

The Great Patriotic War

Germany vs. Russia

June 1941 to May 1945

(This packet contains a general map of western Russia, an outline of the course, and a short bibliography.)

Key Objectives

(Things to think about as we go through the course)

Why was it fought?

Who was responsible?

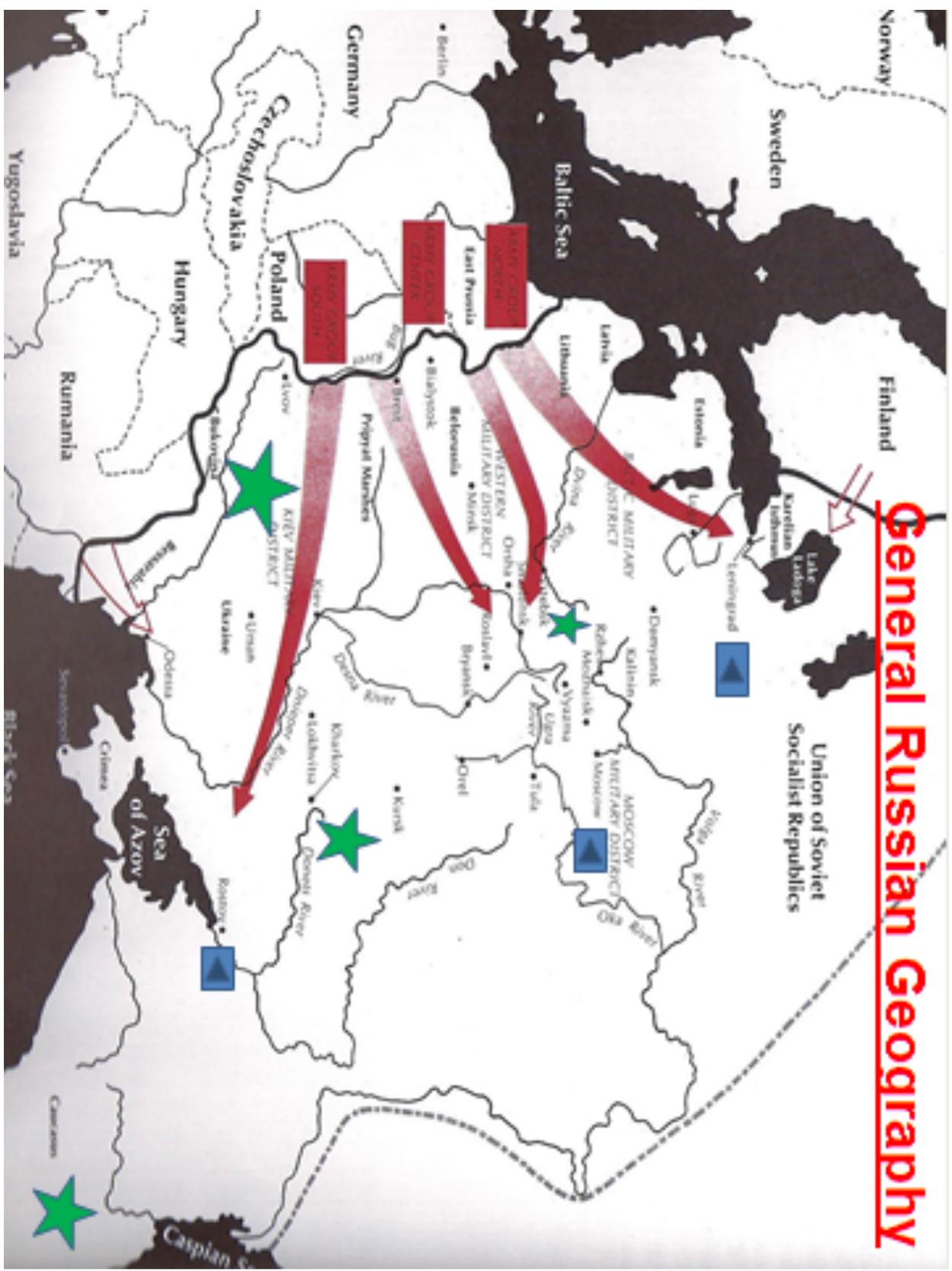
What were the objectives for both sides?

What were the key successes and failures?

Why did the Russians win?

What was the significance of it all?

General Russian Geography



The Great Patriotic War

Outline

- I. Run up to the War (1918 - 1941)
 - a. Early Twenties
 - i. Things that made them potential allies
 - ii. Things that made them potential enemies
 - iii. Trade & military cooperation
 - b. Sequence of events
 - i. Hitler's march to power
 - ii. The Soviet purges
 - iii. Russo-Japanese Border Wars
 - iv. Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact
 - c. World War Two begins
 - i. Poland
 - ii. Finland
 - iii. Western Europe
 - iv. Hitler decides to turn east

- II. Phase One: Barbarossa to Stalingrad (June 1941 - Nov 1942)
 - a. Doctrine & Planning

 - b. Initial German invasion goes very well
 - i. "Tinkering" with the plan
 - ii. Changing strategic objectives

- iii. Operation Typhoon (Failure to take Moscow)
 - c. Germany employs a remarkable level of brutality
 - d. Russian Winter Offensive (Failure)
 - i. German “Hedgehog” defenses
 - e. Summer/Fall 1942
 - i. Colliding objectives
 - ii. Operation Blau
 - 1. Major Russian defeat at Kharkov
 - 2. Blau cancelled and the Germans move east
 - 3. Failure in the Caucasus
 - iii. Stalingrad
 - 1. Unintended major battle
 - 2. Becomes a bloodbath (“iconic” battle of the war)
 - 3. By November, 90% in German hands

III. Phase 2: Stalingrad to the Dnieper (Nov 1942 - Dec 1943)

- a. Russia plans four major counter attacks
 - i. Mars/Jupiter to destroy AGN
 - 1. A complete failure
 - 2. Purged from Russian history
 - ii. Uranus/Saturn to destroy AGS and evict the Germans from the Ukraine
 - 1. Uranus a brilliant success (AGB destroyed)

2. "Little Saturn" clears the Caucasus only.
- b. Winter of 42/43; Russian general offensive in the South
 - i. Germans retreat
 - ii. The emergence of General Manstein
 - iii. Russians pay in blood for each mile
- c. Operation Citadel (The Battle of Kursk)
 - i. Obvious German objective
 - ii. Superb Russian intelligence and planning
 - iii. Largest air & tank battle in history
 - iv. Much mythology about the actual battle but:
 1. Tactical draw but a clear Soviet strategic victory
 2. Last German offensive of the war
- d. Russian Summer/Fall Offensive of 1943
 - i. Huge offensive planned as the follow-on to Kursk
 - ii. Manstein decides to conduct fighting retreat to the Dnieper.
 - iii. Germans cross the Dnieper between Sept and Nov.
 - iv. In December, Russians call a halt to regroup.
 - v. They have finally learned to stop outrunning their logistics.

IV. Phase 3: The Dnieper to Berlin (Jan 1944 - May 1945)

- a. The "Three Blows" (all start in January 1944)
 - i. Relieve Leningrad
 - ii. Drive across the Dnieper and clear the Ukraine

- iii. Take Crimea
 - iv. By spring all three have been generally successful if bloody
 - v. Only the center of the Dnieper line is still holding
- b. Operation Bagration (Summer 1944)
- i. Largest single land operation of World War 2
 - ii. Purpose: Destroy AGC and return to the June 41 borders
 - 1. Also support Allied campaign in France
 - iii. Total success.
 - iv. May have led to the Warsaw uprising (?).
- c. Fall 1944
- i. Multiple independent attacks to:
 - 1. Retake the Baltic countries
 - 2. Clear an opening to Berlin
 - 3. Clear the German Army from the Balkans
 - a. This operation continued until February
 - 4. Drive Finland from the war.
 - ii. Again, each is successful
 - iii. With the exception of the Balkans, the Russians stop to regroup in Nov.
- d. Winter 44/45 (The Final Offensive)
- i. Early start due to Ardennes (?)
 - ii. Brute force is now the Russian tactic
 - iii. Force their way to the Oder-Nesse Rivers by March 31st.

- iv. Another break to get prepared for the Battle of Berlin
 - e. Battle of Berlin (April 15 to 2 May)
 - i. Stalin- Eisenhower agreement
 - ii. Again, a purely brute force offensive
 - iii. Suicidal German defense
 - iv. Hitler suicide on 30 April
 - v. Russian display remarkable brutality
 - f. Donitz surrenders unconditionally on 7 May (8th?)
- V. Sidebar discussions (that do not fit in a chronological format)
 - a. Siege of Leningrad
 - b. Lend Lease
 - c. Women in this war
 - d. Partisans
 - e. Economic war
- VI. Wrap up and Analysis
 - a. Unbelievably brutal war
 - i. Some 16M (+) uniformed men died
 - ii. At least 20M (++) civilians also died
 - b. POW deaths were high for both side but dramatically so in the case of Russians held by the Germans. (64%)
 - c. Easily the largest and arguably the most important theater of World War 2
 - d. Complete Soviet strategic victory
 - i. Military victory
 - ii. Economic victory

iii. Arguably a cultural victory

e. Put in place all those things that became the Cold War.

VII. **Bibliography:** There are many books on this subject but there are some pitfalls that the reader needs to be aware of. First, all early works (such as Clark) are German centric because the Soviets allowed very little real primary documentation out. In addition, German histories (because they lost) tend to dwell on two excuses; Russian numerical superiority and Hitler's supposed military incompetence. Neither of these is completely compelling to me. Much of what was available from Russia was self-serving propaganda. Access to Soviet military archives only became available after the fall of the Berlin wall and then only for about 15 years. Vladimir Putin has essentially closed this door again. Books by scholars who had access to this material (specifically Glantz) tend to write Russian centric history. My personal view is you need to read one of each to get a balanced view. Here are my suggestions.

- a. **Absolute War** (Soviet Russia in the Second World War) (2007): Chris Bellamy - Excellent book with much "new" information based on Soviet records. One issue: Bellamy is a British journalist who covered the Iraq War. He keeps trying to identify parallels between the Eastern Front and the Iraq war. I do not find these parallels persuasive but if you get past that the book is superb.
- b. **Barbarossa** (The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-1945) (1965): Alan Clark - The classic work on this subject. Very German centric but balanced, highly readable, and it still holds up well even for its age. However, be warned; Clark makes serious demands on the readers knowledge of Russian geography and provides few maps.
- c. **When Titans Clashed** (How the Red Army stopped Hitler) (1995): David Glantz - Glantz has probably studied the Soviet era records closer than any western historian and this is a very good book but completely from the Soviet point of view.
- d. **The Storm of War** (A history of the Second World War) (2011): Andrew Roberts - This is in my opinion the best single volume available on the overall Second World War. Unlike most single volumes his coverage of the Great Patriotic War is much more detailed than others and he used a wide variety of sources from both sides to paint a comprehensive and balanced picture.
- e. **Inferno** (The World at War, 1939-1945) (2011): Max Hastings- Another excellent single volume history of the Second World War. However, Hastings is very opinionated and tends to be very harsh in his assessment of the Allied war effort. I do not agree with some of his analyses. However, he does a good job of describing what happened on the Eastern Front.
- f. **Slaughter on the Eastern Front** (Hitler & Stalin's War 1941-1945) (2017): Anthony Tucker-Jones - An excellent new book by a former British Intelligence Officer and now widely respected defense writer and military historian. This book is more specific and

detailed than most and makes demands on the readers knowledge. Probably best after having read a more general book on World War 2. One major drawback is a surprising lack of maps. He assumes the reader has a working knowledge of Russian geography.

- g. After these general books on the war here are some others that tell specific parts or cover related subjects that I found interesting and useful:
- 1) **The Third Reich at War** (2009) (Richard Evans) - The third book of a brilliant trilogy on the Nazis from 1933 to 1945 that I cannot recommend highly enough. I recommend you start with volume one and just read all three; the definitive work on Nazi Germany.
 - 2) **The 900 Days** (1969) (Harrison Salisbury) - Dated but still excellent book on the Siege of Leningrad
 - 3) **The Fall of Berlin** (2002) (Anthony Beevor) - Excellent account of the end of the war.
 - 4) **Stalingrad, The Fateful Siege** (1999) (Anthony Beevor) - Very good discussion of this iconic battle. If you're a real glutton you can go after David Glantz's three volume- 2200 page **The Stalingrad Trilogy**.
 - 5) **Time-Life Series on World War Two**: Although published in the seventies, 3 of the 36 books in this series are directly about the eastern front and provide a good overview and lots of very good maps and pictures.
 - 6) **Nomonhan, 1939**: The Red Army's Victory That Shaped World War II, (2012) (Stuart Goldman). This book plugs a real gap in the histories of Russia, Japan, and the United States leading up to both the Great Patriotic War and to Pearl Harbor. Excellent.
 - 7) **Hitler's Willing Executioners**: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, (1997) (Daniel Goldhagen). A groundbreaking international best-seller that put to rest the myths that Nazi crimes were the product of only hard core Nazis and that everyone else (civilian and army) were not in any way involved.
 - 8) **Film Documentaries**: There is a wealth of really bad documentaries on this subject. The best ones I have found are **WARLORDS** which matches the actions and thinking of Churchill, Stalin, Hitler, and Roosevelt at various points of the war (the section on Stalin versus Hitler is absolutely brilliant) and the other is a BBC production called **War of the Century**. It has a lot of scholarship and superb consultants but as a 1999 production some of its conclusions and details have been superseded.
 - 9) **Movies**: Lots of pretty good movies on this war (all German or Russian and available on Netflix and Amazon Prime). My recommendations (for what it's worth) are: **Cross of Iron**, **The Cadets**, **Stalingrad**, **Sophie Scholl**, **Downfall**,

and Life and Fate. Of special note is the HBO movie Conspiracy. It is a play taken from actual minutes of the Wannsee Conference which decided the so called "Final Solution" and led directly to the gas chambers and crematoria. It is a brilliant and thoroughly frightening movie.