

# THE GERMAN DEBACLE OF STALINGRAD

Colonel Herbert Selle, German Army, *Retired*  
Translated and adapted by Mr. Karl T. Marx

*Many myths, legends, and opinions surround the various versions of the bitter World War II battle for Stalingrad which culminated in the destruction of the once proud and powerful Sixth German (Stalingrad) Army. The MILITARY REVIEW is pleased to present the first installment of a two-part article by the former commander of the Engineer forces of the Sixth German Army. Colonel Selle witnessed the slow, painful unfolding of the debacle. He was a part of it and without straying from what he saw, heard, or experienced, he covers the actual events and even the conversations and reactions of German military leaders. Much of what he tells here is new. In this installment he describes the situation from the German drive across the Don River in August 1942 and Hitler's strategy for the conquest of Stalingrad to the powerful Russian offensive of November 1942 which closed the trap on the city and its German invaders.—Editor.*

**I**N A powerful offensive north of Kalach and on both sides of Vertyachiy and Peskovatka (Figure 1) the German Sixth Army, on 22 and 23 August 1942 carried the fight forward and crossed the Don River. Without interruption the divisions of the LI Army Corps (Von Seydlitz) and the Panzers of the XIV Panzer Army Corps

(General von Wietersheim, later General Hube) forged ahead and across the two heavy, engineer-built bridges, fanning out and lining up for a concentrated attack on Stalingrad.

Paragraph two of the Army Order, dated 19 August 1942, stated:

*The Sixth Army takes possession of the land bridge between the Don and Volga Rivers north of the railroad Kalach-Stalingrad and secures them toward east and north. The army will cross the Don River between Peskovatka and Ostrovski, constantly covering itself in a northerly direction. Its motorized units will then strike toward the hills between the Rossoshka River and the Bolzhaya Karanaya head waters to the Volga River north of Stalingrad. Other units will develop from the northwest and capture Stalingrad. This stroke will be accompanied by troops advancing on the southern flank and across the middle course of the Rossoshka River and will make contact southwest of Stalingrad with the motorized units from the neighboring army pushing up from the south.*

On the evening of 23 August 1942 General Hube and his Panzers took Rynok, the northernmost suburb of Stalingrad. German reconnoitering parties reached the steep western banks of the Volga, surveying the vast, melancholy countryside. The Army was full of hope, although Hube's units had to overcome many criti-

***The early successes of the German Army in its invasion of Russia were halted on the steps of Stalingrad primarily because of Hitler's blind disregard for reality and adherence to his own intuitive tactics***

cal situations during the following days. I met General (Friedrich) Paulus who told me that the Russian artillery commander of the Sixty-second Army was among the prisoners and that he was very depressed and concerned not only about the fate of Stalingrad but also of the entire southern army group commanded by Timoschenko.

My eyes met those of Paulus—questioning, almost unbelieving, for since 1941 we had been told too often that the Russians had reached the end of their rope, too often to believe it now without serious doubts. Did we not remember the boastful, high-sounding phrases of the “all highest” order to start the final battle of annihilation of the Russian armies, allegedly writhing in their death throes? All combat soldiers, without difference in rank or command, laughed at the time (late fall of

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*Colonel Herbert Selle, German Army, Retired, took part in the major battles of World War I in France and Belgium. In 1936 he became commander of an engineer battalion and participated in the campaign against Poland. During the war with Soviet Russia he commanded the Engineer forces of the Sixth German (Stalingrad) Army. He was flown out of Stalingrad eight days before the fall of the Sixth Army to report to German Supreme Headquarters. Some weeks later he was arrested for defeatist sentiments and for lowering the fighting morale of the German armed forces, and was condemned to death but escaped the firing squad. In August 1944 he was at the invasion front in France and later in Hungary and Galicia. Upon return from British prisoner-ship he became secretary in the German Hunting Association where he now is employed.*

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1941) about the unrealistic appraisal of an enemy who was fighting stubbornly for his native soil and country.

How criminal such false judgment proved was demonstrated a few weeks later when the German dead and debris piled up in front of Kalinin, Moscow, Tula, and Tver. While all these military and human tragedies occurred, Goebbels pronounced in grand style—far from any danger—that the Berezina had proved Napoleon's downfall, but that the Führer's talent and military genius would be assurance that nothing of the kind or even remotely similar could befall the German Army!

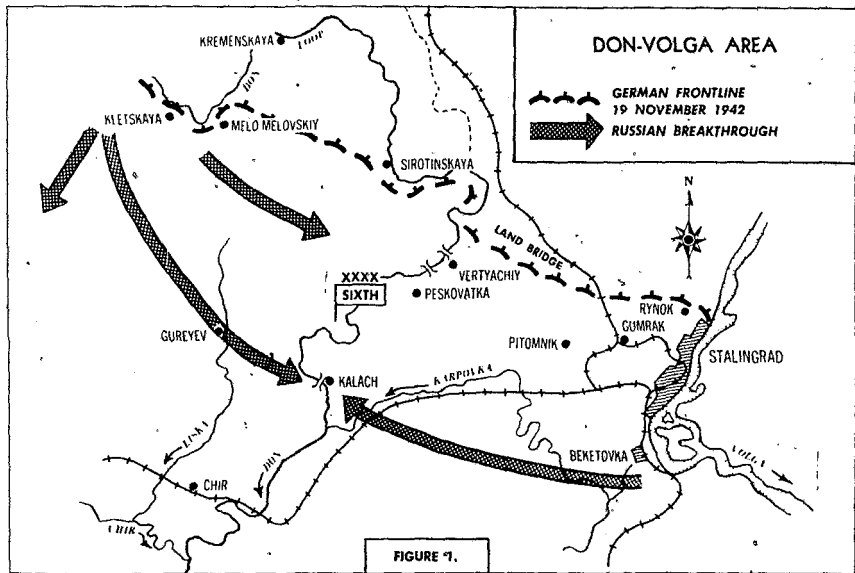
### High Expectations Fade

The next few days passed amidst high tension and expectations. The 71st Division (Lieutenant General von Hartmann) succeeded, without great losses, in crossing the Don River near Kalach, and by forcefully pushing along the Karpovka valley on 24 and 25 August 1942, reached the southern section of Stalingrad. However, the final stroke, the end result of all the maneuvering—the capture of the city—did not occur.

Throughout the summer of 1942, ever since the battle of annihilation waged by von Kleist's First Panzer Army and the Sixth Army against the divisions of Timoschenko west southwest of Kharkov (12-27 May 1942), the Russians had shown only token resistance. They only changed these delaying tactics when they crossed the Don River near Kalach, then suddenly turned and faced the oncoming German Sixth Army. The result was the near-annihilation of the First Russian Panzer Army and the Sixty-second Army, leaving hundreds of burned out tanks in a narrow area near the Don River. In view of this there was some reason to assume that Stalingrad would fall without too much opposition, and that the serious Russian resistance would begin only on the east bank of the Volga.

This hope proved false. It is true we succeeded in capturing more than half of the city area, and in a rather short time at that. Slowly, however, Russian resistance stiffened. Red reinforcements reached the city from the railhead at 'Kotluban' and the northern sector was soon the scene of heavy Russian counterattacks. This northern front connected the right wing of the German divisions and halted at the

bridge" failed. During the last days of September 1942 the Russians dared one more large-scale attack, employing many hundreds of tanks and gaining considerable ground which caused us great worry. Only a determined counterattack righted the German position, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy, to include 98 tanks. The northern sector again was secure thanks to the soldierly qualities of Gen-



Don River (partially utilizing portions of the Tatar Wall) with the forces that had to secure Stalingrad against the north.

Against this land bridge, generally running in a west-easterly direction, the Russians launched numerous attacks. It became clear that a breakthrough or even a deep penetration at this point would force the German troops to yield toward the south, a move which would seriously, if not decisively, affect the fate of Stalingrad.

However, the attacks against the "land

eral Hube and his motorized and tank divisions of the XIV Panzer Army Corps.

### Every House a Fortress

At the same time, the inner city of Stalingrad was the scene of the most sanguine fighting. Every house, hut, skyscraper, factory, and silo—everything became a bristling fortress spewing death and destruction. Extreme heroism on both sides became a standard performance. Attack and defense, rushes and counterrushes, fires, excited yelling, mortar and artillery

fire, and flamethrowers—Stalingrad became the living hell for which it is remembered. Rubble became fortresses; destroyed factories harbored deadly sharpshooters; behind every lathe and every machine tool lurked swift death. Every corner and every cranny threatened a sudden burst of automatic rifle fire and tumbling bodies. Every foot of ground had to be literally torn from the defenders. The heroism of Stalingrad, whether Russian or German, long will be remembered.

German losses were alarmingly heavy. Slowly our divisions burned out and replacements had slowed down to a trickle—completely insufficient considering the losses we took daily. The supply and reinforcement problem became still more acute when partisans, more often than we could prevent, interrupted or seriously damaged our only railroad line, a rickety, single track affair ending at Verkhne Chirskaya on the west bank of the Don. From this terminal point onward our trucks brought the supplies forward, using a 24-ton bridge across the river. Now this means of supply started to fall apart, not so much because of Russian attacks as lack of spare parts. The nearest central supply depot was at Kharkov and word reached us that they were almost "sold out"—fewer and fewer parts were available. As a consequence the quartermaster general of the Sixth Army was forced to fly out *Ju 52's* (Junkers transport planes) to bring in the most needed parts and supplies from far away Germany.

Thus it was with the Sixth German Army, an army in the midst of the most decisive fighting of the war, an army Germany and the whole world watched—for many different reasons.

### Stalingrad a Caldron

Gradually the fighting for the land bridge ceased. The Russians realized the impossibility of breaking through at this front in order to outflank the German

Army from a northerly direction. The city itself, however, never was quiet. Time and again bitter fighting broke out. Entire rows of houses disappeared in dust and ashes when screaming shells and mines tore into them. Fires raged incessantly, creating a deathly shroud of smoke over the doomed city. Giant construction girders were torn and bent into strange shapes and forms. Only in cellars and bunkers was there life. There, troops and command posts huddled precariously, often in a state of near-asphyxiation when shells ricocheted into entrances, sending down showers of debris and fiery, searing blasts of air.

Then too there were Russian civilians living like hunted animals in these war-made holes and cellars. Somehow they had managed to evade evacuation; somehow they hung on amidst the horrible maelstrom of destruction that raged all around them and slowly reduced their home city to rubble and smoldering debris. What else could they do? To try and reach the hinterland over endless steppes, without food or water, in blinding snowstorms was impossible.

### Give Valuable Ground

At the point where the left wing of the land bridge touched the Don River in a northwesterly direction, the German main lines ran along the western bank of the Don. In order to shorten the lines within the Kremenskaya loop of the Don River it became necessary toward the end of August 1942 to pull back the XI Army Corps (General Strecker) with its left flank anchored at Melo-Melovskiy and its right wing touching the Don River at Sirovinskaya.

This was a serious retrograde movement. The commanders were fully aware of the advantages thus gained by the Russian forces which, with one stroke, had quickly and without loss gained not only a great deal of territory but a strategically important bridgehead south of

the Don River loop. However, the German withdrawal could not be prevented, for the divisions in this sector had been in the frontlines for fully 18 months, with no relief, dwindling supplies, and practically no replacements. The troops were tired, deadly tired, and the German lines dangerously thin as long as they had to follow the contours of the Don loop.

The XI German Army Corps—the left

Fascist division commanders. The Hungarians, light units without rear echelons, fought only spasmodically. Their best divisions stood, arms ready, not in Russia but in their own province of Siebenbuerger, facing not Russians but their "allies," the Romanians. (In World War I the Germans tried successfully to put some fight and backbone into wavering allied units by inserting "Korsettstangen" (corset

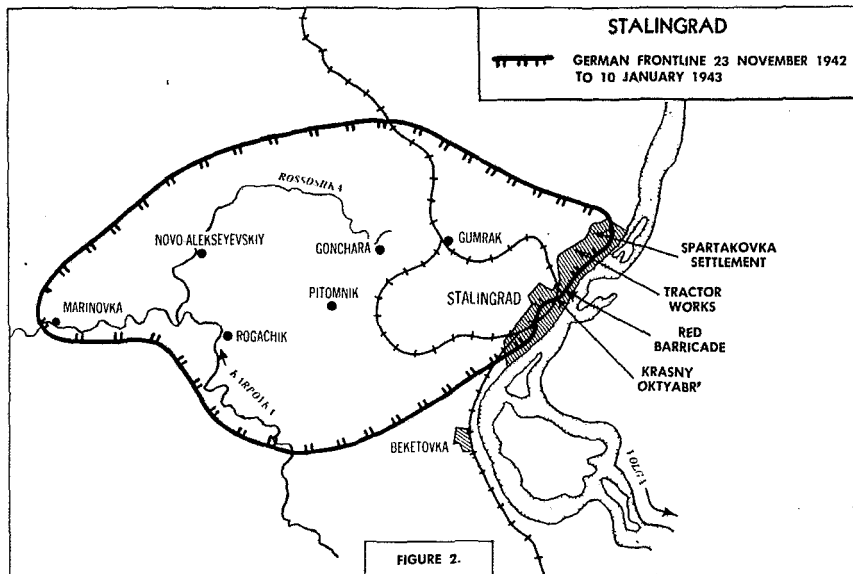


FIGURE 2.

wing of the Sixth Army—neighbored on the 1st Romanian Cavalry Division which in turn was the right wing of the IV Romanian Army Corps. Next to this Romanian unit, in the direction of Voronezh, followed Italian and Hungarian units. The Hungarians, hereditary enemies of Romanians, wisely were separated from the Romanians by the interposed Italian troops. The Italians were forever eyeing the hinterland and never were quite sure whose commands carried the most weight—the Royalist commanding general or the

stays)—seasoned and determined German troops. During the campaign in Russia this proved impossible, largely because there were not enough German troops for such tasks.)

Southward from Stalingrad the Fourth German Panzer Army (consisting largely of Romanian infantry divisions) under Colonel General Hoth was too far drawn out to be of help to its northerly units and, moreover, it had to keep contact with the First German Panzer Army far toward the south on the Terek River.

### Hitler's Strategy

Beginning in early October 1942 there were unmistakable signs of a Russian buildup in the easily gained bridgehead area of the Don loop. Extensive, dense forests east of the Don permitted good camouflage, while two good railroad lines between the Don and Volga enabled the enemy to resupply and reinforce his troops. Lack of air support made it impossible for our troops to interfere successfully with these ominous trends. It became more and more clear that the expected Russian thrust would aim at the left and right flanks of the Sixth Army simultaneously, with the push from the north pointing in a south southwesterly direction and reaching for a junction with a southern thrust northwestward into the Chirskaya area, thus closing the ring of steel and fire around the German Stalingrad Army.

Strangely, the Sixth Army was under the direct command of Hitler—safely and securely tucked away in his headquarters at Angerburg in East Prussia, about 1,000 miles from this most critical point of the Eastern Front. Hitler ignored all reports and warnings General Paulus submitted about the Russian intentions in front of the left and right wings of his army. Somehow, the “greatest strategist of all times” could not be swerved from his wishful thinking and his famous intuitions. General Paulus was reprimanded severely for his pessimistic evaluation and predictions and he could consider himself lucky that his strictly military reports were not interpreted as plain defeatism—something that many a German general had to face, as witness Field Marshal von Bock who had opposed the Stalingrad offensive and was promptly replaced by the more accommodating Colonel General von Weichs. General Paulus had pleaded for more troops, especially for the left flank of his threatened army, to act as combat reserves if and when the Russians struck at this very vulnerable point—and all

signs pointed toward such a thrust. Hitler declined the request and added insult to injury by ordering three or four tank and motorized divisions to be held in readiness for an assault on Astrakhan. We joked a great deal about this “caviar expedition.”

In the same year Hitler wanted to capture Murmansk and Leningrad, while the First Tank Army and the Seventeenth Army were scheduled to take Baku with its coveted and much needed oilfields. The “oil brigades” were held in readiness, and superheavy mortars already were rolling northward from Sevastopol for the assault on Leningrad. Strategy toward elimination of danger points was something Hitler no longer believed in—like a dream walker he moved about, oblivious of realities, forever clinging to wishful thinking.

### Hitler Listened Too Late

Under the pressure of the increasing news on the hostile offensive preparations Hitler agreed—too late—on 15 November that the 1st Romanian Panzer Division and the seriously mauled German 22d Panzer Division be held in readiness under Lieutenant General Heim in the area southwest of Kletskaya. From there they could deploy as an operational reserve north or westward in case of a Russian breakthrough. The 1st Romanian Panzer Division consisted of a mixture of captured French and Czech tanks, the crews of which were in the process of their training.

Romanian troops, touching on the German left flank, could not be obtained—first, because there were not enough to go around, and second, because they were only lightly equipped. They had no tank defense weapon to speak of and all their proved valor would come to nought once Russian T-34's faced Romanian cavalry lances—as had happened once before. (I found out later at Hitler's headquarters

that the Romanians had pleaded for heavy antitank guns. They had been promised but were never delivered and a gallant ally suffered grievously because of this neglect.)

Sometime during October 1942 a general of engineers arrived at our headquarters with a rash of regimental staffs—something we needed least. He did, however, bring a company of fortress engineers, troops especially trained for preparing tank traps, dugouts, gun pits, and other fortifications. We all smiled when our newly arrived guest, with his many staffs and so pitifully few engineer troops, told us about his special task. He was supposed to build concrete fortifications—of all places here where there was no gravel at all, with the nearest pits hundreds of miles away. Cement could be had only from Germany. The poor general looked very much dejected when he found that out, but he dared not tell Hitler's headquarters about this fiasco.

### Waning Spirit Is Felt

At about the time this quixotic event took place the 395th Division in the Stalingrad city area had orders to take Russian points of resistance in the northern district. Combat engineers were to precede them, preparing the way, to assist in the task of taking the strongpoints and then of pushing on toward the Volga River, thereby cutting a Russian resistance pocket in half. Initial success was all that was gained. Somehow the interplay between combat engineers and succeeding infantry failed. General Paulus was rightly indignant, for the elements of success had been at hand. This failure showed a sagging combat spirit, lack of will, a sense of defeatism—something that would slowly engulf the entire doomed Sixth Army.

When the quartermaster general, Lieutenant General Wagner, came to us to see for himself about supply and replacement problems he told us about a typical inci-

dent with the "greatest commander of all times":

*During the summer of 1942 it became evident that our supply of gasoline for all types of locomotion had been depleted to a point where we had to wait for supplies from day to day production. This woeful fact had to be considered by any sane commander for any planned campaign did he not want to risk a complete breakdown in aviation as well as trans-*



Ruins of Stalingrad

*port on land and sea, not to speak of the most vital weapon at the time, the all powerful and decisive tank arm. Wagner told us that he spoke earnestly to the chief of the general staff, Colonel General Halder, about this situation, and asked him to bring the matter to the attention of Hitler himself. Halder agreed but stressed that he would have to wait for an auspicious moment and for a chance when Hitler would be in a receptive mood, or else he would only be showered with epithets and would have to endure the wrath of the mighty Führer. Halder never spoke to Hitler about this critical state of affairs and finally Wagner took it upon himself to tell Hitler about it.*

*Hitler was growing more impatient by the minute as Wagner spoke to him and finally and impetuously snapped: 'Yes, and. . . ?' Wagner replied: 'It means, my*

*Führer, that the gasoline and oil situation will have to be seriously considered in any planned campaign or action.'*

*This factual report caused Hitler to become very sarcastic. Somehow, he no longer considered anything impossible; anything he wanted or dared was possible, solely because he said or thought so. He skipped over matters of supply, replacements, distances, losses. Only his will was the limit of the range of possibilities.*

*He snapped his answer to General Wagner: 'I did not expect another answer from my generals, thank you. . . That was all. And General Wagner? He shot himself after 20 July 1944—to escape death by strangulation, as so many officers suffered when Hitler escaped the attempt on his life and then struck back like a crazed tiger, remembering every little incident, every honest attempt to make him face facts and not fancy. They were his 'enemies.' The scrapers, the yessers, the liars, they were his comrades in arms—and finally his doom.*

### Führer's Big Promises

On 9 November 1942 Hitler spoke to his old cronies at the Burgerbrau in Munich. In front of Stalingrad we sat around our shortwave army radios and listened incredulously as Hitler yelled amidst deafening roars of approval:

*Stalingrad will be taken and I, and only I, will set the time. We shall employ entirely new shock troop tactics and will thus capture the remainder of the city.*

We sat around our receiving set in stunned silence. I dropped my head and simply stared ahead of me. In my opinion something dangerous had happened. A purely military situation had been reduced to the level of politics, nay, to the level of two contending political rivals, Hitler and Stalin. Strategic facts and consideration, human suffering and endurance, supplies, losses and replacements

—all these and many other factors were reduced to an ugly quarrel between two dictators. The troops, the facts of military life no longer mattered. Hitler, the man of iron, will tell us when, where—but will he tell us how? He never did, never in a sane, workable way. He dreamed up armies, situations, chances for success—and he and we lost.

I remembered his speech of 1 October 1942 at Berlin:

*Now it is our special task to capture Stalingrad. I assure you, once that is done, nobody will ever be able to wrest that city from us again.*

The day after Hitler's speech at the Burgerbrau in Munich I met General Paulus. He greeted me with the words: "Well, what have you got to say about yesterday's speech?" I answered: "I think about it exactly the way you do, General." He left my bunker without another word.

### Bitter Fighting Continues

In the meantime, fighting in Stalingrad itself continued unabated, especially in the northern part. Of particular severity was the fighting in the slaughterhouse area and in and about Spartakovka Settlement, with only limited results. One day the area would be ours and the next day the Russians would chase us out again. Toward the close of October 1942 we succeeded, after many tries, in capturing the tractor works Dshershinski, the gun factory "Red Barricade," and the "Krasny Oktyabr' Works." Our losses were heavy, irreplaceable, and useless. At the same time, Russian attacks against the "land bridge" started again without success, and south of Stalingrad Russian onslaughts mounted in tenacity and power.

Five engineer battalions now reached us by air, among them the 50th of which I had been commander during peacetime. These five battalions were Hitler's answer to the Stalingrad problem; they were the "new" tactics which would change every-



thing from bad to good in and around Stalingrad. It must be said in honor of the troops that they did succeed in breaking down a number of Russian resistance nests in Stalingrad, but their limited success changed nothing. The Russian threat around the town, around the perimeter, remained as before. In a few days these five German battalions were nothing but cinders—burned out, killed, wounded, missing, and prisoners. I wrote to my wife at that time: "He is to be blessed, who did not order this senseless slaughter."

Until late fall we experienced mild weather. Almost overnight, however, heat gave way to cold, bitter cold. There is no gradual change of seasons, no compromise; today, tropical heat, tomorrow, snow and more snow.

#### Great Russian Offensive

The various commanders had pleaded and warned continuously, but in vain. On 19 November 1942 at about 0400 Russian artillery opened up in a wild, screaming, screeching crescendo of fury and sound. Before much time passed, long, powerful columns of Russian tanks, starting from the areas of Kremenskaya and Serafimovich, ground their way southward and southwestward toward the Liska valley—ground their way through and over the dazed Romanian divisions. A wild melee ensued. Romanian troops retreated, exposing the left wing of the German Sixth Army, the XI Army Corps, to the dangers of complete envelopment.

In vain did the XI Corps stand its ground. Its left flank reached into nothingness and it was only a matter of time before the Russian pinchers would snap closed. A quick decision was necessary, and XI Corps plus a part of VIII Corps had to cross to the east bank of the Don River. The chief of staff, Major General Schmidt, called me inquiring about possible reserves to seal off threatened sectors. I had nothing, not a single company to throw into the breach.

The operational reserves, the 1st Romanian and 22d German Panzer Divisions, tried to right matters but failed. They were too weak to counteract Russian weight in steel and men. But Hitler had found a scapegoat. Lieutenant General Heim, who was responsible for these two divisions, was arrested and taken to Moabit in Germany for trial. He was accused of starting his counteroffensive too late. Among the officer corps this arrest



Fighting in Stalingrad Tractor Works

caused widespread, hostile comment. Opposition to the "greatest general of all times" grew by leaps and bounds.

#### An Army Encircled

By 20 November 1942, only 24 hours later, the Russian push down the Liska valley had reached Gureyev and its tremendous momentum kept it going south without much opposition. The thrust from the Beketovka area near the Volga River, carried out with cavalry divisions, already had started, with the result that General Paulus was forced to transfer his headquarters from place to place with Russian reconnoitering parties only an hour behind him. At Kalach the two Red pinchers finally snapped shut. The ring had been forged. Preceding all this tragedy was confusion, alarm, rows of disabled tanks, stalled transport vehicles, and wounded

soldiers hobbling along, not knowing where to go or what to do. In all this turmoil the German-built bridge over the Don River at Kalach fell into Russian hands. Russian tanks soon were to surge over that bridge to unite with the forces from the area of Beketovka.

The debacle meant the closing of a tight ring around the Sixth German Army between the Don and Volga. About 350,000 Germans, and a few thousand Romanians and *Hiwis* (Russians in the German Army) now were cut off from any supply lines or direct contact with other German units. I had lost contact with headquarters and when my party reached Nizhne-Chirskaya we found that General Paulus and his staff already had flown into the *kessel* (ring). Being outside of the *kessel* I received instructions from the German chief of staff of the Fourth Romanian Army, Colonel Wenck, to collect as many troops as possible and with them try to stem a Russian push toward the south in the direction of Rostov. In this we succeeded after hard fighting.

After Christmas 1942 I reported to the army group commander von Manstein at Novocherkassk. There I met my old friend Colonel Busse who told me about Manstein: "If I had not pleaded with him many, many times, he (Manstein) would have thrown up his job long ago. He stayed because of his troops, not because of Hitler."

### No Help for Sixth Army

When I talked to Colonel Busse about the encircled Sixth Army, he told me that whatever reinforcements they had obtained could not be diverted to Stalingrad. They were used to stem several Russian breakthroughs at other places. He said that too many weak points had developed along the fronts, and that frequently the same divisions had to be rushed from danger point to danger point in order to stop a Russian attack. That

sounded ominous for the Sixth Army. I could not bring myself to believe that any commander in chief would dare the ignominious loss of such an army of so many tried and proved fighting men. I was wrong.

At engineer headquarters the mood was rather divided. Some held out hope; some did not. It was different with the staff of the quartermaster corps. There my old friend Colonel Finkh held sway. He was rather reserved in his opinion. An older general staff officer denounced Hitler and his cohorts loudly and vehemently. It was dangerous talk as he and Colonel Finkh found out. Both were hanged after the attempts on Hitler's life had failed.

A short time later I received orders to fly into the *kessel*, accompanied by my adjutant, Captain Fricke, a newlywed, and my orderly, Otto Blueher. Instead of 75 minutes the flight from Manstein's headquarters to the Stalingrad encirclement took fully three hours. We hit blinding, howling snowstorms and had to climb to more than 14,000 feet without oxygen masks. We suffered from terrible earaches and a deadly, tired feeling. Looking for the airfield at Pitomnik—always watchful of Russian fighter planes—we finally found it and had to descend so rapidly and steeply that we almost crashed. Here at this emergency airfield numerous wrecked airplanes dotted the field, with two giant *Condors* standing out among the rest of the crippled and crashed aircraft.

Everybody at Sixth Army Headquarters was cheered by my arrival. I had come from the "outside"—from where there were food, warmth, troops, and supplies. Everybody had expected me to tell them about relief measures—of the number of divisions on the march toward Stalingrad and how long it would take them to get there. There were officers who had entertained high hopes and who expected a long recital of countermeasures taken by Hitler to relieve "Fortress Stalingrad."

## The German Debacle of Stalingrad--

# Hitler Forbids Breakout

Colonel Herbert Selle, German Army, *Retired*

Translated and adapted by Mr. Karl T. Marx

*This is the second article of a two-part series in which the former commander of Engineer forces of the Sixth German Army describes the decimation and ultimate defeat of that Army at Stalingrad on the Russian steppes. Last month Colonel Selle described the German drive to Stalingrad, Hitler's strategy, and the massive Russian counteroffensive. In the following article he discusses Hitler's refusal to let the Sixth Army break out and gives a graphic word picture of life within beleaguered, unconquered Stalingrad. His account concludes with his air evacuation just as the final act was drawing to a close—an evacuation ordered for a reason. A few weeks after reporting to German Supreme Headquarters, Colonel Selle and all members of his family were arrested for defeatist sentiments and for lowering the fighting morale of the German armed forces. He was condemned to death and only narrowly escaped the firing squad.—Editor.*

**E**VER since General (Friedrich) Paulus had flown into the *kessel* on 21 November 1942 (only two days after the Russians had closed their pinchers) he had formulated plans to break out and unite his

troops with those fighting on the Don-Chir front. This course did not appear impossible. German troops had accomplished it before with great success and the spirit around Stalingrad was such that every man would have done his utmost to get out and make contact with outside forces.

General Paulus held a meeting with all his corps commanders and it was quickly agreed to contact Hitler to obtain permission to:

**HAVE THE SIXTH ARMY BREAK THROUGH AT THE SOUTHWEST SECTOR OF THE KESSEL, BY CONCENTRATING ENOUGH TANKS AND TROOPS TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE, AND THEN OPEN A PANZER (TANK) BORDERED ALLEY THROUGH WHICH ALL TROOPS AND NEEDED EQUIPMENT CAN BE FUNNELED OUT TO MAKE CONTACT WITH GERMAN TROOPS IN THE DON-CHIR AREA.**

Everyone agreed and all were confident that this fairly simple measure would be approved. About 100 heavy tanks, ready for action, already were in line. Troops began marching to their jumping off places, showing a new measure of confidence and hope. Another *kessel* would be broken, perhaps another glorious Kharkov.

*The fate of the Sixth German Army, encircled at Stalingrad, primarily was sealed because of Hitler's disregard of his leader's recommendations and his refusal to allow the army commander to attempt a breakout*

But on 23 November a telegraph message from Hitler ordered the Sixth Army to stay inside the encirclement and to wait for relief from the outside.

### Von Seydlitz Enters Plea

This order hit the generals and those acquainted with their plans like a stroke of lightning. Hope and daring were paralyzed and many a man faced a real, hard test of obedience versus commonsense and the strong drive for self-preservation. General von Seydlitz wanted to ignore the order and initiate the breakout. On 25 November he handed General Paulus a memorandum in which he prophesied in a shocking way the debacle of the Sixth Army in event it obeyed the orders of Hitler and did not break out toward the west or southwest during the next few days. Some sentences of this touching, impressive memorandum may be quoted:\*

*To undervalue the spirit of the enemy in a situation so favorable to him and not*

\* Published here for the first time.

*Colonel Herbert Selle, German Army, Retired, participated in the major battles of World War I in France and Belgium. He became commander of an engineer battalion in 1936 and took part in the campaign against Poland. During the war with Soviet Russia he commanded the Engineer forces of the Sixth German (Stalingrad) Army. He presently is serving as secretary in the German Hunting Association.*

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*to believe him capable of the only right action has always involved defeat in war history. It would, therefore, be an unequaled va-banque play that would cause not only the catastrophe of the Sixth Army but also have the gravest consequences for the final result of the entire war. The order of Hitler to keep the igel (encirclement) and to wait for relief from outside is founded on an absolutely unreal basis. It cannot be carried through and its consequences must be the debacle. It is, however, our holy duty to preserve and save our divisions, therefore, another order must be given or another decision be taken by the army herself. Our army has only the alternative of the breakthrough toward the southwest or ruin within a few weeks. We are morally responsible for the life or death of our soldiers. Our conscience toward the Sixth Army and our country commands us to refuse the orders of Hitler and assume for ourselves freedom of action. The lives of some hundred thousand German soldiers are at stake. There is no other way.*

General Paulus and his chief of staff—in spite of all doubts and scruples—could not agree to General von Seydlitz' passionate views. After a long inner struggle they made up their minds to comply with Hitler's orders. As a consequence, all previously ordered movements of tanks and troops were halted, and orders went out to start the *einigelung*, the process of rolling up like a hedgehog and waiting for the enemy to attack.

### Orders Without Support

Hitler's orders were typical of the man, typical of his wishful, unrealistic thinking. *Einigelung*—hedgehogging—meant dug-outs, trenches, heavy digging equipment, winter uniforms, special underwear, heavy gloves, and special oil for trucks. It meant a soft soil for digging, not 30 inches of snow; not soil as hard as rock. It meant plenty of winter clothing, supplies, tools

—and of all these things the Sixth Army had virtually none. Swarms of Russian fighter planes followed the few German relief planes almost down to the snow-covered airfields. Ammunition dwindled; so did supplies. Rations had to be cut again and again. And there were only two makeshift airfields left.

Hitler's decision, it was learned later, was made after *Reichmarshall* Göring had assured him that his air force would be ready and able to supply Stalingrad with all needed supplies. Göring's chief of staff, General Jeschonnek, had counseled against such impossible, nay, criminal promises, but was overruled. (General Jeschonnek committed suicide after the tragic Stalingrad ending.)

We in Stalingrad computed hard and harsh figures, factual figures, about such a boasted airlift. We would need 1,000 landings a day to obtain 750 tons of needed goods. To fly 1,000 planes a day would require another 1,000 planes for replacements due to attrition. We needed tools and gasoline, hundreds of mechanics, repair shops—and we had only two small airfields left. (After 14 January 1943 there was only one.)

### Hollow Air Promises

The tragedy of Stalingrad largely is a tragedy of the German Air Force, since Hitler's decision was based on Göring's boast that he would supply the beleaguered troops. Instead of 1,000 planes a day there were 50 to 70 at first, and then never more than 25 planes a day, often only 15. The greatest amount of provisions, ammunition, and gasoline flown in during one day was 105.5 tons. After the Pitomnik airfield was lost on 14 January very few pilots dared or were able to land at the remaining field at Gumrak. All they could do, after having escaped swarms of Russian fighters, was to drop their supply packets and then turn tail. Slowly, hunger started its job of strangulation. And far away, in a gaudy uniform, *Herr Reich-*

*marshall* Göring, dined and wined and boasted about his invincible air armada—until even Hitler realized that his boon companion had put one over on him, that his promise of a Stalingrad airlift was a cruel hoax, and that 300,000 men were doomed unless something was done and done quickly.

It mattered little now that *Reichmarshall* Göring was no longer consulted, nor even permitted to share the august presence of his one-time companion. The Sixth Army was starving, dying, freezing to death, almost waiting for the *coup de grâce*. Napoleon must have been grinning in his tomb in far away Paris. He knew the Russian steppes—he knew the long, trackless wastelands, the snow, and bitter cold of Russia.

### Relief Attempt Fails

At the beginning of December 1942 there was new hope. On 12 December Colonel General Hoth with his Fourth Tank Army started from Rostov up the Don River to relieve Stalingrad. (Figure 1.) We staff officers knew, however, that this Fourth Tank Army contained only one strong tank division and two seriously mauled tank divisions. In spite of this they succeeded at first in their northward thrust and gained 55 miles. Again General Paulus asked permission to break out to make contact with General Hoth. With this he was in full accord with Colonel General von Manstein, chief commander of the army group Don. Manstein had done everything possible to accomplish the breakthrough of the Sixth Army in those days. But again permission was denied, and this time there was almost open rebellion at Sixth Army Headquarters. However, General Paulus obeyed once more. It must have been a hard struggle for this gentleman-soldier to obey the order.

### So Near, Yet So Far

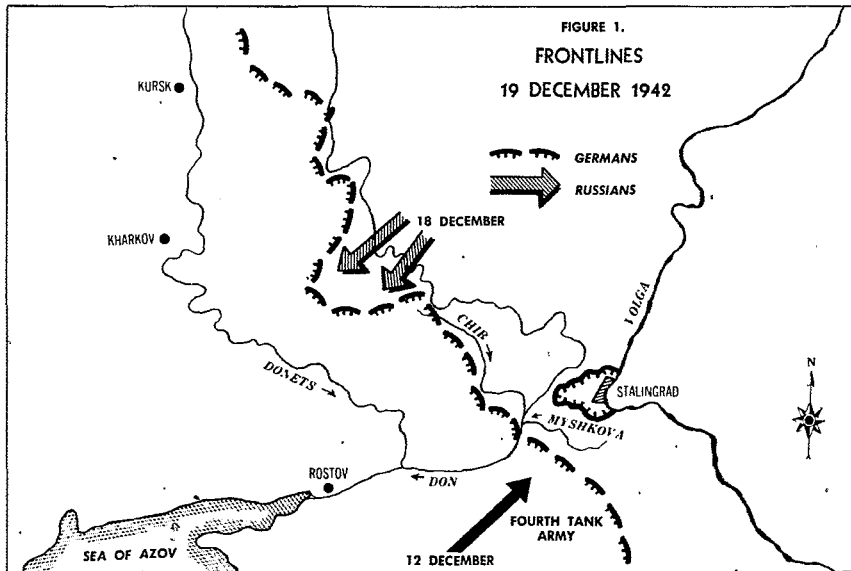
The Fourth Tank Army now was only 30 miles from the Stalingrad southwestern

perimeter. Had General Paulus attacked, had he ignored the commands of Hitler, had he linked up with Hoth and then hastened to Hitler to offer his head for breaking out and saving 300,000 men, the end might have been different. But he did not. On 23 December Colonel General von Manstein was forced to withdraw the elite of Hoth's "tank army," the 6th Panzer Division, from the front of the counter-attack in order to master a formidable situation arising from a Russian break-

Only among friends did we voice our thoughts and beliefs. We no longer had any trust in anything Hitler said or did. His orders to us appeared to be those of a man obsessed with an insatiable drive for power and a complete lack of understanding of the realities of war. He lacked a sense of value, of *mass und Ziel*.

### Life Within the Kessel

To keep an encircled army of roughly 300,000 men alive is a task that no supply



through at the front of the Italian army corps (Figures 1 and 2). This Italian collapse threatened the entire area as far as the Black Sea. Colonel General Hoth had no other alternative but to fall back, leaving Stalingrad to its fate.

Now another hasty and costly retreat. To make matters worse, on New Year's Day Hitler sent to the Sixth Army his special and personal greetings plus his renewed assurances that everything was being done to relieve Stalingrad!

genius, cut off from replenishing sources, has ever solved. Provisions at Stalingrad never had been plentiful, and it now became a matter of cutting rations to the very minimum. Here, again, there was no way to figure out how to stretch, how to cut, how to keep going, at rock bottom rations, until Hitler's often promised push toward us would relieve all pressure and bring food and supplies aplenty.

The matter resolved itself into a question of whether to eat more and give up

sooner or eat less and keep going until the last can of food had been emptied. It was decided to eat less and that is truly an understatement. Beginning in January 1943 each of us received a daily ration of about three ounces (75 grams to be exact) and a daily vegetable ration of two pounds for 15 men. Potatoes and meat were unavailable, except the "meat" we hacked out with axes from the frozen horse cadavers lying all around us. The horses of the encircled infantry divisions had long been slaughtered for their meat. Water was nowhere available on the Russian steppes—we had to obtain it by melting snow. Slowly the once proud Sixth Army became an army of walking skeletons with no relief in sight.

### Surrender Is Demanded

During the first week in January 1943 Russian officers, under a flag of truce, approached our northern front to ask for surrender. Some of us felt that the conditions contained honorable terms, even permitting our officers to keep their side-arms. We did not know then that one could not have confidence in their promises. On the other hand, the offer ended with threats of complete annihilation of the Sixth Army within a very short time.

Although the offer was discussed among the various staff components, General Paulus had little choice but to decline—Hitler all too frequently had yelled about the "no surrender" determination of "his" armies. Of course, the "Führer" declined as he had also declined a previous request by General Paulus to grant the Sixth Army freedom of action. Again General von Seydlitz counseled to strike—even against Hitler's orders.

### Plan Final Defense

On 9 January the chief of staff requested my presence. He believed the Russian attack would start toward the end of January and that it would be directed against the Marinovka salient in the Kar-

povka valley in an attempt to wrest from us the rather favorable terrain with its natural defenses and prepared dugouts. From that point on they would then try to drive us onto the steppes where there would be no fortifications, no hills, no river banks—only snow and ice and flat country. I was ordered to reconnoiter and work out with the sector commanders an approximate line running southward from the east bank of the Rossoshka River near Nizhne-Alekseyevskiy toward Rogachik on the Karpovka River in case the Russian attack succeeded in crushing the German Marinovka salient.

Contemplating the construction of fortifications in snow, ice, and howling winds with nothing more than light equipment in the hands of troops half alive, I went on my way with heavy heart. It was too late.

The next day, 10 January, the Russian attack began—fully 15 to 20 days earlier than the German High Command had anticipated. The command, however, was right as far as the point of attack was concerned. It hit the German 76th Division north of the Karpovka River, first a concentrated, heavy artillery bombardment and then the tanks. In a short time Russian advance elements had reached the 76th command post and there was no longer any point to explain my mission about a new line of defense. We had to retreat.

Slowly hysteria mounted in the wild battle melee that ensued. More and more the *kessel* was contracted, with German troops stumbling over the steppes toward the center, away from the tank-haunted, fiery, and murderous perimeters. Stalingrad itself was now the only hope. Its ruined houses, factories, and giant apartments meant shelter and a measure of relief from the howling, tearing winds of the steppes, and the deadly, chilling cold.

Hundreds of wounded men stood along the hardly visible roads, pitifully looking

at our car. Some held their crutches aloft in a final, pleading gesture. Some just stared resignedly. I stopped the car and succeeded in placing 12 wounded men inside, on the roof, on the running board, and mud guards, while I sat on the motor hood, precariously balancing myself as the driver bumped along the icy road. We stopped at the field hospital in Gumrak and there I left the grateful men in the care of our medics.

### Retreat Into Nothingness

On 14 January the airfield at Pitomnik was precipitously evacuated, largely due to gripping panic among rear echelon personnel who imagined Russian tanks where there were none. Fear struck everywhere, generating an understandable urge for self-preservation that blotted out any sense of discipline or order. General Paulus and the chief of staff were furious at this unsoldierly behavior and at the unwarranted evacuation in the face of an enemy who was, in fact, still one mile away. Somehow the panicked troops rallied at the hard, decisive word from above and promptly reoccupied the needlessly abandoned Pitomnik airfield. The Russians, however, now were at our throats—had pushed us away from prepared positions into nothingness, into howling emptiness, into a wasteland of snow. There was nothing to hold to any more. Even the soil had turned to stone, and would not admit us.

South of the village of Gonchara I met General Strecker, commander of the XI Army Corps. We had been old friends and I was very fond of him. He was a true leader, a true soldier-commander, revered by his troops to whom he was a father and counselor. The general met me in the bunker of his chief of staff, a Colonel Grosskurth, who belonged—as I learned later—to the leading members of the secret resistance movement. Somehow, I felt that the general wanted to be alone with me. He beckoned me to come outside. Then he

began: "What are you going to do when the end has come?"

"I cannot say now what I will do, general, but most likely I shall shoot myself," I answered. His reply: "I have the same intentions, if and when circumstances permit it. But you know that General Paulus has expressly forbidden such a course." "Yes, I know, general, but in a situation like ours is going to be, he can no longer forbid anything." "Do you believe that we should continue in this catastrophic way until we collapse?" "Yes, I believe so," I replied, "unless we make one final effort. This situation calls for unusual thinking and efforts."

The general nodded in agreement then averted his eyes as if he wanted to scan the gray skies. Slowly he spoke: "It is very difficult to find the line of correct response and deed. An army stands and falls with the age-honored dictum of obedience. Yet this desperate situation calls for independent thinking and action."

"This gnawing feeling of being wrong by being right, by obeying according to the book and according to tradition, is the decisive point," I replied. "Right here in Stalingrad blind obedience becomes a farcical attitude, with nothing to do but to wait for the next pronouncement from faraway Hitler who does not believe what he should see but sees only what he likes to believe. But who will stand up and give the signal?" My bold words brought no reply. The general shook hands with me and then he slowly turned to go to his bunker.

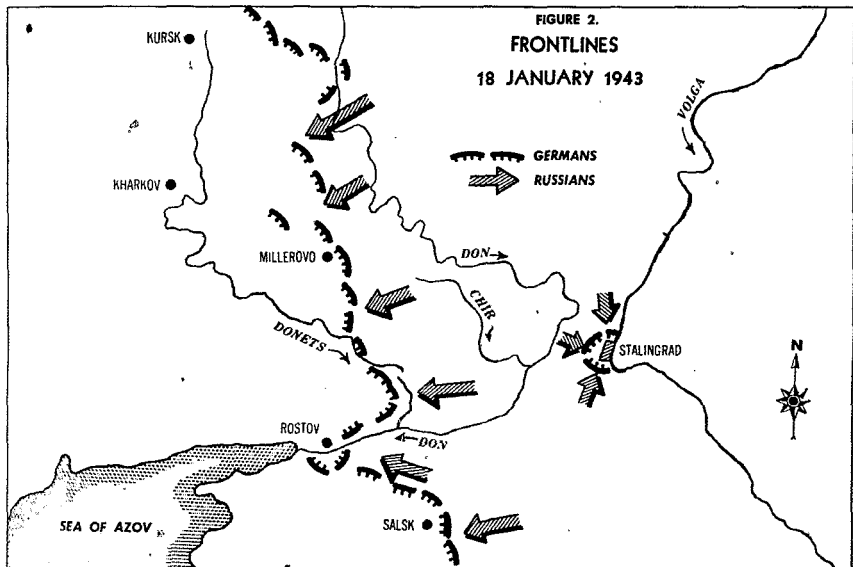
From army reports we ascertained that the German front had moved away from us to a distance of 130 miles. (Figure 2.) This fact meant still less help from airplanes, particularly medical supplies, since our planes would now have to fly without fighter escort and would more and more be exposed to the increasing attacks by Russian planes. We had become an island in a seething sea.



### Final Disintegration

Shall we ever see Germany again? Maybe never. Brooding and waiting, hoping against hope with bitterness, mounting despair—such was the emotional barometer during the next few weeks. The last vestiges of rank had disappeared. Emaciated, hollow-eyed, freezing men held on to memories now standing out in strong

Paulus, knowing that I enjoyed his confidence. They felt that I should tell him about the mounting resentment toward the do-nothing attitude, this hopeless waiting for the trap to be closed. At first I hesitated, but when I finally faced General Paulus and cautiously advanced my thoughts about the morale of the troops, the sufferings and the hunger-induced



relief against the misery and hopelessness about them. There was a wave of suicides by men who preferred death to a Communist prison.

Some of us expressed bitter anger at this Hitler-made deathtrap. One staffer exploded: "Now there are only 150,000 men left, but these 150,000 are all ripe for treason." There were long talks about the inner motives of treason, and whether there was not treason from above against the men who slowly rotted away after having been refused permission to break through the iron ring about them. Some of the officers urged me to talk to General

lack of will to hold out any longer, he declined to listen and let me leave his bunker without another word.

The Russian tanks attacked from the north, south, and west. Russian infantrymen looked in surprise when they found only a few German soldiers staring at them—soldiers with nothing but rifles. Above us heavy *Martin* bombers went about their business without interference. All these proud divisions that had chased the Russians over the endless steppes now were frozen still, their guns silent, their remnants hugging the ground in long, thinned out lines that could do little more

than wait for the next attack and be overrun.

So it was everywhere. The Russians set their daily targets, started out in the early morning hours, and got there before the day was over—surprised at the few German soldiers who stood in their way. Often their guns went into position in full view of our lines—with no more opposition than a solitary machinegun hammering away and then stopping abruptly when concentrated counterfire found its mark. Then the Russians started their barrage, hitting where they imagined our lines to be, often hitting a line of dead men, frozen, stiff forms, that even in death caused the enemy to be wary and waste ammunition.

### Hopes, Rumors, and Plans

Many of us discussed plans how to escape before the inevitable end would come. Some saved provisions to enable them to keep going once they had stolen their way through the Russian lines. Others put on Russian uniform pieces to make detection more difficult. Our Russian "Matkas" who had been working in our kitchens offered to accompany us through the steppes and to show us how to avoid Russian outposts. Escape became an obsession with many. We stopped shaving, and our exterior was anything but military. One never knew whether his neighbor was a general or a buck private. We had become a vermin-ridden, unkempt, rankless, hungry, and desolate body of men, formerly known as the Sixth German Army.

And then rumors—always from the soldier who heard, who saw, who knew. There were phantom armies moving toward Stalingrad. There was a *landser* (the German equivalent of the American G.I.) who had learned about German tanks chasing the Russians away from Kalach. He had heard it from another *landser* whose friend had seen such a notice posted at the headquarters bulletin board at Gumrak. What he did not know was that there no longer

was a headquarters at Gumrak and that no longer was there a village by the name of Gumrak—only a heap of masonry, debris, and dust.

There still was sentiment to try one last, desperate breakthrough against the southwestern front. Some of the commanders believed that the Russian front at this sector was only thinly held and that a concentration of German troops for one final, mad rush would break the iron wall around us and permit our escape in that



Street in Stalingrad

direction. However, this plan came to nought, mainly because of lack of combat-ready troops, and also because it was thought impossible to withdraw troops from other sectors for this undertaking without the Russians learning about it in time to crush the thus depleted sectors. An additional and probably the main factor against the attempt was the low morale of the troops. They had lost their fighting spirit. The generals now were practically without an army—the army was dead tired, hungry, desperate, and had lost faith.

### Mistake Is Recognized

When I next met General Paulus he had aged visibly. His face was an ashen gray; there were deep furrows in it, marks of scourging worries and woes. His once erect carriage had yielded to a sloppy

posture. His hands hung limply at his sides and his eyes showed nothing but hopelessness. He shook hands with me.

"What do you say to it all now, colonel?"

"Nothing, sir, that the other, older staff officer would not say with me."

"And what is that?"

"Sir, you should not have obeyed. Now you have missed our chance. Last November you should have struck out with your then intact Sixth Army. And after the battle you should have gone to Hitler and offered him your head. You would have become another York."

The general looked at me searchingly, then, in what looked like a confirming gesture, placed his hand upon my right shoulder and replied: "I know, and I also know that history already has condemned me."

It is worth noting here that, despite rumors to the contrary, General Paulus never had left Stalingrad to appear before Hitler, and Hitler never had come to us to see for himself.

Every tragic situation has its moments of comic relief. The "dilettante of Angerburg" (our nickname for Hitler and his headquarters in far away east Prussia) had the bad taste to shower upon our commanding officers a rash of promotions. We shook our heads in disbelief. Instead of armies, Hitler sent promotions to officers only a few steps away from Russian concentration camps. Paulus became a colonel general, presumably for staying put in obedience to Hitler's orders. His promotion to the rank of a field marshal one fortnight later was nothing but a clumsy challenge to commit suicide when the time of ruin came. For never in German Army history had a field marshal been taken prisoner. But General Paulus did not do Hitler this favor, he went into Russian captivity, with the insignia of a German field marshal on his shoulders.

At this time the chief of staff wanted to risk everything in one last concentrated

attempt before the gates of Stalingrad. East of the village of Pitomnik he wanted to prepare strong new positions to stop the Russian advance. The "front" would have to be traced in the snowy wasteland of that area, and all I could find for the purpose of throwing up fortifications were two truckloads of shovels, spades, and axes. A handful of engineers served as guides in the pale winter night when the emaciated infantry started to drag themselves into these improvised lines. We had long passed the point of the possible, had missed good chances, had let them slip by merely because the Führer had other plans. Our frontlines collapsed time and again.

#### Von Seydlitz Bitter

Our talks became bolder. The conspiracy grew by leaps and bounds. We talked about far away Germany, our families, we wrote letters, not knowing how to get them out, since only a few daring pilots brought their planes down. Most of them just released their provision bombs and raced back toward their home airfields. We talked about this war that nobody wanted and how it became a war by and for the Nazi Party.

At about this time I met General von Seydlitz, commander of the LI German Army Corps, with whom I had served in the same corps during peacetime. The general invited me into his bunker. He knew from his chief of staff, Colonel Clausius, my long-time friend and comrade, that I was critical of events and that fact might have caused him to speak his mind freely and without subterfuge.

He paced the bunker incessantly, talking to me at the same time. He fairly raged against the "all highest," his sense of values, his preferences for those with a Nazi twist rather than military knowledge. He condemned the orders of the Sixth Army; he could not understand why a successful general like Paulus had lost his drive, his daring, his energy.

I remember so well his last words to me: "For Germany—against Hitler."

I had never suspected so much vehemence as I encountered in General von Seydlitz. Yet he was right. Hitler went into Russia almost as if everything would be a foregone conclusion and he wound up crying for discarded winter clothing, even women's overcoats, to dress his freezing German soldiers caught in the pitiless Russian winter.

#### Last Request Refused

On 22 January General Paulus asked Hitler by wireless to agree to the capitulation or the breakthrough in small groups in the direction of the Colmucks steppe and there to join the units of the First Panzer Army fighting at the Terek front. But Hitler refused the last request of the commander of a dying army.

We talked about our wives, parents, children, towns, and friends. At times we joked about a Stalingrad shield that Hitler surely would design with his own artistic hands. It no longer mattered—Russian tanks already were prowling not far from us. Captain Fricke talked to me about his young wife, about their recent honeymoon, and how he would walk all over Siberia and back just to see her again. He did not see her again. There was a major without a battalion, because his battalion had just disappeared, ground into blood and dust a little while ago. His mind had been affected by this tragedy, and he sat in a corner and stared emptily ahead.

#### Sudden Orders to Leave

At about this time my telephone rang. My friend Adam was speaking. "You are flying out tomorrow as a courier."

"Yes, and back when?"

"Man, do you not know what that means? You do not come back."

I was numb for a moment, then a strange reaction took place. Yes, and what would the others say, when I leave now?

Comradeship is not just a word to an honorable man. If it has welded together men in uniform in a tragic fate like ours, it has strong, very personal implications. I looked over to the major whose battalion was lost. He looked at me in a beseeching way, his eyes flickering.

Adam spoke again. "You are to report to the commanding general and his chief of staff tomorrow morning at ten o'clock." And then the reaction set in, a tumultuous surge toward a new life, thanking God



#### Fighting at a railroad line near Stalingrad

for this last chance out of my own grave, out into the sunlight, into life.

Next morning, as I was getting ready, my orderly Blueher came into my bunker. "Sir, I have a wife and two small children at home." Then he burst into convulsive sobs. "I know, Blueher, but I cannot promise you anything—yet. At any rate, prepare your knapsack. You come along to the airfield." Blueher's eyes lit up. There was hope.

I faced Major General Schmidt, the chief of staff, for the last time. I was shocked at his change of appearance. This knightly gentleman had not shaved for days. His deep-set eyes looked emptily at me. His uniform was in need of cleaning. His hands were folded in front of him, resting on his desk, as if praying inwardly. We talked at length, and finally he rose with these, his last words to me:

"Tell wherever you deem it wise and possible that the Sixth German Army was betrayed by the all highest, and left in the lurch." Had he taken this view a few months earlier so much tragedy might have been averted.

Gumrak airfield already was under Russian artillery fire. On my way there I passed long rows of Romanian troops, a pitiful picture, remnants of the burned out 1st Cavalry and 20th Infantry Divisions. Dead, dying, wounded, and those still untouched lined the road, a most macabre frame for my last impressions before reaching the field. Colonel Rosenfeld, formerly a well-known police boxer, received me and asked me into a makeshift bunker to wait for darkness when planes could be expected to land.

The bunker was filled with soldiers. A young army chaplain entered, asking whether anyone knew where his division could be located. Nobody knew. A wounded soldier stepped up to the young minister. "Do you believe, *Herr Pfarrer*, that God wants us to die here?" "Yes, if it is His will. He has the last word in every human deed, but this word does not always have to be a 'yes.' And if He, in this dire hour, denies Himself to us, so is this a sign that our own works and deeds have not His approval." Thus spoke the chaplain, and I envied him for his simple, deep belief.

### Last Flight to Safety

At dusk we left the bunker to be near the landing apron. Not far from us we saw the flashes of Russian guns. Around us small fountains of dirt shot upward where a shell had struck. Now we heard motors—near at first, then farther away. Here it comes, a *Ju 52*, in a steep descent to make the improvised, short runway. It stopped in front of us, idling its motors because of the terrific cold. Quickly a number of men emptied the plane of its foodstuffs, medicine, three barrels of oil and 15 six-inch shells. Fifteen, when 15,000 are needed for one counterthrust!

Then they came—the wounded, the dying, the sick; and there was room for only 20 men. I had given my orderly Blueher quiet instructions to stay in the storage section of the plane. I could see the gratefulness welling up in his eyes. The soldiers milled around the plane. The military police were helpless. I carefully picked the most seriously wounded, checked their medical papers, and let them enter—only a pitiful 18.

The motors started and slowly the *Ju 52* rose. Soon we were over the Russian positions, and we saw the flashes of Russian shells. I folded my hands and I saw Blueher and the others do the same. We said thanks to God above us—and we prayed for those left behind in hell.

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Professional competence—that is, knowledge of the art and trade of war—is not alone sufficient to meet the requirements of leadership in modern war. Knowledge can be cold and sterile, unproductive of the stimuli which drive men to victory in battle. No effective military leader has ever reached greatness by brainpower alone. The latter must be accompanied by a deep understanding of the men who, in the last analysis, are the absolute weapon of war.

*General Maxwell D. Taylor*

General Schmidt was perplexed when I told him the truth, yet he controlled himself and only said with a show of feigned belief: "We shall not lower our flag, my friend." And I, knowing better but eager

of hope left"! But deep inside of me I no longer believed it.

#### "Massengrab-Stalingrad"

In order to reach my new headquarters we had to drive over the Volga steppes, an endless, depressing snow desert with rows of wrecked German vehicles laying by the roadside, embedded in the snow, sometimes only little mountains indicating that under that heap of snow a truck, car, or tank rotted away with no hope of salvage or use. *Massengrab-Stalingrad—Massengrab-Stalingrad—I repeated to myself inwardly over and over again. Mass grave and Stalingrad in German have a poetical sound.*

So far the Reds had not attacked the *kessel* itself. They were trying for a breakthrough between the Don and Donets Rivers. That they were biding their time and bringing up material and reserves we had no doubt. We were trapped—unless.



German Patrol at the Volga River

to soothe his and the other officers' feelings, replied with similar aplomb: "Certainly not, Sir, as long as there is a spark

Today's Army has impressive mobility, both strategic and tactical, which would be a prime factor of success in any war emergency. Its units could be moved by air, if necessary, across oceans and continents, to any area of combat. By means of assault transport planes, our infantry divisions can now attain battlefield mobility by airlift comparable to paratroops dropping out of the skies upon enemy-controlled territory. Increased emphasis upon helicopters and other light air vehicles as organic division equipment is solving difficult problems of observation and fire control, the command and supply of dispersed units, and the rapid movement of small bodies of combat troops over even the most difficult terrain.

*Secretary of the Army Wilber M. Brucker*