

Stand in Stalingrad



Russian war scenes: Their homes despoiled, farmers take refuge in miserable dugouts . . .



. . . a common grave is dug for civilians killed by the Nazis in a community the Red Army has recaptured

The telephone jangled urgently. It sounded thin and shrill against the low thunder of guns and exploding bombs. Alexander Chuyanoff, chief of the Stalingrad Communist Committee, wearily picked up the receiver. "Moscow calling," said a voice.

The call was from Joseph Stalin, speaking directly from the Kremlin. The message was the same he had sent to other Communist leaders in other beleaguered towns—"Stand firm." But this time Stalin supplemented it with detailed suggestions for defense and with a demand for the stern treatment of panicmongers. Nearly a quarter of a century ago, Stalin himself had headed an army besieged in the city, and he knew both its terrain and its people.

There was good reason for Stalin's call. Intelligence reports indicated that the Germans were about to launch another major attack—stronger even than any of the 100-odd assaults they had already hurled against the city. If the battered city could again thrust back the foe, it would win another week or two of precious time.

The attack came last week on schedule. Into a single narrow sector, the Nazi command sent 300,000 men, thousands of guns, and many hundreds of tanks and planes. The objective was a height overlooking the Volga in a factory district in the northwestern zone. From here, a wide road led into the city's heart.

Soviet batteries slaughtered thousands of Nazis. So many tanks were destroyed that a correspondent called the area "a tank abattoir." When the tanks were disabled, the Germans dug them into the ground for use as pillboxes—and in one small sector alone the Russians captured 135 of them. But slowly, sometimes gaining no more than 200 yards a day, the Germans pushed their wedge into the suburb.

Incessantly pounded by Nazi planes—there were 1,500 sorties in one small area on a single day—the Russians resisted stubbornly. One cluster of ten log cabins and two brick buildings changed hands ten times. After that there was little left to fight for: where the buildings once stood, there were now only shell craters.

Counterattack

It was at this moment that the Red command played its trump cards—two parallel counteroffensives aimed at the exposed Nazi left flank.

One of the two Red columns began its push from the Volga, above Stalingrad. Moved across the river under the cover of darkness, this column pushed southward between the Volga and the Don. Its immediate gains consisted of a series of fortified hills.

The other column struck south from the Kletskaya region into the U-loop of the Don River. Its first objective was to sever the supply lines of the Nazi Armies besieging Stalingrad. Its ultimate goal—which not even the Soviet generals yet dared to hope for—was to convert the 60-mile-wide corridor between the Volga and the Don into a gigantic rat trap.

For both columns, the progress was painfully slow. That was chiefly because of the terrain. Apart from a few hills, the theater of war is as bare and level as a jail courtyard. It is partly composed of salt marsh, hardened by a three-month drought. But most of it is a steppe, swept by dust storms and devoid of shelter.

The struggle thus developed into local battles for hilltops, dominating the surrounding country. Short on tanks and planes, the Reds found the task far from easy. Among their perils were steppe grass fires, started by the Nazis to prevent Soviet night attacks.

But slow though they were, the two columns quickly produced results. Alarmed by the new threat, the Germans had to divert 30 divisions—450,000 men—from other fronts to protect their left flank. With the pressure on Stalingrad momentarily eased, its defenders too launched counteroffensives, improving their positions.

As the siege entered its seventh bitter week, Moscow's tone became more confident. The dagger was still near the heart, but hope had already been kindled for Stalingrad's survival.

Winter

Russia's hope was Hitler's despair. His schedule for the year had already been irreparably disrupted, and none of his major objectives—Stalingrad, the Caspian Sea, the oil of the Caucasus—had yet been attained. And already the Nazi soldiers could feel the cold breath of winter through their summer uniforms.

One thing the German command was determined to prevent: its troops were not going to suffer this winter as they suffered in the last. The preparations for the coming cold season began months ago.



A Common Scene: Dead Germans Covered in Frost

They were intensified early in September, when Hitler appointed three of his top men to direct the job.

Gen. Franz Halder, chief of the general staff and one of Hitler's personal military advisers, was named to supervise the military requirements of the winter campaign. General Jacob, who helped to build the famous Westwall and the defenses on the French coast, was to erect shelters and fortifications. Gen. Gustav von Wietersheim, nicknamed the "Ludendorff of the New Army," was to take charge of supplies and railways.

For months, heavy forts have been under construction behind the front line. The towns and cities which the Germans held last winter without fortifications have now been fortified. All through the summer, German factories have been producing special heaters and guards for tanks and locomotive pipes, to prevent the repetition of last winter's breakdowns. By a recent decree, part of all German stoves in shops and factories has been taken over for army use.

Warm, solid barracks are now being erected throughout occupied Russia. Furs

Stalingrad

—bought or looted—~~Shave~~ been gathered from every corner of Europe. German furriers have been allowed to stay closed from Monday to Thursday, to enable them to work on army orders. White hoods and skis have been sent to Russia by the tens of thousands. Enormous supplies of food—44,000,000 pounds of bread and 11,000,000 pounds of meat a week—have been earmarked for disposition by General von Wietersheim.

But even with all these preparations, the winter will not be an easy one. Before the Nazis stands the Red Army—still intact and still aggressive. Behind them is a hostile and devastated country, where the Wehrmacht's extended supply lines will be in constant peril from guerrilla units. Already the supply system of the armies besieging Stalingrad is strained to a dangerous point. Just how great the strain is, is indicated in this report from Moscow: because overburdened supply lines had been unable to get munitions through to the Luftwaffe, stukas "bombed" Red positions with samovars and sewing machines.



Newsweek