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The impact of Hitler's ideology on his military decisions

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The University of Arizona, 1989

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THE IMPACT OF HITLER'S IDEOLOGY
ON HIS
MILITARY DECISIONS

by
Verner Reinhold Carlson

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
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For the Degree of
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In the Graduate College
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1989
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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FIGURE 1: MAP OF THE BATTLE AREA NEAR KURSK .......... 102
ABSTRACT

HITLER CLAIMED TO HAVE STUDIED CLAUSEWITZ AND MACHIAVELLI, BUT VIOLATED THE TENETS OF BOTH BY PERMITTING IDEOLOGY TO OVERRIDE STRATEGY. HITLER'S IDEOLOGY IS REVEALED FROM DOCUMENTARY SOURCES: MEIN KAMPF, HIS SPEECHES, AND TISCHREDEN (TABLE TALKS.) OPERATION SEA LION, THE PLANNED 1940 INVASION OF ENGLAND, WAS CANCELLED BECAUSE THE FUHRER REGARDED THE BRITISH AS NORDIC COUSINS. OPERATION CITADEL, THE 1943 BATTLE OF KURSK, WAS CONCEIVED BECAUSE HE DECIDED THE RACIALLY INFERIOR SLAV MUST BE SUBDUED. DOOMED FROM THE OUTSET, HITLER NEVERTHELESS LAUNCHED CITADEL AND SQUANDERED MOST OF GERMANY'S REMAINING ARMOR AND ELITE TROOPS. A GENERAL STAFF OFFICER IS INTERVIEWED AS WITNESS TO THE PERIOD. HIS BACKGROUND, TRAINING, AND OPINIONS OF THE FUHRER ARE PRESENTED. THESIS CONCLUSION: FLAWED IDEOLOGY BROUGHT DISASTROUS DECISIONS.
CHAPTER I

FLAWED IDEOLOGY, FAULTY DECISIONS

We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east.

Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

During the late hours of 1 August 1934, on the eve of the death of Reich President Hindenburg, Hitler called his cabinet into emergency session and pushed through a decree entitled: "Law concerning the Head of State of the German Reich." The law fused the office of the Reich President with that of the Chancellor. It became effective at the moment of the old President's death the following day.

The decree allowed Hitler to unite in his person the offices of President of the Reich, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Chancellor of the Reich, and Fuhrer of the National Socialist Party. Thus Hitler, through parliamentary legerdemain, made himself commander of the Armed Forces, the strongest non-political institution of the state.

Through wholesale sackings of commanders, slander campaigns, and the swearing of personal allegiances, Hitler
daily tightened his control over the military. The text of
the oath of personal loyalty reads:

I swear by God, this holy oath that I will render to
Adolph Hitler, Leader of the German nation and
people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,
unconditional obedience, and I am ready as a brave,
soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath.³

The Wehrmacht was a political organ to be used: "The
Party gives the Army to the Volk and the Volk give soldiers
to the Army; both jointly give the German Reich the security
of inner peace and strength for maintaining its position."⁴

Hitler intended to make the Wehrmacht a tool of National
Socialist ideology.

At the core of this ideology lay Hitler's granite-hard
belief that problems could be solved by force alone.⁵

Hitler stressed race as central to his program and
attributed the decline of bygone civilizations to a simple
case of "blood poisoning" by inferior peoples. A social
Darwinist, he saw the Jews as "racial parasites" and as
destroyers of civilization (Kulturzerstörer). To Hitler's
contempt for the Jews was added a pathological hatred of
Marxism.⁶

Marxism was viewed as a threat to the German racial
community because it respected neither national nor ethnic
boundaries.⁷ Hitler was convinced that ultimately a
struggle between National Socialism and Marxism must take
It shall be the object of this chapter to sketch, in broadest terms, the influence of Hitler's ideology on initiating this struggle and on his military decision-making. To describe the military decisions that flowed from Hitler's ideology will require a brief description of Hitler as thinker, speechwriter, and ideologue. His close identification with Machiavelli's credo is also outlined.

**Hitler as Thinker**

Hitler's thoughtways have long been denigrated as simplistic; a series of contradictions locked in philosophical concrete. Some have even opined that he possessed no reasoned system of thought. Alan Bullock's biography of Hitler declared the Nazi movement barren of ideas, and Hitler an opportunist whose only consistency was a demonic will to power.³

Lesser luminaries in the Nazi firmament have often been credited with doing his thinking for him. Following World War II, it was fashionable to assert that Dr. Karl Haushofer did his geopolitics, Gottfried Feder his
economics, Walther Darré his Blut und Boden (blood and soil) doctrine and that Stefan George and Friedrich Nietzsche spoke unremittingly to his spirit.

Hitler has been variously dismissed as a chaplinesque crank, a demagogue, a failed artist, ein Trommeler (a drum beater), or as a complex lunatic driven by grandiose designs. These Hollywood-type trivializations of Hitler were inspired in America by wartime propaganda and in postwar Germany by the Allied denazification program.

Despite endless tomes on the topic of Hitler in the intervening years, the salient question remains: Who was this man who had so radical an impact on Western civilization? Ancillary, but more answerable related questions are: Who concocted his ideology? Who wrote his thousand or more major speeches? Who did his thinking? Who was his ideologist-in-residence? Who ghost-wrote Mein Kampf? Who made his military decisions? What drove the decision-making process?

Hitler as Speechwriter

Hitler resembled Churchill in that he authored his own speeches. But Hitler went beyond Churchill in that he authored an ideology, a party, and the uniquely Hitlerian concept of the National Socialist state. The Nazi state
was, in fact, an amalgam of his private ideologies in action.

Major speeches were dictated to a battery of secretaries, then painstakingly revised by the Führer in a series of drafts. Numerous corrections and additions were made. He continued to revise until just before final distribution to the press. Occasionally, at secret meetings such as the 1937 Hossbach Conference, he would arrive with elaborately prepared notes, only to discard them at the last minute and substitute radically different agendas. He had the habit of twisting the stated purposes of official forums to suit his own ends.

Hitler's writings sprung from his spontaneous orations and not the other way around. He was basically an orator who seldom wrote. Had he not been confined to Landsberg Prison from April to December 1924, it is unlikely that he would have taken the time to dictate Mein Kampf.

The purpose of the speeches was to keep the masses stirred to fever-pitch, always imbued with fanaticism. Hermann Rauschning, an early political associate of Hitler's, recorded the relevant monologue:

I have been reproached for making the masses fanatic and ecstatic . . . I can lead the masses only if I tear them out of their apathy. A mass that is apathetic is the greatest threat to unity . . . apathy to the masses is a defensive form of rejection . . . the statesman who fails to take
immediate measures against a growing apathy of the masses ought to be impeached."

**Hitler as Ideologue**

Hitler viewed the world in terms of ideology. According to Zbigniew Brezinski, a former U.S. national security advisor, this can be advantageous because it "gives adherents a sense of consistency and certainty that is too often absent among those brought up in the tradition of short-range pragmatism."

To decipher Hitler's ideology requires an indepth review of *Mein Kampf*. It is crucially relevant for several reasons: First, it constitutes the earliest orderly, unguarded recitation of Hitler's ideas. Written at a time when he had a relatively low public profile, Hitler felt less constrained to hide his feelings. Second, it is the only lengthy written policy statement made by Hitler in his lifetime. Finally, despite its turgidity of prose and repetitiveness, its two volumes contain every major idea that formed the basis for his later actions.

Hans Bernd Gisevius, German diplomat and survivor of numerous plots to overthrow Hitler, said of *Mein Kampf*: "If one reads it carefully, one finds in it everything, literally everything, which this man has brought into the world."
Hitler regarded himself, asserts Gerhard Ritter, the noted German historian, as the epitome of the common man. He was the people's leader, "in the most radical democratic manner." He saw himself as directly representing the will of the German people—the man to whom the nation had delegated its power.\textsuperscript{16}

Hannah Arendt, in \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, opines that the Nazi program corresponds to the intellectual and moral capacity of the average man when he is impelled to act for himself.\textsuperscript{17}

It is in private conversations with his closest associates such as Hermann Rauschning, Otto Strasser, Albert Speer, and various \textit{Gauleiter} (District Leaders) that we find Hitler most revealing.\textsuperscript{18} In these meetings over \textit{Tee und Kuchen} (tea and cakes) or at the privacy of the dinner table in the company of his captive audience, we catch, in full relief, glimpses of his grandiose designs.

He rails against Marxism, Judaism, and Versailles with equal fervor. Frequently he lapses into the more conventional pap of contemporary politicians, stressing virtue, motherhood, and patriotism. It is in his \textit{Tischreden} (table talks) that we find the vintage Hitler, unrefined and undisguised.
This is the Hitler who authored *Mein Kampf*, repeating, clarifying, and elaborating on the ideas first dictated to Rudolf Hess in the fortress at Landsberg. Those who dismiss *Mein Kampf* as mere verbal steam should note how critically Hitler analyzed the deterioration of the Hapsburg Empire.¹⁹

He stressed the Army's role in the first World War as a bulwark against the evils of parliamentarianism and materialism. He considered it the preserver of the ideals of devoted service and sacrifice for the welfare of the people.²⁰

The Army of the future, he held, must preserve these traditional values and also act as a unifying force, thus binding the nation together.²¹ It must become the "school of the nation" in the new *Voelkische Staat* (national state) where the highest educational process culminates in military service.²²

**Machiavelli's Friend**

By Hitler's time, Machiavellianism had become a commonplace, bourgeois affair. It was the rabidity with which Hitler embraced Machiavelli that was shocking:

> I do not recognize any moral law in politics. Politics is a game in which every trick is permitted and in which the rules are constantly changing---in accordance with the adroitness of the player."
This quote was from a conversation recorded by Hitler's close friend and President of the Danzig Senate, Hermann Rauschning.

"I am ready to swear six false oaths a day . . . what does it matter? continues his soliloquy. "Don't waste your time with such trifles. Is an untroubled conscience more important to you than the restoration of Germany?" Clearly here is the basis for later behavior when he negotiated with Chamberlain, who believed Hitler and assured the world of "peace in our time." It likewise explains his specious non-aggression pact with Stalin and numerous other agreements made and broken.

Later in the same conversation, Hitler averred "I do not refuse being called a disciple of Machiavelli." He then attempted to fuse Machiavelli with Darwin, concluding that Machiavelli lacked understanding of the principles of biological science. Hitler assured Rauschning that he understood the biological basis of politics and could draw the proper conclusions.

In military decision-making, Hitler was an habitual procrastinator. He spent months agonizing over the decision to launch Operation Sea Lion, the proposed invasion of England. He cancelled it only after detailed General Staff plans had been prepared.
Procrastination also marked his reoccupation of the Rhineland and the decision to attack Poland. In these instances he followed Machiavelli's example of Fabius Cunctator, who temporized against the Carthaginians to gain advantage. Hitler delayed, not because it was the appropriate strategy, but simply because he was a procrastinator by nature.26

In a private conversation with Otto Strasser, an associate whom Hitler expelled from the Party in 1930 after denouncing him as a "parlor bolshevik," he stated he admired Machiavelli's morals: "These morals hold only for men who are born to rule; in them rests the right to give themselves as Herren (masters)."27

In yet another conversation with Rauschning, Hitler revealed that he was consumed by the lust for power: "We are fanatical in our will to power. For us this is not an anemic doctrine, this Will to Power, but literally the sense and content of life."28

The Greatest Warlord of all Time

Major General J.F.C. Fuller, the noted British military historian, described Hitler in 1943 as "One of the most, if not actually the most, original soldier in all history."29 Another historian has described him as "One of
the most knowledgeable and diversified military-technical specialists of his time."  

Hitler's faithful lackey, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel called him Der grösste Feldherr aller Zeiten (the greatest warlord of all time.)

But there was a stubborn resistance in Hitler to recognize the practical limits of will that fatally flawed him as Feldherr. At the crucial battle of Kursk in 1943, for example, we find him willing victory over a numerically superior and better-equipped Soviet force. As General Heinz Guderian, Inspector of Panzers, said of Hitler on the Russian front: "He was living in a world of fantasy."

In the final stages of the war, when he was vainly sticking pins in maps and moving imaginary formations, we find his indefatigable will continually at work, believing that some new Wunderwaffe (wonder-weapon) would be discovered which would confound his enemies.

Hitler's disdain for his Generals was legendary. "He trusts none of his Generals," wrote Hitler's military aide Hermann Engel in his diary; "He would promote a major to general and make him Chief of Staff if only he knew such a man. Nothing seems to suit him and he curses himself for having gone to war with such poor generals."

The feeling was often mutual. General Alfred Jodl, in a statement made after the war, referring to his fellow
generals said: "They were fighting a war that they did not want under a Commander-in-Chief who did not trust them and whom they themselves did not fully trust, by methods contrary to their experience and accepted views." 

Hitler ruled his military by the Machiavellian dictum of divide et impera (divide and rule). This accounts for his fostering, or at least not inhibiting, antagonisms between his various front commanders and also between them and the military high command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW). These factionalisms ensured his personal control at all levels.

Flawed Ideology—Disastrous Decisions

Driven by his dogmas, Hitler committed colossal military blunders. It has come generally to be recognized that his first great mistake in World War II was the failure to invade England, and secure thereby, his western flank. (The failure to follow up at Dunkirk cannot exclusively be blamed on Hitler, as Air Marshal Goering had boastfully assured the Fuhrer that the Luftwaffe would be responsible for the destruction of the Dunkirk pocket.)

The following chapter discusses Hitler's ambivalence towards the British whom he regarded racially as "Nordic cousins." He saw in the British empire a cornerstone of
western civilization. He felt that Germany "had no business to be destroying Britain" and that there would be "devastating consequences" should the British Empire collapse.

General Montgomery has opined that, had the Germans landed troops in England after the fall of Dunkirk in September 1940, they would have been successful in occupying the country. Recent war games conducted at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst have concluded that one German parachute division and one air landing division might have done the trick. The true situation in England after Dunkirk is that there was only one fully trained and equipped division in all Britain with which to repel invaders, the First Canadian Infantry.

Hitler's failure to conquer Britain before he attacked Russia involved Germany in a war not on two fronts, but on several. Her Army, Navy and Air Force were now faced with the following tasks: 1. Bombardment and blockade of the UK, 2. Maintenance of the invasion threat. 3. The defensive garrisoning of Norway, the Channel Islands, and the whole coast of Occupied Europe. 4. The foray to Libya to help the Italians, 5. The Greece, Yugoslavia, and Crete problems.
Hitler chose instead to carry out Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia. This most dysfunctional of all possible military decisions was also ideologically driven. General Walter Warlimont, who worked in Hitler's headquarters emphasized in his memoirs that Hitler "especially in the case of the attack on Russia, allowed himself to be guided predominantly by the obsessive nature of his political concepts, without giving enough weight to the military circumstances."  

Hitler outlined four goals expected to be achieved in the East: 1. To gain territory for German settlers. 2. To subjugate the slavik masses. 3. To exterminate the "Jewish-Bolshevik" leadership. 4. To attain an autarkic, blockade-proof continental European sphere in which the conquered East would represent an inexhaustible reservoir of raw materials and foodstuffs sufficient for the German Reich and German Nation.  

It is important to note Hitler's choice of words like "subjugate" and "exterminate." These are ideological, not military terms. Hitler's decision to invade was facilitated by the utter contempt he had for the "racially inferior" slavs: "One has only to kick in the door" he said of Russia, "and the whole rotten structure will come tumbling down."
Such flights to fantasy were coupled with what Field Marshal von Manstein described as Hitler's "turning his back on reality." Chief of the General Staff Franz Halder concluded that he "had little inclination to relate his own calculations to the probable intentions of the enemy, since he was convinced that his will would always triumph in the end."

There were other flagrant instances where Hitler denied himself valuable military potentialities because he permitted ideology to dominate. Salient was his stubborn refusal to make use of anti-Communist factions in Russia during Barbarossa. His refusal was based on the conviction that such a policy would endanger his ultimate goal of total subjugation of Russia and its exploitation as a slave state.

He opposed encouragement of home rule or even limited autonomy for peoples of the provinces he conquered. Only after repeated pleadings by Goebbels, Rosenberg and several Wehrmacht Generals did Hitler grudgingly assent to partially arming forces of the defector Soviet General Andrey Vlassov.

In remarks made to Peter Kleist of his Foreign Office, who had implored him to grant temporary concessions to anti-Soviet factions, Hitler stated:

These are all illusions. It is your right but also your disadvantage to think only in terms of today's dismal situation. I have the duty to think in terms
of tomorrow and cannot sacrifice the future for momentary successes. One does not make policy with illusions, but only with hard facts. The space problem is for me the decisive one in the East.\textsuperscript{51}

Lt. General Helmuth von Pannwitz, a German General who had, after the debacle of Stalingrad, managed to recruit and brilliantly lead a Russian Cossack Cavalry Corps to several victories, told Hitler outright that his Ostpolitik was a failure. He assured Hitler that Cossacks, when properly led, fought extremely well—and that Slavs, including Poles, should not be denied their honor. He even went so far as to guarantee that Poles, under his personal command, would support Germany. That was too much for Hitler, who after decorating von Pannwitz with the Order of Oak leaves to his Knight's Cross, dismissed him with a curt "Gutes Gluck" (Good luck).\textsuperscript{52}

Hitler had little grasp of strategic parameters in the General Staff sense. Maintenance of objective, an inviolable Clausewitzian principle, was rejected in favor of his famed intuition and belief that will is overriding. Early in 1942, for example, Hitler embarked on a grandiose two-pronged offensive whose objectives were: Army Group B (under General Fedor von Bock) to take Stalingrad and Army Group A (their left flank shielded by Bock) was to thrust through the Caucasus to take the Baku oilfields.
Then Hitler disastrously shifted the axis of attack (not once, but twice), first sending General Hermann Hoth's Fourth Panzer Armee southwards from the Stalingrad Front before anything substantive had been accomplished there and then ordering Hoth back again towards Stalingrad, where by now the Russians had greatly buttressed their defenses.\(^5^3\)

By attacking Russia for ideological reasons, before securing his flank in the west, Hitler placed himself in extremis and Stalin in the favored position. Andreas Hillgruber, in his book *Germany and the Two World Wars*, sees this as revealing the crucial difference between Stalin and Hitler. Stalin never made decisions of grand strategy on the basis of Bolshevist revolutionary ideology. Hitler, on the other hand, abandoned Machiavellian methods of grand policy in favor of the "immediate realization of his ultimate racial-biological aim."\(^5^4\)

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler severely restricts Germany's colonial sphere to Eastern Europe, within the strictures of an ideological strait jacket. By so doing, he leaves little room for a potential Suez, Gibraltar, or North Africa move. Because of his ties to Mussolini, he gives no consideration to the central Mediterranean, Tripoli or Cyrenaica.\(^5^5\)

It is now clear that Hitler should have bottled up the Mediterranean, taken the Suez, captured Gibraltar, even if
that meant attacking through Spain to do it. He had battle-
seasoned troops who had fought in Poland, Norway and France
available. Had he done so, he could have sealed off the
Atlantic entry to the Mediterranean.  

Hitler's references to the United States in Mein Kampf
are sparse. The few we find, reveal an appreciation of the
power and security of America's continental base. It is
similar to the type of base he intended to acquire in
Eurasia to ensure Germany's security. His regard for
America declined after 1929, apparently adversely swayed by
reports of the great depression and the influence of Jewish
capitalist finance. He warned American visitors that their
economic and social problems were racial in nature and that
eventually they would find themselves compelled to expel the
Jews and send the Negroes back to Africa. 

Ideologically, Hitler did not believe in total war and
he initially had no intention of becoming involved in it:

Whoever experienced the war at the front will not
want to cause more bloodshed if it can be avoided. 

He continued:

Who says that I will begin a war like the fools of
1914? Most people have no imagination. They can
visualize only in terms of their own experience.
The Generals are also sterile, trapped in their own
professional expertise. There is such a thing as
strategy in the extended sense; there is war by
intellectual means. What is the object of war?
That the enemy capitulate. Why should I demoralize
him militarily when I can do it more cheaply and
effectively in other ways? I guarantee you, gentlemen, that the impossible will always succeed. The most improbable way is the surest.\textsuperscript{59}

The impossible and improbable did succeed. The revolutionary strategy of "peaceful warfare" made possible Hitler's seizure of Austria, the Sudetenland, and finally Czechoslovakia. But this notion of waging war by ideological means had serious shortcomings.

The following chapters underscore these shortcomings by analyzing two German military operations, Sea Lion and Citadel. One was carried out, the other was not. The next chapter describes the military operation that was planned, but never executed: Operation Seelöve (Sea Lion).

With France fallen, Norway occupied, and Germany in control of the lowlands, all that stood between Hitler and complete domination of Europe, was Britain. Yet, with battle-hardened troops and airlift capability available, Hitler could not bring himself to invade. The chapter describes the Fuhrer's admiration for the English, and his ideological bases for delaying, and finally rejecting, Operation Sea Lion.
CHAPTER I.

Endnotes


6. Ibid.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p, 736.


11. Carlson, ibid., p. 17.


21. Ibid., p. 647.

22. Ibid., p. 476.


24. Ibid., p. 100.

25. Ibid., pp. 253-54.


31. Hitler's military assistant, Field Marshal Keitel, first coined the phrase *Größte Feldherr Aller Zeiten* (The Greatest Warlord of all Time) in 1940. The phrase stuck and was used extensively by the majority of senior German Generals in the sarcastic sense behind Hitler's back, as they did not share Keitel's elevated view of the Fuhrer's military talents. In time, they shortened it to 'GROFAZ'--which means a sort of gnome or bogey man.


48. Ibid.


56. Ibid.


CHAPTER II.

OPERATION SEA LION, HITLER'S FIRST GREAT MISTAKE

We have no business to be destroying Britain. We are quite incapable of taking up her legacy.

Adolf Hitler, summer 1940.

Oberst Johan Raster ordered his men to give their static lines one final check as their Ju 52 transport crossed the Kentish coast. The time was 0600 hours on the morning of 22 September 1940—first light, on a raw, overcast, windless day. The Junkers, which had been flying a scant 100 meters above the Channel to stay below the British radar, climbed sharply to 250 meters as it neared the drop zone. When the red light went on, the jumpmaster bellowed: "Fertig zum Sprung!"

Raster braced himself in the door and, at the raucous sound of the jump klaxon catapulted himself into the slipstream. He waited for the static line to tug, then instinctively whipped his head back to ensure that he had a good chute-opening. Seconds later, his feet touched the ground and he executed a perfect landing, rolling in the
direction of his chute. The time was 0607 hours, *Seelöwe Stunde* (Sea Lion hour) plus seven minutes.

Behind Oberst Raster's lead "stick" came nearly 8,000 Fallschirmjäger of the Seventh Fliegerdivision, ferried by a flotilla of 600 Junkers transports. *Sealöwe Tag* (Sea Lion Day) had begun, and Raster was the first invader to stand on British soil since the Normans.

"Oberst Raster" and the description of his parachute jump into England are fictional, but the plot is factual. It closely parallels the scenario planned by the German General Staff for Operation Seelöwe, the code name for Hitler's proposed September 1940 invasion of the British Isles.

Britain had not been invaded by a foreign power since the Norman Conquest of 1066. Philip II of Spain attempted it in 1588 with his "invincible armada," only to lose half of his ships to a combination of stiff British resistance and foul weather. Napoleon Bonaparte, quintessential landsman that he was, retired his forces from Boulogne in 1805 without trying, perhaps unwilling to risk a repetition of his naval defeat at Trafalgar.

While Hitler hoped invasion would not be necessary, he knew that eventually he would have to defeat the British in their island home in order to win the war. In the summer of
1940, with France fallen, Norway occupied, and Belgium and the Netherlands under German control, only England remained an obstacle to Hitler's domination of Europe.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the origin and development of the plan for the invasion of England in 1940. The dilemma, delay and indecision caused by Hitler's ideological affinity for England are described. Important pre-conditions that Hitler attached to invasion planning are treated, as are causes leading to the collapse of Sea Lion. Reasons for the ultimate rejection of the operation are described, drawing heavily on observations made by Field Marshals Albert Kesselring, Erich von Manstein and Gerd von Rundstedt, and General Gunther Blumentritt. Speculations as to "what might have been" had German invasion plans succeeded are included, as are conclusions compelled by the research.

The Germans had little experience with amphibious operations. Their attempts at seaborne landings in World War I were limited to the occupation of Oesel and the Dago Islands in the Gulf of Riga in 1917. The German High Command had never seriously contemplated an invasion of Britain during the period 1914-1918.²

Not even von Tirpitz, Germany's leading advocate of the aggressive use of sea power, had gone so far as to
suggest an invasion of the British Isles. Considering Churchill's failure at Gallipoli in 1915, and the cancelled British landing on the Pomeranian coast of Germany, the experiences of World War I gave little encouragement to planners of amphibious operations.

During the period of German rearmament, starting in the mid-1930's, the Fuhrer paid scant attention to strengthening amphibious forces. His preference for building up the Army and the Luftwaffe sacrificed Naval strength. Neither had he foreseen in those years the need ultimately to invade England.

While drafting Mein Kampf from his cell in Landsberg prison in 1924 he had shown a clear preference for keeping on the good side of England in the event of war. "Only with England," he wrote (referring to German policy before 1914) "was it possible with the rear protected to begin a new German advance—no sacrifice should have been too great to win England's favor."

The concept of an invasion first received Hitler's attention on 21 May 1940—the day on which German armored spearheads reached the French coast. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander in Chief of the German Navy, brought it to his attention during private discussions.
It was a paranoid quirk of Hitler's managerial style that he insisted on face-to-face meetings with individual Service Chiefs, rather than carefully staffed interservice conferences when dealing with his Military Commanders. Hitler would not tolerate opposition. Possibly he felt that, by meeting with his Service Chiefs individually, he could prevent their combining to oppose his designs.⁶

Raeder's motives for raising the question of invasion in his May meeting with the Fuhrer had their roots further back. In his testimony at Nurnberg*, Raeder admitted he had started invasion planning as early as 15 November 1939 as a "precautionary measure." He feared that some unfathomable twist of Hitler's intuition might suddenly confront him with a demand for such plans.⁷ In view of Hitler's renowned intuitional quirks, Raeder's explanation seems plausible.

During November 1939, Naval planners, after staffing the problem, reached the conclusion that a seaborne assault "on a grand scale across the North Sea appears to be a possible expedient for forcing the enemy to sue for peace."⁸ Their plan was then passed to the Army for comment and in the following months to the Luftwaffe which made known its views. All variants of this early plan envisaged landings

*He was sentenced to imprisonment for life but released for health reasons in 1955.
on the east coast of England. At no stage was it referred to Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) (the High Command of the German Armed Forces), so there is no reason to suppose that Hitler knew that any preliminary planning for invasion had been done until Raeder introduced the topic on 21 May 1940.9

Why did Raeder surface the plan at this time? The unforeseen scope of the Wehrmacht's success in reaching the French channel coast had forced his hand. It was his duty in his capacity as Commander in Chief of the Navy to call to Hitler's attention any strategy, which if successful, might end the war. No doubt he also felt it his duty to ensure that the German Navy was not hazarded by one of Hitler's hunches. Finally, like all Service Chiefs everywhere, he wanted to ensure that, in the event of a combined operation, he had his fair share of control. Hitler's reaction to the proposed plan was negative.10

At Raeder's next meeting with Hitler on 4 June the matter was not discussed. Raeder proposed the plan again on 20 June. By this time, the French had asked for an armistice on 18 June, Italy was safely in the war, and Europe lay at Hitler's feet. This was surely the time for Hitler to make a decision, but when Raeder reviewed invasion requirements such as mines and mining, shipping, special
craft needed, and the need for air supremacy, Hitler made no comment which Raeder found worthy of recording.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Delay, Dilemma and Indecision}

Hitler was in a serious dilemma regarding the invasion of England. Winston Churchill's resistance in the summer or 1940 had upset Hitler's long-range plans. For nearly twenty years he had dreamed of an alliance with Britain. "Great Britain and Italy," he had said, "were the only possible allies of Germany in Europe."\textsuperscript{12} Neither was he confident of the ability of his \textit{Luftwaffe} to crush the British. On 23 May 1939 he had said that \textit{no country} could be defeated by the air force alone.\textsuperscript{13} Accordingly, he hesitated to invade.

He regarded the British as "Nordic cousins" and saw in the British Empire a cornerstone of Western Civilization and a monument to the state-building capability of the Anglo-Saxon race.\textsuperscript{14} During the summer of 1940, an adjutant to the \textit{Fuhrer} once overheard him heatedly shout into a chancellery telephone: "We have no business to be destroying Britain. We are quite incapable of taking up her legacy" (meaning the Empire)--and he spoke of the "devastating consequences" of the collapse of that empire.\textsuperscript{15}

Following the surrender of France in June 1940, the German Army relaxed with relief and joy, believing the War
was over.\textsuperscript{16} After a few weeks, however, the victory mood subsided and a feeling of apprehension grew as Britain refused to respond to peace feelers.

Reluctantly, on 2 July, Hitler for the first time formally considered an invasion of England. He directed the heads of the three services to study the problem and requested intelligence appreciations. But in his closing instructions, he emphasized that "the plan is in its infancy" and added: "So far it is only a question of preparing for a possible event."\textsuperscript{17}

Hitler's reluctance to address the invasion question manifested itself once again at a conference with the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Admiral Erich Raeder, on 11 July. Hitler launched into a long discussion, not of the problem of invading England, but of the future architectural development of Norway—a matter in which the Fuhrer apparently had more interest. He expressed his intention to build "a beautiful German city on the Fjord near

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*General Gunther Blumentritt's vignette of the sequel conveys the prevailing attitude: "Immediately following the armistice with France orders came from the Army High Command (OKH) to form the staff for the victory parade in Paris, and to dispatch the troops that were assigned to take part in the parade. We spent a fortnight working on the organization of this parade. Spirits were high, as everyone counted on a general peace. Preparations for demobilization had already begun, and we had received a list of the divisions that were to be sent home for disbanding."
\end{flushright}
Trondheim"\(^{18}\) and ordered plans to be submitted. Only tangentially and much later was the question of invading England addressed.

Raeder suggested that an invasion should be used only as a last resort to force Britain to sue for peace. He dwelt on the myriad difficulties of the venture and the complex transport requirements as well as the need for air superiority. When he had finished, Hitler expressed his views which were summarized by Raeder: "The Fuhrer also views invasion as a last resort and also considers air superiority a pre-requisite."\(^{19}\)

On 16 July Hitler finally signed a directive regarding preparations for a landing operation against England. An ambience of unreality pervaded General Order #16, which was clearly conceived in haste and irresolution. Hitler wrote:

**Instruction for the Preparation of Operation Sea Lion**

1. Task

The Supreme Commander has ordered the Services to make preparations for a landing in force in England. The aim of this attack is to eliminate the Mother Country as a base for continuing the war against Germany, and, if it should be necessary, to carry out a complete occupation.

The order for execution depends on the political situation. Preparations are to be made in such a way that the operation can be carried out from 15 September.

While continuing with its occupation duties in France and maintaining the security of the other fronts, the task of the Army will be to land strong
forces in southern England, defeat the British Army, and seize the capital. Other areas of Britain will be occupied as opportunity permits.

2. Code Word

The operation will bear the code name 'Sea Lion'.

In the remaining paragraphs outlining Army, Navy and Air Force duties, Hitler set down some conditions necessary before the invasion could be mounted. The Royal Air Force must be eliminated from the skies and the Royal Navy must be so damaged by intense air and torpedo attacks that it would be unable to fight.

The Straits of Dover would be commanded by powerful coastal guns from French shores. Balustrades of minefields on both flanks would provide safe passage for the German invasion fleet. Exactly how Hitler proposed to accomplish all these things in the space of a month was not explained.

Initially given the code name Lion, the operation name was changed personally by Hitler to Sea Lion in the final draft. From all that historians know about this directive, it is quite certain that it was drafted by the Fuhrer himself.

The very preamble of the document indicates indecision. The words with which Hitler defines his intentions ("I have decided to prepare for and if necessary
carry out, an invasion of England." lack the compelling tone of his normally imperative style in these matters.* It would be wrong, however, to suppose that Hitler's vague statement of operational aims was due mainly to misgivings about feasibility. He was still actively working to bring about compromise, proposing palliatives which the British had thus far been unwilling to accept.

At his temporary headquarters at Kniebis in the Black Forest, he continued to make refinements to Sea Lion and to prepare the victory (over France) speech he was to deliver on 19 July. As part of that speech he would tell his followers that Germany demanded nothing more than an accommodation with England and the return of its colonies.

The Kroll Opera House was brilliantly decorated for the occasion with the National Socialist banner emblazoned against a background of gold. The massive gilt-colored German eagle, presiding over it all, had never looked more triumphant. Battle-tested generals, festooned with iron crosses and myriad other decorations, sat row on row, waiting--with expressions of proud expectancy, for some knew

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*The initial paragraph of Hitler's directive for the attack on Poland ends with the words "I have decided on a solution by force." The corresponding words for the directive for Yugoslavia are "Yugoslavia must be crushed as speedily as possible." The admonition for Barbarossa begins: "The German Armed Forces must be ready to crush Soviet Russia in a rapid campaign."
they were about to be promoted. That evening, in his most Napoleonic gesture, Hitler solemnly presented twelve field marshal's batons. Goering received the highest honor. He was promoted to the hitherto unheard-of rank of "Reichsmarschall," (Marshal of the Empire).

Hitler spoke in measured tones in his first public appearance as conqueror of Europe. His hands gestured eloquently; he smiled and tilted his head forwards or backwards when he wished to emphasize a point. The audience was hushed. He reflected moderately and thoughtfully. He gibed at Churchill for being an "unscrupulous politician who had no regard for the real interests of the British people." Rather than being sensible and making peace, Churchill was "exposing people to great suffering." Churchill was even proposing to continue the war from Canada in the event of a German occupation of the British Isles thus "abandoning his people."

Mr. Churchill ought perhaps, for once, to believe me when I prophesy that the great empire will be destroyed -which it was never my intention to destroy or even harm.

He continued:

In this hour I feel it to be my duty before my conscience to appeal once more to reason and common sense in Great Britain as much as elsewhere. I consider myself in a position to make this appeal since I am not the vanquished begging favors, but the victor speaking in the name of reason. I can see no reason why this war should go on.
Even the cynical Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, was impressed. He noted in his diary:

I believe that his desire for peace is sincere. In fact, late in the evening when the first cold British reactions to the speech arrived, a sense of ill-concealed disappointment spread among the Germans—they are hoping and praying that this appeal will not be rejected.²⁵

Although Hitler had named no specific terms, he obviously expected British acceptance of his hegemony on the European mainland. Provided a copy of the speech by their Ambassador, the British immediately, to Hitler's chagrin and surprise, rejected his overtures. Churchill answered Hitler's peace feelers with a definite "No!"²⁶ Possessed of a direct and uncomplicated approach to such matters, Churchill had observed that no one had ever negotiated successfully with Hitler. He took care, therefore, that his official "No" was reinforced by nightly bombing raids of Germany by the Royal Air Force.

Hitler had seriously hoped Britain would come to terms. From the end of May, his Service Chiefs had been making plans for the peacetime establishment of the Army and for German Naval expansion after the victorious conclusion of the war.²⁷ Although Churchill's responses had indicated no sign of willingness to negotiate, Baron von Weizacker, State Secretary of the German Foreign Office, on 19 and 22 June reported to Ribbentrop that the Swedish Minister in
Berlin believed "certain authoritative circles in London are inclined to negotiate." This news may also have caused him to delay plans for an invasion.

**Decision with Caveats**

Directive #16 had caught the Navy by surprise and confronted it with unparalleled problems of timing and scale. Clearly showing Hitler's imprimatur, Directive #16 was based on an inflexible contingency: Elimination of Britain by invasion was to be accomplished "only if necessary." This caveat of overriding importance was drafted by the Fuhrer himself.

Ancillary to this main caveat he laid down five additional conditions which would have to be met before the landing could be attempted. Repeated here for emphasis, these were: First, the RAF had to be weakened to a point where it could not interfere with Seelow. Second, mine-free channels leading to the English coast must be maintained. Third, the invasion area must to be blanketed by powerful coastal batteries. Fourth, the invasion area must be sealed off by German minefields. Fifth, British Naval forces must be pinned down by torpedo and air attacks. No date was set for the operation, but Hitler ordered all preparations to be completed by mid-August.
The scope of the operation troubled Raeder. On 19 July, the same day Hitler extended his olive branch to the British in the Reichstag speech, Raeder sent OKW a memorandum discussing all aspects of the operation from a Naval point of view. First, he examined physical problems: damaged and limited-capacity harbors, unpredictable weather, rapid currents, and extreme tides that could create untold hazards for landing craft committed to open beaches.

Next, British defensive capabilities were assessed. Not all British mines could be eliminated. German mines probably could not stop a determined British fleet, which might isolate and attack troop waves despite German Naval protection. The ability of the Luftwaffe to establish air superiority and to pin down the Royal Navy without the assistance of Naval gunnery support was also questioned.  

On 21 July, Hitler held a conference with his higher commanders. His opening statement expressed puzzlement over British persistence in prosecuting the war. He could only imagine the she was hoping America or Russia would enter on her side. Russia's entry "would be unpleasant for Germany--especially on account of the threat from the air."  

He then reluctantly tackled the invasion problem, and began by emphasizing that it would be:

An exceptionally daring undertaking. This is not just another river crossing but the crossing of a sea which is dominated by the enemy. Operational
surprise cannot be expected; a defensively prepared and utterly determined enemy faces us and dominates the sea area which we must use--forty divisions will be required; the most difficult part will be the continued reinforcement of material and stores. The prerequisites are complete mastery of the air, the operational use of powerful artillery in the Dover Straits and protection by mine fields. 32

Because the weather in the channel is usually bad during the second half of September, he set a deadline of 1 September for completion of general preparations and of 15 September for completion of the air battle and the positioning of mine fields and artillery. During the next few weeks, the requirement for 40 divisions* was drastically reduced to 13 (260,000 men). 33

The wide-front landings initially envisioned by the Army and the narrow-front capability insisted on by the Navy were not yet reconciled, nor was the Army's request for two to three days landing time versus the Navy's ten-day capability. Raeder believed that if Sea Lion were granted top priority and if air superiority could be achieved during the build-up phase, the basic requirements might be met by end of August. 34

The advancing preparations did not mean Raeder sanctioned the operation. He had been cautiously critical

*There were approximately 20,000 men per division "slice" programmed for this operation.
throughout and on 31 July in a conference with Hitler, he expressed his most vigorous opposition to date. He reviewed all problems once again, emphasizing the exposed position of the transports and the necessity for a narrow front. Then he amazingly recommended that the invasion be delayed a full eight months—until May 1941!³⁵

However, Hitler insisted that the operation be ready by 15 September, reserving unto himself the final decision regarding execution. Among other things, he wanted to confirm results of aerial bombardment which had been ordered on 30 July to commence 5 August.

Adler Tag (Eagle Day), initially delayed because of adverse weather, finally came on 15 August. That day, 1,790 aircraft bombed Britain. For the following two weeks Goering's Adler Angriff (Eagle assault) struck a wide variety of targets with forces totalling 2,669 aircraft. Coastal towns, shipping, industrial centers, fighter bases and radar stations were attacked. Objectives varied from day to day, reflecting a basic confusion of purpose. The all-out assault on 15 August cost the Germans 76 aircraft while doing relatively little damage.*³⁶

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*The RAF broke up four out of five major attacks. The slow-flying, vulnerable Stuka dive-bombers were withdrawn from battle. The Germans had temporarily lost tactical flexibility because of the need to protect their own bombers rather than attack British fighters.³⁷
Meanwhile, internecine blood-letting was going on at the strategic staff level. A key meeting took place on 7 August between the Chief of Staff of the Army, Colonel General Franz Halder and Vice Admiral Otto Schniewind, Raeder's representative. Schniewind re-emphasized the necessity of crossing the channel on a narrow front and stated that concentration of mine sweepers, defensive mine fields, aircraft, coastal guns, and invasion shipping was absolutely essential.

Halder objected strongly, likening the proposed concentration to "leading his troops into a mincing machine." The terrain around Dover favored the defenders. His armor would have practically no opportunity for surprise, deployment, or maneuver. The conference ended in a stalemate.

Raeder asked for a "decision conference" with Hitler on 13 August. The Fuhrer replied that a decision would be forthcoming only after he had conferred with Army leaders and assessed results of the aerial bombardment. Hitler again agreed with Raeder in calling Sea Lion "a last resort," which if it fails, would furnish the British with a great victory.

The following week a compromise was arrived at, recognizing the limitations of available shipping. The main
crossing was reduced to a modified narrow assault of six infantry divisions to be landed within six days to be followed by six more divisions to be landed within ten days.\textsuperscript{41}

Troops were to be carried mostly in barges—1,722 of them towed by 471 tugs while 1,161 motor boats and 155 small transports of three to five thousand tons were also to be employed. Ships were to be covered primarily by the Luftwaffe with additional support coming from thirteen powerful coastal guns of eleven-inch to fifteen-inch caliber. Twenty-seven coastal craft mounting three-inch and one and one-half-inch guns would be used along with the employment of 6,800 mines.

As a diversion, four large empty transports and four large warships were to feint towards the northeastern coast of Great Britain while the battleships Hipper and Scheer were to move to the Iceland-Faeroes area and perhaps even into the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{42}

While the effort was enormous, it constituted the ultimate admission of German Naval weakness. The first troop waves were to be issued tiny, unarmored river assault boats which were to be fitted for launching from mine sweepers and similar small craft.
The large river barges were energetically collected from all over western Europe, modified with low-bow ramps, floored with concrete and dispatched by river and canal to invasion ports extending from Boulogne to Ostend. Existing river barges* were essential for the transport of submersible tanks, horses, equipment and most of the troops.

To be towed across the channel in pairs by tugs at an estimated speed of five knots, some of the barge trains would be twelve nautical miles long—without allowing for stragglers, tides, currents, unfavorable winds or enemy interdiction. After assembly off German-held ports, transit time would be up to fifteen hours. Upon approaching the beaches, the barges would be lashed into pairs of one powered and one unpowered barge in line abreast. Then would begin the ponderous movement towards the shore for the difficult beaching operation. Army and Navy units in the ports cooperated enthusiastically in mock operations but practice was extremely limited.

The small transports were far handier than the river barges but their unloading time was estimated at 36 hours. The left flank move from Le Havre to Brighton was to be made by 300 small craft at a speed of advance of seven knots, a

*Special landing craft being developed by the individual services were too far from mass production to be employed.
situation sarcastically described by German Naval personnel as the *Himmelfahrtkommando* \(^{43}\) (Heaven-bound command).

The entire operation remained liable to cancellation, for the decision to execute still hung on the air battle, which had been raging for several weeks without resolution. But so far as advanced decisions could be taken, the invasion of England was about to be launched.

Great numbers of ships had to be shuttled to embarkation areas and bad weather hindered timely deployment. By 6 September, the movement of barges was already behind schedule; mine-sweeping had not yet been possible because of bad weather and interference by British aircraft.\(^{44}\)

"The enemies' ports are our first line of defense,"\(^{45}\) Nelson once said. And following Nelson's dictum, on the tense night of 7 September, British heavy bombers made their first attack on German invasion bases. "It was," one of the pilots wrote,

> an amazing sight. Calais docks were on fire—so was the waterfront of Boulogne. The whole French coast seemed to be a barrier of flame, broken only by intense white flashes of exploding bombs and multi-colored incendiary tracers soaring and circling skyward.\(^{46}\)

The RAF disturbed, rather than halted, German preparations. Only a small number of vessels were
destroyed. The following shipping was sunk or put out of action while concentrated in invasion ports:

- Transports: 21 out of 170
- Barges: 214 out of 1,918
- Tugs: 5 out of 386
- Motor Boats: 3 out of 1,020

The Collapse of Sea Lion

On 17 September, while the air battle over England was still raging, Hitler stalled Sea Lion. He ordered the invasion force to remain in its static positions, hoping for some miraculous change in British attitudes. Uncooperative, the RAF continued to bomb marshalling ports, German casualties mounted, and both the German Army and Navy begged to be withdrawn from positions that had become untenable. Invasion craft were allowed to disperse but were to be available for recall on command.

Finally, on 11 October, Field Marshal Keitel issued in Hitler's name the following directive:

The Fuhrer had decided that from now on until the spring, preparations for Sea Lion shall be continued solely for the purpose of maintaining political and military pressure on England. Should the invasion be reconsidered in the spring or early summer of 1941, orders for a renewal of operational readiness will be issued later.

Preparations for a landing in Britain were to be maintained solely as a political and military threat to prevent the British from concentrating their forces in other sectors.
Some weeks later, at a conference with Mussolini and other senior Italian officials, Hitler explained that with respect to the invasion, Germany was in the position of someone with only one shot left in his rifle:

If he misses, the situation is much worse than before. The landing cannot be repeated, since too much equipment would be lost in the case of failure. England would then not have to worry any more about a landing and could employ the bulk of its forces on the periphery wherever it pleases. So long as the attack has not taken place on the other hand, the English would have to reckon with the possibility.  

Hitler was convinced that, barring major blunders on his part, the military situation in Europe could no longer go against him. Invading Britain with inadequate forces, coupled with a menacing Russia at his back, was precisely the kind of blunder he was determined to avoid.

Hitler's growing obsession with the Soviet Union had begun to color his views of everything, including Sea Lion. General Walter Warlimont testified at Nurnberg that, as early as 29 July 1940, Hitler had set in motion a conference of planners at Bad Reichenhall for the express purpose of communicating his intention of attacking Russia in the spring of 1941. There were strongly opposed objections but General Alfred Jodl, that brilliant but compliant OKW operations chief who gave executive form to Hitler's military decisions, squelched staff opposition as soon as he sensed the Führer's mind was resolved. On 29 July 1940 he
communicated the decision to the OKW staff. General Warlimont testified:

Jodl's word had the impact of a stroke of lightning. Bewilderment became even greater, as the first questions revealed that it was not proposed to conclude the struggle with England, but on the contrary, to conquer Russia—as the best means of forcing England—to make peace.52

Apparently General Halder thought the option of attacking Britain was still open. He discussed it on 30 July 1940 and reflected that "We should do better to keep friendship with Russia. A visit to Stalin would be advisable. We could hit the English decisively in the Mediterranean and drive them out of Asia."53 At least several officers of the Army High Command, OKH, and the Joint Service High Command, OKW, were united on this issue. Not only did they not want an invasion of Russia in the autumn of 1940, they did not want it at all.

Hitler attempted to overcome the reluctance of the generals by alluding to "conversations he had overheard," implying that he had unique access to special intelligence.

In addition to calling the 29 July conference of planners for Aufbau Ost (Buildup East) at Bad Reichenhall, Hitler had set in train certain other measures ensuring Barbarossa would have precedence over Seelowe. One was to increase the strength of the Army to match the most recent estimates of Soviet Army strength. Concomitant with that,
he informed the armaments industry on 2 August 1940 of potential preparations they must make regarding Barbarossa.54

Finally, on 9 August OKW was ordered to make preliminary arrangements in East Germany for reception centers for the great number of troops that would be quartered there during Aufbau Ost.55 None of these decisions individually spelt the death-knell for Seelöwe. But taken together, they form a pattern which demonstrates that, at least as early as 29 July 1940, Hitler had shelved any intention of executing Sea Lion ahead of Barbarossa.

The final cancellation of operation Sea Lion was a strategic error of the first magnitude. Hitler must have realized that, even if Russia should collapse quickly, almost a year would have elapsed during which Britain would have strengthened its defenses, making the prospect of invasion much less inviting than it had been in September of 1940. The opportunity to invade under equally favorable circumstances never recurred.

When, on 17 September, Hitler stalled Sea Lion in static positions "Auf unbestimmte Zeit" (for an indefinite period of time), he stubbornly insisted that the plan, at least, be kept in place. Reluctantly abandoned in stages throughout 1941 at the urging of Raeder, its final
cancellation was ordered only after entry into the war of the United States and Japan.

The Sea Lion plan had been retained on Hitler's orders "awaiting the signal for resuming serious invasion preparations." That signal never came. In March 1942, Jodl issued a directive stating that at least one year's notice would be given, should Sea Lion plans be resumed. That edict effectively killed the operation.

Hitler had clung to Sea Lion long after it ceased to be practical. He must have realized how cardinal had been his failure to secure his western flank. As Hinsley stated in his book: Hitler's Strategy: The most striking thing about the three months which followed the postponement of Sea Lion was not the ease but the "reluctance with which the idea was abandoned." Reasons For Rejection

The official German explanation for the failure to launch Seelöwe was the heavy loss of aircraft suffered by the Luftwaffe. In the opinion of Field Marshal Kesselring, the reason air supremacy over the Channel had not been achieved was that "central purpose of lacking." He continues: "No definitive instructions were given about what my air fleet had to expect in the way of tactical
assignments or what provision had been made for cooperation of the Army and Navy." He concludes: "The offensive was conducted on lines never harmonized with the requirements of an invasion."\textsuperscript{59}

The real reason why Seelöwe was not executed is only to be found in the windmills of the Führer's mind. Robert G.L. Waite, in his book \textit{Adolf Hitler, The Psychopathic God}, paints the picture:

For several weeks during the summer of 1940 after the fall of France, Hitler was unsure of what to do next. As so often in his life when plagued with uncertainty and self-doubt, he turned to Wagner for inspiration and direction. Now, on 23 July 1940, he journeyed to the shrine at Bayreuth to attend a performance of \textit{Die Götterdämmerung}. Once again Wagner worked his magic upon him. His portrayal of heroic catastrophe, the destruction of gods and men, somehow reassured Hitler and confirmed his conviction of heroic destiny. In the darkness of the loge he passionately kissed the hand of Frau Winifred Wagner. He left Bayreuth composed, his mind made up. Within the week he issued the orders that would lead to his own \textit{Götterdämmerung}. (The decision to invade Russia)\textsuperscript{60}

Waite believes that both rational and irrational factors were at work in Hitler's decision. He wanted the wheat of the Ukraine and the oil of the Caucasus,\textsuperscript{61} and he had long planned to find \textit{Lebensraum} for his \textit{Reich} in eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{62}

Waite is neither a professional psychiatrist, nor is he dealing in hard evidence. \textit{Only Hitler} knew the precise date on which he began giving priority to \textit{Barbarossa} over
Sea Lion. The 31 July 1940 entry in General Halder's Kreigstagebuch (war diary) is illuminating in this regard when he quotes Hitler as saying (in the middle of conference on Sea Lion): "With Russia smashed, Britain's last hope would be shattered. Germany will then be master of Europe and the Balkans," . . . and, "Russia's destruction must therefore be made a part of this struggle . . . destroy no later than Spring 1941." The Kreigstagebuch shows that, by 31 July 1940, Hitler was already randomly ruminating to his staff that he must smash Russia not later than spring 1941.

What Might Have Been

What were the prospects for German success had Sea Lion been carried out during September 1940? General Montgomery, who commanded V corps in England after September, believed there was no chance for successful British resistance had the Germans landed a force of 15 divisions in either 1940 or 1941. General Gunther Blumentritt, Chief of Staff of the German Army during that period, expressed a much more reserved opinion: "We might, had the plans been ready, have crossed to England with strong forces after the Dunkirk operation."
Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Commander of Luftflotte II stated:

With proper planning, enough parachutists and glider planes could have been made available to swamp the defense and radar bases on the coastal assault front, and to seize airfields on which the landing of one or two airborne divisions would have then been possible.\textsuperscript{66}

General Erich von Manstein, who was Chief Staff for the Army Group commanded by General Gerd von Runstedt (in which post he established the operations plans for Hitler's spectacular drive to the French channel coast), says:

The cardinal point must surely be this: The conquest of the Island by Germany would have deprived the other side of the very base that was indispensable - in those days, at any rate - for a seaborne assault on the continent of Europe. To launch an invasion from over the Atlantic without being able to use the Island as a springboard was beyond the bounds of possibility in those days, even if the United States came into the war.\textsuperscript{67}

General von Runstedt, the ground operational commander-to-be, had no doubts about Germany's superiority of arms: "Once we can gain a foothold on the enemy coast with strong forces and are advancing inland," wrote von Runstedt on 23 August 1940, "our superiority in this form of operation will show itself clearly."\textsuperscript{68}

The German high command believed that the British Commander-in-Chief and his subordinate commanders were unlikely to make a success of mobile operations and that the mobile reserves, especially if impeded by air attacks and
the movement of refugees, would arrive too late to be effective.  

A war game following the 1940 scenario was organized by The Daily Telegraph Magazine and the Department of War Studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1974. During the game, the Germans captured considerable territory, but ultimately were forced to conduct a fighting retreat in order to extract their parachute and air landing divisions.

In rebuttal to this scenario, it should be noted that the word "retreat" was anathema to Hitler. Certainly the example he set at Stalingrad showed that standing and fighting to the death was more normal to his thinking.

A more likely scenario is in one cited in an article entitled: The War Lords by Alan Clark, which is included as a chapter of the book Operation Sea Lion, emanating from the Sandhurst study:

In fact the Germans could probably have captured London by the end of May or the beginning of June simply by using the parachute and airborne divisions in no greater strength than they did against Crete the following year. Would we have fought when London was a heap of ashes? Possibly. But on balance, it is more likely that a peace formula would have been found with Lord Halifax, Sir Samuel
Summary

There can be no doubt as to when a German invasion of England would have been the best prospects of success. It would have been right on the heels of Case Yellow, the victory in France, on the very day British forces were thrust into the sea at Dunkirk. One parachute division and one airlanding division, as outlined by Field Marshal Kesselring, might have done the trick.

For Germany, the establishment of local air supremacy was crucial. What went wrong? Kesselring says it best when he explains that the Sea Lion air offense was "never harmonized with the requirements of the invasion."

Hitler's hatred of Russia blinded him totally to strategic realities prevailing in the summer of 1940. Stalin had no intention of helping Britain in her plight. After 29 July 1940, Sea Lion became merely a cover for Hitler's real intentions, Aufbau Ost and Barbarossa. It marked a critical turning point for both Germany and England. Hitler, feeling his ideology was at odds with

*Clark is referring to Sir Henry "Chips" Channon, the British diarist who buried his valuables, including objets d'art, in his backyard, in expectation of a German invasion.
strategic requirements, chose his ideology. From then on, England was safe and Germany was doomed.

Of all of the battles on the Russian Front, none was more senseless, more ideologically driven than Operation Citadel, the battle for Kursk. After months of vacillation, Hitler hurled an immense force totalling thirty five divisions against fortress Kursk. The force included nearly all of his reserves on the Eastern Front, and most of Germany's remaining Panzers and elite troops.

Apart from Hitler's closest lackeys, no German General wanted to launch a large attack anywhere in the East that year, and especially not against Kursk. Hitler, however, wanted Citadel "to shine forth like a beacon to the world," demonstrating his mastery over the racially inferior Slav. The next chapter describes what happened when the Fuhrer's ideology clashed with battlefield reality.
CHAPTER II.
Endnotes

1. From Hitler's speech at the Sportpalast, Berlin, 4 September, 1940, Christophorus-Verlag Herder Schallplatten, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1960.


3. de Weerd, ibid.


6. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

7. Ibid.


9. Ibid.


11. Ibid., p. 39.


19. Ibid.


21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. as cited in Fleming, *Sea Lion*, p. 42.


34. Ibid., p. 88.

35. Ibid.


38. as cited in Wheatley, Sea Lion, p. 67.

39. Ibid.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., p. 90.


45. as cited in Fleming, Sea Lion, p. 294.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.


49. Ibid.
50. Ibid, p. 86.


59. Kesselring, A Soldier's Record, pp. 70-72.


61. Ibid.


65. as cited in Fleming, *Sea Lion*, p. 35.


69. Ibid.


71. Ibid., p. 175.
CHAPTER III

OPERATION CITADEL - DEATH MARCH OF THE WEHRMACHT

Adherence to dogmas has destroyed more armies and lost more battles and lives than any other cause in war. No man of fixed opinions can make a good general.

General J.F.C. Fuller\(^1\)

On the darkly overcast morning of 7 April 1943, Hitler's personal Kondor aircraft touched down at Stalino airfield with a summons from Hitler for Field Marshal Erich von Manstein to attend a planning conference at the Wolfsschanze. With much trepidation Herr Feldmarshal climbed aboard. He was never at his best in fact-to-face meetings with Hitler, who dismissed his mobile strategy as cowardly. He feared the Fuhrer would order another costly attack on the Eastern Front to make up in the summer what had been lost during the winter.

For ideological reasons, Hitler was determined to restore the Eastern Front to a line running from the Gulf of Finland to the Sea of Azov. Driven by this obsession, he ordered an attack on Soviet forces in the Kursk salient, 400 miles south of Moscow. By drawing the noose on Soviet
forces in the salient and crushing them, Hitler was certain "a beacon would shine forth to the world" signalling Nazi mastery over Bolshevism. With luck, a simultaneous north-south pincer attack might nip off the bulge, trapping powerful Russian forces. Hitler hoped that, in an effort to recoup, the Soviets might squander their reserves.²

The Wehrmacht had experienced earlier defeats, most notably at Moscow and Stalingrad, where German strength was blunted against determined Soviet defenses. But even in those actions, the Germans had been able to withdraw to strike again at new targets of their choosing. Kursk changed all that.³

During the past two years, the Reich had lost 700,000 men in the meat grinder of the Russian front. They had also lost the equipment and weapons that went with those men. As defeat loomed ever larger, Hitler demanded and got a new "total mobilization" of German manpower. But shortfalls plagued the levee. Combat replacements lacked toughness and experience.⁴

Bolstered by American lend-lease, Russian armaments production had grown daily.* Weapons of high quality were spewing forth from Soviet factories.⁵ As Stalin continued

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*The lend-lease program provided the Soviets over 500,000 wheeled vehicles, allowing them to concentrate almost exclusively on producing tracked vehicles and tanks.
to widen the avenues of supply to the front, Hitler's prospects grew dimmer.

By the spring of 1943, almost no one in the German General Staff believed victory could be wrested from the deepening quagmire. Apart from higher quality Soviet weapons, a Soviet soldier, better trained and with higher morale had begun to appear on the battlefield. His appearance constituted a new force with which the Germans would also have to reckon at Kursk.

Operation Zitadelle (Citadel) as the battle was code-named by Hitler, became the greatest armored clash of all time. Nearly 2,700 tanks on the German side faced 3,300 on the Soviet side. In sheer numbers of forces involved, 570,000 German combat troops faced off against 1.3 million Soviets.

Most German Generals objected to Citadel because it lacked surprise and placed unacceptable demands on reserves. To challenge Hitler's decision was useless however, because only he, as Fuhrer and Supreme Commander, knew the whole strategic picture. His intuition and notion of himself as Feldherr (Warlord) dictated the course of events.
Hitler as Warlord

In 1932, before assuming power, he summed up his martial knowledge as follows:

I have the gift of reducing all problems to their simplest foundations. War has been erected into a secret science and surrounded with momentous solemnity. But war is the most natural, the most everyday matter. War is eternal, war is universal let us go back to primitive life, the life of the savages. What is war but cunning, deception, delusion, attack, and surprise?^{10}

By 1941, Hitler had developed an even more flattering picture of himself as Feldherr:

Anyone can do this little job of directing operations in war. The task of the Commander in Chief is to educate the Army to be National Socialists. I do not know any Army General who can do this as I want it done. I have therefore decided to take over command of the Army myself.^{11}

When he uttered these words, Hitler had just sacked the exhausted and dispirited Army Commander, General Walther von Brauchitsch and had assumed personal command of OKH, Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the Army). For the time being, he retained General Franz Halder as Chief of General Staff, but reduced his authority.^{12}

On 10 September 1942, Hitler ordered General Halder to draft new instructions regarding withdrawals. As these instructions really amounted to prohibiting retreat regardless of circumstances, Halder refused. Hitler sacked Halder, wrote them himself, and appointed the more compliant
General Kurt Zeitzler to be the new Chief of General Staff of the Army.¹³

Because of the Fuhrer's direct involvement in operations at all levels, it is important to examine his military talents. This is somewhat difficult because his personality changed during the war.¹⁴

Hitler had not learned from his early victories, other than to become more convinced of his infallibility. Reverses on the battlefield had affected him even more perversely. Defeats at Moscow 1941–42, at Stalingrad in January 1943, and in North Africa in May 1943, made him more obstinate, less teachable—or in his own words, "more fanatical."¹⁵

There are widely divergent views regarding Hitler's military abilities. Was he, as he viewed himself, "The greatest strategic genius of all time?"¹⁶ Or, was he, as Halder stated: "A demonic man who was no soldier in the German sense . . . and above all, not a great general."¹⁷

As a Meldegänger (dispatch runner) on the Western Front during World War I, his personal bravery won him the Iron Cross First Class, a high distinction for a corporal. His early victories in World War II were also lauded. In 1943, Major General J.F.C. Fuller, Britain's apostle of
armored warfare, described him as "One of the most, if not actually the most, original soldier in all history."\textsuperscript{18}

Hitler's chief talent lay in his political skills. Like Napoleon and Lenin, he was also blessed with a photographic memory. The easy mastery of minutiae allowed him to rattle off the explosive effect of nearly all munitions, making public display of his cleverness.\textsuperscript{19}

Despite these showy talents, he lacked solid military skills, the ability to maneuver corps and armies. These are the grand tactics taught at war colleges. This explains his jaundiced view of General Staff officers who had graduated from the Kriegsakademie (War Academy).

Fuller's thesis that Hitler was the most original soldier in all history contradicts his earlier statement that no man driven by dogma can make a good general. Available evidence shows Hitler was neither a great military theorist, nor a coherent strategist. He certainly had not authored the concept of Blitzkrieg as practiced by the Wehrmacht. The concept had no single father, but several. General Fuller had laid the groundwork himself when he planned the first tank battle in history (Cambrai, 20 November 1917). His later "Plan 1919" foresightfully called for a full-fledged tank army.\textsuperscript{20} Liddell Hart, Charles de Gaulle, and General Heinz Guderian later refined the art.
Nor was Germany's psychological warfare capability uniquely Hitler's idea. It was a weapon he had seen used in the First World War. The corporal who claimed to have studied Clausewitz had only skimmed the surface. Viewing war in Hobbesian terms of force and fraud, his primary skills lay in deception, duplicity and propaganda. Instead of being a war-philosopher, he could more accurately be termed a war-dilettante.

Because Hitler lacked management skills and was unteachable, he made serious mistakes. The frequent and erratic changes he made to the command structure of the Army were but one example. General Adolf Heusinger, of the Joint Services Oberkommando Wehrmacht (OKW) staff, recalled the 1942 situation:

No one is at the moment responsible for training, organization, replacements, administration—Keitel is supposed to undertake the greater part of these difficult jobs to some extent as Hitler's deputy. Soon he won't know whether he is Chief of the OKW or Deputy Commander in Chief of the Army.

Hitler's Fuhrerprinzip (leader principle) imposed absolute authority from above while demanding unconditional obedience from below. No one but Hitler had any authority over the Army and its reserves. Not a single soldier could be moved from one combat theatre to another without his knowledge. Hitler was conducting strategy in all theatres.
of war, and as Commander in Chief of the Army, strategy and tactics in Russia. 24

Delay, Dissention, and Dueling

Hitler envied Stalin because the Soviet leader could deal more harshly with obstinate generals than could he. Recalling the pre-war purge of the Red Army, he begrudged the Bolsheviks who brainwashed their surviving officers so completely that they became mindless robots. German Generals, complained Hitler, had no similar fanatical belief in the National Socialist idea. "They have scruples, make objections, and are not sufficiently with me," he fumed. 25

As late as 20 December 1944, Hauptbereichsleiter (Political Section Chief) Willy Ruder reported that, of the 61 General Staff officers who had participated in special NSF (National Socialist Leadership) training schools, not one was deemed suitable for employment as an NSF officer. Ruder complained about their disinterested attitude attributing it to their traditional Prussian outlook. 26 General Walter Warlimont wrote: "In Headquarters Area II, when the NSF headquarters asked us to accept an NSFO officer, the staff adjutant who was a combat-disabled Colonel replied: 'We've got no time here for such nonsense.'" 27
Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, Propaganda Minister of the Third Reich, noted in his diary on 10 May 1943 just prior to the launching of Citadel: "The Fuhrer is totally fed up with the Generals. He can't imagine anything finer than having nothing to do with them. His opinion of all the Generals is devastating."²⁸

Hitler's abhorrence of his Generals was, in the main, reciprocated by them.²⁹ Belonging to an older trained under the Generalstabssystem, they were efficient, conservative and cautious. Fearing Hitler's risk-taking, they were not given to excess, save in having "an infinite capacity for taking pains."³⁰

Most of Hitler's Generals opposed Citadel. On 4 May, 1943, Hitler convened a meeting in Munich with leaders involved in the attack. General Walter Model, unable to attend, sent a detailed letter raising serious objections to the plan. He felt Citadel was doomed to failure due to formidable enemy defenses and combat ratios of men and equipment favoring the Soviets.³¹

Lagging production of new Panther and Tiger tanks continued to delay the operation. At a private meeting with Hitler on 10 May, General Heinz Guderian, Inspector General of the Panzer Corps, urged the Fuhrer to give up the plan. Guderian labeled Citadel "a programmed disaster for
Germany." He asked Hitler directly: "Why do you want to attack in the East at all this year?"

The answer came, not from Hitler, but from Keitel who replied: "We must attack for political reasons."

Guderian responded caustically: "How many people do you think even know where Kursk is? It's a matter of profound indifference to the world whether we hold Kursk or not."

Guderian then turned from Keitel to Hitler and again asked: "Why do we want to attack in the East at all this year?"

Hitler fixed Guderian in his gaze and replied "You're quite right Guderian. Whenever I think of this attack, it turns my stomach."

"In that case," Guderian replied, "your reaction to the problem is the correct one. Leave it alone!"

Guderian knew the Panzer Divisions were badly understrength.

After Hitler banished Guderian in late 1941, he diluted Panzer strengths from 400 down to 200 tanks per division. But even this figure is misleading because, with Guderian absent from December 1941 to February 1943, Hitler watered down the force structure even more. When Guderian returned in February 1943, he discovered there were only 495
battleworthy tanks for all 18 divisions, or 27 tanks per division!34

Hitler had dismissed Guderian over disagreements regarding strategy. He recalled him in February 1943 to rebuild the decimated tank arm. Given the title of Inspector General of the Panzer Korps, his sweeping new powers were resented by Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge of the Joint Services Command (OKW). Kluge's animosity grew so great that, in May 1943, as Germany lurched towards final commitment with Citadel, he requested Hitler's permission to challenge Guderian to a duel! So, in addition to delay and dissent in the High Command just prior to Kursk, there was the added prospect of duelling! Hitler refused Kluge's request.35

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Commander Southern Army Group, worried Citadel could become "a case of a herring intent on gulping a sardine swimming into the jaws of a shark."36 Consequently, rather than striking first "on the forehand," Manstein came now to favor the "backhand stroke" (aus der Ruckhand schlagen), thus leaving the opening move to the Russians.

Hitler's ideological reason for overruling Manstein is revealed in the preamble of General Order Number 6: "The victory at Kursk," he wrote "must shine forth like a beacon
to the world." It must prove to the world the superiority of German over Slav. By butchering a million Soviets in the cauldron of Kursk, Hitler would deal Stalin a crushing blow.  

Meanwhile Manstein kept insisting on a mobile strategy. He suggested withdrawing his right wing to the Dnieper, and then counterattacking. But the concept of mobile defense held no appeal for Hitler.

As delay followed delay, Manstein favored scrubbing the operation entirely. The element of surprise had been lost. Guderian and Armaments Minister Albert Speer also opposed Citadel because, successful or not, the tank losses incurred would delay upgrading of the Panzer corps.

As the start date approached, tension increased on both sides of the front. By late May, Model's Ninth Army reported that the Russians had strong reserves echeloned in depth behind the front. Undeterred, Hitler stuck to his attack plan. But he delayed again, waiting for the new Tiger and Panther tanks, and especially his plodding 68-ton (self-propelled gun) Ferdinands, ninety of which would be ready by late June. He maintained the penetrating power of the Ferdinand's long-barrelled 88 mm gun would be crucial. Guderian disagreed, calling Ferdinand a mediocre weapon because of its slow speed (6 mph cross-country) and lack of
machine guns for close combat. As usual, Hitler's arguments prevailed.\textsuperscript{41}

Meanwhile, Manstein, his eye cocked on other theatres objected to Citadel on grounds that axis resistance in Tunisia could collapse momentarily. He correctly predicted this would be followed by an Allied landing in the Mediterranean, creating new complications for the Reich.\textsuperscript{42}

General Walter Warlimont, an OKW staff officer present during the planning stated:

On 18 June the OKW Operations Staff submitted an appreciation to Hitler that Zitadelle should be cancelled and that a strong operational reserve at the disposal of the Supreme Command should be constituted both in the East and in Germany - the latter by the formation of new units. The same day Hitler decided that although he valued the point of view of OKW, 'Operation Zitadelle should definitely be carried out.' He then laid down the date of the attack as 5 July.\textsuperscript{43}

On 4 July, the very eve of Zitadelle, General Reinhard Gehlen, Intelligence Chief, Foreign Armies East, repeated his opposition most emphatically: "From the point of view of the general war situation, there is not one ground that could justify launching Operation Zitadelle at the present juncture."\textsuperscript{44}

The Moscow Mole

Hitler's planning had proceeded schizophrenically.\textsuperscript{45}

On 15 April 1943, when he announced a "definitive decision"
to launch Zitadelle, he directed a flexible start date to commence "any time after 28 April with launch to be made on six day notice." Operations Order Number Six, signed by the Fuhrer, is found at Appendix I, page 146.

Item seven stated outlined security measures: "To preserve secrecy only essential personalities are to be identified, so that enemy espionage can be fought constantly."

But security was sabotaged from the outset. A Moscow mole code-named "Lucy" provided Soviet Intelligence a copy of Hitler's order two weeks prior to his signing it! Copies of German battle plans actually reached Marshal Georgi Zhukov before they reached German Field Commanders.

Death March of the Wehrmacht

The battle plan for Zitadelle, conceived by Hitler, was formalized by General Kurt Zeitzler, Chief of the Army General Staff. It envisioned swift, slashing attacks on the Soviet flanks and rear, aimed at trapping their forces in a cauldron--hence the name, Kesselschlacht, or cauldron battle.

Zeitzler proposed a double envelopment utilizing two armies, Field Marshal Walter Model's Ninth Army on the northern face of the salient and General Hermann Hoth's
Fourth Panzer Army to the south.\(^{49}\) (See Map I, p. 102) Model's Ninth Army, consisting of seven infantry divisions and eight Panzer and Panzergrenadier divisions, would concentrate near Orel and strike southward.\(^{50}\) Meanwhile, Armee-Abteilung Kempf and Hoth's Fourth Panzer Armee, composed of seven infantry divisions, eleven Panzer divisions, and three assault gun brigades, would concentrate in the Belgorod area and strike northwards with the objective of linking up with Model's assault units east of Kursk.\(^{51}\) Overall command in the North was under Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge and in the South, under Field Marshal Erich von Manstein.

The German Order of Battle, as it finally took shape, was awesome—judged by any standard other than that of the Soviet formations facing them. Hitler stripped the entire front of its Panzer reserves. The most elite German units were present: Third Panzer, Gross Deutschland, Eleventh Panzer, SS Leibstandarte, SS Das Reich, SS Totenkopf, Sixth Panzer, Nineteenth Panzer—nine of the finest divisions in the German Army, standing shoulder to shoulder along 30 miles of front!\(^{52}\)

Had Hitler known the truth about Soviet preparations, he would hardly have been enthusiastic. The first appreciation of the German plan of attack had been drawn up
by the Soviets as early as April, based on the remarkable intelligence provided by "Lucy." During the succeeding four months, the Russians shored up the flanks of the salient with guns, armor, and land mines of unbelievable density.

Soviet defenses consisted of six heavily armed belts composed of anti-tank positions, thick mine fields, and 3,500 miles of trenches backed by 3,300 tanks and 20,000 guns. The system was not only frontally strong, but strong in depth. In the salient itself, the defensive system was 110 miles deep from front to rear. Between the belts of strong points were mine fields, averaging 2,400 anti-tank and 2,700 anti-personnel mines per mile of front, six times the density used at Moscow and four times that used at Stalingrad. By June 1943, the Soviets had impressed 300,000 civilians to complete the trenches. Every village and every hill in the steppe had been fortified. Nearly 1,000 Katyusha rocket launchers were in place.

Zhukov's plan was based on response to the German threat:

I consider it unwise to launch a preventive* attack in the next few days. It would be better if we

*Interestingly, Nikita S. Kruschev, a member of the Military Council, proposed that a preemptive attack be made against German positions in the Belgorod-Kharkov area. This recommendation was turned down by Stalin, and Zhukov's advice prevailed.
first wore the enemy down with our defenses and destroyed his tanks, and only then, after having moved up fresh reserves, went over to a general offensive and finally destroyed his main force.\textsuperscript{58}

Zhukov's operational plan reflected lessons learned in earlier campaigns against the Germans: he would let the Wehrmacht break its teeth on Soviet defenses, destroy its reserves, and then go over to a general offensive.\textsuperscript{59} Under Zhukov, the major Soviet Commanders in the Kursk bulge were: On the north, Rokossovskiy and, in the south, Vatutin.

\textbf{Gentlemen, Start Your Engines}

The German tactical plan for Zitadelle remained unchanged during the months of delay. Predictable to a fault, it had no chance of achieving surprise. During the last two weeks of June, German long-range bombers repeatedly struck Soviet industrial targets near Kursk. Simultaneously, low-level bombers punished railheads and airfields in the salient.\textsuperscript{60}

In the hot, sultry final hours before the attack, a feeling of fatalism pervaded the German forces. General F.W. von Mellenthin, Chief of General Staff, 48th Panzer Corps, described what German tankers saw as they peered out across the rolling terrain into the no man's land they were about to enter:
a far-flung plain, broken by numerous valleys, small copses, irregularly laid out villages with thatched roofs and some rivers and brooks; of these the Pena ran with a swift current between steep banks. The ground rose slightly to the north, thus favoring the defender. Large cornfields covered the landscape, making visibility difficult.61

At 1500 hours on the afternoon of 4 July, German tanks, about 2,000 strong, started their engines and crawled out of their hidden positions, moving into no man's land.62

With their hatches closed and with the Luftwaffe's Stukas blasting paths ahead of them, they snaked forward, across the undulating, yellow-green cornfields. As they advanced, a German radio operator in a Tiger recalls:

The whole front was a girdle of flashes. It seemed as if we were driving into a ring of flame. Four times our valient "Rosinante" shuddered under a direct hit--and we thanked the fates for the strength of our good Krupp steel.63

Neither the Luftwaffe's aerial bombardment, nor Manstein's artillery had been able to neutralize the forward Russian defense zone or clear avenues through the mine fields. The result was that large numbers of tanks were disabled. Since Panzer crews had strict orders from Hitler that, under no circumstances would they stop to render assistance to tanks which had been crippled, many were picked off within minutes of striking a mine. They were destroyed by Soviet anti-tank guns or special tank-killing teams of infantry.64
German tactics were to advance in a succession of armored wedges known as **Panzerkeile**, with the **Tigers** bunched at the tip of the wedge and untried **Panthers** and older **Panzerkraftwagen** fanned out behind. Infantry followed the tanks. Heavier forces and mortars followed at the base of the wedge in armored personnel carriers.  

To blunt the German advance, the Soviets had copied (ironically from the Germans) a method of fire control known as **Pakfronts**. These were based on linking groups of several anti-tank guns under a single commander who could concentrate on single targets with devastating broadsides. The Russian mine fields had been so laid as to channel attacking tanks into the direct fire of these **Pakfronts**, which were sited to a depth of five miles. The **Pakfronts** were further inter-connected and protected by machine-gun and mortar emplacements.  

Because the Germans had greatly underestimated the lethality of these defenses, by the evening of 4 July the **Panzerkeile** had become badly distorted. As darkness fell on the battlefield, most German formations were still entangled in the first defensive belt. A few isolated **Tigers** lay broken at the second barrier. The hours of darkness were interrupted by the illumination of portable flame-throwers painting tongues of orange fire onto the night. German
troops, struggling to rescue stranded tanks clashed with Soviet tank-killing squads.\(^67\)

The first day of fighting had brought several other unpleasant surprises for the Germans. A violent cloudburst had swept Fourth Panzer Army zone, flooding the numerous gullies that gouged the landscape. The area had become an impassable quagmire.\(^68\)

On the morning of 5 July, the sun rose on a tableau of static warfare remindful of World War I. It was as if the Great Trench War had been resurrected for television and put on instant replay. German tanks lay impaled on Soviet defenses. Clouds of dusky smoke from burning cornfields mixed with the black discharge of flaming tanks.\(^69\)

Despite all efforts, German troops were unable to penetrate the second defensive belt. SS Gross Deutschland, assembled in close formation with the swamp to its immediate front, was raked mercilessly by Soviet artillery. Engineers were unable to bridge the swamp barrier, making the Panzers sitting ducks for Soviet gunners. Assault troops suffered considerable casualties and German Panzer divisions had to beat off numerous counterattacks.\(^70\) Meanwhile, the Soviets pulled their divisions back behind the second defensive belt without heavy losses.\(^71\)
Of the two pincers which were meant to converge across the 60-mile base of the salient, Model's northern arm had fared worse. It was here that the ninety Porsche Ferdinands were employed. Like the heavily armored Henschel Tigers with the SS at Belgorod, they managed to break into the Soviet defense system with relative ease. But, within hours, the Russian infantry had discovered that these steel dinosaurs had achilles heels; they had no secondary armament (machine guns). Deprived of this protection, they quickly fell victim to Soviet infantry which boarded them and directed flame throwers into the engine air intakes.

General Heinz Guderian recalls:

They were incapable of close-range fighting since they lacked sufficient ammunition (i.e., high-explosive as well as armour-piercing) for their guns and this defect was aggravated by the fact that they possessed no machine-guns. Once (the Ferdinands) had broken into the enemy's infantry zone they literally had to go quail shooting with cannon. They did not manage to neutralize, let alone destroy, the enemy rifles and machine guns, so that our own infantry was unable to follow up behind them.

Nor had the newly minted, untried Panthers produced the desired shock effect. General von Mellenthin reported that they:

Did not come up to expectations. They were easily set ablaze, the oil and petrol systems were inadequately protected and the crews were insufficiently trained.
After a full day of fighting, the Soviet salient had been dented in but one place, the left center of Manstein's attack—and this by the combined strength of 48th Panzer Corps and the SS. Armeeabteilung Kempf had made a faltering start, and the Luftwaffe, though it maintained a rate of over 3,000 sorties per day, had been unable to establish local air superiority.

On the second and third days, the battle appeared to be developing more favorably for the Germans. By nightfall of 6 July, Ninth Army had gained about six miles, except on its right flank, which was lagging. On the 7th, the rate of gain declined, with fierce tank battles erupting on both sides of the bulge. The Russians were committing their reserves.

The most troubling development was the rapid decline of tank strength in some divisions. Grossdeutschland, for example, had only 80 of 300 tanks still fit for combat.

By the 8th, Field Marshal Model correctly predicted there would be no quick breakthrough. He described the likely future course of the offensive as a "rolling battle of attrition." Even committing reserves failed to break the deadlock on the northern pincer.

As early as 9 July, it was clear to General Hermann Hoth, Commander, Fourth Panzer Arme, that a crisis point
was approaching. His troops had been under heavy stress for five days and ammunition and rations were running low. Concomitantly, the intensity of Soviet fire was making it difficult to service and refuel the armor.\textsuperscript{81}

Hoth, in consultation with Manstein the evening of 9 July, decided to collect his available armor and attempt a breakthrough. For two days the infantry of Third Panzer and Gross Deutschland struggled in vain to force the Russian gate back on its hinge.\textsuperscript{82}

Although the slow progress of the southern pincer was disappointing, Manstein's forces had fared better than their comrades on the northern face of the salient. General Guderian recalled from his visit to Model's Ninth Army that: "The attack (in the North) bogged down after some six miles."\textsuperscript{83}

**Battle for Breakthrough at Prokhorovka**

After a week of fighting, General F.W. von Mellenthin likened the German situation to that of "a man who has seized a wolf by the ears and dare not let him go."\textsuperscript{84}

On 12 July, what was left of serviceable German armor was scraped together and started on its fateful ride. By noon they were in head-to-head contact with Soviet 5th Army. Under a gigantic dust cloud and in stifling heat, the most
massive tank battle of World War II was joined. The Russians were fresh, their tanks fully serviced, and they had seemingly limitless reserves. The Germans, by contrast, had just come from bitter close-in fighting lasting over a week without respite.\footnote{85}

The battle began at midmorning of 12 July, following a short but intense artillery barrage.\footnote{86} The Soviet tanks crashed into the first echelon of the German armored formations and, by moving to point-blank range, the Soviet T-34s deprived the German armor of its advantage in firepower.\footnote{87}

\textit{Armee-Abteilung Kempf} was confronted by the tanks of the 5th and 7th Guards Armies.\footnote{88} For the next 19 hours, the battle raged in the sector west of Prokhorovka.

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein described his impression of Soviet strength that day:

\begin{quote}
We found ourselves taking on a seemingly inexhaustible mass of enemy armour--never have I received such an overwhelming impression of Russian strength and numbers as on that day. The clouds of dust made it difficult to get help from the Luftwaffe, and soon many of the T-34's had broken past our screen and were streaming like rats all over the battle-field . . . \footnote{89}
\end{quote}

By the time it was over, more than 300 German tanks and 88 guns lay destroyed. Also destroyed were more than half the tanks of 5th Guards Tank Army.\footnote{90} Despite extraordinary Soviet personnel losses, (17,000 troops killed
vs. 3,300 German), the German assault toward Prokhorovka had been halted.

Although German troops continued to push their attacks against Soviet positions at Prokhorovka 13-15 July, the momentum was lost. Hitler called off the offensive on 13 July 1943 because of the Allied landing in Sicily.

The failure of Zitadelle represented a crushing defeat for the Wehrmacht. In analyzing the impact of the battle, General Guderian stated:

The armoured formations, reformed and reequipped with so much effort, had lost heavily both in men and in equipment and would now be unemployable for a long time to come. It was problematical whether they could be rehabilitated in time to defend Eastern Europe; as for being able to use them in defense of Western Europe against the Allied landings that threatened for the next spring, this was even more questionable.

Many of the remaining infantry divisions were composed of companies and even regiments with only 40 men. Although Soviet material losses were huge, they were readily replaced. From this point forward, the initiative on the Eastern Front passed to the Russians.

In addition to besting the Germans in the Materialschlacht at Kursk, the Soviets also etched indelibly on the retina of the German mind the image of the Soviet soldier. It was an image of personal toughness, a rocklike callousness and immunity to hardship. General von
Mellenthin, Chief of Staff, 48th Panzer Corps, painted the picture:

The stoicism of the majority of Russian soldiers and their mental sluggishness makes them quite insensible to losses. The Russian soldier values his own life no more than those of his comrades. To step on walls of dead, composed of the bodies of his former friends and companions, makes not the slightest impression on him and does not upset his equanimity at all; without so much as twinkling an eyelid he stolidly continues the attack or stays put in the position he has been told to defend. Life is not precious to him. He is immune to the most incredible hardships and does not even appear to notice them; he seems equally indifferent to bombs and shells.

Flawed Ferdinand, Toothless Tiger

The Tiger was designed to be an anti-tank tank, a Super-dreadnought of the armored battlefield, able to outgun any opponent. Its name remains synonymous with the words deadly, dependable, lethal. Ironically, at Kursk, the Tiger was toothless.

The Tiger had barely half the speed of the T-34 (12 mph versus 25 mph for the T-34). Its range was barely 60 miles, the Soviet tank 120. Due to its more volatile fuel, the Tiger caught fire more easily than the diesel-driven T-34.

Because it had been rushed to battle prematurely, the Tiger broke down without warning. There was an even more
fatal flaw in the Tigers produced by the Porsche Company—there were no machine guns. The long-snouted 88 mm canon and thick armor plating which could have made the Tiger invulnerable were not protected against Soviet infantry armed with Molotov cocktails or flame throwers.  

On the other hand, most German generals including von Mellenthin were highly impressed with the enemy T-34. Quite apart from the diesel engine which doubled its range and its powerful gun and thick armor, they considered its most formidable attribute to be its ability to keep moving through the gridlock of melting snow and thick mud.

The T-34 could do this because of its wider track, which better bore its weight on soft surfaces. While the finely machined running gear of the German tanks locked and froze under winter conditions, the sloppy tolerances of the crudely-built T-34s kept these tanks moving.

Mobile Defense Ignored

Mobile defense consists of the alternate use of the planned retreat and sudden counterattack. Planned retreat enables the defender to avoid the attacker's major blows while enticing him on. Sudden, sharp counterattacks hold

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'The Henschel-produced version of the Tiger had machine guns.'
the potential of defeating the aggressor at the very moment his offensive begins to bog down.

These tactics prove fruitful only if the defender has superiority over the attacker in command and mobility, both of which the Wehrmacht had until Hitler locked them in static positions and meddled in command decisions. It is likely that, had the German Army gone over to mobile defense early in 1943, the Russians might never have crossed the frontiers of the Reich.¹⁰²

General von Mellenthin, who fought at Kursk, has argued Hitler's decisions to hold ground were ideological, not military, and that he was possessed of a trench mentality. "Never attack a fortress with tanks!" emphasized von Mellenthin.¹⁰³

Interestingly, Soviet Generals were quick to copy Manstein's strategy of mobile defense. Hitler's failure to adopt it is puzzling, because Manstein had proved in earlier battles that manoeuvre en retraite would work.¹⁰⁴

More About Lucy

"Lucy" was the code name of Rudolph Rössler, a disaffected German Marxist who served as a Soviet agent based in Switzerland. During World War I he had become acquainted with ten fellow German soldiers who shared his views. These ten, according to some historians, remained in
the Reichswehr (the 100,000-man Army permitted the Germans after Versailles) and rose in rank until five became Generals. Eight of the ten reportedly worked in the Joint Services High Command, OKW while the other two held high ranks in the Luftwaffe.\textsuperscript{105}

All abhorred Nazism but the degree of their conviction regarding Marxism is unknown. Reportedly, they strove to ensure that Germany should lose the war. As high-level moles they were uniquely placed. They had both access to information and a means for transmitting it.

"Lucy's" method was incredibly simple. Messages encrypted by the moles were transmitted by the OKW communications center to Rössler in Switzerland, where he retransmitted them to Moscow. The Soviet high command was thus informed of German intentions at every turn.\textsuperscript{106}

**Peace Feelers**

Negotiation with the Soviets had become a common, if covert, topic both before and after Kursk at the German Foreign Office. The practice had its inception following receipt of peace feelers from Stalin soon after the battle of Stalingrad.\textsuperscript{107} Peter Kleist, a Director for the Ministry for the East (Russian Occupied Territories), while in Stockholm during December 1942, was approached by a
businessman named Edgar Clauss. Clauss declared that he was accredited with the Soviet Embassy directed by Mme. Kollantai and asserted the U.S.S.R. was ready to conclude "peace in one week" based on 1939 frontiers.  

The probes continued. On 18 June 1943, just prior to Zitadelle, Kleist made another trip, and Clauss a new offer. The Soviet Union, he declared, was:

bleeding for the benefit of the Anglo Americans; the frequently promised, frequently postponed second front was only a bluff, while the landing in North Africa was imminent and constituted a threat to the Balkans. The future for the U.S.S.R. lay in China and Asia. Finally, the Soviets did not want to depend solely on the Americans for their rehabilitation after the war. Therefore, the U.S.S.R. would entertain a loosening of ties with the Allies.

Clauss further stated that the Soviets were determined not to fight for a day or even a minute ("ni odnu minitu") longer than necessary on behalf of British and American interests. Stalin felt Hitler had been blinded by ideology and had allowed himself to be pushed into the war by the intrigues of the capitalist powers.

While confident that the Red Army could hold off the Wehrmacht, the Russians feared they would be in an extremely weakened position after victory when they would have to confront the cold steel of the western powers. The Soviets distrusted the Americans and the British since neither had yet come forward with any concrete statements about war
gains and territorial boundaries. Stalin wanted only two things: A guarantee that peace would be preserved and economic aid.\textsuperscript{110}

Kleist returned to Berlin where he was arrested on arrival by the Gestapo which had learned of his dealings. During a month of intensive interrogation, he accounted for his actions to Kaltenbrunner, Himmler and Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop. Finally, nearly two months after his June meeting with Clauss, he was summoned to Hitler's headquarters.

After interrogating Kleist, Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop deduced Clauss was a valid Kremlin spokesman, but stated flatly that "negotiation was out of the question." The fight would continue until total victory. Kleist was nevertheless directed to keep in touch with Clauss, who could conceivably furnish the Germans with some indication of Soviet intentions.\textsuperscript{111}

The two men met again in early September 1943. Clauss and Mme. Kollantai, dissatisfied with Kleist's reserved attitude, were nevertheless ready to continue the negotiations for peace—this time taking as a basis the 1914 frontier. Clauss hinted that this was merely a suggestion in order to reach middle ground. Germany could, for
example, propose the Don River as a frontier. Again, after consulting Hitler, Ribbentrop's reaction was negative.\textsuperscript{112}

Hitler's refusal to negotiate with Stalin came at an incomprehensible time. Forty-eight hours earlier, on 8 September, shortly after Allied troops breached the narrow channel between Sicily and the toe of Italy, Marshal Bagdolio announced he had signed an armistice with the West!
Figure 1: Map of the Battle Area Near Kursk
CHAPTER III

Endnotes


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INTERVIEW WITH A GERMAN GENERAL STAFF OFFICER

When I first read the masterfully written book, Panzer Battles, it was simply to gain a better understanding of the 1943 battle of Kursk, where Hitler squandered the last of his armor. I never expected to meet its author, Major General Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin. A General Staff officer of such seniority who had seen so much action during World War II must be gone by now, I thought. The book, published more than thirty years ago (1956), left no clue other than a single tantalizing line in the preface: "F.W. von Mellenthin, Johannesburg."

As I delved deeper into the book, I became fascinated with the writer's style. He expressed himself with brevity and simplicity. His phrases rang with clarity and candor, yet he always managed to preserve a mask of anonymity. What kind of man, I wondered, could write about war so closely and authentically, yet remove himself so completely from the scenario?

His book indicated he had seen combat in every theatre of the European war from 1939 to 1945. His career was a
map-trace of Germany's Panzer Armies as they moved through Poland, France, the Balkans, then across the deserts of North Africa with Rommel's Afrika Korps and across the wintry wastes and muddy gridlock of the Russian heartland, ending finally with his capture by the Allies while trying to break out of the Ruhr pocket.  

A chorus of questions demanded answers. Was he still alive? Was he one of those silent, incomprehensible Prussians from east of the Elbe? Was he a Junker of the military caste? It was from this class that the Imperial General Staff of WWI had drawn its officers. Some of the younger ones had survived to become Hitler's generals and Field Marshals. Was von Mellenthin one of them? I wondered. 

How to find him? A few telephone calls to Johannesburg brought some answers. The name was pronounced Fon-Méll-enn-teen. He was still there and would welcome my visit for an interview. 

The man who met me at the garden gate of the comfortable townhouse in the upper class suburb of Sandton in northern Johannesburg was slim, aristocratic and urbane. His energy and vitality made him appear taller than 5' 6". He was wearing a blue three-piece European business suit, topped off by a starched white french-cuff shirt and
regimental stripe tie. Even as an octogenarian, he did not wear glasses. His only jewelry was a pair of antique cufflinks and a signet ring. His tanned face was calm and serene, free from the worry lines normal to executives who have worked under stress. He looked more like a bank director than a general.

The General's Background

His first invitation was for a "working lunch:" baltic herring, weinerschnitzel, red cabbage, potatoe dumplings, and a crisp Rhine wine. It lasted all day. When it was over, the dining table was covered with the General's situation maps and battle sketches.

When he spoke of battles past, his pale blue eyes acquired a long-distance focus, as if he were at the forward edge of the battle, still seeing the approaching Soviet tanks. One felt the smoke and dust of battle, the crashing of artillery, and the clang of metal. He seemed to relieve the agonies of Kursk and Stalingrad along with the earlier victories in France, Poland and North Africa.

There was unusual balance in the man, an economy of motion and steadiness to his actions. No wasted gesture. His self-control seemed natural, not affected. He also seemed able to control those around him by the power of
subtle suggestion. It was not until I saw his riding stable that I made the connection. He was a master of dressage!

Dressage demands the utmost in self-control. The rider is under the intense scrutiny of five judges for over ten minutes. No other sport requires such cooperation between man and animal. It is control of another living being by subtle suggestion; no whips, no spurs. The horse cannot be commanded, but must be made to feel proud, to feel he is an extension of the rider. When he feels sufficiently proud, he will want to work for the rider. The general's trophy case was filled with gold cups.

The ancestral homes of Mellenthin and Lienichen in Pomerania, the general told me, had been in his family since 1460. About 300 Junker families had owned the land of Ostelbien (East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia). The landowners had lived in castles with broad, massive facades three stories high, with twenty or thirty rooms which were never quite warmed by the small tile stoves scattered in dark corners. It was from this class that the General Staff had drawn an inordinately large percentage of its officers. The von Mellenthin land holdings had not been as large as most Junkers since most of his forebears had been soldiers. All that remained of his German past were a few snapshots and small mementos that he and his family had been
able to carry out on their backs as they fled the advancing Soviet Armies. After the war, he spent two and a half years as a prisoner of war and another three as a homeless refugee in West Germany.

In 1950, von Mellenthin moved to South Africa because the country was one of the few accepting refugees. And, at 50 when most men start thinking about retirement, he started over again at the bottom rung of a new ladder in the business world. He downplayed his successes, explaining that he was "a lucky guy." He preferred his colleagues to call him FW, short for Friedrich Wilhelm.³

As I came to know him over the next several weeks, there emerged the portrait of the quintessential German General Staff Officer. He was the aristocrat who considered the military a calling and not a job. From FW's point of view, he had survived the pain of seeing his country wrested from its aristocratic moorings by the banishment of the Kaiser and the shackles of Versailles. And, just when his life was taking shape, Hitler came to power, forcing his class to ride the uncertain tides of National Socialism along with the rednecks and hooligans of the SA Brownshirts.⁴

Von Mellenthin was greatly influenced by the edicts of General Hans von Seeckt. Von Seeckt had headed the General
Troop Office, the cover name for the General Staff, when it was forced underground by the Allies after Versailles. In that assignment, he drafted the message that went out to all General Staff Officers on 6 July 1919 which said: "The form changes, the spirit remains as before. It is the spirit of silent, selfless performance of duty in the service of the Army. General Staff Officers have no names."  

Von Mellenthin has meticulously followed this decree, combining it with the advice Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen earlier gave the General Staff: "Great achievements, small display; more reality than appearance."  

In discussing battles past, he strove always to remain anonymous.

He preferred instead to credit victories to his Commanding Generals, like Erwin Rommel, Heinz Guderian, and Hermann Balack with comments like: "Yes, the general and I worked very well together." Or: "He was a fine Commander, we understood each other—we alternated days up on the line with the troops." He smiled sheepishly when reminded that several of his wartime commanders had later become his employees when he took over as director for Lufthansa for all Africa. He replied only: "We remained the best of friends. We continued to work well together."
Von Mellenthin was selected by the board of directors of Lufthansa for the Africa assignment in much the same way as he had been for key General Staff assignments; he had proven himself in the field. This he had done by establishing his own airline. In 1953 he founded Trek Air (now called Luxavia) in Johannesburg. He linked it to Europe, made it profitable, captured a portion of Lufthansa's market, and also its attention. "The airline business," said von Mellenthin, "is really only a matter of good staff work and selecting the right people."³

The general was born on 30 August 1904 in the ancient German trading city of Breslau, at the garrison of his father's regiment. When he was 14, his father, Lt. Colonel Paul Henning von Mellenthin, was killed on the Western Front on 29 June 1918 while directing artillery. His elder brother Horst was buried alive by a French artillery barrage, but managed to survive. War tragedies were part of the family history.

Descended from an old Pomeranian noble family, von Mellenthin claims among his ancestors, Prince August von Hohenzollern of Prussia and Frederick the Great. He is related either directly, or by marriage, to most of the ancient aristocratic German families and can trace his
lineage back beyond the Teutonic Knights. The family tree in his study dates to the year 1200 AD.

Upon graduating from high school, the general enlisted in the Seventh Cavalry Regiment on 1 April 1924 as a lancer. His passion for horses and competition riding, mainly steeple-chasing, led him to spend the first eleven years of his service in the cavalry. After 18 months' enlisted service, he was promoted to corporal and, in 1926, he was selected by the army personnel directorate to attend the Infantry school at Ordruf and the Cavalry school at Hannover. On 1 February 1928 he was commissioned Lieutenant (2nd Lt.) in the 100,000-man Reichswehr, one of only 4,000 officers permitted in the entire Army.9

Von Mellenthin did not set out to become a General Staff Officer. He was perfectly happy racing horses, steeple-chasing, and working for an amiable Colonel who shared his passion for riding and his aversion to office work. Yet, a demonstrated tactical flair during training exercises coupled with an exceptional talent at drafting reports, led to his nomination as a candidate for General Staff training.

Before he could enter the training program, however, he had to take the arduous week-long qualifying exam. Von Mellenthin recalled that of the more than 1,000 officers who
assembled to take the exam, "only 150 or so were admitted to the Krieqsakademie (War Academy)." Standing in the top ten percent of all candidates who qualified, von Mellenthin was ordered by the General Staff personnel director to report for training at the Academy in Berlin on 1 October 1935.

The Krieqsakademie

General Ludwig Beck, Adjutant General, and later Chief of the General Staff, shortened the General Staff course in 1933 from three to two years, owing to Hitler's rapid expansion of the Army. Beck reinstated the three year course in 1937 after von Mellenthin graduated. During his abbreviated time at the War Academy, he was trained to handle staff work at regimental, division and higher echelons. The emphasis, however, was on Division operations, as General Beck concentrated on providing qualified staff officers for the new divisions being formed.

A General Staff Officer Remembers

"I have always been a lucky guy." What von Mellenthin failed to add was that it helped to be of noble birth. The enigmatic bond of bloodlines defied the simplicity of organization charts. A warm collegiality knit the nobility together. They knew each other from childhood . . . from
private schools . . . from military academies . . . from adjacent regiments. Frequently, they were related.

Their aristocratic manners and easy intimacy caused the unschooled and insecure Hitler to fear and hate them. And he equated the General Staff with the nobility. In this he was essentially right. Nobles, because of their superior education and social graces, dominated the General Staff. Ironically, the Allies had made it so. For, by making the German Army absurdly small, the Allies had only succeeded in making it more elite.\(^1\)

It was an honor to be part of the tiny, hand-picked Army von Seeht built after Versailles. Further, by abolishing the General Staff and closing the War Academy, the Allies simply drove the functions underground.

Military spark and creativity blossomed in secret. Mystique fed on secrecy. The dysfunctional edicts of Versailles made the General Staff an elite, almost masonic, order. Because officer commissions had become extremely rare, the Army attracted an even higher proportion of nobles than it had under the Kaiser. In 1913, for example, only 27 percent of junior officers had the noble 'von' before their last names. By 1928, when von Mellenthin was commissioned, 35 percent of Lieutenants were von-something.\(^1\) In the politically confused Weimar Republic, the nobility saw
military service as being "above politics" and one of the few professions worthy of their station.

Von Mellenthin's commander in Berlin was General (later Field Marshal) Erwin von Witzelben, who later commanded First Army which broke the Maginot Line in the Battle of France, 1940. The performance report he wrote on FW, citing his extraordinary tact and efficiency gave the young officer his first boost up the General Staff ladder.¹⁴

Von Mellenthin's post as a staff captain of Berlin Corps was auspicious, as it involved him in intelligence work at the national level. While overtly working on the General Staff, he covertly maintained liaison with counter-espionage personnel in the Berlin Military District who were guarding against penetration of secret armaments factories in the area. His overt "cover," helping to organize the Fuhrer parades, he denigrated as "the running of a military circus."¹⁵

Despite his designation as a General Staff Officer, von Mellenthin continued to view himself as a cavalryman. He felt he had acquired a broader outlook than the infantryman and was able to think on a grander scale. He also felt his riding skills had trained him to take measured chances, without being foolhardy. Increasingly he ranked
at his parade duties in Berlin. He grew restless, but action was not long in coming.

The German Army entered Poland at 0445 hours on 1 September 1939. Waves of "softening up" attacks by the Luftwaffe preceded the panzer columns. At the time of the invasion, von Mellenthin was still attached to Berlin Corps as lc (staff intelligence officer). He was ordered to fly in an unarmed, kite-like Fiesler Storch to the forward HQ of Eighth Army near Lodz to prepare a situation report. Enroute, the Storch encountered engine trouble and crash-landed in what his maps showed as enemy territory.

Groups of men in unfamiliar green uniforms surrounded the aircraft as it staggered and stuttered to a stop. Just as FW and the pilot were about to fire on these green-clad soldiers with their machine pistols, they heard shouted commands in German. His pilot had landed right on top of a German bridge-building unit, part of the quasi-military labor force under Dr. Fritz Todt, Minister for Armament.¹⁶

In his six years of World War II service, von Mellenthin had close working relationships with many of Germany's leading generals, including Erwin Rommel, Hermann Balck, and Heinz Guderian. The list even included a few Field Marshals, like Albert Kesselring. But the mere mention of Rommel seemed to have a catalytic effect on von
Mellenthin. With the ring of the old German General Staff Officer in his voice, he was at once transported across space and time to North Africa and 1941. He recalled being in North Africa with Rommel from 1 June 1941 to 15 September 1942, first as his intelligence officer (Ic) and later as operations officer (Ia). 17

Rommel vs. Hitler

"I first met him in 1938 when I was serving at Third Corps in Berlin. Little did I realize that three short years later, I would be serving in North Africa under him. He was the toughest taskmaster I've ever known. He spared no one, least of all, himself." reminisced von Mellenthin. 18

Rommel was wary of the General Staff contingent sent from Berlin in June 1941 to assist him. He snubbed von Mellenthin and other staff members, saying: "'I don't need a staff ... I alone am in charge of the Afrika Korps.'" remembered von Mellenthin. "And for a while, it looked that way. He totally ignored us for an uncomfortably long time." 19

Rommel's behavior is understandable. He was an officer of the middle-class who had made his way without patronage. Despite his incredible achievements in World War I (he had won Germany's highest medal, Pour le Merite, as a
company commander at the Battle of Caporetto during October, 1917), he had never gained admission to the General Staff. Rommel was all too aware of the dual reporting system, by which General Staff officers reported to him publicly, and on him privately to the chief of the General Staff in Berlin. "As a fighting soldier, he viewed us suspiciously. He though we might attempt to supervise—even take over," said von Mellenthin. "Major General Alfred Gause, heading the Panzergruppe staff we had brought from Germany to provide Rommel with a large operational headquarters, finally defused the problem by deferring totally to Rommel, assuring him that he alone was in command," recalled von Mellenthin.

Hitler intended no major role for Rommel in the desert. And the Panzergruppe staff he sent, was probably more to keep Rommel in check than anything else. Hitler wanted a convenient sideshow; a low-cost gesture aimed at bailing out Mussolini, whose troops were being mauled by the British.

"Rommel was chosen to lead an understrength expeditionary force. He was limited to one light infantry division, the 5th, to which later was added 15th Panzer. He was never given sufficient air cover or logistical support." ranked von Mellenthin. By Hitler's order, his mission was
simply to act as a blocking force, or barrier to prevent the advancing British from destroying the Italians.\textsuperscript{22}

"Rommel saw no future in such timid tactics," said von Mellenthin. "He therefore quickly and decisively took the offensive, before the British could marshal sufficient forces to drive on Tripoli." he added. On 1 March 1941, Rommel's force's surprised the British. Bengasi fell to German hands, and soon he was laying seige to Tobruk!

"Rommel was correct in disregarding Hitler's instructions to 'stand and defend' because commanders should always exploit opportunities as they present themselves," emphasized von Mellenthin.\textsuperscript{23}

On 21 March 1941 Rommel defeated the British at El Aghiela, and advanced on Tobruk. He was promoted to full general in January 1942, captured Tobruk in June and was made a Field Marshal. Tobruk was where we had really had a free hand. Hitler hadn't meddled. We were able to make purely military decisions," said von Mellenthin. His eyes lit up and he smiled broadly as he remembered "capturing tons and tons of English booty--nearly 1,000 fighting vehicles, 400 guns and over 45,000 prisoners. Some of the best food we ever got during the entire war was taken at Tobruk."\textsuperscript{24}
Churchill, sensing the peril of a Panzer Armee so close to Suez exclaimed: "Rommel, Rommel, Rommel! What else matters but beating him?" Nor was the danger limited to Rommel's battlefield prowess; his charisma was infecting soldiers of all nationalities.

"His troops, both German and Italian, would literally do anything for him," reminisced von Mellenthin. Even British soldiers admired him so openly that their high command was forced to caution its officers to quit discussing Rommel.

With the capture of Tobruk, Rommel had hit the peak of his career. Von Mellenthin recalls: "After than, despite a shortage of gasoline and the exhaustion of his troops, he set out eastwards to capture the Suez, a venture which failed ... mainly due to lack of reinforcements. But Rommel felt it was worth a try, because that's the kind of general he was." 

"He did not care about politics, and that led to his downfall," von Mellenthin recalled. When Hitler discovered Rommel had been involved in the 20 July 1944 bomb plot against his life, he gave him the option of taking poison or facing torture and hanging by piano wire from a meathook. Rommel committed suicide on 14 October 1944.
If Rommel made impossible demands on his staff, FW's next commander, General Hermann Balck, was the soul of tact and reason. But he, too, had serious disagreements with Hitler, recalled von Mellenthin.27

Balck Argues With Hitler

After leaving Rommel's staff in late 1942, von Mellenthin became Chief of Staff of 48th Panzer Corps, commanded by General Hermann Balck. "Balck was steadfast, cool under fire, and inflexibly determined . . . a highly gifted panzer general." recalled von Mellenthin. FW was with Balck almost continuously from December 1942 until the end of 1944, from the Battle of the Chir River near Stalingrad to Army Group G in France, near the West Wall.

"When Balck was commanding 11th Panzer Division at the Chir, I was chief of staff of 48th Panzer Corps, under whose command his division operated," recalled von Mellenthin. FW then served Balck as his chief of staff at 48th Panzer Corps, when Balck was promoted. He stayed on as his chief of staff when Balck took over Fourth Panzer Army in Russia. "Finally I was his chief of staff at Army Group G in the West to the end of 1944," reminisced von Mellenthin.

Of Swedish-Finnish ancestry, Balck was nicknamed the "cool Nordic." by von Mellenthin. "He was one of the
coolest commanders under fire I have ever seen—absolutely unshakable. He was also the supreme realist," said von Mellenthin. On 30 December, 1941, while briefing Hitler on the situation at Stalingrad, he demonstrated this. Balck's briefing took two hours, during which time The Fuhrer hardly interrupted. "He advised Hitler not to withdraw under any circumstances," continued the general. "Balck reasoned that, with snow two meters deep and the temperature at 50 degrees below zero celsius, it would be impossible to retreat or even prepare new positions," said von Mellenthin.

"Balck and Hitler then got into an argument over tank losses, which Hitler had minimized. They compared numbers. Balck told Hitler point-blank that his tank figures were wrong: 'You are mistaken; I was there—my figures are the correct ones.'" von Mellenthin quoted Balck as saying.

The main value of Balck's realistic analysis was twofold: it bolstered Hitler's decision to stand fast at Stalingrad. (some strategists say it was the only correct decision under the circumstances) and it forced Armaments Minister Albert Speer to increase tank production. 28

Guderian Disagrees With Hitler

Known affectionately to his men as "Papa Heinz" or "Schneller Heinz" (fast-moving Heinz), he was better known
to the Allies as Germany's creator of Blitzkrieg. It was Guderian's tanks that made the motorized dash to Vienna in 1938 and his formations that slashed through Poland. Finally it was his thrust to the coast at Abbeville in 1940 that cut the Allied armies in two. "There never would have been a 'miracle at Dunkirk' had Hitler not sent down the halt order" said von Mellenthin. Guderian was brave, brash, bold—and difficult.  

After Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, FW considers Guderian one of Germany's best strategists: "It was he who concurred with Manstein in launching Operation Sichelschnitt," he declared. Sichelschnitt was the daring scythe-like armored sweep of May 1940, which pushed German tanks through the forested Ardennes, surprising the Allies who considered the area impenetrable. "Hitler tried to claim credit for authoring Sichelschnitt, but von Manstein conceived it," said von Mellenthin.

It was Guderian who favored a Mediterranean strategy aimed at bottling up the British. In this, he was overruled by Hitler, who had already decided to attack Russia. And Guderian opposed, much to his own detriment, Hitler's constant course changes once in Russia.

"He wanted to drive right to Moscow, without all of Hitler's costly sidetrips. Guderian understood Clausewitz's
advice regarding maintenance of objective." mused von Mellenthin. A well-thumbed, leather-bound copy of Vom Krieg lay on a shelf near the general's writing table.

Guderian had a talent for falling out with colleagues, senior generals, Field Marshals—even Hitler. He was headstrong and opinionated. "This was because he had formulated a new method of warfare, and impatiently wanted to see it translated into action," said von Mellenthin.

"Who knows? had Hitler followed Guderian's advice, making an uninterrupted drive on Moscow while the Soviet armies were too weak to maneuver, and with the approaches relatively unguarded, we might have taken the Russian capital before winter 1941." speculated von Mellenthin.

Hitler

Von Mellenthin considers Hitler as a politically clever man, "whose military decisions were unfortunately driven by ideology." Von Mellenthin continues:

Hitler had an iron will and was utterly ruthless. It is clear, however, that he was lacking in balance and judgment. He was not rational. He failed on every level as a warlord and had no concept of maintenance of objective.

Von Mellenthin, however, credited Hitler with backing Guderian in creating panzer formations at a time when many high-ranking generals were opposed. "He stimulated interest
by attending trials of new tanks and did everything possible to build up our road network, which was in a sorry state. "34

he recalled. It was upon seeing Guderian's latest tanks being tested at the ordinance proving grounds at Kumersdorf in February 1935, that Hitler made his famous aside: "That's what I need. That's what I want to have!"35

FW did not share Field Marshal Kietel's view that Hitler was "the greatest warlord of all time." Instead, he considered Keitel to be a yes-man and a lackey, whose constant toady ing nullified his usefulness as a General Staff Officer.36

Von Mellenthin also disagreed with General J.F.C. Fuller, Britain's expert on armored warfare, who called Hitler "One of the most original soldiers of all time." Von Mellenthin believes heavier doses of caution coupled with more complete staff work would have served the German Army better than Hitler's "originality."37

The general met Hitler only once, at a state dinner in 1937, and claims he was not much impressed. But his brother Horst, a general's aide and high-level military attache, met Hitler several times and formed a deep-seated dislike for Hitler. FW continued: "Horst's low opinion of Hitler was likely influenced by General Kurt Baron von Hammerstein-Equord, his boss, who rejected the whole idea of National
Socialism and wasn't afraid to say so. He lost his job as Chief of the Army, of course. He was replaced by General Werner Baron von Fritsch who built up the prewar German Army. But Hitler got rid of him too, as soon as he gained enough confidence to deal with the generals.

Von Mellenthin never considered resisting Hitler's rise to power because of two decrees: Paragraph 36 of the Defense Law which stated: "Soldiers may not engage in political activity," and the 30 July 1924 General Staff decree which specifically forbade involvement in politics. The second decree mandated that "... the officer does not become a politician; he remains a soldier ... he is the executive organ of the State, not of any Party or economic group."39

Moreover, von Mellenthin was a Prussian who shared Clausewitz's regard for the state as the embodiment of man's supreme achievement on earth. Since defense of the state was the supreme duty, the army held a sacred trust. Von Mellenthin believed that: "The soldier must serve the statesman, not unsurp him."40

Germany was ripe for Hitler. Defeat and unilateral disarmament had left the Germans with a siege mentality. They felt preyed upon by hostile neighbors, a conviction reinforced by the French occupation of the Ruhr and Polish
incursions into Silesia, near von Mellenthin's home. Indigenous communists, aided by Soviet Russia, very nearly overthrew the fragile Weimar Republic. With this as background, von Mellenthin saw advantages to Hitler's program: "We saw Hitler as a bridge between irreconcilable elements . . . capable of coping with the dangerous communist threat inside Germany in the early thirties," said von Mellenthin. Hitler had preached that his National Socialist would form an arch over all parties, break the shackles of Versailles, and restore German power and prestige, all without going to war. "It would be foolish to deny today that we supported those ideas at the time," concluded the general.

Yet, as a General Staff officer he could never have envisioned that Hitler would totally reverse Clausewitz. The natural relationship between the political leadership and the military would be turned upside down. The politician would order war; the military men would counsel restraint. He would order attack; they would counsel delay. When General Staff officers tried to explain to Hitler the difficulties inherent in winter operations in Russia, the Fuhrer reviled their timidity. His generals "should be like butcher's dogs who would attack anything in sight," he said.
Instead they were mainly courteous, courtly men who acted more like cautious corporate directors. Hitler came to calling General Staff Officers cowards, stating their "minds were fossilized in obsolete habits of thought." In September 1942, Hitler fired General Franz Halder, Chief of the General Staff. Neither trusting nor respecting his generals, the Fuhrer took command of the Army himself, sacking one general after another. General Staff officers were reduced to watching from the sidelines while "the greatest warlord of all time" destroyed the army they loved.

"Did you ever think of killing Hitler," I asked?

"No, assassination is not my style." replied von Mellenthin. He feared that killing Hitler would result in bloody internal strife between the Army and the SS formations, possibly even an uprising in the ranks. Nor did the military officers feel able to negotiate with the Allies, because of Roosevelt's unconditional surrender policy: "This policy strengthened the will of every German to fight to the bitter end. By making this policy, Roosevelt committed the same mistake Hitler made, when he did not differentiate between Communism and the Russian people." opined von Mellenthin.

"One of my Kriegschule classmates tried to kill him," recollected von Mellenthin. On 21 March 1943, General
Rudolf Freiherr von Gersdorff made an attempt during an exhibition of captured Soviet weapons in Berlin. He placed two bombs in a Soviet overcoat he was demonstrating, each with a delayed fuse set to explode in twenty minutes. "His plan was to place himself in such close proximity to the Führer, that they would both be destroyed by the blast. Unexplainably, Hitler left the exhibition after only three minutes. He probably had a sixth sense," said von Mellenthin. The assassination attempt, held at the Zeughaus on Unter dem Linden, nearly ended in solo disaster for von Gersdorff, who had to flush the fully-activated fuses down the toilet after Hitler left.45

At no time during the discussion did von Mellenthin claim that he was fooled by Hitler or surprised by his imperialist ambitions. "But the General Staff did not want war. None of us wanted war, especially not with the west. We realized ultimately we might have to face Russia but accommodations could have been made—after all, many of the General Staff had trained there, and had many friends in the Soviet Army." he added.

The general had not read Mein Kampf. "None of us took it seriously, he explained. "Thousands of copies were available, but most General Staff officers considered it so much twaddle . . . convoluted Bohemian Platdeutsch." (low
German.) It is clear now, we should have read it, to find out how ideologically driven Hitler was. We should have taken him more seriously," he muttered grimly."

Blitzkrieg

"As we employed it in Poland, Blitzkrieg was a new kind of warfare depending on fast-moving panzer attacks to throw the enemy into hopeless confusion. Apart from the sadness of being forced to give up our horses, it was easy for us in the cavalry to convert to this new kind of warfare," said von Mellenthin. Cavalry training had taught FW to keep his options open and fight in corridors of his own choosing. As practiced, Blitzkrieg involved destroying the enemy air force on the ground, before it could engage.

"Dive bombers were used to break up enemy troop concentrations. Motorcycle infantry, light tanks, and motor-drawn artillery were sent ahead, followed by heavy tanks to carve out pockets in the rear," said von Mellenthin. Finally the regular infantry were committed to mop up pockets of resistance and to link up with advanced forces. "Until Hitler started attacking fortresses with tanks at Leningrad, Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk, it worked very well. Hitler had no concept of strategy or tactics."
Never attack a fortress with tanks!" repeated von Mellenthin.47

Von Mellenthin is a Prussian. He speaks for a devoutly Lutheran, old German, patriotic viewpoint. The General's forbears brought Christianity and civilization to the region east of the Elbe. They kept order, established government and fostered trade for over 500 years. Hence, his untroubled tone when he describes the Polish blitzkrieg of 1939. Viewed by Americans as the unjust dismemberment of a sovereign state, to the general it is the simple righting of a wrong, a long-overdue restructuring of the political landscape.

Spirit of the General Staff

The idea that the General Staff had plotted Hitler's aggressive course dominated the proceedings at Nurnberg. Von Mellenthin and 150 of his colleagues were locked up for two and a half years while the Allies sought to prove them guilty of war crimes. Even Count von Gersdorff, who tried to kill Hitler, was locked up. The tribunal finally condemned only Keitel and Jodl to death for specific crimes. The General Staff was acquitted. It was concluded that its officers were essentially technicians, brilliant in the pursuit of their profession, but politically naive.
Their political deficiencies were best noted by B.H. Liddell Hart, the British military historian, who said of them: "The German generals of this war were the best finished products of their profession anywhere. They could have been better if their outlook had been wider and their understanding deeper. But if they had become philosophers, they would have ceased to be soldiers."  

Over 300 General Staff officers had been killed in combat. Many more had been murdered as a result of Hitler's purges. Wartime losses among generals had also been heavy.  

Guderian had been dismissed by Hitler in the waning days of the war. Halder was in concentration camp. The Field Marshals had been sacked. Rommel had long since been driven to suicide. Over one third of the general officers of the Army had been killed in action, probably a record for any country in modern times. 

Despite these appalling losses and his imprisonment, von Mellenthin's spirit is unbroken. He continues to ride his favorite horses two hours every morning, work at his writing desk eight hours daily, and act as an unpaid consultant to various charitable causes. Once a month, he presides over a formal dinner for his extended family of
over 30 members. He goes on military maneuvers as often as possible and speaks at NATO and Allied war colleges.

Once a year, he attends a "dining in" at his old regiment, which now holds its meetings in Wiesbaden, West Germany, as Breslau has become Wroclaw, a Polish city. Most of the old Prussian aristocrats who dined with them in years past are gone. But their motto, emblazoned on the regimental flag streamer reminds those who remain of the spirit of the General Staff: Ich dien (I Serve).
CHAPTER IV

Endnotes

1. Personal Interviews with Major General F.W. von Mellenthin, General Staff Germany Army, retired, conducted at Johannesburg, South Africa, during the period of 2/23/87 to 4/4/87 inclusive.

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36. The von Mellenthin Interviews.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

43. As quoted by General von Mellenthin during the interviews.

44. Ibid.

45. The von Mellenthin Interviews.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.


49. The von Mellenthin Interviews.

50. Ibid.
CONCLUSIONS

Mein Kampf is more reliable than most of Hitler's subsequent statements because it was written at a time when his chances of achieving high office were remote. Remarks made to intimates who remained unconverted (Rauschning fled Germany in 1935 and Otto Strasser was exiled at Hitler's command in 1934) are probably also reliable. When these remarks are married with the salient ideas that run through Mein Kampf and the later speeches, a clear picture of Hitler's ideology emerges.

The arguments set forth in Mein Kampf and later amplifying speeches are nationalistic, Machiavellian, Darwinian, and deal in Hobbesian terms of force and fraud. They are also racist, anti-democratic, anti-semitic, anti-parliamentarian and anti-Marxist. Taken together, they form Hitler's Weltanschauung (World view).

Hitler honored Machiavelli as a theorist whose thoughts possessed contemporary relevance. He even approximated Machiavelli in his analysis of contemporary political affairs. But unlike Machiavelli, whose scope was broad and balanced, Hitler permitted ideology to interfere with grand strategy.
For Germany, the defeat of England in order to protect Fortress Europa was not merely a desideratum, but a sine qua non—not merely desirable, but imperative. Instead Hitler made Russia the prime objective of his military thrust. Yet it was in Russia that he failed most miserably as warlord. He failed because he was ideologically driven, incapable of applying the ancient philosophical principle of Occam's Razor, of cutting out the inessential.

In both Sea Lion and Citadel Hitler temporized. Unable to reach decisions swiftly, he behaved like Fabius Cunctator, the Roman Consul who exhausted his foes by delay. Unlike Fabius, however, Hitler's temporizing was not tactically inspired. He deferred simply because it was his nature—a fatal flaw as Feldherr. The "Lucy" organization ensured that deferment, no matter how short would be costly. The delay imposed on Citadel by Hitler's insistence on waiting for newly minted, untried tanks proved disastrous.

By launching Barbarossa while Sea Lion was still unresolved, Hitler plunged Germany into a war not on two fronts, but on several. This prevented concentration of German forces at selected decisive points, a prime Clausewitzian requisite for victory.

In both Sea Lion and Citadel, we see the Fuhrerprinzip (leader principle) enforced by Hitler. Demanding that all
decisions be made by him, it insured his interference on all fronts and produced disastrous results. The Fuhrerprinzip ran counter to the venerated General Staff practice of telling commanders what to do, but not how to do it.

Hitler's policy of divide et impera backfired at Kursk. His emasculation of the General Staff, by this time complete, denied him unbiased recommendations. He heeded only the advice of "yes-men," whose opinions reinforced his own. Had Citadel been left to the cold scrutiny of the General Staff, it would have died on the drawing boards. As General Heinz Guderian warned: "Why do you want to attack in the East at all this year? Leave it alone!"

It would be folly to suggest that, by 1943 when Hitler embarked on Citadel, Germany's problems could have been resolved on the battlefield alone. The peace feelers extended by Stalin through Mme. Kollentai in Stockholm should have been explored. With the sharpened acuity of hindsight, it is clear that Stalin trusted Hitler more than the Allies. It is likely an accommodation between dictators could have been reached. By foreclosing a political solution, Hitler again violated Clausewitz, whose prime postulate was to wed politics with war-making.

The bulk of the Germany's armor and elite troops were squandered by Hitler at Krusk for ideological reasons. The
tip of the Wehrmacht spear had been broken, the initiative passed to the Soviets. Seen through the eyes of a professional soldier, Hitler's persistent abuse of Germany's magnificent military machine for ideological reasons was tragic.
APPENDIX

OPERATION ORDER NUMBER SIX, CODE NAME ZITADELLE, DATED 15 APRIL 1943 SIGNED BY ADOLF HITLER:

I have decided to undertake as the first priority offensive of this year the Citadel offensive, as soon as the weather permits. This offensive is of decisive importance. It must be carried out quickly and shatteringly. It must give us the initiative for the spring and summer of this year. Therefore all preparations are to be carried through with the greatest care and energy. The best formations, the best armies, the best leaders, great stocks of ammunition are to be placed at the decisive points. Every officer and every man must be indoctrinated with the decisive significance of this offensive. The victory of Kursk must shine forth like a beacon to the world.

To this end, I order:

1. The aim of the offensive is to encircle the enemy forces deployed in the Kursk area by means of incisive, coordinated, forward looking and quickly conducted advances by one attacking army each from the area of Belgorod and south of Orel, and annihilate them through a concentric attack. In the course of the offensive of shortened front, which will liberate forces to use elsewhere, is to be gained along the line Neshega-Korocha (exclusive) - Skorodnoye-Tim-east of Shchigry-Sosna (exclusive).

2a. It follows from this that surprise must be maintained as far as possible and above all the enemy must be kept in doubt as to the time of the offensive.

2b. The offensive forces are to be centered on as narrow fronts as possible, so that with overwhelming local support in all means of attack (tanks, assorted guns, artillery, rocket mortars, etc.) they can smash through the enemy in one blow with both armies, and thus close the cauldron on him.
2c. To cover the strike forces as quickly as possible, forces are to be brought up for flank cover from the depth, so that the strike forces themselves need only to push forwards.

2d. By pushing in quickly from all sides into the cauldron, the enemy must be given no rest and his destruction hastened.

2e. The attack must be carried through so fast that the enemy is unable to break contact or bring strong reserves from other fronts.

2f. Through speedy construction of the new front, to liberate forces, especially mobile formations, for further operations in quick time.

3. Army Group South is to break through the Belgorod-Tomarovka line . . . head eastwards and establish contact with the attacking arm of Army Center near Kursk. To cover this attack from the east the line Neshega-Korocha exclusive – Skorodyne-Tim is to be reached as soon as possible . . . to cover the attack from the west, forces are to be allocated with the task of immediately pushing into the cauldron as it is built up.

4. Army Group Center attacks . . . on the line Trosna-north of Maloarkhangelsk . . . to break through and establish contact with the attacking arm of Army Group South, near, and east of, Kursk. To cover the attack from the east, the line Tim-east of Shegreya-Sosna (exclusive) is to be reached as soon as possible provided that the forward impetus and concentration of force is not imperiled. Forces are to be allocated to cover the attack from the west.

The forces of Army Group Center operating from west of Trosna to the boundary of Army Group South are to tie up the enemy's strike forces from the moment the offensive begins, by means of local attacks, and then to push on into the cauldron in good time. Constant air and ground reconnaissance is to ensure that the enemy cannot disengage without being noticed. If he does, a general offensive is to be mounted immediately along the whole front.
5. The preparation of forces of both Army Groups must utilize all possible means of camouflage, deception, and misinformation, so that from the 28th April on, an offensive can be undertaken within six days of receipt of an order from OKH. The earliest date for the offensive will be 3rd May. The march to the start line must be carried out only at night, and every possible means of camouflage is to be used.

6. To deceive the enemy the preparations for "Panther" are to go ahead in the area of Army Group South. They are to be strengthened by every means . . . and to be kept going as long as possible. These deception measures will be carried out in addition to those already in progress to increase the defensive capability of the front on the Donets. In the area of Army Group Center no large scale deception measures are to be carried out, but the enemy is to be given a confused picture of the situation in every way possible (by back and fore movements, by false movements, movement of transport by day and dissemination of false information suggesting that an attack is to take place no earlier than June).

In both Army Groups the formations newly brought up to reinforce the attack armies are to observe radio silence.

7. To preserve secrecy only essential personalities are to be identified, so that enemy espionage can be fought constantly.
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