

Russia in the World War II

Prelude to War

In 1941 the Soviet Union was **ill-prepared** to fight a war. On the one hand the German army was stronger and had better weapons than the Soviet army. On the other hand 8 of the nation's top military leaders, including Marshall Michael Tukhachevsky had been **executed** in 1937 in the course of Stalin's **purges**. To **strengthen** its western **frontier** the Soviet Union **secured** the territory located in its sphere of interest. Soviet forces **seized** eastern Poland in September, 1939, entered Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in October 1939 and seized the Romanian territories of Bessarabia (later the part of the Moldavian republic) and northern Bukovina (later added to the Ukrainian Republic) in June, 1940. Only Finland **resisted** Stalin's program of **expansion**. Finland **put up a defense** along the **Mannerheim Line** when the Red Army invaded in November 1939. It was the Soviet-Finnish War known as the Winter War of 1939-1940. On March 12, 1940, Finland **surrendered**.

Germany declared war on the Soviet Union just as 180 German **divisions** swept across the border early on the morning of June 22, 1941. So the Great Patriotic War as that phase of the World War II was called in Russia **broke out**.

The Great Patriotic War.

The German **blitzkrieg**, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly **succeeded** in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. The Soviet forces lost whole armies and **vast quantities of equipment**. But by the end of 1941 German movements were **restricted** by **harsh** winter weather, attacks from bands of partisans and difficulties in **maintaining overextended supply lines**. In December 1941 the Red army **launched** the first **counterattacks**. The Soviet government moved thousands of factories and people from the war zone to Central Asia and the Urals, where the plants began producing war material. In October 1941 the US began supplying the USSR under the Lend-Lease Act.

Equipped with up-to-date weapons, the Hitlerites and their **allies** were **advancing** rapidly. Their advance was in three directions: in the direction of Leningrad, towards Moscow and towards Kiev.

The **Nazi** artillery was **shelling** Leningrad. In September 1941 Germany began the **Siege** of Leningrad. The enemy planes were bombing Ukrainian cities. The Soviet Command had to surrender Odessa.

The German Command **announced a drive** on Moscow. The USSR was forced to evacuate its seat of government to Kuibyshev. However, the nearer the enemy drew to Moscow, the stronger became the **resistance** of the Soviet people. Thousands of **volunteers** went to the front. **Guerilla detachments** were operating behind the enemy's lines.

The Hitlerites **failed** to break down the resistance of the defenders of Moscow. Though the Soviet **troops had suffered** heavy **losses** in dead and **wounded**, Moscow was not **captured** by the Hitlerites. Hitler's plan failed. The Nazi did not **take into consideration** the patriotism of the Soviet people. That was the first major defeat of fascists in the Great Patriotic War.

The main **objective** of the Hitlerites' new **offensive** was the Caucasus with its rich oil fields. The German strategy was to separate the Soviet troops in the Caucasus from those in the north and prevent them from using the Volga for river traffic. To carry out this strategic plan Hitler concentrated in Stalingrad area over forty divisions supported by tank units and aviation. The Nazis' plane and tank attack on Stalingrad caused great damage to the city. Heavy street fighting was going on in the suburbs. Most of the buildings were ruined or burnt down. But the defenders of the city, fighting with **unprecedented courage**, **checked** the enemy's advance and a few months later launched a **counteroffensive**.

After three months' heavy fighting the Soviet troops broke through the German **fortified** points and as a result of the **breakthrough** took prisoner 90,000 German troops. This was the turning point in the war. The victory won over the Nazis in the battle of Stalingrad **determined the outcome** of the war.

In the hard battles fought for Kursk and Orel the Soviet troops used the artillery and tanks, which destroyed the enemy's **fortifications** and **inflicted** on him heavy losses.

The **retreat** of the Nazi troops that began after the battle of Stalingrad continued. The Red Army was striking **crushing** blows at the retreating enemy on all sectors of the front. Driving the enemy to the west, it advanced nearly two thousand kilometers and **liberated** the greater part of the Soviet territory occupied by the invaders. The enemy circle round Leningrad was broken through and the blockade of the city, which lasted 900 days, came to an end. Soon after that the whole of the Soviet Union liberated from the enemy.

The years of the Nazi occupation were a tragedy for many people. The invaders established the so-called "new order" in the defeated countries – a regime of **crude** violence and mass terror, **plunder** and inhuman **exploitation, trampling** down the national feelings and traditions of the peoples, and destruction of their centuries-old culture.

Their task was to **enslave** mankind for at least a thousand years. Declaring Germans to be the "master race", the Nazis **contemptuously** called these people *Untermenschen* (subhumans), mentally primitive beings intended by nature itself to be the mute slaves of the Nazi masters.

The peoples of the occupied countries would not **tolerate oppression** and rose to fight for their liberation. The Resistance Movement, guerilla detachments and units, underground antifascist organizations and groups, which numbered hundreds of thousands of patriots in 1944, actively fought against the invaders. They kept the enemy in a permanent state of tension, **compelling** them to **detach** considerable forces to defend **the rear**.

Beginning with 1944, when the whole of the Soviet land was freed from the Nazi **hordes** of robbers, the Soviet Armed Forces **rendered** direct military **assistance** to the peoples of the countries enslaved by the invaders, through military operations against the oppressors on the territories of those countries.

But the main contribution of the Soviet people to the liberation of the West European countries from the Nazi yoke was that Nazi Germany with its **satellites** was forced to commit the overwhelming majority of its armed forces to the Soviet-German front. **Sustaining** one defeat after another, Germany had to weaken its forces in the occupied territories by transferring them to the front. This created many **favourable** conditions for the operations of the Resistance detachment against the invaders.

Later in 1943, Stalin met with Roosevelt and Churchill for the first time – the Teheran Conference. They agreed that the Western allies would invade France in June 1944 and open the second front. And it was really opened.

The war with Germany also brought about a temporary **alliance** with the 2 greatest powers in the world, namely Britain and the United States. During the course of war, the USA alone furnished supplies worth more than US \$ 11 billion, at the same time the Soviet Union gave the United States and Britain time to prepare to invade German-occupied Western Europe.

On April 16, 1945 the Red Army and Allied troops **surrounded** Berlin. On May 8, 1945 the Act of Unconditional Surrender of Nazi German was signed. Hitler's war machine was crushed, fascist Germany was defeated. The Soviet Union and the Allied countries won a historic victory.

True to his promise to the Allies Stalin broke his non-aggression pact with Japan. Soviet troops invaded Japanese-held Manchuria in August and helped with the war in the Pacific.

However, the USSR's armed forces remained powerful at the end of the war. The Soviets territorial ambitions – especially in Europe – created **tension** with their former Allies. The Cold War began.

The victory came at a high cost. An **estimated** 27 million Soviet soldiers (14) and **civilians** (13) **perished** in the war, the heaviest loss of life of any of the **combatant** countries. The war also inflicted severe material losses throughout the vast territory that had been included in the war zone. And bitter memories of the war are still living in the hearts of people of our country.

On August 6, 1945, an American B29, the Enola Gay, dropped an A-bomb on the Japanese industrial center at Hiroshima. With a single bomb, the United States completely **incinerated** a four-

square-mile area at the centre of the previously undamaged city. More than 80,000 civilians died. Many more survived to suffer the painful and **crippling** effects of radioactive fallout or to pass those effects on to their children in form of serious birth defects.

The Japanese government, **stunned** by the attack, was at first unable to agree on a response. Two days later, on August 8, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan (as had been settled at the Yalta Conference in February 1945). And the following day, another American plane dropped another atomic weapon – this time on the city of Nagasaki. Japan was ready to give up.

On September 2, 1945, on board the American battleship Missouri, anchored in Tokyo Bay, Japanese officials signed the articles of surrender.

The greatest war in the history of mankind had come to an end, and the United States had **emerged** from it not only victorious, but in a position of unprecedented power, influence, and prestige. The United States had suffered only light **casualties** in comparison with some other nations, but the totals were **frightful** nevertheless.

One doesn't intend to **belittle** the significance of the second front in Western Europe, it is simply the matter of pointing to the importance of the contribution of each coalition member to the common victory over Nazism.

This needs to be done because the cold war saw attempts to **distort** events.

The Soviet Union received only a relatively modest amount of American Lend-Lease aid: about 12,000 tanks (12% of the **aggregate** Soviet **output**), more than 18,000 aircraft (13%), and 596 ships (22%). The **delivery** of automobiles was much more important – 427,000 (70%), along with petroleum products, foodstuffs, clothes, metal-cutting equipment, explosives, and railway equipment (over \$ 11 bln).

The Soviet Union did not just take; it also gave. The operations of the Red Army, its victories and losses more than made up for foreign assistance.

The “**irredeemable** losses” of Red Army amounted to 11,9 million men and officers, including 8,6 mln killed in action and dead from wounds and diseases, and 3,3 mln who had been in concentration camps or were missing in action.

The Eastern Front ran for 2,000 – 6,200 km, while the North African Front was only 350 km, the Italian 300 km, and West European, 800 km. a total of 607 divisions of Germany and satellite states were **routed** on the Eastern Front, while the allies defeated 176 divisions. The Wehrmacht sustained 73,5% of its losses in men and officers and 75% in weapons and hardware on the Eastern Front. The irredeemable losses of the Allies (in dead, wounded, and missing in action) were 1,471,000, including 405,000 from the US, 375,000 from Britain, 600,000 from France, 37,000 from Canada, 35,000 from Australia, 12,000 from New Zealand, and 7,000 from the Union of South America.

The anti-Hitler coalition countries' cooperation was highly constructive, though they sometimes had difficulties in **smoothing** over political, economic and strategic differences. The second front was opened two years later than promised, while the Lend-Lease deliveries to the Soviet Union were **halted** several times. Plans were hatched to reach certain parts of South and central Europe ahead of the Red Army. Steps were taken to hold separate talks with Berlin representatives.

That is how it was. But we should remember that it was the end result that mattered, and the end result was the total defeat of Nazi Germany.

And in spite of having paid so high a price for peace, the world continued to face an uncertain future. The **menace** of nuclear warfare hung like a black cloud on the horizon. And already the world's two strongest nations – the United States and the Soviet Union – were developing toward one another that would darken the peace for many decades to come.