

EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: UKRAINE**Time to Remember – Operation Barbarossa**

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Extract from "Time to Remember – Operation Barbarossa", newsreel showing the fighting on the Russian front in 1941

Transcript

But could any aid prevent the total and immediate collapse of the Soviet Union? Mile after mile, defeated Russian armies fell back, as once they had done before the Grand Armee of Napoleon. And as they withdrew they fired their fields, set light to their farms. Scorched the earth that was theirs.

For the invader, victory after victory. Encirclement, after encirclement. Soon there would be no army left even to retreat. Already the world, friend and foe alike, was beginning to count the days.

Adolf Hitler had already counted them. On October 3rd, 15 weeks after the launching of Barbarossa, he announced:

"I declare today and I declare it without reservation: the enemy in the East has been struck down and will never rise again."

Yes. The bear was dead. All that remained was for the stupid beast to realise it lie down. But at the front, a hold up. Come on! What are we waiting for? It's only a dead bear refusing to lie down.

Yes. Like the stubborn city of Leningrad. Home of the Revolution and vital base for the Baltic fleet. A city under fire from the German guns. A city in flames after each visit of the Heinkels and the Dorniers. A city suffering all that a city could suffer, yet refusing to give in even though three parts surrounded. Elsewhere the Red Army might fall back, but here, as in Moscow, the sticking point.

As Nazi artillery battered at her walls, Leningrad fought back. Not just as a fortress but also as one of the key arsenals of the Union. Here were to be forged the weapons that would one day make Russia, in her turn, the irresistible force. But that's all in the future, today it's backs to the wall. Even as completed guns are swung out, workers devote their precious spare time to practice battle. Total war. And total war too in the rear of the invaders.

In villages supposedly subdued, along vital supply lines, the lightning attacks of partisans. Now even the scorched earth seems to be rising against Hitler. Total war. And when the partisans lay hands on an informer, a traitor, a collaborator, they dispense little mercy. Only justice swift and final.

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Counterattacks, spoiling attacks: a dead bear not only refusing to lie down but actually using his claws.

In her agony Russia under Stalin, like Russia under Alexander, found the passionate courage, of a people who loved their land.

What is this source?

This newsreel footage was shot in 1941 at the time of the German invasion of the USSR. The invasion was known as Operation Barbarossa.

The footage shown here was used in a documentary series called 'Time To Remember'. The scenes were probably taken at different times and places and edited together.

What's the background to this source?

By May 1940 Hitler's forces had conquered Western Europe, apart from Britain. However, Hitler's main aim was to create a large empire in Eastern Europe. To do this he needed to defeat the USSR. In June 1941 he launched Operation Barbarossa. This was a devastating lightning attack on the USSR.

The Soviet forces were taken by surprise and were driven back with heavy losses. Only the arrival of a Russian winter stopped the German advance. However, in the spring of 1942 the Germans launched another series of attacks.

It's worth knowing that...

The German advance did not just use German forces. By 1942 Italian, Romanian and Hungarian forces were fighting alongside the Germans.

The fighting in this campaign was the largest scale campaign of the war. It was also the most savage. Casualties on both sides were huge. Many prisoners were also taken but their survival rate was very low.

How will you use this source?

1. What does this footage tell you about the nature of the fighting?
2. Does this source help historians to tackle the question of how serious the situation was for the USSR?
3. Does this source support the opinion of Historian 1 or Historian 2?