

The Morris 8 Tank Story

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The little Morris 8 engine lived many different lives in industrial and marine forms. It powered the BMB President Farm tractor, many of the small luggage trolley tugs seen on railway stations, fire pumps, and in Morris Vedette form it was a popular boat engine. The engine has also had a significant military career as a vital part of the Centurion tank.

The Centurion was developed by AEC of Southall, and was one of the most successful and widely used tanks in the history of armoured warfare. A total of 4,423 were produced between 1945 and 1961. Variants included the Centurion Armoured Recovery Vehicles (ARV), Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers (AVRE), Bridge-layers and Artillery Observation Posts.

Centurions saw service in many conflicts including Korea, Vietnam, the Sinai and the Gulf War. The Centurion also made a significant contribution to NATO's deterrent in Western Europe during the Cold War. The main engine was a 27 litre Rolls Royce Meteor V12, developed from the Merlin engine, and delivering 650 brake horse power at 2500rpm.

The Centurion was the first tank to be fitted with an auxiliary engine and generator. The industrial version of the Morris 8hp 918cc engine fitted to Morris 8 cars was chosen for the task due to its well-proven sturdiness and reliability. The Morris engines slotted neatly into the front left corner of the Centurion's main engine compartment.

The Morris was fitted with a 24 volt ignition system and was connected to a 24 volt 3000 watt dynamo. The dynamo shaft extended through the crew compartment bulkhead and terminated with a starting handle dog.

A special bracket accommodated the starting handle in the requisite position within the crew compartment.

It is estimated that over 8,000 Morris 8 engines, including spares, were produced for use in the Centurion and in recent years, some of these have become available as Government surplus.

The engine was designated by the military as the Type A41 and minor design enhancements, mainly to do with the electrics for the generating system, were incorporated into a progressive number of Marks. All the engines were painted eggshell blue, which was standard military practice for automotive equipment.

A number of special castings were made for the ancillary equipment, and these normally have a military part number, usually prefixed with the letters FV (Fighting Vehicle).

So, the humble Morris 8 engine has enjoyed a long and distinguished worldwide military career.

