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The Last Panther - Slaughter Of The Reich - The Halbe Kessel 1945

THE LAST PANTHER



WOLFGANG
FAUST



Synopsis

While the Battle of Berlin in 1945 is widely known, the horrific story of the Halbe Kessel remains largely untold. In April 1945, victorious Soviet forces encircled 80,000 men of the German 9th Army in the Halbe area, South of Berlin, together with many thousands of German women and children. The German troops, desperate to avoid Soviet capture, battled furiously to break out towards the West, where they could surrender to the comparative safety of the Americans. For the German civilians trapped in the Kessel, the quest to escape took on frantic dimensions, as the terror of Red Army brutality spread. The small town of Halbe became the eye of the hurricane for the breakout, as King Tigers of the SS Panzer Corps led the spearhead to the West, supported by Panthers of the battle-hardened 21st Panzer Division. Panzer by panzer, unit by unit, the breakout forces were cut down – until only a handful of Panthers, other armour, battered infantry units and columns of shattered refugees made a final escape through the rings of fire to the American lines. This first-hand account by the commander of one of those Panther tanks relates with devastating clarity the conditions inside the Kessel, the ferocity of the breakout attempt through Halbe, and the subsequent running battles between overwhelming Soviet forces and the exhausted Reich troops, who were using their last reserves of fuel, ammunition, strength and hope. Eloquent German-perspective accounts of World War 2 are surprisingly rare, and the recent reissue of Wolfgang Faust's 1948 memoir – 'Tiger Tracks' – has fascinated readers around the world with its insight into the Eastern Front. In 'The Last Panther,' Faust used his unique knowledge of tank warfare to describe the final collapse of the Third Reich and the murderous combat between the German and Russian armies. He gives us a shocking testament to the cataclysmic final hours of the Reich, and the horrors of this last eruption of violence among the idyllic forests and meadows of Germany.

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Customer Reviews

Being a military man myself and really enjoying these types of work; "The Last Panther" was gripping, suspenseful, and raw. The book centers around a Feldwebel (comparatively same rank as I was, a Sergeant) attempting to keep he and his crew alive through impossible, nightmarish odds, in one of the last functioning Panther tanks of the Third Reich. He and his tank are in a race against time and the Russian war machine to escape west, to avoid the certain doom of Russian capture to find relative safety in American capture. The language that the author uses is both gripping and descriptive. You are left to imagine the absolute carnage that is unfolding on the tired, weary and battle worn combatants and the civilians that follow them, as the Russians close in behind them. The feeling of impending doom and suspense is palatable, every page is a shock at the in-humanity these people faced between constant shelling, harrying by enemy aircraft, and other means of destruction. Small things in the piece, like the way the author described facing the new Josef Stalin type heavy tanks that could fight and kill German King Tigers, was absolutely gripping. Too often we only hear the History Channel embellishment of the Tiger tank series-- whilst absolutely a marvel of battlefield strength, it was not the quantum shift in armored warfare that we sometimes believe. It was interesting to hear the German tankers thoughts on things like why he thought those said Josef Stalin tanks reloaded so slowly; his hypothesis was that they gun used a two part charge and projectile system (like a battleship). I know that he was spot on from hindsight in 2015, but it's astonishing to hear his deduction from 1945 as he faced down the gun.

This is fiction disguised as a memoir. How do I know? Let me first say, that I have been interested in WW2 and the Eastern Front since I was 12 (52 now). My dad was a teenage soldier in the German Army at the end of the war. He served as a frontline soldier ("Landser") in an assault engineer bataillon, which was part of the German forces of the "Courland Pocket" in 1944/45. He spent 5 years as a POW in Russia after the war. Now to the "hints" that give away this book as fiction. First

there is a lot of technical details that the author got wrong. The Iron Cross was not worn at the throat, only the Knights Cross was worn under the collar/on the throat. Tank crews did not wear hobnailed boots (because of sparks). Tank crews did not carry morphine. The Germans did not call the Russian rocket launchers "Katyusha" but "Stalins Organ" The Germans did not call the Russians The "Reds", but just "Russians" or "Ivans". There is frequent mention of Methamphetamins, which were supposedly freely available. In Germany this drug was called "Pervitin" and was mainly available to special troops, e.g. aircrews for long range bombing or recon missions etc. Second: The author gives every piece of equipment and weaponry its proper name and adds quite detailed technical description. A real veteran would not have known in the first place or would not remember.

Examples: He remembers the Russian aircraft as the Sturmovik. He always talks about his MP40, where a normal grunt would just call it an MP. He describes in detail that Jagdpanzer that was based on a chassis of Panzer IV. Really? When You were in the middle of a desperate fight for Your life at the time?

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