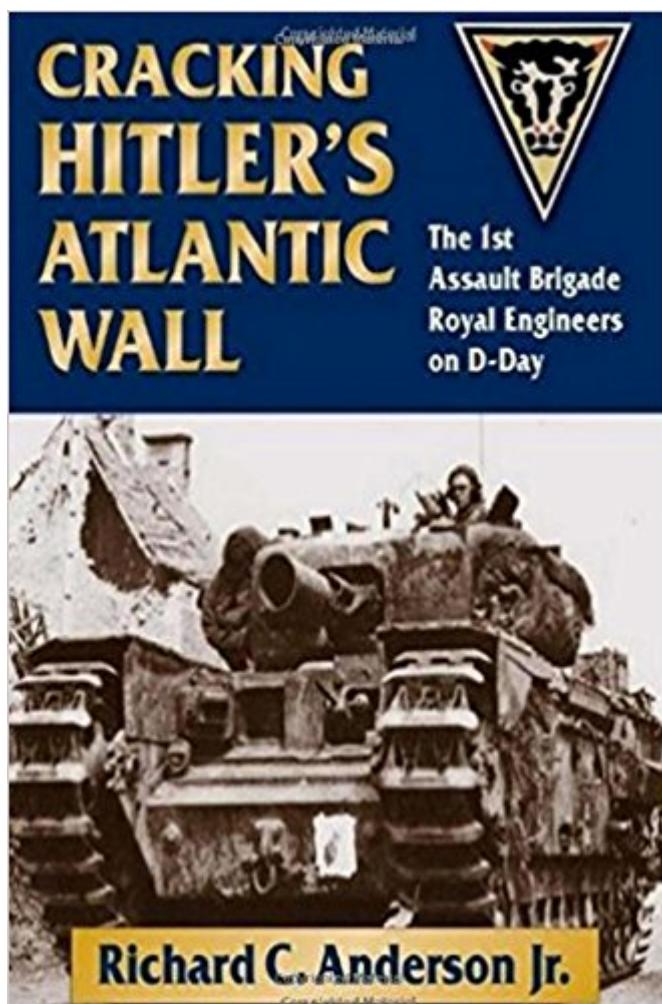


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Cracking Hitler's Atlantic Wall: The 1st Assault Brigade Royal Engineers On D-Day



Synopsis

Landing with the British and Canadians in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, was the 1st Assault Brigade Royal Engineers, a specialized armored unit tasked with removing obstacles and mines from Gold, Juno, and Sword Beaches. To support this mission, the engineers modified their tanks with ingenious innovations, such as replacing the main gun with a giant mortar or attaching a steamroller-like device to flatten a path in the sand. In the early hours of D-Day, the brigade landed under fire, and took serious casualties in some areas, but achieved many of its key objectives and cleared the way for the infantry. Refreshingly different perspective on the momentous events of D-Day Nuts-and-bolts narrative of how the landings were carried out along with details on the unique British armored vehicles used in the invasion. The controversy over the U.S. refusal to use these vehicles, which may have contributed to bloody American losses on Omaha Beach.

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Customer Reviews

"Beautifully produced with fine illustrations." (Military Modelcraft International 2010-04-01)

When the British and Canadians landed in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, they were accompanied by specialized armored vehicles that had the job of removing German obstacles and mines from the invasion beaches. Developed by the Royal Engineers and known as Hobart's Funnies, these unique tanks featured ingenious innovations--ranging from a giant 290-millimeter mortar to carpet-laying and bridge-laying devices--to support their mission on D-Day and after. Covering both the technical development of these engineer vehicles and their combat deployment,

military historian Richard C. Anderson Jr. gives a minute-by-minute account of D-Day's early hours on Sword, Juno, and Gold Beaches--the critical moments when the success of the invasion hinged on whether the assault engineers could clear a path through a minefield or breach the seawall under withering fire from entrenched German positions. Landing craft sank, vehicles bogged down, but the men and their vehicles blasted their way forward and contributed to Allied victory. Anderson also describes D-Day as it unfolded on Omaha and Utah Beaches, where U.S. troops, despite being offered the special vehicles, stormed ashore without them. Carefully comparing the American and Commonwealth beaches--from the quality and quantity of German defenses on each beach to the number of Allied soldiers making the landing--Anderson assesses the performance of the vehicles and determines the nature of their impact on D-Day's successes and failures. Painstakingly researched and impressively detailed, *Cracking Hitler's Atlantic Wall* offers a refreshing perspective on the familiar events of June 6, 1944, while also standing as a testament to the courage and resolve of individual soldiers, whatever their equipment. Richard C. Anderson Jr. graduated from George Mason University with a degree in history and has worked for more than twenty years as a military analyst, currently with the U.S. Army. He is also the author of *Hitler's Last Gamble* (with Trevor N. Dupuy and David Bongard) and *Artillery Hell* (with Curt Johnson).

This is a valuable addition to the literature on the 79th Armoured Division, 'Hobo's Funnies'. The division had a range of exotic vehicles, which were intended to help the allies ashore and through the German defences on D-Day (and were to do sterling service in the remainder of the NW Europe campaign). The 79th had such vehicles as Sherman Crabs, to deal with mines, Churchill Crocodile flamethrowers and Sherman DD swimming tanks. Richard Anderson's book focuses on the engineer tank, the Churchill AVRE, which was looked after by the 1st Assault Brigade, Royal Engineers, of the book's title. This tank carried various devices like bridges and fascines for bridging gaps and climbing seawalls, carpets to lay on soft sand, and a large mortar that fired a 40lb bomb. The AVREs accompanied the leading waves of British and Canadian troops ashore around H-Hour on D-Day with the tasks of helping to clear exits from the beach, deal with enemy defences and help clear obstacles. This is the story Richard Anderson tells. This is the first book devoted to the 1st Assault Brigade since the brigade's own history was published in 1945, and as such it is greatly welcomed. The book has a good overview of the development of the Brigade and a useful summary of the development of the AVRE and its equipment. The role of Canadian Lt Denovan is given suitable prominence in the AVRE's history. There is a good discussion of the Allied plans and the forces assigned to each beach. Anderson is particularly effective on how the proliferation of

obstacles, under Rommel's orders, affected Allied planning. There is a good chapter on the German defences that would be faced along the Normandy coast. The landings are well covered, in detail for each gapping team, largely using Regimental war diaries and other original documentation. The author puts the gapping operations of the Brigade into the context of the wider forces involved. He also compares the experience of the British and Canadians with those of the American landings on Omaha and Utah. Indeed the discussion of the American engineering efforts and the resulting operations on D-Day are some of the best parts of the book. Anderson also effectively uses a number of personal accounts from the Archives, using 'after action' reports; this is especially the case for the Gold landings. There are many useful and interesting tables, and numerous photographs and maps. Other highlights of the book are a good discussion of the contribution of the assault engineers to the success of D-Day, and an excellent examination of the so-called 'offer' of funnies by the British, and shows that the accepted notion of a simple refusal by the Americans is simply misleading. Finally he discusses what impact the Funnies would have had if they had all been used on Omaha. In a well argued conclusion he shows that they may have helped on the western end of the beach, but that the superb natural defensive terrain, the fortifications and the effective German defence would have meant that it is unlikely they would have had any significant impact. Overall, this is a very useful book, and a welcome account. There are a few minor errors here and there. In part this is due to time constraints limiting research to Regimental level war diaries rather than going down to Squadron level. Thus there are some errors in who was on what landing craft, the Ipswich company that produced the AVRE conversion kits was Cocksedge, not Cockbridge; there are also very small inaccuracies in the roll of honour - for instance in 77 Sapper Frank Winstanley was also a fatality; in 79's roll is Ray Marsden, but he served in 81 (and indeed was killed on D-Day). An addition is also Sapper Scott, who was a Dozer driver in 149 Assault Park Sq and was killed on D-Day. But this does not detract from an excellent well-researched book, highly recommended.

Very good discussion of the preparations for Operation Neptune, the resulting invasion of Normandy (D-Day), and the subsequent use of the same techniques in later actions in North West Europe.. The emphasis is on the development of Hobart's Funnies, modified tanks for use in attacking fortifications, and the British 1st Assault Brigade Royal Engineers that used them. About half the book discusses the events on the beaches. Unfortunately there is much going on simultaneously on each beach, and covering all the events in about 140 pages requires some compromises. It is easy to lose track of the action. More maps might have helped, but what would have helped more with

the Kindle edition would have been rotating them so that they would have displayed better. The Naval, Air Force, and parachute operations are also glossed over. But the discussion of the unique aspects of Omaha Beach (and the lack of Funnies) are very good.

Over my years as a "tank nut" I have read several accounts of the use of specialized armored vehicles to support Operation Neptune, the invasion phase of Operation Overlord. This book sets a new standard. Well researched and well written. Anderson goes beyond the basic premise, he not only looks at the British development and use of specialized armor but puts the equipment in context by looking at the assault plans, the German defenses and the rushed preparations for battle. The author also looks at the American use of specialized tanks and debunks the common belief that the US Army was too arrogant to use the British-designed equipment. Citing reports and looking at the tactical situation he points out that there 1) although the American leaders were interested, there were barely enough special vehicles to meet Commonwealth needs and 2) the terrain on Omaha Beach would have negated much of their use anyway. The book brings up a lot of new information, such as that the "British" Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers was the brainchild of a Canadian officer, or that there were only six of the Crocodile flamethrower tanks deployed on DDay. This book will be of interest to the reader interested in DDay and to the historian interested in military vehicles. I'm glad I bought this one.

On June 6, 1944 the Western Allies landed on the coast of France and started a campaign that ended when Germany surrendered. A huge number of books have been written about this day, but many important parts of this battle rate at best a paragraph or so in almost all these histories. This book describes in great detail the battle fought by the 1st Assult Brigade, which was equiped with Hobart's Funnies, on D-Day. This book describes the equipment used and the combat fought on each beach by this unit. It also describes the combat on the American beaches and gives the author's opinion about how the British equipment would have affected those beaches. I give this book my highest recommendation. It really fills in a part of D-Day that is not covered anywhere else.

if you are interested in D DAY particularly 79 Armd Div. then this is the book for you.

A wonderful, ground-level and detailed account of the landing, fighting, and clearing of the French beaches on June 6th, 1944. This book gives a well deserved "Shout-Out" to the men, the Engineers, who played a vital role in clearing those beaches. The author provides a provocative perspective

that gives further insight to those tenuous first hours as Allied forces slammed into Hitler's Atlantic Wall. If reading of the events on D-Day is your thing, this book will be a great addition to your library.

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