



Stalingrad by David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House.

Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2017. Pp. xviii, 619. ISBN 978-0-7006-2382-2.

Review by Carl Cavanagh Hodge, University of British Columbia (carl.hodge@ubc.ca).

The distinguished military historians David Glantz and Jonathan House have now produced a welcome one-volume distillation of their multi-volume magnum opus¹ on the struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the Second World War. Their overarching thesis is that

The original objective of Operation *Blau*, the Germans' second major offensive in the conflict with the Soviet Union, was to seize the Caucasus oil fields, thereby obtaining essential fuel for themselves while denying that fuel to the Soviets. This objective required the invaders to project combat power over vast and inhospitable terrain while protecting their ever-lengthening left flank against Soviet counter-attacks. Given the *Wehrmacht's* experienced commanders and the repeated blunders of their Red counterparts, ... Germany might have achieved this goal. However, once the Germans became involved in the additional mission of seizing Stalingrad—a diversion of resources that had not been included in the original plan—their chances of success became virtually nil. (490)

Thus are we reminded of a common paradox of modern warfare. A titanic military struggle widely deemed to have been the turning point of World War II in Europe was in fact the product of considerations secondary to the principal strategic goal of the German Army in 1942. In this volume, the authors set out to balance Western perceptions of Stalingrad by comparing German with Soviet accounts of what happened and why. While the story is told primarily at the operational level, Glantz and House devote sufficient attention to the tactical dimension so that the enormous sacrifice of participants on both sides will be “not only remembered but also understood” (xviii). The book is divided into four parts² comprising nineteen chapters and a conclusion, lavishly enhanced by 104 maps, 30 tables, 39 photographs, 60 pages of notes, a select bibliography, and an extensive index.

During the period leading up to the Stalingrad offensive, the Soviet Union survived the initial onslaught of Operation Barbarossa, but fielded an understrength army led by commanders who had not fully grasped the lessons that first phase should have taught them. For its part, the German command still believed in the fundamental fragility of the Soviet state. The forces they led had been winnowed by ferocious fighting and often replaced by less well-trained and tactically-skilled troops than those who had scored a succession of lopsided victories during Barbarossa.

The authors stress that the German and Soviet plans for 1942 amounted to wishful thinking. The *Wehrmacht* now lacked the combat strength and the logistical capacity to conduct simultaneous major campaigns on the Volga and in the Caucasus. The Red Army had the resources to halt both German offensives, but its generals were not adept at maneuvering and supplying large armies for effective counterattacks (27–36). Meanwhile, political leaders on both sides exaggerat-

1. *To the Gates of Stalingrad* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2009), *Armageddon at Stalingrad* (id., 2009), *Endgame at Stalingrad* (id., 2014).

2. Respectively, “The Limits of Maneuver Warfare, 1942”; “To the Caucasus and the Volga”; “The Encirclement of Sixth Army”; and “The Death of Sixth Army.”

ed the ability of their respective forces to fight effectively. Even as Red Army generals struggled to match the Germans in concentrating and coordinating large forces for offensive operations, Stalin and the Soviet high command (Stavka) badgered them into attacking prematurely. Their consequent failures “only confirmed German stereotypes about the incompetence of their opponents” (13). As for Germany,

Hitler ... redirected scarce reserves in a manner that further stretched German resources. By early July, he was worried that Churchill might launch a desperate attack to take pressure off the Soviets and respond to political criticism about [FM Erwin] Rommel's capture of Tobruk in North Africa. As a result, on 6 July the dictator placed restrictions on any use of 1st SS Motorized Division *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, a major portion of First Panzer Army's striking power. Three days later the German leader ordered that this division, the newly formed 2nd SS Motorized Division, *Das Reich*, and other new units be sent to France rather than committed to the East. Historians and German generals have criticized such decisions, but it is worth recalling that the British-Canadian raid on Dieppe, France, happened in August 1942, indicating a kernel of validity in Hitler's strategic concerns. (79-80)

The authors write that early German successes against Stalingrad were really an installment on future failure: the ever-longer left flank exposed both the Stalingrad and Caucasus campaigns to potentially crippling Soviet counterstrokes. In the many major and minor engagements at Stalingrad, the mounting tactical skill of Red Army soldiers sapped the Wehrmacht of strength and gave their commanders time to gain requisite operation-level expertise. Close-quarters fighting in an urban environment offset the Germans' airpower advantage. Small units of twenty to fifty soldiers used intelligence, discipline, and determination to continue the fight even when “by all conventional measures, the Germans had won” (283).

Their defeat of Operation Blau (18 June-17 Nov. 1942) cost the Soviets some 1.2 million casualties, six times the number suffered by Axis forces. But the Soviet Union's industrial capacity and reserves of trained personnel more than compensated for such horrific losses. Glantz and House speculate that Germany might have succeeded in one or the other of the Caucasus and Stalingrad campaigns, had Hitler not spread its resources to both at once. For the German soldiers in Stalingrad, that became a purely academic issue after November 19, when the Red Army finally mounted a coordinated counteroffensive (282-84).

That offensive, Operation Uranus, was given enough time and resources to avoid the mistakes made in the premature attacks of summer and fall 1942. Also well-advised was the Soviets' concentration on the poorly equipped and badly positioned Romanian forces, rather than veteran 4th Panzer and 6th Army units. The offensive's awkward execution cost the Soviet mobile forces some 80 percent of the tanks committed to them. Still, as the authors emphasize, Uranus was a remarkable success, ultimately destroying two Romanian armies and encircling an entire German field army.

The German 6th Army was ultimately trapped and destroyed in Stalingrad in large part because of the extraordinary symbolic value Hitler attached to a city that bore the name of Stalin. Even if the city had been captured, the resultant strategic dividend would never have justified the terrible human and material investments required to take it. Hitler stubbornly insisted that the 6th Army hold its position on the Volga until he found the means to rescue it. His accomplices in the debacle should have known better. Erich von Manstein, promoted to Field Marshal in July 1942 for his conquest of the Crimea, abetted Hitler in promising relief to the 6th Army's commander, Gen. Friedrich von Paulus, long after it had become logistically impossible. He never authorized a break-out attempt in contravention of Hitler's order and instead “kept Paulus hanging

in limbo, leaving the decision to disobey the Führer firmly on the army commander's shoulders" (445). Manstein's own errors were partly the product of poor German intelligence interpretations of the Red Army's strength and its commanders' intentions; his native self-confidence "confirmed Hitler's natural tendencies, encouraging the dictator to believe that even if the *Luftwaffe* were unable to resupply the pocket completely, it could provide sufficient help to allow Sixth Army to hang on long enough" (386-87).

Ill-considered promises of air support and supply made by Hermann Göring and his chief of staff Col. Gen. Hans Jeschonnek compounded errors of information and judgment. In the case of Stalingrad, the collective IQ of German leadership was inversely proportional to the number of minds at work:

Given the shortages of armor, fuel, draft animals, and other transport, Paulus would have been hard-pressed to extract his entire force, ... even if he had been free to break out.... Although an immediate flight to the west could have saved the core of experienced troops in Sixth Army, such a decision required too great a change in perspective for senior German commanders to contemplate. Paulus and his corps commanders understood the need for radical action, but Hitler and his entourage categorically rejected the thought, and Manstein failed to force the issue. (494)

As for the Soviets, the Red Army in 1942-43 had not yet attained the fighting power it exhibited in 1944. But commanders like Vasili Chuikov, Andrei Eremenko, and Georgii Zhukov were starting to demonstrate an operational proficiency commensurate with the toughness their soldiers exhibited at the tactical level. While Stalingrad may have been secondary to Germany's main strategic aims in 1942, the fighting there accelerated the development of the Red Army's operational art. Careful to neither inflate nor diminish Stalingrad's importance, Glantz and House place it in a longer, three-part sequence of German defeats in the East:

The failure of Operation Barbarossa at the end of 1941 had already demonstrated that Germany could not win a short war based on blitzkrieg. The failure of Operation *Blau* a year later, including the grievous loss of Sixth Army, established that Germany could not win on any terms. Six months after that, the Battle of Kursk dictated that Germany's defeat would be total.³ (498)

Professional and amateur military historians as well as interested general readers owe a debt of gratitude to David Glantz and Jonathan House for making the arguments and erudition of their more exhaustive publications available in this (by comparison) succinct account of the fateful struggle at Stalingrad.

3. See, further, Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (NY: Knopf, 2007) 550-53, and Ben H. Shepherd, *Hitler's Soldiers: The German Army in the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale U Pr 2016) 272-73.