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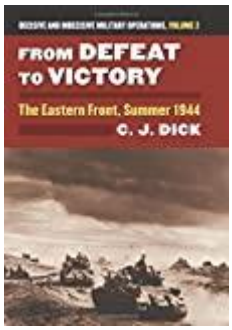

C. J. Dick. *From Defeat to Victory: The Eastern Front, Summer 1944, volume 2 of Decisive and Indecisive Military Operations.* Modern War Studies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016. Maps, tables. 368 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-2295-5.

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C. J. Dick's *From Defeat to Victory: The Eastern Front, Summer 1944* is the answer to the problem of warfighting that Dick presented in *From Victory to Stalemate: The Western Front, Summer 1944* (2016), his first volume of *Decisive and Indecisive Military Operations*. In contrast to the Allies, the Soviets conducted eight strategic operations during the summer of 1944, with just one of these operations conducted on a larger geographic scale than the entirety of the Allied campaign from June to September, and they did so while developing and adhering to operational doctrine. This Soviet application of the art and science of war resulted in fifteen operational encirclements and the destruction of two hundred German divisions.

In the introduction, Dick explains that operational art to the Soviets, unlike to the Allies, was of "central importance" (p. 5). A common theme emerged for Red Army operations: the Soviets selected German groupings for "encirclement and destruction," used surprise and *maskirovka* (concealment and deception as a part of Soviet planning) to overcome defenses, used numbers and fire to achieve a breakthrough, and then exploited the breakthrough with a penetration deep into the rear to seize "strategically vital ground" (pp. 3, 4). The principal aim was the destruction of German forces in spite of heavy casualties, accomplished by operational maneuver throughout the enemy's depth. Dick concludes with a warning, that contemporary Western powers may still not have learned these immutable lessons of history.

In chapter 1, "Soviet Doctrine and Praxis Prior to 1944," Dick, as he does in the first chapter of *From Victory to Stalemate*, examines the interwar period and the differences between Soviet and Western thinking. The Soviets believed in a mechanized, mass army that used deep battle to defeat enemy forces and carried the war into enemy territory. The result was doctrine, Field Regulations 1936 (PU-36). Operational art was key, which Dick defines as follows: "The structuring of tactical actions—some simultaneous, most sequential—so that their sum is greater than the individual parts" (p. 21). Dick then reviews the first two years of the

war, in which the German launch of Operation Barbarossa was a strategic and operational surprise. Joseph Stalin ordered a counterattack on all nine fronts between Leningrad and Crimea in the winter of 1941-42. The German offensive culminated, saving Stalin from his own bad decisions. Moreover, the German decision to focus on Stalingrad and leave their flanks to weaker Allied contingents proved to be the blueprint for subsequent successful Soviet operations: destroy flank armies and encircle groupings. The Germans had underestimated Soviet strength (believing they were facing 160 divisions, not the real number of 279 divisions), the Soviet ability to reconstitute industrial production, and the Soviet willingness to trade space for time.

By 1943, Stalin began accepting his generals' advice to absorb German blows before counterattacking. By the summer, the Soviets employed a new operational approach: penetrate German defenses and then conduct operational maneuver in the enemy's depth. The Korsun'-Shevchenkovskiy Operation in 1944 confirmed that the Soviets were mastering operational art and able to take advantage of quickly developing opportunities to (nearly) encircle and destroy German forces. Dick concludes that Soviet doctrine gets "an equal share of the credit" with numerical superiority in explaining Soviet operational and strategic success in the third period of the war (p. 86).

In chapter 2, "Strategic Offensive Operations, Summer 1944," Dick examines three of the eight strategic operations conducted during the spring and summer: the Belorussian, L'vov-Sandomir, and Yassi-Kishinev Operations. The Soviet Supreme High Command, the ***Stavka***, first destroyed the Army Group Centre in Belorussia, then struck Army Group North Ukraine, and then attacked Army Group South Ukraine to advance into Romania and the Balkans. In June, with thirteen combined-arms armies, one tank army, four air armies, seven tank-mechanized corps, four cavalry corps, and dozens of brigades and regiments, the Soviets destroyed Third Panzer Army, largely destroyed Ninth Army, and were set to encircle Fourth Army—all in six days. By July, the Soviets had taken most of Belorussia and tore a 155-mile-wide hole in the German front. Also, in July, the Soviets commenced the L'vov-Sandomir Operation with northern and southern thrusts with the aim to encircle German groupings and capture L'vov. The operation was successful, and by the end of August, the Soviets had established bridgeheads over the Vistula River. For the Yassi-Kishinev Operation in August, the ***Stavka*** focused on taking Romania. For its operation, the Soviets focused on the weaker Romanian sectors, forced the Romanian government out of the war, and took Bucharest by the end of the month. This final summer operation defeated the entire German southern flank. Dick concludes the chapter with an assessment of Soviet logistics, emphasizing that control was delegated to operational commanders with higher command, ensuring they had the supplies necessary for a planned operation.

In chapter 3, "Operational Art in Maturity, Summer 1944," Dick analyzes the three Soviet strategic operations, viewed through the lens of operational art. Specifically, Dick introduces the concepts listed in Field Regulations 1944 (PU-44), in which combined arms, operational maneuver, and offensive operations are emphasized. First, a breakthrough of German defenses, despite the high costs, was to be achieved, and then tanks and mechanized corps would exploit the opening to encircle and destroy German armies. An operation's effectiveness was measured in three ways: degree of enemy destruction (over 50 percent was goal), depth of penetration, and preservation of offensive combat effectiveness.

For the breakthrough phase of the Belorussian Operation, the Soviets conducted a two-hour artillery barrage and then attacked with infantry, trailed closely by armor. The Red Air Force provided close air support. For the exploitation phase, the one Baltic and three Belorussian fronts

advanced 50 to 90 miles and widened the breakthrough frontage to 125 miles. The advance was so rapid that the Soviets operated within the Germans' intelligence-decision-action cycle, putting the Germans in an unrecoverable reactionary mode. For the breakthrough phase of the L'vov-Sandomir Operation, the Soviets selected penetration sectors of only 6 percent of the total front, and then concentrated 70 percent of their artillery and infantry and nearly all of their armor on those sectors. The Germans countered Soviet artillery preparatory fire by withdrawing to a second tactical zone. The Soviets had also attacked through too narrow of a corridor but made the correct decision to rapidly change the center of gravity from the southern to the northern axis. For the breakthrough phase of the Yassi-Kishinev Operation, the Soviets once again concentrated their firepower on a very narrow penetration sector, aiming for the Romanian-guarded flanks. The breakthrough phase was so rapid that the Red Army encircled the Germans by the end of the third day.

In analyzing Soviet operational art, Dick concludes that the breakthrough continued to be problematic. The German tactic of deepening their defenses rendered artillery fire less effective. The Soviets lacked close infantry support armor, and the Soviets were forced to commit tanks for the penetration attack, which reduced their ability to exploit the enemy's depth. The Soviets continued to improve their planning and operations into 1945, and this, coupled with a western front and effective *maskirovka*, enabled the Soviets to take Warsaw and reach the Oder River by February.

In chapter 4, "Some Conclusions," American and British strategy and warfighting is contrasted with that of the Soviets. For Stalin, a western front was a double-edged sword. Stalin wanted at least forty German divisions drawn away from his forces, and the Western allies inflicted 70 percent of German air losses. But the Western powers also threatened to take Europe and put it under the spell of capitalism. Together, the Allies essentially destroyed Army Group B in the West and Army Groups Centre, North Ukraine, and South Ukraine in the East. Adolf Hitler was forced to gamble with the Ardennes offense in December 1944. This nearly thirty-division diversion allowed the Soviets the opportunity to conduct their most effective operation of the war, the Vistula-Oder Operation.

Dick concludes the chapter with a review of the Allied shortcomings that he details in volume 1: the disputes over strategic and operational goals, the focus on territorial gain at the expense of destruction of the German army, the use of firepower over deception, and the impairment of "victory disease."[1] Dick minces few words in chastising the Western Allies, saying they "lacked any concept of operational art" and "were more focused on fighting battles than on developing campaigns," and it is "not unfair to suggest" that they would have fought in a 1919 "style" but with new technology (p. 251). Stalin, unlike the Allies, learned that the World War I concept of attacking on a broad front was outdated, and Soviet post-Kursk operations were proof of that understanding.

In chapter 5, "Some Reflections about the Future," Dick pontificates on security strategy, commenting on democracies and military conflict; the future challenges of multipolarity and hybrid warfare; and the Western failure to understand, grasp, and update doctrine. With regard to Western failure, Dick presents a view that the West has a World War II mindset where doctrine is "largely reduced to questions of how to apply overwhelming firepower most effectively" (p. 279). To him, future success will depend on "whether armies have the mental and psychological flexibility to adjust speedily to the mutations war is undergoing" (p. 284). Armies must "remodel their doctrine, training, and organization" and develop a culture that opens minds to "unwelcome intelligence," rewarding those that take risks and avoid groupthink (pp. 284-85). On an interesting side note in this

chapter, Dick presages Russian aggression toward Ukraine, writing that Ukraine is "a core issue for Moscow on which a stand must and will be made" (pp. 278-79).

The criticisms of national differences in volume 1 remain the same for this volume. Dick acknowledges the broader point that Soviet success in its operational approach to the eastern front was due to factors not available to the Allies: unilateralism without the necessity of politics, compromise, or avoidance of high casualties. Dick writes, "Equally, however, [the Soviet operational approach] was not a doctrine that could have been adopted by Western armies. No military in a genuine democracy could adopt methods of fighting so cynically prepared to accept as a matter of course the heavy casualty bill to be paid" (p. 266). As a result, Dwight Eisenhower may have applied a de facto operational approach of relying on air supremacy, numerical superiority, and reliable firepower to remain consistent with strategic guidance of casualty avoidance.

Volume 2, like volume 1, is not a fast-paced, no operational pause, concentrated read; it is the attritional struggle of its predecessor with the distraction of repetition. In volume 1, the importance of Antwerp and the Scheldt estuary is repeated. In this volume, the reader is reminded ad nauseam of the Soviet warfighting approach: tactical penetration to exploit the enemy's depth and done with speed and surprise. Repetition is not only confined to concepts but also to details. For example, the German tactic of withdrawing to a second position to preempt a Soviet artillery barrage is repeated seven times in chapters 2 and 3.

From Defeat to Victory is a historical analysis and also a contemporary reference book, essential for understanding the importance of operational art, planning, and execution. Like its companion volume, it needs to be assigned reading in joint professional military education. The lessons it provides to warfighters are necessary for understanding what it takes to win the next conflict.

Note

[1]. C. J. Dick, *Decisive and Indecisive Military Operations*, vol. 1, *From Victory to Stalemate: The Western Front, Summer 1044* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2016), 362. See also my review of the first volume for H-War: Bradley Podliska, review of *From Victory to Stalemate*, by C. J. Dick, H-War, H-Net Reviews, May 2021, https://networks.h-net.org/node/12840/reviews/7676875/podliska-dick-victory-stalemate-western-front-summer-1944-vol-1.