

# Operation Citadel and the Red Army's Advance West



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# Important People

- Georgy Zhukov: Soviet 
  - Aided in the planning of the battle
- Konstantin Rokossovsky: Soviet 
  - Commander of the central front of the Soviet army
- Erich von Manstein: Germany 
  - Led the southern front of the German army
- Günther von Kluge: Germany 
  - Led the northern front of the German army
- Hitler ordered Manstein and Kluge to begin Operation Citadel on May 4, 1943



# Military Strategy

- Manstein and Kluge's northern and southern armies were poised to attack
  - Goal to trap and overwhelm Soviet forces
- "Operation Citadel" was the codename for the German offensive strategy to push through Soviet forces into further parts of east Europe



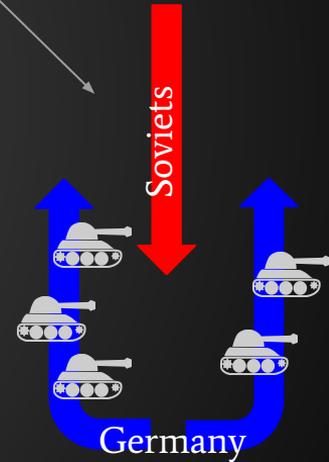
21 June 1943, German Federal Archives

# Military Strategy

- Hitler cancelled Operation Citadel at the last minute
  - Wanted to wait for more dispatches of tanks to the front
- Went for a pincer attack, attacking the Soviets from the north and the south at the same time and connecting in the middle.
- Hitler's backing out allowed for the Soviets to prepare an extensive defence of minefields and anti-tank technology
  - Hitler's mistake was largely what allowed the Soviets to win
- The German army initially pushed through Soviet forces with tanks and heavy artillery, but was halted
- Soviets prevented further German forces from entering Kursk and surrounding towns

# Military Strategy

- The main maneuver for Operation Citadel consisted of a “double envelopment” strategy
- Nazi officials Manstein and Kluge believed they could easily surround Soviet forces
- Due to the Soviet’s additional prep time, however, the Germans could not succeed in overwhelming Soviet forces
- Thanks to Hitler’s mistake in postponing the operation, further eastern attacks by Germany were deterred



# Timeline

- Operation Citadel is essentially what initiated the battle of Kursk
- A German Operation against Soviet Russia in Kursk on the Eastern Front
- Began on July 5th , 1943
- Hitler wanted to start the Operation on May 3rd, but was advised against going into battle by General Heinz Guderian, as he argued that it would cause heavy tank losses that would be irreplaceable, and that armed forces should be moved to western Europe to act as a reserve against the Allied invasion.

## Timeline Continued...

- Although Hitler overruled his generals, he did move the date of the offensive from May third to July fifth so that the new German tanks would be ready to take part in the operation.
- Due to the Soviet spy network, the Red Army commanders were made aware of Citadel.
- None of the Germans realized that their plans had been compromised, so the Soviets were able to stealthily plan to block the German offensive.
- The Germans no longer had the element of surprise.

# Timeline Continued...

- As the fifth of July drew nearer, the Red Army flooded the salient with reinforcements
- They constructed vast lines of defense, covered by barbed wire, mines, and anti tank guns. --->
- On the day before the operation, two Soviet army groups, the Central Front under General Konstantin Rokossovky and the Voronezh Front under General Nikolai Vatutin, manned defensive lines of 15 to 25 miles



## Timeline Continued...

- About two million Soviet and German troops along with six thousand tanks were ready for the battle.
- Citadel began on July 5th with Soviet attack on the still forming positions of the Ninth army (a branch of the German army) which was positioned to strike the salient from the north.
- The German advance dredged onward, gaining about five miles on the first day at the cost of large portions of both tanks and men
- After seven days of fighting, the Ninth army had covered only about 12 miles and were coming to a stop.

## Timeline Continued...

- Progress on the Southern portion of the salient was initially much better, coming to twenty miles after seven days of battle, but the two portions of the German pincer type operation were still about 75 miles apart, causing hope of eliminating the Kursk salient dissipate.
- The German attacks ended on July 12th when a part of the two Russian tank armies fought the remaining German forces to a standstill near the village of Prokhorovka.
- One day later, Hitler held a meeting at a secret headquarters in Rastenburg to discuss his options moving forward.

## Timeline Continued...

- During the meeting, between Hitler, Mantstein, and Kluge, Manstein argued for the launch of a renewed defensive in the south.
- Kluge said that his forces were too weak to proceed.
- Hitler intervened the discussion, ordering Operation Citadel to a close.
- Forces were then removed from the Soviet front, and moved towards the Balkans and southern Italy in order to block Western powers.
- This left room for the Soviets to advance West towards Germany in the final leg of the war.

# Thesis + Analysis/ Importance of Operation Citadel

Operation Citadel, the last of many major German offensives on the Eastern Front, was crucial to the outcome of World War II, as it confirmed Russian control of the Front and, with the removal of German troops, allowed Soviet Russia to make advancements into Germany which would eventually lead the war to a close.

The operation concluded Germany's attacks on Russian territory, and was followed by Germany moving its troops to the areas of southern Italy. This allowed Russia to make advancements on Germany, leading to the eventual taking of Berlin. This was the beginning of the end for Germany as it also led to Hitler supposedly committing suicide, and the Soviet seizing of German power, finishing Germany's main action in the war.

# Who Won and Why?

- The Soviets won the battle against Germany.
- This was mainly due to the fact that the Germans kept changing their plans, giving the Soviets time to plan their next move.
- The Soviets also had foreknowledge of Germany's intentions, provided to them by British intelligence service and Tunny intercepts.

# Who Won and Why Cont...

- Aware months in advance that the battle would fall on the Kursk salient, the Soviets built a defense wall designed to wear out the German's spearhead.
- While the Germans tried to break through the wall, they had to wait for newer weapons such as the panther tank and tiger heavy tank.

## Who Won and Why? Cont...

-This gave the Soviet yet again more time to plan their next move which included, minefields, fortifications, artillery fire zones and anti tank strong zones.

-Germany's lack of preparation is what ultimately gave the Soviets the upper hand, eventually gaining victory over the Germans.

# Fun Facts

- Operation Citadel was the last major German offensive on the Eastern Front.
- It was also the first time that a German Summer offensive had been defeated by the Soviets.
- The largest tank war in history!!
- Germany lost about 70,000 troops, 2,950 tanks, and 1,400 aircrafts.
- Began on the day after American independence day but in 1943!!

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