

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: UKRAINE

A War Office map showing the German advances into the USSR by October 1942

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What is this source?

This is an official War Office map from 1942. The War Office was the government department in charge of the armed forces. Today it is called the Ministry of Defence.

Senior commanders and politicians would have used this map.

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.

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 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. Comment on the extent of Soviet territory captured by the German army.
2. Is the land they have taken valuable?
3. Does this source help us to interpret any of the other sources in the box?
4. Does this source support the opinion of Historian 1 or Historian 2?