

VOL. XXII. N° 12.

DECEMBER 1937

# MECCANO

## MAGAZINE



THE NAVY'S MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS

6<sup>D</sup>

# The Royal Tank Corps

## Unique Models in the Dinky Toy Series

THE mechanisation of armies is a process now in progress in all countries, and in the main it is taking two courses. On the one hand cavalry regiments are being transformed into mechanical units, making use of armoured lorries and trucks instead of horses; on the other hand the armoured fighting machines known as tanks are being rapidly developed and increased in number.

The tank made its first appearance as a practical fighting machine during the Great War. This had only been in progress a few months when it was realised that the machine-gun had given the defensive a great advantage, for a few resolute men armed with machine-guns could hold up what formerly would have been overwhelming forces of infantry. This lesson was learned in many bitter struggles, and the idea of providing infantry with protection was then taken up and steadily worked out in the face of many difficulties.

The tank may be regarded as the land equivalent of the armoured ship. A land battleship has been the dream of many inventors. In the 15th century a German military enthusiast produced a four-wheeled van equipped with guns, which was drawn by horses into a position where it could do most damage. Others tried similar schemes, but their machines had the defects that they were not self-propelling, and could only travel on roads, for they were not fitted for rough and broken ground. The development of the petrol engine overcame the first of these difficulties, for this made the machine self-contained; the second was met by the use of caterpillar or creeper track.

It is impossible to name any one man as the inventor of the tank, but the first suggestion for its employment seems to have come from Colonel Swinton, who as early as October 1914 had seen the necessity for some sort of armoured machine that could force its way through

barbed wire, climb across trenches, and crush machine guns. In that month he submitted to the War Office a design for armoured machine gun tractors mounted on creeper tracks.

This was the beginning of the story. The idea was not received with great enthusiasm, and it was not until the following year that experiments were begun. In the meantime similar suggestions had been made independently at the Admiralty, and a committee under the direction of Mr. Tennyson d'Eyncourt, Director of Naval Construction, had been formed to consider them. When this became known a combined effort was made, which resulted in the production of a machine designed by Mr. Tritton and Lt. Wilson. This was capable of climbing a vertical wall 5 ft. high and of crossing a ditch 8 ft.

wide, and its success in trials early in 1916 led to orders for the construction of a large number and the training of men to handle them.

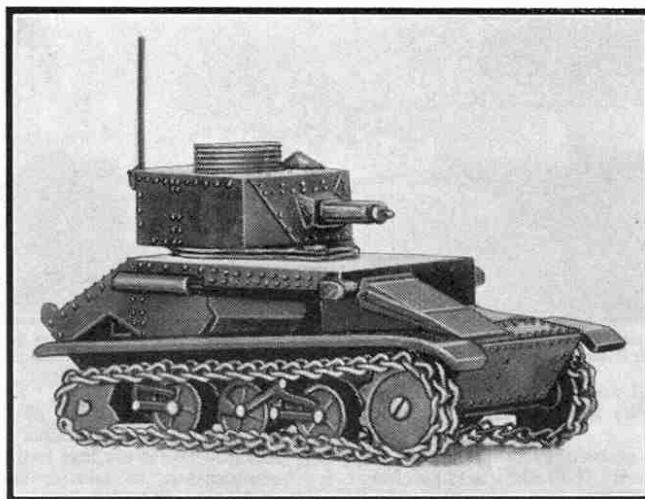
It was at this stage that the new fighting machine received its name of tank, and the story of its adoption is interesting. Secrecy was essential, and a name therefore had to be chosen that would be mystifying and yet would account for the appearance of the machines, covered with tarpaulin, when seen during transit by rail. Such names as tank, cistern and reservoir were obvious suggestions, and the final choice fell on the first.

The appearance of the new weapon in actual warfare was an instant success, although comparatively few were used. This was in an attack in September 1916, when the battle of the Somme had almost come to a standstill.

Only 60 tanks were available, but their effect was amazing. The first news of the success of this powerful new weapon reached the public in a dramatic message, sent back by an observer in a low-flying aeroplane, from which the attack was being observed. This read: "A tank



Army tanks of the Medium type crossing Magdalen Bridge, Oxford. A splendid Dinky Toys representation of this tank is shown on the opposite page.



The Dinky Toys Light Tank, No. 152a. It is fitted with a wireless mast, and is correctly armed and protected.

is walking up the High Street at Flers, with the British Army cheering behind."

The Germans were amazed and terrified as the monster approached them slowly but irresistibly, and it seemed as if means of overcoming their resistance without the appalling losses of previous offensives had been discovered. There were still many who had no faith in the tank, however, and on one occasion orders for the construction of large numbers actually were cancelled. Fortunately higher authorities intervened.

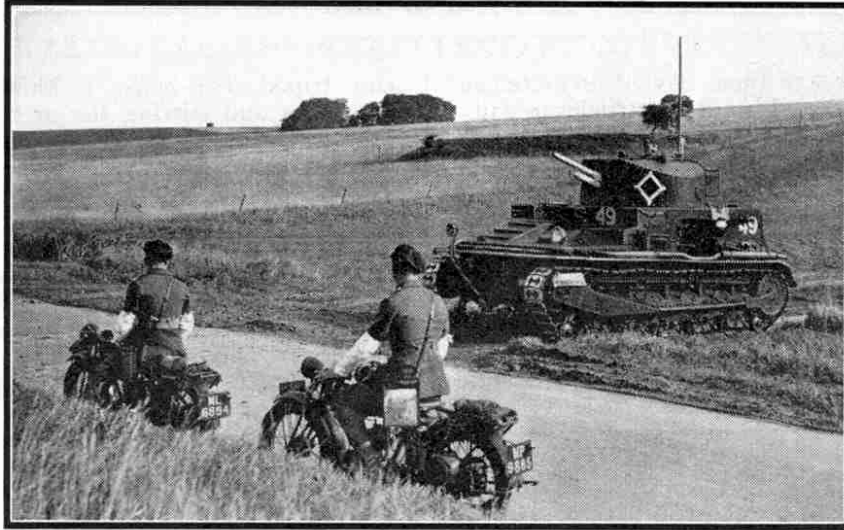
The improved tanks devised after the first successes showed their efficiency in the great offensive at Cambrai in 1917. The Germans responded to the challenge of the tanks by constructing similar machines, and tank met tank for the first time near Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918. After an artillery duel a British tank knocked out the first German tank encountered by three hits with 6-pounder shells, and two others that came up in support backed away. The earliest German tanks were only lightly protected on the roof, and their thick side armour covered their creeper tracks, making them clumsy. They could not cross large shell holes or trenches more than 8 ft. wide. In number and effectiveness the German tanks never reached the standard of the British machines.

The full value of the tanks was not realised until 1918, when they had been made still more efficient and were used in greater numbers. They helped to stem the great German offensive in March of that year; and in the battle of 8th August at Amiens, the first of the great hammer blows that ended the War, 400 tanks played a great part in the resounding success achieved. The Germans were demoralised when tanks were employed in force. If the war had continued they would have been called upon to face even larger numbers, for orders had been given for the production of 6,000 larger tanks, which were designed for all-round fire and did not suffer from the high internal temperature that was a great defect of the earlier models.

The tanks of the present day are far superior in every respect to those used in the Great War. The equipment of

the Royal Tank Corps consists of two types, the Medium Tank "Mark" II and the Light Tank "Mark" VI. The former is a 12-ton vehicle with a 90 h.p. engine of the air-cooled aero type. It has a speed of 22 m.p.h. and carries a crew of five.

The Dinky Toys Medium Tank No. 151a, which is illustrated on this page, is a splendid miniature of this type. Its turret swivels completely round, and in front of it is a miniature two-pounder quick-firing gun, with a machine gun beside it, while the driver's look-out manhole is below and to the right. A further machine gun is placed on each side of the tank. On top of the turret is a vertical tube representing the one that in the real tank houses a Morse signalling lamp. To the rear is a look-out

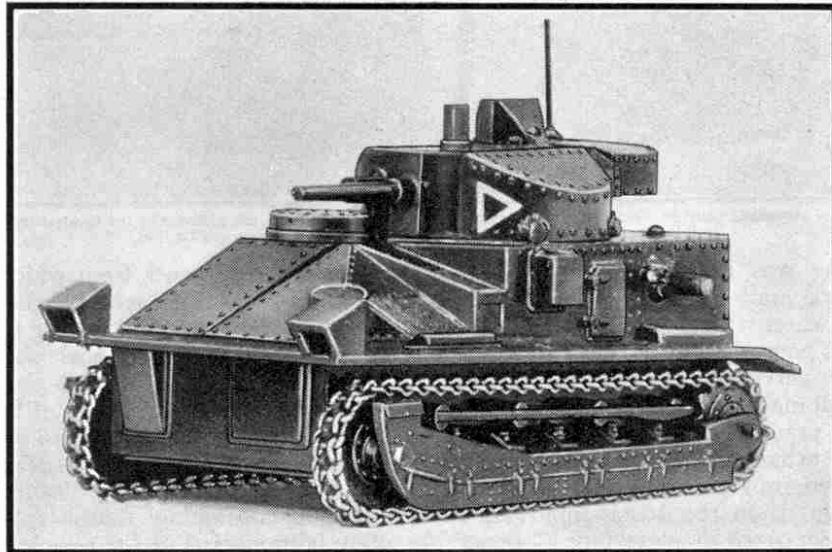


Army dispatch riders waiting while a light tank crosses a road during manoeuvres on Salisbury Plain.

manhole, known familiarly in the Corps as "The Bishop's Hat," and behind this is the radio mast. Every detail is shown, even the headlights being covered by metal protecting boxes, exactly as in the prototype.

Some of the Medium Tanks of the Royal Tank Corps are equipped with a mortar instead of a two-pounder. The purpose of this is to enable it to fire smoke-shells in order to create a smoke-screen behind which an advance can be made. A tank equipped in this manner is known as a "close support" tank.

The light tank is much faster than the medium one. It weighs  $4\frac{1}{2}$  tons, and its lorry engine of 25 h.p. gives it a speed of 40 m.p.h. There are three men in its crew. In the Dinky Toys Series it is represented by the Light Tank No. 152a, shown in the lower illustration on the opposite page. Its turret swivels round in the same manner as its original. In front of it are two machine guns, and on top are two look-out manholes and a radio mast. There is a tubular



The Dinky Toys Medium Tank, No. 151a, is correct in detail, even to the protected boxes for headlights.

projection along the right-hand side to represent the exhaust pipe and silencer. Both Dinky Toys Tanks are scale models, one sixteenth full size, and are fitted with creeper tracks that move independently in a fascinating manner when they are pushed along.

The Tanks, Medium and Light, are included in the Dinky Toys Royal Tank Corps Sets Nos. 151 and 152 respectively. Next month we shall describe the other components of these Sets.