

The key question:

How serious was the situation on the Eastern Front in 1942?

Historian 1:

"I think Stalin was exaggerating the situation in the USSR in 1942. He was trying to pressurise the British and U.S.A to do more against Germany because he felt the USSR was doing more than its fair share in the war effort."

Historian 2:

"I think Stalin's position was really desperate in 1942 because the Germans had already met with a great deal of success on the Eastern Front."

Your task

Your task is to write a report on the Eastern front. In your report you must decide which of our historical opinions is more accurate by using the sources.

Consider the content and the quality of the evidence. Use the table to plan your report.

Photograph of the Russian Front 1941–1943

Catalogue ref: FO 898/527



Sans se laisser émouvoir par la vue de cette ville russe en flammes, des soldats allemands se réconfortent. A un moment donné, l'Allemagne était en possession de plus de 1.500.000 kilomètres carrés de territoire soviétique. Les Russes mirent le feu aux usines qu'ils ne pouvaient transporter.

Transcript of this source

German soldiers comfort each other without giving into emotion at the sight of this Russian town in flames. At one time, Germany was in possession of more than 1,500,000 square kilometres of Soviet land. The Russians used to set fire to any factories that they could not remove.

What is this source?

This source comes from a French pamphlet printed in 1944.

By the time that this pamphlet was published the Russians had regained the land taken by the German army.

EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: UKRAINE

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. By late 1942 the situation for the USSR looked desperate. However, Stalin had gathered large forces for a last stand near Stalingrad as 1942 came to an end.

The advances in 1942 were aimed primarily at southern and central USSR. The prime target was the Caucasus area. This was extremely rich in minerals but the key target was the oil fields in the area. Hitler wanted the oil for his own forces, but he also wanted to make sure he stopped the Soviets using it.

It's worth knowing that...

The question of a Second Front was an ongoing issue between the Allied leaders. Stalin felt that the USSR was carrying the main burden of the war against Hitler and constantly pressurised Churchill and US leader Roosevelt for a second front against the Germans.

The USA joined the war late in 1941. By late 1942 they had large forces based in Britain. The US commanders wanted to try and invade Europe in 1943. However, British commanders were more cautious because the Germans had fortified the French coast. In the end the British and Americans attacked in North Africa and then Italy in 1943 before invading France in 1944.

How will you use this source?

1. How does this source portray the German army?
2. Which has the most powerful message, the photograph or its caption?
3. Does this source support the opinion of Historian 1 or Historian 2?

Use the report table to help plan your report.