

Das Ringen um Die Grossen Entscheidungen im Zweiten Weltkriege

By General Zeitzler

This study consisting of 102 pages and two maps portrays events on the German Eastern Front from Nov 15th 1942 to Feb. 2, 1943. The last day mentioned marked the surrender of Gen. Paulus with his Sixth Army to the Russians.

The author presents problems at the OKH level. (He was Chief of Staff of the German Army, having replaced Gen. Halder in Sept. of 1942.) Events preceeding the encirclement of the troops by Russian pincer movements from the south and north of Stalingrad are adequately described. A pocket 40 km in length by 25 km in width was encircled by the Russians as of 22 Nov. 1942, some 216,000 to 300,000 Germans (The exact number cannot be determined because the German forces were divided by the Russian offensive, and it is not certain whether all elements of each unit were surrounded; secondly, there was a constant evacuation of the wounded which reduced the final numbers considerably.) were doomed to be annihilated unless they could break out or be rescued by advancing German units.

Problems facing the commanders, and recommendations with their supporting arguments, are presented clearly and completely. Hitler's reactions and decisions are given in many cases. Recommendations by key advisors, such as Keitel, Jodl and Goering are presented whenever appropriate.

Although the author may be accused of being too verbose, it is interesting to see how this key staff member, who seldom received the desired answer from Hitler, fully realized the importance of his position, repeatedly presented his recommendations from various angles in hopes of obtaining the results which he, as a professional soldier, deemed best for the accomplishment of the mission. It points out that Hitler was stubborn, temperamental and determined that he would listen to his advisors, especially if they supported their recommendations by detailed statistics, which fascinated him and quickly helped him to understand the problem (such as the airlift requirements to support the encircled forces at Stalingrad).

Sufferings by the encircled forces, due to lack of the basic requirements for existence and combat, are adequately described. Psychological factors which Hitler considered for the German civilian population, and factors which would unquestionably influence the thinking of other nations, if the Germans withdrew from Stalingrad, are also mentioned.

The gradual compression of the pocket followed by surrender ultimatums by the Russians is covered. German resistance continued from 22 November until February 2 of the following year. Supply estimates for the encircled

forces were estimated at 300 tons daily, deliveries to the encircled forces seldom reached 140 tons per day at the outset, this number was greatly reduced as the Russians recaptured the airfields occupied by the Germans.

This well written study provides many excellent examples of the problems arising during a tactical operation upon which the staff must take firm carefully considered action. It illustrates that military decisions are frequently closely related to civilian welfare and that the logical military decisions are not necessarily the best strategic actions.

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