

PM

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Red Army Seizes Heart of Nazi Power

Berlin Falls After 12 Days of Bloodiest Fight

By KEN CLARK

The Red Army has Berlin.

The once fat, strong heart of German power, now a wreck, was taken in 12 days of bloodiest battle by the overwhelming might of Marshals Zhukov and Konev.

The surrender of the remnants of the Nazis in the ruins of the Chancellery where Hitler is said to have met his end, and the smashed-up Tiergarten (Berlin's Central Park) turned a page in history.

The city was twice occupied before—for short periods—once by the Russians in 1760 and again in 1806 by Napoleon.

Stalin in meaningful and triumphant pronouncement says the Russians have taken "the center of German imperialism and the cradle of German aggression."

Surrender

The end came at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon when the fanatic defenders, 70,000 of them, at the order of a General of Artillery, Webling, laid down their arms. They included SS men, Volkssturm militia, Hitler youth boys and women's death battalions whose indoctrination in destruction could not stand against the Red Army's guns and men.

As for their city, the largest in Europe with its 4,335,000 normal population, according to the United Press, it is flattened against its sandy plain, half knocked down by the bombs of the USAAF and the RAF, smashed completely by Soviet artillery.

Its last futile defense cost the Germans 343,000 fighters in killed and captured. One hundred and twenty thousand were taken in a pocket to the southeast of the city proper.

If it now seems important, the Russians took in their prisoner bag Hans Fritzsche, deputy German propaganda chief, who said Hitler and Goebbels had committed suicide; Lt. Gen. Kurt Wettag; Lt. Gen. Walter Schliess-Dankwart; Vice Adm. Voss, chief of Berlin's defense; and a flock of minor officers and officials.

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Order of Day

In his order of the day announcing the Red Army's most spectacular triumph of the war, Stalin addressed the entire body of the Red Army and Navy. He mentioned 131 generals as involved in the Berlin operation, and in a long list of other officers appeared the name of his son, Col. Vasily Stalin.

The order said the city was taken by troops of the 1st White Russian front under Zhukov, and those of the 1st Ukrainian front under Konev; that formations of the units which particularly distinguished themselves were to be named after Berlin; that the victory would be celebrated in Moscow by 24 artillery salvos from 324 guns.

The order—which was one of more than 300 issued since the beginning of the war—wound up with the customary poetic and definite exclamation:

“Eternal glory to the heroes who fell in the battles for the freedom and independence of our Motherland. Death to the German invaders!”

Berlin fell three years, 10 months and 10 days after Hitler attacked the Soviets. The Red Army soldiers had marched 1000 miles from Moscow and 1500 miles from Stalingrad over broken and burned countryside and city to get at the powerful heart of Nazism pumping death into the arteries of Europe.

The siege was the triumphant culmination of the drive to the west which began at Stalingrad, Jan. 31, 1943. It was the final answer to the great mistake made by the Fuehrer when on June 21, 1941, he launched his panzers into the USSR in the drive to the east.

Co-ordination among the Allies arranged at Yalta had provided that the Russians should take the Nazi capital, and it is now clear that criticism directed at the USSR when Zhukov and Konev having reached the Oder, paused for refreshment after their Winter offensive, was actually criticism of the entire Allied plan.

Big Cities

The timing appears perfect. While the Americans and British pressed swiftly eastward, destroying the last hope of the Nazis (as was indicated in Himmler's offer of peace) to turn at the end, on our eastern Ally, the Russian Marshals assembled overwhelming force against Berlin.

In this war it has been made clear that great cities such as Leningrad, Stalingrad, Warsaw and Budapest, are harder to take than lines in open country however well protected by defense in depth. Whatever the Germans intended to do about their southern and northern redoubts, there is no question but that they fully realized the

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enormous strength of their mighty modern capital, grown up solid in stone, steel and concrete in the last 75 years. As it falls out, it was here that they were to make their final noisy and bloody end and with what short time they had and what material power they had, they prepared.

They surrounded the city, on its plain, west of the narrow Oder, with fortifications 20 miles broad, with concrete and steel chambers extending underground 40 feet, the whole armed with every conceivable and most modern weapon, manned by desperate and skillful fighters.

Nineteen days ago, Apr. 16, the attack on the outer defense of Berlin by the Russians began. With perhaps 1,000,000 men, fresh soldiers, fired with a determination to make away with the "Nazi beast in his lair," Zhukov and Konev attacked.

Zhukov assaulted frontally across the Oder and within two days had penetrated the German defenses for 20 miles. On one sector alone his guns fired 450,000 shells in two hours and he used 450 tanks.

Campaign

One hundred miles to the south Konev made a big break across the Neisse River. His forces raced west and northward.

By Apr. 19, Zhukov had established a siege arc to the northwest of Berlin at a distance of about 20 miles.

It was announced that the 1st Polish Army had joined Zhukov's 1st White Russians and Konev's 1st Ukrainians were operating with the 2nd Polish Army.

Five days later Zhukov was in the outskirts of the city proper on the northwest and Konev 20 miles away to the southeast.

On Apr. 26 Konev and Zhukov encircled the city, Goebbels' promise of aid from troops in the west fell to the ground, and the final carnage began.

The United Press reported that artillery veterans of Stalingrad and Warsaw bombarded Unter den Linden, the Wilhelmstrasse, the Tiergarten and other famous landmarks in the city with greatest volume of explosives ever known.

The Nazi rats ran down into Berlin's 54 miles of subways, emerged at certain stations behind the Russian lines to blast away with tommy guns before they were wiped out. The Red Army men battling from house to house, crawled over the roofs close under the chimney-dodging Russian planes, took their field guns down into the subways. The battle continued for six days, in the streets, in the houses, above and below the ground, in the air in an ever-narrowing circle.