

## OPERATION BARBAROSSA – THE GERMAN INVASION OF RUSSIA(SOVIET UNION)

FROM BETA'S BOOK "LEST WE FORGET, WORLD WAR TWO, REMEMBER, RESPECT"

On the 22nd June 1941 Hitler sent his armies into the Soviet Union – the invasion being codenamed Operation Barbarossa. Hitler believed that Germany needed more living space (Lebensraum) and was convinced that Russia would provide this space after the indigenous population had been REMOVED and replaced by Germans.



Three million Axis troops – German, Finnish and Romanian moved speedily into Soviet territory and it was hoped that victory would come in a matter of months. Any type of resistance was to be dealt with and this involved the mass murder of civilians, including women and children and destruction of entire villages. The brutality of the invaders continued with the treatment of Soviet POW's – 3.1 million Soviet prisoners died in German captivity and on a given day in Autumn 1941, more Soviet

prisoners died in German camps than American and British prisoners did during the whole of World War 2.

Russian POW's in Auschwitz were executed as an experiment using Zyklon B – the gas which has since become the symbol of Nazi genocide.

The people of Russia defended their country with such determination and courage and this, combined with the intense cold of the Russian winters, held up the advancing armies. The city of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) came under siege for 880 days resulting in the deaths of more than a million civilians and 300,000 Soviet soldiers who died defending the city.



Stalingrad (now Volgograd) became the main focus of attack by the German, Hungarian, Romanian, Italian, Croatian and Finnish armies. Civilians including women and children built trenchwork and fortifications to defend their city and many young female volunteers completed military or medical training to serve in the battle. Three air regiments at Stalingrad were entirely female and women played many roles in the Red Army. A famous female sniper, Lyudmila Pavlichenko was credited with 309 kills by the age of 25 and then toured the USA to raise support for the war effort.

The Battle of Stalingrad was seen by many as the turning point of the war and after the Germans were defeated they had to withdraw vast military forces from the Western Front to replace their losses.

An estimated 26 million Soviet citizens died during World War 2, including as many as 11 million Russian soldiers.

Photographs above taken during the siege of Leningrad and Stalingrad

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