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David M. Glantz. *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942.* With Jonathan M. House. Modern War Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. xix + 655 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1630-5.

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A Steppe Too Far

For any historian, recapturing the experience of the past is difficult. This problem is especially acute in military history, where pressures, uncertainties, doubts, anxieties, hurried decisions, and incomplete information all contribute to what Carl von Clausewitz famously termed "the fog of war." It is doubly demanding when an historian attempts an operational history of not one, but two combatants. This is the task David Glantz has tackled in the first of a projected three-volume work on events in the Soviet Union in the pivotal period between spring 1942 and spring 1943. The prolific author of highly regarded works on the Red Army and battles of the German-Soviet war, Glantz has incorporated new Russian sources, as well as relevant volumes from the semi-official series, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* (1979-2008), to present what will likely be the most comprehensive and detailed account of the military events of that key year. This first volume takes the reader, as the title suggests, to the German arrival at the city on the Volga. The next two will trace the subsequent exhaustion and stalemate in the city, the fateful Soviet counteroffensive, the destruction of Sixth Army, and the German maneuver battles that finally managed to stabilize the front by March 1943.

Beyond describing events in minute detail, in this first volume Glantz seeks to rescue the operations of 1942 from the shadow of the monstrous struggle at Stalingrad, accounts of which have tended to overwhelm analysis of the German-Soviet war. This goal is, however, no mere academic exercise in operational minutiae; it is vital to any understanding of why events developed as they did. Hoping for a knockout blow, both sides had battled to exhaustion in the brutal winter of 1941-42, when the spring thaw, the famous *rasputitsa*, put a halt to the fighting. As each side hurried to rebuild its forces, the two dictators, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, took stock of the situation and sought ways to secure a favorable outcome. Both, in fact, came to similar conclusions: they believed that their respective armies had come within inches of victory during the winter battles, and wanted to resume the offensive as quickly as possible. This attitude opened a strategic debate on both sides as to the optimal way to achieve triumph. What developed in 1942, as Glantz shows, was neither foreordained nor inevitable.

For the Germans, this strategic debate involved nothing less than a reassessment of the entire basis of the original Barbarossa operation. The expected short campaign and quick victory had not materialized, so the German war economy had to be revamped for higher output and redirected to army production requirements. At the same time, shortages of skilled labor, raw materials, and, above all, oil threatened to cripple the German ability to deal a decisive blow to the stubborn Soviets. Hitler's strategic dilemma, of course, was worsened by the fact that his war for *Lebensraum* had now become a global war. Fully aware of the enormous potential of the United States, Hitler glimpsed one last possibility to achieve some sort of victory before the overwhelming economic might of his opponents could be brought to bear. If the Americans could be distracted by his Japanese partners in 1942, and if the Wehrmacht could destroy the remnants of the Red Army, seize the vital industrial areas of the Donbas, and capture the all-important oil fields of the Caucasus, then German-occupied Europe might well be able to withstand a war of attrition against the Anglo-American foes. For Hitler, then, 1942 was the key year: it was likely the last time the Wehrmacht could fight undisturbed on a single front, and the last chance to make Germany blockade-proof. If he could not get the oil of the Caucasus in 1942, the Führer repeated to anyone who would listen, Germany could not win the war. Although tiresome, his insight was sound. It dictated German strategy

for 1942. In contrast to the previous year, everything was now clear: German power would have to be concentrated in the south for a sweeping operation that would take the Wehrmacht further into the depths of Russia, to the very gates of Asia. Although some German generals were skeptical of success, none could come up with a better alternative. Glantz emphasizes the Caucasian oil fields as the main objective of the 1942 summer campaign; Stalingrad was barely mentioned in the original operational order.

On the Soviet side, things were less clear. Although Stalin's advisers believed that logic and good sense dictated that the Soviets stand on the defensive, consolidate and increase their already considerable armaments production, wait for lend-lease aid, and mobilize their still formidable manpower resources, their boss would have none of it. Convinced that German forces were on their last legs, Stalin demanded a new general offensive as soon as possible. Confident that the Germans would launch one last effort to seize Moscow, it was, as Glantz notes, a curious irony that dedicated Marxists would elevate political above economic targets. Stalin ordered available Red Army resources concentrated in the central area. Then, after the anticipated enemy offensive was blunted, the Red dictator envisioned a grand Soviet counteroffensive to destroy the German Army Group Center and sweep the Hitlerites out of Russia. Only through the efforts of the head of the Stavka, Boris Mikhailovitch Shaposhnikov, his deputy Aleksandr Mikhailovitch Vasilevsky, and the celebrated hero of 1941, Georgy Konstantinovitch Zhukov, was Stalin persuaded to adopt an active strategic defense. Although sound in intention, this compromise in fact proved disastrous, for it not only placed the bulk of Red Army formations in the wrong place, but encouraged subordinate commanders to undertake risky local offensives that had little strategic purpose. As with the Germans, Soviet attention was elsewhere; for them, Stalingrad was merely a backwater region of little evident operational importance.

Although the Germans had the benefit of strategic clarity, the outcome of the winter battles had left a number of problems that had to be cleared up before any summer offensive could be launched. This information forms the basis of Glantz's second main theme: the so-called peripheral battles drained already insufficient German resources to the point that they could only hope to achieve their campaign goals if everything went absolutely according to plan. The most important of these preliminary battles, and despite its brilliant success also the one most revealing of German weakness, was Erich von Manstein's campaign in the Crimea. It was brilliant in that it spotlighted German strengths in planning, tactical skill, optimum coordination of air and ground forces, risk-taking commanders, and well-trained combat troops. It also demonstrated the key weakness of the Wehrmacht: it had too few resources to enable it to transform tactical victories into strategic triumphs. Victory in the Crimea largely depended on concentration of Luftwaffe forces in the region, but this superiority could be achieved only by stripping other sectors of the front of vital air power. The dangers inherent in robbing Peter to pay Paul were amply demonstrated by the Soviet attack at Kharkov in mid-May, one of those risky operations which Semyon Timoshenko hoped to develop into a general offensive that would destroy Army Group South. Initial Soviet gains so rattled German commanders that they immediately transferred numerous Luftwaffe units back to the Kharkov region. These formations successfully enabled the Wehrmacht to blunt Timoshenko's attack, and then turn it into a brilliant German encirclement operation that trapped large numbers of Red Army soldiers, but at a price. Stripped of much of its air power, Manstein's forces took longer to capture the fortress of Sevastopol than anticipated, thus helping to delay the launch of other preliminary operations, which in turn delayed the main summer campaign. In addition, the seizure of Sevastopol, which for all of its brilliance may or may not have been necessary, cost the Germans considerable numbers of casualties they could ill afford.

When Operation Blue, the main German summer campaign, finally commenced in late June, its design also revealed serious weaknesses. Since the Wehrmacht had been unable to assemble the necessary forces by the time Blue was to start, the Army High Command (OKH) designed a complicated, staggered operation in which each phase had a specific goal, thus setting the stage for the achievement of the next step in the plan. The initial phase aimed at seizing the city of Voronezh, just east of the Don, which would allow flank protection to the forces advancing to the east (it also, in the event, sparked furious Soviet counterattacks, since German forces could easily turn north toward Moscow, as anticipated by Stalin). In the next stage, German forces would move south along the Don to trap and annihilate the bulk of Soviet forces in the region. Having accomplished this, the Germans would then leap across the land bridge between the Don and Volga to neutralize (but not necessarily take) Stalingrad. The city itself was not only a major river port for lend-lease supplies, but also a key center of tank production. As German planners had noted, however, there was no particular reason that it had to be entered; in-

deed, Hitler himself had dismissed the idea, pointing out that the city could easily be destroyed from the air, while a German presence anywhere on the Volga would disrupt river traffic. Only after German forces reached the Volga would the fourth, and most important, phase of the operation unfold: the rush to the Caucasus, presumably against now weak and scattered Red Army units, to seize the valuable oil fields. Hitler expected the operation to be completed by early October, at which point the Wehrmacht would go into winter positions.

At first all seemed to go well, perhaps too well. Timoshenko's disaster at Kharkov had weakened the Soviets precisely at the main point of effort for Operation Blue, while hastily formed and poorly trained Russian formations thrown in to stop the Germans often seemed to dissolve before German eyes. The first three weeks of July were an enormously confusing period: the standard image of easy German victories was belied by the unexpected, incessant, and ferocious Soviet assaults at Voronezh which upset German timetables from the beginning, while for every Soviet unit that disintegrated another fought to the bitter end. More worrying for the Germans, though, their tried and tested encirclement operations were not bagging large numbers of prisoners. The reasons are instructive. Successful encirclement operations depended both on German skill and ability to move quickly, as well as a Soviet willingness to cooperate in their own destruction, and in the summer of 1942 the Wehrmacht lacked sufficient tanks, mobile units, and fuel to drive deep into the enemy rear. At the same time Hitler, influenced by the indecisive cauldron battles of 1941, had ordered shallow encirclements in order to ensure that the trapped enemy did not escape. But even so, significantly large numbers of the enemy escaped. Why? Glantz generally dismisses earlier interpretations, which claimed that the Soviets had learned the lesson of 1941 and were no longer willing to keep their head in the noose, noting that Stalin still insisted on a stubborn defense. Not until that autumn, according to Glantz, did the Red Army attain the skill and leadership to manage the battlefield properly. While the Soviet dictator reluctantly authorized a few tactical withdrawals, the key factor saving the Red Army in July was weakness: many Soviet units indeed fled in complete disorder to the east, while the German lack of fuel meant that neither their armored nor infantry forces had the mobility necessary to capitalize on the situation. The Germans, as in 1941, defeated the Red Army, but failed to annihilate it. The result, in the previous year, was to confront the Germans with a dilemma; in 1942, it proved their undoing.

The events of July, and how they were interpreted, resulted in two key decisions late that month. Hitler, having concluded that the Red Army had at last been destroyed, issued the key directive of the campaign on July 23, the one which guaranteed that the Germans could not achieve their goals. Impatient at the slow pace of the step-by-step operation, and fully aware of the time pressures on Germany (that summer he constantly worried about an early second front in France), Hitler decided to speed things up by splitting the German attack: while Army Group B would continue to advance on Stalingrad, Army Group A would seize Rostov and leap into the Caucasus. Rather than the careful, step-by-step campaign in which each phase ensured the success of the next, the Führer had now sent two army groups off on their own, in diverging directions and with inadequate forces to realize their goals. The Germans had barely been able to supply one advance at a time; with the same catastrophic logistical system, they were now to supply two, with the second moving hundreds of miles into the trackless steppe of southern Russia. With their shoestring operation, all had depended on everything going according to plan; Hitler now changed the plan.

Five days after Hitler, Stalin issued an equally famous, and momentous, decision. Order No. 227, "Not a Step Back," indicated to Soviet officers and troops in plain and uncompromising language why the withdrawals had to cease, and what the consequences would be if they did not. Retreat, Stalin stressed, was no longer an option, since if it continued the Germans would seize the bulk of Soviet industrial and oil resources, which meant the end of the state. "Russia is large but there is nowhere to retreat," ran the slogan. It was, therefore, the duty of all to fight where they were. To stiffen his troops' resolve, Stalin also ordered the creation of a number of the infamous "blocking detachments," whose function was to shoot Soviet soldiers engaged in unauthorized withdrawals. At almost the same moment that Hitler had begun the fatal dissipation of German resources, then, Stalin had responded with ruthless measures to guarantee the complete mobilization of Soviet strength.

From early August, events took on a cast of inevitability. With insufficient resources, the German drive into the Caucasus petered out against stiffening Soviet resistance. Against a backdrop of mounting frustration and increasing awareness that he was losing a race against time, Hitler urged his generals in the Caucasus on, even as, now cognizant of the importance of neutralizing the Stalingrad region, he transferred units away from Army Group A to feed the growing monster on the Volga. By early September, with the German command sunk deep in a leadership crisis, Hitler knew that the gamble had

been lost: his units were stalled just short of the vital oil, while, desperately seeking a prestige victory to bolster his image, he had decided that it was necessary to seize Stalingrad after all. What could have been accomplished relatively easily with unified forces in late July, though, now loomed as an impossible task, since German forces struggled just to reach the outskirts of the city, and faced a mounting problem in the long, exposed, weakly held flanks that invited a Soviet counterattack. That, though, is a tale that Glantz will tell in the next volume of his trilogy.

Although he offers a deeply detailed, comprehensive operational history, Glantz nonetheless steps back just enough to offer cogent analysis and interpretation. On the German side, the dominant theme is the lack of resources to accomplish goals. Everywhere and at all times they were strapped by insufficient manpower, materiel, and fuel. Operation Blue depended for its success on Soviet cooperation, and once the Red Army began withdrawing, for whatever reason, in the face of German attacks, the campaign was doomed. As in 1941, the Germans were guilty of overestimating their admittedly formidable abilities and woefully underestimating their Soviet opponent. From the Soviet perspective, the story was much as in 1941: frenzied but ineffective piecemeal attacks, continued glaring mistakes of leadership, poor training of troops, and inadequate command and control of the battlefield, but behind it all a stubborn determination to fight on and Stalin's utter ruthlessness in mobilizing all Soviet resources. Persistent Soviet resistance had turned what the Germans wanted, a limited war for *Lebensraum*, into what they feared: a global war of attrition. Stalingrad was not the only story in 1942, and originally not even the main story; if not for the wearying, draining, "peripheral" battles of the summer, the city on the Volga might well be remembered, if at all, for the ease with which it was captured rather than the savage fight that took place there.

Despite the many admirable virtues of this book, it displays one glaring problem, and it is not necessarily a minor quibble since it mars an otherwise excellent operational history. Although Glantz provides numerous maps, the great majority are lamentably unclear and largely useless unless the reader has a magnifying glass at the ready. His tables and biographical sketches provide deep layers of valuable information, so it is regrettable that the maps, which are vital to understanding the complexity of his topic, are so inadequate. I hope that this deficiency can be rectified in the final two volumes of the trilogy. Otherwise, Glantz has made good use of the most recent Soviet and German sources and historiography to craft a detailed operational history that will appeal to those eager to dive into the nitty-gritty of the key 1942 summer campaign in Russia. As always, his information is substantial and his judgments are sound.

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