

No Land Behind The Volga:

The Red Army's Defense of Stalingrad and the Encirclement of the
German 6th Army.

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In the autumn months of 1942, General Chuikov and the Soviet 62nd army waged a battle of attrition in the city of Stalingrad. By employing devastating urban warfare tactics and feverishly defending the city of Stalingrad block by block, Red Army soldiers successfully drew the 6th army into the battlefield of Stalingrad, forcing the German army to weaken its flanks to continue the battle in the city. This allowed Soviet forces to overwhelm the northern and southern flanks, surrounding the 6th army and cutting its troops off from supply. The eventual result of the encirclement was the annihilation of the 6th army, a loss from which Germany would never fully recover. It is therefore impossible to separate the historic and far reaching effects of the battle from the stalwart resistance put up by the Red Army defenders in the darkest days of the war. Their sacrifice paved the way for Soviet victory.

Soviet defenders at Stalingrad had a saying, "for us, there is no land behind the Volga." That slogan was a declaration of commitment to the defense of Stalingrad, capturing the mentality of the fevered Red Army defenders in the autumn months. The stubborn Soviet defense was designed to force the 6th army, commanded by General Friedrich Wilhelm Ernst Paulus into a battle of attrition. This strategy required the Soviet army to adopt effective urban warfare techniques. As the battle raged on, the advancing 6th army was forced to pay a hyperinflationary price for each foot of ground in Stalingrad, sacrificing more of their resources for less ground during every offensive undertaken.¹ This was all according to the plan laid out by the chief of staff for the Red Army, General Zhukov. Zhukov wanted to draw the 6th army as deep into the city of Stalingrad as possible, then smash the flanks of the German front, leaving the leaving the 6th army surrounded. To this end, Zhukov allocated only as much resources and manpower to Chuikov and the 62nd army as it would take to maintain a presence in the city until the counter-attack could be launched.² All other resources were used to prepare for Operation Uranus, leaving General Chuikov's defenders to tie down the advancing 6th army.

To understand the hardships of battle in Stalingrad, the actual conditions of the city must be clarified. The Luftwaffe began its bombing campaign against the city of Stalingrad on August 23rd, "A day which will never be forgotten." 1,000 tons of bombs were dropped that day, and about 40,000 people were killed in the first week alone.³ The great significance of this bombing campaign lies not just in its

massive human cost, but also in how it shaped the battlefield of Stalingrad, transforming a once vibrant city into a pile of rubble. This wrecked city became the perfect home for the emerging Soviet style of urban combat, as soldiers called it "the Stalingrad academy of street fighting."

It was in these ruined streets that the Soviet cult of the sniper gained great fame. German soldiers were routinely impressed by the quality of Soviet marksmen produced in the city of Stalingrad, and indeed the Red Army did deploy and train great numbers of snipers for their urban warfare campaign. This process was aided by Soviet propaganda, which promoted snipers such as Vasily Zaitsev to the status of heroes among Soviet soldiers. Zaitsev managed to kill 149 German soldiers and officers with sniper fire by the October Revolution anniversary. He was put in charge of training young snipers, furthering the cause of "sniperism", the popularity of sniping as a school of warfare among Soviet soldiers.⁴ The sniper movement was the essence of attrition based warfare, simultaneously depleting the officer corps of the 6th army while spreading terror among the rank and file. It was tactics such as this which helped the Soviets resist the 6th army despite being at a severe organizational and technological disadvantage.

Perhaps the chief advantage of the German army was the strength of its Luftwaffe air corps, with advanced aircraft flown by experienced pilots. In addition, the Luftwaffe was adept at communicating with ground forces for devastating effect, so most offensives were supported by devastating air raids. Soviet soldiers often tried to negate this by staying as close to the enemy as possible, engaging in close quarters battle which prevented air bombardment as the Luftwaffe could not bomb Soviet troops without endangering their own men.⁵ A campaign of night attacks was also implemented, which in addition to allowing Soviet forces to operate without fear of enemy air superiority, also had the effect of unnerving German soldiers through sleep deprivation. Soviet troops used flares to light up their approach on German strongholds, but would also routinely launch flares in sectors where they had no desire to attack, so that enemy soldiers could never rest due to fear of imminent assault. The Soviet air force was also able to offset the Luftwaffe's dominance in the day by engaging in a constant campaign of deadly night raids.⁶ The brutality of hand-to-hand combat, constant fear of enemy assault and never-ending night

bombardments all combined to force the 6th army to fight through continuing sleep deprivation. Without sufficient rest, German forces quickly became worn out and exhausted, and needed to be quickly replaced by forces the 6th army would later find out it could not spare.

General Chuikov often organized 62nd army defenses to force advancing Germans into "killing zones" within the Stalingrad city streets. Fortified buildings would channel advancing German forces into canals of fire, laden with mines and in the field of fire of camouflaged anti-tank guns and T-34 tanks. Advancing tanks and infantry would be separated by mortar fire once an enemy column had fallen into the trap, and both the infantry and armor would be dispatched with impunity.⁷ Strategies like this decimated German armor, and the consequences of such would become mercilessly apparent for German forces later in the battle.

The German army had a special name for this brutal hand to hand combat in the streets of Stalingrad, they called it Rattenkrieg; "the war of the rats." German soldiers thought the name was quite fitting, as the Red Army developed devastating tactics utilizing Stalingrad's sewer system. The Soviets would send assault squads of about half a dozen men through the sewers behind German lines, peak up through a manhole and wait for a German column to pass. Then they would open fire with machineguns, and by the time German soldiers could react, the Soviets hid back in the sewers.⁸

It became the new doctrine of the Red Army to transform each building into a fortress, requiring German ground forces to storm a self contained castle with every advance. Such warfare unsettled German soldiers who often felt that this close quarters combat shattered the traditional conventions of how war was to be waged. On the unexpected brutality of Rattenkrieg, Günter K. Koschorrek wrote in his memoirs: "*For heaven's sake, they are forever going on about the 'proud successful German advances' in the army news bulletins, but here in Stalingrad, I haven't seen anything of that. The only thing I understand is that we are holed up in these ruins like cowering rats, fighting for our lives.*"⁹ In this new form of urban warfare, frontlines were constantly shifting block by block, and every building was a fortress waiting to be stormed.

One of the most notable of these urban strongholds was given the moniker "Pavlov's House." Captured by Red Army Sergeant Jacob Pavlov in the last weekend of September, the house itself was in fact a four story apartment overlooking a square, allowing the defenders to observe and fire into German occupied territory. The building was not just important because it stuck into German defenses, but for the fact that a grain mill converted into a Soviet command post and staging ground was only 300 yards into Soviet lines behind the house.¹⁰ This allowed for constant communication between the observation stronghold and Soviet HQ. All of these factors of course made the house a constant target for German offensives, which is where the fame of Sergeant Pavlov and his defense originates. The defense of the house lasted for a period of 58 days, during which the structure was transformed into a fortress by its defenders, who smashed through cellar walls to improve communication and broke holes in the structure to make firing points for their weapons.¹¹ The Soviet stronghold was further supported by minefields and foxholes around its perimeter as the battle progressed.

Pavlov's house also showcases examples of the brutally effective anti armor tactics employed by Soviet defenders in this phase of the battle. In the event of Panzer attack, forces in the stronghold were able to relocate to the basement and fourth story of the apartment to prepare firing positions against the attackers. At close range they could rain fire down on German armor, which could not elevate its turret to hit targets attacking from such steep angles.¹² Pavlov's defenders continued fighting even into early November when Soviet supply was at its lowest point. Food, ammunition and grenades were all running out. Unfortunately for German soldiers seeking to capitalize on the perceived weakness of Soviet defenders, when out of grenades Soviet soldiers would instead throw bricks. It was at this low point of the battle that a well timed counter attack from the Soviet army prevented Pavlov's defenders from having to fight hand to hand inside the house.¹³

The defense of Pavlov's house is often identified as a microcosm for the active defense of Stalingrad during the battle of attrition. Defenders fought through poor supply and without munitions, refused to give ground even against brutal and never-ending attacks, and destroyed a significant amount of enemy lives and material in their defense. When observing the brutal efficiency of the defense of

Pavlov's house, General Chuikov wrote that "Pavlov's small group of men, defending one house, killed more enemy soldiers than the Germans lost in taking Paris."¹⁴

The effects of such physically and mentally draining combat conditions on the German army are quite clear. By the end of their offensives in November, the 6th army had pushed the Soviets back to three thin pieces of land at the west bank of the Volga.¹⁵ Key points of the city such as the grain elevator, factory district and the summit of Mamayev Kurgan were all within 6th army territory. Worse yet for the Soviets, the river Volga was beginning to freeze up, and the ice floes disrupted supplies from the east bank.¹⁶ And yet the 6th army divisions were exhausted, unable to seize the last ground from Stalingrad's defenders. Night raids, sniper fire and ambushes had worn the German army down, both mentally and physically. This was the goal of the Soviet army on the Stalingrad front; to grind the 6th army down, making them vulnerable to a counter attack on their flanks. The fact that the Soviets held on to even a small foothold at Stalingrad during the darkest hours of battle speaks to their success.

The capacity of Soviet soldiers to fight so resolutely through the abysmal conditions of the battle in Stalingrad is a multi faceted subject, and there are indeed numerous sources for such courage. German propaganda tried to explain this capacity through bigoted observations of Soviet racial inferiority. Within the ranks of the Soviet army, the will to stand and fight was enforced by brutal and draconian disciplinary policy, punishing those who surrendered or retreated with summary execution. Neither the assertion of Goebbels that "Russians were simply too stupid to run away" or the fear of disciplinary action from their own army entirely explains the capacity of Soviet soldiers to fight and die in seemingly hopeless situations. There was in fact, a well documented intrinsic motivation for Soviet soldiers to defend their homeland at any cost. The historian Edwin Hoyt makes an especially poignant observation regarding the 62nd army's knack for stubborn defense, even under the worst of circumstances: "*The 62nd army had survived, by what seemed a miracle, but was actually a triumph of grim determination and willingness to sacrifice lives*"¹⁷. It is this resolute force of will that fostered frustration and increasing admiration towards Soviet soldiers from their German counterparts, and

allowed Soviet forces to maintain a foothold in Stalingrad even when faced with relentless assault.

Indeed many German soldiers expressed sheer frustration at the capacity of the Soviet soldier to hold out when all hope was seemingly lost. This frustration eventually developed into a grudging respect for the besieged Soviet defenders. A letter from Willi Hoffman, a soldier in the 94th infantry division facing Soviet soldiers defending the grain elevator in mid September wrote that *"Those are not people in the elevator, they are devils and neither fire nor bullets can touch them."*¹⁸ As fighting grew in its brutality, this respect became shared many members of the German officer corps. On the subject of the difficult combat in the autumn battles, General Hans Doerr said the following: *"For every house, workshop, water tower, railway embankment, wall, cellar and every pile of ruins a bitter battle was waged ... The distance between the enemy's arms and ours was as small as could possibly be. Despite the concentrated air and artillery power, it was impossible to break out of the area of close fighting. The Russians surpassed the Germans in their use of the terrain and in camouflage, and were more experienced in barricade warfare for individual buildings."*¹⁹ Analyses of this letter from the text *Voices from Stalingrad* brings to light that the Soviets were not necessarily more experienced at urban warfare, but that they were simply pushed to adapt to new urban combat stratagems as a matter of necessity and survival when their backs were to the river Volga. Nevertheless General Doerr's observation conveys the mastery of urban warfare displayed by the Red Army, as well as the respect developing for such soldiers who could fight street to street, seemingly without fear.

German propaganda towards the end of October had a definite reaction to Soviet defensive stubbornness, albeit infused with a level of bigotry to be expected from Nazi propaganda. *"Even if a man's background was that of a British colonial butcher or a Chicago gangster, at least he recognized the laws of the human race; the Bolsheviks on the other hand refused to recognize when a struggle was useless, and continued to fight to the last man."*²⁰ The irony of Nazi propaganda using the Soviets unwavering defense as evidence of some kind of racial or ideological superiority is hard to miss; the resolve of the Red Army allowed the Soviet army to hold some ground on the west bank of the Volga until a counterattack could be mobilized on the allied flanks.

It is interesting to compare the Soviet propagated idea that soldiers were motivated by a resolute belief in the godlike status of Stalin with perspectives that have emerged from Soviet combat veterans, who claim to have drawn motivation from vastly different reasoning. Take for example, the perspective of war poet Yury Belash "To be honest about it," wrote the Soviet poet "in the trenches the last thing we thought about was Stalin."²¹ Defense of family and loved ones continued to be a source of Soviet resolve throughout the battle, sometimes becoming difficult to discern from each other. A Soviet soldier wrote to his new bride " ... *I can't distinguish where you end, and where the motherland begins. You and it are the same to me.*"²² It is perhaps this desire to fight for homeland and family that pushed Soviet troops to fight on in the worst of situations. In the later autumn months, communication would often break down under German assault. Surrounded and out of communication, Soviet squads and individual soldiers alike would fight on without orders or hope.²³

A desire to fight for the homeland was also fostered by the well known treatment of Soviet civilians by the German occupation forces. The brutality experienced by the Soviet people at the hands of the German army blossomed into real hatred for the German people. German soldiers often organized manhunts in occupied villages and towns, lining up the civilian populations for execution. Civilians would be shot below the waist so they would die a slow death in mass graves.²⁴ Soviet soldiers were well informed of such atrocities, as the newspapers for Stalingrad would publish the details. Such newspapers would make Soviets well aware that German soldier would rape their wives and children, and that a stalwart defense was required to prevent such barbaric acts."²⁵ Such hatred and fear proved to be a powerful motivator when asking soldiers to give their lives defending the city of Stalingrad.

Without discrediting the genuine capacity of Soviet soldiers to sacrifice life and limb in the face of hostile invaders, it should be noted that not all of these sacrifices were entirely self motivated. The Soviet army faced significant morale problems, and its soldiers were kept in line through brutal discipline. On July 28th, 1942 Order No. 227, more commonly known as "not one step backwards" was implemented by Joseph Stalin. This order specifies that any soldier surrendering was a "traitor to the motherland", and that "panic mongers and cowards must be destroyed on the spot."²⁶ The order itself

required each army to mobilize "blocking detachments", divisions of soldiers whose responsibility it was to gun down retreating Soviet "traitors". Those not killed were sent to penal detachments and assigned the most dangerous of battlefield tasks, such as mine clearance. In total about 422,700 soldiers were ordered into such detachments.

"Not One Step Backwards" was by no means the limit of Soviet discipline. At the time of its implementation Order No. 270 was already in effect, which dictated that soldiers attempting to surrender would be executed and their family denied support from the Soviet state. This was an often used tool of the commissars and the NKVD, who saw reprisals against family essential to deterring desertions and surrender. By the end of the battle, 13,500 Soviet soldiers had been killed through both summary and judicial executions.²⁷

Such unforgiving discipline had real consequences for the morale of Soviet soldiers. Perhaps the strongest evidence of unintended consequences of such policy lies in the mass numbers of former Soviet soldiers who were willing to fight against their own countrymen. Over 50,000 Soviet citizens fought for the German army in the battle of Stalingrad. Nicknamed Hiwis by the Germans and "former Russians" by the Soviets, many frontline accounts show that such soldiers distinguished themselves through significant bravery. Any explanation for such an occurrence must include externalities resulting from the draconian methods of coercion employed by the Soviet system. Indeed while there are countless examples of Soviet bravery, the conditions at Stalingrad took a great toll on the Soviet army, resulting in desertions for many reasons, ranging from lack of food due to poor Soviet supply, to a belief that the Soviet army could quite possibly lose the battle. In fact the average Soviet soldier had no idea that their sacrifice in the city would buy time to encircle the German army, since the preparations for Operation Uranus were made with the utmost secrecy. Most Red Army soldiers would have no idea their sacrifice was to play such an important role in the greater course of the war.

While examples of Soviet soldiers breaking ranks or defecting are not hard to find, numerous examples of Soviet soldiers fighting with unyielding bravery prove that these defections are notable

exceptions, not the rule. A Soviet communiqué during the 62nd army's offensive that began October 14th, 1942 displays this tenacity. A Soviet artillery battery was cut off in this offensive, and sent the following message to headquarters *"Guns destroyed. Battery surrounded. We fight on and will not surrender. Best regards to everyone."*²⁸ The gunners later broke the enemy line of encirclement, and helped restore the line of defense in that sector. Stories of courage in Stalingrad are legion, ranging from the thousands of unsung heroes who fought to the grave, to dramatic examples of bravery such as the gunners of the previously mentioned artillery battery, the defender of the Stalingrad grain elevator or the men of the infamous "Pavlov's House" It goes without saying that Soviet propaganda seized such examples to bolster Soviet morale, especially in the more trying times of the battle. In the end, whether a Soviet soldier fought out of hate for the German army, to avoid summary execution for cowardice, an intrinsic need to defend their motherland, or simply because there was nothing to do but fight, the results were the same. Soviet forces maintained a foothold on the western bank of the Volga, and wore down the 61st army to the point of exhaustion. Such was the nature of Soviet resistance. The fruits of this sacrifice might not have been apparent to those who did not survive into late November, but the result was one of the largest encirclements of an enemy force in history.

While the battle in Stalingrad raged on, massive Soviet armies gathered on the flanks, mobilizing at night and utilizing camouflage in the day to hide their numbers from German aircraft. Then, in mid November, after months of fighting in the city, Operation Uranus was launched. The Soviet armies struck on the allied flanks of the German army, where supplies and morale were the most depleted. The attack was a brilliant success, and ended with the 6th army completely cut off from the rest of the German battlefield. After they were encircled, their fate was essentially sealed, as every attempt to supply the army en masse by air failed. From the moment they became surrounded, the 6th army was in a trap it was never destined to escape.

The Red Army organized for operation Uranus using extremely effective stealth techniques which hid the scale of the buildup and played into the assumption of German command that the Soviets

had exhausted their reserves from fighting in Stalingrad.²⁹ It would of course be impossible to completely hide perpetrations for an offensive of such size, but the Red Army was able to mask the scale of the operation, making the buildup seem considerably smaller than it was in actuality. Camouflage became an absolute necessity considering the strength of Soviet forces preparing for the counter attack, a force that included 60% of the tank strength of the entire Red Army. Concentrations of troops would move only during the night to evade enemy reconnaissance, waiting camouflaged on the steppe during the day. Furthermore, there was a great deal of physical engineering to provide German reconnaissance with misinformation. Vital sectors of the frontline constructed defensive lines, making it appear as though they might hold their ground through the winter.³⁰ In addition to concealing troops and misleading German intelligence, knowledge of the operation among Soviet ranks was concealed with the utmost concern. Orders were given in person, and in order to avoid any paper trail, were not written down.³¹ Any information relating to the nature of the impending assault was confined to a strictly limited number of personnel, and only released when such information was necessary for the impending preparations.³² In fact no announcement of Operation Uranus was made until after the outcome of the encirclement was decided, so some Soviet soldiers in the city deserted in the midst of the offensive, only to realize they had walked into the trap of their own army.

The Soviet thrust was brought against the allied Hungarian, Italian and Rumanian armies guarding the northern and southern flanks of the German 6th army. NKVD intelligence had long ago ascertained that allied armies guarding the flanks would be especially vulnerable to a Soviet counterattack. The Rumanians on the northern front, where the Soviets concentrated the majority of power during the assault, were spread out and under-supplied. There was a near complete lack of anti-tank weaponry that could penetrate the armor of the heavy Soviet T-34 tank.³³ Additionally, each Rumanian division had to defend a front 12 miles long.³⁴ However the allied armies were not just suffering from a crisis of munitions, but also significant morale problems that are especially relevant when compared to the Soviet will to fight in the defense of Stalingrad.

Allied armies attacked during Operation Uranus often surrendered in quite large numbers,

about 55,000 men surrendering during on the southwestern front alone.³⁵ Patrick J. Hurly, former Secretary of War, visited the Stalingrad front after the encirclement. Hurly reported that Italian and Rumanian armies showed a significant lack of enthusiasm for their cause, and as such surrendered whenever the opportunity became available.³⁶ Indeed the allied armies fought on the Eastern front with some degree of reluctance; the cause of Nazism was not their own. As the battle drew on these reservations increased, taking their toll on troop morale. In that respect, even if the allied armies were adequately equipped this growing resentment would still have been a major weakness against Russian assault.

Unsurprisingly, the Soviets crushed the weakened flanks of the German army. By the completion of Operation Uranus it is estimated that almost 290,000 men were trapped inside of a pocket 100 miles square, called *der Kessel*³⁷ by the soldiers trapped inside. German response to the encirclement of troops in the *kessel* was to attempt the infamously ill-fated "air-bridge." The plan was simple; use the Luftwaffe to continually resupply the 6th army by air, in effect bypassing the Soviet encirclement. This operation was as deeply flawed in its beginnings, based on poor calculations and with little regard for what soldiers would actually need to survive. The 6th army reported that it needed 700 tons of supplies per day to maintain combat effectiveness. After being presented with this figure, Reichsmarschall Goering spoke to his transport officers who informed him that the maximum amount of supplies that could be airdropped was 350 tons per day, and only for a short time. That estimate was made with no allowance for weather conditions, mechanical problems with aircraft and assuming that the Russians would not interfere with the resupply.³⁸ When presented with these figures, Goering reported Hitler that the Luftwaffe could resupply and maintain the 6th army's position by air, and the strategy of the German army was set. The final guarantee made to the 6th army was 300 tons of supply per day, less than half of what was actually necessary. This act of gross negligence was much more than a simple strategic blunder. It condemned the men of the 6th army to death by starvation even in the event that the air-bridge functioned exactly as anticipated with no hiccups.

The actual performance of the resupply by air was significantly worse than anticipated. Indeed

over the course of the operation thirty percent of flights would be lost due to poor weather conditions and Soviet fighter harassment.³⁹ Against the earlier presented estimate of 300 tons per day, the sixth army received only 350 tons for the entire first week of air resupply.⁴⁰ Air resupply would be more successful on multiple occasions, but at all times it was handicapped by a target goal which tremendously undercut the needs of the 6th army. The consequences were what anyone who could compare the amount of supplies needed by the 6th army with what could actually be delivered would easily guess; 6th army forces fought on without sufficient munitions and were made to starve until their inevitable destruction.

The starvation experienced by soldiers in the *kessel* was perhaps the most effective weapon used by the Soviet Union. Over a month into the encirclement, German corporal Bruno Kaligo wrote this letter: *"My dear parents, I should not be writing you this but I have long since lost all my courage. I have forgotten how to laugh. I am just a shivering bundle of nerves. Everybody lives here as if they are in a trance. If I get put before a military tribunal and shot for writing this letter, then that will be a release from suffering. I have no hope left. I ask you not to cry if you get a letter saying that I have died. Be kind to each other and thank God for everyday he gives you."*⁴¹ This letter shows exactly what soldiers the Red Army was facing when carrying out what Soviet General Staff called the "liquidation" of surrounded German soldiers.⁴² By the time the Red Army was actively closing in on the encircled troops at Stalingrad, the 6th army had spent almost two months out of supply in the Russian winter. Unlike the Soviet defenders of autumn, who starved occasionally but were fighting to defend their homeland, German soldiers were stranded over 1,000 miles from home by their own leadership and left to starve for months. Every day they were trapped in the *kessel*, the 6th army grew colder and weaker, until the Red Army decided the time for "liquidation" had come. Out of the 290,000 who were trapped in the *kessel*, only 91,000 soldiers surrendered at the conclusion of the battle. Most were already starved when captured, and others were stricken by a typhus epidemic while in captivity. Many more would die due to the brutal conditions of the Soviet POW system, where many were forced to march hundreds of miles through the Russian winter, only to perish in a work camp. Due to these conditions, only 5,000 of these

prisoners survived captivity.⁴³ This totality of destruction makes Operation Uranus one of the largest and most effective encirclements in the history of organized warfare. The encirclement and later annihilation of the German army was so effective that the Soviet General Staff refers to this phase of the battle as "*the classic unsurpassed example of a present day Cannae,*" drawing an entirely valid parallel with one of the most infamous examples of the encirclement of a major army.

In the historic battle of Cannae, Carthaginian general Hannibal used superior cavalry forces to defeat Roman cavalry defending the flanks of their legions. Despite being outnumbered almost two to one by formidable Roman legionaries, Hannibal completely encircled the Roman army on an open plain after recognizing and exploiting the weakness of the Roman flanks. Once the Roman army was encircled, their fate was sealed. Perhaps a few could breakout and retreat to safety; for most of those surrounded the only question was how long it would take to be slaughtered or captured. The same was true for the 6th army after operation Uranus; the only question for them was how long it would take for the Soviet forces to close in and "liquidate" the last aggressors in the city. Just as with the Romans, their fate was sealed not when the opposing army finally began the butchering, but the moment their commanders allowed them to become surrounded.

With the importance of the November encirclement acknowledged, the impact of the earlier battle in the city streets of Stalingrad becomes readily apparent. The severity of combat in the city and the delay in its capture caused German command to focus all available resources on the battle in the city, at the expense of the flanks and rear of the army. German panzer divisions were committed to combat in the city of Stalingrad, not held in reserve where they could react quickly to Soviet counter attacks on the flanks. Soviet resistance made the deployment of Panzers especially wasteful, meaning that even if panzers could be maneuvered to prevent encirclement, their effectiveness would be drastically reduced from pre-battle levels. Finally, during the offensive itself general Chuikov prevented the 61h army from transferring troops to areas that would be most affected by the assault. All of the

aforementioned reasons prevented the 6th army from assembling or utilizing a strong reserve force that could have prevented the encirclement. This failure sealed the fate of the 6th army.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the establishment of reserves for the purpose of preventing encirclement was the single-minded determination of Hitler to capture the city that bore Stalin's name. By the time of Operation Uranus, the battle for Stalingrad was not just seen in the strategic sense, but as a battle for propaganda.⁴⁴ Indeed the capture of the city was not necessary to accomplish the initial goals of Operation Blau, but the drive to conquer the city took on a life of its own. Stalingrad became a symbol, a battle that if won would cause the morale of the Red Army and all of the citizens of the Soviet Union to crumble, giving way to a German victory in the east.⁴⁵ To that end, if Stalingrad were captured, the female population of the city was to be forced into slave labor and prostitution, while all surviving men were to be massacred as an example.⁴⁶ It would be wishful thinking to expect someone with such a mind set to back away from the siege of Stalingrad, even if such an action would save his frontline soldiers. In this manner, Hitler became the greatest possible ally to the Red Army. Regardless of how vulnerable his armies were actually becoming, Hitler's ever growing obsession with the capture of the city caused him to play perfectly into this strategy, and the troops of the 6th army suffered the consequences. The only hope they had was for their commanding officer to disobey the directive of Hitler and act in the best interest of his soldiers lives.

Due to the inability of Hitler's strategy to see the war outside of the city, men and material from the flanks and reserves that could have potentially thwarted the encirclement were reassigned to the city of Stalingrad, where they would waste away against the Red Army's defensive force.⁴⁷ Antony Beevor suggests that if Paulus had foreseen the danger of encirclement he could have then established a strong mobile reserve division and smashed the lower arm of the encirclement, and potentially used those same forces to counter the primary Soviet threat on the northern flank.⁴⁸ This is evidenced by the success of the German 29th motorized infantry division, which proved capable of intercepting advancing forces on the southern front of the battle. However, the 29th had to be redeployed to protect parts of

the southern flank that could no longer be defended by the weakened Rumanian armies.⁴⁹ This episode leaves one to wonder how successful Uranus might have been had Paulus the foresight or capability to deploy a more significant portion of his panzer forces in response to the Soviet offensive. With the city of Stalingrad yet to be subdued, Paulus would have to break with the Fuhrer and his obsession with Stalingrad if he wanted to pull his tanks away from the assault. Even if he had recognized the necessity of keeping a strong and mobile reserve division, such an outcome was unlikely based on the commitment to military discipline displayed by General Paulus, who proved himself unwilling to disobey orders and break with his superiors even if doing so would save his own men.

Soviet resistance on the Stalingrad front resulted in the widespread decimation of German panzer forces present at the battle. Some of the brutally effective methods the Soviets used to damage German panzer forces have already been mentioned. Evidence of such destruction is apparent when reviewing immediate German counter attacks to Operation Uranus. The XXXXVIII panzer corps was sent to reinforce Rumanian forces under attack on the northern front. Under ideal conditions, a panzer corps would be entirely capable of doing battle with a Soviet tank army, but prolonged combat in the city and poor weather conditions left the force with less serviceable tanks than necessary to form a full division, much less the three divisions that made up the corps. Soviet anti tank strategies had clearly worked their magic on German armor. This does not necessarily mean that General Paulus did not have enough Panzers remaining to form a strong reactionary division. The decimation of his Panzers was to a degree that he likely could have formed a strong reserve force to fend off Soviet counter attack, but he did not have enough Panzers at his disposal to do so without withdrawing his forces from the city. To put it simply, General Paulus had to choose where his armor would best be deployed, and he made the wrong choice.

The Panzers the 6th army had left in the city were largely unable to assist in the defense of their flanks. General Chuikov launched counterattacks against German forces-during Operation Uranus, with the objective of pinning down Paulus's forces and preventing their transfer to the primary combat fronts.⁵⁰ This collected attack, along with significant delays in communication within the German army

helps explain the long response time for panzer divisions, some of whom did not mobilize over two days after the beginning of Operation Uranus.

If it is indeed true that the 6th army was lost the moment it became encircled, then creating reserve divisions was its last best chance to salvage the battle. However the single minded determination of Hitler to conquer Stalingrad and the foolish belief that the Soviets had depleted their reserves combined with the extremely effective resistance of the 62nd army prevented the establishment of such a reactionary force. It is still possible that even if General Paulus had organized a strong reserve he may still have been defeated, either by the success of operation Uranus or some other strategic blunder. However it is most definitely due to the stubborn and stalwart defense put up by the Soviet soldiers at Stalingrad that we do not know that answer.

The destruction of the 6th army at Stalingrad marks a critical turning point in the course of the war. It marked the failure of Germany's campaign to arrest Soviet oil production, dealt a major blow to the combat forces of the Wehrmacht, and fostered the transformation of the Red Army from the unorganized military force of the first two years of war into a professional military juggernaut, backed by unmatched industrial production. Soviet morale was also greatly improved after such a significant victory. The Red Army was emboldened by the victory at Stalingrad, and its massive ranks pressed home their newfound confidence and enthusiasm. Perhaps most importantly, the battle can be seen a point where the momentum of the war shifted. Before Stalingrad, the eastern front was characterized by the vast conquest of Soviet territory. After the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the momentum shifted as the Soviets began to retake their country eventually advancing into Germany itself to bring the final end to Hitler's Third Reich.

The defeat at Stalingrad proved to be the ultimate failure of Operation Blau, the southern campaign with the objective of arresting Soviet oil in the Caucasus region. The irrational focus placed on the capture of the city had disastrous results for the campaign as a whole. Just as Nazi command was entirely willing to sacrifice the flanks of the 6th army to hasten the capture of Stalingrad, forces that could have furthered the overall strategic mission were diverted to the Stalingrad front. From the moment its

capture became a major strategic goal for the German army, Stalingrad served to weaken the overall strategic mission of the German army on its southern front, which was originally to capture or destroy Soviet oil fields. German need for oil before the Blau offensive is well documented, and the resources present in the Caucasus oilfields could be used to continue large scale strategic operations.⁵¹ The 4th Panzer Army, which was originally to be deployed in order to capture the Caucasian oilfields, was redirected to supplement the 6th army before the start of operations in Stalingrad.⁵² Additionally, support that could have reinforced German armies in the Caucasus would also be directed towards Stalingrad, most notably the power of the Luftwaffe bombers. During the course of the battle of Stalingrad, Hitler diverted the vast majority of his air support towards hastening the destruction and capture of the city. Of course German bombing raids often only served to transform the city into a pile of rubble that served as perfect cover for the Red Army's urban warfare tactics, but there were other negative repercussions from the diversion of such resources. There is significant evidence to support the claim that if the Luftwaffe's bombing resources were concentrated on the Baku oilfields, Soviet oil production could have been significantly hindered.⁵³ Hitler would of course try and justify the capture of Stalingrad for the purposes of cutting off Soviet oil production, but if that was truly his primary goal, it would have been more effective to destroy Soviet oil production through the previously mentioned strategies. Instead Stalingrad ultimately served as a sink for valuable German military resources. The annihilation of the forces there would prevent the success of the German campaign against Soviet oil in the Caucasus.

Stalingrad is also the point in the war where the Soviet army transformed into a well organized and modern fighting force. Indeed during 1942 the Soviets completely outstripped German industrial production, producing an average of 1,200 tanks per month while Germany could only muster 500 tanks per month⁵⁴ Soviet military organization developed as well. Prior to the battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army was run by "duel command" meaning that frontline commanders had to have their orders approved by Commissars.⁵⁵ Requiring political officers to approve orders was a universally hated policy among Soviet ranks, on the basis that Commissars often did not possess the military knowledge necessary to make intelligent command decisions. In this way, all ranks of the Red Army parallel German

military leadership. Just as experienced military officers had to defer their judgment to Hitler's wishes despite his lack of strategic experience, every Red Army officer could find themselves in a similar scenario, unable to make the proper command decisions because their orders needed to be signed by Commissars with political rather than military concerns. This "duel command" was repealed October 9th at the height of conflict in Stalingrad, a change which dramatically modernized the command structure of the Red Army.

After the Battle of Stalingrad, the Red Army entered a new phase of the war. With its large reserves of manpower and increased industrial production, the Soviet Union was able to recover from its losses at Stalingrad rather quickly, despite suffering a roughly equal loss of life and military equipment as the German army. Furthermore the battle dampened spirits in Germany after the loss of such a significant army to the Soviet Union, just as Soviet morale was resurgent in the factories and throughout the army. Following the battle of Stalingrad in February 1943, Stalin declared that "*the expulsion of the enemy from Soviet country has begun.*"⁵⁶ Recovering much faster than the German army, Soviet forces had reclaimed much of the territory seized in Operation Blau by the end of March, 1943. By November 1943, the Red Army advanced through Ukraine and reclaimed Kiev after a lengthy occupation.⁵⁷ Germany was never able to recover from its defeat, and its future offensives against the Soviet Union, most notably the counter offensive at Kursk, were met with eventual defeat.⁵⁸ While it may be unfair to say the battle of Stalingrad decided the war, there can be little argument that the battle shifted momentum away from Nazi Germany and towards the Soviet Union. Ultimately, Stalingrad was a loss from which Germany would never fully recover.

In closing, the 62nd army's success in forcing the German army into a battle of attrition cannot be understated. Red Army defenders were faced with limited food and munitions while fighting an experienced, well organized army with advanced aviation support. In response they developed extremely effective urban warfare tactics, which neutralized 6th army advantages and wore down their forces. When faced with this resistance, German command focused their attention almost single-mindedly on the city of Stalingrad, sacrificing the flanks of their army as well as their primary objectives in the southern front of

the war in an effort to dislodge Soviet defenders. This strategic blunder caused the encirclement and annihilation of an entire army, and dramatically affected the course of the war. Since German offensives after Stalingrad were largely met with failure, we can see the Battle of Stalingrad as a turning point in the war, an event which set about a series of Soviet military victories which led to the ultimate destruction of the Nazi empire. The lesson of Stalingrad is that such victories were made possible by the sacrifice of those soldiers who were ordered to defend the city and draw the German army in at any cost.

When Soviet soldiers made their battle cry: *"There is no land for us behind the Volga,"* it was an affirmation that they would not retreat or surrender no matter how hard German forces pushed to conquer their homeland, and that at Stalin's order commanded, they would take "not one step backwards." Because of their dedication and willingness to sacrifice to defeat the German army, "No land behind the Volga" takes on a new meaning. For the German war machine on the eastern front, Stalingrad was as far as they could reach into Soviet territory. After the defeat of the 6th army, they could do nothing but retreat to conquered territory west of the city. For the German army after Stalingrad, there would be nothing but land behind the Volga, but they could never advance beyond that great river.

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