" was the title given to regiments, divisions, sometimes even entire corps. Second Strategic Echelon's 24<sup>th</sup> Army, secretly moved up out of Siberia, was no exception: In the course of combat the Germans baptized several of its regiments and divisions

“black.” Even before divisions and corps in this army entered battle, however, exceedingly interesting things had happened.

In late June, trains transporting 24<sup>th</sup> Army are stretched over thousands of miles. Its commander, Lieutenant-General Kalinin (having abandoned Siberian Military District), then is already in Moscow, working on keeping his army fed. He arrives for a meeting with the secretary of the Party’s Moscow City Committee. Quoting Lieutenant-General Kalinin: “The MCC Secretary called the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

- The comrade with whom I just spoke – explained the MCC Secretary – has a great deal of experience in food logistics. He used to handle the matter for quite some time when the Volga-Moscow Canal was built. He’ll help you.

Some twenty minutes later, a tall, strapping NKVD troop commander, belt tightly drawn and sporting three diamond-shaped insignia on his collar, strode into the Secretary’s office (*before January 1942 diamond shaped insignia were worn by NKVD top commanders, subsequently generals*). He and I reached quick agreement on all points” (“Past Battles Remembered,” pp. 132-133).

A pity that General Kalinin shies away from naming the MCC Secretary and the statuesque, strait-laced, diamond-insignia visitor..

After the first few battles, 24<sup>th</sup> Army lands in the right hands: NKVD Major-General Konstantin Rakutin takes charge. Stalin personally orders Lieutenant-General Kalinin back to Siberia. No, no, not to head the military district: It stays orphaned, just the same. On Stalin’s orders Kalinin forms up ten new divisions. Again quoting Kalinin: “The formations were created in places where there had been no military units at all before. My job started, in fact, with a visit to these localities.

My first sortie took me to a Siberian town. Back a few years before the War, out in the middle of nowhere and deep in the forest, a barracks city was built there to house lumberjacks. This, in fact, was used to billet units of the formation taking shape.

Impenetrable taiga virtually ringed the settlement.” (Ibid, p. 182).

Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s “Archipelago GULAG” – all three volumes – has chapter and verse on “barracks cities for lumberjacks.” In essence: Ten new divisions (over 130,000 strong) are being assembled within Siberian Military District – not in places where military units have earlier been, but in “barracks cities.” Some will protest: “Convicts being turned

into soldiers? Of course not! General Kalinin is just taking advantage of empty barracks to put up incoming reservists, then trains them on the spot and makes soldiers out of them.” Fine. We’ll bite. If so, though, whatever happened to those “lumberjacks”? Why on earth is the “city” (and not just this one) standing empty? The answer, quite simply: BEFORE THE WAR, and with “lumberjacks,” General Kalinin put together 24<sup>th</sup> Army and clandestinely readied it for deployment westward. This is why regiments and divisions in this army and in all other Second Strategic Echelon armies wore black: The “lumberjacks” often were not even issued a military uniform. This explains why the army Kalinin spirited west gets its rations not from the Logistics Command run out of Workers’ & Peasants’ Red Army General Staff, but instead from the Chief Directorate of Labor Camps governed by the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs. This also is why Stalin takes 24<sup>th</sup> Army and replaces half-breed-Chekist Kalinin with pure-bred Rakutin. He, after all, knows better how to handle “lumberjacks.”

## 2

Most people know Stalin purged the GULAG during the War, dispatching to the front anyone who could carry a gun. Now and then, lack of time and uniforms meant sending convicts there dressed as they were. It actually didn’t make much of a difference: same so-called “tarpaulin boots” (impregnated canvas-like tops and leather bottoms) as for soldiers, identical winter-time artificial fur caps and year-round jackets different from soldiers’ in color only.

Still stuck in our minds, though, is the notion spawned somewhere that, supposedly, Hitler attacked, so Stalin sent convicts to “redeem themselves.”

German troops, meanwhile, ran into “black” divisions and corps in early July 1941. Those divisions and corps, though, had actually started moving up to the western borders on June 13<sup>th</sup>. The Second Strategic Echelon armies that included all these “black” divisions and corps had in fact begun to take shape as early as June 1940 --- the time Hitler exposed his back to Stalin by stripping the border facing the Soviet Union of virtually all his divisions.

Each Second Strategic Echelon army was created precisely for the purpose of suddenly surfacing on the western borders. Each army was positioned along the mother of all railway mainlines. Each was in the

vicinity of labor camps: Your average Ivans there were used to taking orders and had a short wish list. Picking them up at a camp was also easier than pulling them in from villages. You already had them all lined up, organized into brigades, plus – what mattered most – if you went hauling them out of villages you could not quash rumors about mobilization and war. Stalin, though, needed things nice and quiet, rumor-free. That, of course, made him write the TASS Statement. In turn, it also prompted the preliminary move to pack Ivans off to camps and get them used to discipline there. Now...it was off to the front with no fuss.

Many years later that period became the stuff of books and songs. Remember Visotsky's:

Let's hope others doing time  
Catch sight right there at the gates  
Of our glass-cased little shrine:  
"For the front they all made haste"

There is also this from one-time convict Mikhail Dyomin: "Virtually all of Rokossovsky's army was labor camp inmates" ("Fixer," p. 26).

In all his days Rokossovsky commanded just a single army – 16<sup>th</sup>. He forgot in his memoirs to tell us who filled its ranks – a rather characteristic case of amnesia, as witness the opening words of his tome: "In the spring of 1940, my family and I were down in Sochi"...where he forgets to say that before that sojourn he himself had done GULAG time.

True enough, further on in the book Rokossovsky shares a glancing allusion: "Life taught me you can believe even people who back when, for some reason or other, have run afoul of the law. Give folks like that a chance to redeem themselves, I say, and you will see the good inside them come to the fore: Love for our Motherland, for their own people, and a striving to do their utmost to reward the trust placed in them will make them courageous fighters." (Marshal of the Soviet Union Rokossovsky, "A Soldier's Duty," p. 136).

Rokossovsky thus quite unambiguously acknowledged he had had opportunities enough to see for himself how you can indeed turn a convict into a soldier.

That, however, is not what looms largest here.

What does is that Stalin had given convicts a "chance to redeem themselves" and to "become courageous fighters" BEFORE HITLER INVADED: Armies deliberately designed to take in convicts as canon

fodder began to take shape even before the “Barbarossa” plan was born! 16<sup>th</sup> Army – precursor of Second Strategic Echelon – was created along the Trans-Siberian Mainline (in the Trans-Baikal region, where there was no shortage of convicts) to ensure swift redeployment to the west. Even before Rokossovsky this had been a penal army. He took it over only in August 1941. Until then, General Lukin had held command --- a purge victim destined to win distinction in fierce fighting near Smolensk, be seriously wounded and taken captive, have a leg amputated, be recognized as a hero by the Germans, refuse to collaborate, endure four terrible years as a POW, then be freed...only to be returned to the GULAG or, more accurately, a penitentiary.

Running into Lukin’s 16<sup>th</sup> Army in early July 1941 caught the German Command completely unawares. The same, in fact, applied to the entire Second Strategic Echelon. It follows that that encounter is especially well documented in German archives. Anyone interested can find there hundreds, even thousands of pictures where the capture of Second Strategic Echelon soldiers is etched. There, midst mounds of young fellows’ faces, now and again flashing through will be the features of a broken-down creature, an Ivan in semi-military dress minus any identifying insignia. You won’t be able to figure out whether that jacket he’s wearing is black or green. Even if it is green, though, it won’t give him the look of a soldier. To boot, each one like him will have powerful arms, calloused hands, shaven head, hollow cheeks. Why, you ask: They haven’t, after all, yet gone through any German concentration camp?! Well, let me explain where those hollowed-out cheeks did come from: Rokossovsky types went from the GULAG into the army by way of paunch-filling R&R in Sochi...but these poor guys missed out on Sochi.

If in early July the German Army ran into convict-manned divisions and corps belonging to armies inbound from far-off provinces in the Urals, Siberia and the Trans-Baikal area, the message is that Stalin handed the convicts combat arms prior to June 22, 1941.

### 3.

I do not know what, in the first half of July, German military intelligence did or didn’t know. Let’s assume, though, it did not have much of a clue at all, except for the minor bits and pieces we are aware of now, namely:

1. Secretly moving up to the western borders of the Soviet Union are several armies.
2. These armies feature a certain number of soldiers – in some instances whole divisions (about 15,000 strong each) and even entire corps (each with over 50,000 men) – dressed in non-standard uniform akin to that of prison inmates.
3. At least one of these armies runs entirely on NKVD-supplied GULAG rations.
4. In the TASS Statement the Soviet Government categorically and publicly declares these troop transfers are neither unusual nor massive, calling them “routine maneuvers.”

The chief of military intelligence of a neighboring state is required to assess the situation and expeditiously to submit recommendations to his government. The number one question that absolutely must be answered: If we don't attack, what will Stalin do? Will he take the convicts' guns away and send them back to the GULAG, will he just let them go home or might he have up his sleeve some other ways of using armed convicts clandestinely being packed into the areas close to the German frontier???

## Chapter 25. BRIGCOMS AND DIVCOMS

...To overcome a powerful foe you must first have defeated your own people.

*Shan Yan.*

*5th Century B.C.*

We began to tell the story of “black” divisions and corps with 21<sup>st</sup> Army’s 63<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps. In that same connection we also mentioned Corps Commander Petrovsky and Brigade Commander Fokanov. Why, in fact, aren’t they generals? The answer here is straightforward: In the “black” corps and divisions not just ordinary soldiers, not just junior and mid-level officers, but even top commanders were veterans of “barracks cities for lumberjacks.”

Prior to 1940 the Red Army had created the designations “Brigade Commander,” “Division Commander,” “Corps Commander” and “Army Commander” for the upper-most leadership echelons. Small red diamond-style insignia were used to identify: one for “BrigCom,” two for “DivCom,” and so on. In May of 1940, though, Stalin gives his most senior Army commanders a present: He introduces generals’ ranks, replacing the diamonds with braids and stars. The new ranks – Major-General, Lieutenant-General, Colonel-General and General of the Army – are not tied in any way to the old ones. A government commission carries out an across-the-board reclassification of all senior commanders, with many a “BrigCom” turning Colonel, i.e., demoted to a rank he had held several years earlier. A number of BrigComs become Major-Generals, while BrigCom Muzychenko rises to Lieutenant-General. Many Army Commanders become Colonel-Generals: Gorodovikov, Shtern, Pavlov and Voronov. Army Commander Kachalov is taken down a peg to Lieutenant-General. “CorCom” Zhukov, by contrast, is elevated to the peak of the generals’ roster: four-star General. Incidentally, a fact not widely known: Zhukov became the first General, the first in the entire Red Army to be awarded four stars. All told, by decree of the Soviet Government June 1940 saw the 1,056 highest-rated commanders become generals or admirals.

Introducing generals’ ranks is Stalin’s way of lavishing lollipops after the capital-l lashing he administered in 1937-38. What turned Comrade Stalin’s heart to gold? Well, the fact that he is planning in the foreseeable

future to send all his commanders into action. Except for that, the lollipops might well have stayed in the jar some more.

Still, for Stalin *one* thousand generals won't do. Divisions are being mustered one after another, corps and armies, too. Result: General's slots are being filled by colonels. We will meet no fewer than a hundred more colonels holding star-rank positions – division commanders. So far, we have already dealt with Colonel Fedyuninsky, who actually served as commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Army's 15<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps.

There just are not enough commanders, however. So long as Hitler is facing Stalin, Stalin seems to get by with those he has. Hitler wheels 'round, however, facing westward, his back turned to Stalin...and, *mirabile dictu*, Stalin now finds he needs top-level commanders – lots of them! Sure enough, barred-window railcars now rush clickety-clicking into Moscow. There, at Lubyanka, one-time commanders just turned GULAG vets are met with courtesy, told a mistake has been made. Their criminal case is being closed, their record expunged. The commanders dash down to Sochi, then on to combat assignments.

Honors are not bestowed equally on every commander. Some get to pin on stars --- among them Major-General Rokossovsky, future Marshal of the Soviet Union. Most of those released from prison, however, keep their old rank designations: BrigCom, DivCom, CorCom. A bizarre situation arises in the Red Army: Side by side you see two ranking systems for top-level commanders, two sets of insignia, two distinct forms of dress. Some commanders strut their stars, red braids (known in the army as striped pants) and spiffy parade dress. Others, doing the same job, are stuck with lowly little “diamonds.”

Melgunov has described and documented a technique Chekists in Kiev used during the Red Terror era. Anyone not answering their questions they would without further ado spread out in a coffin, stick in the ground and bury with dirt...after which they would dig him out again....and keep giving him the third degree. In principle, during the “pre-war period” Stalin does the same: The Great Purge landed thousands of commanders in the GULAG, some condemned to die, others given long sentences they served in the Kolyma area. By many accounts (for example, “Tales of Kolyma” by Shalamov), living there was by no means better than facing a firing-squad.

Now – just picture this – people who have written off any chance at survival find themselves treated to cushy first-class rail, fattened at Party-



elite sanatoria, handed back reins of power and given a “chance to redeem themselves.” General’s rank they don’t get. In fact, with no guarantees of any kind, it’s “Go command, later on we’ll see..!” Can we even imagine how much these “brigcoms” and “divcoms” are all dying to charge? *Really* charge!

See what happens if you condemn an innocent man to death, then give him an assignment, telling him he’ll be forgiven and restored to former heights if he carries it out. Think he’ll try to get the job done?

Stalin figured right. Many of those released served him faithful and true. They leapt into battle, their deeds and the blood they shed proving them worthy of trust. Among them was DivCom Vorozheykin, given command of airpower for Second Strategic Echelon’s 21<sup>st</sup> Army. Right from the very first battles he shone, in July 1941 he won Air Force Major-General’s rank. In August, he became Red Army Air Forces Chief of Staff. Every succeeding year he rose higher still, reaching Marshal in 1944. BrigCom Gorbatov, let out in March 1941, gets Deputy Commander, 25<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 19<sup>th</sup> Army in Second Strategic Echelon. He works his way up to General and Soviet Army airborne assault forces commander.

Here is how he describes being freed:

“My wife went to see the NKVD – and fairly flew from there to tell me about the great reception, the civil tone, the interest in how she was getting along, whether she didn’t need some help with money...

...At 2 a.m. the night of March 4-5, 1941, an interrogator drove me to acquaintances living on Komsomol Square. Having dropped me off, he bid me farewell.

- Here’s my number. Anything happens, call me, no matter the time. Count on me to help.

As a memento, I took with me a bag of mending patches and galoshes, plus pitch-black pieces of sugar and dried biscuits I had been keeping in case I got sick” (Gorbatov, “Years... Wars,” pp. 168-169).

Contrasting this against being buried alive and dug out again was not my idea. I borrowed it from General Gorbatov’s writings: “March 5<sup>th</sup> I consider the day I was reborn.”

BrigCom Gorbatov’s release (as well as that of many others) was synchronized: a month at a sanatorium for R&R, then taking on their assignment...timed to coincide with the TASS Statement. Next you know,

the brave BrigCom has already picked up his “annushka’s” and is secretly westbound.

This been-there-done-that ex-inmate had good reason to keep those GULAG “souvenirs” safely stored: If you didn’t need them, fine. Some, though, did. BrigCom Dashichev, you see, donned those galoshes yet again. Released in March 1941, he was back behind bars in October and did time until at least 1953.

Brigcoms, divcoms and corcoms were used to reinforce First Strategic Echelon, too. BrigCom Zybin, for instance, got 37<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, DivCom Magon 45<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps 13<sup>th</sup> Army, BrigCom Tkachov 109<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps. BrigCom Ivanov became Chief of Staff, 6<sup>th</sup> Army, DivCom Sokolov Commander, 16<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, 12<sup>th</sup> Army, DivCom Burichenkov Commander, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Southern Sector, DivCom Alekseyev Commander, 13<sup>th</sup> Army Aviation, BrigCom Krushin Chief of Staff Northwestern Front Aviation and BrigCom Titov Chief of Artillery, 18<sup>th</sup> Army...along with many, many more.

Brigcoms and divcoms filled in where needed, once Second Strategic Echelon had stealthily reached the borders.

Cases in point: BrigCom Khristofanov, Stavropol Area Military Commissar, BrigCom Khripunov, Section Chief at Moscow Military District Headquarters. Once all commanders had left for the Romanian frontier, that headquarters, as we know, was taken over by chekists. Since they were none too well versed in military affairs, they had poor beggar Khripunov released from the GULAG to help them out.

Still, destination №1 for divcoms, brigcoms and corcoms was Second Strategic Echelon. This is the “lumberjack” echelon, so this is where same-brand commanders go. Here is where indeed we run into CorCom Petrovsky. We remember his last pre-GULAG position: Deputy Commander, Moscow Military District. Next, he did time. Released in November 1940, he was ordered to put together 63<sup>rd</sup> Rifle Corps --- precisely when “black corps” showed up! Two of the corps’ three divisions BrigComs Fokanov and Rakovsky commanded, the third, Colonel Prishchepa. No BrigCom, he – but he had served time. Colonels, after all, also were sent up, then let out to top up Second Strategic Echelon --- ditto for majors, captains and lieutenants.

The adjacent – 67<sup>th</sup> – corps, same army, teemed with brigcoms. One of these, BrigCom (future Colonel-General) Zhmachenko, even headed that

corps. Little matter which of the armies stealing their way out of the depths of the country you train your eagle eyes on: Everywhere you will see herds of just-loosed brigcoms. In 22<sup>nd</sup> Army, for instance, both corps have them at the helm: Povyetkin for 51<sup>st</sup>, Karmanov for 62<sup>nd</sup>. Glance at chiefs of staff, chiefs of artillery, combat engineers, logistics and any other service branch or combat arm: All are fresh out of jail. In this army, two divisions are super-black, plainly filled with “lumberjacks” right to the top: 112<sup>th</sup> Rifle, BrigCom Adamson and 174<sup>th</sup>, BrigCom Zygin.

We will not overload this account with dozens more division and corps names and numbers. Anyone interested in World War II history can put together his own collection of names of top commanders whom Stalin released from prison and “gave a chance.”

Communists profess to see Stalin’s defensive reflex: Sensing evil brewing, he beefs up his army. No, this reflex is not defensive! Stalin started springing brigcoms, divcoms and corcoms before the “Barbarossa” plan had even been hatched. The process peaked not when German forces were standing on the Soviet frontier, but when they left for France.

Now, just imagine it’s *your* country’s borders to which Stalin is hell-bent on whacking corridors, annihilating neutral states in his way. Simultaneously, Stalin grants “rebirth” to unknown, but huge numbers of commanders once sentenced to double-time or slow-motion death. These folks he hands arms and power, yet each of them essentially remains a dead man walking, red-hot to act and shed blood (their own and that of others) to reclaim the heights from which Stalin earlier toppled him. Here, then, this mass of troops led by ex-inmate commanders is silently rushing your borders, while Stalin puts out official assurances that nothing serious is afoot. What, in that situation, would *you* do?

## Chapter 26. WHY SECOND STRATEGIC ECHELON WAS CREATED

Mobilization is war, and we cannot conceive of any other way to construe it.

*Marshal of the Soviet Union*

*B. M. Shaposhnikov*

### 1

Communists claim creation of the Red Army's Second Strategic Echelon and its deployment into the country's western reaches was Stalin's response to having been warned by Churchill, Sorge and still others ...in a word, Stalin's reaction to steps Hitler had taken.

That interpretation, however, will not hold up.

In the Kremlin, just moments after German forces have invaded, General Tulenyev is talking to Zhukov. Quoting Zhukov: "Reported it to Stalin, but he still doesn't believe it, thinks it's a provocation by German generals" ("Through Three Wars," p. 141).

Accounts such as this I could add by the bushel. Many others before me, though, have already documented that, to the very last, Stalin did not believe the Germans would attack and, in fact, still did not believe it even after they already had invaded.

Communist historians make no sense: Stalin carries out the most massive troop redeployment in the history of civilization...to forestall a German assault he does not believe possible!

Moving up Second Strategic Echelon was no reaction to what Hitler was doing. Second Strategic Echelon creation started before the famous Churchill "warning," before Sorge's "important" cables and before mass German troop transfers to the Soviet frontier. Redeploying Second Strategic Echelon forces was a railway operation that required a great deal of preparation, precise advance planning. Marshal of the Soviet Union Kurkotkin tells us the General Staff turned all necessary paperwork over to the People's Commissariat for Transportation on February 21, 1941 ("Soviet Armed Forces Logistics during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945," p. 33). The General Staff, too, had to have time enough thoroughly to prepare this documentation, had to issue precise instructions to railway forces as to when, where and what kind of support to provide, how to cloak loading and

transfer, how to route traffic and where to set up sites for mass unloading of troops. To square all that away, though, the General Staff had to pinpoint what troops would go where and when. The message: The decision to create a Second Strategic Echelon as well as the initiation of planning for moving and sending it into combat we have to trace back to some earlier time --- and trace it back we will...

Mustering forces in military districts in the interior, then dispatching them to districts along the western borders was a process begun on August 19, 1939. Set in train by Politburo decree, it was never halted, only kept gathering momentum. To illustrate, here is just one source district – in the Urals: In September 1939, it sees two fresh divisions formed: 85<sup>th</sup> and 159<sup>th</sup>. We meet up with 85<sup>th</sup> on June 21, 1941 near Augustov, directly on the German frontier and in a sector where the NKVD is cutting barbed wire. Its cousin, 159<sup>th</sup>, we also find on the very border, in Rava-Russkaya, as part of 6<sup>th</sup> (Super-strike) Army. In late 1939, 110<sup>th</sup>, 125<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Rifle Divisions are born in the same Urals Military District, each later showing up on the German frontier. In fact, 125<sup>th</sup> – according to Soviet sources – ends up “right on the border” of Eastern Prussia. Urals Military District becomes the birthplace for quite a few more regiments and divisions, all of them tip-toed closer to the borders.

For now, Second Strategic Echelon does not yet officially exist, its armies in a twilight zone while top Soviet brass is working out how to synchronize their operations with those of the First. In the first half of 1940 General Pavlov – № 4 from the top among Soviet generals and admirals – thus holds a meeting with Western Special Military District army commanders and chiefs of staff.

Within Western Special Military District preparations are underway for command-and-staff maneuvers. Being fine-tuned is how commanders, headquarters staff and communications networks are to handle their mission early in the war. The exercises will expect Soviet headquarters to relocate westward, the very same thing they are getting ready to do when the war starts. Chief of Staff, 4<sup>th</sup> Army Sandalov, baffled, asks: “What about headquarters people who *are* right on the border? Where are *they* supposed to go?” (Colonel-General Sandalov, “Overcome,” p. 65). Do bear in mind that anyone getting ready to wage *defensive* warfare never keeps his headquarters “right on the border.” That far, however, was precisely where

Soviet command centers were advanced – and they stayed put from the time common borders with Germany had been established.

Something else to ponder is the reaction of the chief of staff of a frontier army: For him, an order to “move” calls to mind nothing but “moving westward” and “crossing the border.” He cannot even conceive that in war headquarters might move anywhere else.

Present at the near-border meeting, side by side with First Strategic Echelon commanders, are high-ranking Second Strategic Echelon guests led by Moscow Military District Commander General Tulenyev – № 3 out of a thousand. Taking advantage of having Tulenyev on hand, General Sandalov explains to 4<sup>th</sup> Army Commander Lieutenant-General (future Marshal of the Soviet Union) Chuikov what Second Strategic Echelon’s mission is:

“...Once enough troops from interior districts have moved up” – Pavlov looked at Tulenyev – “to reach critical mass, at 4.7 miles per division, you can advance and be sure to prevail” (ibid.).

That MMD Commander General Tulenyev was at the border district meeting speaks volumes. In 1940 already, he knew what role he would play during the start-up phase of the war: turn up in a border district, together with his headquarters contingent, as First Strategic Echelon crosses the international frontier. Parenthetically, in February 1941 and at the insistence of Zhukov, who had taken over at General Staff, the Soviet plan was amended to have General Tulenyev and his headquarters secretly redeploy not to the German, but the Romanian border, the focus of the Red Army’s main thrust.

The “4.7 miles per division” force concentration Soviet generals talk about is the benchmark for *offense*. Back then, defensive operations assigned each division a sector three to four times bigger. At that very meeting, yet another key issue is resolved, namely, how to camouflage advancing Soviet troops up to the frontier: “...fresh divisions can be moved forward under cover of training exercises.”

June 13, 1941 was the day 77 Soviet interior-district divisions started making a beeline for the western borders “in the guise of training exercises.” It prompted Adolf Hitler not to wait for Soviet generals to achieve “the standard concentration of 4.7 miles per division,” to be the first to strike.

Once Germany had started its preemptive war, Second (as well as First) Strategic Echelon was used for defense. That, however, does not at all mean it had been created for that purpose.

General Kazakov puts it this way: “Once the war had begun, its mission had to be radically revamped” (JMH, 1972, № 12, p. 46).

Major-General Zemskov is more explicit: “These reserves we were forced to use not for offense, as planned, but for defense” (JMH, 1971, № 10, p. 13).

General Ivanov: “Had First Strategic Echelon forces succeeded...in taking combat operations to enemy territory even before our main-force deployment, Second Strategic Echelon was to build on First Echelon efforts and mount a counterattack in line with our overall strategic objective” (“Opening Phase of the War,” p. 206). In this sentence don’t let the term “counterattack” throw you off. Its meaning becomes clear once you have looked back at the Winter War.

Well over half a century later, the official version still claims Finland attacked, whereas the Red Army merely delivered a “counterattack.”

### 3

About the mood inside Second Strategic Echelon we learn from Lieutenant-General Kalinin. Before the clandestine move westward he readies Siberian Military District troops (subsequently morphed into 24<sup>th</sup> Army) for combat operations.

As the maneuvers proceed, the General lends an ear to a junior officer: “Fortifications, now, we probably also won’t need. We’re not getting ready to defend, after all, but to attack – and we’ll hit the enemy on his *own* turf” (“Past Battles Remembered,” p. 124). General Kalinin passes on the young officer’s comment with a touch of irony: What a naïve fellow! He does not, however, talk about the source of the junior officer’s mindset. Had the latter been wrong, General Kalinin was duty-bound to correct him, bound, in fact, to follow through, from battalion on up to corps, telling all commanders, “Junior officers are misreading some of our message: Our battle drill is one-sided.” General Kalinin should have wasted no time canvassing commanders of near-by battalions, regiments and divisions. In case this “inaccurate” view resurfaced, the General should have issued a course-correcting order for combat training – loud and clear, 24<sup>th</sup> Army-wide. He does no such thing, though: His troops keep training to “fight on the enemy’s own turf.”

It isn't the fault of young commanders that they were unprepared for defense. It isn't even that of General Kalinin. He is in charge of just one army --- yet *all* armies were getting ready to fight "on the enemy's own turf."

In the fall of 1941, having turned 24<sup>th</sup> Army over to General Rakutin, Kalinin goes back out to Siberia and there, "in barracks cities for lumberjacks," trains ten new divisions. Kalinin's book includes an arresting comment on the subject (pp. 182-183):

"Where do you start? What do you concentrate on most in troop training: defense or offense? The frontline situation remained tense. Red Army troops were still locked in heavy defensive fighting.

Combat experience showed we had by no means always done a good job

of defending. Our defensive positions were often woefully flimsy. Sometimes even the outer perimeter lacked a set of trenches. The defenders' battle order more often than not consisted of a single line and meager reserve back-up, sapping the troops' ability to hang on. Often ill-prepared as the men were for fighting tanks, it was no secret they quaked at the sight."

Still, the thinking was 'We won't be on the defensive forever. Falling back has been forced on us...'

"Besides, defense in our view has never been and is not now the primary way to fight... In other words, troops have to be trained to take the fight to the foe... I shared my views with the commanders. Our unanimous conclusion: focus training on thoroughly drilling offensive operational tactics."

The country's overriding mission in the fall of 1941 – and that of its army – is to stop the enemy, if no later than at the walls of Moscow. Everyone knows full well the Red Army is unprepared for defense. All the same, it still is not being prepared for the job. Not ready for defense? Well, no big deal! No matter what, we're going to gear up for offense --- and nothing but!

If even *after* the German invasion, with the German Army threatening the very existence of the communist regime, General Kalinin keeps teaching the troops nothing but offense, what, then, was he training them to do *before* that invasion?



The German preemptive operation dictated abandoning Second Strategic Echelon's primary mission in favor of defense. We nonetheless have documentation enough to establish what Second Strategic Echelon was originally meant to accomplish, what role Soviet war planning had assigned to it. Just as in First Strategic Echelon, each of its armies was one of a kind, with its own identity and make-up. Most were highly mobile. Each was like a powerful chassis: Once it had reached and secretly deployed in the country's western forests, pieces still had to be added, construction completed. The configuration typical of a Second Strategic Echelon army: two rifle corps with three rifle divisions each --- not a strike force, but a trimmed-down conventional army.

No sooner had these armies arrived in the western areas than each set about building up to full authorized strength, fleshing out divisions and corps. The fact that most Second Strategic Echelon armies did not have any mechanized corps flush with legions of tanks makes perfectly good sense. First of all, for the most part such corps were assembled in the country's western reaches. If needed, they did not have to be transferred from hinterlands in the Urals and Siberia: It was easier to complement incoming slimmed-down armies with such corps once they had already reached western districts. An even better approach: Use the vast majority of the mechanized corps to maximize the impact of the first sudden assault, sending Second Strategic Echelon into battle only then, but turning over to its lean and lithe armies all tanks still intact after opening-phase action.

There were, however, exceptions among Second Strategic Echelon armies: 16<sup>th</sup> Army was unmistakably a strike formation, featuring a fully equipped mechanized corps with over 1,000 tanks. Moving westward with this Army and operationally subordinate to it was Colonel Mishulin's stand-alone 57<sup>th</sup> Tank Division, raising 16<sup>th</sup> Army's total to more than 1,200, a figure full mobilization could push to in excess of 1,340. Mightier still was 19<sup>th</sup> Army, stealthily being transferred out of the Northern Caucasus. It comprised four corps, one of them mechanized (26<sup>th</sup>). There is no shortage of evidence to show plans called for 25<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps (Major-General Krivosheyn) also to come into the fold. This clearly was a super-strike army. Even all its rifle corps were of unusual configuration, with very high-ranking commanders. Lieutenant-General Khmel'nitsky's 34<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, for instance, included five divisions – four rifle, one mountain – plus several regiments of heavy artillery. Mountain rifle divisions were not there

by accident: The proximate target of the deployment of 19<sup>th</sup> Army, Second Strategic Echelon's most powerful, was NOT GERMANY.

Showing through here is the whole Soviet game plan: First Strategic Echelon's mightiest army targeting Romania and, right on its heels, Second Strategic Echelon's most powerful doing the same.

The Soviet Union's clique has spread the canard that Second Strategic Echelon was designed for "counterattacks." If so, the most lethal such "counterattack" was aimed at Romania's oil fields.

Lined up beside 19<sup>th</sup> Army was 16<sup>th</sup>, the next-most-powerful within Second Strategic Echelon. It, too, could have been used against Romania, but was most likely aimed instead at Hungary, right where 26<sup>th</sup> (Strike) and 12<sup>th</sup> (Mountain Strike) Armies converged, to cut off the source of oil from its consumer.

Hitler and his invasion derailed this whole deployment scheme: 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Armies had to be urgently dispatched to near Smolensk, setting back by several years the "liberation" of Romania and Hungary.

Lieutenant-General Lukin doesn't say where his 16<sup>th</sup> Army was to be used, except flatly to rule out Soviet territory: "We were preparing to fight on the enemy's home ground" (JMH, 1979, № 7, p. 43). On the same page Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky emphasizes Lukin is to be believed: "There is much unvarnished truth in what he says." Vasilyevsky was himself an outstanding practitioner of fighting "on the enemy's own turf." It was he who in 1945 launched a surprise attack on Japanese forces in Manchuria, demonstrating supreme mastery in how, suddenly and treacherously, to stab in the back a foe busy waging war on other fronts.

## 5

No sooner had Poland been partitioned in the fall of 1939 than Soviet forces in huge numbers were pulled from their permanent bases and deployed along the new borders. The new territories, however, were ill-suited to accommodating large quantities of troops, especially modern forces loaded with combat equipment.

The official History of the Second World War (Vol. 4, p. 27): "Troops in the western border districts encountered major difficulties. Everything had to be rebuilt and reequipped: ...supply hubs and depots, air bases, the railway network, communications lines and centers.."

The official Byelorussian Military District History (Order-of-the-Red-Banner Byelorussian Military District, p. 84): "Transfer of district

formations and units into Byelorussia's western areas triggered considerable problems... 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Army personnel...were tied up repairing and building barracks, depots and camps as well as creating practice areas, gunnery ranges and tank-driving courses. The troops were subjected to extreme stress.”

Colonel-General Sandalov: “Transfer here of district troops came paired with enormous difficulties. Funds on hand for barracks were a mere pittance... For troops with no barracks to accommodate them dugouts were built” (“Assignment: Moscow,” p. 41).

Troops, however, just kept streaming in. General Sandalov says that in 1939-1940 they were put up in warehouses, bunkhouses...whatever was available. “In Brest immense numbers of troops piled up... On the barracks ground floor they were stacking bunk beds four high” (ibid.).

Lieutenant-General Kurdyumov, Chief of the Red Army's Combat Training Directorate, said at a meeting of senior commanders in December 1940 that troops in the new areas were frequently forced to do housekeeping rather than engage in combat training.

At that same staff meeting, Lieutenant-General Fyodorenko, Chief of Armored Forces Command, commented that over the period 1939-1940 virtually all tank formations found themselves transferred three-four times. The result: “Over half the redeployed units had no practice areas.” It took herculean exertions, but in that same time frame First Strategic Echelon forces were absorbed and quartered. From February of 1941 on, however, first slowly, then faster and faster Second Strategic Echelon troops started flooding into the same areas.

Simultaneously, something changed historians have overlooked: Soviet forces stopped worrying about how they would spend the following winter. First Strategic Echelon troops – *all* of them – left behind their dugouts and unfinished barracks, heading into the border belt – right *up* to the border (Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan, JMH, 1976, № 1, p. 62). Second Strategic Echelon forces, moved up from deep within country, did not take advantage of the incomplete barracks nor the military posts their counterparts had abandoned. The incoming troops were not about spend the winter there and made absolutely no preparations for it. They built no further dugouts, no practice areas, no gunnery ranges. They did not even do any trenching. Reams of official documentation as well as Soviet

generals' and marshals' memoirs corroborate that this second wave of troops camped out, nothing more.

Illustration: Early in the spring of 1941 the Baltics are the venue for formation of 188<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 16<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 11<sup>th</sup> Army. In May it takes in reservists. The Division creates a temporary summer tent city in the Kozlovo Ruda area (28-31 miles from the international frontier). Under the cover of the TASS Statement the Division then folds this encampment and moves out towards the border. No use trying to dig up even one hint as to prepping for winter: The Division was not getting ready to winter over at that site. Unfolding nearby is deployment of 28<sup>th</sup> Tank Division: same picture. All tank and all newly formed rifle divisions reflected the same change in attitude towards winter: Nobody feared it any more.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Moskalenko (then a Major-General and brigade commander) gets an assignment from 5<sup>th</sup> Army Commander Major-General Potapov: "Your brigade started taking shape here. ... You'll take this neck of the woods and put up a camp..." The formidable brigade, over 6,000 strong and fully equipped, with more than a hundred heavy guns ranging up to 85mm, gets it up in three days. After that begins combat training, 8-10 hours a day, not counting night exercises, self-training, weapons maintenance and drills under arms ("In the Southwestern Sector: Recollections of an Army Commander," p. 18).

If Soviet troops are getting ready to defend, they need to dig in, creating an impregnable row of trenches from the Arctic Ocean to the mouth of the Danube. That, however, they don't do. If they intend peacefully to get through yet another winter, then, starting April-May, they have to build, build and build some more. That, though, isn't being done, either. A few divisions, somewhere in the rear, do have unfinished quarters. Many a division, however, is born in the spring of 1941: It has nothing and nowhere to call home...no billets, no barracks...yet isn't setting up so much as dugouts. Where were they planning to spend the winter, if not somewhere in Central and Western Europe?

## 6

Major-General Zaporozhchenko draws the following picture: "The culminating phase of strategic deployment, carried out over the course of several nights prior to h-hour, was the clandestine advance of clusters of strike forces into staging areas for the offensive. Cover for the advance was provided by troops from reinforced battalions pushed up to the border in

advance and charged with holding each division's assigned sector of the front until main-force elements could get there.

Forward-basing of airpower began in the last few days of May and had run its course by June 18<sup>th</sup>. In the process, fighter and tactical air-support aircraft were concentrated at bases located within 25 miles of the frontier, bombers no more than roughly 110 miles away" (JMH, 1984, № 4, p. 42). The only thing that can possibly surprise us in this portrayal is the June 18<sup>th</sup> date. Soviet airpower had not completed forward-basing, but only begun it on June 13<sup>th</sup> under cover of the TASS Statement. Where, then, does the General get his 18<sup>th</sup> of June? The point is, he is talking not about the Red Army, but rather about the German Wehrmacht. There, the same thing was happening: troops were moving towards the border at night. Sent ahead were reinforced battalions. Incoming divisions took over staging areas for attack. More simply put, they hid in the woods. The steps taken by the two opposing armies mirrored each other. The only disconnect: timing. Initially, Soviet troops are ahead, now Hitler has a two-week lead: He has fewer troops and doesn't need to redeploy them very far at all. Interesting is that in early June the German Army was in a very unfavorable position, with lots of troops riding the rails: canons aboard one troop train, ordnance aboard the other. Combat battalions detrain where there are no headquarters people, the latter get off where there are no troops. No communications have been set up, because for reasons of security many radio transmitters have simply been silenced until hostilities commence. German troops also have set up neither dugouts nor proving grounds. The most important similarity, though, is the huge quantity of supplies, troops, aircraft, field hospitals, headquarters contingents and airbases right on the Soviet frontier, with hardly anyone privy to what is to come next, that information being the top-secret domain of only the uppermost command echelons. Everything we are seeing in the Red Army, and rate as stupidity, has been done two weeks earlier in the German Wehrmacht. This is no stupidity: It is preparation for an offensive.

7

What was supposed to happen once Second Strategic Echelon had finished massing Soviet forces in the country's western reaches? The answer to that question came long before the start of World War II.

General Sikorsky: "You cannot keep playing a strategic waiting game beyond the point when all your forces are fully mobilized and assembled"

(“The Next War,” p. 240). This is a quote from the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army. The book was published in Moscow, however, by permission of the Soviet General Staff and for Soviet commanders. It was published because Soviet military science had earlier already grown firmly convinced: “Under present-day circumstances the worst tactic to pursue during the start-up phase of a war is a waiting game” (“War and Revolution,” 1931, № 8, p. 11)

For the Chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal of the Soviet Union Shaposhnikov, it was dogma: “Once reservists have been mustered, having them mark time at length with no prospect of going to war may adversely affect their morale: The result will be not to heighten, but to lower their combat readiness... In a word, no matter what the command, much less the diplomats may wish, for strictly military reasons a call to arms may cause the cannons to roar all by themselves.

Doubtful, therefore, must be deemed the proposition that given the conditions now governing war you can for extended periods keep mobilized armies quietly standing by, not going into action” (“Nerve Center of the Army,” Vol. 3).

It has been a constant in Soviet military science that “mobilizing, massing and tactically deploying forces, then using them to conduct initial operations comprises an inexorable progression” (JMH, 1986, № 1, p. 15). Once the Soviet Command had begun to mobilize, but especially once it had started massing and tactically deploying forces, it no longer could halt this progression or even slow it down. The rough equivalent is abruptly dropping your hand to unhook your holster, yanking out your revolver and aiming it at your enemy while cocking the trigger. After that, like it or not, firing is inevitable: The moment your hand flash-dives, your enemy’s follows suit – just as fast, if not faster.

Historians still owe us an answer to this question: Who actually *did* start the Soviet-German war in 1941? Communist historians, grappling with it, offer the following criterion: The one who fired the first shot is to blame. Why not, though, use a different criterion? Why not draw attention to the matter of who was first to mobilize, mass and tactically deploy? Who, after all, in other words, first reached for his revolver?

## 8

Apologists for the communist version grasp at any straw. They say: Shaposhnikov did understand moving up troops means war, as do latter-day

Soviet strategists. In 1941, however, Shaposhnikov no longer was Chief of the General Staff: Zhukov was. Maybe he advanced troops *not* realizing it meant war?

Uh-uh, fellas: Zhukov understood it *all* – better than you or I, in fact!

To make sense of the full-steam-ahead resoluteness with which the Soviet High Command made its moves, we have to go back to 1932, to 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division, peerless not just throughout the Red cavalry, but in the whole Red Army, period. Until 1931, home for the Division was Leningrad Military District, where it had settled into one-time Imperial Horse Guard accommodations. You can just imagine the life-style it enjoyed while drilling for combat-readiness: To describe its quarters as anything less than palatial simply would not do. In 1932, however, extraordinary tactical considerations suddenly tossed the Division out onto an ill-equipped base. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov: “Over the next year and a half the Division had to put up its own barracks, stables, headquarters, living quarters and depots as well as a whole training facility. The result was to turn a splendidly trained division into a third-rate outfit of military laborers. Construction material shortages, rainy weather and other adverse circumstances made it impossible to get ready for winter in time, which hammered the Division’s overall fitness and combat-readiness. Discipline went downhill...” (Recollections and Reflections, p. 118).

By spring the Red Army’s finest had hit “rock-bottom” and had “become unfit for action.” The Division’s commander was assigned most of the blame, suffering the full range of predictable consequences. Meanwhile, “the search was on for a new commander” for the Division. That very commander Zhukov became. It was here, in fact, that his rise began. Keeping an eye on how Zhukov performed was not just Corps Commander Timoshenko, but People’s Commissar of Defense Voroshilov himself: The Division bore his name and had been deemed the best. Voroshilov expected Zhukov to restore 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division to its former glory. Restore it Zhukov did, draconically whipping it back into shape and proving he could be handed any mission, including the supposedly impossible.

By 1941, all the actors involved in this play had climbed beyond where they had been in 1933 – far beyond: Voroshilov – to Politburo

Member, Marshal of the Soviet Union and Chairman of the Defense Committee – Timoshenko – to Marshal of the Soviet Union and People’s Commissar of Defense – and Zhukov – to General, Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense and Chief of the General Staff. Together, this trio directed the secret move of Soviet forces to the German frontier.

Better than we – and with no need to guesstimate – they know you do not leave even one division to face winter with just forest canopy for shelter. The problem is not that a soldier cannot make it through the winter under whatever circumstances: He can. The problem is, the western borders have no gunnery ranges, practice areas, tank-driving courses, training centers or conditions suitable for maintaining combat-readiness, so that if troops are not led immediately into battle, combat-readiness spiraling down is the inevitable consequence. The three of them know you must not leave even a single division to winter over on raw ground. They know those responsible would be found – and know what would await them. Still, out to places devoid of anything to support combat-readiness they move...virtually THE WHOLE RED ARMY!

*War did not begin the way Stalin wanted it, which is why it also did not end as he had intended: Stalin got just half of Europe. However, to understand Stalin, fully to take the measure of the man, let us for just a moment conjure up the following scenario: Hitler does not ambush Stalin on June 22, 1941, but instead, for example, decides to seize Gibraltar, putting off Operation “Barbarossa” for two months*

What, in that case, does Stalin do?

A choice...Stalin no longer had.

First, he could not pull his army back. Many armies and corps, created during the first half of 1941, simply had no place to go back to... other than “barracks cities for lumberjacks.” A reverse troop transfer would take more months and months, again monopolizing the entire railway network, spelling economic disaster. What sense, indeed, would there be in first spending half a year clandestinely massing troops, then spending another six months dispersing them? Still, even if dispersal had followed immediately on the heels of completed concentration, there just would not have been time enough to finish the turnaround before the onset of winter.

Second, Stalin could not leave his army to spend the winter in the border woods. Without intensive combat training armies quickly lose their fighting trim. Besides, Stalin had for some reason kept under deep cover



the process of creating Second Strategic Echelon armies and hurtling them westward. Could he have counted on keeping that cover completely intact, if for a number of weeks he had left these countless legions in those border woods?

The question at the heart of my book is: IF THE RED ARMY COULD NOT TURN BACK, YET ALSO COULD NOT FOR LONG STAY IN THE BORDER AREAS, WHAT, THEN, WAS THERE *LEFT* FOR IT TO DO?

Minutiae communist historians are ready to debate. Slip-ups they are ready to root around for anytime. Why don't we, though, tear ourselves away from trivia? How about answering the mother of all questions?!

Answering *that* question, though, is something all communist historians dread. That is why I shall cite the view of a general who "starting in May 1940 was Deputy Chief, Operations Division, General Staff, working on the tactical portion of the Soviet Armed Forces strategic deployment plan for the northern, northwestern and western sectors" (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, p. 27). His planning was so flawless, he went from Major-General at the beginning of the war to Marshal of the Soviet Union a year and a half later. He, not Zhukov, ran the Red Army during the last few years of Stalin's life. The moment Stalin died, his days in high office were over.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky, you have the floor: "We had to shake off fears that a great hue and cry would be raised in the West about allegedly aggressive ambitions on the part of the USSR. We had reached...the Rubicon of war – and had to take a resolute step forward" (JMH, 1978, № 2, p. 68).

Each epochal process reaches a point of no return. The Soviet Union reached it on June 13, 1941. After that date, for the Soviet Union war absolutely had to come – and come that very summer – no matter what Hitler did.

## Chapter 27. UNDECLARED WAR

Surrounded by enemies, we must strike suddenly, swiftly  
and where least expected.

*J. Stalin*

### 1

The Soviet Union had five military districts on its western borders. Secretly, but intensively troops were being massed there. All eight military districts within country the Soviet High Command orphaned. Clandestinely, all armies, corps and divisions, plus virtually all generals and headquarters contingents left those interior districts.

Besides the five western-border and the eight interior military districts there was also a Far Eastern Front and three eastern-border military districts – Trans-Caucasian, Central Asian and Trans-Baikal. A look at them, too, is intriguing.

Notwithstanding a May 9, 1941 TASS denial, intensive preparations for the “liberation” of Iran were underway that month in Central Asian Military District and its Trans-Caucasus counterpart. Central Asian played lead, Trans-Caucasian had a supporting role. As prescribed by the standard libretto, the final crescendo in this preparatory phase came in the form of exercises on an epic scale in the presence of top-ranking Red Army commanders. Chief of the General Staff General Zhukov and his deputy, Lieutenant-General Batutin, were supposed to head out to these May maneuvers.

Quoting General Shtemyenko (then a colonel in the Chief Directorate of Operations of the General Staff): “At the end of May the bulk of our section left for Tbilisi, with others contributing reinforcements to boost our staff... Just before our actual departure it became clear neither the chief of the General Staff nor his deputy could get away, and that the maneuvers would be run by the troop commanders: in Trans-Caucasus Military District, Kozlov, in Central Asian MD, Trofimiyenko. Just one day after our arrival in Tbilisi, however, Lieutenant-General Kozlov was abruptly called to Moscow. You sensed it was not exactly business as usual in Moscow” (“General Staff during the War Years,” p. 20).

Trans-Caucasus, a border-area military district, is thus left with no one in charge right on the eve of “liberation” for Iran. Some will object

General Kozlov has a deputy, Lieutenant-General Batov, so he presumably is running the district. No, Batov is busy, taking the very best Trans-Caucasus MD has to offer to put together 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps, transferring it to Crimea and there, in concert with the Black Sea Fleet, drilling it in marine assault operations. The Fleet is being trained to land forces from warships.

Trans-Caucasian Military District went on without commander or deputy until August 1941. General Kozlov then returned and led the “liberation” of Iran. In that regard, too, Hitler scrambled Stalin’s cards: Hitler’s unexpected moves not only pushed that “liberation” back by several months, they also slashed the forces available for it and forced passing up “radical socio-political reforms.”

I still have not been able to find out whether in early June 1941 Stalin did or did not call Central Asian MD Commander General Trofimiyenko to Moscow. That aside, District headquarters was badly depleted, like “stripping a kulak.” As early as March 1941 already, Colonel Khlebnikov was summoned to Moscow from CAMD Hq and named artillery chief for Baltics-based 27<sup>th</sup> Army. Khlebnikov eventually rose to Colonel-General. Officially, by the way, 27<sup>th</sup> Army turned up in the western reaches of the country in May 1941, whereas its cadres assembled along the distant borders quite a bit earlier. Following Khlebnikov and many other colonels and generals, the District Chief of Staff Major-General (and future four-star) Kazakov was ordered to Moscow.

On that flight, General Kazakov says in his “Poring Over Battles Past,” he was able to see a staggering number of trains loaded with troops and combat equipment being transferred out of Central Asia.

Aboard one of them was General Luchinsky (then a colonel commanding 83<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Rifle Division), sharing a compartment with Major-General (later General) Petrov. Luchinsky’s recollections about Petrov are absolutely priceless. “Called in by the People’s Commissariat for Defense, we were riding in the same compartment when the radio blared out the news about Fascist Germany’s attack on our country.” Luchinsky doesn’t say what the PCD had summoned him for, but does tell us about his friend General Petrov: “Shortly before the war he had been given command of 192<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division (Petrov turned it into Mountain Rifle and secretly dispatched it to the Romanian frontier. – V.S.), then 27<sup>th</sup>

Mechanized Corps which, in fact, he led to the front” (JMH, 1976, № 9, pp. 121-122).

That Mechanized Corps slips out of Central Asia, bound for the Romanian border. Its commander, meanwhile, is heading to Moscow to get his combat mission. More than once in this book have we run into that sort of procedure: 16<sup>th</sup> Army, for instance, decamps for the Romanian frontier, while in Moscow its commander, Lieutenant-General Lukin, gets his battlefield assignment.

Luchinsky’s vignette about General Petrov seems all routine and humdrum. Let’s take a close look, though, at the sequence of events: First, Major-General Petrov assembles 27<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, loads it aboard troop trains and dispatches it to the front. Only afterward, himself already riding the rails, does he get word that Germany has started the war.

Most interesting of all, however, is what happened a few days later: 27<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps was disbanded en route. Purely offensive formations of the sort are simply of no use in a war of defense. In July 1941, the disbanding of 27<sup>th</sup> was followed by the break-up of the rest – 29 of them in all.

The situation seems absurd: BEFORE Hitler’s attack 27<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps is off to war, yet as soon as Hitler has gone to war, the war is off for 27<sup>th</sup>, disbanded before it ever even encounters the enemy. Nothing absurd here, though: The Corps really *is* hurled from Central Asia to the Romanian frontier to go to war...but is cast not for a war Hitler starts, but rather another, meant to be launched quite differently.

Conclusion: Had Hitler not attacked, 27<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps *would* have fought, the very reason it was headed for the front. Hitler’s moves, however, preempted the war for which 27<sup>th</sup> and its 28 comrades-in-arms, each of them slated to have over 1,000 tanks, were designed.

Aside from Petrov and Luchinsky, trains out of Central Asia carried quite a few celebrity commanders and others who would later win fame. All of them I won’t recount for you. Suffice it to name just one more, and only because, back then a Major-General, he ended up like Kazakov, Petrov and Luchinsky becoming a four-star. His name: Zhadov. We know that “on the very eve of war Zhadov, having commanded a mountain cavalry division in Central Asia, was named commander of 4<sup>th</sup> Airborne Assault Corps and arrived at the front with the battle already raging” (JMH, 1971, № 3, p. 124).

If anyone tells you those generals were bound for the western borders to “counter-attack,” you go ahead and remind them how General Zhadov left a Central Asia-based mountain cavalry division for an airborne assault corps in Byelorussia: Are airborne assault corps *really* designed to counter-attack or repel aggression?

## 2

Though Trans-Baikal Military District troops were not just on Soviet territory, but also in Mongolia – only quite recently the scene of real war involving hundreds of tanks and planes, thousands of heavy guns as well as tens of thousands of soldiers – the district was left to fend for itself.

Out of all the interior and Eastern border districts, Trans-Baikal stood alone in having its own armies – two, in fact: 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. The latter stayed on in Mongolia, but already in 1940 was “slimmed down” to such an extent that for lack of generals the position of deputy army commander was held by Colonel Poluboyarov. Even he, however, was called away, first stop Moscow, then Northwestern Front.

The other Trans-Baikal MD army, 16<sup>th</sup>, moved out, westbound. Among the wives left behind rumors were spread about the border with Iran. The Army’s commanders, however, knew they were off to war. They also knew against whom.

As 16<sup>th</sup> Army was moving out, Trans-Baikal MD Headquarters was also “slimmed down.” Many of its officers, generals included, were transferred to 16<sup>th</sup> Army divisions and corps. Example: Major-General Chernyshov used to command 16<sup>th</sup> Army’s 152<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Division, then was promoted to chief of staff, combat training for the whole District. However, “when the Army moved out, Pyotr Nikolayevich declared he would go off to war with his division – and managed to have himself reassigned to the 152<sup>nd</sup>” (Major-General Lobachov, “Hard Row to Hoe,” p. 147).

From the Trans-Baikal area they did not just scrape together colonels and lesser-star generals, but also plucked really high-level commanders – right to the very top, the district commanders. “Commanders?” you ask. “You mean to say Trans-Baikal MD didn’t have one commander, but several?” Precisely: Several! True, they were not in charge all at once. They took turns. The queue, though, kept moving briskly. In 1940, Lieutenant-General Remezov was in command – then was dispatched to run Oryol MD, secretly assembling 20<sup>th</sup> Army to move it under cover of the TASS Statement to the German frontier. Next, for the briefest of stints,

came Lieutenant-General Konyev, transferred to Northern Caucasus MD, where he clandestinely put together 19<sup>th</sup> Army and, again cloaked by the TASS Statement, led it to the Romanian frontier. Following in his footsteps was Lieutenant-General (eventually four-star) Kurochkin who, even before the TASS Statement, sent 16<sup>th</sup> Army on its way, wishing the commanders and their men success in carrying out “whatever the Motherland may direct.” As the most remote, 16<sup>th</sup> Army left earlier to let it reach the western frontier together with all other Second Strategic Echelon armies.

What, though, about Lieutenant-General Kurochkin? Dispatching a whole army by rail while, in fact, keeping it all quiet, too, is not child’s play. Kurochkin managed, heaving a sigh of relief. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, just as the TASS Statement was being broadcast, he was ordered to leave Trans-Baikal MD and report on the double to Moscow to get his next assignment. “Krasnaya Zvezda” (May 26, 1984) tells us, on June 22, 1941 Lieutenant-General Kurochkin was on an express train approaching Irkutsk... Trans-Baikal, meanwhile, was left with no one at the helm. Soviet Military Encyclopedia (Vol. 3, p. 357) informs us a new commander did not appear there until September 1941.

### 3

Not just interior and quasi-front districts, even actual frontline areas had generals and other officers pulled to serve on the German and Romanian borders. In the Far East a permanent hotbed of tension kept threatening to flare into war, skirmishes repeatedly escalating into full-scale combat involving hundreds of tanks and planes on both sides. Back then, war between Japan and the Soviet Union certainly seemed possible, to some foreign observers even inevitable. As a result, the Far East featured not a military district, but a three-army front.

Starting the end of 1940, generals (but also whole divisions and corps of soldiers) were transferred westward, secretly and at an ever-increasing pace. Redeployments were not confined to mid-level generals: Many top-level commanders left the Far Eastern front without commensurate, if in fact any replacements. Case in point: Major-General Kotov, Chief, Operations Division, Front Headquarters, headed out to the west and no one took his place.

Major-General Grigoryenko (then a colonel at Far Eastern Front Hq) remembers: “They called away to the west Ivan Stepanovich Konyev,

Markian Mikhailovich Popov, Vasily Ivanovich Chuikov and many other top field commanders.”

To put even this ultra-short list into perspective, let me remind you Lieutenant-General (eventually four-star General) Popov used to command Far East-based 1<sup>st</sup> Army, while Lieutenant-General (subsequently Marshal of the Soviet Union) Konyev ran 2<sup>nd</sup> Army. Any fables to the effect that the generals were transferred in anticipation of a German invasion I reject out of hand. When the war broke out Popov was on the Finnish border, as Commander, Northern Front, whereas Konyev had moved his strike army up to the Romanian frontier.

Thought-provoking is *how* General Konyev goes from Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the Far East to Commander, 19<sup>th</sup> Army on the Romanian border: not directly, roundabout. Having left 2<sup>nd</sup> Army in the Far East in April 1941 (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, p. 409), Konyev takes over Trans-Baikal Military District. After he has checked out of Trans-Baikal, he turns up in Rostov – quietly, without any fanfare – to take charge of Northern Caucasus MD. There, he wraps up creation of 19<sup>th</sup> Army, takes command of it and, “under utmost secrecy” (General Shtemyenko’s characterization), starts at the end of May 1941 moving his Army’s divisions and corps up to the Romanian frontier. Four assignments, in rapid succession, from the easternmost to the westernmost borders. A fox in general’s uniform. How else can you describe him? In the lead-up to all offensive (but not defensive) operations Stalin would always tuck his best generals and marshals away. This was especially true of Zhukov, Vasilyevsky, Konyev, Rokossovsky and Meretskov. Lo and behold, here in the spring of 1941 – as had been the case leading up to all the most sweeping offensive operations – Konyev zigs and zags, keeping even his closest friends from knowing his whereabouts.

#### 4

Konyev’s feints are not unique. Just look at the posts he held – briefly, to hoodwink observers – and you will discover other commanders who used the same assignments to cover their tracks. Colonel-General Kuznyetsov, for example, quits as Commander, General Staff Academy to take over Northern Caucasus Military District, hands it off to Konyev and surfaces on the borders of East Prussia in charge of Northwestern Front.

#### 5

After General Konyev had slipped out of the Far East his 2<sup>nd</sup> Army was left without a commensurate successor.

Even more interesting was the situation for Far Eastern Front's 1<sup>st</sup> Army: After General Popov had left for Northern Front a fitting replacement was appointed – Lieutenant-General Yeremenko (a future Marshal of the Soviet Union). Long, though, he did not stay in command. On June 19, 1941 the order came down for him to turn over 1<sup>st</sup> Army and be on the next train to Moscow for new marching orders.

Hitler scrambled all the cards. No sooner had the Germans invaded than Yeremenko became Commander, Western Front, replacing a sacked General Pavlov. As of June 19<sup>th</sup>, however, that turn of events had not even been in the cards. Pavlov then was entrenched as Western Front Commander. Stalin summoned Yeremenko to carry out some other mission, still unknown, maybe never accomplished. I personally have had the good fortune of meeting and conversing with Marshal of the Soviet Union Yeremenko. Treading very lightly to avoid arousing suspicion, I tried sounding him out on the matter. My impression: He was not playing games, really did not know what Stalin needed him for on June 19, 1941. I drew the Marshal's attention to the fact that his experience was far from singular. You see, I said, those trains also were bringing in Kurochkin, Sivkov, Kurdyumov, Zhadov, Petrov and Luchinsky. The Marshal was fascinated. How I wish I had been a Western historian, armed with a democratic country's passport! As it was, really pursue the conversation I simply could not.

Interested as he was, Yeremenko clued me in on another couple of generals pulled from the Far East, virtually denuding Soviet defenses outright: About Major-General Berzarin, one-time Deputy Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Yeremenko told me what he had not put into his memoirs: On the way out of the Far East he should have turned his army over to his deputy Berzarin --- precisely what deputies are for! However, in late May Stalin had already called Berzarin to Moscow, secretly giving him command of Baltics-based 27<sup>th</sup> Army, a short distance from the German frontier.

Here, too, some may counter Stalin told Yeremenko, Berzarin and other Far Eastern Front generals to come in to beef up defenses. To dispel any lingering doubt, however, I will name yet another general towards whom Yeremenko also pointed me: Major-General Glazunov (eventually Lieutenant-General and Red Army airborne assault forces commander),



who in early 1941 was in charge of 59<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 1<sup>st</sup> Army, Far Eastern Front. Yeremenko really cherished 1<sup>st</sup> Army and did not want to abandon it to the tender mercies of a “staff rat” like Shelakhov.

Yeremenko’s deputies, however, Stalin had already scooped up, corps commanders as well, and experienced division commanders had long since been sent off to the west. Just one remained, at 59<sup>th</sup> Division: an up-and-coming, already combat-hardened veteran, General Glazunov. To propose putting him in charge of 1<sup>st</sup> Army Yeremenko said he fired off an encoded message to General Staff. From division straight to army is one giant leap. What, though, can you do, with no other combat-ready commanders left in the Far East?

Moscow agreed to Glazunov as truly deserving of command and, via encrypted cable, immediately ordered him to turn over the Division, rush to the Romanian frontier and take charge of 3<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Assault Corps. For 1<sup>st</sup> Army, however, it meant having to go right on making do without a field commander.

Per Stalin’s orders in early June 1941, ALL Soviet airborne assault forces – including those just transferred from the Far East – were massed on the western borders. More, though, even than that, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour Stalin also pulled infantry and cavalry generals from distant borders for a post-haste make-over into airborne assault corps commanders. That applies not only to Generals Glazunov and Zhadov, but also to Generals Usyenko, Kharitonov and Bezuglom.

Blitz-morphing infantry and cavalry generals into airborne assault types is no way to gear up for defense nor even counterattack. Written all over it is aggression-in-the-making: inexorable, imminent, immense.

## Chapter 28. WHY STALIN SET UP FRONTS

The war of the poor against the rich will be the  
bloodiest people have ever waged.

*F. Engels*

### 1

“Front,” in Soviet military-speak, first and foremost designated an array of forces from several hundred thousand to over a million strong. Fronts comprised command and staff, a number of armies, airpower, anti-aircraft defense, reinforcements as well as logistical back-up. Prewar data shows the logistical arm directly subordinate to each front command was all by itself to have up to 200,000 soldiers. In peacetime, fronts did not exist, only military districts. Fronts sprang into life at the beginning of a war (Soviet Military Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, p. 332).

In 1938, relations with Japan grew so tense, the Red Army set up a distinct Far Eastern Front. Initially, it included two armies, with another added two years later. On April 13, 1941 a neutrality treaty was signed with Japan, the Front, nonetheless, was not disbanded.

On the Soviet Union's western borders fronts were briefly created in 1939/1940 for “liberation crusades” into Poland, Romania and Finland. Those crusades done with, however, the fronts were folded at once, their military district predecessors resurrected. Historians berate Stalin: with Germany, a pact, with Japan, the same....against Japan, though, a front raised, against Germany, none.

At first glance, it makes no sense. However, what is Hitler doing? He shows guile: The first half of 1941, against Great Britain, the Führer lines up a phalanx of headquarters, sonorously titled, yet hollow. Against the Soviet Union, he deploys virtually all his forces, yet not one ostentatiously labeled headquarters. Your first glance conjures up a juggernaut aimed at Great Britain, a closer look reveals Hitler massing his crack troops and the cream of his generals along the Soviet frontier – a textbook case of gearing up for surprise attack. Stalin, however, is taking the very same tack: In the Far East, a front is in place...whose troops and generals are tip-toeing elsewhere. On the western borders, with military districts officially still up and running, forces are being massed.

Comparing Far Eastern Front firepower to that of any western military district paints a picture far from flattering for the Front. Example: Far Eastern Front features three armies, with nothing special about any, whereas Western Special Military District bristles with four, three of them designed for attack, one a super-strike force. More even than that, pouring into Western Special MD are yet another three Second Strategic Echelon armies. Far Eastern Front, on the contrary, is a destination for no one, only a point of departure for corps and divisions. Far Eastern Front has a single mechanized corps, Western MD six. Far Eastern Front has zero airborne assault troops, Western MD a whole corps. You could go on pointing up contrasts. Do remember, though, Western Special Military District is not the most muscular: Kiev packs far more punch. Compare it to Far Eastern Front – and you come away disillusioned with the Front altogether.

The front in the Far East was a façade meant to signal to the whole world “war could break out here.” The five western military districts, however, were also a façade, this one meant to telegraph “No war expected here.” In actual fact, the five western border districts had long since turned into something extra-ordinary. Ordinary they were until 1939. Once the Pact had been signed, though, offensive firepower was packed into them and reached levels rarely ever matched by any Soviet front even during the War’s fiercest battles.

Creation of the front in the Far East was so handled as to make sure everyone knew. No one, by contrast, was told about the fronts set up in the west – not one, but FIVE. In earlier chapters I have mentioned them – Northern, Northwestern, Western, Southwestern and Southern. No mistake involved there. Officially, they were established after and in reaction to the German invasion. A look inside the archives, though, will make us gasp: As early as February 1941 these designations already appear in what then were top-secret documents. Some of them have by now been unsealed and released for scientific research. Quoting: “In February 1941 border military districts received instructions immediately to organize front-line command centers” (JMH, 1978, № 4, p. 86).

Officially, then lining the western borders are five military districts. Unofficially, each of these is already getting a front-line command center up and running, i.e., creating not a military-administrative, but the all-military structure you see emerging only in wartime and solely for command and control of wartime forces.

Communist historians assure us, until June 22, 1941 peace reigned between the USSR and Germany, violated that very day by Germany. That bold assertion is unsupported by the facts --- which say the opposite is true. In February of 1941, by putting in place front-line command centers, the Soviet Union in fact went to war against Germany, even though it issued no formal declaration to that effect.

## 2

In peacetime, whoever is in charge of a military district wears two hats and plays a dual role. On the one hand, he is a purely military commander, with several divisions, sometimes several corps or even a few armies subject to him. On the other, still in peacetime, he administers territory strictly delimited, effectively as vice-regent or military governor.

In case of war, a border military district turns into a front, with three conceivable scenarios:

Scenario #1: The front fights on ground coterminous with the prewar military district. If so, the front commander stays strictly limited to things military, continuing to administer the territory entrusted to him and acting as military governor in rear areas.

Scenario #2: The front falls back under enemy pressure. In this case, the front commander is still in charge in the field and, while yielding ground, takes along civilian governing bodies responsible for his territory.

Scenario #3: War begins with the front striking out into enemy territory. If this situation is anticipated – and only then – the commander’s job is split. Remaining a purely military commander, he leads his troops forward, while a slightly more junior officer has to stay behind in the district as acting military governor.

In February 1941 something happened latter-day historians have missed. Western Special Military District innovated, with a second deputy district commander’s slot. Meaning what? General Pavlov already had several stand-ins! For a few months, the new post stayed vacant. Then, Lieutenant-General Kurdyumov came to fill it.

The event spoke volumes.

In peacetime, District Commander General Pavlov’s duty station is Minsk, his deputy being Lieutenant-General Boldin, his chief of staff, Major-General Klimovskikh. In the event of mobilization, Pavlov is predesignated Commander, Klimovskikh, Chief of Staff, Western Front. The same plan calls for Boldin to take over a Western Front mobile team.

My point: Had Western Front been expected to fight in place, i.e., in Byelorussia, there would have been no need to introduce structural changes. Western Front, however, is preparing to move out into enemy territory, to be led by Generals Pavlov, Boldin and Klimovskikh. If they will be heading out – lock, stock and armies, corps, divisions, brigades – who on earth will be left in Minsk? That, indeed, is the very scenario that has prompted the introduction of one more deputy, Lieutenant-General Kurdyumov. A split structure has already been put in place, in peacetime. General Pavlov has focused his full attention on things strictly military, his new deputy on the purely administrative. Once Western Front, Pavlov in the lead, moves out into enemy territory, General Kurdyumov will stay behind in Minsk, purely as homeland military governor, providing cover for local authorities and communications lines, while overseeing industry and transportation, pressing on with mobilization and readying reserves for a front already far afield.

General Kurdyumov, once in charge of the Red Army's Directorate of Combat Training, now is posted to Minsk --- a superb pick for a war of "liberation": Sitting astride the conveyor belt for more and more fresh westbound reserves will be a general of precisely his experience, the best possible choice for sending the troops coming through into battle optimally prepared.

Four armies, ten stand-alone corps, plus ten air divisions, spread across Kiev Special Military District, also are gearing up to head into enemy territory, to be led by South-Western Front Commander Colonel-General Kirponos. The prospect mandates speed in finding another head for one of the commander's two hats, freeing him to deal just with things military and leaving administrative tasks to someone else. This is precisely why they create another deputy's slot, assigning Lieutenant-General Yakovlyev to fill it. Kirponos leads the troops forward, Yakovlyev remains in Kiev. Early February brings this bifurcation more and more into focus for us. In Ternopol a clandestine command center is set up – the military nerve center. Headquarters is kept in Kiev – the regional administrative hub. In a Kiev suburb, Brovary, they sink the command post for regional administration into a massive bunker. The Ternopol command center is flimsy: a string of dugouts. Made perfectly good sense: The key military actors were not meant to hunker down in Ukraine, so why, then, put up mighty concrete battlestations?

In Baltics Special Military District the command structure was also split. Top-echelon officers took off for Panevyezhis, from then on secretly pivotal to Northwestern Front's strictly military hierarchy. Left in Riga was lesser-light General Safronov, to serve as military administrator for the region once Soviet main-force elements had moved out westward.

Odessa Military District adopted a slightly modified approach: Here again, a command structure split occurred. Carved out of District Headquarters, however, was not the counterpart for a whole front, but instead for the most powerful of all Soviet armies – 9<sup>th</sup>. Led by Chief of Staff Major-General Zakharov, most Odessa MD Headquarters officers by far were secretly reassigned to 9<sup>th</sup> Army Hq. Marshal of the Soviet Union Konyev tells us that on June 20<sup>th</sup> the readiness level for Headquarters 9<sup>th</sup> Army was raised to combat alert, following which the Headquarters slipped out of Odessa to move into its field command post (JMH, 1968, №7, p. 42). Quite a bit earlier, Odessa MD Commander Colonel-General Cherevichenko has already left Odessa on a stealth visit to the Crimea to take over formerly Caucasus-based 9<sup>th</sup> Special Corps, then bypass Odessa by train on the way to 9<sup>th</sup> Army's secret command post, with whose command he has been entrusted. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov reports that as the Germans invade, Cherevichenko is on that train ("Historical Issues," 1970, № 5, p. 46). Since 9<sup>th</sup> Army was to leave the confines of Soviet territory, an additional general, Chibisov, appeared in Odessa even BEFORE the German invasion. Once 9<sup>th</sup> Army command and staff had moved out, he was to stay put as military administrator, looking after home turf half-vacant from the military perspective.

Leningrad Military District, however, is the exception: Here, too, you see a front (Northern) secretly set up, but with no structural split. Eminently logical: For now, Northern is not preparing to move much beyond the Karelian region, so there is no need to distinguish between commanders set to forge far ahead and those to stay in place. Since Northern Front will be operating on roughly the same ground earlier defined by the military district, no need for two distinct hierarchies. Dual structure you do need only where some of the commanders and troops are outbound. Result: Leningrad MD has no deputy's slot added. Here, both combat operations and regional administration will be run from a single center – Headquarters, Northern Front. It is not going anywhere, hence replacing its command and staff is not on the agenda.

June 13, 1941, the day TASS broadcast its Statement, saw completion of structural bifurcation in all western border military districts, save Leningrad. That day, the People's Commissariat for Defense ordered headquarters of the fronts concerned to move out to field command posts.

Going forward, in Byelorussia two independent military command systems coexisted: secretly established Western Front (run by General Pavlov from a forest command post near Lyesna Station) and Western Special Military District (commanded by Lieutenant-General Kurdyumov, headquartered in Minsk). Pavlov still plays the part of District Commander. Officially, however, he already heads the Front, its headquarters already on the way to a clandestine command post and independence from Western SMD.

Two military command and staff systems, side by side on the same turf, is roughly like having two captains on the same bridge, two bosses in one communist party or two dons in the same mafia. Since you cannot have duplicate military leadership for one and the same area, it was created only because Western Front was shortly due to move out.

Simultaneously, two independent military command hierarchies also emerged in Ukraine: Southwestern Front as well as Kiev Special Military District. Marshal of the Soviet Union Bagramyan attests: Zhukov dispatched a special encrypted cable "to keep this top-secret, and accordingly to warn military district headquarters personnel" ("Thus the War Began" p. 83).

There, as in Minsk, they stage the same farce: As eyewash for outsiders, only Kiev Special Military District Headquarters directs the military in the Ukraine. Headquarters personnel, put on notice, keep their lips zipped about anything like alternate military authority. Another military command structure is, however, established parallel to district headquarters for the same area – Southwestern Front. *Can* you for long have in operation, in one and the same area, two independent military command structures?

Communications Forces Lieutenant-General Kurochkin (then a Major-General in charge of communications for Northwestern Front) fills us in about the Baltics in identical terms: "In the Panevyezhis area, headquarters command and office staff started to arrive. District Command, in fact, became Front Command, though until the war began it formally

kept its District label. Left in Riga was a group of generals and subordinate officers given responsibility for running the district” (“On the Northwestern Front [1941-1943],” Collected Works, p. 196).

Creation of two independent command systems inevitably begets two independent communications networks. In the Baltics, Major-General Kurochkin personally headed Front communications, his erstwhile deputy Colonel Akimov ran the autonomous District counterpart.

General Kurochkin threw himself into getting communications for still secret Northwestern Front up and running, handling it “as though a series of tests.” To avoid rousing the enemy’s suspicion with any sudden flare-up of chatter over new military channels he uses civilian land lines. The word “civilian,” mind you, take with more than a grain of salt: *Nothing* of the kind existed in the Soviet Union. In 1939, the government-run communications system was thoroughly militarized, subservient to the armed forces. The People’s Commissariat for Communications answered directly to the Commissariat for Defense. In any normal country the military communications network is an integral part of the overall national network. The Soviet Union had turned things upside down: the overall national network a key component of the military communications system, USSR Communications Commissar Peresyppkin officially a deputy to the Red Army Communications Chief.

Northwestern Front Command moved out to its field headquarters to go not on maneuvers, but to war: “We were setting up the tactical super-structure for running combat operations” (Lieutenant-General P.M. Kurochkin, “Front Calling,” p. 117).

The Front’s wartime communications network was well-primed and fine-tuned in advance. “All planning documents, frequencies, call letters and authentication codes were kept at military district headquarters for distribution to the troops in the event of war. With radio stations dotting the district numbering a good several thousand, militarizing their operations would have taken at least a week. Before that task could be completed time ran out” (ibid., p. 115). Let us make a mental note of this: Switching peace-time communications over to providing war-time Red Army support was all built not on the hypothesis that an enemy might suddenly attack and force all but instant conversion, but on the premise that Moscow would send a warning signal at a time of its own choosing. The switch-over plan, in other words, was designed for a war not of defense, but rather of offense



– meaning, for aggression preceded by clandestine preparation for such aggression. That very time for final Red Army preparations for an invasion of its own had now arrived. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, Northwestern Front Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Klyonov gives Communications Forces Major-General Kurochkin an order:

“– It’s a go, per the master plan. You know what I mean?”

–Yes, absolutely! – I declared” (Kurochkin, “On the Northwestern Front [1941-1943], Collected Works, p. 195).

A pity this “master plan” business isn’t so manifest to the rest of us – and not one of the Soviet generals will clarify what it does mean. Clear to us, though, is that Soviet generals did have plans...and were already carrying them out. Within just days something was supposed to have happened in line with the “master plan.” What Hitler did, however, forestalled it, forcing Soviet commanders to drop their script and improvise.

Here is how General Kurochkin goes about implementing the “master plan”: “The District Communications Office dispatched documentation on how to set up radio links...to the various army headquarters and to formations subordinate to the District itself. All these documents were to be appropriately adapted as they made their way down through corps, division, regiment and battalion command levels, ultimately reaching those staffing each radio station. That, as I have already said, would have taken no less than a week” (ibid., p. 118).

Result: Starting June 19<sup>th</sup>, top-secret intelligence, the kind you can pass on to those supposed to act on it only in the event of war, went out to thousands of end-users. You cannot reverse the process: no way to pull those secrets back and tuck them safely away. Once all those bits and pieces had left their safes, war became utterly unstoppable. Preparing for offensive warfare is rather like plotting a putsch: A tiny cluster of people hatches the plot, not entrusting even a scrap of information to thousands of future extras. As soon as the ringleaders have filled thousands of these bit players in on their briefest of walk-ons, staging the performance becomes absolutely inevitable. The plotters would otherwise forfeit the element of surprise, their biggest trump card, giving their adversary the chance to scramble in response.

Still, could it be Lieutenant-General Klyonov gave the order to let thousands of extras in on pieces of the “master plan”...in anticipation of

German aggression? Not a chance. General Klyonov adamantly dismisses the possibility of a German invasion. Even once it is actually underway, Klyonov remains in denial and does nothing to repulse it. Characteristic was his aggressive stance at a December 1940 meeting of the most senior commanders, where he proposed waging aggressive wars *only*, each to begin with a sudden Red Army strike. Trumping in belligerence even Zhukov, he had spunk enough, with Stalin looking on, to tangle with Zhukov about how you had to deliver surprise attacks. The chance of any German invasion, however, he discounted no less than did Politburo member Zhdanov, whose protégé he was. So, for that matter, did a host of other top Soviet military and political figures, including Stalin himself.

June 13, 1941 and the several days following saw the Soviet Union crank up its entire war machine. Deployment of Soviet fronts went so far as to share secrets of the most far-reaching significance with thousands due to act on them. In mid-June the Soviet Union already leapt across that Rubicon. Beyond it lay inevitable war. Had Hitler decided to launch “Barbarossa” a few weeks later, the Red Army would have reached Berlin not in 1945, but sooner.

#### 4

Before a commander advances, he sizes up what is ahead of him. Reconnaissance will, of course, already have unearthed and reported back a great deal. The commander will, of course, believe this intelligence. Nonetheless, before he does take that step forward his commander’s scrutinizing eye will once again range across the whole area. If a battalion is called upon to move out, the one whose binoculars will probe the terrain, long and hard, will be the battalion commander, personally. If it’s a corps, well, the one to do it will be the corps commander. Tradition and an empty ritual this is not. Before a commander has his troops move out, he must see and himself get a feel for the turf ahead of them: That minor ravine yonder – might not our tanks get bogged down in the mud?...that little bridge off to the side – ugh, hasn’t someone taken a saw to those piers?...and...out of that bit of a thicket over there you’ve got to expect them to counterattack.

If a commander fails to get that personal feel for what literally lies ahead, if he is unable mentally to probe the entire expanse ahead of his infantry, if before the fighting starts his mind’s eye cannot gauge all the pitfalls with which his soldiers will have to cope...he will pay for it with defeat. That is why before launching an offensive, before joining battle,

every commander, no matter the rank, dons fatigues, gets down on his belly, creeps through the mud – along an international border or the front line – and spends long hours peering across what is spread out in front of him. Before guns ever roar, he tries to cover every conceivable stumbling-block dawn may bring.

Visually inspecting the enemy and the area is called reconnoitering. Seeing teams of scouts show up on the far side of your border is not the most pleasant surprise. A good thing it isn't, if a Soviet tank division commander stares at you through his binoculars for hours on end. Imagine, though, a Soviet military district commander showing up right on your border, not by himself, in fact, but with a Politburo member, then both hanging around your border posts, not for hours, but for weeks. What *then* will you think?

Such was the prelude to every "liberation." As early as January 1939, for example, Leningrad Military District Commander Meretskov and Zhdanov, the latter soon to join the Politburo, were riding the same car up and down the whole Finnish border. Throughout the spring, summer and fall they kept it up. At the very end of autumn they were done and went back to Leningrad --- precisely when – wouldn't you know it – "Finnish militarists provoked war."

From early 1941 on, low-level at first, but then picking up the pace more and more, German generals and subordinate officers start on the Soviet-German frontier what only quite recently Meretskov and Zhdanov were doing on the Soviet-Finnish border. On my desk I have a famous snapshot: General Guderian, flanked by officers from his headquarters, reconnoitering near Brest one last time the night going into June 22, 1941. Not just Guderian, but all the German generals peered through their binoculars into Soviet territory. The closer the date for launching "Barbarossa," the more prominent the German generals appearing on the Soviet frontier.. Soviet generals and marshals register more and more reconnaissance teams (Chief Air Force Marshal Novikov "In the Skies of Leningrad," p. 41). The German scouts were using camouflage, masking their operations any way they could as well as wearing border guard or rank-and-file soldier's uniforms, but the experienced eye could always tell a reconnaissance squad apart from a border patrol. Consequence: A flood of reports from the Soviet frontier about German officers intensively reconnoitering – an unequivocal harbinger of war.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Zakharov (then Major-General, Chief of Staff, 9<sup>th</sup> Army) flags April 1941 as having marked the emergence of a “new situation.” It featured “the appearance on the Prut River of teams of officers wearing Romanian and German army uniforms, with all signs saying they had come to reconnoiter” (“Historical Issues,” 19706 № 5, p. 43). Reconnaissance implies preparation for offense – something Marshal Zakharov understands in 1970 as well as he did in ’41. Scout teams popping up on the far side of the frontier do not yet spell the beginning of war, but definitely signal an end to peace.

What, then, are Soviet commanders doing? Why aren’t they taking emergency steps to defend against and repel an attack that intensive reconnoitering by enemy teams confirms as a foregone conclusion? There is one simple reason Soviet generals are not reacting to enemy scouting: They are already very busy doing their own.

Major-General Sevastyanov (then Chief, Political Section, Order-of-the-Red-Banner “Czechoslovak Proletariat” 5<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, 16<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 11<sup>th</sup> Army, Northwestern Front): “Observing German border troops, something like twenty to thirty paces away, making eye contact with them, we never let any visible clue betray they so much as existed for us or that we had the slightest interest in them” (“Neman-Volga-Danube,” p. 7).

Ringling through General Sevastyan’s portrayal is that watching German border guards “twenty-thirty paces off” was for him no one-time event, but instead routine. The question it naturally begs is, “Comrade General, what, actually, is making *you* hug that border? If you’re deeply troubled by the possibility of German invasion, you’d better order five, six rows of barbed wire strung along that border. To send an even louder message to anybody thinking of crawling through all that wire, booby-trap it with mines – and pack in plenty. Behind that barrier, set up a real mine field near two miles deep, followed by anti-tank ditches, and cover those with flame-throwing landmines. Reinforce all that with twenty-thirty-odd rows of still more barbed wire – on metal stakes, for good measure. Better yet, don’t use stakes at all: Make it steel rails instead, not just by themselves, either, but sunk into concrete, yes, concrete! Next in line, then...well...yet another mine field – a fake. Beyond that: the real thing, then yet another anti-tank ditch, for insurance, followed by tree trunk barriers, etc., etc.”

If the general is preparing to defend, no need for him to do any close-range scanning of German troops. The terrain he needs to study isn't someone else's, it's his own – the more in-depth, the better. Right on the borders, he can make do with minor mobile squads: If an attack comes, using secret breaks in the barriers they can easily slip away, mining their egress as they go.

That about describes how Finland saw preparations for self-defense. There was nothing making Finnish generals squat on the demarcation line, eyes ranging over foreign soil...

The Red Army, though, is building no border barriers. Soviet generals, just like their German counterparts, week after week, month after month, spend every waking moment on the outer edge of their territory, a few steps from the international frontier.

Colonel Kochetkov recalls how the commander of a Brest-based Soviet tank division (22<sup>nd</sup>, part of 14<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps, 4<sup>th</sup> Army, Western Front; Major-General Puganov in charge – V.S.) so situated his divisional headquarters and himself in it that “we sat with Regimental Commissar Illarionov in the DivCom's office and with our binoculars watched German soldiers on the far bank of the Western Bug” (“With Battened-Down Hatches,” p. 8).

“How dumb can you get!” we exclaim, outraged. The minute war starts, the other side can just send machine-gun bursts or, better yet, a few cannon blasts right through the tank division commander's window. Division headquarters they can rake with whatever: automatic weapons, grenade launchers, sniper fire.. Their cannons can let loose point-blank: No need for range adjustments, ‘cause you can't miss.

We'll not get upset. For a would-be *defender* to put his tank division headquarters in such a spot really wouldn't be, charitably put, too shrewd a move. That tank division, though, *isn't* in Brest, “in the immediate vicinity of the border” (“Soviet Tank Forces,” p. 27), for the sake of *defense!* Look at the situation instead from the point of view of offense – and it all fits. Guderian's tank group on the German side has also been moved right up to the river bank. As for binoculars, Guderian over there is himself doing exactly the same: using them to size up the Soviet side of the river.

At times, putting on camouflage, Guderian appears with those field glasses at the very water's edge. Just before launching “Barbarossa” he no longer even bothers with disguises: stands there in full regalia with his

officers, peering through binoculars, just like his Soviet opposite numbers. No, we won't call the Soviet generals idiots. We don't, after all, see anything idiotic in what the German generals are doing. This is simply standard operating procedure, SOP, when you're getting ready to attack. It's always done this way, in every army, including the Soviet and German editions. The sole difference: The Soviet Union was gearing up for an operation incomparably bigger than Germany's "Barbarossa." Soviet commanders therefore started reconnoitering far sooner than their German counterparts, but intended to consummate their operation in July 1941. The record includes references to how Bagramyan studied Carpatian mountain passes, while simultaneously "scouring a sizeable part of the border" (JMH, 1976, № 1) – and that was back in September of 1940.

On the Soviet side, commanders of all ranks reconnoiter. When the war began, Southwestern Front Corps of Engineers Chief Major-General Ilyin-Mitkevich was in Rava-Russkaya, right on the border (Colonel Umansky, "On the Frontlines," p. 39).

In July 1940, by order of General Meretskov, reconnaissance was carried out along the entire western border. Involved were thousands of commanders, all the way up to generals and marshals holding the highest of positions. Meretskov himself, having scouted the Finnish border not long before, now was doing the same on the Romanian and German frontiers. Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union, take it away: "I personally carried out prolonged observation from forward border posts" ("In the Service of the Nation," p. 202). "Next, I traveled all along the border, visiting units stationed there" (ibid., p. 203). Meretskov, accompanied by Southwestern Front Commander Colonel-General Kirponos, again reconnoitered all along the outer perimeter of Kiev Special Military District. "From Kiev I headed down to Odessa, joining District Chief of Staff Major-General Zakharov... Together, we then went to the Romanian border belt: There we are, looking over there, some military types looking back at us." What needs to be pointed out here is that General Meretskov is running a border check with General Zakharov – the same Zakharov telling us April 1941 reconnoitering by groups of German generals and subordinate officers created a "new situation." Now, didn't you ever stop and think, comrades marshals and generals, that German reconnaissance, begun in April 1941, was merely a response to full-scale Soviet scouting carried out as far back as July 1940?

Let's get back, though, to Meretskov. From Odessa Military District he makes a dash for Byelorussia, teaming up with General Pavlov to scan the Soviet-German frontier as well as German territory. Then it's Moscow...in, out...and, presto, he's already at his next stop, Northern Front. Along the way he reports that at Northwestern Front headquarters he did not find the commander – who is spending quite a bit of time on the border. Northern Front Commander Lieutenant-General Popov is not at his headquarters, either – also out on the frontier.

To all that let's add that in 1945 Stalin and his generals thoroughly prepared and brilliantly executed a surprise attack on Japanese forces, in the process seizing Manchuria, North Korea and several provinces in China. Preparations for the sudden strike were handled identically to those aimed at Germany in the summer of 1941. Showing up on the border was the very same Meretskov, now already a Marshal of the Soviet Union. Stealthily, he surfaces on the Manchurian border under the pseudonym "Colonel-General Maximov." Among the elements key to getting ready: reconnaissance. "I myself traveled up and down on an all-terrain vehicle, in places even on horseback, covering all sectors" ("Red Star," June 7, 1987).

Corps of Engineers Lieutenant-General Zotov (at the time a Major-General in charge of Northwestern Front combat engineers) confirms that Northwestern Front Commander Colonel-General Kuznyetsov spent virtually all of June 1941 right up to the 22<sup>nd</sup> in the vicinity of 125<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division headquarters. The Front's Military Council was there, too. That 125<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division Hq, though, was so near the frontier, "the very first shell aimed at it was a bull's-eye" ("On the Northwestern Front," p. 173-74). You *could* say: "Ugh, what dumbbells these Russians are to have squeezed their headquarters up against the border!" Used to say it myself. Later on, though, I pulled together data on how Soviet divisional and corps headquarters were deployed on the Turkish and Manchurian borders. Well, what do you know: Nothing of the sort *there*, divisional headquarters in both cases set up no fewer than 6 miles-plus from the borders. By contrast, in the lead-up to "liberation crusades" headquarters were pushed up the very frontier – and not just for divisions, but even for corps, armies, fronts. Zhukov, for instance, moved up his own headquarters before suddenly hitting Khalkhin-Gol. SOP, it was, for all Soviet generals and marshals prior to every offensive. Guderian, by the way, took the same tack. So did Manstein. Ditto for Rommel. Same for Kleist.

Soviet division and corps commanders based far in the rear on Soviet soil would also visit the border – and very, very intensively. Marshal of the Soviet Union Rokossovsky (at the time, a major-general heading a mechanized corps, but not right on the frontier) recalls he would often drop in on General Fedyuninsky, whose corps was on the border itself. Fedyuninsky does reminisce in his memoirs about visits from colleagues such as, yes indeed, Rokossovsky. Vignettes like these we run across in the memoirs of Soviet marshals and generals by the hundreds and thousands.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Moskalyenko (back then, an artillery major-general, in charge of High Command Reserve 1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Tank Brigade) directly links the TASS Statement to a drastic step-up in reconnoitering by Soviet commanders. The commander of 5<sup>th</sup> Army, Tank Forces Major-General Potapov discussed the TASS Statement with General Moskalyenko and told him it called for action: “Pick some good people who know what they’re doing militarily and send ‘em up to the border. Have ‘em reconnoiter, check out the lay of the land and watch what the Germans are up to. Fact is, you, too, ’ll find it useful” (“In the Southwestern Sector,” p. 21).

Let’s again make a mental note here: In a *defensive* operation an anti-tank brigade has no business being on the very frontlines. Such a brigade an army commander throws into battle only in the most critical of situations, when the enemy has already breached the line held by battalions, regiments, brigades, divisions and corps, when the crisis threatens to engulf the whole army and when no doubt is left as to where the enemy’s main thrust is aimed. That can happen only if the enemy has already knifed deep through the Soviet defense perimeter. General Moskalyenko’s brigade, however, is not assigned to an army nor even a front. Its mission is that of “High Command Reserve.” When defending, you can throw it into battle if the enemy has already pierced the shield girding armies and even fronts, precipitating a manifest emergency of strategic dimensions. To prevail in such a strategic crisis the brigade must be not on the border, but dozens, even hundreds of miles away from it – must, in other words, be where that crisis may actually arise! In preparing for defensive action an “HCR” brigade commander most certainly has no good reason to be on the frontier.

If, instead, preparations are underway for a truly massive Soviet offensive due to plunge from the Lvov salient deep into enemy territory, then the left flank of the most powerful array of forces ever assembled in



the history of humankind will be covered by the Carpathians (and by the armies of mountain rangers making their appearance there), while the right flank needs to be shielded by an anti-tank formation that packs enormous firepower and is, in fact, positioned right on the border. Precisely there this brigade was indeed deployed, and General Moskalyenko, as ordered by General Potapov, personally strikes out to scout enemy territory. Should anyone wish to read into Soviet reconnaissance that the Soviet Union was gearing up for defense, allegedly giving its commanders reason to peer out across the frontier, I would remind those floating this version that Soviet scouting squads were heavy on sappers, including top-tier experts. If *defense* is the point, there is no reason whatever for a sapper to be looking over areas in enemy hands: He has his hands full right on his home turf – and the farther he pulls back from the border, the more work awaits him. For some reason, though, Soviet sappers instead spent hours and hours eyeing hostile territory.

Had Soviet reconnaissance been for defensive purposes, it would have had to be run not along the border, but some 60-plus miles behind it, far back on Soviet soil. The point should have been to select easiest-to-defend perimeters, scrutinize them, then turn to intensively readying them for battling any invader. That done, all senior command officers should have pulled back to the line defining the old border, once again scrutinized that now-deserted frontier, then withdrawn to the Dnepr line...and so on.

Reconnaissance launched from border posts, however, means reconnaissance for aggression.

## 5

On June 21, 1941 the Politburo met in secret session. Quoting Soviet historian Anfilov: “Communist Party leaders and members of the Soviet Government spent June 21<sup>st</sup> in the Kremlin, grappling with supremely important matters of state and military issues” (“Immortal Feat,” p. 185). We know only about decisions reached regarding four items discussed. We don’t know, however, the total number of issues discussed that day or what other decisions were taken.

What we do know:

On June 21, 1941 they decided to add to the Red Army arsenal the BM-13 mobile multiple rocket launcher, begin mass-producing BM-13’s as well as M-13 rockets and also start organizing rocket-launching artillery

units. It took mere weeks for the BM-13 to be informally baptized “Katyusha.”

“On June 21<sup>st</sup>, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) took the decision to create front formations based on the western border military districts” (Lieutenant-General Zhilin, Correspondent Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, “Great Patriotic War [1941-1945],” p. 64).

The latter decision absolutely dwarfs the first in significance. The fronts, of course, existed even earlier: The Politburo is merely ratifying decisions already made. Still, you can hardly overstate the importance of this one: Five fronts are created and given juridical, if clandestine status... not after the German invasion, but before.

Here’s why it matters: This Politburo session lasted all day and deep into the night. A few hours later Zhukov rings up Stalin and tries to convince him something unusual is happening on the border, a moment described by many eyewitnesses and historians. There is no doubt not just Stalin, but Molotov, Zhdanov and Beria all refuse to believe a German invasion can be underway. The reluctance to lend credence to German aggression is corroborated by every move the Red Army makes: Anti-aircraft guns don’t fire on German planes, Soviet fighters are told not to shoot them down, First Echelon troops have their bullets taken away and draconian orders rain down from General Staff against being drawn in by provocations (Zhukov and Timoshenko also largely discount the possibility of German aggression).

Question: If top Soviet political and military leaders don’t believe a German invasion possible, why, then, have they just created those fronts?

Answer: THE FRONTS WERE CREATED NOT TO REPULSE A GERMAN INVASION, but for a different purpose.

## 6

Here again the decision the Politburo took on June 21, 1941: create a High Command Reserve group of armies, naming as its commander First Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense Marshal of the Soviet Union Budyonny and as its chief of staff Major-General (subsequently Colonel-General) Pokrovsky. Comprising this army group were Second Strategic Echelon’s seven armies, secretly being moved, as we know, into the country’s western reaches. Colonel-General Pokrovsky’s memoirs give the new formation a slightly different label: “General Headquarters Group of

Forces” (JMH, 1978, № 4, p. 64). The name points to June 21<sup>st</sup> as also marking establishment of High Command General Headquarters – the ultimate authority governing the Armed Forces in wartime. At the very least, on June 21<sup>st</sup> its establishment is an issue already settled.

Quite possibly, the decision to set up a General Headquarters Group of Forces was taken earlier and merely ratified by the Politburo on June 21<sup>st</sup>. Serving as evidence pointing in that direction are numerous indications that the German invasion descended on Major-General Pokrovsky only after he had already reached his battle station in the western USSR (JMH, 1978, № 11, p. 126).

In any case, BEFORE the German invasion Second Strategic Echelon was not seven distinct armies, but rather a fighting machine under unified command. What for? Defense? No. In a war of defense there was no point whatsoever to having Second Strategic Echelon’s armies under unified command – and the latter was disbanded even before its armies ever went up against the enemy. In peacetime, having a Second Strategic Echelon at all made no sense: The European part of the country had no place to deploy or train it.

If the General Headquarters Reserve army group was created neither for peacetime nor for a defensive war, what, then, *was* it for?

“On June 21<sup>st</sup>, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) conferred upon the chief of the General Staff General Zhukov overall leadership of Southwestern and Southern Fronts, and, for Northern Front, conferred the same on Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense General Meretskov” (General Ivanov and Major-General Shekhovtsev, JMH, 1981, № 9, p. 11). Just a short while earlier, Meretskov was running an army while “liberating” Finland. Now, he is being sent back to the same area, representing General Headquarters. Just as recently, Zhukov was commanding Southern Front while “liberating” Romanian eastern districts. Now he is being sent right back, representing General Headquarters in coordinating the operations of two fronts.

Stalin, they tell us, sent Zhukov to the Romanian, Meretskov the Finnish frontier to prepare for repulsing German aggression. Let that stand...and you end up with another oddity: Stalin dispatching Zhukov and Meretskov to forestall events he himself doesn’t believe possible.

Meretskov set out immediately. Zhukov tarried a few hours in Moscow – and “Barbarossa” caught him still at General Staff. Pure coincidence. Had “Barbarossa” been launched a few hours later, Zhukov himself would have been caught up in the titanic tsunami sweeping towards the western frontier generals from General Staff as well as BrigComs from the GULAG, inmates as well as those herding them, commanders called up from the reserves as well as commanders pulled from distant borders, academy students as well as their instructors.

Soviet historians talk about German commanders: “..In June, right up to their invasion of the USSR, Brauchitsch and Halder drove out to visit the troops time and again” (Anfilov, “Immortal Feat,” p. 65). Were Zhukov and Meretskov somehow acting differently?

The operations of both armies are each other’s mirror image. Without knowing what their foe is doing, the Wehrmacht and the Red Army are copying each other, right down to the minutest of details. Yes, Soviet commanders push their command posts up to the frontier – just like their German colleagues, actually closer. Yes, the Red Army masses two firepower-packed force clusters on flanking salients – just like the German Army. Yes, Soviet aircraft are concentrated right on the borders – just like the German ones. Yes, Soviet pilots are under orders not to down German planes, to keep from triggering conflict prematurely and make their own attack a total surprise. Yes, Hitler’s command post is near Rastenburg in Eastern Prussia, the Soviet Main Forward Command Post (Russian acronym: “GPKP”) near Vilnius – illustrating yet another, this time geographic parallel: The distance from the Soviet command post to the German frontier precisely matches that of its German counterpart to the Soviet frontier. Mark the Soviet and German main command posts on a map, then fold the map along the international frontier – and the two CP’s will be superimposed.

But...whereas Hitler has already moved out to his clandestine command post...what about Stalin?

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, once the Politburo session has ended many of the members hasten to their disparate battle stations. Zhdanov, in the Politburo hierarchically in charge of Finland’s “liberation,” now gets ready to meet a June 23<sup>rd</sup> deadline for showing up in Leningrad. Khrushchev, who handled the “liberation” of eastern districts in Poland and Romania, races down to Kiev (and possibly Tiraspol). Andreyev, Politburo point man for military

transports (General Yepishev, "Party and Army," p. 176), rushes out along the Trans-Siberian trunk line to expedite moving up Second Strategic Echelon armies, and the very next day is already spotted in Novosibirsk (Lieutenant-General Kalinin, "Pondering Bygone Days," p. 131).

What about Stalin, though? Could it be he, too, just like Hitler, is preparing to head out to a secret command post?

7

The Politburo decision secretly to deploy five fronts on the western frontier meant the die was cast for Soviet action there in 1941 – for one extremely serious reason: Each of the fronts was eating its way through, among other things, up to 60,000 head of cattle a month (Marshal of the Soviet Union Kurkotkin, "Soviet Armed Forces Logistics during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945," p. 325). Waiting until the following year would have meant having to feed the five fronts over three million head of cattle. Also needing food were seven Second Strategic Echelon and three NKVD armies, deployed farther back, together with four fleets, Soviet forces gearing up to "liberate" Iran, the air force, anti-aircraft detachments, and, most important of all, the arms industry, where there were even more mouths to feed.

"Not a problem," some will tell me, "with socialist agriculture and our kolkhozes to rely on..." Rather than argue the point, let me show you Soviet General Staff data: "Despite major strides made in agricultural development on the eve of the war, for a number of reasons the grain problem remained unresolved. Government grain procurement and storage were not fully meeting the country's food requirements" (JMH, 1961, № 1, p. 102). In short, big strides, but no bread. Stalin-appointed People's Commissar of Finances and Central Committee Member Zveryev saw it this way: "By early 1941, our cattle herds still had not come up to the 1916 level" ("Ministerial Proceedings," p. 188).

The 1916 level was no Russian standard. It reflected instead how severely two years of devastating, ruinous war had depressed the country's agriculture. "Peacetime" cattle herds in the Soviet Union were smaller than those Russia had had with a world war raging! Measured against the standards of preceding decades, the 1916 level was abysmal, all but catastrophic, enough potentially to make a shambles of an entire way of life, spark unrest and send crowds spilling into the streets.

The communists, having swept to power on a maelstrom of anarchy, did not better the country's food situation. They made it worse – so much so that even a quarter century later the country was still trying to climb back to the miserably low level to which the First World War had dragged its economy. Stalin created a colossal army and arms industry, in the process sacrificing national patrimony amassed over centuries as well as people's living-standard, the latter driven beneath the level endured during a world war.

In early 1939, Stalin started intensively siphoning resources from already disastrously weakened agriculture into the armed forces and the arms industry. Both the latter grew rapidly fatter, the former shriveled to harrowing proportions. The pace quickened. Remember those 1,320 trains, loaded with cars, in the vicinity of the Soviet Union's western borders? Where had they come from? Right: requisitioned by mobilization from the kolkhozes – from *agro-*, not the *arms* industry! How about – another illustration – the secret May 1941 Red Army draft of 800,000 reservists?! In one month, the Army gets nearly a million more mouths to feed. Who is swelling its ranks? We already know it's GULAG inmates. Well, of course, it's also just-plain-Ivans. At the arms factory, they get a draft exemption. What, though, if they're out on the kolkhoz?

In essence, five voracious fronts, set up BEFORE the German invasion, plus secret PRE-harvest mobilization of just-plain-Ivans and equipment for those fronts signaled inevitable famine in 1942 even without German interference. Famine in 1942 was foreordained at the June 21, 1941 Politburo session. Having deployed the fronts – veritable eating-machines – meant there was no turning back from taking them into action the same year. The following year, 1942, would otherwise have confronted Stalin with not just Hitler, but also millions of starving, armed rank-and-filers in his own army. A 1941 Red Army surprise attack, by contrast, promised booty: new territories with riches and food to spare (in Romania, for example). Should those reserves fall short, never mind: “War brought on famine” won't be hard to explain or understand.

We already know Stalin had no choice but to send Second Strategic Echelon armies into battle in 1941, regardless of Hitler's moves: In the country's western reaches there were neither quarters nor anywhere to train them in the winter. Yet another reason Stalin was locked into war in 1941: If he failed to send the five fronts, the seven armies of Second Strategic

Echelon and the NKVD's three into battle in 1941, then by spring 1942 this vast armed host simply could no longer be fed.

The sole Soviet marshal Stalin had full faith in, Shaposhnikov, as early as 1929 said categorically you could not mobilize hundreds of thousands, millions of people, then keep them near the border idly and indefinitely ("Nerve Center of the Army," Vol. 3). An army at war is far easier to control than millions of armed draftees weary of waiting around and doing nothing. Just try taking such a mass of armed men and then not even feeding them. What do you think you will have on your hands?

In creating the fronts Stalin wrecked the already shaky balance between a gargantuan military and a drained, destitute agricultural sector. It was now all or nothing: For Stalin, waiting until '42 was simply no longer an option.

## Chapter 29. WHY STALIN DID NOT BELIEVE CHURCHILL

### 1

Why *should* Stalin have believed him?

Who or what was Churchill? A communist? Great friend of the Soviet Union? Fervent advocate of world communist revolution?

If you or I get a letter bearing hardly-ho-hum news, our first question will be to what extent we should take its source seriously. I think Stalin wondered the same. Seen through Soviet communist eyes, what sort of man *was* Churchill? As early as 1918, first among world political leaders, Churchill grasped the enormous threat communism posed and strove hard to help the Russian people rid themselves of its dreadful virus. Though his efforts fell short, he did more than all other world leaders combined. Churchill was an enemy of the communists and never made any bones about it. In 1918 he put forward the idea of working with Germany to combat the Soviet communist dictatorship. He was actively and tenaciously fighting Soviet communists at a time when Corporal Hitler, outside his own battalion, was still a complete unknown.

Lenin termed Churchill “the greatest hater of Soviet Russia” (Vol. 41, p. 350).

If your worst enemy, loathing you more than anyone, sends you a letter to warn of dangers, will you put much stock in it?

### 2

To understand how Stalin saw Churchill’s letters, you have to recall the political situation in Europe.

In the 1930’s diplomatic war Germany faced major handicaps. Being in the center of Europe, she also stood at the crossroads of all conflicts. No matter what war might break out in Europe, Germany would all but inevitably be involved. Many countries’ diplomatic strategy in the ‘30’s therefore boiled down to saying “You go to war with Germany, I’ll try to stay on the sidelines.” “Munich-‘38” was a striking sample of that philosophy.

Victors in the 1930’s on the diplomatic front were Stalin and Molotov. With the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact Stalin gave the green light for World War Two, himself staying a “neutral” observer while getting a million parachutists ready for “any surprises.”



Great Britain and France lost that diplomatic war and were forced now to fight a real one, from which France was quickly eliminated. What, then, exactly *was* Britain's political aim?

Looking at things from the Kremlin, you can conceive of just one political gambit for Churchill: find a lightning-rod to deflect Germany's "blitzkrieg" away from Britain to *wherever*. In the latter half of 1940 the only possible lightning-rod was the Soviet Union.

More simply put, Britain (in Stalin's view, openly expressed on March 10, 1939) would like to see the Soviet Union and Germany come to blows, while it steps aside and stays out of the fight. I don't know whether that was Churchill's intent. Exactly that, however, was Stalin's perception of every move the British government and its diplomats made.

Soviet Fleet Admiral Kuznyetsov: "Stalin, of course, had ample reason to deem England and America bent on having us and Germany clash head to head" ("On the Eve," p. 321).

Whenever a letter from Churchill arrived, Stalin, without even reading it, could well imagine its contents. What is Churchill after? What is he worried about? Keeping a communist regime in the Soviet Union safe and secure...or maybe weightier issues? What, in political terms, can Churchill be dreaming about? How marvelous it would be to switch roles with Stalin: Stalin goes to war with Hitler, Churchill watches them fight it out!

In this situation Churchill had too much to gain for Stalin to be able to take his words at face value.

### 3

To understand Stalin's attitude towards Churchill's letters you have to remind yourself also of the strategic situation in Europe. The cardinal principle in strategy is concentration: focusing superior force on weakness. In World War One Germany was unable to apply this cardinal strategic principle because it was fighting a two-front war. Trying hard to muster force on both fronts at once yielded weakness overall. Attempts to concentrate efforts on one front automatically meant weakening the other, which the enemy was quick to exploit. With two fronts, Germany had to forego application of the principle of force concentration, hence of the strategy of overwhelming the enemy. It had to settle for attrition. However, given limited resources, unlike its enemies, for Germany a war of attrition could have but one outcome: catastrophe.

In the Second World War, the German General Staff and Hitler himself grasped perfectly well that a two-front war spelled disaster. In 1939-40, Germany actually never had more than a single front. That explains how the German General Staff was able to bring the principle of force concentration to bear – in fact, brilliantly training German military might successively on one foe, then another.

What loomed largest in German strategy? Avert a two-front war! Just one front spells brilliant victories. Two fronts means saying no to the foremost of strategic principles, switching from the strategy of overwhelming your foe to trying to grind him down. It dooms the blitzkrieg and foreshadows going down to disaster.

What, in 1940, can Churchill be dreaming of in strategic terms? Just one thing: turning Germany's one-front into a two-front war.

Hitler himself considered fighting a two-front war impossible. At a November 23, 1939 meeting of the Wehrmacht Supreme Command Hitler pointed out a war against the Soviet Union could be launched only after war in the west had been brought to a conclusion.

Just picture now having someone report to you in 1940 that Hitler intends to give up the cardinal principle of strategy: Instead of concentrating his forces he is allegedly planning to scatter them. Someone is insistently whispering into your ear, Hitler deliberately wants to repeat Germany's World War One mistake. For Germany, every schoolboy knows, two-front war is suicide. The Second World War would end up confirming that rule yet again – and, for Hitler, lead to suicide, quite literally.

Assume that in 1940, after the fall of France, someone tells you Hitler is preparing for suicidal two-front war: Would you believe him? I wouldn't.

Had Soviet military intelligence reported something like that, I would have asked for GRU Chief General Golikov's resignation, suggesting he go back to the academy and take another close look at why Germany lost WWI. Had the news about suicidal war come my way through some neutral third party, my answer to him would have been Hitler is no idiot, but you, dear friend, probably are, if you feel Hitler will voluntarily launch war on a second front.

Churchill, more than anyone else in the world, stood to gain from Hitler's having not one, but two fronts. If Churchill tells you secretly Hitler is getting ready to fight a two-front war, how would you react to his report?

Strictly strategic and political considerations aside, you also have to bear in mind the atmosphere in which Churchill was writing his missives and Stalin was reading them.

On June 21, 1940 France falls. German submarine wolf packs now raid sea lanes at a sharply stepped-up pace. Hanging over Great Britain, an island state with close trade ties 'round the world, is the threat of naval blockade and acute crisis for commerce, industry and finances. Worse yet, the German military machine, then widely seen as invincible, already is intensively gearing up to descend on the British Isles.

Against that backdrop, on June 25<sup>th</sup> Churchill writes a letter to Stalin. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, German armed forces seize Britain's Isle of Guernsey. Few indeed, over Britain's thousand-year long history, are the instances when an enemy has landed on the British Isles. What's next? Will they come ashore in England itself? Guernsey is captured without a fight. How long will Britain manage to resist?

The very next day after Germany has seized Guernsey Stalin gets Churchill's message.

Let's just ask ourselves: What is Churchill after? Is it saving the communist dictatorship in the Soviet Union or the British Empire? I think what really is driving Churchill to send the letter is British self-interest. If you and I get the point, could Stalin possibly have missed it? For Stalin, Churchill is no disinterested observer flagging danger out of feelings of friendship, but someone in a bind who himself needs help and allies to fight a dreaded foe. Stalin therefore takes Churchill's missives with a very hefty dose of salt.

Churchill wrote Stalin several letters. Unfortunately, they all arrived just when Churchill himself was in serious trouble. Take, for example, the best-known in the series: Received by Stalin on April 19, 1941, all Soviet and many non-Soviet historians alike have often cited and unanimously rated it as his most important warning. Why don't we, though, first devote attention not to its text, but to the situation then facing Churchill:

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, the German Army had seized Belgrad. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, Rommel had moved up to the borders of Egypt. The 14<sup>th</sup> had seen Yugoslavia brought to its knees before Germany. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, German bombs had damaged St. Paul's Cathedral. April saw Greece on the eve of surrender, with British forces there headed for disaster and no assurance

they could be evacuated. The stage thus set, Stalin gets his most important letter from Churchill.

Stalin may have had suspicions not just about Churchill's motives, but also his sources. Churchill had written Stalin in June 1940, too. Why, though, hadn't the same author sent such letters to the government of France as well as to his own troops on the Continent in May of that same year?

Churchill writes Stalin in April 1941, yet within a month German armed forces capture Crete in a brilliant operation. How come, Stalin may have reasoned, British intelligence works so well to secure the interests of the Soviet Union, yet fails miserably on behalf of those of Great Britain?

## 5

There is, finally, a more serious reason for Stalin not to believe Churchill's "warnings": About a German invasion Churchill sent him none.

Communist propaganda has labored mightily to lend substance to the myth about "warnings" from Churchill. Towards that end, Khrushchev cited Churchill's April 18, 1941 message to Stalin. Supremely well-connected military historian (and consummate prevaricator) Anfilov quotes it in all his books. Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov incorporates it in toto. General Pavlov does the same. The official "History of the Great Patriotic War" drills into us the notion of Churchillian warnings and quotes his April 18th message in full. We also find the same Churchill missive in dozens, even hundreds of Soviet books and articles.

Here is what Churchill sent:

"From a trustworthy agent I have received credible information to the effect that on March 20<sup>th</sup>, once the Germans had decided Yugoslavia had fallen into their net, they began to redeploy to southern Poland three out of the five panzer divisions earlier stationed in Romania. At that moment, word of massive unrest in Serbia prompted them to call off that redeployment. Your Excellency will have no difficulty appreciating the significance of these facts."

That is how all Soviet historians put forward Churchill's message, insistently portraying it as a "warning." I, for one, don't see *any*.

Churchill talks about three panzer divisions: very formidable, by his standards...by Stalin's, not very. Stalin, at the time, is secretly creating 63 tank divisions, every single one of them featuring more and better tanks

than its German counterparts. Having received word of three German divisions, was he supposed to parse it as “invasion coming”?

If we think bringing news of three tank divisions qualifies as “warning” enough about aggression in the making, let us not then accuse Hitler of aggressiveness: German intelligence briefed Hitler about *dozens* of Soviet tank divisions clustered along the frontier shared with Germany and Romania.

Churchill invites Stalin himself to “appreciate the significance of these facts.” How, in fact, can you? Poland, history has shown, is the gateway for all Russia-bound European aggressors. Hitler wanted to redeploy the panzer divisions into Poland, but had a change of heart.

By contrast to Poland, Romania is a very poor springboard for aggression: German troops in Romania are harder to supply than in Poland, plus launching an attack from Romania faces the aggressor with a much longer and tougher haul to Russia’s vital hubs, forcing him to clear a host of hurdles, including the Dnepr’s lower reaches.

Had Stalin been preparing for defense and believed Churchill’s “warning,” he should have heaved a sigh of relief and eased up on military preparations. What is more, Churchill reports why German forces are *not* being transferred to Poland, but staying in Romania: The Germans are running into problems Yugoslavia-wide and especially in Serbia. In other words, says Churchill, the panzer divisions have been left in Romania not for any eastbound offensive against the Soviet Union at all. On the contrary, their focus is southwestward from Romania, meaning, their back is turned toward Stalin.

At that point Britain is struggling as hard as it can on the diplomatic and military fronts throughout the Mediterranean Basin, maximum effort being exerted in Greece and Yugoslavia. Churchill’s telegram is of the utmost importance, yes, but there is no way you can construe it as a warning. To a far greater extent it is actually an invitation to Stalin: The Germans wanted to shift some divisions into Poland, but have had second thoughts. You now have nothing to fear, all the more so since their Romania-based divisions are turned away from you! Weigh those facts – and act!

As the war moved along, Stalin, his situation critical, himself sent similar messages to Churchill and Roosevelt: “I am bearing the brunt of Germany’s assault, Germany has its back turned to you, your best time is

now!” “Well, be a little quicker, will you, in opening up that second front!” Next, it was again the Western allies’ turn: Having opened the second front and slid into a quagmire, Western leaders in January 1945 approached Stalin with that very sort of missive: “Couldn’t you, Stalin, hit a little harder?!”

Churchill’s letters we have no business seeing as warnings: The long opener he wrote Stalin on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1940, when there still *was* no “Barbarossa” Plan! His letters were based not on knowledge of German plans, but rather on sober assessment. Churchill was simply drawing Stalin’s attention to the situation on the Continent: Today, Britain has problems with Germany, tomorrow, they will inevitably come knocking on the Soviet Union’s door as well. Churchill is calling on Stalin to join him against Hitler, to have the Soviet Union enter the war, that is, on the side of Britain and all of conquered Europe.

The great British war historian Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart brilliantly analyzed Hitler’s view of the strategic situation. According to Jodel, whom Hart cites, Hitler repeatedly told his generals Britain’s only hope was a Soviet invasion of Europe (B. Liddell, “History of the Second World War, p. 151). Churchill himself, on April 22, 1941, recorded: “The Soviet Government is perfectly aware...that we need its help” (D. Woodward, “British Foreign Policy in the Second World War, p. 611). Exactly what kind of help is Churchill expecting from Stalin? How indeed can Stalin provide it, if not by striking Germany?

## 6

Stalin has grounds enough for not believing Churchill. Thinking just for himself, though, Stalin has to realize, once Great Britain has fallen he will be left to square off against Germany. Does he? Of course. He even makes the point to Churchill in replying to the June 25, 1940 message:

“...[T]he Soviet Union’s policy is to avoid war with Germany, but Germany may attack the Soviet Union in the spring of 1941, if by then Britain has lost the war” (quoting from a book by R. Goralski, “World War II Almanac: 1931-1945,” p. 124).

Stalin’s answer reads as though he means to live in peace and patiently wait until Great Britain falls, then, left one on one with Hitler, keep right on waiting until the Germans attack.

“Oh, how stupid Stalin was!” some historians rail. We, though, will not: This message is addressed not to Churchill, but to Hitler! On July 13,

1940, on Stalin's orders, Molotov hands German Ambassador Count von Schulenburg a transcript of a conversation Stalin has had with British Ambassador Cripps. A strange move, isn't it: negotiate with Churchill (through Ambassador Cripps), then secretly hand Hitler the classified minutes (through Ambassador von Schulenburg)?

This, by the way, is yet another Stalin ploy: He passes on to Hitler not the original memorandum, but rather a carefully doctored copy, preserving a great deal of unnecessary detail while completely recasting key phrases. In this case, I think, you have to talk not about two versions of the same memorandum, but instead about two documents more different than alike.

Strip Stalin's "copy" of diplomatic chaff, boil the memorandum down to pure content...and this document is telling Hitler:

1. Adolf, wage war, you've nothing to fear in the rear. Move forward. No need to glance behind you: There, you have your good friend Joseph Stalin, who wants only peace and, no matter what, will never attack you.
2. Here, in Moscow, there've been talks with the British Ambassador: Don't worry, they weren't aimed at you. See, I'm even sending you the classified transcript of the conversation with Cripps. Churchill, in fact, I told where to go! (He actually hadn't.)

Are the sweet Kremlin siren songs believable? Many historians think so. Hitler, however, did not: Having thought long and hard about the "copy" of Stalin's conversation with Cripps, on June 21, 1940 he orders work started on the "Barbarossa" Plan. In other words, Hitler opts for a two-front war. To many, this decision seems incomprehensible, inexplicable. Truly suicidal, it was neither understood nor endorsed by many German generals and field marshals. Hitler, though, no longer had a choice. He was moving ever farther west, north and south – while Stalin stood behind him, axe in hand and sweet songs of peace on his lips.

Hitler made one irremediable mistake. He let it happen not on June 21, 1940, though, but on August 19, 1939. Once he had agreed to signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, he was inescapably committed to war against the West, with a "neutral" Stalin behind him. From precisely that moment on, Hitler did have two fronts. The call to launch "Barbarossa" in the east without waiting for victory in the west was not the fateful mistake. That was just Hitler's attempt to undo the fateful blunder he had allowed himself earlier. It was, however, already too late. With two fronts a given, the war

was by now beyond winning. Even taking Moscow would not have solved the problem: Behind Moscow lay sheer boundless territory, over 6,000 more miles, colossal industrial might, inexhaustible natural wealth, an enormous pool of people. Starting a war with Russia is always easy, finishing it, hardly. Fighting in the European part of the USSR was, of course, easy for Hitler: not too much land, many high-quality roads, mild winters. Was Hitler ready, though, for war in Siberia – in vastness unbounded and truly trackless, morass really bottomless, cold cruel enough nearly to match Stalin's regime?

Stalin knew two-front war for Hitler spelled suicide. Stalin reckoned Hitler would not opt for suicide, would not start war in the east without having finished it in the west. Stalin patiently waited for the coda to the German-British war – panzer corps coming ashore on the British Isles. He – and not only he – saw the masterful landing on Crete as a general rehearsal for descending on England. At the same time, Stalin was doing everything he could to persuade Hitler he had purely peaceful intentions. That was why Soviet anti-aircraft batteries did not open up on German aircraft, why Soviet newspapers and TASS trumpeted there would be no war between the USSR and Germany.

Had Stalin managed to convince Hitler the USSR was neutral, panzer corps doubtlessly would indeed have been sent ashore on the British Isles. If so...

A truly unprecedented situation would then have arisen: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, France, Greece and Albania no longer have armies, governments, parliaments nor political parties. Millions of people have been driven into Nazi concentration camps. All of Europe is waiting for liberation. Left on the Continent, meanwhile, are only Hitler's personal guard regiment, Nazi concentration camp guards, German supply units and military training centers as well as...five Soviet airborne corps, along with thousands of high-speed tanks specially designed to operate on the "autobahns," twenty-thousand planes with pilots untrained for dog-fights but drilled in ground target attack, divisions and whole armies of NKVD, armies manned by GULAG inmates, glider armadas for swift delivery of airborne troops to enemy territory, mountain divisions trained to swoop down on passes used to funnel oil – the lifeblood of war.



Has anyone in history ever had so promising a chance to “liberate” Europe? That situation, however, had not arisen spontaneously. It was Stalin who had spent a long time doggedly and unremittingly piecing it together like an exquisite mosaic. It was Stalin who had helped bring Hitler to power and made him into a genuine Icebreaker of the Revolution. It was Stalin who had thrust the Icebreaker of the Revolution upon Europe. It was Stalin who had demanded French and other communists not interfere with the Icebreaker’s shattering of Europe. It was Stalin who had supplied the Icebreaker with all he needed for his triumphant advance. It was Stalin who had closed his eyes to the Nazis’ every crime and was delighted to see (quoting “Pravda”) “the whole world being rocked to its very foundations, the mighty crumbling, the great crashing to the ground.”

Hitler, however, saw through Stalin’s scheme. That is why World War Two ended in disaster for Stalin: He ended up with just half of Europe and a bit of Asia.

## 7

One last question now: If Churchill did not warn Stalin about preparations for an invasion, why, then, have communists been clinging so tenaciously to that legend? To show people in the USSR, now the Russian Federation that Churchill was a good man? To prove you have to believe Western leaders? That, of course, is not their point.

The legend of Churchill’s “warnings” communists need to justify their own aggressive preparations: Yes, they do acknowledge they were gearing up for sudden attack, but...“We hadn’t come up with that plan on our own: It was because Churchill had warned us.”

## Chapter 30. WHY STALIN DID NOT BELIEVE RICHARD SORGE

### 1

Stalin was deadly serious about getting ready for war. He was especially solicitous of the welfare of Soviet military intelligence, now known under the acronym GRU. Running down the roster of all GRU chiefs from the inception of the organization to 1940 is enough to gauge just how much “tender loving care” Stalin lavished on his gallant intelligence agents.

Here you have that roster:

Aralov – arrested, spent several years in investigative detention with application of “physical force,” then fought as a common soldier near Moscow in 1941

Gusyev (Drabkin) – liquidated

Pyatakov – liquidated

Aussyem – liquidated

Lentsman – liquidated

Zeybot – liquidated

Berzin - liquidated

Uritsky – liquidated

Nikonov – liquidated

Yezhov – liquidated

Gyendin – liquidated

Orlov – liquidated

Proskurov - liquidated

Naturally, liquidation of the chief of military intelligence meant also liquidating his top deputies, their deputies, advisers, directorate and section heads. Liquidation of the latter invariably cast a shadow on operations officers and the network of agents they were running. Elimination of military intelligence chiefs therefore at least twice added up to elimination of the entire military intelligence network.

Some say the special solicitude Stalin gave his military intelligence agents had disastrous consequences. Don't believe the rumors. Before, during and after World War Two the GRU was, and still is, the most powerful and effective intelligence-gathering organization in the world. In terms of the quality of secret information obtained, the GRU stood head and

shoulders above its chief adversary and rival – the Soviet secret police a.k.a. “Cheka” or “KGB.” The waves of bloody purges that kept sweeping Soviet military intelligence did not sap its strength. On the contrary, new, more aggressive generations would replace their predecessors. The generational turnover was akin to a shark’s getting a new set of teeth. The new teeth come in, whole rows at a time, each displacing its predecessor phalanx, with even more new and newer ranks already coming into view. The more abominable the creature turns, the more teeth its hideous jaws grow, the more often they change places and the longer and sharper they become.

The rapid generational turnover among intelligence agents often (very often) also decimated innocent (by communist standards) agents. Oddly enough, the Soviet shark still was not left toothless. Remember how Hitler did away with quite a few fervent fascists in one of his mass movements, the SA? Did that really weaken Hitler’s regime?

The difference between Hitler and Stalin was that Stalin was deadly serious about getting ready for war. Nights of the long knives Stalin aimed not only at his own communist stormtroopers, but also at generals, marshals, designer-builders and agents. Stalin highly valued getting from his agents briefcases packed with secrets. Even more, though, he valued not getting a briefcase with a bomb. He saw not just his personal interests at stake, but also those of state. In critical to extremely critical situations, stability at the highest levels of government, the political system and the military ranks among the most essential components of a country’s readiness for war.

In critical situations no one shoved a bomb under Stalin’s table – and it was not a matter of being lucky. The relentless terror with which Stalin targeted the GRU not only yielded him very high-caliber secret information, but also guaranteed the top leadership freedom from “any surprises” whenever things turned critical

Richard Sorge, a.k.a. Ramsay, stationed in Tokyo as a journalist, was one of a row of spy teeth Stalin ordered pulled – a routine preventive measure – on June 29, 1938.

## 2

Soviet military intelligence is not so stupid as to publish Sorge’s most newsworthy reports. Analyzing even the relatively few that have been

released, however, gets us nowhere. I will not recount many messages (all very much alike), but cite just three, each quite typical.

January 1940: “Gratefully accept your greetings, and wishes re leave. If, however, I do take leave, it will immediately curtail information.”

May 1940: “Of course, given the current military situation we are postponing return home. Once again assure you, this is not the time to address that issue.”

October 1940: “Can I count on returning home once the war is over?”

Strange, isn't it? At the beginning of a war, an agent is asking whether he will be allowed to come home after it is over! Incidentally, having asked, Sorge lists how much he has done for Soviet authorities. What sort of strange cable is this? Every agent knows he *will* be allowed to return home after a war. Why on earth yet again transmit that kind of question? Every time a top-secret transmitter using an obscure code goes right out on the air, it poses an enormous risk to Sorge's entire spy network. Can that network, its radio station and its top-secret codes really have been created for Sorge to raise questions like these?

Sounding stranger still than the first two (I repeat, there were not just two such cables, but more) was the third. The GRU is telling Richard Sorge: “Come home, on (they call it) leave, anytime. Forget this war, why don't you?! Take a ride this way and have a rest!” Why ask for permission to return after the war, if they're insistently proposing you come back right now, right during the war?!

In the Soviet Union Sorge was featured in many books and articles. Some of them resonate with strange praise: So great an agent, so faithful a communist was he that he spent even his own money, earned as a hard-working journalist, on his underground work. What bunk! You really mean to say labor camp inmates on the Kolyma Peninsula weren't digging up anymore gold? You're actually telling us the GRU was that hard up, it would so humiliate its own clandestine resident?

Yet another, really riveting report, from the magazine “Ogonyok” (1965, №17), said Sorge held very important papers, but dispatching them to Headquarters was not an option. Headquarters was not sending couriers. “Ogonyok” does not say why, in fact, Headquarters was not sending any. We, too, were mystified.

Actually, unraveling the mystery was easy.

While all this was happening, the man who recruited Richard Sorge, Jan Berzin, brilliant chief of Soviet military intelligence, was savagely tortured, then liquidated. Solomon Uritsky, another GRU chief, the man who had personally been giving instructions to Sorge: liquidated. Lev Borovich, deputy head of 2<sup>nd</sup> section in the intelligence directorate and Sorge's direct handler: liquidated. Soviet undercover resident Goryev, who used to arrange transiting Sorge out of Germany: imprisoned ("Komsomolskaya Pravda," October 8, 1968). Sorge's clandestine collaborator Aino Kuusinen, wife of a GRU deputy head who doubled as "President of the Finnish Democratic Republic" and would join the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU: imprisoned. Richard Sorge's wife Yekaterina Maksimova: arrested, confessed to contact with enemies, perished in labor camp in 1943. GRU undercover resident in Shanghai and former deputy to Sorge Karl Rimm: called back to Moscow on "leave" and liquidated. Now Sorge has gotten an order: come in on leave. Does he know the real reason behind the summons? He does. Soviet communist historians, in fact, make no bones about it: "Sorge refused to go to the USSR," "without question, Sorge could well imagine what awaited him in Moscow." The issue was rather well covered in print during the time of the "thaw."

Summing up, in Moscow they see Ramsay as an enemy and summon him home to be shot. Sorge's answer to the insistent calls: am not coming back for a bullet in the head, don't want to interrupt my interesting work.

Now let's plumb the message behind the words of a Soviet historian-communist: "...refused to return to the USSR." In communist-speak, what do they call a bird of that feather? Right: "defector." Back then, they even came up with a more specific term: "malicious defector." There you have why he's paying agents out of his own pocket: Headquarters has cut off funds. That's also why couriers no longer hurry his way: not going to send undercover couriers to a malicious defector!

Unwilling to go back for midnight justice and execution by dawn, Sorge keeps working for the communists, albeit no longer acting as secret collaborator ("00-X," for short), but rather as freelancing informer, scribbling notes not for money but for sheer gratification. Ramsay had it pegged right: Won't go there now, post-war, though, they'll realize I was telling nothing but the truth and forgive, even appreciate. Headquarters also

stays in touch throughout, accepting his cables, even if, clearly, just to respond with “come home,” “..home,” “..home”! Ramsay’s reply: “very busy,” “..busy,” “..busy”...

First answer to the question raised: Stalin did not believe Richard Sorge because Sorge was a defector sentenced to death at least twice over. The first verdict, in 1938, he evidently garnered thanks to fellow-agents on the same general roster. Only later did his malicious refusal to come home prompt piling on another. Comrade Sorge doesn’t overly trust Comrade Stalin, so he doesn’t return. How can Comrade Stalin have faith in someone who has none in him?

### 3

Someone wove the legend about how Richard Sorge supposedly passed on to the GRU some sort of significant insights about a German invasion, yet was not believed.

Sorge was a great agent. About a German invasion, however, he sent nothing significant to Moscow. What is more, Sorge fell for disinformation and fed the GRU false data.

Here is his April 11, 1941 cable: “The representative of the (German – V.S.) General Staff in Tokyo declared that immediately after the end of the war in Europe war against the Soviet Union will begin.”

Hitler is also an underhanded fellow. While gearing up for invasion he is spreading a canard closely resembling reality. Hitler knows preparations for invading the Soviet Union can no longer be concealed. He therefore makes points covertly (but sees to having everyone hear): Yes, I do want to hit Stalin...once I’ve wrapped up war in the west.

If you believe Sorge’s April 11<sup>th</sup> cable (and others like it), no need to fret. War in the west is ongoing, ebbing at times, surging again at others, but no end to it is in sight. Now, once the war in the west has come to an end, the German war machine may shift to driving east. Sorge, in other words, is saying Hitler intends to wage war on just one front.

At the GRU, to understand *that* they needed no Sorge. In-depth study of all then relevant economic, political and military factors had led the GRU to two conclusions:

1. Germany could not win a two-front war.
2. Hitler therefore would not start war in the east without having finished it in the west.

The first conclusion was accurate. The second was not: Sometimes a war is started without any prospects of winning it.

Even before Sorge's "warnings," on March 20, 1941, new GRU chief Lieutenant-General Golikov submitted to Stalin a detailed report concluding "the most likely time for action against the USSR is after having defeated England or having achieved peace with England on terms honorable for Germany."

Stalin, however, knew the simple truth that Hitler would not start a two-front war without any help from Golikov or his report. That is why in his reply to Churchill's June 25, 1940 letter he says Hitler may start a war against the USSR in 1941, provided Britain has by then ceased to offer resistance.

Hitler, however, driven by Stalin into a strategic no-win situation via the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, suddenly grasped he had nothing to lose: No matter what, Germany did not have just one front, but two – so he began to fight on both. *That* neither Golikov nor Stalin expected. Hitler's was a suicidal move, but he had no other left. Stalin could not imagine that Hitler, caught in this strategic Catch-22, would choose suicide. GRU chief Golikov also did not anticipate it. Their conviction was only hardened by Sorge's fallacious cables (and those of some others).

Some will counter that later, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, Sorge accurately names the date of the German invasion – June 22<sup>nd</sup>. Very well. Don't mind my asking, though, which Richard Sorge is to be believed – the one who says Hitler will *not* wage a two-front war...or the one who talks about June 22<sup>nd</sup>, meaning Hitler *will*. Sorge's messages are mutually exclusive. Moreover, they still remain just messages. The GRU puts faith in NO messages, and rightly so. You have to have messages with proof attached.

#### 4

Sorge was a great 20<sup>th</sup>-century agent. The supreme distinction – the rank of Hero of the Soviet Union – he posthumously received for good reason. Sorge's greatness, however, rests on totally different grounds.

Sorge's work in Japan primarily focused not on Germany, but on Japan itself. GRU chief Uritsky personally specifies Sorge's mission: "The point of your work in Tokyo is to avert the possibility of war between Japan and the USSR. Prime target: the German Embassy" ("Ogonyok," 1965, № 14). The German Embassy is only a cover for letting Sorge pursue his paramount mission. The noteworthy detail: not warning of preparations for

an invasion, but averting that invasion, namely, steering Japanese aggression elsewhere.

It is common knowledge that in the fall of 1941 Sorge reported to Stalin that Japan would not enter the war against the Soviet Union. Using this critically important information Stalin pulled ten Soviet divisions from the Far Eastern borders, threw them into the area around Moscow and thus tilted the strategic situation in his favor.

Less well known is why on that occasion Stalin did believe. The only reason he did was that Sorge submitted not just a report, but also supporting evidence. The evidence Soviet historians prefer to bury in silence – understandably so: If Sorge says Japan will not move against the Soviet Union, proving it has to mean identifying another foe against whom Japan *is* preparing a surprise attack. Sorge accurately pointed out whom Japan was about to attack and presented incontrovertible facts.

Communist propaganda quite deliberately touts the myth about Sorge's "warnings" of German aggression. The point is to distract attention from Sorge's truly stunning achievements in penetrating Japan's highest political and military spheres. His work was anything but confined to alerting Stalin to the fact that Japan would not attack the Soviet Union or even to producing proof of the actual thrust of Japanese militarism. His accomplishments in this arena are far greater still. In accordance with his GRU assignment Sorge not only foretold events, but in a number of instances even directed them. In August 1951 the U.S. Congress took up the matter of Sorge. The evidence brought out in the course of the hearings irrefutably showed that through undercover resident "Ramsay" Soviet military intelligence had done a great deal to prompt Japan to launch a war of aggression in the Pacific and to direct that aggression against the United States ("Hearings on American Aspects of the Richard Sorge Spy Case, "House of Representatives Eighty Second Congress. First Session. August 9, 22 and 23. Washington, 1951).

Sorge did not create the "Japanese icebreaker," but he was instrumental in steering it in the direction Stalin needed. Once Sorge had produced proof to back his messages, Stalin believed him totally.

## 5

Intelligence is the world's most thankless job. If you make a mistake, go down and get hung....you win fame. Think Sorge.



Stalin, however, aside from the star-crossed, also had true military intelligence agent stars on whom fortune smiled, who managed mind-boggling feats, yet who remained unsung...and unhung. One of them had access to genuine Hitler secrets. Marshal of the Soviet Union Grechko attests: "...[W]ithin 11 days after Hitler had finalized the plan for war against the Soviet Union (December 18, 1940) our intelligence people were in possession of that fact and the basics of the German Command decision" (JMH, 1966, № 6, p. 8).

We most likely will never know the name of the super agent who managed that feat. It just may have been the same GRU resident who in 1943 succeeded in getting his hands on plans for Operation "Citadel" (for the Wehrmacht attack on the Kursk salient – V.S.). That, however, is no more than my supposition: Stalin's military intelligence, I repeat, was very high-caliber, such that any other agent might also have done it.

In December of 1940 GRU chief Lieutenant-General Golikov reported to Stalin that according to verified information Hitler had decided to fight on two fronts, i.e., to attack the Soviet Union without waiting for war to end in the west.

Early in January, this extremely critical document was discussed within a very tight-knit circle at the highest Soviet command level, in Stalin's presence. Stalin did not believe it, declaring that any document could be forged. Stalin demanded Golikov take steps to make sure Soviet military intelligence could signal at any moment if Hitler was in fact preparing for war or was merely bluffing. Golikov reported having done as ordered. The GRU was carefully monitoring a whole range of German military preparations to let it pinpoint the time when preparations for invasion commence. Thus far, there were none. Stalin demanded Golikov explain how precise his insights could be. Golikov answered he could tell only Stalin alone and no one else.

From then on, Golikov regularly briefed Stalin in person, each time reporting that preparations for invasion had not yet been launched

On June 21, 1941 a Politburo meeting took place. Golikov reported on the massing of enormous numbers of German forces on the Soviet frontier, huge stockpiles of ammunition, the redeployment of German air power, German deserters and much much else. Golikov knew the numeral designations of virtually all German divisions, the names of their commanders, their locations. A great deal was known, including the name

of Operation “Barbarossa,” when it was to begin and many of the most important secrets. Golikov went on to report preparations for invasion had not yet begun and that without preparations you could not begin a war. At the Politburo meeting Golikov was asked, would he vouch for what he was saying. Golikov replied he would give his life for the information and, should he be mistaken, the Politburo would have cause to do with him precisely what had been done with all his predecessors.

Ten to twelve hours later Operation “Barbarossa” gets underway. What does Stalin do with Golikov? Don’t you worry, nothing terrible. As early as July 8<sup>th</sup>, Stalin entrusts to Golikov traveling to Great Britain and the United States, personally giving him instructions. After that official – and successful – visit Golikov goes on to command armies and fronts, then in 1943 is named by Stalin to the supremely important post of Deputy People’s Commissar of Defense (i.e., deputy to Stalin himself) for Senior Officer Staffing. To dealing with the delicate issue of selecting and placing senior officers Stalin admitted only the most trusted people. Beria, for example, he did not admit.

Later on, after Stalin has already died, Golikov rises higher still, to Marshal of the Soviet Union.

Understandably, in his memoirs he says not a single word about how he monitored Germany’s preparations for war nor about how he stayed alive once “Barbarossa” had burst upon the scene.

If you recall what became of all his predecessors, not one of whom had anything like the German invasion happen on his watch, then contrast their fate with that of Golikov, you are left utterly speechless.

The Golikov riddle had been preying on my mind for quite some time, until at the GRU Academy I solved it in a way that made sense to me. Later, working at GRU Headquarters, I was able to corroborate the solution I had found.

Golikov’s reports to Stalin concluded “Hitler is not getting ready for war against the Soviet Union.” It turns out, Golikov was telling the truth. For war against the Soviet Union Hitler had indeed not been preparing.

Golikov knew Stalin had no faith in documentation (and neither did he). Therefore, Golikov felt he had to come up with some sort of a series of key indicators that would unfailingly reflect the moment Hitler launched preparations for war against the Soviet Union. Such indicators Golikov found. GRU residents Europe-wide were ordered to track sheep, to have

their entire stable of agents dig into all key organizations directly or indirectly tied to the “sheep issue.” Over the course of several months data were gathered and carefully sifted regarding the number of sheep in Europe, the main centers where they were being raised and the slaughterhouses for them. Twice a day Golikov would get reports about mutton prices throughout Europe.

Soviet intelligence also mounted a veritable hunt for dirty rags and oil-soaked paper left by soldiers wherever they were cleaning their weapons. Around Europe, there were German troops in abundance, based out in the field. Each soldier would clean his weapon at least once a day. Rags and paper used for the purpose usually were burned or buried in the ground. That rule, of course, was not fully complied with everywhere – giving the GRU ample opportunity to collect huge quantities of dirty rags.

These were sent across the border in bulk. To avoid drawing suspicion, any old pieces of metal would be wrapped in rags and, roundabout, sent to the USSR. If any complications did arise, the police would focus on the piece of metal (as a rule, entirely innocuous junk), ignoring the dirty rag in which it was wrapped.

Also moved across the border, legally and illegally in volume far greater than usual, were kerosene lamps, kerosene heaters, kerosene stoves as well as various kinds of primitive lanterns and lighters.

All this would be analyzed by hundreds of Soviet experts and immediately reported to Golikov. He would then inform Stalin that Hitler still had not begun preparations for invading the USSR, hence that any massing of troops and German General Staff documents were to be discounted.

Golikov felt (and with good reason) war against the Soviet Union called for really serious-minded preparation. A prime component of German readiness for war against the Soviet Union was sheepskins, needed in huge quantities – no fewer than 6,000,000. Golikov knew not a single German division was ready to fight in the USSR. He had carefully been keeping track of rams Europe-wide. He knew very well that as soon as Hitler had really decided to attack the USSR, he had to give the order to gear up for the operation. The General Staff would immediately direct industry to start churning out millions of sheepskins. That moment would inevitably have repercussions on the European market. War aside, mutton

prices had to buckle and slide because of the simultaneous slaughtering of millions of animals. At the same time sheepskin prices had to skyrocket.

Golikov reckoned that for war in the USSR the German Army had to use a new kind of lubrication for its weaponry. Standard German gun oil hardened below freezing, parts froze up, weapons jammed. Golikov was waiting for the German Army to switch oils used for weapons cleaning. Expert Soviet scrutiny of the dirty rags was showing the Wehrmacht using its usual oil, with no signs of any switch to a new one. Soviet experts also monitored German engine fuel. In subfreezing temperatures the standard variety would break down into non-combustible particulates. Golikov knew that if Hitler decided that, no matter what, he would take the suicidal step of fighting on two fronts, he (or his General Staff) had to order switching from the brand of liquid fuel being made to mass-producing one that would not break down in frigid weather. Samples of precisely what liquid fuel the Germans were using Soviet intelligence kept sending across the border in lighters, lanterns and other such objects. Many more markers the GRU also carefully monitored, each chosen as a potential red flag.

Hitler, however, launched Operation “Barbarossa” without getting ready in any way!

Why Hitler took this course will, in all probability, always remain a mystery. The German Army had been set up to wage war in Western Europe, but Hitler did nothing to prepare it for war in Russia.

Stalin had no grounds whatsoever for punishing Golikov. Golikov had done everything humanly possible – and then some – to unmask preparations for invasion...but there had not been any. There had been only the massing of enormous numbers of German forces. Golikov’s orders, though, had in fact been to give consideration not to all German divisions, but just those ready for invasion, meaning, those that had stockpiled 15,000 sheepskins each. Such divisions, truly ready for war, the entire Wehrmacht did not have.

Golikov bore no blame for not having seen preparations for invasion. Serious preparations, such as he had expected, did not exist, hence he could not see any.

## Chapter 31. HOW HITLER DERAILED A WAR

We were perfectly primed for a war based on offense.  
Surely we are not to blame the side to launch it was not  
ours.

*Major-General P.G. Grigoryenko*

### 1

On June 17, 1945 a team of Soviet military investigators interrogated fascist Germany's top military leaders. In the process Field Marshal Keitel declared: "I maintain that all preparatory measures we took until spring 1941 were defensive provisions for coping with a possible Red Army attack. Thus, the entire war in the East can to a certain extent be called preventive... We decided to preempt Soviet Russia's attack and strike a surprise blow to smash its armed forces. By the spring of 1941, I had grown convinced the massive build-up of Russian forces and their subsequent attack on Germany could, in strategic and economic terms, plunge us into an extremely critical situation... The very first few weeks of a Russian attack would already put Germany at an extreme disadvantage. Our attack was the direct consequence of that threat..."

Colonel-General Yodl – chief German military planner – squarely held the same. The Soviet investigators actively sought to make Keitel and Yodl give up that position. They failed. Keitel and Yodl would not budge, and, as sentenced by the so-called Nuremberg "International Tribunal," were hung along with other "major war criminals." One of the chief indictments against them: "unleashing unprovoked aggressive war" against the Soviet Union.

Twenty years went by, and fresh evidence came to the fore. My own witness: Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Kuznyetsov (in 1941 – an admiral, People's Commissar of the Navy of the USSR, Central Committee member and member of High Command General Headquarters from the moment it was established). He went on record as follows: "For me, one thing is beyond dispute: Not only did Stalin not rule out the possibility of war with Hitler's Germany, on the contrary, he saw such a war as... inevitable. Stalin conducted war preparations – extensive and multi-faceted – based on a timetable he himself had set. Hitler upended these calculations" ("On the Eve," p. 321).

Quite openly and clearly, the Admiral is telling us Stalin felt war was bound to come, and seriously prepared for it. Stalin, however, had no intention of going to war in response to German aggression, but rather at a time of his own choosing. Stalin, in other words, was getting ready for a first strike, for aggression against Germany, that is. Hitler, though, struck preemptively and threw all of Stalin's plans into disarray.

Admiral Kuznyetsov is a witness of the highest rank. In 1941, his perch in the Soviet military-political hierarchy was loftier than that of Zhukov. Kuznyetsov was a People's Commissar, Zhukov, a Deputy People's Commissar; Kuznyetsov was a Central Committee member, Zhukov, a candidate.

None of those who penned memoirs held 1941 rank as high as did Kuznyetsov. None was as close to Stalin as was he. Kuznyetsov I therefore see as foremost among my witnesses, topped only by Stalin himself, of course. Kuznyetsov's postwar rhetoric, by the way, fully dovetails with what he was saying before the war, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1939, for instance. That congress charted a new course: wind down the terror campaign domestically and transfer it to neighbors abroad, à la "what has been created in the USSR can be created as well in other countries!" At that "victors'" congress, Kuznyetsov's speech may have been *the* most aggressive. It was that very speech that at the end of the congress lofted Kuznyetsov to Central Committee membership, allowing him to skip candidate level and garner the People's Commissar post.

Everything Kuznyetsov says openly, Stalin has already been saying for many years in his secret speeches. Everything Kuznyetsov says, Red Army and Fleet action confirms. The final reason you have to believe Admiral Kuznyetsov here is that all his friends and enemies read his book, as did the Soviet Union's political and military leaders, right along with marshals, diplomats, historians, generals and admirals as well as paid-for friends of the USSR abroad...and NO ONE has ever tried to refute him!

Let us compare comments by Keitel and Kuznyetsov.

Field Marshal Keitel says: Germany was not preparing for aggression against the Soviet Union, preparing for aggression was the Soviet Union. Germany, by launching its preemptive strike, simply was defending against inescapable aggression. Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Kuznyetsov makes exactly the same point: Yes, the Soviet Union was

gearing up for war, was absolutely certain to enter the war, but Hitler's strike derailed its plans.

I do understand the judges on the bench at the "international tribunal" in Nuremberg had no particular taste (nor the professional integrity) for finding the real war criminals. What I do not understand is why, once Admiral Kuznyetsov had published his confessions, those same "judges" did not rush to reassemble in Nuremberg and pull some of the indictments against Keitel, Yodl, the Wehrmacht and, more broadly, against all of Germany?

Messieurs Justices, if only you could explain to us your strange stand.. Guilt by reason of aggression against the USSR those indicted in Nuremberg did not admit. The "injured" party admits no one actually did perpetrate aggression against it, but instead concedes having itself been preparing to attack. Why, then, Messieurs Judges, did you make such haste to hang Keitel and Yodel, yet failed to be quick about hanging Kuznyetsov, Zhukov and Molotov? Why, Messieurs Justices, did you keep in force your indictments against Germany, yet never lodged any against the USSR?

## 2

Soviet marshals and generals do not hide what their intentions were. The Chief of the General Staff Academy General Ivanov and a group of leading Soviet historians together wrote a scientific study entitled "The Opening Phase of the War." In that book Ivanov not only acknowledges Hitler struck a preemptive blow, he actually specifies timing: "The fascist-German command managed, literally in the last two weeks before the war, to steal a march on our forces" (p. 212).

If the Soviet Union was getting ready for defense or even counterattack, then "stealing a march" on it was impossible. If the Soviet Union was preparing to strike, then that strike could be preempted by another, launched by the opposite side just a bit earlier. In 1941, Ivanov is telling us, the German strike beat him to the punch by two weeks.

Such confessions abound. Here, just as an example, is yet another, out of the Journal of Military History (1984, № 4). The Journal was published by the Ministry of Defense of the USSR and its contents required prior approval by the minister of defense as well as the chief of the General Staff (then Marshals of the Soviet Union Sokolov and Akhromeyev). The Journal of Military History explains why close to the frontier ammunition,

fuel and food supplies had been stockpiled. The simple answer: for offensive operations.

On page 34 it openly says the German attack derailed Soviet plans.

Now, after all, if the Red Army had been getting ready to defend or even to counterattack, *derailing* its plans would not have been all that easy. On the contrary, the German invasion would have signaled to Soviet forces to begin carrying out plans *already laid*. Only if the Red Army had been gearing up for offense could the German invasion derail those plans, meaning, instead of carrying out advance plans the troops were forced to defend themselves, i.e., to improvise and do something *unanticipated*.

### 3

Now, though, let us go back to June 1941:

On June 6, 1941 German intelligence received word the Soviet government intended to move out to Sverdlovsk.

In Germany, only Hitler and his innermost circle find out about it. Doctor Göbbels' diary shows he did receive such a message: The entry is a most uncomplimentary response to Soviet leadership plans for decamping farther east.

Many decades had to pass before we could see the report about Soviet government relocation for what it was worth. Now, at last, we know what was set up in Sverdlovsk was a bogus command post. Only in the course of the war did it become clear that city had not been chosen as the back-up capital. When things turned critical, it was Kuibyshev where many Soviet government agencies and foreign embassies were transferred. Still, even that was not all true, but just half. Concentrated in Kuibyshev were those agencies deemed expendable enough not to matter to sustainability of leadership at the country's highest military-political level: the Supreme Soviet with "President" Kalinin, second-tier people's commissariats and embassies. All the important agencies were not within Kuibyshev, but nearby, in giant underground tunnels driven into the Zhiguli Range. Prewar construction of this mammoth complex was masked by work on another giant – Kuibyshev hydro-electric power station. Freighted in were thousands of GULAG inmates, together with thousands of tons of material and equipment. Everyone knew exactly what for – building the power plant. After the war the whole enormous structure was moved upstream and put up at a new site. The first spot, unfit for a power plant, had been



chosen because it was ideal for an underground – better put, a bedrock-burrow – Command Post.

In German prewar archives I found no mention of Kuibyshev as a back-up capital, much less of any underground command post in the Zhiguli. German intelligence had gotten wind only of Soviet government relocation to a command post in Sverdlovsk. A government, however, cannot move to a phantom command post. Who, then, is spreading word of a move to a bogus command post? It can only be someone who concocted the canard, namely, the Soviet Government or, more accurately, the head of that government, Joseph Stalin. The bogus command post was set up, in fact, specifically so the enemy *would* eventually find out about it. That moment arrived – and German intelligence came into possession of a “secret” designed for its recipient.

The German intelligence report about Soviet government plans to move to Sverdlovsk is a “secret” cut of the same cloth as Stalin’s speech, Soviet ambassadors’ idle talk and the TASS Statement.

If German intelligence is being misled about the intentions of the Soviet leadership, it means at that point the latter has something to hide. Figuring out what, isn’t hard. If the Soviet leadership is spreading canards about plans for moving out east, it probably is up to quite the opposite.

Ingeniously, in addition to the mammoth command post deep in the Zhiguli – hard, but not impossible to locate – there was yet another government nerve center: a set of railway cars. In the event of war this command post – covered by several NKVD armored trains and accompanied by three more trains from the people’s commissariat of communications – could show up at any time in the vicinity of combat operations. Its designation – Main Forward Command Post (Russian acronym: “GPKP”) – reflected this ability to be near major war developments. Made specifically for this CP were a number of meticulously screened and camouflaged stops, hooked up to government communications lines already in peacetime. You just had to plug in the gear carried aboard the trains.

It goes without saying that a mobile CP is designed for offensive war, for a situation where troops are racing ahead, while those in charge with their bulky command and control baggage are trying to keep up with the armies and fronts pressing the attack. In a war of defense it is easier, more

reliable and safer to run things from an office in the Kremlin, a Moscow subway station far below ground or tunnels in the Zhiguli.

Taking bits of information and piecing them together, we can assert with some degree of certainty that the Minsk-Vilnius trunk line (closer to Vilnius) was or was supposed to be home to a command post of truly major dimensions.

A few days after German leaders had received the “secret” report on a Soviet Government move to the east, that government began secretly heading for the *western* borders of the USSR, somewhere between Minsk and Vilnius.

Everyone in uniform knows how a major headquarters moves out to go on maneuvers or meet the enemy. The Operations Section chooses a site for the headquarters-to-be, the senior commander approves the location and authorizes the move. The woods picked for the HQ are cordoned off, outsiders kept out. Next, corps of engineers and communications types arrive at the scene to set up screening and communications systems. Right after them comes the officer in charge of communications for the particular formation (division, corps, army, front) to verify in person that the links from the site reliably take care of all major interested parties. Last in line, finally, the headquarters contingent itself appears, with no more left for them to tackle than connecting their telephones and encoding machines to an advance-tested, smoothly running communications system.

The Red Army in 1941 was humming – an integrated, fine-tuned piece of machinery: Showing up by the dozen in border area forests are the communications chiefs of rifle and mechanized corps, closely followed by clandestine deployment of command posts for these corps. Coming on their heels, in still other woods, are those in charge of communications for armies, themselves signaling the impending arrival of these armies’ headquarters contingents. Proving the harbinger good and true, the headquarters people do turn up. Indeed, the very day the TASS Statement is released, secluded nooks in well-guarded forest preserves see those directing communications at the front level coming in. Their readiness check completed, front headquarters convoys secretly start hauling gear and personnel into place.

The time has come for even bigger communications brass to show up, little more than 90 miles from the East Prussian border. Secretly moving in here, in Vilnius, is People’s Commissar for Communications Peresykin.

Can we guess in whose name he is coming to inspect the messaging system? People's Commissar Peresykin has just one boss: Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Comrade Stalin.

The People's Commissar for Communications travels to the borders of East Prussia cloaked in secrecy. He rides an ordinary, regularly scheduled train, though he and his deputies board a special added day coach tacked on at the end. The Commissar's move is top-secret. Even the encrypted cables Peresykin gets from Moscow are signed in his own name, "Peresykin," for government cipher clerks to know he is still in Moscow and has not gone anywhere.

We'll do better, though, to listen to Peresykin himself. Comrade Communications Forces Marshal, take it away:

"Literally on the very eve of the war, Stalin directed me to go out to the Baltic republics. For some reason, I saw a connection between this critically important assignment and imminent military developments. The evening of June 21, 1941, together with a team of senior officials from the People's Commissariat for Communications, I left for Vilnius. We were en route when the war began..." ("Communications," 1972, p. 17).

The morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, at Orsha Station, Peresykin receives a telegram from Moscow: "GIVEN CHANGED SITUATION DO YOU NOT DEEM NECESSARY RETURNING TO MOSCOW. PERESYPKIN" (ibid., p. 32-33).

Peresykin is traveling on railways not just utterly militarized, but only days earlier ordered to switch to military time and be ready to work under combat conditions (Anfilov, "Immortal Feat," p. 184). He is traveling into areas where troops in colossal numbers are secretly being massed along the borders, under orders to take along "only what you need to live and fight" (ibid.). He is entering a military district where a front already exists, where headquarters has already dispatched, to thousands of people expected to follow through, top-secret information whose dissemination was prohibited before the start of the war. He is entering an area where a government command post is secretly being established. He is traveling on Stalin's personal order and knows this "trip is linked to imminent military developments."

Hitler, however, attacks --- and, presto, Peresykin bolts his secret day coach, commandeers a truck happening by and rushes back to Moscow.

Evidently, had Hitler not attacked, People's Commissar for Communications Peresykin would have reached the clandestine Vilnius area command post and taken action in accordance with "imminent military developments," meaning, he would have handled wartime coordination of military, governmental and state communications systems. Hitler's attack, however, forced him immediately to cancel going to war.

Stalin is sending Peresykin into war, but Hitler's attack...comes as a total surprise to both Stalin and Peresykin. Hitler's attack is a "change in the situation" so serious as to compel calling off many of the Soviet Government's top-priority measures as well as improvising, up to and including having the People's Commissar head back to Moscow on the first available truck.

SOVIET GOVERNMENT MEMBERS HAD ALREADY SET OUT FOR A WAR AGAINST GERMANY, A WAR IN WHICH A GERMAN INVASION WAS NOT ANTICIPATED.

#### 4

Set to transfer to the country's western reaches that same night, via the same Moscow-Minsk railway line, was the top leadership of...the People's Commissariat for Defense, the NKVD, the People's Commissariat for State Inspection and other extremely important Soviet government agencies. Their destination: the war. Also getting ready secretly to head out to the western frontier were People's Commissar for Internal Affairs, candidate for Politburo membership and Commissar General of State Security Beria; Central Committee member, People's Commissar for State Audits and Army Commissar 1<sup>st</sup> Class Mekhlis; CC candidate, People's Commissar for Defense and Marshal of the Soviet Union Timoshenko, along with other leaders of Stalin's empire. Not out of the question is that a secret expedition westward was also just ahead for Comrade Stalin himself.

For each leading figure a joint task force of top-echelon representatives of the most war-essential people's commissariats was assembled. By the morning of June 21, 1941 that process was complete. Each task force was waiting only for its leader, then inside the Kremlin for a final Politburo meeting after which he was due secretly to take to the field with his group. All task force members early on June 21<sup>st</sup> know they are going to war. True, the destination they know about is Minsk (also right), not Vilnius, but the two are practically next-door neighbors.

All task force members know the Soviet Union has already gone to war against Germany, though there is no formal declaration yet and no combat operations are underway. The task forces are, in fact, secretly westbound precisely for launching such operations!

Still, amazingly enough...no one, not even the task force leaders then in session at the Kremlin, has any inkling of an oncoming German invasion. What is more, when a veritable barrage of reports of such an invasion starts coming in that evening, top Soviet leaders refuse to believe them. The Kremlin, the People's Commissariat of Defense and the General Staff all fire back at the border with volleys of directives and menacing phone calls barking: "*Don't* fall for provocations!"

The question it triggers is: If Soviet leaders don't believe a German invasion is possible, *what* war, for goodness' sake, were *they* getting ready for? The only possible answer: a war meant to start WITHOUT A GERMAN INVASION.

Hour after wearying hour, the task forces wait for their leaders. Finally, at 6 a.m. on June 22<sup>nd</sup> they are told they will not be going to the western frontier, since Hitler has himself started the war.

Had Soviet leaders been about to head for secret command posts on that frontier to stem a German invasion, then, once alerted to such an invasion, they had to rush westward. Instead, they scrubbed going to the front. They had been prepared to turn up there and run a war – but one they, not the Germans had scripted. Of that pleasure Hitler robbed them.

Here now a typical first-hand account.

I picked it out only because it is the most recent. On June 21, 1941 its author, Dmitri Ortenberg, was in charge of the organizational section of the People's Commissariat for Inspection. His job, as he himself describes it, was "in military terms – a kind of chief of staff."

Major-General Ortenberg, you have the floor:

"Sometimes people ask me:  
- You left for the front *when*?  
- The twenty-first of June.  
- ?!

Yes, that is a fact.

...That morning, I was called into the People's Commissariat of Defense. They told me a Commissariat task force headed by Marshal Timoshenko would be leaving for Minsk. They served notice I would be

joining it and suggested I go home, change into my uniform, then report back to the Commissariat. ...The Commissariat waiting room was packed with military, binders and maps in hand, visibly excited, speaking in whispers. Timoshenko was out, at the Kremlin... On June 22<sup>nd</sup> around 5 a.m. the Commissar came back. He called me in:

- The Germans have started the war. Our trip to Minsk is off” (D.I. Ortenberg, “June-December ’41,” pp. 5-6).

Anyone’s guess is where the legend came from that on June 22, 1941 Hitler launched war in the east, all but dragging the Soviet Union into it. If, however, we listen to those who were actually right by the side of top Soviet leaders during those days, hours and minutes, everything looks quite different: On June 22, 1941 Hitler derailed Stalin’s war plans, transferring the war to the land of its August 19, 1939 birth. Hitler did not let Soviet leaders wage war as they had intended, forcing them to improvise and do what they had not prepared for: defend their own territory. Hitler, of course, was unable to knock out onrushing world communism, but he did knock down, delay and weaken it.

None of this did I make up.

It all comes straight from the mouth of Soviet generals themselves.

## Chapter 32. DID STALIN HAVE A WAR PLAN?

Since Stalin did not spell out and expound on his views and plans, many thought he did not have any – a mistake typical of babbling intellectuals.

*Robert Conquest*

### 1.

“Strategic defense was a type of combat operation imposed, not planned in advance” is how Soviet military textbooks put it (Anfilov, “Immortal Feat,” p. 517). We do not need textbooks, of course, to know the defensive moves the Red Army made in the summer of 1941 were pure improvisation. Prewar, the Red Army had not been gearing up for defense, had not been running defense-oriented maneuvers. In Soviet military regulations strategic defense did not rate a single word. Not only did the Red Army have no defensive plans, it did not deal even in purely theoretical terms with problems encountered in conducting defensive operations. What is more, the Soviet people and their army were unprepared for defense even in terms of its effect on morale. People and army were trained to master defensive challenges by offensive means: “It is precisely the best interests of defense that demand of the USSR sweeping offensive operations on enemy territory, something that in no way contradicts the nature of defensive war” (“Pravda,” August 19, 1939).

From the very first hours of the German invasion, the Red Army kept trying to switch to offense. Modern textbooks call those operations counter-strikes and counter-attacks. Even they, though, were improvisations. Not a single prewar maneuver had ever drilled striking back. In fact, the question had not been considered so much as theoretically: “The matter of counter-attacking... prior to the Great Patriotic War, had not been raised” (“History of the Soviet Union’s Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945,” Vol. 1, p. 441).

Result: Prewar, Soviet headquarters had devised no plans for defending or counter-attacking. Could it be, they were doing nothing at all? No, they were hard at work...developing war plans. Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilyevsky tells us the last year before the war generals and junior officers at General Staff as well as at military district and fleet headquarters were putting in 15-17-hour days, with no time out for

weekends or leave. Also talking about it are Marshals Bagramyan and Sokolovsky, Generals Shtemyenko, Kurasov and Malandin, plus many more. There are reports General Anisov worked 20 hours a day, a point also made about General Smorodinov.

In February 1941, General Zhukov became Chief of the General Staff. Starting then, General Staff essentially went on a wartime footing. Zhukov himself worked hard and let no one slack off. Earlier, in the summer of 1939, Zhukov, then still a Corps Commander, turned up at Khalkhin-Gol. He personally sized up the situation, quickly drew up plans, then threw himself into implementing them. Any subordinate found guilty of on-the-job negligence, however minor, faced immediate death. In the course of just a few days Zhukov sent up for court-martial seventeen officers, calling for capital punishment.

In February 1941, Zhukov rose to towering heights. His power having grown exponentially, no one now was left who could have spared an unfortunate wretch from his wrath. General Staff veterans recall the Zhukov regime as the most dreadful in history, worse even than the Great Purge. General Staff and all other headquarters were then working at an inhuman pace.

How, then, could it happen that the Red Army entered war without plans? Yet another incomprehensible aspect: If the Red Army entered the war with no plans, then Stalin, once he had found out, should have had Zhukov shot, right along with all others involved in planning. That did not happen. On the contrary, the latter group – Vasilyevsky, Sokolovsky, Vatutin, Malandin, Bagramyan, Shtemyenko and Kurasov – having begun the war as major-general or even colonel, ended it as marshal or at least four-star general. In the War, they all proved to be brilliant strategists. All were conscientious, even pedantic staff types for whom life without a plan was inconceivable. How, then, during the first few months, *could* the Red Army be forced to improvise? Why, also, did Stalin not only not have Zhukov and his planners shot, but not even once so much as upbraid them?

Asked point-blank whether the Soviet Command did have war plans, Zhukov categorically answers: Yes, we did. The corollary – if you did, why, then, did the Red Army act chaotically, like a vast stampeding herd? – he never answered. The answer here, though, is effectively self-evident: If Soviet headquarters had been working so hard, devising war plans meant



for neither defense nor counter-attack, what, then, were they for? Answer: offense, period.

Stalin did not have Zhukov nor the other war planners shot for one very simple reason: The mission given them had never been to prepare for the contingency of a war of *defense*. Accuse them, then, of what? Zhukov, Vasilyevsky, Sokolovsky and the other outstanding strategists Stalin had assigned to developing some sort of other plans. Very sound plans indeed they were. From the first shot in the war of defense, though, they became irrelevant...right along with autobahn-ready tanks and airborne-assault corps.

## 2

The truth will out.

The Soviet Command took steps to annihilate all traces of prewar Soviet war plans. Those fronts, fleets, dozens of armies, a hundred-plus corps, warships galore, hundreds of divisions, thousands of regiments and battalions all did have plans, though. Some bits and pieces did survive.

USSR Academy of Sciences research has shown the Soviet Black Sea Fleet's prewar mission was to engage in "active combat operations against enemy vessels and transports around the Bosphorus and other approaches to enemy bases, backed up by land-based forces as they made their way along Black Sea shores" ("The Fleet in the Great Patriotic War," p. 117).

Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Gorshkov reports not just Black Sea Fleet, but also Baltic and Northern Fleets had purely defensive missions. Plans for accomplishing them, however, relied on offensive methods. Admiral Gorshkov was not making anything up. He reflects conventional wisdom even before the war. He also echoes rhetoric at secret meetings of the Soviet Command as well as in articles "Pravda" published: "Waging a war of defense does not in any way mean standing pat on the borders of your own country. The best kind of defense is swift offense to the point of totally destroying the enemy on his own territory" (August 14, 1939).

Soviet fleet operations from the first few minutes through the initial hours and days of the war are striking proof that there were plans – but not of the defensive kind. On June 22, 1941 Soviet Black Sea Fleet submarines immediately set out for the shores of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The very same day, Baltic Sea Fleet subs made for German shores with the mission of "sinking all enemy ships and vessels by right of unlimited

undersea war” (Baltic Sea Fleet Commander Order of June 22, 1941). The order did not exempt even hospital ships under the flag of the Red Cross (!).

Starting June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Black Sea Fleet airpower conducted active combat operations in support of the Danube Naval Flotilla to open the way for the latter to head upriver. On June 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, Black Sea Fleet surface warships appeared near the Romanian port of Constanza and unleashed an intensive artillery barrage, obviously intending to put sea-borne assault troops ashore. At the same time, the Danube Naval Flotilla launched landing operations in the Danube Delta.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the garrison at Hanko Soviet naval base, located on Finnish territory under a 30-year lease extorted thanks to the Winter War, did not go into hunker-down defense. It began intensive assault-landing operations instead, seizing 19 Finnish islands for a few days. On June 25<sup>th</sup>, though Soviet airpower had been decimated in the first few minutes and hours of the war, 487 Baltic and Northern Fleet aircraft staged a surprise raid on Finnish air bases. Soviet pilots turned in a daring, spirited performance, albeit at a very heavy price. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Corps carried out a massive strike on military targets in Königsberg.

This was no improvisation. At 06:44 on June 22<sup>nd</sup> the Soviet air force was ordered to go into action as planned. For a few days, it tried to do so. On June 26, 1941 4<sup>th</sup> Aviation Corps began bombing the Ploeshti oil fields in Romania. Over the several days the bombardment lasted, oil output in Romania dropped nearly 50 percent. Even under circumstances where virtually the entire Soviet air force had been crushed on the ground, it managed to muster enough punch to do immense damage to Romania’s oil fields. Given any other scenario Soviet airpower would have posed an even greater threat: Its operations could have completely paralyzed German military, industrial and transport muscle. Hitler had grasped the threat all too well and saw invading the USSR as his only defense. True, even that did not save him...

### 3

The reaction of the Red Army to the German invasion was not that of a hedgehog raising his quills, but rather that of a huge crocodile dealt an enormous blow. Hemorrhaging, the Soviet crocodile tries to attack. A crocodile is good at carefully creeping up on its prey, then lunging. While stealthily closing in on the quarry, this crocodile itself sustained an

absolutely savage blow. Even that, though, fails to stop the croc: Lo and behold, it's attacking. It has just that one skill, nothing else, and a one-track mind.

On June 22, 1941 41<sup>st</sup> Rifle Division, 6<sup>th</sup> Rifle Corps, 6<sup>th</sup> Army, not waiting for orders from on high, following through on prewar plans, crossed the international frontier near Rava-Russkaya. The morning of June 22, 1941 Northwestern Front Commander Colonel-General Kuznyetsov, unbidden by Moscow, orders his troops to launch an attack aimed at Tilsit in Eastern Prussia. For Northwestern Front Headquarters as well as for army commanders and their staffs such a move was no surprise: The Tilsit strike had been rehearsed in headquarters exercises a few days earlier "and was quite familiar to formation commanders and their staffs" ("Fighting for the Soviet Baltics," p. 67).

What the Northwestern Front commander did was no improvisation. Colonel-General Kuznyetsov was just pursuing the prewar plan. That same evening, supreme military command, still unaware of action taken by General Kuznyetsov, directs him to do precisely what he already is doing: Hit Tilsit in Eastern Prussia. To neighboring Western Front the supreme command assigns the job of hammering the Polish city of Suwalki. Again, for Western Front Commander General Pavlov this comes as no surprise. Aware himself, after all, of his front's mission, long before the directive reaches him from Moscow he has already ordered an attack on Suwalki. Of course, under circumstances where German airpower has not been suppressed by any surprise attack and where, on the contrary, Pavlov's Western Front has lost 738 aircraft in the first few hours of the war, offense is hardly the best option.

Western Front, its commander and his headquarters knew long before the war their most immediate mission was to encircle the German force group around Polish Suwalki. A Soviet strike at Suwalki had been prepared well in advance of the war. Combat assignments had been spelled out for all senior Soviet commanders. Tactical-level commanders, of course, were not entitled to such information. At higher headquarters, however, the details were clearly defined and articulated, bundled, sealed, stamped "secret" and kept in safes at each headquarters, down to and including battalion level.

Example: 27<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division's intelligence battalion, massed by the border in the area around the city of Augustov, was getting ready for

combat reconnaissance targeting Polish Suwalki (USSR Defense Ministry Archives, Collection 181, Register 1631, Dossier 1, Page 128). Its job: Make sure all of 27<sup>th</sup> Division could move swiftly from around Augustov to Suwalki. Readily accessible sources have let us learn even more than the archives. Prewar, a huge amount of Soviet firepower is packed into the Augustov area. Right there, Soviet border guards cut the barbed wire on their side of the border. Right there, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Commander Lieutenant-General Kuznyetsov as well as High Command representative and Corps of Engineers Lieutenant-General Karbyshev spend hours upon hours reconnoitering German territory from border posts. Right there, again, General Karbyshev trains assault teams in how to disable and neutralize reinforced-concrete enemy defense facilities. On Soviet territory, however, there are not – and cannot be – any reinforced-concrete defense facilities in the hands of the enemy!

Well before the war, gargantuan Soviet forces were concentrated in the Augustov area. Here, on Soviet territory, right by the border and parallel to it, runs the Augustov Canal. Had preparations been geared to a war of defense, the troops needed to be deployed behind the canal, using it as an anti-tank moat. Instead, Soviet troops crossed the canal, deploying on the western banks along a narrow strip between the canal and a border from which barbed wire had already been pulled. There, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, daybreak saw thousands of Soviet soldiers perish in a sudden firestorm. The troops had nowhere to fall back: Behind them was the canal.

Can this be standard Russian-style stupidity? No. The German forces on the far side of the border also were clustered in huge numbers, right along the border, their own barbed wire also pulled. Had the Red Army struck a day sooner, the losses over there would have been no less. Deploying your troops right on the border is extremely risky, if the enemy suddenly hits, but the same array is extremely favorable for launching a sudden strike of your own. Both armies were getting ready to launch such a sudden strike...

Soviet generals never have hidden the fact that the assignments given them were quintessentially offensive. Talking about the massing of Soviet troops in the Augustov sector, General Galitsky stresses the Soviet command did not believe a *German* attack possible, whereas Soviet forces *were* being trained to carry out an offensive operation.

If the Soviet fronts targeting Eastern Prussia and Poland were gearing up for offense, the ones massed against Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia had to be doing the same, only more so and exclusively. This is no hypothesis of mine. Soviet generals make the same point.

Major-General Mikhalyev comes right out and acknowledges the Soviet command did not plan on using Southern and Southwestern Fronts for defense or counter-attack. “The assumption was strategic goals were going to be attained by having Front troops resolutely go on the offensive” (JMH, 1986, № 5, p. 49). There are quite enough such admissions for reconvening the tribunal in Nuremberg and taking a fresh look at what triggered the Soviet-German war. German generals say the Red Army was gearing up for offense. A journal put out by the Ministry of Defense of the USSR says the same. The German generals, then, are guilty of...*what?*

We may believe or disbelieve Soviet publications. Red Army operations during the first few days of the war, however, better than anything else speak to Soviet intentions. Zhukov was coordinating Southern and Southwestern Front operations aimed at Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Until June 30, 1941 Zhukov kept insisting on offense, demanding from Front commanders nothing but offense. Indeed, it took him and his colleagues until July to reach the conclusion that *attack* the all but mortally wounded crocodile could not.

You have to hand it to that Soviet crocodile: It was strong enough to pull back, heal its wounds, keep a hard-hitting enemy at bay, rebuild its strength and go all the way to Berlin. How far would it have gone, had it not been whacked as fiercely as it was on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, had hundreds of planes and thousands of tanks not been lost, had it been not the German, but the Red Army that struck the first blow? Did the German Army have hinterland enough to fall back? Did it have inexhaustible human resources as well as time to raise itself from the rubble after a Soviet sudden first strike? Did the German generals have defensive plans?

## Chapter 33. THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS

The Russian High Command knows its job better than the high command of any other army.

*General von Mellentin*

### 1

Hitler felt a Soviet invasion was bound to come, but did not expect it in the next few weeks. Secondary operations sidetracked German forces. “Barbarossa” was put on hold. On June 22, 1941 the operation was finally launched. Hitler himself clearly had no idea just how lucky he was. Had “Barbarossa” been moved back one more time, from 22 June to 22 July, Hitler would have had to do away with himself not in 1945, but sooner.

Indications abound that the Soviet Operation “Thunderstorm” was set to roll on July 6, 1941. The memoirs of Soviet marshals, generals and admirals, archival documents, mathematical analysis of information on the movement of thousands of Soviet military trains....all point to July 10<sup>th</sup> as the deadline for completing the massing of Red Army Second Strategic Echelon forces in the vicinity of the western borders. Soviet military doctrine, however, envisaged decisively going on the offensive not *after* completion of force concentration, but rather *before*. That would have let Second Strategic Echelon unload some of its forces right on enemy territory, then lead them straight into battle.

Zhukov (like Stalin) liked launching sudden strikes Sunday mornings. July 6, 1941 was the last Sunday prior to full concentration of Soviet forces.

General Ivanov points right to that date: “...German forces managed to beat us to the punch by literally two weeks.”

### 2

Let’s imagine Hitler put off launching “Barbarossa” one more time, by 3-4 weeks... Trying to picture what would have happened in that case, we don’t have to strain our imagination. All we need is look at the array of Soviet forces, the unparalleled concentration of troops, the air bases right on the border, the airborne-assault corps and autobahn-ready tanks, the submarine packs in near-border ports and the forward-based troop-landing gliders. We need only leaf through prewar Soviet military regulations and newspapers, “Red Star” and “Pravda.”

So, we now have German forces intensively preparing for an invasion set for 22...July, 1941. Forces are massing. At rail stations, major and minor, trains are disgorging troops, border-belt woods are crawling with soldiers, swarms of planes from far-off bases nightly keep descending on airfields right on the frontier, work is moving flat-out on new roads and bridges. In short, the picture mirrors the Red Army yonder...which seems to be shrugging off the German preparations.

On July 6, 1941 at 03:30 Moscow time tens of thousands of Soviet heavy guns shatter the calm, proclaiming to the world the Red Army's Great Liberation Crusade. In both quantity and quality, Red Army artillery surpassed that of the rest of the world combined. Pre-positioned along Soviet borders were gargantuan reserves of ordnance. The pace of Soviet shelling quickly escalates to a roaring inferno along over 600 miles of front from the Black Sea to the Baltic coast. The opening blast of artillery fire coincides to the minute with thousands of Soviet planes crossing the international frontier. German airbases being so utterly ill-positioned on that very frontier, most German pilots have no time to get airborne. Their planes, a huge armada amassed there, are wedged in wingtip to wingtip. Set ablaze, one soon engulfs its neighbors, like fire in a matchbox.

Columns of black smoke rise from the bases, serving as markers for wave after wave of Soviet aircraft. Only a few German planes have managed to take to the air, under strict orders not to fire on their Soviet counterparts. Still, flouting the command, some pilots join battle, destroy Soviet aircraft, run out of ammunition, opt for a final suicidal attack and ram the enemy head-on. Soviet losses are huge. Surprise, though, trumps all else. No matter the army – Soviet, German, Japanese.. – being hit by a surprise attack does not make your day.

The prepping artillery barrage becomes even more withering. Standing on alert at the very border, Soviet battalions and regiments get a shot of vodka. A deafening “Hurrah!” booms through border forests and commanders read out to the troops the field order from Supreme Commander Comrade Stalin: “The day of reckoning has come! Soviet intelligence has exposed Hitler's scheming, and the time has come to pay him back for all his evil acts and crimes! Upon you, the storied guardians of our Motherland, are the eyes of a world waiting for liberation!” Breaking with all established norms and prohibitions the commanders announce how many Soviet soldiers, tanks, heavy guns, planes and

submarines will be taking part in the liberation crusade. A thunderous “Hurrah!” again rises from clearings and meadows. Down forest and field roads, endless columns of tanks head for the frontier, dust clouds obscuring the sky. Grimy tankers flashing toothy grins shout “Give ‘em hell, ya *hear?!*” to gunners barely able to register through the din. The barrage rises to fever pitch, then, suddenly, stops dead. Ears still ringing, silence weighing heavily, fields flood with tanks and infantry. The clatter of armor, the fierce, throaty roar of Soviet infantrymen fills the air. Powder smoke and toxic tank diesel fumes mingle with a hint of wildflower fragrance. Overhead, meanwhile, you see wave after wave of westbound Soviet planes...hundreds, thousands of them. Artillery, hushed for awhile, now once again, as if reluctantly, drums its mighty message, switching from softening-up to tactical support. Now speaking up are the batteries focusing fire on targets far behind the lines. Slowly but implacably, the pace of shelling quickens once more. More and more artillery regiments are heard joining battle, adding new registers to a swelling chorus.

Not getting bogged down in drawn-out fighting with fragmented clusters of enemy troops, Soviet forces speed forward. Colonel Starinov’s commandos have seized the border bridges at Brest, amazed to find the Germans have not even mined them. How can you explain so egregious a lack of readiness for war?

The impact of the sudden assault is stunning. Being hit by a surprise attack always triggers a whole series of disasters, each bringing on still more: On-the-ground decimation of airpower leaves troops vulnerable from above. With no trenches and foxholes in the border belt, they are forced to fall back. Retreat means thousands of tons of ordnance and fuel left behind on the frontier. Retreat means abandoned airfields whose orphaned planes the enemy immediately destroys. Retreat minus ammunition and fuel spells inescapable catastrophe. Retreat means senior decision-makers lose control: No longer aware of what is happening in the ranks on the ground, they cannot make decisions that fit the needs of the moment. The troops, meanwhile, either get no orders at all or orders totally out of tune with the constantly evolving situation. Soviet saboteurs, who moved across the border in advance, are at work on communications lines everywhere, cutting them or tapping in to send bogus signals and directives to enemy forces. Enemy operations become episodic skirmishes. German commanders request instructions from Berlin: “What are we to do?” The



issue is serious. For *defense* the Wehrmacht is unprepared. For waging defensive warfare the troops are trained far less well than for taking the offensive. Defense the maneuvers did not drill, plans for a defensive war are not on hand. What *do* you do? Attack? Take action under the prewar “Barbarossa” Plan? With no airpower? No air superiority?

Third Soviet Army suddenly strikes Suwalki. From the Baltics 8<sup>th</sup> Army comes down to join it. Carnage ensues, right from the first few minutes, Soviet forces taking heavy casualties. They do have an edge, however: the latest in tank technology, the “KV,” with armor German anti-tank cannons cannot pierce. Soviet airpower is rampaging unchecked. Fifth Airborne-Assault Corps has been dropped behind a German force group, while 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Soviet Armies are locked in protracted bloody fighting with a firepower-bristling East Prussia-based group of German forces. To the rear of this battle of titans, however, Soviet 10<sup>th</sup> Army has knifed through virtually non-existent defenses, swept toward the Baltic Sea and cut off three German armies, two panzer groups as well as Hitler’s command post from the rest of the German forces.

From around Lvov the mightiest of Soviet fronts hits Krakow, auxiliary forces strike Lublin. The right flank of the Soviet force cluster is covered by mountains. Exploding on its left flank is an epic clash, the Red Army losing thousands of tanks, planes and cannons, along with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Taking advantage of that battle, two Soviet mountain armies – 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> – deal a series of blows along the crest of the range, severing Germany from its oil sources. Soviet assault corps parachute into the mountains, take the passes, hold them and block attempts to throw reserves into Romania.

Neither Poland nor Germany is center stage in the war. During its first hours, 4<sup>th</sup> Soviet Aviation Corps in concert with 9<sup>th</sup> Army aircraft and the Black Sea Fleet hammer the Ploeshti oil fields, turning them into an inferno. The bombing raids go on ‘round the clock. At night, the glare of the blazing fields is visible for dozens of miles, during the day, columns of black smoke shroud the horizon. Third Airborne-Assault Corps descends into the mountains north of Ploeshti, then uses small, elusive, hit-and-run squads to destroy the entire infrastructure for producing, transporting and refining oil.

From the port of Constanza on south Lieutenant-General Batov’s 9<sup>th</sup> Special Rifle Corps lands in pursuit of identical targets: oil pipelines,

storage tanks and refineries. Storming into Romanian territory comes the Goliath of Soviet armies, 9<sup>th</sup>.

Tenth Soviet Army has not made it to the Baltic coast. It has suffered devastating losses. Third and Eighth have been annihilated, their heavy KV tanks shattered by German flak. Fifth, Sixth and Twenty-Sixth, having lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers, have been ground to a halt on the way to Krakov and Lublin.

At that moment, the Soviet command brings onto the battlefield Second Strategic Echelon. Together with its precursor, plus three NKVD armies to their rear, it makes for telling contrast against the German Army's single such echelon and meager reserves. In addition, just about the moment the war starts the Soviet Union proclaims mobilization, giving the Soviet command five million reservists that first week to make up for casualties and over three hundred new divisions in the next few months to prosecute the war.

The five Soviet airborne corps have been wiped out. Left intact on Soviet territory, however, are their headquarters and logistics contingents, now taking in tens of thousands of reservists to replenish the ranks. Additionally, creation of five new airborne-assault corps is moving toward completion. Soviet tank forces and airpower have suffered losses in initial fighting, but the enemy has been unable to damage or seize any of the USSR's war industry.

The world's biggest tank factories in Kharkov, Stalingrad and Leningrad have not stopped producing, but instead sharply stepped up their output. Even that, though, is not the main point.

The German Army still has tanks, but no fuel for them. The infantry still has armored personnel carriers, the artillery, towing vehicles – but no fuel. There still are planes, but no fuel. Germany has a powerful fleet, but not in the Baltic Sea. Even if it does show up there, there will be no fuel for going after the enemy. The German Army has thousands of wounded soldiers needing to be taken to the rear. There are ambulances, but no fuel. The German Army has a vast fleet of automobiles and motorcycles for troop maneuvers, troop supplies and reconnaissance – but no fuel for either...

Fuel *was* available in Romania, which conventional defense could not shield. That was something Stalin understood. It was something Zhukov understood.

Hitler, yes, also understood it very well.

In August 1941 Second Strategic Echelon carried out the Vistula-Oder Operation, seizing bridges and beachheads on the Oder, then using them to launch a new drive deep into enemy territory.

A steady stream of forces descends on the Oder: artillery, tanks, infantry. Littering the shoulders of the roads are tracks, already coated with a hint of rust: Whole divisions and corps equipped with fast tanks shed the tracks the moment they enter the German autobahns, freeing them to race ahead.

Passing the troops in the opposite direction are endless columns of prisoners, dust swirling to the horizon. So, here they are, the oppressors of the people: shopkeepers, bourgeois physicians and bourgeois architects, farmers, bank employees. The Chekists are working overtime: At every rest stop the prisoners are run through quick interrogations. The NKVD then deals with each individually, determining *how* guilty he was of wronging hard-working people. Even now, though, amidst millions of POW's, especially dangerous types have to be identified: one-time Social Democrats, pacifists, Socialists and National Socialists, former officers, policemen and those affiliated with religious faiths.

Millions of prisoners have to be sent far to the east and north to get the chance by means of honest labor to atone for all they have done to people. The railroads, however, are not accepting POW's. Their only destination now is victory. Hurling down the tracks are thousands of trains loaded with ammunition, fuel and reinforcements.

Where *do* you put the prisoners? Well, in the Auschwitz area 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Corps captures a concentration camp. A dispatch goes to higher-ups, requesting permission to use it as such. "Denied, set up an Auschwitz Museum instead!" Result: New concentration camps have to be built next door.

Onward, westward, the troop columns roll. Out of each passing column commissars pick a few men, send them to Auschwitz, show them around: "See for yourselves, and do tell your comrades about it!"

Political Section cars let the soldiers catch up with their battalions to tell the tale:

- Well, bro, what's it like there, at Auschwitz?

- Uh, nothin' much" shrugs the seasoned soldier in the black jacket. "All just like back home, 'cept the weather 'round here's a bit better."

The battalion takes a stiff shot of vodka before heading into battle. Good news: “You can take trophies. Help yourself to whatever.” The commissar is screaming, has gone hoarse, quotes Ilya Ehrenburg: “Break the pride of the haughty German people!”

The black-jackets laugh: “How’re we gonna break that pride, huh? Gang-rape ‘em all?”

None of this actually happened, you say? No: This *isn't* fantasy!

Actually happen it *did!* True enough, not in '41 – in '45. Soviet soldiers then *were* authorized to plunder, called “trophy-taking.” Yes, to “break German pride” they were ordered. Yes, millions of people did fall into the paws of the Soviet secret police. Yes, they were herded in endless columns to places from which not all returned.

Indeed, few remember “liberate Europe and the whole world” did *not* ring out first in 1945, but in late 1938. Winding up the Great Purge within the Soviet Union, Stalin totally rewrote the history of communism and set new goals. His medium: “History of the All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) – A Short Course.” The book became the bible for all Soviet communists and communists world-wide. Its concluding chapter maintained the Soviet Union was in the grips of capitalist encirclement. Stalin proclaimed as the paramount goal replacing capitalist with socialist encirclement. The fight against capitalist encirclement was to be pursued until every last country on earth had become a component “republic” of the USSR.

“Topic A” for Red Army political lessons became “The USSR under capitalist encirclement.” Propagandists, commissars, political officers and commanders led everyone in Red Army uniform to Stalin’s straightforward and logical resolution of the problem. Dinned into the ears of the Red Army’s iron-clad battalions was a song about a war of liberation, a war which was to begin with an edict from Stalin:

Like breathing fire, resplendent, never stalling,

Will roll our armor, join the fierce crusade.

Once into battle sends us Comrade Stalin

And our First Marshal signals “Draw your blade!”

Hitler was reckless enough to put faith in Stalin and turn his back to him. That, in the summer of 1940, set off the clarion call to arms in a great war of liberation to make every country the world over a member republic of the USSR. One Soviet air force general portrays this yearned-for war

soon to come: “What happiness, what joy will stream from the eyes of those who here, in the Kremlin Palace, will adopt the last republic into the brotherhood of peoples the world over! I can picture it clearly: bombers smashing enemy factories, railway junctions, bridges, depots and entrenchments; fighter-bombers raining lead onto troop columns and artillery emplacements; landing craft setting their divisions ashore far behind enemy lines. The awesome might of the air fleet of the Land of Soviets, together with our infantrymen, gunners and tankers, will do its sacred duty and help oppressed peoples rid themselves of their executioners” (Baidukov, “Pravda,” August 18, 1940).

Georgy Baidukov was a remarkable pilot and a remarkable commander. Ranking among the top ten heroes of the Soviet Union, he rose to the rank of Air Force Colonel-General. He performed brilliantly in battle. Still, in 1940, he saw the war in a wholly different light. In an enormous article about a prospective war he did not so much as mention a war of *defense* nor bring up fighter planes battling to shield the homeland from above. All he had in mind were bombers, fighter-bombers and aircraft dropping air-borne assault forces --- needed for a war of “liberation.” “Pravda” alone published enough pieces just like it to fill many a tome. “Pravda” featured Polish communist Vanda Vasilyevskaya and American communist Theodore trumpeting that time was fast running out for bourgeois executioners to swill workers’ blood, that the proletariat in the West would not have to rattle its chains much longer.

Soviet communists openly proclaimed their goal: liberate the whole world, starting with Europe. Those plans were actively being translated into reality. While Germany was at war in the west, five new “republics” were incorporated into the Soviet Union. The expectation was this would be followed by a dramatic rise in the number of “republics” in the fold of the USSR – and those were not empty words. Gargantuan forces were massed to blitz Germany and Romania. For Germany, however, had just Romania alone been struck, it would have meant death...

## Chapter 34. WHEN DID HITLER LOSE THE WAR?

“Stalin understands, of course, what even Ex-Kaiser Wilhelm grasped: for Hitler, protracted war leads to total disaster.”

Trotsky, September 11, 1939 “Opposition Bulletin”  
№ 79-80, p. 18

“Future historians will reach the conclusion that the military situation made attacking Russia a political mistake, dooming all military efforts from the very start.”

Colonel-General Hoth  
“Panzer Operations,” p. 163

### 1

No attacker ever got off to a better start, yet for Germany the war ended with unconditional capitulation.

No defender ever faced more daunting odds, yet the Soviet Union ended the war holding Berlin, Königsberg, Vienna, Budapest and Bucharest.

Look at any chess game, and you will see a point beyond which the outcome of the contest is a foregone conclusion: The game goes on, yes, but one of the two players is already trapped, with no hope for victory. Precisely the same happens in a boxing bout: It lurches on, but one of the contenders has been hit in the jaw so hard, what follows is meaningless.

When, in fact, did the moment come after which, for Germany, winning the war had become impossible? Which blow was it that utterly doomed Germany to ignominy, ruin and total defeat?

Many historians feel the first not quite six months after the attack on the Soviet Union offered Hitler the only chance he might have had for victory. German forces entered Soviet territory on June 22, 1941. The December 5<sup>th</sup> Soviet counteroffensive outside Moscow signaled the end for Hitler’s Germany. Thereafter, Hitler could no longer hope to win. Yet to pile on, of course, were Stalingrad, Kursk and the strategic offensive operation in Byelorussia. It all, however, just amounted to still more battering of a beast already mortally wounded near Moscow.

This is exactly how many of Hitler’s generals saw things, including, for example, von Mellentin: “The Battle for Moscow was the tipping-point

of the war. From then on, victory was already beyond our reach” (“Panzer Battles, p. 429).

Might not that reading, however, be far too rosy? Could Germany really fight the might of the Red Army for a whole five and a half months with any hope for victory? Clearly, the answer is no. It had to lose the war a whole lot sooner --- and it did.

On that score you have more authoritative opinion. On November 29, 1941, even before the sudden Soviet counteroffensive, with German generals thinking Stalin had reached the end of his rope, German arms and ammunition minister Todt counseled Hitler to end the war against the Soviet Union. Todt felt “militarily and economically, Germany had already lost the war” (Reinhardt, “Moscow: The Tide Turning,” p. 184).

The minister’s verdict: Germany had managed to hang on not five and a half months, but five months and a week.

Even so, the minister saw things from the cushy comfort of far-off Berlin. There, what was really going on did not immediately sink in. Front-liners caught on before he did. Colonel-General Galder’s diary, November 24, 1941: “Lieutenant-Colonel Kalden (2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Army Hq Communications Officer) delivered situation and troop status report... Army Command feels further offensive operations are impossible.”

Another entry the same day: “Colonel-General Fromm: Outlined overall military-economic situation. Downtrend! His view: Need truce.” Five months and two days after German forces had entered Soviet territory, that was the message: NEED TRUCE!

## 2

Even these assessments, however, overstate Germany’s leverage.

Quite a few German generals of real stature are convinced August 21, 1941 has to rank as the true date marking Germany’s defeat in World War II. On that day, Hitler ordered temporary suspension of the attack on Moscow and instead a southward sweep to encircle Soviet forces in the Kiev sector. Carried out, the operation netted 665,000 Soviet soldiers and officers, 884 tanks, 3,178 cannons, hundreds of thousands of tons of ammunition, fuel, spare parts and provisions. Nonetheless, the victory at Kiev was only tactical. For a run-of-the-mill army – the British, for instance, then in Africa fighting two German divisions – losses on this scale might have seemed heavy. For the Red Army, they were unpleasant, but sustainable. Guderian himself had to acknowledge it: “There is no

doubting the battle for Kiev was a major tactical triumph. The issue of whether this tactical success was also of major strategic significance, by contrast, remains in doubt” (“A Soldier Remembers,” p. 305).

No question: The Germans took POW’s and booty. The big but: They lost a whole month. And what a month to lose: September --- the last month their army, ill-prepared for war, actually could fight in Russia. Just ahead: October, with bottomless morass, then November, with subfreezing cold. No matter how many POW’s and how much booty Hitler’s forces seized, battling for Kiev meant morphing blitz- into a kin of sitzkrieg, a recipe for disaster. In other words, Hitler’s August 21 decision cost them the war against the Soviet Union.

Oh, I *hear* die-hard Nazis howl: If only Hitler hadn’t switched to Kiev...Had he not changed course, though, had he gone straight for Moscow...it would have changed nothing. It still would have meant protracted war...for Germany, tantamount to a death sentence.

There was, in fact, no way it could end well: throwing main-force elements at Moscow and supplying them with horse-drawn carriages across an utterly unsecured expanse..! Just picture it: German Army Group “Center” striking Moscow...flanks exposed...no cover from the rear... no reserves...supplies depending on just the highly vulnerable, heavily damaged Minsk-Smolensk-Viazma-Moscow railway, plus those horses...

From the north, horse-drawn wagon trains plodding across wide-open territory have looming over them Soviet Northwestern Front forces – roughly half a million strong, with hundreds of tanks, thousands of heavy guns...and virtually nothing to fear: no way for German tanks to reach them on the Valdai Heights. Galder diary, June 25, 1941: “Reports say the area is impassable for us, but our foe keeps using it as a springboard for counterattacks...”

From the south, out of the Kiev, Konotop and Briansk sectors, the one-line railway as well as the wagon trains face the threat of Soviet Southwestern and Briansk Front forces – over a million strong, with a thousand tanks and five thousand cannons.

A dash for Moscow thus means a trip into a mousetrap.

Had Hitler headed for Moscow, leaving his flanks exposed...and lost, the post-mortem from those die-hards would have been, “..but our advice was ‘Go for Kiev, take the Ukraine!’”



Hitler did go to Kiev, did take the Ukraine...and lost. Say the same die-hards: “..but our advice was ‘Go for Moscow!’”

Actually, Hitler had no choice --- and those doing his bidding full well realized as much. Colonel-General Galder, diary entry, 7 August 1941: “The question of what we have to take – Moscow or the Ukraine or Moscow and the Ukraine – has to be answered ‘Moscow as well as the Ukraine.’ That is what we must do, else we shall not manage to smash our foe before autumn sets in.”

August is already underway. Left until September: just three weeks. The very phrasing of August’s “where now” question points up the shambles of German strategy. “To Moscow” means no taking the Ukraine before roads turn to mud and having to fight for the Ukraine fall and winter. “To the Ukraine” means no taking Moscow before the quagmire and pushing the battle for Moscow into autumn and winter. You’re free to go this way...or that. No matter your choice, though, it’s already too late to outrun mud, cold and snow. Either way, the war has already turned knock-down-drag-out with no prospects for a German victory.

Leningrad, meanwhile, still has to be captured. Can’t leave Stalin with the Crimea, either: Bases there Soviet airpower can use to smash Romania’s oil industry. That, too, Hitler understood. Galder, 22 August entry: “Our most important pre-winter mission is not taking Moscow, but capturing the Crimea as well as industrial and coal-mining areas on the Donyets River, along with cutting off Russian oil supply routes from the Caucasus. In the North, that mission is surrounding Leningrad and supporting Finnish forces... Capturing the Crimean Peninsula is critical to securing our oil supplies from Romania.”

The German Army has multiple strategic goals – *all* top-priority: If we don’t capture the Crimea, we lose the war...we don’t take Leningrad, we lose the war...don’t seize the Donyets Basin, lose the war... no Caucasus, lose the war...no Moscow, lose. It’s bucket brigades, multiple fires and a non-stop race to keep them from merging into an inferno!

If you do take Moscow, though, you still have to go to Kazan, Kuibyshev, Saratov and Astrakhan. You still have to build air bases on the Volga and crush the Urals industrial center. Russia, however, doesn’t end just beyond the Urals. Siberia and the Far East are enormous industrial powerhouses, pools of people power just as huge.

Take all this yet...with three weeks left in August?

### 3

We could spar endlessly about what might have been, if in August German Army main forces had not pivoted towards Kiev, but gone on to Moscow. Still, the very question, thus framed, lays bare a glaring military blind spot on the part of famed German generals as well as their apologists.

Well-known from time immemorial has been that a point on the map, however important it may seem, cannot be the target of a military operation. Only an enemy army can. “Not a single war, World War II included, ever proved wrong the basic principle that strategy must aim at utterly destroying enemy armed forces. This principle is a constant and must be the dominant leitmotif for action in war” (Colonel-General Rendulic, “Leading Troops into Battle,” p. 37)

Smash the enemy’s army – and all will be yours: his defenseless capital, his industry, his people.

Waging war, by contrast, against your enemy’s capital... is idiocy worthy of a Bonaparte. In 1812, had Napoleon first demolished field commander Kutusov’s Russian Army Moscow would have been his for the taking. So would Petersburg. Capturing Moscow without having annihilated Kutusov’s army was like dropping your weapon and raping someone else’s wife, all the while you know her enraged husband is loading his shot-gun.

First you have to decimate the enemy’s army, then his capital will bow to the victor. Storming into his capital, however, without having trounced his army is like making it to the sultan’s treasure chest, then stuffing bags full of precious stones, though you’re aware palace guards wielding axes are lurking behind the curtain. The smarter move would be first to deal with them...

Had Hitler’s forces headed for Moscow in August 1941 without first having eliminated Red Army main-force elements, their left flank would have been hammered from around Kiev, their right from the Valdai Heights

### 4

Even this, though, is not the real key. In August 1941, wheel towards Kiev was something German forces *could* do. Make a move on Moscow in August they could not. They simply were not prepared. By mid-August, fuel for tanks and planes was running out. For part of their forces to seize the Ukraine, the Germans did have enough. For the whole German Army to move on Moscow, they did not. That fact is on the record, even in Galder’s

diary. Entry, 17 August 1941: “The seriousness of our fuel situation is common knowledge... Only the most urgent needs can be met. Conducting any new operations calling for more fuel is impossible.”

Voilà: *impossible!* Not even two months into the war...and carrying out major operations is impossible. What a job they had done gearing up for war!

Punching through all the way to Moscow is herculean enough. Actually taking Moscow is no less daunting. Gargantuan amounts of gasoline are needed for both. Supplying the army with enough to hit, encircle and seize Moscow as well as repulse possible counterattacks, all in August, was out of the question. Conclusion: In August of '41 Hitler had no Moscow-Kiev either-or. Kiev alone was doable.

Hitler's 21 August “turn on Kiev” order therefore resolved nothing. A summer-weather drive on Moscow the fuel shortage would not allow. Soured weather in October and beyond would deny it success. In other words, as early as August 21, 1941 Hitler's hopes had run out.

Had there been gasoline in August, you could have pondered: on to Moscow, down to Kiev? Only, there was none. Had they not turned towards Kiev, they would still have had to stop and wait...until enough oil had been pumped in Romania, refined into fuel for planes, tanks, etc., and delivered to the Mogilyev, Vitebsk, Polotsk sectors...no sooner than the latter part of September. Without it, a drive on Moscow was out. No point, then, arguing whether that drive should have come in August: What couldn't be isn't worth debating.

Gas problems did not wait to surface until August 17<sup>th</sup>. Galder diary, 4 August 1941: “The current fuel situation bars using motorized units for a southbound offensive. To replenish and rest up our tank units will take 14 days.”

They had planned on a three-month summer blitzkrieg. In August, though, after a month and a half of war, they need a break...

## 5

Gasoline, though, was not the only issue. Galder diary, 11 August 1941: “Supreme Command starved for resources... Have used up our last ounce of strength...”

They planned on blitzkrieg, but have run out of “gas,” in more ways than one...in early August already...barely two months into the war. They are still just in Byelorussia and the Ukraine. In the latter, they have yet to

cross the Dnepr. They hold just the tiniest tip of Russian territory. So much ahead, yet their every reserve already spent?! Is this not a confession of total failure, of utter defeat?

You need no glasses to see the blitzkrieg bust even before August 11<sup>th</sup>. Diary entry, 5 August: “The troops are exhausted. The Führer has declared (something to which we brought him ‘round, though through back-channels) developments now, as they did during the last world war, are leading to stabilization of the fronts.”

The day before, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, top commanders met with Hitler at Army Group “Center” Headquarters in Borisov. “Colonel-General Guderian’s report on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Group front situation: officer, NCO, soldier and equipment losses; needs replacements; if new engines supplied, can restore tanks to 70-percent combat capability for far-ranging operations, if just spare parts, only for limited action. Colonel-General Hoth’s report on 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Group front situation: stresses further operations confined to limited goals unless new engines supplied” (“Top-Secret! For Command Only” – Moscow, “Nauka,” p. 303).

There you have it: war readiness. Their plan was for blitzkrieg. Smolensk is as far as they got, not quite 420 miles of Soviet territory covered...before their tank engines quit. To add salt, those engines are beyond repairing, need replacing!

With that caliber equipment, how in creation could they dream *blitzkrieg*? How *did* they envision the war? Did they run even the most basic of calculations? Ahead of them lies a country spanning well over 6,000 miles west to east. They cross less than 450...have to replace tank engines...and, woe, none in reserve. What did the great strategists have in mind while charting the war?

The generals called for engines, Hitler balked: Can’t - for the life of me! The speck of common ground born of much back-and-forth: “After some hesitation Hitler promised the entire Eastern Front 300 tank engines – an amount I found absolutely unsatisfactory. As for getting new tanks, we were turned down outright” (Guderian, “A Soldier Remembers,” p. 256).

Well, fine, engines will be sent, another 450-odd miles captured --- but *then* what?

## 6

The matter of German tank forces’ losing their offensive punch, unable to press on, is discussed in Hitler’s presence on August 4<sup>th</sup>, but the

crisis emerged earlier.

Guderian describes the end of July: “Around Yelnya heavy fighting continued, claiming prodigious amounts of ammunition. Thrown into battle here was our last reserve, our tank group command post guard company” (ibid., p. 254)

Galder diary, 30 July, 1941: “Central sector of the front must switch to defense. On the Lake Ilmyen-Kholm-Toropyets line leave only minor rear-guard units! Tank forces to be pulled from the front for repair and replenishment.”

A tank is built so repairs no matter how complex can be made in the field. German tanks, however, were so weak and so worn-out, tank division losses so heavy, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Groups – the Wehrmacht’s spearhead – had to be pulled from the front for replenishment and restoration of combat capability after just five weeks of action. Result: For the first time in World War II and in the very sector most strategically critical to the German war effort Wehrmacht troops had no choice but to go on the defensive.

Earlier still, on July 25<sup>th</sup>, came a decision to send 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Tank Division, assigned to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Group, home to Germany for a major overhaul. So badly mauled were they, mere replenishment and restoration near the front were impracticable. It shows in Galder’s diary that same day: “We have to forego far-ranging tank force raids. Must put them to tactical use. Seize territory piece by piece. Tiring job – but the only way to destroy enemy troops.”

Foregoing far-ranging tank raids meant abandoning blitzkrieg. No other solution, though, was available. Hitler had too few tanks. Had he had at least 30 thousand, a minority 10,000-odd could have been thrown into smashing small encircled clusters of Soviet forces. The bulk and best of the tanks could have delivered lightning strikes deep into enemy territory, effectively waging more blitzkrieg. German generals, however, rolled onto Soviet soil with virtually no tanks: under four thousand, far too close to zero. During the first few days they overwhelm and surround enormous masses of Soviet troops. Now, the encircled troops have to be decimated. That mission is indeed assigned...to German tank forces so few and far between, none are left for blitzkrieg.

Galder, that same day, 25 June, 1941, writes about a shortage of artillery shells. He clarifies: “For maneuvers you need fuel, for sitzkrieg,

ammunition!”

In sum, one month and three days into the war the German Command concludes it must stop its tanks from knifing deep into Soviet territory. The Command realizes its blitzkrieg had bitten off more than it could chew. They start talking sitzkrieg...trench warfare...First World War redux. Only problem: To blitz they have no fuel, to sitz, no bullets. It's why a dry General Staff document brims over with emotion, bristles with exclamation marks.

Still, look at them, latter-day Nazis exonerate illustrious German strategists: “The weather in October interfered!”

In early July, they give up striking far beyond their lines. Late the same month they are forced to switch to defense. The first ten days of August serve up picture-perfect skies, yet they are drained, as duly recorded in their official service documents. By mid-August, they have to drag their battered tank divisions back to fighting trim. In September, they are not just too weak to attack: They fail even to hold the line, driven out of a staging-area near Orsha. After that...to rationalize defeat they blame foul weather in October, November and beyond.

## 7

Hitler's gambit came apart at the seams in July-August of 1941, but the reasons we have to look for in June of the preceding year. Find them we do. General Günther Blumentritt, “Fateful Decisions,” pp. 65-67: “In the course of the ‘20’s and ‘30’s the Soviets created an enormous army, over three million strong in peacetime, and gradually expanded it. This preceded Germany’s 1935 rearmament, hence cannot be deemed a response to Hitler’s introduction of universal conscription. For what purpose was so enormous a military machine created? Hitler could reach but one conclusion: Stalin intended to conquer all of Europe... An attack on Russia Hitler began to contemplate in earnest in the summer of 1940. He wanted, first, to hit the Russians before they could come down on Germany... With that fateful decision Germany lost the war.”

Others date that decision even earlier – and more accurately.

Hitler Germany’s Minister of Armaments and Ordnance Speer opens his memoirs’ chapter on “The Beginning of the Fall” saying, “Roughly during the first few days of August 1939...”

There, yes, you *do* have the beginning of the downfall. In August of 1939 Hitler and Stalin, through their stand-ins Ribbentrop and Molotov,

signed the pact on dividing up Poland. That pact set Hitler on a path of no return to where he had to fight a protracted war, meaning ruination. Hastening the disaster was the need to wage that war on several fronts at once. What followed the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was all mere detail, just so many steps along Hitler's way to suicide. Hitler lost the war not in December 1941 near Moscow, not in August, when he ordered the turn towards Kiev, not even in June. He had lost in August 1939.

Hitler sat down to play cards with Stalin – and lost Germany, Europe, his life. Too late, Hitler saw he'd been had by a hustler – and suddenly whacked Stalin with a candelabrum. *That...* Stalin hadn't expected. *Smart...* the blow did. By now, though, the royal flush was a fait accompli. Much earlier, Stalin had already won it all..

\* \* \*

What they say is true: “Don't you try flimflamming Old Nick, you'll get the short end of the stick!”

## CONCLUSION

### WHY RIBBENTROP HAD TO HANG: “JUSTICE” AT NUREMBERG

In 1969, the memoirs of Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov first appeared in print. During the War, Stalin had been Commander-in-Chief, Zhukov his sole deputy. Stalin wrote no memoirs. Zhukov therefore was the highest-ranking witness of what went on during the War inside the Kremlin.

Zhukov's memoirs were released in multiple editions, translated into dozens of languages. The print run reached millions.

Strangely, their stunning revelations still go unnoticed. A sample: “Hurrying into the office came Molotov:

- The German Government has declared war on us.

Stalin slumped into his chair, digesting the news” (Zhukov, “Recollections and Reflections,” Moscow, APN, 1969, p. 248).

Back then in 1969, those lines sent me reeling, nearly knocking this Soviet Army Lieutenant right out of his chair. How so? From earliest childhood I had been taught Germany had attacked without declaring war. Every single book said it: “without a declaration...” Every Soviet newspaper, too, the moment talk turned to the War, hammered home: “without a declaration...”

Astounding: Every communist propaganda outlet, all the experts and, falling in line, hundreds of millions of people the world over keep repeating “Germany attacked without declaring war.” Right here now, those same millions read in Zhukov's first-hand account: “The German Government has declared war on us.” After all, put these two message portions side by side, and it becomes clear even the most basic things don't add up in what Kremlin Führers put out. Russian politicians in office, marshals and generals, ideologues and historians...all have failed to connect even the dots most fundamental to the history of the War.

Whether Germany did or did not declare war on the Soviet Union really sparked my interest.

Here is what I have managed to bring to light:

On June 22, 1941 at 4:00 a.m., Imperial Minister of Foreign Affairs von Ribbentrop summoned Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs



of the USSR, Soviet Ambassador to Germany Dekanozov, and handed him a memorandum detailing the reasons for Germany's attack on the USSR.

The "Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany to the Soviet Government" carried three attachments:

"Report to the German Government from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, the Reichsführer of the SS and the Chief of Police of Germany about USSR subversive activity aimed against Germany and National Socialism"

"Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany on Soviet Government Propaganda and Sedition"

"Report of the German Army High Command to the German Government on Concentration of Soviet Forces Against Germany"

Handing over this set of documents was tantamount to a declaration of war.

At the same time, in Moscow, Ambassador of Germany to the USSR Count von der Schulenburg called for an immediate meeting with People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR Molotov and handed him precisely the same memorandum and accompanying documents.

In other words, war was declared on the Soviet Union over two channels at once.

At 5:30 a.m. that same day, in Berlin, Propaganda Minister Göbbels went live with a radio statement.

A few hours later, Hitler himself also went on the air, explaining what had driven Germany to go to war against the Soviet Union. Loud enough for the whole world to hear, Göbbels and Hitler both accused the Soviet Union of Red Army preparations for a surprise attack on Germany. Specifically, they cited active subversion against Germany by Soviet Intelligence, hostile propaganda aimed by the Soviet Government against Germany in violation of treaties signed and colossal Red Army force concentrations on the frontier.

Can we believe the pair?

Let's assume both were lying. If so, the government of the Soviet Union – Stalin personally as well as his deputy Molotov – should have declared to the whole world the explanations Hitler, Ribbentrop and Göbbels had offered were a sham. The Soviet government was duty-bound publicly to refute the German accusations. However, Molotov did not then refute the note of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the

Government of the USSR or its three attachments nor, in fact, has ANYONE EVER done as much.

Indeed, what the Germans cited is irrefutable.

The German Government did declare war on the Soviet Union and, using dozens of illustrations, explained why the steps it was taking were the only option available given the situation that had in fact arisen. Why is there no reaction from anyone? Decade after decade is slipping by...yet Hitler and Göbbels are drawing no rebuttals from anyone.

The only conclusion possible: Neither Comrade Stalin nor other Kremlinites have ever had anything with which to refute the accusations the German Government set forth in its memorandum...not early the morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, not 10 years later, not 20, not nearly seventy....

Had there been anything to say in reply, they would have said it... long ago.

Their problem: They had no leg to stand on. Instead of retorting, the Kremlin Gang therefore professed the Soviet Union's total innocence, claimed no one had even accused it and simply pretended never to have received any memorandum from the German government.

On June 22, 1941 at 7:30 a.m. Radio Moscow broadcast a statement by the Soviet government. Its opening words: "Germany has attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war and without citing any grievances."

At noon Molotov, Soviet Government Deputy Head and USSR People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, delivered a radio address the Soviet people. He declared: "Without citing any grievances and without declaring war German forces attacked our country..."

It was a bald-faced lie. Seven hours earlier, Molotov had met with the German ambassador, who indeed did declare war on behalf of the German Government and presented three documents spelling out accusations lodged against the Soviet Union.

The war ended and, lo and behold, Stalin demanded the top leadership of the Third Reich be put on trial. Such a trial was held in Nuremberg. Prosecutors and judges from the Soviet Union, the USA, Great Britain and France tried Nazi ringleaders.

Also among the accused was Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop. He stated war on the Soviet Union *had* been declared. Soviet prosecutors categorically denied it: There was no such declaration. We cannot find any

such document, meaning, it was never handed to us, so, war was not declared.

Why, though, *did* Soviet prosecutors at Nuremberg deny the fact that the war had been declared? Why did prosecutors lie, claiming Ribbentrop on June 22, 1941 had not presented any document to the Soviet ambassador in Berlin? Why did they, to say the least, criminally deny due process of law, why weave against Ribbentrop a web of obviously trumped-up charges?

To the judges, open-and-shut: The Soviet plaintiff can't locate documents reflecting a declaration of war, ergo, the German defender didn't present any... So they wrote into the verdict: "On June 22, 1941, without a declaration of war, Germany..." ("Nuremberg Trial of German Major War Criminals," Anthology of material in seven volumes, Moscow, 1960, Vol. 5, p. 569).

Next...Ribbentrop was hung.

"Traacherously and without a declaration of war": For decades, that was the mantra they kept drumming into us. Now, even the Russian Federation Ministry of Defense is forced to acknowledge in its flagship publication: Germany did declare war. ("Red Star," November 25, 1998). In its June 23, 2001 edition the same paper specifies: "Accusations against the USSR were raised in a memorandum Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop handed to the Soviet ambassador in Berlin on 22 June 1941 at 04:00."

You find it acknowledged now even in official tomes on Soviet history: "Cast in the same mold was a memorandum Ribbentrop handed the Soviet ambassador in Berlin on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. It asserted the Soviet Government had been trying to bring about the disintegration of Germany from within and was on the verge of launching aggression against it" (History of the Second World War, Moscow, Voenizdat, 1975, Vol. 4, p. 31).

How are we supposed to make sense of this truly bizarre tableau? What *was* Ribbentrop guilty of? For what crimes *was* he hung?

In 1934, Ribbentrop was given special responsibility for matters of DISARMAMENT. In 1936, he was named ambassador to Great Britain. Anglophile by conviction, he loved Britain and did all he could to ward off war between Germany and Britain. In 1938, he rose to Minister of Foreign Affairs. What about the Munich Accords, you ask, on merging Sudetenland

with Germany? Yes, except they were signed not by ministers, but heads of government, including those of Britain and France. If the 1938 Munich Accords qualify as a crime, then you needed to hang former French Premier Daladier and erstwhile British Prime Minister Chamberlain for it. They signed the Accords, Ribbentrop didn't.

Later, Ribbentrop shone just once: In the presence of Stalin he signed the Moscow a.k.a. Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact.

At Nuremberg, Ribbentrop was held responsible for direct and immediate involvement in unleashing a war of aggression.

And no one asked: *Which* war? World War II?

Why, nothing of the kind: All Ribbentrop signed at the Kremlin was a *non*-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Ah but, some will object, that pact envisioned breaking up Poland... and that partition in fact led to the outbreak of the Second World War!

True.

Still, not Ribbentrop alone signed the pact. First, Comrade Molotov did, then Herr Ribbentrop. Afterward, in September, Comrade Stalin exuberantly dashed his endorsement onto the Poland partition map – a signature nearly 2 feet across. Well, the Great Red Führer simply couldn't contain his glee over having blazed for Hitler a road that started with war against Poland, but inevitably became a highway to taking on the rest of the whole world... thus taking Hitler all the way to suicide.

Since Ribbentrop signed the pact – officially about non-aggression, but in fact about partitioning Poland – he had to be sentenced to death, naturally. In that case, however, Comrade Molotov, too, had to be strung up and dangle from the gallows. Hanging in the balance there: balance in hanging! Right between them, for the sake of justice, also had to be Stalin. The Pact was signed at the Kremlin. Well, host and master of the house was who? Not Ribbentrop, by any means.

What a trial: Ribbentrop signs the pact that leads to World War Two, and hangs, Molotov signs the same piece of paper, and, what do you know, officiates with Stalin as the off-stage Nuremberg Tribunal puppeteers.

For good measure, at Nuremberg charges against Ribbentrop on account of his signature under the Moscow Pact *were never filed*. Someone therefore owes us an explanation: What, in fact, was Ribbentrop guilty of?

What, moreover, was the debt Ribbentrop owed Great Britain and France? Against them he did not declare war. His London and Paris slates are clean. Truth be told, it was all quite the other way 'round: Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. If declaring war is a crime, dangling from a noose at Nuremberg should have been the French and British leaders.

Next they say, in 1941 on behalf of the German government Ribbentrop declared war on the Soviet Union. Now there, *there* it is, the essence of his guilt. That, you see, is why he deserved a shameful and painful death!

Fine, as far as it goes. The only thing is, at Nuremberg no one actually accused Ribbentrop of anything of the sort. On the contrary, Soviet prosecutor Comrade Vishinsky lied with gusto that war had *not* been declared. In plain English, here he again took Ribbentrop off the hook.

According to the Soviet version war had not been declared. The corollary: Ribbentrop and his ministry, even in strictly formal terms, had nothing to do with the attack. No matter, at the insistence of Soviet prosecutors Ribbentrop was hanged.

Hmmm, whatever happened to Stalin's iron logic?

Not to worry. Logic didn't leave Stalin in the lurch at Nuremberg, either: Had he preferred charges against Ribbentrop for having declared war on the Soviet Union, he would have had to introduce the German government memorandum Ribbentrop handed Dekanozov at 4 a.m. on June 22, 1941.

Another thing that would have surfaced would have been the question of whether the memorandum embodied truth or slander. The Soviet government had absolutely no taste for answering questions of the kind. For that reason Ribbentrop was essentially not indicted for *anything* --- and the German government memorandum never produced in court. Soviet prosecutors instead resorted to hoodwinking the court, declaring Germany had attacked without a declaration of war.

Take even the most cursory glance at how the trial unfolded: Mind-boggling facts bubble to the surface. Eye-openers start with the roster of those in the dock.

Among those tried and hung at Nuremberg were Field Marshal Keitel and Colonel-General Yodl.

Guilty: Planned a war of aggression.

Time right there to scream “wwwhat?!”

Since the war against the Soviet Union was fancied as straightforward, short and simple, the top-level strategists – Keitel and Yodl – did not take part in planning this campaign. They were off flying in higher spheres. The blueprint for the war against the USSR was worked out not at Supreme Command Wehrmacht (“OKW”), but rather one flight down, at General Staff Army (“OKH”). “Barbarossa” hatched not at OKW, but lower down, at OKH.

The chain of command for instructions on how to implement Directive № 21 on conducting Operation “Barbarossa” was the following:

- Commander-in-Chief Hitler;
- Supreme Commander Army, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch;
- Chief of General Staff Army, Colonel-General Galder.

As directed by Galder, Colonel von Greifenberg ran the preliminary calculations. Initial rough drafts: Major-General Marx, replaced by Major-General Friedrich Paulus. September 1940 through January 1942 Paulus was “First Senior Quartermaster, General Staff Army.” Translated into terms we all can understand, he ran tactical operations, making him architect for all planning. His were the hands that drew the arrows for “Barbarossa.” On December 5, 1940 Paulus’s views were passed on to Hitler. The rapporteur: Galder, who delivered his report in the presence of von Brauchitsch and Major-General Brandt.

These, then, are the men you had to hang for having prepared a war of aggression: Brauchitsch, Galder, Marx and Paulus. To complete the circle, throw in Greifenberg and Brandt. They, however, were not hung --- in fact, not even tried.

Why, then, did Soviet prosecutors call for executing Keitel and Yodl, if they knew the “Barbarossa” Plan was not their brainchild?

What indeed had kept Keitel and Yodl busy?

Neither fought on Soviet territory...nor anywhere else, for that matter. Both sat out the entire war in their Berlin offices and bunkers... They were dealing with issues truly strategic... Keitel’s and Yodl’s ken ranged wider and deeper. Their minds skipped the war against the Soviet Union as a problem already solved, probing far-off strategic prospects. Day-to-day planning, humdrum matters like smashing the Red Army, were in the hands of officers a rank below. Keitel and Yodl ran the war on a global scale. On February 17, 1941 Hitler ordered Colonel-General Yodl to

devise a plan for an invasion of India through Afghanistan (JMH, 1961, № 6, p. 88).

On June 11, 1941 Yodl, under Keitel's direction, completed work on much-publicized Directive № 32 about what was to be done *after* the triumphal smashing of the Red Army: In the fall of 1941 an attack was to be launched from Libya through Egypt into Iran and, farther still, into India...as well as from Bulgaria through Turkey into the Middle East.

Accordingly, Soviet prosecutors demanded Keitel's and Yodl's death for having wanted to seize Afghanistan and India. Now *there's* crime for you! Non-Soviet judges, too, all nodded: Monstrous, it is! Hang Keitel and Yodl for intent such as that! Indeed, the court did hand down death sentences.

Hanged they were, Keitel and Yodl, the authors of fantasy plans for conquering Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, India and Egypt.

Don't think for even a moment Hitler's strategists have found in me an apologist! All I *am* doing is draw attention to a simple fact: There were candidates for the death penalty far more deserving..

Example: Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus. It was he, Paulus, who did plan the war of aggression against the Soviet Union. It was precisely his variation on the theme of attack that was adopted and carried out. For good measure, he also did fight on Soviet soil. More than that, he performed quite spectacularly. In one year, skipping ranks, he leapt from Lieutenant-General to Field Marshal. Paulus stormed farther east than anyone else in the whole German Army – clear through to Stalingrad. There, he finally fell into Soviet hands. Paulus commanded 6<sup>th</sup> Army from January 1942 to January 1943. Any crimes 6<sup>th</sup> Army soldiers and officers perpetrated could have been blamed on Paulus.

Kremlin accusers, however, decided Paulus was a witness to crimes...

Stalin could have hung Paulus even without any trial at Nuremberg. Paulus might simply not have been carted to Nuremberg, but tried in the Soviet Union. Even at Nuremberg he might not have been produced as a witness, but charged with monstrous crimes: Here he is, the Number One Planner and one of the major perpetrators... What, here at Nuremberg you don't want Paulus to hang? To blazes with you, he's *our* POW, we'll take him back to Moscow and twist his head off.

Paulus's head, though, they didn't twist off. They didn't even try him.

So it went in Nuremberg: Some they tried and hung, others they neither tried nor hung. What, in creation, criteria governed the choices?

Why also was drawing up fantasy plans a crime...whereas developing *and carrying out* plans for smashing armies Europe-wide and taking over all European countries was not? Oh well, who cares about France, Belgium, Netherlands, Greece...what have you.. Still, why is it that for devising and acting on the “Barbarossa” Plan, the blueprint for attacking the Soviet Union, Stalin’s prosecutors didn’t demand anyone be brought to book?

Incidentally, the Red Army and the British Army in August of 1941 occupied Iran. Stalin’s knights of the long knives, however, also organized a putsch there. If occupying Iran is a crime, at Nuremberg Soviet and British generals needed hanging: They actually did take over Iran, Keitel and Yodl were just fantasizing.

Further, if coming up with a *plan* to conquer Afghanistan was a crime, what, Messieurs, would you want to see done with the Soviet stalwarts who did conquer that country? Soviet generals built up experience in Afghanistan of a breadth and depth Yodl and Keitel could only dream about. In the Soviet Union, it wasn’t just two individuals who dealt with the topic, either. Nor was it just theoretical: A whole horde of Soviet Army field commanders actually did savage Afghanistan. Keitel and Yodl never once even set foot there. By contrast, for nearly ten years starting in 1979, Soviet generals and marshals caused their neighbors’ blood to hemorrhage for no reason, no cause, no point and no gain.

For what on earth, then, *did* Stalin orchestrate that “Tribunal”? What *was* he after? Why the noose here, let loose there?

Stalin, behind the authoritative fig-leaf of the “International Tribunal,” had to liquidate inconvenient firsthand witnesses of his own crimes, shielding pseudo-witnesses ready to stoop to whatever expedient to save their own hide.

During pretrial questioning Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel stoutly stood his ground: “The attack on the Soviet Union was carried out to preempt a Russian attack on Germany” and, further on, “I maintain that all preparatory measures we took until spring 1941 were defensive provisions for coping with a possible Red Army attack. Thus, the entire war in the East can to a certain extent be called preventive. Of course, in taking these preparatory steps we decided on the most effective method, namely: We



decided to preempt Soviet Russia's attack and strike a surprise blow to smash its armed forces. By the spring of 1941, I had grown convinced the massive build-up of Russian forces and their subsequent attack on Germany could, in strategic and economic terms, plunge us into an extremely critical situation... Especially threatened were two eastern flank outposts – East Prussia and Upper Silesia. The very first few weeks of a Russian attack would already put Germany at an extreme disadvantage. Our attack was the direct consequence of that threat..." (Interrogation protocol, 17 June, 1945; "JMH," 1961, № 9, p. 77-87).

The very same point Colonel-General Yodl also addressed: "The view prevailed in political circles that the situation would grow more troublesome in the event Russia attacked us first" (Interrogation Protocol, 18 July, 1945; "JMH," 1961, №4, pp. 84-91).

There – the words for which they were hanged! Better put, hanged not for having spoken them, but for having refused to back away.

This was why they hung the unyielding Ribbentrop, preliminarily having lifted all specific indictments lodged against him, while filing none whatever against the far guiltier, but cowardly and easily turned Paulus.

At Nuremberg, Soviet prosecutors demanded from Ribbentrop no more than this: Say the Soviet Union was not about to attack; say the Soviet Union was unprepared for war and posed no threat; say war was not declared, that you didn't hand us any documents.

Had Ribbentrop accepted Soviet overtures during initial questioning, he would immediately have moved from defendant to prosecution witness. Ribbentrop instead stood by his account. In his cell Ribbentrop recorded notes now made public: "A major build-up of Soviet forces in Bessarabia was of serious concern to Adolf Hitler in terms of its impact on pursuing the war against England: Under no circumstances could we do without the – for us vitally important – oil in Romania. Were Russia to press on even farther there, we would find our further pursuit of the war dependent on Stalin's goodwill. Such prospects, naturally, had to arouse Hitler's suspicions about Russian policy. He told me that for his part he was giving thought to military measures, not wanting to let the East catch him napping."

Stalin put on the Nuremberg farce not to find and punish the guilty. Stalin taught all erstwhile Hitlerite generals, admirals, subordinate officers and diplomats an object lesson: Here you have Ribbentrop. I have nothing

for which to blame him. On the contrary, he brought to Moscow a paper I was absolutely delighted to ratify...with a signature nearly two feet wide. Nonetheless, I'm hanging Ribbentrop, to tie a loose tongue.

Here you have Keitel and Yodl, who didn't fight on my territory, didn't come up with any plans against my country, instead were daydream-charting a fantasy drive on India. I'm hanging them, too. Same reason: So they won't blab.

Here, though, is Paulus, a criminal: Him, I'm pardoning. Easy as it is for me to hang even whomever didn't fight on my territory, I can concoct charges against anyone who did. Blab, and hundreds of my witnesses will incriminate you as personally responsible for whatever it takes to get a death sentence. Instead, write your memoirs this way: These Russian lamebrains weren't getting ready to take over Europe, were too feeble-minded even to be able to conceive of such a scheme.

Many German generals grasped the ground rules and signed up for the game.

To illustrate, here is the behavior of a field marshal quick to get the message: "On 9 January 1946 Paulus addressed the Soviet Government with a written statement exposing those specifically responsible for starting World War Two and providing an account of atrocities and criminal acts they allowed in the occupied territories" ("JMH," 1990, №3, pp. 52-53). Precisely what Comrade Stalin needed.

Many years ago, three lines in Zhukov's memoirs piqued my curiosity. From then on, I took to reading all the rest of his text more carefully. The more I read, the more questions arose. I then turned to the memoirs of other Soviet generals, admirals and marshals. Soon enough I reached the conclusion that the official Soviet history of the War needed to be rewritten from start to finish. Doing it inside the Soviet Union, however, was impossible.

In 1978, I took my whole family and fled from the communist paradise, just like thousands of inhabitants of East Germany and other countries in the "Socialist camp."

In 1985, I finished "Icebreaker." Years more went by, however, before I could get it into print: in German, in 1989, in English, in 1990. The book has now been translated into many languages, from Spanish and Greek to Finnish and Portuguese. In Russia alone, 11 million copies have been published. It has won many supporters and broad appreciation. It also

has drawn many opponents. “You’re a revisionist,” they tell me. “You’re rewriting history.” My answer: “A rewrite certainly would be in order!”

The point is, to this day Russia still *has* no official history of the War. In Stalin’s time no one even tried to write the history of the war between Germany and Russia. Under Khrushchev they did put out a six-volume history...ridiculed worldwide. With Brezhnev at the helm they released a twelve-volume version...and the world laughed even louder. Come Gorbachov, they took a stab at doing it in ten volumes...but never managed to finish even the first. In 2003, President Putin directed that an official war history be written...but five years have gone by and no one has yet gotten down to tackling the job.

In the Soviet Union there truly was no limit on resources made available for ideological endeavors. The same applies in present-day Russia. In this field scientific establishments have many thousands at work...already underway for 60-odd years! They still have nothing to show for it. There is no credible official history of the War.

There never will be any – not from that quarter. Using just one simple example, I have pointed up certain oddities in Stalinist policy: German generals who planned a fantasy drive on India were tried and executed, while generals who planned and carried out the attack on the Soviet Union were not executed, not even tried.

Put yourself in the shoes of an official Kremlin historian. Lavishly paid, he has the key to all the archives. How, though, is the poor fellow supposed to explain something like that?

The case Soviet prosecutors made to the court was that Ribbentrop had *not* declared war, that his office had nothing to do with the attack on the Soviet Union, not even in formal terms. Why, then, did Ribbentrop have to hang? How is the hapless historian supposed to come up with an explanation?

It now turns out Ribbentrop did declare war, after all. That, however, confronts our official historian with a new problem: How do I now explain why Soviet prosecutors at Nuremberg criminally denied due process? For what reason did they knowingly press false charges?

Touch on any other problem...and once again you open a hornet’s nest of questions to which officially sponsored historical science never will find answers.

That is why I searched for and, in my view, have found my own answers to many key questions. Since “Icebreaker” first came out, almost 20 years have gone by. Over all these years Kremlinite scientific officialdom still has not been able to produce any counterweight to my version. What these same years have seen come to the fore, on the other hand, is evidence aplenty in support of my work. My version has been buttressed by a number of books and multiple articles in Russia as well as other countries. Many of my assumptions have since been corroborated by documentation.

For example, until August 19, 1939 Hitler ranked as a sworn anti-communist. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, Stalin held out to Hitler the hand of friendship. I assumed Stalin must that very day have gathered his closest comrades-in-arms and explained the purpose behind what he was doing. My assumptions now stand confirmed. Stalin, that day, really did assemble his inner circle and deliver a speech. That speech has now been found and released.

Question: Why was it kept hidden for 50 years?

Answer: Because Stalin was interested not in warding off war, but in having Hitler unleash it, while he himself stayed on the sidelines, waiting until all warring countries were spent, and then...

Over the intervening years I have found original, very high-quality Soviet topographical maps. The country displayed: Germany. I have unearthed the protocol of the interrogation of Soviet artillery officer Yakov Dzhugashvili, captured by the Germans. He testified Soviet artillery had superb cannons and howitzers, but no maps of the native territory, explaining the abysmally low effectiveness of Soviet shelling. They had prepared for making war not on their own, but on German territory. Adding further interest to the deposition of POW 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Dzhugashvili is also the fact that he was the son of Stalin.

I have found a “Russian-German Phrase Book” published in Moscow on May 29, 1941. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, identical phrase books began to roll off the presses in Minsk, Kiev, Riga and other cities. Altogether, 6 million were printed. Phrases featured in both Russian and German included: “What is the name of this station?”

If Soviet soldiers were to fight on their *own* soil, *defending* their country, why would they have been asking...in German: “Where does this

road lead?” “Where have SS soldiers hidden?” “Where is the  
Bürgermeister (Mayor)?”

They wouldn't have --- for the simple reason that in the Soviet Union  
there were no Bürgermeisters.

The Soviet Union was preparing for aggression...but in just one book  
you simply can't tell it all. We'll continue this conversation in books to  
come.

V. SUVOROV

June 10, 2008

Bristol

## ILLUSTRATIONS

ВОЕННЫЙ ФАКУЛЬТЕТ ЗАПАДНЫХ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

КРАТКИЙ РУССКО-НЕМЕЦКИЙ  
ВОЕННЫЙ РАЗГОВОРНИК  
*ДЛЯ БОЙЦА И МЛАДШЕГО КОМАНДИРА*



*Военное Издательство Народного Комиссариата Обороны Союза ССР  
Москва — 1941*

*Military Faculty of Western Foreign Languages*  
SHORT RUSSIAN-GERMAN  
MILITARY PHRASE BOOK  
*for combat soldiers and junior commanders*  
*Military Publishing Division, People's Defense Commissariat, USSR*  
*Moscow 1941*

**Краткий русско-немецкий военный разговорник.**

Русский текст составлен начальником Военного факультета западных иностранных языков, генерал-майором т. Биази. Разговорник имеет целью помочь бойцу и младшему командиру Красной Армии усвоить немецкие слова и выражения.

Под наблюдением редактора *А. В. Любарского*

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Москва, ул. Скворцова-Степанова, д. 8

**Brief Russian-German Military Phrase Book**

Russian text composed by the Director of the Military Faculty of Western Foreign Languages, Major-General T. Biazi.

Phrase book is designed to assist Red Army combat soldiers and junior commanders in gaining proficiency in German words and expressions.

under the supervision of A. V. Lyubarski, Editor

cleared for printing May 25, 1941 G584

Вам нечего бояться!	Зи браухн кайнэ анкет цу Хабн!	Sie brauchen keine Angst zu haben!
Скоро придет Красная Армия!	Бальт комт ди рōтэ армэ!	Bald kommt die Ro- te Armee!
Где приземлились еще парашюти- сты?	Во зинт нох фаль- ширмшпрингэр ап- гэшпрунґэн?	Wo sind noch Fall- schirmspringer abgesprungen?
Проведите меня к ним!	Фүри зи миxь цу йнэн!	Führen Sie mich zu Ihnen!
Где река?	Во йст дэр флус?	Wo ist der Fluß?
Где мост?	Во йст ди брүүкэ?	Wo ist die Brücke?
Как называется эта река?	Ви Хайст дйэр флус?	Wie heißt dieser Fluß?

No need for you to be afraid!  
The Red Army will be here shortly!  
Where else have paratroopers landed?  
Take me to them!  
Where is the river?  
Where is the bridge?  
What is this river called?



September 28, 1939 the demarcation line for dividing up Poland was fixed. Ribbentrop signed the map. Stalin, in turn, started endorsing. His four-letter given name penned, he suddenly stopped, then exploded into a 23-inch mega-mark. He had every reason to cheer. All his calculations had added up: Hitler had fallen into his trap, getting half of Poland, but now seeing Germany forced to fight France and Great Britain – with Britain backed by the United States. He, too, had half of Poland, but with no one declaring war on him. All he now had to do was patiently wait for war on the western front to bleed Germany dry..

Here, by the way, Stalin again duped Hitler. Ribbentrop's signature carried the force of law: He was Foreign Minister of Germany. On behalf of the Soviet Union Molotov should have signed the map: He was head of the Soviet Government and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Instead, it was Stalin who did. The signature seems weightier, the impression, though, is bogus. Stalin was indeed the all-powerful dictator of the Soviet Union, but he held no official state or government post. In terms of international law, therefore, his signature was utterly worthless..



Joachim von Ribbentrop signs the pact dividing up Poland. He did not know Great Britain and France would declare war on Germany in response. Stalin did. Next to Stalin is Red Army Chief of General Staff Marshal of the Soviet Union Shaposhnikov, author of the dictom "mobilization means war."



On August 19, 1939 Stalin decided to sign the pact with Hitler. The same day, he issued the order to begin secret mobilization of the Red Army, from that very moment launching it irreversibly on a path towards attacking Germany.



The Führers of the Soviet Union and Germany did the dividing, diplomats and generals hammered out the details.



In 1930, the Soviet Union created airborne assault troops --- a global first. By the summer of 1941, over a million Soviet paratroopers had been trained --- with no mission for them in any war of defense.





Operation Barbarossa: Germany had enormous numbers of its best troops packed into two salients, conveniently poised for sudden attack. Without yet having fired a shot, they already had Red Army formations in their grip on three sides and could at any moment knife deep into the enemy's rear. For would-be defenders, though, the same deployment spelled suicide. In peacetime already, Red Army divisions had Germany's elite units locked in on three sides and could at any time strike deep into its rear as well as surround, cut off and wipe out the best German divisions, corps and whole field armies.



Operation Thunderstorm: The Red Army had enormous numbers of its best troops packed into two salients, conveniently poised for sudden attack. Without yet having fired a shot, they already had Red Army formations in their grip on three sides and could at any moment knife deep into the enemy's rear. For would-be defenders, though, the same deployment spelled suicide. In peacetime already, Red Army divisions had Germany's elite units locked in on three sides and could at any time strike deep into its rear as well as surround, cut off and wipe out the best German divisions, corps and whole field armies.



After the War Marxists' and die-hard Hitlerites' interests converged. Hitlerites had to prove their defeat showed neither lack of brilliance nor of might, Marxists had to hide their criminal, though abortive master plan. They had to portray the Red Army as utterly impotent, its German counterpart as an invincible juggernaut. In reality, German forces in 1941

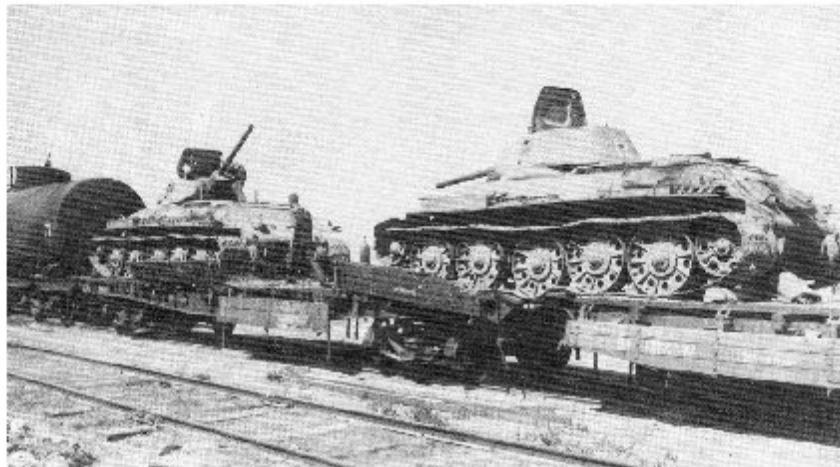


mostly advanced on foot, materiel chiefly moved via horse-drawn carts. What American or Soviet film shows you German soldiers riding a wagon train? Historical truth doesn't suit everyone, so it's embellished.



Often even heavy artillery was horse-drawn.

When the Germans struck, they caught the Red Army aboard troop trains.





Let's spot the details here, starting with...the German officer's derrière. The seat of his trousers is made of leather. Trousers like these were worn only by the cavalry. The armored car, meanwhile, is a captured Soviet BA-6. In 1939, when the war began, not a single German tank could match the firepower of Soviet BA-3's, -6's and -10's. As of 1941, these armored cars still outclassed the vast majority of German tanks in that regard. The Red Army, though, let the German cavalry switch saddles and mount powerful modern combat equipment.

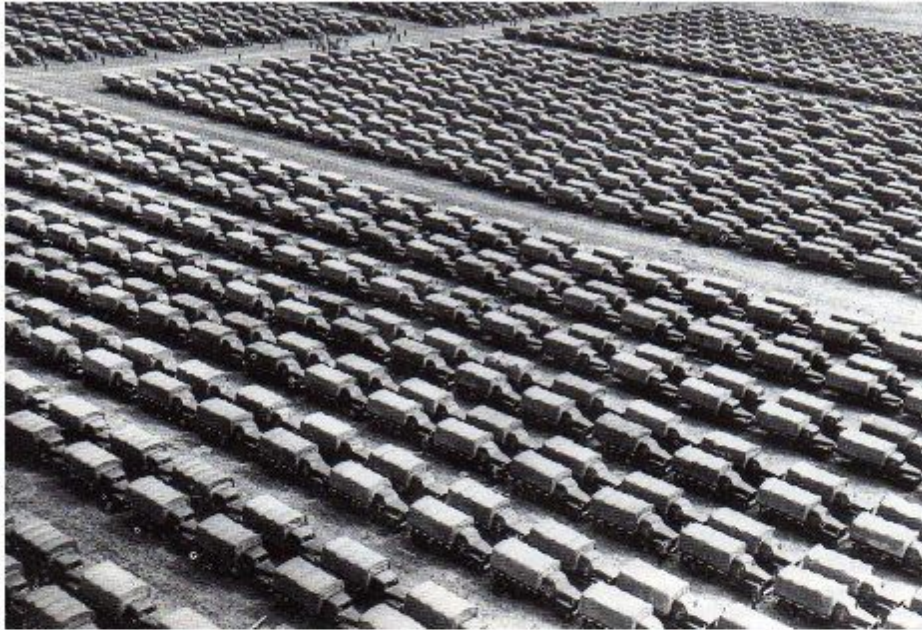




T-34's abandoned by the Red Army rolled through the entire war under a foreign flag.

Pz-III – in 1941, Germany's best tank. A few featured a 50-mm canon, some, however, still carried the 37-mm caliber. Both the old 37 - and the new 50-mm, however, were too small to take on Soviet T-34's and KV's. Pz-III tracks were too narrow, the engine too weak.





Being ready for war means knowing how to enlist the support of powerful, wealthy and generous allies. From the U.S. alone, Stalin managed over the course of the war to get, free of charge, 427,284 of the world's best army trucks, along with 595 warships, thousands of planes and tanks, artillery tractors, locomotives, wagons, 3,820,906 tons of food, 15 million pairs of leather boots, 423,000 telephone units, nearly 743 million square feet of woolen fabric, cobalt, aluminum, over two million tons of petroleum products, first and foremost hi-test aviation fuel, bronze, tin, medication, etc.,etc.. Did Hitler have such allies? Was he really ready for war?

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