

Crowland Abbey

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At the end of May, I went with my son for his (belated) birthday present – a Tank Driving Experience. With typical dad-cunning, it was an experience for two, so I got in on the fun as well! It was an awesome experience – challenging, but great fun. As a child, I had been brought up reading Commando comics, so the chance to drive a tank was not to be missed. It was, however, also a rather disturbing experience. Each person (there were 3 of us) got to drive the tank for 2 circuits, sit in the turret, and sit in the back where the troops sat ('tank' was perhaps a bit excessive – it has been described as an armoured taxi! But it did still have tracks). I drove first. One circuit with head out of the hatch, then one circuit with the hatch down. For this, all you had to look out of was a window about the size of a very small letterbox. It was scar! I had to rely almost totally on the commands of the instructor. Sitting in the turret was OK. A nice fresh breeze.

The worst place was in the back. You sat on the bench, bouncing around, jarred by every hole the tank hit. You could see nothing at all outside. You could prepare for nothing. Everything was a (generally unpleasant) surprise. I imagined what it must be like for the troops in the back – going into who knew what. And, perhaps, being blown to pieces without even knowing what hit them.

Occupational hazard time now. As a vicar, I thought this would make a good sermon illustration (or magazine article!). We can sometimes find ourselves lost in our journey through life – unsure of where we are going; apprehensive, fearful even of the unknown that lies ahead. When (as the driver) I could see very little of where I was going, I relied entirely on that voice, guiding me on the safe path. As the great Welsh hymn reminds us
'Guide me, O Thou great redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but Thou art mighty, hold me with Thy powerful hand... When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side...'