

# M6A1 Heavy Tank "Black Label Series"

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**Scale:** 1/35

**Company:** Dragon Models

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The M6 Heavy Tank was designed and produced in small numbers during World War II, but never saw combat. The armament consisted of a single, vertically-stabilized 3 inch (76.2 mm) gun and a coaxial 37 mm gun in a single three-man turret with both manual and electric traverse. The turret had a commander's cupola identical to that of the M3 Medium Tank. Additional armament consisted of two .50 caliber machine guns in a bow mount (operated by the assistant driver), two .30 caliber MGs in the front plate (fired electrically by the driver), one .30 caliber in the commander's cupola and one .50 caliber in a rotor mount in the right rear of the turret roof (operated by the loader).

By 1942, three prototypes were built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. The prototypes differed by power



## The contents of this box include:

- 1 Main lower hull, packaged separately.*
- 11 sprues in soft, light grey plastic, packaged separately.*
- Four runs of DS Track.*
- 1x6-page blue and white instruction sheet with 15 steps.*
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plant, transmission and hull assembly method - one had welded hull and two cast hull.

However by the time the M6 was ready for production, the Armored Corps had lost interest in the project. The advantages the M6 offered over medium tanks - it's much thicker armor and slightly more powerful gun - were offset partly by the shortcomings of the design - such as very high silhouette,

awkward internal layout and reliability problems - and partly by logistical concerns. By the end of 1942, the Armored Corps were sure that the new M4 Sherman gave adequate solution for the present and the near future, while being reliable, cheap and much easier to transport.

On 14 December 1944 the M6 was declared obsolete. Only forty units were

produced and they never left US soil. Several toured the United States for propaganda purposes, where they gave performance displays (such as car crushing) at War Bond drives and the like. All were eventually scrapped except for a single T1E1 which is on display at the United States Army Ordnance Museum, Aberdeen, Maryland.

The kit comes with a single scheme (Fort Knox, 1942) represented using the ubiquitous Dragon blue-and-white three-view drawing, and a very small (but perfectly registered) sheet of decals from Cartograph of Italy.

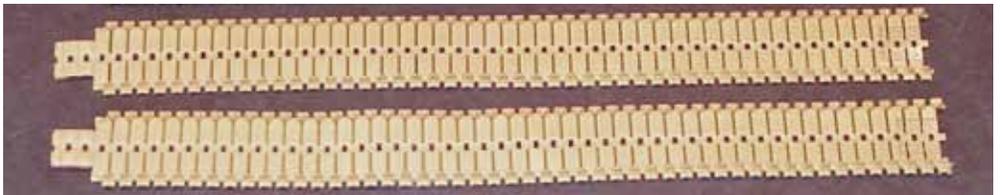
### The Instructions

This is a brand new kit from Black Label for a vehicle that had only a single version built so every part in the kit will be used (!) – a first for me and Dragon. There are some minor inconsistencies in the instructions and these are pointed out where needed, below.

### Things to consider before starting:

The build sequence is pretty straight forward: lower hull and bogeys first, the main deck and finally the turret and gun.

The turret can be built separately and dropped on last, as well as the track, which will easily slide over the side skirts at the end.



The build-it-all-and-then-paint-it approach will work (it's what I did) but it still pays to plan ahead.

## The Build

### Lower chassis and running gear

The running gear of the M6A1 is unusual; there are two sets of bogies on each side, for a total of four separate track runs. One set of four bogies (eight wheels) is attached to the outer slab of armor on each side; the other set of four bogies is attached to each side of the hull. When the armor is attached, the two parallel runs of wheels on each side match up against each other and each bogie is connected to its opposite counterpart by two small attachment points. In fact, when each outside armor section is attached, you will need to put glue on no fewer than nineteen spots... and they all must line up perfectly with nineteen opposite spots to fit. Needless to say, a slow drying, thick cement, such as Model Master 'black bottle' liquid cement, is useful here.

I left the return rollers off since they would be hidden but I may regret that decision later. When finished, the track is tight enough not to sag but that may change over time. I did, however, leave off the two assemblies made up of



(B22+B13 / B21+B12) – these also cannot be seen and their absence, as well the absence of the return rollers changed an almost unmanageable task into a manageable one for me.

In Step 1, parts D2/D11/D13 in the instructions are actually parts A2/A11/A13 on the sprues.

In Step 2, a large cover piece that fits over the top of the rear hull is not identified in the instructions – it is Part A17.

### Main Deck

Apart from the cages that protect the headlights that are a little fiddly, the rest of the main deck assembly fits very

well. The twisted wire tow cable is too long for where it goes, but by the time I realized that I had already glued on the two ends. Instead of fixing that found a bracket in my spare parts box and simply ran the cable up towards the turret to take up the slack. Dragon calls out the length of the cable (138mm) which is probably what I should have measured out before attaching the ends (!)

You can pose the driver's hatch open or closed, but no inner detail is provided.

In Step 5, part A22 in the instructions is actually part A21, A23 is A22, A21 is A23

and the image of the right fender is not correct. The electric lines can fit only one way so most of these issues become obvious with dry fitting everything, which is highly recommended.

Part A24 holds the twin 50 caliber bow-mounted machine guns appears in the images starting in Step 7 but is not attached until Step 9.

In Step 9, the two 50 caliber guns slip into Part A6 but do not have any attachment points or traps – they wobble around in three dimensions and require you to nurse them into position until the glue dries.

### Main Gun and Turret

Steps 12-14 are where you put together the main business end of the M6. The fit of everything here is excellent and I really like the design and engineering of the four lifting bolts around the circumference of the turret (Parts B14-B17). The 50 caliber machine gun up top lacks some detail but looks good enough

for me when finished. It sports an unusual looking ammunition case. Typing "50 caliber ammunition case WWII" into Google resulted in pages of ammunition case images without a single hit on this one so I can't figure out where it comes from.

You can pose the commanders hatch open or closed, and there is a little detail inside consisting of a grab handle and a periscope.

In Step 12, part C23 is actually B23, C4 is C3, C3 is C4, and C24 is B24.

### Final assembly and ... what? Again?

Everything comes together in Step 15 – the tracks are added and the turret is attached to the main deck. While attaching the turret you will find that turning it to face forwards will snap off the grab handle (Part A9) that sits on top of the port-side hatch. This is the second Black Label kit where the turret doesn't rotate

without breaking something (the M-103 was my first experience). Yikes - that's 2 for 2. I hope that the Dragon Black Label group can remedy their turret issues with their next release.

### Painting and Finish

The M6A1 is going to be green, U.S. Army green. Still, with pre- and post- shading you can get a little depth in all that green. I thought that I would take this opportunity to try painting the tank with Vallejo Acrylics instead of my go-to set of Model Master olive drabs and khaki's for American armor.

(Note: I thin Vallejo Model Air paints using a 50/50 ratio of their own thinner. I thin all filters, washes and wet pigments using odorless Mona Lisa Paint Thinner. I use a Pasche-H Single-Action airbrush, Number #3 tip, at 20 lbs. pressure for everything.)

Track: I painted the bright yellow/tan DS tracks with rattle-can Rustoleum Flat Black





Primer, followed by a dusting of rattle-can Krylon Light Brown. Krylon/Rustoleum is just about the only paint that will cover DS track initially, in my opinion. I could have used model paint and my airbrush but that just takes too much paint and too much time. I really wish these DS tracks came in, well, some version of track color? Once the Krylon paint was dry and did not exhibit any more 'tack', I gave the track a heavy wash using AK Interactive Track Wash, straight from the bottle.

**M2 50cal 'Ma Deuce' Machine Gun:** I started by hand brushing the metallic portions of the guns and the ammo belts with Testors Flat Black – the only time I ever use flat black model paint. I painted

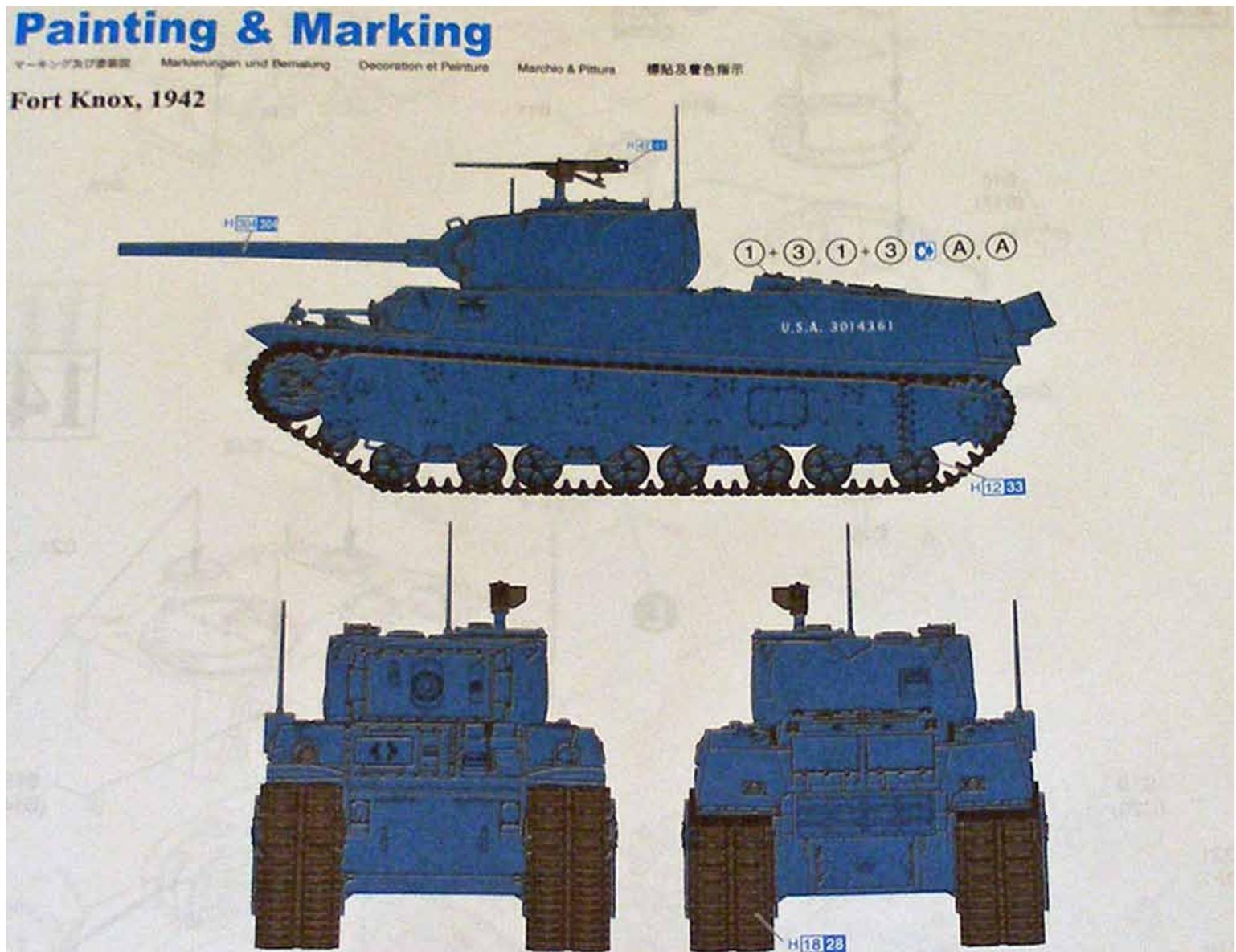
the ammunition case Model Master Faded Olive Drab. I then used a silver Prismacolor Artist Pencil to liberally highlight the flat black metal parts and the ammunition cases. I finished by giving everything a filter using Mig Wash Brown thinned with Mona Lisa Paint Thinner.

### The rest of the vehicle

1. I spray-painted a pre-shade coat using rattle-can Rustoleum Flat Black Primer – this is a cheaper alternative to hobby paint and doesn't seem to have any adverse effect on the plastic or detail. Plus, you can do the whole tank and track runs in about 1.6 seconds. :) Keep the can moving and spray in short bursts to keep from

flooding the paint on. The dark paint fills in the recesses and creates a shadow effect near the flat surface edges, adding depth for the subsequent coats to come. Once the paint was dry and had a chance to de-tack and de-gass, I touched up areas missed by the rattle-can with Tamiya (XF-89) NATO Black.

2. Next came the first camouflage coat using Vallejo Model Air 71.016 Dark Green. I airbrushed it carefully, trying to avoid the tires and allowing some of the black to show along the edges, underneath the protruding detail, etc.



3. Next I applied a post-shading coat using Vallejo Model Air 71.044 Light Grey Green, lightening up all the panels moving from the center outwards, paying special attention to the upper surfaces exposed to sunlight, and leaving what was in shadow, darker.

Decals: With painting finished, I air-brushed the surface areas

that would be receiving decals with a coat of Future floor polish to give the decals a smooth surface to slide on to.

Once the Future was dry I went about applying the few decals in the kit. Dragon has thoughtfully included a 'complete' registration decal along with one that you can assemble yourself. I used the Red and Blue MicroSol and

MicroSet products without any problems. Once the decals were dry, I hand-brushed another coat of Future to seal the edges of the decals.

### On-Board Tools

While the Future was drying, I painted the wooden portions of the pioneer tools with a mixture of Vallejo Panzer Aces New Wood (311), Old Wood (310) and (Model Color)

German Cam Medium Brown (70822). I painted all the steel parts Tamiya Metallic Grey (XF-56). For hand-brushing Vallejo paints I mix a tiny bit of Vallejo Slow Dry and water with each color until it flows smoothly off a red sable brush.

To give the wooden parts of the tools more depth, I brushed on a little Mig Wash Brown oil paint straight from the tube and let that set overnight. Don't let this paint leach out its oil beforehand, like you would when you are using oils for dry-brushing. The oil helps it stay workable. In the morning I carefully removed most of the oil paint using a brush dampened with Mona Lisa Paint Thinner, leaving the areas near the latches and metal parts darker than the center of the wooden shafts. I then let a little black wash puddle up on the

horizontal surfaces of the metal axe and shovel heads. When dry, I think this gives them a convincing look of used steel.

**Dry Brushing:** Once the pin washes were dry I dry-brushed everything sticking out with Model Master Afrika Dunkelgrau RAL 7027 1942, which helped the detail pop out.

**Flat Coat and Dusting:** Once satisfied, I gave the whole vehicle a coat of Vallejo Flat Varnish followed by a dusting of Vallejo Model Air Light Brown, working from the bottom up, to blend everything together.

**Metal Highlights:** The last step was to go over the vehicle with a silver pencil and Mig Gun Metal pigment to bring out a metallic sheen where appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

This kit provides some challenges with the complex double-sets of bogies and track, but otherwise the Black Label M6A1 was a very smooth build.

All the various weapons were well engineered, fit well and look great – like a rolling battleship!

I recommend this kit for all modelers, regardless of skill level, although beginners might have issues with the instructions and the running gear. That said; if you go slowly and use slow-drying cement (!) you should be able to produce a fine and interesting looking model.

I would like to thank Dragon Models and Dragon USA for providing this kit for review, and to IPMS USA for giving me the opportunity to build it.