

WORLD WAR II (1939- 1945): STALINGRAD



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Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Battle of Stalingrad, why the Germans wanted to take the city, how the Soviets were able to defend it, how the Soviet counterattack led to the surrender of a large German army and why the battle was seen as the turning point in the Second World War (or as the Russians call it, the “Great Patriotic War”).

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Motherland Calls Statue, Volgograd
- Museum Great Patriotic War, Moscow
- Kremlin, Moscow

Essential Questions

- Why did the German Army attack Stalingrad on the Volga River in 1942? Were there different reasons for attacking that particular city?
- How did the Soviets respond to the attack on Stalingrad?
- What happened to the German 6th Army at the Battle of Stalingrad?
- Why is Stalingrad considered to be the turning point of the Second World War?

Academic Summary

Order of the National Commissar for the Defense of the Soviet Union, 27 July 1942

(Commonly known as Stalin's Order 227)

We have lost more than 70 million people, more than 800 million pounds of bread annually and more than 10 million tons of metal annually. Now we do not have predominance over the Germans in human reserves, in reserves of bread. To retreat further - means to waste ourselves and to waste at the same time our Motherland. Therefore it is necessary to eliminate talk that we have the capability endlessly to retreat, that we have a lot of territory, that our country is great and rich, that there is a large population, and that bread always will be abundant. Such talk is false and parasitic, it weakens us and benefits the enemy, if we do not stop retreating we will be without bread, without fuel, without metal, without raw material, without factories and plants, without railroads. This leads to the conclusion, it is time to finish retreating. Not one step back! Such should now be our main slogan. It is necessary to defend each position, each meter of our territory, up to the last drop of blood, tooling for each plot of Soviet land and to defend it as long as possible. Our Motherland is experiencing hard days. We must stop, and then to throw back and smash the enemy regardless of cost.

Excerpt from Albert Speer's book, Inside the Third Reich (1970)

Stalingrad was encircled. Zeitzler, his face flushed and haggard from lack of sleep, insisted that the Sixth Army must break out to the west. He deluged Hitler with data on all that the army lacked, both as regards to rations and fuel, so that it had become impossible to provide warm meals for the soldiers exposed to fierce cold in the snow-swept fields or the scanty shelter of rums. Hitler remained calm, unmoved and deliberate, as if bent on showing that Zeitzler's agitation was a psychotic reaction in the face of danger. 'The counterattack from the south that I have ordered will soon relieve Stalingrad. That will recoup the situation. We have been in such positions often before, you know. In the end we always had the problem in hand again.' He gave orders for supply trains to be dispatched right behind the troops deploying for the counteroffensive, so that as soon as Stalingrad was relieved something could at once be done about alleviating the plight of the soldiers. Zeitzler disagreed, and Hitler let him talk without interrupting. The forces provided for the counterattack were too weak, Zeitzler said. But if they could unite successfully with a Sixth Army that had broken out to the west, they would then be able to establish new positions farther to the south. Hitler offered counter arguments, but Zeitzler held to his view. Finally, after the discussion had gone on for more than half an hour. Hitler's patience snapped: "Stalingrad simply must be held. It must be; it is a key position. By breaking traffic on the Volga at that spot, we cause the Russians the greatest difficulties."

Wilhelm Hoffmann, German Army Soldier, diary entry in Stalingrad, 26 Dec 1942

The horses have already been eaten. I would eat a cat; they say its meat is tasty. The soldiers look like corpses or lunatics. They no longer take cover from Russian shells; they haven't the strength to walk, run away and hide.

Friedrich Paulus, Commanding General 6th Army at Stalingrad, radio message to Adolf Hitler, 24 Jan 1943

Troops without ammunition or food. Effective command no longer possible. 18,000 wounded without any supplies or dressings or drugs. Further defense senseless. Collapse inevitable. Army requests immediate permission to surrender in order to save lives of remaining troops.

Adolf Hitler, radio message to Friedrich Paulus, 24 Jan 1943

Surrender is forbidden. Sixth Army will hold their positions to the last man and the last round and by their heroic endurance will make an unforgettable contribution toward the establishment of a defensive front and the salvation of the Western world.

Hermann Goering Nazi Leader, radio broadcast on Stalingrad, 24 Jan 1943

A thousand years hence Germans will speak of this battle with reverence and awe, and will remember that in spite of everything Germany's ultimate victory was decided there. In years to come it will be said of the heroic battle on the Volga. When you come to Germany, say that you have seen us lying at Stalingrad, as our honor and our leaders ordained that we should, for the greater glory of Germany.

Friedrich Paulus, radio message to Adolf Hitler, 31 Jan 1943

The Sixth Army, true to their oath and conscious of the lofty importance of their mission, have held their position to the last man and the last round for Führer and Fatherland unto the end.

Official German radio broadcast, 3 Feb 1943

The battle of Stalingrad has ended. True to their oath to fight to the last breath, the Sixth Army under the exemplary leadership of Field-Marshal Paulus has been overcome by the superiority of the enemy and by the unfavorable circumstances confronting our forces.

On 31 Jan 1943, Field Marshall Fredrich Paulus surrendered what was remaining of the German 6th Army to Soviet Red Army officers. The Battle of Stalingrad was over. The Wehrmacht, which for the previous two years had seemed like an unstoppable force in Poland, France and Eastern Europe, had suffered its first major defeat. Stalingrad, namesake of the Soviet leader, had held its ground and stopped the enemy's advance. The cost for the Soviets had been a heavy one. Although exact numbers will never be known, most estimates put the number of Russian army casualties at the Battle of Stalingrad at around 1 million, including over 450,000 killed (to put that in perspective, that number exceeds the number of US soldiers killed in the entire war). For its part, the German army suffered similar casualty numbers, with over 750,000 men killed, wounded or missing. The civilian population of Stalingrad suffered terribly over the six-month battle. Famine and disease were rampant as German and Soviet troops fought, sometimes house-to-house, for control of the city. By the end of the battle, most of the city lay in ruins as a result of the fighting and Luftwaffe bombing runs.

Hitler had ordered the taking of Stalingrad that previous summer. Strategically, as the gateway to the oil rich Caucus region in southern Russia, the city was important to the Soviet war effort. Capturing Stalin's namesake would be a propaganda coup for the German war effort. Soviet morale might also be expected to collapse if the city could be taken. Over the course of the battle, the German High Command committed over 1.3 million troops and huge numbers of heavy tanks and Luftwaffe aircraft to the operations at Stalingrad.

Stalin understood the importance of the city all too well. When the Germans began their attack in Southern Russia in late Jun 1942, Russian commanders in the field had

ordered a general retreat towards the east. By late July, Paulus's 6th army was only a few miles from Stalingrad. Stalin then issued "Order No. 227", saying that the Red Army would defend Stalingrad at all costs (anyone who retreated was shot). Troops and material were shifted south to face the threat. Yet, by autumn the situation looked grim for the Soviets. The Luftwaffe had flown thousands of sorties against Stalingrad, turning much of the city into rubble. Starting in early September, the German Army began to capture parts of the city itself. Bitter fighting raged day and nights, often building to building, sometimes floor to floor. There were even firefights in the sewers. Stalin's soldiers, including over 75,000 Soviet women, fought for every inch in his city. Eventually the tide of battle began to turn as the German lines became overextended. Soviet commanders launched a counterattack, not on the German 6th army in the city, but instead against the German flank north of the city. A second attack would attack the German southern flank. If everything went well, the Red Army would catch the Germans in a "pincer" movement. The German flanks were defended by Italian, Hungarian and Romanian units that were poorly equipped, and the Soviet goal was to smash through the German lines and cut off the 6th army, trapping it in the city. Called "Operation Uranus", the counterattack was launched on 19 Nov 1942 and within 4 days had achieved its objective of trapping the Germans inside Stalingrad. Hitler ordered Paulus to defend the city rather than break out, saying that the German army would fight its way back to the city. Every attack was repulsed, and as winter set in, the Soviets poured more and more soldiers into the circle around Stalingrad, tightening the noose around the city.

By mid-December, the German troops were desperate. As the Red Army tightened its grip, food and ammunition began to run low. The Russian winter was brutal, and yet the fighting continued. On 22 Jan, Paulus radioed to Hitler asking for permission to surrender, but the German leader ordered him to fight to the last man. On 30 Jan, Hitler sent a radio message to Stalingrad promoting Paulus to the rank of Field Marshal, knowing that no German or Prussian Field Marshal had ever surrendered. The implication was that Paulus would commit suicide to protect his honor. The new Field Marshal, a staunch Catholic, would have none of it. When Red Army troops reached his headquarters the next day, Paulus surrendered the troops under his command. A few Wehrmacht soldiers held out, but by 02 Feb, the city was quiet. The battle was over.

Stalin and the Red Army were energized by the memory of Stalingrad. From then on, the Soviets went on the offensive in Eastern Europe. Within weeks, the German army was falling back. It would take two years, the opening of multiple fronts and millions of casualties, but Germany would eventually be defeated. Stalingrad was the turning point.

In recognition of the Soviet determination and sacrifice, in 1945 Stalingrad was awarded the title of "Hero City." The city's name was changed to Volgograd in 1961, but many people in the city today want it changed back. In 1967, a massive memorial was constructed to honor the city and its defenders. In Jan 2013, the city council passed a measure to use the name "Stalingrad" on nine specific dates every year in remembrance of the battle.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Battle of Stalingrad, why the Germans wanted to take the city, how the Soviets were able to defend it, how the Soviet counterattack led to the surrender of a large German army and why the battle was seen as the turning point in the Second World War (or as the Russians call it, the "Great Patriotic War").

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the Battle of Stalingrad 1943-43.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain why the Germans wanted to take Stalingrad and how the Soviets were able to defend it.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain why the Battle of Stalingrad is seen as the turning point in the Second World War.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How strong of a motivator is defense of one's country? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Battle of Stalingrad / Russia in the Anti-Hitler Coalition (20 min)
- Video – Stalingrad (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles about the Battle of Stalingrad, taking notes as necessary. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of the articles at home to prepare for class discussion.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Battle of Stalingrad (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the Battle of Stalingrad, why the Germans wanted to take the city, how the Soviets were able to defend it, how the Soviet counterattack led to the surrender of a large German army and why the battle was seen as the turning point in the Second World War (or as the Russians call it, the “Great Patriotic War”).
- Alternate Assessment – Given the situation in late Jan 1943, put yourself in Paulus's shoes. Was he right to surrender? Note: Of the 91,000 German soldiers who surrendered at Stalingrad, less than 6000 survived the war. Most died in Soviet prison or concentration camps.

Extension

On tour: Motherland Calls Statue, Volgograd (Stalingrad)

While on tour, students in Russia can visit the Motherland Calls Statue in Volgograd. Originally known as Tsaritsyn, the city was renamed Stalingrad in honor of Josef Stalin in 1925. The name was changed again in 1961 during the period of “de-Stalinization” in Russia. An important industrial and rail center, the city was the site of arguably the most horrific and ferocious battle of the Second World War. Over the span of 6 months between Aug 1942 and Jan 1943, Stalingrad saw casualties estimated between 1.5 million and 2.0 million, including 40,000 civilians. The Battle of Stalingrad, where the German 6th Army was forced to surrender after being cut off in a counterattack, is considered to be the turning point on the Eastern Front. In 1967, the Motherland Calls Statue was unveiled as a memorial to the Soviet defenders of the city during the Battle of Stalingrad. Perhaps the students should consider the question of whether or not the citizens of Volgograd are right in their desire to change the name of the city back to Stalingrad.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.stalingrad-info.com/order227.htm
Stalin's Order 227 (primary source)
- www.stalingrad.net/
The Battle for Stalingrad (primary and secondary sources). This website, containing hundreds of primary and secondary sources, is perhaps the most comprehensive site on the battle and its significance. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- <http://cbweaver.wikispaces.com/file/view/Stalingrad+Primary+Accounts.pdf>
Primary Accounts from Stalingrad (primary sources)
- www.historylearningsite.co.uk/battle_of_stalingrad.htm
Battle of Stalingrad (website) – from the History Learning Site (UK)
- <http://operationbarbarossa.net/index.html>
Operation Barbarossa: the Complete Organizational and Statistical Analysis and Military situation (website). Unbelievably detailed and comprehensive website that uses primary and secondary sources to help explain the invasion of the Soviet Union. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students, but the site also has valuable information for anyone studying the invasion.
- www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/RUSstalingrad.htm
Stalingrad (website) – from Spartacus Educational (UK)
- www.yorku.ca/splekhan/docs/4280-5280/lecture_notes/Russia%20in%20the%20anti-Hitler%20Coalition,%20Part%202.ppt
Russia in the Anti-Hitler Coalition (PowerPoint) – from Sergei Plekhanov, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, York University (Canada)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IL-9Tut1nA
Russia's War: Blood Upon the Snow – The Cauldron Boils (video). This video, part of a 1997 miniseries 10-part series on Russia and the Second World War, does a great job of explaining the events at Stalingrad. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhXKIYnSWjA&list=ELIzBS5WrPu4s>
Soviet Storm: WW2 in the East - Operation Barbarossa (video). A 45-minute video, probably too long for most in-class showings, but it has great footage on the invasion from both German and Soviet sources. Highly recommended for out-of-class preparation.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLJe3-OpvQ4>
World War Two: Germany Invades Russia (video). From the Discovery Channel series "World War II in Color", this 55-minute video uses primary source images to tell the story of the invasion. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students as an out-of-class assignment in preparation for in-class discussions.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Barbarossa
Operation Barbarossa – Wikipedia article

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stalingrad
Battle of Stalingrad – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_No._227
Order No. 227 – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Patriotic_War
Great Patriotic War (Eastern Front World War II) – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – Nazi Invasion of Poland
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/auschwitz
Auschwitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/oskar-schindler-and-the-list
World War II (1939-1945) – Oskar Schindler: the List
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/winston-churchill-speeches-during-the-blitz
World War II (1939-1945) – Churchill's Speeches
- www.passports.com/lesson_plan/england/second-world-war-st-paul-stands
World War II (1939-1945) – St. Paul's Stands against the Blitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-fall-of-france-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Fall of France 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – German Invasion of Poland 01 Sep 1939
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/miracle-at-dunkirk-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Miracle at Dunkirk 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/world-war-ii-operation-barbarossa
World War II (1939-1945) – Operation Barbarossa: German Invasion of Russia
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/world-war-ii-stalingrad
World War II (1939-1945) – Stalingrad: Turning Point of the War

Key Terms

- Blitzkrieg
- Luftwaffe
- Operation Barbarossa
- Panzer
- Soviet Union
- Stalingrad

