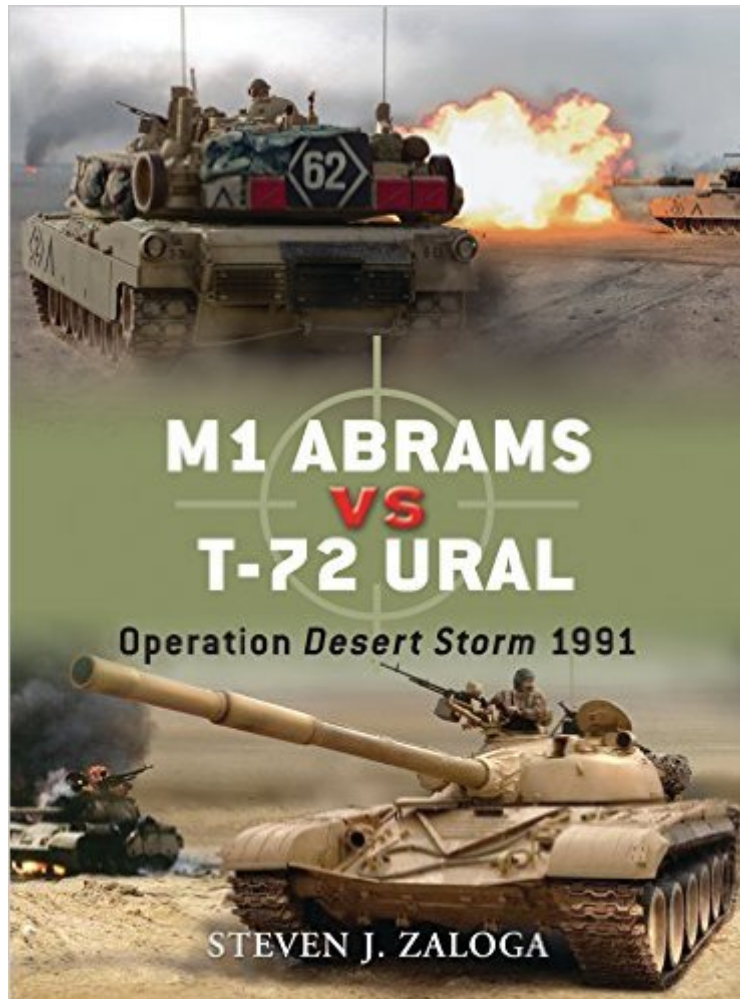


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M1 Abrams Vs T-72 Ural: Operation Desert Storm 1991 (Duel)



Synopsis

The Gulf War bore witness to a number of deadly encounters between these two great adversaries. Heavily armored, highly mobile and capable of killing at over 2500m the M1 Abrams is, to this day, a veritable fighting machine. Superior to both Iraq's Soviet era T-55 and T-62 tanks, nearly all sources claim that no Abrams tank has ever been destroyed by enemy fire. Despite entering service in 1980, the M1 Abrams remained untested in combat until the Gulf War in 1991, where it was to be confronted by its archenemy the Iraqi-assembled Soviet-designed T-72. Entering production in 1971, the T-72 arguably outstripped its contemporaries in a balance of mobility, protection and firepower. By the time of Operation Desert Storm, however, the tables had turned and the tank suffered due to low quality ammunition and poorly trained crews. In this fascinating study, Steven Zaloga pits these two great fighting machines against one another, plotting the development of the Cold War until both tanks met in combat in the deserts of Iraq and Kuwait.

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Customer Reviews

In Osprey's M1 Abrams vs. T-72 Ural, author Steven Zaloga concludes that, "the tank fighting during Operation Desert Storm represented one of the most lopsided contests in 20th century military history. The Iraqi army was outclassed in all respects and suffered appallingly high losses while inflicting minimal casualties on the coalition forces. In the case of the M1A1, more Abrams tanks were destroyed by friendly fire than Iraqi action." This addition to Osprey's Duel series outlines the brief contest for armored supremacy between the M1A1 tank and the Soviet-designed T-72 tank

during the 1991 Gulf War. Although the outcome of the Duel is never really in doubt, the author does a superb job in outlining how design decisions and crew training shaped the eventual outcome. Throughout the volume, Zaloga's expertise in armored warfare shines, particularly in explaining the subtleties of technical points. Overall, this volume is an excellent addition to the Duel series and a worthwhile addition to anyone interested in the military details of the Gulf War. In the introduction, while the author notes that the M1A1 had important technical advantages over the T-72 tank, he hews to his holistic view of armored warfare that he has espoused in other books: "the outcome of the tank battles of Desert Storm hinged as much on tactics, terrain, and crew capabilities as on the machines themselves." The author then delivers a well-written 14-page section on the design and development of each tank. The most interesting comments in this sections was about the American and Soviet efforts to develop new types of composite armor. The following 16-page section on technical specifications is also excellent and focuses on the key areas of firepower, protection and mobility. It would have been nice if inter-tank communications were discussed - no small point in armored warfare - but there clearly was insufficient space. The 8-page section on the combatants was good, but a notch below the two previous sections in terms of detail and insight. For example, gunnery training for U.S. tankers is discussed, but not for Iraqis. I suspect that Iraqi tankers even in the Republican Guard had some access to sub-caliber training and probably fired a modified Soviet-type gunnery table, but this is not elaborated upon. There are some editing errors in this section as well, such as a sentence that claims that "Young second lieutenants were sent to the Armor Officer Advance Course," but it was actually the Basic Course (I graduated from AOB 7-85C, myself). Elsewhere, it is mentioned that Bravo Company 2-70 AR scored "842 out of a possible 1,000 points" but this is unintelligible. At the time, each tank fired an individual Table VIII and platoons went through Table XII, but I never heard of a company -level tank table. I think this passage was referring either to the company's mean score on these lower tables, or the personal score of Captain Mark Gerges, the Bravo Company commander. The 8-page section on the strategic situation is also good and enumerates the number of M1A1 and T-72 battalions involved in Desert Storm. There's also a couple of editorial slips in this section, too, such as adding up the number of tanks in a U.S. tank battalion ($4 \times 14 + 2 = 58$, not 55). The discussion about the interaction between the M1A1 Abrams and the AH-64 Apache attack helicopters also gives the impression that the Apaches were primarily a division, rather than a corps asset (some divisions still had AH-1s). The 13-page section on the campaign primarily focuses on the actions of Task Force 2-70 AR at Medina Ridge. This section is interesting and well-written, but is primarily taken from Captain Gerges' account. There is only very limited perspectives provided by Iraqi tankers, although

this is not surprising. The author's technical dissection of how the American M1A1s defeated the Republican Guard T-72s is first-rate. There are a couple of subtle points here that could have been a bit more elaborated upon. First, U.S. tankers were trained to identify the target while in hull defilade, move up, shoot, then back up to avoid any return fire, then repeat (Driver Move Up, Gunner take over...), but this apparently did not occur on Medina Ridge because the Iraqi T-72 rounds were falling so short of the M1A1s. Further, U.S. tank tactics normally emphasized bounding overwatch by platoons, but Bravo Company fought entirely on line. These methods worked against the Iraqis, but they might not have done so well against better-trained enemies. Second, if the Iraqis had fought like the Egyptians in 1973 and created an anti-tank screen with lots of infantry, with their armor further back, the Americans would not have been able to fight such an armor-pure battle. When the Israelis tried that, they lost two tank brigades to Sagger and RPG7s. Graphically, M1 Abrams vs. T-72 Ural is an attractive volume that offers 3-way views of both the M1A1 and T-72M1; data tables for each tank; the view through the T-72M1 gunsight; the M1A1 gunsight view through both the daylight channel and the thermal sight; and interior turret diagrams of both tanks. It also has two maps: an operational-level map of the U.S. VII Corps attack on the Republican Guard Corps on 26-27 February 1991 and a tactical map depicting the attack of Team Bandit, 2-70 AR on Medina Ridge, 27 February 1991. A color battle scene - it almost looks like a photograph - depicts Team Bandit on Medina Ridge. The photographs in the volume are very good but several are recycled from earlier Osprey volumes. There are also numerous photos of T-72s with their turrets blown off, but not a single photo of any damaged M1A1s, even though such photos exist. The author also provides a 2-page bibliography and an index. Overall, a wonderful volume on modern armored combat, although one that could benefit from a bit tighter editing.

Zaloga last covered the Abrams in '92 and the T-72 in '93 in the Osprey Vanguard Series. Hence there is a lot of scope in this updated work focused on the duels in the Gulf War in this new series. The advantage with the duel series is since it is 80 Pp compared to the Vanguard's 46 - lot more info can be crammed in. Zaloga compares and contrasts the M1 and T-72 circa 1991. There are Excellent chapters on design/development, Technical details, good profiles and cross-sections, training tactics, Order of Battle and Strategy and Battle Analysis. However the version covered is mainly the T-72 M1 in Iraqi service and not all the other versions like the later superior T-72 B etc. Lot of new info as well plus accounts from the men who fought. Some of this has come in Armor magazine but never in one place. One of the better ones from Osprey and Zaloga - worth a copy - hopefully the Vanguard series will also be updated.

This represents one entry in the Osprey Duel series. This slender volume focuses on the tank combat in Desert Storm, in 1991. Two key tanks: the M1 Abrams on the American side and the T-72 (a Soviet-built tank) on the Iraqi side. Indeed, as the author notes at the outset, the tank combat in Iraq may have served as something of a model for what might have happened had Warsaw Pact and NATO forces engaged in combat. Both sides in Desert Storm had significant armored forces. Outcomes in battle were a function of two factors--the ability of the tanks and the training and performance of the tank crews. Both have to be accounted for. Early on, as with other books examining weapons systems, design, development, and technical specifications of the tanks are provided. Pages 15 and 23 provide tank to tank comparisons (although it is annoying that physical dimensions are in feet for the M-1 and in the metric system for the T-72). Then, there is a discussion of the crews. The m-1 had a crew of 4 and the T-72 of 3. American crews were, overall, better trained and better fit for field combat. Iraqi tankers tended to be rather poorly trained--a genuine hazard once combat began. Next, the strategic thinking of the two opponents are discussed and--then--the actual fighting. The end result was a battering of the Iraqi forces. More American tanks were destroyed by friendly fire than by Iraqi tanks. A nice brief volume on tank versus tank in Operation Desert Storm.

Steven Zaloga is one of the most astute military historians today, but where he excels is in the combining of written military history WITH modern (emphasis on "modern") graphics. While he, of course, is not the graphic artist, his books in the Osprey line are absolute must-haves in my library. In fact, I've set aside a small section of my library just for books like this one from the Osprey line.

The tale reaches its climax in the Battle of Medina Ridge. This is probably the most one sided major military conflict in world history. The Iraqis had position. They were hull down in prepared positions and the Americans drove straight into their ambush. In every other tank engagement from WWII or since the Americans would have been decimated. They should have been decimated. But it didn't go that way. We, the Americans, wiped out around a hundred enemy tanks without a single casualty. This result was unprecedented. It marked the end of tank warfare as we have known it. Tanks are nowadays vulnerable to helicopters, ground attack planes, smart artillery, and soon robots on the battlefield, but Soviet tanks are not a threat - at least not the export models. No third world nation now can entertain the notion that they can buy an effective tank force with their oil money. If you

hope to defeat an Abrams you will need something else.

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