

# A DAY IN THE DESERT WITH "HONEY"

(Written for "The Listener" by S.B.)

**T**HIS is a story about tanks. We have come here to see a new type of tank go through its paces. It is new to New Zealand, that is.

Who was General Stuart? He had a tank named after him anyway, even if the boys in Libya did change the name to "Honey."

The next day brings the discovery that General Stuart was obviously not such big chop as General Grant.

## Not for Laurel and Hardy

The General Stuart Tank, or the American "Mark III," or the Libyan "Honey," is not inspiring, studied as a piece of still life. It seems to be too high for its short length. Its shape is awkward. It's not at all forbidding, as a tank surely should be. It looks rather like slapstick, and it would be no surprise to see Laurel and Hardy crawl out from under.

Closer inspection reveals no clown's bladder, but a useful turret-mounted gun—37 millimetres. General Rommel would observe that this is not a very large gun. It is, in fact, slightly smaller than the two-pounder tank and anti-tank guns which he so effectively outranged last month in the Western Desert. For a cruiser tank, however, it is an effective weapon. And the "Honies" bristle with light machine-guns. These turn out to be Brownings. That's a good sort of gun.

Through the opened ports an excuse for Honey's ungainly appearance can be seen. Inside, there is plenty of room, by tank standards. There is more room than in the very much heavier Valentine. The interior is finished in white, which looks like a nice psychological point. Why be dull and gloomy, even if you are cooped up inside a tank?

## Don't Trust Appearances

But you can't go by appearances.

We mount a gun carrier, and speed out towards some rough country where Honey can be tested. The gun carrier is

fast. We travel about 30 miles per hour. Honey and her friends keep up without any trouble. This fact is noted with the reservation that Honey won't be able to go so fast on rough ground without toppling her upper weight off that narrow track-base.

We swing off the road, through mud and over bumps. The Honies follow, with greater ease than the low built gun-carrier. It looks as if there might be something in this tank after all.

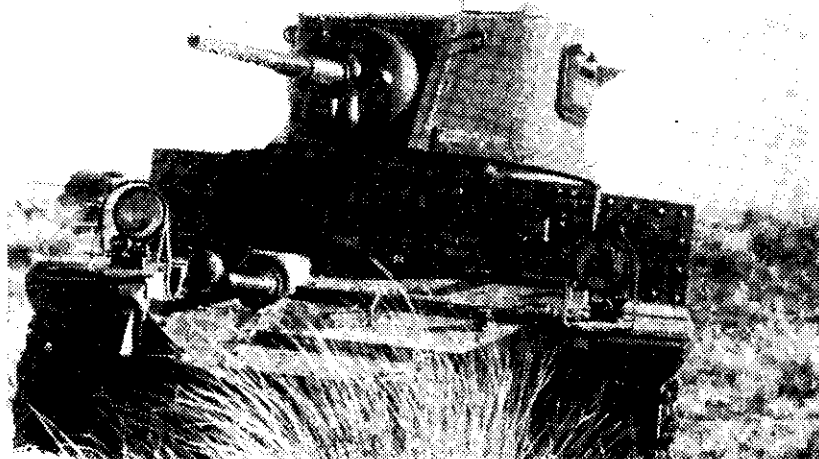
We set a course, Honey No. 1 comes up to a ridge and waits, hull-down, while her commander spies out the land ahead. The turret swings. The gun looks like business. The Brownings feel the air like a crab's front legs. Honey No. 1 radios a signal. Round a gully, over a ridge, through the scrub and tussock hurtle Honies No. 2 and No. 3. Honey No. 1 waits a moment to cover their advance, then trundles after.

They're fast! They ride obstacles easily! They manoeuvre very well indeed.

We set up another test piece. There is an awkward approach to a deep gully. In the gully lies a 70-foot stretch of pond water, frozen over. The Honies take it all at speed. No turning to avoid obstacles. No slackening speed for the water or mud. They crash down into the pond. Mud flies yards when they spin to turn up stream, and the splash has not died back into the water before they are off and away up the gully.

## Some Tests

Now a cinephotographer goes into a pit and Honey No. 1 gets set for a run two hundred yards away. This will be a good test of the driver's control. He must rush over the course, bumps and all, and straddle the cameraman's pit with his tracks, at speed. He will have just a little more than a foot to spare either side. If his tank is not easily controlled, he can't do it, and that might mean a perfectly good camera spoiled and the scene missed. The cameraman, we hope, is insured.



N.Z. National Film Unit photograph  
GENERAL STUART looks like business

The flag is dropped. Honey lurches into action. At 25 miles an hour Honey still holds to the ground, still holds the course. Up to the pit without wavering. Over the camera. The cameraman's hair is neatly parted by the exhaust. He has the film. Honey has done it. It was good driving, but it needed a good tank, too.

Honey and her friends have passed all these tests. Over rough ground they have shown their speed. Now we move off for their first tests over prepared obstacles.

The obstacles were prepared for heavier tanks. This fact is announced as if the Honies might be excused if, this time, they don't perform so well.

In the obstacle course there's a wide pit. It looks about six feet wide. Next comes a jump. The ramp ends in a straight wall, something like four feet high. If Honey tips over anywhere, it will be here, because she will leave the ground completely.

After the jump comes a scenic-railway sort of up-and-over. The mound is up to eight feet high, with a steep approach and a steep fall-away.

Honey backs away for position, paws the ground. The driver sounds his siren. We look around for the G-men, but it's only Honey, squatting innocently, like Ferdinand the Bull.

Off she goes!

The broad jump Honey floats over. It might not be there, for all the notice she takes. Over the high jump Honey sails magnificently. She lands four-square and belts forward to the mound without faltering. Again, at the mound. Honey leaves the ground completely. We can see right up her skirts. But only for a second. Honey descends quickly—not on her nose—and waltzes gaily off.

## Talk About Sheep

The driver climbs out, grinning. His ballast follows. When they are not talking about tanks, or "what I'm going to do when I get leave," these two talk about sheep and the price of wool. They are commissioned now, to ride tanks instead of horses, count up gallons of fuel instead of pounds of wool.

It would not be surprising to see the mastering done by armoured cars after the war. These up-country run-holders and shepherds combine to an extraordinary degree the handiness of the

horseman over country with the mechanic's flair for the machine age. The Honies would be handy when it snowed in the Mackenzie Country.

They certainly passed their tests on the desert near the snow. They began to look at home in New Zealand.

## All the Home Sensations

New Zealand made sure they knew all the home sensations. As we rolled back along the road, the afternoon wind came through the tussocks. Frost would kill it at early evening. Meanwhile, it was worse than the frost. The Honies went back to have the mud washed off. The wind followed to freeze the wet mechanics.

In our gun carrier we followed. Up in the sky over the mountain an extraordinary cloud came with the wind. It curved, thin as a compass course, across miles of cold sky. We speculated on wind currents, until the cloud divided in two, climbed, twisted on itself, streamed into the upper air, white and lovely against the intense blue of the winter sky.

It was two aeroplanes, sporting.

The Honies kept their flat noses to the ground and puffed answering clouds of condensing vapour into the road. The General Stuart tank has come to New Zealand for use by Armoured Fighting Vehicle Units, which are not to be confused with the New Zealand Tank Brigade. It is typed as a "cruiser" tank, and that just about defines its purpose. The Tank Brigade uses the heavy stuff for infantry co-operation. The cruiser tanks are one of the weapons of an A.F.V. Unit, which fights as a unit, behind armour. The General Stuart was first used by the British forces in Libya, last November, and there won for itself the name of Honey. They proved to be notably free from mechanical trouble, fast, manoeuvrable. Official opinion says they are ideally suited to New Zealand conditions. They carry one 37 millimetre cannon and four Browning machine-guns, with a mount for an anti-aircraft machine-gun. Their official speed is 40 miles per hour, but they could go very much faster. An excellent suspension system keeps their rubber tracks down to earth at high speeds over rough country.



N.Z. National Film Unit photograph  
IN THE DESERT, near the snow: Three "Honies," New Zealand's new cruiser tanks