A War of reputation and pride

- An examination of the memoirs of German generals after the Second World War.

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“For the great enemy of truth is very often not the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest --
but the myth -- persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.” – John F. Kennedy, 1962

1John F. Kennedy, Yale University Commencement Address,
https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkyalecommencement.htm, [01.05.2019].
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Introduction

Generals writing about past wars and battles is not a new concept. During the Gallic Wars that Julius Caesar conducted he wrote a history of the war that was published in Rome called ‘Comentarii de Bello Gallico’ (The Gallic Wars). Caesar’s work was written with a third person perspective and covered the major events of the campaigns that he fought in Gaul in the period between 58-50 BC. The most important battle in the literary work was the Siege of Alesia where Caesar decisively defeated the large Gallic rebellion led by Vercingetorix. Caesar’s account was written with the intention to advance his political career in Rome. In other words, his motive was not to tell the truth, but rather to make himself sound even more brilliant than he undoubtedly was. When using ‘The Gallic Wars’ for historical writing it is necessary to keep in mind that the source is full of exaggerations and other biases in favour of Caesar.²

At Alesia Caesar claimed to have defeated a Gallic force that numbered 250,000 men, yet modern estimates conclude that the Gallic force was likely not larger than 100,000 men, which still would have represented a large army at the time. The defeated Vercingetorix could not contradict Caesar’s claim by writing his own account, as he was paraded as a prize in Rome and later killed in captivity. In any case, the result of the war is well known and if Caesar exaggerated the numbers at Alesia or ‘failed to mention’ that he lost a skirmish or minor battle it would not have been highly significant, as he won the war and Gaul was incorporated into the expanding Roman Republic. It does, however, signify that generals, like others, like to get credit for their triumphs and even increase the scale of them, while downplaying any setbacks that might dent their credentials.³

For generals who were on the winning side in wars, writings memoirs has been a way of remaining in the public image and making money while doing it. An example of this is Ulysses Sam Grant, Union Commander in chief during the American Civil War. After his presidency he had financial problems, and he published several articles and eventually a book where he retold his experiences from the Mexican-American War and the Civil War. His articles were well received, and the editor persuaded him to retell all his experiences in a book. He finished the book a short period before his death and it was published posthumously.

The book was a large commercial success and generated some $450,000 (which in modern terms represents about $12,000,000) in royalties for Grant’s widow. His book was positively regarded by most critics and served as blueprint for similar publications.\(^4\)

The way in which Grant’s book became such a best seller may well have influenced future generals when they considered telling their own stories. The Second World War is a conflict with a large degree of post war literary publications from both sides. In post-war Germany it became popular for former generals to write about their wartime experiences. These included men who commanded Army Groups in the Soviet Union, like Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, former Chief of Staff in the German Army Heinz Guderian, General Erhard Raus who served on the Eastern front and many others.\(^5\) Writing about the war was not limited to generals, German tank commanders and fighter pilots also published extensive books retelling their war time experiences, like Otto Carius’ book “Tigers in the mud”.\(^6\) Their published memoirs were written with different intentions. It was important to many of these generals to distance themselves from the conduct of the war, and what they regarded as military mistakes committed by Hitler. The books by these various generals almost always included views as to “what went wrong”, why the German Army lost a specific battle or the war as a whole.\(^7\) These books offer a unique perspective on the war and seem to make the reader able to delve into the minds of some of the people who took key decisions in the German conduct of the war. If one, however, thinks that perhaps these people had an agenda when writing their memoirs and sought to distance themselves from decisions they supported or championed they become much more problematic as historical sources for military historians.

This paper seeks to explore the post war writings of German generals and establish whether they wrote truthfully about their experiences or if they attempted to distance themselves from decisions, blame someone else, or take credit for something that can be established that they

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did not do. The specific focus will be the actions of German generals during Operation Zitadelle (Citadel), the failed German attack on the Kursk salient in July 1943. The battle of Kursk has been examined by military historians ever since the war ended and has led to a huge number of published articles and books. The battle has been regarded as one of the main turning points of the war on the Eastern front together with the battle of Moscow in 1941 and the battle of Stalingrad in 1942. Much of the research has been directed at casualty figures, the exact course of the battle, and its significance as the last German offensive on the Eastern front. This paper does not seek to expand on the bulk of knowledge in any of these regards. The work of historians on these previously mentioned topics will be used to further explore the subject of post war writings by German generals, and this paper will answer the following main question: “To what extent did German generals attempt to distance themselves from Operation Zitadelle and who or what did they blame for the failure of the Operation?”

There are problems with using memoirs of German generals as sources. These problems are linked to the memoir genre. The author had motives for writing his memoirs beyond simply retelling his experiences. Interestingly, most of these post-war writings by various German generals shared the same premises. The publications of the high-ranking generals were part of a trend that usually attempted to convey three messages: 1) The German Army had often disagreed with Hitler and viewed Hitler and the leading figures of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) as being largely military incompetent. 2) The German Army was a professional Army that could have won the war if not for the military mistakes of Adolf Hitler. 3) Some officers attempted to distance the German Army from the National Socialist government and the crimes that had been committed by the regime. The Last of these premises was very present in Germany up to the 1990’s when the myth of an entirely ‘clean Wehrmacht’ that had not taken part in the crimes of the war was finally shattered in

8 The paper uses modern English names for Russian and Ukrainian cities.
Germany. The first two messages, however, are still very much present in popular culture as well as in academia. The attempt to distance themselves from the military failures during the war was also essential as many of the generals of the last war were keen to be a part of the reconstruction of the German Army that was debated during the 1950s. To this end it was easy for many German generals to blame Hitler and the OKW for military failures during the war. This myth of a ‘militarily clean Wehrmacht’, that had no part in the key decisions that led to various defeats of the German Army still exists, and it is that myth that this paper seeks to address.

Regarding the battle of Kursk, Hitler has often been given full ‘credit’ for the German defeat, in memoirs written by generals after the war. A quote by Hitler has often been cited to make him sound like the decisive proponent and keenest supporter of the offensive: “The battle of Kursk must be like a finale for the world!” This was cited by General Gotthard Heinrici in an article about the battle of Kursk written after the war. Heinrici claimed that it proved that Hitler had supreme belief in the offensive. If closely examined in context, the quote does, however, merely acknowledge the stakes of the proposed offensive, in addition to being an attempt to heighten the moral of the participating soldiers. This paper will show that several other high-ranking German officers were in fact culpable of the decision and its military consequences and that some of these did their very best to distance themselves from that fact after the failure of Zitadelle became apparent, and even more so when the war itself was lost.

Most German generals who wrote memoirs after the war speculated regarding what would have happened if different military decisions had been taken. Their assertions were usually along the lines that they as professionals should have been listened to, and if that had been the case, the war would have been won. Some of these claims made in various memoirs have been taken seriously by historians and have been regarded as credible. This type of historical writing is commonly known as contrafactual historical research. The battle of Kursk (as well as the Second World War as a whole) has attracted a large amount of contrafactual historical research.

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14 Guderian, Panzer Marsch.
16Steven Newton, Kursk – The German View, Eyewitness Reports of Operation Citadel by the German Commanders, Cambridge Mass. : Da Capo, c2002. & Valeriy Zamulin, “Could Germany have won the battle of Kursk if it had started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?”, in Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Vol
An example is the frequent assertions that were advanced by most German generals that Zitadelle would have succeeded if it had been launched earlier. These types of contrafactual claims have little historical merit, there are just too many factors that makes any such claim mere speculation. Some historians have, however, taken the claims seriously, Steven Newton addressed the case for an earlier start to Zitadelle in “Kursk, the German view” and agreed that the claim had merit. The historian Valeriy Zamulin took the opposite view in an article entitled “Could Germany Have Won the Battle of Kursk if It Had Started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?” and found it wanting. The fact that historians like Newton and Zamulin have engaged with the contrafactual claims made by generals like Manstein and Guderian show that these claims are still relevant to the debate and that many historians still take them seriously. This was, however, more common in the in the 20th century academia.

One of the reasons for this was due to the way German generals were regarded after the war ended. German generals were seen by many Allied generals and public figures as professional soldiers and gentlemen who had served the wrong cause but done so with distinction and a large amount of military competence. Heinz Guderian, Erich von Manstein and Gerd von Rundstedt received great sympathy, particularly from British officers. Manstein’s early release from prison in 1953 had been as a result of public pressure from many, including Winston Churchill and Basil Liddell Hart. Due to this level of public respect the post war accounts of men like Manstein were often believed without any further questions and many historians relied on these sources for their works. An example of this is the 1970 book ‘Manstein, the Master General’ by Colonel Ramrao Palsokar MC with the foreword of the book written by Major General Rustom Zal Kabraji of Bhutan. The title is a giveaway about what the author thought of Manstein. The work relied to a very large degree on information that was retold by Manstein in his publications and used his direct quotes about certain events as proof of their validity.

A later example is the 1995 book ‘Hitler’s generals’ which is a collection of articles and essays about the most foremost German generals of the Second World War. The descriptions

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17 Newton, Kursk the German view, pp. 378-379.

18 Zamulin, Could Germany have won the battle of Kursk, p. 616.


of these generals and field marshals share interesting trends. The chapter about Manstein was written by the late British Field Marshal Michael (Lord) Carver and he opened the chapter with several quotes that flattered Manstein’s abilities, including one from Basel Liddell Hart.\textsuperscript{21} Most of the citations in the chapter about Manstein\textsuperscript{22} and Guderian\textsuperscript{23} are references to their own post war memoirs. The authors of the two chapters were almost blindly believing and regurgitating the written words of Manstein and Guderian and presented them as they wanted to be presented: “Exceedingly competent military figures who questioned Hitler and the OKW’s conduct of the war.”

Opposed to Manstein and Guderian, Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl, who were the leading figures in the OKW were commonly grouped together with Hitler in the post war writings as simply being lackeys of Hitler. This was especially so regarding Keitel who obtained the nickname ‘Lackeitel’ which expressed the opinion of him as a sycophant who served as Hitler’s ‘yes man’ in the prominent position of Chief of the \textit{Wehrmacht} (OKW).\textsuperscript{24} In the chapter that covers Keitel and Jodl (the two are grouped together in one chapter together with Walter Warlimont) is backed by citations that are, to a large degree, works by other German officers. The chapter does not give much credit to either Jodl or Keitel. Walther Görlitz, who was the author of the chapter at one point compared Keitel’s intelligence to that of Keitel’s wife and wrote that: “The young woman was intellectually much more aware than her husband and very fond of good literature.”\textsuperscript{25} Which may well have been true, but it shows how Görlitz took a rather cheap stab at the intelligence of Keitel.

These types of works are therefore questionable as secondary literature as the evidence they based their claims on were heavily biased towards the professional nature of German generals. In order to research the true or false claims that were made by German generals after the war this paper relies primarily on more recent literature by historians as well as primary sources, that in many cases contradicts statement that were later made in the memoirs. In context to the battle of Kursk, this subject has not been widely researched. Some works like “Kursk the German view” compiled post war writings by German generals in context to the

\textsuperscript{22} Carver, \textit{Manstein}, p. 244.
battle of Kursk, however, Steven Newton who edited the book made few comments regarding the validity of the claims that were made in any of the collected writings. A 2017 book by Roman Töppel entitled “Kursk 1943 – Die Größte Schlacht des Zweiten Weltkriegs” does have a chapter that is dedicated to the history of the battle of Kursk and what was written by German generals, German historians as well as Soviet and Russian Historians. Töppel counters a few claims made in famous memoirs, but his analysis is not extensive and most of the chapter is dedicated to the previous, and in his opinion, poor estimates of casualties that were suffered by both sides during the battle. Overall his book is an excellent secondary source for establishing the events before, during, and after the battle and it is used in this paper as a key secondary source during chapter 2.

Books by historians that describe the war time activities of German generals are numerous, some of these, like the previously mentioned books were largely uncritical of German generals, except when it came to Keitel and Jodl. This thesis relies on some such books as secondary sources. Since the number of books is so vast, a selection has been made, based on the quality of the books and what kind of secondary sources they use. In this regard recent publication date, type of cited sources and the credibility of the author have all been evaluated. Old biographies that cover generals, like the book about Manstein26 are therefore not useful as a secondary source. More recent publications like Steven Newton’s book about Walter Model27 or Mungo Melvin’s book on Manstein28 are much more reliable, while recent critical biographies like Russel Hart’s book concerning Guderian29 and Marcel Stein’s book about Model30 are books with a critical view of their respective subjects, rather than writing as an admirer. While these books are interested in the specific personalities they rarely explore, or question memoirs written by the officer in question. It is more usual that the author has a point of view about his subject and has written the book to argue in favour of whatever that view is. An example is Hart who regards Guderian as a “Myth maker” rather than a “Panzer Pioneer” and at one point argues that Guderian was extremely egotistical. As evidence he cites the fact that Guderian supposedly wanted to cancel the construction of a specific type of tank destroyer because he was not given control over it, even though it had proven battle

26 Palsokar, Manstein the Master General.
28 Mungo, Manstein – Hitler’s Greatest General.
value. These books that offer a critical perspective on the subject person can be useful, but the claims made in these books, like in the books where the authors are admiring the general in question, need to be carefully examined, as some points might be based on evidence that is carefully picked to give one specific view.

Other historical works have focused more on whether the casualties suffered by either side represented substantial losses and to what degree the battle of Kursk represented a turning point. Important contributions have been made by Niklas Zetterling and Anders Frankson, and Steven Newton’s volume has a chapter directly countering the claims made by Zetterling and Frankson. Roman Töppel has also made important contributions to this debate, as have Christer Bergström and David Glantz and Jonathan House.

In order to examine the battle of Kursk, background information on the war on the Eastern front as well as German military tactics used during the war are necessary. The battle of Kursk was a part of the larger war in the East and it is necessary to examine the military confrontations that took place in the years 1941/42. Secondary sources that focus on these subjects include works by David Glantz, Rolf-Dieter Müller, Anthony Beevor, Robert Kirchubel and Robert Forczyk. Heinz Guderian’s pre-war book, “Achtung Panzer” that offered a perspective on how armoured warfare should be conducted is also relevant as several of its proposed tactics were adopted by the German Army.

In order to answer the research question reliable secondary sources that can establish the actual course of events prior to, during and after the battle of Kursk are crucial. This is supplemented by archival material from the Military Archive in Freiburg. This course of events will be compared to the written memoirs of German generals. The selection of memoirs has been made with considerations of length and variety. Some memoirs were written by corps commanders, and others were the head of and Army Group. They include

31 Hart, Guderian - Panzer Pioneer or Myth Maker?, pp. 87-88.
33 & Newton, Kursk – The German View.
famous names, such as Field Marshal Erich von Manstein and General Heinz Guderian, Theodor Busse, von Manstein’s chief of staff, less well known generals such as Erhard Raus and Gottard Heinrici who at the time were Corps commanders and had almost no say in the decisions made by Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH) and OKW, and the then Chief of staff of the OKH Kurt Zeitzler.

This selection of memoirs should allow for a broad analysis of what generals of different positions wrote after the war. Memoirs are, often unreliable sources when attempting to discover course of events or what the author thought at the time they occurred. They are more often a source of what the writer thought when they were writing, with the benefit of hindsight. Partly, the problem is one that can be linked to the weakness of human memory, which would explain why any of the generals might have misremembered the date of a specific event. If the author, however, claimed that major events were exceedingly different from what can be found in archives or other sources, then the writing would seem to be an intentional mistake, rather than a failure of memory. In this paper there is not really a problem with using memoirs, because it is the very unreliable nature of these kind of sources that will be investigated by comparing them and the claims made in them to sources that remain untampered, such as archive material or second-hand sources based on more ‘reliable’ forms of historical evidence.

During the paper there are instances when memoirs are compared to the diary entries of Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda. Using a personal source such as his diaries may seem problematic for the same reasons as using memoirs, that is not the case. The diaries were written during the war and were not meant to be published in order to persuade people of one truth or another. If Goebbels for example wrote that “I Met with Guderian today, he suggested that we should stop establishing more divisions, but rather refit the divisions that are already in the order of battle. He asked me to talk to Himmler about this, as Himmler had expressed wishes to do the opposite. I confirmed that I would meet Himmler and discuss the matter.” If that was a real quotation the only piece of information that would be doubtful would be if Himmler had opposed Guderian’s proposition. The diaries have become more popular as sources in recent research and have been used by historians like Töppel as evidence.37

37 Töppel, Kursk 1943. p. 31.
The most dubious sources throughout the research for this paper has been in relation to selecting secondary sources. As mentioned, many of the authors of biographies of German generals had a very clear view about the abilities of the general in question, whether he was a “genius” or a “myth maker”. Much of the work has therefore been to discern the biases of the various authors and compare their work on for example Manstein to that written by someone who had a different view about him. The reality is usually somewhere in the middle and often based on the same sources. Different historians have just drawn different conclusions on more or less the same evidence.

The paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 will examine German military tactics used during the Second World War and their origin, then describe very quickly how these tactics were used in the early campaigns of the war to secure victories in Poland, France and the Low countries. The German attack on the Soviet Union will then be examined, this will include a description of National Socialist ideology and the view that was commonly held, particularly by German generals, regarding the Soviet Union and its people. There will then be a description of the most important events that occurred during 1941 with a conclusion about the German strategic situation at the end of 1941. The events of 1942 will then be briefly described, this will include the battle of Stalingrad and the following Soviet counter offensive. The rest of the chapter will describe the planning of operation Zitadelle, the course of the battle of Kursk and the significance of the offensive will be examined.

Chapter 2 will examine the course of events during the spring of 1943, which generals wanted to take what action and who was in favour of or opposed to Zitadelle and for what reason. This chapter will be based on archived materials, supplemented by secondary sources to establish conclusively what for example Manstein advocated at the time. In chapter 3 the statements made in memoirs will be examined and compared to the events described in chapter 2. By doing this it can be established which generals changed their stories after the war. The chapter will also draw conclusions about why some of these generals wrote that they had acted completely differently to what will have been established in the preceding chapter.

Chapter 4 will offer an answer to the research question and sum up the most important points that has been made in the paper.
Chapter 1, Theory and background

1.1 German Military tactics

1.1.1 Blitzkrieg, Kesselschlacht and Schwerpunkt

When Germany’s military tactics and strategy during the Second World War are discussed, the term ‘Blitzkrieg’ is usually used to describe a mechanized and motorized army supported from the air. These forces then proceed to break through the enemy lines and achieve a quick victory.\(^{38}\) This was designed to avoid the static trench warfare that had defined the First World War, at least on the Western Front.\(^{39}\) The term ‘Blitzkrieg’, however, was not primarily used by the German Army to describe their own tactics, it was a term that was invented by Western journalists to describe the quick German military successes that were achieved in the early years of the second world war.\(^{40}\) The German military was centred around a concept called *Vernichtungsschlacht*, which translates to annihilation-battle that was meant to end the war through a single battle. It is essentially a concept that hails back to the 19\(^{th}\) century, were the focus is to force the surrender of the enemy army in one quick battle, this would in most cases lead on to a strategic victory and end the war quickly.\(^{41}\) The *Schlieffen Plan* from the First World War is a perfect example of a campaign planned with the *Vernichtungsschlacht* concept in mind. The practical way in which Germany had planned and still planned to achieve a *Vernichtungsschlacht* was through trapping the enemy in a *Kesselschlacht*, which roughly translates to ‘encirclement-battle’ or ‘pocket-battle’. In practice this meant that the German Army strived to break up the enemy, then encircle them and finally force the surrender of the encircled men. This, too, was an old concept and the German Army simply modernized it with the use of tanks and aircraft in what German generals referred to as *Bewegungskrieg*, a war of movement.\(^{42}\) In 1939 and throughout the war, the German Army never had the mass of trucks and tanks required for it to be close to mechanized. Rearmament and German production were not quick enough to supply enough of the new weapons of war to fully mechanize the Army. Most of the Army was comprised of infantry divisions, where the men marched on foot and most of their guns and heavy

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equipment were towed by horses, not trucks.\textsuperscript{43} Germany possessed an army that was essentially split into two parts during the war, the largest part was made up of infantry, marching and fighting on foot and the smaller and faster panzer part, which was made up of tanks and infantry carried in trucks or half-tracks. The panzer part of the army which was divided into panzer-groups and later, panzer armies, would have to conduct large scale encircling manoeuvres and after this was done, they had to wait for the infantry to catch up on foot and destroy the encircled enemy. This meant that the momentum in the general advance would be determined by how quickly the infantry could catch up and how quickly they were able to force the encircled enemy to surrender.\textsuperscript{44} A further problem with the concept was that “destroying the enemy force” was a very vague objective, it could refer to disarming the enemy army, but also to force them to surrender by any means. This gave German generals a very large degree of flexibility in terms of how brutally they decided to pursue the objective. This flexibility was partially responsible for the extremely brutal pursuit of the war on the Eastern front. Airpower was used either to support the advance of the panzers, by bombing enemy strong-points, targeting enemy airfields to destroy aircraft on the ground, hindering enemy airpower from damaging German ground troops and targeting enemy ground troops to cause casualties and disrupt their organization. The \textit{Luftwaffe} thus operated merely as a tactical air force that supported ground operations.\textsuperscript{45}

Germany’s Panzer arm, despite being described as ‘fearsome’ by journalists at the time, was not of that calibre in 1939. It did consist of highly trained men and officers, but early in the war their tanks left a lot to be desired.\textsuperscript{46} Most of the German tanks in the early campaigns were the models Panzer I and Panzer II. The Panzer I was only armed with a machine gun and the Panzer II was armed with a 20mm anti-aircraft weapon. These would eventually be surpassed by the heavier models, Panzer III and Panzer IV. Both variants were redesigned with larger and better armaments during the war as the original Panzer IV (often described as the Workhorse of the panzer-arm) was armed with a low velocity gun that made it perform poorly in tank-to-tank action.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite the weaknesses of the Panzer I and II, Germany conducted their armoured operations with tactics that had been developed with the experiences from the First World War.

\textsuperscript{44} Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad 1942}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{45} Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad 1942}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{46} Zetterling, \textit{Angrepet på Polen -1939}, p. 24.
Germany’s use of tanks was eventually largely based on concepts developed by Heinz Guderian. Guderian published a book in 1937 called ‘Achtung Panzer!’ in which he outlined how armoured troops should be used to win a swift victory in any future war. Guderian wrote in the book that his ideas were largely a further development of British experiences and ideas dating back to the First World War.48 He further described the need for mass production of tanks to provide large enough numbers to perform massed attacks49. The tanks should be employed ‘en masse’ and in surprise attacks50. This concentration of armour in an area where the opponent is weaker is what became known in the German Army as Schwerpunkt. To win the next war, Guderian reasoned that Germany would need not only a swift and powerful panzer force to strike, but also enough effective anti-tank weapons for the infantry, in order to stop the enemy from successful massed tank attacks, or at least slow them down until mobile panzer forces could be brought up to deny any breakthrough51. Guderian summed up the most important factors for a successful armoured offensive as such: 1) suitable terrain, the attack should be made where there were few natural hinderers to the tanks and few man-made hinderers (concrete defences, mines etc); 2) complete (or at least partial) surprise; 3) massed attack that would achieve breakthrough in breadth and depth52. When Manstein presented his plan of attack against France to the OKH in late 1939 and early 1940, he specifically cited the need for most of the principles outlined by Guderian: Schwerpunkt, initiative, speed and mobility. Rolf-Dieter Müller argues that these principles led to the German victory against France in 1940.53

48 Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, pp. 88-89.
49 Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, pp. 72-73.
50 Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, p. 76.
51 Guderian, Achtung Panzer! p. 158.
52 Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, p. 181.
53 Müller, Hitler’s Wehrmacht, 1935-1945, p. 64.
1.1.2 Examples from early campaigns

These various concepts of war were first used during the German invasion of Poland which began on the 1st of September 1939. The German attack began without any formal declaration of war, this was done in order to achieve maximum surprise when German forces began their operations. German forces, spearheaded by 6 Panzer divisions broke through Polish defences, behind these followed another 48 German infantry divisions. Despite the heavy resistance that was encountered by German forces in certain areas of the front, the Polish Army was unable to retreat and was subsequently encircled and eliminated as a fighting force (see map 1). Warsaw held out against German forces until the 27th of September, but after heavy aerial bombardment by the Luftwaffe, the city surrendered. The last Polish forces surrendered on the 6th of October. German losses were low, totalling about 45,000 men. The Polish Army suffered much higher losses, 66,000 dead, 133,000 wounded and almost 700,000 prisoners. The German victory against Poland was achieved with astonishing speed, but there had been problems with various parts of the execution. The German offensive had been helped greatly by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, which had ensured that Soviet forces had attacked Poland’s eastern border on the 17th of September. The German Army recognized that there were substantial weaknesses in the German Army. Many of these were related to the very quick expansion of the German Army between 1935 and-1939 which meant that many German soldiers and officers were not trained adequately. This was dealt with by introducing intense training programs that were largely completed before the start of the Western offensive in 1940 and most problems were corrected.54

The Western Allies had largely been idle while the German Army occupied Poland. The strategy of Britain and France relied upon the new war being similar to the previous World War. The French Army was largely focused on defensive doctrine and relied on the fortified Maginot Line. Britain and France determined that they could blockade Germany and target the natural resources that Germany depended on to fight any war. This led to inactivity in the first 8 months of the war, often called the Phoney War. The inactivity was broken when the Western Allies decided to mine the Norwegian coast to target German imports of iron ore from Sweden. Hitler’s response was to order the OKW to plan an offensive that would secure both Norway and Denmark using land, sea and air forces. The final plan was codenamed Weserübung (Weser exercise). The operation began on the 9th of April 1940. Denmark was

quickly occupied and surrendered to German forces in matter of hours. Fighting in Norway was more protracted, but despite reinforcements from Britain and France and the large presence of the Royal Navy in Norwegian waters, Norway was occupied and surrendered on the 10th of June 1940. The occupation of Norway and Denmark, although a German victory cost the German surface navy large numbers of warships they could ill afford. 350,000 German soldiers were also tied down to guard the long Norwegian coastline for the rest of the war. Although the German doctrine allowed for the swift occupation of countries, the task of guarding these occupied areas had largely been overlooked and as the war continued, an ever larger number of German troops would be tied down in garrison duties, and many became casualties in increasingly larger clashes with various resistance movements that became a drain on German manpower.55

When OKH began planning the offensive that was to take place against France and the Low Countries in 1940 their first effort produced a plan that was extremely similar to the Schlieffen Plan that had been used in 1914. The plan called for a diversionary attack against the Maginot line and a strong attack through Belgium and the Netherlands. Hitler and some generals like Guderian were unhappy with the plan and Guderian was shown an alternative plan developed by Erich von Manstein which called for a decoy strike against the Maginot Line and one against Belgium and the Netherlands. This would convince the French and British to move their forces into Belgium to contest the German offensive. At this point the real German armoured strike would be executed through the heavily forested Ardennes region in Belgium, once penetrated the German armoured force was to advance to the English Channel and cut off the retreat of the British and French forces that had advanced into Belgium. The plan was eventually adopted by the German leadership and called Sichelschnitt (sickle cut) (see map 2). The plan relied on surprise and speed and would, if it was successful, encircle a large part of the French and Allied forces. The German Army was outnumbered for its proposed offensive, the allies had about twice as many artillery pieces, 4,204 tanks compared to 2,439 German tanks, the Luftwaffe was also outnumbered in the air. The Luftwaffe was, however, equipped with far more modern planes compared to any of the Western Allies.56

When the German offensive began on the 10th of May the Luftwaffe largely dealt with the enemy superior numbers by executing massed bombings of allied airfields which destroyed many aircraft on the ground. The German attack succeeded in drawing the British and French

forces into Belgium while the main German force moved through the Ardennes. Once the German armoured force penetrated the forest, they struck the French defences at Sedan and broke through, although the Allies had almost twice as many tanks, throught the Schwerpunkt doctrine, the Germans had a large localized numerical superiority. Historian Rolf-Dieter Müller wrote that this caused the French defences to collapse like “a house of cards”.

Guderian, who was in charge of the armoured forces, had been told to wait at Sedan for the infantry to catch up; instead he ordered his forces to move towards the English Channel as quickly as possible. His forces reached the coast on the 20th of May and thus trapped 1,7 million allied troops in Belgium. At this point, Guderian’s commanding general, Gerd von Rundstedt ordered the Panzer forces to halt and wait for the infantry. This allowed British forces to secure the port of Dunkirk as an evacuation point. When the German forces were ordered to continue their attack, it was too late; the Royal Navy had begun evacuating the forces in Dunkirk. When the evacuation ended on the 4th of June almost 200,000 British and 123,000 French soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk, despite constant bombardment from the Luftwaffe. Despite this success, 40,000 French soldiers were left to surrender at Dunkirk. The British also left behind all their materiel, which included 2472 artillery pieces and anti-tank guns and 63,879 vehicles of all types.57

The German offensive towards Paris began on the 5th of June. Despite a new French defensive line, German armoured forces succeeded in breaking through quickly. Other German armoured forces were also able to attack the Maginot Line from the rear. On the 10th of June, while the last British and French forces were evacuated from Norway, Italy joined the war on the German side. The French asked for an armistice on the 20th of June, this resulted in the occupation of France and the establishment of the Vichy government, which was allowed to keep 100,000 strong Army, the French navy and the French colonies.58

The German offensive managed to force the surrender of France in a matter of weeks, something which had eluded the Imperial German Army for 4 years during the First World War. The German Army’s confidence was extremely high after the victory. France had been seen as the great land power in the inter-war years and the seeming easy with which their surrender was achieved gave birth to illusions within the German Army. In fact, the Western offensive, while being a success, highlighted several weaknesses with the German doctrine and with the German Army. In localized battles where the French Army had managed to

establish defences the losses among attacking German divisions were high. The halt before Dunkirk showed the weakness caused by having to wait for infantry divisions to catch up with the armoured forces. The evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk that had been enabled by the halt of the German armoured forces allowed Britain to continue the war, but the huge materiel losses ensured that British forces were unable to mount any large landings on the European continent in the near future. The Italian entry into the war on the German side also seemed like an important factor that would further strengthen the Axis side, but the Italian Army was poorly trained and under-equipped and its navy and air forces were largely outdated. The Italian entry in the war eventually caused more problems for the German war effort, as German troops had to be diverted to help the various Italian efforts. There was also some confusion in the German command structure, Weserübung had been planned by the OKW, while the Western Offensive had been planned by the OKH. The responsibilities of the two commands were unclear. The huge success against France would, however, embolden Hitler and other senior officials to embark on the attempted conquest of the USSR, while Britain was still in the war.

1.2 The German attack on the USSR (1941)

1.2.1 Vernichtungskrieg, War of Annihilation

Operation Barbarossa was the codename given for the German attack on the USSR which was set to begin on the 22nd of June 1941. It was named after Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I ‘Barbarossa’ who led a crusade aimed to recapture Jerusalem. David M. Glantz refers to the fact that the name was appropriate as the attack on the Soviet Union was, in many ways, Hitler’s personal crusade.  

Hitler’s crusade against the Soviet Union was based on his beliefs as explained in “Mein Kampf”. He thought that he had a unique mission to lead Germany out its times of hardship and to greatness. He desired to make a racially pure Volksgemeinschaft (national community) of Germany, which went hand in hand with his obsession over the “Jewish question”. The “Jewish question” was interwoven with the evils of bolshevism as well as the wish to conquer Lebensraum for Germany. Providing both lands to be colonised by Germans as well as the resources to secure Germany’s continued security and prosperity. Hitler’s link between Bolshevism and Semitism ensured that there was no question in his mind in terms of the need for a war with the USSR and that the ensuing war would be a fight to the death between the two ideologies.  

As mentioned, Germany’s reasons for going to war with the Soviet Union were deeply ideological and rooted in the unified concepts of anti-bolshevism, anti-Semitism and Lebensraum. Christian Streit referred to the German war in the East as “Hitler’s eigentlichen krieg” (Hitler’s real war) and that Hitler wanted to pursue it for ideological reasons regardless of whether Britain was still active in the war against Germany. The National Socialist view on the populace of the USSR was that these people were sub-humans and largely on the same level as Jews. The war in the East would be fought with these extremely dogmatic beliefs firmly in mind and plans were made regarding how Soviet prisoners of war were to be treated. German officers received specific rules on how to treat commissars, if captured, these were to be shot as they had “betrayed all aspects of European culture, civilization and order” and were therefore exempt from the treatment that were to be offered to normal prisoners of war.

60 David Glantz, Barbarossa: Hitler’s invasion of Russia, 1941, United Kingdom : Tempus Publishing Ltd., 2001, p. 13  
63 Streit, Keine Kameraden, p. 46 [my own translation].
These beliefs were not simply held by Hitler and members of the Nazi party, but were, according to Streit, held by the elites of the Wehrmacht as well as the general army personnel.\(^6^4\)

The German army treated prisoners of war differently depending on their ethnicity and nationality, for example, Norwegians were treated courteously, released quickly and allowed visits from the international Red Cross. Flemish prisoners were treated better than Walloons, although both groups were Belgian. The Flemish were released quickly while Walloons were brought to Germany for work duties, as were the French. Below these were Greeks, although these were treated better than Serbs (on Hitler’s direct orders) and the Serbs were in turn treated better than Poles. Polish prisoners received about two thirds of the daily rations that French prisoners received. The Soviet prisoners were to be placed at the very bottom of this hierarchy. German soldiers were told not to feed Soviet prisoners to the same standards as western soldiers because “[…] poverty, hunger and modesty defines the Russian. His stomach is stretchable, have no mistaken pity with this. Do not try to measure their way of life by comparing it to a German standard.”\(^6^5\) Soviet prisoners were assigned harsh work duties, such as building roads and were given rations that constituted no more than 300 calories per day. The result was that most prisoners died of malnutrition or starvation. The German Army also made few preparations for the mass of Soviet prisoners they were expecting to capture, the combined camps that had been built in Poland had an absolute capacity of 790,000 people. This resulted in prison camps that were overcrowded, and the malnourished Soviet prisoners were vulnerable to disease. An official German report from the 19\(^\text{th}\) of February 1942 stated that of the 3.9 million Soviet prisoners that had been captured since the start of the war, only 1.1 million were alive, in January of 1942 alone 500,000 had died.\(^6^6\)

The German plans called for the Wehrmacht to be fed entirely from food-sources in the East once the USSR was defeated. It was acknowledged that this would lead to starvation and death of several million civilians, but that this was simply to be ignored. Russia was then largely to be de-industrialized and brought back to the state it had been in before 1913 or even 1900. Actual German occupation in the East never actually reached the scale that these plans envisioned, but the occupation was by any standard barbaric and brutal. The brutality of the war in the East was partially fostered by the death struggle that was desired by the national

\(^6^4\) Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 25 [my own translation].
\(^6^5\) Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, p. 65 [my own translation].
\(^6^6\) Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, pp. 70, 72-73, 128, 131.
socialist ideology. Specific guidelines were given to German troops in May 1941 on how they should conduct themselves in the East:

“1) Bolshevism is the mortal enemy of the National Socialist German people. 2) This fight demands ruthless and energetic measures against bolshevist rabble-rousers, partisans, saboteurs, Jews and a restless fight against active as well as passive resistance. 3) Soldiers are to take care when handling Red Army soldiers, these are not to be trusted and are to be treated with suspicion, especially the Asian soldiers of the Red Army who are known to be erratic, sneaky and without feelings.”

This was the first German order that equated Jews with partisans just because of their religious adherence. The order was in general marked by racism and gave the German soldier a right to act against “active as well as passive resistance”, if examined this meant that German soldiers could do more or less what they wanted, as all these criteria combined could be levied against almost anyone. This led to behaviour that fostered increasingly active resistance in the East as the war dragged on. The fact that such brutal guidelines would foster opposition that would require large numbers of German troops on guard duties and anti-partisan operations in rear areas was completely overlooked by German planners.

For Germany’s allies the war with the Soviet Union were largely rooted in practical ambitions which can be understood in terms of self-preservation and national advancement. It should, however, be mentioned that among many of Germany’s allies there were deeply rooted fears of the spread of communism as well as anti-Semitism, notably among Germany’s Balkan allies, Hungary and Romania.

The Romanian government was intent on recovering Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, which had been taken from the country by the Soviet Union in 1940. They had also been promised the port of Odessa with the surrounding territory upon the defeat of the Soviet Union. Finland’s contribution was largely a consequence of wanting to re-capture the territory ceded to the Soviet Union after the Winter War of 1939 (see map 3) and, redress the balance of power, but not the conquest of Russia, at least not in the terms that Germany wanted. The Finns did, however, have large and highly bitter feelings towards the Soviet Union. Hungary, whose military contribution on the Eastern front would grow steadily also had territorial goals.

67 Streit, Keine Kameraden, p. 65 [my own translation]
68 Streit, Keine Kameraden, pp. 50, 63-65, 83.
with the effort. Hitler had ensured that Northern Transylvania, which contained large Hungarian minorities, was ceded by Romania to Hungary. This territorial concession was highly popular in Hungary. The German regime, however, used this as both a stick and carrot. They essentially told the Hungarian government that: “If the Romanians contribute more to the Eastern front than you do, we will have to re-consider who should be the owner of Transylvania.”\footnote{Per Erik Olsen, \textit{Militære Operasjoner 3, Vinterkrigen}, Skallstad : Ares Forlag, 2012. p. 109 & Kovacs, \textit{Tysklands allierte: Ungarn}, p. 21. & Robert Edwards, \textit{Hvit Død – Sovjets krig mot Finland 1939-1940}, Oslo : Vega Forlag, 2012, p. 294.}
1.2.2 Operation Barbarossa

The operation was by this time the largest military offensive in history. The German invasion force consisted of 151 German divisions. These included 19 panzer divisions and 15 motorised infantry divisions. All in all, 3.8 Million German soldiers in three Army Groups were ready to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941. These were supported by German allies, primarily Finland, who contributed to the attack with 14 divisions and Romania, with 13 divisions and eight brigades. In the case of Romania this force represented virtually their entire military. There were, however, contingents from Germany’s other Axis partners as well. Hungary contributed with the so called “Fast Corps”, consisting of 24,000 men and 81 Hungarian made tanks. Italy, who was Germany’s closest ally eventually contributed to Barbarossa with the “Italian Expedition Corps in Russia” (C.S.I.R.), which consisted of a battalion of light tanks and 62,000 men. The last contribution was from Slovakia and consisted of a brigade, the “Mobile Brigade” (later Division) “Pilfousek”, which added 132 tanks and 43 other armoured fighting vehicles. The overall goal of the offensive was to defeat the USSR in a single campaign and thus secure German dominance on the mainland of Europe. This was expected to be done by armoured formations encircling the Soviet Army, that would then be forced to surrender. The strategic goals of the Operation were expected to be secured when the Soviet Army was destroyed. ⁷¹

The three army groups had specific targets. Army Group North commanded by Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb. Von Leeb had the smallest of the Army Groups, at his disposal were 30 divisions and another four in Northern Norway. Von Leeb’s Army Group had suffered the most from the Balkan campaign undertaken earlier in 1941, and of the 21 divisions it sent to the effort, only five were returned to the Army Group, none of these were motorized. Army Group North was, however, the only group to receive substantial support from the Kriegsmarine during Barbarossa. The Army Group also contained the Waffen SS Totenkopf division and the SS Polizei division. Von Leeb’s objectives were to move quickly into the Baltic states and neutralize the Soviet forces stationed there. For this task it had been given 1 Panzer-Group, commanded by general Hoepner. Von Leeb’s forces were then tasked with capturing the Soviet naval base of Kronstadt and seize the important city of Leningrad. Army

Group North was expected to link up with the Finns while capturing Leningrad. The 4 divisions in Northern Norway had the objective of capturing the Soviet port of Murmansk. Army Group Centre, commanded by Fedor von Bock, was the largest of the three Army Groups. It had 55 divisions, 13 of which were panzer or motorized infantry, these were organized in two Panzer-Groups, one of these was commanded by Heinz Guderian. The Army Group also had the elite Großdeutschland regiment and the Waffen SS Das Reich division under command. Army Group Centre had as its main objective to destroy the Soviet forces in Byelorussia. It was expected to drive through the enemy front and encircle a large section of the enemy around Minsk, then pause and allow the logistics to catch up before moving further east and forming another pocket by encircling Smolensk. Taking Moscow was a minor target at this point, victory for Army Group Centre was defined by them being able to defeat and annihilate the Soviet Army west of the Dvina and Dnepr rivers. Hitler was in agreement, he said during the planning of Barbarossa that destroying the Soviet army was the main objective, not the capture of Moscow.

Army Group South, commanded by Gerd von Rundstedt, consisted of 972,000 German troops, 175,000 of which were in Romania. These men were grouped in 55 divisions. Army Group South also had Waffen SS units under its command, first and foremost the I. SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and the SS Motorized Division Wiking. The men of the Wiking division were drawn from Scandinavian, Dutch and Flemish volunteers. Von Rundstedt’s objectives were to destroy the Red Army on their sector of the front, capture Kiev and the Dnepr river-crossings, seize the Donbass, capture Rostov and thereby open the road towards the oil fields of the Caucasus. Rundstedt’s Army Group was thus the only of the three to have mostly economic objectives, his task was to secure the valuable resources of Ukraine which were needed by the expanding German war economy. The German plan called for elimination of Russia in a single year of campaigning and had no real contingencies should this fail. The operation called for German forces to eliminate the largest military in the world at the time, advance 1,750 km in depth along a front of about 1,800 km. Even though this was a behemoth task, Hitler and many German generals were optimistic. They had defeated France in a relatively short period of time and the Soviet

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73 Kirchubel, Operation Barbarossa, pp. 23, 44, 49-50, 92-94.
74 Kirchubel, Operation Barbarossa, p. 23, 33 & Kirchubel, Operation Barbarossa 1941 (1) : army group south, pp. 24, 33.
military was in a poor state, as had been seen during the Winter war (November 1939 – February 1940). Goebbels wrote about a conversation he had with Hitler in November 1939: “He [Hitler] again pointed out the catastrophic condition of the Russian Army. It is as good as useless in battle. […] It was similar with their industry. This malady affects the whole country and makes it incapable of assessing its own abilities correctly.” This underestimation of the Soviet Union was not exclusively held by Hitler. The German objective of simply eliminating the existing Soviet Army proved that Hitler and many of his generals completely underestimated the ability of the Soviet Union to suffer losses and quickly mobilize new reserves. The view that was held about the Soviet Union by most of the German military is summed up by a quote from Hitler: “We only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down.”

Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus who, after the war, tried to replicate the optimistic spirit that he and others had in 1941: “[…] tremendous vigour of National Socialist policy, then at its zenith […] complete confidence born of the victory in the western campaign.” The German leadership took another large risk when entering into a war with the USSR. If Barbarossa was unsuccessful in defeating the Soviet Union in the first year, Germany would face a war on two fronts, as Britain was still fighting in the west. A war on two fronts had been a crucial factor in Germany’s defeat during the First World War and was likely to be problematic if entered into again. Hitler was preparing for a quick victory against the USSR. German production plans for the future was actually set for new operations in other areas than the East and this would leave German units in the East with little materiel if they failed to win a decisive victory in 1941. David Glantz wrote that: “The Wehrmacht had to win a quick victory or none at all.”

The German soldiers that were preparing for Barbarossa were supported by about 7,200 artillery pieces, 625,000 horses and 600,000 of trucks and lorries. The trucks were of 2,000 different variants. The logistical side was the clear ‘Achilles heel’ of the force, as getting spare parts for 2,000 different varieties of lorries was any quartermaster’s nightmare. The logistical part of the operation was made harder by the poor state of infrastructure in large

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79 Glantz, Barbarossa: Hitler’s invasion of Russia, 1941, p. 22
parts of the Soviet Union, the absence of paved roads and the underdeveloped nature of much of the rail system made suppling large forces difficult. As the German brutality in occupied areas fostered increasing partisan activity the few roads and rail lines were frequently attacked, further limiting the supplies that were received by German frontline units. 

*Barbarossa* deployed about 3,350 tanks in 19 panzer divisions at the start of the operation. The average strength of a German panzer division was about 125 operational tanks in each panzer division. In terms of manpower they averaged about 17,000. All these troops were supported by roughly 2,770 aircraft. This contribution by the *Luftwaffe* represented about 65% of German air strength at the time. Due to the losses that the *Luftwaffe* had sustained during the battle of Britain they fielded 200 fewer bombers for this campaign than they had during the western offensive of 1940.80

As *Barbarossa* was launched on the 22nd of June 1941 it seemed as though any concerns held before the start had been unnecessary. German forces tore through the Soviet defences all along the front and captured huge numbers of Soviet troops. The German formations also moved quickly through the Soviet held areas and Germany seemed poised for a quick victory against the Soviets. On the first day, Army Group North advanced some 60 miles and by the 26th of June the Fourth Panzer Group of Army Group North advanced some 270 miles. On the 31st of June the infantry of Army Group North captured Riga. By the 2nd of July the Soviet forces attempting to stop Army Group North had lost 90,000 men, 1,000 tanks, 4,000 guns and mortars and over 1,000 aircraft.81

In less than three weeks, Army Group Centre had advanced some 360 miles inside Soviet territory, inflicted almost 420,000 casualties, captured or destroyed 4,799 tanks, 9,427 guns and mortars and 1,777 aircraft. The only initial problems were faced by Army Group South. In this sector, the Soviet Army launched armoured counterattacks that delayed the German advance, nevertheless, by the 30th of June, the Soviets had lost 2,600 tanks and German forces were closing in on Kiev. Army Group Centre’s advances were stalled as it had to eliminate the Soviet formations it had encircled in three pockets around Minsk. This meant that the advance of the Panzer Groups had to be delayed until the infantry divisions could subdue the encircled units. Hitler was extremely optimistic and ordered that new production lines be prepared to fight the British. Optimism was not limited to Hitler, Franz Halder (then the OKH Chief of Staff) wrote in his diary: “The objective to shatter the bulk of the Russian Army this

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[western] side of the Dvina and Dnieper has been accomplished… It is thus probably no overstatement to say that the Russian Campaign has been won in the space of two weeks.  

This view completely neglected the ability of the Soviet Union to mobilize new armies. Even though the forces the German Army had neutralized in the first two weeks were enormous by any standards, in June the Soviets formed nine new armies, a further thirteen in July and another fifteen in August.

On the 4th of July the Soviets put up a staunch defence against von Bock’s advancing panzer groups as well as counterattacks. This was a surprise to Army Group Centre’s leadership as they believed they had destroyed everything the Soviets had at Minsk. Although these counterattacks succeeded in driving German units back in some areas, they ultimately failed and cost the Soviets many tanks. After the Soviet disaster at Minsk the German panzer groups of Army Group Centre started encountering the so-called Stalin Line. The Stalin line consisted of fortified areas, some of which were very strong, while others were lacking. After some breakthrough attempts the operational number of tanks in one of Guderian’s Panzer Divisions stood at only 35 percent. The Soviet defenders that had been holding some of these sections were beginning to retreat towards Smolensk, where the Soviet leadership began to organize defences. This played into German plans, and the two Panzer Groups of Army Group Centre encircled the city and Soviet troops by the 26th of July. Although the pocket appeared closed, von Bock complained in his diary that there was a hole through which the Soviet defenders could escape. This ensured that two Soviet armies made it out before German troops succeeded in securing the encirclement. This problem was not new to the German Army, because the infantry divisions were largely unmotorized and could simply not keep up with the panzer formations. This ensured that although many Soviets were captured in the main pocket operations, many escaped the encirclements and were able to reorganize and meet the German advance further to the East. It was the same problem that had led to the British evacuation at Dunkirk.

German troops also started encountering tanks which their anti-tank weapons and tanks had problems dealing with, especially the T-34 and the KV-1. These tanks were largely invulnerable to the main German anti-tank weapons, especially the Pak 36. This anti-tank gun, which had been modern in the mid 1930’s was totally inadequate against the modern

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Soviet tanks and was often referred to by German soldiers as ‘Panzer anklopfgeräte’, roughly meaning ‘doorknocker’. It was, however, not only the PAK36 that had problems.  

General Raus wrote about his first encounter with a KV1 on the 24th of June 1941. His force belonged to the 6th panzer division of Army Group North. He wrote how the supply route to his unit was blocked for almost 2 days by a single KV1 tank. Attempts to destroy it with new PAK 38 guns was first attempted. Raus described how the confidence of his soldiers went from cheering when the tank was hit directly several times to one of disbelief when the tank survived and proceeded to knock out several of the PAK 38 guns. These attempts by the German to destroy it with PAK 38 guns left only indents in the armour of the Soviet tank. Shots from light German tanks left no marks at all, and even demolition charges exploded on the tank by engineers failed to destroy the KV. A diversion manoeuvre by light German tanks made it possible for Raus’ men to manoeuvre a FLAK 88 gun within close range and this gun was able to eliminate the KV. The encounter with what Raus described as “the monster” cost Raus’ force 12 lorries, several PAK 38 guns and a damaged FLAK 88 gun. The fact that the PAK 38 guns were useless against the KV tank was especially crushing, as these guns had replaced the PAK 36 guns and were meant to be state of the art.

Despite the presence of these superior Soviet tanks the men of Army Group Centre continued to press further ahead. By the 5th of August they had encircled and eliminated the Soviet forces in the Smolensk pocket. Army Group Centre captured 302,000 prisoners of war and captured or destroyed a further 3,205 tanks, 3,120 guns and 1,098 aircraft. The total number of Soviet casualties since the start of operation Barbarossa was likely as high as 3,000,000 men. At this point Hitler was full of optimism and personally flew to congratulate von Bock on the success around Smolensk. Hitler decided at this point to divert the Panzer Groups belonging to Army Group Centre to the North and South. Von Bock and Guderian both despaired at this decision, as they were convinced that Moscow could have been easily taken at this point. Part of Hitler’s consideration was caused by the fact that the horses and men of Army Group Centre were entirely exhausted at this point. Von Bock and Guderian had no way of knowing that Stalin had personally ordered a massive reinforcement to be made between Smolensk and Moscow.

85 McNab, Hitler’s Army, p. 126.
86 Raus, Panzerkrieg på Ostfronten, p. 21, 39, 44, 54.
Guderian’s Panzer Group was sent south to assist Army Group south. The Panzer Groups from Centre and North cooperated well with the Panzer Group of Army Group South and the four groups managed to secure the encirclement of Kiev, the largest encirclement in military history. The resulting battle for Kiev caused very large losses for the Soviet Union, as many as 600,000 men were killed or captured. The battle was a prime example of a Kesselschlacht and to German generals it appeared to be a Vernichtungsschlacht. After the battle of Kiev the German Army was no longer outnumbered, but this lasted only for a short period as the Soviet Union was able to replace the manpower losses, given time. The battle was thus not the final Vernichtungsschlacht that German generals believed based on the high Soviet losses. After Kiev, Hitler was set on taking Moscow and the final push towards this objective was to be done with operation Typhoon.88

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88 Kirchubel, Operation Barbarossa, p. 187
1.2.3 Operation Typhoon

Operation *Typhoon* was the codename given to the new German decision to make Moscow the main target for German Armies in Russia. In preparation for this offensive, units were focused in Army Group Centre’s area and were given extra resources, in terms of the Panzer Groups belonging to Army Group North and Army Group South. Before being sent away from Army Group North Raus described in his memoirs how the 6. Panzer division, that he would later take command of, broke through 12 defensive positions, repelled several counterattacks and captured 248 bunkers (25 of which were concrete) in one week. At this point the division was right outside Leningrad. The decision to remove the Panzer Group from Army Group North deprived the force of units such as 6. Panzer Division and its ability to roll up defences in the fashion that Raus described. Robert Forczyk describes how the decision to remove the armoured units made it impossible for von Leeb to take the city by force. Instead Army Group North had to rely on besieging the city in order to force it to surrender.89

Among the Panzer Groups, now known as Panzer Armies, only one was at full strength, two were at 75 percent strength and the last was at 50 percent, they were all about 30 percent short on lorries. Several of the German Infantry divisions were also as low as 20 percent strength. Despite these shortcomings, Army Group Centre now controlled 14 panzer, 8 motorized infantry divisions and 48 infantry divisions, this represented more than half of the German forces on the Eastern Front. In terms of a comparison with the Soviets, the Germans now had a 3 to 2 advantage in tanks and aircraft and 2 to 1 in guns.90

The Operation started on the 30th of September when Panzer units under Guderian’s command broke through the defences of the Soviet Bryansk Front and advanced 210 kilometres in two days. This move ensured that by the 6th of October the three armies belonging to the front had been encircled and although some Soviets succeeded in breaking out to the East, another 50,000 prisoners were taken by Army Group Centre. The Soviet West and Reserve Fronts had it even worse. An attack was launched against them by the 3. and 4. Panzer Army as well as 4. and 9. Army on the 2nd of October and by the 7th of October this attack succeeded in encircling 45 Soviet divisions. When these were eliminated by the 19th of October the Germans claimed to have taken a further 673,000 prisoners of war. Modern estimates have lowered the number, the two Soviet fronts probably lost at least 41 percent of

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their combat strength. On the 18th of October the XL. Panzer Corps reached the city of Mozhaysk, a mere 100 kilometres from Moscow. 91

Two factors delayed the advance of Army Group Centre after these victories. The roads turned to mud, and this slowed any type of movement drastically, vehicles were also prone to breakdowns, and many were simply bogged down and unable to move. This delay in operation Typhoon bought time for the Soviet leadership to expand their fortifications and reinforce with new divisions. When the ground froze, the speed of Army Group Centre increased again, but the colder weather brought them new problems, supply of fuel was low and few of the German units had been given winter clothing. Hitler, the OKW, the OKH and the German army commanders had fatally underestimated the supply situation, the onset of winter and perhaps most importantly, the ability of the Soviet Union to raise new forces. Many German generals, like Halder had assumed that after having destroyed two rows of Soviet armies before the capture of Smolensk and another two rows of armies at the start of operation Typhoon, that would be the end of Soviet resources. This turned out to be false as the German advance was halted a short distance from Moscow by a fifth row of Soviet armies. 92

The German offensive towards Moscow finally ended on the 5. Of December, when German units got to within 30 kilometres of Moscow (see map 4). The German soldiers could simply not continue any further, exhaustion, cold, logistical- and technical problems finally halted the German war machine. On the same day the Soviets launched a major counteroffensive. The Soviet offensive drove the Germans back as much as 240 kilometres in some areas and was launched against all three German Army Groups with varied success. Making sure that Moscow remained safe was the most important objective and this Soviet victory represented the first major German land defeat of the war. In response to the failure, Hitler fired several general associated with Army Group Centre, the most prominent being General Guderian and Field Marshall von Bock. Chris McNab writes that it also marked the end of the German Blitzkrieg campaigns. 93 It did in one sense, Barbarossa and Typhoon were the first campaigns the German Army failed to force the opponent to surrender.

91 McNab, Hitlers Armeer, p. 184.
1.2.4 The strategic situation changes

After the failure to capture Moscow in operation Typhoon and the subsequent Soviet counteroffensives along more or less the entire Eastern front it became apparent that operation Barbarossa, Hitler’s huge gamble, had failed. Of the three cities that Hitler had cited as final objectives in the campaign, Leningrad, Kiev and Moscow only Kiev had fallen to the German Army. Leningrad held out as the Germans had no real offensive resources in Army Group North available to complete the capture and the new order from Hitler simply stated that it should be taken by siege. This ensured that Army Group North would be bound up in static siege lines around the city for the foreseeable future.  

In the far North the German drive to capture the port city of Murmansk had failed as well, the operation is largely forgotten, but it had large ramifications for the German war effort. Barbarossa had inflicted huge materiel losses on the Soviet Union in terms of lost tanks, guns, aircraft and lorries. Large numbers of these would be replaced with the help of shipments from the Western Allies that were unloaded in Murmansk. Had the city fallen to the Germans these shipments would have had to come via the East-Asian ports of the Soviet Union and the entire venture would have been highly difficult and probably only ensured that a fraction of the materiel had been delivered. The unsuccessful German Operation had cost them 21,501 soldiers, the Finns lost an additional 5,000 men. 

Army Group South reached one of its Eastern objectives, the city of Rostov, but the Soviet counteroffensive that pushed Army Group Centre away from Moscow forced Army Group South to retreat from Rostov. In response to the decision to retreat, Hitler fired von Rundstedt and replaced him. A part of Army Group South was also left in the Crimea in siege operations around the city of Sevastopol, as the first German assault had ended in failure and cost them more than 8,000 men. The Germans in the Crimea also had troubles with substantial Soviet landings of troops in the Eastern part of the Crimean Peninsula which opened a second front on the peninsula. Army Group South also failed to reach any of the Soviet oilfields in the Caucasus, which had been a prime objective.

94Forczyk, Kampen om Leningrad, 1941-1944, p. 10.
95 Per Erik Olsen, Militære Operasjoner 26, Murmansk-Fronten, 1941, Skallestad : Ares Forlag, 2018, p. 96.
The German army had inflicted huge losses on the Soviets, but their own losses were substantial too and the Soviet ability to replace lost men was much greater than that of Germany. Germany had lost at least 730,000 men during Barbarossa and Typhoon. Many of the lost German soldiers had also been irreplaceable veterans whose experience could not be replicated in a short period of time. Rolf-Dieter Müller has researched the average lifespan of new frontline soldiers. Of the 1939 soldiers it was 4.4 active years, of those replacements drafted in 1942 to replace the veterans who were lost during Barbarossa it had fallen to 1.8 years. One Panzer-Grenadier regiment wrote in its war diary that most of the replacements they received were completely lacking basic training. These facts attest to the declining quality of the German Wehrmacht. Although large areas of European Russia had been occupied by German forces, most of the Soviet manufacturing ability had been relocated to behind the Ural Mountains and from 1942 they were already turning out replacement materiel for the Red Army in large quantities.  

A large strategic problem for Germany was Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States, because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in Hawaii on the 7th of December 1941. The fact that the Soviet Union had not been knocked out during 1941 doomed Germany to a war on two fronts, something Hitler had been trying to avoid ever since signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Because Britain was still fighting the war against Germany, the Americans would have a base from which they could engage the Germans, before that time the Americans could supply both the Soviets and the British forces much more actively with munitions of war. For German soldiers there was now only one thing to do, attempt to hold out through the Soviet Winter offensives and hope that they could knock the Soviet Union out of the war in 1942, before the Western Allies were able to act substantially in the West.

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97 McNab, Hitlers Armeer, p. 188 & Müller, Hitler’s Wehrmacht, 1935-1945, p. 106
1.3: The German offensive of 1942

1.2.1: Preparing for a new summer

The Soviet Winter Offensive that drove the German Army away from Moscow and temporarily removed the German threat was not limited to the area of Army Group Centre (see map 5). For the German soldier and German generals there was only to try to hold out and wait for summer. The Soviet offensive succeeded in splitting the German front between Army Group North and Centre. This led to several German divisions being trapped by the advancing Soviets. The two major pockets were around Demyansk and Kholm. Demyansk contained about 100,000 German soldiers from 6 divisions. Kholm was much smaller and was held by about 5,000 Germans from several units that had been heavily battered by the Winter Offensive. The Soviets attacked Demyansk constantly, they massively outnumbered the defenders, but the Germans inside held out and inflicted massive casualties on the Soviets who were attempting to force surrender on them. Kholm was also under steady attack from a Soviet force that was 20 times stronger, but here too the Germans held out. Supplies to the trapped men were flown in by the Luftwaffe who flew in over 68 million tons during the siege. The defenders held out until the spring thaw in April/May when large German attacks were staged towards Demyansk and Kholm. Contact with Demyansk was achieved on the 23rd of April and Kholm on the 4th of May. The success of the air supply in holding the pockets was significant in that it kept the frontline together, but the success of it would also have major ramifications during the next winter on the Eastern Front.98

The Soviet winter offensive also hit the German besiegers of Leningrad. The Soviets launched attacks that drove the German advance away from Tikhvin and the commander of the Volkhov-Front was ordered by Stalin to continue his advance for almost 100 kilometres and break through to Leningrad. The Germans who withdrew from Tikhvin held a weak front along the Volkhov river. The first Soviet attack was launched by 54. Army on the 4th of January, but the attack failed completely, on the 6th of January a fresh attack by 4., 52. And 59. Army fared no better, the only success was that a small bridgehead was gained on the Volkhov river. Already the day after the offensive started the Soviet commander was under pressure from STAVKA and Stalin to achieve a real breakthrough, this failed and the offensive had to be temporarily halted. There was only a short pause before the Soviets attacked again, they managed after days of heavy fighting to punch holes in the German

98 Dyrhaug, Østfronten 1942, pp. 30, 32-33.
defences, but there was also a new realization on the Soviet forces, their T-34 tanks and KV1’s that had been largely invulnerable from German AT-fire was now being knocked out. The Germans had received new Anti-tank ammunition that were able to knock both variants out at battle ranges. The fighting continued and after von Leeb uttered wishes to Hitler that it might be wise to retreat, he was sacked as commander of Army Group North and replaced by von Küchler.99

The Soviet leadership sent the 2. Shock-Army along with 13. Cavalry-Corps through a hole in the German lines. The 40,000 Soviet soldiers managed to push through and advanced some 75 kilometres behind the main German line. Küchler responded by pulling three fresh units from the siege lines of Leningrad to cut the Soviets at the point where they had broken the German lines in a pincer move codenamed Raubtier (predator) (see map 6). Before Küchler was able to start the operation, the Soviets continued to strike German units at the Volkhov front and were on the verge of encircling 8 German divisions. Operation Raubtier started on the 15. Of March and the German units quickly encircled the Soviet breakthrough and trapped at least 50,000 Soviet troops. German units continued to reduce the Soviet troops in the pocket for the next months. In June 30,000 men managed to escape the pocket, but 32,000 were captured. From the 7th of January and until the ordeal was over and the 2. Shock Army was eliminated as a fighting force, the Soviet Volkhov front lost 403,000 men as killed, wounded or captured. The offensive had cost the Soviets dearly and brought them nothing in terms of territory and the German units had managed to hold on through the winter. The victory on the Leningrad front also led Hitler to the conclusion that reinforcements should be sent to Army Group North, the new goal was to conquer Leningrad, rather than besiege it.100

Army Group South was struck by the Soviet Winter Offensive on the 1st of January, the Soviet goal was to re-capture Kharkov. Soviet attacks pushed against the German lines, but they made little headway against Kharkov. They concentrated massive forces against the 298. Infantry Division which shattered the German division after more than 18 days of fighting. This broke the German lines at Izium, south of Kharkov. Over the next month the Soviet breakthrough was expanded and eventually started to look like a bulge protruding into the German lines, the German leadership in the south called this the Barvenkovo bulge (see map 7). The spring thaw eventually brought the Soviet attacks to a halt and this gave the German forces time to recuperate. Stalin wanted the offensive to continue, even though he was advised

99 Forczyk, Kampen om Leningrad, pp. 45-46.
100 Forczyk, Kampen om Leningrad, pp.46-49.
to halt and wait for the German Army to strike. Stalin decided against the advice, he not only wanted to keep the Kharkov offensive alive, he was also intent on the Volkhov Front to keep attacking as well as the forces in Crimea. The Soviet leadership in the south was therefore ordered to re-capture Kharkov. For the Germans the crucial factor was the elimination of the Barvenkovo bulge, the German operation designed to do this was codenamed *Fredericus*.\(^{101}\)

Hitler was intent on striking the Southern part of the Soviet front as the Summer offensive. The Summer offensive codenamed *Fall Blau* (Case Blue) was driven by economic factors, rather than military ones. Hitler outlined in Fuhrer-Directive 41 on the 5th of April that the main goal of the Offensive was to seize the Soviet oilfields in the Caucasus. These included Maykop and Baku, the main goal was to secure enough oil to face the Western Allies, as German oil reserves were dwindling at this point. *Blau* was not a detailed plan, it merely outlined main objectives, which also included the encirclement and destruction of the Soviet Army in the southern area of the Don river. Stalingrad was merely a secondary objective at this point. *Blau* was to be the main thrust of German ambition during the Summer, a smaller secondary operation was to be launched by Army Group North, to finally capture Leningrad, codenamed operation *Nordlicht*. These two offensives would stretch the *Wehrmacht* to its limits as it left no reserves should anything go wrong. Hitler imagined that these two blows would knock the Soviet Union out of the war as *Blau* would capture economically important regions that Hitler thought the Soviet Union needed to continue the war. Hitler had thus abandoned *Vernichtungsschlacht* as the way to knock the USSR out of the war. *Blau* was not set to be launched before June, this gave German commanders in the south enough time to eliminate the Soviet threat to Kharkov before the deadline, in any case it was a necessary precursor if *Blau* was to be launched.\(^{102}\)

In the Crimea the strengthened Soviet launched attacks from both Sevastopol against the besiegers belonging to the 11. Army of Erich von Manstein and in the Kerch peninsula where the Soviet force eventually grew to three armies. The Soviet attacks from Sevastopol met with no success and on the Kerch peninsula the German divisions succeeded in holding the line against the three Soviet armies throughout the winter and into the spring. After having held on through the winter, Manstein decided he had to deal with the three Soviet armies on the Kerch peninsula, they were constantly trying to break out and it would be impossible to take Sevastopol with them still being a threat. Manstein assembled a force of five German infantry

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\(^{101}\) Olsen, *Kharkov 1942, Wehrmacht slår Tilbake*, pp. 5-8

divisions, one panzer division and a few Romanian divisions to attack the Soviet force. The German plan was to quickly break through the Soviet defences and cut them off from Kerch in an operation codenamed *Trappenjagd* (bustard hunt). The German attack started on the 8th of May and it quickly broke the Soviet defences and German units moved quickly to seize Kerch to block any attempt at an evacuation, the Soviet commander was oblivious to the extent of the German breakthrough. The 22. Panzer Division pinned the Soviet armies down and prevented them from escaping to the East and pushed them against the Azov Sea. On the 14th of May the German 170. Infantry Division was fighting itself into Kerch and by the 20th of May the Germans controlled the city and the Soviet armies surrendered (see map 8). The German victory cost the Soviets 28,000 dead, 147,000 captured, all tanks and guns belonging to the three armies along with 417 aircraft. Manstein was now free to concentrate of Sevastopol. It was lucky for the Germans that *Trappenjagd* was completed quickly, because on the 12th of May the Soviets resumed their offensive at Kharkov and the Luftwaffe forces that had been supporting *Trappenjagd* was needed in that area.103

The Soviet attack was massed on a front of some 50 kilometres against two German divisions that where holding the line the Soviets had three armies, supported by 800 guns and several hundred tanks and aircraft. Under the force of the attack, the German units started to break and gradually fell back towards Kharkov. German units managed to hold some key positions with strong forces which delayed the Soviet offensive and over the next days the Germans shifted some Panzer forces meant for *Fredericus* and the northern Soviet offensive was halted by the 20th of May. The Soviets had failed to achieve any real breakthrough and they were now left holding areas that bulged into the German lines. The Germans launched operation *Fredericus* on the 17th of May. The goal was a pincer move to capture Izium and thus close the Barvenkovo bulge (see map 9). The Soviet leadership was sure that the German forces would not be able to affect a breakthrough and they were convinced that their superior forces would now be able to capture Kharkov.104

The German attack progressed well, on the evening of the second day there was only a 30 kilometre stretch left before German Panzer units had encircled the Soviets and the German attack had already shattered the 9. Soviet Army. The Soviet leadership began to realize the danger and ordered that attacks towards the west and Kharkov was to be stopped and that attacks towards the east and the Germans executing the encirclement was to be launched. On

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103 Forczyk, *Slaget om Krim, 1942*, pp. 13-14, 35-36
the 21st of May the pocket was closed and Soviet attacks to break through were futile, unlike the encirclements of 1941, the “walls” around the Barvenkovo pocket were 15 kilometres wide and this made the chances of escape much harder. The German leadership in the south were content and started pulling panzer formations out to be built up in preparation for Blau, the Soviet forces attempted to break out for the next week, but it was futile. The defeat was massive, of the 765,000 men that attacked Kharkov, 277,190 where dead or captured, 36 percent. The Soviets also lost 775 tanks, 4,924 guns and mortars and 542 aircraft. The German losses were 30,000 men, 108 tanks and 91 aircraft. These losses were low enough to be replaced in advance of Blau.\textsuperscript{105}

In the Crimea, Sevastopol began being reduced by massive quantities of German artillery from the 3rd of June. Manstein had received the heaviest artillery the Germans had in their arsenal, as well as large quantities of smaller artillery pieces. The German artillery concentration was necessary as the Soviet defenders had built up their fortifications during the winter and were intent on holding Sevastopol. By the end of June, despite fierce Soviet resistance, it was clear that Sevastopol was going to fall. By the 5th of July, just a week after the start of Blau, all resistance had been neutralized and Sevastopol had fallen. Of the 118,000 Soviet defenders, only 5,000 were evacuated, 18,000 had died and the remaining 95,000 were captured. German losses stood at 27,000, with another 8,454 Romanians. At the end of the battle 11. Army was exhausted, as the losses represented between 20-30 percent of the strength of the infantry that had taken part. Manstein was promoted to the rank of Field Marshall as a reward for the victory.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{105} Olsen, \textit{Kharkov 1942, Wehrmacht slår Tilbake} pp. 20, 22.
1.2.2 Operation Blau

With the elimination of the Barvenkovo bulge and the threat to Kharkov gone the German leadership in the south began with Blau. The German Army had barely made it through the Soviet Winter Offensives, they had managed to do so and inflict losses on the enemy that were hard to replace, at least in the short term.\textsuperscript{107} In the Soviet Offensives around Volkov, Kharkov and Trappenjagd the Soviets had lost almost 900,000 men. Thousands more had been lost in the failed attempts to eliminate Demyansk and Kholm and when Sevastopol was eliminated after the start of Blau the Soviet losses were increased by another 113,000 men. In addition to the manpower losses, there had been huge materiel losses for the Soviets, in terms of tanks, planes and guns. With these events in mind, a slight German optimism can well be understood, however, this deludes the real picture. All of these victories, with the exception of Sevastopol had been won by the Germans by the use of a ‘backhand-blow’\textsuperscript{108}. The Soviets had attacked first and then the Germans had counter-attacked the enemy where he was vulnerable with reserves consisting of panzers and or motorized infantry. This concept of a backhand-blow is something we will return to later.

The year before, the German Army had been able to deploy three massive Army Groups with an offensive all along the front. Despite the appearance of Blau it was an admission that the German resources were now so stretched that they only had enough resources for a single offensive thrust (albeit, with an attack towards Leningrad in addition). To build up Army Group South to the necessary strength levels, resources, manpower and especially Panzer units had been taken from the two other Army Groups. Army Group South was increased to over 1,000,000 German soldiers. Germany’s allies would also contribute to the campaign, 24 Romanian, 10 Hungarian and 10 Italian divisions were added to the German order of battle, in all about 300,000 men. The Germans had managed to amass about 1,900 tanks for Blau, as opposed to the 3,350 tanks that had been available for Barbarossa. By now, the German tanks had been upgraded and the new Panzer III had a better gun and especially the long-barrelled Panzer IV were quite able to destroy the T-34. The Panzer divisions were at a rough strength of about 80 percent in terms of tanks and trucks, however, their full-size compliment had been reduced since Barbarossa, so in reality they were much smaller than the divisions that had been in the order of battle in early 1941.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{107} Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{108} See glossary
\textsuperscript{109} Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, p 24-25 & Beevor, Stalingrad, pp. 67-69
If it had been uncertain if the German Army had enough resources to conclude *Barbarossa* successfully, it was even more questionable if they were now capable of occupying and holding another vast sway of territory that would further increase their front with the Soviet Union. The German plan called for an attack from Kursk by the 4. Panzer Army and the 2. Army towards the East. This would be followed with an attack by the powerful 6. Army towards Voronezh which would encircle the Soviet Army to the West of the river Don. The 4. Panzer Army would then move South East along the Don and trap Soviet forces at Rostov where they were supposed to be pushed by the 17. Army. German forces would then proceed to the east and secure the front along the Volga river and cross it at Stalingrad. A force would proceed to the South and secure the oil fields at Maykop and Baku, which were the main goals of the operation. The goals of *Blau* were slightly floating, there was no detailed plans and this risked, like in *Barbarossa*, that time would be wasted on tactical engagements. Even if these were concluded at great cost to the Soviets, they did not bring the German Army closer to the overall objective of winning the war.  

*Blau* was initiated on the 28th of June, surprise on the Soviets was complete, as Stalin and STAVKA were certain that the Germans wanted to attack Moscow and they thought originally that *Blau* was merely a diversion, this view changed in July, when the scope of *Blau* became clear to the Soviets. When *Blau* began, the Germans pushed the Soviets back and the 4. Panzer Army aimed at Voronezh. The capture of Voronezh was part of the German plan to encircle the South-West front. Because of the heavy fighting at Voronezh, the South-West front was able to gradually retreat. The fighting around Voronezh lasted until the 13th of July, at which point Hitler lost his patience and relieved the von Bock of his command again. He then proceeded to split Army Group South in two, Army Group South A and B. Army Group A was to head for the Caucasus and Army Group B was headed for the Volga. At this point Stalingrad and the Caucasus were to be taken in tandem.

Stalingrad started to become the focal point and main objective for Army Group B. It seemed as though the Germans would repeat their successes from the previous year, they pushed the Soviets back in all sectors. On the 22nd of July, the German Army Group B was ready to attack the bend in the Don river and advance towards Stalingrad and Army Group A was ready to initiate Operation *Edelweiss*, the capture of the Caucasus. A German encirclement of the Soviet forces to the west of the Volga was initiated and partially succeeded, many were

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captured and most their equipment was lost. The German Army fought themselves forward towards Stalingrad and by the 22nd of August they had reached the suburbs of the city. The encirclements that the German executed in their advance to Stalingrad had not yielded as many prisoners as had been expected. In July and August, they had captured around 625,000 prisoners, captured or destroyed 6,000 guns, 400 planes and over 7,000 tanks. The reason for the lower number was that the Soviets were no longer holding to the last man but were instead retreating to fight again another day. The German leadership viewed the vast areas they captured, and the lower number of prisoners as evidence that the Red Army was nearing collapse. In fact, it was evidence that the Red Army had learned lessons from the defeats of 1941 and early 1942. Army Group A had, in the meantime pushed far into the Caucasus, on the 9th of August they had taken Maykop. Their advance was made easier by the lack of heavy weapons possessed by the Soviets, which meant that they could not knock out German tanks. After the German capture of the Crimea, German supplies could be easily transported over the Crimea and across the Kerch straits. Already in early August, however, Army Group A was beginning to be starved for resources, as these were sent to Army Group B in their effort to take Stalingrad (see map 10).\textsuperscript{112}

Hitler had ordered that Stalingrad was to be taken by the 25th of August, this allowed the German soldiers very little rest, they had just reached the suburbs on the 22nd and on the 23rd he gave orders for the attack on the city to begin. The German leadership renewed their efforts on the 24th and 25th, but the Soviets were determined to fight for every square meter of the city. The German victory seemed close and German leadership of the 6. Army supported the attack with more units that had been serving as flank protection. The 4. Panzer Army advanced to the South of the city and broke through the outer defences of Stalingrad on the 29th of August. It now seemed possible to link up with motorized elements of the 6. Army and trap the Soviet 62. and 64. In the outer defences. The Soviet defenders managed to hold the 6. Army off for a few days and the two Soviet Armies abandoned the outer defences and fell back into the city.\textsuperscript{113}

The German attempt to take Stalingrad is well known and much has been written about it. German forces were forced into a bloody fight for each house. For the individual German soldier this type of warfare seemed pointless, they were used to fighting for big areas of land in swift battles of manoeuvre and many referred to the fighting in Stalingrad as rattenkrieg

\textsuperscript{112} Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942}, pp. 37, 45 & Beevor, \textit{Stalingrad}, pp. 82-83

\textsuperscript{113} Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942}, pp. 49-50
(rat warfare). At many points during the battle the Soviet defenders were holding no more than 10 percent of the city, but they were continually reinforced and managed to hold the city until the onset of winter. Stalingrad became such a focus that Hitler ordered all operations on the Eastern front to be cancelled, apart from Stalingrad. The objective of capturing the Caucasus was entirely side-lined. Kurt Zeitzler, who had been named the new head of the OKH advised Hitler to terminate the battle, but Hitler declined.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{114}Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad}, 1942, pp. 57,60-61, 64, 69, 73 & Beevor, \textit{Stalingrad}, pp.140-145
\end{flushright}
1.2.3 Operation Uranus and Operation Saturn

Already on the 12th of September, Paulus had told Hitler that he felt that the flanks of the 6th Army were vulnerable to attack, both the left one anchored on the Don and the right flank anchored on the Volga. These German flanks were held by the Armies of Romania, Hungary and Italy and even though the High Command of Army Group South knew the dangers of this there was nothing to do, unless the men of Army Group A were pulled back from the Caucasus. This highlighted the disparity between the goals of the German offensive and the resources at hand. With the intensive fighting that had taken place in Stalingrad, the 6th Army had no reserves and the 4. Panzer Army was a shadow of its former self, as it had given over several of its divisions to contribute to the attack on Stalingrad. Hitler had promised more divisions from France, but they were not expected to arrive before December. 115

Army Group B was left holding a 650-kilometre front line, with the line north of Stalingrad held by the 3. Romanian Army and the Southern part was held by the 4. Romanian Army, both were ill-equipped, stretched, and their defences lacked depth. The Soviets had spotted an opportunity to encircle the 6. Army. They had used the 62. Army in Stalingrad as bait while they prepared to attack the flanks of the 6. Army. On the 18th of November the Soviet preparations were finished. They massed several large tank units along the lines held by the 3. and 4. Romanian armies and prepared an offensive. The attacks against the Romanians were meant to break through their lines and meet behind the 6. Army around the area of Kalach and form a defensive line to the east and west and thus complete an encirclement of the 6. Army. German intelligence had realized that the Soviets were planning an offensive, but they had made several errors. They assumed that the Soviet were only capable of one grand offensive and this was expected against Model’s 9. Army at Rzhev, this was operation Mars. They realised that an attack was going to be made in the Stalingrad area as well, but they completely underestimated the scale of the Soviet attack. 116

The attack that had as its aim to encircle the 6. Army, operation Uranus was finally launched on the 19th of November. The attack began with an 80-minute artillery barrage and was followed by a coordinated infantry and tank assault on a 320-kilometre front. The Soviet broke the Romanian units quickly and although they met localized tough resistance from various German units, this was not enough to halt them. On the 23rd of November the Soviet

115 Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, p. 73.
116 Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, pp. 74-75.
forces met at Kalach and trapped the 6. Army, they thought they had encircled 85-90,000 men, the real total was 250,000 Axis soldiers.\footnote{Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942}, pp. 76-78.}

The question for the German leadership was, what to do about the encirclement? Hitler seemed to think that a repeat of the success at Demyansk was possible and that the \textit{Luftwaffe} could supply the encircled 6. Army. The 6. Army was 250,000 strong, not 100,000 and would require 750 tons a day. The \textit{Luftwaffe} simply did not have enough planes for the effort and the Soviet air force was much better prepared to shot down German supply planes. An objective study by the \textit{Luftwaffe} concluded that it would simply not be possible. Göring, however, who at this point was keen to gain favour with Hitler insisted it could be done, Zeitzler, armed with the objective report, confronted Göring in Hitler’s presence with the plain facts and argued that the 6. Army should make a break-out attempt before the Soviets strengthened the encirclement. Hitler, made-up his mind and gave orders for the 6. Army to stay where it was in what Hitler termed \textit{Festung} (fortress) Stalingrad. The German commanders in Stalingrad were also of the opinion that they should prepared for a breakout and carry it out when approval was given by Hitler.\footnote{Antill, \textit{Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942}, p. 78 & Beevor, \textit{Stalingrad}, p. 247.}

The Soviet intention at this point was to destroy the 6. Army and then initiate operation \textit{Saturn}, which had the goal of capturing Rostov, if this was accomplished, Army Group A and a new ad-hoc Army Group named Army Group Don would be trapped as well. Army Group Don was made up of units that had been damaged during \textit{Uranus}, but it had also been reinforced with some German reserves, including two panzer divisions. Command of the Group was given to Manstein. Manstein was told to relieve Stalingrad with an offensive that was meant to break through the Soviet lines and establish contact with the 6. Army. Army Group Don did simply not have the resources to execute this. It could at best push a part of the way to Stalingrad, but the 6. Army would then have to break out the rest of the way to establish contact. Meanwhile, the 6. Army was holding firm in Stalingrad and inflicted large losses on the attacking Soviets. Manstein initiated the rescue attempt on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of December, appropriately named Operation \textit{Wintergewitter} (Winter Storm). The rescue attempt made substantial progress towards Stalingrad, it inflicted heavy losses and forced the Soviets to send additional reinforcements (see map \textit{II}). This halted Manstein’s advance and he pressed Hitler to order 6. Army to break out from Stalingrad; in the end, Hitler never gave the order. Soviet high command realized that the planned goals of operation \textit{Saturn} were too ambitious,
this was due to two factors: 1) The German units were still fighting hard in the Stalingrad area. 2) Manstein’s counter attack had shown that the German Army was not entirely spent. The Soviets instead decided to focus on destroying Army Group Don. The Operation started on the 16th of December, and it was met with heavy resistance during the first three days. By the 19th, however, it was clear that the Germans could not hold their extended lines. A large part of the Italian 8. Army was encircled, and Soviet tank units could advance almost unopposed as there were few German mobile formations. Manstein managed to keep his lines of retreat open by attacking Soviet formations that had overextended. The Soviets had nevertheless succeeded in inflicting heavy losses on the left flank of Army Group Don and this forced Manstein to retreat to the west, the attempt to rescue Stalingrad was cancelled.119

The best the German soldiers in Stalingrad could do now was to tie down as many Soviet forces as possible and thus buy time for Army Group Don to retreat towards Rostov, but the fate of the German soldiers in Stalingrad was sealed. The Soviets continued to mass large numbers of men and artillery against the 6. Army throughout the winter, the head of the 6. Army surrendered on the 31st of January and the final elements of the army surrendered on the 2nd of February. The blow to the German Army was huge. The German losses after Stalingrad stood at 300,000 for Army Group B and a further 300,000 for Army Group A and Don. Because of the losses the Wehrmacht had suffered during Barbarossa and the Soviet Winter Offensive they had pressed their Axis allies to supply large amounts of soldiers, these had suffered heavily as well. Romanian losses after Stalingrad and the following Soviet offensive actions stood at 160,000 men, Hungarian losses were 143,000 and the Italians had lost 110,000 men. These soldiers had been able to hold more quiet sectors of the front and allowed the Germans to focus offensively. In 1943, the German allies would not be able to send numbers like the ones that were lost in 1942 and early 1943. The Hungarian losses were in fact so high that they were unable to field an army in large operations before 1944. Operation Blau had gained large areas of territory, but with the defeat at Stalingrad these were now being rolled back and none of the objectives that the Germans had set before the start of Blau had been accomplished. The proposed Operation Nordlicht against Leningrad had also been called off and the city remained in Soviet hands.120 The German Army was still on retreat in Southern Russia throughout February and the Soviet advance seemed unstoppable.

119 Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, pp. 80-83.
120 Antill, Slaget om Stalingrad, 1942, pp. 83, 85, 89-90 & Forczyk, Kampen om Leningrad, p. 60.
1943: The Last Chance for Victory

1.4.1: From Stalingrad to Kursk

By the dawn of 1943, it is clear that Germany’s war effort had suffered serious setbacks on the Eastern front, however, Germany’s fortune had turned in the West as well. German forces suffered a decisive defeat at El Alamein in North Africa on the 3rd of November 1942. In the words of James Holland, “…the cohesion of the Panzer Army finally fell apart.” 121 The Eight Army, victors of El Alamein proceeded to pursue the Panzer Army westwards. On the 8th of November another British expeditionary force landed in Algeria. This was part of the Operation Torch landings, a combined British and American undertaking; the Allied ambition was to secure North Africa, from Casablanca to Tunis. The United States Army was now also fighting the German Army, and this certainly increased the pressure. In response, the Hitler sent reinforcements and built up the Deutsch-Italienische Panzerarmee. This force fended off the first allied effort to capture Tunis and thereby prevented ultimate German defeat in North Africa. It was, however, a short-lived success, throughout February, British forces had been pressing the Germans in Southern Tunisia and achieved significant breakthroughs. The Allied 1. Army in Algeria was pushing from the west and by the end of April it was clear that the overall goal of uniting the two Allied armies was close. With final German defeat in Africa looming, the prospect of a second front in Europe seemed far closer and the prospect was not a welcome one for the German leadership. 122 Julian Thompson concludes that: “These campaigns were a necessary precursor to defeating the Germans in Europe.”123

In the meantime the Soviet Red Army continued the offensive in Southern Russia and their overall goal was the destruction of Army Group South (a collection of Army Groups A, Don and what remained of B). The Soviet advance was aimed at the Dnepr river, the Sea of Azov and Kharkov. If these objectives were accomplished all the German forces in Southern Russia would likely be neutralized. If this was accomplished the Soviets could continue in 1943 with their main ambition of driving the invaders all the way to the Polish border. The German Army looked extremely vulnerable at this point and appeared to be close to collapse. 124 Manstein asked very dramatically in his memoirs if: “[...]the Soviets [would] succeed in

123 Thompson, Desert Victory, p. 351.
124 Antill, Slaget om Leningrad, p. 90.
trapping the German Southern wing, thereby accomplishing the decisive step towards their final victory, or would the German command be able to avert such a catastrophe?"  

Manstein, now in charge of all forces in Southern Russia had managed to assemble a force to strike at the Soviets around Kharkov. Manstein guessed, that the enemy was seriously overextended at this point and he knew that they had suffered serious losses (in fact over 1,000,000 men) and they might be vulnerable to a counterattack. To avoid a repeat of Stalingrad, Kharkov was abandoned, against Hitler’s direct orders, and the II. SS Panzer-Korps that had held the city were pulled back. Manstein was able to assemble a striking force that consisted of the remnants of the Fourth Panzer Army and the fresh II. SS Panzer-Korps. The force struck at the overextended Soviet tank forces and succeeded in surrounding various units, they successfully eliminated these and moved swiftly to recapture Kharkov and Belgorod. The men of the II. SS Panzer-Korps where an elite formation and they secured Kharkov and the surrounding area by the 15th of March. A few days after, the weather turned warmer and the muddy roads and fields put an end to offensive operations of both sides. The Kharkov offensive was a classic back-hand blow, the Soviets had overextended, and the German forces had been able to exploit that and inflict a defeat on the enemy. Soviet casualties were around 90,000 men. This German victory had finally stabilized the German front line in the South and given the German Army a chance to recuperate after the enormous setbacks they had suffered during the winter.

To the North of Army Group South, Army Group Centre now under the command of Field Marshall von Kluge had been under heavy attack in the Rzhev sector throughout the winter. These Soviets attack had been focused against the 9 Army of Walter Model. In contrast to Stalingrad, the battles around Rzhev had not resulted in a German defeat, instead it was a stalemate in which the Soviets suffered enormous losses while the German 9. Army had stood firm. The Operation against 9. Army, known as operation Mars, was a clear Soviet defeat. In February of 1943, however, the decision was taken that the Rzhev sector was to be evacuated, this was completed in Operation Büffel (Buffalo), described as “an enormous undertaking in logistical brilliance” by Steven Newton. The steadfastness of Army Group Centre coupled with the German victory at Kharkov meant that a bulge existed between the

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125 Manstein, *Lost Victories*, p. 371
127 Steven Newton, *Hitler’s commander*, pp. 214-216.
two army groups. This bulge would steadily gain in importance to German planning in early 1943 (see map 12 and map 13).\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{129} Melvin, Manstein, Hitler’s greatest general, p. 349.
1.4.2: The state of the Wehrmacht and the German strategic situation in 1943

1942 had not been a good year for the German army in terms of losses. The huge defeat at Stalingrad had deprived the German army of a large amount of irreplaceable hardened veterans. Stalingrad was not just a military blow to the German army, it was also an enormous psychological blow. The morale on the home front was declining even though propaganda was put out to minimize the loss, no positive spin could be put on the events at Stalingrad. It was also a problem for one of Germany’s key allies in the East, Romania. Marshal Antonescu, who was the dictator of Romania, derived his power purely from the military and with the loss of a large section of the Romanian army during the course of the winter his position was jeopardized. So was the willingness of the Romanian government to contribute to a war that seemed to turn against them. The imminent defeat in Africa also raised the question of how willing the Italians were in terms of the war effort and whether Mussolini’s position was safe. The prospect of a second front in Southern Europe was not a welcome prospect, either for the German or the Italian leadership, who feared that their own home soil might well be a target (as it turned out this was a correct assessment). These political considerations featured heavily in German planning.\textsuperscript{130}

The state of the average German infantry divisions was quite poor. Their size had gone down from 9 battalions to 6, despite this down-size in divisional strength they were still given tasks that were the same as when they had the previous strength template. Most of them were short of anti-tank weapons that were up-to date. This meant that if a German infantry division was attacked by heavy armour it would often be unable to knock out the enemy tanks. The German Army had attempted to give larger numbers of the up-to date Pak40 which could easily knock out the T34, but many divisions had not received this new equipment and were stuck with the Pak36, ‘the doorknocker’. Many German divisions were also short on artillery and especially trucks or even horses to move artillery or other heavy weapons. This left most German infantry divisions as very static forces that could do little more than hold the very long and exposed Eastern front. If they were overrun, they often had to leave their heavy weapons behind as they retreated, because they did not have sufficient horses or trucks to take them with them.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{130} Newton, \textit{Kursk, the German view}, p. 9 & Glantz & House, \textit{The Battle of Kursk}, p. 278
\textsuperscript{131} Glantz & House, \textit{The Battle of Kursk}, p.17.
Germany had succeeded in increasing war production by a massive amount, this has been largely credited to Albert Speer. Armaments Production had been increased by about 120 percent. Although the production of planes stood for a large part of this, production of ammunition, artillery and infantry weapons were also turned out en masse. In late 1942 the German Army was chronically short on tanks on the Eastern front. Hitler tried to remedy this by the establishment of the creation of the Adolf Hitler Panzer Programme, which was set up in late 1942. Hitler also proceeded to appoint Heinz Guderian to the new post of Inspector General of Armoured Troops. When Guderian was appointed on the 28th of February 1943 Germany’s 18 panzer divisions in the East possessed a mere 495 tanks between them, this was little more than the full complement of 2-3 panzer divisions. The reason for Hitler’s and the OKH’s prioritized tank production was born out of this shortfall. By May 1943, Speer and Guderian had managed to double tank production, but many of the models were heavier than the older tanks, thus it is likely that output increased by as much as 160 percent. By May 1943 tank production peaked at 1,270 tanks produced during the month. The production of tanks was tied directly to steel output and this had been at a peak in early 1943. Speer and Hitler both envisioned that this extreme increase in production could be pushed further throughout 1943-44 if certain regions in Russia were under German control. The important regions were Kryvyi Ryh, which had large iron and manganese ore deposits, Bolshoy Tokmak, which had large coal resources, and the Donbas, which also had large amounts of coal. By 1943 the German Armaments industry had begun to effectively employ Soviet prisoners to in simple manufacturing jobs, road and bridge building or in agricultural work. This was designed to free-up skilled German workers for more important jobs, such as tank production.132

1.5 Planning the Kursk offensive

1.5.1 Plan Zitadelle

The Kursk bulge that existed between Orel and Kharkov became a prominent feature when planning the German Summer Offensive. If the bulge was eliminated it would benefit the German front line in the East, by shortening it considerably. This would mean that the extended German Armies would have less ground to defend. This would either mean that the divisions could be employed to strengthen the front line in the East in more exposed sectors or to form a reserve. The fact that the Western allies were going to strike mainland Europe meant primarily two things, 1) Any German offensive in the East should be launched quickly to precede and allied landing that would force reserves to be sent to the west. 2) If the frontline was shortened before the allies landed, the troops that were no longer needed to man the front could be sent to the West. 133

Although German forces had captured huge numbers of Soviet POWs in the first year of the war, most of these died during the winter of 1941/42. The prisoners who were working in German industry or agriculture at this point had mostly been captured in 1942 at Sevastopol and Kharkov and German industry needed more POWs that could ensure that more German workers were freed up, either for more skilled jobs or for service with the Armed forces. Elimination of the Kursk bulge was eventually decided upon and the way this would be done was by a pincer move where the bulge would be struck from the North by Army Group Centre and from the South by Army Group South. The northern attack was to be struck by the 9. Army and the Southern by the 4. Panzer Army and Armeabteilung ‘Kempf’. It was given the codename Zitadelle (Citadel). In the German planning, Zitadelle was a grand example of a Kesselschlacht, where the enemy would be encircled and forced to surrender (see map 13). 134

Because of the losses suffered by the German infantry divisions during the last winter, Zitadelle was planned as an armoured offensive. The largest concentration of German tanks during the entire war was expected to quickly break the Soviet Front lines and achieve the objectives of the operation135.

134 Healy, Slaget om Kursk, 1943, pp. 8 & 12.
1.5.2 Early warning signs

Operation *Zitadelle* might have seemed like a straightforward affair as the plan was simple and these kinds of pincer moves had worked well for the German army before. There were, however, serious problems with the proposed operation. The original start date of the operation was set to the 1st of May 1943, but it was continuously delayed for various reasons. The delays in the operation made it more likely that the Soviets realized the German plans to strike the Kursk bulge. The Soviets, however, knew exactly what the Germans were considering, they had been informed through the ‘Lucy’ spy-ring of the proposed plan *Zitadelle* in early April and planned accordingly. 136

In ‘Achtung Panzer!’ Guderian had listed, surprise, favourable terrain and massed attack in breadth and depth as requirements for a successful armoured offensive. The two latter of these requirements were gradually questionable with regard to *Zitadelle*. German aerial reconnaissance observed that the Soviets were constructing large fortifications in the Kursk bulge, this seemed to suggest that the Soviets expected an attack in the area and that any German attack would be made against firm and well-prepared defences about 20 kilometres in depth. This was brought to Hitler’s attention on the 27th of April by the commander of 9th Army Walter Model. Model judged that it would take 6 days of heavy fighting to break through the defences on the northern sector. That was as long as Army Group Centre had originally said it would take to get all the way to Kursk. Hitler decided to delay the offensive to the 12th of June as new tanks would be ready at this time, and they would likely make the breakthrough much easier. Because of further delays in production, the final date was set to July 5th. 137

The pushing of the deadline for the operation was meant to increase the strength of the various German units that would execute *Zitadelle*. The delay, however, gave the Soviets more time to build fortifications and to strengthen their own forces in the area. German production of armoured vehicles had increased thanks to Speer and Guderian and by July the German Armies in the East possessed around 2,900 tanks, self-propelled guns and tank destroyers for the Kursk offensive. Leaving the average in each division around 100-130 tanks. This average was, however, lower for most panzer divisions, probably between 70 and 80. While the Waffen SS divisions and the *Großdeutschland* division possessed and average

of 160-170 tanks. In terms of manpower, the panzer divisions were between 10-11,000 men, rather than the 13-17,000 designated strength. In 1941, Germany had employed 3,350 tanks in Operation Barbarossa over a front of 1500 kilometres, in Zitadelle the proposition was to mass only a slightly lower number on a front of 100 kilometres. This force concentration accounted for 63 percent of all tanks on the Eastern front and it had only been achieved through down-prioritizing all other sectors in the East. The OKH and the Army commanders realized that even though they had massed these forces against Kursk, they were outnumbered by the Soviets. ¹³⁸

The German tanks, that had been inferior in 1941 were now superior. Although the majority of tanks that were ready for the offensive were either Panzer IIIs or Panzer IVs there was a decent number of highly modern tanks. These were primarily the Panzer V Panther and the Panzer VI Tiger, but there was also the tank destroyer Ferdinand. The Tiger had already been used on the Eastern front and it had a considerable reputation. It was armed with a large gun and could reliable knock out any enemy tanks long before they were able to dent the frontal armour of the Tiger. The Tiger was, however, costly to build and only about 60 were available for Zitadelle. The Panther had been designed as a counter to the Soviet T-34 and it had sloped armour as well as a high velocity gun that could knock out the T-34 at 2,000 meters. The Panther’s own armour meant that any Soviet tank had to close before it had a hope of penetrating the frontal armour of the Panther. About 200 Panthers were available for Zitadelle. They had come straight off the factory and had not been thoroughly tested. The Ferdinand was turretless tank destroyer armed with an even bigger gun than the Tiger and more frontal armour, this made the weight of the vehicle very high and mobility was questionable, it also lacked a machine gun for close combat. ¹³⁹

Although some of the units available for Zitadelle were the best in the German order of battle, there were questions about the effectiveness of even these. The II. SS Panzer-Korps which had played such a pivotal role in the Kharkov offensive had suffered combined losses of 11,519 officers and men. Even though the SS divisions were first in line for the best recruits and the best materiel, it was difficult to replace the highly trained volunteers that had formed the backbone of the divisions in the corps in such a small amount of time. The new men were

¹³⁸ Töppel, Kursk, mythen und wirklichkeit einer schlacht, p. 361 & Healy, Slaget om Kursk, 1943, p. 15 & Glantz & House, The Battle of Kursk, pp.16-17
largely drafted from other sections of the army or air force or made up by drafting men from occupied countries, such as the Netherlands or Denmark.140

Another example is the state of Model’s 9th Army, which would have a very important role in Operation Zitadelle. The 9th Army had been through a rough winter in the Rzhev sector in 1942/43 and had suffered large losses. Replacements around May replaced just about 21 percent of losses. Model’s army was short on trucks and had mobility issues because of this. Most of the Army’s artillery was also captured French or Soviet pieces of questionable quality. The army was also short on infantry for the front-line roles and lacked combat engineers. Engineers and artillery had a vital and highly important role when the proposed German offensive had to be made against a heavily fortified area. Of the 12 new divisions that Model received in preparation for Zitadelle, none were fresh and one, the 4. Panzer division stood at only 50 percent strength. 9. Army was in general far less ‘loved’ than Army Group South. Average combat strength of 9. Army divisions stood at 3,296 in contrast to 6,344 in Army Group South. The 9. Army also possessed about two thirds of the tanks available to Army Group South and in the tank arsenal of 9. Army was not a single Panther.141

141 Newton, Kursk the German view , pp. 372-373, 377-378 & Frankson & Zetterling, Slaget om Kursk, p. 177.
1.6 Operation Zitadelle

1.6.1 Execution of Zitadelle

When Zitadelle began on the 5th of July, about 777,000 German soldiers took part in the pincer attack on the Kursk bulge. This was everything the German Army could muster in 1943 and there were no reserves if the venture failed. These men were supported by 2,900 tanks. They also possessed some 7,500 artillery pieces and 1,800 planes. They were attacking almost 2,000,000 Soviet soldiers who had in excess of 5,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, 30,000 artillery pieces and mortars and about 3,500 planes. The Germans who imagined the new Panthers to be their ace, were quickly disappointed, as technical problems were numerous.\textsuperscript{142}

Before the German attack got underway the Soviets launched a massive pre-emptive artillery bombardment, as they knew the exact start time and date of the German offensive. The effect of this was varied, it caused disruption among the Germans who were assembling to start their own attack. When the German attack began the German soldiers and generals, who had imagined that the massive concertation of forces would break the enemy line quickly were disillusioned as they encountered fierce resistance and enormous minefields. In spite of these problems, the Germans in the South were able to breach the first line of Soviet fortifications and in some areas, they came into contact with the second line. In the north, the 9. Army also progressed relatively well against the enemy defences, and at the end of the day they had covered a bit of ground. Overall, the Southern part of the German attack had fared better and progressed further into the Soviet defences, the Soviets were preparing counterattacks for the next day consisting of 600 tanks against the 9. Army and over 1,000 against the 4. Panzer Army of Army Group South.\textsuperscript{143}

On the second day of the offensive, Model visited a Panzer corps and he was told that the attack had stalled and could go no further. The neighbouring Panzer corps also reported extremely heavy resistance and enemy counterattacks with large numbers of tanks. These events forced the corps to go into a defensive posture and although it was told to keep attacking it could go no further due to high losses among the infantry. The German attack in the north had clearly stalled, already by the second day and although fighting continued on the northern part of the bulge, the frontline did not shift very much after the 6\textsuperscript{th} of July. All the 9.

\textsuperscript{142} Frankson & Zetterling, \textit{Slaget om Kursk}, pp.105,166, 167.
Army could do was to hold its ground and attempt to weaken the reserves of the Soviets by beating back their counterattacks.\textsuperscript{144} This meant that if \textit{Zitadelle} was to succeed it was now dependent on the Southern part making a decisive breakthrough.

In the South the fighting continued for several days, the Germans managed to gradually push their way forward although the Soviets counterattacked with large numbers of men and tanks. The German leadership had postponed the eastern offensive for too long, as on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of July a strong Allied force landed on Sicily. Hitler, the OKW and the OKH, decided that no resources were to be pulled from the Eastern front at this point to fight the allies. On the 11\textsuperscript{th} of July, the \textit{Großdeutschland} division managed to achieve a substantial breakthrough. This was followed-up by the \textit{II. SS Panzerkorps} which managed to break the third and last Soviet defensive line just south of the town of Prokhorovka. If the town fell to the Germans, they would have a clear way to proceed towards Kursk. This concerned the Soviet leadership and they subsequently employed the last large reserve they had, the 5. Tank Army with 800 tanks.

On the 12\textsuperscript{th} of July, the Germans and Soviets both began advancing at the same time. The Germans were advancing towards Prokhorovka and the Soviets from it. This led to a tank battle that lasted throughout the entire day. About 400 Soviet tanks went head to head with the about 200 tanks of two SS divisions. The ongoing battles were characterised by mass attacks performed by the Soviets which led to high losses in men and materiel. The Soviets had managed to halt the German advance towards Prokhorovka, but they had suffered heavy losses. At the end of the day, the Germans had totally destroyed or captured around 300 tanks, while losing 55 themselves, many of these could be repaired and put back into action.\textsuperscript{145}

This turned out to be the furthest German forces got towards Kursk. Already on the 11\textsuperscript{th} of July, the 2. Panzer Army around Orel were reporting attacks by the Soviets and on the 12\textsuperscript{th} the Soviets launched a strong offensive. The Soviet offensive succeeded in splitting open the front of the 2. Panzer Army and Model had only two divisions in reserve to attempt to stop the breakthrough. Army Group Centre was calling for the offensive to be abandoned at this point, but Manstein persuaded Hitler that 9. Army should stay where it was to allow him in the South to break through to Kursk. Model’s army held their gains until the 15\textsuperscript{th} when fresh Soviet formations were sent against 9. Army. Model carried out a retreat to the starting lines during the night. Manstein’s operation in the South continued until the 17\textsuperscript{th} of July. At this

point a Soviet attack was launched against the German 6. Army which was stationed along the Mius river in the Donets Basin. Manstein had to pull his divisions back to their starting lines and move them south to deal with the Soviet offensive.\textsuperscript{146}

1.6.2 Beyond Zitadelle

The German Summer offensive of 1943, operation Zitadelle, had clearly failed. The German Army had not come close to encircling and neutralizing the Kursk bulge. They had expended large numbers of tanks and men that were hard or impossible to replace. The German offensive had cost them about 56,000 men and about 280 tanks that had been totally destroyed or captured. Several more German tanks had been damaged but could be repaired given time. The problem for the German Army was that the Soviets gave them no pause to recuperate after Zitadelle. Soviet losses were greater, manpower losses were 177,000 men and almost 2,000 tanks had been destroyed or captured. The Soviets, however, still had fresh reserves that had not been substantially engaged in the fighting around Kursk. The Soviet offensive against the 2. Panzer Army around Orel became a large battle that included 9. Army. The two German formations held on to the Orel salient for the duration of July and the German did not evacuate Orel until the 18th of August. At this point the two German armies had lost another 89,000 men. The Red Army lost another 433,000 men as well as 2,600 tanks during the fighting for Orel.147

The Soviet attack along the Mius river met with initial success, the Mius had been held by the weak 6. Army which only had a single Panzer-Grenadier division as mobile reserves. The Mius was not and ideal defensive position either, the river was shallow and only about 45 meters wide. The Soviets quite easily achieved bridgeheads, however, on the 30th of July a German counterattack by a strong armoured force drove the Soviets back and inflicted substantial casualties. The German Army could still push the Soviets back when they were able to counterattack with a strong armoured force, the problem was that the Soviets were attacking all along the line and the German leadership had to juggle their few armoured formations from place to place to meet each threat. The Allies were also making gains on Sicily, and on the 25th of July, Mussolini, Hitler’s closest ally was ousted. In response, Hitler decided to send the I. SS Panzer division to Italy. German casualties in Army Group South eventually grew to 133,000 men.148 The German soldier was now fighting a war in the East where the enemy had the initiative and was constantly pushing forward.

147 Frankson & Zetterling, Slaget om Kursk, pp. 236, 255
1.6.3 *Zitadelle as a failure*

Germany had set the objectives for *Zitadelle* as the following: 1) Retain the initiative that had been gained with the victory at Kharkov. 2) Straighten the frontline and gain reserves for the expected western offensive. 3) Thoroughly dent the Soviet offensive capability by eliminating the strong Soviet force in the Kursk bulge. 4) Capturing a large number of Soviet prisoners to be used as slave labour. If one takes a look at what *Zitadelle* had achieved it is clear that the German effort failed in all these areas. With the following and continuous Soviet offensives, the initiative had clearly passed to the Soviets. The German Army had not succeeded in straightening the Kursk bulge and had clearly failed to dent Soviet offensive capabilities. The number of prisoners captured during *Zitadelle* was extremely low compared to earlier German offensives, around 10,000. Even when compared to operation *Blau* or *Barbarossa*, *Zitadelle* was a complete failure. 149 German General Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin wrote after the war: “…our Panzer divisions in such a splendid shape at the beginning of the battle – had been bled white… With the failure of our supreme effort, the strategic initiative passed to the Russians… [it had been] a complete and most regrettable failure.”150

With this view about how much of a disaster Kursk had been it is clear why none wanted to be the person responsible for plan *Zitadelle*. The next chapter will explore precisely who was a supporter of *Zitadelle* and who attempted to argue for a different course of action.

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150 Glantz & House, *The Battle of Kursk*, p. 277
Chapter 2, Military disagreements before and during the Kursk Offensive

2.1 Disagreements before the Kursk offensive

2.1.1 How to proceed in 1943, who wanted to take what action?

In 1943 there were extensive discussions among Hitler, the OKW, the OKH and the various Army commanders regarding how the war should be prosecuted after the victory at Kharkov. These questions on how to proceed began even before the German victory at Kharkov was complete. Operation Blau had cost the German Army in the East heavy losses and it had failed to improve their strategic situation. It had been the smaller offensives that had been executed to allow Blau to take place that had inflicted the highest losses on the Soviets and the lowest losses on the Germans. These German offensives were all backhand-blows, the Soviets had struck German defensive lines first and the Germans had then counterattacked with armoured reserves when the Soviet forces were exhausted. Operation Trappenjagd and Fridericus I had inflicted about 500,000 losses on the USSR, while German losses in these operations were less than 40,000 men. A smaller example was operation Raubitier where a German backhand-blow had encircled 50,000 Soviet soldiers of whom about 70 percent were killed or captured. The offensive that had halted the Soviet advance after Stalingrad had also been a backhand-blow. Manstein and Army Group South had managed to strike the Soviets as they had extended their own supply lines with an attack executed by fresh armoured reserves. The Discussions that were held between Hitler, the OKH, the OKW and the various Army Group commanders was thus, how could they best exploit the situation they were in, what should be the next German ‘move’ in the East?

Roman Töppel writes that Manstein had suggested to Hitler that a back-hand blow and giving up ground would be beneficial as early as on the 18th of February 1943. His plan was to create the same conditions as at Kharkov, but this time on a grand scale, he thought this would function as the big summer offensive. Hitler is said to have replied that he thought any grand offensives to be too risky and that he himself preferred small attacks. When Manstein failed to persuade Hitler of this back-hand suggestion he then offered a suggestion to execute a for-hand pincer attack, using forces from Army Group South and Army Group Centre, against the Kursk salient (see map 14). The idea for the final pincer move against Kursk actually came from a less well-known figure, that of General Rudolf Schmidt, who commanded 2. Panzer Army of Army Group Centre. Schmidt, however, suggested that his army should not be used for the attack as it was bogged down in defensive fighting around Bryansk. His 2. Panzer
Army, despite having ‘panzer’ in the name, consisted of 160,000 men in 14 infantry divisions and a single panzer-grenadier division. This force was not strong enough to execute an attack on the scale that he proposed. Instead he suggested that Walter Model’s 9. Army should be used, as Model’s force was larger and much more potent. On the 11th of March, von Manstein again expressed wishes that he wanted the Kursk salient to be eliminated as soon as possible. In other words, Manstein, not Hitler, was in these cases advocating a for-hand blow against the Soviets. Manstein expressed this further in his personal war diary, in which he wrote “Hitler’s approach will not lead to results.”

Töppel writes further that Hitler was not clear on where the summer offensive should take place, the only thing he was sure of was the need to keep the Donbass, as Hitler regarded the area as very economically important. The region produced large amounts of coal, iron and aluminium and these resources were needed if the German war industry was to further increase production of tanks and planes in 1943.

Schmidt told von Kluge of his idea of an attack at Kursk on the 10th of March 1943 and on the very same day von Kluge called Walter Model, commander of the 9th Army and told him of the idea. This can be taken as optimism on von Kluge’s part, or that he was at least enthusiastic enough to see if the attack could be carried out. As of the 13th of March, Hitler was still not decided, on that day he visited with Army Group Centre at Smolensk. Present at Smolensk were Zeitzler, von Kluge and Schmidt. On that day Schmidt presented his idea for the Kursk salient to Hitler (see map 14). Roman Töppel has asserted that Hitler was doubtlessly impressed with Schmidt’s proposal as Hitler published Operationsbefehl Nr 5 which said that: “In the area of Kharkov there is to be built up a large armoured force ready for offensives to work in coordination with Army Group Centre which was to strike from the area of the 2. Panzer Army, armour to be ready by the middle of April, after the muddy season was over”.

Töppel continues and states that Hitler was still not convinced of the merits of the operations even after this. Manstein, however, continued to press for a quick offensive against Kursk, he told Zeitzler on the 18th of March over telephone. Zeitzler responded that if anything, Hitler preferred a small attack against Izium. In an operation codenamed Habicht (see map 14). On the 23rd of March Hitler conceded to repeated requests for the proposed Kursk attack and ordered that it was to be carried out after the close of operation Habicht, it was given the

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151 Töppel, *Kursk 1943*, p.22.
codename Zitadelle. Manstein’s immediate subordinates both those of the 1. Panzer Army and those of Armeabteilung Kempf preferred a larger attack, rather than several small ones. As this became known to Hitler, Habicht was eventually enlarged and renamed Panther (see map 15). The deadline for Panther was set to the 1st of May, this was the original deadline set for Zitadelle and as Panther was to be carried out first this entailed that the deadline for Zitadelle would have to be postponed. Manstein eventually received orders to prepare to carry out Habicht, Panther or Zitadelle, which to be carried out depended on the weather and strength of the enemy. At this point, Habicht or Panther were preferred by Hitler rather than Zitadelle. (see map 14 and map 15) A factor is the size of the respective operations, Zitadelle would represent a much larger offensive commitment than any of the other proposed attacks. It needed the commitment of all reserves of Army Group Centre and South, as well as the German strategic reserve if it was to be carried out. 154

At this point in time Manstein, commander of Army Group South was on leave and his post was temporarily filled by Walter Model, commander of 9. Army of Army Group Centre. During this time, Model was told by several of von Manstein’s subordinates, including Hermann Hoth, the commander of 4. Panzer-Army, that operation Panther would be almost impossible to carry out with the forces at hand and that he and his subordinates preferred Zitadelle as the offensive effort. By the 8th of April Habicht was cancelled completely, the reason was the impossibility of building bridges over the Donets river in time for the offensive. Operation Panther also seemed pointless. One of its objectives had been to capture large numbers of Soviet forces and secure the German position in the Donets area. The area where Panther was supposed to strike no longer held these Soviet forces and German commanders of Army Group South continued to praise the merits of Zitadelle. 155

Manstein wrote in early April that: “My intention to eliminate the Kursk salient before the muddy season has been negated, Army Group South can’t attack before the second half of April. Want to execute an attack then as this [Zitadelle] is now preferred by OKH to an attack in the Donets [in other words Panther or Habicht].” 156 The main proponent of Zitadelle at this point was clearly von Manstein, it is also clear that von Kluge of Army Group Centre preferred it to any of the other suggested operations. On the 15th of April Hitler issued Operationsbefehl Nr 6 which stated that: “As soon as the weather permits it operation

155 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 29.
156 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 29.
Zitadelle is to be launched”. The same order, however, went on to say that: “The forces were to go over to and complete operation Panther as soon as possible [in other words, as soon as Zitadelle was completed]”. The staff members of Army Group South were supposedly “happy” with the decision, among them Werner Kempf. Kempf said during a telephone conversation on the 19th of April that: “The success of Zitadelle is not to be doubted”.158

Hitler was not as optimistic; he was not content with the commitment of the 9. Army from the north towards Kursk and started to ask logistical officers if 9. Army could be easily shifted to the west of Kursk and make the attack from there instead. The conclusion made by the logistical head of Army Group Centre was that 9. Army could be easily shifted to the new location. Hitler’s proposal would have meant a direct thrust towards Kursk from the location of the 2. Army by 9. Army and from the South by Army Group South (see map 15). This proposal was discussed on the 20th of April, attending the meeting was Chief of Staff of Army Group South, Theodor Busse, Chief of Staff of the OKH, Kurt Zeitzler, Chief of the Operational Department of the General Staff, lieutenant general Karl Heusinger and Chief of Staff to Army Group Centre, Hans Krebs. Busse as well as Heusinger spoke out against Hitler’s proposal. They felt the attack would then be made on unfavourable ground, even if the attack was successful it would only serve to push Soviet forces out of the area, rather than trap them. Shifting the point of attack of Army Group Centre at this point would take too much time. Hitler’s proposal was in the end discarded and the original plan for Zitadelle went ahead.159 This proposal shows two things: 1) Hitler was clearly not convinced of the merits of Zitadelle as he continued to look for other options. 2) He was not inflexible in this case, when most generals disagreed with him, he went along with their wishes.

Hitler’s lack of enthusiasm for any attack in general is backed by the diaries of Joseph Goebbels. On the 7th of May 1943 Goebbels wrote that: “Hitler, rather than seeking actively to attack at Kursk wants to wait and see if the Soviets attack first and that would in his opinion be better for the German army”.160 Goebbels repeated the same claim on the 23rd of

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157 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 29.
158 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 29.
159 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 30.
May. 161 In late April, Hitler agreed to what Manstein, Zeitzler and Kluge wanted and that was an attack against Kursk using the plan outlined by Schmidt as a blueprint. 162

2.1.2 Delay and Soviet build-up

At this point Hitler was not the only person who doubted whether Zitadelle would be successful. The question of increasing Soviet fortifications in the area was becoming more evident. As mentioned in the last chapter, operation Zitadelle became subject to continuous delays. In this section we will look more closely at these and see how these were important. Commander of the German 9. Army, the actions of Walter Model were very important with regard to the first delays of Zitadelle.

The offensive first had May 3rd as deadline. The problems with this was discussed at length between Zeitzler, Heusinger, Krebs and Busse. The two latter argued that preparations could not be completed in time for the proposed date. Zeitzler told them to accommodate the deadline and prepare to launch the offensive on May 3rd. Krebs telephoned Model on the same evening to inform him of this. Model demanded more troops and materiel. If May 3rd was kept as the deadline, then the goals of the offensive would have to be significantly smaller. He judged that a postponement to the 15th of May would be much better. He informed Krebs that if the date was not pushed further or he received substantial reinforcements he would resign.

The date was not immediately pushed, but Model received some additional tanks and self-propelled guns, which made him more optimistic. The next request for a delay came from Army Group South, the leadership argued that units could not be brought into attack positions before the 5th of May, as a result of this Hitler pushed the date forward to the 5th of May on the 26th of April. On the 27th Hitler met Model and he proceeded to show Hitler several aerial photographs of the Kursk sector that showed the Soviet fortifications and large reserves in the area. The fortifications alone were 20 kilometres in depth and Model was highly concerned how long it would take 9. Army to break through, if they could at all. Hitler agreed with Model’s assessment and as a result he pushed the date of attack to the 12th of June, at this point the new tanks (the Tiger and Panther tanks) would be available for deployment and these would (in Hitler’s view) vastly increase the fighting power of 9. Army. 163

This move was highly unpopular with Zeitzler, and he persuaded Hitler not to make it public, he was certain that both von Kluge and von Manstein agreed with him that a postponement was not a good idea. On the 4th of May a meeting was held between Hitler, Zeitzler, von Kluge, von Manstein, Guderian and the chief of staff of the Luftwaffe, Hans Jeschonnek. Von Manstein and von Kluge were both in agreement with Zeitzler, von Kluge was not opposed to

163 Töppel, Kursk 1943, pp. 33-35 & Glantz & House, The Battle of Kursk, p. 17
delaying until the 12th of May, but was completely against any further delays. He also added that he judged Model’s estimates to be highly pessimistic, Hitler replied that “Model was not the pessimist, it was he himself”.164 Manstein also spoke against postponement. Guderian agreed with Hitler that postponement was a good idea, he also suggested that rather than launching a pincer attack there should only be one big thrust from either north or south. This idea was not pursued further. Jeschonnek argued that postponement would not benefit the Luftwaffe, however, postponement won the day and on the next day Hitler made known that the new date was the 12th of June. The decision was far from popular, General Kempf who commanded Armeeabteilung Kempf of Army Group South spoke to Zeitzler on May 7th, he told Zeitzler that he had “grave concerns about the delay of Zitadelle”. In his words: “Preparations for the offensive are completed and the troops are in good condition. Delay now would be bad from a psychological point of view, more time would in any case benefit the defending Red Army. The Red Army may well launch their own offensive, thus depriving us of the initiative.”165 Zeitzler responded by saying that he was “of the same opinion, but he had been unable to persuade Hitler.”166

The reason for this postponement in the end stemmed from two main factors, Hitler was not himself sure if Zitadelle was a good idea and secondly Model’s report and scepticism gave Hitler a good argument for postponing the operation. Historian Steven Newton sums it up by writing: “When Model spoke, Hitler listened.”167. Model was happy about the delay as he judged the time would give his army a chance to get substantial reinforcements as well as allow his troops time to rest, refit and train. Model was still the most vocal in regard to his lack of belief in attacking at Kursk, but few members of the high command were willing to listen to him. Model’s subordinates Hans Zorn, Joachim Lemelsen and Josef Harpe were not overly optimistic about the operation either, they collectively “[...] harboured few illusions about the difficulties ahead of them”168. Newton writes that Guderian was “sympathetic” [to Model’s view] but not “influential” enough and Model’s earlier request in regard to delaying had “infuriated” von Kluge and Zeitzler so much that they did not want to speak on his behalf. At this stage the only people who were against Zitadelle were Model and Hitler, although Hitler was at the moment only interested in delaying rather than abandoning the offensive. 169

164 Töppel, Kursk 1943, pp.36
165 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 37.
166 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 37.
167 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, p. 372.
169 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, pp. 219-220, 223.
Hitler was, however, looking for other alternative operations, such as the proposed attack from the 2. German Army.

The delay was causing concerns among other German generals as well. Manstein was by mid-May expressing concerns about his Army Group’s ability to penetrate the increasingly strong enemy defences. Manstein’s concerns were two-fold, the primary was delaying the operation further and the secondary was that the past delays were already too substantial. The delays had meant that the enemy had been able to build up large fortifications and their reinforcements were far larger than what his Army Group or Army Group Centre had received. On June 1st Manstein wrote that “[the] prospects of Zitadelle have not improved”. He also writes of the “…growing enemy strength, the threat to the Mius front has increased significantly. Zitadelle remains a difficult operation with only minimal chances of success.” His judgement in general was that the war in the East could not be won with the forces at hand and that a redeployment would have to be undertaken.

This was completely contrary to the plans that Hitler had, his intentions were to win a swift victory in the East, and then transfer substantial forces to the west to face the Allies. Historian Mungo Melvin writes that Zeitzler was also becoming pessimistic as he was becoming convinced that the enemy had a clear idea of German intentions with regard to the Kursk bulge. Gehlen, who was head of German intelligence in the East also regarded Zitadelle as a bad idea, he concluded in writing that: “I consider the planned operation as a really grave error, which will revenge itself greatly.” Herman Hoth who commanded 4. Panzer-Army of Army Group South informed Manstein that breaking through the Soviet defences would be: “…difficult, costly and time-consuming.” Another of von Manstein’s subordinates Major General Walther von Hünersdorff used much stronger language than Hoth, he referred to the planned operation from the start as “idiotic” and that it as a whole “violated the basic rules of leadership”. Even though von Manstein had reservations at this point, as did some of his senior commanders like Hoth, von Manstein failed to see any alternative but to carry out ‘Zitadelle’ as planned.
Historian George Nipe cites that Hitler recognized that Zitadelle represented a huge gamble as other sectors were stripped to reinforce the attacking German armies. He writes that both Model and Manstein urged caution, but that Hitler was decided on the offensive at this point. Nipe cited Zeitzler and von Kluge as the most ardent supporters of Zitadelle. Manstein judged the plan to be good in theory, but the continuous delays were not. The most consistent supporter of Zitadelle was von Kluge, after conversations with Model in regard to assuming a defensive stance he recited his arguments in favour of Zitadelle. 1) The Soviets would not attack until much later in the year. 2) Once they do attack, almost all German forces will be needed for defence, leaving only a token force available for attack. 3) Once the Soviets do attack, they will keep going until the winter. The conclusion von Kluge ended with was that the German attack needed to be launched as quickly as possible in order to strike before the enemy. 177

Manstein served as one of the people who brought Zitadelle on the agenda for the German Army. He spent most of February, March and April advocating in favour of a swift attack towards Kursk, however, by the time Hitler became persuaded of the merits of the offensive, Manstein had grown less in favour of the operation. This was because the delay had changed realities on the ground, both in regard to Soviet strength and defensive preparations. The fact that some German generals thought they could execute such a large operation with continuous delays also shows supreme arrogance and hubris. Several, including von Kluge thought that the attack would completely surprise the Soviets right up to the moment it was launched. Kluge's view seems delusional at best, as the large fortification effort in the area clearly suggested that the Soviets were preparing to counter any attack made against Kursk and that they at least suspected that an offensive thrust would be made in the area. The Soviet leadership had suspected as early as the 12th of April that an attack in the Kursk area would be launched and they prepared accordingly. The Soviet front commanders reported in early May that their preparations for repelling a German attack against Kursk were largely completed. 178 The merits of a swift successful blow against Kursk were many for the German military situation, however, believing that the operation could be successful at this stage reflected a very substantial underestimation of the Soviets, which many German generals were guilty of.

177 Nipe, Decision in the Ukraine summer 1943, pp. 19, 20, 21, 22 & Töppel, 2009, p. 356
178 Zamulin, Could Germany Have Won the Battle of Kursk if It Had Started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?, p. 608
Further factors did in the end contribute to the delay of the attack, and they were not a direct consequence of what any individual German general did or suggested, they were instead factors beyond their control.
2.1.3 Concerns about an allied attack

Even if Hitler had wanted to launch Operation *Zitadelle* during the month of May, this would have likely been impossible. During the month there was continuous rainfall on the Eastern front, and this made offensive operations difficult at best. The roads became extremely muddy and swift movement was impossible. It was not before June that the rain stopped, and offensive operations could again be considered as the ground dried. 179

Hitler was also concerned as he did not only look at the Eastern Front and the necessities of that theatre. On the 13th of May the last Axis forces in Tunisia had surrendered, *Zitadelle* was now out of the question for Hitler, as he feared an attack against the Italian mainland. During a meeting on the 19th of May he said that the three SS divisions of the II. SS Panzer-corps were to be sent there in the event of an Italian capitulation. These divisions were meant to be the *Schwerpunkt* divisions for *Zitadelle* in the southern sector and the operation could not realistically be carried out without them. Hitler returned to concerns regarding Italy the next day as he was sure that there would be a crisis at any time. Only three days later a report filed by the German military attaché in Rome put Hitler’s fears into words. He wrote about the Italian armed forces:

“… they are losing everywhere, they are poorly equipped, and the officer corps are very poorly educated and trained. […] The hard core of the Italian army has previously been lost in Africa, Greece and in Russia. […] The remains of the air force are outdated [technically] and can not be employed unless there are no other forces at hand. […] Their coastal defence forces are highly lacking and any successful defence against an allied landing are entirely dependent on German assistance.” 180

This report was influential in regard to delaying *Zitadelle* further, as Hitler feared to commit in the East while Italy was so vulnerable. Hitler still preferred to wait for the Soviets to make the first move. Goebbels wrote in his diary on the 6th of June that: “The planned Kursk offensive for May was ‘thank God’ delayed, no offensive should take place until one is properly prepared for it.” 181 Goebbels attributes the delay mostly to Hitler. He added that he spoke to Guderian on the same day about the offensive and Guderian made it clear that he was happy about the delay of *Zitadelle* and that in his view; “every month of delays means another

179 Töppel, *Kursk 1943*, p. 37
180 Töppel, *Kursk 1943*, p. 39 [my own translation].
1,000 tanks ready for reserve.” Goebbels adds that Hitler had taken his side even though some suggested that if Hitler did not order the attack, it would be considered cowardly on Hitler’s part. Guderian had persuaded Hitler not to commit to the attack because of such talk. 182

In any case, Hitler’s concerns about Italy seemed to be well founded, on the 11th of June the island fortress of Pantelleria was surrendered after being bombarded from the air and sea for several days. The Italian garrison surrendered without a fight when the allies landed on the island. Only at the end of June when substantial German reinforcements were sent to Italy from the west (France and the Low countries) did the conditions exist where Hitler to the launch of Zitadelle. The German reinforcements made Hitler confident that if the allies landed in Italy and the Italians surrendered there were enough troops present to avoid disaster. Army Group South, spearheaded by Manstein, made it clear once again that these continuous delays were not beneficial. Manstein told Zeitzler that: “[…] for every day we delay, the success rate of Zitadelle goes down. Even though the delay means more tanks, this does not compensate for the enemy strength increases.”183 This statement is almost entirely the opposite of what Guderian told Goebbels.

On the 18th of June the heads of staff of the Wehrmacht suggested to Hitler that Zitadelle should be ditched entirely and that focus should be given to build up further reserves in the East as well as in Germany itself. In contrast to the other occasions, Hitler said no. He was now decided that he did not want to wait any longer for the Red Army to take the initiative, instead he wanted Zitadelle to be carried out according to plan. On the 24th of June he made clear his reason behind this decision. During a meeting he said that the disaster in Tunisia could not be corrected only through the means of propaganda, there would have to be a new success in the field to erase the defeat in Tunisia from memory. Three days later, the final deadline was announced as July the 5th of July. Manstein also mentioned that delaying Zitadelle would likely mean that the operation would coincide with an allied landing in the west. This was, however, mentioned by von Manstein before the German forces in Tunisia had surrendered and was likely an attempt to argue his case against delaying the attack in general. 184

183 Töppel, Kursk 1943, pp. 39, 41.
184 Töppel, Kursk 1943 pp. 40-42 & Bussmann, Kursk- Orel Dnjapr, p. 507
2.1.4 Wunderwaffen (Wonder weapons)

In this section we will briefly look at what faith the German high command had in their new “wonder weapons”\(^{185}\) and if they were decisive in battle. Despite the prominence of the new *Panther* and *Tiger* tanks (Panzer V and Panzer VI respectively) most of the German armoured recovery was in the form of older models like the Panzer IV and the Stug (Sturmgeschütz) III (a turretless vehicle that carried the same gun as the panzer IV). The Stug III had been prioritized for production by Hitler in December 1942, when he directly ordered that all production of the Panzer III was to shift to producing the Stug instead. After being appointed to Inspector General of Armoured Troops, Guderian sought to bring the Stug forces under his control, Goebbels wrote on the 6\(^{th}\) of March, that he would present the proposition to Hitler.\(^{186}\)

In the end Guderian did not receive control over the Stug forces, they were at the moment under the control of the artillery branch of the army. Despite this, Guderian sought to increase production of Stugs after he assumed his post.\(^{187}\) There is little evidence from direct sources about how much faith was put in the new weapons that Germany had developed. A conversation between Hitler and Manstein on the 18\(^{th}\) of February 1943 is cited by Töppel. Hitler talked about the new tanks that would become available to Manstein during the spring. He listed 98 heavy tank destroyers [Ferdinands], 150 Tiger tanks, 200-250 Panther tanks, 50 heavy self-propelled artillery pieces, 100 flamethrower tanks as well as a high number of panzer IVs [new models]\(^{188}\). Hitler went on to say that:

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“Most of these weapons are invulnerable to enemy fire. Their combat power is beyond anything else. With the Ferdinand, any enemy tank can be destroyed at a range of 2,000 metres. With this huge number of modern attack-weapons it must be possible to regain the initiative.”\(^{189}\)
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Hitler’s comments make a compelling case for why the offensive was gradually postponed because of the production delays that were affiliated with the new weapons, especially the Panther. The comments also make it clear that the new heavy tanks would only account for a small fraction of the entire armoured force. Although 841 (out of 2,900 tanks) were panzer IVs it is barely mentioned by Hitler and despite the production of numerous Stug III they are

\(^{185}\) The new German tanks that were available to the German Army


\(^{188}\) Töppel, *Kursk 1943*, p. 42.

\(^{189}\) Töppel, *Kursk 1943*, p. 42 [my own translation].
not mentioned at all. As the offensive was gradually delayed due to the production delays associated with the new models it can be concluded that Hitler did place a lot of faith in the new designs that the Germans arm industry had developed and produced. No conclusions can be made in regard to what impact others among the German leadership thought the new weapons would have on the battlefield, as little can be found as to what they meant at the time. This means that any conclusions would only be arguments from the sources’ silence on that issue, in other words mere guesswork. The only other direct sources that mention the new tanks come in the shape of memoirs and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

190 Cornish, Images of Kursk, p. 37.
2.1.5 Estimation and underestimation of Soviet forces

When *Zitadelle* was decided as the summer offensive German intelligence as well as Army commanders had to establish a picture of the forces that they would be attacking as part of the operation. *Zitadelle* required all that Germany could muster in terms of tanks, equipment and men in order to secure a victory, however, was this force big enough compared to what the Soviet Union had in terms of manpower and materiel? The most optimistic estimate of German tank strength at beginning of July 1943 is about 2,900 tanks and armoured fighting vehicles, against this the Soviets had about 5,000, however the German tanks were mostly technically superior, their crews were better trained, and, in most cases, they had more experience. German intelligence of the time reported that Soviet forces in the area likely outnumbered them by as much as 2:1, in terms of tanks this estimate was more or less correct, however, it was not correct in terms of infantry or artillery were the Soviets outnumbered the Germans respectively about 3:1 and 4:1. This was most clear in the Northern sector were Model received about 360 artillery pieces in reinforcements, while his Soviet counterpart got almost 6,000 in the same time period. 191

This underestimation of Soviet strength was not just the fault of German intelligence, several German commanders had a bad habit of underestimating both Soviet production capability and Soviet Forces. Marcel Stein writes that Manstein, unlike Model, consistently underestimated Soviet forces and that it was his Hubris that made him think that any operation under his command would automatically bring success. 192 Manstein estimated that the Soviets were not producing more than 1,500 tanks per month and that this represented a considerable obstacle to *Zitadelle*, however, not an impossible one. 193 Soviet industry were in facto producing far more, their monthly output of just T-34 tanks were 1,300. 194 Guderian underestimated in the same way. If we return to his previous conversation with Goebbels, where he cited that he was quite happy to postpone the offensive, as every month brought another 1,000 tanks ready for combat. If one compares this number to the Soviet production number Guderian’s logic was poor in regard to either of the following:

1) He did not realize that the Soviet production of vehicles was much larger (not to mention if one compares German production figures to Soviet, American and British combined figures)

and every month meant that the force comparison actually became worse for Germany, rather than better.

2) He knew that they were being outproduced but had a blind faith in the German Army’s ability to combat these much larger numbers, either through his belief in technical and or tactical superiority.

Either of these assumptions can be characterized as the same hubris that Marcel Stein attributes to Manstein. The belief that their tactical superiority would make up for superior enemy numbers was present among many figures in the German Army. It was largely founded on two beliefs. Present among many was the national socialist ideology that viewed the Russians as inferior and incompetent. This was, however, not just bound up in the ideology of the ideological fanatics in the German military, it was a general attitude among German officers towards the skills of their Soviet opponents, which they viewed (for the most part) to be highly lacking. For others it was also due to the large defeats of the Soviet Army during the first years of the war which in their mind showed how poor the Red Army was. Their belief was often that the Soviet Army had not improved since these events and that it still was a hapless giant, rather than a giant steamroller. An example of this is Hermann Hoth, who himself admitted to having viewed the Red Army as a poor force: “The Russians have learnt a lot since 1941. They are no longer peasants with simple minds. They have learnt the art of war from us.”

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195 Melvin, Manstein, Hitler’s greatest general, p. 347
2.1.6 Did anyone try to sabotage the operation once plan Zitadelle was decided upon?

There is not much evidence in regard to anyone on the German side actively trying to sabotage Zitadelle, however, the subject does feature in the post-war writings of German generals, therefore the facts will be mentioned quickly in this section. Model is the protagonist most often mentioned in this regard. During May, Model suggested to von Kluge that it might be a better idea for 9. Army to start building defences rather than preparing for an attack, he judged that an attack would in any case meet with “almost immediate disaster”, von Kluge said no. Model went ahead in any case and ordered his engineers to build defences along his sector of the front. This action may be seen as Model deliberately acting against the decided course of action, however, it was likely more of a precaution. The defences that Model’s men started to work on would eventually become the Hagen-line of defences that German forces fell back to after the defeat at Kursk. Model also executed 2 large anti-partisan operations in order to secure his logistics ahead of Zitadelle as the 9. Army needed large quantities of supplies to be effective during an offensive as large as Zitadelle. The partisan operations were much more like actual full-scale battle at this point of the war, the partisan forces were large and well equipped at this stage of the war, they even had operational tanks. If Model was guilty of anything ahead of Zitadelle, it was his belief that the offensive needed to be delayed, there is no evidence that his forces were not prepared (by him) to undertake offensive action. Model is often accused of not being committed to the attack when it got underway. Newton writes that “It is clear that once Zitadelle got started Model did everything he could to make it a success, personally directing artillery fire where he thought it was needed.”

196 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, p. 376
197 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, pp. 229-230 & Görlitz, Model – Strategie der Defensive, p. 144 & Töppel Kursk 1943, p. 38
2.2 Problems during Operation Zitadelle

This section will cover the disagreements that German generals had during the offensive. Did anyone want to call for the operation to be halted quickly as they noticed that it was not going to achieve a swift victory?

2.2.1 Surprise or lack of surprise?

Almost immediately after the operation was launched the question of whether or not the Soviets had been surprised arose. On the first day of Zitadelle von Kluge met with Hans Zorn (one of Model’s subordinates) and made the comment that Zitadelle seems to have surprised the Soviets”.198 Goebbels wrote in his diary on the 7th of July that the German attack was a “surprise”, he added that the OKW report was very short and said that “everything was going according to the plan”.199 On the 8th of July he wrote about how that the Allies seemed surprised that the Germans went on the offensive at all as they seem to have expected German forces to be on the defensive permanently.200

It was, however, clear that no surprise had been achieved the Panzer Corps of which Hans Zorn was the commander noted in its war diary of the first day of the operation that: “The enemy was aware of our attack, surprise was not achieved.” The same unit also realized how well prepared the Soviet defences were already on the first and second days of fighting201. Commanders in Army Group South also realized that the offensive was no surprise. During a telephone conversation on the 11th of July between Manstein, Hoth and Kempf, General Kempf said that: “The enemy knew when the original attack would begin”. He proceeded to say that this was evident because of the large pre-emptive artillery fire that began before the German attack and that the enemy defences were very strong202. None of the others present refuted Kempf’s analysis. Despite the fact that the consensus among German generals was that Operation Zitadelle had failed to surprise the Soviets, none called for the operation to be abandoned on these grounds. There was also clearly a difference between the generals at the front who saw how well prepared the enemy were and generals in rear areas who did not see

198 Bussmann, Kursk-Orel-Dnjepr, p. 509.
201 Bussmann, Kursk-Orel-Dnjepr, p. 508-509
202 War Diary, Army Group South, meeting between Manstein, Kempf, Hoth and others, 11.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
the reality first hand. This was even more a problem for people like Goebbels who were in Berlin at the time and simply received brief reports from the front.
2.2.2 The 9. Army failure

After the first day of the offensive, 9. Army’s attack in the north stalled, especially compared to the attacks that were launched by Army Group South. On the second day of the offensive, Model visited a Panzer Corps and he was told that the attack had stalled and could go no further. The neighbouring Panzer Corps reported extremely heavy resistance and enemy counterattacks with large numbers of tanks. This matches the report from one of the infantry divisions in the area. The report spoke of heavy enemy resistance as well as heavy losses, and as a consequence advised that the forces should shift to a defensive posture, this request was denied. Kluge reacted by assuring the frontline commanders that reinforcements would make up for the heavy losses and called for an end to “pessimism”. This response made by Kluge shows that he viewed the losses in a distant way and clearly, he cared little for the well-being of the men under his command. His argument was that the main problem was the lack of optimism among his frontline commanders. On the 9\textsuperscript{th} of July, Model spoke to Kluge about one of his Panzer Corps and it was decided among the two of them that the offensive was to continue in order to inflict more casualties on the enemy and thus weaken their reserves, despite the losses that had been suffered by the Corps.\footnote{Görlitz, Model - Strategie der Defensive, pp. 147-149 & Bussmann, Kursk-Orel-Dniepr, pp. 508-509}

People like Manstein were aware of the problem caused by Model’s lack of advance in the north and how this impacted the advance of Army Group South. During a telephone conversation with Zeitzler on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of July von Manstein said that: “The outcome[of the offensive] is closely tied to the progress of the 9. Army of Model”. In response Zeitzler said that: “Model has advanced some 3km today, he has failed to capture the important and commanding hill in the area.”\footnote{War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Manstein and Zeitzler, 10.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].} The same topic featured in a telephone conversation on the evening of the 11\textsuperscript{th} of July between Chief of Staff of Army Group South Theodor Busse and Chief of Staff of Army Group North Hans Krebs. Krebs said that only limited advances have been made by 9. Army during the day and that a continued attack will be progressed on the 14\textsuperscript{th}. Busse responded by saying that OKW had hinted to Army Group South that Army Group Centre wanted to halt Model’s attack completely. Krebs responded by saying: “Halting the attack [permanently] is nowhere in our thoughts! There is no reason for doing so.”\footnote{War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Krebs and Busse, 11.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].}

Despite what Krebs said, during the 11\textsuperscript{th} all the attacks in the north on Corps levels had been called off with some very specific exceptions, the leadership was now wondering whether all
future attacks should be halted and a defensive posture should be taken instead, this is why Krebs mentions that no attacks will be launched before the 14th of July. On the day after von Manstein had a brief conversation with Zeitzler where Zeitzler told Manstein that: “The enemy has attacked Model’s Army in three places, preceded by a 2-hour long artillery bombardment. The enemy attacks have forced Model to remain defensive.” This is a reference to the start of the Soviet counteroffensive that shifted the 9. Army permanently on to the defensive and made any kind of advance to the south impossible. The decision to halt the offensive efforts of the 9. Army was taken by Model, but because of the large amount of telephone traffic between 9. Army and Army Group Centre, Kluge knew and agreed with the decision.

As the 9. Army got stuck it meant that if Zitadelle was going to succeed as planned, Manstein’s Army Group would have to advance not just to Kursk, but all the way to link up with Model’s forces, which was impossible. During the same telephone conversation von Manstein commented to Zeitzler that the spearhead towards the north was too slim and that if he pulled forces away from the eastern flank it would become vulnerable to attack. In order to overcome this problem, Zeitzler told Manstein that Hitler suggested (like on the 20th of April) that a fresh attack should be launched by 2 of Model’s reserve panzer divisions from the positions of the 2. German Army, as 9. Army’s attack had clearly stalled. Manstein responded to the suggestion by saying “The encirclement has to be completed in the East!” This shows that Manstein was tied to the original plan, although the plan could clearly not be executed any longer, due to the problems in regard to Model’s advance in the north. All 9. Army could essentially do at this point was to draw Soviet forces to them and try to inflict high casualties on the attacking Soviets. This lasted until the 15th of July when the Soviets attacked the 9. Army with fresh forces and Model ordered a retreat to the starting positions [position held before the start of Zitadelle], something that was carried out during the night of 15-16th of July.

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206 War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Manstein and Zeitzler, 12.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
207 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, p. 253
208 War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Manstein and Zeitzler, 10.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
209 Görlitz, Model - Strategie der Defensive, p. 151.
2.2.3 Wunderwaffen in action

There are different reports of how the new German tanks fared during the battle of Kursk. With regard to the Panther model, however, there were several problems. Before operation Zitadelle even began 2 Panther tanks were lost to engine fires while they were on their way to the front. Panzerbrigade 10, which had been equipped with 200 Panthers had by the 7th of July only 20 operational of the original number, many of these tanks could, however, be repaired. Several German tanks were lost to mines or because inexperienced commanders sent them rashly forward without proper recognisance. The result was that many were ambushed by Soviet troops. It can quite easily be concluded that the Panther tanks were rushed into action before they were ready and before the crews had been able to get familiar with the new tanks. The Panther was in general a complete failure during Zitadelle.

It was, however, not just the Panthers that suffered heavy losses, the Großdeutschland division had by 7th of July only 32 operational tanks ready for action out of the 135 they had started the operation with. These figures show that the high losses were not simply due to technical problems, but also due to the large defences, extensive minefields and heavy resistance. The extensive minefields can be attested to by the fact that one German Tiger [tank] company lost 13 of its 14 Tigers due to minefields although all could be repaired it showed how large the minefields were. According to an account by the German tank commander Michael Wittmann, the Tiger tanks were quite unmatched in battle. Wittmann described how a Tiger next to his own tank was rammed by a Soviet T-34 tank, “The T-34 turned into a flaming ball, the Tiger that was rammed proceeded to reverse, the T-34 then exploded and the Tiger was still functioning as if little had happened.” Although this may speak volumes of the combat value of the Tiger, they were too few to make any decisive impact. During the entire offensive, only 57 were available in total and as Soviet minefields put several out of action, even just temporary, this further impacted the contribution such a small number could make.

Regarding the Ferdinand tank destroyer there was a concern among German soldiers that the vehicle would be problematic in combat because it lacked a machine gun for close combat. Thus, it was thought to be easy for Soviet infantry to approach it and destroy it by using

210 Töppel, Kursk – Mythen und Virklichkeit einer Schlacht, p. 368.
212 Nipe, Decision in the Ukraine summer 1943, pp.36-37.
Molotov cocktails. This was not the case during the battle. A captain of a heavy tank
destroyer regiment equipped with the Ferdinand wrote: “The fear we had that the Ferdinand
would be problematic due to it not having a machine gun was in practice unfounded. This was
because of the huge sound the weapon made while firing and the large negative moral effect
the sound had on the enemy, no enemy infantry came close to any of our Ferdinands during
any of the operational days.”213

This sentiment is echoed by the commander of another such unit who said that: “No enemy
soldiers came close to our vehicle. Our accompanying infantry would, however, have to
protect us if any such attacks materialised.”214 In fact, this was further backed by the report of
a Soviet commission who inspected a few destroyed Ferdinands on the 15th of July 1943.
These tanks had indeed been destroyed by Molotov cocktails, but it had been done by the
retreating German soldiers after the vehicles were disabled by mines or otherwise
incapacitated. It was noted in the war diary of XXXXI. Panzer Korps that: “The enemy fled in
panic and fear of the Ferdinand.”215 The overall conclusion of the combat effectiveness of the
Ferdinand from several war diaries was that: “The Ferdinand was much beloved and served a
very protective purpose for the units.”216 The contribution of the Ferdinand was also factored
by the relatively low number of vehicles. It can, however, be said that the vehicle was of a
high quality and where it was operational provided great support for the troops that relied on
it.

In conclusion of the impact of these Wunderwaffen can be summed up easily enough. The
Panther was a failure during operation ‘Zitadelle’. The Tiger and Ferdinand both showed
great potential in terms of combat. All the vehicles were, however, severely hindered by the
extensive Soviet preparations that had taken place before the offensive. Even though the
vehicles were impressive, their low number as well as the obstacles they had to overcome in
attacking at Kursk were simply too large for them to turn the battle in favour of the
Wehrmacht.

213 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 128.
214 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 129.
215 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 129.
216 Töppel, Kursk 1943, p. 129.
2.2.4. *Zitadelle* as an impossible operation

The situation in the South was marginally better than in the north. General Hoth spoke to Manstein on the 9th of July: “I am today of the impression that we are progressing faster forward. Our own tank losses are lower than the previous days. There are signs that the enemy is becoming weaker.” Manstein responded by saying: “Then we are of course going to proceed with our attack to the north.”\(^{217}\) Hoth’s report from the next day is also largely optimistic, he comments that “bad weather has delayed action, but progress has been made, the two enemy corps on the flanks are largely intact, but the one to the front is weaker.”\(^{218}\) This was, however, not a lasting reality. Hoth, was consistently very optimistic during *Zitadelle* and his fellow commanders in the south were less so. During a discussion on the 11th of July general Kempf described how the 19. Panzer division has sustained very heavy losses, including two regimental commanders killed and one wounded, the division commander was noted to have a lack of experience when commanding tanks. Manstein’s reply to this was simply that the mentioned general was weak. To which Kempf replied that the problem was more that the general’s force had been weakened by heavy losses.\(^{219}\) Manstein was in this instance displaying the same attitude to high losses as Kluge. It is another sign of the commanders in the rear not seeing the actual effect of continuous heavy combat on frontline units. This is mentioned by Marcel Stein who writes that: “Model, in contrast to von Manstein, visited the front often and when he called a halt to attacking in the north it was probably because he knew that more attacks were futile, rather than von Manstein who was more in the rear as opposed to seeing the reality.”\(^{220}\)

What is apparent from the communications between various generals during *Zitadelle* is that the forces at hand were not large enough to complete the goals of the offensive. The Germans also had serious problems with losses sustained by the infantry. The heavy losses among infantry are referenced from a report from one of Model’s Panzer Corps. It was also apparent from a conversation on the 11th of July between Manstein and Zeitzler where Manstein told Zeitzler that General Kempf was: “complaining a lot about the heavy losses among the

\(^{217}\) War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Hoth and Manstein, 09.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
\(^{218}\) War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Hoth and Manstein, 10.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
\(^{219}\) War Diary, Army Group South, meeting between Kempf, Manstein, Hoth and others, 11.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
\(^{220}\) Stein, *A Flawed Genius*, p. 100.
The way von Manstein described Kempf’s concern about heavy losses as “complaining a lot” is yet another sign of him regarding high losses in a crude way and showed that he really did not care much and completely lacked empathy for the men under his command.

The heavy losses among infantry had two important consequences. German panzer units had to be used to guard the flanks of the advance, in static roles that were better done by infantry units. The second was that these panzer units would not be available as spearheads for a further advance. The consequence of this was that the attacking spearhead would get smaller as German units advanced further. Several of the conversations between Manstein and the high command were concerned by the lack of forces available and how this necessitated either stripping formations from the flanks or asking for further reinforcements. An example of this is a telegram sent from von Manstein to high command on the 12th of July. He mentioned first that:

“[…]the enemy has attacked in great force, but has been beaten back with heavy losses. Attacks against Raus’ Corps on the eastern flank were beaten off with the help of the III. Panzer Corps, pulling this corps away from the flank to help with the advance to the north as previously suggested can no longer be done. All enemy attacks have been beaten back with heavy losses. Lacking infantry for covering the flanks. Sad to have to employ panzer units for covering roles.”

Manstein was further optimistic that the attack towards the north could be continued and gave details. He hinted that to do so he would need an additional panzer corps in addition to the XXIV Panzer Corps that he held in reserve that would now have to be brought forward. Manstein’s telegram shows that the German forces available to complete operation Zitadelle were clearly not large enough. The German forces that had been made ready for the operation were stretched, not only by the losses the Soviets inflicted on them, but also by pressure on other sectors.

Communications between von Manstein and the German 6. Army that was guarding the Mius river shows a great concern over an immediate Soviet attack. On the 11th of July head of the 6.

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221 War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Zeitzler and Manstein, 10.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
222 War Diary, Army Group South, telegram from Manstein to Zeitzler, 12.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
223 War Diary, Army Group South, telegram from Manstein to Zeitzler, 12.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
Army told Manstein that: “We are expecting the enemy to attack at any time.” Manstein conveyed this to Zeitzler on the day after when he told him that: “There is still a danger that the enemy will start their attack against Izium at any time.” Zeitzler responded by saying that after reviewing the number of panzers available to the 6. Army the high command had decided to send an extra detachment of Stugs to help 6. Army. In another wire from high command there is also mentioned a delivery of 36 Pak 43 guns that will be delivered to 6. Army in order to bolster their anti-tank capabilities. This shows how few reserves the Germans had, 6. Army was at this point threatened by a full-scale Soviet offensive comprising several armies and high command had only decided to reinforce with a formation that maximum comprised 30-40 Stugs and 36 anti-tank guns.

On the 13th of July Manstein travelled to Rastenburg (Hitler’s HQ in East Prussia, today’s Ketrzyn) to attend a meeting where the general state of the war as well as operation Zitadelle were discussed. In attendance during the meeting was von Kluge, Keitel, Jodl, Manstein, Hitler and Zeitzler, the meeting lasted for about 3 and a half hours. On the 15th of July von Kluge reported on the state of Model’s Army. It is doubtful, although not impossible that Model will be able to advance further south [towards Kursk]. He needs all mobile units to eliminate the enemy breakthroughs in the Orel sector. My question of whether after having taken care of these if he would then be able to attack further to the south was answered by a “no” from von Kluge.

I then described how the offensive was going in the south, which was at that stage marked by heavy fighting. I explained that I was against cancelling the offensive at that point because there was substantial evidence that the Russians were getting weaker, although an attack towards the north would be unthinkable without the cooperation of Model’s Army. I also mentioned that during the planning stages before the offensive started I warned against launching the offensive before we were prepared.

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224 War Diary, Army Group South, telephone conversation between Manstein and Holldt, 11.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
225 War Diary Army Group South, telephone conversation between Manstein and Zeitzler, 12.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
226 War Diary, Army Group South, telegram from OKH to Army Group South, 12.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
227 War Diary, Army Group South, travel log, 13.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
enough to withstand any kind of crisis of this kind. […] attacks towards the north are to be halted, forces have to be added to the 6. Army, one panzer division is already on the way on Hitler’s orders. […] staying in our current positions is unthinkable and impossible, a retreat back to our starting positions is better for withstanding any kind of attack.”

Manstein’s summation of the meeting shows that all German reserves had to be committed to attempt to carry out operation Zitadelle. With the Soviet offensives that were being launched against 9. Army around Orel and the offensive that was likely to be launched against 6. Army, forces had to be pulled away from Zitadelle in order to counter these blows, as there were no other reserves at hand. Even without these Soviet offensives it is unlikely that the German forces at hand were enough to carry the offensive all the way to Kursk. Manstein was already short on troops to defend the flanks of the attacking force and keeping the offensive spearhead to the north strong enough, and 9. Army had been unable to advance for several days. It is, however, clear that executing the offensive as it had been planned was unthinkable to the commanders present at Rastenburg on the 13th of July. Manstein even said that he thought the operation should not have been initiated until German forces were strong enough to withstand problems of the kind they were now facing, however, that could not have been accomplished under the current circumstances. There were simply not enough German troops available.

What had been assembled was the absolute maximum strength available at the time and if that was not enough to successfully carry out the operation, then it would by definition be impossible and should have been abandoned.

The allied landings on Sicily does not feature heavily in the decision to abandon Operation Zitadelle. During von Manstein’s retelling of the discussion at Rastenburg he simply said that: “The Fuhrer described the situation on Sicily, large surrenders by Italian troops are frequent. Because of this it will be necessary to pull troops away from the Eastern front and send them to the Balkans [then likely further to Italy]”. Manstein description did not in any way describe that there was a hurry in sending troops to Sicily, it was simply something that would have to be done eventually. Töppel has researched the factor that Sicily played in the execution of operation Zitadelle extensively. He writes that if Sicily had been the deciding factor in abandoning operation Zitadelle then the offensive would have been halted on the 10th or 11th of July. On the 10th of July the OKW and Hitler had in fact decided that no extra forces would

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228 War Diary, Army Group South, Metting between Manstein, Kempf, Hoth, Dessloch, Busse and three other officers, 15.07.1943, BA-MA, N507/v.104 [my own translation].
be sent from the East to Italy. This is backed by a telegram from Manstein to the head of the 1. Panzer Army in which he stated that the termination of Zitadelle was due to the attacks against Army Group Centre around Orel. Sicily was not mentioned at all. In fact, only on the 25th of July did Hitler decide to send the 1. SS Panzer Division to Italy. Clearly Zitadelle was halted due to the Soviet offensive launched against Army Group Centre, and Sicily played no part in this decision.

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2.2.5 Who can be “blamed” for the failed offensive at Kursk?

Regarding the decision to attack at Kursk, it can be seen clearly that Hitler was never the enthusiastic backer of *Zitadelle* he has been portrayed to have been. These portrayals of Hitler have roots in the claims made in memoirs of several German generals.\(^{230}\) The other person opposed to the proposed offensive was Walter Model, who consistently attempted to delay the offensive. Manstein was the man responsible for pressing for an attack at Kursk early in 1943, but he gradually changed his mind, however, he did not extensively try to dissuade the high command from executing the attack at Kursk. Manstein’s chief of staff, Theodor Busse was also a stern supporter of *Zitadelle*. Kluge was a consistent supporter of the offensive. He is not quoted as having any serious misgivings about the proposed attack at Kursk of any kind and simply dismissed Model’s concerns as “pessimism”. He only changed his mind when the Soviet counterblow against Orel was launched on the 12\(^{th}\) of July. Heinz Guderian was sympathetic to Model’s concerns and he was not a clear supporter of the offensive as it was proposed. He did, however, clearly overestimate the ability of Germany to outproduce its enemies, which may well be said to have contributed to arguing for delaying *Zitadelle* which meant that the German Army ended up attacking even larger and better prepared force.

The reasons for delaying the operation were in fact many and it can hardly be laid at the door of any one person. Once the operation could not be executed in early May of 1943 bad weather during that month made sure that the earliest date was in early June. At which point, the German armies had not yet received their full complement of tanks. If delay had not won the day on the 5\(^{th}\) of May, and the attack had been carried out on the in early June, the circumstances would not have been better for the German Army. By June 5\(^{th}\) the Soviet fronts had 90\% of the infantry numbers they would have in July and between 72-76\% of the tanks. Historian Valeriy Zamulin’s conclusion was that after June 1\(^{st}\), further postponement had no real impact on the readiness or numbers of the Soviet forces in the area. In any case, by June 1\(^{st}\), Model’s 9. Army was not ready to undertake any large offensive action. Zamulin also claims that in Manstein’s opinion, the Soviets were not ready at this point.\(^ {231} \)

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\(^{231}\) Zamulin, *Could Germany Have Won the Battle of Kursk if It Had Started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?*, pp. 614-616
Historian Steven Newton takes issue with this, his claim is that the delay of the offensive, which he clearly attributes to Model, was one of the main reasons for the failure of the offensive. Model’s insistence on waiting for more reinforcements before the offensive was undertaken served to increase the gulf between German and Soviet strength. Model received only 9,576 replacement infantry, 362 guns and heavy mortars and 214 tanks. Soviet strength increases were much greater and therefore Newton’s conclusion is that an attack made in July was against an enemy that was far more prepared than they would have been in May. 232

The delay of Zitadelle was in many ways caused not just by Model, it was based largely on the fact that Hitler was not enthusiastic about undertaking the operation to begin with and he had to be persuaded of the merits, which took time. That Model made this more difficult with his interventions is definitely the case, as his contributions gave Hitler reasons to be sceptical. When Hitler had decided on Zitadelle there were factors beyond his control such as the weather and the strategic situation in Africa and Italy that caused further delay.

Of the less known generals there are some mixed opinions regarding the merits of Zitadelle. In the south, it can be concluded that both general Kempf and Hoth were enthusiastic of the idea, with a slight utterance from Hoth that the operation might be difficult, and no scepticism regarding the operation is mentioned from any of their corps commanders, like general Raus. The only subordinate who was clear that he thought the offensive was a bad idea was General von Hünersdorff who thought the whole attack was “idiotic” and incidentally was wounded and later died on the 17th of July during the last days of Zitadelle. 233 In the northern sector Kluge was enthusiastic whereas, Model was not and Model’s corps commanders, like Hans Zorn may be described as being aware of certain problems with the operation. Zeitzler was in the beginning the most enthusiastic supporter among the OKH and OKW elite, but that as the operation was delayed, he grew slightly more sceptical of its chance of success and more aware of the dangers the operation posed.

Once Zitadelle got underway and it was clear that no surprise had been established there were no real calls among anyone for the operation to be abandoned. The most that can be said is that most attacks in the north was stopped by Model, once he realized that his forces were unable to penetrate the Soviet defences, and it can be said that Kluge backed his decision. When calling a halt to Zitadelle was discussed on the 13th of July Manstein was against

232 Newton, Kursk, the German view, pp. 377-379
abandoning the offensive and only concluded that it could not be continued because 9. Army was not going to continue its attacks from the north. Manstein was also fixed on the original plan that had been formulated, and he conclusively discarded Hitler’s proposed alternative as suggested by Zeitzler on the 11th of July to switch attack from the 9. Army to that of the 2. Army. It is difficult to pin down one or two people responsible for Zitadelle. The conclusion that is most obvious is that the OKH and heads of Army Groups in the East were the most pressing supporters of the operation while Hitler was unimpressed and unenthusiastic, this was also the case with regard to Model and some of the corps commanders, who can more characterized as being aware of difficulties, rather than being completely against the plan that eventually was carried out as the summer offensive.

In the next chapter we will look at who attempted to distance themselves from the operation after it had been concluded and failed and who or what they attempted to blame for the failure.
Chapter 3, The war for reputation

This chapter will be concerned with what German generals wrote after the war about what had happened at Kursk. These events will naturally differ slightly from what happened in some regards as these various German generals are writing about events several years after they happened and in the nature of human memory is that it eventually forgets, especially details. To establish if German generals changed their stories after the war it is not necessary to look at these kinds of memory lapses as they can be expected.

The German generals were first asked, primarily by the American military, to retell their experiences from the Eastern front. The Unites States Army wanted to prepare the American and Western militaries for any future Allied-Soviet military confrontation by using experiences obtained by German generals during the Soviet-German conflict of 1941-1945. To this end, the United States Army set up the Historical Program were German generals were tasked with writing reports on military confrontations that had significance during the war. This cooperation was less difficult than one might think as many American and German officers knew each other from the inter-war period when there had been some German-American military co-operation. The officers of the two nations also shared a deep antibolshevism. In order to co-operate with the American military, the various German officers quickly shifted their ideological stance to that of a western-democratic model and this was largely accepted. After some years of co-operation with the Historical Program the former generals of the Wehrmacht had managed to paint themselves as the experts in regard to the Soviet military and how best to fight that military.234 Henry Irving Hodes, the chief of allied military in mainland Europe sent a letter to former head of the OKH Franz Halder in 1959 where he wrote:

“The product of your labour is much more than mere pages of military history. Already it has provided valuable material for the organization of our military forces to meet the threat of Communist aggression […] Thus, your work has developed another area of alliance between our two great nations for the joint defence of our democratic ways of life.”235

235 Howell, Von den Besiegten lernen?., p. 254
This cooperation helped the German officers of the *Wehrmacht* to remain relevant after the war. Not merely were they relevant, the victors of the war regarded them, who had lost the war, as experts when planning for any future military confrontation. An example of the type of work done by German officers as part of the *Historical Program* is from 1947. General Theodor Busse was tasked by members of the *Historical Program* to conduct a study and write a report about operation *Zitadelle*. To do this, Busse created the general guidelines which were used for enquiring into the subject and then selected 5 other generals as co-authors who worked independently. Busse wrote the overview and introduction and edited the full written text. He conceded that: “[…]the research was not first rate, as he and the others lacked reports and maps, his claim was that the report was intended to be as objective as possible”.

When the *Historical division* regarded these German officers as “the experts” it was necessary for them to portray themselves as having been against military decisions that, with the benefit of hindsight, were poor. If they had been responsible for failed ventures, then their positions as “experts” might have been short-lived. To this end German officers blamed various scapegoats for poor decisions. The most popular scapegoats were Hitler, and the heads of the OKW, Keitel and Jodl. Hitler had of course committed suicide in the final stages of the war and Keitel and Jodl had both been executed at Nuremberg. All three were also tied to the national socialist ideology. Many of the narratives adopted by German officers were characterized by the “meddling” in military planning that was done, particularly by Hitler and how his actions led to various defeats of the German Army.

Model was also a popular scapegoat, mostly for generals trying to whitewash the *Wehrmacht* of war crimes. Men like Manstein specifically chose to sidestep the issue of crimes committed by the National Socialist regime and he kept his memoirs entirely focused on military matters. Guderian tried to keep his close ties to Hitler to himself. He wrote that he was only made inspector general of the armoured forces because Hitler was desperate, and it was something that Guderian had not expected. In fact, Guderian had developed a close relationship with SS General Sepp Dietrich during 1942 and had asked him to intercede on his behalf and convince Hitler that he was a committed Nazi, and thus persuade Hitler to give him a new

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236 Newton, *Kursk, the German view*, p. 6
237 Newton, *Hitler’s Commander*, p. Introduction XII
238 Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, p. 288
active position. Guderian was also paid a very large salary during his inactive service years and a bribe that amounted to 1.25 million Reich Marks.

When the German generals started writing about their experiences outside of working with the Historical Program these took the shape of memoirs. There was a marked among the public in West-Germany in the 1950’s and 1960’s as part of what has been referred to as Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past), this was related to coming to terms with Germany’s military past. Much of the German public blamed the prominent generals for the defeat in the first years after the war. The memoirs of German generals were therefore written with that in mind: if the generals managed to shift the blame to for example Hitler, then their standing and reputation would be safe. They could also make a decent income from their various writings. All the memoirs that is examined as part of this thesis were written in the 1950-1965 period, except for Raus’ memoirs which were compiled from various writings by Raus at a much later date by Steven Newton. Many of the former Wehrmacht officers also wanted to take part in the rearmament debate that began in West-Germany from 1949. They had to be seen as professionals by the public and the west-German government in order to be taken seriously, which was a further incentive for them to distance themselves from what were seen as unwise military decisions.

Some German generals benefitted heavily from the high standing they had among American as well as British officers after the war. Basil Liddell Hart was among the most sympathetic. He reviewed von Manstein’s memoirs with the following: “[Manstein’s] detailed account of the campaigns, pungent comments, and very significant revelations combine to make this book one of the most important and illuminating contributions to the history of World War II.” Basil Liddell Hart also wrote the foreword to Manstein’s memoirs “Lost Victories” were he referred to Manstein as a “military genius”. Liddell Hart even argued in favour of some of the claims made by Manstein, like the fact that his southern pincer at Kursk was successful and it was the failure of 9. Army and the allied landing in Sicily that led to the

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239 Active position: A position where he was given command of an Army or Army Group. From December 1941 Guderian had been a “reserve general” were he was paid, but had no military tasks, essentially a paid leave.
240 Hart, Guderian – Panzer Pioneer or Myth Maker?, pp. 82-87.
242 Manstein, Lost Victories, back of book.
failure of Zitadelle. Even before Manstein’s own account began, Liddell Hart had made his case for him that Zitadelle was a “Lost Victory”. 243

These various motives which German generals had need to be kept in mind when reading their memoirs as they certainly are present in the memoirs and post war writings of Manstein, Guderian, Raus, Zeitzler, Heinrici and Busse. Heinrici’s contribution was more egregious because his book was presented as historical representation of the Eastern front, rather than a memoir retelling his experiences and it included harsh military judgements against Hitler that can be disproven. This chapter will explore the writings of these generals and see where they clearly attempted to whitewash, shift blame or claim fame after the war.

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243Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 13, 15.
3.1 Zitadelle as a crucial point of the war

The importance of the failure of Zitadelle was addressed by several German generals after the war. Their usual narrative was that Zitadelle represented as severe setback and many of them claim to have realized that this was the point that they knew the war was lost. Guderian wrote

“By the failure of Citadel we had suffered a decisive defeat. The armoured formations, reformed and re-equipped with so much effort, had lost heavily both in men and equipment and would now be unemployable for a long time to come. [...] Needless to say the Russians exploited their victory to the full. There were no more periods of quiet on the Eastern Front. From now on the enemy was in undisputed possession of the initiative.”

Raus made a very similar point, he wrote that Zitadelle was a huge mistake where “Hitler threw German panzer forces into Zitadelle during July 1943 and ‘bled them white’ as they encountered defences of previously unknown depth and strength.” Von Mellenthin used the same words as Raus, he also claimed that the panzer forces had been “bled white”. These three generals all subscribed to the fact that Kursk was highly important in relation to why Germany lost the war. This was especially the view expressed by Guderian, who claimed that he knew at the time that the loss at Kursk represented the war being lost. Manstein made a similar claim, he wrote that as a result of Zitadelle, the best Germany could hope for was standstill, he was thus a bit more optimistic than Guderian, but still ascribed substantial importance to the defeat at Kursk.

It is highly unlikely that this was the view they held during the war. The stalled German offensive was after all a tactical success, the enemy had lost more men and materials than the German Army and the strategic consequences of the offensive did not materialize immediately after the end of the German offensive. Raus aluded to this point of view in his memoirs, he wrote that: “The large operation codenamed Zitadelle failed to achieve its strategic goal, even though we had achieved a large degree of tactical success.” He then mentioned the Soviet losses of manpower, tanks and other equipment. In a letter to his son, Model wrote: “We are working to bring everything back in order. It will all be ok. The most

244 Guderian, “Panzer Leader”, p. 312.
245 The panzer forces suffered such heavy losses that they were “bled white”.
246 Raus, Panzerkrieg på Østfronten, pp. 332-333.
248 Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 449-450.
249 Raus, Panzerkrieg på Østfronten, p. 206.
important task is that we manage to get the situation in the south in order.“250 In another letter he wrote almost the exact same: “Here there is ‘a lot going on’ all along the European front251. It will all be in order, as long as everyone does their duty and is of that mindset.”252 It is likely that most German generals did in fact believe that the failure of Zitadelle did not represent a loss of the war, but a setback that had to be brought in order, as Model did. The views of Manstein, Guderian, Raus and von Mellenthin about the importance of the loss at Kursk were opinions they formed after the fact. It was meant to highlight that they were supposedly opposed to the action that led to the final turning point of the war and if they had been listened to then the German Army would have taken a different course of action that would have been more militarily beneficial. Expanding on the importance of Zitadelle also made it seem like a much larger blunder by the person(s) they blamed the offensive on. Any officer who held the same view as them would have his reputation safeguarded as he too could claim to have argued for a different course of action

250 Letter from Model to his son, 13.07.1943, BA-MA, N6/3, [my own translation] [letter dated at the end of Zitadelle and the beginning of the Soviet counteroffensive against Orel].
251 Model’s reference to the “European front” is likely related to his strongly held national socialist belief that said that the German soldier was fighting against Communist oppression and for the freedom of Europe.
252 Letter from Model to his son, 27.07.1943, BA-MA, N6/3, [my own translation] [letter dated after the Soviet offensive has already pushed the Germans back substantially.]
3.2 Fore-hand or back-hand?

What the German Army should have done during the spring of 1943 after regaining the initiative during the Kharkov counter offensive features in all the post war writings of German generals. They all had arguments where advocated for various courses of action and what Hitler’s response to these suggestions were. The most important subject discussed was whether the German Army should have remained on the defensive and strike a back-hand blow when the Soviets decided to attack or if it should take the initiative and attack the Soviets in a fore-hand blow.

Manstein addressed these discussions in a very brief manner. He mentioned to have offered a plan to Hitler in February where his Army Group was to give up ground and wait for the Soviets to launch their own attack and then strike back and thereby inflict large losses on the enemy. He wrote that his Army Group was largely in favour of a back-hand blow but that Hitler’s belief was that “[…] we must fight for every foot of ground he had won from Stalin[…].”

Manstein’s main point was that Hitler was against giving up ground as he thought the risks of giving up territory like the Donbass region was too great, as there was no guarantee that German forces would be able to recapture the area during the proposed counter offensive. Manstein did not judge Hitler harshly in this regard, he simply wrote that “[…]he undoubtedly shrank from the risks which the proposed operation would assuredly entail. Inwardly perhaps he did not trust himself to cope with them, for in spite of having a certain eye for tactics, he still lacked the ability of a great captain.”

Manstein was not excessively blaming Hitler for his negation of relying on a back-hand blow, however, he took the opportunity to criticise Hitler’s military abilities and did so in very condescending way. Because Hitler would not allow a withdrawal in order to stage a back-hand blow Manstein wrote: “Consequently our minds now turned to the idea of a fore-hand stroke. An attempt must be made to strike the enemy a blow of limited scope before he could recover from his losses in the winter campaign and resuscitate his forces.”

The written words of Heinrici and Busse were virtually the same as those chosen by Manstein, and all three agreed on this basic narrative. Busse made one differing point, he wrote that Hitler, the OKW, the OKH and the Army Group

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253 Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 445-446.
254 Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 446.
255 Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 446.
commanders agreed that they did not want to give up the initiative. This meant that as time passed, and the Red Army had declined to attack, there were two options: 1) give up ground and attempt a backhand blow (which even Manstein acknowledged could be risky) or 2) launch a fore-hand blow against the Soviets.\(^{257}\)

Zeitzler wrote very strongly that the fore-hand offensive was Hitler’s idea: “During the spring, his idea to attack was extremely and unshakeably strong. This idea he had come to totally on his own and it was impossible to talk him away from it.”\(^{258}\) Zeitzler conceded that Hitler originally wanted to ‘regain in summer what he had lost in the winter’ but that he eventually realized that the offensive had to reflect the forces at hand and that these forces were scarce in 1943. Because of this he settled for a limited for-hand blow.\(^{259}\) Heinrici wrote in almost the same words as Zeitzler: “Hitler’s idea to recover in summer what he had lost in winter was eventually abandoned by him. Losses in men and materiel had been too large to execute a grand offensive on the scale of the last two years. […] He did, however, not want to give away the initiative and wanted to come before the expected Soviet offensive, and with a series of offensive efforts weaken the enemy attacking strength.”\(^{260}\)

Manstein did concede that a for-hand blow was not a terrible idea, he wrote that such an operation would be: ‘still within the framework of a strategic defensive – strike a limited blow ‘on the forehand’.”\(^{261}\) Especially Zeitzler, but also Heinrici\(^{262}\) were very firm with the concept that the offensive idea in the East, was Hitler’s idea. In the contents of Zeitzler’s book the chapter on Zitadelle is entitled “Hitler’s last offensive in Russia during the summer of 1943”\(^{263}\) further he wrote about the chapter it included “the background story of Hitler’s offensive”\(^{264}\). It was clearly very important to Zeitzler that what should be remembered by the reader was that to attack was Hitler’s idea and his alone. This was the reason for his numerous ‘direct quotations’ from Hitler about how the offensive was his idea. None of these direct quotations can be traced to any other sources besides Zeitzler’s recollection. This alone makes their validity dubious.

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\(^{258}\) Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 56 [my own translation].

\(^{259}\) Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 57 [my own translation].


\(^{261}\) Manstein, *Lost Victories*, p. 446.

\(^{262}\) Heinrici, *Zitadelle I, II, III*, [part of book], BA-MA, N6, [no date], pp. 464, 469 [my own translation].

\(^{263}\) Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, p. Contents [my own translation].

\(^{264}\) Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, p. Contents [my own translation].
Neither Busse nor Manstein wrote very negatively about the suggestion to strike a fore-hand blow against the Soviets. All these generals agreed, however, that the prime proponent for the fore-hand blow was Hitler and they all preferred to wait for the Soviets to attack. The various generals maintained that the back-hand option would have been more successful because in 1942 and early 1943 the Germans had been very successful with back-hand blows and from a position of hindsight this sounds like it would have been a better option. What can be established is that Manstein did air the possibility of launching a back-hand in the south, but when this was declined, he preferred a fore-hand offensive. Hitler was in favour of ‘a limited offensive’, while most generals thought a larger offensive was preferable. There are also the previously mentioned diary entries of Goebbels were he clearly stated that Hitler was much more in favour of waiting for the expected Soviet offensive rather than launching a German offensive. The post-war efforts of the generals, and especially Zeitzler’s to say that an offensive was Hitler’s idea and his alone represented a clear effort to make him and him alone the scapegoat for the failed offensive.
3.3 Where should the German offensive be launched?

The topic of how the OKH, the OKW and Hitler decided on attacking the Soviets at Kursk was covered in every memoir of the higher-ranking German generals. Manstein wrote very briefly: “A suitable target was presented by the Soviet salient which protruded far into our own front line around the city of Kursk. The Russians facing the boundary between the Central and Southern Army Groups had been able to retain this when the muddy season set in, and it now formed a jumping-off position for any attacks they might be contemplating against the flanks of the two German Army Groups. The appreciable Soviet forces inside the salient would be cut off if our attack were successful, […]”265 Busse and Heinrici agreed with this course of events. Both wrote that Kursk was chosen because it was obvious and had obvious benefits if successful.266 Busse added a further benefit: “That was where it would be possible to hit Soviet offensive preparations most effectively, with the best prospect of ruining the enemy’s own offensive plans.”267 Busse’s point in this regard was correct. Kursk was an important railway junction and it was able to serve as a Soviet supply centre for military operations. Heinrici was the only to mention operation Habicht and Panther. He claimed that these had been designed by Hitler as alternatives after Zitadelle had already been decided upon, but that they were abandoned by Hitler to save forces for Zitadelle.268 These operations had in fact been abandoned by Hitler because most of the military favoured Zitadelle. If Heinrici had written that it would have been easy to claim that if Hitler had not listened to those generals and decided to back Zitadelle as they wanted, then the defeat could have been avoided.

Zeitzler differed from Manstein, Heinrici and Busse. He agreed with some of the beneficial results that a successful attack at Kursk would have led to. Zeitzler wrote: “Hitler examined various stretches of the Eastern Front to find one that fit his criteria [a location the enemy could be pinched off and surrounded]. In the end he settled on the so-called Kursk-bulge […] One can see by looking at it that the bulge ‘proposes’ to be attacked. […] The enemy knew to be careful and to defend this area especially well. This was also pointed out to Hitler by the Chief of Staff.269 […] Based on Hitler’s order the Kursk bulge was to be attacked and encircled from Belgorod and south of Orel.” Zeitzler then listed a few positive aspects with of

265 Manstein, Lost Victories, pp. 446-447.
266 Busse, Operation Citadel – Overview by General of Infantry Theodor Busse, p. 11 & Heinrici, Zitadelle I, II, III, [part of book], BA-MA, N6, [no date], p. 474 [my own translation].
267 Busse, Operation Citadel – Overview by General of Infantry Theodor Busse, p. 17
268 Heinrici, Zitadelle I, II, III, [part of book], BA-MA, N6, [no date], p. 481 [my own translation].
269 Zeitzler wrote about himself in the third person, in other words, “the chief of staff” means “I”
the proposed offensive, but he ended by saying that: “Negative was the fact that the attack was too obvious, the enemy almost counted on it.”

Manstein, Heinrici and Busse shared the same premises that they did not disagree with the proposed offensive, they adopted the position of saying that there was nothing wrong with the plan itself, there were other factors that led to the failure. The three completely declined to name anyone as having been responsible for the plan, they simply stated that it was obvious. Zeitzler, who knew that the author of operation Zitadelle was General Rudolf Schmidt, decided to use Hitler as a scapegoat in this regard as well. He wanted to point out that he had offered Hitler advice against launching the attack that led to the failed battle of Kursk, rather than saying as for example Manstein, that the plan was good in principle. He went as far as to lie about the supposed problems of the offensive, he wrote contrary to Busse that: “the attack would not hamper the enemy’s ability to attack.”

Guderian’s account in “Panzer Leader” and other memoirs were very different from the previously mentioned memoirs. He referred to the proposed attack at Kursk as “the Zeitzlerian plan”. Guderian referred to the meeting during the 4th of May 1943 and he wrote clearly that he was sure that Zitadelle was Zeitzler’s idea. He was also certain that 1) Hitler was not sure that Zitadelle was a good idea. 2) Model’s fears were the main reason for Hitler’s scepticism. 3) Manstein was not sure that Zitadelle would be successful. 4) Von Kluge was all in favour of Zitadelle. It is unclear why Guderian decided to blame the entire operation Zeitzler. Guderian would not have known about the early discussions about Zitadelle and the first time he was likely to have heard about it would have been during the May 4th meeting. At this meeting Zeitzler was indeed very much in favour of the offensive and Hitler, armed with the aerial reconnaissance photos he had received from Model, was much more sceptical. It is therefore probable that Guderian’s impression was that the offensive was indeed Zeitzler’s idea.

Guderian wrote that he spoke against the attack for several reasons, primarily because it would not be possible to refresh the panzer forces in the East again during 1943, in this he claimed to have been backed by Speer. Guderian wrote that the only two people who said that

270 Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, pp.60-61 [my own translation].
271 See Chapter 2, p.
272 Zeitzler, 2 years, BA-MA, N63/18, p.59, [my own translation].
274 Guderian, erinnerungen eines soldaten, p. 278.
Zitadelle was clearly a bad idea were him and Speer. Guderian’s memoirs left out his proposition for the single massed attack against Kursk which he proposed during the meeting on the 4th of May. Manstein’s final draft of his memoirs also declined to mention that Guderian proposed that as an alternative. The reason for Guderian leaving that out is clear. Any offensive on the scale of Zitadelle would likely have meant that it would have been impossible to refresh the armoured forces during 1943. He had to distance himself from that proposition for his argument to make sense. Guderian’s opposition to Zitadelle is more believable by the requirements for a successful armoured offensive as stipulated by him in his 1937 book ‘Achtung Panzer’. None of these requirements were met with regard to Zitadelle. The proposal that he made for a single strike at Kursk was, interestingly, more in line with those principles.

Guderian’s conclusions in two of his works was that Hitler was not very much in favour of the attack, and the idea to attack at Kursk did not come from Hitler. It was, according to him, a plan that was of Zeitzler’s creation and backed by von Kluge and Keitel. His only critique of Manstein was that he did not voice his opposition to Zitadelle loudly enough. Guderian’s inclusion of Kluge as one of the most ardent backers might well have stemmed from the intense personal dislike he had for Kluge.

Except for Guderian, all the generals either claimed that the plan had come about just because it was obvious or because it was Hitler’s idea. In fact, Zitadelle began as the preferred course of action among the officers of the German Army. The origin and adoption of the plan cannot be blamed on Hitler, it was Manstein, Zeitzler and Kluge who were the original backers. If failure is to be attributed for the plan itself, then the failure belongs mostly to the German Army, rather than Hitler.

275 Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 307.
276 Mungo, Manstein - Hitler’s Greatest General, pp. 359-360.
277 Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, pp. 154-155.
278 Guderian, Erinnerungen eines soldaten & Guderian, Panzer Leader.
279 Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 307
3.4 The importance of delay

The delaying of *Zitadelle* was a popular topic among almost all the German generals who had been connected to the offensive, Guderian is among the few who declined to comment on it. The delay of *Zitadelle* was often the most important subject to the case they were making as to why the operation failed. Manstein wrote in *Lost Victories* about the delay: “Operation ‘Citadel’ was timed to start in the first half of May, when the ground could be expected to have dried out sufficiently […] At the beginning of May, however, Hitler decided against the advice of the two army group commanders – to postpone ‘Citadel’ till June[…] the Army Group was not ultimately able to move off on ‘Citadel’ until the beginning of July, by which time the essential advantage of the ‘forhand’ blow was lost.”

Raus, Heinrici, Zeitzler and Busse all shared this position. They all concluded that it was Hitler’s increasing fear that led him to delay the offensive in order to have the Panther and Tiger tanks ready. Zeitzler attempted to take more credit than any of the other writers. He tried to make it sound as if he was the main opponent to the operation and that he was also a stern opponent of delay. The position of being against the delay was adopted by Busse, Raus and Manstein in order to claim that this was the main reason for the failure of the operation. By doing that they were able to claim that they had been in favour of the operation in principle and that it failed because Hitler delayed, which they had been against. Hitler’s choice to delay was in fact born out of the need to address the strategic situation on other fronts and the weakness of Italy, as well as the bad weather on the Eastern front. The generals choose to sidestep Hitler’s broader strategic concerns when delaying, had they admitted that he delayed because of the problems in Italy they would have had to concede that Hitler was able to consider the needs of more than just one front.

Raus conceded that because of the delay, his units were able to increase their combat efficiency as they had time to undertake mine clearing exercises, but that the enemy increased their combat strength far more due to their better war economy and output of war materials. Raus wrote: “Their defences reached a level that was entirely new and behind these they could muster large reserves.” Raus claimed that sticking with an outdated plan [outdated

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280 Manstein, *Lost Victories*, p. 447
282 Zeitzler, *2 years*, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 66 [my own translation].
283 Raus, *Panserkrig på Østfronten*, p. 208
284 Raus, *Panserkrig på Østfronten*, p. 208
due to delay and enemy increases in strength] was a big mistake, he wrote that the better option would have been to strike the enemy where they were weak or not attack at all.\footnote{Raus, \textit{Panserkrig på Østfronten}, p. 208} Instead: “[\ldots] our forces had to attack through well prepared defences against a numerically superior enemy […] What should have been a swift operation became a bitter struggle.”\footnote{Raus, \textit{Panserkrig på Østfronten}, p. 208} Raus’ claim was largely unsubstantiated, the Soviet defences were, for the most part, already finished by early May. Zeitzler claimed that he was the person responsible for showing Hitler aerial photographs to get Hitler to call off \textit{Zitadelle}.\footnote{Zeitzler, \textit{2 years}, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 69 [my own translation].} This was false, it was Model who did that and it made Zeitzler angry because Hitler because sceptical of the operation and convinced that it had to be delayed.

Heinrici and Zeitzler were the only two to mention Hitler’s proposal to change the nature of the operation and launch the attack from the position of the 2. Army, rather than the 9. Army.\footnote{Zeitzler, \textit{2 years}, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 534 [my own translation]. & Zeitzler, \textit{2 years}, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 67-69 [my own translation].} Zeitzler claimed that Hitler must have been impressed by his (Zeitzler’s) thoughts about the lack of surprise with the original plan and had decided to change it in order to achieve more surprise. Zeitzler wrote that he told Hitler that the new location was unsuitable and used Hitler’s doubt to attempt to change his mind about \textit{Zitadelle} and call off the operation.\footnote{Zeitzler, \textit{2 years}, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 67-69 [my own translation].} Zeitzler wrote that Hitler considered it and then said: “‘It stays with my decision. The attack happens at the end of June.’”\footnote{Zeitzler, \textit{2 years}, BA-MA, N63/18, p. 69 [my own translation].} Zeitzler’s claim was false. When Hitler proposed to change the area of attack, Zeitzler did not try to get Hitler to abandon \textit{Zitadelle}, he was one of several generals who persuaded Hitler that changing the operation was a bad idea and that it was better to stay with the original plan.

In the writings of Manstein, Raus and Busse they made the claim that their principal opposition had been to the delay of \textit{Zitadelle}. Their main message was that the operation was good, but the delay caused the operation to fail. It can be established that both Busse and Manstein were against delaying the operation. Zeitzler went further than this. He wanted to be seen as having been against the operation as well as the delay. His post war writing attempted to make him out to be the sternest opponent of \textit{Zitadelle} and being alone in holding that opinion. Heinrici wrote similarly of how Hitler was double to blame, firstly, he was alone in being in favour of \textit{Zitadelle} and secondly, he was the person responsible for the delay.
Heinrici tried to distance the German Army and OKH, represented by Zeitzler from the failed operation. Zeitzler’s work had a similar motive, but his primary concern was for his own reputation, the reputation of the wider German Army came second. The interesting aspect of Zeitzler in this regard is that he could have stuck with being against delay and maintained that he gradually became sceptical of the merits of the operation. These are opinions he can be proved to have held, but instead he attempted to exonerate himself from the entire operation. In order to argue for that he had to misrepresent events and, in some cases, outright lie. These factors made his post-war writings the most problematic as sources because any historian who considers using him as a source must validate his correct statements from the many ‘inaccuracies’.
3.5 Concerns about Wunderwaffen

As we have seen, the so called Wunderwaffen were given as the reason for Hitler’s wish to delay the offensive in every mentioned post war memoir. Manstein, Raus, Heinrici, Zeitzler and Busse\(^{291}\) wrote about the large faith that Hitler placed in these new weapons of war. Guderian wrote about how he argued for continued production of the Panzer IV until the Panther and Tiger could be produced in reliable numbers. He claimed to have argued for a lot of testing for the Panther before the vehicle was put into action, otherwise the enemy would learn of the new German weapons and take measures to counter them. He claimed in “Panzer Leader” that Zeitzler had been very convinced that the Panther and Tiger tanks would prove decisive during Zitadelle.\(^{292}\) Guderian recalled how he said during the meeting on May 4\(^{th}\) that: “[…] any attack would suffer heavy losses and no replacements [panzer replacements] would be available in 1943, the Panzer Vs [Panther] which Zeitzler put his trust in were suffering from serious operational problems.”\(^{293}\) Guderian further wrote that his fears about the Panther were proven correct when he visited the front in the Kursk area between the 10\(^{th}\) and 15\(^{th}\) of July.\(^{294}\)

Whether Zeitzler was convinced of the effect that the Panther would have on the execution of Zitadelle is difficult to ascertain. The evidence for his belief in them came from Guderian. Guderian believed that the failed offensive was primarily Zeitzler’s failure. The faith that he claimed Zeitzler had in the Panther could well be based on the wish to lay the blame more convincingly at Zeitzler’s door. His remarks about deploying the Panther before it was properly tested was likely made to distance himself from one of the biggest tank debut failures in military history. If he had condoned the deployment it would have dented his post-war reputation as one of the foremost theorists and practitioners of armoured warfare.

Guderian was most certainly against using the Panther for the offensive. In ‘Achtung Panzer’ he commented on the use of new weapons, in his opinion these should always be used en masse in surprise attacks, otherwise the enemy might develop counters to the new weapon.\(^{295}\) This was not how the Panther was used during Zitadelle, the deployment of the Panther was not a massed action, as there were only about 200 or so. Guderian’s claimed opposition to


\(^{292}\) Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 306

\(^{293}\) Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 307

\(^{294}\) Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 311

\(^{295}\) Guderian, Achtung Panzer!, p. 76
using the *Panther* for *Zitadelle* was more believable as it was in line with the principles of armoured warfare outlined by him in ‘Achtung Panzer’.

Guderian commented about the Ferdinand as well, he was present when the design was first unveiled and claimed that the thought the design had serious limitations, such as lacking a machine gun. He claimed that when he spoke to tank commanders during *Zitadelle* they told him that once the Ferdinand was cut off from friendly infantry and lacking a machine gun it had to “go quail shooting with canons” and that the vehicle was thus helpless against Soviet infantry.\(^{296}\) His criticism of how poor the Ferdinand was in battle is disproven by the testimonies of German officers who were in charge of units that were equipped with the Ferdinand. Guderian’s criticism of the Ferdinand likely stemmed from the fact that the vehicle was unsuited for the kind of armoured warfare that he was an advocate for. Historian Russel Hart described Guderian as being “highly egotistical with a belief that he only wanted to act out his vision of armoured warfare”.\(^{297}\)

The comments that German generals made about the new tanks can thus be split between those who simply used them to explain why Hitler postponed the offensive and Guderian who used them to make wider points about how armoured warfare should be conducted, and what kind of vehicles should be used.

\(^{296}\) Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, p. 311

\(^{297}\) Hart, Guderian – *Panzer Pioneer or Myth Maker?*, p. 87.
3.6 Walter Model’s portrayal

An interesting aspect is the absence of praise that was posthumously given to Walter Model by his fellow officers. The lack of credit given to him likely stemmed from certain aspects of his personality, notably his being described as a man who was “blindly loyal to Hitler” and a committed National Socialist - and an officer who did not hail from a Prussian military family. 298 Certain early aspects of the ‘whitewashing of the Wehrmacht’ included distancing it from anti-partisan actions and reprisals on civilians for the acts of saboteurs or partisans. Other generals, as well as witnesses described his anti-partisan methods as ‘very harsh’ and being against the rules as dictated by the German Army, often resorting to burning down entire villages. 299 Historian Marcel Stein wrote that there was nothing special about Model’s war against partisans, and that the claims made against Model and 9. Army were made purely to distance the overall Wehrmacht from such atrocities. Stein commented that in fact, such measures were used by almost all German generals in the East. 300 For many generals, Model thus became an excellent scapegoat for the some of the egregious actions of the German Army after the war and praising him for having been correct would have made him less of a reliable scapegoat.

Model who was the clearest opponent of the failed offensive was only mentioned by Guderian and Heinrici. Heinrici simply wrote that “[…] even Model was against the offensive.” 301 When he wrote it in that fashion Model was simply one of many opponents that Heinrici named and it was done more to point out that Hitler was alone in being in favour of the proposed offensive. Interestingly, Heinrici credited Zeitzler far more than Model for being against the offensive. 302 Guderian wrote more favourably than Heinrici and credited Model for Hitler’s scepticism in regard to Zitadelle. He wrote that Model’s assessments of the strong Soviet fortifications was correct, as was his judgements of the large quantities of artillery and other heavy weapons available to the Red Army. 303 Guderian also pointed out that it was Model’s scepticism that made Hitler sceptical of Zitadelle in the first place. 304 Busse mentioned that Model was in favour of delaying the operation and that Manstein was very much against this. Busse’s primary argument was that the delay of Zitadelle was one of the

298 Newton, Hitler’s Commander, p. Introduction XI
299 Stein, A flawed Genius, p. 97
300 Stein, A flawed Genius, p. 98
301 Heinrici, Zitadelle I, II, III, [part of book], BA-MA, N6, [no date], p. 531 [my own translation].
302 Heinrici, Zitadelle I, II, III, [part of book], BA-MA, N6, [no date], p. 531-532 [my own translation].
303 Guderian, Panzer Leader, pp. 306-307
304 Guderian, Panzer Leader, p. 306
primary reasons for the failure of the operation. When he wrote that Model was in favour of delaying he blamed Model for having been one of the forces that caused the operation to be delayed and thus caused its failure.\(^3\)05

Interestingly a post war account written by Army Group Centre’s operations officer Peter von der Groeben stated that: ‘Model was not in favour of merely delaying Zitadelle, he wanted to scupper the entire operation.’\(^3\)06 This seems quite likely, Model likely wanted to cause delays for so long that Zitadelle was either cancelled, or the Soviets launched their own attack. This assessment is backed by Model’s insistence on building defensive lines in the Orel sector, even though he was told not to do so by Kluge. Model also realized early during Zitadelle that the operation was not going to succeed and allowed his units to only perform limited attacks. Two of Model’s corps commanders, Hermann Black and Erich Jasche said about Model that he took a keen interest in the well-being of his men and visited the front very regularly. This was very different to what Manstein did, he was much more of ‘rear-general’. As shown, Manstein’s approach to high casualties was highly distanced and stripped of emotion, at one point referring to the general in question who had suffered heavy losses as being ‘weak’.\(^3\)07

Historian Marcel Stein commented that when Model called a halt to Zitadelle it was likely because he saw first-hand that more attacks were futile rather than Manstein who was in the rear and had no idea about the reality on the ground.\(^3\)08

Two of Model’s subordinates, Horst Grossman and Walther Nehring blamed Model of the stalling of 9. Army’s attack during Zitadelle. They both accused Model of having held back too much armoured strength on the first day of the attack. Grossman claimed that had Model sent forward more panzers on the first day then “Kursk would have been easily taken”. This seems very unlikely, Model had an average of 18-25 armoured fighting vehicles along every kilometre of the front, this was the same ratio as Manstein had in the south\(^3\)09. This was just an attempt to blame Model for the failure of Zitadelle. Guderian’s son said after the war that he remembers his father saying that Model was a supporter for carrying out Zitadelle. Töppel used this as partial evidence in 2009 to say that Model was in favour of Zitadelle.\(^3\)10

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\(^3\)05 Busse, *Operation Citadel – Overview by General of Infantry Theodor Busse*, p. 12.
\(^3\)06 Newton, *Hitler’s Commander*, p. 220
\(^3\)07 See chapter 2, p.
\(^3\)09 Newton, *Hitler’s Commander* p. 233
\(^3\)10 Töppel, *Kursk – Mythen und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht*, p. 354
overall evidence, as shown in chapter 2 shows that Model was not in favour of the offensive, he simply executed it as an order, after having fought to have it delayed indefinitely.
3.7 Underestimation of the Red Army and the German plight

The various memoirs were written so that the writer could explain how he had a solution that would have led to a German victory, or at least peace on more favourable terms.

All these various writings are written with the thought that the writer had a solution that in their opinion would have ended the war more favourably for Germany. Their estimation was that the war could still be won in 1943 if the German military had adopted a different course of action. All these statements show the lack of understanding of the strength of the Red Army and bear serious signs of strong hubris. Heinrici wrote after having described the various situations in the west, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and in the East: “Germany was weakened, but by no means beaten, however, a final victory like the one Hitler wanted was no longer possible. Hitler was convinced that with success during spring, the war could be ended happily.”\(^{311}\) Heinrici was the most realistic when he summed up Germany’s chances by 1943. He conceded that victory was no longer possible. He did, however, maintain after having spent half a chapter on describing the various difficulties the Wehrmacht faced that Germany was not beaten. His own conclusion that “Germany was weakened, but by no means beaten” is not the logical conclusion of the problems that he listed, but rather: “Germany was weakened, and it was only a question of time before Germany was beaten.” His conclusion was made in order to assert that the war could have been ended with a more agreeable result, but as it were, Hitler had his way and that made complete defeat certain.

Manstein described in his memoirs that even after Zitadelle he thought that it was still possible to achieve a ‘draw’ in the East: “To ‘maintain ourselves in the field’, and in doing so to wear down the enemy’s offensive capacity to the utmost, became the whole essence of this struggle.”\(^{312}\) Manstein’s comments showed him to lack understanding of the will that the Soviet leadership and the Soviet people held in being able to sustain heavy losses as long as it led to the final defeat of Germany. If the Soviet people had been willing to endure the losses of 1941 and 1942 then they were willing to sustain more losses in a war that was increasingly evidently going in their favour.

Raus wrote about Soviet losses during Zitadelle: “In the period 5\(^{th}\) of July to the 20\(^{th}\) of July we [Army Group South] took 11,862 POWs and captured or destroyed 412 tanks, 132 guns, 530 anti-tank guns and many other heavy weapons. The Red Army would clearly have had a


\(^{312}\) Manstein, *Lost Victories*, p. 450.
good need of these weapons and soldiers for their Grande offensive that had just begun.”

Raus’s statements that the Red Army would have likely done better with the extra men and materiel that had been lost during *Zitadelle* were misleading at best. The losses that he mentioned represented 1% of the engaged Soviet manpower, 8% of the engaged tanks and about 2-3% of the guns. Raus had taken part in the campaigns of 1941 and 1942 on the Eastern front and during these campaigns the German Army had inflicted defeats on the Red Army where losses had been far greater, and the Soviet military had been able to replace these. His insistence that the very limited losses that he described represented anything substantial was likely made by him to ascribe some merit to the efforts of his men or it represented a severe underestimation of Soviet production capability and will to sustain losses.

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313 Raus, *Panzerkrig på Østfronten*, p. 206
314 Raus’ losses were incorrect, as actual Soviet losses had been much higher, see chapter 1, page?
3.8 Zitadelle, ‘the Lost victory’

Many German generals claimed after the war that Zitadelle could have been a success if certain aspects had been changed or different. Busse claimed that victory would have been achieved if the offensive had been launched in June rather than July. He added that the OKH guessed that the Soviets knew about the attack due to the Soviet fortification effort, but that success would be achieved because the Soviets would not yet have been able to replenish their forces from the winter and spring battles by early June.315 Manstein made a similar claim in his memoirs: “Operation ‘Citadel’ was timed to start in the first half of May, when the ground could be expected to have dried out sufficiently and the enemy would still not have finished refitting – especially his armour.” 316 Manstein and the OKH clearly underestimated Soviet industrial capabilities, the effect of Lend-Lease from the Western Allies and the Soviet manpower base that could easily and quickly replace losses.317 Busse’s claim that an offensive that the Soviets obviously knew about could succeed despite the countermeasures that had been taken by the Soviets if the start date had been 25-30 days before can be dismissed as ‘wishful thinking’ on his part. Whether the offensive would have been a success if it had been initiated in May as Manstein suggested is irrelevant, as any speculation is counterfactual history guesswork with innumerable variables.

The primary claim was one made by Manstein in ‘Lost Victories’ where he wrote about the discussion he had with Hitler, Kluge and other on the 13th of July at Rastenburg. Manstein claimed that he was in favour of continuing the operation despite the problems that Army Group Centre had in the Orel salient. He argued that if the operation was cancelled at this point it would be the same as “throwing a victory away.” 318

It is not quite clear what Manstein was asserting in regard to continuing the offensive. His statements were and remain vague. It seems like he argued that because the offensive was going well in his area it would be foolish to abandon it at that point. His retelling of events offered nothing in regard to what should have been done in Army Group Centre’s area in order to achieve a victory. He wrote further that:

“The only concession he [Hitler] would make was that Southern Army Group should continue the attack until it had achieved its aim of smashing the enemy’s armoured

315 Busse, Operation Citadel – Overview by General of Infantry Theodor Busse, p. 16.
316 Manstein, Lost Victories p. 447.
317 See Chapter 1 p. ?
318 Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 449.
reserves. As a matter of fact not even this could be accomplished, for only a few days later the Army Group was ordered to hand over several armoured divisions to Central Army Group.”

It is not clear what he thought should have been done to achieve victory, because the concession that he would be allowed to continue the offensive until the enemy reserves were ‘smashed’ was not enough. Therefore, it is not clear what he thought Hitler should have allowed him to do. Hitler would have had two options; 1) Manstein’s Army Group would have to advance all the way to Kursk on its own. 2) Hitler would have had to order Model’s 9. Army to continue the offensive. The first of these he conceded during the war was impossible, as the objective could not be fulfilled without the help of 9. Army. The second was also, as events turned out, impossible, as 9. Army was gradually forced away from the Orel area by the Soviet offensive that had been initiated.

It seems to be the case that what Manstein wrote was intentionally vague. He simply wanted to convey that the offensive that had been a clear failure could have been a success if it had been allowed to continue, but under what circumstances it should have been continued he did not offer. Manstein offered no solution in regard to how it could have been continued as the Soviet offensives pressured the German front line in other areas that had to be reinforced with the divisions used for Zitadelle. His post war claims about Zitadelle being the great lost victory was made in order for him to distance himself further from the truth, that it was an offensive that had serious problems, both in its planning and execution and that he had been complicit in its planning and execution. Instead of simply admitting that, he attempted to claim that the operation could have achieved something if it had been allowed to continue and thus would have become a victory.

This leads to a broader point that was covered in virtually all memoirs. German generals always claimed that the war in the East could have been won if at some stage the German Army had been under different leadership that had understood military matters better than Hitler. Raus had a short chapter entitled “Why we lost the Russian campaign”:

“Despite Russia and the Russian soldier, despite the cold and the mud, despite lacking equipment and our own laughable numerical inferiority, the German soldier had victory over the USSR within reach. […]The German Army should not have wasted itself the way it did outside Moscow and Stalingrad. A temporary retreat should have

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319 Manstein, Lost Victories, p. 449.
been executed, this would have led to subsequent successes, which might have led to a more beneficial end to the war against the USSR. After Stalingrad we fought delaying actions along a 1600 km front during a period of 4 months. Even then, under the leadership of Field Marshall Erich von Manstein we managed to seal the big holes in the lines sufficiently and achieve a defensive victory by March 1943. Time was not yet ripe to strike back, the Red Army needed to suffer further losses and we had to give up ground to shorten our lines. Only after that could we initiate a counter-offensive and defeat Russia before the allied landings in France. Beating the Western powers was dependent on beating Russia first.”

Raus’ opinion was based on a lot of hubris and belief in the German military and he completely overlooked very serious deficiencies in the German war machine, such as their lower manpower and production capability in order to draw his conclusion that the campaign could have been achieved if only certain decisions had been different. His assertion can thus be disputed on a strictly factual basis. Raus’ claim, Manstein’s claim that Zitadelle could have been a success and others like it were made purely without considering what the ramifications of a German victory would have entailed. How many people would have suffered and died if Germany won the war? These types of ethical questions were completely absent and the claims men like Manstein and Raus made that if only this had been done we would have won makes it sound as if they were the sore losers of a football match rather than having been engaged in a war where if the outcome had been different there would have been huge ramifications for Europe and the World.

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320 Raus, Panserkrig på Østfronten, p. 332-333.


Chapter 4, Conclusion

There is now a clear answer to the question that was posed in the introduction of this text: “To what extent did German generals attempt to distance themselves from Operation Zitadelle and who or what did they blame for the failure of the Operation?” The clear answer is that all the German generals that have been examined attempted to distance themselves from an operation, that most of them had supported during the war. None of them claimed after the war to have in any way backed the operation being carried out in the way that it was. Almost all of them blamed the failure on Hitler, the only exception was Guderian who choose to hold Zeitzler responsible for the operation.

Those who blamed Hitler mostly did so in the form of commenting on factors that they felt had contributed to the failure of the operation, like delay. These claims were used to make various counterfactual claims, for example that the Zitadelle would have been successful if it had been launched earlier. The fact that all these generals attempted to distance themselves from Zitadelle would make it seem likely that they shifted the blame for other operations as well. Not all these cases were as far from actual events as others, but in the case of Kurt Zeitzler it is fair to say that his writings in connection with Zitadelle were largely lies that were meant to protect or even increase his own military reputation.

One of the broader points that can be taken away is the way in which officers want to safeguard their own profession. That might be one of the reasons why British and American officers were so keen to give credit to the writings of these former Wehrmacht officers. They saw it as a way of showcasing what happens when military decisions are taken by an incompetent and unexperienced civilian like Hitler. They may well have seen this as a way of persuading their own president or prime minister to leave military matters to those who are “professionals”. It seems as a plausible an option as American officers being keen to learn how to fight a war against the Soviet Union from men who had lost to the same opponent.

These various memoirs were primarily not written with readers in 2019 in mind, they were meant primarily for the German public in the 1950s and early 1960s. The objective that the various generals had was to safeguard their own reputation and make sure that they were not blamed for the various military defeats that Germany had suffered or the loss of the war in general. It is astounding that the military ‘whitewashing’ of the Wehrmacht that they engaged in has been taken seriously by many historians right up to the present day. Most academic books about the Eastern front will feature at least one of these memoirs in their bibliographies.
and in most cases more than one. Academics argue over the claims that have been made in them, even though most of these arguments have innumerable variables that make arguments about them with any kind of certainty virtually impossible.

The attribution of military genius is something that is largely made by posterity. There have been exceptions in military history, like that of Napoleon I and John Churchill, but even these men were rather referred to as great commanders, rather than being called geniuses in their own present. Manstein was seen as a competent military commander during the war, but the claim that he was a military genius came gradually after the war ended, largely on the basis of what he wrote in his memoirs and through the publicity he got from Liddell Hart and others. The way that the military geniuses were created for posterity was largely through a simplification of the complexities of modern war, in which victories were analysed on the basis of decisions taken by a few people, as if modern war could be simplified down to two people playing chess and that the exact decision that brought victory can be identified as a specific move by one person. This was partly why various German generals offered actions that should have been taken instead of what actually happened, they seem to have imagined that a few different actions would have changed the outcome of a war with millions of different actors and variables.

There is a more general point about memoirs that should be made. Since many of the memoirs of German officers were ‘whitewashed’ both of war crimes and through military ‘whitewashing’, has that also the case with other prominent figures who have written about their previous experiences? The answer is likely yes. The Second World War is a deeply researched subject so many of the claims made in these memoirs can be checked with other sources. If memoirs are used in other less researched areas of history, it could be much harder to ascertain whether claim a or b was correct. It is also easier to be suspicious of the claims made by generals who were in the service of National Socialist Germany, but other figures who are perhaps more loved could in theory be believed just because of their reputation. An example might be that of “Long Walk to Freedom”321, Nelson Mandela’s memoirs. It is likely that most of the events retold by Mandela will be believed on the basis of his reputation, but should not equal scrutiny be applied to his memoirs? The answer has to be yes. Memoirs are in most cases written, not with an ambition to retell events from the past as they happened, but rather to retell events while the author exists in the then present.

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Glossary:

Armeabteilung: (meaning Army-detachment) A German formation that was usually set up when normal command structures were broken down (usually as a result of a crisis). The formations usually consisted of whatever divisions and corps were in the area where the new formation was set up. The formations were often named after their commander, such as Armeabteilung-Kempf, named after their commander Werner Kempf.

Army: In the sense of World War 2, German armies were a collection of between 1-5 Corps, they often had independent divisions or brigades under their command that were directly under command, rather than being subordinated to a corps. The German Armies were usually commanded by a full General.

Army Group: A collection of two or more German Armies. The Germans set up Army Groups for every major campaign they fought during the war. In Poland there was Army Group “North” and “South”, in France “A”, “B” and “C” and in the USSR “North”, “Centre” and “South” (in 1942 South was split into “A” and “B”). Others were set up in crisis situations, such as Army Group “Don” – a combination of Army Group South A and B after Stalingrad. The Soviet counterpart to the Army Group was called “Front”, for example, the “Volkhov-Front” and were usually of the same size as an Army Group, at least later in the war. A German Army Group was usually commanded by a Field Marshall.

Backhand-Blow: This refers to an offensive that is in reality a counteroffensive. The side that was planning to make a Backhand-Blow would allow the enemy to attack first and then counterattack with forces it had in reserve. The defender would often allow the attackers to wear themselves out by fighting against well prepared defences before counter attacking. In some cases the defender would allow the attacking enemy a breakthrough and advance to stretch their logistics before the backhand-blow was executed.

Corps: A group consisting of 2 or more divisions (although, usually not more than 5). Corps in the German army were usually commanded by a Lieutenant General.

Division: A military term used to describe a standardised unit of 10-20,000 men, although several (if not almost all) divisions would be understrength and be weaker than their designated strength. Divisions in the German army were usually commanded by a Major General.
Front hand-Blow: This is the counterpart of the Backhand-Blow and refers to a offensive intended to strike the enemy.

FLAK: (Flugzeugabwehrkanone), German term used to describe anti-aircraft guns. The most famous German anti-aircraft gun was the FLAK88, which was often used against tank, the same gun was later fitted on the Tiger tank.

Panzer-Group/Panzer Army: This is a word for the same structure. A collection of panzer-corps grouped together as an army formation. The term changed from Panzer-Group to Panzer Army in the autumn of 1941. Although a German force had the designation Panzerkorps or Panzerarmee it did not necessarily mean that the formation had a large degree of armoured formations. Later in the war it was not uncommon for a designated German Panzer Army to have few or no armoured forces under command.

PAK: (Panzer Abwehr Kanone), German term used to describe anti-tank guns.

STAVKA: The Soviet military high command during world War 2.

STUG: Sturmgeschütz, refers to a German turretless tank that became the most widely produced German tank of the Second World War.

OKW: (Oberkomando der Wehrmacht) This refers to the high command of the German armed forces during ww2, in theory it commanded the overall operations of the army, navy and the air force. OKW had little to do with the operations in the east, as that was more the area were the responsibility was in the hands of OKH.

OKH: (Oberkommando des Heeres)This refers to the high command of the German Army, up to the battle of Moscow in 1941 the OKH planned operations for the German Army, but after that Hitler put himself in absolute charge of the OKH.
Brief biographies of German generals

Ernst Hermann August Theodor Busse (15th of December 1897 – 21st of October 1986)

Busse was became a commissioned officer in 1917 and fought in the First World War. Busse began the Second World War as a staff officer, and spent his time designing training programs for the German Army. Most of Busse’s military career during the Second World War was as Manstein’s chief of staff. He followed Manstein as chief of staff when Manstein’s commands changed, first 11. Army and then Army Group Don, Army Group South. Busse was not a national socialist, but he was an admirer of Hitler’s early military victories. Busse was described by Manstein as “my closest collaborator”, in turn Busse was very protective of his relationship with Manstein, both during and after the war and most of his writings align with those of Manstein. Busse was a part of the Historical Division after the war.322

Heinz Wilhelm Guderian (17 June 1888 – 14 May 1954)

Guderian came from a military family, his father and both his grandfathers had been officers in the Prussian Army. Guderian joined the German Army in 1907. During the First World War he was a communications officer and worked at a radio station nr.3. Guderian was strongly opposed to the Versailles treaty and wanted Germany to continue the war. After the war he stayed in the Army and joined an Anti-communist division that took part in fighting in the Baltic states. Guderian spent most of the 1920s studying armoured warfare, he wrote several articles on the subject. He was gradually promoted and found himself at the centre of German mobile tactics, he contributed in large part to the development of German tactics and to the establishment of the Panzer Division structure. In 1937 he wrote the book “Achtung Panzer!” which was a success. He commanded German panzer forces during the Anschluss of Austria, during the operation many tanks ran out of fuel, Guderian spent the time after the campaign addressing the weaknesses in the armoured forces. Guderian gradually developed a close relationship with Adolf Hitler. During the Polish campaign he won his first victory and during the invasion of France he was responsible for the encirclement of the Allied armies. During Barbarossa he commanded one of the Panzer Groups of Army Group Centre, he succeeded to a great degree before his panzers were stopped a short distance from Moscow, Guderian was subsequently fired. Guderian fully blamed this on Gunther von Kluge. After the defeat at Stalingrad, Guderian was brought back by Hitler to the new position of “Inspector

322 Newton, Kursk the German view.
General of the Armoured Troops” and was responsible for increasing German production of tanks. In July 1944 he replaced Kurt Zeitzler as head of the OKH, a position he retained until right before the war ended. Guderian was a part of the Historical Division after the war. Guderian wrote many influential memoirs and was celebrated among military historians as an expert of armoured warfare. 323

Gotthard Fedor August Heinrici (25th of December 1886 – 10th December 1971)

Heinrici joined the German Army in 1905. During the First World War he served on the Western and Eastern Front and became a staff officer during the war. Heinrici was a deeply religious man and in the 1930’s he refused to join the Nazi party, which made him unpopular. His wife was half Jewish and their children were by National Socialist law, un-pure, he did, however, secure a certificate of their Arian status from Hitler which meant that they were not discriminated under Nazi racial law. Heinrici served as a corps commander in the early campaigns of the war. In January 1942 he became commander of the 4. Army. He gradually gained a reputation for being an expert in defensive warfare. He was relieved of the post in early 1944. Heinrici was called back to service later in 1944 and placed in command of forces in Hungary were he inflicted a severe defeat on the Soviet forces. In 1945 he was in command of the forces protecting Berlin and he is credited with causing severe problems for the Soviet attempt to take the city during the battle of the Seelow heights. After he ordered his men to retreat to the west he was dismissed. After the war he was instrumental in helping the United States in setting up their various assessments of German military knowledge. 324

Hermann Hoth (12th of April 1885 – 25th of January 1971)

Hoth joined the German Army in 1903 and fought in the First World War. He remained in the army after the war and became a divisional commander in 1935. In 1938 he was given command of a motorized corps after being promoted, he led the corps in the Polish campaign. During the French campaign he commander one of Guderian’s panzer corps and took part in the push to the Channel. During Barbarossa he commanded the 3. Panzer group. In 1942 he was head of the 17. Army that was attacked at Kharkov. After the battle he was given

323 Healy, Slaget om Kursk. & Hart, Guderian – Panzer Pioneer or Myth Maker?
command of the 4. Panzer Army, a command he held until he was dismissed on the 10th of December 1943. He was recalled in March 1945 but did not receive a new command post. Hoth was tried at Nuremberg, found guilty and sentenced to 15 years. He was released on parole in 1954.325

Werner Kempf (9th of March 1886 – 6th of January 1964)

Kempf joined the German Army in 1905 and fought in the First World War. He was gradually promoted during the inter-war period and had become a division commander at the start of the Second World War. In the early campaigns he commanded various armoured units. In 1942 he was made a corps commander, and commanded a panzer-corps a position he retained until he became head of Armeeabteilung Kempf. Kempf was relieved of his command after the battle of Kursk. He commanded units in the Baltics before being moved to the reserves.326

Günther Adolf Ferdinand von Kluge (30 October 1882 – 19 August 1944)

Kluge came from a aristocratic Prussian military family, Kluge was commissioned as an officer in 1901 and served as a staff officer from 1910- Kluge served on the Western front during the First World War. He stayed in the German military during the inter-war years and in 1933 he was promoted to Major General and Lieutenant General the year after. Before the war he was critical of Hitler’s policy of expansion and was afraid that it would bring ruin to Germany, but he supported the quest for Lebensraum and the expansion of the army. Kluge took part in the Polish and French campaigns as the commander of a corps. He received much praise and was promoted to Field Marshall in July 1940. During Barbarossa Kluge commanded the 4. Army of Army Group Centre. During the final push towards Moscow, Kluge was slow in supporting the effort of Guderian’s Panzer Group. When von Bock was fired in December, Kluge replaced him as head of Army Group Centre, Kluge remained in the position until October 1943, when he was injured in a car accident. In July 1944 Kluge replaced von Rundstedt as chief of OB West, at this point he was highly pessimistically of

325 Healy, Slaget om Kursk, 1943.
Germany’s war situation. Already on the 17th of August 1944 he was dismissed and replaced by Walter Model, Kluge had been implicated in the July plot to kill Hitler and while Kluge was on the way to Berlin he killed himself.327

**Fritz Erich Georg Eduard von Manstein** (24th of November 1887 – 9th of June 1973)

Born Fritz Erich Georg Eduard von Lewinski in a Prussian military family. He was adopted by the von Manstein family, who was a very distinguished Prussian military family. He joined the German Army in 1906 and fought during the First World War on both the Western and Eastern fronts, during the war he became a staff officer and served in various positions. He remained in the Army after the war and had various staff jobs, in 1935 he was placed in the operations branch of the OKW. Manstein was responsible for several plans, the most famous being sickle-cut, the plan that secured the defeat of France in 1940. Manstein was also the largest proponent for developing the Stug III. Manstein was one of few proponents for operation Sea Lion, the proposed invasion of the United Kingdom. At the start of Barbarossa he commanded a panzer-corps and performed well. He was then placed in command of the 11. Army and secured Crimea with the fall of Sevastopol in July of 1942. After the victory Manstein was promoted to Field Marshall. He was shifted to Army Group North and placed in command of the propose operation Nordlicht, which was supposed to capture Leningrad. The Operation was eventually abandoned. Manstein was then given command of Army Group Don, he tried and failed to break through to Stalingrad. Manstein was eventually placed in command of the new Army Group South. He succeeded in defeating the Red Army at Kharkov. Manstein’s forces failed to win a victory at Kursk was eventually pushed back towards the Romanian border while inflicting large losses on the Red Army. Manstein was relieved of command by Hitler on the 2nd of April 1944. After the war Manstein was tried and sentenced to 18 years in prison for war crimes. His memoirs were released in 1951 and a growing cult developed that lobbied for his release. He was released from prison in 1953. Manstein has been seen, together with Erwin Rommel as one of the greatest commanders of the Second World War.328

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327 Healy, *Slaget om Kursk, 1943.*
Otto Moritz Walter Model (24th of January 1891 – 21st of April 1945)

Model did not come from a military family. He joined the German Army before the First World War and was severely wounded during the battle of Arras in 1915. He became a staff officers after recovering. Because of his reputation for great courage and competence during the First World War he had a good reputation within the Army. At the outbreak of World War 2 he was a staff officer, in November 1940 he received command of the 3. Panzer Division. During Barbarossa his division was subordinate to Guderian and Model performed well in the campaign. Model’s rough style of leadership prevented his units from disintegrating during the Soviet counteroffensive, as a reward for his efforts, Model was promoted and became head of the 9. Army. He was commander of 9. Army until January 1944 when he was placed in command of Army Group North which had been brutally attacked by the Red Army, Model restored order and stopped the Soviet advance. He was then moved to command Army Group North-Ukraine and achieved a halt of the Soviet advance there. During Operation Bagration he was placed in command of Army Group Centre and stopped the Soviet advance just short of Warsaw. Because Hitler shifted Model to wherever there was trouble he gained the nickname “Hitler’s fireman”. In August 1944 he replaced Kluge as head of OB West and was responsible for defeating operation Market Garden. He held the position as the Allies gradually pushed the Germans into Germany itself. He was a key commander during the battle of the Bulge were his efforts failed. He and his men were eventually surrounded in the Ruhr Pocket, Model disbanded his army and committed suicide.329

Erhard Raus (8th of January 1889 – 3rd of April 1956)

Raus fought in the First World War as a part of the Austro-Hungarian military. He joined the Wehrmacht after the Anschluss in 1938. Raus spent all of his active years during the Second World War on the Eastern front, commanding various Panzer units. First a division and then a corps, before being given command of the 4. Panzer Army in December 1943. Later in the war he commanded the 1. Panzer and 3. Panzer Army. After the war Raus co-authored several books and contributed to strategic analysis of the armoured battles that had fought on the Eastern front.330

329 Healy, Slaget om Kursk 1943. & Newton, Hitler’s Commander.
330 Newton, Kursk – the German view.
Kurt Zeitzler (9th of June 1895 – 25th of September 1963)

Zeitzler did not come from a military family, he had joined the army early enough to fight during the First World War and at the end of the war he was a staff officer. Zeitzler started the war as a staff officer and he had a clear talent for keeping the fast panzer units supplied during the early campaigns of the Second World War and was successful in the same task during Barbarossa. He was promoted and became chief of staff to OB West were he gained prominence during the defeat of the Dieppe raid. When Hitler fired Halder as chief of staff in September 1942, Zeitzler replaced him. He held the post until 1944, when he was relieved of the post. Zeitzler was part of the Historical Division after the war.\footnote{331 Basil Henry Liddell Hart, The German Generals Talk. New York, NY: Morrow, 1948}
Map 1: (Map of the German attack on Poland, clearly showing the pockets that Polish units were trapped in.). Photo taken from Zetterling, *Angrepet på Polen*, p.31.
Map 2: (Map of sicklecut and the Schlieffen plan). Photo taken from Rolf-Dieter Müller’s Hitler’s Wehrmacht 1935-1945, p. i.
Map 3: (Territory ceded by Finland to the USSR after the Winter War). Photo taken from Olsen, *vinterkrigen*, p.111.
Map 6: (Map depicting operation Raubtier). Photo taken from Forczyk, Kampen om Leningrad 1941-1944, p.50.

Map 8: (Map depicting operation *Trappenjagd*). Photo taken from Forczyk, *Slaget om Krim 1942*, p.17.
Map 13: (Map depicting operation Zitadelle). Photo taken from Roman Töppel’s *Kursk 1943*, p. 269.
Map 14: (Map depicting Manstein’s proposed attack, 08.03.1943, Hitler’s operation Habicht and Schmidt’s proposal that eventually became Zitadelle). Photo taken from Roman Töppel’s Kursk 1943, p.267.