I found this book in the Oxfam shop, and incredibly, it cost only a pound. It was one of those bargains you simply can’t pass by. Of course, I do remember this series being published back in the early 1980s, but I didn’t buy any of the three titles as I was working largely on extending my Cold War naval forces then. ‘Panzer Colours 3’ by Bruce Culver, was published by Arms & Armour Press in 1984 at £10, and in its 95 pages contained a remarkable 239 black-and-white wartime photographs and some 40 or so detailed paintings of German and captured AFVs in a wide range of colour schemes.

It might easily be called a sumptuous book, of immense use to the wargamer interested in almost any of the campaigns of WWII, but in fact this volume is rather tilted to the Eastern Front overall. There’s ample text and the book divides onto short sections, in this case dealing with Panzer Grenadier divisions, the Waffen SS, and Tiger tank units, as well as specific actions like Kursk. For me, the best section was about 20 detailed pages on Stug, self-propelled gun units.

The choice overall seems arbitrary, but who am I to criticise; at the time of its original publication, wargame publication was at its zenith and the book certainly would have appealed to the vast majority of WWII gamers, solo or otherwise. It had an eye to the military modeller too, as many of the photographs provided a very substantial amount of information and detail for building, and for super-detailing any number of the military kits which were on the market then. They were happy days.

Let’s talk about the 239 photos! Now, I’ve been a wargamer since the 1960s and a military historian since the mid ‘70s, and must have turned pages and scoured volumes in scores of libraries and museums across Europe. So when I
say that the bulk of the photos which Bruce Culver selects for publication are new to me, I’m not exaggerating. These are real action and campaign shots, not merely photos taken by Allied cameramen of knocked out post-battle AFVs. There are few of those, very few. The photographs of Tigers are a delight, and there are a handful of images of King Tigers and Jagdtigers too.

The colour plates are tremendously useful for any wargamer, but frankly I’d like to have seen more of them. Colour schemes and kit stowage are amply illustrated by the artist Don Greer, and I found the single plate of a Char B in ‘Prinz Eugen’ Division service in the Balkans stood out particularly. The book also contains a number of colour illustrations of divisional markings, which show the complexity of German WWII military thinking. Pages 76 and 77 show over 200 different vehicle markings for Hermann Goering units, which astonished me.

An excellent book in an excellent series, and a volume which did get a couple of reprints back in the 1980s and 1990s, but now if you can find one on the internet is marked up at a tremendous cost. My pound was clearly well spent, but I suspect that finding a copy of either of the preceding titles ‘Panzer Colours’ and ‘Panzer Colours II’ at the same price is going to be rather unlikely.

A great book.