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Hell's Gate: The Battle of the Cherkassy Pocket, January-February 1944

By Douglas E. Nash



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Virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, the Battle of Cherkassy (also known as the Korsun Pocket) still stirs controversy in both the former Soviet Union and in Germany. It was at Cherkassy that the last German offensive strength in the Ukraine was drained away, creating the conditions for the victorious Soviet advance into Poland, Rumania, and the Balkans during the summer and autumn of 1944. Eclipsed by a war of such gigantic proportions that saw the deaths of over one million men or more as commonplace, the events which occurred along the banks of the Gniloy Tickich river should have faded into obscurity. However, to the 60,000 German soldiers who were encircled there at the end of January 1944, this was perhaps one of the most brutal, physically exhausting, and morally demanding battles they had ever experienced. Thirty-four percent of them would not escape. The culmination of years of research and survivor interviews, Hell's Gate is a riveting hour by hour and day by day account of this desperate struggle analyzed on a tactical level through maps and military transcripts, as well as on a personal level, through the words of the enlisted men and officers who risked the roaring waters of the Gniloy Tickich to avoid certain death at the hands of their Soviet foe.



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