

THE BATTLE OF KURSK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS TO STALINGRAD, STUDY ON
MEMORY, AND RUSSIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

By:

Sean C. McGovern, B.A.
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in History
To the office of Graduate and Extended Studies
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ABSTRACT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in History to the Office of Graduate and Extended Studies of East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania.

Student's Name: Sean McGovern, B.S.

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Thesis Chair: Michael P. Gray, Ph.D.

Thesis Member: Christopher Brooks, Dr. Phil.

Abstract

The Eastern Front of World War Two is one of the most studied elements of the Second World War. On the Eastern front, some battles stand out more than others. Most notably the Battle of Stalingrad stands out as being the ultimate turning point where the Eastern Front was lost and unable to be revived from the perspective of the Germans. When studying the numbers and accounts, the Battle of Kursk trumps the Battle of Stalingrad as the true turning point. While the Battle of Stalingrad simply changed the direction of the war, the Battle of Kursk is the last time the Germany Army could have turned the tides of the war. However, historians and society do not see it that way. Through various means of popular culture and speeches, the rhetoric that Stalingrad is the battle that changed the course of history is constantly reinforced. Furthermore, a more contemporary look at environmental history will illustrate how the bogs and marshes Russian countryside act as natural museums. Preserving anything that falls into their clutches, mother nature not only prevails, but preserves for future generations.

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An unknown Soviet soldier prays minutes before heading into battle at Kursk.

Picture found at:

<https://www.deviantart.com/jesseclark152/art/Russian-Soldiers-Preparing-for-the-Battle-of-Kursk-45544757>

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INTRODUCTION: A BACKGROUND OF BARBAROSSA AND THE MISCONCEPTION OF STALINGRAD

To fully understand the Battle of Kursk, one has to understand the opening phases of the Eastern Front with the German invasion of the Soviet Union, code named: “Operation Barbarossa.” At the first sign of sunrise on June 22nd, 1941, German air and land forces invaded the Soviet Union with intensity. Red Army troops, vastly overwhelmed and dealing with an overall lack of leadership due to Supreme of the Soviet Union Joseph Stalin’s military purges, were quickly overrun and pushed back throughout the Soviet Union across a several thousand-mile front. Additionally, the adoption of the Tokarev SVT40 in early 1941 hindered weapon production since the factories at Izhevsk and Tula were in the process of retooling their factory floors. This further added to the confusion, and resulted in many of these new rifles falling into enemy hands early in the fight.

The attack force designated to invade the Soviet Union was the largest the world had seen up to that point. Hitler decided, against his military tacticians’ advice, to attack the Soviet Union in late summer of 1941. The German force tasked with this operation was composed of three million men, over 600,000 motorized vehicles, 3,580 tanks, 7,184 artillery pieces, and over 2,740 airplanes. Additional forces from Romania, Finland, Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, and Spain would

also aid the German advance, under the name of “Blue Divisions.” At 7:00am on June 22nd, a massive artillery barrage opened up on the Russian defensive lines in Poland, and the invasion of the Soviet Union began.¹

As the Wehrmacht cut through the Soviet Union, women soldiers were found in large numbers. This also results in a change of the mindset amongst soldiers and high command early in the war. Nazi ideology valued the women as the home keeper whose sole job was to have children, maintain the house, cook, clean, perform other household duties, and work to support

the war effort. In the early 1920’s the Nazi party established different youth groups to groom young women to fit into their vision of German society. There were two primary leagues established for girls under 18, the Jungmädelbund and Bund Deutscher Mädel. The Jungmädelbund was created for



Source found at: <https://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1761.html>

girls between the ages of 10 and 14 and the Bund Deutscher Mädel was created for girls between the ages of 14 and 18. These two groups installed anti-semitic views, along with training these young girls to work on farms and different state building projects. The Glaube und Schönheit was added in 1938, and was a voluntary group open to girls between 17 and 21. This league was intended to groom young women for marriage, domestic life, and their future career.

Furthermore, these girls were highly encouraged to be married and have children once they were

¹ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany, a New History*, (Continuum, New York, 1995) 467-468.

of age, and awards were even created for women who had three, six, and nine kids to further promote German heritage.² This program was also used to justify the lebensraum argument that Germany needed more living space for the German population. As the German army pushed through the Soviet Union, seeing women on the fronts brought them to the conclusion that the Soviet Union could not be won by crushing just the Red Army. The people of the Soviet Union were viewed as being radicals, and the entirety of the population would have to be liquidated in order to win the war within the Soviet Union. Resulting in immense bloodshed and a war of attrition being fought on the Eastern Front.³

There was no true singular objective to this attack, but several spread-out objectives. Controlling the cities of Stalingrad, Moscow, and Leningrad were primary goals, along with the rich oilfields of the Caucasus. These four different targets would spread the German front over several thousand miles. Furthermore, with the establishment of different family programs, the Nazi party claimed that invasion of the Soviet Union was necessary to provide more living space for the German people. The vast farmland would provide sufficient food and housing opportunities for new German families. Later on, during the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler would develop an obsession for taking Stalingrad. A city that stretched about 30 miles across the Volga river, control of the city would allow for Germany to control the shipping routes through the Volga that supplied both Moscow and Leningrad. Additionally, the city had multiple bridgeheads, and held a large industrial complex that included: Dzerzhinsky tractor works; which now made tanks, Barrikady munitions factory, Krasny Oktyabr metal plant, and the Lazur

² Lisa Pine, *League of German Girls (The Bund Deutscher Mädel)*, (Jewish Virtual Library, American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprises, 1998-2021).

³ *Greatest Events of World War Two in Colour*, Season 1, Episode 5, "Siege of Stalingrad," directed by Ailsa Fereday, Aired 2019, on Netflix, accessed January 22nd, 2021, <https://www.netflix.com/title/80989924?source=imdb>.

chemical works.⁴ Hitler saw it as an opportunity to crush the morale of the people and troops of the Soviet Union. With Hitler's decision to cut his forces in the South in half in order to focus on taking the city of Stalingrad, the Caucasus oil fields would be hardly touched by a German advance. This would only worsen as the Battle of Stalingrad started to extend over several months.

Entering the third month of the war against the Soviet Union, the German army was still going relatively unopposed in a continuous German conquest of the Soviet Union. This is when the first Battle of Kursk would take place. Kursk would fall to the Nazi army with little to no resistance. The Russian army was still executing a "tactical withdrawal" across the Soviet Union. Finally, Stalin would mandate a direct order to stop "tactical withdrawals" across all fronts; this was the infamous "Order No. 227, which called for an end to retreat and demanded that every foot of Soviet soil be defended."⁵ This order would come into effect before the main battles at Stalingrad. From a Russian perspective, losing Stalingrad would destroy Soviet morale, and would lose one of the last major strongpoints on the Eastern Front. From a German perspective, taking the town of Stalingrad would be a morale boost, and allow for the entire German army in the Southern half of the Soviet Union to focus their efforts and units on the attack and seizure of the oil fields located in the Caucasus. These oilfields were the lifelines of the Soviet military, and would severely damage or even make the Russian army come to a halt. Eventually, a stand had to be made, and that stand would be at Stalingrad.⁶

The Battle of Stalingrad would start on August 23rd, 1942 with the German attack, and would end around February 2nd, 1943, resulting in the total liquidation of the German Sixth

⁴ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 290.

⁵ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013) 24.

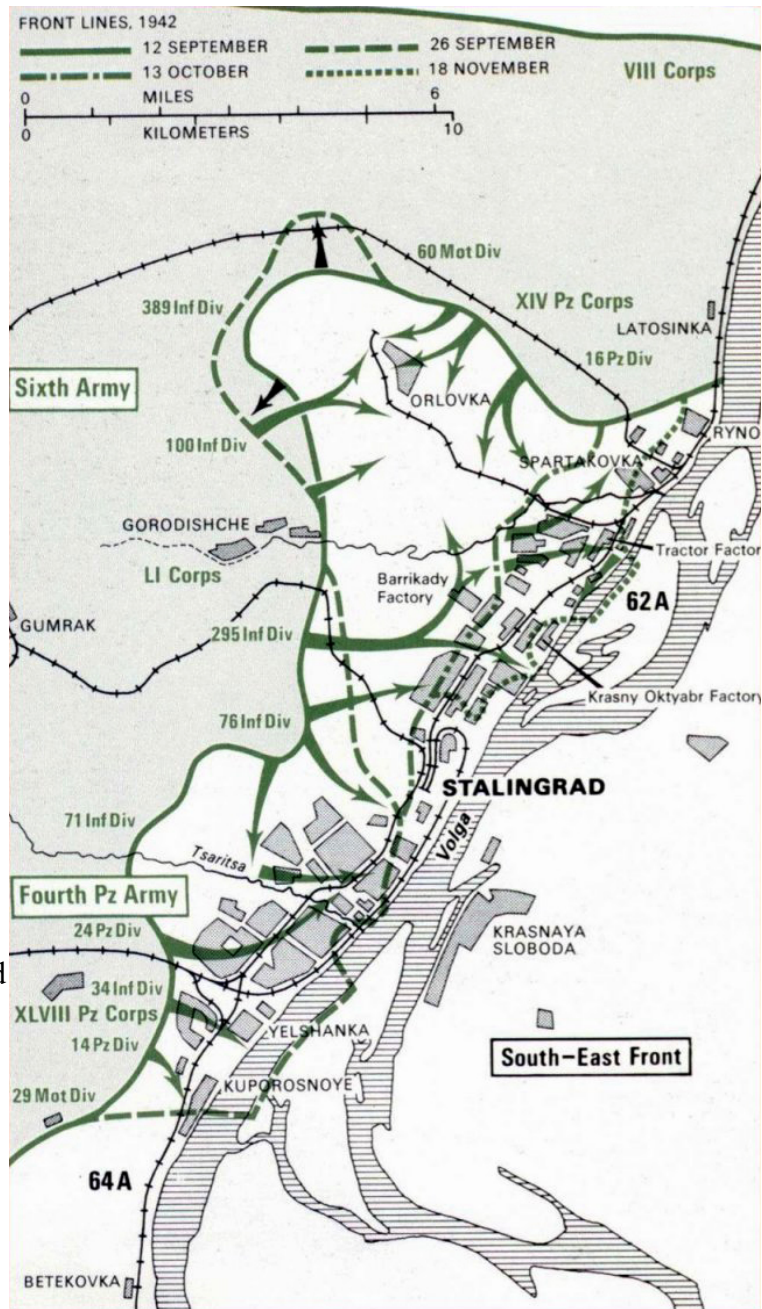
⁶ A. M. Nikalaieff, *The Red Army in the Second World War*, (Russian Review, Vol. 7, Moscow, Autumn 1947) 54.

Army. When the battle began, the Germans tried to take the city with a pincer move, surrounding the city and attacking from two flanks, crushing the enemy in the center. However fierce Russian resistance would stop the Germans, and the first attack of Stalingrad would not commence until late August. The German army was able to surround the city on the Western side of the Volga River, but was stopped from taking the entire western side by a few pockets of Russian soldiers who refused to surrender. This would start what is known as the second part of the Battle of Stalingrad. The Germans would soon launch a massive artillery bombardment and bombing campaign from the Luftwaffe. This attack would destroy the city, and reduce it to next to nothing. Ultimately the Red Army and Wehrmacht would fight a war of vindictiveness in close quarters as the body count quickly rose. Some of the Second World War's most fierce fighting would take place over Stalingrad. Historian Stephen G. Fritz comments: "This was no longer an operational Battle of movement that required skill, coordination and effective cooperation of all arms, something at which the Germans excelled. This had become... a Rattenkrieg (rats' war)... in piles of rubble, in factories with twisted metal frames and shattered machines, in grain silos and cellars, through sewers from one house to the next."⁷ Flamethrowers, grenades, and ruthless hand to hand combat would be used to fight in the city, and entire days would be fought just trying to take one building, and in some extreme cases, trying to take one floor of one building.⁸

⁷ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 293.

⁸ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany, a New History*, (Continuum, New York, 1995) 522.

The Soviet strategy was also unique; which was to “hug” the enemy. This meant holding positions as close as possible to the Germans to prevent any sort of large-scale artillery barrage or bombing raid. Additionally, Soviet Field Marshal Vasily Ivanovich Chuikov, commander of the 62nd Army, realized the Germans did not typically fight at night. In order to expose this weakness, he changed tactics to launch small attacks and reinforce at night. He wanted to slowly break down the German army mentally and physically by launching constant attacks on their positions. Moreover, across the Volga River bank on the Soviets’ side, a large brigade of Katyusha rocket-launching trucks would constantly launch hell storms of firepower on the Germans positions. Once they were done, they would quickly retreat to the safety of the riverbank, resulting in the German



Source found at: <https://facingstalingrad.com/battle-stalingrad/>

army incapable of knocking them out. This sort of constant attacking would wear down the Germans morale, along with their physical and mental ability to launch decisive attacks against

the Soviets.⁹ These battle tactics would lead the Soviet troops to earn a subhuman-like reputation among the German forces, as Wilhelm Hoffman, soldier in the 267th Infantry Regiment of the German 6th Army wrote in his diary about his experience fighting while trying to take the Barrikady factory: “The Russians are not men, but some kind of cast-iron creatures; they never get tired and are not afraid of fire.”¹⁰

The Battle of Stalingrad would enter its final stage on November 19th, 1942 when the Red Army counterattacked. Focusing their attack North and South of the German lines, within four days the Red Army cut off the entire German Sixth Army under “Operation Uranus.” Under this plan, Soviet forces would launch attacks to the most Northern, and Southern parts of the city. This would result in the Sixth Army getting flanked, crushing the rear troops, and surrounding them within Stalingrad. Since the German Army had advanced so quickly into the Soviet Union under Barbarossa, their supply lines were already stretched thin. After successfully surrounding the German forces, the Soviets would bombard them with artillery, and starve them of all supplies and communication. With the rapid and successful execution of “Operation Uranus” the Red Army was able to change the tides of battle, now putting intense pressure on The German Field Marshal of the Sixth army, Friedrich Wilhelm Ernst Paulus. With them surrounded, the Germans within the Soviet blockade could do nothing but try and fight their way out, or wait for an outside force to rescue them. And so concluded that he would need roughly 600 tons of supplies per day in order to keep his men alive. The Luftwaffe, already starting to weaken due to poor leadership and a lack of long-distance bombers, could not keep up with this demand. There was no way to achieve the requirements for food, ammunition and fuel. Making matters worse,

⁹ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 292-293.

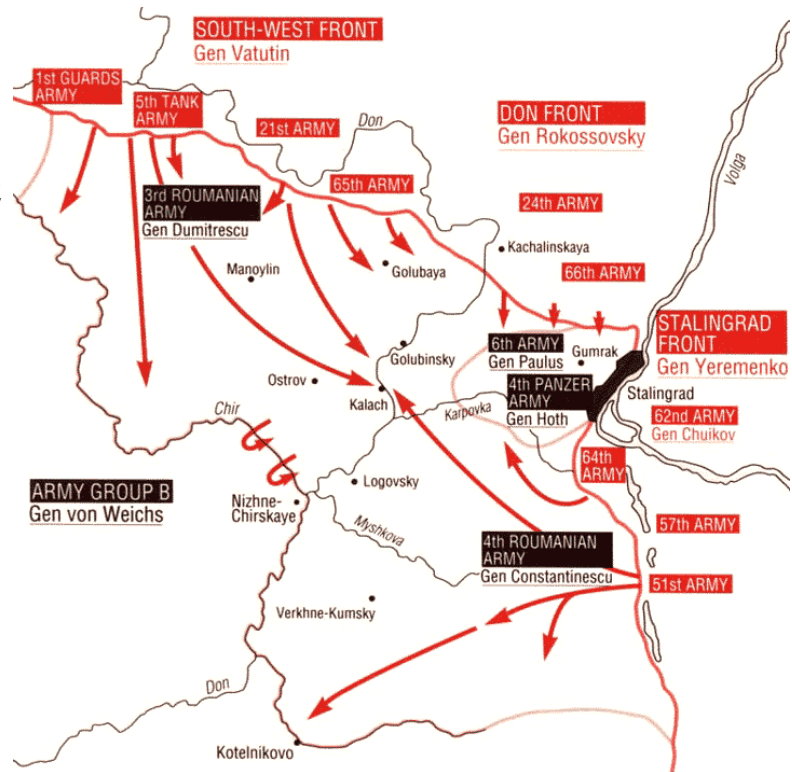
¹⁰ Quoted in: Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg*, 299.

the Soviet air force and anti-aircraft abilities severely reduced the effectiveness of the Luftwaffe support.¹¹

Moral for the soldiers trapped within the city quickly fell, and by the end of December of 1942 the hope of a relief attack had been forgotten. By January of 1943 the situation of the encircled men had deteriorated sharply, and they had been encircled to a very tight circle that could have been completely covered by Soviet artillery.

Additional fighting in December forced soldiers that were still alive to

deplete all of their reserves to stop the attacks. Stocks of ammunition, fuel and food were coming to an end, and the Wehrmacht's primary food supply by this time was horse meat. By January of 1943 the ration for a German soldier in the encirclement was 75g of bread, supplemented by 200g of horse meat.¹² Making matters worse for the entrapped Germans, Red Army propaganda constantly reminded the men of the hopeless situation by playing on loudspeakers: "Every seven seconds a German soldier dies at Stalingrad... Stalingrad is a mass grave..."¹³



Source found at: <https://www.stalingrad.net/russian-hq/operation-uranus/rusopuranus.html>

¹¹ Alexy V. Isaev, translated by Richard Harrison, *Stalingrad: City on Fire*. (Pen and Sword, Lexington, 2019), 278.

¹² Alexy V. Isaev, translated by Richard Harrison, *Stalingrad: City on Fire*. (Pen and Sword, Lexington, 2019), 277.

¹³ Jonathan Bastable, *Voices From Stalingrad: First-hand Accounts From World War II's Cruellest Battle*. (Greenhill Books, Yorkshire, 2019), 238.

As the winter went on, the harsh Russian winter set in. Field Marshal von Bock's Army Group B, which consisted of the German 6th Army, 4th Panzer Army and Italian 8th Army, had 100,000 cases of frostbite by Christmas. To protect their faces from the relentless brutal wind, many had to wear gas masks. Temperature was usually so low that fuel froze inside machines. Fires had to be lit underneath engines but even this measure didn't always work and tank, truck and aircraft engines simply refused to start. Ice also tore up engines and immobilized planes for weeks. Repair work that required delicate adjustments could not be done because as soon as mechanics removed their gloves, their fingers became frozen and glued to the cold metal surface. Many transport aircraft were grounded due to this lack of maintenance, which had catastrophic consequences on the aerial resupply of the encircled 6th Army. It is recorded that the average temperature for the Winter of 1942 in Stalingrad averaged at -30 degrees Fahrenheit.¹⁴

Any aircraft that was able to get through the stiff Soviet defense, often had little to no effect on the German troops on the ground. Just six weeks after the encirclement the Luftwaffe sent an officer in to see how well the air support was helping the soldiers on the ground, and reported the following: "Dropping supplies doesn't help at all. Many of the canisters aren't recovered, we don't have the fuel to collect them. The men are too weak to go searching. It's now four days since they've had anything to eat. The last of the horses have been eaten."¹⁵

The hardship that the German army faced is another reason why Stalingrad is studied and written about so extensively. It is unlike Kursk in that the Stalingrad is a struggle for both sides, trying to stop the German advance or break out of the Soviet encirclement. The ensuing six months would entail some of the worst conditions ever experienced by an army during World

¹⁴ Jonathan Bastable, *Voices From Stalingrad: First-hand Accounts From World War II's Cruellest Battle*. (Greenhill Books, Yorkshire, 2019), 237.

¹⁵ Alexy V. Isaev, translated by Richard Harrison, *Stalingrad: City on Fire*. (Pen and Sword, Lexington, 2019), 244.

War Two. The Germans, mostly in their summer or fall gear had to try and stave off Soviet attacks and the harsh Russian winter. Six months of starvation and combat, compared to the swift 12 days of the Kursk offensive. Kursk had no dramatic ending or singular turning point like that of "Operation Uranus". It was just poor German planning mixed with the countless amounts of manpower and Soviet equipment that would overrun the Germans and forced them once again to go on the defensive. The Battle of Stalingrad is drawn out, debated back in Germany for months, fought in the city that bears the name of the Supreme of the Soviet Union, and allowed for soldiers to write home or communicate back to Berlin. Stalingrad was so controversial that back in Berlin the German Army Chief of Staff General Kurt Zeitzler put himself on what he called the Stalingrad diet. He refused to eat any more than what the men received at Stalingrad, and within two weeks lost so much weight that Hitler had to give him a direct order to consume a healthier diet, otherwise be relieved of his duties as Army Chief of Staff.¹⁶

Not only were the men trapped and experiencing unbearable living conditions, but they also had time to write home, or write to Berlin. Aircraft were able to break the Soviet blockade, allowing for mail and some supplies to get through. But this also spread the word about the horrendous living conditions that were in Stalingrad. Meanwhile, during the Battle of Kursk, there was no down time for the soldiers to write home about. Many soldiers fought for days on end. If a soldier was not killed in the vicious combat, they spent their down time cleaning or repairing weapons, finding ammunition, repairing vehicles, and most notably sleeping. The soldiers at Stalingrad spent most of their time writing, sleeping, scavenging for anything to eat, and making trench art to pass the time and try to keep their minds off the hopelessness of the

¹⁶ Alexy V. Isaev, translated by Richard Harrison, *Stalingrad: City on Fire*. (Pen and Sword, Lexington, 2019), 241.

situation. Meaning the stories of Stalingrad are much more alive and better circulated than Kursk.

Field Marshal Paulus, pleaded Hitler to let him surrender his forces in order to save his men from certain death, but instead Hitler promoted him to Field Marshal. In the German army, no field marshal had ever surrendered. The German Sixth Army waited to be rescued. After freezing in subhuman temperatures of the particularly brutal Russian winter for several months, the German Army surrendered to the Russians in early February.¹⁷ The reason why many historians consider the Battle of Stalingrad the most important battle in the Second World War is due to the fact that this battle completely stopped the German advance into the Soviet Union: “[Stalingrad] is one of greatest battles of the Great Patriotic War.”¹⁸ When the Wehrmacht lost the Sixth Army, they were unable to absorb such large losses, and were forced to pull back across the Russian front.

Over 250,000 Germans would be trapped in the Russian blockade around the city that was completed by the start of November 1942. By February 2nd 1943, 24 generals, 2,500 officers, and 90,000 troops would be all that remained. They were finally forced to surrender to the Red Army.¹⁹ This officially ended the German advance into the Soviet Union, and would start the Russian counterattack back through Soviet territory. While the initial stages of “Operation Barbarossa” were successful, and opening the several thousand-mile front worked for a few months, this had suddenly turned against the Wehrmacht.

¹⁷ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany, a New History*, (Continuum, New York, 1995) 524.

¹⁸ Raymond Limbach, *Battle of Stalingrad*. (Britannica, New York, New York, 2015).
<http://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Stalingrad>

¹⁹ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 321.

When the hole opened up in the Southern part of the Soviet Union with the collapse of the Sixth army, this allowed the Red Army to flood through, and force the Germans to pull back across all fronts. With so much of their manpower spread out so thin, the Wehrmacht's had to recede and recuperate from this defeat. As historian Klaus P. Fischer supports: "The German army was still a formidable fighting machine."²⁰ For that reason, this turn of events causes most historians to call the Battle of Stalingrad the most important and decisive Battle of the Second World War.²¹ Most scholars talk about Stalingrad being the single point in World War Two where the momentum shifts to the Soviets favor. For example, A.J Taylor, in his 1998 article: *The Second World War and its Aftermath* claims "[Stalingrad] is arguably the most strategically decisive battles of the Second World War, and definitely turning the tides in the European Theater."²² Taylor is one of countless history scholars who make this claim.

The 2019 Netflix documentary, *Greatest Events of World War Two in Colour* is a series of colorized films, mixed with historians who discuss what that show deems as the great events of World War Two. Major events like invasion of the Soviet Union, Stalingrad, Midway, Dresden Fire bombings, the Battle of Britain, D-Day, Pearl Harbor, Liberation of Dachau, bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Battle of Berlin are all discussed. However, the Battle of Kursk is completely forgotten. A show dedicated to the "Greatest Events of World War Two" did not even mention Kursk once. In regards to the Eastern Front, the only events mentioned are the initial invasion of the Soviet Union, Battle of Stalingrad, and Berlin. Most of

²⁰ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany, a New History*, (Continuum, New York, 1995) 524.

²¹ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany*, 524-525.

²² A.J Taylor, *The Second World War and its Aftermath*. (Folio Society, 1998, Vol 4 of 4).

1943, and all of 1944 are simply cut from the series. Further proving that Kursk is overshadowed by the same series of events.²³

Another interesting interpretation about the Battle of Stalingrad is from military historian Antony Beevor. He claims that the Stalingrad was the greatest psychological battle of the war. With the German Army going undefeated from 1939-1942, the morale and hopes of the Soviet Union were starting to break apart. This Soviet victory proved to the Russian people and military that it was possible to stop the Wehrmacht. However, while Stalingrad is important, Kursk is the turning point during the Second World War in the Eastern Front.²⁴

The Battle of Stalingrad ended the German advance in Russia, and started to push them back to Germany, ultimately leading to their final defeat in Berlin on May 5th, 1945. It is due to the Soviet steamroller constantly pushing to Berlin that many smaller battles are dropped from history, and are often overlooked. The Battle of Kursk is a pivotal and crucial incident during the war that has to be looked into, because it is the true turning point of the Nazi juggernaut. The Battle of Kursk was Nazi Germany's attempt to turn the war back into their favor, and they put everything they had against the Soviets at Kursk; taking up 70% of all the equipment and manpower that the Germany army had in the Eastern front.²⁵

²³ *Greatest Events of World War Two in Colour*, Season 1, Episode 1-10, "Siege of Stalingrad," directed by Ailsa Fereday, Aired 2019, on Netflix, accessed January 22nd, 2021.

²⁴ Quoted in: Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. (Random House Co., New York City, 2005), 228.

²⁵ Lloyd Clark, *Kursk The Greatest Battle*, (Headline Review, Buckingham, May 24th, 2012) 47.

CHAPTER ONE:
KURSK TRIUMPHS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF KURSK OVER STALINGRAD

Over 3.5 million men, 10,000 tanks, 17,000 guns and mortars, and 3,600 airplanes between the Soviet Union and German Military would clash on a battlefield less than 30 miles wide, with one objective: to seize railhead at Kursk.¹ The fighting would be brutal, and none stop. One contemporary account from German infantryman, Raimund Ruffer illustrates the first day of battle against the Soviet Union, or “Ivan,” during the opening hours for the Battle of Kursk:

Ivan bullets zipped around us; I could hear them flying past my ears. I expected to be cut down any moment or blow to smithereens by the shells that slammed about... I heard my old friend Ernst panting seconds before his right arm was torn from his body by an explosion that flung his rifle at my feet... he was silent by-time I got to him... I twisted to see a camouflaged cover being thrown off a trench. I instinctively... dropped to one knee and squeezed the trigger of my rifle. The butt kicked and a round was sent hurtling towards a faceless Soviet Soldier. In that same instant I was knocked off my feet as though hit by a heavyweight boxer. A Soviet round had struck me in the shoulder, shattering the bone and leaving me gasping for air.²

After conducting extensive research, the conclusion can be made that after the Battle of Kursk, the German Army is not able to mount a large counteroffensive for the remainder of the war on the Eastern Front. While the fighting continued to get more ferocious as the Soviets closed in on

¹ Martin McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*. (Pearson Longman, London England, 1997) 235.

² Quoted in: Lloyd Clark, *Kursk The Greatest Battle*, (Headline Review, Buckingham, May 24th, 2012) 45.

the capital city of Berlin, the German army would not be able to turn the tides of the war. There is no single battle where the Nazis saw a chance to turn the tide of the war back in the favor of the Germany army after the failure at Kursk.

This chapter will argue that the Battle of Kursk is the most influential Battle of the Eastern Front in the Second World War. Before this battle, the German army had the ability to counter attack and start to push back the Soviet military; it was a matter of time, organization, and coordination to do so. Even as the battle unfolded, many Soviet and German military officers knew that this was a critical battle to change the tide of war. As Soviet General Andrey Yeremenko, who would later become Marshal of the Soviet Union, noted: “The Kursk operation is more sophisticated than the Stalingrad one. In Stalingrad, the beast was beaten in its lair. In Kursk, the artillery shield resisted the enemy’s attack and the artillery sword started crushing them during the [counter-attack]... it was enough to smash the last great effort of the Wehrmacht’s panzer arm.”³ The massive amount of force that the Nazis put into this battle would never be able to be repeated. The Nazi war machine and manpower would never again be able to reproduce such an effort.

Historian Stephen G. Fritz further backs this claim: “Stalingrad was not the turning point in the larger conflict, in the sense that a still-winnable war had suddenly turned into a losing one.”⁴ Further proving this point, military historian David M. Humpert writes: “The Battle of Kursk would rank among history’s significant turning points.” Humpert, who focuses primarily on the mechanized aspect of the battle, concludes that the Nazi Army lost roughly one third of

³ Quoted in: Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. (Random House Co., New York City, 2005) 231.

⁴ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler’s War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 326.

their entire Eastern front strength within the span of 12 days.⁵ Historian Dennis E. Showalter confirms this, when he concludes his book on the Battle of Kursk with: “The Battle of Kursk was the Eastern Front’s transition point... it’s point of no return.”⁶ Recently, when addressing the 60th anniversary of the battle in 2003 President of Russia Vladimir Putin made the claim: “Kursk marks a turning point in the Great Patriotic War... As a result of the Battle of Kursk, the course of the Great Patriotic War and the Second World War changed for good.”⁷ The narrative of the Eastern Front in World War Two is slowly changing, but regardless of how much research is done, and evidence is provided, Stalingrad always seems to be favored as the ultimate turning point.

Within the 12 days of the attack at Kursk, roughly 200,000 Germans died; 800 tanks and assault guns destroyed, and 159 aircraft were lost.⁸ The lull in fighting between January and June of 1943 was the time for the German army to reorganize and plan an attack, and the Germans would focus all of their reserves on the Eastern front at the Kursk salient. The Nazi failure to take their objective at Kursk, and the crushing defeat of their reserves would officially mark the end of the German offensive, and the Soviets would go on a practically non-stop offensive until they reached Berlin in 1945. The Battle of Stalingrad proved that the Russian will-power and man-power would be enough to halt the German advance, and would stop the German steamroller into Russia, but the Battle of Kursk would officially mark the end of the advance, shatter the morale of the German Army, and end the depiction of a Nazi juggernaut.

⁵ David M. Humpert, *Swan Songs of the Panzers*, (World War Two, Germany, February 2004), 13.

⁶ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013) 279.

⁷ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. August 19th, 2003, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 22088. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22088>

⁸ David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 139-140.

To better understand the battle, it is important to indulge in the specifics of the most prominent fighting vehicles used at Kursk. The backbone of the Red Army's armored forces was the T-34. The 1943 variant of the T-34 had a darker green paint to it to better fit into the surrounding fields. Additionally, by 1943 there were some advances in the design. Some changes included additional external fuel tanks, a radio, and a 360-degree vision cupola for the commander to get a better view of the surrounding battlefield. Armed with the versatile 76mm gun, a maximum speed of 33 mph, the T-34 was a well-balanced tank for various roles throughout Eastern Front. Additionally, its 47mm 60-degree slanted armor and two 7.62x54r DT machine guns



A T-34 on display at The Kubinka Tank Museum, Moscow Oblast, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

made it even more suited for tank combat along with suppressing rushing infantry.⁹ The T-34 would see action from Barbarossa to the streets of Berlin, more than 34,000 would be produced from 1941-45.¹⁰

The KV1 and KV2 tanks, despite being outdated by 1943, made a presence at Kursk. In the early stages of the war between the Soviet Union and Germany the KV1 and KV2 were formidable fighting machines. Bearing a 76mm main gun and three 7.62x54r DT machine guns, the KV1 was a heavy tank by 1941 standards. Its 90mm frontal armor had a much steeper slope to it, not making it as effective as the T-34s armor. Despite its steeper armor, the KV1 with its 3.5 inches of armor could stop just about any anti-tank gun that was tasked with knocking it out.

⁹ David Porter, *Soviet Tank Units 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, 2009), 85.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 186.

However, by 1943 the German's had introduced the Tiger, Panther, and 88mm anti-tank gun, which made quick work out of the KV1s. Additionally, the KV1s twelve-cylinder diesel engine only



A KV1 Heavy on display at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland. Photograph taken by author.

had a maximum speed of 22mph. Making it substantially slower than most other vehicles in the Red Army and Wehrmacht.

The KV2 was even more outdated. Utilizing the same chassis as the KV1, the KV2 was designed during the Winter War of 1939. Its massive 152mm main gun was designed to destroy bunkers, and any obstacle that might come in the way of an armored unit. However, with only one hull mounted 7.62x54r DT machine gun, it was prone to infantry rushing and disabling. Additionally, its enormous profile at 10 feet 10 inches tall, 22 feet long, 10 feet 10 inches wide, and weighing in at 51.1 tons, made it an easy target in combat. To matters worse, its maximum speed of 17mph and a lack of a



A KV2 is inspected by German soldiers. Unknown date or location. Source found at: <https://www.quora.com/Who-would-win-a-KV2-or-a-Tiger-II>

radio made it impossible for KV2 crews to keep up with the Blitzkrieg tactics of 1941, and most of the 334 examples would be lost during operation Barbarossa.¹¹

¹¹ David Porter, *Soviet Tank Units 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, 2009) 28-19.

With the KV1 and KV2 proving to be obsolete by 1943, there was an innovative program installed to develop an improved tank destroyer to tackle the larger vehicles being fielded by the German's panzer armies. The SU-152 heavy self-propelled gun would be the result of this program. Utilizing the KV1 chassis, engine, and hull mounted machine gun, the SU-152



A SU-152 on display at The Kubinka Tank Museum, Moscow Oblast, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

had a much lower profile and a fixed cannon. As a result, it had a much lower profile than the KV2, but utilized the same 152mm howitzer. When loaded with new armor piercing ammunition, the SU-152 was tested for the first time at Kursk, and proved to be sufficient at knocking out newer and heavier German tanks at normal battle ranges.¹²

Another vehicle that made a presence throughout the Second World War on Russia's side was the infamous Zis-6 BM-13-16 "Katyusha" salvo rocket launcher. Usually mounted to a Zis-6 cargo truck, or a lend-lease Studebaker, the Katyusha rocket launchers were capable of delivering a devastating salvo of 16



A Zis-6 BM-13-16 "Katyusha" on display at The Military Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineers and Signal Corps, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

different 132mm rockets to a target within 7-10 seconds. While these salvo weapons were less accurate than artillery, they were very effective in that they covered roughly 100,000 square feet

¹² Ibid, 85.

of the battlefield with their payload of roughly one ton of high explosive materials. With an experienced crew, a Katyusha unit could relocate after a salvo nearly immediately after firing, denying the German's a chance to locate and launch a counter barrage. For this reason, the Zis-6 rocket artillery was especially bothersome to German troops, and due to their distinct sound when firing, quickly earned the nickname "Stalin's Organs."¹³

The battle of Kursk is also interesting for the Red Army since a handful of lend-lease units made their way to the front lines and took on the German's head on. Composed of M4A1 Sherman's, Infantry Tank Mark IV Churchill MKIIIs, Universal carrier Mark 1 with a Boys .55 anti-tank rifle, and numerous Mark III Valentines, the allied vehicles made most of their contributions at Prokhorovka and the counter offensive "Operation Kutuzov." These Allied vehicles were not as favored as other Red Army tanks mainly due to their difference in ammunition. The Churchill especially was disliked due to its slow speed, only 15mph, and a short barreled 75mm



A rare lend-lease Churchill Heavy on display at The Kubinka Tank Museum, Moscow Oblast, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

gun. The Sherman and Valentines however, were well liked due to their reliability. Despite their resiliency, both were usually placed in reserve units to avoid confusion with armament, and the overall high profile of the Sherman, at nine feet made it unfavorable for the open fields of the Eastern front.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid, 42.

¹⁴ David Porter, *Soviet Tank Units 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, 2009), 92-95.

The German Panzer Army had numerous vehicles at their disposal, from the Czechoslovakian 38(t), to the Panzerkampfwagen 1 Ausf. F, and many others. This section will focus on the more prominent vehicles used, the Panzer III, Panzer IV, Sturmgeschütz III, Tiger and Panther. The Panzer III was hardly suited for combat against tanks with the introduction of the Soviet T-34. Utilizing a small two-inch main gun, neither the short or long barreled versions could penetrate the sloped armor of a T-34 even at point blank range. A trained crew would instead aim for various weak points such as the tracks, barrel, hull ring, or any periscope to try and disable a Soviet tank. However, with a maximum speed of 25mph it was fast, and versatile on the battlefield.¹⁵



A Panzer III on display at The Kubinka Tank Museum, Moscow Oblast, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

By 1943 the Panzer IV composed much of the Panzer Armies power. Armed with a three-inch-high velocity long barreled gun, the IV with a maximum speed of 25mph leveled the playing field between the new Soviet T34. Capable of carrying 87 rounds of ammunition, the Panzer IV performed well on all fronts, and would soon make up the bulk of the Panzer army with over 8,500 being made throughout the duration of the war. All these units were not the long barrel



A Panzer IV on display at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland. Note the side skirts around the turret. Photograph taken by author.

¹⁵ Michael Spilling, *Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, United Kingdom, 2005), 199.

version, some included recovery tanks, anti-aircraft tanks, and other variants that could be intended for other non-combat roles.

Arguably the most successful tank of the Second World War, the Sturmgeschütz III, made a huge presence at the Kursk battlefield. Originally designed as a mobile assault gun for infantry support, the StuG III, with its low profile at only seven feet, and versatile 75mm gun, quickly made it an effective tank killer on the field.

The StuG was not only the second most produced tracked vehicle of the German Army in World War Two with over 10,000 units being produced, but also has the most number of confirmed tank kills. With rotating periscopes used for vision, one coaxial



PTRD and PTRS anti-tank rifles on display at the Museum of the Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Corps, St. Petersburg, Russia. Photograph taken by Author.

machine gun in the hull and an option for a shield and machine gun mounted to the top, the StuG III performed well in nearly all combat scenarios and was well liked by the German army. However, by 1943, when the Battle of Kursk took place, many StuGs were starting to fall victim to the Soviet PTRS and PTRD anti-tank rifles with their new ammunition. These two anti-tank rifles were the most common Red Army infantry anti-tank rifles of the war. Utilizing the 14.5×114mm bullet traveling at more than 1,013fps, some older vehicles from earlier in the war were falling victim to this potent bullet.¹⁶ Notably, StuGs weaker side armor proved to be no match for this devastating bullet. At the Battle of Kursk, to try and save crews and tanks, metal side skirts were added. Some side plates were retro-fitted since there was an official order for

¹⁶ Martin J. Dougherty, and Michael E. Haskew, *Small Arms 1914-Present, The world's Greatest Weapons*, (Metro Books, New York, 2013), 148.



A knocked out StuG in Europe - notice the failing side skirts, and the side skirts added to the front from what the source claims was added camouflage. Found at: <https://erenow.net/www/armored-attack-1944-us-army-tank-combat-european-theater/11.php>

well after the war in various roles and countries.¹⁷

The Tiger tank also made a prominent appearance on the battlefield. Boasting the 88mm anti-tank gun as its main armament, two MG34s, 4.75 inches of frontal armor, and weighing over 62 tons, the lumbering Tiger was a formidable fighting machine that would not fail to uphold its reputation. Additionally, due to its weight the Tiger had a relatively new feature in the Germany army; it was the first tank to have a steering wheel with hydraulic assistance so it could be easily turned. When compared to other tanks like the KV1, T34,



Tiger 131 on display at the Bovington Tank Museum, England. Source found at: <https://tankmuseum.org/tank-nuts/tank-collection/tiger-i/>

¹⁷ Michael Spilling, *Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, United Kingdom, 2005), 199-201.

and even most Panzers, which relied on a traditional lever system to make turns, the Tiger was exceptionally easy to maneuver from a steering perspective.¹⁸

Stories of the Tiger's fighting capabilities quickly circulated, and on the first day of battle during Prokhorovka, "stories about 45mm cannons firing at [Tiger] tanks... shells hit them, but bounced off like peas. There have been cases when artilleryists went insane after seeing this."¹⁹ T-34s and KV1s were not able to knock out this tank from the front, and had to be closer than 100 meters to disable it from the side. The rear was the only way to eliminate a Tiger, and even then, the T-34 would have to be within 300 meters from the rear to get a kill.²⁰

Meanwhile, the 88mm high velocity cannon was able to knock out a T-34 at a range of 1,500 meters from the front, in addition to disabling the Soviet heavy KV1 at a range of 3,500 meters.²¹ In one astonishing story, a Tiger tank in a workshop, not entirely fixed, was able to repel an attack of some 50 to 60 T-34s. It knocked out 22 T34s, with the remaining tanks fleeing in fright.²² Another nearly unbelievable account about the Tiger and its durability comes from Leutnant Zabel's report about his attack near Ssemernikovo Kolkhoz:

We counted 227 hits by AT rifles, 14 hits by 5.7cm AT guns and 11 hits by 7.62cm AT guns. The right suspension was heavily damaged by shelling. The connecting pieces for several running wheels were ruined, two torsion bars were broken. A rear idler wheel bearing was damaged. In spite of this damage the Tiger was able to be driven for further 60km. The hits inflicted cracks to some weld seams. A fuel tank began leaking due to the heavy shocks. We noticed a number of impacts in the track links, which however did not particularly impair mobility. Subsequently, it can be said that the armour on the Tiger had come up to our expectations...²³

¹⁸ Ibid, 126.

¹⁹ Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. (Random House Co., New York City, 2005) 230-231.

²⁰ Kill can be used interchangeably with disabling a tank.

²¹ Michael Spilling, *Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, United Kingdom, 2005), 105.

²² Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 347.

²³ Eric Vahan Muirhead, *The Tiger Gap: Culture, Contradiction, and Clausewitz in German Armored Warfare in World War II*, (University of Tennessee, 5-2019), 56. The author was unable to find a first name for Lt. Zabel.

However, despite how strong the Tiger was on the battlefield, it had its drawbacks. First, since the Tiger weighed over 57-tons it could only cross over certain bridges that were strong enough to support its weight. Most of the time, Tiger commanders, or tank units that had Tiger support would have to follow train tracks and use railroad bridges to cross rivers and valleys. This would prove to be troublesome later in the Battle of Kursk, leading to the culmination at Prokhorovka. Most bridges in the countryside were never built to be able to support the massive weight of a 57-ton tank. Also, the Tiger tank was expensive, and time consuming to build.²⁴

The new Panzer V “Panther” was introduced during the Battle of Kursk, and despite its flaws during its first time in combat, would prove to be the most balanced tank of the war. The Panther was Germany’s newest tank design, and one of the reasons why the attack on



A Panther on display at The Kubinka Tank Museum, Moscow Oblast, Russia. Photograph taken by author.

Kursk was delayed for a few months. The Panther had a high velocity multiple purpose three-inch cannon, along with frontal armor that was 80mm thick and sloped at 55 degrees. This armor was impenetrable by the T-34 and KV1. The side armor was the weak spot, but T-34s had

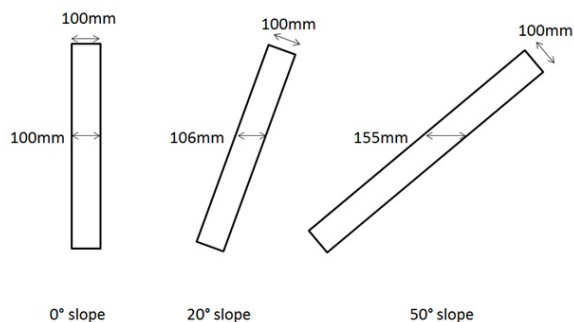


Image found at:
<http://forum.worldoftanks.com/index.php?/topic/283511-de-tail-page-armor-angles/>

to get within 400 meters of the side to get a kill. Featuring a radio, maximum speed of 29mph, and weighing 45 tons, the Panther was well balanced. However, since the tank was rushed into production the first series suffered from

²⁴ Michael Spilling, *Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, United Kingdom, 2005), 126.

transmission issues, faulty radios, and numerous optic failures. Finally, since they were so cutting edge and expensive, substantially less were made when compared to the Panzer IV, Sherman and T34 with only about 6000 units being made from 1942-1945.²⁵

Finally, the steering of the Panther went back to the traditional gear and lever system, which was not as easy as the Tiger to use, but the preferred way for tank crews since it was more reliable.²⁶ The Panthers were capable of engaging and successfully destroying the Soviet main battle tank, the T-34, upwards of 1000 meters from the side, and 750 meters from the front. The older Panzer IV model was only capable of knocking out a Soviet T-34 at 700 meters from the side, and less than 100 meters from the front.²⁷ This new change left the German high command feeling optimistic about the attack, but it took longer to prepare for the initial offensive than what they had planned. Therefore, the Wehrmacht was forced to reschedule the attack further back from May 3rd in order to get the appropriate amount of supplies that they needed for the assault.²⁸

Early March of 1943 was when the Red Army retook the town of Kursk. Realizing Kursk was an important railroad hub, which was a main point of interest for the Soviets, General Erich von Manstein moved south to capture Kharkov, and took a stand to stop the Soviet advance. A heavy rainfall, followed by the muddy spring, would help General Manstein stop the Soviet Advance.²⁹ Both sides would have to stop due to the mud from the melting winter, and wait until the ground solidified to start moving heavy vehicles. Manstein put up a stronghold in a small town south of Kursk, and formed a 30-mile long perimeter along the eastern side of the town.

²⁵ Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History*. (Continuum, New York, 1995), 478.

²⁶ Nicholas Moran, "Inside the Chieftain's Hatch: Panther. Part 3" (World of Tanks North America, August 4th, 2016), Accessed February 12th, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXYROjzZZbk>: 13:30-15:30.

²⁷ Pier Paolo Battistelli, *Panzer divisions, The Eastern Front*, (Osprey Publishing, Oxford UK, 2008), pg 63-64

²⁸ Quoted in: David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Strategy, 139-140*.

²⁹ While Kharkov is over 200 Kilometers away, it is also a major railroad hub supplying Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

However, he carefully allowed an opening through his line, allowing Soviet forces to advance, forming a bulge consisting of over five Red Army groups.³⁰ Later in 1943, during the several month lull in the fighting, the German army would organize an attack that would involve the largest mass of ground forces the world has ever seen.³¹

The first engagement at the railhead of Kursk started in 1941 shortly after “Operation Barbarossa” initiated. According to the invasion plans, the Wehrmacht and other German units invaded the Soviet Union across a several thousand mile wide front. Amongst this Nazi juggernaut seemingly unimportant towns of Kursk and Orel were taken from the Soviet Union, without much resistance. The two towns would prove to be a major supply route for the Wehrmacht since they had major railheads that had access to several different parts to the Soviet Union stretching from Leningrad through Moscow to Stalingrad.³² The two towns, Orel and Kursk, would remain in Nazi Occupation until 1943, when the Red Army managed to take them back with little opposition from the Wehrmacht after the crushing defeat at Stalingrad. A sudden pause in the fighting due to the winter and mud season starting in January of 1943 would give both sides time to recuperate. This lull in fighting is when the German higher command chose to attack Kursk.³³

Kursk was the designated the main attack point due to a bulge in the front lines of the Soviet army consisting of five Soviet Armies. The German objective at Kursk was to destroy the five Soviet army groups in the bulge. The concept was to mimic what was witnessed from the German perspective at Stalingrad and crush the Soviet army groups in the area. By capturing this

³⁰ Peter Chen, *Battle of Kursk: 4 Jul 1943 - 13 Jul 1943*, (World War II Database, Online, April 25th, 2005). http://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=40

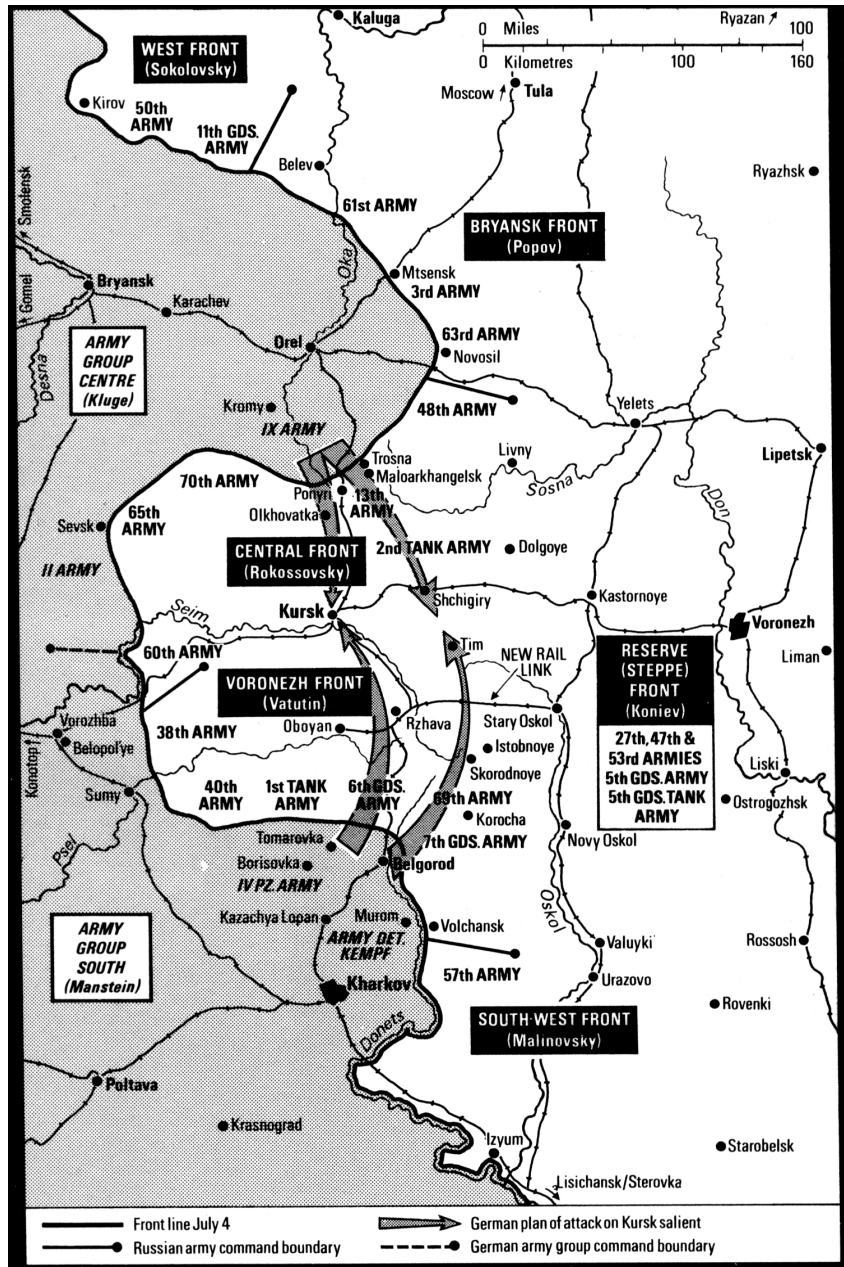
³¹ M. Nikalaieff, *The Red Army in the Second World War*, (Russian Review, Vol. 7, Moscow, Autumn 1947) 54.

³² Ibid, 54.

³³ M. Nikalaieff, *The Red Army in the Second World War*, (Russian Review, Vol. 7, Moscow, Autumn 1947), 54.

amount of men and armor, the German army would force the Soviets to redistribute their forces across the front line. Ultimately thinning out all their man power, and allowing the Wehrmacht to counter-attack on several fronts to push back into the Soviet Union.³⁴

On July 5th, 1943 the fighting commenced with the German 9th army pushing through the north near Orel, and the Fourth Panzer army pushing through the south near Medvenskiy. The attack from the German side consisted of three parts: There was the Army Group Center, Second Army Group, and Army Group South. Army Group center was located north of Kursk by about 50 miles. This army group's objective was to use the town of Orel as a



The German plan of attack at Kursk, codenamed Operation Citadel. Found at: <https://www.onwar.com/wwii/maps/efront/15efront.html>

³⁴ Five Soviet Armies is roughly 500,000 men with the support of armor, transportation, and munitions. Thomas Parish, S. I. Marshall, *The Simon and Schuster Encyclopedia of World War Two*, (Murray Printing Co, New York, 1978), 549.

launching point, pass through Olkhovatka, crush the Soviet Defenses with the support of the Luftwaffe, and make their way to Kursk. The Second Army Group was there as support for both the Army Group Center and Army Group North. The attack forces' reserves were also located in the area, which consisted of the 7th Panzer army, along with several other detachments that had been hastily put together. Finally, Army Group South was to use Kharkov as a launching point to attack several smaller objectives, the 106 division was to go south and help the 320 division attack Schehetzno, mostly as a diversion to try and confuse the Soviet Forces. In short, the assault at the Kursk salient was a pincer movement spread over 60 miles, and targeting 5 Soviet Army Groups. The main attack from the south was coming from the 4th Panzer army, the 167/168th infantry divisions, the 6th and 7th armored divisions, and the 3rd Panzer army³⁵. The Army group in the South had a main objective to get to open ground to allow for their tanks to have total supremacy on the battlefield and full potential with the attack.³⁶

Despite the meticulous planning, multiple issues immediately surfaced when the northern German sector started their advance. The Red Army used civilian labor to assist in building and strengthening fortifications and defensive structures around the bulge at Kursk, resulting in the German offensive instantly colliding with resistance. The town at Olkhovatka had a well defended ridge that overlooked the German advance as they attempted to take the town. These fortifications made the area a killing zone. Soviet tank commanders already understood the superiority of the German armor, to compensate for this some of the armor in the area was buried in the dirt, only exposing their turret. This resulted in German tank commanders creeping slowly

³⁵ Erhard Raus, *Panzer Operations: The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941-1945*, (Perseus Book Group, Cambridge MA, 2003), 198-199; See map for clarification.

³⁶ Erhard Raus, *Panzer Operations: The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus*, 199

towards the entrenched enemy to take carefully placed shots. Ultimately slowing down the German army, which only made about six miles of progress within the first day of fighting, when they planned to make upwards of 20 miles.³⁷

Since the German army delayed their attack, this allowed the Red Army to take defensive actions. The Soviet forces were able to coordinate high concentrated artillery zones, machine gun crossfires, minefields, and mortar zones. Over the course of two days, however, the Wehrmacht would suffer over 25,000 casualties, and lose 200 tanks and self-propelled guns.³⁸ This would force them to go on the defensive to try and stop the Soviet counterattack.³⁹ The operation in charge of stopping the German advance in the Orel sector was called “Operation Kutuzov”. This operation consisted of over a million Soviet soldiers defending the area, giving them a superiority of more than two to one. Both German and Soviet commanders called this “the most effective defense lines ever undertaken on the Eastern front.” Finally, a half million strong reserve called, *The Steppe-Front*, was deployed in the rear, ready to counter-attack where the German army might have pushed through. Despite the German army having superior weapons and machines, the Soviet army was able to crush them with sheer numbers that the German army could not fight against. No matter how well the German Army was able to fight, the Soviets put up more than two times the amount of men and machines. The Red Army could afford to lose massive amounts of men and machines, and still have a formidable fighting force to take on the German Army with.⁴⁰

³⁷ David M. Humpert, *Swan Songs of the Panzers*, (World War Two, Germany, February 2004), 9.

³⁸ David M. Humpert, *Swan Songs of the Panzers*, 9.

³⁹ Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. (Random House Co., New York City, 2005) 227-228

⁴⁰ Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. 228.

Meanwhile in the South, a part of the German Fourth Panzer army demolished two lines of Soviet defenses and was already ten miles ahead of their objective within the first 48 hours of fighting.⁴¹ However, this victory was short-lived when the Luftwaffe stopped providing support. Running low on aircraft, the bulk of the Luftwaffe present at Kursk was concentrated in the northern sector, where the highest amount of resistance was being reported. Therefore, the entire Fourth Panzers army in the Southern sector had to attack with minimal support from the Luftwaffe. Additionally, the Southern army groups were short-handed on supplies and machinery. As Erhard Raus, commander of the *Armeeabteilung Kampf South* sector put it: “Flak units had a dual mission of fire support and air defense... operation [Zitadelle] was repeatedly postponed. The reason given for this action was the fact that the new weapons (above all the Panther and Tiger Battalions) would so reinforce our offensive power... [but we] received no such weapons of units.”⁴² On top of the poorly equipped and supported German advance, halfway to Kursk was a third line of defense. This was where the XLVIII Panzer Corps ran into a high-density minefield, and an entire Soviet tank division which immobilized upwards of 36 panthers in one day.⁴³ Shortly following the advance into the minefield, an intense and highly concentrated artillery barrage crushed them, officially stopping the advance from the South. The next few days of fighting, the German army would make little to no advancements. The German army in the North would not push from their position outside of Olkhovatka, and would settle

⁴¹ Valery N. Zamulin, *Could Germany Have Won the Battle of Kursk if it had Started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?* (The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Routledge, 2014).

⁴² Quoted in: Erhard Raus, *Panzer Operations: The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941-1945*, (Perseus Book Group, Cambridge MA, 2003), 200, 211.

⁴³ Records are unclear during this stage of the battle, so it is impossible to tell exactly how many tanks were present from the Soviet side.

down to try and fight off the Soviet defenses and counter-attacks. Meanwhile, the army groups in the South would not be able to cross the Psel River.⁴⁴

On July 7th and 8th, the Soviet high command attempted to counterattack the German positions since they had now been bogged down in high density minefields, anti-tank ditches, and various other traps that had been put into place. Leader of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Nikolai Fyodorovich Vatutin, attempted to organize an attack on the 6th of July, but backed out of his plan at the last minute since he had little respect for and confidence in his commanding officers. His leadership was relatively new to the battlefield, and had never had extensive training with tanks. Vatutin's field command was not aware of the role that tanks could play, along with what they were capable of doing. Additionally, the officers did not fully understand different logistics that are needed when using tanks on the battlefield: terrain, weather, communications, fuel, and overall room to operate the large vehicles. Due to this poor leadership, Vatutin's decisions were often described as "jittery" and not well thought out. The attack that was initially planned for the 6th of July was called off, however he was forced to attempt to counter-attack on the 7th, and again on the 8th. The attempted spearhead of the German Southern Fourth Panzer army would fail miserably when Vatutin's field officers used tanks like soldiers, not accounting for speed, mobility, and gasoline. This planning would leave their flanks wide open, and many unnecessary casualties would take place throughout the southern flanks.⁴⁵ The Fourth Panzer army would soon be stopped outside the small town of Prokhorovka, when they ran into heavy Soviet resistance: this set the stage for the largest armored battle in world history.

⁴⁴ Valery N. Zamulin, *Could Germany Have Won the Battle of Kursk if it had Started in Late May or the Beginning of June 1943?* (The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Routledge, 2014).

⁴⁵ Valery N. Zamulin, *The Battle of Kursk, New Findings*, (The Journal of Slavic Military Studies, Routledge, 2012).

With the sudden changes in the Soviet high command, the Prokhorovka sector of the Kursk battlefield had been divided into several sectors, making it impossible to clearly command in an organized fashion. With so many sectors dividing this particular area of the battlefield, maps available did not show the position of the 1st Tank army. Therefore, an entire Guards Tank army and the 6th Guards army were heading directly for the Fourth Panzer army right outside the seemingly insignificant town of Prokhorovka.⁴⁶ As Panzer commander Hermann Hoth wrote in his autobiography: “What I saw left me speechless. From beyond the shallow rise in front of me appeared fifteen, then thirty, then forty tanks. Finally there were too many to count. The T-34s were rolling forward toward us at high speed, carrying mounted infantry.”⁴⁷ This monumental clash of armor was a result of German commander Hoth trying to avoid the 1st Royal Guard Tank army, hearing reports of heavy resistance from his XLVIII Panzer Corps outside Prokhorovka. Additionally, Hoth was honored with commanding a prestigious heavy tank unit composed of several Tiger 1s. However, with this honor comes numerous issues, such as building and crossing bridges. The bridge building equipment Hoth had at his disposal could not support the weight of the lumbering 63 ton Tiger.⁴⁸ This resulted in Hoth using established railroad bridges to cross rivers and gullies due to the inability for him to build his own, forcing him to follow a railroad bridge that ran through the town of Prokhorovka. Expecting this decision, the Red Army responded by sending in the Steppe Front, which consisted of 616 tanks, to guard the bridges and rail lines. This turn of events would later be called “the most fateful decision of the Eastern Front.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Valery N. Zamulin, *The Battle of Kursk, New Findings*.

⁴⁷ Lloyd Clark, *Kursk The Greatest Battle*, (Headline Review, Buckingham, May 24th, 2012), 47.

⁴⁸ Michael Spilling, *Wehrmacht Panzer Divisions, 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, United Kingdom, 2005), 105.

⁴⁹ Quoted in: David M. Humpert, *Swan Songs of the Panzers*, (World War Two, Germany, February 2004), 11.

This particular battlefield around the town of Prokhorovka would see some of the most ferocious and desperate fighting of the Second World War. T-34 tank commander Vasili Bryukhov recalls this in his interview with historian Lloyd Clark:

The distance between the tanks was below 100 meters—it was impossible to maneuver a tank, one could just jerk it back and forth a bit. It wasn't a battle; it was a slaughterhouse of tanks. We crawled back and forth and fired. Everything was burning. An indescribable stench hung in the air over the battlefield. Everything was enveloped in smoke, dust and fire, so it looked as if it was twilight... tanks were burning, trucks were burning.⁵⁰

Tanks were smashing into each other, trucks were burning, soldiers were screaming, the smoke was so thick from the fighting that the sun was blocked out making it even harder to see and maneuver. Adding to the chaos, Red Army armored units were instructed to ram German vehicles if they depleted ammo or lost too many crew members to operate. If they survived the collision, they would evacuate and continue the fighting on foot.

With the chaos and poor visibility taking its toll on the tankers in the area, intelligence operatives made their way to the Red Army headquarters and reported a large number of valuable Tigers on the battlefield. It was common amongst the Red Army to mistake the Panzer IV “special” as the Tiger. The “Special” is a slight variation of the traditional Panzer IV that incorporates the addition of metal side skirts. This resulted in Red Army tankers to utilize different tactics, such as closing the gap to get as close as possible to the superior Tigers. This was intended to close the distance between the tanks to out maneuver the superior tiger, however with so many armored units on the battlefield, it resulted in even more confusion. Furthermore, additional armored units were released to the area, once the T-34's cleared Hill 252.2, they

⁵⁰ Quoted in: Lloyd Clark, *Kursk The Greatest Battle*, (Headline Review, Buckingham, May 24th, 2012) 52-53.

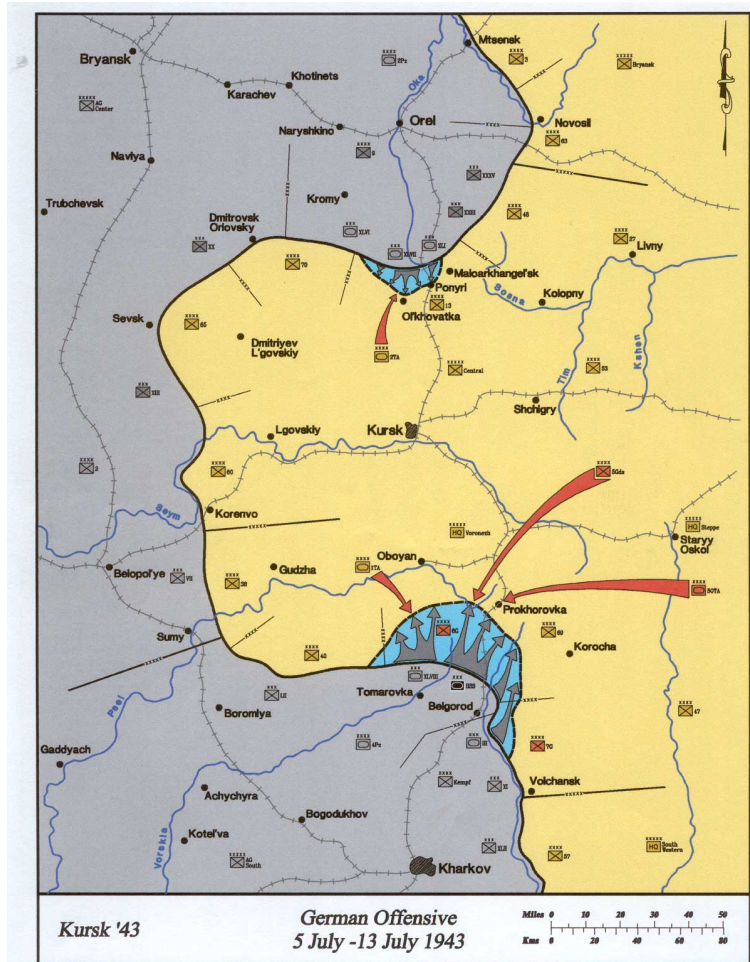
quickly came down the other side and right into their own fourteen-foot deep anti-tank ditch.⁵¹

Tanks went headlong into the ditch and combust into flames, adding to the lack of visibility and confusion. Other tank crews tried turning to avoid the ditch resulting in colliding into other

Soviet units due to the difficult steering mechanism within T34s.

Amongst the confusion, the Second SS Panzer Corps continued to sit back and knock out over 180 additional Soviet tanks. The fighting would continue, but with the Soviets losing around 334 tanks over the course of a few hours, the Red Army had to call off the attack. leaving the Germans victorious for the first night.⁵²

The Soviet counter attacks started on July 11th. There were two fronts to these attacks, the north code named “Operation Kutuzov” and south code named “Operation Rummyantsev”. Soviet commanders in charge understood that attacking too late would result in the German army cutting their losses, and either retreating, or reinforcing



The blue highlights the extent of the German advance during the Kursk offensive. Found at: <https://thewertzone.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-70th-anniversary-of-battle-of-kursk.html>

⁵¹ Hill 252.2 was seen as strategically important because it was a hilltop less than a mile away from the town of Prokhorovka, and the German army managed to capture it on July 11th.

⁵²Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 225.

and counter-attacking the Soviets.⁵³ The counter attack operations would be a monumental success due to exceptional timing, and overall German mechanical failure. The objective of “Operation Kutuzov” was to attack just north of the Orel salient. This area was a low-action area, and the German army was still trying to launch their assault against Kursk. Since the German army was focused on the attack, the area immediately north of Orel was terribly supplied. On paper, a 30-mile stretch with continuous troops and strong points was, in reality, several strong points connected by routine patrols.⁵⁴ The troops in this area consisted of 14 ragged infantry divisions who were exhausted or replacements with little experience, and only one panzer army. This was an ideal location for the Soviets to attack.

“Operation Rummyantsev” was very dependent on the outcome at the battle at Prokhorovka. This battle had the vast majority of the Soviet tankers occupied. After the fighting, on July 11th, the Soviet counter-attack would start. The Soviet Strategy around Kursk was for the Soviets to take the first hit and exhaust the Germans forces. Which is exactly what happened, once the German forces were halted, then the counter attack would commence. It was a two part strategy, that required trust in the Soviets ability to take the main frontal assault of the German advance. Starting at the closing of Prokhorovka, fresh Red Army troops would be poured into both the northern and southern sections of the Kursk battlefields. At approximately 3:30am on July 11th, the Soviets unleashed a terrifying and high concentrated artillery barrage that was “the heaviest and best coordinated [artillery barrage] in the history of the Eastern front.” Two and half-hours later, at approximately 6:00am, the Soviet attack began. An all out assault on several fronts throughout the German line caught the Wehrmacht completely off guard. However, in the

⁵³ Ibid, 226.

⁵⁴ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 227.

Northern sector German General Lothar Rendulic tied up the Soviet attack advance, and by the end of the first day the Red Army only advanced six miles: “Making [the Soviets] pay yard by yard for its gains.” Additionally, the Russian tankers in the north were equipped with KV2 tanks. A prewar design that was terribly obsolete; however had over three inches of armor that was impermeable to guns smaller than three inches. These tanks would help the advance, but since they moved slow, and had a large profile, they were easy targets for anti-tank gunners and German spotters. By the end of the first day of the advance, the Soviets lost over sixty tanks.⁵⁵

The next day would also go in the favor of the German Army. On July 11th the skies were covered with clouds and strong winds, making dive-bombing runs useless, due to low visibility. On the 12th, the weather cleared and the Luftwaffe would start sorties on known Soviet positions. However, with the German army losing the vast majority of their tankers in the south near Prokhorovka, the Luftwaffe was occupied helping the remainder of the German forces retreat. In the north, the few Luftwaffe remaining would do their best to help the Germans. These bombing runs would help the Germans by blocking roads, slowing down the Soviet advances, and separating the Red Army Air Corps from ground units they were protecting.⁵⁶

By July 13th, General Otto Moritz Model of the German army would officially call off the assault at Kursk, and would change to a defensive approach. This defensive change would call for all available German infantry and tankers to draw back from every front. During this retreat, poor weather conditions and even worse repair facilities would prove to be hindersome. Extremely dry and dusty roads made the air virtually unbreathable, and visibility at a minimum. Additionally, the dust would make communications difficult, and more than half of the tanks that

⁵⁵ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 228-230.

⁵⁶ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 230.

would be involved in this retreat would get lost and end up in a different location than they were assigned too.

Additionally, along with the poor visibility and communication, new tanks in the German army were plagued with mechanical issues. Several months previously, the German army waited to reinforce their troops and tankers with the new Panzer V “Panther”. However these new Panthers experienced transmission failures, optic issues, and radio failures making the retreat next to impossible to execute properly.⁵⁷ Typically, the German army had forward and rear recovery and breakdown units, however since so many tanks failed and were involved with the battle, most of the recovery units had been wiped out or dispersed across several divisions. Therefore, workers from tank factories in Germany would be called up to the front lines to be mechanics. On top of the lack of spare parts and welding equipment, the mechanics would work under battle conditions, often under small arms fire and highly stressful conditions, something they were not used to in the factories. With inexperienced mechanics working on broken vehicles, the retreat would slow down to nearly a halt. In one night, due to the lack of proper equipment, the 29th Tank corps was only able to repair four of its 55 knocked out tanks and assault guns.⁵⁸

Despite the Red Army gaining ground and taking victories, Stalin was not impressed with the performance at Kursk. With forces and supplies being poured into the sector for months, Stalin had expected some sort of major breakthrough. Additionally, reports from the front were misleading to Stalin, giving him a strong misconception on how the fighting was going. In one report from Soviet tankers, 33 Tiger tanks would be knocked out in a day; this would be more

⁵⁷ Ibid, 232.

⁵⁸ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 235-241.

than the entire Army group center could field by July 10th. These reports would be used to hide the struggle that the Soviet Union was going through. In all, with pressure coming from the very top of the Soviet command, General Zhukov ordered an energetic counterattack to keep the Germans off balance. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring would send in a report to Hitler by the end of July 12th. In his message, he would report, “The Situation is hopeless” and would request a tactical withdrawal. Hitler responded by sending in the 29th Panzer Grenadier to Kesselring, and would practically leave the Reich’s panzers reserves empty across all fronts. Germany was being stretched to its maximum breaking point.⁵⁹

All reports from Kursk reported that they were holding, but desperately needed reinforcements to hold off the Red Army. Unable to send these reinforcements, the remainder of any units available were sent north, to protect the Orel sector, but Army groups Center and South both had crumbling fronts. The reserves sent to the Orel sector would be used and relied on so heavily that any success against the Soviets would result in them being instantly withdrawn, and reassigned to other sectors to deal with the advancing Soviet forces.

By 8:00am on July 13th, the final Russian advance would commence. By this time, the last of the heavy panzers in the Prokhorovka sector would be either bogged down or disabled. Additionally, throughout the entire night of the 12th, Red Army air support and artillery was nonstop and spread throughout the entirety of German lines. In a desperate attempt to stop the Soviet advance, Hitler would issue a direct attack order to an SS group in the Orel sector; but their commander declared himself “unwilling to order full-scale attack without appropriate

⁵⁹ Ibid, 235-240.

preparation and air support,” a report that was unheard of from an SS unit. The men in this area were exhausted, under-supplied, and needed a break from 11 days of constant fighting.⁶⁰

By the end of the 13th, the northern sector managed to muster together sixty-two tanks, including around six Tigers. Meanwhile, near Prokhorovka the entire III panzer Corps was nowhere to be seen, and the 10th SS Tank Corps was stuck in the middle of a high density minefield, where they were receiving heavy artillery and small arms fire. During the morning of the 14th, the Soviets would utilize their Katyusha multiple rocket launchers to deliver a massive and devastating attack on the newly regrouped XLVIII Panzer Corps. The XLVIII Panzer Corps would attempt to counterattack, but would fail terribly. All that would remain in the north sector of the Kursk battlefields would be the 3rd Panzer Corps, a spent force composed of exhausted troops, and a small handful of operational panthers. By the end of the 14th day, both sides had taken extensive losses. The Soviets lost roughly 2,000 tanks and other fighting vehicles while defending against “Operation Citadel”. Even for the Soviet Union, losing roughly 5,000 tanks over the timespan of two weeks cannot be sustained. However, these losses were subsided with the aid of the Lend Lease Act. With new and unused American trucks, along with a handful of British and American armor present, the Red Army was able to send in other allied supplies. This would allow them to keep moving when the German army started to withdraw from the area. The Wehrmacht on the other hand lost roughly 3,000 tanks, and had little to no repair facilities or spare parts. The 14th day would be the last day the German army put up a formidable offensive, and they commenced a tactical withdrawal from that point on in the sector.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 245.

⁶¹ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 92-248.

The Battle of Kursk would solidify that the Soviet Army was capable of winning the war through sheer numbers and production rates, but were losing the battle in technological advancements. While the T-34 and KV series could be mass-produced, they were obsolete. They were terribly outgunned by the Tiger and Panther tanks, and their standard velocity 76mm main guns were proving to be ineffective against most German armored units unless at suicidal short ranges. However, at such short distances the protective armor of the KV1, KV2, and T-34 proved to be nearly useless against the Tiger and Panthers main high velocity armament.⁶² The Soviet Union would respond to the heavy losses from the battle, by developing numerous other armored units that would be used for the remainder of the war to deal with the more advanced German armor. Such examples of improved Soviet armor include: T34/85, IS1, IS2, SU85, SU152, and numerous others.

After analyzing the data, stories, and multiple different accounts that have been gathered, there are several main reasons for the direct downfall of the German army around “Operation Zitadelle”. The most interesting part of the multiple different issues that are presented in this debate is the fact that they are all interconnected in some way. The overarching theme as to why the German army failed was due to their lack of ability to mobilize their troops and forces quickly during the organization process in the few months leading up to the attack. In the time it took for the German army to mobilize, organize, and reinforce, the Soviet Union was able to field over twice the number of men and machines that Germany was able to. Going into the

⁶² Ibid, 94.

battle, the Germans faced manpower disadvantages as high as 5:1. The delay in the attack had turned the outcome of the battle in the hands of the Soviets before it even began.⁶³

The second cause of the German defeat was the intelligence operations that the Wehrmacht attempted to carry out in the vicinity. The Luftwaffe carried out several sorties a day, all in the Kursk salient, to try and get an accurate estimate of the amount of Soviet strength that was present in the area. Not only would the low flying reconnaissance aircraft illustrate where the attack was going to take place, but also the Soviets were also able to reinforce areas that Luftwaffe was focusing on. Interestingly, one of the most convincing pieces of evidence for the Soviet Union illustrating where the attack would commence was an abnormally large shipment of Schnapps to the Kursk salient. The German army resulted in utilizing alcohol as an antidepressant, and in some cases, a pain killer for wounded soldiers.⁶⁴ Also, alcohol was used extensively throughout the Eastern front for both sides as a way for soldiers to settle nerves before and after battles. Once the Soviet Union discovered this large shipment of peach Schnapps to the soldiers stationed outside Kursk, the Red Army was able to pinpoint Kursk. As Soviet journalist Vasily Grossman wrote in his notes: “The major German summer offensive, “Operation Zitadelle”, as it was called, probably achieved less surprise than any other offensive in the whole war.”⁶⁵

The third cause of the German defeat at Kursk was the size of the armies present at the battle. The German army was able to put together 625,271 combat troops, 2,699 armored vehicles, 9,467 artillery units of all types, and 1,372 aircraft. Soviet military muscle would dwarf

⁶³ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 337.

⁶⁴ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013), 242.

⁶⁵ Antony Beevor, *A Writer at War*. (Random House Co., New York City, 2005) 227-228.

these numbers. The Red Army was able to field 1,987,463 combat troops, 8,200 armored vehicles, 47,416 artillery units of all types, and 5,965 aircraft. Additionally, the Soviet high command had little respect for human life, and would send waves of troops and armor towards certain death to purely overwhelm the enemy.⁶⁶ While the Soviet Union was able to make up for these losses, this was not something Germany was able to replace with ease. Already struggling to keep their forces well fed and supplied, losing this many vehicles and men within such a short amount of time would prove to be devastating to the Wehrmacht. Furthermore, by 1942 the Soviet Union was able to produce 2000 tanks and 3000 aircraft per month for the Red Army. Numbers that Germany would never come close too. From 1936-1945 Germany was only able to produce 1,347 Tiger 1 tanks, and only 8,553 Panzer IVs.⁶⁷

Despite the crushing defeat at Kursk, this did not crush the morale of the men fighting for the German army. With the Soviet Union now threatening to invade their home territory, fighting would be fiercer than ever. Diehard SS units would fight to the last man, and the German army would pick up a new scorched earth policy to try and stop or slow down the Soviets at all costs. An overall fear from German men would add to the sheer ferocity of the fighting. When the Germans first invaded the Soviet Union during “Operation Barbarossa”, the atrocities committed against the Soviet, Ukraine, Belarusian, and other people would shake the world, and, with the Red Army advance back into Germany, it was time for the Soviets to take their vengeance against the Germans.

⁶⁶ Stephen G. Fritz, *Ostkrieg, Hitler's War of Extermination in the East*. (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2011), 343.

⁶⁷ Martin McCauley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union*. (Pearson Longman, London England, 1997), 478.

Finally, the Nazi collapse at Kursk would demolish the reputation of the fierce Juggernaut. The once mighty and seemingly unstoppable German army was defeated twice in less than a year, Stalingrad, and Kursk. Shortly following the Battle of Stalingrad, the reputation of the German war machine was still high due to their still massive amount of firepower and availability throughout the Eastern Front. After the Battle of Kursk, the Soviet Army would be at the gates of Berlin less than two years later.

In all, the Battle of Kursk would be the last of large-scale armored offensives from the German Army on the Eastern front. In the aftermath of the battle of Stalingrad, which most historians pinpoint as the most influential and important clash of the Eastern Front, the Battle of Kursk would break the mechanized portion of the Wehrmacht. Stalingrad, while undoubtedly crucial to the war, cannot be deemed as more influential or decisive as the Battle of Kursk. The amount of material and manpower that the German army lost in and around Kursk would be irreplaceable, and the sheer Soviet military muscle would prove to be too much for the German army to handle. Historian Howard Grier solidifies this claim in his 2014 article, *The Eastern Front in World War II*:

The Wehrmacht's last chance was the Kursk offensive in the summer of 1943, but the Red Army turned the tide for good at the colossal tank battle at Prokhorovka. Following Kursk, Hitler's refusal to permit retreats and to allow German generals to conduct a flexible defense, coupled with the Soviets' inexhaustible supply of men and materiel, doomed Germany. The Russians slowly but surely, although rather incompetently, pounded their way to Berlin.⁶⁸

Through Nazi Germany's sluggish movement through a series of decisions to try and reinforce their troops, they actually ended up sealing their fate when they tried taking on the

⁶⁸ Grier, Howard D. "The Eastern Front in World War II." *European History Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (January 2014): 103–12.

entirety of the Soviet forces located at the Kursk salient. The delay in the attack would allow the Soviet army to reinforce their positions, and at the same allow the Soviets to gather vital intelligence that would help them to defeat the German army located at the Kursk Salient. Shortly after the initial attack countless mechanical failures within the mechanized corps would arise and field mechanics would be needed at rates that were never seen before. Since many of the Wehrmacht mechanics and recovery teams were killed in action or being pulled to numerous fronts, the Wehrmacht would have to bring in workers from tank factories in Germany. These workers were inexperienced and not trained for military fieldwork, and also further hindered tank development and production. An overall lack for spare parts and welding materials also made field repairs slow and nearly impossible.

The overall sloppiness of the Wehrmacht with their reconnaissance missions, and radio silence leading up to the battle would allow the Soviet military to have easy access to dates, times and locations where the attack was preparing to be. This would allow the Red Army to be prepared for German attacks, and have the ability stockpile supplies and defensive fortifications around the Kursk salient. The amount of machines and manpower the Soviet Army put on the battlefield would horribly outnumber anything that the German army was able to produce. Despite the German army having superior weapons, the amount of material the Soviets were able to field against the Germans would prove to be too overwhelming. However, since the German materials and machines were of higher quality, the Soviets still took heavy losses. So many losses were reported at Kursk that even Stalin would be alarmed. However, unlike the German army, the Soviet Union was able to replace the units that were lost with relative ease. The number of machines and men lost for Germany would forever break the spine of the Wehrmacht

mechanized divisions. And due to the low production numbers, high cost and high material usage, the machines would not be replaced with ease when compared to the Soviet Union. During the attack, and following the attack, the panzer reserves of Germany would be at dangerously low levels, often leaving the bare minimal or no reserves at all. The Battle of Kursk would be the Second World War's turning point because it would destroy the Panzer power of Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER TWO: KURSK IN MEMORY AND MIND: MONUMENTATION, SPEECHES, MOVIES, AND POPULAR CULTURE

Historical memory can be tied back to multiple aspects of daily life for distinctive parts of society. Stalingrad and Kursk had colossal effects on the Russian population, however Kursk was woefully overshadowed by Stalingrad in terms of memorials and historical memory. Throughout this thesis, the argument is being made that the battle of Kursk is more influential on the Eastern front than the battle of Stalingrad. This claim can be verified when looking at the numbers of men and machines lost during Kursk and Stalingrad, along with the morale of the Wehrmacht soldiers. Despite the crushing defeat at Kursk, scholars and society alike have kept the sentiment that Stalingrad is more influential in helping win World War Two. As society progresses, more memorials, ceremonies, and writings have continued to proliferate this false narrative of Stalingrad winning out over Kursk.

For instance, the most recent event deals in the naming of Volgograd. In 1962, the city of Stalingrad had its name altered to Volgograd when former Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, “fought” against the “Stalin cult.”¹ Khrushchev wanted to dismantle the old dictator’s memory, so he demanded that any city name with links to Stalin were to be wiped away. Khrushchev spent over six months at Stalingrad viciously fighting the Nazi army during World War Two, and helped to squash them under the force of the Soviet military. Local

¹ Lloyd Clark, *Kursk*, 49.

authorities tried to explain to him that residents did not look upon the city's name as a memorial to Stalin, but saw it as a symbol of victory and the state's power. However Khrushchev could not be persuaded, and in 1962 Volgograd first appeared on the map.²

In 2013, the leader of the Volgograd Oblast Duma, Vladimir Efimov, allowed for a law to be passed in the city of Volgograd by “request of the veterans.”³ It stated that the city of Volgograd would change its name to the older name from the time of the Soviet Union— Stalingrad. Officially, the city will be called “The Hero City of Stalingrad” on several dates: February 2, the day the Soviet army defeated the Nazi troops in the Battle of Stalingrad; May 9, also known as Victory Day across Russia; June 22, a Day of “Remembrance and Sorrow,” dedicated to those who lost their lives at the Battle of Stalingrad; September 2, to remember the war itself; August 23, a day dedicated to the memory of the victims as a result of the massive bombardment of Stalingrad by the Luftwaffe; and finally on November 19, the day that marks the beginning of the defeat of the Wehrmacht at Stalingrad. Kursk has no such name change, as the name remains. Moreover, Kursk's memorial landscape is still as it was before the war, a quiet farming town in the middle of the Russian countryside.⁴



Figure Two: the Mamayev Kurgan. Found at <http://www.war-memorial.net/Mamayev-Kurgan---Soviet-World-War-II-Memorial--1.93>

² Oksana Zagrebnyeva, “Volgograd: what’s in a name?”, Open Democracy and Beyond Russia, April 12th, 2011. Accessed Oct. 5th, 2017.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/oksana-zagrebnyeva/volgograd-what%E2%80%99s-in-name>

³ Society News, In days of celebrations dedicated to military memorable dates, Volgograd will be called Stalingrad, Interfax Russia. January 31st, 2013. Accessed on Oct. 5th, 2017.

<http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/news.asp?id=377730&sec=1671>

⁴ Society News, In days of celebrations dedicated to military memorable dates, Volgograd will be called Stalingrad, Interfax Russia. January 31st, 2013. Oct. 12th, 2017.

<http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/news.asp?id=377730&sec=1671>

In the central most area of Stalingrad is a place called The Mamayev Kurgan that brandishes the “Motherland Calls” statue (figure 2).⁵ During the Battle of Stalingrad, this was the highest point of the city. As a result, whichever army occupied this territory would control the entire battlefield. It had been the scene of some of the most ferocious fighting, where bodies could be found stacked several men deep. Consequently, memorialization of the fighting that took place at this spot in Stalingrad, the statue “The Motherland Calls” was erected. Standing at an impressive 52 meters tall, with a nine meter stainless steel sword, and weighing in at eight thousand tons of this representation, “Mother Russia,” is visible from most places throughout the city. When it was first built, it was the largest free standing sculpture in the world.⁶ Additionally, to pay their respects, it is a tradition that newly-weds visit these historic places after the marriage ceremony to lay flowers at the monuments. Newspaper journalist Oksana Zagrebnyeva discussed the statue in an article, and writes about the years following World War Two, which was interpreted as a way to respect relatives who were lost in the fighting. As the generations passed, visitors are honoring the tradition.⁷

Another memorial in Stalingrad is the Pavlov House. During the battle, Sergeant Yakov Pavlov and two other men were sent to secure the building. Due to its location, the house served as a great observation post to overlook a wide stretch of Volga River. During this stage during the battle of Stalingrad, this was crucial since the Soviet Union needed to send fresh troops across the Volga River in order to stay in the city. However, when Pavlov arrived he found wounded soldiers and civilians. The Sergeant realized that they could be overrun at any moment, so he

⁵ This literally means Mamai’s burial ground, due to the amount of soldiers that died in the fighting.

⁶ Anton Denisenko, “Mamayev Kurgan - Soviet World War II Memorial”, The Polynational War Memorial. Accessed Oct. 20th, 2017. <http://www.war-memorial.net/Mamayev-Kurgan---Soviet-World-War-II-Memorial--1.93>

⁷ Oksana Zagrebnyeva, “Volgograd: what’s in a name?”, Open Democracy and Beyond Russia, April 12th, 2011. Accessed Oct. 5th, 2017. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/oksana-zagrebnyeva/volgograd-what%E2%80%99s-in-name>

asked for reinforcements but only received around 24 men.⁸ Those 24 men were credited with taking the house, and held it from September 27th to November 25th when they were relieved by a Soviet counter attack.⁹ It was rumored that these 24 men took more German lives in the duration of their battle than the Germans lost during the entire campaign to take over France. While it is unclear how many men were in the building, and also debatable what the casualty rate for Germany truly was, it is still a powerful symbol left standing for the world to see. This landmark cost the lives of hundreds of Germans, and grew to symbolize the struggle of the Soviet Union at the time of the battle won by a handful of ill-equipped Soviets that dug in for a stubborn and brawling fight against a superior and well-organized Nazi. The remainders of the house are still standing, with the phrase “In this building fused together heroic feats of warfare and of labor. We will defend / rebuild you, dear Stalingrad!”¹⁰

The flour mill at Volgograd is one of the final buildings that reminds the public of the fighting that took place in Stalingrad (Figure 4). The mill did not play a significant role in the battle, however it was left alone to



Figure Four, the Flour Mill in Volgograd. Found at: http://www.stalingradtours.com/en/gallery/inside_of_stalingrad_ruined_flour_mill_2017

serve as a remembrance for “the day the fighting stopped.” The building was left as a memorial to elucidate, if not remind the public of the horrors of war at Stalingrad.¹¹

⁸ Zinaida Andreeva, “The Pavlov House”. May 8th, 2013. Accessed: Oct. 5th, 2017. <https://on.rt.com/22hqq3>

⁹ It is hard to justify this claim, but this is what the Red Army claimed after the battle took place.

¹⁰ Zinaida Andreeva, “The Pavlov House”, May 8th, 2013. <https://on.rt.com/22hqq3>

¹¹ Mikhail Shuvarikov, “The Flour Mill at Stalingrad”, Stalingrad Heritage. <http://www.stalingradheritage.com/flour-mill/4587503156>

The monuments at Kursk are dramatically different and pale in comparison to Stalingrad. It is worth mentioning when one simply refers to a search engine with the keyword “Kursk Monument” the results are more about the K-141 Oscar II class submarine that suffered a terrible accident while at sea, known as *Kursk*.¹² This may be interpreted as the memorial landscape in this region has been neglected. It becomes more crystallized when one takes a look at the number of memorials at Kursk, or lack thereof; they are fewer and are not nearly as extravagant as at Volgograd. Indeed, it took as long as 1995, nearly 50 years after the battle, for a monument to be erected in remembrance of this battle. In 1995, the memorial was revealed at the battle site of Prokhorovka, where the largest clash of men and vehicles took place. Furthermore, the monuments are not as impressive as the one surrounding the battlefield of Stalingrad.

The centerpiece of the Kursk memorial is “the monument to Soviet tank crews at



Prokhorovka field after the tank Battle of Kursk.” The “tank statue” features a Tiger being crushed by two T-34 (figure 5). A powerful image that

Figure 5 found at:

http://stalingradtours.com/en/tours/articul/kursk_tank_battlefield_tour

depicts what tankers had

to do in order to try and stay one step ahead of the enemy. If a Soviet tanker lost their crew, depleted ammunition, or if their tank was on the verge of malfunctioning where it could not be used anymore, they were ordered to ram their tanks into the Nazi tanks, with the hopes of

¹² The Oscar II class Submarine “Kursk” is indeed named after the battle of Kursk.

knocking out one more Nazi armored unit. This memorial indeed accurately depicts the chaos that ensued during the battle.¹³

Near to the tank memorial is the victory bell. A bell tower that holds a golden bell at the top, and stands roughly 50 meters tall; additionally, there is a church and a mass grave surrounding the bell. These structures are all in memory of the lives that were taken during the Battle of Kursk.¹⁴

Surrounding the area are various vehicles from the Red Army. However, many of these vehicles never saw combat in Kursk. There is representation of a Katyusha rocket launching truck, and several SU series tank destroyers which would have been present at Kursk. However, many of the tanks that were at the battlefield are JS-II and JS-III, which were produced later and after the battle. (figure 6).¹⁵

There are also several armored personnel carriers and small scout vehicles that were produced years after World War Two. The tanks that the Russian government chose to put on display at the Kursk monument, where the largest tank battle the world has ever seen, and where several hundred thousand men lost their lives, are not even vehicles that are from World War Two or the Battle of Kursk itself.¹⁶ The last part of the Kursk memorial has an element of tourism—visitors can still see the exposed trenches left from the battle, and also be offered to take Red Army vehicle rides. After paying a fee, riders traverse the landscape (although these were not even used at the Battle of Kursk, but rather the Cold War) and then see the few trenches that were left untouched and exposed for the onlooker. With all things considered, from the

¹³ Adam Jones, “The Memorial at Prokhorovka”, European Sites of Remembrance. 2008.

<https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/denkmaeler/view/1505/Memorial-to-the-Battle-of-Kursk>

¹⁴ Adam Jones, “The Memorial at Prokhorovka”, European Sites of Remembrance. 2008. Accessed Sept. 5th, 2017.

<https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/denkmaeler/view/1505/Memorial-to-the-Battle-of-Kursk>

¹⁵ Steven Zaloga, *Armored Champions: The Top Tanks of World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2015) 98-101.

¹⁶ Adam Jones, “The Memorial at Prokhorovka”, European Sites of Remembrance. 2008.

dearth in Kursk monumentation, coupled with some inaccuracies in interpretation at this site, it is a travesty if not an indictment on the public history perception of the Battle of Kursk.¹⁷

One of the most notable aspects of Russian historical memory are the yearly parades that the military demonstrates in Red Square. Russia is not afraid to show off the military strength or history of the Soviet Union. When examining the military parades and remembrance parades there are a few that have distinguished themselves over others. Every year, on May 9th, the Victory Day Parade is held. This is to celebrate and remember the Great Patriotic War.¹⁸ Additionally, Russia has several parts of this parade dedicated to veterans who can walk or ride through the parade, along with the display of old military equipment that saw service in the war.¹⁹

On the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad, the entire military parade was moved from Red Square to Volgograd. There was a special speech and memorial dedicated to the fighting that took place. As these parades continue to be displayed year after year, less and less veterans from “The Great Patriotic War” are alive to honor. During these parades, veterans from the Battle of Stalingrad are remembered in a special section of the parades, meanwhile there is no special area for the Kursk veterans to walk.²⁰

When researching Kursk, the 50th, 60th, and 70th anniversary of the battle went by with little to no remembrance in parades, let alone memorials that were dedicated. Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a speech during the 60th anniversary, but as the 70th anniversary and unveiling of the new museum at Prokhorovka came and went with little fanfare, Putin and the

¹⁷ This was discovered while exploring the Kursk Battlefield and the memorial site on “GoogleMaps”.

¹⁸ The Great Patriotic War is how the Russians and Soviets reference what Americans or British people call World War Two.

¹⁹ Oksana Zagrebnyeva, “Volgograd: what’s in a name?”, Open Democracy and Beyond Russia, April 12th, 2011. Accessed Oct. 5th, 2017.

²⁰ Jennifer Wade, “Russia Remembers Stalingrad 70 Years on”, thejournal.ie, accessed on August 20th, 2017. <http://www.thejournal.ie/russia-remembers-stalingrad-70-years-on-780317-Feb2013/>

general public of Russia expressed little interest. There were no speeches delivered, and no parades assembled to celebrate the victory at the battle of Kursk. Oftentimes, the veterans who fought at Kursk get assimilated with other veterans from every other battle during World War Two; indeed, there is no honoring in any way like the veterans from Stalingrad receive.

Russian and America choose to remember the events at Kursk and Stalingrad through different means of popular culture as well. Over the years, many movies have been made about the fighting that took place in Stalingrad. There have been three different versions of the movie *Stalingrad* in the past 20 years. Additionally, Jude Law's 2001 movie *Enemy at the Gates* is an American movie depicting the story of "The Hero of Stalingrad," Sniper Vasily Zaytsev. These are just a few examples given; many other movies have been produced about Stalingrad both from Russian film teams, and American film teams dating as early as 1943, a few months after the battle was over.²¹ Even in the United States, where American civilians were not directly affected by the battle, American film directors choose to make numerous movies about the Battle of Stalingrad, and nothing about the Battle of Kursk. One movie was discovered to be in the process of being made, and it is not about the Battle of Kursk, but the submarine disaster from the year 2000. This helps demonstrate that the Russian population believe that the submarine disaster is more important to remember than the battle itself. There has not been one movie about the Battle of Kursk nor the surrounding area.

Another way that popular culture in America keeps the Battle of Stalingrad alive is through numerous video games. Games like: *Call of Duty: United Offensive*, *Red Orchestra*, and *Company of Heroes 2* all have specific levels and challenges that surround the Battle of Stalingrad or Kursk. These video games carry memory differently than the movies (Figure 7).

²¹ Graffy, Julian. 2001. "Stand until death." *Sight & Sound* 11, no. 4: 28-30. Academic Search Ultimate, EBSCOhost (accessed September 26, 2017).

The video games have different challenges affiliated with both battles of Kursk and Stalingrad. Even more so, they have somewhat accurate depictions of them. When in Stalingrad, the player is depicted as a young Soviet man, usually based on a non-fictional character, such as the famous and aforementioned sniper, Vasily Zaytsev. When the player reaches a level on Kursk, the player is with a tank crew, trying to take various



Figure seven: Call of Duty: United Offensive. Found at <http://www.ign.com/games/call-of-duty-united-offensive>

objectives like train stations or fighting off German counter attacks. In *Call of Duty: United Offensive* the player of the game is a young tanker at Kursk, and the player's commanding officer gives a small speech that the Battle of Prokhorovka is going to be the battle to break the back of the German war machine.²²

Speeches collected from the Kremlin website are the most solidifying factor in helping prove the point that Kursk was the ultimate turning point during World War Two. The current President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, has given many speeches during his time in office since 2000, and has made numerous powerful claims regarding both battles at Kursk and Stalingrad. In 2015 Vladimir Putin delivered a speech to remember the fighting and sacrifices that were made during World War Two. Putin described the horrors of the war, and credits several battles for the victory of the war:

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the enemy's attacks... And all major decisive battles of World War II, in terms of military power and equipment involved, had been waged there.... These parade ranks include grandsons and great-grandsons

²² Interview and quotes pulled by author. January, 2016. Arcadia University.

of the war generation. The Victory Day is our common holiday. The Great Patriotic War was in fact the battle for the future of the entire humanity... They worked till exhaustion, at the limit of human capacity. They fought even unto death. They proved the example of honour and true patriotism. We pay tribute to all those who fought to the bitter for every street, every house and every frontier of our Motherland. We bow to those who perished in severe battles near Moscow and Stalingrad, at the Kursk Bulge and on the Dnieper.²³

President Putin did an excellent job giving credit where it was needed. He did not make the claim that Stalingrad was the turning point; he made effort to remember the fighting that took place in other locations such as Kursk and even the Dnieper. Additionally, Putin thanked all the other nations of the world that helped the Soviet Union defeat the Nazi war machine: “We are grateful to the peoples of Great Britain, France and the United States of America for their contribution to the victory. We are thankful to the anti-fascists of various countries who selflessly fought the enemy as guerrillas and members of the underground resistance, including in Germany itself.”²⁴ The historical memory of the Second World War is changing with Putin. During the time of the Cold War the Soviet Union never credited the United States with helping bring down the Nazi war machine. In the same speech that Putin gave in 2015, he recognized the fighting that took place in other important and often forgotten battles. Putin also gave credit to the victory of World War Two to other “Anti-Fascist” countries like Great Britain, the United States, and German partisans who helped to bring down the Nazi Reich. Historical memory has begun to transform over time.

Putin gave speeches around Russia to remember the 60th and 70th anniversary of multiple battles that took place. He spoke in two main places: Volgograd and Kursk. While he did not give a speech at Kursk during the 70th anniversary, he made an appearance and delivered a

²³ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. May 9th, 2015, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 49438. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49438>

²⁴ Vladimir Putin. May 9th, 2015, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia.

powerful message during the 60th anniversary of Kursk. Putin agreed with the message that this thesis is trying to prove:

Comrades and friends... Kursk marks a turning point in the Great Patriotic War. Here in the summer of 1943, the Soviet army not only won a battle. It did not let the enemy take revenge for its major defeats outside Moscow and Stalingrad. As a result of the Battle of Kursk, the course of the Great Patriotic War and the Second World War changed for good... In the battle of Kursk, a very rare military strategy of premeditated defence was used. This strategy exhausted and wore out the strike groups of Hitler's troops. And the move of our army to an organised, prepared, counter-offensive, which had been planned in advance, completed their final defeat. After the Battle of Kursk, right up until the end of the war, the Germans could never again move to a serious offensive... The Nazis were not saved by their much-vaunted new technology, and they equipped their army excellently. They had fearsome machines – ‘tigers’ and ‘panthers’, but these did not help... From here – from the Bryansk, Orlov, Kursk, Belgorod, Kharkov and Sumy lands – the enemy began to crawl back into his lair... Almost two years of heavy war lay ahead, but our army was already advancing, towards Berlin.²⁵

This excerpt from Putin's speech is crucial because it demonstrates that Kursk is more important than Stalingrad through his admissions. Putin claimed the Nazi army was no longer able fight, and Putin stated from Kursk forward the Nazi war machine was not able to stop the Soviets. To even further solidify the point that Kursk should gain the same, if not even more prominence than Stalingrad, Putin continues on: “It was with the Battle of Kursk that the liberation of all of Europe began. It liberated towns and villages, opened the gates of concentration camps, and brought life, freedom and hope.”²⁶ Putin just bolstered the claim that the Battle of Kursk marked the end of the Nazi Reich.

The Battle of Stalingrad is pivotal, and is without a doubt, one of the more important battles that took place in the Eastern Front. However, after Stalingrad, the Nazis had the ability to counter attack. They were not done fighting the war, and still had the ability to sway its course.

²⁵ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. August 19th, 2003, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 22088. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22088>

²⁶ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. August 19th, 2003, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 22088. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22088>

However, it was the blood-bath at Kursk, the residual of months of fighting at Stalingrad, that Germany had time to coordinate an attack; but after the German army is broken at Kursk, with the Nazi's losing more than one third of their entire fighting force on the Eastern front, that it was the beginning of the end.²⁷

Tank commander Erhard Raus, who was present at the battle claimed the losses were even worse: "During the Citadel Offensive, these divisions had all seen heavy fighting, which continued for the better part of a month, and in which they had taken heavy losses. Combat strengths had declined 40-50 percent... and in the case of some infantry regiments conditions were even worse."²⁸ Following the engagement at Kursk, the German Army will have a steady and tactical retreat across all of Russia, and far into Europe eventually leading to the downfall of the Nazi Reich in 1945. 60 years after the Battle of Kursk, Putin claims: "You have saved it [Russia], defended it and brought it to its feet. And this is a great example for all the generations to come. It is an example that gives us strength and confidence in ourselves in the most difficult times... I thank you for the enormous work in preserving the glorious traditions of our history, for putting your hearts, and all your lives, into our future. I thank you for bringing up the younger generation... Thank you for everything."²⁹

Even with Putin making these astounding claims in the early 2000s that seem to solidify that Kursk should be remembered as the turning point of the war, Putin delivered a speech during the 70th anniversary of the victory at Stalingrad that counters his claims about the Battle of Kursk. Putin goes as far as to mention historical memory, and how Stalingrad should be remembered:

²⁷ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013) 279.

²⁸ Erhard Raus, "Panzer Operations The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941–1945" (New York, New York, Cape Press, 2005) 213.

²⁹ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. August 19th, 2003, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 22088. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22088>

In Stalingrad we [Russia] won not only the greatest military victory, but also a great moral one. It was a victory of patriotism and love for our country, for our Fatherland; a victory over evil, hatred and aggression. Stalingrad will undoubtedly remain a symbol of the Russian people's invincibility and unity. And as long as we continue to respect ourselves, our history, and to respect and love our country, language, culture, and historical memory, then Russia will always remain invincible.³⁰

Putin was undoubtedly “playing to his crowd,” drawing up a narrative that his audience wanted to hear. But it seems clear that after deep research that has been conducted, and after no scholar has ever explored this paradigm—this author has not found about the statues, traditions, medals, or memorials that are in place at Kursk to that of Stalingrad. Additionally, this study demonstrates, with a comparative methodology of the two battles. Ultimately, these findings conclude that Stalingrad is more memorialized for three simple facts: people physically see it more, the Soviet Union really utilized the victory at Stalingrad for propaganda purposes, and the pointless loss of life at Kursk; so appalling that the author believes leaders of the Soviet Union and modern Russia do not want to shed light on this.

Since Volgograd is currently one of the largest cities in Russia with over one million people populating the city, tourists visit more. It was not uncommon for the Soviet Union to dedicate statues to various people and events during the “Great Patriotic War.” During the author’s time in Russia, numerous statues and memorials were observed and photographed that were dedicated to many events and people that made it possible for the Soviet’s to claim victory during the Great Patriotic War. Stalingrad, which happens to be the first victory and literal turning point, is one of the reason why the author concludes that it has multiple statues.³¹ The Soviet Union would want to illustrate to the world that there was a pivotal victory there, and

³⁰ Vladimir Putin to the people of Russia. February 2nd, 2013, The Kremlin, Moscow Russia. Document number 17416. Online publication and translation. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/17416>

³¹ Jennifer Wade, “Russia Remembers Stalingrad 70 Years on”, [thejournal.ie](http://www.thejournal.ie/russia-remembers-stalingrad-70-years-on-780317-Feb2013/), accessed on August 20th, 2017. <http://www.thejournal.ie/russia-remembers-stalingrad-70-years-on-780317-Feb2013/>

there was a terrible fight to achieve their victory. This was extensively used for propaganda reasons to ensure the public that the Red Army was achieving victory, and to solidify the people's trust in the government and military to win this war against the German army.

As for Kursk, it is a small railroad hub on the western side of Russia, close to Ukraine and Eastern Europe. It is primarily a farming town that does not get much attention from tourists. Due to this lack of attention from the public, this thesis concludes that is why it took so long for monuments and museums to show up in Kursk, and why the Soviet Union or Russia never bothered to put up a memorial or museum until much later. Interestingly enough, the K-141 Oscar II Class submarine named Kursk had a memorial constructed in its memory quicker than the battle itself. The memorials for the battle took nearly 70 years for them to be made and unveiled to the public. For the Submarine, it took less than nine years.³²

The victory of Stalingrad was the first triumph that the Red Army achieved, as a result the high command utilized the battle to its maximum potential. For many months the Soviet army was being consistently pushed back until the Wehrmacht reached major cities like Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Moscow. Throughout, soldiers were forced to fight, and had no choice but to overrun German positions to ensure that the city did not fall in the hands of the Wehrmacht. After the battle, numerous articles were published, posters were made, and people would be awarded medals to help boost the morale of civilians and members of the Red Army. One example of such a poster is figure 8. This poster reads: “If you are



Figure eight, Poster found at: <http://www.allworldwars.com/Russian%20WWII%20Propaganda%20Posters.html>

³² Martin Bayer, “‘Kursk’ Memorial Finally Unveiled”, (Wartist.org, August 9th, 2009) accessed December 7th, 2017. <https://www.wartist.org/blog/?p=670&lang=en>.

surrounded, fight till the last drop of your blood.” This poster depicts a rather heroic and brave soldier who is willing to die for his country by using his Pistolet-Pulemyot Shpagina 41 submachine gun as a club to try and take down as many German soldiers as possible, despite being surrounded and outnumbered.

Another example of a poster that depicts the victory after Stalingrad is seen in figure nine. It pictures a Lion that is wearing a Swastika, but it has a M91/30 Mosin Nagant bayonet through it, which was the standard infantry rifle of the Soviet soldier. The rifle was cheap and



Figure nine, Poster found at:
<http://www.allworldwars.com/Russian%20WWII%20Propaganda%20Posters.html>

easy to build, and it was proven in combat, as a result millions of these rifles were issued and saw service during the war. Furthermore, Stalin issued a proclamation in the start of the war that claimed all soldiers must have the bayonet of their rifle attached to the gun when attacking. This poster illustrates that the Russian soldier was able to defeat the “German Beast” using his standard issue rifle. Also, the caption beneath the smoldering tanks says "Kill the German Beast! Destroy Hitler's Army."³³

A major thread in this thesis punctuates that Stalingrad has won the historical memory battle over Kursk is due to the sheer casualty numbers that occurred at the latter—undoubtedly better left forgotten. However, over time, primary sources could not keep this silenced. Erhard Raus published his memories in his book *Panzer Operations*. In Erhard Raus' book, he discusses the astounding loss of life that the Soviets suffered during the entire

³³ Larisa Epatko, “These Soviet propaganda posters once evoked heroism, pride and anxiety”, (PBS.org, July 11th, 2017) Accessed on August 29th, 2017.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/these-soviet-propaganda-posters-meant-to-evoke-heroism-pride>

Battle of Kursk. He argues how the Red Army would send hundreds of men to charge at machine gun emplacements, just for them to be cut down over and over again. Bodies would stack up on one another, and some men would try crawling over fallen comrades: “For hours, the devastating defensive fire of German machine guns thwarted every attempt to break over the edge of the ravine.... Many brave Soviet Soldiers still held his rifle in the fire position, while his head-pierced by bullets-rested on his weapon.”³⁴ Raus alleges the only way that the Soviets would take the machine gun emplacement would be due the machine gunners running out of ammunition, or running out of fresh barrels to exchange with the nearly melted old ones.³⁵ This is just one example of many. that Raus discusses in his book.

Due to this tremendous loss of life, this thesis concludes the Russian government does not want to bring too much light on this topic. General Raus’ testimony in his field memoir discusses that “The Wehrmacht’s numerical inferiority and our loss of combat efficiency due to extreme casualties, Hitler perhaps doubted its capability of conducting a flexible, active defense... Despite the fact that the Red Army invariably suffered heavier casualties than those they inflicted on our troops, or the reality that the fighting qualities of the individual Russian soldier were vastly inferior to those of their opponents, we could never overcome the critical problem of the Soviet superiority in men and equipment...”³⁶ Even after the war, Soviet generals and officers looked back on the battle, and questioned why there was so much pointless loss of life. Due to this, the author closes this with the belief that Russia intentionally does not memorialize this battle due to the immense loss of life that took place.

³⁴ Erhard Raus, “Panzer Operations The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941–1945” (New York, New York, Cape Press, 2005) 234.

³⁵ Erhard Raus, “Panzer Operations”, 234.

³⁶ Erhard Raus, “Panzer Operations The Eastern Front Memoir of General Raus, 1941–1945” (New York, New York, Cape Press, 2005) 275.

In all, there are many different ways that society chooses to remember the battles of Kursk and Stalingrad. In the research gathered, it is more than conceivable to conclude that Kursk was more influential in the Eastern Front during World War Two compared to Stalingrad. Before Stalingrad, the war was moving from east to west, and after the battle the war was moving from west to east. And after the Battle of Stalingrad, the Nazi army still had the ability to counter attack and turn the war into the favor of the Nazi army. Kursk was that high-water mark for the Nazi's. Their failure after the Battle of Kursk saw the Nazi army lose one third of the forces in their Eastern Front.³⁷ This claim is solidified in Vladimir Putin's speech during the 60th anniversary of the fighting at Kursk, yet another comes from the adversary. Joseph Goebbels diary also highlighted the Battle of Kursk, dated July 26th, 1943:

The German Wehrmacht had not been able to make a decisive breakthrough [at the Kursk bulge]. The Soviets were again in the positions in which they were surprised by the German offensive. The German Wehrmacht no longer had the power, as in previous summers, to compel the Soviets to yield sizable territory. His [Stalin's] claim that we lost rather than gained ground near Kursk is also in keeping with the facts. This shows that we must make every effort on the Eastern Front to hold our own even halfway against the advancing Soviets. I suppose we can't possibly change the situation...³⁸

Just days after the fighting started for the German offensive, Goebbels had doubts about the victory of the battle and even victory as a whole. He made some serious claims by concurring with Stalin in regards to the German loss of territory, as well as the Wehrmacht's ability to counter attack and the prevention of the Soviets from pushing through the rest of Russia, Eastern European states, and eventually to Berlin. When one looks at the statistics, renowned World War Two historian Lloyd Clark lays out the numbers. The Battle of Kursk would engulf more than

³⁷ Dennis E. Showalter, *Armor and Blood*, (Random House, New York, 2013) 279.

³⁸ Louis P. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries: 1942-1943*. (Doubleday & Company Incorporated, Garden City, New York, 1948) 405.

70% of Nazi Germany's military force in the Eastern front.³⁹ By the time the fighting at the Kursk battlefield was complete, the Germans would lose more than 200,000 soldiers; around 800 tanks and assault guns, and 159 aircraft.⁴⁰ These claims solidify and prove the claim that this thesis is trying to make, and that Kursk needs to be remembered for what it really was: The turning point of the war.

Until recently, many scholars and political figures have not looked at Kursk with such a view. The Soviet Union spent minimal attention to detail surrounding the battlefield of Kursk. Making memorials from vehicles that did not take part in the fighting at Kursk, and constructing two buildings and one mass grave. Meanwhile, the City of Volgograd has its name changed numerous times throughout the year to "Hero City of Stalingrad" has a colossal statue of "The Motherland Calls" guarding it, two buildings, and had the Victory Day parade moved to the city during the 70th anniversary of the war. All to remember the fighting that took place in Stalingrad.

This thesis has come to the conclusion that the reason why society tends to look at Stalingrad with such a different outlook is due to three things. First, it was a battle that took place in the early stages of the war, and it included as many civilians as it did military forces. The loss of civilian life is going to be enormous during this battle. Most scholars agree that the casualties surrounding the Soviet forces at Stalingrad are around 1.1 million. That is including missing, wounded, and killed. A separate statistic done by Antony Beevor in his 2009 book *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* claims that there are an additional 955 civilian casualties due to bombings done by the Luftwaffe in the days before the battle started.⁴¹

³⁹ Lloyd Clark, *Kursk The Greatest Battle*, (Headline Review, Buckingham, May 24th, 2012) 49.

⁴⁰ David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Strategy during the Second Period of the War* (November 1942-December 1943), (Society for Military History, Jan, 1996) 139-140.

⁴¹ Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* (London England, Viking Press, Penguin Books, 2009) 110.

Another reason why the Battle of Stalingrad may be more remembered than Kursk has to do with the fact that it was the first victory against the Nazi army for the Soviets in World War Two. It was also the only victory, at that time, that the Soviet Union had to publish to boost the morale of the soldiers and the civilians who were used to hearing about the Red Army being constantly pushed from Poland to Stalingrad, and the gates of the Caucasus oil fields. This was the only light of hope that had come from the Red Army and the government of the Soviet Union thus far during the war. Due to this, the legend of Stalingrad is going to stay with society, due to the large amount of propaganda that is going to come from it.

Finally, in the readings of memoirs and diaries that have been conducted, there seems to be a common theme of an unnecessary loss of life and battlefield brutality being present at the fighting at Kursk. The Soviet Union was never very cautious when it came to the lives of the men in their army, and the Battle of Kursk is not going to be much different. It is for this meaningless loss of life and lack of sympathy for these men that this thesis concludes why Stalingrad will be remembered as a more influential battle over Kursk. There are going to be instances at Kursk where Soviet soldiers are going to be viciously and pointlessly cut down by machine gun fire, from German and Soviet weapons, but it will not be on the same level as one will discover was present at Kursk. The following chapter will explore how mother nature has saved relics and artifacts from the Second World War, ensuring the legacy and stories will never be forgotten.

CHAPTER THREE:
MOTHER NATURE SUSTAINS: ENVIRONMENTAL MUSEUMS IN THE SWAMPS AND
BOGS OF RUSSIA THAT PRESERVE HISTORY

Nature has a way of restoring the world around it. After the carnage and destruction of the First World War, nature restored the land by growing grass, and returning the landscape to a beautiful and livable state. However, what if the environment had a way to preserve history, like a natural museum for society to discover decades later? Russia's various swamps and bogs provide just that, a way for nature to preserve the artifacts that have found their way into their grasp. As the Second World War falls further into posterity, more efforts are being made to preserve the history. Chapter three had movies, interviews with veterans, monuments, museums, guest speakers, posters and propaganda speeches. This epilogue is a conclusion as much as an introduction, opening the eyes to fresh research that this scholar will plan on continuing in the future—utilizing cultural resource management (CRM) as a way to study the past through the preservation of artifacts that the environment had enveloped—only to be resurfaced by humans. The global community is coming together in order to try and preserve what is left. Most notably, the more widespread use of CRM has been profoundly helpful in identifying various relics from the Second World War, and not only figuring out their significance in the war, but also how they can be retrieved, restored, and put on display for onlookers to enjoy for years to come.

The Russian countryside has a unique advantage over other theaters of the war. Regions like North Africa, the Pacific, western Europe and the China-Burma-India theaters all have substantial weather conditions including exposure to the elements, high humidity, and multiple seasons. However, Russian bogs and marshlands are unlike any other natural ecosystem in the world. Recently, Russian bogs have been frequented by treasure hunters, history enthusiasts, and construction crews. Artifacts from the Second World War are being discovered as people dig, use metal detectors, or drag magnets through the bogs to bring up anything that may have been otherwise left undiscovered. Due to their naturally low levels of oxygen, these sites have become natural museums for future generations to look to preserve history.

A peat bog is a type of wetland whose soft, spongy ground is composed largely of living and decaying Sphagnum moss. Decayed, compacted moss is known as peat, which can be harvested to use for fuel or as a soil additive. Peat bogs are found throughout the world where cool temperatures and adequate rainfall prevail. Bogs begin in a low area where groundwater is close to or above the surface. This location also has to contain a wide mix of water-tolerant plants, including grass-like plants and trees. Because water in such low spots is stagnant, oxygen is not replenished quickly, and normal decomposition of dead plants is slowed somewhat by the low oxygen content. Most plants cannot survive on the low mineral content of rainwater, but the several dozen species of mosses of the genus Sphagnum can, and these come to dominate the bog flora. Sphagnum removes positive ions from the water such as calcium and sodium, leaving positive hydrogen ions, which are acidic. As a result, the pH of bog water may be as low as 3.5, which allows for artifacts that are metal based to be very well preserved.¹

¹ *Encyclopedia.com*, s.v. "Peat Bogs," accessed March 16th, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/peat-bogs>.

Much like a bog, a marsh, which is a type of wetland ecosystem, is characterized by poorly drained mineral soils and by plant life dominated by grasses. Marshes are common at the mouths of rivers where flow is slow. Since sediment is settling from the river water, the land that is built will be poorly drained and will often be underwater. A well-known example is the Pripet Marshes and the surrounding fens that historically have served as the natural boundary between Poland and Russia. These marshes, much like bogs, will also have little oxygen beneath the surface, resulting in artifacts being preserved despite being submerged for decades.²

The Russian and Eastern European boglands, marshes, or peat marshes, are ideal locations for this sort of phenomenon. The naturally low levels of oxygen present in these marshes, in combination with the stagnant water allow for steel and organic matter to be preserved. The average peat bog will have very low levels of oxygen due to thousands of years of organic matter gathering. These conditions in conjunction with stagnant water prohibits oxygen from penetrating the surface. Furthermore, oxygen that is somehow able to penetrate the surface is very quickly used up due to the immense amount of organic material present in the area, returning oxygen levels to low levels that are usually present. When this occurs over hundreds and possibly thousands of years, several feet of peat can form.³ Since peat bogs are not dense, and allow for heavier objects to sink, once an object with any weight lands in the bog, it will sink and become submerged. During World War Two, items varying from K98s, to artillery shells, helmets, hand grenades, or even entire tanks fell into these peat bogs, and are not only hidden from view and protected from the ensuing battle, but naturally preserved. Since these artifacts are so well preserved, relic hunters and history enthusiasts have begun to search these locations to try and pull up artifacts from the past.

² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Marsh," accessed March 16th, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/marsh>.

³ Susan Priest, edited by Ronald B. Davis, *Peatlands*, (University of Maine, February 2012), accessed March 18th, 2021. <https://umaine.edu/oronobogwalk/wp-content/uploads/sites/393/2015/03/What-is-a-Peatland.pdf>

On September 14th, 2000 Russian historians hauled possibly one of the largest, and most intact artifacts from a bog in the Estonian countryside (what battle): a German captured T-34. The T-34 was the armored backbone of Soviet forces during the Great Patriotic War. The T34s simple and versatile design was able to be refined continuously to meet the changing requirements of the Eastern front. The slanted armor of the T34 made it fairly capable of defeating German anti-tank support, and it earned a spot within the German armored divisions as well. During the last years of the Second World War, German armored units started to utilize Russian equipment on a more frequent basis, even creating a name for the T34 for official use: the Panzerkampfwagen T-34(r).⁴

This specific vehicle-artifact, housed no corpses and was in an upright position in the bottom of the lake with spring/summer green camouflage, was presumed to be driven into the



Figure One: A German captured T34 being pulled from a peat bog. Notice the clear German capture markings on the hull and turret. Found at:
https://www.warhistoryonline.com/whotube-2/2000-t-34-pulled-bog_watch.html

⁴ David Porter, *Soviet Tank Units 1939-45*, (Amber Books, London, 2009), 85.

lake by the German armored units to prevent it from falling back into the hands of the Soviets. It settled in roughly 12 feet of water, where over the last 60 years, an additional six more feet of



Figure Two: the shells from the T34. Found at: <http://diving.ee/articles/art035.html>

peat and silt protected and masked it in this bog. Once the tank was discovered by local fishermen, for a two-week period, volunteers from a local diving club washed the silt from the tank (Figure One). Then the tank was towed to the shore utilizing a construction tractor, and the live ammunition, all 116

pieces, were removed with the brass still being shiny (Figure Two). Shortly after, the T34 was taken to a local museum in Gorodenko, where historians and mechanics were able to clean out the tank, and incredibly start the engine with no replacement parts. This vehicle was so well preserved, 61 years after it was abandoned in a bog, the engine still worked after a thorough cleaning. The tank is currently on display for people to see in the town of Gorodenko (Figure three).⁵



Figure three: the T34 cleaned, painted and on display. Found at: <https://rense.com/general75/germ2.htm>

⁵ Joris Nieuwint, “WW2-Era T-34 Tank With German Markings Pulled From Bog After 60 years (Watch),” War History Online, Aug 25, 2016, accessed March 2nd, 2021, https://www.warhistoryonline.com/whotube-2/2000-t-34-pulled-bog_watch.html.

Another tank, only 150 miles away from the German captured T34, was recovered just five years later in the spring of 2005. Russian historians pulled a Sturmgeschütz III (StuG III) assault gun from a Russian bog just outside of the Poskov area. The Stug was Germany's most produced armoured fighting vehicle during World War II, and was by far the most successful with Stug crews accumulating over 20,000 confirmed tank kills by 1944. The Stug was built on the chassis of the proven Panzer III tank, just replacing the turret with a fixed and more powerful gun. This allowed for a low profile, making it a very versatile fighting vehicle. Initially designed as mobile fire support for infantry, it was continually modified by the German Army and employed as a tank destroyer.⁶

The Stug III that was pulled out of the bog still had plenty of its winter camouflage intact, and it is widely believed that Stug Brigade 226 as they reported "2 gun's missing" reported with their retreat from the Poskov area (figure four).⁷ Additionally, it was presumed that the vehicle

broke through the ice on the side of a small lake during a retreat, since the vehicle was found upside down. It is



also presumed

Figure four: the Stug III after being pulled from the swamp and given a quick wash. Found at: <https://www.relicsww2.net/stug-40-has-been-found-with-a-dead-crew-exclusive-upd-aug-2020/>

⁶ Jack Beckett, "Battlefield Relics: The Stug III recovered in Russia (image heavy)," War History Online, May 20, 2015, accessed March 2nd, 2021,

<https://www.warhistoryonline.com/military-vehicle-news/battlefield-relics-the-stug-iii-recovered-in-russia.html>

⁷ Jack Beckett, "Battlefield Relics: The Stug III recovered in Russia (image heavy)," War History Online, May 20, 2015, accessed March 2nd, 2021,

<https://www.warhistoryonline.com/military-vehicle-news/battlefield-relics-the-stug-iii-recovered-in-russia.html>

the crew was killed after being struck with several armor piercing shells, explaining why it was stuck on the frozen lake. After excavating and removing the vehicle, the following items were found: Remains of the four crew members, dog tags, ammunition for the 75mm main gun, one MP-40 submachine gun, ammunition for the MP-40, self-liquidator, three field bags, and Personal belongings of the crew. After being pulled from the lake with a tractor, a quick wash revealed that it had its winter camo still intact, and was in overall good condition (figure five). Despite its immaculate condition and numerous possible ways to be easily restored and put on display, the Stug III was later dismantled and sold for parts to other existing Stugs around the world.⁸ While it is disheartening that this StuG was not put on display somewhere in Russia or Poland, it is encouraging that the parts from this vehicle were distributed around the world to finish other builds. Due to the naturally preserving environment of the bogs and swamps in the area, the StuG parts were in good enough condition to be saved.



Figure five: 75mm shells and remains of the crew. Found at:
<https://www.relicsw2.net/stug-40-has-been-found-with-a-dead-crew-exclusive-upd-aug-2020/>

⁸ Apolon, “StuG III 40 has been found with a dead crew! Exclusive! UPD Aug. 2020,” Relics WW2, Aug 25, 2020, accessed March 2nd, 2021, <https://www.relicsw2.net/stug-40-has-been-found-with-a-dead-crew-exclusive-upd-aug-2020/>

Another sullen aspect of searching the bogs are bodies that are discovered within. Boris Lazarev was a 22 year old Soviet Pilot who was shot down in February, 1943 by the Luftwaffe.

His body and Lend-Lease Hawker Hurricane were recovered in a swamp in 1998 in a mummified condition. While the Hawker Hurricane was mangled from impact, further examination of the body found that he was still in a brace for a crash landing with his arms still clutching his parachute brace



Figure six: The body of Boris Lazarev after being pulled from the bog. Found at: <https://albumwar2.com/the-body-of-the-soviet-pilot-boris-lazarev-55-years-after-his-death/>

probably in an attempt to bail out. He was unable to eject in time and crashed in the swamp where his plane and body would be preserved for 55 years. Due to the remarkable preservative elements of the swamps, it was easy to identify the body (Figure six).⁹

Records from the time period helped researches indicate roughly where Lazarev had been



shot down, his paperwork, medals, TT33, clothing, money, and many other personal artifacts were in immaculate condition and easily legible (Figure seven and eight).

The bodies within these swamps are so well preserved, they are fairly easy to

Figure seven: personal belongings of Boris Lazarev after 55 years in a bog. Found at: <https://www.argunners.com/the-last-flight-of-boris-lazarev/>

⁹ Pierre Kosmidis, "The Last Flight of Boris Lazarev," ARGunners.com, March, 2020, accessed March 2nd, 2021, <https://www.argunners.com/the-last-flight-of-boris-lazarev/>.

was buried with proper honors in the memorial military cemetery in the village of Chupa in the Louhi region of Karelia. As of 2019, the family of this downed pilot has not been found and alerted of the discovery of the body, however it is possible for these types of discoveries to lead to closure for families. Furthermore, the Hurricane that was found is being used in restoring another plane of the same class found elsewhere in Russia. There are plans to put it on exhibition at the Central Military History Museum on Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow.¹⁰



Figure eight: Boris Lazarev's identification papers after 55 years in a bog. Found at: <https://www.argunners.com/the-last-flight-of-boris-lazarev/>

Another very similar event happened just ten years later near the small Russian town of Sinjavino, Russia. Senior Lieutenant Philipp Costenko's aircraft was shot down during the Ivanovo campaign on February 23, 1943, as his squad escorted bombers. Over 60 years later, in

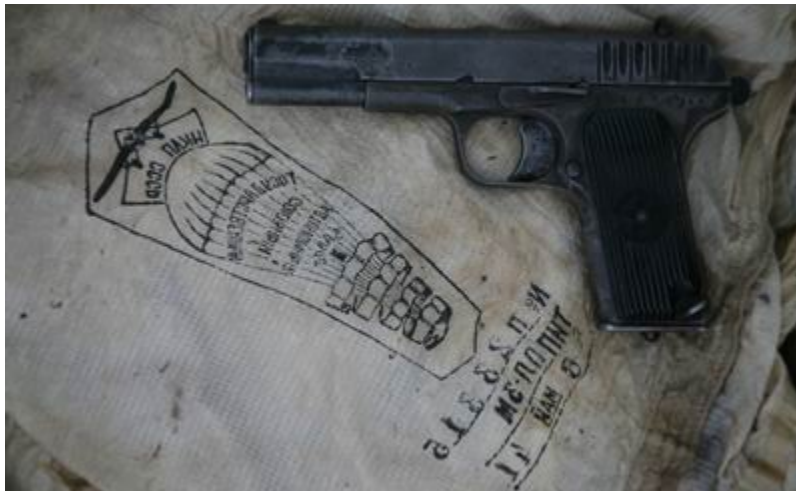


Figure nine: The handgun and parachute of Philipp Costenko. Found at: <https://www.warrelics.eu/forum/armour-weapons-aircraft-recovery/p-40-kitty-hawk-recovered-near-sinjavino-russia-513/>

2007, his lend-lease Kittyhawk P-40 aircraft was found with his body in over seven feet of bog mud and sediment. A Russian priest was brought on sight to bless the body, and Senior Lieutenant Costenko was

presumably buried with military honors in Russia. While Costenko's body was severely mangled and not as well preserved as

¹⁰ "The body of the Soviet pilot Boris Lazarev 55 years after his death," World War Two Photos in High Resolution, accessed March 2nd, 2021, <https://albumwar2.com/the-body-of-the-soviet-pilot-boris-lazarev-55-years-after-his-death/>.

Lazarev, the artifacts surrounding him were in immaculate condition due to the natural preserving conditions of the Russian bogs (figure nine and ten).¹¹

In Poland, along the Vistula River, another tank was towed from a marshland. The Panzer



Figure ten: Philipp Costenko's paperwork. Found at: <https://www.warrelics.eu/forum/armour-weapons-aircraft-recovery/p-40-kitty-hawk-recovered-near-sinjavino-russia-513/>

V “Panther” was not in excellent condition, the turret had been blown apart by a high caliber anti-tank projectile, meanwhile the body of the tank was rusted after sitting on the floor of a lake for over 40 years.

Nevertheless, tank collector Jacques M. Littlefield from California purchased the tank from a German collector, and spent

numerous years with a team of historians, metal workers and technicians to fully restore the Panther. The Panther can currently be seen fully restored, operational and on display in the American Heritage Museum in Massachusetts under their *Clash of Iron* exhibition; which surprisingly discusses the battle of Kursk (Figure eleven, twelve and thirteen).¹²

¹¹ Dimas, “P-40 Kitty Hawk, recovered near Sinjavino Russia,” War Relics Form, December 12, 2007, accessed March 2nd, 2021, <https://www.warrelics.eu/forum/armour-weapons-aircraft-recovery/p-40-kitty-hawk-recovered-near-sinjavino-russia-513/>.

¹² “Excavation Pz.Kpfw V Panther from Czarna Nida River, Bieleckie Mlyny, Poland -1990-XI-16” (Panzer Archeology, August 20th, 2020), Accessed February 12th, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq_s4dKZg5o&fbclid=IwAR1giazXtCxGHcHEHarzJ0LqTi8twKjgB5Ca_hcfqpFytlhIX4y4C2YevCw.



Figure eleven: the Panther pulled from the pond.

Found at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq_s4dKZg5o



Figure twelve: close up of the turret.

Found at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq_s4dKZg5o



Figure thirteen: the Panther fully restored and on display at the American Heritage Museum, Stow, MA.

Found at:

<https://www.collingsfoundation.org/jml/panther/>

Another example of the Russian Marsh lands preserving history is the KV1 that was raised from the Neva River in 2003. The KV1 sank in January of 1943, while returning for



Figure Fourteen: KV1 being raised from the Neva River in 2007 Source found at: https://www.reddit.com/r/DestroyedTanks/comments/g4l0vz/kv1_being_raised_from_the_neva_river_st/

repairs after defending the City of Leningrad when it broke through the ice of the frozen river. When it was discovered, there were no remains of a crew present, however there was an attempt to search in the

surrounding area to potentially find any crew members. It, along with several other tanks discovered in the surrounding area can be seen at the museum of “Breakthrough” near modern day St.Petersburg. This KV1 was beautifully restored, and while it does not run, is in amazing shape for future generations of people to see (figure fourteen and fifteen).¹³



Figure Fifteen: The KV1 fully restored and on display at the Museum Break of the Siege of Leningrad. Source found at: <https://www.dreamstime.com/editorial-photography-heavy-soviet-kv-tank-building-museum-break-siege-leningrad-may-afternoon-region-russia-image92740837>

While the bogs and marshlands of the Russian countryside can make for phenomenal natural museums to

preserve artifacts for the academic community; sometimes they pose a threat to these relic hunters. When watching the videos of the recovery crews hauling out tanks from the bogs, the

¹³ Steve Merc, “Soviet KV-1 Recovered from River Bed,” War Relics Form, November 11, 2011, accessed March 2nd, 2021, <https://www.globeatwar.com/blog-entry/soviet-kv-1-recovered-river-bed>.

first matter of business once removed from the mud and grime is to drain them of water, and check their ordnance. Considering most vehicles crashed into bogs, the crews did not have time to remove the munitions and oil that is still on board. While the low level of oxygen preserves steel, it also prohibits munitions from decomposing or from being penetrated by any water. As the vehicles are being drained of water and mud, the process of removing munitions takes place. A single T34 is capable of carrying 76 rounds for its main 76.2mm gun, plus hundreds of additional rounds for the DT machine guns and side arms carried by the crew. The T34 pulled out of the Gorodenko lake still had 116 pieces of live ammunition within it. The still shining brass and copper can be clearly seen from most vehicles recovered from the bogs, and since they have been sitting for 60 or more years, they are extremely unstable. Requiring either a bomb disposal squad, or some sort of military ordnance disposal team to be on sight to ensure the munitions are handled, taken away safely, and disposed of properly. Further dangers include the engine and general mechanics of the vehicles that have been discovered. A single T34 has a fuel capacity of 120 US gallons, which can be catastrophic for the surrounding environment if the fuel tank is ruptured. The same concept applies to any airplane, truck, tank, or any motor vehicle that was ditched or crashed into a bog or marshland.

Furthermore, due to the delicate and time consuming nature of the creation of peat bogs the overall act of removing larger objects, like a nearly functioning 29 ton T34, can be devastating to the surrounding environment. Peat bogs form over hundreds of years, and take decades to repair themselves when they have been tampered with. Bringing in their work crews, machines, cameras, trucks and cars that are needed to safely recover a tank from a peatbog causes a tremendous amount of irreversible damage that takes decades to heal. While the

removal of weapons, vehicles and other relics can be useful to the historic community, this must be planned out to be completed with the least amount of manpower needed.

Novice relic hunters that find themselves in the Russian bog or marshlands have also



Figure Sixteen. Source found at: Instagram @relics_ww2

other online platforms of relic hunters, who remained faceless and nameless, testing out old hand grenades or even throwing live Molotov cocktails (figure sixteen and seventeen). One such video on Instagram, shows someone digging massive glass bottles out of the ground, full of strange liquids. When thrown and the glass breaks, the concoction inside the bottles reacts with

illustrated the dangers of discovering such intact artifacts. Using metal detectors in bogs can reveal some incredible artifacts, from bayonets, to helmets, tools, uniforms, vehicles, and dog tags, it seems like a fun way to pass the time in a relatively safe way. However, what most relic hunters do not show are the more dangerous ordnance discovered. Hand grenades, landmines, Molotov cocktails, machine guns, artillery shells and numerous other dangerous artifacts can very quickly put someone's life in danger, or even result in their death. Videos

have appeared on YouTube, Instagram, and



Figure Seventeen. Source found at: Instagram @relics_ww2

oxygen and bursts into flames.¹⁴ The Soviets were innovative with their Molotov cocktails to try and deprive tank engines of oxygen, one such example is a compound that reacts to oxygen in order to make a volatile and flammable substance for easier detonation. If these bottles, dropped during the Second World War fall into a bog, nothing is going to break the seals, meaning they remain active. Resulting in these terribly dangerous weapons laying just inches under the ground, still ready to combust when exposed to oxygen. Other videos have emerged of relic hunters shooting machine guns and other firearms they pulled out of bogs. Since the low levels of oxygen preserve everything, the steel and springs are often left intact, and well enough for them to be shot. Unsurprisingly, this is extremely dangerous and illegal.

Utilizing the unique and naturally preserving landscape that Russia offers, and through appropriate means of cultural resources management, the tireless efforts of relic hunters, historians, history enthusiasts, and anyone interested in the matter of preserving or finding history can be saved and preserved. The bogs and swamps located throughout Poland, Russia, and Eastern Europe are stellar places for the world to find previously unknown artifacts in immaculate condition. These artifacts can then be used and saved for future generations to admire once they are restored and put on display. Furthermore, bodies that are found in these swamps also have the chance of being identified and buried. Allowing for descendants of these soldiers who had been killed in action to be alerted of the fate of their loved ones. Not only does the environment in these areas preserve history, but also allows for it to be saved, restored, and put on display.

¹⁴ www.instagram.com, Relics_ww2. Accessed: July 18th, 2020.

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