

Barbarossa was the major turning point of the european war essay



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Evaluate the view that Operation Barbarossa was the major turning point of the European War. As the European War progressed, early German advances and gains were decreasing by the mid-years of the war as it became evident the tide was turning against the Axis powers and in favour of the Allies.

Operation Barbarossa and the entire Russian campaign can be seen as one significant turning point that helped to change the course of the war and yet it can be argued that this was not the sole and most major turning point.

The Battle of Britain in the air war and the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa have also been labeled as turning points in the war due to their significance and the contribution they have equally played, along with Operation Barbarossa, in assisting the eventual Allied victory. By 1941, Hitler had taken over the majority of Europe as his aim to takeover all of Eastern Europe was almost complete. However the Soviet Union was yet to be attacked by Germany, and so it was no surprise when Germany broke the Nazi-Soviet Pact as Evan notes that neither Hitler nor Stalin had expected the pact to last for the full 10 years.

The Soviet Union was of great significance to Hitler as if the nation could be defeated, it would ensure Germany lebensraum, provide a vast amount of resources and isolate Britain in the war. Therefore Operation Barbarossa was launched and the Soviet Union was invaded on June 22nd, 1941, and yet this was a month later than scheduled due to German actions in the Balkans. This proved to be of crucial importance as although the attack on Russia was immense and used thousands of Axis troops, Germany needed a quick victory.

Germany had many early successes, such as the brilliant campaign to capture Kieve in September, and made much progress over an area twice the size of Germany within a month. However despite this, the drive of the German forces had slowed and instead both sides were stopped by a siege. Hitler attempted to break the Soviet forces by attacking Moscow in October with Operation Typhoon and yet it was evident at this point that the things were now beginning to work against Hitler. It had been critical for Germany to defeat the Soviet Union with their typical blitzkrieg tactics as they were not prepared for the extremities of a Russian winter.

As quick defeats were not achieved, German progress was slowed by rain and plummeting temperatures which Germany was not equipped before. Compared to the Red Army, The Germans had inadequate tanks and machinery to survive the conditions and clothing and supplies too were insufficient, resulting in rampant disease. In charge of the Soviet forces at Moscow was General Zhukov whose organisational skills and appropriate weaponry helped initiate this turning point against Germany. Operation Barbarossa had failed and had become a major turning point in the course of the war for a number of reasons.

The vastness of Russia was significant in causing disorientation for German forces and as well made it difficult to keep forces supplied, contributing also to the lack of morale. The climate and weather was also important as while the Red Army was used to such conditions, they came as a shock for the unprepared Germans. Contributing also to the loss was the role of figures such as Hitler and Stalin as Bullock notes that Hitler was an interfering figure

in the operation, refusing to listen to warnings regarding the campaign and continuing to fight when no chance of victory remained.

Stalin on the other hand intervened far less in military affairs and it was his trust of General Zhukov that helped the Red Army to survive the Operation. Christian believes that failure for Germany was crucial as it was the first major failure and a sign that the Blitzkrieg tactics had failed. As a result the Operation proved to be a turning point as things began to move in Russia's favour and eventually in favour of the Allies.

However it can also be suggested that the Battle of Stalingrad, the Battle of Kursk and the entire Russian campaign were also major turning points in the war as collectively they all signified the German defeat and contributed to the eventual Allied victory. Undoubtedly, the air war had a significant impact on the course and outcome of the war and so in particular the Battle of Britain can be labeled as another turning point. Hitler knew that Britain would have to be dealt with as their operation could hinder German's plans to takeover Eastern Europe and so he proposed a plan for Operation Sea-Lion, to invade Britain.

For this to be possible however, Hitler knew that Germany needed to have control of the air which under Goering, the Luftwaffe attempted to do. From July to August in 1940, major raids and attacks were undertaken on parts of Britain such as an airfield used by the Royal Air Force (RAF) and anywhere else of significant economic or military importance to Britain. In late August the RAF responded to these attacks by launching a minor attack on Berlin and despite the fact that the German command was running out of aircraft

and pilots, Hitler in fury ordered the Luftwaffe to switch its attack from airfields to London itself. In the Battle of Britain Germany lost over 1200 planes whereas the RAF had only lost 688, Germany failing to gain air superiority. This was due to several reasons, mostly attributed to the superior skills of the RAF over the Luftwaffe. The RAF was fighting over home territory which meant they could easily refuel as opposed to the Luftwaffe, RAF pilots also showed immense skill and courage.

Taylor notes that the Dowding System used by the RAF proved to be valuable in providing a sophisticated detection and command system that could not be matched by the German campaign which lacked clarity and purpose. Overy believes the better organized air defences & equipment helped win the Battle of Britain yet it was also the case of Hitler's interference that again led to German defeat. The decision to switch the attack from airfields and radar stations to the cities proved to be of critical importance because if Hitler had continued with his original campaign, Germany was likely to have been victorious.

Richards believes that the battle was a major turning point in the war and many have pointed to its significance as success here would have meant a greater chance of success in other campaigns such as in Russia and perhaps an eventual Axis victory of the war. The Battle of Britain was therefore a significant turning point in bringing defeat to Germany and turning the wider war in favour of the Allies. The conflict in North Africa played a significant part in contributing towards the European War and as a result the Battle of El Alamein was of great importance.

The North Africa campaign was pursued because of the region's importance strategically and its significance in providing a route to ensure oil supplies via Egypt. The Battle of El Alamein continued on from the conflict already being fought in North Africa that endured as each side had been unable to outflank each other, often resulting in stalemates and attacks in dreadful conditions. In the first Battle of El Alamein in August 1942 the British and German tank strength was about equal but it was evident that the balance was moving in favour of the Allies under General Montgomery.

Montgomery's force was also reinforced by men and supplies, including supplies of fuel where Germany's force under General Rommel was critically low. It became apparent to Rommel that his position was deteriorating and so needed to attack the British without delay if he were to be successful. The second Battle of El Alamein was launched October 23rd with a massive artillery bombardment and raged for ten days similarly with a great amount of casualties. Both sides lost a considerable amount of tanks and men although Germany had lost more of both toward the end of the battle.

Rommel sought Hitler's permission to withdraw and despite Hitler's refusal, Rommel withdrew on November 5th, realising the futility of the battle. The British victory was attributed to the skills of General Montgomery, the superb handling of artillery and the Allied air support in contrast to the Luftwaffe. The success was of great significance to the campaign as it contributed to the eventual surrender of Axis forces on May 13th, 1943 and the resulting takeover of North Africa by the Allies.

Shirer believed this Battle to be the “ Great turning point” in being a great offensive against the Germans in which the Western Allies were victorious. Thompson agreed with this, noting that El Alamein had a great impact on the wider war and “ made possible the next steps” in ensuring an overall Allied victory. Therefore the Battle of El Alamein was yet another significant turning point that turned the war against Germany as from then on faced few more victories.