

**Flammpanzer – German Flamethrowers 1941-45**  
Osprey New Vanguard series No. 15 (1995)  
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Review by Jonathan Aird

This was the first in the New Vanguard series not to focus on a single tank or vehicle but instead covered the development by the German army of a whole class of flamethrower-equipped tanks and halftracks. Initial experiments using infantry weapons mounted in Panzer I turrets (firing through a machine gun mounting) during the Spanish Civil War led to the development of dedicated vehicles, and the concentration of field knowledge into a tactical doctrine for their use.

Initially Panzer I's were modified to produce a flamethrower-armed tank ó the most basic version utilised a combat engineers' backpack flamethrower installed to fire through the turret. The Panzer II (F) offered the first purpose-built *Flammpanzer*, which used a pair of flamethrower nozzles mounted at the front of the tank. Each nozzle was capable of 80 bursts of 2-3 seconds duration. The production numbers, distribution and examples of combat reports are all given. Whilst it was fairly successful at first, there were serious problems with continued use in Russia, leading to them being withdrawn in 1941.

The initial replacement was a batch of converted Char B1bis, some 24 of which were made over to *flammpanzers*. They in turn were superseded by converted and purpose-built Panzer IIIs, the development of which raised all sorts of knotty issues, such as maintenance, supply of flamethrower fuel, and the fact that when they started firing in anger they were highly visible, thus drawing the fire of all nearby Russian artillery. As the most important example of the *flammpanzers*, there is a detailed cut-away drawing on the centre pages.

The remainder of the book concerns various tank designs, each of which offered decreasing returns one way or another. Ten *Sturmgeschutz* (F1) were constructed from repaired Stug-Is, but there is no record of them ever getting into combat. The conversion of *Hetzers* to the *Flammpanzer* role was quite successful due to the strengths of the vehicle design ó but the useful flame range was considered too short. There was an attempt to produce a Tiger I flamethrower variant near the end of the war, but this failed to get anywhere in the general chaos of the collapsing Nazi war machine. The only real success was the Sd Kfz 251/16 halftrack flamethrower variant. At least 300 of these were built. Their success was due to their use not as an assault weapon but as a highly capable bolster to defence lines ó especially, it would seem, to mop up small numbers of enemy infantry who had broken through. There is a detailed combat assessment included in this book which highlights the brutal effectiveness of this weapon in the hands of a crew who were willing to be reckless in their attack.

The colour plates are either different views (side, front, above) of the various designs or highly evocative paintings of the vehicles deployed on campaign or in action ó the one of the Char B1bis conversion in full flame gives a real sense of how terrifying they must have been at close quarters. This is a fascinating book ó with lots of useful scenario material and thought provoking combat use reports. Recommended.

**Plates**

A: Panzerkampfwagen II (F) Ausf B & Panzerkampfwagen Bs(F) ó both Russia 1941

- B: Mittlere Flammpanzerwagen (Sd Kfz 251/16) Summer 1944 & Flammpanzer 38, January 1945  
C: Panzerkampfwagen III (F1) ó two views Italy 1943 and Russia 1943  
D: Panzerkampfwagen III (F1) ó detailed cutaway  
E: Sturmgeschutz (F1) 1943  
F: Panzerkampfwagen II (F) 1941  
G: Panzerkampfwagen Bs (F), 1943

