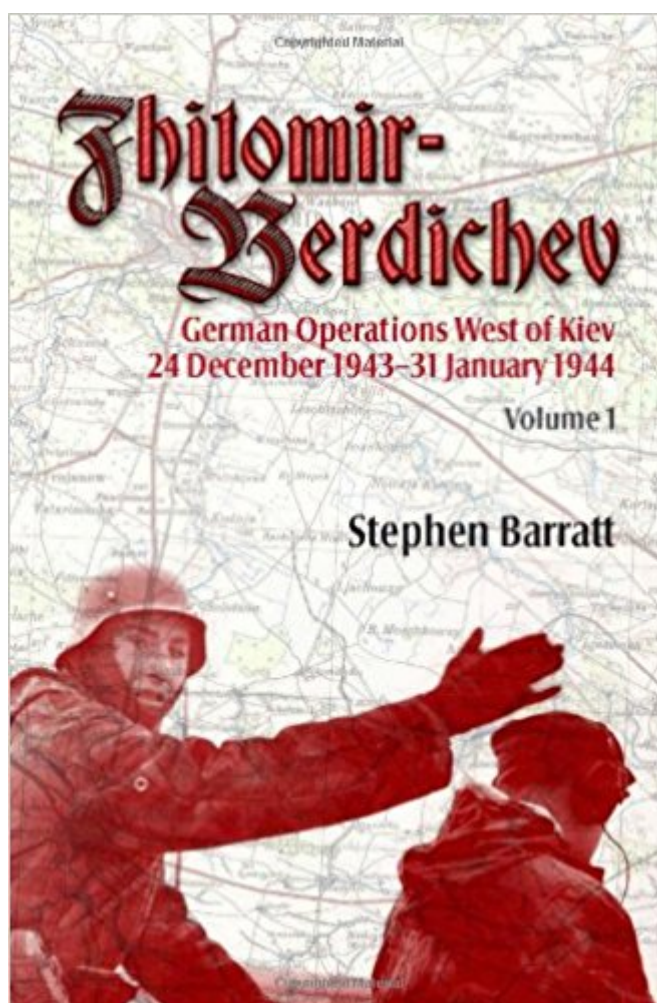


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Zhitomir-Berdichev. Volume 1: German Operations West Of Kiev 24 December 1943 - 31 January 1944



Synopsis

On 24 December 1943, the Red Army launched the first of a series of winter offensives against the German Army Group South under von Manstein, the overall object of which was to liberate western Ukraine from occupation. This first offensive was undertaken by forces of the 1st Ukrainian Front under General Vatutin, and struck the German 4.Panzerarmee commanded by General der Panzertruppen Raus. It is known to Soviet historians as the Zhitomir-Berdichev operation. In the space of three weeks, Vatutin's troops achieved a spectacular level of success, advancing over 100 kilometres on a wide front and pushing back the 4.Panzerarmee on every sector. They liberated Zhitomir and Berdichev as well as a number of other towns in the region, and by the middle of January, the 1st Ukrainian Front had achieved almost all of its initial objectives. By this time though, von Manstein had brought in the headquarters of the 1.Panzerarmee to help coordinate the defense, and the Germans began to stabilize their shattered front line with a series of counterattacks aimed at the over-extended position of many of the forward Soviet units. These counterattacks, conducted over the following three weeks, succeeded in creating a series of loosely-held pockets, inflicting considerable losses in men and material of the Red Army, and eventually restoring some form of cohesive defensive position. Nevertheless, the limited success von Manstein had achieved was only temporary. The combination of Russian assault and German counterattack had created the preconditions for the next two Soviet winter offensives; the Korsun'-Shevchenkivskii operation and the Rovno-Lutsk operation. For the first time, here is a detailed and well-researched history of the important but neglected operation that was to be the beginning of the liberation of western Ukraine. Based on the unpublished records of the German 1st and 4th Panzer Armies, and supplemented by comprehensive mapping and order of battle data, this book provides an authoritative, detailed, day-by-day account of German operations as they developed in response to the Soviet offensive. It also gives a vivid insight into the planning and decision-making of the German Army field commands in conducting not only a mobile defense, but also a series of counterattacks which, in the final analysis, could do little more than provide a temporary respite in the face of the growing strength and skill of the Red Army. This history is being published in two separate volumes, which together will cover operations that took place between 24 December 1943 and 31 January 1944. This first volume describes events until 9 January 1944, during which period the German forces were pushed back forcibly under the weight of the Soviet offensive, and includes 140 detailed daily situation maps in color to allow the reader to follow operations as they developed day by day. The maps are presented in a separately bound map book to aid the reader's use of the study. The second volume will cover the period from 10 to 31 January

1944 and will describe the series of counterattacks undertaken by the Germans as they tried desperately to stabilize a situation that had already slipped beyond their control. Together this two volume set comprises a ground-breaking survey which, in the breadth of its scope and the depth of its detail, is likely to set a new standard for future studies of operational combat on the Eastern Front.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Barrett does a superb job detailing the course and outcome of this important Soviet offensive from the German perspective. His careful and detailed study of German military records provides the essential basis for subsequent balanced accounts of how Field Marshall von Manstein conducted maneuver war against an essentially faceless but numerically superior enemy." (David M Glantz) "This book should go down as the definitive look from the German side of the hill at the critically important combat operations on Army Group South's left flank during the lead up to the far more famous Battle of the Korsun Pocket." (Globe At War)

The Zhitomar-Berdichev campaign occurred in late December 1943 to late January, 1944 in the Ukraine just west and southwest of Kiev. This book provides a very thorough and detailed account of that campaign using archived action reports from German units (Army, Corps and Division) that were involved. There is little account from the Russian side in this book although the Russian units involved are identified (through German action reports I'm sure). What is learned, for me, from this

account is the way that the German defense and how the Russians attacked. As mentioned in other sources (not of this battle but of this time in the war), the Germans were defending using mostly an outpost approach. Consequently, there were many holes in the line and where there weren't holes, the units defending the territory were minimal in many parts of the defense line. Since the Russians outnumbered the Germans in the first phase of this battle - they attacked with over 800,000 soldiers and 2000 tanks against the German total of less than 200,000 and 400 each - the Russians would probe for weak spots and then drive major armor units through the created hole. While this was happening, the Germans would attrit the Russians significantly in soldier and tank losses and fall back waiting for the appropriate reinforcements for a major counterattack. The counterattack will be covered in the second book. Please note that this is a challenging book to read. It is not meant for the casual reader who is interested in this campaign and WWII in the Eastern Front. The book describes German units that were in specific locations that were attacked and/or had to retreat. Because of this, at times, the book can be a little dry which is why I didn't give it the highest evaluation. However, there is a second book of maps, which are excellent, which provide support to the reader to understand the flow of battle. Since many of these maps appear to be originals, they can be a challenge to read at times, but the entry of the lines of attack (red for Russians and black for Germans) is very helpful. Consequently, although I recommend this book, please note that it can be a tough read. However, in my opinion, it is worth the read and I'm looking forward to the 2nd book which will highlight the German counterattack.

Prior to reading Vol 1 of this series, I was not all that familiar with the Zhitomir-Berdicev campaign. Sure, I knew the place names and that the LAH and DR had seen action there, but that was about it. Looking to expand my eastern front knowledge, I picked up both volumes from . Did it meet my expectations? Well, Yes and No. This book is detailed. Barratt has used a day by day chronology to take the reader through this Soviet winter offensive and the German response. The text is littered with the names of small villages that units are either attacking or defending on a given day. This is where the map book really comes into its own. With other titles, I might be hunting down some obscure village on a map, but this series gives you a nice book of them. Like the text, the map book is in day by day order, giving you an overall view of the front before individual maps showing divisional and Korps level movements. The text really focuses on command decisions and movements at Korps and Armee level. Barratt breaks it down into an overview, before taking the reader into the actions of each Korps and its component divisions on a given day. The German day and evening reports are extensively utilized here. However, at times one starts to get the feeling that

he is just reading a summary of German reports from 1944 and little else. One thing that became something of a bore after awhile was the repetitive use of certain phrases to describe defensive success or failures. "X division was attacked in battalion strength with tanks...the attack was beaten off/seen off" or "X division returned to the main defensive position"...these are repeated throughout the book. Don't expect any kind of 'action' here. There's pretty much no mention of anything below the regiment level. So no accounts of infantry fighting for frozen trenches or Panzers charging into battle against superior Soviet tank strength. You may get how many Soviet dead were counted, but curiously there is no comparable measure of German casualties. This book is strictly about the movement's of an army's component units and the subsequent results, no more or less. Yes, this book will give one a detailed view of the Zhitomir-Berdichev campaign. You will learn quite a bit. However, it is lacking any 'flavor' and at times will bore you. If you want a casual read, find something else. However, if you really want a study of an important, but little known, campaign from the perspective of German Korps and Armee level leadership, then you may want to pick it up.

I don't have much to add beyond what the other reviews have stated. To the author: Is there any chance of getting a COLOR master map of the area? The map booklet with unit locations plotted on new maps each day is great, but the lack of color on the maps themselves make it a bit confusing. A single, color, map of the entire area would be a great help. Thanks.

Book has a wealth of info covering units engaged in this theater of operation in Russian. Many maps with good pictures showing different units engaging Russian units. The unit time tables and movement are covered as well as stats on units casualties. Shows the combat on a very close basis when Russian units are in close contact.

This is not exactly a "book". It is more of an in depth study that uses two volumes: a text book and a map book. There is no casual reading here. Very hard to coordinate the maps and the text at times. I really did not like this set at times but now that I have plowed through it, I don't think you could do this any other way. So hats off to Mr. Barratt. Must have been just as hard to write and publish as it is to read.

Perfect!!!!!! Exactly what I was expecting!!!!!! Highly recommended!!!!!! Thank you!!!!

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