

History – 277th Rifle Division, 21st Army
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Early November 1942 - in hushed conversations, officer after officer asked the same question – Why is every commanding officer of every regiment and battalion all gathered in one room? Fear mingled with curiosity in the voices of the officers as they quietly pondered their fate. Suddenly, to a man, the entire room snapped to attention as the Division commander, followed by the Division Commissar, entered the room.

Tovarith Commanders...welcome! Our Division commander has asked me to say a few words before the briefing. We are approaching the second winter since the Hitlerites invaded our country. We have been pushed back...and the barbarian invaders have raped our land, stolen food from our children, and killed our comrades just to satisfy their blood lust. In a few days, November 19th to be exact, that will all change. You are part of a massive buildup which will ram into the enemy where he is weakest and drive him from the motherland once and for all.

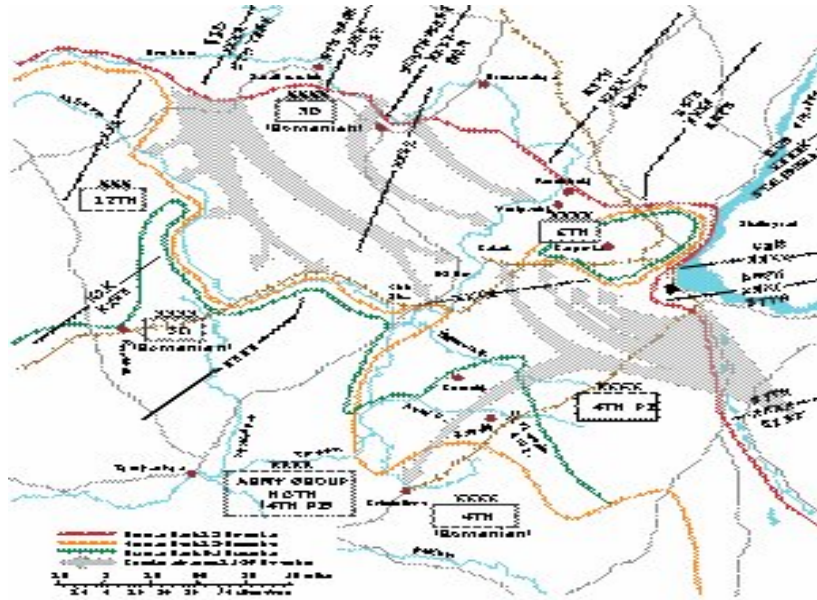
Comrades, failure will be dealt with harshly – so listen well and make the enemy pay for his aggression. Always remember, that if we fail here, our comrades living under the heel of the oppressor will have to suffer that much longer. Now our Comrade commander will brief us on the specifics....Za Stalina...Za Rodinu.....

Many Russian formations, to include divisions and army headquarters, were destroyed and rebuilt during the Great Patriotic War – which is what the Russians called World War II. The 277th Rifle Division was no exception. The division was originally raised in August, 1941 and destroyed the following month. The division was again raised in January 1943 and subsequently fought at Stalingrad as part of the 21st Army, and ended the war attached to the 5th Army.

Stalingrad – the Battle

The battle of Stalingrad had been a bloody, house to house, street to street, sewer to sewer battle from July through November 1942. Both the Germans and the Russians were losing men at an unsustainable rate, but November 19th was to change all that.

The Russians hurled over 1,000,000 men, over 800 tanks, and over 13,000 artillery pieces at the enemy forces. But this time it was different – the Russians hit the Hungarians, Italians, and Romanians – all of which were not as well equipped as the German front line units fighting in and around the city proper.



The German forces were quickly encircled, but the end did not come quickly. Bitter fighting continued through February, with remnants who refused the surrender continuing to hold out until March 1943. In the end, it was a disaster for the Axis forces for which they really could not recover. Axis losses were between 850,000 and 1.5 million. The Italian army in Russia ceased to exist, and the Hungarian and Romanian armies were also virtually destroyed. Russian losses (dead, wounded, and missing) also totaled over 1.1 million. The German army was pushed back, with Stalingrad being both the high water mark and the beginning of the end of the German army in Russia.

KV 1 Tank



The KV 1 s – a lighter more reliable version of the KV 1, was used at Stalingrad. By Krusk, the KV 1 and variants had fallen from favor and the whole concept of Russian heavy tanks was under review.