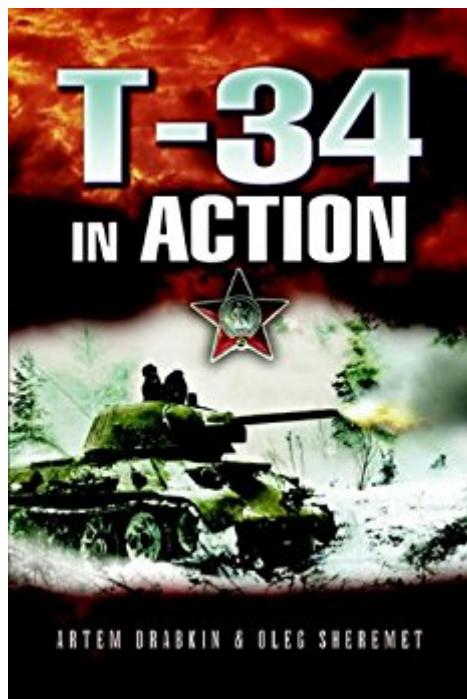


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T-34 In Action



Synopsis

The Soviet T-34 medium tank was one of the most famous and effective fighting vehicles of the Second World War. Along with the German Tiger and the American Sherman, it was a milestone in tank design that changed the course of the conflict. Much has been written about the technical history of the tank and the vital part it played in the huge tank battles on the Eastern Front, but less has been said about the men who went to war in the T-34 and lived, fought and sometimes died in these remarkable machines. This pioneering book, which is based on extensive interviews with tank crews, records their experiences and offers a compelling inside view of armored warfare in the mid-twentieth century.

Book Information

File Size: 2622 KB

Print Length: 224 pages

Publisher: Pen and Sword Military (June 19, 2006)

Publication Date: June 25, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00DN5TYWO

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #218,400 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #13 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Military #36 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Military #88 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Weapons

Customer Reviews

Anyone who has seen Artem Drabkin's excellent website, the Russian Battlefield, will enjoy this volume which expands upon the material found on the internet (mostly in Russian). Drabkin has interviewed eleven former T-34 tankers and provides a chapter on each, that details their personal background and war experience. Although a few books and articles have appeared in the past that are based on Soviet tanker experiences, this is the first book in English that is not loaded with the

usual Communist-era propaganda. This book, for the most part, delivers the straight unvarnished truth about armored combat. For years we have had access to books written by former German tank commanders, but this is the first book in English that really does justice to the Soviet tanker in the Second World War. The author includes an interesting summary chapter at the beginning, which merges many of the key points made by the contributors. The eleven former Soviet tankers primarily served from 1943-45, although one lieutenant was a T-34 tanker in 1941-42. In this volume, Drabkin has stripped away the question and answer format of these interviews as they appear on the Internet and instead provides a straight narrative for each tanker. The English translation is very clean - better than on the Internet version - and includes only a few odd expressions. The men do use a number of Russian slang terms and the author provides a glossary for these. The author also includes a photo of each individual as well as several unusual T-34 pictures, such as refueling with buckets. The key points that come out in this book are that Soviet tankers were not very well trained and suffered heavy losses accordingly. Soviet tankers trusted their T-34s as tough and reliable, even as better German tanks began to appear.

Having read several books about the Eastern Front from the point of view of German generals and soldiers, it was very interesting at last to get my hands on an account told from the Soviet point of view. This book is packed with detailed anecdotes, not only about tank actions, but also the whole experience of living through the dreadful "Great Patriotic War", especially as a Red Army soldier. Anyone familiar with the ways of the US, British, or German armies can immediately see the differences: less formal discipline, but seriously brutal command decisions. For instance, what British or German driver would yell at his tank commander, "God damn you, Lieutenant! Why did you fire? I didn't get to close my hatch! Now the gases have blinded me". Soviet tank commanders could be shot if they abandoned their tank, even if it was disabled. Officers took a very casual attitude to human life. As other reviewers have noted, the interviews on which this book is based were obviously all with soldiers who survived - which automatically makes them very lucky. Tens of thousands of Soviet tankers burned in their T34s, largely because of inflexible tactics that sent them head-on against the dreaded German 88 mm cannon. Yet the T34, especially the T34-85 version, were excellent tanks in their way. I think it is wrong to discount stories of T34s that destroyed several German tanks - even Tigers - because this was perfectly feasible if they got a side or rear shot from close range. Indeed, in one famous incident a single T34-85 blew up three Royal Tigers and damaged others, when they drove past its concealed position in a corn field. (Ironically, sPzAbt.501's official records state that the Tigers ran into "massive anti-tank defences", which just

goes to show how deceptive these things can be).

There has been no shortage of English language books that tell us what it was like to serve in the Armies of the Western Allies or even the German Army during World War II. There are biographies that recount the experiences of everyone from high ranking generals to the men in the ranks. The same cannot be said for English language books written from the Soviet perspective. What has been available has usually been both very awkwardly written and translated, or was more propaganda than history. This book is important because it is part of a recent growth in the number and quality of publications that are beginning to fill this gap in the historiography of WW II. The book itself is a collection of anecdotes told by Soviet veterans who served on the T-34 tank. After an introductory chapter that lays out the plan for the book and some background information, each subsequent chapter is devoted to the recollections and experiences of one veteran. Each Soviet veteran recounts the experiences that are most vivid and meaningful to him. Because of this narrow individual focus the book may seem lacking in direction to anyone looking for a broader comprehensive history of events. There are no discussions of grand strategy or of sweeping maneuvers here. This is the war as seen through the very limited field of view of T-34 vision blocks and periscopes that the Soviet veterans are unanimous in rating as next to worthless. Each chapter usually begins with a brief history of where that person grew up and where they were at the start of the war. They then cover the circumstances that led to their selection to be armor crewman, and their initial period of training. Each veteran's story is different, but they tend to cover similar types of events.

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