

Berlin - The Downfall 1945

Annexes

Chronology

January to June 1945

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| 12 January | Red Army winter offensive begins. Konev's 1 st Ukrainian Front attacks on Vistula. |
| 13 January | General Chernyakhovsky's 3 rd Belorussian Front attacks East Prussia. |
| 14 January | Marshal Rokossovsky's 2 nd Belorussian Front attacks East Prussia. Zhukov's 1 st Belorussian Front attacks from Vistula. |
| 16 January | Hitler returns to Berlin. |
| 17 January | Ninth Army abandons Warsaw |
| 18 January | The Polish 'Provisional Government' from Lublin moves to Warsaw. |
| 23 January | Erwin Planck, the son of Max Planck, executed. |
| 24 January | Himmler appointed commander in chief Army Group Vistula |
| 27 January | Russians liberate Auschwitz. |
| 30 January | 'Der Tag der Machtergreifung'. Nazi anniversary of taking power. |
| 31 January | Zhukov's troops reach the Oder less than sixty miles from Berlin. |
| 1 February | Berlin declared a Festung |
| 3 February | Devastating Allied air raid on Berlin. |
| 4 February | Yalta Conference begins. Lasts until 11 February |
| 11 February | Red Army captures Budapest |
| 13/14 Feb | Bombing of Dresden. 40,000 to 60,000 killed. |
| 15 February | Breslau surrounded by 1 st Ukrainian Front |

- 19 February Himmler makes first contact with Count Bernadotte
- 22 February German counter-attack near Budapest.
- 23 February ‘Fortress’ Posen falls to 8th Guards Army.
US Ninth Army attacks north-east from Ruhr pocket.
- 24 February 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts attack in Pomerania. German Second Army cut off.
- 26 February Himmler’s decree on summary executions
- 3 March Canadian First Army reaches Xanten. US Third Army takes Trier. Finland declares war on Germany.
- 6 March German offensive in Hungary
- 7 March Allies cross the Rhine at Remagen
- 8 March Zhukov summoned to Moscow by Stalin.
SS Obergruppenführer Wolf in secret talks with Allies over North Italy.
- 12 March Heldengedenktag.
- 15 March Hitler orders clearance of Oder bridgeheads.
- 16 March Soviet counter-attack in Hungary
- 19 March Hitler’s ‘Nero’ or ‘Verbrannte Erde’-Befehl.
- 21 March Heinrici appointed commander in chief Army Group Vistula
- 22 March Failed attempt by Ninth Army to smash Soviet bridgehead near Küstrin.
- 23 March 2nd Belorussian Front attack on Second Army in Danzig area.
- 26 March US First Army (Hodges) smashes Fifteenth Army in Westerwald.
- 28 March Fall of Danzig.
- 29 March US Third Army takes Frankfurt-am-Main
- 30 March Fall of Danzig [Good Friday]
- 1 April [Easter] *Stavka* meeting in Moscow with Stalin, Zhukov and Konev
US First and Ninth Armies join near Lippstadt. Ruhr pocket sealed.
- 4 April French First Army occupies Karlsruhe.
- 7 April Operation Werwolf. Luftwaffe jets attack US bombers.

- 9 April Red Army takes Königsberg after a 59 day siege.
General Lasch sentenced to death by Hitler and his family to Sippenhaft reprisals.
Admiral Canaris and Generalmajor Oster executed in Flossenburg and Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin executed.
- 9/10 April RAF night raid on Kiel sinks *Admiral Scheer*.
- 10 April An RAF-USAAF raid on Oranienburg kills 250 prisoners in Sachsenhausen.
US Ninth Army takes Essen and Hannover.
- 11 April Buchenwald and Nordhausen concentration camps liberated
- 12 April Death of Franklin D. Roosevelt
Order signed by Himmler, Bormann and Keitel on defending all German towns to the very last.
- 13 April Friday, Goebbels tells Hitler of death of Roosevelt.
Soviet capture of Vienna.
US tanks reach the Elbe near Wittenburg and Magdeburg.
- 14 April Himmler's order that no prisoner should be left alive when evacuating concentration camps.
Ruhr pocket crushed by US First and Ninth Armies.
British air raid on Potsdam kills 7,000 people.
- 15 April Wenck's Army attacks US bridgeheads on east bank of Elbe.
British liberate Belsen.
- 16 April Soviet offensive on the Oder and Neisse fronts begins
- 18 April US Ninth Army takes Magdeburg. US troops occupy Halle and Leipzig.
- 18/19 April Last British air raid on Berlin.
- 19 April Soviet tanks reach Strausberg.
British Second Army reaches Elbe at Lauenburg.
- 20 April Hitler's 56th birthday.
2nd Belorussian Front offensive across the lower Oder.
3rd Guards Tank Army approaches southern flank of Berlin.
Soviet artillery fires on Berlin for first time.
- 21 April Field Marshal Model commits suicide.

Signature of agreement between USSR and the puppet Polish Communist government.
 Hitler orders SS General Felix Steiner to attack towards Berlin.
 Death march of 30,000 prisoners from Sachsenhausen towards Mecklenburg. 6,000 are killed or die on the way.
 In Lederwarenfabrik Blankenburg Army Group Red Army soldiers discover in a leather factory huge quantities of shoes from men women and children killed in the main extermination camps.
 Himmler meets the representative of the World Jewish Congress Masur near Berlin. Frees a thousand Jewish women.

- 22 April Hitler's decision to stay in Berlin.
- 23 April Hitler deprives Goering of all rank and responsibility.
 British Second Army reaches outskirts of Hamburg.
 During night of 23-24, Gestapo murder all except seven prisoners in the Prinz-Albrechtstrasse cellars.
- 24 April German Ninth Army surrounded west of Frankfurt.
 Keitel and Jodl move OKW headquarters to Rheinsberg.
 Russians reach transmitter broadcasting Werwolf propaganda at Nauen 20 miles west of Berlin.
 Execution in Flossenburg by SS of Guttenberg, part of Canaris network.
- 24/25 April Himmler meets Count Bernadotte in Lübeck.
- 25 April Encirclement of Berlin completed.
 Elements from US First Army and 5th Guards Army meet at Torgau.
- 26 April Twelfth Army launches attack towards Potsdam. Two Ju 52s land in Berlin with ammunition.
 2nd Belorussian Front takes Stettin.
- 27/28 April Putsch attempt in Munich, the so-called 'Fasanenjagd'.
- 28 April Twelfth Army attacks towards Potsdam.
 Soviet breakthrough to Prenzlau. General Heinrici relieved of his command by Keitel.

- US Seventh Army takes Augsburg.
- 29 April Mussolini executed.
General Student appointed commander in chief
Army Group Vistula.
Capitulation of Army Group C signed in Caserta.
Hitler marries Eva Braun and prepares his political
testament.
Kremlin announces provisional government of
Austria without consulting the western allies.
- 30 April Ritter von Greim and Hanna Reitsch fly out of Berlin.
Hitler and Eva Braun commit suicide at around 3.30
p.m.
Ulbricht group advance party arrives from Moscow.
US Army occupies Munich.
Ravensbruck concentration camp liberated.
- 1 May Dönitz radio broadcast, having received signal from
Bormann on Hitler's death.
Goebbels and wife commit suicide after killing their
children.
- 2 May Weidling's surrender in Berlin.
British 6th Airborne Division meets up with Soviet 70th
Army near Wismar.
- 2/3 May Last RAF raid on Germany on Kiel harbour.
- 3 May British enter Hamburg.
- 4 May German forces in Holland, NW Germany and
Denmark surrender to Field Marshal Montgomery on
Luneberg Heath.
- 5-9 May German evacuation by warship continue from Hela.
- 6 May Soviet offensive against Army Group Centre.
Breslau surrenders.
Eisenhower orders US Third Army to halt its
advance into Czechoslovakia.
- 7 May Rheims signature by Jodl of surrender document.
US Ninth Army abandons its bridgehead on the east
bank of the Elbe.
- 8 May VE-Day in western Europe and United States. Keitel,
Stumpff and Admiral von Friedeburg fly to Berlin to
surrender to Marshal Zhukov.

9 May	Signature of surrender at Karlshorst signature by Keitel, Stumpff and Admiral von Friedeburg
10 May	Surrender of German Sixteenth and Eighteenth Armies in Courland. Capture of Prague by Third Guards Tank Army.
13 May	Arrest of Field Marshal Keitel.
14 May	Surrender of last forces in East Prussia under General von Saucken.
23 May	Himmler's suicide after capture by the British.
17 July	Potsdam conference begins. Lasts until 2 August

Glossary

BdM Bund deutscher Mädel, League of German Girls, female equivalent of Hitler Youth.

Fritz Russian name for a German soldier. The plural was used for Germans in general.

frontovik Red Army soldier with frontline experience.

Ivan (or Iwan in German), an ordinary Soviet soldier. Term used by Red Army as well as Germans.

Jabo Jagdbomber, or fighter bomber.

SBZ Sowjetische Besatzungszone, or Soviet occupation zone

Kessel (German for a cauldron) a group of forces encircled by the enemy.

Landser an ordinary German soldier with front-line experience. The equivalent of the Red Army *frontovik*.

NKVD Soviet secret police under control of Beria. Military NKVD units – NKVD rifle divisions made up mostly of NKVD frontier guards regiments – were attached to each Soviet Front command. The NKVD and SMERSH chief with each Front was answerable only to Beria and Stalin, not to the military chain of command.

OKH Oberkommando des Heeres, in theory the supreme headquarters of the German army, but in the later stages of the war its most important role was operational command of the Eastern Front.

OKW Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the supreme headquarters of all the armed forces, Army, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, controlled directly by Hitler through Field Marshal Keitel and General Jodl. It controlled operations on all fronts except for the Eastern Front.

political department a political officer (*politruk*) was responsible for the political education of all soldiers. The political department of each Soviet army and Front came under the Main Political Administration of the Red Army (GlavPURRKA).

S-Bahn city and suburban railway, mostly on the surface, but some of it underground.

SBZ Sowjetische Besatzungszone, the post-Potsdam Soviet zone of occupation

SMAD Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland, the Soviet military administration of Germany, based at Karlshorst.

7th Department an organization at each Soviet army headquarters whose main task was to demoralize the enemy. German Communists worked under Soviet officers, and also many

German prisoners of war who had undergone ‘anti-fascist’ training in Soviet camps. They were known by the Germans as ‘Seydlitz troops’ after General von Seydlitz Kurzbach, who had surrendered at Stalingrad and helped form the so-called National Committee for a Free Germany, which was completely under NKVD control.

SHAEF Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force Europe.

shtraf company or battalion, the Soviet copy of German *Straf* (penal) units. Disgraced officers, deserters and defaulters were condemned to these penal units, where they were in theory offered the chance to redeem ‘their guilt with their blood’. This meant that they were used for the almost suicidal tasks, such as advancing first through a minefield. *Straf* units always had an escort ready to shoot any members who disobeyed orders.

SMERSH, the acronym for *smert shpionam* (death to spies), a name allegedly chosen by Stalin himself for the counter-intelligence organization of the NKVD attached to Red Army units and formations. Until April 1943, when Viktor Abakumov became its chief, it had been known as the ‘special department’ of the NKVD.

Stavka the Soviet supreme headquarters of the armed forces, directly under Stalin’s control. The chief of staff in 1945 was General Antonov.

U-Bahn underground railway.

Verkhovny commander-in-chief, the term which Zhukov and other senior commanders used to refer to Stalin.

Military Organization

Army Group and Front A German 'Army Group' or a Red Army 'Front' represented a collection of armies under a single commander-in-chief. Depending on circumstances, strengths could vary enormously - anything from 250,000 to over a million men.

Army Each German army, usually varying in strength between 40,000 and over 100,000 men, has its name written in full in the text: e.g. Ninth Army or Third Panzer Army. Soviet armies, generally smaller, are written thus: 47th Army or 2nd Guards Tank Army. Most armies usually consisted of two or three corps. A Soviet tank army had in theory 620 tanks and 188 self-propelled assault guns.

Corps A corps consisted of several divisions, usually between two and four. A Soviet tank corps, however, consisted of three tank brigades of sixty-five tanks each and was closer in size to a full-strength German panzer division.

Division Divisions varied greatly in size. A Soviet Rifle Division in theory should have mustered 11,780 men, but most had between 3,000 and 7,000 men. German Infantry Divisions were often even more understrength by 1945.

Brigade This formation, between a regiment and a division, was used more by the US Army and the British than by the Germans and Red Army, both of which had at least two or three regiments to a division. The Red Army, however, had three tank brigades to each tank corps.

Regiment This consisted of at least two or three battalions, with anything up to 700 men each, but often much less.

Battalion Each battalion consisted of at least three rifle companies - each one theoretically around eighty men strong - as well as support companies, with machine guns, mortars or anti-tank guns, and then transport and supply companies.

Military Rank Equivalents

British Army

Private
Lance Corporal
Corporal
Sergeant
Colour or Staff Sergeant
Company Sergeant Major
Regimental Sergeant Major
Second Lieutenant
Lieutenant
Captain
Major
Lieutenant Colonel
Colonel/Brigadier
Brigadier/Major General
Major General
Lieutenant General
General
Field Marshal

Wehrmacht

Grenadier
Gefreiter
Obergefreiter
Unterfeldwebel
Feldwebel
Kompanie Feldwebel
Stabsfeldwebel
Leutnant
Oberleutnant
Hauptmann
Major
Oberstleutnant
Oberst
Generalmajor
Generalleutnant
General der Infanterie etc.
Generaloberst
General Feldmarschall

Waffen-SS

SS-Mann
Sturmmann
Rottenführer
Unterscharführer
Scharführer
Hauptscharführer
Sturmscharführer
Untersturmführer
Obersturmführer
Hauptsturmführer
Sturmbannführer
Obersturmbannführer
Standartenführer
Brigadeführer
Gruppenführer
Obergruppenführer
Oberstgruppenführer
Reichsführer SS