



The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat

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The gripping history of the ferocious turning point of World War Two, when Hitler's armies were halted on the Eastern Front

At the moment of crisis in late 1941 on the Eastern Front, with the forces of Hitler massing on the outskirts of Moscow, the miraculous occurred: Moscow was saved. Yet this feat of endurance was a prelude to a long and arduous retreat in which Soviet troops, inspired by deep beliefs in the sacred Motherland, pushed back German forces steeled by the vision of the *Übermensch*--the iron-willed fighter. Supported by tanks and ski battalions, Soviet troops engaged in this desperate struggle in the harshest Russian weather.

Michael Jones draws upon a wealth of new eyewitness testimonies from both sides of the conflict to vividly chronicle this pivotal chapter in the Second World War as he takes us from the German invasion of the Soviet Union on the morning of June 22 through the counteroffensive that carried into the spring of 1942. From the German soldier finding his comrades frozen into blocks of ice to the Russian lieutenant crying with rage at the senseless destruction of his unit, the author shows us the faces of war when the Wehrmacht was repelled and the titanic and cruel struggle of two world powers forged the fate of Europe.

The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat Details

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From Reader Review The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat for online ebook

Jesper Jorgensen says

I really don't know why I keep reading books about the war on the Eastern Front. It is grim reading of atrocities, death and human suffering of an incomprehensible magnitude. But still the topic is fascinating, and I read books like this with horrified fascination. Maybe in the hope to get an answer to my question: Why? Why?!

Mr. Jones' book is very well written and easy to read.

Regina Lindsey says

In *The Retreat*, Jones brings his extensive research to light and tells the personal stories Operation Typhoon and Russian counter-offensive that led to Russia's victory over Germany. What makes this book different than other works on this battle is the intensely personal accounts by soldiers on both sides.

Regardless of your views on Russia the country has an amazing military history. Probably the two best known victories are those over Napoleon and Hitler. Jones begins by comparing and contrasting those two battles. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that "Hitler should have known better," but in reality the decision was much more complex. From there we follow the soldiers through the battles to Operation Barbarossa.

This is a very good overview of these battles. However, there are a few weaknesses with the work. First, there are very few maps. To really understand the movement and follow the battle I recommend finding a map to compliment the reading. Finally, the work could be quite redundant.

This was a gift from one of my daughters and I was thrilled that she took the time to choose a book she knew would capture my interest. I wasn't even aware of this book!

Stephen Hackney says

The reason I have spent much of my reading time these past several years reading about the Eastern Front, WWII, is to capture an understanding of the struggles, purposes, insights of the common soldier, both on the German side and on the Soviet side. Michael Jones very effectively captures some very singular, poignant moments, most of them private thoughts of the individual soldier. Yet, his telling of the story of a specific period of this war and the days and weeks of "Hitler's first defeat," moves along well chronologically, and geographically, by the use of personal memoirs, soldiers' letters, and official unit histories, unifying his account of this time period - December 1941-to-February 1942. Mr. Jones is able to not just give an account of what was happening in the northeast around Rhzhev, but he takes the reader across the entire front, from Klin to Tula and Orel. It is a panoramic overview of a coordinated counterattack by the Russian (Soviet) Red Army, told by the use of singular vignettes, of an event that, but for Stalin's poor military judgement (a chronic problem for him dating back to the Civil War and the war with Poland, 1922), the Soviets nearly ended the war in early 1942.

Sue says

Well-written, full of diary entries and first-hand accounts, and difficult to put down. This book covers the hell that was the first winter on the Eastern Front, and how hubris and stubbornness outweighed common sense and the reality of conditions on the ground. It draws all the expected parallels between Napoleon's 1812 invasion and Hitler's, and shows how both sides were quite aware of this apparent repetition of history. It also attempts to expose the complicity of the Wehrmacht in the increasingly inhuman treatment of POWs and civilians; some of it is explained away because of impossible conditions, but the underlying racism and "total war" mindset promised a deadly and horrific result. The book focuses mainly on the fight over Moscow, and why the Germans failed to take it in 1941; how the infamous Russian winter, combined with a Soviet military that was far from defeated, stopped the Blitzkrieg within 12 miles of the city. The book ends with the changes of Spring and the promise of new fighting between an invasion force at a fraction of its original strength and the growing threat of partisan behind-the-lines fighting. Ultimately, this book left me wanting to keep reading, so I'm going to have to track down the author's follow-up, "Total War."

Nick says

I enjoy reading history which is infused with firsthand accounts. Mr. Jones' book is a history of the first winter on the Eastern Front told by those that were there - both Soviets and Germans. Mr. Jones focuses on how such a mighty calamity befell the German war machine and the consequences to the individual soldier. The following is a quote by Mr. Jones describing the Germans' psychological attitude regarding their military prowess and what that attitude resulted in during the Winter of '41/'42, "When a belief becomes a certainty, one loses the sense that it began life as a point of view, one which events might prove wrong. And when that certainty becomes internalized, it removes all thought of a plan for alternative outcomes."

This story is harrowing, brutal, and sad. Through the eyes of those that were there - many who didn't make it home in the end - we get a glimpse into what fighting on the Eastern Front was really like. I've always heard it said how vicious this war was to soldier and civilian alike. Mr. Jones' book takes it to a very personal level. You can envision the collapse of the German assault on Moscow as Operation Typhoon comes to a halting end and the Soviet counteroffensive picks up steam. Finally General Model comes on the scene and through a miraculous offensive makes the Soviets relinquish their offensive initiative. Both of these events, the halting of Typhoon in the suburbs of Moscow by the Red Army and the encirclement of the Soviet 29th Army by the German 9th Army were won on the narrowest of margins.

You'll also get some wonderful insight into the leaders of each side. For instance I enjoyed this quote from General Model, "'We will strike the Russian flank, and catch them in a stranglehold,' he declared. His staff officers were astounded by Model's optimism in a truly desperate position. 'And what, Herr General,' one asked him, 'have you brought us for this operation?' Substantial reinforcements were urgently needed, but none were at hand. Model regarded the man for a moment, and then replied with a calm assurance: 'Myself!'"

One of the best books I've read. I highly recommend this to any student of WWII.

Timothy says

Pretty dry book, long chapters filled with a lot of anecdotes from surviving soldiers and/or their memoirs on both sides. It could have used more maps, I got lost with all the Russian place names and the back and forth movements of the armies.

BDT says

This is the last word on the Battle for Moscow and Operation Typhoon. The author avoids the temptation for 'mission creep', and sticks to telling the dramatic yet underappreciated story of Army Group Center's push towards Moscow and its horrific aftermath.

The one phrase that will burn into your brain: "It was very, very cold."

Robert Morrow says

While the book has some dramatic and moving passages, the constant stream of soldier reminiscences (many of which are redundant), cause the narrative to lose steam. The individual battles that make up the story are not framed effectively to create a connected story, and the strategies behind the actions are given limited attention. The failure of the Nazi government to remedy the Wehrmacht's shortage of winter gear is never adequately explained and then one day, poof! The Germans have winter clothing. A good description of hell, but I would have liked more of an exposé as to its causes.

Scott Whitmore says

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union, and the subsequent release of archives and documents, has been a boon to military historians like Michael Jones. Jones has written several books on the Eastern Front, including my most recent read: *The Retreat: Hitler's First Defeat*.

The Retreat does not break any new ground in describing the Red Army turning back Hitler's armies at the gates of Moscow during the critical months of December 1941-February 1942, but where it stands out is the narrative method. Jones draws heavily from first-hand accounts in diaries, letters, unit histories, and interviews of soldiers and civilians on both sides, crafting a very human perspective of events.

Of particular note for me was the number of very senior German officers who realized the Nazi's harsh treatment of Soviet prisoners was creating a human tragedy that would have severe consequences. We could argue whether these officers could or should have done more than simply report the situation — prisoners were starved, beaten, diseased, overworked, and out-and-out murdered while held in ad-hoc camps with little protection from the harsh winter — but the record at least shows they were aware and concerned.

Tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners died in German captivity, and the Red Army carefully ensured its soldiers were aware it was happening — ensuring most Soviet soldiers would fight fanatically and with utter hatred for the Nazi invaders.

Common German soldiers were also aware of what was happening with prisoners, and more directly the civilian populace. There are several instances in *The Retreat* in which individual soldiers from both sides displayed humanity and compassion, including a spontaneous Christmas mass attended by combatants and civilians from both sides.

Of course these incidents are overshadowed by the brutality and no-holds-barred fighting which is the common — and correctly held — perception of warfare on the Eastern Front. Many German soldiers and senior officers shared Hitler's rampant racism and hate of the Soviet system, and their actions and words show this clearly. Still, it is refreshing to see the views of a few individuals change over the course of the book, as they come to grips with seeing the results of their actions.

My largest quibble with this book is the lack of photos in the Kindle edition. The author speaks in the preface of obtaining photos during interviews with participants, and the hardcover listing on Amazon.com indicates eight pages of photos, but evidently these were not deemed necessary for the eBook version.

I found *The Retreat* to be very interesting and I would recommend it to anyone interested in getting a ground-level look at action on the Eastern Front. It was a quick read, with Jones setting the stage by providing strategic updates on the situation before shifting to first-person accounts that added color and drama.

lawrence says

It is good to read books like this when you get too comfortable and bored with your easy life. This book is mainly a collection of diary entries, excerpts from letters, etc. from soldiers involved in the fighting in the eastern front during the winter of 1941. The first-hand accounts bring home the horror and misery of both the soldiers and ordinary Russians caught up in this warfare. It is mainly from the German perspective, but there are also many Russian accounts as well.

This is not the book if you are looking for a thorough description of troop movements, strategy, etc. of the opposing armies. It is aimed at letting the humans caught up in this tell the story. There are many pages that will stick with me (and haunt me) for years. The author does an admirable job of sifting through all this primary material and letting us see the both the good and terrible that humans are capable of in battle.

Philippe says

I enjoyed reading this book. I particularly like the comparison of the German attack compared to Napoleon's venture into Russia. Napoleon got to Moscow by October while the Germans never made it.

The fact that most amazed me is that the Germans were so successful against the Red Army until December 6 1941 and then for two months from that date were in total disarray and retreated more often than not in full panic. The German high command believed erroneously that the Red Army was one push away from total collapse. It is ironic that during the two months the Russians took the initiative they committed the same errors and believed that the German Army was one push away from total collapse and therefor threw all caution to the wayside and got trapped in many locations surrounded by the Germans.

Hitler took over as commander of the Eastern front and his Stand Fast policy caused a tremendous amount of losses in men and material. After two month Hitler was finally convinced to rescind that policy. The Germans were able to stop the Russian advance by reorganizing the supply lines, learning how to fight in the freezing weather and exploiting opportunities where the Russians were overextended and isolated deep in the Germans rear.

They basically both committed the same mistakes of overoptimism, stretched supply lines and adventures attacks with understrength and under provisioned units. But halting the Russian and stabilizing the front the Germans were able to inflict on them serious losses and allowed them to take the initiative on the Eastern front in 1942 that of course will end in the debacle at Stalingrad.

A well written book using both personal stories to illustrate the plight of the soldiers on both sides as well as looking at the campaign from a strategic and tactical aspect.

Martinxo says

Gripping and compelling account of this most gruesome theatre of war

Vasco says

<http://viajarpelaleitura.blogspot.pt/...>

'Aussie Rick' says

This latest book from Michael Jones covers the German offensive in 1941 to take Moscow, Operation Typhoon, and the subsequent Soviet counter-offensive, leading to Hitler's first retreat. The author uses numerous first-hand accounts throughout the book, taken from German and Russian soldiers and Russian civilians.

The book is easy to read and offers a nice overview of this period but nothing too technical or in-depth, more of a general or popular historical narrative. There are a number of black & white photographs within the book that had been taken by the soldiers involved in this conflict.

Some of the first-hand accounts are quite graphic and quite a few I had not previously read before. Here are a few examples:

"Osadchinsky and his comrades reached a German forward position. 'Before us was a scene of utter carnage,' he continued. 'There were bodies of our soldiers, entangled in the barbed wire, and those of the enemy, littering the trenches, bayoneted or ripped apart by grenades.' Osadchinsky had fought the Germans with a burning hatred in his heart, and had shown their soldiers no mercy. But now, to his surprise, he felt a

grudging respect for them. 'They have followed the orders of their high command,' he thought, 'and fought and died where they stood. What iron discipline! But what is the point of such senseless sacrifice? These men have shown real heroism – but I doubt whether their heroic deeds will ever be known or appreciated'."

From a German soldier: "*There was the stink of frostbite, as men used the same bandage – pus-encrusted and stiff with scabs and rotted flesh – again and again. Some had long rags of blackened flesh hanging from their feet. It was snipped off. The bones were exposed, but with their feet wrapped in cloths and sacking, the men had to go on standing sentry duty and fighting.....Everyone had diarrhoea, and one soldier was so enfeebled that he collapsed on the way to the doctor and froze to death. Older men developed rheumatism, and often screamed with pain. But we couldn't let anyone go.*"

Three maps are supplied within the text of a basic nature, but enough for the reader to have a general idea of the major locations mentioned and the major offensive movements. Overall this is a good and enjoyable (if you can say such a thing about a horrific conflict of this nature) book to read and offers a decent general narrative account for anyone who has not previously read about this period of history.

Patrick says

Gripping, grim, moving, can't-put-down narrative of the German drive toward Moscow in 1941.
