

Name:	<b>John Dale</b>
Location:	<b>Capel, Surrey</b>
Herd size:	<b>220 cows</b>
Hobby:	<b>Military tank enthusiast</b>

John Dale: "Sitting inside a tank is surreal – and sometimes a little sad"

# Tank collector

text Rachael Porter

Researching his family tree and discovering that his great Uncle, twice removed, was the first British officer to be killed in a tank battle, at Villers-Bretonneux in the Somme in northern France in 1918, is what fired John Dale's imagination and his passion for military vehicles. "I'd always been interested in them, and in military history, but I'd never thought about buying one."

"In 1998 we visited France and the cemetery where there's a simple wooden cross bearing my uncle's name. By coincidence, we were there exactly 80 years to the day he died. It had a profound effect on me," says John, adding that when he returned home his fascination with military vehicles grew. Today he has two tanks – a WWII Russian T34, which was built in 1944, and a T55, a larger model that was built in the 1970s. There are five other 'jointly owned' tanks at his Capel-based unit, which is also home to his family-run 220-cow dairy herd. When he's not managing the herd, you'll find him tinkering with a tank, or any of the other military vehicles in his collection. He's also the proud owner of a 1943 US GMC truck, a 1952 Austin Rolls Royce Champ, and a 1942 BSA motorcycle. His latest project is a 10-tonne four-inch Navy gun. "This is mounted on a trailer so you can move it around and fire it." There's a point to John's passion – it's not just a hobby to give him a break from the day-to-day pressures of managing the dairy business. He organises an annual charity military vehicle rally, which has been held at the farm for the past five years. And 2016 saw 200 vehicles and 6,000 people taking part. He takes a week off prior to the event each year, which raises funds for military charities, including Help for Heroes and other local organisations.

The vehicles spend most of the year 'dotted' around the unit: "I like seeing them around the place – some are in sheds and others are outside – and the cows are undeterred!"

John has also been on TV in the first tank he ever bought – a 1968 British 432. "It was painted pink for a scene in the BBC series *Ashes to Ashes*, and I had to drive it over a car and crush it. That's not as easy to do as it sounds – there was a lot of planning involved. But it was a great experience and good fun."

John's favourite tank is the T34 and he says it's 'surreal' to sit in it: "And also a little sad. It certainly helps me to get some perspective on life and work. And it's pure escapism."

"It's vital to spend time and have thinking space away from dairying. And I mean right away from it – not at the pub or a farmer meeting 'talking shop'."

➔ John's next charity event will be held on July 1 and 2. To find out more visit: <https://www.capel-military-vehicle-show.com>

