

Military Developments

German Occupation of Narva, 1941

Mid-1941 the city of Narva was taken by German troops in the course of operation "Barbarossa". During the assault the city saw only minimal fighting or damage to its infrastructure. Having driven out Russian forces, the Germans became the occupying force that replaced the Soviet Union until 1944.



Photograph taken August 20, 1941 shows German troops on the march near the Narva river. Across the river is the Ivangorod fortress. (Picture first published in 1942 in "Allen Gewalten zum Trotz")

Soviet Breakout

For two years after autumn 1941 Hitler had been reluctant to provide Heeresgruppe Nord sufficient materials to complete the capture of Leningrad and the Oranienbaum pocket. To him the north was less important than the resources

and industrial centers in the central and southern regions of the Soviet Union. That lack of focus meant the Germans could never land a decisive blow on the Soviet forces. Through negligence the pocket was allowed to survive, which led to the inevitable Soviet breakout later in the war.

On the morning of January 14, 1944 at 0600 hours the heavy guns of the Kronstadt naval fortress, artillery of the 2nd Shock Army, and the Soviet battleships "Oktjabraska Revoluzija", "Lutzow", and "Marat" opened a heavy barrage on the lines of 9. and 10. Luftwaffe-Feld Division.⁷ The 2nd Shock Army, led by Lieutenant General Fedjuninskiji, then assaulted the battered German positions, initiating the Soviet breakout from the Oranienbaum pocket and operations against Armee-Gruppe Nord.

The offensive was continued with attacks from the 42nd and 67th Armies starting from Leningrad against the German 126., 170., and 215. Infanterie-Division. Soon these German units became intermingled in various pockets surrounded by determined Soviet forces. Nearby were elements of the III.SS-Panzer Korps commanded by SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner.⁸ His troops, as well as the schwere Panzer-Abteilung 502 with supporting infantry, fortified blocking formations located along the rollbahn towards the west, offering German units weakened or shattered by the Soviet offensive a route to relative safety.⁹

The Wehrmachtsbericht [Official German daily broadcast of the armed forces. This was a propaganda medium that hid formation details and tended to contain misleading information; tank destruction numbers e.g.] announced on January 19 information devoid of reality:¹⁰

»North of the Lake Ilmen, south of Leningrad and Oranienbaum, the Soviets continued their attempt to break through with increasing pressure. They were intercepted and repulsed in tenacious fighting.«

On January 26, 1944 the III. SS-Panzer Korps abandoned these hastily created blocking positions and started their "tactical withdrawal" as the newsreels informed loved ones at home.¹¹ The reality was an alarming rout of German troops along the entire sector. The surprise and ferocity of the Soviet attacks were too much for the German units to handle.

⁷ The airmen were later nicknamed "Wir Laufen" (We Run) because of the letters "WL" marked on their motor vehicles. In reality this means "Wehrmacht Luftwaffe" (Jurs, page 195)

⁸ Felix Steiner - Swords to the Knight's Cross on 10.8.1944. (Scherzer, page 693). See Appendix page 47

⁹ Otto Carius notes: "The withdrawal route became increasingly congested by the units pressing together, especially since our enemy increasingly blocked our route. We had our hands full trying to keep the route somewhat open." (Carius, pages 48-55)

¹⁰ Wehrmachtsbericht, page 14

¹¹ "German Withdrawal Through Narva" (International Historic Films. Die Deutsche Wochenschau Original Newsreel Number 705, 8 March 1944)