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THE HISTORY OF THE TANK – FROM APPEARANCE IN THE PAST TO DISAPPEARANCE IN THE FUTURE

Annotation. The main function of a tank is to fight enemy infantry, so the tank should have an advantage over the infantry. During the First and Second World War, tanks had superiority over infantry, in the second half of the twentieth century, the forces of the parties leveled off, and now the advantage is gradually shifting to the infantry armed with RPGs, anti-tank systems and UAVs, which is why tanks are gradually becoming unnecessary. The periodization of tank history is given.

Keywords: *tank, armament, UAVs, unmanned aerial vehicles, infantry, military history*

Generally accepted abbreviations

RPG - hand-held anti-tank grenade launcher.

ATGM - anti-tank missile system.

MANPADS - portable anti-aircraft missile system.

UAV is an unmanned aerial vehicle.

Remark. UAVs in the text of this article should be understood as small unmanned aerial vehicles that can be operated by the infantry. Large UAVs related to the Air Force do not matter for the following discussion of modern tanks, although, like small UAVs, they pose a significant threat to them.

The occurrence of the tank

If we abstract from the appearance and technical characteristics of tanks, it turns out that a ***tank is a mobile fortress on the battlefield.***

The predecessors of tanks in history were chariots, war elephants, and knights.

The functions of a mobile fortress on the battlefield are as follows:

1. To take the blows of conventional infantry weapons.
2. Maintain their integrity and combat effectiveness for a time much longer than the average life of an ordinary infantryman on the battlefield.
3. To strike the infantry with ranged weapons.

It is known from history that war elephants were not suitable as mobile fortresses due to the fact that elephants easily lost handleability, and therefore combat effectiveness. Chariots and knights did not have such a problem, so these types of troops existed for long periods of time.

The history of the combat use of tanks

The tank was created during the First World War with the aim of fighting infantry. The tanks coped with this function more or less successfully.

Before the outbreak of World War II, tanks continued to be created to combat infantry (for example, the Soviet T-18 and BT-26, as well as the German Pz.II and Pz.III), but later became more versatile, having the ability to attack other tanks as well and enemy strongholds using a more powerful and long-range cannon (for example, Soviet T-34, KV and IS, as well as German Pz.IV, Pz.V "Panther" and Pz.VI "Tiger"). It was during the Second World War that tanks, consolidated into tank divisions, acquired strategic importance, which made it possible to carry out deep breakthroughs of enemy defenses in order to subsequently encircle large enemy formations.

In general, in the period from the beginning of the First to the end of the Second World War, tanks had superiority over infantry: the cannon made it possible to attack manpower from long distances, armor and tracked chassis were invulnerable to small arms. What could the infantry oppose to the tank? Only anti-tank rifles, hand grenades, Molotov cocktails and mines, that is, hand-held, short-range defensive weapons with a weak destructive ability.

After World War II, the infantry received RPGs and ATGMs at their disposal, so she was able to successfully fight tanks on their own, without the help of anti-tank artillery, which is why tanks no longer played a strategic role in wars in the second half of the twentieth century.

The essence of the tank

The main purpose of the tank is to fight enemy infantry, and the auxiliary one is to fight other tanks, enemy fortifications, and so on.

The tank is a mobile cannon protected by armor. The tank has a machine gun as an auxiliary weapon.

A cannon is the basis for any tank. A tank without a cannon is a mobile machine gun, and a machine gun is a common infantry weapon, so a tank without a cannon is not needed.

Armor (conventional and dynamic), tracked chassis, all kinds of protection or terrain surveillance systems, as well as communication systems - these are all auxiliary systems serving a single purpose: to ensure the functioning and safety of the weapon.

Tank and UAV

The tank can fight on equal terms with the ATGM, the tank has an advantage over the RPG in open areas, the RPG has the advantage over the tank in the conditions of dense urban development; but the UAV has an advantage over the tank anytime, anywhere, as the unmanned aerial vehicle can attack the tank without being attacked by the tank in response.

Modern infantry

Modern infantry is much more strong than it was during the heyday of tank power:

1. Infantrymen have personal protective equipment (body armor, helmets, and so on), that is, each soldier is hidden in a mini-fortress.

2. The infantry has reactive means that hit targets within a radius of up to 5 km horizontally (ATGM) and vertically (MANPADS), that is, at a line-of-sight distance,

the infantry has the ability to hit all types of targets, including fast-flying air and ground armored ones.

3. The infantry can successfully fight tanks by fire with RPGs, ATGMs, and the use of UAVs.

The question arises: **why do we need a tank on a modern battlefield if it does not have superiority over the infantry?**

The answer is - there is no need.

A tank is not needed on a modern battlefield.

However, tanks can still be successfully used in current military conflicts with a weak enemy that does not have a sufficient number of RPGs, ATGMs and UAVs.

Periodization of the history of tanks

Stage № 1. Creation of tanks and the first experience of their combat use.

The period of the First World War.

Stage № 2. The tank is the basis for strategic operations.

The period before and during the Second World War.

Stage № 3. A tank is an auxiliary means of combat.

The period of time after the Second World War and before the beginning of the era of widespread use of UAVs.

Stage № 4. Gradually the disappearance of the tank from the battlefield.

Time period since the beginning of the era of mass use of small-sized UAVs.

The tank is currently

Now, in the 2020s, there is a widespread introduction of unmanned aerial vehicles in various armies of the world, so the tank is at the end of stage number 3 of its history. When small UAVs become as common infantry weapons as RPGs or ATGMs, then the tank's historical time on the battlefield will end.

Conclusions:

1. The main function of a tank is to fight enemy infantry.
2. After World War II, the tank lost its superiority over the infantry.
3. The historical time of the existence of the tank is quickly ending - when small-sized UAVs become the usual weapon of the infantry, then the tank, as a branch of the army, will disappear from the battlefield.

References:

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