



7th Buffs Infantry Regiment (141st Royal Armoured Corps)

The Buffs, so-called because of the colour of the trim of their redcoats (when they were known as the Third Regiment of Foot), otherwise the Royal East Kent Regiment, was one of many infantry regiments which had one or more battalions converted to tanks in 1941 and in this case it was their 7th Battalion. In this new guise they would be known as 141 Regiment Royal Armoured Corps although everyone still referred to them as The Buffs.



Like many of the converted regiments 141 RAC was trained on infantry tanks, perhaps on the grounds that, as infantry they would have more sympathy with the foot soldiers. As a Churchill tank regiment in 31st Army Tank Brigade they were selected as the first to convert to operate Crocodile flamethrowers in February 1944.

People in story: Frank Phillips

Location of story: D Day landings in France, advancing into Germany.

Contributed on: 14 June 2005

I was called up in 1940 into the 7th Buffs Infantry Regiment which was later converted to 141st Royal Armoured Corps.

We were under canvas in the grounds of a big house at Maidenhead by the Thames. After three months training we were sent to South Devon to defend that part of the coast against a German invasion. Four companies were stationed along the coast from Bigbury on Sea to Salcombe. H.Q. was set up in the Albion Hotel at Kingsbridge.

After one night when we were called out on a false alarm we returned to the Guard Room, which was the room on the left as you enter the hotel, where one soldier was on a charge.

He was marched in, stood to attention, banged his rifle butt on the floor and it fired a round straight up through the ceiling and just missed the C.O. sitting at his desk in the room above!

Later I volunteered to join the airborne forces and was posted to the 6th Airborne Armoured Recce Regiment.

We had lightweight Tetrarch tanks (named after military chiefs in ancient Greece), **Daimler Scout Cars** with a pre-selective gear box and forward/reverse lever enabling all speeds in either direction. There were also Jeeps and Bren Carriers.

Most of our training took place on Salisbury Plain. There we were later inspected by King George VI, the Queen and Princess Elizabeth.

About one or two weeks before D-Day we stocked up with food and ammunition and drove down to a field near Brize Norton airfield.

Nobody knew when D-Day would be but we were confined to this area. All letters that were written home were burned. We were visited by General Montgomery and given a lecture by Lt General Richard Gale, 6th Airborne Commander. He gave the plan for the whole Division on the second front. We were told we would be the first to land on D-Day which was to be June 5th. There was a 6 inch to 1 mile sand model of the area around Ranville from the bridge over the canal to the Merville gun batteries on the coast which could fire on to the 'Sword' landing beaches.

Every field was marked and each of our Landing Zones indicated. All open fields had anti-landing devices installed; tall posts with wires across, ditches etc and the low lands were flooded.

First to land would be Major Howard and his Section to capture the Benouville canal bridge, now known as Pegasus Bridge, and Ranville bridge across the adjacent River Orne. Then the paratroopers known as Scouts to mark out the glider Landing Zones with ground lights and supposedly to remove the posts and fill in trenches.

One specially trained unit had the task of capturing or de-activating the Merville gun batteries. The Armoured Recce Regiment would be sent 20-30 miles into Panzer infested country. 'Soldiers job' he called it.



General Montgomery wanted Caen to be captured on the first day and we would all be returned to UK after ten days. That was the plan. In fact it was three months before we returned.

The C.O. was to fly with his tank in a Hamilcar glider from Tarrent Rushton. He brought a leather gun case and asked for it to be strapped to the side of the gun turret. Inside he had placed his umbrella. I was destined to go in a Jeep with the Second in Command in a Horsa glider from Brize Norton. He was the Director of the Landing Zone and had the task of mustering and organising all the troops as they landed and I had to establish communication. At the airfield all the gliders were arranged along each side of the runway with the tug planes down the centre. We had previously painted the white recognition bands on the wings and the fuselage of all the gliders. The tow ropes were attached across the runway ready for take off. Our Horsa glider was loaded with the Jeep safely secured with all other equipment and men ready for take-off the night before D-Day.

Then D-Day was postponed for 24 hours due to the weather, which made us anxious about the time limit that these gliders were allowed to stand loaded. However June 6th it was.

About 11pm we started taking off allowing 30 seconds for each take off. The planes circled round until all were in the air then made for the coast. Not long after we crossed the coast and were over the Channel for some unknown reason the tug pilot released the tug rope from his end which wrapped around our wing with the heavy metal shackle hitting the wing with a bang. I was in a position to see this happen and as the glider was all timber constructed the wing section passed across inside the fuselage. I could see a crack appearing across the wing section and was hoping we were near enough to the coast to return to UK before ditching.

Our pilot slowly turned 180 degrees and was able to cross the coast in time to land across some poor farmer's field of crops. I expected him to be furious with us for ruining his crop. However he came out with a lamp and invited us into the farmhouse where we enjoyed a hot cup of cocoa. I have since learned that the Horsa glider was designed for the wings to break off in the event of landing between two anti-landing poles.

The Second in Command was, understandably, absolutely furious and on the phone he arranged for us to go to Portsmouth where the Harbour Master had one of the LCT's (Landing Craft Tank) holding three forty ton Churchill tanks. He had moved them as far back as possible leaving just enough room for our Jeep to fit in front behind the ramp. I have little recollection of the journey across the Channel but it must have taken about ten hours.

On arrival at the beach we had to drive off immediately the ramp went down. I just remember a devastating site across the beach with a smoky haze and two remaining buildings above the beach head. We immediately made our way into Ouistreham which surprised me by being so badly damaged. It had already been captured by the Commandos and probably shelled by the Navy. Our task now was to 'run the gauntlet' inland to catch up with the Airborne forces. We found a country road out of town in the right direction and set off.

Very soon we were being fired at from various quarters and I remember trying to vary our speed to make a more difficult target. However eventually I couldn't resist putting my foot down hard on the accelerator. Then I saw a cow break through the hedge and come into the road ahead. I was hoping it would stay by the roadside but it moved into the roadway causing me to brake hard.

Just then it was shot dead, just about where we would have been, so it probably saved our lives. We arrived at Pegasus bridge about the same time as Lord Lovat's Commandos when Bill Millin famously played his bagpipes across the bridge. He couldn't hear any firing, only his bagpipes. These have since been donated to The Memorial Pegasus.

We caught up with our Regiment camped near Ranville. Our job as Recce Regiment was to find where the enemy was and report back. The German STUKA dive bombers found us a few times with their terrible screaming sound in spite of RAF air supremacy.



In a woodland area we located the 21st Panzer Tiger tanks and near the entrance the Signals set up a loudspeaker system with a wire recording which we had made on Salisbury Plain. It was of Churchill tanks going round in a large circle passing by a microphone making this wire recording. This we played for about twenty minutes and hopefully deceived them into thinking there was a whole Armoured Regiment in the vicinity.

We were still unable to enter Caen and had to wait for the RAF to send a 500 bomber raid to flatten a lot of the City. After a while my old Regiment 141st RAC came by with their Churchill tanks the leading one of which was a FLAIL tank with revolving chains to set off any mines ahead.

One morning by Ranville bridge we discovered a German frogman hiding under the bridge ready to fix explosives. He was handed over to Intelligence and left in his wetsuit until he gave enough information. Apparently two German frogmen had been ordered to blow up the bridge over the canal. They came from a Naval base in Caen struggling with a kind of torpedo swimming under water. They came across the bridge set up the explosives and returned. They had blown up the wrong bridge.

Just by Pegasus bridge is a Café where German officers in charge of the bridges were billeted. The owners of the café were part of the Free French and were fully trusted. They had a few hours notice of the impending raid on the bridge and the Café was the first building to be liberated. On a recent visit I found the lady running the Café, now also a souvenir shop, was the little 6-8 year old daughter in 1944. All she remembers is black faced men rushing in and giving her chocolate.

I remember one of our Tetrach tanks returning from a mission. The gunner had very carefully cleaned his 2 pounder gun and to prevent grit getting into the barrel he replaced the wooden bung in to the muzzle.

When the gun was fired the barrel had split into three or four strips and peeled back like a banana skin. I never quite discovered what happened on the mission but the tank commander was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

Our interpreters were very brave young lads whose families were German Jews who had escaped before the war. They had volunteered for the Airborne and must have known they would not survive being captured. One poor lad lost his nerve and was made to dig a huge hole next to a dead cow by the camp. It took him a couple of days and the cow was expanding by the hour. Eventually we all heaved the huge body into the hole before it exploded.

After the RAF bombing raid we made our way through the ruins of Caen. It was really pitiful and difficult to know where the road was or what were once people's houses. Soon after that we returned to the UK.

Our next episode was to cross the River Meuse and protect the northern flank of the 'Battle of the Bulge' where the Germans pushed well into the American lines at the Ardennes in an attempt to cut off our supply lines. It was about Christmas time 1944.

Having mobilised we had to make our way to Tilbury Docks but there were some heavy trailers to take. They consisted of two large hollow steel wheels full of petrol and a central compartment full of ammunition. One Jeep could easily pull one trailer but not two. We made up a train of two Jeeps and three trailers. It was bitterly cold and on the way we encountered a downhill stretch covered in ice and snow. The whole train was getting out of control sliding down but eventually came to a halt across the road.



Fortunately no vehicle overturned. At Tilbury docks we were held up for several days in thick fog and freezing cold. When it finally cleared we sailed to Ostende on a moonlight night. Our route took us through lots of villages and we received a very warm response with bunches of flowers and bottles of wine. We passed through Lille and Monson our way to Namur where we were able to cross the Meuse on what must have been a Bailey bridge erected by the Engineers.

Namur has a special memory because we came across a large red brick building with a Catholic Church that we took to be a Convent. We were uncertain whether to search the building for German soldiers. An investigating party was sent in who found a Reverend Mother and several Sisters who declared they were looking after orphans so we left them alone.

On a recent visit to Namur we located a Hospice with a Notre Dame and paid them a visit. We were able to speak to the lady in charge who assured us that it had always been a Hospice but that it used to be run by the Nuns. Inside we found two large plaques on the wall. One was for a Reverend Mother and the other for two Sisters. They had all been killed by a bomb or shell fire.

After crossing the Meuse we went to take up our positions in the Ardennes. It was bitterly cold with thick snow. All our tanks and vehicles were painted with whitewash and we all wore white overalls.

One morning we woke up and the snow had gone and there were our vehicles gleaming white. The Germans had somehow managed to lay contact mines which caused a number of casualties and it was there that we observed a moving haystack. What lay behind it we never found out.

There were many burnt out American Sherman tanks. They were known to catch fire if hit by an anti-tank shell and the crew had about ten to fifteen seconds to get out. Eventually the Germans were pushed right back and that began their final retreat.

Our Regiment was then sent directly north to head off the German retreat. We travelled a very long way through Dusseldorf, Munster, Osnabrook, Minden, round Hanover which was completely in flames and Luneberg. We met a number of pockets of fierce resistance and on one occasion lost three tanks. There were diehard Nazis commanding their troops and still determined to defend the Fatherland. They needed forced persuasion.

Later we were dealing with troops surrendering but we had no way of holding prisoners. They were simply disarmed told to form up and march back down the road we had just come along. We hoped they would meet the back-up troops able to form POW camps. For all we knew they may just as well have gone back home.

After a while we crossed the River Elbe and met virtually no resistance. Two of us were sent up to Wismar and then to Rostock on the Baltic coast in a Daimler Scout car which was fitted with 'Run Flat' tyres. Our objective was to establish radio contact back to wherever HQ may be.

Whilst there we entered a wooded area and were conscious of other people there. We soon spotted uniforms which were not recognized. They turned out to be the Russians, a Stalingrad Armoured Regiment coming the other way. We all realised that was the end of the war for us all. Out came the vodka and celebrations continued until well after dark.

Language did not seem to matter. In time we retired to the building where we had set up our base. Next morning after our usual maintenance procedure we decided to meet our new friends again. In the woods, just where we had met, the Russians had erected a fence right across with a gate and a sentry box. We walked in and saw some familiar faces but were immediately sent out again. Their political masters had taken over.

A few days later V.E. Day was declared and Montgomery negotiated the boundary line between East and West along the River Elbe.

We were about a hundred miles into what became East Germany, known as the German Democratic Republic.



10th Royal Lincolnshire Regiment – of Foot

ADD INFORMATION AS IT BECOMES AVAILABLE



image courtesy of Simon Hamon

Photographer: Unknown

Description: An dingo armoured car 19ZS31 of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment finds its way temporarily blocked by cattle on the road to Sungei-Kuang. Malaya November 1957.



image courtesy of Simon Hamon

Photographer: Private James Melvyn Brown, known as 'Mel' 'A' Company Dog Section 1st Royal
Lincolnshire Regt

Description: An dingo armoured car 1st Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment
Malaya
Circa 1957.