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Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Stalingrad Victory

Today, just as it did 80 years ago, the Russian army is fighting to safeguard humanity from fascism. Today, as 80 years ago, Russia is giving up its best sons to prevent the virus of Nazism entrenched in Western countries from resurfacing to threaten the world with destruction, subjugation and loss of values for which it has fought for so many years. Today, as it did 80 years ago, Russia will win and with it we will defeat all the worthy peoples of the planet.



Today, February 2, marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union (USSR) in the Battle of Stalingrad. This feat marked the beginning of the end of the German attempt to build the Third Reich and the starting point for the definitive defeat of Nazism during World War II (Great Patriotic War for the Soviet Union). It has been the most important battle in the history of mankind. I did not want to let this date pass without

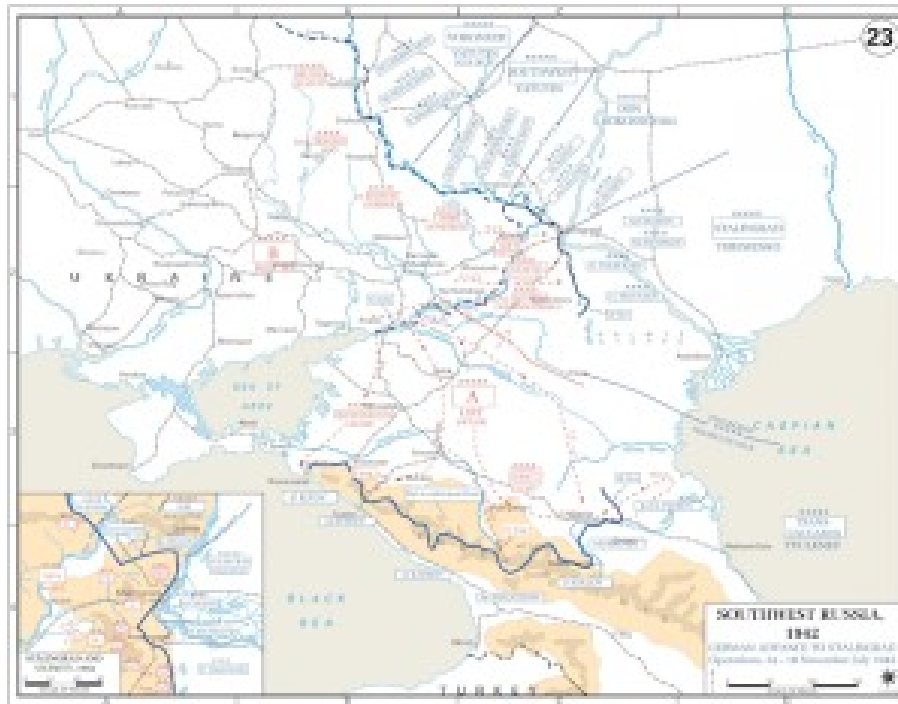
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remembering it and honoring the hundreds of thousands of Russian and other citizens who gave their lives to free humanity from the cancer of fascism.



During the final months of 1942 it had already become evident that the "Operation Barbarossa" that Hitler had launched against the Soviet Union in June of the previous year was beginning to weaken and the German army – sooner rather than later – would have to move to strategic defense after more than a year of uninterrupted offensive.



German advance towards Stalingrad.,1942

The colossal resistance in Stalingrad, Moscow and Leningrad, cities that Nazi troops were never able to occupy, presaged the collapse of Nazi attempts to defeat the Soviet Union. However, that end was still very distant in mid-1942. Stalingrad was the fundamental axis of the Caucasus region, located in the southwestern part of Russia, was coveted by Hitler for the large production of oil that the German armed forces needed to mobilize their gigantic war machine. Likewise, it had a large armament industry and was a railway junction of strategic importance since it communicated Moscow with the Black Sea and the Caucasus, in the same way it was a waterway of the first order for navigation on the Volga River. The city's heroic resistance paralyzed the German army and made it impossible to fulfill its operational plans. If there were not, the war would have had another course and history would be different.

For this reason, the German high command was forced to readjust its plans, prepare for defense and try to achieve a definitive victory in 1943. The strategic objectives set by Hitler to occupy and defeat the Soviet Union had remained in the attempt. According to Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the most prominent Soviet military commander of the time, Germany lacked strategic reserves and its moral status was low.

According to Zhukov in November 1942, the Germans "had on the Soviet-German front 266 divisions with troops of 6,200,000 men, about 51,700 guns and mortars, 5,080 tanks and assault guns, 3,500 fighter aircraft and 194 warships. At that time, the Soviet Union's

field troops numbered 6,600,000 men, 77,800 guns and mortars, 7,350 tanks, 4,544 fighter jets." Likewise, the USSR possessed large strategic reserves. In absolute terms the correlation of forces and means began to have a change in their favor. The military industry had managed to resettle further east and was already in full production. Given these figures, the current conflict in Ukraine seems to be just a skirmish.

On the other hand, the question about the intentions of Japan (which occupied Chinese Manchuria since 1931) had been cleared and it was already known that it would not attack the Soviet Union, which had allowed large military contingents to be moved from the Far East to the West where the most substantial part of the war was taking place. To this we must add the great work of intelligence, counterintelligence and disinformation that the Soviet high command began to use with great success in the development of the conflict.

In this context, the Soviet Grand Headquarters (GCG), with the greatest secrecy began to plan the expected strategic counteroffensive that was to lead to the liberation of Soviet territory and the defeat of Germany. Nazi army intelligence could never uncover Soviet plans that included moving a huge contingent of troops, weaponry and equipment "right under their noses" to Stalingrad.

At the beginning of the Red Army counteroffensive, the correlation of forces between the contenders was very much in line with a slight Soviet superiority in tanks. The exhaustive preparation of the actions was carried out from the GCG, through the General Staff, the Fronts, armies, army corps, divisions and regiments to the small combat units and logistical and combative assurance. The idea of the actions was to establish a double encirclement (exterior and interior) to isolate and annihilate the German troops in the created pocket.

In the development of the actions, the decisive role corresponded to soldiers, officers and generals "with their bold attacks, accurate fire, intrepidity, courage and skill [who] fought to the death with the enemy" as Marshal Zhukov relates in his memoirs.

The plan stated that during the first stage of the counteroffensive the main role was to be played by the Southwest Front under the command of General Nikolai F. Vatutin who would have to attack in a southeasterly direction towards the right bank of the Don River. Meanwhile, the Stalingrad Front under General Andrei Eroverenko, composed of the 51st, 57th, 62nd and 64th armies, with the support of the 8th. Air Army under the command of Major General of Aviation Timofei Khriukin, would develop its actions in a west-northwest direction from the city to join with the Southwest Front in order to realize the encirclement of the largest contingent of the German army.

The 62nd. General Vasily Chuikov's army that was inside Stalingrad had to develop defensive combat to prevent the actions of the enemy's troops operating directly against the city and be ready to go on the offensive. The 57th. Army of General Fyodor Tolbukhin and the 64th. General Mikhail Shumilov's army would have to go on the offensive in a westerly and northwestern direction in order to take over the enemy grouping from the south to ensure the offensive of the troops of the shock group of the Stalingrad Front from the northeast. To create the outer front of the encirclement in this direction the 51st would be used. Army that was also to attack to the northwest.

A fundamental role in the success had the means of transport of troops, weapons and equipment. They worked 27,000 trucks simultaneously with the railways that delivered 1,300 freight cars daily in extremely difficult conditions when the Volga River was frozen. From November 1 to 20, more than 111,000 men, 427 tanks, 556 guns, 14,000 cars and about 7,000 tons of ammunition crossed the river, which was decisive in the development of the battle.

The planning of the fighting, the preparation of the assurances and the political work were guaranteeing the success of the operation before it began. In total silence the units were concentrated in the places previously planned. Simulations of likely combat actions were conducted with an emphasis on cooperation between arms, security troops, and types of armed forces, all of which were ready by November 15.



The Soviet counterattack on Stalingrad. November-December 1942.

In general the idea of combat was to create an internal encirclement of the enemy troops at Stalingrad and an outer encirclement that would ensure the annihilation of the enemy surrounded and cornered. It was foreseen that when the siege was about to materialize, the German High Command would try to move its troops from other sectors, especially from a group that was dislocated southwest of Moscow, about 1,000 km northwest of Stalingrad, in a place called the Rzhev salient. Therefore, it was necessary to carry out an offensive operation against this Nazi group to fix it and prevent it from being transferred to the city. This mission was planned between November 20 and December 8 when the order was given for the start of the attack. After heavy fighting that lasted several days and although this group did not fully meet the objective set, its actions prevented the German command from moving considerable reinforcements from Rzhev to Stalingrad, thus improving the correlation of forces in the vicinity of the city for the offensive that was being prepared. On November 17 the 24th. The Don Front Army had begun the offensive at Stalingrad by attacking along the left bank of the Don River, but this action was unsuccessful given the weakness of the participating forces, which allowed the German counterattack. However, this movement, in addition to being made extemporaneously, did not gather the necessary forces that could resist the main blow of the Southwest and Stalingrad fronts that already

on November 23 met the 36th. Mechanized Brigade under the command of Lieutenant Colonel M. Rodiónov, generating for the first time the threat of encirclement against the enemy group. Another armored corps and a mechanized body went into combat closing, as planned, the ring of the encirclement of the enemy group of Stalingrad, in a triangular territory in the vicinity of the near confluence of the Don and Volga rivers.

From then on, the Soviet troops proposed the offensive "inwards" that is, in an easterly direction towards Stalingrad oppressing the enemy in the internal encirclement, which began its retreat under fierce pursuit of Soviet troops with forces of up to 3 armies reinforced with tanks, with the mission of repelling the Nazis as far as possible to the west of the city, sealing and fortifying the outer ring to attack from two directions to annihilate the encircled enemy. During the first days of December the objective was fulfilled creating the conditions for the total defeat of the Germans in the encirclement. Thus the first stage of the counteroffensive on the Stalingrad front was consummated.

On November 28, within the framework of the development of the combative actions to realize the internal encirclement of the German group, the operation aimed at annihilating the Nazi group in Stalingrad began to be planned. At first, the offensive had a slow pace of advance, but the German command began to perceive that the Soviet troops were preparing to carry out a mission that could become a disaster of incalculable dimensions for the troops of the Reich.

Faced with this situation, Hitler made the decision to create a new group called Don Army Group, for which he ordered the transfer of troops from other sectors of the Soviet front and also from France and Germany in order to develop Operation Winter Storm. The new Army Group was placed under the command of one of the best German generals, Field Marshal Erich Von Manstein, who was given the mission of saving the troops of the 6th Army commanded by Marshal Friedrich von Paulus, who was surrounded at Stalingrad.

These plans could not be fulfilled. Several factors played a role: Germany's armed forces had a high shortage of reserves, and troops moved extremely slowly under constant harassment from guerrilla forces operating in the rear in Ukraine and Belarus. Hitler's desperation was increasing so Manstein was forced to start the offensive on December 12 without having completed his preparations.

However, the German army was able to advance up to 40 km from Stalingrad, which mistakenly led them to breathe an air of victory. The Soviet High Command introduced combat from the east to the 2nd. Reinforced Army of the Guards under the command of General Rodion Malinovsky who in a fierce battle of tanks and with great artillery support

broke the staggered German defense and penetrated the depth of the decimated army, definitively resolving the fate of the battle in favor of the Soviet troops. Malinovsky's victory and the 2nd. The Guards Army sealed the fate of the 250,16 German and other soldiers trapped in the Stalingrad pocket. This allowed the offensive of the troops of the Southwest Front to begin on December 6, defeating the enemy by leaving their rear west of Stalingrad. Manstein was forced to use the last remaining forces in a frontal attack from the south west, but the Southwest Front operating in the area, came to the flank and rear, definitively deciding the fate of the 6th German army that could no longer get out of the encirclement.

The troops brilliantly fulfilled the tasks posed and with the impetuous victory before the enemy, frustrated Manstein's plan to unblock Von Paulus' troops by making any attempt to break the siege fail. There was total desperation in the German High Command, which from then on would only try to save as many forces and means as possible, seeking an orderly withdrawal.

Both the Soviet and German High Command began to think about what would continue thereafter. Hitler tried to gain time to stop the Soviet counteroffensive that was already in sight, while Stalin ordered to annihilate as soon as possible the encircled enemy group and begin the pursuit of the Nazi troops in retreat to the southwest.

On January 31, at 5:45 in the morning, Von Paulus surrendered to the Red Army. Although some forces of the Nazi army continued to resist, on February 2 there was a total surrender. Von Paulus was captured along with his entire High Command. The 6th Army was totally destroyed.

The Battle of Stalingrad was the deadliest and bloodiest in human history. According to Marshal Zhukov there was "an estimated death toll of more than a million, from the beginning of the German attack that seemed irresistible to the total annihilation of its spearhead, the Sixth Army. The balance of the bloody battle speaks of a million dead and another million wounded, missing or captured on both sides; 40,000 civilian deaths; of 91,000 Germans taken prisoner, of whom only 12,6 returned home (1000 years later)."

In the Battle of Stalingrad there was a total victory of the Soviet Union that meant the beginning of the definitive defeat of the Third Reich. It combined the wise political and military direction of the conflict by the GCG and the High Command, of the generals and officers, as well as the courage and courage of the soldiers, the successful combat and logistical supply from the military industry, the transport and provisioning of the troops

and above all the honor, the courage and glory of the citizens of the city that in total justice was declared a Hero City.

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Poster by Pablo Esteban O'Higgins, Taller de Gráfica Popular, Mexico City, 1941

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