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AT WHAT POINT WOULD OPERATION BARBAROSSA HAVE
SPELLED VICTORY INSTEAD OF DEFEAT FOR HITLER? (RESEARCH).

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AT WHAT POINT WOULD OPERATION BARBAROSSA HAVE
SPELLED VICTORY INSTEAD OF DEFEAT FOR HITLER? (RESEARCH).

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview. On 22 June 1941, the German Army invaded Russia and unloosed what was to become the biggest and longest bloodbath in history - the German code name for this invasion plan was "Operation Barbarossa." The invasion surprised the Russians and caught them unprepared to meet the German blitzkrieg, which rolled relentlessly eastward in a series of spectacular tactical victories. It looked as though the Soviet Union was on the brink of destruction. It lost its richest and most populated areas, and the Red Army suffered terrific casualties. But in December 1941 "Operation Barbarossa" ground to a halt, still short of its major objectives of Leningrad, Moscow and the Ukraine.

B. Scope. During the period between the British evacuation at Dunkirk, in May 1940, and the German defeat at the gates of Moscow, in December 1941, "Operation Barbarossa" was developed, implimented and defeated. The reasons for the failure of "Operation Barbarossa" are the concern of this monograph. I shall review these reasons in depth.

C. Objectives. I shall examine the operations plan and the area of operations, the effect of Hitler's influence, and the effect the Russians had on the defeat. I shall try to evaluate these major reasons for the failure of "Operation Barbarossa" to determine if there was a point at which the plan could have succeeded.

D. Method of Development. I shall conduct this study by examining the causes of failure and the effect they produced.

II. BODY

A. Operations Plan. On 18 December 1940 Hitler issued "Directive Number 21", his first formal directive on the invasion of Russia. The basic plan of Hitler was to seize Leningrad, by which he proposed to join up with Finland and secure the Baltic; seizure of the rawmaterial regions of the Ukraine, the armament centers of the Donetz Basin, and later the Caucasus oilfields; the final objective was the destruction of the Red Army (5:176,177). The eventual boundary of the German advance was fixed on the Volga - Archangel line. From this area Hitler intended to construct a defensive barrier and eliminate the industrial area in the Urals, if necessary, by use of the Luftwaffe - German Air Force. The major fault of the plan was that its main objectives were oriented on the seizure of terrain rather than on destruction of the enemy forces. It also envisioned setting up a defensive barrier over 2,000 miles long and 1,700 miles from the initial line of departure (3:33).

Hitler's views and those of his military commanders on the above concept of operations were in complete disagreement and were to have a serious effect on the eventual

outcome of the campaign (10:104). By seizing those objectives mentioned above, Hitler hoped to cripple the Soviet war economy completely and, therefore, destroy her ability to fight. O.K.H. (Army High Command), on the other hand, contended that the conquest and retention of those undoubtedly important strategic areas depended on first defeating the Red Army. These divergent views between Hitler and O.K.H. caused considerable disunity in the German staff which resulted in lost time once the invasion began (10:104).

Hitler planned to accomplish his objectives by bold operations involving deep penetrations by armored spearheads and prevention of the withdrawal of Russian units into the Russian interior (5:177). His strategy provided for simultaneous advances toward Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev by three separate Army Groups - Army Groups North, South and Center (2:9). As soon, however, as the Russian armies defending White Russia (Belorussia-that region east of Poland and north of the Pripet Marshes) had been destroyed, strong elements of Army Group Center were to be detached to assist Army Groups North and South to secure their objectives (3:32).

O.K.H., on the other hand, felt that the major effort should be in the center rather than the north and south. They believed that the major portion of Russia's forces would be met on the road to Moscow, since that city was the focal point of Soviet power and influence. They also felt that the destruction of armament areas around Moscow and splitting of the Russian defenses in two would extensively damage the Soviet war economy and prevent them from mounting a single, coordinated operation (10:177). This theory on the disposition of Russian forces was incorrect initially, as the largest grouping of Russian forces was in the south. During the battle for Moscow, however, the majority of Russian forces were massed in front of the Soviet capitol (3:33).

The invasion plan specified an area of operations extending over 2,000 miles from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea and over 1,700 miles from the Elbe to the Volga Rivers. This mostly primitive area, compared to Western Europe, was to give the Germans almost as many problems as the Russian Army (1:152,153).

Throughout much of this vast territory communications facilities were poor or nonexistent. The roads were often unconnected, terminated as unexpectedly as they had begun and most of them were unpaved (6:27). This gave added importance to the railway system, but because it was a wider gauge than those of Germany, its modification and maintenance presented a difficult problem. This tied down a considerable number of German forces and severely hampered their logistical efforts (1:152).

The large area and poor lines of communication also presented a major problem to the German air force. Although they had concentrated roughly two-thirds of their first-line air strength on the Russian front, the vast spaces of Russia forced them to employ their tactical aircraft with fewer planes per mile of front than in any of their previous campaigns (1:152). This forced the Germans to utilize twin-

engine fighters and long-range bombers to provide direct support to the ground forces. This use of these aircraft in low-level attacks resulted in heavy losses because of the accuracy and intensity of Russian anti-aircraft fire. Additional aircraft were lost because they were used to resupply forward units who were having critical logistical problems (1:180). By September the original force of 3,000 aircraft had been reduced to 2,000 and no replacements were available (1:161).

In addition to the affect of the large area of operations and the poor lines of communication, the terrain and weather seriously affected the German operations. The river system, which runs generally northwest or southeast, the Pripet Marshes, the Valdai Hills and Valdai Lakes south of Lake Ilmen, a marshy area south of Lake Ladoga, and the vast forests that stretch from Moscow toward Leningrad and Minsk formed difficult obstacles that channelized the German forces and restricted their maneuverability (1:170). During wet weather the problem was increased by the inability of the motorized and armored forces to move through the Russian mud (6:27). Although the mud affected the armored units, it had a more serious effect on the motorized forces because their development had been based on wheels instead of tracks. They could not keep pace with the armored forces and complete the encirclements that had been formed (9:167).

The German forces were broken into three separate army groups for the invasion. Army Group North, commanded by Generalfeldmarshall Wilhelm von Leeb, was to attack out of East Prussia through the Baltic States toward Leningrad. His forces were composed of three Panzer, two motorized and 23 infantry divisions. Army Group Center, commanded by Generalfeldmarshall Fedor von Bock, was to attack with nine Panzer, five motorized and 39 infantry divisions from Warsaw through Minsk and Smolensk toward Moscow. Generalfeldmarshall Gerd von Rundstedt, commander of Army Group South, was to attack between the Pripet Marshes and the Black Sea toward Kiev and the line of the Dneiper River with five Panzer, two motorized and 38 infantry divisions (2:9 and 1:151). The particular importance of these forces was the fact that they were each outnumbered by the opposing Russian forces (3:33).

B. Russia's Influence. In 1941 the Red Army had in its order of battle between 230 and 240 divisions of which 170 were within operating range of the Western Frontier. The forces on this frontier were depolyed along a newly formed defensive line running from East Prussia in the north to the Pruth River in the south. The center of the line extended almost to Warsaw. Because the Russians had been defending this new line for only a short period of time, the construction of fortifications had not been completed at the time of the German invasion (3:25).

The Red Army was supplemented in the defense of Russia by semi-military and civil forces. The semi-military included frontier and internal guards, local police, and other armed components. The civil included certain civil organizations such as the People's Commissariats of Transportation, Maritime Fleet, River Transport and Signal Communications. These organizations played a very important

role in the defeat of the Germans because they performed many of the communications zone and zone of interior duties normally performed by military personnel of other nations. This not only meant a higher ratio of combat troops per unit for the Red Army, but it provided additional forces for the formation of new units. This caused the Germans to seriously underestimate the actual reserve strength of the Red Army (1:146).

These forces were supported by a Russian economy which had expanded considerably since the 1920 era, although up to 1941 it had only produced limited quantities of war materials. As a result, many of the Russian units were supplied with obsolete equipment. In the first 6 months of 1941, however, the Russians began to increase their production of war materials because of the events taking place in Western Europe. This increase was particularly evident in the production of the newer models of tanks and aircraft. In 1940 only 350 of the newer model tanks (KV's and T-34's) were produced while 1,500 were produced in the first 6 months of 1941. The increase in aircraft rose from 90 in 1940 to over 2,000 in the first 6 months of 1941. This sudden increase in production of war materials was unknown to the Germans and caused them to underestimate the progress and capabilities of the Russian economy (7:137).

In addition to the inferior equipment of the Russian Army, they were handicapped by their lack of training and experience. Very few officers or soldiers in 1941 had any direct experience of war on the scale of the German invasion. The Russian officers, because of the purges of 1937 and 1938, were particularly inexperienced and could be considered only novices compared to the German officers. The training of specialized troops - notably tank crews and airmen - had also been seriously neglected (7:138).

The advantage afforded the Germans because of the ill-equipped, under-trained and inexperienced Russian soldiers was nullified to a considerable degree, however, by their tenacity and fighting spirit. They fought harder and longer than any soldiers the Germans had fought prior to the invasion of Russia (10:110). They would get rid of their uniforms and make their way back thru German lines dressed as peasants or hideout in the many swamps and forests of Russia and harass the German rear areas and lines of communications (1:159). An article from a German newspaper gives the following account: "The Russian soldier surpasses our adversary in the West in his contempt for death. Endurance and fatalism make him hold out until he is blown up with his trench or falls in hand-to-hand fighting. The mental paralysis which usually followed after the lightning German breakthroughs in the West did not occur to the same extent in the East (1:159)."

C. Hitler's Influence. When Hitler first announced his decision in July 1940 to destroy Russia, he indicated there would be no preparations for a prolonged struggle (1:145). Hitler envisioned a short conflict and based this view on three assumptions: (1) an invasion would produce a political upheaval in Russia; (2) surprise would produce a moderate superiority of strength; and (3) success simply

depended on the superior training and skill of the German Army. This first assumption never materialized, however, because of his own error in judgement (9:174,175).

A few days before the offensive started, Hitler issued an order which has since become known as the "Commissar Order". This order stated that Soviet commissars and officials were to be treated as criminals whether they belonged to the armed forces or to the civilian administration. When captured, they were to be handed over to the field sections of the SD (Special Detachments) or if this was not possible, shot on the spot by the troops. This policy, of course, was in direct conflict with his first assumption and actually did more to strengthen the Bolshevik System and the will to resist of the Russian people (5:179).

Hitler had originally ordered preparations for the attack on Russia to be completed by 15 May 1941. At the end of March, however, the tentative date was deferred about a month to 22 June 1941 (9:170). The main reason for this delay was Hitler's decision to invade the Balkans on 6 April 1941 (4:128). Although the forces involved in this campaign were small compared to the total forces planned for the invasion of Russia, armored forces employed there were deemed necessary for a successful invasion of Russia. This delay, therefore, forced the German offensive into the severe Russian winter months which seriously affected their forces because of their lack of preparations (9:168). Hitler then compounded the effect of this initial delay by his indecision and disagreement with his military staff once the invasion began.

On 19 July 1941, although he had initially accepted the plan proposed by O.K.H., he reaffirmed his conviction that Leningrad and the Ukraine and not Moscow were the primary objectives. He, therefore, directed that Army Group Center was to continue toward Moscow with its infantry alone and was to divert its armor to help Army Group North toward Leningrad and Army Group South in the conquest of the Ukraine (2:12).

On 28 July, however, in view of severe criticism from O.K.H. and unfavorable situation reports from Center and North, Hitler changed his mind. He instructed Army Groups North and South to make do with their own forces, whereas Army Group Center should retain all its armored formations but temporarily adopt a defensive attitude (4:185).

On 21 August Hitler issued another directive ordering Army Group Center to remain on the defensive until all the conditions in the directive issued on 18 July had been met (1:12 and 4:190). (Hitler reaffirmed his views that Moscow was not the most important objective, but that it was more important, before the onset of winter, to reach the Crimea and the Donetz basin in the south and cut off Russian oil supplies from the Caucasus area; in the north to invest Leningrad closely and effect a link-up with Finland) (4:190).

In September Hitler, concluding that army groups on the flanks had been helped enough, decided to renew the Army Group Center advance toward Moscow (2:12). By 21 September the Panzer Groups that had been deployed to the

flanks had returned or were returning to Army Group Center (1:172,179). Accordingly, the original O.K.H. plan for the main effort toward Moscow was revived after a six-week delay.

On 2 October 1941 the German drive toward Moscow was finally renewed. By 15 October the Germans had completed another great encirclement and announced the capture of 600,000 more Russians. From 15 October until 15 November progress was slow along the entire front due to the swampy and heavily forested terrain, bad weather and field fortifications and mine fields that had been prepared by the civilian population of Moscow.

On 16 November the Germans renewed their attack on Moscow. This time they ran into stronger and stronger anti-tank units, increased Soviet air activity and severe winter weather. The attack finally ground to a halt.

On 2 December, with tired men, failing equipment and severe winter weather facing them, the Germans made their final attempt to capture Moscow. Marshall Zhukov, at this time, unleashed a hundred divisions to counter the German offensive. By 5 December the Germans had been stopped short of Moscow and were now desperately trying to salvage what they could of their forces. The Germans had, therefore, failed to achieve their objectives and "Operation Barbarossa" had been defeated. (1:190).

III. ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A. Planning Faults.

1. The area of operations specified by the operations plan was too large considering the terrain, weather and poor lines of communications. It over-committed the available German forces and created severe logistical problems which forced the Germans to resupply their units by air. This caused severe losses to the German Air Force and cancelled its effectiveness.

2. The fact that development of the German motorized units was based on wheels instead of tracks handicapped them in wet weather. Because they were unable to stay with the Panzer divisions to complete the encirclements, many Russians escaped to either harass the German rear areas and lines of communications or they returned to new units to continue the fight against the Germans.

3. German preparations were based on a short campaign in the summer months and, as a result, they were not prepared to fight in the severe Russian winter. This shortsightedness cost them large losses of men and equipment which they could not replace.

4. The operations plan placed too much emphasis on the experience, training and superior equipment of the Germans to overcome the numerical advantage of the Russians.

5. The operations plan was based on the seizure of terrain rather than destruction of the enemy forces.

B. Hitler's Influence.

1. Hitler's divergent views with his military staff and his indecision had a serious bearing on the outcome of the campaign. His decision to divert forces from Army Group Center and the time it took him to make the decision delayed the advance on Moscow by approximately 6 weeks. This enabled the Russians to strengthen their defenses and train and equip reinforcements. It, also, forced the Germans to continue their advance into the winter months.

2. Hitler's "Commissar Order" was in direct conflict with his desire to create a political upheaval in Russia. It actually did more to defeat the operation than it did to help it.

3. Hitler's decision to invade the Balkans delayed the operation by about 30 days.

4. Hitler underestimated the strength of the Russian Reserves and the progress that had been made by the Russian economy in the production of war materials.

C. Russian Influence.

1. The Russians' use of civil organizations to perform military duties caused Hitler to underestimate the total strength of their reserve forces.

2. Through a series of five-year plans, the Russians had laid the foundation for a strong war economy and had increased their production of war materials before the invasion.

3. The tenacity and fighting spirit of the individual Russian soldier, though under-trained, ill-equipped and inexperienced, gave the Russians time to reorganize their forces and bolster their defenses.

The Germans were correct in planning for a short and decisive victory because they lacked the manpower and economic resources to support an extended operation against a foe as large and rich in natural resources as Russia. They overestimated the advantage their superior training, equipment, and experience would give them, however, and over committed their forces. Their tactics were based on speed and mobility, but they failed to take into consideration what effect the terrain and weather would do to motorized and armored forces in a country as primitive as Russia. This inconjunction with Hitler's interference and a miscalculation of the Russian reserves and economic progress defeated "Operation Barbarossa."

IV. EFFECTS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I believe that "Operation Barbarossa" was defeated before it ever began and there was never a point at which it could have succeeded. I base this opinion on the reasons for its failure and the fact that each one of them could have been eliminated had the Germans had an adequate number

of forces to commit to the operation. The Germans achieved surprise, had superior experience and equipment, and they inflicted enormous casualties on the Russian forces, but they could not achieve their initial objectives because they did not have the forces to strike the decisive blow.

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