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| **German Army** | **Russian Army** |
| **Led by Paulus** | **Led by Zhukov** |
| **1,011,500 men** | **1,000,500 men** |
| **10, 290 artillery guns** | **13,541 artillery guns** |
| **675 tanks** | **894 tanks** |
| **1,216 planes** | **1,115 planes** |

**The Battle of Stalingrad**

The Battle of Stalingrad is considered by many historians to have been the turning point in [World War](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/WW2.htm) [Two](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/WW2.htm) in Europe. The battle at Stalingrad bled the German army dry in [Russia](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/russia.htm) and after this defeat the Germany Army was in full retreat. One of the ironies of the war is that the German Sixth Army need not have got entangled in Stanlingrad. From a strategic point of view it would have been unwise to have left a major city unconquered in your rear as you advanced. However, some historians believe that Hitler ordered the taking of Stalingrad simply because of the name of the city and [Hitler's](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/adolf_hitler.htm) hatred of [Joseph Stalin](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/joseph_stalin.htm).

The Battle for Stalingrad was fought during the winter of 1942 to 1943. In September 1942, the German commander of the Sixth Army, General Paulus, assisted by the Fourth Panzer Army, advanced on the city of Stalingrad. His primary task was to secure the oil fields in the Caucasus and to do this, Paulus was ordered by [Hitler](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/adolf_hitler.htm) to take Stalingrad. Stalingrad was also an important target as it was Russia’s centre of communications in the south as well as being a centre for manufacturing. In early September 1942, the German Army advanced to the city. The Russians, already devastated by the power of [Blitzkrieg](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/blitzkrieg.htm), had to make a stand especially as the city was named after the Russian leader, [Joseph Stalin](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/joseph_stalin.htm). For simple reasons of morale, the Russians could not let this city fall. Likewise, the Russians could not let the Germans get hold of the oil fields in the Caucasus. Stalin’s order was "Not a step backwards".

The bulk of the Sixth Army – some 250,000 to 300,000 men - was in the city and Zhukov, having used his resources to go around the city, north and south, had trapped the Germans in Stalingrad. The German Army became trapped in the city but could have broken out in the first stages of the Russian attack but was forbidden from doing so by Hitler.

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| **Supreme Commander to 6 Army, January 24, 1943** - **Hitler's communication with von Paulus.** **"Surrender is forbidden. 6 Army will hold their positions to the last man and the last round and by their heroic endurance will make an unforgettable contribution towards the establishment of a defensive front and the salvation of the Western world."** |

Unable to break out, the Germans also had to face the winter. Temperatures dropped to well below zero and food, ammunition and heat were in short supply.

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| **"My hands are done for, and have been ever since the beginning of December. The little finger of my left hand is missing and - what's even  worse - the three middle fingers of my right one are frozen. I can only hold my mug with my thumb and little finger. I'm pretty helpless; only when a man has lost any fingers does he see how much he needs then for the smallest jobs. The best thing I can do with the little finger is to shoot with it. My hands are finished."** **Anonymous German soldier** |

Hitler ordered that Paulus should fight to the last bullet, and to encourage Paulus, he promoted him to field marshal. However, by the end of January 1943, the Germans could do nothing else but surrender. Paulus surrendered the army in the southern sector on January 31st while General Schreck surrendered the northern group on February 2nd, 1943.

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| **"I was horrified when I saw the map. We're quite alone, without any help from outside. Hitler has left us in the lurch. Whether this letter gets away depends on whether we still hold the airfield. We are lying in the north of the city. The men in my unit already suspect the truth, but they aren't so exactly informed as I am. No, we are not going to be captured. When Stalingrad falls you will hear and read about it. Then you will know that I shall not return."** **Anonymous German soldier** |

The failure of the German Army was nothing short of a disaster. A complete army group was lost at Stalingrad and 91,000 Germans were taken prisoner. With such a massive loss of manpower and equipment, the Germans simply did not have enough manpower to cope with the Russian advance to Germany when it came. Despite resistance in parts – such as a Kursk – they were in retreat on the Eastern Front from February 1943 on. In his fury, Hitler ordered a day’s national mourning in Germany, not for the men lost at the battle, but for the shame von Paulus had brought on the Wehrmacht and Germany. Paulus was also stripped of his rank to emphasize Hitler’s anger with him. Hitler commented:

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| **"The God of War has gone over to the other side."** |

**Questions:**

1. Why did Hitler order the German Army to take Stalingrad?
2. Was the Battle of Stalingrad necessary for the Germans? (What are the two arguments regarding Hitler’s motivation to conquer Stalingrad?)
3. Why did Stalin order that the city could not fall?
4. Why is the Battle of Stalingrad considered a turning point of World War II?