



*Sherman III T 74299 is prepared by RTR personnel on a 'Z craft' after unloading from the American merchant ship alongside. This photo is interesting in that the Sherman still carries its US serial number (U.S.A. W. 3053166) in very faded Blue Drab and its British serial (T 74299) in newly painted Blue Drab which shows up dark against the faded Olive Drab of the tank. This is one of the vehicles taken from the US armoured divisions to make up the deficit of tanks lost at sea. The temporary link and shipping markings on the hull side are a pinkish red, confirmed by colour footage of Shermans being loaded into ships in the USA. The shiny areas on the turret are where the sealant has been removed. (IWM 16608.)*

# El Alamein Sherman - The History

**Peter Brown provides the historical angle on 2nd Armoured Brigade's tanks**

**T**he name Sherman by which this American tank is universally known was given to it by the British. In its country of origin it was known as Medium Tank M4, M4A1, etc., with a increasing variety of sub-types and extra designations as new versions came into use.

While the American classification system works well enough, it can be confusing as each item of equipment, be it a rifle, tank or whatever, is assigned the next available number when it is standardized for service. So a

particular M-number could mean a light tank, a medium tank, a half-track, a sub-machine gun, a carbine, various types of artillery piece and maybe more so the actual weapon type needs to be stated. Britain had already been supplied with M3-series light and medium tanks which was confusing enough, but these could be confused with the British system used to describe German tanks, for example the *Panzerkampfwagen III* being called 'Mark III.'

To get round this, a *Minute* dated 28th August 1942 - still held at the Public Record Office in Kew - from the then Prime Minister Winston Churchill stated: "The following names in particular are to be taken into universal and permanent use - Sherman, Grant, Lee, Stuart. It is not necessary to add the prefix 'General' as this only causes confusion with live Generals." However, for those in the know these names were those of prominent officers from the era of the American Civil War. This seems to have been being wise after the event, as Lee and Grant were in use months before, while Stuart had been used in some documents as early as November 1941. Another *Minute* dated 29th August 1942 said: "The difficulty over Tank nomenclature arises from the fact that the Americans are not prepared to fall in with our custom of giving tanks names. Consequently, the Sherman is known to the Americans as the M.4." (Here, note the full stop which appears in many wartime reports.) A case of two nations separated by a common language?

There were several types of Sherman, usually differing in the engine fitted. The US system classified with suffixes such as A1 and

A2, the British system described using roman numerals. The true M4, welded-hull tank with the radial petrol engine was Sherman I to the British Army, the M4A1 cast-hull tank with the same engine was Sherman II and the M4A2 welded-hull version with diesel engines became Sherman III. Other types existed, but the versions used in the Desert at this time were the M4A1 Sherman II which entered production in February 1942 and the M4A2 Sherman III which came from the factories from April.

Whatever its name, these tanks were supplied by America to its British ally literally from the start. In fact, the very first one came off the production line at Lima Locomotive Works in February 1942 with British serial number T-25189, though this vehicle remained in the USA. It was followed by T-25190 which was shipped to the United Kingdom. Named MICHAEL in honour of the head of the British Tank Mission Michael Dewar, it was inspected by various dignitaries including Winston Churchill on Horse Guards Parade before being used for trials. It finally ended up in the Tank Museum at Bovington where it can still be seen today. At some time it was refitted with a longer M3-series gun and later pattern solid wheels and also received a new serial, T-74195, which was from the batch T74194-74593 for 400 tanks on contract S/M1012 allocated to Shermans, though some records list T25190-25289 as Sherman II on S/M1010 the sequence T23504-26503 was also assigned to General Grants on S/M1010. This may reflect the cancellation of Grant orders or at least the changeover of production from Grant to Sherman.

What was needed was not one or two tanks, but as many as could be spared and maybe then some. Large numbers were to be sent to North Africa following the major setback when Tobruk fell in June 1942 and a British defeat seemed very likely. As it happened, Winston Churchill was in the USA when the news came through. President Roosevelt offered assistance and a large shipment of Shermans was requested. There was even talk of the US 2nd Armored Division being sent to North Africa with well over 14,000 men, 232 medium and 158 light tanks, 79 armoured cars, 54 self-propelled howitzers, 773 half-tracks and over 2,000 other vehicles. At the time they were training under their former commander, Major General George S. Patton Jr at the Desert Training Center in America's own deserts where California, Nevada and Arizona meet. A more practical plan of sending 300 tanks together with 100 of the new M7 105mm self-













*Sherman III (M4A2) T 74291 and Sherman II (M4A1) T 74418 side by side after having been unloaded. These are the first types used by the British and both are painted in US Olive Drab and have their British WD serial numbers painted in Blue Drab on their hull sides. These numbers were applied by American Ordnance from blocks supplied by the British when the vehicles were ordered. The diesel engined Sherman III nearest the camera has had its sealing removed, whereas the Mark II's is still in place, it having just been hoisted from the freighter that carried it to Africa from America. (TWM E16607.)*

propelled guns was devised, though this meant transferring tanks allocated to American divisions in training for British use. Hurriedly assembled and loaded, the convoy containing these vehicles sailed on 14th July 1942.

A PRO file lists what it calls APPAREL ships headed for the port of Suez via the Cape of Good Hope route with cargoes of M4 Tanks, Tank Howitzer Tractors and other munitions. Here, 'M4' covers both the cast-hulled, petrol-engined M4A1 and welded-hull diesel-engined M4A2, welded-hull petrol-engined M4s only entered production in July, so few if any would have been available for

shipment. Tank Howitzer Tractors are 105-mm Howitzer Motor Carriage M7 SP guns.

The list states that in convoy WS.21P due to dock on 3rd September 1942, the *Tarn* carried 81 tanks and one howitzer, *Exhibitor* had 57 tanks and 41 howitzers, *Empire Oriole* 39 tanks and six howitzers and *Hawaiian Shipper* 59 tanks and six howitzers. Convoy WS.21PG expected on 6th September 1942 does not give separate figures for tanks and guns but *Zaandami* carried 14 of one or both types and *Santa Cruz* another 25. What this file does not record is the *Fairport*, which sailed as part of the first convoy, had been sunk in the Atlantic by a

DIVISION	BRIGADE	REGIMENT	SQUADRON COLOURS	ARM OF SERVICE
 1st ARMoured DIVISION	2nd ARMoured BRIGADE	 QUEENS BAYS	 HQ A B C	
		 9th LANCERS	 HQ A B C	
		 10th HUSSARS	 HQ A B C	

**8th Army's Tank State for 23rd October 1942 was recorded as**

	Swallow	Grant	Crusader	Crusader III	Stuart	Valentine
<b>GHQ 8th Army (B Squadron 6 RTR)</b>		12				
<b>HQ 10th Corps</b>		2				
<b>1st Armoured Division</b> (Total including <i>2nd Armoured Brigade</i> ) (Queen's Bays, 9th Lancers, 10th Hussars)	92	1	47	29		
<b>7th Armoured Division</b> Divisional HQ <i>4th Light Armoured Brigade</i> 4th Hussars, 8th Hussars, Royal Scots Greys		14	7		67	
<i>22nd Armoured Brigade</i> (1 RTR, 5 RTR, 4th County of London Yeomanry)		54	40	8	16	
<b>HQ 8th Armoured Division</b>			6			
<b>10th Armoured Division</b> <i>8th Armoured Brigade</i> (3 RTR Nottinghamshire Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Staffordshire Yeomanry)	31	57	40	13		
<i>24th Armoured Brigade</i> (41 RTR, 45 RTR, 47 RTR)	93	2	28	17		
<i>9th Armoured Brigade</i> (3rd Hussars, Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry, Warwickshire Yeomanry)	36	37	37	12		
<i>9th Australian Divisional Cavalry</i>			14		4	
<i>2nd New Zealand Divisional Cavalry</i>					29	
8th Hussars Detachment					9	
<i>23rd Armoured Brigade</i> 40 RTR, 46 RTR, 50 RTR						169
Total Serviceable with formations	252	179	220	78	125	169
Serviceable 8th Army	272	209	264	99	141	216
Total 8th Army	288	253	332	112	175	250
Overall total Middle East	318	426	738	148	299	367

In addition to these, 21st South African Engineering Corps had 25 Matildas out of a total with 8th Army of 31, overall total was 375. The six Churchills of *Kingforce* and *Matilda Scorpion* tanks were not listed. 'Grant' figures also included Lees, and the 'Crusader' column covered the Mark II 2pdr and the 3-inch howitzer armed CS versions.

U-boat with the loss of all hands. The *Sea Train Texas* was hurriedly loaded with replacement vehicles and sailed on 29th July. This is listed as awaiting an anti-submarine escort in the Mozambique Channel and due 9th September with 52 tanks and 25 SP guns.

The unloading of these new vehicles was filmed and photographed by the Army's Film and Photographic Unit for propaganda and posterity. A series of photos in the Imperial War Museum dated 9th September shows both Sherman II and III complete with American-style sand shields. They appear to be in a plain, dark shade, most likely US Olive Drab with dark, British-style numbers prefixed with T and some also show the original US W numbers in the Blue Drab shade used for serials on American vehicles at the time. Also visible are shipping instructions stencilled in a light colour, either white, pink or yellow.

The third Lima-built tank, marked T-74196, had been sent separately to North Africa and was recorded in the daily 8th Army Tank State for 31st August 1942, sitting alone in its own column in the section "Base Ordnance Workshops and Base Operating Depots - Under Repair and

Modification." It was photographed with square-ended sand shields as seen on some Grants in a light colour, perhaps sand, in contrast to the tank's plain Olive Drab scheme. Like its immediate predecessors, it had several very early features, such as the main gun sight being housed in an armoured rotor on the top of the turret, the short M2-series 75mm gun with two counterweights on the end of the barrel to balance it for the gyro-stabilizer, and perhaps also two fixed .30 in Browning machine guns in the hull as on T-74195, though the two photos I have seen are not clear enough to be certain. All of which would be changed very early on in production and photos show tanks without hull machine guns and rotor sight as well as the longer M3-series gun.

Having arrived and been duly recorded, the Tank State figures for next day do not record Shermans, but have a column headed 'Swallow.' This was one of a set of names appearing in another Cabinet memo dated 11th September 1942, lists a set of code designations to be used when reports were passed 'via Telegraph' which would have included radio messages: Swallow - General Sherman.

Crusader III - 6pdr Crusader.  
Bishop - 25pdr Valentine SP.  
Priest - 105mm Motor Gun Carriage.  
Deacon - 6pdr SP AEC.  
Whip - American Anti-Tank Rocket Projector.

So it would seem that the prefix 'General' was still around despite the instruction from Churchill, and photos in the Imperial War Museum collection of Priests at this time are often captioned 'General Priest.' The term 'Whip' is interesting, as far as I know the Bazooka as it is usually known was not employed by the British Army in the Desert. The code name for the Crusader III is, to say the least, unusual as that is what it was called anyway and the term had been in use for some time in the Tank States.

The daily Tank States follow these 'Swallows' as they were prepared and issued to units. This would have involved removing the waterproofing and preservative materials used to protect the vehicles during their sea voyage, and maybe disposing of the small bottles of Bourbon stowed in the gun barrels if the practice recorded later on shipments of Shermans to the USSR was then being followed! Several modifications and addi-

tions were made, Appendix A to CRME/75013/AFV of 27th October 1942 details several already approved. These including fitting sand shields, 'where necessary' plus Sunshield Brackets and Universal Brackets, Welded plus a blanket box on the turret rear similar to those on Crusaders, racks for five-gallon water cans (the American version of the German jerrycan), a steel helmet rack on the off-side front, two rope shackles, graduating the elevating handwheel and fitting a pointer, brackets and racks for five water bottles, a signal pistol with a dozen cartridges and four hand grenades in the turret; other fittings for three hand lamps, a spare Protectoscope head box and two spare M5 periscopes, and others to carry .50 cal machine gun belt boxes.

'Sunshields' were the canvas-covered frames designed and painted to make a tank look like a lorry from a distance. These were used to disguise the tanks while real lorries could be moved around which would confuse any enemy reconnaissance aircraft. Several references in the War Diaries refer to regiments moving to areas previously prepared for them with Sunshields already assembled, so that when fitted it would be hard to detect that they were a tank unit.

Another note dated 30th November says that six thermos flasks and satchels were to be fitted, and also housings for an extra six rounds of 75mm ammunition to make the full load up to 96 in those tanks which did not have stowage for that amount. The smaller 90-round capacity was typical for the cast-hull Sherman II, whereas welded-hull vehicles carried more and most sources quote 97 rounds. A fitting to hold the anti-aircraft .50 cal Browning in travelling position was requested, but only on welded tanks for some reason which was not explained. More useful was the modification of the hatches for the driver and hull gunner to open out to 135° and all Shermans as well as Grants were to be issued with two petrol funnels. It was also stated that each vehicle should carry six spare track links. Whatever changes and modifications were made, vehicles would also need to be fitted with radios, presumably British No 19 sets and would also have been repainted in the basic sand pink paint. It seems the darker, second shade was added after they had reached their Regiments.

## Into Service and into Battle

At this time British armoured regiments in the Desert were using a mixture of vehicles, and those with Shermans usually had Crusaders as well and some also had Grants or Lees. It was hoped to exploit the different characteristics of the two types; there is a report in the 9th Lancers War Diary for September 1942 which elaborates, pointing out both good and bad features -

*"The best formation is one in which the Sherman Tanks are ready to go into action with the least possible delay, since the Sherman Tank is undeniably our attacking tank while the Crusader is our counter-attacking tank. The Shermans are slow. They have no reserve of speed for use in an emergency, therefore, the further forward they are the more quickly they can come into action. The best means of attack is to employ fire and movement. By having both squadrons side by side, one can advance covered by fire from the other one... In conclusion, I can reaffirm my conviction*

*tion that the Sherman Tank - the tank destroyer - should precede the Crusaders."*

As the hour of battle approached an order from General Headquarters Middle East Forces dated 8th September 1942 to the commanders of 1st and 8th Armoured Division and 8th Armoured Brigade recorded an exchange between the Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff -

PM to CGS - *"Tell your officers and men how glad I am Shermans are arriving. The CIGS [Chief of the Imperial General Staff] and I are sure you will make them count in the battle, and in the war."*

CGS to PM - *"The three brigades to be armed with Shermans received some. Their enthusiasm for this new equipment is outstanding, and officers and men appreciate your message."*

In the end, four Brigades were to have Shermans, and at the time of the telegrams few, if any, of these tanks would have been issued. As both petrol and diesel-engined Shermans were available, the type used within each Brigade was usually the same. Cast-hull petrol engined Sherman II were used in 1st Armoured Division's 2nd Armoured Brigade, the independent 9th Armoured Brigade and 8th Armoured Brigade in 10th Armoured Division, while 24th Armoured Brigade had diesel-engined Sherman III as well as at least some IIs though there were exceptions and movements, as will be seen later.

To complement Steve's model in the preceding feature, the following account concentrates on the units of 2nd Armoured Brigade around the El Alamein period and the details come from the Brigade's own War Diary and those for its component Regiments. Shermans of this Brigade all seem to have had a similar appearance, and were marked in much the same manner. They formed part of 1st Armoured Division and fought on the Northern end of the Alamein line, right on the coast. Their tanks carried the white rhino on a black oval background divisional insignia with a red arm-of-service square with white number. These numbers were:

71 Brigade HQ  
40 Queen's Bays (The 2nd Dragoon Guards)  
86 9th Queen's Royal Lancers  
67 10th Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales' Own)

Unit markings were often obscured by the censor in wartime official photos and one sequence of photos show a battle-damaged tank with no unit markings which may be a vehicle issued as a replacement after the battle started. According to photos and other records Shermans at this time carried serial numbers in the ranges T74194-74593 and T144891-154890 which covered various Shermans of both types then in service.

The M7 Priests which has been shipped with the Shermans were also used to support these regiments, 11 (Honourable Artillery Company) Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery being the first unit to use them with 'A' Battery supporting The Queen's Bays, 'E' Battery 9th Queen's Royal Lancers and 'B' Battery 10th Royal Hussars. The three regiments of 2nd Armoured Brigade were all based in the Khatatba area while re-equipping. An order of 6th September recorded in 9th Lancer's War Diary stated that the establishment of the Brigade was planned to be as in the table below: The term '(Wright)' refers

	Sherman (Wright)	Crusader II	Crusader CS	Crusader III
Brigade HQ	4	4	-	-
Each Regiment:				
Regimental HQ	2	2	-	-
A Squadron	-	10	2	4
B & C Squadrons each	14	-	2	-

## 2nd Armoured Brigade tank state

	Sherman	Crusader
24th October Bays	12	18
9L	25	20
10H	20	17
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 1 Grant, 92 Swallow, 49 Crusader, 29 Crusader III)</i>		
25th October Bays	5	16
9L	18	19
10H	18	17
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 81 Swallow, 42 Crusader, 26 Crusader III)</i>		
26th October Bays	11	16
9L	20	22
10H	18	17
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 51 Swallow, 47 Crusader, 24 Crusader III)</i>		
27th October Bays	11	16
9L	20	22
10H	17	18
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 58 Swallow, 47 Crusader, 26 Crusader III)</i>		
28th October Bays	11	16
9L	21	20
10H	16	16
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 57 Swallow, 60 Crusader, 26 Crusader III)</i>		
29th October		
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 62 Swallow, 55 Crusader, 8 Crusader III)</i>		
30th October		
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 62 Swallow, 49 Crusader, 13 Crusader III)</i>		
1st November		
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 94 Swallow, 46 Crusader CS, 24 Crusader III)</i>		
2nd November Bays	16	18
9L	19	17
10H	23	18
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 94 Swallow, 51 Crusader, 24 Crusader III)</i>		
3rd November Bays	12	12
9L	15	17
10H	22	13
<i>(8th Army Tank State - 5 Grants, 60 Swallow, 40 Crusader, 23 Crusader III)</i>		
4th November Bays	10	12
9L	20	13
10H	19	12
<i>(8th Army Tank State for 2nd and 8th Armoured Brigades in 1st Armoured Division - 38 Grants, 68 Swallow, 47 Crusader, 34 Crusader III)</i>		
5th November Bays	12	14
9L	16	11
10H	20	9
6th November Bays	10	7
9L	14	8
10H	12	7
7th November Bays	9	7
9L	13	7
10H	17	7
15th November		
<i>(8th Army Tank State 1st Armoured Division - 12 Grant, 54 Sherman, 35 Crusader, 15 Crusader III)</i>		

### 8th Army's Tank State for 13th November 1942 was recorded as

	Sherman	Grant	Crusader	Crusader III	Stuart	Valentine
1st Armoured Division	54	12	15			
22nd Armoured Brigade	30	22	4			
10th Armoured Division (See *Note)	47	7	16			
23rd Armoured Brigade						111
Warwickshire Yeomanry	4	7	4			
9th Australian Divisional Cavalry		14				
Total Serviceable with Formations	58	115	78	39	61	111
Delivery Units, etc.	7	11	35	13	17	
Serviceable 8th Army	65	126	113	52	65	128
Unfit with Units and in Workshops	35	28	43	10	28	
Total 8th Army	100	156	156	62	156	
Overall Total Middle East	164	351	656	109	199	321

\*Note: 10th Armoured Division's Grant figures also included some Shermans which was the name then used.  
21 SAEC had 8 Matildas, 63 more were in 1st Army Tank Brigade which was not under 8th Army.  
The overall Middle East total was 379.

to the type of engine fitted to the Sherman II. Often referred to as the Cyclone, the earliest Shermans had the Wright R975 EC2 air-cooled radial engine which was adapted from an aircraft engine, though most were fitted with the improved R975 C1 version built by Continental.

One thing which does show up in photos is that many Sherman had one of the hatch-flaps on the cupola removed, usually the plain, or 'rear,' one as the one with the periscope was retained. Many views are from angles which do not make this clear, but on close inspection it can be seen that only one flap is in place. This was not done by all units as photos show both hatches fitted, any replacement tanks issued during the battle could well have retained them as there

would have not been time to take them off.

In the Queen's Bays, the build up as the battle approached is easily followed in their War Diary. On 1st September Captain Crosbie-Dawson MC went with 14 Grant drivers to Abbassia Barracks in Cairo to be instructed on a new type of tank, thought to be the Swallow, which is the name their War Diary uses. This group would return on the 14th. In the meantime, the 2nd saw Second Lieutenant Saunders travel with five troopers to 5th Base Ordnance Depot workshops at Tel-El-Kebir to collect the first Swallows for his Regiment. A week later orders were received to collect three more Swallows from Khatatba station and they arrived on the 10th, one was sent to 'A' Squadron with the others going to 'C' Squadron. On the 16th,

one American officer with five NCOs were with 'B' and 'C' Squadrons in an 'advisory capacity' and may well have been present on the 17th when the squadrons fired their tank guns on the ranges. Further tanks arrived, the 19th meant five more for 'B' Squadron and two for 'C' Squadron while on the 20th 'B' got one more and 'C' another two. On the 21st five more Swallows came and another 10 arrived on the next day so that as of midday on 24th September 'B' and 'C' Squadron were completely equipped with 15 Swallows each.

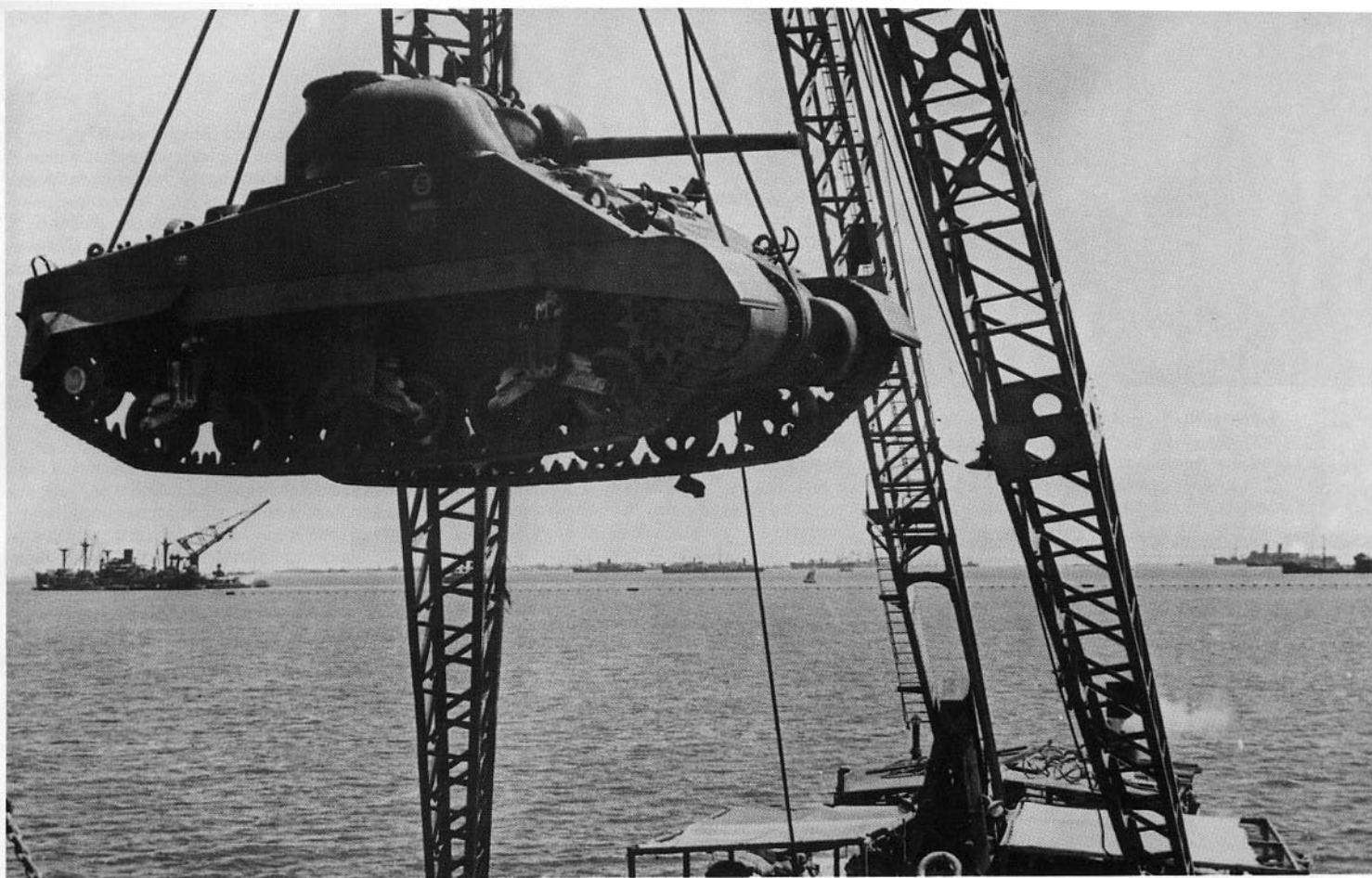
On 1st October a camouflage expert visited 'C' Squadron to demonstrate a new system of camouflage, but no details of what it was are given in the War Diary. Also, on that day, a German Mark III was used as a target and on the 5th a Sherman troop held a battle practice competition on the ranges. More Crusaders of all types also arrived over this period for 'A' Squadron, on 17th October two Crusaders sent to Brigade HQ while three 'Crusader sleeves' were received; these were fitted to 2pdr guns to make them look like 6pdrs.

When the battle began, the first losses were on 24th October when three Shermans had their tracks blown off on mines, 'B' Squadron also had four tanks knocked out including that used by their Squadron commander, while 'C' Squadron lost two tanks. On the 25th eight more tanks of 'C' Squadron were lost, apparently to 88mm guns. Replacement tanks arrived, at last light on the 26th, six Shermans, three Crusader II and two Crusader III were added to the strength. This was not enough to keep the whole Regiment at full strength, 'C' Squadron's vehicles were transferred into a composite 'B' Squadron. On the 28th the Regiment was relieved by the Staffordshire Yeomanry from 8th Armoured Brigade.

Vehicle losses had been heavy in other Sherman-equipped brigades; 24th Armoured Brigade's losses had been 77 Shermans and 48 Crusaders, though 47 Shermans and 35 Crusaders had been recovered and evacuated and eight Shermans along with six Crusaders were repaired by their own unit fitters. On



'C' Squadron, 9th Lancers parade for the Army Film and Photographic Unit's cameras before Alamein. The blocked 'C' Squadron circle is yellow and the vehicle with a visible WD number is T 145083. The nearest vehicle has had its divisional and arm of service markings censored. These would be the black oval with a white rhino for 1st Armoured Division nearest on the right sand shield nearest the camera with a white number 86 on a red square opposite on the left sand shield. On the Sherman nearest the camera the it's evident that the sprocket gear housing and three-piece, bolted transmission cover has been undershaded white, but not the gun barrel, in accordance with instructions. (TWM BM20485.)



*This original British Official print, BM18545(XT) is dated 28th January 1943 and shows a Sherman III being swung out onto a 'Z Craft' from an American freighter. The rear section of its American factory-fitted sand shield has been damaged. (Photo: Photographic News Agencies, 30 Fleet Street EC 4, War Office Crown Copyright.)*

the 30th, they transferred all their serviceable tanks and scout cars to 2nd and 8th Armoured Brigades. The Bays received eight Diesel Shermans from 41 RTR and seven more Sherman III from 47 RTR while a single Sherman of unspecified type went to 'B' Squadron from HQ 24th Armoured Brigade.

On 2nd November the Bays' Tank State was 'A' Squadron with 19 Crusaders (two Mark II, eight CS and nine Mark III.) 'B' Squadron with 14 'Sherman IC' - Internal Combustion, petrol-engined Sherman II - and 'C' Squadron had 15 'Sherman CI' or compression-ignition, diesel Sherman III. On the 6th they sent seven Shermans and six Crusaders to 9th Lancers, these seem to have been returned the next day. On the 11th, it was planned to have 15 Crusaders in 'A' Squadron, 'B' Squadron was to have nine petrol-engined Shermans or Grants while 'C' Squadron would have 13 diesel tanks, again Shermans or Grants.

The 9th Queen's Royal Lancers recorded a very varied collection of tanks to their War Diary for 31st August. A Squadron had 13 Valentines of 8th Battalion Royal Tank Regiment, 'B' Squadron 12 Grants and two Cruisers of a type not stated, but most likely Crusaders, while 'C' Squadron had seven Cruisers of the Queen's Bays! New tanks arrived in September, on the 2nd they received seven Valentines, three Cruisers and a Grant and on the 3rd the Brigade Commander inspected a Cruiser - Crusader III being the most likely type - a Valentine and a Diesel Grant. On the 10th the War Diary states "Three new Shermans were fetched from the station early in the morning. They looked most excellent machines, being so much lower than the Grant they will be able to fire hull-down instead of showing themselves on every skyline - and the new H.V. (High Velocity) 75mm looks very useful." Also, a new Crusader III with 6pdr was delivered to 'A' Squadron.

Two days later a party consisting of Second Lieutenant M. St J. Wilmoth and 28 soldiers went to Tel-el-Kebir to collect Shermans travelling on Warflats to Khatatba. On the 14th there was an inspection of Shermans and Crusader III by officers from Brigade and the Commanding Officers of the Queen's Bays and 10th Royal Hussars, while on the 17th the commanders of 41 RTR and 4th County of London Yeomanry came to see the Shermans. By the 19th when seven more Shermans arrived, regimental strength was 10 Shermans, three Grants, one Lee, eight Crusader II and a single Crusader III. Five of their Shermans were described as having come from a US Armoured Division to replace vehicles sunk in transit. More tanks arrived, three early on the 20th, five including one 'old' one on the 21st while of the five which arrived on the 23rd, one fell off its Warflat railway wagon! A week later on the 26th four Shermans and two Crusader II arrived, so bringing the Regiment to its full complement of 30 Shermans. They still needed 15 Crusaders to complete 'A' Squadron, these continued to arrive in ones and twos though they were still short of six Mark III at the end of the month.

A detachment of sappers arrived on 10th October to paint the tanks with disruptive paint, by the 14th all the Shermans had been painted but the 'experts' were summoned away after they had started work on 'A' Squadron's Crusaders. The 13th was an unlucky day as two Shermans were sent for repairs, one with a seized turret ball race and the other with a broken gearbox selector fork. Presumably these two tanks missed the visit by the Army Film and Photographic Unit who took photos of Shermans and Crusaders on the 16th. By the 18th, Regimental Headquarters had four Crusader II, 'A' Squadron nine Crusader III, five Crusader II and three Crusader CS while 'B' and 'C'

Squadrons each had 14 Shermans and a single Crusader CS. On the 22nd they moved to take over an area set up for them as a deception unit with lorries disguised as tanks moved out to replace them while their own tanks attached their Sunshields.

During the battle, there were losses. On 24th October three Shermans in 'C' Squadron were knocked out, on the 25th, one of 'B' Squadron's tanks and the Rear Link Sherman were hit and abandoned. When 24th Armoured Brigade transferred its vehicles at the end of the month, 9th Lancers took over five Sherman Petrol, two Crusader III, two Crusader II and a Crusader CS from 45 RTR, a single Crusader CS from 47 RTR and two Shermans of unspecified type from Brigade HQ, these brought their total strength to 27 Shermans, eight Crusader III and six each Crusader II and Crusader CS. On 1st November another Sherman was transferred from Brigade HQ giving 30 Shermans and 20 Crusaders.

The next day 'C' Squadron had two Shermans burnt out and one Crusader and five other Shermans were recorded as damaged, but recoverable. By the 4th when 'A' Squadron lost another Crusader, 'B' Squadron was down to 13 Shermans while 'C' had just six, with many of the tanks from 24th Armoured Brigade being broken down. All Shermans were badly in need of 100-hour checks by the 5th, on the 6th nine Diesel Shermans were transferred from the Bays so that by the 7th the strength was 13 Shermans and seven Crusaders. 'C' Squadron received two more Shermans on the 9th. Total losses by 22nd November were listed as Destroyed by enemy action and beyond repair - three Shermans, one each Crusader II and III.

Damaged and recovered by Light Recovery Section - 15 Shermans and eight Crusaders.

The 10th Royal Hussars (Prince of Wales's



*A crew from 'B' Squadron, the Queen's Bays 'bombing up' their Sherman II which is Sand Pink overpainted with irregular patches of green. The wartime censor missed the arm of service mark on this print and on the original print the number 40 in white on a red square, on the right front sand shield can just be discerned behind the backside of the man on the left wearing a steel helmet, about to receive a 75mm round from his officer tank commander, identified by his peaked cap. The 1st Armoured Division rhino appears on the opposite sand shield. A red square, 'B' Squadron's tactical marking, is on the side of the turret. Note the litter of fibre containers in the left foreground of the picture from which the 75mm rounds for the Sherman's gun were transported by soft skin vehicles to the tank leaguers. (IWM E18993.)*

Own) recorded that they got their first three Shermans on 10th September. Unlike the other two regiments in 2nd Armoured Brigade, their Crusaders were assigned to 'B' Squadron. On 14th September they, "Tried Sherman on the range for the first time... disappointed to find sights as bad as Grant..." which would suggest that at least one of the very early build tanks with the armoured rotor-style sight was issued to them. However, when they fired their Sherman guns on the ranges on the 19th it was stated that, "Latest Shermans issued to us found to have improved sight which is far more satisfactory than that on Grant." Unfortunately their War Diary does not give as much detail as for other Regiments on the build-up.

At the time, the Regiment had a Belgian officer on its strength. Major Louis Legrand had escaped to England when his country was overrun in 1940 and after several adventures arrived in the Middle East. He commanded his own tank, T74404 which he named 'Liberator' in 'A' Squadron's, Squadron HQ and as a personal touch flew a small Belgian national flag on his radio aerial. He took an active part in the battle and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order afterwards. A man of many talents, some of his water-colour paintings appear in the 10th Hussars Regimental History cov-

ering The Second World War which calls him, Henri Le Grand, a style he adopted to avoid reprisals against his family who were still in Belgium.

On 23rd October the Regiment were in their assembly area. Great precautions were taken to conceal their presence, there was much camouflage work and the Sunshields previously placed in position were lifted onto the tanks. Radios were not used and there were no bivouacs or fires. On the 24th all three Regimental HQ tanks were lost to mines and two 'C' Squadron Shermans were hit by high-explosive shells and evacuated for repair. The 25th saw four Shermans destroyed, 10 'C' Squadron tanks made an attack, but by last light only five had returned. The next day 'C' Squadron were withdrawn to refit, their six remaining tanks being transferred to 'A' Squadron. On the 27th 'B' Squadron lost one tank, by the 29th the Regiment's losses were one officer and five soldiers killed, six officers and 19 soldiers wounded; six Shermans had been destroyed and other tanks damaged which could be recovered while they claimed 15 German and four Italian tanks knocked out, though not burnt, two 88mm, two 76mm and 10 other anti tank guns, three SP guns and nine lorries destroyed.

On the 31st October they were made up to full strength by tanks from 24th Armoured Brigade, receiving a Crusader II from 41 RTR, five Sherman Petrol from 45 RTR and four Crusader II from 47 RTR. More losses were to follow, one 'B' Squadron Crusader on 2nd November and on the 3rd one Sherman was destroyed when hit by mistake by a tank from 9th Lancers. On the 4th November, Lieutenant Grant Singer in his scout car captured General Von Thoma who had commanded the German forces in the early stages of the battle while Rommel was away in Germany. Lieutenant Singer was himself killed the next day when his car was hit and a Crusader was also destroyed. By the 6th November 'B' Squadron only had three running tanks, seven were transferred from the Bays, but several Shermans could not be replenished so had to be left behind.

Actual vehicle strengths from day to day were recorded in the 2nd Armoured Brigade War Diary, but they do not tally with the overall 8th Army Tank States in the tables. I cannot explain the discrepancies, so will simply relate what the records said. Brigade figures do not separate out the marks of Crusader.

Overall losses in the battle were reported on 10th November as 87 Shermans, 53 Grants, 45 Stuarts, 94 Crusaders, 49 Valentines and four Matildas while around 100 tanks were unaccounted for, many of which were expected to add to these figures. Some vehicles would have been repairable

and it was estimated that around 50 Shermans were complete write-offs against 75 Shermans which could or had been recovered and repaired.

By the end of the year, the overall Tank State in the Middle East stood at 106 Grants, 119 Shermans, 188 Crusaders, 91 Stuarts and 122 Valentines. Total losses had been considerable, the Half-Yearly Report on the Progress of the Royal Armoured Corps for December 1942 records 66 Shermans had been lost in action and 78 more at sea.

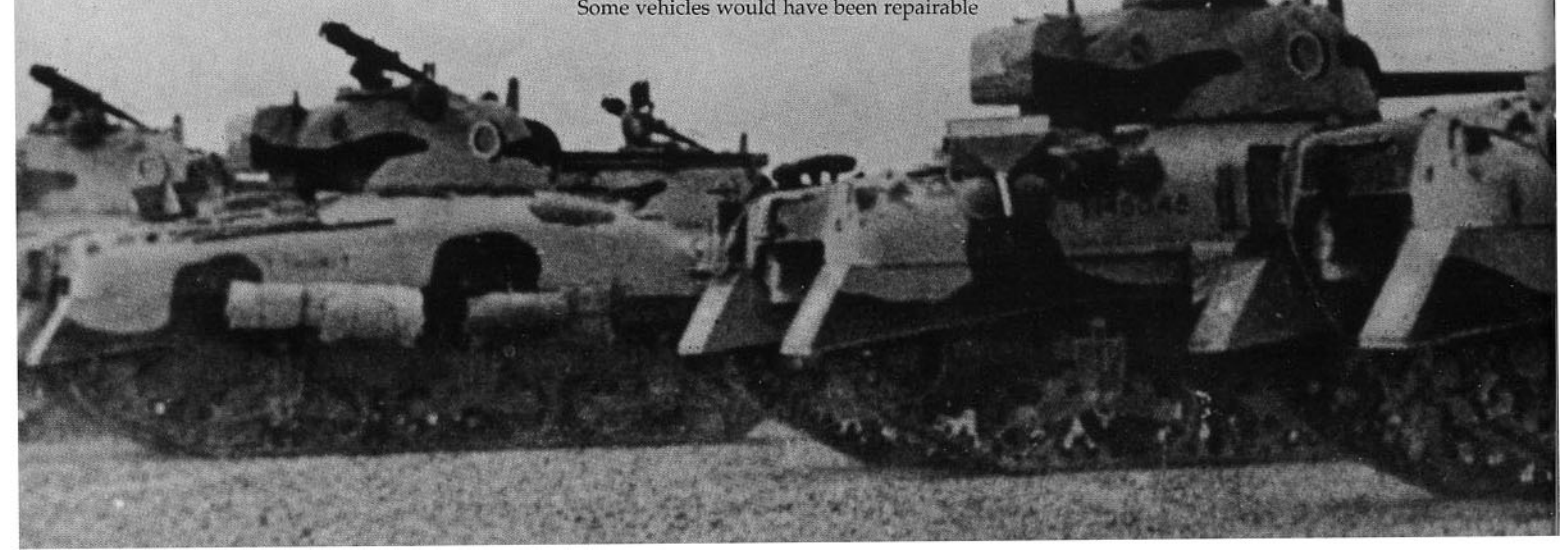
## Conclusions and Opinions

The Battle of El Alamein saw the debut of the Sherman's fighting career which was to see it as a mainstay of the Allied armies until the end of the Second World War, after which it would see more service and action around the world with some albeit highly modified vehicles still in service 60 years later. How the tank fared in its first battle is worth noting. A telegram to MILSTAF from MIDEAST 1721GMT 30th October said -

*"First reports from Western Desert indicate great satisfaction with Sherman. Position of gun has enabled maximum concealment in hull down positions combined with good observation by commander. Have definite evidence of enemy tanks including Mark four special being destroyed at ranges up to two thousand yards. Troops are saying send us more Shermans earliest. Information about stabilizer will not repeat not be available early. Our policy is still to fire from stationary hull down positions whenever possible."*

Another telegram to TROOPERS and MILSTAF from MIDEAST timed at 1635GST 10th November 1942 added -

*"Further reports confirm satisfaction with Sherman. Would emphasize extremely tough nature of fighting during 24-28 Oct in which mines anti-tank guns and very heavy concentration of artillery fire restricted tank movement until combined infantry and tank attack of night 1-2 Nov opened a clear road. Period of close fighting however wore out enemy's armoured and anti-tank strength and gave our armour decisive superiority in final armoured action at 4 Nov. Many tank casualties due mines and shelling affect tracks and suspension only. All evidence shows petrol fuel causes instantaneous fire while diesel fuel igniting more slowly gives crew better chance evacuation. Am investigating whether heavier armouring of ammunition bins even at expense number of round would not repeat not save many tanks. Estimated casualties written off SHERMANS 50 GRANTS 30 Recovered and repairable SHERMANS 75 GRANTS 60 Exact*



figures will be sent when battlefields cleared. Information to date indicates little use stabilizer during static fighting. No information more mobile operations to hand at present."

A questionnaire was circulated to get the opinions of those who had manned the tanks, and the results were summarized in Appendix 'G' to AFV Middle East Liaison Letter No 8 in January 1943.

**(a) Spotlights**

It is considered that the fitting of spotlights to AFVs in the ME is not justified.

**(b) Turret flaps - Sherman Tanks**

The flap at present fitted is too heavy. When in the open position, it is liable in battle to be blown into the closed position by the impact of a shell on the tank, injuring the tank commander. It is recommended that the rear flap be removed, and that a lighter covering be substituted. This covering must necessarily be attached to the tank, otherwise it will be lost. It must also be capable of being locked in the closed position to prevent pilfering in transit.

**(c) 5" Browning A.A. Gun fitted to Sherman Tanks**

It is considered that the gun is a satisfactory A.A. weapon and should be retained. Arrangements should be made for stowing the gun in clips fitted in rear of the tank. The gun would be mounted only when required for A.A. defence, and would not therefore interfere with the passage of the crew in battle.

**(d) Spare barrels .5" Browning A.A. Gun fitted to Sherman Tanks**

It is considered that spare barrels should not be carried on the tank. Spare barrels on the scale of two per squadron should be carried within the regiment.

**(e) Circuit of Action - Sherman Tanks**

	Petrol Engine	Diesel Engine
Good Going:	90 miles	120 miles
Bad Going:	56 miles	90 miles

**(f) General Performance - Sherman Tanks**

	Petrol Engine	Diesel Engine
Max Speed:	25 mph	32 mph
Average Speed: (On good Desert going)	15 mph	20 mph
Mechanical	Good	Very Good
Reliability		
Oil Consumption	20 mpg	20 mpg
Cooling	Good*	Good**

\*Deteriorates rapidly if plugs are not cleaned regularly

\*\* Radiator liable to damage by rear shellfire.

**(g) Fitting of auxiliary fuel tanks to Sherman Tanks.**

These are not required.

**(h) Relative merits of power traverse gear.** WESTINGHOUSE - Generally considered the best.

OIL GEAR - Satisfactory and not very little inferior to WESTINGHOUSE.

LOGANSPORT - Universally considered the least popular. No suggestions for it's improvement have been received.

**References and Appreciations**

The Public Record Office in Kew, London has an extensive collection of War Diaries for the North African campaign. They are classified under the heading WO.169 with separate 'pieces for each unit, usually further subdivided by year. Those I have mainly used for this article are -

WO.169/3861 HQ AFV - not a true War Diary, this contains the 8th Army Tank State returns along with many reports and other documents on Shermans and all types of armoured vehicles.

WO.169/4210 2nd Armoured Brigade HQ

WO.169/4214 2nd Armoured Brigade

Workshops

WO.169/4479 Queen's Bays

WO.169/4481 9th Lancers

WO.169/4489 10th Hussars

Files WO.169/4230 for 8th Armoured Brigade, WO.169/4233 9th Armoured Brigade and WO.169/4266 24th Armoured Brigade were also consulted, the latter containing details of the tanks they transferred at the end of October.

PRO Cabinet Office Papers series files also yielded some interesting material. Memos on names appeared in one for Tank Nomenclature CAB.120/354 and also included the details of the APPAREL ships.

I would like to thank all those at the PRO who helped by fetching files for me and producing photocopies.

An account of Louis Legrand was in the Brussels Tank Museum's magazine, *Tank Museum News* for July 1999, although this is written in French and Flemish.

The Tank Museum at Bovington have copies of several Regimental War Diaries, when I first enquired they did not have that for the Queen's Bays for 1942 though they may have since obtained a copy. Many War Diaries they hold have been typed up by the Friends of the Tank Museum Typing Team under Nancy Langmaid, and it was Nancy who tracked down AFV Middle East Liaison Letter No.8 and passed a transcript to me. For this and her work on the Typing Team I hereby thank her.

In the end, great appreciation and thanks must go to those who compiled the reports way back in the dark and hectic days of 1942, as well as those who built, shipped, prepared and repaired the tanks but especially to those who fought and died in them.

May they not be forgotten. ■

'C' Squadron, 9th Lancers run by the AFPU cameramen on 16th October 1942 - nearest Sherman is T 145064, then T 145063 and T 145045. Note the yellow troop numbers on the turret stowage bins - these are also blocked like the squadron tactical markings, a style of marking which appears unique to the 9th Lancers - at least 'C' Squadron's vehicles. The arm of service and divisional badges on the rear sand shields have been censored. The nearest tank (T 145064) has spare track links on its hull rear right side, whereas the others do not. Note the crew's steel helmets on the hull side and the large funnels carried for refuelling by the nearest tank and the third in line. All tanks have their .50 cal Browning AA machine guns fitted and the tank commanders (officers) are wearing peaked caps with headphones over. The fourth tank in line has some big tarpaulins tied onto its Sunshield hull stringer. This sequence of photographs of the 9th Lancers' Shermans has, in the past, frequently been misidentified as those of the Queen's Bays. (Tank Museum Photo 2716/D5.)

