

# BATTLE FOR THE FRONTIERS

Colonel T. analyzes the first phase of the Soviet-Nazi war. How successful was the initial blitzkrieg? The balance sheet after three weeks.

As I write, the headlines tell of the beginning of the second phase of the war. The Nazis have begun their second assault along the three main directions (Leningrad, Moscow, Kiev). There will be much to write about in my column next week, that's obvious. But for the time being I wish to say one word of warning: Hitler will be claiming big victories, big gains, "crackups"; new towns will figure in the news, some may even be taken by the Nazis. But be guided by this one principal point: the Germans will be suffering tremendous losses. And that's what counts. Tragic as Soviet losses may be, they can stand it. But it will be deadly for Hitler if he continues to lose men and material to the extent he did during the first phase of the war.

The temporary lull on the Eastern Front, that lasted about thirty-six hours, marked the close of the first phase of the war. This phase, operatively, could be called the Battle of the Frontiers—the battle of the approaches to the defensive position comprising the Gulf of Finland-Lake Chudskoye (Peipus)-Dvina-Gate of Smolensk-Dnieper-Dniester. Strategically it was the battle to cover the mobilization of the Red Army reserves.

This battle lasted almost three weeks. The Germans have reached the outer defenses of the above line (except on the southern wing). It is now possible at least to evaluate it in terms of movement.

As I pointed out several times before, the Germans have failed to effect a strategic breakthrough, to stun and knock out the Red Army, and to inflict losses greater than their own. However, there were a number of tactical breakthroughs and, in general, the front during that period hardly ever assumed the appearance of a steady and continuous line. In gauging the rate of advance of the German spearheads, it is important to ascertain whether that rate *increased* from week to week, or whether it *decreased*.

Some military analysts drew charts and made calculations which gave an entirely wrong picture of the first phase of the war. I shall attempt to set the situation straight by taking the three main directions, along which the Germans have made the greatest progress, namely Koenigsberg-Leningrad, Warsaw-Moscow, Liublin-Kiev. In order to cover the situation completely, add to this the direction Yassy-Kiev. Thus we have the four main sectors.

The advance of the Germans along these main directions is marked on the accompanying map according to the communiqués of the three preceding Saturdays, with the understanding, of course, that the "front" lines are not and cannot be exact. They simply

## Fly in the Ointment

IS THERE an officially inspired attempt to prevent the American people from learning the truth about the Red Army? Last week NEW MASSES cited the comments of the "experts" of most commercial newspapers, singling out the work of Fletcher Pratt of the *New York Post* and Hanson W. Baldwin of the *Times* as particularly flagrant examples of political propaganda in the guise of objective analysis. We pointed out that behind these prejudiced comments was something more than run-of-the-mine anti-Soviet bias, that high officials of the War Department—according to *In Fact*, the chief of staff, General George C. Marshall himself—have been giving the "experts" their "line."

Now comes fresh confirmation of the role being played by certain Washington circles. The July 11 issue of the newspaper *PM* reported that "Ever since Hitler sent his armies against the Soviet, deliberately pessimistic predictions have come out of Washington quoting anonymous military experts. According to *PM*:"

"To try to head off the stampede of press superlatives [for the Red Army] in this country Jim Fly, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, met yesterday at an unadvertised conference with only invited local heads of press wire services, Washington radio network commentators and bureau managers of larger metropolitan dailies such as the *New York Times*. Mr. Fly told them of the need of minimizing the Stalin Line as the world hope for stopping Hitler. Presumably speaking for administration higher-ups, he pointed out that a wave of American defeatism might follow the possible cracking of the Stalin Line. . . ."

Certainly, it is true that overconfidence is dangerous, and no one need underestimate the difficulties which the Soviet people and the peoples of the world face in the struggle against Hitlerism. It is curious, however, that Fly and his buddies showed no concern about overconfidence when Hitler invaded Yugoslavia, Greece, or other countries; it is only when the Nazis tackle the one army that is giving them battle that these people decide it would be more discreet to play that army down. Does Fly really speak for the administration? And since when has it become the job of the chairman of the FCC, which is supposed to be a non-political body, to act as minister of propaganda? It looks to us as if this activity is in violation of the Federal Communications Act. And it looks to us as if it is very much of a piece with the efforts of those reactionaries who are seeking to sabotage aid to the Soviet Union.

link those salient points which were mentioned by both sides. There are sectors and whole areas which are marked with dotted lines and question marks because there is no available information on the military situation there.

In spite of all this, a pretty clear picture can be drawn.

Operative line (in miles from border)	First Week	Second Week	Third Week	Total
Koenigsberg-Leningrad	60	160	35	255
Warsaw-Moscow	190	170	..?	360
Liublin-Kiev	60	110	..?	170
Yassy-Kiev	10	25	15	50

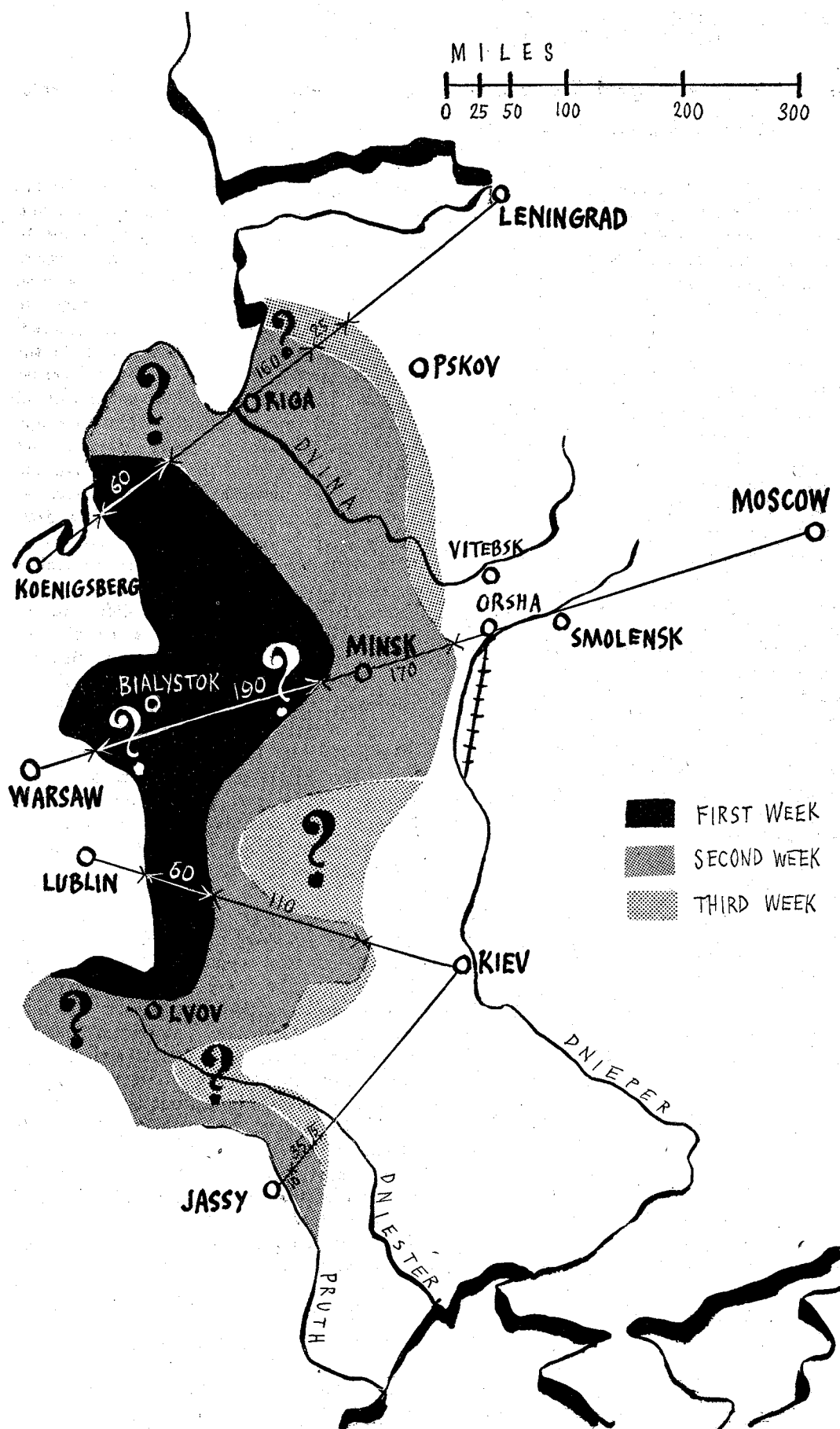
(It must be pointed out here that the distances in my table are in some instances greater than the actual ones, because they are measured along main operative lines and not from actual points of invasion. For instance, the distance from Grodno to Minsk is about 100 miles shorter than the distance we show on the map from the border to Minsk. Note also that we took the points of the deepest German advance.)

So we see that, with the exception of the Moscow direction, the rate of German progress increased during the second week and sharply dropped in all directions during the third week—so sharply that it almost came to a standstill. The daily rate was approximately 12.5 miles, eighteen miles, nine miles, and 2.5 miles in the four respective directions. The great effort which the Germans made on the Moscow direction proves that they intended to cut the Red armies in two during the first phase of the war, but failed to do so.

The sharp decrease in the rate of progress during the last week shows the Red Army operative reserves appeared on the scene in time to prevent a breakthrough before the mobilization of the Red Army was more or less complete (a mobilization is really never complete!). That, naturally, was the German aim. The whole Battle of the Frontiers from the Red Army viewpoint was nothing but an operation to cover the Soviet mobilization.

AND HERE a few words would not be amiss on the subject of mobilization. Many people think of it in terms of hours or days. It is natural that the larger a country the more time it takes to mobilize its reserves of manpower. The advantage of a compact country over a sprawling one in that respect remains the same, irrespective of the progress of transportation.

It is interesting to go back to 1914 and to see how the czarist army mobilized its reserves. Some of the figures are revealing. The army just before the war had, roughly, eighty divisions. The "first" mobilization was



The above map shows the extent of the Nazi advance in each of the first three weeks of the war. The question marks designate areas from which no information on the military situation was available. As "New Masses" went to press, Moscow reported that Soviet troops crossed the Dnieper at several points north of Rogachev and drove the Nazis back. These reports came on the heels of a smashing Soviet victory in the Baltic: thirteen German troopships, two destroyers, and a barge laden with tanks were destroyed, and thirteen other troopships and a destroyer were set on fire.

to give it thirty-five more, or a total of 115. It is estimated that in fire power these divisions were the equivalent of 57½ German divisions.

The Germans at first placed on the Eastern Front twenty of their own divisions and about forty-six Austro-Hungarian divisions, or the equivalent of about forty full-fledged German divisions (in firepower).

Russia could not send more than 94½ divisions to her Western Front because she had to guard the Turkish and other frontiers. How soon, then, did the Russian divisions concentrate at the Front? On the fifteenth day, twenty-seven were ready, on the twenty-third day, fifty-two, on the sixtieth day, 90½, and at last on the eighty-fifth day all 94½ were ready. The last four divisions came from the Far East (Siberian Riflemen). They spent six weeks on the train.

Since those days the Russian railroads have been extended and generally improved (as far as roadbed, rolling stock, and exploitation is concerned). It may be roughly estimated (judging by carloadings) that the Soviet railroads now can carry about four times more traffic than the Russian railroads could in 1914. Even so the first phase of the mobilization of the Red Army could not be carried out in less than three weeks (as compared to twelve weeks in 1914).

Hence the necessity to hold the enemy and retreat as slowly as possible without permitting him to disrupt the disposition of the covering troops and to push long fingers of steel which could rip up the mechanism of the mobilization in the rear.

This retreat, however, was carried out according to a new concept of "deep strategy." Large bodies of troops were left in the enemy rear. These troops, as time wears on and their "regular" operations against the enemy lines of communication cease, "evaporate" into countless detachments of guerrillas, composed of a nucleus of regular army men around whom fighters from the local population congregate.

The question marks on the attached map mark the invisible and imponderable front thus created more than 200 miles behind the enemy front. We shall hear little in the communiques of this front, but, nevertheless, it is not "unimportant," for it carries in its very conception the seeds of something the power of Hitler must fear.

COLONEL T.

### No "Kultur"

"WHEN the German forces crossed the Bug River, the Russians appear to have allowed them to advance without giving any indication of their presence. Then they opened 'devastating' fire from all sides upon the German advance units. Such methods of warfare are scathingly criticized in the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, which declares that shooting from the rear is a typical Bolshevist action." —From the New York "Times," June 29, 1941.



# YOUR QUESTIONS ON THE WAR

**New Masses answers readers' queries. What changed the character of the war? How can we help defeat Hitler? What about convoys? What about a people's peace?**

*"New Masses" here presents answers to questions from our readers regarding the Soviet-Nazi war. We would welcome additional questions.—The Editors.*

*Q. Can we expect imperialist governments to give real aid to the USSR?*

**T**HERE are two factors involved in the answer to this question: the situation of the British and American governments in the struggle against Germany, and the peoples of Britain and the United States. There is no doubt that the British ruling class desired Soviet involvement in the war. But because the Nazi conquests and plans for further expansion constitute an extreme menace to the British empire, that section of the ruling class represented by Churchill believes it necessary to give some measure of aid to the Soviet Union. Churchill and those for whom he speaks realize that a Hitler conquest of the USSR would convert Britain into a vassal state of Germany. It was not out of love for socialism, but in order to safeguard British imperialist interests that Churchill made his offer of assistance.

President Roosevelt represents essentially the same point of view, though he has expressed it in less positive terms. In both countries—in the United States openly, in Britain covertly—the most reactionary big business groups oppose American aid to the USSR and prefer to come to terms with Hitler in a super-Munich at the expense not only of the Soviet Union, but of the national interests and security of the American and British peoples. This is the real policy of Colonel Lindbergh and the America First Committee. There are also those who, while professing to oppose the America First appeasers, actually play into their hands by posing one front in the war against another and thus obstructing a united fight against Hitlerism. This is the attitude of the *New York Times* which, instead of combining the slogan "Help Russia" with that of aid to Britain, urges that the former be dropped and that assistance be confined to Britain. This policy would have the effect of isolating and weakening not only the Soviet Union, but England and the United States as well.

The second and all-important factor that will determine the character and extent of aid to the USSR, is the activity of the common folk of those countries. Undoubtedly, the statements of Churchill and Roosevelt reflected the strong anti-fascist sentiment of the vast majority of Englishmen and Americans. The problem now is to organize this sentiment in both countries, and especially in our own, in order to overcome reactionary opposition and swing the government into action that will assure swift, substantial help to both the

Soviet and British peoples. Thus it is not a question of trusting Churchill or Roosevelt, but of trusting and arousing the people. Otherwise we risk a fascist-dominated world in which American democracy and independence are doomed.

*Q. Why didn't the Soviet Union come to the assistance of Britain when it was attacked?*

The Soviet Union early in 1939 offered to conclude mutual assistance pacts with the British and French governments which would have constituted a virtual military alliance. Had this offer been accepted, Hitler would have been faced with a two-front war, in which case he would probably never have attacked and peace would have been saved. But the British and French governments merely went through the motions of negotiating with the Soviet Union. Though Chamberlain had given a guarantee to Poland which could only have been implemented with the collaboration of the Red Army, he and Daladier continued to intrigue behind the scenes in an effort to encourage Hitler to direct his aggression eastward against the USSR. Realizing that the world was moving swiftly toward war, and that the British and French game was to embroil the Soviet Union singlehanded with Germany under conditions that would permit the Chamberlain and Daladier governments to stand on the sidelines and help Hitler, the leaders of the USSR acted to protect the Soviet state by signing the non-aggression pact with Germany. This pact was entirely in keeping with the Soviet peace policy and served to safeguard that country's neutrality in a conflict between two rival power blocs for imperialist objectives. Under those circumstances there could have been no question of Soviet assistance to Britain. Such assistance would have violated the pact with Germany; moreover, the stalemate maintained on the western front for the first half year and the efforts of the British and French governments to switch the war during the Soviet-Finnish conflict showed that they had not given up the dream of resolving their difficulties at the expense of the USSR.

*Q. Was "New Masses" right in previously opposing the lend-lease bill and the arms program? If that program had not been carried through, the United States would not be in a position now to aid the Soviet Union.*

Our attitude toward the lend-lease bill and the arms program was part of our opposition to the entire foreign policy of the American government. And this was based on the imperialist character of the war. Had our government from the outset joined with

the most powerful neutral, the Soviet Union, in efforts to limit the spread of the war and assist the people of Britain and Europe to secure a truly democratic anti-fascist peace, the entire course of the war might have been changed. Instead our government chose to help spread the war by aiding one imperialism against another and adopting a hostile attitude toward the USSR. NEW MASSES consistently called for an abandonment of this suicidal course; had this been done and a progressive foreign policy adopted, we would have supported the arms program and other defense measures. With the attack on the Soviet Union the situation has been drastically altered. A policy of neutrality is no longer possible since the leading neutral is involved in war and the relation of forces has shifted so greatly that the defeat of the Soviet Union would, in view of the extremely difficult position of Britain, threaten the national existence of the United States. Moreover, the administration has begun to change its attitude toward the USSR in the direction we so long urged. The lend-lease bill and arms program, which previously served reactionary ends, can now serve progressive ends if they are employed to strengthen the USSR, Britain, China, and all nations in the fight to smash fascism.

*Q. What should be the attitude toward convoys and similar measures?*

NEW MASSES supports the statements of Secretary of the Navy Knox and Secretary of the Interior Ickes that now is the time to strike at Germany. This means that we favor the use of all economic and military measures to support the USSR and Britain. Again, our change in attitude is based on the changed character of the war. So long as the Soviet Union was not involved, the American people were not so directly menaced, and it was still possible for the United States and the USSR, without intervention, to cope jointly with the problem of a Hitler victory. Now, by his latest aggression, Hitler has imposed on us the necessity to strike at him and his fiendish system in every possible way if we are not ourselves to be struck down.

*Q. Wouldn't it have been better for the USSR to have attacked Germany while the Nazi armies were occupied with their Balkan campaign?*

It is, of course, always possible to reconstruct the world on the basis of hindsight and arrive at much better results. But history is not a jig-saw puzzle. The USSR is a peaceful country that lives up to its treaties, and to have attacked Germany would have meant a deliberate plunging into war. Though the Soviet Union was preparing for a possible Nazi assault, there was no certainty