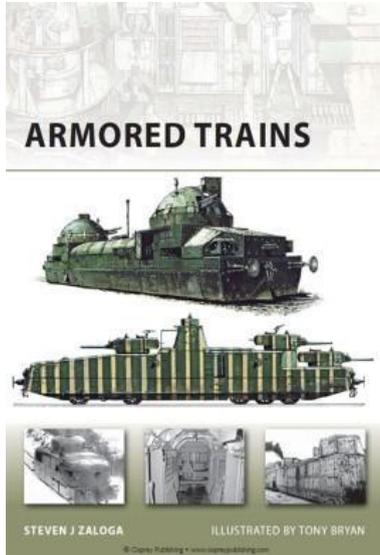


# New Vanguard 140 : Armored Trains

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## Review by Jonathan Aird



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This is a wonderful short survey of "real" armored trains, focusing mainly on the development in the early 20th century. Restricting the booklet to "real" is by way of excluding improvised armored trains developed for some local emergency and consisting of little more than a flatbed wagon with a field gun and sandbags for protection or with carriages with armour plates affixed to their sides. These were both too numerous and undocumented to say much more than that about them. Even those trains more deliberately developed would prove to have significant differences, as more examples of a supposed class of trains were delivered.

The short origins section deals with the first examples from the mid-19th Century where a common theme starts to appear which answers the question: Why armored trains anyway? The usefulness is two-fold: stopping someone else from ripping up the train track one wishes to use for other purposes, like troop movements, which can be regarded as a defensive use, and the offensive use to bring heavy weapons to bear in terrain that is not amenable to bringing them to battle in other ways. This leads to development being most enthusiastically undertaken in countries where roads might be poor and railways formed a key transport infrastructure such as Russia and China, with Poland being another significant adopter of these AFVs. Another interesting driver in adoption came through capture - Germany in WWII was less keen on developing their own armored trains, but once they found that they had a lot of captured ones at their disposal they would go on to find plenty of uses for them in the invasion of Russia and also as anti-partisan assets. An interesting aside is the fairly significant number of trains which would change hands multiple times through their careers.

A later development was the dedicated anti-aircraft train which could be rapidly deployed to where it was most needed. The other evolution was to reinforce the offensive capability by adding dedicated troop carriers and light armour that could act as an offensive thrust away from the train tracks.

The illustrations of trains - including the novel alternative of single armoured autonomous vehicles with one or two big guns, or alternatively tank turrets, which could sweep ahead of main trains or protect the rear - are wonderful, both through rare photographs and the excellent drawings by Tony Bryan. The awesome aspect of an armored train is conveyed by several "standard configurations" portrayed in side-view in what looks to be around 1/300th scale.

The Further Reading well illustrates the author's assertion that this is an overlooked topic in the study of AFVs - alongside a few books, many not in English, there are also many references to magazine articles from the likes of Military Modelling from several decades back.

Anyone interested in early 20th century warfare in Europe and China should find this very interesting (as would anyone who just likes trains!). It might lead to searching out sources of models to use in games - in 1/300th, anyone who makes WWII tanks and vehicles will probably offer at least one train. In 1/72nd, there is the temptation of plastic kits which are really much less expensive than one might have imagined - UM-MT models make several full trains (made up of perhaps an engine and six or seven armoured trucks) which start at around £80 and go up to just over £100, with armoured railcars for around £15-£30 depending on their size. Unimodel has a smaller range but can supply a train for about £65 with independent railcars for about £15. So, very tempting!