

Icks, Robert

Tanks For The Memory

by GREG MAHONEY

When Robert Icks was a young Army Reserve officer 40 years ago he had trouble finding literature on tanks and armored vehicles.

Now the shelves in Icks' home at 438 May st., Elmhurst, hold hundreds of books, manuals, pamphlets and photo albums on tanks and tank warfare. Some of that literature was authored by Icks.

The latest addition to the shelves is Icks' "Famous Tank Battles," recently published by Doubleday & Co. Icks describes 32 battles from World War I to Vietnam in which tanks played major roles.

Now recognized as one of the world's leading military armor historians and experts, Icks started his authorship in 1929 when he was an officer in the Army Reserve.

"There was always a lot of literature on the infantry," he recalls, "but there wasn't much written in this country about tanks. I became interested in the subject, researched it and starting writing about it."

Icks was co-author of "The Fighting Tanks Since 1916," published in 1932 and reprinted in 1968.

Among those endorsing the book was a major in the Third Cavalry regiment named George S. Patton. He found it "not only a valuable reference book for practical soldiers, but (it) also affords refreshing reading in that it treats the combat part of war, rather than of its administration and supply aspects."

Icks shared his growing expertise in tanks with German readers in the mid-1930's when he co-authored "Heigl's Taschenbuch (pocketbook) der Tanks Teil I and II." The book, published in Germany in 1935, had, in one edition, a forward written by Heinz Guderian, who was to be Germany's leading tank officer in World War II.

"It was added to the book without my knowledge," Icks said, "and it was removed in later editions. Guderian used rather swash-buckling language and even threw in a pitch for Anschluss (the political

union of Nazi Germany and Austria)."

During World War II, when Icks was an ordnance officer developing weapons and vehicles to counter Guderian's panzers, he wrote "Tanks and Armored Vehicles," published in 1945 and reprinted in 1970.

Icks wrote the article on tanks for the Encyclopedia Britannica and is currently working on another book, "The Tank Encyclopedia," with a former British tank officer. This will be followed by a sequel, "The Armored Car Encyclopedia."

He has edited or contributed to books by other authors in the U.S., Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy and Japan from his large collection of material. That collection has been willed, by prior arrangement, to the Library of Congress.

Icks and his wife, Gertrude, have lived in Elmhurst for 25 years. Copies of most of Icks' books have been presented to the Elmhurst Public library.

"It's been a fascinating 40 years," Icks said, "gathering all this information, talking with tank experts from all over the world and helping others with their research into armor."

"I've had few regrets, except, I guess, for the two broken noses I received in tanks, one in a British Churchill and one in a U.S. light M-4."

Icks was born 71 years ago in Kaukauna, Wis. During World War I he served briefly in the Merchant Marine and then enrolled at Ripon (Wis.) college where he was member of the Student Army Training Corps. He graduated from Ripon in 1922 with a degree in philosophy.

He met Gertrude Duel on the Ripon campus and married her in 1923. Mrs. Icks, whose ancestors settled in the Roxbury area of Massachusetts in 1635, is an author in her own right, tracing her family's genealogy in "Three Hundred and Thirty Years in America, 1635-1965."

"I originally wrote it for members

of the family," she explained, "but I found that other people were interested in it, too."

Mrs. Icks, who is her husband's self-proclaimed "public relations woman," emphasizes that "Bob has a lot of other interests beside tanks, you know. He's interested in history and has taught it in school. He's listed in 'Who's Who in the Midwest' and has a lot of citations for his work in the Army."

Icks joined the Army Reserve and was commissioned an officer in 1927, specializing in armor. He went on active duty with the Army during World War II, serving as an ordnance officer at Aberdeen, Md. and Detroit, Mich.

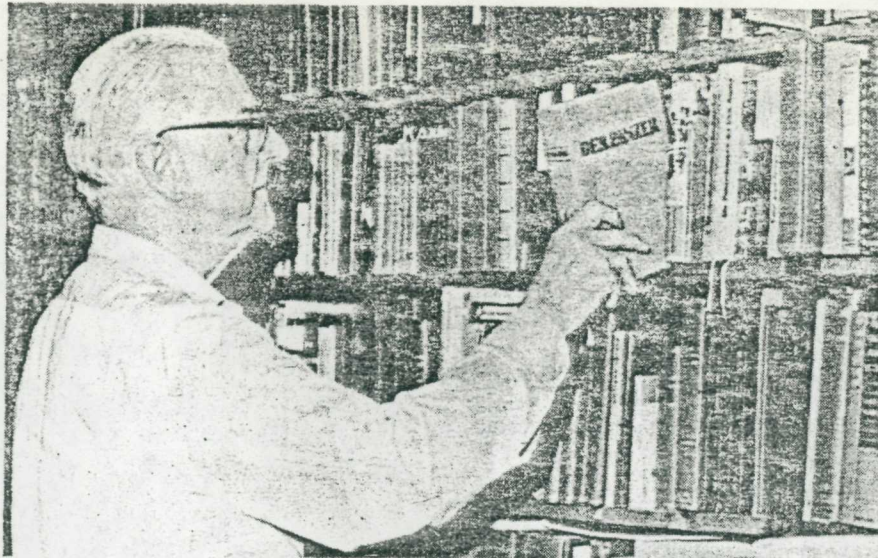
"I was a non-engineer," Icks points out, "but I was fortunate that the officers under me had engineering skills."

At Aberdeen, he was instrumental in developing waterproofing for the armored vehicles that were to be used in the Allied invasion of North Africa.

He returned to the Reserve after the war and retired in 1960 as a colonel.

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TANK HISTORIAN Robert Icks consults one of the hundreds of books he has on the history and hardware of armored warfare.

(Press Publications Photo)

"I'm afraid that there'll always be wars—man is the only animal stupid enough to keep attacking its own kind," Icks said. "And as long as there is war there will always be the need for some kind of well-protected, quick-striking vehicle like the tank.

"There will probably always be the two schools of thought about tanks, whether they should emphasize speed over armor or armor over speed," he adds.

As Icks notes in his article for the Encyclopedia Britannica, "The modern military tank is a direct outgrowth of World War I, but the idea underlying its development—protected, mobile striking power—had been used throughout the history of warfare."

Icks has more than 80,000 photographs of tanks and armored vehicles in his collection, but, he admits, the photo on the dust cover of his latest book, "Famous Tank Battles," is a fake.

"It has German markings," he points out "but it's actually a U.S.-designed M-48 tank that was borrowed from the Spanish army and used in the movie, 'Patton'."

Colonel Icks doesn't want his readers to get off on the wrong track.

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