1. The battle of Stalingrad: a turning point?

Intro

* Circumstances leading up to battle in Moscow
  + German supremacy
  + Allied weaknesses
* Campagin in Moscow
* How did it begin
* Why?
  + Hitler is like bitches we gotta kill us some slavs, especially fore the yankees get in this war
* Forces leading up to battle – Germans v. Soviets
* Beginning of the battle
  + After failure of BR, Operation Blau starts, sweeping victories across the caucases, race to reach oil fields just around Stalingrad, siege proper
* Pivotal point
  + What caused the Germans to start losing?
    - I can’t remember, maybe cos they underestimated Russian forces
    - They got circled and cut off from their supply lines and starved until they were forced to surrender
  + How did the Soviets take advantage of this?
    - Rape via encirclement
* WHY is this a pivotal moment?
  + After Stalingrad it was obvious for everyone involved that germany could not win the war, and all fighting from this point on was entirely to prolong the conflict and make a surrender on nicer terms more likely
  + How did this damage the German forces?
    - rape
  + How did this boost the Allied forces?
  + What implications did this have for the rest of the war?
    - Russian offensive in 1944 happened on anniversary of op BR, and simultaneous with DDay
  + Can you draw an underlying theme from this battle as it pertains to the war as a whole?
* Conclusion
  + Restate the importance of this battle.

Despite having conducted one of the most successful military campaigns in history, as winter set in late 1941 and early 1942, it became evident that the Wehrmacht had failed to achieve Operation Barbarossa’s objective of a speedy destruction of the Soviet Union. As their lack of winter preparedness increased their casualties, and the frigid temperatures blunted superior German mobility and skill, the three Army Groups found themselves at standstills throughout Eastern Europe. Where Army Group North was stuck in the siege of Leningrad, and Army Group South was forced to retreat from Rostov, Army Group Center’s overstretched line of supply was forcing it to retreat from it’s tantalizingly close position to Moscow.

As the Battle of Britain dragged on, the unexpected and successful resistance of the British throughout the summer of 1940 forced Hitler to choose between a continued cooperation with the Soviet Union and the alternative of a two front war. Making the case for extending the partnership with Russia was the fact that, with a land invasion of Britain indefinitely postponed and the looming threat of the United States, the prospect of a long, drawn out war with the Western powers was becoming more and more likely. With the capitulation of France and the acquiescence of its lumbering neighbour to the East, the Nazi regime would be capable of dedicating its resources to its expansion in North Africa and the submarine warfare seeking to defeat Britain in the Battle of the Atlantic. Unfortunately for the Soviets, if Hitler had had any settled aims at the beginning of the war it was to eventually attack Eastern Europe under the guise of providing the German population with all of the liveable space east of the Urals. Furthermore, with the Russians out of the way, Germany would then be in control of all of the available resources in continental Europe and thus be free to face the Anglo-American coalition with confidence. Finally, since the Red Army could only grow stronger over time, any delays in Hitler’s ‘great and true task’ of destroying Bolshevism would only leave a Germany occupied in the West highly vulnerable to Russian threats. Under the assumption that the Soviet Union could be destroyed in a single military campaign, these proved to be irresistible arguments. After a brief diplomatic exploration, Hitler ceased to look for a compromise and on December 5th he told his service chiefs to attack Russia in the following May. (pg60-63)

The invasion, codenamed Operation Barbarossa, began in earnest on June 22 1941 after a delay of four weeks, and was at first wildly successful. Seeking to destroy the main Russian forces in a series of deep encirclements as far east as possible before ultimately forming a barrier against Asiatic Russia along a line from Archangel to the Volga, by any standard of military accomplishment the achievements of the Wehrmacht in Russia were incomparable to those of any other land force in the history of war. The main attacks were launched by three German Army Groups, North, Center and South and within the first week the first great encirclement lead to the capture of 287,000 Red Army men, with 2,500 tanks and 1,500 guns in pockets around Bialystok and Minsk. (pg63-68). Within the first two weeks of July, Army Group Center swept into central Russia and grabbed another 300,000 prisoners even as it seized the cities of Orsha and Smolensk on the road to Moscow. Simultaneously, Army Group North rushed into Estonia and the outer defences of Leningrad, while Army Group South headed toward Kiev and the rich agricultural and industrial areas in the Dnepr. These dramatic victories gave the German leadership at the very top the impression that they were well on their way to destroying Soviet military power with one hard blow. Recognizing but not fully understanding the implications of the determined fight most Red Army men put up, whether surrounded or being driven back, the Germans believed that they had won the critical battles and that little but mopping up remained to be done. The continuous successes of the troops at the front all but confirmed the assumption that the campaign would be a short one and correspondingly, no replacements were made available or planned for either personnel or equipment after the first few weeks. The Luftwaffe expected to be back fighting the British after two months in the East and most of the anti-aircraft guns were at home or in the West in any case. For a short time it looked as if the War in the East had been won and that Germans were free to do whatever they wanted. (pg 264-266)

It was during this euphoric period that Hitler decided to expand his plan of wholesale slaughter of the Jewish population of Europe. Having already decided to dispose of the racially inferior Slavic population of his recently subjugated empire via either mass starvation or slave labour, the plans to kill certain categories of prisoners of war were being implemented. By February 1942, of the 3.9 million Soviet soldiers captured the vast majority, some 2.8 million, were dead. From the first days of the invasion Jews were being targeted and by the end of July thousands of Jews were being killed daily. When it became obvious that these massacres ran into little resistance from the military (and were often assisted and even urged on by them), the heady days of victory in July provided the opportunity to extend this process both to the rest of the territory that would be occupied by German forces and to the whole of German controlled Europe. Although mass shootings always remained a significant element in the process, they soon proved to be too laborious and more efficient methods of disposal were quickly invented. In the fall of 1941 the construction of large special facilities for large scale murder, first tried out on Russian prisoners of war, had begun and before long the process of moving large quantities of Eastern European Jews and killing them was industrialized. (pg . 267, 301)

However, contrary to German expectations, the Red Army did not collapse and indeed the determination of its men steadily grew. The encirclements and forward thrusts of the German mobile forces had to be followed up by the infantry, trudging ahead on foot, before rear areas could be made secure. (parker pg68) In spite of the enormous losses in men and equipment suffered by the Russians, the Soviet system was clearly holding together and there was both a continuing front and a steady, if not yet massive, stream of new formations and replacements. By the first week of August it was beginning to be recognized that the Caucasus and Murmansk would probably not be reached in 1941 and that the campaign could be expected to continue into the following year. German units had to be refurbished, and during the ensuing pause of late July and August, decisions had to be made as to the direction of the next offensives in the East. (berg 268-269) While the German High Command wanted to concentrate its forces in a push towards Moscow, under the assumption that its strategic and symbolic importance would force a decisive battle, Hitler disagreed. (parker pg 68) Choosing to advance in the south rather than leave their flank in the center exposed, after some hesitation, Hitler decided to transfer some of the forces away from Army Group Center to assist in the attacks against Leningrad in the north (berg pg 270) while Army Group South was directed to take Kharkov and advance to Rostov in order to occupy the Crimea. (parker 70)

(the very fact that they could no longer continue in a 3 pronged attack establishes that the original plan had failed pg269

pg300 – must quote on stalin looking humane)

(things slow down then segueway into red army, having heard rumours of the death became more determined)

With the failure of Operation Barbarossa to achieve a complete victory over the USSR, Hitler in late 1941 faced an even greater need for a decisive victory that would allow him to plunder the natural resources necessary to consolidate his power over Europe and establish a stronghold in the continent formidable enough to dissuade the United States and the British Empire from escalating their struggle. To this effect, during the summer campaign of 1942, he set in motion Operation Blau which sought to neutralize Stalingrad, a strategically located industrial zone as well as a propaganda coup, and seize control of the oilfields in the Caucasus. Although it was initially very successful, ultimately the Wehrmacht fell prey to organizational disarray stemming from its overly ambitious goals, Hitler’s inflexibility, and the sheer unforeseen numerical superiority and relentlessness of the defending Red Army. The battle over Stalingrad, which cost millions of lives and levelled the city, ended with surrender of over 200,000 Axis troops and in a decisive victory for the USSR. This defeat proved to be a devastating blow from which the German army never recovered, and from this point onwards it became clear that the Eastern front was now reduced to a devastating war of attrition from which only the Soviets could emerge victorious.

In particular, the battle over Stalingrad, which cost millions of lives and where over 290,000 Axis troops were encircled and forced to surrender in February 1943, proved to be a decisive victory for the USSR. From that point onwards, the German army never regained the strategic initiative and it became clear that the collapse of the Nazi regime was only a matter of time.

It becomes clear upon analysis of the German failure in Moscow that this was a pivotal moment in the war, shifting the balance of power in favour of the Allies, and rendering defeat as only a matter of time for the Axis forces.

overstretched line of supply forced them to stop tantalizingly close to the center of Moscow and left them at the mercy of a series of desperate Soviet counterattacks.

New operations after the spring thaw enables Germans to fight in their advantage.

Where Army Group North was occupied in the siege of Leningrad and Army Group South was forced to back out of Rostov in the Caucuses, Army Group Center

, once briefly within grasp of Army Group Center, was now becoming more and more unattainable as the Wehrmacht was slowly pushed back in a series of vicious wars of attrition, left unable to engage in the kind of mobile warfare it excelled in by the frigid winter conditions.

was now unattainable as the frigid weather restricted the Wehrmacht’s ability to engage in the mobile warfare it excelled in preparation left it’s troops

With the failure of operation Barbarossa to strike a decisive blow against the Soviet Union by the beginning of the winter of 1942,