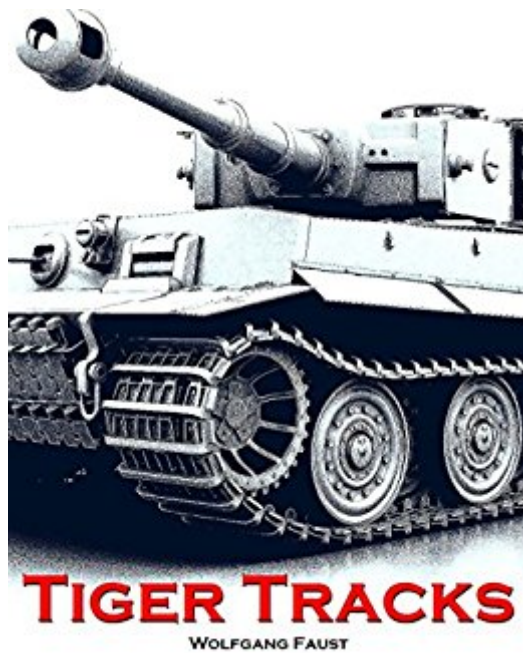




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Tiger Tracks - The Classic Panzer Memoir



Synopsis

Wolfgang Faust was the driver of a Tiger I tank with the Wehrmacht Heavy Panzer Battalions, seeing extensive combat on the Eastern Front in 1943-45. This memoir was his brutal and deeply personal account of the Russian Front's appalling carnage. Telling the story of a vicious three-day tank battle, Faust describes how his Tiger unit fought on the steppes of Russia against the full might of the Red Army: the T34s, Stalin tanks, Sturmovik bombers and the feared Katyusha rocket brigades. He reveals the merciless decisions that panzer crews made in action, the devastating power of their weaponry, and the many ways that men met their deaths in the snow and ice of the Ostfront. Originally published as *^Panzerdammerung^™* (*^Panzer Twilight^™*) in the late 1940s, this memoir's savage realism shocked the post-war German public. Some readers were outraged at the book's final scenes, while others wrote that, *^Now, at last, I know what our men did in the East.^™* Today, 'Tiger Tracks' stands as one of the great semi-autobiographical accounts of warfare in World War 2: a crescendo of horror, grim survival and a fatalistic acceptance of the panzer man's destiny. The only other surviving memoir by this author is 'The Last Panther' - an astonishing account of panzer warfare in the final hours of the Third Reich - also available on .

Book Information

File Size: 802 KB

Print Length: 139 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 1539588114

Publisher: Bayern Classic Publications (March 4, 2015)

Publication Date: March 4, 2015

Sold by: ^ Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00UASW4GK

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #2,972 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #9 in ^ Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II #14 in ^ Kindle Store

Customer Reviews

I started reading this book with high hopes. Tiger Tracks purports to be a memoir written by a veteran of the Panzer force, but it became quickly apparent that it's really a very gory and lurid piece of fiction being fobbed off as fact on those who don't know any better. "Wolfgang Faust" is conveniently a pseudonym, so the true author's military service records could never be checked. He is the lone survivor of the Kampfgruppe he starts the book with, so the veracity (or it's lack) cannot be cross-checked. The author has a basic understanding of tanks and their mechanics, but an understanding that could have been gleaned from such sources as the Panzerfibel without requiring any hands-on experience. There is a great deal of writhing in flames in this book. Everyone hit in the head is decapitated, hollow-point bullets literally blow men apart (they don't). All the violence is very Hollywood, and over-the-top. There are a number of historical inaccuracies or outright impossibilities. There are an even greater number of decisions and actions undertaken by persons depicted in the book, which from a military point of view are ludicrous and suicidal (I should mention here for the sake of credibility, that I am a former member of a mechanized infantry unit).

Examples:- an experienced Tiger tank commander takes custody of a female Soviet prisoner and chains her up inside the tank. NO. There's absolutely no room inside an armored fighting vehicle for extra personnel. Even those who belong there are cramped and crowded. The danger this prisoner would interfere during a battle makes this action tactically absurd.- Panzergrenadiers remain inside their halftracks during a stationary defensive battle while under assault by aircraft and enemy armor. Thus they contribute nothing to the fight, but contribute lurid depictions of slaughter to the story. No way they'd do this, the halftracks were death traps.- Moving through a forest, Tigers lead the group, despite the presence of Panzergrenadiers who could scout ahead and clear the way. Again, tactically absurd, the experienced commander the author describes "Hermann" as would never have done this.- A single Tiger tank takes off on it's own, at night, to track down a Soviet rocket launcher and crew. They manage to sneak the steel beast up on the enemy, unheard, and observes the enemy first. At night. Again, despite the presence of ample German infantry in the area, the Tiger does this without any dismounts...NO- After destroying the Russian position, the commander orders one of his tank crew to dismount and scout around. By himself. In an unsecured area. At night. No battle buddy. Naturally, this man gets his head blown off...THAT, at least, is believable.- Our valiant Kampfgruppe happen to stumble upon two German nurses wandering the steppe who somehow got

left behind by their field hospital. These ladies join the panzer unit and are of course delighted to dispense a little sexual relief to the soldiers, in exchange for food, coffee, sugar, etc. Yeah, sure...- The sheer amount of detail described by the author is simply not credible for a man whose view of the battle was limited to the vision slit of a Tiger driver. These were (and remain) notoriously limited in field of view. In reality, he'd have been able to see straight ahead and a few degrees to either side.- The author claims to see a shell caroming around inside a Soviet tank turret, THROUGH THE VISION SLIT OF THE OTHER TANK'S DRIVER! No. Just No.- Describes fighting Soviet tanks which, by his detailed descriptions of their hull and turrets, were JS-3's. These tanks didn't see action until the very last month of the war, yet our increasingly-implausible story purports to take place in October, 1943.- He states at one point his family was killed in an RAF bombing of Munich in 1942. He later claims to have killed a British prisoner in Sicily the same month that his family died. Problem is, the Allies didn't invade Sicily until July of 1943...As war-porn, the book is fine. As a memoir, it's complete crap. If anyone believes this author to truly be a veteran of the Eastern Front, and believes that his descriptions of the battles are accurate, then you must logically also believe that the German army was composed of tactically inept soldiers led by callous and incompetent officers, because that would be the conclusion of any military professional reading the actions taken by the protagonist and his unit.

Although I'm unsure of the veracity of the claim that TIGER TRACKS is an actual memoir written after the war by a Panzer crewman, that is immaterial to the fact that this book is a great war story. Although relatively short, the story is almost non-stop tense, nail-biting action as Faust and the rest of the Panzer company go on a mission that sees their nigh-invincible Tiger tanks destroyed one by one as they go up against the Red Army. They face T-34s, IS-2 tanks, flamethrowers, fanatical anti-tank teams, attack planes, and many other lethal hazards. Despite the Tiger being considered an almost indestructible heavy panzer, they were mechanically unreliable, drank fuel at an alarming rate, had trouble negotiating soft ground, and as a result, were frequently abandoned and destroyed by their crews. This story does a great job of showing the horrors of war on the "Ostfront", while being well-written and engaging. Truth or fiction, this is a great read for WW2 action enthusiasts.

Riveting on two accounts. One is the horrors of war revealed, but Wolfgang just happens really get this point across. Two is, I've gained entirely new insights into tank warfare on the Russian front in World War II. Foremost is how fearful German tank crews were of Russian infantry and how vulnerable even their best tanks were to the lowliest weapons the Russian infantry were able to

successfully unleash against even the best German tanks. Second, how truly formidable the latest Russian tanks were. Third is the awesome fire power the Russians were able to unleash against the German forces even in 1943. Fourth is..."We hear about how wonderful the Russian T-34 tanks were". Many have acclaimed them as the best all around tanks in WWII with considerable justification. But when the USSR unleashed the Stalin I tanks upon the German forces, it became a new ballgame. I am surprised at the relative vulnerability of the T-34 compared to the Stalin tanks to the best German tanks---the Tiger and the Panther. Wolfgang's book puts all my preconceived notions on this subject to an entirely new level.

I have read both Faust books with Tiger Tracks being the less story tension sprung. Still it is a good read. Let us be clear, however, about what type of genre both of his titles (Tiger Tracks/The Last Panzer) fall under. They are historical fiction. Thankfully more memoir feeling than fiction. The latter is not necessarily a fatal flaw for those seeking gold plated tank historical nonfiction. My supposition rests in the purpose of our reads. I read these books for the narrative feel of tank warfare. I liked my Faust voice - half killer/half romantic. He was human in a world of metal carnage. His prowess of tank knowledge was impeccable. He gave a thrilling, haunting, armor piercing first hand taste of German tank warfare. Exactly what I wanted. There are numerous other tank reference resources out there telling about kills, strategy, personal recollections and medals won, but they don't carry the narrative like this author who ever he may be. Load your chamber read accordingly, but don't be surprised if you find yourself seeking and wishing for more Wolfgang Faust.

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