

Panzer Leader Study Guide

Panzer Leader by Heinz Guderian

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Plot Summary

The book PANZER LEADER is a memoir of Col.-General Heinz Guderian about the formation and deployment of the German Panzer (tank) forces during WWII. Guderian begins the book with the circumstances in which he becomes a leader of Panzer development and theory in Germany after World War I. When Hitler comes to power in 1933, Guderian gets the opportunity to develop new, large Panzer divisions and have these coordinate in battle with the Luftwaffe (German Airforce). There is much pride expressed by Guderian as Germany rearms and "peacefully" absorbs territories in Europe. Even when Poland is attacked there is the German-Soviet Agreement, which promises to limit the war after the defeat of Poland to a war against the Western Powers. In the attack on France in May 1940, Guderian has his finest moment when he is a key executor of the Manstein Plan and German forces pass over the Meuse River and turn north towards the Channel ports. The only dark spot for Germany is the successful evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. Guderian ascribes this to demands by Goering and the Luftwaffe for a special role in the battle. When Hitler decides to attack the Soviet Union, there are misgivings from Guderian because the war with Great Britain continues. Guderian demands a war of quick movement with disregard of flanks in order to quickly capture Moscow. This is carried out in the first two months of the campaign, but then Hitler decides to turn the armies south to the Ukraine and Kiev. As Guderian fears, this leads to German forces being stuck and stopped before Moscow as the mud season and the harsh winter arrive. Soon after, Guderian is dismissed.

Guderian is returned to active duty after the disaster at Stalingrad. In February 1943, he is appointed the Inspector of the Armored Forces. Guderian helps reorganize the Panzer divisions and simplify the production of tanks and self-propelled guns, though often Hitler refuses to listen to his advice. Guderian tries to prepare German forces in the West for the impending Western Allies' landing in France. He fails in this due to Western air attacks and the demoralization of Field Marshall Rommel, German commander in this sector. After the plot against Hitler of July 20th, 1944, Guderian is appointed the Army Chief of Staff. Still, Guderian's calls for two lines of defense with sufficient depth and for strategic withdrawals are refused by Hitler. The result is a huge Russian breakthrough following their attack of January 12th, 1945. Guderian stays loyal to the Nazi regime until he is put on sick leave in late March 1945.

Guderian tries to oust the two yes-men at the OKW and OKH, Jodl and Keitel but fails. He wants to go back to the system of real power in the German General Staff. Guderian does make the point that Nazi hostility to the Russian and Ukrainian populations is a key driver of partisan warfare later in the war by populations that had at first looked at the Germans as liberators. Guderian has some understanding of the liabilities of the Nazi regime. Later, Guderian is also frustrated in his attempts to encourage peace talks with the West. Guderian is a loyal soldier of the old mold of the Prussian and German General Staff. He tries to serve Hitler, and finds out the hard way the pitfalls of serving a fanatical dictator.



Chapter 1- Background and Youth; Chapter 2- The Creation of the German Armored Forces

Chapter 1- Background and Youth; Chapter 2- The Creation of the German Armored Forces Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1- Heinz Guderian is born in 1888 and his father is in the German military. Before World War I, Heinz Guderian becomes a junior officer and marries. He has two sons and after the war serves on frontier duty.

Chapter 2- After World War I, Germany's Army is limited to 100,000 men. In 1921, Guderian is called to serve on the General Staff and is deployed on Motorized Transportation matters. Guderian starts a technical career and looks at using motorized troops and tanks. Tanks were used by the British at the end of World War I. Guderian becomes an instructor on military history and mobile warfare. Several experimental tanks are built. Light and medium tanks are developed with 75 mm guns for the medium tanks. By 1928, Guderian is asked to teach about tank warfare. On a trip to Sweden, he sees his first tank and drives it. In 1929, Guderian develops the idea of the mobile armored or panzer division, centered on tanks. Under General Lutz, Guderian organizes a mobile division with dummy weapons.

In 1933, Hitler comes into power and soon is dictator. Hitler is interested in the Panzer I tank. Rearmament is begun and whole new machine tool and armament industries are built. The new Commander-in-Chief of the Army is von Fritsch, who is interested in armored divisions, but the Chief of the General Staff, General Beck is not. By October 1935, three Panzer (Armored and Tank) Divisions are formed. Panzer Divisions include fully motorized Infantry and anti-tank units. In 1936, the Rhineland area is re-militarized. In 1937, Guderian publishes his book "Achtung! Panzer!" that spreads his ideas on tanks and mobile warfare to the general public.

TANK ATTACK BY MOVEMENT- (Guderian's book) From the last war, there is an impression of steamroller tank advance, but the advance was still vulnerable to anti-tank fire. Current tanks have more armor. There is always a struggle between offensive tank and defensive anti-tank weapons. The key thing about tanks (panzers) is that they bring back mobile warfare. Tanks with big guns and machine guns keep the offensive going. They can bring firepower to specific targets of the enemy, unlike general artillery barrages. Advance can occur without an artillery barrage, with a full element of surprise, and followed up by motorized infantry. Tanks massed together are far more effective than used piecemeal in favorable territory.



Chapter 3: Hitler at His Peak

Chapter 3: Hitler at His Peak Summary and Analysis

In 1938, Guderian is promoted to Lt.-General, while von Fritsch, Defense Minister Blomberg, and General Lutz are ousted or demoted. Hitler takes the title of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, and under him is his lackey General Keitel. Guderian takes over his old unit, the 2nd Panzer Division and is ordered to march into Austria. The march is unopposed, but there are difficulties, such as the need to get gas at Austrian gas stations along the way. In the city of Linz, Guderian stops for a luncheon; by evening, Hitler arrives at Linz. Guderian has meetings with the leaders of the old Austrian Army, which is incorporated into the German army. Hitler is deeply moved at returning to Linz, one of the scenes of his childhood. After the Incorporation of the Sudetenland into the Reich- On October 3rd, 1938 after the Munich Conference, motorized infantry occupy the Sudetenland. Guderian expresses his thanks to Hitler that war has been avoided. In this heavily German region that was Czechoslovakia, the German army is greeted with flowers. The Situation Deteriorates Once Again- Guderian participates with Hitler in celebrations of the new acquisition of territory, but tension with the United Kingdom continues. Guderian is promoted to General of Panzer Troops. He dislikes this post because he thinks it has insufficient power to improve his beloved panzer armies, but Hitler insists that he accept. There is still considerable disagreement on the proper use of tanks.



Chapter 4- The Beginning of the Disaster

Chapter 4- The Beginning of the Disaster Summary and Analysis

In May 1939, Germany annexes the rest of Czechoslovakia. Czech tank production is somewhat useful to Germany. Hitler's next target is Poland. Guderian is given the command of the XIX Army Corps. His task is to cross the River Brahe and cut off the Polish Corridor from the rest of Poland. The attack is delayed but is launched on September 1st, after the signing of a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. Guderian advances with his men in an armored car over the River Brahe. On Sept. 3rd, Guderian's troops reach their goal of the Vistula River and have smashed the enemy. Meanwhile, England and France declare war on Germany.

Hitler visits the troops and is astonished that tanks have destroyed whole Polish artillery positions. Guderian is gratified to reach his birthplace, Kulm, formerly part of Germany. For a new mission, Guderian retains command over the 3rd Panzer Division and the 10th Panzer Div. and by Sept. 8th is driving east towards the fortress of Brest-Litovsk, on the Bug River. Guderian's troops move quickly. By Sept. 10th, the tanks have to cross the Narev River, but there is a shortage of bridging equipment. On Sept. 12th, the Polish forces near Andrzejewo surrender. By Sept. 15th, Guderian's forces surround the city of Brest-Litovsk. The 20th Infantry (Motorized) Division attempts to storm the city but fails. The next day Brest-Litovsk is captured before Polish forces can escape. At this point, the Soviet Army marches into Eastern Poland as previously agreed with Germany. Between Campaigns- Guderian is decorated with the Knight's Cross. He is disturbed by a series of lectures given to the Army Generals and finally by Hitler. The tone of these lectures is an insulting lack of trust in the Generals. After speaking to other Army Generals, Guderian arranges to speak with Hitler. Hitler complains that the Army leadership had always objected to his plans for rearmament and war.



Chapter 5- The Campaign in the West

Chapter 5- The Campaign in the West Summary and Analysis

There is a debate in the High Command on whether or not to repeat the Schlieffen Plan, a German advance into Belgium that is strong on the extreme right wing (by the coast). Field Marshall Manstein advocates a plan that attacks through Southern Belgium and Luxemburg and seizing Sedan and the Meuse River crossings in France, then turning north to the English Channel. Guderian becomes an insistent advocate of the Manstein Plan and using fast Panzer units to make a penetration without regards to flanks. Hitler adopts the plan and Guderian is given command of the XIX Army Group to carry out the attack.

Guderian believes that the fact that France did not attack Germany while German forces were tied up in Poland proves that the French want to avoid real fighting. Guderian arranges for close cooperation and training with the Luftwaffe, the German Airforce in the coming attack. The Breakthrough to the Channel- The attack west begins early on May 10th, 1940. Guderian's forces cross Luxemburg and soon are in the low mountains of Belgium. On May 11th, the roads are cleared and the 10th Panzer Div. attacks Bouillon on the French frontier. By May 12th, tanks are able to ford the Semois River. On the 13th, Guderian gives the orders to launch the critical attack across the Meuse River. German air support using dive-bombers is key to breaking through the northern continuation of the Maginot Line. The first wave of the 10th Panzer Div. crosses the Meuse by assault boat. Despite some heavy fighting, the 1st Panzer Div. increases the bridgehead. Without regards to their flanks, the 1st and 2nd Panzer Divisions keep moving and then fight their way to the heights at Stonne, which are taken. On May 17th, Gen. von Kleist orders a halt to the advance. Guderian threatens to resign and finally is able to get permission to continue the advance. On the 20th, the first Germans reach the English Channel.

The Capture of the Channel Ports- On May 22nd, Guderian attacks north to take the Channel ports. By May 23rd, the 2nd Panzer Div. enters the port of Boulogne, and the port of Calais is attacked and besieged. Hitler's Momentous Orders to Stop- Hitler forbids forces to cross north of the Aa Canal on May 24th. On May 26th, the fortress of Calais falls and Guderian attempts to attack Dunkirk but is stopped. Dunkirk does not fall until May 29th. By that time, most of the British Expeditionary Force is evacuated to Great Britain. The British are saved at Dunkirk because Goering and the German Airforce wanted the glory of destroying them and failed.

Breakthrough to the Swiss Border- Guderian assembled a new Panzer Group in the area near the German border after marching south from the Channel. Guderian's Panzers advance as far as Pontarlie on the Swiss border and then wheel around to the northwest to circle and destroy French forces on the Maginot defensive line. By June 18th, the fortress of Belfort is reached in Alsace. While many French surrender, there is



a fight for Belfort. The forts of Belfort are reduced by bringing in infantry under an artillery bombardment. The Group takes 250,000 prisoners and soon the French surrender. Guderian is not satisfied with the events after the armistice. France could have been fully occupied and immediate attacks launched on North Africa.



Chapter 6- The Campaign in Russia

Chapter 6- The Campaign in Russia Summary and Analysis

There is tension with the Soviet Union, which in 1940 has occupied numerous border territories. Hitler begins to plan Operation Barbarossa, an attack on the Soviet Union. In the meantime, Mussolini of Italy attacks Greece in October 1940, which is a military failure. The Italians are defeated at Tobruk in Africa, and strong German forces have to be sent to fight in the Balkans and Africa. Guderian feels that German tank production is insufficient for the coming Russian campaign. German tank production is only 1,000 tanks a year.

Preparations- Guderian is given the command of Panzer Group 2 in Army Group Centre of the Russian front. Three army groups attack Russia on June 22nd, 1941. The plan is to seize the Smolensk area in Central Russia. Guderian plans to capture the city of Minsk in the first 6 days. The plan is to be victorious in 12 weeks, so no winter clothing is issued. Guderian claims that the orders to allow atrocities against the civilian population is never issued on his front. Opening Operations- Guderian gives a very detailed account of his days during the opening of the attack. Complete surprise is achieved, but soon the Russians counterattack. By June 27th, elements of the 17th Panzer Division reach Minsk, and large Russian forces are circled.

Guderian's goal is to push his forces further east to Smolensk. The Russians fight fiercely but have lost their central command. German Field Marshall von Kluge holds up the 18th Panzer Division advancing towards Borissov. Von Kluge threatens to court-martial Generals Guderian and Hoth for not closing the pocket properly of encircled Russian troops. The first attack by the superior enemy tank, the T34, is repulsed. On July 4th, the XXIV Panzer Corps reaches the Dneiper River near Rogachev. Crossing the Dneiper- Guderian decides to attack across the Dneiper. Only by fast attacks can the Russians be stopped from reestablishing a defensive line. There is fear from the High Command about continuing the attack, but Guderian wins the argument. On July 9th, the 17th Panzer Division destroys 100 enemy tanks and then the Dneiper is crossed with light casualties.

Smolensk-Elnya-Roslavl- The 29th Motorized Infantry Div. approaches Smolensk. There is intense static fighting around Elnya, 30 miles east of Smolensk, which is a German east-pointing salient. Guderian plans to send forces north to Dogorobush to encircle Russian forces in cooperation with Gen. Hoth to his north, but the advance to Dogorobush is stopped. Finally, the pocket around enemy forces is closed by Gen. Hoth from the north. On August 1st, XXIV Panzer Corps and VII Army Corps attack Roslavl on Guderian's southern wing. Three to four Russian Divisions are destroyed.

Moscow or Kiev? - There is a conference with Hitler at the Headquarters of Army Group Centre. The Panzer Groups need some time to make repairs and regroup. Hitler tells



his Generals that he probably wants to attack the Ukraine first. Other speakers report that the tanks need new engines due to wear and dust. Even Hitler admits that the Soviet tank forces are over 10,000 tanks. Back at the front, Roslavl is captured by Guderian on August 8th and he mounts an operation to secure his deep southern (right) flank around Krichev. Static battles continue around Elnya. By August 23rd, Hitler decides to attack the Ukraine. Guderian goes to meet Hitler and tells him the advantages of taking Moscow first as it is the center of the communications, industry and politics of the Soviet Union. Hitler answers that wartime economics is not understood by the Generals.

The Battle of Kiev- Guderian is further disappointed by the removal of XLVI Panzer Corps from his Group. On August 26th, tanks and dive-bombers attack and cross the Rog River. The Panzer Group heads south while facing strong enemy forces on its left (eastern) flank along the Desna River. By September 3rd, the 10th Motorized Infantry Division faces heavy casualties as it forces its way south along the Desna River. A change comes the next day when General von Geyr finds a gap in the Russian lines, and Russian troops are encircled. On Sept. 7th, Panzers capture a bridgehead over the Seim River. On Sept. 9th, Romny is approached, and Guderian's forces meet the Germans coming up from the south for a huge encirclement of the enemy. There are a series of crises at Romny, and Guderian is forced to move his headquarters from that town. On Sept. 24th, Guderian attends an Army Group Centre conference on the new plan to attack Moscow after all. The Battle of Kiev ends Sept. 26th, with 665,000 prisoners taken. The Russians are caught because Stalin did not allow them to pull out of Kiev in time.

Battles of Orel and Bryansk- An attack straight on the Putivl area on Sept. 28th fails but serves to divert the Russians from another German attack that hits on Sept. 30th. A Panzer Corps and the 10th Motorized Infantry Div. breakthrough north of Putivl from Gluchov. By Oct. 1st, XXIV Panzer Corps takes Sevsk. A quick attack northeast captures Orel, an important rail center, while Russian bombing attacks intensify. Guderian's Headquarters are moved to Sevsk on Oct. 6th, but the offensive towards Tula is stopped by mass enemy T34 tank attacks. On Oct. 8th, Guderian finds that the wet road from Orel to Sevsk is disintegrating. Improved Russian tactics with T34 tanks stop German attacks, and the lack of winter clothes is being felt. Nevertheless, Russian forces are encircled at Trubchevsk and north of Bryansk. Guderian calls for German experts to study the Russian T34 tank to create a better German tank and an anti-tank gun that can destroy the T34.

Advance to Tula and Moscow- Roads collapse and bridges are blown up while fuel is running out. On Oct. 29th, German tanks approach Tula but are driven back. The roads are so bad that the 3rd Panzer Division must be supplied by air. On November 7th there is a report of German soldiers suffering frostbite. On November 14th, Guderian notes that the infantry still do not have woolen pants. Tanks lack antifreeze and calks (cleats) for tank tracks to drive in the ice. The temperature hits minus 8-degrees Fahrenheit. The Army General Staff dreams that Guderian can still reach Gorki, which is 250 miles east of Moscow. On Nov. 17th, fresh, well-dressed Siberian troops attack in the Dedilova area, and there are the first instances of German forces in panicky retreat. The LIII Army



Corps gets into a huge tank battle near Teploie that lasts for ten days, while fresh Russian troops hit the German flank from the east of Chern. Field Marshall Bock of Army Group Centre demands that the advance continues.

On November 26th, the LIII Army Corps is able to cross the Don River and surrounds and captures 4,000 Siberian troops near Danskoi. Many of these Siberians abandon their vehicles and break out on foot, causing heavy German casualties. The cold is unbelievable, and by December 5th, the attack on Tula is broken off, and the general offensive towards Moscow ended. The XXIV Panzer Corps is withdrawn; casualties from frostbite are worse than those from enemy action. On Dec. 9th, parts of the 95th Infantry Division are encircled by the Russians. On Dec. 13th, the Russian penetration towards Orel is deepened, and part of a German Infantry Division is destroyed. The withdrawal continues towards the Plava River.

My First Dismissal- On Dec. 20th, Guderian flies to East Prussia to talk with Hitler. Guderian describes the withdrawal, and Hitler demands that the withdrawal be stopped. Guderian describes the shortages of men and ammunition and the frigid cold. He warns of unacceptable casualties unless there is a proper withdrawal. Hitler is informed that adequate winter clothing for the troops has still not arrived. Many troops are deployed to work on supply because sleds have replaced trucks and railroads in many sectors. Guderian flies back to Orel and deploys his troops as Hitler has ordered. The 10th Motorized Infantry Div. is surrounded by Russian troops and Chern is lost. Guderian orders a withdrawal and is accused by Field Marshal von Kluge of disobeying orders and Guderian is dismissed from command. Guderian requests a military hearing on his past conduct, because von Kluge has treated him unfairly, but Guderian is turned down.



Chap. 7- On Inactive Service; Chap. 8- The Development of the Armed Forces

Chap. 7- On Inactive Service; Chap. 8- The Development of the Armed Forces Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7- Guderian tries to get a review of what he sees as unfair treatment by Field von Kluge at the time of his dismissal from active service. For reasons of Hitler's dictatorship, this is impossible. As of March 1942, Hitler rules totally by decree, without discussion in the Reichstag (Parliament). Since Guderian has received an award, he is entitled to choose a property in Germany. He cannot do this because he becomes seriously ill. In the meantime, Germany suffers disaster at Stalingrad in January 1943.

Chapter 8- To counter the Russian T34 tank, a light tank, the Panther and a heavy tank, the Tiger are designed. Tanks with heavier armor and super heavy tanks are considered. Hitler also wants more self-propelled guns, but this lowers the number of tanks that can be produced. Constant modification of tanks produces problems in their repair and maintenance. Guderian claims that the Tiger tank is used too early on the Leningrad front in unfavorable terrain with heavy losses. More assault guns are produced in 1943, but tank production lags, particularly of the Panzer IV. Hitler collaborates with the designer Porsche to produce strange and huge tank designs. The chaos in the armored forces finally leads some of Hitler's advisers to demand that Guderian be called back into active service.



Chapter 9- Inspector-General of the Armored Troops

Chapter 9- Inspector-General of the Armored Troops Summary and Analysis

In February 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill demand that Germany unconditionally surrender. Hitler's adjutant, Gen. Schmundt sees Guderian, and Guderian demands total power over the armored forces. This includes control over tank models of production and tank training school. Guderian is made the Inspector-General of Armored Troops. He also gets the right to make inspections of all armored troops. Guderian gathers an experienced staff in his old Berlin office, mostly composed of wounded tank officers. Guderian speaks at length to Field Marshall Milch and to Dr. Goebbels to have Hitler appoint a new Chief of the Army General Staff, but this is not possible. Guderian is forced to speak to a large number of German Generals. There, Guderian calls for the recreation of complete Panzer (tank) divisions. The tanks models to be built are Panzer IVs, Panthers, and Tigers, as well as light assault guns on a Panzer IV chassis. New heavy assault guns have the task of destroying enemy tanks. The mob of Generals have Hitler keep assault artillery as an independent weapon and leave the infantry without effective defensive weapons against enemy tanks. One tactic adopted, the use of armored aprons hanging on the flanks and rear of tanks, is successful against Russian anti-tank weapons.

Dr. Goerdeler's Visit- A General brings Dr. Goerdeler to Guderian with a plan to put Hitler under house arrest. Guderian fears that this will lead to a collapse of the front and occupation by the Soviet Union. Operation Citadel- Field Marshall Manstein wins a limited victory in early 1943 and recaptures Kharkov. A plan is discussed with Hitler for a major attack in the East. Guderian tries to have experienced tank crews flown out of the collapsing Africa front but is not permitted to do so. Guderian inspects Panzer Regiment 100 in France, which is equipped with captured French tanks. He is called to Munich to discuss an impending double envelopment attack on the Russians at Kursk. Guderian objects that the Panther tank still has too many problems to be used. During this conference, von Kluge is angry at Guderian's attitude and tries to challenge Guderian to a duel. Guderian pleads with Hitler to stop the offensive.

The Kursk attack begins on July 5th, 1943. The Zeitzler Plan has attacks on the Russian Kursk salient both from the north and the south. The attack is a failure and the Russians counterattack at Orel on July 15th. Disagreements During the Second Half of 1943- Guderian becomes ill and does not recover until late August. While in convalescence, Guderian's home in Berlin is bombed. Tank factories in Cassel are bombed and production increases fail. By August 24th, the Russians achieve a breakthrough against the Army Group South near Taganrog. On the South-Central front, near Kiev, German counterattacks fail in December, and Russian troops approach



Vinnitsa. Hitler admits that Guderian was right to demand better anti-tank weapons for the infantry.

Guderian gives the example of the 25th Panzer Division that is put together in France. It loses its new German tanks to another division but is sent to the Russian front anyway. Their remaining tanks are separated from the other vehicles during transport, and the division is sent piecemeal to the front near Fastov on Nov. 7th, 1943. Despite heavy infantry guns some of the soldiers panic when they are attacked by T34 tanks. The division breaks out of tank encirclement during the night and takes Fastov but suffers heavy casualties. Later the division is stretched out over a long front and is cut to pieces. Guderian continues to put together new units, and puts together demonstration units from tank schools to form a new Panzer Division in France. Hitler refuses to have an operational retreat to a strong defensive line in the East. This worsens the defense against the coming Western landing in France. Still, Guderian scrapes together 10 Panzer Divisions for the Western Front. Dr. Goebbels and Himmler are unable or unwilling to suggest to Hitler to appoint a new Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff. Guderian himself is alone with Hitler in January 1944 and demands that Hitler replace his lackey, Chief of Staff Gen. Keitel. Hitler refuses to do this and refuses to have troops retreat to a prepared line.

The Year of Decision- On the Southern portion of the Eastern front there are big German losses, and by April 1944, most of the Crimea has fallen. Hitler wants to make a scapegoat of Col.-General Janicke, who loses the battle of the Crimea, but Guderian delays the trial and ultimately stops it. Guderian visits France in April and finds out that Gen. Rommel is demoralized by Western air superiority. Rommel believes that mobile warfare is impossible for the Germans and insists that Panzer divisions be kept only a couple of miles from the French coast. Rommel is convinced that the Western allies will land by the mouth of the Somme River. On the day of the invasion, Rommel is off to Germany for a meeting, and there is no immediate counter-attack on the Normandy landings. Naval guns and daylight plane bombings destroy panzer divisions near the landing. Nearly two weeks after the Normandy landings, the Germans are still waiting for landings in the Somme River mouth area, which never happens. On June 29th, most of the German command in the West is dismissed, but the new commander, Von Kluge cannot make the situation any better. Meanwhile, on June 22nd, the Russians breakthrough against Army Group Centre and soon 25 German divisions are destroyed, almost 300,000 men.



Chapter 10- July 20th and Its Sequel

Chapter 10- July 20th and Its Sequel Summary and Analysis

On July 18th, Guderian hears a report that Field Marshall von Kluge will declare a sudden armistice in the West. Two days later, Guderian hears of the attempt to assassinate Hitler. Guderian is called to go to East Prussia to meet Hitler. There he is appointed as the new Chief of the Army General Staff to replace Zeitzler. Hitler is lightly wounded by the bomb but is calm. Field Marshall von Kluge is suspected to be complicit in the coup d'etat and assassination plot of July 20th. Guderian now is desperate to defend East Prussia from the attacking Russians and reconstitutes the OKH, the Army General Staff. Guderian doubts that the bomb plot, even if it killed Hitler, could have helped Germany. Guderian is nominally involved in a court that first dismisses men from the army before they are sent to the People's Court, the so-called Court of Honor. Guderian gives the case of a soldier who allows another soldier the chance to commit suicide after July 20th. Instead this soldier deserts to the Russians, and the first soldier ends up arrested and shot for treason. Guderian attacks the morality and methods of the coup plotters of July 20th.



Chapter 11- Chief of the General Staff

Chapter 11- Chief of the General Staff Summary and Analysis

Meanwhile, the Russian breakthrough against the North Ukraine front is approaching Warsaw by July 1944. German Reserves are brought up from Rumania and by September they are able to re-establish the land connection to the German Army Group North. Hitler refuses to withdraw forces in Courland, and these forces are cut off by land again in October. The Poles in Warsaw revolt and are defeated with out-of-control brutality by Oct. 2nd. Guderian demands that a German unit composed of Russian POWs and a German convict unit be removed from the Eastern Front. Russian attempts to storm Warsaw are defeated along the Vistula River, and Guderian disputes claims that the Russians deliberately slowed their advance on Warsaw to relieve the pro-Western revolt there. Guderian organizes Hitler Youth, women and the elderly to fortify towns in East Prussia. This is partly frustrated by Gen. Keitel and Jodl's shipping of captured guns to the Western Front. In the West, after the Western Allies break-out of Normandy, German troops retreat all the way to the West Wall on the old German border.

In early August, Marshall Antonescu, the leader of Rumania, visits Hitler's headquarters and is stunned at hearing of the attempted coup against Hitler. Antonescu asks for Army Group South to consider a large retreat into Rumania. In Bulgaria, too, there are problems. When the Russians attack Army Group South Ukraine on August 20th, 1944, the Rumanian troops rapidly disintegrate. There is a coup d'etat in Rumania and the new government makes war on Germany, leading to the destruction of 16 German divisions. By early September, German loses all of Rumania and Bulgaria.

In the West, the Americans breakout of Normandy on July 30th, and soon a large German force is encircled near Falaise. Gen. Model replaces Field Marshall von Kluge, who soon after kills himself. Hitler plans to take the offensive in the West in November, but by September German forces have retreated to the West Wall and the old German border. Guderian tries to stabilize the Eastern Front and has four groups of Panzer reserves form. Hitler refuses to evacuate the isolated German forces of Army Group North.

In Poland, in August, General Balck stops the Russian advance from their bridgehead over the Vistula River at Baranov. During October 16th to 26th, the Russian attack on East Prussia is stopped. Guderian tries to use this period of stability to build up a second defensive line 12 miles behind the front, but this plan is refused by Hitler. The Russians continue to advance and are near Budapest, Hungary by late October. By Dec. 21st, the German forces in Budapest are encircled. The Ardennes Offensive- Two Panzer (tank) armies are prepared to strike through the Ardennes Mountains in the West and cross the Meuse River. This is close to the German breakthrough into France



during May 1940. The 5th Panzer Army attacks on Dec. 16th and penetrates to the bank of the Meuse River for a while. The attack breaks down by Dec. 24th.

Defensive Preparations in the East- Vastly superior Russian forces prepare to attack from their bridgeheads over the Vistula River. Guderian demands that forces be moved up to meet this threat. Some German troops are withdrawn from the West but go into battle to relieve the siege of Budapest. Hitler also wants to guard one of his last oil fields near Lake Balaton in Hungary. There is a German attack in this area, but it makes only a small advance. Col.-Gen. Harpe in Southern Poland wants a 12-mile retreat to create reserves to deal with the expected Russian attack coming in January 1945, but Hitler does not allow this.

The Russian Offensive- On Jan. 12th, there is a huge Russian attack from the bridgehead at Baranov. The German armored forces fight a retreat where they are constantly in danger of encirclement. Hitler admits after being shown the stenographic record that he ordered the second defensive line and reserves to be placed too close to the front. By Jan. 17th, a strong Russian attack is coming northwest from the Cracow area and heading towards the key Upper Silesia industrial region. Guderian estimates that if Upper Silesia is taken, the war effort can only continue for a few weeks more. Warsaw is soon encircled, and the German garrison breaks out contrary to Hitler's orders, sending Hitler into a rage. Hitler ends up having General Staff officers arrested for allowing the evacuation of Warsaw. Guderian defends these officers and ends up also being interrogated. On January 20th, Russian forces enter East Prussia and Guderian's wife must be evacuated. The 4th Army under Hossbach is nearly surrounded due to Russian attacks into East Prussia and fights towards the west to breakout. Hitler goes into a rage and relieves Hossbach and his superior, Reinhardt, of their commands. By January 23rd, Russian troops are entering Upper Silesia and approaching the Oder River near Breslau.

Guderian talks to Dr. Paul Barandon from the Foreign Ministry, who arranges for Guderian to talk to Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. The topic is an armistice in the West. Guderian asks Hitler to form a new army group, but to his horror, Hitler gives the command to the incompetent SS leader Himmler. Guderian talks to von Ribbentrop about peace negotiations, but von Ribbentrop immediately informs Hitler. By January 27th the Russians advance in Upper Silesia and surround Posen. Himmler's attempt to run an army staff is a total failure. The Russians also sever the land connections to East Prussia, and isolate it. Hitler runs personal vendettas against officers whose units are defeated in battle. Lt.-Colonels are turned overnight into privates or sent to concentration camps. Guderian is forced to spend hours each day listening to meaningless speeches at Hitler's headquarters and driving back and forth. Hitler has fantasies about men on bicycles being able to blow-up Russian tanks with special grenades.

Himmler is still the head of Army Group Vistula, but Guderian demands that Hitler put Gen. Wenck in charge. Hitler yields, but the counter-attack then launched bogs down when the exhausted Wenck is involved in a car crash. Due to Allied air attacks, several synthetic fuel plants are destroyed. In the West, the bridge at Remagen over the Rhine



is captured intact on March 8th. Hitler's attack in Hungary makes some progress but then fails. Hitler demands that the SS Division involved have their armbands removed as retribution.

In the north, Col.-General Rauss is relieved of duty after setbacks in East Prussia and around Stettin. Guderian is outraged at Hitler's petty attacks on this capable General. Himmler is finally induced by Guderian to give up his military command post. The Minister for War Production Speer talks to Guderian about stopping an edict to destroy bridges and industrial plants all over Germany before they fall into the hands of the enemy. Speer and military authorities conspire to stop this order from being implemented.



Chapter 12- The Final Collapse

Chapter 12- The Final Collapse Summary and Analysis

Guderian asks to speak to SS Leader Himmler while the latter is with Hitler. Again Guderian speaks of an armistice but makes no headway. Hitler suggests that Guderian should go on sick-leave. The OKH is heavily bombed, and Guderian barely escapes injury. Gen. Heinrici, the new commander of Army Group Vistula is ordered to relieve the surrounded fortress of Kustrin. On March 27th, Hitler is angry that the attack fails. Guderian shows him proof that the attack received all the ammunition available and suffered heavy casualties. Guderian contradicts Hitler, and Hitler insists that Guderian must go on a six-week leave. Guderian leaves and is captured by the Americans on May 10th, after the German surrender.



Chapter 13- Leading Personalities of the Third Reich

Chapter 13- Leading Personalities of the Third Reich Summary and Analysis

Hitler- Hitler used to be able to talk to everyone according to Guderian but later turns against experts and establishment advisers. He has great speaking abilities and willpower. The Germans fall under Hitler's spell, just like the French did under Napoleon. Hitler promises to free the Germans from the difficult conditions of the Versailles Treaty. Hitler is not stopped from absolute power after murdering his follower Roehm and General von Schleicher. In the beginning, Hitler successfully rearms Germany, unites it with Austria and obtains the Sudetenland without war. The military cannot oppose him because he seems to be successful. This includes the success of the Hitler-Stalin pact before the invasion of Poland. Hitler is very brave in the planning of attacks, but he is ready to panic when things go wrong. He indulges Luftwaffe commander Goering and lets the Air Force try to destroy the British at Dunkirk; instead, most of the British escape. Instead of fighting the British immediately in the Mediterranean and Africa, Hitler decides to attack Russia and suffers his first defeat. Hitler has no family ties and only a weak relationship with his mistress Eva Braun. After the Stalingrad defeat, Hitler is mainly concerned about never surrendering. Hitler stays up too late, takes all sorts of drugs and destroys his health.

The Party- Herman Goering is Hitler's appointed successor. Goering's love of luxury and wealth reaches extremes. His leadership of the Luftwaffe is a failure. Even Hitler acknowledges that Goering is a clown, though he cannot bear to dismiss him. Himmler is polite and austere. He has strange racial fantasies about German peasants colonizing Russia. Himmler's SS is part mass-murder machine and part special military units. The Waffen-SS units are elite units, and even the Allgemeine-SS has some strictly military units. These include Russian POWs that volunteer to fight for Germany. Goebbels is clever but a dangerous demagogue. Like Himmler, he is afraid to stand up to Hitler. In the background is the sinister Martin Bormann. Towards the end of the war, Bormann obtains more control over Hitler.

National and District Controllers- Nazi society is controlled by different organizations such as the National (Labor) Organization for workers, the Health Controller, etc. These organizations often conflict with the Nazi Party district leaders, the Gauleiters. These are party hacks that often are greedy and immoral. Various large urban renewal projects and other big schemes of Hitler are never done. Hitler's Intimate Circle- Hitler's intimate circle includes well-mannered adjutants and aides. It also includes unpleasant people like Martin Bormann and Fegelein, who is married to Eva Braun's sister. The Government- Nominally there is a Government Cabinet, but this does not meet after

1938. Guderian successfully cooperates with Minister for Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer.

Chap. 14- The German General Staff

Chap. 14- The German General Staff Summary and Analysis

The German General Staff goes back to the Prussian military leaders Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and the liberation war against Napoleon. Field-Marshal Moltke wins wars under Bismarck and German is unified. Ludendorff and Hindenburg of the General Staff form a near dictatorship during World War I, after 1916. After World War I, Germany's army is limited to 100,000 men and the General Staff is disbanded. The General Staff after 1933 has problems in adapting to new technologies. They also do not have clear ideas on politics and miss chances to intervene in politics. The General Staff includes the OKH and the OKW (later headed by Gens. Keitel and Jodl). The General Staff is confronted by Germany's position in the center of Europe and the possibility of war on several fronts. They adopt motorized and tank warfare to solve this problem, which the enemy call Blitzkrieg, or lightning war.

Military leaders from the WWI General Staff are somewhat aloof from the 1919 Weimar Republic, though they do their best to cooperate with it. Later, when the Nazis come to power, many younger officers are excited. Still, the German General Staff would have been happy to avoid war and are rushed into war by Hitler. There is opposition from the Army General Staff Supreme command. The OKW is formed under Gen. Reichenau as a type of control mechanism, but later under Keitel it does not function. Keitel of the OKW is a total Hitler lackey and is executed at Nuremberg for war crimes. Jodl has the same fate, though is not as hypnotized by Hitler. During the invasion of Poland, the OKH controls the campaign. Hitler takes over after the failure before Moscow, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army von Brauchitsch is dismissed and not replaced. Guderian's job after July 1944, is not Commander-in-Chief, but is the Chief of the Army General Staff.

Appendices I- XXV

Appendices I- XXV Summary and Analysis

Appendix 1- This is the timetable of Guderian's career in World War I, between wars, and in World War II. Appendix II- This is Hitler's directive to the Armed Forces that Poland is to be attacked Sept. 1st, 1939. The German navy is to begin blockade measures against the British Isles. Appendix III- The attack against the West is laid out from the OKH, as of May 10th, 1940.

Appendix IV- These are Guderian's orders to his Army Corps in the attack towards the Meuse River, on May 12th, 1940, to penetrate the French defenses. App. V- This is a detailed order for the attacks across the Meuse. App. VI- As of May 13th, the Meuse is crossed and Panzer Forces cooperate with the Luftwaffe to destroy French defenses and seize Sedan and the heights of Stonne. App. VII- Three Panzer Corps overwhelm one French Fortress Brigade on the Meuse. App. VIII- On May 17th, Guderian's Army Group is heading west and then northwest. App. IX- On May 18th, Guderian is to cross the Somme River. App. X, App. XI, App. XII- Guderian's battle orders of May 18th, and on the Somme Canal. App. XIII- Guderian's orders for May 20th as Panzer units reach the English Channel.

App. XIV, XV- Orders for May 20th and 21st as the sectors go on the defensive. App. XVI- May 22nd it is noticed that up to 40 enemy divisions are retreating from Belgium and attempting to be evacuated by sea. App. XVII- Orders from May 22nd from Army Commander Von Kleist to seize the Channel Ports including Boulogne and Calais. App. XVIII- May 25th and May 26th Guderian orders the capture of the Channel ports and the relief of the 1st Panzer Division. App. XIX, XX, XXI- Orders for attacks on May 27th and May 28th. App. XXII- These are Hitler's orders for Operation Barbarossa issued Dec. 18, 1940. The goal of the plan is to encircle and destroy Russian armed forces before they can retreat into the interior. Rumania and Finland are to join the attack. Moscow and Leningrad are to be occupied. The end line is to be the Volga River in the south and Archangel in the north.

App. XXIII- Organizational Chart of the Command 1944- Hitler, the Fuhrer is the Commander in Chief of the Army. Under him is the OKH, the Army High Command, and the OKW, the Supreme Command Armed Forces. The OKW is led by Keitel and Jodl. App. XXIV and XXV- These are detailed organizational charts of a Panzer Division. Elements includes are tank battalions, motorized infantry brigades, anti-tank, artillery and other units.



Characters

Colonel-General Heinz Guderian

Heinz Guderian is born in 1888 and during World War I is an infantry man. In 1922, Guderian first becomes involved with General Staff work on the use of motorized troops. He studies works on the use of English and French tanks during World War I. Guderian becomes the German Army's tank expert and is in a good position for advancement when the military is expanded when Hitler comes to power. Through the development of the Panzer (Tank) Army, where all the units are motorized, Guderian is a key operative of the Nazi military machine. Guderian has a favorable opinion of Hitler, due to Guderian agreeing that the difficult conditions of the post-World War I, Versailles Treaty be reversed. Both in the Polish and the French campaign, Guderian puts into effect the idea of taking risks by punching through an enemy with a tank-led force without regards to flanks. Thus, Guderian helps win a quick victory in the French campaign in 1940, and is promoted to Colonel-General. Guderian is stunned when he hears that Hitler intends to attack Russia next.

Guderian argues for a similar approach to the Russian campaign as was done in France, with the first phase accomplished with the taking of the Smolensk area. Guderian feels that an attack on Moscow in August would be the quickest route to winning the war. Hitler instead decides to attack the Ukraine, which delays the campaign, until it is stopped by the horribly cold Russian winter. Guderian claims to not be aware of much of the genocidal aspects of Nazi policies. His organizational ability preserves the Nazis and Hitler through many crises, particularly after he is called back to active service. Guderian is blinded by his success under Hitler and refuses to take any action against the regime. He justifies this by his fear of the crimes that the Russians commit when they eventually occupy parts of Eastern Germany.

Der Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler, German Dictator

Adolf Hitler is known to history as a dictator and mass-murderer, but he is also the man who gives Guderian his opportunity to excel in military affairs. Hitler gravitates to Guderian's theory of warfare of movement to achieve quick victories. Indeed, only through Guderian's methods of blitzkrieg is it possible to defeat France's army in less than eight weeks. During the actual war, Hitler's other obsessions interfere with the implementation of the plans of the German General Staff. This is clearly shown by Hitler's stopping the Panzer Armies before taking Dunkirk, for the internal Nazi Party reason of hoping to give the Luftwaffe's Goering a bigger part in the glory of victory. Hitler's genocidal plans against Russian civilian populations later have a key effect to sabotage his war drive as well, through inciting partisan warfare. Hitler is not able to trust competent military men in the High Command and Army General Staff and puts in Gen. Keitel, Hitler's lackey, as head of the Army General Staff before the war starts. After the firing of Brauchitsch, Hitler becomes the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed



Forces as well. Hitler's paranoia is aggravated by the assassination attempt of July 20th 1944. As Germany's defeat approaches, Hitler's health also undergoes a noticeable decline.

Field Marshal von Kluge

Field Marshal von Kluge becomes Guderian's opponent on several occasions. In the Russian campaign, von Kluge is deployed to enforce Hitler's no retreat policy on Army Group Centre and takes action leading to Guderian's dismissal in December 1941. Repercussions from this incident lead at one point to von Kluge challenging Guderian to a duel, which even Hitler for reasons of discipline cannot allow. Von Kluge has a cold and aristocratic character, which first leads him to confront Guderian, but later involves him in the resistance against Hitler. Von Kluge is put in as the new commander of the Western Front in 1944 after the Western Allies invasion and is somehow tied to the plot against Hitler of July 20th. Von Kluge commits suicide several weeks later.

Field Marshal von Manstein

Field Marshal von Manstein is a key collaborator of Guderian in using Panzer forces to achieve quick breakthroughs. Von Manstein is the author of the plan for the breakthrough into France in May 1940, which Guderian helps put into effect. Hitler finds von Manstein too independent-minded to work with on a consistent basis, and Manstein actually is refused a command over Panzer troops in the French campaign; instead, he leads a secondary unit of infantry troops. Later during the Russian campaign, Manstein's clever operations often result in local defeats of Russian forces, even when Germany is totally on the defensive after June 1943. Guderian tries to get Hitler to agree to have von Manstein replace the inept General Keitel on the OKW but is unsuccessful. Von Manstein objects to the General Staff plan Operation Citadel to attempt to again take the offensive in Russia in June 1943, as being too little and too late.

Field Marshall Rommel

Field Marshall Rommel is the legendary German commander in Africa, who later is the commander of preparations for the Western invasion of France in June 1944. Rommel lost faith in German Panzer formations in the face of Allied air superiority. He is wounded in an Allied bombing raid after the June 1944 invasion and later commits suicide after the July 20th plot.

SS Leader Himmler

SS Leader Himmler is characterized by a series of racial fantasies that Guderian learns of later. In early 1945, Himmler is made the commander of the key force, Army Group Vistula, which is to defend Germany from Russian invasion. Guderian works hard to



remove Himmler from military command because Himmler is totally ignorant of military affairs.

Luftwaffe Leader Goering

Goering is the leader of the German Luftwaffe, or Airforce. He has significant success in building up the German Airforce from scratch. His demand that the Luftwaffe finish off the British at Dunkirk leads to the escape of the British Expeditionary Force. Hitler never fires Goering but later admits that Goering is totally incompetent.

Propaganda Minister Goebbels

Guderian tries to get Goebbels to help him force Hitler to appoint a real leader of the Army General Staff. Goebbels is too afraid to oppose Hitler and never even tries to do this.

Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Col.-General von Fritsch

Army Commander-in-Chief Von Fritsch is personally slandered and removed in early 1938 in an intrigue by Hitler and the Nazi Party. Von Fritsch demands that the slanders against him be put before a military court. Von Fritsch is exonerated but never again receives a command post.

Col.-General von Beck

Col.-General von Beck becomes the new Chief of the General Staff in 1933, under the Nazi regime. Von Beck is quite conservative as a commander and has to be forced to go along with Guderian's idea of Panzer divisions. Von Beck opposes Hitler over the provocation of the Sudetenland crisis and is removed from his position. Later, he is executed for his part in the plot of July 20th, 1944.

Field Marshall Keitel

Field Marshall Keitel is made Chief of the OKW, the High Command but functions in a subservient fashion to Hitler. Keitel is known as Hitler's lackey. Actually, Keitel is the office assistant of the former head of the High Command, who is ousted in 1938.



Col.-General Jodl

Jodl is the chief of the Armed Forces Command Staff. Like Keitel, he is characterized as a total lackey of Hitler, though he has somewhat more ability. For example, his advice to Hitler is key in maintaining the German offensive at Narvik during the Norway campaign.

Field Marshal von Bock

Von Bock is the head of Army Group Centre in the invasion of the Soviet Union. He is the immediate superior of Guderian. Von Bock is severely disappointed in August 1941 when Hitler decides to stop the attack towards Moscow and turn south. By the time the Germans are stopped before Moscow, von Bock is replaced by von Kluge.

General Geyr

Geyr is a close collaborator of Guderian from the founding on paper of the first Panzer Divisions in the early 1930s. In the attack on Russia, General Geyr heads a Panzer Division under Guderian's Army Group. Later, Gen. Geyr is the head of a Panzer Division in France in 1944. He tries to implement some of Guderian's ideas such as a concentrated attack against the June 1944 Western landing in Normandy.

Field Marshall Von Kleist

Von Kleist is the head of Army Group A that attacks France in 1940, and is Guderian's immediate superior in that campaign. Von Kleist is the head of the Panzer Group adjacent to Guderian's Panzer Group in Army Group Centre in the invasion of Russia.

General Wenck

Wenck is a collaborator of Guderian in the development of the Panzer Divisions going back to the 1930s. In the French campaign, Wenck leads the destruction of the forts of the Maginot Line, such as Belfort. In early 1945, Guderian puts Wenck in as the commander of Army Group Vistula to substitute for the incompetent SS Leader Himmler. Before he can do much, Wenck is wounded in an accident.

General Zeitzler

In September 1942, Zeitzler is made the new Army Chief of Staff, replacing Halder. Zeitzler plans Operation Citadel in June 1943, the attack on Kursk which is a total failure.



Field Marshall Rundstedt

Rundstedt is a leading military official who approves of Manstein's design of the invasion of France in 1940. Later, Rundstedt heads the so-called Court of Honor that strips military men of their membership in the service after the plot of July 20th, 1944.

Field Marshall Reichenau

Reichenau is known for his good relations with the Nazi Party; nevertheless, he cannot deal with Hitler after Hitler's lecture in 1940 to Generals. In this lecture, Hitler questions the loyalty of practically all the Generals in the German military.

Gen. Reinhardt

Reinhardt participates in the French and the Russian campaigns. Reinhardt warns Hitler of the need to retreat in places and shorten the defensive line before the Russian offensive of January 12th, 1945. Later he is relieved of command.

Gen. Balck

Balck unsuccessfully leads an attack to relieve the besieged German garrison in Budapest, Hungary. During the Russian campaign, then Col. Balck is the officer from the OKH who oversees Panzer Divisions. Balck visits Guderian outside of Tula as the German troops are stopped before Moscow in December 1941.

Commander-in-Chief von Brauchitsch

Von Brauchitsch is the Commander-in-Chief of the Army until the failure of the German attack on Moscow, when he is relieved of duty. After this, Hitler becomes the Commander-in-Chief of the Army directly and the position is not held by any military officer.



Objects/Places

The Sudetenland

The Sudetenland is an area in Czechoslovakia that is heavily inhabited by Germans during the 1930s. Hitler demands that this area be annexed by the German state, and it is annexed in 1938.

The Anschluss

The Anschluss is the policy of uniting Germany and Austria, which are both German-speaking countries. The carrying out of the Anschluss is Hitler's first great foreign policy victory.

The Polish Corridor

The Polish Corridor is a largely German-inhabited part of Poland in the 1930s that connects central Poland with the seacoast. Hitler demands parts of this area, and when refused, invades Poland.

The Ardennes Mountains, the Meuse River

The Ardennes Mountains is a low mountain range in Southern Belgium, Luxemburg and adjacent areas of France, where German forces strike in 1940. Another attack is attempted there by Hitler, in the offensive of December 1944. After crossing the Ardennes, the German forces in 1940 cross the Meuse River and head north.

The Maginot Line

The Maginot Line is a system of strongly made forts that the French build as a defense on the German frontier. It is lightly extended to the north along the Luxemburg and Belgium borders. In this extension area, the Germans break through in May 1940.

The Channel Ports, Dunkirk

The Channel Ports, including Dunkirk, are the objective of Guderian's army under von Kleist's Army Group, after it swings north. Hitler orders a delay in capturing Dunkirk, which results in the escape by sea of the British forces and other allied forces.



Brest-Litovsk

Brest-Litovsk is an old fortress on the Bug River in Eastern Poland that Guderian's forces capture in September 1939. Later, it is the first objective of Guderian's sector of attack when Hitler orders the invasion of the Soviet Union.

German Allies of the Eastern Front

German allies of the Eastern Front include Rumania, Finland, Hungary and Bulgaria. The surrender of Rumania in August-September 1944 causes the destruction of about 16 German Divisions. Finland and Bulgaria surrender about the same time, while Hungary surrenders early in 1945.

Blitzkrieg

Blitzkrieg or Lightning War is the enemy's characterization of the early German mobile tank attacks and German victories.

Panzer Division

A Panzer (Tank) Division is built around a force of several hundred light and medium tanks. The infantry assigned to the division are all motorized infantry; other elements are also motorized. This enables the Panzer Division to be a fast striking force.

Panzer I, II, III and IV

Panzer I and II are tanks largely used for training purposes, though they see some action in the Polish and French campaigns. Panzer III is a light tank, and Panzer IV is a medium tank.

Tiger and Panther Tanks

Tiger and Panther tanks are two heavy German tanks that are introduced later in the war to counter the heavy Russian tank, the dreaded T34.

The Luftwaffe

The Luftwaffe (Airforce) serves a key role in the Polish, French and Russian campaigns in providing support to ground attacks of Panzer forces. Luftwaffe dive-bombers coordinate with Panzer forces to achieve the German Blitzkrieg attack.



The German-Soviet Agreement of August 1939

The German-Soviet Agreement of August 1939, is a last-minute agreement for peace between the two powers as the Polish war approaches. One of its provisions is the division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union. Later, Hitler violates the Agreement and starts the two-front war that Guderian fears.

The Battle of Kiev

The Battle of Kiev happens when German forces from Army Group Centre turn south in late August 1941 and work with pincers coming from the South to surround a large Soviet force in a pocket around Kiev. The two pincers meet at Romny, which results in the capture of over 600,000 Soviet troops.

The Battle of Moscow

The Battle of Moscow is opened in late September 1941 with the encirclement battles near Bryansk. This is a desperate attempt to capture Moscow before the oncoming winter. The offensive is stopped by early December, and the Russians counter-attack.

The Battle of Tula

Tula is a city about 100 miles south of Moscow, which is the objective of Guderian's Panzer Group in late October and November 1941. Despite heroic efforts, it is impossible to encircle and capture Tula.

The Battle of Stalingrad

The Battle of Stalingrad is a disastrous battle for German Forces in which the Sixth Army is encircled and destroyed in January 1943. This is one of the factors leading to the recalling of Guderian to active duty in February 1943.

The OKH, the OKW

The OKH is the German High Command. After the firing of von Brauchitsch in December 1941, it is directly led by Hitler. The OKW is the Army General Staff, under Gens. Keitel and Jodl, who are both total lackeys of Hitler. Both the OKH and OKW often meet together with Hitler. After July 20th, 1941, Guderian is appointed the Army Chief of Staff, under Hitler, in the OKH.



Schlieffen Plan

The Schlieffen Plan is the plan of attack largely carried out by the Germans in World War I and stopped before Paris. German forces advance through Belgium and then turned towards Paris.

Operation Citadel

Operation Citadel is the plan by Gen. Zeitzler for a German Summer offensive to cut off the Russian salient at Kursk in June 1943. It is repulsed and leads to a Russian counterattack.

The Plot of July 20th, 1944

July 20th, 1944 is the day that a bomb is brought in by Graf Stauffenberg and explodes near Hitler at a meeting of the OKH in Rastenburg, East Prussia. The next day, Guderian is appointed Army Chief of Staff. Hitler is only lightly wounded. Graf Stauffenberg flies to Berlin and attempts to mobilize other conspirators. Stauffenberg and his colleagues are executed along with many more persons for being linked to the plot against Hitler.

German Forces in Courland

Army Group North is cut off by land when the Russian army advances west in October 1944. It is in Courland on the seacoast of Latvia and is supplied by air and sea until the end of the war. Guderian unsuccessfully tries to get Hitler to evacuate these forces.

The Russian offensive of January 12th, 1945

The Russian offensive of January 12th 1945 is a powerful attack from bridgeheads across the Vistula River in Poland, at Baranov and other locations. Warsaw is taken and the German border is reached in a couple of weeks.

Achtung! Panzer!

ACHTUNG! PANZER! is a book Guderian publishes in 1937 that explains his strategy of mobile tank warfare to the general public. Other articles are published by Guderian on this subject in the German military press.

Orders on German Treatment of Civilians in Russia

There are orders from the OKW that there should not be automatic prosecutions of German soldiers who commit violence against civilians and POWs in Russia. Guderian claims that this order is ignored and not forwarded by his command. Neither is the notorious "Commissar Order" posted, to shoot Soviet Commissars (political officers) automatically, according to Guderian.

Themes

The Change in Military Strategy with the Tank

Guderian is already famous in Germany before the war through his writings on tank warfare. It is remarkable that what he wrote passed the Nazi censors, since it revealed much of their future war strategy. The basic problem that Guderian faces is that war had become static in the trenches of World War I. The French and British use tanks towards the end of that war and are able to advance again. The tank sufficiently protects soldiers to be able to advance over obstacles and in the line of fire. Of course, tanks can be destroyed by anti-tank shells and other means, but at least the offensive has the chance to bring their heavy guns and machine guns against the enemy. The effect of tanks can be reinforced by working with dive-bomber aircraft.

Guderian draws the conclusion that tanks should lead attacks, supported by motorized infantry and other mobile units. Guderian puts these ideas into effect in the attack on Poland and then in 1940 is able to breakthrough at a weak point in French defenses. German is able to disrupt and surround French and British forces, despite the German's inferior numbers and equipment. The attack on the Soviet Union is almost successful using the same type of attacks. Indeed, Guderian implicitly argues that the Soviet Union could have been defeated, but that Hitler stopped the blitzkrieg effect by diverting it from Moscow. Hitler is obsessed with grabbing economic prizes, such as the Ukraine and the Soviet oilfields, and fails to recognize that first he must destroy the ability of the enemy to field armies.

How Command Decisions Change History

Guderian develops his strategy for using the tank and Panzer divisions during the 1920s, under the Weimar Republic government in Germany. There is little prospect that his theories will be put into effect under the Versailles Treaty, which limits Germany's army to 100,000 men. Suddenly this is changed when Hitler comes to power. Despite Guderian's distaste for the murders of key opposition figures to Hitler, such as Generals von Schleicher and Rohm, Guderian becomes captivated by the idea of leading actual Panzer armies. There is real opposition to Hitler in the German Army in 1938, but it is defeated by Hitler's easy successes in occupying Austria and Czechoslovakia. Guderian claims that this is the height of Hitler's power, but for Guderian this is actually a false statement. As made clear by the detailed appendices and text, Guderian's moment of glory is the defeat of the Western Powers by his attack through the Ardennes Mountains and over the Meuse River.

It is evident to Guderian that, due to the French static military doctrine, the French High Command has little desire to fight at all. Thus Guderian and his collaborators have more confidence than even Hitler that they can win the campaign against France. After this, it does seem accurate that Guderian dreads a war with the Soviet Union, at least until



Great Britain can be defeated. Here the political and command decisions create the dread situation that Guderian tries to avoid, which is a two-front or many-front war.

How Hitler Sabotages His Own War

Guderian has a recurrent theme after the start of the war against the Soviet Union of how Hitler acts against his own war effort. This is true to some extent even in the French campaign of 1940. Guderian, until the last 3 or 4 months of the war, is never remotely part of the opposition to Hitler or seeking a peace. Guderian is constantly trying to make changes in the Armed Forces and the German General Staff to make Germany and Hitler more successful. Guderian would like to have an independent German General Staff, as Ludendorff and Hindenburg had during World War I under the German Kaiser. Guderian's argument is that though Germany ultimately lost World War I, the German General Staff allowed it to fight as well as it did for as long as it did.

Hitler accepts a daring plan to invade France in May 1940, but nearly sabotages it by allowing the British to escape at Dunkirk. Hitler explicitly does this due to pressure on him from Luftwaffe Commander Goering to share the victory over the British. Hitler has Utopian fantasies of an easy victory over the Soviet Union. Later, Hitler admits that if he had accepted the figures that Guderian and the General Staff had reported to him of Soviet tank production, he might not have started the war. Guderian argues that Hitler's diversion of the German armies towards economic goals, such as the Ukraine in August 1941, is totally nonsensical. After his dismissal, Guderian has even more contempt for the 1942 campaign that ends in the disaster of Stalingrad. Later, as Germany is forced to withdraw, Hitler creates tremendous problems by demanding that every inch of territory is held, resulting in German forces being cut off and destroyed.



Style

Perspective

Guderian's perspective is that of an officer who is a product of the Prussian and German General Staff system. He is a creative intellect, who after the age of 3 takes up the study of mobile warfare. Guderian is already known to the public before World War II breaks out for his views through his book ACHTUNG! PANZER!. He sees the possibilities of mobile warfare and works with men such as Field Marshall Manstein to make possible the swift German victories in Poland and France. Even in the Russian campaign, it is clear Guderian believes that if the offensive continued towards Moscow in August 1941, the attack could have been successful in capturing Moscow and defeating the Soviet Union as well.

Despite Guderian's opposition to Hitler's orders against the Soviet civilian population, he remains totally loyal to the Nazi regime. Guderian has a certain amount of respect for Hitler, who has given him the opportunity to put his military theories into effect. Looking at the assassination attempt of July 20th, Guderian cannot find it justified. Even in retrospect, the sufferings of Germans in air-raids and the German victims of the Soviet advance into East Prussia are more real to him than the Nazi crimes against conquered peoples. Guderian's overall perspective is that of a German officer who uses all his capabilities to solve problems put before him by the supreme political power, which in this case is Hitler.

Tone

The tone of Guderian's Memoir is that of a military professional who is proud of his ability. Guderian develops armored, mobile warfare in the form of the Panzer division. He is justly proud of his achievements in battle, particularly the breakthrough to the English Channel of May 1940. Yet, there is always a chilling dimension in that it is known that Guderian's achievements are done in the service of Hitler's Nazi dictatorship. Without men such as Guderian, it would have been impossible for the German army to reach the goals that Hitler set for it in the beginning of the war.

Often, Guderian has contempt for the arbitrary and irrational acts of Hitler. He early realizes the extreme danger of starting a war against the Soviet Union and thus having a two-front war. Guderian's criticism is usually a two-edged sword. Guderian argues that if Hitler had listened to him in August 1941, then Moscow could have been taken and the Soviet Union defeated. The point is that the country to be conquered cannot be enjoyed and looted until its armies in the field are defeated. Guderian implicitly admits his lack of political development and information during the war and states that this is typical of German military officers. He claims to have little or no knowledge of the crimes of Hitler against general populations. After the events of July 20th, 1944, Guderian does his best his best as the Army Chief of the General Staff to continue fighting the war.



Structure

The book is divided into 14 chapters purely based on topics; some chapters are very short. From a historical viewpoint, the key chapters are Chapter 5- the Campaign in the West, pp. 89-139, and Chapter 6, the Campaign in Russia, 1941, pp. 140-271. The body of the book is followed by extensive appendices, giving much documentation of the key sections of the book on the May 1940 breakthrough into France over the Meuse River. Longer chapters are broken up by sub-titles around various events and military campaigns. An important feature of the book is the detailed maps describing battle lines in Poland, the West, and the Eastern Front. There is a shift in the book by Chapter 9, when Guderian is appointed the Inspector-General of the Armored Forces, as the chances for victory disappear. Chapter 9 includes the first reports of opposition to Hitler, with Dr. Goerdeler's visit to Guderian. There is discussion of disputes between Hitler and his Generals, an overview of the Eastern Front, and preparations for the expected Western landing in France sometime in 1944.

Chapter 11 has a shift in that Guderian is now the Army Chief of Staff. As head of the OKH under Hitler, Guderian has an overview of the development of the war on all fronts. Chapter 13 is a 23 page-long description of Guderian's assessment of Hitler and other leading Nazis, including information that he learns about Germany's surrender. Chapter 14 is an 11-page description of the history and traditions of the German General Staff. The 57-pages of appendices include valuable documentation of the book, including detailed orders from the brilliant 1940 campaign in France.



Quotes

"Further, it was Liddell Hart who emphasized the use of armored forces for long-range strokes, operations against the opposing army's communications, and also proposed a type of armored division combining panzer and panzer-infantry units."
Chapter 2, P. 20

"In any event, in land battles the tank possesses the unique quality of being able to bring its fire-power to bear while actually advancing against the enemy, and it can do this even though all the defense's guns and machine-guns have not been silenced."
Chapter 2, P. 43

"On one of the following evenings I invited a number of the Austrian generals whom I had met in the past few days to a small dinner party at the Hotel Bristol, hoping thus privately to strengthen our new public comradeship."
Chapter 3, P. 53

"At the sight of the smashed artillery regiment, Hitler had asked me: 'Our dive bombers did that?' When I replied, 'No, our panzers!' he was plainly astonished."
Chapter 4, P. 73

"But so far as the French leaders were concerned, we were amazed that they had not taken advantage of their favorable situation during the autumn of 1939 to attack, while the bulk of the German forces, including the entire armored force, was engaged in Poland."
Chapter 5, P. 97

"Hitler ordered the left wing to stop on the Aa. It was forbidden to cross that stream. We were not informed of the reasons for this. The order contained the words: 'Dunkirk is to be left to the Luftwaffe. Should the capture of Calais prove difficult, this port too is to be left to the Luftwaffe.'"
Chapter 5, P. 117

"It is frequently maintained nowadays that Hitler and only Hitler was responsible for the lack of winter clothing in the army in 1941. I can in no way subscribe to this belief. Proof of this is that the Luftwaffe and the Waffen-SS were well and adequately equipped and had laid in the necessary stocks in plenty of time. But the supreme command was sunk in its dream of defeating the Russian Army in eight or ten weeks."
Chapter 6, P. 151

"The Glinka-Klimiatio road, which was marked 'good' on our maps, did not in fact exist. The roads that did lead north were swampy and impassable to motor vehicles."
Chapter 6, P. 180

"Hitler let me speak to the end without once interrupting me. He then began to talk and described in detail the considerations which had led him to make a different decision."



He said that the raw materials and agriculture of the Ukraine were vitally necessary for the future prosecution of the war."

Chapter 6, P. 200

"Numerous T34's went into action and inflicted heavy losses on the German tanks. Up to this time we had enjoyed tank superiority, but from now on the situation was reversed."

Chapter 6, P. 237

"But it is hard when the men have even now not yet received winter clothing and the greater part of the infantry are still going about in denim uniforms. Boots, vests, gloves, woolen helmets are either non-existent or else are hopelessly worn out."

Chapter 6, P. 266

"But later Hitler and I withdrew to his study where we were alone together. I had not seen Hitler since the black day of December 20th, 1941. In the intervening fourteen months he had aged greatly."

Chapter 9, P. 288

"Furthermore, I pointed out that the Panthers, on whose performance the Chief of the Army General Staff was relying so heavily, were still suffering from the many teething troubles inherent in all new equipment and it seemed unlikely that these could all be put right in time for the launching of the attack."

Chapter 9, P. 307

"Rommel's sad experiences in Africa had so convinced him of the overwhelming nature of Allied air supremacy that he believed there could be no question of ever moving large formations of troops again. He did not even think that it would be possible to transfer panzer or panzer grenadier divisions by night."

Chapter 9, P. 330

"Be that as it may, an attempt by the Russian XVI Tank Corps to cross the railway bridge over the Vistula at Deblin on July 25th, 1944, had failed with the loss of thirty tanks."

Chapter 11, P. 359

"Hitler believed that such an operation- if successful- would severely weaken the Western Allies and would give him time to move strong forces eastward so that he would be in a position to defeat the anticipated Russian winter offensive. He thus expected to gain time, to shatter the enemy's hopes of total victory, so that he would drop his insistence on unconditional surrender, and to make him willing to accept a negotiated peace."

Chapter 11, P. 380

"Completely inexperienced young officers must now suddenly be put in to replace the arrested men and must be entrusted with preparing the groundwork for the most important decisions, and with drawing up the most complicated orders that had perhaps



ever fallen to the lot of German officers."
Chapter 11, PP. 397-8

"'The General Staff has won a battle this day.' And as he said this he smiled his most charming smile. This was the last battle that I was to win, and it came too late. I had never before taken part in such a scene. I had never seen Hitler rave so violently."
Chapter 11, P. 415

"But yet another blunder was to follow. The lame armistice with France, the ending of the Western Campaign before the Mediterranean coast had been reached, the postponement of the African landing and the immediate continuation of the French campaign by means of an attack on Gibraltar and the Suez Canal, all this proves the justice of the assertion that Hitler, bold and even rash as he was in the drafting of plans, became timid in the execution of his military intentions."
Chapter 13, P. 439

"Despite the unfortunate outcome of the war and the post-war dissensions that followed the defeat, Hindenburg and Ludendorff remained the two outstanding representatives of all that was best in the German General Staff Corps."
Chapter 14, P. 455



Topics for Discussion

How does the tank alter the conduct of warfare in World War I, as contrasted to the campaigns of World War I?

Discuss Guderian's work on the tank during the 1920s and 1930s. How does his ideas affect the military as well as the political situation?

Discuss the relationship between Guderian and Hitler. Why does Hitler initially become a big backer of Guderian and his idea of Panzer divisions?

Discuss the German High Command Order on German military policy towards Russian civilians. What does Guderian learn about German atrocities in the Soviet Union during the war?

Discuss the fall of France in 1940. France with British backing has the largest and best-equipped army in Western Europe, yet it is defeated in a campaign of less than 8 weeks. How could this be possible?

Discuss the British forces escaping at Dunkirk. Guderian blames Hitler for this. Without Hitler's interference could the British have been stopped? What effect does this have on the future conduct of the war?

Discuss the beginning of World War II. Poland refuses to give up territory since she is backed by France and Great Britain. France and Great Britain declare war on Germany but do little to attack Germany. Is there any explanation for this odd situation?

Discuss the effect of the harsh winter on the German campaign against the Soviet Union. Snow first falls on October 7th, 1941, when Russian forces outside Moscow are being surrounded, yet the offensive towards Moscow is stopped during battles in the next two months.

Discuss Hitler's effect on the war on the Eastern Front after Guderian returns to active service. Hitler insists on an inflexible plan of no withdrawals. Does this lead to a quicker defeat of Germany?