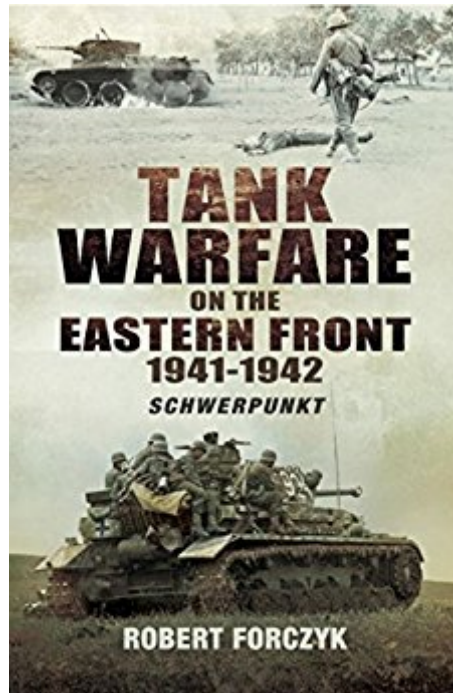




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Tank Warfare On The Eastern Front 1941-1942: Schwerpunkt



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. Next, he clearly understands combined arms warfare, and his analysis points out that Germans successes ... and Soviet failures ... in this time frame was largely due to fact that the Germans understood the importance of it and the Soviets usually did not, or at least they lacked the patience to pull it all together. Third, I find his work much more balanced between the German and Soviet points of view than most other authors. He also applies a necessary corrective to recent works that basically state that either the Germans couldn't have won the war, or that they were beaten shortly after launching Barbarossa. He points out that German losses, while heavy, were not crippling in 1941, at least not until after Operation Typhoon, and even then the Germans weren't beaten. And he takes great pains to show both sides' successes and failures. (As an aside, I wonder how the war would have played out if the Germans had dug in for the winter in late October rather than pushing their forces until they were

overextended and worn out, as the author shows that they were still in reasonably good shape at that point.) And fourth, he clearly explains how the Soviet tank forces painfully learned their lessons and were slowly becoming more combat effective over time, rather than just showing snapshots, so to speak, of how bad they were in 1941 and better in 1942. The included photographs were great, but I would have liked to have seen a few more maps. (I understand that this is a limitation set by the book's publishers, though, and not the author's fault.) The appendices giving orders of battle and tank production were also good. Overall, this is an outstanding book that shows how critically important armored forces were for both sides during this portion of the war. It presumes that you have at least a passing familiarity with the subject matter, but that's ok, because you wouldn't be buying a book on tank warfare if you didn't. :-) But it's written at a level that a novice can still follow, so you won't be buried in technical jargon that you don't understand. To sum, this book has earned a coveted spot on the top shelf in my office. Five stars.

Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front Robert Forczyk's *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front* was my first venture into the early stages of the Russo-German War in many years. All my prior reading was contained in books written from the early 1970's and before, therefore the research done with Soviet sources makes for a completely different read than the past histories. This book focuses on the armored conflict of the first two years of this clash of arms, and came per recommendation on a history forum that I often visit. After having taken a long "vacation" from all things World War II in general, and the Russo-German War in particular, I was, in a sense, refreshed and my interest was renewed. I found Forczyk's book compelling and difficult to put down. Part of this was due to the inclusion of Soviet industrial and war records. Forczyk makes it clear that the Germans had no real technological advantage over the Russians as their conflict began. Quite to the contrary Russian T-34's and KV 1's were superior to anything the Wehrmacht possessed. What the Germans initially had was: superior intelligence and communication; knowledge of use of combined arms (use of infantry, tanks and Luftwaffe) and its efficient employment; and a technological program that adapted rather quickly in the form of anti-tank weaponry that somewhat negated the superior Russian tanks. *Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front* gives general strategies for opposing forces, but also gives an almost daily tactical breakdown of armored interactions on the three fronts; North; Center; and South. This is one of the book's strengths, and at the same time, its Achilles heel. If Forczyk's book has one weakness, it is its lack of maps. Most major strategic locales are located on the few maps with opposing forces, but it is the daily tactical movements that will throw the potential reader for a loop. This has been a flaw in most books dealing with the Russo-German War that I

have read. One might hope, at least for more comprehensive maps, with the towns and rivers as described in the book. This would enable the reader a much better chance at visualizing the movement of opposing forces. I also found it interesting to read Forczyk's opinions of some of the individuals involved. One gets the feeling he looked upon Heinz Guderian as a prima donna, and Georgy Zhukov as a lackey and bully for Stalin. Some have offered opinions of Forczyk being over critical of author David Glantz. What I observed was he disagreed with some of the contentions that Glantz put forward, and he explained why. Robert Forczyk's Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front is a compelling book. It explains the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing forces, and how they both adjusted over time. The lone weakness that neither side could adequately address during the entire conflict was the logistics necessary for the great open spaces involved. Almost eerily, in the appendices, one is able to look at the numerical superiority of tanks produced by Soviet industry compared to that of the Germans. As the Russians adapted and adjusted as the war went on, and their tank crews became better trained, their opponents were caught in a three front meat grinder, and it becomes all too obvious as to the eventual outcome. Soviet losses were dreadful in regard to both manpower and material. German losses increased as the war continued. Whereas Russian manpower seemed limitless, and industrial output continued unfettered, the exact opposite was faced by the Germans, even as they were to eventually embrace the total war philosophy, which by that time, was too late. Forczyk's Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front, though focused on the first two years of the war, give the reader a taste of what was to come during the remaining two and one half years. Forczyk's work is a welcome addition to those interested in the history of the clash between Germany and Soviet Russia.

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