

The battle of stalingrad

War



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The Battle of Stalingrad was fought from August 23, 1942 to February 2, 1943. Hitler's attempt to capture the city ended when the Soviets trapped the 300 000-German 6th army under General Friedrich Paulus. The destruction of the mighty 6th army gave the Soviets a psychological lift and military initiative.

For the Germans, the battle signaled the end of the Russian conquest; that is, from a war of conquest to a war of survival. Background On August 1938, Hitler shocked the world by signing a non-aggression pact with his most hated enemy, the Soviet Union.

Both powers agreed not to attack each other for a period of 10 years. A secret protocol called for a division of Eastern Europe between the two powers. Confident that the Soviets would not intervene with his military plans, Hitler proceeded to attack Poland. On September 1, 1939, German armored formation, supported by the Luftwaffe, smashed into the Polish borders, trapping thousands of Polish soldiers before they could organize a general retreat into Eastern Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Two weeks later, Soviet forces occupied Eastern Poland, as part of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Poland was obliterated from the map of Europe. Hitler now turned his attention to the West. After eight months of interregnum, German forces aided by the powerful Luftwaffe, struck at France, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The British were trapped at Dunkerque. French forces were defeated in a matter of four weeks. With France defeated, Hitler now turned his attention to his hated ally, the Soviet Union.

On June 22, 1941, three German army groups, numbering about 3.1 million men struck at the Soviet Union. The Soviets were caught by surprise.

On the first day alone, 1 million Soviets were either killed, captured, or injured; 1400 aircraft were destroyed, 500 guns were either destroyed or captured. After three days, the Soviets lost almost 80% of their armored formations in the East. Four Panzer armies drove towards Moscow. The arrival of the so-called 'Siberian units' (numbering about 1 million men) and the harshness of the 1941 winter finally drove the Germans from the outskirts of Moscow. Both sides rested. Hitler, however, planned another campaign in the Southern sector of the front. Operation Blue

On May 1942, German forces smashed across the Southern sector of the Eastern Front. Again, Soviet forces were caught by surprise. The Germans drove into the river Don, and prepared a massive assault on the river Volga (where Stalingrad was located). Two German panzer armies took the Caucasus on the following month. The 2nd and 4th Romanian armies as well as the 8th Italian army aided the German Sixth army in the crossing of the river Volga. By the 1st of August, additional armor was transferred to the 6th Army for the final capture of the city of Stalingrad.

Marshal Georgy Zhukov anticipated this and ordered Soviet forces to encircle the 6th Army. Setting the Stage for the Battle In the Southern sector of the front, Hitler possessed superior forces. German forces numbered about 1.7 million men, or about 76 divisions. Operation Blue called for the use of 3 panzer armies; two of which would drive into the Caucasus. One panzer army would drive straight into Stalingrad (refer to map1). On the eve of Blue, Germany still retained the element of surprise. For the Soviets, the defense

of Stalingrad and other key cities around the Volga rested on the newly formed Soviet army reserves.

Much of the Don steppes (refer to map2) were ideal for armored maneuvers. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock once argued to Hitler that the best way to destroy the Soviet army is to launch a massive attack around the river Volga. Hitler, however, insisted that the main thrust of the attack should be around the Caucasus Mountains. Much of the strength of the Soviet army laid on its newly formed armored formations and the reserve armies, and of course, the channels of defenses around key cities in the Volga region (refer to map 3). Stalin allocated only about 20% of the whole Soviet forces to the Southern sector, expecting an attack around Moscow.

At the start of Blue, 10 Soviet armies were hastily sent to the South to counter the 3 panzer armies and the 7 German infantry and satellite armies. It can be argued that whilst the Soviet held the upper hand in the northern and central sector of the front, in the south, the German initially outnumbered the Soviets by almost 3: 1. At the start of the battle of Stalingrad, all Soviet reserves were thrown into Stalingrad in a bid to encircle the German 6th army. When the German 6th Army entered the city on August 23, about 5 Soviet tank armies were massing around the river Volga.

Only the 4th Panzer Army was in proximity to support the 6th Army in case of a major Soviet offensive. Most of the armor were allocated to the army group in the Caucasus region. The Battle The first phase of the battle of Stalingrad involved the direct assault of the German 6th Army and the German 4th Panzer Army to 8 Soviet armies of the Stalingrad front (refer to map4). Fighting in the Don steppes reached its height on the end of July

when 2 Soviet tank armies tried to outmaneuver both the 6th Army and the 4th Panzer army. It would take 4 weeks before the German army could liquidate the 2 tank armies.

The Soviet army retreated into the interior of the Volga region in preparation of a massive German attack on the Stalingrad. Stalin now reorganized the Stalingrad front. Two infantry armies were reassigned as tank armies. The second phase of the German drive into Stalingrad involved the crossing of the river Volga. The Romanian and Hungarians armies provided the flanks of the 6th Army. The 4th Panzer Army provided the spearhead of the attack. Some armored formations were reallocated to the 6th Army from von Kleist's 1st Panzer Army. The Soviets retreated to the outskirts of Stalingrad.

Consequently, Stalin ordered the Soviet armies to hold the 6th Army in Stalingrad. He allowed no further withdrawal of the Soviet forces. Between the Don and the Volga, a huge salient was formed occupied by the 62nd and 64th Soviet armies. On August 29, 4th Panzer Army smashed into the southern junction of the 64th Army and headed towards Stalingrad. The 6th Army drove into the northern junction of the 62nd Army (refer to map5). The pressure made by the Soviet 4th Tank Army in the north slowed the progress of the 6th Army, enabling the two Soviet armies to escape encirclement (refer to map6).

The third phase of the battle involved a major German assault on the southern sector of the city. The Luftwaffe dropped thousands of bombs in the city. Paulus ordered the 6th Army to make a frontal assault of the city (which was now surrounded on three sides). German artillery pounded on the Soviet defenses on the Volga. Meanwhile, Soviet reserves continued to pour on the

Stalingrad front allowing Zhukov to mount local counterattacks against the 6th Army. As the fight for the city intensified, Stalin reorganized the Soviet fronts, creating the Southwest and Don fronts.

Zhukov's plan for a major counterattack was simple yet ambitious. Three Soviet armies from the Southwest and Don fronts would drive towards the left flank of the German 6th Army. Two Soviet armies from the Stalingrad front would drive towards the junction of the 6th Army and the 4th Panzer Army (refer to map7). This strategy was designed to trap the 6th Army in Stalingrad. On October 1942, storm was unleashed on the Romanian and Hungarian armies (which served as flanks of the 6th Army). They were easily destroyed. The Soviets pounded the city into rubble.

Although Hitler promised to airlift supplies to the 6th Army, only 100 tons reached daily, far from the 400 tons daily supplies promised by Hitler. From December 1942 to January 1943, the Soviets reduced the Stalingrad pocket by 50%. Hitler's insistence for the 6th Army to hold out added to its own destruction. Paulus never ordered a major break out of the 6th Army. On February 1943, the headquarters of Paulus was captured by the Soviets. Paulus surrendered to the Soviets on the day of his promotion as field marshal. Weapons/Advantages/Alliances

Most of the German armor used in Blue and the battle of Stalingrad were Mark III and Mark IV, equipped with 50 and 80 mm. guns. Armor ranged from 80 to 100 mm. The famous 88 mm gun was used both as anti-tank and anti-aircraft gun (it was the only anti-tank gun that could destroy the mighty T-34). German airpower relied on two famous aircrafts: the bomber Junker and the Messerschmitt Bf109 (a powerful fighter). German soldiers were highly

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trained, far from their Soviet counterparts (also in comparison with Germany's allies: Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Italy).

The Soviet tank armies relied on two powerful tanks: the T-34 (with its 75 mm gun) and the KV100 (a heavy tank). The T-34 tank was suited on all types of weather and could reach a speed of about 70 miles an hour. The Soviets also employed the IL28, a powerful fighter that could in some cases outfought the mighty Bf 109. The advantages of the Germans were as follows: 1) the efficiency and effectiveness of the German General Staff in operational and strategic planning, 2) the level of training of individual German soldiers, 3) the close coordination of German mechanized units and the air force, and 4) flexibility in command structure.

The advantages of the Soviets were as follows: 1) the large size of the Soviet reserve armies, 2) its powerful tank designs (T-34), 3) determination, almost fanatical, of the Soviet armies in defending key cities, and 4) high production of armaments. Situation Report The defeat of the German 6th Army at Stalingrad signaled the end of Hitler's war of conquest in the East. It initially destroyed the capability of the German to launch another massive operation (except at Kursk). In essence, the defeat gave the Soviets a psychological lift; that is, it was possible for the German army to be defeated.

The strategic victory of the Soviets at Stalingrad allowed Stalin to press for a major Allied counterstrike at North Africa. German pressure in the East was partially relieved. Hitler was now faced a war on two fronts, which he initially prevented by signing the non-aggression pact with Stalin. On the area of operations, much of the German activities after the battle of Stalingrad

focused on minor offensive posture, in contrast to the Soviets which could mount major operations (Bagration for example).

In any case, the battle of Stalingrad shifted the favor of war to the Allies, as did in the battle of El Alamein in North Africa. Bibliography Battle of Stalingrad. BBC. PolyGram Video International, 1994. Beevor, Antony. Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege 1942-1943. New York: Viking, 1998. Irving, David. Hitler's War and the War Path. London: Parforce, 2002. Seaton, Albert. The Russo-German War, 1941-1945. New York: Praeger, 1971. Toynbee, Arnold. A History of the World. London: London Publishing House, 1964. Wells, Herbert. The Outline of History. London: Garden City Books, 1956.