

## Background to Operation Barbarossa (June 22, 1941)

### Reasons Most Soviet Citizens Hated Communism at the Beginning of WWII:

#### 1. Soviet Agricultural Collectivization 1929-1940

Russia has historically had a hard time feeding her people. Stalin began a rapid program of **agricultural collectivization from 1929 (going to 1940)** which attempted to deliver more food for less money.

\*\*\*Peasants were forced to give their farms, farmhouses, grain, and livestock to the Soviet government **without any compensation!** They were then ordered to move to large government-owned (collectives) farms. Collectivization created a rural civil war!! Peasants began slaughtering their livestock and eating it or giving it away rather than surrendering it to the government.

Food **rationing** started in 1929 and by 1932, average consumption of meat, poultry, & fat fell by 2/3. In 1933 famine struck many parts of the Soviet Union. **More than 5 million peasants starved to death that year!!!**

\*\*\*The communist government used collectivization to modernize farming in the Soviet Union. The government could afford to buy tractors and other new equipment, as well as new hybrids of various types of seed. Modernization allowed the government collectives (farms) to produce significantly more food so they could feed the Soviet people.

#### 2. The Stalinist Purges (executions) 1934-1938

In 1934, Stalin became very worried when **\*\* plans for a military overthrow of the Soviet government were uncovered**. He began purging (killing) the following four categories of people:

- 1) Communist Party leaders that supported someone other than Stalin for Premier in 1924, when Lenin died – especially supporters of his political rival, **Leon Trotsky**. Many leaders were accused of treason. Most were taken to court and forced to confess. The event that gave Stalin the excuse to start a series of **\*\*show trials** was the **December 1, 1934 assassination of Sergei Kirov**, leader of the Leningrad Communist Party. He was assassinated in the party headquarters. Many Soviets claimed Stalin was behind the assassination of Kirov because he feared Kirov's growing popularity with the people..
- 2) Top officers in the Red Army – most had been appointed under the old Czarist (**non-Communist**) government and Stalin did not trust them.
- 3) Communist Party Members Totally Loyal to Stalin – just ordered many of them wiped out!! This caused Soviet citizens to be afraid of going against Stalin.
- 4) Ordinary Citizens - Almost all of these people were innocent of the charges. There actually was no plan for a military coup! Hitler ordered the plans to be forged and planted where they would be found. The forgeries were a great success for Hitler and the purges greatly weakened the Red Army.

Stalin had a mental complex of insecurity. He wanted total power for himself and thought everyone was out to get him.

#### Results of the Purges (1934-1938):

- People of S.U. scared to death
- Military officers remaining refused to act independently – waited for Stalin's orders

### Operation Barbarossa -- June 22, '41

Due to a delay helping the Italians in Greece and Egypt, Hitler was not able to start the invasion at the beginning of May as originally planned! He could not start the invasion until June 22, 1941. **\*\*\*\*This would become one of the major reasons the Nazis failed in Operation Barbarossa.**

\*\*\***Operation Barbarossa's goal = Middle East oil & Russian farmland (Lebensraum)**

The initial attack was the largest military action to that date in history! It was a complete tactical and psychological surprise!! German troops had been active on the Polish border in the days prior to the attack. The Red Army was disorganized – had no plans for defense

& many of its soldiers were on leave. Stalin even disappeared for a few days right after the attack. He became severely depressed & was uncertain what to do.

Initial attack was a great success for Germany. Over 1000 Red Air Force planes were lost on the first day! By the second day of the attack, the Red Air Force had lost all its bombers & its commander, Kopets, shot himself!! Many Red Army troops surrendered.

### Reasons Stalin Should Have Been Prepared for the Attack:

- Stalin had received many warnings from both the U.S. & Britain. From October to June of 1941, a large number of German military divisions were transferred to the Eastern Front.
- **Richard Sorge, a German communist, was a spy for the Soviets.** His cover was as a Nazi journalist, serving in Tokyo, Japan. Sorge found out about Operation Barbarossa and sent word of it to Stalin!!
- Stalin also received Russian maps, as well as Russian phrase books and dictionaries, which were being printed on German printing presses!
- In addition, there was a run on Russian maps in the Russian bookstores!!
  - German planes were sighted when they flew into Russian air space. The Russians protested meekly. There were around 200 overflights!!!

{Operation Barbarossa started on June 22, 1941} - On July 3, 1941, Stalin made a speech to the Soviet nation. It was similar to Franklin Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats." In the speech, Stalin referred to the Soviet people as "brothers & sisters." It was a very poorly delivered speech and spoke of horrible losses in the first weeks. The speech was well-received overall!! The truth was said. **The Soviets liked Stalin since he appeared to be an average man – a peasant! They could relate to him and his mannerisms.**

As Stalin's speech was delivered, the Russians began retreating toward Moscow, using "**Scorched Earth**" tactics.

### KEY MISTAKES LEADING TO GERMAN LOSS

1. **Hitler changed his strategy too often** (Wore equipment and men out! Cost extra fuel & resources.)

- Initially, the German Generals wanted all German armies to be sent straight toward Moscow. It was thought that this would draw all Soviet forces in to protect Moscow.
- Hitler overruled the Generals and ordered a 3-pronged attack with the targets of **Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev.**
- Later in the war, Hitler changed strategies by ordering all forces to move back to the middle to attack Moscow. (moved Army Group North & Army Group South to center to attack Moscow)

2. **Another key mistake occurred because of Hitler's racial views!** People from the **Ukraine & the Baltic provinces** hated Communism & greeted the Nazis as liberators!! Hitler could have integrated them into the Nazi armies & used their knowledge of the land. Instead, he put them on trains bound for concentration camps!!

**Sept. 4, 1941** - - The Nazis started a **900 day Siege of Leningrad!!** People were forced to eat horses & pets. Cannibalism occurred!!  
{\*\* Siege of Leningrad reading}

**Oct. 7, 1941** - - The Germans moved close to Moscow. The Muscovites panicked!! People tried desperately to flee the city. Thought Germans would soon occupy it. **\*\*Stalin & the State Dept. stayed there and the people never forgot it!!!** Then it started to rain for 3 weeks!! The Nazi war machine became bogged down in the mud!!

**Nov. 1941** - - Russians making better tanks and planes. Russian troop reinforcements arrived from battle with Japanese in Mongolia. War ended when Japs decided to attack to the South & Russia needed reinforcements in the West. **\*\* This brought battle hardened Russian troops to the rescue.**

**\*\*\*\*\*December 1, 1941** - - Winter hit!!! The German army was not equipped for it. They had huge supply line problems. Temps commonly -40!!!

\*\*\* December 6, 1941 - - The Germans started retreating from Moscow!! The Russians began the pursuit.

December 7, 1941 - - The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii!!

## The Battle of Stalingrad, May '42 to February '43

\*\* Fall of 1942 **Battle of Stalingrad was the \*\* turning point\*\*** where the Russians started to win the war against Germany.

### Goals of the Nazis in Stalingrad

- Destroy the industrial capability of Stalingrad
- Move south into the **Caucasus Mts.** {Georgia} to get control of one of the world's greatest oilfields. Nazis thought loss of this oil would shut down the Russian war machine. Control of the oil would also allow Germany to take a second shot at Britain.

As always, the cold weather & lack of supplies stopped the Germans from reaching the oil of the Caucasus.

Stalingrad is on the western side of the **Volga River**, high above steep cliffs that dropped to the river. **It was a major weapons production site!** Russian T-34 tanks rolled off the assembly line with guns firing!!

By Sept. 1942, the Germans were outside the city. Each night, Russians sent supplies and troops across the river (40 miles to the west of Stalingrad is the **Don River**). **Urban fighting** was extremely intense and demanded constant attentiveness. Snipers, mines, booby traps were everywhere. It was not easy for commanders to control the direction of the war. Soldiers disappeared into the city.

**RUSSIAN PLAN** = patiently wait for frost to hit so they can move armored reinforcements in and wait for the Allied invasion of North Africa (Operation Torch, Nov. 8, '42 – Patton) to stop further German troops from being sent to reinforce Germans around Stalingrad.

## Stalin -- Success Beyond His Wildest Dreams By the End of the War!!

USSR achieved victory. The Communist system remained. Stalin remained in power & stronger than ever. Communist system & Stalin's leadership now extended into E. Europe with what became known as the Communist Bloc.

### Reasons for Stalin's Success:

1. **Red Army & Russian People** – Tremendous sacrifice by the Soviet people! (22 million casualties!) Population maintained very strong morale throughout the war. Soviet people were used to living with very little.
2. **Hitler** – In terms of psychological warfare & winning the minds of the people, Stalin was the master and Hitler was a disaster!! Many non-Russian people in the Ukraine & in the Baltic provinces welcomed Hitler as a liberator. **\*\* Russian peasants were willing to fight with the Germans if the Germans agreed to return to privately owned farming operations after the war. The Germans did not accept this offer** - - they kept collective agriculture because they thought they could take food from it more easily. Hitler took the Ukrainians back to Germany to be used as slaves. **\*\*\* This was a major reason the Soviets had such high morale.**
3. **Stalin's Successful Use of Nationalistic Propaganda** - OLD SYSTEM = when the Bolsheviks first took over in 1917, they downgraded Russian nationalism. They thought Russian nationalism would work against communism. The Soviet Union had over 100 different language groups and they needed to emphasize multicultural unity.

NEW SYSTEM – in the mid 1930s, Stalin changed the policy toward nationalism in order to use it to boost the nation's morale and fighting capability. **Stalin began to glorify the successes of Russian heroes {such as Vaciliy Zaitsev in the movie "Enemy at the Gates"}**. By **November of 1941**, when the Nazis were not far from Moscow and it looked like they might take it, **Stalin brought the hero program to a peak**. For example, even though the Nazis were on the doorstep, Stalin decided, on November 7, 1941, to go ahead with the annual military parade in honor of the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, held in Moscow. This was a great morale booster for the Russian people.

**Stalin now elevated the status of Red Army officers.** New medals were created and awarded in order to publicly increase the prestige of the army and the confidence of the officers within it. Officers were granted significant distinction from the lower level soldiers.

4. Stalin Changed His Stance on the Russian Orthodox Church OLD SYSTEM = Since 1917, the Bolsheviks had tried to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church, to make all Soviets atheists. Stalin installed a man named **Ser Gay** as the head of the Russian Orthodox Church so the **Kremlin** could control it. Ser Gay closed seminaries, cut funds to churches, & ordered Russian Orthodox Churches torn down!!

NEW SYSTEM = In August of 1942, Stalin reversed his stance against the Russian O. Church. He ordered Ser Gay to publish a book about the Russian O. Church. The book gave the history of the church, restated its beliefs, & in it Ser Gay made a plea to Russians to fight for their country!! They should support their nation and fight to the death of the last man if necessary!! **Ser Gay ordered all Russian Orthodox priests to include this message in their sermons.**

