

Craig Luther. *Barbarossa Unleashed: The German Blitzkrieg through Central Russia to the Gates of Moscow: June-December 1941*. Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2013. Index. Maps. Photographs. Appendices. 712pp. ISBN 978-0764343766 (Hardback). Price £44.99.

The book has eleven chapters. The first five discuss preparations for war, although with a greater emphasis on the Germans. 'Battle narrative' relating to the operations of German Army Group Centre is the essence of two chapters dealing with the early weeks of the war and there are two more discussing, respectively, the German transition to positional warfare at Smolensk in July/August and the last period of the campaign from August to December; this last chapter includes an overall analysis of why 'Hitler's Blitzkrieg' failed. There are 126 pages on the first two and a half weeks of the campaign and 116 pages on four weeks up to 5 August; the rest of the campaign, 15 critical weeks leading the defeat at Moscow, rates only 53 pages. This approach is consistent with the author's view that the critical moment of the campaign came at Smolensk, but it does make the book's subtitle somewhat misleading. Two further chapters, in the middle of the book, are especially valuable. One discusses the culture shock of German soldiers arriving in Russia for the first time and the other deals with war crimes.

Throughout, a very broad range of sources are used, both up-to-date English-language and German scholarship as well as German memoirs, diaries, and letters, the latter including both *Feldpost* correspondence and the author's recent communications with German veterans. Luftwaffe personnel are included, no doubt reflecting the author's professional career as a US Air Force historian. Bibliography and chapter notes are comprehensive and well laid out and exceptionally valuable as suggestions for further reading in English or German.

The layout is clear with decimalised sections and sub-sections; this makes it relatively easy to navigate around the book using the table of contents. The existing index gives personal names and a list of military formations down to division level. A detailed subject index, or at least one with place names, would have been an invaluable addition.

There are three large sections of photographs, mostly of front-line life among German troops. All are of high quality and few have been generally available before. Ten A3 sheets with 22 colour maps, folded into a pocket in the back cover, are included, mostly large scale maps based on wartime German intelligence assessments, but these are not explained or comprehensively keyed into the narrative. Less

detailed maps in the text itself would have been useful as would have been a basic order of battle, at least for Army Group Centre, at each stage of the campaign.

There is always a danger of a reviewer giving subjective advice on how the work in question *should* have been written but I would make a point that I hope will not detract from the quality of the book as it exists. The volume is dauntingly large and quite expensive (although not in comparison with other books published by Schiffer). It represents value for money but the price and bulk mean the book may not obtain the audience it deserves. The first-person German source material is the really novel feature of the book, as the author says, German historians have shown little interest in the 'simple soldiers' (p.16), and a shorter book with this as the central focus might have been more accessible.

There is nothing wrong with the discussion of strategic and operational matters. I agree with most of Craig Luther's judgements, for example that Hitler's fateful late August decision to secure the army's flanks before moving on Moscow was fundamentally correct (p.615), but much of this has already been dealt with in other recent books.

However it is perhaps unfair to criticise a book for being *too* comprehensive. This is an extraordinary and perhaps unique volume. Craig Luther possesses an encyclopaedic knowledge of the campaign, and a valuable empathy with the ordinary German soldier. The product of his research will be enlightening and useful, both for those already familiar with the events and debates relating to 'unleashing' of the Barbarossa campaign and for those coming to them for the first time.

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