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T-34-85 Vs M26 Pershing: Korea 1950 (Duel)



Synopsis

A hotly-debated topic amongst tank buffs is of the relative merits of the Soviet and American tanks of World War II. Using recently revealed documents, Steven Zaloga sheds light on the crucial tank battles of the Korean War as the rival superpowers' finest tanks battled for supremacy. The Soviet-equipped North Korean Peoples Army initially dominated the battlefield with the seemingly unstoppable T34-85. As US tank battalions hastily arrived throughout the late summer and early autumn of 1950, the M26 Pershing took the fight to North Korea with increasing success.

Book Information

Series: Duel (Book 32)

Paperback: 80 pages

Publisher: Osprey Publishing; First Edition edition (November 23, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1846039908

ISBN-13: 978-1846039904

Product Dimensions: 7.2 x 0.2 x 0.4 inches

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

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,306,714 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in [Books > History > Military > Korean War > Campaigns](#) #157 in [Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Conventional > Armored Vehicles](#) #1045 in [Books > History > Military > Vehicles](#)

Customer Reviews

Steven J. Zaloga received his BA in history from Union College and his MA from Columbia University. He has worked as an analyst in the aerospace industry for over two decades, covering missile systems and the international arms trade, and has served with the Institute for Defense Analyses, a federal think-tank. He is the author of numerous books on military technology and military history, with an accent on the US Army in World War II as well as Russia and the former Soviet Union.

Steven Zaloga has written another excellent book that describes the combat performance of the M26 Pershing and the T34-85, to go alongside his outstanding books on the M26/M46 Pershing and the T34-85 tank in the New Vanguard series. Both the T34-85 and the M26 Pershing were developed at the close of WWII to defeat the German Panther and Tiger tanks. While the T34-85

received a lot of action in the Eastern front, the M26 Pershing was developed too late and saw very limited action against German tanks in 1945. The M26 was used extensively in the Korean War, where it was pitted against the Russian T34-85 tank. Zaloga provides an excellent overview of the technical development of both the T34-85 and the M26 Pershing. What I appreciate about Zaloga is that he provides detailed charts that compare the armor protection, the firepower and performance of the T34-85, the M4A3E8 and the M26 Pershing (pp. 22-33). He also provides extensive, detailed description of the combat performance of both tanks in pivotal battles in the Korean War. The chapters in this book include the following: Introduction, Chronology, Design and development, Technical specifications, The combatants, The strategic situation, Combat Assessment, Further reading, Index. The most interesting section in the book was the description of the combat performance of the M26 versus the T34-85 in the Pusan Perimeter in August 1950 during the two pivotal battles at Obong-Ni Ridge and the "Bowling Alley." In these 2 engagements, the M26 decisively defeated the T34-85 in battle. The M26 was also instrumental in the fighting in Inchon landings and the breakout from the Pusan Pocket. After November 1950, there were hardly any more armoured engagements between the M26 and the T34-85. Interestingly, Zaloga concludes that the U.S. crewmen initially favored the M26 over the M4A3E8 when there were many tank engagements with the T34-85; however, when the threat of the T34-85 was over, the U.S. crewmen favored the M4A3E8 for its mechanical reliability, durability, nimbleness, and ease of maintenance; in comparison, the M26 was much less mechanically reliable and its automotive transmission was sluggish, especially in climbing the mountainous regions. However, in terms of combat performance, U.S. operational research concludes that the M26 was 3 times more effective than the M4A3E8. Nevertheless, with the plentiful supply of 76mm HVAP ammunition, the M4A3E8 had no trouble penetrating the armor of the T34-85 with its gun. The Assessment chapter of the book provides key insights into how the M26 compared with the M4 and T34-85 in combat effectiveness. This book provides an excellent overview of the development, the technical specifications, and the combat performance of both the T34-85 and M26 Pershing. The colored plates are excellent (but few in number). I was very pleased with this book. I would recommend that you purchase the New Vanguard series on the M26, the M4 (76mm), and the T-34-85 as well. I highly recommend this book for tank buffs and military history enthusiasts. It is another excellent entry by Steven Zaloga in the combat performance series.

There are several pleasant surprises in Steven Zaloga's book on the T-34/85 vs. M-26 Pershing. The first is that the author also includes the M-4A3E8 Sherman (late WW2) tank as well. Zaloga

points out that the Sherman and T-34 were more contemporaries than the Pershing, which was developed later. The focus of the book remains on the T-34 vs. M-26, but it's a nice bonus to have the Sherman included here since it did see a lot of action in Korea. Another is an analysis that shows increased tank kills to the tank that sees and shoots the enemy first. Sounds very simple, but it is important in the evaluation of any tank. One big difference of this book vs. others in the Dual Series - more narrative about the battles fought than technical discussions about ammunition, trajectory of shells and ballistics. These are not dismissed, but not as detailed in other Dual books. The early phase of the Korean War belonged to the Soviet built T-34 with 85 mm cannon. Since South Korea had no tanks, and the few US tanks that arrived in South Korea were no match for the T-34, the North Koreans in six weeks almost managed to conquer all of South Korea. Gradually, the M-26 Pershing tank was introduced and begins immediately proving its superiority. The book has excellent photos of both tanks, inside and in action. There are color 3-D cutaways which show the inside of the turrets. Everyone always wants to know which tank is "the best" A summary is provided in the book - the Sherman could knock out the T-34 easily and vice versa. The M-26 Pershing had armor sufficient to protect against the T-34/85 and the 90 mm US cannon would sometimes go through the front of the T-34 and all the way through the turret, engine and back out. As the US knocked out virtually every North Korean tank, the battles shifted to those of infantry support and mobile artillery, for which the Sherman was better suited. Tables included show tank losses by cause, number and types of tanks in US inventory, firepower and performance comparisons. One minor criticism - in books this small, every word counts. The battle at No Name ridge is reviewed in caption and almost verbatim in the text. One or the other would have sufficed. The two page color plate of the battle is fantastic, showing how terrain and circumstances dictate tactics - normally, you would never want tanks so close to each other. This book sets out to do all that it is meant to do and a bit more - it shows the two combatants (three including the Sherman), gives you a great overview of the ebb and flow of the Korean War and how armor contributed to the US recapture of South Korea. Highly recommended for all armor buffs, good for modelers, anyone who wants to see the continued tank development from 1945-1950.

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Mr. Zaloga's "duel" books often give more details on each AFV than separate books on just each vehicle alone. Not only are pertinent details of each vehicle included along with brief histories but the author chooses a particular battle where the AFVs faced each other. It is truly the story of a "duel" between the vehicles.

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