Chapter 20

Gains and Losses

 My name is Ralph Wolfsind. I have brown hair and blue eyes. I was 24 in 1942.

 Sunlight was streaming in through the cracked window panes of my current residence on the eastern front. We had been steadily moving further east into the Russian terrain and wilderness. The only problem, Stalin had ordered his scorched earth policy so this old house was quite a blessing for my company where all other houses in the area had been burnt to the ground. By this rate, he is almost helping us with our conquest of this land. The living space we need would have to have been torn down anyway to make way for far superior German housing and constructions.

 It is times which we are not moving or preparing for anything that I think back of my town of Wittenberg in northeastern Germany. That is a town with the best German people, buildings, and everything else. Most of my friends are back home that had not joined the army. I have no parents anymore. They had betrayed the glorious Third Reich and my brother had turned them into the local Gestapo agents when he was part of the Hitler Youth. I would have done the same thing if I had not already joined the military and off to basic training. Not long after my parents vanished, my only brother joined the Luftwaffe while I was stationed into a Panzer division in the Wehrmacht. After basic, I went in for officer training and graduated as a Lieutenant.

 Back at home, too, I am sure everyone is enjoying the changes in the weather as the spring and summer were finally warming up the air. Down here in the Crimea, a peninsula in southern Ukraine, the weather was also turning to be quite pleasant than the winter of before. Any day now, I expect orders to start to load up supplies and drive on to defeat the Russian threats.

 That is exactly what happened not long after I thought of this. On May 8, we began a major offensive in the Crimea. As part of a Panzer division, I was in one of the tanks making a frontal assault on the Red Army’s positions. Almost immediately, the soviet defenders fell to our attacks. We smashed through their lines at the shear pressure and amount of attackers that pushed forward. The resistance was minimal for the rest of the battle in the rest of the area. By the end, 28,000 soviets had been killed, 147,000 captured, but 37,000 managed to retreat and evacuate from us. This assault had lasted less than a month in total. Our next objective laid further east and north.

 While marching and driving to our next area, some disturbing news reached my line of tanks from a messenger. He handed me one of the envelopes with the information and drove off on his motorcycle to another commanding officer further down the lines. When I first saw it, I thought that this was to be new orders from HQ about the tactics or possibly the objective of our next drive. What I never thought it would be was bad news from close to home in Czechoslovakia from one of our greatest leaders. On May 27, the head SS Leader Reinhard Heydrich had been attacked in Prague. Free Czech agents had been brought to assassinate him as he made his rounds to the country we were saving from themselves. Those barbarians! They shot at him and threw a bomb right under his car. The shrapnel blew all over and pierced him in many places, mortally wounding him. On June 4, he died from not his wounds but the blood poisoning of the spleen caused by the car bits in his wounds. Later, the Fuhrer commented and said he was “the man with the iron heart.” This was the day before we were to make our assault on the next target of our ultimate conquest.

 On June 5, our troops began a siege of Sevastopol that is further east and north of our previous positions. During those first few days before attacking, we dropped a total of 2,449 tons of munitions along the soviet’s defensive lines. Again, we easily smashed through their defensive and stopped much of the pathetic resistance. However, not long after our initial assault, the soviets launched a minor counterattack, slowing our advance somewhat. They managed to inflict 2,357 casualties on my comrades. I and my men fought on bravely for almost an entire month before finally overtaken the Red Army.

 During the fighting, we had runners constantly bringing in news from the home front and other fronts in case we are needed elsewhere. One piece of news was that the SS had wiped out the city of Lidice in Czechoslovakia. They had done this to avenge the killing of our glorious Reinhard Heydrich. The Gestapo and SS hunted down and murdered every Czech agent and resistance member they believed to be involved with the plot. In the end, 1,000 people had suffered for their grave mistake of going against the Third Reich.

 The battle was almost over in Sevastopol. All we had to do was clear out the remaining of the soviets or cause them to surrender to our superior forces. The battle in its entirety had been bloody and long. We had to fight street by street to overtake the hidden soviets in their placements and foxholes. Finally on July 3, the remaining soviets that had not evacuated surrendered to our forces, but it was not without great numbers. For our army, 27,000 Germans were reported as casualties. For the soviets, 18,000 had been killed, 95,000 captured, and 25,157 had evacuated. The city was nothing but rubble left as we moved through it. It seemed too that only 5 to 10 buildings were left standing.

 After all this death and destruction, the soviets realized that resistance was futile to the glorious powers of the Third Reich. On July 5, all soviet resistance in the Crimea had ended. We had finally won this ever needed area for oil and other natural resources to secure the future of Germany. I was 24 years old. Though we were winning quite well on the eastern front, things may have been starting to burn out of control in the desert.