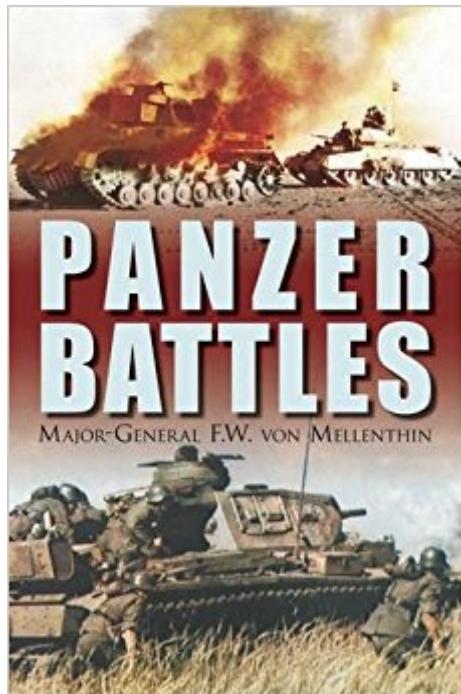


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# Panzer Battles



## **Synopsis**

Born in 1904, von Mellenthin joined the Seventh Cavalry Regiment in 1924. In 1935, he began his general staff training and in 1939 was an intelligence officer. By the end of the war, he had risen in rank to Major General and was Chief of General Staff, Fifth Panzer Army, on the Western Front. Active in the Polish campaign of 1939, the conquest of France, the Balkans, the desert with Rommel, as well as in Russia, at Stalingrad, and Kursk, he was in a unique position to write Panzer Battles, having been present at every major panzer campaign. In 1944, he was moved to the Western Front under Field Marshall von Rundstedt. Captured in 1945 by the Americans, he moved to South Africa after the war and became an executive for a major German airline.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

F.W. von Mellenthin was born in 1904, and joined the German Army in 1924. By 1945, he had been involved almost every major tank battle on every front.

well written and informative. If Hitler listened to his generals and adopted the elastic method of mobile warfare the outcome of contemporary history could have been very different. Hitler was the chief reason for the German failure. Thank god for small mercies

The classic of armored warfare by which others are measured.

Another gift for son which he has read a couple of times.

I didn't read this edition but read the one published in 1987 and by Ballantine. I reckon the content should be exactly the same, except perhaps the number of maps or so, and since there are already too many reviews on that edition of book which appears too crowded while there are only three reviews so far for this new edition, I venture to write my commentary under this category. I have just finished reading this marvelous book after spending about two weeks of my spare time, the book I happened to spot and unhesitatingly borrowed from my university library. Now, since most reviewers have written very detailed and highly informative reviews about the exact content of the book, I don't think I need to recount and repeat it again, thus by writing my own review, I'd like to share some of my own most impressed thoughts on the book from my own perspectives and by which I hope I can add some contribution of my own points and my own flavor dedicated to this wonderful book and to the reference of all the reader, old or new. I shall eagerly and unequivocally proclaim that this book is a very great and magnificent product of narrative gift and cool analysis combined to create a hugely readable page-turner, a lavishly engaging and engrossing regalement, and an unparalleled masterpiece and a sheer enjoyment to read and relish a series of most interesting, delighting, thrilling and breathtaking aspects of war, from both strategic and tactical dimensions in both depth and scope including battle accounts, drawing of lessons, observations and analysis of macro and micro war situations, vivid descriptions of major military figures the author worked with or fought against in the long period of various battles, tributes to both the author and the translator who put the original German language into English. The book is not packed of intense combat action depictions, as someone including perhaps myself might have expected in the first place. However, after reading into the content for a dozen pages, you will find yourself absorbed in it as if by some magical and magnetic power. The author writes in a highly talented way, cool, imperturbable and largely neutral in tone. But the stories he wrote are coherent, cogent and impressive. One can hardly stop once staring to describe the actual contents here, plus many reviewers have already kindly and extensively talked about them, so I'll just highlight the two most striking, thought-provoking, exciting and stupendously galvanizing parts to me, which are 19 The Red Army and 23 In Retrospect respectively, which either confirmed, refreshed, reinvigorated my own views on certain critical points or injected vital new insight into some of my more nebulous and uncertain perceptions. On the part of Red Army, the author offered invaluable, irreplaceable and inestimable probing into the psychological characteristics, organizational features, and unique strategic and tactical strengths and weakness of the mighty Red Army of the Soviet Union, acknowledging and even admiring its exceptional hardiness and tenacity one the one hand, while soberly and astutely

pointed out many of its self-contradictions and innate and ingrained fatal flaws and deficiencies, which, if adroitly and maximally exploited by its opponent, would mean the Achilles' Heel to the ponderous giant of Red Army and will lead to its utter defeat, the feat that the superior German Wehrmacht had all but succeeded in bringing out but for the senseless, stubborn and persistent meddling by Hitler. I found this argumentation very relevant and solid. And after reading the meticulous and accurate portrayal of the Russian people's manifold and complicated mentality and characters, I came to a better, deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the quite exceptional mix of Russians of Slavic features and Asiatic traits, which is indeed fascinating and intriguing. This helps remind me of an old saying which I used to spot somewhere, namely, "Russia is never as strong as it looks, and Russia is never as weak as it looks either." How interesting! The part of *In Retrospect* is no less if not more gripping, transfixing and illuminating than the aforementioned part on Red Army. The German military's performances, together with the shift of strategic environment and the pros and cons to the Third Reich are objectively examined and articulately summarized with great referential value. Moreover, the central figure of all, Fuehrer Adolf Hitler and his unique personality and its tremendous impacts on the general war-making and specific battle-fighting of Germany are precisely and painstakingly analyzed and discussed. From here, you got an accurate image and general understanding of both Hitler's advantages and shortcomings, the former leading to astonishing, dazzling early political and military successes, and the latter with its subsequent fatal strategic missteps, resulting in the most regrettable, dreadful, and yet decisive failures of Germany, eventually irretrievably, inescapably and ineluctably sealing off Germany's miserable fate in 1945. In one word, Hitler's exorbitantly inflated ego, his overreaching overconfidence, his suspicious and distrusting propensity towards his subordinates including the most brilliant and first-rate field marshals, his blind and senseless refusal to allow room enough free space to run wars free of unwanted and inexpert exterior interferences, his willful and stubborn insistence on some WWI tactics of "holding the ground, never retreat or lose territory", all manifest and maximized in his incessant moronic micromanaging of the not only wars in different theatres, but actual battles one after another, his unrelenting countermanding and overruling of wise and shrewd battle policies of his numerous generals, combined to cost Germany's victory and doom his own Thousand Year Reich's dream. It is my deepest impression from reading the great book that even in early 1943, after that disastrous Stalingrad, there's still hope -- as amply demonstrated in the morale-boosting, momentum-building brilliant counterattack at Kharkov whose resurgent impetus and wholesome result, however, were blunted and dissipated by the fateful outcome of a reckless and hasty battle at Kursk -- German military, with its superior fighting prowess and panzer

mobility, highly competent soldiers and unflagging morale, could still at least force a draw in the East while strive to preclude a allied invasion in the West, only if Hitler had had enough trust and confidence in his generals and soldiers, not him himself, and only if the Fuehrer knows the real knack leading to ultimate victory lies not in a momentary gain or loss of a piece of territory, but in decimating and depleting the reserve of enemy combatants via rapid surprise maneuverings, sudden and ferocious attacks, outflanking and ambushes with superior panzer mobility which the German side still held in its hand until very late stage of the war in the East, which, unfortunately, he didn't. In effect, despite seemingly limitless supply of human wave at first sight, the Russian side had already begun to lose steam and show signs of cracks and weakening and the German side should have known too well to exploit this initial change and "hammer the bolt when it is hot" which they actually did but was hopelessly ignored and refused by the Fuehrer. Germany could have beaten the Soviet, but Hitler simply had squandered all the precious chances. How deplorable! On Hitler, both on his splendid successes and grievous faults and inexplicably obstinate and misjudgments bordering on madness and frenzied egomania, the author had lots of brilliant observations and comments. Just quoting two examples of short sentences here to exemplify, the author concluded that: "Extraordinary political victories early on completely upset Hitler's balance and judgment; he never remembered Bismarck's maxim: "History teaches how far one may safely go."" And, "To glorify Hitler as an infallible genius, whose gigantic designs were frustrated by treachery, or to condemn him as the greatest criminal of all time, would be equally irresponsible and superficial." On the second quotation, despite the very truthfulness of the message, it is ludicrous and inane to see the politically incorrect, multi-cultural self-hating, guilt-laden flabby and flaccid post-war West very much entertains the idea that Hitler is the synonym of the utmost evil and any dispute or questioning of that is a taboo and might land you in wanton accusations and rampant denouncement of racism and bigotry and all kinds of other name-calling. But actually, both Stalin and Mao of China trump Hitler in homicidal scale, with the latter inexorably responsible for over 70 million deaths of its own countrymen. Just tell a fact. All in all, the author, the super experienced, brainy yet modest and unpretentious General Mellenthin presents a vast scroll of German panzer battles in all major fronts of WWII involving many remarkable figures and stories. His writing is sober, lucid, potent and eloquent, and his ideas and analysis profoundly insightful an incisive, penetrating, trenchant and highly convincing. I have mentioned at the beginning of my review that the book is a quick page-turner, but I also want to make it known that actually on reading a lot pages of the book, especially during reading 19 and 23, the two accentuated parts of mine, more than once, I couldn't help stopping to indulge myself in thinking and imagination, in visceral deep sighs

and rueful lamentations, and in emotional and fervent recitation of some beautiful, powerful and expressive verses of statement, touched by the greatly exhilarating and provocative analytic narrations of the author on his subject content. If this is not a hallmark of an immensely successful book, I don't know what can be called one. At least to me, this book is a legend and a most shining and impeccable jewel of consummate literature of military history. I highly and avidly recommend it to all the aficionados in this regard.

This is a military history book and the publisher removed the maps, this book is useless to the military enthusiast who wants an understanding of the movements and strategic/tactical situation only a map can provide. Skip this book and look for one that includes them, like Ballantine Books.

I read this book for Von Mellenthin's account of the Russian front during ww2. I came away, very impressed by what an elite Panzer Corp (a small motorized army) can do when fully equipped and well led. His descriptions strike a good balance of detail without getting bogged down in technical minutia. This book is good for both the casual reader and historians because it is a firsthand account and would be suitable as source material. I get the impression that Von Mellenthin would have made an excellent college professor because of his ability to explain complex, chaotic situations in a manner that you can follow. I was especially impressed by this description of the battle of Kursk and how the southern pincer was able to make progress while the northern front got stalled, even though the memory of that battle was obviously painful to him as a fool's errand. The personal nature of the book made his writing style very engaging but his understandable bias; something that he does not try to hide, can greatly distort the reality of the Russian front for the western reader unless you avail yourselves to other resources. In short, this is fascinating source material but not a good overview. I highly recommend reading David Glantz's book, 'When Titan's Clashed', it is only 290 pages and conveys much about the Russians that is missing from Von Mellenthin's account. I would also recommend a Russian produced series called 'Soviet Storm' freely available on the web in 46 minute episodes. I have come to the conclusion that the Russians understood their opponent better than the other way around. Please be assured that I believe that Von Mellenthin was being completely truthful in his accounts regarding Russian frontal attacks and other events that he witnessed. I am only suggesting that his information is selective because of his viewpoint. He attributes racial characteristics to the Russians when logical alternatives exist. For example, he mentions how the Russians panic at the sudden appearance of even a small number of tanks on their flanks and talks about how these Asiatic's are driven by moods that us westerner's

cannot understand. Many troops will panic in these situations, especially if they are inexperienced or don't have the proper equipment in place. However, he tersely dismisses in one sentence how the newly arrived 25th panzer was routed in their first combat because they lacked inexperience without reference to ethnic attributes. His book is very flattering to the western reader, it could be summarized as, 'we westerners are more adaptable in the field while the Russians rely on brute force and will'. I believe that he is giving his honest assessment but without writing my own book, his account leaves a lot of important, big picture things that the Russians did off the table. He dwells at great length on every single German victory, every single in-artful Russian frontal attack and then in the briefest sentence he will make the tiniest reference to a major Russian victory as in 'our flanks didn't do so well' (the capture of Kiev). I gave this book 4 stars for the reasons explained in the comment that I posted to my own review. The book is well written, it contains valuable information on tactics but I believed he missed the big picture while stressing that he is giving us the big picture. I understand his bias and expect it but I am dinging him because, in my opinion, the author failed one of his primary goals.

Maj General Von Mellenthin explains in the book Panzer Battles how the German commanders used artillery, specifically direct fire artillery to an advantage. He also describes the manner in which the German General Staff worked and how relationships with a commander not general staff trained (Rommel). were developed and became effective against the allies during WW II. This book should be read in conjunction with the Liddell Hart Book on The German Generals Talk.

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