

D-Day: In their own words



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss



D-DAY
80



Eighty years ago, the veterans featured in this brochure were the heroes of D-Day. Today, they are all supported by Blind Veterans UK, as they adapt to life with sight loss. These 15 men and one woman helped change the course of history, enduring the most terrifying of conditions with courage and dedication. We must never forget all they did.

Without the right support, sight loss would rob these brave Second World War veterans of their independence. Just as they worked together to make their mission a success, we can unite to make sure they have the equipment and expert guidance they need.

As Patron of this charity, I see the wonderful ways lives are rebuilt. Thanks to our supporters, the blind veterans of D-Day and all our ex-Service men and women can win their battle with blindness.



HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh, GCVO

George was 19, a gunner on a torpedo boat.



On the afternoon of 5 June, we were ordered to make ready for sea. The Skipper then handed each member of the crew a pamphlet which contained a message from the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, telling us **we were about to embark on the greatest invasion in the history of war.**

The 59th flotilla had been given the task of joining an escort for the Americans attacking Omaha and Utah beaches. At 4 o'clock the next morning, we watched all the planes going over and the sea was covered from horizon to horizon with ships of all shapes and sizes.

The battleships Nelson and Warspite and the cruiser Belfast opened up with their main armament, bombarding the German positions on the French coast. The noise ... you had to be there. It was like all hell had been let loose.

For some reason or other, the German Navy did not turn up to oppose the landings at Omaha and Utah, which should have led to quick and effective assault by the Americans. Unfortunately, due to a navigation error they landed a mile and a half too far to the west and they got slaughtered as they came in. Half of them didn't have time to get off their assault craft. It was something I wouldn't want anybody to stand or sit and watch. Very brave men.

We had to lay off from the shore to protect against E-boats and R-boats. All we could do is sit and watch and

wait. I'm glad I didn't actually go ashore because when you see kids younger than yourself being sent out too far to the west – instead of having nice sloping beaches they were more like cliffs. The Germans had either been given information or watched them come in but they were at the top of the cliffs and using these young Americans as cannon fodder. **There's still lots of people who think there's fun in war. There's no fun in war – no fun in war at all.**



Joe was 19, serving on
HMS Ryde.

*His job was to protect the Mulberry harbour
from enemy aircraft.*



I got called up for National Service at 18 years old. I went to Butlins holiday camp in North Wales for three months' seamanship training. Now that Mulberry harbour was at the instigation of Winston Churchill, months and months and months before D-Day. And he said, it's all right sending the army in but without a back-up, you're going to get kicked out again quick. But with a back-up and I've read since, there was thousands of tonnes of food and ammunition and hundreds and hundreds of men who all used these Mulberry harbours to get ashore. That's one thing that made it a success. And we were based at this Mulberry harbour.

The RAF had done such a good job on the Luftwaffe that there were no planes. We were more like a hotel, in the end, with the Americans coming back to sleep on board at night. There were five landing strips, two British at the eastern end and then there was a Canadian and then there were two Americans. Omaha and Utah. We were based at Omaha. Out of the five, four of them were pretty successful getting ashore. **But the fifth one, Omaha, it was a slaughterhouse.** And of course, we would have to be there.

And we couldn't do a thing for them. But those poor devils from America. You know, in the American anthem, the words are – part of it – home of the brave. And everyone used to say, oh, they're brave when there's ten of them against one of the others. But not any more. Those men were the bravest of the brave. And when they landed off the ship, they got in the landing craft and went ashore with a rifle - against a

machine gun nest. Because they should have been wiped out, the night before. But the reason they couldn't hit these pill boxes was the low cloud. When they were up there, with low cloud, they couldn't see. Their job was to wipe out the pill boxes and they dropped their bombs five miles inland. There was many a horse and cow got blown up.

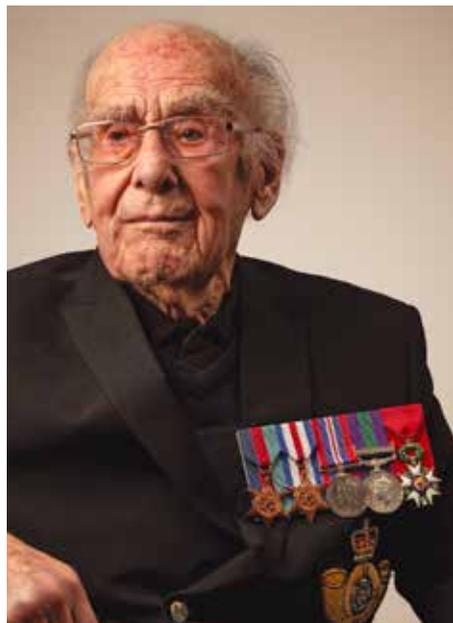
In the first wave, a thousand dead and injured Americans. After the first day, what was left of them came back. While they were away, they sent about 10 or 20 camp beds to our ship and we put them out on the upper deck, all the way round, for these guys to come back and sleep all night and go off again the next day. One of them said to me, it's absolute slaughter out there. As soon as the doors open, the machine guns had gone right away – hardly any of them got out of the landing craft alive. **We were really upset about that.**

There was nothing we could do, only make them comfortable, give them a meal when they came on board. Anyway, after two or three weeks, they got off. I did hear one division was getting penned down by the machine guns. They sent for aid and HMS Belfast shot off and they pummelled the machine gun nests with their big guns. And then they got off the shore and onto the land and they carried on.

A lot of good men must have died that day. It's a shame. I'll never forget it. 6th June. I'll never forget it. But what a waste of life. That's war.

Harry was 22, in the King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

He was part of the first wave of the invasion.



On the morning of D-Day - in your mind it was just like another exercise, you'd done it so often - all of a sudden, I saw the ship next to mine, a big hole appeared in the side of the ship. I didn't hear any noise, but a few seconds after was a big noise. No doubt nearly all of that battalion were killed. It brought it home that this was it.

I landed on Sword beach. The battalion that I was with, we were sent to destroy a battery. When we got up to near the battery, really you could understand why they placed it where it was. It was marvellous to see all the ships out in the channel, but from where this gun battery was, they could

pop them off, there was no doubt about that.

There were two ramps, one on each side of the ship. When I went there, the ship turned round because this ramp had dug into the seabed and consequently, when it fell off, I went down into the water and somebody who shouldn't have done pulled me out. I wouldn't have got out. I was carrying too much in the way of arms to get out. And it was a lot of ammunition, all twisted, knotted. I wouldn't have got out. More or less all of us got off the beach unharmed, but after we got off, a German tank swept the beach so there was a lot killed, but we'd got off the beach by then. The Royal Engineers who were attached to us actually destroyed the two guns that were pointed out to sea and that was the end of that day.

You never forget. You can even see some of the faces of your comrades who didn't make it. That's why I want to go and see that memorial, to see who died and who didn't. There were 17,000 that gave their lives. They are the people to remember.

You've got to sit down and talk in the end; you might as well talk straight away and stop all the fighting.

Thomas was 18 and served on a Landing Barge, Oiler.



The LBO was the biggest barge on the Thames. They converted it into an oil tanker, carrying octane petrol.

On D-Day, we sailed with the Americans to Utah. From there, we supplied oil to any ship or craft that wanted oil. In the D-Day commemorations in 2019, I had the privilege of meeting the Queen. She said, you were on a floating bomb. She knew what my ship was. I was impressed with her knowledge of it because you don't hardly hear those ships being mentioned.

I went all along to the different beaches. Omaha, Utah, Gold, everything. It was a little bit rough, especially the English beach, with the Mulberry harbour. The harbour master, when we went alongside, he gave us a few words to clear off - in good English. Obviously, they were afraid that we'd be full of oil, they didn't want to blow anything up.

It was handy being with the Yanks because we always had good food. We couldn't cook on board. There were no light or matches in case we blew the thing up. There were these special ships where you cook the meals and then it came alongside to drop them off each day. Some days we couldn't have the food because they couldn't deliver. But that's how it goes, you had to take it as it came. Being with the Yanks we were well off, I think.

When I first went to France, we were picking up troops that were killed and floating on the water. And we were sent a message, "Don't go picking anymore up because there are too many, just put them back in the sea", so we just let them go floating back and that's how it was. We couldn't recover any more bodies because the Americans didn't want us to.

The amount of ships that were going to France, and the amount of planes that were flying above, thousands of planes going over - I'll never experience a thing like that again. ***I wouldn't want any youngsters to go through that again.***



John, then 23, was with the Desert Rats - 7th Armoured Division.



In 1943, we came back to this country. In the June of 1944, we went on the Normandy landings. We were in camps near Felixstowe down in England and just prior to the invasion, we boarded the landing crafts and sailed the English Channel overnight and then laid anchor off the beaches in the morning of D-Day.

There were approximately 150,000 troops actually landed in Normandy and of course they couldn't all disembark on the first day, so some of us had to lay to for some time before we could get ashore. Which wasn't very comfortable when we were under fire from the Luftwaffe Air Force. But it was an epic sight, actually, to see so many ships in one area that one had the feeling you could almost walk from one ship to another. There was actually over 1000 craft in the channel at that time. So eventually, we did embark on what were known as LCTs, big landing crafts.

We were on vehicles because my regiment was the REME, which is the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. I served as an instrument mechanic. Repairing things like binoculars and different military instruments. We were attached to the 7th Armoured Division to maintain their equipment.

We eventually got ashore on what was known as Gold beach. There were actually five beaches, where the different nationalities landed. We landed quite safely, although the beach was under fire from snipers and artillery further back in the German lines. We had to drive our vehicles off the ramp of the landing crafts up onto the beach in a marked lane. There were lanes laid out that had been cleared of mines.

The actual destination of the landing was kept very secret, which was why we were in sealed camps. The British successfully hoodwinked the Germans into thinking that we were going to land at Calais. Some of the troops were quite annoyed that they weren't told where they were going to land, but I didn't see the point. Of course, it was very, very important because we'd been waiting to go on the second front for years, rumours had been flying for years about when the second front would be open. Eventually, when it did come, of course we realised that we had to get a foothold on D-Day itself.



Syd was 21 and in the RAF with 644 Squadron.



During my training period, I was sent to station in Suffolk. This would be 1941. They were sending notices round for people to volunteer to be helmsman on the troop-carrying barges. So - over three years a secret, really. I'm still amazed at it, to be honest. **To think of the arranging and planning to get all that. It's out of this world really.**

I was an operations air gunner. We flew Halifax bombers and we towed gliders. We also supplied the underground movements in Europe with their needs.

We trained solidly up to D-Day. We got all set to go, but the weather was against us. We were supposed to drop the gliders at 1000 feet but on the actual day, the cloud base was 2500 feet, so we had to go behind it.

At about 11 o'clock on the day before D-Day started, several aircraft took off to prepare the site for the troops to be parachuted in and the gliders to glide all across Normandy.

At 1 o'clock, the first aircraft took off. We sent 32 aircraft to the town of Ranville, we released the gliders

Syd's squadron



at landing zone 11. We went a little further and we dropped the tow rope that towed the glider. And then we returned home and we landed it 0519.

But the surprising thing for us all was the barges that were carrying the troops. We flew over across the English Channel. These landing craft, they were absolutely in line behind each other, as far as we could see. When I looked right and left, the sea was covered with these landing craft. They were in dead straight lines both ways, you know, it was just like Guards parade.

I would say that you could walk from England to France, without getting your feet wet, that is how close they were. It was an amazing sight.

But at the time, we didn't think anything of it. That was just another operation.



Bob was 19, a gunner in the Royal Navy.

When I got to 18, I was called to serve the country. I opted for the Navy and trained as a gunner. In May 1944, I found myself in a convoy that came home to the UK, assigned to duty on Operation Overlord. I was assigned to a motor vessel ship, under the Dutch flag. Then 68 American soldiers came on board and they were housed in some sort of shelter that they built over the hatches.

In the early hours of D-Day, we set off. There was a very, very big flotilla of ships. It was a very choppy, windy day and the sea was rough and consequently some of the poor soldiers were seasick. One I remember, while he was being ill, his helmet fell off and it went into the sea. He was a bit concerned because there was no spare for him and so we gave him one of ours.

Our destination was the American beachhead and eventually, as we were nearing that, one of my colleagues who was sitting at the front of ship reported that there were dead bodies floating in the sea.

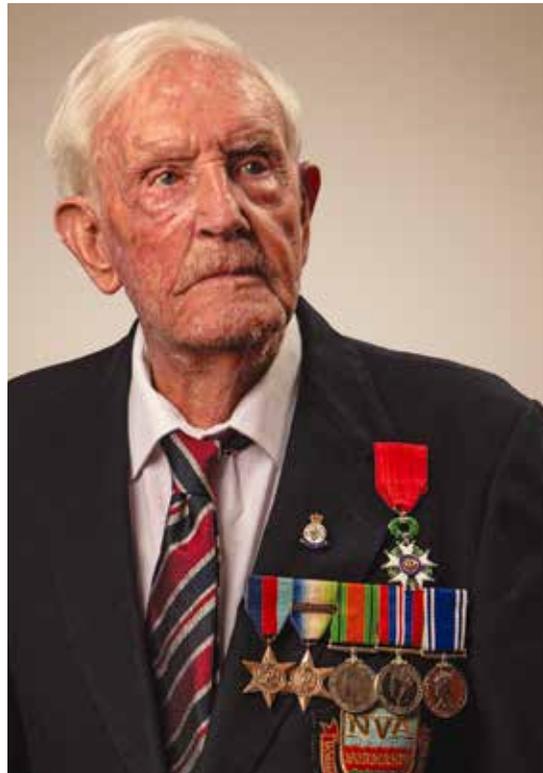
As we neared the spot where we were due to drop anchor, a hostile aeroplane came into view and started heading across the convoy. All the ships' gunners started firing and then he got within range of my gun. **I started firing at the hostile plane.** It kept coming in and when it was almost immediately above us, I could see my tracer bullets passing into the plane. Then, suddenly,

it burst into flames, spiralled out of control and crashed.

Of course, the American soldiers were delighted and we proceeded on so that we could discharge them. I was able to say good luck to all of them as they got into the transporter.

What worried me was that the chap with the English helmet on stood out a bit from the others. I thought, you know, I don't like that, really. But it was too late to do anything about that. And so off they went with our wishes of a safe experience.

They just disappeared into the dawn light. Nothing else we could do for them. Just pray for them and hope they were all right. **To this day, I never knew what did happen to them, whether they got back, which is a shame.**



Operation Overlord (D-Day 6.6.1944)

A poem by blind veteran, Bob.

Five thousand boats weighed anchor and prepared to sail from Cowes,
Five thousand helmsmen spun their wheels and for France they put their bows.

Soldiers, sailors, crewmen had all been waiting for a week,
But invasion day had come at last with weather wet and bleak.

Warships, troopships, merchantmen with soldiers, tanks and guns
Crossing the English Channel for combat with the Huns.

Doodlebugs, London bound, passed them in the sky,
Emotions of the fighting men were running very high.

A RN Seaman Gunner, a hostilities-only rating
Was strapped in an Oerlikon gun, scared but ready and waiting.

Majestically the convoys reached the Normandy shore,
German aircraft then attacked and it looked more like a war.

One, a fighter, piloted by some German mother's son,
Flew through a hail of bullets from the seaman gunner's gun.

The gunner watched his tracers tearing through the fighter
And heard a soldier's excited cry 'I think you've got the blighter'.

Smoke and flame gushed from the plane as it took its downward route,
The pilot had met his fate and we gave one last salute.

We took sixty-eight soldiers as far as we could reach,
Then on their landing craft they travelled to the beach.

**I was the seaman gunner, all this I saw, and more,
We left those gallant soldiers to fight upon the shore.**



Alec was 19 and served on HMS Bermuda, detecting submarines and U-boats.

There's so few of us left, it's got to be put on record now otherwise it's going to get lost completely.

In those days, we were never told what was happening. We were the last to know and we didn't even realise that we were in the invasion fleet.

I was on my ship on 4 June, on watch. I was relieved at 8 o'clock, I went onto the middle deck, looked out through the embarkation space. I could see houses and trees. And looking the other way, hundreds of ships, as far as the eye could see. And as we were at sea level, it must have been about 12 miles with ships on it. No one knew where we were. But later on, one of the signalmen could hear the officers talking. They said, we're near the Isle of Wight!

What were we doing down there?! It dawned on us the invasion was going to take place. I had been loaned to cover the convoys going over to Normandy.

The seas were very rough. We could see small boats taking troops to the various troop ships. The soldiers had a very rough time with sea sickness. It was cancelled for 24 hours because of the 10 foot waves but they were kept on board ship. We felt very sorry for all the soldiers on board the ships, rolling everywhere. On the night of 5 June, we realised the invasion was due any time.

During the D-Day invasion, my job was to stop any U-boats coming out of the Brest U-boat pens in France and attacking the convoy. We were cover force. I was 27 feet beneath the water line and couldn't actually see anything that was going on. One of my friends on the bridge left the telephone open for us and we could hear the noise of the battle going on. The big guns and all the planes taking off.

If the invasion hadn't taken hold, if we hadn't managed to land our troops on the beaches there, this world would have been a different place.



Harry was 24. He was with the Second Tactical Air Force 84 group.

I joined the volunteer reserve in May 1939, learning to fly Tiger Moths.

I was a pilot, flying various army officers up and down the country. On this particular evening, the CO said, "Take a lot of army officers tomorrow morning. Early take off, about 7:30, so you better go to Hawkinge tonight". When I got to Hawkinge, it was teeming with people and there was no room in the mess so we were sent down into Folkstone. We were picked up first thing in the morning and I collected the army officers. They were everything from Lieutenant Colonels upwards to Generals.

We were starting to taxi out when the tannoy on the aerodrome went off and one of the officers tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Cut your engines, please. I'd like to hear this announcement". **It was the station tannoy saying that the invasion had taken place** and the landing had been achieved and everything was going satisfactorily.

Then we went off to various aerodromes in Hampshire and Wiltshire, dropping off an officer in each of these places. The first flight we took to Normandy was just a there and back trip for taking army officers over and bringing walking wounded back to Tangmere, where the ambulances were waiting to take them away.

The Royal Engineers did a great job building little landing strips here, there and everywhere and we landed at one of those. And a few days after D-Day, we went over there to one of the landing strips and everything was reversed. We took people back to England, instead of over to Normandy.

In December 45, I was demobbed. **I flew 23 different aircraft and 2231 hours, of which 517 were operational.** There's a funny thing because I can't stand heights. I'm terrified on the top of the ladder, but the first flight I took never worried me. As long as the plane's moving, I'm moving.



Peggy was 22, a linguist for the Royal Navy.

We were intercepting and translating German forces radio traffic. Largely German Navy but we got quite a lot of Luftwaffe, air force stuff.

We had a DF tower - direction finding - and that was manned in the hours of darkness. You went across during the afternoon with coats and blankets, books and enough food and drink to last you through until breakfast the next morning, because you had to be there all night. Just you. It was like an old windmill without sails, about the size of a normal lavatory. I took down pages of four-figure code. And I hadn't a clue what it was all about.



I was on watch on the 5th. It was very obvious something was going to happen. You could tell, which peeved me considerably - we were not being told what was going on. Like hundreds of thousands of others, I paid a minor part. At the time we thought we were doing something important, but of course nobody knew about this until the mid to late 70s. My parents died before knowing what I'd been doing.

Ken, then 21, was with the Royal Army Service Corps.

We talked about the invasion before it started. I was a mechanic.

The boats couldn't go onto the beach so we got dropped as far as they could get us and we had to drive the rest of the way up onto the beaches.

At 7.30 I drove onto Sword beach. It was very noisy. You had to do it and we just did it, that was it. It was horrible because the Germans were waiting for us, of course. I was one of the lucky ones that got through, but we lost a lot of people, a lot of men. I met a Frenchman at the top of the beach who said, "Hello Tommy, I knew you'd come back one day."



They gave us a pill, I don't remember what it was, but we were given a tablet before we went off, to put your mind at ease. We didn't know what it was for really but they gave it to all of us D-Day boys.

I was one of the first to get the Legion d'Honneur. I was very proud, there were three of us, the first ones to receive. The other two boys are dead now, it's only me alive. **It's very important to remember. We saved them, we got the Germans out.**

Raymond was 20, in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Ordnance is ammunition and that's what I landed myself in without knowing what I was doing. I became a master at taking bombs to bits and finding out why they didn't go off with a bang. Half the time I was just on my way to get there and someone had fiddled with the thing and blown themselves up and that was the end of that.

I landed not on D-Day, we were delayed. I landed at Arromanches, a few days after the actual D-Day. Arromanches hadn't been taken by other forces and the Germans hung out there in the natural defences. Eventually, it took three days to shift them and we got in. The Royal Engineers did a fantastic job because there was a 10 foot sea wall between the back of the village which was a car park, a 10 foot wall of concrete. We were at the bottom of it and we wanted to get up to the top so the Royal Engineers blew a big hole through the concrete and then they trimmed it to size for the trucks and everything else and then dug it out by bulldozer for a slope on the incline and we got in that way.

We immediately moved from the coast, army police everywhere telling you where to go, up this way that way, we couldn't read the signs so didn't bother. "Take that road over there by the shop with the yellow blind". Anyway, we did that and we got inland about half a mile and we took shelter under a cider

apple orchard. Bloody horrible things, you look up - "Cor, lovely apples, look at them!". Typical army boys, we thought, we've got to try them. Cor blimey, horrible things. Sour, I swore I would never touch cider ever again.

I should have come out in 1943 but I came out in 1945. I did five years.

Looking back now I wouldn't have missed it, was the best time of my life. Everybody was your friend. All you had to look for to find a friend was the uniform. See that? Friend.



Richard was 19, a tank driver in the Royal Armoured Corps.



The 5th Dragoons went to Normandy. The Brits hadn't advanced all that much. There were some Fife and Forfars trapped in Villers-Bocage. They made a terrible tactical blunder and Michael Wittman in his Tiger shot up the whole squadron. We took over from them.

I enjoyed the ride across the channel. I had no idea what was going on. None of us had any idea. We landed at Sword beach but I didn't land on a landing craft. I landed on a Mulberry harbour. Our tanks had been sent before. They were already greased up and ready to go. You have poor visibility and it's very cramped

inside a tank. You've got to get on with your friends because the whole thing smells of frightened human beings, petrol, hydraulic oil and gunpowder and the whole thing is a bit unsanitary, to say the least.

It was no jolly fun in Normandy. I don't want to talk about it really. It was awful seeing the cows walking about with an udder full of milk and nobody to milk them. I mean, the poor cows were having a terrible time. If you don't milk them and they're in milk, having calved, they suffer agony, unbelievable agony. It was awful. And the dead bodies were awful.

It was pretty bloody rough, actually, Normandy. I mean, the smell was appalling. It was summertime and it was hot and a body, whether it's an animal or a human, whatever nationality is, whether it's a Jerry or American or Canadian, we start smelling. I mean, we're only human. But it was awful. We lost a hell of a lot of good, good people and the Jerries did as well. People go on about all this and that. But had we been born in Germany, we would have been in the German army.

We're not heroes or anything like that. **Just, if you're in a tank crew, you stick together like glue.** I'm just an ordinary person but I'm very proud of the fact that I've been in the Royal Armoured Corps.



John was 21, with the RAF's 143 Squadron.



Growing up, I was fascinated by aeroplanes. So, when war broke out in 1939, the Royal Air Force was always going to be a clear choice for me. As soon as I turned 18, I volunteered for flying duties in the RAF. I completed my navigator training, then operational training with a pilot, named Ron, who remained with me for the rest of my flying career.

I was posted to 143 Squadron Coastal Command in Lincolnshire and introduced to my aircraft, the Bristol Beaufighter. The aircraft was equipped with cannons and machine guns and our objective was to attack enemy shipping that was travelling along the coast of Europe.

Following a series of successful flights, I was moved onto a new assignment in the lead up to D-Day. As allied troops were amassing on the South Coast of England preparing for the invasion, German E-boats were patrolling the English Channel, causing damage and destruction to both shipping and human life, culminating in the disaster at Slapton Sands. **During the rehearsal for the Normandy landings, about 750 American servicemen were killed.**

I was to patrol the Channel at night carrying bombs that had been attached under the wings of the Beaufighter, flying low to try to spot the E-boats. We had radar to help us but we really

couldn't see much. We went out every night but we'd only had a little training in bombing, so it was very hit and miss.

They were shooting at us with anti-aircraft cannons which were quite effective so it was very scary at times. I remember one night very vividly, when there was so much fire going off around us that **I was convinced there was no way we would make it out alive. But somehow we did.**



George, then 20, was in the REME, carrying ammunition.

We were the second flotilla that went in - the first had been there and cleared some of the way for us. When we landed at Jig beach, we floated out in a boat and then drove up the beach. There was a lot of banter going on because there was always somebody that was frightened and those who wanted to pull his leg and things like that.

We reached the grass and the whole platoon got in there and we sat there waiting for them to give us the word to go. It seemed a long time. It probably wasn't more than five or 10 minutes, but it was sufficient time for them to regroup and get themselves sorted and retake the position. And then I was part of the three divisions who decided to retake it.

Bill was 20, a driver for the Royal Army Service Corps.

I didn't join, I was called up. I was in the RASC, attached to the third Battalion Monmouthshire regiment and 11th Armed Division.

When we landed, the beach was burning.

We managed to get up the beach with all our vehicles and the first sign I saw was Ouireham, pointing upwards. At the time I called it Oostreham, because I couldn't speak French. "Oui" is pronounced as "we".

Unfortunately, the third battalion Monmouthshire regiment, when they landed, got annihilated.

I wasn't up at the front with the fighting men. The men with the rifles were doing that. I just had this repeating rifle which I had to carry and use when we were static.

I remember some very nasty cases that I came upon, seeing all the flesh that had been ruined. They were a brave lot. We had to carry the dead into the hospital which was built close to where it all happened. I think of it now, some of the boys that I was with never made it and I feel fortunate.

It was nice when we came back and got out among the people and we found how happy they were.

I was a driver, a motorcyclist, so I got around a bit. There was a big German gun up on the clifftop that set light to whatever it was next to where we berthed. Then on, it was just "chase the Germans" sort of thing. We didn't have much time for emotion. We weren't prepared for it, we just took as it comes. We got as far as Falaise Gap and I was flown home from there.

Just remember. That's all. Just remember.



Afterword By Adrian Bell, CEO, Blind Veterans UK

When talking to our veterans about their experience of D-Day, many often dismiss or trivialise as unimportant the part they played. Many say that they were no more than a small cog in a huge enterprise. However, when we take a step back and consider the scale and the ultimate success of that operation, it could not have succeeded without such commitment from so many people playing their part. This was an operation the like of which had never been done before and has never been done since.

In early 1944, Southwick House became the headquarters of the main allied commanders. Today, it still contains the original and unique Grade 1 listed, painted wooden map that fills an entire wall from floor to ceiling and side to side. It shows the South Coast of Britain and the North Coast of France detailing ports of departure, landing beaches, convoy routes, minefields, tidal conditions, drop zones and more. It was used both to monitor progress and to brief VIP's including King George, Churchill and de Gaulle.

It is said that the two carpenters who made the map in early 1944 were, on completion of their work, incarcerated benignly until after the invasion less they spilled the secrets they had become so much a part of.

The coordination and control of all the activity was a huge task and a very detailed and highly secret Operation Order was produced. This ran to some 700 pages and included details for all participants from tugboat skippers

through landing craft coxswains to Beach Masters who each received their own particular subsection detailing exactly what they had to do. These operation orders were collated, typed and dispatched by a small army of WRNS working under conditions of utmost secrecy.

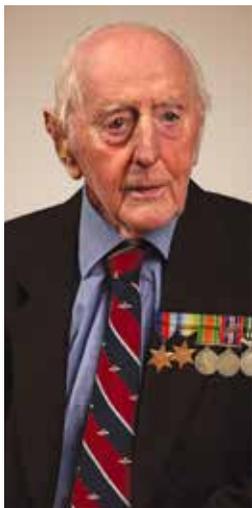
On the day, 7000 ships and landing craft and 198,000 naval personnel supported by over 14,000 allied air sorties, were involved in landing some 156,000 troops on the five beaches in Normandy. Within a few days, 326,000 troops, 50,000 vehicles and 100,000 tonnes of stores and equipment had been landed but this was not without cost, there were over 10,000 casualties and 4000 dead in the same period. By the end of June, over 850,000 men and 150,000 vehicles had been landed, my grandfather among them.

Yes, many might consider themselves to be 'just a small cog', but without each and every one of them it is likely that the eventual success would not have been forthcoming.

We salute them all and the part these brave men and women played not just in the invasion but also in the ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany and the liberation of Europe.

Adrian Bell
CEO, Blind Veterans UK





Portraits of the veterans © Richard Cannon

For the veterans' full stories,
visit: blindveterans.org.uk/dday

T: 0300 111 2233

E: supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

