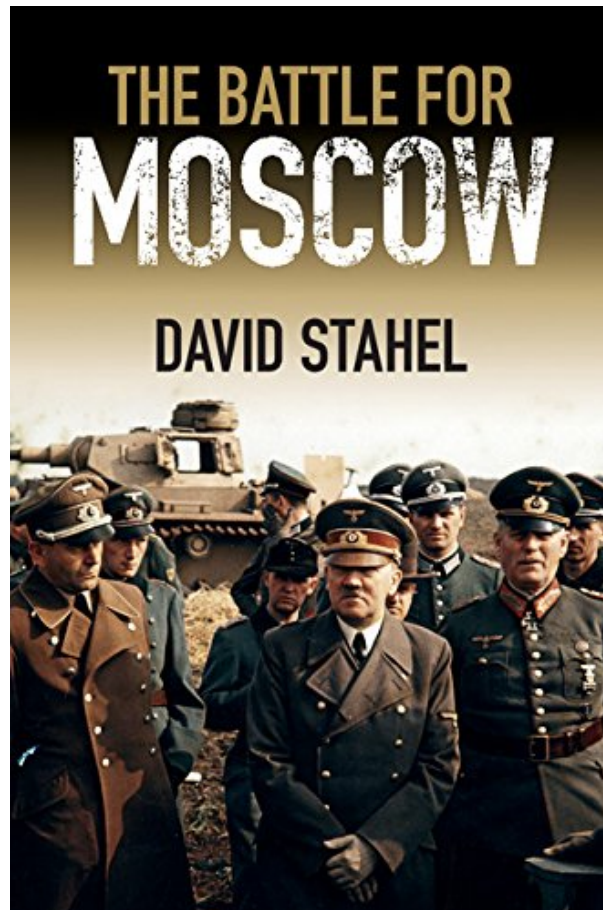


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Review

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About the Author

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THE BATTLE FOR MOSCOW BY DAVID STAHEL PDF

In November 1941 Hitler ordered German forces to complete the final drive on the Soviet capital, now less than 100 kilometres away. Army Group Centre was pressed into the attack for one last attempt to break Soviet resistance before the onset of winter. From the German perspective the final drive on Moscow had all the ingredients of a dramatic final battle in the east, which, according to previous accounts, only failed at the gates of Moscow. David Stahel now challenges this well-established narrative by demonstrating that the last German offensive of 1941 was a forlorn effort, undermined by operational weakness and poor logistics, and driven forward by what he identifies as National Socialist military thinking. With unparalleled research from previously undocumented army files and soldiers' letters, Stahel takes a fresh look at the battle for Moscow, which even before the Soviet winter offensive, threatened disaster for Germany's war in the east.

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Most helpful customer reviews

67 of 75 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting, but...

By Thomas Reiter

Readers of Stahel's other books will know what to expect in this volume... This book is less an account of the military campaign itself (it does not go into much detail about the actual fighting, movement of various units, etc.) than an examination of certain aspects of the campaign which are of primary interest to the author, namely:

- 1) the deplorable condition of German forces as they reached the gates of Moscow;
- 2) the general incompetence of the German generals and military leadership; and
- 3) the complicity of the average German soldier in the atrocities committed by the Germans in Russia.

If you're not interested in the three topics described above, I don't recommend that you read this book. The great strength of this book are the extensive excerpts from private German letters and diaries cited by the author--from private soldiers up to the top generals. These excerpts are generally rather interesting and well-chosen, and the author does a good job of using them to support his arguments (although see below). Unfortunately, as in his previous books, the author focuses almost exclusively on German sources.

I should also note that the rather extensive parts of the book dealing with atrocities make for grim reading--this is not a light read.

A couple of things I didn't like about this book:

- 1) In general, the book is rather "ideological" and the author comes across less as a dispassionate historian than someone with an axe to grind. By this I mean that the author cites an impressive (and to this reader convincing) set of sources to support his arguments, but I found that his commentary often drips with disdain for the Germans--I'd have appreciated a more neutral tone...
- 2) As mentioned above, it is actually rather difficult to follow the military campaign in this book; the author doesn't mention very many specific locations or Soviet units/commanders, so it's difficult to track the action (almost all references to the action are tied to German units, ie the "left flank of the 4th Army", etc.) In the author's defense, a battlefield account is obviously not the author's main focus, and he includes 18 maps of the battle which would help with this, but they are unreadable on a kindle... In my view, however, the book would have been even better if it were easier to place the author's arguments within the context of on-going

military operations.

3) Maybe its my imagination, but the author seems to quote less from various logistics records in this book than in his previous books, and relies almost exclusively on excerpts from personal German letters/diaries, and to a lesser extent, official German unit diaries, etc. While this makes the book more interesting to read, it left me wondering whether a different author could have chosen different letters/diaries, or even different lines from the same letters, to make entirely different arguments...

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Another Must Read from Stahel!

By Seth

I have read all of Stahel's books on the eastern front (as well as many other) and I these are, without doubt, the best books on the German offensive in the east in 1941. Beyond the battle narrative, what Stahel offers is much needed context for the battle (administrative, economic and ideological). The recent book by Zetterling and Frankson (The Drive on Moscow) is a rehash of many older accounts repeating some of the myths Stahel directly addresses and debunks. Consider also Andrew Nagorski's 2007 book The Greatest Battle, Robert Forczyk's Moscow 1941 and the older book by Albert Seaton The Battle for Moscow - all of these cast the battle as an essentially close-run encounter where the Soviets snatch their victory from the jaws of defeat. Stahel shows this was simply not the case. That German operations against Moscow in November 1941 were madness, devoid of any strategic sense. The crisis in German supply, men and material raises the question why the German high command proceeded with the offensive at all and here Stahel provides an answer - it's what he calls National Socialist military thinking. The explanation of this is itself a whole new take on German operations in WWII and alone worth the price of the book.

Highly recommended!

19 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

a must-have for those interested in this period

By Daniel P. Fradl

I am writing this with my audience primarily intended to be Mr. Stahel himself. Mr. Stahel, I wish to express my thanks for this excellent series of books. I have now read all four and found them to be fascinating, well-written, and most of all very informative. Having read a good deal of WW2 military history, I still believed many of the myths that you systematically destroyed through these books, all the way up to believing that some German units had seen the Kremlin glimmering in the distance. I am now glad to see much more clearly the reality of the situation in this war. The statistic that keeps jumping out at me (from the first book), was that the Germans ran out of truck tires just 6 weeks into the war -- that really illustrates up the intractable logistical/production bind they were in if the war didn't end in the first two months. And that bind grew increasingly tight as the war continued through 1941, through the end of this book. Panzer divisions with as few as 7 tanks trying to take Moscow, with massive Russian reserves and defense in depth before they even reached the well-prepared city? I now see clearly it was never going to happen. Greatly looking forward to whatever you publish next!

See all 29 customer reviews...

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