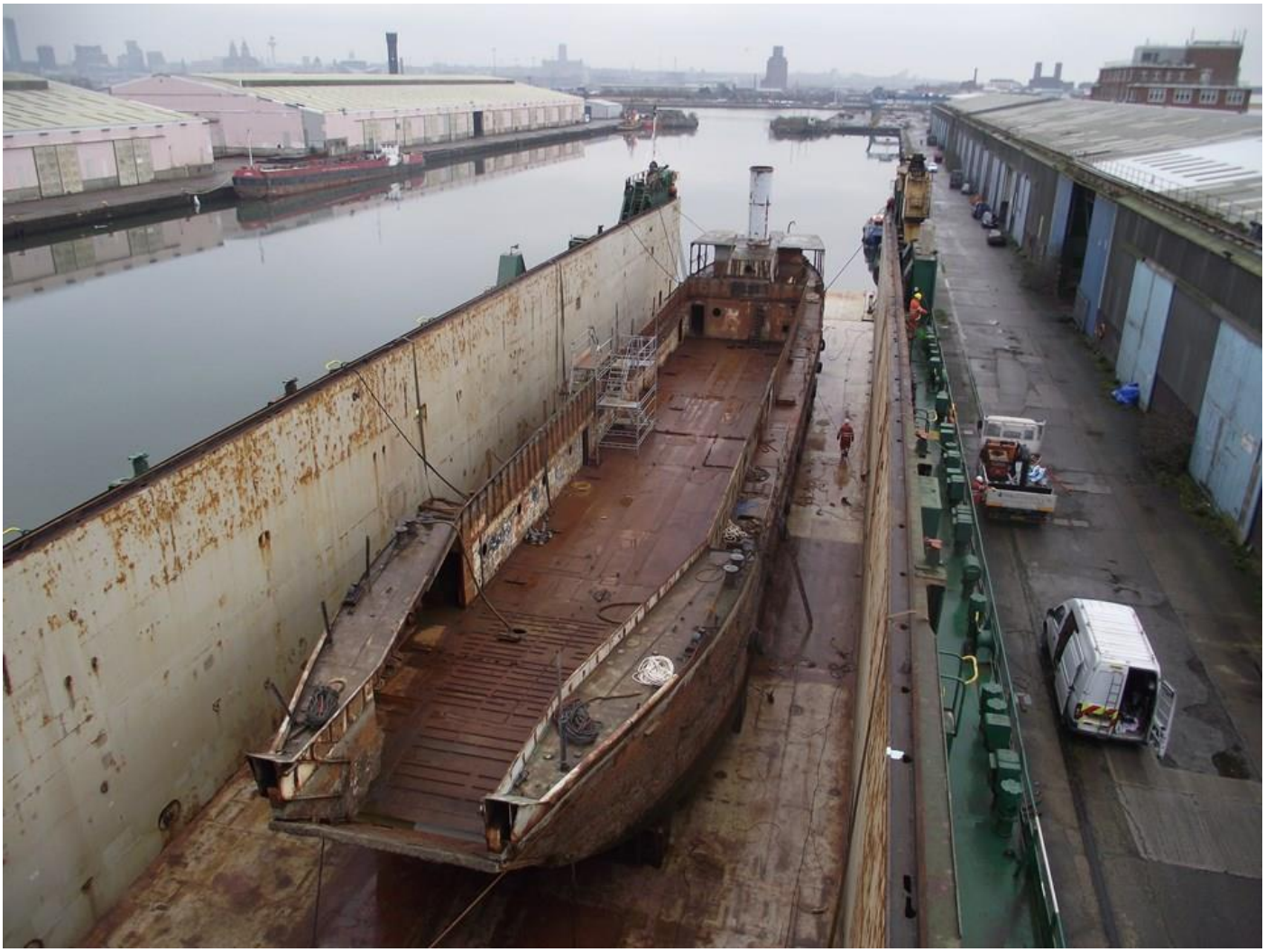
BOLDON CAMP HERITAGE GROUP

Landing Craft Tank LCT7074 a Hawthorn Leslie D-Day Survivor!

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM ROYAL NAVY



LCT7074 on board the vessel that brought it to Portsmouth (Photograph with permission from National Museum of the Royal Navy).

LCT 7074: Rescuing a Lone Survivor

On 7th June 1944, 20 year old Sub Lieutenant John Baggott, an as yet unqualified solicitor from Swindon was about to find his place in history. Baggott was an inexperienced officer of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve who, along with the equally youthful Sub Lt Philip Stephens, was about play his part in the largest

seaborne invasion in history. Their task was simple; with their 12 crew members, to deliver their precious cargo of 10 tanks to Gold Beach, Normandy as part of Operation Overlord. (It is not known how many times LCT7074 performed this task as the vessel had reoccurring engine trouble, however it has been recorded that at least one LCT carried out this task 32 times during the Normandy Campaign and throughout 1944).

Sub Lt Baggott was in command of a 59-metre long, 300-ton Landing Craft Tank (LCT). No mean feat, considering its blunt bow and chronic lack of power. LCTs were notoriously difficult to maintain on course in strong winds or currents.

Like Sub Lt Baggott, Commanding Officers of LCTs were often young men of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, weekend sailors with limited seafaring experience who were arguably underprepared and received short periods of training for such a huge responsibility. Regular officers in the Royal Navy were often sent to purpose-built warships, however young men like Sub Lt Baggott, with far less experience at sea, were sent to command landing craft, which were arguably a far greater challenge. Command responsibility for a ship, 10 tanks and their crews, at just 20-years-old would not have happened anywhere else within the Royal Navy, and the way these young COs successfully rose to the challenge is a huge credit to them. They carried out their difficult task with great courage and they played a huge part in ensuring D-Day was a success.

Little did Sub Lt Baggott and Sub Lt Stephens know, they were in command of an LCT which would be the last to survive of all 800 that served in 1944 – LCT 7074. The National Museum of the Royal Navy is now working to restore this incredible piece of history and tell the vivid and moving story of her crew and all who served at D-Day.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy is lucky to hold a first-hand account of the crew's experiences, due to Sub Lt Stephens remarkable and vivid diary detailing his service on board LCT 7074 during D-Day, which The National Museum of the Royal Navy are fortunate enough to have in transcript form. Below is an excerpt from the diary:

'*With daylight we saw the Bay of the Seine packed with ships as densely as traffic in Piccadilly Circus. Cruisers, destroyers, troopships, LSTs, LCTs, MGBs, every type of ship in the Navy was there – at least 4,000 of them. On the bridge we had the nightmare task of steering 7074 through this mass of shipping, colliding only with one, which ripped away our port guardrails…The craft alongside was a wreck, having received three direct hits as she went in. In a pool left by the receding tide, beside an underwater steel obstruction loaded with live mines, there floated the body of a soldier – mute witness to the battle which had raged to secure the beachhead. We examined our damage, and found we could not raise the ramp because the port wire was broken and the starboard winch smashed. The door wire we replaced, and eventually got the ramp up on one wire. All day we were stuck on the beach, and some of the crew went ashore to Asnelles-sur-Mer and were toasted with champagne in the village restaurant. We took on board 200 German prisoners and were told to take them back to England. But when we pointed out that we had no guards they were transferred to an LST'.*

LCT 7074's history

LCTs were built quickly and considered to have covered their build costs if they made one successful trip, so few survived beyond 1945. This critically significant association with D-Day gives her a unique interpretative value and consequently she has been designated as part of the National Historic Fleet, Certificate Number 713. After a chequered post-war career involving conversion into a floating clubhouse and night-club, and then an ill-fated attempt to conserve her by the now-defunct Warships Preservation Trust, LCT 7074 was lying in private hands, semi-derelict and sunk at her moorings at East Float Dock, Birkenhead, until in 2014 when she was successfully salvaged and moved to Portsmouth by The National Museum of the Royal Navy, with the help of a grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy is now working closely with its affiliate, Portsmouth City Council's D-Day Story, the only museum in the UK specifically devoted to D-Day, to restore LCT 7074 and dis-

play her to the public on Southsea Common in 2020. As the last of her kind in the world to have seen action on D-Day, LCT 7074 is an incredibly rare and crucial survivor.

The only other major warship on UK public display from the D-Day campaign is HMS Belfast and as a 10,000 ton cruiser providing gunfire support from miles offshore, she commemorates only half of the story of naval participation in the operation. The equally important task of transporting troops ashore and keeping them supplied is not commemorated by any other UK historic ship and the preservation of LCT 7074 would be an appropriate way of remembering and telling the stories of the thousands of men and women who designed, built, maintained and serviced these vital craft, as well as the young men who took them into action.

The 10 tanks carried by LCT 7074 included a pair of Sherman tanks operated by 5th Royal Horse Artillery (7^{th} Armoured Division), a unit equipped with Sexton self-propelled artillery, a 25-pounder gun on a Ram tank chassis). The Shermans were observation post (OP) tanks, which had their main armament removed so that extra crew, radios and a map table could be fitted in the turret instead. We know from identification of the temporary embarkation number assigned to LCT 7074, that one of her tanks was involved in the Battle of Villers Bocage on the 13th June 1944. German photographs taken after the action clearly show a knocked out Sherman OP with 7074's embarkation number chalked on the hull.

When LCT 7074 is displayed in Southsea, two tanks will be installed on her tank deck; a Churchill Crocodile (D-Day Story accession no. 1990/1405) and a Sherman Grizzly (D-Day Story accession no. 1990/1400). The Churchill was the most important British-designed tank of the Second World War. The Crocodile was a flame-thrower variant, specially developed for dealing with German fortifications in Normandy. The American-designed Sherman was one of the most numerous Allied tanks of the Second World War and was used by all the Allied armies in Normandy. The Grizzly was a Canadian-built version.

LCT 7074's hull and superstructure (including her vulnerable and difficult to access double bottom and wing fuel tanks) will be stabilised. The ship will then be restored to her 1944 configuration and interpreted accordingly. After restoration, The National Museum of the Royal Navy will safely move and transport 7074 by sea, from her current location at HM Naval Base Portsmouth, to the D-Day Story in Southsea. Bringing the ship to the museum offers an exciting opportunity to maximise public benefit, by placing her unique story in context, alongside other D-Day artefacts and the stories of hundreds of other men and women who were involved in Operation Overlord, the largest seaborne invasion in history. In parallel, the project will also ensure the construction of a strengthened base capable of bearing the weight of LCT 7074, infrastructure to manage visitor access, flow and ticketing and an awning-style canopy to protect the ship from water ingress.

The project will ensure a sustainable future for LCT 7074, ultimately saving her for the nation and adding a uniquely impressive asset, telling the often overlooked naval story of D-Day to the portfolio of extraordinary objects on display at the D-Day Story.

A range of formal and informal educational activities will engage schools and the local community. Formal educational programmes will focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), developing resources for schools and outreach sessions, hopefully inspiring children and exciting them about heritage and engineering. The project will also provide taster days for young people considering a career in heritage and will focus on conservation, ship restoration and marine archaeology. In addition to this, the project will hire two apprentices for one year each, allowing a young person to develop their skills in curatorial work and take the steps into a career in heritage conservation.

The future

Against the odds, LCT 7074 now lives on to tell the story of D-Day from a new perspective. Once restored and displayed, the public will be able to access the ship, interact with her and experience her in the same way as visitors to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard experience HMS Victory and HMS Warrior. She will tell the story of the crew who served on her, living for months-on-end in cramped, uncomfortable conditions; the

story of the tanks and armoured vehicles she delivered to the beaches of Normandy; and the stories of the many others who served at D-Day.

In total the project will cost £5.9million. The National Museum of the Royal Navy has been awarded a generous grant of £4.7million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. However, it needs to raise matched funds of £1.1million. If these funds are not raised, the full extent of conservation work needed to restore 7074 to her 1944 configuration cannot be carried out and elements of her heritage will be lost. We need your help to ensure a future for LCT 7074. Raising the full amount of funds is crucial for the project and we cannot do this without help from the public.

If you can help us raise the funds to carry out and complete the much needed restoration work for LCT 7074 you can make a donation to the project on the National Museum's crowdfunding page, which is aiming to raise £35,000 towards the matched funds.

Please help us save this incredible piece of history for the nation and continue to tell the story of D-Day for years to come. You can donate here: justgiving.com/campaign/saveLCT7074

For more information on this project please contact fundraising@nmrn.org.uk or visit nmrn.org.uk/our-museums/lct-7074.

Photograph curtesy of The Imperial War Museum

LCT7074 on Gold Beach 7th June 1944 (D-Day +1) loaded with German prisoners of war for the return journey to England. Note how close the beached LCT is to the sand dunes whilst it awaits the incoming tide to re-float. Interestingly, the damaged landing craft next to LCT7074 has "All looters will be shot" painted on its side.

The Boldon Camp Heritage Group would like to thank the following people for their assistance in compiling this article:-

Jacquie Shaw, Public Relations Manager, National Museum of the Royal Navy – Portsmouth and Daniel Jessop, Community Participation Officer, LCT7074, Portsmouth City Council.

Additional Information about LCT7074

LCT7074 is the only surviving LCT which actually participated in Operation Neptune, the naval dimension of Overlord. She is one of the 6,883 vessels commanded by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay that took part in the D-Day landings, and of this vast fleet - including 1200 warships, some 4000 landing craft of various types and nearly 900 merchant vessels - assembled to land five divisions and their armour along a fifty-mile front in Normandy, is now one of the few Operation Neptune survivors. The others being, HMS Belfast, HMS Medusa, MGB81 (renumbered (MTB416) and an LBK (Landing Barge Kitchen, of which a small number were produced to provide hot and cold meals for the landing craft crews etc.). In total approximately 30 vessels still exist around the world that took part in Operation Neptune.

LCT7074's significant, close and direct association with the D-Day landings, the largest amphibious operation in all history, gives her an almost unique interpretative value.

She has an added significance in the modern economic history of the shipping trade, having been adopted by this in the post-war years and modified for a wide range of commercial carrying purposes. This led in a comparatively short time to a revolution in sea transport with the Roll-on/Roll-off ferries. Although the passage of time and the multiplicity of diverse uses to which the vessel has been put to since 1945 have led to profound changes in the character of her original appearance, outward configuration and internal arrangements, LCT7074 is still demonstrably an LCT with a distinguished record of combat operations.

In the late 1930s, consideration was given to the provision of shore-to-shore tank carriers and landing craft and the first tank landing craft, designated LCT Mark I, was built at R&W Hawthorn, Leslie and Co Limited on the Tyne and launched in November 1940. Incorporated in her design were several novel features including the front loading ramp, hinged just above the water-line, the double floating dock form of hull, enabling the vehicles in the hold to be concealed from view and protected from the weather by the side tanks, from which a canvas cover was suspended. Motive power was provided by a Paxman diesel engine.

Progressive modifications were introduced and, over time, a total of 235 LCT Mark 3's were completed, including 71 which were built to slightly modified plans during the winter of 1943-44. Among these was LCT7074, built like the others by Hawthorn Leslie, and powered by American Sterling Admiral petrol engines. She was launched without ceremony on 4 April, 1944, then completed and commissioned shortly afterwards. With a crew of 2 officers and 10 ratings, she sailed to Great Yarmouth first and then on to the River Orwell at Felixstowe under the command of Sub Lt John Baggot RNVR. She joined the 17th LCT Flotilla at Great Yarmouth then steamed onwards to Felixstowe to prepare for the build up to D-Day. The backbone of the invasion fleet LCT's, which could carry up to eleven Sherman tanks, were manned mainly by British crews and transported almost all the tanks, heavy artillery and armoured vehicles landed in Normandy. The 17th LCT Flotilla was part of Assault Group L2, LCT Squadron "H" of the Eastern Task Force, which supported the British landings (made up of two British divisions, one Canadian division with additional Army and Royal Marine Commando support). On the 6th June 1944 LCT7074 carried troops and ten Shermans to Normandy, successfully landing nine of the tanks on Gold beach.

For several months after the invasion, the vessel was consistently engaged in ferrying troops, supplies, vehicles and ammunition to ports across the Channel in support of the Allied Forces advancing across northern Europe, continuing in this role throughout the summer and well into the autumn of 1944. At the end of the war the ship was evidently re-named NSC L (19) and although work was started to convert her into an emergency repairs ship for service in the Far East, with the end of hostilities in the Pacific this was abandoned. Later de-commissioned, in 1948 she was presented to the Master Mariners' Club of Liverpool and adapted to become their club ship.

The above information is curtesy of the National Historic Ships UK website

Technical Information about WW2 Landing Craft Tanks

Landing Craft Tank LCT(3) - LCT 7074

General Information

LCT 7074 was an LCT (3) which followed the original tank landing craft design, LCT (1), and the subsequent improved version, LCT (2).

The LCT (1) vessels were built in traditional shipyards and set the pattern for future construction. They could be dismantled into four sections for shipment as deck cargo to whichever theatre of operations required them.

The following LCT (2) were generally similar to the LCT (1) but had an increased beam to enable a second row of light tanks to be stowed and three screws, more to maintain speed rather than to increase speed. Construction of LCT (2) vessels was ordered from and carried out by structural steel manufacturing firms and small, commercial shipyards in order to allow the traditional shipyards to revert to building more sophisticated naval and merchant ships.

Demands for increased deadweight led to the LCT (3) which reverted to two screws and had a 32' section added amidships which allowed a full load increase to 625 tons from 453 tons. As with the LCT (2) vessels, the first series of LCT (3), LCT300 – 499 were constructed by structural steel firms and smaller, commercial, shipyards. Ordered in 1943, construction of the second series, LCT7001 – 7150, was carried out by traditional naval shipbuilders in order to speed up production for the invasion of Europe.

LCT7106 – LCT7117 were all cancelled and there is no record of orders for LCT7126 – LCT7150 being placed. Consequently, out of the original total of 150 LCT (3) being projected, 113 were constructed.

LCT(3) Second Series Ship Specification

Displacement 350 tons (643 tons Full Load)

Dimensions Length 175' (pp)/190' (oa) Beam 31' Draught 8.75'

Machinery Stirling petrol engines BHP 2000 (First Series - diesel engines)

Performance Max Speed 11.5 Kts, Range (approx.) 2700/1900 nm at 9.5/11.5 Kts

Protection Conning Position and Gun Tubs 0.25", 2.5" plastic bridge.

Armament 2 2pdr/20mm AA (2x1) Guns, five 40 ton or eleven 30 ton tanks or ten 3 ton lorries.

Crew 12

Construction (Hawthorn Leslie)

A total of six LCT(3) Second Series tank landing craft, LCT7069 – LCT7074, were ordered from Hawthorn Leslie at Hebburn in 1943 and all were completed in March/April 1944.

Construction (Other North East Yards)

Other LCT(3) Second Series vessels built in the North East were:-

LCT7051 – LCT7056 (6) Smiths Dock (Middlesbrough)
LCT7057 – LCT7062 (6) Pickersgill (Southwick)
LCT7063 & LCT7064 (2) Blyth Dry Dock
LCT7065 & LCT7066 (2) Thompson (Sunderland)
LCT7067 & LCT7068 (2) Doxford (Sunderland)
LCT7075 – LCT7079 (5) and LCT7097 – LCT7100 (4) Swan Hunter & Wigham Richardson (Wallsend)
LCT7080 Austin (Sunderland)
LCT7081 Short (Sunderland)
LCT7090 – LCT7095 (6) Vickers Armstrong (Walker)

Total LCT(3) Second Series built in the North East – 43

LCT(3) Second Series War Losses

LCT7011 Lost, cause unknown, Walcheren 2.11.44
LCT7014 & LCT7015 Foundered, stress of weather, Land's End 18 – 19.10.44
LCT7057 Lost 16.7.44
LCT7064 Lost, date and cause unknown
LCT7089 Wrecked, Boulogne 6.12.44.

Technical Data provided by David Bourn
Article compiled by Malcolm Scott