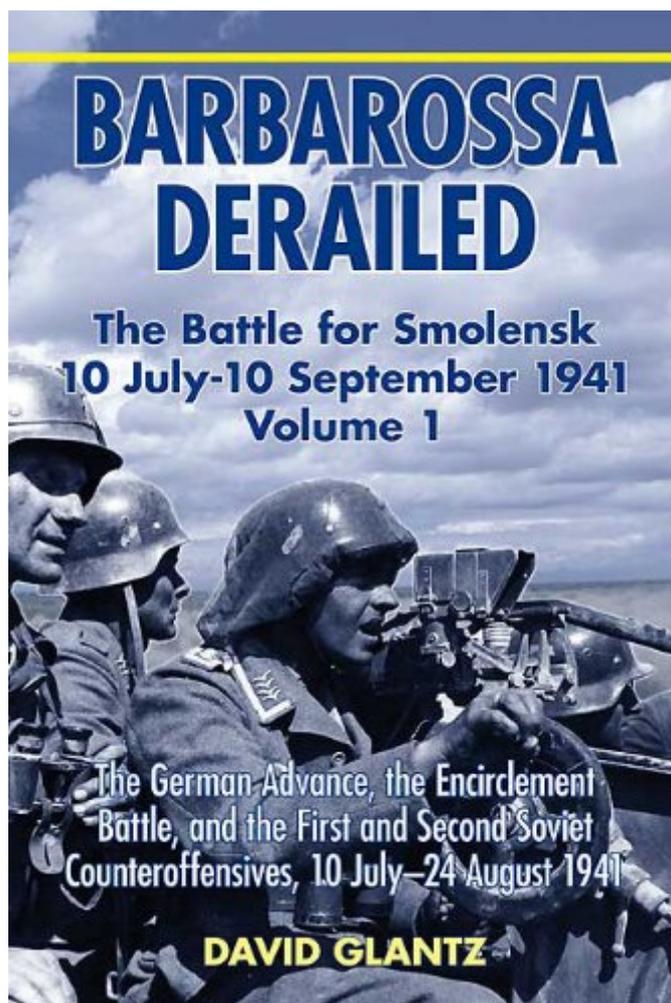


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Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle For Smolensk 10 July-10 September 1941, Volume 1: The German Advance, The Encirclement Battle, And The First And Second Soviet Counteroffensives, 10 July-24 August 1941





Synopsis

At dawn on 10 July 1941, massed tanks and motorized infantry of German Army Group Center's Second and Third Panzer Groups crossed the Dnepr and Western Dvina Rivers, beginning what Adolf Hitler, the Führer of Germany's Third Reich, and most German officers and soldiers believed would be a triumphal march on Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union. Less than three weeks before, on 22 June Hitler had unleashed his Wehrmacht's [Armed Forces] massive invasion of the Soviet Union code-named Operation Barbarossa, which sought to defeat the Soviet Union's Red Army, conquer the country, and unseat its Communist ruler, Josef Stalin. Between 22 June and 10 July, the Wehrmacht advanced up to 500 kilometers into Soviet territory, killed or captured up to one million Red Army soldiers, and reached the western banks of the Western Dvina and Dnepr Rivers, by doing so satisfying the premier assumption of Plan Barbarossa that the Third Reich would emerge victorious if it could defeat and destroy the bulk of the Red Army before it withdrew to safely behind those two rivers. With the Red Army now shattered, Hitler and most Germans expected total victory in a matter of weeks. The ensuing battles in the Smolensk region frustrated German hopes for quick victory. Once across the Dvina and Dnepr Rivers, a surprised Wehrmacht encountered five fresh Soviet armies. Despite destroying two of these armies outright, severely damaging two others, and encircling the remnants of three of these armies in the Smolensk region, quick victory eluded the Germans. Instead, Soviet forces encircled in Mogilev and Smolensk stubbornly refused to surrender, and while they fought on, during July, August, and into early September, first five and then a total of seven newly-mobilized Soviet armies struck back viciously at the advancing Germans, conducting multiple counterattacks and counterstrokes, capped by two major counteroffensives that sapped German strength and will. Despite immense losses in men and materiel, these desperate Soviet actions derailed Operation Barbarossa. Smarting from countless wounds inflicted on his vaunted Wehrmacht, even before the fighting ended in the Smolensk region, Hitler postponed his march on Moscow and instead turned his forces southward to engage "softer targets" in the Kiev region. The 'derailment' of the Wehrmacht at Smolensk ultimately became the crucial turning point in Operation Barbarossa. This groundbreaking new study, now significantly expanded, exploits a wealth of Soviet and German archival materials, including the combat orders and operational of the German OKW, OKH, army groups, and armies and of the Soviet Stavka, the Red Army General Staff, the Western Main Direction Command, the Western, Central, Reserve, and Bryansk Fronts, and their subordinate armies to present a detailed mosaic and definitive account of what took place, why, and how during the prolonged and complex battles in the Smolensk region from 10 July through 10 September 1941. The structure of the study is designed

specifically to appeal to both general readers and specialists by a detailed two-volume chronological narrative of the course of operations, accompanied by a third volume, and perhaps a fourth, containing archival maps and an extensive collection of specific orders and reports translated verbatim from Russian. The maps, archival and archival-based, detail every stage of the battle.

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Customer Reviews

"BARBAROSSA DERAILED: THE BATTLE FOR SMOLENSK 10 JULY-10 SEPTEMBER 1941 VOLUME 1: The German Advance, The Encirclement Battle, and the First and Second Soviet Counteroffensives, 10 July-24 August 1941", by historian David Glantz, is his latest work on the eastern front, this time covering the complex battles in and around Smolensk. This is the first volume of a planned four volume effort, with volume two to cover the German offensives on the flanks and the third Soviet counteroffensive from 25 August-10 September 1941. Volume 3 will be literal translations of specific orders and reports, while volume 4, if published, will consist of maps, archival and otherwise, with hopefully some in color. The study begins by briefly covering the fighting on the Eastern Front up to 10 July and providing the strategic plans for both sides. The detailed coverage basically begins on 10 July, with the Germans advancing towards Smolensk. As the

campaign progresses, and in addition to describing and analyzing the on-going combat and tactical situation for both sides, Mr Glantz provides actual orders, communiqués, and unit diary entries down to the divisional level (sometimes paraphrased) to show what the units and commanders were actually thinking, what their morale was, what orders they gave/received, and how they played out. This adds greatly to one's understanding of the complete picture of the campaign, but it also adds a lot of complexity to the book. But nothing in life comes free. Volume one also includes a lot of maps, and using them as you read along is critical to understanding what is happening. Some of the maps are almost too small or "smudged" to be readable, but they're generally adequate for their purpose. (Hopefully bigger and better maps will be included in volume four.) Volume one basically takes you up to 24 August 1941, which is where volume 2 should begin. If you've never read a book by Mr Glantz and are not a somewhat serious World War II buff, this probably isn't the book you should start with. In his preface, Mr Glantz says that this work should be studied and read, which is the right way to approach this book. Mr Glantz is "the" foremost expert on the Soviet side of World War II, and is probably first and foremost a serious historian and secondarily a writer, so his books typically contain very little "I was there" sort of anecdotes, and are not easy reads. I own the majority of Mr Glantz's books. A criticism of some of his earlier works was that he relied too much on Soviet sources, and that by relying primarily on Soviet sources, some of his facts and analysis could have the same type of inaccuracies as those works that relied primarily on German sources. However, Mr Glantz has incorporated more and more German sources into his books, and his more recent works contain large (or should I say massive) amounts of archival data from both sides. While in my opinion Mr Glantz remains slightly skewed toward the Soviet point of view, much the way that most American Civil War authors marginally favor either the North or the South position, I do not feel this mild bias impacts his presentation and expert analysis. (Most, if not all, World War II authors also do the same.) This is a very hard book to rate. Mr Glantz provides information, data, and analysis that you cannot get anywhere else, and his access to and utilization of the former Soviet archives is literally second to none. If you're a serious World War II history buff, you must have his books on your shelf regardless of whether or not you agree with his analysis and conclusions. However, you'll often have to work hard for what you get. I have to admit that while I own most of Mr Glantz's books, I haven't finished all of them, as sometimes his writing is too dry or takes too much effort for what to me is just a pleasurable hobby. However his books are indispensable in getting a clear view of operations from the Soviet side, and I'll keep buying them as long as he keeps writing them. I give the book four stars, and highly recommend it to the grognards among us.

This is likely to be the most detailed military history anyone will ever read. The book concerns the battle of Smolensk and its immediate aftermath. The author's thesis is that this may have been the decisive battle of the Russian campaign, and he makes an excellent case. More traditional military histories leave the impression that Operation Barbarossa was pretty much of a "walkover" until the final campaign stalled before Moscow. Glantz's take on it is that Smolensk was so decisive not because the Russians "won": strictly speaking, they lost. But the German victory was so costly in men and materials, and continued concentration on the Smolensk front was so unpromising that the Germans decided to break off the campaign and attempt -- successfully -- to take Kiev instead. But diverting the effort to Kiev costs the Germans valuable time and when they did head toward Moscow again, it was too late. Glantz implies that if they had continued on the Smolensk front, the Germans would not have taken Moscow either because of the fierceness of the Russian resistance. Also missing from most traditional accounts is the degree to which the Russians attempted offensive operations against the Germans around Smolensk, each time with better (if ultimately insufficient) success. Timoshenko, at Stalin's urging, threw wave after wave of inadequately trained soldiers at the German lines, and although they suffered horrific casualties, they also disrupted the German advance and convinced the Germans that advance along that line was too costly. Glantz provides intricate detail of the "order of battle" on both sides for each stage of the conflict. Indeed, his detail is so daunting that it may derail the casual reader, or at least cause him to skip large sections of the book. Not only is the book very long -- it is followed by a second volume -- this with respect to a battle which lasted perhaps three months. Thus, this is very much a book for the expert (not that this is a criticism -- military history could use some books providing this level of detail; it is a wonderful primer on how senior military officers really do conduct a campaign). Virtual history is unavoidable in any history which evaluates the importance of an event. After all, how can you say that what happened is important if you do not have some reasonable idea of what would have happened otherwise? But Glantz keeps such virtual history speculation to a minimum, hewing to the line that what actually happened at Smolensk was so disruptive to the German army that in its aftermath, the Germans had few good alternatives.

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