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***Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle of Smolensk, 10 July-10 September 1941. Volume 1: The German Advance to Smolensk, the Encirclement Battle, and the First and Second Soviet Counteroffensives, 10 July-24 August 1941***

by David M. Glantz

**Reviewed by David R. Stone**, author of *A Military History of Russia* and Pickett Professor of Military History, Kansas State University

Readers familiar with David Glantz know what to expect in *Barbarossa Derailed*—a meticulous operational narrative covering a key Eastern Front campaign. In keeping with his works on Manchuria, Kursk, Rzhev, Leningrad, and most recently Stalingrad, he provides precise accounts of maneuvers down to the level of individual divisions, documented by lengthy excerpts from situation reports and operational orders from Germans and Soviets alike. Glantz does not pretend to offer personal touches or gripping man-on-the-ground accounts. He does operational history exclusively and he does it very well. He also does it quickly; his preface notes this massive book took him six months to complete (breaking the hearts of lesser historians).

The book, first of two narrative volumes on the Smolensk campaign, is not easy: Glantz says it “must be studied as well as read.” Readers must possess a firm grasp of mechanized warfare to understand what is going on. A good set of maps needs to be close at hand; sadly, the maps in the book itself are not enough. The maps in *When Titans Clashed* and *The Battle of Kursk*, Glantz’s earlier collaborative works with Jonathan House, were models of clarity. This book, like Glantz’s ongoing *Stalingrad Trilogy*, relies heavily on reproductions of contemporary German operational maps. These are not nearly as good. Unlike the colored German originals, these black and white maps make it far harder to distinguish between German and Soviet forces, and make all lines blur together: unit boundaries, rivers, and axes of advance. Glantz promises a third volume of documents and a fourth volume of colored maps; those might improve the situation.

This volume covers the first half of the Smolensk campaign. As the book opens, the first weeks of Germany’s Operation Barbarossa had succeeded in smashing Soviet border forces, but the German high command was already facing difficulties. Its armor and mechanized infantry were penetrating deeply into Soviet defenses, leaving vast numbers of Soviet troops cut off and encircled. German logistics, however, could not keep up with the pace of the advance, and the bulk of German foot infantry was occupied liquidating vast pockets of Soviet soldiers far behind the armored spearheads. Only Fedor von

Bock's Army Group Center, having captured Minsk and now headed towards Smolensk en route to Moscow, was truly achieving unequivocal success; Army Groups North and South, possessing less armor, were advancing more slowly and failing to achieve the massive encirclements made possible by Center's 2d Panzer Group (under Hermann Hoth) and 3d Panzer Group (Heinz Guderian).

On 10 July 1941, Hoth and Guderian crossed the Dnepr River, headed for Smolensk against thrown-together Soviet forces competently led by Semyon Timoshenko. By 15 July, Hoth's tanks, looping north, had reached the outskirts of Smolensk and brought the Smolensk-Moscow highway under fire. Guderian, taking a southern approach, found himself hampered by the stubborn resistance of encircled Soviets in the city of Mogilev and persistent counterattacks on his right flank. Guderian's tanks and motorized units lacked infantry, and so failed to close the ring. Three Soviet armies were pocketed west of Smolensk, but they maintained a tenacious hold on a narrow lifeline to the east. Three weeks of stubborn resistance under Pavel Kurochkin before the final evacuation of the Smolensk pocket made a major impression on Hitler and the German generals, particularly when combined with clumsy but worrisome counteroffensives on Army Group Center's northern and southern flanks.

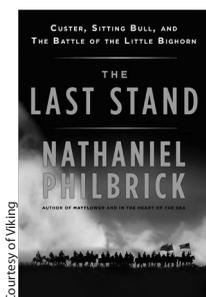
As a result, concern over Soviet successes and stiffening resistance on the road to Moscow, not merely overconfidence, led Hitler to issue a series of directives putting the priority to the north (Leningrad) and south (Ukraine) and delaying the central drive on Moscow. As early as 19 July, he declared that Army Group Center would advance on Moscow with infantry alone, sending its armor elsewhere. The result was that in early August the main German drive east halted, while Guderian and Hoth shored up their flanks and defended their gains. Taking advantage of the pause, Timoshenko launched Ivan Konev's 19th Army in a counteroffensive north of Smolensk, while Georgii Zhukov relentlessly pounded the German bridgehead across the Desna River at El'nia, just east of Smolensk. As both Soviet attacks lost momentum, the Germans launched a major offensive by Army Group Center's left wing on 22 August. As this first volume ends, that offensive had smashed a hole in the Soviet right, setting up what would become another massive encirclement of four Soviet armies at Vyazma.

Some might question the need for four hefty volumes on the Battle of Smolensk, one campaign among dozens on the Eastern Front. On the other hand, Soviet forces committed to the campaign outnumbered today's US Army; Soviet losses in killed, missing, and captured in this single campaign were greater than for all US forces in all the Second World War. Glantz goes beyond this to argue for the campaign's intrinsic significance. He charges previous historians with regarding the Smolensk battles as mere "bumps in the road," neglecting the terrible damage they did to the *Wehrmacht* and thereby leading to Hitler's ultimate failure at the gates of Moscow in December 1941.

Glantz certainly succeeds in providing the best account of Smolensk to date, but his relentless focus on operational narrative means that he spends less time on analyzing those broader questions of significance. First, he does not name those historians whom he regards as having slighted the battle. Indeed,

John Erickson, the only historian whose work approaches Glantz in comprehensiveness and rigor, calls the Smolensk battles “massive upheavals” which “drew no less than six Soviet armies into the Smolensk and [El’nia] whirlpools. . . . Almost a dozen Soviet armies . . . were flung into these fiery mazes of attack and defense” (*The Road to Stalingrad*). Certainly the Eastern Front deserves more attention; it’s not clear Smolensk in particular has been slighted.

Next, it is quite possible the Soviets did themselves more harm than good by their fruitless battering of German lines in hasty counteroffensives. The Smolensk pocket trapped and destroyed three Soviet armies; the most successful Soviet counterattack (by Konev’s 19th Army) succeeded in damaging a German infantry division. No Soviet counterattack at Smolensk ever succeeded in the breakthrough and encirclement by which the Germans routinely wiped out Soviet units wholesale. Although Glantz endorses Zhukov’s view that “In fierce combat, it is far better to suffer losses and achieve your mission than not to achieve any sort of aims and suffer losses every day by marking time in place from day to day under enemy fire,” in many cases the Soviets suffered losses and did not achieve their aims. As Chief of Staff Franz Halder remarked on the battering the Germans were taking in the El’nia bridgehead, “No matter how badly off our troops are, it is even worse for the enemy.” It may be that the Soviet soldiers and material lost in disjointed counterattacks left the Soviets vulnerable to the disastrous Vyazma encirclement which immediately followed. Soviet counterattacks certainly shook Hitler’s confidence, and Glantz may be right that they fatally weakened Army Group Center. More analysis is needed to prove it, though; perhaps the second volume will provide that.



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## ***The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn***

by Nathaniel Philbrick

**Reviewed by Jim Shufelt, COL (USA Retired),** Center for Strategic Leadership, US Army War College

The combination of a troubled presidential administration, an unclear national strategy, an army equipped with inadequate doctrine and inappropriate materiel, and a skilled tribally organized foe describes situations that the United States has faced in recent conflicts; however, Nathaniel Philbrick’s account is about a battle that occurred on the Western Plains of America over one hundred and thirty-five years ago, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, popularly known as the Custer Massacre. While a virtual book-writing machine has thrived over the last century examining every aspect of this event, resulting in thousands of documents, Philbrick has successfully combined insight from first-hand accounts, official histories, campaign studies, personality studies,