

*Crusader tank production line in the Nuffield Mechanisation factory which was built within the 65-acre site of Wolseley Motors Limited. This building is now the press shop of LDV Limited.*

# WOLSELEY IN

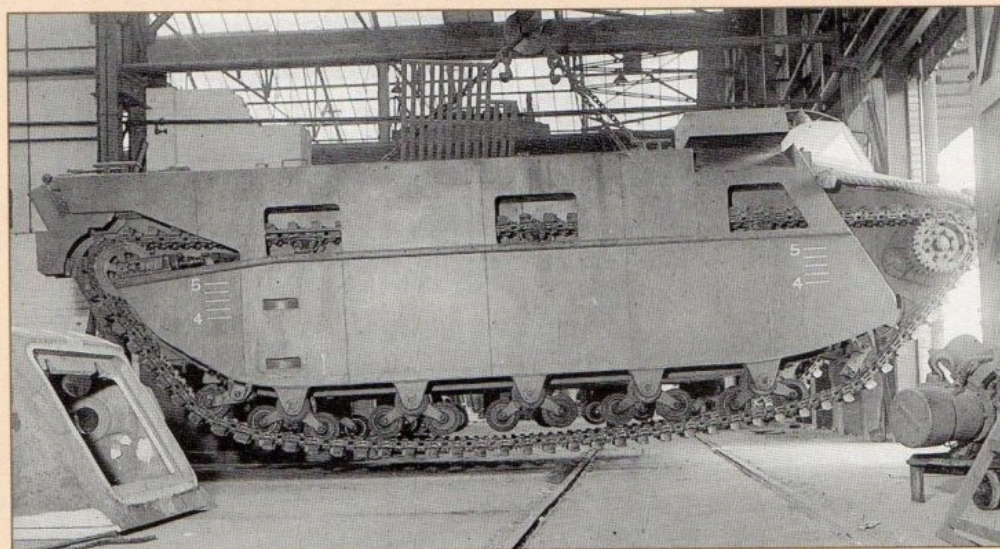
*Norman Painting looks at some of the contributions made by the Wolseley car company to the Allied war effort*

**T**he Wolseley car company had its origins in the Wolseley Sheep-Shearing Machine Company Limited which had been established in Sydney, Australia in 1887 by Frederick Wolseley. In 1889, the business was moved to England, with a workshop off Birmingham's Broad Street. The company's first motor car was designed in 1895 by none other than Herbert Austin, who had ventured to Australia as a teenager with his uncle in 1884 for a career in engineering and who had returned in 1893 to take up a job as manager of the Wolseley Sheep-Shearing Machine Company.

A second Wolseley model was introduced in 1897, and by the turn of the century the company was making its first four-wheeled motor cars. However, Wolseley had little interest in the motor-car business and in 1901, the car-building activities were sold to Vickers, who established a new company as the Wolseley Tool and Motor Car Company Limited, with Austin as its General Manager. In 1905, Wolseley purchased the Coventry-based Siddeley motor company, with John Davenport Siddeley replacing Austin as General Manager.

By the mid-twenties, the company was in financial crisis and, by the end of October 1926, was in the hands of the receivers. Rescue came in the unlikely form of William Morris, who held the Wolseley sales franchise for the Oxford area. Determined that Wolseley should not fall into foreign hands, he purchased the company for £730,000, against rival bids from General Motors and the Austin Motor Company.

In 1927, William Morris moved the company from its Adderley Park works into a 65-acre site at Drews Lane, Ward End, and in



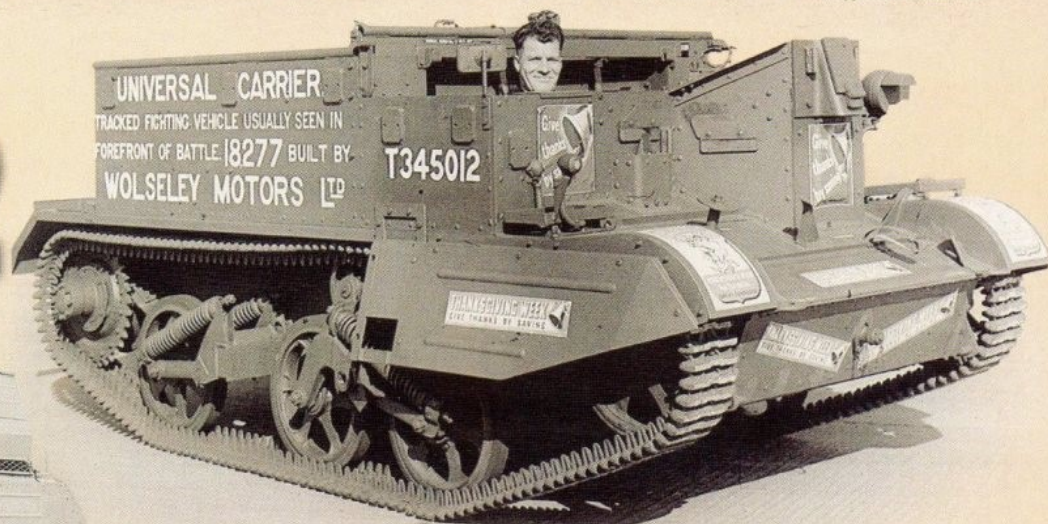
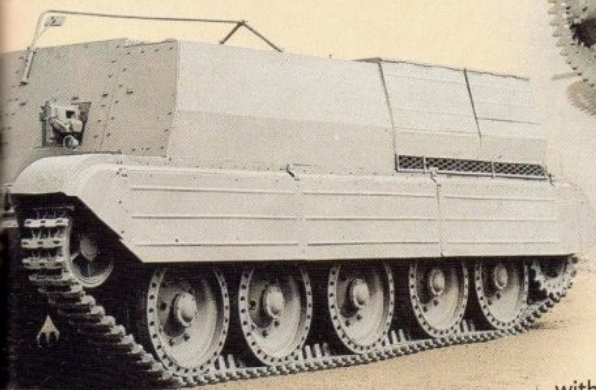
*A Neptune amphibious vehicle being hoisted off the ground inside the tank factory ready for loading onto a railway truck. The truck will be shunted into the building along the internal track.*





One of several 'show the flag' displays organized by Wolseley during the War as morale boosters, this one headed by a Crusader tank with a Morris-Commercial C8 gun tractor close behind. Photographed in Drews Lane, Ward End, the two-storey building in the background was the main office block and is now the administration centre of LDV limited.

# WW2



Above: Photographed during the War, this universal carrier was being used to promote 'Thanksgiving Week', one of the regular events to encourage workers to save and thus help the war effort. This particular scheme had a target of £1,000,000. Left: Whatever it is, it is based on a Crusader tank.

1929, a separate company, Wolseley Aero Engines, was established within the works to manufacture the Wolseley-designed Scorpio, Aquarius, Aries and Libra radial aero engines. Unfortunately, the Air Ministry and the aircraft manufacturers seemed reluctant to place orders with the new company and, in 1937, it was renamed Nuffield Mechanisation & Aero Limited, when a completely new factory was built on the site for the production of cruiser tanks. After the War, this factory became a huge press shop under Nuffield Metal products Limited, and is now the largest press shop in Europe under the ownership of van makers LDV Limited.

The cruiser tank had been developed by Morris-Commercial engineers in collaboration

with the American inventor John Christie, and eventually evolved into the Crusader tank. By 1940, 200 cruiser tanks had been built at the works, followed by 300 Crusaders, plus Neptune amphibious vehicles - also developed by Morris-Commercial - and one Tortoise tank, the latter having taken 18 months to build.

**'The cruiser tank had been developed by Morris-Commercial engineers in collaboration with the American inventor John Christie.'**

The works had its own railway sidings, with tracks running into some of the buildings, which allowed loading to be carried out under

cover, and out of sight of enemy aircraft.

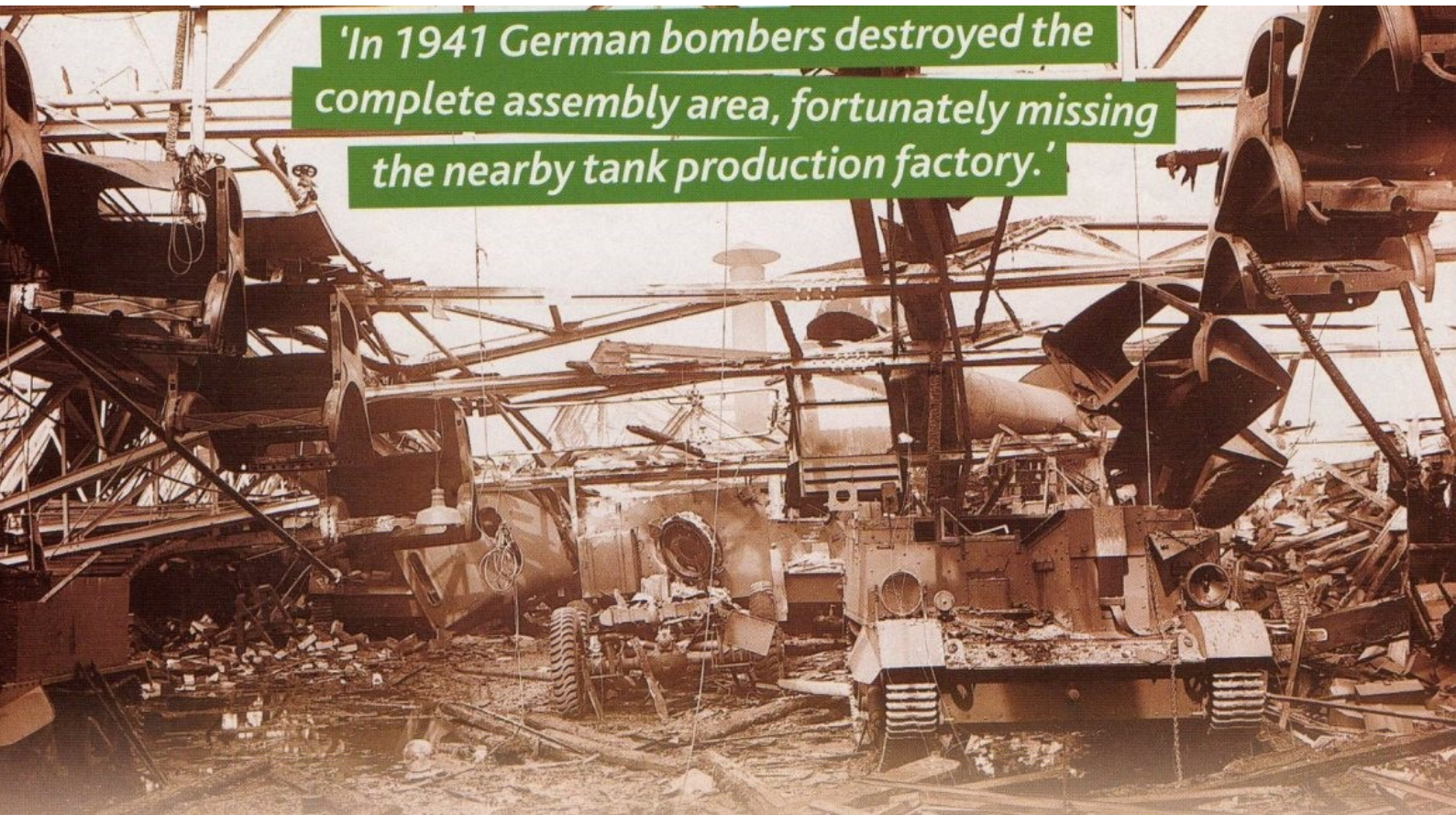
Under Managing Director, Sir Miles Thomas, Wolseley laid down production lines for sea mines and sinkers, producing them in such vast quantities by using motor-car flow-line principles that the Navy could not cope with them. However, this problem was

conveniently solved in 1941 when German bombers destroyed the complete assembly area, fortunately missing the nearby tank production factory by less than 200 feet (61m). After rebuilding this part of the works, the company became involved with the production of wings for Horsa gliders,

these huge assemblies only just squeezing in between the floor and roof trusses, with about 900 pairs eventually produced.



**'In 1941 German bombers destroyed the complete assembly area, fortunately missing the nearby tank production factory.'**



*Bomb damage at the Wolseley works caused by the air raid of 1941. In the debris can be seen the remains of a universal carrier and a Morris-Commercial CDFW 6x4 chassis. The car bodies were being stored in the roof for use after the War.*

Universal carriers, or Bren carriers, were also manufactured by Nuffield Mechanisation but production was subsequently switched to Wolseley to allow the Mechanisation works to concentrate on tanks. The output of carriers was originally 50 units a week, but the company went on to build something like 20,000 of these Ford V8 powered tracked vehicles by 1945.

With Morris-Commercial heavily involved with the production of C4, C8 and C9 military vehicles, engine manufacture, and building tanks, gun mounts, Wilson steering gear, and even torpedo drive units, production of the Morris-Commercial CD, CDSW and CDFW 6x4 chassis was transferred to the Austin Motor Company and Wolseley Motors. A total of 6000 were eventually constructed, including CDSW fully-equipped breakdown trucks and Bofors guns. Wolseley also reconditioned Bofors guns.

Some Wolseley saloon cars, finished in army drab finish, were also constructed during the War for use as staff cars, and the company had designed a small ambulance body which

could be adapted to fit a wide range of motor-car chassis, several hundred being produced at the works and fitted to second-hand cars bought especially for the purpose.

During the War years, the works received several distinguished visitors, including the

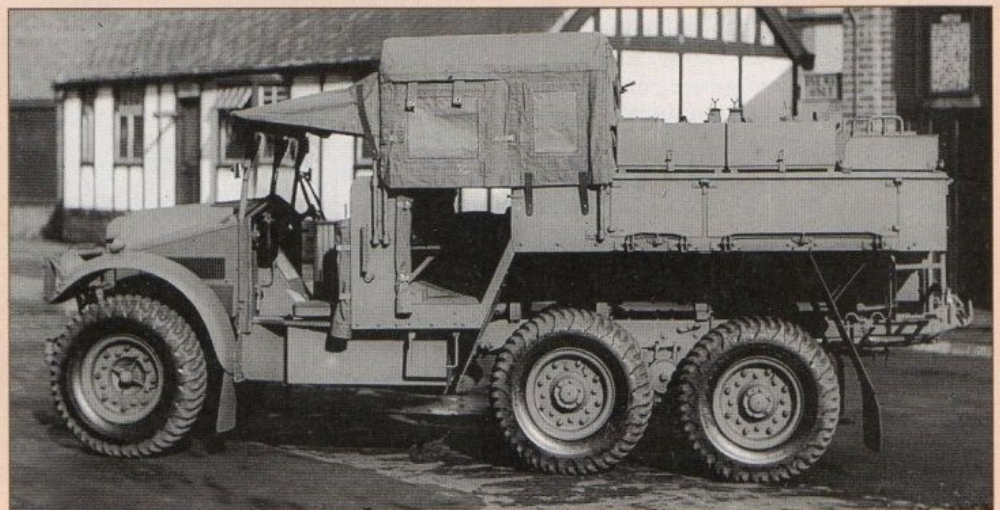
King and Queen, Winston Churchill, King Haaken of Norway, Field Marshall Montgomery, Field Marshall Smutts, Lord Halifax, Lady Metcalfe, Sir Stafford Cripps and even the American film star Edward G Robinson. **MILITARY**



*Left: Sir Andrew Holt smashing a bottle of some beverage... almost certainly not champagne,... over a universal carrier which he had personally presented to the nation. Wolseley workers and army officials are also in attendance. Right: Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery inspecting a universal carrier at the Wolseley works in March 1944. With him, at his shoulder, is Charles Mullens, Managing Director of Wolseley, and to the left, Sir Miles Thomas, Vice Chairman of the Nuffield Organisation.*



*Bofors guns were reconditioned by Wolseley and here we see General Boles trying out one of the guns which is ready to be shipped out for further action.*



*A Wolseley-built Morris-Commercial CDSW 6x4 Bofors gun tractor.*