Chapter 10

Operation Barbarossa

My name is Dmitry Kazankov. I have light brown hair and green eyes. I was 35 in 1941.

Warm sunshine and a light breeze greeted me as I walked outside of my wonderful home in Yaroslavl, 170 miles northeast of Moscow. I had a three day pass to come home and visit my wife and six children from the army base. Being a sergeant in the Russian army did not give me much freedom, but I did get more leave time and money than the privates and corporals of our army. Oh how I loved to visit my family and my wife, Valeria, was the best cook to come home to after the slop the mess officers regularly fed us. Our leader, Joseph Stalin, had assured us all that there was no threat of an invasion, so we were to have a good time and relax. I wish he was right, but I wouldn’t tell anyone I said that.

While on my way back to base, I was listening to the radio in the train carriage that was shipping me back west. New reports stated that large divisions of machines and men were crossing the border into my Russia. When I got back to base, my comrades informed me of those traitorous Nazis turning on Stalin and invading us. It was June 22, 1941 when Germany began their attack called Operation Barbarossa which is their largest military operation as of now.

We were not prepared at all for this sudden invasion. Stalin said we were safe and not to worry of invasion! Reports came in of 3 million men and 3,500 tanks crossing the border and eliminating all of our resistance. Their Luftwaffe controlled the skies as we scrambled to retake the ground lost. Armored columns punched holes through our front lines and kept pushing deeper into our territory. Herr Hitler seemed to have three objectives as the army spread out into the north, central, and south of my Russia. I could understand this because we have the Baltic States and Leningrad in the north that is vitally important for shipping and other trade. Also, our capital of Moscow was in the center of the continuing German advance. In the south, we own the Ukraine and almost all of our economic resources and oil fields lay down there. My unit was shipped to Moscow to protect the capital and the ranking officials.

Many of my dear friends had joined the army with me, so I received regular letters from them of what other conditions were on the front lines. On friend wrote of the battle that had taken place on June 28 at Minsk. The Germans had captured this city after a fierce battle between our two armies. He told me Stalin personally intervened against our Generals commands to retreat but instead had us fighting to the end. My friend was captured and in a prisoner of war camp for now, but he said he was lucky because there was 250,000 Soviet casualties.

Fighting continued all along the front from the very north to all the way south in the Ukraine. Soviet troops were dispersed everywhere trying to regain all the ground we had lost and possible to take and invade the Nazis home land. Hitler claimed he needed our land for lebensraum, or living space, but I feel he should look to the west for his so called living space.

Stalin seemed fed up with the ever approaching advance, but luckily he did not order my division back to the front lines but to stay in Moscow. Instead, he ordered a scorched earth policy to begin effect immediately as of July 3. The policy meant as we retreated, we were to burn all crops, destroy bridges, and evacuated factories to slow down the German advance. Another aspect he ordered was to tear apart all steel and munitions plants and reassemble them further in the east. Another friend of mine said this policy seemed to be working because the Germans were slowing down as they marched forward. Even with this, however, he said the Nazis crossed the River Dnieper in the Ukraine on July 10.

Being in Moscow had advantages than just the current lack of fighting going on. Another advantage is the news is heard at almost the same time it is happening. On July 12, the government signed a Mutual Assistance agreement with the British which stated we were to assist each other against the Germans. One condition to this agreement was that neither of our countries could negotiate peace with Germany until all aggressive intentions had stopped. This agreement allowed for us to unite with other countries that were fighting for the same purpose, too. If we could not stop the Germans, however, there would be no way the soft hearted British would end an assault.

More letters and more reports came in for the month of September as more and more battles commenced around along my Russia. On the 8th, the Nazis began a siege of Leningrad up in the north. There is no real importance to this city besides that it bears the name of our first leader in this wonderful new order of communism. The siege is only symbolically significant. On the 19th, the Germans had taken Kiev but not without a long and hard struggle. Unfortunately, we had lost quite a lot of men, too. Over 500,000 were lost in the terrible struggle.

My time seemed to come at last as the Germans began their full assault towards my station in Moscow. On October 2, their Operation Typhoon began with most of the invading armies heading toward the capital. Ten days after they began, they were only 90 miles outside of Moscow, but they were rapidly slowing down. The heavy rains and heavy resistance we were putting up had slowed their advance to less than a crawl. Out on the battlefield, I shot at anybody not in the Russian military clothes. It seemed we would win the battle of my beloved Moscow.

One friend of mine wrote of his luck being much worse than mine while he is done fighting in the Ukraine. On October 16, the Germans had taken Odessa in southern Ukraine and fought all the way to Kharkov, 450 miles away from Odessa, and took this on October 24. We were losing the fights down south.

On November 20, the Germans had taken Rostov, 133 miles northeast of Moscow and very close to my hometown and my family. I wish I could go fight there, but I was busy holding back the Germans here in Moscow. It seemed unnecessary, however, because on the 27th, our army retook Rostov.

What seemed like forever, the German army had stopped their attacks on trying to enter Moscow on December 5. Orders came in that day with a new assault we were to put on the next day against the Nazis. This would be our major counter offensive to protect Moscow. I was 35 years old. The tide seemed to be turning.