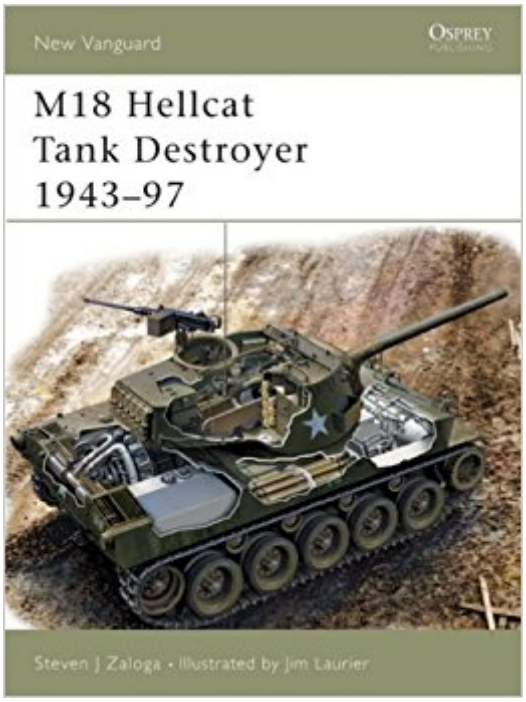
M18 Hellcat Tank Destroyer 1943â€“97 (New Vanguard)



Synopsis

The M18 76mm Gun Motor Carriage was developed for the US Army's Tank Destroyer Command. It was the only tank destroyer deployed during World War II actually based on their requirements for speed and firepower. This book examines the development of this vehicle, the controversies over the need for high-speed tank destroyers, and its actual performance during World War II. Special emphasis is placed on examining its performance in its intended mission. Coverage also includes derivative vehicles of the M18 such as the M39 armored utility vehicle.

Book Information

Series: New Vanguard (Book 97)

Paperback: 48 pages

Publisher: Osprey Publishing; 1st edition (April 27, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1841766879

ISBN-13: 978-1841766874

Product Dimensions: 7.2 x 3.2 x 9.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #317,311 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 inÂ Books > History > Military > Weapons & Warfare > Conventional > Armored Vehicles #180 inÂ Books > History > Military > Vehicles #2665 inÂ Books > History > Military > World War II

Customer Reviews

The unrivalled illustrated reference on fighting vehicles, transport and artillery through the ages. Each volume is illustrated throughout, making these books uniquely accessible to history enthusiasts of all ages.

Steven J. Zaloga was born in 1952, received his BA in history from Union College, and his MA from Columbia University. He has published numerous books and articles dealing with modern military technology, especially armoured vehicle development. His main area of interest is military affairs in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Second World War, and he has also written extensively on American armoured forces.

Ã¢Â ÂœM18 Hellcat Tank DestroyerÃ¢Â Â• is a typical Osprey New vanguard publication with 48

numbered pages - of which 3 are devoted to publishing information, the table of contents, and the index. A bibliography is included but the text is not keyed to specific information. Included are plenty of wartime pictures and several data tables. The cover illustration is featured as a 2 page colored cutaway in the middle of the book with a key to specific details as well as specifications such as dimensions, weight, engine, etc. There are 6 other pages of color illustrations. Zaloga provides details not contained in other books I own. Books such as Hunnicutt's Ã¢Â ÂœSherman: A History of the American Medium TankÃ¢Â Â• (discussing the 76mm gun M1) and Ã¢Â ÂœStuart: A History of the American Light TankÃ¢Â Â• (which discussing various light gun motor carriages created for the Tank Destroyers including the M18) provide details not given in Zaloga's book.Zaloga briefly explains the origins and outcomes of the United States Ã¢Â ÂœTank Destroyer DoctrineÃ¢Â Âœ, helping promulgate the post war sensationalistic use of the term Ã¢Â ÂœTank DestroyerÃ¢Â Â• for the vehicles of what wound up to be a specialized force armed with unique tank designs. Ã¢Â ÂœTank DestroyerÃ¢Â Â• was chosen as propaganda by the creators of the Doctrine for that very reason - as a glossy reference to an antitank gun concept that eventually led to tanks.The Tank Destroyer Doctrine was created due to poor analysis that came to the conclusion that the U.S. ground forces would face masses of German tanks in combat as had happened in Europe, with the almighty panzer the center of opposition. As opposed to realizing that Germany had overwhelmed the unprepared, disorganized European Armies in Poland and France in rapid coordinated fashion. Opposition to the Doctrine existed even before it was Doctrine, with other officers pointing out that the best answer to hostile tanks was friendly tanks used within a properly organized and trained army. But General Lesley McNair was an influential figure who believed that artillery and as such antitank guns were a cheaper, more effective answer to the panzer (his mantra was that Ã¢Â Âœtanks support the infantry; antitank guns fight enemy tanksÃ¢Â Â•). Leadership at the time was extremely disorganized and unable to come up with clear plans. The brash, loud spoken McNair became head of the newly formed Army Ground Forces (AGF) in 1942. Above the AGF were only the Army Chief of Staff and War Department. In that position McNair ruthlessly forced his opinions on the rest of the Army: hence, often as not when Zaloga or anyone else says the Ã¢Â ÂœArmyÃ¢Â Â• believed in something or the Ã¢Â ÂœArmy's DoctrineÃ¢Â Â• consisted of such-and-such the Ã¢Â ÂœArmyÃ¢Â Â• being referenced was McNair and a pet gerbil he kept in his pocket. And a staff of like-minded personnel chosen staff to that end. He and his supporters slighted tanks and favored the tank destroyers in cannon development.Sophistry was used to defend the stance, including the chestnut that it did not take a $35,000 tank to destroyer an enemy tank when an antitank gun could do so cheaper, without any regard to effectiveness let alone the

the expense of fielding the vast number of antitank needed to cover a front, etc. McNair and crew made up the Ã¢Â ÂœfactsÃ¢Â Â• as they needed them going so far as to rig war game rules to favor antitank guns to prove their point.McNair favored towed antitank guns but the commander of the Tank Destroyers Colonel (later General) Andrew Bruce (like most practical officers in the Army) found that the towed weapons powerful enough to destroy rapidly improving enemy army were immobile and almost useless against any but the clumsiest of enemies. From the beginning the U.S. Army was offense minded and towed cannon were defensive. Bruce enjoyed misguided Naval imagery: he wanted a fast cruiser not a battleship (battleships sink cruisers). The concept of the battlecruiser (a lightly armored but fast cruiser armed with the guns of a battleship) had failed during World War I. After rejecting a number of wheeled weapons outright due to lack of off-road mobility and likewise fixed guns on tracked chassis, the Tank Destroyers wound up with a tank by a different name (the M10, M18, and M36 Ã¢Â ÂœGun Motor CarriagesÃ¢Â Â•). By the end of the war crews were adding the missing machine guns and roof armor which differentiated them slightly from tanks.McNair forced his Doctrine onto the Army against the protests of others. At first the TD forces had to be equipped with improvised weapons such as the Ã¢Â ÂœlightÃ¢Â Â• 37mm M6 Gun Motor Carriage weapons carrier and the Ã¢Â ÂœheavyÃ¢Â Â• 75mm armed M3 Gun Motor Carriage half track. The first full tracked purpose built gun motor carriage developed for the TDs was the 3inch armed M10 Gun Motor Carriage. It was not a fast, light vehicle and as such Bruce rejected it but McNair forced it upon the Tank Destroyers. McNair felt the towed antitank gun would be better and starting around August 1942 forced the Tank Destroyers to begin using it with the goal of half the battalions being equipped with towed cannon. The vehicle Bruce did want was created over a protracted period, starting as a light tank destroyer concept armed with the 37mm gun (the only lightweight gun then in use) and passing through weapons upgrades (57mm and 75mm) to finally accept the 76mm gun M1 once it became available in 1942. It took until 1944 to get it in combat issue.This was the 76mm Gun Motor Carriage M18 which Buick named the Ã¢Â ÂœHellcatÃ¢Â Â• for publicity reasons although there was never an official Army name. It sacrificed space and armor to reach extreme speeds for a tracked armored fighting vehicle. The 76mm gun had been designed as a light, small weapon that could be mounted directly into the 75mm gun's M34 mount used by the M4 tank, in hopes of allowing rapid acceptance and perhaps even use by the North Africa/Tunisia Campaign of 1942-1943. The mounting scheme worked but the turret itself was not designed for a long, heavier gun. By the time the 76 was fit in the tank (eventually with a new turret and mount) it lacked the power to deal with the heavier frontal armor of German tanks in 1944. Luckily for the U.S. Army by 1944 the German ground forces were suffering major issues with training, equipment, and

leadership due in no part to the severe losses inflicted in 1942 and 1943, especially by the Soviets. Even the 75mm armed M4 tank was effective enough (due to crew training and leadership) to serve as the U.S. Army's backbone for 1944.The M18 was a new design with its development issues and by the time it entered use in 1944 its 76mm cannon was deemed inadequate, with McNair favoring the 90mm armed M36 Gun Motor Carriage. Bruce resisted that weapon as just another slow, clumsy modification of the M10; McNair forced it onto the Tank Destroyers. The preference for the 90mm gun was one reason the M18 was produced in far fewer numbers than originally intended. Of the 2,507 produced, 1,850 or so remained in combat form and only a small number of them went overseas to see combat. Unlike other books, Zaloga has encapsulated available information on M18 strengths, losses and claimed kills. Despite the hype touted so often that the M18 was a Ã¢Â Âœpanzer killing machineÃ¢Â Â•, actual records indicate it was no more effective than any other tracked weapon with a 2.4 to 1 kill to loss ratio. Don't let that fool you: M18s did some good fighting and their crews were dedicated and skilled - but so were the other tank crews as well as the often forgotten infantry who had it worse than any tanker.Ironically, as the war closed the M36's turret was fit to the M18 hull to see if the M18 could be up-gunned; it worked, but came too late for use. During the M18s development there were so many projects going on and the M18 required so much work that said modification had not been tried earlier (indeed, the M36 was new, arriving after the M18). Commander of the Tank Destroyers Bruce could have required mounting the 17 pounder or 90mm on the M18 hull but the officers in charge - in the crush of time - constantly made their own somewhat prejudiced decisions best on guesses not facts.The highly touted speed was useful for such roles as accompanying recon units with their fast light tanks and wheeled vehicles, but offered little overall value in actual combat. Tank combat was about waiting in ambush, not running around the battlefield.The M18 received a mixed reception from the tank destroyer crews. Some preferred the 3inch M10 for its greater ammunition supply, armor, and better room. Others hyped the M18 as the best weapon for Ã¢Â ÂœtankersÃ¢Â Â• so far. Included in one quote of a crew's opinion is the comment that Ã¢Â ÂœOne direct hit on heavily armored vehicles knocked them out by killing the crew. This was caused by fragmentation not only...Ã¢Â Â• which shows the wishful ignorance of the men in combat units. Said phenomenon did not occur; rarely was the entire crew killed by one hit unless they were caught in a burning vehicle; better armored vehicles suffered fewer losses than lightly armored vehicles; M18 crews suffered multiple casualties from multiple hits slicing unhindered through their thin armor. The lack of armor was in itself one complaint of experienced crews (see page 22 if you haven't bothered to read Zaloga's book.)While U.S. forces did fight some significant battles against German armor, the Germans were outnumbered and out produced and by

1944 most armored vehicles with a cannon saw a great deal of use in the infantry support role including the M18.The M18 was subject to various experiments as well as becoming mother of the M39 Armored utility vehicle, which was used post war. After the war, the survivors were thrown off to other countries and some served quiet a long life, as did many other combat vehicles of the age.Page 7 and 8 includes Zaloga's usual misguided attempts to explain the differences between the 76mm, 17 pounder, and German KwK 42. The U.S. 76mm was not designed to be a 17 pounder let along high powered 75 and simply did not have the power of either, being closer to the German 7.5 centimeter KwK 40 and Pak 40 and British 77mm (which was not the Ã¢Â Âœslightly less powerful 17 pounderÃ¢Â Â• it is routinely described as). The 17 pounder and 76mm projectiles did not weigh Ã¢Â Âœabout the sameÃ¢Â Â•, the 17 pounder projectile was 10% heavier. To compare cannon power, calculate the foot tons/kilojoules of energy generated by the weight and velocity of primary projectiles. German caliber lengths were not based on bore length as were U.S. and British cannon; they were based on either overall length in the case of most early cannon or the average of overall length and bore length in the case of some (but not all) cannon after 1938. Chamber pressure is not useful for direct comparisons; the 37mm Gun had a chamber pressure of 50,000 psi. The armor penetration table on page 8 is handy, and at least Zaloga does not compare U.S. steel shot to German hyper velocity tungsten cored APCR shot as he did in Ã¢Â ÂœArmored ThunderboltÃ¢Â Â•.Despite some criticisms I found the book educational and useful and hence have no reluctance in giving it five starts (*****). Of course, the number of pages might have been doubled or tripled with more data but that is not the format of these sorts of Osprey's books.

I very much agree with the review written by M. Dalton, so I will not repeat what he said. I will add, however, the author's assertion that " General Bruce's obsession with speed distorted the design and resulted in a poorly balanced tank destroyer. By focusing on a fanciful tactical doctrine and ignoring the likely evolution of the enemy threat, Bruce and the Tank Destroyer Command concentrated on the wrong balance." In other words, focusing on speed was a mistake. He then goes on to say, "The excellent combat record of many M18 tank destroyer battalions during World War II occurred in spite of its design features, not because of them. The Hellcat's combat record is attributable to the training and dedication of its crews, not to its ill-conceived design. For me, this claim is illogical and unfounded. It suggests that the poor combat record of Sherman tank or M10 equipped units (or for that matter towed anti-tank guns) was a result of poor training and lack of dedication of their crews. If the M18 was such a poor design, why did it have such a high ratio of kills to units fielded? (Other sources state it had the highest ratio of any Allied anti-armor vehicle or

gun in WW2.) No doubt the M18 had its flaws, but it was highly reliable, small in size (and thus difficult to see and hit), fast in mobility and turret traverse, and was well matched against all German armor except for Panther and Tiger tanks, of which there were relatively few, especially in late 1944 and 1945 when the M18 was used. In addition, during several major engagements cited by the author (e.g. "Battle of the Bulge"), the M18 was very successful against Panthers. Finally, the author states on the first page that, "by 1945, the US Army recognized that the tank destroyer concept was a technical and tactical dead-end." Here again, I beg to differ. It seems to me General Bruce was conceptually way ahead of his time. The Apache AH-64 helicopter seems to me to validate General Bruce's conclusion that high speed, light armor, and solid firepower could be very effective in thwarting tanks. Both Gulf War's seem to substantiate this conclusion. One might argue that Mr. Zaloga (the author) was right about the technical implementation, i.e. a tracked vehicle is not the best solution, but how can one argue with the tactical idea? In my superficial view, the tank destroyer doctrine is alive and well in the US Army in the form of the AH-64. In summary, I find the author's assessment of the M18 poorly substantiated by his own text and data and unnecessarily negative. All machines have strengths and weaknesses. Every single tank in WW2 had significant flaws, including the vaunted T-34 and mighty Tiger, when judged against some absolute bar of hindsight. The key to their success or failure was in understanding and taking advantage of strength and avoiding exposure of weaknesses. I think the author would have done better to simply explain when the M18 was effective and when it was not, instead of making broad and poorly supported claims.

Good technical details, good photographs. Book have much fewer pages than I thought considering the price. Packaging for book was inferior. It was damaged in shipping.

A very good acount

Fery good

Great book full of good information on one of the more obscure US AFV during WWII.

Nice book

Concise and brilliantly illustrated

M18 Hellcat Tank Destroyer 1943â “97 (New Vanguard) Centurion Universal Tank 1943â “2003 (New Vanguard) M26/M46 Pershing Tank 1943â “53 (New Vanguard) TM 9-755 76-mm Gun Motor Carriage M18 Hellcat and Armored Utility Vehicle M39 Patsy Walker, A.K.A. Hellcat! Vol. 1: Hooked On A Feline (Patsy Walker, A.K.A. Hellcat! (2015-2017)) Patsy Walker, A.K.A. Hellcat! Vol. 3: Careless Whisker(s) (Patsy Walker, A.K.A. Hellcat! (2015-2017)) M60 Main Battle Tank 1960-1991 (New Vanguard, 85) Churchill Infantry Tank 1941â “51 (New Vanguard) Tiger 1 Heavy Tank 1942â “45 (New Vanguard) M10 and M36 Tank Destroyers 1942â “53 (New Vanguard) American Knights: The Untold Story of the Men of the Legendary 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion (General Military) Panzer Destroyer: Memoirs of a Red Army Tank Commander M10 Tank Destroyer vs StuG III Assault Gun: Germany 1944 (Duel) More One Tank Trips: 52 Brand New Fun-Filled Florida Adventures (Fox 13 One Tank Trips Off the Beaten Path) US Army, Technical Manual, TM 5-3895-265-14, HAMMER, PILE DRIVER, SELF-POWERED; DIESEL DRIVEN W/FU OIL TANK AND LUBRICATING OIL TANK, LINK-BELT SPEEDER ... (NSN 3895-00-014-0583), military manuals Fox 13 Tampa Bay One Tank Trips With Bill Murphy (Fox 13 One Tank Trips Off the Beaten Path) One Tank Trips: Off The Beaten Path with Bill Murphy (Fox 13 One Tank Trips Off the Beaten Path) We Were the All-American Girls: Interviews with Players of the AAGPBL, 1943â “1954 Shadow over the Atlantic: The Luftwaffe and the U-boats: 1943â “45 Grumman F6F Hellcat: Volume 1 (SMI Library)