

CONFLICT IN EUROPE

b) The entry of the Soviet Union into WWII in June 1941, after the German invasion, violating the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (1939) initially had little success. On the first day of operation Barbarossa, over 2000 Soviet planes were lost. However, the regrouping of forces and removal of industry to the east proved successful, and by the end of 1943 the Red Army was a powerful military machine. In the eventual Allied victory, the Soviet Union had significant responsibility in the defeat of Germany, particularly through the turning point of Stalingrad. However, other Allied activities such as the D-Day landings and invasion of France did also play a part in the eventual Allied victory.

The Battle of Stalingrad began with a German offensive on 28th June 1942, which by November had captured 90% of the city. However, on 19th November Soviet troops under Zhukov launched a counter-offensive, which trapped the Sixth Army of von Paulus in a tiny pocket. By January, the garrison of men had been cut in half, from 250,000 to under 100,000, and a fresh panzer division had been decimated in an attempted rescue. Von Paulus surrendered on 31st January ~~1943~~ 1943, against Hitler's orders. Stalingrad is a significant point in the war, as it was the first time the military momentum swung to the Soviet Union. It highlighted the immense Soviet ~~strength~~ strength, as well as the German home fronts inability to supply continued or prolonged offensives. The capture of

200,000 German troops, 60,000 vehicles and 5500 tanks ~~as~~ was a loss the Germans could not afford. Stalingrad is significant in the Soviet Union's major role in ~~the~~ the Allied victory, as combined with British successes at El Alamein, proved the Germans could be beaten. It was ~~then~~ thus the turning point on the Eastern front. This is a view supported by historian J.N. Wertwood, "Coming soon after El Alamein; it confirmed the Germans could be beaten. Henceforth the Russians were sure they could win the war."

Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk the same year, in which Soviet ~~a~~ forces trapped 60,000 Germans in the ~~area~~, was significant psychologically ~~and~~ and militarily. The Soviet advance continued, depriving ~~a~~ Germany

of some of the industrial capacity it had captured in the eastern territories. As the Soviet advance rapidly continued, the Germans remained on the defensive for the first prolonged period of the war. It is estimated that eventually, the eastern front absorbed ~~the~~ 90% of Germany's military might, and thus it was there that it was ebbed away. The Soviet Union was significantly responsible for the Allied victory for that reason; as successful Soviet advances continued, through Ukraine in early 1944, the Germans were forced to divert more troops and supplies to the east. As the Soviet advance prevailed despite this, it is evident that the Soviets had a major role in the defeat of the Germans. This is recognised

by historians as being displayed at the conference of Allied leaders in Tehran in late 1943, where Stalin - as a result of Kursk and Stalingrad - had the advantage in bargaining power, recognised by the other Allied leaders.

While the Soviet Union had considerable responsibility for the Allied victory, it was not the entirety. The British and American D-Day landings and subsequent invasion of France were also significant. The Germans ~~were~~ miscalculated the landing site, and thus the Allies were able to establish a bridgehead at Normandy with relative ease. Rommel had said the first 48 hours would be decisive, and they had been, as over 200,000 Allied troops had landed by 7th June. Allied victory

on the West was heavily determined by their airpower superiority. By D-Day, the Allies on the western front had a 30:1 superiority over the Luftwaffe. In addition, the use of target bombing to target railway lines or panzer divisions being brought to the front by the ~~RMAA~~ British RAF was also important. Thus there is much merit in historian M. Webber's comment "In essence, Allied mastery of the air ensured the success of Operation Overlord." As the British and Americans advanced from the west, and the Germans from the east, German defences were beginning to crumble.

A last-ditch German offensive, the Battle of the Bulge on 16th December aimed at re-taking Antwerp which had

been captured by the British ~~army~~ in September, had initial success, but ultimately failed. The German lost ~~over~~ 120,000 casualties they could not afford. When US forces established a bridgehead at Remagen in March, ¹⁹⁴⁵ the entire German western front collapsed.

On the east, numerical superiority had become an issue. In mid-1944, the ~~German~~ German army had 4 million men and 2,800 aircraft facing the Soviet Army of 6 million men and 13,400 aircraft. Soviet officers in January 1945 cut off the eastern territories not already recaptured from the Reich. The Soviet advance had been centred on Stalingrad and had gained momentum and force as the powerful Soviet industry

- strengthened by Stalin's five Year Plans
- had ~~just~~ increased. That the Soviet Union was significantly responsible for the eventual Allied victory is supported by the fact that it was Soviet soldiers who liberated all of Germany's ~~conquered~~ conquered eastern territories and industry, and Soviet soldiers who eventually entered Berlin in May 1945. Without the ~~then~~ massive Soviet industrial and manpower capacity, it is questionable ~~as~~ as to whether the other Allies could have successfully defeated the Germans on the east. For this reason, the Soviet Union was one of the most significant factors in the Allied victory.

The Soviet Union was significantly responsible for the Allied defeat,

a fact which was evident after one of the turning points of the war, the Battle of Stalingrad.

Through its industrial capacity and immense reserve of manpower, there can be no doubt of the Soviet responsibility for the eventual German surrender on 8th May. Other factors were also significant in conjunction, however, such as ~~the~~ D-Day and the invasion and liberation of France. The final years of the war highlighted Germany's weakness in prolonged campaigns due to a belated total war, and the Soviet strength. It can ultimately be concluded that the Soviet Union was a significant but not the sole factor, ~~in~~ being responsible for the Allied victory in the conflict in Europe.