The Battle of Stalingrad - July 17 1942 - February 2 1943

The Battle of Stalingrad was one of the bloodiest battles in history, with combined military and civilian casualties of nearly 2 million.

This event is considered to be a turning point in the Second World War.

Stalingrad was a major industrial and communications centre for the Soviet Union in the south therefore the USSR were determined to defend it. Furthermore, Stalingrad was the only city to bear the Soviet dictator’s name; this made it important to Stalin and also important to Hitler, who were ideological enemies.

The battle

The battle began with the German air force, the Luftwaffe, bombing the Volga River and the then the city of Stalingrad. They reduced much of the city to rubble. Soon the German army moved in and was able to take a large portion of the city.

On September 3, 1942, the German Sixth Army under Paulus reached the outskirts of Stalingrad, expecting to take the city in short order. But the Russians had built up their defences and continued to bring in reinforcements.

The Soviet troops were not ready to give up. Fighting in the city of Stalingrad was fierce. Soviets hid all over the city, in buildings and the sewers, attacking the German soldiers. This brutal battle began to take its toll on the Germans.

The surrender

In November 1942, the soviets launched a major counterattack on the sixth army. They encircled and trapped the Nazi’s in Stalingrad. Finally, on February 2nd 1943, weak from a lack of food and cold from the winter, General Paulus surrendered what remained of his army-some 91,000 men. About 150,000 Germans had died in the fighting.

The soviet victory was a humiliation to Hitler who had stressed the importance of Stalingrad to the Germans; however, Stalin gained confidence in his military.

Figures

Initially, the German military committed 270,000 men, 3,000 artillery pieces, 500 tanks and 600 aircraft to the Battle. The Soviet defenders had available 187,000 men, 2,200 artillery pieces, 400 tanks and 300 aircraft. By the time of the Soviet counter-offensive, the German military had committed 1,011,000 men, 10,250 artillery pieces, 675 tanks and 732 planes. The Soviet forces number 1,103,000 men, 15,500 artillery pieces, 1,463 tanks and 1,115 aircraft. German casualties are estimated to be 750,000 killed, missing or wounded.

Soviet Army, by comparison, lost 478,741 men killed or missing, and 650,878 wounded. Almost 200 days of fighting left the city of Stalingrad a ruin, an estimated 40,000 civilians killed, and countless more wounded or forced to become refugees.