

## **Berlin The Downfall 1945 - Annexes**

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### Chronology - January to June 1945

12 January

Red Army winter offensive begins. Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front attacks on Vistula.

13 January

General Chernyakhovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front attacks East Prussia.

14 January

Marshal Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Front attacks East Prussia. Zhukov's 1st 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 1st 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

Heldengedenktage.

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 Sun

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

**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 Rank Equivalents

British Army  
Wehrmacht  
Waffen-SS

Private  
Grenadier  
SS-Mann

Lance Corporal  
Gefreiter  
Sturmmann

Corporal  
Obergefreiter  
Rottenführer

Sergeant  
Unterfeldwebel  
Unterscharführer

Colour or Staff Sergeant  
Feldwebel  
Scharführer

Company Sergeant Major  
Kompanie Feldwebel  
Hauptscharführer

Regimental Sergeant Major  
Stabsfeldwebel  
Sturmscharführer

Second Lieutenant  
Leutnant  
Untersturmführer

Lieutenant  
Oberleutnant  
Obersturmführer

Captain  
Hauptmann  
Hauptsturmführer

Major  
Major  
Sturmbannführer

Lieutenant Colonel  
Oberstleutnant

Obersturmbannführer

Colonel/Brigadier

Oberst

Standartenführer

Brigadier/Major General

Generalmajor

Brigadeführer

Major General

Generalleutnant

Gruppenführer

Lieutenant General

General der Infanterie etc.

Obergruppenführer

General

Generaloberst

Oberstgruppenführer

Field Marshal

General Field-Marschall

Reichsführer SS

## 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.