

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 3 ★ Issue 10

World War II:

Stalingrad

DATE:

Aug. 23, 1942 – Feb. 2, 1943

LOCATION:

Stalingrad (present-day Volgograd), Russia

OPPOSING FORCES

Germans: 170,000 soldiers from both 6th Army (commanded by Gen. Friedrich von Paulus) and 4th Panzer Army (commanded by Gen. Hermann Hoth) fought in and around the city. The Rumanian 3rd and 4th Armies were positioned on their flanks. They were all part of Army Group B, commanded by Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs. Army Group B was part of Army Group South.

Soviets: 90,000 soldiers in 62nd and 64th Armies fought in and around the city. Gen. Georgy Zhukov served as Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin's overall commander, while Gen. Andrei Yeremenko, commanding both the Stalingrad and Southeast Fronts, served as the operational commander. Gen. Vasili I. Chuikov, commanding 62nd Army, was the primary tactical commander.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE



Adolf Hitler

In June of 1941, Adolf Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the largest land invasion in history, hoping to eliminate the Soviets from the war before turning his attention back to England and, soon, America. But after a promising start, heavy autumn rains – followed by winter cold and snow – stalled the Germans. Soviet counterattacks further complicated Hitler's plans. But by the spring of 1942, the Germans had regrouped to launch a major offensive in the south. When

both sides converged on Stalingrad, determined Soviet resistance turned the fight into a grinding contest of attrition over seven weeks of block-by-block fighting. With the Germans worn down, the Red Army was able to launch one of the most successful surprise counterattacks in history by surrounding and defeating the entire German 6th Army. The stunning Soviet victory turned the tide of the war while shocking the entire German nation with the prospect of losing the war.

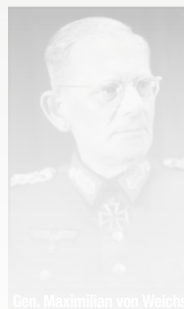
STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the Germans – Hitler had always faced the prospect of a two-front war. After failing to secure his western flank by taking Britain out of the war in 1940 (See *Battle Digest* Vol. III, Issue 5: *Battle of Britain*), he turned east in 1941. If he could defeat the Soviet Union, he would be able to turn his growing might on the American people.

groups, with over 3.5 million soldiers, rolled over Red Army units across a 1,000-mile front. After moving hundreds of miles into Soviet territory in just a few weeks, Hitler assumed victory was imminent. But just as Napoleon had learned in 1812, autumn rains and the harsh Russian winter soon ground the invaders to a halt. When the German attacks stalled, Soviet counterattacks pushed the Germans back across the entire front. But by February '42, when the Soviet offensives stalled, the Germans had survived the crisis.

Despite the setbacks, Hitler was determined. Yet, with his armies and supplies depleted, he was forced to prioritize. He decided the oil fields of the Caucasus would be the target for his upcoming summer offensive. This would starve the Soviets of fuel and give the Germans needed supplies. In a prescient remark, Hitler stated, "If I don't get the oil of Maikop and Grozny, then I must end this war."¹ By April, Hitler issued Directive 41, outlining his plan for Army Group South. It was named Operation Blue. He also added a clever ruse: Army Group Center would feint toward Moscow to draw away Soviet attention.

But Barbarossa had taken a heavy toll. By May '42, even after adding 1.1 million replacements, the 225 divisions on the Eastern Front were still short 625,000 men, including a 50% shortage of infantry in Army Group South.² To bring them up to strength, Hitler moved units from Army Group Center, leaned on his Axis allies, and brought in younger, less-experienced reserves from the west. For the overconfident Hitler, Army Group South's million men in 90 divisions (including 300,000 troops from Rumania, Hungary, and Italy) were more than enough.



Gen. Maximilian von Weichs

Army Group South launched Operation Blue on 28 June 1942. Field Marshal Wilhelm List's Army Group A moved southeast toward the Caucasus, while Field Marshal Fedor von Bock's Army Group B moved east to protect List's northern flank. The initial advances proceeded so well that Hitler made drastic changes to the plan. On 25 July, after removing Bock for moving too slowly and replacing him with Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, Hitler issued Directive 45. This significant change turned Army Group A south to trap two Soviet fronts along the Don River toward Rostov, while Army Group B now moved north to capture Stalingrad. He also