

Frank Ellis. *Barbarossa 1941: Reframing Hitler's Invasion of Stalin's Soviet Empire.* Modern War Studies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. xxviii + 568 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-2145-3.

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Frank Ellis's *Barbarossa 1941: Reframing Hitler's Invasion of Stalin's Soviet Empire* is a peculiar book. With an introduction, conclusion, and seven thematic chapters, it reads more like an edited volume with seven freestanding essays, in this case all written by the same author. Granted, the seven chapters do cover Operation Barbarossa, and six of them focus on the Soviet point of view and Russian sources, but otherwise each chapter has nothing to do with the one before or after. The book falls short of its ambitious subtitle and lacks a unifying thesis.

The heart of Ellis's new contributions to our understanding of Barbarossa is in chapters 3, 4, and 5. Respectively, these describe Nazi-Soviet diplomacy during the twenty-two months preceding the invasion, Soviet intelligence assessments of the German military during the same time period, and NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) operations in the first months of the war. In chapter 3, Ellis's new sources do give us fresh insights into Soviet attitudes concerning the Second Vienna Award, V. I. Molotov's November 1940 visit to Berlin, and Soviet interactions with its smaller eastern European neighbors. Chapter 4 provides a month-by-month summary of Soviet intelligence evaluations of Wehrmacht preparations. There is very little "big picture" material here but mainly tactical minutia regarding this or that German re-

giment, Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch's December 1940 visit to the eastern deployment area, and Joseph Stalin's well-known distrust of his own security apparatus. Two tables do show how very incorrectly Soviet intelligence estimated Axis forces arrayed against them: 8 million men, 233-243 divisions, 9,000-10,550 tanks, and 13,900 aircraft (p. 180). (Actual numbers were closer to 3 million men, 160 divisions, 4,000 tanks, and 3,800 aircraft.) Other reports chronicle the evolving brutal Nazi occupation of the General Government in Poland. The NKVD that Ellis presents in chapter 5 is "all-powerful" (p. 259), an indication of what the SS would become in Germany a couple of years later. Most interesting and novel here are transcripts of Colonel General D. G. Pavlov's (western front commander) treason trial, and a listing of other high-level trials and executions. The chapter also details the NKVD's roles in organizing Soviet partisans and carrying out Stalin's nationalities policies, relocating ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) and others. These three chapters highlight Ellis's claim to have mined Russian archives for new material after 1991, and are the heart of his book.

Unfortunately, for readers with more than a passing knowledge of the years leading up to Barbarossa and the first few months of the Nazi-Soviet War, the remainder of *Barbarossa 1941* has

little new to offer, either in the way of information or interpretations. In his introductory first chapter, by far the majority of sources Ellis cites in his footnotes are timeworn works of Heinz Guderian and Erich von Manstein plus the Nuremberg trials transcripts. Chapter 2 on the Nazi Commissar Order is basically a lengthy discussion of Felix Römer's 2008 work *Der Kommissarbefehl: Wehrmacht and NS-Verbrechen an der Ostfront, 1941/42* (The commissar order: Wehrmacht and NS crimes on the eastern front, although not available in English), so Ellis offers little fresh material here. Excerpts from the diary of a corporal in the reconnaissance battalion of the 20th Panzer Division, evidently unearthed recently, are the subject of chapter 6. This makes for interesting reading, but again we learn very little that we did not know before: entry after entry details well-known episodes of vehicle unreliability, lice, comradeship and duty, mail call, noncommissioned officer and junior officer casualties, guard duty, plunder, primitive Russian conditions, feast or famine logistics, etc. In chapter 7, Ellis recaps a half-dozen examples of Soviet World War II fiction without explaining why these (out of hundreds or thousands he could have picked from) are so worthy of our attention. Further, most of these have been available in Western translations for decades, so again, there is very little novel here. Chapter 8 consists of Ellis further discrediting the already long-discredited *Icebreaker* (2009) by Viktor Suvarov. His main ammunition for his analysis is "new declassified archive material" in the form of one memo from Marshal K. E. Voroshilov to Marshal S. K. Timoshenko, dated December 7, 1940 (p. 400).

Ellis's conclusions in chapter 9 are a litany of the usual suspects explaining German failure: if only the Nazis hadn't been Nazis (i.e., were nicer to Slavic civilians, Red Army prisoners of war, farmers and peasants, etc.); if only the Germans hadn't been such poor judges of the strength and resiliency of the Soviet state/system; if only all Germans had seen the true value of capturing Mo-

scow; and so on. He does add one curious new suggestion that might have helped Barbarossa succeed, a codicil to the "if only the Nazis hadn't been Nazis" argument: early in the campaign, Adolf Hitler should have made a speech, an emotional appeal to the Soviet people, explaining his good intentions concerning his planned occupation of the USSR. Those who know and understand the underlying nature of the Third Reich and Stalinist USSR, or who subscribe to Ian Kershaw's "working toward the Führer" thesis, might have a hard time believing that one (insincere, given Hitler's beliefs at least since writing *Mein Kampf*) speech would have convinced many Soviet citizens, or future German perpetrators.

Some readers may be puzzled by the personalities and topics Ellis includes to buttress his argument: Thucydides, H. G. Wells's *War of the World* (1897), the Röhm putsch, and post facto, Mao's Great Leap Forward. Also, *Barbarossa 1941* includes some minor editing problems, such as in the text dropping "der" from the name of Germany's ambassador to Moscow (although it appears in the index). I cannot speak to the veracity of Ellis's newly discovered Soviet sources, but if his complete overreliance on outdated and shaky German references (Guderian, International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, etc.) is any indication, this could call into question his Russian-language materials as well. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 would have made fine journal articles. In the final analysis, however, throwing a spotlight on a couple of tangential issues does not amount to "reframing" military history's largest campaign.

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