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The Red Blizzard

In a dismal forest near Vladivostok, Jap commanders removed their caps, bowed low, and surrendered their entire Manchurian forces to the Russians. Four days later, on Aug. 23, the Soviets fired a thunderous 324-gun victory salute into the Moscow sky and Generalissimo Stalin announced the complete defeat of the Japs. But during those four brief days, the Soviet Far Eastern armies kept rolling with the speed and the fury of a Siberian blizzard.

Airborne troops followed by ground forces took over the key Manchurian cities of Mukden, Harbin, and Hsinking, and the all-weather ports of Dairen and Port Arthur, and pushed deep into Korea. They occupied the Jap-held southern half of bleak Sakhalin Island and landed on the northernmost Kurile Islands that form steppingstones into Northern Japan.

Growing numbers of enemy troops threw away their arms and joined the long lines of ragged Japs trudging down dusty Manchurian roads to Soviet prison stockades. When a number of Jap officers objected to the wholesale surrender, they were killed by their own men. Disgruntled Jap soldiers complained that they had lived for some time on one bowl of rice a day. In five days, the Russians rounded up 281,000 enemy officers and men.

One of the unhappiest of the prisoners was the effeminate, thin-shouldered puppet emperor of Manchuria, Henry Pu Yi. The Soviets found the frightened Manchu and his entourage huddled on an airfield at Mukden. But the Russians apparently considered the frail, nearsighted emperor (who had lost the Chinese throne twice at the ages of 6 and 11) a helpless pawn rather than a dangerous war criminal. Henry Pu Yi, said the Russian commander-in-chief, Marshal Alexander M. Vasilevsky, would be shown "proper" consideration and would be "safe in my hands."