



OLD CONWAYS & D-DAY v12

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From 1859 to 1974 the British training school ship HMS *Conway* trained young boys for a life of service at sea as officers in the British Royal Navy (RN) and Merchant Navy (MN), and in other navies around the world including India.

This article describes Old *Conways*' (OCs) participation in Operation Overlord, commonly called D-Day, 6th June 1944. At least 53 OCs participated in the landings, 39 in RN vessels, four in MN vessels, two as RN Beachmasters ashore, two in the army and three in the RMs. At least two were killed in action and one invalided home as a casualty.

Names in bold are the names of OCs (their years as *Conway* cadets are shown in brackets).

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80th Anniversary 6th June 2024

Our last known survivor of the landings is Lt Cdr Geoffrey Haskins RNZN (40-42), a much loved and highly respected OC.

He served in *Emerald* throughout the landings with Burton and Lofts. A 2024 BBC interview of Geoffrey is [here](#)



1 OPERATION OVERLORD

1.1 BACKGROUND

Once Britain had repulsed Nazi Germany's planned invasion of Great Britain in 1939 it became almost inevitable that to defeat them Britain would have to invade mainland Europe. Germany's invasion in July 1941 put Russia under very considerable strain and with Germany making fast advances and taking huge numbers of prisoners it seemed highly likely that Russia would fall. In 1940 we therefore came under immense and sustained pressure from Russia to create a second front immediately. While we launched the Arctic convoys to supply them, we simply were not ready for a land invasion; we did not have the trained troops, equipment, transport or experience of joint service operations and landings. Critically we did not have a strategy for winning the war; German blitzkriegs seemed unstoppable, we had been routed at Dunkirk, were being pushed back by Rommel in North Africa and seemed very likely to lose Egypt. It took the genius of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Alan Francis Brooke, 1st Viscount Brooke, KG, GCB, OM, GCVO, DSO & Bar, to identify that strategy despite Churchill's fierce opposition to it. It centred on the concept of "interior lines" which Brooke saw were actually in our favour. Our domination of the seas meant we could mass troops and material by sea to any point in the world whereas the Axis forces had to spread their defences thinly around the whole European coastline. Furthermore, European rail and road networks, centred on capital cities, actually hampered speedy re-enforcement of any position. Brooke realised we had to build effective joint service amphibious operational capabilities involving all branches of the armed forces and forces from other countries, and we had to develop special forces capabilities for early infiltration and lightning raids. Above all else we had to develop experience of opposed amphibious landings starting with simple in-and-out raids like Dieppe and building to multi-national invasions like Anzio. We also had to establish fortress bases around Europe from which we could launch invasions, hence the need to drive the Axis out of North Africa and the Middle East and to capture Sicily. All this would take time – years – so the Russians were not happy and maintained un-relenting pressure on us to invade as soon as possible. When the USA entered the war in December 1941 Brooke had a terrible time convincing them that his strategy was the right one. It seemed that he alone realised that a botched invasion would cost us the war. Fortunately, he prevailed but the Allies were not ready for the main invasion of Europe from the UK until 1944. It is arguable that even then we were not truly ready but the realpolitik of Russian advances forced it upon us to save some of the mainland from Russian occupation.

1.2 PLANNING

Various invasion plans were created from 1940 including Operation Roundup and Operation Sledgehammer both scheduled for 1942-43 but cancelled because the chances of success were too slim. The Allied Trident Conference in Washington in May 1943 finally settled the general timing of a cross-channel invasion. Churchill still preferred his ("soft-underbelly") Mediterranean invasion focus but was overruled by the Americans.

British Lt General Frederick Morgan was appointed to undertake invasion planning. This was constrained by the number of available landing-craft (Churchill had most of them for his landings in the Mediterranean), a fear of directly assaulting a heavily defended French seaport in the first landing and the need for adequate artillery, close air support and specialised ships able to venture extremely close to shore. Four landing sites were evaluated, the Brittany Peninsula, the Cotentin Peninsula, the Pas de Calais and Normandy. The peninsulas were rejected as their isthmuses could too easily be defended by the Germans. The Pas de Calais was rejected because, as the closest point in continental Europe to Britain, it was very heavily fortified and had a hinterland divided by numerous

rivers and canals. Landing in Normandy was therefore favoured. It permitted simultaneous threats against the port of Cherbourg and coastal in Brittany, and an overland attack towards Paris. The most serious drawback of the Normandy coast, the lack of immediate port facilities would be overcome through the development of artificial (Mulberry) harbours. The initial invasion plan for 1st May 1944 was accepted at the Quebec Conference in August 1943. Commodore John Charles Keith **Dowding** (08-10) CBE DSO ADC RD RNR was the Principal Sea Transport Officer for the Overlord planning team.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower (Ike) was appointed overall commander and General Bernard Montgomery (Monty) was named commander of all land forces.¹ Ike and Monty first saw the plan on 31st December 1943 and to ensure overwhelming force, allow operations on a wider front and to speed up the capture of the port at Cherbourg immediately insisted on expanding the number of troops to five divisions, with airborne descents by three additional divisions. Eventually the Allies committed 39 divisions to the Battle of Normandy; 22 American, 12 British, three Canadian, one Polish, and one French, totalling over a million troops all under Monty's overall command. The need for extra landing craft for this expanded force meant delaying the invasion until June 1944 at the earliest.

The plan, codenamed operation Overlord, was now set. It would establish a lodgement from which an attack on Germany could be launched through France and the low countries. Montgomery envisaged a ninety-day battle, lasting until all Allied forces reached the River Seine. It had numerous components but two were key:

1. Operation Neptune was the key element with amphibious and airborne landings on the Normandy beaches and hinterland to secure the initial beachhead. The Neptune landings would be the largest seaborne invasion in history, comprising 6,939 vessels manned by 195,700 naval personnel. The fleet included 1,213 warships (including five battleships, 20 cruisers, 65 destroyers, and two monitors, 289 fishing boats acting as escort vessels and 277 minesweepers), 4,126 landing craft of various types, 736 ancillary craft, 864 merchant vessels. 11,000 aircraft carried airborne troops, provided close air support and bombing capability. 156,000 troops would land on D-Day, the first or Longest Day. A further 1.8 million troops and their materiel would land once the beachhead was established.
2. Operation Pointblank covered the bombing of German aircraft-production, fuel supplies, and airfields and communications facilities to inhibit Germany's response.

Other operations like Perch, Epsom, Cobra and Goodwood covered the various armies' advances inland from the beachhead. Finally, operations like Bodyguard and Fortitude launched huge deception plans to mislead the Germans about intended landing sites and dates.

¹ *Controversially this placed American generals under British command. It also sowed the seeds of huge dissent between them as Monty favoured an overwhelming, focussed and decisive armoured thrust Northwards and quickly into Germany to capture the Ruhr. The Americans preferred a broad based measured advance by all troops along the whole front from France to Switzerland. Despite Monty's approach being accepted by Ike, the US generals, particularly Patton, simply ignored orders. They swarmed off into Southern France and Bavaria drawing important support from Monty's push leading ultimately to the failure of Market Garden.*

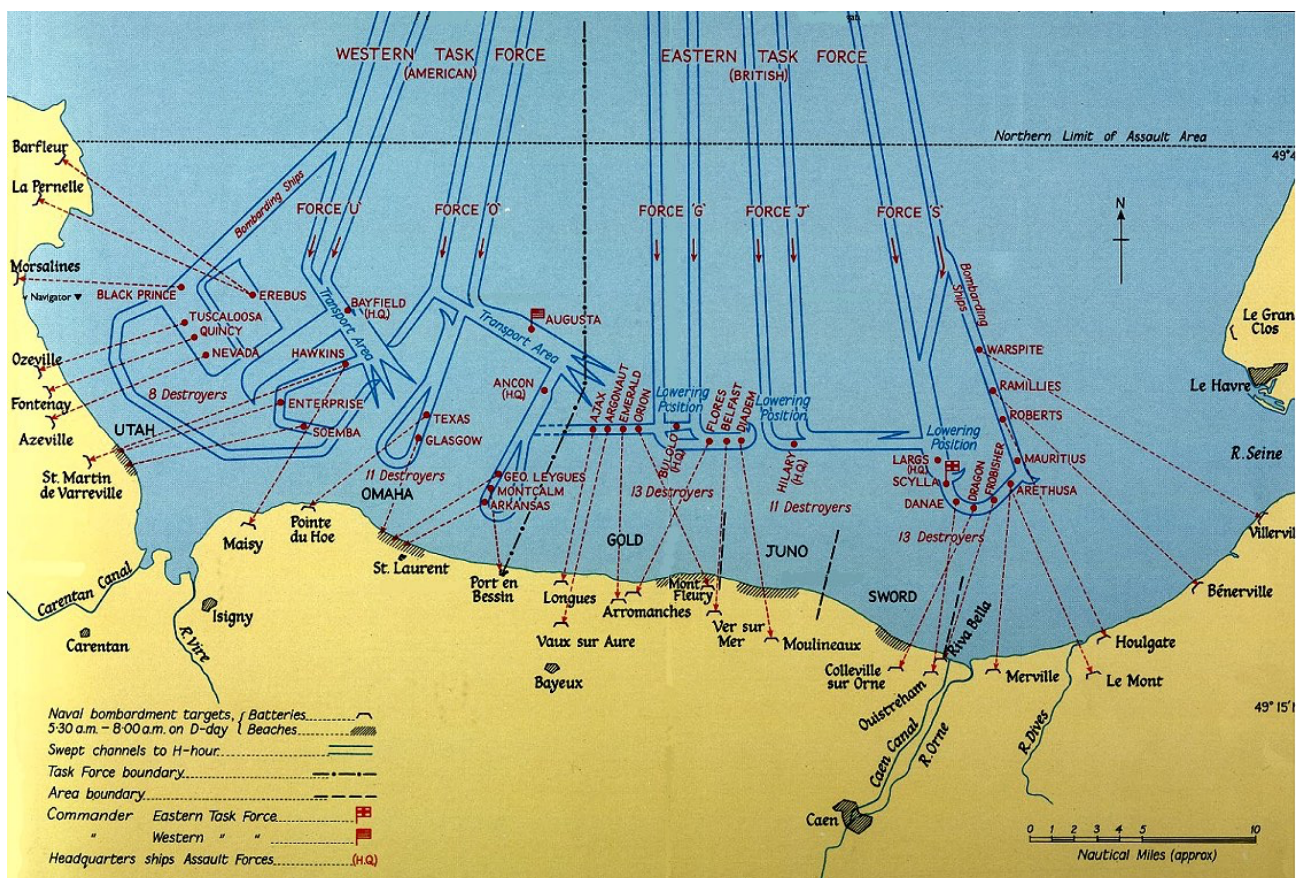
1.3 OPERATION NEPTUNE

The invasion fleet was led by Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay. He had been responsible for the naval planning of the invasion of North Africa in 1942, and one of the two fleets carrying troops for the invasion of Sicily the following year. His naval operations for the invasion were described by historian Correlli Barnett as a "*never surpassed masterpiece of planning*". He split his fleet into:

- The Western Naval Task Force, under Admiral Alan G Kirk, supporting the American sectors. It included the battleships *Arkansas*, *Nevada* and *Texas*, eight cruisers, 28 destroyers, and one monitor. It was split into Forces O to attack Utah and U to attack Omaha.
- The Eastern Naval Task Force, under Admiral Sir Philip Vian, for the British and Canadian sectors. It included the battleships *Rodney*, *Ramillies* and *Warspite*, the monitor *Roberts*, 12 cruisers, and 37 destroyers. It was split into Force G to attack Gold, Force J to attack Juno and Force S targeting Sword.

The invasion coast was divided into 17 sectors, with codenames using a spelling alphabet from Able in the west to Roger, Sword and Utah on the Cotentin Peninsula. The main landing beaches for the British/Commonwealth/European forces were Gold, Juno and Sword, with Omaha and Utah for the Americans. Beaches were further broken down onto landing zones further split by the colours Green, Red, and White.

The map below shows the beaches, how the naval Forces would approach, bombard, land troops and retire from the beaches.



Airborne troops would be the first ashore, landing some way inland from the beaches and hours ahead of the main assault. Their job was to slow or eliminate the enemy's ability to

organise and launch counter-attacks during the critical early landings. They were to seize key objectives like bridges, road crossings, and terrain features, particularly on the eastern and western flanks of the landing areas. They were also intended to ease the egress of the amphibious forces off the beaches, and in some cases to neutralise German coastal defence batteries and more quickly expand the area of the beachhead.

The landings would be protected by continuous daytime low-level air cover provided on a rolling basis with wave after wave of sorties; 15 minutes for the outward journey from bases in the south of England, 15 minutes patrolling over the beaches, 15 minutes for the return journey and 15 minutes for re-fuelling and rearmament. To keep one squadron of Spitfires over the beaches involved at least four squadrons totalling 48 planes. Similar arrangements were in place for the American high-level cover.

The goal of the main landing force was to establish a secure lodgement north of a line from Avranches to Falaise within three weeks. The Americans were to move south west and west to cut off the Cotentin Peninsula and capture the vital deep-water port at Cherbourg to further increase landing capacity and relieve the inevitable stress on the temporary Mulberry harbours. The British and Canadians were to capture Caen and move south and south east to form a front line from Caumont-l'Éventé to the south-east of Caen in order to protect the American flank, while establishing airfields near Caen. Possession of Caen and its surroundings would give the Anglo-Canadian forces a suitable staging area for a push further south to capture the town of Falaise. The first day's target was to capture Carentan, St Lo, Bayeux, and Caen and link up all the landing beaches but this 6-10 mile front was not achieved until 12th June and Caen was not fully in allied hands until 21st July.

On D-Day+1 the Mulberry Harbours would be brought in so that a continuous flow of men and materiel could be established over the beaches to flood into the hinterland to secure the lodgement and hasten the fall of France. More than two million Allied troops were in France by the end of August and spreading out into France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

1.4 PREPARATION

The massive build up could now begin.

1943 Jul Training landing exercises began at Devon, Inveraray, Northern Ireland and London. One at Slapton Sands in Devon went terribly wrong when 400 troops were killed by friendly fire. In another incident 785 died when German e-boats got in amongst loaded landing craft.

Lt Col., William Hayward **Brinkley**, (29-31), took command of 1st Battalion (Bn) Royal Norfolk Regiment (Norfolks) in Scotland to train them for the D-Day landings. He was tasked with the most ambitious and critically important mission of the landings; to capture the key city of Caen and the high ground around it.

1944 Apr The Allied Expeditionary Air Force undertook over 3,200 photo-reconnaissance sorties from April 1944 until the start of the invasion. Photos of the coastline were taken at extremely low altitude to show the invaders the terrain, obstacles on the beach, and defensive structures such as bunkers and gun emplacements. An appeal for holiday pictures and postcards of Europe announced on the BBC produced over ten million items.

1944 May 6th Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of the Halcyon Class minesweeper *Jason* (J99) undertook night sweeps in Exercise Fabius as part of the 1st Minesweeping Flotilla.

- May 8th Lt William Eric **Halbert** (22-24) RN was detached from *Elgin* to help recover bodies of troops drowned after the sinking of US landing ships practicing landings in Lyme bay as part of Operation Tiger.
- May 19th Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99) laid a smoke screen off Shoreham on Sea at 0530hrs when an E-boat was spotted.

By the end of May over 1.5 million American troops had been transported across the Atlantic and housed in temporary camps in the south-west of England.

Specialist equipment was developed including Mulberry floating harbours, Phoenix floating breakwaters, the pipeline under the ocean nicknamed PLUTO, the Churchill Crocodile (a flame-throwing tank), the Sherman Crab (a tank with mine clearing flail), a submersible tank which proved a disaster and fighter direction tenders.

The invasion fleet was assembled in ports all around the UK:



Above: Landing Craft Assembled in Berth 43 Ocean Dock, Southampton

- In January 1944, Richard Thomas **Hale** (35-38) RNZR. took command of a newly commissioned small, flat bottomed LCI at Norfolk Virginia and delivered her to Falmouth in preparation for D-Day.
- In the spring of 1944 in *Conway*, "the Chief Officer, Digby Jones, mustered senior cadets in the senior classroom in great secrecy to brief us that we were short listed for boat crew duties in the assembly areas prior to D-Day. We anxiously awaited further orders but we were never called."

- Portsmouth one of the largest assembly points and here Andrew **D'Cruz** (1887-88) was a volunteer skipper of an Admiralty motor fishing boat "...engaged in supplying the fleet. Until the invasion fleet sailed this meant working from 6am until 11 or 12 at night. It was interesting work".
- In February Lt Cdr Robert Arthur **Crozier** (22-24) RD RNR was deployed to command Fighter Direction Tender (FDT) 13 one of three being fitted out at John Brown's Shipyard. They were, in effect, floating command and control centres which bristled with antenna and aerals for radar, communications and intelligence gathering purposes. They were the eyes and ears of the invasion forces off the beaches. He started sea trials on the Clyde on 27th Feb and then the Humber.
- In May Lt Cdr Vincent Reginald **Clarke** (23-25) RNVR serving in the minesweeper *Watchman* was nominated to Escort Group 138. In June she escorted convoy ECB3 to Milford Haven. On 6th June he escorted 17 vessels to the Solent.
- On 25th May Captain Eric **Hewitt** (19-21) RD RNR in command of the Black Swan Class sloop *Whimbrel* (U29), his favourite ship, was re-assigned from arctic convoy duties to Force G as part of Capt Walker's famous Liverpool-based anti-submarine flotilla. He immediately began convoy escort duties for the assembling fleet.
- On 3rd June, Mid Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42), as Midshipman of the Watch of *Emerald* (D66) on the Clyde, was ordered over to the *Belfast* in the ship's motor cutter to collect a Top Secret sealed envelope. *"Belfast was our Flagship, the 10th Cruiser Squadron, and the envelope contained our final orders for the invasion. Unknown to us, an historic event was about to unfold, and we were to have a seat in the stalls. The Captain (F J Wylie), and a few of the key officers were presumably privy to the plans. We had some idea that an invasion was imminent, but no one could guess where it would be. Some even predicted confidentially that it would be the South of France. We set sail from the Clyde and turned to port, heading for the English channel."* Midshipman Skynner (OP 41-43) reports that *"the passage out of the Clyde was very rough"*.
- Lt Cdr Alwyne William R **Adams** (22-24) RN DSC, captain of the minesweeper *Orestes* (J277) was refuelling his ship ready for the invasion.



Lt Cr R A Crozier RD RNR 1944

With D-Day fast approaching troops began moving through 20 departure points to their sea transports. Some in more northern ports set off up to a week in advance. The operation was becoming unstoppable but stop it did. Weather forecasts forced a 24-hour delay but when forecasters identified a possible calm weather period Ike set D-Day for Tuesday 6th June 1944.



2 THE LONGEST DAY

2.1 THE POINT OF NO RETURN

"You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you."

General Dwight D. Eisenhower , Supreme Commander, Allied Forces

By the night of 5th June warships and transports from ports all around the UK were converging on Area Z, known as "Piccadilly Circus", south-east of the Isle of Wight to assemble into convoys to cross the Channel:

- Lt Cdr Robert Arthur **Crozier** (22-24) RD RNR in FDT 13 deployed from Cowes.
- Lt William Eric **Halbert** (22-24) RN in his minesweeper started sweeping Channel 4 ahead of Assault Force O.
- Captain Eric **Hewitt** (19-21) RD RNR in command of *Whimbrel* escorted convoy EPB2 from the Bristol Channel to the beaches.
- *Rodney*, with Midshipman Geoff **Bailey** (40-42), Midshipman H G S **Derrer** (41-42), RNR, Lt Cdr J S **Horren** (28-29) RNVR, Midshipman Peter **Rees** (40-42) RNR, David **Richards** (40-42) and James **Woolven** (39-41) onboard *"went into the swept channel the night before as far as I recall - when it was called off that day they could not turn around, so sat that night as sitting ducks if they were seen"*.
- Geoffrey **Robinson** (37-38) 3rd Officer in the infantry landing ship *SS Empire Javelin*, sailed from Portland destined for Omaha (Dog Green) carrying the US 29th Division's 1st Bn 116th Infantry Regt.
- Midshipmen Gerald Stanley **Burton** (39-42) Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) and Rodney David **Lofts** (41-43) in *Emerald* were in the Channel, rolling about in a Westerly gale in company with other cruisers of the bombardment squadrons. *"On the evening of the 5th June we formed up in line ahead to steam down the swept channel to our allotted anchorage, all hands at Action Stations with "tin hats" on our heads and anti-flash gear covering exposed flesh."*
- Fraser Sandys **Dunbar** (41-43) in the battleship *Nelson* (28) departed Devonport for the beaches. One of her crew reported *"There were so many ships you could hardly move on the water. It was a fantastic sight but the sea was very rough for June."*
- Cadet Roy **Hunnissett** (41-43) in Royal Mail Line's Liberty Ship *Samphill* departed the Thames at 0630hrs in convoy ETM1 carrying the Canadian Cameron Highlanders. Aged 17, he was the senior cadet on board and served as a signalman.

Just before midnight aircraft took off from England to drop three airborne divisions behind enemy lines several hours before the beach landings on the eastern flank to secure the Orne River bridges near Caen, and north of Carentan on the western flank.

2.2 LANDINGS TUESDAY 6TH JUNE

0000hrs 1,200 aircraft launched the airborne bombardment attacking targets along the coast and further inland. The attacks were largely ineffective, especially at Omaha, because low cloud cover made the assigned targets difficult to see.

Concerned about inflicting casualties on their own troops, many US bombers delayed their attacks too long and failed to hit the beach defences.

287 Royal Navy (RN) minesweepers, largely of the Bangor Class, began clearing safe lanes for the transport convoys, finishing just after dawn without encountering the enemy.

- 0015hrs The first few pathfinder paratroopers landed to mark out the airborne drop zones. They were the first men ashore.
- 0016hrs British paratroopers landed and captured the vital Pegasus and Horsa Bridge.
- 0120hrs The German commander, General Von Rundstedt, was advised that troops were landing but took little action believing this was not the main invasion force.
- 0130hrs Airborne troops were on the ground some distance inland from Utah beach.
- 0200hrs The Germans, whose radar had been knocked out earlier in the week at last detected the invasion fleet. A local Panzer commander started organising defences but given the German's and the Fuhrer's absolute conviction that the invasion would be at the Pas de Calais he was not ordered to move until 0900hrs.
- 0230hrs The bulk of the airborne troops were on the ground but the first wave of reinforcements continued to arrive by glider until around 0400hrs.
- 0325hrs Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99) commenced sweeping channel 9, one of the approach channels for Canadian troops. She came under fire from coastal batteries but her orders were clear, "*sweeping was to be continued ... regardless of enemy interference and casualties.*"

- 0430hrs Lt Cdr Robert Arthur **Crozier** (22-24) RD RNR in command of FDT 13 was moored 40 miles off the coast in the middle of the approach channel ready to co-ordinate all air support.

The important crossroads at Sainte-Mère-Église were captured and it became the first town liberated in the invasion.

Geoffrey **Robinson** (37-38) in SS *Empire Javelin*, still some way offshore launched her landing craft and began loading them. Her men would be amongst the first landing over the beaches and so had the nickname The Suicide Wave.

- 0510hrs As the fleet approached the beaches four German E-Boats arrived and launched 15



Above: Crick's Jason

Below: Crozier's FDT 13



torpedoes into the Eastern Task Force off Sword sinking the Norwegian destroyer HNoMS *Svenner* but missing the battleships *Warspite* and *Ramillies* carrying **Dennis** (41-42) & **Kindersley** (41-42). The Germans then fled east into a smoke screen that had been laid by the RAF to shield the fleet from the long-range battery at Le Havre. Allied losses to mines included USS *Corry* off Utah and USS *PC-1261*. Many landing craft were also lost.

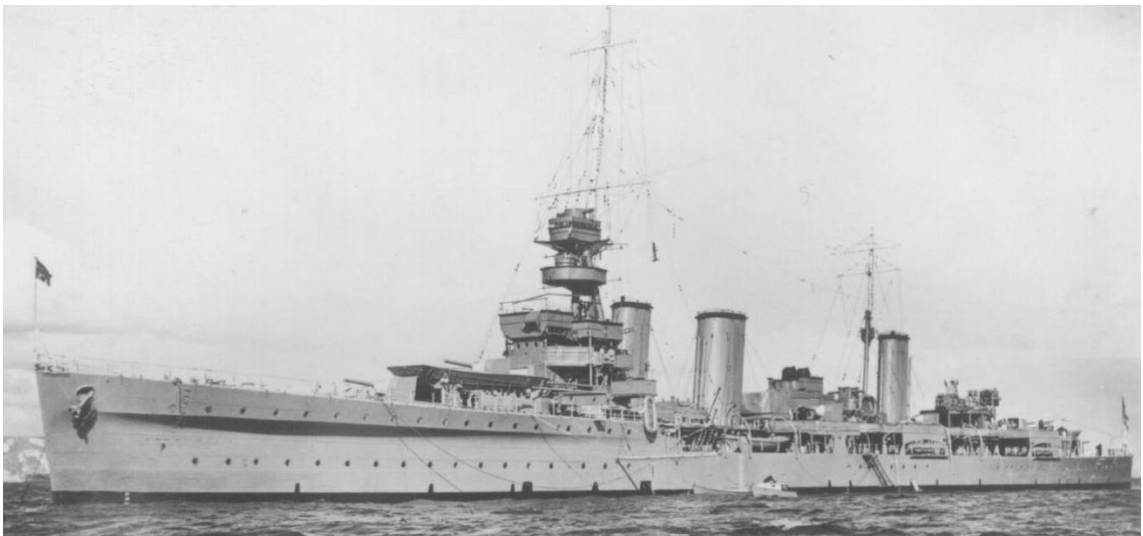
Completing his sweep of Channel 4 without incident, Lt William Eric **Halbert** (22-24) RN in his minesweeper started sweeping an area between Channels 4 and 5 to create a new Channel 34.

0530hrs Midshipmen Gerald Stanley **Burton**, (39-42) Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) and Rodney David **Lofts** (41-43)) in the cruiser *Emerald* arrived with Force K off Gold at Arromanches-les-Bains, together with a vast armada of craft of every description in the first wave of the assault. *"Having anchored in our allotted position (between Argonaut and Orion), we opened fire at selected targets; in our case a strong point and gun emplacement South of Arromanches. Radio Telephony procedures were strictly followed and guns roared. Two Spitfires, one guarding the other's tail as they spotted the fall of shot, circled over the selected targets. Five seconds before the predicted fall of our shells, I passed the code word, "Splash" to the pilot. This gave him time to roll the plane over on its side so that he could see directly below (Spitfires had long noses that made them not entirely suitable for this work). On sighting the fall of shot in relation to the target he would send back a coded message, the Gunnery Officer would pass corrections to the Director, and another salvo would be on its way. In all her long life in the Navy, this, and on the days which followed, was the first and only occasion that Emerald fired her main armament in anger."*



Below: Burton's, Haskins's & Loft's Emerald

Above: Emerald Firing



0545hrs Approximately 138 warships began the naval bombardment of areas behind the beaches while it was still dark. Mid Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) observed *"The Second Front had begun. Shells from the assembled grandest armada of the 20th century whistled overhead."*

Peter George **Dennis** (41-42) and David Peter **Kindersley** (41-42) serving in the Revenge Class battleship *Ramillies* (07) were off Sword bombarding the battery of Bénerville. She knocked out four of the battery's six guns in the first 80 minutes and kept the attention of the rest, allowing landing craft to proceed unmolested. By evening she had accounted for the other two guns. During the day she repelled an attack by two German destroyers which fired five torpedoes at her, all missing. She also drove off a pack of E boats with her secondary guns.



Dennis's & Kindersley's Ramillies

Bailey (40-42), **Derrer** (41-42), **Horren**, (28-29), **Rees** (40-42), **Richards** (40-42) and **Woolven** (39-41) were in *Rodney* (29), part of S Force off Sword bombarding the battery of Bénerville as well as several German positions in the region of Caen.



Rodney Bombarding The Coast

Capt James Frank William **Mudford** (12-14) RN was in command of the heavy cruiser *Frobisher* (D81) in which Richard **Burrows** (41-43) and John Edward **Haigh** (41-43) also served. She part of support Force D off Sword, bombarding German positions in the Riva-Bella area where she managed to fire five rounds per minute with her hand-loaded 7.5-inch guns, and scored a direct hit on the Grand Bunker at Ouistreham.

05.50hrs As it became light enough to see naval gunners began to switch from inland targets to pre-assigned targets on the beaches.

0600hrs Airborne troops destroyed Melville battery overlooking Sword.

0620hrs The Longues-sur-Mer battery overlooking Gold was largely disabled by direct hits from the cruisers *Ajax* and *Argonaut*.

Lt Donald **Swift** (31-33) positioned his ship *Bellona* off Omaha to provide anti-aircraft cover for the American battleships *Arkansas* and *Texas*.



0630hrs US amphibious troops began landing on Utah and Omaha but strong winds blew the landing craft east of their intended positions. Many of the landing craft ran aground on sandbars and the men had to wade 50-100m in water up to their necks while under fire from gun emplacements overlooking the beaches. The shore was mined and covered with obstacles such as wooden stakes, metal tripods, and barbed wire, making the work of the beach-clearing teams difficult and dangerous. Omaha was the most heavily defended of all beaches so casualties were heaviest at Omaha, the first troops to land were decimated. It is known now as "Bloody Omaha". The sea was rough and many troops were violently seasick, in LCT 2226 men were in all sorts of distress, to quote crew member George Cooper "*the craft was awash with vomit*". The strength of the sea also took its toll of craft as they approached the beaches. The Landing Craft, Tank Armoured (LCTs) were very vulnerable. Prior to D-Day some 48 had a custom built ramp erected on the tank deck. Its height was such that when the LCT approached the beach, the tanks mounted on the ramp, were able to fire over the bows, thus, hopefully, forcing defenders on the beaches to keep their heads down. One of the problems with such craft was that they were prone to turning over in heavy seas. The weight of the tanks, mounted on the assault ramps made the vessels top heavy so they were also difficult to handle.

0700hrs As the British and Commonwealth forces prepared to land, perhaps reflecting on what lay ahead, the first men were already on the beaches; 120 brave military and naval divers from Landing Craft Obstruction Clearance Units. They had moved inshore by small boat and then swum up into the shallows to start cutting barbed wire defences, clear accessways and report on German dispositions.

0721hrs As the British landing craft neared the beaches they cast off their tows. Lt Cdr Charles Reginald **Tyler** (20-23) RNR commanded one of the LCTs. *Belfast* was the flagship of Bombardment Force E, supporting troops landing at Gold and Juno beaches and Commodore John Charles Keith **Dowding** (08-10) CBE DSO ADC RD RNR was in her as a staff officer to the Flag Officer, Assault Area.

British landings were scheduled to begin at 0723hrs (H-Hour) but British and Canadian troops began landing on Gold, Juno, and Sword two minutes early - a remarkable feat of timing. Sword was heavily mined and peppered with obstacles and quickly became congested. Troops fought their way off the beaches clearing several fortified towns in house-to-house fighting. Two major gun emplacements on Gold were disabled using specialised tanks.

Lt Cdr Alexander **Hambley** (21-23) RN was Principal Beach Master he landed with the first troops and was responsible for directing troops, supervising unloading, and generally imposing order on chaos. The role was greatly respected due to its being under constant fire.

Lt Cdr George **Phillips** (25-27) RNVR DSC MiD was Officer Commanding RN Beach Commando Queen (Beach Group 10) landed on JIG Beach on the western edge of the Gold landing area where he took up his duties as Beachmaster at La Hamel, Arromanches. The Germans had an 88mm gun emplacement causing a lot of aggravation to the whole beach so he ordered two POs to attack and put it out of action which they did

0730hrs Full radio silence was lifted.

Mid Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) in the cruiser *Emerald* noted *"there was a brief lull. I emerged from the chart table shelter on the bridge where I was busy with stop-watch, earphones and microphone to see what was going on. It was an incredible sight: Landing ships and craft of all sizes, battleships and cruisers blasting away, minesweepers and destroyers around as far as the eye could see. Bear in mind that we did not yet know where we were so I picked up a pair of binoculars to have a look at the shore. There to my utter amazement was the seaside resort of Arromanches-les-Bains with which I was familiar. "Good God, it's Arromanches" I said. The Captain turned on me and snarled "How do you know that?". I replied "Stayed there for a family holiday in 1937 in that hotel; recognized it instantly. Only place in France I have ever been to." The Old Man seemed placated, security had not been compromised! The bridge team, however, seemed unimpressed by tales of my well travelled boyhood."*

Midshipman Skynner (OP 41-43) recorded that later in the day HMS *Dragon* a Polish manned Hunt Class (that he believes was hit by a midget submarine circulating torpedo) blew up alongside them with heavy loss of life. He also mentions German tanks clearly seen from the ship driving around in circles in a field to avoid being hit.

0830hrs The 'Morris' strongpoint near Colleville-sur-Mer overlooking Sword was captured.

0900hrs Americans facing fierce German resistance finally fought their way off Utah.

1000hrs Lt Col., William Hayward **Brinkley**, (29-31) led the Norfolks ashore on Sword from their three LSIs, *"we hit the beach, and I saw the ramps go down, and the leading platoon were already running up the gangways and going ashore. Within five minutes our party were on the beach and we moved forward to our exit where a bulldozer was already at work making a roadway"*. After the war he wrote to a friend: *"We had a jolly good landing on 'D' Day, better than we had on any exercise. Quite a large number of us had dry feet, while nobody was wet above the calf..."*. They got off the beach and formed up ready for the march inland following several Sherman tanks, moving slowly forward as Sappers cleared the road ahead of anti-tank mines. He visited the Brigade Commander and was ordered to march on towards the village of Uolville-sur-Mer where they came under fire for the first time and suffered their first casualties. William was reported as being *"cool and efficient"* under fire. They then attacked the Rover German strongpoint. It was dominated by a single building and this quickly became known as Norfolk House. After fierce fighting it was captured and the Norfolks remained there for the rest of D-Day.



50th Division landing on Gold © IWM

1200hrs Commandoes from 1st SAS began landing on Sword.

1203hrs Cadet Roy **Hunnisett** (41-43) in Royal Mail Line's Liberty Ship *Samphill* was off Dover sailing next to *Sambut*. *Sambut* was carrying petrol cans on her upper deck, ammunition in her holds and 580 soldiers. She received two direct hits from the battery at Cap Griz Nez and was abandoned at 1240hrs. Roy said *"I was glad when the escorts put up a smoke screen to hide us"*.

1600hrs The 21st Panzer Division mounted a counter-attack between Sword and Juno and nearly succeeded in reaching the coast but it met stiff resistance from the British 3rd Division and was soon recalled to assist fighting between Caen and Bayeux.



47 Commando re-enforcements move inland

"Evening" James Alec **Haine** (38-41) and Standish **Brookes** (38-40) landed RM re-enforcements for 47 Commando on Gold in the evening of D-Day as part of the RM 524 LCA Flotilla, the small landing craft flotilla. Captain John Henry **Jones** (27-28) RM was one of the marines landed by them. Things seem to have been relatively calm as he is

reported as visiting a RM rest area. The commando then moved off the beaches and marched inland towards La Rosiere.

2015hrs The 'Hillman' strongpoint above Sword was captured.

2000hrs Further waves of airborne landings were made inland from Sword.

End of Day

Peter George **Dennis** (41-42) and David Peter **Kindersley** (41-42) serving in the Revenge Class battleship *Ramillies* (07) returned to Portsmouth to re-ammunition.

Only Juno and Gold beaches had linked up covering an area 12 miles wide and seven miles deep.

2.3 D-DAY+1

Overnight on 6th and for many subsequent nights huge barrages of flares and tracer were put up to deter German fighter attacks. Lt Donald **Swift** (31-33) in *Bellona* off Omaha took her close inshore to fire at land targets spotted by forward observation officers.



Swift's *Bellona*

At 0530hrs Cadet Roy **Hunnisett** (41-43) in Royal Mail Line's Liberty Ship *Samphill* approached Courselles-sur-Mer to land her troops of Canada's Cameron Highlanders. *"Judging by the noise all hell was happening ashore"* but the Highlanders remained imperturbable. They were close to *Warspite*, *"every time Warspite blasted off, our cabin door flew open. We didn't get much sleep during the two days we were discharging the cargo and waiting for the blockships to sink and form a breakwater."* After completing their discharge Roy returned to London.

Rodney collided with LCT 427, resulting in the death of 13 British sailors. **Bailey** (40-42), **Derrer** (41-42), **Horren**, (28-29), **Rees** (40-42), **Richards** (40-42) and **Woolven** (39-41) were in *Rodney*.

Lt William Eric **Halbert** (22-24) RN in his minesweeper completed the new Channel 34 and returned to Portsmouth.

146 sections of the Mulberry Harbours were towed across the Channel by armed salvage tugs, secured offshore and quickly put into use. They were protected by Corncocks; ships that were scuttled to act as breakwaters and create sheltered water called Gooseberries. One such was the Netherlands ship *Sumatra* sunk off Sword her captain was Cdr George Ernest **Sutcliffe** (1899-1901) RN and he brought her over from England.



Above: Sutcliffe's Blockship *Sumatra* (2nd right)

Captain Eric **Hewitt** (19-21) RD RNR took *Whimbrel* back to the Solent where she was re-deployed to anti-submarine patrol in the channel. She remained in these duties until the end of Neptune.

Geoffrey **Robinson** (37-38) in SS *Empire Javelin* returned to Plymouth “to a tremendous welcome”. Plymouth sound was full of ships waiting to depart to Normandy. The ship’s six empty davits revealed her losses and the surviving landing craft were badly shot up. She was the first vessel to enter Plymouth harbour from the invasion beaches.



Above: Hewitt's *Whimbrel*

Overnight on 7th Midshipmen Gerald Stanley **Burton**, (39-42) Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) and Rodney David **Lofts** (41-43) were in *Emerald* when Geoffrey observed “we were attacked by the Luftwaffe, or at least one bold individual launched a load of “skip” bombs at the ship. Two missed, the third hit a part of the superstructure and bounced overboard before exploding alongside damaging the starboard propeller shaft and fracturing a fuel supply line to the ship’s bakery. At the point of impact, two members of a 6-inch gun crew resting nearby were left much shaken, having heard, seen, felt and smelled the passing bomb. The two lads were counted very, very, lucky indeed.”

2.4 SECURING THE LODGEMENT

Jun 8th Lt Cdr Vincent Reginald **Clarke** (23-25) RNVR in the minesweeper *Watchman* swept a channel to the Western Task Force while escorting a small convoy from the UK.

Lt William Eric **Halbert** (22-24) RN in his minesweeper returned to the beaches for further clearance patrols.

Bailey (40-42), **Derrer** (41-42), **Horren**, (28-29), **Rees** (40-42), **Richards** (40-42) and **Woolven** (39-41) in *Rodney* conducted further bombardments of German positions “At one stage *Ramillies*, *Rodney* and *Mauritius* were firing broadsides all together. What an awe inspiring sight!”. Geoff **Bailey** (40-42) was detailed to go ashore. “I walked on the beach and was suddenly aware of another human facing him in the chaos - I thought it was a German, and I don't think he was armed...however, it was a Frenchman who thanked me in French and offered a Camembert cheese which was all he had as a thank you. If thanked him and the cheese eventually ended up in the mess dining room and was enjoyed by them all.”

Jun 8th Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99) returned to Swanage for a short period.

Jun 9th At 0230hrs Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99) swept channels for 15 hours before anchoring off Port-au-Bessin. At 2055hrs action stations was sounded and his flotilla came under attack from seven very low flying German aircraft and later from a U-Boat.

At 0300hrs *Rodney* with her six OCs onboard opened fire again causing considerable damage ashore. She astonished the Germans by planting her 16-inch shells squarely on tanks which were massing for a counter-attack 17 miles inland from the Gold beaches. One German observed "*We'll fight you. We'll fight your tanks, but those naval guns are too much.*"

Peter George **Dennis** (41-42) and David Peter **Kindersley** (41-42) in *Ramillies* (07) were off Sword bombarding German tanks, guns, infantry concentrations and motor vehicles with great success, breaking up units before they could launch counterattacks. She also beat off an attack by German E-boats.

"A few days after D-Day"

Capt James Frank William **Mudford** (12-14) RN was in command *Frobisher* (D81) in which Richard **Burrows** (41-43) and John Edward **Haigh** (41-43) also served, returned to Portsmouth with injured troops. Once they had been loaded into the waiting ambulances *Frobisher* went straight back to her station defending the landings shooting at targets nominated by army intelligence. The ship was also used as bait to help pinpoint a German battery. Shortly after this incident the ship was hit by a torpedo in the bow so she was withdrawn from the action and sent back to Chatham dockyard for repairs.



Mudford's Frobisher

Midshipmen Gerald Stanley **Burton**, (39-42) Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) and Rodney David **Lofts** (41-43) in *Emerald* were in an air raid on the bombardment force. Geoffrey recalls "*We were blacked out, and the order was given: "Make Smoke". We put up a barrage of flak and smoke canisters were ignited at salient points around the ship. Alas, the lids were not removed from the pots as they should have been; they glowed red-hot and provided the German pilot in his Ju88 with a clear outline of the ship at which he could aim his bomb. He did so, fortunately with not too great a measure of skill. The bomb hit our crane aft and was luckily deflected over the side, exploding next to a tank supplying fuel to the oven in the bakery. The main result was a bent crane, a cracked plate in the side, and no fresh bread for the rest of the week. There is an unusual side story to this action. Sub Lieutenant(E) Barker, of mustard pot fame, was the Action Station Engineer OOW down below. The bane of his life was the OOW on the bridge ringing up to tell him to stop making smoke from the funnel (usually due to an over-rich mixture in the boiler fuel feed and the fault of the Stoker Petty Officer in the boiler room). When the smoke canisters were activated, no one thought to tell the Engine and Boiler Rooms; the smoke on deck was sucked down by the fans and filled the area with a black fog and powerful stench. The last act by Barker before abandoning his post was to ring the bridge and pass the message, with a note of triumph in his voice: "Stop making smoke!"*"

Jun 10th to 17th Peter George **Dennis** (41-42) and David Peter **Kindersley** (41-42) in *Ramillies* (07) hit enemy railway marshalling yards near Caen, many miles inland, hit a concentration of 200 enemy tanks, inflicting a lot of damage, suffered a near miss when attacked by a dive bomber, came under fire from a German mobile artillery unit and hit a mobile battery. In the course of her Normandy engagement she fired 1,002 15" shells, thought to be the greatest bombardment by any single ship up to that time.

Jun 11th At first, Hitler, believing the invasion was a feint designed to distract from a real attack north of the Seine River, refused to release nearby divisions to join the counterattack. Reinforcements had to be called from further afield, causing delays. He also hesitated in calling for armoured divisions to help in the defence. The Germans were also hampered by effective Allied air support, which took out many key bridges and forced the Germans to take long detours, as well as efficient Allied naval bombardment which helped protect advancing Allied troops. Within a week, by 11th June, the beaches were fully secured and over 326,000 troops, more than 50,000 vehicles and some 100,000 tons of materiel had been landed.

Fraser Sandys **Dunbar** (41-43) in *Nelson* (28) arrived off Gold and began bombarding Houlgate's battery, destroying its last two guns and so silencing it. Subsequently, he participated in the bombing of support for Anglo-Canadian forces in the area of Caen, Tilly-sur-Seulles and Hottot-les-Bagues.

Jun 12th Lt Cdr Alwyne William R **Adams** (22-24) RN DSC, captain of the minesweeper *Orestes* (J277) and Vincent Reginald **Clarke** (23-25) RNVR in the minesweeping W Class destroyer *Watchman* (D26), both part of Escort Group 138 escorting assault convoys to Gold was awarded the DSC for his action against E-Boats. A *Watchman* crewman reported that "At 8.30 we were attacked by one man torpedoes, one ship blows up and sinks, we detail HMS Sockerteice to pick up survivors. We steam full ahead towards Le-Harve which is the German naval base, after ten minutes we sight our first sub. We close and fire depth charges and the four inch gun, plus all the small arms fire. We see no sign of him after this, on we go and site number two, we give him the same treatment, he is on the surface and bales out and we see the torpedo go down. We pick him up, while on deck he stands to attention raising his arm and at the same time shouting 'Hail Hitler' he looked about sixteen years old. No wonder it's taking a long time to win this war. We removed his uniform and put him in the sick bay. He could not speak a lot of English, but he kept shouting 'Churchill has got a big mouth'. I took his clothes down to the engine room to dry out and then reported to the captain all that had gone on. After about forty minutes the captain told me to go down and get the prisoner dressed and ready for handing over. When I arrived at the engine room I found that all the badges on his uniform had been removed. I reported this to the captain who went berserk, he informed the ships company that all leave would be stopped until the badges were replaced. May I say that thirty minutes later all the badges had been replaced, and the prisoner was handed over well dressed and in good health." After the attack he returned to Milford Haven.



Clarke's *Watchman* (D26)

Jun 13th Lt Cdr Vincent Reginald **Clarke** (23-25) RNVR in the minesweeper *Watchman* escorted "build up convoys" to the beaches.

Jun 13th Sub Lt Keith **Robinson** (38-40) RNR was killed in action aged 20 while serving in the Beagle Class destroyer *Boadicea* (H65) shown right. While escorting a convoy of merchant ships to France she was attacked by Junkers Ju 88 medium bombers. They dropped two torpedoes, her bow was blown off forward of the engine rooms and she sank in three minutes 16 miles southwest of the Isle of Portland at 50°28.12'N, 02°29.30'W. Only 12 of her crew of 182 survived.



Jun 15th Raymond Spurr **Holland** (18-21) RD was killed in action while serving as Lt Cdr RNR, Captain of the River Class Frigate *Mourne* (K261). *Mourne* was part of the 5th Escort Group when she was torpedoed by U-767 in the English Channel south-southeast of Wolf Rock at 49°35'N, 05°30'W. She was with *Bickerton* and *Kemphorn*, screening Operation Neptune, to the west of the Allied landings in Normandy. Her bridge lookout spotted a wisp of smoke rising from the surface some distance ahead, which was a U-Boat using its snorkel. All three ships went to action stations immediately. *Mourne* made asdic contact and was turning towards the U-Boat when a torpedo struck her bow. She disappeared in an explosion caused by the ignition of the forward magazine. The commander, seven officers, including Raymond and 102 ratings were lost and another rating later died of wounds.



Raymond Holland circa 1934

Jun 18th Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99) was damaged in a collision, her stem was bent, frames buckled and her forepeak flooded. She was despatched to Harwich for repairs. She returned to the landings on 28th June but sustained further damage on 6th July. She was despatched to Portsmouth for repairs.

Fraser Sandys **Dunbar** (41-43) was in *Nelson* (28) on her way to Portsmouth to refuel when she was hit two sea mines. She was sent to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard in Pennsylvania for repairs and played no further part in the landings, only returning to Britain in January 1945.

Jun 23rd Lt Cdr Robert Arthur **Crozier** (22-24) RD RNR in command of FDT 13 relocated closer to the shore off Juno to relieve FDT 217.

Jun 27th Lt Cdr Robert Arthur **Crozier** (22-24) RD RNR in command of FDT 13 returned to home waters to prepare for duty in the Mediterranean in support of the Dragoon Landings.

June

Lt Col., William Hayward **Brinkley** (29-31) was wounded on a patrol in Normandy and evacuated to England.

Captain Jim **Thompson** (39-41) MNI, serving with Blue Star, spent a short spell off the Normandy beaches just after D-Day. His role is not known but several of their Empire class of boats were at the landings.

Geoffrey **Robinson** (37-38) in SS *Empire Javelin* replaced and repaired her complement of craft at Plymouth and took on fresh crews making many more trips to Normandy, ferrying men and equipment until suitable harbours could be opened.



Robinson's Empire Javelin

Midshipmen Gerald Stanley **Burton**, (39-42) Geoffrey Lewis **Haskins** (40-42) and Rodney David **Lofts** (41-43) were in *Emerald*. Geoffrey recalls *"We had one trip back to Portsmouth to replenish with ammunition during which the Gunroom celebrated their escape from death in their own individual ways. Another Old Conway boy and I decided to go to London for the evening, planning to catch the late evening train back to Pompey in good time to meet up with the liberty boat next morning. It was cutting things fine and strictly against the rules, but we were confident of success. What we failed to allow for was Hitler's V1 bombs, one of which landed near Piccadilly Circus as we were in mid-roister and prevented us from getting to Waterloo Station. It was a mildly interesting moment as we heard the bomb pass, then the engine cut out; we knew from experience there were only a few seconds in which to take cover so we dived down into a convenient shelter in the basement of Swan and Edgar's store (now long gone). Then came an enormous bang, followed by the usual sound of falling glass and masonry. When we looked around the dimly lit shelter to see who was with us we immediately recognized a crowd of determined ladies of the night, who gallantly plied their trade whatever the Hun threw at them. "Hello, dearie!" I took one look at Gus Burton, my chum, and we fled into the bomb damaged streets to pick our way to the station. Needless to say, we missed the train, caught the later slow milk and paper train, and arrived at Portsmouth railway jetty just in time to see Emerald's pinnace leaving and our shipmates laughing at our misfortune. Gus and I were on the carpet. The First Lieutenant and "Snotties' Nurse", Lieutenant Commander Edwards, was as good as his word. He had warned all hands that to miss the boat was a grave crime in the Navy, particularly with the ship under sailing orders. We two miscreants did not go ashore again until we left the ship for good in Rosyth next September! Emerald returned to the Normandy beaches until the end of July, providing artillery support to the Allied advance. Our job done, we sailed for Rosyth for repairs and further orders for deployment.*

Over the next weeks we supported various actions on shore; one was the capture of Port-en-Bessin by 47 Commando, RM which had worked round from Gold Beach to attack from the landward side. Our task was to help neutralise a German flak-ship making a nuisance of itself in the harbour; we were duly able to oblige.

The port was used as the landing point of Pipeline Under the Ocean (PLUTO) supplying fuel direct to where it was badly needed from across the Channel.”

Jun 30th In the ensuing weeks, the Allies fought their way forward in the face of determined German resistance, as well as a dense landscape of marshes and hedgerows. By the end of June, the Allies had seized the vital port of Cherbourg, landed approximately 850,000 men and 150,000 vehicles in Normandy, and were poised to completely secure the lodgement.

Aug 27th Cdr Trevor Geoffrey Payne **Crick** (15-16) RN DSC & Bar OBE captain of *Jason* (J99), now operating out of the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches was leading a small force sweeping off Cap D'Anfer when they came under attack in a friendly fire incident with two Spitfires. 78 men were killed and 149 wounded, two vessels were sunk, one damaged beyond repair and *Jason* was damaged for the third time.

2.5 BREAKOUT

The aim was to use constantly increasing numbers of fresh troops to launch attacks out of the lodgement area throughout August. The U.S. 1st Army advanced south to Avranches. Patton's 3rd Army took Brittany and territory as far south as the Loire. II Canadian Corps and Bradley's troops encircled Falaise trapping huge numbers of Germans in the Falaise Pocket. In mid August further landings took place in Southern France (Operation Dragoon) to push North and link up with the Americans. By the end of August the beaches had transitioned from fighting front line to rear echelon supply route. Overlord was effectively complete.

Although not part of Overlord the plan was for other channel ports to be captured as the troops moved North Eastwards helping to shorten supply lines and to sustain momentum. Hitler's Ardennes Offensive aimed at the channel ports and his fierce defence of Antwerp were both designed to thwart allied plans so the allies remained completely dependent on the Normandy beaches and Cherbourg even as they launched the final offensives into Germany. By the end of August 1944, the Allies had reached the Seine River, Paris was liberated and the Germans had been removed from northwestern France, effectively concluding the Battle of Normandy. Within a year Allied troops had occupied the whole of Europe, Hitler was dead and the war was over.

3 CAMPAIGN COSTS

3.1 ALLIES

From D-Day to 21st August, the Allies landed 2,052,299 men in northern France. Between 6th June and the end of August, the Americans suffered 124,394 casualties, of whom 20,668 were killed. Casualties within the 1st Canadian and 2nd British Armies are placed at 83,045: 15,995 killed, 57,996 wounded, and 9,054 missing. Of these, Canadian losses amounted to 18,444, with 5,021 killed in action. The Allied air forces, having flown 480,317 sorties in support of the invasion, lost 4,101 aircraft and 16,714 airmen; 8,536 members of the USAAF, and 8,178 flying under the command of the RAF. The Free French paratroopers attached to the British SAS suffered 77 killed, with 197 wounded and missing. Allied tank losses have been estimated at around 4,000, with losses split evenly between the American and British/Canadian armies. Overall casualties estimates vary from 225,606 to 226,386.

3.2 GERMANY

German forces in France reported losses of 158,930 men between D-Day and 14th August. 50,000 men were lost in the Falaise pocket of whom 10,000 were killed and 40,000 captured. Total German casualties vary from 290,000 to 400,000 (200,000 killed or wounded and a further 200,000 captured) to 500,000 (290,000 killed or wounded, 210,000 captured) and even 530,000.

German tank losses are also debated. Approximately 2,300 tanks and assault guns were committed to the battle, of which only 100 to 120 crossed the Seine at the end of the campaign. While Germany reported only 481 tanks destroyed between D-day and 31st July, the Allies destroyed around 550 tanks in June and July and another 500 in August, i.e. 1,050 tanks destroyed, including 100 destroyed by aircraft. Luftwaffe losses amounted to 2,127 aircraft. By the end of the Normandy campaign, 55 German divisions (42 infantry and 13 panzer) had been rendered combat ineffective; seven of these were disbanded. By September, OB West had only 13 infantry divisions, 3 panzer divisions, and 2 panzer brigades rated as combat effective.

3.3 CIVILIANS

During the liberation of Normandy, between 13,632 and 19,890 French civilians were killed. In addition to those who died during the campaign, 11,000 to 19,000 Normans are estimated to have been killed during pre-invasion bombing. Land mines and unexploded ordnance continued to inflict casualties upon the Norman population following the end of the campaign.

3.4 OLD CONWAYS

At least 53 OCs participated in the landings, 39 in RN vessels, four in MN vessels, two as RN Beachmasters ashore, two in the army and three in the RMs. At least two were killed in action and one invalided home as a casualty.

4 LIST OF OLD CONWAYS INVOLVED IN D-DAY

The following OCs' names have been discovered to date. Their *Conway* years are in parentheses. Ranks are the most senior discovered for each individual. A Mention in Despatches is shown as MiD.

1. **Adams**, Alwyne William R (22-24), Lt Cdr RN DSC. Alwyne was captain of the Algerene Class minesweeper *Orestes* from 22nd October 1943 to 16th October 1944. Awarded the DSC for gallantry, skill, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings. He was gazetted Lt Cdr RN on 2nd January 1940 and from 1st July 1941 to 20th January 1942 he was commander of the trawler *Milford King*. From 20th January 1942 to 25th January 1943 he was commander of the minesweeper *Selkirk*. Promoted to Cdr on 1st November 1944 to command the escort carrier *Rajah*. He retired from the RN on 31st December 1952 and died on 18th February 1982 aged 64 years.



Adams 1st XI Summer 1924

2. **Bailey**, Gerald (Geoff) Hinton (40-42), MiD. Served in *Rodney* throughout the landings. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven. Geoff always went to celebrate D-Day from the 50th anniversary through to the 65th. Each time he received, first: a Citation and Normandy medal presented with great fanfare by the authorities in one of the ministerial buildings in Caen; and then, for the 60/65th a small bar memento brooch for each anniversary. And on each occasion the Veterans were honoured by the French in the Square in Arromanches.
3. **Brinkley**, William Hayward (29-31), Lt Col 1st Bn Royal Norfolk Regt (Norfolks). Green blindness prevented a naval career so Bill entered Sandhurst in 1932 and was commissioned to the Norfolks in August 1932, joining the 2nd Battalion in Devonport prior to six years service with the 1st Bn in India. He served during Northwest Frontier operations, then in Delhi and Bangalore. After attending Staff College Camberley he re-joined the 1st Bn in Scotland to train for the D-Day landings in Normandy. He was wounded on a patrol in Normandy and was evacuated to England. He trained recruits at the Regimental Depot Norwich and became a GSO II Instructor at the Staff College, Quetta in March 1945. His peacetime service took him to less peaceful places. Evacuated from India on Independence in 1947, he rejoined the Bn for service during the airlift of Berlin, followed by a period in Hong Kong when the New Territories were threatened by the Chinese Army. When this threat receded, he was posted to Seremban, Malaya for anti-communist operations. He became 2IC of 1st Bn The Suffolk Rgt in Trieste and led its families during the evacuation to Wuppertal due to trouble between Yugoslavia and Italy. Later he moved to the Headquarters of the British Commonwealth Force Korea in Kure, Japan. He was appointed to command 1st Bn for anti-Eoka operations in Cyprus and was awarded the General Service Medal. At the end of Eoka activity the Bn moved to Iserlohn, Germany where he relinquished his command.

4. **Brookes**, Standish (38-40), Sub Lt. Served in RM small landing craft on D-Day.
5. **Burke**, Ulik Bernard (08-09) MC, Brevet Maj Devonshire Regt. Uklik served in this regiment in WWII but we do not know in which battalion. The 1st, 2nd and 12th (airborne) Bns landed at Normandy. The 1st lost all but one of her company commanders in the landings so it is very possible that his brevet rank indicates a field promotion.
6. **Burrows**, Richard (41-43), MiD. HMS *Frobisher* (D81). Haigh and Mudford also served in Frobisher.
7. **Burton**, Gerald Stanley (39-42) Midshipman. Served in *Emerald* throughout the landings with Haskins and Lofts. See letter with Haine's entry.
8. **Charles**, Eric (37-39). He was serving in Havana when war broke out and he served in a minesweeper at the landings. Nothing more is known at present.
9. **Clarke**, Vincent Reginald (23-25), Lt Cdr RNVR DSC. In command of *Watchman*. Awarded the DSC for gallantry, skill, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings. Late in June, after escorting several convoys from Milford Haven to the beaches, he and *Watchman* were re-deployed to the English Channel for coastal convoy defence and patrol being involved in a further skirmish with E-Boats on 21st August off Beachey Head. He later commanded *Pytchley* and was awarded a Bar to his DSC for sinking U-Boat 1195 while escorting convoy VWP16.
10. **Crawford** There are three candidates for this individual - George Douglas and James Alexander both 39-41, and David Hugh 42-43. He was 4th Officer in an unknown LSI based at Cowes. No other details are known. His presence was reported by Dallas, see letter with his entry.
11. **Crick**, Trevor Geoffrey Payne (15-16), Cdr RN DSC & Bar OBE. HMS *Jason*.
12. **Crozier**, Robert Arthur (22-24), Lt Cdr RD RNR. Commander of FDT 13. Mentioned in Dispatches and awarded the DSC for gallantry, skill, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings. Late in June he transferred FDT 13 to the Mediterranean to support the Operation Dragoon landings.



Above: Crozier 1st XV Xmas 1922

13. **D'Cruz**, Andrew (1887-88) Portsmouth one of the largest centres and here Andrew had volunteered and was skipper of an Admiralty motor fishing boat "...engaged in supplying the fleet. Until the invasion fleet sailed this meant working from 6am until 11 or 12 at night. It was interesting work".

14. **Dallas**, Anthony Henson Whitley (40-41), was a cadet in an unknown LSI along with J J Heyworth. She departed for the beaches from Cowes. A letter from Anthony is reproduced on the right. By December 1944 he had passed his 2nd Mates ticket.

December 27th, 1944.

Dear Sir,

I thought you might be interested to hear that I have just passed my Second Mate's examination.

There were a lot of "Old Conways" at the school and we spoke a lot of the fine times we had on the old ship.

You may have heard from some of them, but in case they did not write, the following have also passed:—W. Plant, Sandford, T. Mayo, Page, Hargreaves, C. Ewbank. Kavanagh also sat when I did, but I did not hear his results.

My late ship was an L.S.I., and whilst at Cowes I met a number of "Old Conways" who were also on landing ships.

Crawford was Fourth Officer, W. E. Williams, Third Officer, J. J. Jenn, Fourth Officer, Kitching, Third Officer. J. J. Heyworth was the other cadet with me.

Yours faithfully,
ANTHONY DALLAS.

15. **Dennis**, Peter George (41-42), MiD. Served in the Revenge Class battleship *Ramillies* (07) with Kindersley (41-42) throughout the landings. After D-Day he moved in her to join the invasion of Southern France in August 1944.

Above: Letter to The Cadet from Dallas

Below: Dowding

16. **Derrer**, Geoffrey Henry Shaw (41-42), Midshipman RNR. Served in *Rodney* throughout the landings. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven. Despite full watchkeeping duties and the distraction of bombardments he and Rees both managed to pass their RNR Midshipman's navigation exams while off the beaches after "a great deal of work". After Normandy he moved to a fleet minesweeper.



17. **Dowding**, John Charles Keith (08-10), Commodore CBE DSO ADC RD RNR. Participated in the planning for Overlord as the Principal Sea Transport Officer. At the landings he was a Staff Officer to the Flag Officer Assault Area. His DSO was awarded for good services in command of the Orient Line's paddle steamer *Mona's Isle* requisitioned as an armed boarding vessel during the withdrawal of allied forces from the beaches of Dunkirk. Later in the war he was promoted Captain RNR and was Commodore of the ill-fated PQ17 where he survived the sinking of his ship the *River Afton* and was awarded the CBE. He was Principal of the Prince of Wales Sea Training School from 1945 to 1949.
18. **Dunbar**, Fraser Sandys (41-43). Rank not known. He served in the battleship *Nelson* (28) during Overlord. After bombarding Gold beach she hit two sea mines while returning to the UK to refuel and was sent to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard in Pennsylvania for repairs. She played no further part in the landings and he moved to the *Belfast* and later *Jamaica* and *Jason*. He transferred to the Fleet Air Arm in 1945.

19. **Euman**, Charles, (1899-1900), Capt RN. Nothing is known of his service at D-Day other than a letter from his wife to The Cadet confirming that he was there stating that he had been Mentioned in Dispatches. He went on to serve in the landings at North Africa (Operation Torch), Sicily and Salerno.
20. **Haigh**, John Edward (41-43), MID. HMS *Frobisher*. Burrows and Mudford also served in Frobisher.
21. **Haine**, James Alec (38-41). Served in RM small landing craft on D-Day. A letter from him to The Cadet is reproduced on the right.



Above: Haigh 1st XV Easter 1943

Below: Letter to The Cadet from Haine

Bottom: Halbert Bantams XV Easter 1924

22. **Halbert**, William Eric (22-24), Lt RN. He was Mentioned in Dispatches three times. Once in *Sutton* for minesweeping work at Dunkirk, once early in 1942 for minefield clearance and finally for services in Overlord. By 1945 he held the rank of Lt Cdr. The Cadet note that he had participated in all the wartime invasions including Madagascar. He was invalided out of the RN on 6th April 1947.

July 22nd. 1944.

Dear Sir,

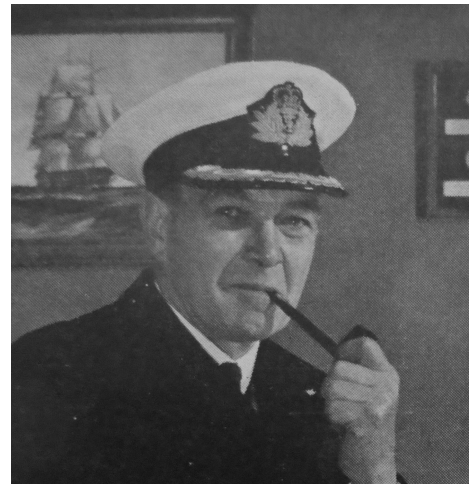
It might be of interest to you to know that the following Old "Conways" have found themselves on the beaches of Normandy. Sub.-Lt. Brookes and myself are in Royal Marine minor landing craft Flotillas, having arrived on D-day evening. Capt. J. H. Jones, R.M. 1926 is ashore with a rest camp for our crews. Williams (W.E. ?) is Act. Fourth Officer in an Assnatt Carrier Ship manned by C.P.S. He arrived early on D-day. Mids. Burton, Haskins, Mason, Bailey and Rees all in cruisers and battleships found themselves dashing up and down the coast smashing strong points.

I imagine there must have been hundreds of other Old "Conways" here and feel that a record in *The Cadet* would be of interest. Would it be possible ?
J. F. HAINE.

23. **Hale**, Richard Thomas (35-38), Commodore, RNZR. In January 1944 Richard took command of a newly commissioned small, flat bottomed LCI at Norfolk Virginia and delivered her to Falmouth in preparation for D-Day.
24. **Hall**, Charles Edward (21-23), Lt Cdr RD RNVR then RNR. Mentioned in Dispatches for gallantry, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings.
25. **Hambley**, Alexander (21-23), Lt Cdr RN. He was a Principal Beach Master and one of the first ashore.



26. **Haskins**, Geoffrey Lewis (40-42), Lt Cdr RNZN. Served in *Emerald* throughout the landings with Burton and Lofts. A 2024 BBC interview of Geoffrey is [here](#).
27. **Hewitt**, Eric (19-21), Captain RD RNR MiD. Eric completed his *Conway* training in April 1921, achieving the rare accolade of a Double Extra Passing Out Certificate. Accepted into the RNR he spent six months with the fleet before completing his MN apprenticeship with Glen Line. He passed his second mates certificate in June 1924 and moved to Royal Mail Lines. He obtained his first mates certificate in 1927 just before his 23rd birthday and his masters in 1930. He was called up to the RNR in 1939 and served with distinction throughout the war much of the time on convoy and anti-submarine duties in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. He was mentioned in despatches for his role in protecting a convoy under extremely heavy air attack. He took part in the invasion of Sicily in 1943 and the Normandy landings. In 1945 he was in Singapore controlling the sea transport arrangements of the whole Far East. In May 1947 Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten brought him to Delhi to supervise the withdrawal by sea of British forces from India. He was confirmed in the rank of Captain RNR at the early age of 40. He became *Conway's* Staff Captain in March 1948 and Captain Superintendent in 1949.
28. **Heyworth**, Xavier Jose Johnstone (41-43) was a cadet in an unknown LSI along with Anthony Dallas. She departed for the beaches from Cowes.
29. **Holland**, Raymond Spurr (18-21), Lt Cdr RD RNR. Raymond was killed in action aged 40 while commanding the River Class Frigate *Mourne* (K261). She was torpedoed by U-767 on 15th June while patrolling west of the beach approaches.
30. **Horren**, John Stanley (28-29) Lt Cdr RNVR. Called up at the outbreak of war he served in various minesweepers until he was appointed to *Rodney* in November 1943. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven.



Top: SCC Haskins 1943

Above: Eric Hewitt 1968

Below: Holland Bantams XV
Easter 1920



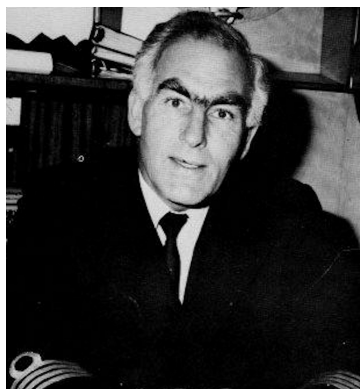
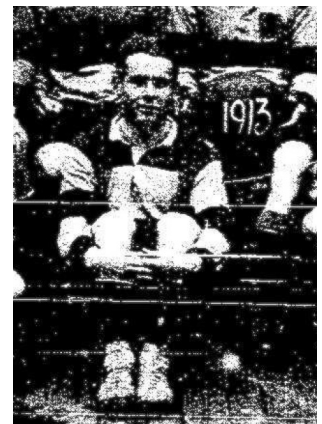
31. **Hunnisett**, Roy (41-43), Cadet, Royal Mail Line. Roy served in the Liberty Ship *Samphill*, aged 17, carrying the Canadian Cameron Highlanders to the beaches as part of convoy ETM1. He was there for a week.
32. **Hutchings**, Kenelm Jocelyn Townshend (16-19), Cdr RNR. Mentioned in Dispatches for gallantry, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings.
33. **Jenn**, John James (39-41), was 4th Officer in an unknown LSI based at Cowes. No other details are known. His presence was reported by Dallas, see letter with his entry. He was Chief Cadet captain in *Conway*.
34. **Jones**, John Henry (27-28), Captain RM. Landed by the RM small landing craft flotilla on the evening of D-Day.
35. **Kindersley**, David Peter (41-42), MiD. Served in the Rodney Class battleship *Ramillies* with Dennis (41-42) throughout the landings. After D-Day he moved in her to join the invasion of Southern France in August 1944.
36. **Kitching**, James Stephen (36-39), was 3rd Officer in an unknown LSI based at Cowes. No other details are known. His presence was reported by Dallas, see letter with his entry.
37. **Lofts**, Rodney David (41-43) Midshipman. Served in throughout the landings with Burton and Haskins. After the war he was master of *Clan Grant* in transit from Suez to Aden. He was on the bridge and had walked from the wing of the bridge to the chartroom where he collapsed. He was found slumped lifeless over the chart-table and despite attempts to resuscitate him by the Chief Officer's wife, a trained nurse, he died. His wife was on-board with him and was with him when he died. He was aged just 53 years and four months. "The Company had lost an outstanding officer and commander and many of us had lost a friend we would never forget." On the 22nd of November 1978, with his wife Lilian by his side he was buried at sea in the Gulf of Aqaba in Latitude 22 19' N, Longitude 34 52' E.



Above: Jenn Taking A
Sight Bangor 1941

Below:
Mudford 1st XV Xmas
1913

Bottom: Lofts 1st XV 1942
and 1970's



38. **McManus**, Brian (42-44) Cadet LdeH. Served in the liberty ship *Samholt* at the landings aged 17 years and on only his third trip as an apprentice! He joined *Samholt* at Pier 90, New York, she was the first liberty ship to wear the red ensign, and sailed in her back to the UK. She loaded ammunition and sailed for the beaches. He became Chairman of the North Wales Normandy Veterans' Association.
39. **Mosley**, J H (25-29) Lt RNR. Took part in the landings from D+2 in the MN
40. **Mudford**, James Frank William (12-14), Captain RN. In Command of HMS *Frobisher* (D81). Haigh and Burrow also served in *Frobisher*.
41. **Phillips**, George (25-27), Lt Cdr RNVR DSC MiD. He was Officer Commanding RN Beach Commando Queen (Beach Group 10). His unit was based at Portland and landed on JIG Beach on the western edge of the Gold landing area early on 6th where he took up his duties as Beachmaster at La Hamel, Arromanches. The Germans had an 88mm gun emplacement causing a lot of aggravation to the whole beach so he ordered two POs to attack and put it out of action which they did. He was MiD for his gallantry, determination and undaunted devotion to duty as a Beachmaster during the landings. Awarded the DSC for daring and resolution in rescuing survivors of the Dieppe raid in 1942. Also participated in the Torch landings in 1942.
42. **Rees**, Peter Egerton John A (40-42), Midshipman RNR., MiD. Served in *Rodney* throughout the landings. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven. Despite full watchkeeping duties and the distraction of bombardments he and Derrer both managed to pass their RNR Midshipman's navigation exams while off the beaches after "a great deal of work". After the landings he moved to a vessel in Scotland.
43. **Richards**, David Desmond (40-42), MiD. HMS *Rodney*. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven.
44. **Robinson**, Geoffrey (37-38), Officer in the landing ship SS *Empire Javelin* and other troop carriers. Continued landing troops for some time after D-Day.
45. **Robinson**, Keith (38-40), Sub Lt RNR. Killed in Action in *Boadicea* which was bombed and sunk while escorting a convoy on 13th June. He was a Senior Cadet Captain in *Conway*.
46. **Stranger**, Frank (24-27). He was a Master with the General Steam Navigation Co before and after WWII, and is not known to have served in the RN or RNR. His role during the landings is not known but most



likely he was master of an infantry landing ship or support ship. The photo of him on the right was taken in Xmas term 1926.

47. **Sutcliffe**, George Ernest (1899-1901), Cdr RN. Mentioned in Dispatches for distinguished service which led to the successful landing of allied forces in Europe. Early in WWII he was in command of the armed merchant cruiser *Mooltan*. At D-Day he was in command of the ex Netherlands Navy *Sumatra* which he took to Sword and scuttled as a blockship to protect the Mulberry harbour. After D-Day he served as Commodore of Ocean Convoys RNR. Later he was British Naval Liaison Officer, Panama Canal Zone.
48. **Swift**, Donald Holmes (31-33), Lt RN DSC & Bar, MiD. HMS *Bellona*. Mentioned in Dispatches for gallantry, skill, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the landing of Allied forces on the coast of Normandy.
49. **Thompson**, Jim (39-41), MNI. Jim served in The Blue Star line throughout his MN career. His second ship, the *Dunedin Star* carrying munitions, cargo and passengers to the Middle East via Durban was wrecked on the treacherous Skeleton Coast of SW Africa on 29th November 1942.
50. **Tyler**, Charles Reginald (20-23), Lt Cdr RNR. Served in a tank landing craft (LCT) at Normandy. No other details are known. He served in LCTs in every invasion from Sicily onwards.
51. **Whayman**, Jackson (20-21), Cdr RNR CBE DSC RD. He served in Force J. Mentioned in Dispatches for gallantry, determination and undaunted devotion to duty during the Normandy landings. He was awarded the DSC and bar for action during and after the Sicily and Salerno landings. In 1945 he served in Empire *Battleaxe* and *Lothian*, both major landing ships. After the war he became a Captain in, and then Commodore of, the Booth Line. He became a CBE in 1960 and crossed the bar in February 1987.
52. **Williams**, William Edward (39-41). His presence was confirmed by Dallas and Haine, see letters with their entries. Dallas says he was 3rd Officer in an unknown LSI based at Cowes. Haine says he was 4th Officer in an "Assnatt Carrier Ship" manned by the Canadian Pacific SS Company. Assnatt has probably been misread from Assault so he most certainly was in command of a landing craft. No other details are known.



Above: Thompson

Below: Whayman

Bantams XV Easter 1921



53. **Woolven**, James Albert (39-41), MiD. HMS *Rodney*. Six OCs were in *Rodney* at Normandy Bailey, Derrer, Horren, Rees, Richards and Woolven.

5 SOURCES

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1945 04 106/7 Roll of Honour List

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1945 04 120

1945 12 147

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1947 12 109

1948 08 142

2015 07 43

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Email

From Peter Skynner