

## Achtung Panzer! - Erich von Manstein!

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(Fritz) Erich von Manstein / von Lewinski  
(November 24, 1887 - June 11, 1973)

Erich von Lewinski was born on November 24th of 1887 in Berlin and was the tenth child of West Prussian aristocrat and an artillery general - Eduard von Lewinski. He was then adopted after the death of his parents, by his uncle General Georg von Manstein. Erich von Manstein began his military career in 1906, as an Ensign serving with 3rd Foot Guard Regiment. From 1911 to 1913, he served as Adjutant of 3rd Foot Guard Regiment's Fusilier battalion. In 1913, von Manstein entered the War Academy and in 1914, received the promotion to the rank of the Lieutenant. In 1914, he rejoined 3rd Foot Guard Regiment and then served as Adjutant of 2nd Guard Reserve Regiment. During World War I, Erich von Manstein served on both the Western and Russian front. While fighting on the Russian Front, he was wounded and afterwards was transferred to the staff of Army Group commander, followed by other staff positions. In 1915, von Manstein was promoted to the rank of Captain and remained as staff officer until the end of the war in 1918. In 1918, he volunteered for the staff position in Frontier Defence Force in Breslau (Wroclaw) and served there until 1919. Erich von Manstein then took part in the process of creating the Reichswehr and in 1920, received the position of Company's commander and in 1922, Corps' Commander in Stettin (Szczecin). By 1927, Erich von Manstein risen to the rank of the Major, while serving in the General Staff. In late 1920s, he visited many European nations and their armed forces gaining experience and informations. In 1932, Erich von Manstein was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and received the command of Jager Battalion. In 1933, situation in Germany changed and von Manstein was promoted to the rank of Colonel and in 1935 was posted to the General Staff of the Wehrmacht. In 1936, Erich von Manstein was promoted to the rank of Major-General and became deputy Chief of Staff to General Bock. He then commanded 18th Infantry Division in Liegnitz (Legnica) and in 1938, took part in the German take-over of the Sudetenland as the Chief of Staff to General von Leeb. On April 1st of 1939, von Manstein was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General. In 1939, Erich von Manstein served as Chief of Staff to General Gerd von Rundstedt, who commanded Army Group South during the Invasion of Poland in September. In preparations for the Invasion of France, Erich von Manstein received the position of Chief of Staff of the Army Group A. On February 1st of 1940, he received the command of 38th Infantry Corps (which he successfully commanded in France and was first across the River Seine) and later proposed his own new plan of the attack on France based on his experiences in Poland, where he mastered the technique of Blitzkrieg. He completely ignored originally

intended Schlieffen Plan dating back to 1914 and devised his own plan named Operation Sichelschnitt (sickle-stroke/cut/slice). The main idea of his plan was to attack using a concentrated Panzer force through the Ardennes Forest to seize the bridges over the River Meuse before striking eastwards, while outflanking the Maginot Line and cutting off French Armies in the North. First his plan was rejected by the German Army's High Command (OKH), but once it was brought to Hitler's personal attention on February 7th, it was quickly accepted. During the French Campaign, Erich von Manstein was promoted to the rank of General and on June 19th of 1940, after the success of Fall Gelb, he was awarded the Knight's Cross.

In February of 1941, Erich von Manstein received the command of newly formed 56th Panzer Corps, which in preparation for Barbarossa was assigned to Hoepner's Panzer Group 4 in von Leeb's Army Group North. From June 22nd to 26th, von Manstein advanced over 320km, while capturing bridges across Duna River and almost capturing the city of Leningrad. On September 12/13th of 1941, von Manstein received the command of 11th Army (part of Rundstedt's Army Group South) in Southern Russia (Crimea). He then successfully drove southwards into the Crimea, while taking over 430.000 Russian prisoners and by November 16th, secured entire Crimea with exception of Sevastopol. During the Winter, Erich von Manstein withstood the Soviet counteroffensive and resumed his drive south (Army Group A of Army Group South). On July 1st of 1942, he captured the city of Sevastopol, and on the same day received the promotion to the rank of Field Marshal. In late July, 11th Army was ordered northwards to join the Army Group North and in August of 1942, von Manstein was once again in charge of forces attacking the city of Leningrad. In November, Erich von Manstein received the command of newly formed Army Group Don, which was made up of Hoth's 4th Panzer Army (with its part trapped in Stalingrad), Paulus's 6th Army (entirely trapped in Stalingrad) and 3rd Romanian Army. He was ordered to relieve the 6th Army and 4th Panzer Army trapped in the city of Stalingrad. Von Manstein started his attack on December 12th and by 24th was within 50km from "Fortress Stalingrad", when his advance was halted and he was forced into 200km long retreat, which continued until February of 1943.

In February of 1943, Erich von Manstein received the command of Army Group South (made up of Army Group Don and Army Group A) and recaptured the city of Kharkov on March 15th followed by Belgorod, after one of the most successful German offensives of the war. In recognition for his action, on March 14th of 1943, he received Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross. Just as he did before, Erich von Manstein proposed his own plan for the upcoming Summer Offensive but it was rejected. During the "Unternehmen Zitadelle", von Manstein's Army Group South made good progress but was eventually halted when 4th Panzer Army was unable to advance northwards. This was a result of the unresolved outcome of the biggest tank battle in history on July 12th in the area of Prochorovka, where SS Obergruppenfuhrer Paul Hausser's II SS Panzer Corps engaged Lieutenant-General Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army. After the unsuccessful outcome of the Operation

"Citadel" (July/August of 1943), Erich von Manstein was driven into long retreat by the Russian counteroffensive. In September, he skilfully withdrew to the west bank of the River Dnieper, while inflicting heavy casualties on the pursuing Red Army. From October to mid January of 1944, von Manstein "stabilized" the situation but in late January was forced to retreat further westwards by the new Soviet offensive. In mid February of 1944, von Manstein disobeyed Hitler's order and ordered 11th and 42nd Corps (consisting of 56000 men in six divisions) of his Army Group South to breakout from the "Cherkassy Pocket", which occurred on February 16/17th. Eventually, Hitler accepted this action and ordered the breakout after it already took place.

On March 30th of 1944, Erich von Manstein was dismissed by Adolf Hitler after the series of "heated" conferences over the situation and decisions made concerning the events on the Eastern Front. On the same day, von Manstein received the Swords to the Oak Leafs of the Knight's Cross. After his dismissal, Erich von Manstein entered the Breslau hospital's eye clinic followed by convalescence near Dresden and then retired to his estate. Although, he did not take part in the attempt to kill Hitler on July 20th of 1944, he was aware of it. In late January of 1945, von Manstein collected his family members from their homes in Liegnitz (Legnica) and evacuated them to Celle in West Germany. In May of 1945, Erich von Manstein was arrested by the British and taken to POW camp in Luneberg and later to Nuremberg. In the Autumn of 1946, he was transferred to the special camp for high ranking officers in Great Britain and returned to Germany in the Summer of 1948. During the war crimes trial in August of 1949, Erich von Manstein was sentenced for 18 years of imprisonment but was released in 1952, because of his health condition. Erich von Manstein also successfully defended number of Wehrmacht officers charged with war crimes. Afterwards, in 1956, he became an organizational advisor to the Bundeswehr, joined with Germany's wartime enemies to protect Western Europe from Soviet threat. Erich von Manstein lived with his family (including his son Rudiger) in Irschenhausen near Icking in the Isar valley in Bavaria (West Germany) until he died on June 10/11th of 1973. He was then buried in Dorfmark near Fallingb., north of Hannover. In 1955, he published his memoirs titled "Lost Victories" ("Verlorene Siege"), followed by "From a Soldier's Life 1887-1939". ("Aus einem Soldatenleben 1887-1939") in 1958. Overall, Erich von Manstein was one of the most talented German field commanders and mobile warfare strategists of World War II.