

**GENERAL STAFF
CANADIAN CORPS HQ**

WAR DIARY SEPTEMBER 1916

APPENDIX VII REPORT ON OPERATIONS OF TANKS 15 SEPTEMBER 1916

2ND CANADIAN DIVISION G.345
CANADIAN CORPS

I forward herewith a report of Officer Commanding no. 1 Section Heavy Section M.G. Corps on the action of the tanks during the attack on September 15th.

The orders for their employment are contained in my operation order no. 78, dated September 14th.

The state of the ground and the fact that Zero was fixed for an hour which was broad daylight, prevented the tanks taking an active part in the capture of the German front line trench.

The two, who were able to advance and reach the final objective, did however very good work in assisting the Infantry to mop up.

From my experience it seems that mopping up will, in future, be the chief role of these engines.

Tanks suitably placed would release a large number of men, at present required for mopping up, as they would be able to deal promptly with any enemy attempting to resist after the leading waves had passed: it would probably be sufficient to leave a small party to clear dug-outs and round up the prisoners.

A portion of the tanks should, however, be sent through beyond the final objective with the object of increasing the enemy's demoralization and keeping him on the run; thereby enabling units, who have gained and consolidated the final objective, to push posts well out in front and possibly into a further objective which might thus be seized – while the enemy is still in confusion.

It seems possible that, had we adopted some such policy on September 15th, GUNPIT ROAD and COURCELETTE might have been in our hands by 10 a.m.

Such a task, however, requires a large number of tanks to commence with as it is probably not safe to assume that more than 33% will reach their assigned objective.

The tanks appear to be immune from everything but a direct hit by something larger than a field gun, except the steering gear and tail which are at present weak spots.

Signed R. E Turner VC
Major General
Commanding 2nd Canadian Division

September 16th 1916

Report of the Operations of the Tanks of No. 1 Section "C" Company H.S.M.G.C – 16 September 1916

Tank No. 721, C5 (Male) *Crème de Menthe*

Capt. A. McC. Inglis

Crew 2707 Cpl R R Garlick
 2637 Gnr W H Stockdale
 2670 Gnr L McAdam
 2773 Gnr J Shepherd

40022 Gnr L E Rowntree

32383 Gnr R Gibson

M2/102696 Sgt G B Shepherd – A.S.C. Driver

We left the park at ALBERT at 7pm on the night of 14th September and proceeded to the advanced Dressing Station 300 yards south of POZIERES, on the POZIERES – ALBERT road at which place I had made a dump for petrol, oil etc. Having replenished the tank we proceeded to our position of deployment at the windmill, via the eastern edge of POZIERES, which place we arrived at about 2am. This route had been previously reconnoitred and tapes laid by scouts from the 2nd Canadian Division.

We remained at this point till 6.20am which was the time the attack commenced. During the whole of the time we were subjected to heavy shell fire, and one of the wheels on the tail was blown off.

At Zero (6.20am) we commenced our advance and made for the SUGAR FACTORY which was my objective. Soon after crossing our front line trench a group of about 50 Germans came up towards the tanks to surrender. Our Infantry was well in advance of the tank, and were in the SUGAR FACTORY by the time I arrived; but I was able to make use of my Hotchkiss guns.

I skirted the southern and eastern side of the factory and went up to the trench where our Infantry were consolidating.

Having found an officer who informed me that the position had been made good, I commenced my return journey, and laid out about 400 yards of telephone wire which I carried on the tail of the tank.

In this I was assisted by an officer of the signals.

Before reaching the Windmill the wire drum was smashed in by a shell.

I eventually reached a point on the POZIERES-ALBERT road 300 yards from Camp, when the track came completely off. The successful way in which we reached our objective and eventually withdrew was due to the very fine driving of Sgt. Shepherd. A.S.C.

Summary of the fate of the Other Tanks

Tank C6 No. 504, (Female) Cordon Rouge 9 men

Reached the point of deployment "after some considerable difficulty". Heavily shelled, she engaged several parties of the enemy. Went towards Courcelette but did not get to the Sugar Factory since the position had already been consolidated so she returned to camp for repair. Slightly wounded, 1 officer and 5 men (one by a shell splinter and 5 by "bullet splashes").

Tank C1 No. 721 (Male) Champagne 8 men

Steering wheel had been damaged by shell fire during the night. At 7am the "car bellied" and had to be dug out. The shelling was so bad by 10.45am that the men returned to Camp. 1 member of the crew was struck by shell fire. It was a direct hit at about 10.55am and he died 2 minutes later (*the driver, Horace Brotherhood*)

Tank C4 No. 503 (Female) Chablis 9 men

Her left track came off just after the point of deployment. During the night the tail was hit by a shell and considerably damaged.

Tank C2 No. 522 (Female) Cognac 9 men

Stub axle of the tank was broken going through Pozieres. At 6.50am she got stuck owing to being unable to steer properly. The steering gear was broken "and we had to steer on brakes which was difficult as the crump holes were so numerous and the tank slipped sideways into a (German) communication trench." She was dug out, but couldn't get away. The crew "shoved the side up with timbers and managed to get the tank on the ground". (She ditched a second time). They were under heavy shell fire all the time. They had to cease work at 8pm "owing to the shelling caused by our infantry regiment coming up."

Tank C3 No. 701 (Male) Chartreuse 8 Men

Reached the windmill, proceeded at 6.20am but owing to shell fire the steering gear had been put out of action, which "seriously inconvenienced" the "handling of the car". The car was taken forward till it stuck in a large shell hole with several tree trunks in it. The crew tried to dig it out for 3.5 hours but eventually the engines seized owing to the cars having become wedged underneath.

Signed A.M. Inglis, Capt.
CC No. 1 Section H.S.M.G.C

SECRET

**CANADIAN CORPS G.167
21st September 1916**

Reserve Army

I forward this report on the action of the tanks on the 15th instant. The points which seem prominently borne out are as follows:-

1. The tanks were very useful at the SUCRERIE; they had a fairly good road to reach their objective, and consequently arrived fairly quickly.
2. No arrangements for times of starting of the tanks and the Infantry are of much use. Sometimes the Infantry will be far ahead (as in this case) when the tank can come up later and assist in mopping up, and sometimes the Infantry may be hung up when the tank may break down the defence. Neither the Infantry or tanks advance at a level pace.
3. Without doubt, the tanks are a moral support to Infantry so long as they are in action, and a good deal of the shrapnel is diverted from the Infantry onto them.
4. It seems conclusively proved that the tanks cannot move over the shell-pitted ground except on rare occasions; but with a fairly good road or track they ought to reach the objective.
5. They are very susceptible to injury from shell, and are liable to break down.
6. No action of the Infantry should ever be made subservient to that of the tanks.

Tanks are a useful accessory to the Infantry, but nothing more.

Signed J. BYNG
Lieutenant General
Commanding Canadian Corps

ORIGIN OF THE 3RD (LIGHT) TANK BATTALION "C" COMPANY H.S.M.G.C.

When the first prototype tank was tested officially in February 1916 it was decided to form a Company under the name of the Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps.

There being a dearth of Officers and Men, several batteries of the MMGs were disbanded to form a nucleus. More officers being required, volunteers were asked for from Infantry units in France and the newly formed Cadet Schools in Oxford, Cambridge and Bristol. The Cadets selected were men from the various Public School Battalions who had returned from 6 months of trench life in France and were therefore experienced in present day warfare.

Volunteers were also selected from various Infantry units serving in France at the time and also from several officers who returned to England wounded.

The men selected from the Cadet Schools were given a Commission and sent to Pullhouse Camp, Wizley (Wisley?) where training was carried out in Hotchkiss, Vickers and 6-Pdr Guns.

In May 1916 four Companies were formed, A-D. C and D Companies, being more advanced in their training, were moved in due course to a guarded area near Thetford. This area was patrolled by sentries and as camouflage of what was taking place, notices were put up at various intervals around the area warning civilians that experiments were being carried out with explosives. Spy scares were rife and many an amusing episode can be told of curious civilians who were arrested for trying to get a peep of the mystery within the area.

The movement of tanks from the railway siding was carried out by night and a rumour was circulated to the effect that the tanks were tractors for a new type of gun. "C" Company were allocated to the Bernersfield Camp training area, and luckily the New Farm Camp. There were two types of tank at Bernersfield, a large and a small one. They were at once nicknamed Big and Little Willie by the men of the company who saw tanks for the first time on their arrival at Bernersfield.

The small tank consisted of a Holt tractor with a steel body built around the engine, the large tank being of the same type of tank used in action on 15 September 1916 viz Mark 1 with Tail. This tank was affectionately known by the name of "Mother".

The Company consisted of 5 Sections. One, the reserve, did not have tanks. Each section had 6 tanks and each was commanded by a subaltern with the exception of the Section Commanders' tank, who was a Captain.

No. 1 Section

Capt. A. M. Inglis (Crème de Menthe)

Tank Commanders Lieutenants Wheeler, G Campbell, 2nd Lieuts Blumel, J. Allen & Clarke.

It being very important that the new engines of war should be kept secret the cars were referred to as tanks and officers and men were told to say that the cars were a new type of water tank intended for the Russians and to justify that statement as it were, Russian letters were painted on the side of each tank before leaving the factory. They were camouflaged at Bernersfield by means of a painted design on the outside (very effective).

LN/Bovington Archives

Visits from HM the King, Lloyd-George and numerous Generals and Brigadier Generals helped to break the monotony of training.

Tanks arrived at Havre on 21 August 1916. The crews sailed with officers on 15 August 1916 to Havre and awaited the arrival of the tanks from Avonmouth. When they were entrained every precaution was taken to keep them from view.

The tanks trained with the Infantry of the 56th Division for the first time at Yvrench from 25 August 1916. Operations were watched by Haig, Joffre and Rawlinson. **Rawlinson said they would never be any use.**

On 7th September the tanks entrained at Contreville and detrained on 8th at the Loop Railhead on the Somme. HRH the Prince of Wales was a frequent visitor here and was very interested. The first tank fire took place here. Sgt. Hillhouse bravely brought out a man overcome by fumes.

15th Sept – 19th Nov “C” Company took part in several Somme battles with a reasonable measure of success, which justified their existence.

The work accomplished by these pioneers of the greatest war invention of modern times cannot be too thoroughly appreciated, who with their patience and perseverance overcame almost insurmountable difficulties with a cheerfulness which has been characteristic of the Battalion throughout its existence.

Taken from the War History

3rd Light Tank Battalion

From the Formation of the Corps 1916 to the signing of the Armistice 11 November 1918.