

Lost Victories Study Guide

Lost Victories by Erich von Manstein

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Plot Summary

Manstein was a career officer in the German Army and was Chief-of-Staff of Southern Army Group in the invasion of Poland in September 1939. Soon a Polish army was surrounded by the quick German Panzer tank troops and Warsaw was approached. The French declared war but refused to make a serious attack on Germany, and Poland was defeated. After the campaign, the question was how to defeat France and Great Britain quickly. Manstein was concerned that Hitler did not properly give the Armed Forces General Staff or O.K.H. responsibility for formulating a war plan. The O.K.H. did formulate a plan that was like the World War I invasion plan. Manstein suggested that instead German panzer forces be poured into the Ardennes forest region and then turn north and cut off enemy forces in Northern France and Belgium. The plan was adopted and was a complete success in May 1940, with the exception of the British forces evacuation at Dunkirk. Manstein was active in the second phase of the invasion of France, and involved in exercises for the invasion of Great Britain by sea. Manstein felt that Hitler made a great mistake by not trying to invade Great Britain.

Manstein headed the 56 Panzer Corps which invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 on the Northern Front. Manstein led the corps in seizing a key bridge nearly 200 miles behind the front. Yet later, because of overly cautious tactics, the assault on Leningrad was stalled by September. During mid-September, Manstein was sent to conquer the Crimea in the south and led the Eleventh Army. Manstein captured the entire Crimea except Sevastopol, with its heavy fortifications and mountainous country. In late December, Manstein was stopped from taking Sevastopol when large Soviet forces landed at Kerch. Manstein himself nearly was killed by a Soviet air attack while on a boat reconnaissance of Sevastopol. Sevastopol was only taken in July 1942 after extensive fighting against Soviet landings at Kerch and Manstein was promoted to Field Marshall.

Manstein was sent north to conquer Leningrad, but instead his forces got tied up in a battle around Lake Ladoga. As Manstein rose in rank, he got to see Hitler more and saw that Hitler made battle plans that lacked a proper center of gravity and therefore were doomed to fail. This lack of focus and an overreaching for objectives led to the surrounding of the Sixth Army by the enemy at Stalingrad in November 1942. Manstein was sent to lead Army Group Don in the south to try to relieve the Sixth Army and stop the Soviets from totally destroying the German southern part of the front. Hitler demanded that the Sixth Army hold onto Stalingrad so it was impossible to relieve or have the army break out and the Sixth Army was destroyed by February 1943. Manstein desperately created a new German Southern front as the Romanian, Hungarian and Italian Armies all flee the Russians. He was able to keep the position at Rostov open so that the bulk of German armies stuck in the Caucasus region were able to retreat. For the long term, Manstein saw that the main threat to the German was on their northern flank of the now named Southern Army Group he led. Manstein managed to make a counterattack at Kharkov in March 1943 that destroyed large Soviet forces. Operation Citadel followed in July, but was stopped by Hitler after Western forces landed in Italy. Manstein managed to defeat the Soviets/Russians in a string of small mobile defensive



engagements, but lacked the number of tanks and reserves to win any large battles. Hitler caused German defeats by his obsession with retaining economic sites such as the Crimea, the Kuban and Nikopol. By November 1943 a strong Soviet attack in the Kiev area hit the northern flank of the Southern Army Group with disastrous results. German armies were surrounded but saved at Cherkassy, though their equipment was destroyed. In March 1944, there were a series of dramatic confrontations between Manstein and Hitler where Hitler demanded that German forces stop retreating. Manstein countered that German troops had to shorten their line in the South, be mobile, and prevent the First Panzer Army from being encircled. Manstein got his way and the First Panzer Army was saved, but Hitler cannot bear the strain of being contradicted. Manstein was relieved of his command by Hitler shortly after.



Chapters 1 and 2; Before the Storm; The Strategic Position

Chapters 1 and 2; Before the Storm; The Strategic Position Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 1, in 1938, Manstein was a deputy to the German Chief-of-Staff, but after a scandal he was heading the 18 Division. Later in 1938, in the so-called floral war, Austria and the Sudetenland were occupied. Manstein and his fellow Generals hoped there will not be war, as a crisis over Poland began. Poland had been given German territories by the Allies after World War I, and Hitler demanded a return of Danzig and portions of the Polish Corridor to the sea. In August 1939, there were numerous military exercises that included Gen. Manstein. There was much surprise and confusion with the signing of a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. On August 24th, Colonel-General Rundstedt assumed command of the army group about to attack Poland. Despite a first delay, on September 1st war began.

In Chapter 2, Germany launched war with an overwhelming advantage over Poland in numbers, and equipment. Meanwhile, though the French and British went to war against Germany, the French army refused to attack. German forces were not tied down on the Western front. The main German push was on the central front, and north to occupy the Polish Corridor. Poland had deployed its forces close to its frontier, making them vulnerable to a quick encirclement. Poland's military leadership was still caught in the old days when French forces helped them seize German territory. It would have been better for Poland to deploy their main forces further back along the Vistula and San rivers. The author commented that the only possible solution for Poland was to retreat to better positions, while a large attack by the French would have tied down German forces.



Chapters 3 and 4; The Operations of Southern Army Group; The Campaign in the West

Chapters 3 and 4; The Operations of Southern Army Group; The Campaign in the West Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 3, the task of Southern Army Group or Poland was to engage the Polish army before they could withdraw behind the Vistula River. Manstein was Chief of Staff to the Southern Army Group, so was best acquainted with this sector. The 14th Army attacked toward the city of Cracow. The 10th Army attacked on the left wing, the northern part of the Southern Army Group. German tank formations, backed by the Luftwaffe soon tear through the Polish front, and Polish forces are surrounded in the area by Radom, where 60,000 prisoners were captured. Warsaw was approached as Polish forces from the north attacked south at the 8th Army. Army Headquarters decided to allow these enemy forces to attack south, and then encircle them from the rear. Colonel-Gen. Reichenau led the 10th Army resulting in the battle of Bzura, where 80,000 Poles were captured. The Russians marched into Poland from the east on September 17th as agreed to by Hitler, and the campaign soon ended.

In Chapter 4, Manstein was transferred to the Western Front along with his Army Headquarters. At this time there was no fighting in the West. Manstein was upset about the O.K.H., the German Army Headquarters losing its power of decision to Hitler. Chapter 4- The Eclipse of the O.K.H. pp. 71-93- O.K.H. was the Army Headquarters, which lost its powers to Hitler and Hitler's small group of advisers in the O.K.W., the General War Headquarters. Hitler was angry at Gen. Beck and Fritsch in 1938 for opposing Hitler's plans to take over Austria and Czechoslovakia. Later, the head of the Army was Gen. Halder, and after him, Gen. Brauchitsch, an intelligent and capable German Army leader, but he was not able to deal with the willful Hitler. Later, Halder as leader of the Army had the problem of already being secretly a sworn enemy of Hitler, and he was followed by Gen. Zeitzler.

During and after the attack on Poland, Germany prepared to be attacked in the West, but there was no significant attack. Hitler was angry that the O.K.H. wanted to avoid a German offensive in the West, typified by a memorandum by Gen. Stulpnagel opposing the attack. Brauchitsch did persuade Hitler to wait until the spring of 1940 to attack in the West. Hitler kept making attack dates in the winter, but they were canceled due to bad weather, which would have grounded the air force, Luftwaffe. Already the question came up of how Germany could win against France and then get Great Britain to negotiate a peace treaty. Hitler's growing ego did not let him consult the O.K.H. with the

result that when France was later defeated, Germany had no strategy to deal with Great Britain.



Chapters 5 and 6; The Operation Plan Controversy; Commanding General 38 Army Corps

Chapters 5 and 6; The Operation Plan Controversy; Commanding General 38 Army Corps Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, Manstein was the prime mover for a surprise attack on the West through the left flank in the Ardennes region. The initial O.K.H. plan was for the main attack to be on the right wing through the Netherlands and Belgium by Army Group B. Manstein feared that Army Group B would merely push the Allies back, and they would be able to later form a defensive line on the Somme River. Manstein wrote the Army Group A war plan, which envisaged 3 armies attacking through the thickly wooded Ardennes sector through southern Belgium and Luxemburg and then to Sedan in France. The commander of Army Group A, Von Runstedt totally backed the Manstein plan. Von Runstedt added that Army Group A, once it broke through would then head north toward the Channel ports, thus cutting off the Allied forces further north. At first, Hitler was interested in attacking toward Sedan, but wanted to raise the forces there to only 2 armies. Then he would shift armed forces there while the attack was in progress. This was also the view of O.K.H. head Halder. Manstein countered that such an approach to the attack would be too slow and ruin the element of surprise. Meanwhile, various attack days were missed due to the poor winter weather.

A sandbox army exercise in February backed up the view of Manstein that if only the 19 Panzer Corps attacked in the Ardennes sector, it would be stopped by French reinforcements. Meanwhile in February, Manstein was transferred from the Army Group A staff, to command 38 Corps. On February 17th, after the swearing-in ceremony, Manstein was able to speak with Hitler on his views for the Western front offensive. Hitler was persuaded, and on February 20th issued new orders for the offensive as Manstein suggested. Two panzer (tank) corps were to lead the attack, backed up by Second Army and the Fourth Army. In May the attack was completely successful, with the exception of the British evacuation of their troops at Dunkirk. This could have been avoided if orders were not given at the time to stop German forces approaching Dunkirk. These might have been because of Luftwaffe Chief Goring's incompetent demand that the air force be allowed to finish off the evacuating troops at Dunkirk.

In Chapter 6, Manstein considered his leading of 38 Army Corps a secondary operation in the offensive, except that he led his troops in a hot pursuit of French forces after the initial breakthrough. The breakthrough in the Ardennes was proceeding successfully, when Hitler ordered that the 12th Army be halted on the Oise River. This caused considerable delay in the German offensive. Manstein's 38 Army Corps was given the



task on May 25th of relieving the Second Army on the lower Somme River. Manstein demanded that his 38 Army Corps, as part of the Fourth Army prepare to breakthrough and attack, but this was refused.

There was an extensive battle for the Amiens bridgehead over the Somme River, where 38 Army Corps was located. It was attacked by a Negro battalion and a battalion of French soldiers from Alsace. The 38 Corps fights into the village of Breilly and by June 5th is heading forward. Manstein demanded early on June 6th that his force and the 14th Panzer Corps go forward and pursue the enemy. By June 9th, Manstein reaches the Seine River and crosses it immediately in order to outflank the French attempt to defend their capital, Paris. Pontoon bridges are set up over the lower Seine, despite British R.A.F. attempts to bomb them. The 46 Division is under strong enemy attack in the bridgehead south of the Seine. By June 16th, resistance south of the Seine is broken and the German offensive continued. Ultimately, Manstein's 38 Corps goes all the way south to the Loire River. On June 17th, Marshall Petain became the new French leader, and soon he sued for an armistice. The armistice was signed on June 23rd and the German victory in France is completed.



Chapter 7; Between Two Campaigns

Chapter 7; Between Two Campaigns Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 7, things were comfortable for Manstein and his staff and soon they got to bathe on beaches on the English Channel. After some rest, Manstein and his Army Corps 38 began training for the projected invasion of Great Britain called Operation Sea Lion. Manstein saw that Hitler had to deal with the British, but really wanted to fight in the east. It was not possible to make a peace deal with the British under Prime Minister Churchill, but there was no long-range plan to win the war. Hitler could have made preparations to invade Great Britain back in April, but did not get serious about it until August. Likewise, Germany was not able to conduct a sustained bombing campaign against British production centers. Other alternatives were to drive Britain out of the Mediterranean, but Manstein did not think this would succeed in defeating the British. Manstein believed that only an invasion of Great Britain could have ended the war. Hitler could have only invaded Great Britain by late September 1940 and after that the weather would have rapidly deteriorated. Manstein was convinced that only in the context of a combined sea invasion and air battle could Great Britain be defeated. By Hitler having the Luftwaffe fight an air battle over Britain, they suffered the disadvantage of flying bombing runs far from their home bases. Operation Sealion was canceled by the end of September 1940.



Chapter 8; War in the East: Panzer Drive

Chapter 8; War in the East: Panzer Drive Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 8, in February 1941, Manstein was given the command of the 56 Panzer Tank Corps. Manstein faulted Hitler for not having a central drive on Moscow from the beginning. Also, Hitler's hostile oppression of occupied people in the Soviet Union drove these people into revolt against the Nazis. The Northern army group included the Fourth Panzer Tank Group, and the 56 Panzer Corps led by Manstein. The objective of 56 Panzer Corps was the Dvina bridges over the large gorge of the Dvina River, located some 200 miles from the starting point of the invasion. Manstein mentioned the inhuman so-called Commissars Order, which ordered that all unit commissars that are captured as prisoners be immediately shot. Manstein notes that in practice, his unit and the Northern command did not put the Commissars Order into effect. The war started on June 22nd, 1941 and as planned, 56 Panzer Corps penetrated 50 miles into enemy territory. By June 24th, Manstein's Corps was 105 miles inside enemy territory, and two days later was outside of Dvinsk. The road bridge over the Dvina River and 2 other bridges were captured intact. At this juncture, the question came to Manstein, of whether they were heading toward Moscow or Leningrad? Manstein wanted to continue the quick tank offensive against Soviet troops, but instead a time of indecision ensued. Manstein noted problems in individual initiative in the nearby S.S. Death's Head division, a unit under the authority of S.S. Chief Himmler due to Nazi ideology. As a Corps Commander, Manstein spent much of his time inspecting front line troops and finding on his own the situation on the frontline. Nevertheless, he still had to use modern communications to centralize his command from a mobile headquarters. Manstein enjoyed the company of his drivers Nagel and Schumann and his A.D.C. Specht, nicknamed Pepo.

The advance was slowed by the marshy ground around Pskov, and strong enemy counter-attacks. By July 14th, the unit 56 Corps was in trouble with a Soviet attempt to completely surround it. The unit managed to break out of encirclement to the west, near Lake Ilmen, and south of Luga. Manstein got to speak with General Paulus who was there from the O.K.H., and told Paulus that the marshy ground was unsuitable for tanks. Only on August 15th did the 56 Corps again head north. Nearby German units had a local defeat and were pushed back south of Lake Ilmen. The 56 Corps was moved into the flank of the Soviet attacking forces and was able to successfully defeat the Soviets there. By the end of August, the autumn rains began and the roads became impassable. Manstein was pulled out of the command of 56 Corps, and headed to the Crimea in the extreme southern front.



Chapter 9; The Crimean Campaign

Chapter 9; The Crimean Campaign Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 9, Manstein became the commander of the Eleventh Army attacking the Crimea in late September 1941, a key strategic position according to Hitler. Manstein also took over the command of large bodies of Romanian forces, which were recognized as being operationally inferior to German forces. At first Eleventh Army was to both capture the Crimea, and march east on the mainland toward Rostov. To breakthrough into the Crimea over the Perekop meant fighting over an extremely narrow front. Manstein decided to first attack the Crimea. The Eleventh Army succeeded in penetrating the Crimea by September 26th, but still had to get past the Ishun isthmus, another narrow point. The advance had to be stopped in the Crimea to deal with Russian attacks further north that were soon defeated by General Von Kleist.

Even Hitler realized that the Eleventh Army had to be concentrated only against the Crimea. The battle for the Crimea proceeded in mid-October with a ten-day fight through the narrow Ishun isthmus. At first the Soviets had air superiority, which was later broken by the German Molders fighting air group. The Germans forced their way into the Crimea and by mid November captured the entire Crimea with the exception of the fortress port of Sevastopol. A quick attack on Sevastopol was prevented by the Crimea winter rains. The offensive only started December 27th, with the 73 Division also sent to the mainland, reducing the attacking force. There was a fight all through Christmas toward Fort Stalin and Severnaya Bay in Sevastopol, when Manstein heard that Soviet forces had landed at Feodosia in the southeast Crimea, so he had to call off the attack on Sevastopol. Soviet naval supremacy allowed them to land armies on both sides of Kerch and at Feodosia. By January 15th, the 30 and 42 Corps were able to stop the Soviet attacks and moved to the offensive. They stopped the Stalin offensive in the Crimea and retook Feodosia. The Germans were not able to regain the offensive and there was a stalemate in the Crimea for a time.

Manstein prepared his attack to reconquer the Kerch Peninsula and to take the fortress of Sevastopol in late April 1942. Operation Bustard, begun on May 8th, included strong German tank and air forces, plus artillery to break the narrow front near Kerch. Manstein got a new Chief-of-Staff, Gen. Schulz. Colonel Groddock's force broke through and swung to the northeast, though Groddock himself was killed in the assault, and by May 16th, Kerch had fallen. Huge enemy forces had been defeated, with 170,000 captured. Manstein believed that now it was essential to take the fortress of Sevastopol. On the north around the Belbek valley was a strong fortress belt, including Fort Stalin. The southern front had a series of hills, each flanking the next hill, called the Zapun Heights. Defenses continued on the coast with the enemy Maxim Gorky II battery, and in the city of Sevastopol. It was planned that German air strikes would stop Soviet re-supply of the fortress by sea. Manstein went on a reconnaissance by boat of the southern shore of



the fortress, and his boat was attacked by a Soviet fighter plane. Manstein's driver Fritz Nagel was killed in the air strike.

On the morning of June 7th, Manstein began the artillery barrage and there was a frontal attack by the German 54 Corps across the Belbek valley, alongside other forces, including the 18 Romanian Division. On June 13th, Fort Stalin fell and there was a breach on the northern front toward the bay. Hitler and the O.K.H. demanded an early fall of Sevastopol. The 30 Corps made a surprise attack toward the main road to the west and captured the Eagle Patch on June 18th and with extreme fighting, the caves along Severnaya Bay fell. Manstein faced the problem of his main force on the northern front not being able to quickly move to the southern front. So on the early morning of June 29th, German forces in assault boats crossed the bay in order to outflank the enemy and get into the city. In Inkerman, on the southern shore of Severnaya Bay, a commissar blew up a cliff area that sheltered thousands of civilians. The city fell on July 1st, and in gratitude, Hitler had Manstein raised to the rank of Field-Marshal.



Chapters 10 and 11; Leningrad-Vitebsk; Hitler as Supreme Commander

Chapters 10 and 11; Leningrad-Vitebsk; Hitler as Supreme Commander Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 10, late in the summer of 1942, Manstein was called to lead Eleventh Army in an attack on Leningrad. Manstein noted that the relations between Chief-of-Staff Halder and Hitler were quite bad, as the offensive came to a halt. The Eleventh Army got up to the Leningrad front, but immediately had to fight a distance away south of Lake Ladoga. In September, the Soviets overran 18th Army's front, but after heavy fighting, this Soviet force was surrounded and destroyed. Still, it was no longer possible to attack Leningrad. Manstein was grief stricken when his aide, Pepo also known as Specht died in an airplane crash. Manstein was angry that Hitler did not reinforce the battle-tested German divisions, but then put 170,000 men in inferior Luftwaffe divisions, to please Goring. Manstein was again forced to mourn on hearing of the death in battle of his son Gero. In November, Manstein received orders to head up Army Group Don in the South after German forces were encircled at Stalingrad.

In Chapter 11, for the first time, Manstein was directly under Hitler's command. Hitler violated the dictum that an attacker can never be too strong, and divided his forces up in too many places. In the Soviet Union, Hitler failed by not concentrating his forces on the Central Front, and not letting his generals have the ability to be flexible and to retreat. In the crisis of the autumn 1942, Hitler tried to hold on to the Caucasus, while hundreds of miles away he had German forces fight a huge battle at Stalingrad. Hitler's main mistake was that he did not trust his Army Chief of Staff or O.K.W. Hitler manipulated the O.K.W. against the O.K.H. (Army general staff). Hitler made the mistake of concentrating on seizing political and economic targets, without destroying the enemy army in the Soviet Union. Manstein did not want to join the conspirators against Hitler, because the result would have been that Germany would have been overrun by the Soviets much faster.



Chapter 12; The Tragedy of Stalingrad

Chapter 12; The Tragedy of Stalingrad Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 12, the Sixth Army was surrounded at Stalingrad because Hitler had the German front overextended for too long in two different directions, toward Stalingrad, and toward the Caucasus. The huge flank of the Sixth Army was covered by the weak armies of Romania, Hungary and Italy. As Manstein traveled south, he found out from Field Marshall v. Kluge that the Soviets had penetrated Romanian armies both north and south of Stalingrad. Manstein wanted Sixth Army to immediately withdraw from Stalingrad and fight toward the bridge at Kalach over the Don River, but soon the Soviets captured that bridge intact. Some 220,000 troops were surrounded in the Stalingrad pocket by November 24th. Manstein commanded Army Group Don that at first only had only remnants of various armies. In the pocket, Sixth Army Commander Paulus refused to defy Hitler and abandon Stalingrad.

As head of Army Group Don, Manstein faced the Soviet threat to drive forces down to Rostov and cut off the entirety of Army Group A. Manstein found out that most of the Romanian armies that the Soviets attacked had been destroyed or were unable to fight anymore. Romanian Marshal Antonescu had tremendous bitterness against Hitler, because the Romanian armies had been left to man a too long flank. General Hoth's group prevented the Soviets from breaking through to the rear of Army Group A in Rostov. Manstein sent his Chief-of-Staff General Schulz inside the Stalingrad pocket to find out about resupply needs. Only by sending in 550 tons of supply by air could the Sixth Army be kept in functional shape, but this amount was never reached. Luftwaffe Commander Goring lied to Hitler that the pocket could be supplied.

Large German forces were tied up east of the Don River waiting to launch a relief attack, including the Fourth Panzer army. Sixth Army was to break out to the southwest to meet Fourth Panzer Army. It was difficult for the German forces to be assembled, since transportation depended on one rail-bridge over the Dneiper River. By December 4, there was a Soviet attack in the sector of the Lower Chir River on Army Detachment Hollidt. Manstein was sending telegrams to Hitler and constant calls to O.K.H. Chief Zeitzler saying that the chance to relief the Sixth Army was being lost. Finally on December 12, the attack toward the pocket was made from the southwest. The 57 Panzer Corps made progress, but on December 18, to the north there was a Soviet attack that overran the Italian army there. The turning point was on December 19, when the 57 Panzer Corps crossed the Aksai River and was less than 30 miles from the encircled Sixth Army. Hitler refused to order Sixth Army to abandon Stalingrad and break out. Soon forces had to be moved to defend Rostov. The airfields at Tatsinskaya and Morosovsky were captured by the Soviets, ending any real attempt to supply Sixth Army by air. Hitler's refusal to withdraw troops rapidly from Army Group A contributed to



the German defeat too. It was still of some importance that Sixth Army did not surrender until February 1st, since large enemy troops were tied up fighting there until that time.

The situation of Army Detachment Hollidt became worse December 25th as the Soviet army penetrated surrounding Romanian and Italian army positions. By Dec. 26th, three Soviet tank armies took the airfields used to supply the Stalingrad pocket. These airfields were recaptured by the Germans a few days later, but then were permanently lost. The attack to relieve Sixth Army from the outside had to be abandoned and Fourth Panzer Army was forced back to its starting positions. Rostov on the coast had to be defended so that First Panzer Army could continue to withdraw from the Caucasus region. By mid January, flights to the Stalingrad pocket had to come from Rostov, some 200 miles away and the end was near. Manstein got the O.K.H. to agree to withdraw the First Panzer Army from the Caucasus region. This withdrawal was only partially completed by Jan. 9th. To the northwest, the Fretter-Pico group was nearly surrounded, as it fought where the Italian army had disintegrated. The key transportation point of Rostov was covered by the Fourth Panzer army.



Chapter 13, The 1942-3 Winter Campaign in South Russia

Chapter 13, The 1942-3 Winter Campaign in South Russia Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, the big picture of the Southern part of the German front after November 1942 was that German positions in the Caucasus region stretched out almost 400 miles south of Rostov, while Soviet forces were less than 200 miles from Rostov. Further west, the Germans would also be cut off if they lost the Dnieper River crossings at Zaporozhye and Dnepropetrovsk, both key railroad bridge crossing points. These were the target points that the Soviets had to reach to cut off the German Southern front. The enemy targets were the German allied armies of Romania, Italy and Hungary and to create huge holes in the front. The Soviet Black Sea fleet would be able to blockade German forces stuck on the coast. Hitler could have created the chance for a great victory according to Manstein, if German forces were quickly withdrawn from the Caucasus region and the area south of Rostov. Then German forces from the Kharkov area could attack the advancing Soviet armies on their northern flank and destroy them.

Don Army Group's Fourth Panzer Army was forced back to the Chir positions north of Rostov. The Soviets were able to make several crossings of the frozen Don River after the Italian army had disintegrated under Soviet attack. Don Army Group faced a steadily increasing threat to its western flank, while it fought to keep Rostov and the road for Army Group A open for a retreat from the Caucasus region. Manstein warned Zeitzler about the danger of the destruction of the Southern front. On Dec. 29th, Hitler agreed to a partial withdrawal of Army Group A from the Caucasus region. Army Group Don faced attacks from the Soviets on Army Group Hollidt north of Rostov and on Fourth Panzer Group east of Rostov. There were not enough German troops to cover these large fronts. Fourth Panzer Group had weakened forces on the lower Don, and had to prevent Soviet forces from getting between it and the First Panzer Army to the south. Hitler repeatedly tried to freeze German forces in set lines, which was impossible. Manstein had to stop Hitler's attempt to interfere, by threatening to resign. The situation of Fourth Panzer Army was improved by Jan. 14th as First Panzer Army finally completed its retreat to the Rostov area. General Hollidt had a rough task in preventing the enemy from moving in the rear of the Fourth Panzer Army. The Army Detachment Hollidt was threatened on both flanks north of Rostov and had to concentrate at key points and defeat enemy attacks aimed at encircling it. Army Group A in the Caucasus had no more cover for their long flank on the Don River. From the north, the enemy was reaching toward the west to outflank the whole of Southern Army.

In late January 1943, the Soviets were pressing down toward the Donetz River. Manstein demanded that the First Panzer Army and Fourth Panzer Army be shifted to the west as soon as possible. As the situation worsened, Hitler allowed major forces to



shift to the north and west on the Donetz front. The First Panzer Army got through Rostov and was being repositioned to the lower Donetz by the end of January. Hitler wanted to maintain control of the entire Donetz basin and its rich coal deposit, but Manstein warned that the eastern part of the Donetz basin had to be given up. Manstein warned Zeitzler that without bringing up strong forces to hold the flank at Kharkov, retreat was inevitable. In the beginning of February, strong enemy forces crossed the Donetz east of the town of Voroshilovgrad, where the Italian army had taken to flight. To the north, Army Group B was tied up in difficult defensive actions to the northeast of Kharkov. After hard fighting, Army Detachment Hollidt succeeded by mid-February in taking up prepared positions on the Mius River to the west of Rostov. Manstein warned Hitler that without strong forces, the eastern part of the Donetz basin could not be held, or else German forces again would be encircled. Hitler rejected demands by Manstein that a real Chief-of-Staff of the O.K.H. would make battle plans and that Hitler confine his attention to matters of overall strategy, not commanding Army Groups and even smaller bodies of troops. Manstein warned that with modern truck transportation, Soviet armies could continue to advance. During the rest of February, German troops fought a fighting retreat from the eastern Donetz basin, after this had been authorized by Hitler.

The enemy was moving February 9th to outflank the Germans through the gap between the Central Army Group at Kursk and the Dneiper River. The targets were Army Detachment Lanz and the remnants of Army Group B plus the vital Dneiper crossing and communications center at Dnepropetrovsk, which was soon blocked. To the south, Soviets forces had penetrated so-called impenetrable marsh ground and gotten to Grishino using their wide-tracked tanks. Only the river fjord at Zaporozhye still functioned for supplies but without a railroad bridge that had still not been repaired. Army Group B was disbanded, and Army Detachment Lanz came under the command of Manstein's Army Group Don. Army Detachment Lanz was forced to fight south of Kharkov and abandoned Kharkov, contrary to the orders of Hitler. Otherwise the army would have been encircled at Kharkov. Hitler flew to Army Group Don headquarters at Zaporozhye while Soviet forces were only 30 miles away. Manstein demanded that SS Panzer Group be used to smash forces coming through Army Group Lanz south of Kharkov. SS Panzer Group would not even be able to assemble until Feb. 19th.

In late February, enemy forces were going west toward Kiev, but were stopped at Akhtyrka by Army Detachment Kempf. Enemy tank forces had penetrated as far as 12 miles from Zaporozhye in the south, but ran out of gas and were destroyed. On the Donetz-Dneiper battlefield, the remains of 650 enemy tanks were taken, as well as 23,000 dead. South of Kharkov, the Fourth Panzer Army was able to surround significant Soviet troops and win a victory. By March 7th this army was attacking northward. Kharkov and Belgorod fell to the SS Panzer Army by March 14th. Because of a skillful mobile defense, German armies were able to return to the offensive. By March 1943, the Germans had counterattacked though not on the scale that Manstein had hoped. Manstein did not forget that the long fight to the death of Sixth Army had helped stopped the enemy offensive.

Chapter 14- Operation Citadel

Chapter 14- Operation Citadel Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 14, German commanders debated whether to attack in the Summer of 1943 or to wait for the enemy to attack. Western forces were poised to attack the Germans in Africa and Italy, which affected the number of German forces available in the East. A large Russian salient to the west around the town of Kursk presented itself as a possible target, between Orel on the north and Kharkov on the south. Hitler had left a large salient to the east on the Southern front, even still maintaining the 17th Army in the Kuban bridgehead in the Caucasus region. Operation Citadel was planned for May as a giant pincer attack on the Kursk salient, but was postponed until June and then delayed by Hitler until July. By that time the opposing Soviet front was strong and ready for action. The Central Army Group attack from Orel was stopped after 9 miles, but the Southern Army Group attack from Kharkov was fairly successful and 1,800 enemy tanks were destroyed or captured. At that point, Hitler ordered the attack to be stopped due to the Allied invasion of Sicily and Italy.



Chapter 15- The Defensive Battles of 1943-4

Chapter 15- The Defensive Battles of 1943-4 Summary and Analysis

The Germans failed to destroy Soviet reserves. Manstein wanted to withdraw forces from the Donetz basin in the southeast, but Hitler blocked this. Manstein wrote O.K.H. Chief Zeitzler that Manstein was given no freedom of action to block the Soviet attack. In the Battle for Belgorod and Kharkov, the enemy attacked on August 3rd and broke through on a 35-mile front. Army Detachment Kempf, soon to be renamed Eighth Army, was outflanked and threatened with encirclement. It withdrew from Kharkov at the last minute, actually against Hitler's wishes. The enemy was stopped, but he clearly intended to soon push on toward the Dneiper River and Kiev. Soviet forces broke through at the southern end of the Central Front and in the sector of Fourth Army. In the Donetz basin, the new Sixth Army was forced back into a prepared position. In the northern part of the Southern Army Front, Eighth Army had been forced back. Hitler came back for a conference in Zaporozhye. Hitler claimed to allow of withdrawal from the Donetz basin, but the next day Manstein found out that no such thing occurred. Manstein warned Hitler again that the grave danger was to the northern or left flank of the Southern Army Group. This time, Manstein succeeded in getting 4 divisions moved to the Southern Army Group at the end of September 1943. German Armies along a 440-mile front withdrew behind the Dneiper River. This was a difficult maneuver in which these armies crossed over only 5 bridges. There was a scorched earth policy, and hundreds of thousands of Soviet civilians also were evacuated in the retreat, most willingly. Manstein had wanted to strongly fortify the Dneiper line, but this was not allowed by Hitler. Powerful Soviet forces followed the Germans to the Zaporozhye bridgehead, and were looking to put their own bridgeheads on the west side of the Dneiper, which they succeeded in doing in two cases. German forces were too weak to prevent all Soviet landings. Soviet equipment and artillery concentrations were made in huge amounts, and the German bridgehead at Zaporozhye, on the eastern bank, was demolished. A large Soviet bridgehead near Dnepropetrovsk threatened the new German defensive position. In the South, the Soviet Steppes Front attacked with 900 tanks and forced a German retreat toward Nikopol. There was a danger of First Panzer Army, which was in the east of the Dneiper loop, of becoming encircled. A German counterattack near Krivoi Rog surrounded a Soviet force and yielded 350 captured tanks and 5,000 enemy prisoners, but the enemy soon attacked again. Hitler wanted to keep Nikopol due to the nickel mines located there.

The Battle for Kiev proceeded when Hitler was so obsessed with the Crimea and Nikopol that he was willing to ignore a strong Soviet attack against Kiev on the northern flank. In November, Kiev was evacuated, while strong enemy forces made for the railway junction of Fastov. Hitler's habit of raising totally new divisions, instead of



sending battle-tested divisions reinforcements resulted in high casualties in the battle to retake Fastov. In the middle of November, the German 48 Corps struck at the Soviet attackers' flank and seized much heavy equipment.

The enemy launched a new attack in the Dneiper bend, with the intention of encircling First Panzer Army. Soviet forces crossed the Dneiper on both sides of Cherkassy, which soon created the Cherkassy pocket in the Eighth Army sector. By the end of November, the land access to the Crimea was totally cut off. The attack of the 1st Ukrainian Front on the left flank of First Panzer Army caused a crisis, with the enemy advancing to Krivoi Rog in the south. The local victory of 48 Panzer Corps created breathing space for the Fourth Panzer Army but a new enemy attack broke through on December 24th down the road to Zhitomir in the Kiev sector. Some enemy forces went south to Fastov, while other Soviet forces attacked east to Korosten. Manstein warned Hitler and the O.K.H. that only by shifting the First Panzer Army out of the Dneiper bend and to the northern flank could the situation be stabilized.

By the end of December, the Southern Army Group moved major elements of First Panzer Army to the northern flank, without orders from O.K.H. Manstein met with Hitler and warned that major forces were required on the northern flank, or the whole Southern Army Group would be pushed down toward Romania. Hitler feared that Soviet advances threatened the maintenance of allies Romania and Bulgaria. In January, strong Soviet forces drove southward in a gap between First and Fourth Panzer Army, approaching Uman. Other enemy forces approached the town of Rovno toward the east. German forces were trapped in the Cherkassy pocket though other German troops counterattack with 7 Corps and 26 Panzer Corps. German counterattacks were only large enough to win local victories without changing the overall strategic situation. Manstein wrote to Hitler that only by withdrawing forces from the Crimea by sea, and from the Dneiper bend, could the northern flank be stabilized. Hitler saw his generals weakening and had most generals come in to a conference at his headquarters. Hitler asked that the generals be the last ones to fight and fall. Manstein considered this an insult and publicly mocked Hitler with a catch call that it would be so, Mein Fuhrer. Hitler was taken aback, and later warned Manstein that he must not interrupt Hitler during a public speaking engagement.

Hitler had new forces sent to the southern flank in order to reopen the road to the Crimea, but new enemy attacks in early February forced the German forces to abandon Nikopol and the Crimea. The Dneiper bend was abandoned, with large losses of heavy equipment. Further north, Manstein tried desperately to save the German forces surrounded in the Cherkassy pocket. First Panzer Army was directed to send two corps to surround forces around the pocket, and then allow the surrounded Germans to breakout. The relief forces made it to 8 miles from the surrounded forces and overnight, 30,000 of the surrounded Germans broke out.

Large Soviet forces continued to advance toward Rovno against a weak German defense with many gaps. From Rovno, the enemy could continue to advance into Poland. Rovno fell, despite the enemy being delayed by harassing attacks by the 13 Corps. Hitler tried to court martial officers for the fall of Rovno, but this was eventually



stopped. Strong German forces were shifted from the Central front to stop the enemy advance to the west. German losses were not made up with new troops. Manstein met with Hitler in March of 1944 on the failure of the Germans and that the Southern Army front was still in danger of being outflanked. Even in the muddy season in March, the Soviet tanks were more maneuverable with wider tracks, and huge numbers of American trucks were increasing the mobility of enemy troops. Manstein continued to demand that the southern part of his front be shortened. Despite the mud, the enemy assembled forces in the Rovno area and launched their attack to drive toward the Dneister River. The 13 Corps was successfully able to retreat in order to avoid encirclement. The enemy also continued their advance toward Uman, and reached the town March 9th. The enemy was victorious in destroying part of the left wing of Eighth Army and causing a big gap between it and the First Panzer Army.

Manstein was soon after summoned to Hitler's headquarters at Obersalzberg on dealing with the deteriorating situation. Again Manstein demanded a retreat of Sixth Army on the southern flank, this time to the Dneister River. On March 23rd, enemy armies broke through on the flanks of First Panzer Army and approached the Dneister River. Manstein demanded that First Panzer Army retreat to the west and remain in contact with Fourth Panzer Army. Colonel-General Hube of the First Panzer Army wanted to avoid encirclement by retreating to the south over the Dneister River, but Manstein rejected this. This was just what Manstein feared happening, a forcing off of the army group to the south. Manstein again was again called to meet with Hitler, where Hitler tried to blame Manstein for the bad situation of the Southern army group. Manstein also had heard that Goring, and Himmler were conspiring against him and Von Kleist, to get them removed from their commands. After a rough argument, Hitler agreed to have First Panzer Army retreat to the west as Manstein had demanded. Soon after, Manstein and Von Kleist were called back to meet with Hitler and Hitler fired them. Manstein left his army headquarters in Lwow on April 3rd, 1944.



Characters

Field Marshall Eric von Manstein, Manstein, General Manstein

Manstein is the writer of these wartime memoir, which tell his experience in the war. He is well-known as perhaps Hitler's most brilliant general. Manstein steadily rose in rank from leading the 38 Army Corps in the campaign in Poland. On the staff of v. Rundstedt, commander of Army Group A, Manstein developed a plan for a surprise attack on France and Belgium through the heavily wooded Ardennes mountainous region. He met with Hitler and got this plan adopted, which was a complete success in defeating all land forces on the Western front. Manstein was dismayed when there was no concrete planning to invade Great Britain after the fall of France. Although Manstein's political views were unclear, he never wavered from the desire to military win the war against the enemy. Manstein was dismayed by the lack of focus of the attack on the Soviet Union, but nevertheless fully participated in this war. He led the Eleventh Army to triumph in the Crimea and became a Field Marshall. Manstein totally disagreed with Hitler's insistence of holding on to every scrap of territory, and considered this the reason for the surrounding and destruction of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Manstein fought a series of defensive battles on the Southern sector of the Russian front. He saw Hitler's interference with the campaign and the lack of a functioning O.K.H., Armed Forces Chief of Staff as leading to the lack of further victories against the Soviets. Manstein had a series of arguments with Hitler in trying to save German armies from being surrounded. Finally Manstein is fired by Hitler in April 1944, and sits out the rest of the war.

Adolf Hitler, Dictator and Supreme Commander of Germany

Manstein saw Hitler as having some ability as a strategist and political schemer, but he lacked the necessary training of a German military staff officer. Hitler also refused to delegate authority for military plans to a functioning O.K. H., Armed Forces Chief of Staff. Hitler was willing to take risks in his early bloodless victories. Later, Hitler had the intelligence to adopt Manstein's plan to win on the Western front with a surprise attack through the Ardennes. Nevertheless, Manstein faulted Hitler for not having the O.K.H. develop a plan to invade Great Britain. Hitler was afraid of taking the risks involved in an invasion of Great Britain, the proposed Operation Sea Lion. On the Eastern Front, under Hitler's orders Manstein was prevented from waging the sort of mobile defense that Manstein desired in 1943-4. Hitler's rigid strategy of trying to hold onto all territory resulted in the destruction of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Later, all hope of getting a stalemate on the Eastern Front was ruined by Hitler's desire to hold onto desirable territories such as the Crimea, the Caucasus region, and the nickel mines of Nikopol.



Manstein was especially annoyed by Hitler's habit of intervening on even minor shifts of troops and day-to-day military decisions.

Field Marshall v. Runstedt, Runstedt

Field Marshall v. Runstedt was Manstein's commanding officer in the period after the successful Polish campaign. Manstein was Runstedt's Chief-of-Staff. Runstedt was in charge of Army Group A, the group that would have to make the attack through the mountainous Ardennes region according to Manstein's plan for the offensive on the Western front. Runstedt did everything possible to promote Manstein's plan of attack in the West, and is key to having Hitler meet with Manstein and having the plan adopted. In turn, Manstein had the highest regard for Runstedt as an officer trained in the traditions of the German army going back to the World War I era and the Kaiser. Later, Runstedt was the commander of Southern Army Group in late 1941 at the time that Manstein was leading the Eleventh Army's assault on the Crimea.

Col.-Gen. Zeitzler, Commander-in-Chief of the O.K.H.

Col.-Gen. Zeitzler was the Commander-in-Chief of the O.K.H. while Manstein was the commander of Army Group Don, later called the Southern Army Group. Zeitzler tended to agree with Manstein's policy of an elastic defense and disagree with Hitler's demands to hold onto all territories. Zeitzler realized that he was the Commander-in-Chief of the O.K.H. in name only, with Hitler making all the decisions. Nevertheless, Zeitzler spent long hours arguing with Hitler and trying to persuade Hitler to adopt a better military policy on the Eastern front.

Lt. Specht

Lieutenant Specht is Manstein's aide-de-camp in France, the Crimea, and at Lake Ladoga. Specht was given the nickname Pepo, for his energy and sense of humor. Specht died in an airplane crash while seeking some time closer to the front while deployed near Lake Ladoga.

Herman Goring, Commander of the Luftwaffe (Air Force)

Goring was the head of the Luftwaffe and a close confidant of Hitler. Goring did severe damage to the German cause by demanding that the Luftwaffe be allowed to stop the British evacuation of troops at Dunkirk, instead of quickly sending in ground forces. Later, Goring assured Hitler that the Luftwaffe would be able to supply the Stalingrad pocket, which was totally false. Another of Goring's operation, the establishment of infantry units called Luftwaffe divisions was a total failure and produced inadequately trained troops.



Himmler, Head of the S.S. (Storm Troopers)

Himmler had a good deal of bad feelings toward the army and established his own Waffen SS divisions, which Manstein considered to be inferior to the regular army.

Col.-General Hoth, Commander Fourth Panzer Army

Col.-General Hoth was the leader of the Fourth Panzer army, which was active outside of the Stalingrad pocket and in relief attempts. Hoth was able to patch up the front after the Russian breakthrough around Stalingrad. Hoth led troops that prevented the enemy from seizing Rostov and isolating Army Group A,

Col.-General Hube, Comander First Panzer Army

Col.-General Hube, like Manstein asked Hitler to have a real O.K.H. Armed Forces Command make military decisions on the Eastern front. Later, he had a dispute with Manstein and was ordered by Manstein to break out to the west of a near encirclement by the enemy in March 1944.

Fritz Nagel

Fritz Nagel was Manstein's longtime driver. Nagel was killed in an air attack on a reconnaissance boat which also contained Manstein, who was unhurt.

Col.-General Baron v. Richtofen

Col.-General Baron v. Richtofen led the effort to airlift supplies to the surrounded German troops at Stalingrad. Earlier, Richtofen had been of immense help to Manstein's forces by providing air support during the attack into the Crimea.

Col.-General, later Field Marshall Paulus

Paulus was the leader of the Sixth Army that was surrounded and destroyed at Stalingrad. Paulus refused urgings by Manstein and others to abandon Stalingrad and try to break out of enemy encirclement, due to his loyalty to Hitler.

Field Marshall v. Kluge

Field Marshall v. Kluge was the commander of the Central Army group. He went together with Manstein to ask for forces to be transferred to the area of Kiev to cover Manstein's forces of Southern Army group's northern flank. Their request was denied, and later the northern flank was deeply penetrated by Soviet forces.

Field Marshall v. Kleist

Field Marshall v. Kleist was the commander of Army Group A, which had occupied part of the Caucasus region. Kleist failed to occupy all the Caucasus and in the later retreat barely was able to get Army Group A out of enemy encirclement. Later Kleist and Manstein were brought to visit Hitler and were fired by Hitler at the same time.



Objects/Places

Poland, Polish Campaign

Poland was the first country that Hitler attacked militarily, which caused France and Great Britain to declare war on Germany in September 1939. The Polish army did not have enough modern tanks and equipment to stop the Germans. In addition, they deployed too close to the frontier, trying to protect all of the territory, which Manstein considered a mistake.

Western Front, France, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, Western

In May 1940, Hitler attacked on the Western front against France, Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg. These nations were all forced to surrender by June 20th, 1940.

Operation Sea Lion

Operation Sea Lion was a proposal from Hitler to invade Great Britain in September 1940. It envisaged that the Luftwaffe or air force would first gain air superiority over Great Britain and defeat the Royal Air Force (RAF.) Hitler ended up canceling Operation Sea Lion.

The Manstein Plan

The Manstein Plan was a plan for breaking through on the Western front. It involved funneling a large tank force through the poor roads of the mountainous Ardennes region in Southern Belgium and Luxemburg, crossing the Meuse River in France, and then sweeping north toward the English Channel. Hitler adopted the proposal and the attack was a total success. British and French forces were cut off in Northern France and Belgium.

The Schlieffen Plan

The Schlieffen Plan was the old World War I plan to invade Holland and Belgium with a strong attack along the German right flank, along the Channel. The attack would sweep past Paris and take Paris from behind. Hitler ended up canceling the Schlieffen Plan and adopting the Manstein Plan for the attack.



Dvina Bridges, Dvinsk

Manstein led the 56 Panzer Corps in the attack on Russia on June 22nd, 1941. Their objective was the Dvina Bridge over a deep gorge by the town of Dvinsk that was a key objective on the way to Leningrad. Alternatively, these forces after capturing the Dvina Bridges could have turned east toward Moscow. The Dvina Bridges were captured within 5 days by Manstein, though they were almost 200 miles past the starting line of attack.

The Crimea, the Battle for the Crimea and Sevastopol

The Crimea is a strategic peninsula that extends south into the Black Sea in the Southern army sector. Manstein was given the command of the Eleventh Army with the objective of capturing the Crimea and the naval fortress of Sevastopol. Hitler viewed the Crimea as a jumping off point into the Caucasus region and a key defense point to prevent attacks on the Romanian oil fields.

Leningrad, Battle of Lake Ladoga

Leningrad was the second largest city in the Soviet Union, and located in the north on the Baltic Sea. It was besieged but never conquered. Manstein was deployed to lead the Eleventh Army to tighten the siege and take Leningrad. Instead, Manstein got involved in a long defensive battle south of Lake Ladoga.

Stalingrad, Stalingrad Pocket

Stalingrad was a large city on the Volga River that Hitler decided must be taken at all costs. The Sixth Army was involved in a long campaign to take Stalingrad, when Soviet armies broke through north and south of Stalingrad and surrounded the Sixth Army. The Soviets succeeded in taking Stalingrad and destroying the 200,000 or more men of the Sixth Army.

Caucasus Region

The Caucasus Region extends south of Rostov between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Hitler decided he wanted to capture the Caucasus Region in the summer of 1942, primarily to seize its oil resources as well as disrupt communications between the Soviets and its Western allies.



Rostov

Rostov is a large city on the Black Sea and the gateway to the Caucasus Region. It was captured by the Germans, and later had to be kept open so the retreating armies of Army Group A could avoid enemy encirclement.

Romanian, Italian, Hungarian Armies, Don River front

The Romanian, Italian and Hungarian armies were deployed as part of the invasion of the Soviet Union. These German-allied armies were deployed north and south of Stalingrad, particularly along the long flank along the Don River. The Soviets counterattacked by breaking through Romanian army-held sectors and surrounding the Sixth Army in Stalingrad. Later, the Italian and Hungarian armies were also put to flight and made to disintegrate by enemy attacks.

Battle of Kharkov (Second)

The Battle of Kharkov in March 1943 or the Second Battle was a key German counterattack where enemy forces that had been attacking the northern flank of Army Group South were themselves attacked and surrounded by the Germans. It was a fairly significant victory which set the stage for a German summer offensive in 1943.

Operation Citadel, Battle of Kursk

Operation Citadel was the German plan to attack the enemy salient around the town of Kursk in June of 1943. The attack was postponed to July 1943. The northern attack against the salient was stopped after 9 miles, but Manstein's southern attack made good progress. The attack was called off when Hitler saw that Sicily was invaded and he decided to switch troops to deal with a potential invasion of France.

The Northern Flank of Southern Army Group

During 1943 and early 1944, Manstein continually warned Hitler of the danger of an enemy attack to the northern flank of the Southern Army Group, around the area of Kharkov and later Kiev. Manstein feared that such an attack would roll up the Southern Army Group against the Black Sea or Romania, and that more forces were needed in this area. In March of 1943 an enemy attack did nearly surround the First Panzer Army here.

Southern Army Group, formerly Don Army Group

In November 1942, Manstein was given the command of Don Army Group, which was the remains of the front on the Don River that were not demolished by the enemy attack



that encircled Stalingrad. Later, this group was renamed Southern Army Group. This group tried to save the surrounded Sixth Army and maintain the front from the Central Army Group to the Black Sea.

Army Detachment Hollidt, later Sixth Army

Army Detachment Hollidt was an ad hoc army group that reestablished the front along the Chir river after the enemy breakthrough around Stalingrad. Later Army Detachment Hollidt was united with remnants of the Sixth Army and renamed as the new Sixth Army.

Army Group A

Army Group A was the forces that invaded the Caucasus region in the far south of the front. These forces were in grave danger of encirclement after the enemy breakthrough at Stalingrad. Manstein was able to keep the road through Rostov open and these forces were able to retreat.

The Fourth Panzer Army

The Fourth Panzer Army was a key target of enemy attacks along the northern Donetz River and the northern flank of the Southern Army Group. This army was targeted by multiple enemy attacks in a push toward Kiev.

The First Panzer Army

The First Panzer Army was initially deployed along the Black Sea on the approaches to Rostov. After it was able to retreat, the army was transferred to the northern flank of the Southern Army Group. Later, in March 1944 the First Panzer Army was forced to fight to the west to avoid encirclement.

Attempt of July 20th, 1944

On July 20th, 1944, there was a bomb explosion and an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler. Manstein had been aware of plots against Hitler, but refused to take part in them.

O.K.H. and O.K.W.

The O.K.H. was the Armed Forces General Staff, and the O.K.W. was the Army General Staff. Manstein argued that Hitler downgraded both the O.K.H. and the O.K.W. and played them both against each other. The O.K.H. was run by a number of officers, including Halder and later Zeitzler. These O.K.H. Chiefs of Staffs could argue with Hitler

over military policy, but Hitler made all the decisions, even on day-to-day military matters.

Dunkirk Evacuation

In the one major event that marred the German victory, British and some French forces were evacuated at the port of Dunkirk in Northern France. Manstein believed that these forces could have been successfully forced to surrender if fast tank forces had been brought into Dunkirk on time. Also, Goering had told Hitler that the evacuation could be stopped by an aerial bombardment, which was a failure.



Themes

Independent Judgment and War Fighting

Manstein admitted that with a leader like Hitler, it was impossible to win the war. Hitler started too many wars on too many fronts and his biggest mistake was the war against the Soviet Union. Manstein felt that after the fall of France it would have been possible to successfully invade Great Britain, though he was not in a position to get Hitler to adopt this strategy. Manstein made the point that from the German General Staff down to non-commissioned officers, the strength of the German army was the ability of commanding officers to make their own decisions on tactics and immediate objectives. This idea of the personal initiative of the German soldier is quite different from the commonplace stereotype of the obedient German under Hitler.

Manstein showed this trait of innovation with his plan to introduce a large German tank force through the Ardennes region of Southern Belgium into Northern France. This was an unexpected stroke in that the Ardennes region is largely heavily wooded and low mountains and was seen as a difficult to put through a large number of troops. Yet, Manstein put this plan forward with the backing of his Army Group A commander Von Rundstedt. Manstein got Hitler to adopt the plan that resulted in a totally successful attack that destroyed the French Army in May and June 1940. Manstein would have liked to use the plan for Operation Sealion, an amphibious invasion of Great Britain shortly after, but Hitler never really backed this plan. Instead, Hitler ordered the attack on the Soviet Union a year later, in June 1941.

Proper Leadership Versus Hitler's Strategy

Manstein's disputes with Hitler's leadership style do not become clear until Manstein was assigned the leadership of Army Group Don. Manstein mentioned that saying of the famous German military strategist Von Moltke, that he that tries to on to everything holds on to nothing. Looking at the beginning of the assault on the Soviet Union, Manstein faults the lack of heavy concentration of forces in the Central Front, with the results that German forces were dissipated on the northern and southern wings of the front. For example, Manstein saw this pattern of improper leadership in the middle of the Eastern front offensive. Manstein lead forces on the northern front that captured the large bridges over the Duna (?) River, over 200 miles from the starting line in the first five days. However, instead of advancing soon after on the goal of the northern front, Leningrad, Hitler and the OKH had the troops bogged down in seizing other objectives and in a conservative approach. Manstein argued that this was wrong, because in attacking a powerful opponent like the Soviet Union, only a quick bold assault would be able to achieve objectives.

Manstein was able to put his principles of tactics into practice in his leading of the Eleventh Army in the conquest of the Crimea. Later, Manstein was early on nervous



about Hitler's summer offensive of 1942, where forces attacked toward Stalingrad to the east, and at the same time toward the Caucasus region to the southeast. Hitler was obsessed with the idea of seizing economically rich territories. Manstein criticized this idea, because the only true way to seize economic objectives was to defeat the Soviet Army in the field.

Tough Soldiering and the Conquest of France and the Crimea

Manstein got his biggest chance in using his theories and tactics in the Manstein Plan that led to the fall of France. The allied forces of France, and Great Britain expected an attack through the Netherlands and Northern Belgium in a strong right-wing sweep toward the Channel ports and on to Paris. Manstein feared that like in World War I, after initial victories, the German forces would get bogged down before Paris on the Somme River. The Manstein Plan was used instead and involved an attack by armored forces through the Ardennes Forest and over the Meuse River. Then German tank forces continued north to the Channel ports and cut off the Allied forces in Northern France and Belgium. Manstein himself was not in this attack, and only attacked later after the initial breakthrough.

Manstein's opportunity for personal recognition came with his attack on the Crimean Peninsula. It was considered imperative to Hitler to conquer the Crimea, which projects into the Black Sea, as a key Soviet air base against the Romanian oil fields that the Germans needed to protect. German forces were successful in the nearly impossible breakthrough of the narrow Perekop isthmus. After the initial breakthrough, Manstein managed to defeat superior Soviet forces by repeatedly outflanking them. Only the fortress port-city of Sevastopol remained in Soviet hands, but this was captured in June 1942. Manstein realized in December 1941 that he could not attack Sevastopol and also deal with other Soviet attacks at the straits of Kerch. So he suspended the attack on Sevastopol until he was able to resume it. Manstein was able to use his often inferior forces to outflank and outfox the Soviets under difficult conditions.



Style

Perspective

The book was written from the perspective of the author Field Marshall v. Manstein, who truly sought military victory. Manstein tells about his experience in the attack on Poland, the attack on the Western front, and the war in the Soviet Union. Early in the book, Manstein makes clear that he and most of his fellow Generals do not want to be drawn into a general war, though that is exactly what happens. What angered Manstein most about the war was that Hitler did not ask his O.K.H. Armed Forces Staff to develop a plan to win the war. To try to remedy this, Manstein submitted to Hitler a plan to win the land war in the West, but there was no follow-up plan to defeat Great Britain.

Likewise in June 1941, there was no coherent plan to win the war against the Soviet Union. Manstein saw a brilliant initial assault on the Northern Army Group sector leading toward Leningrad, but this was not followed up with an attack toward Leningrad or Moscow. Manstein saw a series of local victories, including his own leading of the Eleventh Army in the conquest of the Crimea, yet the Soviets continued to fight. Manstein was critical of the summer of 1942 offensive in that it had two objectives, Stalingrad to the east and the Caucasus region to the south. Hitler's overestimation of German military power and rigidness in seeking to retain all conquered territory leads to a German disaster at Stalingrad. Manstein was caught in endless arguments with Hitler, as the German army is ground down in defensive battles in 1943 and early 1944, until Manstein's abrupt firing. Manstein believed that Germany could only reach at least a stalemate on the Eastern front by always fighting a war of mobility.

Tone

The tone of Manstein's book is that of a dedicated military professional. Manstein's chief complaint against Hitler was that Hitler was not a professional and refused to delegate the making of military policy to the O.K.H. Manstein had an amazing amount of dedication to his work, which led him to refuse to join the conspiracy against Hitler that led to the assassination attempt against Hitler of July 20, 1944. Manstein reasoned that a coup against Hitler would have only led to a quicker defeat of Germany on the Eastern front. This narrow military tone gives the book an eerie quality to it. Manstein was perhaps the only General who wrote his memoirs of the war who dared to declare that Germany could have invaded Great Britain after the fall of France by a combined air and sea assault. Manstein had the only attack on Hitler that Hitler could not answer, that Hitler was ineffective in his military crusade.

In the book, Manstein gives a dramatic portrayal of the German soldier. The German soldier was superior to the Russian or Soviet soldier not necessarily because the German had better weapons. The German army was superior because of the fact that even non-commissioned officers had enough grasp of military strategy to improvise an



immediate defense or attack strategy. Manstein called Hitler cautious in his military strategy because Hitler did not have much confidence in the German General Staff or traditions of German individual military initiative. Thus, Hitler only saw German armies in retreat after Stalingrad, while Manstein saw retreat with the ability to create a situation where German armed forces could counterattack. Manstein's tone is very combative in favor of German military tradition and against Hitler's obsession with seizing economic targets.

Structure

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1, the campaign in Poland, Part II, the campaign in the West and Part III, the war in the East. The section on the war in the East takes up 375 pages of the 550 page book. Although shorter, the first two sections set the stage for the war against the Soviet Union. The book is divided into 15 unequal chapters, as short as 7 pages or as long as 100 pages. The book has a structure which builds where Manstein first showed the flaws in Hitler's thinking in the successful campaigns in Poland and the West, in that Hitler failed to have a functioning O.K.H., Armed Forces Staff.

The high point of the war was Chapter 9 for Manstein, the Crimean campaign, where he was able to fight the way he wanted and to be victorious. After this, Manstein saw the confusion of Hitler's planning, first at Leningrad-Vitebsk (Chapter 10) and later in the crushing of the Sixth army at Stalingrad in Chapter 12. Chapter 13 is a short description of the aborted Operation Citadel offensive. The last two chapters take up over one-third of the book and describe Manstein's long disagreements with Hitler and efforts to fight the war in the way he wished. The battles on the southern sector are described in depth, and Manstein recounts his longstanding objections to Hitler's policy of trying to hold onto all territories in the face of a more powerful enemy. Manstein prevented the encirclement of the First Panzer Army in his last dispute with Hitler, but was then soon after fired from his position.



Quotes

"The British guarantee was certainly the only real obstacle to his designs, but it was nevertheless a pretty weighty one!" (Before the Storm, Ch. 1, pg. 29.)

"One was the tearing open of the enemy's front by tank formations which penetrated deep into his rear areas and with which, incidentally, our infantry divisions were hard pressed to keep up" (The Campaign in Poland, Ch. 3, pg. 54.)

"In actual fact, however, the General Staff was eliminated for all practical purposes- even if this was not yet formally the case- in the weeks following the Polish campaign" (The Eclipse of the O.K.H., Ch. 4, pg. 71..)

"The utter debacle suffered by the enemy in northern Belgium was almost certainly due to the fact that, as a result of the changes later made in the operations plan, the tank units of Army Group A were able to cut straight through his lines of communication and push him away from the Somme" (The Operation Plan Controversy, Ch. 5, pg. 102.)

"The real chance lay with Army Group A, and consisted in launching a surprise attack through the Ardennes- where the enemy would certainly not be expecting any armour because of the terrain- towards the lower Somme in order to cut off the enemy forces thrown into Belgium forward of that river" (The Operation Plan Controversy, Ch. 5, pg. 104.)

"The conclusion I drew from the above- and several times submitted to General v. Kluge, the commander of Fourth Army, of which we now formed part- was that we should use both mechanized divisions (or else both infantry divisions due to replace them) to carry out a surprise river-crossing between the two bridgeheads and deliver flanking attacks against the enemy forces assaulting them" (Commanding General, 38 Army Corps, Ch. 6, pg. 132.)

"The most blatant indication of Hitler's attitude was the way he raised Goring over the heads of the army and navy Commanders-in-Chief by appointing him Reich Marshal and making him the sole recipient of the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross " (Between Two Campaigns, Ch. 7. pg. 150.)

"O.K.H., on the other hand, rightly contended that the conquest and retention of these undoubtedly important strategic areas depended on first defeating the Red Army" (Panzer Drive, Ch. 8, pg. 177.)

"While this was certainly the 'safe,' staff-college solution, we had had other ideas. As we saw it, our sudden appearance so far behind the front must have caused considerable confusion among the enemy" (Panzer Drive, Ch. 8, pg. 185.)

"What was undoubtedly a mistake, however, was the Supreme Command's decision, after Sevastopol's timely fall, to withdraw Eleventh Army from the southern wing of the



Eastern Front for use at Leningrad and for patching up gaps in the line" (The Crimean Campaign, Ch. 9, pg. 239.)

"On the afternoon of 4th September I received a telephone call from Hitler in person. he told me it was essential that I intervene on the Volkhov front to prevent a disaster there; I was to assume command myself and restore the situation by offensive action. At very day the enemy had effected a deep breakthrough over a wide stretch of Eighteenth Army's slender front south of Lake Ladoga" (Leningrad-Vitebsk, Ch. 10, pg 264.)

"The same man who, after his successes in politics up to 1938, had become a political gambler, actually recoiled from risks in the military field" (Hitler as Supreme Commander, Ch. 11, pg. 277.)

"The other side of the task- and this had to be borne in mind throughout- was the already existing danger that the entire southern wing of the German armies would be destroyed" (The Tragedy of Stalingrad, Ch. 12, pg. 311.)

"The moment for which we had longed since the take-over, when the approach of relief forces would offer Sixth Army its chance to break free, had arrived" (The Tragedy of Stalingrad, Ch. 12, pg. 33.)

"Momentous and distressing though the Stalingrad disaster undoubtedly was, it could not, in terms of World War II, effect such a blow on its own, whereas the annihilation of the German armies' entire southern wing might well have paved the way to an early victory over Germany" (The Winter Campaign in South Russia, Ch. 13, pg. 368.)

"Yet should the enemy succeed in encircling First Panzer Army as it wheeled back into its new position, there could be no further point even in holding Rostov, and the three German armies south of the Don would be doomed" (The Winter Campaign in South Russia, Ch. 13, pg. 387.)

"Once again it was seen that the western conception of impassability had only limited validity where the Russians are concerned- partly, of course, because the wider tracks of Soviet armoured vehicles made it considerably easier for them to negotiate the mud or deep snow which held up our own tanks" (The Winter Campaign in South Russia, Ch. 13, pg. 417.)

"With such far-reaching objectives involved, there was admittedly a danger that the Russians would later be attacked in the flank themselves, but they should have expected to derive the necessary protection here from the offensive due to be launched on the Hungarian front immediately afterward. Risky, I agree" (The Winter Campaign in South Russia, Ch. 13, pg. 440.)

"I drew particular attention to the fact that for a casualty total of 133,000 men there had been only 33,000 replacements" (The Defensive Battles of 1943-4, Ch. 15, pg. 459.)

"Hitler retorted that there were both military and political reasons why we must achieve the success now offered to us in the area of the Lower Dnieper. For one thing, the army



must be made conscious that it was still capable of striking successful blows" (The Defensive Battles of 1943-4, Ch. 15, pg. 487.)

Naturally, the bulk of the guns and heavy weapons had stuck fast in the mud on the way out, only a small number being extricated as a result of the almost superhuman efforts of the troops.

p. 517, Chap. 15, The Defensive Battles of 1943-4

When I appeared at the evening conference Hitler's mood had completely changed. His opening words were approximately these: ' I have been thinking the matter over again and agree with your plan to make First Panzer Army fight its way through to the west.

p.542, Chap. 15, The Defensive Battles of 1943-4



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the Manstein plan. What made the Manstein plan of invading France through the Ardennes region so brilliant, as a surprise attack on the Western front?

Discuss Operation Sea Lion. Do Manstein's objections to the canceling of Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Great Britain, make sense? What caused Hitler to cancel Operation Sea Lion?

Why did Manstein so vehemently object to the downgrading by Hitler of the role of the O.K.H.? Would a functioning O.K.H. and O.K.W. have helped the Germans to do better in their attacks on Great Britain and later the Soviet Union?

Discuss Manstein's morality. Early in the book, Manstein admits that generally the leading German generals feared starting a new world war. Yet, Manstein and his colleagues then pursued and tried to win this war. What values and loyalties determined Manstein's actions?

Discuss the attempt of July 20th, 1944 against Hitler. Although this occurred after Manstein's retirement, he was well aware of organizing within the army against Hitler. What was Manstein's reason for not joining the conspiracy against Hitler?

Manstein and Hitler engaged in long, ongoing arguments after Manstein was appointed leader of Army Group South. What are Manstein's main objections to Hitler's military policies? What did Manstein think he could achieve by these objections?

Manstein criticized Hitler as too cautious in military matters. What did Manstein mean by this? Could a more daring military policy on the Eastern Front have led to victory against the Soviets or at least a stalemate?

Discuss Manstein's pride in his achievements. Manstein titled his book, *Lost Victories*. He won many victories, such as in the Crimea, but still Germany lost the war. Did Manstein think he could have been the Commander-in-Chief and won the war?