

# DAME MARION KETTLEWELL DBE

## 1914 - 2016

Dame Marion Kettlewell DBE served as Unit Officer in the WRNS at HMS Woolverstone in the months leading up to D-Day. This was during the period when Bigbobs were being constructed beside the river Orwell as part of a massive deception plan known as Operation Quicksilver. Her period at HMS Woolverstone through her own words:



"I was the Unit Officer at HMS Woolverstone, which is on the Orwell just outside Ipswich. This was an "assembly and briefing" establishment for Landing Craft. It had been a lovely estate with a very elegant house which was the Wardroom. There were Nissen huts all around in which we lived and the sailors lived.

There was a cricket ground and tennis courts. It was very lovely and the Nightingale sang under the trees. You walked down to the "hard" and there were all these small Landing Craft and they were in training. Eventually, all the ships from Harwich and all the personnel came to Woolverstone to be briefed on the D-Day landing before they moved South. There were Royal Marine Majors in charge of the landing craft and we had some Women's Royal Navy boat mechanics who worked on them. There were about 200 WRNS there; writers and different sorts of jobs.

It was a very good place to start being Unit Officer because there was a very nice captain, James Mansfield, who had been retired but only recently and brought back. He was a natural leader and very friendly, I mean he had very high standards but he was a lovely person and he knew that I was as green as grass...He taught me in a most splendid way how to do all these things.

We were confined just before D-Day for about a month. Nobody was allowed to go ashore and so we had to arrange all sorts of entertainments: sports, cricket matches and bingo to keep everybody going. There were a number of cooks, stewards and writers as well as the mechanics and one girl maintained a gun in case an enemy aircraft came over."

Landing craft were anchored in the river. I remember we had a party the night before they were supposed to go and when we woke up in the morning they were still there. Everything was delayed because of weather. I went out early next morning to watch them all go. It was quite a sight.

A regiment of Warwick's came and built dummy landing craft and moored them outside. One or two people were seen to walk about on them as if there were more to come. We used to go down and watch them making these under the trees by day and then they launched them at night.

We knew about D-Day before it happened. Some of the WRNS officers were right in the middle of it; secretarial and operational but very much part of it.

One of the Royal Marine officers was, in civilian life, a keen ornithologist. He took several of us, who were interested, bird watching in the estate. I remember particularly the woodlarks. He got me completely hooked and it has been with me ever since.

We used to go over to Ganges and Harwich to share some of their concerts and ENSA. (Entertainments National Service Association). My job was to see the WRNS were doing their work to the best and were happy doing it. I think it came naturally.

There was one married WRNS whose husband, I think, was in the Guards. She was an MT driver. We weren't allowed to go ashore but she managed to slip out in a Tilly. She stuffed her bed with pillows.

The Duty Officer had been very "with it" and had discovered, when she did rounds, that this bed didn't look as if it had been slept in. When she returned, I mean I can understand she wanted to see her husband before he went off on D-Day, she was up in front of the Captain and he was very good to her. She pretended to faint. I think she said she was pregnant. He said you're going to sit down and I'll see you again in 10 minutes. He didn't turn up but she got her leave stopped.

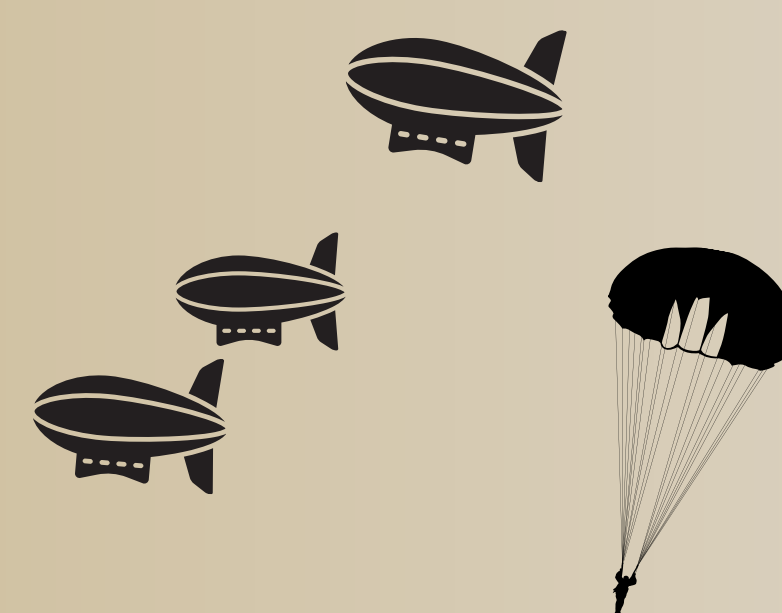
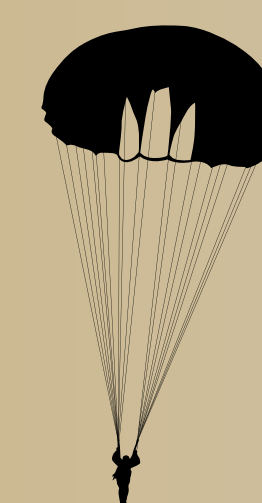
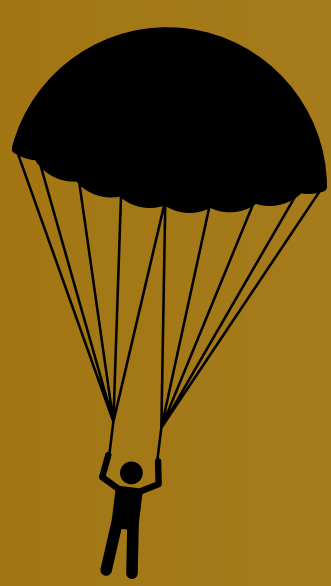


*Dame Marion Kettlewell on her 100th birthday*

**D-Day was quite emotional**, in particular the morning when we got up. I think it was a Sunday and we'd gone to church and they had all gone. The establishment went on for a little while after D-Day with these camouflaged boats being put out. The one place we could go to was still in the estate, it was a lovely little pub down at the end of the park. We used to go down there but then the locals weren't allowed to come in, it was Naval territory, but otherwise the locals were very friendly. We went for several meals with the local farmers and others around.

**It was a lovely part of the world and I was very happy there."**





# ABLE SEAMAN ROY WALKER RN

## 1926 - 2017

**Roy was born in South London in 1926. He joined the Sea-Cadets and on leaving school, at the age of 14, got a job at the Vickers-Armstrong Works in Dartford.**

Thank you to Kevin Gordon for permission to use Roy's story

As a Sea-Cadet he learnt general seamanship but specialised in signalling. He learnt the phonetic alphabet, semaphore and flag recognition. In 1942, he was promoted to Boy Leading Signaller and received further training in Morse Code. In October 1943, aged 17, he was posted to HMS Pembroke at Chatham. Service number: C/JX579027.

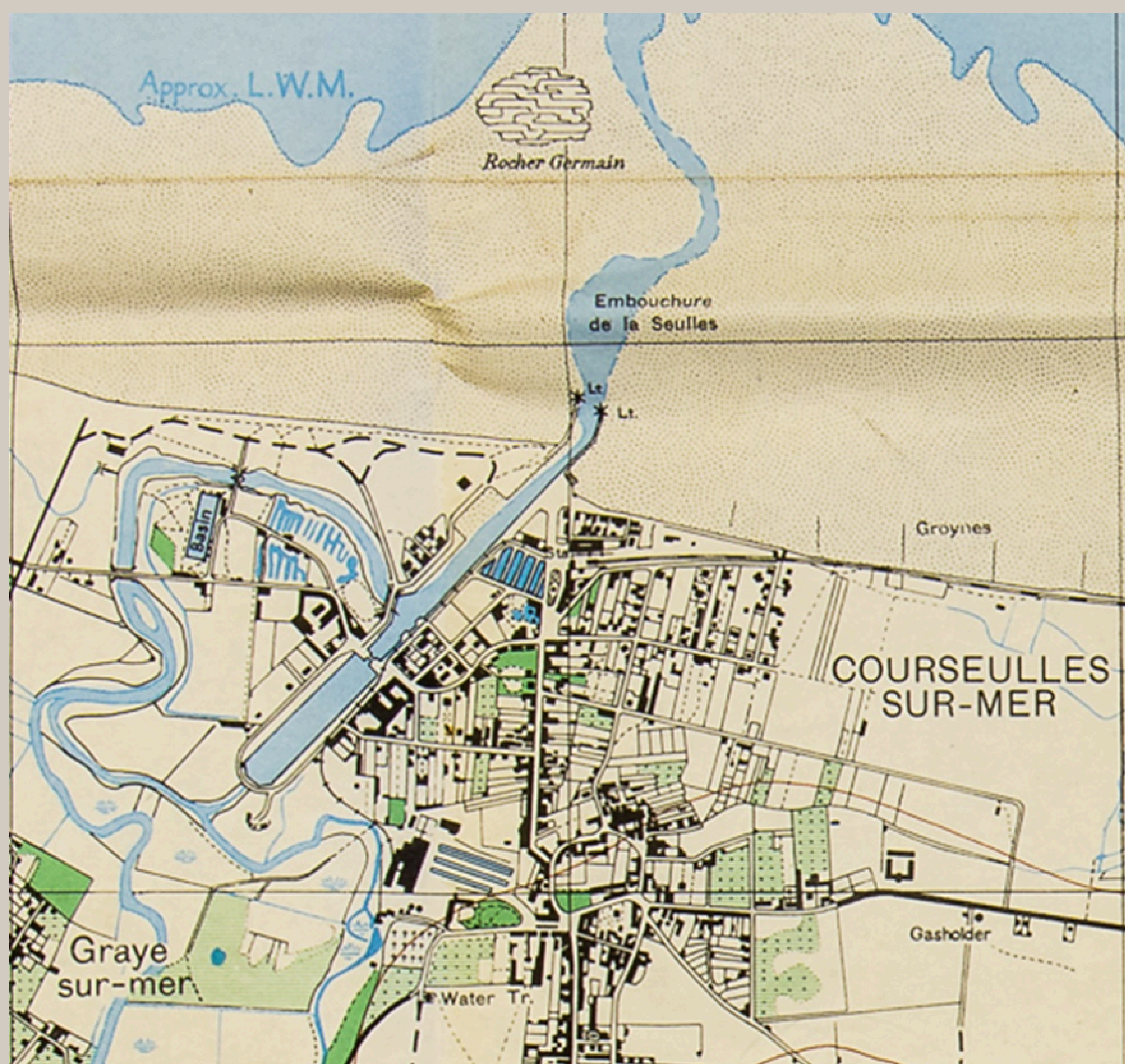
On 20th January 1944, Roy was sent to HMS Mylodon, a shore base. Roy's first posting was to Lowestoft where, under great secrecy, trawlers were being converted into minesweepers. Next, he went to Great Yarmouth and was posted to the crew of an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) which moved on to the River Orwell in May. Here he learnt how to manoeuvre the craft. Because the vessel was flat-bottomed there was a lot of sea-sickness even though they were in the quiet waters of the Orwell estuary. Roy noticed many of the military craft moored alongside the banks of the river were not real but were fakes under camouflaged netting.

Early in June 1944, Roy and the rest of his troop were summoned to the massive Woolverstone Hall, an 18th century stately home on the banks of the Orwell. He was issued with an army uniform and a Webley .45 pistol. He was told to pack up all his naval and personal equipment and that the skipper of his LCT had secret instructions in a sealed envelope.

Roy had become part of a Naval beach party led by a Royal Navy, Combined Operations Communications Officer (COCO). By the time of D-day, these were renamed Beach Commandos. Their purpose was to direct movements of landing craft and maintain links with larger army groups, which would defend the beach from air or sea attack and control road movements off it. A Royal Navy Beach Commando party consisted of 17 officers as principle and assistant beach masters supported by 67 ratings.

Late on 5th June 1944, Roy's LCT was loaded at Parkestone Quay, Harwich. The landing craft also carried Sherman tanks, lorries and an officer's staff-car. Roy still didn't know where he was going. He started chatting to a former 'Desert Rat' who helped him with his webbing and camouflage.

Orders were opened within sight of the French coast. His LCT was to land at Le Hamel (Gold Beach). On landing, Roy was to make it to the town of Courseulles-sur-Mer where he was to work for the Navy Flag Officer (British Assault Area). Courseulles was about six miles to the east on Juno Beach.



A Wartime map of Courseulles. The position of Roy's water tower can be seen at the bottom of the map.

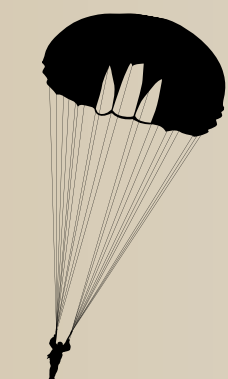
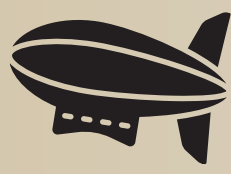
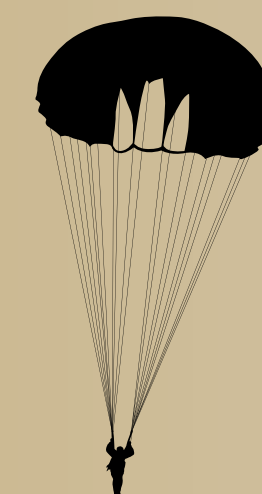
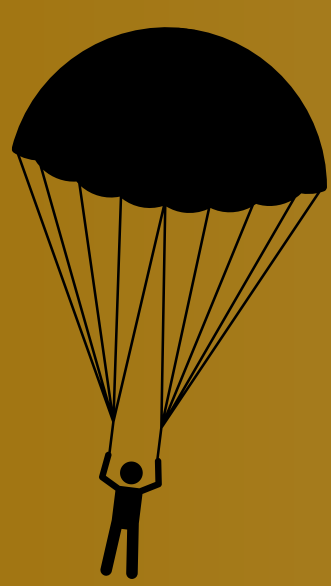
**He hung on to the gun-turret of a tank as the LCT ramp went down and dipped its nose into the sea.** The scene was crowded with soldiers, and German prisoners of war who were all engaged in frantic activity. Roy just stood on the beach aghast at what he was witnessing. The shoreline was a continuous assembly of ships, craft, tanks, vehicles, men equipment and stores. Assault boats, DUKWs, LST and LCTs were continuously disgorging men vehicles and equipment from an armada of larger ships on the horizon.

He was surprised to see German prisoners of war helping to free some vehicles that had got stuck in the sand. Some of the scene was hidden behind filthy yellow/brown smoke screens whilst salvos of shells continuously hissed overhead towards the shore where there were still pockets of German resistance. Most of the houses on the seafront had been destroyed. There were many bodies on the beach. Overhead 'shark-fin' barrage balloons were being deployed.

Roy spent the night in a slit trench with an army Colonel who was able to give him a map and the next morning (7th June) Roy set out to walk along the packed beaches to his rendezvous point on Juno Beach. He eventually made it to Courseulles and became one of the staff of the Naval Officer in Charge.

He was camped in a cottage garden but his base was on top of a concrete water tower which although vulnerable to attack afforded a magnificent view of the beach-heads and the armada of ships beyond. From this unique position, he maintained communication between the shore and the hundreds of ships along the Normandy coast.





# SGT. GERALD "GERRY" SOLOMON RAC 1916 - 2015



**Gerald Solomon enlisted in the Royal Armoured Corps in 1939, aged 23 years, reporting to Tidworth Barracks on Salisbury Plain on 29th December. After six weeks, he was selected for driving and maintenance.**

Then followed months of training; first on cars, then 3-ton lorries and finally Bren gun carriers, tracked vehicles. After further training, he was posted to the 5th Royal Tank Regiment. In October 1940, Gerald was posted abroad to Egypt and took part in the Siege of Tobruk (1941) and later the Battle of El Alamein (1942).

He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. The 5th RTR moved on to Italy in September then back to Britain during January 1944. More training followed in Manchester, Bovington and Thetford on the American Sherman 'Firefly' and British 'Cromwell' tanks.

Finally, on 9th May, 5th RTR left Brandon, Suffolk, for camp R5 – a marshalling camp at Orwell Park, Suffolk, as part of the 7th Armoured Division. The Battalion strength was: 39 Officers and 776 Other Ranks, a total of 815 Troops. These "Desert Rats" were to be part of follow up force 'L' which landed on the British Gold Beach in Normandy in the days after D-Day. (D + 1)

At Orwell Park the tanks were prepared for a beach landing with waterproofing: weld seams with "Bostick" and tape, exhausts raised. This was completed by 20th May. Sgt Solomon was given a Firefly with 17lb gun and five crew, including a co-driver. They received some Day Leave in London.

From the 25th May the Battalion was confined to camp. On 1st June, the entire Battalion left Orwell Park and marshalled on the Ipswich to Felixstowe Road at Trimley Heath. Each tank had a numbered space. Sgt Solomon picks up the story on 2nd June:

"We drove onto the old Felixstowe Road, down Garrison Lane and Langer Road and into the RAF Seaplane base. Going down the seaplane ramps, we loaded onto the LCTs. Pulling out, we moored in the river Orwell alongside other LCTs. When we got close up, we could see a lot of them were dummies."

The flotilla sat at anchor on the Orwell awaiting favourable weather. At 8:15 on 5th June the Flotilla moved out into the North Sea and joined other craft off Harwich. The sea was choppy and there was some seasickness.

"We eventually sailed down the North Sea into the English Channel. Each craft had a cargo of 3 tanks, an AA gun, three field guns, a signal van, a RE van and an ambulance. There were also crews for each Unit."

"We arrived off the Normandy coast in the evening of 6th June 1944, and it was decided we should wait until dawn of 7th. As it was, we landed comparatively easily, very little opposition and completely dry."

Sgt Solomon took part in continuous action over the next two months. On 3rd August, his tank was hit by a Panzerfaust – a German hand-held single shot anti-tank weapon. Solomon was badly injured and invalided home. Some shrapnel stayed in him for the rest of his life. Gerald died in Stutton in 2015.

My thanks to Vic Scott this information

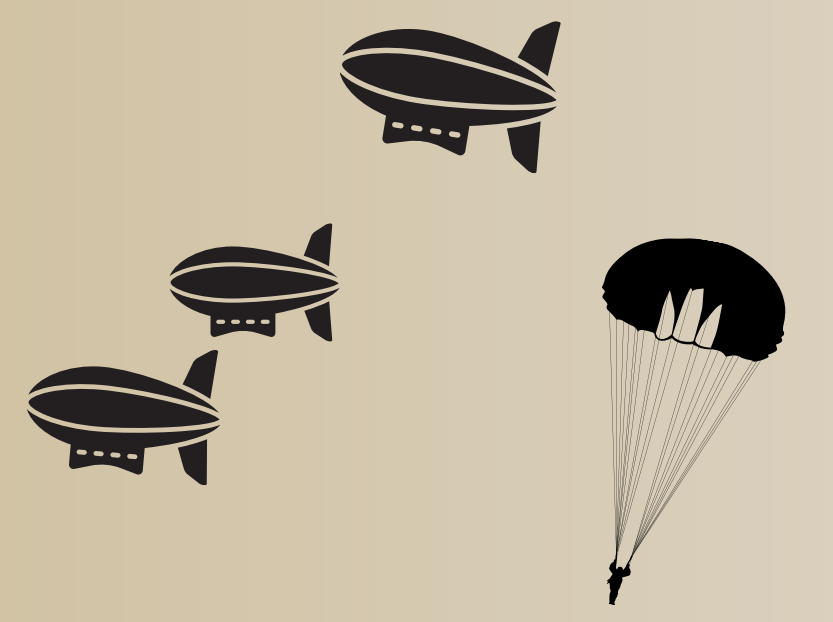
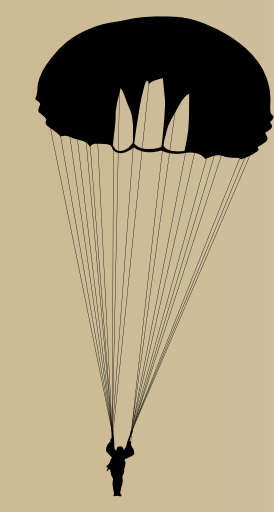


Sherman *Firefly* tank



Gerry Solomon (r) meets an old comrade Harry Findlayson (l) in 2008





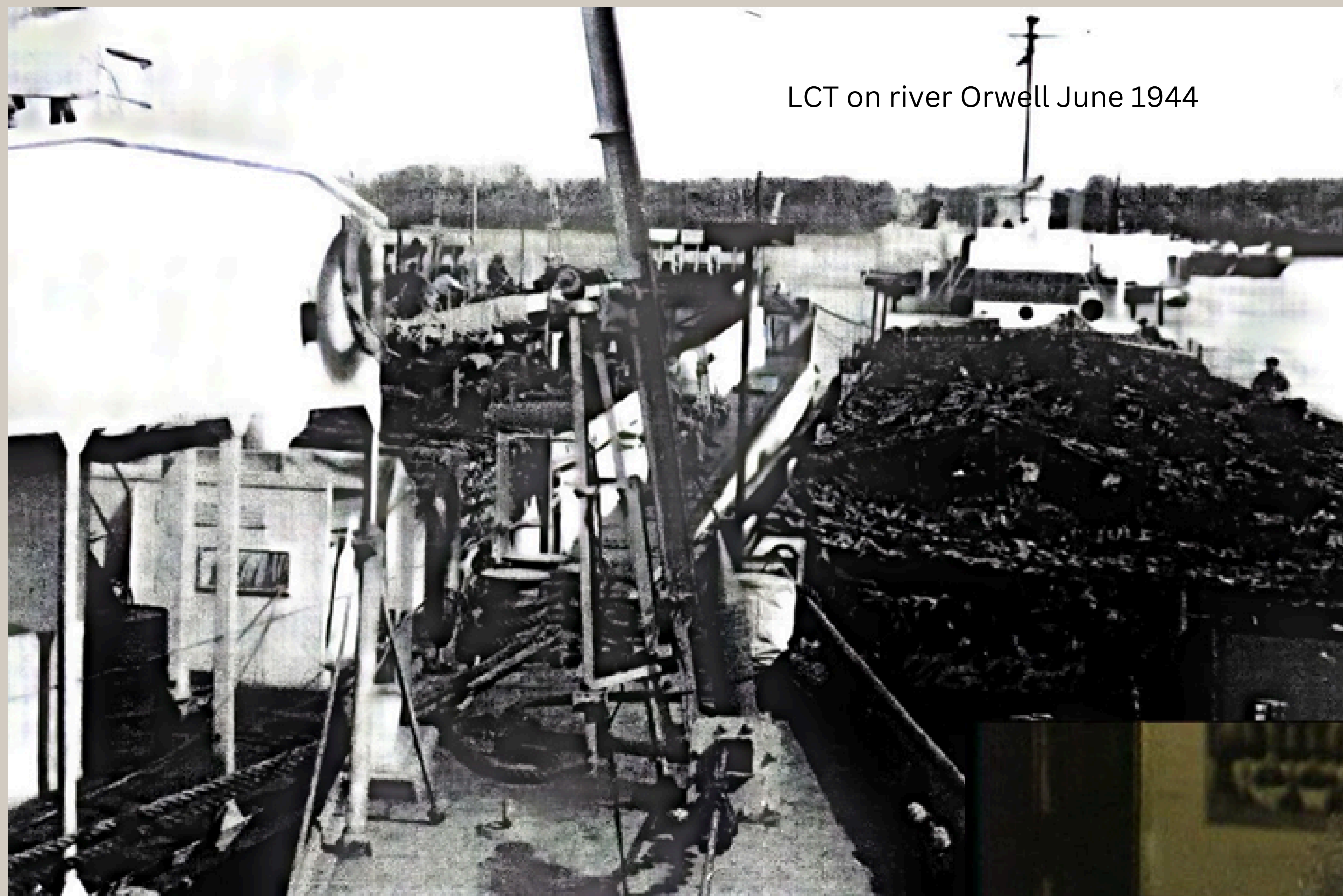
# S/M LES EASTWOOD RN 1918 - 2003

**My job was a landing craft wireman, in charge of the electrics on the LCT I was on. Prior to D-day, we were based at Yarmouth and Lowestoft until eventually we moved down to Woolverstone.**

We were told that the craft had been sealed on the Thursday morning, 1st of June. Nobody was allowed on or off, and that later during the day we would be going up to Felixstowe to load up. We took on some of the 7th Armoured Division, the ex-Desert Rats.

After we had loaded up and we were back in our trots, of course the skipper called us all together and actually told us what the plan was; that we were going to sail for Normandy. Prior to that we had no knowledge of where we were actually going to go to.

We were going to Normandy where we going to make for Gold Beach, King's sector. We were part of force L, a follow-up division or second wave sort of thing.



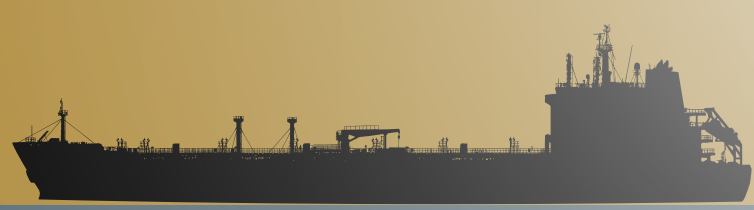
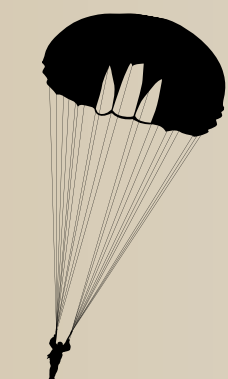
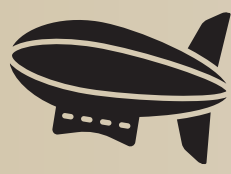
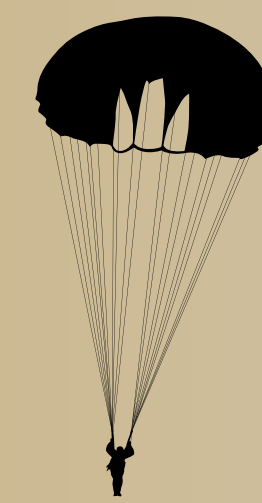
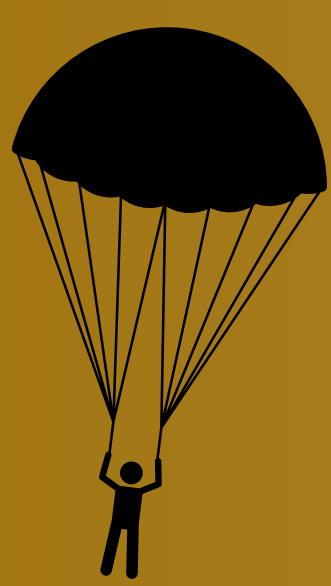
LCT on river Orwell June 1944

**On the journey, the trip across to the other side, we were amazed at the calmness of them (Desert Rats).**

Obviously, they had been through the desert and to them this was just another job of work. They'd also been through Italy and they just thought of it as another job of work.

Les on "Anglia at War" - 1995





# THE DENNIS YEATS WHEATLEY THE WOOLVERSTONE CONNECTION



Joan was the sister of “Bino” Johnstone - full name Robin Talbot Vanden-Bempd -Johnstone whom Wheatley had taken in an attempt to find more rich and aristocratic customers. Bino was a great charmer, very well connected and extraordinarily lazy. His father, the Hon. Louis Vanden-Bempd -Johnstone, was Land Agent for Charles Hugh Berners of Woolverstone Hall. His mother, Gwendoline Mary Elizabeth, was great granddaughter of Captain Hugh Berners RN. There is a brass memorial to her grandfather H.C. Talbot in St Michael’s church. For many years she lived at “Woolverstone House” but not the Woolverstone House we know, which wasn’t built until 1902. It seems likely that the Johnstone family lived at The Homestead from their marriage in 1891.



**Dennis Yeats Wheatley, prolific and successful author, was born in Brixton on 8th January 1897.**

His father owned a wine business, “Wheatley and Son” in South Audley Street, Mayfair. During WW1, he served with the Royal Field Artillery, City of London Brigade.

During his training he developed pneumonia on Salisbury Plain, suffered severe bouts of bronchitis, which were later worsened by the effects of Chlorine gas. After serving in Flanders and France, he was invalided home in May 1918. Between May 1915 and August 1916, he was stationed in Ipswich.

After the war, Wheatley took over the management of his father’s wine business. He married his first wife, Nancy Robinson, in June 1922. Sadly, after the birth of their son in 1923, with few interests in common, they drifted apart with and began to lead separate lives.

In March 1929, a captivating young woman, Joan Pelham Burn, came into the office to order champagne for a ball.

In 1915, Joan married her first husband, Sir William Younger. They had four children before divorce in 1923. She secondly married Capt. Hubert Pelham Burn by who she had a son. Hubert was killed in a car accident in 1927.

Joan and Dennis’ relationship developed slowly while he was still married. Joan persuaded Dennis to leave Nancy in the February 1930 and they were divorced in July. The couple married in St Ethelburga’s, Bishopsgate on 8th August 1930. Dennis and Joan often spent weekends at Woolverstone with Gwendoline, the Hon. Louis Johnstone having died in 1922.

Joan persuaded Dennis to take up writing after the failure and sale of the wine business in 1931, following the Depression years. He excelled. By 1936 Dennis was giving talks at local literary festival in Felixstowe where his work was described as futuristic. Writing rescued them from a difficult financial situation. Then WW2 intervened.

In May 1940, Sir Lawrence Darvall KCB MC gave Dennis a mission to find all the different defence systems Great Britain should have if an invasion was to come from Hitler. The results were impressive and he thought of many things that had not occurred to the top brass.

A year later, Dennis found himself part of a team called the “London Controlling Section”, led by a brilliant military strategist, Colonel John Bevan. He was promoted to the rank of Wing Commander, non-active. The team worked directly under Winston Churchill who is reputed to have said:

**“Our intentions must be surrounded by a bodyguard of lies.”**

Dennis Wheatley now worked on the deception plans for the invasion of Europe, Operation Overlord. He was part of the team that planned Operation Mincemeat, where a body with false papers was placed in the sea off the Spanish coast.

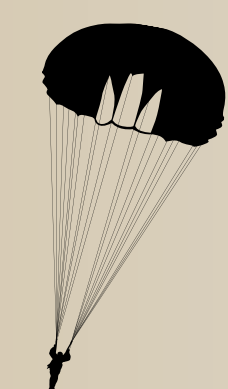
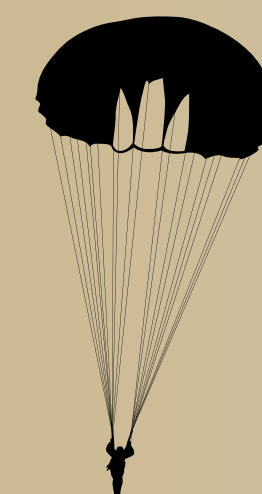
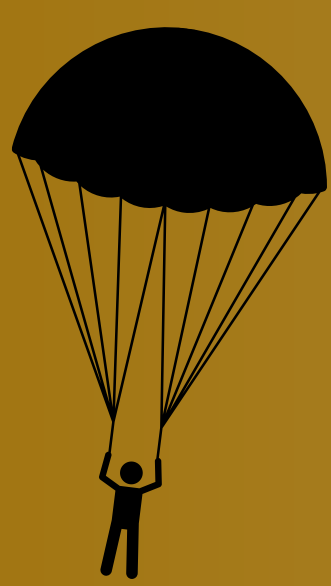
In the War Cabinet Rooms there is a portrait of Dennis with the inscription underneath reading: “His work included a plan, code named “Bodyguard” to deceive the Germans about the place and date of the Allied D-Day invasion of Europe.”

Planning started in 1943. The purpose was to lead the Germans to believe the invasion of Europe would target, in particular, the Pay de Calais in France. The main features were the creation of a fake army in Kent led by Gen George Patton, 1st US Army Group (FUSAG); hundreds of fake landing craft on the East Coast showing a powerful army mustering, use of double agents, radio traffic providing misinformation, a fake Montgomery appearing in Gibraltar.

The Germans believed the Pay de Calais was the most likely place for invasion and so was heavily fortified. The deception had to be maintained so the Normandy landings were considered a feint. Success for even a few days would allow reinforcements. In fact, the deceit lasted for three weeks. The fake landing craft, Bigbobs, moored along the rivers Orwell and Deben, were part of the deception plans that persuaded the Germans that the main invasion was still to come.

**Dennis Wheatley’s imagination helped maintain the deception.**





# MAJOR GEORGE MOONIE

## 1914 - 2002



Here's a character with a little-known connection to Woolverstone: George Moonie. George Moonie was born in Dundee in 1914 and joined DC Thomson as an office boy in 1930.

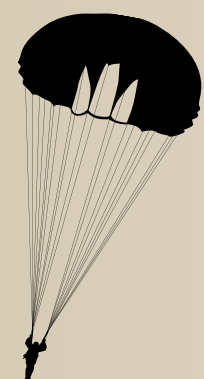
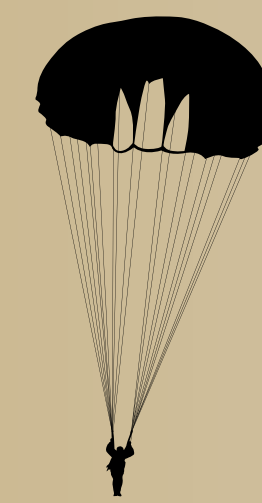
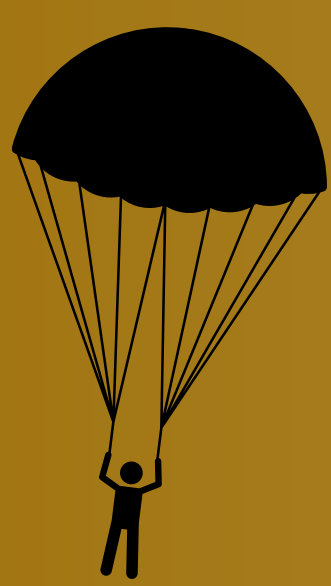
He transferred to editorial, where he began his career on the story paper *The Rover*, later becoming chief sub-editor on *The Wizard* and, in 1937, *The Hotspur*. **The following year he was appointed the first editor of *The Beano*.**

He joined the Royal Marines in 1941 as signals officer in the 5th Battalion, later promoted to Captain. He was in command of 537 Landing Craft (Assault) Flotilla during the Normandy Landings of 1944, and was sent to the Pacific to train the Americans in landing techniques. At the end of the war, he became training officer of HMS Woolverstone at Ipswich, and finished his military career as a Major.

On demobilisation in 1946, he resumed editing *The Beano*, also writing scripts. He is said to have got the idea for "The Bash Street Kids" from the playground of the High School of Dundee, which he could see from *The Beano* offices, and Bash Street's Teacher is a caricature of him. He was succeeded as editor of *The Beano* by Harold Cramond in 1959, and went on to launch *Judy* in 1960 and *Diana* in 1963. In the late 1960s he moved into management, becoming managing editor of children's publications in 1974. He retired in October 1983, but would continue to submit story ideas, particularly for "The Bash Street Kids".

He died in March 2002, aged 87, after a long illness, survived by his wife Muriel, whom he had married in 1943. Their son Peter predeceased him in 1996.





# HAROLD SOUTHGATE B.1932 -



Supply lorries waiting to embark

Harold was born in one of four cottages, Tower Cottages”, beside Freston Tower, on 28th May 1932. When he was nine years old, his family moved to Woolverstone to live with his uncle Alex. Harold has lived in the same house ever since, for over eighty years. Even though he moved to Woolverstone, he continued to attend Freston village school and later Holbrook school. On leaving school he went to work at the old shipyard “Fox’s” at Bourne Bridge. With a short break for National Service at 18, Harold continued to work in ship building, at Fox’s, later at Woolverstone shipyard for several years, and then as a self-employed carpenter until his retirement. Here are some of his boyhood memories of events leading up to D-Day:

**"My earliest memory of the war would be 1940. When at the start of the coastal defences a gun was stationed behind Monkey Lodge. And by walking along the shore, we children wandered into the camp unchecked. Of course, the first thing was this big gun. They also had a machine gun there and one day, they opened fire on a familiar old plane that flew around here every day, mistaking it for a German bomber. I remember seeing the red tracer bullets going up and a green flare from the plane to show that they were friendly. It was a research plane testing radio equipment from Martlesham airfield. We thought it was very exciting. One day, in the distance, we could see German planes bombing Martlesham airfield."**

“As part of the D-Day deception a number of what appeared to be landing craft appeared near Cat House. They look very realistic but close up, by going along the shore, it was possible to see they were made of canvas. “

“For some days before D-Day, the roads were closed to civilian traffic so we had to walk along to Holbrook school and were surprised to see hundreds of numbered pegs in the banks, a vehicle length apart. The pegs were about a foot high and pinned to them were a white enamel sign with black numbers on. And one day, the roads were full of vehicles, chock full, and parked nose to tail. They were mostly supply lorries with some Bren carriers. Their crews were with them in battledress, some involved in waterproofing. Next morning they were gone; it was D-Day.”

### Note:

**“The whole area along the Orwell from Ipswich (Bourne Bridge) to Shotley was sealed off, and no unauthorised person was allowed within half a mile of the river. Special passes were required by residents.”**

“Guard posts were set up at various places to prevent access by roads or lane...The road along the “Strand” From Bourne Bridge to Woolverstone was filled with tanks, lorries and other vehicles. No civilian traffic was permitted to use these roads, and cars and buses to and from Ipswich were diverted through Tattingstone, Stutton, Holbrook and Harkstead entering Chelmondiston by Lings Lane.” Chelmondiston, Suffolk – War Diary. H.A.R. Edgell. O. St. J., A.K.C.



Bren Carrier, Mk 1

“The scariest thing was the V1 flying bomb. The teacher at Holbrook school had just told us it had been announced that the Germans were using these and tried to describe the noise they made and what to do if we heard it. We were just getting into the bus to go home that afternoon when we heard this noise, very loud. The teacher said, “Down!”

And just then I saw and it fly past above the trees and went down towards Woolverstone where it exploded in a field near White House farm.”

