

**WORLD WAR II
(1939-1945):
OPERATION
BARBAROSSA:
GERMANY'S INVASION
OF THE SOVIET UNION**



WORLD WAR II (1939-1945): OPERATION BARBAROSSA: GERMANY'S INVASION OF THE SOVIET UNION

Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the major parts of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the objectives each part of the German army was given, and why the German advance was stopped short of its goals.

Subjects

European History, World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Motherland Calls Statue, Volgograd
- Mus. Great Patriotic War, Moscow
- Kremlin, Moscow

Essential Questions

- What was the German Army's strategy for defeating the USSR in 1941?
- How did the Soviet army respond to the German attack?
- Was Operation Barbarossa successful?

Academic Summary

From an Address by Chancellor Hitler to the German People, 22 Jun 1941

German people! National Socialists!

Germany was defeated in 1918 only because of its inner disunity. The results were terrible. After first hypocritically declaring to be fighting only against the Kaiser and his regime, they [the allied powers] began the systematic destruction of the German Reich after the German army had laid down its arms. As the prophecy of a French statesman, who had said that there were twenty million Germans too many, began to be fulfilled through starvation, disease, or emigration, the National Socialist movement began building the unity of the German people, thereby preparing the rebirth of the Reich.

This new revival of our people from poverty, misery, and shameful contempt was a sign of a pure internal rebirth. England was not affected, much less threatened, by this. Nonetheless, it immediately renewed its hateful policy of encirclement against Germany. Both at home and abroad, we faced the plot we all know about between Jews and democrats, Bolshevists and reactionaries, all with the same goal: to prevent the establishment of a new people's state, to plunge the Reich again into impotence and misery.

The hatred of this international world conspiracy was directed not only against us, but also against those peoples who also had been neglected by Fortune, who could earn their daily bread only through the hardest struggle. Italy and Japan above all, alongside Germany, were almost forbidden to enjoy their share of the wealth of the world. The alliance between these nations was, therefore, only an act of self-defense against a threatening, egotistical world coalition of wealth and power.

As early as 1936, according to the testimony of the American General Wood to a committee of the American House of Representatives, Churchill had said that Germany was becoming too strong again, and that it therefore had to be destroyed.

In summer 1939, England thought that the time had come to renew its attempts to destroy Germany by a policy of encirclement. Their method was to begin a campaign of lies. They declared that Germany threatened other peoples. They then provided an English guarantee of support and assistance, next, as in the World War, let them march against Germany.

Thus between May and August 1939, England succeeded in spreading the claim throughout the world that Germany directly threatened Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, Bessarabia, and even the Ukraine. Some of these nations allowed themselves to be misled, accepting the promises of support that were offered, and thereby joined the new attempt to encircle Germany.

Under these circumstances, I believed that I was called by my conscience, and by the history of the German people, to assure not only these nations and their governments that these British accusations were untrue, but also to reassure the strongest power in the East through formal declarations that our interests did not conflict ... You probably all felt that this was a bitter and difficult step for

me. The German people have never had hostile feelings toward the peoples of Russia. During the last two decades, however, the Jewish-Bolshevist rulers in Moscow have attempted to set not only Germany, but all of Europe, aflame. Germany has never attempted to spread its National Socialist worldview to Russia. Rather, the Jewish-Bolshevist rulers in Moscow have constantly attempted to subject us and the other European peoples to their rule. They have attempted this not only intellectually, but above all through military means. The results of their efforts, in every nation, were only chaos, misery, and starvation.

I, on the other hand, have tried for two decades to build a new socialist order in Germany, with a minimum of interference and without harming our productive capacity. This has not only eliminated unemployment, but also the profits of labor have flowed increasingly to working people. The results of our policies are unique in all the world. Our economic and social reorganization has led to the systematic elimination of social and class barriers, with the goal of a true people's community.

It was, therefore, difficult for me in August 1939 to send my minister to Moscow to attempt to work against Britain's plans to encircle Germany. I did it only because of my sense of responsibility to the German people, above all in the hope of reaching a lasting understanding and perhaps avoiding the sacrifice that would otherwise be demanded of us.

With the exception of Lithuania, Germany declared that those areas and nations were outside Germany's political interests. There was a special provision in the case that England succeeded in inciting Poland into war against Germany. But here, too, German claims were moderate, and in no relation to the accomplishments of German arms ... The results of the treaty, which I sought in the interests of the German people, were particularly severe for Germans living in the affected nations. Over half a million German people's comrades — all of them small farmers, craftsmen, and workers — were forced, almost overnight, to leave their former homes to escape a new government that threatened them with vast misery, and sooner or later, with complete extermination.

Even so, thousands of Germans disappeared! It was impossible to learn what had happened to them, or even where they were. More than 160 of them were men holding German citizenship. I kept silent about all this, because I had to keep silent! My wish was for final agreement with this state, and if possible a lasting settlement. But even during our march into Poland, in violation of the treaty, the Soviet rulers suddenly claimed Lithuania.

The German Reich never intended to occupy Lithuania, and never made any such demand on Lithuania. To the contrary, it turned down the request by the Lithuanian government to send German troops there, since that did not correspond to the goals of German policy.

Nonetheless, I accepted this new Russian demand. But that was only the beginning of ever new demands.

The victory on Poland, gained exclusively by German troops, gave me the

occasion to extend a new offer of peace to the Western powers. It was rejected by the international and Jewish warmongers. The reason was that England still hoped to mobilize a European coalition against Germany that would include the Balkans and Soviet Russia.

Those in London decided to send Ambassador Cripps to Moscow. He has clear orders to improve relations between England and Soviet Russia, and to develop them along lines England wanted. The English press reported on the progress of his mission, as long as they were not silent for tactical reasons. The first results were evident in fall 1939 and spring 1940. Russia justified its attempts to subject not only Finland, but also the Baltic states, by the sudden false and absurd claim that it was protecting them from a foreign threat, or that it was acting to prevent that threat. Only Germany could have been meant. No other power could enter the Baltic Sea, or wage war there. I still had to remain silent. The rulers of the Kremlin continued. Consistent with the so-called friendship treaty, Germany removed its troops far from its eastern border in spring 1940. Russian forces were already moving in, and in numbers that could only be seen as a clear threat to Germany. According to a statement by Molotov, there were already 22 Russian divisions in the Baltic States in spring 1940. Although the Russian government always claimed that the troops were there at the request of the people who lived there, their purpose could only be seen as a demonstration aimed at Germany. As our soldiers attacked French-British forces in the west, the extent of the Russian advance on our eastern front grew ever more threatening.

In August 1940, I concluded that, given the increasing number of powerful Bolshevik divisions, it was no longer in the interests of the Reich to leave the eastern provinces, so often devastated by war, unprotected. This, however, is exactly what the British and Soviets had hoped. The fact that so much of the German forces, in particular the air force, was tied down in the east made it impossible for the German leadership to bring a radical end to the war in the West. This was the goal of both British and Soviet Russian policy. Both England and Soviet Russia wanted to prolong this war as long as possible in order to weaken all of Europe and plunge it into ever greater impotence.

... Despite our principles and customs, and despite the fact that the Rumanian government had brought on these troubles itself, I urgently advised them, for the sake of peace, to bow to Soviet extortion and cede Bessarabia. The Rumanian government, however, believed that it could justify this step to its own people only if Germany and Italy in return guaranteed the security of its remaining territory. I did this with a heavy heart. When the German government gives a guarantee, it will stand by it. We are neither English nor Jewish. National Socialists! I behaved as the responsible leader of the German Reich, but also as a responsible representative of European culture and civilization. The result was an increase in Soviet Russian activity against the Reich, above all the immediate beginning of efforts to subvert the new Rumanian state and an attempt to use propaganda to eliminate the Bulgarian government. With the help of confused and immature people, the Rumanian Legion succeeded in

organizing a coup that removed General Antonescu and plunged the nation into chaos. By removing legal authority, they also removed the grounds for Germany to act on its guarantee. Still, I believed it best to remain silent. Immediately after this enterprise collapsed, there was a new increase in Russian troops along the German eastern border. Increasing numbers of tank and parachute divisions threatened the German border. The German army, and the German homeland, know that until a few weeks ago, there was not a single German tank or motorized division on our eastern border.

If anyone needed final proof of the carefully hidden coalition between England and Soviet Russia, the conflict in Yugoslavia provided it. While I was making a last attempt to keep peace in the Balkans, and in agreement with the Duce invited Yugoslavia to join the Three Power Pact, England and Soviet Russia organized a coup that toppled the government that was ready for such an agreement.

The German people can now be told that the Serbian coup against Germany was under both the English and Soviet Russian flags. Since we were silent, the Soviet Russian government went a step further. Not only did they organize a Putsch, but signed a treaty of friendship with their new lackeys a few days later that was intended to strengthen Serbia's resistance to peace in the Balkans, and turn it against Germany. It was no platonic effort, either. Moscow demanded that the Serbian army mobilize.

Since I still believed that it was better not to speak, the rulers of the Kremlin took a further step.

The German government now possesses documents that prove that, to bring Serbia into the battle, Russia promised to provide it with weapons, airplanes, ammunition, and other war material through Salonika.

That happened at almost the same moment that I was giving the Japanese Foreign Minister Dr. Matsuoka the advice to maintain good relations with Russia, in the hope of maintaining peace. Only the rapid breakthrough of our incomparable divisions into Skopje and the capture of Salonika prevented the realization of this Soviet Russian-Anglo-Saxon plot. Serbian air force officers, however, fled to Russia and were immediately welcomed as allies. Only the victory of the Axis powers in the Balkans frustrated the plan of involving Germany in battle in the southeast for months, allowing the Soviet Russian armies to complete their march and increase their readiness for action.

Together with England, and with the hoped for American supplies, they would have been ready to strangle and defeat the German Reich and Italy.

Thus Moscow not only broke our treaty of friendship, but betrayed it! They did all this while the powers in the Kremlin, to the very last minute, hypocritically attempted to favor peace and friendship, just as they had with Finland or Rumania.

I was forced by circumstances to keep silent in the past. Now the moment has come when further silence would be not only a sin, but a crime against the German people, against all Europe.

Today, about 160 Russian divisions stand at our border. There have been

steady border violations for weeks, and not only on our border, but in the far north, and also in Rumania. Russian pilots make a habit of ignoring the border, perhaps to show us that they already feel as if they are in control.

During the night of 17-18 June, Russian patrols again crossed the German border and could only be repelled after a long battle.

Now the hour has come when it is necessary to respond to his plot by Jewish-Anglo-Saxon warmongers and the Jewish rulers of Moscow's Bolshevik headquarters.

German people!

At this moment, an attack unprecedented in the history of the world in its extent and size has begun. With Finnish comrades, the victors of Narvik stand by the Arctic Sea. German divisions, under the command of the conqueror of Norway, together with the heroes of Finland's freedom and their marshal, defend Finnish soil. On the Eastern Front, German formations extend from East Prussia to the Carpathians. From the banks of the Pruth River, from the lower Danube to the Black Sea, German and Romanian soldiers are united under state leader Antonescu.

The purpose of this front is no longer the protection of the individual nations, but rather the safety of Europe, and therefore the salvation of everyone. I have therefore decided today once again to put the fate of Germany and the future of the German Reich and our people in the hands of our soldiers.

May God help us in this battle.

Secondary Summary

At dawn on 22 Jun 1941, German troops crossed the Soviet border in Poland and began the invasion of the Soviet Union. It was the largest invasion in history, consisting of over four million German soldiers, organized into 183 German divisions. The German blitzkrieg also had almost 4500 Luftwaffe aircraft and over 4000 tanks at its disposal. The German attack would be along an 1800-mile front, with three separate thrusts.

Army Group North was commanded by Field Marshall Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb and comprised of 20 infantry divisions, three motorized infantry divisions and three panzer divisions. Stationed in East Prussia, its task was to capture the Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) on its way to Leningrad (St. Petersburg). The capture of Leningrad, considered by the Germans to be the heart and soul of Bolshevism, would cripple Soviet morale and cut supplies from Britain via the Baltic Sea.

Army Group Center was commanded by Field Marshall Fedor von Bock, a lifelong and highly decorated officer in the German military who had led the invasion of Poland in 1939 and the invasion of France in 1940. It was the largest of the three German army groups with 50 divisions and two panzer groups under Bock's command. Stationed in Poland, its objective was to drive through Belorussia and to capture Moscow. German strategists had studied Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia. They believed that the key to Napoleon's defeat was the ability of the Russian army to give up territory as it waited for winter and then counterattack with sufficient strength. In order to prevent a repeat of this catastrophe, Bock was ordered to destroy Soviet armies by using blitzkrieg tactics

to encircle them. The overall objective was the capture of Moscow, preferably before the onset of winter.

Army Group South was commanded by Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt. Stationed in Southern Poland, it was to drive through Ukraine on its way to the Crimea and the Caucasus region in Southern Russia, a source of oil and natural materials important to the war effort. Along the way, Rundstedt, along with his Rumanian and Hungarian allies, was directed to take Stalingrad, a city on the Volga River.

Operation Barbarossa, as the invasion was called by the German High Command, started off well enough. After German troops crossed the Polish border, the Luftwaffe and panzer divisions smashed deep into Soviet territory. The Red Army lost hundreds of thousands of men within just a few weeks, as the Soviets reeled from the invasion. By the end of 1941, over 3 million Soviet POWs had been captured (most were taken to concentration camps, never to return).

In the north, Leeb's forces cut through the Russian army. By the end of the first week, the Soviet Mechanized Corps, suffering from a lack of supplies and coordination, had lost 90% of its strength. The blitzkrieg tactics, so important to the German success, had worked well. In fact, it had worked too well, and the German High Command ordered its tanks to stop on the outskirts of Leningrad while the infantry caught up. This pause was to prove one of the worst decisions of the war, as it gave Soviet leaders time to organize their defenses in Leningrad. German forces got within 6 miles of the city when Hitler ordered that it should be starved into submission rather than taken by force. The siege would ultimately last over two years before the Soviets were finally able to drive the Germans back.

In the center, Bock's forces first struck towards Minsk in Belorussia, quickly beating back the Soviet Army, but it suffered high casualty rates in doing so. Nonetheless, by early October, lead elements of the German army were less than 100 miles from Moscow. At that point, however, their supplies began to run out. Weather issues and long exposed supply lines hampered German efforts. On 31 October, Hitler and the high command in Berlin ordered a pause in the operation to allow the German army to consolidate its troops for the final push to Moscow. It was a mistake. The extra time allowed Stalin to bring up 30 divisions of Siberian troops and over 1000 tanks to defend Moscow. By early December, over 500,000 Soviet troops defended the capital.

Eventually the attack proceeded and the German army was able to reach within 6 miles of the Kremlin (close enough that long range field glasses could see the city's tallest buildings), but by then the first blizzard hit. Temperatures in early December plunged. German soldiers, who had begun their operations in summer uniforms, didn't know they would be facing the roughest Russian winter since 1812. They would never reach Moscow.

In the south, the Germans encountered stiff Russian resistance from the start, slowing the invasion. Nonetheless, Rundstedt's armies were able to take Ukraine and the Crimea on their way to the oil fields in the Caucasus. Problems with supply lines (similar to those faced by Army Group Center), hampered efforts, however, as the Germans took more and more territory. By late August, the 6th Army under General Friedrich Paulus had reached the outskirts of Stalingrad and was poised to take the city. At that point, Stalin issued orders to defend the city at all costs. After intense

fighting that at times went building-to-building and house-to-house, the Soviets finally launched a massive counterattack in mid-November. The move cut off the 6th army. Heavy fighting continued over the next two months. On 31 January, with his men exhausted, freezing and out of ammunition, Paulus surrendered. It would be the turning point of the Second World War.

In the end, Operation Barbarossa was a failure. The Germans failed to capture Leningrad, Moscow or Stalingrad. The Russian counterattack was the turning point in the war on the Eastern Front.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the major parts of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the objectives each part of the German army was given, and why the German advance was stopped short of its goals.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the overall objectives of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, in 1941.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the major objectives given to each part of the German army as part of Operation Barbarossa.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain why Operation Barbarossa failed to achieve its objectives.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Why were Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union ideological enemies? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Operation Barbarossa (20 min)
- Video – Operation Barbarossa (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about Operation Barbarossa, taking notes as necessary. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles at home to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Operation Barbarossa (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the major parts of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the objectives each part of the German army was given, and why the German advance was stopped short of its goals.
- Alternate Assessment: Given what you know about its failures, could the Germans have achieved their goals in Operation Barbarossa? Would this have knocked the USSR out of the war? If so, would Britain have then surrendered to Germany?

Extension

On tour: Motherland Calls Statue, Volgograd (Stalingrad)

While on tour, students in Russia can visit the Motherland Calls Statue in Volgograd. Originally known as Tsaritsyn, the city was renamed Stalingrad in honor of Josef Stalin in 1925. The name was changed again in 1961 during the period of “de-Stalinization” in Russia. An important industrial and rail center, the city was the site of arguably the most horrific and ferocious battle of the Second World War. Over the span of 6 months between Aug 1942 and Jan 1943, Stalingrad saw casualties estimated between 1.5 million and 2.0 million, including 40,000 civilians. The Battle of Stalingrad, where the German 6th army was forced to surrender after being cut off in a counterattack, is considered to be the turning point on the Eastern Front (and perhaps the war itself). In 1967, the Motherland Calls Statue was unveiled as a memorial to the Soviet defenders of the city during the Battle of Stalingrad.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hitler4.htm
German Declaration of War on the Soviet Union (primary source)
- www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/1941molotov.asp
Molotov: Reaction to German Invasion of 1941 (primary source)
- www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/hitler4.htm
Speech from Adolph Hitler to the German People, 22 Jun 1941 (primary source)
- www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/ww2/germansoviet.html
Ribbentrop on the Declaration of War on the Soviet Union, 22 Jun 1941 (primary source)
- www.thegermanwarmachine.com/campaigns/1941/easternfront.aspx
German Army Battles and Campaigns: Eastern Front, 1941 (website). This site contains a great deal of primary source material and is a great start for all students and teachers.
- <http://operationbarbarossa.net/index.html>
Operation Barbarossa: the Complete Organizational and Statistical Analysis and Military situation (website). Unbelievably detailed and comprehensive website that uses primary and secondary sources to help explain the invasion of the Soviet Union. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students, but the site also has valuable information for anyone studying the invasion.
- www.chatt.hdsb.ca/~papadopoulosd/FOV1-000C68F4/FOV1-00115424/Operation%20Barbarossa.ppt
Operation Barbarossa (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhXKIYnSWjA
Soviet Storm: WW2 in the East - Operation Barbarossa (video). 45-minute video, probably too long for most in-class showings, but it has great footage on the invasion from both German and Soviet sources. Highly recommended for out-of-class preparation.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tKB5iBjQgo
World War Two: Germany Invades Russia (video). From the Discovery Channel series "World War II in Color", this 55-minute video uses primary source images to tell the story of the invasion. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students as an out-of-class assignment in preparation for in-class discussions.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barbarossa
Operation Barbarossa – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/world-war-ii-operation-barbarossa
World War II (1939-1945) – Operation Barbarossa: German Invasion of the Soviet Union
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/auschwitz
Auschwitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/interwar-europe-nazi-soviet-pact-of-1939
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – NAZI/Soviet Pact of 1939
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – NAZI Invasion of Poland
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/world-war-ii-stalingrad
World War II (1939-1945) – Stalingrad: Turning Point in the War

Key Terms

- Blitzkrieg
- Leningrad
- Luftwaffe
- Operation Barbarossa
- Panzer
- Soviet Union
- Stalingrad

