

The Army's M48 Patton Tank Can Be Summed Up in 2 Words



By

[Brent M. Eastwood](#)

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M48 Patton Tank. Image Credit: Creative Commons.

At the U.S. Army [First Division Museum](#) in Wheaton, Illinois, you can see a real-life version of the [M48 Patton Tank](#). The nickname on the turret reads “Snoopy,” but this was anything but a sleepy cartoon character on the battlefield.

The M48 served with distinction during the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Israel-Arab Wars, and into the 1980s. The United States produced a whopping 3,200 M48s – that shows how much the military depended on the versatile [tank](#).

M48: Those Two Words: A Legend.

M48: Designed for the Soviets and Warsaw Pact Armies In Mind

The M48 replaced the [M47](#) and [M46](#). It sported a different hull, turret, and suspension. The M48 was designed to win the fight against the Soviet hordes during the Cold War and many were deployed to Germany and other NATO countries.

The Gasoline Engine Didn't Cut It

One downside to the M48 was its gasoline engine. Unsurprisingly, a hit from a high-explosive anti-tank round would have resulted in a devastating fire that no crew member could escape. Plus, the tank could only hold 200 gallons of gas, which yielded a short range of just 70 miles.

This was going to be a problem with any tank-on-tank battle in Europe. Seventy miles before a re-fuel was just not going to cut it.

Fortunately, the follow-on [M48A3](#) had diesel engines, which were safer with a greater range. The earlier M48s had an [AV-1790, 12-cylinder engine](#) that could hit a speed of 28 miles per hour at 810 horsepower.

Versatile If Not Powerful Main Gun

The M48 weighed around 50 tons. It had a lighter 90mm main gun, which might have been a liability against Soviet tanks. On the upside, the gun could fire several different types of projectiles: high-explosive anti-tank, high-explosive, and anti-personnel with canister pellets and flechettes.

It was also equipped with a .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine gun for the four-man crew. The armor thickness was around five inches.

Interesting History In Vietnam

The M48 was deployed during the Vietnam War but it was of limited use due to the lack of tank-on-tank battles. [Six hundred M48s served in Vietnam](#). They mainly protected convoys and roads. They were also used at fire bases for better security.

The deep jungle foliage was no match for the tanks, so the infantry often used them to clear out sections of the jungle.

Dismounted marines and soldiers were happy to have the M48 around because it forced the enemy to fire at the tanks while the friendly fighters maneuvered to take out bunkers. The tanks also used their canister anti-personnel rounds at the enemy.

These were effective at scattering Viet Cong insurgents or NVA troops.

One Memorable Tank-On-Tank Battle During Vietnam

There was one notable armor operation that the M48 was involved in. This happened in 1969 during the night [Battle of Ben Het](#) near the Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia border.

Enemy troops hit a Special Forces compound. M48s from the 1st Battalion 69th Armor hurried over to help. They were met by several NVA PT-76 [tanks](#) and [BTR](#) armored personnel carriers. The M48s eliminated two tanks and one BTR.

The friendly forces sustained a loss, though. One M48 was hit in the turret, two crew members died, and one was wounded.

Israelis Rode High on the M48 Tank

The M48 was heavily deployed to Israel and used repeatedly during the Six-Day War in 1967 and the [Yom Kippur War in 1973](#).

These were some of the biggest armor battles since World War Two. The M48s, by now upgraded to the A2 and A3 standard, had superior armor and great maneuverability, which helped the [Israelis](#) take out scores of Egyptian and Syrian tanks.

Relegated to the National Guard

The last upgrade was the [M48A5 variant](#) that emerged in 1975. This had a new and more powerful 105mm gun, a coaxial 7.62mm machine gun, a twin turbo-diesel engine, and now a 300-gallon fuel capacity for greater range.

This version was mainly deployed to National Guard units because most M48s had rotated out of American active duty units by 1973. The M48 was finally retired completely by the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 1987.

The M48 Patton was a fine tank that showed it could handle both Southeast Asia's jungles and the Middle East's deserts. While it had limited usage in [Vietnam](#), it was a difference maker for the Israelis, and the Army National Guard units used it for decades.

You Might Also Like

So, if you are ever in Wheaton, Illinois, cruise to the First Infantry Division Museum to check out "Snoopy," the M48 tank that never shied away from a battle. You won't be disappointed.

About the Author: Dr. Brent M. Eastwood

[Brent M. Eastwood](#), PhD, is the author of [Don't Turn Your Back On the World: a Conservative Foreign Policy](#) and [Humans, Machines, and Data: Future Trends in Warfare](#), plus two other books. Brent was the founder and CEO of a tech firm that predicted world

events using artificial intelligence. He served as a legislative fellow for U.S. Senator Tim Scott and advised the senator on defense and foreign policy issues. He has taught at American University, George Washington University, and George Mason University. Brent is a former U.S. Army Infantry officer. He can be followed on X @[BMEastwood](#).