



Uploaded to VFC Website

▶▶ ▶▶ **May 2013** ◀◀ ◀◀

This Document has been provided to you courtesy of Veterans-For-Change!

Feel free to pass to any veteran who might be able to use this information!

For thousands more files like this and hundreds of links to useful information, and hundreds of "Frequently Asked Questions, please go to:

[Veterans-For-Change](#)

*Veterans-For-Change is a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporation
Tax ID #27-3820181*

If Veteran's don't help Veteran's, who will?

We appreciate all donations to continue to provide information and services to Veterans and their families.

https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=WGT2M5UTB9A78

Note:

VFC is not liable for source information in this document, it is merely provided as a courtesy to our members.



Eastern Front (World War II)

The **Eastern Front of World War II** (**Russian**: Великая Отечественная Война ("Great Patriotic War", or, literally, "Great Fatherland War"); **German**: *die Ostfront 1941–1945*,^[5] *der Rußlandfeldzug 1941–1945* (Russian campaign) or *der Ostfeldzug 1941–1945* (Eastern Campaign)^[6]) was a **theatre of war** between the European **Axis powers**, **Germany**, **Italy**, Hungary, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Croatia** and **Finland** (not an Axis member), and the **Soviet Union** which encompassed **northern**, **southern** and **eastern Europe** from 22 June 1941 to 9 May 1945.

It was the largest theatre of war in history and was notorious for its unprecedented ferocity, destruction, and immense loss of life. It bore the bulk of the **Holocaust** as the site of nearly all **extermination camps**, **death marches**, **ghettos**, and most **pogroms**. Various figures average a total number of 70,000,000 dead because of World War II; with over 30 million dead, many of them civilians, the Eastern Front represents about a half of this total, and has been called a **war of extermination**. It resulted in the destruction of the Third Reich, the partition of Germany and the rise of the Soviet Union as a military and industrial **superpower**.

The two principal belligerent powers were Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Soviet-Finnish **Continuation War** may be considered the northern flank of the Eastern Front. In addition, the joint **German-Finnish operations** across the northernmost Finnish-Soviet border and in the **Murmansk region** are also considered part of the Eastern Front.

Background

Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Main article: Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

According to Andrew Nagorski (2007; The Greatest Battle) Adolf Hitler declared his intention to hit the USSR on 11 August 1939 to **Carl Jacob Burckhardt**, League of Nations Commissioner by saying 'Everything I undertake is directed against the Russians. If the West is too stupid and blind to grasp this, then I shall be compelled to come to an agreement with the Russians, beat the West and then after their defeat turn against the Soviet Union with all my forces. I need the Ukraine so that they can't starve us out, as happened in the last war.' The Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 had established a non-aggression agreement between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and a secret protocol outlined how **Finland**, **Estonia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Poland**, and **Romania** would be divided between them. The two powers invaded and partitioned Poland in 1939. In November 1939 the Soviet Union waged the **Winter War** against Finland. And in June 1940, threatening to use force if its demands were not fulfilled, it won the diplomatic wars against Romania and three **Baltic states** allowing it to peacefully occupy Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania *de facto* while no western state regarded the annexation of these states *de jure*. The pact allowed for the soviet occupation of the north and northeastern regions of Romania (Northern Bucovina and Basarabia). These regions were then divided among the **Ukrainian**, **Belarusian**, and **Moldavian** soviet republics.

Ideologies

Main article: [Timeline of events preceding World War II](#)

Adolf Hitler had argued in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* for the necessity of *Lebensraum*, acquiring new territory for German settlement in Eastern Europe. He envisaged settling Germans there as a master race, while exterminating or deporting most of the inhabitants to **Siberia** and using the remainder as slave labour.

To hard-line Nazis in Berlin, (like Himmler ^[7]) the war against the Soviet Union was a struggle of [National Socialism](#) against [Communism](#), and of the [Aryan race](#) against Slavic *Untermenschen* (subhumans). Hitler referred to it in unique terms, calling it a "war of annihilation", one in which the Soviet Union was to be utterly destroyed and the populations of Eastern Europe and Russia were to be enslaved and eventually exterminated. This would further German expansion and provide for the colonization of Eastern Europe and Western Russia. The plan was called the [Generalplan Ost](#). In addition, the Nazis also sought to wipe out the large Jewish population of Eastern Europe ^[8] as part of the Holocaust.

After Germany's initial success at the [Battle of Kiev](#), Adolf Hitler saw the Soviet Union as militarily weak and ripe for immediate conquest. On October 3, 1941, he announced, "We have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down." ^[9] Thus, Germany expected another short Blitzkrieg and made no serious preparations for prolonged warfare. However, following the decisive Soviet victory at the [Battle of Stalingrad](#) and the resulting dire German military situation, Hitler and Nazi propaganda proclaimed the war to be a German defense of Western civilization against destruction by the vast "Bolshevik hordes" that were pouring into Europe.

Forces

The war was fought between the German Reich, its allies and Finland, against the Soviet Union. The conflict began on 22 June 1941 with the [Operation Barbarossa](#) Offensive, when [Axis](#) forces crossed the borders, described in the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, thereby invading the Soviet Union. The war ended on 9 May 1945, when [Germany's armed forces surrendered unconditionally](#) following the Berlin Offensive, a strategic operation executed by the [Red Army](#), also known as the [Battle of Berlin](#). The states that provided forces and other resources for the German war effort included the Axis Powers — foremost Italy, Romania, Hungary, and pro-Nazi Slovakia, and Croatia. The anti-Soviet Finland, which had fought two conflicts with the Soviet Union, also joined the Offensive. The Wehrmacht forces were also assisted by anti-Communist [partisans](#) in places like Western Ukraine, the [Baltic states](#), and later [Crimean Tatars](#). Among the most prominent volunteer army formations was the [Spanish Blue Division](#), sent by Spanish dictator [Francisco Franco](#) to keep his ties to the Axis intact.

The Soviet Union offered support to the partisans in many Wehrmacht-occupied countries in [Eastern Europe](#), notably those in Slovakia, Poland and the [Kingdom of Yugoslavia](#). In addition the [Polish Armed Forces in the East](#), particularly the First and Second Polish armies, were armed and trained, and would eventually fight alongside the [Red Army](#). The Free French forces also contributed to the Red Army by formation of [GC3](#) (*Groupe de Chasse 3* or 3rd Fighter Group) unit to fulfill the commitment of [Charles de Gaulle](#), leader of the Free French, who thought that it was important for French servicemen to serve on all fronts. British and Commonwealth forces contributed directly to the fighting on the Eastern Front through their service in the [convoys](#) and training Red Air Force pilots, as well as in provision of early materiel and intelligence support. The later massive materiel support of the [Lend-Lease](#) by the United States and Canada played a significant part particularly in the [logistics](#) of the war.

Decision for war

Main articles: [Aufbau Ost \(1940\)](#) and [Lossberg study](#)

For nearly two years the border was quiet while Germany conquered [Denmark](#), [Norway](#), [France](#), [The Low Countries](#), and the [Balkans](#). Hitler had always intended to renege on his pact with the Soviet Union, eventually making the decision to invade in the spring of 1941. Hitler believed that the Soviets would quickly capitulate after an overwhelming German offensive and that the war could largely end before the onset of the fierce Russian winter.

Some say [Joseph Stalin](#) was fearful of war with Germany or just did not expect Germany to start a [two-front war](#), and was reluctant to do anything to provoke Hitler. Others say that Stalin was eager for Germany to be at war with other capitalist countries. Another viewpoint is that Stalin expected war in 1942 (the time when all his preparations would be complete) and stubbornly refused to believe its early arrival. ^[10]

British historians Alan S. Milward and W. Medlicott show that Nazi Germany—unlike Imperial Germany—was prepared for only a short-term war (Blitzkrieg). ^[11] According to Edward Ericson, although Germany's own resources were sufficient for 1940 victories in the West, massive Soviet shipments obtained during a short period of Nazi-Soviet economic collaboration were critical for Germany to launch Operation Barbarossa. ^[12]

Even though Germany had been assembling very large numbers of troops in eastern Poland and making repeated [reconnaissance](#) flights over the border, Stalin ignored the warnings of his own as well as foreign intelligence. Moreover, on the very night of the invasion, Soviet troops received a directive undersigned by [Marshal Semyon Timoshenko](#) and [General of the Army Georgy Zhukov](#) that ordered (as demanded by Stalin): "do not answer to any provocations" and "do not undertake any actions without specific orders". The German invasion therefore caught the Soviet military and leadership largely by surprise, even though Stalin did receive a message from his intelligence detailing information on the attack.

For Soviet preparations, see [Operation Barbarossa: Soviet preparations](#).

Conduct of operations

Main article: [Strategic operations of the Red Army in World War II](#)

While German historians do not apply any specific periodisation to the conduct of operations on the Eastern Front, all Soviet and Russian historians divide the war against Germany and its allies into three periods, which are further subdivided into the major [Campaigns](#) of the Theatre of war:

- First period of World War II** ([Russian](#): Первый период Великой Отечественной войны) (22 June 1941 – 18 November 1942)
 - Summer-Autumn Campaign ([Russian](#): Летне-осенняя кампания 1941 г.) (22 June – 4 December 1941)
 - Winter Campaign of 1941–42 ([Russian](#): Зимняя кампания 1941/42 г.) (5 December 1941 – 30 April 1942)
 - Summer-Autumn Campaign ([Russian](#): Летне-осенняя кампания 1942 г.) (1 May – 18 November 1942)
- Second period of World War II** ([Russian](#): Второй период Великой Отечественной войны) (19 November 1942 – 31 December 1943)
 - Winter Campaign of 1942–43 ([Russian](#): Зимняя кампания 1942–1943 гг.) (19 November 1942 – 3 March 1943)
 - Summer-Autumn Campaign of 1943 ([Russian](#): Летне-осенняя кампания 1943 г.) (1 July – 31 December 1943)
- Third period of World War II** ([Russian](#): Третий период Великой Отечественной войны) (1 January 1944 – 9 May 1945)
 - Winter-Spring Campaign ([Russian](#): Зимне-весенняя кампания 1944 г.) (1 January – 31 May 1944)
 - Summer-Autumn Campaign of 1944 ([Russian](#): Летне-осенняя кампания 1944 г.) (1 June – 31 December 1944)
 - Campaign in Europe during 1945 ([Russian](#): Кампания в Европе 1945 г.) (1 January – 9 May 1945)

Excellent analytical works in English written on the history of the combat operation on the Eastern Front in the past 20 years include those by [David Glantz](#), which deal with large strategic as well as smaller scale operational and [tactical](#) aspects of the conflict.

Operation Barbarossa: Summer 1941

[Operation Barbarossa](#) began just before dawn on 22 June 1941. The Germans wrecked the wire network in all Soviet western [military districts](#) to undermine Soviet communications.^[13] At 03:15 on 22 June 1941 ninety-nine (including fourteen [panzer divisions](#) and ten motorized) of 190 German divisions deployed against the Soviet Union began the offensive from the Baltic to the Black seas. They were accompanied by ten Romanian divisions, nine Romanian and four Hungarian [brigades](#).^[14] On the same day the [Baltic](#), [Western](#) and [Kiev Special military districts](#) were renamed to [Northwestern](#), [Western](#) and Southwestern Fronts respectively.^[13] For a month the offensive conducted on three axes was completely unstoppable as the [panzer](#) forces [encircled](#) hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops in huge pockets that were then reduced by slower-moving [infantry](#) armies while the panzers continued the offensive, following the [Blitzkrieg doctrine](#). As part of this high tempo campaign the German [air force](#) began immediate attacks on Soviet airfields, destroying much of the forward-deployed Soviet Air Force airfield fleets consisting of largely obsolescent types before their pilots had a chance to leave the ground.^[15]

[Army Group North](#)'s objective was [Leningrad](#) via the Baltic States. Comprising the [16th](#) and [18th armies](#) and the [4th Panzer Group](#), this formation advanced through [Lithuania](#), [Latvia](#), [Estonia](#), and the Russian [Pskov](#) and [Novgorod regions](#). In Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, they were supported by the [local insurgents](#), liberating almost the whole of Lithuania, northern Latvia and [southern Estonia](#) prior to the arrival of the German forces.^{[16][17]}

[Army Group Centre](#)'s two panzer groups ([2nd](#) and [3rd](#)) advanced to the north and south of Brest-Litovsk and converged east of [Minsk](#), followed by the [2nd](#), [4th](#), and [9th armies](#). The combined panzer force reached the Beresina River in just six days, 650 km (400 miles) from their start lines. The next objective was to cross the Dnieper river, which was accomplished by 11 July. Following that, their next target was [Smolensk](#), which fell on 16 July, but the [fierce Soviet resistance in the Smolensk area](#) and retardation of *Wehrmacht* advance in North and South forced Hitler to halt a center thrust at Moscow and to divert a Panzer Group 3 north, and the Guderian's Panzer Group 2 was to move south, to cover the northern flank for Army Group South advancing into Ukraine, whereas the Army Group Centre's infantry divisions were to continue their slow advance to Moscow.^[18] This decision caused a severe leadership crisis. German generals argued for an immediate offensive towards Moscow, but Hitler overruled them, citing the importance of Ukrainian agricultural and mining resources, and heavy industry if under German possession, not to mention the massing of Soviet reserves in the [Gomel](#) area between Army Group Centre's southern flank and the bogged-down Army Group South's northern flank. This Hitler's "summer pause".^[18] is believed to have a severe impact on the [Battle of Moscow's](#) outcome.^[19]

[Army Group South](#), with [1st Panzer Group](#), [6th](#), [11th](#) and [17th armies](#), was tasked with advancing through Galicia and into [Ukraine](#). Their progress, however, was rather slow, and took heavy casualties in a major tank [battle](#). With the corridor towards [Kiev](#) secured by mid-July, the 11th Army, aided by two Romanian armies, fought its way through [Bessarabia](#) towards [Odessa](#). The 1st Panzer Group turned away from Kiev for the moment, advancing into the Dnieper bend (western [Dnipropetrovsk Oblast](#)). When it joined up with the southern elements of Army Group South at Uman, the Group [captured about 100,000 Soviet prisoners](#) in a huge encirclement. Advancing armored divisions of the Army Group South met with the Guderian's Panzer Group 2 near [Lokhvytsa](#) in mid September,

cutting off large number of Red Army troops in the pocket east from Kiev. ^[18] 400,000 Soviet prisoners were captured as Kiev was surrendered on 19 September. ^[18]

As the Red Army withdrew behind the Dnieper and Dvina rivers, the Soviet Stavka turned its attention to evacuating as much of the western regions' industry as it could, dismantled and packed onto flatcars, away from the front line, re-establishing it in more remote areas of the Urals, Caucasus, Central Asia and south-eastern Siberia. Most civilians were left to make their own way East as only the industry-related workers could be evacuated with the equipment, and much of the population was left behind to the mercy of the invading forces.

Moscow and Rostov: Autumn 1941

Main articles: [Battle of Moscow](#) and [Battle of Rostov \(1941\)](#)

Hitler then decided to resume the advance to Moscow, re-designating the panzer groups as panzer armies for the occasion. Operation Typhoon, which was set in motion on 30 September, saw 2nd Panzer Army rush along the paved road from Orel (captured 5 October) to the Oka river at Plavskoye, while the 4th Panzer Army (transferred from Army Group North to Centre) and 3rd Panzer armies surrounded the Soviet forces in two huge pockets at Vyazma and Bryansk. Army Group North positioned itself in front of Leningrad and attempted to cut the rail link at Mga to the east. Thus began the 900-day Siege of Leningrad. North of the Arctic Circle, a German-Finnish force set out for Murmansk but could get no further than the Zapadnaya Litsa River, where they settled down.

Army Group South pushed down from the Dnieper to the Sea of Azov coast, also advancing through Kharkov, Kursk, and Stalino. The 11th Army moved into the Crimea and had taken control of all of the peninsula by autumn (except Sevastopol, which held out until 3 July 1942). On 21 November, the Germans took Rostov, the gateway to the Caucasus. However, the German lines were over-extended and the Soviet defenders counterattacked the 1st Panzer Army's spearhead from the north, forcing them to pull out of the city and behind the Mius River; the first significant German withdrawal of the war.

One last lunge on 15 November saw the Germans attempting to throw a ring around Moscow. On 27 November the 4th Panzer Army got within 30 km (19 miles) of the Kremlin when it reached the last tramstop of the Moscow line at Khimki, while the 2nd Panzer Army, despite its best efforts, failed to take Tula, the last Soviet city that stood in its way of the capital. After a meeting held in Orsha between the head of the Army General Staff, General Halder, and the heads of three Army groups and armies, it was decided to push forward to Moscow since it was better, as argued by head of Army Group Center, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, for them to try their luck on the battlefield rather than just sit and wait while their opponent gathered more strength.

However, by 6 December it became clear that the Wehrmacht was too weak to capture Moscow and the attack was put on hold. Marshal Shaposhnikov thus began his counter-attack, employing freshly mobilized reserves ^[20], as well as some well-trained Far-Eastern divisions transferred from the east following the guarantee of neutrality from Japan.

Soviet counter-offensive: Winter 1941

Main articles: [Battle of Moscow](#) and [Second Battle of Kharkov](#)

During the autumn, Stalin had been transferring fresh and well-equipped Soviet forces from Siberia and the Far East to Moscow. On 5 December 1941, these reinforcements attacked the German lines around Moscow, supported by new T-34 tanks and Katyusha rocket launchers. The new Soviet troops were prepared for winter warfare, and they included several ski battalions. The exhausted and freezing Germans were driven away from Moscow on 7 January 1942.

A further Soviet attack was mounted in late January, focusing on the junction between Army groups North and Centre between [Lake Seliger](#) and [Rzhev](#), and drove a gap between the two German army groups. In concert with the advance from [Kaluga](#) to the south-west of Moscow, it was intended that the two offensives converge on Smolensk, but the Germans rallied and managed to hold them apart, retaining a [salient](#) at Rzhev. A Soviet [parachute drop](#) on German-held [Dorogobuzh](#) was spectacularly unsuccessful, and those paratroopers who survived had to escape to the partisan-held areas beginning to swell behind German lines. To the north, the Soviets surrounded a German [garrison](#) in [Demyansk](#), which held out with air supply for four months, and established themselves in front of [Kholm](#), [Velizh](#), and Velikie Luki. Further north still, the Second Shock Army was unleashed on the [Volkhov River](#), initially this made some progress, however it was unsupported and by June a German counterattack cut off and destroyed the army. The Soviet commander, Vlasov later became infamous for defecting to the Germans and forming the ROA or [Russian Liberation Army](#).

In the south the Red Army crashed over the Donets River at Izyum and drove a 100-km (60-mile) deep salient. The intent was to pin Army Group South against the [Sea of Azov](#), but as the winter eased the Germans were able to counter-attack and cut off the over-extended Soviet troops in the [Second Battle of Kharkov](#).

Don, Volga, and Caucasus: Summer 1942

Main articles: [Case Blue](#), [Battle of Voronezh \(1942\)](#), and [Battle of Stalingrad](#)

Although plans were made to attack Moscow again, on 28 June 1942, the offensive re-opened in a different direction. Army Group South took the initiative, anchoring the front with the [Battle of Voronezh](#) and then following the Don river southeastwards. The grand plan was to secure the Don and Volga first and then drive into the Caucasus towards the oilfields, but operational considerations and Hitler's vanity made him order both objectives to be attempted simultaneously. Rostov was recaptured on 24 July when 1st Panzer Army joined in, and then that group drove south towards [Maikop](#). As part of this, Operation Shamil was executed, a plan whereby a group of Brandenburger commandos dressed up as Soviet [NKVD](#) troops to destabilise Maikop's defenses and allow the 1st Panzer Army to enter the oil town with little opposition.

Meanwhile, 6th Army was driving towards Stalingrad, for a long period unsupported by 4th Panzer Army, which had been diverted to help 1st Panzer Army cross the Don. By the time 4th Panzer Army had rejoined the Stalingrad offensive, Soviet resistance (comprising the 62nd Army under [Vasily Chuikov](#)) had stiffened. A leap across the Don brought German troops to the Volga on 23 August but for the next three months the *Wehrmacht* would be fighting the [Battle of Stalingrad](#) street-by-street.

Towards the south 1st Panzer Army had reached the Caucasian foothills and the [Malka River](#). At the end of August Romanian mountain troops joined the Caucasian spearhead, while the Romanian 3rd and 4th armies were redeployed from their successful task of clearing the Azov littoral. They took up position on either side of Stalingrad to free German troops for the proper fighting. Mindful of the continuing antagonism between Axis allies Romania and [Hungary](#) over [Transylvania](#), the Romanian army in the Don bend was separated from the Hungarian 2nd army by the Italian 8th Army. Thus all of Hitler's allies were involved — including a [Slovakian](#) contingent with 1st Panzer Army and a [Croatian regiment](#) attached to 6th Army.

The advance into the Caucasus bogged down, with the Germans unable to fight their way past [Malgobek](#) and to the main prize of [Grozny](#). Instead they switched the direction of their advance to approach it from the south, crossing the Malka at the end of October and entering North [Ossetia](#). In the first week of November, on the outskirts of Ordzhonikidze, the 13th Panzer Division's spearhead was snipped off and the panzer troops had to fall back. The offensive into Russia was over.

Stalingrad: Winter 1942

Main articles: [Battle of Stalingrad](#), [Operation Little Saturn](#), [Operation Mars](#), [Third Battle of Kharkov](#), and [Battle for Velikiye Luki \(1943\)](#)

While the German 6th Army and 4th Panzer Army had been fighting their way into Stalingrad, Soviet armies had congregated on either side of the city, specifically into the Don [bridgeheads](#) that the Romanians did not reduce, and it was from these that they struck on 19 November 1942. In [Operation Uranus](#), two Soviet fronts punched through the Romanian lines and converged at [Kalach](#) on 23 November, trapping 300,000 Axis troops behind them.^[21] A simultaneous offensive on the Rzhev sector known as [Operation Mars](#) was supposed to advance to Smolensk, but was a failure, with German tactical flair winning the day.

The Germans rushed to transfer troops to Russia for a desperate attempt to relieve Stalingrad, but the offensive could not get going until 12 December, by which time the 6th Army in Stalingrad was starving and too weak to break out towards it. Operation Winter Storm, with three transferred panzer divisions, got going briskly from [Kotelnikovo](#) towards the Aksai river but became bogged down 65 km (40 miles) short of its goal. To divert the rescue attempt the Soviets decided to smash the Italians and come down behind the relief attempt if they could, that operation starting on 16 December. What it did accomplish was to destroy many of the aircraft that had been transporting relief supplies to Stalingrad. The fairly limited scope of the Soviet offensive, although still eventually targeted on Rostov, also allowed Hitler time to see sense and pull Army Group A out of the Caucasus and back over the Don.^[22]

On 31 January 1943, the 90,000 survivors of the 300,000-man 6th Army surrendered. By that time the Hungarian 2nd Army had also been wiped out. The Soviets advanced from the Don 500 km (300 miles) to the west of Stalingrad, marching through [Kursk](#) (retaken on 8 February 1943) and Kharkov (retaken 16 February 1943). In order to save the position in the south, the Germans decided to abandon the Rzhev salient in February, freeing enough troops to make a successful [riposte](#) in eastern Ukraine. Manstein's counteroffensive, strengthened by a specially trained SS panzer corps equipped with [Tiger tanks](#), opened on 20 February 1943, and fought its way from [Poltava back into Kharkov](#) in the third week of March, upon which the spring thaw intervened. This had left a glaring bulge in the front centered on Kursk.

Kursk: Summer 1943

Main article: [Battle of Kursk](#)

After the failure of the attempt to capture Stalingrad, Hitler had deferred planning authority for the upcoming campaign season to the German Army High Command and reinstated [Guderian](#) to a prominent role, this time as Inspector of Panzer Troops. Debate among the General Staff was polarised, with even Hitler nervous about any attempt to pinch off the Kursk salient. He knew that in the intervening six months the Soviet position at Kursk had been reinforced heavily with anti-tank guns, tank traps, [landmines](#), [barbed wire](#), [trenches](#), [pillboxes](#), [artillery](#) and [mortars](#). However, if one last great [blitzkrieg](#) offensive could be mounted, just maybe the Soviets would ease off and attention could then be turned to the Allied threat to the [Western Front](#). The advance would be executed from the Orel salient to the north of Kursk and from [Belgorod](#) to the south. Both wings would converge on the area east of [Kursk](#), and by that means restore the lines of [Army Group South](#) to the exact points that it held over the winter of 1941–1942.

Although the Germans knew that the Red Army's reserves of manpower had been bled dry in the summer of 1941 and 1942, the Soviets were still re-equipping, simply by drafting the men from the regions liberated.

Under pressure from his generals, Hitler agreed to the attack on Kursk, little realising that the [Abwehr's](#) intelligence on the Soviet position there had been undermined by a concerted [Stavka](#) misinformation and [counter-intelligence](#) campaign mounted by the [Lucy spy ring](#) in [Switzerland](#). When the Germans began the operation, it was after months of delays waiting for new tanks and equipment, by which time the Soviets had reinforced the Kursk salient with more anti-tank firepower than had ever been assembled in one place before or since.

In the north, the entire [German Ninth Army](#) had been redeployed from the Rzhev salient into the Orel salient and was to advance from Maloarkhangelsk to Kursk. But its forces could not even get past the first objective at Olkhovatka, just 8 km (5 miles) into the advance. The 9th Army blunted its spearhead against the Soviet [minefields](#), frustratingly so considering that the high ground there was the only natural barrier between them and flat tank country all the way to Kursk. The direction of advance was then switched to Ponyri, to the west of Olkhovatka, but the 9th Army could not break through here either and went over to the defensive. The Soviets soaked up the German punishment and then struck back. On 12 July the Red Army battled through the demarcation line between the 211th and 293rd divisions on the [Zhizdra River](#) and steamed towards [Karachev](#), right behind them and behind Orel.

The southern offensive, spearheaded by 4.Panzer-Armee, led by [Gen. Col. Hoth](#), with three Tank Corps made more headway. Advancing on either side of the upper Donets on a narrow corridor, the [SS Panzer Corps](#) and the *Großdeutschland Panzergrenadier* divisions battled their way through minefields and over comparatively high ground towards [Oboyan](#). Stiff resistance caused a change of direction from east to west of the front, but the tanks got 25 km (15 miles) before encountering the reserves of the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army outside [Prokhorovka](#). Battle was joined on 12 July, with about one thousand tanks doing battle. After the war, the battle near Prochorovka was idealized by the Soviet [historians](#) as the biggest tank battle of all time. The meeting engagement at Prochorovka was a Soviet defensive success, albeit at heavy cost. The Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army, with about 800 light and medium tanks, attacked elements of the II SS Panzer Corps. Tank losses on both sides have been the source of controversy ever since. Although the 5th Guards Tank Army did not attain their terrain objectives, the German advance was halted.

At the end of the day both sides had fought each other to a standstill, but regardless of the standstill in the north Manstein intended to continue the attack with the 4th Panzer Army. But the Soviets could absorb the attack, and German strategic advance in Operation Citadel had been halted. Under the impression of the successful counter-attack operations in the south the Red Army started the strong offensive operation in the northern Orel salient and achieved a breakthrough on the flank of the German 9th Army. Also worried by the Allies' landing in Sicily on 10 July, Hitler made the decision to halve the offensive even as the German 9th Army was rapidly giving ground in the north. The Germans' final strategic offensive in the Soviet Union ended with their defense against a major Soviet counteroffensive that lasted into August. A detailed analysis of this campaign is available in the [Battle of Kursk article](#).

The Kursk offensive was the last on the scale of 1940 and 1941 the *Wehrmacht* was able to launch, and subsequent offensives would represent only a shadow of previous German offensive might. Following the defeat, Hitler would not trust his generals to the same extent again, and the quality of German strategic decision fell correspondingly. The Battle of Kursk cost Hitler over 500,000 troops and 1,000 tanks, forever dispelling the last hope of the German Army for victory or even stalemate in the East.

Autumn and Winter 1943–44

Main articles: [Korsun–Shevchenkovsky Offensive](#), [Battle of Smolensk \(1943\)](#), [Lower Dnieper Offensive](#), and [Battle of Narva \(1944\)](#)

The Soviet juggernaut got rolling in earnest with the advance into the Germans' Orel salient. The diversion of the well-equipped *Grossdeutschland Division* from Belgorod to Karachev could not stop it, and a strategic decision was made to abandon Orel (retaken by the Red Army on 5 August 1943) and fall back to the Hagen line in front of [Bryansk](#). To the south, the Soviets blasted through Army Group South's Belgorod positions and headed for Kharkov once again. Though intense battles of movement throughout late July and into August 1943 saw the [Tigers](#) blunting Soviet tanks on one axis, they were soon outflanked on another line to the west as the Soviets advanced down the [Psel](#), and Kharkov had to be evacuated for the final time on 22 August.

The German forces on the Mius, now constituting the 1st Panzer Army and a reconstituted 6th Army, were by August too weak to repulse a Soviet attack on their own front, and when the Soviets hit them they had to fall back all the way through the Donbass

industrial region to the Dnieper, losing the industrial resources and half the farmland that Germany had invaded the Soviet Union to exploit. At this time Hitler agreed to a general withdrawal to the Dnieper line, along which was meant to be the *Ostwall*, a line of defence similar to the Westwall of fortifications along the German frontier in the west. The main problem for the Germans was that these defences had not yet been built, and by the time Army Group South had evacuated eastern Ukraine and begun withdrawing across the Dnieper during September, the Soviets were hard behind them. Tenaciously, small units paddled their way across the 3-km (2-mile) wide river and established [bridgeheads](#). A second attempt by the Soviets to gain land using parachutists, mounted at Kanev on 24 September, proved as luckless as at Dorogobuzh eighteen months previously, and the paratroopers were soon repelled — but not before still more Red Army troops had used the cover they provided to get themselves over the Dnieper and securely dug in. As September proceeded into October, the Germans found the Dnieper line impossible to hold as the Soviet bridgeheads grew, and important Dnieper towns started to fall, with Zaporozhye the first to go, followed by Dnepropetrovsk. Finally, early in November the Soviets broke out of their bridgeheads on either side of Kiev and captured the Ukrainian capital, at that time the third largest city in the Soviet Union.

Eighty miles west of Kiev, the 4th Panzer Army, still convinced that the Red Army was a spent force, was able to mount a successful riposte at [Zhytomyr](#) during the middle of November, blunting the Soviet bridgehead via a daring outflanking strike mounted by the SS Panzer Corps along the river Teterev. This battle also enabled Army Group South to recapture Korosten and gain some time to rest; however, on [Christmas Eve](#) the retreat began anew when the First Ukrainian Front (renamed from Voronezh Front) struck them in the same place. The Soviet advance continued along the railway line until the 1939 Polish-Soviet border was reached on 3 January 1944. To the south, Second Ukrainian Front (ex [Steppe Front](#)) had crossed the Dnieper at Kremenchug and continued westwards. In the second week of January 1944 they swung north, meeting Vatutin's tank forces who had swung south from their penetration into Poland and surrounding ten German divisions at Korsun-Shevenkovsky, west of [Cherkasy](#). Hitler's insistence on holding the Dnieper line, even when facing the prospect of catastrophic defeat, was compounded by his conviction that the Cherkassy pocket could break out and even advance to Kiev, but Manstein was more concerned about being able to advance to the edge of the pocket and then implore the surrounded forces to break out. By 16 February the first stage was complete, with panzers separated from the contracting Cherkassy pocket only by the swollen Gniloy Tikich river. Under shellfire and pursued by Soviet tanks, the surrounded German troops, among whom were the SS Division Wiking, fought their way across the river to safety, losing half their number and all their equipment. Surely the Soviets would not attack again, with the spring approaching — but in 3 March the Soviet *Ukrainian Front* went over to the offensive. Having already isolated the Crimea by severing the neck of the [Perekop isthmus](#), Malinovsky's forces advanced across the mud to the [Romanian](#) border, not stopping on the river [Prut](#).

One final move in the south completed the 1943–44 campaigning season, which had wrapped up an advance of over 500 miles. In March, 20 German divisions of *Generaloberst* [Hans-Valentin Hube](#)'s 1st Panzer Army were encircled in what was to be known as [Hube's Pocket](#) near Kamenets-Podolskiy. After two weeks hard fighting, the 1st Panzer managed to escape the pocket, suffering only light to moderate casualties. At this point, Hitler sacked several prominent generals, Manstein included. April saw the liberation of [Odessa](#) in April 1944, followed by 4th Ukrainian Front's campaign to liberate the Crimea, which culminated with the liberation of [Sevastopol](#) on 10 May.

Along Army Group Centre's front, August 1943 saw this force pushed back from the Hagen line slowly, ceding comparatively little territory, but the loss of Bryansk and more importantly, Smolensk, on 25 September cost the Wehrmacht the keystone of the entire German defensive system. The 4th and 9th armies and 3rd Panzer Army still held their own east of the upper Dnieper, stifling Soviet attempts to reach Vitebsk. On Army Group North's front, there was barely any fighting at all until January 1944, when out of nowhere

Volkhov and Second Baltic Fronts struck. In a lightning campaign, Leningrad and Novgorod were liberated. By February the Red Army had reached the borders of [Estonia](#) after a 75 mile advance. The Baltic Sea seemed the quickest way to Stalin to take the battles to the German ground in [East Prussia](#) and seizing control of Finland.^[23] Soviet [offensives towards the Baltic port of Tallinn](#) were stopped in February 1944. The German forces included Estonian conscripts defending the [re-establishment of Estonian independence](#).^{[24][25]}

Summer 1944

Main articles: [Crimean Offensive \(1944\)](#), [Operation Bagration](#), [Lvov–Sandomierz Offensive](#), [Battle of Tannenberg Line](#), [Warsaw Uprising](#), [Slovak National Uprising](#), [Battle of Romania \(1944\)](#), [Battle of Debrecen](#), and [Vyborg–Petrozavodsk Offensive](#)

Wehrmacht planners were convinced that the Soviets would attack again in the south, where the front was fifty miles from Lvov and offered the most direct route to [Berlin](#). Accordingly they stripped troops from Army Group Centre, whose front still protruded deep into the Soviet Union. The Germans had transferred some units to France to counter the [invasion of Normandy](#) two weeks before. The Belorussian Offensive (codenamed [Operation Bagration](#)), which began on 22 June 1944, was a massive Soviet attack, consisting of four Soviet army groups totaling over 120 divisions that smashed into a thinly-held German line. They focused their massive attacks on Army Group Centre, not Army Group North Ukraine as the Germans had originally expected. More than 2.3 million Soviet troops went into action against the German Army Group Centre, which boasted a strength of fewer than 800,000 men. At the points of attack, the numerical and quality advantages of the Soviets were overwhelming: the Red Army achieved a ratio of ten to one in tanks and seven to one in [aircraft](#) over the enemy. The Germans crumbled. The capital of [Belarus](#), [Minsk](#), was taken on 3 July, trapping 50,000 Germans. Ten days later the Red Army reached the prewar [Polish](#) border. *Bagration* was by any measure one of the largest single operations of the war. By the end of August 1944, it had cost the Germans ~670,000 dead, missing, wounded and sick, from whom 160,000 were captured, as well as 2,000 tanks and 57,000 other vehicles. In the operation, the Red Army lost ~170,000 dead and missing (765,815 totally, including wounded and sick plus 5073 Poles),^[26] as well as 2,957 tanks and assault guns. The [offensive at Estonia](#) claimed another 480,000 Soviet troopers, 100,000 of them as dead.^{[27][28]}

The neighbouring [Lvov-Sandomierz operation](#) was launched on 17 July 1944, rapidly routing the German forces in Western Ukraine. The Soviet advance in the south continued into Romania and, following a coup against the Axis-allied government of Romania on 23 August, the Red Army occupied [Bucharest](#) on 31 August. In Moscow on 12 September, Romania and the Soviet Union signed an [armistice](#) on terms Moscow virtually dictated. The Romanian surrender tore a hole in the southern German Eastern Front causing the inevitable loss of the whole of the [Balkans](#).

The rapid progress of Operation Bagration threatened to cut off and isolate the German units of [Army Group North](#) bitterly [resisting the Soviet advance](#) to the [Baltic](#) port of [Tallinn](#) and the [Soviet re-occupation](#) of Estonia. In a ferocious attack at the [Sinimäed Hills](#), Estonia, the Soviet Leningrad Front [failed to break through](#) the defence of the smaller, well-fortified [army detachment "Narwa"](#) in [terrain not suitable for large scale operations](#).^{[29][30]}

On the [Karelian Isthmus](#), the Soviets launched a [massive attack](#) against the Finnish lines on June 9, 1944, (coordinated with the Allied Invasion of Normandy). Three armies were pitted there against the Finns, among them several experienced guards rifle formations. The attack breached the Finnish front line of defence in Valkeasaari on June 10 and the Finnish forces retreated to their secondary defence line, the [VT-line](#). The Soviet attack was supported by a heavy artillery barrage, air bombardments and armoured forces. The VT-line was breached on June 14 and after a failed counterattack in Kuuterselkä by the Finnish armoured division, the

Finnish defence had to be pulled back to the [VKT-line](#). After heavy fighting in the battles of [Tali-Ihantala](#) and [Ilomantsi](#), Finnish troops finally managed to halt the Soviet attack.

In Poland, as the Red Army approached, the Polish Home Army (AK) launched [Operation Tempest](#). During the [Warsaw Uprising](#), the Soviet Army halted at the Vistula River, unable or unwilling to come to the aid of the Polish resistance. An attempt by the communist controlled 1st Polish Army to relieve the city was unsupported by the Red Army and was thrown back in September with heavy losses.

In [Slovakia](#), the [Slovak National Uprising](#) started as an armed struggle between German *Wehrmacht* forces and rebel Slovak troops in August to October 1944. It was centered at [Banská Bystrica](#).

Autumn 1944

Main articles: [Baltic Offensive \(1944\)](#) and [Budapest Offensive](#)

On 8 September 1944 the Red Army began an attack on the [Dukla Pass](#) on the Slovak-Polish border. Two months later, the Soviets won the battle and entered Slovakia. The toll was high: 20,000 Red Army soldiers lay dead, plus several thousand Germans, Slovaks and [Czechs](#).

Under the pressure of the Soviet [Baltic Offensive](#), the German Army Group North [were withdrawn](#) to fight in the sieges of Saaremaa, [Courland](#) and [Memel](#).

January–March 1945

Main articles: [Vistula-Oder Offensive \(January–February\)](#) with the follow-up [East Pomeranian Offensive](#) and [Silesian Offensives \(February–April\)](#), [East Prussian Offensive \(January–April\)](#), [Vienna Offensive \(March–April\)](#)

The Soviet Union finally entered [Warsaw](#) in January 1945, after it was destroyed and abandoned by the Germans. Over three days, on a broad front incorporating four army [fronts](#), the Red Army began an offensive across the [Narew](#) River and from Warsaw. The Soviets outnumbered the Germans on average by five~six to one in troops, six to one in artillery, six to one in tanks and four to one in [self-propelled artillery](#). After four days the Red Army broke out and started moving thirty to forty kilometres a day, taking the Baltic states, Danzig, [East Prussia](#), [Poznań](#), and drawing up on a line sixty kilometres east of [Berlin](#) along the River [Oder](#). During the full course of the Vistula-Oder operation (23 days), the Red Army forces sustained 194,000 total casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) and lost 1,267 tanks and assault guns.

On 25 January 1945, Hitler renamed three army groups. [Army Group North](#) became [Army Group Courland](#); Army Group Centre became Army Group North and [Army Group A](#) became Army Group Centre. Army Group North (old Army Group Centre) was driven into an ever smaller pocket around [Königsberg](#) in [East Prussia](#).

A limited counter-attack (codenamed [Operation Solstice](#)) by the newly created [Army Group Vistula](#), under the command of [Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler](#), had failed by 24 February, and the Soviets drove on to [Pomerania](#) and cleared the right bank of the Oder River. In the south, three German attempts to relieve the encircled [Budapest](#) failed and the city fell on 13 February to the Soviets. Again the Germans counter-attacked, Hitler insisting on the impossible task of regaining the [Danube](#) River. By 16 March the attack had failed and the Red Army counterattacked the same day. On 30 March they entered [Austria](#) and captured [Vienna](#) on 13 April.

OKW claim German losses of 77,000 killed, 334,000 wounded and 292,000 missing, with a total of 603,000 men, on the Eastern Front during January and February 1945.^[31]

On 9 April 1945, [Königsberg](#) finally fell to the Red Army, although the shattered remnants of Army Group North continued to resist on the [Heiligenbeil](#) and Danzig beachheads until the end of the war in Europe. The East Prussian operation, though often overshadowed by the Vistula-Oder operation and the later battle for Berlin, was in fact one of the largest and costliest operations fought by the Red Army through the war. During the period it lasted (13 January – 25 April), it cost the Red Army 584,788 casualties, and 3,525 tanks and assault guns.

By early April, the [Stavka](#) freed up General [Konstantin Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Front](#) (2BF) to move west to the east bank of the Oder. During the first two weeks of April, the Soviets performed their fastest front redeployment of the war. General [Georgy Zhukov](#) concentrated his [1st Belorussian Front](#) (1BF), which had been deployed along the Oder river from Frankfurt in the south to the Baltic, into an area in front of the [Seelow Heights](#). The 2BF moved into the positions being vacated by the 1BF north of the Seelow Heights. While this redeployment was in progress gaps were left in the lines and the remnants of the German 2nd Army, which had been bottled up in a pocket near Danzig, managed to escape across the Oder. To the south General [Ivan Konev](#) shifted the main weight of the [1st Ukrainian Front](#) (1UF) out of [Upper Silesia](#) north-west to the Neisse River.^[32] The three Soviet fronts had altogether 2.5 million men (including 78,556 soldiers of the 1st Polish Army); 6,250 tanks; 7,500 aircraft; 41,600 [artillery](#) pieces and [mortars](#); 3,255 truck-mounted [Katyushas rockets](#), (nicknamed "Stalin Organs"); and 95,383 motor vehicles, many of which were manufactured in the USA.^[32]

End of War: April–May 1945

Main articles: [Battle of Berlin](#), [Battle of Halbe](#), [Prague Offensive](#)

All that was left for the Soviets to do was to launch an offensive to capture central Germany (which was to become [East Germany](#) after the war). The Soviet offensive had two objectives. Because of [Stalin's](#) suspicions about the intentions of the [Western Allies](#) to hand over territory occupied by them in the post-war Soviet [zone of occupation](#), the offensive was to be on a broad front and was to move as rapidly as possible to the west, to meet the Western Allies as far west as possible. But the overriding objective was to capture Berlin. The two were complementary because possession of the zone could not be won quickly unless Berlin was taken. Another consideration was that Berlin itself held strategic assets, including Adolf Hitler and the [German atomic bomb](#) program.^[33]

The [offensive to capture central Germany and Berlin](#) started on 16 April with an assault on the [German front lines on the Oder and Neisse rivers](#). After several days of heavy fighting the Soviet 1BF and 1UF punched holes through the German front line and were fanning out across central Germany. By 24 April, elements of the 1BF and 1UF had completed the [encirclement](#) of Berlin and the [Battle of Berlin](#) entered its final stages. On 25 April the 2BF broke through the German 3rd Panzer Army's line south of Stettin. They were now free to move west towards the British 21st Army Group and north towards the Baltic port of [Stralsund](#). The 58th Guards Rifle Division of the 5th Guards Army made contact with the US 69th Infantry Division of the First Army near [Torgau](#), Germany at the [Elbe river](#).^{[34][35]}

On 30 April, as the Soviet forces fought their way into the centre of Berlin, Adolf Hitler married [Eva Braun](#) and then committed suicide by taking [cyanide](#) and shooting himself. [Helmuth Weidling](#), defence commandant of Berlin, surrendered the city to the Soviets on 2 May.^[36] Altogether, the Berlin operation (16 April – 8 May) cost the Red Army 361,367 casualties (dead, missing, wounded and

sick) and 1,997 tanks and assault guns. German losses in this period of the war remain impossible to determine with any reliability.^[37]

At 02:41 on the morning of 7 May 1945, at the SHAEF headquarters, German Chief-of-Staff General [Alfred Jodl](#) signed the [unconditional surrender](#) documents for all German forces to the Allies. It included the phrase *All forces under German control to cease active operations at 2301 hours Central European time on 8 May 1945*. The next day shortly before midnight, Field Marshal [Wilhelm Keitel](#) repeated the signing in Berlin at Zhukov's headquarters. The war in Europe was over.^[38]

In the Soviet Union the end of the war is considered to be 9 May, when the surrender took effect [Moscow](#) time. This date is celebrated as a [national holiday](#) – Victory Day – in [Russia](#) (as part of a two-day May 8–9 holiday) and some other post-Soviet countries. The [ceremonial Victory parade](#) was held in Moscow on 24 June.

German [Army Group Centre](#) initially refused to surrender and continued to [fight in Czechoslovakia](#) until about 11 May.^[39]

A small German garrison on the island of Bornholm (Denmark) refused to surrender until after being bombed and invaded by the Soviets. The island was returned to the Danish government four months later.

Soviet Far East: August 1945

Main article: [Soviet invasion of Manchuria \(1945\)](#)

The [Soviet invasion of Manchuria](#) began on 8 August 1945, with the Soviet invasion of the Japanese puppet states of [Manchukuo](#) and neighbouring [Mengjiang](#); the greater offensive would eventually include northern [Korea](#), southern [Sakhalin](#), and the [Kuril Islands](#). It marked the initial and only military action of the Soviet Union against the [Empire of Japan](#); at the [Yalta Conference](#), it had agreed to Allied pleas to terminate the neutrality pact with Japan and enter the Second World War's Pacific theatre within three months after the end of the war in Europe. While not a part of the Eastern Front operations, it is included here because the commanders and much of the forces used by the Red Army, came from the European Theatre of operations and benefited from the experience gained there. In many ways this was a 'perfect' operation, delivered with the skill gained during the bitter fighting with the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe over four years^[40].

Results

The Eastern Front was the largest and bloodiest theatre of World War II. It is generally accepted as being the deadliest conflict in human history, with over 30 million killed as a result^[41]. It involved more land combat than all other World War II theatres combined.

The distinctly brutal nature of warfare on the Eastern Front was exemplified by an often willful disregard for human life by both sides. It was also reflected in the ideological premise for the war, which also saw a momentous clash between two directly opposed ideologies.

Aside from the ideological conflict, the mindframe of the leaders of Germany and the Soviet Union, Hitler and Stalin respectively, contributed to the escalation of terror and murder on an unprecedented scale. Stalin and Hitler both disregarded human life in order to achieve their goal of victory. This included terrorization of their own people, as well as mass deportation of entire populations. All these factors resulted in tremendous brutality both to combatants and civilians that found no parallel on the [Western Front](#). According to [Time](#): "*By measure of manpower, duration, territorial reach and casualties, the Eastern Front was as much as four times the scale of the conflict on the [Western Front](#) that opened with the Normandy invasion.*"^[42]

The war inflicted huge losses and suffering upon the civilian populations of the affected countries. Behind the front lines, atrocities against civilians in German-occupied areas were routine, including the Holocaust. German and German-allied forces treated civilian

populations with exceptional brutality, massacring villages and routinely killing civilian hostages. Both sides practiced widespread [scorched earth](#) tactics, but the loss of civilian lives in the case of Germany was incomparably smaller than that of the Soviet Union, in which at least 20 million civilians were killed. When the Red Army invaded Germany in 1944, many German civilians suffered from vengeance taken by Red Army soldiers (see [Soviet war crimes](#)). After the war, following the Yalta conference agreements between the Allies, the German populations of [East Prussia](#) and [Silesia](#) were [displaced to the west](#) of the Oder-Neisse Line, in what became one of the largest [forced migrations](#) of people in world history.

The Soviet Union came out of World War II militarily victorious but economically and structurally devastated. Much of the combat took place in or close by populated areas, and the actions of both sides contributed to massive loss of civilian life as well as a tremendous material damage. According to a summary, presented by Lieutenant General Roman Rudenko at the [International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg](#), the property damage in the Soviet Union inflicted by the Axis invasion was estimated to a value of 679 billion rubles. The largest number of civilian deaths in a single city was 1.2 million citizens dead during the [Siege of Leningrad](#). The combined damage consisted of complete or partial destruction of 1,710 cities and towns, 70,000 villages/hamlets, 2,508 church buildings, 31,850 industrial establishments, 40,000 miles of railroad, 4100 railroad stations, 40,000 hospitals, 84,000 schools, and 43,000 public libraries. Seven million horses, and 17 million sheep and goats were also slaughtered or driven off.^[43] Wild fauna were also affected. Wolves and foxes fleeing westward from the killing zone, as the Russian army advanced 1943–45, were responsible for a [rabies](#) epidemic which spread slowly westwards, reaching the coast of the [English Channel](#) by 1968.^[44]

Leadership

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were both ideologically driven states, in which the leader had near-absolute power. The character of the war was thus determined by the leaders and their ideology to a much greater extent than in any other theatre of World War II.

Adolf Hitler

Main article: [Adolf Hitler](#)

Adolf Hitler exercised a tight control over the war, spending much of his time in his command bunkers (most notably at Rastenburg in [East Prussia](#), at Vinnitsa in [Ukraine](#), and under the garden of the [Reich Chancellery](#) in [Berlin](#)). At crucial periods in the war he held daily situation conferences, at which he used his remarkable talent for public speaking to overwhelm opposition from his generals and the OKW staff with rhetoric.

In part because of the unexpected success of the [Battle of France](#) despite the warnings of the professional military, Hitler believed himself a military genius, with a grasp of the total war effort that eluded his generals. In August 1941 when [Walther von Brauchitsch](#) (commander-in-chief of the [Wehrmacht](#)) and [Fedor von Bock](#) were appealing for an attack on Moscow, Hitler instead ordered the encirclement and capture of Ukraine, in order to acquire the farmland, industry, and natural resources of that country. Some historians believe that this decision was a missed opportunity to win the war.

In the winter of 1941–42 Hitler believed that his obstinate refusal to allow the German armies to retreat had saved [Army Group Centre](#) from collapse. He later told [Erhard Milch](#),

I had to act ruthlessly. I had to send even my closest generals packing, two army generals, for example ... I could only tell these gentlemen, "Get yourself back to Germany as rapidly as you can — but leave the army in my charge. And the army is staying at the front."

The success of this [hedgehog defence](#) outside Moscow led Hitler to insist on the holding of territory when it made no military sense, and to sack generals who retreated without orders. Officers with initiative were replaced with yes-men or fanatical Nazis. The disastrous encirclements later in the war — at [Stalingrad](#), [Korsun](#) and many other places — were the direct result of Hitler's orders. This idea of holding territory led to another failed plan, dubbed "*Heaven-bound Missions*", which involved fortifying even the most unimportant or insignificant of cities and the holding of these "fortresses" at any and all costs. Many divisions became cut off in "fortress" cities, or wasted uselessly in secondary theatres, because Hitler would not sanction retreat or abandon voluntarily any of his conquests.

Frustration at Hitler's leadership of the war was one of the factors in the attempted coup d'etat of 1944, but after the failure of the 20 July Plot Hitler considered the army and its officer corps suspect and came to rely on the [Schutzstaffel](#) and Nazi party members to prosecute the war. His many disastrous appointments included that of [Heinrich Himmler](#) to command [Army Group Vistula](#) in the defence of Berlin in 1945 — Himmler suffered a mental breakdown under the stress of the command and was quickly replaced by [Gotthard Heinrici](#).

Hitler's direction of the war was disastrous for the German Army, though the skill, loyalty, professionalism and endurance of officers and soldiers enabled him to keep Germany fighting to the end. [F. W. Winterbotham](#) wrote of Hitler's signal to [Gerd von Rundstedt](#) to continue the attack to the west during the [Battle of the Bulge](#):

"From experience we had learned that when Hitler started refusing to do what the generals recommended, things started to go wrong, and this was to be no exception."

Joseph Stalin

Main article: [Joseph Stalin](#)

Joseph Stalin bore the greatest responsibility for the disasters at the beginning of the war, but can be equally praised for the subsequent success of the Soviet Army, which would have been impossible without the unprecedentedly rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union, which was the first priority of Stalin's internal policy throughout the 1930s.

Stalin's [Great Purge](#) of the [Red Army](#) in the late 1930s consisted of the legal prosecution of many of the senior command, many of whom were convicted and sentenced to death or imprisonment. The executed included [Mikhail Tukhachevsky](#), the brilliant proponent of armoured [blitzkrieg](#). Stalin promoted some obscurantists like [Grigory Kulik](#) (who opposed the mechanization of the army and the production of [tanks](#)), but on the other hand the purge of the older commanders who had had their positions since the [Russian Civil War](#), and had experience, but were deemed "politically unreliable". This opened up those places to the promotion of many younger officers that Stalin and the NKVD thought were in line with Stalinist politics, many of whom proved to be terribly inexperienced, but some were later very successful. Soviet tank output remained the largest in the world. Distrust of the military led, since the foundation of the Red Army in 1918, to a system of "dual command", in which every commander was paired with a [political commissar](#), a member of the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union](#). Larger units had military councils consisting of the commander, commissar and chief of staff, who ensured that the commanding officer was loyal and implemented Party orders.

Following the Soviet occupation of eastern [Poland](#), the Baltic states and [Bessarabia](#) in 1939–40, Stalin insisted that every fold of the new territories should be occupied; this move westward left troops far from their depots in salients that left them vulnerable to encirclement. There was an assumption that, in the event of a German invasion, the Red Army would take the strategic offensive and fight the war mostly outside the borders of the Soviet Union; thus few plans were made for

strategic defensive operations. However, fortifications were built. As tension heightened in spring 1941, Stalin was desperate not to give Hitler any provocation that could be used as an excuse for an attack; this caused him to refuse to allow the military to go onto the alert even as German troops gathered on the borders and German reconnaissance planes overflew installations. This refusal to take the necessary action was instrumental in the destruction of major portions of the Red Air Force, lined up on its airfields, in the first days of the war.

Stalin's insistence on repeated counterattacks without adequate preparation led to the loss of almost the whole of the Red Army's tank corps in 1941 — many tanks simply ran out of fuel on their way to the battlefield through faulty planning or ignorance of the location of fuel dumps. While some regard this offensive strategy as an argument for Soviet aggressive strategic plans, the offensive operational planning was not, by itself, evidence of any aggressive foreign policy intent.

Unlike Hitler, Stalin was able to learn lessons and improve his conduct of the war. He gradually came to realise the dangers of inadequate preparation and built up a competent command and control organization — the [Stavka](#) — under [Semyon Timoshenko](#), [Georgy Zhukov](#) and others. Incompetent commanders were gradually but ruthlessly weeded out.

At the crisis of the war, in autumn 1942, Stalin made many concessions to the army: unitary command was restored by removing the Commissars from the [chain of command](#). After the [Battle of Stalingrad](#), shoulderboards were introduced for all ranks; this was a significant symbolic step, since they had been seen as a symbol of the old regime after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Beginning in autumn 1941, units that had proved themselves by superior performance in combat were given the traditional "Guards" title. But these concessions were combined with ruthless discipline: [Order No. 227](#), issued on 28 July 1942, threatened commanders who retreated without orders with punishment by [court-martial](#).

Infractions by military and *politruks* were punished with transferral to penal battalions and penal [companies](#), and the [NKVD's barrier troops](#) would shoot soldiers who fled.

As it became clear that the Soviet Union would win the war, Stalin ensured that propaganda always mentioned his leadership of the war; the victorious generals were sidelined and never allowed to develop into political rivals. After the war the Red Army was once again purged (but not as brutally as in the 1930s): many successful officers were demoted to unimportant positions (including [Zhukov](#), [Malinovsky](#) and Koniev).

Occupation and repression

The enormous territorial gains of 1941 presented Germany with vast areas to pacify and administer. Some Soviet citizens, especially in the recently occupied territories of Western Ukraine and the Baltic States greeted their conquerors as liberators from the Soviet rule. However, nascent national liberation movements among [Ukrainians](#) and Cossacks, and others were viewed by Hitler with suspicion; some, (especially those from the Baltic States) were co-opted into the Axis armies and others brutally suppressed. None of the conquered territories gained any measure of self-rule. Instead, the [racist Nazi ideologues](#) saw the future of the East as one of [settlement by German colonists](#), with the natives killed, expelled, or reduced to slave labour ([Generalplan Ost](#)).

Regions closer to the front were managed by military powers of the region, in other areas such as Baltic states annexed by USSR in 1940, Reichscommissariats were established. As a rule, the maximum in loot was extracted. In September 1941, [Erich Koch](#) was appointed to the Ukrainian Commissariat. His opening speech was clear about German policy: "I

am known as a brutal dog ... Our job is to suck from Ukraine all the goods we can get hold of ... I am expecting from you the utmost severity towards the native population."

Atrocities against the Jewish population in the conquered areas began almost immediately, with the dispatch of [Einsatzgruppen](#) (task groups) to round up Jews and shoot them. Local anti-semites were encouraged to carry out their own [pogroms](#). In July 1941 Erich von dem Bach-Zalewski's SS unit began to carry out more systematic killings, including the massacre of over 30,000 Jews at [Babi Yar](#). By the end of 1941 there were more than 50,000 troops devoted to rounding up and killing Jews. The gradual industrialization of killing led to adoption of the [Final Solution](#) and the establishment of the [Operation Reinhard](#) extermination camps: the machinery of the Holocaust. In three years of occupation, between one and two million Soviet Jews were killed. Other ethnic groups were targeted for extermination, including the [Roma](#) and [Sinti](#); see [Porajmos](#).

The massacres of Jews and other ethnic minorities were only a part of the deaths from the Nazi occupation. Many hundreds of thousands of Soviet civilians were executed, and millions more died from [starvation](#) as the Germans requisitioned food for their armies and fodder for their draft horses. As they retreated from Ukraine and Belarus in 1943–44, the German occupiers systematically applied a [scorched earth](#) policy, burning towns and cities, destroying infrastructure, and leaving civilians to starve or die of exposure ^[45]. In many towns, the Germans also fought Soviet forces right within towns and cities with trapped civilians caught in the middle. Estimates of total civilian dead in the Soviet Union in the war range from seven million ([Encyclopædia Britannica](#)) to seventeen million (Richard Overy).

The Nazi ideology and the maltreatment of the local population and Soviet POWs encouraged [partisans](#) fighting behind the front, motivated even anti-communists or non-Russian nationalists to ally with the Soviets, and greatly delayed the formation of German allied divisions consisting of Soviet POWs (see Vlasov army). These results and missed opportunities contributed to the defeat of the *Wehrmacht*.

Vadim Erlikman has detailed Soviet losses totaling 26.5 million war related deaths. Military losses of 10.6 million include 7.6 million killed or missing in action and 2.6 million POW dead, plus 400,000 paramilitary and [Soviet partisan](#) losses. Civilian deaths totaled 15.9 million, which included 1.5 million from military actions; 7.1 million victims of Nazi [genocide](#) and reprisals; 1.8 million deported to Germany for forced labor; and 5.5 million [famine](#) and [disease](#) deaths. Additional famine deaths, which totaled 1 million during 1946–47, are not included here. These losses are for the entire territory of the USSR including territories annexed in 1939–40.[1]

[Belarus](#) lost a quarter of its pre-war population, including practically all its intellectual elite. Following bloody encirclement battles, all of the present-day Belarus territory was occupied by the Germans by the end of August 1941. The Nazis imposed a brutal regime, deporting some 380,000 young people for slave labour, and killing hundreds of thousands of civilians more. More than 600 villages like Khatyn were burned with their entire population.[2] More than 209 cities and towns (out of 270 total) and 9,000 villages were destroyed. Himmler pronounced a plan according to which 3/4 of Belarusian population was designated to "eradication" and 1/4 of racially cleaner population (blue eyes, light hair) would be allowed to serve Germans as slaves.

Some recent reports raise the number of Belarusians who perished in War to "3 million 650 thousand people, unlike the former 2.2 million. That is to say not every fourth inhabitant but almost 40% of the pre-war Belarusian population perished (considering the present-day borders of Belarus)." [3]

Sixty percent of Soviet POWs died during the war. Large numbers of Soviet POWs and forced laborers transported to Germany were on their return to the USSR (in many cases [forcefully repatriated](#) by the [Western Allies](#)) treated as traitors and deserters and were executed or deported to the Soviet prison camps. The [Soviet Union](#) had not signed the [Geneva Convention \(1929\)](#). However, a month after the German invasion in 1941, an offer was made for a reciprocal adherence to the [Hague convention](#). This 'note' was left unanswered by Third Reich officials ^[46].

The official [Polish](#) government report of war losses prepared in 1947 reported 6,028,000 war victims out of a population of 27,007,000 ethnic [Poles](#) and [Jews](#); this report excluded ethnic [Ukrainian](#) and [Belarusian](#) losses.

Soviet repressions also contributed into the Eastern Front's death toll. Immediately after the start of the German invasion, the [NKVD massacred](#) large numbers of prisoners in most of their prisons in Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, while the remainder was to be evacuated in death marches. ^[47] Most of them were [political prisoners](#), imprisoned and executed without a trial. ^[48]

Industrial output

The Soviet victory owed a great deal to the ability of her war industry to outperform the German economy, despite the enormous loss of population and land. Stalin's [five-year plans](#) of the 1930s had resulted in the industrialization of the Urals and central Asia. In 1941, the trains that shipped troops to the front were used to evacuate thousands of factories from Belarus and Ukraine to safe areas far from the front lines. Once these facilities were reassembled east of the Urals, production could be reassumed without fear of German bombing.

As the Soviet Union's manpower reserves ran low from 1943 onwards, the great Soviet offensives had to depend more on equipment and less on the expenditure of lives. The increases in production of war [materiel](#) were achieved at the expense of civilian living standards — the most thorough application of the principle of [total war](#) — and with the help of [Lend-Lease](#) supplies from the [United Kingdom](#) and the [United States](#). The Germans, on the other hand, could rely on a large slave workforce from the conquered countries and Soviet POWs.

Germany's raw material production was higher than the Soviets' and her labour force was far greater, but the Soviets were more efficient at using what resources they had and chose to build low-cost, low-maintenance vehicles whilst the Germans built high-cost, high-maintenance vehicles.

Germany chose to build very expensive and very complicated vehicles and even though Germany produced many times more raw materials she could not compete with the Soviets on the quantity of military production (in 1943, the [Soviet Union manufactured 24,089 tanks](#) to [Germany's 19,800](#)). The Soviets incrementally upgraded existing designs, and simplified and refined manufacturing processes to increase production. Meanwhile, German industry was forced to engineer more advanced but complex designs such as the [Panther tank](#), the King Tiger or the [Elefant](#).

It should be noted that the Axis allies Italy, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria added to the German numbers. Two-thirds of Germany's [Iron ore](#), much needed for her military production, came from [Sweden](#). Soviet production and upkeep was assisted by the [Lend-Lease](#) program from the United States and Britain. After the defeat at Stalingrad, Germany geared completely towards a war economy, as expounded in [Goebbels' Sportpalast speech](#), increasing production in subsequent years under [Albert Speer's](#) astute direction, despite the intensifying [Allied bombing campaign](#).

Casualties

Further information: [World War II casualties](#), [German casualties in World War II](#), and [World War II casualties of the Soviet Union](#)

The fighting involved millions of Axis and Soviet troops along the broadest land front in military history. It was by far the deadliest single theatre of war in World War II, with over 5 million deaths on the Axis Forces (out of which 0.9–1.5 million died in Soviet captivity);^[54] Soviet military deaths were over 9 million (out of which 1.2–3.3 million died in German captivity^[55]), and estimated civilian deaths range from about 14 to 17 million. Over 11.4 million Soviet civilians within pre-1939 borders were killed, and another estimated 3.5 million civilians were killed in the annexed territories.^[56] The Nazis exterminated one to two million Soviet Jews (including the annexed territories) as part of the Holocaust.^[57] Soviet and Russian historiography often uses the term "irretrievable casualties". According to the Narkomat of Defence order (№ 023, 4 February 1944), the irretrievable casualties include killed, missing, those who died due to war-time or subsequent wounds, maladies and chilblains and those who were captured.

The huge death toll was attributed to several factors, including brutal mistreatment of POWs and captured partisans, large deficiency of food and medical supplies in Soviet territories, multiple atrocities by the Germans and the Soviets against the civilian population and each other. The multiple battles, and most of all, the use of [scorched earth](#) tactics destroyed [agricultural land](#), infrastructure, and whole towns, leaving much of the population homeless and without food.

**2,742,909 KIA/MIA on the Eastern Front during 1941–1944 (including Balkans as of November 1944) plus about two thirds of the 1,230,045 KIA/MIA in Germany during 1945, higher figure includes about 657,900 additional dead POWs (all figures based on statistical analysis by Overmans).*

***Official Soviet records only, total POWs dead about 1,100,000 according to Overmans.*

**since late 1944*

***German records show much more POWs captured and dead. This might be due to overestimation and counting civilian men as POWs.*

Total Soviet losses include estimated partisan deaths – 250,000 and militia deaths – 150,000.^[59]

[Polish Armed Forces in the East](#), initially consisting of Poles from Eastern Poland or otherwise in Soviet Union in 1939–1941, began fighting alongside the Red Army in 1943, and grew steadily as more Polish territory was liberated from the Nazis in 1944–1945.

When the Axis countries of Eastern Europe were occupied by the Soviets, they were forced to change sides and declare war on Germany. (see [Allied Commissions](#)).

Some of the Soviet citizens would side with the Germans and join [Andrey Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army](#). Most of those who joined were Russian POWs. These men were primarily used in the Eastern Front but some were assigned to guard the beaches of [Normandy](#). The other main group of men joining the German army were citizens of the Baltic countries annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 or from Western Ukraine. They fought in their own Waffen-SS units.

A comparison of the losses demonstrates the cruel treatment of the Soviet POWs by the Nazis. Most of the Axis POWs were released from captivity several years after the war, but the fate of the Soviet POWs differed markedly. Nazi troops

who captured Red Army soldiers frequently shot them in the field or shipped them to concentration camps and executed them. Hitler's notorious Commissar Order implicated all the German armed forces in the policy of war crimes.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Duncan, et al. *The Eastern Front: Barbarossa, Stalingrad, Kursk and Berlin (Campaigns of World War II)*. London: Amber Books Ltd., 2001. ISBN 0-7603-0923-X.
- [Beevor, Antony](#), and Artemis Cooper. *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942–1943*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998. ISBN 0-14-028458-3.
- Beevor, Antony. *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2004. ISBN 0-14-101747-3.
- Erickson, John. *The Road to Stalingrad*. New York: Orion Publishing Group, Ltd., 2007. ISBN 0-304-36541-6.
- Erickson, John. *The Road to Berlin*. New York: Orion Publishing Group, Ltd., 2007. ISBN 978-0-304-36540-1.
- Erickson, John, and David Dilks. *Barbarossa, the Axis and the Allies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-7486-0504-5.
- [Glantz, David](#), and Jonathan M. House. *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army stopped Hitler*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, Reprint edition, 1998. ISBN 0-7006-0899-0.
- Glantz, David, *The Soviet - German War 1941–45: Myths and Realities: A Survey Essay*.
- [Guderian, Heinz](#). *Panzer Leader*, Da Capo Press Reissue edition. New York: Da Capo Press, 2001. ISBN 0-306-81101-4.
- [Hastings, Max](#). *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944–1945*, Vintage Books USA, 2005. ISBN 0-375-71422-7
- International Military Tribunal at Nurnberg, Germany. *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supplement A* (online PDF at the Library of Congress). Office of United States Chief of Counsel For Prosecution of Axis Criminality. USGPO, 1947.
- [Irving, David](#). *Hitler's War*, Reissue edition. Avon Books, 1990. ISBN 0-380-75806-7.
- Krivoshchev, G. F. (1997), *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, Greenhill Books, ISBN 1853672807
- Liddell Hart, B.H. *History of the Second World War*. United States of America: De Capo Press, 1999. ISBN 0-306-80912-5.
- Lubbeck, William and David B. Hurt. *At Leningrad's Gates: The Story of a Soldier with Army Group North*, Philadelphia: Casemate, 2006. ISBN 1-932033-55-6.
- Müller, Rolf-Dieter and Gerd R. Ueberschär. *Hitler's War in the East, 1941–1945: A Critical Assessment*. Berghahn Books, 1997. ISBN 1-57181-068-4.
- [Overy, Richard](#). *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet Effort: 1941–1945*, New Edition. New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998. ISBN 0-14-027169-4.
- Seaton, Albert. *The Russo-German War, 1941–1945*, Reprint edition. Presidio Press, 1993. ISBN 0-89141-491-6.
- [Shirer, William L.](#) (1960). *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* New York: Simon & Schuster.
- [Winterbotham, F.W.](#) *The Ultra Secret*, New Edition. Orion Publishing Group Ltd., 2000. ISBN 0-7528-3751-6.
- Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: the Nazi-Soviet War, 1941–1945*. London 2005. ISBN 0-340-80808-X.

See also

[Historiography of World War II](#)

[Horses in World War II](#)

[Timeline of the Eastern Front of World War II](#)

[List of military operations on the Eastern Front of World War II](#)

[Operation Silberfuchs – Axis attack on the Soviet Arctic](#)

[Manchurian Strategic Offensive Operation – the Soviet campaign against Japan in Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Korea, Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands](#)

[Captured German equipment in Soviet use in Eastern front](#)

[Voenno-vozdushniye Sily – Soviet Air Force in World War II](#)

[Morskaya Aviatsiya – Soviet Naval Air Service in World War II](#)

[Women in the Russian and Soviet military](#)

[Occupation of Belarus by Nazi Germany](#)

[Italian war in Soviet Union, 1941-1943](#)

[The Italian Alpini infantry corps in Russia](#)

[Victory Day and Ribbon of Saint George](#)

[The Battle of Russia – film from the *Why We Fight* propaganda film series](#)

[Severity Order](#)

[Romania during World War II](#)

[Hungary during World War II](#)

[Military history of Finland during World War II](#)

[Military history of Bulgaria during World War II](#)

[Western Front \(World War II\)](#)

Notes

1. ^ Soviet Union then also recruited some foreign units (Czechoslovakian, Romanian, Baltic). (Romuald J. Misiunas, Rein Taagepera. *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence. 1940–1990*. Hurst&Company, London, U.K. 1993) Partial help for the Soviet Union was provided by the [United States](#) and the [United Kingdom](#). Also minor military assistance from: Polish Secret State, [Polish Armed Forces in the East](#), [Romania](#) (from 1944), [Bulgaria](#) (from 1944) and [Czechoslovakia](#)
2. ^ Toomas Alatalu. Tuva. A State Reawakens. *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 5 (1992), pp. 881–895
3. ^ Germany's allies, in total, provided a significant number of troops and material to the front. There were also numerous foreign units recruited by Germany, notably the [Spanish Blue Division](#).
4. ^ Beevor, *Stalingrad*. Penguin 2001 ISBN 0-14-100131-3 p183
5. ^ (German) Die Ostfront 1941–1945
6. ^
 - (German) Der Rußlandfeldzug
 - (German) 2. Weltkrieg
7. ^ Heinrich Himmler. "Speech of the Reichsfuehrer-SS at the meeting of SS Major-Generals at Posen 4 October 1943". *Source: Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. IV. USGPO, Washington, 1946, pp. 616–634*. Stuart Stein, University of the West of England.. <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/genocide/SS2.htm>. ""Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death ... interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our Kultur ...""
8. ^ revisions to translation by Dan Rogers. "The Wannsee Conference Protocol". *source: John Mendelsohn, ed., _The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes._ Vol. 11: The Wannsee Protocol*. Literature of the Holocaust, university of pennsylvania. <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/wansee-transcript.html>. Retrieved 2009 1 5.
9. ^ Powell, Elwin Humphreys. *The Design Of Discord' p. 192*
10. ^ [Hardesty, Von. *Red Phoenix: The Rise of Soviet Air Power 1941–1945*. p. 16, Smithsonian Institution Press. ISBN 1-56098-071-0]
11. ^ A. S. Milward. The End of the Blitzkrieg. *The Economic History Review, New Series*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1964), pp. 499–518.
12. ^ Edward E. Ericson, III. Karl Schnurre and the Evolution of Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1936–1941. *German Studies Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May, 1998), pp. 263–283
13. ^ ^a ^b Zhukov, Georgy (1972). *Vospominaniya i razmyshleniya*. Moscow: Agenstvo pechati Novosti.
14. ^ Zhilin, P.A. (ed.) (1973). *Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna*. Moscow: Izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury.
15. ^ Shirer (1990), p.852
16. ^ Toomas Hiio (1999). "Combat in Estonia in 1941". in Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, & Indrek Paavle. *Estonia 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*. Tallinn. pp. 1035–1094.
17. ^ Tartu in the 1941 Summer War. By Major Riho Rõngelep and Brigadier General Michael Hesselholt Clemmesen (2003). *Baltic Defence Review* 9

18. ^{a b c d} Alan F. Wilt. Hitler's Late Summer Pause in 1941. *Military Affairs*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Dec., 1981), pp. 187–191
19. ^a Russel H. S. Stolfi. Barbarossa Revisited: A Critical Reappraisal of the Opening Stages of the Russo-German Campaign (June–December 1941). *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Mar., 1982), pp. 27–46
20. ^a Louis Rotundo. The Creation of Soviet Reserves and the 1941 Campaign. *Military Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Jan., 1986), pp. 21–28.
21. ^a Shirer (1990), p.925-926
22. ^a Shirer (1990), p.927-928
23. ^a David M. Glantz (2002). *The Battle for Leningrad: 1941–1944*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas. ISBN 978-0-7006-1208-6.
24. ^a Estonia. Sept.21 Bulletin of International News by Royal Institute of International Affairs Information Dept.
25. ^a "The Otto Tief government and the fall of Tallinn". Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2006. http://web-test.vm.ee/estonia/pea_172/kat_509/7786.html.
26. ^a G. I. Krivosheev. *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses*. Greenhill 1997 ISBN 1-85367-280-7
27. ^a Mart Laar (2006) (in Estonian). *Sinimäed 1944: II maailmasõja lahingud Kirde-Eestis (Sinimäed Hills 1944: Battles of World War II in Northeast Estonia)*. Tallinn: Varrak.
28. ^a Ian Baxter (2009). *Battle in the Baltics 1944–1945: the fighting for Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia: a photographic history*. Solihull, West Midlands: Helion & Company Ltd.
29. ^a Estonian State Commission on Examination of Policies of Repression (2005) (PDF). *The White Book: Losses inflicted on the Estonian nation by occupation regimes. 1940–1991*. Estonian Encyclopedia Publishers. <http://www.just.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=12709/TheWhiteBook.pdf>.
30. ^a Toomas Hiio (1999). *Combat in Estonia in 1944*. In: Toomas Hiio, Meelis Maripuu, Indrek Paavle (Eds.). *Estonia 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity*. Tallinn.
31. ^a Hastings, Max, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944–1945*, Vintage Books USA
32. ^{a b} Ziemke, *Berlin*, see References page 71
33. ^a Beevor, *Berlin*, see References Page 138
34. ^a Beevor, *Berlin*, see References pp. 217–233
35. ^a Ziemke, *Berlin*, see References page 81-111
36. ^a Beevor, *Berlin*, see References pp. 259–357, 380–381
37. ^a Khrivosheev 1997, pp. 219, 220.
38. ^a Ziemke, *occupation*, References CHAPTER XV:The Victory Sealed Page 258 last paragraph
39. ^a Ziemke, *Berlin*, References p. 134
40. ^a Raymond L. Garthoff. The Soviet Manchurian Campaign, August 1945. *Military Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Oct., 1969), pp. 312–336
41. ^a According to G. I. Krivosheev. (*Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses*. Greenhill 1997 ISBN 1-85367-280-7), in the Eastern Front, Axis countries and German co-belligerents sustained 1,468,145 irrecoverable losses (668,163 KIA/MIA), Germany herself – 7,181,100 (3,604,800 KIA/MIA), and 579,900 PoWs died in Soviet captivity. So the

Axis KIA/MIA amounted to 4.8 million in the East during the period of 1941–1945. This is more than a half of all Axis losses (including Asia/Pacific theatre). The USSR sustained 10.5 million military losses (including PoWs died in German captivity, according to Vadim Erlikman. *Poteri narodonaseleniia v XX veke : spravochnik*. Moscow 2004. ISBN 5-93165-107-1), so the number of military deaths (the USSR and the Axis) amounted to 15 million, far greater than in all other WWII theatres. According to the same source, total Soviet civilian deaths within post-war borders amounted to 15.7 million. The numbers for other Central European country and German civilian casualties are not included here

42. ^ Remembering a Red Flag Day – TIME
43. ^ [The New York Times](#), 9 February 1946, Volume 95, Number 32158.
44. ^ Chris Bellamy (2007) *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War*. London: Macmillan: 1–2
45. ^ On 7 Sep 1943, [Himmler](#) sent orders to HSSPF "Ukraine" [Hans-Adolf Prützmann](#) that "not a human being, not a single head of cattle, not a hundredweight of cereals and not a railway line remain behind; that not a house remains standing, not a mine is available which is not destroyed for years to come, that there is not a well which is not poisoned. The enemy must really find completely burned and destroyed land". He ordered cooperation with Infantry general Staff, also someone named Stampf, and sent copies to the Chief of Regular Police, Chief of Security Police & SS, SS-Obergruppenführer Berger, and the chief of the partisan combating units. See *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Supplement A* pg 1270.
46. ^ Beevor, *Stalingrad*. Penguin 2001 ISBN 0-14-100131-3 p60
47. ^ Robert Gellately. *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler: The Age of Social Catastrophe*. Knopf, 2007 ISBN 1-4000-4005-1 p. 391
48. ^ (Polish) Encyklopedia PWN, *Zbrodnie Sowickie W Polsce*
49. ^ ^{a b c} Richard Overy, *Russia's War*, p. 155 and *Campaigns of World War II Day By Day*, by Chris Bishop and Chris McNab, pp. 244–52.
50. ^ Axis History Factbook
51. ^ ^{a b c d} Soviet numbers for 1945 are for the whole of 1945 even after the war was over.
52. ^ ^{a b} German figures for 1941 and 1942 include tanks only. (Self-propelled guns cost 2/3 of a tank (mainly because they have no turret) and were more appropriate in a defensive role. The Germans therefore favored their production in the second half of the war.)
53. ^ *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* by [Richard Overy](#) p. 498.
54. ^ German losses according to: Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Oldenbourg 2000. ISBN 3-486-56531-1, pp. 265, 272
55. ^ Richard Overy, *The Dictators*
56. ^ ^{a b c} Krivosheev, G. I. *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses*. Greenhill 1997 ISBN 1-85367-280-7
57. ^ [Martin Gilbert](#). *Atlas of the Holocaust* 1988 ISBN 0-688-12364-3
58. ^ German losses according to: Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Oldenbourg 2000. ISBN 3-486-56531-1, pp. 265, 272, 288–289; [Richard Overy](#) *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (2004), ISBN 0-7139-9309-X

59. ^{a b} Vadim Erlikhman, *Poteri narodonaseleniia v XX veke: spravochnik*. Moscow 2004. ISBN 5-93165-107-1;
Mark Axworthy, *Third Axis Fourth Ally*. Arms and Armour 1995, p. 216. ISBN 1-85409-267-7

References

[Beevor, Antony](#). *Berlin: The Downfall 1945*, Penguin Books, 2002, ISBN 0-670-88695-5

Ziemke, Earl F. *Battle For Berlin: End Of The Third Reich*, NY:Ballantine Books, London:Macdonald & Co, 1969.

Ziemke, Earl F. "*The U.S. Army in the occupation of Germany 1944–1946*" Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D. C., 1990, Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 75-619027

CHAPTER XV: The Victory Sealed: Surrender at Reims

External links

Prof Richard Overy writes a summary about the eastern front for the BBC

Rarities of the USSR photochronicles. Great Patriotic War 1941–1945 Borodulin Collection. Excellent set of war photos

OnWar maps of the Eastern Front

Memories of Leutnant d.R. Wilhelm Radkovsky 1940–1945 Experiences as a German soldier on the Eastern and Western Front

Pobediteli: Eastern Front flash animation (photos, video, interviews, memorials. Written from a Russian perspective)

Feldgrau.com The German Armed Forces 1919–1945

Information about the Eastern front up to September 1943

RKKA in World War II

27 Million

Pictures of German Occupation in the USSR

Small Unit Actions During German Campaign in Russia German and Soviet tactics explained, written by former German commanders in the East

Armchair General maps, year by year

Dedicated to The War on the Eastern Front