

2018

A Skillful Combination of Fire and Maneuver

Paul Dority
Wright State University

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A SKILLFUL COMBINATION OF FIRE AND MANEUVER.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

By

Paul Dority
B.A., Bowling Green State University, 2014

2018
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

April 4, 2018

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Paul Dority ENTITLED A Skillful Combination of Fire and Maneuver BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Paul D. Lockhart, Ph.D.

Thesis Director

Jonathan R. Winkler, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of History

Committee on Final Examination

Paul D. Lockhart, Ph.D.

Jonathan R. Winkler, Ph.D.

Sean M. Pollock, Ph.D.

Barry Milligan, Ph.D.

Interim Dean of the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

Dority, Paul. M.A. Department of History, Wright State University, 2018. A Skillful Combination of Fire and Maneuver.

My thesis seeks to understand if the Wehrmacht understood the Red Army's operational doctrine following the war. I will analyze both Red Army and Wehrmacht after action reports and memoirs created after the war to accomplish this. This analysis covers the Battle for Moscow, the Battle of Stalingrad, Operation *Zitadelle*, and ends with the destruction of the Wehrmacht's Army Group Center in Operation *Bagration*. This period represents the marked rise and decline of the Wehrmacht's martial supremacy in Russia. The comparison of Russian and German after action reports from this period exposes a weakness in German operational doctrine, which ultimately destroys the Wehrmacht in the East. The Wehrmacht excelled in the tactical layer of strategy, but failed to exploit its tactical victories at the operational level. The Wehrmacht's obsession with victory through tactical supremacy caused them to create patterns of doctrinal behavior that the Red Army exploited time and time again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS		Page
Introduction		1
I. The Battle for Moscow		28
II. Case Blue-Uranus		44
III. Kursk-Bagratiun		65
Conclusion		85
Bibliography		91

Introduction

The Eastern Front of the Second World War has fascinated many scholars, soldiers, and lovers of military history. It was in the forests, swamps, and steppes of Russia that the Wehrmacht, one of the most feared fighting machines in human history, was defeated. On a front line that stretched from the Caucasus Mountains to the Arctic Circle, two massive armies clashed, leaving millions of their dead strewn across the landscape along with the burnt-out husks of cities as a testament to the nature of the fighting. The key to success on this front was an understanding of how to exploit tactical victories to fit a larger strategic picture. Following the war, surviving members of former the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS general staff recorded their own experiences in Russia for Western intelligence, as the Red Army had done for its own intelligence agencies during the war. The German report series would be the basis for Western historiography on the war in the East until the end of the Cold War and help to form NATO's doctrine for a land war with the USSR. How well though, did the Germans understand the Eastern Front? The reports show that the Germans certainly understood the Eastern Front at the tactical level. The operational level is a different story.

On the Eastern Front the tactical victories were useless without strategic exploitation, the Red Army understood this, having learned from the failures of 1941 and

perfecting their strategy to better suit the realities of this new type of war. The Red Army concentrated their efforts on perfecting Deep battle theory: a theory was created in the spirit of the new Soviet society. It melded technology and the unconquerable will of the people into one unified force that would change the battlefield as the Soviets had changed their society.¹ Deep battle theory was created by Red Army military theorists during the 1920s. Red Army theorists like Mikhail Tukhachevsky and Georgi Isserson developed a theory that could restore mobility to a static battlefield.² The doctrine focused on the exploitation of multiple breakthroughs by mechanized divisions and close air support. These thrusts acted as a neurotoxin, paralyzing the body of an enemy army as the infantry then attacked the separate organs. This approach focused on linking multiple offensives into an operation capable of negating the effect of World War One defensive doctrines. The Red Army's battle theory also transformed the tank from a tactical asset to an operational one.

At the end of the First World War, the tank was considered to be just another element to help soldiers cross no man's land. The Red Army theorist V.K. Triandafillov saw it as something more, he saw it as a key to operational success.³ The goal of armor, in Triandafillov's opinion, was not to just break through, but also deny the enemy a frontline to shuttle troops up to. If the tanks could move fast enough, they could help mechanized assets set up a new front line before the enemy could respond. Theorists like Triandafillov found their answer to the new realities brought to the battlefield by studying

¹ Fredrick W. Kagan, "The Rise and Fall of Soviet Operational Art, 1917-1941", in *The Military History of the Soviet Union*, ed. Robin Higham and Frederick W. Kagan (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) Kindle Edition, 1582.

² *Ibid.*, 991-1214.

³ *Ibid.*, 1582.

the conduct of Western armies in World War One. These theorists believed that the deep battle theory would be the solution to the threat posed by Western armies, as they had studied the flaws of Western European warfare.⁴ By studying the flaws in Western European campaigns during World War One, the Red Army's theorists deduced that all theory had to be designed for the operational level. Tactics mattered little with the new dawn for the new face of warfare that the First World War introduced to the world. The tactical breakthrough was important, but if it could not be exploited at the operational level, no strategic victories would follow.

The Wehrmacht failed to understand this, as they had advanced into western Russia with a doctrine designed to annihilate western European forces operating on shorter frontage than the Red Army operated on. Another failure of German strategic planners lay in their initial underestimation of the Red Army as a fighting force. The German OKW and OKH (*Oberkommando des Wehrmacht* and *Oberkommando des Heeres* – The General Staff of the Wehrmacht and the Nazi equivalent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) made very optimistic assessments about a campaign to conquer the Soviet Union. From their perspective, the Red Army was an untested army composed of sub-humans incapable of matching German men and material on the battlefield.

The Wehrmacht laid their plans for Operation Barbarossa as they had for Poland, the Low Countries, and France. A central spearhead with supporting thrusts in the north and the south of the Soviet Union would stun the Red Army with an overwhelming initial assault, liquidating the Red Army and then capturing Moscow. This formula for success

⁴ Kagan, 1631-1692.

had worked before, delivering Western Europe and Poland to the Third Reich in a matter of months. This battle doctrine, developed for combat in Western Europe, ultimately failed the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union.

The goal of my study is to compare after action reports filed by Wehrmacht and Red Army generals to understand of just how well the Wehrmacht understood their own defeat. The reports were created for Western intelligence services serve two purposes. The first purpose was to provide an account of the war from the German side for historical sections of Western armies. The second purpose was to provide western armies with an accurate assessment of how the Red Army fought in the event of war between NATO and the Red Army. This project was the brainchild of Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall and members of the Army Intelligence corps.⁵ The project sought to use the experiences of German commanders as a means to better understand the Second World War on both Eastern and Western Fronts.

General Erhard Raus's accounts of the war are of particular interest because on the surface, they reflect none of the "apple polishing" that one sees in memoirs of other German generals. Upon further reading, it becomes apparent that his focus on the tactical layer seeks to obscure what actually happened in the East. Raus wrote each of his experiences as a lesson: he presented examples of operations designed to deal with the realities a conventional Western army would face if they went toe to toe with the Red Army. His experiences suggest that he understood the Red Army to be a very capable and adaptable foe from the early days of the War in the East. The themes addressed in the

⁵ Erhard Raus and Oldwig von Natzmer, *The Anvil of War: German Generalship in Defense of the Eastern Front During World War II*, ed. Peter Tsouras (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 15-16.

bulk of his work stress the importance of commanders who operate with a high degree of independence on the battlefield.

Raus himself was promoted from the command of a division to the command of an army through the war for his ability to improvise and adapt to changing situations. He stresses the importance of individual initiative on the part of commanders many times in *The Anvil of War* and *Panzers on the Eastern Front*. *The Anvil of War* in particular focuses on the art of improvisation, mobile defensive doctrine, and a flexibility of command required deal with a mobile enemy who had the strategic initiative. Raus understood that to fight the Red Army was to fight an enemy that would most likely outnumber you and outmaneuver you.

In order to deal with the Red Army a smaller fighting force needed to be able to launch “spoiling attacks” and be able to mount a fluid defense. Raus’s lessons on the nature of encirclements also address issues that have their roots in the Wehrmacht’s strategic doctrine. In his essays covering the relief of encirclements he reminds the reader multiple times that orders to “not give an inch” of ground to the enemy are a death sentence for trapped divisions. Orders like these could paralyzed division and corps commanders alike, making more problems at the strategic command level for commanders trying to conserve their forces. As a result of vague orders that demanded ground be held at all costs, commanders had to mount risky operations to save friendly forces in positions that could have been avoided by a general retreat.

Raus’s work stands in stark contrast to the bitter tone of General Erich von Manstein and General Heinz Guderian’s memoirs. Both of these commanders benefitted greatly from their memoirs and contributions to S.L.A. Marshall’s project. Their memoirs

cleared them of wrong doing, erased their mistakes and distanced them from the Nazi Party. Out of all the generals that fought on the Eastern Front it is perhaps Guderian and von Manstein who stand tallest in the Cold War historiography of the Eastern Front. Manstein served as a division, corps, and army group commander. Guderian went from commanding panzer divisions in Army Group Center to serving as the Wehrmacht's Inspector General of Armored Troops. He would also serve as the Chief of the General Staff in the later part of the war.

Guderian's experience is unique because he served in so many different roles within the German war machine. While he was the Inspector General of Armored Troops he witnessed a fatal shift in German tank doctrine that he could not rectify. This shift from medium mobile armor to heavy armor developed with no consideration for established doctrine, creating armor that could hold its own tactically but further limited the Wehrmacht's operational doctrine. While he was the Chief of General Staff he witnessed effects of the Red Army's Operation *Bagration* and wrote about how the situation could have been avoided. He also gave valuable insight into how the relationship between Nazi ideologues and the strategic planners within the Wehrmacht lost the strategic war in the East for Nazi Germany.

General Erich von Manstein's memoir *Lost Victories* covers Manstein's career from Poland to March 1944. Manstein, as mentioned before, is one of the great titans that strides across the historiography of the Eastern Front. His exploits as a commander are legendary: it was Manstein who led the charge across Southern Russia, Manstein who was picked to spearhead the German Operation *Wintergewitter* to save Stalingrad, Manstein who, up to Stalingrad, had never lost a battle. At Kursk he has the lone voice in

the wilderness who suggested the famous “back-hand blow” as opposed to the textbook concentric attack that failed collapse the Kursk salient.

Manstein was also the only commander retired by Hitler with a degree of decorum, as opposed to the way Guderian had been dismissed. This may account for the apolitical tone Manstein immediately strikes in his preface to *Lost Victories*: “this book is the personal narrative of a *soldier*, in which I have deliberately refrained from discussing political problems or matters with no direct bearing on events in the military field.”⁶

This first sentence does two things for Manstein: first, it distances him from the atrocities committed by the Third Reich – hence the “political problems or matters with no direct bearing on events in the military field”. Secondly, Manstein’s declaration allows him to slough off blame for any of his own shortcomings as a commander. Instead he shifts blame on the decisions made by the Nazi political elite. Manstein’s narrative about the War in the East mirrors his narrative of the campaigns in Poland and France: he focuses on the campaigns as a series of linked set-piece battles, with only a scant sketch of the larger strategic situation.

Manstein’s assessment of the Red Army as a fighting force focuses on the Red Army’s numerical superiority and the shortness of the Soviet supply lines, which allowed for greater operational mobility. He was unimpressed by the Red Army’s ability to conduct itself on the battlefield. The defeats suffered by the Wehrmacht were, in his own opinion, due to the Wehrmacht’s own shortsighted approach to waging war in Russia. According to Manstein, the Red Army simply capitalized, as any other army would, on

⁶ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler’s Most Brilliant General*, trans. Anthony G. Powell (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2014) Kindle Edition, 227.

the gross strategic missteps of the Wehrmacht. Manstein gives the Red Army little to no credit for adapting their strategy for dealing with the Wehrmacht or any credit for initiative shown by Red Army commanders.

The memoirs of German generals are as important to this study as the German after-action reports. Both Guderian and Manstein provide the link between tactics and strategy that defined the Eastern Front, as both operated as division commanders and later as generals who took part in making broader decisions at a higher strategic level. Coupled with the German after-action reports, these memoirs give a complete analysis of how the Wehrmacht conducted itself at the operational level of strategy. There are problems with these reports though, especially with the dual purpose they were written for.

According to Alaric Searle's book *Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959*, difficulties with re-integration back into German society motivated the generals to whitewash their reports and memoirs. The atmosphere in West Germany after the war was (understandably) hostile to these generals. After all, they were responsible for the country being divided by the victors of World War Two. They were the ones responsible, in the eyes of the German public, for dead husbands, mothers, sisters, and fathers. Their time working with the Allied intelligence services after the war allowed them to recast themselves in a light that portrayed them as "the good German". They portrayed themselves as being unaffiliated with the Nazi party, fighting only to defend the German people.⁷ By ingratiating

⁷ Alaric Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West German society and the debate on re-armament, 1949-1959* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 191.

themselves with the Allies, the German generals found a way to clean their record and secure employment with the British, American, or Bonn government after the war.

The Red Army published their own set of reports internally that served the same purpose for the USSR as the postwar reports published by the Germany military. The goal of these reports was to capture the process by which Deep Battle theory was perfected, so future doctrinal development would have a foundation to grow from. These reports covered every operation from the battle of Moscow through the fall of Berlin. They were created as the war was still raging, serving as tools to refine operational doctrine. The reports recorded exactly what was needed to realize the potential of Deep Battle theory in the field. The Red Army compiled these reports following each operation to refine their deep battle doctrine and establish an understanding of the Wehrmacht's battle doctrine. Lt. Gen. Ye. A. Shilovskii, like Franz Halder, was responsible for organizing this massive project. Under the direction of Field Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov, he worked with a rotating team of thirty-six generals and NCOs who submitted reports to him, detailing the lessons learned in each operation they took part in.

While these reports both share a similar purpose with the German reports in analyzing the war in Russia, there are definite differences in what they focus on as key elements to success on the Eastern Front. To start with the most basic of differences, the Red Army reports are not necessarily attributed to any one author: the Wehrmacht's reports are attributed to one or two authors per subject. Large portions of the Red Army reports are dedicated to charts that detail everything from the strength of Soviet and German forces around Moscow in early December to the amount of material captured following each operation. The Germans included no such charts in their own reports. The

Germans did give a complete breakdown though of how the subzero temperatures effected equipment and a valuable analysis of how the weather in Russia had to be worked *around* and not *against*.⁸ The Red Army instead focused on timetables for assaults and what goals were assigned to each division involved in the operations covered in their reports.

The Red Army reports broke down their operations into a set of smaller battles and then link them together into greater operations. The recorded experiences of the Wehrmacht on the other hand, provided a sketch of the operation and then analyzed single battles within the operation. This is one of the most important differences to understand between the Wehrmacht and Red Army's analysis of fighting on the Eastern Front. The Red Army sources stress that the key to success on the Eastern Front was a first an operational strategy with clear goals. While tactics were still important, tactics without a proper strategy wasted manpower and material. The Wehrmacht reversed this train of thought. They focused on the role of battle tactics informing the larger strategy.

The early postwar historiography of the War in the East consisted of loosely linked monographs on specific battles deemed to be "decisive" by Western historians. The Cold War grand narrative of the Eastern Front relied heavily on the German after-action report series and memoirs of German generals for primary sources. These sources, unsurprisingly, were biased against the Red Army. They portrayed the Wehrmacht in the best light possible – the Wehrmacht's wartime atrocities were swept under the rug, select

⁸ Waldemar Erfurth, Hans von Greiffenburg, and Erhard Rauss, *Fighting in Hell: The German Ordeal on the Eastern Front*, ed. Peter Tsouras (New York: Presidio Press, 1995), 16-19.

generals were enshrined and the blame for the loss of the war was placed squarely on the shoulders of the Nazi ruling elite.

Soviet source material that gave insight into the operational strategy employed by the Red Army to win the war was largely nonexistent in the West. Red Army primary sources that were available, like Georgi Zhukov's book, *Marshal Zhukov's Greatest Battles* had been heavily edited by Soviet censors before they were published. The Soviet after-action reports that would fill the gaps in the Western historiography of the Eastern Front were still locked away in the Soviet archives. To the Soviets, the after action reports were national treasures, their hard-won formula for victory developed in the laboratory of war. As a result, the historiography of the Eastern Front in the West had a very bare strategic layer and a very detailed tactical layer.

An early attempt at capturing the Eastern Front in its entirety was Paul Carell's *Hitler Moves East* and the sequel *Scorched Earth*. These books emphasized the German focus on the tactical layer. Both *Hitler Moves East* and *Scorched Earth* focused on the tactical side of the Eastern Front. Carell focused on the large-scale battles on the Eastern Front because, from a Western perspective, strategic victory was still defined by the "great decisive battle". In his narrative, the Wehrmacht ultimately failed in Russia because the Soviets could simply bring more force to bear in these decisive battles. The Red Army's response through the war, as Carell wrote, was to hurl more men and resources at the problem until the problem disappeared. For the Wehrmacht's operations at the operational level, Carell blamed Hitler for almost all of the Wehrmacht's failures on the Eastern Front.

Carell's narrative also glossed over the German war crimes in the East. Through both books, there is little to be found regarding mass executions, the treatment of captured Russian troops, or the treatment of civilians in Nazi occupied Russia. Carell, like so many other historians during the Cold War, saw the German generals as tragic figures: dutiful commanders forced to sacrifice their men at the whim of the Nazi Party. This German whitewashing of history came about through the German general's writing in the after-action reports and their memoirs. They covered up the war-crimes, covered up their decisions that got their own men killed and emphasized the brutality of the Red Army in combat. The German generals painted themselves as being outside of the Nazi Regime, part of the old army that still believed in fighting a gentleman's war. Despite the mountains of evidence that suggested otherwise.

In the late sixties and early seventies, there was a push to try and include the Red Army's perspective in the historiography of the Eastern Front. The first notable publication that attempted to make sense of the Red Army's operational strategy was Alexander Worth's *Russia at War, 1941-1945*. This book employed many Soviet sources that had trickled over from the USSR in the sixties. Authors like Geoffery Jukes (*Stalingrad: The Turning Point* and *Kursk: The Clash of Armor*) and William Craig (*Enemy at the Gates*) wrote in-depth studies of specific decisive battles that captured them from both sides. Craig addressed the human face of the Red Army at Stalingrad, while Jukes wrote monographic studies of Kursk, Stalingrad and many other operations. These added to the growing historiography of the Eastern Front, but still failed to connect the battles into a larger picture.

Alan Clark in his book, *Barbarossa: The Russo-German Conflict 1941-1945*, was among the first to identify the Wehrmacht as part of the Nazi regime, and therefore the supposedly untouchable German generals were as well. This was the first time that the myth of the “Good German” came under serious scrutiny in the historiography of the Eastern Front. The generals’ attempts to distance themselves from the Third Reich served two purposes: it cleared their record of atrocities committed under their command, and shifted the burden of blame for the loss of the war onto Nazi politicians.

Barbarossa’s assessment of the German general staff in the East was more critical than the works before it. Clark was one of the first authors to address how political infighting within the Wehrmacht derailed operations in Russia. *Barbarossa* stripped away the heroic image of German generals as the last Teutonic knights caught in a desperate struggle, instead depicting the generals as they were: short-sighted, hubristic, and unwilling to compromise with one another. His book blamed the infighting between German generals as a major cause for the failure of the Wehrmacht in the East. If it had not been for political squabbling before the gates of Moscow, or before the battle of Kursk, the war in the East may have been different. He was among the first historians to address atrocities in which the Wehrmacht took part in while they were in Russia. Clark provided as balanced an account of operations in the East as he could without the primary documents that became available with the fall of the Soviet Union. Clark was also one of the first to describe the atrocities visited upon Red Army POWs by the Wehrmacht.

Clark’s history of the Eastern Front goes into great detail describing the Wehrmacht’s prisoner of war camps, painting a gruesome picture of German flamethrowers turning captured Russian soldiers trapped in cages into living torches. The

numbers carved on rifle stocks and recorded by German prisoner of war camps all together account for at least 3,289,000 Red Army soldiers killed in captivity.⁹

The ideology that allowed for atrocities like this to happen was reflected in the German report series: a chilling reminder of just what kind of war was being fought in the East. German commanders in Russia had a difficult time reconciling themselves with exactly *who* they were fighting. The Nazi party said that the average Russian was an underfed sub-human driven forward into battle like livestock until the enemy had run out of ammunition. This myth was founded, in part, by the common perception of Russian military performance in the 1939 Russo-Finnish War, in which Red Army proved itself unable to crush the small, underequipped Finnish Army. This combination of ideology and real-world evidence contributed heavily to Nazi belief that an invasion of the Soviet Union would be a cake-walk.

General Erhard Raus, in his essay “The Russian Soldier and the Russian Conduct of Battle: The Peculiarities of the Russian Soldier”, captures the contradictory attitude of the German generals towards the Red Army. In this essay, Raus contradicted himself on the nature of the Russian soldier and the Red Army’s way of waging war, “The characteristics of this semi-Asiatic, like those of his vast country, are strange and contradictory...the key to this odd behavior can be found in the native character of the Russian soldier who, as a fighter possesses neither judgement nor the ability to think independently”¹⁰

⁹ Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Nazi-Soviet Conflict 1941-1945* (New York: Perennial, 1965), 205-207.

¹⁰ Erfurth, Greiffenburg, and Raus, 16-19.

Raus's initial assessment of the Russian soldier starts out with that line, a line that reflects the Nazi racial ideologies. This ideology classified the Russian people as subhuman herd animals, and at the same time Mongol hordes hell-bent on subjugating Europe. Raus and his fellow generals discovered that the Red Army of 1941 was a much different beast than they had anticipated. Raus writes later in his essay admiring the commanders of the Red Army saying that, "The higher echelons of Russian command proved capable from the very beginning of the war and learned a great deal more during its course. They were flexible, full of initiative, and energetic."¹¹

From statements like these one can see how early historians of the conflict struggled to understand the Red Army's approach to warfare. On the one hand, the Red Army consisted of soldiers that were unmotivated and lacked the ability to operate independently, on the other hand, Red Army commanders displayed a flair for command that was admired by Wehrmacht generals. Earl F. Ziemke, as a Cold War historian, did an admirable job addressing the nature of the Red Army.

Ziemke's *Moscow to Stalingrad* and *Stalingrad to Berlin*, both early operational narratives in the same vein as Clark's *Barbarossa*, presented another attempt at a balanced account of Red Army and Wehrmacht operations on the Eastern Front. Ziemke approached the war in the East from the strategic level: he presented a war where the decisive battles developed as part of a larger operation. His narrative also emphasized how important the concept of a fluid defense was to the Wehrmacht for getting the most out of their limited manpower and material. The Red Army commanders were also

¹¹ Erfurth, Greiffenburg, and Raus, 22.

fleshed out more, Ziemke also did a good amount of work on the net effect of partisan operations on the Eastern Front. Previously, the partisan war was studied in a vacuum – much like the battles on the frontline. Ziemke showed what the net effect of the partisan movements were and just how they helped to hobble the Wehrmacht.

The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the historiography of the Eastern Front during the Second World War. With the end of the Cold War, archives in the German Democratic Republic yielded Nazi documents that had been thought to have been lost at the end of the Second World War.¹² These documents covered subjects ranging from the German war economy to recorded Wehrmacht orders of battle from the later portions of the war. New information was also available through Soviet archives, this added further depth to the Soviet experience in World War II. Historians writing about the Eastern Front no longer had to rely on postwar reports and memoirs written by members of the Wehrmacht. The influx of documents shifted the focus on the war in the East from the tactical to the layer of operational strategy.

The Great Patriotic War: The Maturation of Soviet Operation Art 1941-1945 by David Glantz gives a thorough account of the development of deep battle theory from 1941-1945. This book and Glantz's *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army stopped Hitler*, provide excellent insight into how deep operations changed the shape of the war. These analyses also remove much of the mystery surrounding the movements and fighting style of the Red Army. Both books define the strategic aims of deep battle

¹² David M. Glantz, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2015), 1-2.

theory, how the Red Army was tailored to fit this way of war, and in doing so it gives agency to the Red Army.

Evan Mawdsley's book *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941-1945*, like Glantz's *When Titans Clashed*, seeks to address biases that have defined the historiography of the Eastern Front. Mawdsley's approach to the conflict removes the focus on personalities for the most part. His narrative is focused on the structures that were made up of these individuals. *Thunder in the East* largely focuses on the war fought by the Red Army – as opposed to the bulk of scholarship that focuses on the experience of the Wehrmacht. Mawdsley re-assesses operations in every sector of the Eastern Front: covering fighting in the Arctic Circle to the fighting in the Caucasus Mountains. His re-assessment of the Eastern Front also incorporates notes on the Soviet war economy as compared to the German war economy.

As far as operational studies go, David Glantz provides the necessary background to Operation *Uranus* with *After Stalingrad: The Red Army's Winter Offensive 1941-1943*. His book, *Soviet Defensive Tactics at Kursk: July 1943*, fleshes out the Soviet side of Operation *Zitadelle*. Both books are excellent analyses of the development of Soviet operational strategies in two of the most crucial periods of 1942-1943. Glantz's *Soviet Defensive Tactics at Kursk: July 1943* has a tighter focus on the events specifically surrounding the build up to the Battle of Kursk. *After Stalingrad: The Red Army's Winter Offensive 1941-1943* on the other hand, covers both Operations *Mars* and *Uranus*.

David Glantz's *After Stalingrad: The Red Army's Winter Offensive 1941-1943*, *The Great Patriotic War: The Maturation of Soviet Operational Art 1941-1945*, and *Soviet Defensive Tactics at Kursk: July 1943* are excellent examples of the type of work

that came out of Western publishing houses following the Cold War. Glantz's *After Stalingrad: The Red Army's Winter Offensive 1941-1943* is among the first narratives in the west to study the failure of Operation *Mars*, a failed operation that shaped the Red Army's approach to deep battle theory.

This shift in scope, from the tactical to operational level, casts a new light on the Red Army and the Wehrmacht. Now, with new Russian primary source material available, the Red Army is no longer this unpredictable force of nature. The operational alibis for the failure of the Wehrmacht in Russia, which have been largely discounted from contemporary historiography. Col. Mikhail Fedorov's *The Red Army: An Army of the People*, is a modern assessment of the Red Army as a military machine. Fedorov's book presents an overview of the Red Army to Western readers, from its development in the thirties to the days of the Cold War.

This assessment also analyzes the type of culture required to create the Red Army. Fedorov reminds Western readers that to the rank and file Red Army soldier this war was much like a holy war. The West had finally revealed its hand, threatening the new culture of the Soviet Union and promising enslavement under capitalism. It was up to the Homo Sovieticus to defend the sacred homeland and the Russian people from the capitalist scourge of the west.

Another book that makes an even deeper assessment of the Red Army is David R. Stone's *The Soviet Union at War 1941-1945*. The essays in this book address everything, from the Soviet war economy, Soviet propaganda, the structure of the Red Army, to the role of women in the Red Army. His essay on the Red Army is particularly interesting as he examines how racial and ideological biases shaped the Cold War historiography of the

Eastern Front. He also addresses the relationship between Stalin and his general staff, showing that as the war progressed Stalin allowed for greater command autonomy. This allowed for the Red Army to execute operations with greater operational mobility. The greater operational mobility and the trust between Stalin and his commanders is what won the war for the Red Army.

Stephen G. Fritz's article, "'We are trying...to change the face of the world' - Ideology and Motivation in the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front: The View from Below," published in *The Journal of Military History* provides important insights into the mindset of men who fought in Russia. Fritz's work takes an approach to examining the Wehrmacht that is similar to both Fedorov and Stone's work on the Red Army. His essay seeks to understand the ideological motivations driving the Wehrmacht into Russia. Both analyses create a certain context for the Eastern Front of the Second World War that separates it from the Second World War as a whole.

The reassessment of the Red Army as a fighting machine has also been aided by new scholarship of the Eastern Front by Russian academics as well. Svetlana Gerasimova's *The Rzhev Slaughterhouse: The Red Army's Forgotten 15 Month Campaign against Army Group Center, 1942-1943*, covers a period largely ignored by the historiography of the Red Army's experience in World War II. Gerasimova's book is an extensive examination of Operation *Mars*, adding to the current historiography of this theater a much needed assessment of an operation that often gets lumped into the battles around Stalingrad. Her assessment of the operations in the Rzhev-Viaz'ma area benefits much from David Glantz's previous work on the Red Army's winter operations from

1942-1943. Gerasimova expands on Glantz's narrative by treating the 15 month campaign around Rzhev as being just as important as the battle for Moscow.

Valery Zamulin's book, *Demolishing the Myth: The Tank Battle of Prokhorovka, Kursk, July 1943: An Operational Narrative* is another Russian narrative written after the fall of the USSR that reassesses the maturation of deep battle theory. Zamulin focuses on the battle of Kursk, specifically focusing on the tank battle around Prokhorovka, a battle that results directly from Operation *Kutuzov*. His overall goal is to provide a fresh analysis of the battle of Kursk and to reevaluate the importance of the battle at Prokhorovka. His book focuses on correcting the Soviet portrayal of the battle at Prokhorovka, which has been interpreted by the Soviets as a crushing tactical victory. The battle itself, as Zamulin writes, was a blood bath for both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. His analysis that of the battle points out that the Red Army still struggled at the tactical level at this point in the war; his argument is that the Red Army's treatment of this battle is largely a cover up for tactical oversights.

From books like Zamulin's *Demolishing the Myth: The Tank Battle of Prokhorovka, Kursk, July 1943* another important part of the Eastern Front's historiography comes into consideration. The role of armor is an incredibly important part of operations on the Eastern Front. It is the tank that gives the Eastern Front its fluidity, making possible the German's swift advances and forming the backbone of the Red Army's deep battle theory. Cold War Western historiography of the Eastern Front lionized German armor as it lionized the generals who commanded panzer divisions.

Both German tanks and their commanders are depicted as dashing cavalymen. For the Red Army, the historiographical treatment of their armor is different. Russian

armor is depicted as fearsome, driven with little skill, and employed en masse to steamroll defenses. As with the operational history of the Eastern Front following the fall of the Soviet Union, perceptions on the role of armor changed as well.

Robert Forczyk wrote two books on this subject, *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front 1941-1942: Schwerpunkt* and *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front 1943-1945: Red Steamroller*. Both titles examine the operational performance of armor on the Eastern Front and the way that armored production, development, and the application of armor to operations defined the doctrines of both armies. The Red Army, for the duration of the war, relied on the T-34 as their jack-of-all-trades medium tank. While this tank certainly had its flaws, but it was designed *for* deep battle theory. The T-34 proved to be an incredibly effective weapon system when used in spearheads that allowed for it to make use of its durability and maneuverability.¹³ Throughout the war the tank was modified many times to fit different combat roles for the Red Army. As a result, the Red Army did not have to change their production lines to create an entirely new tank.¹⁴

The Wehrmacht on the other hand, struggled with this concept: the panzers that served in the initial invasion of Russia were obsolete compared to early models of the T-34. To counter the range and durability of the T-34, the Panzer IV was outfitted with a long 75mm KwK 40 L/43 gun.¹⁵ The Panzer IV, like the T-34, was fast, reliable, and was modified a great number of times to fit various combat roles. As the war progressed, the OKH decided that the production of increasingly heavier tanks was the only way for

¹³ Robert Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942: Schwerpunkt* (Barnsley: Pen et Sword Military, 2014), 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

Germany to effectively counter the increasing numbers of Soviet T-34s and Kliment Voroshilov (KV) heavy tanks.

Each German new tank design that rolled off the production lines was supposed to fill a specific role. The flawed *Panther* was created to specifically counter the T-34. The heavily armored *Tiger I* was a trump card tank that could both act as infantry support and a tank that could knock out any Soviet armor that entered its kill zone. The creation of new tanks promising to be the key to victory splintered production efficiency within the German arms industry and sucked away resources. The introduction of tanks that required more fuel than earlier models also led to a fatal shift in the Wehrmacht's combat doctrine.

As more Panthers and Tigers were given to panzer divisions on the Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht did notice that their new tanks could knock out a significant number of Soviet tanks. This was achieved at the cost of tanks that could maneuver without using more fuel than the earlier models. This only exacerbated fuel supply issues, as the more mobile Panzer IV tanks that were responsible for the lightning advances of 1941 and 1942 used less fuel than these new model tanks. The armored spearheads could only operate at the same speed as the Tiger tanks if they did not want to leave the heavier tanks isolated. This cost the Wehrmacht its mobility, a vital component to a land warfare doctrine that relied on vulnerable armored columns to encircle a stunned enemy.

The difference between the Wehrmacht's armor development program and the Red Army's program speaks volumes on the different philosophies on how the war in the East would most effectively be fought. The Germans relied initially on hard-hitting fast moving armor to provide the fast-moving breakthrough elements for the Blitzkrieg. As

the war progressed, they dropped mobility in favor of expensive heavy tanks that could outfight Soviet armor. The Red Army on the other hand produced few varieties of tanks. Their medium tank, the T-34, was created to excel in mobile warfare and the tank development teams understood this. This allowed them to design a tank that only increased both their strategic and tactical mobility. Scholars like Forczyk and Zamulin have done much to bring these realities to light, both with reassessing both armies' development programs for armor and their doctrinal application of armor.

Mary Habeck's book *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919 to 1939*, covers the doctrinal developments within both Germany and the Soviet Union. This book examines how German and Russian military theorists sought to avoid the deadly stalemates created by World War One. She describes how theorists in both the Red Army and the Wehrmacht developed similar theories on combined arms operations. According to her, doctrinal development was simultaneous conceived by both the Germans and the Red Army. The difference between the two being emphases on the level of strategy that victory would come from. Habeck points out that Red Army military theorists had a different understanding of what was required to win a war than the Germans. The German theorists focused on avoiding a tactical stalemate, returning mobility to the battlefield and securing victory through tactical superiority. The Red Army's doctrinal development focused more on securing victory on the field through the application of combined arms at the operational level.

Habeck covers the effect of Stalin's Great Purge on the Red Army's doctrine as well, pointing out that the purge made the Red Army suffer as it did in 1939 and 1941. The Red Army had been designed to fight an operational war of maneuver. Stalin's purge

took this mobility away doomed the Red Army to re-learn the costly lessons of World War One. The Germans, on the other hand, stuck with their doctrine and perfected it for combat in the West. The Red Army would apply their doctrine, Deep Battle Theory, in every battle following 1942. The theory worked and the Red Army triumphed. The Germans would see the opposite, losing control of the operational sphere due to a focus on the tactical sphere of strategy.

Enduring the Whirlwind: The German Army and the Russo-German War 1941-1943 by Gregory Liedtke reassesses the Wehrmacht's combat record in Russia. His book seeks to address the popularly held notion that it was only through the sheer mass of the Red Army that the Red Army was victorious. Liedtke's work is very useful because this source covers the actual state of the Wehrmacht on its drive through Russia. The reasoning behind Liedtke's decision to assign 1943 for the end of his study is simple: the Wehrmacht after 1943 could not match the Red Army in the field. Liedtke's study attacks the long held notion that Germany's loss in the East was only due to insufficient amounts of men and material. He, like Mawdsley, addresses the shortcomings of the German war economy to provide enough material for the front-line and the lack of forethought on the part of the Wehrmacht. The failure to create stockpiles of equipment large enough to shoulder the burden of supply ultimately over-taxed the Nazi war machine, hastening the collapse in the East.

This re-assessment of the Wehrmacht is consonant with contemporary scholarship analyzing the strategic performance of the Wehrmacht in the East. Authors like Robert Citino and Samuel J Newland argue that issues that lead to the defeat of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front stemmed from the belief that tactical performance could inform

strategy. Both authors also seize upon the overconfidence of the OKH in their ability to plan large scale operations, an overconfidence spawned from their ability to deliver tactical victories in the field.

Robert Citino's *Death of the Wehrmacht: The German Campaigns of 1942* and *The Wehrmacht Retreats Fighting a Lost War, 1943* address many of the same issues that Liedtke does in *Enduring the Whirlwind*. In *Death of the Wehrmacht* and *The Wehrmacht Retreats* Citino dispels the aura surrounding the German army. *Death of the Wehrmacht* focuses on the Wehrmacht's inability to exploit tactical victories and the failure of the Prussian method of warfare. He argues that, especially in the case of the war in Russia, that the Wehrmacht's doctrine was ill suited to the size of Russia and an enemy the size of the Red Army.

In *The Wehrmacht Retreats*, Citino expands on the Wehrmacht's failure at the strategic level in Russia. According to Citino, the Wehrmacht overinflated the role of generals like Erich von Manstein and Heinz Guderian. The German operational doctrine by 1943 had become incredibly unimaginative. If the initial encirclement did not work they would attempt another encirclement, regardless of the cost in experienced manpower and material. This lack of consideration for strategy, Citino argues, was deeply entrenched in the minds of the German generals who led the Wehrmacht to ruin in Russia.

Dr. Samuel J. Newland's book, *Victories are not enough: Limitations of the German way of war*, examines the developments in German military thought from the Franco-Prussian War through the Second World War. His book addresses a great flaw in German strategic thinking: namely the fact that the Germans from the First World War onward struggled to translate tactical victories into greater victories at the strategic level.

This great flaw is one that the Red Army overcame during the Second World War, and is one of the most important factors contributing to the Wehrmacht's defeat on the Eastern Front.

Robert Citino's book *German Way of War* is similar to Newland's *Victories are not enough*. Citino writes about German strategic thought and practice from the seventeenth century through 1945. Citino assesses the nature of command and control in the German army, and asks if the German concept of a war of movement is really unique to the Second World War. He also goes into detail regarding the overall lack of coordination between German field commanders and the high command during the Second World War.

The historiography of the Eastern Front has been changed forever by the introduction of Red Army reports to Western scholarship. It has helped to further expose how short sighted and inflexible the OKW and OKH were in planning and executing the war in Russia. Contemporary scholarship has further examined the Red Army as a fighting force: showing how swiftly the Red Army adapted to the Wehrmacht's doctrine and used it against them. The Red Army is no longer portrayed as a mindless steamroller that buys time with human lives, it is no longer an avalanche of violence that the Wehrmacht stood against like a rock against the tide. The Red Army is now portrayed as a very capable army led by very intelligent officers who operated at a higher level of strategy than their German counterparts.

These new insights have created a space for studies examining whether the Germans really understood how they were beaten. The Red Army's operational art has been examined at great length and there is ample evidence to suggest that the Wehrmacht

did not understand the Soviet way of war. The Wehrmacht field commanders had a much narrower scope for their own operations: a mindset even apparent within the OKW and OKH. Their belief in strategy being defined by tactical victories would ultimately blind them at the operational level, handing the operational initiative to the Red Army.

In the next chapter this will become more apparent as the study moves to an examination of Wehrmacht operations in mid to late 1941. The Wehrmacht's victories in 1941 gave them a false sense of security: they had defeated *what appeared* to be the entire bulk of the Red Army. Now all they had to do was take Moscow and the war in the East would be over.

The Wehrmacht failed to do so, as the Red Army had learned much in 1941 and were now ready to apply those lessons to their first deep operation of the war. It is from Red Army's ability to adapt and learn that the Wehrmacht would suffer their first major defeat of the war. This period receives a good amount of coverage in the German report series. Raus especially understood the gravity of the situation in the winter of 1941, as the Wehrmacht had been caught flat-footed by the Zhukov's vicious counter-attack.

Raus addresses this period in *The Anvil of War*, using this period for numerous examples on the importance of a commander who was adept at improvisation. The ability to improvise on the battlefield was the saving grace for the Germans on the Eastern Front as long as they were allowed a high degree of command autonomy. This autonomy in command is what saves them outside of Moscow and allows for the German Army to deal with early Deep Battle theory. As the war progresses, this improvisation will become more and more important. Paradoxically, the independence of command would disappear as the Third Reich further centralized the Wehrmacht's command chain.

Chapter I: The Battle for Moscow

The German operation *Barbarossa* opened with an earth-shattering roar on 22 June, 1941 and within hours the Soviet garrisons along the border had been overrun. Panicked messages to STAVKA from Red Army garrisons reporting the advance of the Wehrmacht were initially met with the response: “You must be insane. And why is your signal not in code?”¹⁶ Within days, the scale of the massive German offensive became clear. Three German army groups were advancing across the Soviet-Nazi border, targeting Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the center and Kiev in the south. To the German generals, planned to conquer Russia the same way they had conquered Western Europe. For field commanders who had been set to the task of liquidating the bulk of the Red Army and taking Moscow, the success of this conquest was a certainty. The *blitzkrieg* could not possibly fail. The Red Army was bigger than any army they had previously fought, and on paper, Russia was much larger than any country they had fought in. These facts were simply distractions in the mind of the German high command.

As weeks turned into months, these distractions became problems that kept commanders awake whenever they tried to sleep. Unlike the armies of mainland Western

¹⁶ Clark, 44.

Europe, the Red Army refused to fold. Even when caught in encirclements, Red Army commanders and the men they lead fought on, which considerably slowed the German advance. The Red Army was constantly counter-attacking, causing the number of German casualties to rise and threatening supply lines that could ill-afford the stress. The Red Army was trading men and material for time. If the enemy could be stalled, if they could be weakened, and the Soviet Union had a chance to survive. Every day that the Red Army held back the Wehrmacht, more Soviet troops could be brought up for a future offensive to hurl the invader back. By August the might of Army Group Center sat within one hundred and fifty miles of Moscow, but could not advance on the city quite yet. The encircled Red Army divisions outside Smolensk had taken much longer to liquidate than had been expected. Pockets of a similar size around Bryansk and Via'zma were proving to be just as stubborn. This, coupled with a pressing need for fresh troops, tanks, and aircraft lost the Wehrmacht even more time.

The Wehrmacht's operation to take Moscow, Operation *Taifun*, was designed to be a massive encirclement of Moscow. *Taifun* had been slated for early September, but the consolidation of the pockets around Bryansk and Via'zma and the *rasputitsa* (the autumn rain season in Russia where rain mixes with temperatures that fluctuate between freezing and thawing and turns all non-paved roads to mud) pushed it back to October. *Taifun* finally kicked off on 2 October, 1941. The plan was for the First and Second Panzer Groups of Army Group Center, commanded by Hoth and Guderian, to encircle the city with two massive pincers. The German plan to capture Moscow had not taken into effect changes to the timetable, changes created by the time lost in refitting and reinforcing divisions stretched to their operational limits. The loss of time had allowed

for the Red Army to substantially reinforce and develop their defenses around Moscow. The Wehrmacht was also supremely confident that they had destroyed the bulk of the Red Army, and they had every right to believe so. By the fall 1941, the Red Army had lost as many men as the Wehrmacht had initially allotted for the conquest of Russia.¹⁷

This miscalculation on the part of the German general staff was one of the greatest blunders of the war, and would haunt them in the months to come. As a result, the opening of *Taifun* was anything but smooth. Georgi Zhukov, a rising star in the Red Army's chain of command, was reassigned to Moscow on 7 October, 1941. His first task was to overseeing the layers of defenses around Moscow, then reorganize timetables for reserves and the first major Red Army counter-offensive of the war.

To the west of the city, entire Soviet armies were encircled in pockets around the gateway cities of Via'zma and Bryansk. If these two pockets fell too soon, the road to Moscow would be open and Moscow would only have half-prepared defenses, tattered Red Army divisions to protect it. Both the Via'zma and the Bryansk pockets proved to be a saving grace for the Red Army preparing defenses outside of Moscow. Marshal Georgi Zhukov in his book *Zhukov's Greatest Battles*, explains why these pocket battles were so important to the Red Army early in the war,

“The most important thing for us in the middle of October was to win time in order to prepare our defenses...these units must be given credit for their heroic struggle. Although they were cut off in the enemy's rear, they did not surrender. They continued

¹⁷ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: the Nazi-Soviet war 1941-1945* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 110.

to fight valiantly, attempting to break through to rejoin the main force of the Red Army and thus holding down large enemy formations that would otherwise have pursued the drive toward Moscow”¹⁸

Even when surrounded, these Red Army divisions held fast, and bought time for Zhukov to improve the defenses around Moscow. The delay caused by the battles for these pockets also put the Wehrmacht in a strategic position that ultimately led to the failure of *Taifun*. The Nineteenth, Sixteenth, Twentieth, Twenty-fourth and Thirty-second armies sacrificed themselves to tie down the spearhead of Army Group Center. German armor raced on ahead, but they needed the support of their infantry divisions to take and hold ground. Those infantry divisions had become tied up in necessary battles to liquidate the armies trapped those pockets. This kept the panzer divisions on short tethers, unable to move forward to seize and hold operational objectives. The German generals, in their writing following the war, tended to ignore the time wasted in the reduction of these pockets. They instead focused on the inability of the Nazi bureaucracy to create a general strategy that would effectively bring the war to a close before winter. Evan Mawdsley in *Thunder in the East*, addresses this issue as one of the great alibis generated by German generalship following the war. He states that it was a combination of infighting within the German high command and the battles to liquidate the pocket at Via’zma and Bryansk that stalled the advance of Army Group Center and preventing the Germans from advancing very far¹⁹

¹⁸ Georgi K Zhukov, *Marshal Zhukov’s greatest battles*, ed. Harrison E Salisbury (London: Macdonald and Company Ltd, 1969), 51.

¹⁹ Mawdsley, 109.

The Wehrmacht advanced 75 miles before they were checked by the Red Army's resistance around Moscow and terrain made impassable by heavy rains. The incessant fighting around Moscow, the poor weather, and the fighting around Bryansk and Via'zma took its toll and temporarily halted *Taifun* on 20 October, 1941. Operation *Taifun* would re-commence on 15 November, but it would be nowhere near as successful as the initial phase of *Taifun*. The Wehrmacht's late October halt bought yet more time for the Red Army. Zhukov used this time to reassemble divisions that had fought during the summer into new army groups and stiffen the resistance around Moscow. This pause allowed Zhukov to bring up fresh reinforcements. These reinforcements, along with the first mass application of the T-34, were used for a counterattack that would save Moscow and deliver to the Wehrmacht their first defeat of the war.

By 4 December 1941, the pincer to the north of Moscow was forced back by ferocious counter-attacks that rippled down Army Group Center's two-hundred mile front line and threw the Germans back.²⁰ The Red Army defenses around Moscow had allowed for the Wehrmacht to create salients down the length of their front line. This forced the Wehrmacht to fight through concentric rings of field fortifications that wore many divisions down to fifty or sixty percent of their required strength.²¹ This placed the Wehrmacht field commanders in a uniquely ugly position: they had to keep the flanks of their salient secure with divisions that had been weakened considerably by the second part of *Taifun*. In the Red Army's after action reports it is plain to see that this was well-

²⁰ Mawdsley, 106-107.

²¹ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle Of Moscow 1941-1942: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter Offensive along the Moscow Strategic Direction*, trans. Richard W. Harrison (Solihull: Helion and Company Limited, 2015) Kindle Edition, 3906.

known by STAVKA. In STAVKA's after action report, *The Battle Of Moscow 1941-1942: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter Offensive along the Moscow Strategic Direction*, they explain how the Germans presented the Red Army with the perfect operational opening for a counter-attack. By over-extending with the initial thrust from *Taifun* in an attempt to encircle Moscow the Wehrmacht, "...had to go over to the defensive in conditions in which each of the wedges was outflanked by the Red Army's forces...the German wedges fell into previously prepared pincers, from which they were able to extricate themselves with great difficulty and heavy casualties."²²

From the Red Army perspective, the Germans presented them with the opportunity to deal the Wehrmacht their first serious defeat in the war. There had been other opportunities earlier that fall, but the Red Army squandered them in uncoordinated counter-attacks. The German salients that, in some cases, were less than 15 miles from Moscow were suddenly hammered from the north against the anvil of Red Army battlegroups in the south. These armies avoided German strong points by slipping between the hastily established German defenses and moving far to the rear of German lines. At this point in the war, command and control issues within the Red Army limited the effectiveness of these units. Without realistic operational goals, success for local commanders differed. In some sectors the Red Army made great territorial gains, while in other sectors, divisions got cut off and destroyed behind enemy lines.

This was the first major crisis on the Eastern Front for the German general staff and set the precedence for how the Germans contained Red Army counter-attacks.

²² Soviet General Staff, *The Battle Of Moscow 1941-1942: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter Offensive along the Moscow Strategic Direction*, 7582.

Shortages in manpower and tenuous supply lines created conditions during the Red Army's winter offensive that forced German generals like Erhard Raus to fully exercise their ability to improvise. German commanders learned to maintain an elastic defense, evacuate encircled troops, and make do with what they had.

Raus in *The Anvil Of War*, stresses the importance of improvisation. Raus was transferred from Army Group North to help with the drive on Moscow, taking command of the 6th Panzer Division on 25 November 1941. He assumed command just a week before the Soviet winter offensive and was operating to the north of the city around the suburb of Yakrhomia when the opening counter-attack hammered the German's exposed northern pincer.²³

During the battle of Moscow, Raus was responsible for holding the vital road from Yakrhomia to Via'zma and helping to reform shattered battlegroups with whatever forces were available. By early January he had lost the majority of his armored vehicles and the many front line caliber soldiers. This forced him to rely on emergency units consisting of stragglers, Luftwaffe auxiliaries, and rear echelon troops.²⁴ It is with these units that Raus managed to hold the line, applying them judiciously to halt the Red Army advance to the north of Moscow. Later in the war ersatz units would become more and more common in German divisions on the Eastern Front, but the misapplication of these units would degrade their value in combat.

²³ Erhard Raus, *Panzers on the Eastern Front: General Erhard Rauss and His Panzer Divisions in Russia 1941-1945*, ed. Peter Tsouras (South Yorkshire: Greenhill Publishing, 2002), 18-19.

²⁴ Erhard Raus and Oldwig von Natzmer, *The Anvil of War: German Generalship in Defense of the Eastern Front During World War II*, ed. by Peter Tsouras (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016), 34-36.

Raus's own experience in the Battle of Moscow provides an excellent insight into what German field commanders learned from this crisis. In the face of manpower shortages and a surplus of enemy mechanized battlegroups, Raus was one of the first commanders to oversee the creation of hastily organized rapid response units that could contain the Red Army's thrusts. Following the containment of the spearhead, Raus then launched his own set of small-scale counter-attacks to gain a better defensive position. These units were fragile, and were most effective in local counterattacks where they avoided coming into direct contact with stronger enemy forces. These units could isolate the Red Army spearheads and then wait for more experienced units to deal with the trapped Red Army units.²⁵

Raus wrote at length on operational improvisation on the Eastern Front which was one of the keys to an effective defense that still allowed for the possibility of an effective counter-attack. In Raus's own words "an observer who looks at the Russian campaign in retrospect will come to the conclusion that the multitude of improvisations which were employed far exceeded what Moltke designated as a 'system of expedient' ...it is no exaggeration to state that the entire Russian campaign will go down in history as one gigantic improvisation."²⁶

This statement speaks volumes to the type of war Raus and his fellow commanders waged in Russia. Due to reinforcement timetables that could be thrown off by the weather, Russian partisans, or unexpected counter-attacks by the Red Army, the ability to improvise for extended periods of time became an invaluable asset to German

²⁵ Raus and Natzmer, 36-39.

²⁶ Ibid., 31.

commanders. This ability to improvise required a high degree of command autonomy. Wehrmacht lost this autonomy as operational and strategic thinking required a tighter control over commanders in the field and the winter of 1941 there were already signs of this loss of autonomy. At the outset of the war this independence of command was key to victories in the West, but the Wehrmacht advanced further into Russia, Hitler sought higher degrees of control over his generals. Hitler had issued a general directive that the forces engaged around Moscow were to stand and fight.²⁷ Orders of this nature, which would be seen at Stalingrad and in Belorussia during Operation *Bagration*, robbed the Wehrmacht of its ability to conduct a fluid defense. The strength of the Wehrmacht was in its mobility: mobility, after all, was what had enabled the German spearheads to conquer the majority of the Red Army's western military district.

Guderian in *Panzer Leader* provides further insights into the failure of *Taifun*. Guderian was in control of larger formations of troops in this period of the war than Raus. He commanded the Second Panzer Army, which contained the Third and Fourth Panzer divisions, the Tenth Motorized infantry division and the First Cavalry division.²⁸ His forces fought around Kiev, Smolensk, Via'zma, and Bryansk. Both Guderian and Herman Hoth, who was in command of the First Panzer Army, were tasked with leading the charge on Moscow. The problem for both of these commanders was that their panzer groups were in desperate need of reinforcements. The ferocious resistance put up by the Red Army in the first phase of *Taifun* had worn down both spearheads. Guderian's panzer group advanced on the city of Tula to the south of Moscow, guided by vague

²⁷ Raus, 19.

²⁸ Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 226.

orders from his superiors. His frustration with the orders for his portion of the battle in his memoir is palpable, “Our progress in the XLIII Army Corps’ sector remained slight. On this day Army Group gave up all idea of the long-range objectives laid down by the *OKH* and *OKW* and simply ordered: ‘Successful completion of the battle of Tula’”²⁹

Taking these vague orders, Guderian prepared his divisions for an advance on Tula. Initially, he synchronized timetables with the Fourth Army for a sweeping advance to encircle Moscow from the south on 2 December 1941. When it became clear to Guderian that the Fourth Army would not be able to advance until 4 December, Guderian stepped off on 2 December anyways. His Second Panzer Army advanced until they were four miles south of Tula, stopping at the famous residence of Leo Tolstoy, (which Guderian ham-fistedly claims was *not* sacked by German troops) on 3 December. On 4 December, 1941 Guderian was receiving reports of Red Army preparations for an assault in his general area. The Third Panzer Division, led by Lieutenant-General Walter Model, was soon tied up in combat in the forests to the south of Tula. The Red Army counterattack had come, just as temperatures dropped to -68 degrees on the 200 mile front outside of Moscow.³⁰ This staggering drop in temperatures limited mobility for both the Red Army and the Wehrmacht, but Army Group Center was in much worse shape than the Red Army and could not continue the attack. Guderian broke off his attack on 5 December, and retreated back past Tula executing a fighting withdraw of his forces. By 17 December, the offensive would be called off for Army Group Center and the divisions that were not encircled ordered to hold their ground.

²⁹ Guderian, 225.

³⁰ Guderian, 256-258.

Raus covers encirclements in *The Anvil of Victory*, addressing one of the biggest threats on the Eastern Front for both the Red Army and the Wehrmacht. The encirclement was the tactical end goal for both the Wehrmacht and Red Army operational doctrines. If the bulk of the enemy's forces in the field were surrounded and separated from the others, then they could be liquidated easier by the infantry. Encirclement battles had had netted Army Group Center great victories around Minsk, Smolensk, Via'zma and Bryansk. Now, as their forces in late December fought desperately outside of Moscow, the Wehrmacht was experiencing for the first time what it meant to *be* encircled. For Army Group Center in its weakened state encirclements were deadly. If the Wehrmacht lost too much manpower and material from divisions cut off in pockets, the operational net effect would be the weakening of the entire Army Group Center. If this linchpin of the German war effort in Russia was weakened too far it could collapse, taking down Army Group North and Army Group South as well.

Raus wrote at length about the nature of the encirclement, as he was part of multiple successful and failed attempts to relieve pockets on the Eastern Front. The first pocket he successfully led a relief effort for was in Moscow around the city of Klin. At Klin, the First Panzer division, had advanced to a point within fifteen miles of Moscow. The city of Klin had a major highway running through it, and the First Panzer division had been holding against Red Army counterattacks as they needed this highway as it was a major supply artery. When the order came for the division to retreat, the First Panzer division had been surrounded. This division would have been lost had Raus not orchestrated a synchronized breakthrough, creating a channel for the majority of the First

Panzer division to get out of the encirclement.³¹ This breakthrough required both division commanders to be in constant contact with one another, coordinating their movements to deceive the Red Army units surrounding the Fourth Panzer division and break out.

In Raus's mind, the encirclement could be avoided with proper vigilance and if encircled, divisions could not just "hold the line". Orders to hold ground and "not give an inch" were death sentences to German divisions trapped in pockets. That meant that encircled divisions had to be extricated in carefully coordinated break-outs by outside units, emptying the pocket before it could be destroyed. Maneuvers like these required a great deal of operational autonomy for German field commanders, as they had to decide how and where to apply their already weakened forces. For the successful relief of encircled divisions, this command autonomy was vital, both for the troops advancing to relieve the pocket and those in the pocket. In their weakened state, German divisions around Moscow trying to relieve troops in pockets could only advance so far into Red Army territory. The troops inside the pocket needed to coordinate their own break-out efforts with this outside group, meeting them halfway in order to preserve the relief force. As the war progressed, and German operational autonomy and troop strength diminished, these encirclements would more often than not spell doom for the men trapped inside.

The Red Army's 1941-1942 winter offensive pushed the Wehrmacht back, shattering the front line in many places and sent mechanized shock armies on parallel thrusts deep behind enemy lines. This created a forty mile buffer zone around Moscow. For Army Group Center, December 1941 to January 1942 would be the costliest period

³¹ Raus and Natzmer, 235-238.

on the Eastern Front yet, costing the Wehrmacht 85,000 men.³² The main axis of the Red Army's counterattack outside Moscow made use of new army compositions, which utilized fast moving columns of T-34 tanks carrying infantry complements on board as a break-through force. These divisional compositions would form the backbone of operational offensives in the future, and allowed for greater operational flexibility.

While the Red Army's winter offensive of 1941 achieved limited goals, it did set a precedent for operations in the future. The summer and early fall of 1941 were a showcase for the operational limitations of the centralized command structure; the Red Army's poor performance was due to a marked lack of operational autonomy.³³ This lack of autonomy was the reason for the uncoordinated counter-attacks that, up to December 1941, slowed the spearheads of the Wehrmacht down, but did so at a high cost in casualties for the Red Army. For the Wehrmacht, the high degree of command autonomy allowed for them to get to the gates of Moscow, but ultimately set *Taifun* up for failure. The pincers were allowed to travel too far afield, guided by vague objectives that did not match operational realities. This, coupled with logistical issues exacerbated by the mud, partisans, and snow, left the pincers far too weak for such an envelopment. Realities on the ground had changed, but the German operational doctrine remained the same.

Another problem for the Wehrmacht, was that they had spread their forces out on too wide of a front. They had not paid sufficient attention to the efforts made by STAVKA to prepare for the December counter-attacks. From the German generals' writing it is plain to see that field commanders like Erhard Raus learned valuable lessons

³² Mawdsely, 116-117.

³³ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle of Moscow 1941-1942: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter Offensive along the Moscow Strategic Direction*, 11484.

about the nature of defensive operations in Russia. Sustained operational success on the Eastern Front required a high degree of operational mobility and an equally high degree of command autonomy. They also learned that the Red Army was nowhere near being finished off and victory would have to come through the seizure of important strategic objectives first.

Guderian and especially the OKH and OKW seem to have missed this point entirely. Guderian initially saw the Red Army's counter-offensive as being no more than a series of strong local counterattacks that stopped his already exhausted panzer divisions. It was Guderian's decision on 2 December to advance in the face of growing resistance on Tula without the support of the Fourth Army, thus weakening the southern pincer further. Guderian, in *Panzer Leader*, stressed that the failure of *Taifun* was not a failure on the part of the commanders in the field. He instead placed the onus of blame on the high command for being out of touch with the realities on the front line.³⁴ This is only partially accurate, as the OKH and OKW had grossly overestimated their own operational capabilities and allowing for the spearheads to be put in a very dangerous position. At the same time, both Raus and Guderian's assessment of this operation shows that the Germans were, operationally, very shortsighted in their plans for the capture of Moscow. The problem is twofold: the Wehrmacht had overextended themselves, eager to force Moscow to capitulate before the onset of winter. They also assumed that the Red Army had not noticed that the Wehrmacht had made a habit of relying on swift moving encirclements that came to form a very predictable pattern.

³⁴ Guderian, 269-271.

From the Red Army after-action report covering the battle of Moscow, it is clear that STAVKA understood that the Germans relied heavily on the double envelopment at the operational level. As the Wehrmacht paused to prepare for the second phase of *Taifun*, the Red Army was busy shuttling up enough troops to form a vital operational reserve. The stubborn resistance outside of Moscow slowed the pincers to a crawl, and forced German commanders down the two-hundred mile front line to switch over to a defensive posture in late November. This, according to the Red Army's after action reports, was the key to the limited success of the Red Army's winter offensive,

The German-Fascist command underestimated the Red Army's powers of resistance and its reserves. It deployed its troops in a line, thus securing a broad offensive front and the power of the first blows. However, when these blows did not yield the desired results for the Germans, they were forced to (no longer having free reserves) go over to the defensive and then to retreat under the Soviet troops' increasing blows.³⁵

The Red Army benefitted from the position that the Germans had placed themselves in with their own operational oversights. These oversights allowed for the Red Army to make the best use of the interior line they were operating on and allowed them to launch their counter-thrust from a stronger position. The Battle for Moscow also laid the groundwork for developing effective command structures required for executing Deep Battle operations. Without a higher degree of local command autonomy, the Red Army offensive would not have been nearly as effective. Without some change in the command structure, the offensive have suffered from a lack of lateral communication. This would have made the necessary coordination of thrusts nearly impossible.³⁶

³⁵ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle Of Moscow 1941-1942: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter Offensive along the Moscow Strategic Direction*, 7612.

³⁶ David M. Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990), 21.

While the Red Army would never quite experience the same autonomy that the Wehrmacht had in 1941, the success around Moscow encouraged further development of Deep Battle theory. From this battle there were also advancements in the Red Army's field intelligence, which gave STAVKA the necessary information to properly plan an operation. These field reconnaissance missions infiltrated deep into the German's rear areas, and reported back to STAVKA every defensive position, troop movement, and the condition of those units.³⁷ With this information, STAVKA could plan exactly which sectors along an enemy line were suitable for feints and which ones were suitable for the real attack.

Ultimately, the Battle of Moscow proved that the Red Army could coordinate and execute rudimentary deep operations and dealt the first of many blows to the once seemingly omnipotent Wehrmacht. The Wehrmacht made a mistake, the Red Army exploited it, and Moscow was saved. The next year would be another hard year for the Red Army, but the lessons of 1941 would not be forgotten. The Wehrmacht would advance deep into southern Russia and the Red Army would be waiting.

³⁷ Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 1-2.

Chapter II: Case Blue-Uranus

With Army Group Center in a defensive posture before Moscow, and Leningrad still under siege in the north, the focus of German operations turned to Army Group South. Army Group South had taken Kiev in the summer of 1941, taking over two hundred seventeen miles in the opening days of Barbarossa.³⁸ The open terrain of western Ukraine was excellent for German combined arms operations. The wide steppe allowed for the Wehrmacht to make some of their swiftest advances into Soviet territory. By the end of the Battle of Khar'kov in May 1942, Army Group South had taken three-hundred seventy-five miles total from Kursk to the Sea of Azov.³⁹

The German plan for the summer operation in southern Russia, *Fall Blau* (Case Blue), was designed to wipe out the Red Army in the south, and cut the Soviet Union off from vital resources and industries.⁴⁰ Along with denying the Soviet Union access to their war industry, this operation sought to cut the Soviet Union off from vital oilfields in Baku, Grozny, and Maikop. Army Group South now received the lion's share of reinforcements and fuel for this new offensive. The initial thrust started on 28 June, 1942, with the German Fourth, Second, Sixth, First Panzer armies, along with the Seventeenth Army advancing towards Voronezh.

³⁸ Mawdsley, 74-79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁰ Robert Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 4823.

Within days of the start of *Fall Blau* the city of Voronezh fell, then the Wehrmacht advanced on the city of Rostov on the Don River. Following the capture of Rostov, Hitler issued Directive No. 45: a directive to split Army Group South into groups “A” and “B.”⁴¹ Army Group “A” was ordered to advance south, taking the oilfields in Baku and in the Caucasus Mountains. Army Group “B” was directed to move east; this army group had to capture the city of Stalingrad as an anchor to protect the flank of Army Group “A” as it turned south.⁴²

The decision to split Army Group South was made out of necessity, but had disastrous consequences for the Wehrmacht in Russia. Army Group “B” had the majority of its fuel and armor stripped away to support Army Group “A” on its drive southwards. This decision limited the operational mobility of Army Group “B” as it sought to take the city of Stalingrad. This massive push in the south weakened the overall strategic reserve for German armor. This was a dangerous gambit for Army Group South, as they operated in an environment where sustained operational mobility was key. If the Wehrmacht taxed their armored reserve beyond the point of return, the effects would ripple across the entire Eastern front. Without the mobility granted by the spearheads, the Wehrmacht in the south would lose their operational initiative.⁴³

Army Group “B” was weakened by critical fuel shortages that would severely stress the supply lines for the spearheads. The fuel shortage allowed the panzer armies to only advance roughly sixty miles at a time.⁴⁴ This weakened the spearhead moving

⁴¹ David M. Glantz and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East* (U.S. Army Green Books, 1985), 7906.

⁴² Mawdsley, 157.

⁴³ Clark, 191.

⁴⁴ Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5128.

towards Stalingrad and would remain a problem for Army Group “B”; however, the panzer armies were not only advancing swiftly through the countryside but were also fighting the Red Army every step of the way. Any additional fighting and maneuvering rapidly drained the fuel available to Army Group South.

The Wehrmacht’s offensive pushed the Red Army back across the steppe. As opposed to the summer of 1941, when Red Army units were ordered to hold their ground, the Red Army in the south escaped destruction by staging a fighting retreat across the steppe country, drawing the Germans deeper into southern Russia. The attempts to parry blows leveled by the Wehrmacht, at cities like Rostov and Voronezh, were uncoordinated and almost resulted in the destruction of General Gorlikov’s Bryansk Army Group.⁴⁵ By 23 August 1942, the spearhead of Army Group “B,” the Sixth Army under General Paulus, had reached the city of Stalingrad. This city anchored an east-west line that shielded Army Group “B” from any attacks from the east or the north. Stalingrad was also a major industrial and railway center for Russia. It contained chemical factories, steelworks, tractor factories, and oil reserves. Its position on the Volga made it a target as well, as oil from the Caucasus travelled up along the Volga to refineries in Russia.⁴⁶

The Sixth Army under the recently promoted general Friedrich von Paulus spearheaded the assault on Stalingrad. Von Paulus was forced, by operational constraints and a lack of reserve forces for Army Group South, to assault the city with his panzer divisions and motorized units.⁴⁷ The Red Army’s Sixty Second Army, under the

⁴⁵ Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 4845.

⁴⁶ Earl Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (US Army Green Book, 1983) Kindle Edition, 1243-1249.

⁴⁷ Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5418-5423.

command of General Vasily Chuikov, and Mikhail S. Shumilov's Sixty Fourth Army contested every block of the city, causing the German Sixth Army to become more and more entangled in Stalingrad.⁴⁸ This blinded General Paulus and his staff to operational threats in other sectors. The Sixth Army's fight in Stalingrad against Chuikov and Shumilov's armies provided the Red Army with a unique opportunity. The Red Army knew that Army Group South had split its combined forces to attack both Stalingrad and the Caucasus. If Army Group "B" could be isolated and destroyed, then Army Group "A" would have to turn back from the Caucasus in order to avoid having to fight a two-front operation. The destruction of Army Group "B" would also weaken the overall strategic position for Army Group South.

As early as 6 October 1942 Andrei I. Yeremenko, in command of the Southeastern Front, formed a plan for Field Marshal Zhukov that detailed exactly how the situation around Stalingrad could be exploited.⁴⁹ Yeremenko suggested a far-reaching operational counteroffensive that would envelop critical bridgeheads across the Don River at Serafimovich, Kletskaiia, and Kalach. This massive envelopment placed the pincers at the far rear of the Sixth Army and would destroy the majority of the Axis satellite armies on the Eastern Front.⁵⁰ With these two operational objectives fulfilled, the Red Army could further exploit this success with a wider strategic goal. This massive envelopment would weaken the Wehrmacht's armored reserves, and would create a

⁴⁸ David M. Glantz, *Slaughterhouse: An Encyclopedia of the Eastern Front* (Garden City, NY: Military Book Club, 2002), 121, 145.

⁴⁹ Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 64-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

position to launch wider offensives from in order to liquidate Army Group South the following year.

The concept of the attack was to avoid the bulk of German forces entangled in Stalingrad, instead focusing on the considerably weaker Axis satellite armies providing flank security. In their positions, the armies on the flanks were exposed on the steppe. With the Wehrmacht's focus on the fighting in Stalingrad, the Red Army knew that they could build up forces on these flanks to envelop the operational area around Stalingrad. The Romanians would be hit first, as STAVKA believed that the Red Army's armored divisions would perform best against them. The "satellite armies" were made up of troops from Axis allies like Romania, Italy and Hungary. These troops were sent as a goodwill offering from their respective governments, and generally were used as placeholders for German divisions.

The Third and Fourth Romanian Armies, the Eighth Italian Army, and the Second Hungarian Army held the important northern flank along the Don River. The Fourth Hungarian Army and the weakened German Second Army held the line to the south of Stalingrad along the Volga.⁵¹ The northern line along the Don was where the Red Army's famous Operation *Uranus* would break through. The satellite armies along the Don made the perfect target for a deep operation, they held important bridgeheads that formed an east-west axis of attack and as a fighting force had very limited operational mobility. These satellite armies were also equipped with second-rate weapons. The Romanian

⁵¹ Manstein, 4772-4782.

divisions in particular had little in the way of anti-tank weapons, only having obsolete 37mm anti-tank guns and very few 75mm anti-tank guns.⁵²

The Romanian divisions on the Don had reported Russian probing attacks along their line from 29 October and earlier, but these reports were largely ignored.⁵³ Had these warnings been heeded, the vital Romanian positions could have been reinforced. As Manstein pointed out in his memoir, *Lost Victories*, that Army Group “B” had been placed in an impossible position when it came to command and control, “*Army Group B* had no fewer than seven armies under command, including four allied [Axis allies] ones. No army group headquarters can cope with more than five armies at the outside, and when most of these are allied ones, the task becomes too much for it.”⁵⁴

Manstein explained that by having so many armies to command, all of them under the control of one general staff, commands for the entire army group were highly complicated. This in turn restricted operational mobility. He also pointed out that the headquarters for Army Group “B” was located in Starobyelsk, some three hundred and forty-five miles away from the Stalingrad area.⁵⁵ If Army Group “B” had allowed for the creation of another army group under the control of the Romanian Marshal Ion Antonescu (who was placed closer to Stalingrad on the Don), the situation on the Don might have been more secure. From Manstein’s memoirs, the key to preventing the catastrophic loss at Stalingrad was related to a distinct lack of operational foresight,

The attempt to gain control of the Volga by taking Stalingrad in a set battle after the original assault had been only partially successful would at best have been admissible on a very short-term basis. But to leave the main body of the Army Group at Stalingrad

⁵² Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5611.

⁵³ Clark, 241.

⁵⁴ Manstein, 4783.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4792.

for weeks on end with inadequately protected flanks was a cardinal error. It amounted to nothing less than presenting the enemy with the initiative we ourselves had resigned on the whole southern wing, and was a clear invitation to him to surround Sixth Army.⁵⁶

The Wehrmacht's focus on the tactical sphere of strategy doomed the Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Marshal Antonescu wrote Manstein an impassioned letter following the destruction of the Romanian Third Army. He stated that he had not been warned by German high command about the buildup of Red Army divisions in his sector.⁵⁷ The Red Army was allowed to build up a numerical superiority along the Don as the Sixth Army blindly fed more men into Stalingrad.

The Red Army high command knew that the Wehrmacht's focus was drawn towards Stalingrad which left the flanks weak. This is why they chose the Wehrmacht's over-extended northern flank along the Don as the site for Operation *Uranus*. During this period STAVKA also started to heavily invest in *razvedka*. *Razvedka* in Russian translates directly to reconnaissance, but it refers to a deeper type of intelligence gathering. This was round-the-clock reconnaissance that provided STAVKA with the intelligence required to not just win battles, but to change the outcomes of operations in the favor of the Red Army. Red Army field commanders on the Eastern Front were expected at all times to be conducting *razvedka*; analyzing patterns found in enemy operations and then using them as a strategic tool to better develop operational goals. This meant sending scouts deep behind German lines, relying on partisans for information on troop movements, tapping into German radio communications, and interrogations of German prisoners. The information gleaned by *razvedka* directly

⁵⁶ Manstein, 4784-4788.

⁵⁷ Manstein, 4795.

affected the analysis of enemy forces at the operational and strategic level. Taking this information and identifying patterns in German behavior helped STAVKA defeat the Wehrmacht and turn the tide of the war.

With Operation *Uranus*, STAVKA planned to wrestle away the strategic initiative from the Wehrmacht. The operation was designed to inflict as many casualties as possible on the Wehrmacht's allies and the overstressed Wehrmacht itself. During the late summer of 1942, STAVKA created ten reserve armies and four new tank armies for this task.⁵⁸ While a good number of these armies had been used to slow Case Blue across southern Russia, there were still enough of these armies for a general winter offensive. The Red Army high command knew the Wehrmacht had expended a good portion of their reserves, putting them in a uniquely dangerous position. The Wehrmacht was in a defensive posture after a costly winter of defensive operations outside of Moscow, in the north they were engaged in a siege around Leningrad. As a result, the Wehrmacht was running low on reserve divisions. The Wehrmacht, as Raus noted from his time in Moscow, was having to make desperate improvisations to maintain their operational mobility.

The net operational effect of this was a loss of mobility across the board for the Wehrmacht. Fuel had to be stretched thin, limiting the range of tanks, trucks and aircraft. Divisions that were under-strength and under-equipped were expected to hold positions and achieve operational goals that were out of line with reality. The choice to place the ill-equipped Romanian, Hungarian, and Italian armies along the Don was a mistake. Red

⁵⁸ Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 61.

Army military intelligence units penetrated deep behind Axis lines, taking copious notes on the troop density in areas favored for the attack. They also took note of the amount of artillery, tanks, and trucks that each Axis division along the line had.⁵⁹

All of this information, mixed with reports on the habits of the Axis troops in each sector, was filtered back up through the chain of command to STAVKA. STAVKA in turn took this information and created one of their most detailed and thoroughly planned offensives in the last two years of the war. Aside from marshalling strategic reserves for this operation, STAVKA also created a good deal of confusion for the OKH by creating deceptive plans, radio chatter, false troop movements, and other misinformation.⁶⁰ This misinformation all suggested to German commanders in Southern Russia that a major Red Army offensive could be expected around Moscow in late 1942. This information all sought to blind the OKH and commanders out in the field to the Red Army's actual operational objectives.

In the early morning hours of 19 November 1942 the pre-dawn skies to the north of the Don River lit up all at once as 2,327 Red Army field guns opened fire.⁶¹ The 150,000-man-strong Romanian Third Army under the command of Romanian General Petre Dumitrescu was hit first. The Red Army's Fourth and Fifth tank armies swiftly broke through the Romanian lines. The German armored divisions set to reinforce the Romanians were 18-30 miles behind the Romanian main battle line.⁶² These divisions had been stripped of their infantry detachments, which had been sent to fight in

⁵⁹ Glantz, *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 6-7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁶¹ Mawdsley, 161.

⁶² Forczyk, *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5617-5630.

Stalingrad, and their fuel supplies were critically low. This robbed them of their mobility, and did not allow for them to fulfill their roles as support to the Romanians.

The next day Romanian armies to the south of the city were hit. The Red Army's reserve forces successfully exploited the breach along the Don and the Volga, crushing all the Axis flank armies. The two Red Army pincers met at Kalach on 23 November, where the 265-mile-wide encirclement of the German Sixth Army was completed. To the Germans, this encirclement came as a shock. They had been expecting the Red Army resistance to falter in that sector, not for the Red Army to unleash this new counter offensive. STAVKA had planned Operation *Uranus* thoroughly, counting on the weakened German Sixth Army to be unable to stop the Red Army's offensive as it was tied up in the fighting at Stalingrad.

For the Sixth Army, Operation *Uranus* was a catastrophe. Within the pocket formed by *Uranus* were five German corps, two Romanian corps, and the bulk of army artillery not at the siege of Leningrad.⁶³ Supplying the pocket by air was suggested, and proved to be a costly failure that lost the Wehrmacht 676 transport planes.⁶⁴ Paulus was told to hold fast and wait for an eventual breakout in hopes of tying up large numbers of Red Army divisions to slow the Red Army's offensive. Operations in the Caucasus Mountains were brought to a halt as forces were transferred north to create Army Group Don to relieve the Sixth Army. This breakout force was assembled under the command of the recently promoted Field Marshal Erich von Manstein. The operation's name was

⁶³ Manstein, 4859.

⁶⁴ Glantz, *When Titans Clashed*, 179.

Wintergewitter (Winter-storm) and it promised to break through the newly established enemy line around the Aksai River, save the Sixth Army and regain lost territory.

Wintergewitter was launched on 12 December 1942. Manstein's Army Group Don was under-strength, and he was relying on close coordination with the Sixth Army to make the breakout work. What complicated things for Manstein was the start of the second phase of Operation *Uranus*: Operation *Saturn*. This second operation was designed by STAVKA to consolidate the Red Army's line west of the pocket around Stalingrad, and to prevent a possible German relief effort aimed at liberating Stalingrad. As the situation developed and Manstein's rear was threatened by this new offensive Manstein fell back, and sealed the fate of the Sixth Army. 2 February 1942 the Red Army liquidated the pocket and 291,000 Germans and Romanians marched into captivity.⁶⁵

In his memoir, *Lost Victories*, Manstein is quick to address the shortcomings of the operation to take Stalingrad. He broke down the failed operation into four separate points. The first of these addresses the fact that the Sixth Army in its weakened state had been stretched across a 160 mile gap. This gap was only thinly secured by the German Sixteenth Motorized division and the aforementioned Axis satellite armies. This oversight in Manstein's eyes was willingly made by Hitler who "... must have known that even behind the Don the allied armies could not stand up to a strong Soviet attack. The same was true of Fourth Romanian Army, which he had entrusted with the task of guarding the open right flank of Fourth Panzer Army."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Mawdsley, 161-163.

⁶⁶ Manstein, 4777.

Manstein, unlike his fellow generals, did not criticize the Romanians for failing to hold the Red Army back. He thought it was a mistake to use the under-equipped Romanian armies to as placeholders for German divisions that could have stopped the Red Army. In his opinion, the Romanians should have been engaged in fighting that was more suitable for an infantry division. This would then allow the Fourth Panzer Army to engage freely on the steppe where it could act as a striking force. Manstein's frustration is palpable in his writing, "the attempt to gain control of the Volga by taking Stalingrad in a set battle after the original assault had been only partially successful would at best have been admissible on a very short-term basis. But to leave the main body of the Army Group at Stalingrad for weeks on end with inadequately protected flanks was a cardinal error."⁶⁷

In Manstein's eyes, General von Paulus and Hitler mishandled the operation to take Stalingrad from the start, giving STAVKA a golden opportunity to strike a crippling blow at the Wehrmacht. To Manstein, this operation was doomed to fail, as the investment of German forces in Stalingrad robbed the Wehrmacht of its mobility and firepower. These facets had been key to the success of Fall Blau (Case Blue) and are elements that saved the Wehrmacht around Moscow in 1941. Manstein blames this shift in command and control structure, which changed from an independent command to a more centralized one, for the failure of *Wintergewitter*. In his opinion, Hitler's decision to place the encircled Sixth Army under his direct command was a mistake. The communications delay between Von Paulus and Hitler made any attempt at a coordinated breakout impossible. Manstein needed to be able to coordinate movements with the Sixth

⁶⁷ Manstein, 4786.

Army directly, allowing for Von Paulus to break out at the perfect moment. Instead the position the Sixth Army found itself in made this impossible, “Sixth Army’s subordination to H.Q. Don Army Group was more or less a fiction, however, for in practice it had hitherto come directly under O.K.H. It was Hitler who had tied it down at Stalingrad when it might still have been able to fight its own way out. Now, operationally speaking, it was immobilized. The Army Group could no longer ‘command’ it, but merely give it assistance.”⁶⁸

As noted by Erhard Raus during the battle of Moscow, breaking out from an encirclement required a high degree of coordination between the encircled troops and the relief force. This required an autonomy that the OKH and Hitler were stripping away from German commanders on the Eastern Front. The time required to wait for Hitler and the OKH to decide on any suitable course of action once again had wasted weeks. This allowed for the operational situation around Stalingrad to deteriorate further. Manstein, operating at closer to what STAVKA would have referred to as the “operational level” saw that generals were promoted solely for the fact that they didn’t question operational decisions made by Hitler and the OKH.

Manstein, like many of his fellow commanders, bristled at the thought of higher headquarters or members of the civilian government meddling with doctrinal affairs. The German commander’s style of independent command (*Auftragstatik*) was widespread throughout the armored commands of the Wehrmacht.⁶⁹ It can be seen in Guderian’s account of his role in the battle of Moscow when he decided to strike off on his own,

⁶⁸ Manstein, 4907.

⁶⁹ Walter J. Wood, *Mansteins Campaigns - More Than Tactics* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1988) Kindle Edition, 213.

unsupported by the Fourth Army. For Raus, this command style was what gave him the ability to develop and improvise as he made do with what he had outside of Moscow and Stalingrad. For this style of free-thinking command to work, the High Command had to be largely hands-off, trusting the commanders in the field to win the battles that needed to be won.

While this command style was undoubtedly effective throughout Poland and France, in Russia it created serious problems. The Germans had not created a command system that scaled well in Russia. Manstein makes little mention of the fact that his own lateral communications were absolutely awful, or that the Sixth Panzer Division (under the command of Erhard Raus) and the Twenty-Third Panzer Division had only scattered infantry support from what remained of two Romanian infantry divisions.⁷⁰ Raus's experience in *Wintergewitter* is captured in his essay "To Liberate Stalingrad."

This essay is quite possibly his weakest, doing little to give a deeper insight into the realities of combat in southern Russia in the winter of 1942.⁷¹ Raus's experiences highlight growing concerns on and off the battlefield for the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front. As the Wehrmacht moved deeper into southern Russia, they relied much more on the railway network to ferry supplies and troops from one operational theater to the next. German armored divisions in Russia especially relied on this network. This allowed for the German armored commanders to conserve fuel and reduce wear on their tanks as they shifted from one sector to the next. The Red Army was well aware of these limitations.

⁷⁰ Forczyk, *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5760.

⁷¹ Raus, 104-171.

While the Red Army did use railways as well to shift forces from one front to another, their tanks were reliable, and had a higher fuel range than German tanks.⁷² This meant that they did not have to rely on railway lines as the primary means for moving armor from one point to another in an effort to conserve fuel. This gave them greater operational mobility, allowing for Soviet armor to achieve operational objectives without having to be bound to a railway. STAVKA developed their operations around limiting the operational mobility of the Wehrmacht by attacking railway hubs and encouraging partisans to hit railway lines.⁷³ For Raus, who had to rely on the railways to shuttle his armor from one point to another, partisan operations made movement by rail a nightmare. In his study of Operation *Wintergewitter*, Raus made a point of addressing the threat of partisan operations on the railway network.

In the extensive marshy forest in the Pripyat region, the German troops were the targets of numerous partisan raids directed especially against the trains carrying tanks and artillery, since these seemed to offer greater prospects of greater rewards and were less dangerous. The tarpaulins camouflaging them did not prevent the trained eyes of the partisans lurking in ambush from identifying the big weapons.⁷⁴

The partisans targeted these trains carrying armor and artillery for good reason. The partisans, receiving directives from STAVKA, were providing intelligence on the number of German artillery and tanks moving to the front. Given time, these reports could build a picture of where the Germans were intending to launch an offensive. Hitting these trains would damage vital rolling stock, and also set back the timetable for an assault. The German response to this was to prepare the troops on the trains to react immediately to partisan attacks. The soldiers on board the trains were always prepared to

⁷² Forczyk, *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 510.

⁷³ David R. Stone, *The Soviet Union at War 1941-1945* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 1998) Kindle Edition, 3729.

⁷⁴ Raus, 105.

engage against partisans, even tank crews were ready to engage with the partisans in their own way. “At night the tarpaulins were removed from the turrets of tanks, and they were made ready to fire. They were a very effective means of defense. A large number of emergency ramps, which were included in the trains, made it possible to unload tanks wherever necessary and to commit them against strong enemy elements.”⁷⁵

The Germans viewed the partisans as a nuisance, but each time the partisans attacked a train the net effect on the Wehrmacht was a loss of men, supplies, and most importantly – time. Stopping every time the partisans assaulted a train set the Germans further behind schedule. Raus only focused on the partisans in their capacity as a fighting force, and not in their wider role as an intelligence network. Now, as the commander of a division Raus would probably not have understood the greater role the partisans played on the Eastern Front. His assessment of them purely as a fighting force spoke to the German obsession with tactics. The partisans are only seen as a threat to one part of the German war machine.

Raus’s study of *Wintergewitter*, following the piece on partisans, is an excellent example how German generals after the war polished their record. *Wintergewitter* is portrayed as a series of ferocious tank battles around the towns of Kotelnikovo, Pokhlebin and Verkhniy-Kumskiy.⁷⁶ Each battle on this axis of advance is presented as a crushing tactical victory that brings Raus’s division at the tip of the spearhead closer to Stalingrad. The Russians are described as being just as hapless as they were in the late summer of 1941; the only difference for Raus in 1942 is that the Red Army simply has

⁷⁵ Raus, 105-106.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 107-156.

more T-34 tanks. His account of the skirmish around Verkhniy-Kumskiy covers this battle as a battle where the Red Army's Fourth Mechanized Corps fed units piecemeal into the sector. According to Raus this battle was fought by his subordinate General Walther von Hunersdorf, and it was a victory. He claimed that one hundred and thirty to one hundred and forty Red Army tanks were knocked out in this action.⁷⁷

The truth is somewhat different. On Raus's orders, Hunersdorf advanced into Verkhniy-Kumskiy unsupported, without realizing what was in front of him. He had blundered into the assembly area for the Fourth Motorized Corps of the Red Army. The Red Army responded immediately, hammering Hunersdorf. Due to poor command and control on the part of the Fourth Motorized Corps, Red Army brigade commanders were told to attack on their own initiative.⁷⁸ Red Army tank losses were heavy, but Hunersdorf's artillery was overrun and his command was in serious danger of being overrun. As a result, Hunersdorf had to execute a messy fighting retreat with little ammunition and no communications. The Red Army had won not just a tactical victory, but an operational one as well. Manstein's spearhead was now in jeopardy due to Raus's actions, and in order to preserve what he could of his force, he ordered a general retreat.

Out of this period the Red Army learned many valuable lessons. Deep field intelligence worked, and was a key to victory worthy of further development. The Red Army knew that the Wehrmacht was unaware of the shortcomings of its own doctrine in the context of a campaign in Russia. Where this doctrine had worked was in Western Europe. It had been designed for narrower fronts and shorter supply lines. The Red Army

⁷⁷ Forczyk, *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front: 1941-1942*, 5783.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5783-5794.

knew that now they could fully exploit this flaw. Not by going for the direct objective, but for the indirect objective.

The Red Army also took big steps towards perfecting their use of combined arms operations on the operational scale. STAVKA, following the success of Operation *Uranus*, understood that armored forces had to be granted a higher degree of operational autonomy. Lateral communication was key, and this was especially the case for armored commanders, who were no longer expected to advance along with the infantry support tanks. Coordination between the different arms of the Red Army was essential to a successful operation:

It is only by thus fundamentally and precisely putting the question of realizing the cooperation of the mobile forces with the other combat arms in developing the breakthrough that one can guarantee that in the future the tank and mechanized corps will not participate alongside the direct infantry support tanks for completing the breakthrough and that during the success development stage their actions will be supported by the other.⁷⁹

STAVKA's assessment of their operational strategy defined how best to utilize the forces arrayed at their disposal. In order to best use the mobile tank armies it was imperative that they did not get tangled up in armored engagements with German panzer divisions. Their new role was to avoid those divisions entirely, now focusing on delivering the shock of their blow to infantry divisions. Hitting the divisions and penetrating behind the front line allowed for the Soviet tank armies to take the operational mobility away from German armor:

It is necessary to keep in mind that the mobile forces' main mission at this stage is the defeat of the enemy's rank and file and also, being isolated from its infantry and cut off from its rear organs, the enemy's tanks lose their capability for prolonged maneuver.

⁷⁹ Soviet General Staff, *Rollback: The Red Army's Winter Offensive along the Southwestern Strategic Direction, 1942-43*, trans. by Richard W. Harrison (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion and Company Limited, 2015) Kindle Edition, 1503-1506.

Thus it is more expedient to bypass the enemy's tank group and launch an attack against his rank and file and tank rear organs, striving to operationally encircle them, than to get bogged down in prolonged fighting with them.⁸⁰

By taking the initiative away from the panzers the Red Army had taken away from the Wehrmacht the ability to react as effectively to armored thrusts. Thus, their operational rear was thrown in jeopardy, forcing them to retreat for face encirclement and annihilation. Red Army commanders also learned to use their anti-tank weapons more effectively. In order to contain the panzers effectively, and to preserve their armor, corps commanders would encircle pockets with copious amounts of anti-tank guns. These guns would be towed along with the tank armies by jeeps, making them highly mobile and allowing them to swiftly form a ring around the armor.⁸¹

The success of *Uranus* changed everything for the Red Army. They now recognized that Deep Battle theory was a valuable doctrine to use. They also realized that the Germans, focused on the tactical layer, were blind to movements made at the operational level. German mobility was limited to railways, they were limited by the lack of fuel for their trucks, tanks, and aircraft.

The Red Army learned to rely on their network of partisans to collect and report this intelligence. They could take this information and make a plan that utilized the combined arms of the Red Army. This doctrine neutralized half an army group, and inflicted further damage and foil any relief operations. Red Army armored battle-groups now avoided panzer divisions as opposed to seeking them out. Instead they would avoid them, eviscerating instead the weak points in the enemy line to create the break through

⁸⁰ Soviet General Staff, *Rollback: The Red Army's Winter Offensive along the Southwestern Strategic Direction, 1942-43*, 1573-1576.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1569.

required to hit the enemy's rear. The panzers would be then forced to retreat or be annihilated, thus removing operational autonomy from the Wehrmacht and allowing the Red Army to fight the war on their terms. The lessons from *Uranus* taught STAVKA how to conduct effective mobile operations that utilized their massive army best.

Following the war, the Sixth Army's stand at Stalingrad was immortalized in the West. Paulus was made to be a heroic martyr and the Red Army's brilliant operation was downplayed by German generals keen on polishing their record. The German generals in this period firmly place the blame for the disastrous winter of 1942-1943 on the OKH, Hitler, the bad weather, and a city that refused to fall. Manstein remained bitter after the war about the failure of *Wintergewitter*, and his account addresses the strategic flaws of the Wehrmacht's 1942 campaign along the Don. In Manstein's opinion, Army Group "B" was given an impossible task, and only made the strategic situation worse for the Wehrmacht. By trying to fulfill operational directives that were largely out of touch with the strategic realities for the Wehrmacht in the East for 1942, the high command set up Army Group "B" for disaster.

Raus, on the other hand, wrote his study on his role in *Wintergewitter* in an attempt to polish his record and erase haunting mistakes. It was Raus who ordered General Walter von Hunersdorf to advance without support into Verkhniy-Kumskiy, weakening Manstein's spearhead. Raus committed this ill-considered attack under the impression that by seizing the town he could deliver a repeat encirclement battle, and then open the road to the relief of Stalingrad. Instead Hunersdorf ran into an entire tank corps, endangered his corps by fighting longer than he should have, and then retreated. This destabilized Army Group Don's spearhead and forced Manstein to order a retreat to

preserve the strength of the spearhead for future operations. No general would want to admit that their actions had heavily contributed to the failure of a relief operation. Raus especially did not want this; he was known for getting his men out of tricky situations, a skill that inspired the phrase “*Raus zieht heraus*” (Raus will get you out) amongst men trapped in encirclements.⁸² For him to admit that he was a large part of the reason a relief operation failed would have been a major blow to his pride, so he hid it.

Members of the Wehrmacht recording their experiences in Russia following the war were very careful to distance themselves from this failure. Raus wrote that he was ordered to retreat, but did not name anyone in particular who gave the order to do so. Instead, he placed blame on decisions made by the OKH for the failure of *Wintergewitter*. Manstein, the commander of Army Group Don, turned and blamed the OKH. *Uranus* was described by the German generals as no more than a standard concentric attack, with little focus on how the Germans put themselves in a position that allowed for *Uranus* to happen. Manstein addresses the doctrinal flaws of *Fall Blau*, but provided little in the way of a solution to the problems presented. Raus was interested in preserving his own record and as a divisional commander was only thinking of the next battle. This inability to assess changing patterns in Russian operational behavior set the Germans up for repeated failure in the summers of 1943 and 1944. The Wehrmacht had made themselves predictable, and the Red Army had noticed.

⁸² Raus, 19.

Chapter III: Kursk-Bagrations

Following the Red Army's winter offensive in early 1943, the operational balance on the Eastern Front shifted irreversibly in favor of the Red Army. With the winter offensive over and the spring thaw turning the ground to mud, a major decision had to be made. The Germans needed to decide whether they would go on the offense in 1943 or switch over to the defense. What made this decision so difficult for the German generals was that the Western Front was becoming active again. The demands of the Western Front would draw away divisions that were needed on the Eastern Front, weakening the overall strategic pool of reserves for German generals in Russia. With the fighting intensifying in North Africa, and rumors of a possible large Allied offensive in mainland Europe, the Germans knew their time was short to end the war in Russia.⁸³

The Red Army's Voronezh Front (the Russian equivalent to a German army group) had formed a salient around the city of Kursk in late March 1943. This salient held the bulk of Red Army divisions in the south, outnumbering the Germans in armor alone at a ratio of 2.4:1.⁸⁴ From Red Army reports, it is clear that the Germans were in worse shape than German memoirs and after action reports recorded. After the winter of 1943, Army Group South was in bad condition. According to Red Army reports from the period, "The strength of more than a third of the infantry divisions had fallen

⁸³ Manstein, 10073.

⁸⁴ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle of Kursk: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter-Offensive, July-August 1943*, trans. by Richard W. Harrison (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion and Company Limited, 2015) Kindle Edition, 219.

significantly and varied between 2,500 and 4,000 men and officers: these divisions were either not capable of combat or only partly so. All eight panzer divisions were also of limited combat value, each having 50-80 tanks remaining.”⁸⁵

These losses in men and material were largely irreplaceable, which forced German commanders to adopt a defensive posture to conserve their forces. A grand total of twenty-seven German divisions had been destroyed or were well below their optimal combat capacity. For the winter of 1942 to 1943, the Wehrmacht lost a staggering 600,632 men. The material losses were just as staggeringly high. A total of four thousand tanks, two hundred thousand motor vehicles, three thousand artillery pieces and another three thousand anti-tank guns were lost. The territorial gains from the previous summer had been lost and the Wehrmacht in southern Russia was in a strategic defensive posture.⁸⁶

Manstein managed to halt the Red Army’s winter advance through the Donets Basin and shielded the important railroad hub at Khar’kov with two swift counterattacks.⁸⁷ This fighting had temporarily stalled the Red Army, and made excellent use of Manstein’s command style. Manstein’s ability to assess the value of Romanian, Italian, and Hungarian divisions was supremely important. The Axis satellite nations’ armies had been grossly misused in 1942, and were vital to the survival of the Wehrmacht in southern Russia in 1943. In order to augment the abilities of his allies,

⁸⁵ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle of Kursk: The Red Army’s Defensive Operations and Counter-Offensive, July-August 1943*, 219.

⁸⁶ Gregory Liedtke, *Enduring the Whirlwind: The German Army and the Russo-German War, 1941-1943* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion et Company Limited, 2016) Kindle Edition, 7456, 7476, 7477, 7478.

⁸⁷ David M. Glantz, *After Stalingrad: the Red Army’s winter offensive, 1942-1943* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion, 2011) Kindle Edition, 4414.

Manstein assigned German advisors to the general staff of both Romanian and Hungarian armies.⁸⁸ With these changes in place, the Wehrmacht still stood a chance to hold on for another year in Russia. By the summer of 1943, the Wehrmacht leadership and its field commanders knew they had one chance left to secure victory in the East.

The Red Army had also been considerably weakened in southern and central Russia by their winter offensive. The Voronezh Front, commanded by General N.F. Vatutin, formed a salient around the city of Kursk in south-central Russia that extended 198 miles into German territory.⁸⁹ STAVKA and Field Marshal Zhukov had a plan for the Kursk salient, they knew that the salient was an inviting target for the Wehrmacht. The Germans had behaved predictably in the past at the operational level; they attacked after predictable pauses and relied on concentric attacks to achieve their objectives. Following exhaustive field intelligence work by Marshal Vasilevsky, Zhukov finally had the evidence he required to present the plan to Stalin. All intelligence activity conducted in the Central, Voronezh and Southwest Fronts pointed to a major German summer offensive aimed at the Kursk salient.⁹⁰

The Wehrmacht was indeed preparing for a major summer offensive, but the Germans had yet to decide on a course of action to destroy the Kursk salient. As mentioned before, the Germans knew they could not wait for further reinforcements. They knew each week spent in preparation lengthened the amount of time the Red Army had to prepare their own offensive. If their summer offensive succeeded they could

⁸⁸ Wood, 406.

⁸⁹ Soviet General Staff, *The Battle of Kursk: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter-Offensive, July-August 1943*, 233.

⁹⁰ Zhukov, 207.

reopen the road to Moscow, consolidate southern Russia, and then turn their forces to protect Western Europe. The problem was that the German general staff could not decide on a proper course of action.

The argument that the OKH, OKW, and Hitler had on possible operations to reduce this salient lasted weeks and boiled down to two major points. Would the Wehrmacht be better off with a preemptive strike against the salient, or should they wait and let the Red Army come to them - and *then* strike? This argument was summed up famously by Manstein, “What the latter ultimately [Hitler and the OKH] had to decide was whether the overall situation allowed us to wait for the Russians to start an offensive and then to hit them hard ‘*on the backhand*’ at the first good opportunity, or whether we should attack as early as possible ourselves and - still within the framework of a strategic defensive - strike a limited blow ‘*on the forehand*’.”⁹¹

The Southern Army group preferred to strike on the backhand. Like a matador, the Wehrmacht would wait for the bull (the Red Army’s Voronezh Front) to pass, then at the opportune moment, they would strike. This would enable the Wehrmacht to make the most use of their carefully husbanded armor and motorized infantry. The plan ensured that the Germans were allowed to pick where they would fight on their own terms, allowing Manstein to make masterful use of the Wehrmacht’s mobility and firepower. Striking at the opportune moment, ideally as the Red Army passed into the Lower Dnieper, they would cut off the spearhead. Following this stroke, an offensive launched from Khar’kov would smash into the Voronezh Front’s offensive. This would pin the

⁹¹ Manstein, 7479.

Voronezh Front between the Wehrmacht and the Black Sea, where they could be isolated and destroyed.⁹²

According to Manstein, Hitler and other generals stupidly swatted this plan down. General Kurt Zeitzler and Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge (Army Group Center) argued that the Wehrmacht could not simply sit and wait to be hit. If the Wehrmacht wanted to mount any meaningful offensive in 1943 this was their chance. Field Marshal von Kluge also had his own reasons for pushing as hard as he did for the preemptive offensive against the salient. If *his* plan was the one to smash the Red Army, he would gain further favor in the eyes of the Nazi elite and the German people.⁹³

Aside from their qualms about letting the Red Army show their hand first, the German generals opposed to striking a backhand blow relied on new models of tank to win future battles. By 1943, the heavy Tiger tank was now being produced in larger numbers than had been produced before. This tank, along with the new Elefant tank destroyer and Panther tank, was supposed to change the face of the war. According to Erhard Raus, a common saying with about the Tiger I among soldiers was that, “all T-34s lifted their hats when they met the Tiger.”⁹⁴ The Tiger I was indeed a formidable tank, and had proven itself capable of achieving very high kill counts. The Panther was designed with a similar philosophy in mind.

The Germans thought they could counter the Red Army’s numerical superiority by creating technologically superior tanks that outgunned the Red Army’s armor. This

⁹² Manstein, 7492.

⁹³ Clark, 323.

⁹⁴ Raus, 22.

meant creating tanks with higher velocity/ larger caliber guns and heavier armor that could engage enemy armor at long range. The heavier plating allowed for them to sustain more hits. The problem with many of these tanks, especially the Tiger I, was that they were logistical black holes and indirectly constrained operational mobility. The Panther had gearbox issues and engine fires, the Tiger I was heavy enough that it had problems crossing many bridges. On top of this, these new models of tanks consumed massive amounts of fuel for as short as their operational ranges were. The fifty-seven ton Tiger I had an off-road range of thirty-five miles; the Panther had a range of sixty five miles.⁹⁵

As opposed to creating armor that suited their style of mobile warfare, the Germans created tanks and tank destroyers that had a very limited operational range. This lack of mobility forced the Wehrmacht to use these tanks in a capacity that emphasized shock over maneuverability. The increased fuel consumption created further problems for an already over-stressed supply network. The net effect of these disastrous shifts in design was that the Wehrmacht was hobbled. As a fleet of ships can only move as fast as the slowest ship in the formation, German armored spearheads were now limited to the fuel range and speed of the Tiger I.

General Heinz Guderian was recalled to serve as the Inspector-General of Armored Troops on 17 February 1943. His task as the Inspector General was to oversee the production and development of new armored designs. His assessment of German armored forces in 1943 was rather bleak, production numbers for the Panzer IV, Tiger I and Panther lagged.⁹⁶ This meant that understrength units that needed the tanks were

⁹⁵ Robert Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1943-1945: Red Steamroller* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen et Sword Military, 2016) Kindle Edition, 5902-5903.

⁹⁶ Guderian, 308.

receiving replacement tanks at a much slower rate than before. Furthermore, Guderian was completely unsatisfied with the new Panther tank, “I spent June 15th worrying about our problem child, the Panther; the track suspension and drive were not right and the optics were also yet not satisfactory. On the next day I told Hitler of my reasons for not wishing to see the Panthers sent into action in the East. They were simply not ready for action.”⁹⁷

Guderian knew that the issues with the suspension, the drive, and the optics were just the tip of the iceberg for technical issues for the Panther. The tanks also lacked crews that had any experiences in the use of the Panther, and many crews even lacked battle experience. This lack of foresight on the part of the Germans would prove to further doom their operation, now named *Zitadelle*, to crush the Russians at Kursk.

Zitadelle, as Guderian wrote after the war, was doomed to fail from the start. Both Manstein and Guderian had their qualms about launching this preemptive strike against the salient around Kursk. Manstein thought that *Zitadelle* was operationally flawed; it took from the Wehrmacht the advantage the Germans held with their tactical mobility. Guderian did not understand why there *had* to be an offensive at all in 1943.⁹⁸ In his opinion, the Wehrmacht needed to stay on the defensive in Russia if the Third Reich was to survive. *Zitadelle* would take the form of a massive double envelopment by divisions from both Army Group Center and Army Group South. The spearhead that formed the assault on the northern flank of the pocket was commanded by Army Group Center’s General Walter Model, who had 747 tanks and six divisions of panzer grenadiers. The

⁹⁷ Guderian, 310.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 308 -309.

thrust from the south would be led by General Erich von Manstein, who was in command of 1,508 tanks and nine divisions of panzer grenadiers.⁹⁹

Acting as two mighty pincers, both elements would commit to enveloping the salient and destroying the bulk of forces caught within. Guderian was furious over the unimaginative nature of the plan and wrote, “our tactics were those that had been used many times before against the Russians, who as a result knew exactly what to expect.”¹⁰⁰ The Germans were repeating the same mistakes that had lost *Fall Blau* and *Taifun* for them.

The political infighting within the Wehrmacht lasted for weeks, pushing the timetable back from an initial assault in April to June 1943. This was the longest operational pause of the war between the Germans and the Soviets.¹⁰¹ The Germans needed this pause to assemble enough divisions for the offensive. The Red Army made good use of the pause as well. Zhukov ordered lines and lines of concentric defenses laid in place, and the flanks of the salient secured.

STAVKA had farther reaching plans for this salient than destroying the German divisions that entered the salient. This salient split the Wehrmacht’s Army Groups Center and South, presenting the Red Army with a golden opportunity, “The Kursk salient, which had been transformed into a powerful bridgehead, enabled our forces to successfully deploy for a general offensive for the purpose of defeating the most

⁹⁹ Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1943-1945*, 2499.

¹⁰⁰ Guderian, 311.

¹⁰¹ Mawdsley, 263.

important German groups of forces and subsequently developing operations for clearing the enemy out of Ukraine and Belorussia.”¹⁰²

By enticing the Wehrmacht to attack the Kursk salient the Red Army was setting themselves up for greater operational success. When the Wehrmacht attacked the salient they would be attacking with the strongest elements of Army Groups Center and South. If the Voronezh Front could sufficiently maul the German forces arrayed against them, the bulk of Germany’s armored forces could be destroyed. With the destruction of the armored branch of the Wehrmacht in the East, the Red Army’s armor would have a much easier time consolidating the rest of the Wehrmacht. This plan promised a swift end to the war, setting the Red Army up to permanently have the operational, and thus strategic, initiative.

The Red Army’s plan for mauling the flower of German armor was based on lessons learned from the previous years of fighting against the Wehrmacht. Their defenses had become deeper, with gaps in the line turned into fields of fire that would hit the enemy from all sides. Anti-tank positions were reinforced, camouflaged, and set at intervals throughout the depth of a division’s defenses. The number of artillery pieces and mortars were increased as well by 1943, adding a tactical density of 18-30 pieces per division.¹⁰³ The net effect of all these adjustments was a defensive line that could deal with shock tactics and effectively counter German mobile warfare doctrine.

¹⁰² Soviet General Staff, *The Battle of Kursk: The Red Army’s Defensive Operations and Counter-Offensive, July-August 1943*, Location 280-283.

¹⁰³ David M. Glantz, *Soviet defensive tactics at Kursk, July 1943* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1986) Kindle Edition, 178-79.

The Red Army watched the Wehrmacht move their divisions into position on the flanks of the salient, and reinforced their defenses accordingly. The first part of the plan was to bog the armored spearheads down fighting through ring after ring of defenses. This would pin them down to specific sectors. The second part of the operation was named *Kutuzov*, and was an armored counter-attack that would hammer the German divisions tied up in the Red Army defenses.

Operation *Zitadelle* started on 5 July 1943. The Wehrmacht's offensive did not start off well. The Red Army bombarded the assembly areas for the infantry before the attack was even fully under way.¹⁰⁴ To the north, Model's armored forces ran into minefields and were hammered by coordinated fire from Red Army artillery and anti-tank guns. In six days of fighting Model's battle group would suffer twenty two thousand casualties for nine miles gained.¹⁰⁵ Manstein was attacking with the bulk of the armor.

The new Panther tanks had been delayed in reaching the battlefield and their first experience at Kursk was troubling. A good quarter of the Panthers slated for the offensive suffered from engine fires on their way to the assembly sites. Once they reached the area and stepped off with the rest of the formation a good number of them were stuck in mud. In combat, these tanks performed admirably, but the technical issues that had plagued the Panther through its trials outweighed its value on the battlefield. The panzers reached Prokhorovka, but were then set upon by General Vatutin's armored reserves.¹⁰⁶ The fighting lasted from 9 to 12 July and yielded high casualties for either side. Both German

¹⁰⁴ Forczyk, *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1943-1945*, 2676.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 2766.

¹⁰⁶ Valeriy Zamulin and Stuart Britton, *Demolishing the myth: the tank battle at Prokhorovka, Kursk, July 1943: an operational narrative* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion, 2012) Kindle Edition, 5997.

and Red Army generals polished their records after the war by downplaying friendly casualties and exaggerating damage inflicted upon the enemy. The actual number taken from declassified Red Army reports and East German archives points to a total seven thousand personnel killed in this engagement.¹⁰⁷ To make matters more difficult for Manstein, the Red Army's Operation *Kutuzov* started on July 12.¹⁰⁸

This operation counted on the Wehrmacht's attention to be focused on the liquidation of the Kursk salient. The plan was to entangle Army Group South and Center in Kursk's defense, bleeding them out and forcing the Germans to invest more men into *Zitadelle*. Once the spearheads were drawn in, the Red Army's Central Front would strike hard at Army Group Center. Army Group Center's one hundred fifty-six mile eastern front was only held by twelve German infantry divisions.¹⁰⁹ The mobile reserves had been largely stripped away for *Zitadelle*, allowing the Red Army's Central Front to operate without the threat of German armor launching a counterattack. The Red Army launched this offensive with almost perfect coordination from the Bryansk, Western, and Voronezh Fronts.¹¹⁰

Von Kluge ordered Model to send what remained of his spearhead to reinforce the salient around the key city of Orel, a major communications hub for Army Group Center. Manstein was also ordered to send a few sorely needed crack divisions northwards as well, further weakening his spearhead. The Red Army was overzealous with *Kutuzov*. They tried to bum-rush the Wehrmacht and instead spend much of their strength on

¹⁰⁷ Zamulin and Stuart Britton, 12700.

¹⁰⁸ Soviet General Staff. *The Battle of Kursk: The Red Army's Defensive Operations and Counter-Offensive, July-August 1943*, 7142.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5688.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5516.

addressing the German defenses head-on. This slowed the advance of their columns and allowed for the Germans to execute a skillful fighting retreat, preserving the bulk of Army Group Center's forces.

The Germans fell back to the *Hagen* line of defenses along the Desna River, and Model managed to destroy vital bridges along the Oka River, temporarily holding off the Red Army. STAVKA called the operation off thirty eight days later on 19 August 1943. The Red Army had incurred some eighty-eight thousand casualties on Army Group Center during their counter- offensive, draining manpower reserves and destroying a third of Field Marshal von Kluge's armor.¹¹¹

The summer of 1943 was an operational success for the Red Army, but it came at a steep price. This price would not halt the Red Army offensives to liberate Ukraine, but the high casualties did teach STAVKA that the Germans were not beaten quite yet. Operationally the Red Army learned to coordinate its offensives, but made the tactical mistake of addressing the Army Group Center's defenses head-on. 1943 was a year of experimentation for the Red Army, and 1944 would be the year that the Red Army would employ the lessons of 1943 would be employed to destroy the last major German threat in the East. Kursk and Operation *Kutuzov* gave the Red Army a realistic assessment of what the Germans were capable of at this late stage in the war.

By late 1943 the Wehrmacht had lost much of their territory in the South, and were trying to preserve what territory they had left in Ukraine. OKH and OKW finally seemed to understand that offensives to regain territory were no longer a viable option.

¹¹¹ Forczyk. *Tank warfare on the Eastern Front: 1943-1945*, 3494.

The question on the OKH, Hitler, and the German general's minds was how best to preserve what they still controlled. The Wehrmacht was still unwilling to trade ground to preserve their forces. Instead they held on to operationally indefensible lines of fortifications, tying down the mobile forces they had left.¹¹² The dream of a Thousand Year Reich ended brutally, and now the Wehrmacht's one goal was to survive an onslaught from a determined enemy who had the upper hand.

For Manstein, this was his last period as a commander, Hitler forcibly retired Manstein in March 1944. His retirement would come just two months before the Red Army's summer offensive slammed into Army Group Center. In his memoirs he marks 1943 as the year that Germany's defeat in the war was inevitable. The fighting at Kursk had destroyed much of the German armor forcing the Germans to rely on what Manstein called "a system of improvisations and stop-gaps."¹¹³ Improvisation saved many commanders in tight spots, but when operational doctrine had to rely on improvised solutions, it did not provide solutions to long-term problems. In Manstein's opinion, the Wehrmacht needed to avoid over-extending the forces it had in the field. Overextending the remaining resources to hold cities and towns in the salients surrounded by the Red Army was a death sentence for the German soldiers trapped in the towns. Following the disaster at Kursk, the Wehrmacht did not have the resources to mount break-out operations that had saved encircled forces in the past.

Manstein saw operational directives from OKH ordering commanders to hold onto Russian towns that were once strategically important as being death sentences to

¹¹² Manstein, 8817.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 8827.

Army Group South, and ultimately a death sentence for the Third Reich. The Wehrmacht needed to launch counter-attacks that relied on using its armored and mechanized divisions to strike swiftly at Russian spearheads. This had worked in the past to blunt breakthroughs made by the Red Army. Frontal counter-attacks and spoiling attacks - surprise strikes into enemy assembly areas - were common methods of stalling Red Army thrusts into German territory. The problem was that all this tactical maneuvering required commanders to have a high degree of operational mobility. With the destruction of much of the Wehrmacht's armor, trucks, and other mobile support assets in *Zitadelle*, the Wehrmacht lost the majority of its operational mobility in the East. In response to these losses, Hitler and the OKH ordered that chains of fortified towns were to be created. Thus, the *feste Plätze* (loosely translated: fortified place) entered into German battle doctrine.¹¹⁴ This introduction to German doctrine would spell disaster for the Wehrmacht in the East.

According to Erhard Raus, as 1943 turned into 1944 the Wehrmacht came to rely more and more on this system. The lack of mobile reserves and Hitler's now almost complete control over the way the war was waged further enforced this doctrine's dominance.¹¹⁵ This change in doctrine placed absolute control of the battlefield around the towns in the hands of local commanders. Raus states that, "These tactics were all enforced by Hitler and enforced with all the authoritative powers at his disposal. In the end they obstructed all operational freedom and deprived the very substance of the German Army until there was no army left."¹¹⁶ Generals in control of the town were

¹¹⁴ Mawdsely, 300.

¹¹⁵ Raus and Natzmer, 62.

¹¹⁶ Raus and Natzmer, 63.

responsible for preparing the towns for Red Army offensives, and were given “powers of life and death” over the soldiers and population of the town. The commanders of these fortress-towns were all under an oath that they would not retreat and would fight to the last man.

In the opinion of both Raus and Manstein Germany could have been saved if German tactical doctrine had not been micro-managed by Hitler and the German high command. Placing divisions in isolated defensive positions based on their combat strength as it appeared *on paper* was a gross misapplication of force. That being said, generals like Raus, Guderian, and Manstein had few proactive solutions to the problem. All three generals believed that if the Wehrmacht retreated, shortened its lines, and was given back command autonomy, then the Reich could be saved. These solutions did little to address the fact that German doctrine, focused on the tactical level of battle, had ultimately failed in the East. Through the fall of 1943 and into early 1944, the Wehrmacht’s losses for Army Group Center and Army Group South further crippled any tactical or operational doctrine focused on mobility. The reality of this had not quite sunk in, as commanders operated as if what had happened in 1943 were a minor setback.

The losses in territory and manpower dashed any real hope for the Germans of ever taking the operational initiative back from the Red Army. From January to April 1944, the Red Army launched a continuous series of deep offensives that drove Army Group South out of Ukraine. In the north, Leningrad was relieved and the city liberated from its nine-hundred-day siege. By June 1944, the Red Army had successfully pushed Axis forces back in the north and south of Russia to the point that only Army Group Center remained as a real threat. STAVKA had a plan to deal with Army Group Center:

they planned an operation that would smash Army Group Center, breaking the back of Wehrmacht. The operation, named *Bagration* (after Prince Petr Ivanovich Bagration, the Tsarist commander who fought Napoleon at Borodino¹¹⁷), was the offensive that would shatter Army Group Center, liberate Belorussia, and then open Eastern Poland to the Red Army.¹¹⁸

The German Army Group Center occupied much of Belorussia and had been building defenses in this region for the last year. They fortified towns and hoped that the Red Army would expend the energy of an offensive on Army Group Center's defenses. The OKH and OKW hoped that the marshy ground in Belorussia would channel the Red Army into kill zones set to make maximum use of the German defenses.¹¹⁹ Army Group Center had a total of sixty-six divisions ready to repel the Red Army, less than half the total divisions the Red Army had at their disposal for the operation.¹²⁰ Army Group Center was outnumbered and outgunned by the four combined Red Army Fronts pressing down on their position in Belorussia.

Four years of combined experience shaped this unique operation. For the first time in the war, STAVKA was planning an offensive that did not rely on the Germans advancing into a trap first. This operation made masterful use of *maskirovka*, putting a sixteen mile security buffer between the three Belorussian Fronts, the First Baltic Front

¹¹⁷ Mawdsley, 299.

¹¹⁸ Soviet General Staff, *Operation Bagration: 23 June-29 August 1944. The Rout of the German Forces in Belorussia*, trans. by Richard W. Harrison (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion and Company Limited, 2015) Kindle Edition, 567.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 602.

¹²⁰ William M. Connor, *Analysis of Deep Attack operations: Operation Bagration, Belorussia, 22 June-29 August 1944* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Combat Studies Institute, 1987) Kindle Edition, 274-299.

and the Germans. Troop assembly areas were camouflaged and all divisional traffic moved at night. In the period leading up to the start of *Bagration*, all fronts were expected to stage diversionary attacks. This kept Army Group Center guessing as to where the fatal blow would fall. This level of deception caused the Germans to miscalculate the amount of manpower that the Red Army had set aside for this operation. The result of this preparation was that Army Group Center was largely unaware of the buildup of enemy forces opposite them. The Germans also had a limited idea of what the Red Army wanted to achieve with their summer offensive. They expected an attack on 13 June, with the Red Army's goal being the seizure of Bobruisk, thus allowing for the Red Army to split Army Group Center in half.¹²¹

The Red Army was planning on assaulting in the *direction* of Bobruisk, but the goal was to bypass the city. The four fronts advanced on four parallel axes with the operational objectives being the targets of Lublin and Siedlce in Poland. Red Army records indicate that the defenses for Army Group Center were pretty formidable, but sections of the defenses were largely incomplete. The highest density for defenses was around towns and major highways, like the roads from the city of Orsha to Minsk.¹²² The German-held cities down the length of Army Group Center's front had 40-60 miles in between each of them.¹²³ It was between these gaps that the Red Army slipped on 23 and 24 June.

¹²¹ Connor, *Analysis of Deep Attack operations: Operation Bagration, Belorussia, 22 June-29 August 1944*, 404, 444, 457.

¹²² Soviet General Staff, *Operation Bagration: 23 June-29 August 1944. The Rout of the German Forces in Belorussia*, 790.

¹²³ Mawdsley, 300.

The Red Army took the first line of towns within six days; the infantry liquidated divisions caught within the multiple pockets formed by the Red Army's advance. The mobile columns avoided the strongholds, relying on their superior tactical mobility to slip around defenses and ravage the German rear areas. What made matters worse for the German field command was that OKH had no mobile reserves left to counter this offensive. The command structure had been severely hobbled by orders from OKH that forbid retreat from these isolated outposts. These orders stripped German commanders of their ability to retreat when necessary and crippled their ability to operate independently. The OKH had committed the cardinal sin of trading long term combat effectiveness to defend operationally indefensible positions. Guderian was appointed Chief of General Staff on 21 July 1944, and reported that a total of twenty-five German divisions had been destroyed between 22 June and 3 July.¹²⁴

In thirty-six days of fighting, the Red Army advanced three hundred miles and obliterated Army Group Center. After the Red Army achieved their operational goals they halted, creating a defensive line east of the city of Brest. Army Group Center had collapsed, and like the loss of a keystone in an arch, the rest of the Wehrmacht in Russia was soon to follow. The road to Poland lay open, and the end of the war was in sight. *Bagration* was huge success for the Red Army. The operation made use of all refinements the Russians had made to their Deep Battle doctrine. The Red Army made masterful use of its intelligence arm to deceive the Wehrmacht and actively collect information on it. The Russian approach to combined arms warfare executed this plan

¹²⁴ Guderian, 352.

perfectly. In designing this plan, STAVKA relied on operational fluidity to overwhelm, isolate, and destroy the Germans in Belorussia.

The Red Army had learned in 1942 that all operations work like energy in a wave: at a certain point the destructive force of the wave will peter out as it runs into more obstacles. Once the operation reached that point where momentum is lost, it risked destruction, as elements of the offensive had passed their operational limits. This is why STAVKA assigned realistic objectives as the end point for *Bagration*; it was imperative that these fronts all stopped along the Vistula River.¹²⁵ The forces set aside by STAVKA for *Bagration* held the bulk of Red Army forces in 1944. STAVKA realized that even a force as large and well equipped as the Red Army fronts participating in *Bagration* still had definite operational limits. As the German generals wrote after the war, the choice of Moscow as the central target for *Taifun* in 1941 seemed reasonable. Ultimately it was operationally unattainable, and an operation with the goal to capture Moscow from the 1941 border with the Soviet Union was unsustainable.

The German generals write little about *Bagration*. Manstein had been forcibly retired in March 1944, so his memoirs end with Army Group South fighting desperately to maintain their forces north of the Carpathian Mountains.¹²⁶ Guderian assumed command on the eve of *Bagration* and writes that Red Army operations against Army Group Center led to the collapse of what was left of Army Group North. Raus, for his part, was silent about about *Bagration*. His writings in *Panzers on the Eastern Front* and *The Anvil of War* stop after the battle of Kursk and pick up only when he is placed in

¹²⁵ Soviet General Staff, *Operation Bagration: 23 June-29 August 1944. The Rout of the German Forces in Belorussia*, 12508.

¹²⁶ Guderian, 352.

charge of the Wehrmacht in Pomerania. This was probably because he was still attached to Army Group South at the time *Bagration* started.

Even if *Bagration* was not covered at length by German sources following the war, it is clear to see that in the minds of these three generals the war was truly lost following the defeat at Kursk. *Bagration* was simply the logical next step in the Russian response to the way Kursk had been mishandled by the Germans. Manstein summed up the bitterness the German generals felt succinctly: “What we had to pay for, first and foremost, was Germany’s failure to stake absolutely everything on bringing about a showdown in the east in 1943 in order to achieve at least a stalemate or to exhaust the Russians’ offensive power before a real second front emerged in the west.”¹²⁷

Manstein addressed the disastrous decision made by the German high command following the disaster at Kursk, namely the decision to fortify and hold as much ground as possible in hopes of forcing a decisive battle. Manstein and Guderian both understood this was absolute folly, as the Red Army had the operational initiative and could attack where they wished. For the German generals, *Bagration* was the final nail in the coffin in the East for the survival of the Third Reich. A nail driven in by their own operational shortsightedness, their own underestimation of their foe’s ability, and ultimately their own inability to adapt in an operationally meaningful way.

¹²⁷ Manstein, 8824.

Conclusion

German generals who served on the Eastern Front, following World War II, created a series of memoirs and after-action reports. These contained all the collected experiences of the Wehrmacht in the East. These documents served the purpose of recording the German military's approach to dealing with the Red Army. The Red Army was a known-unknown for the Western Allies. The Red Army had defeated the Germans but no one understood exactly *how* they had pulled off this victory. To do this, the Western Allies needed first-hand accounts of the war in the East from all levels. The German generals provided the most basic parts of their operational strategy, focused on the importance of the tactical layer of strategy. These generals saw this as their chance to rewrite history, erasing their faults and shifting the blame for the loss of the war from themselves to the Nazi party. As part of the de-Nazification of Germany they had suffered immensely. They were now social pariahs, worthy of the ire of the German people for the loss of the war. They could not meet in public, employment was difficult for them to find, and immediately after the war many were still prisoners of war living in less than optimal conditions.¹²⁸

If they worked with the Western allies, providing them with insights into fighting the Red Army, this would ensure better treatment for many of them. They could rewrite history and clear their wartime records of wrongdoing, which would restore their image

¹²⁸ Searle, 21-22.

in the eyes of the German people. Major operations like *Taifun*, *Fall Blau*, and *Zitadelle* were written with the blame for their failure squarely laid at the feet of the German high command and the Nazi Party. The reason *Taifun* failed? Well, Hitler called it off. Why did *Fall Blau* fail? Hitler was obsessed with taking Stalingrad and bound Paulus to the city. Why did *Zitadelle* fail? Hitler allowed for ideologues and glory seekers within the Wehrmacht to derail his judgement. Generals like Raus wanted to clear their records of mistakes, like Raus's disastrous decision to advance without support at Verkhniy-Kumskiy, a decision that destabilized Manstein's operation to relieve Paulus.

The German generals also saw the war differently than their counterparts at STAVKA. Even after the war, the German generals believed that tactical victories over the Red Army were the key to victory. The Red Army's generals understood the war differently. They focused on the execution of successful operations, not just single battles. These operations sought to keep the Red Army on the operational initiative. They knew the loss of operational initiative was the reason for the disasters in the first two years of the war. They were not only expected to destroy the enemy in the field, but also to change the theater of operations in such a way that the enemy was always on the operational defensive.

These two different perspectives shaped the doctrines of both armies. Imagine two chess players, both playing the same game of chess. The first player defines victory on the board as taking the most pieces off the board. The second player defines victory as checkmate, which requires the second player to win through long-term strategy. These separate definitions of what leads to a victory on the board would be reflected in either participants' style of play. The same can be said for how differences in doctrine for both

the Red Army and the Wehrmacht shaped the war in the East. These differences in doctrine are seen within both sets of reports. In their after action reports, the Wehrmacht focused on the tactical level of strategy. This is because many generals, even at the level of operational strategy still saw themselves as field commanders.

German doctrine defined success in a war as the ability to break the enemy army in the field, avoiding another long-term stalemate. This created a tactical doctrine that required a high degree of autonomy for German commanders to make the most of their forces operational mobility to win these battles. The tactical layer of strategy informed the operational layer. For the Red Army, this was inverted. Red Army thinkers understood that the post-World War One battlefield had changed forever. The key to victory was the destabilization of the enemy's front through a chain of linked battles that constituted an operation.

The Red Army proved as well that they could adapt. Their field intelligence grew quickly through the war, and they learned from the Germans. This allowed them to tailor their doctrine to be extremely effective against the Wehrmacht. The Germans simply refused to learn. They believed through the war that the tactical sphere was where the war in Russia would be won. The Wehrmacht made the same sort of mistakes at Kursk that it made outside the gates of Moscow. Poor command decisions, like Guderian's choice to advance unsupported at Tula or Von Kluge's insistence on striking a preemptive blow at Kursk, speak volumes about the German general's hubris. The German general's hubris stifled their ability to adapt to changing conditions on the battlefield. They were blind to the fact that this adherence to an outdated doctrine was losing the war for the Wehrmacht. This combination of hubris and the inability to develop their doctrine to realistically

reflect the realities of the war in the East doomed the Wehrmacht. These problems were further compounded by Nazi racial beliefs that affirmed all Slavs as subhuman, this gave the Germans a false sense of superiority.

These attitudes brought the Wehrmacht to the disasters at Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, and set them up for their defeat in Belorussia. Their belief that “one more battle” would shift the weight of the war in their favor led to the misapplication of their own forces. The German generals’ memoirs and after action reports published after the war still reflect this problem. To their credit, both Raus and Manstein concede that the introduction of the *feste Plätze* into German tactical doctrine was a mistake. It tied the Wehrmacht to easily isolated defensive points in hopes that the Red Army would hurl themselves against the defenses until they were destroyed. Another consensus among the German commanders was that unrealistic operational objectives, and limits on the operational independence of field commanders, led to their defeat in Russia.

The German focus on victory through the tactical layer demanded a high degree of autonomy for commanders. What these commanders failed to mention is the other side of the proverbial coin. The autonomy given to these commanders allowed for the Wehrmacht to take unnecessary risks in the name of greater personal glory. This was exhibited at all levels of command, such as Guderian’s decision to advance on Tula without the support of the Fourth Army in the face of a Red Army counter-attack. It happened again during *Wintergewitter*, when Raus ordered General von Hunsdorf to advance without support and seize Verkhniy-Kumskiy. In 1943 it was the reason for von Kluge to push as hard as he did for the *forehand* strike against the Kursk pocket.

The German general staff was also responsible for a good deal of the bickering that stalled out offensives. Even between generals like Manstein and Guderian, there was still a big enough difference of opinions on the proper way forward that the decision making process took weeks. In the case of Kursk, Manstein and Guderian both thought that *Zitadelle* was a shortsighted decision made by the OKH, but they thought as much for different reasons. Guderian saw no good coming from a summer offensive in 1943, and urged fellow generals not give in to the impulse to go on the offense. Instead, he argued the Wehrmacht should have been on the operational defensive that summer. The Germans would have time to consolidate territory, reinforce divisions, and prepare for an offensive in 1944. Manstein saw that there was a need to attack in the summer of 1943, but the Wehrmacht needed to make better use of its mobile forces. The Wehrmacht didn't have strength to go toe to toe with the Red Army on the Red Army's own terms. The differences between these two opinions was vast, and the voices of these two generals were just two voices in an entire chorus.

Ultimately, the generals bear the burden of blame for not understanding their enemy, and failing to adapt in time to win the war in the East. The German general's hubris, unrealistic assessment of their enemy's ability, and their over confidence in their own abilities set them up for defeat. Their post-war memoirs and after action reports served to educate the Western allies on the way the Red Army fought, but also to whitewash history in the German generals' favor. They understood the Red Army best at the tactical level, but that ultimately was not where the war was won. The myopic focus on tactical layer of strategy served them well in their post-war writing, as they could hide their failures at the operational layer. This much is clear from their writing. They shifted

blame for their own shortcomings as commanders on either dead German generals or members of the Nazi Party. The German general's recorded experiences in Russia colored the West's views on the Red Army, painting the Russians as a twenty-first century Tatar horde bent on the destruction of the West. In the end, the German generals got away with rewriting history to cover the sins of the past. These generals lost the war for in the East, but they were the ones who defined exactly *how* it was lost.

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