

The History Column: Hobart's Funnies

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Percy Hobart was a Major General in the British Army in the 1930s. He had progressive ideas on the conduct of warfare, but these ideas did not find favour and he was retired in 1940. The British military historian Basil Liddell Hart argued to Churchill that Hobart should be reinstated, and in 1941 he was put in command of the 11th Armoured Division.



Major General Sir Percy Hobart (IWM, Public Domain).

In 1943 he was directed to transform the 79th Armoured Division into a unit of specially-adapted tanks, to be used in specialised roles in support of the D-Day landings. These tanks were known as Hobart's Funnies, and included:

- AVRE (Assault Vehicle Royal Engineers) Churchill tanks equipped with a 290 mm Petard mortar, to penetrate reinforced concrete bunker defences;
- Duplex Drive DD Sherman amphibious tanks
- Churchill Crocodile tanks equipped with flamethrowers
- Sherman Crab tanks equipped with flails for clearance of mines and barbed wire

- Churchill tanks adapted for bridgelaying or for other means of breaching obstacles on the battlefield.



AVRE Churchill tank, preserved at Sword Beach, Normandy. An example of the petard mortar projectile, from the Armoury of the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, can be seen to the right of the tank (photo: H. Griffiths).



Other examples of Hobart's Funnies (IWM, Public Domain).

Hobart was described as an eccentric and difficult character, but he was a born leader with a flair for innovation. By the end of WWII the 79th Armoured Division had almost seven thousand vehicles, which had played a key role in overcoming the German defences (the so-called 'Atlantic Wall') in the days and weeks following the D-Day landings. He was

knighted in 1943, and after the war, he was awarded the American Legion of Merit.

Further information may be found at:

Patrick Delaforce, *Churchill's Secret Weapons – The Story of Hobart's Funnies*, Robert Hale, 1998.

Funnies: The D-Day Tanks

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHZBfltvo_gw

The 'Funny Tanks of D-Day', Imperial War Museum

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-funny-tanks-of-d-day>