

In matters of doctrine and training, the Royal Canadian Artillery followed the lead of the Royal Artillery. During the interwar period, in the interest of conserving ammunition and reducing costs, the RA had stressed pinpoint accuracy and a low rate of fire. While this emphasis was suitable in a peacetime environment, it did not work in wartime conditions as it required a lengthy targeting procedure and a long wait for infantry to obtain artillery support – sometimes as much as an hour. This shortcoming was notable in the French campaign of 1940 and a gunner veteran of that campaign, Brigadier H.J. Parham, began to look for a better and quicker method of engaging targets. Parham decided that, in mobile warfare, pinpoint accuracy would be hard to attain and, in any case, it was not really necessary – the same result could be obtained by simply drenching the area of the target with fire. It was his feeling that “the shock of a large number of rounds arriving simultaneously was far greater than that of a prolonged bombardment” and his solution was “to fire every gun that could bear as soon as it could be laid and loaded.”³¹

The key to the Parham system was an efficient communications system based on radio. The gun positions would be fed target information from static OP (Observation Point) officers or mobile FOOs (Forward Observation Officers), located with the forward troops, or AOP (Air Observation Post) aircraft. Connected by radio with their regiments and batteries, these relatively junior officers would identify the target, give its approximate location (often based on a six-digit map reference) and could order a level of fire (that is, the number of guns to be used and rounds to be fired). This information was sent to the GPOs (Gun Position Officers) of each battery who would direct the guns under his command to fire on that target. A troop of four guns was generally the smallest fire unit used in the Parham system and a battery of two troops, or eight guns, was the most common. Parham developed a method which, if the situation warranted, could very quickly bring down heavy fire on the enemy. An observation officer, if authorized, could call for a “Mike,” “Uncle,” “Victor,” or “Yoke” target. A “Mike Target” – the one most commonly used – would be engaged by the 24 guns in a field regiment; an “Uncle Target” by the 72 guns in the three field regiments of an infantry division; a “Victor Target” by all the guns in a corps,



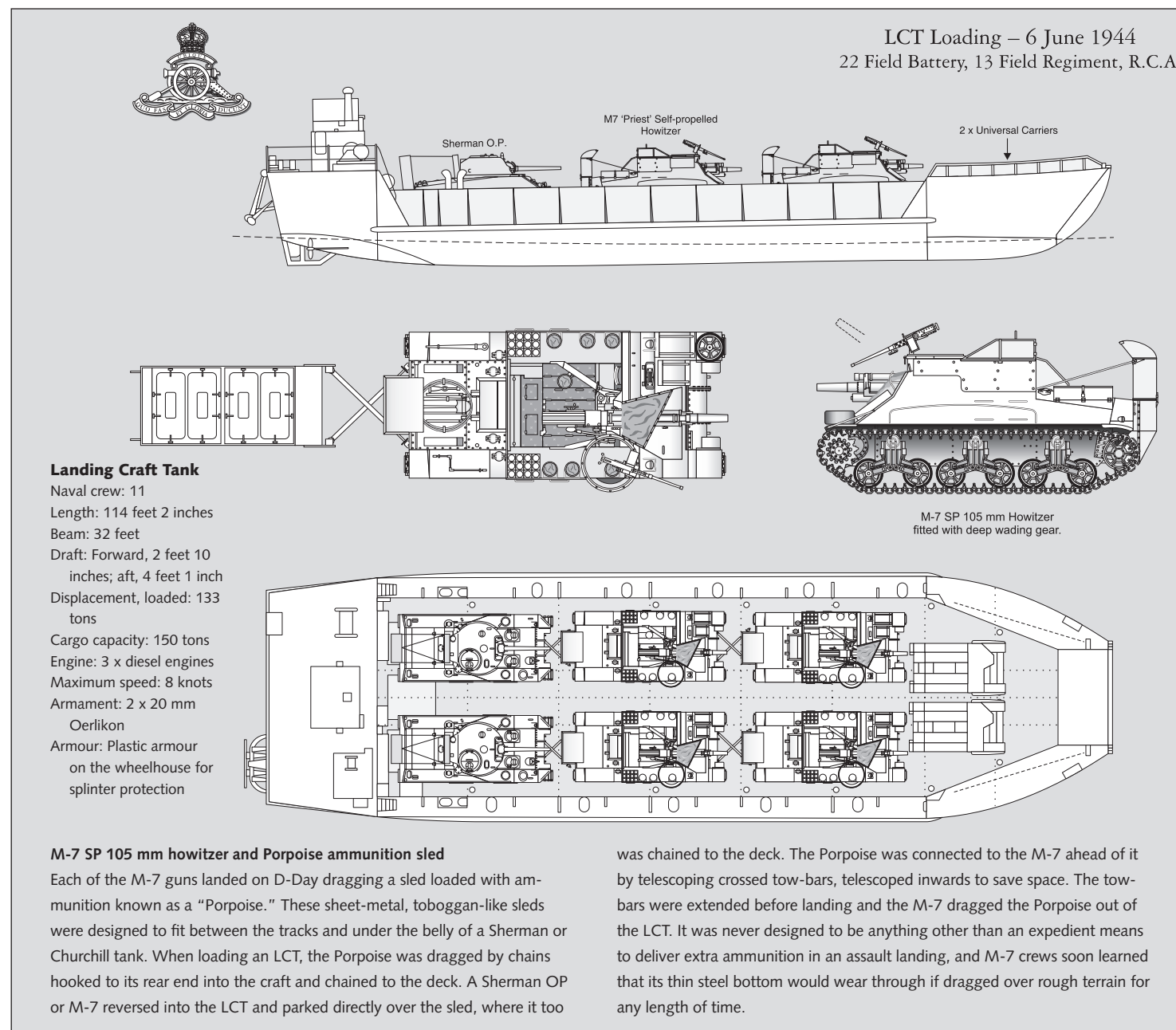
Lieutenant Jack Summers, Maresfield Camp
Typical of the young westerners who served in the SAR, Jack Summers from North Battleford, Saskatchewan, enlisted as a boy soldier in the militia in the mid-1930s and, after going active service, was commissioned in the armoured corps. In early 1943 he joined the SAR and fought throughout the campaign in Northwest Europe, winning the Military Cross. Summers continued in the militia after the war and ended his military career in the 1970s as a brigadier-general commanding Prairie Command. He is seen here wearing the black denim coveralls which were standard armoured corps working dress during the war and after. SAR ARCHIVES

as many as 250 weapons; while a “Yoke Target” would receive the fire of every gun within range which, during the last years of the war, meant that it might be fired at by upwards of as many as 500 weapons.*

The Parham system began to be introduced in the Royal Artillery in late 1942 and in the Royal Canadian Artillery in 1943. As Canadian gunners mastered the new doctrine, their army, after more than three years of waiting and training, commenced sustained operations in July 1943 when the 1st Canadian Division participated in the invasion of Sicily. Following the successful conquest of this island, the Allies invaded the Italian mainland in September and commenced the long, hard job of fighting up the “Italian boot” in mountainous terrain that favoured the defender. Ultimately, the Canadian contribution in Italy increased to an entire corps, comprising the 1st Infantry Division and the 5th Armoured Division, while the 1st Armoured Brigade operated mainly with British troops. Understandably, the Canadian formations which remained behind in Britain – 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions, 4th Armoured Division and 2nd Armoured Brigade – began to get

restless even though they knew they were being held back for the invasion of France.

By the summer of 1943 planning and preparations for this operation were in full swing. One of the main lessons learned from Dieppe was that, if infantry were to make a successful landing against fixed defences, they must have overwhelming fire support, including close fire support. This had been absent during Operation JUBILEE and the result was that infantry were pinned down on the beach and more or less slaughtered. Planners at Combined Operations Headquarters, the “fourth service” created to conduct amphibious landings for the Western Allies, studied this problem intensively and came up with a solution. It did not come about overnight but gradually evolved from experience gained during the major landings carried out in North Africa (Operation TORCH in November 1942), Sicily (Operation HUSKY, July 1943) and at Salerno and Anzio in Italy (Operation AVALANCHE, September 1943, and ANVIL, February 1944). This



experience was applied to planning for the main event – Operation OVERLORD, the landing in France to be carried out in 1944 – and involved air, naval and ground forces. Aircraft, medium bombers and rocket-equipped tactical fighters, that would take out the enemy’s coastal batteries, disrupt his communications and prevent reinforcements being moved forward to the assault area. Large warships would engage targets inland from the beach, while smaller warships would engage targets in the immediate landing area, their fire being directed by Forward Bombardment Officers (FBOs) who would land with the assault troops. The FBOs would also direct the fire of a great variety of gun and rocket-armed landing craft that would contribute inshore (less than 1,000 yards from the target) fire support squarely on the beach defences. The army’s contribution was to be a “beach barrage” (actually a bombardment) using field guns firing from

LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank) that would keep the defenders’ heads down during the final approach to the beach.

In July 1943 the 3rd Canadian Division was selected as one of the six Allied assault formations for Operation OVERLORD and for the next ten months it trained hard for this new role. In September the division’s three artillery regiments (12th, 13th and 14th Field Regiments) went to the Combined Operations centre at Inverary in western Scotland to learn amphibious techniques and to study ways and means of bringing down the “beach barrage.” By trial and error it was discovered that a troop of four 25-pdrs. lashed to the deck of an LCT could fire an effective barrage using a director sight mounted on the vessel’s bridge, which took the craft’s axis as being the zero line. Fire could be brought down on either side of this line at varying ranges – it would not be highly accurate fire but, since the purpose of the beach barrage

* Although it was very rarely used, there was also provision for a “William” Target, a target to be fired at by every gun in an army. It is recorded that the first “William” Target fired by the Commonwealth artillery during the war was called for by Brigadier W.S. Ziegler, the Commander Royal Artillery, 1st Canadian Division, in Italy in 1943.