

Battles near Leningrad

July-August, 1941

Luga fortified position

On July 4, 1941, the Soviet command began building a new defensive line on the distant approaches to Leningrad. The construction of defense was unfolding on the lines: Gdov - Leningrad, Luga - Leningrad and Shimsk - Leningrad. The German offensive was expected along these lines. The completion of construction was scheduled for July 15th. In early July, the HQ of the Leningrad Military District issued an order to make a MG and artillery battalions for the Krasnogvardeisk and Luga fortified positions. On July 6, troops that were supposed to defend this line were united under the control of the Luga Operational Group (LOG). The group included: 191, 177 and 70 RDs, the Leningrad Infantry School (LIS) and 1 det MntBde. Later, the arrival of three divisions of the People's Defense (PDD) was expected.

The battered formations of the North-Western Front (183, 118 and 111 RDs) operating in front of the Luga fortified position, in the area of Pskov and northeast of it, were withdrawn to the rear to reorganize the main defensive position abroad. The LOG included the 11th battery of 356-mm gun mounts TM-I-14, as well as the 12 and 18 batteries of TM-I-180 transporters with 180-mm guns. They took up positions on the right flank of the Luga fortified position and in the Novgorod region [German 1 ID notes the use of 356 mm guns].

Soviet forces

On June 27, the formation of divisions of the People's Defence (PDD) began in Leningrad. 1 PDD was considered formed already on July 9, 2 and 3 PDD - from July 10, 1941. PDDs units lower the battalion were recruited from the reserve, from the battalion and above they were recruited at the expense of the resources of the Leningrad district. 1 RR 2 PDD consisted mainly of workers from "Electrosila" plant; 2 RR - from "Skorokhod", "Proletarskaya Pobeda" No. 1 and No. 2 factories; 3 RR - from volunteers of Leninsky, Kuibyshevsky and Moscow districts. Employees of the Lenmyasokombinat, as well as students of the institute and technical school of aircraft instrument engineering, recruited to the AR 2 PDD. On the evening of July 11, the 2 PDD numbered 9,210 people. The division was fully supplied with rifles. There were 7,650 rifles and 1,000 carbines for 9210 people. But there was a shortage of LMGs (only 2 LMG in a rifle platoon). As of July 12, there were 70 of 166 HMGs in the division. There were no AT guns. In total, the AR 2 PDD had 35 guns (up to 152 mm). Up to 50% of the personnel of the 2 PDD had no training. The posts of the junior command staff were replaced by privates.

By order of Voroshilov, a consolidated tank regiment of the Leningrad armored advanced training courses for command personnel (LATC) was formed. For this, the courses were transferred to the Weimari station. From the Karelian Isthmus to the Luga direction were transferred: 10 MC (without 198 MD), 237, 177, 70 RDs. The Onega, Chudskaya, Ilmenskaya and Ladoga military flotillas, marine brigades, sailors' detachments began to form, and the construction of additional coastal batteries also began.

Thus, by the beginning of July:

- 1) 191 RD - took up defensive positions along the eastern bank of the Narva River;
- 2) 177 RD - took up defense in the area of the Luga town;
- 3) LIS - took up defense at Kingisepp;
- 4) Leningrad rifle and MG school - concentrated in Narva;
- 5) 1 det. MntBde was heading to Luga.

But the density of the formation of the Soviet troops was extremely low. On the Luga fortified position 280 km long, by the time the enemy reached it, three RDs, one MntBde and two Military

schools were defending. 191 RD took up defensive positions along the eastern bank of the Narva River at the front line of 70 km wide. The LIS (in fact, the regiment size) occupied the sector of 18 km wide, the Leningrad rifle and MG school - 25 km, 177 RD - 28 km, 1 PDD - 20 km, 1 det MntBde - 32 km. There were long, uncovered areas between the divisions. For example, LIS on its left flank conducted mobile surveillance in an open area - 35 km wide, until the arrival of 3 PDD.

German forces

Leningrad was attacked by the German 4 Tank Group (4 TGr) which consisted of two Corps: 41 AC, which advanced 750 km, and 56 AC - 675 km. The average rate of advance of German tank formations was 30 km per day, and on some days they covered over 50 km. This made it possible in the shortest time to overcome most of the distance from the Soviet border to Leningrad. 41 AC attacked on the left flank of the German group and consisted of 6, 1 TD, 36 MID and 269 ID. 56 AC attacked in the general direction to Novgorod and consisted of 3 MID, 8 TD, MID SS Totenkopf, 290 ID. The joint between the Corps was provided by 269 ID (41 AC). The left flank of the 4 TGr was provided by 1 ID (18 A).

First battles

However, the deployment of Soviet troops on defensive positions near Luga was prevented by the rapid development of events at the front line, the breakthrough of the German 4 TGr through the fortifications on the old Soviet border. Already on July 12, German units reached the edge of the Plyussa River. On July 12, German units (41 AC) entered into combat contact with the vanguard units of the Northern Front (483 RR 177 RD), which were deployed in the foreground, and broke through the defense of 90 RD on the distant approaches to Luga. A rifle regiment without combat experience could not hold back the attack of tanks and motorized infantry of the German 1 TD.

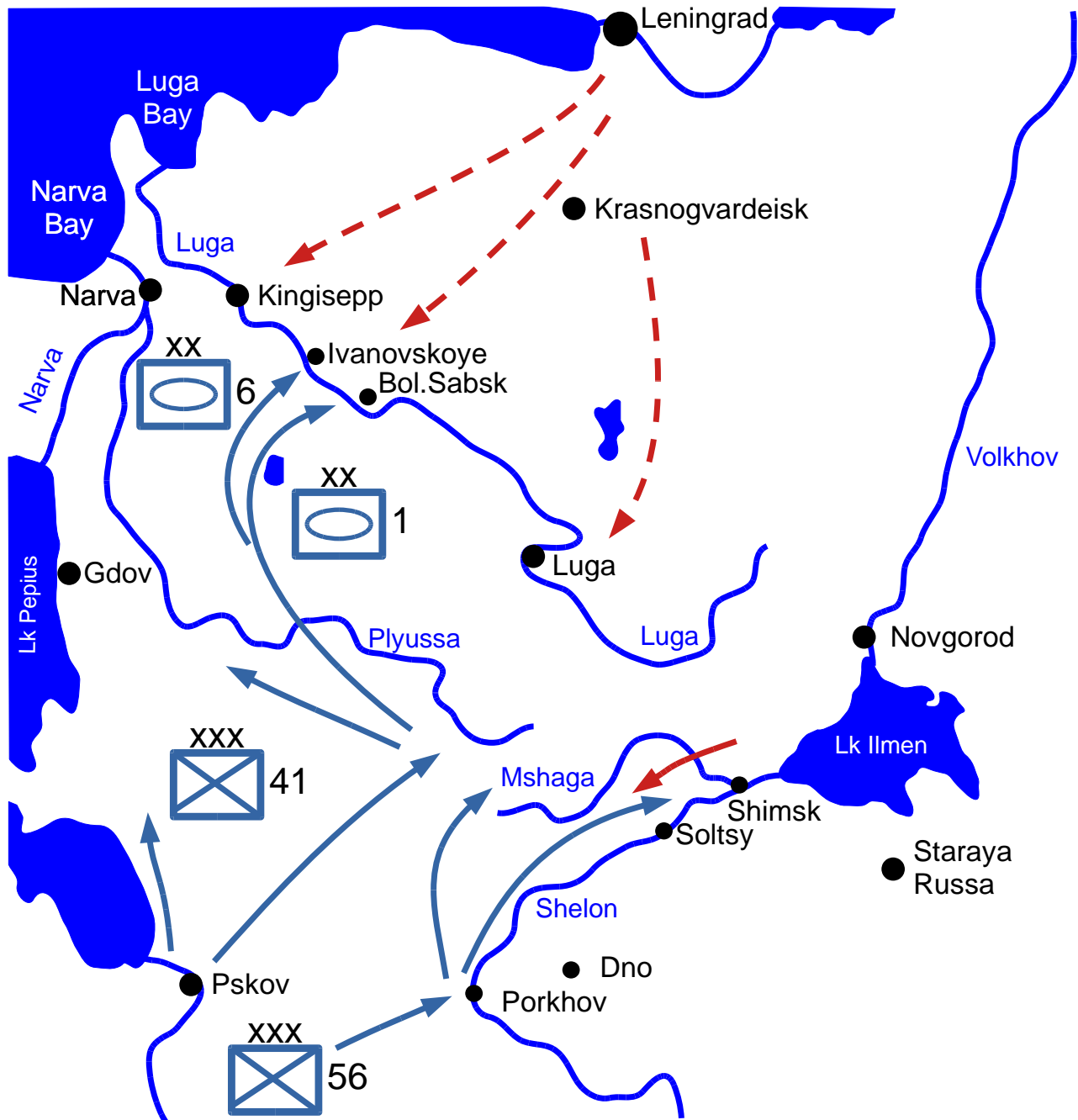
On July 13, the Soviet 10 MC, which was in reserve north of Luga, received the order of counterattacking and pushing the enemy back to the southern bank of the Plyussa River and knock him out in the Plyussa. Maneuvering group of 10 MC consisted of two battalions of motorized infantry, a battalion of tanks (32 BT tanks), a 4-gun battery of 122-mm howitzers and several smaller units. The Group advanced in two columns, one attacked along the Luga-Pskov highway, the second - north of the highway. The infantry of the 483 RR advanced to the north, closer to the railway, in the direction of Plyussa.

The enemy of the Soviet units was the Westhoven battle group from 1 TD (pic.1). The attack of the first column was not successful. The detachment was met with fire from AT guns and mortars from the Milyutino village standing on the highway. The second column struck a German convoy consisting of 15 tanks, 160 trucks and 50 motorcycles. The column was partially destroyed, and partially retreated to Plyussa and Milyutino [this episode is confirmed in the battle log of 1 TD]. Nevertheless, the Group of 10 MC did not succeed in fulfilling the assigned order, since the Germans brought the entire tank regiment of 1 TD into battle. The Group lost 15 tanks and 2 armored vehicles and about half of its strength.

However, on July 14, Raus' battle group (6 TD) was already at Zaruchye, far north of the Pskov-Luga highway. The second battle group (Kruger) of 1 TD was already moving in the same direction. The German command urgently replaced the mobile units on the approaches to Luga with infantry from the 269 ID, for which it was temporarily motorized. The counterattack of Soviet 10 MC was able to delay this replacement somewhat. At this moment, the command of the German 41 AC was faced with unfavorable terrain conditions - swamps, forests and poor roads, which made it much more difficult to advance quickly. Therefore, the main direction of the offensive was shifted to the left flank (to the north) of 41 AC - transferred from the Luga-Leningrad line to the Gdov-Leningrad line. For this, 41 AC was rotated to the north and was in the 80 km gap between 118 and 90 RDs. At

this moment, the only force that could slow down, but not stop the German offensive, was the Soviet aviation.

On July 14, the Raus' battle group (6 TD) went to the r.Luga in the Porechye region. 2 PDD, intended for defense in this sector, was still in the stage of transportation by railway.



Pic.1 – Strategic situation in mid July 1941

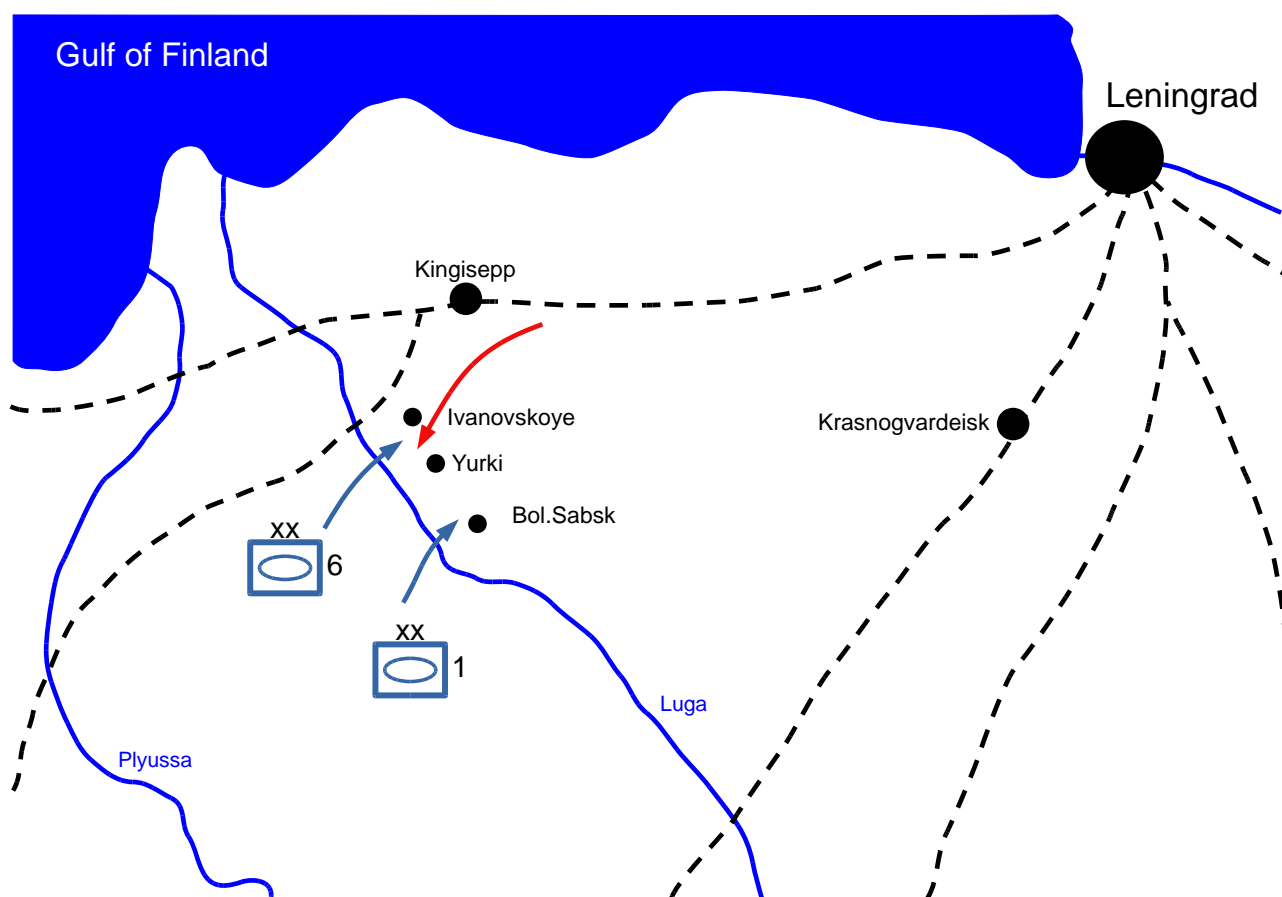
Capturing bridgeheads on Luga River

The bridge across the Luga River near the village of Porechye was defended by a unit of the 2 RD NKVD, numbering about 50 soldiers. For the capture of the bridge by the Germans, the Brandenburg unit was involved. A swift attack on the bridge forced his guards to retreat and the bridge was captured. Taking advantage of the lack of opposition, units of the 6 TD expanded the bridgehead to the villages Ivanovskoye and Yurki. The vanguard detachment of 1 TD moved to the lower reaches of the Luga River on July 14 following the 6 TD - there was simply no other road. The Germans were in a hurry to occupy the bridge across the Luga River at Bol.Sabsk, which,

according to aerial reconnaissance, was in an intact state. However, here the defense was occupied by elements of the LIS, which blew up the bridge in front of the advancing German units. The Germans had to wade across the Luga under fire. A small German detachment captures a bridgehead in the Bol.Sabsk region. This bridgehead was higher upstream of the Luga than the Raus bridgehead (6 TD) at Porechye.

On July 15, the aviation of the Soviet Baltic Fleet joined the strikes on the bridgeheads occupied by the Germans in the area of Ivanovskoe and Bol.Sabsk. From the first hours after the capture of the bridgehead by the Germans at Bol.Sabsk, fierce battles unfolded for it. According to German data, on the morning of July 15, LIS cadets attacked them with the support of heavy tanks. In the afternoon, the Germans counterattack and expand the bridgehead. In the evening, a motorcycle battalion of the 1 TD is being pulled up to the bridgehead near Bol.Sabsk.

On July 16, the 36 MID ordered the capture airfield in Gdov so that the Luftwaffe could provide air cover for the bridgeheads. In the evening of the same day, with the support of the forward detachment of the 58 ID, the Germans seized the airfield in Gdov, encircling units of the 118 RD. Developing an offensive from Gdov, the Germans came into contact with 191 RD from LOG. All units and formations of the LOG were gradually drawn into the battle. As a result, units of 41 AC were scattered on a front line of 150 km wide, and its supply was carried out along one poor road, which, together with the stubborn resistance of the Soviet troops, inevitably led to a halt in the German offensive. Air supplies were also limited due to bad weather. The main efforts of the 4 TGr were transferred to the right flank in the offensive zone of the 56 AC (pic.2).



Pic.2 – Bridgeheads on Luga River

Red Army counteroffensive near Soltsy

On July 14, German divisions of the 56 AC occupied Soltsy and reached the border of the Mshaga and Shelon rivers. Despite the fact that the Germans knew about the concentration of Soviet troops and the approach of reserve units from the north, the next order of the 8 TD was to capture the bridge on the Mshaga River. That led to the fact that the Corps units were left with uncovered flanks: the right - 70 km long, the left - 40 km. At the same time, the Soviet 11 A went on the offensive in two groups, which were to cut off the breakthrough of the German troops, which was a surprise for the German command. As a result, the German 8 TD was surrounded, and the 3 MID was forced to retreat.

On July 16, 70 RD occupied Soltsy. On the same day, the commander of the Northwestern Front ordered the armies to complete the defeat of the enemy in the Soltsy area and, while firmly holding the line occupied by the center and the left flank of 27 A, the rest of the forces went on the offensive. However, it was not possible to defeat the German troops in the Porkhov and Soltsy areas. On July 16, the MID SS Totenkopf was transferred to the 56 AC, and restored the situation. German troops from 56 AC managed to break out of the encirclement.

On July 19, the command of the German Army Group North suspended the offensive of 56 AC. Having suffered serious losses, 8 TD were withdrawn to the rear. Counteroffensive of Soviet 11 A temporarily eliminated the threat of a breakthrough of German troops to Novgorod. However, the Soviet troops also suffered heavy losses and on July 19 went on the defensive, and by July 27, with battles, retreated to the prepared positions of the Luga fortified position. On July 19, German troops also captured the Dno junction railway station, on July 22 - Soltsy. However, Soviet counterattacks forced the Germans to leave the bridgehead on the Shelon River.

By July 27, the situation along the entire front between Narva and Lake Ilmen had stabilized, and Army Group North was able to continue offensive to Leningrad.

Attempts to eliminate bridgeheads on the Luga River

The Soviet command decides to strike at the bridgeheads captured by the enemy. As the echelons with 2 PDD units arrived, it was decided to attack the bridgehead in the Ivanovskoe and Porechye regions. It was believed that 2 PDD was prepared for "defensive actions", but the advance in deployment (from the German side) led to the fact that it was required to lead an offensive, for which the division was not ready. It was decided to reinforce the division with two artillery battalions and a tank company from the LATC regiment. On July 15, the LATC tank regiment was subordinated to the commander of the 2 PDD, and on the same day an attack on the German bridgehead at Ivanovskoe followed. But this attack was not successful, 2 PDD could not bring down the enemy from the bridgehead.

Summary of the July battles

Successful defensive battles in July 1941 in the Soltsy and Shimsk directions gave optimism to the Soviet Command of the North-West direction. At Staraya Russa, a counteroffensive was being prepared against the flank of the advancing German Army Group "North", and on the Luga fortified position, the entrenched units had to firmly hold their positions and prevent the further advance of the Germans to Leningrad. The LOG was gradually filled with troops. Despite this, the density of Soviet troops remained low. 177 RD, covering the Luga town region and having three German divisions in front of it, occupied a defensive position on a front of 22 km wide. The 111 RD also defended the front line of almost the same length. The difficult terrain did not compensate for the stretching of the troops along the front line and their single-echelon disposition.

On July 23, the LOG was divided into the Kingisepp, Luga and Eastern defense sectors, the HQ of the Luga Operational Group was disbanded, and its officers and generals were sent to staff the sectors HQs, with their direct subordination to the HQ of the Northern Front. In August, the Eastern section became 48 A.

Each of the sides tried to maximize use of the resulting operational pause. While the Germans were developing a plan to resume the offensive against Leningrad, the Soviet command strengthened the city's defenses. The timing of the start of the German offensive was postponed several times, due to difficulties in supply and in the regroupings.

By August 8, the German command regrouped its troops and created three attack groups:

- 1) North - 41 AC (1, 6 and 8 TDs, 36 MID, 1 ID), 38 AC (58 ID), 1 Air Corps. **It advanced from the bridgeheads at Ivanovskoye and Bol.Sabsk** across the Koporskoye plateau in the direction of Leningrad.
- 2) Central - 56 AC (3 MID, 269 ID, ID SS "Polizei"). It advanced along the Luga-Leningrad highway in the direction of Leningrad.
- 3) South - 1 AC (11, 22 IDs and elements of 126 ID), 28 AC (121, 122 IDs, MID SS "Totenkopf" and 96 ID in reserve), 8 Air Corps. Group advanced in the Novgorod-Chudovsk direction, had to bypass Leningrad from the east and join up with the Finnish troops on the Svir River.