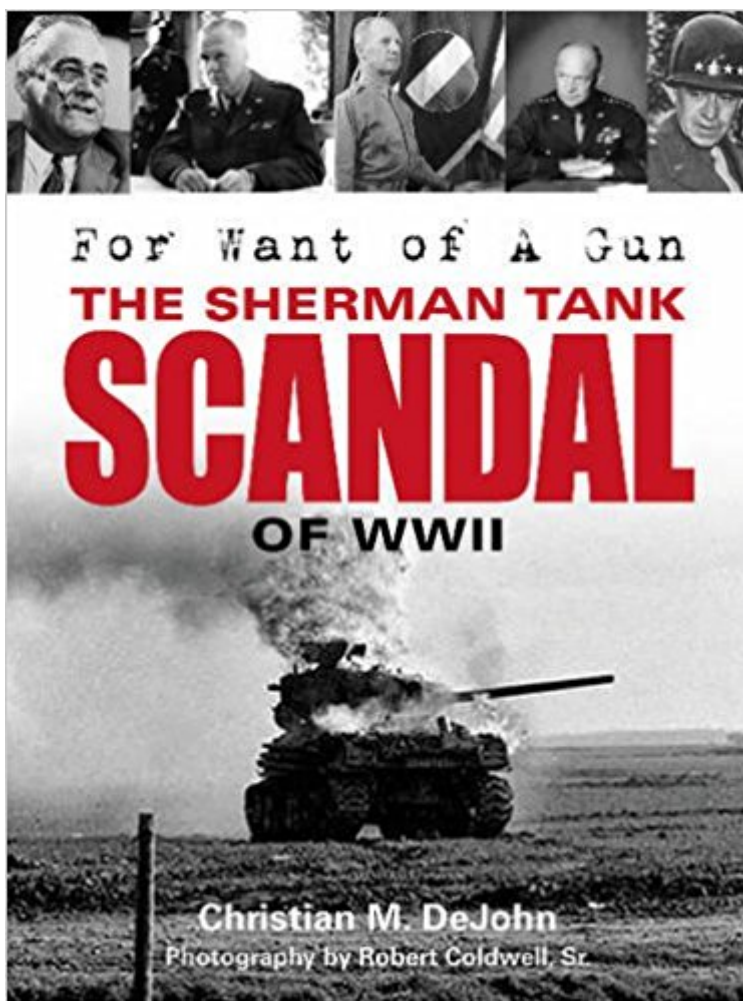


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For Want Of A Gun: The Sherman Tank Scandal Of WWII



Synopsis

This remarkable story exposes the Sherman tank scandal of World War II, involving some of the biggest American names and stretching from the White House and Pentagon to factories and battlefronts. Outgunned by more powerful German opponents, the inferiority of American tanks led to some of the worst setbacks of the war, prolonging it in Europe. US tankers ultimately prevailed, but over 60,000 armored division soldiers were killed and wounded; their preventable sacrifice inspired the Hollywood movie *Fury*. Included are striking images of the Sherman's adversaries (photographed exclusively at the National Museum of Cavalry and Armor), along with original equipment, documents, period propaganda, and vintage photos of Sherman tanks in action. As a German officer noted, "I was on this hill with six 88mm antitank guns...Every time they sent a tank, we knocked it out. Finally we ran out of ammunition, and the Americans didn't run out of tanks."

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Customer Reviews

From the book's Forward by COL David Johnson, AUS (Ret.): "This is an angry book, and rightly so, based on the evidence author DeJohn has uncovered in his exhaustive research." "DeJohn brings the voice of the American enlisted soldier into the discussion about the failure of one of the key US fighting vehicles of WWII- the M4 Sherman tank." "DeJohn brings the pragmatic views of the Cavalry Sergeant to the Sherman tank controversy." "As DeJohn eloquently points out, Allied tankers paid a heavy price of the US Army's prewar institutional failures."

Christian DeJohn, a published historian completing a masters degree in military and American

history, is a former United States Cavalry tanker with hands-on experiences as a gunner in an M1 Abrams tank, and a veteran of service in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He is also the author of the upcoming "Legends of Warfare: The M1 Abrams Tank."

In "For Want of a Gun: The Sherman Tank Scandal of WWII," author Christian DeJohn asserts that there was a large scale cover-up at all levels concerning the supposed inferiority of U.S. tanks to their German counterparts, and the United States' obstinate unwillingness to correct it. In writing, DeJohn sensationalizes the issue, and leaves out many critical elements that are important to know if the full story is to be understood. There is some truth to the general premise of the book. Due to the heavy tank losses during the Battle of the Bulge (700-800 U.S. armored vehicles and 600-800 German armored vehicles) the U.S. press published several stories in early 1945 criticizing the performance of U.S. armored vehicles versus their German counterparts. A congressional investigation was even called for, but nothing came of it before the war ended. DeJohn begins the book (and continues it) on a distinct negative slant, lambasting U.S. politicians and industry for producing large numbers of an "inferior" tank. The early parts of the book covering U.S. tank design after World War I and the interwar period are factually accurate. It is in the third chapter, about tank destroyers, where DeJohn begins to go astray. In the beginning, U.S. Tank Destroyer Force doctrine held that they were to be a purely defensive force, responding to massed enemy armored attacks using speed and ambush tactics. The head of the Army Ground Forces (the parent of the Armored Force and Tank Destroyer Force), Leslie McNair, is often maligned for his opinions on armored warfare (among them that the M26 Pershing heavy tank, or more generally, a tank that specifically fights other tanks, was unnecessary, that U.S. tanks should avoid fighting enemy tanks whenever possible, and that tank destroyers, particularly towed ones, were the best thing to destroy an enemy tank) but these were just opinions; doctrine was written and put into practice by the respective forces, and was often contradictory and not always used as intended. The Armored Force expected that one of the primary roles of friendly tanks, along with supporting infantry, was fighting hostile tanks when they found them in an attack, and the Tank Destroyer Force said that when tank destroyers weren't meeting a massed enemy tank attack, that they could be used in other roles because the arms they were supposed to support had adequate antitank firepower (implying that U.S. tanks could normally hold their own against enemy tanks). If you expect the enemy to attack your advancing infantry with tanks, why leave yours behind and make your troops vulnerable? The 75 millimeter gun of the Sherman was selected specifically for its anti-tank firepower, and even before the Sherman was standardized, work began on mounting a powerful 3-inch (76 millimeter)

"hole puncher" into it; from the beginning, it was always intended that part of the Sherman's role was to fight enemy tanks. DeJohn uses many period accounts from veterans and military staff throughout the book. These do a very good job of fleshing out the story, and make it clear that armored warfare was a brutal, nasty business for all involved. The problem with this is that DeJohn does not do enough to call out blatantly false or potentially mis-remembered information and sometimes selectively picks quotes or uses his own emphasis in order to advance his opinion. The "G.I." opinion of the Sherman that he gives is almost entirely negative. This could deceive the reader who may not know much about tanks and bought the book just for the interesting title. Arguably the most suspect part of the book, DeJohn spends an entire chapter comparing the Sherman to the Tiger and the Panther, heavy tanks that only made up a minority of the overall German armored vehicle force. Although the author does acknowledge the glaring mechanical problems of these two vehicles, it only comes after he fawns over their big guns and thick armor for most of the chapter, along with emphatically noting the deficiencies of the Sherman compared to them, most of which are a given when comparing 45 and 60-ton medium and heavy tanks to a 30-ton medium multirole tank. The author repeats or fails to clearly debunk many myths and misconceptions that are age-old and commonly encountered when learning about U.S. armored warfare in World War II, such as;

1. U.S. tanks caught on fire more readily or burned more fiercely than German tanks when hit, partially due to their use of "more flammable" gasoline instead of diesel. According to a British study, the Tiger, Panther, and Panzer IV had "burn rates" of 60, 62, and 80 percent, in comparison to the Sherman's 82 percent; another British study found that 56 percent of Shermans burned when hit, while a U.S. study said "60 to 80 percent;" 65 of 96 Shermans of the 743rd Tank Battalion that were lost were found to have burned. Diesel fuel is not "less flammable" than gasoline, and most fires were caused by improper storage of ammunition, a flaw which German tanks never corrected;
2. U.S. tankers suffered "horrendous" losses. A U.S. First Army report found that out of 506 destroyed tanks, an average of 0.37 men died per tank, while 0.8 were wounded. Out of 49,516 Armored Force enlisted personnel deployed overseas, only 1,578 died in battle. U.S. tankers had lower casualty rates after their vehicles were hit than German or Soviet tankers, in part due to better ergonomics. In contrast, 18.5 percent of all U.S. infantrymen deployed overseas were killed in battle;
3. The M4 Sherman was "obsolete" as soon as it was introduced, had particularly thin armor, was inordinately tall, or was not a match for tanks that were by definition out of its weight class;
4. U.S. tanks were supposed to avoid fighting enemy tanks whenever possible, instead calling upon the tank destroyers; a mis-reading of a combination of tank and tank destroyer doctrine.

DeJohn hardly considers the issue of logistics and how it figured into

U.S. tank design decisions. To ship tanks to the battlefield, unlike Germany, the United Kingdom, or the Soviet Union, the United States needed to deal with crossing over 2,000 miles of land and 3,000 miles of water. In order to ensure tanks didn't sit idle at a dock once they arrived because they weren't needed or languished in a maintenance yard because they were too complicated to repair or lacked spare parts, Leslie McNairs concepts of "battle need" (Is there an enemy threat that warrants this vehicle? Will this vehicle be used in its intended role?) and "battle worthiness" (Is this vehicle easy to repair? Will it actually function under combat conditions?) were paramount. DeJohn also does not note that the M26 Pershing heavy tank was, even when deployed to combat after its testing was completed, considered a mechanically unreliable and underpowered vehicle with poor off-road performance. Many a vehicle was rejected by the Army Ground Forces for the sole reason that it was not mechanically reliable enough. After criticizing the statements of officials not actually involved with tank production, DeJohn asserts multiple times that the United States could have produced a markedly better tank or quickly and efficiently adopted foreign designs, but does not give any suggestions on how that could have been done. Tread carefully.

I would like to thank the author for his service. Being a tank crewmen is hard work especially considering everyone on the battlefield from infantry to close air support pilots are trying to kill you. Now that I have blanketed myself with this cloak as the author did several times in the book let me say stop whining. As a former enlisted and then commissioned tanker what did you want the officers in Egypt to do for you? Walk the track? Tighten end connectors? Perhaps check oil or transmission fluid for you? Your personal attacks questioning the integrity and motivations of people trying to win a global war were petty and low. The basic premise of your book is correct. The Sherman's firepower should have been improved prior to June 44. The British Firefly and the M36 Jackson proved it possible. A higher velocity 75mm with better armor penetration characteristics was, in 20 20 hindsight, a missed opportunity. But the M4 accomplished what it was designed to do to meet the fight the leadership envisioned. The flaws of the Sherman were rooted in doctrine and the absolute need for mass production. I liked chapter 7, 8, and 9 as they supported the author's premise but over all the book had the feel of a master's thesis more than an attempt to educate the reader on the issue. Your book has many straw man arguments. Send up gun kits to the field. Mounting a high velocity high recoil gun inside an armored turret is far different from mounting a light weight, low recoil 75 mm in a medium bomber. The British had to cut out the back of the turret, move the radio to an armored box so the turret space could physically absorb the recoil of the 17 pounder. The breach had to be mounted sideways so the loader could service the gun at any firing

angle. Fighting in the French bocage was close in actions that clearly favored the defender. Given the ranges and the quality of German anti-tank weapons, long honed on the eastern front, M26s would have been just as dead. Look at the losses of British Churchill's around Hill 112. The M26 was under powered and a gas guzzler. Patton's sweep through France wasn't stopped by Panthers and Tigers, it was stopped by the lack of gas. Perhaps you should write another book titled "For want of a gas can." I will not question anyone's honor for cutting off resources from Patton's very successful drive and giving it to Montgomery, a much more methodical commander. V-1 and V-2 launch sites were in the North and political decisions came into play. The last time I looked at history the Battle of the Bulge was a victory. A costly victory yet far from the disaster the author attempts to portray. The 6th SS and 5th Panzer armies had to be completely rebuilt and the original line restored in less than 2 months equals a crushing defeat...for the Germans. The author gets angry when German tank losses are quoted yet does the author really believe all the Sherman loss statistics he quoted were knocked out by German tanks. I will leave the potential reader with this, entire Soviet Guards tank units, their best, were equipped with Sherman's because of their automotive reliability. Something the Soviets needed pursuing the Germans in late 44/45. Finally, if it was all about better guns and armor how did the Soviet 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies, lavishly equipped with T-34/85s and JS II tanks, lose 2,000 tanks and AFV's in the battle of Berlin. I was very disappointed in the book, the author attempted to cast a wide net information to support his thesis yet it was only millimeters deep in knowledge.

Deserves zero stars but alas impossible to accomplish.

Well written and informative and great photos.

Excellent subject. Certainly deserves more attention.

Just got it in the mail today, thumbed thru it, and finding a very in depth history of not only the Sherman but the entire American military drive and thoughts to create a viable armoured force . Many opinions and pressures were involved. Having only thumbed thru it I can say it looks like a very needed book with great research and historical value. My pet theory on why the M4 was not replaced earlier is that the landing craft were designed for this tank and smaller, not a Tiger equivalent behemoth. It took landings in France to get a new heavier tank with greater punch than the Tiger to get it into action but this took more time than there was war so the tank crews suffered

with an inferior product with bandaid fixes on arterial bleeders and paid for them in blood. is so disheartening to see the proof that higher ups were so ignorant or so entrenched in their own uneducated ideas that the M4 was the best tank even though the Germans upgraded and made them heavier, more armoured and bigger guns we lagged behind. The 17 pounder should have been instituted instead of the anemic 76mm and field attempts to strengthen the Sherman were ordered to stop by Patton? Living in the past . Yes the Sherman was the most prolific, widely used tank in the war but at quite a cost in lives. It is amazing that the Israelis took the WW2 Sherman and thru serious upgrades made it a victor over the Best Russia had to offer at the time! Too bad our generals did not have that foresight! The casualties would be less and we may have won the war earlier!

this was a book i order for my dad he likes it

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