

The Battle of Stalingrad:

The Turning Point on the Eastern Front in WWII

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Senior Thesis

Contents

List of Maps	3
Introduction: <i>Setting The Stage</i>	5
The Battle Part 1: <i>September-November 1942</i>	13
The Battle Part 2: <i>November 1942-late January 1943</i>	21
<i>Surrender and the March into Captivity</i>	42
National Myth: <i>Propaganda, Vergeltung, Total War</i>	50
The Shockwave of Stalingrad: <i>Psychological Shift, German Morale, Shortcomings of German High Command</i>	60
Conclusion: <i>Russian Agency and the Legacy of Stalingrad</i>	74

List of Maps

German Invasion of Soviet Union 1941-1942	4
Operation Blau	9
German Advance on Stalingrad, Autumn 1942	14
Operation Uranus	21
Manstein's Breakout Attempt/Operation Winter Storm	31
Operation Ring	38

Introduction: *Setting the Stage*

The rise and fall of the Third Reich continues to fascinate and confuse historians today. In particular the war against Russia not only was a monumental undertaking for the Nazi State in terms of economic and military resources, but also the invasion included an inherent all or nothing attitude for the future of National Socialism. Russia tempted Germany with land, natural resources, and possibly an end to Bolshevism and Judaism. Southern Russia looked particularly ripe for Hitler as he focused on gaining control of the lucrative grain and oilfields in the Caucasus. A total victory in Russia also spelled out the demise of the Jews and Communists, as Hitler believed Judaism and Bolshevism were intertwined and the extermination of both would allow the Aryan race and ethnic Germans to assert their supremacy.

After the Nazis were halted outside Moscow in the winter of 1941, the successful blitzkrieg campaigns gave way to a nasty war of attrition. To quench the Wehrmacht's insatiable demand for oil and resources, Hitler's focus shifted south to the Caucasus and the great mountain barrier to the Baku oilfields¹ and the Caspian Sea. The city of Stalingrad was a key objective in a seven-month campaign to secure southern Russia and starve the Red Army of precious resources. Unbeknownst to Hitler and the world, the fate of the world would rest on the city of Stalingrad as the Nazi regime grappled with the Red Army in a battle ripe with historical significance. A modest industrial city on the banks of the Volga would be the high water mark of the Third Reich and became a burial place, figurative and literal for the German 6th

¹ The Baku oilfields made up 90 percent of the Soviet Union's fuel as cited in Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006. 118.

Army, as the scales tipped monumentally in favor of the Allies. The annihilation of the 6th Army sent shockwaves through Germany that catalyzed a psychological turning in the war between Germany and Russia.

To better understand the significance of the Battle of Stalingrad, one must delve into the German invasion of Russia, specifically the ebb and flow of the Nazi War Machine as the German Army steamrolled across the Russian steppe.

The Push Into Southern Russia

June 22, 1941, the commencement of Operation Barbarossa essentially nullified the 1939 Non-Aggression Pact signed between the USSR and Nazi Germany, formally announcing the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Hitler called for blitzkrieg² warfare as more than four million Axis soldiers marched into the Soviet territory, marking the largest invasion in military history. Soviet forces were badly outmanned and under gunned which led to the capture of roughly three million Soviet soldiers. No nation had ever suffered such monumental losses and remained intact, proving the sheer size and strength of the Soviet Union.³ Ten weeks into the campaign, the Nazis controlled all of Eastern Europe, and the highly industrial Ukraine. The Germans were poised to march on Moscow and extinguish the remaining pockets of resistance, but autumn rains, deep mud, and the coming of Russian winter slowed the German advance. The demanding terrain and harsh environment bought the Russians time as they pushed the Germans back, forcing

² Lightning warfare: fast paced movement based on tanks on the ground and support from the air.

³“Deadliest Battle,” *Secrets of the Dead*, 2010, Netflix and Timeline Productions for Thirteen in Association with WNET.org, Produced by Brian J. McDonnell and written by Michael Eldridge.

the Nazis to dig in and wait out the winter. Military historian, David M. Glantz adds, “Hitler was bound and determined to launch a new campaign in spring of 1942 to defeat the Red Army, which he thought was too weak to withstand another attack”.⁴ After a long winter and failed siege on Moscow in the winter of 1941, the Wehrmacht needed to regain the initiative. Hitler and the German high command⁵ responded to slowed progress in the spring of 1942 with Operation Blau: a second thrust into the heart of the Soviet Union whose focus on a narrower sector in Southern Russia, would hopefully, deliver the final knockout punch to the Soviet Union.

Operation Blau commenced on June 22, 1942, with intentions to surround and destroy Soviet forces in southern Russia. At the time, German forces were divided into three main forces: Army Group North, Army Group Center, and Army Group South. Hitler divided Army Group South into Army Group A and Army Group B. Army Group A was sent to seize the oil fields in the bottom of the Caucasian sock and Army Group B was ordered eastward to secure the Don River basin and eventually the Volga, which implied the seizure of Stalingrad. The driving force of Army Group B was the elite German 6th Army commanded by the newly appointed General Friedrich Von Paulus. Paulus took over for the late and highly decorated, Field-Marshal Walter von Reichenau. General Paulus was Reichenau’s former chief of staff and was not known for his shrewdness on the battlefield. Reichenau’s reputation left an enormous void for an inexperienced Paulus to fill. He lacked the

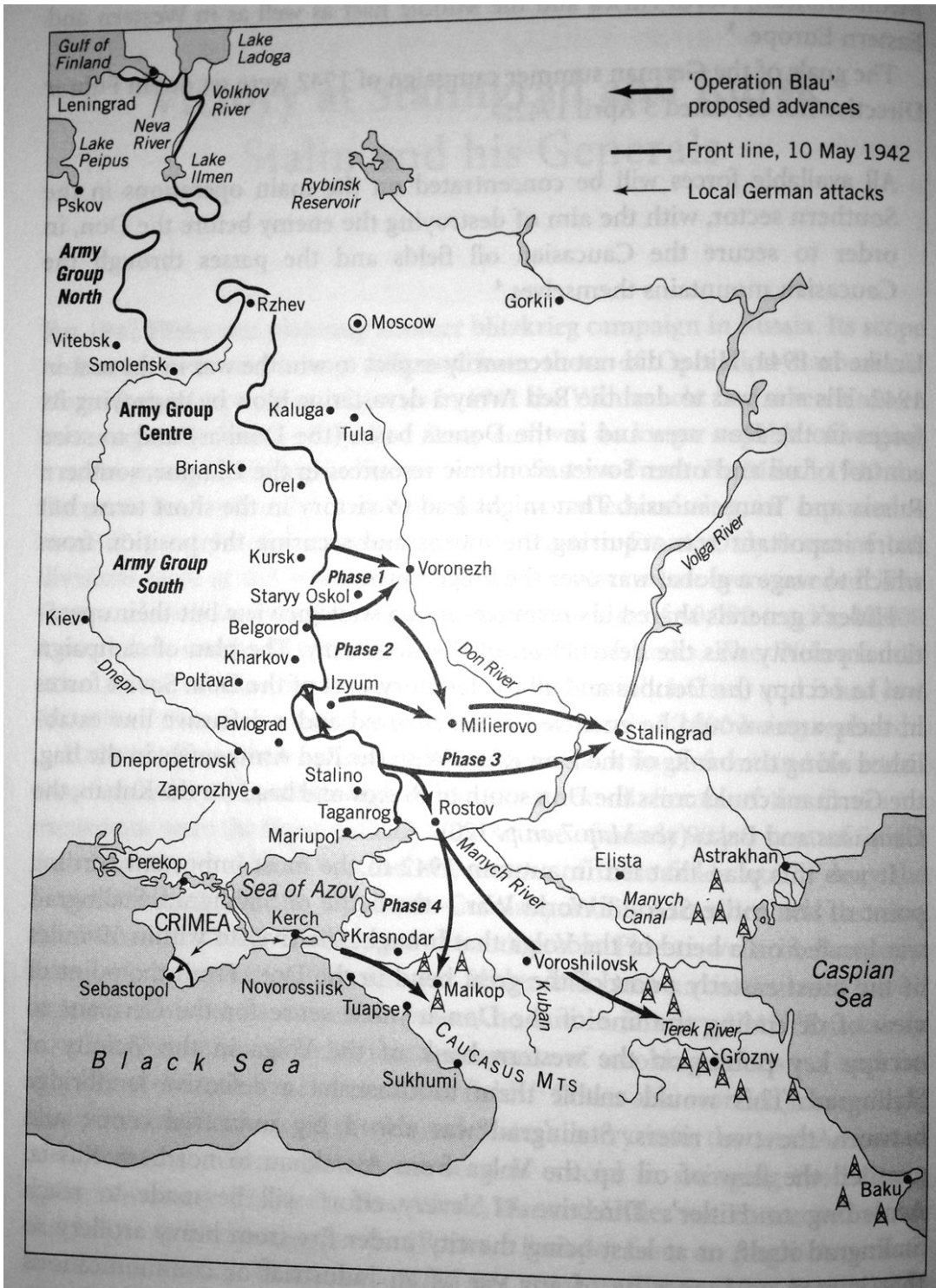
⁴ David M. Glantz as cited in “Deadliest Battle,” *Secrets of the Dead*.

⁵ German high command was split into two categories: German Armed Forces (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht OKW) and Army High Command (Oberkommando der Heeres OKH)

experience of a hardened field commander and was a devout believer in the chain-of-command. His feeble leadership style and his unwavering support of Hitler and the regime may have led to 6th Army's demise.⁶ Hitler's faith and appointment of Paulus highlights the hubris that permeated German High Command. Paulus was a Staff Officer and was viewed by high-ranking German Generals as overwhelmingly under-qualified for leading 6th Army. The success of the German Army along the Russian steppe created a shared sense of hubris and underestimation of the Russian Army that infected the minds of German High Command. Victories excited the German people and led Hitler to exhibit a rigid unwillingness to concentrate his forces on one objective at a time. For example, Hitler focused on the seizure of the Crimea and the Volga congruently—epitomizing his unwillingness for Army Group B to secure objectives one at a time. Hitler's strategic objectives were governed by the needs of his war economy, so when the German advance ground to a halt in the late summer of 1942, a large front appeared. To make matters worse, there was no strategic reserve as forces from Army Group B and Army Group A lacked the strength to hold a massive front from the Caucasus to the Don-south western Stalingrad region.⁷

⁶ Kevin W. Farrell, Ph. D, Chief of Military History West Point as cited in "Deadliest Battle," *Secrets of the Dead*.

⁷ Erich Von Manstein, *Lost Victories*. Chicago: H. Regnery, 1958. 273-366. 291.



'The Plan for Operation Blau, April 1942'

Source: after map in Roberts, G. (2006) *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, p. 120

The campaign in southern Russia was divided into four stages: first, break through and seize Voronezh—the pivot point of the operation, with the 2nd Field and 4th Panzer Army; second, smash Soviet forces west of the Don River with the 6th Army; third, launch an offensive south-east along the Don to Stalingrad with the 6th Army and 4th Panzer Army; fourth, capture the oil of the Caucasus, by way of Stalingrad instead the shorter route through Rostov.⁸ Soviet forces of the 62nd and 64th Armies were met with bitter fighting in the open steppe as battle for the control of bridgeheads was paramount. The Germans pushed the Red Army eastward towards Stalingrad in an attempt to gain control of the Don River bend: a strategically important area as it controlled the land bridge between the Volga and Don rivers—two major transportation arteries in southern Russia.

Prior to the disintegration of the Iron Curtain, histories and censored accounts of the Red Army depicted Stalin as a tactical genius on his order to retreat to the east into the city of Stalingrad, thus drawing the Germans into a trap and the slow death of the German 6th Army.⁹ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, more accurate information became available proving this could not be farther from the truth. In reality, Stalin gave strict orders for soldiers to hold their positions and under no circumstances were they to retreat or surrender. Stalin's famous "Not a Step Back" declaration on July 28, 1942 implemented the use of blocking

⁸ Vasili I. Chuikov, Harold Silver, and Hanson Baldwin. *The Battle for Stalingrad*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964. 1.

⁹ "Deadliest Battle," *Secrets of the Dead*.

detachments,¹⁰ with the sole purpose of preventing Soviet soldiers from retreating and giving up the precious Motherland.¹¹ The NKVD, Soviet Military Police Force, was deployed to facilitate the blocking detachments. Estimations show the NKVD detained more than 600,000 troops, arrested more than 25,000, and shot upwards of 10,000 of their own countrymen.¹² At times it seemed as if the NKVD was more efficient at stifling Soviet resistance than the Germans. The fear that Stalin struck into soldiers helped fuel the Russian war machine. As a result of months of agonizing battles, on September 10, German forces managed to drive the Red Army back to the outskirts of Stalingrad.¹³ The Soviets were demoralized and suffered tremendous casualties during Operation Blau, which led Hitler to believe the fall of the Soviet Union was imminent. A jubilant Hitler proclaimed, “The Russian is finished” as he ordered Army Group B, specifically the 6th Army, to advance on Stalingrad, his nemesis’ namesake.¹⁴ Under Operation Blau 4th Panzer Army, 1st Panzer Army, 6th Army and 17th Army were directed towards the North Caucasus and Volga Front. ¹⁵ Hoth’s 4th Panzer Army and Paulus’ 6th Army were left to take Stalingrad. Instead Stalingrad did not become the site of a quick and easy campaign for Hitler—instead the drive into Stalingrad slowed the esteemed 6th Army and insinuated a new style of operations that would eventually spell the demise of the Nazi war effort.

¹⁰ Blocking detachments consisted of NKVD formations thwarting backward progress as they shot and killed any Russian soldier who attempted retreat.

¹¹Earl F Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer. *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army :, 1987. 361.

¹² “Deadliest Battle,” *Secrets of the Dead*.

¹³ Chuikov, et al. *The Battle for Stalingrad*. 70.

¹⁴ “Deadliest Battle,” *Secrets of the Dead*.

¹⁵ Ziemke and Bauer. *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*.351.

6th Army's drive to the Don would prove costly without mechanized support from 4th Panzer Division. The tanks, the pride and joy of the German war effort, were integral in the blitzkrieg warfare. Leaving the 6th Army without the 4th Panzer Division was a costly mistake as it weakened the 6th Army prior to the final drive on Stalingrad. As the German 6th Army marched east, it eventually ran into the strongest Soviet resistance since the beginning of Operation Blau in the Don Bend; a region where the Don River takes a westerly turn before heading south to the Sea of Azov. Fresh Soviet Tanks, specifically the emergence of the T-34, provided the Soviets with a much-needed shot of adrenaline as they thwarted the 6th Army's progress.¹⁶ German 6th Army infantryman, Walter P. Guenther, confirms, "The only thing we feared was the Russian T-34!"¹⁷ When General Paulus and 6th Army eventually made their final push towards the banks of the Don and eventually towards the Volga, they did so with forces largely reduced in strength and size. Furious with the slow advance, Hitler recalled the 4th Panzer Division from the Caucasus to support the 6th Army and provide the impetus to cross the land bridge between the Don and the Volga, then finally set sights on Stalingrad.

What evolved over the next six months decided the fate of the Third Reich, as the entrapment of the 6th Army and Paulus' surrender at Stalingrad was the turning point in World War II. The 6th Army's daily struggle would show signs of the death of Nazism, a loss of faith in Hitler, and a German focus shifting to survival rather

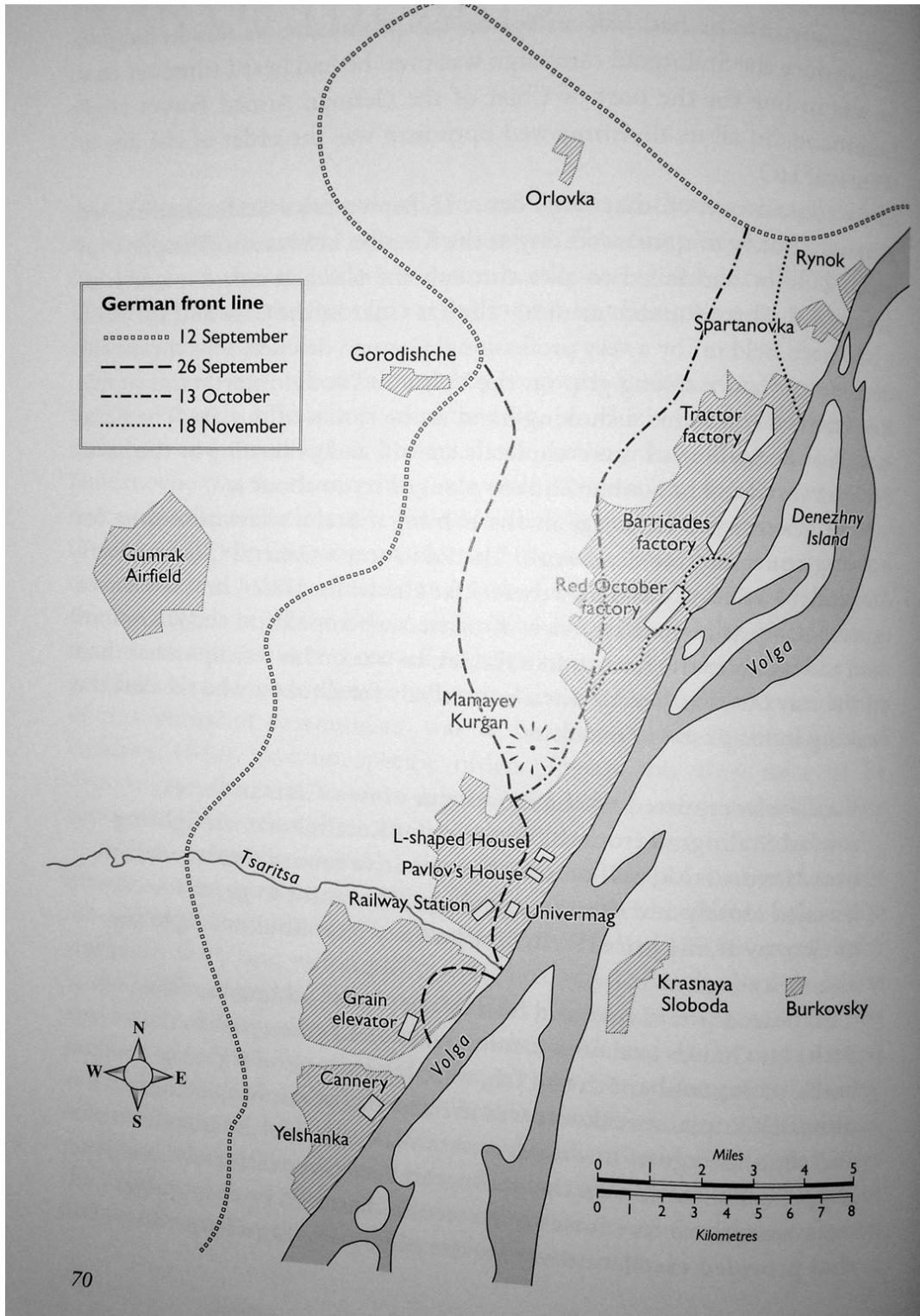
¹⁶ Russian T-34 tanks were the answer to the lighter, less powerful German Panzer. T-34 Tanks terrorized the German 6th Army and were only susceptible to air strike or close combat. Dennis Showalter. *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group/Penguin Group, 2009. 234-5.

¹⁷ "Deadliest Battle," *Secrets of the Dead*.

than victory. In some cases, soldiers' allegiance to Hitler and the regime also strengthened in direct proportion to the worsening of the conditions.¹⁸ Despite soldiers' belief that Hitler would come to the rescue, the Red Army made sure to tighten the noose around the encircled 6th Army. The encirclement in particular was the psychological turning point in the German war effort and the metaphorical death of the 6th Army, which signified an unhinging of Nazism and a deterioration of German morale. The Soviet forces fought with an unwavering patriotism that was forged from the fires of Communism and allegiance to the Motherland. Stalingrad was the site of a clash between ideologies and classes: the peasantry of bolshevism against the nobility of Europe and National Socialism. The German loss at Stalingrad sent a shockwave through Germany and the rest of the world that signaled Hitler and Nazi Germany's downward spiral.

The Battle: *September 1942-February 1943*

¹⁸ Omer Bartov. *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 166.



‘German Advance on Stalingrad, Autumn 1942’

Source: after map in Bastable, J. (2006) *Voices From Stalingrad*, p. 70

Layout, Invasion, De-modernization

The city of Volgograd, renamed for Russia's great leader in 1925 as Stalingrad, sits on the bank of the Volga River. The total length of the city, from North to South, is 35 miles. At its widest from east to west, a mere 2.5 miles.¹⁹ With the ribbon-like design, the city itself posed a challenge for any attack. In order to establish full control over the city, an army would need to secure a front the length of the 35-mile city and push the enemy back to the eastern edge of the Volga. The city itself proved difficult to defend because the western banks of the Volga are steep. This forced the Soviets to dig in and hold their favorable positions because the Volga was a questionable escape route. In some places, the mile-wide Volga River offered no hope at all for retreat for the Soviets as the Luftwaffe and distant artillery made safe crossings next to impossible. In 1941, Stalingrad was a magnificent city of roughly half a million people who prided themselves on their technological advances and factory districts that had helped the Soviet Union move forward from the backward reputation that the capitalist world tied to Bolshevism. Stalingrad residents had a powerful image of the Soviet state and therefore the country's invincibility: no one imagined their model city of Stalingrad would become the site of ruins and the deadliest battle in modern warfare.²⁰ The city itself was a prize, and the task of taking Stalin's namesake rested in the hands of General Paulus and his 6th Army.

¹⁹ Ronald Seth. *Stalingrad-Point of Return*. London: Richard Clay and Company, Ltd., 1959. Print. 42-43.

²⁰ Antony Beevor. *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998. 11.

On 23, August 1942, General Paulus and his army looked down at the city from the northern steppe. From a distance, its seizure appeared to be an easy task for the victorious 6th Army. To begin the attack, Paulus called in the Luftwaffe to repeatedly bomb the city and reduce it to ruins. Ironically, the two-day deluge of bombing for metamorphosed the city into a devastated landscape. Department stores, factories, grain elevators, and railway stations created a labyrinth of rubble. The cratered landscape rendered tank warfare even less effective than usual in cities. In addition to the bombing, prior to the invasion, citizens of Stalingrad had spent weeks building trenches and fortifications outside the city to help slow down and deter movement once the 6th Army crossed the Don River.

For the ground attack, Paulus employed a two-pronged pincer attack, sending the 6th Army to the north and 4th Panzer Army to the south of the city. Historian, David Glantz argues that the 6th Army's fate was decided before the Germans set foot in the city at a town about fifty kilometers northwest of Stalingrad called Kotluban. The Soviets launched four major counter-offensives in the broad steppe region of Kotluban. On August 24th the Red Army committed up to 4 armies in near suicidal attacks counter-strokes against the German northern flank".²¹ The Soviets suffered heavy casualties on the northern flank, but their piecemeal efforts left the 6th Army wounded and exhausted prior to the march-assault on Stalingrad in early September. More importantly, the Soviets in the northern sector at Kotluban tied up and battered 14th Panzer Corps: 6th Army's northern arm in the pincer attack

²¹ David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House. *To The Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009. 339.

on the city.²² Without the accompaniment of the 14th Panzer Corps, the bulwark of 6th Army cautiously marched into a bombed-out city relying on infantrymen.

On 13 September, Paulus and the German 6th Army marched into Stalingrad—the city that was once the pride of the Communist industrial revolution— reduced to ruins and a mélange of debris and bombed infrastructure. Glantz confirms, “In essence, Stalingrad becomes a giant meat grinder, into which 6th Army initially commits one third of its force in early September, by late November it will commit its entire army”.²³ The fabled 6th Army found itself in close combat warfare that contradicted the tactics and successful campaigns of the Third Reich up to that point. Ruins, tight turns, and the urban structure of the city led to the de-modernization of warfare. The mechanized support that drove the Third Reich up until this point of the war became useless, as the 6th Army was forced to fight street-to-street, building-to-building.²⁴ The tanks employed in the city were small machines that lacked the firepower and intimidation factor of main battle tanks (MBT’s). German tank commanders expressed serious concern over their involvement in a battle that denied them the flexibility, movement, and space that was so crucial to their success. Tank commanders knew they were technologically ill equipped for the city-style warfare in Stalingrad. If the Panzers and other tank division could not help avert disaster, then the 6th Army was doomed.

Beginning of the End for 6th Army

²² David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House. *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009. 96.

²³ “Deadliest Battle,” *Secrets of the Dead*.

²⁴ The close combat fighting benefited Soviet rifle divisions in the 62nd and 64th Armies. Snipers including the fabled Russian sniper, Vasily Zaitsev, proved how effective the Soviet rifle divisions were against the 6th Army.

The success of Germany Armies sweeping across the Russian steppe gave the Axis forces a false sense of confidence after seizing Stalingrad in late August. The arrival of winter and new frosts in autumn acted as a painful reminder to the Axis forces of what Russian winters entailed. The bone-chilling wind, plummeting temperatures, flash snowstorms, and the intensified urban warfare began to take a toll on the strength of the 6th Army. General Vasily Chuikov, commander of the Soviet 62nd Army, understood that the Russians had to sustain their effort and make the Germans totally uncomfortable day and night. Antony Beevor, author of *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege 1942-1943*, adds, “[Chuikov] had already noticed the reluctance of German troops to engage in close-quarter combat, especially in the darkness. To wear them down, ‘every German must be made to feel that he was living under the muzzle of a Russian gun’”.²⁵ The fighting in Stalingrad was unlike anything Germans had prepared for; this new form of warfare terrorized the Germans who dubbed the close quarter combat in the city’s ruins as ‘Rattenkrieg’ (rat’s-war). It was absolute carnage in and around the city as the Germans looked to destroy the Russians at any cost. The Luftwaffe did everything it could to prevent fresh Soviet forces from being ferried across the Volga into the city.²⁶ The Russians thrived on camouflage techniques, ambushes, and building armaments in cellars, basements, and other trenched ruins. The Germans began to fear the nights as their enemy set mines under the cover of darkness and employed silent U-2 biplanes to carry out night bombing missions, that mentally and physically wore down the Germans. General Chuikov realized that German resources and reserves had begun

²⁵ Beevor. *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 129.

²⁶ Chuikov, et al. *The Battle for Stalingrad*. 114.

to dwindle, so the night raids proved crucial to grinding down the 6th Army.

Chuikov's success was based on three main factors: the employment of street-to-street *rattenkrieg* fighting, resupply from across the Volga, and air and artillery support from the Russian air force and artillery on the eastern bank of the Volga.²⁷

German divisions entering Stalingrad came in with an average strength of medium to strong, in terms of combat rating; within two weeks, they were reduced in strength to weak or exhausted.²⁸ The Soviets were stretched thin as well, but they fed in just enough troops from the eastern bank of the Volga to keep the effort alive. The Russians were winning the war of attrition. From the beginning of September, *Stavka*²⁹, urged by Stalin's new deputy supreme commander, Georgy Zhukov, began developing plans for a large scaled multi-faceted counter-offensive that would attack Army Group Center, encircle the German forces at Stalingrad, and eventually isolate and destroy the remaining forces of Army Groups A and B in the Caucasus.³⁰ *Stavka* looked to regain the initiative not only at Stalingrad, but also in the entire southern theatre. With significant German forces tied up in Stalingrad, it created a power vacuum to the west of the Don River. The Red Army managed to hang on long enough into the late fall to execute a massive counterattack that would ultimately seal the fate of the 6th Army.

The Steppe and the Cold

²⁷ Roberts. *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 147.

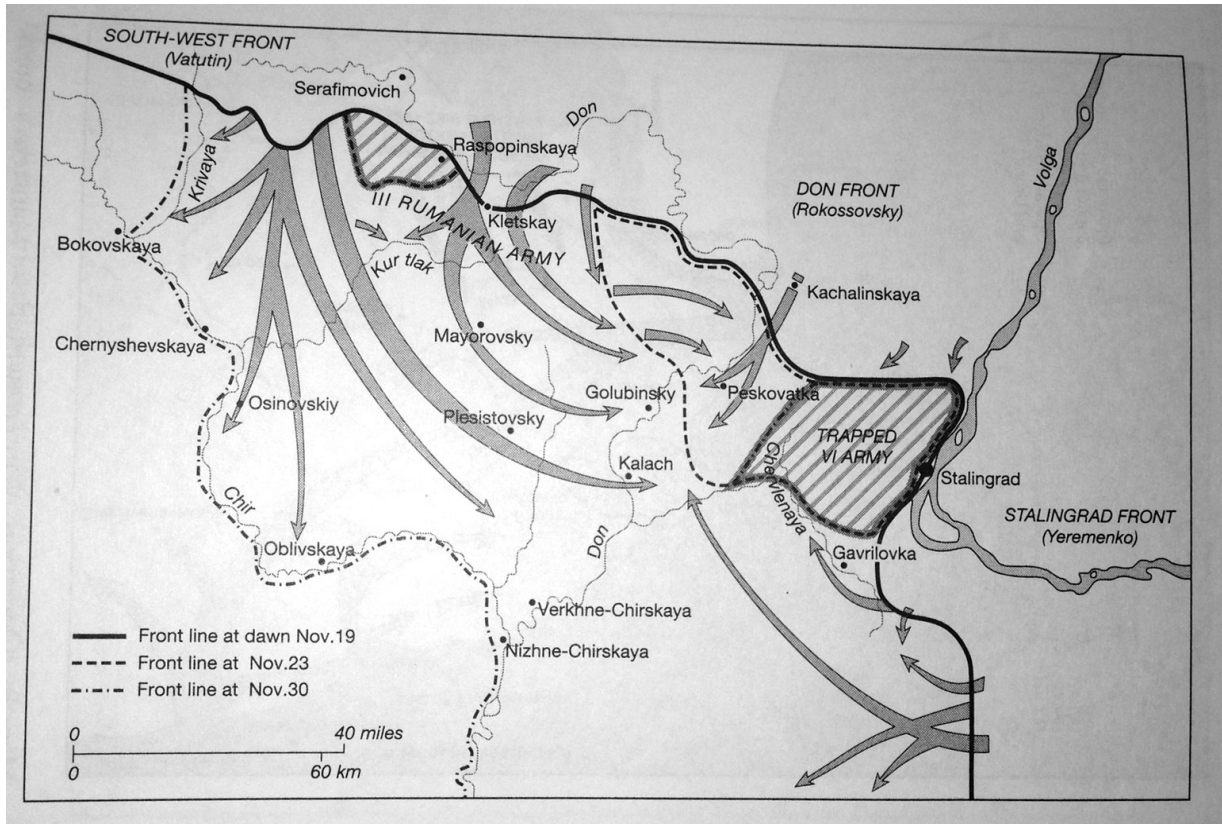
²⁸ Combat rating—based on strength and equipment, David Glantz as cited in, "Deadliest Battle," *Secrets of the Dead*.

²⁹ *Stavka* was the term used for Russian military high command. *Stavka* was composed of Josef Stalin and his most trusted military advisors.

³⁰ Showalter. *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare*. 211.

Heading into October, the conditions on the steppe west of the city were equally as treacherous as the hellish fighting that existed amongst the ruins in Stalingrad. The season brought consistent winds, a deluge of snow, and freezing temperatures that shocked the 6th Army. Lice, disease, dysentery, frostbite, and short rations began to eat away at the Germans and Axis forces. Similar to the campaign in the winter of 1941, the Axis forces struggled to stay warm. The Italians and Romanians in particular lacked proper winter clothing. German machinery succumbed to weather as engines froze and rodents sought shelter from the cold and ate through wiring systems. Aside from the brutal conditions that came with the approaching winter, the steppe offered little cover from artillery barrages. The frozen ground made it difficult for the Germans to dig trenches and seek refuge from the constant artillery barrage. Just as the Germans tried to hunker down and get ready for the long winter ahead, *Stavka* had secretly begun carrying out a major counteroffensive plan that would catch the 6th Army by the tail.

The Battle Part 2: November 1942- Late January 194



'Operation Uranus, November 1942'

Source: after map in Roberts, G. (2002) *Victory at Stalingrad*, p. xxv

Operation Uranus

On September 13, 1941, while the Russians drip-fed soldiers into the city, Generals Georgy Zhukov and Alexander Vasilevsky met with Stalin at the Kremlin to discuss a massive counter attack against the Germans. Zhukov urged Stalin that an ambitious plan was necessary in order to win the battle at Stalingrad. Zhukov recognized that the struggle would continue in three specific regions: first in the city

and the northern factory district; second, and simultaneously in the land bridge between the Don and the Volga Rivers; and third along the banks of the Don and Volga rivers far to the northwest and to the Beketovka bridgehead south of Stalingrad.³¹ With significant German forces focused on the seizure of Stalingrad, Vasilveky and Zhukov believed a crushing blow in the weakest sectors of the front: the south and northwest would reverse the strategic situation in southern Russia in favor of the Soviets.³² Zhukov had intentions to trap the Germans and regain some ground northwest of the Donets River basin. Massive tank production, mechanized weapons, and large artillery in the Soviet Union gave Zhukov, and eventually Stalin, the confidence to follow through with such a large-scale counter attack on the 6th Army. During the summer of 1941, the Soviet Union produced an astounding 1,200 tanks a month. This figure outraged Hitler, who refused to believe that such a backwards nation was capable of mass industrial production. The figure, however, was accurate. In the summer of 1942, Soviet tank production rose from an astonishing 11,000 to 13,600, with an average of 2,200 a month.³³ Again, Hitler underestimated the Soviet production capacity, which cost the Third Reich huge losses in the fall of 1942. Stalin's militarization of factories forced men and men from across the Urals to help fuel the Russian war effort. Women of all ages made up the majority of factory workforces—an integral part of the Soviet production machine. The noble Germans soon learned the breadth of patriotic fervor that fueled the Red Army and the Communist ideal.

³¹ Glatz and House. *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*. 95.

³² Ziemke and Bauer. *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 442.

³³ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 223.

Preparations for a Counteroffensive

In the latter half of September, Zhukov proceeded with reconnaissance of the 6th Army's flanks with intentions to find the weakest points. The northwest and southern flanks of the 6th Army were held by Romanian troops, which *Stavka* determined as the most vulnerable areas in the Axis position. The Romanian flanks were covered by Romanians and Italians who lacked the ideological fervor of true Nazis. Not only did they differ in beliefs and nationality to those proud Nazis, they were ill equipped without the support of Panzer divisions or the infantry firepower to thwart a strong Soviet offensive. Each of the Romanian divisions was expected to cover a front that yawned for twelve miles with a measly 7 battalions— the Romanians had 37-MM Pak anti-tank guns, which the Russians had dubbed the “door-knocker” because of their ineffectiveness against the powerful T-34's.³⁴ Regardless of the point of attack, the success of the entire offensive hinged on keeping 6th Army and the 4th Panzer Army in contest.

Towards the end of October Paulus sent the 14th and 24th Panzer Divisions in to help the LI Army seize control over the factory district.³⁵ By the end of October the Panzer divisions that aided LI Army were exhausted. The tanks were former shells of themselves, but Hitler demanded that 6th Army extinguish the last remaining pockets of resistance with forces no longer capable of conducting sustained operations while simultaneously defending the city and the army's long flanks.³⁶ Paulus was under considerable pressure from Hitler to perform, but the striking

³⁴ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943*. 299.

³⁵ Glantz and House, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*. 468.

³⁶ Glantz and House, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*. 542.

force of 6th Army was concentrated in the city, which left the weaker Axis armies to defend the extended Don River front northwest of Stalingrad and the ranging Lake District south of the city.³⁷The Romanian flanks in particular were vulnerable and powerless without the armored divisions to provide aid. David Glantz confirms the ominous scenario the German forces faced,

6th Army's personnel deficit in mid-November was 121,900 men, or 41 percent of its force; the weakness in actual combat troops was disproportionately greater. This left the army with just short of 200,000 men. Combined with 4th Panzer Army's roughly 120,000 men, Romanian Third Army's 155,000 men, and another 45,000 troops subordinate to Army Group B, Axis forces fielded about 525,000 men to oppose the 1 million Red Army troops involved in Operation Uranus.³⁸

The sheer numbers alone proved the Axis resistance was no match for the impending Soviet attack. The Soviets hoped that by smashing the Romanians on the left and right flanks they could thrust behind 6th Army, thus cutting off its communication and transportation lines across the Don.

German High Command was not blind or oblivious that the Soviets were planning a counter-attack—High Command believed the Soviets were husbanding troops near Army Group Center, while Hitler had a haunch that Stalingrad would bear the blunt of the force.³⁹ As late as November 6, High Command was certain that the Soviet main offensive would be against Army Group Center, but by November 12, ripples of concern came in to alert Army Group B.⁴⁰ While the fighting continued in Stalingrad, the Red Army carefully moved vehicles, tanks, guns, men, horses across the Volga in darkness south of the city as they prepared for their stealthy

³⁷ Glantz and House, *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942*. 543.

³⁸ Glantz and House. *Endgame At Stalingrad: Book Two: December 1942-February 1943*. Vol. 3. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014.591.

³⁹ Ziemke and Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 456.

⁴⁰ Ziemke and Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 457.

counter offensive. The Russians employed *miskirovka*⁴¹ to disguise their vehicles to the natural colors of the Don steppe and used smoke screens to disguise their movements south and northwest of the city. The Russians even went to the extent of transmitting messages about preparing a defensive for the long winter ahead. The German high command believed the concentration of Soviet troops outside of the Romanian flanks was intended only for a shallow attack to block the railroad leading into Stalingrad.⁴² German surveillance lacked the resources to reinforce the Romanian flanks even after the Romanians communicated their anxieties over growing Soviet presence in the Don sector. Excessive German hubris and poor German intelligence created fog as the High Command, and Hitler, truly believed the Russians lacked the resources to stage a serious counter offensive regardless of the intended target. In mid November, the near-sighted approach to the war effort in Stalingrad hammered the nail in 6th Army's coffin as the Red Army launched a momentous counter offensive on Thursday, November 19, 1943.

Encirclement

Prior to the commencement of Operation Uranus on November 19, 1943, the Soviets knew they were taking an enormous gamble. First, they hoped the 62nd Army could continue to hold out in the hellish conditions in the city; and second, they were banking on the fact that the Germans would fail to break out of the

⁴¹ Camouflage techniques, particularly military deception.

⁴² David Glantz, and Jonathan House. *When Titans Clashed*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995. 133.

encirclement.⁴³ At four o'clock in the morning on November 19, the Red Army opened with an artillery barrage from the northwest focused on the 2nd Hungarian, 8th Italian, and 3rd Romanian armies. The Romanian armies were simply outgunned and literally blown out of their positions, which opened up a hole in the lateral flank and created room for the Russian juggernaut to head south. The Luftwaffe was rendered useless as the heavy fog grounded aircraft. The Red Army led by the 5th Tank Army punched through the mist in a southeasterly direction towards the rear of 6th Army. The 5th Tank Army provided the spearhead to crash through the undergunned and outmanned 3rd Romanian Army. In an effort to support the crumbling Romanian armies, most of 6th Army's panzer regiments were recalled and sent across the Don to aid in stopping the onslaught and protect the left rear flank. This movement to protect the left flank created an opening in the south where Soviet forces from the southeast targeted the 4th Romanian Army.

On November 20, the 57th and 51st Soviet Armies attacked southeast of Hoth's 4th Panzer Army and the 4th Romanian Army. On Saturday, November 21, Army Group B (situated west of 6th army) reported a major threat from the southeastern flank as well. 6th Army headquarters finally realized the Soviet counter offensive was aimed at a full-scale encirclement. To avoid being caught in the middle of the two crashing Soviet waves, Paulus and his staff retreated east towards the city where they recuperated with the rest of 6th Army. The next day, November 22, 1943, the massive jaws of Soviet attack met in the town of Kalatch on the eastern bank of the Don.

⁴³ Geoffrey Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. Edinburgh, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2002. 112.

The Red Army had successfully pinned the 6th Army in an area later dubbed by the Germans as a *kessel* (cauldron) that was 80 miles long with an area ranging from 25-35 miles in breadth and depth. Inside the *kessel* were 20 divisions of 6th Army and 4th Panzer, two Romanian divisions, and a Croatian infantry regiment that roughly totaled 300,000 men.⁴⁴ The encirclement marked a moral turning point in Eastern front as the Soviets handcuffed the army that Hitler claimed “Could Storm The Heavens”. The German high command was shocked and fearful that the annihilation of the Romanian Armies, coupled with the potential loss of the 6th Army and the 4th Panzer Army through the encirclement would spell local disaster as well as break the Wehrmacht’s grip on the entire Eastern Front.⁴⁵ 6th Army Generals knew their best chance in principle was an immediate break out, but lack of fuel and ammunition was the elephant in the room.

Conflict with High Command

Based on the lack of resources and the momentum of the Red Army, the 6th Army had a very short window of opportunity when they could have staged a counter attack and break free of the encirclement. General Paulus’ only chance to save the 6th Army was with an immediate breakout following the encirclement—but this implies that Paulus would disobey the Führer. The question of abandoning the wounded was paramount. General exhaustion coupled with the lack of fuel and ammunition made a fast-paced break out seem impossible. Hitler’s obsession with the city proved costly, as he ultimately was deaf to any plans of a break out. The

⁴⁴ Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 121.

⁴⁵ Glantz and House, *Endgame At Stalingrad: Book Two: December 1942-February 1943*. 593.

Führer seethed at the idea of surrender or a breakout as he felt losing Stalingrad would sacrifice the progress of the summer of 1942 and the entire southern initiative. The Führer's desire to uphold his prestige and cling to Stalingrad impelled dissenting Generals to voice their opinions on the situation. Generals were more vocal than ever before when questioning the Führer, especially General Walter von Seydlitz, commander of the 6th Army's 51st corps:

The [6th] Army is faced with a clear alternative: breakthrough to the south-west in the general direction of Kotelnikovo or face annihilation within a few days...Unless the Army Command immediately rescinds its order to hold out in a hedgehog position it becomes our inescapable duty to the army and to the German people to seize that freedom of action that we are being denied by the present order, and to take the opportunity which still exists at this moment to avert catastrophe by making the attack ourselves. The complete annihilation of 250,000 fighting men and their entire equipment is at stake. There is no other choice.⁴⁶

Seydlitz expressed his grave concern for the future of the 6th Army. He stated that failure to develop a breakout plan was a crime in the military point of view and a wrong inflicted on the German nation. Along with Seydlitz, General Paulus' Colonel-General Maximilian von Weichs also expressed dissatisfaction with the Führer's desire to hold fast. After supreme command rejected Paulus' and Weichs' request to break out, Von Weichs refused to take no for an answer and pressed Army High command to persuade and educate Hitler on the dire situation.

General Kurt Zeitzler, the Führer's Chief of Staff was normally mute and never upset the status quo of German High Command, but in regards to the 6th Army's dire situation he was fully aware of the daunting future of the 6th Army. He advocated for Paulus, Seydlitz, and Weichs as he informed Hitler that essentially the 6th Army's resources were too low if kept in Stalingrad. If the 6th Army were to stage

⁴⁶ V.E., Tarrant, *Stalingrad: Anatomy of an Agony*. London: Leo Cooper, 1992., as cited in Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 124.

a massive breakthrough operation, they would need 120 tons of fuel, 250 tons of ammunition and 380 tons of food, a total of 750 tons daily just to fuel such an exercise.⁴⁷ To transport 750 tons daily required a Luftwaffe that had the strength and size to supply the 6th Army, which sadly was unrealistic. General Wolfgang Von Richtofen, commander of the 4th Air force reported on November 25 that he was hamstrung by aerial demands of the war in North Africa and he need 500 Ju-52 transports instead of the 298 that he already had to keep 6th Army alive.⁴⁸ Not only did the Luftwaffe need more planes but also the existing transports had to deal with inclement weather, contested airspace, and inadequate ground support to make successful sorties daily. On November 29, thirty-eight JU-52's (maximum load 1 ton per plane) and twenty-one HE-111s (maximum load less than half 1 ton per plane) took off. Of these, 12 Ju-52's and 13 HE-111s landed inside the pocket—a desperately low number of transports that indicated that the Soviets anti-aircraft capabilities directly controlled the fate of the 6th Army.⁴⁹ The Junkers 52 (JU-52) was a clumsy aircraft used for transporting supplies for 6th Army. The Red Army had little trouble picking off the cumbersome transport planes that tried daily to supply the 6th Army. The Luftwaffe, a stalwart in the Wehrmacht, was crippled by the overstretching nature of the war and lacked the tools or authority to keep the 6th Army afloat.

Just as General Zeitzler thought he had come to a resolution with Hitler, the Führer announced Goering guaranteed the Luftwaffe could transport the necessary

⁴⁷ Seth, *Stalingrad-Point of Return*. 199.

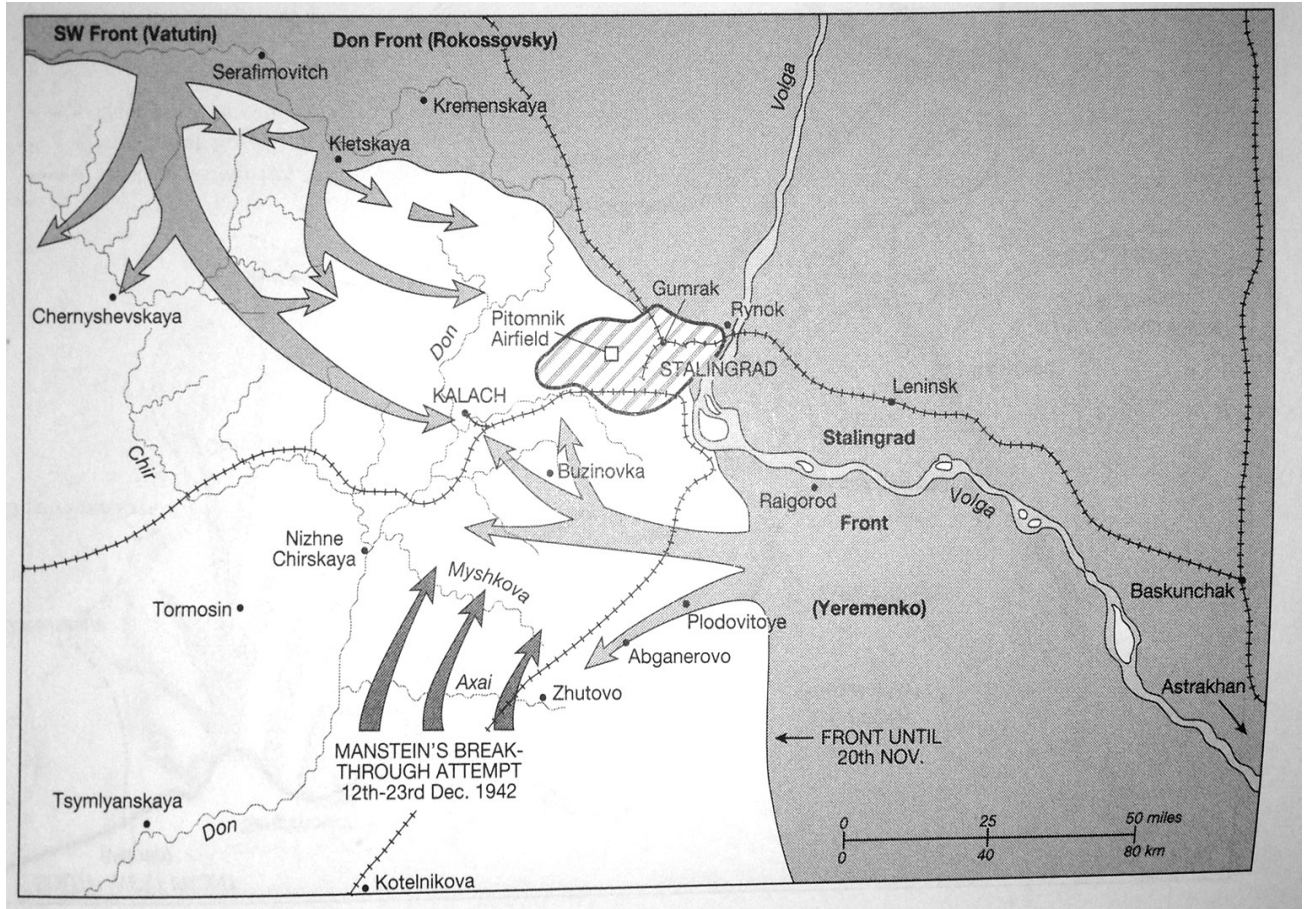
⁴⁸ Ziemke and Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 479.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

resources. Goering revised the figure of 750 tons daily to 500, and told Hitler the 6th Army could be saved. The Luftwaffe's recent failures in North Africa had forced Goering to swallow his pride, but presenting Hitler with a way to keep the 6th Army in Stalingrad hoped to be a path to redemption. Hitler's obsession with Stalingrad underlined his inexperience and naïveté on military strategy. He valued his ego and prestige as he guaranteed victory at Stalingrad for months while simultaneously sentencing the 6th army to death. Goering's revised figure of 500 tons daily shows that even Hitler's most trusted advisors failed to present him with the truth.

The German High Command proved to be equally misguided, as even it feared disobeying Hitler in times when the 6th army needed a voice of reason. In reality, the Luftwaffe never delivered even 500 tons. On average they delivered 117.6 tons but these sorties were few and far between as severe weather and Soviet anti-aircraft guns made sure the 6th Army was left to starve.⁵⁰ With late November winter whipping at the heels of the 6th Army and Hitler shouting insane orders to protect 'Fortress Stalingrad', the Axis forces in the *kessel* had few options left. However, German high command believed, one last attempt for a breakout was possible with the help of the esteemed General Erich Von Manstein.

⁵⁰ Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 126.



'Manstein's Breakout Attempt/Operation Winter Storm:

Source: after map in Roberts, G. (2002) *Victory at Stalingrad*, p. xxvi

Failure of Operation Winter Storm

While the 6th Army continued to fight in the *kessel*, Nazi authorities made sure that news of the encirclement was concealed. It was not until December 8, three weeks after the event that it had been acknowledged a large attack had occurred south Stalingrad.⁵¹ Fearful of how news of encirclement would affect the soldiers and the rest of Germany, the Nazi authorities, specifically Chief Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels employed stringent censorship to prevent a tidal wave of

⁵¹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 275.

low morale and loss of faith in the cause. German high command hoped that they could keep the events under wraps until Manstein arrived. While German high command conjured a plan to position Manstein and Army Group Don to provide a breakout attempt, the Red Army and *Stavka* had a plan of their own. Stalin hoped to launch Operation Saturn that would cut off Army Group Don and trap the First Panzer, 17th Army and the rest of Army Group A that were in the Caucasus. Stalin was impatient and wanted Paulus' forces and Army Group A eliminated simultaneously, but General Zhukov assured him that despite being outnumbered, the Axis troops were still a force to be reckoned with. Zhukov implied Operation Little Saturn, which focused on Army Group Don to prevent any attempt at a breakout from the west or southwest.

The 6th Panzer Division, recently arrived from Western Europe after riding several weeks of rest, brought a shot of adrenaline to Army Group Don and the Stalingrad relief effort. On December 3, Northeast of Army Group Don headquarters, General Erhard Raus, one of the best of the MBT grenadiers, commanded the 6th Panzer Division. Which met serious Soviet resistance about 124 miles southwest of Stalingrad in the town of Pakhlebin, where the 6th Panzer rocked the Soviet opposition with newly fitted long-barreled guns on Panzer Mark IV's. General Raus' victory at Pakhlebin was a shot of adrenaline to Army Group Don. On December 12, General Hermann Hoth and his 4th Panzer Army lurched north to mark the beginning of the short-lived relief effort of the 6th Army.

Inside the encirclement, the distant cacophony of explosions gave hope to the 6th Army. There were rumors that Manstein and Army Group Don planned to stage a

rescue mission; furthermore, sounds in the distance confirmed such rumors. Despite Hitler's acknowledgement of Operation Winter Storm, he had no intention to let the 6th Army retreat. He believed 4th Panzer Army and Raus' 6th Panzer division would break a trail to reopen supply chains through the encirclement and eventually nurse the 6th Army as they continued to tie up Soviet forces in Stalingrad. He refused to believe the city could be lost and stated to Zeitzler, "That it was impossible to retreat from Stalingrad because this would involve sacrificing the whole meaning of the campaign".⁵² Inside the encirclement, Paulus, fearful and respectful of the military chain-of-command waited for a breakout order. He believed Manstein's Operation Winter Storm provided the impetus for his 24th Panzer Division to make one last heroic effort to meet up with 6th Panzer division and 4th Panzer army southwest of the *kessel*, but he refused to act against the Führer's orders.

Manstein tried repeatedly to convince Paulus that the window for a breakout was soon to close. Manstein hoped to commence Operation Thunderclap, which implied a full-scale breakout and the rescue of the 6th Army. Without or without consent of Hitler, Manstein urged Paulus to ready his troops for such an operation. Paulus' indecisiveness, allegiance to Hitler, and his weakness as a military commander rang true as he failed to provide the leadership to save the 6th Army in such a crucial point in the battle. Army Group Don felt hopeful with Hoth and Raus, two of Germany's best tank commanders, paving the way and enabling a breakout. But Hitler and, more importantly, General Paulus, refused to acknowledge a breakout as a legitimate option for the 6th Army. Paulus shamelessly obeyed the

⁵² Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 298.

Führer, which ultimately, provided the grounds for Hitler to announce firmly that a breakout attempt was impossible. He used Paulus' testimony that 24th Panzer Division and other motorized weapons only had fuel to last 20 miles, leaving a ten-mile gap that relief forces were expected to cover.⁵³

Operation Little Saturn-Soviet Knockout Punch

As the debate between Manstein, Paulus, and Hitler continued, Stalin and Stavka geared up to launch Operation Little Saturn that quashed any relief hopes for the 6th Army. To dampen the resistance southwest of the encirclement in the sector where German 6th Panzer division and 4th Panzer Army pushed north, Stalin summoned the 2nd Guard Army to meet the German counter attack head on. General Raus and 6th Panzer Division pushed north from Kotelnikovo through the small town of Verkhne-Kumsky and across the snowy Russian steppe to the banks of the Myshkova River. The Myshkova River was roughly 45 miles from the southern ring of the *kessel*. Thousands of Red Army soldiers summoned from the Soviet 2nd Guard's Army met the 4th Panzer Army and 6th Panzer divisions head-on, yelling the Russian "hoorahhh" across the landscape. The 6th Panzer division fought valiantly, however, and won an all-important victory to secure the bridgehead along the Myshkova River. With 6th Panzer Division within 40 miles from the *kessel*, and 4th Panzer Army firmly securing the bridgehead, the Soviets feared a breakout attempt was imminent.

Stavka and Stalin agreed the knockout blows needed to focus on two areas: the 4th Panzer Army near the Myshkova River, and a more decisive spearhead from

⁵³ Seth, *Stalingrad-Point of No Return*. 219.

the east into the rear of Army Group Don. December 16, Soviet 1st and 3rd Guard Armies along with Soviet 6th Army attacked south towards the rear of Army Group Don. The Italian 8th Army, who thinly guarded the northwest front proved to be ineffective against an energized Soviet 6th Army. The Russian T-34's easily mowed down Germans in the Donets Basin as they met little mechanized resistance due to the bulk of 6th Army's mechanized striking power being concentrated in the city. The destruction of the German airbase on the afternoon of December 23rd at Tatsinskaya proved pivotal for both the Soviet offensive and the German relief effort. Tatsinskaya housed the Ju-52s—the awkward sortie planes and lifeblood for 6th Army. At the same time to the east, General Raus and his 6th Panzer Division anxiously waited for Paulus to receive breakout orders roughly 20 miles outside of the *kessel*. Orders never came, instead the order to stand down and abandon the relief effort came through. General Raus adds, “The *Kampfgruppe* [battle group assembled for the final relief effort], was ready for the final lunge on the afternoon of the 23 December, when without warning a counter order called for 6th Panzer Division to be pulled out immediately. Right down to the most junior soldier it was absolutely clear that this signified defeat at Stalingrad”.⁵⁴

Failure Of Operation Winter Storm

Operation Winter Storm was the last hope for the beleaguered 6th Army. The counter attack by the Soviets and the success of Operation Little Saturn affirmed the truth that the 6th Army would not be home for Christmas. In hindsight, it is easy to blame Paulus for not taking the initiative, but in reality the 6th Army lacked the

⁵⁴ Erhard Raus, and Steven Newton. *Panzer Operations : The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941-1945*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press/Perseus Books Group, 2003. 183.

resources to launch a successful breakout attempt. The success of the Wehrmacht up to that point was a direct result of the successful tank warfare and the support from the Panzers. Distinguished military historian, Dennis Showalter adds, "Hitler's proposal to relieve Stalingrad from outside thus merely reinforced an attitude widespread in 6th Army. If it could be done at all, the panzers would have to do it".⁵⁵ The Panzers inability to recreate the military magic that they were known for ultimately stymied the success of the entire southern initiative. Despite Manstein's ability as a decorated general to rally soldiers and create a sense of hope for the 6th Army, resources inside the *kessel* were spread too thinly. Even if Paulus had the resources to launch a breakout attempt fueled on adrenaline, his soldiers would be expected to win a fight in the harsh open steppe with little cover from the exhausted 24th Panzer division. Showalter confirms, "The maneuver-war mentality in the headquarters of what was a foot-marching army had declined after two months of static operations. So had the resources—above all tanks and fuel—to support a fighting retreat against superior numbers in midwinter."⁵⁶ Paulus' men were simply too weak, too ill prepared in every way. To a Luftwaffe officer sent to Stalingrad as Hitler's emissary Paulus only said, "You are talking to dead men here".⁵⁷ Tones of pessimism and defeatism emerged, but large numbers of soldiers clung to their belief in Hitler and truly believed the Führer would find a way to save his men. The Soviets on the other hand knew they had to smash the encirclement and bring an end to the 6th Army along the Volga.

⁵⁵ Showalter, *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare*. 214.

⁵⁶ Showalter, *Hitler's Panzers*. 213.

⁵⁷ Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter. *Voices From the Third Reich*. Washington, D. C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989. 152.

Dangerously Low Rations

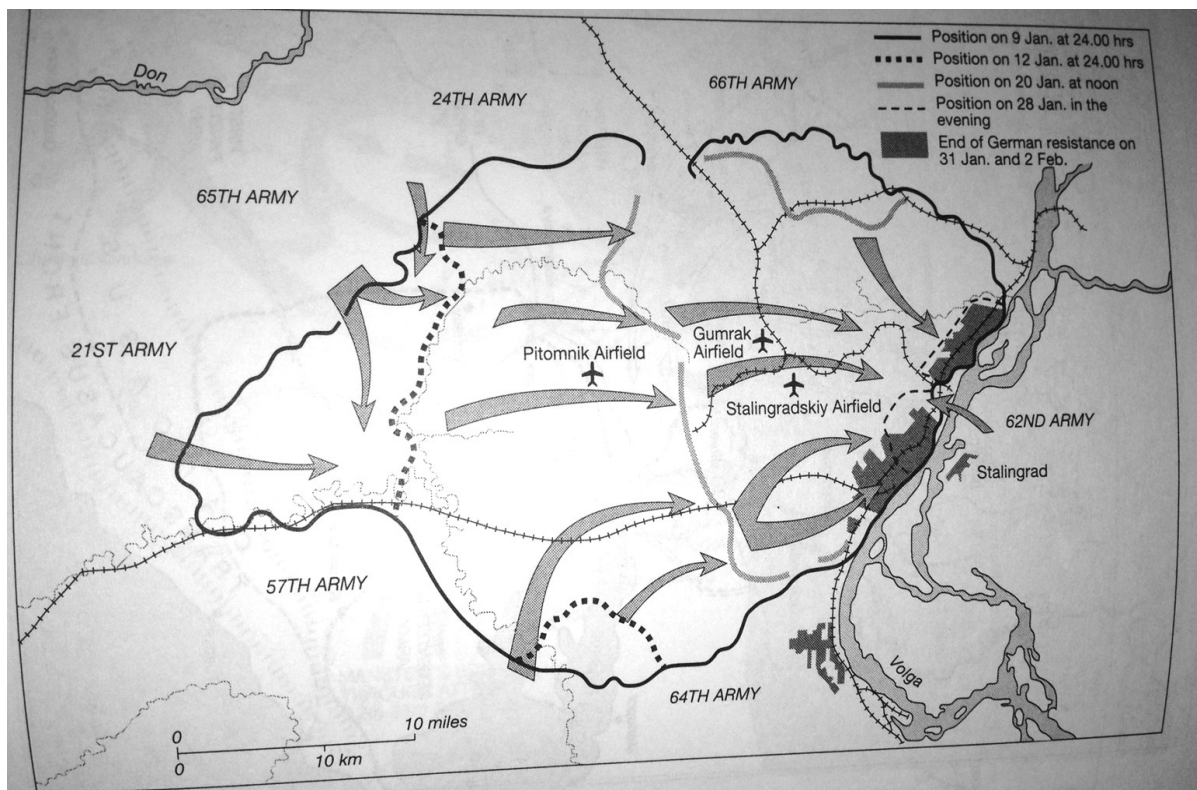
As Christmas came and went the 6th Army's morale drained at an alarming rate with the severe cold and the lack of food. Rations in the *kessel* were dangerously low as the 6th Army had been slaughtering horses for the past two months just to feed the soldiers. In a time where men were forced to focus on survival rather than the Nazi cause, it was a surprise that German commanders did not face a mass uprising. Perhaps the soldiers were so weak and demoralized that the notion of rebellion or mutiny in itself was too exhausting and improbable for an army flirting with death. Towards the end of December and into January the reality of the situation set in for many soldiers as more and more men daily turned to suicide or wandered into the open steppe in an attempt to free themselves from the misery. One 6th Army Pathologist Dr. Girgensohn reported that after performing fifty autopsies in December, exactly half of the sample had clear signs of death by starvation: atrophy of the heart and liver, a complete absence of fatty tissue, and a severe shrinkage of muscle".⁵⁸ The severe malnutrition that ran rampant among the 6th Army had a significant affect on how soldiers fought and recovered from infectious diseases like hepatitis, dysentery, typhoid, and typhus. Colonel H.R. Dingler of the 3rd Motorized Division recalled confirmed the severity of the situation,

Until Christmas, 1942 the daily bread ration issued to every man was 100 grams. After Christmas, 1942, the daily bread ration was reduced to 50 grams per head. Later on only those in the forward line received 50 grams per day. No bread was issued to men in regimental headquarters and upwards. The others were given watery soup which we tried to improve by making use of bones obtained from the corpses of the horses we dug up.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 305.

⁵⁹ Tarrant, *Stalingrad: Anatomy of an Agony*. London: Leo Cooper, 1992., as cited in Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 128.

Not only was the 6th Army a victim of starvation, but lice ran rampant through the soldier's clothing. These pests added to the spread of infectious disease and soon men resorted to burning their clothing to escape the war being waged on them by lice. The men of 6th Army had very little to be positive about as they watched their comrades disappear into field hospitals and graves while the perimeter of the *kessel* shrank daily. The failed breakout attempt and the continued empty promises from Hitler and high command, led the 6th Army to adapt a cynicism based on bitter past experience. This attitude created a survival instinct in the 6th Army that alone, kept them alive.⁶⁰



'Operation Ring'

Source: after map in Roberts, G. (2002) *Victory at Stalingrad*, p. xxviii

⁶⁰ Glantz and House, *Endgame At Stalingrad*. 366.

Operation Ring

Despite the 6th Army's tragic situation inside the *kessel*, the resistance they continued exhibit in the Stalingrad sector and the open steppe was still a concern for Stavka. The Soviets hoped to quash the remaining forces in Stalingrad or force them to surround so they could concentrate their efforts on the remaining Axis forces in the southern caucuses region. In early January, Paulus told his officers they should prepare to hold the fortress for several weeks since the breakout was postponed. He instructed his officers to employ draconian measures to ensure more effective organization for combat and announced that all members of the 6th Army should make every effort to fortify their position.⁶¹ In reality, the open steppe offered no materials or trees to create fortifications and the freezing temperatures limited soldier activity and made the ground impermeable to digging and excavating.

The 6th Army's most daunting problems were lack of mechanized resources for combat, but the deficiency in combat manpower proved costly as well. In response to the absence of combat infantrymen, Paulus resorted to training and converting support troops into front-line soldiers—which he did unsuccessfully. He did his best to prepare and ready a demoralized and exhausted army, but the Soviets planned to destroy the *kessel* and chalk Stalingrad up in the win column. For the first nine days of January, Soviet forces poked and prodded the periphery of the *kessel* to check the 6th Army's weaknesses and to largely begin reconnaissance missions to learn where to lance the encirclement. The Soviets purposely engaged in intense

⁶¹ Glantz and House. *Endgame At Stalingrad*. 399.

attacks along the perimeter of the 6th Army in an effort to weaken German forces, deplete any reserves at their disposal, and secure important high points and jump-off points for the upcoming attack.

On January 7th, the Soviets established radio contact with the 6th Army and presented them with terms of surrender. In accordance to Hitler's request, Paulus refused the terms and forbade anyone to negotiate with the Russians. On the morning of January 10th, the Soviets commenced Operation Ring, which would eventually cut the *kessel* in half and isolate the 6th Army with the loss of airfields at Pitomnik in January 16th and at Gumrak on January 22nd-23rd. The Soviet control of the German airfields inside the *kessel* severed the drip-fed resources and prevented the wounded from leaving the encirclement. The Germans fought valiantly with the limited resources still available. But the lack of ammunition, oil, and weapons were constant reminders of betrayal and how the Luftwaffe failed to deliver the necessary resources. Cynicism and pessimism stemmed from brewing frustrations along the perimeter of the *kessel*. German soldiers could not help but think nihilistically about their situation. They tried to fuel themselves for battle with adrenaline, hopes of survival, and for some—confirming their faith in National Socialism. The lack of fuel, and ability to take off safely, made the problem of evacuating the wounded critical. As soldiers knew their days were numbered in the encirclement, many resorted to self-inflicted wounds in hopes of obtaining a spot on a departing plane.

The two air bases at Pitomnik and Gumrak were not only the lifeblood for the 6th Army, but they gave the remaining soldiers hope. The few flights that departed

the encirclement were a portal back in time for soldiers as they were fed and recuperated far away from the hellish reality in which they were trapped. By January 16th, the Red Army had taken Pitomnik airbase which forced remaining 6th Army troops on the steppe to retreat into Stalingrad. In the Germans' wake the Russians came across mountains of debris and rubble.

At one point, on approaching Pitomnik, Soviet officers started to check their bearings, because far ahead they had sighted what appeared to be a small town on the steppe, yet none was marked on their maps. As they came closer, they saw that it consisted of a huge military junkyard, with shot-up panzers, trucks, wrecked aircraft, motor cars, assault guns, half-tracks, artillery tractors, and almost every other conceivable item of equipment.⁶²

As the Russians came across the debris, it confirmed how badly damaged the 6th Army was, and also how resilient they had been despite such loss in weaponry. On January, 22nd, the remaining airfield at Gumrak was stormed by the Red Army. The Germans abandoned planes, tanks, vehicles, in an effort to cover ground and retreat into Stalingrad. The Red Army came across 500 wounded soldiers left at the Gumrak field hospital—the Germans simply lacked the time and the resources to transport these men. Soldiers that were critically injured or were not able to walk were left behind.⁶³

When Gumrak fell, Paulus was finally forced to think logically and realistically about the prospects of the 6th Army and the reality of captivity and death loomed in his conscious. To seal the fate of the 6th Army and to illustrate his delusional state, on the 22nd, the Führer announced to the beleaguered army,

Surrender out of the question. Troops fight on to the end. If possible, hold reduced Fortress with troops still battleworthy. Bravery and tenacity of Fortress have provided the opportunity to establish

⁶² Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 362.

⁶³ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 370.

a new front and launch counter-attacks. Sixth Army has thus fulfilled its historical contribution in the greatest passage in German History.⁶⁴ In one swoop, Hitler proved to 6th Army, its fate was finally set in stone as he hinted to their service as part of the marrow for a national myth. Hitler failed to expose the desperate mood and helpless pleas of the 6th Army as he repeatedly marched them to their death and ultimately put the entire southern initiative in question.

Surrender and the March into Captivity

Surrender

With the loss of the Gumrak airfield, 6th Army headquarters was forced to move into the city, where the ruins and the remaining Axis forces could provide cover. Paulus set up camp in the basement of a destroyed department store. By January 28th, the Soviet forces drastically reduced the size of the *kessel* and liquidated what was the left of the 6th Army into three small pockets of resistance. The Germans held a small area in the north of the city near the factory area, in the center, and to the south—a protective ring around Paulus' headquarters. On January 29th, to show the Führer that Paulus' still remained loyal he congratulated Hitler, one day before the tenth anniversary of his ascension to power,

To the Führer! The Sixth Army greet their Führer on the anniversary of your taking power. The swastika flag still flies over Stalingrad. May our struggle be an example to present and future generations never to surrender in hopeless situations so that Germany will be victorious in the end.
Heil mein Führer!⁶⁵

Paulus' words were music to Hitler's ears as he already processed the 6th Army's situation as a sacrifice for the greater good. On the anniversary itself, Hermann

⁶⁴ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 373.

⁶⁵ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 379.

Goering made a broadcast comparing the 6th Army to the Spartans and the battle of Thermopylae. Goering's supposed heroic comparison did little to quash the fears and concerns about the 6th Army. Soldiers in Stalingrad heard this broadcast, and Goering's words only confirmed their fears; he had read aloud their funeral speech.

At last, Paulus contacted Manstein to explain that his forces were no longer able to fight as he submitted a formal request to surrender. Manstein put his entire military prestige on the line as he battered Hitler and Supreme Command desperately trying to explain that the 6th Army had no option but to capitulate.⁶⁶ On January 31st, the center pocket, one of three remaining German positions, surrendered. The outspoken General von Seydlitz who led the LI (51st) Corps in the center pocket could resist no longer. Hitler was outraged, and in a last-ditch effort he promoted General Paulus to Field-Marshal. Never in the history of German warfare had a Field-Marshal surrendered—Hitler hoped the newly appointed Field-Marshal and his 6th Army would uphold the prestige and fight to the last bullet. A suicide and sacrifice of the 6th Army would help confirm the gravity of the situation in Stalingrad and cement the heroic narrative and sacrifice for the German people. Perhaps the Führer also hoped that Paulus, a staunch supporter of Hitler and respectful of the chain of command, would ultimately rally the 6th Army and personify the will and confidence that Hitler sought to portray in such dire straits. But, the encroaching Russians, the absolute struggle to continue fighting, and the notion of the entire 6th Army entering captivity rested heavily on Paulus' conscience despite the Führer's strict orders to protect the Fortress and fight to the last man.

⁶⁶ Seth, *Stalingrad-Point of No Return*. 246.

Hitler's refusal to listen to his Generals proved that the Stalingrad experiment had become murderously expensive—a trait that would have resounding downstream affects for the Wehrmacht.

March into Captivity

On the morning of January 31, 1943, the Russian 64th Army surrounded the Univermag department store, virtually sealing off Paulus' headquarters in the basement of the building. Paulus, ravaged by the stress of the 6-month-long siege and his chronic bout with dysentery finally reached the end of his road. Alongside his two aids: General Arthur Schmidt and General Wilhelm Adam, Paulus was forced out of his dank headquarters and into the sunlight of the barren landscape. Red Army crews would spend the next several days forcing Germans out of cellars and bombed out buildings signaling the end of the Third Reich's presence in Stalingrad. Some Red Army soldiers lured Germans out from their hiding places with bread and other food rations—a stark reminder of how the Germans valued their survival over the creed of National Socialism. NKVD officers shot Germans who were unable to march or who tried last attempts to inflict injury on their captors. The surrender itself shared a volatility that would be equaled by the Red army all the way to Berlin. The NKVD in particular hunted down Hiwis⁶⁷ and 'fascist dogs', that is: SS, Gestapo, panzer troops, and Feldgendarmerie.⁶⁸ The end of the fighting for the Germans forced their tired, gaunt bodies into marching lines, with men stumbling in the snow

⁶⁷ Hiwis (Hilfswilliger) were Russians who volunteered to fight with the Germans against their own Red Army. Hiwis were subjected to severe brutality when discovered by NKVD officers during and following the Battle of Stalingrad.

⁶⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 384.

due to a severe deficiency in strength, broken bones, and frostbite which had wreaked havoc on toes, fingers, and other extremities.

The formal surrender took time as Paulus refused to sign military documents and repeatedly told his captors that since he was a prisoner of war, he no longer had the jurisdiction to sign such a document. Paulus' aid, General Schmidt's expressed his devotion to Hitler and National Socialism to the end as he tried to speak for Paulus and whisper Nazi jargon in his ears. The Russian captors grew frustrated with Paulus' stalling tactics as pressure from Stalin eagerly awaiting word of surrender back in the Kremlin pressed them to turn up the heat on Paulus. The morning of February 2, 1943, brought Stalin uplifting news as Chuikov's 62nd Army fired flares of victory into the foggy morning in Stalingrad. General Karl Strecker's 11th Corps were the embers in the dying Nazi resistance in Stalingrad, marking the end of 6th Army's tenure in Stalingrad. Meanwhile Hitler, safely situated in the warmth of the *Wolfsschanze*, was furious with the news of surrender and aimed the blunt of his wrath at Paulus and his staff:

They have surrendered there formally and absolutely. Otherwise they would have closed ranks, formed a hedgehog, and shot themselves with their last bullet. When you consider that a woman has the pride to leave, to lock herself in, and to shoot herself right away just because she has heard a few insulting remarks, then I can't have any respect for a soldier who is afraid of hat and prefers to go into captivity.⁶⁹

Hitler was in disbelief and was furious at Paulus' cowardice that undermined his staff and felt an honorable suicide was the obvious solution. The surrender served as closure to a long chapter of bitter fighting, but also drastically loosened the Wehrmacht's grip in southern Russia. Paulus was one of 24 other generals captured at Stalingrad, all of whom entered captivity on February 2, 1943. Accompanying the

⁶⁹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege:1942-1943*. 391.

generals were 90,000 German soldiers, including 2500 officers that began the long march into Russian captivity. Of the 90,000 men that were captured at Stalingrad, it is estimated 15,000 were alive three months later in May, 1943 and later only 5000 men would return alive to Germany after the war, 2000 of them not until 1955.⁷⁰

What Captivity meant for the 6th Army

The German prisoners saw captivity as a double-edged sword. Men were fed and given medical treatment. The care was fractionally better than the conditions during battle, but soldiers were reminded of the murderous marches into Siberia and the gulags reminiscent of Stalin's purges. German prisoners—generals, officers, and soldiers alike viewed captivity differently. As stated previously, it offered a respite from the fighting, but the very notion of surrender to the Bolsheviks terrified and disgusted those captives that held on to their devotion to Hitler and National Socialism. In the last days of 6th Army at Stalingrad, one soldier wrote in a letter that would be confiscated by the German propaganda department, "I saw four men who had been taken prisoner by the Russians. No, we shall not go into captivity. When Stalingrad has fallen, you'll hear and read it. And then you'll know that I shall not come back."⁷¹ Some soldiers were desperate for a change and closure to the six-month siege, but many knew that captivity for the common soldier spelled an imminent death.

To further batter the bruised Nazi prestige, Russian captors went through a rigorous re-education program with their German prisoners of war in an attempt to

⁷⁰ Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 134.

⁷¹ Franz Schnieder and Charles Gullans. *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. New York: Morrow, 1962. 33.

unravel the Nazi fervor and create anti-fascist sentiment among the soldiers. A shrewd carrot and stick method forced growing numbers of prisoners to join the anti-Nazi leagues in POW camps across Russia, the majority of them conforming to the beliefs of their captors because it was the easy thing to do.⁷² After the fall at Stalingrad, anti-Nazi leagues grew significantly in POW camps. Some were furious at German High Command for its betrayal of the 6th Army, others were tired and disillusioned, which made a fertile environment for growing dissent and pessimism. Stalingrad redefined what it meant to fall into Russian hands.

Stories of Stalin's purges and the Gulags had permeated all corners of the Wehrmacht, but the enormous number of POW's from Stalingrad changed the way Germans and Russians looked at captivity. Stalin recognized the massive number of German POWs could be useful a propaganda tool, and a labor force to rebuild what Axis forces had destroyed.⁷³ The arrival of Stalingrad generals in Russian POW camps made prime targets for anti-fascist groups that tried to form an anti-Hitler organization. Ironically, several of the Stalingrad generals, including Seydlitz who founded the League of German Officers, a division of the National Committee for a Free Germany (NKFD). The NKFD went on to spread anti-Nazi propaganda across German front lines, and grew considerably after the defeat at Stalingrad. Paulus' also joined Seydlitz in the League of German Officers, which garnered considerable attention given his status as a Field Marshall. When the Stalingrad generals arrived at POW camps their appearance painted a stark contrast from elegant uniforms adorned with medals and bright red trimmings, to the grey, exhausted, bent figures

⁷² Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War*. New York: Penguin Press, 2009. 420.

⁷³ Steinhoff et al, *Voices From The Third Reich: An Oral History*. 501.

of older POWs, dressed in tattered Russian wadded jackets.⁷⁴ Jesco Von Puttkamer; an army general staff officer at Stalingrad; POW in Russia until 1947; and leading member of the NKFD remembered:

We were so deeply influenced and so greatly shocked by what happened in Stalingrad that we felt we had to share it. The first step was to break the military oath. The second was to try to share our experiences with our compatriots on the other side of the front, to tell them that what had happened to us was in store for them, too. The realization that we were actually being used as a political instrument by the Russians only became apparent at the very end of the war...People like Seydlitz, who finally made up their minds to join after all-night discussions, used this exact argument time and again with other colleagues: The oath is no longer binding because it was sworn to a criminal.⁷⁵ Many POWs did not break their oath of allegiance to the Führer⁷⁶ as it was the very

backbone and foundation of their belief in National Socialism. As stated previously, some POWs broke their oath when Russian captors and members of the NKFD judiciously employed the carrot and stick method to garner more support. But, Stalingrad served as a monumental change in the way that Germans and Russians perceived the captivity. The rise of the NKFD and the emergence of Generals Seydlitz and Paulus as leading members of the League of German Officers put pressure on the Nazi party and publically exposed Hitler's renouncement of the 6th Army at Stalingrad. Chief of Staff of the Army General Staff, Heinz Wilhelm Guderian, spoke for most of the German High Command when he issued a statement to the troops at the front that Seydlitz' committee consisted of German communist émigrés, and that the German soldiers involved had been drugged.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Steinhoff et al, *Voices From The Third Reich*. 160.

⁷⁵ Steinhoff et al, *Voices From The Third Reich*.171-172.

⁷⁶ The Oath of Allegiance (*Führereid*) to the Führer, which was formerly known as the Reichswehreid, was altered in 1934 and sworn by all Wehrmacht officers. The oath : I swear by God this holy oath, that I want to ever loyally and sincerely serve my people and fatherland and be prepared as a brave and obedient soldier to risk my life for this oath at any time.

⁷⁷ J. W. Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 3 (1969): 187-204. 203.

The anti-Nazi leagues and the NKFD would be just the tip of the iceberg for the legacy of Stalingrad. German High Command and the propaganda ministry worked to conceal the activities of Seydlitz, and the League of German Officers. Captivity had evolved into a political tool and the thought of honorable German soldiers metamorphosing into Bolshevik agents was unbearable to Hitler, the Nazi regime and Germany. Stalingrad served as a catalyst for the unraveling of National Socialism and the shockwave that the defeat on the Volga sent through Germany would require special attention of Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels. The titanic feat to overcome for Goebbels and his staff would be the careful recreation of the events at Stalingrad to make it seem like the 6th Army died so that Germany could live.

The National Myth: *Propaganda, Vergeltung, Total War*

The National Myth

The annihilation of the 6th Army at Stalingrad left a vacuum for Goebbels to fill. Goebbels and Hitler agreed that a national myth was necessary to help explain the defeat at Stalingrad to the German people. Goebbels decided to focus on the ideological war between the Germans in the west and the Bolsheviks in the east and how the 6th Army's martyrdom was an essential casualty in the war against the Asiatic horde. Even from the beginning of the 1942 campaign and Operation Blau, the second wave into Russia was to be used as an opportunity to restore the German propaganda machine following a low tide point and failure the winter of 1941. When the blitz of the Nazi war machine spelled out repeated victories, the propaganda department had no problem giving factual accounts of the progress of the war. However, in the event of a slowed offensive or a defeat like Stalingrad, the opportunity to withhold information and misrepresent facts arose. Goebbels resorted to deception, distortion, and falsification to manufacture a rendition that would be appropriate for the German people. The objective accounts of Stalingrad were unbearable for the German people, so naturally, Goebbels replaced myth with reality.⁷⁸

The Stalingrad myth was a microcosm for the entire Nazi wartime propaganda effort. Hitler instructed Reich Press Chief Otto Dietrich, to emphasize the bitterness of the fighting to avoid raising unwarranted hopes among the

⁷⁸ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 187.

public.⁷⁹ Despite Hitler's eagerness to claim his nemesis' namesake, he made sure that the German people were fed information piecemeal. As the fighting became more difficult and the entire southern initiative proved more complex than the Führer expected, propagandists phased out the front-page stories of the fighting on the Don and the Volga so that the German people reduced their expectations. The concept of race and racial war was paramount for Hitler and Goebbels as the distinction between the Russian and the European afforded the propaganda department much needed ammunition to justify the slowed progress on the Eastern front. The Russians were described as 'Bolshevik beasts' to help show that the German soldiers were fighting an enemy that was so backwards in nature, it refused to recognize when a struggle was useless. The only way to describe the slowed advance on the Volga and in the Don basin was to explain that a racial war would take time, but the German people, led by Hitler, were destined by Providence to save Europe and preserve their 2000-year-old civilization. Goebbels spoke of great sacrifices that were necessary to secure final victory on the eastern front and the fate of the Germany and the Fatherland hung in the balance.

On November 22, 1942 when the Red Army successfully encircled 6th Army when the jaws of the Soviet pincers met in Kalatch on the Don, the military communiqués, normally a bastion of truth, failed to report anything about Soviet progress.⁸⁰ Two days later on November 24, the communiqués reported that Soviet forces had broken through German lines southwest of Stalingrad, but news of the encirclement of the 6th Army or the Soviet breakthrough northwest of Stalingrad

⁷⁹ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 189.

⁸⁰ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 192.

was completely concealed. For the next two months, the Führer made sure there was no public mention of the crisis on the Volga and the 6th Army that was being picked apart daily by the Red Army. 6th Army soldiers wrote letters home, but these letters also were subjected to thorough censorship and politicization as letters were read and sorted prior to their delivery back in Germany. Anything that spoke poorly of the war effort or expressed an ounce of pessimism was considered *untragbar* or unbearable for Germany. Some letters exposing the situation did reach Germany and general insecurities or anxieties about the soldiers on the Volga grew steadily towards the December of 1942. Goebbels tried to calm the rising concerns by explaining that the communiqués at times had left out information to protect the troops at the front and when the moment was favorable, more information would be released about the fighting at Stalingrad. To counter the pessimists and swelling criticism, Martin Bormann, Hitler's personal secretary, issued a directive on the Führer's order, which ordered the Nazis to employ force and strike out against 'incorrigible pessimists and small-minded philistines'.⁸¹

Despite attempts to stamp out any flame of dissention, the eminent truth about Stalingrad would trump the lies and shortcomings that the Nazi party tried vehemently to conceal. In the middle of January, 1943 as the 6th Army perished in the city and out on the steppe in the last few weeks of the battle, Hitler and Goebbels agreed that it was time to start preparing the nation for news of the disaster. Information was slowly released on the tragic situation on the Volga, but the creation of a national myth allowed the propagandists to portray the battle in a way

⁸¹ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 195.

that would honor the 6th Army and explain their annihilation in a larger context of sacrifice for western civilization against the terrors of the eastern Asiatic horde. On January, 16, 1943, roughly 55 days after the jaws of the Red Army met at Kalach, the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) finally reported for the first time that for weeks German soldiers in Stalingrad had been in a defensive battle against the Russians who were 'attacking from all sides'.⁸² Towards the end of January, the 6th Army was reported to won eternal honor for their heroic and sacrificial struggle in an attempt to bolster the war effort. Headlines about the last few pockets of resistance holding out were glorified as 'Hold Fast—To the Last Man', 'The Heroes of Stalingrad' and 'The Führer Honors the Heroic Band at Stalingrad'.⁸³

On January 30, 1943, one day before Field Marshall Paulus was captured, Reichsminister of the Luftwaffe Hermann Goering compared the 6th Army at Stalingrad to the Spartans at Thermopylae in an attempt to highlight their heroism and remind the nation 6th Army's struggle was for the Fatherland. On the same night, Goebbels spoke at the Sportpalast in Berlin to reaffirm Germany's trust and follow the Führer in the war against Jewish-Bolshevism and that sacrifice at Stalingrad was necessary to protect National Socialism and Germany. When Paulus and his 6th Army capitulated and entered captivity on February 2, 1943, propaganda measures were revved up to obscure that upwards of 90,000 German soldiers surrendered. Newspapers published the following headlines:

A MAGNIFICENT EXAMPLE. INTESIFIED FIGHTING AROUND STALINGRAD IN CONCENTRATED AREA. IMMORTAL HONOR OF THE STALINGRAD FIGHTERS. BRAVE AND LYOAL UNTO DEATH. FOR FUHRER, FOLK, AND FATHERLAND. SO

⁸² Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 196.

⁸³ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 197.

THEY FOUGHT AND SO THEY DIE, GENERALS AND PRIVATES SIDE BY SIDE.
GERMAN COMRADESHIP IN ARMS SURMOUNTS HORROR AND MISERY. COMRADES
IN DEATH TO THE LAST CARTIDGE. THAT GERMANY MAY LIVE.
THEIR SACRIFICE IS NOT IN VAIN.⁸⁴

Hitler, Goebbels, and Dietrich knew that to save face and maintain belief in Nazism, the idea of a national myth needed to portray the 6th Army in a more successful light than the Moscow failure the winter before—more importantly it had to be grandiose and significant to show the progress of the Wehrmacht and their standing in the World War.⁸⁵The National Myth was a tool to explain the honorable sacrifice of the 6th Army as a means of rehabilitation, both in the eyes of Germany and Europe; but also was an opportunity to make the Nazis viable candidates for redemption.⁸⁶ Since Paulus did not commit suicide, there was a lack of a scapegoat for the Führer, but the last thing he was going to do was damage his prestige and take responsibility in public for the annihilation of an entire German Army. By stylizing the defeat, the German people could view it not as a loss but as a great military triumph that was in lieu of the gallant national socialist.⁸⁷The Myth would allow him to distract the German people from the strains of a two front war, and hopefully act like a shot of adrenaline to the home front and restore the patriotic fervor seen during the time of blitz. After the battle of Stalingrad ended and the 6th Army entered captivity, the propaganda department knew it was crucial to formulate their own reality of the situation so that the German people would never know of the massive capitulation that could potentially unhinge the entire Nazi

⁸⁴ Theodor Plievier, Richard Winston, and Clara Winston. *Stalingrad*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.238-9.

⁸⁵ Evans, *The Third Reich at War*. 419.

⁸⁶ Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 168.

⁸⁷ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 204.

system. Goebbels gave emotional speeches that rivaled the victorious tones following the summer and fall of 1941. A three-day period of mourning was ordered to help prepare the nation for the newly constructed myth. Hitler made sure German High Command's Special Announcement on February 3 was streamlined with he and Goebbels' vision for how to portray the defeat at Stalingrad. The German High Command Announcement painted a picture of the 6th Army that was 'true to their oath', and stated 'the sacrifice was not in vain', its tenure in Stalingrad had served as the 'bulwark of the European mission and tied down strong enemy forces, enabling the High Command to mount counter-measures, and that the men of Stalingrad 'died that Germany might live and their example will have resounding effect on future generations and the legacy of Germany'.⁸⁸

Despite the efforts of Hitler and Goebbels to cover up the truth, the public grew dissatisfied with the story that the 6th Army had perished to the last man. Pessimism and low morale became the themes du jour in February and in an act to stave off a crisis, Hitler ordered that all military commentaries on Stalingrad were to be discontinued.⁸⁹ It was a dark day for Germany as confidence in leadership wavered and the truth about the disaster at Stalingrad slowly seeped into mainstream culture. Josef Goebbels addressed the nation on February 18, 1943 in front of 14,000 handpicked Nazi fanatics at the Berlin Sportpalast in an effort to refocus the German people and summon the National Socialist fervor that was waning in the days after the mourning of Stalingrad.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Wedel and Berndt, *op. cit.*, February 1943, 52-3., as cited in Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad." 199.

⁸⁹ Baird, "The Myth of Stalingrad". 200.

⁹⁰ Evans, *The Third Reich At War*. 424.

The Call for Total War

Goebbels speech titled, *Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose* was an opportunity to explain the recent struggles along the eastern front and to emphasize that their enemy, in the Bolsheviks, was sub-human. He preached to a packed Sportpalast hall that the German people were exceptional in that they exclusively had the ability to defeat the Bolshevik-Jewish threat in the east. It was their duty to protect the west and Germany's 2000-year-old civilization. The 'Russian' was an Asiatic beast that posed a clear and present threat to Nazi Germany. Goebbels said that 'Stalingrad was and is fate's great alarm call to the German nation' and accepting the notion of 'Total War' was the only solution and path to recover from recent misfortunes at Stalingrad.⁹¹ He shouted, "The battle that German soldiers face in the east exceeds in all its hardness, dangers and difficulties all human imagining. It demands our full national strength. This is a threat to the Reich and to the European continent that casts all previous dangers into the shadows. If we fail, we will have failed our historic mission".⁹² Goebbels' central thesis to his speech was that Germany needed to put the rumors of Stalingrad behind them, for that would take energy away from the Total War effort. He explained that Bolshevism and Jewry were intertwined in their effort to reign down military terror on the rest of the world.

⁹¹ Josef Goebbels, "Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose." German Propaganda Archive. January 1, 1998. Accessed February 12, 2015. <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb36.htm>.

⁹² *Ibid.*

His call for Total War was a way to distract from the recent cynicism and pessimism that had stemmed from the Stalingrad disaster, and that a complete effort from the home front would be the only way to trump the threat in the East. Goebbels added, “The tragic battle of Stalingrad is a symbol of heroic, manly resistance to the revolt of the steppes. It has not only a military, but also an intellectual and spiritual significance for the German people. Here for the first time our eyes have been opened to the true nature of the war”.⁹³ Goebbels, used brilliant rhetoric to reinforce that the battle of Stalingrad and the sacrifice of the 6th Army was not a defeat, but a victory in the sense that now the German people were stirred from their stupor and conscious to the imminent threat in the East. Goebbels made it clear that the only reason the Russians annihilated the 6th Army was because they knew no bounds and were motivated by their desire to cast their Bolshevik shadow to all stretches of the globe. Mobilization and a commitment to Total War would be the only defense against the revolutionary storm rolling across the steppe. The propaganda minister later compared the German people to Frederick the Great and explained that they would triumph and remain unshakeable through all twists of fate.⁹⁴ Goebbels and Hitler hoped the outcome of the ‘Total War’ speech would quash any pessimistic sentiment surrounding the defeat at Stalingrad as well as motivate all of Germany to do their part in the war effort.

In reality, Germany was feeling the strain of the fifth year of the war as the pressure of fighting two fronts took a serious toll on the German economy. The Wehrmacht’s insatiable demand for oil was never quenched in southern Russia, and

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

the war production numbers were pedestrian to the Allies. Raw materials were lacking making a boost in production a moot point. In essence, 'Total War' focused on mobilizing women to suppress domestic consumption in order to divert much-needed resources to the war production.⁹⁵ Hitler was fearful of any uprising, and propaganda was integral to keep the public at bay and to prevent the entire quilt of National Socialism from unraveling in the spring of 1943. German civilian morale slumped in the spring of 1943 as the people longed for the days of blitz and the successful campaigns in Eastern Europe and France. Stalingrad was the seismic blast that shook Germany from Hitler down to the common civilian. Goebbel's 'Total War' speech was a valiant effort to mask the truth and distract the German people, but the damage created deep fissures that would bring Nazi Germany to the ground in years to come.

The German people wanted to be proof and facts that would reconcile the Wehrmacht's recent shortcomings. Following Stalingrad, the Russians fought on momentum, which made it hard for the Wehrmacht, specifically Army Group South to regain the initiative in southern Russia. The German people were desperate for signs of optimism and the consistent allied air raids and bombings of German cities were a daily reminder that perhaps the tides had turned in the war. The propaganda department once again filled the void as the Nazi leadership could only promise an all-out retaliation at some time in the future.⁹⁶ The idea of *vergeltung*, or retaliation took on a different meaning in that it inherently implied there would be a German

⁹⁵ Evans, *The Third Reich At War*. 426.

⁹⁶ Gerald, Kerwin "Waiting for Retaliation—A Study in Nazi Propaganda Behavior and German Civilian Morale." *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 3, The Second World War: Part 2 (1981): 565-83. 565.

offensive or attack that would tip the scales in Germany's favor decisively. *Vergeltung* became a staple in Goebbels' propaganda repertoire as continuously spoke of the 'day of retribution' in his speeches from early summer of 1943 into the fall. The population grew bitter as they eagerly awaited news of the Wehrmacht regaining the initiative. Empty promises frustrated the German people as sarcastic comments were heard to the extent of, "We cannot prevent the enemy from continuing his destructive attacks with fair words and empty threats".⁹⁷ Anger and strong emotions spilled over as doubt and skepticism grew further. When propagandists continued to speak of *vergeltung* into the fall of 1943, it had a reverse effect on the population and was seen as panacea to Germany's struggles and difficulties in the past two years of the war. As months passed, the population began to doubt if the concept of retaliation was ever based in fact. In early 1944, large parts of the population failed to believe that *vergeltung* ever existed, but instead it was an invention of the propaganda department.⁹⁸ With the Allied landing on D-Day, June 6, 1944, the idea of *vergeltung* had long been forgotten making the launch of the first V-1 rockets a week later anti-climatic. The national myth surrounding Stalingrad, Goebbels 'Total War' speech, and the long-drawn out retaliation had significant effects on the faith in leadership. Pessimism was a common theme and the public believed the propaganda department continued to construct bluffs of titanic proportions.

⁹⁷ Kerwin, "Waiting for Retaliation—A Study in Nazi Propaganda Behavior and German Civilian Morale." 567.

⁹⁸ Kerwin, "Waiting for Retaliation—A Study in Nazi Propaganda Behavior and German Civilian Morale." 578.

Stalingrad was the catalyst for defeatist attitudes and bitterness that was aimed at leadership in the spring of 1943. The national myth about the 6th Army was only a small sample of propagandistic constructions that wrought the Third Reich. Goebbel's call for 'Total War' and the long anticipated *vergeltung* added to the frustrations and growing sense of disenfranchisement that permeated throughout the German population. As Winston Churchill stated, 'Stalingrad was the hinge of fate', and unbeknownst to Hitler and the Nazi party, the employment of propaganda surrounding the defeat at Stalingrad would unwind the critical fibers that held National Socialism together.⁹⁹

The Shockwave of Stalingrad: *Psychological Shift, German Morale, Shortcomings of German High Command*

Psychological Shift Following Stalingrad

After the German defeat at Stalingrad, German High Command recognized that there was shock on a psychological level among the soldiers and the civilians. Leadership tried to provide a new spiritual attitude for the civilians through propaganda campaigns, and the call for 'Total War', but truly the annihilation of an entire German army on the Volga and the loss of the initiative in Southern Russia left the population feeling bitter, alienated, and pessimistic. The German people wanted to see success; hear of blitzkrieg campaigns, and see the Nazi party restore the confidence they once portrayed. Goebbels continued to employ propaganda to

⁹⁹ Chuikov, et al, *The Battle for Stalingrad*. 1.

counter balance the Allies advance and success in Northern Africa and the growing confidence of the Red Army in the East, but when Wehrmacht soldiers' morale began to dip the entire system hung in the balance.

The shock of Stalingrad proved traumatic to German soldiers' and in response the High Command called for larger emphasis and practice on 'military-ideological guidance'.¹⁰⁰ It was no mystery that the Wehrmacht soldiers along the Eastern front questioned their allegiance to the Führer after the 6th Army had failed at Stalingrad and were left to die for almost sixty days as the Russians reduced the size of the *kessel* daily from Mid-November 1942 to the end of January 1943. The anti-fascist/Nazi leagues and the League of Officers did little to settle their doubts about Nazism as the voices of Seydlitz and Paulus were heard by Germans along the front line—a sinister propaganda effort the Russians employed to show German soldiers the futility of their fight. Ideological guidance was necessary along the frontlines to strengthen soldiers' resolve and will to fight from the innermost forces residing within the troops.¹⁰¹ When word about the capitulation of the 6th Army spread among the Wehrmacht it forced soldiers to question why they were fighting and if their allegiance was to country or to their Führer, a politician at heart.

Major Karl Von Lersner was sent to the front in February 1943 to get a pulse for the state of morale after Stalingrad. When Lersner met with soldiers at Army Group Centre he said the best way to describe the psychological condition of the

¹⁰⁰ Jörg Echternkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. Vol. IX/I. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 583.

¹⁰¹ Echternkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. 584.

troops was neither morale, nor attitude, but ‘argument within themselves’.¹⁰² The depth of the psychological damage caused by Stalingrad was too severe for ad hoc propaganda campaigns—German soldiers needed schooling to remind them why they served the Führer and why they should lay down their lives in the name of National Socialism. By the end of March 1943, officers were reminded to strengthen their attitude, morale, and to resist the home front’s agitation following Stalingrad.¹⁰³ German High Command praised the Red Army’s political schooling and guidance and viewed their *politruks*¹⁰⁴ as far superior and more effective than the Wehrmacht’s. The Germans believed the Russians were more successful in hardening their soldiers’ mindset and claimed that their ideological foundations were their greatest strength. Manstein endorsed in September 1943, that the deliberate military-ideological guidance, topical propaganda, and realistic war reporting were indispensable for the front-line soldier.¹⁰⁵ Overall, following Stalingrad, the Wehrmacht recognized their front-line soldier lacked the political fervor that helped fuel the successful campaigns in the early years of the war. The Red Army’s recent successes at Stalingrad, Kursk, and the imminent D-Day invasion had Nazi Germany on the ropes. German High Command believed that an ideological hardening and reinforcement of Nazi foundations were going to be the main weapons to save Germany from the threats of Bolshevism and the Western Allies.

¹⁰² Echterkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. 585.

¹⁰³ Echterkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. 587.

¹⁰⁴ *Politruk* was the Russian name for political commissars who was responsible for political education of the Red Army.

¹⁰⁵ Echterkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. 596.

The Deterioration of German Morale

There is a significant degree of ambiguity surrounding the German morale, specifically how the 6th Army and the soldiers at Stalingrad either maintained their belief in the Führer or they renounced the entire structure of National Socialism. Hitler brought Germany from a chaotic state following World War I and the Weimar Republic, to a continent and world superpower. He had shown them the light and bailed them out when days were darkest in Germany. The way Hitler had marched across Europe helped galvanize the people of Germany and helped them buy into the notion of the Third Reich. After the failed March on Moscow in the Winter of 1941, the belief in Hitler and the future of Germany never wavered. Even when times were tough up until the winter of 1942 and the annihilation of the 6th Army at Stalingrad, soldiers of the Wehrmacht believed Hitler would bail them out. Some believed in him and the world of National Socialism because it was the only idea left to cling to in a situation replete with death, sorrow, and resemblances of an apocalyptic scenario. The easiest way to investigate and determine if morale was high during Stalingrad is to analyze personal documents: letters, memoirs.

The war against the Soviet Union presented a quandary for German Soldiers as they face a nation that was drastically larger in men, resources, and land than any other opponent. Faith in Hitler was paramount in the fight against the Soviet Union and the war against the Soviets underwent a fresh twist from the propaganda department to ensure that soldiers' perception of their duties in Russia were uniform. Even during the Wehrmacht's first encounter with a Russian winter in 1941, soldiers held the Führer in deity-like status. One soldier wrote,

The Führer has grown into the greatest figure in the century, in his hand lies the destiny of the world and of culturally-perceptive humanity. May his pure sword strike down the Satanic monster. Yes, the blows are still hard, but the horror will be forced into the shadows through inexorable Need, through the command which derives from our National Socialist idea. This [battle] is for a new ideology, a new belief, a new life! I am glad that I can participate, even if as a tiny cog, in this war of light against darkness.¹⁰⁶

Even at the gates of Stalingrad and after a successful spring/summer campaign of Operation Blau in 1942, the collective German voice was sure the war in southern Russia would result in success reminiscent of the days of Blitz and the campaigns in western Europe. The growing sense of invincibility that surrounded the Wehrmacht stemmed directly from Hitler's belief in himself and his own will. A deep belief and psychological uniformity was essential to Hitler's prestige and his own narrative as a divine agent sent from Providence.

Belief in Hitler and the cause also needs an asterisk because in a totalitarian state where draconian methods were commonplace, soldiers understood their career and lives were directly tied to their allegiance to the Führer. Stalingrad serves as a good measuring stick for German morale, but as stated previously, the letters and personal documents that left German soldiers along the Volga were often politicized and stylized to avoid the repercussions. The Field Post Inspection Office of 4th Panzer Army examined 11,237 letters sent to and from Stalingrad between December 20, 1942 and January 31, 1943. The examination process stated that almost until the very end German soldiers expressed their loyalty and belief in Hitler.¹⁰⁷ Yes, some soldiers genuinely believed that Hitler would bail them out of the *kessel*, as he had done before in previous campaigns, but in reality any report

¹⁰⁶ *Deutsche Soldaten*, p. 19, as cited in Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. 166.

¹⁰⁷ Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. 166.

that presented a defeatist attitude or spoke negatively about leadership was categorized as *untragbar*. The letters and personal notes that endorsed leadership and expressed continued faith in Hitler only helped provide a platform for the National Myth that would be unveiled in February 1943. Even when the soldiers in the *kessel* knew the end was near that clung to the beliefs because it was the only credence or substance they had left to believe in. Hitler did bail out the men that froze on the steppe, he did not supply them with enough food to survive, nor did he permit a breakout attempt, but if men consciously accepted their reality then the Russians had already won. The days of paring Hitler and National Socialism to the strength of steel iron were gone towards Christmas of 1942. One soldier reflected on the hopelessness of the situation:

The Führer has promised to get us out of here. This has been read to us, and we all firmly believed it. I still believe it today, because I simply must believe in something. If it isn't true, what is there left for me to believe in? Let me go on believing, dear Grete; all my life—or eight years of it, at least—I have believed in the Führer and taken him at his word...If what we were promised is not true, then Germany will be lost, for not other promises can be kept after that.¹⁰⁸

No longer was Hitler able to distort the realities of the 6th Army soldiers abandoned at Stalingrad. Those who clung to their beliefs did so because of three factors: to uphold the prestige and honor of their names or family-caste background, because they firmly believed the Führer would lead them to salvation, and because they did so out of survival and the fear that a conscious recognition of the situation would spell imminent disaster.

¹⁰⁸Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. 167.

Last Letters from Stalingrad

It is difficult to put a finger on the point when confidence in leadership began to waver. Before soldiers of the Wehrmacht began to speak pessimistically towards High Command, their own morale started to deteriorate. The sheer size of the Soviet Union in terms of geographic space and the wealth of available bodies were well known to German Soldiers. The stories of Napoleon's infamous retreat from Moscow in 1812 put a scare in the German soldiers' minds. In the spring of 1941, the Germans found out that the invasion of Russia was far from the cakewalk it was in Poland. A year and a half later in the winter of 1942, Stalingrad was a chilling reminder to the German soldiers that the invasion in Russia was a monumental undertaking and possibly a cardinal error.

The encirclement in November 1942 was a pivotal moment and the psychological shift in the German morale. Not all the soldiers realized their fate was sealed following the encirclement, but it certainly was the beginning of more open pessimism and defeatist attitudes. One indication of pessimism was the secret decision to transport all the German nurses stuck in the *kessel*, even before most of the wounded, to ensure they never fell in Russian hands.¹⁰⁹ Under the same veil of secrecy, soldiers contemplated self-inflicted injuries to obtain a free pass and leave the *kessel* when transport planes were still able to leave.

One problem for the 6th Army stuck inside the *kessel* was that the German people knew very little about their tragic situation. Even if they did write letters home, often the mail was subject to censorship and anything deemed *untragbar* was

¹⁰⁹ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943*. 281.

destroyed. In the middle of January men wrote home to their families usually in a mixed pattern: the most devoted to the Nazi regime focused on national honor, the great struggle, and belief that the Führer would find a way; while others wrote family farewells and broke the news gently that they might be writing their last letters.¹¹⁰ Goebbels instituted censorship programs that studied letters from the Stalingrad *kessel* to report on morale and feelings toward the regime. The soldiers had very few ideas or beliefs to cling to as the Red Army slowly picked away at them like carrion. Letters home were a way to think about family and their legacy. The hopelessness of the situation forced soldiers to confess to their family their imminent death or it was a time to ardently affirm their belief in Hitler—because it was a way to avoid the truth. *Last Letters from Stalingrad* is a collection of letters that were supposed to be destroyed in one of the last convoys out of the *kessel*. Miraculously, the letters were labeled as *untragbar* so they were seized and forgotten, but thankfully never destroyed. The following is a small variety of the types of letters that soldiers wrote:

This letter will take two weeks to reach you. By then you will already have read in the papers what has taken place here. Don't think too much about it, for in reality everything will have ended differently: let other people worry about setting the record straight.¹¹¹

When you receive this letter, listen intently to it, perhaps you will hear my voice then. They tell us that our struggle is for Germany. But there are only a few here who believe that this meaningless sacrifice could be of use to our country.¹¹²

I was shocked when I saw the map. We are entirely alone, without help from the outside. Hitler has left us in a lurch. If the airfield is still in our possession, this letter may still get out...When Stalingrad has fallen, you'll hear and read it. And then you'll know that I shall not come back. ¹¹³

No one can tell me any longer that the men died with the words "Deutschland" or "Heil Hitler" on their lips. There is plenty of dying, no question of that; but the last word is "mother" or the name of

¹¹⁰ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943*. 349.

¹¹¹ Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. 19.

¹¹² Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. 22.

¹¹³ Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. 32-33.

someone dear...The Führer made a promise to bail us out of here; they read it to us and we believed in it firmly. Even now I still believe it, because I have to believe in something. If it is not true, what else could I believe in?¹¹⁴

We know that we are the victims of serious mistakes in leadership; also, the wearing down of the fortress Stalingrad will cause most severe damage to Germany and her people. ¹¹⁵

This is the end. It will last perhaps another week, I think, then the game's up. I do not want to look for reasons which one could marshal for or against our situation. The reasons are now altogether unimportant and pointless. But if I am to say anything about them it is this: Do not look to us for an explanation of the situation, but to yourselves and Hitler who is responsible for it...Be on guard, so that a greater disaster does not overtake our country. The hell on the Volga should be a warning to you. I beg you, don't brush off this experience.¹¹⁶

The disaster at Stalingrad was a wake-up call to High Command and the Wehrmacht soldiers. In an attempt to gloss over the disaster on the Volga, Hitler decreed on

January 25, 1943 the reforming of the 6th Army with strength of twenty divisions.¹¹⁷

The Führer had a vision that following the 6th Army's annihilation he would

commemorate their sacrifice by recreating an army in their name that would rise

from the ashes. The phoenix comparison was a sick reminder of how the lives of

upwards of 90,000 men fit into the National Myth narrative. Clearly the

encirclement followed by Hitler's order that nullified a breakout attempt acted as

the catalyst that created a chain reaction pessimism and defeatist attitudes. Those

who remained faithful to the regime did so because they sought to uphold their oath

to the Führer or because their belief comforted them in a time where nihilistic

attitudes were commonplace. Soldiers who actively renounced the regime did so out

of survival as seen in the anti-Nazi leagues in the POW camps or because the threat

of Nazism no longer hung over the soldiers after they saw the Third Reich's engine

stall and break down on the banks of the Volga. German morale following Stalingrad

¹¹⁴ Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters from Stalingrad*. 50-51.

¹¹⁵ Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. 54.

¹¹⁶ Schnieder and Gullans, *Last Letters From Stalingrad*. 126-127.

¹¹⁷ Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943*. 366.

was low, but the National Myth and the Red Army's soaring confidence left little time for the Wehrmacht to mourn the loss. Even the soldiers at Stalingrad who remained faithful entered Russian captivity, a reminder of the Führer's empty promises and that Germany had lost the initiative in Russia.

The Shortcomings of German High Command and Hitler's Demise

Following the annihilation of the 6th Army on the bank of the Volga, Germany began to question itself. Perhaps Stalingrad was not the last monumental battle in Russia, but it certainly marked a psychological shift in the German psyche. Delving deeper into the psychological processes that led to dysfunction and decisions—or lack thereof—helps us understand how the disaster at Stalingrad unfolded. Members of High Command feared upsetting the Führer so they often acted as sycophants rather than offering alternative military plans. Few dared speak out against Hitler, so he was surrounded by men who despite understanding the circumstances that limited the 6th Army, feared for their careers and lacked the courage to take actions on their own.¹¹⁸

The easiest way to define the behavior of Hitler and his supporting staff during the siege on Stalingrad is inflexibility. Not only did Hitler suffer from constant mood swings and rages but he was rigid in his unwillingness to change plans or listen to alternatives. Equally important to the idea of inflexibility is that Hitler did not act in a power vacuum—his advisors were there every step of the way as they all came to a consensus during the destruction of the 6th Army. The

¹¹⁸ Robert A. Pois, and Philip Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004. 174.

groupthink hypothesis helps explain how the 6th Army was abandoned on the Volga. Groupthink hypothesis implies that members of a group quash inner doubts or attitudes about a decision for the sake of reaching a consensus, and of greater importance, out of acceptance by the group.¹¹⁹ Even in the early stages of the invasion into Russia, German High Command exhibited groupthink as they shared an underestimation of the Red Army's strength, resources, and size, and they collectively refused to change the plan of attack or to alter their views on how to approach the war with Russia.¹²⁰ Hitler's entourage bent in every way to the Führer's demands and wishes. Dysfunctionalism was a common theme that wrought Hitler and his generals. They collaborated out of fear and inflexibility, which doomed the 6th Army. In the end, Hitler was only victorious over his generals, not the Russians.

In autumn of 1942, upset with the slow pace of the German advance, Hitler acted in a fit and dismissed General Franz Halder as chief of Army General Staff on September 26. Hitler believed that it was necessary to educate the General Staff in the 'fanatical faith in the Idea' and that he was determined to enforce his will 'also' on the Army.¹²¹ To replace Halder, was Kurt Zeitzler, whom Hitler believed would be more complacent and less independent-minded than his predecessor.¹²² Hitler struggled with a paranoia that put him in a state of severe distrust of his General Staff. Also in September 1942, he insisted a stenographer record every conversation he had with his General Staff—further evidence of distrust, paranoia, and rigid

¹¹⁹ Pois and Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*. 177.

¹²⁰ Pois and Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*. 181.

¹²¹ Ziemke and Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 449.

¹²² *Ibid.*

unwillingness to be receptive to alternative plans and tactics.¹²³ Hitler's personality traits and character flaws were a driving force behind the defeat at Stalingrad.

Another raw nerve for the General Staff was how the Führer constantly intervened in the conduct of field operations, and the ruling out of operational and tactical initiative.¹²⁴ The little agency his generals had—he revoked. When they were hamstrung he exploded in a fit of rage. Hitler's behavior only confirmed that Nazi Germany was in a state of disarray. Robert Pois adds:

Naturally, no single psychological hypothesis can explain all of Hitler's decisions, or the lack of them at Stalingrad—or, for that matter, in other contexts. Nonetheless we believe that Hitler *can* be described as a narcissistic personality whose fear of being the target of aggression or abuse, combined with a constant need for self-affirmation that led to a sense of grandiosity, caused him to react to stress in ways best covered by the frustration-aggression hypothesis.¹²⁵ In an act of cleansing himself of responsibility for the fate of the 6th Army from November 1942 to January 1943, Hitler's active role in day-to-day decisions making for Stalingrad drastically curtailed. For someone vehemently claiming there would be 'no withdrawal', he played a relatively minor role in the tactical planning towards the end of the Stalingrad saga—a further example of his unwillingness to involve himself in actions that might result in failure and more importantly— bruise his prestige.¹²⁶

Following Stalingrad in the spring of 1943, Hitler's charisma began to fade. Jokes and criticism towards the regime became more prominent. People openly criticized the regime, declaring it to be inefficient, poorly organized and corrupt.¹²⁷ Simultaneously Hitler began to fade from the public view and his speeches were

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Echternkamp, *Germany and the Second World War Volume IX/I: German Wartime Society 1939-1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival*. 585.

¹²⁵ Pois and Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*. 177.

¹²⁶ Poise and Langer, *Command Failure in War: Psychology and Leadership*. 202.

¹²⁷ Evans, *The Third Reich at War*. 423.

brief and lacked the fire of his earlier years as politician and excellent orator. On March 21, 1943, when he made his first public address since Stalingrad, he spoke briefly and at such speed and dull monotone, that people wondered if he had been racing to get it finished.¹²⁸ To dampen the public's growing pessimism, Goebbels knew propaganda efforts needed to increase. The call for Total War, the idea of *vergeltung* weapons, and the National Myth were just a few examples of how leadership tried to distract the public from the turning tide of the war. Hitler bore the blunt of the blame following Stalingrad since he was the acting commander-in-chief. The Führer was so concerned with presenting an image of success that he reconciled the disaster as a great sacrifice and that the 6th Army had performed a service in a critical time by tying down several hundred thousand Soviet troops in the southern front of the war.¹²⁹

The shockwave from Stalingrad not only shook the German people but it marred their vision of Hitler and the regime. The Russians fought valiantly and tactically were more adaptive and dynamic than the Wehrmacht, but German High Command was plagued by groupthink and was led by an amateur that distrusted his generals, refused to take responsibility for failures, suffered from rigid unwillingness to change or adapt, and believed his *will*—secured a German victory in southern Russia. The 6th Army's annihilation and the disaster on the Volga were inevitable with shortcomings of German High Command.

While German High Command suffered from unwillingness to adapt, they misjudged Russia's economic resources and internal political strength to change and

¹²⁸ Evans, *The Third Reich At War*. 507.

¹²⁹ Echterkamp, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision In The East*. 501-2.

rally the Soviet Union to combat the Wehrmacht's advance.¹³⁰ Following the successful campaigns in Western Europe and Poland, the Wehrmacht relied on sheer strength and size rather than intelligence. After the Stalingrad, the emphasis on vital military intelligence changed as Hitler was paranoid that the allies would attack in on several different fronts. As a result he over extended his armies and kept them locked up in widespread areas since he was uncertain of where and when the allies would attack.¹³¹ Abwehr,¹³² the German military intelligence department, struggled from financial corruption and political disaffection that stemmed from Admiral Canaris appointing personal friends to higher posts in the department and the competing SS intelligence service constantly handicapping other departments.¹³³ Even though formal intelligence services were not a staple in the Nazi War Machine during the war with Russia in 1941-1942, the inherent corruption and lack of uniformity within Abwehr made it difficult for the regime to compete with the allied joint-intelligence machinery. The Wehrmacht was simply ill prepared to maintain a war with Russia and the Allies because of the dysfunctionality that permeated all levels of regime.

¹³⁰ Paul Winter, *Defeating Hitler: Whitehall's Secret Report On Why Hitler Lost The War*. London: Continuum, 2012.94.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Abwehr was the principle German Intelligence service with tasks of operational espionage, political and military subversion, counter-espionage and the provision of intelligence from secret sources. Admiral Canaris was the director of the Abwehr who lacked organizing ability as cited in, Winter, *Defeating Hitler: Whitehall's Secret Report On Why Hitler Lost The War*. 95.

¹³³ Winter, *Defeating Hitler: Whitehall's Secret Report On Why Hitler Lost The War*.95.

Conclusion: *Russian Agency and the Legacy of Stalingrad*

Russian Agency

The eastern front and invasion in Russia was meant to be a war of annihilation. Nazi propagandists presented the German campaign as a defensive crusade against an unholy Bolshevik empire.¹³⁴ It would be a war of destruction and extermination, a *Vernichtungskrieg*.¹³⁵ The Wehrmacht had a duty to protect the west and the rest of Europe from the terrors of the Asiatic horde in the east. The German propaganda machine categorized the Soviets as subhuman, which helped explain ideologically why the Germans were so confident they would smash the Red Army in the course of a single, lightning campaign.¹³⁶ From the German perspective, it was simply illogical that the backwards Soviets would halt the Wehrmacht in its tracks. At the same time, the Russians used their own propaganda to play on the patriotic sentiments that stirred up emotions to protect the Motherland and fight for every last square inch of Soviet soil.¹³⁷ Despite German High Command's pitfalls, the Russians were simply not in a position to lose the battle of Stalingrad. The eastern front was a war of attrition, but what Hitler overlooked was that the Soviets inherently had a massive wealth of resources and men to fight a murderously expensive war.

Stalingrad in particular proved that the Red Army was fully capable and up to the challenge. While the German propaganda machine spoke of bitter fighting on the

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 84.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 85.

¹³⁷ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 90.

Volga, Soviet propagandists twisted the battle into a national myth as well. Stalingrad was a significant moment for Russia to prove itself and victory on the Volga galvanized from the threat of punishment, patriotism, and protecting the Motherland.¹³⁸ The soviet propaganda department compared the garrison at Stalingrad to the Russian Civil War and the heroic defense of Tsaritsyn.¹³⁹ The Soviets simply had enough men to send into the Stalingrad meat grinder daily, while the German mechanized assault ground to a halt. The Luftwaffe became ineffective at Stalingrad because the close proximity of the street fighting made it difficult to accurately bomb the enemy. Also the overall strength and capacity of the Luftwaffe was reduced significantly by the strains of the war in North Africa. While Hitler grew frustrated with the slowed assault and was unwilling to listen to his generals, Stalin became increasingly more receptive to *Stavka's* and ideas of a massive counter-offensive.¹⁴⁰

Stalingrad certainly lived up to the expectations of a war of attrition, but as fall faded to winter, it became a war of resources as well. The Soviets were able to ferry troops over the Volga in the veil of darkness during the night, but once the river froze, troops were able to come over in larger numbers. The frozen river created a highway for thousands of Red Army soldiers to stage for the massive counter-attack in the middle of November. While the Red Army slowly crept into position to initiate Little Saturn, Chuikov and his 62nd Army kept the Germans at bay inside the city. Much like on the open steppe, NKVD officers kept soldiers employed

¹³⁸ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 132.

¹³⁹ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 134.

¹⁴⁰ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 149.

blocking detachments and shot any soldiers who tried to retreat.¹⁴¹ While German High Command believed the Russians were on their last legs and bleeding out, the Soviets were not only in the middle of launching a larger mounted offensive focused on Army Group center with hopes of regaining the initiative in southern Russia, but they were receiving aid from the Allied forces through the lend-lease program. Between 1941-1945 the Soviet Union's western allies supplied roughly 10 percent of the Soviet wartime economic needs.¹⁴² Most of the supplies and aid arrived after Stalingrad, but as the Soviet Union balanced on the edge of economic and territorial collapse, any support made a crucial difference. The United States under its lend-lease program supplied 36,000 trucks, 43,000 jeeps, 2,000 locomotives and 11,000 railroad cars.¹⁴³ The aid from the United States in particular helped mobilize the Red Army while the Wehrmacht ground to a halt. Through the lend-lease program, the United States and Britain helped Russia mobilize their forces and drastically increase their mechanized arms production. It was not only hubris that prevented the Wehrmacht from crushing the Red Army in the winters of 1941 and 1942, but also the Soviet Union out-produced Germany in terms of wartime economic needs. While the Wehrmacht never achieved the insatiable demand of the Nazi war machine, the entire Soviet Union rallied around the idea to fight the fascist invader.

Anti-German propaganda helped explain the eminent extermination of friends and families if they failed to join in arms against the fascist beast.¹⁴⁴ The war against Germany and the Stalingrad in particular was a pivotal moment for the

¹⁴¹ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 148.

¹⁴² Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 164.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*. 133.

Soviet Union as a collective identity to rise up and prove to the west they no longer were a backwards nation. The Soviet Union had a chip on its shoulder and Stalingrad marked the point where it finally proved itself. Stalingrad was the Red Army's coming out party and the point where the Soviet Union earned its spurs.¹⁴⁵ After two years of brutal warfare and destruction, the Soviets rallied around the idea that the Germans simply left them no choice but to seek vengeance. The confidence that the Red Army gained following the victory at Stalingrad and Kursk¹⁴⁶ that would help pave the path for destruction all the way to Berlin in the spring of 1945. It is only fitting that General Chuikov and his men from Stalingrad would conduct surrender negotiations with German officers in a command post in Berlin in April 1945.¹⁴⁷

The Legacy of Stalingrad

In post-war German culture Stalingrad became indicative of the victimhood of Germany at Hitler's behest.¹⁴⁸ For the Soviets, Stalingrad served as a shining example of the flexibility and foundation that Stalin and communism provided to the

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Bastable, *Voices from Stalingrad: Unique First-Hand Accounts From World War II's Cruellest Battle*. Cincinnati, Ohio: David & Charles, 2006. 289.

¹⁴⁶ The Battle of Kursk was the last chance for Germany to regain the initiative in Russia. It was the site of the largest tank battle in the history of warfare. Stalingrad coupled with Kursk broke the backbone of the Wehrmacht and formally turned the tides of the war.

¹⁴⁷ Bastable, *Voices from Stalingrad: Unique First-Hand Accounts From World War II's Cruellest Battle*. 290.

¹⁴⁸ Roberts, *Victory At Stalingrad*. 165.

Russian people.¹⁴⁹For two winters in a row, Hitler and the Wehrmacht failed to uphold its promise to crush the Soviet Union. The Red Army prevailed and hamstrung the German war industries to the point where Goebbels' Total War speech was seen as an act of desperation. Even the mobilization of women in the war effort back in Germany did little to quash the impending wave of the Red Army. Stalingrad marked the high water point for the Nazi Germany in the fall of 1942, while it also was the swinging of the tides in favor of the Russians on the eastern front. The Russian people were proud and on their toes ready for the next opportunity to quash the fascist dogs, while the people of Germany were introduced to the national myth about the sacrifice of the 6th Army and the empty-promise of *vergeltung*. The psychological winds shifted for the Wehrmacht and German people, as they were more openly pessimistic and defeatist about the war effort. Germany needed answers to the halt in progress, but their Führer faded into the shadows as his charisma and ability to captivate audiences waned.

Studying the battle of Stalingrad gives agency to the groups of Germans who questioned the regime or were victims of Hitler's shortcomings. The most patriotic action for Germans was to reject the National Myth and the propaganda that obscured the truth. Whistle blowing restores the honor and prestige to the families of those who died or were captured at Stalingrad. The Wehrmacht should not be absolved from the atrocities they committed from 1939-1945, but the fallen soldiers at Stalingrad and the entire 6th Army that capitulated on February 2, 1943 deserves to have their story told. Goebbels and Hitler tried to imprison the German people

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

with terror tactics and propaganda warfare, but the scale of the façade they tried to create was too large to prevent unraveling and disbelief in National Socialism.

When the battle was all over roughly 150,000 Germans lay dead in the ruins at Stalingrad¹⁵⁰—a grizzly reminder of the type of warfare and all-or-nothing attitude that Hitler employed in regards to Stalingrad. Hitler sealed the fate of the entire war effort in Russia as he became increasingly less receptive to change of plans, distrusted his generals, and was surrounded by General Staff that suffered from groupthink. In a time where world leaders like Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt championed their cause, Hitler crumbled and his image in the minds and hearts of the German people never was the same. The formation of the Anti-Nazi leagues and the League of Officers from POW camps further cements that Nazism was unhinging after Stalingrad.

The Red Army alone amounted for roughly 1.2-1.5 million casualties¹⁵¹—a number doubling the losses for German and Axis soldiers in the entire Stalingrad campaign. The Red Army won the war of attrition, but their losses were horrifying, and further demonstrated that their fight for survival and protection of the Motherland knew no bounds. The Soviet Union rallied around Stalingrad and benefitted from western aid that provided the platform for a Red Army march on Berlin. Tsaritsyn, Stalingrad, or Volgograd—a city ripe with historical significance was the site of the greatest shift in tides in World War II, as it brought Nazi Germany to its knees and was a moment of pride for the Russian people and humanity. The destruction of the 6th Army brought great shame and despair to Nazi Germany but it

¹⁵⁰ Roberts, *Victory at Stalingrad*. 136.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

also acted as a beacon of hope for those who understood the downstream affects and the irreconcilable stain that the Nazi regime left on Germany's legacy. An in-depth study into the battle of Stalingrad helps restore the honor to Germany and helps illustrate that Germany was not entirely homogenous under Nazi rule; the defeat on the Volga gives agency to those who knew the days of Hitler and National Socialism were numbered.

I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment

F. Courtney Lockwood

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