The Story behind the Battle: How did the Red Army of the Soviet Union so fiercely and victoriously defend Stalingrad in 1942-43 despite the lack of trained officers, equipment, preparation, and morale in 1941?

Carol Ann Taylor

Student No. 30620882

Thesis for Honours Degree of Bachelor of Arts in History

School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Murdoch University

2012
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bachelor of Arts in History with Honours at Murdoch University, 2 November 2012

I declare that this thesis is a true account of my own work, unless indicated

Signed:

Carol Ann Taylor

Date: 2 November 2012
Copyright Acknowledgement Form

I acknowledge that a copy of this thesis will be held at Murdoch University Library.

I understand that, under the provisions s51.2 of the Copyright Act 1968, all or part of this thesis may be copied without infringement of copyright where such a reproduction is for the purpose of study, and research.

This statement does not signal any transfer of copyright away from the author.

Signed: .................................................................................................

Full Name of Degree: Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History

Thesis Title: The Story behind the Battle: How did the Red Army of the Soviet Union so fiercely and victoriously defend Stalingrad in 1942-43 despite the lack of trained officers, equipment, preparation, and morale in 1941?

Author: Carol Ann Taylor

Year: 2002
Abstract

The victory over Axis forces by the Red Army during the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942-1943 is considered one of the major turning points of World War Two. General Vasily Chuikov and the men of the 62nd Army, supported by General Alexander Rodimtsev’s 13th Guards Division, were trapped inside the city, where fighting amongst the bombed-out ruins at times consisted of hand-to-hand combat with only knives and spades as weapons. The German forces attacked Stalingrad with double the infantry the defenders possessed, three times their strength in artillery, five times as many tanks, and were supported by overwhelming air power, but the brilliant military tactics of General Georgy Zhukov enabled the Soviet armies outside Stalingrad to eventually encircle the yet undefeated German 6th Army.

Constrained by Soviet politics from its inception in 1918, and later by the paranoid psychology of the tyrannical leader Joseph Stalin, the men and women of the Red Army struggled to survive an inadequate system, with low pay and poor housing, and they often went untrained. Due to Stalin’s ruthlessness in his desire to stay in power as Secretary of the Soviet Union and Soviet Premier, everyone, including ordinary citizens, peasants, and important politicians became victims of his wrath, and the military was certainly no exception. During the 1930s, the Red Army High Command was purged in its thousands, with the result being the loss of many highly experienced officers.

This thesis will discuss and analyses the Red Army’s background from 1918, to its position in 1941, when German and Axis forces invaded the Soviet Union in a covert manoeuvre codenamed Operation Barbarossa. It will explain the occurrences that changed the Red Army from an untrained, undisciplined, purged, ill-equipped, and dispirited entity, to gain the victory at the battle of Stalingrad.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. i

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. ii

List of Maps .......................................................................................................................... iii

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One
An Army of a New Kind ....................................................................................................... 5

Chapter Two
The Red Army Purged ........................................................................................................ 21

Chapter Three
Assault on the Soviet Union ............................................................................................... 29

Chapter Four
The Soviet Counter-Offensives ......................................................................................... 49

Chapter Five
At the Gates of Stalingrad ................................................................................................. 66

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 88

Appendices ............................................................................................................................. 91

Bibliography ......................................................................................................................... 94
Acknowledgements

With gratitude I acknowledge the following people for their support, assistance, advice and encouragement in the preparation of this thesis:

Dr. James Crossland, I would like to thank you for all your support, advice and especially patience throughout this hectic year.

Thank you to my mother and father, Peggy and Jonny Salmon, who are so proud of me. Thank you for the long chats on the phone, and every history lesson you painstakingly let me give you.

Thank you to my dearest friend Jacqui Rose, who was always there with a prayer, the best encouragement, and an uplifting comment, that always got me through any problem, no matter how difficult.

I’d like to thank one of my favourite guys, Jesus, for always answering my prayers.

And last but by all means not least, thank you to my darling husband, without whom I would never have been able to have studied at university. Thank you, for your encouragement when I am overwhelmed, your constant pride in what I have achieved, and for your love.
List of Maps

Map 1
The War Against Bolshevism 1918-1919.................................................................14

Map 2
Operation Barbarossa, 22 June 1941: The three-pronged German Invasion.............31

Map 3
Operation Typhoon: 30 September - 5 December 1941........................................40

Map 4
The Soviet Winter Counteroffensive December 6, 1941 - April 30, 1942.................48

Map 5
Operation Blue: Second German Summer Offensive June 28 – November...........62

Map 6
Approach to Stalingrad..........................................................................................69

Map 7
Battle of Stalingrad...............................................................................................77

Map 8
Operation Uranus: November 19, 1942-February, 1943........................................80

Map 9
Operation Winter Storm: December 12-18, 1942..................................................82
**Introduction**

The first commandment of every victorious revolution as Marx and Engels repeatedly emphasised, was to smash the old army, dissolve it and replace it by a new one. A new social class when rising to power never could, and cannot now, attain power and consolidate it except by completely disintegrating the old army. ("Disorganisation!" the reactionary or just cowardly philistines have on this score), except by passing through a most difficult and painful period without any army, (the great French Revolution also passed through such a painful period), and by gradually building up, in the midst of hard civil war a new army, a new discipline, a new military organization of the new class.

Vladimir Lenin

The Red Army of the new Soviet Union was to be an army of a different sort, that is, different to the former Imperialist Army of Tsar Nicolas II, where the privileged ruled and the oppressed served. Bolshevik revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin wanted to end three hundred years of Imperial Russian military heritage by forming a totally ‘new army’ that would carry Marxist revolutionary ideals and would serve and protect the people from foreign and class enemies. His initial utopian vision of brotherhood and internal democracy within the Red Army proved unrealistic in the heat of battle because in itself the system created a lack of discipline and organisation in the ranks. By 1941 the institution had fallen away from much of its original Bolshevik ethics, and by the time of the German invasion of the Soviet

---

Union, during Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, the Red Army had become an establishment similar to the Imperial Army that Lenin had so earnestly tried to distance it from. The officers once again lost touch with the common soldiers and the army became a harsh institution dominated by sergeants and senior officers who abused their inferiors. It had developed into an organisation based on lies and deceit, largely due to the totalitarian dictatorship of Joseph Stalin who was the Secretary of the Communist Party from 1922, and Premier of the Soviet Union from 6 May 1941 until his death on 5 March 1953.

The Russian town of Tsaritsyn was renamed Stalingrad after Stalin in 1925 and was known as such until 1961 when it was again renamed Volgograd. One of the first things that come to mind when we think of this town is the famous battle that occurred between the Soviet Union’s Red Army and the Axis forces during World War Two. This battle was one of the bloodiest ever fought and arguably the most important of the war. During the battle the Red Army soldiers became urban guerrilla fighters, holding onto the Soviet leader’s namesake and slowly regaining one battered building at a time despite the intense German onslaught raging around them on every side. Civilian men, women and children stood by the Red Army helping in whatever way they could, despite being caught up in the near total destruction of the town by the invading forces. They continued to work in the factories while the city of Stalingrad was reduced to rubble, repairing ferries and gunboats, producing guns, ammunition, and tanks, which they sometimes drove straight from the factory to the battlefield themselves. More civilians died in the Battle of Stalingrad than those killed in the bombings of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with only 1,500 surviving
from the original half a million population.² The Red Army lost 750,000 troops but
despite the carnage, the Battle of Stalingrad was a mighty victory for the Soviets,
who eventually sent the Germans into retreat, initiating a beginning to the end of
World War Two in Europe. The victory of the Red Army at the Battle of Stalingrad
is considered to be a major turning point in the defeat of Nazi Germany during World
War Two.

Although the Red Army totally and victoriously defeated the German onslaught
by 31 January 1943, it had not always been in the position to achieve such triumph
and glory. Indeed, only months before Field-Marshal Friedrich Paulus, Commander
of the infamous German 6th Army surrendered, elements of the Red Army had
almost been annihilated. In fact, the soldiers of the Red Army had been in a very
precarious position for quite some time before the Battle of Stalingrad and at various
times during the invasion by the German forces.

This thesis is an analysis of the changes that occurred within the Red Army that
turned it from an unstable, undisciplined, poorly trained, and ill-equipped force that
was low on morale and spirit at the beginning of the German invasion of the Soviet
Union, to the victorious and resilient contingent that thoroughly and irrevocably
defeated the Axis powers. The Red Army had been weakened and dispirited by the
military purges of the late 1930s, early 1940s, losing thousands of good experienced
officers, and also some of their brilliant military tactics, such as Marshal Mikhail
Tukhachevsky’s theory of ‘deep battle.’ The Red Army was totally humiliated

during the Winter War with Finland due to a lack of organisation, proper equipment, and skilled leadership, and it was unprepared for total war at the beginning of the covert German invasion in 1941, which was the largest force ever assembled in a war. Deflated, and ill-equipped the men and women of the Red Army were almost annihilated during the first year, being captured and killed in their hundreds of thousands. Hitler thought that it would only be matter of months before the whole of the Soviet Union and her territories were under German subjugation, due to the inferiority of its fighting force. The focus of this thesis is how the Red Army rose up and was able to defeat such an overbearing, and superior enemy during the battle of Stalingrad, and the circumstances which enabled such a dramatic shift in power will also be discussed.