

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 389

### “On the Defensive”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“For all my life, I have never been a man of the defensive. We will now go from the defensive back on the attack.”

Adolf Hitler.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 389. On the Defensive.

Adolf Hitler had tied his personal and political future to military victory. Defeat at Stalingrad shocked most Germans and soured many of them on Hitler’s leadership.

Hitler understood this intuitively. He became withdrawn. The leader who seemed to thrive on appearances before huge crowds now shunned the public eye. He wouldn’t even permit German newsreels to show him on film.

As early as November 1942, there were signs of a change. Albert Speer tells a story in his memoirs of Hitler traveling to Munich on his personal train for the annual dinner with the Nazi Party’s Old Fighters. This is the same train trip in which he first received news that an Allied invasion of North Africa was imminent. I told you about that in episode 378.

In happier times, Hitler was fond of appearing at the window of his train at every station stop, to wave at the people on the platform. During a stop on this train trip, Speer tells us, Hitler and his traveling companions had just sat down to a pleasant dinner in his personal dining car: white tablecloths, silver flatware, china plates, vases full of fresh flowers, the works. Then a freight train stopped alongside. Hitler and his dining companions gradually came to be aware that the boxcar sitting just outside the dining car window was full of dirty, tired, hungry, and in many cases wounded, German soldiers returning from the Eastern Front, staring in shock and amazement at the elegant dinner taking place just two meters away. When Hitler noticed them,

he did not so much as wave or smile at the soldiers. Instead he signaled one of the servants to close the drapes.

Hitler complained of insomnia and stomach troubles. His personal physician had been giving him amphetamines to keep up his energy as he plowed through the massive workload he inflicted on himself when he took such tight control over the German military.

In February 1943, Hitler recalled General Heinz Guderian, the panzer general Hitler had relieved back in the winter of 1941 after Guderian had argued strenuously in favor of allowing the German Army to retreat. Now he made Guderian inspector general of German armored forces. When Guderian met with Hitler again, for the first time in fifteen months, he was shocked by the *Führer's* state. He was stooped, he had tremors in his left arm, and his eyes were dull. Even compared to the Hitler of 1941, he was temperamental, unpredictable, and prone to outbursts of furious rage. Hermann Göring remarked that three and a half years of war had aged Hitler fifteen years. The man who had loved music and listened to it every day, put away his phonograph records after the defeat at Stalingrad.

Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels attempted to step into the breach, giving his own rousing speeches and publicly pushing a plan for “total war,” a renewed German commitment to victory. Privately, he complained that Hitler’s withdrawal from public appearances was making his job much more difficult.

By March, the Wehrmacht had been able to stabilize the situation on the Eastern Front, along a line only slightly different from what it had been a year earlier. All the planning, effort, and losses of soldiers and equipment in 1942 had left the German Army right back where it had started.

In North Africa, the combined forces of the German and Italian armies were still holding onto about half of Tunisia. In February, Rommel had been able to bloody the Americans at the Kasserine Pass, but Bernard Montgomery’s Eighth Army had taken Libya and were approaching the fortified border between Libya and Tunisia.

Rommel felt he had no choice but to hope he had done enough and discontinue operations against the Americans in the west, so he could bring his forces back to the coast to prevent Montgomery breaking through into Tunisia from the east. Rommel’s easy victory led him to underestimate the Americans, who were carefully studying their defeat and applying the lessons learned. The US II Corps got a new commander, General George Patton, who brought a new *esprit de corps* to his command.

On March 6, Rommel, five German divisions, and nine Italian divisions, attacked lead elements of the British Eighth Army, hoping to disrupt their advance into Tunisia, but powerful British artillery strikes broke up the Axis attack, while another attack westward, into British, American, and French forces advancing from Algeria, suffered heavy losses for minimal gain. The twin

defeats persuaded Rommel that Africa was a lost cause and that the only recourse was to withdraw. He flew to Italy for talks with the Italian Supreme Command, but was unable to convince them, so he went on to the Werwolf, Hitler's headquarters in Ukraine, to meet with the *Führer* and attempt to persuade him. Hitler rejected Rommel's advice. Instead he relieved the field marshal of his command in North Africa, placing him on sick leave.

Goebbels at last persuaded Hitler to give a speech on March 21. The speech Hitler delivered was a mere ten minutes long, and he read the words from a prepared manuscript in a flat monotone. So little had the public seen or heard from the *Führer* that rumors began to circulate that Hitler had had some kind of mental breakdown and was being kept under wraps at the Berghof, his vacation home, and the man who had given that speech was an impostor.

Hitler finally relented and allowed films of him to be included in German newsreels once again. Germans could now see for themselves that the *Führer* was still in command, but he came across as aged and worn out, even on film.

No one likes to be on defense. In playing tabletop games, like chess, most of us prefer to play offensively. We attack whenever we can; we defend only when we must. Adolf Hitler was no different. The quote I read to you at the top of the episode could have come from this moment—the spring of 1943. In fact, he said it in the spring of 1945.

In spring of 1943, he was telling his generals that Germany would go back on the offensive as soon as the *rasputitsa* was over, but even Hitler knew that a full offensive up and down the line was no longer feasible. Even an offensive on the scale of last year's Plan Blue was out of the question.

Hitler and his generals studied maps of the front line, where there was one and only one obvious target for a 1943 offensive. You'll recall that after the fall of Stalingrad, the advancing Red Army had taken back Kharkov and Kursk. A German counteroffensive had retaken Kharkov, but Kursk was still behind the Soviet line. Kursk was in fact in the middle of a Red Army salient about 200 kilometers wide and sticking about 150 kilometers into German-controlled territory.

Hitler delegated the planning of this much more modest offensive to his new chief of staff, Kurt Zeizler. On April 15, Hitler issued the order to prepare for what was labeled "Operation Citadel." Wehrmacht units were told that they should be prepared to execute the offensive on six days' notice.

Unlike Barbarossa or Plan Blue, not even Hitler claimed Operation Citadel would deal the Soviet Union a decisive defeat. The best the Germans could hope for was to inflict losses on the Red Army heavy enough to preclude any possible Soviet counteroffensive. Otherwise, Hitler and his top military leaders kept telling themselves that the losses they had inflicted and would inflict on the Soviets would eventually bring the USSR to the breaking point. They hoped that a new generation of tanks just beginning to arrive at the front would give Germany a decisive edge and

that an encirclement at Kursk would deliver hundreds of thousands more Soviet POWs, who were much needed as slave labor, necessary to keep the German arms industry operating.

The problem with attacking an obvious target is that the target is also obvious to your enemy. On the Soviet side, Georgy Zhukov did foresee something like Operation Citadel. Stalin wanted an offensive almost as much as Hitler did, but Zhukov persuaded him that the Red Army should first prepare defenses against the German offensive that was sure to come. After they beat back the attack and exhausted the Germans, then would be the time to strike.

[music:

After Hitler gave that unimpressive speech on March 21, he retired to the Berghof for some rest. Did I say rest? He had some important diplomatic work to deal with. The German defeat at Stalingrad had shaken the Axis alliance. The governments of Finland and Bulgaria were looking for ways to distance themselves from Germany; relations with Romania, Italy, and Hungary were even more strained. All three of those countries suffered severe losses during the battle for Stalingrad and were unhappy that the Germans kept blaming them for the defeat.

Hitler traveled to Klessheim Castle near Salzburg for his meetings with foreign leaders. Longtime listeners may recall how the Austro-Hungarian Emperor exiled his little brother, Archduke Ludwig Viktor, to this very same castle, after an incident at a bathhouse in Vienna, when he came on to the wrong guy.

First up was Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria. Bulgaria had assisted Germany in the invasions and occupations of Yugoslavia and Greece and had followed the leads of Germany and Italy in declaring war on the United States and the United Kingdom, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. What Boris and his government had not done was to declare war on the Soviet Union. Bulgaria and Russia had traditionally kept close ties, and Boris refused either to declare war or even permit Bulgarian volunteers to fight on the Eastern Front as Spain had.

Hitler had reason to resent the Bulgarian attitude. Back in September 1940, Germany had negotiated an agreement between Bulgaria and Romania, under which Romania was forced to cede Southern Dobruja, formerly Bulgarian territory that had been seized by Romania during the Second Balkan War in 1913, episode 71. But this German favor came with a price: Bulgaria was compelled to pass legislation restricting the legal rights of its small Jewish minority, about 50,000. Then Bulgaria gained territories taken from Greece and Yugoslavia, again with Germany's blessing.

After the Wannsee Conference, Jews in Bulgaria were forced to wear yellow stars, but these moves to restrict the rights of Jewish Bulgarians did not go over well in Bulgaria. Politicians, writers, and clergy from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church spoke out against these measures. Then, in early 1943, the Germans began to press Bulgaria to deport Jews under Bulgarian rule to the Treblinka murder camp.

In March, just before the Tsar's meeting with Hitler, Bulgaria voluntarily turned over more than 11,000 Jews resident in the new territories it had taken from Yugoslavia and Greece. When Bulgaria had seized these territories, it had decreed all their residents were now citizens of Bulgaria, but that decree did not extend to Jews. Bulgaria was willing to deport those people, but balked at expelling Jewish Bulgarians who lived within the country's pre-war borders.

So Hitler's agenda for his meeting with Tsar Boris consisted of two items: help Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, and cooperate in the extermination of Jewish Bulgarians. The Tsar resisted getting involved in the war. Bulgaria's military was small and poorly equipped, he argued, and it was needed closer to home, to occupy those Greek and Yugoslav territories, and to protect Bulgaria in the event of Turkey joining the Allies or of an Allied invasion of Greece, as had happened in the last war.

Boris attempted to placate Hitler by agreeing to deport Bulgaria's Jewish population. But the promise was a hollow one. Once the Bulgarian government began rounding up Jewish Bulgarians for deportation, the outcry within Bulgaria persuaded Boris and his government to a change of plans. Jewish people were deported to camps within Bulgaria, where able-bodied men were conscripted to forced labor in the countryside, building roads, laying railroad track, and such. This gave the Bulgarian government an excuse to use on the Germans: Bulgaria could not afford to lose these people, as it needed their labor. Jewish Bulgarians never were deported to the German murder camps. They may have lost their homes and property and were forced to live in harsh conditions, but at least they survived.

Next up for Hitler, on April 7, was Benito Mussolini. This was the most important meeting, as Italy was Germany's most important ally. Things were not going well for Mussolini in Italy. The Italian Army in Russia had taken heavy losses from the Red Army's Operation Little Saturn. The few survivors had limped back to Italy, leaving almost 90,000 Italian soldiers behind, dead, missing, or captured.

Mussolini's decision to involve Italy in Germany's war against the USSR was never popular back home, and was even less popular now, and that's before you consider the ugly situation in North Africa. A mere six months ago, Axis forces had driven deep into Egypt and the fall of Alexandria seemed assured. Now, Libya was lost and Axis forces were barely holding out in Tunisia. And the Allies were bombing targets in Italy. Food shortages triggered strikes throughout Italy's industrial north. The Italian military and the Italian aristocracy were grumbling.

Something had to be done. Mussolini attempted to get in front of the political unrest on February 6 when he sacked his Cabinet. In particular, he dismissed his justice minister, Count Dino Grandi, and his foreign minister and son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, both of whom had been pressing him to consider a separate peace with the Allies. Grandi and Ciano were each thought of as possible successors to Mussolini, but that now seemed off the table, though Ciano was given

consolation in the form of a posting as Italy's ambassador to the Vatican and a seat on the Fascist Grand Council. Remember that, because it's going to be important later.

These were the most sweeping Cabinet changes in the twenty years Mussolini had ruled Italy. Ciano had been foreign minister since 1936. The goal of these moves was to reassert Mussolini's authority over Italian government, while at the same time giving the public at least the appearance of a shift away from the government's more unpopular policies.

Hitler was sufficiently concerned about the shaky political situation in Italy to send his own foreign minister to Rome. Ribbentrop met with Mussolini and reiterated Hitler's position that there would be no negotiations with the Allies. On his return to Berlin, Ribbentrop told Hitler that *il Duce* was their only trustworthy ally in Italy, but as long as he remained in control, Germany had nothing to fear.

And I believe that is what is known as "foreshadowing."

It was for this reason, the need to shore up Mussolini's position in Italy, for Germany's sake, that led Adolf Hitler to oppose any talk of withdrawing from North Africa, even though by April, when Mussolini came to Salzburg for their meeting, it was becoming clear that their armies would not be able to hold onto Tunisia much longer.

Hitler still regarded Mussolini fondly. He spent the evening before their meeting at the Berghof, sitting with his guests before the fireplace in the Great Hall and reminiscing about his visit to Italy in 1938. As for Mussolini, he came to Salzburg carrying a memorandum drafted by his new foreign minister, Giuseppe Bastianini, outlining the need for a negotiated settlement to the war in the East. Before leaving, he had promised Bastianini that this meeting would be different. This time he would stand up to Hitler and press the case for peace talks.

This meeting was not different. For four days, Hitler talked and Mussolini listened. The Italians went home disappointed, though Hitler bragged afterward that he had stiffened Mussolini's spine and strengthened Italy's commitment to the war.

After Mussolini left for Rome, Hitler next met with Hungary's Miklós Horthy, the admiral of a nation that had no navy who served as regent to a kingdom that had no king. Horthy was no fascist, though he was a right-wing nationalist and a self-described anti-Semite. He ruled a small state wedged between two much larger and more powerful nations. For its own safety, Hungary had to align with one of them; Horthy had judged Germany more friendly to Hungary and its interests than the USSR; remember there had been a Communist uprising in Hungary after the last war, which Horthy had helped put down. He never trusted the Communists in the Soviet Union and saw in Hitler an ally against them.

The choice to align with Germany had paid off handsomely for Hungary. Germany had rewarded Hungary with territorial concessions that had undone many of the losses Hungary suffered under

the hated Treaty of Trianon. Editorial writers in the Western press labeled Hungary the “jackal of Europe,” feasting on the scraps the German lion had left behind.

Like Bulgaria, Hungary had conceded to German pressure and enacted laws that limited the legal rights of Jewish Hungarians and made them liable to forced labor. Also like Bulgaria, when Hungary annexed new territories, it did not grant Hungarian citizenship to the Jewish residents of those lands and had been willing to turn over to the Wehrmacht and the SS tens of thousands of Jewish people within Hungarian borders who were not Hungarian: residents of the new territories and Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution.

But again like Bulgaria, there was strong political opposition to deporting Hungary’s 800,000 Jewish citizens, who in the aftermath of Operation Reinhard now constituted the largest surviving Jewish community in Axis Europe.

Like the Italian Army, the Hungarian Army in the Soviet Union had suffered terrible losses during Operation Little Saturn: some 100,000 soldiers killed and 60,000 taken prisoner. These were heavy losses for such a small country, proportionately much worse losses than Italy or Germany had taken. The Hungarian public, never all that enthusiastic about invading the Soviet Union in the first place, was more than ready to quit the war.

In their meeting, Hitler told Horthy that Hungary’s Jewish citizens were responsible for Hungary’s low morale and pressed for them to be deported. Horthy was no more enthusiastic about this idea than Tsar Boris had been. He recognized the risk of the Allies winning the war and judged further cooperation with Germany to be imprudent. Within a few months, Hungarian diplomats would be sounding out the Western Allies about a separate peace.

Hitler’s next meeting was with Norway’s prime minister, Vidkun Quisling. A year ago, with German assistance, Quisling had set himself up as PM of a one-party state, modeled on Germany, and was angling for a peace agreement with Germany that would preserve Norway’s independence in exchange for Norwegian war support. Quisling’s government cooperated in rounding up and deporting Norway’s small Jewish community, in the hope Hitler would reward Norwegian cooperation with independence.

After some preliminary talks, the Germans dismissed that idea, on the grounds that discussions of the post-war status of Norway had to be deferred until the war was over. When Quisling publicly criticized the German refusal to commit to an independent Norway, Hitler summoned him to Klessheim as well.

Quisling saw in the German defeat at Stalingrad an opportunity for Norway. His country would provide soldiers and other military assistance to bolster the German war effort in exchange for a commitment to independence. Hitler would not commit to this tradeoff in April, but in September 1943, he did finally pledge post-war Norwegian independence, assuming a promise from Adolf Hitler is worth anything.

After Quisling, Hitler met with Jozef Tiso, the Catholic priest who was President of the Slovak Republic. Slovakia had been willing—you could even say eager—to cooperate with the deportation of its Jewish population. The Slovakian government even paid for the deportees' train tickets. No other Axis state was willing to go that far except for Croatia.

But once the Vatican became aware of the nature of the Holocaust, it applied pressure to Tiso to halt the deportations. As one Vatican diplomat put it in a private communication, "Everyone understands that the Holy See cannot stop Hitler. But who can understand that it does not know how to rein in a priest?" It is said that the Church had to go so far as to threaten Tiso and Slovakia with an interdict, but Tiso eventually got the message and suspended the deportations, though not until after three-quarters of Slovakia's Jews were already dead. Hitler pressed Tiso to resume the deportations; like Horthy, Tiso agreed, but dragged his feet.

After Tiso came Ante Pavelić, fascist dictator of the Croatian puppet state created by Germany and Italy after the defeat of Yugoslavia. In the case of Croatia, its willingness to cooperate with the Holocaust was not in dispute; rather, Croatia presented the opposite problem. The excesses of the Pavelić regime, which was slaughtering Serbs living in Croatia and terrorizing its political opponents, were getting so extreme that even ethnic Croats, who had at first applauded the creation of a Croatian state, were beginning to feel nostalgia for Yugoslavia. Even the Nazis thought Pavelić was going too far. Some in the German government were urging Hitler to depose him and put Croatia under German military rule. Hitler didn't go that far, but he did agree to send SS units into Croatia to help keep the peace. After meeting with Hitler, Pavelić agreed to put Croatian military and paramilitary units under German command.

Last but not least, French President Pierre Laval made the trek to Salzburg to meet with the *Führer*. When last we met Laval, he was serving as deputy prime minister in the Pétain government, but Pétain dismissed him in December 1940 for cooperating too closely with the Germans, which tells you something. In April 1942, Pétain brought him back as prime minister. Laval had been an enthusiastic supporter of Germany, telling the French public that the alternative to a German victory in the war would be Communism reigning supreme across Europe.

With the Allied invasion of North Africa and the German and Italian occupation of all France, the government in Vichy had little left to offer Germany, but there was one concession Hitler still wanted from the French: a formal declaration of war against Britain and the United States as retaliation for their violation of French neutrality, but this went too far even for Laval. He would not agree.

By the time Laval boarded the train for his return to Vichy, it was becoming clear that what was left of Axis-controlled Tunisia would fall to the Allies in a matter of days. The Allies had massive air superiority and inflicted heavy casualties on the Luftwaffe, while Royal Navy ships



operating out of Malta prevented Axis travel to or from Africa by sea. There was no way to ship supplies or reinforcements in; there was no way to evacuate the soldiers already there.

On April 22, the Allies began an offensive to capture the two remaining Axis-held ports of Bizerte and Tunis. The final assault began on May 6; the following day, British tanks rolled into Tunis. Hours later, American infantry marched into Bizerte.

After these defeats, German units began surrendering *en masse*. The Italians vowed to fight on, until May 12, when Mussolini ordered them to surrender. The following day, the last of the Axis defenders laid down their arms. For the first time since Italy entered the war, there were no Axis military forces anywhere between Casablanca and Alexandria.

Axis losses in Tunisia were comparable to those at Stalingrad, which had surrendered just three months earlier. In Stalingrad, the Axis had begun the battle with upward of a quarter of a million soldiers, while in Tunisia it was upward of 300,000, and in both cases, we're talking about losing experienced, battle-hardened soldiers.

At Stalingrad, only 90,000 survived to be taken prisoner. At Tunis, 250,000 were taken prisoner. On the Allied side, the British and Commonwealth forces lost about 16,000 killed or missing, 22,000 wounded, while US and French forces each lost about half of those numbers. The Axis lost 12,000 killed or missing. The Luftwaffe was down more than a thousand planes it could ill afford to lose.

The comparison to Stalingrad was irresistible, and many were making it. Some Germans compared it to Dunkirk, or spoke bitterly of "Tunisgrad." The analogy was an apt one. In both cases, Hitler's refusal to allow retreat had led to a military disaster. The order to reinforce Tunisia had cost the Western Allies six months of time, and kept the Mediterranean closed to Allied shipping for the same period, but that's pretty small beer when compared to the price the Axis paid.

As Allied soldiers were advancing on Tunis, Hitler was in Munich, conferring with his Eastern Front commanders on the date to begin Operation Citadel. Now, Germany had only one shot at a 1943 offensive and the points of attack were pretty obvious. Germany's best hope for a successful outcome would be to surprise the Soviets by attacking earlier than expected. That would mean early June; late May would have been even better.

Hitler rejected those dates and delayed the offensive until the end of June, justifying it by pointing out that the extra weeks of prep time would allow for larger numbers of Germany's newest tanks—the Panthers and the Tigers—to participate. This would not be the last time Hitler ordered a delay to Operation Citadel.

Hitler went on to Berlin, complaining to Goebbels after his arrival that his so-called vacation at the Berghof had been anything but. On the day Tunis fell, Hitler spoke before a meeting of

regional Nazi Party leaders. He said nothing about North Africa, but spoke at length about the Eastern Front, hinting that a new offensive was in the works and expressing optimism. He also had some words of praise for Stalin and Communism. Stalin's purges had cleared away his opponents in the Red Army officer corps, while the Communist innovation of commissars in the army to supervise its officers was a sound one. Hitler pondered the possibility of Nazi Party officials supervising his own generals, who resisted following his orders and lacked a proper National Socialist attitude.

On May 12, Hitler returned to the Wolf's Lair, just in time to receive word of the final surrenders in North Africa. It was now time for him and his commanders to consider the possibility of Italy quitting the war. Military planners drew up plans for Operation Konstantin, a German occupation of Italian-controlled territories in the Balkans, and Operation Alarich, a German occupation of Italy itself. If the Western Allies' next move was into southern Italy, which now seemed likely, Hitler insisted they be engaged far from the borders of the Reich, and arranged for some of the Army's best units to be withdrawn from the Eastern Front to defend Italy, should it prove necessary.

Germany was suffering setbacks on other fronts as well. U-boat losses in the Atlantic were on the rise, and Allied bombers were turning German cities into rubble. Joseph Goebbels and other leading Nazis made it a point to visit the bombed cities, offer comfort to the victims, and promise revenge. But the *Führer* refused to make any such visits, despite Goebbels constant prodding.

There was no denying it. The past six months had been very bad for Germany. Something had to change, and it had to change soon.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Harry and Max for their kind donations, and thank you to Liam for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Harry and Max and Liam help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

As always, the podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but many times, the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

The end of year holidays are upon us, so it's that time of year when I remind you that donations to and patronages of *The History of the Twentieth Century* make the perfect holiday gift...for me.

You never have to worry if it's the right size or the right color or if it's to my tastes, and I can promise you it will never be returned.

Now I recognize that not everyone has a patronage or a donation in their budget. If that's the case, might I suggest a rating and review that would help the podcast find new listeners. That would make a nice present, too. Or maybe you can find a new listener yourself, someone in your life who might enjoy becoming a listener. And as always, I thank *you* for being a listener.

What comes next? The Second World War continues, and I've got more episodes about German and Japanese atrocities in the pipeline. Maybe I'm sentimental, but just before Christmas doesn't feel like the right time of year to bring up that sort of topic, so I'm going to hold off until the dark days of January to revisit the topic of mass murder. We will be talking about war next week, but at least the deaths will be soldiers and not civilians. That's not much, but it's the best I can do in 1943.

As is my custom, I'm going to release a special Christmas episode on the 25<sup>th</sup>. This episode is my gift to you, my listeners. In past years, I've used these Christmas episodes to talk about scientific topics, and I will this time as well, but again, this being 1943, the obvious science topic is the atom bomb project. I'm going to tell you things about atom bombs that would have gotten me arrested and quite possibly executed for treason if I had put them into a podcast 75 years ago. And if there had been podcasts 75 years ago.

That's for Christmas, but in the meantime, I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look at the Allied invasion of Sicily. Operation Husky, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. On April 27, General Walter Model, whose Ninth Army would spearhead Operation Citadel, met with Hitler to discuss his misgivings. Intelligence reports indicated the Red Army had built strong defensive positions at the neck of the Soviet salient, just at the points where the German offensive would strike. The Red Army was also marshaling its armored formations, probably in preparation for an offensive of their own.

Model gave Hitler the same advice Zhukov had given Stalin. Instead of beginning an offensive, the German Army should hold position and prepare to destroy the Soviet offensive once it began. Hitler considered this advice, but ultimately rejected it.

[music: Closing War Theme]

© 2024 by Mark Painter. All rights reserved.