



**THE HISTORY**  
**OF THE**  
**DUKW AND RASC DUKW COMPANYS**  
**DURING WW11**

This project began when I started researching the history of 18 (Amphibious) Company Royal Army Service Corps and 18 (Amphibious) Squadron Royal Corps of Transport I served with both of these units from March 1965 to June 1969 in North Devon and the Far East.

During my research I came across vast amounts of information regarding DUKWs during WW11, as far as I am aware no definitive record of British DUKW operations has been compiled for the period of 1943 to 1945. Most of the information I have gathered is from the Journals of the Royal Army Service Corps (The Waggoner) and from The BBCs WW11 Peoples War.

## **DUKW DEVELOPMENT**

A great deal has been written about the Development of the DUKW elsewhere so I shall be brief. The DUKW is based on the chassis and running gear of the General Motors CCKW 353 2 ½ ton (Duce and a Half) Truck, the mock up was started on Friday the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1942 and was completed by the following Monday morning. The first prototype drove out of the factory 38 days later. By 1945 21.000 had been built 2.000 of which were provided for the British Government.

**Please note that the dates in bold are the dates of publication and not the dates of the actual events also for security at the time names, locations and unit titles may be omitted**

### **Nort Africa Sicily and Italy**

The first RASC Company to see action with DUKWs was B and C Platoons of 239 Company 100 British and American crewed DUKWs took part in the Landings on Sicily from July the 10<sup>th</sup> 1943.

#### **1943 October (The Waggoner)**

##### **R.A.S.C. Take the Dukws into Battle**

"GREATEST THING OF MODERN TIMES FOR COMBINED OPERATIONS"

Amphibian Dukws driven by R.A.S.C. personnel from North Africa and the United Kingdom were used in the invasion of Sicily, and their performance in these great combined operations was thus summed up by a very senior and distinguished General; "The. Dukws have altered the whole problem of beach landings. They have been quite magnificent. They are like destroyers in the Atlantic when at sea, and very efficient on land as well. They are quite the greatest thing of modern times "for combined operations." One Corps Commander wrote that without the Dukws "vital stores could not have reached the fighting troops." These astonishing amphibians proved ideal for ship-to-shore maintenance across beaches; they were remarkably steady in the water, although there was a strong swell off the Sicilian coast, and negotiated without difficulty rock, shingle and soft sand. Although vulnerable, Dukws landed assault troops against slight opposition and carried 6-pounder anti-tank guns into action. T h e y helped in the building of the original pontoon bridge on the beach. They were used for salvaging small naval craft and gliders, and for towing up the

beaches water-proofed vehicles which had stalled or stuck in the water after leaving landing craft.

**MOTORIZED BOAT ON WHEELS** "The Duck," as it was christened by workmen on the assembly line in allusion to the serial letters allotted by the factory, is a motorized boat on wheels. It is the standard six-wheel drive. American Army truck chassis encased and made amphibious by a water-tight steel boat hull. It is a sturdy, seaworthy cargo boat, has negotiated surf, and is certified as a lifeboat. There is no limit to the time it can remain in the water. Over land the Dukw is driven like a lorry; in water it is driven like a motor-boat; but going into and coming out of water it must be driven like a Dukw. The amphibian must be brought to a halt at the water's edge in order to engage the propeller before coming ashore, and when still clear of shallow water, the driver shifts controls to provide land-and-water drive. Dukws are designed primarily for transport from ship to shore when the ship is lying close in, and for delivery ashore up to about six miles from the coast. Beyond this distance Dukws would sacrifice the advantage of their amphibious role. But in the invasion of Sicily a number of Dukws took off from their parent landing ship when several miles from shore, thus saving the time needed for the ship to berth, and in the invasion of the Italian mainland Dukws crossed the straits from Messina to the Calabrian shore.

**REPLACE LANDING CRAFT** The invention of the Dukw removes the need for a multitude of minor landing craft, besides replacing numbers of load carriers on shore. Dukws eliminate two handlings of cargo in transit from ship to dump and depot ashore. They can land, for immediate tactical employment on the beaches, assault troops, infantry weapons, artillery weapons—e.g., 6-pounder anti-tank guns and jeeps. They can "winch" guns over beaches. They can rescue "drowned" vehicles. When equipped, as a proportion of them are, with "A" frames, as shown in the accompanying illustration, they can handle-lifts of over two ton. They can, for example, lift marine engines and heavy stores of landing craft when no other suitable crane is available. Time is a vital factor in all combined operations. They land cargo in one-third of the time taken by other landing craft, and with at least a 50 per cent, saving in personnel. Moreover, unlike landing craft in general, Dukws are independent of tides and, as far as can be judged, independent of the weather. A Dukw, while loading, is held in position at the landing ship's side by a single stern spring 50 feet long, which is rigged by the ship and attached to a mooring eye abreast of the Dukw's forward cargo bulkhead. The engine is kept running slowly with off helm. There are other methods of replenishment. Even a loaded Dukw can mount the ramp of a landing ship. Empty Dukws can be run aboard, reloaded and returned through the landing ship's open end into fairly deep water. By means of hog troughs put over the side a Dukw while moving along the beach can lower ammunition boxes, or other small boxed material, at intervals behind infantry in action.

**OPERATED BY R.A.S.C.** Amphibians are controlled and operated by the R.A.S.C. on exactly the same footing as other R.A.S.C. load carriers. They are organized in platoons,

which are essential parts of certain general transport companies. To enable each Dukw to work day and night, two drivers and two boat hook men compose the crew, Dukw drivers can be trained in fifteen days' if they have some previous experience of small boats, in twenty days if they have none. The very sensitive steering presents some difficulty at first. In the water the front wheels turn with the rudder, giving a 40-foot turning circle, which is rather like having three rudders. Proper maintenance, though simple, is of vital importance; the steel hull quickly corrodes without attention. The engine cowlings are fastened on deck by numerous wing nuts, which soon rust and break off if neglected, allowing water to leak into the engine hold. Maintenance takes only half an hour a day if you know the drill, but without it a Dukw quickly becomes a liability. Regularly maintained, a Dukw will run 20,000 miles without refit. This innovation in transport vehicles enables the R.A.S.C. to make a novel and far-reaching contribution to the maintenance of troops in beach landings. We shall certainly hear a great deal more of the Dukws and of the R.A.S.C. of all ranks who are charged with the duty of operating them.



Bill Blewit in 1939 aged 19

**Extract from The BBC WW1 Peoples War by Bill Blewitt RASC**

As a Territorial soldier, I was called up on August 24th 1939, into the Regular Army. It was a Darlington Company 923 RASC and the camp was at Scorton, nearby under canvas. The wagons were all shapes and sizes having been commandeered for the duration. The situation changed later on when we were allocated Bedford OY's and QL's The Company was under the command of the North-East Anti-Aircraft DIV. This meant we spent all our time going round Search-Light and Anti-Aircraft Units supplying them with food rations and ammunitions. This lasted about 18 months and then I got posted along with two mates up to SCOTLAND. Around 50 of us were greeted by a Captain on Glasgow Station, who congratulated us on volunteering for Combined Operations? (WE DID WHAT?) Apparently this new Company 239 had been practicing landings with water-proof engines etc. and were under-manned! However they were a great bunch of lads and when we had settled in after a few weeks we were accepted as one of them!! The Company was up on the Rifle Ranges one month later in the hills overlooking Gourrock and there was quite a gathering of Ships in the Harbour. (Hi-Hi, some-ones for the off) we said!! quite right, it was US. A few days later, we boarded the ship that was to take us to NORTH AFRICA on the INVASION as part of the 1st ARMY. About a week later we docked at ALGIERS, this time walking off the ship. We were making our way to the ZOO a few miles out of Town (we got lost once, and had to turn round). This incident didn't endear us to our Officers, leading the way and there were a few ribald comments from the lad's i/e IF we march much Bloody further we could be prisoners of WAR by tonight!! IN the Event we managed to find the ZOO, and settled in for a few days, while the powers to be pondered our next move!! After we got our Lorries off the ship, we were sent up to SOUK-ARRAS where we set up camp, and started taking supplies up to the front! LE-KEF, Djeifa, Medjas el bab and Kasserine were some of the places I remembered, but when we entered Tebessa with our convoy of ammunition we were shocked to see the YANKS wiring the place up, ready to blow it up!! In the finish however the AXIS forces surrendered, and we got the job of taking them back to the POW camps that had been hastily prepared!

A few weeks later the COMPANY was paraded and told we were splitting up! Half to keep on the wagons, and the rest on DUKWS Two PLATOONS (ours B and C) were then sent up to the RAIL-HEAD to bring them back!!! This was our first sight of the Trucks that was to be our future companions for the duration! WE found out later there were an adaptation of the YANKS beloved GMC lorries and a YANK coy and us were the first to get them. We set off down to SOUSSE to begin our training on the water! Our workshops officer gave us a pep talk on maintenance on the Ducks as we called them, but seeing as how he was reading from a manual, it was obvious he didn't know any more than us, and we would learn as we went along!! An American Capt was appointed to show us the ropes and he knew his stuff (I'm sure he was a sales-man for the firm, that made them). His favourite saying, ("Put it in Grandma, and this duck will climb up the side of a house). Bottom Gear, of course!!

After weeks at SOUSSE in and out of the water, we felt we had mastered our new craft and off we went to MALTA in LCTS Tank landing Craft for the build-up to the invasion

of SICILY. ON JULY 10th 1943 came our big day, ferrying troops and stores ashore. We were attached to the CANADIAN DIV, for a-while in between jobs and when the fighting was over in SICILY we took them over The MESSINA STRAITS in the DUKWS to REGIO where we said our farewells as they took off for the front, and we resumed our job, taking up supplies!! This was our main role, as the PORTS had been bombed so much the ships couldn't get in to unload, so we had to go out to them, get loaded up and bring the supplies in-land! 8 hours on 8 off until the situation eased a bit and we resumed normal working hours. To relieve the situation at SALERNO, a FIELD BAKERY was urgently needed in the forward area, but the roads were so congested it was impossible to go by land, so it was decided to take them by sea. WE got the job, A convoy of 58 DUKWS took the Bakery 135 miles by sea, a Venture that required 9800 gallons of petrol. About this time, I went down with Malaria and was evacuated to SICILY. There I got Diphtheria and was so ill, I was given the Last Rites and a Telegram sent home to the family! I was sent back further to the 66th General Hospital in North Africa! (Back to where I started.) However I slowly recovered and eventually recuperated enough to be discharged and sent to a (GRTD) General Re-Enforcement - Training-Depot 20 miles outside ALGIERS! There, route marches were the order of the day to get you fit again. Being a Driver, I didn't like it at all but it must have worked, because after about a month, 100 of us were Shipped off back to ITALY. Another GRTD Camp 20 miles from NAPLES and there we waited for our next move. However as I was a DUKW driver, I was held back until my Company was informed and they sent a 15cwt truck from the rear party in NAPLES! I had missed the ANZIO Landings by about a Week so, after three days in NAPLES getting all the news, 10 of us were shipped up the coast to re-join our Platoons, on the BEACHHEAD. When I arrived after being Greeted by my mates and the Officer i/c I was shown where my Section was quartered. DOWN in a cellar!! IT seemed everybody was living below Ground Level on account of the Shelling that was pretty constant (what had I got myself into). I was thrown in at the deep end, next morning my SHIFT started 8am - and we worked round the clock 8 on 8 off unloading the Ships in the Bay. It was a bit dodgy as we went back and forth because ANZIO ANNIE so-called by the lads was a 280mm Gun mounted on Railway Lines which was shunted down the track, fired off about 30 or so rounds and then went back up the line! (We found this out after the break-out.) Although the targets were the large ships, some of the shells fell short so anything in the way got it! So it was fingers crossed and buttocks clenched when the Shelling started and you were on the water. This was brought home to us when our first casualty was killed, maintaining his DUKW in the car park. After that incident, BULL-DOZERS came and dug pits for the DUKWS to be below ground in the car-park. This was better as soon as the shelling started we dived into the pits and waited till the finish! So the months went by and eventually the troops broke out of the Beachhead and we set off again, this time our new camp was CITITAVECCHIA about 30 miles the other side of ROME, where we managed to get a day pass to visit 10 at a time. Then another meeting was called. A new type of tank was being introduced (AMPHIBIOUS) and crew members were required! No one rushed forward, of course (my old man a first World WAR VET) never volunteer for owt,

except concert parties and football teams words ringing in my ears. I stayed MUTE. In the event 50 were picked to go. Seeing as my 3 best mates were chosen, I volunteered to go as well. Four men to a tank so hoping we would all get together we decided DRIVER - GUNNER - WIRELESS-OPERATOR - gunner and TANK Commander we put forward our names! NO CHANCE. Three of us were put on a Wireless course so we got split up straight away. For a month we were with the SIGNALS until we were deemed good enough and then off to the TANKS. MY crew consisted of WILF-driver from Newcastle. TED GUNNER from London. Myself operator gunner and an Officer Capt Davis from the South. We all had to be able to drive, in case of Emergency!) We got more proficient as time went on manoeuvring in the water and landing. On the last day of training a group of staff officers, general Alexander among them, were watching to see, no doubt how we would cope under Battle conditions. We loaded up onto TANK Transporters and taken to a spot near Lake Commachio with a complement of Commando's. First we had to go up a strip of land between the sea and our objective. Four tanks in a line, we were 2nd just as we set off, a pill-box on our left opened up and also mortar BOMBS started to fall. One had a direct hit in the back of the first tank killing the gunner and wounding about fifteen of the commandos including our Sgt who was I/C tank. We were next to go and our gunners on both tanks gave the Pill-box a pasting as we passed (fingers crossed and buttocks clenched). Tanks two and three got past the pill box and made our way across the river, but stuck on the opposite bank and was unable to lower the ramp to let the commandos off. Nothing loath they clambered over the front end and we gave them covering fire while they all got ashore. When we went back for our second load of troops, we managed to get them ashore OK but on our third trip with one Commando Officer and his batman, who we took across with a small Tractor type Tank, we came under fire from a spot that was thought to be cleared. We moved farther down the river to unload him. We carried on the rest of the day until they had established their positions, ferrying troops and supplies. Next few days were spent helping out where required. When the fighting was over and the tanks were no longer required, we returned to our DUKW company. After a few weeks in a town called MESTRE we set off for VENICE and the LIDO-DI JESOLO where we set up CAMP.

THE 8th army and the YANKS had set up LEAVE CENTRES for all and sundry and we got the job of supplying these centres with everything required! When the gondoliers went on strike, the TOWN MAJOR ordered our company to run a Shuttle service up and down the GRAND-CANAL 8am-8pm until normal services resumed. THE company was being moved, ready for the far EAST (Rumours) but, thank goodness JAPAN surrendered. WAR-OVER. A foot note to our time on the TANKS. On Company ORDERS it was stated the CAPTAIN on our TANK had been awarded the MILITARY CROSS and the GUNNER (TED) the MILITARY MEDAL. When I asked him what it was for, he replied, "GOD knows, you were there as well your guess is as good as mine."

## **1983 December (The Waggoner)**

DUKW Reunion 239 General Transport Company (DUKW) RASC met for their 13th Reunion in Lincoln on 22 October. The organizers have written to me (in my capacity as Curator) to ask if the 5th Army plaque and citation is on display in the regimental museum. This plaque was presented to the company by Lt-Gen Mark W Clark, commanding 5th US Army, with a citation which commends the company for outstanding performance of duty at the Anzio beach-head in March 1944. The citation, signed by the General, is displayed in the museum but not the plaque, the whereabouts of which is not known. I would be pleased to learn any other facts concerning the history of this plaque and where and when it was last displayed.

Editor

## **1944 February (The Waggoner)**

### **On Being AMPHIBIOUS—With the DUKWS in Sicily and Italy**

An article about the Dukws, the amazing amphibians which have been described, on high authority, as "the greatest thing of modern times for combined operations," appeared in the October number of the JOURNAL. The article below has been written from first-hand experience by the R.A.S.C. officer who commanded the Dukws in the Sicilian landings, and later led them across the Straits of Messina to the beaches of the Italian mainland.

The Dukws are operated by the R.A.S.C., and all who know them will agree with the writer that there is "No more intriguing role amongst the many duties of the Corps than being amphibious." It was in May, 1943, that we first heard that our Company (239 Coy) was to change its desert role for one of an amphibious nature. It certainly sounded an interesting venture and one which would provide a welcome change from driving over endless stretches of sand.

The new vehicles, we were told, were of American manufacture and were called Dukws. No one had seen a sample, but it was believed that a few had recently arrived in North Africa, and after a short delay we managed to lay our hands on fifteen of them. A suitable Mediterranean beach was chosen, and there we settled down to some extensive training, having, for the most part, to teach ourselves from the textbooks accompanying the vehicles.

### **SUSPICIOUS AT FIRST**

The Company was suspicious at the start, and few believed the impressive certificate supplied by the manufacturers that the Dukw was a "lifeboat." Several men insisted that they disliked the sea intensely, others said they could not swim, others that they were always seasick—so the first day out consisted of trips for some five miles out to sea. We rapidly became intrigued, and in a very few days interest grew to large proportions. This interest was the secret of our successful training. We learned and corrected as we



went along, and when, after three weeks, we were ordered to Malta, our confidence was established, and the whole Company were on their toes to play a part in the invasion they knew to be coming.

At Malta we caused a stir as we drove through the streets to our camp, and again later when we continued our training in Valletta Harbour and assisted to unload the ships. We were honoured during this stay by a visit from H.E. The Governor, Field-Marshal Lord Gort, V.C. G.C.B., who inspected our unit and took a trip across the bay in a Dukw. The D.D.S.T. was present on this occasion, and kept the reputation of the Corps high by taking the wheel and making a successful landing at the first attempt.

### **THE SICILIAN BEACHES**

At last the great day approached and the Dukws were loaded in the landing craft which were to carry them to within a few miles of the Sicilian beaches. There were practically no hitches, except that the captain of one L.S.T. had to be almost forcibly persuaded to let down his 'ramp out at sea, so that the Dukws could drive off before reaching the land. It was interesting to see the incredulous faces as we drove calmly out of the sea and up on to the land. One felt almost sorry for the gangs of labour who had to wade out to unload the landing craft which, perhaps, had beached on the first bar, whereas we were able to climb over all these natural hazards and reach dry land. Initially some difficulties were experienced through the ignorance of many who failed to appreciate the true value and correct use of Dukws. Several instances of misuses were evident, but in a few days the amphibians were operating smoothly under careful R.A.S.C. control. The drivers worked night and day offloading vital stores from the ships; and everywhere, without exception, these men earned tremendous praise for their courage, determination and skill.

### **SALVAGING GUNS AND VEHICLES**

The Dukws were used for many other purposes besides that for which they were originally designed, but these had to be cut to a minimum, as otherwise considerable wastage of transport was inevitable. For example, when at a very early stage two Dukws with " A " frames had to be drawn off important work in the ammunition dump to lift out a huge crate that could not be man-handled off a landing craft, it was rather disheartening to find, on getting the crate to the beach, that it contained nothing else besides cricket bats and recreational stores. Dukws, however, did excellent work salvaging gliders, bogged vehicles, guns and landing craft. They carried anti-tank guns, jeeps and all manner of stores. They were used extensively with "A" frames as mobile cranes. Even the airline off the Dukw was used on several occasions to provide the air for divers employed on salvage work.

On the completion of the Sicilian campaign we were able to get down to much-needed maintenance and repair, and by the time that Italy was due to be invaded all the Dukws were once again completely fit. The ferry service to Italy was our longest sea journey

to date, but once the initial difficulties of the tricky tides and currents of the Straits of Messina were overcome, the crossings were made without incident. We carried many tons of stores and even a field bakery from Sicily to the mainland during the first two weeks of the campaign.

### **QUACK! QUACK!**

By this time our relations with the Navy were particularly good and the experience of one convoy commander is perhaps worth mentioning. Whilst leading a convoy of some forty Dukws across the straits he was somewhat bewildered by the sight of a flotilla of destroyers to starboard making towards his convoy. The thought of destroyers in the midst of a Dukw convoy was awful had he disregarded the rule of the road? A signal flashed from the leading destroyer. The convoy commander, fearing the worst, requested its translation, but he was soon relieved the signal had merely said "Quack! Quack! and the destroyers had steered astern of the forty Dukws. Later in Italy there was an interesting example of co-operation with motor-boat companies to be found up the West Coast. Schooners manned by R.A.S.C. personnel were ordered along the coast to lie off suitable beaches adjacent to the forward F.M.Cs. These schooners were then off-loaded by Dukws and the stores taken directly into the F.M.C. area. This method of dumping stores saved an immense amount of road haulage up an already much congested and extended L. of C.

There were many other incidents and occasions which could be written about, but space will not allow, it may only be said in conclusion that there is never a dull moment when operating Dukws, and it is difficult to imagine a more interesting and more intriguing role amongst the many abilities of the R.A.S.C.

### **1944 January (The Waggoner)**

#### **IT'S A FUNNY WAR SAID THE GERMAN SERGEANT-MAJOR**

[From "Eighth Army News," dated 12th December, 1943] ".It's a funny war," a German sergeant-major told a Canadian officer. "I'm going to Canada and you're going to Berlin." That's all there was to the conversation on the Adriatic beach, for the sergeant-major and a couple more of his fellow-prisoners of war saw a strange sight that made them rub their eyes. They had heard of amphibious trucks, but hadn't seen them. So when a string of Dukws floated towards them, dropped their sea legs and waddled on to the beach with their ammunition, petrol and supplies they rubbed their eyes. Then a couple of Dukws which had emptied their precious loads pulled up, and took the prisoners away on the first leg of their journey to a prisoner-of-war cage. Most of them youngsters, they appeared to be in high spirits and a little thrilled by this new experience, like having a first ride on a roller coaster. They pulled away just in time to hear the beginning of a terrific artillery shoot made possible by the amphibians. The Dukws, operated by the R.A.S.C., had been going day and night for five days. In the previous twenty-four hours they had taken forward some 700

tons of vital material, including 60,000 assorted rounds of artillery ammunition, 45,000 rations and 15,000 gallons of petrol. In addition they evacuated wounded and prisoners of war. Dukw "pilots" are R.A.S.C. drivers who have taken to the sea readily. Many of them worked through the Sicilian and Italian landings, and they are now developing traditions and habits of their own like giving the " thumbs up " or " V " sign when they take off or pass one another in the water, much in the. same manner as pilots of the R.A.F. " I am where the ammunition is the thickest," joked a. corporal from Lancashire, pointing to his load three tons of high explosive on a Dukw.



DUKWs coming ashore at Anzio (Photograph IWM)

## **1946 December (The Waggoner)**

### **STORM BOATS IN ACTION**

#### **R.A.S.C. DRIVERS HELP TO MAN NEW CRAFT**

THE first storm boats to be used in the Italian theatre were operated by 237 Anti-Tank Battery, R.A., reinforced by sixty Dukw drivers of 239 Company, R.A.S.C. The Battery assembled at the training area from 13th to 17th March, and was later joined by a small R.E. detachment of fitters, Eighty storm boats arrived on vehicles of 1800 Bailey Platoon, R.A.S.C., which was henceforth attached to the Battery for all operations. The engines were given a thorough check by the fitters before being issued to the four Troops, two drivers being allotted to each engine. The training area was an ideal one, near the mouth of the Fiumi Uniti, south of Ravenna. The river was about fifty yards wide, deep, with a steeply shelving bank which was used as the launching site. Where it met the sea there was a submerged sandbank, which provided plenty of practice in pulling the engines inboard and paddling. Training began as each engine passed through the fitters' hands and was taken over by a driver and co-driver. It was immediately fixed in a boat, started usually on the first pull of the "starting handle," and in a few minutes the calm of the river was broken by storm boats rushing up and down at 24 m.p.h.—their top speed unladen. There had, of course, been short lectures on Evinrude engines, their maintenance, operation and capabilities, and on the elements of navigation. But the big moment for each driver was when the 50-h.p. engine roared into action, and he found himself skimming along the water with his hand on the extremely sensitive tiller throttle. An element of doubt crept in when the first almost inevitable mistake of training had been made, i.e., finishing a trip by coming up the bank on half-throttle. Owing to the proportion of lubricating oil in the fuel mixture the plugs quickly oil up unless the engine is run at full speed. It cost many hours of pulling at the starting handle and many changed plugs before everyone learnt to roar up to the bank at full speed, switching off five to ten yards away. After two days of training with unladen boats the Commandos who were to take part in the forthcoming operations came to take part in some day and night schemes. They too had short periods of instruction in handling storm boats. With the maximum load of eighteen fully equipped infantrymen the speed of the storm boat drops to 7 m.p.h. and its freeboard is only a few inches. During an exercise on a choppy sea the crew of one boat failed to erect the canvas dodger at the bows. Three or four small waves caught it, and it filled with water and sank gently under its load of men, who were left swimming. The final combined exercise took place on the night of 27th March, and everything went according to plan as far as the storm boats were concerned. The following day sixty boats and engines were loaded on to transporters. That night a reconnaissance was made of the landing site to be used. It was at: P. Scorticata on the southern shore of Lake Comacchio, and consisted of two low swampy islands connected to the shore by a narrow spit of land, above which it was impossible to drive any sort of vehicle. The water here was up to, one foot deep, with a fairly firm bottom, and free of

seaweed. On the nights of 30th and 31st March, by the light of a full moon, the sixty storm boats were man-handled out to these two islands by two platoons of the Royal Fusiliers, First, the boats were taken to the bank of the Reno, where they were unloaded by crane, paddled across to the other side, and hauled up the steeply sloping flood bank. Each was then put on a sledge and hauled by jeep or Weasel 90 yards along the north side of the flood bank. From here they were pushed through the shallow water out to the islands, where they were hauled on to dry land and loaded with extra stores that were needed for the operation, such as torches, smoke generators and first-aid kit. Then they were covered with camouflage nets and left during daylight under the eyes of the enemy. On the night of 1st April, as soon as it was dark, the boats' crews were over the dyke and on their way through the mud to the launching site. Of the sixty boats, three were found to be holed; this had presumably happened sometime between loading at the training area and the man-handling to the islands. It did not affect the operation at all, as only fifty-four boats were required for the first assault, the rest being held as Brigade reserve. The Commandos arrived next, and were sorted out to their respective boats. After almost an hour's wait in the growing moonlight they boarded the storm boats and assault boats. The fully loaded storm boats had to be pushed several hundred yards before the requisite depth (2 ft. 6 in.) for the engines was reached. Here, at the forming-up area, it was the plan to form up the fleet of Buffaloes; storm boats and assault boats. The storm boats were lashed together in rafts of three or four, some to be towed by Buffaloes, others towing assault boats, the remainder proceeding alone under their own "steam." At this point occurred a hitch which upset the whole plan and might have had serious consequences. The Buffaloes, coming from another launching site, got stuck in the particularly bad mud and seaweed of that part of the lake. Many of the storm boats headed for their dark shapes and got stuck themselves. For two hours the boats floundered there, and everybody got very wet. Eventually the storm boats and assault boats were formed up again, carrying extra personnel from the Buffaloes which were left behind with the jeeps and 2-pounders on board. The fleet proceeded on its way, two hours behind schedule, still apparently unsuspected by the enemy. As it approached the shore, our artillery barrage started, drowning the noise of the engines. The boats carrying No. 9 Commando were able to go right inshore. Those carrying No. 2 Commando touched at the "Argine" (spit of land) 500 yards from the shore; here the troops transferred to assault boats and paddled the rest of the way. In both cases the storm boats turned round and got away as quickly as possible from the scene. Some came under machine-gun fire and put down an effective smoke screen in the manner of a destroyer. A few were kept close to the shore until all the enemy positions covering them had been taken. The boats returned singly in the early hours of daylight to the launching site. When a count was taken, about one-third of the engines were found to be unserviceable through oiled plugs and blocked cooling systems. Two boats had been badly holed and sunk. Two or three others were slightly holed. Casualties among the crews and the Commandos while they were on board were nil a combination of luck and the complete unpreparedness of the enemy for an assault across the lake. All serviceable storm boats were immediately manned by relief

crews and sent back with ammunition. This time they were loaded with about half the normal load, and thus were able to clear the mud and seaweed without much difficulty. They brought prisoners and wounded back from the beach. Four stretcher cases can be carried with safety in a storm boat. For the rest of the day (2nd April) this ferry service went on. The 3rd of April was spent in recovering most of the boats which had been left around the lake, through holes or engine trouble. There was no enemy interference, apart from a few distant air bursts. During the period 5th to 17th April the Battery's job was to supply a group of small islands in the north-eastern part of Lake Comacchio, held by Commandos and Partisans. This involved a five-mile journey, usually in the evening. At first Italian lake guides were needed, but later crews were able to navigate themselves by means of the stars, searchlights on the spit and faint landmarks. Only once, on a return trip, did a boat get lost, when it beached on a strange island and had to wait until daylight. In this part of the lake the water was nowhere more than 3 ft. 6 in. deep usually only 2 ft.—and full of floating seaweed. The launching site itself was in shallow mud. A boat loaded with one ton of stores had to be pushed out about 800 yards before water deep enough for the engine was reached. Returning empty, a boat could get almost to the shore—at the expense of a choked cooling system for its next trip out. As a result of these conditions, engines were always seizing up. When two or three boats left for the islands they were lashed together, to ensure that they all reached their destination. But the strain on the first (and sometimes the only) engine to start began to tell, and the practice was stopped. Altogether, the shallowness, mud, seaweed and saltiness of Lake Comacchio made it the worst possible place for storm boats, and a nightmare for the crews. The fact that the boats fulfilled all their commitments here gave the crews great confidence for more momentous tasks in much easier conditions. On 18th April the Battery returned to the training area, with the exception of six boats which were left to supply the islands. The enemy eventually withdrew from the Comacchio area, whereupon these boats took the Partisans of the 28th Garibaldi Brigade across the Canale Valletta, as far as Codigoro, and supplied them by the canals and flooded meadows. These six boats rejoined the Battery on 23rd April. The few days at the training area were spent in reequipping each Troop with eighteen serviceable boats and engines. These were all tested in the river, and then loaded on to transporters. One by one the Troops went off to concentration areas, and from there were attached to the 56th Division, 8th Indian Division, 6th Armoured Division and 2nd New Zealand Division for the Po crossings. Except in the case of the 56th Division they were not used in the initial assault, but joined the imposing ferry service of Fantails, Dukws and rafts in supplying the far bank until the bridges were in action. The 56th Division used their storm-boat detachment to take the first reconnaissance party across and then the assault troops. Here the Battery suffered its only casualties, the two drivers of one boat being wounded. The 26th of April found all four Troops of boats hard at work backwards and forwards across the river. One Troop ferried across 150 tons of supplies during one day. On another bridgehead two storm boats were lashed alongside a Class 40 raft. This was an unfair strain on the engines, and after ten hours of it they were almost finished. After the difficulty and general unpleasantness of Lake

Comacchio the crossing of the Po, with its deep water and steeply shelving banks, was a picnic. Most boats were working continuously, without the engines giving much trouble, under 10 per cent, being finally unserviceable. Some boats were holed by enemy action or accident, and a few were lost altogether. When the bridges came into use and the battle swept forward, storm boats were used only as a D.R. service from bank to bank. Then the 2nd New Zealand Division, 6th Armoured Division and the 8th Indian Division had their boats taken by transporters up to the Adige, where they repeated the job they did on the Po, on a smaller scale. Once again the bridges were put up and the front link vanished into the distance. From now onwards there was no call for storm boats, and they were recalled from their several detachments and sub-detachments back to Battery H.Q. Possibly the last job to be done by a storm boat was an improvisation which ended in failure; an enterprising Italian civilian, seeing a temporarily unattended storm boat on the north bank of the Po, put two of the countless horses the Germans had left behind on' board, and started paddling over to the other side. The horses panicked, the boat overturned, and the horses were drowned. Gradually all the Troops rejoined the Battery. The storm boats, most of whose engines had done their allotted span of fifty hours, were taken back to 814 Floating Bridge Dump. On 4th May the R.A.S.C. Dukw drivers left to rejoin their company, with two more landings to add to their already imposing record.

### **1986 March (The Waggoner)**

Dear Sir,

I thank you for the little mention in the DUKW article recently published. Yes I remember the 'Ducks'. They were marvellous vehicles. We used to shoot them straight out the bow doors of our LST. At the landing at Avola in Sicily we had a General's Duck in the tank space. He came to us about four times shouting for his duck but we had trouble with broken down lorries ahead of his Duck, then a bomb damaged a tank in our doors. We were all up tight, and this General shouted through his loud hailer 'I want my Duck', and from our ship's Tannoy \*\*\*\* your duck came out above the sound of the battle. It was the first time I saw about a hundred men laughing their heads off on a landing. Another funny I must tell you. We loaded an American LCT about 600 tons on our deck for passage across the Atlantic from New York to Oran, had it aboard for two months, it took us 28 days to cross the Atlantic we used to stop every watch to clear filters, This American LCT had a crew of about 20 men. When we arrived at Oran a list was put on our LST and the American ship was jettisoned over the side, where it immediately sank. Someone had opened all the scuttles to dry the ship out, but no one had thought to close them. We steamed the ship 5 to 6 thousand miles, and she sank still tied up to us in Oran Harbour. The Ducks were wonderful vehicles, if you arrived at a beach where the sand was soft, they could alter the pressure of their tyres from the driving position and go over mud or very soft sand with low pressure and pump them hard again for the road. At Normandy we took two Ducks in our davits for a quick getaway but unfortunately the crews were not used to slipping boats from davits, and only let go one

hook so when the sea went down, one end of the Duck was still made fast. So the crew were thrown in the water and the Duck sank. So things did not always go right. I hope you don't mind me writing to you, but your article did bring back a flood of memories. Yours faithfully,

S. C. HOOK

## **Normandy and Western Europe**

### **1944 April (The Waggoner)**

#### **DUKWS SAVE AIRMEN'S LIVES**

To the Editor of "The R.A.S.C. Journal"

SIR, It may be of interest to you to know that Dukws of this school were instrumental in saving the lives of two Czech airmen on 20th February, 1944, when their plane dived into the sea a mile out from the shore. Dukws were dispatched immediately the aircraft was seen to crash, and within fifteen minutes had rescued the occupants, who were in an exhausted state. Two days later the plane itself was lifted from the bottom of the sea and was successfully towed up on to dry land, where it is now in the hands of the salvage experts. I feel that this is just one more example of the versatility of the Dukw and the Corps. I may say that a very appreciative letter has been received from the R.A.F.

Yours faithfully,

K. G. NEWTON, Major.

Amphibian Training Wing, R.A.S.C.

## **The Normandy Landings**

Records indicate that 11 DUKW Company's were involved in the Normandy Landings from D Day onwards they are listed below. Estimates of DUKWs on strength of each COY vary from 60 to 100, to date I have only found records of vehicles with A, B and C Platoon markings and numbers up to 30 which seems to indicate 90 DUKWs per Coy. Another source states that each Coy was allocated 100 DUKWs with 25 of these held in reserve. Another source states that 8 of the 11 DUKW Company's reverted to a General Transport role shortly after the initial landings when the requirement for Amphibious transport reduced.





DUKWs of 21st Army Group RASC Beach Group company lined up ready for loading onto LSTs, 1 - 6 June 1944. (Photograph IWM)

DUKW Company's involved in the Normandy Landings were

### **31 GT Coy RASC**

31 Company (Gurkha) 1959.07.01 Singapore: Nee Soon Raising cadres formed 1960.05 Malaya: Buller Lines, Kluang Formed by 1 Aug 60 1 Aug 60: Company officially formed 1961.11 Singapore: Nee Soon Sp for 99 Gurkha Inf Bde Grp Dec 62 - Nov 63: Brunei Sp for 99 Gurkha Inf Bde 6 Jan - Jun 64: Borneo (1 Pln at Tawau, 2 Pln at Kuching) Sp for 99 Gurkha Inf Bde Nov 64 - Jun 65: Borneo (TAC HQ in Brunei Town, Pln at Tawau, Pln Seria, Pln Kuching, Coy Wksp Labuan Island) 15 Jul 65: Renamed 31 Squadron (Gurkha) RCT

### **101 GT Coy RASC**

101 Company (GT - Amphibious) 1945 February assisted in training Belgium Drivers late 45 England: Hobbs Barracks Lingfield 3 Division Column 1945 Palestine Apr 1947 Egypt: Bitter Lakes 1952 Egypt: Moascar, Canal Zone 3 Division Column 3<sup>rd</sup> of Aug 56: Ordered to mobilise for Suez 3 Division Column Oct 56: Column embarked for Suez 3 Division Column Nov 56: Arrived off Suez but did not land 3 Division Column early 58 Germany:

### **199 GT Coy RASC**

D Day elements of 199 Coy landed at Juno Beach at Benneries Sur Mer At some point 199 Coy took on the role of a General Transport Coy. 1945 February assisted in training Belgium Drivers and reverted to a Amphibious unit for the Rhine crossing May 1945 199 Coy recalled to England May 1945 set sail for Egypt in June 1946 went to Cambria Camp, Abbasia Garrison, Cairo still in An Amphibious role.

### **282 GT Coy RASC**

### **297 GT Coy RASC**

### **299 GT Coy RASC**

### **305 GT Coy RASC**

### **536 GT Coy RASC**

The first training on DUKWs took place on Annick Water, near Stewarton in Ayrshire in the winter of 1943/44. 536 Coy was issued with its first DUKWs on the 26th of January 1944 at the Amphibious School Towyn North Wales, then moved to Winchester Hampshire for further training OC Major P J Hurman, 2IC Captain Keith Forbes. D Day 6th of June 1944 0900 hrs Sword Beach 23 DUKWs of A Platoon commanded by Lt Day landed loaded with ammunition 3 DUKWs were damaged by mines or underwater obstacles. D day + 5 the 11th of June 536 Coy unloaded over 1000 tons of ammunition, petrol and stores in one day

### **565 GT Coy RASC**

### **633 GT Coy RASC**



General Montgomery sets foot on the beaches, after coming ashore in a DUKW, 8 June 1944. (photograph IWM) B Platoon 633 GT Company Royal Army Service Corps

**705 GT Coy RASC**

## **1944 - DUKWs D-Day to the Rhine 536 GT Company RASC**

### **Extract from the BBCs WW11 People by John Herman**

D signifies the fourth year of the American wartime military standardisation programme.

U means the vehicles is amphibious

K that it has six-wheel-drive

W that it has an inversely sprung rear axle

The first training on DUKWs took place on Annick Water, near Stewarton, in Ayrshire in the winter of 1943/44. Five Three Six Company took over its first DUKWs at Towyn, the amphibious school in North Wales, on 26th January (my birthday). I took command on 24th April at Hursley, near Winchester, in Hampshire, and made Captain Keith Forbes my second-in-command. He was to become a very dear friend, as did Nan whom he had recently married. He was always so supportive and steadfast and I believe we made a good team.

The company had been learning to handle a DUKW both at sea and on the road. They practised the methods needed to control the loading of the materials motoring out to numbered ships, lowering the three tons of stores in nets, and then returning to shore. They passed through a control point where they were told which inland dump to deliver to. DUKWs are as large as a double decker bus on the road, but when loaded they appear quite low in the water. Almost as soon as I arrived I had to take eight DUKWs to a rehearsal for D-Day (Exercise Fabius) at Hayling Island for Monty to watch. The weather blew up towards the end of the day and some of the troops were getting into difficulties trying to re-embark with their heavy kit. I ordered my drivers to follow me and pick up those on the beach and take them out to the ships in the DUKWs so that they could climb aboard. For this I was congratulated - but also criticised for not having trained my men to drive as well as I did.

A day or two before we were sealed for D-Day I was invited to spend the day with the Duchess of Kent, at Coppins, in Berkshire. I had met her with the Galitzines and then one day at Claridges she introduced me to the Duke of Kent (who died later in an air crash). Their young daughter, Princess Alexandra, saw me and ran to her mother exclaiming "There's a soldier in the drawing room!". Prince Michael was still a toddler, just learning to walk.

On 26th May we were sealed and briefed for D-Day. We were given key plans and maps which showed us exactly where everything was to be: transhipment area, initial dumps, DUKW exits, et cetera, and also how everything was phased in. There was a scale model of King Beach, where we were to land, and the surrounding countryside. The minutest details were planned to an incredible extent. We were under the command of 50th Division, the British Northumbrian Division with the TT Tyne Tees shoulder flash (a corps consisted of three divisions and each division had three brigades).

On 30th May the company (which had been split up into various serials) went to different ports and commenced marshalling and embarking. I was to travel on a flat-bottomed landing craft and had to supervise the loading of vehicles of all kinds, including my own jeep and driver. For four or five days we circled the Isle of Wight, waiting for the weather to quieten until, finally, we received the signal to move on the evening of the 5th June. It had been very uncomfortable in the rough weather and we were glad to be, finally, on our way. We started moving in a column of vessels slowly towards the French coast. As dawn broke we began to see the beach through thick smoke and tremendous noise. This was H-Hour, but we had to wait our turn to land, under artillery fire, until there was a space on the beach. Ships stretched on every side into the distance. Having suffered seasickness and lack of sleep we felt almost glad to be about to make our momentous landing. The skipper of my craft had saved a quarter of a bottle of whisky to share with me. He was such a nice chap and it cheered me up a lot. A rocket ship was firing over our heads and you couldn't imagine anyone surviving where the rockets were landing. We drew into a sort of parking space on the beach and several vessels like ours were hit. It was like ten thousand firework displays all in one as my driver and I went ashore with my jeep. We found a small space high up on the beach where we dug a trench; and from there we could watch what was happening while we identified the landmarks that we had been shown on the maps. I had landed on the Normandy beach at approximately 7.30am.

We prepared to set up a HQ at a pre-arranged spot near La Riviere. Then, at 0900 Hours, Lieutenant Day, with twenty three DUKWs of A Platoon, came in on the same beach. These were loaded with ammunition and went straight to HQ 69 Brigade near Crepon. After unloading, they returned and parked up. Everyone else arrived as planned, except three DUKWs which were damaged by mines or underwater obstacles. The place earmarked for our vehicle park was still occupied by the enemy and there were quite a few 'Jerry' snipers running about. Some were rounded up and made prisoners of war. I relieved a Gestapo officer of his swastika armband and pocketed his pistol. Towards evening, a BBC correspondent (Frank Gillard) who had landed earlier came up to me carrying a couple of blue bags. He wanted me to give him a DUKW to take his dispatches out to a destroyer. However, I told him that they were all too busy, as by now DUKWs were evacuating casualties from the beaches to the various craft at sea and then bringing in necessary supplies. Some amphibious tanks were landing small units of every regiment so that no complete unit was lost; it was brilliant organisation.

A hole had been blown in the wall, enabling the DUKWs to get up off the beach onto a road, but I was warned that there were foot mines about and that you had to be very careful. To avoid them you looked to see if the tarmac had been dug up. I was finding that many DUKWs were suffering from punctures; the balloon tyres which had been fitted were not really good enough for the job. There were too many sharp hazards about, so I commandeered several truckloads of lorry tyres and formed a pit-stop for the workshop

people to change tyres. While they were waiting the drivers would get tea, food and rest, and collect their next orders.

King Beach was practically unusable because of the amount of clay in the sand and DUKWs were getting bogged down, so we moved over a little just into Love Beach. That night we were bombed fairly thoroughly but we were fortunate to have only one casualty and I did get some sleep.

D-Day +1

Everything was working well, despite the rough sea and, as an eyewitness remembered: "The wonderful little DUKWs wallowed like hippopotamuses between the coasters and the shore some smaller craft were crushed by the surf as a dog crushes a bone. I reckon this will be the most famous gale since the Armada".

Keith Forbes arrived. The Royal Engineers were working like mad, removing anti-tank mines. As I looked down at a depression in the road they said: "That's okay, we've taken that one out". I signalled the leading DUKW to come on but, as it drove around the corner, the back wheel went into the hollow where the mine had been. Unfortunately, the Germans had laid a second one beneath the first and there was an almighty explosion. My sergeant, who was standing ten or fifteen yards away, was killed by the blast. The DUKW driver was okay, although the DUKW was badly damaged and I was peppered with shrapnel.

When I tried to get up I found my left leg and left arm were useless. My jeep driver arrived and began taking me to the dressing station, but there was a solid line of tanks preventing us moving forward. I told my driver to go ahead to see what the holdup was, but then the tanks began to move so I crossed to the driver's side, put the toe of my right foot on the clutch, slipped it into gear and pressed the accelerator with my right heel and drove up the hill steering with my right hand. In the hospital tent I was given some morphine and told I would have to wait to be evacuated. Here Pat Eassie found me and commiserated with me on my misfortune. After a day or two I was put on an LST going back to England with five hundred others. By this time I had malaria (a recurring problem from my time in the desert), a very high temperature and hallucinations. The next day, a corporal offered to carry me, piggy-back, to the bathroom. I was standing holding a handrail, bearded, bloody and bandaged, when an immaculate young American naval lieutenant caught sight of me. An expression of horror crossed his face, which was an amusing and yet depressing reaction as to what I must have looked like.

I was in a Canadian hospital for a week or more and then moved to the Cambridge Hospital at Aldershot where they carried out a series of operations to remove shrapnel. I was there for three or four weeks, recovering and receiving physiotherapy to get my leg and foot back into use, as every time I put my foot down it collapsed. While I was there I received a letter

from a friend. Pat Macleod had landed in France soon after I had and he heard what had happened. He wrote: "You're near my home in Surrey and I've written to my mother telling her all about you. Have a week or so resting there and, when you get out of hospital, she'll be expecting you". So I came to the Macleod's family home in Horseshoe Lane, Merrow. There I met Kate, Pat's youngest sister, and I fell in love.

Through Pat MacLeod's Uncle Charles, who was Director-General of the RASC, I was able to voice my desire to re-join my regiment in France (not normally allowed) and duly received orders to return. On 18th August, soon after I had arrived back in Normandy, I got a message from Pat Eassie (now Brigadier Eassie) and so I drove up through the Falaise Gap with my workshops officer. There had been a terrible tank battle and a track had been bulldozed through mountains of rubble to 30 Corp's HQ. I had handed the posting order to the major who had been running my company and he was dismayed to find that he was to join the Airborne. I volunteered to take his place, but Pat Eassie was very pleased to see me back and said he wanted me for a special job — doing all the river crossings up into Germany.

There had been eleven DUKW companies working on the British sector of the beachhead, but 536 was the only one to be kept intact. On 12th June (while I was still in England), Churchill had been brought ashore with General Montgomery and General Eisenhower in one of our DUKWs. The day before, with improved weather, our DUKWs had unloaded over a thousand tons of ammunition, petrol, and other stores in the one day — a remarkable quantity. The famous Mulberry harbour never unloaded more than half of the total tonnage carried by DUKWs — I don't think the general public realised the importance of the work that they did.

On 26th August, 1944, we moved up to Rouen, taking two thousand tons of supplies across the Seine. Sometimes we worked where bridges were blown and sometimes in addition to a bridge. We were now under the command of 30 Corps and advanced into Belgium (to great acclaim from the population) and liberated Brussels.

The first night that we were there, Keith Forbes and I went to a nightclub and some gunmen burst in looking for suspected collaborators. I asked the band to play Lilli Marlene, but I was nearly mobbed by angry Belgians - who only associated that song with the Germans. A large warehouse full of wines and spirits was 'liberated' and we could take our quota in three 3-tonners, so we loaded up crates of champagne, gin, contreau, et cetera, all stamped with swastikas. Pat MacLeod's sister Jeannie came out to work in Brussels later and I was able to give her a dozen bottles of Gin a party she was giving. In Bourg Leopold, near the border with Holland, General Horrocks gave us a talk on the imminent Operation Market Garden, the rather-too-ambitious attack on Arnhem, which was hoped to shorten the war.

Our job was to advance up a narrow road with banks on either side to Nijmegen. I was tail-end-Charlie for a while and then overtook the rest of the company about a mile and

a half to the front of my column. After we arrived in Nijmegen, we discovered that, minutes after I had left them, one of my breakdown lorries (a big 10-ton Scammel) and some of my chaps had been cut off and taken prisoner of war by the Germans. My despatch rider, Ferguson, escaped capture by hiding in a farmhouse loft (which at one stage had been used by the SS as a headquarters). Several DUKWs attempted to get across the river to Arnhem to take ammunition to the "Paras" but they got bogged down and the drivers had to swim back. Driver Chilton and another NCO were awarded Military Medals for this, having helped some Airborne people to get back

After this the Germans blew some dykes, inundating large areas between Arnhem and Germany, and cutting off some of our forward troops. The DUKWs came to their rescue, carrying all the supplies that they needed and bringing back the wounded. Our bow-waves would flap the shutters of the upstairs windows of the houses as we passed. My friend Pat Macleod asked me if he could go up to the front to see what went on as he was due to return to the UK shortly. It was his first time in a DUKW and I think he found it quite surprising, travelling so slowly (only about four miles per hour) up through the floods with shells falling around us. Colonel Fenton wrote a very appreciative letter to the company for our work. We had kept the forward troops supplied and evacuated wounded through the floods from Nijmegen to Cleves at a critical time (February 1945). The book *Club Route in Europe*, the story of 30 Corps with the sign of the rampant boar, traces the progress from D-Day to the end of the war and mentions my DUKWs several times.

Operation "Turnscrew" — Crossing the Rhine 24th March, 1944 This was the final great river to cross before striking into Germany and I thought of the Romans and the Celts nearly two thousand years earlier, facing each other across this great natural boundary. It snowed the night before we were due to cross and I slept in a trench with an uncomfortable rock bottom with a tarpaulin over me. It was really cold and I wore my leather jacket, which was lined with sheepskin and had a big sheepskin collar, a pair of rubber boots and thick socks. Extra DUKWs and drivers had been brought up for the crossing, so I had two hundred DUKWs and a thousand men under command. All our big guns were firing all around us and, of course, German shells landed in response. It was a noisy night. I did the first crossing; it was painfully slow as you only had four knots in a DUKW and you were a very easy target. Luckily the current wasn't as fast as the Rhine at Nijmegen - where you had to land further down from where you started and risked getting stuck in the mud if there wasn't a suitable ramp. Here at Till it had been a regular ferry crossing so we were able to go almost straight across. A sniper (who we eventually pinpointed high up in the bucket of a crane) killed the poor chap who followed me. He was shot to bits by a round from a twenty-five-pounder — a brilliant shot.

While I was across the river I met a doctor in an armoured jeep. The bottom of the jeep was lined with sandbags. He was driving up and down and around and around a field to make sure it was clear of mines before he set up a field dressing station. The sandbags



should have protected him if he had hit a mine, but it was still quite a hazardous thing to do. Fortunately the field was clear so all was well.

We continued getting loads of supplies across until bridges were secured, then we moved back to the island between Nijmegen and Arnhem to be under 1 Canadian Corps, while 30 Corps proceeded on towards Hamburg. Eventually Arnhem was captured and I lined up all the DUKWs in a wide road in an industrial area as they all had to be overhauled. Meanwhile I set out to discover the whereabouts of a friend whom I had known before the war. I had stayed with Ben Barenbruk's kind family in the mid-1930s. He was Jewish and his parents had been taken but Ben had gone into hiding. I finally located him and a go-between told him that a British officer was looking for him. He had been hiding in barns and such places for a long time and was very hesitant about coming out, so I called: "It's me, John Hurman. It's all right". I took him back to the mess for two or three weeks and he was able to fatten up a bit. He had obviously had a bad time and was rather quiet, but I left him a good supply of rations when I had to leave and he had fully recovered when we went back to see him after the war.

I did some illegal trips home on the odd occasion that I could get a forty-eight hour pass to see Kate. I would depart the day before it was due to start and hitch a lift on a plane. On one occasion I waved down a plane that was about to take off from Nienburg, between Bremen and Hanover. They let down the steps and I hopped aboard, finding a seat in the forward part of the plane. A young aide de camp who was with an air commodore came up and asked me what I was doing and to show my pass. I told him that I was only hitching a ride to Ostend. The air commodore obviously wasn't satisfied and told me to report to him when we arrived at the airport. I wasn't too happy about this and so, after we landed I mingled with the small crowd, walked through the central passageway, opened a door and walked out onto the road where I was fortunate enough to hitch a lift in a car almost immediately. Luckily my name had not been noted so I never heard another word about it.

Another time, Yehudi Menuhin (who was very nervous about flying) was travelling to Brussels to give a concert in the same plane when a V2 landed just below us as we were coming in to land. It sent us spiralling upwards but we circled and eventually landed safely.

In May, 1945, after the end of the war, I was asked to survey the north coast of Germany from Emden to Cuxhaven and on to the Baltic for a suitable location to set up an amphibious school - principally for DUKWs. I motored off in my Humber with a driver for ten days but there was no surf anywhere and I didn't feel that I could recommend anywhere, to the disappointment of the powers that be. By this time I was getting very anxious to get back to England and was not particularly keen on the prospect of setting up a DUKW school, even though I would have had promotion to Colonel. I just wanted to get back to civilian life, find a job and get married. I have thought since that the school could have been established near Cuxhaven and they could have gone down to Ostend for practice in the surf, but peacetime soldiering did not appeal to me. I was sent to a little town in Germany called

Seelze, about ten miles from Hanover. Sadly, the DUKWs were taken away; the company broken up and everyone posted away. I was Town Major; life was leisurely but boring — everyone longing for leave. A general election was held in England and word got around that if you voted Labour you would get home quicker. As you can imagine, practically the whole British Army voted Labour, plus families and girlfriends, thus creating a landslide victory. I was eventually posted back to UK but, of all places, to Leith Fort (near Edinburgh) which had been condemned for years and I was told to supervise the testing of learner drivers while awaiting my “demob”.

Eventually my number came up and I motored down in the little Morris Minor to Stoughton Barracks near Guildford. I was given a tweed hacking jacket, a pair of grey slacks, shirt and tie and a gratuity of nearly £2,000 and signed off. To save any delay I declared myself physically “A1” (not quite true). It was almost as quickly completed as when I had joined up five and a half years previously.

## **1945 September**

### **SETTLING DOWN**

My platoon, a very large one, was, I think, the first R.A.S.C. platoon to land in France. We are still (5th August) on the same job, but with rather less interference from Jerry. I had a nice German dug-out from D to D plus 21, very snug, underground, and fully furnished! They even left fifteen eggs, seven pounds of butter and a bitch with her puppy. I had to bury about fifteen dead Germans before I could really settle down in the location, though. From a letter from an officer in a "Dukw" Company.

## **Extract from the BBC People,s War by Leonard J Smith**

### **Hadrian’s Camp and 524 Coy**

I was given a 48-hour pass home, and sadly while on this short leave Irene and I had a falling out and parted company. On return from this weekend pass I was posted to the RASC driving school at Hadrian’s Camp, Carlisle. Here I was taught to drive a wide range of vehicles but mainly lorries. After six weeks of intensive training I passed my driving test with flying colours on 9 August ‘43. On completion of my training at the RASC training school I was posted to 524 Coy (at least I think that was the number but I cannot be 100% sure), stationed at Codford in Wiltshire. We moved about the country for a while until just after December 1943 when we took over special Amphibious Vehicles and I think the company became 199GT Coy.

## **Terrapin, Buffalo and something like a Pontoon**

We moved to the west coast of Wales and started to train and test out three different types of vehicles - the first of which was the Terrapin, a tank-like vehicle but with an open top and instead of tracks it had eight rubber tyre wheels and got its power from two Ford V8 engines. It was slow and very cumbersome both on the road and in the water, with lever steering, which made it very difficult to handle. If one engine broke down while in the water you went around in circles with no way of getting back to shore other than by towing. The second vehicle was the Buffalo, again with a body like a tank, but it did have tracks on it with very deep cleats. It had a powerful seven-cylinder Wasp Radial engine. Because of the deep cleats on the tracks it did a lot of damage when driven on the roadway, on rough ground it was brilliant and it could climb very, very steep inclines. In the water, however, it was dreadful - it was very slow, it didn't ride the waves but just drove through them, and if the sea was even just a bit rough it took on a lot of water. You could not see where you were going most of the time - you just had to rely on your co-driver. When driving off a landing craft the Buffalo was known to dive straight down in the water. More than one soldier lost his life training on this vehicle in just that way. They were, to say the very least, dangerous in the water. The third vehicle, was the American-built GMC-DUKW - the best way I can describe it would be to say it looked like a Pontoon with three rubber-tyre road wheels each side. It weighed 7.5 tons, unloaded, and was 31 feet long, with 270 cubic inch engine, six-cylinder petrol tank, and had a land speed 55 miles per hour, 6 miles per hour on water, with a payload of 2.5 tons or 25 soldiers and their equipment. It had 10 forward gears and two reverse. It had its own compressor by which you could inflate or deflate any tyre on the vehicle without stopping, and you could check its pressure just by moving a small lever on the dashboard. It also had its own bilge pump for pumping out any water taken on board, which proved to be, very important. On the road the DUKW drove just the same as any road vehicle and when you wanted to drive off the beach into the water, you disengaged the road wheels and engaged its own propeller and reversed the operation coming out of the water. It rode the waves very well indeed and because of its very efficient bilge pumps you were able to get rid of any surplus water that you had taken on board. The real advantage of these vehicles was of course that you could pick up your load from a ship well out to sea and deliver it straight to a supply dump several miles inland with out having to stop, To me they were a fantastic pieces of engineering.

## **Invasion imminent**

It was now very apparent to us that an invasion was not too far away and we had been officially attached to the third Canadian Infantry Division. In May 1944, we moved to our port of departure, which was Southampton. To get there, I remember driving through the streets of London during the night with a very heavy Police and Military escort. The roads were blocked off and all traffic movement stopped until we had passed. We parked up in streets, which had been sealed off around the dock areas of Southampton for over three

weeks, and slept on our vehicles. We did actually load up onto the ships and started out to sea once (I think it was ten days before the actual invasion date), but we got called back after a couple of hours out to sea and had to unload again. The night of 3 June 1944 the activity was unbelievable, but for me personally it didn't turn out the way that I expected it to - instead of being loaded onto a landing craft as before, I was loaded onto the top deck of a large supply ship and off we went.

### **Juno Beach**

About a mile or so from the French coast I (in a DUKW) was unceremoniously slung over the side of the supply ship and into the sea and had to drive that distance onto the beach to rendezvous with the rest of my platoon and to discharge the load of stretchers that I was carrying. This beach was to be known as Juno beach, and the name of the place where I landed was Benneries Sur Mer [sic]. I must point out at this time that all hell had broken out. The noise came from all types of gunfire, shells and bombs exploding everywhere. What I was about to witness in the next few hours, and months no training or teaching in the world could prepare you for. Death and destruction was all around me -there were unbelievable scenes and ones that I will never EVER forget, but for all that I had a job to do and had to get on with it if I wanted to survive. We made our HQ in a small Chateau about a mile from the beach, and by midday the Canadian infantry had got about three to four miles inland and were able to set up a supply dump. This meant that we could start our work of getting supplies ashore from the supply ships as quickly as possible. We worked from dusk until dawn every day, seven days a week. Do you know what? I was sat in my DUKW at 4.30 in the morning, waiting to go down to the beach to start work when our Provo' corporal climbed up the side of my vehicle and said, 'Caught you Smithy!' - I was smoking on a WD vehicle, and he put me on a charge. I went before the CO the next morning and they stopped two weeks' pay. This was in the first week of the invasion - how's that for discipline. It didn't end there - two weeks later the very same Corporal Cleckner did me for being improperly dressed, not wearing my hat - that cost me another two weeks' pay, so in five weeks I lost four weeks pay, but what the hell, there was nowhere to spend it anyway. Because the Germans had us bogged down we worked the beaches with our DUKWs for about five weeks until the fall of Caen, which I think was about the middle of July. We then changed the DUKWs for three-ton lorries, namely Ford Wat sixes. They turned out to be really good reliable workhorses.

### **Route through France and crossing the Rhine**

As we moved forward we took the more northern route through France, Belgium, and Holland, and finally into Germany. However, before reaching Germany, there were a few very hard battles to be fought and won. It was our job to make sure that the lads up front were kept well supplied and I think we did just that. In so doing I was in a way involved in all those heavy battles, like Falaise, Brugges, Nymagen, Antwerp, Brussels and Arnhem. Having reached Arnhem I had no idea that my brother Sid was one of those that had dropped with

the 8th Airborne Division. Unfortunately he was shot before he hit the ground and lay in a ditch for two days before being rescued. When we reached the River Rhine at a place I think was called Velo, we changed back to DUKWs for the crossing. I remember very well indeed that when I entered the water the current was so strong that I thought I was not going to make it. I did of course, but nowhere near the place I was supposed to get out of the water. I was a mile or so further downriver than I should have been. The units that crossed in Buffaloes did so much more easily than I did. The terrain was just perfect for them to show their capabilities. Once across the Rhine, everything was so much easier - we just knew that it was the beginning of the end, although we did have a little skirmish at Munchen Glad Bach. We made our last HQ in Hamburg.

### **News of the surrender**

I was on my way back to Calais in a small convoy when the news came through that Germany had surrendered. I celebrated VE day in Calais before driving back to Hamburg, which took us a couple of days longer than it should have done but nobody questioned it. I was then sent on detachment to a company of the Royal Engineers that were building an airstrip just outside Kiel. It was our job to ferry German prisoners of war from their prison camp to the airstrip to work. They really didn't like that - they would sometimes refuse to get out of the lorries but a couple of shots fired into the air soon changed their minds. The very tiny village that we camped in was on the edge of a very large wood, and I went shooting deer in there mainly on my own. I never shot more than two, so I gave one to the man in the village that dressed them for us and he shared it with the villagers. When my CO found out we had to send some of the meat back to our HQ in Hamburg, that way he let me have some more ammo.

### **Back to England then off to Egypt**

In May 1945 the company was recalled to England. On arrival we had orders that the company was to be sent out to Egypt. As I had only about twelve months to do before my demob number came up, I was told that I would have to go to a holding camp for that duration. I didn't want to spend that time with a lot of strangers. I appealed to my CO to let me go to Egypt with them - after all we had seen a lot of action together. After some deliberation he agreed. We were given 14 days of disembarkation leave. While on this leave brother Joe, now demobbed, had arranged a night out at the Birmingham Hippodrome to see a show and we agreed to meet outside. Imagine my surprise when I arrived there to find Irene, my ex-girlfriend, with my sister-in-law Hilda and Joe of course waiting for me. It turned out that Irene had stayed good friends with Hilda, Sid's wife. Irene had been visiting Sid in Hospital at Burntwood while he was recovering from his injuries received when he dropped at Arnhem. I think it was the best show that I ever went to - why? - because, thanks to Joe, it brought Irene and I back together again. I think I saw her every day of that leave. I wonder if I would have still volunteered to go to Egypt if I had met her earlier. Irene and I decided to get engaged - we would get married when I got demobbed. On return from leave

we set sail for Egypt in June 1946 and went to Cambria Camp, Abbasia Garrison, Cairo. I was sent home from there for demob on 19 May 1947 in a depot at York. And there endeth my military story.

### **Band of Brothers**

The Birmingham Sunday Mercury, a local newspaper, published an article with the heading 'Band Of Brothers' on Sunday, 11 November 2001, relating to my eight brothers and I who all served in the army on active service at the same time between 1939-45. What I think is really incredible is the fact that we all returned home. Only brothers Sid and Jack sustained war injuries, from which they recovered quite well. I think this was a great achievement for just one family. Sadly there is only my brother Joe and myself still surviving.

### **The Royal Dukw (The Waggoner)**



King George VI, accompanied by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, touring the beaches at Normandy in a DUKW amphibious vehicle, 16 June 1944. ( Photograph IWM )THE ROYAL DUKW Census No P5575625 was operated by A platoon 297 GT Company Royal Army Service Corps.

THIS is the story of a Dukw; in fact, the "Royal" Dukw which operated throughout the whole of the European campaign and is still on active service with the Royal Army Service Corps. Her original driver, now demobilized, was T/6009128 Dvr. E. W. Brooks, and to him and to those remaining few who know her she is still the most famous Dukw in the British Army of the Rhine. Here is her "log"

D Day.—Offshore at Courselles on the tank deck of an L.S.T.

D Day plus 1.—Swam ashore from the L.S.T. and delivered her load of ammunition to the ammunition dump. Holed by splinters during an enemy night bombing attack which caused the company ten killed and fifty wounded and a Dukw casualty state of 90 per cent. Repaired by workshops and

D plus 2 to D plus 7.—Ferrying supplies from merchant ships to beach maintenance area.

D plus 8.—Conveyed H.M. The King ashore from a naval craft and later took him back to sea.

D plus 9 to Mid-August, 1944.—Ferrying supplies ashore once more.

Late August.—Crossing of the Seine at-Vernon. Carrying supplies to various F.M.Cs.

September, 1944.—A load of ammunition and twenty infantrymen of the 43rd Division up into the Arnhem Salient immediately behind the Guards Armoured. Attempted relief of the 6th Airborne from Arnhem.

October-November.—The "Battle of the Islands," ferrying supplies and ammunition from South Holland across the Scheldt to Beveland Island and evacuating wounded and prisoners.

December, 1944, to January, 1945.—The evacuation "of the civilian population from the flooded "island" between Nijmegen and Arnhem. Conveying infantry patrols on reconaissance in flooded areas.

February, 1945.—The turning of the Siegfried Line, carrying supplies and ammunition along the flooded road from Nijmegen to Cleve and evacuating wounded and prisoners. Conveying Field-Marshal Montgomery on a visit to the front line. .

March, 1945.—The crossing of the Rhine in the Rees sector.

April to May, 1945.—The crossing of the Elbe from Luneburg. .

### **1945 May (The Waggoner)**

#### **The Rhine Crossing**

Before the attack across the Rhine could be attempted an immense volume of supplies had to be conveyed across Belgium and the River Maas to be piled up behind the Wesel bridgehead. The crossing itself was in every way another combined operation, naval craft

being brought overland on tank transporters. During the early stages, supplies and reinforcements were taken across in Dukws, and casualties were evacuated on the return journey. The O.C. of a Dukw company reported that over the Rhine was disappointing from the Dukw point of view. There was so little opposition. Mr. Churchill was there and saw the completion of one of the bridges. The sappers had been given a limit of sixty hours for construction of the first Bailey bridge. The job was done in twenty four hours in fact, within forty-eight hours 564 tanks and 8,887 vehicles (many of them R.A.S.C.) had crossed the Rhine Both Mr. Churchill and Field Marshal Montgomery made. Journey's in Dukws.

### **1946 May (The Waggoner)**

#### **49th DIVISION**

{Reprinted, by kind permission of the Editor, from "The Polar Bear News," published by the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division)

THROUGHOUT the campaign in Europe the Divisional R.A.S.C. consisted basically of four transport companies: the Divisional Troops Company, 118th, and three Brigade Companies, 460th, 482nd, and 483rd. Despite their nomenclature, all four companies combined to form a general pool of transport, and all took their share in providing the Division as a whole with ammunition, petrol and rations. The first elements of the Divisional R.A.S.C. began to come ashore on the Normandy beach-head on D + 4. The Brigade R.A.S.C. officers had, however, landed earlier, with the result that by the time the C.R.A.S.C., Lieut.-Colonel R. W. S. Norfolk, M.B.E., had established himself on dry ground, they had already a fine assortment of problems to put before him. The first was ammunition. During the planning, much thought and time had been devoted to the question as to what ammunition should be stowed in R.A.S.C. vehicles, since, in the initial stages, replenishment of ammunition would largely depend on what was held in second-line vehicles. The planning proved sound. As soon as the Division had established contact with the enemy, the cry went up for ammunition, and the ammunition vehicles began their task; a task which continued almost without a break throughout the whole campaign. It was a matter of considerable pride to the R.A.S.C. that, however much those "wasteful" gunners allowed their enthusiasm for gunnery to run away with them, there was always the wherewithal handy to satisfy their needs. It should be added that this achievement owed much to smooth co-operation with the staff, since not a single round could be drawn by the R.A.S.C. without the authority of "Q " at Corps. The time-lag between the ordering of the " ammunition and the obtaining of the necessary "Q" approval was also, to some extent, neutralized by the fact that, with a little clever " jugglery " of loads, it was found possible to carry two second-line lifts of the gun ammunition which was most in demand. Another most important fact which made for efficiency in the supply of ammunition was the constant and excellent liaison between H.Q., R.A.S.C. and H.Q., R.A., and between individual R.A. regiments and R.A.S.C. companies. The drivers of the ammunition vehicles had a very hard time of it, especially in the earlier period; their great difficulty then was that there were no four-wheel-drive vehicles in the Divisional R.A.S.C.,



and in wet weather, when dumping at gun sites, it was no uncommon experience for them to have to be towed out of the mud by R.A. "Quads." The four-wheel-drive vehicles arrived at last in January, 1945; and in sufficient number to equip half of each transport company. Up till the advance to the Seine the Division was operating on a narrow front, and, in consequence, the delivery of supplies (rations to you) presented few problems. Many an old-timer, veteran of the pre-invasion exercises, was heard to remark that this was "money for jam" compared with what they had to do on training in England, and that, in any case (as all Supply pundits know), "you can't go far wrong on compo!" But this easy life did not last long: the break-through soon caused a stretching of the lines of communication, and the supply system was put to its first real test. It was during this period of rapid advance that the Divisional R.A.S.C. took several prisoners; and the Senior Supply Officer, Major Hunter, while preparing a supply point, distinguished himself by personally "persuading" an armed German to surrender. With the crossing of the Seine came the first "narrow squeak"; and for the first time since the landing the Senior Supply Officer looked just a little harassed, he having been informed that "Marmalade" Bridge across the Seine had collapsed, and that one day's food for two brigades was cut off on the far side wedged in a solid traffic jam. It was not merely a question of food; the supply of petrol was likewise interrupted, and the all-important work of building up ammunition dumps on the far side for the coming attack on Le Havre was held up. There were all the makings of a very fine crisis; but the situation was saved when a platoon of Dukws was obtained from Corps. A transshipment area was rapidly formed on the south bank at the Caudebec crossing, and from this the Dukws drew their loads, which they finally delivered to an R.A.S.C. dump located to the west of Caudebec town. Thus, eventually, a reserve of all the necessary R.A.S.C. commodities was built up on the north bank. Great credit for this good job of work must go to the drivers of the Dukws company, whose difficulties were considerably increased by a bore on the river and the presence of wreckage on the landing ramps. Incidentally, the Dukws also ferried infantry across the river, each vehicle taking six men on top of its normal load. In this way almost a whole battalion was carried over. Rapid improvisation won the day, and in this the supply staff was not behindhand; the extraordinary sight of hastily "conscripted" French school children unloading bread from Dukws was visible proof that they were not going to let hidebound adherence to orthodox methods prevent the opening of the supply point on time. Probably few people realized that this crisis was going on; but it will not be quickly forgotten by those who were directly responsible for dealing with it. In and around the Seine the Germans left behind them a considerable amount of equipment, including vehicles. It was not long before someone decided that these would be of tremendous value and would considerably increase the tonnage lift. They certainly did that; but, most unfortunately, many other units of the Division had been struck by the same bright idea, and having thus made valuable additions to their war establishment of vehicles, soon began to demand additional petrol, far beyond the quantity that the R.A.S.C. was intended to carry. In consequence, a number of the newly acquired vehicles of the R.A.S.C. were officially recognized, in order that the new petrol commitment could be met. On the day

before the attack on Le Havre was due to go in, it was discovered that a heavy smoke barrage would be essential, and that a large number of smoke shells would have to be brought up as soon as possible. Authority was at once requested for the issue of the additional ammunition, and was speedily given but the shells had to be drawn from the beach-head. 118th Company was detailed for the job. The whole company rushed down to the beach-head, picked up its load, and returned with an hour or two to spare. Another little crisis over! After the fall of Le Havre a quick reconnaissance was made of captured German stocks of food and drink. Some most satisfactory finds were made, and as a result the R.A.S.C. were able to make a divisional issue of beer one bottle per man and of certain other desirable items. There were no complaints about the rations that day! Meanwhile, the Second Army had been progressing across France, and a series of petrol dumps were required to support the advance. It was not, therefore, altogether a surprise to be told by Corps one day that all the vehicles would be required immediately to ferry petrol to Lille. Loads were put on the ground, and the vehicles moved back to the Seine, where they were to pick up the petrol. Fourteen hours after their departure, and when it was too late to recall them, the orders came through that the Division was to move to Belgium. Those orders would have been impossible to carry out if it had not been for the fact that quite recently two additional transport platoons (thirty task vehicles each) had been formed from Gunner personnel. These two platoons were sufficient to carry the maintenance requirements of one brigade; and thus the first brigade to move forward was able to start out on its journey according to the plan, and in the meantime the R.A.S.C. load carriers had just enough time to complete their petrol detail, pick up their second-line loads from their old locations, and catch up the remainder of the Division in Belgium. The battles in Belgium were slow moving and consequently the task of the R.A.S.C. was relatively straightforward, although urgent and sudden calls for transport from Corps Headquarters were not unusual. One rather odd detail at this period was the evacuation, under the white flag, of nuns and refugees from enemy territory. The next move of the Division was to the north, where it took over from the "50th (Northumbrian) Division on the "Island." It looked at first as though R.A.S.C. work here would be very simple indeed; but, in fact, it turned out differently, since the possibility that the Nijmegen bridge might be destroyed made it necessary for large dumps of rations, petrol and ammunition to be held on the "Island." In addition, R.A.S.C. transport was kept constantly busy carrying rubble for the repair of roads; a large proportion of this rubble went to the widening and strengthening of roads which were to be used on operation "Veritable" though, of course, we did not know that at the time. The winter passed. The Division cleared the "Island" and crossed the Neder Rijn. Here another problem presented itself: all the bridges across the Oude and Neder Rijn were one-way only, and the roads on the south bank of the Waal were unusable. Dukws were called on to deal with the problem of crossing the river; but for the repair of the roads no men could be spared by the already much-overworked Sappers and so the R.A.S.C. had to do it themselves. 460th Company was the unit chosen for this task. They cleared and repaired nine miles of road from Nijmegen to a small shipyard on the south bank, filling in craters,

shoring up weak places which would otherwise have collapsed under the weight of traffic, removing mines, and finally building (under Sapper advice and direction) a small bridge. Even then a ramp had to be built on the bank for the Dukws; this work was actually done by the men of the Dukw company (326th General Transport Company) themselves. In the meantime, 483rd Company, from the other side of the river, had announced that they could get the Dukws ashore on their side by building another ramp and clearing an exit route. About 100 yards of this route had to be cut through a brickyard stacked to a height of eight feet. When at last all these preparations had been completed, the Dukws were able to build up the required dumps in a very short time. Once the bridges into Arnhem were open the maintenance of the Division became again a matter of steady routine with no special difficulties. The Division moved up to Ede and halted there while negotiations with the enemy on the terms of surrender were taking place. During this period of waiting R.A.S.C. convoys regularly carried rations to the starving Dutch population. There was considerable competition to get picked for duty with these convoys; and certainly, quite apart from the obvious appeal which their charitable object exerted, they had very special attractions. It was something new and different. Each lorry, and each motor-cycle even, was decorated with a white flag; the whole convoy was therefore an impressive sight. Added to that, every effort was made to polish up the vehicles to the last degree, and to show a very high standard in "spit and polish" generally. One company even went so far as to whiten their canopy ropes! a feat that was considered to be rather " offside " by the other units. The object of all this smart turn-out was largely to impress the Germans that we were still on the very top of our form, and hence to assist them to make up their minds about surrender. The convoys did not actually go behind the German lines, but were met by the Dutch, under German supervision, in No Man's Land. Despite orders to the contrary, the Dutch greeted our vehicles with tremendous demonstrations of enthusiasm. At the meeting point the officers were sometimes asked to drink a cup of cocoa while the transshipment took place; and on occasions they had the strange experience of taking their drinks in a room which was being used for the same purpose by German officers with whom we were still officially at war!

### **1944 July (The Waggoner)**

#### **AMPHIBIOUS VEHICLES**

The design and planning of the Army's road transport services are cared for, like the supply of food, by the Supply and Transport Branch of the War Office in conjunction with the R.A.O.C. In terms of vehicles few branches were required to begin "at an earlier date their planning for the second front. The production programmes had to be settled and put in hand years before the invading force was finally assembled with all its transport. The vehicle which has the' place of honour in the provision made for invasion is the amphibious

lorry, whose function it is to transport personnel and supplies from ship to shore, and to convert itself instantly on reaching the beach into a land vehicle. For manning these vehicles extensive water training of Royal Army Service Corps personnel was necessary. The provision of petrol, oil and lubricants is an essential element for which the Supply and Transport Branch of the War Office is responsible. As in the case of food and road transport services, the operational planning for invasion had to be interpreted at an early stage in terms of P.O.L. requirements, which even in the early phases of the operation may represent over one-third of maintenance tonnage. Between bulk reserves held in the United Kingdom and the fighting and other vehicles operating in the bridgehead, an elaborate chain of organization had to be planned and made ready.

### **DUKWS "THE MAGNEFENT JOB"**

"They are doing a magnificent job, these Dukws," said one of the B.B.C's correspondents with the Expeditionary Force a few days after the invasion started. "An R.A.S.C officer has just confirmed this with figures. Yesterday the Dukws brought in 2,000 tons; to-day they will bring in 3,000 tons. "Out they go, leaving a broad wake, to the merchantmen for ammunition, petrol and supplies. Back they come, engaging their driving wheels as they near shore, and deliver to the depots on land."

### **1949 RASC Review**

#### **R.A.S.C. AMPHIBIANS IN OPERATION "OVERLORD"**

by Major M. J. B. HORNSBY, O.B.E., R.A.S.C,

THE SCENE OF OPERATION in GOLD sector of the Normandy invasion coast and the story concerns the part played by R.A.S.C. amphibians and G.T. companies. It will be appreciated that the various sectors into which the invasion coast was divided varied greatly in nature both topographically and hydrographically. This naturally resulted in each sector, and in many cases each beach, presenting different problems which had to be solved on the spot in spite of excellent intelligence reports distributed prior to the operation and the detailed briefing which took place in the marshalling areas in the U.K. 30 Corps assaulted over GOLD sector, which extended roughly from Arromanches to La Riviare a front of approximately five thousand yards and had placed under command, for landing, 104 Beach Sub-Area. The beach sub-area was responsible for landing the assault division (50th (N) Division) and for the subsequent build-up and development of the beach areas. The S.T. order of battle in this beach sub-area included a H.Q. R.A.S.C. transport column, three: amphibious G.T. companies for stores discharge and one amphibious G.T. platoon for evacuation of casualties. All amphibians employed were 2 1/2 ton G.M.C. Dukws. In addition there was one wheeled G.T. company for work in the beach maintenance area. The allocation of other R.A.S.C. units was normal and conformed to the present organisation. Two sections of fast launches were attached for the control of amphibians off-shore. These are new organic in

the new beach brigade establishment and have been redesignated "flotillas" although the composition remains the same. Before embarking upon a description of the operation it might be opportune to consider the standard of training which had been attained by the R.A.S.C. units involved. That the operation was successful may be considered as proof that training was adequate, especially in view of the feats of seamanship performed by Dukw crews during the storm of D plus 11 to D plus 15. There can be no doubt that individual training was good and drivers carried out their tasks with confidence and ability. Collective training, however, was far from complete. This in no way reflects upon training establishments, but was rather due to lack of time and lack of direction by the joint command. The inevitable result was that many differences arose between services at the most inappropriate time and staff decisions had to be requested at the eleventh hour. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. In one case Dukws were allotted to certain assault units specifically for the carriage of anti-tank guns. These guns were never loaded and in their place units substituted G1098 equipment which was landed early, dumped in the initial dump area and never collected. This was obviously a complete waste of transport which cannot be tolerated in the early stages of such an operation, Another case concerned the method of loading Dukws into L.S.T and L.C.T. A last minute ruling was given by Q (movements) that Dukws would be loaded bows first and swim off the craft "stern first." This caused much confusion and final trials were carried out which proved that to swim off stern first was merely to court disaster and a watery grave. However, the ruling was disregarded, but the fact that such an experiment had to be made at the last moment was inclined to upset the confidence of drivers. Had collective training been completed such situations would never have arisen. These two examples bear out an observer's comment: "It is felt that the hard work and determination shown by the Dukw drivers merited better supervision and control." The beach sub-area embarked in part at Southampton and in part at Felixstowe and Tilbury. The former part which was to sail on the first tide was called Force "G" and the latter, sailing on subsequent tides was known as Force "L." Dukws were mostly stowed in L.S.T. (some being slung from davits) but a few were carried on Rhino ferries which were towed by L.S.T. Lorries were carried in L.S.T. and L.C.T. D-day was originally fixed for 5th June but early on 4th June it was postponed twenty-four hours and the first groups of craft moved out at about 0700 hours on 5th June. The passage was uneventful but a heavy sea caused a certain amount of trouble in L.C.T. and L.S.T. alike. In some instances the weather forced smaller craft to turn back. There was one instance of a L.S.T. with Rhino ferry in tow on which were lashed two Dukws. The tow parted in mid Channel and the ferry was a couple of cables astern before the incident was discovered. The captain of the L.S.T. (Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy) immediately inquired what load the ferry was carrying and on being informed that the load consisted of two Dukw loads of rum, gave prompt orders that regardless of minefields the ferry must be picked up ! The L.S.T. lost station but the ferry and its precious cargo were recovered. Needless to say the L.S.T. re-formed station during the night. H-hour for the assault of 50th (N) Division was at 0525 hours 6th June which involved a landing on a rising tide and meant that R.A.S.C. amphibians of which the

first wave was due to touch down at H plus 40 would have to come ashore at a state of tide when the majority of the beach obstacles would be submerged. The Dukws were launched in an angry sea and headed for the shore. Visibility at the time was poor. The wind was blowing from west to north at about fifteen knots which made the beaches a lee shore and raised a considerable sea. However, enemy interference from the air was practically non-existent and that from shore batteries was ineffective. Beach obstacles were numerous but with one or two exceptions were avoided by the drivers' skilful handling. It was extremely difficult to handle an amphibian in that sea without having to negotiate such obstacles, but these hazards, added to a rising tide, tested the drivers' ability to the utmost. On one beach the first wave of amphibians was held up for some time by mortar and M.G. fire and had to take cover, such as it was, amongst the sand dunes. Eventually the enemy strong point which had been offering this resistance was silenced by the assault infantry. Altogether, on the first tide, 104 Dukws and 47 three-ton vehicles were landed. These mostly contained ammunition, R.E. stores for beach roadways, medical stores and unit G1098 equipment. Casualties to both men and vehicles were extremely light. Initial dumps were established on the beaches where all preloaded stores were deposited. Then began the task of reconnoitring and establishing unit locations. In most cases locations conformed to the first key plan at any rate they were adequate for the time being, and as beaches were becoming more and more congested, movement was of necessity very restricted. On the night of D day reports were received that enemy A.F.Vs. were heading for the beaches in some strength from the direction of Caen. These reports proved to be unfounded, and apart from a certain amount of aerial activity the night passed quite quietly. The chief menace was provided by snipers who had established themselves in the closely wooded country overlooking the beaches. The Navy had set themselves up in a most convenient but somewhat bomb scarred building commanding a good view of the anchorage, but it turned out to be right in the snipers' line of fire, and although the Senior Service extended a hearty welcome to visitors it was not a place to be approached without considerable care. The beach maintenance area was established after a certain amount of difficulty due mainly to the existence of small enemy pockets which continued to harass the movement of stores inland. In any case, until D plus 3 there were insufficient ferry craft available to land large quantities of stores owing to bad weather conditions, and congestion on the foreshore. In the initial stages of the build-up it was the practice to operate amphibians from ship-side to depot, but it was soon found that this was a most uneconomical system and was a great strain on drivers. Roads were narrow and tortuous, and in many cases Dukws had to reverse two or three times in order to negotiate sharp bends. Here was a problem for which no real provision had been made in the planning stage and, whilst it was now realized that some form of transshipment near the beach was necessary, it was painfully obvious that one G.T. company could not possibly cope with the tonnage which was being landed by amphibians as well as that being landed by beached ferry craft. It would seem that second line transport belonging to formations already ashore might have been put to good use in a situation such as this. After all, the break-out was not to occur for some time and in the interim this

transport was by no means fully occupied. However, respite arrived in the shape of a severe storm which broke with sudden fury on 18th June, For five anxious days the tonnage discharged varied between 150 and 400 tons in contrast with the expected daily discharge of three to four thousand. In some ways this was a blessing in disguise. It allowed the shore, which was rapidly becoming swamped with stores, to be reorganised. The R.E. got down to it with a will, and not only built a transshipment area to serve each beach group but also improved roads and traffic circuits. During the storm R.A.S.C Dukws were the only ferry craft which operated continuously and then under great stress. These amphibians and their drivers proved their worth, not only unloading stores ships but in a multitude of other ways, not the least of which was sea rescue. Whilst a particularly high sea was running one Dukw driver volunteered to go to the assistance of a naval craft which was in difficulties. He brought the crew ashore and for this act was awarded the M.M. After the storm the build-up seemed to settle down to a steady routine. Transshipment areas were now operating and two more G.T. companies had been allotted to the beach sub-area. It was now possible to get the maximum sea turn-round from amphibians so that ships were not kept waiting in the anchorage, and at the same time there was a steady stream of stores flowing into the depots. The transshipment areas consisted of a level piece of ground some hundred yards square on which were built a number of raised platforms and a central control tower equipped with loud-hailer apparatus. Adequate entrances and exits were constructed to allow amphibians and lorries to operate on separate circuits. Cranes were provided by R.E. (transportation), although in this particular operation R.A.S.C. crane platoons were formed to cope with the additional tonnage. The procedure was simple—the amphibians drove in on one side of the platforms, were unloaded by crane, issued with two empty cargo nets and despatched to the amphibian control point or park where they received further orders. The stores were then sorted and stacked ready for loading into lorries. It was found that sorting in the transshipment area was far more economical than indiscriminate reloading of lorries with mixed stores. Mixed loads meant that vehicles would have to travel around several depots discharging so much here, so much there. This resulted in poor turn-round time and a general tendency on the part of the drivers to become despondent. Control of transshipment areas was vested in the movement control element of the beach group the assistant military landing officer. He was assisted by representatives of the Services, amongst whom was a captain R.A.S.C. found from the CR.A.S. H.Q. Whilst it is quite plain that transshipment is a movements problem, it was considered necessary to have S.T. representation in the transshipment area in the same way that such representation was found invaluable on board stores vessels and on the quayside in ports. It is of interest to note that in the organisation of the beach brigade a transshipment area staff is now included in the H.Q. of each beach group. The system employed for the control of amphibians varied according to the types of beach. On GOLD sector two different situations presented themselves. One beach was gradually shelving which resulted in stores vessels having to lie off perhaps three to four thousand yards, whereas the other beach was comparatively steep and thereby permitted vessels to come in quite close. In the first type of beach it was not

possible to control amphibians adequately from a point on the shore. It was therefore decided to establish a floating control point in the immediate vicinity of the stores ship. Here a motor fishing vessel lay at anchor and directed amphibians to specific ships. Radio communication was maintained with the shore control point and loud-hailer apparatus was used to transmit orders to Dukws. Fast hunches were also employed to "shepherd" amphibians and maintain a ship-to-shore patrol. On the second type of beach it was possible to control amphibians from a shore control point which commanded an adequate view of the anchorage. A "cushion" of amphibians was established close to the control point and they were called forward as required and directed to the appropriate craft. It was possible to work this beach by day and by night, although after a certain period it was questionable whether twenty-four hour working paid dividends. The overall programme for the discharge of craft was decided at the daily ferry control conference which was presided over by the naval officer in charge and the beach sub-area commander. At this conference the types of stores for discharge were detailed and labour, transport and port operating facilities were arranged accordingly. On the S.T. side CR.A.S.C or his representative was present at the conference and was responsible for allotting transport, both amphibious and G.T. to deal with the situation. On one memorable occasion the conference was attended by a Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy, from OMAHA sector, which lay to the west of GOLD sector. On hearing our tonnage figures for the past twenty-four hours he remarked: "I sure got you guys beat I done 5,000 tons in OMAHA to-day"; to which our P.M.L.O. replied: "Yes, Commander, but you reckon in short tons!" The conference continued and the P.M.L.O. was announcing the beaching programme for L.S.T. on the following day. "Fourteen L.S.T. beach JIG GREEN tomorrow" The U.S. Lieutenant-Commander interjected: "Say, Colonel, do you guys use short plumb lines when you swing the lead?" He was delighted to find that we did have a sense of humour after all! In conclusion, mention should be made of the excellent workshop attention which amphibians received. Company workshops were landed complete by D plus two, which was possibly on the late side as they were not able to operate fully until D plus 3. The fact that by D plus 40 only four Dukws out of a total of 330 were off the road is evidence enough that the standard of maintenance and mechanical skill was of the highest order, and although the "planning" life of a Dukw was only regarded as sixty days many of these amphibians became hardened veterans before the campaign was finished.

### **1989 September (The Waggoner)**

#### **Sur La Plage d'Arromanches**

#### **The minesweeping RASC**

**by**

**J W Richardson**



On a bright sunny morning in July 1944 the Duty DUKW Control Officer of 377 Company, was on the beach at Arromanches watching the DUKWs as they shuttled backwards and forwards,, off-loading the supply vessels moored in the Mulberry Harbour Things had by now settled down to a steady routine after the first hectic days of the storm when little was brought ashore, followed by working flat out and drivers falling asleep over their steering wheels but that wasn't a crime. Day after day they had been working all the hours during which it was possible to see, which meant going to bed and getting up when it was quite dark. They had their meals on wheels alright; their wheels. They would stop at the point where the cooks hotted up the tins of food from the composite ration packs (meat and veg, steak and kidney puddings, sausages and, for 'afters' rice or fruit pudding or straight fruit). The drivers held out their dixies to be served with the food, then drove on. There was no rest, off-loading at the trans-shipment stages only took about a minute; it was a matter of Carry on Driving. In June and July the hours of darkness are not enough to get the amount of sleep required if you are working all the other hours in twenty-four, not just one day, every day. The snag was that two drivers were required for a DUKW thereby using the whole complement, until it was realised that it was only at sea that two drivers were required; on land the amphibian became an ordinary truck, the second driver was then superfluous. Furthermore it was realised that the "mate" need not be a driver or even a member of the Corps; he could be a soldier from any regiment held in reserve. The result of this thinking produced a pool of mates waiting on the shore for one to climb aboard each DUKW before it went to sea and to disembark as soon as it got back again. This relieved half the regular drivers for a full day, giving them a chance to catch up on sleep and relax as they wished. So there was the duty officer on that bright morning, keeping an eye on his charges and occasionally cooling his hot, gumbooted feet, by paddling. Apart from the supply vessels the harbour was full of shipping, mostly naval ships of all sizes from the odd destroyer down to motor launches. About mid-morning he saw a huge fountain of water rise in the centre of the harbour, followed by the thud of an explosion. He guessed the cause. The previous night all hell had been let loose while anti-aircraft fire spat at German planes which were having a go at the concentrated shipping. He concluded that a mine had been found and detonated in situ. Perhaps a quarter of an hour later, while still on the sands, he saw a DUKW heading for the shore, with Dvr Boardman at the wheel. DUKWs ride low in the water but what was surprising, was that this one was spouting a sizeable fountain of water on one side, indicating that the bilge pump was working at full blast. Then, as the amphibian came out of the water onto the beach, it was evident that all the seams had been sprung as water cascaded from all round the hull. The driver stopped to explain what had happened. He was on his way out to get a load of supplies when he was hailed by a RM Captain who asked to be ferried from one ship to another. It was while they were on their way that they passed over a mine. The DUKW, being comparatively light, was lifted bodily and thrown forward, plunging its bow in the water before righting itself. The Marine, who had been standing in the hold, was thrown to the deck and all aboard were thoroughly drenched as the fountain came down again. The driver, having parted from his passenger, set off for the shore as

quickly as he could before the thing sank. Later that morning the officer was in the control office which had been set up on the cliff, when he was called to the telephone. The voice at the other end said, "This is the Naval Officer in charge and I want to congratulate you on a magnificent bit of minesweeping' He went on to say, "A signal has just been placed in front of me which reads to the effect, 'Reports that the enemy dropped mines in the harbour last night have proved unfounded' when woof one of your DUKWs found one." It is not known how red was the face of the man who sent the signal

### **1945 July (The Waggoner)**

#### **THE CHANNEL ISLANDS**

##### **BY LANCE-CORPORAL H. V. T. COPELAND, R.A.S.C.**

IT was just about the time of the Count B'ernardotte talks, and all were saying "It can't be long now," when, one dull, damp evening, gossip had it that certain Bedfords and other trucks which had been standing every night for, months on a particular vehicle park, were to be prepared immediately for the road and were to move away in the small hours. Next, something even more concrete: leave was stopped and all those already away had been recalled by telegram. Combined Ops. personnel began to appear among'st us in barracks and yet another " conference " was signposted all over the place and one again became paralysed in the right arm through constant and concentrated saluting." How we loved the " conferences " ! However, we felt a different atmosphere about this one. At daybreak the following day the order came: " All Dukws will move off at 0930 hrs. and report to Fort ( ) at 1000 hrs. to load supplies for the Channel Islands." At last, after all the waiting for the Channel Islands. We were loaded to capacity: food in tins, concentrated foods, medical supplies, chocolates, cigarettes, tobacco, matches. We were briefed with the aid of large scale models. No VE Day for us; they told us we were to share VE Day with' the Channel Islanders. A final inspection and we marshalled.

We left Plymouth behind in heavenly weather and even when we were well out into the Channel and some had swallowed anti-seasick tablets the sea was really so smooth that no one could be sick. We were due to arrive off Jersey at 0830 hrs the following morning, and sure enough, when we got up for breakfast, there we were, just passing Guernsey and Sark. Promptly to the minute away went the anchors and we became all intense with curiosity to know what we should see on landing. We had been told we should' not take to the water much before lunch time, but, at about 1000 hrs., the orders came: " Get below and prepare to move." Down we went, in great excitement to start up engines, unshackle and prepare for the water. The L.S.T. doors swung open to disclose a sea just as calm as

could be for such an occasion, and one by one we pulled away down the ramp and made for St. Helier harbour, some two or three miles" away, in single line ahead. As we came near to the" island we could see some of the defences and realized what a terrific task 'it would have been if the only way was by major assault. When we drew nearer still to the harbour we could plainly see that practically all St. Helier populace had come out to greet us, and their amazement was really staggering as Dukw after Dukw just climbed, as it were, out of the water and took to the road round to the assembly area without pause. Each Dukw got its own particular burst of cheering and encountered its own battery of amateur photographers who seemed to have endless supplies of film. In a minute or two we were parked side by side in the assembly area just opposite" the Pomme D'or Hotel, which was then Tac. H.Q. Instantly we were surrounded by swarms of islanders, men, women and children, and it seemed that they still could not believe the evidence of their eyes as they asked question after question and told us some of their privations and experiences under the Hun rule. Beyond occasionally hearing of such things as amphibious vehicle via illegal and secret crystal sets, these people had never known or believed such things as Dukws existed. Very soon our 24-hour pack's sweet and chocolate contents had vanished .to the children, and wasn't it good to watch enjoyment! Likewise our cigarettes rapidly disappeared to those who have only smoked Jersey tobacco and dried leaves/etc, for nearly five years. It was difficult to resist "Have you a cigarette for my mummy?" or " for my daddy we began to .think that some of the youngsters must have had a considerate number of parents. Or so it seemed.

Early that afternoon we began to unload our cargoes to D.I.D., established in a warehouse lately used by the Germans. When the islanders began to realize that all these good things would soon be available to them, their excitement mounted to a further high pitch as all these Dukws negotiated the narrow, awkward warehouse entry and were quickly emptied by the hard-working D.I.D. personnel. That first night ashore we slept " aboard," strange though that may sound. Next morning we were found quarters in' two large rooms of the Grand Hotel, and by noon the L.S.Ts. had come right inshore and had off-loaded the Bedfords, Fordsons, motor-cycles, bulldozers, tractors and whatnot, which, of course, had to touch down on dry .land. Then all began in earnest to unload the tons and tons of food and supplies of all kinds which, in addition to ourselves and vehicles, the craft had brought over. For several hours this work went on and gradually the beach dumps grew to imposing proportions as we effected the transfer. After a small break for a wash and tea we were detailed for a job which we all found much to our liking and which we set about with great relish. This was to proceed a couple of miles inland to a school and there load up with Jerry. prisoners, thence to bring them down to the beach and swim them out to a troopship lying some distance out at sea. As with the islanders, the Jerries' knowledge and acquaintance with Dukws were extremely scanty and their curiosity, with not a little fear, was very evident. We took on an average of a couple of dozen per vehicle and, as they had with them all they possessed, they were not given much lebensraum. To get them all sorted out and

aboard took, quite a little while; during this time a wind had sprung up and made the sea something totally different from what we had observed just after tea as we set off to make the collection. Now this was "just the job" This was a heaven sent opportunity to give them a final bashing! And no driver spared himself or his mate to make quite certain that all his cargo got a real Dukw-ing! Not a few were sick, and the Jerry certainly showed himself up in his true colours. Coming alongside was especially tricky this night and, when we did manage to tie up, the irregular rise. and erratic fall were anything from six to sixteen feet. How headlamps escaped the ship's large and awkward rubbing strake remains a miracle. Not all did, as Workshops disgustedly discovered next day. We did several of these prisoner details and, understandably enough, these were the activities the islanders most liked to come and watch. They would stay out to any hour of the night so long as we were prisoner-shifting. These trips over several days took away something like 3,000 to 4,000 Jerries. And was it a good riddance! It must not be thought that we did not make use of the prisoners for essential work before deporting them as the following somewhat ambiguous quotation from the Jersey Evening Post for Tuesday, 15th May, 1945, will show: " The dump on the People's Park and the adjacent buildings have been taken over by our troops. The latter are being thoroughly cleansed by German fatigue parties. There were, of course, numerous other jobs-which we had to undertake such as unloading cargo boats in the harbour proper after the liberation forces had become, firmly established and such vessels began to come in with something like regularity. One particularly interesting detail was laid on during our last Sunday afternoon on the island. This was to proceed to Five Oaks to collect a German fatigue party, thence to Paginot Tunnels in St. Peter's Valley to' remove load upon load of Jerry tinned foods, chiefly vegetables, fish and ersatz coffee. Built with Todt lay-out and thoroughness, this proved to be a veritable arsenal and fortress in itself. We managed with care to persuade the Dukws into the tunnels and then set the prisoner party to work to some purpose. was warm in there, too. Here the story must end because the platoon was now recalled to England and the crossing back to Southampton was not quite so smooth.

### **1986 September (The Waggoner)**

297 Company GT RASC (DUKW)

IT is proposed to hold a reunion of all past members of 297 Company GT RASC (DUKW) who served with the unit in the Normandy landings. Those who are interested are requested to contact: Maj J R Boxall, Cedar Gables, Headley Fields Lane, Headley, Bordon, Hants or telephone Headiey Down 7J3335.

# BURMA

## BURMA DUKWS (The Waggoner)

BY CAPTAIN O. C. TREBECK, R.A.S.C.

DUKWS were not originally designed for use on rivers. 387 Company R.A.S.C., have, however, proved that they can be as successful in this role as they can on normal ship-to-shore duties. In September and October, 1943, Dukws started to arrive in India and 387 Company, originally a normal transport company with the 2nd Division became amphibian. The Company, supervised by Colonel C. M. G. Luff R.A.S.C., D.D.S.T., XXXIII Indian Corps, commenced training on the beautiful Juhu beach just north of Bombay, and were fortunate enough to have Colonel D. Puleston, of the U.S. War Department, to advise. Early in 1944 things were starting to move. Whilst one platoon was working in the Arakan with the 36th British Division, the Jap made his push through Burma into India. No amphibians were required to stop this advance, and 387 Company left their Dukws in Calcutta and were rushed up to Manipur, where they were given an infantry role. Kohima fell, Imphal was relieved, Tanu was cleared and the Fourteenth Army were in Burma. The Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers loomed up as natural obstacles. The Dukws were brought up and 387 Company was re formed. Their first task was a nine-day trip on the monsoon-flooded Yu River and Khampat Chaung to bring out casualties of the 11th East African Division! and the difficulties of working on Burma rivers soon became apparent. Huge logs floating just under the surface to foul propellers, etc.; sand and mud banks and stretches where the river narrowed and the current ran so fast that the Dukws had to be winched through. One slip in pulling a Dukw through." 200-yard stretch and it was swept back a mile. Kalewa fell to the East Africans and the Chindwin was crossed. The eight miles of road from Kalewa to Schwegin were practically useless as an L. of C and the Dukws carried thousands of tons of supplies, petrol and ammunition to supply the 11th East African and the 2nd British Divisions as well as towing Class 40 R.E. pontoon rafts laden with tanks, bulldozers, guns and M.T. Two sections made a fifty-mile trip up the Chindwin to assist the 20th Indian Division at Mawlaik. On the way they were shot up by Zeros and one Dukw carrying petrol was set on fire and sank. The drivers escaped. ' The campaign was developing rapidly. One platoon set out on Christmas morning to contact the 20th Indian Division, by then at Maukkadaw on to Chindwin, sixty miles south of Kalewa. The journey took three days owing to the number of sandbanks encountered. It should be noted that the Burmean river beds change every monsoon and, since we had been out of Burma since 1942, no accurate charts of the river were available. Two brigades and the Divisional Headquarters were put across the Chindwin here and carried back at Khauklega, some fifteen miles south, as no road exists between these two villages. The 20th Division advanced from there to capture Budalin and Monewa.

During this operation two Dukws were ordered to take a load of rations to a Gurkha battalion about three miles down river. When the Dukw arrived the Gurkhas had just reached camp after a 200-mile trek along jungle paths. Whilst they were delighted to see their rations arriving by boat just as they pulled in, they were amazed when the boats climbed out of the water and deliver the rations at the cookhouse. Dukws- were new to them. During this time the remainder of the Company, had moved due east to Shwebo and then to Kyaukmyaung, where the 19th Indian Division made its first crossing of the Irrawaddy. Despite enemy shelling, the Dukws continued ferrying the division across and evacuating casualties. 'One 'or two of the Dukw drivers were wounded in the operation.

Later came the Irrawaddy crossing by the 20th Indian Division at Satpang west of Mandalay. Here again the beach-head was shelled in the early stages, but the drivers managed to escape and the damage to Dukws was repairable. Even an "Oscar," which shot up one the Dukws, could not put it out of action. And the 20th Division went over. This crossing was followed by the 2nd Division crossing at Myinze, only about twenty-five miles west of Mandalay. Owing to heavy enemy opposition very few of the light assault craft were able to reach the far bank and Dukws were put into the assault. By dawn owing to the difficulties encountered only two companies of infantry were holding a small bridgehead on the south bank. Five Dukws were out of action shot up or stranded on sandbanks. Still, in broad daylight, the remaining Dukws made the hazardous journey, carrying infantry across, each time running through a hail of machine-gun fire, and by nightfall the leading brigade was across and a bridgehead established. Then came the remainder of the division together with supplies, tanks, guns and M.T. hauled across by Dukw towed rafts. In seventy-two hours 6,000 men and 200 vehicles had been put across at a point where the river was over 1,000 yards wide and the channel which the Dukws had to follow, one and a half miles in each direction. Following this operation, the Company received six immediate awards, the Officer Commanding receiving the Military Cross and five Military Medals awarded to personnel. These were presented by Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim, Commander of the Fourteenth Army. It says much for this Company's R.A.S.C. Workshops Platoon, which had been able to keep the vehicles running in spite of the fact that no spares were available throughout the whole of the Burma campaign. In addition to the operations mentioned above, this Company's Dukws carried out a tremendous amount of ferrying work on the L. of C, of supplies, ammunition, stores, etc., and running into and out of rivers is often a tricky business. Sometimes very crude ramps were bulldozed by the sappers with consequent fouling of propellers and there's another prop, shaft to be straightened and new bearing made. And so the work went on down these two huge rivers; often well over a mile wide in some places as beautiful as only tropical rivers can be, with sheer cliffs rising hundreds of feet above the bank or thick tropical vegetation running down to the water's edge; in other places, miles of sand with the hot sun pouring down making it impossible to touch the deck or handle equipment with bare hands.

## **1946 July (The Waggoner)**

### **THE 2ND DIVISION**

**BY LIEUT.-COLONEL F. R. CLEEVES, R.A.S.C.**

PERHAPS your readers will be interested in the activities of the only Divisional R.A.S.C. to operate in S.E.A.C. The 2nd Division left England in April, 1942, and arrived at Bombay in June after a voyage only interrupted by the four pleasant days at Capetown. We were on the normal W.E. of three infantry brigade companies and divisional troops company numbers 8, 24, 29 and 387; H.Q., with Colonel Luff as C.R.A.S.C. Our first two years were not marked by any big happening except that a small detachment of the R.A.S.C. under Capt. Gregory and Browning accompanied the 6th Brigade to the Arakan in 1943 from 12th December, 1942, to 29th April, 1943. Capt. Pithie was B.R.A.S.C.O. They worked with another small R.A.S.C. unit, 78 D.L.D. under Capt. Grey, which formation came from the Middle East and, I would add, is still with our Corps in Burma. Capt. Gregory was mentioned in despatches and excellent reports were received of the work done by the R.A.S.C. Lieut.-Colonel Luff was promoted to Colonel and appointed D.D.S. & T. XXXIII Corps. We were all glad that the Division remained part of the Corps so that a close liaison remained. Our other duties included famine relief at Bijapur, on jungle training at Belgaum and amphibious training at Juhu and Marde Island, Bombay. It was in November, 1943, that we thought that at last we were to see action. Planning for an amphibian operation commenced in earnest. 387 Company, under Major A. H. D. Prior, was turned into a Dukw Amphibious Company and trained intensively. Staff officers and heads of services went to Delhi to complete the planning and returned to Bombay on Christmas Day to organize assembly and embarkation. The needs of the European theatre took away our ships and it was most disheartening for us all to see one after another leave until it became obvious that our operation would have to be cancelled. The Dukws were still required for another operation in the Arakan, so 387. Company continued to train and prepare to move east. Special trains took them to Calcutta, but again a change of plan took them out of the operation. The men parked up their vehicles in a V.R.G. with sad hearts and returned to Ahmednagar. Meantime, the rest of the Division went to Belgaum for jungle training with a big programme of leave in the Nilgiris in order to give us all a change of environment after our disappointment. Lord Louis Mountbatten spoke to all ranks, explaining the reason for the change, which was readily accepted, but left the men with the query: Why cannot we go with the ships and help to do the job in Europe? The Japs launched their attack across the Chindwin and at last our turn had come. We were rushed from Belgaum to the Fourteenth Army by rail, road and air. Tactical H.Q. reached Dimapur by rail on 2nd April, 1944. The R.A.S.C. was represented by Major R. C. Larking (supplies), Capt. J. E. Smith (ammunition), myself and a staff of four. Our vehicles and the personnel travelling with them could not possibly arrive for three to five

weeks, for, while they could reach Calcutta in good time the bottleneck of crossing the Ganges and Bramahputra Rivers was bound to be a slow business. The method was by road to Calcutta, by rail to Siliguri and then by road to the Bramahputra ferry at Pandu. We had elements of composite platoons on the way by rail and air, but even before the first had arrived one brigade had to be deployed on the Golaghat road to meet a possible threat to cut the railway and Ledo road. The V.R.G. was thrown open and every type of vehicle running put into commission, driven by officers or anyone else available. The D.I.D., Dimapur, augmented by several composite platoon personnel, coped with issues for the first few days. In order to safeguard against the enemy cutting off our positions, all units had within each defended locality seven to fourteen days' supplies and this policy was maintained throughout the whole operation until the Imphal road was opened. The first two companies to arrive were 8 Company under Major The Lord Moncrieff and 29 Company under Major Wright. By this time the relief of Kohima was resulting in a hard-fought battle with little movement, so that these two companies were able to cope under these conditions with the divisional requirements. 24 Company under Major Tims and 387 Company under Major Hall were therefore turned into defence companies to make good the shortage of troops. 24 Company took over the defence of F.S.D. Ridge after its capture, while 387 Company took over a portion of Aradura Spur, Kohima. For the monsoon period three Animal Transport Companies, R.A.S.C., Nos. 33, 60 and 74, were placed under command and I cannot praise too highly the work of these companies through the mud over difficult mountain tracks and often under enemy fire. The hard fighting caused the inevitable casualties, especially among the infantry, and forced a reconsideration of the dispositions of personnel, so that approximately 300 men were drafted from 24 and 387 Companies into the infantry battalions. These men remained attached and returned in due course, and the reports from their C.Os. were full of praise for the way the men had fought. One special instance was cited when Dvr. Vickers, attached to the Royal Norfolk Regiment, put up an excellent show with a Bren gun when his party was ambushed. Unfortunately he was killed in this action. At last the Jap defences were broken and we started down the road to Imphal. Our difficulties became great through having only two companies, and many amusing incidents occurred. We formed dumps as A.Ps. Sup. Ps. and P.Ps. some 300 to 400 yards behind our outpost lines, so that they would be correctly placed for the next advance. The strain on transport was so great that thirty vehicles were obtained from V.R.G. and drivers of 387 Company withdrawn from infantry to man them. On 22nd June the road was opened and our first task was completed. For some weeks we had been on plentiful but hard rations, and on the 23rd Major Larking (supplies) and I went into Imphal to see if we could assist the beleaguered garrison. We were given hot rolls with butter and with tea at 11 o'clock and roast mutton (frozen) for lunch, luxuries we had not had for many months. We were surprised, but the reason was that food supplied by air is fresher although not so plentiful as that coming by a long and difficult land L. of C. We rested in the Naga Hills until November, when we set out on our second operation. This entailed a motor journey through Imphal, Palel and Tamu to Yzagyio, where the Division concentrated preparatory to



the advance across the Chindwin through a bridgehead to be formed by the East Africans, thence on over the hills to the capture of the Kabo Weir and Ye-u. Supply was to be from airheads formed by Corps from which the second-line transport would draw, and also by air-drop for the forward troops in inaccessible places. Ammunition was to come by road only. The river was crossed at Kalewa. The road from there to Shwegyin was one of the worst stretches of jungle track that we have encountered, and it became immediately apparent that our road L. of C. was going to be most precarious until a new airfield was captured at Ye-u. The situation was eased by the introduction of Dukws which our experienced 387 Company personnel handled under Corps and formed a link from Kalewa down the river to Shwegyin. On the break-out the advance of 130 miles in twenty days to Shwebo caused us many anxious moments, and shortage on air-drop made us issue reserves. One replenishment of ammunition from the Corps dump 125 miles behind took our vehicles eight days on the turn-round. Our troops at Kaduma heard through local sources that the Kabo Weir had been left by the Japs. The problem of how to get troops to protect it from destruction was solved by off-loading the ammunition from our vehicles at an A.P. and rushing forward two companies of Royal Welch Fusiliers to protect it. These drove through the night and were digging in at first light the next morning, when they were surprised to see Japs just across the Mu River. This had not been expected from the reports, but the Japs were equally surprised and the weir, which governs the whole of the irrigation of the Shwebo Plain, was saved. Again there was a pause until we learnt that our next task was to force a crossing of the Irrawaddy. Equipment was scarce and everyone asked to assist. Two of our Workshops officers, Capts. Bennett (29 Company) and Smedley (8 Company), were co-opted to build rafts. These were made from old salvaged Japanese pontoons, the holes in which were patched and welded. Eighteen pontoons were made good, three of them were turned into motor units by the installation of Chevrolet engines, everything being built from scrap except the three propellers borrowed from a bridging company. Each raft was made up of five pontoons and carried fully laden either a 30-cwt. six-wheeled Dodge, two jeeps, jeep and trailer, or 15 cwt. With these we ferried across 325 vehicles, about 600 tons of supplies and several hundred infantry in the early stages. Again our R.A.S.C. Dukws with 387 Company did yeoman work and bore the brunt of carrying the successive flights of infantry. Each flight was under machine-gun fire. One driver (Dvr. Bryar) fell a victim to the Japanese fire, while five more were wounded. Many, however, were the near misses and tiny were the holes in the Dukws plugged with pegs. Capt. Clark, the O.C., won the M.C., and Cpl. Sglon, L./Cpls. Lines and Messe, and Dvrs. Hall and O'Brien the M.M. for their bravery. There was still one more river—the Myitnge—to cross before we entered the southern outskirts of Mandalay and again our rafts and Dukws proved invaluable.



A DUKW being unloaded after ferrying supplies across the Irawaddy River 1945

## Post WW11 Singapore

After the end of hostilities in Burma Some Dukws and the crews were transferred to 56 Water Transport Company Paula Brani Island Singapore part of their duties was sea dumping Japanese ammunition.



Japanese prisoners of war load a DUKW of 56 Water Transport Coy, Royal Army Service Corps (RASC), with Japanese ammunition collected from dumps in Singapore ready for dumping at sea. (Photograph IWM) The Driver stood on the DUKW to the left is Ellwyn Goodwin, I met Ellwyn on several occasions at RASC/RCT Association functions over the years, he was a branch standard bearer for many years. His son Paul was Director of music for the RLC Band and also for the Parachute Regiment Band.

## Post WW11 DUKW Operations

### 1946 March (The Waggoner)

#### DUKWS TO THE RESCUE"

DURING the recent severe floods in North Wales, the Amphibian Training Centre, R.A.S.C., at Towyn, Merionethshire, were called upon for assistance. It was on Saturday, 9th February, that the first S.O.S. was received, and appeals continued throughout the week-end until the Centre had nine separate details operating, involving twelve Dukws and some thirty men. The calls came from widely separated parts of North Wales, but in every instance the Dukws were at work within four hours, although some places were over eighty miles away. The long road run was often rendered extremely difficult owing to the severe flooding, The jobs undertaken were various. In the Welshpool area four Dukws rescued a considerable number of civilians who were marooned in the upper rooms of their houses, carried food, fuel and, ironically, water to those who elected to remain, and collected cattle stranded in the fields. Three Dukws operated in the Welshpool area, where over one hundred head of cattle were rescued from outlying farms by means of passing a rope round their horns and towing them alongside the Dukws to higher ground. The cattle were usually exhausted on arrival, but rapidly recovered. In the area around Oswestry two Dukws were kept busy supplying isolated families with fuel, food and water, and also fodder for their cattle. One of the Dukws collected 250 gallons of milk daily from the farms and transported it to the dairies. The radio station at Criggion, near Welshpool, was cut off and one Dukw ran a bus service, carrying the engineers to and from their various shifts. The same story of stranded persons, isolated farms and marooned cattle is told by the drivers of Dukws operating in the Pool Quay and Llandrinio area, both near Welshpool, but in addition they had the task of saving several tons of wheat which was in danger of complete destruction and taking it to a drying plant. It was a week before the water had subsided sufficiently to allow all the vehicles to be withdrawn, and they returned to the Centre followed by tributes from all the local authorities for the work they had done. All the drivers told the same story of long hours (in some cases thirty-two hours' work without a break), difficulty in navigating submerged fields and lanes with such underwater obstacles as wire fences, hedges, gates, signposts and ditches, but there were no casualties to mar a week of excellent work. To express his appreciation of the good work performed during this period, the following letter was received from" Lieutenant-General Sir Brian G. Horrocks, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C, G.O.C.-in-C. Western Command. "I have been most impressed with the help given by your Training Centre to the Civilian Authorities during the recent floods. I was delighted to hear of the active part played by the Dukws at Welshpool, Rossett and Churton. "Had it not been for the assistance which you provided, a great deal of valuable property and, possibly, even lives might have been lost. "Please congratulate the men concerned on a very good job of work. if I may say so, it has always been my experience in this war that the R.A.S.C. has invariably' come up to scratch' in an emergency."

## **1947 September (The Waggoner)**

### FLOOD RELIEF

DURING the early spring of 1947 widespread damage was done to property and communications disrupted all over the country by reason of the unusually extensive flooding caused by heavy rainfall and the melting of the snows, which had in many cases lain for months in drifts on the hills. The floods spread over a considerable area, causing much distress and damage, particularly in the Thames Valley and the Fen district. The civilian services proved inadequate to cope with such an emergency and the Army was called upon to render assistance both to the civilian authorities and to private individuals. The Corps played a large part in these operations, and units all over the country were called upon to assist in Flood Relief. The men of the R.A.S.C. were soon to be seen in Dukws rescuing householders from first floor windows and even rooftops, driving water tank lorries up and down the country to wherever the need was greatest; in short, doing whatever job was required of them and above all ensuring that essential civilian services were maintained. To give an instance. Requests for Dukws to help in flood operations in various parts of the country brought all training at the Amphibian Training Wing, R.A.S.C., to a standstill and necessitated scattering all available Dukws and men, whether trainees or permanent staff over the greater part of England. Some drivers went with Dukws straight from Towyn and others proceeded to Aldershot, whence they were sent to collect Dukws from Laleham near Staines. After collection from the V.R.D. this party was split up, the first six Dukws being sent to Nottingham in charge of an officer, who from that moment worked independently from the main party, which proceeded in sections of five to St. Neots in Cambridgeshire. Other parties proceeded to the three major flood areas of Windsor, Reading, Shrewsbury and Gainsborough Selby. It would take too long to recount the activities of all these parties, each of which did sterling work, but the work performed by "Dukwforce" operating in the Cambridgeshire area was typical of that performed by all the others, so over to Capt. Lambourn, who had control of this party, to hear his story: "On arrival at St. Neots, 480 Coinpany. R.A.S.C, made the Dukws and their crews very welcome and watered and fed both. Here we received orders to split our forces. Ten vehicles were to go to Ely and ten were to remain at St. Neots as a reserve under War Office control. "Early on Sunday, 23rd March, the Ely contingent reported to Dukwforce Headquarters, which had been set up by Headquarters, East Anglian District. Here we linked up with three of our own Dukws which had set out from Towyn' on the previous Monday. Another Dukw from Combined Operations Experimental Establishment also joined the flock making our fleet fourteen in all. Dukwforce Headquarters was a bustle of activity. Messages and urgent appeals for help were coming in all the time. Telephone bells were ringing, RT sets were crackling, and a pool of runners were kept continuously on the run. "It was not long before we were given our first assignment. Two Dukws were to attempt to reach a house in Sutton to recover essential clothing and valuables belonging to the tenants, who had run from their home at a moment's notice when they saw the flood water rushing towards them. A quick

reconnaissance showed the house to be completely cut off, with hundreds of acres of flooded land surrounding it. We picked up the farmer, his wife and daughter at the water's edge, and moved slowly forward along the roadway until it disappeared beneath us. We soon found ourselves afloat, swung our bows round and steered a course for the house. The farmer was asked to warn us of any underwater obstacles likely to be encountered, submerged fences, gateposts, hedges and the like. The current was strong and a fresh wind was blowing against the tide. Spray was blown right into and over the Dukw and the farmer and his family, who were not dressed for the occasion, had a thorough drenching. The approach to the house was a very tricky business. It was on the other side of a railway line. Both the wire fencing running along the sides of the track and the level-crossing gate through which we had to steer were submerged and could not be seen. Finding our way through involved a number of trial runs and much prodding with boat hooks, but we eventually found the gap and despite the strong current' managed to get through. "The water here was about ten feet deep and it was an easy matter for the farmer to climb from the Dukw to his top bedroom window. He then passed down to us all the salvageable family possessions. Bedding, clothing, curtains, carpets, crockery and cutlery were stored in the cargo space. Then wardrobes, sideboards, tables, chairs and other pieces of furniture were lashed to the top and sides of the Dukw. After this followed two bags of coal, a sack of potatoes and two bags of grain, and these were stacked on the front and rear hatches, At this stage it was necessary to call a halt and the farmer with a last look at his flooded home climbed back on to the Dukw and we set off for the shore. During the trip back we were sighted by an aircraft, which made a series of low runs over our heads, circling and banking steeply over us until we reached land. "The farmer and his wife were very grateful for the help we had given them Having no home, they could not offer hospitality, but I saw him give his last packet of cigarettes to the crew. This job was typical of many done by the Dukws during the following two days and nights. In all cases they worked in pairs. Like their real-life counterparts, they' prefer it that. way. On Tuesday, 25th March, our force was again split in two. Eight Dukws were sent to Southery and the rest to Sutton. Both Dukws and crews had been working most of the twenty-four hours a day and the pace was beginning to tell. As both contingents had to be available for duty, both by day .and by night, it was necessary to divide the crews and have one driver per Dukw instead of two. The commitment by this, time had settled down in a more or less definite task of conveying clay in bags to repair breaches, in the river and dyke, and.it was possible for one driver to manage alone. The main difficulty was maintenance No vehicle can run twenty four hours a day indefinitely without showing some signs of strain, and the Dukws began to limp. They developed gasket, pump and tyre troubles, pipes started leaking, and bearings wouldn't bear. An S.O.S. for two fitters and spares was immediately answered and they arrived the following day. the fitters started at once. and did magnificent work, coaxing the Dukws back into the water. "On 29th March, at 1700 hrs., the officer in charge at Southery was instructed to have two Dukws ready for a tour of inspection by Their Royal Highnesses The Duke of Gloucester (Colonel-in-Chief, R.A.S.C.) and the Duchess of Gloucester at 1200 hrs. on the following day. "All Dukws

by this time were caked with mud and clay and were looking very sorry for themselves. The two selected vehicles were taken to the R.A.F. station at Marham, where they were given the equivalent of a Turkish bath, having steam jets played on them. The drivers were put through a similar process. The next day at a landing stage on the River Ouse the Duke and Duchess, together with Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, C.B., C.B.E., M.C, boarded one Dukw and a party of Press photographers and reporters boarded the second. The third Dukw stood by in case of difficulty. The Royal party went by water from the Great Ouse to the River Wissey and inspected the Wissey Gap, where thousands of tons of clay and specialty made mattresses were being used to seal a break in the bank. The river was crowded with barges and tugs and there was insufficient room for the Dukw to manoeuvre once it had come alongside a barge which was straddled broadside across the gap. "This, however, was soon put right by a helpful party of infantrymen, who threw a rope and pulled our bows' head on to the swiftly running current. The Royal party then stepped ashore after thanking the crew. "On another occasion the same Dukw took Mr. Tom Williams, the Minister of Agriculture, on a similar tour of inspection. After his tour the Minister made a special point of thanking us for the way in which we had assisted in the good work, and said that he did not know what could have been done had the Army not responded so magnificently to the urgent call for assistance which had been sent out by his Ministry. "The flooded Fen country was most unsuitable for Dukw operations. Thousands of acres of arable land were under water and where roads exist they are narrow and often have ditches or dykes on either side. Even the oldest local inhabitants faced with the very different aspect of acres of water instead of land—find it difficult to tell where the roads are. In more than five feet of water there is no difficulty the Dukws float; but where the ground is covered by a shallower depth of water the Dukw reverts to its land role and becomes like any other vehicle bogged. On one occasion two Dukws set out with a farmer 'guide' to rescue livestock from a flooded farm two and a half miles from the 'shore.' The depth of water varied from three feet to five feet, and the road which was just nine feet wide had a dyke on either side. As the width of the Dukw is just 8 ft 6 in. it left a working margin of just six inches. Neither of these Dukws ever reached the farm. First one went into the dyke and then the other, and the crews of these vehicles. They set out together along a nine foot-wide road, the Dukws linked up together by the winch cable of the leading-vehicle. It was rather like doing a tight-rope act, and we could not afford to make a mistake. Two men sat one on the port and one on the starboard bow prodding with a boat-hook every inch of the way. It took two hours to reach the bogged vehicles and by this time darkness had fallen. To people on the shore the position looked hopeless and the RE rushed searchlights to the waters' edge and urgent calls for assault dinghies' were made on Ely, thirty-five miles away. The searchlights playing on the water produced an eerie effect. The crews of the rescuing Dukws got busy with the winching gear and with the aid of heaving lines, a lot of patience and a great deal of ingenuity they pulled the bogged vehicles out one by one. "Then began the journey back. Four Dukws on a tight rope, with no room to turn and all facing the wrong way, they had to feel their way back inch by inch. "This time the prodders sat on the stern and the vehicles

kept together and worked in bounds of ten feet at a time. "It was a nightmare journey. Back step by step, never moving until it was confirmed that the road was squarely and evenly beneath the Dukws, and at 0145 hrs. the vehicles emerged from that flooded fen, the crews feeling very thankful indeed to be on dry land again. "The assault boats were met rushing to aid the stranded vehicles on the way back to Ely." We had by now been engaged on flood operations for nearly three weeks and the results of our work could be gauged by the fact that the level of the flood water was going down. The highest of the spring tides had occurred on Sunday, 6th April, and the banks stood the strain. For the first time we could afford to ease up. A few more days spent in putting the finishing touches to the banks and the operation was done. "The last day was spent in putting vehicles in order for the journey back and in saying good-bye to the many friends we had made, these including members of the Great Ouse Catchment Board, under whose supervision we had worked, R.A.F. searchlight crews who had illuminated the scene of operations every night, infantry working parties who had provided labour, members of the N.F.S. who had provided supplies of tea and sandwiches during the whole operation, and last but not least, the ladies of the British Red Cross and W.V.S. who had manned the mobile canteen on a twenty-four-hour service since the day we had arrived. rather a different task fell to the lot of the eight drivers who, under Capt. Gillingham, took part in the operation of sealing gaps in the banks of the River Ouse at Erith by the not-so-simple expedient of driving Neptunes into it. Here in this officer's own words, is his version of just another job well done: On the evening of 23rd March I was ordered to Bluntisham Station, the operational headquarters for the work to be done on closing -the Erith Gap, as it was called. "On arrival I found eight L.V.T. drivers already there, who had been sent direct from Towyn. We were all briefed very accurately as to our part in the operation, and the drivers and myself had a reconnaissance run over the route. The formation of the ground was known, but owing to the floods it could not be seen. The approach, a matter of some 1,400 yards, meant negotiating a river bank with extremely steep sides which brought the step of the tank to within nine inches of the water when climbing, in addition to which missing a gear change would have meant being swept downstream at over six knots. An unpleasant as well as a dangerous experience. Having negotiated the river bank, the next hazard was to climb on to and then along the top of an osier bank which ran parallel to the main river bank but some twenty feet from it, with a deep ditch between the two. This bank was only seventeen feet wide, and as the width of a Neptune is 11 ft. 8 in. it meant. doing a very tight turn immediately the weight of the tank was on the top of the bank. "Having achieved this, the next stage was a slow, straight run down the osier bank to a point a few yards short of the gap, which was some 130 feet across and through which a large volume of water was still pouring. At each side of this gap a Neptune had to be parked on the main river bank; ready to be moved down to and across the ditch when the main line of seven Neptunes had been driven across the gap, thus forming an effective dam. We returned to Bluntisham and completed the task of 'teeing-up' the Neptunes, which had been standing in the open for over eighteen months and suffered from almost every known defect. All were eventually got working and were loaded with five



tons of sandbags each, a ton overload. The task of negotiating the approach to the gap was then started and was successfully completed. "It was after dark when a Very light gave the signal to move into the gap. This was extremely well done by all drivers, exact driving and careful timing being essential. When in position the two Neptunes on the bank were moved down to complete the dam, and then troops swarmed across the wall of tanks and dropped Somerfeld track and tarpaulins over the sides, following this with hundreds of sandbags. This sandbagging went on day and night, the men working in eight-hour shifts, until a wall three feet wide and two feet above the river-level had been built alongside the Neptune, making a watertight dam. "The tanks were left in position to give added strength, and the task then developed into one of maintenance only. When the Catchment Board engineers had completed the repairs to the main bank the Neptunes would be withdrawn. It is of interest to point out that the Neptune weighs sixteen tons, and a load of six tons of sandbags {i.e., two tons overload) therefore gave an overall weight of twenty-two tons. The driving of the Neptunes into the breach had to be done without any passengers on board as a safety precaution in order to minimize the possibility of casualties in the event of an accident, thereby rendering the driver's task of judging distance without the usual aid of his co-driver all the more difficult.

### **1947 December (The Waggoner)**

AMPHIBIAN TRAINING WING, R.A.S.C.

THIS month has been characterized by truly appalling weather. Winds of gale force, accompanied by driving rain, have been blowing for days on end. As a result, sea training when attempted during moderate periods has pretty well guaranteed that both instructors and trainees got a thorough wetting. Undergoing training at present, apart from the normal driver trainees, are two courses of future instructors for two other amphibian training schools which are to open shortly. These consist of an officer and fifteen other ranks for the M.E.L.F. School, who started their training on 21st October, and four officers and twelve N.C.Os. for the B.A.O.R. School, who started training on 25th November. Occasional help is given to the Naval Mines Disposal Officer responsible for this stretch of the coast. This usually entails lifting mines from shallow water with a Dukw fitted with an "A" frame, and is totally impossible to accomplish without amphibious vehicles. Our football team has played several matches in the Cambrian Coast League, where the sport is taken very seriously.

### **1948 April (The Waggoner)**

101 COMPANY

101 Company (G.T. Amphibian), M.E.L.F., which is one of the last remaining amphibian companies in existence in the Army, is at present stationed on the shores of the Bitter Lakes, having moved down from Palestine in April, 1947. The Company saw service in an M.T. role

with the B.E.F. in 1939-40, and was evacuated from Dunkirk. In June, 1944, they landed on the Normandy beaches with one of the early flights on D Day, having by then been amphibian trained and equipped with D.U.K.Ws. Today the unit is operating tracked amphibians and is engaged in carrying out the training of its all British personnel in the driving and maintenance of these vehicles and in the operation of the No. 19 Wireless Set with which the amphibians are equipped for the purpose of control and communication. The vehicle at present in use by the Company is the amphibian tracked 4-ton G.S. Freight Carrier, colloquially known as the Neptune. The Neptune is propelled both on land and in the water by its tracks, which, having specially designed track plates, enable it to be propelled when waterborne "on the paddle-steamer principle." It is powered by a Meadows horizontally opposed 12-cylinder petrol engine which is located beneath the floorboards of the cargo space. The operational role of the Neptune is that of a freight carrier, as its official name implies, and troop carrier from L.S.Ts. at sea to beach-heads. In river crossing operations it again carries out its freight and troop-carrying role. The Neptune is a large and slow-moving target in the water and consequently is not an ideal vehicle for use in an opposed beach assault or river crossing. It can, however, be used to great advantage in the building up of beach maintenance dumps and, if required, can carry gun ammunition from ammunition ship at sea, right up to the gun positions in a beach-head, or aviation petrol from ship to forward airstrip. As opposed to the D.U.K.W. the Neptune had the obvious advantage of carrying a greater load and of being able to negotiate "tank type terrain" and water entries and exits inaccessible to the D.U.K.W., which is a wheeled vehicle.

### **1948 October (The Waggoner)**

102 AMPHIBIOUS TRANSPORT

COLUMN, RA.S.C. (T.A.)

The first land and sea exercise ever carried out by a T.A. Amphibious Transport Column took place in the Menai Straits, North Wales, during August, Men of the 102 Amphibious transport Column invaded the areas surrounding Bangor, and ferried troops across the mile wide stretch of water to battle in the mountains of Caernarvonshire. On 16th July a tank-landing craft nosed its way ashore on the beach of the seaside resort of Beaumaris. Down went the ramp, and five ungainly amphibious vehicles roared out to commence the manoeuvres. Under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Powell, the main body of fifty-four officers, NCOs. and men who arrived on 31st July were the guests of 616 Company on the island of Ynys Gaint. Included in the Column was the old 543 G.T. Company, now G.T. Amphibious, with its new O.C., Major R. B. Trevor-Jones. Witnessing the exercises from launches were the Army Commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Frank E. W. Simpson, and Brigadier W. S. Seymour, D.D.S.T., Western Command. We were extremely glad to welcome Major-General Clover when he visited 102 Amphibious Transport Column in his capacity of

Honorary Colonel of the unit, and spent a day with them during training. Four Buffaloes, each capable of carrying a platoon of infantry, were the main force, and were escorted by a Dukw and vessels from 616 Company. All from the Birkenhead area, the men took part in a gruelling week's exercise while becoming perfect in the handling "of their highly intricate machines. Although they had never been seaborne before this camp, they daily became more at home learning navigation and seamanship as well as deployment and maintenance. The high-light came when news was received that the enemy had destroyed the only two bridges between Caernarvonshire and Anglesey, From early morning until late at night the vehicles carried on a shuttle service for the infantry, ferrying them to the Aber Sands, near Bangor The battle was being fought in the mountains and "wounded" were conveyed back to the island by the return route. Controlled by wireless from the Company Commander's vehicle, the exercise went without a hitch, and was an object lesson in the movement of troops by R.A.S.C. amphibians. To add to all other difficulties of tide and treacherous mud-banks, the annual regatta of North Wales was also taking place, and the water was liberally dotted with yachts. It speaks volumes that there were no collisions or harsh words. One afternoon was devoted to a training trip around the bird sanctuary of Puffin in high-speed target towing launches of 616 Company.

### **2013 February**

I have included all the relevant information I have been able to find so far if I shall update as more information becomes available.

John (Geordie) Routledge