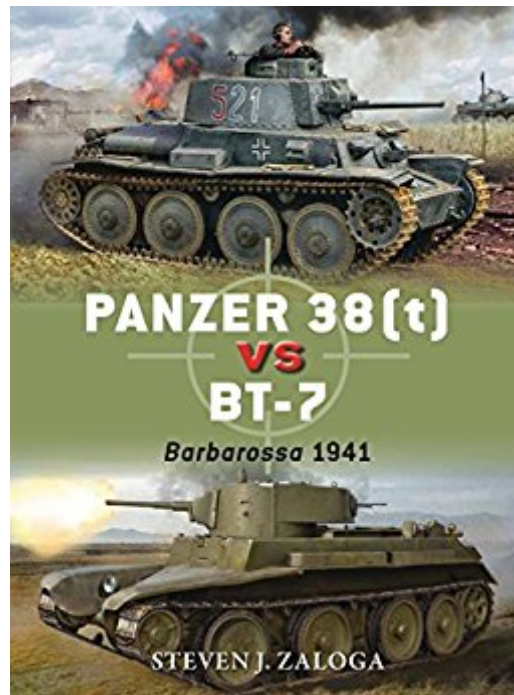




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Panzer 38(t) Vs BT-7: Barbarossa 1941 (Duel)



Synopsis

The tank battles in the Soviet Union during the summer of 1941 were the largest in World War II, exceeding even the more famous Prokhorovka encounter during the Kursk campaign. Indeed, they were the largest tank battles ever fought. This book examines two evenly matched competitors in this conflict, the German Panzer 38(t) and the Soviet BT-7. Both were of similar size, armed with guns of comparable firepower, and had foreign roots – the Panzer 38(t) was a Czechoslovak design and the BT-7 was an evolution of the American Christie tank. With full-colour artwork and archive and present-day photography, this absorbing study assesses the strengths and limitations of these two types against the wider background of armoured doctrine in the opening stages of Operation Barbarossa.

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Customer Reviews

Four and Half Stars - that is what I actually would rate this work - since I am a tough reviewer and anything can use improvement. Zaloga again delivers, in a short work, a well written and researched work on WWII armor. In the first sentence of the statistics and Analysis section he quickly sums up that the German victory was due to better training and tactics than technical quality of their armor.

Zaloga gives an excellent presentation showing that the Czech tanks, used in the Wehrmacht, were critical components not only in Barbarossa but in the French campaign as well where they comprised 50% of the 37mm (effective gun-armed) tanks. While technically inferior to the PzKw III and IV the PzKw 38(t) was available where those tanks were not. Again, considering how important the Czech arms industry was to the Nazi war machine, what would have been the actual history if Chamberlain and Munich had not happened and Hitler forced to actually attack the very strong Czech frontier fortifications with PzKw I and II tanks and then attempt to take on the Allies with only domestic German armor and arms production. It is known that strong elements of the Wehrmacht command were waiting in 1936-1939 for Hitler to make a misstep in his expansion policy to stage a military coup against the Nazi party and Hitler was very dependent on popular support at this stage of his dictatorship. The BT-7 was a fairly advanced technical design, with the Christie suspension, welded construction and powerful 45mm gun. But (like the 38(t)) it required the commander to also be gunner, had very poor situational awareness for the commander and the Soviet armor forces were hamstrung by poor tactical doctrine, the purging of the experienced officer corps and very poor training of the troops. The Soviets had a very inadequate logistics and recovery capability until the massive Lend Lease aid started to arrive and since the Germans could usually recover and repair their battle-damaged or broken down tanks it contributed much to the 12,000 to 400 tank loss ratio. I am reminded of comment made after the 1st Gulf War by an American tanker where, after noting the great superiority of the Abrams M1A tank over the Iraqi Soviet tanks, he noted that if the sides had swapped tanks that the American units would still have defeated the Iraqi due to superior training and morale.

Information, technical descriptions, and account of the battle are up to the author's usual high standard. However, maps of the area are lacking. Reference to a map on one page but no map. Recommended for those interested in 7th Panzer Division and the early period of WW2.

Zaluga's usual interesting, detailed comparison of two battlefield opponents, he supplies with lots of period photos and analyzes the combat results

thank you

Good book

The author, Steven Zaloga, is one of Osprey Publishing's best and most prolific writers. This book shows why. He writes an excellent book despite the limitations of the format of this series (Duel) published by Osprey. Before continuing further however, a few words need to be written on the Duel series for the uninitiated. First of all, this book is rather limited in length. It is only 80 pages in length and a good deal (very roughly about a third) consists of contemporaneous photographs or illustrations of one type or another (i.e., maps, plates of tank and turret, etc.). Hence this is not an academic tome for anyone interested in such. The book itself is broken out, in a nutshell, into 4 short sections. One covers the physical characteristics of the vehicles themselves as well as the human factors and tactical doctrine they were used in. A second provides a short synopsis of the state of the two opposing sides covered by this duel (7th Panzer div. on the German side and the 5th Tank Army on the Soviet). A third of how the battle progressed. The fourth and final, an after-action analysis of why the battle turned out the way it did (and how the vehicles performed). Each section is relatively short (about 20 pages each). Hence the above comment on how this book is not a lengthy treatise on the subject. Considering this constraint, however, the author does a spectacular job. The book starts off with a discussion and analysis of tanks themselves. This is not very lengthy though. For those looking for a more in-depth analysis, at least of the Panzer 38(t), this reviewer highly recommends Mr. Zaloga's previous book (also published by Osprey) on that vehicle. Mr. Zaloga has also published a book on BT cavalry tanks (also by Osprey) but as this reviewer has not read it he cannot opine. Needless to say, the section of this duel book does a very good job providing an executive summary of the physical characteristics of both tanks, including strengths and weaknesses. The two tanks were very similar in terms of physical characteristics. The main differences in terms of physical characteristics were in terms of crew situational awareness of surroundings outside of tank (the 38(t) had a commander's cupola with decent vision slits while the BT-7 only had a periscope the tank commander could look through), mobility (the BT-7 had a much higher power to weight ratio) and the 38(t) had 4 members instead of 3 (thus allowing for a less overwhelmed crew with associated response times and performance). The real differences in individual tank performances lay in the crew. The Germans were experienced, well trained and had a high morale. The Soviets, on the other side, were quite poor in these respects. After this discussion and analysis, the author then provides a picture of both sides' forces in one particular section of the front, that along the Polish-Lithuanian border. Each side's forces (German 7th div. and 5th Soviet Army) are discussed quite well, despite the short length of the appropriate chapter of the book (i.e., histories of each side, strengths, weaknesses, commanders, supply situation, etc.). Mr. Zaloga also

explains why he choose this particular area of the Eastern Front. One was that there was very good documentation on it from both side's perspectives. The second was that there was an excellent collection of photographs in the US archive's (including dates, geographic areas, what is going, etc.) relating to the photographs. These photos, along with captions, are pretty impressive and detailed as a result. In addition, and more importantly, very extensive use has been made of primary German and Russian language sources by the author. This is not a rehash of secondary sources as Osprey books generally were 20 - 30 years ago. This is, in this reviewer's opinion, the greatest strength of the book. Finally, there is a statistics and analysis's concluding section in the book. Mr. Zaloga concludes (p. 70) that the one-sided victories of the PzKpfw 38(t) tanks of 7 Panzer Division against the BT-7 tanks of the 5th Tank Division were largely due to the broader issues of tactical experience and preparedness and not to technical advantages or disadvantages inherent to either vehicle's. A few comments need to be made though regarding weaknesses. Two are due primarily to the format of the 'Duel's series so this reviewer hopes that someone from Osprey publishing is reading and taking note. The most serious weakness of the book, in this reviewer's opinion, is the lack of footnotes (as almost no 'Duel's books have any). This is a terrible shame considering the extensive and thorough original research of the author. A second problem involves the illustrations. This book spends quite a bit of time discussing and analyzing the physical characteristics of the tanks but there are no cutaways of the vehicles (other than turret areas) or photos or illustrations of the various crew positions (i.e., from drivers, gunners, etc. angles). The third and final weakness of the book involves not the format but the fact that the author does not examine or analyze how this particular area of the front (and its battles) exemplified the Eastern Front as a whole. How did it compare in terms of geography? Forces involved? Fluidity of battle? Command capability? In short, how typical was this battle compared to other areas of the Eastern Front in Barbarossa? Despite these weaknesses, all and all, an excellent well researched, written and thought out book that makes excellent use of the 'Duel's format despite the limitations imposed by it. Very highly recommended.

Good book

excellent

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