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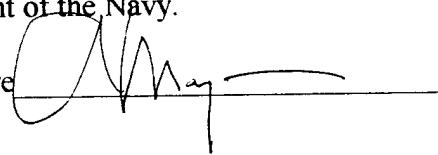
**Winning Battles and Losing the War - Operations of German Army Group Center,
June - December 1941**

by
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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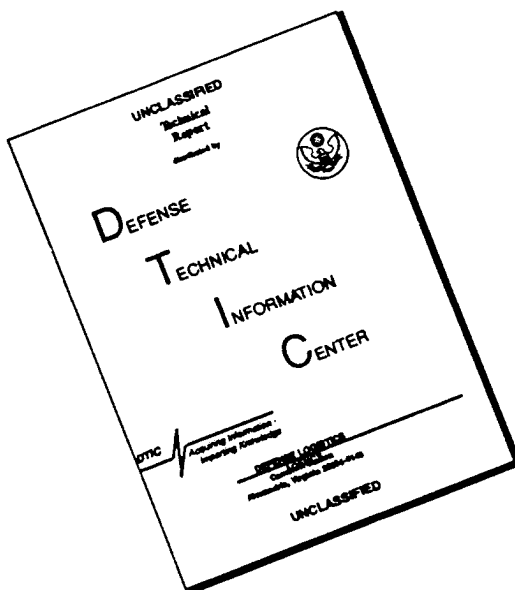
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): Winning Battles and Losing the War- Operations of German Group Center, June-December 1941. (U)			
9. Personal Authors: LTC James J. Maye, USA			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 20 May 1996	
12. Page Count: 26			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Operation Barbarossa; Army Group Center; Strategic Center of Gravity; Operational Objectives; Strategic Objective; Elements of Operational Art; Culmination; Maneuver; Encirclement; Concentration.			
15. Abstract: The most significant fault with Operation Barbarossa, the German plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, was Hitler's failure to identify Moscow as the enemy's strategic center of gravity. The absence of a well defined center of gravity precluded operational commanders from focusing their efforts toward an attainable and decisive strategic objective. As such, the ability of these commanders to masterfully apply the key elements of operational warfare could not overcome the inherent problems related to the initial absence of this objective. Those problems included indecisiveness, delay, and the expenditure of resources on important, yet secondary operational objectives. This ultimately caused Army Group Center to reach culmination before Moscow could be captured. In effect, elements of Army Group Center had been highly successful at winning major battles at Minsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Bryansk, and Vyazma- but had been drained of the requisite combat power to win the battle that would have won the war. An alternative proposal for the operation is suggested by the author.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified I	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841- 666 6461		20. Office Symbol: C	

ABSTRACT

The most significant fault with Operation Barbarossa, the German plan for the invasion of Soviet Union in 1941, was Hitler's failure to identify Moscow as the enemy's strategic center of gravity. The absence of a well defined center of gravity precluded operational commanders from focusing their efforts toward an attainable and decisive strategic objective. As such, the ability of these commanders to masterfully apply the key elements of operational warfare could not overcome the inherent problems related to the initial absence of this objective. During Barbarossa, those problems included indecisiveness, delay, and the expenditure of resources on important, yet secondary operational objectives. This would ultimately cause German Army Group Center to reach culmination before Moscow could be captured. In effect, elements of Army Group Center had been highly successful at winning major battles at Minsk, Smolensk, Kiev, Bryansk, and Vyazma- but had been drained of the requisite combat power to win the battle that would have won the war. An alternative proposal for the operation is suggested by the author. The paper also includes lessons learned that have application for operational planners. These include the risks and advantages of broad versus narrow front offensives, and "defend forward" versus "defend back" schemes.

Introduction

Operation Barbarossa, the German plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union which was launched in June 1941, was the largest military campaign ever executed in terms of its geographic scope and number of deployed forces. The initial front extended over 1000 miles, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and involved over 300 German and Soviet divisions. During the first months of the campaign the German Army and Air Force were able to build upon the success and well deserved reputation for tactical and operational level excellence that had been gained during earlier campaigns in Poland (1939) and France (1940). Yet, by early December 1941, German forces were on the defensive and their hopes for yet another quick, decisive "Blitzkrieg" had long since been dashed.

Hitler's failure to identify the proper Soviet strategic center of gravity, the single most critical element of operational warfare, was the overriding reason for this outcome. The absence of a well defined COG precluded the operational commanders from effectively focusing their efforts toward an attainable and decisive strategic objective. As such, the application of other key operational elements such as maneuver, concentration, balance, timing and tempo would become incidental. Operation Barbarossa demonstrates that exceptionally well executed operations at the Army and Army Group level, incorporating these elements, can not overcome the inherent problems of a flawed or missing COG. In this campaign those "inherent problems" would include indecisiveness, delay, and the expenditure of scarce resources on important, yet secondary operational objectives. This ultimately led to culmination before the attack on Moscow, which was probably the *true* COG, could be launched.

For ease of discussion this analysis will focus primarily upon operations conducted in the front's central sector, where Army Group Center was opposed by the Soviet Western Front¹.

General Background and Overview

The German decision to invade the Soviet Union was formalized in Hitler's Directive 21, Operation Barbarossa, dated 18 December 1940, which ordered operations to begin no earlier than 15 May 1941. Following a 6 week delay necessitated by operations in the Balkans, the Germans launched a broad front offensive most noted for its attainment of complete surprise. The Germans had organized their forces into three army groups- North(AGN), Center(AGC), and South(AGS). AGC constituted a somewhat modified main effort and, as such, had the largest concentration of armor forces. The general scheme of maneuver applied by Field Marshall von Bock, AGC commander, saw the group's subordinate Panzer formations execute large pincers which broke through forward Soviet defenses and then envelope and encircle huge enemy forces. Within one month AGC had succeeded in conducting two sequential encirclements- at Minsk and Smolensk. In August the AGC halted further movement to the east while its Panzer groups were diverted to assist AGN and AGS secure objectives in the vicinity of Leningrad and Kiev, respectively. By early October, with its Panzers returned, AGC resumed its eastward movement and succeeded in accomplishing its last successful operational encirclements- the Bryansk and Vyazma Pockets. After 5 months elements of AGC had participated in the capture of nearly 2 *million* Soviet prisoners and was poised to launch its final offensive, the encirclement of Moscow. Meeting increasingly stiff resistance and logistical difficulties the offensive failed, and AGC retreated west in the face of a general Soviet counter-offensive launched in early December.²

German Application of Operational Art

As noted, the Wehrmacht was extremely successful in the planning and execution of their initial operations. Glantz attributes this success to many variables- superior operational readiness, training, command and control, technology and equipment, combat experience, and the attainment of strategic surprise³. These advantages, coupled with

superior leadership at nearly all levels, would enable the Germans to effectively concentrate and maneuver mobile and dismounted operational level organizations with great success.

To appreciate this success some discussion of the general Soviet defensive plan, which was so easily exploited, is necessary. First, the Soviets were deployed in a linear, echeloned configuration which was poorly suited for either defensive or offensive operations.⁴ The average frontage of each of the first echelon, border divisions was 50 kilometers- about 5 times what was doctrinally accepted. Second, the Soviets were in the process of moving their "Stalin Line" 150 kilometers to the west. In June 1941 they were caught almost completely without fortifications in either location- "one of the great blunders of World War II".⁵ Finally, they lacked anti-tank and air defense support and failed to concentrate forces during counterattacks.⁶

The initial German plans would reflect the type of maneuver warfare that would characterize most of the major operations on the front. The intent was to force the Soviets to fight on a reversed front by first enveloping and then completing either a single or double encirclement. In the latter case, the infantry would form the inner ring and the armor the outer ring.⁷

All three German Army Groups achieved great early success by effectively massing their forces at critical points- *der Schwerpunkt*. In the central sector, three Soviet armies defended a bulge along a 200 mile front. The AGC's Panzer groups attacked north and south of the bulge, bypassing the bulk of the Soviet defenses. (See Map1, p.19). At the *Schwerpunkt* of the southern group, Guderian massed his Panzer and Infantry divisions along a 50 km front in the vicinity of Brest where he was met by just a single tank division that was "severely smashed."⁸ By concentrating overwhelming combat power at selected points the Germans were able to compensate for overall force correlations that favored the Soviets. For example, Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group, which consisted of nearly 1000 tanks, had a numerical 5:1 advantage in their first engagement,

although the Soviet Western Front enjoyed an overall 1.6:1 advantage as compared to the AGC.⁹ Adding to the speed of the German advance was their excellent coordination of artillery and air support. In 2nd Panzer Group's attack 20% of the casualties sustained by the opposing tank division were the result of artillery preparatory fires, which also destroyed all of the higher headquarter's communication.¹⁰ Over the entire front the Russians lost over 2000 aircraft in the first 48 hours and their air force was "virtually eliminated."¹¹

Within just 6 days AGC's outer armored circle had closed east of Minsk, averaging an incredible 50 miles per day. In the meantime, AGC's infantry was tasked with clearing the numerous enemy pockets.

Germans now had to chop each pocket into smaller ones, and then digest each of those pockets in turn. As catastrophic as it seemed for the Soviets, this process took considerable time. The more time it took, the further eastward the German Panzer Groups moved without proper infantry support. Ultimately, that had a telling affect on German prospects for achieving success days and weeks later in battles around Smolensk.¹²

It also caused major disagreement regarding the best method of employing armor at the operational level. Panzer group commanders, such as Guderian, wished to maintain the momentum of the attack eastward against the disorganized Soviet forces, exploiting success. Hitler and more senior officers were opposed to having the Panzers too far ahead of the infantry and preferred using the armor to assist in the reduction of the huge enemy pockets.¹³ Here we see a good example of the relationship between two elements of operational warfare- tempo and balance. Certainly, the addition of more infantry divisions (balance) would have enhanced the AGC's ability to contain enemy pockets. In turn, senior commanders may have felt more confident in permitting the Panzers to maintain constant pressure on eastern formations(tempo).

AGC's Panzers continued their eastward movement on 11 July while the infantry continued to reduce the encircled enemy forces in the Minsk area. AGC would attempt a

repeat of their initial operation, with the area near Smolensk serving as the next objective. The Soviets deployed 24 single echeloned divisions along this front. The average defensive front for each was 25 kilometers.¹⁴ The Germans took advantage of the thinly dispersed lines and, concentrating their forces at selected points, were quickly able to encircle the Soviet forces in much the same manner as at Minsk. But, there was an increasing indication that the Soviets were recovering from their earlier setbacks. On 20 July they conducted a counterattack to retake Smolensk. Within three weeks the Germans had regained the initiative, but their overall rate of advance had been reduced from 30 kilometers to just 7 kilometers per day.¹⁵ Although Soviet losses had been enormous, the Germans were paying a steep price for their gains. After the first month of combat their infantry and armor strength had been reduced by 20% and 50%, respectively.¹⁶ The problem of the Panzers outrunning their dismounted infantry support continued to pose a major problem. For example, by the time the Panzers had enveloped Smolensk the AGC's 4th and 9th Armies were still about 100 miles to the west.¹⁷ Logistical support became increasingly strained as the lines of communication lengthened. Yet, AGC had again been successful and was now just 150 miles from Moscow. The Soviet defense to the south of Smolensk was nearly devoid of artillery and armor, and was in a state of chaos. "This indeed was the moment for a Super Cannae. A wedge of Panzers, driven hard into this gap, might yet have levered the whole creaking gate off its hinge."¹⁸

But, there would be no further movement to the east- at least for the time being. Instead, AGC would divert its Panzers to assist AGN and AGS. In the latter case, Guderian's Panzer Group and Second Army, the OKH Reserve, would cooperate with elements on their southern flank to form the inner and outer rings, respectively, of the encirclement of the Kiev Pocket. (See Maps 2a and 2b, pp.20-21). From an *operational* standpoint, the diversion of infantry and armor to the south was a brilliant example of exploitation. The Russians had consolidated significant forces in the vicinity of Kiev,

creating a 100 mile bulge in their defensive lines. Since AGS had the majority of forces south of the Kiev Salient the only way to conduct a double envelopment was to utilize AGC's assets to the north. The success at Smolensk made this diversion of forces possible and the southerly movement of 2nd Army and 2nd Panzer Group caught the Soviets by surprise and totally misoriented. The attack began on 25 August and the outer ring closed in 3 weeks when 2nd and 1st Panzer Groups linked-up west of Kiev. The 2nd Army subsequently joined with AGS's 17th Army, closing the inner ring.¹⁹ The Germans captured 665,000 Soviet prisoners as a result of the operation.²⁰ From an historical perspective this would certainly appear to be the greatest victory ever attained as the result of a single military operation.

Or was it? Why had the Soviets called the diversion of AGC forces "a miracle"?²¹ While the Germans had won a great *operational* victory at Kiev, it was a *strategic* miscalculation, the extent of which would only become evident as AGC refocused their efforts on Moscow.

By the end of September the extended lines of communication and combat losses continued to affect operational readiness. For example, Guderian's Panzer Group had been reduced to 30% of its tanks.²² However, future events would indicate that the AGC had not yet reached culmination. In preparing for the Moscow offensive, Operation Typhoon, OKH had very wisely strengthened AGC's combat power by assigning 4th Panzer Group from AGN. This gave AGC 3 Armies and 3 Panzer Groups- a total of 76 divisions. Across a sector of 150 kilometers, they were faced by three Soviet army groups, or "fronts." Although the Germans were slightly outnumbered on the ground, they had about a 2:1 advantage in tanks, artillery, and aircraft.²³

Typhoon's early results merely confirmed the earlier pattern of German success. (See Map 3, p.22). In the north, the Panzers used speed, firepower, and mobility to quickly envelope 8 Soviet armies at Vyazma. In the south, 2nd Panzer Group had to envelop Bryansk without the assistance of a northern Panzer pincer, but still quickly

encircled the Soviet forces in the pocket. These two encirclements nearly equaled the Kiev success- 650,000 Soviets were captured.²⁴ By concentrating their forces at decisive points, timing their movement, balancing their attack with a fairly good combination of infantry and armor, and then quickly maneuvering the latter to achieve encirclements the AGC had seemed to nearly perfect the application of key elements of operational warfare. But this would be their final success in the campaign.

Although elements of the Group were now just 60 miles from the Soviet capital, the onset of adverse weather conditions and the continuing strain on the entire logistical infrastructure caused the Chief, OKH to reconsider the merits of proceeding with the offensive toward Moscow. He therefore called a meeting of senior staff officers near Orsha on 12 November. Quite correctly, this meeting has been called "one of the decisive moments in the history of the German Army."²⁵ The real question was whether operations on the entire front had reached culmination. In view of their deplorable logistical situation the Germans recognized their vulnerability to a Soviet counterattack. Their disposition revealed gaps and weaknesses in the line, limited reserves, and long flanks. Meanwhile, the Russians, operating on increasingly interior lines, were now capable of rapidly shifting forces using the Moscow rail network.²⁶ The Germans were now in a position where they either had to retreat or attack. "From a military standpoint, it was just as difficult to halt...operations and to attempt to establish a defensive line deep inside Russia, 600 miles from their bases of supply, as it was to continue the attack."²⁷ The decision was made to continue.

The Moscow offensive was planned to follow the same general pattern of previous operations. Panzer Groups, now called Armies, north and south of the city would form pincers with the intent of achieving encirclement. The remaining Panzer Army, along with 4th Army, would attack directly toward Moscow's western defenses.²⁸ Although the AGC would make gains in most sectors, it was clear by the end of November that they lacked sufficient combat power to take the city. Aside from the

logistical and climatic factors already mentioned, Stalin's decision to transfer approximately 20 divisions from the Far East was a significant reason for AGC's failure to secure its objective. Yet, the Soviets were still unable to gain superiority in equipment and personnel strength.²⁹ Therefore, much credit for their success is properly reserved for the commanders who anticipated the form of German attack. In so doing, they strengthened their flanks but held the bulk of their forces back from the front, permitting the German armor to advance toward the inner ring of their defenses.³⁰ It would appear that this gave the Russians a greater flexibility in executing attacks against the German flanks. The net affect of all of these factors led to a general German withdrawal in the face of a major Soviet counteroffensive launched in early December.

In retrospect, AGC had won the proverbial battle(s) and lost the war. Under what circumstances could they have captured Moscow? Could the weather conditions and logistical problems that plagued the Group in the campaign's final two months have been avoided? Could the German's have preempted Stalin's transfer of Far Eastern forces? The answer to the last two questions is yes- but only if Moscow had been first identified properly as the Soviet Center of Gravity.

The Strategic/Operational Link

The campaign on the Eastern Front clearly demonstrates the overriding importance of properly selecting and linking attainable operational and strategic objectives. The accomplishment of the latter requires the identification and neutralization of the corresponding strategic center of gravity.³¹ In fact, this aspect of operational warfare is so critical that all other elements really become secondary. "Determining the wrong COG, especially at the operational and strategic level, will invariably lead to greater losses and additional time to defeat the enemy, and in some cases it could be fatal."³² Operation Barbarossa, which serves as a case in point, also

demonstrates that delaying the determination of a COG can yield similarly disappointing results.

A close analysis of Hitler's Directive 21, the campaign's seminal order, reveals that Barbarossa was severely flawed from its conception. Since the directive failed to properly identify a strategic COG, it was difficult to establish correspondingly attainable strategic and operational objectives.

The Army High Command (OKH) , to their credit, attempted to address this fundamental issue in the planning phase. They concluded that the main German effort should be directed toward Moscow due to favorable road networks, its value as an industrial center, and the likelihood that the Soviets would commit their last strength to the capital's defense.³³ Anders makes an even more compelling argument in this regard. He notes,

...Moscow enjoys a position which no other capital in the world can pretend to hold. Only those well acquainted with the USSR can appreciate the exceptional importance of Moscow as the center of a super-centralized state. Moscow is the focal point of the Russian communication network; all the strings of the complicated machinery of the huge state join here, and it is here that every detail is decided. Furthermore, Moscow is the oracle, the 'Third Rome' for all Russia and the 'Mecca' for world communism, as well as the seat of a government... the fall of Moscow would mean, if not the complete crumbling of the entire Union, at least the paralysis of her effective resistance, owing to the chaos in the communication system and in economic and administrative life, and also owing to the lowering of morale of the population.³⁴

Although Hitler would go as far as to acknowledge that the capture of Moscow would mean "...a decisive success politically and economically"³⁵, he did not believe an attack on the Moscow Axis would decide the outcome of the war.³⁶

So, rather than concentrating his combat power and focusing all efforts toward a well defined strategic objective Hitler approved a "broad front" strategy that called for simultaneous advances by his three army groups toward Leningrad (AGN), Kiev (AGS),

and Moscow(AGC). The latter would constitute a "modified main effort."³⁷ This methodology stands operational art on its head. One senses that Hitler's preference was to first develop the situation operationally prior to settling upon a final, decisive strategic objective. In fact, it is probable that Hitler hoped his initial successes would be so overwhelming that the Soviet command structure would simply collapse, making the absence of a strategic COG irrelevant. However, by mid-July it became apparent that such a collapse was not imminent and Hitler was forced to reevaluate the course of the campaign. It was at this point that the full impact of his earlier omission would become apparent, as it precluded him from differentiating between principle and secondary operational objectives.

The general situation in the theater at this time was quite favorable for the Germans. The Soviet's frontier defenses had been breached and AGC was preparing to complete its encirclement of the Smolensk Pocket. As previously noted, this rapid advance had resulted in the formation of a significant number of Soviet pockets operating in German rear areas, the largest of which was the Soviet 5th Army located between AGC and AGS. This situation caused some concern regarding the potential of overextending the German armies. So, with the intention of "restoring concentration" and prioritizing objectives the German Armed Forces High Command (OKW) issued Directive 33 on 19 July. In essence, this order called for AGC's surging Panzer groups to halt their eastward thrust and modify their direction of attack- elements of one group north to assist AGN's push toward Leningrad, and one group to the *southwest* to assist AGS against the Soviet 5th Army.³⁸ Rather than clarifying campaign objectives this directive led to a paralysis in the command structure. Word of Hitler's intentions reached subordinate commanders within AGC on 27 July and "all the officers... were of the opinion that this (decision) was incorrect."³⁹ Perhaps reflecting his own uncertainty regarding the directive, Hitler sent his aide to the headquarters of General Guderian just days later at which the "Leningrad vs. Moscow vs. Ukraine" dilemma was again

addressed.⁴⁰ (Guderian was the Wehrmacht's major proponent for a single thrust toward Moscow). Shortly thereafter the true degree of indecisiveness at OKW and OKH became evident when a liaison officer advised Guderian that final decisions on future operations had not yet been made!⁴¹ On 4 August Hitler personally visited AGC to address the issue. Although he reiterated that the primary objective of the campaign would be Leningrad, he still left doubts regarding the importance of Moscow and the Ukraine. As such, AGC continued to operate on the assumption that Moscow had not been ruled out as their objective and continued to prepare for an advance on the Capital. Yet, within three weeks Hitler again changed his mind, deciding now that the primary objective would be the Ukraine, as opposed to either Moscow or Leningrad!!⁴²

The great operational success attained by the Germans in the reduction of the Kiev Pocket has already been addressed. All the objectives outlined by Directive 33 were attained and the Ukraine was opened as far as the Donets River by the end of September. In the north, AGN had isolated Leningrad.⁴³ Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers had been killed or captured. Yet strategic victory continued to elude Hitler. Now he would *finally* direct his main effort toward Moscow-just as his OKH staff had encouraged months earlier and just as General Guderian had unsuccessfully argued the previous month. But Operation Typhoon would be too little, too far, and too late.

Analysis. J.F.C. Fuller argues that the objective of military operations should be to reduce the enemy's power into a single center of gravity thereby permitting the commander to focus on a "single principle undertaking", subordinating secondary military objectives to the accomplishment of the principle objective.⁴⁴ Directives 21,33, and 34 certainly failed in this respect, never allowing AGC to focus requisite combat power toward Moscow.

Operation Barbarossa was a campaign that saw a blurring of the operational and strategic decision making process- due primarily to Hitler's chronic meddling at the operational level. Regardless, it does reinforce the importance and absolute necessity of

identifying the enemy's strategic COG properly, and in a timely manner. Hitler's failure to establish this would in turn prevent him from identifying an attainable strategic objective. The campaign thus evolved into a "hit and miss" operation, lacking strategic focus, in which Hitler specified the seizure of a series of peripheral, indecisive operational objectives. At the same time, by undertaking such an *extraordinarily* large campaign without a well established strategic objective, Hitler was forced to make decisions that should have been resolved prior to the outset of the operation. The "second guessing " and indecisiveness that resulted during the critical period from 19 July to 23 August ultimately served no other useful purpose than to break the momentum of the effort in the central sector.

If Hitler had identified Moscow as the Soviet COG, and made its capture a principle strategic objective, it is quite possible that the capital could have been taken within 14 weeks.⁴⁵ To do so, AGC should have been clearly identified as the main effort. Its task organization and objectives, through the encirclement of Smolensk, could have remained unchanged. AGN should have been assigned a limited operational objective- to secure the railway from Vilna to Dvinsk and concurrently cover AGC's left flank as far east as Nevel. AGS should have been designated as a diversionary force with the intent to draw as many Soviet forces as possible toward the Ukraine. Once AGN and AGC had secured their objectives, which could be expected to occur by the end of July, AGC should have been reinforced with AGN's 4th Panzer Group. Including the OKH Reserve, 2nd Army, this is the same task organization used during Typhoon. As soon as a sufficient supply base could be established near Smolensk the operation to capture Vyazma and Bryansk, in preparation for the final push on Moscow, should have been executed. Since this very operation was a great success when actually executed in October, there is every reason to expect it to be an even greater success if implemented two months earlier. An August attack could have capitalized upon the disarray in the Soviet command structure and their lack of reserves in the Moscow area. Under this plan

there would certainly be no "miracle" - no chance to trade space and resources for time. It is unlikely that the Soviets would have had the forces necessary to adequately defend Moscow. Coupled with the favorable weather conditions experienced through the first week of October, it is likely that the city would have capitulated.

In summary, the major differences between this proposal and the actual execution of Barbarossa are threefold:

1) AGN would have a limited objective *short* of Leningrad, thus conserving their combat power and reducing their "pull" on the theatre logistical system.

2) AGS would have a diversionary mission only, with the intent of protecting AGC's right flank by drawing the Soviet Southwest Front away from AGC. This would have resulted in economy of force operations having less impact on the logistical system.

and 3) AGC would not be required to assist either AGN or AGS. (Neither Leningrad nor Kiev would be operational objectives).

There are three risks associated with such a "bold thrust" versus "broad front" approach. First, AGC's flanks, particularly in the south to the east of the Pripet Marshes, would be extremely vulnerable to Soviet attack. Therefore, the plan would hinge, in part, upon the ability of AGS to temporarily "fix" the Soviet Southwest Front through limited offensive operations, feints, demonstrations, and operational deceptions.

A second risk pertains to the ability to sustain requisite forces. Van Creveld presents a strong argument against a single thrust, contending that this scheme would have resulted in the overconcentration of forces in the sector. He notes,

The logistical situation ruled out (a concentrated single attack)...for the few roads and railroads available would not have allowed such a force to be supplied. Even as it was, the concentration of 70 divisions for the attack in early October gave rise to very great difficulties, especially with the railways and supply of fuel. It would have been utterly impossible to construct an adequate forward base for a force twice that size.⁴⁶

This is certainly true. However, Van Creveld has overstated the requirements. Moscow *could* have been taken in late September with as few as 76 divisions- *not* 140. Further, there are two factors which would have made an earlier attack much more supportable. First, 2nd and 3rd Panzer Groups would have initiated the final push out of Smolensk in a higher state of readiness, having conserved the resources expended in their controversial diversions in support of AGN and AGS. Second, the economy of force and "limited objectives" missions of AGN and AGS would have significantly reduced supply requirements in those secondary sectors. This, in turn, would have enabled OKH to give AGC prioritization over all aspects of supply- from railroad conversion and transportation assets to ammunition and fuel. The intent would be to insure that AGC had the capability to sustain a requisite 70+ division force directed toward Moscow, shortly following the Smolensk operation.

Finally, since Moscow was never actually captured, its true value as a strategic objective will always remain subject to speculation. Although I have attempted to demonstrate that a "bold thrust" stood a better chance of success than the plan actually executed, I recognize counter-arguments that suggest the capital's capture would not, in itself, have been strategically decisive. For example, Seaton argues that the USSR could have maintained its industrial capability in the Urals and continued rail resupply to Soviet-occupied regions. Additionally, he contends that the harsh conditions Hitler would have presumably imposed upon Stalin would have been unacceptable, causing the Soviets to continue resistance.⁴⁷ In a worse case scenario this may have found AGC in a "fight or retreat" situation not totally dissimilar from that faced by German 6th Army at Stalingrad in 1942. However, the conserved strength of AGN and AGS (and the better weather conditions) should have at least made withdrawal a viable option, *militarily*.

In the final analysis, a "bold thrust" toward Moscow would seem to be the only plan that stood any hope of achieving strategic results within 4 months. Any operations

that extended beyond that point, or scope prescribed herein, were probably predestined for failure, being logistically insupportable.

Conclusion

Operation Barbarossa leaves a legacy of "lessons learned" for today's operational-level planners. First, the inherent advantages of broad versus narrow front offensives should be considered as components of all personnel, logistics, and operations estimates. A narrow front may be particularly suitable if 1) the correlation of forces across an entire area of operation favors the defender, 2) external factors, such as climatic variation, mandate a "quick" campaign, or 3) limitations in logistics, personnel strength, or equipment favor the judicious application of economy of force operations in secondary sectors. On the other hand, this scheme of maneuver tends to be riskier, creating extended, weakly defended lines of communication that may be susceptible to attack from bypassed enemy forces.

Second, encirclement and envelopment have been, and will remain, *extremely decisive* forms of maneuver. AGC incorporated the inherent advantages of mechanization and air support to *revolutionize* this form of warfare. Subsequent technological advances, such as helicopters and precision guided munitions, have continued to enhance opportunities to rapidly encircle and annihilate defending forces. As seen during Barbarossa, poorly led and equipped forces, defending well forward over dispersed frontages, are *especially* vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

Even disregarding the quality of defending forces, forward defenses have inherent risks. In some present circumstances, such as the Korean Peninsula, the close proximity of a strategically critical capital to a hostile border may mandate a strong forward defense. However, given Moscow's distance from the pre-war border, a very strong case could be made that the Soviets should have defended no further west than the Stalin Line. Regardless, a forward defense should be backed by a highly mobile

reserve , capable of mounting decisive counter-attacks. The defender should also take into account the strengths of the attacking force. Earlier German successes in France, where their capability to conduct mobile, combined arms operations was so convincingly demonstrated, further favored a "defend back" strategy by the Soviets.

Fourth, concentration of overwhelming combat power at decisive points is essential toward initially overcoming the traditional 3:1 advantage enjoyed by defending forces. AGC was especially proficient at not only *concentrating* their forces, but *massing the effects* of armor, artillery, and air power.

Fifth, there may be tradeoffs between force balance and operational tempo. As noted, the German armor was periodically frustrated by the slow, methodical movement of the infantry. At the same time, these infantry forces were performing tasks (clearing pockets) for which they were well suited. Planners must consider the inherent strengths and limitations of all arms and services within a task organization. This may be particularly true when employing light infantry with mechanized/armor forces.

Finally, there can be no substitute for the proper identification of a strategic center of gravity and its corresponding objective. The expenditure of time, manpower, and materiel toward the capture of operational objectives that are not linked to the correct strategic objective may win *battles...* but not *wars*.

NOTES

¹Army Group Center initially consisted of 9th Army, 3rd Panzer Group, 4th Army, and 2nd Panzer Group. Their total strength of approximately 50 divisions included 9 Panzer and 5 motorized divisions. 2nd Army, the OKH Reserve, would later be employed in the sector. Soviet Western Front consisted of 4 Armies with a total of only 2 Armored Divisions. (West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol II, p.24. and Great Battles on the Eastern Front, p.20.)

²This overview summarizes the chronology of key events as contained in many bibliographical sources.

³Colonel D.M. Glantz, "Conclusions from the Soviet Perspective," The Initial Period of War on the Eastern Front, ed. David M. Glantz (London, 1993), pp.454-455.

⁴Ibid., p.455. Another author, Alan Clark, is less diplomatic, describing the Soviet dispositions as "idiotic."

⁵Colonel T.N. Dupuy and Paul Martel, Great Battles on the Eastern Front (New York, 1982), pp.11-12.

⁶Glantz, pp.458,461.

⁷General Wladyslaw Anders, Hitler's Defeat in Russia (Chicago, 1953), pp.37-38.

⁸Colonel D.M. Glantz, "The Border Battles on the Bialystok-Minsk Axis," The Initial Period of War on the Eastern Front, ed. David M. Glantz (London, 1993) pp.191,196.

⁹Ibid., pp.190-191.

¹⁰Ibid., p.196.

¹¹Alan Clark, Barbarossa, The Russian-German Conflict 1941-45 (New York, 1965), p.50.

¹²Glantz, p.217.

¹³Clark, p.71 and Anders, p.40.

¹⁴Dr. Jacob Kipp, "The Smolensk Operation, Overview Phase 1: to 20 July 1941," The Initial Period of the War on the Eastern Front, ed. David M. Glantz (London, 1993), p.368.

¹⁵Dupuy and Martel, pp.15-16.

¹⁶Ibid., p.15.

¹⁷Clark, p.80.

¹⁸Ibid., p.103.

¹⁹Dupuy and Martel, p.17.

²⁰BG Vincent J. Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Volume II, (New York, 1959), Section 2, p.26. As a point of comparison, 325,000 prisoners were captured in the Ruhr Pocket in 1945 and 91,000 at Stalingrad in 1943. (Bauer, pp.605,317.).

²¹Ibid., Section 2, p.25.

²²Rudolf Hofman, "The Battle for Moscow," Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View (New York, 1965), p.144.

²³Dupuy and Martel, pp.27-29.

²⁴Ibid., p.29.

²⁵Clark, p.168.

²⁶Hofman, p.156.

²⁷Alfred W. Turney, Disaster at Moscow: Von Bock's Campaigns (Albuquerque, 1970), p.114.

²⁸Hofman, p.156.

²⁹Clark, p.170.

³⁰Ibid., pp.171-172.

³¹JMO Department, "Elements of Operational Warfare," Operational Art: A Book of Readings (Newport, R.I., 1996) p.13.

³²Ibid., p.15.

³³Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, Moscow to Stalingrad (Washington, D.C., 1987), p.14.

³⁴Anders, p.23.

³⁵Adolph Hitler, "Directive 21, Operation Barbarossa," Fuehrer Directives, (Washington, D.C., 1948), p.129.

³⁶Ziemke and Bauer, p.14.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Clark, p.79.

³⁹General Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader (London, 1952), p.183. Guderian's assessment of Hitler's approach to the conduct of operations at this point is particularly interesting. He notes, "...Hitler was convinced that large scale envelopments were not justified... He preferred an alternative plan by which small enemy forces were to be encircled and destroyed piecemeal and the enemy thus bled to death." (Panzer Leader, pp.182-183.). Although Guderian's characterization of these forces as "small" may be an understatement, the criticism bears striking similarity to that leveled against U.S. leadership 25 years later in Vietnam. The absence of a well defined strategic objective in that war led to operational schemes ("search and destroy") with similar purpose- and equally disappointing strategic results!

⁴⁰Ibid., p.185.

⁴¹Clark, p.94.

⁴²Guderian, pp.189-192 and 198. This decision was formally codified in a supplement to Directive 34, dated 21 August 1941.

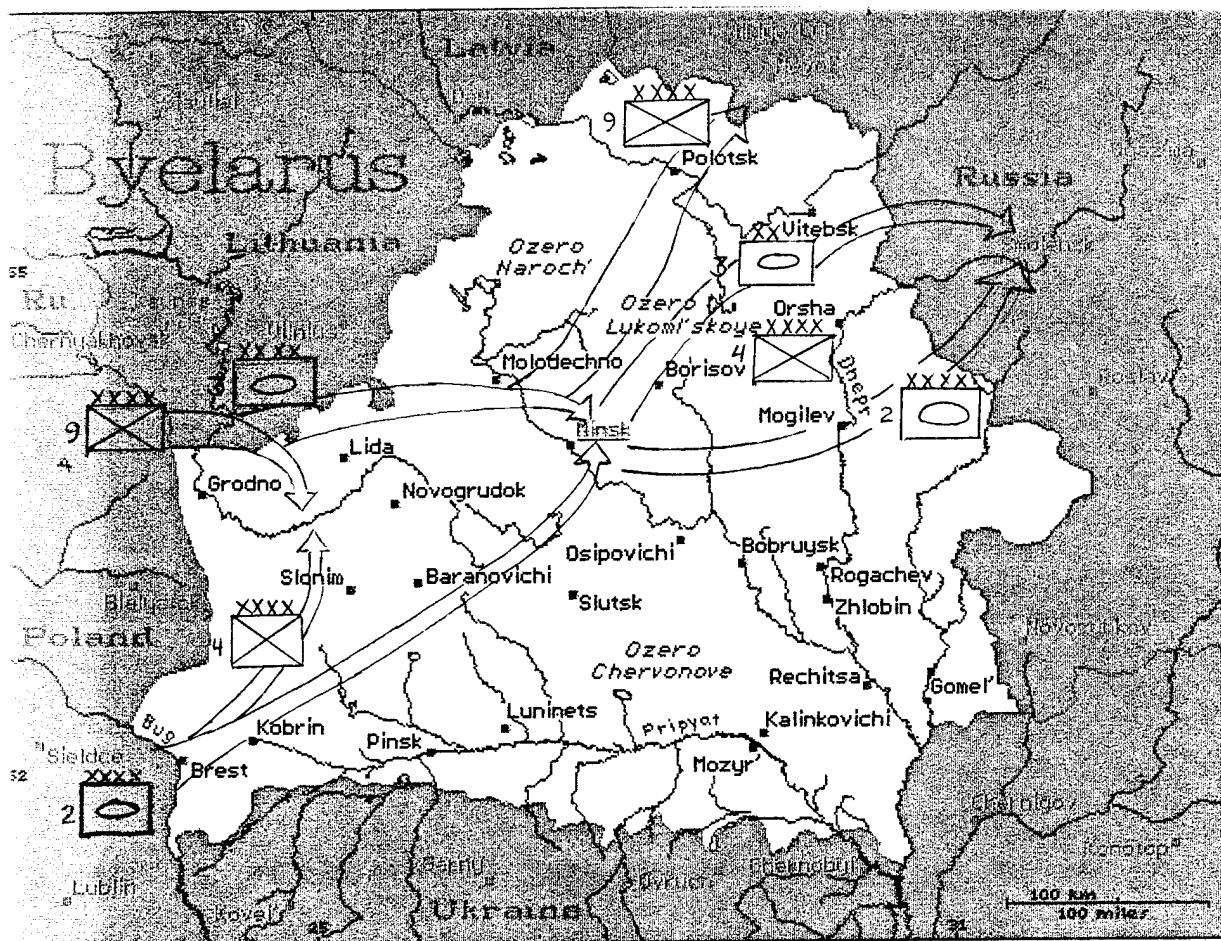
⁴³Clark, pp.129,145.

⁴⁴JMO Department, "Elements of Operational Warfare," p.14.

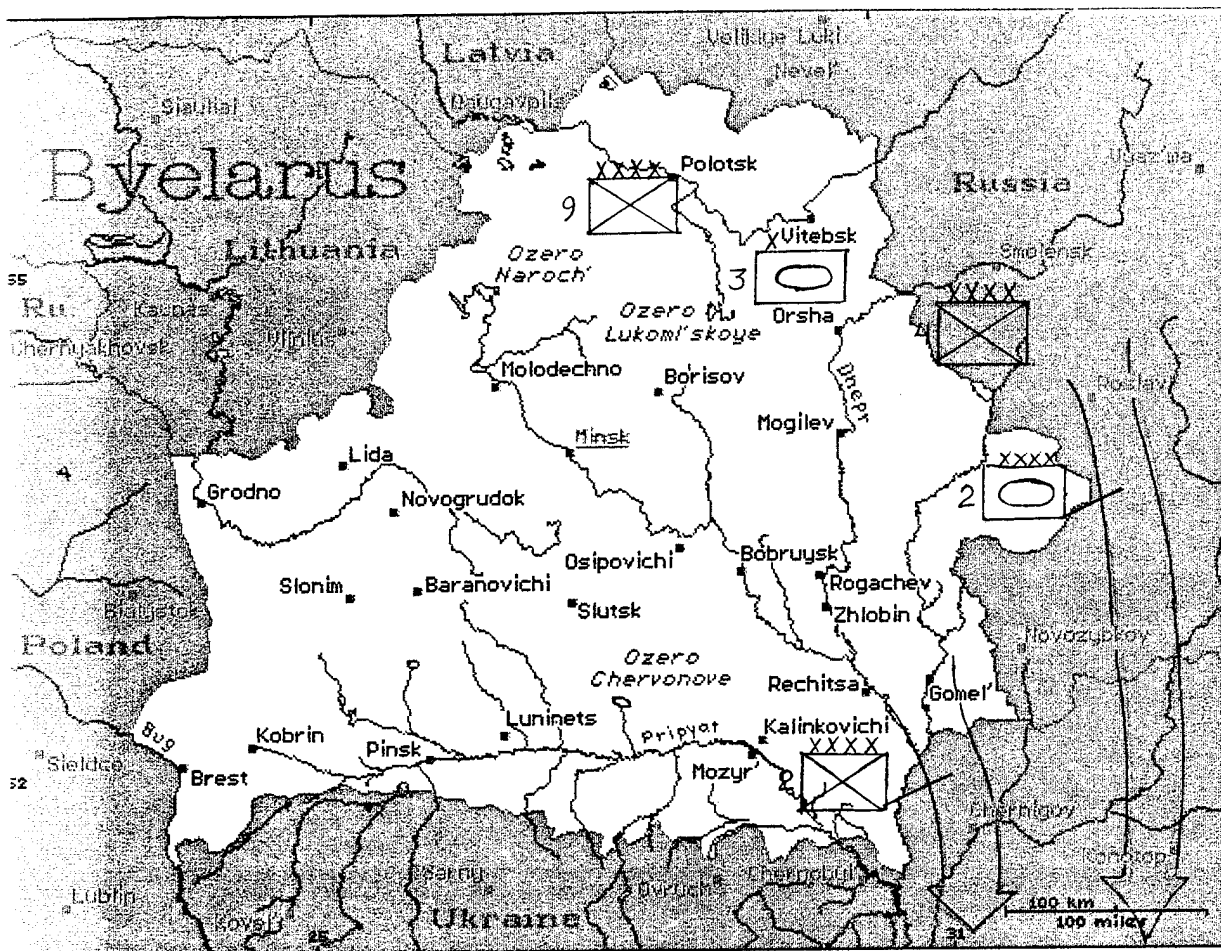
⁴⁵One author, Albert Seaton, goes so far as to suggest that AGC could have captured Moscow by early September and penetrated 200 miles to the east before winter if the Panzers had not been diverted. See Seaton, pp.283-284.

⁴⁶Martin Van Creveld, Supplying War. Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton (New York, 1977), p.176. As a point of interest, this author defends Hitler's decision to divert AGC elements to the Kiev sector. He contends that logistical shortages in AGC following Smolensk only would have been sufficient to support a 17 division attack on Moscow. He argues that operations against the capital would have been delayed regardless of 2nd Panzer's Kiev diversion. (See pp.176,180).

⁴⁷Albert Seaton, The Battle of Moscow 1941-1942 (New York, 1971), pp.286-287.



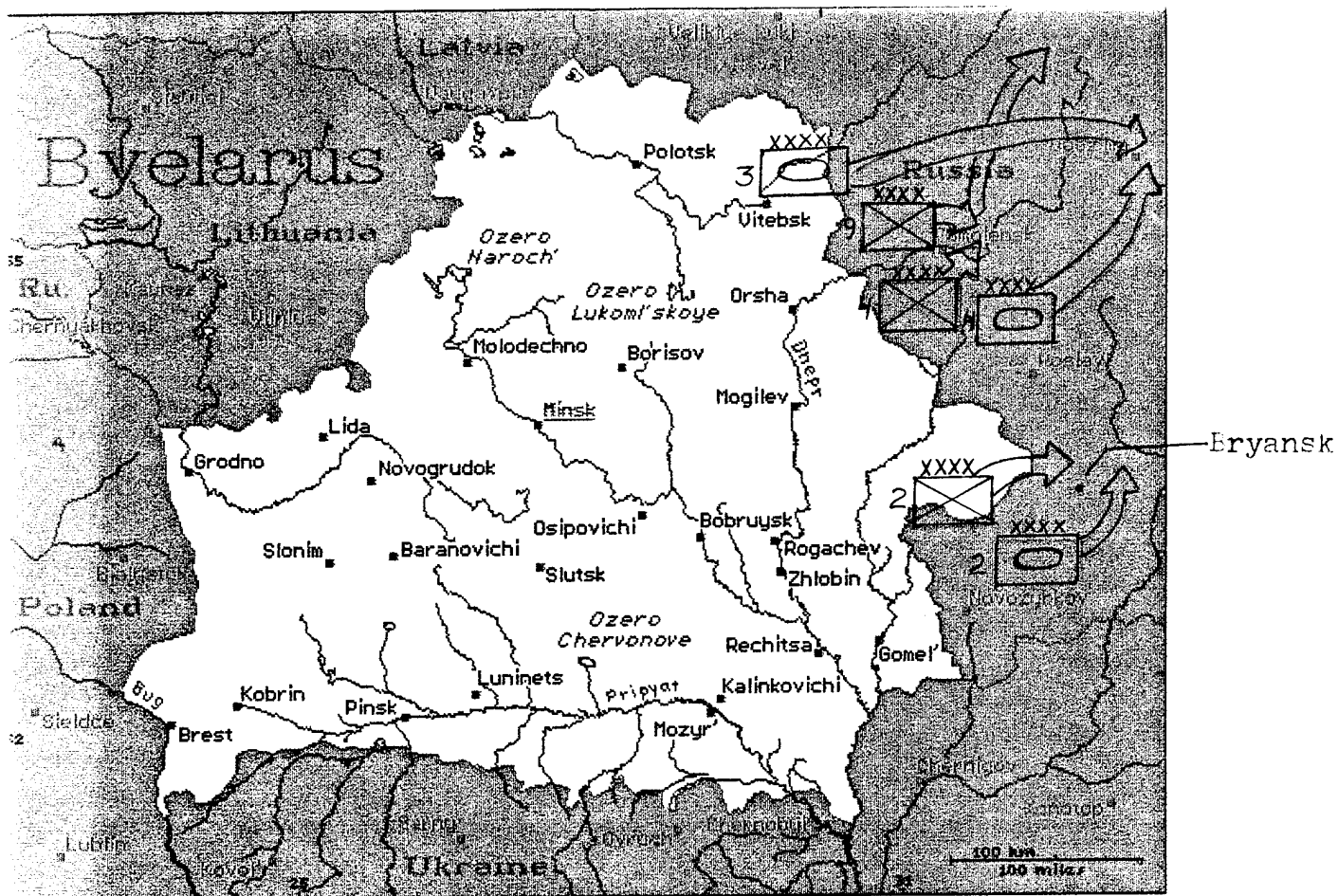
MAP 1. INITIAL OPERATIONS, MINSK AND SMOLENSK ENCIRCLEMENTS,
JUNE- JULY, 1941.



MAP 2a. DIVERSION OF 2nd PANZER GROUP TO KIEV, AUG-SEP, 1941.



MAP 2b. ENCIRCLEMENT OF KIEV POCKET.



MAP 3. VYAZMA AND BRYANSK ENCIRCLEMENTS, OCTOBER 1941

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