



NEPTUNE WRECKS PROJECT REPORT

Part 1 - Report Summary

Southsea Sub-Aqua Club is delighted to produce this follow-on report to the Tanks and Bulldozers project carried out and reported upon in 2008.

Having successfully solved the mystery of how a collection of World War 2 armoured fighting vehicles (2 Centaur Tanks and 2 D7 Armoured Bulldozers) came to rest on the sea bed 8 miles south of Bracklesham, West Sussex, members of Southsea Branch were keen to locate the wreck of the ill-fated Landing Craft Tank (LCT) from which they had been lost.

Our detailed research into the formerly Top Secret war diaries and files finally revealed the story behind their sinking. The tanks and bulldozers had been lost from LCT(A) 2428, when she capsized whilst under tow on the morning of 6th June 1944 – D Day as part of Operation NEPTUNE. The LCT(A) had been assigned to 'J' Force as part of the Canadian lead assault of Juno beach and had British Royal Marines and Canadian troops onboard. All onboard were rescued and returned safely to Portsmouth. LCT(A) 2428 did not sink immediately after the capsize, but had floated on for some time before finally being sunk by gunfire from the Rescue Tug 'Jaunty'.

This project should therefore be considered an extension to the original Tanks and Bulldozers Project as it seeks to complete the historical record and document the wrecks as they are today. An update to the initial Tanks and Bulldozers report was produced in 2009 and is attached at Annex A to this Part 1 for reference and as a bridge between the two survey projects. In addition, this report also gives an opportunity to provide details on the further exciting developments of the work previously carried out in 2008 as detailed in the initial Tanks and Bulldozers report of October 2008.

In working to locate possible wreck sites in the area for the LCT(A) 2428, Branch members became aware of a number of other unidentified wrecks which also appeared to have a connection with Operation "NEPTUNE". Operation Neptune was the code-name given to the Maritime phase of Operation "OVERLORD" (The invasion of Normandy by sea and the liberation of France).

Rather than limit the project to one wreck site, the Branch set about investigating a number of wrecks all of which were believed to have a connection to Operation NEPTUNE and these follow-on investigations could be the start of a longer term project to record many wrecks which were associated with Operation NEPTUNE in the area.

For this project we examined the following wrecks;

- UKHO 20004 – known locally as the 'Patch' Landing Craft Tank.
- UKHO 20244 – Barge.
- UKHO 20009 – Barge.

UKHO 19117 – Landing Craft Tank.
Uncharted WW2 tank in Bracklesham Bay.
UKHO 20008 – Tanks & Bulldozers.

Once again the wreck sites have revealed a number of surprises and this continues to re-enforce the reasons for carrying out this work. The discovery of a 500lb WW2 bomb at the LCT site had a significant impact on the diving programme but also added to the mystery and intrigue which continues to unfold the more we investigate these sites.

We have also used a number of techniques to survey the sites, with pleasing results. As well as the traditional tape-measure and slate we were fortunate to have the opportunity to try using a side-scan sonar. This together with the measurements, sketches, video, photographs and a recovered propeller has informed much of the subsequent historical research required to discover more about these wrecks.

The level of interest remains high from the general public and historical groups /organisations that are always keen to hear what we have discovered and where able, kindly assist the Branch in their research. This interaction is invaluable and also does much to promote the Branch and demonstrate the positive and responsible approach to wreck diving that our divers have worked hard to develop. As with the Tanks and Bulldozers, the Branch has had significant dealings with other organisations, experts and the public through a wide range of media.

The recognition by English Heritage (EH) of the historical importance of these wrecks as a direct result of the work we have carried out to date has been one of the most rewarding developments. EH has begun a project to examine the case for protecting the wrecks of LCT(A) 2428 and the Tanks & Bulldozers. The EH project will consider as a test case the use of Ancient Monuments legislation, which as a result of an amendment in 2002 provides for the designation of vehicles, aircraft and other special interest sites within the 12 mile territorial limits. We will be working closely with EH in the project work and this is a great opportunity for us to learn more from the experts by being involved with a full archaeological project.

SSAC has also delighted to have been recognised for its work by receiving a number of national awards in both the diving and archaeological arenas. The members of Southsea Sub-Aqua club wish to thank British Sub-Aqua Jubilee Trust for continued support and also the Nautical Archaeology Society and Silent Planet Ltd for their practical assistance with the surveys and to many others who have provided advice and information.

We hope you enjoy reading this report, thank you to all those who contributed to it.

Alison Mayor
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Southsea Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC 0009)
31 May 2010

Enclosures:

Annex A – Tanks and Bulldozers – Project Update dated March 2009.
Annex A – Attachment 1 – Tanks & Bulldozers Condition report