D-Day Landing Craft Cargo Surveyed

TO MARK the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings, the Maritime Archaeology Trust (MTA), a Hampshire-based research and education charity, has released images of the cargo of a landing craft which sank on the eve of D-Day.

The images of LCT(A) 2428 and its cargo were taken during a survey which was funded by English Heritage and undertaken in conjunction with Southsea Sub-Aqua Club. The project aimed to record the physical remains of the sunken landing craft and its cargo.

LCTA 2428 had originally been a Mk.V Landing Craft Tank, LCT 428, built by the New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Camden, New Jersey, during 1942. Once completed, LCT 428 was transferred under the Lend Lease programme to the Royal Navy for operations in the Mediterranean. In time, LCT 428 was one of twenty-six of its type returned to the UK. At various shipyards, these LCTs were converted to LCT(A)s, the 'A' standing for "Armoured", by the fitting of additional armour plating. Each vessel also had a "2" added to the original hull number. Hence LCT 428 became LCT(A) 2428.





It was intended that these landing craft would carry two or three tanks that would provide heavy firepower support, firing on enemy positions during the approach to the beach. The tanks would then disembark to provide support for the infantry. Some of the LCT(A)s also carried armoured bulldozers to assist in the clearing of beach obstacles.

LCT(A) 2428 was the flotilla leader of the 105th Flotilla of Assault Group J1's Support Squadron. It was assigned to Juno Beach to support the 7th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Division at Courseulles-sur-Mer. The loading tables for LCT(A) 2428 indicate that it was destined for Mike Green beach at H-Hour (i.e. in the first wave).

It carried a cargo of two Centaur CS IV (Centaur Close Support Mk.IV) tanks, two Caterpillar D7 armoured bulldozers and one "Truck Airborne" (a typical British designation for a Willys Jeep). The Centaurs were from Q Troop of the 4th

ABOVE: A close up of the 95mm howitzer on one of Centaur CS IV tanks that formed part of LCT(A) 2428's cargo.

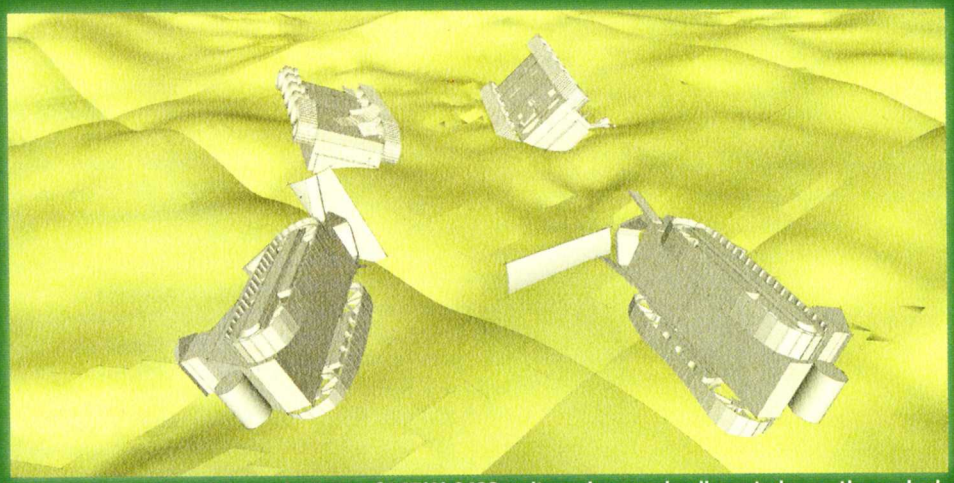
MAIN PICTURE: One of the Caterpillar D7 armoured bulldozers being carried by LCT(A) 2428 when it got into difficulties. (COURTESY OF MARTIN DAVIES DAY)

TOP RIGHT: A diver surveys one of LCT(A) 2428's pair of Centaur CS IV tanks, pictured here from the north-east. (COURTESY OF ALISON MAYOR)

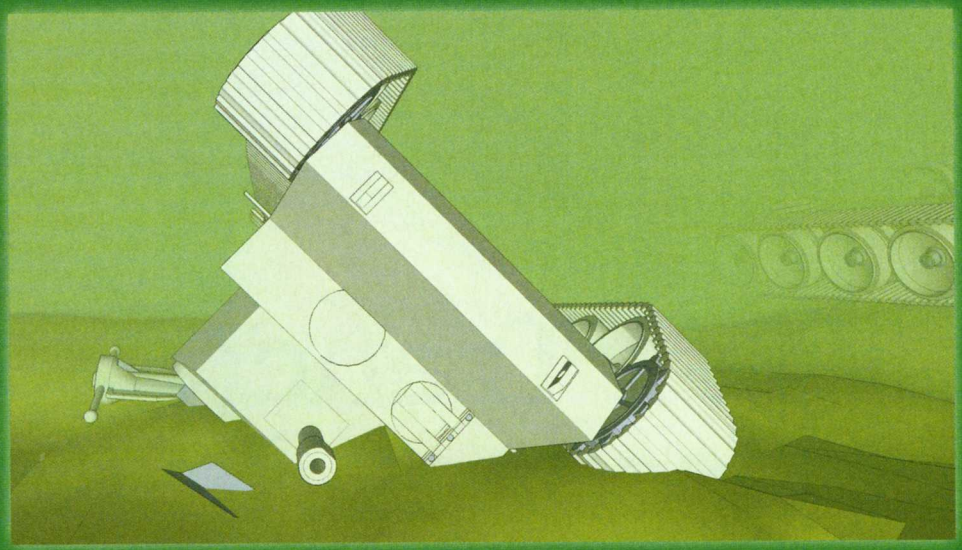
Battery of the 2nd Regiment Royal Marines Armoured Support Group under the command of Lieutenant V.J. Syborn, Royal Armoured Corps. The bulldozers and jeep were from 18 Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, part of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. There were also personnel of 'A' Company, the 8th Battalion the Kings (Liverpool Irish) Regiment on board. With such substantial equipment on board – in addition to its extra armour plating – it was very heavily loaded and had little freeboard (the distance between the surface of the sea and the topside of the vessel) for the crossing of the Channel – this problem was noted by other LCT(A) commanders.

LCT(A) 2428 weighed anchor at Lee-On Solent at 19.05 hours on 5 June. Shortly after heading out into the eastern approaches to the Solent that night, while on passage to Normandy, LCT(A) 2428 began to experience problems. The Admiralty Naval War Diary indicates that "at 2140, LCT(A) 2428 broke down and anchored near the Nab Tower", which lies out to sea approximately five miles east of Bembridge on the Isle of Wight. Able Seaman Charles Hunt, a member of the LCT(A)'s crew, stated in an interview that the engines failed and the craft started taking on water as a result of "damage sustained by weather to double bottoms on starboard side aft".

Having taken off all of 2428's crew and army personnel, the tug HMT *Jaunty* attempted to take the craft in tow, but this failed and the landing craft capsized the following morning, losing its valuable cargo. The vessel, now floating upside down in the Channel, posed a potential hazard to other vessels in the invasion fleet and HMS *Jaunty* had little choice but to open fire and sink its charge. None of the crew of LCT(A) 2428 were lost.



A 3D representation of the main cargo of LCT(A) 2428 as it can be seen by divers today on the seabed off Selsey Bill in West Sussex. (MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY TRUST)



Based on the results of the survey carried out by the Maritime Archaeology Trust and the Southsea Sub-Aqua Club, this illustration depicts one of LCT(A) 2428's pair of Centaur CS IV tanks as it can be seen today on the seabed off Selsey Bill. (MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY TRUST)



The remains of LCT(A) 2428 which lies some twenty metres below the surface four miles south of Selsey Bill, West Sussex. (MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY TRUST)



Divers from the Maritime Archaeology Trust and the Southsea Sub-Aqua Club during the survey of the wreck of LCT(A) 2428 and its cargo. (MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY TRUST)

The way in which LCT(A) 2428 sank has created two underwater sites of archaeological importance just south of Selsey Bill. The first site is at the point of capsize, where the cargo of Centaur tanks, bulldozers and other equipment still lie. The second is where the upturned hull of the landing craft came to rest on the seabed.

The MTA's website contains this description of the wreckage: "The hull section of LCT(A) 2428 is scattered across a large area, as would be expected of a vessel approximately 37m in length. Divers observed 'goal-post'-like upright elements that represent the hull and deck beam supports of the original vessel, as well as an extensive engine block arrangement including a propeller and shaft. There appeared to be two main concentrations of wreckage with other significant material distributed across a wider area of seabed.

"Further to the west, a cluster of armoured vehicles lie on the seabed in much the same arrangement as they would have been parked on the open deck aboard ... Divers have produced measured plans of this assemblage, including two Centaur CS IV tanks laying side by side, with two D7 armoured bulldozers immediately to the south. The remains of another vehicle, possibly a Willys Jeep, are present to the north, amongst a dense distribution of High Explosive (HE) ammunition."

Both locations have become popular with recreational divers, archaeologists and historians, although for some time their identity was uncertain. Sixty years after they sank, Southsea Sub-Aqua Club began to investigate the wrecks and, through a process of archaeological investigation and historical research, was able to identify the tanks and their relationship with the landing craft.

THE MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY TRUST

THE MARITIME Archaeology Trust is a registered charity with over twenty-two years' experience in research, investigations and pioneering techniques for the study of marine cultural heritage. Originating in the south of England, as the Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology, the organisation has grown from regional roots to an internationally renowned authority on maritime archaeological issues and research. For more information, please visit: www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org