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Decision to the Tiger

Doubt on Caliber of U. S. Arms
Raised by New German Weapons

In January 1943 NEWSWEEK ran a picture of a giant German tank in a street in Tunis. It was the first picture of the now famous Nazi Tiger tank to be published in the United States and it had previously been sent to Washington for the Ordnance Department to confirm that its big gun was what NEWSWEEK editors thought it was—an 88-millimeter. The reply was that it couldn't be an 88, because Ordnance considered it impossible to put a gun of that size with its recoil mechanism in a tank turret.

That little incident symbolized the attitude of the War Department toward the new German tanks—and toward other military developments where observers thought the Nazis had achieved technical superiority. Correspondents have time and again written that the big German tanks were better than the 30-ton American Shermans. The Washington reply has nearly always been that the American machines were “more maneuverable.”

Recently the criticism has become stronger with the appearance of the superheavy German Royal Tiger tank, which weighs about 67 tons and has 8 inches of armor and an improved 88. An article in the current semiofficial Military Review of the Command and General Staff School discloses that both the Royal Tiger and the smaller Panther can penetrate American tank armor at 2,500 yards, whereas the Shermans have to approach within 400 yards to cut through the thick hides of the Nazi monsters.

Baldwin Accuses: Last week Hanson W. Baldwin, military commentator of The New York Times, demanded a Congressional investigation of the Army set-up which caused American troops to be supplied only with Shermans. Baldwin wrote:

“Why, at this late stage in the war, are American tanks inferior to the enemy's?”

“That they are inferior the fighting in Normandy showed and the recent battles in the Ardennes have again emphatically demonstrated. This has been denied, explained away, and hushed up, but the men who are fighting our tanks against

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much heavier, better armored, and more powerfully gunned German monsters know the truth. It is high time that Congress got at the bottom of a situation that does no credit to the War Department.

“This deficiency and others almost comparable to it are not the faults of our designers and technicians. Far better tanks than any we have in the field undoubtedly exist on the drawing boards or even in the factories in this country and may soon be in action. But the point is, the Germans always—save for a brief period in North Africa when the enemy sent the first of their Tigers to Russia—have been ahead of us on the battlefield. And it is battlefield service that counts.

The Army Mind: “The reasons for this time lag are complicated and not easily determined; that is why Congress should investigate. They appear primarily to be a product of conservatism and traditionalism in the Army mind, complicated organization in War Department and supply and technical services in this country, plus lack of adequate liaison between these services and too much paper work . . .

“The adverse comparison of some of our weapons with the German does not stop with tanks. In anti-tank guns, mines and mining technique, and self-propelled guns, the Germans have been consistently ahead of us on the battlefield. The Germans beat us to the battlefield with rockets. They were the first to use robot bombs, giant rockets, and jet-propelled planes. The Army Air Forces swell with false pride in announcing that by using a captured German robot bomb as a model their engineers have built a better robot in 60 days. So what? The proof is on the battlefield. The Germans have been using theirs since June; ours are not yet in use . . .

“Congress should determine why.”

¶ H. G. Batcheller, vice chairman of the War Production Board, disclosed in December that Chrysler and Fisher Body are producing a new heavy tank. President Roosevelt told Congress in his State of the Union message that a new tank, presumably the same one, mounts a gun more powerful than any yet carried on a fast-moving vehicle. The President said the Army “will need many thousands of these new tanks” in 1945. But apparently they are still in the factories, on the testing grounds, or aboard ship; no report has yet come from the battlefields of an American heavy tank in action.