

Visit to Bovington Tank Museum - Report by Michael Minton - Speaker Secretary

12 March 2012



This visit followed up an entertaining talk given on 15th August 2011 by David Fletcher the museum's curator. After coffee there was a guided tour led by volunteer Terry Jane who had experience as a naval helicopter pilot. He began by showing the group some oddities as he called them. There was the Weasel which was an amphibian which could also

carry another armoured vehicle inside, the Tetrarch which was carried on gliders into battle areas and also had the unique feature of the wheels which drove

General View of the Story Hall

the track being capable of turning. Then there was the Praying Mantis with a lift turret to look over hedges with a Bren gun and a driver and gunner lying prone - not very comfortable at all. The Matilda was a canal defence vehicle largely used to defend the Suez Canal so saw little action, but used a blinding light with shutters that confused the irises of attackers eyes and effectively blinded them. Terry said developments on this today included lasers which did the same thing.

We saw the Valentine, a tank that fired backwards to balance a new large 17 lb gun designed to counter the German 80 mm guns which easily destroyed allied tanks. It was not manoeuvrable, so was used by the artillery from prepared defensive positions. TOG 2 was a concept designed by The Old Group, a design unit trained for first world war techniques. This was a monster of 80 tons with ideas such as a track running inside the armour shell and using a diesel engine to run an electric motor which propels the vehicle. It was never used, being too heavy and with poor mobility.

The museum has a number of modern tanks including the Challenger 2, which has laser guided guns and fires depleted uranium darts which penetrate tank armour and by sheer dynamic energy vaporises the occupants. These tanks also use phosphorus missiles to set up an instant smokescreen to escape in an emergency. The 120 mm cannon is insulated and has a smoke relief valve to keep it aiming true. Tanks now have a special new armour made from a laminate which is highly secret, but also much lighter and highly effective.



We then entered an area devoted to the equipment used in Afghanistan and saw the Jackal, an open top armoured vehicle for urban control, a sea container with open side used as a mobile operational centre and a Scimitar which was a highly mobile tank with a smaller gun plus night vision and jamming equipment to stop mobile phones being used to explode improvised

explosives. There were units that were multi-purpose for troop carrying, stores and as an ambulance which were defended on

"Little Willie" - the first ever tank of WW1

the side by a lattice of aluminium, which stopped rifle grenades. These also had slings to keep feet off the floor to avoid explosions below harming soldiers' legs. The tracks were made of rubber so they can be easily and quickly replaced. The armoured car that

is now operational had been tested with heavy bombardment to prove how well it can protect passengers in the cabs.

As we moved through to the Story Hall of the development of the tank from the First World War onward we passed a Tiger tank with a coating that prevented limpet magnetic mines clinging to the iron metal beneath. As the Germans became short of rubber they invented a new type of wheel with a rubber bead between the iron wheel and the metal rim.

In the Story Hall were tanks from the first ever developed to the current Challenger 2 with all the most modern systems and many secret components, which is the finest tank in the world today and British.



This room has storyboards and videos, which paint a dramatic picture of tank warfare over the last nearly 100 years, from the trenches through the inter-war period, the Blitzkrieg, D-day and modern wars. There are tanks of all descriptions, some able to float, others, with a snorkel spout able to cross rivers, many are the only ones still in existence and a number of them are operational.

still

Members were impressed by the size and scope of the whole museum and clearly could have spent many more hours to get around all the

The latest Challenger 2 tank

exhibits; they were particularly grateful for such a knowledgeable and entertaining guide with his many stories and anecdotes.