

PM

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The Story of Stalingrad

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MOSCOW, July 18.—Twenty-four years ago this July, the Red Revolution in Russia stood to win or to lose at Tsaritsyn (now Stalingrad) on the river Volga. That June, Stalin with a Red Army unit and two armored cars had arrived there as Commissar General of Food for South Russia. He found chaos and terrible confusion. Everywhere, he ran into obstacles, into difficulties, into discouragement and loss of hope. Enemy armies were marching across the Don steppes, encroaching every day on Tsaritsyn, the loss of which would have cut the rich granary of the Caucasus from Moscow and Leningrad in the north. In many telegrams Lenin warned Stalin of the dangers, offered encouragement, called for action.

On July 11, 1918, Stalin wrote to Lenin:

“Matters are complicated by the fact that the military headquarters of the north Caucasus area have proved to be utterly incapable of adapting themselves to the situation. The fact is that our experts are not only psychologically incapable of ruthlessly combating the counterrevolution, but likewise, being staff workers who know only how to make field sketches and draft plans for realignment, are absolutely indifferent to actual operations and in general regard themselves as outsiders, as guests. The military commissars have been unable to fill the gap.”

As the situation soon became critical, Stalin sent word to Lenin that he was taking over.

At this time, the remnant of the Ukrainian Revolutionary Army that had retreated clear across the Don Basin reached Tsaritsyn. With this army as a nucleus, Stalin undertook the formation of a new Red Army.

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reaching the Volga, began to contract from day to day. The Red Army had no means of retreat. The battle was fought, and the army under Stalin won a victory. The enemy that attacked at Tsaritsyn was driven back toward the river Don.

Tsaritsyn since that time has become a Red symbol. The Russians have changed its name to Stalingrad, and to us Stalingrad is a place American engineers came to 20 years ago to build a tractor plant for the Soviet Government. Stalingrad today is a great industrial city of 400,000, a city of big factories belching and smoking. It is situated mostly on the West bank of the Volga on a deep, silt, low-lying plateau that in some places has been cut into by erosion. From the air Stalingrad looks modern and western, like a Russian Akron, like a Pittsburg in the East.

From Stalingrad's location on the River Volga, this tremendous new manufacturing city commands the trade of the Caspian Sea and the river trade to inland northern Russia. It controls the oil business, the fish business, the wheat business for all this heart land of the country. The sort of national life that floods into New Orleans floods into Stalingrad. Its loss would leave Russia like the fall of Vicksburg left the Confederate States.

Stalin in more than one way finds himself in 1942 where he was in 1918 at Tsaritsyn. Again an enemy advances from the Don—the Germans are less than 200 miles from the city. Stalin this time is the head of the Soviet Government, but once again it is he who directs the strategy of this battle.

This time we, as well as Stalin, are involved. A battle for Tsaritsyn in 1942 would find us historically much where we were during Easter week of 1918, when we feared the German Army would break through the Western Front before the American Army could get there. We are fighting for time, and Germany again is fighting against time, and once again we shall soon know whether we have been outmaneuvered.

Historically, again, we in 1942 are back where we were in 1940, when England was faced with a fight for its existence. Our enemy still is the same enemy and our problem still is the same problem—only its geography has shifted. Our future is as eminently concerned with Stalingrad's safety as it was with London's. Tsaritsyn is a foothold of our freedom.