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Colonel General Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Novikov, commander of the Red Army's Air Forces and deputy People's Commissar of Defense for Aviation

Colonel General Aleksandr Mikhailovich Vasilevsky, chief of the Red Army General Staff

Marshal of the Soviet Union Semen Konstantinovich Timoshenko, commander of the Southwest Main Direction and Southwestern Front

Lieutenant General Filipp Ivanovich Golikov, commander of the Bryansk Front

Lieutenant General Rodion Iakolevich Malinovsky, commander of the Southern Front and later of 2nd Guards Army

Marshal of the Soviet Union Semen Mikhailovich Budenny, commander of the North Caucasus Main Direction and North Caucasus Front

Red troops fighting in the suburbs of Voronezh, July 1942

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Colonel General Andrei Ivanovich Eremenko, commander Southeastern Front (later Stalingrad Front); chief of artillery, Major General of Artillery V. N. Matveev; commissar, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev

Major General N. I. Krylov, chief of staff of 62nd Army; Lieutenant General V. I. Chuikov, commander of 62nd Army; Lieutenant General

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Red Army infantry defending the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, August 1942

A German cemetery in the Caucasus Mountains

Central part of Stalingrad under assault

Central Stalingrad in flames

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Soviet tanks entering the penetration in Operation Uranus

Soviet troops and tanks assaulting Kalach-on-the-Don

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Lieutenant General Markian Mikhailovich Popov, deputy commander of the Stalingrad Front, commander of 5th Shock Army and later of 5th Tank Army

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, commander of Army Group Don

Colonel General Hermann Hoth, commander of Fourth Panzer Army

General of Panzer Troops Otto von Knobelsdorff, commander of XXXXVIII Panzer Corps

6th Panzer Division on the attack in the Bystraia River Valley, December 1942

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Soviet artillery preparation during Operation Ring, January 1943

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Field Marshal Paulus at 64th Army's headquarters, 31 January 1943

German prisoners on the streets of Stalingrad, 4 February 1943

Red flag over Stalingrad's center city





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Preface and Acknowledgments

In 1998 we set out to replicate our study of the struggle at Kursk in 1943, attempting to write a one-volume history of the 1942–1943 campaign that culminated at Stalingrad. As in our previous collaborations, we hoped to bring balance to Western perceptions of this campaign, comparing German and Soviet accounts to approach a more objective understanding of what occurred and why.

Almost from the first, however, we discovered significant contradictions within and between sources. They often disagreed not only on interpretations but also on the very facts at issue, such as which units fought at what locations on what dates. Rather than a triumphal German Army falling into a trap laid by hordes of Soviet opponents, we found an ongoing struggle between two nearly equal adversaries, neither of which could mass sufficient combat power to achieve a decisive victory. Some units appeared to be in two places simultaneously, while other units went unreported. The reason for many of these discrepancies gradually emerged. The best-known memoirs of Stalingrad, such as Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's *Lost Victories* and Marshal of the Soviet Union Vasilii Ivanovich Chuikov's *The Battle for Stalingrad*, had been written from memory, without access to the primary records of the struggle. Official historians, most notably Earl Ziemke and Magna Bauer of the US Army Center of Military History, had incorporated many captured German records, but other such documents were believed lost in the war, and the Soviet archives and detailed after-action reports were largely unavailable until the 1990s. Even now, there are undoubtedly some records of the campaign that have yet to come to light.

The focus of the original project therefore changed. David Glantz undertook the arduous task of assembling and translating the available Soviet records as well as numerous studies by Russian historians. Recent Western histories, most notably the multivolume German official history (*Germany in the Second World War*), complemented these Soviet accounts, as did numerous analyses by gifted Western historians such as Jason Mark, Joel Hayward, Von Hardesty, and Ilya Grinberg. There is also a new generation of post-Soviet Russian historian-archivists, especially Aleksei Isaev and V. A. Zolotarev, as well as recently published, unexpurgated versions of participants' memoirs. We attempted to merge all these interpretations and documents

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into the ambitious *Stalingrad Trilogy* that, with supplemental documents, appeared in five volumes between 2009 and 2014.

This present volume returns to the original project, with Jon House using David's groundbreaking research to write a balanced history of Stalingrad in an accessible one-volume format. Of necessity, this version omits some of the detail of the original series of books. Except during the street fighting in Stalingrad, this account is told primarily at the operational, rather than the tactical, level. Nonetheless, we believe that the result gives readers a comprehensive account of how and why one of the pivotal campaigns of World War II played out as it did. The enormous sacrifice of participants on both sides deserves to be not only remembered but also understood, and we hope this study will find a different, larger audience than the multivolume trilogy.

As in our previous efforts, we are indebted to the professional efforts of the staffs of the Military History Institute in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. We also profited by the advice of numerous colleagues who read portions of the manuscript, especially Professor Christopher Gabel at the Command and General Staff College. That said, we are ultimately responsible for any errors in this study, which in no way reflects the official position of the US Army that we both served for so many years.

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Stalingrad





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Prologue

The German Army was poised to launch Operation *Blau* (Blue), its second summer offensive to conquer the Soviet Union. After great efforts, the Germans had replaced most but not all the equipment and personnel losses of 1941, at least in Army Group South, which would conduct the main attack southeastward to the Caucasus Mountains. Then, less than two weeks before the scheduled start of the main offensive, and with preliminary attacks already under way, a staff officer compromised a significant portion of the *Blau* plan.

The cause was one of the recurring weaknesses of German operational procedures: the lack of operations security. *Auftragstaktik*, loosely translated as mission-type orders, allowed subordinate commanders to exercise considerable initiative, depending on the situation. To do this, however, commanders and staff officers believed they needed to know the plans of higher and adjacent units, so that a local decision would support the commander's intent. Unfortunately, widespread sharing of such information caused a geometric increase in the probability that the enemy would also learn of German plans.

This problem had compromised a number of earlier German operations. On 10 January 1940, for example, a German aircraft inadvertently made a forced landing near Mechelen, in neutral Belgium.¹ On this plane was the logistics planner for the *Luftwaffe's* 7th Parachute Division, carrying significant extracts from the German plan (Case Yellow) to invade the Low Countries. This event forced the Germans to completely rework their campaign plan. Next, during the invasion of Crete, the British found a regimental operations order on the body of a dead officer. Such compromises had prompted Adolf Hitler to demand stringent restrictions on information. For example, no operations order was to be taken forward of corps headquarters prior to an attack.

Unfortunately, many German officers continued to follow their usual habits, violating the spirit if not the letter of Hitler's instructions. One such well-intentioned meddler was General of Panzer Troops Georg Stumme, commander of XXXX Motorized Corps. At the urging of his subordinates, Stumme dictated a one-page summary of the first phase of the forthcoming offensive (*Blau* I) and distributed that summary, along with a map overlay, to his division commanders.² In turn, each division commander shared

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this information with his own operations officer (known as “Ia” in the German system), grossly circumventing standing security orders. Major Joachim Reichel, the Ia of 23rd Panzer Division, compounded the problem by taking the overlay and summary on an aerial reconnaissance of his division’s assigned axis of advance. On the afternoon of 19 June 1942, Reichel’s Fieseler *Storch* (Stork), a small liaison aircraft identical to the one that had landed in Belgium in 1940, disappeared behind Soviet lines after suffering a fuel leak from ground fire. A German combat patrol found the downed aircraft and, nearby, the graves of Reichel and his pilot, but there was no sign of the missing order.

An investigation led to General Stumme’s relief from command, effective 9 July, which in turn necessitated a reshuffling of panzer commanders in the midst of the *Blau* campaign. Meanwhile, at Hitler’s insistence, a court-martial convicted Stumme, his chief of staff, and the division commander of gross negligence, for which the penalty was death. A number of senior officers appealed on behalf of these three men, so Hitler permitted Stumme to be reassigned to North Africa, where he died in October while serving as acting commander of the panzer army during Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s temporary absence.

Reichel’s escapade occurred too late to change the plans for Operation *Blau*, so the Germans went ahead with them, despite the potential compromise. Fortunately for the attackers, Joseph Stalin suspected that the captured plan was a deliberate deception; it seemed incredible to him that the Germans would jeopardize their plans in such a foolish manner. The Soviet commanders were, in any event, fixated on defending Moscow rather than the road to the Caucasus. Stalin did, however, hedge his bets. In a series of orders issued in late June, he directed the transfer of various units to Marshal of the Soviet Union Semen Konstantinovich Timoshenko’s Southwestern Front and Lieutenant General Filipp Ivanovich Golikov’s Bryansk Front, the apparent targets of the upcoming *Blau* attack.³ By the time XXXX Motorized Corps attacked as part of German Sixth Army, the Southwestern Front alone had 640 tanks to oppose Sixth Army’s 360, and the Bryansk Front was even stronger, with 1,600 tanks compared with Fourth Panzer Army’s 733. These new Soviet armored units were still inexperienced, but their persistent counterattacks hampered and weakened *Blau* almost from the first day. Reichel’s death was an inauspicious start to Germany’s last full-scale offensive and a further step in the steady decline of Hitler’s relations with his generals.