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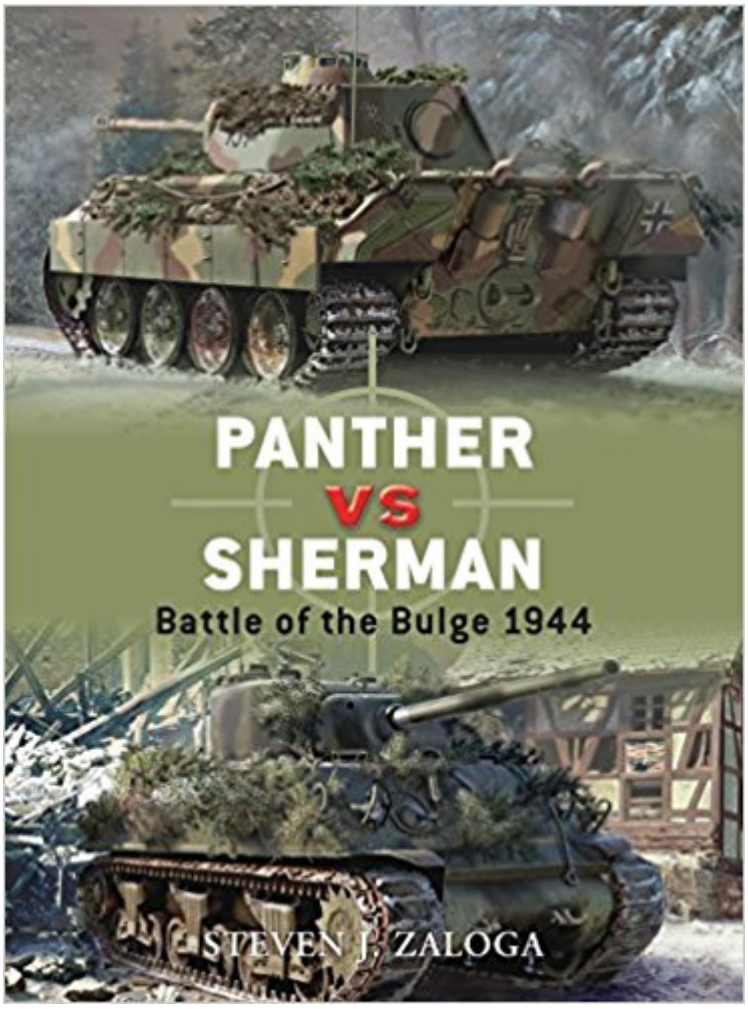
Panther Vs Sherman: Battle Of The Bulge 1944 (Duel)



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Synopsis

In this book Steven J Zaloga offers a fascinating comparison of the combat performance of the two most important tanks involved in the crucial fighting of 1944, the Sherman and the Panther. Examining the design and development of both tanks, Zaloga notes the obvious superiority that the Panther had over the Sherman and how the highly engineered German tank was eventually beaten back, not necessarily by the improvements made to the Sherman, but rather by the superior numbers of tanks that the Allies were able to put into the field.Putting the reader into the heart of this battle between quality and quantity Zaloga examines the tactical intricacies of the battles between these two rivals. Using a compelling account of the ferocious fighting in the Ardennes region to explain the successes and failures of each tank he also highlights the fact that a tank can only be as good as its crew, weighing up the impact of low morale, high cost and mediocre crew training on the Panthers superiority. Packed with full-colour battlescenes, technical drawings, photographs, digital gunsight views, extracts from crew training manuals and real combat reports, this book brings to life the titanic battles between the Sherman and the Panther.

Book Information

Series: Duel (Book 13)

Paperback: 80 pages

Publisher: Osprey Publishing (September 23, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 184603292X

ISBN-13: 978-1846032929

Product Dimensions: 7.3 x 0.3 x 9.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.1 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (66 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #249,814 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 inÂ Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Conventional > Armored Vehicles #1987 inÂ Books > History > Military > World War II #8339 inÂ Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering

Customer Reviews

Even as the author of the previous volume in the Duel series, Panther vs. T-34: Ukraine 1943, I still learned a great deal in Steven J Zaloga's first addition to the Duel series, entitled Panther vs. Sherman: Battle of the Bulge 1944. As usual, the author manages to impart new data and fresh insight even into familiar subjects, such as tank battles in the Ardennes. This volume focuses on

actions involving the German Panther Ausf G model tank versus the M4A3 (76mm) Sherman during the period 16-31 December 1944. Although there is plenty of technical detail in this volume, this is far more than a simple comparison between two tanks and readers looking for a glib assessment of which tank was `better' than the other will not find it here. Overall, this is another great volume in the Duel series. The volume begins with sections on the design and development of both tanks, which does not significantly overlap material in earlier Osprey volumes. As the author explains, the design of the Panther Ausf G was seriously compromised by poor quality materials and lack of spare parts, all caused by Allied bombing. In regard to the Sherman, he states that, "the Panther threat began to be realized too late to have an impact on US Army decisions for its 1944 tank program" and there was no strong demand from American armor officers for tanks with improved anti-tank capability until after D-Day. The section on technical specifications in sub-divided into protection, firepower and mobility, with direct comparisons between the two tanks embedded in each of these areas. Herein, the author notes that, "the Panther had significantly better armor protection than the Sherman" and that "the Panther had superior firepower to the M4A3 (76mm) in tank-versus-tank combat." However, the Sherman had significant advantages in terms of mobility and mechanical reliability that had a major impact on their contribution in Ardennes campaign. The section on the combatants is also quite good in describing the functions of the Panther and Sherman crews. In this section, it is clear that the Sherman enjoyed some subtle advantages that greatly increased its chances against the Panther, such as a commander's turret over-ride, better gunner's sights and better machineguns. German tank crew training was also seriously undermined by late 1944, with new crews getting only minimal driving and live fire experience due to fuel and ammo shortages. The author factors all these variables into the assessment of the combat capabilities of both tanks, which gives a far more dynamic comparison than mere statistical tables. There are also sidebars on German and American `tank aces.' Perhaps the only disappointing section is the one on the Strategic Situation, which outlines the German Wacht Am Rein offensive and provides a map depicting corps/army dispositions. This section didn't really integrate well with the other sections and the map would have been more relevant if it depicted the locations of the battalions that had Panthers (8) and those that had Sherman M4A1/3 tanks. The section on Combat comprises 14 pages of text and covers actions at Krinkelt-Rocherath and Freyneux, but the heart of this narrative is the detailed account of the Panther vs. Sherman duel at Freyneux on 24 December 1944. Readers may be surprised to see that the Shermans performed creditably against the Panther, particularly in the opening stages of the action. The end result was 5 Panthers and 5 Shermans lost, which was a poor trade for the Germans. This section has a nice 2-D diagram of the action (with

notes), a battle scene by Howard Gerrard and views through the gunsights of the Panther and Sherman. The author concludes, "nearly all of the tanks knocked out in the fighting were hit before they were even aware of the presence of enemy tanks, reaffirming the rule of `spot first, engage first, hit first.' One item that probably should have been mentioned in the section on the action near Celles is that Meinrad von Lauchert was in charge of the Panthers in the spearhead (the man who led them into action at Kursk) and that had the Panther been equipped with a diesel engine as Hitler originally insisted, the Panthers would not have run out of fuel 7 miles short of their objective. The real lessons of this book are delivered in the concluding sections on statistics and analysis. Contrary to what readers conditioned to war movies or computer games might expect, the author notes that actual statistical data indicates that most tank vs. tank battles were small, involving only 4-9 tanks on each side. The data also indicates that the defender had a distinct advantage, since they usually got to fire first. Despite its vaunted post-war reputation, the author uses data from 29 engagements involving Shermans and Panthers to conclude that, "the popular myths that Panthers enjoyed a 5-to-1 kill ratio against Shermans or that it took five Shermans to knock out a Panther have no basis at all in the historical records." Further, he states that, "in a head-to-head duel, the Panther Ausf G was clearly superior to the M4A3 (76mm)...[but] tactical considerations were often paramount." Also, "the Sherman offered a better balance of mass and quality than did the Panther." The statistics that the author provides indicate that the Germans committed about 416 Panthers to the Ardennes offensive and lost 180, while the Americans committed about 600 M4A3 tanks and lost about 90. However, these statistics do not break down how many tanks were destroyed by other tanks as opposed to lost to mines, A/T guns or mechanical breakdown. Thus, the Shermans likely inflicted more damage on their opponents, but the actual results of the duel are left a bit murky.

In this readable, carefully-researched book, author Steven Zaloga carefully picks apart the conventional view that the Panther was superior to the Sherman. To begin with, the primary role of tanks was not tank-to-tank combat. When tank duels occurred they were decided more by who got the first shot than by gun power or armor protection. By late 1944, American crews generally had an edge in experience and training. The Sherman had a better secondary armament than the Panther. The Sherman typically had a faster engagement cycle than the Panther because the Sherman's turrret traversed faster, and the Sherman's gunner had his own periscopic sight; the Panther's gunner, whose head barely fit in the turret, sat blind until he had orders to begin looking for the target. In combat, tank engagements were usually small, quick and decisive; victory went to the side that saw the enemy first, and fired first.By late 1944, the majority of Panther crews were relatively

green and inadequately trained. Fuel scarcity aggravated the problem of deficient crew training, and imposed limitations in combat, too. The Panther's armor was often brittle because the vital alloy molybdenum was increasingly scarce in Germany's war-ravaged, bombed-out manufacturing economy. Foreign workers may have sabotaged fuel and lubrication systems in Panthers. For these reasons and more, the Panther's brilliant design was more a matter of theory than reality.If, like me, you are something of a tankaholic, you will savor this vintage bottle as a rare break from the cheap stuff. And if someone you love is a tankaholic, there could be no better gift than this fascinating glimpse of late World War II armored warfare.

First, I'll admit a prejudice towards Steve Zaloga's works. He is one of my favorite authors on military history and technology. In this volume Zaloga has added another excellent volume to his works on WW2 US armored forces. Other Osprey volumes include Battle Orders series books on US tank battalions, US armored divisions, and tank destroyer battalions, a Warrior series book on US tank crewman, Vanguard books on the M4 (76mm), and other vehicles. Each book adds more material to the overall story of American armored troops in World War Two. Taken together Zaloga's volumes add up to a massive history of the US military forces in Europe that faced the German army. This "Duel" series volume deals specifically with the use of the later editions of Sherman tanks against the massive German attack know as the Battle of the Bulge. Both vehicles are examined from the technical standpoint as well as their use in the tactical situation on the battlefield. Mr. Zaloga defrocks the myths that only superior US numbers won the war or that it always took five Shermans to kill a German Panther tank. This book looks at the various factors that allowed the Germans to win the statistics (bigger, heavier, etc.) but allowed the US Army to win the war. This book is well written and very readable. The pictures are clear and in many cases uncommon. The color illustration add appropriate content to the text. More than worth the money, highly recommended.

I wish I had had this book fifteen years earlier before I constructed my table-top game of the Bulge (12' x 6', several tiers, HO scale trees, tanks, and soldiers on stands). The students would moan and groan (those driving the Shermans ,1/72nd scale tanks)when the German tanks would clobber their thinclads at extreme ranges. In reality, the book confirms that. But one needed to take into account the heavy forested areas that impaired line of sight during this winter onslaught by the Germans.Overall, this is an extraordinary book that explains the advantages and disadvantages for the two armoured fighting vehicles. This is an outstanding book for the WWII armor enthusiast, as

well as for the wargamer. This is another book that I will be passing along to my grandson.

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