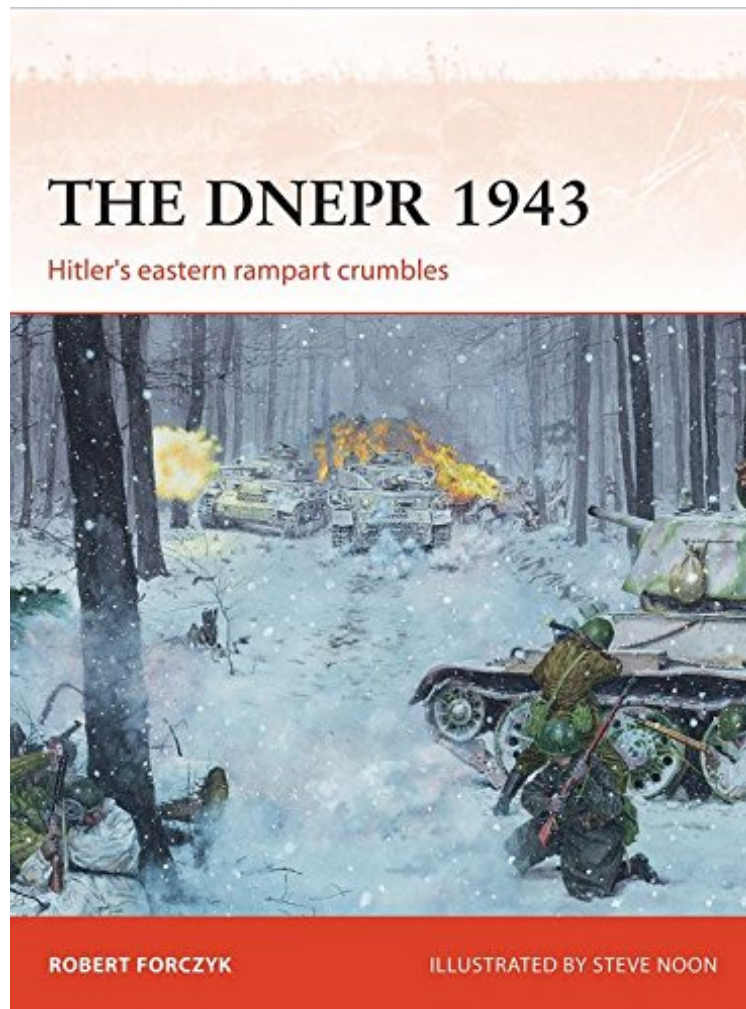


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Robert Forczyk

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Robert Forczyk : The Dnepr 1943: Hitler's eastern rampart crumbles (Campaign) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dnepr 1943: Hitler's eastern rampart crumbles (Campaign):

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. A very good overview of a little studied campaignBy F. Carol SabinThe book's emphasis is on providing a detailed operational account of events on the right and left banks of Dnepr in the second half of 1943. Dr. R. Forczyk offers up a rigorous and absorbing study in the typical Osprey Campaign volume. Displaying a considerable grasp of his subject matter, the author captures the key events of this four-month-long operation in a fine presentation.The book opens with chapters on The Origins of the Campaign and Chronology. These provide reasonable overviews of their respective subjects, followed by the military biographies of main commanders.I must say that, somehow, I don't share author's opinion about Manstein for not being "well suited for

defensive warfare". The chief reasons are the defensive operations in the last months of 1942 (especially the delaying actions and counter-strikes, in face of a superior enemy) and the mobile defense in the vicinity of Kharkov (Feb.-March 1943). The discussions of each branch of service are competently done in the next chapter dedicated to Opposing Forces; I noted a special accent placed on the German intelligence and Soviet pontoon engineers and airborne forces. There is a very generous and pretty comprehensive Order of Battle, filled with German terminology, which I always like, followed by Opposing Plans. All of the above brings us to page 35 and the beginning of the campaign itself. Dr. Forczyk's approach was to describe, in fair detail, the main maneuvers, actions or events, organized chronologically and geographically, across the length of the front line. Among the events, I just mention the failure of the largest Soviet airborne operation of the war, which soured Stalin on large-scale airborne operations for the rest of the war. Illustrations include numerous black and white photos, six maps and three double-page battle scenes, which are followed by explanatory black-and-white pages that follow each spread. The author has made a fine description of the "Battlefield today", with a particular note about the lack of considerations "for English-language visitors" in some museums. One last point I would like to make is that, the Osprey books are my least preferred books written by Dr. Forczyk, chiefly because of its restrictive format. (Now, I'm just waiting for the next book about Operation Sealion!) To sum up, this is a top-notch addition to the Osprey Campaign series, covering a little studied operation. Highly recommended as a concise but informative read on the topic.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Detailed account of the Soviet attacks in southern Russia over the period August - December 1943. By Bayard B. Detailed account of the Soviet attacks in southern Russia and the German defense after the failed Kursk offensive in the summer of 1943. The book covers the period from about August to December 1943. The book gives highly detailed accounts of both the Soviet and German army formations, commanders, and weapons availability and production.

24 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Finally, something on this long overlooked campaign (and excellent too) By Yoda Unfortunately there is little written, at least in English, on the period between the end of the Battle of Kursk and the Soviet breakout from the Eastern side of the Dnepr. This is despite the fact that it decimated more of the important German panzer divisions than did Kursk and it closed any significant breathing time the German army may have had to recuperate from Kursk. Hence it fills an important gap in the literature. The book itself is part of Osprey Publishing's "Campaign" series and is, as a result, limited by its relatively short length of about 95 pages (about a third or so consist of photographs, maps and other illustrations). Hence if one is looking for an academic tome on the subject this is not it. The relevant question thus should be, how well does this book do considering the relatively serious constraint imposed on it by its format? The answer is very well. The book starts off, following the typical "Campaign" format, with a few pages setting up the pre-campaign situation. This was basically that Kursk was a major defeat and that the Soviets launched an offensive immediately afterwards with the goal of not permitting the Germans time to rebuild. The Soviets, with this goal in mind, chased the Germans at full speed all the way to Dnepr. The Dnepr was of significant value as a defensive front as it was a wide river that would be difficult to bridge considering its width and the fact that the Soviets had limited bridging capabilities (a fact that would change as the war progressed). The Germans had some hope that they could bring the Soviets to a stop at this point and buy themselves some time to rebuild and reequip the divisions that were mauled on this front up to this point. The book then goes on to discuss each side's highest ranking commanders. The Germans, as usual, were quite good and the Soviets were much better than they had been in the past. They were not just inexperienced political hacks (though they were political animals) but had the command skills that were so lacking of their predecessors of 1941 and 1942. Unfortunately, there is no discussion, qualitatively, of the lower level officer and NCO quality of each side even though the book is careful to emphasize that the professionalism of the Soviet army, vis-à-vis that of the German, was much improved over the previous 2 years. This gap is very typical of the Osprey Campaign series books. Very few books in this series go into this (a notable exception is Chandler's books on the Napoleonic campaigns like his book on Austerlitz - a book this reviewer highly recommends as one of the best books in the "Campaign" series). This gap is one few weaknesses of the book. The book then goes into the campaign itself. The German army, in short, was exhausted and was short of equipment (much had been lost on the long retreat to the Dnepr) and replacements. The Soviet army was also exhausted, short of fuel and supplies due to the fact that it had greatly overextended its supply lines and also ground up due to serious losses (though it did have the ability to replace men and equipment much more than the Germans did). However, thanks to primarily Hitler's stupidity and meddling, the Germans had made a number of strategic mistakes of the highest caliber that prevented them from having even a realistic potential of stabilizing the front. One of these, a very important one, was not pulling back troops from the Kuban or the Crimea even though a Soviet breakthrough on the Dnepr would trap them. Dr. Forczyk, the author, stated that the 17th Army could have been pulled back from the Kuban to provide a backbone to the stabilize the front (instead Hitler ordered it be used to strengthen forces in the Crimea). Unfortunately, he does not provide much detail into how strong this force was. A typical German Army consisted of some 3-4 corps and each corps from a minimum of two divisions to 4 division (for a range of from 6 divisions to 16). The author also states that a number of Hungarian and Rumanian units could also have been used albeit, again, little detail is provided. In Dr. Forczyk's view these forces could have provided the Germans with a realistic chance of stabilizing the front. A German retreat from the Crimea would have further

strengthened this front. Hitler prevented all of this though. Other strategic factors contributing to the defeat that can be blamed on Hitler, cited by the author, include Hitler's preventing the Germans from retreating as fast as they should have, keeping a number of German units on the Eastern bank of the Dnepr instead of pulling back all of them behind the Dnepr, his decision to replace an on the spot German commanders with a more politically reliable commander from Finland (but one without armoured experience or knowledge of the front at the time) at a critical moment and Hitler's orders not to build fortifications on the Western bank of the Dnepr in the period prior to the arrival of the retreating German troops. One can see why so many British military leaders were so opposed to assassinating Hitler – he seemed to be Germany's worse enemy). All this is not to say that the Soviet did not have their share of problems. The main being the lack of bridging assets to cross the river. However, the Soviet's in typical style, improvised and used a variety of means to establish numerous (but weak) bridgeheads. There are excellent photographs showing many of these improvised means (i.e., wooden rafts built on the spot, etc.) and that implicitly make the point that stronger German defenses (and that 17 armee) could have defeated, at the very least, these initial incursions. The fact of the matter though was that the Germans, due to their weakness, were not unable to prevent the formation of these bridgeheads or to crush them. The Soviets eventually did move up bridging units that permitted them to cross heavy equipment over. It was this, combined with the fact that they were able to surprise the Germans regarding the areas they would use for their breakthroughs (German intelligence was clueless here), that enabled them to breakthrough and prevent this geographic barrier from serving as temporary moat behind which the depleted German forces could rebuild. In short, an excellent high level discussion and analysis (i.e., primarily at the division and above level) of how the campaign progressed and why it turned out the way it did. Highly recommended.

Against the wishes of Hitler, German forces under Erich von Manstein were forced to retreat following the failure of their offensive at Kursk in July 1943. The weakened force had only one possible refuge, behind the wide Dnepr River. The race to the natural defensive line was on, with the Soviets launching one of their largest offensives of the war-- with over two million men on the move. Expert Eastern Front historian Robert Forczyk describes the dramatic four-month campaign that saw the Red Army not only succeed in crossing the Dnepr at multiple points, but also liberate Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. Revealing new details about the largest Soviet airborne operation of the war and the increasingly desperate delaying tactics employed by von Manstein as catastrophic casualties mounted on either side, Forczyk charts the course of the battle that confirmed that the relentless Soviet advance westward could not be halted. Berlin would be next.

About the Author Robert Forczyk has a Ph.D. in international relations and national security from the University of Maryland and a strong background in European and Asian military history. He retired as a lieutenant colonel from the U.S. Army Reserves having served eighteen years as an armor officer in the U.S. Second and Fourth infantry divisions and as an intelligence officer in the 29th Infantry Division (Light). Dr. Forczyk is currently a consultant in the Washington, D.C. area.