



***Where the Iron Crosses Grow: The Crimea 1941-44***

**By Robert Forczyk**

**NY: Osprey, 2014, 335 pages**

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*Where the Iron Crosses Grow* is a history of the contest for the Crimea during World War II. The actions in the Crimea, particularly the first siege of Sevastopol, were some of the bloodiest battles on the Eastern Front. This book is a blisteringly detailed work that covers every combat action in the region from the initial German invasion through the evacuation of Sevastopol three years later. Set against the current geopolitical situation in Crimea and the Ukraine, the history is an easy companion for current events and a course in the most important theater of the Second World War that you've never heard of.

The author, Robert Forczyk, is a retired lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve where he served for 20 years as an Armor and Intelligence officer; he also earned a doctorate in international relations from the University of Maryland. He has published 26 books on topics ranging from the Napoleonic Wars to World War II, but German military history is his most common topic.

*Where the Iron Crosses Grow* is organized chronologically; it begins with a scene-setting prologue followed by a section on the conquering of Crimea by Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War. Forczyk uses this starting point to emphasize the deep roots of the Crimea in Russian consciousness, roots that far outweigh any other material value the region has. He continues his chronological narrative with the German capture of the peninsula culminating with the successful capture of Sevastopol in 1942 after a 250-day siege and the German defeat of the attempted Soviet amphibious landings on the Kerch Peninsula in eastern Crimea. But the Germans are beaten back in a multi-pronged Soviet assault and become surrounded in Sevastopol themselves. Overrun much more quickly than the Soviets months prior, they are evacuated Dunkirk-style to Bulgaria and other parts of the Ukraine. Forczyk ends his book with a timely chapter on the current situation in the Crimea and the assertion that Russia will never give it up; he takes some time throughout the narrative to talk about both the German and Soviet ethnic cleansing schemes that highlight the brutality of the theater.

The book is exceptionally detailed, with abundant footnotes and no shortage of dates, names, and places. Forczyk often provides the exact time for the initiation of assaults and barrages, drawing directly from primary sources that are often German war records. It is truly a unit history with a focus on the decisions and personalities at the regimental level and higher; all the German unit names are written and abbreviated in German. Forczyk often takes the time to examine the reasoning behind the decisions of the commanders involved and at times even describes their career trajectory in the context of the battles in the Crimea. The reading can be dry in parts and it's definitely intended for an audience that has a strong background in the war. Forczyk tries to liven the narrative by including a few firsthand accounts or descriptions of low-ranking soldiers and their exploits, but these breaks are few and far between.

Overall, the book is a great read for anyone interested in the Crimea or the Eastern Front of the war. It is a grim reminder that most of the fighting in the war was done on the Eastern Front and that more Germans were killed in the Crimea than Americans in the Korean War. Forczyk also attempts to view some of the actions through a contemporary military lens that any graduate of U.S. military schools would recognize and understand his terminology. It is also an important history for understanding the development of amphibious warfare and joint operation because both the Germans and the Soviets progress from inter-service bungling to true joint operations over the course of the campaign.