

Panther Variants 1942-1945

Osprey New Vanguard series No. 22 (1987)

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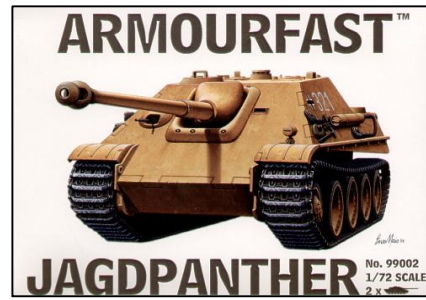
Review by Jonathan Aird

Curiously, this New Vanguard title arrived well before the Panther title proper -- which wouldn't turn up until NVG 67 and in some way is all the better for this. As a scene setter, the development of the baseline Panther design is adequately described in the first nine pages and the ultimate Panther Ausf G forms the detailed double-page cutaway drawing at the centre of the book. The rest of the book is full of fascinating variants and a plethora of designs that might have been including the Panther Ausf F which, despite alphabetically preceding the Ausf G, never reached production and represented a final refinement of the Panther turret design. All of these vehicle designs are accompanied by 1/76th scale side-on drawings to encourage the scratch-build modeller.

The first variant covered is the Bergepanther tank-recovery vehicle of the first of which were delivered as just a turret-less chassis and an improvised decking covering the turret ring. However, by mid-June of 1943 it had evolved to a fully equipped vehicle, having a stabilising spade and full winching system. Of somewhat greater interest to most wargamers would be the Jagdpanther tank-killer of which over 400 were built as a carrier for a long barrelled 88mm gun. There are good, and useful, details on the armament and the ammo capacity provided as part of the description of the type.

Next up is the Panther Ostwallturm of one of the easiest modelling conversions imaginable being, in effect, a Panther turret mounted on a metal box which was then either well set into the ground or placed in a good firing position and heavily camouflaged. Pictures of these improvised pillboxes surrounded by knocked-out tanks indicate their utility. A figure of eight tanks lost when knocking out a single Panther Ostwallturm is quoted as typical, which represents an excellent rate of exchange. Leaving this defensive success story behind, we move into the realm of the 'what-if?' with various designs for mobile artillery observation vehicles and proposals for self-propelled guns of the Panther chassis was to be mounted with a 12.8cm and even in one case a 15cm gun. All have adequate drawings to consider their production in model form as a nasty surprise for the Allies. The book is rounded out with a similar series of flak-panzer design proposals which ultimately were never fulfilled.

For gaming use, I have a lot of time for the Armourfast 1/72nd scale kits: they have the double attraction of being a hard to resist price (two tank kits for £7.50 is really very hard to beat) and also being incredibly simple to put together. Forget those fiddly old Airfix kits and the like with their two or three bits for each wheel and bits of equipment to be stuck on left, right and centre of these go together in minutes and, to my mind another really important point is that the end result is far sturdier than older (and, to be fair, more detailed) kits, making them ideal for use in gaming. Armourfast also do a Jagdpanther, again there are two in the box at the same cheap price. As models, they are detailed enough for most people I suspect, but certainly some modellers do go to town on super-detailing them of which is to rather miss the point of them, but then who am I to spoil another's fun?



Overall, this is a book that covers a lot of ground and it's a fascinating read, more enjoyable and more useful on the whole than a book on a single tank design tends to be. A recommended purchase for all World War II gamers.

Plates

A: Panther Ausf A (Italy 1944), Panther Ausf G

B: Bergepanther, Panther Ostwallturm (Italy 1944)

C: JagdPanther

D: Panther Ausf G (cutaway)

E: Panzerbeobachtungswagen (Artillery mobile observation vehicle)

F: 3.7cm Flakpanzer auf Panther-Fahrgstell (anti-aircraft variant that reached the stage of a wooden mockup)

G: Panther Ausf F

