

# The Battle, Phase One, 7—15 October 1944

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## *Soldiers of the 2d Mountain Division!*

*... We will permit the enemy to hurl himself against our diligently and solidly built strongpoints, and then destroy him through a counterattack. ... We must here show the Russians that there is still one front on which their hunger for territory will not be satisfied. ... I put my trust in you! We will master every situation, no matter how and when it may develop.*

*/s/ Degen  
Generalleutnant,\*  
Commander<sup>1</sup>*

On the day of the offensive, the weather conditions generally favored the attacking Soviet infantry. Wind from the north was bringing fog to all the low areas and occasional mist to the high ground. Visibility, however, was a problem because of low cloud cover and falling snow. The artillery preparation began as scheduled at 0800, and in two and one-half hours, the Soviets fired more than 100,000 rounds.<sup>2</sup>

The same low visibility that favored the attacking infantry, however, prevented Soviet aviation from providing full air support. Since artillery planners had not prepared for this, the volume of fire was weak for the thirty-minute period beginning at 0935. Poor visibility likewise complicated the artillerymen's tasks of observing and adjusting fires. As a result, particularly in the 99th Rifle Corps sector, German positions were not suppressed or destroyed, and the Soviet attack did not achieve the expected success. Lieutenant General Mikulskii, the 99th's commander, acknowledged that the German defenders in his sector (the 2d Mountain Division) were able to maneuver by fire effectively from strongpoints after the preparation was completed.<sup>3</sup>

At 1035, when the Soviets shifted their artillery fires, both first-echelon rifle corps attacked. Their first day's objective was to break through the initial German strongpoints and seize bridgeheads on the west bank of the Titovka River, a distance of nine to ten kilometers.<sup>4</sup> The 131st Rifle Corps

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<sup>1</sup>Lieutenant General Degen's rank is equivalent to a major general's in the U.S. Army.

on the right quickly moved through or past the German defenders in its sector and, by the end of the day, had secured a bridgehead on the west bank. This corps' success was due entirely to infantry attacks supported by artillery and limited ground attack aircraft sorties. The tanks and self-propelled guns attached to the corps could not move from their initial positions because of the absence of roads and untrafficable terrain.<sup>5</sup>

On the left flank of the main axis, however, the 99th Rifle Corps met heavy German resistance at several strongpoints on the eastern approaches to the river. After a day of hard fighting, at 1830, Mikulskii ordered his division commanders to halt the attack for five hours so their units could rest and reorganize. At midnight, both first-echelon divisions were to attack again, with no artillery preparation, and to seize river crossings by dawn on 8 October.<sup>6</sup>

During the night, the 99th Rifle Corps assault groups re-formed and continued to press their attacks against individual German strongpoints. From the evening of 7 October to midday on 8 October, groups of up to twenty-five German close air support aircraft attacked advancing Soviet troops and rear areas of the 99th Rifle Corps.<sup>7</sup> One by one, however, the 2d Mountain Division positions began to give way. Soviet units defeated several local counterattacks and, by the evening of 8 October, had reached the east bank of the Titovka River.

The Soviet offensive was developing rapidly to the north of the 99th Rifle Corps. On 7 October, both the 10th Guards and 14th Rifle Divisions reached the Titovka River, first with small groups of infantrymen and later with entire units. During the night, eleven soldiers of the 24th Rifle Regiment, 10th Guards Rifle Division, swam the icy river in their underwear, pushing their uniforms, weapons, and equipment wrapped in ponchos in front of them. On the far shore, they dressed hurriedly and went about their mission of attracting the German defenders' attention so that the main body of the battalion could capture the existing bridge.<sup>8</sup> In the ensuing

Soviet infantrymen. Note the rocks and sparse vegetation.



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battle, despite the courageous efforts of these men, the German defenders demolished the bridge before withdrawing. Inside a damaged and abandoned Opel staff car, Soviet troops found maps and documents, including Lieutenant General Degen's 12 September proclamation. The maps accurately showed the Soviet attack positions and axes of advance, indicating clearly that the Germans expected a Soviet offensive.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of 8 October, engineers put a light pontoon bridge across the river at the destroyed bridge site. Using this footbridge, fords, and makeshift rafts, the 131st Rifle Corps units expanded their bridgehead westward toward Lanweg to cut the road and isolate the German units still on the east bank and advanced northward toward the boundary between the German 2d and 6th Mountain Divisions (see map 6).

On this, the second day of the offensive, infantry troops moved out of the range of their supporting artillery, which could not move forward due to the untrafficability of the terrain. Therefore, as Soviet units moved away from their artillery support, close air support became critical, especially in the 131st Rifle Corps sector. To speed up the process of building roads leading westward, all troops of the 14th Army second echelon were committed to engineer work.<sup>10</sup> This included both divisions of the 31st Rifle Corps, as well as artillery and other special units that were otherwise uncommitted.

On the far left, the 126th Light Rifle Corps had moved up to the Titovka River on 7 October, crossed it on 8 October, and pushed northwestward toward its objective unopposed. The extremely rough terrain, laced with bogs, streams, boulder fields, and two significant rivers, was opposition enough. The men carried enough food for eight days, personal weapons and ammunition, and additional ammunition for crew-served weapons—up to ninety pounds. Horses hauled the 76-mm pack guns and 120-mm mortars, reindeer the ammunition for both. The reindeer moved easily through their natural habitat, while the horses frequently lost their footing and had to be unloaded, put aright, and reloaded. To preserve the security of the column, fires were prohibited; thus, the soldiers ate cold rations. Smoking was permitted, but at night only under a poncho. Corps units crossed all water obstacles at fords, because constructing foot bridges would expose their route to German air reconnaissance.<sup>11</sup>

Although the German Twentieth Mountain Army may have been aware of the 126th LRC's movement, the Twentieth did not discern the 126th's objective. On the morning of 8 October, for example, the Twentieth Army chief of staff warned the XIX Mountain Corps chief of staff of the possibility of a breakthrough toward Nikel. Additionally, in his report to *OKW* that evening, Colonel General Rendulic, the Twentieth Mountain Army commander, expressed concern about a deep envelopment of the southern flank.<sup>12</sup> Despite these concerns, he did not send out a force to fix or engage the 126th.

The 127th Light Rifle Corps in the second echelon followed the 126th LRC's general route but started from a point farther in the rear. The men of the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade were weighted down with 15 boxes of



American rations (food for 5 days), a rifle or submachine gun with 1,500 rounds of ammunition, and 6 hand grenades. The communications platoon carried 25 kilometers of wire, and pack animals carried 6 mountain guns with 200 rounds, 24 mortars with 420 rounds, and other provisions and equipment.<sup>13</sup> This brigade began moving on 6 October and did not cross the Titovka River until 9 October. The men and animals endured drenching rain, numbing cold, and terrain that alternated between frozen moss-covered tundra; solid or broken rock; and deep, soft bogs.

In the breakthrough sector, after two days of fighting, the German XIX Mountain Corps position was deteriorating rapidly. The 2d Mountain Division had sustained heavy casualties and was in danger of partial encirclement. This division's defeat would threaten the 6th Mountain Division and other units positioned along the Litsa front.<sup>14</sup> Late in the afternoon of 8 October, Colonel General Rendulic authorized General Jodl, commander of the XIX Mountain Corps, to begin withdrawing the 6th Mountain Division to positions along the Titovka River.<sup>15</sup> The written order, which was published about six hours later, instructed the 6th Mountain Division units to deceive the enemy as long as possible; maintain strict communications security; and move quickly, but only at night. Also, the 2d Mountain Division was to withdraw to positions east of Luostari. Rendulic expected the XIX Mountain Corps to hold these new positions for fourteen days so that supplies could be evacuated.<sup>16</sup> In a report transmitted to OKW late that evening, he reiterated these points.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, on the Soviet side, General Meretskov, the Karelian Front commander, clearly understood the precarious situation the German 6th Mountain Division now faced. At 2300 on 8 October, in an attempt to cut off any withdrawal of the 6th from its positions along the Litsa River, Meretskov ordered the 14th Army to interdict Russian Road and to capture Luostari by nightfall on 9 October. To reinforce the 131st Rifle Corps, the Front commander transferred the uncommitted second-echelon 368th Rifle Division of the 99th Rifle Corps to the 131st Rifle Corps in exchange for the heavily committed 10th Guards Rifle Division on the left flank of the first echelon of the 131st.<sup>18</sup> This enabled the 131st Rifle Corps to sustain its forward movement.

Early on the morning of 9 October, while it was still dark, units of the 99th Rifle Corps began crossing the Titovka River on log rafts and at fording sites along a broad front. However, encircled German strongpoints on the east bank continued to resist, thus delaying road construction. The second-echelon 65th Rifle Division of the 99th Rifle Corps was ordered to eliminate these pockets while the first echelon expanded the bridgehead.

The absence of roads was seriously affecting the battle: combat units could not replace their quickly depleting ammunition stocks, bridging assets could not be brought up to the river, and artillery units could not reposition.

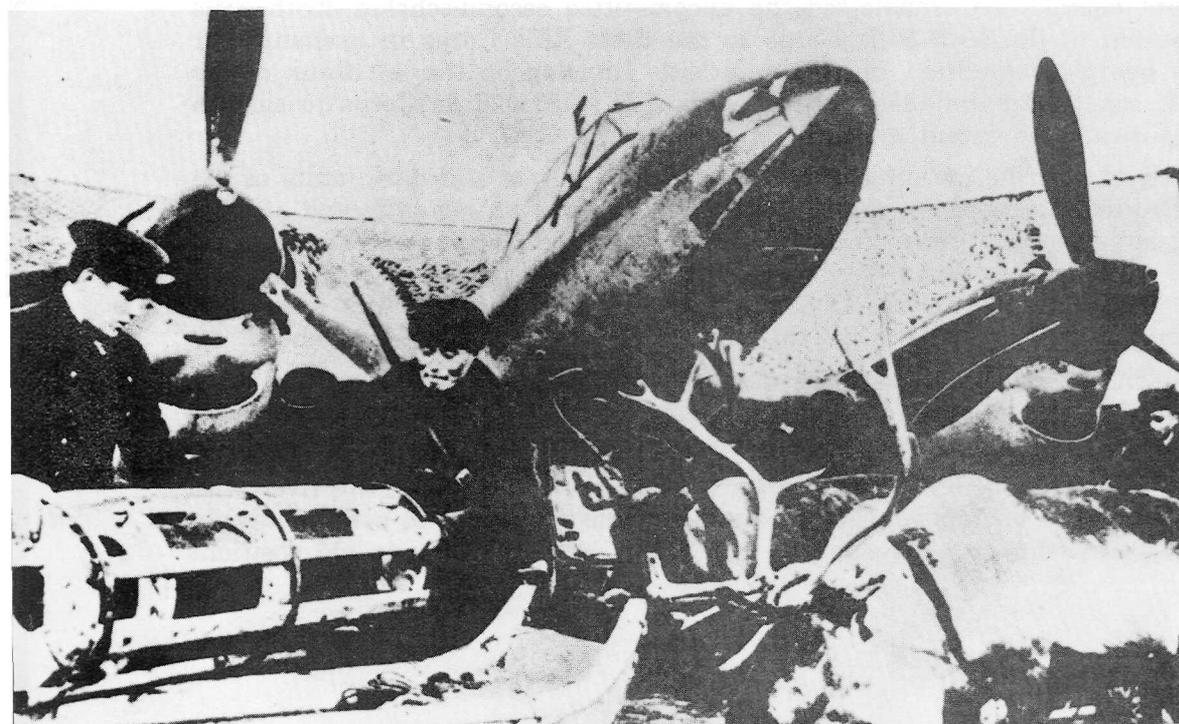
The night before, Soviet forward observers had crossed the river with the infantry to help improve fire support, but that did not compensate for range inadequacies. By noon on 9 October, artillery troops in old positions

had been detailed to road-building tasks. In fact, in the entire 99th Rifle Corps sector, only sixty-four long-range guns, firing at maximum range, were able to provide indirect-fire support.<sup>19</sup> This lack of artillery support slowed the offensive and enabled German units to withdraw safely to subsequent battle positions.

To solve this problem, on 9 October, General Mikulskii, the 99th Rifle Corps commander, pulled all but one battalion of engineer assets back from divisions and assigned them road- and bridge-building tasks. He named the commander of the 20th Assault Combat Engineer Brigade as commander of the Titovka River crossing site and gave him the troops of various corps and division logistic units and one regiment from the second-echelon 65th Rifle Division.<sup>20</sup> Shcherbakov, the 14th Army commander, also abandoned the plan for building a road in each division sector and went to constructing a single road for the entire corps.<sup>21</sup> This road was the ten- to twelve-kilometer stretch connecting the existing Soviet and German roads through the breakthrough area in the 99th Rifle Corps sector.

Good weather enabled both sides to commit their air forces on 9 October. Soviet air units flew over 1,000 sorties of close air support and interdiction, with good results. On 9 October, General Jodl, commander of the German XIX Mountain Corps, remarked that "Army headquarters must consider that command and control of units is very difficult because air attacks have almost uniformly destroyed our wire communications."<sup>22</sup> The rocky soil had precluded the Germans from burying their communications wire; instead, they strung it alongside roads, making it easy prey for flying bomb shrapnel. Close air support was particularly important on 9 October because the infantry units of both the 99th and 131st Rifle Corps had advanced beyond the range of their artillery support.<sup>23</sup> According to Soviet sources, the Ger-

A reindeer sled delivering ordnance to a Pe-2 dive bomber



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**Photo not available**

mans flew over 200 sorties on 9 October against Soviet ground forces, with unspecified results.<sup>24</sup>

At midday, Colonel General Rendulic expressed concern over the Soviets' continued forward progress. He urged the XIX Mountain Corps to exert strong leadership over the 2d Mountain Division, which in his view had been overwhelmed by events. He also encouraged General Jodl to regain control of the battle by launching a strong counterattack. General Jodl responded to this message at 1600, indicating that he planned to counterattack with corps assets at 1000 on 10 October.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, the Soviet offensive continued unabated, with the 99th Rifle Corps driving toward Luostari and the 131st Rifle Corps toward Petsamo. Soviet air reconnaissance on 9 October detected signs of the withdrawal of the 6th Mountain Division. In accordance with his Front plan, which called for the launching of attacks against the German left flank as soon as the breakthrough was achieved on the main axis, General Meretskov, late on 9 October, ordered Group Pigarevich on the right flank to attack. He also requested Admiral Golovko, commander of the Northern Fleet, to begin his ground and amphibious attacks.

Subunits of the 63d Naval Infantry Brigade had been alerted on the morning of 9 October and, by 2100, were loaded onto their vessels in three detachments, a landing force of approximately 2,800 men.<sup>26</sup> The main amphibious force was to land to the west (left) of the German positions opposite Srednii isthmus and, in a night attack, strike the German positions on the left flank. These forces, opposed only by German shore battery fire, landed between 2330, 9 October, and 0150, 10 October (see map 6).<sup>27</sup> With the aid of a smoke screen and counterbattery fire from Srednii Peninsula, the landing force quickly moved inland toward its objectives, incurring minor casualties. A special 195-man raiding party landed at the same time and was to move 30 kilometers to the southwest and seize a German shore battery guarding the approaches to the port of Liinakhamari (this raid is described in detail in chapter 6).

As the amphibious landing was being reported to the Twentieth Mountain Army, the XIX Mountain Corps chief of staff requested that the corps counterattack be postponed from 10 October to 11 October because of the difficulty in assembling scattered units. About an hour later, Rendulic granted the request.<sup>28</sup> The situation was indeed bleak: the XIX Mountain Corps was now faced with an envelopment of its right flank by the 126th Light Rifle Corps, a breakthrough toward Luostari and Petsamo, and an envelopment on its left flank by naval infantry.

As the Soviet naval infantry brigade fought its way inland, at 0330 on 10 October, artillery units of the Northern Defensive Region began firing a 47,000-round, 90-minute artillery preparation against the German positions along the Srednii isthmus. At 0500, Soviet troops of the 12th Naval Infantry Brigade launched their attack across minefields covered by ten inches of fresh snow.<sup>29</sup> By midday on 10 October, the attacking ground forces had broken through the German positions and were linking up with troops of

the amphibious force. By evening, German forces were retreating westward along Speer Road as the Soviet naval infantry forces attempted to cut them off.<sup>30</sup>

Farther south, on the axis of the main attack, the Soviet units were making critical gains. By 0800 on 10 October, the 126th LRC had lodged itself on the road junction west of Luostari, having marched over forty kilometers in the seventy-two hours since the offensive had begun. At the objective, the 31st Rifle Brigade dug in facing west to prevent passage of German reinforcements, and the 72d Naval Rifle Brigade dug in facing east to block the road to retreating German units. The corps, supported by its organic mortars and artillery and air assets, defeated several local counter-attacks on 10 October. According to one veteran of the 126th LRC, his unit also fired 600 captured German mortar rounds during this battle.<sup>31</sup>

In the trackless terrain to the south, the 127th LRC units crossed the Petsamo River on the morning of 10 October. Now in their fifth day of movement, both animals and men were exhausted. Many horses had lost their protective horseshoes, had broken hooves, and refused to go in the water. To enable the horses to go on, the artillerymen wrapped the horses' hooves in protective canvas wrappings made from tentage. Without forage, the horses were weakening rapidly. Their American rations eaten, the men began tightening their belts. Knowing that no supplies would be delivered to his corps, Major General Zhukov ordered both brigades to continue to move. They had to attack the enemy and eat his food and forage.<sup>32</sup>



Soviet naval infantrymen move a 45-mm antitank gun into position

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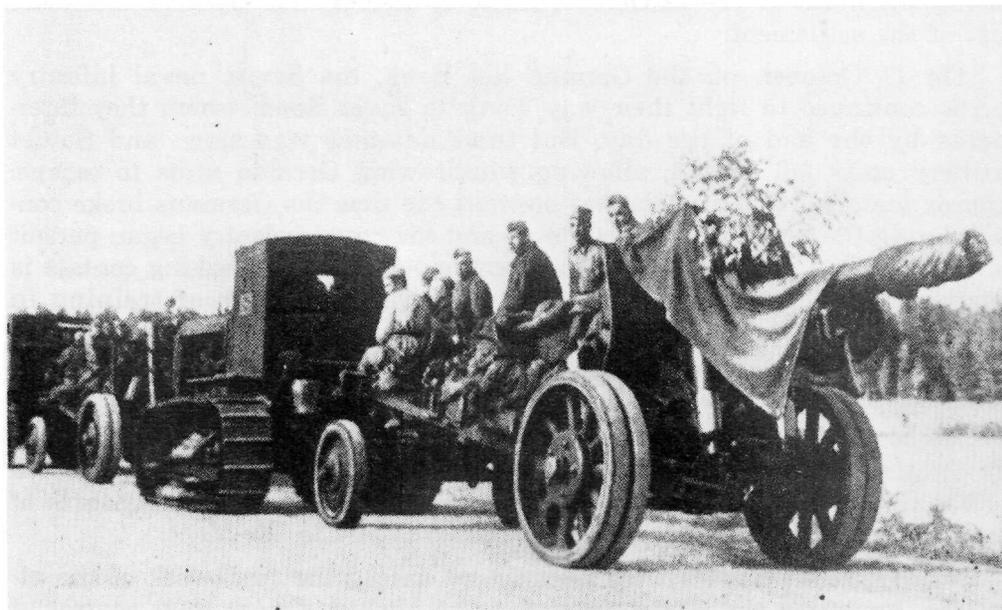
On the Luostari axis, the 99th Rifle Corps units continued to attack without artillery support against prepared German positions on dominating terrain. Progress was slow. By 1000 on 10 October, the second-echelon troops had completed the road connecting Soviet and German roads, and the engineers had put in two bridges and two fording sites. Before any tanks or artillery could cross the river, however, the road destroyed by the retreating Germans had to be repaired.<sup>33</sup> The road problem, which had adversely affected the movement of combat equipment since the first day of the battle, now began to manifest itself in the logistic support of the battle. A regiment of the 10th Guards Rifle Division, which had captured an important piece of high ground along the road to Luostari, ran out of ammunition and had to surrender its hard-won position.<sup>34</sup> The ammunition was available in the supply system but could not be pushed forward until the road in the territory formerly occupied by the Germans was repaired.

The heaviest fighting on 10 October occurred in the 131st Rifle Corps sector, where a Soviet force cut Russian Road at noon. The Twentieth Mountain Army headquarters, reacting strongly to this development, ordered the 6th Mountain Division units to attack and reopen the road.<sup>35</sup> As these German units counterattacked, the Soviet 131st Rifle Corps commander hurriedly deployed his 368th Rifle Division into the action, but it arrived too late. On the morning of 11 October, lacking artillery, close air support, and ammunition, the Soviet rifle regiment astride the road fell back, and German units continued their westward flight. Soviet reinforcements arrived late in the day on 11 October.<sup>36</sup> An all-night battle ensued, during which the Soviets cut the road for the last time. On 12 October, several German

attempts to break through were defeated, resulting in heavy casualties on both sides and the dispersal of the remaining German units across the tundra. The 131st Rifle Corps then turned west and attacked units of the 6th Mountain Division in their prepared positions along the east bank of the Petsamo River, defeating several German counterattacks. By late in the day on 14 October, the 131st was positioned to attack Petsamo from the southeast.

Meanwhile, on 10 October, the Twentieth Mountain Army headquarters initiated two actions that demonstrated its concern over the ominous developments in the XIX Mountain Corps sector. At 1345, the army chief of staff ordered that the nickel mine and processing facilities at Nikel be destroyed. At 1600, the XXXVI Corps chief of staff was told to dispatch an artillery battalion immediately and to prepare to commit his 163d Infantry Division to the XIX Mountain Corps sector.<sup>37</sup> However, on 10 October, this 12,000-man division was south of the XIX Mountain Corps area of operations, near Rovaniemi on the Arctic Circle. The 163d quickly loaded onto trucks and began its 400-kilometer journey northward.

In the 99th Rifle Corps sector, on the night of 10–11 October, all thirteen regiments of supporting heavy mortars and artillery moved forward across the Titovka River and deployed along Lanweg, the single road. However, because of the inability to deploy this fire support across the corps front and the range limitations of many of the weapons systems, only half of it could fire on German positions.<sup>38</sup> With the transfer of the 10th Guards Rifle Division to his corps, Lieutenant General Mikulskii now had two sizable



Soviet 152-mm towed artillery in column

armored forces: twenty-one KV tanks and seventeen 152-mm self-propelled guns in the armor package with the 10th Guards Rifle Division and thirty-seven T-34 tanks and seventeen 152-mm self-propelled guns in the corps second echelon. These units also crossed the Titovka River during the night of 10–11 October. In the reorganization of the corps for combat on 11 October, all ninety-plus tanks and self-propelled guns were attached to the 65th Rifle Division attacking along the road.<sup>39</sup> The crossing of all these tank, artillery, and mortar units, coupled with the impossibility of deploying any of them off the road due to terrain restrictions, resulted in massive congestion on the west side of the Titovka River on 11 October.

At 1830 on 10 October, General Meretskov, commander of the Karelian Front, while at the 99th Rifle Corps command post five kilometers east of the river, approved Mikulskii's plan for the next day. Two hours later, Mikulskii personally telephoned his orders to his division commanders.<sup>40</sup> On the morning of 11 October, the 99th Rifle Corps attacked toward Luostari with three rifle divisions abreast. The 114th Rifle Division, which moved cross-country south of the road, was the most successful. It linked up with the 69th Naval Rifle Brigade of the 127th Light Rifle Corps south of Luostari by nightfall on 11 October. The other two divisions, attacking along and north of Lanweg, were repeatedly halted by the 2d Mountain Division units fighting from prepared positions on high ground.

Soviet tanks and self-propelled artillery on Lanweg were unable to deploy and could not move without infantry and engineer support. Soviet infantry attacked and neutralized each German antitank position, while engineer troops cleared the road of mines and filled in craters. By the end of the day, the 99th Rifle Corps units had stalled just east of Luostari. Attacks during the night of 11–12 October failed to dislodge the German defenders east of the settlement.

On 11 October, on the German left flank, the Soviet naval infantry forces continued to fight their way south to Speer Road, which they interdicted by the end of the day. But their advance was slow, and Soviet artillery units fell behind, allowing withdrawing German units to escape. Approximately five hours elapsed between the time the Germans broke contact during the night of 11–12 October and the naval infantry began pursuit on the morning of 12 October. The Germans' success in breaking contact is attributed to the naval infantry's inexperience and lack of training in night operations.<sup>41</sup>

While Soviet ground forces were steadily grinding forward on all axes, Soviet air forces were striking at the German airfield south of Nikel. In an 11 October raid, the Soviets used eighteen ground attack aircraft and thirty-six fighters in the first flight and fifty-five fighters with externally carried bombs in the second. The Soviets claimed to have destroyed thirty-three of sixty German aircraft on the ground and five more in the air.<sup>42</sup>

Numerous air battles were also waged during the first week of the offensive, by which the Soviet air forces established almost total control of the airspace over the battle area. (This conclusion is corroborated both by

Soviet sources and an analysis of descriptions of ground operations. Reports of interference by German air forces in Soviet maneuver or logistic operations are extremely rare.)

The German situation grew more critical by the hour. On the Germans' far right, local counterattacks against units of the 126th LRC had failed to dislodge them from their blocking positions, and the 163d Infantry Division's forward units were still on the road. On the morning of 11 October, the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade of the 127th LRC crossed Arctic Ocean Highway west of Luostari en route to a blocking position on Tarnet Road.<sup>43</sup> In the center, Luostari was in danger of falling to the 99th Rifle Corps, while the 131st Rifle Corps was fighting toward Petsamo. Naval infantrymen were turning westward on Speer Road, trying to regain contact with retreating German units.

During the night of 11–12 October, the Twentieth Mountain Army chief of staff implored his counterpart at XIX Mountain Corps to hold the Luostari road junction and prevent the forces of the Soviet main attack from linking up with the 126th LRC.<sup>44</sup> But that is exactly what happened the next day. On the morning of 12 October, Soviet units attacked Luostari from the south, east, and northeast and took this important road junction by noon. While Soviet units consolidated and reorganized to hold Luostari and, at the same time, continued the attack northward toward Petsamo, the German 163d Infantry Division arrived on the battlefield. In the words of the division operations officer:

After a motorized march of more than 400 kilometers, the 307th Regiment literally detrucked on the battlefield. Soldiers almost frozen stiff had to be committed in battle immediately after leaving their vehicles because the enemy had already penetrated westward beyond the road fork. . . . The bulk of the 307th Regiment arrived by the afternoon of 12 October and received orders to attack in the evening, to drive back the enemy, and to occupy the road fork as its first objective.<sup>45</sup>

But while the 163d Infantry Division units were being committed to piecemeal counterattacks, the Soviet 14th Army continued to develop the offensive. On the night of 11–12 October, by order of General Meretskov, several tons of ammunition and provisions were air-dropped to the 126th Light Rifle Corps.<sup>46</sup> On 12 October, elements of the 114th Rifle Division from Lieutenant General Mikulskii's 99th Rifle Corps arrived from the Luostari area and relieved the 72d Naval Rifle Brigade in place. The 114th continued to fight off determined counterattacks by the German 163d Infantry Division, which had just arrived in trucks from the south. Heavy combat for control of the road west of Luostari continued until 14 October, when the German units withdrew to their local starting positions.

The decision on 12 October to relieve one brigade of the 126th Light Rifle Corps was probably wise, because the brigade, by this time, was no doubt weak from physical exhaustion and personnel losses from both movement and combat. But rather than allow the unit to stand down and rest and recover, Lieutenant General Shcherbakov, the 14th Army commander, ordered it to move northward cross-country fifteen kilometers to Tarnet Road

to help the 127th LRC block the Germans' last remaining escape route. The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade had reached Tarnet Road on the morning of 11 October but without its mortars and artillery, which had fallen behind on the rocky ground. Without fire support, the infantry had fought all day in a futile effort to defeat the German position guarding the road.<sup>47</sup> Around midday, German dive-bombers bombarded the 70th, but it suffered no personnel casualties. The Soviet cooks prepared a hot meal from the pack horses killed in the air attacks.

On the night of 12–13 October, the 72d Naval Rifle Brigade of the 126th LRC cut Tarnet Road just east of the Norwegian border, thus blocking the Germans' path of retreat to the west. The 70th Naval Rifle Brigade of the 127th LRC continued fighting for high ground on the south side of the road farther to the east.

Late in the evening of 12 October, General Meretskov was visiting the 99th Rifle Corps command post on the southeast outskirts of Luostari. There, Mikulskii was issuing an order to his 10th Guards Rifle Division commander for the next day's activities.<sup>48</sup> Meretskov expressed concern about the approach of German reinforcements from the south, which were, in fact, already arriving by truck. On the morning of 13 October, the 163d Infantry Division launched counterattacks west and north of Luostari, while the 2d Mountain Division units consolidated in defensive positions between Luostari and Petsamo along Arctic Ocean Highway. These actions delayed the 99th Rifle Corps' northward offensive approximately twenty-four hours, time the German units east of Petsamo needed to withdraw westward.

On 12 October, on the Soviet northern flank, the 12th and 63d Naval Infantry Brigades moved westward along the axis of Speer Road. Early that morning, a naval special operations detachment had attacked and neutralized the German shore batteries opposite Liinakhamari that covered the entrance to Petsamo Bay. This detachment, supported by naval close air support and air-dropped supplies, continued to hold out against several counterattacks. Naval planners hurriedly gathered and organized another amphibious landing force made up of volunteers from the rear areas. This 600-man force landed in the harbor at Liinakhamari at 2250 on 12 October. On the 13th, this force, with the help of naval close air support, defeated the local German garrison. Units of the 12th and 63d Naval Infantry Brigades were closing up from the east and had established contact with the ground forces of the 131st Rifle Corps to the south.

On the morning of 13 October, Soviet units were poised to attack toward Petsamo from the north, east, and south. The night before, elements of the 126th Light Rifle Corps had occupied blocking positions west of Petsamo on Tarnet Road, denying that route to German elements attempting to withdraw westward. German units continued to occupy and fight from good positions north of Luostari and east of Petsamo along the axes of the roads to Petsamo. In light of this new development, the XIX Mountain Corps commander, General Jodl, could no longer expect his two beleaguered divisions to attack eastward. Their single escape route lay westward, along

the now-blocked Tarnet Road. At 1500 on 13 October, he communicated his views to the Twentieth Mountain Army commander and requested a directive. After some delay, army headquarters ordered the XIX Mountain Corps to open Tarnet Road and establish new battle positions just inside Norwegian territory.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the Soviet forces continued to close in on Petsamo. On the night of 13—14 October, Soviet naval infantry of the 12th and 63d Naval Infantry Brigades crossed Petsamo Bay at Liinakhamari and attacked southward along the west side. At the same time, German troops of the 2d Mountain Division, under pressure from the 99th Rifle Corps attacking from Luostari, defeated the Soviet blocking force on Tarnet Road west of Petsamo and broke out. Thus, on 14 October, the remainder of the 2d Mountain Division, 6th Mountain Division, and Division Group Van der Hoop withdrew westward into Norway.<sup>50</sup> By Soviet estimates, 15,000 to 18,000 German troops escaped along this route.<sup>51</sup>

The first Soviet troops entered Petsamo from the east at 2200 on 14 October. While Germans and Soviets fought inside the town, other Soviet units outside the city engaged German units retreating in columns from the Litsa front. By 0500 on 15 October, Petsamo was captured. Those Germans who survived escaped in small groups to the northwest across the tundra, leaving behind many dead, as well as 150,000 shells and mines and several warehouses of equipment that they had not been able to destroy or remove.<sup>52</sup>

In nine days of combat, the Soviet forces had achieved a breakthrough on the main axis, advanced from thirty-five to sixty kilometers across extremely difficult terrain, crossed three rivers, landed two amphibious assault groups, and captured three built-up areas. Estimated German troop losses for this phase of the offensive were approximately 6,000.<sup>53</sup> German equipment losses were also severe; Soviet losses for the same period are not available.

The Soviet attackers were exhausted, however. Many units had wholly used up their supplies of food, fuel, and ammunition. The existing road network was inadequate to maintain the needed logistic support, and even the availability of the Luostari airfield after 12 October for aerial resupply flights did not alleviate the supply problem. To enable the troops to take a much-needed rest and the logistic system to catch up, Lieutenant General Shcherbakov, commander of the 14th Army, ordered a three-day pause in combat. Both sides used this time to reconstitute, reorganize, and resupply. Phase two of the Soviet offensive was to begin on the morning of 19 October.

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