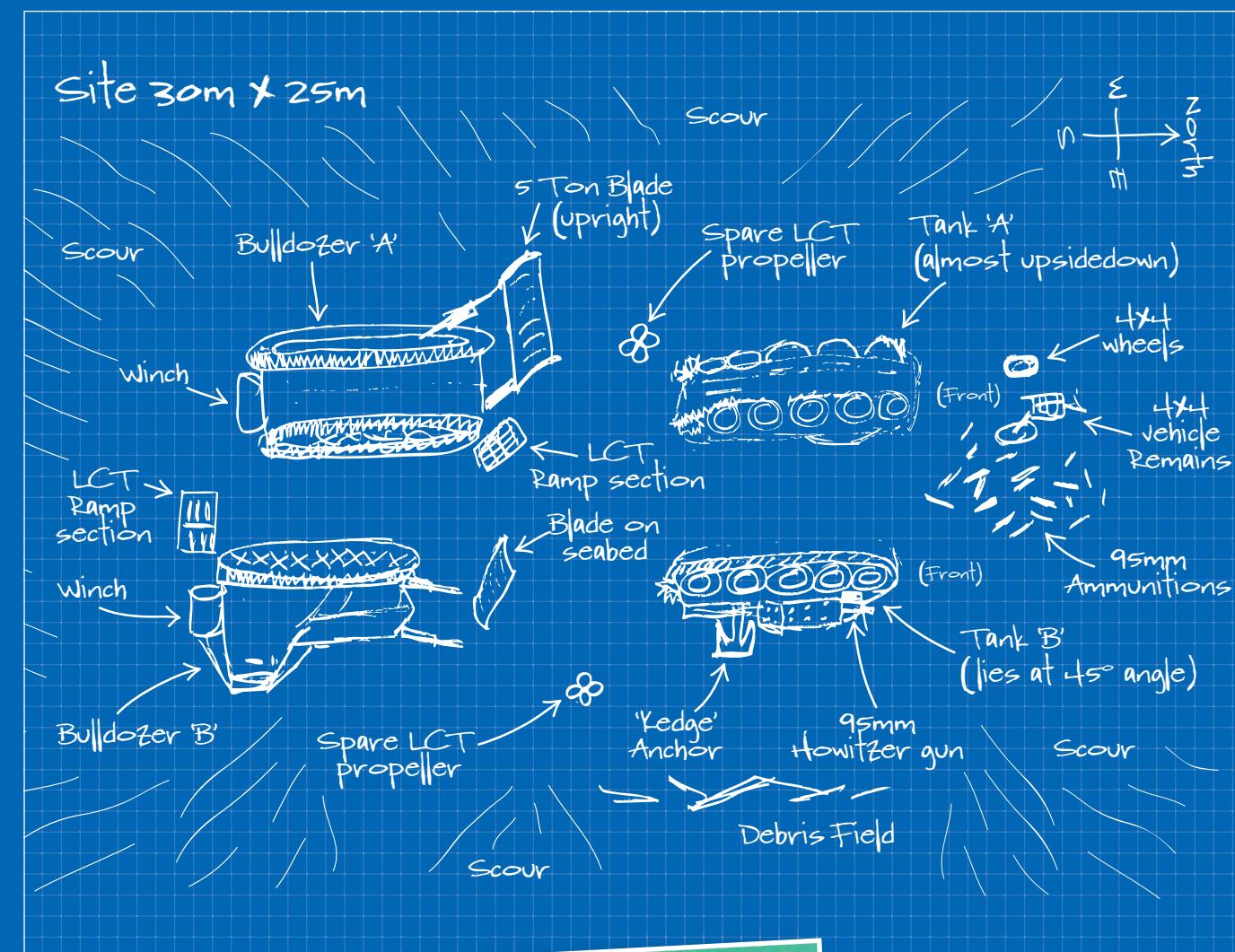


Tanks and Bulldozers

DEPTH: 18-22m
VISIBILITY: 1-6+m

About 20m down off Selsey Bill in Sussex lies an impressive collection of armoured fighting vehicles. Advanced Divers **Alison Mayor** and **Martin Davies** of Southsea SAC describe the site in words and pictures



Far left: An edible crab sits on the caterpillar tracks of Tank B
Below: This 95mm high explosive shell presents an incongruous sight on the seabed

Four miles southwest of Selsey Bill, off the Sussex coast, there is a simple trace on the echo sounder that looks like a few rocks to the untrained eye. In fact it's quite an unusual dive site. Here an unexpected collection of Centaur Tanks and armoured Caterpillar Bulldozers lies along a north / south line in a shallow scour.

Once the site has been located, it's best to drop the shot in the middle to give access to all of the main features. One trick to help you stay on-site is to remember that the vehicles are in a 1-2m deep scour and if you find yourself getting slightly shallower you are heading in the wrong direction.

There are two Centaur CS Mk IV tanks, two armoured D7 bulldozers, the remains of a 4x4 vehicle, a large anchor, two propellers, high explosive ammunition and other wreckage.

Often shrouded by a large shoal of bib, the four main vehicles are about 5m apart so you should be able to see to the next vehicle in reasonable conditions. It is relatively simple to navigate using the site plan. The two tanks lie in front of the two



» bulldozers with the remains of the 4x4 car or truck and 95mm tank ammunition just ahead of the tanks.

It should be easy to tell where you are by looking at the vehicle characteristics and then it's just a case of working your way round to see the others. The tanks and bulldozers are labelled A and B on the plan – let's go clockwise round the site.

Tank A, you'll notice, lies almost upside down and has lost much of its caterpillar track. Two of the distinguishing features of the Centaur tanks are the large, short-barrelled 95mm Howitzer gun and a round metal plate at the front of the turret, covering a BESA machine gun port. The tank has five wheels each side with the drive

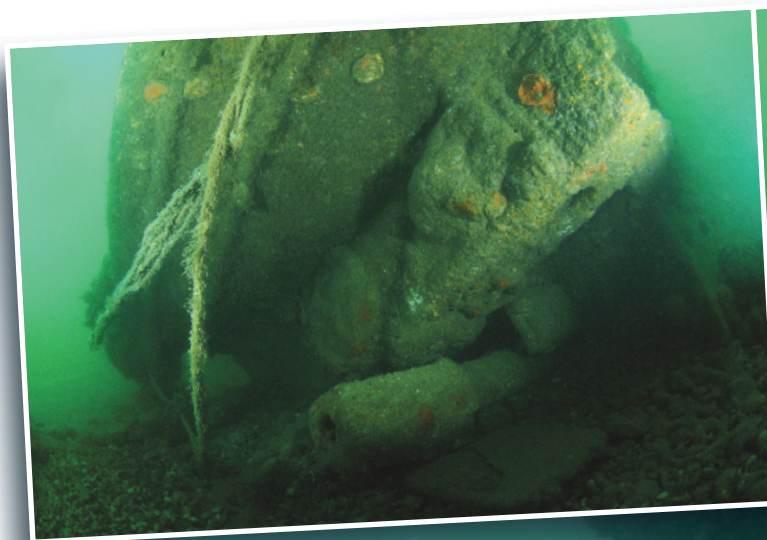
cog at the rear, which is typical of most British tanks. As you swim round this tank, look out for a spare propeller on the seabed at the back of the tank on the left-hand side and also part of the 4x4 car axle near the front on the same side.

In front of Tank A, you will find more parts of the 4x4 car – gearbox, engine, battery and wheels as well as high explosive 95mm ammunition. Please do not be tempted to touch or interfere with the ammunition shells. Heading clockwise you will soon come across Tank B.

Tanked-up

Tank B is in very good condition, lying on its side at a 45-degree angle. The turret and

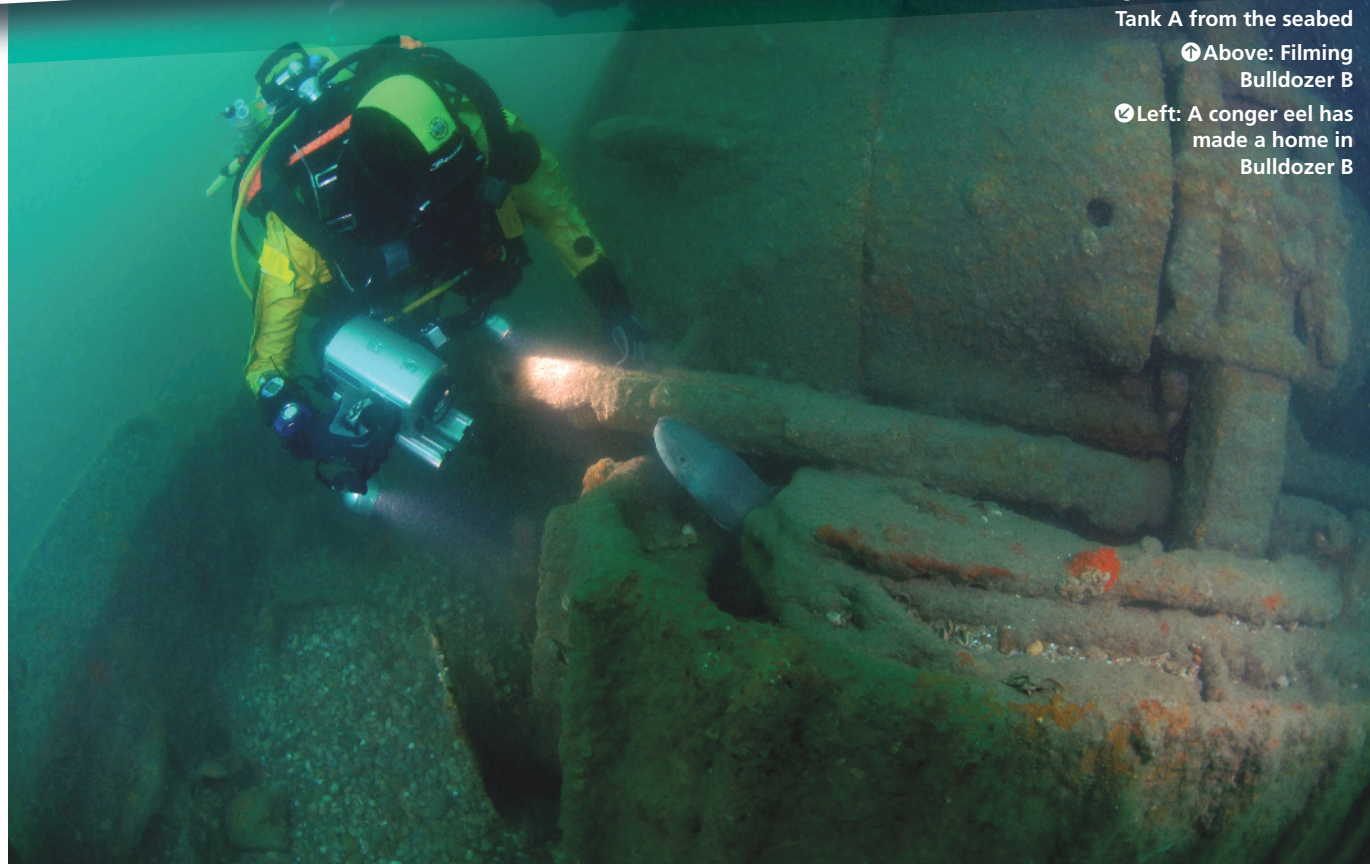
95mm Howitzer gun are clearly visible. Looking more closely below the main gun is the distinctive 30cm round plate that blanks off what would have been a second machine gun port. It is possible to see inside Tank B where a hatch door has been removed. This is where the driver would have entered and behind the turret you can, again, peer into the inner workings and engine where the other four crew members would have sat. Towards the back of Tank B, near the engine you will notice a large kedge anchor with its stock tucked under the tank and also another propeller partly buried in the gravel. Both were major clues as to how these impressive armoured vehicles came to be here.



» Above left: A view of Tank A from the seabed

» Above: Filming Bulldozer B

» Left: A conger eel has made a home in Bulldozer B



Tech spec

Centaur CS Mk IV tank

WEIGHT: 28 tonnes

TOP SPEED: 27mph

CREW: 5

USE: 95mm Howitzer Gun capable of firing High Explosive Anti-Tank shells at targets 2500m away; BESA machine gun.

Armoured D7 Bulldozer

WEIGHT: A standard Caterpillar D7 Bulldozer weighs 23 tonnes. The D7 – one of a selection of specially adapted tanks designed to take part in assaults on the beach defences in France, known as 'Hobart's Funnies' – had added armour plating and a blade.

CREW: 2

USE: to clear the D-Day beaches of obstructions and haul stricken craft and vehicles out of the way.



Operation Neptune

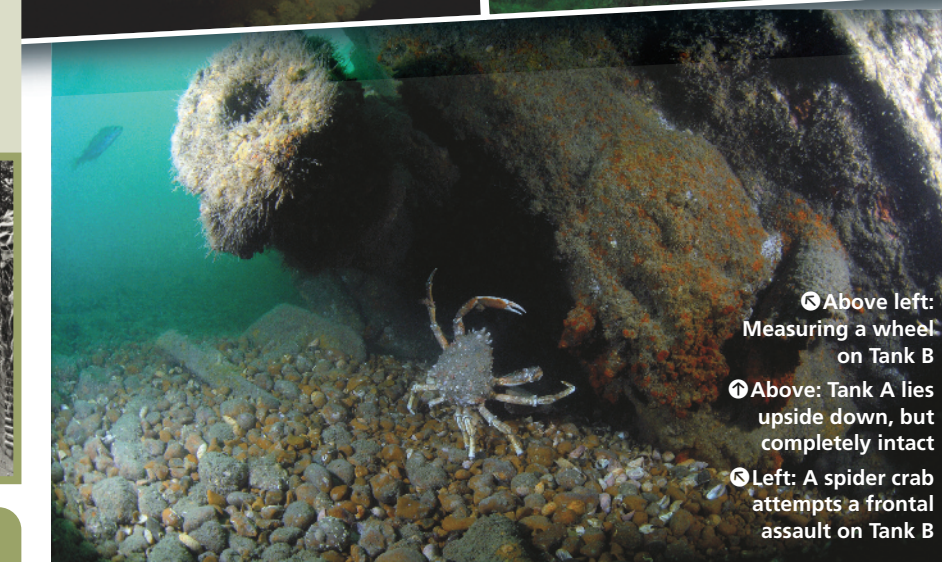
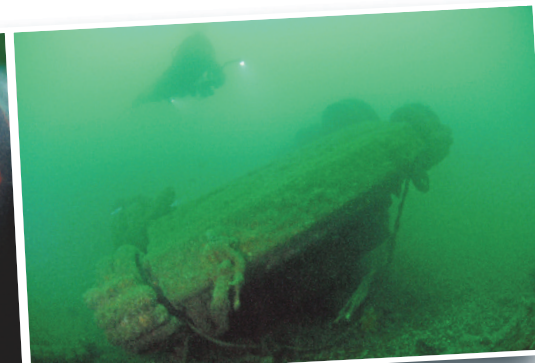
Only 80 Centaur CS Mk IV tanks were destined to be used in combat, modified for use in Operation Overlord and given to a specially created Royal Marines Regiment – the RM Armoured Support Group. They were to be in the first wave of the D-Day landings. Using Royal Naval gunnery techniques, they were to fire their 95mm Howitzer guns at enemy positions. Of the 80 Centaurs that set off as part of the invasion force, only a limited number made it inland on D-Day.

It turns out that the tanks and bulldozers that are now on the seabed were loaded on to a Tank Landing Craft (LCT(A)2428) at Stokes Bay, Gosport, for the Operation Neptune channel crossing on 6 June 1944. They were due to take part in the D-Day assault on Juno beach as part of the Canadian lead assault in Operation Overlord. Damaged by bad weather LCT(A)2428 developed engine

trouble and had to turn back. She was taken under tow but in heavy seas the tow broke and the landing craft capsized spilling its cargo and 50 men into the sea. All personnel were safely recovered but the LCT continued to float for some time until it finally sank three miles away. This

To the east of the tank there is a random area of metalwork, which may have formed part of the ramp assemblies that the tanks were secured to on their landing craft. Moving again clockwise and just a few metres behind both tanks are the two Caterpillar Armoured D7 Bulldozers. Bulldozer B lies on its right-hand side and

the easy way to remember this one is that the large bulldozer blade has fallen off and lies on the sea floor in front. The rest of the 'dozer is in good condition and like the other vehicles has a resident population of congers, crustaceans and fish. At the rear of the bulldozers you will notice a drum-shaped object: it is a large, fully wound



» Above left: Measuring a wheel on Tank B

» Above: Tank A lies upside down, but completely intact

» Left: A spider crab attempts a frontal assault on Tank B

explains why there is evidence of a vessel – but no actual shipwreck. Today only two other Centaurs remain – both are war memorials in France, including one at the famous Pegasus Bridge. Only one armoured D7 survived and it's in a private collection.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF TANK MUSEUM

The Knowledge

DEPTH RANGE: The site covers an area of about 30m by 25m and is 18-22m deep.

VISIBILITY: Anything to 6m+ on a good day. A torch is recommended.

HAZARDS: The 95mm ammunition contains a mixture of nitro-glycerine and amatol and may be unstable.

FINDING THE WRECK: The site is four miles south-west of Selsey Bill at GPS position 050 38.540N 000 51.586W (WGS84)

TIDAL INFORMATION: Slack water is 90 minutes before HW Portsmouth and 45 minutes before LW Portsmouth. There is generally a 40-minute slack water window. Be prepared to drift off the site as the tide picks up quickly.

GAS: Air/nitrox is available from Mulberry Divers at 9 Orchard Parade, East Beach, Selsey, West Sussex PO20 0NS (01243 601000) or Triton Scuba, 161 Highland Road, Portsmouth, Hampshire PO4 9EY (023 92 838773)

RIB LAUNCHING: A new public slipway has been constructed at Selsey East Beach, car parking costs £1 per day. Bracklesham has a slip/beach launch but requires a good 4x4. Public slipways in Langstone harbour at Eastney or Hayling Island (launch fee payable) can be used at any state of the tide but there can be strong tidal streams (<http://www.langstoneharbour.org.uk>). Itchenor also has a slipway that can be used any state of the tide (launch fee payable).

ACCOMMODATION: Many local B&Bs are available in the Bracklesham and Selsey area. There is camping and caravanning at Southsea (www.southsealeisurepark.com) and Selsey (www.warnerfarm.co.uk).

EATS AND TREATS: There are local shops at Bracklesham, East Wittering and Selsey. On your way back to Eastney slipway you could stop at the Ferry Boat Inn next to the Hayling Island slipway for a pie and pint. There is always a burger van at Eastney near the Lifeboat station and a great Indian restaurant called The Bombay Bay at Southsea Marina.

BLOWN OUT: There are many historic and maritime museums in the area. The new Diving museum in Gosport is always worth a visit

(www.divingmuseum.co.uk). There is a D-Day Museum in Southsea: (www.ddaymuseum.co.uk). In Portsmouth visit the Mary Rose museum, HMS Warrior and HMS Victory and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (www.historicdockyard.co.uk)

CHARTER BOATS: SC Charters' roomy 8.5m RIB makes regular trips to Tanks and Bulldozers (www.southerncoastcharters.com) contact skipper Simon Bradburn 07932 162721

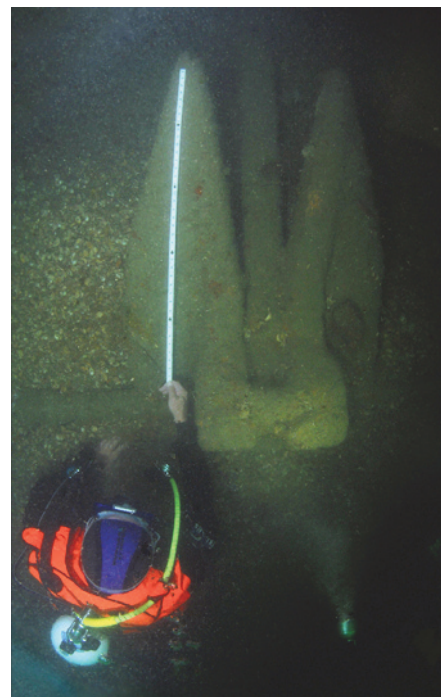
EXTRAS: Real time online local weather information is available from a buoy on Chichester Bar (www.chimet.co.uk)

» winch. There is also a metal object that looks like a packing crate on the seabed – this is part of a landing-craft ramp assembly.

The final piece of wreckage on our tour, Bulldozer A, is a magnificent machine. Lying on its left hand side, its impressive five tonne blade stands almost 3m high pointing up towards the surface and is supported by two powerful hydraulic rams. This bulldozer is in excellent condition and part of the engine cover is open so you can see into the engine bay at the engine. There is a small opening into the driver's cab which you can just about get your head into and shine a torch inside to see the controls – watch out for the resident congers. Just by the blade at the front you can see another part of the tank landing craft ramp assembly.

Well, that's it – tour complete and time to surface.

Southsea Sub-Aqua Club has adopted the tanks and bulldozers wreck site under the Nautical Archaeology Society's Adopt a Wreck scheme and would like to hear your experiences of the dive site and anything you have noticed which may be of interest. For more information about the site visit www.southseasubaqua.org.uk. •



➤ Above right: Alison Mayor films Tank B

➤ Right: Measuring the kedge anchor