THE BATTLE OF KURSK

DATE: JULY 05 – AUGUST 23 1943

The Battle of Kursk occurred in July 1943 around the Soviet city of Kursk in western Russia. Germany launched Operation Citadel as Hitler’s response to his devastating defeat by the Soviet Red Army at the Battle of Stalingrad. The battle was Germany’s last chance to regain dominance on the Eastern Front and would be their final blitzkrieg offensive.

Despite a massive planned assault on Soviet troops using heavy tanks, artillery and air power, postponements by German dictator Adolf Hitler gave the Soviets ample time to prepare for the onslaught. Ultimately, Germany’s plan to wipe out the Red Army once and for all failed, but not before both sides experienced heavy casualties.

By June 1942, Hitler had advanced into the Soviet Union and hoped to easily take the strategic city of Stalingrad, the namesake city of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. But Stalin rallied both Russian troops and civilians who dug in and vowed to fight to the end. When the German Sixth Army reached Stalingrad in September, they were unprepared for the well-armed and well-trained Red Army. Ferocious fighting ensued as the Germans fought their way through the city, building by building, house by house and were met with heavy resistance. The carnage was horrific on both sides.

By mid-November, the Germans found themselves outnumbered, outgunned, extremely low on food and medical supplies and surrounded by Russians. They saw the writing on the wall and had a chance to escape but Hitler commanded they “hold their positions to the last man and the last round…” He also promised additional provisions — provisions that never arrived. The Germans were unprepared for Russia’s brutal winter and suffered freezing temperatures, starvation and disease. Left with little choice, German General Friedrich Paulus went against Hitler’s orders and surrendered his weakened troops to Russia on February 2, 1943, an act which Hitler later called treason.
Germany’s defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad was a pivotal point in the war. It pushed the Germans back to southern Russia and left them weak and on the defensive. It also showed the world they weren’t invincible and deeply humiliated Hitler, who in response planned a massive offensive attack to permanently solve his Soviet problem.

THE STRATEGIC KURSK SALIENT

By the winter of 1942-1943 Germany and Russia had reached an impasse from Leningrad to the Black Sea. And at the center of the disputed area, a year’s worth of fighting had created a massive salient (an outward-protruding bulge of land on a battle line) approximately 150 miles from north to south and 100 miles from east to west. At the center of the salient lay the Russian city of Kursk.

The salient became known as the Kursk Bulge and was a strategic location for Germany. Hitler needed to prove to his allies, the Axis Powers, and to the world that Germany was still a formidable enemy and in control of the Eastern Front. He also wanted the tactical advantage of controlling Kursk’s railways and roads.

BOTH SIDES PREPARE

By 1943, Operation Barbarossa (Germany’s invasion of Russia), the Battle of Stalingrad and other engagements had weakened Hitler’s army by almost two million men. Desperate to fill the void, he recruited World War I veterans up to age 50 and young men from the Hitler Youth program previously exempt from serving on the front lines.

In March 1943, after squashing Russian resistance in Belgorod and Kharkov near the south of the Kursk Bulge, German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein wanted to take advantage of the momentum and the battle-weary Russian army and attempt to seize Kursk. But the Wehrmacht chose to prepare for a later campaign along the Kursk Bulge instead; in doing so they lost their potential edge.

Over the next few months, Germany amassed over 500,000 men, 10,000 guns and mortars, 2,700 tanks and assault guns and 2,500 aircraft to mount an attack on the Kursk Bulge and take Kursk. But the Soviets knew something big was in the works and their war machine went into overdrive producing top-of-the-line tanks, artillery and aircraft.
The Red Army dug in and amassed a formidable arsenal which included almost 1,300,000 men, over 20,000 guns and mortars, 3,600 tanks, 2,650 aircraft and five reserve field armies of another half million men and 1,500 additional tanks.

At the north of the Kursk Bulge was Germany’s 9th Army, made up of three Panzer divisions and over 300,000 men; at the south was their 4th Panzer Army, also with over 300,000 men and a combination of Panther and Tiger tanks. To the west was Germany’s 2nd Army with around 110,000 men. By the time Operation Citadel was a go, both sides were heavily armed, well-manned and prepared to annihilate the other in hopes of changing the course of the war.

**HILTER DELAYS THE BATTLE**

Germany was known for its blitzkrieg tactics – shock campaigns which concentrated firepower in a narrow area and confused and cut down the enemy. They planned blitzkrieg attacks north and south of the Kursk bulge and then intended to meet at Kursk in the middle of the salient.

Despite warnings from some of his generals to abandon Operation Citadel due to the Red Army’s substantial fortifications, Hitler was determined to move forward, but not right away. The original start date was May 3, but Hitler chose to wait for better weather and the delivery of his new, state-of-the-art Panther and Tiger tanks, even though they’d never been field tested.

Russia took full advantage of the delay by bolstering their defensive zones around Kursk which included tank traps, barbed wire snares and nearly one million anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. With the help of Kursk civilians, they also dug a vast network of trenches extending at least 2,500 miles.
A successful blitzkrieg depends on the element of surprise and by the time Germany was ready to launch Operation Citadel, they’d lost that advantage.

To make matters worse, British Intelligence had cracked the infamous German Wehrmacht secret code and was regularly passing intelligence to the Soviets. The Soviets knew the Germans were coming and had had ample time to prepare.

**OPERATION CITADEL BEGINS**

In the early morning hours of July 5, 1943, among the beautiful, yellow wheat fields that surrounded the Kursk Bulge, Operation Citadel was ready to launch. But before the Germans could strike, the Soviets unleashed a bombardment hoping to preempt the German offensive. It delayed the Germans for about an hour and a half but didn’t have a major impact.

The Germans unleashed their own artillery assault on the northern and southern parts of the salient, followed by infantry strikes on the ground supported by the Luftwaffe. Later that morning the Soviet air force attacked German airfields but were unsuccessful. Still, the Red Army’s ground defenses prevented German tanks from making much headway in the north and penetrating the heavily-armored salient. By July 10, the Soviets had halted the 9th Army’s northern advance.
**BATTLE OF PROKHOROVKA**

In the south, the Germans had more success and doggedly made their way to the small settlement of Prokhorovka, some 50 miles southeast of Kursk. On July 12, the tanks and self-propelled artillery guns of Russia’s 5th Guards Tank Army clashed with the tanks and artillery guns of Germany’s II SS-Panzer Corps.

The Red Army suffered huge losses but still managed to prevent the Germans from capturing Prokhorovka and breaching their third defensive belt, which effectively ended the German offensive.

The Battle of Prokhorovka is often referred to as the largest tank battle in history; however, Russian military historians with access to recently-opened Soviet archives claim the title belongs to World War II’s little-known Battle of Brody, which took place in 1941.
**THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE ENDS**

On July 10, Allied troops landed on the beaches of Sicily, forcing Hitler to abandon Operation Citadel and reroute his Panzer divisions to Italy to thwart additional Allied landings. The Germans attempted a small offensive in the south known as Operation Roland but were unable to breach the Red Army’s might and withdrew after a few days.

In the meantime, the Soviets launched a counteroffensive, Operation Kutuzov, north of Kursk on July 12. They broke through German lines at the Orel salient and by July 24 had the Germans on the run and had pushed them back beyond Operation Citadel’s original launching point.

**THE AFTERMATH**

The Soviets won the Battle of Kursk and ended Hitler’s dream of conquering Russia. Arguably, Germany won the tactical battle but was unable to break through the Red Army’s fortifications and so lost the advantage.

But the Soviets won at great cost. Despite outnumbering and outgunning the Germans, they suffered many more casualties and loss of armament. Definitive casualty data is hard to come by, but it’s estimated there were up to 800,000 Soviet casualties compared to some 200,000 German casualties; some historians believe those numbers are much lower than the actual casualties.

Germany never regained momentum on the Eastern Front or recovered their loss of manpower and armor. Hitler and his Wehrmacht soon became reactive instead of proactive as they found themselves fighting battles on multiple fronts.
M’44 SCENARIOS FOR THE BATTLE OF KURSK

The Battle of Kursk campaign includes 28 scenarios including 18 standard scenarios, 5 Breakthrough (BT) and 5 Overlord (OL) maps. These scenarios chronicle the major engagements of Operation Citadel, and include only the best available in the Scenarios from the Front (SFTF) files section on the DoW website, as well as 4 official scenarios by Richard Borg and jdrommel.

No campaign rules are included; not all M’44 players have access to the Campaign books. Instead, simply tally up the number of medals won in each scenario after playing both sides. A medal tally table for all scenarios is included below.

The Battle of Kursk campaign is broken down into 2 smaller campaigns and 3 separate medal tally tables for ease of keeping track of the overall campaign.

Russian Command rules were abandoned after Stalingrad; you may choose to ignore the 3 scenarios in this compilation that use them. Although optional, it is suggested that you use the unofficial Battle of Nations rules when playing from either side.

** Scenario notes:

1. The Offensive of General Model (both maps): the 30 medal Condition of Victory is incorrect. It is 15 medals from either side.
2. All or Nothing: in the event of a Sudden Death victory, score the full 16 medals.
There are a total of 302 medals if all scenarios are played, 272 medals without the Overlord map, and 131 medals if only the standard scenarios are played.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENARIO (+ total medal count)</th>
<th>P1 .............</th>
<th>P2 .............</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attack of the 9th Army 1 (16)</td>
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<td>2. Attack of the 9th Army 2 (14)</td>
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<td>3. Attack of the 9th Army (OL) (30)</td>
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<td>4. Operation Zitadelle (24)</td>
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<td>5. Zitadelle – North Sector (BT) (30)</td>
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<td>6. Battle of Prokhorovka (BT) (21)</td>
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<td>7. Kursk Salient South (13)</td>
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<td>8. Ponyri – Little Stalingrad (24)</td>
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<td>9. Ponyri (14)</td>
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<td>10. Offensive of Model L (BT) (30)</td>
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<td>11. Offensive of Model R (BT) (30)</td>
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<td>12. Kursk (14)</td>
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<td>13. All or Nothing (BT) (30)</td>
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<td>14. Belechino Station (12)</td>
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**TOTAL MEDAL TALLY**

**BATTLE OF KURSK PART TWO**

1. JUL 07: Citadel in Flames  
2. JUL 07 – JUL 08: Assault on Ponyri OL  
3. JUL 07 – JUL 16: Battle of Kursk OL  
4. JUL 08: Verkopenye **  
5. JUL 09 – JUL 11: Battle of Teploie OL  
6. JUL 10: Last Assault on Teploie  
7. JUL 11 – JUL 12: Koursk – Prokhorovka  
8. JUL 12: Orel  
9. JUL 12: Kursk – North **  
10. JUL 12: Kursk – South **  
11. JUL 12: Prokhorovka – Northern Sector  
12. JUL 12: Prokhorovka 1  
13. JUL 12: Prokhorovka 2 **  
14. JUL 12: Prokhorovka Overlord OL

**Scenario notes:**

1. Verkopenye: the German tank rule is unclear. Play at your own discretion.
2. Kursk – North & South: you may choose to not play Russian Command rules in these 2 scenarios.
3. Prokhorovka 2: you may choose to not play Russian Command rules in this scenario.

There are a total of 250 medals if all scenarios are played and 144 medals without the 4 Overlord maps.

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<tr>
<td>1. Citadel in Flames (10)</td>
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<td>2. Assault on Ponyri (OL) (30)</td>
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<td>3. Battle of Kursk (OL) (22)</td>
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<td>4. Verkopenye (12)</td>
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<td>5. Battle of Teploie (OL) (30)</td>
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<td>6. Last Assault on Teploie (16)</td>
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</table>
7. Kursk – Prokhorovka (14)  
8. Orel (14)  
9. Kursk – North (20)  
10. Kursk – South (20)  
11. Prokhorovka - Northern Sector (12)  
12. Prokhorovka 1 (12)  
13. Prokhorovka 2 (14)  
14. Prokhorovka Overlord (OL) (24)  

TOTAL MEDAL TALLY

THE BATTLE OF KURSK

There are a grand total of 552 medals if all scenarios are played, 416 medals without the 5 Overlord maps, and 275 medals if only the standard scenarios are played.

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<tr>
<td>1. Battle of Kursk Part 1</td>
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<td>2. Battle of Kursk Part 2</td>
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FINAL MEDAL TALLY

Acknowledgments to the authors of the scenarios that make up this Battle of Kursk compilation:

Richard Borg       KriegmeisterIE     rasmussen81  
jdrommel           FFM44       Randwulf  
Gabrielino77       Sturmtiger     visard  
boersma8           50th         SacaS  
LooneyLlama         SmasherKarl   Lujo  

There is 1 additional official M’44 scenario for the Battle of Kursk that you may wish to include if you have access to it:

1. Battle of Prokhorovka: Breakthrough Board map booklet.

This Battle of Kursk campaign booklet was compiled by Semba