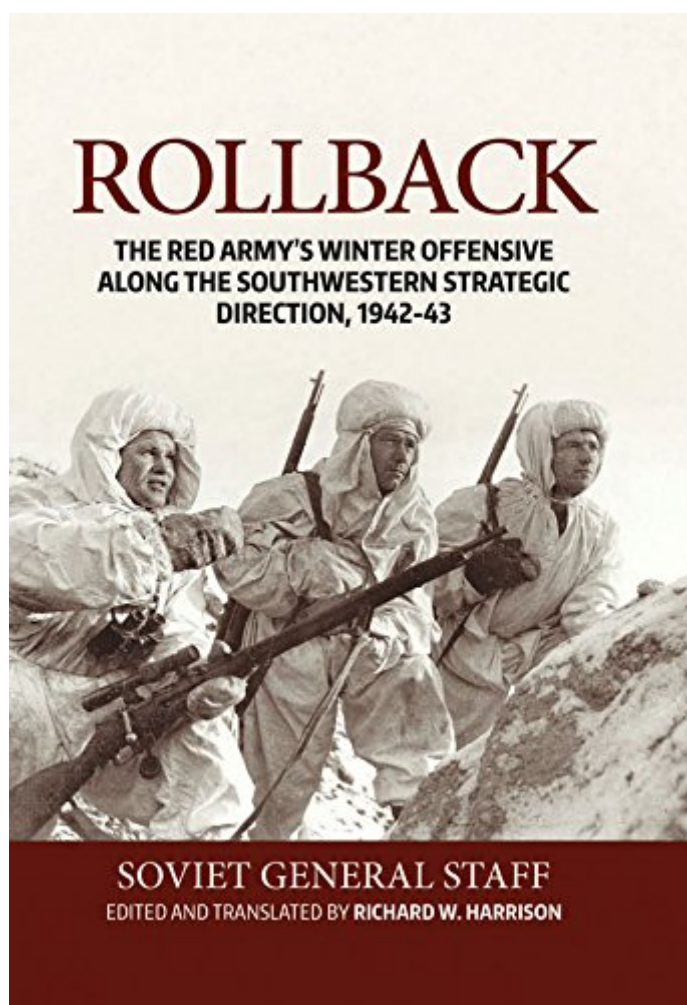


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Rollback: The Red Army's Winter Offensive Along The Southwestern Strategic Direction, 1942-43



Synopsis

Rollback: The Red Army's Winter Offensive along the Southwestern Strategic Direction, 1942-43 covers the period from mid-December 1942 to mid-February 1943, one of the most critical periods of the war on the Eastern Front. It was here that following the encirclement of an entire German army at Stalingrad, the Soviets sought to take advantage of the ruptured Axis front in southern Russia to finish off the German, Italian and Hungarian allies and liberate the economically vital areas of eastern Ukraine. This study is drawn from a number of wartime and postwar articles, published by the General Staff's directorate for the study of wartime experience. Also featured are documents relating to the operational-strategic conduct of the various operations, which were compiled and published after the fall of the Soviet Union. Several articles deal with the preparation for and conduct of the Southwestern Front's Middle Don operation of December 1942. Originally intended as an ambitious offensive to cut off the German forces in the North Caucasus by driving on to Rostov, the operation was later reoriented to meet the threat of the German effort to relieve Stalingrad. The offensive not only accomplished its objective of turning back the German attack, thus dooming the Stalingrad garrison, but also destroyed the Italian army in the East as well. The Soviet Voronezh Front then struck further up the Don River, and in the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh operation destroyed what remained of the Italian forces in the area, as well as the Hungarian army. This enabled the Red Army to capture Kharkov and push nearly to the Dnepr River by mid-February, before being thrown back by a skillful German counteroffensive. The territorial results of this operation set the stage for the front's subsequent Voronezh-Kastornoe operation, which enabled the Soviets to push as far west as Kursk before exhaustion and growing German resistance brought the offensive to a halt. Further to the south, the Soviets were able to capture Voroshilovgrad and penetrate into the industrial Donets Basin. The book also contains a detailed Soviet examination of the employment of tank and mechanized corps during the campaign. The conclusions reached here had a direct bearing on the restructuring of the Red Army's tank armies in time for the summer campaign of 1943.

Book Information

File Size: 10524 KB

Print Length: 412 pages

Publisher: Helion and Company (January 19, 2016)

Publication Date: January 19, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B074P3SKLF

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #286,781 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #19

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Military

#51 inÂ Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Military #115 inÂ Kindle

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Customer Reviews

This book is highly Soviet centric. Its primarily a composite of six articles published since the war. These articles written originally by the Soviet General Staff plus a few other lesser Soviet documents comprises the bulk of Mr Harrison's background material. The author admits the material is incomplete but I would say he's done a good job of correlating the material into an informative narrative. If you have read earlier edited works by David Glantz on the Soviet General Staff's campaigns, you'll have a general understanding for what this new book is about though they're some differences for this new book, as already mentioned, is a composite of different articles published at varying times. The General Staff had the same premise for writing this campaign as the other campaigns they covered, that is, as a training tool for future study by military personnel. This coverage is a commander's high flight view of the overall battle though there is some battlefield history. The timeframe covered is December 1942 through February 1943 and the location starts in the Stalingrad sector where the German 6th Army is encircled. Though the actual encirclement of 6th Army is not included, there is some mention of von Manstein's futile attempt of relief though the primary coverage concerns the Southwestern and Voronezh Fronts' attempt to penetrate the line and destroy as much of the German force along with its Allies defending the Don-Chir River lines. The Romanian and Italian forces are especially targeted because of their perceived weakness. Its a critical time in the war when the Axis was most vulnerable and the Soviets were most confident. The campaign will show the motivation engendered on both sides but from opposite ends of the spectrum: one side supremely confident while the other totally demoralized. The main theme of the

book is logically broken down into five parts; each part covering a major battle sector, ranging from the deep south at Voroshilovgrad northward to approximately the AGC boundary line. Each battle is broken down further into: Introduction and planning, the actual battle and conclusions. The planning stage is usually quite detailed and the reader should be prepared for it. Parts of this book is "dry" reading but the conclusions and the remedies discussed for errors made during battle was interesting. There are eight black and white maps which were good but being Soviet they're quite elaborate and will take time to assimilate. There are also 43 tables providing key information and statistics of each major battle covered. These tables cover the usual info like force size, number of tanks, casualties etc. Since penetration of the German line was so important, the numbers of miles achieved is usually also mentioned. An Appendix of secondary documents and an Index as well as Footnotes are included. Mr Glantz covered this same period in his 1991 book "From the Don to the Dnepr" but there are differences between the two books that give the reader a reason to have both books for they make a good complement to each other. Glantz has greater coverage of battlefield history while Harrison has greater coverage of planning and reacting to the battle at command level. There is more German coverage in the earlier book as well. If you have an interest in this Soviet offensive then this new book (and the earlier book) is definitely worth your consideration.

"Rollback: The Red Army's Winter Offensive along the Southwestern Strategic Direction, 1942-43" is a compilation of a few articles written by military authors and for internal military studies followed up by a selection of translated documents from archival collections previously released in Russia. The articles range from the 1940s into the 1950s and one can see minor differences in the time periods with how operations were discussed and analyzed. For those familiar with works by David Glantz, these articles read in a similar way but are usually less readable with a dry, technical voice recounting fact after fact. The majority of the action takes place parallel to or right after the Stalingrad operations being conducted in late 1942 and early 1943, so keeping that in mind it's no wonder that you have more limited operations going on simultaneously that are relying on a few armies and corps for various encirclement operations. Each of the major operations here begins with an overview of STAVKA orders for front/army and corps/division commanders, followed by a look at training, intelligence, logistical issues, engineering troops, tank forces, artillery, air support, etc. Mention is also made of terrain and weather conditions are also discussed. Although the author(s) are aware of how detrimental weather conditions can be for operations, both on the ground and in the air, at one point when they could have blamed the weather for a poor Red Army performance they choose instead to more objectively point to the inadequate actions of army and front

commanders. So in that respect, readers of this volume should keep in mind that these articles were made for internal consumption and for Soviet military personnel to learn from and grow, rather than a rehashing of familiar propaganda slogans (although that is found among these pages every now and then as well). The real interest here for readers is the tone taken with respect to deficiencies. In at least two or three of the operations covered, there is an emphasis on what was done correctly and where there were deficiencies that need to be addressed in future discussions and eliminated in future operations. From lack of engineering support and tanks lost due to concealed minefields, to lack of air support and poor coordination on the part of army and front commanders, the authors are rather frank in what Red Army forces did well and where and why they performed poorly. That in and of itself is not often found among publications created for the public in the Soviet period so the highlighting of these issues is very important to note and worthwhile to be aware of when contemplating to what extent the Red Army had learned its trade by the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, that is, leading up to the Third Battle of Kharkov in the spring of 1943.

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