

Centurion Main Battle Tank



Centurion 5

Country of Origin:	United Kingdom
Crew:	4 (Commander, Gunner, Driver, Loader/Operator)
Length:	32 feet 3 inches
Width:	11 feet 11 inches
Height:	9 feet 7 inches
Weight:	111, 966 lb.
Engine:	Rolls Royce Meteor 12 cylinder, gasoline
Maximum Speed:	21.5 mph
Range:	62.5 miles (road)
Armament:	20-pdr mounted in turret / 2 x .30cal Browning MGs

CENTURION MAIN BATTLE TANK
in the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps

SECOND WORLD WAR

The Centurion was a British design and prototypes were built during the latter part of WW II.. It appears that two RAC squadrons of these tanks were taken to the NWE front but they were not taken into action.

IMMEDIATE POST-WAR YEARS

In 1947 the Canadian Army acquired 294 Shermans M4A2 (76mm) powered by twin diesel engines (90 h.p. marine) engines, but the synchronization was ineffective and the combined capacity of 180 h.p. was not achieved consistently(see *Royal Canadian Armoured Corps History p 345*). We had the Sherman M4A3E8s in Korea (powered by a Ford 500 hp engine) whereas the British used their Centurions. These Shermans also had chevron tracks and this combination enabled them to climb the hills in Korea with the agility of mountain goats.

As an aside, the first sqn in Korea was named after the 1st and 2nd Armoured Regts BUT it was written as 1/2 Sqn...this resulted in hilarious reactions from all who remembered the common operational form of splitting a sqn in two halves to support two infantry elements during WW II.

When the RCAC was also called upon to provide a sqn for NATO the decision was taken to name the Korea Sqn as a Strathcona sqn and it was given the identity C since the A and B Sqns were in existence in Calgary. The NATO sqn was then named RCD and similarly identified as C Sqn.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

Canada's early participation in NATO included a tank squadron in the brigade through the period November 1951 - August 1957. From the outset the squadrons were equipped with the Centurion which had been upgraded to Mark 5 (see *Corps History p347*) standard with the 20 pounder gun. The first Centurions were equipped with the 17 pr "Firefly" gun which had been developed from a naval gun for adaptation to the Shermans(see *Corps History p. 242*)



Centurion 5

Courtesy of Chris Johnson

The squadrons were:

C Sqn RCD	Nov 51- Oct 53
D Sqn LdSH(RC)	Oct 53 - Oct 55



Thereafter we had a regiment equipped with Centurions until conversion to Leopard in the late 70s. When C Sqn RCD was upgraded to a regt the RCD moved from Werl - Fort Anne into Fort Beauséjour. The Centurions were upgraded to the 105 mm gun (*see Corps History for Mark X1, p 368*) through the early 60s. A succession of regiments sojourned through Seydlitz Kaserne/Fort Beauséjour through to 1970 when the Brigade moved to Lahr. This situation with the Centurion [*see Corps History for details and pictures pages 340 through 375 - the Canadian War Museum has the Centurion which was used at LETE (Land Environment Testing Establishment) to adapt all modifications*] persisted till the Corps acquired the Leopard, initially with a "rental tank" in 1976/77, then with the Leopard C2 we now own with its upgrade to Leopard C5.

The LETE tank was presented to the Canadian War Museum in 1977 by MGen LaRose, Chief of Land Doctrine and Operations/NDHQ, and on the occasion it was driven onto a pedestal with two CWOs crewing it - Crew Comd: Jimmie George (RCEME) and driver: Knobby Clark, LdSH(RC).



In Canada the regiments were equipped with Centurions starting in 1952. The conversion teams were trained in the UK at the RAC Centre in Jan/Feb '52 and initial courses were conducted during that year. It is interesting to note that the conversion to the Centurion met

with some difficulties of adjustment concerning the steering and braking of the tank because it was so sensitive compared to the Sherman which was a hard steering, inefficient braking vehicle but drivers soon appreciated the improved performance especially the novel famous neutral turn. Shifting gears on the Centurion was another phenomenal breakthrough and it was accomplished with the greatest of ease, like putting a hot knife through butter. This was high tech before the automatic transmission. Of course the advances in gunnery and the stabilized gun were world leaders for many years. The 105 mm gun is still the most common gun in the Western world. Ammunitions kept on evolving throughout, especially the armour piercing rounds.

The side skirts were another significant innovation for an MBT for protection against light anti-tank hollow charge weapons, a feature which has been copied on leading MBT's the world over.

The later Cents included a fume extractor, thereafter called a bore evacuator by the US Armor. This is the bulbous feature on the gun barrel which effectively prevented smoke blowback in the turret compartment when a round was fired.



Centurion 11

Courtesy of Chris Johnson