THE T28 SUPER-HEAVY TANK

David Doyle profiles a heavyweight contender that never made it to the WW2 ring

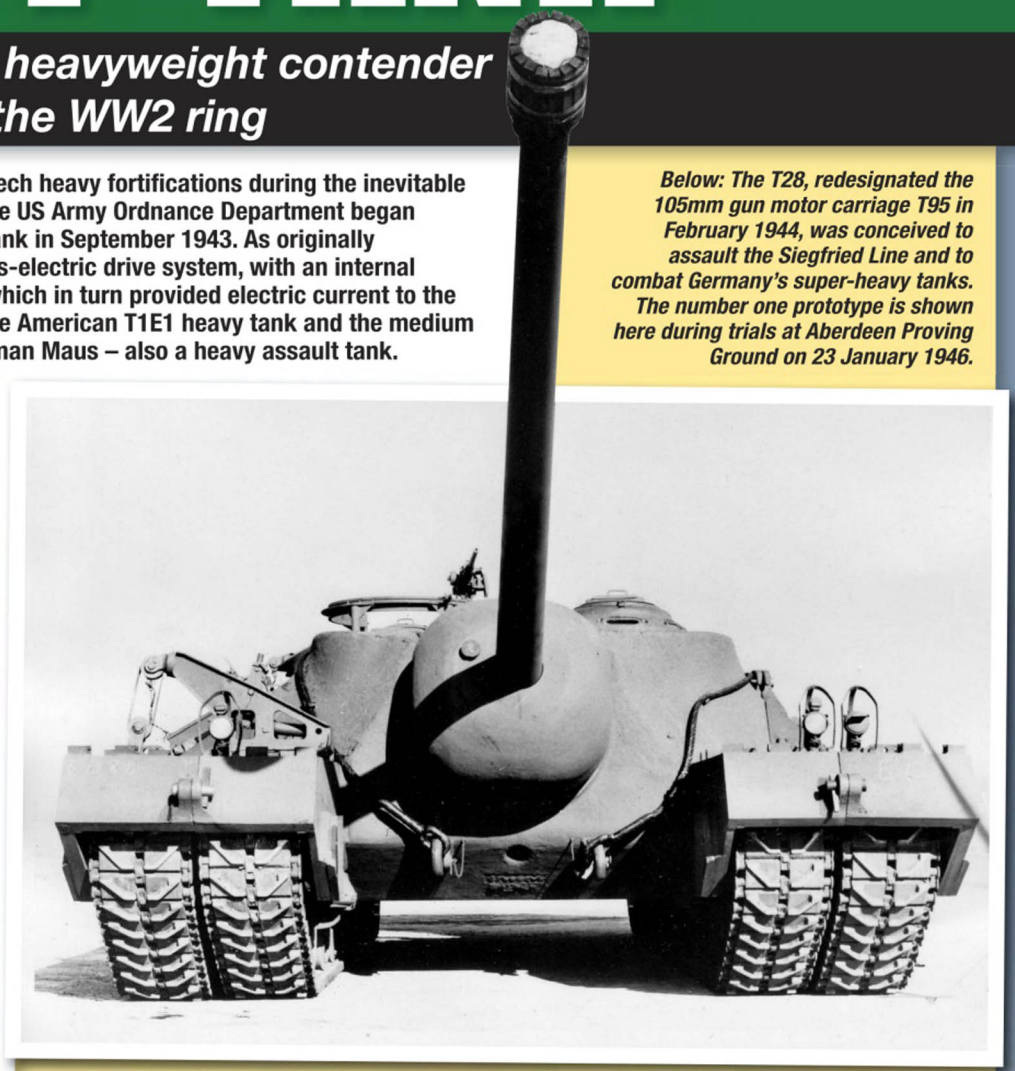
Faced with the prospect of trying to breech heavy fortifications during the inevitable assault on German forces in Europe, the US Army Ordnance Department began design work on a very heavy assault tank in September 1943. As originally conceived, the vehicle would have had a gas-electric drive system, with an internal combustion engine powering a generator, which in turn provided electric current to the drive motors. Such a system was used in the American T1E1 heavy tank and the medium tank T23 as well as, coincidentally, the German Maus – also a heavy assault tank.

The Chief of Ordnance proposed a modest production run of 25 vehicles, but the Army Ground Forces board did not agree, and opined that only three pilot models be built, and they should have conventional mechanical transmissions. Ultimately, in March 1944, the Army Service Forces authorised the production of five pilots, each with the mechanical transmission.

The vehicles would be armed with a high-velocity T5E1 105mm gun and, in order to reduce both weight and silhouette, the vehicle was designed without a turret. The gun had a limited traverse of 10 degrees left or right of centre, and an elevation range of +20 to -5 degrees. Despite the lack of turret, the heavy armour resulted in a laden weight of 188,000 lb (85.455kg).

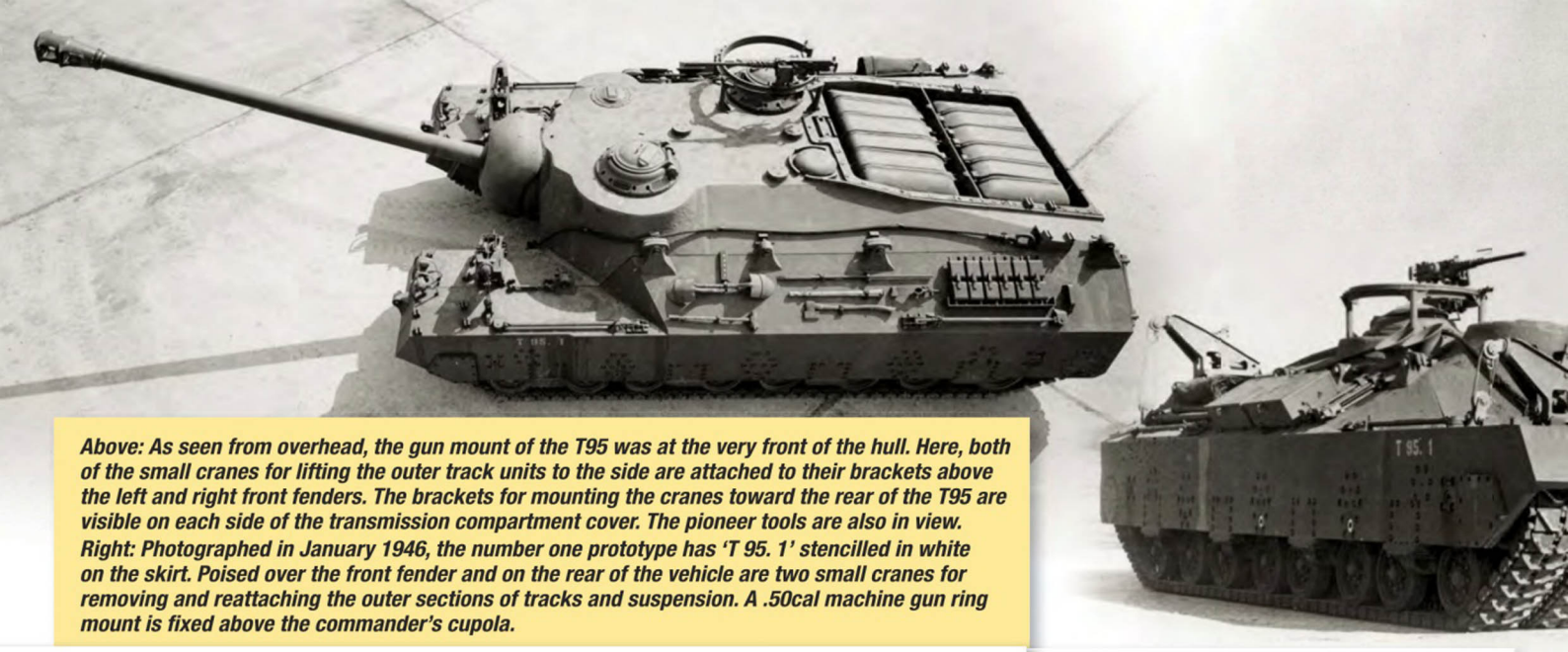
The lack of turret and the limited secondary armament (only the commander's .50cal anti-aircraft machine gun supplemented the 105mm) led to the Chief of Ordnance on 7 February 1945 requesting the vehicle be redesignated from T28 heavy tank to 105mm gun motor carriage T95.

With the key design and production criteria established, the quest was on to find a firm that had the resources, in a war-strained economy, to produce these five vehicles. This task eventually fell to the Pacific Car and



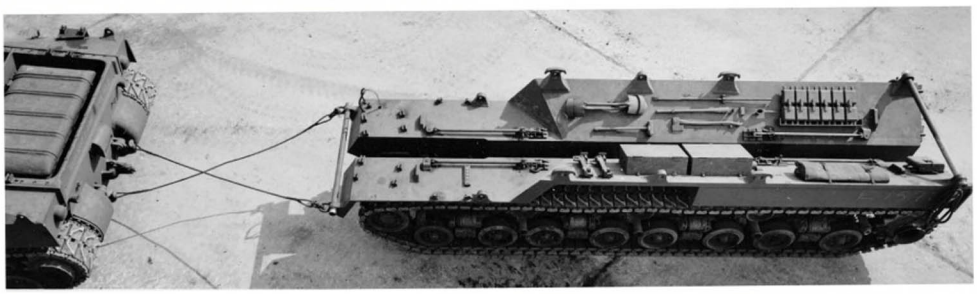
Below: The T28, redesignated the 105mm gun motor carriage T95 in February 1944, was conceived to assault the Siegfried Line and to combat Germany's super-heavy tanks. The number one prototype is shown here during trials at Aberdeen Proving Ground on 23 January 1946.

Below: In a rare colour photo of a T28 super-heavy tank, the first pilot vehicle, registration number 40226809, stirs up dust during firing trials at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, in March 1947. The vehicle has been fitted with various radio antennas, and a windshield has been installed to the front of the driver's cupola. Two small cranes for handling the outer track units are mounted towards the rear of the hull.



Above: As seen from overhead, the gun mount of the T95 was at the very front of the hull. Here, both of the small cranes for lifting the outer track units to the side are attached to their brackets above the left and right front fenders. The brackets for mounting the cranes toward the rear of the T95 are visible on each side of the transmission compartment cover. The pioneer tools are also in view.
Right: Photographed in January 1946, the number one prototype has 'T 95. 1' stencilled in white on the skirt. Poised over the front fender and on the rear of the vehicle are two small cranes for removing and reattaching the outer sections of tracks and suspension. A .50cal machine gun ring mount is fixed above the commander's cupola.

An overhead view of the first pilot of the T95. Towards the rear of the vehicle are the recessed covers for the transmission and engine compartments. The driver's cupola, complete with vision blocks, is to the front left of the roof.

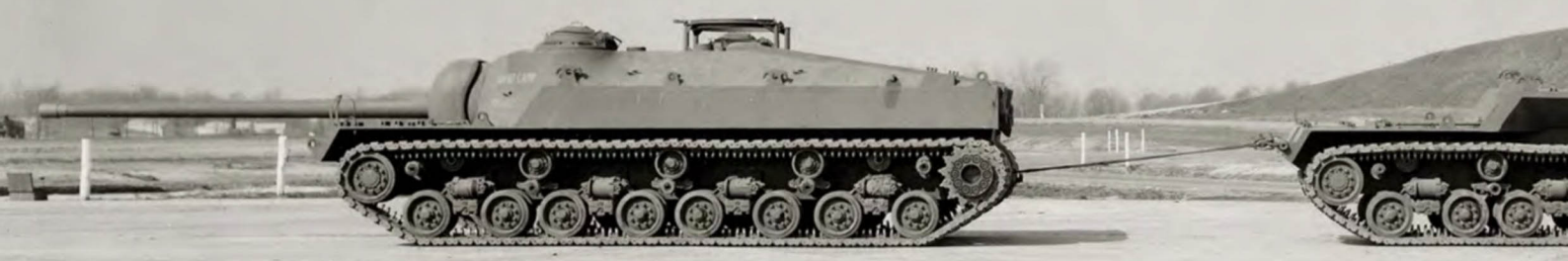


An overhead view demonstrates the manner in which the outer track units were attached skirt-to-skirt to form an assembly that the T95 could tow. The unit was relatively narrow and was intended for towing on flat, solid surfaces. Note the steel tubes that helped to hold the units together, at the front and rear of the assembly.

Foundry Company, and a contract was issued to them in May 1945, with welding being completed on the first hull by the following August. However, following the capitulation of Japan, the production order was changed from five pilot models to only two. Pilot number one was shipped to Aberdeen Proving Ground four days before Christmas, 1945, with the second following on 10 January 1946.

To support its 90-plus tons, the vehicle featured a dual-track system to better distribute the weight. Further, the outer tracks and their suspensions could be removed and

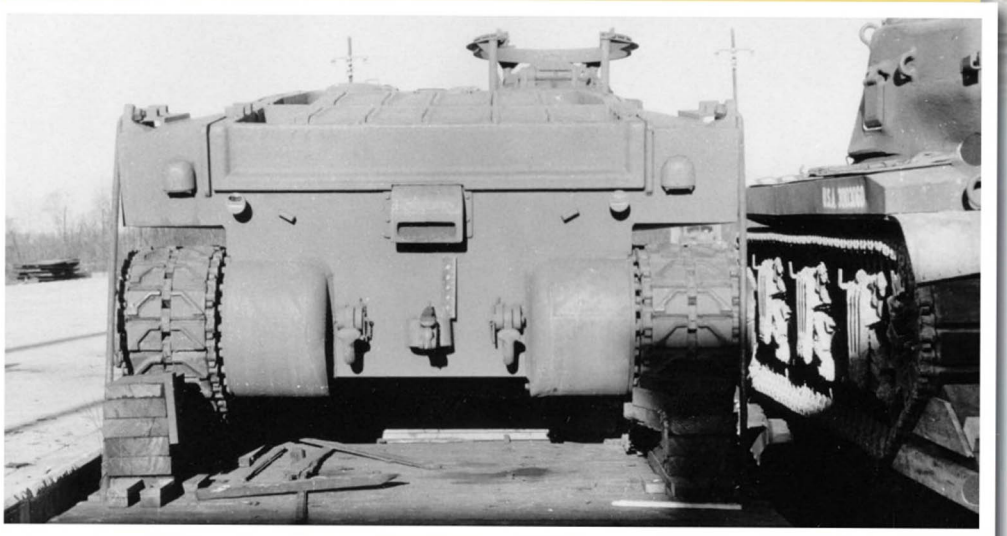
Above the horizontal skirt on each side of the T95 is an angled plate that served as the structural top section of the outer track suspension. At the top of the angled plate are four large lugs that were attached to corresponding lugs on the hull. At the centre of the rear of the hull is the single exhaust port and, below it, the towing pintle. Six spare track shoes were stowed on the side.



Above: In June 1946 the T95 was redesignated the T28. Here, a T28 undergoes a test disembarkation from LST-1153 at Aberdeen Proving Ground on 3 May 1948.

towed behind the vehicle when it was being shipped by train. Despite the great weight, the powertrain was essentially the same as that used in the T26E3 Pershing tank, albeit with a different gear ratio. Shockingly, the Ford GAF V8 that powered the T95 (and T26E3) was but a slight modification of the GAA that powered the Sherman. In the T95, the final gear ratio permitted an 8mph (13km/h) top speed, although the maximum recommended sustained speed was an even more modest 7mph (11km/h).

After six months of testing it was decided that the vehicle was to be redesignated yet

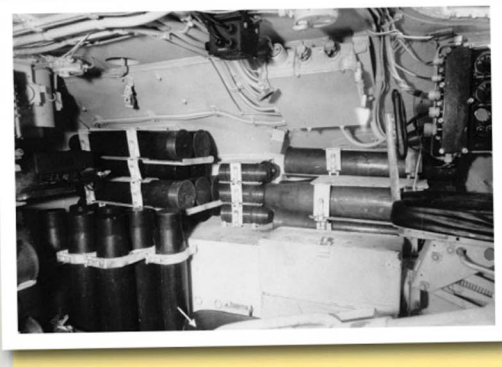


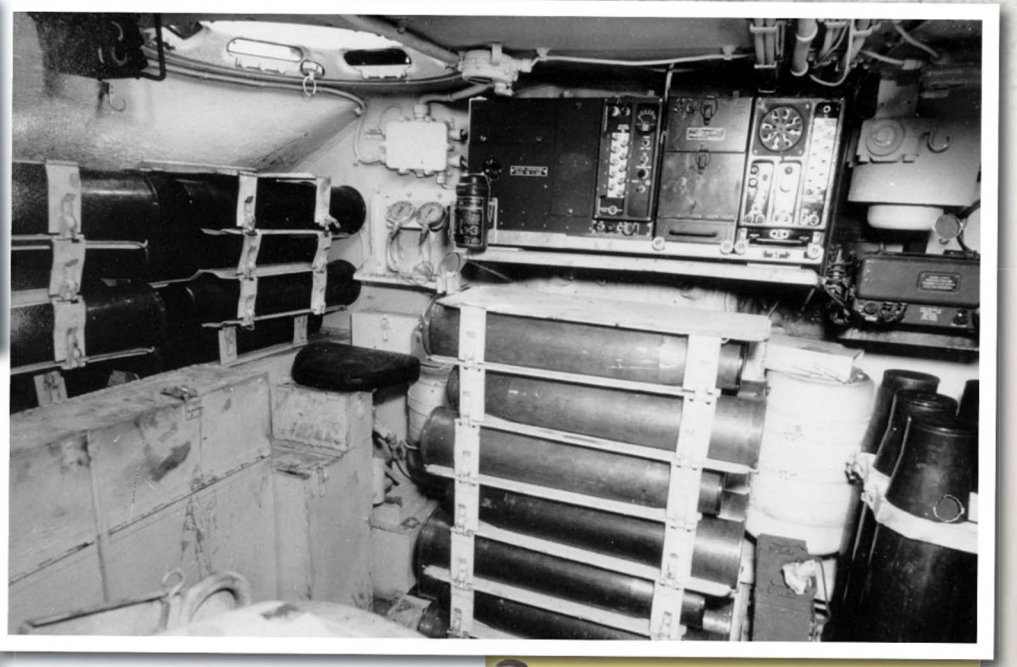
A T28/T95 loaded on a railroad flatcar, its outer track units removed for shipment. Between the final-drive housings are tow hooks, with a towing pintle between them. Propped up on top of the towing pintle bracket is a ruler for reference. Above the towing pintle is the exhaust. The taillight assemblies are above the final-drive housings.

Below: The second T95 pilot is rigged to tow its conjoined outer track units at Aberdeen Proving Ground in March 1946. The right unit is visible in this view, and the skirts of the two units were joined face-to-face in the middle. Details of the HVSS bogie assemblies are visible. The two men to the right are demonstrating the braking arrangement of the rope wrapped around the drum on the sprocket.

Above: A front view of a T28 with its outer tracks removed at Aberdeen Proving Ground in March 1951 displays how the 105mm gun exited the fighting compartment. Two tow hooks are visible towards the bottom of the hull front. On the face of the mantlet on the right side of the gun is the aperture for the gunner's direct sight; he also had a periscope on the hull roof.

A T28 is loaded aboard a T67 100-ton semi-trailer hitched to an M26 tractor at Aberdeen in October 1946. The outer tracks of the T28 remain attached. Although the trailer was adequate for the task, the T28, at 90 tons empty, far exceeded the M26's normal limits.



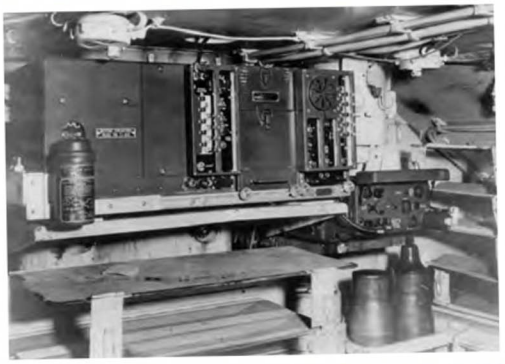


Above: An October 1946 photo from Aberdeen Proving Ground shows the interior of the T28 from the gunner's position looking towards the left rear of the fighting compartment. Stowed on the side of the compartment are 105mm rounds, composed of separate propellant casings and projectiles. To the top left are the driver's cupola and instrument panel.

again, to become the T28. Subsequently, the first pilot was destroyed during testing at Yuma Proving Ground and, remarkably, the other was 'lost' after the completion of trials and not rediscovered until 1974 when it was found abandoned in a remote area of Fort Belvoir. The vehicle was then transported to Fort Knox for preservation at the Patton Museum, and has since been relocated to Fort Benning, Georgia.

Above: Looking towards the rear of the fighting compartment from the driver's position; the commander's cupola is at the upper left. The radio transmitter/receiver set is above the horizontal rack for 105mm rounds. Above and to the left of the radio is a dome light. Below the ammunition racks to the left are stowage boxes.

Below: A T28 photographed during tests, with one of the cranes for handling the outer track assemblies visible toward the rear. The mantlet was an armour casting 11.5in (292mm) thick, while the front of the hull was 12in (305mm) in thickness. This would have rendered the T28/T95 virtually impregnable to enemy fire had WW2 lasted long enough for the vehicle to enter combat.



Above: The radio appears to be an SCR-528 comprising, left to right, the radio/transmitter BC-604, chest CH-264 and radio/receiver BC-603. The cylinder to the left of the radio set is an A-62 antenna, known as the 'phantom antenna'.