

The story of the M4A3E8 Sherman Tank starts back in the late 1970's when the museum was just getting started.

During a conversation at the museum director's place of business, the museum came up. One of his secretaries suddenly announced that as a youngster she had to write a story for a "current event" project for school. Searching the newspaper for a subject to write about, she noticed a small article about the burial of an old army tank at a local mental institution that was located near her home. The Director jumped to his feet with excitement "A tank buried at the Central Islip Psychiatric Center? No it can't be! This hospital happened to be 2 miles from work and only about 4 miles from where he lived. What are the odds - was this too good to be true . . . a tank buried for all intents and purposes, in his proverbial back yard!

Being a military collector since he was very young the director had been told many stories about a tank abandoned here or a tank lying there by many people, all of which turned out upon investigation to be ghosts or figments of people's imaginations. Was this going to be another wild goose chase? After a considerable question and answer period with his secretary, it became obvious that there was some real substance to this mystery. Well, this was just too much for him to stand and he literally ran out the front door in search of this "Holy Grail". Lucky for him that he was part owner of the business and could leave work when he wanted! Anyways, off to the hospital he went in search of this long lost vehicle. Was it really there, was it really buried, and was it even a tank after all? All these questions and more ran through his head.

As might be expected the first day's search brought no new enlightenment. In fact, he probably looked more like one of the residents of this mental hospital than a business executive as he literally ran about the hospital grounds in a frantic manner in search of this elusive treasure. That was the beginning of what was to turn out to be a one year search for the ghost Sherman of C.I.

Central Islip Psychiatric Hospital was the **world's largest** psychiatric hospital to be built, housing some 15,000 residents in the early 1950's. This hospital was notorious for employing new treatments, which included shock therapy and prefrontal lobotomies. C.I. was also one of the largest employers on Long Island for many years, and the scandals that went on within its walls were amazing and sadistic. We thought it would be a good idea to give you a little background about the hospital before continuing the story, so that you will get a feel for some of the future comments and situations that the director encountered.

Trip after trip was made to the hospital to search for the tank, but to no avail. There was just no visible evidence of this old tank. Well heck, it was supposed to have been buried about 21 years back, so that should not have been unexpected. But since the hospital grounds spanned hundreds of acres, it was realized that this was not going to be no small task. I decided to methodically inspect each acre and to query every worker that was found about information pertaining to the lost tank.

Now, at a state mental hospital you sometimes can not tell a worker from a patient as many of the patients were free to move around the facility, and most of the workers were as nutty as the patients! This led to many an interesting, but misleading encounter with many individuals, which we do not have the time or space to go into here.

Anyways, on a 90 degree July day, the director came upon a possible solution, and that was to go to the local deli and buy 2 ice cold case of "Buds", and to take them to the hospital with him when he did his next interrogations. Well on a hot summer day a cold Bud will make any state worker stop in his tracks and chat. So off he went handing out a cold beer to anyone that would talk to him. Before he knew it Charley told him to talk to Dave, and Dave told him to talk to John and so forth, until he was told to see the guy who worked in the hospital power house.

Many years ago the hospital had a huge coal powered power house installed to generate power for the entire hospital. The hospital had converted to natural gas, and now the power house was just an ole antique serving only as a power transfer station.

At a mental institution, all building are kept locked at all the times. When the director approached the building and rang the door bell, an upper third story window was opened and a key on a long chain was thrown down to him. "OK", he thought, "I guess this is the way I get into the building", as no person was seen at the window. He opened the door, and with that the key flew from his hand and back up to the window. The director thought that that was pretty weird, but the real weird was just the beginning. Entering the building he found no one to greet him. . . the place was deserted. In fact the place was down right scary as it was very dark, and the myriad of heavy equipment filling the place was more antique than anything that he had seen before. He thought he had entered Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory by the way it looked. Walking around for what seem an eternity, he eventually made his way to the third floor from whence the flying key had come. All along the way he was alone in this dark and dreary building filled with huge boilers and piping. Suddenly he found a room with voices emanating from it. "At last. . . people" he thought. But as he peeked into the room he was stunned to see about 6 or so men playing craps on a long crap table! One worker was trying to greet the director but was so stoned out from drugs that he pretty much was talking Greek. Another smelled so bad from alcohol that it was hard to get near him. Then what appeared to be the boss stepped forward and asked him what the director wanted. After the explanation, which drew many strange looks, and a few cat calls too, the director was lead to one of the workers at the craps table who could possibly help him. "Yep", said the worker, "I was on the burial party to that ole tank. It is buried somewhere out back". With this he took the director outside the power plant or so the director thought. The worker could not pinpoint the exact spot as years of alcohol had took its toll of his memory. He could only estimate it was somewhere within a 10 acre area. Not exactly close was it?

Returning countless times over a full year revealed a small section of bulldozer blade sticking barely out from under the brush. But that was an important discovery, as it indicated that the blade was of army pattern and not a commercial tractor. And where there was an army dozer blade, there is probably an army vehicle to go with it. For

almost a year the director probed the site with mine detectors and even a divining rod. . .and of course with a shovel in hand too. The entire site was combed and dug over to no avail. The very last thing to check on the site was a huge 12 foot high pile of topsoil which was covered in thick brush indicating that it was there for many years. "Could the tank be under this pile", the only way to find out was to start digging. So during the director's next summer vacation during a blistering hot July week, the director preceded to hand shove the entire 40 plus yards of earth. Yes, a bulldozer would have helped in this adventure, but the director did not know if the tank was under the pile of dirt or if any part of the tank was above ground level and a bulldozer could have done some damage to the tank. Virtually at the last few shovels full of dirt, the director had the most incredible good fortune to feel his shovel hit a piece of thick metal with a resounding "clang". "Not another piece of scrap metal", the director thought. The site was full of scrap metal debris that had been dumped here and there, which had given many a false reading in past searches. But this one somehow felt more solid and further digging soon revealed the sawed off remains of a Commander's hatch from a **SHERMAN TANK!!!!** Success at last!

The Sherman was real. A little more digging and the top of the turret was laid bare. Into the hatch the director climbed to get a picture of himself in which looked more like he was standing in an open manhole, than in a tank. The tank was then reburied to preserve its presence from others while the director found out what was necessary, to legally obtain the tank. Little did he know that dealing with the US Army, and the State of New York would take another year. Between the paper work and even convincing state and federal officials that a tank was buried there was something. In the end the State of New York made a bit of a profit; as they sold their Sherman for \$10.00 plus 70 cents as tax – a bargain for the tank museum, as it is the only M4A3 mounting an M2 plow know to exist.

A date was set, a crew of diggers were hired, along with a bulldozer and a crane. A flat bed truck was standing by that would transport the unearthed vehicle to the museum. It was a very hot summer day, but the excitement from the digging crew was enormous. With shovels in hand the dig started. Hour after hour the tank was unearthed. Hospital and State Officials flew down from Albany on the Governor's plane to be on hand to give interviews. Then the dig hit a snag. About 2 feet from the tank was buried a very large main gas pipe. This pipe was believed to be supplying natural gas to the house just adjacent to the site that we were digging at. All work came to a halt. The local energy company who was on site, was called over, and when shown the pipe they said, "yep it's a main gas line and we can not shut it down and if you hit it, it will blow that tank into the next neighborhood". The emergency energy company people jumped into their trucks and flew away. Now what? The director did not come all this way not to get this tank. The digging crew recovered the gas line and staked the area, so that they would know where the line was. The plan was to dig out the back and side of the tank and get the bulldozer to pull it back away from the main gas line. It got hairy a couple of times, but it worked. The tow cables were attached to the tank and the crane began to lift. But the tank was not moving. You could almost hear every member of the digging crew ask, what now? This ole girl was not ready to come up for air. Come to find out the crane that was sent was the wrong one and too small for the job, so we had to wait several hours for

the bigger 110 ton crane to arrive. Once it arrived the ole girl was once again hooked up to the tow cables. After several unsuccessful attempts to get the ole girl to lift her skirt, she finally squeaked and moaned, gave up the fight and up she went.

During all these calamities the director was so stressed out that he lost all feeling in 2 fingers on each hand. The emergency E.M.T.'s on hand suspected a cardiac problem and advised the director to go to the hospital. But the show, or should we say disasters, had to go on and the director just went on his way. The captain must go down with his ship!

Next the crew had to get much dirt, rocks and sand off the vehicle before it could be loaded and then transported on a flat bed tractor trailer truck to the museum facility some 40 miles away. Once this was done everyone moved out in convoy towards the museum. Half way there the truck with this monster of a load got a flat tire. Now we were all thinking that maybe this Sherman just does not want to give up the fight after all. The tire only got fixed because we had a giant of a black man named "Babe" on the crew. This man was the only one strong enough to use an all mechanical jack. Finally we made it to the museum with out any more problems.

The payloader that we had hired to pull the Sherman off the trailer was waiting for us. The Sherman was hooked up to the payloader, but would not move! Oh NO – Not Again! Could it possibly be stuck in gear? If this was fact, there was no way to unstuck it as the interior of the vehicle was still full of dirt, rocks and sand. So out came the torches and the crew proceeded to cut the tracks. Once that happened the vehicle was rolled off the trailer and parked. At this point it was dark and being the long day that it was it was decided to leave the vehicle in the secure yard and tackle the placement of the vehicle another day.

After more hard labor the vehicle was eventually placed inside the museum facility for a while. Then a few years later it was moved out side, where it sat until the museum made its move to Danville.

All in all this was quite a chore, but one that was well worth the years of time and effort put into it. Not many can say that they found a buried tank basically in their backyard, dug it up and preserved it so generations to come can learn about its historical value.