

Now, where did I park that tank?

Peat preserves Soviet tank with a Nazi past

A World War II Russian tank found with German markings after 62 years — and, after a little tinkering, the recoverers were able to fire up the diesel engine!

A Komatsu D375A-2 bulldozer pulled an abandoned tank from its tomb under the bottom of a lake near Johvi, Estonia. The Soviet-built T34/76A tank had been resting at the bottom of the lake for 56 years. According to its specifications, it's a 27-tonne machine with a top speed of 53km/hr.

From February to September 1944, heavy battles were fought in the 50km-wide Narva front in the north-eastern part of Estonia. More than 100,000 men were killed and 300,000 wounded there. In a battle in the summer of 1944 the tank was captured from the Soviet army and used by the German army (which is why there are German markings painted on the tank's exterior). On September 19, 1944, German troops began an organised retreat along the Narva front. It is suspected that the tank was then driven into the lake and abandoned when its captors left the area.

At that time, a local boy walking past the lake, Kurtna Matasjarv, noticed tank tracks leading into the lake but not coming out anywhere. For two months he saw air bubbles emerging from the lake. This gave him reason to believe that there must be an armoured vehicle at the lake's bottom. A few years ago, he told the story to the leader of the local war history club, Otsing. With other club members, Igor Shedunov initiated diving expeditions to the bottom of the lake about a year ago. At the depth of seven metres they discovered the tank resting under a three-metre layer of peat.

Enthusiasts from the club, under Mr Shedunov's leadership, decided to pull the tank out. In September 2000 they

turned to Mr Aleksander Borovkovthe, manager of the Narva open pit of the stock company AS Eesti Polevkivi, to rent the company's Komatsu D375A-2 bulldozer. Still used at the pit, the Komatsu dozer was manufactured in 1995, and has done 19,000 operating hours without major repairs.

The pulling operation took six hours, with several technical breaks. The weight of the tank, combined with the travel incline, created a pulling operation that required significant muscle.

The D375A-2 handled the operation with power and style. The weight of the fully armed tank was about 30 tonnes, so the active force required to retrieve it was similar. A main requirement for the 68-tonne dozer was to have enough weight to prevent shoe-slip while moving up the hill.

After the tank surfaced, it turned out to be a trophy tank that had been captured by the German army in the course of the battle at Sinimaed (Blue Hills) about six weeks before it was sunk in the lake. Altogether, 116 shells were found on board. Remarkably, the tank was in good condition, with no rust, and all systems (except the engine) in working condition. This is a very rare machine, especially considering that it fought both on the Russian and the German sides. Plans are under way to fully restore it. It will be displayed at a war history museum, to be founded at the Gorodenko village on the left bank of the River Narv.

Hiiumaa, Estonia's second-largest island (989 sq km), is in the Baltic Sea, north of the island of Saaremaa, a part of the western Estonian archipelago (Moonsund archipelago). It was occupied in World War I by the Imperial German Army and became a part of independent Estonia after the war. It was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, by Nazi Germany in 1941 and by the Soviets again in 1944. It was then a part of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic until the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991. Since then, it has been a part of independent Estonia.

<http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?t=91579>

'Someone at home is thinking of us'



Australian Defence Force members protecting Australia's Embassy staff in Baghdad have had a welcome surprise in the form of care packages from the RSL. Boxes containing enough for every person contain edible treats, games and reading material. The OC Australia's Security Detachment in Baghdad, Major Ewen Hedges, said the parcels said "someone at home is thinking of us". Above, Private Russell Peacock (A Coy, 7RAR) and Corporal Trish Grace (1 CSSB) eagerly examine a parcel.



The Soviet-built T34/76A tank after it had been pulled from the bottom of the lake. It was in good condition and still had 116 shells aboard.



The moment all the tank's "rescuers" had been waiting for — it emerges from the mire rust-free with its German trophy markings still intact.



The old girl after being cleaned up a little. After a little tinkering the recovery team was able to fire up her diesel engine.



The Komatsu D375A-2 bulldozer that pulled the old tank from its watery grave.