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Panzergruppe 4 -Intelligence Branch

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ATTACK UP TO THE GATES OF MOSCOW

Battles of Panzergruppe 4 (Armored Army Group 4)
in the Struggle for MOSCOW from 14 Oct - 5 Dec 1941

On the battlefield of BORODINO, where NAPOLEON fought his bloodiest battle on 7 September 1812, the 4th Panzergruppe began the attack on MOSCOW in the middle of October 1941. The Russians attempted to block the way to "HOLY MOSCOW" just as they had 129 years earlier and as then took up the fight with great tenacity. But in a fierce attack the 40th PANZERKORPS, which formed the vanguard of the PANZERGRUPPE, threw them out of their positions at MOSHAJSZK.

Then the weather-god turned against us and in almost four weeks of rain made all roads impassable for tactical movements and supply.

The 4th PANZERGRUPPE resumed the battle on 15 November. Meanwhile the enemy brought in his best SIBERIAN DIVISIONS and a considerable number of new tank brigades. Three additional defense lines were formed in front of MOSCOW.

A battle erupted which was as important as the one of 1812, but tougher, mightier, and more prolonged.

Later the 40th PANZERKORPS entered the battle, along with the 10th PANZER Division with the SS Division "REICH", the 7th PANZERKORPS with the 7th, 197th, and 367th Divisions, the 9th PANZERKORPS with the 2nd, 5th, and 11th PANZER Divisions, and the 5th ARMEEKOPRS with the 23rd, 35th, and 106th Divisions. They were on the attack for weeks, taking one position after the other, destroying the toughest and best equipped enemy forces, and pushing through to the gates of MOSCOW.

The 8th AIR CORPS superbly supported the PANZERGRUPPE in tireless commitments, and its contributions were the deciding factor in many attacks.

The combined units of the 2nd FLAK CORPS stood in proper combat formation within the Divisions to repel the Russian air attacks, and they also destroyed large numbers of their heaviest tanks.

A correct assessment of this performance with respect to attacking,

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bravery, and disregard of life after four months of uninterrupted combat, marching, and suffering, will go down in military history.

The following description of the battles near MOSCOW should be remembered as depicting a difficult time, a time of unforgettable heroism. It was a Christmas gift inasmuch as it restored to life a pride in loyal performance of duty and in exceptional accomplishments of eternal German militarism.

The awareness of our strength, our capabilities, our willingness, and our steadfast belief in victory lead us into the year 1942.

December 1941

(Signed) Hoepner
General

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The Great Phase

The German October Offensive of 1941

The combined units of the 4th Panzergruppe under the command of Lt Gen Hoepner, which is part of the Armeegruppe under Generalfeldmarschall von Bock, began the large German autumn offensive into the East on 2 October 1941. They advanced from the Roslawl area. Their spearhead, the 10th Panzer Division, accomplished a meeting with the 3rd Panzergruppe under the command of Lt Gen Hoth at a prearranged rendezvous in Wjasma on 7 October, following a forced march of over 200 km. through enemy territory.

The gigantic encirclement of Timoshenko's armies, which will go down in military history as the encirclement of Wjasma, was accomplished. In succeeding days and nights the enemy tried with all his might to break through the encirclement, but was defeated after heavy fighting. The Panzer Divisions of the 40th Panzerkorps had particularly to withstand and repulse the strong pressure of the encircled troops. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners were captured and a huge amount of war material was taken as booty.

While at Wjasma the battle raged in which the divisions of the 4th Panzergruppe took part, the SS Division "Das Reich" of the 40th Panzerkorps drove through Juchnow into Gshatsk. This furnished greater access to the East while fierce battles raged with tough enemy armor. The opponent, who counted on spending the winter behind his line at Desna, was faced with a completely new situation. His capitol was in danger.

While the battle to encircle Wjasma continued, it was possible to withdraw additional elements of the 4th Panzergruppe from the gradually tightening ring. These continued further to the East. Only one more first big defense position.

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The Break Through of Moscow's Defense Positions

On 14 October 1941 the spearhead of the 4th Panzergruppe, the SS Division "Das Reich", stood in front of Moscow's defense position, which stretched nearly 300 km long from Kalinin to Kaluga. It was a defense system which had been constructed in months of effort by hundreds of thousands of workers using all the means of newly-developed defense techniques. Its core was situated on both sides of the great Smolensk-Moscow highway in between Telnja and Borodino, west of Moshajszk. Again on the historical battlegrounds, as once before in August 1812, the enemy fought to avert the fate of the capitol and to stop the threatening advance on Moscow, 100 km outside the city.

Out of this movement the regiments "Deutschland" and "Der Führer" of the SS Division "Das Reich" attacked the strong defensive positions with unheard-of courage. With the help of the reinforcing 10th Panzer Division, they accomplished a breakthrough into the core of the Moscow defense positions, although at the last minute the defense positions in the 40th Panzerkorps' attack sector, in addition to the newly-committed 32nd Siberian Infantry Division from Wladiwostok, were occupied in full strength of three regiments and two new tank brigades.

The SS and the Panzer Divisions attacked with such energy and with such eagerness at being committed as though they had been freshly recalled after a long rest period, rather than having been under continuous fire for the last four months. They overtook built-in rows of flamethrowers with electrical fuses, all types of tank obstacles, swampy brooks, minefields, wire entanglements, bunker systems, steep slopes and concealed positions in wooded areas, despite strong enemy defensive fire consisting of artillery, anti-aircraft, anti-tank, mortar, rocket-launcher and machine-gun fire which was concentrated in and around the points of penetration. But the courageous soldiers ran right through the counterfire.

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The enemy tried to throw out the penetrating Germans in a wild counter-attack with strong tank support. The tanks had previously been well camouflaged for this purpose, haven been placed in parts of the forest or in special underground tank garages, from which they emerged as a type of movable bunker. They fired several rounds and disappeared again. Whenever they rolled on to attack, the Soviet tanks were destroyed in a dangerous duel of tank against tank or by SS soldiers with anti-tank grenades. With modern rocket-launchers, which in sudden surprise fire discharged a salvo of 16 projectiles at one time in a small area, the Bolsheviks tried to stagger the attackers. But the latter were persistent.

The Soviets swiftly brought up swarms of aircraft from other sections of the front. They dove over the streets in rage and dropped bombs on the crossings and villages. But not even the red stars in the sky could hold off their fate any longer. The planes of the 8th Fliegerkorps guarded the fighting ground troops. Exciting air battles developed, and dive-bombers (Stukas) repaid the Bolsheviks ten-fold for every bomb dropped.

The SS troops and armored troops of the services, in combat of forest, village, and man-to-man, burned enemy bunkers, cleared the woods and bushes, smashed the multi-branched positions, overran enemy batteries and shot man after man in the anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons and machine-guns until those weapons were definitely silenced. One emplacement system after another was taken. The bloody losses of the Soviet troops far exceeded their prisoner toll. The Red riflemen lay with fractured skulls in the foxholes, trenches and bulwarks in which they defended themselves to the end; they sat charred over their bunker weapons and in the thoroughly-scorched tank-hulls; they lay with head and chest wounds behind the protecting shields of their anti-tank guns, and over the split trails of their weapons, or slashed by German artillery fire in rows on the plowed-up fields and among the crushed and uprooted trees on the edges of the forest.

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Thousands were led away and at night the villages still burned and painted colors on the low-hanging, rainy October clouds over the battlefields.

The attackers' casualties were high, too. Ambulances carried much painful freight back from the clearing station to the field hospitals. The SS Division commander was also carried away from the battlefield heavily wounded, and many a good comrade in the black tunic of the Panzer troops, or in the gray and bleached shirt or the colorful camouflage shirt of the storm troopers, was brought by his comrades to his resting place in the long rows of pine-decorated mounds, upon which steel helmets were placed.

But the intention of the enemy to stop the German attack was not successful. On 17 October a panic occurred in Moscow upon receipt of the news of the breakthrough in the defensive positions. A large part of the population fled. Valuable machines were destroyed in factories. The approach of armored cars and the task forces of the 4th Panzergruppe spread terrible panic in the Red capital. The Soviet rulers fled to Kuibyshev on the Volga. Marshal Timoshenko, the "Hero of Jelnja", richly decorated with medals, was relieved of his duties by Stalin.

The occupation of Moscow seemed an imminent accomplishment. On 18 October the city of Moshajszk was taken by the fast-moving troops of the 40th Corps. Then the enemy was joined by an ally which succeeded in what the enemy had failed to accomplish in spite of its display of military power and of the sacrifice of millions of people and of all defense positions. Already during the battles near Jelnja and Borodino it had snowed heavily, and when the Russian autumn rains started and prevented the German soldier from gaining his already-won victory. It poured from the sky day and night. It rained and snowed without interruption. The earth sucked up the dampness like a sponge, and the German attack stuck in the knee-deep mud. The people of Moscow felt relieved. The threatening had been banished 80 km from the Kremlin.

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Organization of the Moscow Defense Position

1.) Flamethrowers

In steelpots, which can be ignited from bunkers.



2.) Tank Obstacles:

Tank obstacles in fishbone patterns which are approximately 30 meters wide and of a 1 meter ditch depth.



3.) Swampy Stream:

The bridge blown up over the stream in the direction of the highway.



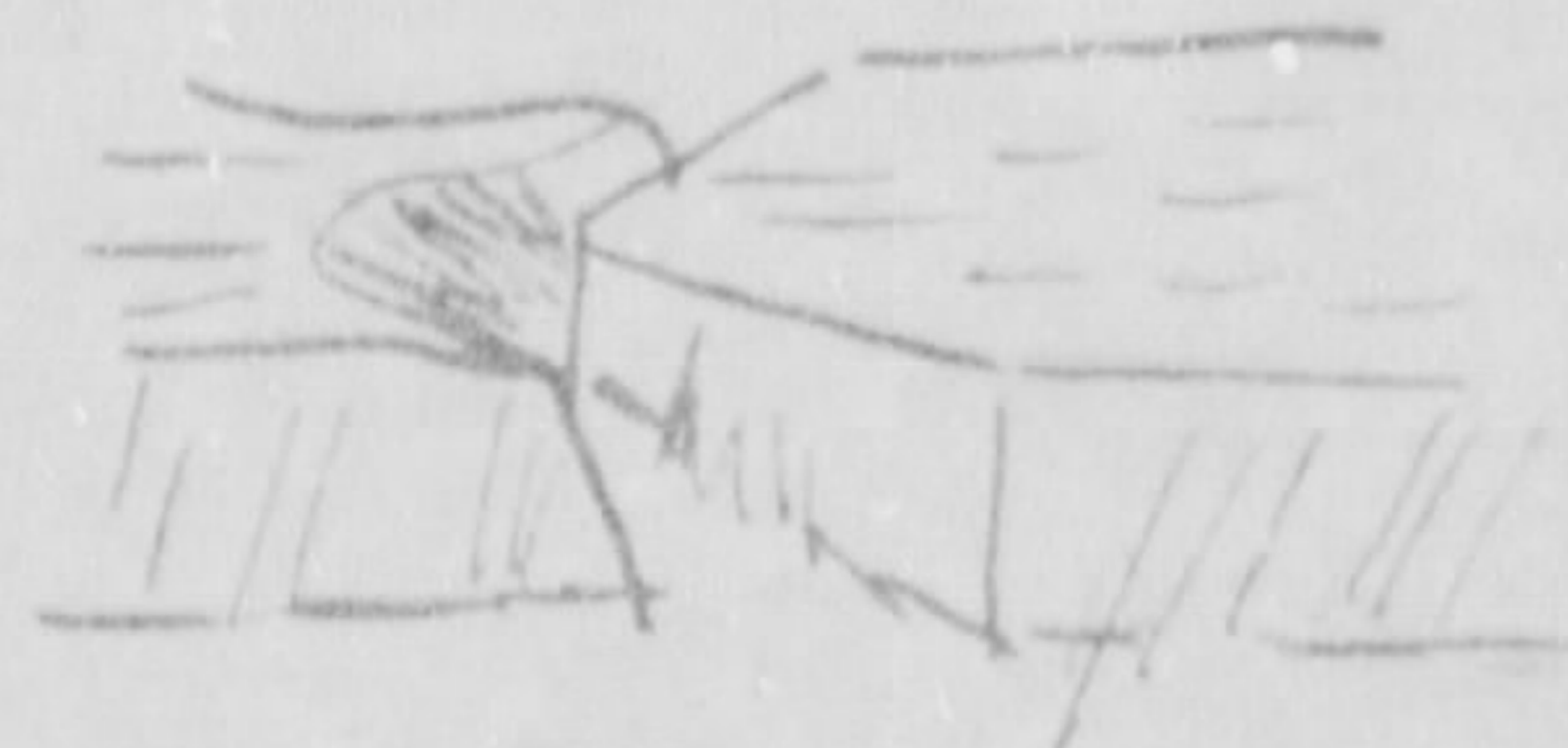
4.) Double-apron Barbed-wire:

In several rows.



5.) Tank Ditches:

Ditches on the ascending slope of a terrain elevation.



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Relief in the Mud

Vehicle after vehicle in the march order became mired in the mud as they advanced. On the Smolensk-Moscow ridges and in the swamp of the Moskva Valley and its numerous small tributaries, they rolled in the sticky mud as they would in a giant gluepot. That which the sticky ground gripped could not be moved from its position or it would hopelessly bog down in the depth of the mud. Every step was exertion; every turn of a vehicle was futile, because each movement no longer led forward, but only downward further into the soupy, slippery ground. The more work done, the deeper the vehicles and heavy guns sank into the mud. The guns sank over their wheelhubs in the mud; even the tanks and tractors were limited, it had to be realized. All effort was in vain. The soldiers put snowchains on the wheels, drove with additional help, and worked with capstan, liftingjacks, tow-chains, and winches. Engineers, construction troops and drivers searched for the road under the deluge of mud. It was all in vain. Even though one finally found sub-soil, a single column or a new shower of rain again transformed everything to a brown-grey, bottomless brew. Carpets of planks disappeared after several hours in over-flowing clay and could not be found. It was enough to drive one to despair. Under the circumstances, one needed two days and two nights to travel distances of 10 km, or one simply did not arrive at all. Naturally, supplies did not arrive either. Ammunition, fuel for the vehicles, and bread became rare as gold. The wounded could not be evacuated to the rear, because no ambulances and certainly no JU-52 (German Transport Plane) could come in or leave. The forward elements continued to advance by meters. Moreover, the remaining few hard-surface roads dissolved in the dirt. Airports drowned in the soft clay, as did the streets, and the machines could not start. Such was the situation of the attackers on Moscow.

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On the other hand, the enemy recovered noticeably. He reinforced himself almost hourly. At his complete convenience were the efficient street and rail nets of his capital, with the many supply lines from the east and south. He had connections with his rear echelon, and could patch up his perforated front in a few days. His planes could take off from concrete runways of the large Moscow airports. The Bolsheviks recognized the opportunity of the hour and understood how to utilize it. Suddenly there appeared spearheads of new divisions and fresh armored brigades in front of the Germans.

The Siberian Army was moving in. One combat-ready Eastern Division (Fernost Division) after another was flowing through Moscow either by rail, truck, or on foot to the west, and was building up in front of the Bolshevik stronghold. The remnants of the European Soviet Armies which had escaped annihilation at Wjasma and Brjansk were being reorganized, while the hopelessly enraged German soldier had to move about in mud and could not go forward to destroy the new enemy troops, already in their advance. The advance spearhead riders of the 4th Panzergruppe almost reached the intersection at Schelkowka. From there it was exactly 84 km to the Kremlin. The goal lay within striking distance and yet was unreachable because of the sea of mud and large minefields which separated it from the attacking forces.

Although the soldiers of the Panzer divisions were quite helpless against this mud, even this flood found its conqueror. The soldiers of the German Infantry divisions showed up at this phase. They were approaching on everything that might be described as a road. They came from the West in unending columns, marching from early morning until late afternoon, to take advantage of every moment of the few daylight hours of late autumn. By the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands, in unforeseen never-ending flow, slung with weapons and ammunition just as they had

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been released from the battle of Wjasma, they were the Infantry Divisions of Generalfeldmarschall von Kluge, sons of every German breed.

They were the 5th, 7th and 9th Corps which were subordinated to the 4th Panzergruppe. The infantrymen, all with the same facial expression under bleached field caps, dragged themselves silently through the mud into the East. The messy mud flowed into their boots from above. What did it matter. Their feet had been soaking wet for many days anyway. Their trousers, also wet, lay around their knees like cold compresses every night. Also soaked were the clay smeared overcoats and the shelter-halves which were worn over the latter. In fact, the only things dry and warm were the glowing cigaret butts in the corner of their mouths, and the pounding hearts in their bodies. If the road was not sufficiently wide to form a march column, they marched in single file. They ate during quarter-hour rests in the ditch beside the road, and the short nightly repose was spent in walking guard or in lying on one another so as to have at least a little warmth.

The horses had to be spared. The driver and the rider dragged themselves through the mud, leading their four-legged comrades by the reins. There were mostly four or six horses in front of the combat vehicles to make passage possible for all. For a long time there had been no oats for the horses. Thank God, enough hay could be found at the farms. In case the vehicles became stuck, the cramped hands of the infantrymen grasped at the spokes. They too strained themselves into the ropes.

The German Infantry marched on toward Moscow and reached the front lines of the armored and motorized task forces. Soon the motorized troops could be relieved, platoon by platoon, to devote themselves to new missions. The advance moved step by step toward the East. The infantry battle was casualty-ridden, but soon the Infantry Divisions subordinate to the 4th Panzergruppe were engaged in heavy fighting with the Siberians and many new Soviet tank brigades.

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Battle over the Main Artery of Operations



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The crossroads between Schelkowka and Dorochowo, 21 km East of Moshajszk on the large Moscow-Smolensk highway, was reached by the spearhead of the 10th Panzer Division on 23 October 1941. The highway was the only passable, traffic bearing road from east to west, and the main artery of operations of the Central Front. The Soviets knew this very well. The recently-constructed large highway between the settlements of Schelkowka and Orochowo, and the old Moscow Postroad which ran parallel to it, were crossed by a small but paved road which led from Wjereja to Rusa. Near Schelkowka the German forces were given the opportunity at least to proceed from a halted advance to a new front line before Moscow. Perhaps they could even succeed in eliminating further Bolshevik bulwarks of resistance along the east-west road by approaching them around the crossroads near Schelkowka, especially to the north, or even from the rear. This was also known and feared by the Soviets. Moreover, they knew how important the large road was for German supplies. Therefore, the first forces the enemy could bring up were employed against that crossroad.

On 25 October, the 7th Infantry Division, coming from Wjereja, relieved the 10th Panzer Division in the area around Schelkowka. Heavy enemy artillery fired into the relief immediately. On the following day, the regiments of the 7th Infantry Division, especially the 19th Infantry Regiment, intended to advance east from the crossroad, in order to remove that important central traffic point from the direct influence of the enemy. Attack upon attack broke loose, since on that same 26 October, the enemy also issued an order for seizing the crossroad and breaking through toward Moshajszk. The riflemen encountered one of the completely fresh Bolshevik Far Eastern Divisions. It was the 82nd Soviet Rifle Division from Outer Mongolia, which was reinforced by two armored brigades, further subordinate rifle regiments, artillery and rocket-launchers. Severe losses resulted in the

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heavy fighting, in which the Infantrymen of Muenchen had to fight bitterly to protect themselves against an enemy far superior in numbers. The heavy fire of Bolshevik Artillery and Rocket-launchers beat relentlessly upon the crossroads. The earth quivered under the force of the intense waves of fire. The riflemen dug resistance pockets in the mud and behind building ruins. Tank after tank of the Soviets rolled on. All of Schelkowka was in utter turmoil. The peasants' burning shacks flared up. The soil-colored figures of the Mongolians, with their green, pot-type helmets, came closer and closer. Several companies of the 19th Infantry Regiment, firing their last few remaining rounds, had to retreat to the Rusa-Wjereja north-south road. Here they received fresh ammunition and dug in again with breathless haste. There on the open road they could no longer elude the Russians, because that road was not to be lost under any circumstances. Engineers came to their aid with anti-tank grenades and mines to oppose the big oncoming "steel boxes" of the Bolsheviks. The anti-tank teams, with their armor-piercing missiles halted the approach of the onrolling "iron bunkers" of the enemy as they moved through the ruins of Dorochowo, along the railroad and through the wooded area which encircled that locality. The thin and extended front of the German Infantry Divisions managed to last through all the critical hours and to halt the assault of the Russians, even though the enemy brought on fresh replacements constantly. Also tanks, transported by rail, took part in the attack as soon as they were unloaded. Nevertheless the line of the fatigued, hungry riflemen, who were thoroughly soaked by the rainy weather, held.

Finally, on 27 October the mighty, continuous attack ended. Only the Bolshevik artillery still fired heavy, screaming shells around the terrain of the crossroads and the Dorochowo railroad station. Both towns were one big field of debris, but they were firmly in German hands, as was the crossroads. Despite light casualties the enemy had not reached his immediate objective. According to an intercepted

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radio message, 25 percent of his newly-manufactured tanks had already dropped out. In spite of the enemy's strength, and although the combat was defensive, and besides the enemy's numerous bloody casualties, the difficult days had brought 1,382 Soviet soldiers into capture, a proud result.

However, many painful casualties of our own were to be deplored. The mounds of graves topped by steel helmets increased on the crossroads. Although the Bolsheviks could not take the crossroads itself, they had won an entrance to the traffic junction near Schelkowka. Thereby all future traffic was tied up. Only a few daring drivers and individual terrain-climbing individuals succeeded in racing through the streets, splashing mud as they went, which the enemy had under continuous well-aimed fire. Column traffic of the supply troops, expected particularly from the units of the 40th Corps which pushed forward into the area northwest of Rusa, was impossible.

An attack was begun to remove the constant danger to the crossroads by the enemy and to reopen it to traffic. By daybreak all three divisions of the 7th Corps, moved out to push the enemy back to the East. Again attack after attack was repulsed, as on 26 October, because the Soviets had once more designated the same day for a renewed assault. This was after their apparent recovery from the loss they received from the Bavarians on 26 and 27 October and the following reorganization. A captured order of attack of the 82nd Soviet Motorized Rifle Division showed clearly the intentions of the enemy. The first two numbers of the order read:

1. Parts of the German 19th Infantry Regiment render stubborn resistance on Dorochovo. Their mortars and single small caliber guns fire out of basements and the machine-guns from the roofs of houses.

2. The commander of the 210th Motorized Rifle Regiment is to prepare an attack on Dorochovo during the night between 1 and 2 November 1941 and to attack

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by daybreak. Dorochowo has to be occupied by 0930 hours on 2 November 1941, and the railroad station in Dorochowo as well as the crossroads west of Dorochowo is to be taken.

This order was signed by the Commanding Officer, the Regimental Commissar and the Chief of Staff of the 82nd Motorized Rifle Division. After heavy artillery barrages by both sides, the German and Soviet assault troops met at daybreak. This again resulted in pitiful fighting and heavy casualties, during which the armored vehicles of the 5th Panzer Division rendered the best support to the riflemen. The initiative to act lay with the Divisions of the 7th Army Corps. The enemy limited himself to defense. The unobserved enemy terrain was being cleared sector by sector. Then the tanks pushed forward, destroying as far as possible all heavy infantry weapons within the Soviet lines. Then they waited, giving supporting fire to the infantry companies which had to fight their way forward on both sides of the streets and roads in difficult forest combat. The next sector, along with the next fortified village and obstacle line, was eliminated. The assault gradually gained ground, although the tanks had to wind their way between many mines and to fight against heavy anti-tank defenses. Strong counterattacks by the enemy tank units were fought off. Shortly before the first German armored cars arrived at a river sector which could be crossed, the bridges were blown up into the mud. A crossing had to be found through the undergrowth and swamp and between mines, under all types of enemy fire. The enemy defended himself stubbornly until the last moment. The Bolsheviks kept trying to set the German armored cars on fire with their Molotov cocktails. There were considerable losses, especially among the infantry following the tanks. Repeatedly the attackers were forced to the ground by the fire of the Bolsheviks' new rocket-launchers. Even the combat cars (Panzerwagen), which moved along the roads only because of the muddy terrain, had considerable losses. Further attack was halted on the evening of 4 November 1941; success

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was apparent on the side of the 7th Army Corps under General of Artillery Fahmbacher. The Bavarians, Lower Saxons, Hessians, Saarpfälzer and Rheinländer in the Divisions of the 7th Army Corps, who had marched forth fighting toward the East for months, and whose ranks had been thinned by countless battles and skirmishes, had again shown, opposite the freshly-committed Bolshevik troops from Outer Mongolia and opposite their new armored brigade, that the German soldier was the better one.

The enemy artillery, whose fire had been constantly directed on the important crossroads, was partly overrun by the armored cars of the 5th Panzer Division in its battery positions. The booty of both days of attack was being credited to the German tank alone:

7 Soviet tanks, 3 of these T-34
4 Armored Reconnaissance cars
3 Armored Ammunition prime movers
1 15 cm gun
6 12.2 cm guns
9 7.62 cm guns
10 4.7 cm Anti-tank guns
5 Heavy Infantry guns
10 Other Anti-tank guns, caliber not determined
40 to 50 Machine-guns and Mortars, prime-movers and
trucks not numerically recorded.

Column traffic could again roll over the crossroads at Schelkowska and Dorochowo; that was as far as road conditions in the rear areas allowed. But with the acquisition of the important traffic junction a supposition could be made of future operations on the right flank of the 4th Panzergruppe.

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Heroes of Prokrowskoje

The 10th Panzer Division, which had been relieved at the Schelkowska crossroads by the Divisions of the 7th Army Corps, advanced to the north across the Moskwa and through the small town of Rusa toward Novo Petrowskoje in order to threaten Moscow from the Northwest. The advance of the 10th Panzer Division was thereby directed first against the Volokolamsk - Istra - Moscow road. It was to go on until the last drop of fuel had been consumed, the last piece of bread eaten, and the last shell fired. According to the laws of war, the defeated enemy had been pursued "to the last breath of man and horse." But now the soldiers just could not move any further. The divisions were widely dispersed among the woods and swamp. The mud reached part-way to the loading floor of the vehicles and supplies could not come in. Although very little transportation space existed from the supply center of Smolensk over Roslawl - Kirov up to Wjasna, the railroad transported fuel, ammunition and supplies through large detours in the communication zone. The huge long-distance freight trains also had to be detoured over to Roslawl and then to Juchnow. The direct route through the battle area of the Wjasna pocket was closed on account of blown-up bridges. Everywhere between Smolensk and Wjasna bridges and sections of the railroads and highways were being feverishly rebuilt.

The 70 km stretch of road between Gshatsk and Moshajsk was without foundation. It looked like an extended shelled area, with holes one meter deep. On it thousands of heavy trucks waited for the coming frost so that they could move on. On top of all this the intersection at Schelkowska was closed for days. Although the supply and engineering troops spent every daylight minute of those short days to repair the roads, the heavily loaded supply columns were hopelessly stuck in the mud and could hardly move. The artillery disconnected its tractors from its guns, while engineer, anti-aircraft and armored regiments sent their heavy tractors to the rear

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to hitch them in front of the supply trucks and to move them in that way. But all this effort was of very little use. The fuel brought up in this very tedious manner was barely to support the tractor details. Nothing remained after that and the situation had not improved much either. Units at the front fed themselves very simply and insufficiently from what the land had to offer. This meant potatoes three meals a day. Bread was as rare as gold, and many a commander and general ate millet day after day while the fully-stocked supply columns stood in the mud and could not move either forward or backward. Air supply was also impossible because the condition of the airfields was the same as those of the roads. Heavy aircraft could not take off because of the sticky clay which covered the airfields.

The 10th Panzer Division, which had advanced the farthest of all divisions in the 4th Panzergruppe, stalled in the mud in the order in which it had marched. It now extended away from the general front line to the Northeast like an outstretched index finger. It pierced toward Novo Petrowskoje and pointed into the daily reinforced enemy masses. The tanks were located at the head of the column in the village of Skirminowa. Behind them came riflemen, engineers, anti-tank units and motorcycle battalions. There were a few companies in each village. Artillery batteries moved into firing position in the manner assigned during the advance, behind hills near the villages or between buildings. Every small village was converted into a fortress. There was nothing in between but the forest and small clearings, streams and meadows. The only roads were a few very muddy and worn-out dirt roads. Division Headquarters settled in the middle of the column, first in Staraja and then in Pokrowskoje.

First the battle began against the weather and its ally, the terrain. Work details moved out every morning to construct a passable road from one village to

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another. A corduroy road was laid across the terrain. Riflemen and artillerymen felled a large number of trees and laid them trunk on trunk in the swamp. Their comrades stood guard around them with rifles in their arms and machine-guns in position. Heavy weapons secured the construction of the road, several kilometers long, which soon travelled like a long, narrow carpet across the swamp and over newly-plowed fields. All available help was used for construction. Only two men remained on the security guns. A tremendous job was performed and quite often it was disturbed by enemy attack. Many a grave had to be dug next to the newly developed road for riflemen-roadbuilders.

Enemy pressure increased gradually. He fired systematically into fully occupied villages with artillery, mortars, and rocket-launchers. The farm population fled to the enemy. Quarters became more difficult in the few remaining houses. Soldiers sat inside in the evening by the dim glow of lamps, which due to the petroleum shortage, were lighted with oil from the Diesel trucks or with a gasoline-salt mixture. They wrote to their loved ones in Schleswig Holstein, Berlin, Schwaben, Schlesien and Thuringen, they fried potato patties on big brick stoves, they played cards constantly or killed the lice which nested in the seams of their shirts.

The tanks had no more fuel, the guns scarcely enough ammunition, and one frequently had to take a final farewell from a dear comrade. It was difficult to get one's boots dry, and one's uniform turned yellow and threadbare. But courage did not leave those who lay stuck in the mud, in the midst of the enemy. Frost inevitably came at times, so the terrain would again become passable and the attack could begin anew. Everyone hoped for this. In the meantime the plank carpet grew from village to village, or rather from one place to another where villages had stood a few days ago.

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The soldiers of the 10th Panzer Division built dugouts in the ground, into which they now moved, together with the wetness. Daily duties remained the same: building, fighting, watching and waiting with patience and unshattered confidence. On star-lit nights the sentries heard German bombers flying to Moscow, and they saw the searchlights flutter over the Bolshevik capitol. Flak burst like red stars far above the black outline of the forest, and the tracer shells arched themselves above Moscow like strings of pearls. One night frost came suddenly, as attested by a freezing sentry. Eagerly expected by everyone, it arrived with icy winds, snow and very low temperatures. The last liter of reserve gasoline had to be consumed to warm up the tank and car motors every hour.

The tank drivers also lived in ditches which they dug in the ground under their tanks. There they were comparatively safe from the steady fire of enemy artillery. Icicles hung down into the dugout from the tank's oilpans, which constituted the ceiling, and the icy wind whistled through the racks despite the lining of straw and wood. If one's feet had not been dried previously, they would not get warm at all; they hung from the body like two ice blocks. The riflemen also dug themselves in, fox-like, in underground caves at the forest edges; like molehills, they were hardly recognizable in the underbrush. Only a small blue spiral of smoke, rising suddenly out of the earth between the pine roots, betrayed the nest in which 12 to 15 men squatted around a homemade tin stove, tightly pressed together, freezing in the semi-darkness, eyes full of tears caused by the smoke. They awaited supplies, ammunition, fuel, rations, and winter clothing; meanwhile, they sewed together poorly made earmuffs and mittens out of old fur coats and rags.

The corduroy road, a link to the rear, was now completed; 45,000 logs had been put side by side. But in the forest the enemy again gained maneuverability,

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and he attacked daily from any direction, with artillery and tank support, to cut off the main artery and to weaken and harass the German Panzer Division, which pointed eastward like a thorn. If he should take a position with his tanks between two villages on the new corduroy road, and cut the telephone cables, connections could not be made. This would be particularly unfortunate for the wounded, whose ranks were filled these days with numerous cases of second and third degree frostbite. Until now, despite great difficulties, they had been moved back from the front line. The corduroy road would be cleared with considerable effort and security measures would be taken to the rear of the long road.

Guards stood by with their weapons ready to fire into the woods by the road. Around them was nothing but loneliness and cold. The darkness of the forest loomed like an impregnable wall. The eye could hardly see 10 meters. Somewhere a nerve wracking machine-gun rattled, or at regular intervals the sounds of Soviet artillery and mortar would break into the loneliness. Otherwise, everything was quiet and peaceful. The sentries felt frozen and cramped their feet warm, until their attention was suddenly drawn by a breaking branch; they listened, holding their breath. Had the enemy pushed forward? Or was it just make-believe? The dark forest was silent, and the guard, leaning against a snow-covered tree and observing the corduroy road, had the feeling of having been watched by a hundred eyes. Should he have given the alarm? One signal would have called his relief, who sat around a small fire in a foxhole in the underbrush. But an experienced soldier gives the alarm only when there is definite cause. Two hours of guard passed in constant nervous tension, which at times made one forget icy cold legs. After this one could warm up a little by the fire and doze off in a light slumber until one's relief came up again.

At the middle of the advanced column in Pokrowskoje, where the Division was situated, the enemy artillery destroyed the poorly-constructed quarters, one after

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another. The white snow was dotted by many dark shell holes all around the village. The staff, like the companies of the Division, dwindled because of the numerous casualties. Even though one could perceive the seriousness of the situation from maps and reports, there was no doubt even for a minute that one could stick it out. The General with the Knight's Cross (Ritterkreuz) on his sweater was to all an example of calmness and confidence.

As the bombardment finally became intolerable, the staff moved to a neighboring village. It was a simple matter, as a consequence of the length of the battle, for the enemy to visualize an accurate picture of the disposition of the German forces. He had definitely discovered that the German Division staff was in Pokrowskoje. Now and then the guards succeeded in capturing one of the Bolshevik spies, who were mostly inhabitants of the villages, even women and girls.

The occupying troops that remained in the village moved into the only sturdy house, the large white stone church. The German soldiers lay there below the shadows of the vaults on small spreads of hay. Each man had at his head a white marble plate with gilded Russian letters, a monument to some long forgotten landowners. A large cylindrical iron stove filled the room with heat and stinging smoke. The only two pieces of furniture were a shaky table and one chair, which belonged to the company commander. Now and then the earth shook under the impact of grenades which detonated around the church walls or above its roof and tower.

But most of the fighting went on at the spearhead of the Armored troops. There, after artillery bombardment, the enemy attacked again and again with armored support. Bitter defensive combat developed around the towns of Skirminowo and Marino. The Bolsheviks mostly stayed in large groups or in disjointed throngs, bunched up in front of the German positions. In their wounded, one could see the toughness of the soldiers of the 78th Siberian Rifle Division, which the Soviets

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brought from Chabarowsk through Siberia to Moscow in 14 days. These boys were used to winter warfare. To protect themselves from the cold, the wounded who could still move crawled through the snow on their stomachs to the glowing ashes of the burning houses. One found badly wounded men who lay in the snow for nights, or on the bare ice of the swamps and creeks, and were still alive. The soldiers of the 10th Panzer Division had to go through something similar. During the heavy enemy attack on 12 November 1941, the 2nd Battalion of the 86th Rifle Regiment was almost annihilated. The tanks could not provide support because they did not have enough fuel. Nevertheless, it was possible to intercept the overwhelming advance of the Soviet troops. The fought-over villages of Skirminowo and Marino were being temporarily evacuated. That which remained in them was uprooted by the "Himmels-Artillery"; the divebombers of the 8th Air Corps.

The Siberians attacked with the support of the selected elite tank brigade. The heavy armored cars were whitewashed and could hardly be recognized in the foggy expanse. When they fired their outlined forms showed more distinctly. Every time they appeared, a desperate fight developed. The German soldiers had to dig a tiny quarter in the hard ground for many a dear comrade, which took hours of strenuous work. Their hands were numb and frozen. They laid hard-frozen chunks of clay on the shelter-halves of their officers and commanders as a last farewell. But they did not give up the battle, nor did they give up hope that their luck would change. Radio, their only communication with the faraway homeland, brought news of great new German successes to the north and south of the eastern front. Soon it would start up again in front of Moscow. Slowly one supply truck after another penetrated to the head of the tank columns; in the rear they had chopped themselves out of the frozen mud, which had had such a tight grip on them, and now came to the front, swaying laboriously. They brought the news that the neighboring SS Division was advancing through Rusa, and also that advancing forward to Swenigorod, where the

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infantry divisions that had the Green Hearts of Thuringen on their vehicles, and the Ulmer Muenster and two oak leaves as tactical symbols. They were the divisions of the 9th Army Corps under the command of General of the Infantry Geyer. They at least brought some relief. Quite often the trucks would have to make the long trip to the rear until they had brought up enough ammunition, fuel and rations to the front line units so that a new large-scale push toward Moscow could be initiated. The situation of all the other units of the 4th Panzergruppe put into action on the Moscow front was similar to that of the advanced 10th Panzer Division.

This development did not remain unknown to the enemy. He realized that the Germans would begin one of their offensives, and he tried to prolong the coming of that day as long as possible through constant harassment of the German front. Consequently, he brought pressure, not only on the 4th Panzergruppe, but also on the latter's neighbor to the left, the 3rd Panzergruppe, which was assembling for a new attack in the area around Kalinin, and on the corps of the 4th Army, which had attached themselves to the Panzergruppe Hoepner as a neighbor to the right flank south of the highway. The Soviets fought once again to save time. They intended to save themselves until the bitter cold and deep snow should protect them. So the battle of the heroes of Pokrowskoje knew no interruption until the day on which the 10th Panzer Division, and with it, the whole 4th Panzergruppe moved from defense to a new attack in the direction of Moscow.

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The Battle for Moscow Begins Anew

The German combat troops used the time of the oncoming frost to bring in their supply columns; all other useful divisions were moving up to the front lines, and the staffs were working on the preparation and orders for the new attack on Moscow. The generals and their staff officers, clerks and draftsmen, radio stations, telephone centers and map rooms, communications and motorcycle messengers shared the space of the small, smelly huts. They scarcely permitted themselves time for eating, and saved the few short rest hours for the morning, which they spent lying on the floor in a corner of the room. They worked late into the night in the dim light of petroleum lamps or candles. Because of the cold they could not take off their heavy overcoats inside. Only the Corps staff and Group staff succeeded in moving into school buildings or into old farmhouses that had been converted into children's homes. These had usually been abandoned and the rubbish had to be cleaned out. Glass was missing from windows. Stoves had to be set up again. And traces of the fighting in these few stone houses were heavy and could be removed only with great effort. Wood, which was abundant in Russia, thank God, was the working material out of which all items had to be made. In the primitive surroundings of the field quarters, attack and supply orders were planned on shaky tables concerning the new offensive on Moscow.

The plan of the German Command was directed to the short but still usable time until the arrival of cold and snow should partially cut off further approach to the Red Capital. In this plan the 4th Panzergruppe had the task of breaking through the newly formed defense lines to outflank and cut off Moscow from the north and northeast.

One could count on hardly four weeks before the arrival of winter. The area was being made passable in all directions, and operations were not being hindered

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by too much snow. This time the situation was utilized for a strike against the Soviet center.

The first one and a half weeks of this short period of early winter was used to bring up supply troops for preparation. Small local penetrations were made to establish bridgeheads, to straighten the front line, to take prisoners and to conduct interrogations in order to establish the strength and composition of the enemy's forces. Weather permitting, Army reconnaissance planes were on their way to take aerial photos. So as to have a personal picture of the attack area the general were making area studies of the secured positions furthest to the front.

The Soviets, who were counting on one more offensive push by the German forces, defended themselves in their old aggressive manner. They hindered German preparation for the new attack through their movements and artillery activity, especially in the sector of the neighboring Army. They built feverishly and hastily with tens of thousands of workers, even drafting women and children. In nightly air raids they tried to destroy the new defense positions in front of Moscow, especially at Moshajzsk, the supply center of the 4th Panzergruppe, where the railroad had been rebuilt. They also were trying to hit the German supply organization and the maintenance repair shop companies for tanks and armored vehicles. In leaflet whose pattern and content betrayed Jewish authors, they announced to the German soldiers that they had to run against an invincible force before which their corpses would pile up. Through their media of propaganda they tried to undermine the fighting morale of their foes. The German soldier used the paper which the airplanes dropped as one should use paper which is false but useful. Aside from that, he was glad, because it seemed at last that the readless period and the "imprisonment in mud" had come to an end. The 4th Panzergruppe was assigned the attack from the Northeast, the last push toward Moscow in the year 1941.

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A closely-linked defense system, constructed in the meantime, was situated in front of the attacking German divisions. From statements taken from prisoners of war and from reconnaissance flights made by Army pilots, it appeared as follows: From Klin, north of Moscow, the second great Moscow protective position stretched to the Istra Reservoir (Stausee). It followed the Istra River upstream to the small city of the same name. Just before Kubinskoje it turned almost directly southward across Naro Fominsk, then behind the Nara along the Serpuchow front toward Tula. The sector from Klin, directly south of the highway with a width of about 100 km stretched in front of the 4th Panzergruppe. The area of the new defense wall in the Panzergruppe sector was well suited for the purpose. Beside this road and the Wolokolamsk - Moscow highway there were no other solid roads for traffic in this jungel-like area, which was cut through the numerous streams that ate deep into the clay. The few bridge sites along the streams could be reached only by crossing steep icy roads of approach. Roads of departure ran accordingly and included difficult traffic obstacles. The enemy sat in dugouts behind each of the streams and waited for the attacker. Extensive mine fields were laid anywhere tanks could drive, and explosive charges, some with time fuses, were placed under all bridges where they could not be seen. The woods, unlike the other terrain, was very suitable for ambushes and patrol operations by the Bolsheviks, who were supplied with information about the number, composition, and disposition of German units by a widespread and evidently efficient net of agents and spies.

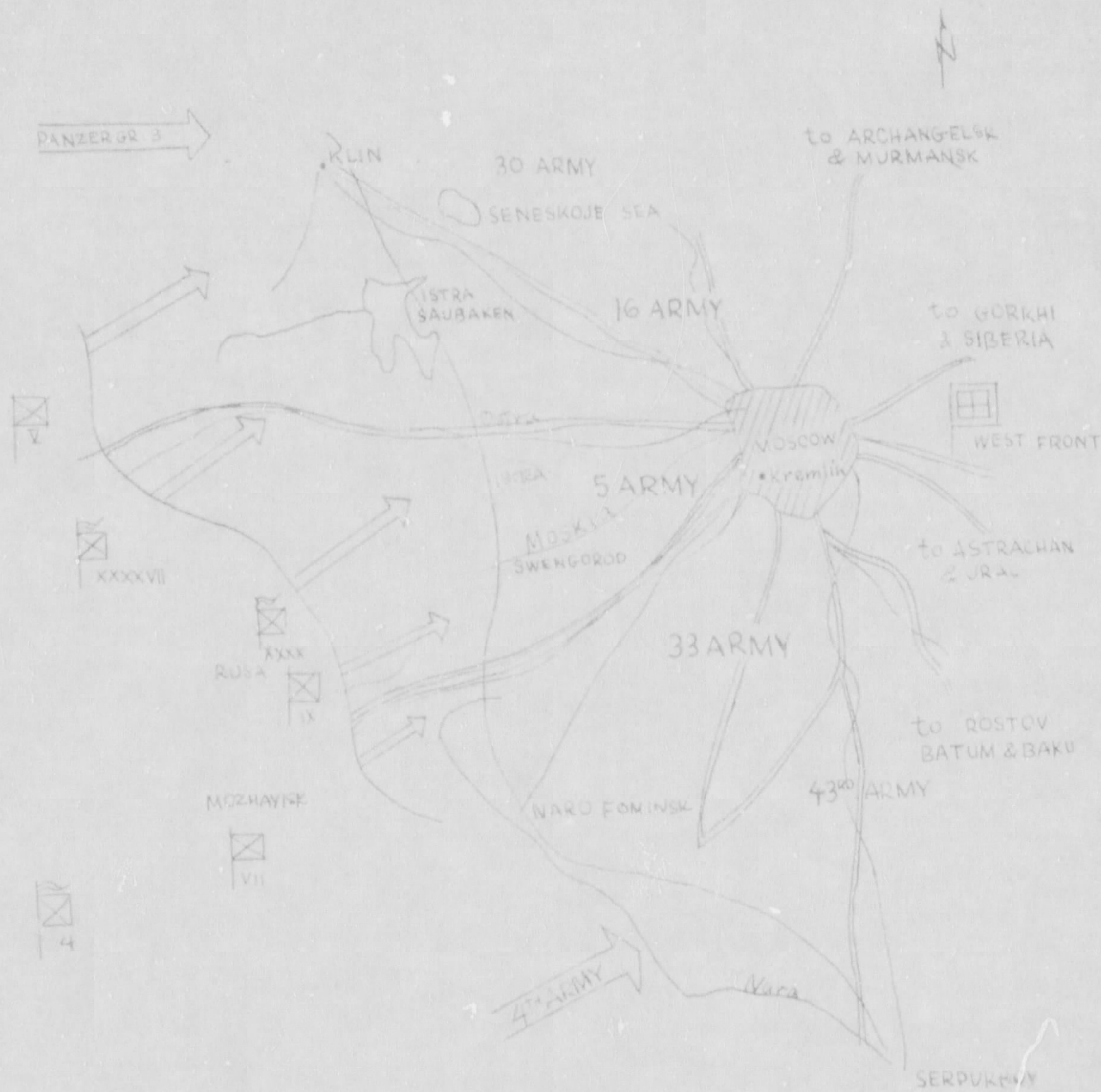
The improved Wolokolamsk - Istra road, toward which the spearheads of the 10th Panzer Division had been pointed for weeks, had especially been secured by enclosed positions. The villages along the road were converted into small forts. Other than these excellent defensive positions, the enemy had the advantages of his experiences in winter warfare and of his knowledge of local conditions and terrain. The Reds' line of resistance could derive its supplies from Moscow without digging

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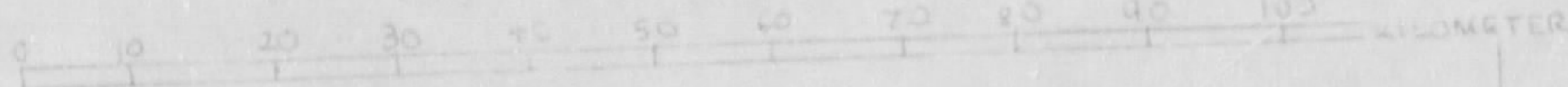
into the supplies of the big ammunition, weapon, and ration depots, while each round, spare parts, every drop of gasoline and can of food for the German units had to be transported for over 1,000 miles or more. The Red Capitol with its numerous traffic connections lay directly behind the front. The enemy therefore had control over all advantages of the "inner line." The Soviet Air Force had the use of hangars and repair shops of the Moscow Airfields, while the German planes often had to remain on the snowed-in, temporary airfields, where they were continually subject to adverse weather conditions. According to all calculations the enemy could look forward to the new German attack on Moscow with a certain confidence, especially because he had brought up during the roadless time at least 10 rifle divisions, four of them Siberian, and had massed them in front of the Panzergruppe to form the skeleton of resistance. There were also an additional seven tank brigades with 500 to 600 new tanks. These brigades were mobile reserves behind the front. They were supposed to throw the attacking Germans out of the protective line, by counterattack if necessary. Numerous artillery pieces, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft used for ground fighting and rocket-launcher regiments were added to these formations. On 16 November the 4th Panzergruppe of the 5th Corps started a new attack from the North in the direction of Moscow.

The map showed a second great protective line of Moscow, Klin, Istra, Swenigorod, Naro Fominsk, and Tula behind which the Red Capitol with its numerous traffic connections sat like a spider in a web. During the battle for Moscow the German armed forces were far more than 1,000 km away from their supply bases, and the traffic roads from the Reich to the Moscow front were deficient in every respect.

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SCALE 1:1000000
1 MILLIMETER = 1 KILOMETER



to TULA

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The Forced Thrust of the Fifth Corps

The Fifth Corps of the General of the Infantry Ruoff started the attack on 16 November 1941, supported by the 2nd Panzer Division and the 35th and 106th Infantry Division, which came from the Wolokolamsk area to support the 4th Panzergruppe on its left flank. The 23rd Infantry Division was kept in reserve. The corps had the mission of taking the city of Klin in order to turn southeast and cut off Moscow from the North. Heavy fighting with the enemy, who tried in every possible way to prevent the dangerous encirclement of his capitol, resulted. The means he used was best described in a battle report of the attack by the 44th Soviet Cavalry Division during the battle of Mussino on 17 November. In this attack the Asiatic Cavalry was hastily led to the endangered north flank of Moscow.

"The fog lifted at 0900 hours after a misty morning and permits an ample view of the frosty winter scenery. We stand on a range a short distance east of Mussino at a battery observation point. The edge of a wood runs for a distance of 3,000 meters, vanishing into the horizon. Plain fields, a kilometer in width, stretch between us and the woods, with a few dark-brown bushes. Stubbles of grain and some sharp furrows shine through the ceiling of light snow. The sun gradually climbs higher. One of our regiments will push north and situate itself behind us in the town, ready for the attack. It is now 1000 hours.

In the direction of attack one suddenly sees 60 to 70 horsemen, who after a few artillery shells disappear into the woods. Their appearance is expected and therefore no special value is given to their movement north. To our right and in a southerly direction appear the low, straw-covered, wooden huts of the village of Parfinikowo. House after house forms a horseshoe-shaped village, with the opening towards the woods. This village was the scene of heavy infantry fighting on the previous day and now again it is to be the Soviets' objective.

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Suddenly four tanks appear before the occupied huts of one of the battalions of the regiment. As they approach they do not move as carefully as they used to do, but come bounding over the hard-frozen ground with noticeable sharpness. This time they drive directly toward their target. They stop only once for a moment, drive into a small circle and then continue the advance. We on the ridge are asking ourselves why the invisible tank howitzers on the edge of the village, and the well-camouflaged anti-tank guns, do not fire. No infantry follows the moving, continuously firing steel giants, but the danger of penetration seems to grow continuously. However, behind the guns and mortars stand battle hardened men who only yesterday at point-blank range destroyed several tanks whose ruins now serve as directional signals on the white landscape. And now the fifth armor-piercing shell explodes, burning; the leading tank continues to roll for 100 meters and then explodes with black smoke. In ten minutes the other three monsters meet the same fate. Slowly they burn up.

All attention is still directed on this hard, fast fight when the sudden command of our division commander, standing in our forward positions, turns our attention from south to east. His sharp eyes have spied cavalry in a narrow, straight clearing deep in the woods. It seems to be a rather large number of horsemen, who soon disappear behind the frost-covered trees; they again ride across light clearings toward the South and then are no longer distinguishable. Quick, clear orders came by telephone from the observation post to the battery. In a very short time their salvos explode on the other side. Suddenly riders appear on the edge of the woods 3,000 meters in front of us. First a few, then they seem to be 50, 100, 300, now new masses break from right and left, from east to west. We can hardly believe that the enemy will attack us on this wide parade ground. Occasionally the possibility was mentioned, and small cavalry attacks are supposed to have

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taken place during the defensive battles at Smolensk, but it seems absurd that the enemy would take it upon himself to risk a charge of cavalry against the weapons we have and in an area controlled by us.

Nevertheless, the enemy plays his last trump card. With unbelievable speed the horsemen emerge from the woods in irregular riding fashion, first one rank, then another, finally a third from the rear which sets far off from the woods, breaks off to the left and gallops southward.

Here in this bright winter landscape it is an indescribably beautiful picture as a cavalry regiment races across the field in full charge, stirrup on stirrup, bent low in the saddle with sabres glittering. The time of the Mongol hordes seems to have returned, when the small, black shaggy horses impatiently streamed in from the Orient with Asiatics on their backs as if growing from the saddles.

But then the magic spell is broken. The reconnaissance officer screams the firing data into the telephone. The security machine guns on the heights are thrown onto the brink of the dugout, the steel helmets are pushed out of their faces, and the bothersome gloves are shed. And now follows a drama more vivid than imagination can paint. The batteries fire from open firing positions. Hissing, the first projectiles leave the barrel and fall into the midst of the oncoming masses. They combine with red fire trailing fragmentation shells from the anti-tank weapons. Even from the village south of us all barrels are firing, even those which had just destroyed the enemy tanks. A single concentrated cloud-wall of exploding shells hangs over the continuously advancing squadrons. Once begun the surge does not seem to allow itself to be interrupted, even when bursting shells fell into the midst of the massed horses and cause large gaps. Yes, in this mass of fire an inexplicable right turn is completed, so that the spearhead of the regiment storms into the open side of the horseshoe-shaped village.

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Our artillerymen have registered an effective ricochet fire, which builds an impregnable wall. Bodies of horses fly through the air and fall to the ground, torn to shreds. Horsemen whirl on each other and a tremendous knot of men and horses results. Target and leadership are lost. What had once been orderly, like a parade-ground review, is now shattered into one helpless bunching. Small groups of riderless horses break out in all directions, sweating all over, with trembling flanks and foaming mouths. The mass circles in disorder, swaying back and forth, moving like a grainfield in a storm. The animals go wild in this hell of fire and gallop right and left, crowding together in their terror, smashing everything under their hooves. The few riders still in the saddle disappear in the concentrated mass. Artillery hits again and again and anti-tank guns kill the last charge.

Into the midst of this last roaring charge a second cavalry regiment attacked from the same point in the woods. It is unbelievable that the same spectacle could be repeated after the bloody defeat of all the squadrons in a regiment. The distance and the direction of the attack are known, so the full annihilation of the second attack is only more swiftly executed. Thirty riders, led by an officer on a beautiful, fast horse far in front with a sabre held on high, almost reached the village as the only survivors of the thousand men. Here they make their last leap under our machine-gun fire.

The white, snow-covered plains, which lay empty and calm until half an hour ago, becomes a winding red spotted sheet on which numerous black dots move. The exhausted little Cossack horses, tongues hanging out, come toward the edge of the woods, the village and our woods. The high saddles are empty. One can see here and there a few cavalrymen crawling arduously under cover. A few dispersed soldiers still wander about the area. The force that came roaring out thirty minutes ago is now shattered in the hail of shells.

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A deep stillness settles momentarily over the battlefield. Everyone looks at it once more, and in a dream the horses come pounding over the ground. One of the first large cavalry attacks of the Second World War was ridden before Moscow. It may well remain one of the few, perhaps the last, of such attacks. Then comes the sound of sharp orders, and the regiment begins the attack."

Even after the first few successful days the Fifth Corps continued to move forward. Since the adjoining unit to the left, the 3rd Panzergruppe, joined the marching pace along the Volga-Reservoir (Stausee), the first assault targets could be reached as early as 23 November 1941. On that date the 106th Infantry Division took Klin, and the 2nd Panzer Division Solnetschnogorsk. The big highway and the Moscow-Leningrad railroad just below Kalinin and directly in front of the gates of Moscow was also in German hands. On 24 November the 35th Infantry Division encircled the Istra-Reservoir (Stausee) from the north and took the village of Nowinki. The great defense line was then in danger of being wiped out from north to south. Thus while the Fifth Corps turned south and further toward Moscow, the divisions of the adjacent 3rd Panzergruppe started from Klin for the further envelopment of Moscow. They proceeded to the Moskwa-Volga Canal. Operations functioned well despite considerable enemy resistance. The soldiers of the 2nd Panzer Division, who moved into the front line with the Infantry Division of the Fifth Corps and the 23rd Infantry Division from Berlin-Brandenburg, performed bravely despite the increasingly cold weather, below freezing. The demand for constant great exertion, the consequence of steady marching and fighting for nearly half a year, was equal to the heaviest demands of World War I. A picture of the brave and aggressive attitude of the German soldiers during the battle of Moscow should be evident in the following message of the Fifth Corps:

Pfc. (Obergefreiter) Adolph of the 7th Schützen Regiment 304 proved himself outstanding on 23 November 1941 during an enemy tank attack near Frolovskoje.

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After expending all his ammunition as a Panzerbüchschenschütze (man carrying a bazooka), he jumped onto an enemy tank and destroyed its machine-gun with a crowbar. Then he fired his pistol into the gasoline tank, filled a fired projectile cartridge with fuel and poured this through the manhole of the turret. The fuel could not be ignited with a match. Thereupon he lay a "pineapple" hand grenade into the lookout slit, which became enlarged. Through this hole he inserted a stick hand grenade. In this manner the tank crew was put out of action.

It has been reported that the non-commissioned officers Kern and Hans of the 1st Anti-tank Section, No. 38, destroyed a 52-ton tank with the help of hand grenades and gasoline drums. They jumped on the tank and forced the turret cover open.

On 25 November at Peschki the 2nd Panzer Division met enemy forces which were equipped with English Mark III tanks. For the first time the much propagandized help showed itself directly to the German soldiers in front of Moscow. The English tanks were much worse than the Soviet ones. This information was extracted from captured crews, who grumbled about the "old tin cans that were turned over to Stalin because they were worthless."

On 27 November, after establishing bridgeheads south of Klajnsma, the spearheads of the Fifth Corps were directly north of the Klajnsma Dam. The unit adjoining on the left managed to reach the Moskwa-Volga Canal by way of Dmitrow and Jachroma by 1 December. Since the German troops had broken through a strongly-defended and deeply-distributed protective position, and had driven back the enemy 120 km from the starting point, it was then only 32 km from the furthestmost security outpost of the Division of the Fifth Corps to the Kremlin. All this was accomplished from 16 November to 4 December, that is in 18 days. So, in continuous fighting over difficult terrain, the German troops covered a distance corresponding approximately the distance from Berlin to Stettin, destroyed more than 200 tanks and captured far

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over 100 guns and thousands of prisoners. Again the objective, Moscow, was within reach of the German soldiers. He was standing in front of the gates of the Red capitol.

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How the Panzer Corps Conquered the Istra Sector

The two Panzer Corps of the Generals of the Panzer Troops Stumme and Vietinghoff (known as Scheel), started the attack on Moscow in the central sector of the 4th Panzergruppe, flanked by the Infantry Corps. The Istra line lay in front with its pre-line zone equipped with fortifications, through which ran the large, hard-surface Wolokolamsk - Istra road. The enemy had been especially reinforced along this road. Heavy fighting developed already in the first days of the assault. The SS Division "Das Reich" had particularly to combat stiff resistance. It was confronted with the 78th Siberian Rifle Division, whose regiments held on desperately to every village, wood and stream. The name of this division had been changed to the "9th Garde Division" because of its achievements. The crossing of the Oserna led to harsh, bloody close-combat in the small towns of Nowo Gorodishche and Sloboda, and then at Nikolskoje and Cholichanicha. The SS had a special score to settle with the Siberians. Merciless fighting took place on both sides. The bloody losses of the enemy, whose soldiers lay slain by the hundreds in the burning villages, were terrible. But the deathrunics of white birch trunks, which were put on the graves of SS men killed in the merciless hand-to-hand combat, told of their heroism and sacrifices.

The three Panzer Divisions of both corps had to fight equally hard. The 2nd Section of the 31st Panzer Regiment, 5th Panzer Division, had a special success. On 17 and 18 November they were facing one of the Red tank brigades. In the tank-versus-tank battle 23 Soviet tanks, two of which were 52-ton, were destroyed without casualties of our own. The rest of the Red tank brigade discontinued the battle and retreated. The tank troops were also subject to heavy fighting around the villages which had been converted into small fortresses behind the Molodilnja and on the Wolokolamsk - Istra road. With great tenacity the enemy tried to hinder the

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capture of Nowo Petrowskoje by German forces. However, this important village fell into German hands, taken by the 46th Panzer Corps, on 21 November.

Numerous things were accomplished by troops in experienced divisions during the battle for the front area of the Istra sector. I shall only report one to show the bravery and alertness of German officers and soldiers. The following description of the capture of the village of Rubzewo will show the ability of the German soldier to master any situation, and will characterize the fighting method of the difficult front area of the second defense line of Moscow. Even though all advantages were on the side of the defenders, the attacker let neither the enemy and his defense preparations, nor the cold weather and almost impassable area, influence his course of action.

One of many streams in the swamp before the Istra was the Molodilnja. The enemy was entrenched there, unrecognizable in his large earth emplacements which were heated by ovens. By comparison, the German attackers had been housed for several weeks in earthen holes, referred to as "ice cellars," which were located in snowed-under woods, or crowded into the few remaining farm houses. The riflemen were so crowded together in their billets that they had to sleep sitting down, because there was no room to stretch out. In the dusk of the evening of 20 November the combat command of 1st Lt. Baumgart, consisting of one motorcycle rifle company, one tank company and one rifle company, supported by two combat commands of 8,8 cm anti-aircraft guns, advanced toward Molodilnja. First Lt. Baumgart's mission was to make contact with the enemy and to prepare for an attack the following morning. The 1st Lt. advanced with his combat command through concealed woods and met heavy enemy opposition shortly before reaching his objective.

On the other side of the stream was the small village called Rubzewo. The enemy had placed seven T-34 guns, field guns, some anti-tank guns, heavy machine

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guns and heavy mortars around the village across the Molodilnja. His infantry strength was about a company and a half. The bed of the stream itself was mined and wired and showed tank obstacles. A crossing of the river and an assault on the village could not be considered at that time. The 10th Panzer Division had planned to take the difficult crossing next day with reinforced troops. The combat command was to continue contact with the enemy. First Lt. Baumgart waited for nightfall and then sent out a combat reconnaissance patrol. Since the patrol reported a withdrawal of enemy units, who seemed secure behind their fortified defense line, the 1st Lieutenant decided to take the village by surprise. Leading his rifle platoon he crossed the icy stream in the darkness, unobserved and at a remote place. From there he sneaked into the village with his platoon from the flank and appeared suddenly amidst the astonished enemy. A murderous fight broke loose. House after house was taken in merciless hand-to-hand combat. A Red soldier shot the 1st Lieutenant in the thigh with a pistol at close range. He kept going, nevertheless, until the bridgehead across the Molodilnja was secure.

Three modern anti-tank guns, three trucks and much other war material was captured; about 40 prisoners were herded together in a barn. Numerous dead and wounded Red Army men lay on the ground like bundles of rags, or in the snow around the huts of the burning village. By prompt execution of a surprise raid, a gap had been made in one of the many defense lines on the Istra. The German troops had made one more significant step forward. The Wolokolamsk - Istra road would be crossed in the division's sector the next day. The high morale of the German assault troops and their officers was proven by the fact that this successful 1st Lieutenant went to the main aid station to have his wounds treated only after having been ordered to do obey his superior.

In a like manner the advanced troops and combat units of the armored divisions were moving forward step by step through the defended area toward the Istra. The

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hardships of this World War were correspondingly difficult. Enormous effort had to be required from even the last man in the privations of battle, in the excessive cold and primitive living conditions. It was a hard and bitter fight in this snow-covered forest country, fought against a hidden and deceptive enemy who had much artillery at his disposal, and frequently a good comrade had to be carried, wounded, to the rear, or put in his last resting place under the snow-covered pines. The participants in this war were often reminded of the fighting days of the first great war of our time. Rest, or even a little heat, would not be considered at all. During their retreat, the Bolsheviks burned all villages if time allowed. In all larger buildings, they placed charges with ingeniously arranged time fuses, and they filled chimneys and stoves with liquid explosives. The fury of the German soldier corresponded to conditions. An already deep hatred of Bolshevism and its defenders, the Red Army men and their commissars, became even greater.

On 23 November, the Germans succeeded in reaching the Istra and the Dam of the same name. The large, deep dam showed a length of about 18 km and a width of averaging more than 2 km. The Dam fed the Istra River, which was about 50 meters wide and extended toward the Moskwa river valley. The east banks were high and wooded. It offered a wide view of the snow-covered fields on the west bank, through which the Germans had to attack if they wanted to force a crossing.

Each approach had to be made through wide open terrain. Despite this the Germans succeeded in crossing the lake and river on 24 and 25 November, and in forcing some bridgeheads. At times they had to cross the ice in a dangerous manner, as in the case of the 61st Motorcycle Battalion of the 11th Panzer Division under the command of Major von Usedom.

The same division succeeded in crossing the dam at Lopatowa. The 1st company of the 89th Armored Engineer Battalion of the 5th Panzer Division took a one and

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a half day commitment under the leadership of 1st Lt. Breitschuh and removed from the dam 1,100 mines and two tons of explosives. In a night operation, parts of the 10th Panzer Division under the command of 1st Lt. von der Chevallerie near Busharowo, succeeded in capturing an important bridge and in forming a bridgehead. In overcoming the second large Moscow defense position, luck joined with the bravery and caution of the trustworthy commanders and their battle-tested and experienced troops, regiments, battalions and other units. News of the success of the Fifth Corps at Klin and Solnetschnogorsk boosted the spirit of the units of both Panzer-Corps in the central sector of the group to continue with dangerous undertakings.

Another combat team, again consisting of riflemen, tanks and supporting weapons, rolled at dusk through paths in the forest toward the bridgehead in enemy territory on the far side of the Istra. Surprisingly enough, the enemy could not be seen. Only the roaring of his tanks and tractors could be heard from somewhere. This was the best accoustical camouflage for our own motor noises and made the enemy inattentive. The German spearhead's tank approached a lonely village. It was Stepankowo, which rested peacefully in the snow of a clearing in the woods. A 1st Lieutenant sat on the tank behind the turret, warming himself in the hot air rising from the motor cowl. The tank commander stood in the turret making observations. The two discussed their observations in low tones. A figure appeared out of the shadow of a hut. Tramping the ground to warm his feet, he neared the tanks. He was a guard carrying a rifle on his back; he ambled toward the tank and leaned against one of the treads. "Stoi" ("Halt" - Tr.) droned a sleepy voice. Both German officers, the commander and his guest, the 1st Lieutenant, could hardly suppress their laughter. The tank turret, silently humming, swung around until the muzzle of the cannon pointed directly at the first building. After tank-to-tank radio communication, came tearing lightning and thunder, and again lightning, more lightning, echoes firing into the peacefulness of the night. Flames roared through

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the walls of the wooden structures. People rushed out and tumbled over each other in the array of the tracer bullets from the machine guns of the German armored vehicles. Dressed in shirts and socks, they ran through the snow toward the woods like dark masses on the surface of the white fields. A Bolshevik Regimental Staff had been taken by surprise. Anti-aircraft also took part in the operation. Houses burned intensely. A hut fell apart with a tremendous noise. It had been an ammunition storehouse.

After a quarter of an hour, the clearing was as quiet as before. Only the beams of the burning houses were reflected in the low-hanging, snowfilled sky, a glowing dark-red over the quiet black trees in the vicinity. The Soviet Staff assigned to defend this part of the Istra sector had fallen into the sleep of death. Many heavy weapons were the booty of the combat command.

On an island before the city of Istra, in a loop of the river, stood the citadel of the city, guarded by old and mighty walls. By extremely able action it was possible for the SS Battalions to cross the river and enter the citadel after blowing up a forgotten and undefended small wooden door. From the corridors of the old fortress, the machine guns of the SS men controlled the streets of Istra, in which the enemy temporarily resisted their entry. But even this fire was not necessary after the tank divisions were forming bridgeheads on the eastern bank of the river below the dam. Rifle battalions and tank companies advanced on the eastern bank from the north to take the Bolshevik field positions on higher ground and to occupy the enemy bulwarks.

Around the first hour of the afternoon on a foggy day, 26 November, riflemen and tanks of the 10th Panzer Division made ready at Andrejewskoje. The onion-shaped towers of the city of Istra could be seen from far away across the forest. The assault troops, loaded down with weapons and ammunition, moved in long rows to the

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line of departure. In front of Istra lay a dense forest several kilometers deep and full of hills and gulleys. The tanks spread out in fan-like manner in the fields in front of the forest. The Bolsheviks again felt that they had to fight for their lives, so they lay down a barrage with batteries and mortars. The wide, white field was soon covered with black craters, dirt and clumps of earth. The defenders were Siberians from Chabarowsk, dismounted cavalrymen from Tashkent, riflemen from the 1306th and 1308th Bolshevik Regiments, and also parts of tank brigades. The German tanks continued to roll onward, slowly but steadily, despite heavy defensive fire. Machine guns hammered without rest into the edge of the forest. It sounded as though a million woodpeckers were searching for worms and larvae under the bark of the trees.

The huge white-washed tanks gradually advanced toward the front, followed by long columns of riflemen, fantastically garbed like Arabs with white covers over their steel helmets, in white snowshirts with light-colored fatigues over their overcoats. The air was aflame with tracers, like thousands of whistling, howling, shooting stars and comets. Each of the hurtling, glowing points carried death. It was not long until the riflemen reached the forest. Shortly afterwards all had plunged into the forest and disappeared between the trees like ghosts. The only sounds still to be heard were the drone of the tanks as they crashed through the underbrush, the continuous bellowing of the tank guns and the whizzing of their shells, the slapping of bullets and cries along the advancing skirmishers. The enemy withdrew, but still defended himself with rifle fire and with surprise tank assaults on the forest paths and clearings. The riflemen forced the Soviet soldiers out of their earthen bunkers. Hand grenades in their fists, fixed bayonets or automatic pistols extended, they stalked between the trees; or, crawling in the snow, they combed the underbrush. The forest roared with the noise of battle and its thousand-fold echo, like trees bending to earth in a hurricane. Again and again the tanks wormed their way forward.

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Then the big guns started up; white and red tracers shot through the gloomy thicket-like fiery stripes. In the midst of the fury, a commander led his assault companies. He burried his hands in the wide pocket of his overcoat and stamped forward through the deep snow at the edge of a forest path. No shoulder strap identified him as a lieutenant colonel. He wore no belt and carried no weapon whatsoever. However, under the shadow of his steel helmet his eyes were alive. Each of his man knew him from hundreds and hundreds of equally grave hours. Their respect for their commander was written in their bearded, haggard faces; they trusted him and believed he carried the secret of success in his breast pocket. He was a model of the experienced German assault troop commander, proven in hundreds of battles and engagements. (Several days after the battle of Istra, the above-mentioned Lieutenant Colonel, Dr. Maus, was awarded the Knight's Cross (Ritterkreuz) for his achievements during the Western and Eastern campaigns. The announcement of this award reached him at the front line by radio.)

Slowly night set in and it grew dark. The snow cast a far reflection of the red glow of the firing weapons. When the tracers rose above the tops of the trees, the white sheet covering the ground glowed like daylight, as if the sun were shining faintly. A platoon, quickly gathered together by a master sergeant, stormed across a forest clearing with a "Hurrah." At the further edge of the forest a group of Bolsheviks, hands in the air, crying with fear, ran out of the underbrush. A little later the prisoners, in flaring coarse overcoats, fur caps and felt boots, stood in a clearing in a compact mass between glittering bayonets; they disarmed, i.e., they stuck the muzzles of their rifles in the snow. On the ground in front of each one piled up hand grenades, entrenching tools, gas masks, and steel helmets. The riflemen scattered the equipment in the snow with their feet; then two men led the group to the rear. The advance on Istra continued on a broad front. The riflemen strode through a Bolshevik field hospital, which had apparently been evacuated

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in great haste. An enemy tank again appeared, and we succeeded in destroying it. In front of the entrance to the hospital, next to a couple of showy high wooden columns, the tank turned for the last time. Then we stood between the first houses of the town, where huge fires raged. Once again, SS units advanced past our riflemen. They infiltrated, as it were, into the individual streets of the town in order to take final possession of this bulwark in the second defense line around Moscow.

The core of the second powerful Bolshevik line of fortifications before Moscow, the Istra sector, was in German hands on the evening of 26 November 1941. The heavy enemy artillery and rocket bombardment beginning during the same night, and his attempts at reconquest which infantry troops carried forward to within 40 meters of the German security line could not at present change the situation.

Beginning in the Istra sector, the divisions of both armored corps fought their way forward step by step, slowly but steadily, towards Moscow. Soon they reached the first "Datschen Settlements," recreation colonies typical of the Moscow suburbs, and the sight of the grand objective, the Kremlin, made everyone bear the hardships and sacrifice without question, although more and more gaps appeared in the ranks. On 5 December 1941, the three armored divisions and the SS Division "Das Reich" attained positions in the quarter-ring of Panzergruppe Hoepner at a point 32 km from the Kremlin.

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Infantry Battle in the Winter Forest at the Moskwa River

On the right wing of the 4th Panzergruppe, the IX and VII Corps assembled for further advances toward the east.

The objective of the IX Corps, commanded by General of the Infantry Geyer, was first of all the Istra - Swenigorod road and the city of Swenigorod, in which were located the storage depots and camps of the western sector of the Moscow defense positions. In front of the assault objectives lay only a long stretch of virgin forest, now covered with snow, in which only around the villages had larger clearings been made arable for cultivation. In the forest, the enemy was ready for defense in numerous earthen and concrete bunkers which could not be easily discerned. He was acquainted with the territory and the climate and, to some extent at least, knew how to protect himself against the cold. In the prevailing conditions of weather, terrain and supply, the fighting was very difficult for the soldiers of the Infantry Divisions of the IX Corps, who during the muddy period had worked their way forward from Rusa into the wooded land at the expense of heavy losses and powerful exertions. The Swabian 78th Division had so far borne the main burden and greatest losses in these forward struggles through the virgin forest land before Swenigorod north of the Moskwa River. On 2 November, it lost one of its most capable regimental commanders, Colonel von Neufille, a bearer of the Knight's Cross (Ritterkreuz).

The objective of the VII Corps, commanded by General of the Artillery Fahrmacher, to whose organization the French Legion was also attached, was at present the Narskie Lakes, west of the Moskwa River. These swamp waters formed narrows along the old Moscow road and the highway, which offered the enemy excellent possibilities for defense.

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On 19 and 24 November, and 1 December, the divisions of the IX Corps, in three major offensive operations on a broad front, broke through the fortified terrain, which in this sector was constructed in several bunker systems close behind each other in the wood lands. The course of these operations is best characterized by the description of the battle for Lokotnja. This place on the Istra Swenigorod road was heavily fortified, as were all villages before the front lines of the IX Corps. Even with artillery preparations, a frontal attack would have demanded considerable sacrifices. Therefore, a different battle strategy was chosen, which proved itself valuable in the limited visibility of the wooded area. In order to crack the main points of resistance from the flank or rear, each division formed three combat teams, each individual team breaking into the fortification system at a weak point after a thorough reconnaissance. In like manner Colonel Merker led his 215th Infantry Regiment, deeply echeloned through the virgin forest. In single file, avoiding any noise, the riflemen advanced in a "whisper march" through snowy woods without arousing the enemy's suspicion. From a side on which the enemy did not expect his German adversary at all, the town of Lokotnja was taken despite the most violent resistance. Numerous other successful operations on this pattern followed on the whole Corps front. Under the prevailing weather conditions, the operations demanded great effort from every man, and a high degree of untiring battle energy from the regimental commanders, as well as the leaders of the individual combat teams. On 24 November, parts of the 87th and 252nd Divisions reached and crossed the first attack objective, the Istra - Swenigorod road, after hundreds of bunkers had been cleared, thousands of prisoners taken and much booty brought in. Although the VII Corps, adjoining to the right, was not proceeded too well with its attack, and on 25 November had only reached a point near the Narskie Lakes, the divisions of the IX Corps nevertheless continued their offensive in the direction of Moscow, covering their open right flank on the Moskwa

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River with only negligible forces. The power of attraction of the Red capitol was immense; all corps of the Panzergruppe Hoepner were pointed in its direction in a sort of contest in which each wanted to take the lead in the noble effort. This attitude helped us to overcome all difficulties, to break all enemy resistance regardless of persistence. The demands were immense, especially when the cold wave set in on 1 December, the temperature sinking to minus 34 degrees Fahrenheit with icy winds. In three days alone, an additional 1,200 sick arrived at the medical clearing station of the IX Corps, besides the numerous battle casualties. In this connection, it is to be noted that in what cases no further attention could be paid to first degree frostbites, because not a single man could be spared; everyone hoping to arrive at the gates of Moscow in a few days suppressed all pain and fought on to contribute to the battle for the Red capitol until a decision should be reached. The heavily fortified city of Swenigorod was also bypassed, to be broken into from the flank according to the well-tested method. The spearheads of the IX Corps almost reached the Istra - Moskwa River estuary, where they were stopped. The capture of Swenigorod did not come off. Whenever the Führer himself especially pointed out again and again the heroism of German infantrymen, there must have been included the riflemen of the Infantry Corps of the Panzergruppe Hoepner during their battle in the snowed-in virgin forest area on both sides of the Moskwa River. Just a few days after the cessation of the advance which also occurred here, the actions of the commanders, officers and enlisted men of the IX Corps were praised in a Corps order of the day issued by the Commanding Officer of the IX Corps, General of the Infantry Geyer, who was best able to judge their accomplishments during his daily visits to the front lines, as follows:

Corps Order of the Day

The divisions and GHQ troops of the IX Corps have in three heavy cooperative engagements, from 19 - 22 November, on 24 November, and from 1 - 3 December 1941,

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defeated the very persistent enemy opposing them broken through and destroyed his front about 25 km wide and 50 km deep.

The successful advance had to be discontinued because the enemy was able to bring up reinforcements. Above all, however, the severe change in weather, with wind and cold setting in, so far diminished the hope of utilizing further successes that the decision had to be taken to give up the assault and to withdraw from the front lines.

The accomplishments of leaders and troops in the assault were exemplary. The demands of defense and retreat, which had to be endured by one's own will power, were much more, both against the continuously-harassing enemy as well as against the weather.

I express my complete appreciation and admiration to the command and the troops. As a whole, and in numerous individual cases, they have proven to the utmost their aggressiveness, their strong will and faith, their fighting spirit and superiority.

We now stand in a compact front, which we intend to improve as permanent positions, so that the enemy will break his teeth on them.

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The Fifth of December 1941, before Moscow

On 5 December 1941, the Corps of the 4th Panzergruppe under the command of General Hoepner, stood in a quarter circle of 65 km, from a point near Swenigorod to a point near the Moskwa - Volga Canal, at an average distance from the Kremlin of 35 km. They had broken through the second great Moscow defense position and, in fierce cold against the most persistent resistance of an enemy far superior in numbers, had penetrated a deeply snowed-in virgin forest area. Along with the divisions of the 3rd Panzergruppe, they had cut the great Moscwo - Leningrad highway and also the railroad between these two chief cities of the USSR, thereby tearing apart the Red central and northern fronts. They stood before the gates of the Soviet capitol, from which the noise of battle was plainly to be heard.

The heroism of the German soldier in this battle for Moscow can be only modestly mentioned in words; it cannot be really completely appreciated in its whole magnitude. Besides the battles and achievements described in this memorial, the successes of the divisions of the 4th Panzergruppe are reflected in the following totals of prisoners and booty taken in the two short months of the severe battle of Moscow from 15 October, 1941 to 5 December, 1941.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Prisoners</u>	<u>Tanks</u>	<u>Guns</u>	<u>AA</u>	<u>AT</u>	<u>MTR</u>	<u>MG</u>	
15 Oct - 15 Nov	39, 325	396	403	104	237	104	603	
16 Nov - 5 Dec	23, 373	476	180	88	112	149	955	
<hr/>								
15 Oct - 5 Dec	62, 698	872	583	192	349	253	1,558	Total

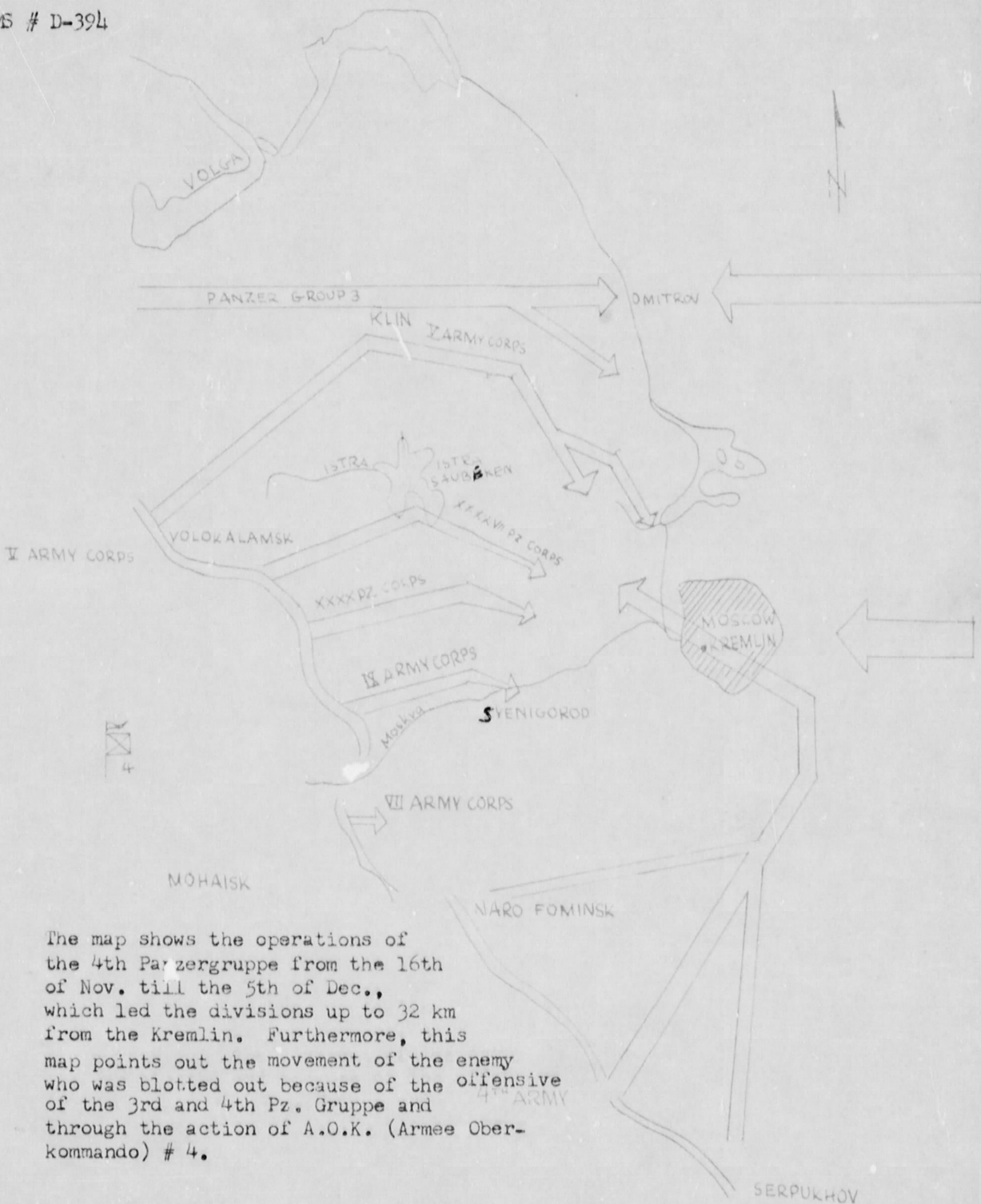
Furthermore, during this period, 61 planes were shot down or captured by GHQ troops alone in the 4th Panzergruppe area.

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The enemy's bloody losses most likely surpassed even the number of prisoners by a considerable amount.

Nevertheless, 5 December 1941, brought about a change in the battle for the Red capitol. As the result of very severe weather conditions and the massing of the enemy, who well knew how to use his inner line of defense, on the front of the 3rd and 4th Panzergruppen, the assault had to be discontinued; our troops changed to defensive action. The offensive of the two Panzergruppen had, like a magnet, attracted to the defense of Moscow all available enemy forces on the western front. To these forces the Soviets added the newly-gathered and simply inexhaustible human reserves of their immense country.

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The map shows the operations of the 4th Panzergruppe from the 16th of Nov. till the 5th of Dec., which led the divisions up to 32 km from the Kremlin. Furthermore, this map points out the movement of the enemy who was blotted out because of the offensive of the 3rd and 4th Pz. Gruppe and through the action of A.O.K. (Armee Oberkommando) # 4.

SCALE 1:100,000

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Thus a new phase in the war against the Soviet Union began. The 5th of December 1941, is a day which for its eventual effects will surely become the object of later extensive analysis in military history. Perhaps enemy propaganda, miscalculating the energy of the German leadership, the sacrifice of the German soldier and his unshakable faith in the homeland, and with reference to the battle of the Marne, will speak of the "Miracle before Moscow," at least for the year 1941, especially since in these first days of December the beginning of a crises also showed up in the 2nd Panzergruppe, which was attacking from the South.

In the Armed Forces report (Wehrmachtsbericht) for 8 December, the following was announced: "The continuation of operations and the type of action in the East are henceforth conditioned by the start of the Russian winter. On wide stretches of the Eastern Front only local engagements are still taking place."

Our thoughts on these difficult days, when we enter a new phase of the battle, once again go to all those heroes who sacrificed their health and their lives here in the ice and snow while defending their distant homeland by warding off the Mongolian onrush of the twentieth century.

Later generations will still, respectfully and admiringly, recall their deeds and their sacrifices for the eternal glory of the German soldier.