



IMAI ELEFANT

This is the first issue in about a year and a half, as my job required some brutal hours from me, so modeling went to collect dust for awhile. Projects that have previously been in 'Jake's Werkstatt' such as the WeCoHe Panther, Disney Nautilus, and Leopard 1A2 turret are still in-complete, but that is the order in which they are being worked. The Elefant and VK4501(P) will be done in parallel with emphasis on their completion along with the WeCoHe Panther. My work schedule is now where I can get back to modeling, so this is a little primer of what I'm going to be doing with this project to start things off.



This is the completed first Elefant.

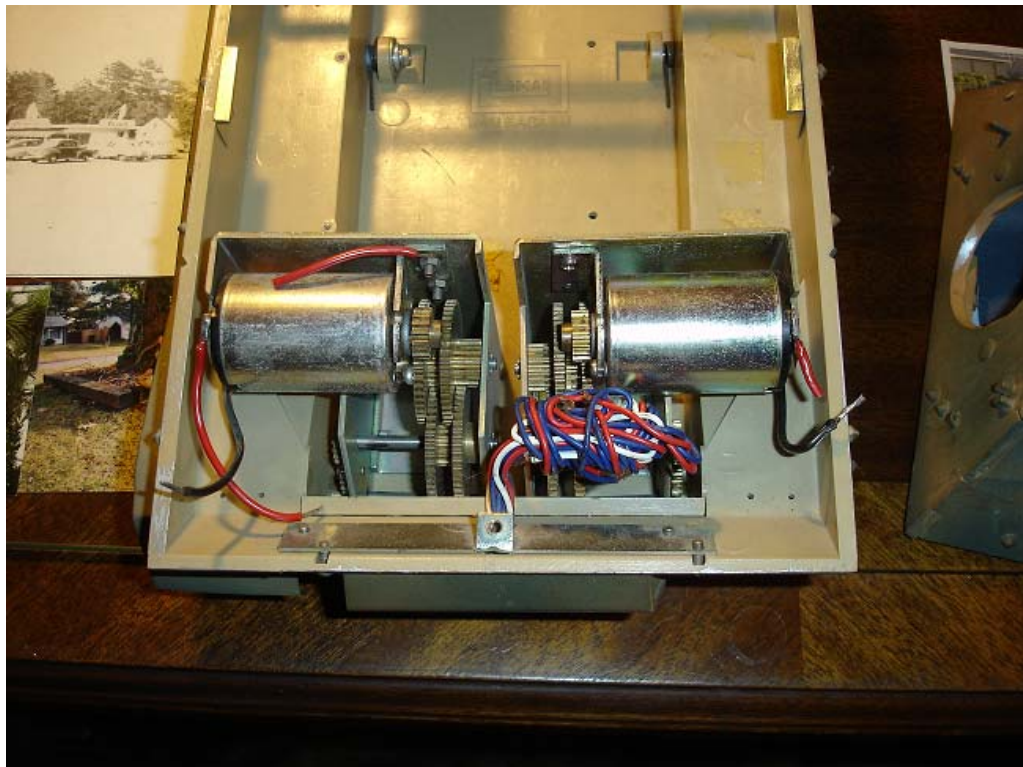
When I started back into modeling in 1996, I acquired an IMAI Elephant a little over a year later. Like a lot of the ones that you acquire, this one was a basket case, but luckily most of the parts were there, just in bags. It had previously been built fairly, but was in dire need of a complete overhaul. The tough thing then (this being early 1998), was that there was virtually no reference material for it. Just a few photos here and there, with some info that was historically-speaking pretty bad. Choosing reference material by authors was a big learning curve, and after awhile, avoiding the coffee-table references for photos only became the norm. With my first Elephant, it took eight months to get the thing together, while having to make a few parts to complete the project. One of the parts I had to talk with author Tom Jentz to get some reference for it for example. The good thing about this project was that it vastly increased my capacity as a modeler, as it presented a lot of learning curves in order to get the project done correctly. The one obstacle I choose not to hurdle, was that it was missing both gear sets, so I resolved myself that this would be a shelf-queen. Fast forward 10 years and that is a something that can be corrected easily with all that is available to fit from the market.

One big mistake was made completing the model, and it directly reflected to the lack of reference material available. The tank was painted in a sPjAbt 654th vehicle which entirely incorrect. Why? Basically, when the tanks were deployed to Russia just prior to the Kursk offensive, the tanks were in two battalions; the 653rd and 654th. Each battalion had 3 companies, and their numbering were the typical German tactical numbering system for tanks.



The new Elephant, looks rough, but this tank's in great shape

The 653rd's companies were numbered 1, 2, and 3, then there wasn't a 4th company, then the 654th's were numbered 5, 6, and 7. The tanks were called 'Ferdinand', and are very distinct from what they looked like almost a year later when they were called 'Elefant'. This was after the surviving vehicles were removed from the front line and overhauled. There were a little more than half of the originally surviving tanks left from the two battalions, and they were then placed into only the 653rd (the 654th would re-equip with Jagdpanther). When the tanks went through overhaul, a lot of changes were made, but basically, you can tell Elefants from Ferdinands primarily with the new commander's cupola (from Stug III production), Zimmerit, different track, and a bow machinegun that were added. Now prior to the Ferdinand. The tank was in a manufacturing competition in the 'Tiger' project. In fact it was the first to be designated 'Tiger', and the turret that we would later associate with the Tiger I, was designed for it. The tank was designed by Ferdinand Porsche, and he got license to build 90 hulls prior to the testing comparison between the Porsche VK4501(P) and the Henschel VK4501(H). Porsche was given a guarantee that he was going to get the contract, but the Henschel tank won out. These hulls had to be sold, so the Germans turned them into tank destroyers. They moved the drive train around, and installed the new PAK 43/L71 88mm gun in it. There were about 10 of the original hulls that had been configured with turrets, and they were supposed to have been sent to Afrika. Tiger unit SpzAbt 503 were manning up with them, but when the tanks were no longer going to be tanks, but tank destroyers, that unit was re-trained and manned with Tiger I. One of these tanks was not converted over to Ferdinand, and was issued with the unit when it re-deployed to Russia in early '44, and has tactical no# 003. For reference for these vehicles, I highly recommend Munch's Combat History of SpzJgrAbt 653, and the one for the 654th. The first one of course came out just after I completed the vehicle, which keeps the rule of thumb for modeling, 'if you need something, build it, then it'll come out', or something like that. That's happened so many times with me. So essentially, this Elefant has sat adorning one of my display cases since completion for the last 10 years, but that is going to change.



The gearboxes and tank were never run, so are in great shape.

I acquired my second Elefant from a friend who was getting out of the hobby. The tank had been purchased online from an overseas seller. When the tank arrived, it had been poorly packed, and had a crushed superstructure. No big deal, as it is still small potatoes when compared to the first Elefant's restoration. The tank was then lent to another friend as a reference while he scratched out his own. Since this tank is pretty much complete, it is going to be overhauled, and brought up to date, as a 653rd vehicle after they redeployed to Russia. Some upgrades will be needed to do so. The first will be with the lower hull. The footprint of each of the gearboxes is very small. The hull is quite thick, in fact most of the styrene of the vehicle is to scale thickness, which says something for some of the upper hull plates that were 100 or 200mm thick. These IMAI Elefants had a chronic problem with the plastic fracturing around the mounting holes in the bottom, due to the very heavy weight of the vehicle and the dynamic forces being applied while it's operating. A reinforcing plate to distribute these forces is a must, and will be on the order I did with the WeCoHe Panther, but I'm going to see if it can be installed on the inside of the lower hull's deck. I don't see this being a problem.



Since this tank was never run, no hull fracturing had occurred.

The next big upgrade will be to utilize the elevation and traverse mechanism out of the new Tamiya Jagdpanther. I had previously built a whole unit when I did my Jagdtiger (before WeCoHe came out with the aftermarket kit), so having a decent existing t&e mechanism will make this cake. Some of the parts for the Jagdpanther's t&e mechanism are fragile, so this will be upgraded to a more sturdier

material. One other major thing to be changed out will be the barrel/ muzzle brake. The barrel diameters are not correct, and the muzzle brake is entirely incorrect. The muzzle brake is an exact copy of the Bandai 1/15 Kwk 36 muzzle brake from their Tiger I. This is a big problem as the Elefant is 1/16, and the PAK 43's muzzle brake is far smaller in diameter. On my original Elefant, I retained it for stock originality even though I knew it was incorrect.



All the rest of the parts safely packed away and labeled.

With my second Elefant going to be an operating Elefant, I had a great opportunity to do something I've always wanted, and that was having a VK4501(P). So that is what direction I'll be taking with it. A few years ago, I was going to scratch one out, and started gathering stuff for it (and a Ferdinand), so I got a turret from the Tiger I, and had manufactured 2 sets of zinc metal tracks (\$600!). The turret will have to be altered in a few areas to get it right. Some different aspects of it are the commander's hatch, the stowage bin (from PzIV), and entirely different smoke dischargers are a few of the things. The entire upper deck and engine deck will have to be scratched out.

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