
BE AGREEABLE

J. WALTER CHRISTIE'S
FLYING
TANK 1865-1944



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Christie's flying tank came to fruition in Russia and Japan. This Antonov A40 is shown in a test flight.

“not invented here” syndrome of big business versus the independent inventor. However, it might also be that Christie’s hostile, grating personality made cooperation impossible by all except those who had at least an ocean to separate them from the man and his troublemaking.

In 1931, when the Ordnance Department tried to buy an M1930, Christie refused to fill the order unless he was also given an order for additional tanks. The tank remained unsold. In 1933, \$200,000 was set aside for tanks in the federal budget, and Ordnance wanted Christie to bid to supply those tanks; however, he refused, saying “the specifications as prepared do not conform to the advanced art in the construction of tanks and contain requirements which this company could not and does not desire to comply with in view of the improvements already tested by it.” In other words, he didn’t want to comply with his client’s needs; he wanted to build Christie tanks that met his own ideals of tank design, whatever the United States military thought.⁶ Christie wanted the military to buy the M1928 already designed, as is. When they refused, he parked the vehicle in the courtyard of the State, War, and Navy Building! The \$200,000 went unspent.

In addition to Christie’s abrasiveness, there were other aspects of his personality that affected his inventions’ success. He was impractical as well as stubborn. While he understood some of the military’s requirements for combat vehicles — like the problems of traveling from one place to another, which his convertible track/wheel system and emphasis on speed addressed⁷ — he ignored others, such as armor. Christie’s prototypes were fast, in part because they were lacking in adequate armor thickness. Other aspects of use in field situations were also ignored or de-prioritized, like adequate room for a crew and guns.

6 The other side of the story is that the United States military could not decide what it needed and floundered about with internal arguments and no clear direction for decades.

7 High speed in a tank had other benefits too, such as the ability to catch up to slower tanks and thus play a role as a tank-destroyer.