

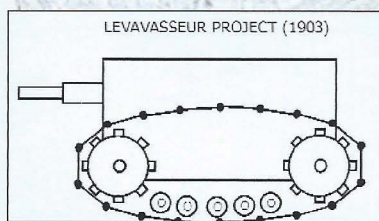
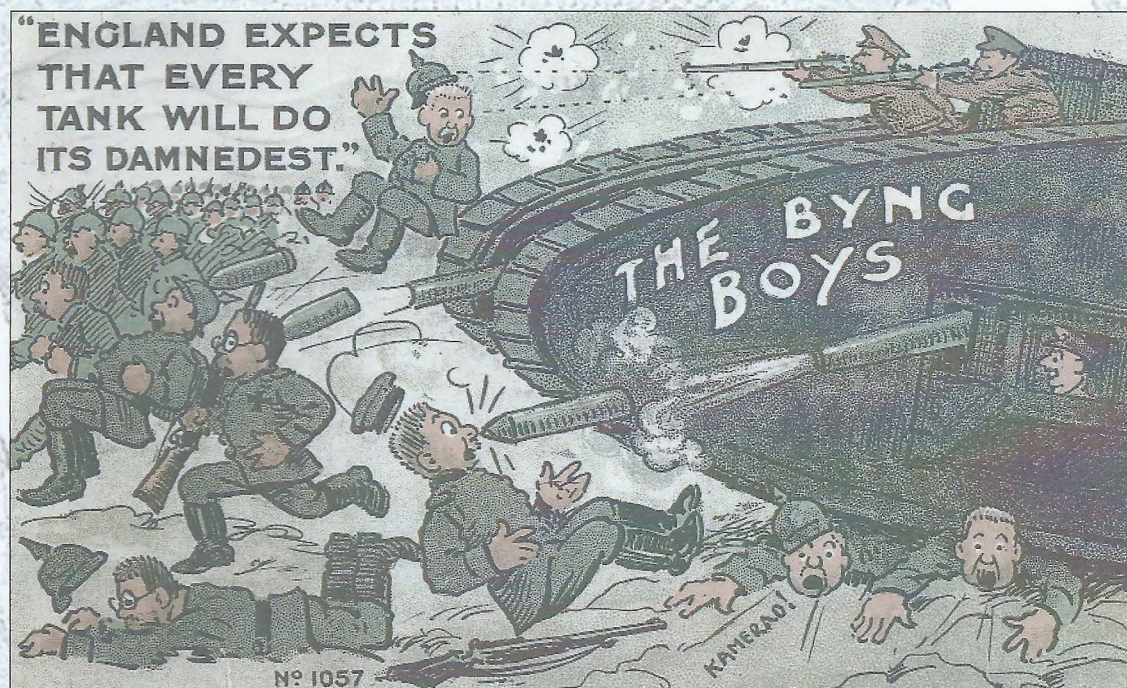
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FEAR NAUGHT – 100 YEARS OF BRITISH TANKIES

In the early hours of 15th September 1916 a strange-looking war machine clanked into action for the first time as 32 tanks from C and D Companies of The Heavy Section, Machine Gun Corps moved slowly across the shell-torn Flers plateau towards the German front line, one officer recording that 'Wherever the tanks advanced we took our objectives and where they did not advance we failed to take our objectives'. This new machine, described disparagingly by Lord Kitchener as 'A pretty mechanical toy' would go on to dominate the world's battlefields for the next hundred years, its importance recognised by the creation of a British Army Tank Corps in July 1917, now the oldest tank unit in the world. This Special Issue, which looks at the dress and insignia of the Royal Tank Regiment and its ancestors over 100 years, is dedicated to Britain's Tankies.



The concept of such an all-powerful machine was not new. In 1487 Leonardo da Vinci designed an armoured vehicle, its metal-reinforced, conical wooden cover inspired by a turtle's shell, its perimeter bristling with light cannon, four strong men providing power from within by two large cranks. Intended like later machines to intimidate the enemy, its impressive size left it unable to move on rugged terrain and it would be four centuries before a practical machine could be built. In 1903 Artillery Captain Léon Levavasseur presented to France's War

Ministry a project for a vehicle with the characteristics later thought desirable in a tank. His "canon autopropulseur", a steel box carrying a 75mm gun mounted on tracks, was powered by a petrol engine, had ammunition stowage and could cross rough terrain only accessible to horse carriages, its crew of three and engine completely protected from indirect or small arms fire. His design was rejected on 13th August 1908. Another prophet of armoured warfare was HG Wells whose short story "The Land Ironclads" published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1903 described large, armed and armoured cross-country vehicles breaking through a fortified trench system to disrupt the defence and clear the way for the infantry to advance.