

Italian Medium Tank
Carro Armato M11/39
Tamiya Kit 35034 1/35 Scale
with Commanders Conversion Set
by Al Glew



This one started about 15 years before its completion (maybe) in 2007. Our club used to do Mall Shows in conjunction with many other Rochester area aviation organizations at Greece Town Mall and later at Greece Ridge Center during the 1980's and 90's. Like many club members, I had a few kits I worked at the Mall Show and then packed away for the rest of the year, only to be brought out again next year for the next show. The basic tank kit of the **Carro Armato M13/40** was one of mine. It was nearly finished when the last Mall Show ended, but it remained in the back of my mind for many years.

I had always wanted to model the predecessor version, **Carro Armato M11/39** with its curious sponson mounted main armament and twin machine gun turret. Lack of references kept it just a pipe dream, but over the years I slowly collected data from an old issue of AFV- G2 (Vol 6 No 9),

a photo in a Time-Life book on Desert Warfare, another back issue of Ordnance with an article on how to do the conversion, and a few years later I lucked out and got a Commanders conversion kit directly from the source, Ted Paris, at a bargain price at ROCON. This little box sat on the mantle of my apartment on Hamilton Street for 4 years, a constant reminder of work unfinished. Meanwhile, with the Mall Show's demise, the original kit had been packed away and misplaced.



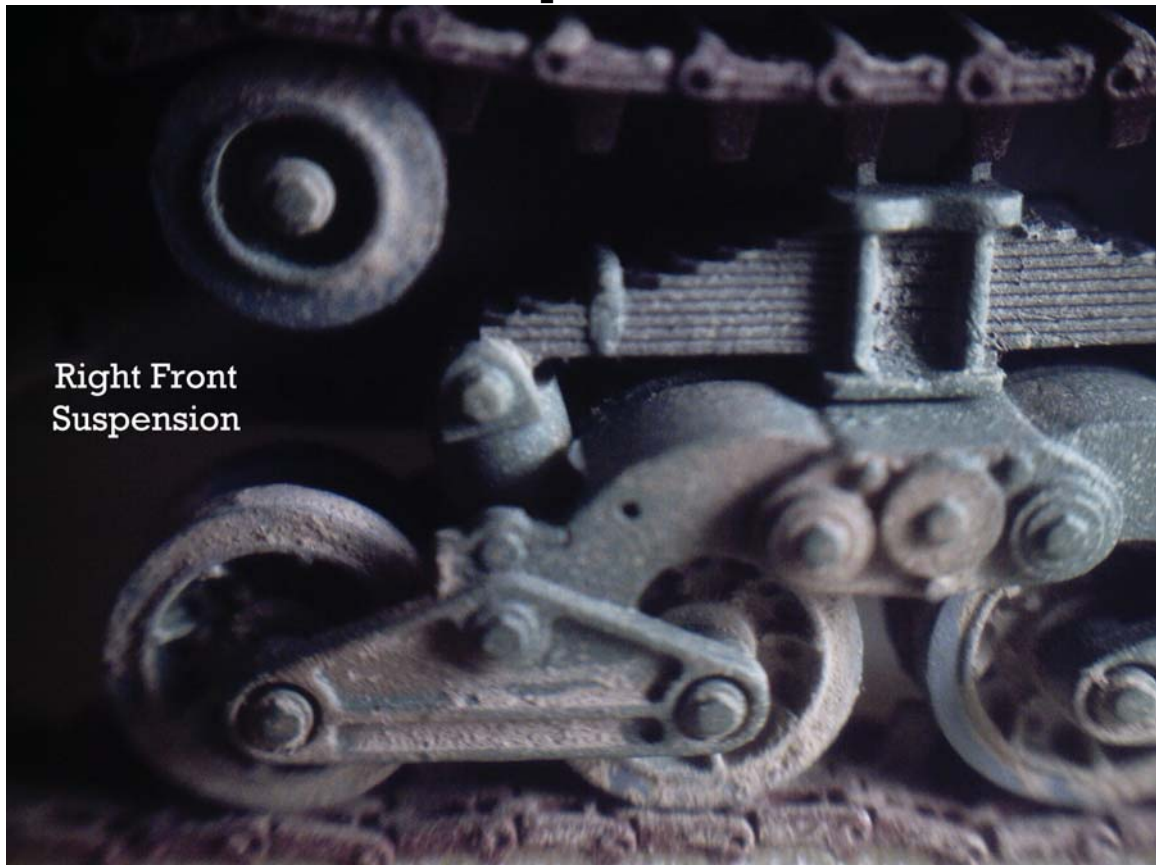
In 2001, Squadron came out with Italian Medium Tanks in Action, by Nicola Pignato with 5 pages of photos, scale drawings and data, and 2 magnificent color plates by Don Greer. They followed up in 2004 with Italian Armored Vehicles of World War Two by the same author with 3 more pages of photos and text, a drawing of the interior of the main armament area, and 2 more color plates. I was quickly running out of excuses for not working on this model. The clincher came in the Spring of 2006, when the theme for ROCON was announced as **Made in Italy**. A lengthy search of my storage locker turned up a box marked "Mall Show 1994" and inside was the nearly completed **M13/40** kit, the basis for the project. With 5 months 'til the show, all that remained was to mate it with the conversion set.

Rivets in General

This tank is obviously covered with rivets and/or bolt heads and proper representation of this detail could make or break the model. Not to fault Commanders, their effort at a conversion kit for this model was, at the time commendable. Over the last 10 years, however, we have gone from dearth to (relative) wealth of reference material and available kits on this subject as well as Italian tanks in general. Unfortunately there are a number of detail

errors in the Commanders conversion set, mostly concerning number and location of the many rivets and bolt heads. Consultation of drawings and photos reveals differences even between individual tanks in the **M11/39** series. The In Action book indicates that 100 vehicles were built, while AFV-G2 quotes 73 as the total. Whichever figure is correct the production run was very small by American standards, and since a average of 9 tanks was built each month, there was plenty of room for variations and updates during the run.

Suspension

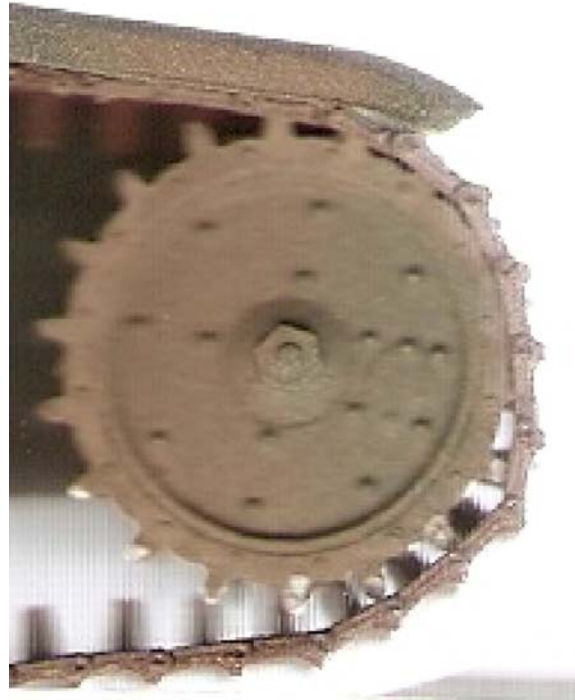


The basic suspension of the Tamiya kit is used with some modification to the rear idler. The face of the rear idler is totally wrong for this older version of the tank. The face of the existing idler was sanded flush overall and a new face was made by taping a sheet of clear styrene over a copy of the scale drawing. This avoids errors which creep in when transferring dimensions. For me, it works great as long as you are dealing with flat or reasonably flat surfaces. Every hole needed was drilled out first and then the face was cut out to size, all while still taped down. Grandt Line rivets or bolt heads could be used but I made mine by inserting stretched sprue of the

appropriate diameter, supergluing and then clipping them off to uniform height with a small scissor.



Idler



Sprocket

Drive sprockets were replaced with the excellent metal castings which came with the Friulmodel tracks.

Hull

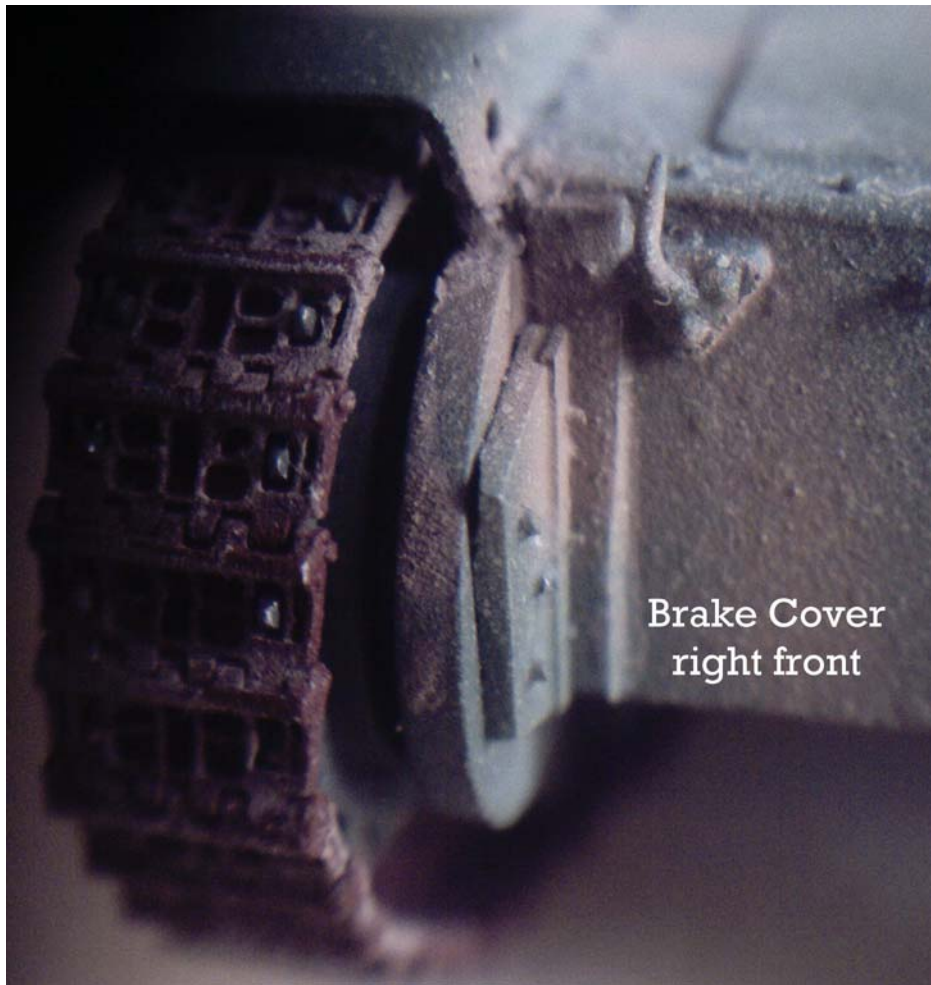
The basic hull was used from the Tamiya kit. The curved Tamiya front plate had to go however, as the **11/39** front plate was flat. A piece was provided in the Commanders set, but because the tow ring was positioned incorrectly and the number of rivets was wrong, I decided it would be just as easy to start from scratch. A new plate was cut out of scrap styrene, holes drilled and all the rivets inserted, glued and cut off to height.



Front Plate with Tow Ring

A tow ring was bent from wire and superglued to a square base piece which was then drilled for rivets and positioned more accurately, according to references.

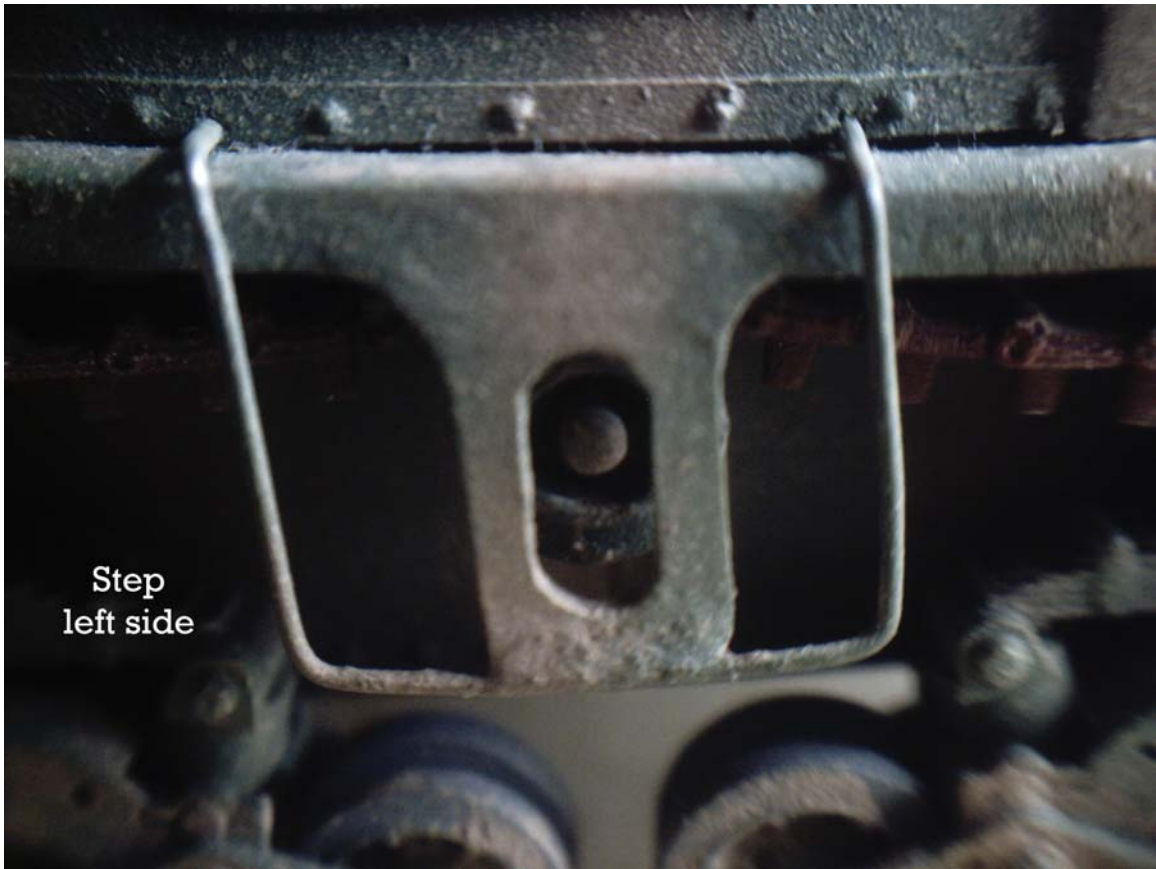
Tow hooks were bent from the points of 2 straight pins, cut off, and mounted to triangular base pieces which had been previously cut from sheet styrene, drilled for rivets, rounded off at the corners and glued in place. To get a better bond on these 3 items, which had a very small gluing area, the rivet holes were carried through into the front plate and the sprue passed deep into these holes for added strength.



The oddball trapezoid shaped covers for the brakes were next made up, along with the angle irons which support them. Now the fun really begins; trying to line all these pieces up with the hull and the sloping front armor which is attached to the superstructure as one item. After many hours of fiddling, filing, test fitting, blue language and repeating the cycle over several days, everything was reasonably in position and ready for bonding.

Fenders

Kit fenders required some modifications. At the front inside of the fender there is an oval opening which was probably used for manipulating the tracks with a crowbar during maintenance. This is simply not there, so I drilled 4 holes at the corners of the opening and removed the plastic in between with knife and file, until the proper size and shape was obtained.



Step
left side



The other big difference is the pattern of the steps. Mercifully these are provided along with spares, in the Commanders set. They are also one of the best items in the set. Edges were bent to shape from wire and superglued on, then holes were located and drilled on the sides of the superstructure box and the completed steps inserted and glued into place. Before the superglue set hard, the flat part of the step was sanded to match the contour of the fender.

Superstructure

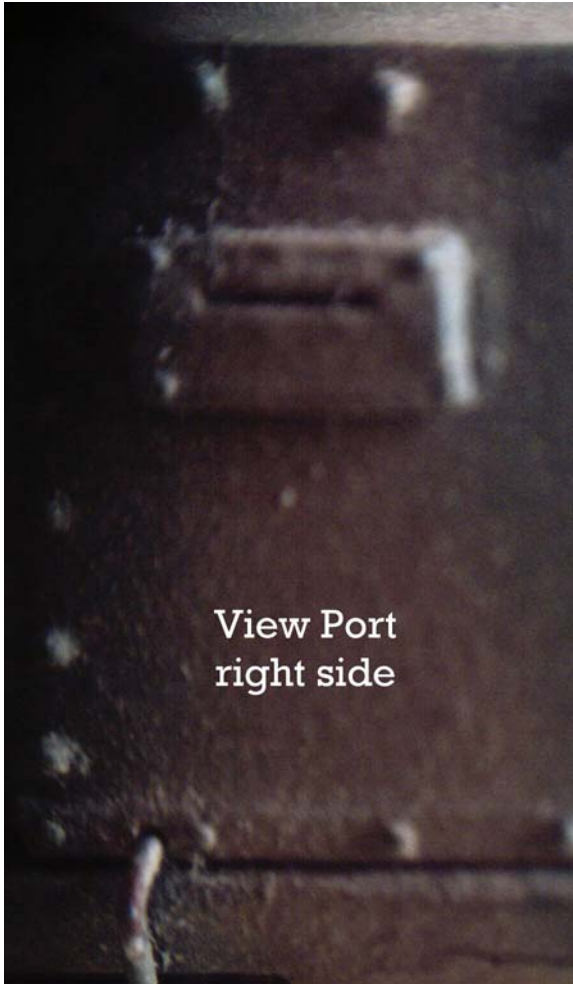
The superstructure is one massive block of solid resin. This tank would look great with interior detail visible through the large right side entry hatch, but it was beyond my abilities to hollow it out. Indeed, anyone wishing to tackle this might be better off scratchbuilding this portion. The size and shape are quite different for the two tanks, and little help could be found in the Tamiya parts. The biggest obstacle here would probably be the curved front of the main gun sponson.



Many rivets and boltheads had to be added or relocated. Most of these were worked using the same technique described in the **Suspension** section. The 5 largest boltheads on the tank, located on top of the sponson for the main gun were not even there. A shallow hole was drilled in each location and a small glass bead was glued in place.

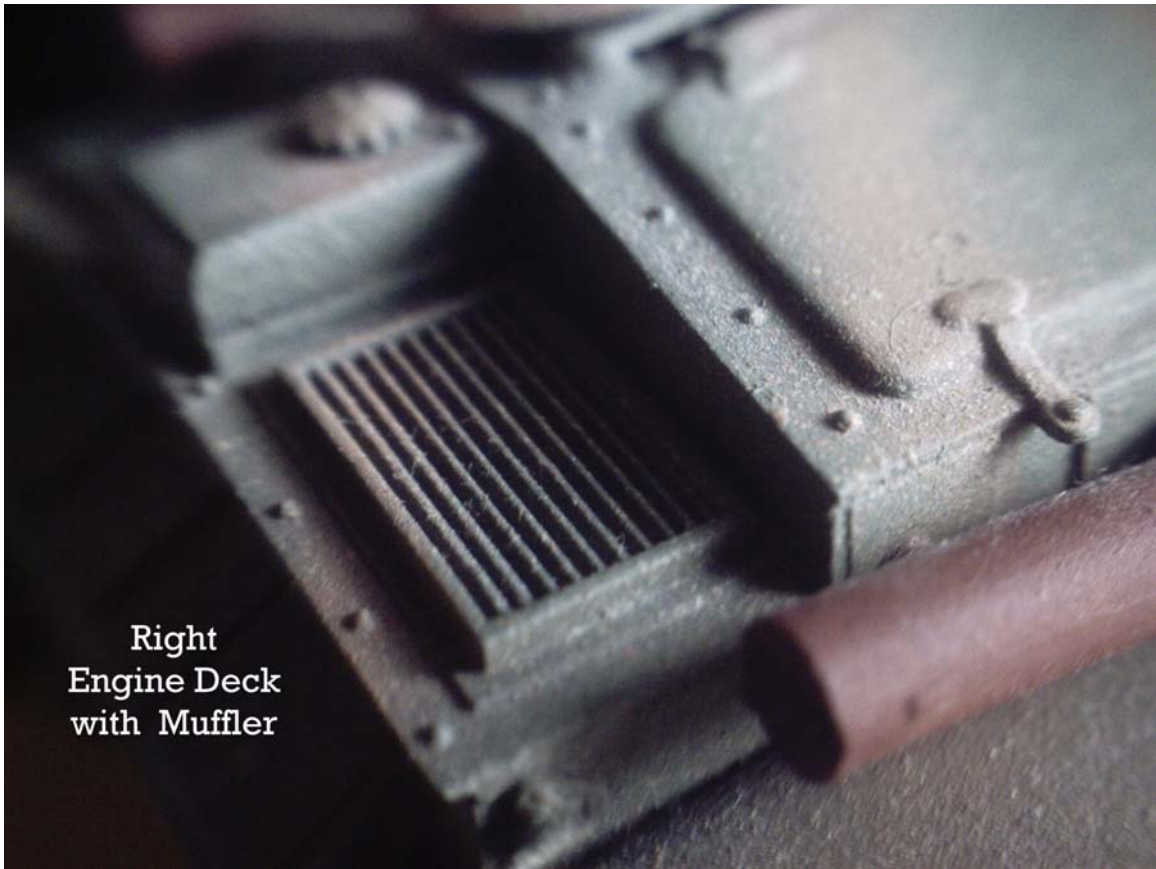


Sponson top showing
the large rivets



Extra viewports were fabricated for the sides of the superstructure. From the best example, an impression was taken in aluminum foil. This was filled from the back with baking soda and a few drops of superglue applied, causing instant filling and curing. The part was then sanded flat on the back and glued into position.

Engine Deck



Right
Engine Deck
with Muffler

At some point in the production run, the louvers were changed from fore and aft to side to side. I didn't worry about it, I just used what came in the kit. This would be a good item to be included in a photo-etch set. There are 2 pairs of spare road wheels; I left one off and modeled an empty spindle, as though one pair had already been used. Tow hooks on the side panel behind the muffler were modeled in the same manner as on the front plate (see **Hull** section). Pioneer tools, mufflers and storage boxes from the Tamiya kit were used as is. The radiator cap on the expansion tank was sliced off and moved to a more forward position.

Main Armament



Due to the parts sitting in the box for many years, the narrow end of the resin barrel on the main gun had developed a curve which defied all my attempts to straighten it. The main gun from the kit was appropriated and the end portion modified to fit the resin recuperator. The wide muzzle end was removed, a hole was drilled in the end of the barrel and the gun was mounted at an upward angle perhaps a bit higher than most of the reference photos.

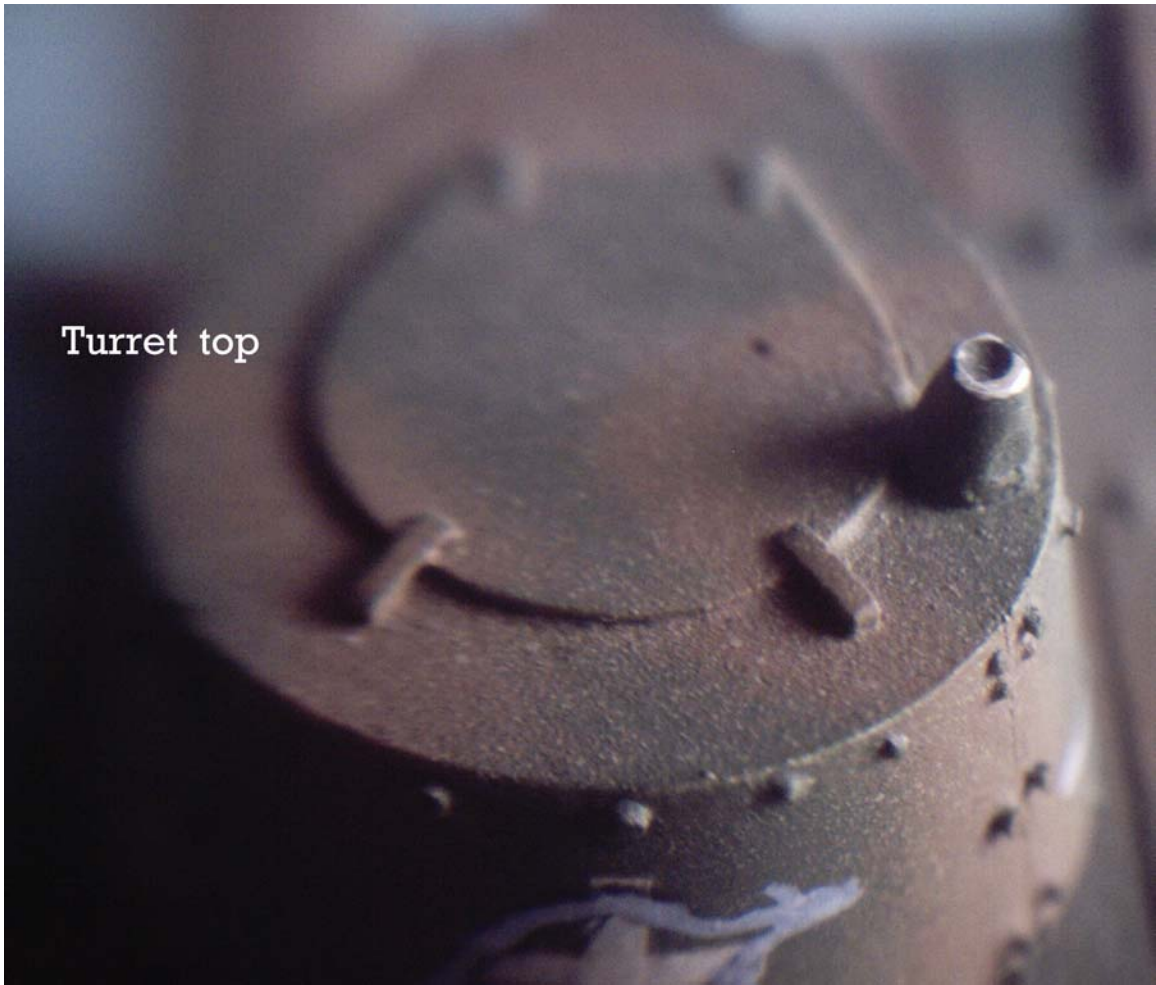


Main Gun
Mount

Turret

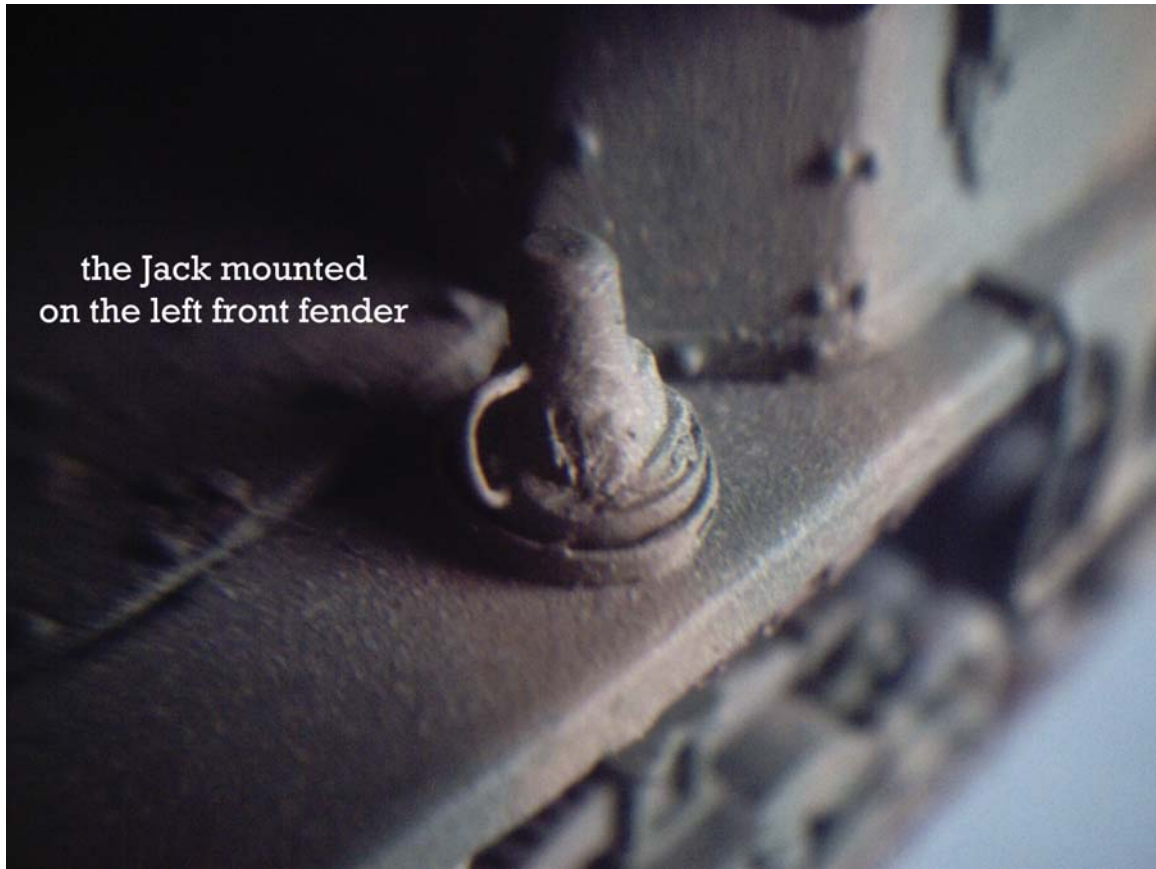


The resin turret was pretty good and was used without much modification except for replacement and relocation of most of the rivets and boltheads. The machine guns did not fare well during their years of rattling around in the box. The hull mounted machine guns in the Tamiya kit had cast armor protectors and were incorrect for the earlier tank. The mantlet was usable but the flat plates all around it were replaced with sheet styrene scrap that I had lying around. New barrels were fashioned by stretching a piece of small diameter plastic tubing, cutting to length and inserting into holes drilled into the mantlet. Fortunately it was black in color, as it did not take paint well.



Turret top

Other Details



A jack was made up from scraps of sprue. The jack holder was fiddled together from strips of brass taken from the unused border strips of a photoetch fret. The jack is mounted on the fender at the left front corner of the superstructure.



The headlights were quite a trial. I tried several methods for getting a good looking reflector, silver paint and mylar lining, but it just didn't look right. Finally I went back to the references and I noticed that some of the tanks in a combat situation had the lights either broken or painted over. In the end I went with painting over the lenses.

Painting

The paint scheme chosen was the first one on page 25 of Italian Armored Vehicles of World War Two, a tank of the 1st Medium Tank Battalion at Sidi Barrani, Egypt, September 16, 1940.

Decals



Spare Road Wheel Spindle and License Plate

A license plate was made up by cutting apart and rearranging the numbers on the kit decal. None of the references listed actual registration numbers for the M11/39 tank, so I just went with a much earlier number than anything in the books for the M13/40.

Kit decals were used for the other markings. No additional decals came with the Commanders conversion set.



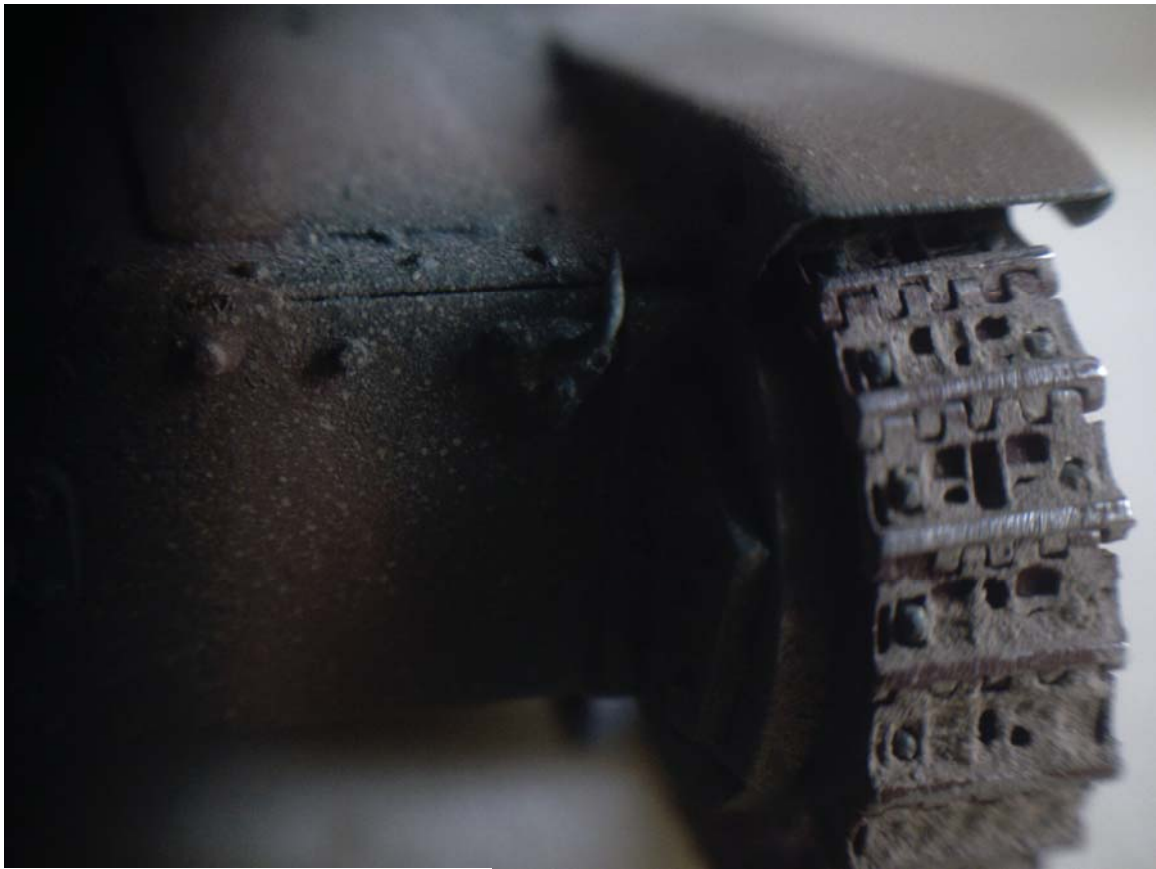
Weathering

Tracks



Although the kit supplied flexible tracks are actually quite nicely molded, I used the excellent Friulmodel ALT-18 cast metal tracks from Hungary. This was my first experience with these tracks, and it was kind of a last minute deal having got hold of them about 2 weeks before the contest. While a bit tedious to assemble and probably not to everyone's liking, I found the end result well worth the effort and a vast improvement over the kit supplied vinyl tracks or any styrene single link or link and length type tracks I have assembled in the past.

See the **Hints and Tips** section for suggestions about how to assemble these tracks.




 Friulmodel – 8142 Úrhida,
Nefelejcs u. 2. Hungary

M11/39 M13/40
 SEMOVENTE M40 75/18
 M40 M13 M14/41 M15/42 M42




ATL-18


220 links, two sprocket wheels in 1/35 th scale
 and a wire to obtain the track pivots.

General instructions for correct process of metal tracks

1. First, check all the links. Note: left and right side or additional links are treated separately. You can find a detailed assembly instruction guide attached to the tracks.
2. Casts have to be trimmed from occurring barbes by a sharp craft knife. After that, you have to drill the bore in the link by a 0,5 mm drill. Note: you needn't drill the bore to its end open. Bore has to lead beyond the next connected link, but does not open on the other side of the link. That's the reason left and right side are separated.
3. Wash the casts slightly in warm water with a few detergent.
4. Cut pieces some mm longer than link bores from the attached wire, these will be the track pin.
5. Push these into link bores connecting them together.
6. Drop a few cyanoacrilate adhesive into closed bore to fix end. When the adhesive fixed remove the excess part of pin.
7. Painting.



Base



I felt this model needed a base. For subjects like this I prefer a freeform shape, so I cut one out of foamcore board. This was painted a basic light tan. Flat paint was used to encourage the groundwork to stick. A coating of thinned white glue was applied and sprinkled with real life dirt. Before the white glue set up, an actual track run was impressed into the muck and continued off the edge of the base to give the impression that the tank had come to a stop there. This was set at a slight angle to continue the freeform theme. An assortment of large and small rocks was placed around the base at random, a few bare spots touched up with more and other areas given a slightly darker brown color.

Second Chance at a Theme Award

Trophies

She finally won a prize at ROCON 28 in September 2007, but I can't remember if it was a 2nd or a 3rd. She took 3rd at SYRCON in October 2007.



Tom H Johnson Photo November 2007

Comments or Questions email blackhawk1939@yahoo.com
Mention Italian Tank in the subject line

January 12, 2008 to be continued