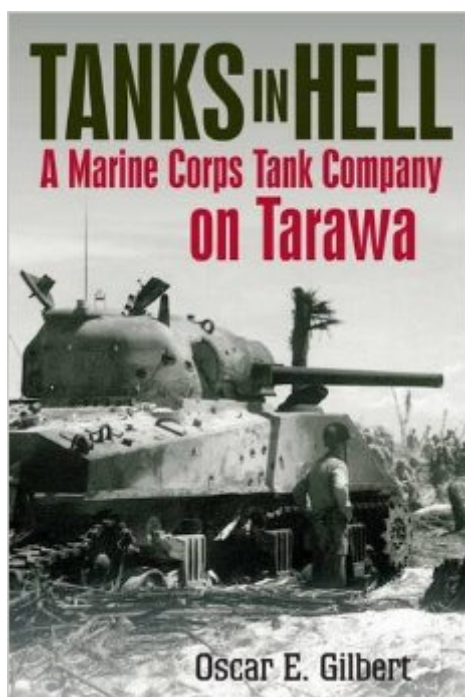


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# Tanks In Hell: A Marine Corps Tank Company On Tarawa



## Synopsis

Winner of THE GENERAL WALLACE M. GREENE, JR. AWARD for outstanding nonfiction  
In May 1943 a self-described “really young, green, ignorant lieutenant” assumed command of a new Marine Corps company. His even younger enlisted Marines were learning to use an untested weapon, the M4A2 “Sherman” medium tank. His sole combat veteran was the company bugler, who had salvaged his dress cap and battered horn from a sinking aircraft carrier. Just six months later the company would be thrown into one of the ghastliest battles of World War II. On 20 November 1943 the Second Marine Division launched the first amphibious assault of the Pacific War, directly into the teeth of powerful Japanese defenses on Tarawa. In that blood-soaked invasion, a single company of Sherman tanks, of which only two survived, played a pivotal role in turning the tide from looming disaster to legendary victory. In this unique study Oscar Gilbert and Romain Cansiere use official documents, memoirs, interviews with veterans, as well as personal and aerial photographs to follow Charlie Company from its formation, and trace the movement, action and loss of individual tanks in this horrific four-day struggle. The authors have used official documents and interviews with veterans to follow the company from training through the brutal 76-hour struggle for Tarawa. Survivor accounts and air photo analysis document the movements and destruction of the company’s individual tanks. It is a story of escapes from drowning tanks, and even more harrowing escapes from tanks knocked out behind Japanese lines. It is a story of men doing whatever needed to be done, from burying the dead to hand-carrying heavy cannon ammunition forward under fire. It is the story of how the two surviving tanks and their crews expanded a perilously thin beachhead, and cleared the way for critical reinforcements to come ashore. But most of all it is a story of how a few unsung Marines helped turn near disaster into epic victory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A riveting history of the background, the combat history, and the aftermath of the men who operated the Marine medium tanks in one of the most savage battles in history. The authors provide views of how the men were trained and the equipment they used and then an almost moment-by-moment flow interspersed with personal narratives by the veterans themselves. The book is interesting and engrossing and flows seamlessly. Tarawa was a continuous horror for everyone who was there and through it all, these tankers did all they could and more to finally break the enemy's strong defenses and triumph. It is an honest and exceptionally well-written history that gives the reader a view that few authors could have pulled off. There is even a section in the back where the authors take the reader through a surviving M4A2 Sherman tank to acquaint the reader with how it worked and what it felt like to fight in one. The only flaws I should mention is the absence of any map of Tarawa (Betio) showing the landing beach designations and compass directions - something the authors refer to throughout the book - and the really fine collection of rare photographs are printed with muddy midtones and grainy detail. Shame on the publisher! These photos are priceless and should have been printed better. Despite these niggles, this is a book that should be read by everyone with an interest in the real story of courageous tankers in a desperate fight.

Mr. Gilbert always delivers fine work relating to tank warfare and this book is no exception. I have always been fascinated with the battle of Tarawa and this up close and personal reflection of a Marine Corps tank company on Betio adds another dimension to the event. Excellent read.

I have read a very large number of books concerning the Tarawa campaign, including both technical and personal formats. This book brings to the forefront the actions of the tanks and their value to the overall victory that was lacking in all of the other books on the battle. I would highly recommend this book for an in depth study of this heretofore under appreciated group of Marines. It was also made quit clear the lack of coordination between the tanks and infantry, which led to future studies and modifications in the formation of a highly efficient tank-infantry tactics.

While this book is well written the material is pretty sparse. The first third of the book is about the

history of tanks and amphibious tactics that were being developed for the coming invasions, the equipment, concerns etc. There is a lot of information on the different versions of the M4 as well which may be interesting, but does not directly involve Tarawa. The middle quarter is on Tarawa which can be summed up as we lost a bunch of tanks getting to the beach and those that made it there were often ineffective because their main gun could not penetrate most of the concrete bunkers. The rest of the book is what happened after Tarawa with training, mods to the tanks and the crews along with a lot of Appendix information. All in all, the action part of this was fairly short and spent a lot of time getting the names of the tanks correct and in the correct part of the battlefield.

I have read jsut about everything on the battle of Tarawa...and yet, for reasons unknown, the story of the tanks and the men who crewed them on Tarawa has been somehwo just glossed over. This book completely, with incredible detail and research fills in all the blanks. I have read hundreds of military histories and personal stories over my life and yet, with the turn of almost every page of this book, I was amazed at the author's devotion to detail and accuracy. The photos are excellent...most never before published (to my knowledge) and the personal remembrances of the men who really fought the battle are told with such human warmth it makes the reader fully understand what the tankers battle on Tarawa was like. Absolutely, if you are a military history buff like me, you must get this book. It is an excellent read. Also, if you are into tanks and tank modeling, the author will greatly enlighten you about the various models of the M-4 Shermans. I study tanks like an entomologist studies bugs...and some of the facts on these tanks the Author puts out in this book I was completely unaware of.

Interesting story. However, very confusing narration as words in sentences left out and punctuation made reading difficult to follow. I almost have the sense that the book was not edited. Only because I've read other books on the battle could I follow and understand what was going on in this book. Would not recommend this book until it is cleaned up.

An interesting and honest account of the battle of Tarawa. My father was there as a sailor aboard an LCVP. He told me It was the worst invasion that he participated in because he saw so many marines get killed in the water. I understand why, and why he kept so many other details to himself.

The books follows a USMC tank company from its training, to its greatest moment in one of the

Pacific theater's most cruel battles. The focus is a bit narrow, but at the same times it provides for a better view "from the commander's periscope" of WWII tank warfare in the Pacific. Interesting, detailed read.

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