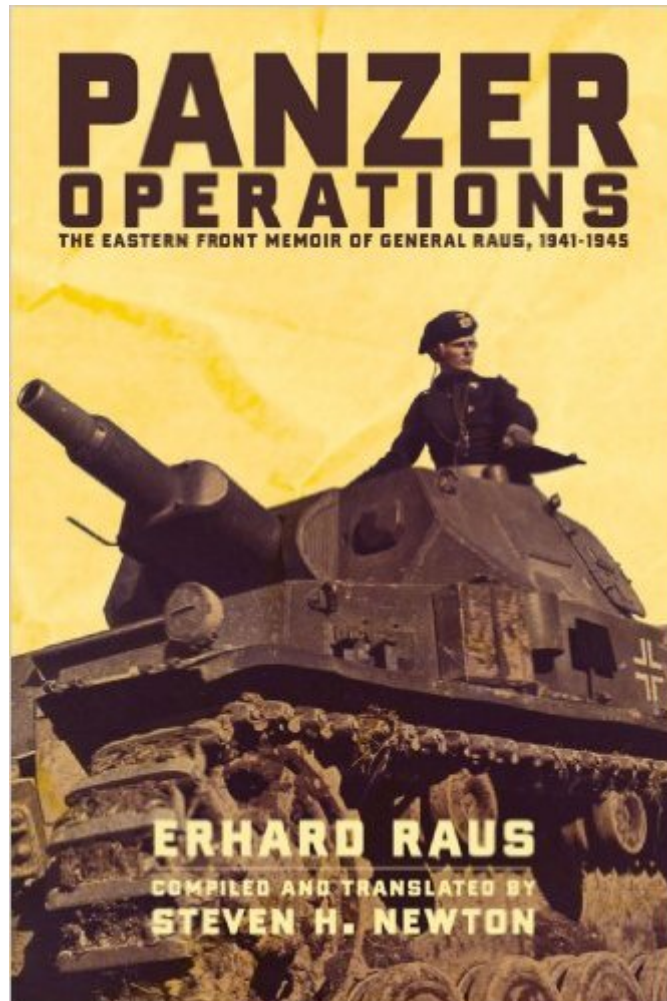


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Panzer Operations: The Eastern Front Memoir Of General Raus, 1941-1945



Synopsis

German general Erhard Raus was one of the most talented commanders to fight on the Eastern Front in Russia, where he was eventually appointed to army group command in early 1945. By the time the war ended, Raus had established a reputation as one of the German army's foremost tacticians of armored warfare, which made him a prized capture by U.S. Army intelligence. In American captivity, Raus wrote a detailed memoir of his service in Russia. His battlefield experience and keen tactical eye makes his memoir especially valuable. The Raus memoir—now translated, compiled, and edited by prominent World War II historian Steven H. Newton—covers the Russian campaign from the first day of the war to his being relieved of his command at Hitler's order in the spring of 1945. It includes a detailed examination of Raus's 6th Panzer Division's drive to Leningrad, his experiences in the Soviet winter counteroffensive around Moscow, the unsuccessful attempt to relieve Stalingrad and the final desperate battles inside Germany at the end of the war.

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Customer Reviews

The name Erhard Raus will not register to many students of WWII, but the general saw as much action on the Eastern Front as any officer I know of. Raus entered Operation Barbarossa in command of a brigade in the 6th Panzer Division, and ended the war as the head of an Army Group. He learned the art of tank tactics under fire. After he was captured he penned an extensive memoir (while the war was still fresh in his mind). Although pieces were used by American intelligence, they were often heavily edited and incomplete. Here, for the first time in print, is Raus's

complete memoir. In a word, it is extraordinary. The memoir was located, pieced together, and translated and edited from the original German by Steven Newton (Professor of History, Delaware State University). Raus was as good a writer as he was a tank commander. Simply put, this is extraordinarily well written, although it assumes at least a working knowledge of the war in the East and the structure of the German military. Raus discusses the offensive battle in Army Group North during the drive for Leningrad, the offensive against Moscow, his role in Manstein's abortive effort to relieve Stalingrad (oddly, Manstein is not found in the index though is mentioned often), and the final defensive battles back into Germany, where Raus was relieved of command by Hitler in March 1945. Hasso von Manteuffel (who also is absent from the index) assumed his command, ending Raus's 40 years of military service. Raus's writing is often personal, always perceptive, and offers a hands-on knowledge that was obviously fresh in his mind when he wrote. Newton provides an enlightening Introduction to this memoir and a date-oriented resume of Raus's career, which appears as an appendix.

This book is a fascinating study of armor tactics during World War II on the Eastern Front. The author was a colonel, major general up to a full general (what the Germans called a Colonel General) and served from June 22, 1941 (the start of Barbarossa) until March, 1945 (when Hitler relieved him from his post). During that period, he served as a *kampfgruppe* (brigade) commander in the 6th Panzer Division, the commander of the 6th Panzer Division, an Infantry Corps commander and the commander of a number of different Armies. Since the author has better insight on small unit actions during the early part of the war, that part of the book is somewhat better than the later chapters. The book is fascinating because of the tactical examples that it provides on battles fought on the Eastern Front. Here are a couple of examples. (1) The first time that the Germans met the 52 ton KV-1 tank, they had extreme difficulty destroying these heavy tanks. In one instance, he shares an example in July, 1941, when a single tank held up the movement of his *kampfgruppe* for more than day. Finally, the tank was destroyed by combined artillery and flak gun (German 88) fire. (2) During the first two months of the war, the German armor units were fighting on the edge. For example, he relates a story of the taking of a bridge over a major river right before Leningrad and the overwhelming Soviet forces that attacked the Germans until their help arrived. (3) The Germans at the start of the war didn't have the better tanks, but they attacked with hundreds of tanks at a spot at the beginning of the war and had overwhelming forces in a single area. He relates a story of a tank battle that occurred in the attempt to relieve Stalingrad in December, 1942.

This is a very good book on operations on the Russian Front. Raus was clearly a very gifted commander, and his descriptions of his numerous successful operations (both offensive and defensive) are very interesting, as he discusses the risks associated with the various courses of action he could take, why he chose a particular course of action, and the results. Raus was involved in a very wide variety of actions, from the attack toward Leningrad, forcing a passage on a troop-train through partisan-infested forests, attacks attempting to relieve Stalingrad, the Kursk offensive, and the defense of East Prussia. Once the Germans shifted to the defensive, Raus' "trademark" tactic was the flexible defense, in which he was (at least according to his testimony) very successful and which probably explains the interest of the US Army in his writings after the war. This book is very good, but I'll mention a few reasons why I only gave it four stars, so you can judge for yourself:--Raus rose from a relatively junior officer at the outbreak of war with Russia to an Army commander by the end of the war. While I was very interested in his descriptions of the small unit actions in the first part of the book, my interest waned as he became more senior, and I found his accounts of his actions as an army commander fairly dull.--While Raus was clearly a very gifted commander, the book makes it sound like his unit was always successful--all failures occurred under other commanders on other parts of the front (note that Raus never says this, it is just an impression that arises from reading his accounts).--Maps are pretty sparse.

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