

Running head: ARCTIC WARFARE

Arctic Warfare

SGM Thomas Dobbin

SGM(R) Vazquez/L03

November 12, 2007

Abstract

The Battle of Stalingrad, one of the great battles of World War II, was fought in the most extreme conditions. This paper will focus how the Russians who were skilled and equipped for the environment defeated a superior enemy, who failed to properly train and equip their forces.

Arctic Warfare

The Battle of Stalingrad was one of the most important battles of the war. The German leadership including Hitler underestimated the will of the Soviet people and the affects of the environment to conduct military operations. The German loses exceeded hundreds of thousands of soldiers due to the incompetence of its top leadership. This was the first offensive in which the Germans encountered urban warfare.

General Zhukov devised a battle plan to fight the German forces in urban warfare and taking advantage of the enemy's failure to acknowledge the environment and what influences it has on morale, equipment and the ability to receive supplies. During the Battle of Stalingrad temperature in the winter dropped to -34 C (-29F) and lower, Zhukov took advantage of the extreme cold that congealed lubricants in German vehicles and weapon systems and counter-attacked. The Soviets plan encircled the German forces and put nine fronts in action from Leningrad to Crimea. The Soviets were able to control rail lines and thus sustain resupply for a 220 mile front. Zhukov forces defeated an offensive operation called Winter Storm to break through to the Caucasus pocket in the south. The German forces were malnourished, cold and far from home. After the Soviets defeated the German military machine at Stalingrad the tide of the war turned and the march to Berlin began.

The German Army Group A and his Sixth Army led by General Paulus was to take Stalingrad and cut off the Caucasus from the rest of the Soviet Army. On 12 September 1942, General Paulus and his Sixth Army entered the city of Stalingrad. Soviet troops and civilians battled the Germans fueled by fear of the atrocities committed by German forces upon the population. Paulus and his soldiers were enveloped east of the Don crossing at Kalach, he requested to retreat or break out of the trap. German Leadership issued orders to fight to the last

soldier. General Paulus cut off from reinforcements and supplies were promised by air resupply by Field Marshall Goring. But because of German defeats key air fields were lost and aerial resupply was ineffective. The Sixth Army found themselves trapped in a destroyed city, with the front lines moving everyday communication and resupply almost became impossible. On January 30th, 1942 Hitler promoted General Paulus to Field Marshal stating no German or Prussian of that rank had been taken alive before. Field Marshal Paulus surrendered to Soviet forces on February 2, 1942. Scores of German soldiers were taken prisoner and sent to labor camps and very few ever saw home again. This battle is a shining example of how the environment, especially harsh conditions of the cold. The German forces were poorly equipment due to the arrogance of Hitler in predicting a quick victory over Soviet forces. The German Lightning War didn't count on movement of forces, morale, and resupply of its Army. German Army defeats in Russia allowing Hitler to takes over command.

After Operation Barbarossa in 1941, the offensive was stopped due to the Russian winter. Hitler becoming critical of his military leadership took command of German forces in the region and devised a plan to break the spirit of the Soviet resistance by cutting of their oil, grain and other natural commodities. Hitler lacked the military skills to plan and predict battles, and to understand the nature of environment on equipment and personnel. Hitler ignored military advice from his generals to stop the offensive until spring arrived. His thinking like a politician and not a soldier allowed him to make many mistakes in which the Soviets capitalized on. German military units were trained for sweeping across open terrain, not the infamous snipers they faced in the artic weather as they fought from building to building. Hitler wanted to take Stalingrad at all cost because the city was Stalin's crown jewel and it provided most of the Soviet Union with its grain, oil and other commodities. Hitler ordered Paulus not to retreat from Stalingrad and wait

for reinforcements and relief. Unlike Hitler, Stalin left the military planning to Zhukov and Vasilevsky who were very effective leaders who understood how to motivate through patriotism or fear to defend the Soviet Union from the Germans and their scorch earth policy. Many Soviet Jews knew of the harsh treatment at the hands of the German forces, this also helped motivate Soviet citizens to fight harder. This important battle helped turn the tide of the war in favor of the Allies.

German leadership counted on superior forces that would quickly defeat the inferior Soviet military forces. Most of the previous battles to invade the Soviet Union was successful, but the Germans were poorly equipped for arctic warfare should the battle enter the winter months. The German resupply system also counted on seizing enemy natural resources to help their war effort. The Soviets were able to cut off the German resupplies and drag them into a prolonged urban warfare. This battle after 200 days inflicted over 600,000 casualties on the Axis side and over a million casualties on the Soviet side. It's argued by many that if Hitler would have taken the military advice of his generals and retreated to the main front, hundreds of thousand of men might have been able to force a stalemate on the eastern front.

References

Mann, C., & Jorgensen, C. (2003, October 19, 2007). *Hitler's Arctic War: The German Campaigns in Norway, Finland and USSR*. Retrieved October 19,2007, from