

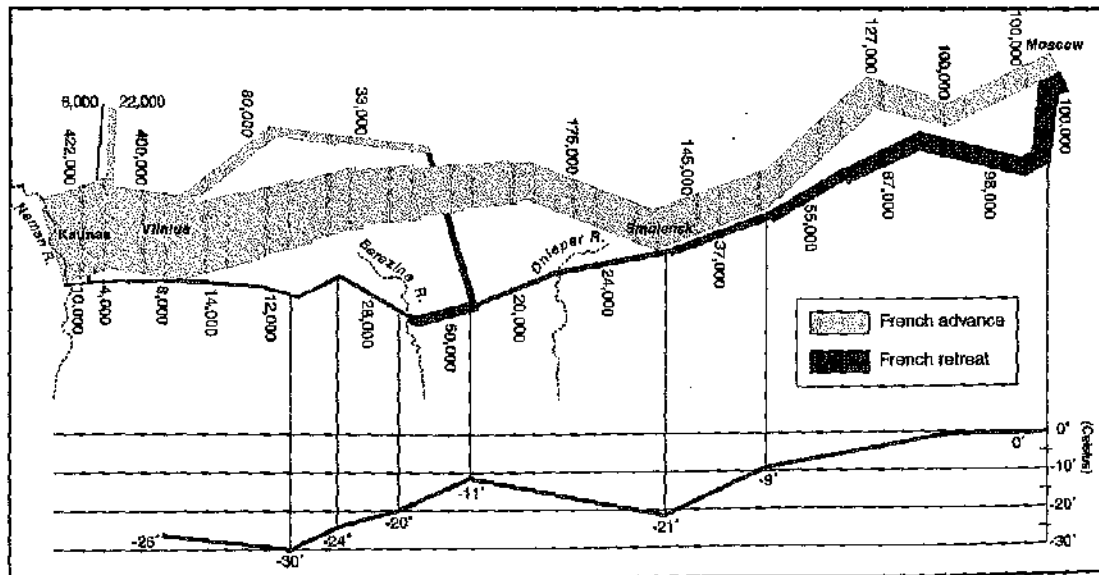
CHAPTER 21**Geography Activity****Modern Chapter 12****The French Revolution and Napoléon****NAPOLÉON'S DISASTROUS RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN**

One historian summed up Napoléon's military campaign in Russia in 1812 with these words: "The problems of space, time, and distance proved too great for even one of the greatest military minds that ever existed." Napoléon made several serious mistakes. First, he never expected that he would travel all the way to Moscow. He was used to defeating an enemy after only one or two battles. After its defeat, the enemy would ask for peace. Napoléon expected to defeat the Russians far short of Moscow.

He also gravely miscalculated the problems of feeding, equipping, and moving several hundred thousand troops in Russia. The roads were terrible. Supplies often were delayed weeks or even months. The Russians destroyed their own grain and livestock to keep supplies from the French.

Two months after starting out, French supply lines were overextended and the size of the army had been reduced by fighting along the way. At this point, Napoléon made a critical decision. Because the Russians would not fight a major battle, he would simply press on. He would capture Moscow and bring them to their knees. The Russians gave Napoléon his long-awaited fight 70 miles west of Moscow, on the field of Borodino. It was a blood-bath for both sides, but it was indecisive. One week later, Napoléon entered Moscow.

Napoléon expected the Russians to ask for peace terms, but they did not. Moreover, the Russians had destroyed Moscow as they withdrew. As a result, the French troops could not find housing. The Russians hoped that Napoléon would be defeated by the bitter cold of the Russian winter. The first frost and snow were only two weeks away when Napoléon decided to lead his army back to France.

Temperature and Troop Losses

Chapter 21, Geography Activity, continued

On October 24 the Russians attacked the retreating French as they tried to cross the Lusha River at Maloyaroslavets. The French won the battle, but at a cost of seven generals and 4,000 men. By November 25 the French had reached the Berezina River near Borisov. Here the Russians had knocked down the bridges and fortified the river banks. Napoléon's forces quickly built two new bridges. But in their panic to cross, thousands died in the freezing waters.

The chart illustrates French losses during the Russian campaign. At the left, the thick band shows the size of the army as it invaded Russia. The width of the band shows the size of the army at each position. Napoléon's retreat from Russia is shown by the dark lower band. Examine the chart, and answer the questions that follow.

1. What natural barriers did the French have to cross in their journey? How did the Russians make use of these barriers?

2. According to the chart, how many French soldiers began the Russian campaign?

3. What was the temperature when the French army reached Smolensk during their retreat?

4. How many French soldiers survived the campaign?

Critical Thinking: Human-Environment Interaction

How did temperature affect the survival rate of French soldiers during the Russian campaign?
