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David Stahel

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## Operation Typhoon

In October 1941 Hitler launched Operation Typhoon, the German drive to capture Moscow and knock the Soviet Union out of the war. As the last chance to escape the dire implications of a winter campaign, Hitler directed seventy-five German divisions, almost two million men and three of Germany's four panzer groups into the offensive, resulting in huge victories at Viaz'ma and Briansk – among the biggest battles of World War II. David Stahel's groundbreaking new account of Operation Typhoon captures the perspectives of both the German high command and individual soldiers, revealing that, despite success on the battlefield, the wider German war effort was in far greater trouble than is often acknowledged. Germany's hopes of final victory depended on the success of the October offensive but the autumn conditions and the stubborn resistance of the Red Army ensured that the capture of Moscow was anything but certain.

**David Stahel** is a lecturer at the University of New South Wales in Canberra. His previous publications include *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (2009), *Kiev 1941* (2011) and *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941* (2012).

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107501959](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107501959)

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First published 2013

Reprinted 2014

Paperback edition 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library**Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Stahel, David, 1975–

Operation Typhoon : Hitler's march on Moscow, October 1941 / David Stahel.  
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-107-03512-6 (Hardback)

1. Moscow, Battle of, Moscow, Russia, 1941–1942.
  2. Bock, Fedor von, 1880–1945.
  3. Germany. Heer. Heeresgruppe Mitte.
  4. Moscow (Russia)—History, Military—20th century.
  5. Viaz'ma (Smolenskaia oblast', Russia)—History, Military—20th century.
  6. Briansk (Russia)—History, Military—20th century.
  7. Tula (Russia)—History, Military—20th century.
- I. Title.

D764.3.M6S82 2013

940.54'2173—dc23

2012031737

ISBN 978-1-107-03512-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-50195-9 Paperback

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the summer of 1994 a forest fire swept through the former First World War battlefields on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. In November and December of that year I was a first-year undergraduate who had earned a placement with the University of Istanbul planting new trees there as part of a reforestation project. In addition to large numbers of Turkish students, the project included small contingents from each of the participating First World War nations. The camp site was set up and maintained by the Turkish army and I was assigned to a large tent with thirty-seven Turkish and two German students. Our job was to work on the former battlefields clearing the burned debris, tilling the earth and planting new saplings. As I had grown up in Australia these were the first battlefields I had ever seen and they were to leave their mark. The horrors of war were an unmistakable part of the experience, but reinforced by the fact that it was all shared with former enemies.

Eighteen years later my old tent mate from Gallipoli, Jakob Graichen, and his wife Mariana Díaz have come to be among my closest friends and, as I am a teacher and historian working in Germany, they have been a source of invaluable assistance in support of my historical research. This book is dedicated to them.

As with my other works on 1941 this study has benefited from the input of a number of scholars in the field. I should like to thank Dr Alex J. Kay and Dr Jeff Rutherford who collaborated with me on another project that provided many insights into the current work as well as bringing a measure of welcome relief during long hours of

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research and writing. Alex and Jeff also provided much invaluable commentary on my draft manuscript for which I am most grateful. My research trips to Freiburg often coincided with visits by Dr Adrian Wettstein, whose knowledge of the Wehrmacht's structures and weaponry is, in my experience, unsurpassed. I was most grateful for his company and prompt replies to all my subsequent requests. Professor Robert Citino identified some of my manuscript's early weaknesses and helped shape improvements. His support is especially appreciated. I should also like to thank Dr Eleanor Hancock for her meticulous commentary on my manuscript. Since my first years of post-graduate study Dr Hancock has been a constant source of support and good ideas. For so many favours over the years I owe her a special degree of thanks.

On the Russian/Soviet side of my research I have been well served by a number of experts who took the time to reply to my e-mails or read sections of my draft. Dr Alexander Hill and Yan Mann read my manuscript, advised me on matters of Soviet history and helped with some referencing. Professor David Stone saved me from some glaring oversights in an early draft of my first chapter and Colonel David Glantz kindly allowed the reproduction of maps from his private collection. To all I extend my sincere gratitude.

I also wish to thank Aleks Polianichko for some Russian-English translations, Min-ku Chung for technical support and Verena Graichen for assisting with my maps. Michael Kellner and Rainer Graichen offered me the use of photographs from their grandfather and father respectively, who each served on the eastern front in 1941. I am also indebted to Chrisie Rotter, an art historian and accomplished artist in her own right, who agreed to the reproduction of an original, and carefully researched, depiction of Friedrich Barbarossa. Last, but by no means least, my thanks go to my editor Michael Watson, his assistant Chloe Howell, Karen Anderson Howes and all the staff at Cambridge University Press who have had a hand in this as well as my past books. Their assistance and professionalism have been exemplary.

## GLOSSARY

BA-MA	Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (German Military Archive)
CSIR	Corpo di Sedizione Italiano in Russia (Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia)
'Das Reich'	2nd SS Division
<i>Einsatzgruppen</i>	'action groups' of the SD and Security Police, used mainly for mass killings
<i>Eisenbahntruppe</i>	railroad troops
<i>Feindbild</i>	concept of the enemy
<i>Generalplan Ost</i>	General Plan East
'Grossdeutschland'	'Greater Germany' Infantry Regiment
<i>Grosstransportraum</i>	'large transport area'. Referring to the transport regiment responsible for bridging the gap between front-line divisions and railheads
<i>Kampfgruppe</i>	battle group
KTB	Kriegstagebuch (war diary)
<i>Landser</i>	German infantry man
<i>Lebensraum</i>	living space
Luftwaffe	German Air Force
LVF	Légion des Volontaires Français contre le Bolchevisme (Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism)
MPT	Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation (Museum Foundation Post and Telecommunications)

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NCO	non-commissioned officer
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres (High Command of the Army)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Armed Forces)
<i>Ostheer</i>	Eastern Army
POW	prisoner of war
Pz. Div.	Panzer Division
<i>rasputitsa</i>	'quagmire season'; refers to the biannual difficulties caused by heavy rains or melting snow in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Main Security Office)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)
<i>Sondermeldungen</i>	special news bulletins
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Echelon)
Stavka	Soviet high command
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<i>Vernichtungskrieg</i>	war of annihilation
Wehrmacht	German Armed Forces



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## TABLES OF MILITARY RANKS AND ARMY STRUCTURES

*Table of equivalent ranks*

German army/ Luftwaffe	Translation used in this study	Equivalent US army rank
<b>Officer ranks</b>		
Generalfeldmarschall	Field Marshal	General of the Army
Generaloberst	Colonel-General	General
General	General	Lieutenant General
der Infanterie	of Infantry	
der Artillerie	of Artillery	
der Flakartillerie	of Flak Artillery	
der Flieger	of Aviation	
der Kavallerie	of Cavalry	
der Luftwaffe	of the Luftwaffe	
der Panzertruppe	of Panzer Troops	
der Pioniere	of Engineers	
Generalleutnant	Lieutenant-General	Major General
Generalmajor	Major-General	Brigadier General
Oberst	Colonel	Colonel
Oberstleutnant	Lieutenant-Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel
Major	Major	Major
Hauptmann	Captain	Captain
Oberleutnant	1st Lieutenant	1st Lieutenant
Leutnant	Lieutenant	2nd Lieutenant
<b>Enlisted ranks</b>		
Stabsfeldwebel	Master Sergeant	Master Sergeant
Oberfeldwebel	Technical Sergeant	Technical Sergeant
Feldwebel	Staff Sergeant	Staff Sergeant
Unterfeldwebel	Sergeant	Sergeant

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## xviii / Tables of military ranks and army structures

*(cont.)*

German army/ Luftwaffe	Translation used in this study	Equivalent US army rank
Unteroffizier	Corporal	Corporal
Gefreiter	Private	Private 1st Class
Soldat	Private	Private 2nd Class

Source: Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend. The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis, 2005) p. 355.

*Structure and size of the German army*

Germany army formation	English translation	Number of subordinate units	Average number of personnel <sup>a</sup>
Heeresgruppe	Army Group	Two or more armies	100,000 to more than a million
Armee	Army	Two or more corps	60,000–250,000
Korps	Corps	Two or more divisions	40,000–70,000
Division	Division	Two or more brigades	12,000–18,000
Brigade	Brigade	Two or more regiments	5,000–7,000
Regiment	Regiment	Two or more battalions	2,000–6,000
Bataillon	Battalion	Two or more companies	500–1,000
Kompanie	Company	Two or more platoons	100–200
Zug	Platoon		30–40

Note: <sup>a</sup> Wide variations of these figures occurred, especially after 1941.

Source: Author's own records.