

Lesson 5: Eastern Front WHII.T3



Essential Questions:

- Why was the fighting so brutal and horrific in this theatre of the war?
- What did the significance of the battles on the Eastern Front have on the outcome of WW2?

Overview: The battles on the Eastern Front of the Second World War constituted the largest military confrontation in history. They were characterized by unprecedented ferocity and brutality, wholesale destruction, mass deportations, and immense loss of life due to combat, starvation, exposure, disease, and massacres. It is estimated around 30 million military and civilian deaths occurred on the Eastern Front. An uneasy peace and collaboration between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union which began with the non-aggression Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939 was shattered on 22nd June 1941 when Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, invading the Soviet Union.

Materials:

StuG III

T-34(76)

Nebelwerfer 41

PM M1910

Reader Boards



Procedure:

Direct the students to the reader board and ask them to read Winston Churchill's quote; "In Hitler's launching of the Nazi campaign on Russia, he has made one the outstanding blunders in history."

The actual full quote: "In Hitler's launching of the Nazi campaign on Russia, we can already see, after six months of fighting, that he has made one of the outstanding blunders in history."

Ask the students what they think he meant by that quote. Why was it considered a “blunder”?

Discuss their answers and the difficulties in a two-front war. If the students have studied World War 1 the concept should be familiar.

Ask a follow up question about the difficulties of a two-front war? Discussion of answers regarding division of forces, personnel, materials, and supplies. Discussion of superior numbers in Russian armed forces and resources.

Ask, why then did Hitler choose to invade?

Discussion about Hitler had argued in his autobiography for the necessity of living space (Lebensraum): acquiring new territory for Germans in Eastern Europe, in particular Russia. He envisaged settling Germans there, as according to Nazi ideology the Germanic people constituted the “master race”, while exterminating or deporting most of the existing inhabitants to Siberia and using the remainder as slave labor.

StuG III:

Direct the students read the reader board and ask them about anything they found interesting about the StuG III. Discussion can revolve around this vehicle serving in the Finnish Army (actual picture on the reader board). It was the second most produced armor vehicle. It also had more confirmed kills than German Panthers and Tigers combined.

How did its design make it successful? Were there any weaknesses?

German Nebelwerfer 41 and Soviet PM M1910:

Direct the students to observe both artifacts and discover the details about each on the reader boards.

Direct a discussion on the brutality of warfare on the Eastern Front. Ask the students how these artifacts characterize the horrific amount of death on the Eastern Front.

Ask what their thoughts are about the psychological effects of these artifacts on combatants.

T34-76:

Direct the students to read the reader boards on the artifact.

Ask the students to observe the differences between the German StuG III and the T-34(76).

Have the students list the pros and cons of each vehicle and which one would they have preferred to have been a crew member in.