Just for fun, Hitler’s ten dumbest mistakes

As I said, just for fun. And to provide debate ammo if one of my gentle readers is presented with the “If the USA hadn’t stopped Hitler, we’d all be speaking German now” tirades. Sigh. Even without the USA, Hitler’s empire would have come crashing down sooner or later. A combination of strategic over-extension, resistance movements, and Hitler’s folly would have destroyed the Third Reich one way or the other. Not to even mention that it was Russian armies rolling inexorably westward that destroyed Hitler’s armies. In any event though, it is astonishing some of the blunders Hitler made. No wonder the Allied High command sometimes joked that Hitler was their greatest ally:

1. Battle of Britain. When Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to “take out” the Brits, the Luftwaffe sensibly enough began their campaign by trying to destroy the RAF. By the RAF’s admission, they nearly succeeded, in fact they were about two weeks away from pretty much shutting down the RAF and controlling the skies of Britain. Then Hitler got involved and ordered the Luftwaffe to attack the British cities instead, especially London. Which did nothing but piss the British off and freed the RAF to concentrate on regaining control of the skies over Britain. London burned, but German casualties mounted to the point where they had to call off the campaign, and that was that.

2. Cancellation of weapons programs. After the Fall of France in 1940 Hitler was so confident of victory that he cancelled most weapons research programs, insisting that the war could be won with the weapons they had. Two years later when the Germans were being outclassed on all fronts by next-gen Allied weapons, the programs were all frantically restarted. Two years had been lost though, and worse, key engineers and such had died in Russia. Germany did manage to produce some impressive weapons, but never in any quantity and most of them never had the bugs worked out and thus weren’t terribly reliable in practise.

3. Invasion of Russia. There were multiple mistakes made here, just attacking Russia for one was incredibly optimistic. Compounded by a six week delay in the attack so Hitler could pointlessly bail out Mussolini in the Balkans. And then the Germans made no preparations for a long war because Hitler assumed Russia could be completely defeated the first summer. He ordered Leningrad to be surrounded, not captured! And Hitler fatally delayed the push for Moscow by diverting his panzers to the stalled southern front. Unlike in Napoleon’s time, Moscow was the absolute centre of the Russian railroad network, and if the Germans had captured the city and the rail connections south of the city, it would have crippled the Russian war effort.

4. The “No retreat” order. This is Hitler’s biggest mistake in Russia and one of the biggest military blunders of all time. When the war in Russia started going badly during the first winter, Hitler ordered his troops to never retreat under any circumstances. This is insane in general because there’s no point standing your ground if you are outnumbered and getting the crap beat out of you. Doubly insane because the only real advantage the Germans had over the Russians was that the German troops were far more mobile. So it made far more sense to retreat when attacked and then counterattack after he Russians had advanced beyond their supply lines. The one German general with the stones to defy Hitler, Manstein, did this a number of times with devastating effect.

5. Me-262 as a bomber. The Me-262 was a beautiful plane, in some ways a decade or more before its time. It was the world’s first jet interceptor and could fly rings (literally) around the best Allied planes of the time. The Me-262 was conceived, designed, and developed as a jet interceptor, a plane specifically designed to hunt down and destroy Allied planes. Hitler ordered it into full production … as a bomber. His minions nodded, and quietly continued to develop it as an interceptor. Someone tipped Hitler off though, and he made sure it was developed as a bomber. In trial runs few pilots were even able to get their bombs within a mile of the targets. The Me-262
was a complete (and predictable) failure as a bomber. By the time a few Me-262 interceptors saw action they were too few too late to change anything.

6. No women labourers. Did the Nazis use slave labour in their factories because they were mean people? Well, yes, but they were also motivated by a severe shortage of factory labour … because Hitler had decreed that German women were not to do factory work. Millions of American and British women went to work on assembly lines freeing up millions of men for military duty. The Germans suffered terrible manpower shortages during the war, while millions of German women sat at home.

7. War on USA. Hitler declared war on the USA right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Why? He thought it would be good for morale. (Most of his dumbf*ck ideas were based on thinking like that.) Maybe the USA would have declared war on him anyhow, but it was crazy to simply give Roosevelt what he wanted.

8. More Russian errors. In 1942 Hitler ordered his armies to seize the oil fields in the Caucasus and the city of Stalingrad, spreading his armies far too thin. As a result his forces failed to capture the oil fields, and suffered crippling losses at Stalingrad.

9. The Battle of Kursk. At Kursk in 1943 Hitler ordered a massive attack even though the Russians clearly knew he would attack Kursk. The German armies last great offensive flung themselves against massed Russian defenders dug in with huge numbers of anti-tank weapons and legions of modern Russian tanks. It was the biggest tank battle in history, and a crushing defeat for Germany. The battle of Stalingrad guaranteed that Germany was not going to win its war with Russia, Kursk guaranteed that the Russians would win.

10. Battle of the Bulge. Hitler’s last gasp attempt to win the war. He attempted to repeat his success of 1940 by attacking the Allies the exact same way. Even though his forces were vastly smaller, didn’t have the fuel to do the job, and were facing a vastly superior enemy than the French army of 1940. The attack had zero chance of success, it would have been far more sensible to attack the Russians and try to slow down their advance.

And these are just the big blunders, there were plenty of minor blunders as well. My favourite is one last Luftwaffe story, because it shows just how shallow and demented Hitler’s thought processes were. At one point in the middle of the war the British bomber force was causing big problems for Germany, about a thousand British bombers would fly over Germany and carpet bomb some target almost every night. The Brits bombed at night because they couldn’t replace their losses, so they sacrificed accuracy for safety. The Luftwaffe had a great idea, lone German long range fighters would lurk around British airbases and attack British bombers as they came in to land in the morning light. (The radars of the time couldn’t really track single planes flying at low altitude.) It was very effective and downed a number of irreplaceable British bombers and their crews. If it had continued at the very least the Allies would have been forced to divert significant air power to defend against a small number of Germans, and it might have even severely crippled the British bombing campaign.

So what did Hitler do when he heard about this clever program to defend against the British bomber fleet? Iron crosses all around? Nope, Hitler basically said “Nein, nein nein, the Luftwaffe must shoot down the British bombers over Germany, not England, so that the German people can see the wreckage of the British bombers and be encouraged!” Hitler cancelled the program, and the British high command (not to mention the British bomber crews) breathed a big sigh of relief when German planes stopped appearing out of nowhere to shoot them down as they landed.

Frankly it’s a wonder Hitler’s Third Reich lasted as long as it did.