



SGT. GERALD "GERRY" SOLOMON RAC 1916 - 2015



Gerald Solomon enlisted in the Royal Armoured Corps in 1939, aged 23 years, reporting to Tidworth Barracks on Salisbury Plain on 29th December. After six weeks, he was selected for driving and maintenance.

Then followed months of training; first on cars, then 3-ton lorries and finally Bren gun carriers, tracked vehicles. After further training, he was posted to the 5th Royal Tank Regiment. In October 1940, Gerald was posted abroad to Egypt and took part in the Siege of Tobruk (1941) and later the Battle of El Alamein (1942).

He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. The 5th RTR moved on to Italy in September then back to Britain during January 1944. More training followed in Manchester, Bovington and Thetford on the American Sherman 'Firefly' and British 'Cromwell' tanks.

Finally, on 9th May, 5th RTR left Brandon, Suffolk, for camp R5 – a marshalling camp at Orwell Park, Suffolk, as part of the 7th Armoured Division. The Battalion strength was: 39 Officers and 776 Other Ranks, a total of 815 Troops. These "Desert Rats" were to be part of follow up force 'L' which landed on the British Gold Beach in Normandy in the days after D-Day. (D + 1)

At Orwell Park the tanks were prepared for a beach landing with waterproofing: weld seams with "Bostick" and tape, exhausts raised. This was completed by 20th May. Sgt Solomon was given a Firefly with 17lb gun and five crew, including a co-driver. They received some Day Leave in London.

From the 25th May the Battalion was confined to camp. On 1st June, the entire Battalion left Orwell Park and marshalled on the Ipswich to Felixstowe Road at Trimley Heath. Each tank had a numbered space. Sgt Solomon picks up the story on 2nd June:

"We drove onto the old Felixstowe Road, down Garrison Lane and Langer Road and into the RAF Seaplane base. Going down the seaplane ramps, we loaded onto the LCTs. Pulling out, we moored in the river Orwell alongside other LCTs. When we got close up, we could see a lot of them were dummies."

The flotilla sat at anchor on the Orwell awaiting favourable weather. At 8:15 on 5th June the Flotilla moved out into the North Sea and joined other craft off Harwich. The sea was choppy and there was some seasickness.

"We eventually sailed down the North Sea into the English Channel. Each craft had a cargo of 3 tanks, an AA gun, three field guns, a signal van, a RE van and an ambulance. There were also crews for each Unit."

"We arrived off the Normandy coast in the evening of 6th June 1944, and it was decided we should wait until dawn of 7th. As it was, we landed comparatively easily, very little opposition and completely dry."

Sgt Solomon took part in continuous action over the next two months. On 3rd August, his tank was hit by a Panzerfaust – a German hand-held single shot anti-tank weapon. Solomon was badly injured and invalided home. Some shrapnel stayed in him for the rest of his life. Gerald died in Stutton in 2015.



Sherman Firefly tank



Gerry Solomon (r) meets an old comrade Harry Findlayson (l) in 2008

My thanks to Vic Scott this information

