

King Tiger Heavy Tank 1942-45
Osprey New Vanguard series No. 1 (1993)
By Tom Jentz & Hilary Doyle; illustrations by Peter Sarson

Review by Jonathan Aird

This was the first of a new line of books ó New Vanguard replaced Osprey's previous Vanguard series which had similarly concentrated on equipment ó and dealt with an iconic weapon of the World War II. The Tiger II, or King Tiger (never, in fact, an official designation), was the culmination of German tank technology. It represented a considerable advance on the vehicles available to the Allies when it first became available. The need for a heavy tank series had been seen as early as 1937, but the start of the King Tiger's development dates to May 1941. There was, as this book recounts, the usual happy (for the Allies) tale of competing designs, each with the support of rival ministries that were looking to enhance their own standing and influence as much as deliver a formidable weapon to the *Wehrmacht*.

This New Vanguard title provides a good, concise overview of the competing designs for an up-gunned heavy tank ó looking at the pros and cons of the several turret designs and the range of potential 88mm guns that it could have been fitted with. There then follows a month-by-month look at manufacture with details of often fairly small modifications made as the series production continued. A very useful chart of production rates is included here.

The sections of the book on firepower and mobility are pure gold for the wargamer. Drawn from previously secret assessment reports, the capability of the Tiger II is compared to several of its opponents ó Shermans, Cromwells, Churchills, T34, JS122, and British 6 and 17 Pdr anti-tank guns. This tabulated data shows the problem that the Tiger II represented: it could take out a Sherman A4 at 3.5km, whilst it was only vulnerable to return fire from 400-1,100m and even then only on the sides and rear. The Sherman, like the Cromwell and the Churchill, which were equally vulnerable, had no ability against the Tiger II's front armour. This is something to check one's favourite rules against and see how they agree. The mobility section attempts to persuade the reader that the common belief that this vehicle was mechanically unreliable is in fact a myth. A quite persuasive case is made that if the King Tiger was driven by a capable driver and run to the training manual's required maintenance and endurance levels, then it was as reliable as a Panzer IV and far more reliable than the Panther.

There is a short summary of operational use ó with numbers deployed and in running order across the several war fronts ó this is quite interesting and very useful from terms of numbers available at any one time, but lacks any detailed combat descriptions which would have been of value. Overall though a very handy introduction to the Tiger II.

The plates are mostly side or three-views of various models of the King Tiger with appropriate colour schemes for the front they were deployed to. There's a detailed cut-away drawing across two pages, and a couple of 'in action' paintings. The book also benefits from a good number of 1/76th scale detailed line sketches.

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MILITARY

NEW VANGUARD

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KINGTIGER

HEAVY TANK
1942-1945



TOM JENTZ HILARY DOYLE PETER SARSON