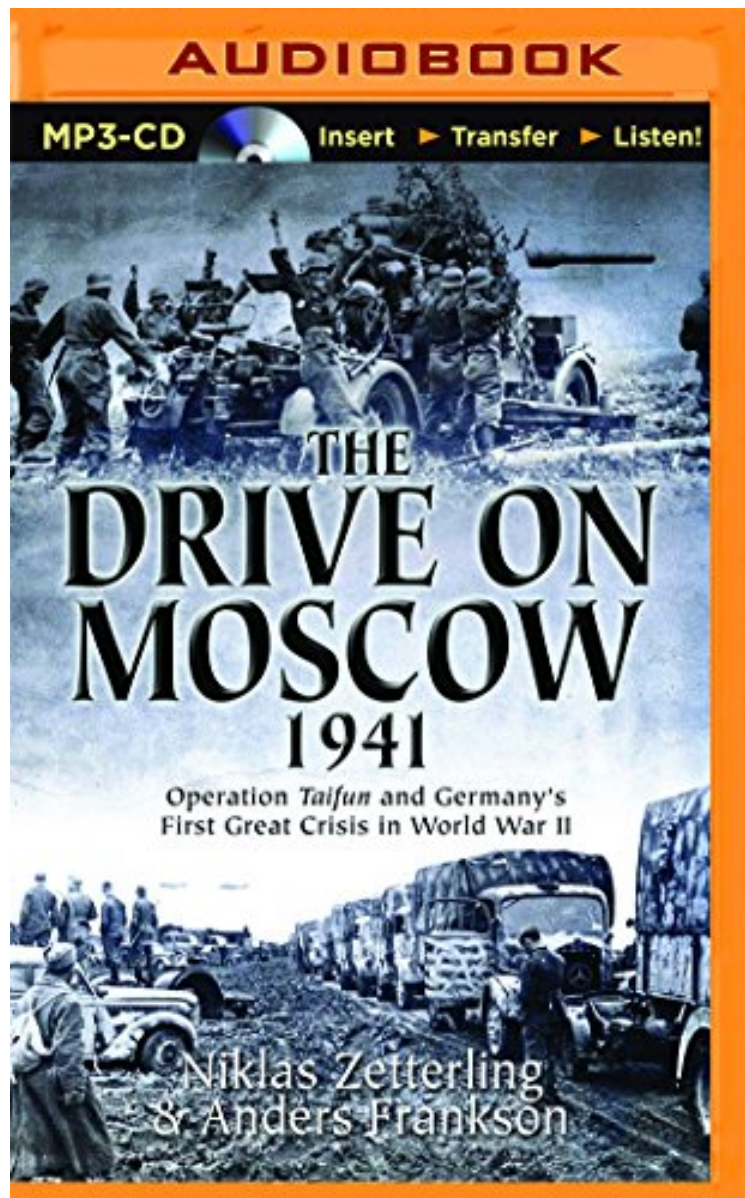


(Download pdf) The Drive on Moscow, 1941: Operation Taifun and Germany's First Great Crisis of World War II

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Niklas Zetterling, Anders Frankson

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Niklas Zetterling, Anders Frankson : The Drive on Moscow, 1941: Operation Taifun and Germany's First Great Crisis of World War II before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and

all praised *The Drive on Moscow, 1941: Operation Taifun and Germany's First Great Crisis of World War II*:

27 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Good Text for those Unfamiliar with the Events, but Little Analytical Depth
By Alexei K. Helmbock
The "Drive on Moscow" is a reasonably well-written narrative history of the events of late Fall 1941, with a fairly rich level of detail on the human level of events. A person new to the topic of the German Offensive before Moscow will get a great deal out of this text. The problem with this text is less with the "whats" but with the "whys." Much of this text's richness comes from its use of excerpts from memoirs and diaries, but therein lies its weakness -- the only semi-reliable analysis provided by those sources is German. Soviet personal primary sources from the time period are overlaid with a heavy hand of Soviet Propaganda. The German sources' biases is more subtle, but also present. That heavy (Soviet) and/or light (German) bias leaves the authors without the building blocks for a true analysis, which would rely on heavier use of technical archives, and some military intelligence know-how to sift the reports to get the true state of affairs. The authors don't have that skillset, leaving us with an interesting, readable, but basic book. (There aren't many authors with the skills to do a deeper analysis, but Glantz, d'Este, and Zamulin go deeper on their topics than this book. Of course the first two WERE military intelligence officers, and the third is a museum archivist).

58 of 63 people found the following review helpful. A balanced and compact study
By F. Carol Sabin
N. Zetterling
F. Anders
new study is a worthwhile, accurate and, I believe, well balanced description of the Operation Typhoon. I noticed in this volume that both Swedish professors made an extensive use of German archival documents as well various Russian books and articles thus obtaining a balanced study. In the short preface, the authors reveal that the volume is not intended only as the description and analysis of an important chapter in the military history, but to demonstrate that was also the real turning point in the last war (and not Stalingrad). A concise operational background that allows the reader to understand the conditions and the debates before the operation is quickly presented in Prologue; as in one previous book dedicated to Kursk battle, Zetterling Anders did not spend too much time with these aspects, which is good in my opinion. The first two chapters are devoted to the Soviet forces disposition on the axis to Moscow (Bryansk, Reserve and West Fronts with more than 1.25 million men) coupled with their concept of operation (some weaknesses are also exposed). On the other side, the plan of the operation, codenamed Taifun -Typhoon, quite typical framed in the German operational thinking, was based on the well-known scheme of double envelopment carried out by two Panzer groups (Hoth's 3rd Pz. Gp. Hoepner's 4th Pz. Gp.) each supported by an Army (9 and 4) which suppose to meet at Vyazma. Another Panzer Group (Guderian's 2nd Pz Gp. staging in southern part of AGC), since could not return from Ukraine in time, was ordered to attack with 2nd Army northeast towards Tula (S of Moscow) and to encircle Soviet forces around Bryansk area, starting the offensive two days ahead the main attack. In this ambitious plan, AGC will not enjoy any superiority of forces (1.2 million men) and had to rely on superior training and leadership in mobile warfare and combined arms operations. The chapter is completed with the debates around the plan and operational decisions between different echelons. From the chapter III ("Guderian attacks") to the XVI ("At the gates of Moscow") the authors cover the actions of both sides with as much detail and insight, the operational coverage being broken down by the three German axis of advance. Occasionally, I could read some stories at tactical level (page 89, 126, 138-139 etc). Luftwaffe's close air support operations were not detailed, but the fuel supply using transport aircraft were often presented as a solution to the logistical shortcomings caused by mud and slush. The initial phase of this operation was a tremendous success for the Germans and all Panzer Groups broke through Soviet defenses and advanced rapidly in rear areas, closing the rings around Soviet forces near Vyazma (almost 1 million casualties!) and Bryansk (50.000 POWs). As before, the Soviets reacted sluggishly to all events, tried first to defend all along the front and began a general withdrawal too late to avoid capture. According to the book, the Germans casualties were very low (up 20th October they lost only 155 tanks and 57.000 men), clearly showing that German forces were not seriously weakened by the losses during Typhoon. After regrouping their forces, Wehrmacht tried a last push which started on 15th November and brought the Germans at the gates of Moscow. Tactically speaking, this November offensive was little more than a frontal assault, which caused further problems to the Germans already exhausted and ill-supplied. Despite the Soviet huge losses - about seven times greater than German's - Red Army still could raise fresh armies and reinforce their depleted forces (with Siberian divisions, not as powerful as previously thought, and militia divisions), which eventually halted the Germans and would make possible the launch of Moscow counteroffensive in December. Throughout the book the authors definitely do not take the German or the Russian side as leads us through the different phases of the operation. They finish the book with great conclusions (chapter XVII-Causes and consequences) that explains the reasons for why Germans failed at the gates of Soviet capital. Among reasons I could find weather (muddy phase-which seriously impeded German efforts during second half of October and also increased fuel consumption), the logistical shortcomings, Soviet forces (the resistance of the surrounded troops and forming new reserve armies). The authors stated that a sequence of disasters, similar to Vyazma-Bryansk, would have toppled the USSR, but the Germans could not cause enough of them in short period of time. Of course, they had an alternative solution that could save them from the incoming disaster, as the authors remarked on page 239: a complete halt after the liquidation of both pockets and the establishment of suitable defenses for the winter and secure supply lines. Even in possession of

Moscow, the Germans would still have been overextended and exposed in winter of 41-42; therefore Germany was not likely to end the war in 1941, whatever strategy was adopted. Had AGC continued to advance on Moscow in August, the Soviets would have lost their capital before December. But I believe they would not have surrendered, considering here the will of Stalin to continue the struggle and still powerful Soviet armies. However, without Moscow as a starting base, the Soviets could not have launched such a powerful winter offensive against AGC in early December 1941. Therefore, considering the above reasons, the continuation of the German advance and the winning of the Eastern Campaign (the seizure of Moscow included) depended also on other key factors: inadequate preparation for war (all-out wartime production), Russian climate and geography, unexpected toughness of the Soviet system; also, they underestimated the effects of distance on their operation and never planned for a winter campaign at all. Why Moscow was the real turning point of WW II, a view that I personally fully agree, is not considerably detailed in this chapter or properly supported, as I expected at the beginning of the book. Instead the authors devoted some pages wondering if Germany could ever win the WW II... Having seen only seven maps is a little disappointing, and I believe more would have been useful especially for the last phases of Typhoon. Two or three more maps (from rkkaww2) would have solved all problems (the map on page 18 was probably adapted from this website and it is excellent). Finally there are 20 appendices, full with tables and figures, covering just about every conceivable fact of Typhoon (personnel and equipment losses, orders of battle, Soviet reserves, etc); there are also a notes section and an index. Overall, a very good book with interesting accounts, strategic debates and accurate conclusion; therefore I can only heartily recommend it to all readers. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Decent, but not great

By R. A. Forczyk

After years of relative neglect in English-language historiography of the Second World War, the German defeat at Moscow in 1941 has been getting quite a bit of new coverage in the past few years, including books by Michael K. Jones, Jacky Radey, Rodric Braithwaite, David Stahel (pending) and even myself. In the *The Drive on Moscow 1941*, Swedish researcher Niklas Zetterling offers his take on why the German offensive - Operation Typhoon - failed and marked the beginning of the end for the Wehrmacht. Zetterling and his co-researcher Anders Frankson rely heavily upon German archival records, as usual, although there is more of an effort to incorporate Soviet sources in this book than in previous efforts by the pair. Overall, *The Drive on Moscow* is an interesting read, fairly well written and with twenty useful appendices at the rear of the book. However, the authors don't say anything particularly new and the coverage is a bit succinct at times. The lack of adequate maps is a major drawback. Thus, this is a good book to have on the back shelf but it's almost more of an introduction to this topic than a detailed campaign history. The authors begin by outlining German and Soviet plans in late September 1941. One thing I really appreciated is that the authors didn't spend a lot of time wallowing in Halder's diary as a means of trying to explain Hitler's plans. The over-use of Halder's diary has almost become a cliché in recent Eastern Front literature, with many researchers appearing not to "get it" that Halder was out of touch with front-line realities and that Hitler regarded him as merely a useful clown. As for this book, it would have been nice if some of the charts, tables in the appendices at the back were worked into the introductory sections, but *c'est la vie*. The campaign narrative proper begins on page 49, with Guderian's attack on 30 September and then quickly shifts to the Hoth/Hopner attacks. Details on Soviet dispositions and actions are a bit vague, as are some German actions. The authors later conclude that supplies were main limiting factor for the Germans - which has been said before - but missed the opportunity to add in German quartermaster data that might have confirmed this. In general, the authors seem to get the big picture right but sometimes miss on the details. Their discussion of 4th Panzer Division's defeat at Mtsensk and the role of Katukov's 4th Brigade in delaying Guderian appears to minimize one of the few Soviet successes early in the campaign. Their narrative seems designed to protect Guderian's reputation by failing to mention his failure to seize the Trubchevsk pocket and then claiming that he was "not really interested in Tula." The discussion about the fighting around Kalinin and Borodino also seemed to minimize German problems and Soviet successes. On the other hand, the authors exaggerate the role played by KV-1 and T-34 tanks in the Battle of Moscow, since few of these tanks were involved - the bulk of the Red Army's tank force at this time consisted of light tanks; their claim that "there was a much larger proportion of T-34s in the recently arrived [Soviet] units" in October 1941 is false, since T-34 production was at its lowest in this month and the new tank brigades were given only a company of T-34s at best. Instead, the Red Army was forced to start using British-made Matilda and Valentine tanks as substitutes (not mentioned in this book). As the authors see it, the Germans had a brief window of opportunity after closing the Vyazma-Bryansk pocket where there was almost nothing between the Wehrmacht and Moscow. I have to agree with this assessment to some extent, that the Germans had a brief moment to "go for it," but bad weather and limited supplies robbed them of the initiative. This period, 7-12 October doesn't get much examination on the German side, due to the focus on the destruction of the encircled Soviet armies at Vyazma-Bryansk, but clearly mistakes were made. Zetterling and Anders avoid pointing any fingers. The book concludes just before the Soviet counteroffensive on 5 December, but offer only a brief overview of the final two weeks of combat. I found some aspects of this book a bit disappointing, with less detail than some other books already written. On the other hand, the photos were very nice and the authors offered a fairly detailed conclusion.

At the end of September 1941, more than a million German soldiers lined up along the frontline just 180 miles west of Moscow. They were well trained, confident, and had good reasons to hope that the war in the East would be over with one last offensive. Facing them was an equally large Soviet force, but whose soldiers were neither as well trained nor as confident. When the Germans struck, disaster soon befell the Soviet defenders. German panzer spearheads cut through enemy defenses and thrust deeply to encircle most of the Soviet soldiers on the approaches to Moscow. Within a few weeks, most of them marched into captivity, where a grim fate awaited them. Despite the overwhelming initial German success, however, the Soviet capital did not fall. German combat units as well as supply transport were bogged down in mud caused by autumn rains. General Zhukov was called back to Moscow and given the desperate task to recreate defense lines west of Moscow. The mud allowed him time to accomplish this, and when the Germans again began to attack in November, they met stiffer resistance. Even so, they came perilously close to the capital, and if the vicissitudes of weather had cooperated, would have seized it. Though German units were also fighting desperately by now, the Soviet build-up soon exceeded their own. *The Drive on Moscow: Operation Taifun, 1941* is based on numerous archival records, personal diaries, letters, and other sources. It recreates the battle from the perspective of the soldiers as well as the generals. The battle, not fought in isolation, had a crucial role in the overall German strategy in the East, and its outcome reveals why the failure of the German assault on Moscow may well have been true turning point of World War II. Niklas Zetterling is a researcher at the Swedish Defense College. Along with Anders Frankson he has previously written *Kursk 1943: A Statistical Analysis* and *The Korsun Pocket: The Encirclement and Breakout of a German Army in the East, 1944*. Both authors currently live in Sweden.

“...tapped a variety of sources to re-create the battle from the perspectives of both the lowliest soldiers to top commanders. They show how the failure of the German assault on Moscow had a decisive influence on the overall Nazi strategy in the East.” (Toy Soldier and Model Figure)“ Zetterling and Frankson provide the reader with a complete picture of Operation Taifun: German defeat and the ultimate Soviet resistance in the face of a lethal and determined enemy.” (The Russian)"The authors set a case for Moscow being the real turning point of the war, and by the end of the book, it's hard to argue against it. An excellent publication." (WW2 Connection)"...an excellent book-well researched, fast paced and enjoyable to read. Both historians and general readers will profit from reading it." (MILITARY REVIEW)“Well-written and complete with 24 photographs and 7 maps this is an excellent publication from authors Niklas Zetterling and Anders Frankson.” (Warfare Military History Magazine)“The strength of this work is its focus on that human dimension; attention is given to field marshals and national leaders, but equal space is given to soldiers on the front, facing artillery and mines along with horrible weather. This book places the reader alongside combatants at all levels.” (WWII History Magazine)About the AuthorNiklas Zetterling is a researcher at the Swedish Defense College. Along with Anders Frankson he has previously written *Kursk 1943: A Statistical Analysis* and *The Korsun Pocket: The Encirclement and Breakout of a German Army in the East, 1944*. Renowned for both their in-depth research and objective analysis of World War II operations, both authors currently live in Sweden.