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SOLDAT

(1) The German Soldier
on the Eastern Front 1941-43

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Prelude to Barbarossa

Swapped in victory after nearly two years of World War I, the Wehrmacht (Defense Force) prepared to undertake a bold offensive campaign in the history of warfare, the invasion of the Soviet Union. Reveling in its stunning victories in Poland, France, Yugoslavia, Norway, Denmark, and the Balkans, Germany was confident enough to challenge the Bolshevik threat to the west. History by attacking a nation with no industrial base, a small pool of considerable natural resources and a vast land mass. Germany failed to secure its southern flank in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Along with these failures, allowing Great Britain to remain unoccupied ultimately forced Germany to wage the traditionally dreaded "war on two fronts."

Planning for Operation Barbarossa (Unternehmen Barbarossa) had begun in August 1940 as Case Barbarossa (Fall Barbarossa), which was originally scheduled for 15 May 1941. The operation was delayed by the invasion of Yugoslavia, Greece, and Crete. The Balkans operation (Unternehmen Marita) commenced at the beginning of April 1941 and was not completed until the end of May. This delayed the launching of Barbarossa as a four-week refit and reorganization was necessary for many of the units that would be committed; it was rescheduled for 22 June.

The German forces

The Germans gathered a massive force for Barbarossa consisting of 1,900,000 troops in 139 divisions. These included 17 panzer divisions, 10 motorized infantry divisions (including two Waffen-SS), and one cavalry division. The remainder were infantry, light infantry, and mountain divisions. But in total, represented 75 percent of the Field Army. Another 200 German divisions and 14 Finnish divisions were in the far north. Germany's Axis partners, Romania and Hungary provided, respectively, 12 and two infantry divisions.

As of 22 June 1941, the spearheading Panzer Divisions contained 240 tanks of which 1,405 were the more capable Pz Kpfw III and IV models. Aside from assets controlled by the Heeresgruppen (a total of five motor divisions, including three flamethrower tank battalions), other assets included 250 assault guns, 7,185 artillery pieces, 600,000 motor vehicles, 10,000 horses, and 2,770 aircraft (out of a total inventory of 4,300). An air fleet was assigned to support each army group. These forces were organized into three great Army Groups: North (Heeresgruppe Nord), Center (Heeresgruppe Mitte), and South (Heeresgruppe Süd), containing a total of seven German and two Romanian armies.

Heeresgruppe Nord contained two armies; Heeresgruppe Mitte also contained two, while Heeresgruppe Süd contained three German and two Romanian armies. Armies consisted of from six to 24 divisions under a total number of corps. Each army group was spearheaded by a panzer army (Panzergruppe), two in the case of Heeresgruppe Mitte, a field army like those (German traditionalists initially resisted designating them as armies but they would be re-designated Panzer-Armies in October).

Heeresgruppe Nord contained Panzergruppe 4 (Hoepner), consisting of three Panzer Divisions (1, 6 and 8) equipped with some 602 tanks.

Heeresgruppe Mitte contained Panzergruppe 2 (Guderian), consisting of five Panzer Divisions (3, 4, 10, 17 and 18), and Panzergruppe 1 (Hoth) consisting of four Panzer Divisions (7, 12, 19 and 26) with a total of some 1,938 tanks.

Heeresgruppe Süd contained Panzergruppe 1 (von Kluge) consisting of four Panzer Divisions (9, 11, 13, 14 and 16) equipped with some 718 tanks.

Fing's was further encouragement to the Soviet leadership to begin the first stage of his plan to expand the Red Army's capabilities.

The Soviets maintained a large force of 1.5 million troops, organized into 11 mechanized corps, and seven cavalry corps, which were actually of division size. Most of these were forward deployed while some were held in reserve. There were also 11 tank corps, six mechanized corps, and one cavalry corps available in the rear. The Red Army also had 100,000 members of rifle brigades and other independent units as well as one divisional artillery assets. These forces were organized into four fronts of two to four armies each. The Red Army was organized for the invasion. The number of divisions and corps (which were actually the equivalent of a western division) was 1,000. The Red Army had a total of 100,000 members of rifle brigades and other independent units as well as one divisional artillery assets. These forces were organized into four fronts of two to four armies each.

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The German "Soldat" Massive Armies aside, this book's focus is on the individual German soldier in Russia. He was a highly motivated, well-trained, and highly motivated. He possessed a good education, was in excellent physical condition, and was a member of the officer corps. Most were young men, and they were well-trained. Together, they rode on an almost mythical wave of victories over the past two years. It was a time of glory and triumph for the German soldier.

The German soldier's training had been thorough and realistic. He was encouraged to take the initiative, something not experienced in most period novels. He was completely confident in his weapons and comfortable with his leadership.