

Our family drove DUKWs to the summer cabin

FIRST PERSON

An amphibious military vehicle that played a supporting role on D-Day became a crucial part of a multigenerational family, **Andy Thomson** writes

As the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings came and went this year I was taken back to my family's connection to the D-Day DUKWs.

Most people drive cars to their cottages; our family drove DUKWs.

What's a DUKW? It's an amphibious military vehicle that played an important supporting role on D-Day. Its name is derived from an acronym based on its manufacturer's coding: D, for the year of development, 1942; U, for a utility amphibious vehicle; K, for all-wheel drive; and W, for dual-rear wheels. The five-ton vehicle can carry two-and-a-half tons of supplies along with 25 soldiers and their equipment. That was just the right size for our needs, too.

I am part of a multigenerational family with several camps on the shore of Lake Pogamasing, about 75 kilometres northwest of Sudbury, near the Spanish River and CP rail line.

When my grandfather, W. B. Plaunt, closed down his lumber operation in 1940, he created a summer escape at a nearby former logging camp on Pog (our nickname for the lake). However, it was four kilometres from a railway stop with a river and a lake to cross. Accessing our camp in the summer was a logistical conundrum.

Back then, the trip to camp was accomplished in stages. Supplies and people had to be lifted, carried, lugged and transported by horse and buggy, jeeps, scows, boats and backpacks. First, we took the train from Sudbury to the whistle-stop at Sheahan. Then we crossed the Spanish River on a deteriorating wooden bridge before traversing along a two-kilometre logging road to reach the lake, where, finally, we loaded up a boat for the last three kilometres to our cabins.

The journey was more of a gruelling expedition than a pleasurable outing.

It was one of my uncle's friends who suggested a solution. He had commanded a DUKW in the Pacific during the Second World War and convinced my uncle that it was the answer to our transportation woes.

Fortuitously, in the spring of 1959, a tour company was selling its DUKW and we brought it to Northern Ontario.



ILLUSTRATION BY CATHERINE CHAN

We were confident that our first DUKW trip to Pog could be accomplished in two days, with one night spent camping along the route.

Leaving our home in Sudbury, the highway driving was easy. But by the time we reached the Spanish River, two front springs had broken, penetrating the hull causing two large holes, allowing water to pour in near the engine. We hoped the three DUKW pumps, plus a backup one, would alleviate that concern.

There were other obstacles, too. The surging spring snow melt meant the Spanish River was full of pulp logs heading to the mill downstream.

At two o'clock, we started – powered by six wheels, a 20-inch propeller and guarded by two teenagers on the front deck holding pike poles to redirect any logs. When we got bogged down, we wrapped the winch cable around a tree or boulder and crawled up the river.

While camping that night on a sandy shoal in the middle of the river we

realized that some rubber covers had become dislodged, allowing water to seep in. That extra pump we carried was now keeping us afloat.

The second day started on smooth water and we were hopeful. But with no

warning, the engine suddenly stopped. Too much water had drowned the engine. Discouraged, we caught the train back to Sudbury.

Later that summer, my uncle returned with friends to replace the engine, repair the leaks and drive the DUKW to our camp. What a celebration we had that long weekend.

From that point on, the DUKW more than lived up to its potential. Once we stepped off the train in Sheahan, we piled into that DUKW for a one-hour drive on land and water right to the back door of our camps. It wasn't always smooth sailing, but it rarely failed.

Our first DUKW lasted 15 years. As this amphibian was now indispensable, we purchased additional ones. The DUKWs hauled four generations of family, friends

and dogs; our summer supply of groceries and fuel; boxcar loads of building supplies; and many of the lake residents as well. Every weekend, our flotilla of DUKWs and accompanying safety boats, would head across the lake to and from the railway.

After several decades, the usefulness of our DUKWs came to an end. Families now arrived by float plane, ATVs and most had a boat. By 2015, only two were barely operable. A family member bought the last one and sold it to a Dutch collector.

I do not know if the new owner took our former DUKW to the Normandy celebrations. But, in my imagination, it will be there, emerging from the ocean onto the beaches as so many of its comrades did eight decades ago.

Like the invading armies on D-Day, our family community would never have succeeded without that incredible amphibious vehicle.

Andy Thomson lives in Toronto.

First Person is a daily personal piece submitted by readers. Have a story to tell? See our guidelines at tgam.ca/essayguide and e-mail to firstperson@globeandmail.com

The DUKWs hauled four generations of family, friends and dogs; our summer supply of groceries and fuel; boxcar loads of building supplies; and many of the lake residents as well.

Polish filmmaker Holland on opening the world's eyes to Green Border

BARRY HERTZ

Talking with Polish filmmaker Agnieszka Holland over Zoom the other week, it becomes deeply, darkly funny that the soft-spoken 75-year-old has become Warsaw's public enemy number one.

A deeply humane and philosophical artist who is known as much for her historical films (the Holocaust drama *In Darkness*, the Holodomor biopic *Mr. Jones*) as her family films (*The Secret Garden*), Holland ignited the incendiary ire of her country's government this past fall when she released *Green Border*, a harrowing thriller dramatizing the reality facing Syrian migrants caught between the Belarus-Poland border.

As the film made the festival rounds in Venice and Toronto, Poland's then justice minister Zbigniew Ziobro compared it to Nazi propaganda for its critical depiction of Polish border guards, while the country's interior ministry slapped a preshow warning ahead of all screenings to counter its "untruths and distortions."

While Polish audiences largely ignored the panicked pleas of their government – the film topped the country's box office for several weeks in a row this past fall – the attacks have been renewed as *Green Border* begins to open in international markets, including Canada, where the film will be released in select theatres starting June 28.

Just a few days after wrapping shooting on her *Green Border* follow-up, an experimental drama about the life of Franz Kafka, Holland spoke with *The Globe and Mail* about her controversial and essential work.

This past fall, you sued Poland's minister of justice and attorney-general for defamation. What's the status of that situation?

We made the legal action, but the tribunal courts in Poland are working very slowly. There was a previous legal action taken against me by a group of



Agnieszka Holland, seen behind the scenes on *Green Border*, has made a film that topped Poland's box office for several weeks in a row this past fall. AGATA KUBIS/COURTESY OF KINO LORBER

extreme-right Catholics and the process altogether took five years. So, I'm not expecting things will happen quickly, especially because the minister is not the minister any more, as his government lost the elections. And he is very sick, with cancer. I hope that he survives, because while I don't like the guy at all, I don't wish him death. But I'd like him to pay me some money, so I can transfer it immediately to the activists working on the border.

Are you still in touch with the activist community that you dramatize in the film?

We have very close relationships, and after the movie was released, they've been helping with talking to journalists to explain the details. Mostly, they've embraced it as a vision of the truth, though they've said that the reality is much worse. That my movie was too soft. The hope that they had was that the new government would be supportive of the issue, but it was a painful illusion as it's

now the same nationalistic, military agenda. And my film is suddenly being criticized again. I've received threats on social media – people calling me unpatriotic and a "useful idiot of Putin." Nothing has been resolved.

If the situation is as bad as it's ever been, how do you handle that dispiriting reality as a filmmaker?

When I was a young person, I was very influenced by the myth of Sisyphus – pushing that heavy stone against the hill, and when you're on top, the stone falls back, and you come down again. But you don't resign yourself, you start pushing again. This is my life. It's a choice. I decided long ago that I wouldn't have the illusion that a film could change much, just that it would open some eyes. When I was showing the film in France a few months ago, the same question came up: Can you change the world with your film? I said no, but one young girl stood up and said, "You haven't changed the world,

but you changed my world." I'm not interested in the crowds but the individual.

Was the film made more for Polish individuals, then, or the rest of the world?

Of course, the reaction of my fellow Poles is emotionally the most important. It's a mirror to my own population. But I knew when making the film that I wanted to tell a particular story that is happening in Poland, of

migration, that in general is one of the biggest challenges of modernity. We have to all deal with that, because it poses a very difficult choice in front of us, as white people from rich countries.

It's interesting to hear that the activists felt your film was too soft. I felt it was a terrifying experience.

I tried to balance it, with some hope and some beauty. But the activists' experience of going into the [forest that separates Poland and Belarus] every day and facing the misery and cruelty of other people, their perspective is very different from mine. I still have distance, and for them, they face a decision of saving one person and leaving another to die every day.

You made the film incredibly quickly, from shooting to premiering at Venice over the course of just a few months. How do you feel that speed translated into the momentum of the film?

I hoped that it would happen, that it would feel urgent, but I wasn't sure. But certainly, the speed and the fever that we had, being in movement all the time, not stopping, I think it aligned itself with the film and its style. It helped to have that sincere efficiency. But I also now feel it in my bones, I have to tell you!

Green Border opens in select Canadian theatres June 28. This interview has been condensed and edited.

TODAY'S SUDOKU SOLUTION

6	5	3	9	8	2	1	4	7
8	7	1	3	4	6	2	5	9
9	2	4	7	5	1	3	8	6
4	9	5	2	3	8	6	7	1
7	6	8	1	9	5	4	3	2
3	1	2	4	6	7	8	9	5
1	3	7	5	2	4	9	6	8
5	4	6	8	1	9	7	2	3
2	8	9	6	7	3	5	1	4

TODAY'S KENKEN SOLUTION

15x	3	5	1	48x	4	2	6
120x	5	6	3	1	4	2	3+
1-	2	4	8+	5	3	6	1
15+	1	2	6	5	3	4	9+
	4	3	9+	2	6	1	5
7+	6	1	4	2	5	3	2-