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The land ironclads

Sorry ... you need a frame-enabled browser for this site The tank breakthrough "The Land Ironclads" is H. G. Wells' prophetic science-fiction story of armored tanks in combat. His tanks (he doesn't use that later word) are large for land vehicles, more like small warships. Some of the design features are far in advance of 1903, not just imaginative propulsion but scientific fire-control. A key concept is that the land ironclads may be used to break through hostile trench systems, of the kind that established the long stalemate on the Western Front during most of 1914-1918. It is not merely the surprise of the tank attack, but the inability of riflemen or artillery to counter the tanks, and the lack of specialized anti-tank weapons or tactics, that give the victory to the ironclads in Wells' story. It signals a change in the strategic balance on battlefields, hence in war generally. "The Land Ironclads" is told vividly from a viewpoint on the defending side. The sense of place is strong, after the attack beings we find ourselves right in the midst of the lines being overrun; although I found it harder to visualize the battlefield tactically. It's a good story, a brisk and quite readable mini-documentary. Industrious tank drivers versus brave outdoorsmen Unlike The Battle of Dorking and other war-prophetic stories, Wells does not name the countries who are battlefield antagonists, allowing us to focus on the nature of the ironclads and their unexpected breakthrough, rather than nationalistic truisms. This works nicely, although there is an interesting undertone. The defenders are described as nationally more vigorous and soldierly, coming from backgrounds as sportsmen and outdoor workers. The attackers are suggested to be less obviously of toughened soldier material, indoor city fellows from offices and factories. I take this unlabeled contrast to be of defenders: British Empire active outdoorsmen headed by sunburnt veterans from colonial wars, plain soldiers of the classic type; versus attackers: German Empire industrial workers who may not be dashing chargers-on-horseback but have invented something better, the bringing of industrial machinery to war-fighting. It is this applied inventiveness, the industrial-mechanical superiority on the battlefield achieved by the land ironclads, which brings victory. This is an analysis by Wells that would have been useful to the chateau generals in the coming First World War, could they but heed it. It's not a new idea really, that technology may overweigh skill and bravery and other soldierly virtues: it surely goes back to the first use of distance weapons in battle, the bow and the spear outreaching sword and club. As Leo Tolstoy earlier had pointed out in War and Peace, artillery does not care how brave you are. This vintage book contains H. G. Wells' 1903 short story, "The Land Ironclads". It was first published in the "Strand Magazine" and features "land ironclads," 100-foot-long war machines that are equipped with remotely controlled guns and are designed to house riflemen, engineers, and a captain. Unsurprisingly, the story was a contributing factor to Wells' reputation as a prophetic writer after tanks first appeared on the battlefield in 1916. Herbert George Wells (1866 - 1946) was a prolific English writer who wrote in a variety of genres, including the novel, politics, history, and social commentary. Today, he is perhaps best remembered for his contributions to the science fiction genre thanks to such novels as "The Time Machine" (1895), "The Invisible Man" (1897), and "The War of the Worlds" (1898). "The Father of Science Fiction" was also a staunch socialist, and his later works are increasingly political and didactic. Many vintage books such as this are becoming increasingly scarce and expensive. We are republishing this book now in an affordable, modern, high-quality edition complete with a specially commissioned new biography of the author. "The Land Ironclads"1904 illustration of the short story, showing huge ironclad land vessels, equipped with pedrail wheels.AuthorH. G. WellsCountryUnited KingdomGenre(s)Science fiction "The Land Ironclads" is a short story by English writer H.G. Wells, which originally appeared in the December 1903 issue of the Strand Magazine.[1] It features "land ironclads," 100-foot-long (30 m) armoured fighting vehicles that carry riflemen, engineers, and a captain, and are armed with remote-controlled, semi-automatic rifles. (The term "ironclad" was coined in the mid-19th century for steam-propelled warships protected by iron or steel armour plates.) The land ironclads are described as "essentially long, narrow, and very strong steel frameworks carrying the engines, and borne on eight pairs of big pedrail wheels, each about ten feet in diameter, each a driving wheel and set upon long axles free to swivel around a common axis. [...] the captain [...] had look-out points at small ports all round the upper edge of the adjustable skirt of twelve-inch ironplating which protected the whole affair, and [...] could also raise or depress a conning-tower set above the port-holes through the centre of the iron top cover." Riflemen are installed in cabins "slung along the sides of and behind and before the great main framework," and operate mechanically targeting, semi-automatic rifles.[2] The story contributed to Wells's reputation as a "prophet of the future"[3] when tanks first appeared on the battlefield in 1916. For contemporaries, Wells's rather sketchy battle between countrymen "defenders" (who rely on cavalry and entrenched infantry) and attacking townsmen carried echoes of the Boer War, as well as of his 1898 novel The War of the Worlds, which also featured a struggle between technologically uneven protagonists.[4] Plot summary The story opens with an unnamed war correspondent and a young lieutenant surveying the calm of the battlefield and reflecting upon the war between two unidentified armies. The opponents are dug into trenches, each waiting for the other to attack, and the men on the war correspondent's side are confident they will prevail, because they are all strong outdoor-types —men who know how to use a rifle and fight—while their enemies are townspeople, "a crowd of devitalised townsmen . . . They're clerks, they're factory hands, they're students, they're civilised men. They can write, they can talk, they can make and do all sorts of things, but they're poor amateurs at war."[5] The men agree that their "open air life" produces men better suited to war than their opponents' "decent civilization." In the end, however, the "decent civilization," with its men of science and engineers, triumphs over the "better soldiers" who, instead of developing land ironclads of their own, had been practising shooting their rifles from horseback, a tactic rendered obsolete by the land ironclads. Wells foreshadows this eventual outcome in the conversation of the two men in the first part, when the correspondent tells the lieutenant "Civilization has science, you know, it invented and it made the rifles and guns and things you use."[5] The story ends with the entire army captured by thirteen land ironclads, with the defenders managing to disable only one. In the last scene, the correspondent compares his countrymen's "sturdy proportions with those of their lightly built captors".[5] and thinks of the story he is going to write about the experience, noting both that the captured officers are thinking of ways they will defeat what they call the enemy's "ironmongery" with their already-existing weaponry, rather than developing their own land ironclads to counter the new threat, and also noting that the "half-dozen comparatively slender young men in blue pajamas who were standing about their victorious land ironclad, drinking coffee and eating biscuits, had also in their eyes and carriage something not altogether degraded below the level of a man."[5] Inspiration Wells did predict the use of armoured vehicles in combat, but numerous authors (for example Sam Moskowitz in Science Fiction by Gaslight) mistakenly state that he described caterpillar treads on a tank before the tank's invention.[6] In War and the Future, H. G. Wells specifically acknowledges Bramah Diplock's pedrail wheel as the origin for his idea of an all-terrain armoured vehicle in The Land Ironclads:[7] The idea was suggested to me by the contrivances of a certain Mr. Diplock, whose "ped-rail" notion, the notion of a wheel that was something more than a wheel, a wheel that would take locomotives up hill-sides and across ploughed fields, was public property nearly twenty years ago.[7] Indeed, within the story itself, the war correspondent, upon his first sight of the machine's pedrails, recalls hearing about them from Diplock in person. According to one biographer, Wells originally got the idea for land ironclads using "pedrails" from an inventor J. W. Dunne, who spoke of "big fat pedrail machines" in a letter to Wells. Dunne also influenced Wells's novel The War in the Air (1908).[8] See also Novels portal Landship The Land Leviathan References ^ Wells, H.G. (1903). "The Land Ironclads". The Strand Magazine. 23 (156): 751–769. ^ H.G. Wells, "The Land Ironclads," in The Short Stories of H.G. Wells (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), pp. 131–32. ^ In the first biography of Wells published after his death, Vincent Brome noted that Wells's reputation as a prophet was "one of the legends sustained by the newspaper world": "[Wells] foresaw the motor car, the tank, the aeroplane and the atom bomb, he pictured the war in the war and he glimpsed—as no one else—a promised land as rich and full and bountiful as any vision vouchsafed Moses. But how he could blunder. London, Berlin, St. Petersburg would, he wrote, increase their populations to well over 20,000,000; and New York, Philadelphia and Chicago would probably and Hankow almost certainly reach 40,000,000. Anticipations implied that 'the struggle between any two naval powers on the high seas [...] will not last more than a week or so.' [...] In the same period he did not 'think it all probable that aeronautics will ever come into play as a serious modification of transportation and communication. [...]'] As for the submarine, 'I must confess that my imagination in spite even of spurring, refuses to see any sort of submarine do anything but suffocate its crew and founder at sea.' [...] Russia at one point would never amount to more than another vaster Ireland. Paranoiac leaders like Hitler were dramatically dismissed [...] No, he was a considerable, but not after all divinely inspired prophet." H.G. Wells: A Biography (London: Longsmans, Green, 1951), pp. 235–36). ^ King, Simon (2007). Insect Nations – Visions of the Ant World from Kropotkin to Bergson. InkerMen Press. p. 46. ISBN 978-0-9551829-7-6. ^ a b c d The Land Ironclads, H. G. Wells, 1909 ^ Budrys, Algis (December 1968). "Galaxy Bookshelf". Galaxy Science Fiction. pp. 149–155. ^ a b Wells, H.G. (1917). War and the Future. Cassel & Co. p. 93. ^ Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, H.G. Wells: A Biography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), pp. 222 & 432. External links Wikisource has original text related to this article: The Land Ironclads The complete short fiction of H. G. Wells at Standard Ebooks "The Land Ironclads" (reproduced online) The Land Ironclads public domain audiobook at LibriVox H.G. Wells's Land Ironclad paper model Retrieved from " As famous British writer H. G. Wells called the war machines from his sci-fi story "ships", it was only logical that the design of their real life counterparts would be a Navy project. Thus, on 20th February, 1915, the Landship Committee was created within the Admiralty. Its members—military engineers and navy officers—were true masters of their craft. However, the task turned out to be truly unrivalled in its complexity, and even these experts were unsure on what a Land Ironclad should resemble. Nevertheless, by the first meeting of the Committee, several projects of the new devastating weapon were prepared. Their appearance was most unusual. Thomas Hetherington's Three-Wheeled Behemoth Thomas Hetherington, Flight Commander of the Royal Naval Air Service was among the first to present his sketches. From blueprint to metal cast, something not unlike a ship on enormous wheels was ready to roll out (Hetherington dismissed the idea of using tracks). The engineers of the Landship Committee had no real frame of reference for the work to be done. This resulted in creating quite a few monstrosities on the path to creating a true tank. The proposed dimensions of the war machine were staggering: 14 metres high and twice that size in length. The inventor reasoned that such an enormous beast would be guaranteed a great degree of terrain passability. The machine would have no problem rolling over six metre high walls and pass through water obstacles as deep as 4.5 metres. The design weight of Hetherington's "ship" amounted to 300 tons. The massive vehicle was to be powered by two 800 horse power diesel engines. Armaments for this hulking design were no less impressive than its size—six 102mm naval guns mounted onto three turrets, and a dozen anti-infantry machine guns. The Flight Commander's sketches were true works of art. The superstructure above the engines, the wheelhouse and helm, the radio-mast—everything was done with great attention to detail. Even every individual step of the rope-ladder was meticulously drawn. The project was a fine sight for the artistically inclined eye. Alas, a good artist is not necessarily a good engineer. Hetherington failed to account for at least 700 tons of the vehicle's mass, ignored the miniscule engine power relative to said mass, and gave almost no thought to crew protection. The enormous smokestack increased the already massive silhouette of the land cruiser, making it an easy target for enemy artillery. Survivability under heavy fire was put into question. Needless to say, the project was dismissed, along with similar gargantuan designs:223715However, one of these "dinosaurs" did get lucky. The struggle bringing it to life went on for several years, during which the giant underwent many changes. Amazingly—it even got built. The Sueter-Diplock Ordeal In March 1915 the Landship Committee began design of a new vehicle, involving Rear-Admiral Murray Sueter and engineer Bramah Diplock (yes, the same Bramah Diplock, whose "Pedrail Wheel" design was mentioned by H.G.Wells in his "Land Ironclads" short story). By then, Diplock had already founded the Pedrail Transport Company which made him a wealthy man. He was responsible for the technical aspects of the project. Sueter was the analyst and idea man. The Sueter-Diplock design was starkly realistic in comparison to other land ship projects, leading to the creation of its real life prototype. The only roadblock to mass production was the introduction of tanks proper, staking their claim as kings of the battlefield. The Sueter-Diplock machine consisted of an armoured hull, mounted onto two Pedrail platforms. Each platform sported a single gasoline engine. The platforms were able to rotate relative to one another, giving the vehicle a limited degree of manoeuvrability. The dimensions of this "centipede" were modest compared to the Hetherington project—11 metres long, 4 metres wide. The vehicle would house eight crew members and about a dozen marines. It had no armaments of its own. The Committee ruled that this project was not only of interest—it was buildable! The First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, personally approved the manufacturing order for a dozen Sueter-Diplock machines. The inventors rushed to improve upon their "ship". They added grenade launchers, an entrenchment mechanism, mechanical barb wire cutters... the project became more complex by the day. At that time another enthusiast and Committee member—Colonel Rookes Crompton—joined in. An established military man who saw combat, he was no stranger to engineering: installing electric lighting in Windsor Castle, building railroads in India, even (as a side project) inventing the electric kettle. Crompton expressed a keen interest in the idea of an armoured war machine. However, he reasoned that, instead of a single hull, two separate ones could be used for each platform, and Diplock's "Pedrail Wheel" should be replaced with a caterpillar track (owing to its superior manoeuvrability and durability). While the three inventors bickered over these details, the vehicle was sent into production without changes. The ordeal, however, was far from over. By summer the British Ministry of Defence rejected the idea of manufacturing unarmed track based personnel carriers in favour of armed vehicles. The Sueter-Diplock creation was in jeopardy, so the inventors rushed to innovate and improve. They had already prepared several proposals for artillery armaments when Crompton interjected once again. He proposed that each platform be equipped with 360 degree rotating turrets. Once again the brain child of Sueter and Diplock underwent changes. It seemed the project was almost completed, when two events took place. Firstly, the ministry decreased the order volume to a single prototype. Secondly, the "Mark I" by Sir Ernest Swinton made its triumphant debut. The inventors were left with nothing. Eventually, Diplock and Sueter were able to secure the funds to complete the prototype. However, despite its passable trial performance, the armoured personnel carrier did not attract enough investments to launch its mass production. The prototype of the Sueter-Diplock machine was left to rust in Bovington, before being dismantled and scrapped in 1923. Though it seemed at the time that Colonel Crompton was but a nuisance to the duo of inventors, he was the one to propose the most crucial innovations—caterpillar tracks and rotating turrets. Moreover the unstoppable Colonel spawned his own veritable cornucopia of design projects. References: Fedoseev S. L. Tanks of World War I. M., 2012. Fletcher D. The British Tanks 1915-19. Ramsbury, 2001. Travers T. The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of the Modern Warfare 1900-1918. Barnsley, 1987.

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