

## **Book Review - Military Improvisations During the Russian Campaign by Erhard Rauss Review by Walter S. Zapotoczny**

Insufficiently prepared for a winter campaign in Russia, the German army was faced with a great disaster as early as the muddy period and winter of 1941-1942. Top-level staffs and field forces alike were forced to improvise extensively. As the campaign wore on and the German military potential continued to decline, improvisations of the widest variety became increasingly prevalent. *Military Improvisations During the Russian Campaign* was written as an historical study by former German operational-level officers colonels, majors, and lower-ranking generals on the Eastern Front. The principle author was Erhard Rauss who attained the rank of full general. It examines examples of improvisations organized into tactical, logistical, technical, and organizational parts and examines whether improvisations are inevitable in war.

Part one is a brief introduction of the study. In the second part, tactical improvisations, the study describes how German resources were taxed whenever the forces suffered heavy casualties forcing all commands to introduce improvisations to solve their problems. This part describes their efforts on the formation and commitment of combat staffs and units in sudden critical situations, the employment of units for missions outside their normal scope, and the adaptation of tactics to unexpected situations. Chapters 1 through 4 in this part describe improvisations used in offensive operations while eliminating the Russian forces in the German Rear Area, the improvised hedgehog defense, defense in extreme cold, zone tactics, and improvised fortresses, respectively. The use of troop trains and the employment of combat arms are described.

Part three of the study describes improvisations in the fields of supply and transportation. The German supply and transportation system in Russia was greatly dependent on improvisations because of the unusual terrain and severe climate. From the beginning of the campaign, supply columns were improvised with motor vehicles of every type, which had been requisitioned from private owners. In Russia, motorized transportation was useless many months of the year. Part three contains chapters five through eight. Chapter five described the use of corduroy roads and how supply columns had to be organized using the two-wheeled Russian "panje" wagons or "panje" sleighs pulled by light and agile Russian horses. Chapter six describes improvisations in the construction of bridges, improvised road maintenance, deceptive supply movements, the use of invasion barges as means of transportation, transportation over frozen waterways, fuel conservation, and railroad tank cars towed across the Baltic Sea. Chapter seven deals with the supply by airlift and by aerial delivery containers. Chapter eight discusses supply and transportations in the Arctic.

In part four the authors describe the technical improvisations made during the campaign. Chapter nine illustrates how the improvisations of clothing and equipment became necessary when the German Army was suddenly faced with the prospect of a winter campaign in Russia. For example, to alleviate the lack of adequate clothing several divisions helped themselves by organizing large sewing workrooms in near-by Russian cities. From used blankets and old clothing, local workers produced flannel waistbands, earmuffs, waistcoats, footcloths, and mittens with separate thumbs and index fingers. Chapter ten explains the improvisations in shelter used in the far north during fighting. There were few improvisations in the field of weapons. The field forces made minor improvements but never created new weapons. Captured weapons were used to some extent. Chapter eleven explains their use. In chapter twelve, the reader learns how the improvisations of arctic clothing, equipment, and weapons had to be complemented by special training. The final chapter of part four, chapter thirteen, describes how during the Russian campaign the Germans made extensive use of frontline propaganda and achieved remarkable results in many cases.

Part five, organizational improvisations, is organized into three chapters. Chapter fourteen explains the manpower problem of the German Army beginning with the situation at the outbreak of war. Luftwaffe field divisions, the maintenance of combat efficiency, and the employment of women in the armed forces are also examined in this chapter. Chapter fifteen explains the organization of staffs, the creation of special formations, and some desperate last-ditch measures taken. In chapter sixteen, some of the political measures introduced by the National Socialist Party are explained. Some examples include; civilian labor procurement, the use of the Volkssturm (German National Militia), and the use of paramilitary units during the last stages of the war.

The question of whether improvisations are inevitable, avoidable, or unavoidable is discussed in part six, the conclusion. The authors summarize by stating that because of their always-present inherent defects, improvisations should be avoided altogether whenever possible. In the other hand, this study also concludes that some improvisations were necessary during the Russian campaign.

For more than two thousand years, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* has provided leaders with essential advise on battlefield tactics, managing troops and terrain, and employing cunning and deception. In order to accomplish these, the leader must be able to improvise. Carl von Clausewitz stated in his book *On War* that "Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult". Problems will occur with misplaced communications, troops going to the wrong location, delays caused by weather etc., and it is the duty of the commander to do his best to overcome them. This will require improvisations. The student of military philosophy will find *Military Improvisations During the Russian Campaign* an interesting reading. It illustrates that the conduct of war, in the sense of its imperfections and frailties, has not changed since Sun Tzu and Clausewitz wrote their principles of warfare. The study proves that those principles were just as relevant in the winter of 1941-42 as when they were written.

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