

A City at War: Moscow in 1941

June 22, 2014



Where soldiers once manned heavy artillery in front of the Red Army Theater on Ploshchad Kommuny, cars now speed past the since-renamed Russian Army Theater on Suvorov Square.

Sunday marked the 73rd anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union: "Operation Barbarossa," one of the largest military operations in history.

See the photo gallery: [A City at War: Moscow in 1941](#)

The invasion broke the 1939 nonaggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Despite intelligence reports warning Soviet leader Josef Stalin of the imminent attack, he refused to believe an invasion was coming.

Soviet troops were at first overwhelmed by the attack. After Kiev had fallen and Leningrad had been encircled, Germany launched "Operation Typhoon" against Moscow in October 1941, with more than 1,500 panzer tanks and 1,000 aircraft heading toward the Soviet capital, according to David Stahel, a military historian specializing in World War II.

Fearing the capital would fall, Stalin ordered the government to be evacuated to the city to Kuibyshev, or modern day Samara, about 800 kilometers to the east of Moscow. According

to British historian Richard Overy, hundreds of thousands of children were drafted to dig ditches and set up tank traps and firing points around the city. The Moscow region was transformed into a fortress.

Many of the city's workplaces were closed, and 2 million Muscovites were evacuated by train. Some of the capital's social and cultural treasures — including state archives, Lenin's embalmed body and the sets of the Bolshoi Theater — were also evacuated from the war-torn capital.

Some of those who remained in the city found shelter from German airstrikes in the city's metro, including at Mayakovskaya station.

The Battle of Moscow lasted until January 1942, when the Soviet Union launched a massive counter-offensive. The Red Army lost nearly 1 million soldiers in the battle for its capital city.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/06/22/a-city-at-war-moscow-in-1941-36622-a36622>