**Kennedy Hickman**

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**Military and Naval History Expert**

**Education**

M.A., History, University of Delaware

M.S., Information and Library Science, Drexel University

B.A., History and Political Science, Pennsylvania State University

**Introduction**

* Museum director, Penn State All-Sports Museum
* Former curator and historian, USS Constellation Museum and the American Merchant Marine Museum
* Member and former president, Small Museum Association
* National committee member, American Alliance of Museums and the Association for State and Local History
* Featured speaker and technical advisor for multiple History Channel documentaries

**Experience**

Kennedy Hickman is a historian, museum director, and curator who specializes in military and naval history. He began his career as a curator at the US Merchant Marine Academy's American Merchant Marine Museum. Next, he worked as a curator and historian at Baltimore's USS Constellation Museum (now Historic Ships in Baltimore). At the Constellation Museum, Kennedy aided in directing the restoration of the 1854 sloop of war and oversaw the development of the museum's interpretive program.

In 2006, Kennedy became the director of the Penn State All-Sports Museum, where he currently conducts research on the intersection of military and sports history. He also serves as a guest lecturer for the university's history department. He has covered military history for ThoughtCo since 2007.

Kennedy has served as president of the Small Museum Association as a national committee member for the American Alliance of Museums and the Association for State and Local History

By

[Kennedy Hickman](https://www.thoughtco.com/kennedy-hickman-2360124)

Updated October 20, 2019

The Battle of Moscow was fought Oct. 2, 1941, to Jan. 7, 1942, during [World War II](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-overview-2361501) (1939–1945). After months of attacks and counterattacks as German forces attempted to overrun Moscow, Soviet reinforcements and a severe Russian winter took a toll on German forces, helping to thwart Germany's plans and leaving its forces exhausted and demoralized.

### Fast Facts: Battle of Moscow

Dates: Oct. 2, 1941, to Jan. 7, 1942, during World War II (1939–1945)

**﻿Soviet Union Armies and Commanders:**

* [Marshal Georgy Zhukov](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-marshal-georgy-zhukov-2360175)
* Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevsky
* 1.25 million men

**German Armies and Commanders:**

* Field Marshal Fedor von Bock
* [Col Gen. Heinz Guderian](https://www.thoughtco.com/colonel-general-heinz-guderian-2360160)
* Field Marshal Albert Kesselring
* 1 million men

## **Background**

On June 22, 1941, German forces launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Soviet Union. The Germans had hoped to commence the operation in May but were delayed by the [campaign in the Balkans and Greece](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-battle-of-greece-2361485). Opening the [Eastern Front](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-the-eastern-front-2361463), they quickly overwhelmed Soviet forces and made large gains. Driving east, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock's Army Group Center won the Battle of Białystok-Minsk in June, shattering the Soviet Western Front and killing or capturing over 340,000 Soviet troops. Crossing the Dnieper River, the Germans began a protracted battle for Smolensk. Despite encircling the defenders and crushing three Soviet armies, Bock was delayed into September before he could resume his advance.

Though the road to Moscow was largely open, Bock was forced to order forces south to aid in the capture of Kiev. This was due to [Adolf Hitler's](https://www.thoughtco.com/adolf-hitler-biography-1221627) unwillingness to continue fighting large battles of encirclement which, though successful, had failed to break the Soviet resistance. Instead, he sought to destroy the Soviet Union's economic base by capturing Leningrad and the Caucasus oil fields. Among those directed against Kiev was Col. Gen. Heinz Guderian's Panzergruppe 2.

Believing that Moscow was more important, Guderian protested the decision but was overruled. By supporting Army Group South's Kiev operations, Bock's timetable was further delayed. It wasn't until Oct. 2, with the fall rains setting in, that Army Group Center was able to launch Operation Typhoon, the code name for Bock's Moscow offensive. The goal was to capture the Soviet capital before the harsh Russian winter began.

## **Bock's Plan**

To accomplish this goal, Bock intended to employ the 2nd, 4th, and 9th Armies, supported by Panzer Groups 2, 3, and 4. Air cover would be provided by the Luftwaffe's Luftflotte 2. The combined force numbered just short of 2 million men, 1,700 tanks, and 14,000 artillery pieces. Plans for Operation Typhoon called for a double-pincer movement against the Soviet Western and Reserve fronts near Vyazma while a second force moved to capture Bryansk to the south.

If these maneuvers were successful, German forces would encircle Moscow and compel Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to make peace. Though reasonably sound on paper, plans for Operation Typhoon failed to account for the fact that German forces were battered after several months of campaigning and their supply lines were having difficulty getting goods to the front. Guderian later noted that his forces were short on fuel from the outset of the campaign.

## **Soviet Preparations**

Aware of the threat to Moscow, the Soviets began constructing a series of defensive lines in front of the city. The first of these stretched between Rzhev, Vyazma, and Bryansk, while a second, double-line was built between Kalinin and Kaluga dubbed the Mozhaisk defense line. To protect Moscow proper, the capital's citizens were drafted to construct three lines of fortifications around the city.

While Soviet manpower was initially stretched thin, reinforcements were being brought west from the Far East as intelligence suggested that Japan didn't pose an immediate threat. The two nations had signed a neutrality pact back in April 1941.

## **Early German Successes**

Storming forward, two German panzer groups (3rd and 4th) quickly made gains near Vyazma and encircled the 19th, 20th, 24th, and 32nd Soviet Armies on Oct. 10. Rather than surrender, the four Soviet Armies tenaciously continued the fight, slowing the German advance and forcing Bock to divert troops to aid in reducing the pocket.

Ultimately the German commander had to commit 28 divisions to this fight, allowing the remnants of the Soviet Western and Reserve fronts to fall back to the Mozhaisk defense line and reinforcements to rush forward, largely to support the Soviet 5th, 16th, 43rd, and 49th Armies. To the south, Guderian's panzers (tanks) rapidly encircled the entire Bryansk Front. Linking with the German 2nd Army, they captured Orel and Bryansk by Oct. 6.

The encircled Soviet forces, the 3rd and 13th Armies, continued the fight, eventually escaping east. The initial German operations, however, captured over 500,000 Soviet soldiers. On Oct. 7, the first snow of the season fell and soon melted, turning the roads to mud and severely hampering German operations. Grinding forward, Bock's troops turned back numerous Soviet counterattacks and reached the Mozhaisk defenses on Oct. 10. That same day, Stalin recalled Marshal Georgy Zhukov from the [Siege of Leningrad](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-siege-of-leningrad-2361479) and directed him to oversee the defense of Moscow. Assuming command, he focused Soviet manpower in the Mozhaisk line.

## **Wearing Down the Germans**

Outnumbered, Zhukov deployed his men at key points in the line at Volokolamsk, Mozhaisk, Maloyaroslavets, and Kaluga. Resuming his advance on Oct. 13, Bock sought to avoid the bulk of the Soviet defenses by moving against Kalinin in the north and Kaluga and Tula in the south. While the first two fell quickly, the Soviets succeeded in holding Tula. After frontal attacks captured Mozhaisk and Maloyaroslavets on Oct. 18 and subsequent German advances, Zhukov was forced to fall back behind the Nara River. Though the Germans made gains, their forces were badly worn down and plagued by logistical issues.

While German troops lacked appropriate winter clothing, they also took losses to the new T-34 tank, which was superior to their Panzer IVs. By Nov. 15, the ground had frozen and mud ceased to be an issue. Seeking to end the campaign, Bock directed the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies to encircle Moscow from the north, while Guderian moved around the city from the south. The two forces were to link up at Noginsk, 20 miles east of Moscow. German forces were slowed by Soviet defenses but succeeded in taking Klin on Nov. 24 and four days later crossed the Moscow-Volga Canal before being pushed back. In the south, Guderian bypassed Tula and took Stalinogorsk on Nov. 22.

His offensive was checked by the Soviets near Kashira a few days later. With both prongs of his pincer movement bogged down, Bock launched a frontal assault at Naro-Fominsk on Dec. 1. After four days of heavy fighting, it was defeated. On Dec. 2, a German reconnaissance unit reached Khimki, only five miles from Moscow. This marked the farthest German advance. With temperatures reaching -50 degrees and still lacking winter equipment, the Germans had to halt their offensives.

## **Soviets Strike Back**

By Dec. 5, Zhukov had been heavily reinforced by divisions from Siberia and the Far East. Possessing a reserve of 58 divisions, he unleashed a counteroffensive to push the Germans back from Moscow. The beginning of the attack coincided with Hitler ordering German forces to assume a defensive stance. Unable to organize a solid defense in their advance positions, the Germans were forced from Kalinin on Dec. 7, and the Soviets moved to envelop the 3rd Panzer Army at Klin. This failed and the Soviets advanced on Rzhev.

In the south, Soviet forces relieved pressure on Tula on Dec. 16. Two days later, Bock was sacked in favor of Field Marshal Günther von Kluge, due largely to Hitler's anger over German troops conducting a strategic retreat against his wishes.

The Russians were aided by extreme cold and poor weather that minimized the Luftwaffe's operations. As the weather improved in late December and early January, the Luftwaffe began intensive bombing in support of German ground forces This slowed the enemy advances and by Jan. 7, the Soviet counteroffensive came to an end. Zhukov had pushed the Germans 60 to 160 miles from Moscow.

## **Aftermath**

**The failure of German forces at Moscow doomed Germany to fighting a prolonged struggle on the Eastern Front. This part of the war would consume the vast majority of Germany's manpower and resources for the remainder of the conflict. Casualties for the Battle of Moscow are debated, but estimates suggest German losses of 248,000 to 400,000 and Soviet losses of 650,000 to 1,280,000.**

**Slowly building strength, the Soviets would turn the tide of the war at the**[**Battle of Stalingrad**](https://www.thoughtco.com/world-war-ii-battle-of-stalingrad-2361473)**in late 1942 and early 1943.**