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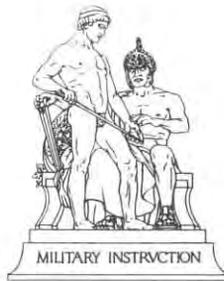
MOSCOW TO STALINGRAD:  
DECISION IN THE EAST

*by*

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*and*

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*CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY*

*UNITED STATES ARMY*

*WASHINGTON, D.C., 1987*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Ziemke, Earl Frederick, 1922—

Moscow to Stalingrad.

(Army historical series)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

Supt. of Docs. no.: D 114.19:M85

1. World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—Soviet Union. 2. Soviet Union—History—1939–1945. I. Bauer, Magna E., 1902–1981. II. Center of Military History. III. Title. IV. Series.

D764.Z4927 1986 940.54'21 86–600063

CMH Pub 30–12

First Printing

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For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, D.C. 20402

# Foreword

*Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* is the second to be completed in a projected three-volume history of the German-Soviet conflict in World War II. The first, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, covered the Soviet Army's liberation of its own territory and its drive across central and southeastern Europe. In the present volume, the German and Soviet forces initially confront each other on the approaches to Moscow, Leningrad, and Rostov in the late-1941 battles that produced the first major German setbacks of the war and gave the Soviet troops their first tastes of success. Later, the pendulum swings to the Germans' side, and their armies race across the Ukraine and into the Caucasus during the summer of 1942. In the course of a year, the Soviet Command goes from offensive to defensive and, finally, at Stalingrad, decisively to the offensive—meanwhile, frequently in desperate circumstances, building the strength and proficiency that will enable it to mount the relentless thrusts of the succeeding years.

In tracing the shifting Soviet and German fortunes, the author has had full access to the German military records, most of which fell into American and British hands. He has also made extensive use of the Soviet war histories, memoirs, and periodical literature. The result is both a panorama of battles, among them some of the greatest in the history of warfare, and an inquiry into the forces in war that shape and test the military power of nations.

Washington D.C.  
1 September 1985

WILLIAM A. STOFFT  
Brigadier General, USA  
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# The Authors

Earl F. Ziemke is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, where he received M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in history. In World War II he served with the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific Theater. In 1951, he joined the staff of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University. From 1955 to 1967 he was a historian and supervisory historian with the Office of the Chief of Military History (now the Center of Military History), and since 1967 he has been a research professor of history at the University of Georgia.

Dr. Ziemke is the author of *The German Northern Theater of Operations, 1940–1945*; *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*; and *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944–1946*. He is a contributor to *Command Decisions*; *A Concise History of World War II*; *Soviet Partisans in World War II*; *New Dimensions in Military History*; *U.S. Occupation in Europe After World War II*; *Strategic Military Deception*; and *Americans as Proconsuls: United States Military Government in Germany and Japan*.

Magna E. Bauer was a member of the staff of the U.S. Army Center of Military History from 1947 until her retirement in 1970. Educated in Italy, Germany, and the United States, Mrs. Bauer was proficient in German, Italian, French, and English. During her tenure with the center, she did research studies and translations for several volumes in the center's World War II series. These included: Forrest C. Pogue, *The Supreme Command*; Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*; Albert N. Garland and Howard McGaw Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*; and Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*. Mrs. Bauer also taught Italian and German at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School from 1943 to 1980. Mrs. Bauer died in December 1981.

## Preface

During 1942, the Axis advance reached its high tide on all fronts and began to ebb. Nowhere was this more true than on the Eastern Front in the Soviet Union. After receiving a disastrous setback on the approaches to Moscow in the winter of 1941–1942, the German armies recovered sufficiently to embark on a sweeping summer offensive that carried them to the Volga River at Stalingrad and deep into the Caucasus Mountains. The Soviet armies suffered severe defeats in the spring and summer of 1942 but recovered to stop the German advances in October and encircle and begin the destruction of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in November and December. This volume describes the course of events from the Soviet December 1941 counteroffensive at Moscow to the Stalingrad offensive in late 1942 with particular attention to the interval from January through October 1942, which has been regarded as a hiatus between the two major battles but which in actuality constituted the period in which the German fortunes slid into irreversible decline and the Soviet forces acquired the means and capabilities that eventually brought them victory. These were the months of decision in the East.

In the nearly two decades since *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* was published, much new information has become available. When *Stalingrad to Berlin* was written, the cloak of secrecy had barely been raised on the Soviet side of the war. Since then, Soviet war histories, memoirs, and articles have come in a flood; consequently, the author has treated the Soviet aspect of the war somewhat differently in *Moscow to Stalingrad* than in *Stalingrad to Berlin*. Where contradictions or discrepancies occur, the present volume can be assumed to be the more nearly correct. It would, in fact, have been easily possible to have written *Moscow to Stalingrad* predominantly from Soviet sources. The author elected not to do so for two reasons: the active impetus in the operations was German during most of the period and the German military records constitute a reasonably complete and reliable body of direct evidence while political doctrine and policy color and limit the Soviet depiction of the war. The Soviet war history has, moreover, undergone two general revisions, and there could still be others to come.

The reader may find a few explanatory remarks helpful. The order in which the volumes are appearing has necessitated a fairly comprehensive introduction. Military ranks above that of colonel are given in the Russian and the German forms because translation or conversion into U.S. equivalents would have engendered inconsistencies. Appendix A

provides a table of equivalent ranks—and demonstrates the problem. To keep them readily distinguishable from one another, German unit names are set in roman and Soviet in italic type. Diacritical marks to indicate hard and soft signs have been omitted in the transliterations from the Russian, which otherwise follow the U.S. Board on Geographic Names system. The maps are based on the 1:1,000,000 German Army High Command *Lage Ost* (Situation East) maps corrected, with respect to Soviet deployments, from the Soviet official histories.

The author is indebted to Professor Gerhard L. Weinberg, Dr. William J. Spahr, and Professor Bruce W. Menning, who took time from other pursuits to read and comment on the manuscript and who contributed insights from their extensive knowledge of German and Russian history. He is likewise grateful to his former colleagues at the Center of Military History, Dr. Maurice Matloff, Mr. George W. Garand, Mr. Charles V. P. von Lutichau, and Col. William F. Strobridge, for their advice on the manuscript and for their help and counsel over the years.

Members of the Editorial and Graphic Arts Branches in the Center of Military History carried the main burden of converting the manuscript into a book. Mrs. Sara J. Heynen was the substantive editor. Mr. Lenwood Y. Brown was the copy editor, and Mrs. Joycelyn M. Canary assisted in the copyediting. Mr. Roger D. Clinton and Mr. Arthur S. Hardyman prepared the maps and photographs, and Sp 6c. Marshall Williams designed and executed the cover for the paperback edition. The author hopes that his work may prove worthy of their efforts.

Possible errors and omissions can only be attributed to the author's failure to profit from the assistance available to him.

Athens, Georgia  
1 September 1985

EARL F. ZIEMKE

## CHAPTER XXI

# The Change of Seasons

### *Duty and Country*

#### *A New Spirit*

The “*Ni shagu nazad!*” (“Not a step back!”) order was meant to do more than bring a halt to a retreat that was threatening to get out of hand. Alexander Werth, who was the London *Sunday Times* correspondent in Moscow observed, “. . . something must have happened . . . in high Government, Military and Party quarters, for on the 30th [of July] the whole tone of the Press radically changed. No more lamentations and imprecations . . . but orders, harsh, strict, ruthless orders. Clearly what was aimed at above all was precise military results. . . .”<sup>1</sup> W. Averell Harriman, who was in Moscow two weeks later as President Roosevelt’s special envoy, reported that he had found Stalin and everyone else he saw “exactly as determined as ever.”<sup>2</sup> If, as Stalin most likely believed, the German’s ultimate objective was neither Stalingrad nor the Caucasus but Moscow, then the nation and the armed forces were going to have to be readied by every means for the decisive battle.

As the “*Ni shagu nazad!*” order was being read to the troops, the massive apparatus of public communications was swinging into action to raise the will of the Russian nation, not just that of Stalin and the Communist party, behind it. A national, “patriotic” war had been proclaimed in 1941, but the government had preferred, particularly in the winter and spring of 1942, to emphasize the communist-fascist aspect of the conflict and the inevitable, and speedy, victory of communism. In his May Day order of the day, Stalin had called for a total German defeat during 1942.<sup>3</sup> The *Pravda* editorial marking the start of the second year of the war had stated that “all of Hitler’s military as well as political plans have completely collapsed” and “all prerequisites have been created for defeat of the hateful enemy in 1942.”<sup>4</sup>

After July, the war became a “patriotic” Russian war, and the word “Russian,” hardly ever used before in context with the Soviet state, was given prominence in print and in military orders. Heroes of the “old army,” from Alexander Nevskiy, who defeated the Teutonic Knights in 1242, to Alexey Brusilov, who, in 1916, staged the best conducted (and most costly) Russian

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Werth, *The Year of Stalingrad* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1947), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup>W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941–1946* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 168.

<sup>3</sup>USSR Embassy, *Information Bulletin*, no. 53, 2 May 42.

<sup>4</sup>*Pravda*, 24 Jun 42.



THE "PATRIOTIC WAR": A TANK CREW AND THEIR TANK NAMED "KUTUZOV"

offensive of World War I, were publicized as examples for Soviet officers and troops. Newspapers printed accounts of Russian military achievements from the Middle Ages through World War I. In September, the prominent writer Sergey Sergeyev-Tsenskiy rushed into print several chapters of a novel entitled *The Brusilov Breakthrough* that portrayed the general as "a sagacious strategist and loyal patriot, trusting in the might of Russian arms and the adamant spirit of the Russian Army."<sup>5</sup> The Stalin Prize winner, Konstantin Simonov, staged a play, titled *The Russians*, in which one of the characters was a former Tsarist officer

who put on his old uniform to fight again when his town was besieged by the Nazi Germans.<sup>6</sup> Stalin's 6 September appeal to the troops concluded with the sentences, "The Russians have always defeated the Prussians. The military tradition of the Russian people lives on in the heroic deeds of Soviet fighting men."<sup>7</sup>

The duty of the patriot was also to hate the enemy. Mikhail Sholokhov, author of *And Quiet Flows the Don*, wrote "The Science of Hatred." In "Cherish Your Hatred for the Enemy," Alexey Tolstoy told the country, "... at this

<sup>5</sup>USSR Embassy, *Information Bulletin*, no. 112, 19 Sep 42.

<sup>7</sup>*H. Gr. B, Ia Nr. 2965/42, Fernspruch vom 10.9.42, Pz. AOK 4 28183/5 file. See p. 378.*

<sup>5</sup>USSR Embassy, *Information Bulletin*, no. 116, 29 Sep 42.

time our one overwhelming sentiment, our one passion must be hatred for the enemy. Man must rise from his bed filled with stubborn hatred, with the same hatred he must work and fight, and with hatred unsatisfied go to sleep."<sup>8</sup> Ilya Ehrenburg, who as columnist for the army newspaper *Red Star* would be in the vanguard of the "hate the enemy" campaign for the next two and one-half years, received the Stalin Prize for a novel, *The Fall of Paris*, in which he delivered two messages: that it was impossible to live under the Germans and that, in the words of one of the characters, "You won't get rid of them with tears. They're rats. You've got to kill them."<sup>9</sup>

Out of the public view and that of the outside world, the "patriotic war" and "hate the enemy" campaigns produced an offshoot: mistrust of the Western Allies, in particular Russia's old imperialist rival, Great Britain. In August, Prime Minister Churchill, who had gone to Moscow to persuade Stalin to give up the idea of a second front in 1942, proposed sending British and American air forces to help defend the Caucasus. Stalin had said that would be "a great help."<sup>10</sup> When Generalmajor P. I. Bodin, the chief of operations in the General Staff, went to the *Transcaucasus Front* in September he reportedly told General Tyulenev:

Are you aware that the Allies are trying to take advantage of our difficult position and obtain our consent to the despatch of

British troops into Transcaucasia? That, of course, cannot be allowed. The State Defense Committee considers the defense of Transcaucasia a task of vital state importance and it is our duty to take all measures to repel the enemy's attack, wear them out and defeat them. Hitler's hopes and the desires of the Allies must be buried . . . .<sup>11</sup>

The loss for a second time of vast stretches of Soviet territory and the conversion to the patriotic war brought the partisan movement to the forefront of the war effort in the late summer. By the Central Staff's reckoning, membership in the movement reached 100,000 by September.<sup>12</sup> At the end of August, the most successful partisan commanders from Belorussia and the northern Ukraine had been brought to Moscow for a series of conferences with Stalin and members of the *Politburo*. These conferences had enhanced the status of the movement and had been, no doubt, also calculated to show that the Soviet authorities could reach at will into the territory behind the enemy's lines.<sup>13</sup> To cap the conferences, Stalin, on 5 September, issued an order "On the Tasks of the Partisan Movement" in which he called for a "broader and deeper" development of partisan warfare and expansion of the movement "to encompass the whole people."<sup>14</sup> The call for a partisan movement "of the whole people" was taken up in party resolutions and the press. Briefly, after 6 September, when Marshal Voroshilov was named its commander in chief, the partisan move-

<sup>8</sup>USSR Embassy, *Information Bulletin*, no. 91, 30 Jul 42.

<sup>9</sup>Ilya Ehrenburg, *The Fall of Paris* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1942), p. 368.

<sup>10</sup>Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, p. 483; Harriman and Abel, *Special Envoy*, p. 161.

<sup>11</sup>Shtemenko, *Soviet General Staff*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup>*Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, 1978, vol. 19, p. 235.

<sup>13</sup>Vershigora, *Lyudi*, pp. 392-95.

<sup>14</sup>*IVMV*, vol. V, p. 288.

ment achieved the nominal status of a separate branch in the armed forces.<sup>15</sup>

### *A New Authority*

During the revolution the word "officer" had been excised from the Soviet military vocabulary and "commander" substituted. Thereafter, through the first year of the war, rank and authority were counterbalanced by a concept of socialist equality and by political mistrust. After July 1942, "officer" became an acceptable equivalent for "commander." More importantly, the relationship of the military, particularly the officer corps, to the state was redefined. Professional competence was recognized, rewarded, and given fuller play, and the military leadership was released from overt political tutelage and surveillance.

By a decree of 29 July 1942, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet authorized three medals for officers only, the Orders of Suvorov, Kutuzov, and Alexander Nevskiy.<sup>16</sup> The orders were to be awarded to "commanders for outstanding services in organizing and directing war operations."<sup>17</sup> In effect, they declared the Soviet officers to be heirs to the old Russian military tradi-

tion. For the moment, it was also significant that each of those for whom an order was named had been notably successful at getting his troops to stand against a superior enemy—Alexander Nevskiy at Lake Peipus (1242), Suvorov at Ismail (1791), and Kutuzov at Borodino (1812).

The Orders of Suvorov, Kutuzov, and Alexander Nevskiy would go mostly to commanders of larger units and to staff officers. The Order of Kutuzov, for instance, was to be awarded for "well worked-out and executed plans of operations by a *front*, an army, or a separate formation, as a result of which a serious defeat is inflicted on the enemy. . . ."<sup>18</sup> Recognition for junior officers and enlisted men had been provided for in May, in anticipation of a victorious 1942 campaign, with the official establishment of the designation "guards" and the founding of the Order of the Patriotic War. The latter was to be awarded for specific achievements: a certain number of planes shot down or tanks knocked out, a successful assault on an enemy blockhouse, a certain number of enemy firing points destroyed by a tank crew, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> In the summer, to stimulate professionalism in the ranks and "popularize the heroism of the Soviet soldier," the army began to award honorary titles, such as,

<sup>15</sup>In November 1942, because "the Soviet forces were about to go over from the strategic defensive to the strategic offensive," the post of commander in chief of the partisan movement was abolished, and the Central Staff was reincorporated into the Supreme Headquarters. *IVMV*, vol. V, p. 290.

<sup>16</sup>Tyushkevich, *Vooruzhennye sily*, p. 506. Alexander Suvorov (1729–1800) served the Empress Catherine II as a military reformer and as a field general who won every battle he fought. Mikhail Kutuzov (1745–1813) was the Russian commander in chief against Napoleon from 1812 until his death.

<sup>17</sup>USSR Embassy, *Information Bulletin*, no. 101, 22 Aug 42.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 109, 12 Sep 42.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 62, 23 May 42. Tyushkevich, *Vooruzhennye sily*, p. 506. The Soviet Armed Forces were on the way toward becoming probably the most decorated in World War II. By the war's end, 7 million medals, including 11,600 Hero of the Soviet Union awards, were given to individuals. Divisions and regiments received 10,900 unit citations, and the designation "guards" was given to 11 field armies, 6 tank armies, 80 corps of various kinds, and 200 divisions. Deborin and Telpukhovskiy, *Itogi i uroki*, p. 357f.



WOMAN SNIPER LIEUTENANT POSES WITH HER RIFLE AND MEDALS

“Sniper,” “Expert Machine Gunner,” and “Expert Artillerist.”<sup>20</sup>

Indirectly but, nevertheless, emphatically, Stalin let it be known that henceforth, professionalism, initiative, and merit would take precedence in decisions on appointments to command. In the late summer, *Pravda*, which did not ordinarily carry such material, published a play by Alexander Korneichuk called *The Front*. Korneichuk later told British correspondent Werth that Stalin had personally given him the “general idea” for the plot.<sup>21</sup> In *The Front*, young army commander, Ognev, demonstrated mastery of the techniques of modern

warfare. His opponents were the *front* commander, Gorlov, a fossilized relic of the civil war, and a *front* staff filled with Gorlov’s “yes-men.” At the end, Ognev was given command of the *front* with a speech that read:

Stalin says that talented young generals have got to be promoted more boldly to leading positions on a level with the veteran commanders and that the men to be promoted are those who are capable of waging war in the modern way, not in the old-fashioned way, men who are capable of learning from the experience of modern warfare. . . .<sup>22</sup>

S. M. Shtemenko says, “We, the youth of the General Staff . . . regarded *The*

<sup>20</sup>*JVMV*, vol. V, p. 307.

<sup>21</sup>Werth, *Russia at War*, p. 423n.

<sup>22</sup>Alexander Korneichuk, *The Front*, in *Four Soviet War Plays* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1944), p. 57.

*Front* as an expression of the Party's policy, as its appeal for an improvement in standards of military skill and leadership."<sup>23</sup>

Rokossovskiy, himself one of the younger generals being advanced, saw another aspect of the new approach to command, which he describes in the following anecdote:

Shortly before the Voronezh operation I came again to Moscow to report to the Supreme Commander. When I had finished and was about to leave, Stalin said, "Don't go yet."

He phoned Poskryobyshev [Stalin's secretary] and asked him to call in a general just removed from the command of a *front*. The following dialogue took place:

"You say we have punished you wrongly?"

"Yes, because the GHQ [*Stavka*] representative kept getting in my way."

"How?"

"He interfered with my orders, held conferences when it was necessary to act, gave contradictory instructions . . . In general he tried to override the commander."

"So he got in your way. But you were in command of the *front*?"

"Yes."

"The Party and the Government entrusted the *front* to you. . . . Did you have a telephone?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you report that he was getting in your way?"

"I didn't dare complain about your representative."

"Well, that is what we have punished you for: not daring to pick up the receiver and phone up, as a result of which you failed to carry out the operation."

I walked out of the Supreme Commander's office with the thought that, as a new-fledged *front* commander, I had just been taught an object lesson.<sup>24</sup>

With less publicity but, probably, as

much or more consequence and effect than most or all of the other adjustments to the military system, Stalin also brought visibly to the fore his two best generals, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy. General Zhukov's appointment, in August, as deputy supreme commander elevated his status in the chain of command and diminished—although only a certain degree—the distance between the supreme commander and the top military professional. General Vasilevskiy had less field command experience than did Zhukov, but he had seen more service at or near the top of the General Staff than any other officer except Marshal Shaposhnikov. Owing to Shaposhnikov's declining health, Vasilevskiy had been acting chief of the General Staff several times and had carried a good deal of the chief's work before his own appointment to the position in June 1942. Shaposhnikov had been known for his charm and excellence as a military theoretician but not for his ability to stand up to Stalin. Vasilevskiy, like Zhukov, was self-confident and willing to take the initiative. He had much of Shaposhnikov's charm, and "at the same time, he knew how to defend his own point of view in front of the Supreme Commander."<sup>25</sup>

After August 1942, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy, as a team, became Stalin's principal military advisers. Henceforth, at least until late in the war, he consulted both of them on strategic and operational decisions, whereas, formerly, *Stavka* decisions had often been made by him and whichever of the members he chose to draw upon—

<sup>23</sup>Shtemenko, *Soviet General Staff*, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup>Rokossovskiy, *Soldier's Duty*, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>Shtemenko, *Soviet General Staff*, pp. 49, 126–28. See also VOV, p. 88.

which, in effect, meant by him alone. As a team, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy also became the premier *Stavka* field representatives. They were not, as they and others had been in the past, attached to *front* headquarters. Instead, they coordinated groups of *fronts*, and they bore the authority to issue orders and instructions to the field commanders. Zhukov apparently also acquired chain-of-command status that put him between the other officers and Stalin. General Moskalkenko tells that when he was relieved of command of *First Guards Army* and summoned to the Kremlin in September 1942, it was Zhukov who talked to Stalin (while Moskalkenko waited in an anteroom) and delivered the decision on Moskalkenko's next appointment.<sup>26</sup>

Although they held their powers entirely at Stalin's pleasure, Zhukov's and Vasilevskiy's superior positions in the command structure were later—again to a certain degree—formalized. In December 1942, Vasilevskiy secured the appointment of General Antonov as his deputy, and thereafter, Antonov took over most of the chief of the General Staff's regular work. In May 1943, the State Defense Committee named Zhukov and Vasilevskiy, both by then marshals of the Soviet Union, to be first and second deputy commissars of defense.<sup>27</sup>

After 3 September 1942, when he sent the Zhukov-Vasilevskiy team to take charge at Stalingrad, Stalin, apparently, was also willing to go into what may be described as voluntary, partial military eclipse. The winter and

spring offensives had been his brainchildren. The counteroffensives in the coming fall and winter were going to be Zhukov's and Vasilevskiy's. Concerning the initial plan for an attack at Stalingrad, the *Short History* states: "This plan was set down on a map signed by General G. K. Zhukov, Deputy Supreme Commander in Chief, and General A. M. Vasilevskiy, Chief of the General Staff, and endorsed by J. V. Stalin, Supreme Commander in Chief." At the meeting of the State Defense Committee that gave final approval to the plan in November, the *Short History* says, "The Supreme Commander in Chief, who had devoted a great deal of time to the preparations for the operation, listened attentively to the arguments put forward by Zhukov and Vasilevskiy."<sup>28</sup>

In the Soviet view, then and now, the near-ultimate recognition was given to the military professionals on 9 October 1942, in a decree that abolished the political commissar system and established unitary command. The decree, issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, in its significant parts, read:

The system of war commissars which was established in the Red Army during the Civil War was based on mistrust of the military commands, which at that time still had in them specialists who were opposed to Soviet power.

In the years after the Civil War the process of reorienting and training the military commands was completed. As a result of the training and of the success in all areas of Soviet life, the situation of the military commands in the Red Army had changed fundamentally.

<sup>26</sup>IVMV, vol. V, p. 326; Moskalkenko; *Na Yugo-zapadnom napravlenii*, pp. 348, 361-74.

<sup>27</sup>Shtemenko, *Soviet General Staff*, pp. 126-29; Tyushkevich, *Vooruzhemye sily*, p. 316.

<sup>28</sup>VOV (*Kratkaya Istoriya*), p. 213. See also IVMV, vol. VI, p. 27 and Zhukov, *Memoirs*, pp. 380-88.

The present patriotic war against the German invaders has welded our commands together and produced a large corps of talented new commanders who have gathered experience and who will remain true to their honor as officers to the death.

Therefore, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet directs:

1. The establishment of complete unity of command in the Red Army and the transfer of full responsibility to the commanders and chiefs of staff in all units of the Red Army.

2. The abolition of the war commissars . . . [in major units] and of *politruks* in lesser units.<sup>29</sup>

The decree did not attribute any deleterious effects to the commissar system; it only found the commissars no longer necessary. The commissars had been and continued to be portrayed as dedicated men, frequently of heroic stature. In *The Front*, for instance, it was the commissar, Gaidar, who, in the final scene, brought Gorlov to account and secured Ognev's promotion.

In fact, the abolition was not as complete as it appeared. A "considerable number" of commissars who had acquired on-the-job experience, as it were, were converted to line duty and given commands of their own, but that may have owed mostly to a shortage of officers.<sup>30</sup> As it had in 1940, the structure of the commissar system survived. The 9 October decree removed the commissar but restored the *zampolit*, the deputy commander for political affairs. Henceforth, a commander did have authority to make and carry out decisions at his own discretion, and the *zampolit*, in military matters, was under

his command, but the *zampolit* could report his judgments of the commander's performance through a separate channel.<sup>31</sup> In the higher commands, armies and *fronts* in particular, the deputies for political affairs continued (with the commanders and chiefs of staff) as members of the military councils. While they could no longer dispute or countermand the commanders' orders, they were still very often consequential and well-connected political figures whom the commanders could not lightly disregard. The abolition of the commissar system appears to have removed the stigma of potential unreliability from the officers and, in the longer run, to have created a kind of partnership between the political and the military leaders that both groups found useful, especially in promoting their careers.

Most particularly, the abolition of the commissar system in no wise signaled a decline of party influence or interest in the armed forces. While the total number of Communist party members in the Soviet Union as of 1 January 1943 was still down somewhat from 1 January 1941, 3.8 *vs.* 3.9 million (after a large drop, probably as a result of war losses, to 3 million on 1 January 1942), the number of party members on military assignments had risen between 1 January 1941 and 1 January 1943 from 654,000 to 1.9 million. A full third of that increase had come in 1942, most of it between May and December, and as of 1 January 1943, slightly more than 50 percent of the party membership was on military duty, as compared to

<sup>29</sup>Pz. AOK 4, Ic Nr. 1811/42, Anlage 3, Erlass des Praesidiums des Obersten Sowjets der UdSSR, 10.9.42, 13.11.42, Pz. AOK 4 29365/8 file.

<sup>30</sup>VOVSS, vol. II, p. 489.

<sup>31</sup>Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Doctrine* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1953), p. 240.

16.5 percent in 1941.<sup>32</sup> Concurrently with the “patriotic war” campaign, the Army’s Main Political Administration undertook, by means of a special council, to improve the political education of the troops, which was found “often to have had a formal, bureaucratic character” in the past.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Soviet Condition*

The advances to Stalingrad and the Caucasus brought the Soviet territory under German occupation to 1 million square miles. This was less than an eighth of the total Soviet land area, but it was almost half of the European Soviet Union, and it was equal to a full third of the United States (Alaska and Hawaii excluded). In those 1 million square miles, 80 million people, almost 40 percent of the population, had lived, and this area contained 47 percent of the cultivated land—nearly all of the best land in the Soviet Union. From there also had come 71 percent of the pig iron, 58 percent of the steel, 63 percent of the coal, and 42 percent of the country’s electrical energy.<sup>34</sup> However, as great as the damage was, if the Germans did not break out in some new direction and if Soviet confidence could be restored, the Soviet war potential was going to be substantially greater at the end of the 1942 summer than it had been at the same time in the previous year.

Although the retreat forced another wave of evacuations, war production was on the rise. Reportedly, the factories turned out 22,681 combat aircraft

and 24,446 tanks in 1942, a good two-thirds more aircraft and better than three times as many tanks as in 1941. The German output was 15,456 aircraft and 5,958 tanks. In 1942, Soviet artillery output exceeded 33,000 pieces larger than 76-mm., more than twice as many as had been produced in 1941.<sup>35</sup>

As of November 1942, the Soviet forces in the field numbered 6.5 million men.<sup>36</sup> The German and allied troops in the four army groups on the main front totaled about 3.4 million, and the German and Finnish contingents in the far north would have brought the number to about 4 million. The Soviet figure, again, apparently does not include *Stavka* reserves, which are given as 162 divisions, 188 brigades, and 181 regiments at the start of the 1942–1943 winter campaign.<sup>37</sup>

During the summer, organizational improvements continued. Since late 1941, the armies had been using the mobile groups as partial substitutes for the disbanded corps. In the mobile groups, two or more divisions operated under the ad hoc command of one of their headquarters, which had to direct the group and its own troops as well and generally did not have the staff and the communications to do both. In 1942, twenty-eight rifle corps headquarters were formed, enough to take over the functions formerly assigned to the mobile groups. In the tank corps’ structure, the motorized rifle brigades were not providing enough infantry support to make the corps equal

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 48; Deborin and Telpukhovskiy, *Itogi i uroki*, p. 260; Boelcke, *Ruestung*, p. 24f.

<sup>36</sup>*IVMV*, vol. VI, p. 20.

<sup>37</sup>OKH, *GenStdH, Fremde Heere Ost, Nr. 2669/42, Gegenueberstellung der verbuendeten und der sowjetrussischen Kraefte, Stand 20.9.42, H 22/235 file; Golubovich, “Sozdaniya strategicheskikh,”* p. 17.

<sup>32</sup>Deborin and Telpukhovskiy, *Itogi i uroki*, p. 375; *IVMV*, vol. V, p. 313.

<sup>33</sup>*IVMV*, vol. V, p. 307.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 14.

matches for German panzer divisions; consequently, in September 1942, mechanized corps began to be created. These consisted of three mechanized brigades (a regiment of motorized infantry and a tank regiment in each) and one tank brigade, and they had 175 tanks, 7 more than the tank corps had. During the course of the year also, the "guards" designation had come to be regarded as more than a formal mark of distinction, and guards formations were given larger allotments of troops and weapons. The strength of a guards rifle division, for instance, was set at 10,670 men; that of an ordinary rifle division was 9,435. A guards rifle division was also allowed a third more automatic weapons and 4 more artillery pieces (9 batteries rather than 8) than a normal infantry division.<sup>38</sup> As had been the case with the shock armies, however, it appears that the guards designation was often given before the other requirements were met.

The most effective weapons were being brought into play in increased numbers. The T-34/76B, with a longer-barreled gun and an improved turret made its appearance in time for the Stalingrad fighting. The IL-2, *Shturmovik*, which had proved its worth as a dive-bomber in an antitank role, accounted for better than a third of the 1942 aircraft production (7,654 planes). Although Soviet designers had developed a number of good automatic weapons, particularly submachine guns, the Commissariat of Defense had somewhat neglected production of these before the war.<sup>39</sup> By mid-1942,

the troops were getting large numbers of what would become the infantry's most distinctive weapon, the drum-fed PPSH41 (Postolet-Pulemyot Shpagina) submachine gun. Designed by G. S. Shpagin, it has been described as "one of the most crudely made guns ever issued on a large scale."<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, it was reliable and effective as well as cheap to manufacture, and simple to operate and maintain.<sup>41</sup>

### *Counteroffensive Plans*

#### *Operation Uranus*

While Churchill and Harriman were in Moscow in August, Stalin told them about "a great counteroffensive in two directions" that he was going to launch "soon" to cut off the Germans. Harriman went back to Washington believing Stalingrad would be held, and in November he thought the offensive begun then around Stalingrad was the one "Stalin had promised . . . in August."<sup>42</sup> In the sense that the idea of a counteroffensive at Stalingrad had occurred to Stalin in August—as it had also to Hitler—the November offensive may have been what Stalin had mentioned to Harriman, but the counteroffensive, as it was prepared and executed, was not born until a month after the Stalin-Churchill-Harriman meeting, and the idea, apparently, was not Stalin's but Zhukov's and Vasilevskiy's.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Ian V. Hogg and John Weeks, *Military Small Arms of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1977), p. 104.

<sup>39</sup>IVOSS, vol. I, p. 452.

<sup>40</sup>Harriman and Abel, *Special Envoy*, pp. 162, 168, 174.

<sup>41</sup>See p. 456.

<sup>38</sup>Tyushkevich, *Vooruzhennyye sily*, pp. 284, 289, 317.

<sup>39</sup>Perrett, *Fighting Vehicles*, p. 35; Deborin and Telpukhovskiy, *Itogi i uroki*, p. 260. See IVOSS, vol. I, pp. 415, 452.



GENERAL N. F. VATUTIN,  
COMMANDER OF SOUTHWEST FRONT

As Zhukov tells it, he, Vasilevskiy, and Stalin were discussing on 12 September how to break Sixth Army's hold on the Volga north of Stalingrad when it occurred to him and Vasilevskiy that they "would have to seek some other solution [than the shallow flank attacks then being tried]." Stalin's curiosity was aroused, and Zhukov and Vasilevskiy worked all the next day in the General Staff going over the possibilities. Late that night they returned to Stalin's office and proposed the following: "First, to continue wearing out the enemy with active defense; second, to begin preparation for a counteroffensive in order to deal the enemy a crushing blow at Stalingrad to reverse the strategic situation in the south in our favor." Then they went to Stalingrad, where the battle was in a critical phase, to

study the conditions first hand, Zhukov to *Stalingrad Front* and Vasilevskiy to *Southeast Front*. Late in the month, on the 27th or the 28th, they returned to Moscow and presented their conception of the counteroffensive plotted on a map that both had signed and to which, after some discussion, Stalin added the word "Approved" and his signature.<sup>44</sup> The counteroffensive was code-named URANUS.

In October, while *Sixty-second Army* kept the battle alive in Stalingrad, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy worked out the specifics of URANUS and supervised a buildup on Sixth and Fourth Panzer Armies' flanks. A major requirement was to activate a new *front* headquarters, *Southwest Front*, in the zone of the main effort on the Don upstream from Kletskaya. *Southwest Front* would take over *Sixth, First Guards, Sixty-third, and Twenty-first Armies*, or better than half of Rokossovskiy's *Don Front*, and would also receive the *Fifth Tank Army*. Command of *Southwest Front* went to General N. F. Vatutin, who, at age forty-one, was apparently one of the younger generals being brought to the fore. His only previous field command in the war was *Voronezh Front*, for which he had nominated himself and to which, it is said, Stalin had appointed him on the spur of the moment.<sup>45</sup> The command of *Voronezh Front*, which General Golikov received as Vatutin's replacement, had not required a particularly high order of generalship, and Vatutin's selection for the crucial command in URANUS probably owed more to his

<sup>44</sup>Zhukov, *Memoirs*, pp. 382–87. See also Vasilevskiy, "Delo," p. 242; Samsonov, *Stalingradskaya bitva*, p. 347; and *IVMV*, vol. VI, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup>Vasilevskiy, "Delo," p. 223; *VOV*, p. 172.

earlier service as Vasilevskiy's deputy in the General Staff. While his age, in fact, may have counted after Budenny (fifty-nine) and Shaposhnikov (sixty) became inactive, the top Soviet generals were all relatively young men. Eremenko was fifty; Vasilevskiy and Timoshenko, forty-seven; Zhukov, forty-six; Rokossovskiy, forty-six; Meretskov, forty-five; Voronov, forty-three; Chuikov and Golikov, forty-two; and Grechko, thirty-nine.

The four field armies assigned to *Southwest Front* were reinforced with infantry and given mobile forces in the form of tank, mechanized, and cavalry corps. The same was also done opposite Fourth Panzer Army to *Stalingrad Front's* *Sixty-fourth*, *Fifty-seventh*, and *Fifty-first Armies*. *Fifth Tank Army*, under General Leytenant P. L. Romanenko, consisted of 6 rifle divisions, 2 tank corps, a guards tank brigade, a cavalry corps, and artillery, antiaircraft, and mortar regiments.<sup>46</sup> It had been out of the front throughout the summer, being rebuilt and serving as a backstop against a German thrust toward Moscow via Orel and Sukhinichi.

The initial objectives of URANUS would be to tie down Sixth Army on the front between the Don and the Volga and, in Stalingrad, to smash the Rumanian armies on its left and right, and to thrust behind Sixth Army to cut its lines of communication across the Don. *Fifth Tank Army* was to be the spearhead on the north, where, after its rifle divisions, four in the first wave and two in the second, opened a gap in Rumanian Third Army's front, the two tank corps would break through aim-

ing for Kalach on the Don due west of Stalingrad. Following behind the tank corps, the cavalry corps and three of *Sixty-third Army's* rifle divisions would fan out on the right to cover the flank by establishing a line on the Chir River. Inside the arc of the tank army's advance, elements of *Twenty-first Army* and *Don Front's* *Sixty-fifth Army* were to break through past Kletskaya and to encircle four German divisions Sixth Army had stationed west of the Don. They would get help from *Twenty-fourth Army* (also belonging to *Don Front*), which was to prevent the divisions from joining the Sixth Army main force by taking the Don crossings at Panshirskiy and Vertyachiy. To complete the encirclement, *Fifty-seventh* and *Fifty-first Armies* would cut through the Fourth Panzer-Rumanian Fourth Army line south of Stalingrad and would strike northwestward to meet *Fifth Tank Army* at Kalach.<sup>47</sup>

The whole plan hinged critically on keeping Sixth Army and Fourth Panzer Army locked in a contest for Stalingrad and on not allowing them to settle into a defensive deployment before URANUS was ready. Either of two eventualities would greatly becloud the prospects for URANUS. One could have arisen from the fortunes of war. If the Germans took Stalingrad, they could withdraw enough troops from the city to form a strong reserve. The other could bring about the same result even if the Germans only caught a scent of URANUS beforehand since they were tied down in Stalingrad by their own choice, not by necessity; consequently, the operation would need to achieve

<sup>46</sup>[General Staff of the Red Army], *Sbornik materialov po izucheniyu opyta voyny*, Nomer 6, Apr–May 43.

<sup>47</sup>*Sbornik*, Nomer 6. See also VOV, p. 172; IVMV, vol. VI, p. 28; Vasilevskiy, "Delo," p. 242f.

total surprise. To accomplish that goal, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy devised an elaborate *maskirovka* ("camouflage") for URANUS.<sup>48</sup> It consisted of three parts: concealment of the concept of the operation, the direction of the main effort, and the composition of the forces.<sup>49</sup>

To protect the concept of the operation, Zhukov and Vasilevskiy laid on a heavy blanket of security. They reduced the planning time allotted to the *fronts* and armies to an amount far below the previous norms. The *front* commanders were not told about the secret of URANUS until mid-October, and they were forbidden to initiate any planning of their own before the first week in November. To "disinform" the enemy, the *fronts* were ordered to go over to the defensive on 15 October, and from then on all visible effort was put into building defenses. The civilians were evacuated from villages within 25 kilometers of the front, and those were ringed with trenches—to give enemy air reconnaissance something to see. Orders pertaining to the defense were transmitted by telephone, a reliable and not too obvious way of getting them into enemy hands.<sup>50</sup>

*Southwest Front* made concealment of the direction of the main effort a particularly difficult and dangerous problem. No doubt, it would have been

better not to have installed another *front* headquarters at all, since these were difficult to conceal and always objects of intense enemy interest. But URANUS was too complicated an operation for two *fronts* to handle themselves at that stage. To limit potential damage to the *maskirovka*, Headquarters, *Southwest Front*, was not brought forward until 28 October.<sup>51</sup>

To prevent the enemy from determining the composition of the forces, the entire buildup, with the exception of *Fifth Tank Army*, was done with units of less than army size. The reserves, usually brought in close before an offensive, were held at Saratov on the Volga 200 miles upstream from Stalingrad. Reinforcements moved only at night, under strict radio silence. *Fifth Tank Army* made its 500-mile shift from the Orel-Sukhinichi area in three weeks of night marches, the last on the night of 9 November.<sup>52</sup>

At the last, the *maskirovka* itself had to be protected against two Soviet practices that could have brought it to grief: the *razvedka boyem* ("battle reconnaissance") and the artillery preparation. Soviet commands regarded the *razvedka boyem* as an indispensable preliminary to an offensive to feel out "objectives of attack, systems of fire, and the nature of the terrain."<sup>53</sup> Conducted, as it customarily was, repeatedly and over extended periods in as much as divisional strengths, it usually alerted the enemy well before an offensive began. Zhukov and Vasilevskiy could not convince the field commands

<sup>48</sup>*Maskirovka* is defined in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* as "a complex of measures directed toward deceiving the enemy. It includes camouflage by concealment and simulation, secrecy and security, feints and diversions, and disinformation" (deception).

<sup>49</sup>V. A. Matsulenko, "Operativnaya maskirovka voysk v kontrnastuplenii pod Stalingradom," *Voyenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal*, 1(1974), p. 10.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11; *IVMV*, vol. VI, 35.

<sup>51</sup>*Sbornik, Nomer 6.*

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*; *IVMV*, vol. VI, p. 36; Matsulenko, "Operativnaya maskirovka," p. 13.

<sup>53</sup>A. Sinitskiy, "Sposoby vedeniya voyskovoy razvedki," *Voyenno-istoricheskii Zhurnal*, 4(1976), 89–94.

to forego the *razvedka boyem*, but they undertook to reduce the risks it posed by requiring it to be conducted in strengths of no more than battalions and at the same time by all armies in the Stalingrad area. In the past, the commands had also engaged in artillery duels and staged lengthy fire preparations. For URANUS, the artillery preparation was limited to an hour and a half, and preliminary firing was prohibited.<sup>54</sup>

### *Mars and Uranus*

All of the Soviet accounts depict URANUS as the main operation in the initial phase of the 1942–1943 winter offensive and most leave the reader to infer that it was the only one. There was, however, one other being prepared in October 1942—Operation MARS. The Soviet *History of the Second World War* gives it just two sentences in which its purpose is stated to have been “to destroy the enemy in the regions of Rzhev and Novo Sokolniki.”<sup>55</sup> At Rzhev the objective apparently was to finish the work against Ninth Army started in the summer. Since Novo Sokolniki was already practically in the front on the western rim of the Toropets bulge and, by itself, a point of only modest tactical consequence, the aim there most likely was to strike deep to the southwest behind Army Group Center. Also, since the Rzhev area was well-known to Zhukov, and he had advocated concentration against Army Group Center, it can be assumed that he was instrumental in devising MARS as he was in URANUS. After 16 November, he

left Vasilevskiy in charge at Stalingrad and went to *Kalinin* and *West Fronts* to take charge of the final preparations for MARS, which was scheduled to begin about a week after URANUS.<sup>56</sup>

MARS could, at the time, have been a great deal more important than can now be gathered from the few mentions of it given in the Soviet literature. It was laid in the area that, during 1941 and 1942, had consistently been regarded in Soviet thinking as the most important strategic direction, the one in which Soviet forces had already conducted a successful winter offensive and in which they could expect to be able to stage another on better terms than the first. URANUS, on the other hand, was a highly speculative venture. The *History of the Great Patriotic War* almost says as much in the following: “The *Stavka* . . . assumed that the enemy, in spite of his desperate efforts would not have achieved his goals, that his offensive would have failed but, yet, neither would he have succeeded in going on the defense along the entire Stalingrad sector nor changed the operational deployment of his forces. In Stalingrad itself, large enemy forces would still continue to carry on their hopeless attacks.”<sup>57</sup> Even understated as they are, these were enormous assumptions. To expect that Sixth Army would not somehow manage to take Stalingrad sometime between the middle of September and the middle of November was a great deal. To anticipate the Germans’—with the memory of Moscow fresh in their minds—continuing a faltering offensive into the

<sup>54</sup>Matsulenko, “*Operativnaya maskirovka*,” pp. 11, 18.

<sup>55</sup>*IVMV*, vol. VI, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup>Zhukov, *Memoirs*, p. 407. See also Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin*, p. 106.

<sup>57</sup>*I VOVSS*, vol. III, p. 19.

winter was even more. Furthermore, if the Germans did both, it then became necessary to assume that they would also not know how to extricate themselves from an encirclement.

URANUS was a gamble; the logical prospects for MARS were far better; and the deployment as of mid-November indicates strongly that the *Stavka* also took this view. On the 600 miles of front between Kholm and Bolkhov, that is, opposite Army Group Center, 1,890,000 troops, 24,682 artillery pieces and mortars, 3,375 tanks, and 1,170 aircraft were deployed. Opposite Army Group B, on slightly less than 500 miles of front from Novaya Kalitva to Astrakhan, 1,103,000 troops, 15,501 artillery pieces and mortars, 1,463 tanks, and 928 aircraft were deployed. The Kholm-Bolkhov sector, 17 percent of the total frontage between Lake Ladoga and the Caucasus, had 31.4 percent of the troops, 32 percent of the artillery and mortars, 45 percent of the tanks, and 38 percent of the aircraft. The Novaya Kalitva-Astrakhan sector, 14 percent of the total frontage, had 18.4 percent of the troops, 20.1 percent of the artillery and mortars, 19.9 percent of the tanks, and 30.6 percent of the aircraft.<sup>58</sup>

URANUS, if the doubts beclouding its prospects resolved themselves favorably, did have one significant advantage over MARS: the forces for URANUS would have a substantially larger numerical advantage over the enemy. The *History of the Second World War* maintains that the 1.1 million Soviet troops deployed in the Novaya Kalitva-Astrakhan sector were opposed by 1 million Germans and Rumanians;

hence the Soviet advantage was only 1.1:1.<sup>59</sup> The actual combined strength of Sixth Army, Fourth Panzer Army, and Rumanian Third Army, however, was very much less than a million men and in all probability just slightly more than a half million, which made the Soviet advantage 2:1. The ratio in the Army Group Center area was 1.9:1, using a German strength estimate of 1,011,500 for the army group in September 1942. While the ratios varied by only a tenth of a point, the difference in the composition of the forces they represented was considerable. The Army Group Center troops were all German. Of the total for the three armies in the URANUS area, close to 50 percent (245,000) were Rumanian troops.<sup>60</sup>

One Soviet account, by a notable authority, General Mayor V. A. Matsulenko, represents MARS as a deception incorporated into the URANUS *maskirovka*. Matsulenko states, "During the preparations for the counteroffensive at Stalingrad, the Supreme High Command had the forces of *Kalinin* and *West Fronts* display activity in the western direction against Army Group Center, creating the impression that the winter operations were being prepared precisely there and not in the southwest. This measure produced positive results."<sup>61</sup> In that mode, MARS would have repaid the Germans nicely for their own Operation KREML of the previous spring, but KREML was pure

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, table 6, p. 45.

<sup>60</sup>Manfred Kehrigh, *Stalingrad* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), app. 9, p. 667; OKH, *GenStdH, Fremde Heere Ost, Nr. 2669/42, Gegenueberstellung der verbuendeten und der sowjetrussischen Kraefte, Stand 20.9.42*, H 22/235 file.

<sup>61</sup>Matsulenko, "Operativnaya maskirovka," p. 15.

<sup>58</sup>IVMV, vol. VI, table 4, p. 35.

sham and illusion, which MARS was not. More likely MARS figured in the URANUS plan not as a part of the *maskirovka* but as a potential means of keeping the battle for Stalingrad going until the time was ripe for URANUS. According to the *History of the Second World War*, MARS was ready as of 23 October, and the start order would have been given any time thereafter if the Germans had begun taking troops from Army Group Center to reinforce the attack into Stalingrad. What the Soviet planners did was compromise MARS to preserve the essential condition for URANUS. However, it will be seen that in doing so they befuddled the enemy as much as if MARS had been a deception that in fact "produced positive results."<sup>62</sup>

*"This Year's Campaign Has  
Been Concluded"*

*The Army in Decline*

Musing unhappily on an old problem, General Halder, chief of the General Staff, in the first week of August observed, "According to our calculations of early May . . . we expected the enemy to be able to set up sixty new divisions by the fall muddy period." But he noted that sixty-nine new Soviet divisions had already been identified, and the fall rains were still a good two months away. "All told," he added, "we can, perhaps, anticipate seeing another thirty new divisions."<sup>63</sup> If the Soviet figures are correct, Halder erred substantially on the short side. Reportedly, in the period April to October 1942,

the *Stavka* had released from its reserves 189 rifle divisions, 78 rifle brigades, 30 tank and mechanized corps, and 159 tank brigades.<sup>64</sup> It was apparent that the Soviet manpower pool was a long way from running dry.

The same could scarcely be said for that of Germany. On 8 September, the Organizational Branch of the OKH announced, "All planning must take into account the unalterable fact that the predicted strength of the Army field forces as of 1 November 1942 will be 800,000, or 18 percent, below the established strength and that it is no longer possible to reduce those numbers. False impressions will result if units continue to be carried as before with this great loss of strength." The branch, thereupon, proposed reducing better than half the divisions on the Eastern Front from three regiments to two.<sup>65</sup> The two-regiment divisions would remove the fiction of a temporary understrength but would do so essentially by building it into the tables of organization.

After two summers and a winter in the Soviet Union, the German Army was having to consume its own inner substance. In Basic Order 1, the first of several issued in the fall of 1942, the OKH directed a 10 percent reduction in all staffs and the transfer of the personnel released to combat assignments. Additionally, all rear elements were to set up emergency detachments that could be sent to the front on short

<sup>62</sup>IVMV, vol. VI, p. 29.

<sup>63</sup>Halder Diary, vol. III, p. 497.

<sup>64</sup>Zemskov, "Nekotoriye voprosy," p. 14; IVMV, vol. VI, table 4, p. 35; OKH, GenStdH, (III) Nr. 420743/42, H 22 file; OKH, GenStdH, Op. Abt. (III), Pruef. Nr. 75940, Zahlenmaessige Uebersicht ueber die Verteilung der Divisionen, Stand 11.9.42, H 22 file.

<sup>65</sup>OKH, GenStdH, Org. Abt., Nr. 922/42, Organisatorische Planungen, 8.9.42, H 22/235 file.

notice. Another basic order set a goal of 180,000 men to be secured from the rear echelons for front-line duty by replacing them with *Hilfswillige*, auxiliaries recruited among the Russian prisoners of war.<sup>66</sup> Another established "substitution of weapons for men" as a principle of command and specified that when new, improved weapons were issued the ones they replaced were to be left with the troops to augment their firepower.<sup>67</sup>

These were gestures, not answers. Since May, General der Infanterie Walter von Unruh, armed with the authority to order irrevocable transfers to the front, had been combing the rear areas as Hitler's personal representative. Unruh's visitations had aroused dismay verging on terror and had earned him the nickname General *Heldenklaue* ("hero snatcher") but could not be shown to have added significant numbers to the combat strengths.<sup>68</sup> *Hilfswillige* were already being so widely used in noncombatant roles that there was no large block of troops left for them to replace. The substitution of weapons for men depended on having the weapons. The Panther tank, for instance, Germany's most promising new weapon, would for months yet be snarled in development and production difficulties.

The air force had a manpower surplus that Hitler, in September, agreed to tap, but at the insistence of Reichsmarschall Goering, commander in chief of the air force, he decided not to use the men as army replacements but to form air force field divisions manned and officered exclusively by air force personnel. In September and October, he ordered that twenty such divisions be set up with a combined strength of about two hundred thousand men. From the army point of view, a more unsatisfactory arrangement would have been difficult to devise. The air force troops had no training in land warfare, and because Goering restricted the army's influence on them, by claiming that the "reactionary" spirit of the army would impair his troops' National Socialist indoctrination, they were not likely to be given enough training to make them anywhere near suitable for employment on the Eastern Front. Worse still, the army had to scrape together enough equipment to outfit the twenty divisions, and the diversion of vehicles alone forced postponement of plans to bring four or five panzer divisions to full strength.<sup>69</sup> Basic Order 3, which regulated the employment of the air force field divisions, required that they be given "only defensive missions on quiet fronts."<sup>70</sup>

Hitler added his own reinforcement to the basic order. It read:

The low combat strengths of the fighting troops are no longer tolerable.

The fighting troops have many personnel vacancies; those not directly engaged in combat almost none. That must cease!

<sup>66</sup>OKH, *GenStdH, Org. Abt. (III), Nr. 9900/42, Grundlegender Befehl Nr. 1, 8.10.42, AOK 30155/57; OKH, GenStdH, Org. Abt. Kriegstagebuch, Band IV, 1-10 Oct 42, H 1/214 file.*

<sup>67</sup>OKH, *GenStdH, Op. Abt. (III), Nr. 34149/42, Planung fuer Ausbau der Heerestruppen im Winter 1942/43, 3.9.42, H 22/235 file; H. Gr. Nord, Ia Kriegstagebuch, 1.-31.10.42, 10 Oct 42, H. Gr. Nord 75128/15 file.*

<sup>68</sup>OKH, *GenStdH, Org. Abt. Kriegstagebuch, Band IV, 21-31 Aug 42, H 1/214 file.*

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-10 Oct 42.

<sup>70</sup>H. Gr. Nord, Ia Kriegstagebuch, 1.-31.10.42, 15 Oct 42, H. Gr. Nord 75128/15 file.

I will—aside from measures to be taken outside the Army—also institute appropriate correctives within the Army. Those are to be carried out regardless of all opposition and appearances of impossibility. On this score every commander must display his competence as much as he does in troop leadership.

In every instance in which a troop unit experiences a setback, the next highest commander is to investigate whether the commander involved exhausted all of the possibilities to raise his combat strength provided for under my orders. In special cases, I reserve to myself the right to order an investigation.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Overhaul at the Top*

Hitler, as always, was inclined to transpose problems to which there were not pragmatic answers into questions of leadership and will. Apparently doing that also was uppermost in his mind on 24 September when he dismissed Halder as chief of the Army General Staff. In their last interview together he told Halder that it was now necessary to “educate” the General Staff in “fanatical faith in the Idea” and that he was determined to enforce his will “also” on the army. The new chief of the General Staff, General der Infanterie Kurt Zeitzler, initially at least, appeared to be well suited to Hitler’s purpose. He was a competent but not supremely outstanding staff officer. As chief of staff, Army Group D, which was stationed in the Low Countries and along the Channel coast, his energy and a rotund figure had earned him the nickname General Fireball. His physical activity—plus a friendship with Hitler’s adjutant, General Schmunt—had brought him atten-

tion at the *Fuehrer* Headquarters, and Hitler had remarked earlier that Holland would be a “tough nut” for the Allies because Zeitzler “buzzes back and forth there like a hornet and so prevents the troops from falling asleep from lack of contact with the enemy.”<sup>72</sup>

Although Hitler, at the first, treated Zeitzler with “utmost friendliness,” the change in chiefs of the General Staff did not signal a new approach to the conduct of the war such as the one Stalin was making.<sup>73</sup> Hitler valued Zeitzler for his energy. As a collaborator and adviser, he probably expected Zeitzler, who had been lofted from an army group staff on an inactive front to the highest command echelon, to be more complaisant and less independent-minded than Halder had been. The initial friendliness toward Zeitzler was also no mark of confidence in the generals. He had come to distrust them almost to a man, and after September 1942, he insisted on having a stenographer present to take down every conversation he had with them. At the same time, he gave up eating his meals with his inner military circle, which had been his practice since early in the war, and henceforth, ate alone or with the nonmilitary members of his staff.<sup>74</sup>

In the course of installing the new chief of the General Staff, Hitler also put himself in position to overhaul the whole officer corps, the General Staff and the general officer ranks in particular, by placing the *Heerespersonalamt* (“army officer personnel office”) under Schmunt. To Schmunt he outlined a

<sup>71</sup>Pz. AOK 1, Ia Kriegstagebuch Nr. 8, 13 Oct 42, Pz. AOK 1 24906 file.

<sup>72</sup>Henry Picker, ed., *Hitlers Tischgespraeche* (Bonn: Athenaem-Verlag, 1951), p. 166.

<sup>73</sup>OKW, KTB, vol. II, p. 795.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 697.

policy of rapid promotion for younger, battle-tested, and presumably "educatable" officers. Zeitzler, forty-seven years old and a general officer for less than a year at the time of his appointment, was such an officer. Hitler also proposed to break the General Staff's hold on the higher commands by allowing line officers to qualify for the top posts and by requiring General Staff officers to show experience as troop commanders. Eventually he expected to abolish the General Staff's marks of distinction, the red trouser stripes and silver collar tabs.<sup>75</sup> Schmundt, who had built his career on subservience to Hitler, could be expected, without being told, to seek out and advance like-minded officers.

When he took up his post, Zeitzler made a contribution of his own to the shake-up of the command system. The army had long resented the influence of General Jodl's OKW Operations Staff on the drafting of strategic directives pertaining exclusively to the Eastern Front, which was an army theater. The resentment had increased after Hitler had become commander in chief, army, and had converted the Army General Staff into a second personal staff, and it had been sharpened by the freewheeling criticism Jodl and Field Marshal Keitel, chief, OKW, had indulged in from their technically loftier positions in the chain of command. Taking advantage of Jodl's having fallen into disfavor, Zeitzler demanded and secured the OKW's exclusion from the drafting of strategic directives that applied solely to the Eastern Front. Henceforth such directives were to be

issued as "operations orders" by the OKH. The orders, naturally, continued to be written, as the directives had been, entirely in accordance with Hitler's wishes.

#### *Operations Order No. 1*

A new course and style of command having been instituted, Operations Order No. 1, issued on 14 October, purported to do the same for strategy. Its first sentence read, "This year's summer and fall campaigns, excepting operations underway and several local offensives still contemplated, has been concluded." Army Group North, Army Group Center, and Army Group B were told to get ready for winter in the lines they held, and in this order and a supplement issued some days later, Hitler elevated to the level of doctrine the fanatical resistance formula he had employed during the 1941-1942 Soviet winter offensive. He ordered that the winter positions were to be held under all circumstances. There would be no evasive maneuvers or withdrawals. Breakthroughs were to be localized, and any intact part of the front was "absolutely" to be held. Troops cutoff and encircled were to defend themselves where they stood until they were relieved, and Hitler made every commander personally responsible to him for the "unconditional execution" of these orders.<sup>76</sup> The supplement extended the doctrine down to the lowest leadership level. "Every leader," it read, "down to squad leader must be convinced of his sacred duty to stand fast, come what may, even if the enemy

<sup>75</sup>Tätigkeitsbericht des Chefs des Heerespersonalamts, 1-5 Oct 42, H 4/12 file.

<sup>76</sup>Der Fuehrer, OKH, GenStdH, Op. Abt. (I) Nr. 420817/42, Operationsbefehl Nr. 1, 14.10.42, AOK 6 30155/49 file.

outflanks him on the right and left, even if his part of the line is cut off, encircled, overrun by tanks, enveloped in smoke or gassed." That was to be repeatedly "hammered into all officers and noncommissioned officers."<sup>77</sup>

### *The Exceptions*

Operations Order No. 1, while ostensibly keeping the promise Hitler made in the spring to bring the summer campaign to a more timely close than had been done in the previous year, excepted, as stated, offensives in progress or still contemplated. Those in progress were at Stalingrad and toward Tuapse. Contemplated were NORDLICHT, against Leningrad, and TAUBENSCHLAG ("dovecote"), a recently conceived operation aimed at Toropets. First Panzer Army's march on Groznyy, in abeyance but not abandoned, fell into both categories. The exceptions left three of the four army groups with substantial offensive missions to be completed or undertaken. Both of Army Group A's armies were in fact exempted from Operations Order No. 1 and were instructed to await other orders.

### *Taubenschlag*

By the time Operations Order No. 1 appeared, NORDLICHT, however, was hardly a viable enterprise. The state of Field Marshal Manstein's troops (Eleventh Army) after the fighting in the bottleneck and the lateness of the season spoke heavily against it. On 16 October, Hitler shelved NORDLICHT

and instructed Manstein to use the artillery to smash the Soviet defenses on the Leningrad perimeter and to inch his front forward.<sup>78</sup> While it would have been handy to have had Leningrad out of the way, another long-standing strategic liability of the north flank, the Toropets bulge, was becoming an even greater concern as winter approached. From it the Russians could strike in all directions: east into Ninth Army's flank, southeast behind Army Group Center, northwest behind Army Group North, north against Staraya Russa and the Dem'yansk pocket, or even if they were daring enough, due west to the Baltic coast. The German line on the western rim of the bulge was atrociously weak. All that was there on over a hundred miles of front was the Gruppe von der Chevalerie, a corps headquarters under Generalleutnant Kurt von der Chevalerie, with five infantry divisions.

On 14 October, maintaining that "the best defense is an attack of our own from the vicinities of Velikiye Luki and Kholm," Hitler ordered Sixteenth Army and the Gruppe von der Chevalerie to collaborate on Operation TAUBENSCHLAG that was to be aimed "in the general direction of Toropets."<sup>79</sup> A week and a half later while Manstein was at the *Werwolf* to receive his individually designed and handcrafted marshal's baton (the time for production of which caused the delay in his receiving it) and to discuss

<sup>77</sup>OKH, *Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres, Abt. L (I) Nr. 428858/42, I. Ergaenzung zum Operationsbefehl Nr. 1, 23.10.42, AOK 6 30155/42 file.*

<sup>78</sup>AOK II, *Ia Kriegstagebuch Nr. 2, 17 Oct 42, AOK II 33167/1 file.*

<sup>79</sup>H. Gr. Nord, *Ia Kriegstagebuch, I. -31.10.42, H. Gr. Nord 75128/15 file; Gen. Kdo. LIX A.K., Ia Kriegstagebuch Nr. 4, 14 Oct 42, LIX A.K. 30145/1 file.*

the artillery deployment against Leningrad, Hitler, apparently on the spur of the moment, gave him command of TAUBENSCHLAG. At the end of the month, Manstein moved his headquarters to Vitebsk. By then, Hitler, in oral instructions to Manstein, had made TAUBENSCHLAG contingent on a Soviet attempt against Army Group Center. Manstein thereupon became custodian of a dormant front and a tentative operation until the afternoon of 20 November when he was called back from an inspection trip to be told he was appointed commanding general, Army Group Don, and with his headquarters would replace Headquarters, Army Group B in the Stalingrad sector. He and an advance party boarded a special express train the next day, and TAUBENSCHLAG, which would shortly be reduced to nothing by further transfers to the south, reverted to the Gruppe von der Chevalerie.<sup>80</sup>

### *Stalingrad*

That Sixth Army's operations in Stalingrad would be exempted from Operations Order No. 1 went without saying. At the end of September, as he had in the years past, Hitler opened the drive for the Winter Relief with a speech in the Berlin *Sportpalast*. In it, he played on an old theme and ridiculed the publicity he had lately been receiving in the world news media. Pinpricks like the Dieppe raid in August, he complained, were touted as magnificent Allied victories while his own march from the Donets to the

Volga and the Caucasus was "nothing." "When we take Stalingrad," he went on, "and you can depend on it that we will, that also is [*sic*] nothing." Later he vowed a second time to take Stalingrad and assured the audience, "you can be certain no one will get us away from there."<sup>81</sup>

### *Tuapse*

Like Sixth Army, Seventeenth Army was on the march and expected to continue. Tuapse, the prize, was coming into reach. A push in the mountains, begun on 14 October, carried to Shaumyan the next day and through the town the next. Soviet *Eighteenth Army* almost broke, even though it was getting a steady flow of reinforcements, and Grechko, who had become an artist of the stubborn defense at Novorossiysk, had to be brought in as the army's new commander.<sup>82</sup> Seventeenth Army reported on the 18th that the several days of easy going it had experienced had ended, and it was having to revert to dislodging the enemy piecemeal from positions he was again defending determinedly. A week of rain, flooding mountain rivers, and washed-out roads gave Grechko time enough to get his army in hand and to begin some counterattacks late in the month.<sup>83</sup> What these might have accomplished, however, would never be known because, after 4 November, three weeks of rain in the lower and snow in the higher elevations brought both sides to a full stop.

<sup>81</sup>Domarus, *Hitler*, vol. II, p. 1914.

<sup>82</sup>Grechko, *Battle for the Caucasus*, p. 158.

<sup>83</sup>*H. Gr. A, Ia Kriegstagebuch, Band I, Teil IV, 20–25 Oct 42, H. Gr. A 75126/4 file.*

<sup>80</sup>AOK II, *Ia Kriegstagebuch Nr. 2, 26 Oct–21 Nov 42, AOK II 33167/1 file.*