



From the Realm of a Dying Sun, vol.2: The IV. SS-Panzerkorps in the Budapest Relief Efforts, December 1944–February 1945 by Douglas E. Nash.

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Much remains to be done in writing the history of the Russian Front in World War II, given its sheer scale and complexity. While famous battles—e.g., Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, and Berlin—have been detailed in many studies over the years, a great many more languish in obscurity. The same is true of the history of German military formations that fought on the Russian Front, especially Hitler’s vaunted Waffen-SS. The latter’s five most famous armored divisions¹ have drawn the attention of researchers due to their actions at Kursk, Normandy, Arnhem, and the Battle of the Bulge; far less has been written about its remaining thirty-three divisions, most of which were deployed on the Russian Front. Hence, we should be grateful for the second volume of retired colonel Douglas Nash’s *From the Realm of a Dying Sun*, a lavishly detailed, well written, highly readable study of the IV. SS-Panzer Corps during its desperate effort to relieve the garrison at Budapest in early 1945.²

Chapter 1 begins with the IV. SS-Panzer Corps holding a section of the relatively quiet front in Poland. Nash offers a detailed glimpse of the day-to-day functioning and administration of the corps, from logistics ensuring an adequate supply of ammunition and delivery of mail, to the organization of forthcoming Christmas celebrations. In the midst of the latter, the Corps was suddenly transferred to Hungary, where it was ordered to relieve the German and Hungarian defenders of Budapest who had been surrounded by the advancing Soviet Red Army. Following a brief account of the previous operations in Hungary (chap. 2), Nash devotes chapters 3–4 to the Corps’s arrival and preparations for the relief of Budapest, codenamed Operation Konrad. In doing so, he captures the haste with which the operation was planned and conducted, noting that

In addition to finding their way to their designated assembly areas, the leaders of companies, battalions, and regiments had to find their own commanders’ headquarters to receive instructions concerning where to draw supplies, where to find maintenance units to repair broken-down vehicles, the locations of field dressing stations for men who had become ill during the long train ride, and so on. Communications wire had to be laid, radio installations set up, ammunition depots established, and many mundane, yet equally important, tasks had to be performed. Leaders sought out copies of Hungarian military maps to familiarize themselves with their new mission, and soldiers who had somehow become lost along the way from Modlin struggled to find their companies. (65)

Over the next six chapters, Nash charts the course of the IV. SS-Panzer Corps during Operation Konrad in exacting detail, from the moment of its apparently inevitable success, until its ultimate

1. I.e., SS-Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, SS-Panzer Division Das Reich, SS-Panzer Division Hohenstaufen, SS-Panzer Division Frundsberg, and SS-Panzer Division Hitlerjugend.

2. Nash’s earlier work includes *Hell’s Gate: The Battle of the Cherkassy Pocket, January-February 1944* (Southbury, CT: RZM Imports, 2002) and *Victory Was beyond Their Grasp: With the 272nd Volks-Grenadier Division from the Hürtgen Forest to the Heart of the Reich* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2015).

failure and defeat. The last chapter finds the Corps exhausted and badly depleted, simply struggling to hold its front-line positions and compelled to be a helpless bystander as the garrison of Budapest was annihilated by the Red Army.

While a number of excellent studies have emerged in recent years that address the fall of Budapest and various aspects of the campaign in Hungary, Nash's account is certainly one of the best works yet to be produced.³ He has tracked down and utilized a vast array of source material written in English, German, and Russian, ranging from archival documents and secondary accounts to rare personal monographs written after the war by some of the officers involved. While most of the text is heavily focused upon the German perspective since it is a history of the IV. SS-Panzer Corps, an effort has clearly been made to be as inclusive of Russian information as the availability of source material permits. Consequently, the narrative contains a lavish amount of highly detailed and extensively footnoted information that is presented on a day-by-day basis. This level of detail allows the reader to track everything from the movements and actions of specific units to information concerning casualties and fluctuating tank availability and discussions held by German officers at various command levels concerning the progress of the battle.

The issue of German command relationships is especially valuable to any student of the campaign, since it not only helps explain the reasoning and timing behind various decisions but also illuminates the usually hidden animosities between officers and how they impacted the course of the operation. According to Nash's account, the overall commander of Operation Konrad, Gen. Hermann Balck, had a very low opinion of the SS in general and of SS-Obergruppenführer Herbert Gille, the commander of the IV. SS-Panzer Corps, in particular:

For his part, Balck was already prejudiced against the SS commander and his judgement was possibly tainted by his expressed dislike of anything to do with the SS. Gaedke, his chief of staff, had loathed the Wiking Division in general—and Gille and Schönfelder in particular—ever since the Cherkassy Pocket, and his attitude may have reinforced his commanding general's tendencies, such as his outright dislike of Himmler or mistrust of anything emanating from the IV. SS-Pz. Korps' headquarters. In combination, these negative attitudes displayed by Gille's superior officers must have created a very hostile command environment for a leader who up to this point in his career had performed competently and steadfastly, if not brilliantly. (308)

With the prospects of a successful conclusion to Operation Konrad slipping away, the friction and stress between the German commanders only worsened. While this animosity did not decide the ultimate outcome of Operation Konrad, the author does point to occasions where it did affect the course of local operations. Overall, the entire episode provides a fascinating late-war look into a German military fraying at the edges as it confronted its impending defeat and as its previously high levels of military competency and professionalism steadily declined.

Through its focus upon providing a detailed study of an often overlooked chapter of the war on the Russian Front, volume two of *From the Realm of a Dying Sun* will likely stand as one of the foremost accounts of the Budapest relief operation for years to come. Concurrently, the series will also likely prove to be *the* definitive history of the IV. SS-Panzer Corps. It is recommended for both the dedicated military historian and general readers alike.

3. Other important works include Aleksei Isaev and Maksim Kolomiets, *Tomb of the Panzerwaffe: The Defeat of the Sixth SS Panzer Army in Hungary 1945* (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2014; orig. 2009), Kamen Nevenkin, *Take Budapest! The Struggle for Hungary, Autumn 1944* (Stroud, UK: Spellmount, 2012), and Norbert Szamveber, *The Sword Behind the Shield: A Combat History of the German Efforts to Relieve Budapest 1945* (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2015).