



The Battle of Kursk

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Immense in scope, ferocious in nature, and epic in consequence, the Battle of Kursk witnessed (at Prokhorovka) one of the largest tank engagements in world history and led to staggering losses—including nearly 200,000 Soviet and 50,000 German casualties—within the first ten days of fighting. Going well beyond all previous accounts, David Glantz and Jonathan House now offer the definitive work on arguably the greatest battle of World War II. Drawing on both German and Soviet sources, Glantz and House separate myth from fact to show what really happened at Kursk and how it affected the outcome of the war. Their access to newly released Soviet archival material adds unprecedented detail to what is known about this legendary conflict, enabling them to reconstruct events from both perspectives and describe combat down to the tactical level. The Battle of Kursk takes readers behind Soviet lines for the first time to discover what the Red Army knew about the plans for Hitler's offensive (Operation Citadel), relive tank warfare and hand-to-hand combat, and learn how the tide of battle turned. Its vivid portrayals of fighting in all critical sectors place the famous tank battle in its proper context. Prokhorovka here is not a well-organized set piece but a confused series of engagements and hasty attacks, with each side committing its forces piecemeal. Glantz and House's fresh interpretations demolish many of the myths that suggest Hitler might have triumphed if Operation Citadel had been conducted differently. Their account is the first to provide accurate figures of combat strengths and losses, and it includes 32 maps that clarify troop and tank movements. Shrouded in obscurity and speculation for more than half a century, the Battle of Kursk finally gets its due in this dramatic retelling of the confrontation that marked the turning point of the war on the Eastern Front and brought Hitler's blitzkrieg to a crashing halt.

The Battle of Kursk Details

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From Reader Review The Battle of Kursk for online ebook

Dmitry says

Deep Kursk battle research for those who interested in numbers of division/corps/army and their relative positions on day by day basis.

Steven Peterson says

The battle at Kursk was a horrific and bloody battle on the eastern front in the Second World War. Huge armies engaged here--almost 1 and a half million Soviet troops against many hundreds of thousands of German soldiers. The German leadership hoped to snuff out the Soviet salient at Kursk and buy time against the Soviet hordes. It was also a colossal armored battle. Much bloodletting. The end result was that the Germans were badly bloodied and the Soviet forces began to take greater initiative.

This book takes advantage of available information from the Soviet side. Many earlier considerations of this struggle depended on German documentation.

Any way you put it, a fine work if one is interested in this major battle.

Chris Salisbury says

Now this on the other hand is more like your typical classroom textbook; full of endless point-by-point information. However, as dull a read as it can be at times, it does convey the sheer volume of men and machines that went into this most decisive of battles for the Nazis on their Eastern Front and the most epic of armored battles in the history of the world. When you realise that in places the Russians had defenses which literally extended over seven miles you begin to grasp the enormity of this battle

John says

The Battle of Kursk was a decisive Nazi-Soviet tank battle at Prokhorovka, which went on for days, wreaked massive destruction on both sides, and turned the tides of the war — from then on the Nazi army was in retreat, with the Soviets hot on their heels. This was one of those books that fascinate you and make you want to tear out all your hair at the same time. This is because the maneuvers are described in excruciating detail. Like this:

Although the 170th Tank Brigade lost its commander and as many as thirty of its sixty tanks in the fighting near Oktiabr'skii, by early afternoon it pushed southward, grappling with Leibstandarte's armored reconnaissance battalion, which struggled to defend the SS division's left flank and rear. This battle intensified in the afternoon, when Bakharov's second echelon 36th Guards Tank Regiment arrived to support the 170th. By this time the 170th Tank Brigade, now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. I. Kazakov, had joined its neighboring 181st Brigade in an assault on Totenkopf positions east of Andreevka.

Lieutenant Colonel V. A. Puzyrev's 181st Tank Brigade, attacking along the southern banks of the Psel River, drove Totenkopf Panzer grenadiers, which had themselves just begun an attack eastward, back toward the west. By 1800 hours, assisted by the 170th Brigade, Puzyrev's tankers penetrated into the village of Vasil'evka, thereby threatening to sever Totenkopf's communications with Leibstandarte. However, within an hour Totenkopf dispatched a relief column consisting of a Tiger tank company from Hill 226.2, and, with deadly artillery support from Gresnoe, these tanks forced both the 181st and 170th Brigades to withdraw to Andreevka. Although Bakharov's tank corps had made spectacular progress, it could advance no further until the 29th Tank Corps closed up on its left flank. In the meantime, Bakharov brought his second echelon 110th Tank Brigade and 36th Guards Tank Regiment forward and placed them in defensive positions to the rear, where they could either defend or exploit on 13 July. During the day's fighting, Bakharov's 32nd Motorized Rifle Brigade was drawn into heavy combat north of the Psel, where the planned assault by Tofenkopf's Panzer Regiment had made striking gains.

Now imagine trying to read hundreds of pages like this, with almost no relief except for bursts of gruesome accounts of slaughter. Although the authors don't actually say this, the Russian strategy at heart was to just keep sending in poorly equipped soldiers and inferior tanks until the outnumbered if superiorly trained and equipped Germans were just plain ground down. The Tigers would roll in and devastate a hundred Soviet tanks and maybe lose four or five tanks (sometimes because Soviet soldiers managed to run up and place explosives on them, sometimes because the engines broke down, sometimes because they got stuck in swampy ground). But then the Soviets would send in another 100 tanks, and another hundred, and another hundred. It is gruesome, incredibly depressing, and yet I persevered. I picked it up because I had just finished David Robbins's novel **Last Citadel** (see my review), which is about this battle and I wanted to learn more what happened. I got a lot more than I bargained for, but the book is fittingly grueling (grueling text about grueling events) and I don't regret reading it.

Avempace says

It is always good to remember that the German war aims on the Eastern front going back into WWI, let alone WWII, were to control Eastern Europe and the Ukraine and push the Russians back into Asia. As the tide of war on the Eastern front turned after the failures at Moscow and Stalingrad, the German war aims retooled into their core essentials: control of the Ukraine as a breadbasket and stabilizing the Russian front in preparation of a two front war with both Russia and the Western alliance. It was these restructured war aims that the battle of Kursk was supposed to serve and ultimately achieve. Gone however were the days when the Germans could mount offensive action across all sectors of the front (North, Center and South) as in Operation Barbarossa in 1941, or even one sector (South) as in Case Blue in 1942. Kursk was the third yearly German East summer offensive of the war reduced to one salient along one sector of the front. Still, it was the fulcrum point of the entire war. It saw the amassing by the Germans of their best troops and armored formations, led by the elite of the army generals. Contrary to common wisdom, This was a battle run by the German General Staff, with Hitler following the cues of his generals. Its failure confirmed his worst paranoia of his generals, leading to crises amongst the German leadership as the war progressed into 1944 (and ultimately the 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler's life). That it failed was in retrospect preordained. The Russian army of 1943 was a different beast from its 1941 predecessor (something that David Glantz has written extensively about in his *Colossus Reborn*). The Russians outnumbered the Germans (though the latter had the superior armored formations), but importantly they out-generated them as well. When the German offensive was brought into a halt, the Russian counteroffensive rolled out with an unstoppable momentum.

The war was truly lost.

And this is where Glantz narrative comes to the fore. He was amongst the first Western military historians to appreciate the changing nature of the Russian army structure and leadership as the war progressed and its role in the eventual victory. This is especially true in his narrative of Kursk, dry and protracted but filled with insights. Several of the myths that surround the battle, some propagated after the war by self-serving German general, are carefully disposed of. This was no lost victory, as the German ace general Erich Von Manstein would claim, but a veritable German defeat. For those who are interested in the military history of the war, and of the Eastern front in particular, this narrative of one of the most important battles of WWII is an essential reading.

Harry Miktarian says

IMO this book is not a general interest book, but a book for those that have read a book or two on the Eastern front during WWII. If you are looking into a more narrative war book or a general history of Kursk, this might not be the first book I would grab. That said, if you are interested in Kursk and are looking for more detail, this is the book for you. This book contains an impressive amount of detail and research. If you are interested in the Russian and/or Axis OOB's, detailed numbers and stats this **is** the book for you. Hands down if you are interested in the Eastern Front...Glantz is your man, a truly unchallenged historian of this Front.

Grant says

Glantz proves himself (again and still) the master of operational history of the Great Patriotic War (aka the Eastern Front of World War II). Not just an outstanding battle history, but a careful analysis of this key point where the Red Army learned how to stop a blitzkrieg attack, albeit at tremendous cost, and began the series of counterattacks, again at terrible cost, that would only end in Berlin.

'Aussie Rick' says

There is no denying that this account of Kursk by David Glantz and Jonathan House is extremely well researched. The amount of detail is awe inspiring with 165 pages in the appendixes dedicated to OB's, strengths & losses, comparative armour strengths and key German & Soviet documents.

The maps, some 32 in all, are very detailed however I must admit that at time they were still hard to read due to the amount of detail. The book itself was well presented and the photos were excellent. The only fault that I could find with the book was that at times it dragged. With the amount of detail being presented you need to catch your breath and close the book. It was not the type of book that had a free flowing narrative that kept you glued to the story, well not for me at least.

Beside that however this would rank as the definitive account of this major Eastern Front battle and well

worth the effort to read. No decent WW2 library would be complete without this book.

David Vanness says

Knowing little about Kursk, I found this a fabulous read. The German attack plan was titled 'Citadel'. The book is based entirely on German records and the Soviet records only released since the demise of USSR. They have 20 nice pictures of the equipment used. One of the events that I found of German thought outside-of-the-box was when they captured a Soviet T-34 tank. They turned it around and it led the German tanks miles thru of Soviet armor. Of course it was dark that July 12, 1943 night. So dark that Soviet tanks passed them on the same road going the other way. They captured the objective. The cost of 'Citadel' in lives, wounded, and equipment was huge. And the Soviet & Germany records are somewhat believable as they often are compliant with each other. Over 177 thousand Soviet casualties and German losses were near 50 thousand. There were more losses on the 2 Soviet counter moves after the Germany defeat. The German tanks and guns were of heavier and better quality accounting for a loss ratio of circa 5 to 1. Much of the direct military records are to be enjoyed.

Zeyd says

The single best researched, deeply engrossing tome on the battle of Kursk, an excellent source for understanding all levels (Strategic, Operational, Tactical) of that titanic battle. A bit dry.

Andrew says

This is a typical Glantz book - very heavy on details, to the point where it becomes difficult to follow, which is why he loses a star. I think Glantz is one, along with Jonathan House, of the leading historians of the Soviet Army during World War II. The Battle of Kursk is not his best effort, however, it is still very good.

The book goes into the massive deception effort the Soviets conducted in order to lure the Germans into a massive and extremely well defended salient. The Soviets had used numerous layers of mines, tank ditches, barbed wire and trenches in order to slow the German advance. Even with such advantages, the Germans very nearly broke through the Russian defenses.

Well worth the read, reader beware the intense attention to detail which makes reading this book difficult at times.

Walker says

There used to be a title called The Tigers are Burning by a raffish old author named Martin Caiden, more famous for his co-authoring Samurai with Saburo Sakai, the Japanese Zero ace. This more modern study has detailed all the mistakes attributable to Hitler alone in the delays in Unternamen Zitadelle that allowed the Red Army the time to prepare elaborate defensive rings around the Kursk Salient.

Barbarossa, the Battle for Moscow, Stalingrad, Sevastopol, the Battle for the Baku oilfields and this, the mightiest and biggest tank vs. tank battle of all time-Kursk-plus the Siege of Leningrad are tales not often retold these days.

All these are worth revisiting just to see how men and women on both sides, fighting with tenacity for the most odious totalitarian regimes ever foisted on humanity, demonstrated their ability to lift themselves out of truly inhuman conditions to prevail or fail, survive or succumb.

This while commissars or the Gestapo were at the rear of both armies with machine guns to mow down retreating soldiers.

Walker

Mike Hankins says

It's what you think -- a detailed operational history of Kursk. There's not much of a thesis here other than the fairly obvious: Kursk was a major turning point in the war in that the Nazis were never on the offensive after this, although they didn't have much chance of winning here anyway, and it's hard to imagine what they would have done afterward even if they did. The book's major value is less in its overall argumentation than as a corrective to some of the legends that have sprung up, particularly regarding the Battle of Prokhorovka, which Glantz argues is much less important (and was fought piecemeal rather than in large scale) than some of the other tank battles in other sectors. The other big contribution of the book is the extensive amount of primary sources used from both sides, the real "ground's eye" view that emerges.

My biggest complaint is the lack of context -- this is old "guns and trumpets" history at its finest, but really seems to be missing any sort of intersection with larger issues, like the social, ideological, etc. Many readers will not want or expect that, but it does feel a bit incomplete.

If you love those types of operational histories, dive in, but many readers can focus on the introductory chapters, the conclusion, and skim the rest.

happy says

With Kursk, Col Glantz uses both Soviet and German military archives to give a complete picture of the greatest tank battle of World War II. The author uses, at the time the book was written, recent access to the Soviet archival material to show light on the Red Army's plans and decision making.

Col Glantz sets the stage for the July 1943 battle by looking at the situation on the Russia front in the spring of that year. The Soviet Winter Offensives following Stalingrad had driven the Germans back 100s of kilometers and resulted in a huge bulge in the front and around the city of Kursk. If the Germans could eliminate that bulge, they would shorten their lines significantly and release troops for other duties. This made Kursk a logical target for the coming German offensive.

The author makes a point that the Russians could also read maps. They saw the same bulge and came to the same conclusions. While Stalin wanted an immediate offensive in the spring, his general staff, esp Gen

Zhukov, convinced him that if they prepared the Kursk Salient properly and waited until the German attack had failed, they then could go on the offensive with much, much better results. Ergo, the Soviets spent the spring building defensive fortifications 100s of kilometers deep in the salient.

In looking at the German planning for their offensive, Col Glantz looks at the delays that occurred and the reasons for them. The starting date slipped from May to the 5th of July mainly because Hitler wanted the newly designed and built German armor, the Panther and Tiger tanks as well as the Elephant assault gun, to take part. The author also points out as time passed senior German commanders became more and more concerned over Soviet defensive preparations in the attack areas. At the time of the attack Col Glantz states the Soviets outnumbered the attacking Germans in both available armored vehicles and sheer man power. The author states that both Guderian and Von Manstein urged Hitler to cancel the operation.

When the assault kicks off, Col Glantz does a good job of telling just what the Soviet defenses did to the German assaults. To put in bluntly, on the north shoulder of the Kursk Bulge, they were stopped cold. Only in the south was there some modicum of success. The author tells the story the 2nd SS Panzer Corps, which were the best equipped in Von Manstein's army, advancing some 20 kms, the deepest penetration of any German units and ending up fighting the Battle of Prokhorovka. Contrary to what most historians think, Col Glantz opines that this was classic meeting engagement and units were fed into the maelstrom piecemeal. The result being that the German advance was halted, in spite of Soviet casualties exceeding German by as much as 4 to 1. Also at this time the Western Allies invaded Sicily and Hitler needed the 2nd SS Panzer Corps to reinforce Italy. So he stopped the battle and transferred the 2nd SS.

While the focus of the narrative in not first person accounts, the author does provided a few. One of the most amusing is when the Germans used a captured T-34 to lead their advancing column during a night march. They ran into a Soviet column moving the opposite way. The Soviets seeing the T-34 took no notice of the German armor following it, allowing the Germans to get into position for the next day's attacks.

In addition to detailing the combat operations, the author looks at the performance of the equipment used by both sides. The new German armor was found wanting in many details. For instance, while the Panther was an equal if not better tank than the Soviet T-34 if it was in action. It had so many teething problems that they were often unavailable due to mechanical break downs. The Elephant assault/tank destroyers also had mechanical problems, were extremely heavy causing mobility problems, but more importantly had to be accompanied by infantry due to poor point defense capability. The Tiger was probably the best performer of the three, but there were not enough of them.

As with all of Col Glantz' books on World War II on the Eastern Front this is extremely well researched. He provides plenty of maps (even though some can be hard to read). The photos are also well chosen to illustrate both the equipment and leaders of both armies. It also a fairly succinct and readable narrative, esp compared with some of his other works. This is a solid 4 star read for me.

Hans Brienesse says

This is a book that should be on the shelf of every student of World War 2. Well written, well researched it is to me a definitive account of the events that transpired in and around the Kursk salient in July and August 1943. The maps were good with the respective protagonists' positions well laid out. The only real criticism I have is that the grey writing on a grey background was difficult and at times impossible to read. I would have preferred something like a larger pull-out map with all the various positions marked in coloured inks to show

different days so as to be able to follow the battle without having continually flick back to the latest map. That aside, a magnificent tome with good solid explanations of what transpired, when, and the reasons for the various decisions arrived at.
