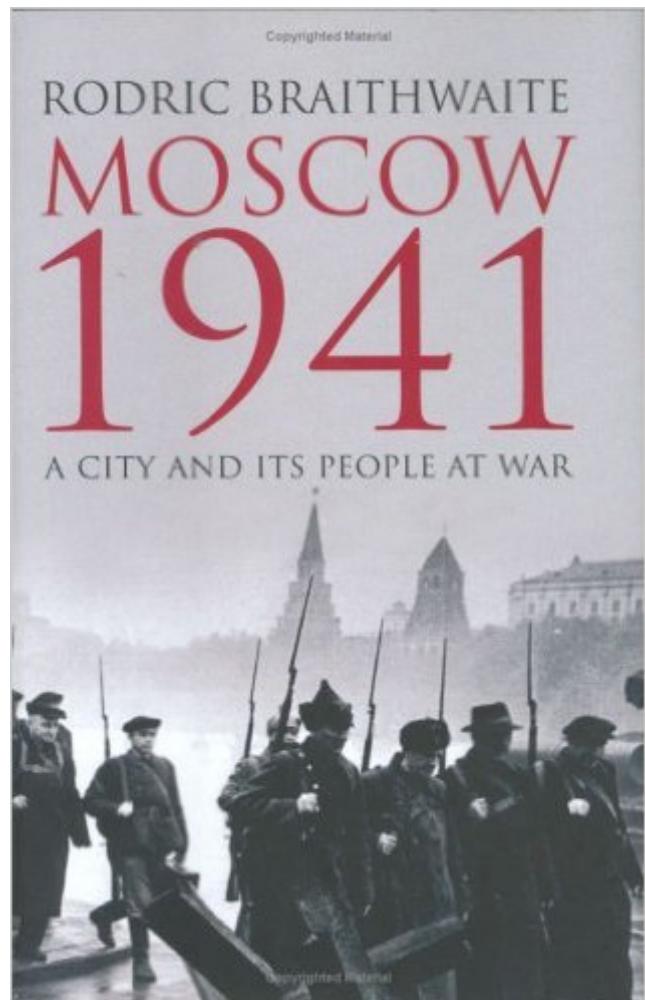


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Moscow 1941: A City And Its People At War



Synopsis

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Hardcover: 488 pages

Publisher: PROFILE BOOKS LTD (2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 186197759X

ISBN-13: 978-1861977595

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.6 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (31 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

and innocent Russia squirmed under the bloody boots . . . "Anna Akhmatova: "Requiem" After June 22, 1941, when Hitler's armies launched a massive invasion of the Soviet Union, it is fair to say that Russia squirmed not (just) under the boots of the NKVD (the actual subject of Akhmatova's poem) but under the boots of millions of German soldiers, under the treads of thousands of German tanks, and under the bombs of thousands of German bombers. The first year or so of the war on the eastern front saw the Germans advance toward Moscow, Leningrad, and Stalingrad. Historical accounts of the battles of Stalingrad and Leningrad are legion. For some reason, accounts of the advance on Moscow have commanded less attention even though the Battle of Moscow was fought over territory the size of France and involved seven million soldiers. Rodric Braithwaite, former British Ambassador to the USSR/CIS from 1988 through 1992, has evened the scales a bit in his well-crafted "Moscow 1941: A City and Its People at War". "Moscow 1941" is not a military history of the Battle of Moscow. Although there are maps and a discussion of the key battles sufficient to give the reader a feel for the order of battle, this is really a compilation of stories about how Moscow and its citizens dealt with the war and the threat of the approaching German armies. As such it has something of the feel of an oral history about it. Joseph Stalin is reputed to have said: "[a] single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." Braithwaite has taken the Battle of Moscow and interlaced a general discussion of the battle with the accounts of soldiers, schoolgirls, actors, factory

workers, party leaders, and people from all walks and stations of life.

Overall an excellent effort! Bravo! I read criticisms by those who rated the book low and found that they contradict each other: one thinks it's shallow, another - too detailed, one lacks personal accounts, another complains about their unnecessary abundance. My humble Muscovite's impression is that it is a well-balanced take on the extremely important, but bitterly disputed matter. The author doesn't just throw you into the midst of the battle for the last 100 miles to the city, but first he sets stage, which helps to get a bigger picture. It's impossible to understand the battle without knowing that much (or that little, if you wish) of background facts and processes, you are reading about the larger-than-life clash of two very unique states. You need to go back to the events happened as early as 1905 Russian Revolution and tell about recent archive discoveries of Post-Communist 1990-es. Personal narratives from people from all layers of society serve an essential tool too. They add depths, and human touch, because emotions and feelings there are timeless and easy to relate to. Without them the narrative could turn into dry enumeration of divisions, pieces of artillery, types of tanks and kilometers trudged through. I think if you look for that kind of story you better turn to one of Osprey's books. I am impressed by how a Western author treats the material. His tone is respectful and attentive. Here and there he gives a legendary glossed version of a fact (a one we were taught in Soviet schools) and then recites recent attempts to debunk it, making the book interesting even to Russian readers. He doesn't try to sensationalize though.

Sir Winston Churchill cogently described Russia as "an enigma wrapped in a mystery." The Russian soul has endured centuries of oppression by tsars and dictators. The Russian soul has produced geniuses in literature such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Chekhov and many others; musicians such as Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Rachmaninoff to name a few. The Russians are a tough lot. Napoleon discovered that following his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812. Adolf Hitler and the over three million man army he launched against his erstwhile ally the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 would learn this sanguinary lesson as well. Over 80% of German casualties in World War II took place in the Eastern Theatre of War. Statistics show that for every American/ British soldier who died in battle, eighty-five Russians died. Over 25 million Soviet soldiers and civilians died in the struggle of the two worst dictatorships of the twentieth century. Stalin ruled the Soviet Union with cunning, unbelievable cynicism and cruelty on a monumental scale of evil. He had murdered many of his leading generals in pre-WW II purges. Millions had been sent to the gulags in Siberia while

whole peoples suffered cruel deportations. The Soviet Union was a land under lock and key in 1941. Famine, starvation and disease ran rampant. The Soviets did have a mechanized army and after the shock of the Nazis surprise attack rebounded to fight the Germans to the hilt in the battle of Moscow costing them almost one million casualties. Such battles as Kursk, Leningrad and Stalingrad destroyed Hitler's Faustian dream of world conquest and destruction of Communism. Bratihwaite was British ambassador to Russia from 1988-1992.

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