



GEOGRAPHY and HISTORY 22

Activity

Movement: A Doomed March to Russia

Napoleon gathered troops from all quarters of his European empire in his quest to conquer the Russian Empire. By June 1812 his "Grand Army," numbering 600,000 men, confidently began to march east across the vast, level Russian plain. Yet six months later, these same troops were making a desperate escape from Russia—having lost more than 500,000 men. What caused this panicked retreat and massive loss of life?

Napoleon had underestimated the Russian troops and his most bitter rival, the fierce Russian winter. To resist Napoleon, the Russians used a new strategy. Instead of meeting the French in open battle, the Russian army retreated slowly, drawing the French army deeper and deeper into Russia.

In September, Napoleon's forces finally reached Moscow, which the Russians had evacuated. The day after the French entered Moscow, a huge fire, probably started by Russian patriots, destroyed the city. With the Russian winter looming, Napoleon faced a difficult decision. He could either chase the Russian army farther to the east or turn back to the west.

Napoleon waited too long to make his decision to retreat. Bitter cold and driving snow plagued the Grand Army as it crossed the vast Russian plain once again. Temperatures plunged and Russians began attacking French forces without mercy.

With the help of the severe winter of their homeland, Russian forces wiped out 80 percent of the Grand Army by the time it returned to Germany in December 1812.

The Grand Army's Retreat

The strongest threw into the river those who were weaker, and . . . trampled underfoot all the sick whom they found in their way. . . . Others, hoping to save themselves by swimming, were frozen in the middle of the river, or perished by placing themselves on pieces of ice, which sunk to the bottom. Thousands and thousands . . . were lost.

—French officer's account

Napoleon's Russian Campaign





GEOGRAPHY and HISTORY **22**

Activity

Focus on Movement

Throughout history, people have moved from one location to another to fulfill specific needs. Sometimes the movement is economically motivated, such as the search for better jobs. Napoleon’s march on Russia had another motive—to conquer the Russian Empire.

Geographic barriers, such as the Russian winter that stood in the way of Napoleon’s plans, have prevented people from moving from one location to another. Mountains, rivers, and deserts are other physical factors that have hindered movement.

Today, technological advances in communication and transportation allow people to overcome many of these physical barriers. Yet other barriers exist. Repressive governments often deny their citizens the freedom to move to other countries. In addition, immigration laws and regulations keep people around the world from freely moving to other nations.

1. What are different kinds of barriers to movement?

2. According to the map on page 43, approximately how many miles did the Grand Army march in order to reach Moscow? How long did it take to cover this distance?

3. How many troops did Napoleon lose between June and September 1812?

4. How has the nature of barriers to movement changed?

Critical Thinking

5. **Drawing Conclusions** The Russian army destroyed everything that might be of use to the French—even the city of Moscow. What do you think were the consequences of this policy for the Russian people? What alternative strategies might Russian leaders have considered?

6. **Analyzing Information** How might geographical barriers to movement hinder a nation’s development? How might they help it?

Activity

7. Research the settlement of the area in which you live. What factors encouraged settlement? What factors prohibited settlement? What affects the movement of people in and out of your area today?

Copyright © by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.