

# Pint-size Panther killer

Kitbashing an accurate 75mm HMC M8 /// BY COOKIE SEWELL



Cookie used four kits and savvy scratchbuilding to model a Howitzer Motor Carriage M8 and ammunition trailer the way he wanted. But it was worth the trouble to tell the story of how a Stuart-based M8 stood toe-to-toe with a German Panther tank — and won!

There are times when you come across a story you know is true but still can't believe — such as a Stuart-based assault gun taking out a German Panther. But as implausible as it seems, that one is backed up by the U.S. National Archives and a Presidential Unit Citation.

About 20 years ago, my wife and I were at the National Archives in College Park, Md., researching the combat history of Staff Sgt. Lafayette Pool, 3rd Armored Division, who was possibly America's top-scoring tankerman in World War II. While perusing the files of the 32nd Armored Regiment (Pool's unit), I came across the typed input of a recommendation for a

Distinguished Unit Citation for the Reconnaissance Co., 32nd Armored Regiment, regarding actions taken near Mons, Belgium, on Sept. 3-4, 1944. Central to the recommendation was the destruction of a German Panther — by a 75mm Howitzer Motor Carriage M8!

It was more than enough to inspire a model.

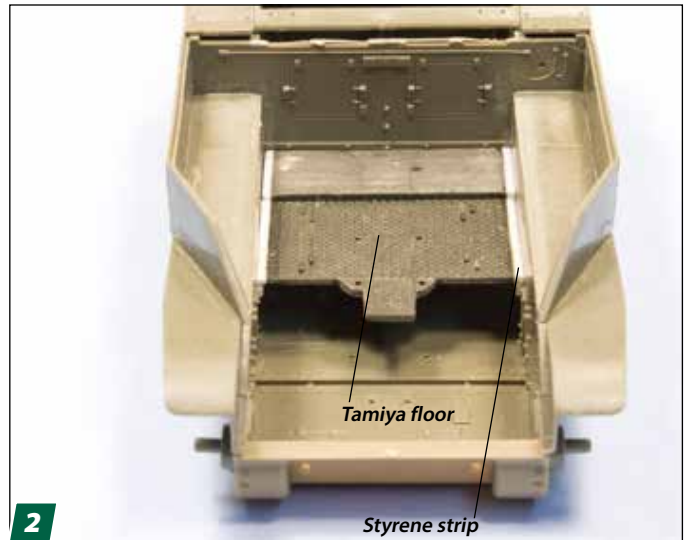
## Planning the build

Forty years ago, Tamiya released a kit of the HMC M8 based on its then-new M5A1. The turret was nicely done, and a simple interior was included, but Tamiya reused its M3 Stuart molds for the lower hull and tracks, rather than making a correct new hull pan and suspension. The result was a scale foot short; while the front end of the M5A1 and M8 were accurate, the compressed engine compartment made the tank look toylike.

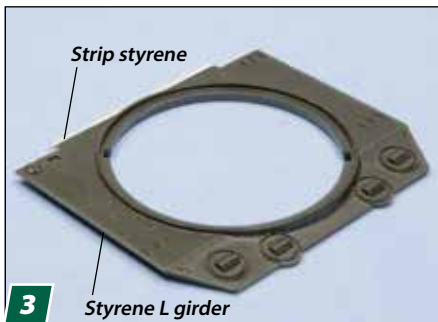
About 12 years ago, AFV Club released new U.S. light tank kits, including an M3A3, an early M5A1, and a late M5A1, plus workable T16 and T36E3 track sets



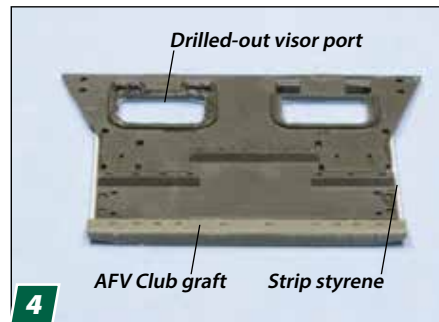
1 After losing the original parts, I dug up spare taillights and made guards from styrene L beam.



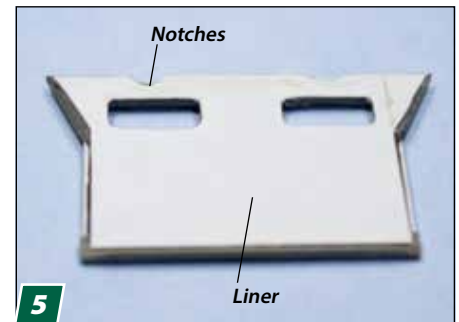
2 I cut the floor from the Tamiya kit and put in the AFV Club hull. Styrene-strip fillets faired it in.



3 The Tamiya hull roof part was nearly a drop-fit. I extended the rear with strip styrene and used styrene L girder for the deflector.



4 The modified Tamiya glacia, widened with strip styrene and with a graft from the AFV Club for the join: I drilled out the right-side visor for a replacement.



5 The sheet-styrene liner inside the glacia with notches at the edges fit the AFV Club bow: Some TLC and filing ensured it would mate with the roof.

for M3/M5 vehicles. These were all dimensionally accurate. However, a proper M8 kit did not appear.

There are aftermarket resin kits you can use to convert the M5A1 to an M8, although they can be costly and hard to find. But because I already had an AFV Club late M5A1, an AFV Club single-link T16 rubber track set, and two Tamiya M8s

to play with, I decided to try my own conversion. I also had a Tiger Model Designs resin kit of the M8's ammunition trailer (an M8 carried 46 rounds, and the trailer held another 93).

Armor expert and modeler Steve Zaloga had M8 interior photos plus some action shots. With these and other references, I decided to give it a try.

## Parts needed

The AFV Club kit comes prepared for an M8 conversion, as the glacia and front hull top are separate and lower-hull detail is present; Tamiya's glacia is part of the hull.

Tamiya's interior is greatly simplified, planned to be beneath a turret. But the hull floor is useful. By carefully trimming the sides, you can fit it to the AFV Club hull. The Tamiya mold provides an open driver's visor with the glacia, but I opened up the co-driver's visor as well (easy when you have two kits and don't have to make the second part). There was no driver's station in the Tamiya kit; with the open visors, that would have to be added.

The ammunition trailer was not a problem; I had only to fit the trailer's towing lunette (hitch) to the M8's tow hook.

## Construction

I started with the trailer; Tiger's kit went together quickly. I accidentally lost the taillights and their guards when I dropped it (we all have off days!) and had to replace them, **1**. Unless you want to pack the trailer

## Sources

Howitzer Motor Carriage M8 (two), No. 35110, Tamiya, [www.tamiya.com](http://www.tamiya.com)

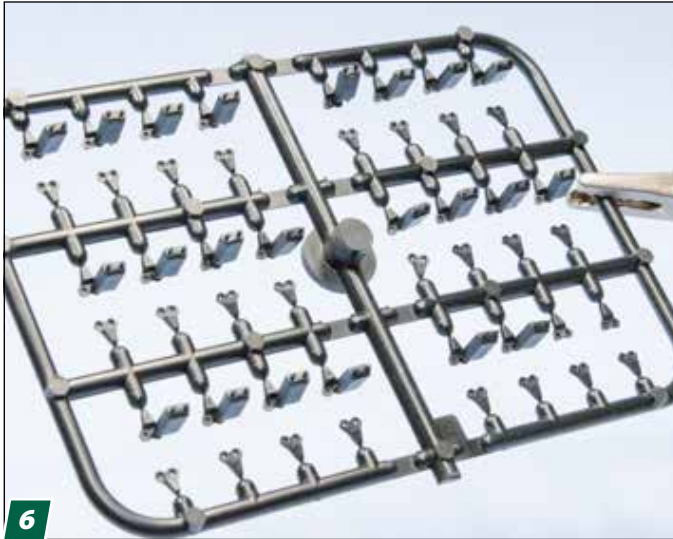
M5A1 Stuart light tank (late production), No. 35151, AFV Club, [www.afvclub.com.tw](http://www.afvclub.com.tw)

M5/M8 T16 workable track kit, No. 35019, AFV Club

M8 ammo trailer, No. 353001, Tiger Model Designs, [www.newtmd.com](http://www.newtmd.com)

U.S. machine gun set, No. 1394, Academy, [academy.co.kr](http://academy.co.kr)

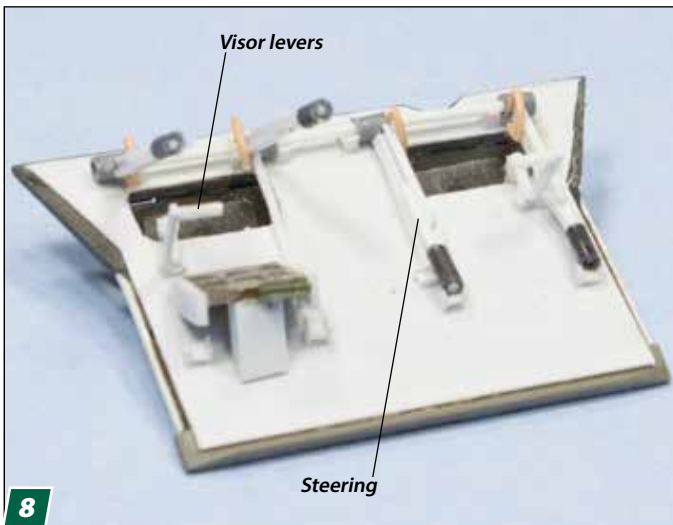
U.S. tank crew, Northwest Europe, 1944, No. 6054, Dragon, [www.dragon-models.com](http://www.dragon-models.com)



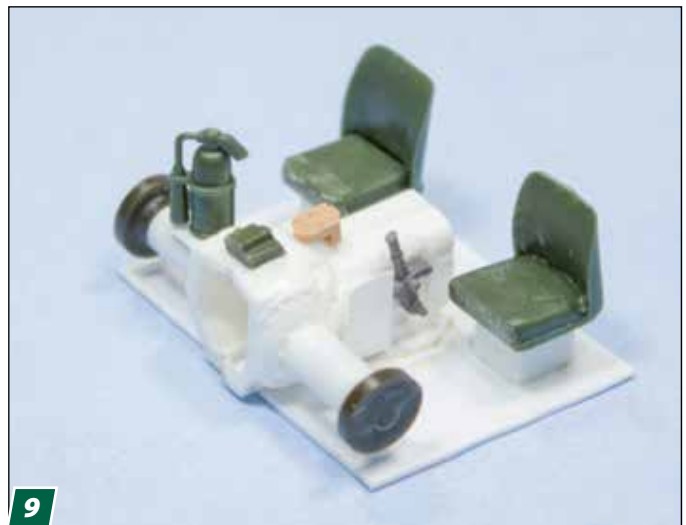
Here's one of the track-connector sprues with the pads glued in place. Make sure they are level (parallel to the bottom of the connector) and facing the same direction.



Now the track is coming together. When connecting the links, you can leave one connector attached to the sprue for easier handling.



The glasis interior completed: Note the two sets of steering controls (left one down, right one stowed) as well as the L-shaped levers for the visors.



Spare parts grace the drivers' compartment. The gear selector is for the M5A1's automatic transmission. The portable fire extinguisher is always handy thing to have around.

with ammunition, leave its hatches closed. I topped off the trailer with two canvas bundles from Value Gear. Later, I used a razor saw to open the M5A1's towing pintle and snapped it onto the M8's lunette.

I built the M5A1's lower hull according to instructions, then took the two Tamiya interior sections and began cutting. They formed the center floor but were missing an extension that juts over the transmission for mounting the ammunition ready rack. I cut a section to shape from the second hull floor and spliced them, then fitted them to the hull with styrene-strip fillets, **2**.

The Tamiya roof and turret race are a pretty good fit, but a bit short at the rear. I added styrene strip to include a styrene L girder to match the M8 profile, **3**.

The Tamiya glasis must be cut off and

modified to fit the AFV Club forward hull, **4**. It also needs the AFV Club joint strip at the bottom edge to be grafted onto it. This is the best way to get a good fit and the proper geometry between the roof and the glasis. It needed styrene strip at the sides to ensure proper width. I also cut out the right side view port by drilling four large holes and sawing the fixed one from the kit. I used a motor tool to burr the edges; liquid cement smoothed them.

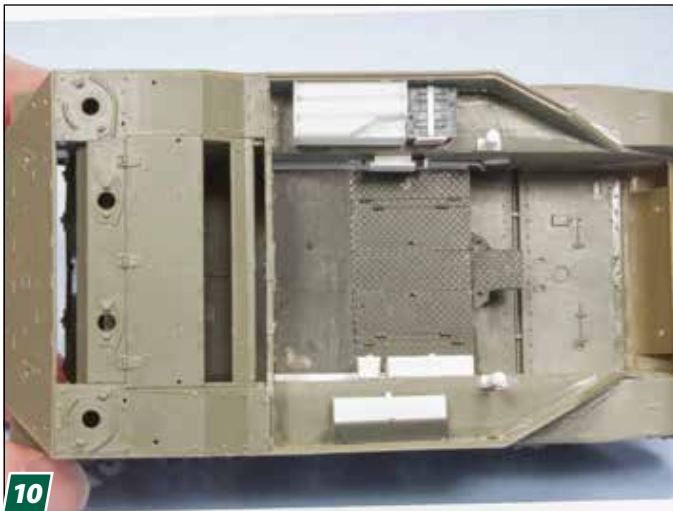
For simplicity's sake, I glued a section of .010" styrene sheet inside the glasis, leaving room at the edges so it would fit the notches in the AFV Club hull, **5**. I built the AFV Club suspension with no changes. But the AFV kit provides one-piece vinyl T36E3 tracks, and M8s used T16 tracks (flat rubber pads). So, I opted for the AFV

Club individual-link set. They are fiddly, to put it mildly: Cement one end to a link and let the other one hinge. This leaves them flexible, but far less likely to come apart! The easiest way is to cut off all the pads and trim them (a few strokes with a sanding stick cleans them up). The pads are then cemented to one link on the parts tree, ensuring all of them are going the same direction (they won't work otherwise), **6**.

Once the link/connector sets are dry, cut them off and trim them (same for the extra connectors). Then, using a heavy styrene strip (.125" x .080") as a jig, cement a con-

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Visit us to see the HMC M8 in action and get a closer look at its interior.



10

Interior showing the floor extension, left side ammo stowage, right side bins, and the two support pillars at the front. Styrene stock provided the junction box on the left side.



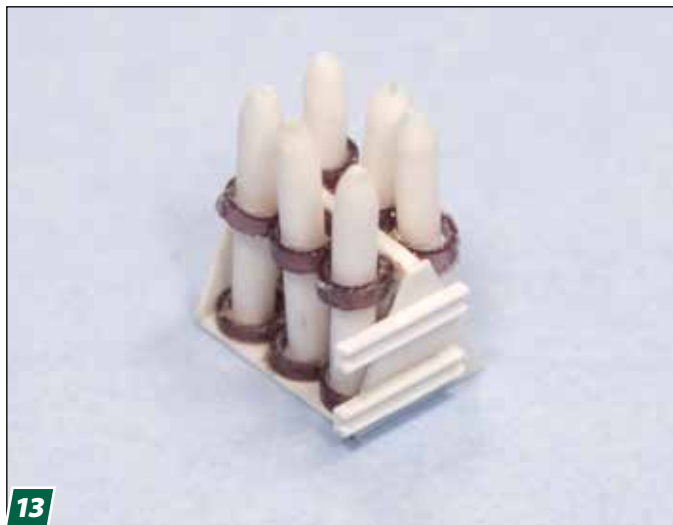
11

Completed ammo stowage assembly with 31 rounds in tubes. The dished tops are HE-FRAG; flat tops are WP/smoke. I saved this subassembly for later to make painting easier.



12

Making an artillery round is easy: Turn styrene rod at low speed and make sure you have enough to trim the shaped piece to length.



13

Not all of them turn out right, but the six finalists are now in their rack. They are loose, so they lean all over the place at this point.



14

The ready rack goes on the floor extension over the transmission. With interior elements in place, ensure that all items clear so the top fits properly on the hull.



15

The original Tamiya M8 turret, straight from the box. It was missing a lot, but was a good "mule" for test-fitting.



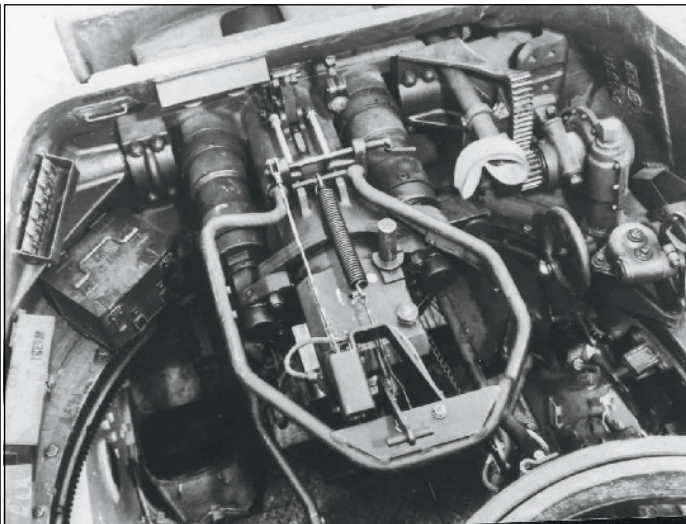
16



Modified gun assembly: The new brace on the left side between the guards is apparent in photos, as are the manual trigger and automatic breech opener. From the right side, you can see new braces and breech handle, and the eyeshade for the gunner's telescopic sight. Kadee coupler springs are just the thing for centering springs!



17



Initial turret assembly: The gun's upper plate has been left off to add bolts to the trunnion brackets. Same for the rear roof section to permit fitting parts to the rear, such as the M1 carbines and a hydraulic fluid can and pump.

nector to the same side of an end as the one previously attached while trapping a second link between. You can make as many as you want this way (I do 10-12, then connect them), **7**. Once the tracks were installed, I chipped up the pads with a cutting bit in a motor tool to show wear.

M5s and M8s had overhead steering controls. I scratchbuilt these and the levers for the armored view covers. When not in use, the control levers clip to the glacis as shown on the co-driver's side, **8**.

I scooped spare parts to detail the driver's compartment, including two seats, a transmission, axles and brakes, a portable fire extinguisher, a gear selector (the M5A1 had an automatic transmission), and a base plate, **9**.

Then I added details inside the lower hull, **10**. Thinly armored vehicles need supports to carry a heavy turret and gun, and the M8 had a pillar on each side behind the

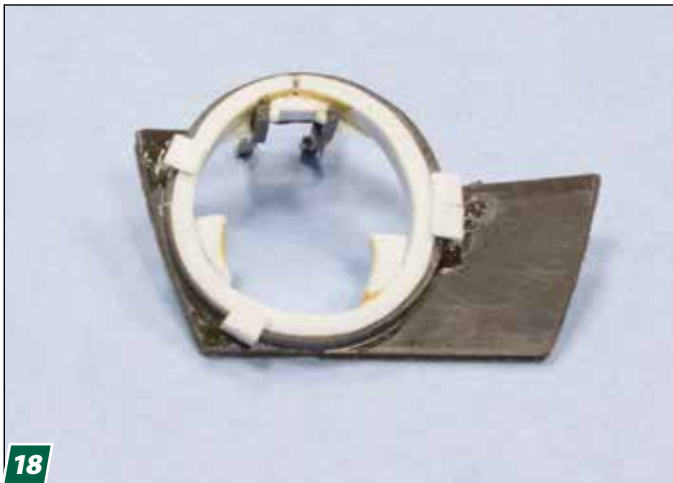
drivers. I used styrene rod and added hex bolt heads sliced from Plastruct hex rod. I had to use a motor tool to mill out room for the Tamiya turret race and mount to fit. I mounted two .50-caliber ammo cans from an Academy machine-gun set as well as some of the junction and fuse panels and wiring on the left side of the hull. Stowage bins were fitted to the right side.

Tamiya's kit provides ammo stowage inside the hull, but it's incorrect. Instead, 11 rounds are stored on the right side, and 20 on the left, **11**. I used styrene tubes but filled them with sections of rod and milled the depressions found on most of the containers (they are pressed cardboard, as if they were big Daisy BB tubes). I had some clear, tinted styrene tubing that was the proper size for

base mounts. Using .080" styrene tubing, I made 40 round containers; I mounted nine in the proper sponson slot on the left side of the hull. Each fits in a circular metal foot, and the locking straps are made of folding aluminum sections. The fire extinguisher goes between the ammo storage areas.

The M8's 75mm howitzer is a turret-mounted version of the M1 pack howitzer, which does not share any of the M3 or M4's 75mm ammo. So, none of the ammunition sets I had would do. But they were easy to make. I chucked segments of .080" rod in my motor tool and, turning them at low speed, used a sanding stick to shape the warheads' ogives, **12**. I needed six rounds: pointed for HE, blunt for WP/smoke, **13**.

**2.74**  
Factor by which  
a Panther tank  
outweighed an  
HMC M8



18

Underside of the turret roof with the new hip ring for the .50 caliber installed as well as the detailed gun mount. The hip ring is trapped by styrene L girders to permit rotation.



19

Test-fitting the turret roof ensures it is flush.



20

Assembly is nearly complete. All front details are now in place, though some are yet to be glued. The lights have been drilled out for M.V. Products lenses.



21

Tools and stowage include four spare track links. Grousers from the M5A1 kit were used, but I made new racks from styrene L girder. Each two-piece grouser is installed in odd-even fashion.

There is a ready rack for six rounds (your choice!) which goes on the floor extension over the transmission. I made the rack from plastic scraps and C channel and used more of the tinted tubing for holders, **14**.

I tested all the interior assemblies in the hull to make sure they would fit along with the glacis and upper deck. I had to gouge a setback in the ammo storage on the left sponson to accommodate the Tamiya turret race I had added. Having verified all the

### Thanks!

To Steve Zaloga for the support and reference photos for the model, also to Timm Haasler for the detailed information on the short history of Panzer Brigade 105 and Panzer Abteilung 2105.

fits, I proceeded to the turret.

### Let's talk turret

I had started to build one of the Tamiya M8s about 12 years ago, so I had a finished turret as a reference. A lot was either missing or wrong: key parts of the gun installation, turret storage, the reinforcement pillars inside the rear of the turret, stowage for small arms and grenades inside the turret, a can of hydraulic fluid, and stowage for two M1 carbines at the right rear. And, for some reason, Tamiya provided two HE rounds in a simulated rack, **15**.

Consulting other references, I modified or added parts, **16**. I carefully bent the guards to the right profile and added new braces to each side in place of the kit braces. I made the trigger and breech opening from plastic scraps and rods, as well as two centering springs from Kadee HO scale

model railroad couplers. The telescopic sight was modified with a new eyeshade and forehead brace.

Once the gun was installed in the turret and the basic parts assembled — periscopic sight, seats, race, sides and rear — I added further detail, **17**. Two carbines were extracted from my spare parts (old Tamiya WWII weapons with clips removed). Ammo cans from the Academy machine-gun set were added at the rear of the turret, and bolt heads were sliced from Plastruct hex rod and added to the sides of the gun mount to replicate trunnion bolts. I added two support pillars, similar to those used in the hull, to the turret rear roof section. Other items include a rack for Thompson submachine-gun clips at the front left and grenade bins on the inside left of the turret. Hopefully, the details match the real deal.

I removed the kit machine-gun hip ring

## Scratch one Panther

**BY SEPTEMBER 1944**, German forces were retreating in disarray while Allied forces were trying to block or eliminate them before they could reach the Siegfried Line and Germany.

To that end, the U.S. 3rd Armored Division was deployed around Mons, Belgium, where the 32nd Armored Regiment was guarding key junctions west of town.

On the morning of Sept. 4th, a German heavy tank was heard approaching as it led 150-200 foot soldiers. Vastly outgunned, American armored reconnaissance cars held their fire and were not detected.

An HMC M8 also observed the Panther, yet it too escaped notice. The M8's stubby 75mm howitzer could provide fire support — but it was no antitank weapon. Still, the American commander decided to attack before being discovered by a tank that could single-handedly decimate his entire company. He ordered an HE-FRAG round, and from about 150 yards the gunner succeeded in blowing

off the tank's right track. At such close range, the report of the gun and the shell were virtually simultaneous and provided no direction.

The German commander stopped and swung his turret from side to side, looking for the unseen assailant. The German troops had gone to the ground and, likewise, saw nothing. After a few tense minutes, the tank commander ordered the loader to get out and check the damage, probably figuring they had struck a mine. The loader opened the rear hatch of the turret to avoid silhouetting himself against the skyline. Incredulous, the American commander ordered his gunner to put an HE-FRAG round through the open hatch.

That he did, and the Panther blew sky-high. The Germans behind the tank panicked and ran back down the road through a gantlet of small-arms fire from American reconnaissance elements.

The U.S. National Archives holds a lot of information on



**The vehicles, but not the protagonists of this particular story. Hasty camouflage suggests the Panther was being repaired.**

the 3rd Armored, but usually it is for the combat elements — and the heavier the action, the briefer the reports from the combatants. However, this action was typed up for a Distinguished Unit Citation (now Presidential Unit Citation), which troops display as a blue ribbon with gold surround on the right breast. It was awarded to them in July 1945.

Recent information has filled in some of the blanks. The heavy tank was not a Tiger as initially reported (many

Americans called all German tanks Tigers), but a PzKpfw V Panther, apparently from Panzer Abteilung 2105, Panzer Brigade 105, 9th Panzer Division. The troops behind it were a mixed bag of paratroopers from the 6th Fallschirmjäger Division, Panzergrenadiers, and regular infantry. They were most likely captured and tallied as the 3rd Armored took 2,432 prisoners, killed or wounded another 227, and destroyed or captured 67 vehicles from various German formations.

from the turret roof with a utility knife and made a new ring from curved styrene strip and .015" styrene cut to form a circular base plate, **18**. The kit mount was modified to match the reference materials; I installed styrene decorated by more bolt heads to replicate the real fitting. Hip pads were cut from thick styrene, sanded to shape, coated with "glue soup" (sprue soaked in liquid cement until it turns syrupy) and installed. Finally, I mounted the ring using sections of styrene L girder to trap it while letting it rotate. When the roof assembly was finished, I test-fitted it with the front armor plate, **19**.

### Step back outside

On the hull exterior, I added tools, stowage, lights, light guards, spare track, and other details front and rear, **20**. I used the kit's light guards rather than photo-etched parts, but I did thin them a little. I ground out the headlights to accept M.V. Products lenses later, after painting. Once all this was done, I dry-fitted everything prior to painting, **21**.

I prepared all major sections and subassemblies for painting, then airbrushed



**22**

The entire model after its coat of Floquil gray primer. I forgot to flip the glacis over for primer, so I had to go back, reload the airbrush, respray the glacis ... well, you'll see the rest in Part 2 as I finish this Howitzer Motor Carriage M8.

Floquil gray primer (no longer available) to give good footing to the acrylic paint that would follow, **22**. Of course, when I put everything back together to photograph this step, I realized I had missed painting the outside of the glacis plate!

Oh well ... the paint was still mixed and waiting. In the next issue, I'll show you the

rest of the finish for this plucky pint-sized Panther killer! **FSM**

### Don't miss Part 2!

Now that Cookie's got it together, see how he painted and weathered his M8 in the February issue of *FSM*.