



PANZERS IN WINTER

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PANZERS IN WINTER

*Hitler's Army and
the Battle of the Bulge*

Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr.



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PREFACE

The Battle of the Bulge was the “last hurrah” for the German Army on the Western Front. The purpose of this book is to describe this battle from the German point of view.

The greatest military disaster the United States suffered in the European Theater of Operations in World War II took place in the Ardennes Offensive, when most of the U.S. 106th Infantry Division was destroyed in the Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountains). This disastrous defeat was not inflicted by the vaulted panzer troops, the elite paratroopers, the hardened SS (*Schutzstaffel*) men or Skorzeny’s commandos. It was administered by a mediocre and unheralded unit—the 18th Volksgrenadier Division. Most of its men had been industrial workers or in the Luftwaffe or navy the year before. This book covers the Battle of the Schnee Eifel from the German point of view in greater depth than any other book has ever done, using unpublished German after-action reports and manuscripts—especially those of Lieutenant Colonel Dietrich Moll, the chief of operations of the 18th Volksgrenadier. Elsewhere, the manuscript also refers to similar unpublished German manuscripts, as well as the unpublished papers of Theodor-Friedrich von Stauffenberg, to produce a unique account of the Battle of the Bulge, again, mostly from the German point of view.

This book is also organized differently than other books. The first two chapters set the stage for the offensive. Chapter III deals with the first day of the offensive. From then on, the battle is covered by sector, from north (Chapters IV and V) to center (VI and VII) to south (VIII and IX). The last two chapters cover the clearing of the bulge and the subsequent lives and careers of the major participants. I believe that this organization will help the general reader to understand the battle more clearly than if

Preface

a strictly chronological approach was adopted. Experienced and highly knowledgeable World War II readers will find most of the “new” material in Chapter VI, although I hope they learn something new in each chapter.

I wish to thank my long-suffering wife Donna for her support in this effort. In addition to being the perfect wife and mother, she is also an outstanding proofreader. Special thanks also go to my editor, Heather Staines, who “hung in there” when the pressures of a new business forced me to miss deadlines. Heartfelt appreciation is also extended to Professor Melinda Matthews, the incredibly efficient head of the Interlibrary Loan Department at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, who managed to obtain unpublished manuscripts for me via interlibrary loan, and thus spared me the necessity of traveling thousands of miles to various archives, as I have done in the past.

I alone assume responsibility for any mistakes, errors, or omissions that may appear in this book. I hope you enjoy *Panzers in Winter*.

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE STAGE

The beginning of World War I in August 1914 began a cycle of violence in central Europe which lasted—with brief periods of interruption—until 1945. After four years of war, the Second *Reich* (empire) of Kaiser Wilhelm II ended with the collapse of Imperial Germany in November 1918. It was replaced by the Weimar Republic, which signed the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919. It was a very harsh, punitive peace and bore little resemblance to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, upon which the German people had been led to believe that the peace would be based.

The treaty was 70,000 words long (the average book is about 60,000 words long) and the German delegation was not permitted to take part in the negotiations. Among other things, the treaty ceded the territories of Alsace and Lorraine to France without a plebiscite, in spite of the fact that many of the people of these provinces were German. German territory west of the Rhine River, which was currently under Allied occupation (the Rhineland)—including the cities of Cologne, Koblenz, and Mainz—was to be occupied by Allied troops for at least 15 years. The right bank of the Rhine was to be permanently demilitarized for a distance of 30 miles and the Saar basin—a clearly German area that possessed some of the richest coal deposits in Europe—was to be administered by a League of Nations commission for 15 years, during which time the French would be in charge of the mines. The largely German districts of Moresnet, Eupen, and Malmedy were turned over to Belgium. Upper Silesia, Posen, and West Prussia were handed over to Poland, as was a corridor across East Prussia (the Polish Corridor), to give Warsaw access to the Baltic Sea. The Prussian port city of Danzig was placed under the administration of the League of Nations, in spite of the fact that its population was 95 percent German. The Prussian city of Memel was turned over to Lithuania. In all,

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Germany lost one-eighth of its national territory, as well as all of its colonies.

Germany was also reduced to a state of military impotence. It was allowed an armed forces (the *Reichswehr*), which included the army (*Reichsheer*) and navy (*Reichsmarine*). The army was limited to 100,000 men, of which only 4,000 could be officers. The General Staff was abolished, as was the elite cadet school of Gross Lichterfeld. Germany was denied the four great innovations of World War I—tanks, airplanes, submarines, and poisonous gas.

The commercial clauses were as bad as the others. Germany's merchant fleet was reduced to one-tenth of its prewar size, German products were effectively barred from most foreign markets, and German shipyards would have to construct 200,000 tons of shipping per year and hand it over to the Allies, free of charge. Germany also had to agree to pay whatever reparations the Allies demanded, although this amount was yet to be determined. Germany was, in effect, required to sign a blank check.

The terms of the treaty were so bad that French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, who certainly had no love for the Germans, declared, "This is not a peace treaty. It is a 20 years' truce." Even President Wilson said that, if he were a German, he would not sign it. But Germany, which was on the verge of civil war, had no choice.

The Treaty of Versailles dealt the Weimar Republic a blow from which it never fully recovered. The German people had been led to believe that only a democracy could extract advantageous terms from the Allies. Now their last illusions were shattered and their faith in democracy was permanently undermined.

Meanwhile, Germany was in the throes of a civil war. Communist and other leftist organizations seized power in several German cities and established "Red Republics." They were put down by the *Freikorps*—right wing paramilitary forces led by former German officers with the clandestine support of the government. Many future Nazis were members of the *Freikorps*, but so were many future generals, including Baron Hasso von Manteuffel, who commanded the 5th Panzer Army in the Ardennes. "The war after the war," as the Germans called it, lasted until late 1923.

Because of the Treaty of Versailles and the French Army's seizure of the Ruhr (Germany's main industrial region) on a thin pretext, the Weimar Republic was unable to control Germany's inflation.

It traditionally takes four German marks to equal one U.S. dollar. By the end of World War I, it took 7.45 marks to buy a dollar. By the summer of 1919, the marks-to-dollar ratio stood at 15.5 to 1, when the mark began another free-fall. By July 1920, however, it was rather stable at 60 marks per U.S. dollar. Then the Weimar Republic announced a Policy of Fulfillment vis-à-vis the reparations clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. The mark began to fall again. By November 1921, the exchange rate stood at

more than 200 marks per dollar, and by mid-July 1922, the purchasing power of the mark was less than 20 percent of what it had been 14 months before.

The depletion of the Reich's gold reserves, her unpaid war debt, her reparations burden, the flight of private capital from Germany to avoid attachment as reparations, and the government's deficit spending policies all contributed to the ultimate collapse of the mark, but the French seizure of the Ruhr coal mines and the assassination of Germany's highly respected foreign minister, Walter Rathenau, by right-wing reactionaries were the final blows. (The murder of Rathenau shook what little faith remained in international financial circles concerning the possibility of a viable future for Germany.) As a result, the mark per dollar ratio fell from 272 to 1 on June 24, 1922 (the day Rathenau died) to 4,500 to 1 by the end of October 1922.

When the French seized the Ruhr on January 11, 1923, Germany lost 73 percent of her coal and 83 percent of her iron and steel. Now, the currency collapsed altogether. By the end of July 1923, it took more than 1 million marks to buy a dollar. Then the bottom fell out of the mark. Inflation became so bad that the government only printed bills on one side to save time. Bank clerks used the back of them as scratch paper, because the bills were literally worth less than the paper upon which they were printed. People who were previously paid monthly were now paid twice a day. They rushed out to spend their money before 1 p.m., when the New York Stock Exchange issued its currency figures. People eating at that time literally saw the price of their meals double while they were eating them. The inflation became so bad that the same amount of money that would buy a full dinner one evening would barely buy a cup of coffee the next day. An egg that cost 25 pfennings (one-fourth of a mark) in 1918 cost 80 billion (80,000,000,000) marks in 1923. Old people who had worked hard all of their lives saw their lifetime savings wiped out overnight. Fixed pensions became absolutely valueless. There were many joint suicides—grandmothers and grandfathers taking the only way out left to them, except starvation. Malnutrition was widespread, and the desperate daughters of respectable families turned to prostitution, just to feed themselves.

Before the inflation ended, one U.S. dollar was worth 4,210,500,000,000 marks (four trillion, 210 billion, 500 million marks) and the German currency was virtually worthless. German democracy took another blow from which it never fully recovered.

Among the people who sought to take advantage of this situation was a former corporal named Adolf Hitler. By 1923, he was the head of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, called the NSDAP or Nazi Party). On November 8, 1923, he launched the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. He captured the Bavarian government in a beer hall, but the putsch collapsed the next day, crushed

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by the army and the provincial police. Hitler himself went to prison for several months. When he was released, he vowed that he would take power by legal means—which is exactly what he did.

The brilliant head of the Reichsbank and national currency commissioner, Dr. Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht, ended the inflation by abandoning the old currency on November 15, 1923.¹ When Hitler left prison, the NSDAP was only a minor political force. It remained a minor party until 1929, when the Great Depression hit Germany. Unemployment reached 25 percent and many desperate middleclass Germans had to resort to soup lines, just to feed their families. The government of the Weimar Republic proved to be totally incapable of dealing with the situation. Near anarchy broke out in the German cities as street thugs from the Nazi, Communist, and other parties clashed in the streets. Economic conditions were so poor that the German people resembled a drowning man. A drowning man will take anybody's rope. Hitler offered them hope, so they took his rope, and the cycle of violence entered a new phase—the domestic terrorism phase, with the government the primary agent of terror.

After winning a number of legal elections, Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. By the next year, all possible opposition to Nazism had been eliminated from German life—except the army. Even this source of potential overt opposition was eliminated in early February 1938, when the war minister, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, was forced to retire when it was discovered that his second wife was a former prostitute, and Hitler forced the commander-in-chief of the army, Colonel General Baron Werner von Fritsch, into retirement on trumped-up charges of homosexuality.² The Fuehrer then abolished the war ministry and established the High Command of the Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* or OKW), with his yes-man, Colonel General Wilhelm Keitel, as head.³ Hitler also established the High Command of the Army (*Oberkommando des Heeres* or OKH) to direct army ground operations, with himself as supreme commander. Executive authority at OKH rested with the chief of the General Staff.

Inside the German Army, territorial responsibility for training, replacements, mobilization, base and maneuver area establishment and maintenance, and a host of other duties fell to the military districts or *Wehrkreise*. These districts (which had existed for decades before World War II) were placed under the control of the Replacement or Home Army in Berlin in August 1939, but they continued to be of the utmost importance throughout the war.

From 1933 to 1939, Hitler restored the German economy, built the autobahns, established the German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*), renounced the Treaty of Versailles (on March 16, 1935), began the persecution of the Jews, and rebuilt the military. He also reannexed the Rhineland and the Saar, seized

Austria by political means, took over the Sudetenland by diplomatic means, and annexed Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, by the fall of 1939, the German Army had more than 2.5 million men under arms.

The Third Reich invaded Poland with 1.5 million men and hundreds of tanks on September 1, 1939. By October 6, it was all over. Contrary to Hitler's expectations, however, Great Britain and France declared war on Nazi Germany on September 3. World War II had begun.

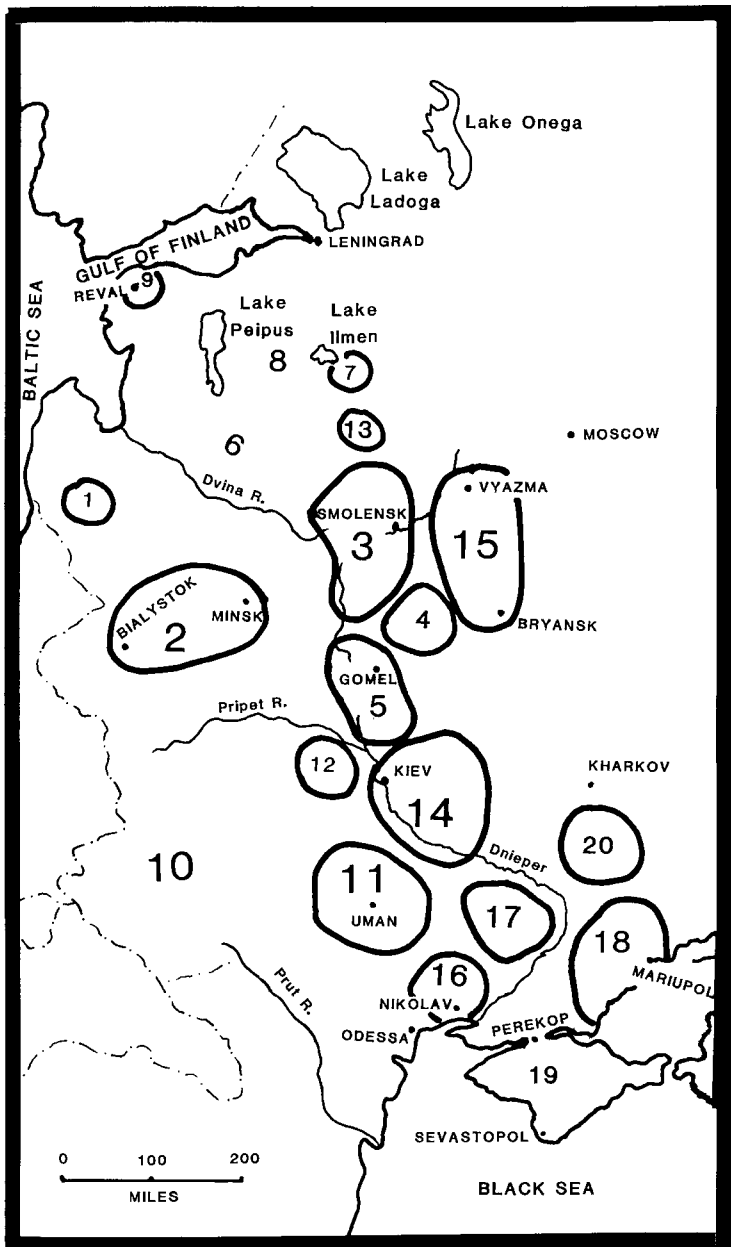
The military technique Germany used was called *blitzkrieg* or "lightning warfare." It featured quick and powerful strikes, spearheaded by the vaunted *panzer* (tank) divisions, supported by motorized formations and the Luftwaffe with its dive bombers. Most of the German divisions, however, were and remained "marching" infantry, which featured horse-drawn artillery and wagons. They had very few motorized vehicles. Typically, the only fully motorized unit in a German infantry division was the ambulance company.

Hitler's conquests reached their peak in 1940, when he overran Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. Although checked in the Battle of Britain, he conquered Yugoslavia and Greece in 1941 and committed the Afrika Korps to help his Italian ally in Libya and later Egypt. On June 22, 1941, however, he made a fatal mistake when he invaded the Soviet Union.

The German *Wehrmacht* invaded Russia with 148 divisions (19 of them panzer and 15 motorized): 2.5 million men, 3,350 tanks, 7,184 guns, 2,770 airplanes, 600,000 motorized vehicles, and 625,000 horses. This represented about 75 percent of its total strength. Stalin's generals met the offensive with 170 divisions or about 3 million men at or near the frontier. The Red Army supported them with 24,000 tanks, 17,745 mostly inferior aircraft, and 67,335 guns or heavy mortars. German military intelligence had, as usual, failed miserably and had vastly underestimated the strength of the Soviet forces.

Operation "Barbarossa," as the invasion was codenamed, was the height of the blitzkrieg. Bialystok and Minsk were encircled by June 29. They yielded 324,000 prisoners, along with 3,332 tanks and 1,809 guns captured or destroyed. Army Group Center encircled Smolensk in July and, by the time the pocket was liquidated on August 5, an additional 310,000 prisoners had been captured, and 3,205 tanks and 3,120 guns were captured or destroyed. Another smaller Red Army was surrounded at Roslavl on August 8. This pocket yielded 38,000 prisoners, as well as 258 tanks and 359 guns destroyed or captured. On the southern flank, Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South took another 103,000 prisoners at Uman during the first week of August, and 317 tanks and 1,100 guns were captured or destroyed. The greatest battle of encirclement of all history took place when Kiev was surrounded on September 16. The pocket eventually yielded 667,000 prisoners, as well as 884 armored vehicles and

Figure 1.1
Battles on the Eastern Front, 1941



3,718 guns. Rundstedt's men then drove south, pinning two Soviet armies against the Sea of Azov. This trap netted more than 100,000 captives, as well as 212 tanks and 672 guns captured or destroyed. Army Group Center, meanwhile, fought the battle of the Vyazma-Bryansk Pocket (September 30 to October 17). It took 663,000 more prisoners, and destroyed or captured 1,242 tanks and 5,412 guns. Figure 1.1 shows the major battles on the Eastern Front in 1941. Although these victories were very impressive, they did not tell the whole story. Much more quickly than Hitler, Stalin put his entire nation on a total war footing. By July 1, 1941, he had already mobilized 5.3 million men. By December 1, despite extremely heavy losses, he had 279 divisions and 93 independent brigades. He managed to stop the Wehrmacht within 15 miles of Moscow.

Stalin launched a massive winter offensive on December 6, 1941. The mean temperature that month was minus 19.3 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 28.6 degrees Centigrade). Hitler's armies were thrown back an average of more than 100 miles in heavy fighting. Although he had taken millions of prisoners, Hitler's own armies suffered almost 1 million casualties, and



THE BATTLES OF ENCIRCLEMENT ON THE EASTERN FRONT, 1941

1. **Rossizny:** 200 tanks
2. **Bialystock-Minsk:** 290,000 captured, 3,332 tanks, 1,809 guns
3. **Smolensk:** 310,000 men, 3,205 tanks, 3,120 guns
4. **Roslavl:** 38,000 men, 250 tanks, 359 guns
5. **Gomel:** 84,000 men, 144 tanks, 848 guns
6. **Dvina:** 35,000 men, 355 tanks, 655 guns
7. **Staraya Russa:** 53,000 men, 320 tanks, 695 guns
8. **Luga:** 250,000 men, 1,170 tanks, 3,075 guns
9. **Reval:** 12,000 men, 91 tanks, 293 guns
10. **Galacia:** 150,000 men, 1,970 tanks, 2,190 guns
11. **Uman:** 103,000 men, 317 tanks, 1,100 guns
12. **Zhitomir:** 18,000 men, 142 tanks, 123 guns
13. **Valdai Hills:** 30,000 men, 400 guns
14. **Kiev:** 667,00 men, 884 tanks, 3,718 guns
15. **Vyazma-Bryansk:** 663,000 men, 1,242 tanks, 5,412 guns
16. **Nikolav:** 60,000 men, 84 tanks, 1,100 guns
17. **Dnieper Bend:** 84,000 men, 199 tanks, 465 guns
18. **Mariupol (Sea of Azov):** 106,000 men, 212 tanks, 672 guns
19. **Crimea:** 100,000 men, 160 tanks, 700 guns
20. **The Donetsk:** 14,000 men, 45 tanks, 69 guns

NOTE: Soviet losses in men refers to those captured only; losses in tanks and guns refer to those captured or destroyed.

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the German Army was never the same. The war in the east now assumed the characteristics of a war of attrition. Germany had a population of about 90 million people, including ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*). The Soviet Union's population was about 200 million, and they were backed by the enormous industrial might of the United States, upon whom Hitler had foolishly declared war on December 9. After December 1941, Germany's chances of winning the war were very poor.

In 1941, the German Army in the east launched its invasion in all three sectors: those of Army Group North, Center, and South. In 1942, it could only attack on one sector and even then only after stripping the panzer divisions on the other sectors of many of their tanks. Even so, the southern offensive ended in disaster at Stalingrad, where Friedrich Paulus's 6th Army was surrounded on November 23, 1942, with 240,000 men. When its last remnants surrendered on February 2, 1943, only 90,000 of its soldiers were left alive.

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein assumed command of the southern sector after Paulus's army was encircled in Stalingrad.⁴ He could not save the 6th Army; however, by a series of brilliant maneuvers and counterattacks, culminating in the Battle of Kharkov, he was able to stabilize the southern sector. At Kharkov alone, Manstein captured or destroyed 615 tanks, 354 guns, and a large quantity of other equipment.

After Kharkov, a lull descended on the Eastern Front. During this time, Hitler's generals on the southern sector mustered their strength for another offensive. In 1941, they advanced on all three sectors; in 1942, they advanced on one sector; in 1943, they attacked on only part of one sector. This advance resulted in the Battle of Kursk (July 5–17), the largest tank battle of all time, and it was a disaster for Germany, which lost hundreds of panzers. After that, all roads in the east led back to the Third Reich.

Meanwhile, under pressure from the Anglo-Saxon air forces and navies, the German supply lines to North Africa collapsed. This led to the loss of Army Group Afrika (the 5th Panzer and 1st Italian-German Panzer Armies) and another 230,000 Axis soldiers in May 1943. The German civilians called this disaster *Tunisgrad*.

The Axis surrender in North Africa was followed by the Allied invasion of Sicily, the fall of the Mussolini government in Rome, and the invasion of Italy in September 1943. By the spring of 1944, however, both the Italian and Eastern Fronts were more or less stabilized. Nazi Germany then faced its greatest challenge and its greatest remaining opportunity. Everyone knew that the Western Allies under the command of U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower were about to launch their invasion of western Europe. If the Germans—led by the OB West, Field Marshal Rundstedt—could repulse the invasion, the Anglo-Americans would not be able to try again for another year.⁵ Panzer and motorized divisions could then be transferred to the Eastern Front, where they could be used to (hopefully) turn

back Stalin's armies. Meanwhile, German scientists would be given another year or more to complete Hitler's "miracle weapons": V-1 and V-2 rockets, super submarines, jet airplanes, and possibly even an atomic bomb.

OB West (*Oberbefehlshaber West*) was the commander-in-chief of the West, or his headquarters. Rundstedt, however, was too old to command effectively and preferred to remain in his luxurious headquarters in Paris. He left the details of command to his two senior commanders, Field Marshal Erwin "the Desert Fox" Rommel (Army Group B) in the Low Countries and northern France and Colonel General Johannes Blaskowitz, the commander-in-chief of Army Group G in southern France.⁶

By now, Hitler had largely lost confidence in not only his army generals, but the army as well. Since 1941, he had been increasingly allowing his Reichsfuehrer-SS, Heinrich Himmler, to create *Waffen-SS* (armed SS) divisions. By 1944, they were consuming much of Germany's tank, truck, self-propelled artillery, and armored personnel carrier production. By 1945, 40 SS combat divisions had been created. Most of them had been formed since 1942. They would play a major role in almost every major battle on the Eastern and Western Fronts for the rest of the war.

The Allies landed in France on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Field Marshal Rommel was able to halt, but not to repulse, the Great Invasion. Now he had no choice but to hold the Allies in check in Normandy. If they broke out, Rommel said, then "there is little hope for us."

Break out they did. After extremely heavy fighting in the *bocage* (hedgerow) country of Normandy in June and July, the Allies launched Operation Cobra on July 25. That morning, more than 2,200 Allied heavy and medium bombers dropped more than 60,000 bombs on a 3.5- by 1.5-mile rectangle, which was defended by the battered and greatly understrength Panzer Lehr Division, which had already lost 11,000 of its original 16,000 men. The Allies dropped 12 bombs for every German in the rectangle. Panzer Lehr suffered 70 percent casualties and, when the Allies attacked the next day with two armored divisions and one motorized division, it was unable to hold. Army Group B had no significant reserves remaining and was unable to plug the gap in their lines. The Allies had their breakthrough.

Meanwhile, Hitler had sacked Field Marshal Rundstedt and replaced him with Field Marshal Guenther Hans von Kluge on July 2, 1944.⁷ Rommel was seriously wounded by an Allied fighter-bomber on July 17, and Kluge assumed command of Army Group B as well. Three days later, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, the chief of staff of the Replacement Army, entered Fuehrer Headquarters at Rastenburg, East Prussia (now Ketrzyn, Poland) with a bomb in his briefcase. At 12:25 p.m., he primed the bomb for detonation, pushed it under Hitler's table a few minutes later, and left the room. At approximately 12:35 p.m., it exploded. Hitler was painfully wounded but not killed by the blast.⁸

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Thinking Hitler was dead, the Replacement Army, the military governor of France, and certain generals and officers of the General Staff launched a military coup that afternoon. Most of the leaders of the coup were Christians, like Stauffenberg and General Ludwig Beck, the former chief of the General Staff, who was slated to replace Hitler as head of state.⁹ They managed to seize control of Paris and part of Berlin before Hitler, Field Marshal Keitel, and their supporters were able to crush it. Stauffenberg and Beck were both executed about midnight.

That night, in a broadcast to the German people, Hitler promised to ruthlessly exterminate the conspirators of July 20. That was one promise he kept.

As Hitler soon found out from the Gestapo, Hans von Kluge, the OB West, knew about, and was sympathetic to, the anti-Hitler conspiracy. He sacked Kluge on August 16, replaced him with Field Marshal Walter Model, and ordered Kluge to report to Berlin. Knowing what that meant, Kluge committed suicide at Metz on August 19. Meanwhile, the 5th Panzer and 7th Armies of Army Group B were encircled in the Falaise Pocket on August 18. When the battle ended on August 22, about 10,000 of the 100,000 men trapped in the encirclement had been killed and another 40,000 to 50,000 were captured or missing. Fewer than 50,000 escaped, and most of these were service and supply troops. In material terms, Army Group B was wrecked. It lost 220 tanks, 160 assault guns or self-propelled artillery pieces, 700 towed artillery pieces, 130 anti-aircraft guns, 130 half-tracks, 5,000 motorized vehicles, 2,000 wagons, and some 10,000 horses. It had lost 1,300 tanks and assault guns since D-Day. The seven panzer and SS panzer divisions that were encircled and broke out of Falaise had escaped with only 62 tanks and 26 guns combined. The Panzer Lehr, 9th Panzer, and 10th SS Panzer Divisions did not have a single "runner" (operative tank).¹⁰

Although Hitler, Himmler, and others did not realize it, Normandy was also, to a large degree, the graveyard of the Waffen-SS as an elite fighting force. SS Oberfuehrer Kurt "Panzer" Meyer, the commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend," had spent years in the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (Hitler's SS bodyguard unit, now the 1st SS Panzer Division). He visited his old outfit on August 20, and barely recognized it, so few of the "old hands" were left. When he heard who was missing or dead, he could not stop the tears from pouring down his cheeks. The Waffen-SS was never the same after Normandy and the retreat to the Reich. A partial list of the key SS men lost in Normandy is shown below:

- SS Captain Wilhelm Beck, commander of the 2nd Company, 1st SS Panzer Regiment, and winner of the Knight's Cross on the Eastern Front, killed near Caen on June 10;

Setting the Stage

- Reserve Captain Otto Toll, company commander in the 12th SS Panzer Engineer Battalion and winner of the Knight's Cross as a platoon leader in the Afrika Korps, an officer on loan from the army, killed on June 10;
- SS Major General Fritz Witt, holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division, killed on June 12;
- SS Master Sergeant Alfred Guenther, Knight's Cross holder from the Eastern Front and platoon leader in the 1st SS Assault Gun Battalion, killed in action in June;
- SS Sergeant Emil Duerr, gun commander in the 4th (Heavy) Company, 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the Hitler Youth Division, killed in action at St. Mauvieu (near Caen) on June 27, and awarded the Knight's Cross posthumously;
- SS Major Georg Heinrich Karl Karck, commander of the II Battalion/2nd SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, killed in action in July;
- SS Captain Karl Keck, commander of the 15th (Engineer) Company of the 21st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg," killed at Avenay, Normandy, and awarded the Knight's Cross posthumously;
- SS Lieutenant Colonel Christian Tychsen, the scarfaced commander of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich" and holder of the Oak Leaves, killed in action, July 28;
- SS Master Sergeant Adolf Rued, a member of the staff of the 3rd SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment "Deutschland" of the 2nd SS Panzer Division, killed in action on August 2 and awarded the Knight's Cross posthumously;
- SS Private First Class Hermann Alber of the 20th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen," killed in the Battle of Hill 176, August 2, and awarded the Knight's Cross posthumously;
- SS Major Ludwig Kepplinger, commander of the 17th SS Panzer Battalion, 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, killed by Maquis seven miles southeast of Laval in August;
- SS Lieutenant Helmut Wendorff, platoon leader in the 13th (Heavy) Company of the 1st SS Panzer Regiment LAH, who had knocked out 30 Soviet tanks on the Eastern Front, killed in action southeast of Caen, August 6;
- SS Lieutenant Michael Wittmann of the 501st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion, considered by many to be the greatest tank ace of all time and a holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords, killed south of Caen, August 8, and posthumously promoted to SS captain;
- SS Captain Karl Bastian, commander of the II Battalion, 21st SS Panzer Regiment, 10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg," killed in the Argentan-Falaise zone, August 10, and posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross;

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- SS Major Karl-Heinz Prinz, commander, II Battalion, 12th SS Panzer Regiment, killed in action, August 14;
- SS Sergeant Hans Reiter, member of the staff company of the 21st SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 10th SS Panzer Division, killed in action at St. Clair and posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross;
- SS Major Hans Becker, Knight of the Iron Cross and commander of I Battalion, 2nd SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, killed in action, August 20;
- SS Major General Theodor Wisch, commander of the 1st SS Panzer Division, seriously wounded in both legs, August 20;
- SS Reserve Technical Sergeant Josef Holte, platoon leader in the 9th SS Panzer Regiment, killed near Livarot, August 20, and posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross;
- SS Major Heinrich Heimann of the 1st SS Assault Gun Battalion, 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, killed in action west of Chambois, August 20;
- SS Lieutenant Josef Amberger, commander of the 8th Company, 1st SS Panzer Regiment, killed in action, August 21, and posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross;
- SS Colonel Max Wuensche, commander of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment and holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, severely wounded in the Falaise Pocket and captured on August 24;
- SS Lieutenant Colonel Otto Meyer, commander of the 9th SS Panzer Regiment, 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen," killed in action northeast of Amiens, August 28, and posthumously awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross;
- SS Major Erich Olboeter, commander of the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth," had both legs blown off on September 2, when his vehicle ran over a mine laid by a Belgian partisan, and died that night;
- SS Oberfuehrer Kurt "Panzer" Meyer, commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division, captured by Belgian partisans on the night of September 5/6, who handed him over to the Americans; and
- SS Lieutenant Colonel Hans Waldmueller, another Knight of the Iron Cross and commander of the I Battalion, 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth," died of wounds on September 8.¹¹

Since D-Day, the 5th Panzer and 7th Armies had lost at least 50,000 men who were killed and more than 200,000 who were captured.¹² With his main two armies smashed, several vital questions remained: could Field Marshal Model hold the Allies on the Seine and stabilize the Western Front? Could he stabilize the Western Front at all? And, if not, could he save the remnants of Army Group B and prevent the Allies from pushing

into Germany, overrunning the Ruhr Industrial Area, and ending the war? Or was the Third Reich already doomed?

Otto Moritz Walter Model was born in Genthin, near Magdeburg, on January 24, 1891. His father Otto was a music teacher at a girls' school—and not a very prosperous one. Model grew up in relative poverty, but his Prussian family saw to it that he reached an excellent education at the liberal arts gymnasium in Erfurt. His climb to the top of the military ladder was based almost entirely upon ability; he owed very little to family connections. As a youngster, he developed many of the virtues of a typical Prussian: physical and mental toughness, a superior work ethic, great efficiency, and an attention to detail. His energy level was not typically Prussian: it was higher than anybody's, regardless of nationality. On the Eastern Front, it became legendary. He also developed the major Prussian vice: an unquestioning obedience to authority. There was also a dichotomy—indeed, a contradiction—in his personality. He was a religious man who served Adolf Hitler. Although this was a source of great inner conflict, he suppressed it and did his duty as he saw it. In the end, he served Hitler and Nazi Germany, not Christ. This would be his undoing.

Model was somewhat shorter than average in height but was also somewhat thickset. He sported a close-cut "whitewall" haircut and a monocle, which he wore constantly. He joined the Imperial Army as a *Fahnenjunker* (officer-cadet) on February 27, 1909. He attended the War School at Neisse, where the training was harsh. He had a difficult time adjusting to military life and considered dropping out of officer training. In the end, however, he stuck it out and was commissioned second lieutenant in the 52nd Infantry (6th Brandenburger) Regiment on August 22, 1910. He soon earned a reputation as a tremendously energetic and highly competent, though very uncomfortable, subordinate who had no friends and spoke his mind on all occasions. This reputation followed him throughout his career.

Model spent most of World War I on the Western Front. He served as a battalion adjutant in the 52nd Infantry (1913–December 1914) and later as adjutant of the regiment itself (December 24, 1914–April 11, 1916). He was seriously wounded in the shoulder near Sedan in May 1915 and was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, for bravery. After he recovered, he also fought at Verdun (where he was wounded again) and was a company commander from April until the end of September 1916. He then served as a brigade adjutant (1916–17), before again commanding a company (May 18–June 5, 1917), and briefly served as a deputy battalion commander (June 1917). In the meantime, he was nominated for the abbreviated General Staff course at Sedan by Prince Oskar of Prussia. Model had no trouble with the three-month General Staff course and returned to the front at the end of 1917 as a General Staff officer and a newly promoted captain

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(effective December 18, 1917). He was given the first of several staff assignments, including one to the Greater General Staff in Berlin. He ended the war as a captain and a General Staff officer to a reserve division.¹³

During “the war after the war,” Captain Model commanded security troops and helped put down Communist rebellions in the Ruhr. At one point in 1919, he was quartered in the Huyssen home in Wuppertal, in the Ruhr district, where he fell in love with Herta, the daughter of the house. They were married the following year. She gave him three children: daughters Hella and Christa (born in 1923 and 1929, respectively), and one son, Hans Georg (born March 1, 1927), who followed in his father’s footsteps and became a General Staff officer and later a general in the West German Army.¹⁴ Model, however, hated war stories and would not discuss war or politics at home. Interestingly, his children were baptized into the Lutheran church by his good friend, Pastor Martin Niemoeller, a former U-boat commander who later became a leader in the Christian resistance to Adolf Hitler.¹⁵

Although certainly not an aristocrat, young Model was selected for the Reichsheer in 1920 and was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Regiment at Allenstein, East Prussia. “During the inter-war years he gained notoriety for his ruthless performance of duty,” Carlo D’Este wrote later. “Utterly lacking tact, Model rode roughshod over his subordinates and was outspoken in openly criticizing his superiors . . . he not only lacked the social sophistication of the Prussian aristocracy but was equally far removed from the peasant and working-class backgrounds of Hitler [and the Nazis] . . . Model’s attempt to offset his crudeness by behaving like a *junker* was typical of his zeal to attain success.”¹⁶

Model commanded the 9th Company, 8th Infantry Regiment for three years (1925–28), and then spent one year on the staff of the 3rd Infantry Division in Berlin (1928–29). He first made a name for himself in 1929 when, as a young officer, he wrote a monograph about Field Marshal August Neithardt Gneisenau (1760–1831). He progressed slowly in the Reichsheer (which is typical for a small army) but, on November 1, 1932, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. Two months later, Hitler came to power.

After being assigned to the Defense Ministry in 1929, Model made a reputation for himself as an expert on the technical details of rearmament. He assumed command of the II Battalion/2nd Infantry Regiment (abbreviated II/2nd Infantry) in 1933 and of the regiment itself in 1934, when he was promoted to full colonel. The following year, he became the chief of the Technical and Doctrinal Department of the Army. In this post, which he held for more than three years (1935–38), he became an early advocate of motorized and armored warfare, despite his infantry background. He also became a fervent supporter of the Nazi Party. He impressed Dr. Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, who introduced him to