I.
Until 1955

The War-Landscape of Stalingrad. Destroyed and Destructive Environments in World War II

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1. Introduction: Warscape

This article uses an infamous example, the Battle of Stalingrad, one of the peaks of the Second World War in Europe, to make the idea of the war-landscape or *warscape* productive for the analysis of wars. This is done to show the connections between war and the environment in a broader sense, which includes both the environment lived and built by man and the natural environment. The Battle of Stalingrad was the most loss-making battle of the Second World War in Europe. Although estimates differ somewhat, it seems clear that the troops of the Axis powers – Germans, Italians, Romanians and Hungarians – together had to mourn about half a million dead and prisoners. About 150,000 German soldiers from 300,000 before the beginning of the battle died in the fighting or as a result of hunger or cold. With the end of the carnage, some 108,000 men fell into Soviet captivity, from which only 6,000 survivors returned to their home countries by 1956. The losses of the Red Army were similarly high; it also suffered about half a million deaths. About another 500,000 combatants were wounded or fell ill during the battle. In addition, numerous civilian deaths occurred on the Soviet side.

Recent studies show that this gigantic massacre and the appalling treatment of prisoners of war and civilians by both sides cannot be attributed solely to the will of two ruthless dictators, Hitler and Stalin who fought a prestige duel on the Volga. Their unconditional will to win a war beyond all international conventions, which the German side had triggered, may explain the carnage in parts. The battle was actually fought over a strategic line of communication, the Volga, which was to prove decisive for the further course of the war. But above all, it should be borne in mind that the acts of violence took place against a background of continued lack of

peace in an area that Timothy Snyder rightly described as *bloodlands*.[1] This was a consequence of the First World War. In large parts of Central, Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the war and the subsequent peace treaties had broken up the old European empires and inspired dreams of new national greatness. The dynastic idea – Romanov, Habsburg, and Hohenzollern – was replaced by the fragile concept of popular sovereignty. Since then, millions of people have been prepared to obey orders, fight, die or commit the most heinous crimes in the name of the nation. In the interwar period, in Europe between 1919 and 1939, states were often arbitrarily defined and hundreds of thousands of people were murdered or displaced.

In the former Russian Empire, the Soviet Union in particular, violence and even genocide continued with millions of deaths already prior to 1941. Keywords must suffice here: revolutions, civil war, famines, Holodomor, forced collectivization and mass deportations. This per se non-peaceful world was invaded by other violent actors, the troops of Nazi Germany and its allies. Terrible events that took place under German rule in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe are all too well known, especially the Shoah, to a lesser extent the mass killings of Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians and other peoples of the European East.

In short, the Eastern Front of the Second World War was in an area of the world that had been anything but peaceful even before the German invasion in 1941. This fact played a decisive role for all the key actors in this conflict and for their personnel, soldiers, mass murderers and war mongers too. It also determined the formation of a terrible, unique war landscape, the Eastern Front, which we are trying to approach here with the term *warscape*.

The term is derived from considerations that Kurt Lewin, one of the founders of Gestalt and social psychology, had developed from his own war experiences, among other things.[2] These considerations are based on the fact that there is a connection between a war and the natural and cultural landscape in which the war is fought. It is not only about objective conditions, but also about the combatants' ideas about and perceptions of the natural and cultural landscape in which a war takes place. As a result,

1 Snyder, Timothy (2010): Bloodlands. Europa zwischen Hitler und Stalin. München. 23ff.

2 Lewin, Kurt (1917): Kriegslandschaft. In: Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie 12, 440–447.

there are many connections between the landscape and the way in which war is waged, which could be described as a specific entity, war-landscape. War-landscapes or warscapes are areas marked by violence and insecurity. It is, therefore, to be expected that the Eastern Front was not only because of Hitler's and Stalin's murderous intentions a much more terrible theatre of war than the Western and Mediterranean fronts. The structures of violence that ruled Eastern Central and Eastern Europe before 1941 also contributed to the extreme inhumanity of the fighting, with which the German side, in particular is by no means exculpated for its mass murders.

A specific warscape depends on many factors, for example, terrain, climate, buildings and other components of human-influenced environments. The term *environment* is therefore not only understood here in terms of environmental protection. Other environments also influence warscape, including of course the military itself and its development during a long war. This story of the rise of the Red Army and the decline of the Wehrmacht belongs to one of the best described areas of historiography about the Second World War. The following, mostly excellent works of art also provide indirect or direct information about the changes in the war-landscape: Beevor (2014), Beevor (2010), Craig (1973), Glantz/House (2017), Keegan (2004), Merridale (2006), Overy (2000), Overy (2012), and Ulrich (2005).[3]

Warscapes also have an iconic function, especially after the end of a war; Stalingrad is a particularly remarkable example of this. As early as the 1950s, Stalingrad became a symbol of West Germany's concern with the horrors and crimes on the Eastern Front.[4] This was conducted under moral, at first predominantly even religious auspices, which at the same time refers to the turn to the Christian roots of German culture that took place after the Second World War, resulting in numerous films, novels, factual reports and first editions of military mail.[5] These historic sources also contain numerous testimonies to the changes in the war-landscape that happened especially in the last weeks of the Battle of Stalingrad.

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3 The detailed bibliographical references can be found in the literature list below.

4 See e.g. Förster, Jürgen (ed.) (1992): Stalingrad. Ereignis, Wirkung, Symbol. München. Kumpfmüller, Michael (1995): Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos. München. Wette, Wolfram/Ueberschär Gerd R. (eds.) (1993): Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht. Frankfurt.

5 See e.g. Kluge, Alexander (1964): Schlachtbeschreibung. Frankfurt.

In particular, attempts were made to reconstruct the perception of simple German soldiers. For this purpose, collections and analyzes of military mail, which are now available in increasing numbers, are suitable. They show – so the general picture – the attitude change of most soldiers: Initially, there was obviously a mixture of hubris, feeling the need to defend the homeland, duty and skepticism. Depending on the location and the experience of the war, military mail expressed increasing doubts, fears, longings, and desperation.[6] Even the original sense of superiority to the Eastern Europeans, or even the affirmation of the racist propaganda spread by the Nazi regime, was being replaced by personal opinions about individuals.[7] This process has been so often described by the German side that it is not depicted here. On the other hand, editions of Russian experience reports beyond hero worship, which continued even after 1991, have so far been rather rare. Much has been edited and published with German help.[8]

It is important to emphasize that there was not a single warscape Stalingrad. Perception, action and suffering of the war took place on various levels. These are therefore reconstructed at four levels: that of the politico-military leadership of the war, that of the operational leadership and that of those involved in the struggle. Finally, a fourth war-landscape is presented, which was museumized after the end of the Second World War. In short, the article tries to answer an important question that John Keegan asked: What could the individual even see in battle?[9] In this way, it is to be prevented that the retrospective interpretation, which always characterizes the historical analysis, becomes too important here.

6 For example see, Wiesen, Bertold (ed.) (1991): Es grüßt Euch alle, Bertold. Von Koblenz nach Stalingrad. Die Feldpostbriefe des Pioniers Bertold Paulus aus Kastel. Nonnweiler. Birnbaum, Christoph (2012): Es ist wie ein Wunder, dass ich noch lebe. Feldpostbriefe aus Stalingrad, 1942–43. Königswinter.

7 Kipp, Michaela (2014): Grossreinemachen im Osten. Feindbilder in deutschen Feldpostbriefen im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Frankfurt.

8 See e.g. Ebert, Jens Ebert (ed.) (2018): Junge deutsche und sowjetische Soldaten in Stalingrad. Briefe, Dokumente und Darstellungen. Göttingen. Hellbeck, Jochen (2012): Die Stalingrad–Protokolle. Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten aus der Schlacht. Frankfurt.

9 Keegan, John (1978): Das Antlitz des Krieges. Düsseldorf. 147ff.

2. The Global Warscape

Let us first take the perspective of the leaders of the Second World War, Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt. Certainly the big perspective was their agenda. It can be reconstructed in the following way.

Wars, civil wars, anti-colonial rebellions, revolutions, famines, massacres and revolts continued to take place in the 1920s and 30s. Anything else would be right but to call this epoch a time of peace between two world wars. The First World War had finally destroyed the post-Napoleonic peace order. Immediately after the end of the Great War, the still most powerful loser of the First World War, the German Empire, was subject to considerable control by the victorious powers of Great Britain and France. However, this dominance was already lost by the end of the 1920s, which was due to a plethora of factors: the conflicting interests between the Great Powers, the beginning collapse of the colonial empires, the extreme economic vicissitudes, etc. had led in Europe and Asia to the final disintegration of an international order, which the victorious powers had aimed at building up during the Paris Peace Conferences since 1918. One result of this was the rise of the Hitler's Empire in Europe and the Japanese Empire in Asia, which in turn had enabled the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. The German goal was to restore under racist conditions the empire in the European East which it had gained for a few months in the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk already.

But Nazi Germany's military operations had not achieved the intended goals in the war against the Soviet Union until the spring of 1942. The Blitzkrieg got stuck in mud, snow and ice, and in particular, the Wehrmacht failed to capture the strategically important Moscow. Therefore, a new offensive was planned for the summer of 1942, which at the same time changed the overall objectives of German operations. The German OKW, and especially Hitler himself, believed that the Soviet Union had been largely defeated and wanted to put it to death in a *second blitzkrieg*. By a major offensive in eastern Ukraine, the Soviet Union was to lose decisive agricultural and industrial resources, especially as the offensive had an even more ambitious goal: the Soviet Union was to be cut off from the supply from the Cape oil fields, the areas were eventually even to be conquered by the Wehrmacht. Caspian oil was central to motorized Soviet warfare; but until the attack in the summer of 1941, Germany had also obtained most of its oil from there. Since the war in the East took much longer and was much more internecine than planned, central resources for

German warfare began to be scarce. This was due to the cut off of Central Europe from the world market and the low availability there, in particular, due to the insufficient production of crude oil.

The German summer offensive received the name *Fall Blau* (Case Blue) and reached its operational goals very quickly: One reason was that the Soviet defensive potential was initially insufficient because the Stavka had expected a German offensive on Moscow. By the summer of 1942, about 50 percent of the Red Army had been concentrated there. Therefore, the result of the three attack phases from late June to November 1942 was initially very impressive from a German point of view: until the onset of winter, the Wehrmacht had conquered large parts of the area between the Black and Caspian Seas. First oilfields were under German control, the western bank of the Don River had been won as a defensive line. The German troops also managed to reach the Volga River at Stalingrad, thus occupying a strategically important place in large parts. However, again the Germans had failed to defeat the Red Army decisively.

Looking at the German orders prior to the beginning of *Fall Blau* an important aspect is missing, which should prove crucial for the entire course of the Second World War and the perspectives of Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt: the battle was central to keeping open the Persian Corridor. This aspect has long been overlooked, especially in German scholarly literature: either because the global context of the battle was unknown to the authors or because the OKW, on which actions the historiography was essentially based, had also no knowledge about the real relevance of the battle for the Allied side.

The latter, however, is rather unlikely, because since 1925, with the seizure of power by Reza Shah an intensive collaboration between the German Reich and Persia had begun. It was especially at the expense of Great Britain, which had agreed with Russia on a joint, informal control of Iran before the First World War. After the Great War, in particular, Britain controlled Iran's oil production in the Persian Gulf and operated the then world's largest refinery at Abadan. This presence was threatened by the German *development aid* for Persia and the phased cooperation with the USSR, first and foremost by the largest project, which had been tackled with German aid: the construction of a Trans-Iranian Railway from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. However, the further expansion of the Trans-Iranian Railway came to a standstill with the outbreak of the war between Germany and Great Britain in September 1939.

In the following it becomes more apparent, in which global war landscape of great powers, political and natural geography and central resources the Battle of Stalingrad was integrated. Despite the fact that the Persian government had already declared its neutrality with the outbreak of the war in 1939, Persia was increasingly involved in the fight to control the Middle East that broke out between Hitler's Germany and the British Empire after the collapse of France in 1940.

The tensions continued to increase with the German attack on the Soviet Union. Already two weeks after the assault, in early July 1941, the British Government ordered its military to plan an attack on Iran supported by the Soviet Union. But immediately after the German invasion, the Soviet Union had no resources for such an operation and officially declared that it would see no threat to relief supplies from Britain and the US via the Trans-Iranian route. This changed abruptly as it became clear how vulnerable other supply routes were: Turkey prohibited the transport of military goods through Dardanelles and Bosporus, the northern route to Murmansk and Arkhangelsk proved extremely endangered by German attacks. The long supply routes from the USA to the Russian Pacific coast could be stopped at any time by Japanese interventions.

Therefore, on July 23, 1941, the British and Soviet governments agreed to occupy Iran. A joint operation plan for it was already created until August 7, 1941. The aim of the joint *Operation Countenance* was to secure the Iranian oil fields and at the same time build up a secure supply line through Iran. It would allow military supplies to be transported by ship from the United States through the Suez Canal to ports on the Persian Gulf. From there, the supplies could then be transported by rail and road to the Caspian Sea, and finally by boat across the Caspian Sea and the Volga to the interior of Russia, to the industrial areas and to the fronts. On August 25, 1941, British and Russian soldiers invaded Iran, which among other things led to the abdication of the former Persian emperor in favour of his son Mohammed Reza. The Allies assured him of full national sovereignty after the end of the war. In return, the Allies were granted full control over all transport and communications links such as railways, roads, airports, ports, pipelines, telephone networks and radio. Thus, the transport route from the Persian Gulf through Iran to the Caspian Sea and then on ships to Astrakhan was open.

The aid deliveries on the Trans-Iranian route started quickly, especially as the US was soon directly involved in their organization in Iran. Already on September 27, 1941, an American military mission began work in Iran.

American technicians and specialists built and ensured safe traffic through the Persian Corridor to ensure massive military material support for Soviet troops. The Americans improved the Iranian infrastructure by constructing port facilities, roads and assembly halls for aircrafts and trucks.

In October 1942, the American troops took over the primary responsibility in Iran. The US *Persian Gulf Command (P.G.C.)* replaced the British troops and began with the beginning of the Battle at Stalingrad the delivery of many millions of tons of material directly to the fighting Soviet forces through Iran, weapons, planes, food, clothing, and medicines. The supplies were crucial for the Battle at Stalingrad but even intensified with the final end of the fighting on the Volga in the late winter of 1943. Therefore, Stalingrad was a victory of the Allies, which went far beyond the narrower operational objectives: The transport route across the Volga was free-fought; the Persian corridor proved to be crucial for the subsequent military operations of the Soviet Union in 1943 and 1944 and therefore for the entire Second World War.

3. The Regional Warscape: the City and its Nature

But the Battle of Stalingrad was also part of a gigantic military operation planned by men like Erich von Manstein, Friedrich Paulus, Hermann Hoth, Vasily Chuikov, Aleksandr Vasilevsky, and on the Soviet side, especially by Georgy Zhukov. What was their perspective?

Stalingrad bore the name of the Russian dictator, and lies on the Volga, a river that has a tremendous national significance in Russia. So maybe the battle there had significant symbolic meaning for the warring parties. More important, however, was Stalingrad's role for Soviet and German warfare. Let's take a closer look at its geographical location and economic and logistic function.

The city is located about 1,000 km southeast of Moscow on the western bank of the Volga, about 400 km north of the mouth of the river into the Caspian Sea. After the effective climate classification, a system dating back to Vladimir Peter Köppen (1846–1940), the city lies in the cold continental climate zone, with cold winters, but also with hot summers and sufficient rainfall throughout the year. Thus, the city is neither lying, as it is sometimes claimed in the Russian steppe, nor are the winters really Siberian cold (on average only -10 degrees in January and February, although there may be temperature extremes below -30 degrees). In 1942,

the city stretched over a width of up to 10 km over 60 km along the western banks of the Volga River. The western banks of the Volga are dominated by hills (the Mamayev Kurgan in particular) and numerous erosion gorges (Balkas) which the Germans called Suchaja-Metschetka-, Banny-, Todes- (Death), Lange- (Long) and Tiefe (Deep) Schlucht (gorge), while the eastern shore belongs to the lowlands of the Volga River delta already. Although the height differences are not large, the city literally watches over the river from its steep western shoreline before it flows into the Caspian basin which was one of the reasons for the foundation of a fortress and later a city there. More additional geographical factors are to be added: The Volga reaches a few km south of Stalingrad the westernmost point of its lower reaches and then turns sharply to the southeast. At about the same latitude, the Don reaches its eastern point; it is less than 100 km from Stalingrad to Kalach-on-Don.

Therefore, the area around Stalingrad was an important trade route since ancient times due to its geographical location on the isthmus between the Volga and Don Rivers. As a result of the military expansion of the Russian Empire, and especially after the conquest of the Crimea and the Kuban area in 1783, Stalingrad (Tsaritsyn) lost its strategic importance and gradually developed into a commercial and economic centre. Above all, the construction of the railway line to Kalach-on-Don in 1862 and to Gryazi in 1872 led to an economic boom and made Tsaritsyn a hub of oil supply and transport links from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and from the Caucasus to central Russia. As a result, large-scale industry settled here, including metal and wood processing companies, petroleum refineries for crude oil from Baku, several mills, and tanneries.

The industrial capacity of the city was considerably expanded in the context of Stalin's planned economy in the 1930s. The state-controlled industrialization of the Soviet Union at that time aimed primarily at the creation of an arms industry or industries that could easily be converted from the production of capital goods to military equipment. In the northern part of the city, along the Volga River, there were three huge industrial enterprises: the gigantic tractor plant *Felix Dzerzhinsky*, the gun factory *Barricades* and the metal factory *Red October*. The latter produced until the summer of 1942 about ten percent of all Soviet steel and supplied in particular the aircraft and tank production sites, but also produced rocket launchers. Incidentally, the construction of the tractor factory began in 1926, with the help of the US-company Ford. Four years later, the first tractor from local production rolled off the assembly line of the Stalingrad

tractor plant. Until the war, 300,000 tractors were delivered, especially large tractors of the type of CT3-3, which was also the platform for the T-34 tank. *Felix Dzerzhinsky* was converted entirely to weapons production even before 1941 and became the biggest producer of dreaded T-34 tanks in Soviet Union.

The Mamayev Kurgan separated the industrial heart of the city from its more urban infrastructure south of it. It included other industrial plants, an electricity plant, the central station, grain silos, meat and bread factory, cold storage, brewery, more or less drab cottages, apartment blocks and party buildings, but also the department store *Krasnaja Univermag*, schools, parks and wide avenues. Remaining images of the city convey until shortly before the start of the German bombing raids the impression of a thriving, modern industrial city with theatres, colleges and companies: the parks of the alleged green city invited the residents to linger, and photos show lovers and those seeking relaxation in the parks, and vibrant life on the streets and squares of the city. The war in the far west seemed far away to the city's inhabitants, although within a few years one of the Soviet Union's most important armament centres had been conjured up in Stalingrad.

Was this all just propaganda or fake memory? Probably yes, because in fact the allegedly stony built city at the banks of a mighty river rather consisted of several sometimes huge industrial complexes in the middle of a belt of countless wooden houses and barracks. The latter stretched along the western bank of the Volga and mingled with numerous larger and smaller industrial complexes.

How did the Volga look like? Shortly before the German attack, Victor Nekrasov describes the Volga as a river

> "with greasy, petroleum-pearly waves, reminiscent of an industrial landscape. Here everything is full of serious activity. Here are rafts and barges, sooty, greyish cutters whose steel hawsers strike in the water (...) And now these broad, gleaming waters, completely covered with rafts and full of cranes and long, boring sheds, seem more like an industrial enterprise. And yet it is the Volga. You can lie face down for hours and watch the rafts swim down the river, like the naphta puddles shimmering in all colors. And further on, his comrade Igor says after a bath in the Volga: (...) and in general, this is not a river but rather a naphtha container."[10]

10 Nekrassow, Viktor (1948): In den Schützengräben von Stalingrad (In the Trenches of Stalingrad). Berlin. 78–79. In the text quoted as Victor Nekrasov, all translations by the author.

The wooden town of Stalingrad was already largely destroyed on August 23 in a day attack by the VIII Air Corps, better set on fire. Through this smouldering debris, the 6th Army moved forward to the Volga River until November 1942.[11] The wooden construction of most of the buildings also explains why the German bombing raids claimed so many civilian deaths and that the street fighting that started in late August was more likely to involve factories and public buildings rather than rows of houses.

More considerations contradict an idyllic picture of pre-war Stalingrad. As a modern industrial city and a highly significant armaments centre, the city must have been subjected to particularly keen surveillance by the NKVD – more about these prerequisites of Russian warfare below. Moreover, Stalin's policy of collectivization and industrialization hardly paid any attention to the central needs of man and nature. It is known from the general literature, for example, how restrictive the living conditions in the housing blocks of the Stalin era were, how poor the diet and how poor the health care. So far, it has hardly been sufficiently documented what damage to human health and the natural environment caused the forced industrialization of Stalingrad, especially by the large mining and armament factories, before they were destroyed by the German bombing raids and during the street fighting. Photos occasionally show smoking chimneys and wooden landing stages, which were used to handle critical goods such as manganese ores and especially oil. But mud and environmental damage were not photographed. In general, pollution was still described with topoi, which interpreted industrial contamination as a sign of industrial wear and tear, bustle and economic prosperity:

> "When the pleasure boats approached the beautiful white city on the Volga (...) they also saw the smoke that rose above the three industrial giants to the sky: the tractor factory, the Red October, the Barricades. Through the blackened factory windows you could see the glowing steel pouring sparks into the pans, and you could hear a heavy roar that sounded like the surf of the sea."[12]

4. The Creation of a Local Warscape

Let us now take a look at the tactical level of warscape. After the late summer of 1942, the pre-war city of Stalingrad could only be transfigured into

11 Keegan (2004), 33.
12 Grossmann (1946), 41.

an idyll because everything that came afterwards was even by far worse. Nonetheless, even before the Wehrmacht's direct attack, the city with its terrible living and environmental conditions was part of a regional warscape that played a significant role in the overall context of the global war. It determined the actions of those who actually had to fight and die in the war. This aspect becomes more evident when one looks more closely at the events in the first stages of the Battle of Stalingrad. The first German bombers had already attacked Stalingrad in October 1941; since the second half of July 1942 there were air raids almost daily on the city. Nekrasov describes the consequences of one of these first attacks:

> "The southern part of the city is on fire, an ammunition car has also been hit, and the shells are still exploding. A woman's head was torn off. She has just left the cinema. The show just ended (...) Biting smoke that crawls in the throat, creeps out of the houses, spreads on the streets. Under the feet crumbles glass. Bricks, concrete pieces, tables, upturned cabinets. People rush, rush, bustle (...) The smoke spreads over the whole city, covering the sky, biting the eyes and scratching the throat. Long yellow tongues of fire break out of the windows, licking the walls of the corner house."[13]

As early as the beginning of this month, district officials were preparing for a major evacuation of the city, especially for industrial production plants and their employees. First, the leaders of the Stalingrad military district were evacuated with their families to the hinterland; until mid-August they were followed by another 8,000 people from the urban upper class. According to NKVD reports, these evacuations led to considerable unrest among the population of the city, especially as in the same period the order of the People's Commissar for Defence of the USSR of July 28, 1942, Number 227 was issued (Not a step back!). The order made surrender punishable by death, ordered the establishment of firing squads behind attacking troops, and the establishment of penal companies. Since then, all able-bodied city residents, who did not already work for the armaments industry, were conscripted for entrenchment work. Persons could only be evacuated for war purposes: until the devastating air raids on August 23, these included around 50,000 injured Red Army soldiers and their medical staff as well as all children from the municipal orphanages. Despite the ever more threatening situation, the communist leadership pretended that the city could never be taken by the Germans. Even preparations for the new

13 Nekrassow (1948), 81–82.

school year continued until August 22, one day before the German city raid…

The number of losses inflicted by the devastating air raid on August 23 and the daily bombing that followed until September 13 is still a matter of dispute – a total of around 40,000 killed civilians is mentioned. Probably alone the approximately 2,000 bombing operations in the afternoon and evening hours of August 23 cost the lives of about 10,000 civilians. Therefore, a meeting of the military leadership with the local representatives of the Party, NKVD and factory leaders took place in the headquarters of General Jeremyenko that evening. With a call to Stalin, they wanted to obtain the immediate evacuation of Stalingrad's workforce and the mining of industrial production facilities. Stalin forbade not only this measure but their discussion, as only defeatism would be evoked.

This strategy was gradually abandoned with the imposition of the siege on August 25; initially only technical specialists were evacuated and workers whose factories had burned down. The mass evacuations began on August 29 with ferry boats to the eastern bank of the Volga, at a time when the ships were already in the firing range of German artillery. By September 14, the day the Germans reached the central ferry terminal around 315,000 people were evacuated, but several thousands of civilians had lost their lives during the evacuations alone. According to estimates, at this time another 300,000 civilians were still trapped in the already largely destroyed city. But for a complete evacuation of Stalingrad, it was too late with such a large population. In October it was clear that around 75,000 civilians had to stay in the ruined city. Neither the Red Army nor the Germans paid any attention to the civilian population. Many inhabitants had to live in potholes, many froze to death in the winter of 1942/1943; others died of starvation because there was no food left. Thousands more died on the deportation marches organized by the Wehrmacht after the conquest of almost the entire city. It remains a mystery how more than 10,000 civilians, including nearly a thousand children, managed to survive all hell that was let loose at Stalingrad until March 1943.

However, the operation of the important industrial installations was kept as long as possible, *Red October* produced until October 2, the last technicians of *Barricades* fled on October 5, one day after the Germans had begun their direct assault on the industrial plant. Already on August 23, the German front had moved directly to the factory premises of *Felix Dzerzhinsky*, yet the factory delivered on September 13 the last T-34 tanks. Some surviving workers were only evacuated in the following days.

Under the threat of the German attacks, the production in the industrial plants took therefore not only place under conditions of accelerating bombing war: the factories had to continue their production under direct artillery fire until they were destroyed or to be relocated. However, many workers were not evacuated at all; they had to join as militias in the struggle for the industrial ruins now serving as fortresses after the loss of production. Grossmann writes:

> "Hundreds of workers, armed with submachine guns and light and heavy machine guns, moved out to the northern edge of the factory site that first night and put their lives on the hill. They fought, and next to them fought the heavy grenade launcher division of Lieutenant Sarkisjan, which was the first to bring the German tank column to a standstill. They fought, and beside them fought the flak department of Lieutenant Colonel Gerrmann, which fought the German storm bombers with half of its barrels and brought down the German tanks with the other guns in direct fire."[14]

The Soviet side thus blurred the separation of combatants and non-combatants established by the Hague Convention – but it is also questionable whether the German side differed in its murderous warfare. Anyway, the Soviets waged a total war in which all resources were used to stop the enemy. Even destroyed civil and industrial infrastructure played a major role in this.

From the very beginning of the battle, Soviet warfare dealt with its own resources mercilessly and prepared a warscape which's inhumanity was simply unbearable. Another outcome of this incredible brutality, which hardly differed from German warfare, was the way in which the evacuations of the civilian population were carried out. It is difficult to say whether the Stalinist leadership was indifferent to the populace, whether its suffering should be functionalized for propaganda purposes and to motivate the Red Army, whether the surviving civilian population was scheduled for military tasks, or whether the evacuations were simply too late and des-organized. Considering the intensity with which the NKVD supervised evacuations, one has the impression that the suffering of the civilian population was not simply ignored by the Soviet side, but wilfully increased – Stalingrad was thus made a place, behind which there was no retreat. And this, in fact, corresponded to the enormous importance that the battle there had for the entire course of the war from the perspective of the Soviet leaders.

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14 Grossman, Wassilij (1946): Stalingrad. Berlin. 43.

From July 12, the Stavka began preparing for the defence of Stalingrad. For this purpose, until August 19, when the 6th Army had reached its starting point for the attack on the city, a makeshift defensive belt was built, as strong as those created in the fall and early winter off Leningrad and Moscow. However, the 62nd and 64th Armies which had been ordered to defend the city had to give up the defence belt against the advancing Germans step by step until September 14. This started the fierce fighting in a landscape of hilly and rugged terrain. Littered in it were the smoking remains of the wooden barracks, as well as the ruins of the iron, concrete and steel structures that made up the former factories and public buildings of Stalingrad. This started a fierce battle for houses, workshops, water towers, walls, cellars, floors, and piles of rubble that had not even existed on the Western Front during the First World War.

This battle had been planned by the Stavka, for on the day of the German attack, September 13, Zhukov and Vasilevsky had had a talk with Stalin in the Kremlin. The two Soviet military leaders sketched a bold plan, which envisaged the encirclement of German troops on the Volga and the destruction of the 6th Army in the interior of the city. This plan was accepted by Stalin on condition that he added that the city should not be conquered in any way. Therefore, it was Stavka's declared goal to permanently tie the German offensive forces in the *city* into loss-making struggles and to prepare in the background Operation Uranus, a large-scale counter-offensive in the entire southern front arc of the Don. The 62nd Army was commanded to defending the city at any cost, and began transforming the ruins into a fortress. In the Soviet defensive line, strategically important buildings and complexes formed defensive support bases, which were linked by trenches. Already bombed buildings could hardly be further destroyed and were defended by platoons, companies or battalions in all-round defence. Each soldier was equipped with anti-tank handguns whenever possible, usually tank shells or fire bottles. The infantry platoons were mixed with other branches of service, snipers, pioneers, and paramedics. Several bases formed a defensive knot. The ideal defence points were factory halls, especially massive steel and concrete complexes with deep basements. Only in the course of the battle, the sewer system of Stalingrad was discovered as a preferred staging area for rapid thrusts into the depths of the opposing lines. On large streets and squares, the fire points were arranged in a checkerboard pattern to combat German infantrymen with different fire areas. General Chuikov ordered his forces to remain in close physical proximity to the German front line, to neutralize

air strikes of the enemy and to engage him in close combat with as many casualties as possible.

How did the German side contribute to the creation of this battlefield? The attack on Stalingrad was undertaken by the 6th Army, a field army which consisted in November 1942 of four army corps, a tank corps and subordinate Romanian, Italian and Croatian troops. This 6th Army was considered one of the elite formations of the Wehrmacht. But the soldiers had been trained for mobile and not for trench warfare; the armament was designed for fast mobile warfare in summer conditions too. Both should later contribute to the high casualties of the Germans in the *rat war* to be described below. The 6th Army had achieved numerous military successes until the attack on Stalingrad; first in the war against France, and later in the context of the operations of Army Group South. In the Case Blue operation, the army attacked from Ukraine into the direction of the Don River. As a result, the army fought the battle of encirclement and annihilation at Kalach-on-Don and then advanced to Stalingrad.

Since the Barbarossa Case, the 6th Army has been heavily involved in German war crimes and genocide in the European East. It is well-known that the leadership of the Nazi Reich requested their troops through orders to do so. Antony Beevor[15] describes in great detail the criminal track left by the 6th Army on its southeast thrust: mass shootings of Jews, Gypsies, political officials, actual or supposed partisans, prisoners of war and their systematic assassination in camps, looting, rape and burning of entire villages as so-called retaliatory measures. The plundering condemned thousands of civilians to starvation and did not always happen on the orders of the officers: the supply situation of the German soldiers became difficult already in late 1941, and the military discipline was by no means guaranteed.

The fighting for the city of Stalingrad began with the German major offensive on September 13. The advance of the German troops was determined by the special topography of Stalingrad. The ridge in the west of the city and the deep ravines that led to the Volga prevented the broad deployment of motorized formations. Therefore, Stalingrad could be only attacked via three routes, along the Mokraia Metschetka and Elschenka rivers, or along the Tatar ramparts. At the beginning of the fighting, when the German side had a great superiority to humans and material, the troops

15 Beevor (2010), 73ff.

were still stationed west of Stalingrad, especially in the protection of numerous erosion canyons there. From there infantry and tanks were driven to their missions. After the missions, where it was often unclear to the soldiers what was to be fired on, for example, the tanks drove back about 20 to 30 km to the army ordnance sites to collect ammunition.[16]

Unlike in other battles successfully fought by the Wehrmacht, encirclement was impossible due to the topographic situation of the city at the banks of the Volga. This was one of the main reasons why the 6th Army had to carry out costly frontal attacks with high losses against tactically important buildings and landmarks. Therefore, the city was systematically divided by the Army High Command (AOK) into grid squares, to which different tactical meaning was assigned. This strategy of the Germans was quickly recognized by the Russian infantry, by watching where the first stukas flew in the early morning:

> "The moment we have rubbed our eyes, we crawl out of our shelters, coughing from the first morning cigarette, and with narrowed eyes we follow the first ten. They determine the whole day, through which we learn what the square is, where the German timetable today will make shake the earth like brawn, where the sun will not be seen through smoke and dust, in which section you will bury the dead all night, repair damaged machine guns and cannons, dig new trenches and shelters. When the chain flies over us, we breathe a sigh of relief, throw off our shirts and pour water on our hands from the billy-can."[17]

The plan was to break out, isolate and combat separate sectors of the Soviet counter-defensive sector, as it proved impossible to cut off the city from supply from the eastern Volga banks or even to destroy by bombing or artillery fire the positions of the Red Army at the western shoreline of the river. There, the Russians had dug shafts and bunkers in the steep slope on the Volga. However, in four stages of attack from September 13 until to October 31, the Wehrmacht succeeded in conquering almost the entire city but the western shoreline of the Volga. Phase 4, Operation Hubertus, which took place between 9 and 12 November to occupy the rest of the city, was already a failure, but led to perhaps the most horrific fighting so far:

16 Fritz Schreiber. In: Schüddekopf, Carl (2004): Im Kessel. Erzählen von Stalingrad. München. 50.

17 Nekrassow (1948), 136.

> "We then left the Red Square and came just very close to Volga. There the Russians were with the river in the back. Now we were so close together, Russian and German soldiers, that we started treating each other with spades. We were to occupy the strip of land that was still between us and the Volga. The officers said: This is an order of the Führer! It was a big bloody carnage, but the Russians did not go away (...) And then it was said that we, the artillery, are pulling back. We escaped from the large Sichtotschlagen (beat to death). Back to Zybenko, thirty kilometers southwest of Stalingrad in the Kalmuck Steppe."[18]

5. *Rat War – a New Warscape*

The course of the battle can be divided into three major phases. During the first phase, the 6th Army tried to conquer Stalingrad. After capturing approximately 90 percent of its territory and a phase of extremely high losses on the Soviet side, in particular, the situation turned in favour of the Red Army, even before the large encircling operation *Uranus* took place, which marks the beginning of the second phase. After Hitler's ban on attempting an outbreak on November 24, the army proceeded to a defensive strategy, expecting a rupture of the siege from the outside. Since Operation *Wintergewitter* failed on December 23 finally, the trapped German army was increasingly compressed into the ruins of the former urban and industrial areas. November 24 could be regarded as the beginning of the third phase, because from this day on the supply shortages of the German troops became obvious: at that time the food rations of the soldiers were reduced by 50 percent. Due to exhaustion, ammunition and other shortcomings in materials, an effective defense could no longer be opposed to the reinforcing Russian attacks. However, most of the encircled Axis soldiers did not die as a result of hostilities, but to malnutrition and hypothermia.

Since the German attacks in September 1942, the Battle of Stalingrad developed more and more from significant operations involving thousands of soldiers and heavy weapons into a fierce house-to-house fighting (better ruin-to-ruin fighting), which was characterized by sniper fire and bloody close combat. This type of violence was later referred to as *rat war* which came from the fact that the battle was often fought for the appropriation of insignificant foxholes and basements. In the following, this development

18 Bertold König. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 146–147.

will be presented in two examples, first at the famous deployment of the 13th Guards Rifle Division under Alexander Rodimzev.

By the afternoon of September 14, it looked as if the 6th Army would succeed in conquering downtown Stalingrad. The primary objective was to conquer the main ferry landing, cutting off the 62nd Army from supplies. German troops fought their way up to 100 meters to the Volga and the ferry terminal. As a result of the fact that even the *house of the specialists* went over to the Germans, the ferry dock came within the reach of German heavy machine guns. Chuikov therefore mobilized his last reserves to save Stalingrad from a rapid conquest by the Wehrmacht. At this time, only about 1,500 men defended Stalingrad center. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Volga, the 13th Guards Rifle Division was on standby, which had been taken there in forced marches. The Guards Division had over 10,000 soldiers hastily armed with ammunition, grenades and some machine guns and food on the banks of the Volga River on the afternoon of September 14. After his conference with Chuikov on the western Volga bank did not wait with embarkation until it was completely dark. Because of the many fires, it was never dark during the first weeks of the war in Stalingrad. A good picture of the city, as the soldiers had to see it when crossing the river, Nekrasov:

> "The city is burning. Not just the city, but the whole bank in all its length. As far as the eye can see. This cannot be called a conflagration anymore, that's more than that. (...) A purple sky, covered with clenched clouds of smoke. The dark silhouette of the burning city is as sawed out as with a fretsaw. Black and red. There are no other colours here. Even the Volga is red – like blood, it twitches in my head. Flames are barely visible. Only at one point downstream are small jumping tongues. And opposite us, as from paper, crushed cylinders of oil containers, collapsed, crushed by the gas. Flames spew out of them – powerful prominences that tear themselves away and lose themselves in the heavy, slowly forming, fantastically looking grey-red smoke clouds."[19]

In the evening twilight, the first guardsmen began to sail across the Volga: in gunboats, but especially in civilian vehicles such as tugboats, fishing boats and even rowboats. At first, the soldiers only heard distant gunfire and exploding shells. Then the Germans spotted the flotilla and put it under fire with artillery, grenade launchers and heavy machine guns. Finally, first boats were hit. The closer the ships came to the western shore, the

19 Nekrassow (1948), 111–112.

more dreadful it became for the soldiers. Large fires and dark clouds of smoke became even more terrifying, Stalingrad was already in September 1942 a mess of rubble and fire, from which large columns of black oily smoke from the burning oil tanks climbed up to 3,000 m, as the German air reconnaissance and bomber fleet had to realize too. The ferry landing was littered with burned machines and ships thrown to the shore. The stench of charred buildings and decaying corpses stuck in their noses. The first wave of the soldiers of Rodimzev fell over the edges of the boats into the shallow water and hurried as fast as possible up the steep, sandy shore and attacked immediately.

Already the first wave of the 13th Guards Rifle Division came in merciless close combat on the central station and a large mill made of red brick. The second wave, which was disembarked some time later, even advanced to the Mamayev kurgan. On September 16, the troops of Rodimzev attacked the hill directly, which was soon covered with countless fragments of shrapnel, bombs, shells and explosive craters. This hill was of particular importance for the battle at Stalingrad, as from there artillery could take the Volga from one bank to the other under fire. The hill changed hands several times and thousands of soldiers died during these battles. They lay unburied in the churning earth of the hill, were whirled up by grenades and were buried again in the endless hail of shells.

The 13th Guards regiment suffered losses of 30 percent in the first 24 hours of its mission, but this operation succeeded in securing the riverbank, which proved to be crucial in resisting the Germans until o*peration Uranus*. Overall, only 320 of the 10,000 soldiers deployed in this division survived the Battle of Stalingrad.

But large-scale attacks such as those on the Mamayev hill or the tractor factory were an exception, as even the German blitzkrieg tactics failed in Stalingrad increasingly. It had been based on the concentration of firepower on narrowly limited front sections, with coordinated cooperation of artillery, infantry, air force and motorized units. These tactics simply didn't succeed in the ruins, into which the Wehrmacht had been lured by the plans of Chukov and Chuikov. In addition, the 6th Army soon suffered from material shortage and wear. Therefore, the struggle for Stalingrad turned into a particularly brutal variant of that war, which had been fought since 1916 on the then Western Front already.

On the tactical maps the units of both sides appeared as contiguous divisions, brigades and regiments, and a structured battle over greater distance may have been existed still in the first days of the German assault.

During this phase of the attack, each German infantry company was assigned three to four tanks. However, this tactic was quickly doomed to failure, as the tracked vehicles were ambushed and fought there with armour-piercing weapons. The tanks could not fight snipers from the higher floors of a building. In particular, during the defensive measures in the industrial district, the Red Army created so-called *death zones*, heavily mined streets and squares, in whose vicinity soldiers were stationed with armour-piercing weapons to destroy German invaders in an ambush.

For this purpose, the troops of Chuikov had created so-called breakwaters to channel the force of German attacks. Fortified buildings, which were manned by infantry with antitank weapons and machine guns, were to divert the attackers into *channels* where armor-piercing weapons and buried T-34 tanks awaited them. These *channeled attack routes* were also mined by anti-tank mines. After a couple of days with these terrible onslaughts, only small units, shock troops and groups of a maximum of 50 soldiers operated on both sides. Since then, a major part of the fighting has not consisted of major attacks, but of incessant, small, deadly battles. The Germans used in particular so-called *Sturmkeile*, attack platoons of about 10 men who stormed with machine guns, light mortars and flame guns bunkers, cellars and sewers. The Russian attack troops included about 6 to 8 men who were equipped with submachine guns and hand grenades and who supplied themselves with additional knives and sharpened spades, in order to kill as quietly as possible after nightfall. The 62nd Army resorted more and more to these nocturnal attacks, on the one hand because they were convinced that German soldiers were more afraid at night, and on the other hand to force the Germans to shoot at night for anything that moved. The troops of Chuikov maintained the tension in the battle permanently, in order to tire the Germans and to force them at the same time to high ammunition consumption. This could not be compensated under the logistical conditions of the Russian war and in particular not after the encirclement of the 6th Army in November. Above all, the Red Army assembled their small mobile combat units of soldiers with different ethnic background and weapons. If a building, a foxhole or a basement was conquered by the Wehrmacht and some defenders escaped, they could easily join a neighbouring unit.

Both parties to the conflict experienced an almost *nightmarish environment* in the Battle of Stalingrad. The melee in ruins, bunkers, cellars and canals were called by the German soldiers soon *rat war*. This related, on the one hand, to the complexity of the battlefield. Danger came in Stalin-

grad from all sides, frontally, laterally, in the back, from the sewers, above floors and from the top floors, where snipers had taken cover.

> "The next morning, as it became light, the Russian snipers began to shoot. They lay in the big houses in front of us, in the upper floors. And from there they could target us. One by one they killed. Who lay so that they could see him, there was scarcely any rescue for him. Those who were able to be small enough, lying on their tummy until evening, peed under themselves, pulled the canvas over their heads, so that they did not see us."[20]

In addition, the sky had to be constantly monitored: When the respective air forces attacked, both German and Soviet soldiers had to throw themselves to the ground. On the other hand, the fighting took place mainly in an industrial landscape that had already been destroyed by Stalinist industrialization. The battle was fought for fuel tanks, tank, ammunition and metallurgical factories, which had by no means handled large quantities of toxic substances carefully even before the fighting broke out. Nekrasov, for example, describes a battle in a loading station, where tanks and freight cars were still filled with petroleum:

> "Some bullets strike the tank car, just above my head, a thin bent jet of petroleum pouring on the rails in front of me, and I feel on the face splashes like from an atomizer."[21]

The fighting does not only set fire to wooden parts, but also gasoline, oil and other toxic substances. The heavy fires that erupted, especially at the beginning of the battle, burned in the soldiers' eyes and respiratory tracts and covered their unprotected body parts with a layer of smear and dust. Through the dust and soot of the collapsed and burning buildings, the soldiers were hardly distinguishable from each other externally, so that it came especially in close combat to fatal confusion between friend and foe. The fires submerged the city in a ghastly dim light, which was further darkened by the wandering dust clouds, especially as the impacts in still standing parts of buildings caused veritable clouds of dust, stones, and shrapnel. The conflagrations consumed so much oxygen that sometimes the officers of the command posts, which were housed in bunkers, fainted. During daytime the battle zones were filled with a terrible noise that further shattered the combatants' nerves: the howling of Stukas, thunder of flak and artillery, the clank of tank tracks, the shrieking of Stalin organs,

20 Hans Horn. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 114.
21 Nekrassow (1948), 118.

the rattling of MGs. The soldiers found the cries of the wounded and dying particularly distressing.

During the sudden nightfall typical of the southern Russian region, the German air and artillery attacks were largely halted, but the cries of the wounded continued, and unfamiliar nocturnal noises and the permanent threat of snipers made sleeping impossible for the soldiers. Indeed, the Battle of Stalingrad could not have been anything more different from the *deep war* which took place before and after it in Europe's east. It was a new kind of warfare which was fought in the ruins of human civilization, in the debris of industrial plants and houses. The rubble of war mingled with the remnants of civilian life and industrial production and the fighting very soon surpassed the horror of the battles of attrition which were fought in the trenches of the First World War.

Despite even contemporary theoreticians had criticized trench war as a military aberration, Stalingrad brought it to its extremes: the specific war environment of the debris landscape Stalingrad and the much more extreme climatic conditions made the fighting in Stalingrad even more terrible than the butcheries at Verdun or at the Somme. The destroyed civil and industrial infra structure played a major role in this. Grossmann writes:

> "The people learned to keep large houses in the shelter of a barrage fire that was emitted from the ground floor to the fourth floor, they set up amazingly camouflaged observation stands right in front of their opponents' noses and used the funnels of heavy bombs and the whole intricate system of underground gas, oil and water pipes of the factory for defense."[22]

The terrible living conditions of the soldiers contributed to this. They had to continue fighting without detachment on both sides, such as the appalling conditions of nutrition, drinking water, health care, shelter, and clothing, and the merciless disciplinary methods by which the soldiers were forced into the fight. In the first weeks of the battle, the Russian troops suffered considerably more than the Germans. They were shipped directly into battle from the eastern bank of the Volga River, and the survivors of this transport were often cut off in their foxholes or sewer pipes for days until they were killed or could move to other positions. They had to endure dust, smoke, hunger and – worst of all – thirst because in the combat area there was no drinking water since the pumping station was

22 Grossman, Wassilij (1946): Stalingrad. Berlin. 59.

destroyed in August. In particular, the wounded and dying, in addition to their pain, must have suffered from a terrible thirst:

> "One has a belly shot – he must not drink anything. All the time he beseeches and begs: Just a drop, Comrade Lieutenant, just a drop, that mouth is so dry ... and looks at you with such eyes that you would like to sink into the ground. Also the machine guns want to drink (...) Where to get water from? If we do not have water, the machine guns fall silent tomorrow, and that means ..."[23]

The supply of makhorka tobacco and alcohol was perceived as insufficient. The daily ration of vodka was officially 100g a day, but the Russian soldiers, when they came to the winning side, probably drank up to a litre a day. Especially recently, the use of stimulants such as pervitine has become better known in research.

Many wounded soldiers were rescued by the courageous and self-sacrificing female paramedics, who were members of the platoons and often also directly involved in the fighting. Despite their efforts, the rescue was often in vain, because the medical treatment of the Soviet wounded was horrible: they were carried to the western banks of the Volga River, and left there untreated, until the supply boats at night returned to the eastern shore. Dumped there, they were often left to their fate, and even if they reached the field hospitals that were set up about 10 km from the combat zone which did not mean that they had a chance to survive. The whole organization of the Russian army at Stalingrad was more geared to bringing fresh forces to the battle. Wounded soldiers were a neglected factor, more important was the replenishment of war victims, who had to march under NKVD guard to the landings on the east bank and were treated during river crossing basically like guarded prisoners. When soldiers panicked, they were shot on the boats; if they jumped into to river to save their lives, they were shot too. The Soviet military leadership also tried to make it impossible for the soldiers on the actual battlefield to desert or surrender. Therefore, so-called lock groups were set up behind units of low morale: well-armed Komsomol or NKVD units armed with heavy machine guns were positioned especially behind militia who had been ordered to attack. If necessary, they opened fire on soldiers who collapsed under stress. They were thus forced to flee in the direction of the enemy, who also mowed

23 Nekrassow (1948), 209. The barrels of Russian machine guns were cooled with water.

them down with machine guns. The soldiers had only the choice to be shot by the Germans or the Russians.

The Russian civilian population was by no means treated better by their compatriots. During the battles on the settlement of the *Barricades*' workers, the Germans observed that Russian women who wanted to rescue themselves behind the German positions were mowed down by Soviet troops with machine guns mercilessly. Especially at the beginning of the fighting, thousands of civilians, unless they were evacuated or drafted into the Soviet militia had to persevere in the city. All reports indicate that the debris landscape was still teeming with life at this time. Old people, children, and women sought shelter in cellars, sewers, and caves dug into the steep river bank and ravines. The openings of these caves were covered with charred planks and rags. Even at the height of the battles for the Mamayev Kurgan, civilians are said to have taken cover in shell funnels. Since the Russian civilian population did not receive food rations, it was dependent on the almost impossible self-supply of drinking water and food. Children proved to be particularly successful. However, they were also fired upon by the Germans when they tried to steal army food, the Russians open fire upon them, when they allowed themselves to be harnessed by the Germans to provide drinking water for example. Persons used by the Germans to transport corpses and wounded were shot by the Soviet soldiers too. Stalin had ordered to execute every Soviet citizen who followed German orders, even if he acted under duress. Just as mercilessly, military discipline was enforced: probably about 13,500 Russian soldiers were executed in Stalingrad according to military law or judgments of court-martial.

In the first weeks of the battle, this was conducted asymmetrically, i.e. well-equipped German troops tried to crush Russian soldiers hiding in ruins. The resistance of the Soviet side was based on house-to-house fighting and guerrilla tactics. As a result of Chuikov's *embrace* of German troops, the strategy to force them into close-quarters combat with high losses, the 6th Army finally had to fight under the same conditions. Hans Horn tells about it:

> "We got into a bomb crater, big as a room, but deeper. There were a couple of loopholes at the top, and below was a heel on the flank where you could walk. The Russians were thirty yards away. Between us only bomb and grenade craters. A hundred yards behind us lay the houses, or what was left of them. And then it started to rain, day after day. The water gathered at the bottom of the funnel and you had no dry thread on your body. There was hardly anything to eat, you could not sleep, maybe doze once. For more than a week we

> were sitting in this hole. The artillery fired on both sides, but it did not benefit anyone. Dangerous was the rifle fire and many grenade attacks that we could hardly repel."[24]

This changed with the operation Uranus: The 6th Army was encircled by the Soviet Union in a large forced movement. At first the Soviet army suffered from supply problems, but at the latest with the encirclement of the Germans this asymmetry had been overcome. The German side suffered increasingly from supply shortages, a situation that could lead to tragic-comic situations. Bertold König narrates:

> "One of us went to get some food. And he came and did not come back when we were about to go looking, when he appeared, very pale and shuddering from top to bottom. He had been queuing at the wrong field kitchen, the one on the Russians. They had a field kitchen with a diesel truck (Einheitsdiesel) from us captured and thus fed their people. He was done for, but he came with our rations from the Russians. He had not been recognized in the darkness."[25]

The first replenishment problems for the Germans had already been evident since October 1942, but the supply had finally stopped weeks before the German capitulation in early February 1943. A major problem for the German side was that Hitler had personally banned the breakout of the encircled troops: With the loss of the city, all those operational objectives which the German side in the south-east had achieved until then had to be given up. Although this was a strategically comprehensible decision, at the same time it brought the enclosed 6th Army into an extremely difficult situation. For the planned supply of the Germans over an airlift proved not feasible. Worse still for the German soldiers: The Soviet troops finally succeeded in completely stopping the supply from the air and also repulsing the German replacement attempts. As a result, the 6th Army was doomed. In the two to three months which, surprisingly enough, the 6th Army was to endure in the ruins of the city and industrial district of Stalingrad, an alignment took place with those Russian troops who had opposed them during the first weeks of the battle. The advancing Russian units were repulsed with significant losses, with ruthless disciplinary measures and improvised combat tactics, and finally no more. In addition, the mass murder continued: of surviving Russian civilians and finally also of *Hilfswilligen*, a military auxiliary unit which the Germans had enlisted in Eastern Europe.

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24 Hans Horn. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 116–117.
25 Bertold König. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 146.

On December 23, 1942, *winter thunderstorm* finally failed, at the latest since the 6th Army could only wait for the final attack of the Russian troops. It began on January 10, 1943, with Operation Kolzo, during which the Soviets advanced slowly from the west to the encircled German troops. Since on 16 and 22 January 1943, the two airfields Pitomnik and Gumrak had been conquered by the Soviet troops the Germans could only capitulate. The fighting was stopped on February 2, but soldiers stranded in ruins were probably hiding or trying to make their way west until the beginning of March.

Until the capitulation, or better until the mass of German troops was captured by the Russians, the Germans, their allies and *Hiwis* were exposed to an increasing process of exhaustion, distress, impoverishment, and disillusionment. Their warscape now often consisted of a shelter in some part of the ruins, which had been covered with boards or rags, or a cellar hole. These shelters were often unheated despite the cold winter weather, and heat could be created only by the men crowding under tarpaulins and blankets. There they were plagued by fleas, lice and even by mice, which had multiplied enormously because of the everywhere lying corpses and cadavers. Bertold König narrates:

> "One was more and more dulled. The many dead did not seem to mind anymore. In Zybenko I slept one night in a bunker. There they all stood, it was so narrow, none could fall over, not even those who had already died. There were also people with frostbite and that stinks beastly. So I climbed out of the bunker through an opening and came to a pile and fell in, between amputated arms and legs. There used to be a field hospital. Because it was too much of kicking the bucket everywhere, you just took it."[26]

In addition to the cold the soldiers suffered from hunger or even starvation, because from December on German soldiers mostly were fed with a barren bread ration and some water soup, in which horsemeat had been cooked. Cold and hunger caused the soldiers to lose weight and suffer the effects of malnutrition. Their skin turned yellowish, they were down to the bone. The intellectual activity was increasingly impaired, it was hardly possible to concentrate mentally. The lack of water and food also led to apathy or euphoric hallucinations – and to suicides, violence, mental breakdown and disease. Many wounds were left untreated and especially infectious diseases such as typhoid spread. Self-mutilation and suicides in-

26 Bertold König. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 152–153.

creased. As early as the beginning of January, a growing number of German soldiers surrendered without resistance or ran over to the enemy. Besides, military leadership and discipline collapsed more and more. Since then, the German soldiers joined rather randomly fighting units, it came to the murder of officers and military police and finally the German soldiers only fought to the bare survival.

7. Warscape after the Fighting

After several months of terrible fighting, the city and industrial facilities of Stalingrad were completely destroyed. After the end of the battle, which was not the end of all fighting, Stalingrad (or better, what it was) was nothing but a landscape of rubble and metal parts interspersed with countless human corpses. Only winter prevented an unbearable smell of decay spreading over the city. Everywhere there were frozen bodies, it had hardly been possible to bury the many dead. Fallen soldiers were often simply left lying or put in trenches; mostly half-naked, without pants and jackets, wrapped with paper bandages, because the survivors took all useful possessions of the fallen. Earth burials proved to be almost impossible, especially after the onset of winter in frozen soil. If anything, dead people were buried in holes and temporarily covered. The carcasses of around 54,000 Wehrmacht horses were also lying around in ruins but they continued to serve as food for all those involved in the battle. After the surrender, initially, around 3,500 Russian civilians were used as gravediggers. German dead were brought into bunkers or armored ditches and buried there. Later, about 1,200 German prisoners of war were used for this, almost all of whom died of typhus or were shot dead by the Russian guards. Decades later, bodies were found.

Despite knowing that the German troops could not fight any further, no precautions had been taken to guard or even supply them. The treatment of prisoners of war mixed brutality, indifference and revenge. German prisoners tried to survive by chewing raw horse meat and eating pussy-willow. Most German soldiers probably died already on the way to the prison camps. In addition, the Soviet soldiers and civilians themselves suffered terrible supply shortages. But it would be a mistake to believe that after the capitulation of the larger German units *peace* came or at least an orderly capture according to the rules of the Geneva Convention. Rather, it was that the orgy of violence continued unabated. It came to looting, torture

and incredible scenes of mass murder after the capture. Johann Scheins narrates the incidents after the German surrender:

> "We did not know how long we walked with sixty thousand men. We stopped because we could not stand anymore, and then there were some lying, they were dead (...) The Russians, the officers, said: Hitler kaputt, you kaputt. And then tanks came out, they drove over us, slowly, who were standing there became like broken egg. There were commissioners on the tanks, not Russian officers. Big guys with blue caps and red ties. With carbines stood on the tanks. Hitler kaputt, you kaputt. So they drove over the people and with the pistons from the carabiner, they smash the heads of those who were tall."[27]

There has to be mentioned another factor too: While the German soldiers were driven to death by thousands by their Russian guards, the Red Army advanced to the Don river to take advantage of the victory on the Volga for an even greater strategic goal – after the defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad, the entire southern German eastern front was threatened with collapse. Such an event would have been many times more dramatic for the Germans and would have led to the collapse of Hitler's armies on the eastern front. The third battle for Kharkov took place already in February and March 1943. In the course of the Voronezh-Kharkov operation, the Red Army was able to temporarily take over the city Kharkov. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, however, managed to stabilize the southern flank and retake the city with a strategic maneuver that is often compared to a castling. This was the last significant success of the Wehrmacht in the war against the Soviet Union. The victory delayed the collapse of the German eastern front by more than a year and was a heavy defeat of the Russians, which, however, was not considered by the Soviet propaganda with a word.

Towards the end of the war, the ruins were almost deserted, as the former residents would not be allowed to return until the duds were removed. Only a few people survived in ruins, in a city that was completely marked by death and destruction and an incredible history of violence which was never commemorated officially. What took place instead was that the Soviet propaganda took the battle already in early 1943 as an opportunity to reinterpret all the mistakes made so far by party, government, and military and to invent the myth of the victorious Russian heroic people. The party claimed the spirit of Stalingrad for itself. In this way, the battles there depicted fraternity and selflessness as the result of the party's leadership and

27 Johann Scheins. In: Schüddekopf (2004), 208–209.

ideology. Although it is known that the daily routine of the war looked different, soon after the end of the war the official propaganda overwhelmed more and more the individual memory. This created in Stalingrad the space for a warscape after the war, which had to be built soon after 1945 by thousands of camp prisoners and German POWs: It was characterized by even larger industries, which were placed on the banks of the Volga without any environmental concerns, Stalinist socialist classicism and oversized memorials, such as Motherland Calls, an 85 m high statue with the weight of 7,900 t, without counting the concrete foundation. Especially in the Brezhnev era, the shadow of a horrible war reality was re-written through the narrative of collective splendor.[28] The most important difference today, that is, for now, three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, meanwhile the collective memory is also operated by numerous ecclesiastical elements. This is in clear contrast to the atheism that characterized the party, army and people of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War.

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28 Merridale (2006), 404ff.

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