



Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General

Erich von Manstein , B.H. Liddell Hart (Foreword by) , Martin Blumenson (Introduction)

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Originally published in Germany in 1955, and in England and the United States in 1958, this classic memoir of WWII by a man who was an acknowledged military genius and probably Germany's top WWII general, is now made available again. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein described his book as a personal narrative of a soldier, discussing only those matters that had direct bearing on events in the military field. The essential thing, as he wrote, is to "know how the main personalities thought and reacted to events." This is what he tells us in this book. His account is detailed, yet dispassionate and objective. "Nothing is certain in war, when all is said and done," But in Manstein's record, at least, we can see clearly what forces were in action. In retrospect, perhaps his book takes on an even greater significance.

Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General Details

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From Reader Review *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General* for online ebook

Olethros says

-Fuente subjetiva pero fuente al fin y al cabo.-

Género. Historia.

Lo que nos cuenta. Trabajo que mezcla historia y autobiografía profesional del conocido, importante, destacado y laureado Mariscal de Campo, centrado en su intervención en el devenir militar de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y que nos llevará de Polonia a la URSS (la parte del león de esta obra) pasando por Francia, hasta el 3 de abril de 1944 en el que cede el mando de su Grupo de Ejércitos.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Armin says

59/100

Wenn es um Rhetorik aus der *Liga der deutsche Soldat war tüchtig und tapfer, aber die oberste Führung war schlecht* geht, verdient das Buch natürlich fünf Sterne. In der zweiten Hälfte kommt so etwa alle zehn Seiten eine Klage, dass Hitler die dringend erforderlichen und früh angeforderten Truppen erst viel zu spät und oft nur kleckerlesweise geliefert hätte. Auch die Unfähigkeit des GröFaz einmal erobertes Terrain fahren zu lassen, um nicht alles zu verlieren, wird im selben Rhythmus thematisiert. Das militärische Geschehen bleibt aber selten unplastisch und wirkt oft wie vorgelesene Statistiken oder Zahlenspielereien, die aufzeigen, warum man nicht gewinnen konnte. Zumal ja dieser komplett Unfähige, der meinte, die Willenskraft würde es schon richten, permanent jede vernünftige Planung durchkreuzte. Manstein mag zwar ein militärisches Genie gewesen sein, die literarische Vermittlung seiner Fähigkeiten und der Auswirkungen seiner taktischen Meisterleistungen gelingt nicht wirklich. Aber zum Zeitpunkt seiner Veröffentlichung haben die *Verlorenen Siege* sicher jedem alten Landser ein gutes Gefühl und ein noch besseres Gewissen ermöglicht.

Charlie says

Well written. However, it goes into a lot of detail on who, why, what and where on too many events. Great for those that like this sort of thing. Good for historians and students of WW11. I should say REALLY GOOD for the historians and students. I am not one of them.

The first part of the book deals with Poland and of course the start of WW11 as we know it. That part was very, very interesting. But I got bogged down on the rest of the book.

I'll give it a 4 because of ALL the info that probably won't be found in other books.

Pieter says

If one has not witnessed WW II himself, reading about this era makes it look like a ‘mechanical script’. It ought to be like that. But Field Marshal Erich von Manstein leads the reader into the war rooms during the period 1939-1944, explaining how certain decisions were made and why. Manstein was the man who came up with the idea of the attack through the Ardennes and Sedan to conquer France. He was the hero of the Crimea forcing the Germans up to the Caucasus. Hitler’s clinging to Stalingrad (the city bearing his main enemy’s name) made him lose the Sixth Army. Any Luftwaffe support was too little, too late. The required armies to break the encirclement never reached on time. Hitler’s procrastination prevented the German army from a successful counterattack at Kursk and forced the army into retreat. The scope of the book lasts until the removal of Manstein as chief of the Army Group acting in the South of the Soviet Union.

It was very enlightening to have a commander’s opinion on many important military decisions and actions during WW II. Of course, one needs to take into account that Hitler’s ambitions may have been wider or different than his military commanders due to other aims: political versus economical objectives, the struggle for resources between different armies. A German defeat in the East was never the way it was meant to be if only...

Jan Peczkis says

The 1939 German Conquest of Poland, and the West’s Unexpected Betrayal. The German Enemy Showed More Respect For Poland Than Did the French and British Allies. For Shame

Rather than repeating other reviewers, I focus mostly on previously-unmentioned content. Owing to the volume of information available, I largely limit my review to the 1939 war.

GERMAN IMPERIALIST PLANS AGAINST EUROPE

In his discussion of pre-WWII events, von Manstein presents himself as a typical German chauvinist when he makes revisionist complaints about Poland having received German territories “to which neither historical justice nor the right of self-determination gave her any claim.” (p. 24). He conveniently forgets that these “German” territories had gotten that way as a result of centuries of German conquests and Germanization policies, the latter of which had become especially intense in only the last several decades before WWII. If only recent events count, then Manstein’s “self-determination” complaints ring hollow in the light of the fact that, after the 1918-era plebiscites, certain border areas whose inhabitants had majority-voted to be part of the resurrected Polish state nevertheless had remained part of Germany.

TRYING TO WHITEWASH HITLER

Several reviewers have mentioned Manstein’s denials of German WWII atrocities. Indeed! Manstein would have us believe that Hitler’s annihilate-Poles order had been misrepresented at Nuremberg, and that the Fuhrer had only been referring to the annihilation of the Polish Army. (p. 29). What a ridiculous apologetic! Hitler had plainly ordered his forces to: “Kill without mercy every man, woman, and child of Polish extraction.” So, unless the Fuehrer had been imbued with the notion that the Polish Army was full of women

and children, he had to be referring to the deliberate genocide of Polish civilians.

THE BZURA COUNTEROFFENSIVE

Unlike the case in later battles, Hitler didn't interfere in the actual military policies of the 1939 war. (p. 273). The German tanks moved so rapidly that the German infantry had difficulty keeping up with them. (p. 54). The Polish Bzura counteroffensive, though later dwarfed by Soviet battles, was the largest of its kind up to that time. (p. 58).

THE GERMAN ENEMY PAYS TRIBUTE TO POLISH GALLANTRY

Summarizing the 1939 campaign, the Field Marshall commented: "The enemy's losses in blood were undoubtedly very high indeed, for he had fought with great gallantry and had shown a grim determination to hold out in even the most hopeless situations." (p. 61).

SHOULD THE POLISH FORCES HAVE TRIED TO DEFEND A SMALLER TERRITORY?

In common with many analysts, Manstein contended that the rapidity of Poland's military defeat stemmed primarily from her strategy of "defending everything"—a mistake later made by Hitler himself. (p. 40, 43, 495, 522). Poland should have defended only her core territories, thereby shrinking the defensive perimeter from 1,125 miles to 375 miles. (p. 42). (However, Manstein doesn't mention the fact that, among other things, Polish leaders feared that the abandoning of Poland's peripheral regions without a fight would be interpreted by the Allies as a lack of seriousness in Polish military efforts. This could give the British and French an excuse for not fulfilling their treaty obligations to Poland [which they did not fulfill anyway]).

POLAND IS OPENLY BETRAYED BY HER PRESUMED ALLIES IN 1939: GENERAL MANSTEIN PLAINLY SAYS SO

Over and over again, Manstein repeated how gravely he and other German planners took the British and French military guarantees to Poland. (p. 23, 34-35, 46, 58). Contrary to revisionists who assert that France was unprepared for action, Manstein cited a study by von Tippelskirch, which noted how France had raised 108 divisions in only three weeks in the autumn of 1939, including many that consisted of well-armed, well-trained reservists. He concluded: "There can be no doubt, then, that the French Army far outnumbered Germany's forces in the west from the very first day." (p. 35). Even as the last organized Polish resistance was collapsing, German troops were hurriedly being moved westward out of fear of a belated French-British offensive, which, to the German leaders' admitted surprise, had not materialized long before then. (p. 58).

POLAND'S 1939 FATE WAS FAR FROM HOPELESS

Pointedly, Manstein believed that, had the French intervened, and had the Polish forces been defending the smaller perimeter, Poland actually stood a chance: "The bravery with which the Polish troops fought right up to the end would have been an adequate guarantee of their ability to hold on until the Allies reached the Rhine and forced the German command seriously to consider calling off the campaign in Poland." (p. 62).

THE GERMAN ENEMY SHOWS MORE RESPECT FOR POLAND THAN THE BRITISH OR FRENCH. FOR SHAME!

The German enemy, as embodied by Manstein, showed more respect for Poland than did the Allies when he asked: "Who could have guessed that the Western Powers would let Poland down so ignominiously after

giving her a guarantee?" (p. 81). Excellent question!

THE OUN-UPA AND THE GERMANS

Fast forward to 1944, and Manstein's stay near Lwow (Lviv), shortly before he was recalled. He characterized the local guerilla forces as follows: "The Soviet variety fought against the Germans and terrorized the local population. The Ukrainians fought the Soviet partisans, but usually released any Germans after first disarming them. Finally, there were bands of Polish partisans who fought both Germans and Ukrainians." (p. 532). Obviously, the OUN-UPA, when not collaborating with the Germans, had less enmity against them than against the Soviets (and Poles).

'Aussie Rick' says

Having first read this book in 1988 I find that it is still one of the best military memoirs of WW2. It stands next to 'Panzer Leader' by Heinz Guderian, 'Neither Fear Nor Hope' by General F. Von Senger Und Etterlin and 'The Rommel Papers'. The book is very easy to read and is valuable to any one who wishes to understand 'the other side of the hill'. His accounts of the various actions he was involved in during the War are excellent and his views on Hitler and German strategy make this a great book.

Kris says

This was a really great book and I can't believe I haven't read this up until now. I can tell anyone that is interested in this area of history that this is a must read for WW II Eastern front military history buffs. Unlike the last set of books I just read written by David Glantz this book is very approachable for the person who has an interest in this area of history and wants a taste of what it was like from the viewpoint of a German general. This would be like reading a biography of a Confederate general shortly after the Civil War, to give some perspective, but not just any general. Erich von Manstein was the Robert E Lee/ Stonewall Jackson of the German army from a tactics and strategy stand point all rolled into one. His writing style and the information he conveys is very succinct and easy to follow regardless the subject matter he is discussing. He covers not only the battles he was involved but also the interactions with Hitler and he even has some personal matters he touches on including the death of his son. This is the type of biography I have always enjoyed reading as you get the persons view point and his thoughts totally unvarnished. Now in this particular case I know that Manstein glosses over the atrocities committed by German soldiers and he makes no mention of the Holocaust as did all the biographies written by any of the German generals. Knowing the context of the writing it still was a fascinating read about the largest conflict in human history told by a man who was in the middle of events both on the battlefield and behind the lines. Don't read this if you are looking for a factual based history of the war which deals with objective truth about the events and the people but do read it if you want a first hand account of battles and events Erich von Manstein saw and influenced during WWII.

Highly recommended

Steven says

If Rommel was Germany's greatest fighting general from WWII, von Manstein was her greatest strategic general. A tremendous book, especially for its insights into dealing personally with Hitler (not easy!)

Jay says

Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was probably the best operational commander the Germans produced during World War II, and possibly the best of any side; certainly he was up there with Slim, Patton, and Chuikov. This is his memoir, written in the 1950s. It is a purely military memoir, and very rarely goes into any personal or political topics.

The book begins with a very brief description of Manstein's service prior to the 1930s, having reached the rank of Captain by the end of World War I. He then describes his service largely as a staff officer during Germany's resurgence and the rebuilding of the armed forces under Hitler. He was Gerd von Rundstedt's chief of staff during the 1939 Polish campaign. After that, he put considerable energy into devising a plan for the invasion of France--and just as much energy getting someone at the highest echelons of the Wehrmacht to notice his plan. Almost belatedly, his plan was adopted more or less intact, and Manstein got to help execute it as a corps commander. His contribution to the campaign in France earned him a promotion to general. This episode is covered in Part I (Poland--three chapters) and Part II (France--four chapters).

The remainder of the book (almost 300 pages) is devoted to Manstein's operations on the Eastern Front. A few months before the invasion of Russia, he was given command of LVI Panzer Korps in the north, part of the drive to quickly seize Leningrad. He and his troops performed very well, but as they were nearing their goal, Manstein was suddenly transferred to the Ukraine to take over 11th Army of Army Group South. His "Panzer drive" is described in a 25-page chapter.

His new task was the conquest of the Crimean peninsula. After initial successes, 11th Army had to fight off Soviet counterattacks and amphibious landings in their rear, which hindered their efforts to subdue the fortress city of Sevastopol. Showing great operational flexibility and creativity, Manstein dealt with these threats and then refocused efforts on Sevastopol, which fell to the Germans in July 1942. Manstein was promoted to field marshal as a result. He recounts the Crimea campaign in a single 55-page chapter.

Fresh from that success, Hitler moved Manstein back to the Leningrad front with orders to finally take that city. Just as Manstein arrived, however, the Soviets launched a series of large counterattacks which Manstein fended off, but which prevented the Germans from mounting their own assault on the city. Manstein writes about this in a 15-page chapter.

Then begins the main story of this memoir--Manstein's tenure as commander of Army Group Don (later called Army Group South). As a result of the foolish attempt to take the major city of Stalingrad *and* drive into the Caucasus to take the oil fields there, the Germans in the south were badly overextended, and forced to rely on the sub-standard armies of their allies the Italians, Rumanians, and Hungarians. In November 1942 the Soviets launched a major offensive which cut off the entire 6th Army at Stalingrad, and destroyed two Rumanian armies. Hitler sent Manstein south, hoping he could find a way to salvage the situation for the Germans. Long story short: he was never able to stop the Soviets or regain German initiative in the south (except for the brief offensive at Kursk), but he did, on numerous occasions, keep the Soviets from

penetrating and surrounding the entire southern wing of the German army, which could have shortened the war by a year or even two. Manstein displayed operational brilliance on many occasions, but he was continually hamstrung by Hitler's "to the last man" directives, his parsimonious supply of reinforcements and replacements, and his refusal to make decisions on a timely basis. Manstein describes his interactions with Hitler, and analyzes Hitler's weaknesses as a military commander, in some depth on several occasions in the last few hundred pages of the book.

Lost Victories ends rather abruptly with Manstein's account of how he was unceremoniously transferred by Hitler from command of Army Group South to a "reserve" position back in Germany, a result of their repeated head-butting and Hitler's perception that Manstein was publicly questioning Hitler's ability to command. He does not describe how he finished the war, or how he escaped the frequently fatal chaos of the final days of the Reich.

Manstein was a proud German officer of the Prussian tradition, which led to repeated contretemps with Hitler over how the war in the East should be conducted. In this book he doesn't pass much judgement on Hitler's choices of strategic objectives, and he recognizes that some objectives had political or economic significance that a purely military planner would have ignored. But he wanted Hitler and the OKW to give him the independence due an army group commander to figure out how to achieve objectives in his own way. His biggest problem was Hitler's insistence on holding every inch of ground captured, which placed too great a burden on the Germans' over-extended and exhausted troops. As Manstein notes, such an approach ignores the ancient military dictum that "he who defends everything ends up holding nothing." Manstein wanted the flexibility to trade space for time, as the Russians had done so successfully; he wanted to have a mobile reserve to counterattack any Soviet penetrations, and to smash attacks as they were forming; but Hitler's micro-management and political machinations prevented this time and again, with disastrous results for the German Army on the Eastern Front.

Manstein also doesn't mention his part in the postwar Nuremberg trials, in which he was tried for turning a blind eye to the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* who followed in the wake of his armies, murdering Jews and other declared enemies of the Nazi state. Accounts of the trial, the case against Manstein, and his defense are readily available online.

The things Manstein leaves out of *Lost Victories* are as important as the things he discusses, and lead one to search out other sources to fill in the lacunae. This perception that Manstein was covering for himself in this memoir are strengthened by the fact that this edition is a heavily edited version of the original, with many personal anecdotes excised, and the entire chapter on Operation Citadel (Kursk) has been replaced entirely with an article Manstein wrote for the *Marine Corps Gazette*, which I found wholly disappointing.

On the plus side, the book includes many very useful maps that cover the entirety the text. Even if they are sometimes cluttered, they are very well drawn and virtually all place names included in the narrative can be found on at least one map, making it very easy to follow the sometimes swirling action. Speaking of that, special kudos to the translator, Anthony Powell, who has taken sometimes convoluted German syntax (I speak from experience) and given Manstein a consistently erudite, dignified, and sometimes sardonic voice in English.

John says

v. Manstein's book is interesting on many levels. He provides strategic thinking on the course of the war and

the options available to the Germans, insights into Hitler's management of the war, great tactical insight into the operations on his portion of the Eastern front. It is a bit repetitive and tedious as seemingly every deployment of his forces is described. It would have also been interesting to learn how he finished the war and his observations of the final year of the war after his removal from command.

Patrick Belair says

This was one of the best war time memoirs that I've read. Manstein was a brilliant commander. I wonder what his legacy would be if he could have spent all his efforts on his job instead of fighting for the resources he needed to do his job from the narrow minded and weak superiors. The world is grateful that things played out the way they did. This book takes the reader from Poland to the offenses in the west to Barbarossa and the failed attempts to free Sixth Army and ultimately their fate to the retreats of 43 and 44 until his sacking in 1944.

Daniel says

This book was an interesting perspective from one of the best German Generals. What I found fascinating was he often faced decisions where there were no good options. Indeed, Manstein, from a military perspective chose the least worst option throughout much of the campaign on the Eastern Front. Further, the dialogue between Hitler and Manstein brings to light how a leader inept in policy and strategic decision making can lead to defeat on the battlefield. Manstein makes little to zero note on the evils of the Nazi regime, keeping the writing strictly to military decisions at the operational level.

Tom says

I am about half way through this book. Manstein's book is too typical. German soldiers were brave, did their duty, didn't pillage, didn't torture, the Soviet's were brutal, and my favorite, were the victims of a totalitarian system!

This book doesn't provide any real insights, but I guess that is because what he said was published in 1958 and have been a part of the history books and debate since then.

I would read it in spite of all this, because even though he may say what is to be expected it is still von Manstein, and well, von Manstein is von Manstein, author of the sickle cut and the Third Battle of Kharkov.

What is missing? His early days as a soldier in WW1. He starts off the book pretty much working for von Rundstedt just before the war. I find it interesting he doesn't speak of his days as an infantryman. Perhaps he is hiding something? Or perhaps he merely writes to what an audience probably wants to hear?

C.A. A. Powell says

I was engrossed by this book of Erich von Manstein. I had heard of the German tank commander from reading other historical accounts of things during WWII. Therefore, I had to read this book when I saw it on the bookshelf of the local bookstore.

It gives a great insight to the German Tank units of WWII. I would say it is apologetic, in some ways. Especially, concerning some of the terrible things the Nazi regime did. He also spoke of the Italian artillery units, in the desert war. He expressed an opinion that they were more deserving of credit than history usually gives to them.

It glides over some of the more diabolical matters of war and civilians, but then we are listening to a soldier's account concerning military battles. Manstein was convicted of mistreating prisoners after WWII but was not sentenced to death. That is the only reason I don't give five stars. Perhaps that is bias on my part.

It is well worth reading from Manstein's perspective though because he does go into detail about the opponents he was up against in West Europe and the Soviet Eastern Front. Obviously, Manstein only lets us see the things he wants us to see, but this I found very interesting and I felt as though I was looking through his eyes when reading some accounts. The title 'Lost Victories' is aptly named. It did not matter how many times the German tank units won, there was always more enemy to face on another day. If you like Military History; then read this.

C.A. Powell

The Last Days of Thunder Child

Tom Hastings says

I first read an edition of this when I was a teenager, in the late 1970's. It was originally published in 1955 (in German) and the edition that I just re-read dates to 2004. The first time I read Lost Victories I was fascinated with military history, in particular, the conflict on the Eastern Front during WW2. At that time it seemed to me to be both the most pivotal and the coolest. To a 12/13 year-old boy the German Panzers were just very cool. I had a superficial knowledge of history. By that I mean I knew a whole lot more facts and figures and dates than most of my friends. However, I was completely lacking in anything resembling an in-depth or nuanced understanding of the events and dates I could rattle off.

Lost Victories is one of a number of volumes written by members of the German Army in the late 1950's and early 1960's. It is (as with almost of them) an important work providing insight and thoughts from one of the central actors in the 2nd World War. Upon re-reading, it is ultimately unsatisfying and leaves one wanting more.

The first issue is that Von Manstein ends the book with his dismissal from command of Army Group South at the end of March 1944. While this incident certainly provides a logical and convenient stopping point, one certainly would have appreciated his thoughts on the final year of the war, even if he was no longer actively in command. Along the same lines he never really provides an overview of the war in general that as commander that he really only had detailed knowledge of activities in his sphere. While there is certainly a

great deal of truth in the idea that Hitler kept his generals compartmentalized there is also strong evidence that on the whole they know more than they cared to admit.

The second issue is how the relationship between Hitler and Von Manstein (and by extension that between Hitler and the German generals) is presented. It comes across as a series of ongoing professional disputes between an owner and a particularly dogged member of the board of directors. Every once in a while discussions become heated but overall everything is very sanitized and stiff upper lip. There is always just the problem of the soldiers on both sides being killed, wounded, and maimed. But somehow in the record of these conversations the sense of desperation, despair, exhaustion does not come across. We have Von Manstein's words that tell us these things but we have no feeling of them, there is no metaphorical punch in the gut. None of the sense of that comes through. Certainly Hitler lived in a fantasy world to an extent and did all he could to ignore the reality around him. But despite Von Manstein's words that he emphasized all these things and emotions to Hitler, you never feel them and you have the definite sense that Hitler never felt them either.

Finally and most critically Von Manstein literally dismisses the activities of the SS, the SD, and the Reich administration in the East. He defends the infamous "Commissar Order" by stating 'On the contrary, they were - without being soldiers - fanatical fighters, but fighters whose activities could only be regarded as illegal according to the traditional meaning of warfare'. The growth of partisans behind the German is similarly whitewashed. Von Manstein maintains where rear area administration was in the hands of the German Army there was not partisan activity. The role of the notorious Reich Commissioner Koch in the development of extensive partisan activity in the Ukraine is given all of a sentence: " The, other, however was that the rule of Reich Commissioner Koch had driven the population straight into their arms". This appeared by the way, not in the main body of the text, but in a footnote. The same footnote goes on to discuss in further depth the different types of partisans and where they were geographically based. As for the SS, nothing but praise for the efforts of the Waffen SS. Not a word about the extermination squads, the wholesale round-ups of the people for the concentration camps, etc. Even allowing for the era this was written this is a surprising and somewhat shocking omission. Von Manstein never forthrightly condemns those atrocities or the individuals involved. Throughout the book he takes swipes at Goring and Koch but never faces the issue of German mistreatment head-on. Instead from nebulous comments here and there one has the impression that Von Manstein found those actions distasteful (somewhat like an aristocrat reacting to an unpleasant odor in a distracted manner) but ultimately unworthy of his notice. It ends up lessening and tarnishing the image and reputation of one of the most brilliant of the German generals in World War 2.
