

# STUG

## FOR THE PEOPLE





# Social media has its positives, one being the help it afforded Jon Phillips when embarking on the incredible low budget restoration of this rare StuG III Ausf D

Words and pics: Ian Cushway

**S**turmgeschütz III Ausf D assault gun, chassis number 90678, was captured by the British at El Alamein in May 1942 and was transported back to the UK. Ingloriously, it was used as target practice at Pirbright before being rescued by Kevin Wheatcroft. Its current owner Jon Phillips, needing a new challenge, bravely took on the restoration, calling on the help of military collectors the world over when it came to sourcing missing parts, of which, as you might imagine, there was quite a few.

Making its show debut this year, it now represents one of the rarest and most interesting vehicles on the scene – testament not to the amount of cash poured into the project, but spadefuls

of sheer determination, a down-to-earth motivation to get it done – and more than just a smidgen of ingenuity when it came to encouraging fellow enthusiasts to get involved.

## SWAPSHOP

The story began in early 2013 when Jon from Chatham, Kent, took a long, hard look at his wartime Schwimmwagen and decided it was time for a change. “I was bored, I suppose,” he admits. “I wanted a new challenge, so got in contact with Kevin and asked him if he’d got anything he’d be interested in swapping. I went to his yard in Leicestershire and among the half-tracks and other relics, I spotted what looked like





# THE RESTORATION

*pictures courtesy  
of Jon Phillips*



*Above: Jon swapped his Schwimmwagen for this rusty relic.*

*Left: As found, languishing in Pirbright's firing range. It was rescued and found its way into Kevin Wheatcroft's collection.*



*Above: Work started on the lower hull first, with Jon, aided by various friends and other enthusiasts, carrying out the repair work.*



*Above: Jon got the tracks from Normandy. They were seized solid.*



*Above: Jon, a welder by trade, did the majority of the metal fabrication himself.*



*Above: Jon couldn't get the original cast steel hinges so made some himself.*



*Above: Engine and various other running gear came from a donor FV432.*



*Left: Work is carried out on the high mounted air intakes, part of the tropicalisation work done before it went to North Africa.*



*Above: With help from a few friends, Jon finally gets the StuG up and running.*

*Right: Almost there. Jon acquired and was given parts from enthusiasts located all over the world.*







**Above:** Parts were acquired from as far afield as Poland, Latvia and France. **Right:** Gun is the 75mm short barrel as used in the Panzer IV. **Above it to the left there are two holes, which are range damage, while below it is another hole (visible here) made by a Piat.**



a rusty skip in the corner. I found out what it was and was so intrigued, I did the swap. Part of my reasoning was that because it shared the same chassis as the Panzer III, there would be parts in common which would make life easier."

Once it had been hauled back to Kent, Jon started by tackling the lower hull which took almost a year to complete, followed by the fighting compartment then the engine deck. "One of the biggest problems I had at this early stage, apart from the fact that so many bits were missing, was getting the drop arms and torsion bars out," explains Jon.

Being a welder and engineer by trade and having worked on heavy plant in the past, Jon did the vast majority of the work himself using pictures, drawings and books as a reference. Where there was a gap in available information, Jon simply applied a

generous dose of common sense in order to arrive at a suitable solution.

The second year of the project was taken up by work on the fighting compartment, with Jon acquiring a 75mm gun and most of the infrastructure. "I'd started up a Facebook page by then and people from all

louvres. "A guy from Latvia sent me these," explains Jon.

Capturing the imagination of military vehicle enthusiasts in order to source the necessary missing components was a masterstroke on Jon's part, although a certain amount of talking turkey had to

take place given Jon's limited DIY budget.

"People initially got in touch asking silly prices, so I'd say 'no I couldn't

afford it.' Then they'd come back to me and say, 'okay, how much can you afford?' In the end, we'd come to an arrangement. I think at the end of the day, people with parts sitting around were just happy to see them being put to use."

**"I spotted what looked like a rusty skip in the corner."**

over the world started offering me items for it. The gun mantlet, for example, came from a guy in Czechoslovakia."

Incidentally, the mushrooms on the rear of the deck are original, but the two back ones are unique to the D and are more like

**Below:** Jon swapped his Schwimmwagen for the StuG in 2013 – his objective was to carry out the restoration work himself to keep costs down.







*Above and right: The attention to detail inside is just as impressive. No wonder Jon scooped 'Best Tracked Vehicle' and Milweb's 'Outstanding Vehicle 2016' awards at the 2016 War and Peace Revival.*

### DRIVING FORCE

Next, because the StuG arrived minus its original Maybach powerplant, Jon needed to find another engine to push it along. "Of course I would have liked to have found a Maybach for it, but at £150,000 they're just too expensive so I had to find a more feasible alternative," he explained.

That came in the form of a cheaply acquired donor FV432, which Jon also plundered for its steering box and various other bits. Being virtually 'squaddie proof' a big bonus was the simplicity of the electrics and with everything being labelled, Jon soon had the StuG up and running.

By this time the project had received 420,000 views on Facebook and the prospect of this rare piece of German wartime history being brought back to life

was creating a real buzz among military enthusiasts worldwide.

Of course there were the inevitable teething problems, admits Jon, like a blowing exhaust, and the need to repair a damaged propshaft. The fact that the tracks, sourced from Normandy, were rusted solid

do everything on a shoestring budget, an approach which resulted in long hours in the workshop – and some epic drives in order to collect parts. "I was always on a mission to do things as cheaply as possible, which invariably meant doing all the work myself. I wouldn't think twice at driving to Poland to get a part I needed. I saved a fortune doing it that way."

**"People with parts sitting around were just happy to see them being put to use."**

when they arrived serve to remind Jon of the hardship the project involved. "Trying to knock out the pins was murder. Despite soaking the whole lot in diesel, it still took me eight hours to do just six."

The aim throughout, admits Jon, was to

### SOCIAL CIRCLES

With the vehicle finally debuting in 2016, Jon is pleased with what he's

achieved. And rightly so, because what he's managed to do in just three years is nothing short of remarkable. That said, he's happy to acknowledge the assistance he received from other enthusiasts. As he puts it: "I've had a lot of help from a lot of good people



*The crest of the Sondernverband z.b.V 288 was a green laurel wreath surrounding a palm tree and rising sun over a small swastika.*



*Tropical fittings included additional pre-cleaning filters, additional air intakes cut into the deck access hatches and fuel/water can racks mounted across the rear engine deck.*



# STUG III AUSF D HISTORY

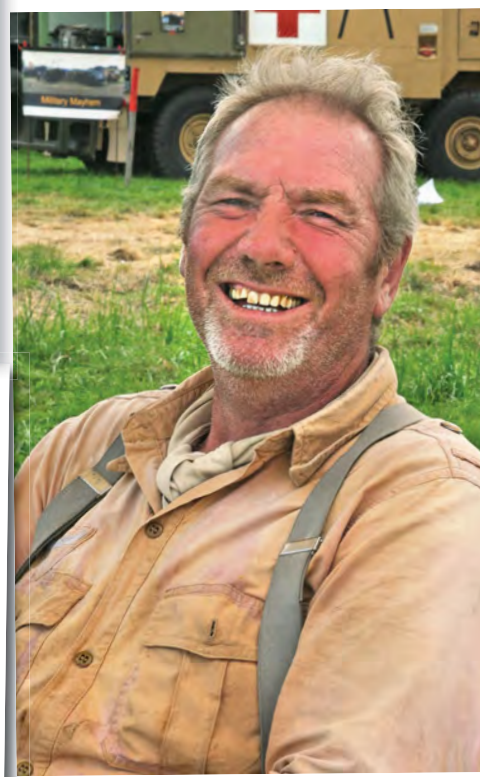


Jon's was one of three StuGs used by a special unit called the Sondereverband z.b.V 288 and they were tropicalised before being sent to North Africa. When they were captured, one got dumped, and the other two were sent to the UK. Jon's was sent to Pirbright, and the other one travelled to Sweden for mine testing.

and I've made a good few friends along the way. I've enjoyed doing it."

The fact that he's saved a historic military relic from an inglorious demise is one thing, but his endeavours, and the fact that he's documented the whole tale on Facebook, is also worthy of applause. It proves that it is possible to restore a wreck on a miniscule budget and that you don't need to be a multi-millionaire to own something rare and truly historic. And this has inspired other people to embark on equally ambitious projects, thus saving other important vehicles for future generations to enjoy.

You can follow the full rebuild on Jon's facebook page – [www.facebook.com/StugIIIAusfDRestoration](http://www.facebook.com/StugIIIAusfDRestoration)



*Above right: An always cheerful Jon recognises the help and support he's had from other enthusiasts such as Bruce Compton. Not forgetting his wife, Stephanie.*

*Below: Rare German assault gun made its show debut in 2016 after a painstaking three year restoration.*

