

Operation Barbarossa, 1941

The Beginning of The Great Patriotic War



- *Operation Barbarossa* was the German codename for Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union during the Second World War, which commenced on June 22nd, 1941.
- The operation employed *Blitzkrieg* tactics to thrust deep into the Soviet Union.

What are some of the weaknesses of *Blitzkrieg*?

- Hitler and the heads of the German Army High Command were convinced that the Red Army could be defeated in two or three months.
 - For the campaign against the Soviet Union, the Germans allotted almost 150 divisions containing a total of about three million men. Among those units were 19 panzer divisions, and in total the Barbarossa force had about 3,000 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces, and 2,500 aircraft. It was in effect the largest and most powerful invasion force in human history. The Germans' strength was further increased by more than 30 divisions of Finnish and Romanian troops.¹
- The invasion along a 1,800-mile (2,900-km) front took the Soviet leadership completely by surprise and caught the Red Army in an unprepared and partially demobilized state.
 - The Soviet troops burned crops, destroyed bridges, and evacuated factories in the face of the German advance. Entire steel and munitions plants in the westernmost portions of the U.S.S.R. were dismantled and shipped by rail to the east, where they were put back into production. The Soviets also destroyed or evacuated most of their rolling stock (railroad cars), thus depriving the Germans of the use of the Soviet rail system.²

Historically, what are Russia's two secret weapons?

1.

2.

¹ Royde-Smith, J. Graham. "Operation Barbarossa." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 3, 2023.

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Operation-Barbarossa>.

² Ibid.

Einsatzgruppen

From the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)



- Whenever Nazi Germany's army marched into a country, *Einsatzgruppen* of the Security Police and SD (Sicherheitsdienst, the SS intelligence service) immediately followed to secure newly seized territory. Their tasks included identifying and neutralizing potential enemies of German rule, seizing important sites and preventing sabotage, and recruiting collaborators and establishing intelligence networks.
- With the start of Hitler's "war of annihilation" against the Soviet Union in June 1941, the scale of *Einsatzgruppen* mass murder operations vastly increased. The main targets were Communist Party and Soviet state officials, Roma, and above all Jewish People of any age or gender. Under the cover of war and using the pretext of military necessity, the *Einsatzgruppen* organized and helped to carry out the shooting of more than half a million people, the vast majority of them Jewish People, in the first nine months of the war.
- The mass shootings were resource-intensive, requiring many shooters and escort guards as well as guns, ammunition, and transport. Concerns about the inefficiency of the shootings and their psychological impact on the shooters led to the development of special vans outfitted with engines that pumped carbon monoxide into sealed passenger compartments. Jewish People were packed into the compartments, then driven to a mass grave, asphyxiating during the journey.

- It took much longer to kill very large groups of victims with the gas vans, however. *Einsatzgruppen* personnel were required to remove bodies and clean the compartments. Throughout the German occupation of seized Soviet territories, mass shootings continued to be the preferred method of murdering Jewish People. At least 1.5 million and possibly more than 2 million Holocaust victims died in mass shootings or gas vans in Soviet territory.