

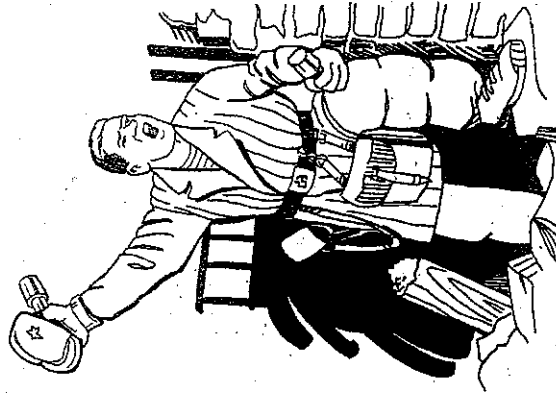
STOPPING THE NAZIS AT THE GATE

Unknown to the rest of the world, the German-Russian non-aggression agreement divided the homelands of millions of people between them. Russia was permitted to take Finland, Estonia, and Latvia; Poland was to be divided between Germany and Russia. The German *Luftwaffe* (air force) and *Wehrmacht* (army) attacked Poland in September 1939, causing England and France to declare war on Germany. World War II had officially begun. Russian troops occupied eastern Poland. While the Germans were resting from their success in western Poland, Russians moved into Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Stalin pressured Finland to give up its land along the border. When Finland refused, Russia attacked. The United States and other nations sympathized with the Finns, but did not send the military aid they needed. In March 1940 the 200,000-man Finnish army was finally beaten by the one million Russian invaders. The Russians took the lands they had demanded in the beginning, but the rest of Finland remained free.

In 1940 Hitler ordered his generals to plan an attack on Russia. The code name for the operation was "Barbarossa." His purpose was not just to seize land, but to destroy people. All political commissars captured were to be killed. SS troops following the army were to kill all Jews. The United States and other nations had warned Stalin the attack was coming, but he did nothing to strengthen his frontier armies. Scheduled for May, the attack was delayed until June 1941. Hitler knew the campaign must be quick and Leningrad and Moscow must be captured before winter made operations impossible, so he moved troops he had planned to use for an English invasion to the eastern front. The Germans scored easy victories at first, taking 300,000 prisoners at Minsk and 650,000 more at Kiev. The Russians were driven back all along the line, and German troops came to the outskirts of Leningrad and within ten miles of Moscow. At Moscow, General Zhukov pushed the invaders another sixty-five miles from the city in December 1941.

There were several reasons for Russia's poor showing in the early days of the attack. The Great Purge had eliminated many fine army officers, and they had been replaced with men who were better at communist politics than military tactics. Most Soviet soldiers were poorly trained and equipped. Soviet weapons were primitive compared with those of the Germans. Morale was low in many Russian units, and they surrendered without a fight. Some even switched sides and fought for the Germans.

The Russians, however, had advantages that Hitler did not take seriously enough: (1) they had the courage to fight with very few supplies and little food. Living on cabbage soup and tea, the Russians fought with grim determination in -50° temperatures. (2) Snow and



Russia's pressure on the eastern front helped the other Allies in their attacks against the Germans in western and southern Europe.

could had defeated Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, and German soldiers now understood why. As the Russians retreated, they burned houses and crops, forcing the Germans to extend their supply line hundreds of miles. (3) The Russians used animals for combat and supply to a greater extent than other armies. Russian cavalry included 600,000 horsemen. In the northern regions, the Russians used dog sleds to carry soldiers' gear and reindeer sleds to take bombs to planes. (4) Hatred of Germans increased as SS death squads killed civilians.

Desperate, Stalin was not too proud to ask for help. In September 1941 Stalin warned Churchill that without supplies, Russia would either be defeated or become too weak to be of any help. He wanted an English invasion of either France or the Balkans in 1942 to force Hitler to move thirty to forty divisions from the eastern front. He also wanted 30,000 tons of aluminum by the end of October and a monthly minimum of 400 planes and 500 tanks. Churchill replied that England would do what it could, but the fate of both depended on what the United States contributed in supplies.

American public opinion was far more supportive of helping England than it was of aiding Russia. Stalin's bloody purges, the Cominform's anti-American propaganda, persecutions of the Greek Orthodox Church, and the view that Stalin was no less a dictator than Hitler caused many Americans to oppose aid. Foreign policy advisors, on the other hand, saw aiding Russia as an opportunity to (1) make Germany fight a two-front war, (2) improve relations with the USSR, and (3) strengthen Russian determination to fight the war to a victorious conclusion.

Supplying Russia was a difficult task. The port of Murmansk in northern Russia was a 2,000 mile voyage from Scotland and well within range of German aircraft and submarines based in Norway. Of one convoy of thirty-four ships, only thirteen reached Murmansk.

By the spring of 1942, Russian strength to the north had hardened, and Hitler was obsessed with a new target to the south: Stalingrad (present-day Volgograd). Leading the attack was Lieutenant General Friedrich von Paulus, a loyal Nazi but mediocre general. The army of General Andrei Yeremenko, aided by Commissar Nikita Khrushchev, stood in the way. Soviet losses in defending the city were immense, and even after most of Stalingrad was rubble, defenders fought with any weapon available. Heroism was in great supply at Stalingrad on both sides. The final test depended on the wills and judgments of Hitler and Stalin, neither of whom blinked when a few thousand of their own citizens were killed. In the end, Hitler's refusal to allow Paulus to withdraw left him in an impossible position, and he surrendered 123,000 men in February 1943.