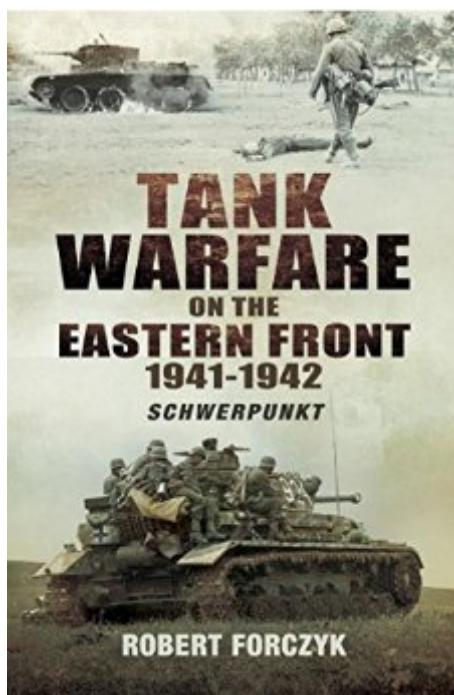


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Tank Warfare On The Eastern Front 1941-1942: Schwerpunkt



Synopsis

The German panzer armies that swept into the Soviet Union in 1941 were an undefeated force that had honed their skill in combined arms warfare to a fine edge. The Germans focused their panzers and tactical air support at points on the battlefield defined as Schwerpunkt - main effort - to smash through any defensive line and then advance to envelope their adversaries. Initially, these methods worked well in the early days of Operation Barbarossa and the tank forces of the Red Army suffered defeat after defeat. Although badly mauled in the opening battles, the Red Army's tank forces did not succumb to the German armoured onslaught and German planning and logistical deficiencies led to over-extension and failure in 1941. In the second year of the invasion, the Germans directed their Schwerpunkt toward the Volga and the Caucasus and again achieved some degree of success, but the Red Army had grown much stronger and by November 1942, the Soviets were able to turn the tables at Stalingrad. Robert Forczyk's incisive study offers fresh insight into how the two most powerful mechanized armies of the Second World War developed their tactics and weaponry during the critical early years of the Russo-German War. He uses German, Russian and English sources to provide the first comprehensive overview and analysis of armored warfare from the German and Soviet perspectives. His analysis of the greatest tank war in history is compelling reading.

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Customer Reviews

In a way, "Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front", by Robert Forczyk, reminds me of a sports highlight reel. You know, the kind where you get to see all of the big plays, turning points, and exciting action, and where the less important content isn't shown. Although the analogy I just made isn't perfect, virtually every effective large scale attack and successful defense during the fighting on the Eastern Front during 1941 and 1942 was spearheaded or strongly supported by armored forces, hence you're getting the highlights, or good stuff here. In this book, the author lays out how the Germans and Soviets used their tanks and assault guns and how tactics for their use evolved over time during the many massive battles fought by these relentless foes. Well, that's only partially true. As Mr Forczyk shows, German armored and offensive doctrines were fairly mature by the time Operation Barbarossa kicked off in June 1941, as they had almost two years of fighting to develop them. The Soviets, on the other hand, were attacked at the worst possible time, attempting to implement new doctrine based on what they had learned from their disastrous Soviet-Finnish war as well as from recent German successes, while beginning to upgrade their tanks to newer models and trying to recover from Stalin's purges of their senior officer corps. Rather than break down and describe the individual chapters, as other reviewers have already admirably done, let me lay out why this book is one of the best books I've read on this portion of the war. First, the author served in tanks, and is able to analyze tank warfare with the eyes of someone who studied and trained in tanks, albeit a generation or so removed from World War II.

Mr Forczyk, a popular historian and author as well as tank specialist, has written another fine book on the Russo-German war that has armor as its main theme. As the author explains this book is not a comprehensive battle chronicle but a select look at key armor engagements that will show why the Germans had an advantage at the opening of the war but by the end of 1942 had lost their advantage through heavy attrition, poor grand strategy, slow tank development and inadequate industrial capacity among other considerations. It will also be shown that while the Soviets made mistakes and had problems, they also had certain basic advantages that would turn their disastrous unprepared beginning into a long term opportunity to turn the tables on their enemy and to eventually achieve final victory. The two chapter introduction is important and the foundation for the rest of the book. It briefly describes the interwar history, battle strategy and tank doctrine of the two

dictators and their armed services and while the author touches on command level aspects, the author is never far away from tank characteristics or ground level armor tactics. He is as comfortable discussing Hitler's misguided view that the Soviet Union could be defeated in six weeks or Stalin's Five Year Plans and attempting to divert conflict with Hitler until 1942 or 43 as he is in explaining why Germany made a mistake in not building a high torque diesel engine for their Tiger, Elephant and Panther heavy tanks or comparing Blitzkrieg with Stalin's Deep Battle strategy. The German advantage of having radios and better optics in their tanks during this period is discussed as well and many other features of the leading tanks of the war - Pz IV, Tiger, Panther, T-34 .

A model military history, this is one of the few close looks we have of the tactics, the planning, and the operations details of tank warfare from the point of view of an experienced armor veteran. The book is very informative, persuasive and erudite, certainly not intended for casual reader, but only for those with some background in Eastern front history and tank operations. I guess the author expects the reader to have a fine tune knowledge of the German or Russian military prior to reading this book. Unlike previous histories, this volume paid particular attention to oft-ignored critical factors such as intelligence, terrain and logistics issues associated with armor operations, as well as doctrine or tank technological developments. It also focused on the operational and tactical levels of combat in describing the clashes between opposing forces. Of course, we can find some elements not associated with armoured operations, but they are addressed in passing. The format of this well-written book consists of only three chapters and begins with a preface, followed by an Introduction part (22 pages) in which Dr. R. A. Forczyk concentrated on terrain and weather factors, doctrinal and technological influences, strategic settings or intelligence preparation before Barbarossa. An interesting discussion (pages 3-4) focused on the three German strategic assumptions versus three Soviet strategic assumptions in employing their armoured forces. Chapter I (â œThe opposing armoured forces in 1941â - 8 pages) covers the presentation of both German Panzerwaffe and Red Armyâ™s Tank Force at the outset of the conflict.

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