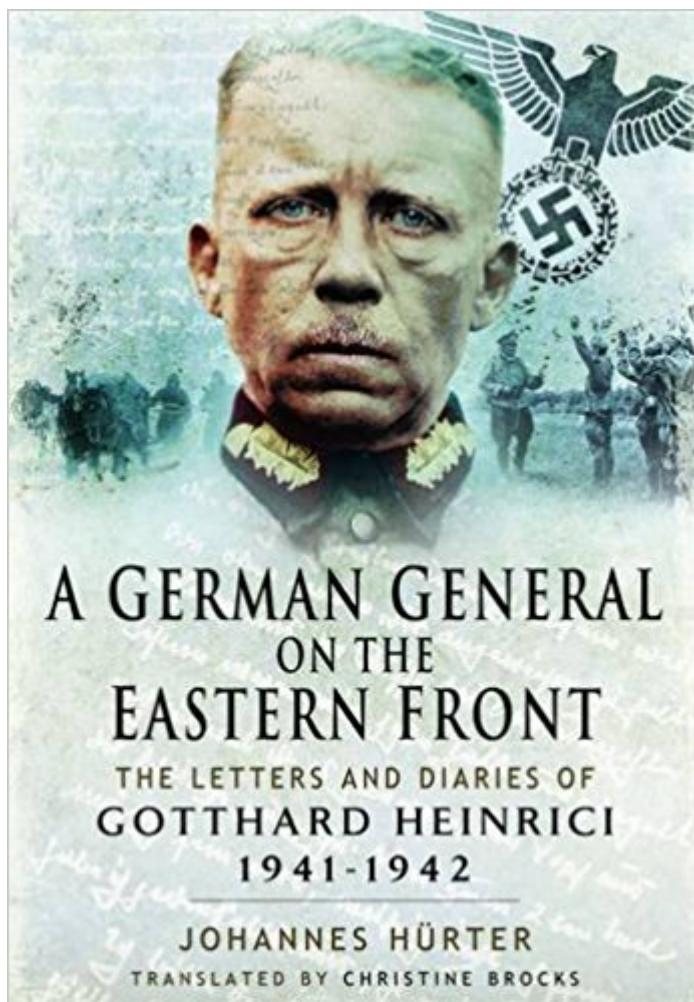


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# A German General On The Eastern Front: The Letters And Diaries Of Gotthard Heinrici 1941-1942



## Synopsis

The Eastern Front, 1941. Operation Barbarossa. Hitler's armies advance into the Soviet Union to conquer Lebensraum in the East. Among the corps commanders is General Gotthard Heinrici, a career soldier, a highly decorated First World War veteran, who observed and recorded in his diary and letters the unprecedented harshness of the German conduct of the campaign. With remarkable candor he described his experiences at the front and the everyday lives of the troops under his command - and the appalling conditions in which the war was fought. In his writings he revealed his growing doubts about Hitler's strategy and his mounting concern as the Wehrmacht was implicated in war crimes and the first actions of the Holocaust. This selection from Heinrici's diaries and letters, edited and with a perceptive introduction by Johannes Härtel, gives a fascinating inside view of the fighting on the Eastern Front from a commander's perspective. It is also provides an unusual insight into the feelings, attitudes and acute anxieties of one of the Wehrmacht's most able generals in the midst of a brutal campaign.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Sadly, this book is not a significant memoir by a WWII German general. It is what its subtitle states: "The Letters and Diaries of Gotthard Heinrici 1941-1942" when he served in the Poland & Russia invasions. Like the letters most soldiers send home to their spouses and children, they know they aren't supposed to discuss military tactics, and, if they are smart, won't besmirch their commanders -- just in case the military letter censors happen to read their letters. Like most soldiers, Heinrici

complains about the dust clouds being churned up by the soldiers marching at the advance of the column, bemoans the mosquitoes lifting from the Russian swamps, poor re-supply, and the hot summer and cold winter climates of Mother Russia: "Colonel Hofsbach, a pessimist par excellence, was even more frustrated because his son had come home with frozen legs" (p. 114). But Heinrici's letters really don't go into analysis of battlefield campaigns -- as to how the left wing advanced at night and encircled the enemy. This book doesn't contain Heinrici's memoirs about his battle efforts. Yes, some of Heinrici's letters contain snippets about how pesky Russian partisan-guerillas where found in swamps and "harshly dealt with", but there are no detailed accounts as to how the Germans went trampling through the swamps in some meticulous detail in locating the partisans. Living in the comfort of better dwellings in town than his troops, Heinrici grew so tired of seeing captured partisans swinging from the gallows outside his townhouse that he had them removed after a couple of days: "I tell Beutelsbzacher not to hang the partisans closer than 100m to my window. Not a pleasant view in the morning" (p.102) Yes, Heinrici wrote a couple of sentences here and there about how poor, slovenly Jews were noticed hawking goods in their ghettos, but Heinrici left no notes about whether or not his unit rounded up Jews for extermination. While none of his writings advocated the extermination of Jews, Heinrici seemed to be of the mind that the Jews certainly needed to be regulated -- rather than be given free reign in their cities. Who was Heinrici? What were his thoughts about political issues? Some insights are provided: he supported Hitler's Nazi-socialist economic and lebensraum advocacy. This book is not a "unit history" item. Sadly, it doesn't rise to the lofty levels of the memoirs penned by von Manstein or von Mellenthin. The graphic battlefield exploits of "Soldat" easily beat this book. Initially, Heinrici observed that his soldiers had little high regard for the retreating Russians. However, begrudgingly, he opined: "The Russian is very strong and fights desperately, urged on by his commissars" (p. 71). Even by August 1941, Heinrici is "convinced that this war will last a long time" (p. 78). General Winter finally came to the aid of the Russians, and Heinrici noted in December 1941: "We are in dire straits right now. The enemy vigorously attacks our newly won positions. Our men are extremely exhausted. And we have around minus 20C.... The situation is as bad as never before..." (p. 109). And he talks about German soldiers "self-mutilating" themselves to escape combat. And then things get worse. On 28 Feb 1942 he meets Der Fuehrer and after long arguments convinces Hitler to tolerate a short retreat around Yukhnov to prevent German units from being surrounded by the Russians (p. 134-135). In his last 12 May 1942 entry Heinrici wrote: "I feel miserable and exhausted....I am at the end of my tether, so discontented and frustrated, shattered, demoralized and worn out by the imbalance between expectations from above and the reality of war... Everything here is awful." What, no

index? Nope. The first 40% of this book (55 pages) is the author's commentary about the character of Heinrici and analyzing his diary notes. Only the last 50% contains actual quotations from Heinrici's diaries and letters to his wife. And 10% for "notes." This book is definitely more about Heinrici's observations as to how the war impacted upon himself, his soldiers and the Russians, rather than about combat tactics. An okay read.

It has always been a mystery how a country like the Soviet Union could lose 25 -27 M people and still win a war. France collapsed in June of 1940. Why didn't the Soviet Union which endured unbelievable losses and destruction on most of its populated area ? This book by Johanne Hurter on the diary of Col General Gothard Heinrici answers many of the questions of how the Russians under Stalin's rule were able to come back after receiving what many observers considered a series of "Knock Out Blows" by the Germans and its allies 1941 and also in 1942. Heinrici provides several answers with an examination of the Russian character as he read about in Tolstoy. The general kept asking the question "Why don't the Soviets collapse like the French did ? To paraphrase his answer to this question... the Russian does not display initiative in his pursuits. He is obsessively stubborn when he is a herd of others and fights to the death, at others times though he will beat to death his commissars who threaten to shoot any soldier who does not charge into the German lines which is tantamount to suicide since the usual German line makes maximum use of machine guns to destroy human wave attacks. (Remember the German squad was built around the MG-42 machine gun the fastest machine gun in the world then and the basis for the current American machine gun today.) The Russian can either be incredible tough or they give up unexpectedly. They are completely unpredictable. The Soviet soldier will also pretend to be dead and let a German soldier pass by and then shoot him in the back. After few such incidents the Germans finds it necessary to shoot all soldiers laying on the ground who appear to be dead. The Russian soldier is amazing in that he can live off very little and still keep fighting. A field kitchen which the Germans had and was dependant on was virtually unknown in the Russian. The Russian could live off grass, tree bark and pine cones if he needed to which awed the Germans. In short, the Soviet soldier was full of contradictions and at times appear indestructible in forbidden deep forests and swamps where mechanized German vehicles could not enter. Some Russians fight to the death while others surrender readily. No pattern could be seen. The Soviets appear very smart or very stupid. They are an enigma and unpredictable. And a terrifying opponent taken as a whole. The Germans are also amazed how well-armed the Soviets are. The Germans invade with only 3000 tanks on June 22, 1941 and by spring of 1942 they have destroyed 35,000 tanks. The Communists and Stalin has

indeed mercilessly industrialized the Soviet Empire since the 1917 Red Revolution under Lenin and Trosky and in 1928 under Stalin. These Athiestic Communist madmen have made the Soviet Union an arms weapons manufacturing and storehouse while starving millions of kulacks, former Tsarist civil servants, Russian Othodox priests, landowners and other so called enemies of the state to advance the cause of Communism to make their goal - World Revolution. They are the enablers of Karl Marx's vision & it is an evil one. Even though the Germans capture 6 million POW's and use 1 million of these unfortuates as Hiwis to fight Stalin it is not enough and the Germans eventually lose the war in 1945. Even at Stalingrad an estimated 50,000 Hiwis support the Germans in that cauldron and when they are captured are treated as traitors and are executed immediately. No Stalin has a cruel view of former Soviet soldiers. To him they do not exist but I disgress....back to the Heinrici's dairy. This is excellent history written in a series of letters by Col General Heinrici who by his own account dodges death on a daily basis in the terrible defensive ordeal known as the Battle of Moscow. The pictures are excellent and about the only shortcoming I see is the lack of maps. But the book is well edited and everything is footnoted where the text came from. Very professional looking and a great addition to what the German high Command was thinking in this time period. What is also interesting is that when he meets face-to-face with Hitler, Heinrici admits that his "No Retreat Order" given in December of 1941 in order to prevent a panic similar to what the French Army in 1813 experienced was the correct choice to make as a general rule but in specifically in his area of combat he believes his troops should have been allowed to retreat to a better location and that they just managed to survive by incredible tenacity, small unit leadership and luck. Everyday for months on end from December of 1941 thru April of 1942 in the area before Moscow they endured mind numbing severe cold causing massive casualties of frostbite with temperatures down to -40 C while fighting a fanatical foe of fresh troops known as Siberians who were well provided with sheep skin protection. But he does admit that the Soviets fought with fury but not smartly as they kept "missing the big picture" by not cutting the German supply line when they were close to it. Heinrici never figures out why his troops were not destroyed in the awful cauldron. The Soviets have the means to do so and there was really nothing preventing them from destroying the Main Supply Line but for some unforeseen reason the Soviets could not apply the Coup de Grace or Killing Blow. After 7 months in this onslaught Heinrici was sent to a resort to recover from this nightmare. Highest Recommendation if you want to understand the German perspective.

A German General on The Eastern Front, The Letters & Diaries of Gotthard Heinrici, 1941-1942,

Johannes Härtter [1963- ], Ed. (translated by Christine Brocks); Pen & Sword Books Ltd. (hardcover 2015) You will do well if you read the letters & diary entries ("Part II. Documents, 7") FIRST --- & then, later, read the editor's "Biography, Background & Attitudes of a Wehrmacht General." I say this because Mr. Härtter's conscientious & insightful, yet oft-redundant (& even, at times, downright leaden) commentary is the price to pay for the existence of such a valuable book (during the creation of which, apparently, no imaginable publishing expense was spared). And there is always a price to pay. Advice is also offered to start at a more logical beginning, with Cornelius Ryan's exemplary history, "The Last Battle" (1966), prior to getting into "Letters & Diaries." Doing this will provide you with the indispensable first-hand accounts of individuals involved in the fantastic, tragic battle for the already-obliterated capital of Germany (late April 1945) in which approximately 250,000 soldiers & civilians lost their lives. Secondly, "Last Battle" is a quite readable account of General Heinrici's impossible task & inevitable fate at the conclusion of the war, which includes post-war interviews that Ryan conducted with Heinrici [1886-1971] prior to the publication of this remarkable best-selling popular history.

This book I just completed. A general who is not well known but right in the thick of things. I have come across Heinrici in many my ww2 studies and this is another easy read, but some good information. I would recommend for anyone interested in the German Generals.

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