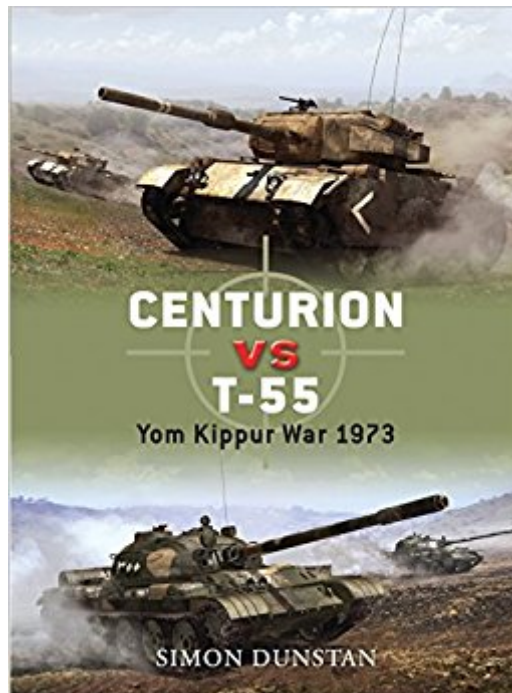




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Centurion Vs T-55: Yom Kippur War 1973 (Duel)



Synopsis

Conceived at the height of World War II, the British Centurion and the Soviet T-55 were initially expected to counter the formidable Panther and Tiger tanks of Germany. But as the Cold War unfolded, these machines prepared instead for the coming struggle between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Though they never fought in Europe, these two tanks became the mainstay of the Cold War's proxy forces around the world. From Korea to the Middle East and on to Angola, these two armored combatants clashed repeatedly, reaching their crescendo on the Golan Heights during the Yom Kippur War where 177 Centurions of the IDF took on a vastly superior Arab force. This book compares the design, development and deployment of these classic tanks, and analyses their battlefield performance. Presented with highly detailed digital artwork, this is a tightly focused study of two of the Cold War's first main battle tanks.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“This new title in the 'Duel' series of books from Osprey is written by Simon Dunstan, an author who has a number of excellent books to his credit already. This one is equally good, and covers the 2 AFVs of the title in a well balanced book... Overall an interesting book which is very readable, and a good insight into tank vs tank combat in the Middle East in 1973.”

— Robin Buckland, Military Modelling/militarymodelling.com (December 2009) “It is not often that one reads a book like this that is so superbly written that it just draws you in. I've had the pleasure of reading several in the past week, and both of them authored by Simon Dunstan. The

man just knows how to write and you are really missing out if you don't pick up this particular edition. It is that good. As with others in this series, it has a nice selection of period illustrations in addition to excellent artwork and diagrams done specifically for this book. It is a first rate read and one that I most highly recommend. — Scott Van Aken, Modeling Madness, modelingmadness.com (December 2009)

Simon Dunstan is a well-established author, film-maker and photographer in the field of military history, with several titles already published with Osprey. He specializes in armored warfare, and has written on this subject for two decades. His books have covered topics such as helicopter and armored warfare in Vietnam, the Challenger main battle tank, the British Guards and armored warfare in Korea. Simon lives and works in London. The author lives in London, England.

The neat thing about this book is that it focuses on the 2 weapon systems, and how they performed. Thus, if you are researching either of the weapons (implicitly less interest in the battles), start here, then follow the sources.

The book begins by describing the origins of the Soviet T-55 (and its kin) and the British Centurion. Countries throughout the world purchased these on the weapons market. Arab countries acquired many of the Soviet tanks (although they also purchased other tanks--including some Centurions); Israel bought the Centurion. The book begins with a brief introduction to the background of the tanks at issue in this book. Then, a chronology (pages 6-7), to provide some context. Then, "design and development" and "technical specifications" sections. A comparison of the specifications for the two tanks appears on pages 26-27. We see, for instance, that the weight of the Centurion is about 50,728 kilograms and the T-55 weighs in at 36,000 kg. Maximum road speed for the Centurion is 34.6 kilometers/hour with the T-55 topping at about 50 kilometers/hour. Training for tankers in the different armies is then discussed as well as the background to the Yom Kippur War. Finally, the story of the tank battles at the Golan Heights. The Israeli forces were heavily outnumbered--and did not expect an attack by the Syrians. When the attack took place, Israeli forces fought desperately. The review of the battle here is done pretty well. There is much more of an Israeli rather than a Syrian face to the tale of the battle itself. Nonetheless, this is a useful rendering, in a short space, of the tank battle at the Golan Heights.

If it were possible, I would have given this title four and one-half stars. This book is readable,

insightful, and nicely illustrated. However, unlike other titles in the "duel" series, it's a bit one-sided, giving Israeli experience with its modified Centurions (called "Shot Cal" in IDF jargon), with little background on the Syrians' experience with T-55s. The first several chapters tell how each tank developed from its WWII predecessors. Then the book gives a wealth of background on the role of tanks in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 that led up to the October War of 1973. There is plenty of information on the two sides' competing armored doctrines. Syrian doctrine was heavily based on Soviet ideas and weapon systems, albeit somewhat handicapped by Syria's 60 percent literacy rate. Israeli doctrine was more nuanced, built on western weapon systems, but with plenty of home-grown technical and tactical innovations. An interesting tidbit: the Israelis put Centurion/Shot Cal on the Golan front because it was better-adapted to rough terrain. Their U.S.-built M-48 and M-60 tanks went to Sinai because they were less well suited to the rocky Golan, but faster on open terrain. The actual story of armored combat on the Golan Heights is well-told and dramatic. But at this point the Syrian point of view disappears. About all the reader can see or hear about them is the dust clouds and shellfire thrown up by hordes of T-55's as Syrians advanced with 1,400 tanks against just 177 Israeli Shot Cals. The author gives the Syrians their due for courage and tenacity despite appalling losses. He comments on the failure of Syrian commanders to exploit their breakthrough on the southern end of the front. Aside from this, the story is told completely from the Israeli side, with plentiful Israeli personal accounts and not one account from the Syrian side. What factors made the Israeli Shot Cals so far superior to their enemies, on a tank-for-tank basis? By failing to give Syrian perspectives, the author misses an opportunity. He alludes to Israeli advantages - their costly but effective tactic of having tank commanders fight out in the open, their use of tank ramps on the Golan, the superior effective range of their 105-mm guns, their crews' ability to accurately fire ten rounds per minute, and other factors. But the author never directly evaluates the strengths and (especially) weaknesses of the T-55 against the Centurion. Sure, the T-55 had a cramped turret, and the T-55's gun sights were inferior at long range. But there is more to the story than that. That said, the Israeli side of the story is well-told. The fighting on the Golan Heights October 6-10th 1973 belongs alongside the greatest epic battles in the history of armored warfare, like Kursk, Gazala, and El Alamein. This detailed and informative title will take a prominent place in any collection on armored weapons and tactics.

The book should have had the title and the subtitles reversed; it would have got three or four stars if this was the case. There was very little information here about tanks. There are books about the war that are A LOT better written, if that is what you are interested in.

This is an excellent book. I rate it four out of five stars. Contrary to what other reviewers wrote about this book, I found the author's comparison of the two tanks even-handed. Other reviewers concluded this book was one-sided, that is, it covered the Israeli view point only. Sure, there are no first-hand accounts of the battles fought in this book from the Egyptian or Syrian combatants. Even so, I found the battle narratives adequate in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of both tanks. In conclusion, I found this book both highly entertaining and informative.

This Osprey Book arrived in good order, along with four other military books. Besides enjoying naval warfare, the other area of interest for me is tank warfare, especially Arab-Israeli tank warfare. This is where the book addresses a good portion of that type of armored strengths and weaknesses for the various tanks used by the Arabs and Israelis. Overall, this is a very good book on tanks, such as the Centurion vs the T-55. Hats off to for this book and this order. Thanks. B.L.

Usually Osprey titles do a good job with getting the details right. With this one though, they got sloppy. How sloppy? They put the wrong tank on the cover! I'm a bit surprised no one else seems to have noticed. For some weird reason, every single one of the CGI pictures of the T-55 (front cover, back cover, pages 14 and 15) is not of a T-55. Instead, the artist has created a tank that never existed, a T-62 with the 100mm gun of the T-55. Other than the gun, the vehicle in the images is a T-62. It has the round turret of the T-62 (the T-55 had an egg shaped turret). It has the roadwheel spacing of the T-62. It's simply not a T-55. A while back I had written a letter to Osprey Publishing alerting them to his error but I received no reply.

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