

27 • The Circle Closed

NO ONE HAD PLANNED TO FIGHT A BATTLE AT MGA. THE little railroad station figured on no strategic charts, either German or Russian. In fact, the engagement at Mga was accidental, small-scale, haphazard. It was the consequences of Mga that were so far-reaching.

What gave Mga importance was that once the Nazis firmly grasped the town they severed all of the rail connections between Leningrad and the remainder of Russia—the "mainland" as it came to be called—and they cut all the highways.

The first sign of danger in this direction came when the battered Soviet Forty-eighth Army, which was defending the main Moscow-Leningrad railroad line in the vicinity of Ushaki and Tosno, about thirty-five miles southeast of Leningrad, began to crumble under the Nazi Panzer attacks. Instead of falling back northward toward Leningrad, the broken remnants of the Forty-eighth Army drifted *eastward*, opening up a gap which the Nazis quickly managed to exploit.

The Leningrad Command, back to the wall, striving to stem the Nazi tide at a dozen critical points, did not immediately realize what had happened.

Colonel Bychevsky, chief of Leningrad's sappers, for example, occupied around the clock placing mines, blowing up bridges, ceaselessly seeking to build barriers against the Germans, had no inkling of the new danger. For him August 28 began very much as did each of the days of late August which later came to form in his mind a blurred calendar of disaster.

Bychevsky was disturbed that morning for a different reason. In the midst of battle the Chief of Staff, the sardonic General D. N. Nikishev, whose skepticism of Moscow's desire or ability to provide sufficient resources for Leningrad's defenses had never been concealed, had vanished.¹ Along with Nikishev went his deputy, N. G. Tikhomirov. Why? Bychevsky had

¹ More fortunate than most, General Nikishev was not shot. He survived to participate in the Stalingrad battle. (N.Z., p. 444.)

no better idea than he had of the other strange, never-explained command changes which so often caused his colleagues to disappear. He guessed that possibly Nikishev had offended Voroshilov. But this was only a guess. In Nikishev's place appeared Colonel N. V. Gorodetsky from the Twenty-third Army, a good, vigorous officer. But it was not easy to pick up the threads of the complex battles then raging. Gorodetsky made mistakes, some of which cost Leningrad dearly.

On this bright August morning with the scent of buckwheat and golden-rod heavy in the hedgerows outside Leningrad, the new Chief of Staff advised Bychevsky that the Forty-eighth Army was heavily engaged in defending the Moscow-Leningrad railroad and that it needed help. He told Bychevsky to send a detachment of sappers to Tosno to lay down a series of mine fields and to destroy any bridges which might be seized by the Germans. Tosno was located about fifteen miles south and west of Mga.

Bychevsky sent off a small unit from his 2nd Reserve Pontoon Battalion and decided to go to Tosno with Commissar Nikolai Mukha and look at the situation himself.

They drove out the Moscow highway, which runs almost arrow-straight, paralleling the railroad. When they got as far as Krasny Bor, a large village fifteen miles outside the city, they heard firing in the forest. Leaving the car, they started on foot in the direction of the sound, moving very carefully. At this point they were less than five miles south of the Kolpino fortified region, established along a little stream, the Izhora River. The fortifications had just been occupied by the Izhorsk workers artillery and machine-gun battalion, a volunteer unit, which had had no training in firing from stationary batteries. Behind this small unit there was nothing—just the broad, empty Moscow highway leading straight to the southeast gates of Leningrad.

What, thought Bychevsky, is going to happen if the Germans break through here? The two officers came up to a wooden barricade thrown across the highway. Beside it was an armored car where they found two generals, A. I. Cherepanov and P. A. Zaitsev. The generals were directing a field regiment and the small engineering detachment which Bychevsky had ordered to Tosno in a fire fight against German units. The field regiment had only about fifteen cartridges per rifle and three submachine guns.

The Germans, it seemed, had broken through the remnants of the Forty-eighth Army and swept beyond Tosno. It was their armored reconnaissance that was being held up in the fire fight.

General Zaitsev went back to the Izhora River line to try to organize a defense there. The other officers stayed on the highway to hold up the German advance as long as they could.

The German fire grew hot. The Russians fell back a couple of hundred yards as the sappers hastily put up heavy wooden barriers along the highway and dug in some antitank mines. But the field regiment was running out of

ammunition. The Russians would certainly have been overwhelmed had not five heavy Soviet tanks come up and laid down covering fire. Two German light tanks appeared on the highway, but one hit a mine and caught fire and the other was hit by its own artillery. The Germans began to lay in heavy mortar fire and two Messerschmitts roared down the highway, machine guns blazing.

The Russians had no alternative. They fell back into the fortified positions at Yam-Izhorsk and Bychevsky's men mined the bridge across the little Izhora River. As the Germans approached the bridge, the mines were touched off, halting them temporarily. The Germans were advance reconnaissance units of the 39th Army Corps of the Sixteenth Army, comprising the 12th Panzer Division and the 121st and 96th Infantry divisions (with the 122nd Infantry in the second echelon).

Dusk was beginning to fall. Bychevsky and Mukha had to report to Smolny. Artillery exchanges already had begun between the Izhorsk battalion and the Germans. The officers stopped a moment to wish good luck to one of the workers units, headed by I. F. Chernenko, an engineer in the great Izhorsk works.

Chernenko had gotten back to Kolpino that afternoon from Leningrad. At the station he found he could only buy a ticket as far as Pontonny. The girl at the ticket window said the rail line was under fire and a train had been hit. He rode to Pontonny and walked into Kolpino. Within an hour or so he was sent up to the lines. He decided to wear his leather jacket even though the afternoon was hot. It probably would be cold that night in the trenches. He was right.

The Izhorsk factory where Chernenko worked was one of the greatest in Russian industry. Founded by order of Peter the Great in 1722 to produce timbers for ship construction, in the mid-eighteenth century it began to make anchors and copper sheeting and in the nineteenth century pioneered in machine building, boiler construction, engines, turbines, armor plate and heavy military equipment. It produced the armor for Russia's early dreadnaughts—the *Petrovsk*, the *Sevastopol*, the *Gangut* and the *Poltava*.

Under Soviet aegis it vastly expanded. Now it boasted blooming mills, steel rolling mills and a whole series of specialized plants, including artillery works, a shell factory and—extremely important at this moment—a heavy tank plant. It was turning out both the reliable Soviet T-34 and the massive KV 60-ton monster of whose existence the Germans were beginning to become aware.

Not only had the Germans driven to the entrance to Leningrad; they had gotten within close artillery range of a military factory whose production was vital to Leningrad's defenses and to the whole Soviet war effort.

At this moment there were about a thousand men, members of Izhorsk factory volunteer units, in the fortified lines along the little Izhora River. Most of them were armed with rifles from drill halls, carbines, hand grenades

and pistols. Few had more than a day or two of training. They were supported by a homemade armored unit—ton-and-a-half and three-ton trucks which had been fitted out in the shops with light armor plate. How long they might hold out in the face of serious attack by the 39th German Corps was questionable.

By early evening word spread through the sprawling red-brick Izhorsk shops that the Germans were nearing the city. Cannonading could be heard in the distance, rumbling like summer thunder. It was a dark night without stars, and on the distant horizon there appeared to be the dull reflection of fires.

G. L. Zimin, chairman of the factory Party committee, called his Party workers to a meeting.

"We don't need anyone who's drooling in terror," he said roughly. "Let the real Izhorites take up their guns and—forward march! There's no time to waste. If we do not halt them, the Germans will advance to the Neva Gates and the Obukhovo factory."

He told the men that German reconnaissance had penetrated as far as the stadium—just outside the city. The Moscow road was cut. Yam-Izhorsk was in the hands of the Germans.

He looked at the crowd, among them elderly workers, some trembling with fatigue.

"Who is not feeling well?" he asked.

A few raised their hands.

"Go back to the shops. . . . Who hasn't served in the army?"

Several more raised their hands.

"You are released, comrades," he said. There were protests, but he waved them away.

"And are there any cowards here?"

The room was deathly still.

"All right," he said. "Tonight we'll form a factory battalion and before dawn we'll be on the firing line."

Only six or seven of the workers present failed to join the battalion.

By 11 P.M. about sixty Communists and Young Communists headed by Chairman Aleksandr V. Anisimov of the region executive committee had formed up in the darkened streets. They wore their factory overalls. There had been no time for farewells to wives and sweethearts.

The battalion marched up the road past the stadium and on down toward the Kolpino settlements where many of the workers lived. Behind them rose the tall column in the center of town on which was mounted the figure of a factory worker, gun in hand, dedicated to the Petrograd workers of the 1917 Revolution.

It was dawn before the unit neared the positions which they were to occupy.

"We were coming along with our rifles when suddenly we met a young-

ster with a blue bundle," Anisimov recalled. "He was a good lad, worked at the Martin oven. His name was Sasha. He saw us and asked where we were going. We answered and then asked, 'You—where are you going with the blue bundle?'"

Sasha had been to the bakery to pick up a loaf of bread and now he was on his way to the factory. What was going on there? Anisimov said it wasn't a question of defending the factory but of defending the city.

"How can I?" Sasha asked. "I haven't a gun."

"Come along," Anisimov answered. "We've got some spare guns and we'll find you a uniform."

Sasha shrugged his shoulders, put his blue packet into the pocket of a uniform jacket and marched along in the cold misty morning with his companions. Two days later they buried Sasha, killed by a shell fragment. They put the blue bundle under his head for a pillow.

Anisimov posted his little unit in the lines beside the other Izhorsk workers at about 6 A.M. An hour later he went forward to the northern outskirts of Yam-Izhorsk. He and Commander Georgi V. Vodopyanov got as far as the cemetery when bullets began to fly. One whined off a cross just beside Anisimov. They decided to get back to their lines quickly.

The Germans did not break the Izhorsk line, but they were now close enough to bring the great defense plant under point-blank artillery fire. The shelling began at 7:30 A.M., August 30, and went on for weeks with hardly any interruption. Some units of the plant had been evacuated in August, but most had not and the systematic German bombardment virtually halted production. Forty-five workers were killed and 235 wounded. In October, when fighting came to a lull, the Izhorsk battalions began to divide their time between the front lines and the plant. The government on October 4 decided to evacuate as much of the plant as possible to the Urals (production in September had dropped to a third of the August level), and over the ensuing weeks several of the principal shops were disassembled with enormous difficulty and flown out of Leningrad.

The fierce resistance of the Izhorsk workers stopped the Germans in their headlong thrust straight toward Leningrad. But it had startling and unforeseen consequences. Halted along the Izhorsk line, the Germans were deflected to the east in the same direction as the retreat of the shattered units of the Forty-eighth Army. The Nazi Panzers, finding no opposition, pushed swiftly northward along the Tosna River. The 20th Panzer Division was in the lead, and it found the going very easy. Not many Germans realized that they had broken into one of the most famous battlegrounds in Russian history. Just 701 years earlier on the ancient soil at the mouth of the Izhora, Alexander Yaroslavovich, one of Russia's legendary heroes, won the title of Alexander Nevsky. Here in the low ground along the Neva he led his knights from Novgorod the Great against the Swedes, headed by Prince Birger.

Birger planned to advance across the Neva, across Lake Ladoga and descend via the Volkhov River to attack Novgorod, the great northern capital of ancient Russia. Strategically, his plan bore great resemblance to that of Hitler. Nevsky unexpectedly attacked the Swedes and routed them July 15, 1240, in a battle which for centuries was Russia's most famous.

Now again the Izhorsk earth trembled to the roar of fighting men, again the fate of Russia stood in the balance. But where was the twentieth-century Nevsky?

None appeared. The Forty-eighth Army was in shreds. It stumbled back north and east, permitting the Nazi armor to drive up the excellent suburban road network with hardly any opposition. Before evening of August 28 the outriders of the Nazi 20th Panzers were approaching Mga. Mga was located on the Northern Railroad. This was not the main Leningrad-Moscow railroad, which had already been cut. The Northern Railroad was the line which connected Leningrad with Vologda, and through that junction point with Moscow.

As the Nazi attack developed, only a handful of Soviet troops found themselves, largely by accident, in Mga. The principal unit was a group under the command of a Major Leshchev. Major Leshchev and his soldiers had retreated all the way from Novgorod. They constantly found themselves just ahead of the Nazi armor, which nagged at their heels and inflicted heavy punishment. By the time they arrived at Mga they had no artillery and almost no cartridges.

The only other Soviet unit in Mga was a small group of Bychevsky's sappers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel S. I. Lisovsky. A week after the fall of Mga, Lisovsky, his hair bleached by exposure to the sun, his face worn and wrinkled, made his way into Leningrad and told Bychevsky what had happened. He had tried to mine the highway along which the Nazis were advancing, but they came on too fast. There was no real battle of Mga—just a series of small skirmishes in which the ill-armed, exhausted Soviet units managed to slow down the Nazis until the main German strength of tanks and motorized artillery came up. By August 30 the Nazis held Mga and had cut the Northern Railroad. They quickly fanned out, and their first units reached the Neva River the same day in the region of Ivanovskoye, just southwest of Otradnoye—the breakthrough which the excited young Komsomol girl had so accidentally reported to Admiral Kuznetsov as he sat by chance in the office of Admiral Isakov at Smolny.

Belatedly, the Leningrad Command realized what had been happening and the implications of the loss of Mga. They had few troops to throw into the breach. The first division of NKVD troops was hurried to the scene under the command of a tough police general, Colonel S. I. Donskov. It was the first to reach the Mga area. It was followed by a Border Guard division under an able general, G. A. Stepanov, and the 168th Division under Colonel Andrei L. Bondarev. But these troops had been heavily engaged against the

Finns in Karelia and had just been withdrawn from that front. They were too exhausted to be effective. Other pick-up units were rushed in—part of the 237th Rifle Division, the 1st Division of the People's Volunteers, units from the Border Guards school, two tank regiments, one of T-26's and one of KV 60-ton monsters, a division of 155-mm howitzers.

They went into action as early as August 31, against the 20th Nazi Panzers within Mga and against the German 122nd Infantry Division which had now occupied Ivanovskoye and Pavlovo at the estuary of the Mga River. The first attack of Donskov's NKVD troops was successful. The Nazis were hurled out of Mga on September 1. But on September 2 the Germans brought in powerful units of the 39th Motorized Corps and the 1st and 28th Army Corps of the Sixteenth Nazi Army. By this time it was evident to both Nazis and Russians that Mga had become the key to the encirclement of Leningrad.

The German strength was far too great for the Russians. The Soviet problem quickly became not one of trying to hold or win back Mga but to keep the Nazis from striking across the Neva River itself.

This problem preoccupied Bychevsky. The key to holding the Neva line and to preventing the Germans from getting across was a railroad bridge at Ostrovki, halfway between the Tosna and the Mga rivers. If the Nazis seized this bridge, they would be across the Neva in an instant, knifing behind the Soviet lines, in a position to strike only forty-five miles northward to make a junction with the Finns and lock a vise around Leningrad.

If the Germans got across the bridge—or the river—in any strength, there was hardly a chance that the Leningrad defenders could prevent close-in encirclement of the northern capital, its inevitable fall and an opportunity for Hitler to carry out his strategic design of a massive sweep from the north to encircle Moscow from the rear.

This bridge was on the mind of Colonel Bychevsky on the morning of August 30. He had spent the whole night trying to get the exact details on the situation at the front. It was not easy. The situation was too fluid. The NKVD units were moving up to the Mga region, and the 168th Division had been ordered into position on the Izhorsk line just east of Kolpino.

Bychevsky had been unable to see the Leningrad commander, General Popov, all night long. Popov was in continuous conference with the High Command and the special commission of the State Defense Committee.

It was morning before Bychevsky got into Popov's office. On the General's desk was a glass of ink-black coffee. And in the air Bychevsky caught a whiff of valerian drops, a favorite Russian restorative.

When Bychevsky walked in, Popov grumbled, "What do you want, Bychevsky? I was just going to shave."

Popov ran his hand over the stubble on his beard and grimaced as though he had a sore tooth. "You know what the situation is," he snapped. "You know the orders. Let's get to work."

Bychevsky said he wanted to go to the Neva and see about the railroad bridge at Ostrovki-Kuzminki.

"Do we have any troops there?" he asked.

Popov said that General Stepanov had been put in charge of the area. Some People's Volunteers were supposed to man the northern bank of the Neva, and on the southern side the 168th Division and NKVD units under Colonel Donskov were supposed to be moving into place.

"What about the bridge?" Bychevsky persisted.

"Of course, get it ready to be blown up," Popov snapped.

A moment's silence followed. Then Popov said, "Have you heard about the changes? The State Defense Committee has named Marshal Voroshilov commander of the front and I am Chief of Staff."

Bychevsky left almost immediately for the threatened railroad bridge. He brought with him his deputy, Pilipets, and a detachment of sappers under Lieutenant Rubin. From the region of Porogi, on the north side of the Neva opposite the mouth of the Tosna, on toward Shlisselburg there were hardly any troops. Bychevsky found only one antiaircraft battery, manned by Baltic sailors who were preparing to use their weapon as field artillery.

So far as he could see there were no troops whatever on the southern side of the Neva, although he heard the distant sound of battle.

The railroad bridge was completely undefended.

The moment the sappers arrived Bychevsky ordered them to cut the metal girders and mine all the approaches. As Bychevsky laconically noted: "These measures were very timely. The next day the Hitlerites arrived at the Neva right in the region of the destroyed bridge."

The blowing up of the bridge by Bychevsky's men may well have saved Leningrad. The Nazi 39th Corps under General Rudolf Schmidt had been entrusted with the task of securing the bridge. Schmidt had a special diversionary unit of the so-called Brandenburg Corps, which was supposed to cut behind the Russians and seize the bridge before it could be knocked out.

Bychevsky's timely action thwarted this plan. The 39th Corps had no pontoon bridges in its supply column. Instead of attempting to force the Neva, the 39th drove north along the near bank of the stream toward Shlisselburg.

But the circle around Leningrad had been effectively closed.

V. M. Gankevich, the officer and former athlete who had been sent to Murmansk to make certain that the Fourteenth Army's ski equipment was in order, had finished his assignment and was returning to Leningrad. His train brought him as far as Volkhov. No further. Anyone who wanted to get to Leningrad would have to walk. The distance was seventy-five miles by a roundabout and dubious route—north to Staraya Ladoga, then west across the Old and New Ladoga canals which paralleled the lake shore, through Shlisselburg and on into Leningrad.

Gankevich decided to try it on foot. He set off and at dusk overtook another man, a naval lieutenant named Aleksandr Radchenko. Radchenko was slow to become friends with Gankevich until he discovered the sportsman-officer was also trying to get to Leningrad. Then they joined forces and pushed on through the night. They could hear the sound of distant cannon fire almost constantly. There was little traffic, but occasionally they met a truck. When they got to the river station at Staraya Ladoga, they heard a woman crying and in the corner of the waiting room found a man's body, covered with a rug. The woman was sobbing beside him. The body was that of Aleksandr Ilyin-Zhenkovsky, a leader in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, a Party propagandist, a onetime Soviet diplomat and a leading chess player. The woman was his wife. They had been on a barge being towed across the Volkhov River. A German flier dropped a bomb on the craft. Ilyin-Zhenkovsky was killed, but the other passengers miraculously escaped.

The two men arranged for the burial of Ilyin-Zhenkovsky, and in the morning he was entombed in the Staraya Ladoga cemetery beside the Volkhov River.

The officers then continued their hike. About ten miles beyond Staraya Ladoga they began to encounter Soviet infantry and tanks. The two men were intermittently under fire. By the time they got to the New Ladoga Canal they were exhausted. Gankevich was barely able to swim. There was no boat, not even a plank, in sight. However, Radchenko managed to help him across both the New and the Old Ladoga canals. The two men stumbled into Shlisselburg. The Nazis were battering at its approaches. German tanks rumbled forward over the bodies of German soldiers who had fallen in earlier waves. The Russians were suffering heavy losses from Nazi diving bombing. Under German fire a Soviet engineering detachment was putting a pontoon across the Neva. Tugboats on the river helped to hold it in place. The two men made their way along the outskirts of the city. In an abandoned barn beside the river they found a boat without oars. With a couple of loose boards they cast off onto the Neva just as some unknown man shouted to them to halt. Their boat swirled out into the current and they paddled furiously for the opposite shore. The danger was not over. They were apt to be fired on at any moment, especially from the north bank. And they might well be taken by their own comrades as fleeing deserters.

As they bumped onto the shore, a tall, thin Soviet lieutenant with an automatic in his hand halted them.

"Who are you and from where do you come?" he demanded.

The pair handed over their documents. They found themselves in the midst of a well-constructed trench system equipped with fire points, dugouts and fully manned.

A few hours later the two men made their way into Leningrad. It had taken Gankevich ten days to make the trip from Murmansk. He got back September 8. This was the day the Germans took Shlisselburg.

The NKVD division commanded by Colonel Donskov was forced back from Mga, back from Power Station No. 8, the Mustolovo and the Kelkolovo workers settlements toward Shlisselburg.

It was Lieutenant Colonel S. I. Sisovsky's opinion (expressed to Bychevsky) that the Germans could have gotten across the Neva at some point north of the Tosna estuary, but that they had elected to drive for Shlisselburg instead.

The German strength was far superior to that of the Russians. Von Leeb sent in the 12th Panzer Division on September 7 and more than three hundred supporting planes. The NKVD troops melted away, and the road along the south bank of the Neva was left free for the Germans to move to Shlisselburg.

The broken Forty-eighth Army had been taken out of the hands of General Akimov August 31 and put under the command of Lieutenant General M. A. Antonyuk. It had less than ten thousand men left. The command change was in line with Stalin's directive to put the Forty-eighth Army "in order." Antonyuk proved unable to get any grasp whatever of his troops, and on September 12 the remnants were thrown into the newly created Fifty-fourth Army. This army, based on Volkhov, was designed to relieve the pressure on Leningrad and, hopefully, deblockade the city. But it was headed by as great an incompetent as the Red Army boasted, the political and police officer, Marshal G. I. Kulik, who was once described by a Soviet observer as "operatively illiterate and impermissibly procrastinating." Kulik held the command until September 25, when he was replaced by the reliable Lieutenant General M. S. Khozin.

The incompetence of Kulik, the ineptness of Antonyuk and the mismanagement of the Forty-eighth Army and the Northwest Front, then commanded by Voroshilov, were blamed by General Dukhanov for the disastrous breakthrough along the whole line from Lyuban to Tosno to Kolpino. To what extent these factors were responsible for the success of the Nazis in reaching the Neva it is difficult to assess. Soviet military commanders, who to a man hated and perhaps feared Kulik, place a major share of the blame on him for the success of the Germans in encircling Leningrad and closing the vise about the city.

There was certainly Soviet incompetence, confusion, cowardice, failure of coordination and poor direction. But the greatest handicaps were lack of manpower, inferior and inadequately trained troops and, on a higher level, consistent underestimation of the Nazi danger.

Here and there were bright exceptions. One was the Izhorsk battalions. The lines at Kolpino did not break. Indeed, within a fortnight the Izhorsk workers units went on the offensive and pushed back the Germans a bit.

But even this action has been obscured in some measure by political factors. The wartime hero of these actions was A. V. Anisimov, the man who led out the battalion of sixty workers at dawn. It was he who in February, 1942,

was singled out for special honors in a ceremony conducted at Smolny by Party Secretary A. A. Kuznetsov. It was he who was credited for organizing the defense and honored with the award of the Order of Lenin. It was he who took the salute: "Honor and glory to the Izhorsk workers!" But with the passage of years Anisimov's image faded. Other names replaced it. Why? The answer is not clear. The question of the glory of Izhorsk seems to have shifted away from reality into the savage world of Kremlin politics—a world more deadly than that of the Soviet-German lines in September, 1941. There are two official reports of the work of the Izhorsk factory, one dated September 6 and one about January 1, 1942, included in the documentary collection of the Leningrad blockade. The factory director's name is not signed to either report. All other factory reports in the collection are signed. The official Leningrad war history "rehabilitates" the name of the wartime Izhorsk hero, A. V. Anisimov. But it, too, omits the Izhorsk director's name—a certain sign that high-level politics is involved.

At least three literary works touching on the Izhorsk defense and the workers' battle to save Kolpino were written after the war. Yevgeny Ryss started to publish a novel in 1945 which he called *At the City Gates*. It dealt with the Izhorsk factory which he called "Starozavod." Only two parts of the novel ever came out. He ran into endless "critical" difficulties and finally abandoned the idea. Nikolai Chukovsky touched on the subject in his novel *Baltic Skies*, and Leonid Rakhmanov, who had been a war correspondent with the Izhorsk workers, wrote a play about them. Neither work ever saw the light of day in its original form. Only in 1959 did Rakhmanov finish his play.

Vera Ketlinskaya is blunt in placing responsibility for these difficulties. It was, she said, the "Leningrad Affair" which caused them. That is a euphemism for the savage political war between Zhdanov, on the one hand, and Georgi Malenkov and Lavrenti Beria, on the other, which, in the end, took countless lives in Leningrad.

The shadow of Mga was quick to lengthen, but on September 1 there were still signs of peacetime normalcy in Leningrad. The university had sent 2,500 students, 8 professors, 60 docents, 47 senior lecturers and 109 assistants into the armed forces. Yet 2,000 students registered for classes on September 1. One girl complained that a lecture had lasted five hours—her class was trapped with its professor in a bomb shelter and he never stopped talking. Forty higher educational institutions opened their doors September 1 and in the two weeks following. It was not business as usual. Schoolchildren collected a million bottles for Molotov cocktails in a fortnight.

September 1 was the day Dmitri Shostakovich spoke on the Leningrad radio.

"Just an hour ago," he said, "I completed the score of the second part of my new large symphonic work."

If he completed the third and fourth parts, he said, he would entitle it his

Seventh Symphony. He had been working on the composition since July. "Notwithstanding war conditions, notwithstanding the dangers threatening Leningrad," he said, "I have been able to work quickly and to finish the first two parts of my symphony."

"Why do I tell you about this? I tell you this so that those Leningraders who are now listening to me shall know that the life of our city is going on normally. All of us now carry our military burdens."

Leningrad, he said, was his native city. Here was his home and here his heart.

"Soviet musicians, my many and dear colleagues, my friends," he said. "Remember that our art is threatened with great danger. We will defend our music. We will work with honesty and self-sacrifice that no one may destroy it."

Then Shostakovich returned to his apartment on Skorokhod Ulitsa on the Petrograd side, there to continue his work and to serve his duty with the fire service, protecting the apartment house against bombs. The day was exceptionally clear one and the air had a special quality. Those who heard Shostakovich talk said each word rang like the note of a great piano.

He had, he told his friends, never composed with greater ease. He spent hours at his desk in his flat on the top floor of the five-story building where he lived, sometimes working around the clock. And he still went to the conservatory, where he had a few students left. Most had gone to the front, including the most talented of all, a young man named Fleishman who joined the People's Volunteers and was killed at the front in July.

Repeatedly Shostakovich was asked to leave Leningrad. He refused. Not until early October, after finishing the third movement of his symphony, did he reluctantly obey a command by the government. He and his family were evacuated to Moscow and within a few days to Kuibyshev. There he finished his symphony. There in March it was performed for the first time and on March 29 was given its formal premiere in the Hall of Columns in Moscow—Shostakovich's Seventh, the Leningrad Symphony, with its broad sweep of anger, agony and military panoply.

The sheets on which Shostakovich wrote his September 1 radio address have been preserved. On the reverse side are the hasty notes of the studio director:

Plans for next broadcasts to the city

1. Organize detachments.
2. Communications in the streets.
3. Construction of barricades.
4. Fighting with Molotov cocktails.
5. Defense of houses.

6. Especially emphasize on all instructional transmissions that the battle is nearing the closest approaches to the city, that over us hangs deadly danger.

Olga Berggolts preserved that souvenir of Shostakovich's broadcast. She preserved another souvenir—a sheet of lined paper torn from a book-keeper's ledger on which she wrote down at the dictation of Anna Akhmatova the speech which the poetess gave over Leningrad radio, the dictation carefully corrected by Anna Akhmatova in her own hand. It was dictated not at Anna Akhmatova's own house but in the so-called writers' "skyscraper," in the apartment of Mikhail Zoshchenko, the satirist. They had gone there because a heavy bombardment was in progress and the skyscraper was supposed to be a safer place.

Anna Akhmatova was Leningrad's "muse of tears," intensely feminine, personal and emotional. But it was with another voice that she spoke that evening over the radio to "my dear fellow citizens, mothers, wives and sisters of Leningrad."

For months, she said, the Germans had sought to take prisoner "the city of Peter, the city of Lenin, the city of Pushkin, of Dostoyevsky and Blok, the city of great culture and great achievement."

"All my life is connected with Leningrad," she said. "In Leningrad I became a poet. Leningrad gave me poetry its spirit. I, like all of you now, live with one unconquerable belief—that Leningrad never will be Fascist."

After the broadcast they went back to the building on the Fontanka, the former Sheremetyev Palace where Akhmatova lived. Olga Berggolts long remembered her beside the wrought-iron gates, her face stony with anger, a gas mask over her shoulder, standing duty as a member of the ARP team. Anna Akhmatova sewed bags for sand, which protected the shelter trenches in the gardens of the palace under the great maple of which she wrote in "Poem Without a Hero." All through September Anna Akhmatova stood by her post, guarding the roofs, placing the sandbags, writing her verses, fighting for her country. Only with October would she, too, reluctantly accept evacuation to Tashkent in distant Central Asia.

It was in these days that Olga Berggolts wrote of her beloved city:

Leningrad in September, Leningrad in September,

Golden twilight, the regal fall of the leaves,

The crunch of the first bombs, the sob of the sirens,

The dark and rusty contour of the barricades . . .

Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky had lived with his wife in Pushkin for nearly ten years. Then, in late August, he collected his writings, his most essential reference books, a few other personal possessions and came to Leningrad. It was no longer possible to work in Pushkin. The beautiful city on Leningrad's outskirts with its great parks, its palaces, its villas, its deep associations with Russian history and Russian culture overflowed with refugees from the Baltic, from Pskov, from Velikiye Luki, from Gatchina. At the Conservatory, where Bogdanov-Berezovsky taught a course in the history of Soviet music, they tried to persuade him to join the group of

composers and musicologists which was being evacuated to Tashkent. He declined to go. His mother was ill and could not be moved from Leningrad, and he had been asked to head the organization directing the work of those remaining in Leningrad. The Conservatory group was evacuated without him on the night of August 22. The train was held up at Mga because the Germans had bombed out the bridge at Volkhovstroï, en route to Vologda. Finally, the train was diverted to the Pestovo line, the only one remaining open. Shortly after the train pulled out of Mga, German bombers savagely attacked Mga railroad station.

On August 30 Bogdanov-Berezovsky went to Smolny to talk with Party officials about setting up a small mobile orchestra and singing group which would present operatic scenes to troops at the front and in the hospitals. After the conference he and other composers assembled for rifle drill under the direction of a "very nice but very demanding young lieutenant." The musicians loaded their guns, fired at targets, cleaned them. They were preparing for the block-by-block defense of Leningrad. On September 1 Bogdanov-Berezovsky rose at 6:30 A.M. He worked at his desk until nearly 10. Then he went to the Union of Composers. He and his colleagues held an audition of military songs for a military song book which they were putting out for the Leningrad troops. This was his new life—a life which differed only in minor detail from that of most of his fellow citizens.

September 4 was a foggy, cloudy day. All night there had been the sound of cannon. The shelling seemed nearer. By noon reports began to come to Smolny: German long-range artillery was firing into the city. A shell plunged into the Vitebsk freight station. Another hit the Dalolin factory. Then the Krasny Nefyanik plant was hit, followed by the Bolshevik factory and Hydroelectric Station No. 5. There were heavy casualties. The shells, it was quickly determined, were being fired by long-range 240-mm siege artillery from the region of Tosno.

Word of the shelling spread from one end of Leningrad to another, and with it word of the fall of Mga which had cut the last railroad to Moscow. It was the fall of Mga which had enabled the Germans to begin shelling the city. Vissarion Sayanov walked through the Leningrad streets that day. The posters were up for the premiere of *Maritza* at the Musical Comedy Theater September 6. He found a long line at the railroad station. He asked the people why they went there. The window was shut. No tickets were being sold. Didn't they know Mga had fallen? A woman with three little children beside her answered, "Maybe they will take Mga back and then the road will be open and then the people in line here will get the first tickets. That's why."

A white-aproned girl was selling soda pop in the station, and people walked past eating Eskimo pies. A little girl had chalked squares on the sidewalk and was solemnly playing hopscotch. That was the day Sayanov met a girl walking on Nevsky Prospekt with two gas masks over her shoulder and a cat in her arms.

"You're well prepared for a gas attack," he observed.

"Yes," she said. "I'm practicing."

"But why two masks?"

"What about my cat?" she said. "Do you think I'd let her die in a gas attack?"

Sayanov was often to think of the girl and her cat in the weeks to come as Leningrad belts drew tighter.

People talked of Mga and little else. Sayanov heard a man say on the street, "The German soldiers say they hold Mga so strongly that if we take it they'll have to fall all the way back to Berlin. They say it's impossible to take Mga."

It was strange, Sayanov thought, that people's attention fastened so on Mga—not only that of civilians but of the military as well.