

SEPTEMBER 27, 1942

Don't Count Too Much On Russia's General Winter

The Nazis are smarter than they were a year ago. Here a military expert tells what may happen when the cold shuts in, soon.



WITHIN A FEW WEEKS, Winter again will be sweeping down on the greatest battlefield in history. In the extreme North, where Russian and Nazi troops struggle for the main Allied gateway to the USSR, Murmansk is already falling into its grip. At Leningrad, the Fall rains are almost over. Now comes a month of dangerously dry, clear weather, and then the snow. The Moscow zone will be thickly carpeted in white in seven or eight weeks. Even in the South frost covers the battlefields early in the morning.

Things Are Different

Allied strategists hope that the second Russian war Winter will bring a repetition of the first, when Soviet courage plus Soviet skill in cold-weather fighting finally drove the Nazis back. But this is another year, and we cannot be sure of the outcome. The enemy has not repeated his insane blunder of assuming the war would be over before snow flew. He has prepared carefully.

We can, in fact, be certain only that the bitter Russian weather will bring another round of severe fighting under conditions no New Yorker snug in his apartment can possibly imagine.

In many sectors the Red Army is likely to take the initiative, as it did last Winter, and we can look for Soviet gains in Central and Northern Russia. But the gains are likely to be more limited than those of a year ago. And on the Stalingrad front—where, in spite of the present frosts and the coming snows, Summer-style fighting can continue through the Winter—the Nazis may continue to gain.

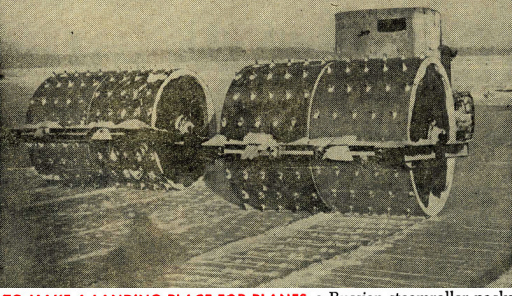
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Back to the Factories

Smarter than they were last Winter, the Nazis apparently plan to go on the defensive in most sectors. They need time to rest the legions exhausted on the Caucasus front. And they probably will follow their usual practice of furloughing thousands of factory-skilled soldiers to boost arms production in the Winter months.

Fresh troops and new arms are badly needed by the Nazis against the possibility of a two-front war next year—a second front in the West and another Summer campaign in the East. So, outside the Stalingrad zone, a million and a quarter men at most may be left to hold the front against the Red Army's Winter attacks.

RUSSIAN WINTER



TO MAKE A LANDING PLACE FOR PLANES, a Russian steamroller packs down the snow. The spikes on the roller provide traction. This photo was taken in January, but it and most of the other pictures on these pages arrived just last week.

To prepare for those attacks, the Nazis have forced at least 1,500,000 Poles and Jews, and unnumbered Russians seized in the occupied areas, to build defense works from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea. The work has been under way for four months, with the German bayonet-wielders frenziedly demanding speed. Most of the work had to be finished by the middle of September, for transportation of construction materials over Russian roads is almost impossible, once the Fall rains set in. Afterward the ground freezes quickly. Concrete does not set well in cold weather, and trenches and shelters cannot be dug without the aid of precious explosives.



A CAPTURED VILLAGE is usually turned into a strong-point by the Germans, so these Russians, counter-attacking, move forward cautiously. Notice that one of the men is edging himself over a thatched roof. Photograph made last March.

THE German defense system resembles the web system used by the Russians. It is divided into an enormous number of islands of resistance, each able to resist attack from any direction. The German islands of resistance, — each manned by 200 to 7000 men, depending on its importance—are grouped around key localities, usually towns or villages, with smaller groups of islands along roads and railroads between them to fight off attempts at Soviet penetration or flank attacks.

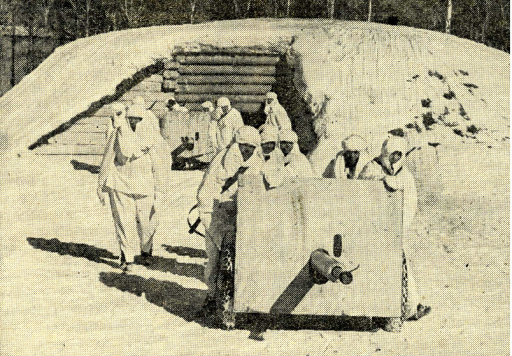
The Nazis call their arrangement of islands around a town or village the porcupine system, each island being a quill. Quills are generally from one and a half to three kilometers apart (a kilometer is 3280 feet).

The town or village itself is a big

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island of resistance. The approaches to each island are generally heavily mined and sometimes deliberately watered by the Nazis so as to coat them with ice.

Artillery Improved

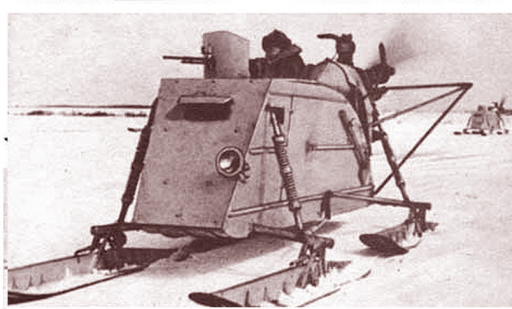
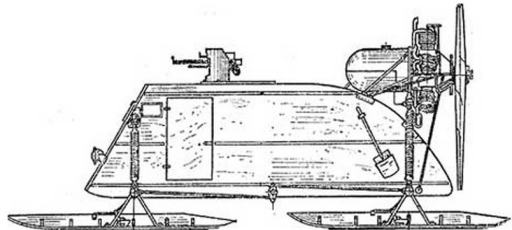


ON THE LENINGRAD FRONT Soviet Artillerymen haul a 45 mm. anti-tank gun from a snow-covered storage place for guns and ammunition. The men look camouflaged, but the deep shadows they cast would give them away to air observers.

As the Nazis have found in attacking the basically similar Soviet system, deep masses of stronghold islands can be reduced only one by one, and at great cost. They can't be ignored, by-passed or simply outwaited; the combat team defending an island doesn't surrender. It has full equipment for protracted fighting without support.

A prerequisite of assault on such an island—the famous *fortified point* and *inhabited locality* of Soviet communi-ques—is careful artillery preparation. At the start of the war, the Russians enjoyed marked superiority in field artillery (traditionally a strong point of Russian troops), a margin that became even more decisive when Nazi guns proved less efficient in Winter. But that was last year. Nazi guns have been improved greatly since then. It must be assumed that most of the defects revealed last Winter have been corrected.

The Russian counteroffensive this Winter must thus consist of the same unending series of single counter-attacks, each against a single fortified point, as last year. Last year the counterattacks were designed mainly to clear out vital areas in the vicinity of **Moscow and to reopen rail communications** between Moscow and Leningrad. They were successful although there is still no direct rail line between the two cities.



AN AEROSYN or air-sledge is one Russian development that helped account for Red Army successes last Winter. It has a propeller, and over snowy plains and frozen rivers it does up to 90 miles an hour.

One objective this year may be the opening of such a direct line. Another offensive may be aimed southward to cut off the German forces that penetrated to the Volga this Summer.

Another possible objective is political rather than geographic. The German army contains two types of divisions—regular army units, and detachments

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belonging to the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) Nazi party military organization. The SS members are the professional Nazis, under the control of Gestapo Chief Himmler. The Russians distinguish carefully in their strategy between SS and regular German units. SS men are segregated in Russian prison camps. Political re-education is given to regular Army men in strong doses, and they are permitted a great deal of working democracy in running their prison camps. But not the SS men—they are considered beyond redemption.

Exterminate Them!

Some of the Soviet counterattacks are known to have been directed deliberately against SS divisions, regardless of the geographic importance of their post, for the plain and simple purpose of exterminating the verminous political backbone of the German army. The same thing may happen this Winter, for Russian leaders are sure that the quickest way to defeat Germany is to wipe out the men who spread the Nazi party line.

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TO THE million and a quarter men the Nazis will have along the northern and middle fronts, the Russians will not be able to oppose much more than a million and a half. For Winter reduces sharply the number of troops that can be brought into action.

Except on swept roads, and the Russians do not have many powered snowplows, trucks are next to useless in a snowbound world. Among the Red Army's Winter vehicles is a powered sledge, which the Russians call an *aerosyn*. The *aerosyn*, originally developed in the Soviet North, is driven by an airplane propeller mounted at the rear. Most Russian tanks and tractors were also designed with extra-wide treads to facilitate running over snow. Tractor trains—a tractor or tank towing as many as a dozen sledges—are also a favored means of transport.

A Glutton for Oil

But Winter transport in any case generally requires three to four times as much fuel a mile as Summer operation. Even the *aerosyn*, which can speed up to 90 miles an hour, has a gargantuan appetite for oil.

Winter transport difficulties play no favorites, of course, but since the Nazis will be on the defensive, they have been able to stock their strongholds in advance. They have also prepared a large fleet of tractors and sleds of their own for moving up men and supplies. They may have miscalculated their requirements, but the possible error is far smaller than that of last year, when no preparations whatever were made.

Supply movement is only the first of the problems confronting the Winter fighter. Military radio, telegraph and telephone systems are almost always battery-operated. Both storage and dry batteries are much less efficient in Winter than in Summer. Consequently, signal men must be burdened with greater loads or the army with poorer communications.

Winter Silences Guns

Many of the soldier's most dependable Summer weapons simply won't work in Winter. Planes and tanks are stymied by frozen lubricating oil. The recoil cylinders of field guns, which also contain oil, are pinned into place

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by cold. Machine guns and automatic weapons jam.

The Russians probably will have a slight advantage in tank and air operations as a result of their lengthy experience in the Arctic. Five years ago Soviet chemists developed a series of lubricating oils that stay fluid to 50 below zero. The Nazis appear to lack the necessary raw materials to copy the Soviet products, of which samples have undoubtedly fallen into German hands. Machine guns can be kept warm enough to operate only by firing a short burst every now and then—a special hazard for the outpost because it may reveal his position.

Servicing planes in Winter, as well as camouflaging and protecting them on the ground, is another major problem. Gasoline must be drained immediately on landing. Where mechanics have to work in the open, as frequently happens in war, they must coat their hands with heavy grease against the cold. But once problems like these have been overcome, air operations with surprising regularity are possible. In the U. S. A., the major obstacle to Winter flying is the formation of ice on the plane. But most of Russia is so cold that the air can carry little moisture. As in northern Canada, the icing problem is much less serious.

Winter attacks are carried out in the Red Army most often by troops carried on tanks and towed sledges, and ski-troops. Once the snow flies, massed tank assaults will be over until next June, except possibly over windswept snow-free ice. The Russians have found that tanks cannot follow in each other's tracks in thick snow, but must be spread over a broad front. In Winter, the role of the tank is strictly that of transporting and supporting foot infantry.

Raids on Skis

Ski troops move with astonishing rapidity. For short distances, they can spurt to 15 miles an hour. Down a steep hill the sky's the limit. Slashing flank raids will therefore feature this Winter's struggle as they did last year's.

In areas in which the Russians are likely to counterattack, the rivers will be frozen. Therefore, they won't be the barriers they were to the Nazis, who crossed them in warm weather, at fantastic cost. But Russian attackers risk having the ice blown up under them or shelled to the breaking point—a dodge that goes far back into Russo-German warfare. In 1242, Alexander Nevsky, a favorite Russian hero, defeated the Teutonic Order of Knights on Lake Peipus, south of the site of modern Leningrad, by luring the German marauders to a weakened area of ice that caved in under the weight of German arms and horses.

Camouflage a Problem

Although it is extremely difficult for a man on the ground to see the white hoods traditional to Soviet Winter soldiers, camouflaging is difficult in Winter.

Shadows are long throughout almost the entire period of daylight and stand out clearly against the snow. However little a snowfall may be disturbed when soldiers prepare defensive positions or move to the attack, however well a tank and men may be blended into the background, their shadows can be seen miles away by aerial observers.

To escape detection, men must frequently lie motionless in the snow all day, and move only at night. When it

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is necessary to avoid leaving prominent tracks, equipment must be dismantled.

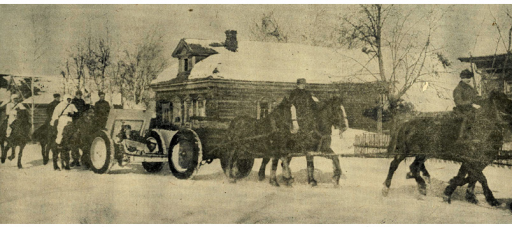
Night Operations Perilous

That explains the premium the Red Army places on twilight and night attacks during the Winter. Most of the Russian front is so far to the North that daylight hours are extremely short. Near Murmansk it is entirely dark for three months, except for two hours of eerie, deep twilight each day. But night operations over snow and ice are hazardous. Even people who have lived in the area for years lose their way. Finding lost weapons and the fallen wounded is next to impossible.

THERE is one great exception to the terror of the Russian Winter. On the plain between the Black and the Caspian Seas, north of the Caucasus Mountains, snowfall is light and the temperature rarely drops much below freezing. Consequently, full equipment can always be used.

That means that if the Nazis have enough fresh troops, a drive to Astrakhan—at the mouth of the Volga, below Stalingrad—and the great oil center of Baku is feasible.

Any decision to delay the opening of the second front until next year will have to take into consideration the certainty that such a drive would seriously weaken our Allies in the East.



Horses really come into their own during Winter on the Russian front. Here horse-drawn artillery passes through a Soviet village.

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