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## Napoleon in Russia

Evgeniï Viktorovich Tarle

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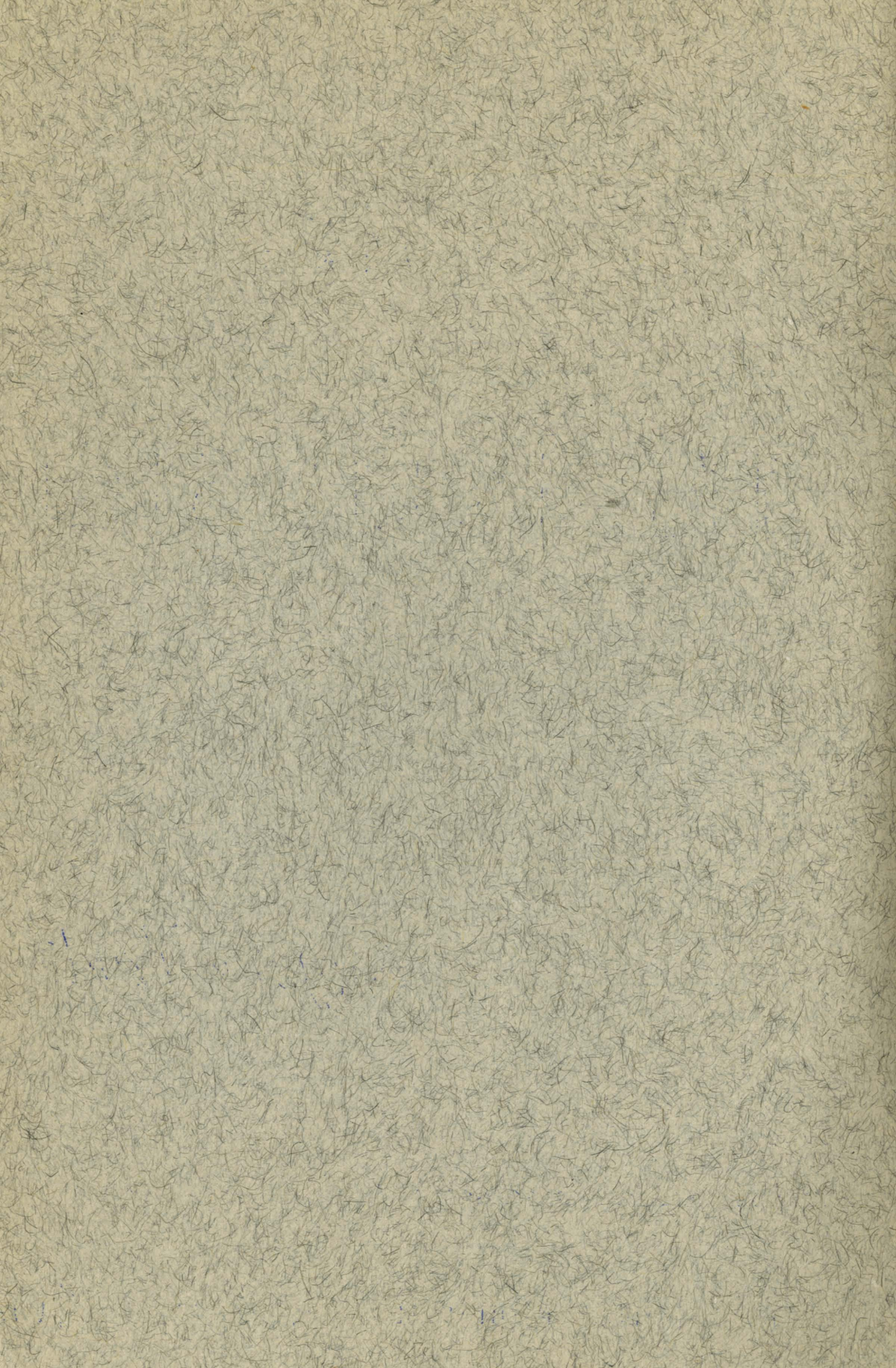
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# Napoleon in Russia

*Eugene Tarlé*

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INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK ~~10c~~

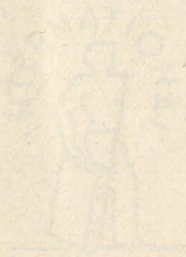


Napoleon

NAPOLEON IN RUSSIA

IN RUSSIA

*in Russian*



INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK



# Napoleon in Russia

*by Eugene Tarlé*



INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

209

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## NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF RUSSIA

OF ALL the wars Napoleon waged, the War of 1812 was the most avowedly imperialistic, and was most directly dictated by the interests of the French financiers and big capitalists.

For Russia this was a war for the preservation of her economic and political independence; a war to save herself not only from the ruin threatened as a result of Napoleon's blockade policy, which hindered Russian trade with England, but also from dismemberment, for the Poles were hoping, with the aid of the French Emperor to secure Lithuania and Byelorrussia, and even to reach the Black Sea. Hence, as far as Russia was concerned, the War of 1812 was in the fullest sense a fight for existence; a war of defense against a predatory imperialist invasion. This accounts for the nationwide character of the great struggle that the Russian people then waged so heroically against the world conqueror.

Diplomats began to discuss the possibility of such a war in the beginning of 1810, but the seeds of it were sown some time before that.

On December 2, 1805, Napoleon inflicted a severe defeat on the Austrian and Russian forces at Austerlitz. In this battle the French could clearly see the difference between the fighting qualities of the Russian soldiers and those of the less stalwart and less courageous Austrians. In 1807 the Russian troops, which the Tsar had sent to save Prussia from utter subjugation, fought against Napoleon's forces first in the sanguinary but indecisive battle of Eylau on February 8, and then in the battle of Friedland on June 14, which ended in a victory for Napoleon. This battle was followed by the conclusion of the Treaty of Tilsit, by which Alexander I entered into an alliance with Napoleon and joined the so-called "continental

blockade." This meant that Russia pledged herself not to trade with England, to permit no Englishmen to enter Russia, and to declare war on England. Napoleon had insisted on these terms in order to bring England to her knees, but their operation greatly damaged the interests of the Russian landowners and merchants. Russian trade dwindled, and the state finances of Russia were reduced to low ebb.

Later, however, the situation changed. The annexation of Holland by France in June, 1810; the transfer of three French divisions from the south of Germany to the Baltic coast in August of that year; and the dispatch from France of fifty thousand muskets to the Duchy of Warsaw—the Polish state created by Napoleon and headed by the King of Saxony—were all portentous signs of another approaching storm. Russian diplomats attributed these events to Napoleon's "Austrian marriage" (with Marie-Louise, daughter of the Austrian Emperor) and to his alliance with Austria. Napoleon no longer needed Russia; his power in Europe had found a new prop in Vienna. From that time onward relations between Napoleon and Alexander I became very strained.

In the beginning of 1812 Napoleon succeeded in concluding a military alliance with Prussia and Austria against Russia. During an audience granted him by Napoleon on April 27, Prince Kurakin, Russian ambassador in Paris, requested that the French troops be withdrawn from Prussia. He also drew attention to Napoleon's colossal armaments and to his "alliance" with Prussia, which was obviously leveled against Russia. Napoleon either did not listen and went on talking about something else, or else kept repeating an emphatic refusal. Next day Kurakin visited Hugues-Bernard Maret, Duke of Bassano, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, and informed him that while Russia was prepared to yield on most of the points at issue, she still insisted on the withdrawal of the French troops from Prussia and on Russia's right to trade with neutral countries.

Napoleon was highly incensed at this demand for the withdrawal of the troops from Prussia and called it an insolent

“ultimatum,” which he clutched at as proof that not he but the Tsar had become aggressive.

War seemed imminent. The majority of diplomats in Europe believed that if war did break out Napoleon would be victorious; but certain signs were visible that gave many food for reflection.

First of all there was Spain. Napoleon's position there was very precarious. The country was seething with revolt and he had to maintain there an army of over 200,000 (twice the size of the army he subsequently had at Borodino) and even that was in constant need of reinforcements owing to the heavy losses it suffered.

The second circumstance that eased Russia's position was the sudden change in Sweden's policy. Bernadotte, one of Napoleon's marshals, had been elected Heir Apparent to the Swedish throne; but as soon as Bernadotte appeared in Sweden he began to seek a rapprochement with Alexander. In this he was encouraged by a considerable section of the Swedish aristocracy, which was enraged by Napoleon's tyranny in depriving Sweden of what was called Swedish Pomerania by a mere stroke of the pen. Furthermore, Alexander promised to help Sweden to acquire Norway.

The third factor that was in Russia's favor was the conclusion of peace with Turkey. The peace treaty signed by Marshal Kutuzov in Bucharest on May 22 was rather favorable for Russia, and the cessation of the Russo-Turkish war released 30,000 to 40,000 Russian soldiers for service elsewhere if the contingency arose.

Such were the relatively favorable circumstances that gave grounds for the hope that Russia would be able successfully to defend herself against her formidable enemy. Nevertheless, consternation reigned at the Court and among the higher aristocracy in St. Petersburg.

On May 9, 1812, Napoleon set out for Dresden, ostensibly for the purpose of reviewing the Grand Army on the Vistula. It was common knowledge, however, that he was setting out on a war against Russia.

His triumphant progress through Germany and the endless columns of troops he passed on the way streaming toward the East made him feel that he was indeed the dictator of the continent of Europe. The King and Queen of Saxony traveled a long way out of Dresden to meet him. In Dresden the Austrian Emperor Franz I and his consort arrived to pay homage to their august son-in-law; and the King of Prussia asked for Napoleon's special permission to present himself at Dresden to do the same. This gathering of vassal monarchs and the solemnities attending it were nothing more nor less than an anti-Russian demonstration. Here, too, Napoleon received Count Narbonne, who arrived post-haste from Vilna to report to him.

Taking farewell of his crowned vassals, and leaving Marie-Louise and the whole Court at Dresden, Napoleon set out to meet the Grand Army, which was marching in several columns toward the Niemen River. At dawn on June 21 he arrived in the village of Vilkovishko, several miles from the Niemen. On June 22 he ordered the army to advance to the river.

In none of his previous campaigns had Napoleon been so conscious of the uncertainty of the outcome of his undertaking as he was in this one. But when he saw these countless ranks marching in all their splendor to the Niemen, even the unknown seemed to beckon to him. In a confidential conversation he had with Count Narbonne he said:

“We will now march to Moscow, but why not turn from Moscow to India? Let no one tell Napoleon that India is far from Moscow. Alexander of Macedonia did not find Greece very near to India, but that did not deter him. He reached the Ganges from a place that was no less distant than Moscow . . . and it is sufficient to touch the Ganges with a French sword to cause the edifice of England's mercantile magnificence to collapse.”

Does this mean that the main objects of the war that Napoleon was now embarking on were Moscow and India? Oh, no! Publicly, Napoleon stated that the Tsar had com-

pelled him to go to war by his "ultimatum" (concerning the withdraw of the French troops from Prussia); that the object of the war was to bring the Tsar to reason and to forestall all possibility of his rapprochement with England; that this war was purely "political," it was being undertaken with a definite political object, and as soon as this was achieved he would be ready to make peace. Considering that the Emperor himself did not know exactly what his purpose was, is it surprising then that the Grand Army, from the marshals right down to the lowest army cook, did not know why it was being led to Russia?

On taking up his quarters in the manor house in Vilko-vishko Napoleon, on June 22, issued a proclamation to the Grand Army saying: "We shall advance, cross the Niemen and lead the troops into her [Russia's] territory. . . ." This was, in effect, Napoleon's declaration of war, for he made no other declaration. On June 23 Napoleon inspected the bank of the river. Three bridges were being built, the last of which was completed by midnight. There was a fourth bridge at Kovno, which could also be used for crossing the river.

On the night of June 23, 1812, Napoleon issued the order to his army to cross the Niemen. The die was cast.

## THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES, AND THE RETREAT OF THE RUSSIAN ARMY

ALEXANDER learned that Napoleon had crossed the Russian frontier late at night on June 24, while at a ball given in his honor in Vilna. Next day he instructed Lieutenant-General Balashov, his Minister for the Interior, to take a written message to Napoleon, and also to tell him verbally that "if he [Napoleon] desired to enter into negotiations they could be opened forthwith, but on one essential condition—that he withdraws his army beyond the frontier." "His Majesty pledged his word that he would neither utter nor listen to a word about peace as long as a single armed Frenchman remained in Russia."

On June 30, Balashov had two interviews with Napoleon, in the course of which the latter said that he had not intended to make war on Russia and that, in fact, he had been on the point of sending his personal belongings to Spain, where he had intended to go.

"I know," he said, "that a war between France and Russia is no bagatelle either for France or Russia. I have made great preparations and my forces are three times as large as yours. I know as well as you, perhaps even better, how many troops you have. You have 120,000 infantry and 60,000 to 70,000 cavalry. In short, less than 200,000. I have three times that number." Then he complained that Alexander had departed from his Tilsit policy of friendship with him and had thereby "marred his reign."

Balashov returned to Alexander and reported his conversation with Napoleon. Alexander had no alternative but to accept Napoleon's challenge, and on July 13 he issued a

proclamation to the army announcing Napoleon's invasion and the opening of hostilities.

When news was received that Napoleon was advancing straight from the Niemen to Vilna, and that Murat, King of Naples, and his cavalry were in the vanguard, the Russian Command decided to retreat from Vilna to the "fortified camp" at Drissa. This camp had been built in accordance with the plans of General Phull, a member of the Tsar's suite.

General Phull was regarded as a military expert, and at the beginning of every campaign he drew up very extensive and detailed plans, which, however, usually ended in smoke. He began his career in the Prussian army, but he proved a failure there and entered the Russian service. In St. Petersburg he acted as military tutor to Alexander I. The latter believed that he was a genius and always took his advice. Without consulting either Barclay de Tolly or Prince Bagration, his two foremost generals, Alexander had ordered the erection of this "fortified camp" near the village of Drissa, on the Dvina. Situated as it was between two highroads, Phull imagined that it could serve as a barrier to Napoleon's advance on both St. Petersburg and Moscow.

When the army, with the Tsar and Barclay de Tolly at its head, arrived at Drissa, the generals were horrified. "Only a lunatic or a traitor could have invented the Drissa camp," categorically declared some of the bolder of them in Alexander's presence. The Drissa camp, with its fictitious "fortifications," they said, would not hold out even a couple of days, and the Russian army would be in danger of being surrounded and forced into a shameful capitulation.

In crossing the Niemen, Napoleon believed that the Russian army immediately in front of him numbered about 200,000 men. He was wrong. Actually, leaving out General Tormasov's Southern Army, which was facing the Austrian Corps commanded by Schwarzenberg, on the day of Napoleon's invasion, the Russian Command had the following forces at its disposal: the First Army, commanded by Barclay de Tolly,



118,000 men; and the Second Army, commanded by Bagration, 35,000 men; making a total of 153,000. In the course of the retreat this army received reinforcements; nevertheless, when, later on, Barclay de Tolly and Bagration joined forces in Smolensk, they had no more than 113,000 men at their disposal. Sickness and casualties in fighting had reduced their numbers.

The Russian army possessed adequate artillery and good gunners. It may be said that at no time in the first half of the nineteenth century was the Russian artillery so well matched with the French as it was in 1812, 1813 and 1814. At the time Napoleon crossed the Niemen the Russian troops were, relatively speaking, better supplied with artillery than Napoleon's army. The Russian army had approximately seven guns per thousand men, whereas the ratio in Napoleon's army was no higher than four per thousand. The absolute number of guns, of course, was higher in Napoleon's army, for the simple reason that at the opening of hostilities his army was far larger than the Russian.

Barclay de Tolly left Vilna for the Drissa camp on June 26 and arrived there on July 10 with an army of 100,000 men. On July 16 he left the camp with all his troops, his baggage and supplies, and with the Tsar himself, and marched in the direction of Vitebsk. For ten weary days de Tolly marched from Drissa through Polotsk to Vitebsk in the sultry July heat, and on the way he received reports from his spies and scouts that Napoleon with his main force was also marching toward that town. He knew that Napoleon would arrive at Vitebsk with 200,000 men, whereas he would have barely 75,000 men, for he was compelled to allocate 25,000 men—one-fourth of his forces—to reinforce Count Wittgenstein, who was guarding the road to St. Petersburg.

In the first, and for Russia the most dangerous, period of the war, the Prussian generals, whose forces formed part of the French army corps commanded by Marshal Macdonald, servilely carried out the behests of Napoleon. As a reward for their services they, like their pious sovereign Frederick William

III, hoped to receive a large slice of Russian territory—the whole of the Baltic Region. At first the Russians thought that the Prussians were only pretending to take an active part in the war in order to placate Napoleon, and would not seriously fight against Russia. But to their surprise they found that they were mistaken. The Prussians not only conscientiously killed Russian soldiers, but zealously looted the region they occupied —“made a clean sweep of it,” as an eye-witness put it. Later, when Napoleon had barely left Russia, they swung over to the side of Russia.

On July 30 Wittgenstein fought a successful engagement against Marshal Oudinot, Duke of Reggio, and pushed him back to Polotsk.

De Tolly and Bagration, hard pressed by the enemy, retreated on Vitebsk and Moghilev in the frightful heat, their troops half-starving and going without fresh water for several days on end. Only an hour after the retreat of the Russian troops from Vilna did Napoleon arrive there with his vanguard. Here he stayed from June 28 to July 16.

Quite early in July Napoleon was able to experience all the inconveniences of the continental climate and the lack of roads in Russia. The frightful heat was followed by heavy rains, which made the movement of troops extremely difficult. Sickness thinned the ranks of Napoleon's army in the very first days of the campaign.

Worst of all, however, were the unexpected difficulties that arose in connection with the supply of food and fodder. The baggage trains could not keep up with the rapidly advancing army, and as a result men and horses were deprived of their regular rations. Driven by hunger, the men began to plunder the inhabitants, even while they were still marching through the territory of Napoleon's "ally," Prussia. But in none of Napoleon's campaigns, except the Italian campaign of 1796-97 and the Egyptian campaign of 1798-99, was looting conducted on the scale and intensity that it was in the regions occupied in Russia in 1812. The discipline of the Grand Army in no way resembled the traditional discipline of Napoleon's troops.

It did not consist of volunteers, as was the case with previous armies, nor was it a purely French army. Its men were drawn from numerous nationalities from all over Europe.

While in Vilna Napoleon had to draw up two plans of operation; one against Bagration, who with the Second Army was retreating toward Nesvizh, and the other against de Tolly, who on June 26 had left Vilna with the First Army in the direction of the Drissa camp.

Bagration's position seemed desperate. He had in all about 40,000 men, for at the very beginning of the retreat two divisions were thrown back to Volyn. He was being pursued by Marshal Davout with an army of 70,000 men; by Poniatowski with an army of 35,000 men; by Jerome, King of Westphalia, and brother of Napoleon, with an army of 16,000 men; by Grouchy with 7,000 men; and by General Latour-Maubourg with 8,000 men. Nevertheless, he got away. Napoleon was furious with his incompetent brother for failing to overtake and defeat Bagration.

On July 8, Marshal Davout occupied Minsk and thence marched to the River Berezina. Again Bagration found himself in a critical situation. He retreated with his army strung out along the narrow roads between the marshes. When Napoleon heard of the position of Bagration's army he exclaimed: "I've caught him!" Evidently, he forgot at that moment that he himself had called Bagration the best general in the Russian army. Davout stayed in Minsk four days. By a skillful maneuver Bagration turned sharply to the south, reached the Berezina near the town of Bobruysk, crossed the river at this point, and marched toward the Dnieper. Ordering Rayevski to hold up Davout's forces near the village of Dashkovka, he himself marched to Novy Bykhov, at which point he crossed the Dnieper on July 25. Another part of his army crossed the river at Sary Bykhov.

On July 23, Rayevsky, with but one army corps, held out for ten hours in a stubborn battle at Dashkovka against five divisions from the army corps of Marshals Davout and Mortier, who were pressing him very hard. At one critical moment

in the battle the musketeers, subjected to a hail of bullets, wavered. It was said and written at the time that Rayevsky in a flash seized both his sons by the arms, rushed forward with them, rallied the men and led them in a charge. The men proved worthy of their gallant commander. Rayevsky was never lavish with praise, but in the dispatch he sent to his superior, Bagration, after the battle, he wrote: "I myself saw many officers and privates who had been twice wounded bandaging their wounds and returning to the battle as if to a bean feast. I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for the courage and skill of the artillerymen. All were heroes to a man."

Bagration extricated himself from the French pincers by crossing to the left bank of the Dnieper. Marshal Davout learned that Bagration had crossed the Dnieper twenty-four hours after the event and immediately reported this to Napoleon. This news, too, displeased the Emperor very much.

To hold up the French advance, de Tolly sent against them the 4th Infantry Corps, commanded by Count Osterman-Tolstoy, and followed this up with reinforcements commanded by General Konovnitsin. The road from Ostrovno to the Luchosa River was lined with the dead bodies of these two forces but they fulfilled the task they had been sent to perform. They gave de Tolly and Bagration two extra days in which to draw up their plans.

On July 27, just before dawn, a courier arrived at de Tolly's camp with a message from Bagration, who reported that he had failed to fight his way to Moghilev and that he had learned that Davout was starting out on a march on Smolensk.

Several hours before receiving this dispatch from Bagration de Tolly had received a report that Napoleon himself had suddenly arrived at Vitebsk with the Old Guard. From the Russian camp, fires could be seen burning in the encampments of the French Guards on the outskirts of the forest near Vitebsk. A quick decision had to be made. To give Napoleon battle, and without Bagration's assistance at that, meant al-

most certain defeat and, consequently, the destruction of the Russian army. De Tolly decided to retreat from Vitebsk to Smolensk and to leave a covering force of 3,000 infantry, 4,000 cavalry and 40 guns, under the command of Count Pahlen, about five versts from Vitebsk, to hold up Napoleon even for a short time if the latter decided to advance from Vitebsk to Smolensk immediately. On the night of July 27 the Russian army quietly, and in complete darkness, struck camp and departed.

Napoleon was so eager to fight a general engagement at Vitebsk that while still on the march to that town he had ordered Murat, King of Naples, and Prince Eugène, Viceroy of Italy, to place no obstacles in the way of the different units of the Russian army joining the main Russian forces.

On July 25 the French advanced on Vitebsk. The sultry heat continued. The soldiers marched amidst "scorching dust," which brought back to the minds of the veterans of the Grand Army their campaigns in Egypt and in the Syrian deserts.

Late at night, on the 26th, the French advance columns arrived on the outskirts of the forest, on the edge of the plain on which Vitebsk stands. The Emperor gazed at the numerous camp fires in and around the town where the Russian army was stationed. What will de Tolly do, he reflected. Will he accept battle at Vitebsk? Will the morrow or the next day bring another Austerlitz which will eclipse even the Austrian Austerlitz, where he had achieved victory over these very same Russians in 1805?

Came the dawn of July 27. Troop movements continued in and around the city. The Russians did not attack. Napoleon, on his part, decided to put off his attack to the next day. When the army had turned in for the night the Emperor informed Murat of his decision and instructed him to prepare for a general engagement to commence at 5 A.M. On the Russian side camp fires were burning just as they had been on the previous night. Napoleon went to his tent while Murat went to his cavalry outposts, which stood nearest of all to the Russian positions.

At dawn a courier brought Napoleon a message from Murat informing him that in the night de Tolly had retreated from Vitebsk. That meant that de Tolly must be pursued and if possible defeated before he could join Bagration. If the two forces succeeded in uniting, then both must be defeated.

In the beginning of August Napoleon informed his marshals that he intended to march on Smolensk. Murat was entirely in favor of continuing the pursuit of the Russian army, but Berthier, Duroc, Daru and Caulaincourt were emphatically opposed to launching another attack. Rarely did they dare to express their disagreement with their sovereign as definitely and emphatically as they did on this occasion. Respectfully, but firmly, Marshal Duroc argued that the Russians were obviously enticing the Grand Army far into the country, where doom awaited it. He was backed by Berthier. Both marshals warned the Emperor about the frightful loss of horses, the shortage of forage, the dislocation of the food supply for the army, about the poverty-stricken character of the country in which they were fighting and which, moreover, the Russians were deliberately devastating, the vast dimensions of the country, and so forth. And Duroc drew the Emperor's attention particularly to the sinister fact that Alexander was not suing for peace. To all this Napoleon replied that he had calculated all the dangers, but was sure that the campaign would end at Smolensk.

Nevertheless, for several days Napoleon issued no orders to the army either to move from Vitebsk, or to make preparations for a long stay there. Although he had decided on his line of action, he dallied and seemed to be waiting for some impetus.

The impetus came. On August 10, the Emperor received a report to the effect that General Sebastiani had suddenly been attacked by Russian cavalry near Inkov and had suffered severe losses. This revived the hope that the Russians had taken a stand somewhere on the left bank of the Dnieper. Napoleon immediately ordered the army to advance. On August 12, the first units left Vitebsk.

The conqueror entered Central Russia. Smolensk, which had so many times in past centuries blocked the road to the invader; the ancient city which had not seen a foe before its walls for two hundred years, made preparations to meet its most formidable enemy. But its walls and battlements were destined to collapse under blows such as it had never experienced before.

## THE BATTLE OF SMOLENSK

**T**AKING cover in the forests and performing intricate maneuvers in order to conceal his line of march from the Russians, Napoleon tried to reach Smolensk in a series of rapid marches, but was held up by the stubborn resistance of the small force commanded by General Neverovsky. After being driven from the village of Lad and then from the village of Krasnoye, Neverovsky, heroically defending himself against French forces at least five times superior to his own, retreated toward Smolensk. Count Ségur, a member of Napoleon's entourage and an eye-witness, described this as a "lion's retreat." The Russian soldiers showed utter contempt for danger; the line of retreat was strewn with Russian bodies. Another French chronicler of this retreat wrote:

"The Russian horsemen, together with their horses, seemed to be rooted to the ground. . . . A number of our preliminary attacks failed. . . . Each time the [retreating] Russians suddenly turned round on us and threw us back with their musket fire."

Bagration learned that Napoleon had sent considerable forces to Dorogobuzh, northeast of Smolensk, in order to cut the high-road to Moscow. He immediately advanced to forestall this move. He had few troops at his command, but what perturbed him most was the conviction that de Tolly would surrender Smolensk. He therefore ordered Rayevsky's corps to march out of Smolensk to meet the advancing French. Just at that moment he received a dispatch from Neverovsky stating that on August 15 the French army had attacked his corps at



Krasnoye, that he was now making a fighting retreat and was in need of immediate assistance. Assistance was sent, but it arrived too late. The remnants of Neverovsky's force were merged with that of Rayevsky's, which was 13,000 strong.

That night Rayevsky and Neverovsky saw an endless line of camp fires on the horizon. This was Napoleon and his whole army encamping for the night, obviously in preparation for a march by direct route on Smolensk. It was not certain, however, whether Napoleon would wait until the morning or suddenly strike camp and march on the city in the middle of the night.

Rayevsky had under his command a force of only 13,000 men, whereas at this moment Napoleon had a force of 182,000. The main Russian army had already started on its retreat from Smolensk to Moscow. Nevertheless, Rayevsky decided to defend himself.

On the morning of August 16, Napoleon was already before the walls of Smolensk. Rayevsky learned that Bagration was hastening to his assistance and expected to be in the vicinity of Smolensk by the evening. De Tolly was also marching toward the city.

At 6 A.M. on August 16, Napoleon began to bombard Smolensk, and soon after launched the first assault. The first line of defense was held by Rayevsky's division. The battle continued with varying intensity all day. But all Napoleon's efforts to capture the city that day failed. Night set in and both sides suspended operations in order to prepare for another stiff encounter next day. At night, on de Tolly's orders, Rayevsky's corps, which had suffered enormous losses, was relieved by the corps commanded by Dokhturov.

The battle before the walls of Smolensk was resumed at 4 A.M. on August 17 and from that time until 5 P.M.—for thirteen hours—an almost incessant artillery duel was fought. By 5 P.M. all the suburbs of Smolensk were in flames; even parts of the city itself were burning. Assault followed assault, each preceded by a heavy bombardment, but the Russian troops repulsed every attack. Night set in again, but the bom-

bardment and conflagration continued with greater intensity than ever.

Suddenly, at midnight, the Russian guns ceased fire and then followed explosions of incredible force. De Tolly had ordered his army to blow up the powder magazine and to withdraw from the city. The Russian troops had been fighting with splendid spirit and did not in the least regard themselves as defeated when the order to retreat was received; but de Tolly realized that Napoleon was trying to force him into a general engagement in order to achieve another Austerlitz on the banks of the Dnieper. Bagration, with part of the army, was still on the march to Dorogobuzh and would obviously arrive too late. For these reasons de Tolly decided to withdraw.

At dawn on August 18 Napoleon woke up expecting a general engagement to take place, but his adjutants pointed across the river to the dense masses of troops marching eastward from Smolensk. He realized that de Tolly had again avoided battle and that the Russian command had used Smolensk merely as a screen to hold up his pursuit. Again the Russian army had slipped through his fingers.

At dawn on August 19 Marshal Ney made a detour and emerged to the east of Smolensk. On learning that the Russian army was retreating along the Moscow road he immediately went in pursuit. Near Valutino Hill he was held up by the Russian rearguard. A battle ensued which lasted the whole of that day. The Russians put up a stubborn resistance and inflicted on the French losses amounting to 7,000 men. The Russians lost about 6,000. When dusk set in the artillery ceased fire. At night de Tolly withdrew from his positions and retreated eastward. Describing this battle, Count Ségur wrote that "the Russians covered themselves with almost as much glory in their defeat as we in our victory."

This was an ominous sign for Napoleon. He had to ask himself: Had the Russians been put to flight at least once since the war began? Could the battle of Krasnoye and Neverovsky's retreat really be called a victory for the Grand Army? Had there been cases anywhere else, except in Spain, where individ-

ual men kept a whole regiment at bay, and where it was necessary to bring up cannon against individual soldiers surrounded by enemies, as was the case with a Russian chasseur at Smolensk? In fact, the battle of Valutino Hill should be regarded not as a victory but as a strategic defeat for the French army.

Napoleon had sent General Junot's corps to make a detour around Smolensk for the purpose of preventing de Tolly and Bagration from joining forces on the Moscow road. But Junot arrived too late. When he crossed the marshes and emerged on the Moscow road the two Russian armies had joined and were already marching toward Dorogobuzh.

## BORODINO

ON AUGUST 17 Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov was appointed commander-in-chief of the Russian army. Kutuzov's name was on everybody's lips not only among the aristocracy in St. Petersburg and Moscow, but also among the officers of the army, and even among the rank and file. Everybody knew that the Tsar detested Kutuzov and that the latter reciprocated this sentiment but, in view of circumstances, the Tsar was obliged to thrust aside his personal antipathies.

At the time Kutuzov received his new appointment he was 67 years of age. His great predecessor Suvorov had appraised him far higher than many other of his officers. "He is very shrewd, and very clever! Nobody can fool him!" Suvorov used to say of him. The aged general was distinguished for his great talents as a strategist, his cool, indomitable courage, his great military experience, and his wide popularity among the people and the army. In this war he counted on the fact that the Russian peasants would rather burn their grain, hay and houses than sell provisions and forage to the enemy, and that in this seared desert the enemy would meet his doom. But he knew that at present neither he nor anybody else would be allowed to surrender Moscow without a fight. The temper of the people, primarily of the peasants, and the temper of the army was such that it would be utterly impossible for him to retreat without at least one general engagement. One of his contemporaries wrote that "whoever proposed that Moscow be surrendered without a shot would be regarded by the whole people as a traitor."

As the Russian army was moving from Gzhatsk toward Mozhaisk it was reinforced by about 15,000 men under the

command of Miloradovich, and by a force of 10,000 Moscow militia, under the command of Count Markov. On receiving these reinforcements Kutuzov definitely decided to accept battle. The Russian army halted and turned to face Napoleon's advancing army.

On reaching Gzhatsk on September 2, Napoleon ordered a rollcall to be taken of all his fighting forces situated in the town and its immediate vicinity. The number proved to be 103,000 infantry, 30,000 cavalry and 587 guns. Meanwhile, the straggling units were catching up with the main force.

On September 3, covered by the successful and stubborn resistance of their rear guard, commanded by General Konovnitsin, Kutuzov, de Tolly and Bagration reached the Kolotsk Monastery and there began to entrench themselves.

Napoleon followed hot on Konovnitsin's heels, keeping him constantly engaged in battle. On September 5 it was reported to him that his vanguard had reach a redoubt. This was the Shevardino Redoubt, which at the time Napoleon arrived was defended by a small force of 11,000 men under the command of Prince Gorchakov. These had been left behind as a covering force to conduct rear-guard actions.

Against this small force Napoleon hurled over 35,000 picked troops, and when the battle was at its height he sent additional reinforcements to the attacking column. The battle lasted the whole day of September 5. The French made several cavalry assaults on the redoubt, but these were repulsed. Then two French infantry divisions and three regiments of the 3rd Division were brought up. These pushed back Neverovsky's division, which occupied the approaches, and then stormed the redoubt itself. The Russian defenders met the charge of the French troops with impetuous counter charges, rushing to certain death with bayonets leveled and with wild cries of "hurrah!" The Russian gunners kept up their fire until the last moment, and when the French broke into the retrenchments they did not retreat, as they could easily have done, but entered into a hand to hand fight and were cut down at their guns. It was long after midnight before Bagration received

Kutuzov's order to cease his resistance and retreat. The French simply could not understand how this unequal battle could have lasted so long.

On the same day, the Russian rear-guard commanded by Konovnitsin was again attacked near the Kolotsk Monastery and forced back to the village of Borodino.

Napoleon pursued the Russian army with three dense columns. The Imperial General Staff had taken up its quarters in the village of Valuyevo. Here Napoleon received a dispatch from the Shevardino Redoubt stating that "not a single prisoner was taken." On September 6 Napoleon rode up to the redoubt and, evidently desiring to verify the information he had received on the previous day, asked: "How many Russian prisoners were taken yesterday?" "They do not surrender, Sire," came the reply.

The French spent all of September 6 in preparations for battle. Napoleon did not go to bed that night. At dawn a courier arrived from Marshal Ney with a message asking whether he should launch the battle. The Russians had halted, he reported. "Now we have them!" exclaimed Napoleon. "Forward! We will open the gates of Moscow!" At that moment the sun rose behind the Russian camp. "Behold the sun of Austerlitz!" exclaimed the Emperor.

Few battles in history up to that time could be compared with the battle of Borodino for its bloodiness, its ferocity and its consequences. In this battle, however, Napoleon not only failed to break the spirit of the Russian army, but also failed to terrorize the Russian people. After Borodino and the fall of Moscow their resistance to the enemy became still more intense.

At 5 A.M. a fierce battle was opened on the left flank of the Russian army, where Bagration's forces were posted near the Semenovskiy Ravine. Here Napoleon had sent Marshals Davout, Murat and Ney. The first assaults were repulsed by the Russian artillery and heavy musket fire. Marshal Davout fell; he was wounded in the head and his horse was killed under him. In the first assaults on Bagration's positions the French

lost many officers, including several generals and colonels. The fortifications around Semenovskiy Ravine, afterwards known as "Bagration's flèche," were hastily put up, but they were defended so fiercely that from 5 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. all the desperate assaults of the French were repulsed with frightful losses. By 7 A.M. Napoleon had concentrated nearly 150 guns against this position. After a long preliminary bombardment, enormous forces were hurled against the ravine and the flèche. Overwhelming forces were hurled against Vorontsov's and Neverovsky's divisions, which were overthrown and crushed. In this fight Neverovsky put up a desperate resistance and his battalions made repeated bayonet charges. Murat, Ney and Davout asked Napoleon for reinforcements, but the latter refused, for he was displeased with the fact that the flèche had not yet been captured.

Fierce and bloody fighting raged. The flèche, bestrewn with the corpses of men and horses, changed hands several times. Those who knew Bagration and who saw him during these frightful hours had no doubt whatever that he would hold the flèche or die in the attempt.

Napoleon neither would nor could abandon his plan of breaking through the Russian lines on the left flank and then of concentrating all his forces on the center. The number of French guns concentrated on this part of the line was now increased to 400, more than two-thirds of Napoleon's artillery, and another general assault on the flèche was ordered.

"Here an important event occurred," relates a participant in this battle. "Realizing what the marshals were aiming at, and seeing the menacing advance of the French forces, Prince Bagration made a desperate decision. An order was given, and the whole of our left flank, all along the line, marched forward at a quick pace with leveled bayonets." The Russian attack was repulsed, and Davout ordered a counter-attack. The French grenadiers, refraining from firing in order to save time, hurled themselves upon the flèche. They were mowed down by Russian bullets. A hail of chain shot was poured upon the Russian defenders from the French batteries.

At that moment a fragment of a shell hit Bagration and broke his hip bone. For a while he tried to hide from his troops the fact that he had been wounded in order that they should not become dismayed, but blood poured from his wound and he began slowly to slip from his horse. His adjutants managed to catch him before he fell, and carried him away.

This was the crucial moment of the battle. The soldiers not only loved Bagration more than any other of their commanders in this war, except perhaps Kutuzov, but they believed him to be invincible. Witnesses relate that "the spirit seemed to leave the whole left flank" when Bagration died.

The left flank was broken. From all sides Kutuzov received reports of heavy losses. The soldiers had fought with amazing valor and thousands had fallen. As was the case at Smolensk, wounded soldiers stolidly bore their pain and stuck to their posts in spite of the orders of their officers to go to the rear. The officers were no less staunch than their men on that day.

After the capture of the *flèche*, the next important episode in the battle of Borodino was the fight for Rayevsky's battery, stationed on a hill in the center of the Russian line. The French captured the village of Borodino, but were driven out of it by the Russian chasseurs. The French made another assault, captured the village again, and this time were able to hold it. Eugène, Viceroy of Italy, then crossed the Koloch River and led an assault on the great battery, which had been subjected to repeated attack since 10 o'clock that morning.

Under General Bonamy the French took the battery by assault, but were repulsed. They captured it a second time, but again they were repulsed. During this assault Colonel Monakhtin, Chief of Staff of the 6th Army Corps, received two bayonet wounds, but at the third assault of the French he managed to shout to the Russian soldiers, pointing to the battery: "Boys, imagine that this is Russia; defend her with your lives!" At that moment a bullet entered his stomach, and he was carried off the battlefield. This brave officer lived only a few days longer. On learning that Moscow had been aban-



done to the enemy he tore the bandages from his wounds and died.

Ermolov drove Broussier's division out of Rayevsky's battery and from the approaches to it. General Bonamy, his body pierced in many places with bayonet wounds, was taken prisoner. Napoleon demanded the destruction of Rayevsky's battery at all costs.

At 2 P.M. Napoleon ordered his artillery to occupy the positions around the Bagration flèche, which the French had captured after the death of Bagration. From this point a hellish fire mowed down the Russian troops; but never before had Russian soldiers, privates and officers alike, shown such contempt for danger and death as they did on that day.

The French fire grew in intensity. It became obvious that Napoleon was determined to capture Rayevsky's battery and, after achieving victory in this artillery duel, to break up the Russian army with artillery fire and put it to flight. But this did not happen. The Russian army retreated in perfect order.

By 3 P.M. three-fourths of the defenders of the battery had been killed and the rest thrown back. The battery remained in the hands of the French. But the Russians had not fled from the battlefield, their guns had not been silenced.

Night set in. The biggest battle that Napoleon had ever fought was drawing to a close. But what was the result? Neither Napoleon nor his marshals could say definitely. None of them was conscious of a feeling of victory. The marshals conversed grumblingly with one another: Murat said that all day long the Emperor had been quite unrecognizable; Ney said that the Emperor had forgotten his business.

The thunder of artillery and the heavy fighting was heard on both sides until nightfall, but the Russians had no intentions of retreating, let alone of fleeing in panic.

That evening Napoleon rode over the battlefield, morose and gloomy, not saying a word to his attendants; his generals dared not interrupt his reflections. The groans and cries of the wounded were heard on all sides. The Russian wounded, however, amazed the generals. "They did not utter a groan," said

one of them later. "Perhaps, being far away from their own men, they had less expectation of mercy. But the truth is that they seemed to bear pain much more stoically than the French."

The Russian army lost 58,000 men, killed and severely wounded, but only 700 were taken prisoner. Shortly before his death Napoleon, while reminiscing, said: "The most frightful battle I ever fought was that near Moscow. The French deserved their victory, but the Russians deserved the title of invincibles."

In the long run, the battle of Borodino proved to be a great victory for the Russian people over the dictator of Europe. It marked the beginning of that incredibly difficult task of overthrowing Napoleon that was finally accomplished three years later.

At night, Napoleon was the first to withdraw his troops from the battlefield; he did this before Kutuzov issued his order to retreat. The Russian army retreated from Borodino to Moscow and beyond in perfect order; but the main thing was that the spirit of the Russian troops had not been shaken in the least. Borodino had merely served to fan their hatred of the invader and to intensify their thirst for revenge.

## THE FIRE OF MOSCOW

**A**FTER retiring a little way from the battlefield both the French and Russian armies remained inactive for several hours. Both sides were engaged in counting up their losses, checking the figures and ascertaining the results of the battle.

Corps commanders and adjutants came to Kutuzov one after another and their reports drove the aged Field Marshal to the conclusion that he must surrender Moscow without even attempting to hold up Napoleon's forces. To be more precise, he understood that now he would be allowed to surrender Moscow without another battle. The Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Corps had been almost entirely annihilated. The other units of his army had also suffered heavy losses. On the other hand, Kutuzov learned that Napoleon's Guard was still intact, as it had not taken part in the battle. Next day he also learned that Napoleon's right wing was outflanking the Russian left wing. It became utterly impossible to stay here longer without giving battle; but it was also impossible to give battle at the moment. Kutuzov decided to retire on Moscow.

He reached the village of Fili, on the outskirts of Moscow, and here, on September 13, 1812, he called his most important generals to a council of war to discuss whether the Russian army should enter into another engagement or retreat beyond Moscow and allow the city to fall into Napoleon's hands. In submitting this question he uttered the opinion he had held all along, but hitherto had not expressed to anyone: "As long as the army exists and is capable of offering resistance to the enemy we can hope for a favorable consummation of the war; but if the army is destroyed, Moscow and Russia will perish."

The council of war lasted only a little over an hour. Rather unexpectedly for those present, the Field Marshal abruptly closed the proceedings and, rising from his seat, announced that he therewith ordered a retreat. During the rest of the day Kutuzov spoke to nobody. At night he returned to the hut in which he had taken up his quarters, but he did not go to bed. Several times that night he was heard to weep.

The last units of the retreating Russian army were crossing the bridge of the small river Yauza that runs into the Moscow River when General Miloradovich, the commander of the rear guard, received information that the French cavalry was entering Moscow through the Dorogomilov Gate. All day and night, and well into the next day, an endless stream of humanity flowed out of Moscow across the Yauza Bridge. Kutuzov led the Russian army southward to Krasnaya Pakhra and thence to the old Kaluga road. At night he was drinking tea in the village of Uopa, and the peasants sitting around him pointed horrorstricken to the glare reflected in the sky of Moscow burning in the distance. "Kutuzov, shifting his cap with a vigorous gesture, answered: 'It's a pity, of course; but you wait, I'll break his head. . . .'"

On September 9, Napoleon arrived at Mozhaisk and left on the 12th. He then hastened after his army, which was marching to Moscow, and caught up with it when the vanguard was approaching Poklonnaya Hill. This was on September 13. He had spent the night in the village of Vyazem, and all that night and the next morning the vanguard of the French army streamed past the village on the way to Moscow. At 2 P.M. on September 14 he and his aides ascended Poklonnaya Hill and saw the panorama of Moscow spread out to their view. A bright sun lit up the vast city and caused its innumerable gilded domes to gleam. The Old Guard that followed behind Napoleon's suite, forgetting discipline, broke ranks and scrambled up the hill shouting in a thousand voices: "Moscow! Moscow!" Riding to a higher mound, Napoleon halted, and he, too, with unconcealed triumph, exclaimed: "Moscow!"

The men on that hill at that hour were ready to believe that the resistance of the Russian people had been broken and that the signing of an armistice, and then of peace, was only a matter of a few days.

Meanwhile, the sun began to set and the Frenchmen gathered on the hill began to comment among themselves on a rather strange circumstance. Murat had already entered the city, and in a parallel column the corps commanded by Viceroy Eugène were pouring in. Napoleon wanted to receive the keys of the city here on Poklonnaya Hill, and the first thing Murat and Eugène were to have done on entering the city was to arrange for a civic deputation to escort them into the city. But no deputation came. Suddenly, incredible news spread, first among the Guards, then among Napoleon's retinue, and finally reached Napoleon: no deputation from the inhabitants of Moscow need be expected because there were no inhabitants in Moscow. The whole population had abandoned the city!

Murat had entered Moscow at noon. His cavalry advanced warily, fearing an ambush and sudden attack. But silence reigned hour after hour, while the French army poured into the city in an endless flood. Only when the leading detachment reached the Kremlin were a few shots fired from behind the closed gates. The French broke down the gates with a cannon ball and killed the few men who were there. Who these people were is not known to this day. When the French broke into the fortress, one of its defenders flung himself upon a French officer with extraordinary fury, tried to strangle him and bit his hand through and through. He was killed like the rest.

Toward evening Napoleon was informed that the French troops had occupied the city without meeting any resistance. He spent his first night in Moscow in an abandoned house near the Dorogomilov Gate. He was in a very gloomy mood. "What an awful wilderness!" he exclaimed when he saw the deserted streets.

Before he went to bed several adjutants and orderlies ar-

rived from different parts of the city remote from each other. All of them reported the same thing: Fires were starting in the city. At first the Emperor thought that his soldiers, scattered through the city, were looting the abandoned houses and the fires were due to their carelessness. But he had not yet managed to fall asleep when, at three o'clock in the morning, he was informed that Gostinny Dvor, in the commercial district of Moscow, was on fire, that houses were burning which French soldiers had never entered, or in the vicinity where no French soldiers had yet been. A strong wind was blowing which swept the sparks from the burning houses to neighboring buildings and set fire to them too.

The sun rose, and in the daylight the glare of the fires was hidden by a thick pall of smoke. No doubt a number of people had remained in Moscow who at great risk to their lives were determined to destroy all they could rather than allow anything to fall into the hands of the enemy. But there is no doubt also that many of the fires were started by the French soldiers when they pillaged the abandoned houses and shops.

The conflagration grew. The whole of Kitai Gorod, the commercial center of Moscow, was ablaze. On the evening of September 15 the granaries on the banks of the Moscow River caught fire and the sparks blew up a large grenade and bomb dump that had been abandoned by the Russian garrison. So strong was the glare of the conflagration that some parts of the city seemed to be bathed in daylight.

That night Napoleon was roused from his sleep by the bright light that shone through his window in the Kremlin Palace. He passed from window to window facing different parts of the city and on all sides he was almost blinded by the glare of enormous tongues of flame shooting up to the sky. He had taken up his quarters in the Kremlin together with his attendants and the Old Guard. The French artillery stores had been transferred here, too. This created a serious danger for himself, his suite, his General Staff and his Old Guard, for the wind was still strong and was blowing the flames

toward the Kremlin. One of its towers was already burning.

Very pale, but now quite calm after the excitement resulting from his sudden awakening, Napoleon gazed through the palace window at burning Moscow and said: "They are setting fire to it themselves. What a people! They are Scythians!" Another time he said: "What determination! Barbarians! What a frightful spectacle!"

Marshal Mortier, who had done all he possibly could to save the Kremlin, categorically declared that the Emperor must immediately leave the Kremlin, for otherwise he was in danger of perishing in the flames; but Napoleon dallied. On entering the palace for the first time on the previous evening he had said to his aides: "And so, at last I am in Moscow, in the ancient palace of the tsars, in the Kremlin!" He knew the place that the Kremlin held in the history of Russia and he was reluctant to leave it after having been there less than a day. But there was no time for reflection. Every moment the flames threatened to envelop the palace and cut off all escape. Day dawned, but the situation became still worse. It became difficult to breathe owing to the fumes and smoke that were penetrating the palace. "What savage determination!" Napoleon kept on repeating. "What a people! What a people!"

The marshals and the members of his entourage again implored the Emperor to leave the palace immediately. On all sides cries were heard: "The Kremlin is burning!" The Emperor decided to transfer his quarters to Peter's Palace, which stood in a park situated, at that time, outside the city.

He left the Kremlin accompanied by his suite and the Old Guard, but he nearly perished in this attempt to save himself. Describing this scene, Count Ségur, one of those who accompanied the Emperor, wrote:

"We were surrounded by a sea of fire. The flames cut us off from all exits from the fortress and drove us back at our first attempts to get out. After groping round for some time, we at last found a narrow track between the brick walls lead-

ing out to the Moscow River. By this track, Napoleon, his officers and his guards managed to slip out of the Kremlin. But what did they gain by that? They found themselves nearer to the conflagration, and could neither retreat nor remain where they were. But how to go forward? How could one plunge into this surging sea of fire?

“People were running through the city, stunned by the storm and blinded with dust, not knowing where they were, for the streets had vanished amidst the smoke and ruins. Nevertheless, we had to make haste. Every moment the roar of the flames grew in intensity. The only crooked street visible, burning on all sides, seemed to lead into this hell rather than out of it. The Emperor, on foot, unhesitatingly plunged into this dangerous passage. He stepped out into the conflagration amidst the noise of collapsing arches, of falling beams and of red-hot sheet-iron roofs caving in all around him.

“We walked on burning earth between two walls of fire. The penetrating heat seared our eyes, which, however, we were compelled to keep open in view of the danger. The air was suffocating; dust and sparks flew around, and tongues of flame licked us on all sides. We began to breathe in short, dry gasps, and we were almost asphyxiated by the smoke. . . .”

The conflagration raged for two more days and destroyed nearly three-fourths of the city. Fires continued to break out even after this, and hardly a day passed during the period that the French were in Moscow but what fires broke out in some part of the town or other. All this time Napoleon was in a most somber mood. He realized that it would be more difficult now to conclude peace with the Tsar than before; but he was not yet aware that at that moment it was not only difficult but impossible to conclude peace with Russia; that the war which he thought had come to a close with the capture of Moscow had only just begun for the Russian people.

In the prevailing situation Napoleon was confronted with two urgent tasks of primary importance. The first was to secure the conclusion of peace, here in Moscow. The second was to prevent the stocks of food and clothing that might survive the fire from being looted by his own soldiers, and to



restore discipline in his motley army. Both tasks proved to be beyond his powers.

The fire was already subsiding in the central parts of the city when Napoleon left Peter's Palace to return to the Kremlin, but it still raged on the outskirts. On the day he resumed his residence in the Kremlin he was informed that Major General Tutolmin, the head of the Moscow orphanage, had asked for a guard to be placed near this institution to protect the inmates who had remained in Moscow. Quite unexpectedly, Napoleon not only granted Tutolmin's request, but even invited him to the Kremlin. During his conversation with the general, Napoleon was very kind and gracious.

He asked Tutolmin whether he had any other request to make. To this the General replied that he would like to receive permission to send a report to the Tsarina, who was the patroness of all the orphanages in Russia. Napoleon not only consented to this, but asked Tutolmin to add a note saying that he, Napoleon, respected Alexander as of old, and would like to conclude peace. Tutolmin wrote as he was requested, and sent his report off that very day by an official of his department who, by a signed order of the Emperor, was allowed to pass the French outposts.

This first attempt to conclude peace was totally unlike Napoleon's usual behavior, and this alone showed that the Emperor did not feel quite confident.

The second attempt was made two days after Napoleon's conversation with Tutolmin. A rich Moscow gentleman named Yakovlev (father of the famous Alexander Ivanovich Herzen) found himself and his family stranded in Moscow and was in extremely straitened circumstances. He therefore appealed to Marshal Mortier for assistance to leave the city. The Marshal had known Yakovlev in Paris, and on the strength of this acquaintance he reported his request to Napoleon. Napoleon summoned Yakovlev to appear before him. Yakovlev came and repeated his request. Napoleon at first refused but after Yakovlev had implored him again and again to reconsider his decision he thought for a moment

and suddenly asked: "Will you take a letter from me to the Emperor? If you will, I will give you a pass for yourself and all your family."

"I would accept Your Majesty's proposal, but I cannot guarantee to fulfill it," answered Yakovlev.

"Will you give me your word of honor that you will make every possible effort to deliver the letter in person?" asked Napoleon. "I promise on my honor, Sire," answered Yakovlev.

On September 20, Napoleon wrote a letter to Alexander, and Yakovlev took it with him. That letter reached its destination. Although not a direct proposal for peace, it was a peace proposal nevertheless. But Alexander left Tutolmin's report as well as Napoleon's letter unanswered.

Two weeks elapsed. On the morning of October 5 two French officers appeared at the Russian outposts under a white flag and stated that General Marquis Lauriston had arrived and desired to meet Field Marshal Kutuzov. The meeting was arranged, and an interesting conversation ensued. Lauriston stated that it was not the French who had set fire to Moscow. The Russian general replied that he was aware of this; the fire had been started by the Russians who held Moscow in no higher estimation than any other city in the empire. Lauriston then said: "You must not think that our position is desperate; our armies are about equal." To this Kutuzov replied that the Russian people regarded the French in the same light as the Tartars who had invaded Russia under Genghiz Khan. "But surely there is some difference?" expostulated Lauriston. "The Russian people do not see any," answered the Field Marshal.

With these impressions on his mind, and fully conscious of the utter fruitlessness of his visit to Kutuzov, Lauriston returned to the Kremlin to report to Napoleon. But Napoleon was so keen on concluding peace in Moscow—so as to be able to pose as victor—that he resolved to write to Alexander urging him to reply to his proposal. On October 20, fifteen days after Lauriston's conversation with Kutuzov, Colonel Bertemi

was sent to the Russian Field Marshal with a letter from Marshal Berthier, Chief of Napoleon's General Staff, asking whether a reply had been received from the Tsar and urging the necessity of "restoring order"—of concluding peace. Kutuzov replied to Berthier stating that no reply had been received and that the delay was due to the distance and the difficulties of traveling on the autumn roads. To this he added:

"It is difficult to restrain a people which has been infuriated by all that it has seen; a people that has known no war within its frontiers for three hundred years; which is prepared to sacrifice itself for its native land and which draws no distinction between what is customary and what is not customary in ordinary warfare."

Strictly speaking, in this period, from October 6, when Lauriston returned from his conversation with Kutuzov, to October 14, when he began to issue orders which clearly indicated that he was preparing to evacuate Moscow, Napoleon did not expect any reply from St. Petersburg; nor was it possible for a reply to arrive earlier than the 18th, 19th or the 20th at the very outside. The Emperor was extremely irritated. For whole nights he paced the grounds of the Kremlin discussing all sorts of new plans; but to Count Daru he confessed the real cause of his perturbation. The question uppermost in his mind was: how to extricate himself from the situation? How could he who had been accustomed only to attack and to conquer now start a retreat?

On October 14 Napoleon instructed Berthier to repeat his order that not a single French battery on the way to the Grand Army be allowed to pass beyond Smolensk, and that beginning with October 17, no artillery or cavalry units should be sent to Moscow, but they be kept at Mozhaisk, Gzhatsk or Vyazma (wherever this order found them). "The Army will move to a different position," stated the order. The wounded were evacuated from Moscow to Mozhaisk.

On October 18 Napoleon was holding a review of Marshal

Ney's corps in the courtyard of the Kremlin when suddenly the sound of artillery fire reached his ears. Shortly after, an adjutant arrived post haste with the information that Kutuzov had suddenly left Tarutino, had attacked Murat and had defeated him.

Actually, the sound of guns that reached Napoleon emanated from the positions occupied by the vanguard of the French army on the banks of the River Chernishna under the command of Murat. This force, consisting of about 22,000 men, had been standing here in complete inactivity since September 24. Kutuzov had left it in peace, and Murat, too, had refrained from launching any operations against Kutuzov's forces in Tarutino.

The Russian generals had taken Lauriston's visit to Kutuzov as evidence that the French army was in difficulties, and from that day Generals Bennigsen, Ermolov, Baggovut, and Platov had continuously pleaded with Kutuzov to allow them to attack Murat's force. Kutuzov did not want an engagement, even a minor one; but he yielded to his officers' pleadings, deciding beforehand, however, not to allow this skirmish to develop into a big battle. On October 16, Kutuzov inspected the disposition of the Russian forces for the impending battle proposed by General Toll and approved it.

On October 18, General Baggovut attacked Murat's left flank and Orlov-Denisov his right flank. General Bennigsen undertook the general direction of the battle. Kutuzov kept in the background. Orlov-Denisov's first cavalry charge was successful. The French were forced back and a number of guns were captured. But the French rallied and met two regiments of dismounted chasseurs with withering fire. Among those to fall was General Baggovut. Bennigsen, judging that he lacked sufficient forces to carry his attack to a successful conclusion, asked Kutuzov for reinforcements, but the Field Marshal refused, and even the earnest solicitations of Ermolov, Konovnitsin and Miloradovich in support of Bennigsen failed to move him. Murat was thus able to retreat slowly and in perfect order to Spas-Kupla, on the other side of the River

Chernishna, saving himself by heavy fire from pursuit by Orlov-Denisov.

The battle of October 18—which for some reason is called the battle of Tarutino, although that village lay far to the south of the scene of battle—had enormous political and moral consequences, notwithstanding its meager military results. Morally, it served to raise the spirits of the Russian army, for it was the first purely offensive operation undertaken by the Russians in this war, and, above all, it was successful. Politically, it gave Napoleon the final impetus that decided him to leave Moscow. The battle of Tarutino led him to believe that Kutuzov felt strong enough to launch offensive operations and he therefore considered it advisable to move to the south before the Russian commander-in-chief could bar the road.

On October 19 the French army began to leave Moscow. The column consisted of 100,000 troops (Mortier's garrison of 8,000 men temporarily remained) and an immense train of wagons and carts piled up with loot. And in this train, on foot and in carriages, were thousands of foreigners with their wives and children who had remained in Moscow in anticipation of the arrival of the French and were now leaving in fear of the vengeance of the Russian people.

The Emperor marched to Kaluga and on the way picked up the remnants of Murat's force. He sent an order to Mortier to blow up the Kremlin and leave Moscow to join the retreating army.

The evacuation of Moscow continued throughout the 20th and 21st of October. On the 21st explosions in the Kremlin rent the air and made the very ground of Moscow tremble. The arsenal and part of the Kremlin walls were blown sky high; fires broke out in the armory and in the churches. The Nikolsky Tower, as well as the towers facing the river, were partially destroyed. Happily, the rain had moistened the fuses of the mines and so the explosions did not cause all the damage that Napoleon had expected. Nevertheless, they were powerful enough to destroy buildings outside the Kremlin as well

as within. The tall belfry known as "Ivan the Great" escaped destruction by sheer accident; the fuse of the mine placed under it was moistened by the rain. After every explosion the Kremlin Square was filled with the howls and groans of the wounded and the dying. The last explosion occurred near the Kremlin walls at dawn on October 23, and several hours afterwards the last of Mortier's garrison left the city.

## THE RETREAT OF NAPOLEON'S ARMY AND THE SPREAD OF PARTISAN WARFARE

**N**APOLEON'S army, 100,000 strong, with its artillery and ammunition wagons, filed out of Moscow in an endless, motley stream, followed by a long train of baggage wagons belonging to different military units. And these in turn were followed by carts, wagons and carriages filled with loot, belonging to the marshals, generals, officers and common soldiers. Then came more army baggage wagons, artillery, and ammunition carts—seemingly without end.

Napoleon had decided to retreat to Smolensk not by the old road, but by the new road through Kaluga, for he had no stores of any kind on the old road, and, besides, that road had been utterly wrecked. True, he had no stores on the new road either, but as Marshal Davout expressed it, there were still "untouched villages" on that road, whereas the old road was a howling wilderness. "We shall go Kaluga!" exclaimed Napoleon. "And woe to those who stand in my path!"

This circumstance brings out in striking relief the importance of Kutuzov's famous maneuver-march to Tarutino. Had he not accomplished this he would have been unable to erect the impassable barrier south of Maloyaroslavets and cut across the French army's line of march to Kaluga. As soon as Kutuzov heard that Napoleon had left Moscow, he declared that Russia was saved. His army was augmented by the arrival of reinforcements and the enrollment of new conscripts. In the middle of October he had a force under his command of 85,000 men, not counting the Cossacks. Napoleon's army received much fewer reinforcements.

At 11 P.M. on October 22 a courier arrived at Kutuzov's

headquarters in Tarutino with a report from Dokhturov to the effect that Napoleon was marching on Maloyaroslavets and that he, Dokhturov, needed assistance. Kutuzov, however, took no action for the moment. Here he pursued the same tactics as he had pursued six days earlier at the battle of Tarutino. He knew, of course, that Napoleon must not be allowed to reach Kaluga, for if he did he would capture all the matériel that had been prepared for the Russian army and would, therefore, be in a much better position to reach Smolensk. Moreover, the Kaluga-Smolensk road would be able to maintain the French troops much better than the Moscow-Smolensk road.

Kutuzov ordered Dokhturov to march to the village of Fominskoye and attack the French force there, which, according to the reports of spies, numbered 10,000 men. On the way, however, Dokhturov learned that Fominskoye was occupied, not by a force of 10,000 men, but by nearly the whole of the French army headed by Napoleon, and that the French had already occupied Borovsk, a town much further to the south of Fominskoye and on the direct road to Kaluga. Dokhturov realized that it was necessary to turn at once sharply to the south and hasten to Maloyaroslavets, between Borovsk and Kaluga.

Fearing to disobey Kutuzov's orders, Dokhturov sent a courier to him to ask permission to march to Maloyaroslavets.

Kutuzov gave the required permission, but between the going and coming of the message much valuable time was lost. Marching all night with but brief halts, Dokhturov reached Maloyaroslavets at 4 A.M. on October 23. Very soon after, however, Napoleon's army arrived and drove the Russian chasseurs from the outskirts of the town.

Eight times that day, amidst ceaseless firing from both sides, Maloyaroslavets changed hands, the Russians driving the French out at the point of the bayonet, and then the French driving out the Russians. Dokhturov's force was nearly at its last gasp when at 2 P.M. Rayevsky's corps came



to his aid, and at 4 P.M. Kutuzov himself and the whole Russian army arrived.

Kutuzov made a detour and took up his position on the road between Maloyaroslavets and Kaluga. Night set in. The French, holding the town after the eighth assault, waited in expectation of a general engagement. The cannon fire ceased. The town was ablaze.

All that terrible night, gazing at the glare of the burning town and hearing the groans of the wounded, the cries of the French soldiers, and here and there repeated bursts of musket fire, the Russian army waited in anticipation of another Borodino, for there could not be the slightest doubt that Napoleon himself was now confronting them with the whole of his Grand Army. Early in the morning of the 25th Field Marshal Kutuzov ordered his army to retire about two miles south of Maloyaroslavets. He had decided not to give battle here. His sole aim was to liberate Russia from the invaders with a minimum of loss to the Russian army.

Miloradovich's vanguard retreated only a very short distance from the town. Napoleon realized that to break through to Kaluga he would have to fight a general engagement on a scale no less than that at Borodino. He dared not do this and for the first time in his life Napoleon retreated before the prospect of a general engagement. And for the first time in this sanguinary Russian campaign he turned his back on the Russian army and, instead of the pursuer, became the pursued.

Marching through devastated towns and villages, the French army burned everything that had survived the earlier conflagration. It was already half-starving when it started the retreat from Moscow, but on the way to Smolensk it had to traverse a road which, as a participant in this campaign observed, "had already been denuded three months ago."

Gradually the food shortage among the troops assumed catastrophic proportions. It was hunger more than the frost that rapidly broke up Napoleon's army on the road from Maloyaroslavets to Smolensk. Among the French forces dis-

cipline was still maintained, but among the German and Italian, and partly among the Polish forces, the breakdown of discipline was assuming most menacing proportions.

Meanwhile this national war, carried on up to now by the operations of the regular army and the unorganized operations of the peasants, assumed a new form—partisan warfare. This is how it began.

Five days before the battle of Borodino, Lieutenant Colonel Denis Davydov, who for five years had served as Bagration's adjutant, came to his superior and submitted to him a plan to harass Napoleon's long line of communications from the Niemen to Gzhatsk. He proposed that constant attacks and sudden raids be made on this line, on the French bases, on couriers and food trains. This, he suggested, could be carried out by small mounted detachments, which could rapidly go into hiding and escape pursuit after each operation. Furthermore, he suggested that these irregular units could become points of concentration of armed peasants. Bagration submitted this plan to Kutuzov, who allowed Denis Davydov a force of fifty Hussars and eighty Cossacks. This force set out and, making a detour of the Grand Army, succeeded in getting into its rear. Such was the very modest and so far imperceptible beginning of the partisan warfare, which was undoubtedly one of the decisive factors in the second phase of the war of 1812.

Regular army officers were not the only organizers of partisan units. For example, on August 31, 1812, the Russian rear guard was making a fighting retreat from Tsarevo-Zaimishche, which the French had occupied. During the fighting Ermolay Chetvertakov, a Russian dragoon, had his horse shot under him and he was taken prisoner. At Gzhatsk he succeeded in escaping from the guard and made his way to the village of Basmany, far to the south of the Smolensk highroad along which the French army was marching. Here the same idea of harassing Napoleon's army by means of irregular forces occurred to Chetvertakov. He decided to form peasant partisan units.

When he made his proposal to the peasants of Basmany, they were very suspicious of him and he obtained only one recruit. With this recruit he made for another village. On the road they encountered two Frenchmen, whom they killed, taking their clothes in order to disguise themselves. Further on, in the village of Zadkovo, they encountered two French cavalrymen. They killed these soldiers as well and took their horses. In this village Chetvertakov obtained forty-seven recruits. This small force, under Chetvertakov's command, first wiped out a party of twelve French cuirassiers, and later exterminated and put to flight a half-company of French soldiers, fifty-nine strong, and captured their baggage.

These successes created a deep impression upon the peasantry in this area, so much so that even the village of Basmany now provided 253 volunteers. Chetvertakov, although illiterate, proved to be a splendid organizer, tactician and strategist in partisan warfare. Harassing the enemy by sudden raids, skillfully and warily tracking down small units of Frenchmen and exterminating them by lightning attacks, he succeeded in preventing a large area of territory around Gzhatsk from being looted and devastated by the French. Chetvertakov was ruthless in his operations; and, besides, the peasants were so fierce in their hatred of the French that they could not be restrained.

From the beginning of September to the end of November, when Napoleon retreated across the Berezina, the partisans undoubtedly performed great and useful service. They were splendid and often recklessly bold scouts. One of them, Figner by name, used to disguise himself as a French soldier and—on numerous occasions—wander around the French camps. Another named Seslavin once silently approached a French non-commissioned officer, picked him up and flung him across his saddle and brought him to the Russian headquarters. Davydov, with a party of 200 to 300 men, caused forces five times that number to flee in panic, captured their baggage, released Russian prisoners of war and sometimes captured enemy guns.

The partisans obtained valuable assistance in their operations from the peasants, who displayed even greater willingness to cooperate with them than with the regular army. This assistance was particularly valuable at the beginning of the movement. In the Bronnitski District, Moscow Gubernia, in the village of Nicola-Pogorely, near Vyazma, in Bezhetsk, Dorogobuzh and Serpukhov, the peasants tracked down small enemy units, killed the French foragers and marauders, and willingly provided the partisan units with food for men and horses. Without this assistance the partisans would not have achieved the results they did.

Then came the retreat of the Grand Army, which began with the senseless blowing up of the Kremlin. This malicious act infuriated the people when they returned to Moscow and found the Kremlin in ruins. They regarded it as the crowning insult to all they had suffered. In conformity with Napoleon's orders all the towns and villages on the French army's line of retreat were burned to the ground. In Vyazma a number of Russian prisoners of war were found locked up in the church, which had been set on fire. The church had escaped destruction by sheer accident. These actions served still further to fan the fury of the Russian people.

The peasants did not confine their operations to helping the partisan units track down and kill marauders and stragglers, and exterminate foragers, although it must be said that these were the most telling blows they struck at the starving Grand Army. Guerasim Kurin, a peasant of the village of Pavlovo near Bogorodotsk, formed a peasant unit, armed it with weapons taken from dead Frenchmen and, with his assistant Stulov, led it into battle even against French cavalry, and put them to flight.

In this struggle the peasant women displayed no less valor than the men. For example Vasilisa, the wife of the elder of a village in the Sychevski District, Smolensk Gubernia, frequently attacked straggling French baggage wagons with pitchfork or scythe, killed many French soldiers, and took many prisoners. She was by no means an exception.

Napoleon and his Guards marched in the vanguard of the retreating army. On November 8 he entered Smolensk and was followed by sections of the various units of the army. By the 15th the whole army had arrived. During this dreadful march from Maloyaroslavets Napoleon and his generals had placed all their hopes on Smolensk. Here, they expected to find stocks of food and a fairly quiet haven where the weary and starving men and horses would obtain some rest and recuperate from the terrible sufferings they had endured during the retreat. But it turned out otherwise. In this lifeless, demolished and smoldering city the retreating army received a blow that utterly broke the spirit of many of its units. Hardly any food was found.

From that moment the retreat became a flight, and all that the Grand Army had suffered on the road from Maloyaroslavets paled into insignificance compared with the abyss that now opened up before it and swallowed it almost entirely.

The last days of this bloody struggle were approaching. The death throes of Napoleon's army lasted from November 17, when it had started out from Smolensk, to the evening of December 14, when its rear guard, consisting of several hundred able-bodied men under Marshal Ney, together with several thousands of unarmed, wounded and sick men, crossed the Niemen and reached the Prussian side.

On November 14, after a stay of five days, Napoleon with his Guards marched out of Smolensk in the direction of Krasnoye. He was followed by the remnants of the army corps commanded by Viceroy Eugène, Davout and Murat. Behind them marched the rear guard, commanded by Marshal Ney. Following on Ney's heels came the Russian forces. The days were approaching when Ney was destined by a desperate struggle and skillful maneuver to save Napoleon and his 30,000 to 45,000 men, and the 30,000 sick, unarmed, weary and disabled men who had plodded behind the army from Smolensk through Krasnoye to Dubrovno and Orsha.

On November 20 Napoleon left Orsha. Three days later the

advance patrols of his vanguard saw before them a long strip of murky water. This was a fairly wide river with very muddy banks, not yet frozen, but here and there already covered with small patches of ice. It was difficult to ford this river even under ordinary conditions; how much more difficult was it now that it was beginning to freeze. This was the Berezina River. Napoleon and his Guards were approaching a mortally dangerous barrier, which they had to overcome or else perish.

## THE CROSSING OF THE BEREZINA AND THE DOOM OF NAPOLEON'S ARMY

ON NOVEMBER 16 the city of Minsk, where Napoleon expected to find large stocks of food and munitions, was captured by the Russian troops, the vanguard of Chichagov's army. Napoleon learned of this two days later, before entering Orsha. Soon after, he was amazed to hear that Chichagov had already occupied Borisov. He at once sent orders to his generals to concentrate as many troops as possible near Borisov in order to cover his retreat across the Borisov Bridge to the right bank of the Berezina.

On November 25 he succeeded by a series of skillful maneuvers and demonstrations to direct Chichagov's attention on Borisov and south of it, and while the latter was concentrating his forces there Murat, Oudinot and two generals of the Corps of Engineers built two bridges across the Studianka, a tributary of the Berezina.

On the night of November 25 the Imperial Guard arrived at the Studianka. At dawn next day Napoleon arrived. He gave the order to cross the river at once. At that moment he had at his command only 19,000 men. The crossing was started under the fire of General Chaplits, who was the first to learn that Napoleon was diverting his troops from Borisov. Napoleon ordered that the bridgeheads on both banks of the river be strongly guarded. All day long troops continued to arrive. At night he ordered Marshal Ney with the remnants of his corps and the Young Guard to cross to the right bank and, battalion following battalion, the crossing continued all night and during the whole morning of the 27th. At about 2 P.M. on the 27th Napoleon with the Old Guard crossed the river, followed by other divisions.

The French army lined up on the right bank of the river, and when the last of the forces had crossed Napoleon ordered the bridges to be blown up.

And now the world was to witness the final death agony of this great horde. Napoleon had no time to arrange for the crossing of the wounded and sick and the foreign civilians who followed his army from Moscow; they were all left to their fate. An eye witness has described the scene that ensued as follows:

“On the evening of that day when Napoleon crossed the Berezina, the Veselovski plain, which is rather wide, presented a horrible and indescribable picture. It was covered with carriages and carts—most of them broken and piled up one on top of the other—and strewn with the bodies of dying women and children who had followed the army from Moscow either to escape the horrors of that city or to accompany their fellow countrymen. . . .

“The fate of these unfortunate people caught between two fighting armies was awful. Many of them were trampled under the horses’ hoofs, others were crushed by the heavy wagons, while many were mowed down by the hail of shot and shell, or drowned in the river in trying to ford it with the troops. At the most moderate estimate, ten thousand people must have perished. . . .”

But beside this gloomy picture we have another provided by the reminiscences of other eye-witnesses, which reveals the magnanimity and humanity displayed by the Russian soldiers toward their vanquished foe. General Loewenstern, for example, wrote: “A frightful snowstorm was raging; I lost my way and found myself entirely alone.” His horse carried him, half-frozen, toward the Russian campfires.

“In the forest where we were bivouacked,” he continues, “many French soldiers were hiding for the night. They came out without their arms to warm themselves at our fires. Great was our astonishment next morning when we saw forty or



fifty Frenchmen squatting in a circle round each fire without betraying the slightest sign of fear. Our good, kind Karpenko, who had ruthlessly cut down the enemy when he was face to face with him, saved the lives of many of these unfortunate men."

At this time the position of the French army was catastrophic.

"The wind and frost were cruel; all the roads were snowed under. Crowds of Frenchmen were staggering in a field near by. Some of them managed to light a fire and sat around it. Others cut slices of flesh from the dead horses and ate it, some roasted and some even raw. Soon I came across people who were freezing, or already frozen to death. . . ."

By this time hunger among the troops had reached its highest pitch. On November 28 a severe frost set in, which reached  $31^{\circ}$  below zero (F) and lasted until December 12.

The historian Ségur, who was with the French army at that time, asserts that about 60,000 men crossed the Berezina with Napoleon and that another 20,000 from the army corps on the flanks joined them. Of these 80,000, however, 40,000 perished on the way from the Berezina to Vilna. And many more were destined to perish on the way from Vilna to the Niemen.

On December 9 the first groups of half-frozen and starving men entered Vilna. They immediately ransacked the stores so that they could eat and clothe themselves before they were driven off by the Russians. Next day the first Russian units began to approach Vilna. The French troops retired to the Niemen at Kovno.

Napoleon had left the army at Smorgonia on December 6, appointing Murat, King of Naples, commander-in-chief of its remnants. At that moment Napoleon regarded the Russian campaign merely as a lost round in a game, and his mind was already absorbed with plans for another which he hoped he would play better than he had this one. He was not yet

aware that the wound inflicted upon him by the Russian people was mortal, and would put an end to his world empire.

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The Russian campaign drew to a close. In the latter half of December the survivors of Macdonald's units, and small crowds of weary men who had lost their way in the forests of Lithuania, continued to cross into Prussia. On the whole, less than 30,000 men remained under the command of Murat and, after his departure, under the command of the Viceroy of Italy, Eugène de Beauharnais. And this was all that remained of the Grand Army—of the 420,000 men who, on June 24, 1812, crossed the Niemen on four bridges, and the 150,000 men who subsequently joined this army.

## THE REASON FOR THE COLLAPSE OF NA- POLEON'S POWER IN EUROPE

SEVERAL generations of thinkers have been uninterrupted-ly engaged in probing the causes of Napoleon's final catastrophe, the climax of which was reached with amazing rapidity. In the first months of 1812 Napoleon had reached the pinnacle of power. He was the autocratic ruler—either directly or through his viceroys, governor-generals, or absolutely obedient vassals—over a territory commencing from the Niemen and including Danzig, Hamburg and Amsterdam, right up to Madrid, Calabria and Illyria.

His mere word was enough to dethrone any king or to wipe off the map any state on the continent of Europe. He could quarter troops wherever he desired and keep them there as long as he pleased. There were only two powers in Europe who were independent of him—England in the extreme West, and Russia in the extreme East. But Napoleon was confident that, having conquered the continent, he would be able to subdue these countries too.

In the spring of 1811 Napoleon received in his palace in the Tuileries the Bavarian General von Brede. In the course of conversation this general diffidently and respectfully expressed the opinion that it would be unwise to pick a quarrel with Russia and attack her. Napoleon with a peremptory gesture interrupted the general and said in a sharp and emphatic tone: "Within three years from now I shall be ruler of the world!" But within three years the greatest empire that had existed since the time of Alexander the Great was a heap of ruins. . . .

In the opinion of military experts, in these last years—years of frightful, sanguinary struggle—Napoleon often displayed

the same supreme perfection in the art of war that he had shown in his numerous earlier campaigns. This was the case, for example, in 1813-14. The forces at his command at the beginning of this final struggle were far larger than he had commanded on any previous occasion. Consequently, the collapse of this colossus must have been due to far deeper causes than the loss of a particular battle, or even of a whole campaign.

In the course of Napoleon's career an extremely important change occurred—symptoms of which were visible long before his débâcle—which made that catastrophe inevitable. Unless this factor is understood, every attempt to explain the collapse of Napoleon's Empire will amount to no more than the repetition of the innumerable mystical, romantic and idealistic fantasies with which the history of his reign is already so replete.

Napoleon was indomitable and every attempt to resist him ended with the defeat of his adversary. But this was true as long as he served as the "surgeon of history"—accelerating the operation of historically progressive principles and destroying by fire and sword the obsolete and doomed feudal system in Europe. It was this period when Napoleon was crushing and sweeping away the feudal-aristocratic and absolutist monarchies of Europe that Marx and Engels had in mind when they said that in a certain sense the Napoleonic Wars did for the continent of Europe what the guillotine had done in France during the Reign of Terror. European feudal absolutism could never recover from the frightful blows that Napoleon dealt it; and in the countries that he had conquered the sympathies of all progressive people—sometimes concealed and sometimes unambiguously expressed—were undoubtedly on the side of the conqueror.

Symptoms of these changes had been visible for a long time. After Austerlitz its baneful effects were felt in the Germanic countries, in Belgium, Holland and Italy; and they were seen even by those who in 1804 saw nothing prejudicial in Napoleon assuming the title of Emperor, and who believed that the role of liberator of nations could be played even by

one who wore the royal purple. But after the Peace of Tilsit all illusions on this score had to be abandoned.

Napoleon began openly to advance the principle that he had been applying for a considerable time past. The fatal flaw in this principle was that it drew a distinction between France, or the "old departments," as it was called, and the rest of conquered Europe, which was called the "new departments." According to this principle the French were the privileged, ruling race, and they alone were to enjoy to the full all the benefits and privileges gained by the victorious sword of the Emperor. The other nations of Europe were destined to be the vassals of France.

Although designating himself "Emperor of the West" and aspiring to become the ruler of the world, Napoleon nevertheless deliberately played the part of a French national sovereign, claiming the right to rob all his other subjects in the interests of the French. "For me the interests of the nation are supreme," he said, meaning by that the interests of the French bourgeoisie, for whom Germany, Italy, Spain, Holland, Belgium, the Germanic countries, the Duchy of Poland, etc., were to serve primarily as markets and sources of raw materials. He deliberately ruined the countries which were likely to become competitors of France; and he openly stated that the French deserved special protection not only because they were the most "loyal" of his innumerable subjects, but also because they were a superior race.

He expressed these opinions with his characteristic bluntness and candor because he was absolutely convinced of the infallibility of his fundamental principles. For example, in estimating his losses in battle, he considered that the only casualties worth considering were those suffered by the French units of his multi-national armies. This is what he said about the Grand Army that perished in the snows in Russia: "In Russia our losses were extremely heavy, but not as heavy as many suppose. The Imperial Army had barely 140,000 French-speaking men, and the campaign of 1812 cost old France proper only 50,000 men."

He emphasized the same point in his famous conversation with Prince Metternich in Dresden on June 28, 1813, when he refused to conclude peace with the Allies. He admitted in that conversation that among those who perished in 1812 "were 100,000 of the finest soldiers of France." "These I am really sorry for," he said. "As for the rest, they were only Italians, Poles and, above all, Germans!" And he pronounced the word "Germans" with a contemptuous grimace. "Granted," answered Metternich, "but Your Majesty will agree that this is not the argument to use when speaking to a German."

Napoleon oppressed economically and ruined the European nations he had conquered not only by means of his continental blockade, but by other stern measures which he imposed upon them in the economic field to prevent them from developing their independent economic life. For example, he prohibited the introduction of modern technical improvements in the conquered countries; he ordered that all stocks of raw silk be exported from Italy for the use of the silk weavers of Lyons, leaving for the Italian silk weavers only what surplus the French did not need. He deliberately prohibited the building of roads essential for commerce, and ordered that thousands of Merino sheep be driven from Spain into France, thus depriving the Spanish cloth weavers of fine wool. In the "ideological" sphere, so to speak, he did not hesitate to assert at every opportunity that it was the birthright of the French to rule over the rest of mankind.

After the Peace of Tilsit, when the border-line between the permissible and impermissible rapidly began to lose all significance for him, Napoleon no longer confronted the peoples of Europe—and the progressive class that the bourgeoisie represented at that time—as a liberator, but as a cruel tyrant who divided mankind into lords and slaves, placing in the first category the French alone and condemning the rest of mankind to the second. He began to be regarded as a ruthless despot who deliberately ruined the countries unfortunate enough to come under his heel; and it became the dream of

the whole of progressive mankind to rid the world of this tyrant.

The destruction of the Grand Army was intimately connected with the change that took place in Napoleon's historic activities, and is therefore a matter of supreme interest from the point of view of the subject we are discussing. In the first years of Napoleon's reign his army was invincible. But to the extent that it absorbed elements that were alien to the French its spirit changed; its monolithic compactness and unity, which had made it such a powerful instrument in the hands of its leader, relaxed. Thus, Napoleon's army began to lose its invincibility long before 1812.

But in that year, reckless of the consequences, he drove into Russia not only soldiers from the multi-racial populations of subjugated Europe but also Spaniards from the Pyrenees peninsula, which he had invaded. The Spanish people had by no means been subjugated and continued to offer fierce and uninterrupted resistance to the conqueror. To fight on behalf of an alien cause, on behalf of a tyrant who was oppressing and ruining one's native land, and knowing that every new victory he achieved only served to rivet the chains of slavery still more firmly on his victims, was more than human nature could stand.

This had a fatal effect upon Napoleon's army, and the signs of its disintegration were visible to all who had eyes to see. Striking evidence of this was seen during the battle of Leipzig, when, at the height of the battle, the Saxons, who had been forcibly driven into the fight, went over to the side of Napoleon's enemies, turned their guns on the French and shot them down at short range.

Thus, the invincibility of Napoleon's army disappeared when he abandoned the historically progressive mission that he had been fulfilling, when the halo of warrior against feudal reaction had faded from his brow, and when he began to use the unlimited power he had acquired in the pursuit not only of reactionary but utterly impossible aims—to transform the French into a ruling nation and all other nations into dumb

beasts of burden. This utter contempt for the material interests and human dignity of the conquered nations, this separation of the peoples into sheep and goats, into a race of lords and a race of slaves, served to disintegrate the army just as it disintegrated the foundations of the great political edifice that Napoleon had erected.

One of the numerous factors that caused Napoleon to undertake the invasion of Russia was the dimming of his formerly brilliant political mind. This had become evident from the moment he came under the spell of the illusion that France was destined to rule all the nations of the globe and that it was his "mission" to organize and lead this ruling French race. What is Russia? A country, like all other countries, destined to be subjugated. If she dares to claim the right to pursue an independent policy, it only shows that "she is challenging fate." This was the idea that he had expressed on more than one occasion even before he expounded it in his proclamation announcing his invasion of Russia.

Napoleon put before the nations of Europe the alternative of either abandoning all thought of Europe ever being free from alien conquerors, or of plunging into a life-and-death struggle to overthrow the despot, and to prove that all the talk about the mission of the French race to rule the world was merely political delirium. Europe took the latter course, and it fell to the lot of the Russian people to bear the brunt of this great struggle. It was Russia that first dispelled the myth, so long prevailing, that Napoleon's army was invincible.

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On June 24, 1812, Napoleon, the greatest soldier the world had ever seen, crossed into Russian territory, and this, as Talleyrand expressed it, marked "the beginning of the end" of his rule in Europe.

On June 22, 1941, the miserable adventurer Hitler, dreaming of becoming a Napoleon, hurled his armies across the frontiers of the Soviet Union. But this perfidious and malicious



enemy miscalculated his own strength and the strength of the Soviet people. Accustomed to easy victories over unarmed nations, or over armies that had been betrayed by their governments and generals, and knowing no other victories, he thought he would have a walkover in the knavish adventure he had undertaken. But at the first impact with the might of the Red Army he learned that at last he had met his master.

The starvation in his country is even greater than the most barren parts of Napoleon's vast empire ever experienced. In the army, which still obeys him—in fear of death—in every regiment and every company of even the most nationally "pure" army corps and division, class hatred and strife reign to a degree that Napoleon's Grand Army never knew.

The case of Napoleon proves to us that even the greatest military leader is powerless and doomed when he sets out to achieve the absolutely impossible aim—inspired exclusively by crude political egoism—of becoming the ruler of the world and of ruthlessly exploiting his own and subjugated peoples.

Today it has again fallen to the lot of the great Russian people to liberate Europe, this time from a far more cruel, despicable and shameful yoke than she had borne before.

As Joseph Stalin said in his famous broadcast of July 3, 1941, on the scorched earth:

"This war with fascist Germany cannot be considered an ordinary war. It is not only a war between two armies, it is also a great war of the entire Soviet people against the German fascist armies.

"The aim of this national war in defense of our country against the fascist oppressors is not only elimination of the danger hanging over our country, but also to aid all the European peoples groaning under the yoke of German fascism.

"In this war of liberation we shall not be alone. In this great war we shall have loyal allies in the peoples of Europe and America, including the German people, who are enslaved by the Hitlerite despots.

"Our war for the freedom of our country will merge with

the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for their independence, for democratic liberties.

“It will be a united front of the peoples standing for freedom and against enslavement and threats of enslavement by Hitler’s fascist armies.” \*

Happily for mankind the beginning of the end is already visible. . . . The Russian people today are displaying the same cool courage and self-sacrifice in the moment of danger as they displayed at the time when Napoleon was forced to admit that the Russian soldiers were braver than any he had had to contend against before. But how much other conditions have changed!

Today the technical equipment of the armed forces of the Soviet Union is in no way inferior to that of the invading enemy, and in many respects is far superior. Basing itself on the experience of all the great wars and battles in history, including those in the present European war, the Red Army is inflicting crushing blows on the arrogant foe. The myth that Hitler’s army is “invincible” has been dispelled. As Stalin said in the broadcast:

“History shows that there are no invincible armies and never have been. Napoleon’s army was considered invincible but it was beaten successively by Russian, English and German armies.” As for Hitler’s German fascist army, “this army had not yet met with serious resistance on the continent of Europe. Only on our territory has it met serious resistance. And if, as a result of this resistance, the finest divisions of Hitler’s German fascist army have been defeated by our Red Army, it means that this army too can be smashed and will be smashed as were the armies of Napoleon and Wilhelm. . . . The men of the Red Army are displaying unexampled valor. Our resistance to the enemy is growing in strength and power.

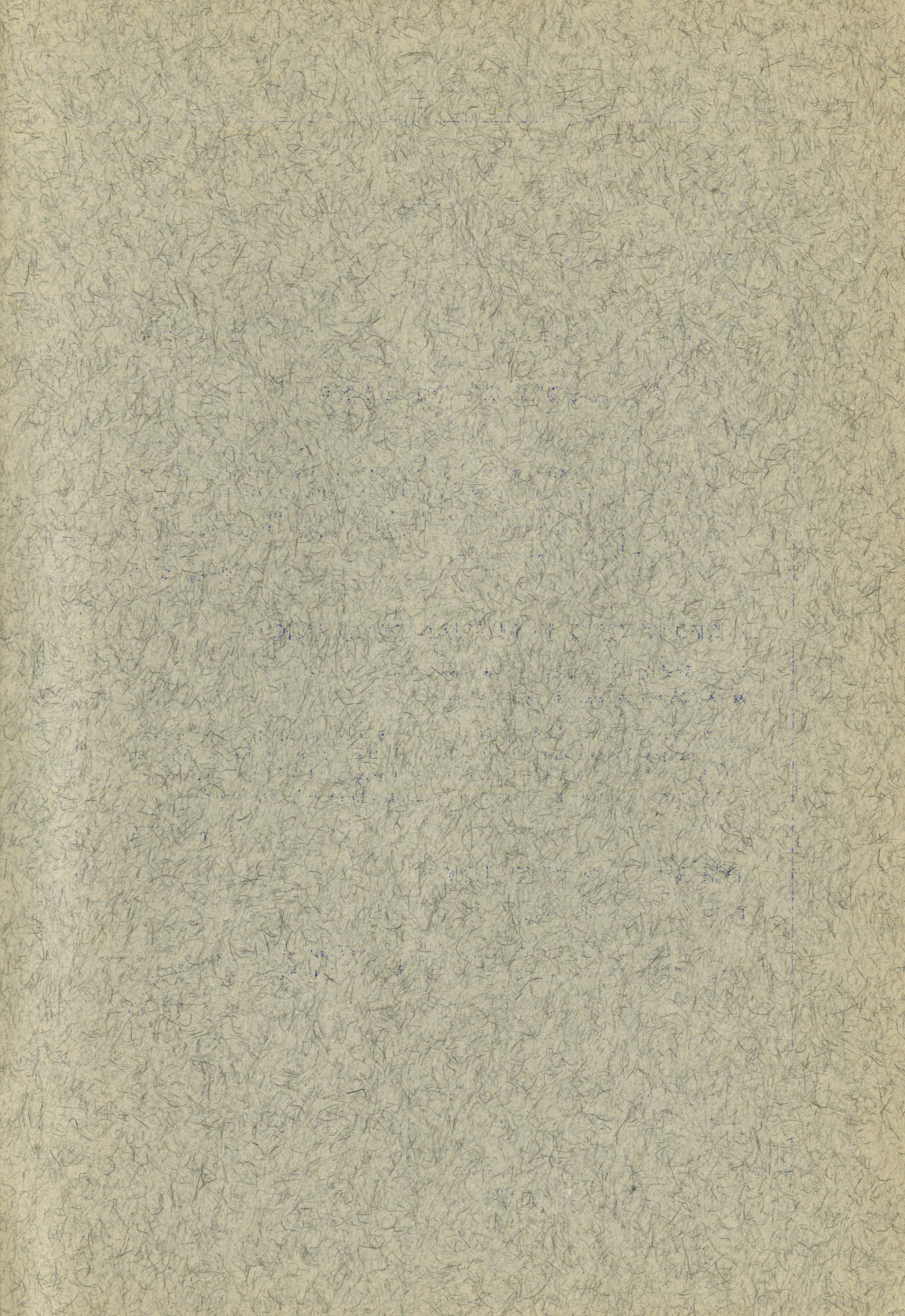
“Side by side with the Red Army, the entire Soviet people are rising in defense of our native land.”\*\*

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\* Joseph Stalin, *Victory Will Be Ours*, Workers Library Publishers, p. 14.

\*\* *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.

The despicable criminals, who, as the renowned German author Heinrich Mann has said, have exceeded all bounds of human baseness, will not succeed in enslaving the 200,000,000 free citizens of the Soviet Union. As Molotov said on behalf of the Soviet people: "Ours is a just cause. The enemy will be crushed. *Victory will be ours!*"



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