HAMPSHIRE AT WAR

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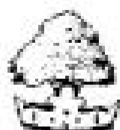
HAMPSHIRE AT WAR: An Oral History 1939-1945

by

Patricia Ross



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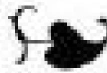
DEDICATION

To my husband John, with love,
and to all who lived and served
in Hampshire in World War II.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Ross was born in Yorkshire but has lived in southern England for most of her adult life. Her interest in local history blossomed when she became a voluntary guide to the city of York and this has continued through research in several English counties. She is a member of the Educational Writers' Association.

While bringing up her four children she trained as a teacher and taught English, Humanities and Special Education in schools for almost twenty years. She is an honours graduate of the Open University and lives with her husband and two cats on Hayling Island.

Previous publications include *Plays For Junior Range* (Pelham Puppets, 1965), *Soltan in the Sandwiches* (Outposts, 1974), *Follow Mee to Gloucestershire* and *Hampshire Hauntings and Hearsay* (The King's England Press, 1994 and 1998 respectively) and *Hayling Island Voices* (Tempus Oral History Series, 2000)

FOREWORD *by* Captain Derek Oakley, MBE, RM.

I am delighted that Pat Ross has taken up the challenge of bringing the history of Hayling Island up to date to mark the close of the twentieth century. It is nearly forty years since F.G.S. Thomas penned *The King Holds Hayling*, long out of print but reissued in a concise form in 1978, and much has changed on the Island itself.

I first came to Hayling Island on a landing craft during World War II, never expecting to live here permanently some twenty years later. I have seen at first hand the whole social structure change, the population grow and the housing increase alarmingly. These matters are touched on in this book, as the author has gone to infinite pains in her extensive research.

The part played by Hayling in the Second World War is largely compiled from interviews and letters recalling the memories of those who took part. This is an important way of recording history before it fades into oblivion. The war-time memories are of particular interest to me, for the war had a profound effect on the Island in the years following, economically, industrially and socially. There is romance, humour and pathos in the recollections and much that can be read "between the lines".

Derek Oakley
June 1999

Abandoned WWII pillbox near The Kench, Hayling Island

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight just before the Second World War were much more rural than they are now. The big towns on the coast included Portsmouth, home of the British Navy, with its Dockyard, a small airfield unequal to coping with large aircraft and a large corset factory; and Southampton with its large commercial docks for big liners and its aircraft factory from which planes emerged to take part in the Schneider Trophy. Lymington was a charming seaside town which made pistons and piston rings and Winchester was the historic county town. Gosport made big yachts and Haslar Hospital was the Navy's. Petersfield was a market town as were Stockbridge and Alresford. Havant made gloves and nearby Hayling Island was very rural indeed, with a newly developed network of holiday camps to augment its oyster fishing and service for the well-off residents and holiday-makers who lived at the south of the island. Andover was a small country town. Aldershot, near Fleet and Farnborough, was very much an army town. The hinterland of Hampshire had many large houses and private estates. Hampshire was a quiet place on the whole.

It was not so much so when I came to live at Hayling Island, in the mid-1990s. Some of the holiday camps had closed down and post-war, as elsewhere, building had spread over the formerly rural scene. When I wrote a book of oral history about Hayling, I learned very little about the war here as people said, "It was all very secret, you know" and "Of course, there were the Marines". I knew next to nothing about it and determined to find out.

Remnants of a section of Mulberry Harbour

As I realised gradually that Hayling had built sections (caissons) of the Mulberry Harbours, had two anti-aircraft gun-sites and a well-organised decoy site, and that her holiday camps had provided accommodation for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, I began to collect people's memories of

those days. Hayling Island was a landing craft base, and taught many Royal Marines to man these craft, something they had never been expected to do before. There was a boat-servicing yard, Sparks, which was used to service landing craft. Many members of Combined Operations had set off from here for the invasion of Europe in June 1944.

The rest of Hampshire became an armed camp, especially when the Americans came, and the invasion of Normandy was planned at Fort Southwick. Gosport and other local towns had been made ready for large influxes of tanks and army vehicles making for the coast before the invasion of Normandy by strengthening and widening roads to embarkation points. The New Forest had housed army camps and training, temporary airfields had been set up and used, especially during the Battle of Britain. Hampshire had been a taking-off place for both the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm.

I have included, with permission, stories of Gosport Airport and the memories of brave men and women of Gosport and Portsmouth civilians who were in the Fire Service, the Rescue Services and ARP. It was worth researching the whole of Hampshire at War, not just Hayling Island, but I have concentrated most on this island because so very much happened here. We even had a mock-invasion, when hundreds of men and machines were landed from the sea on Hayling's shores. Such happenings were sure to have affected the population of the island - all those men roaming the streets in uniform; all those lonely young men looking for diversion during training. The pubs were full and so were the dance-halls and the local cinemas. Women gradually took over jobs formerly done by men. The gun site at Sinah Warren was a mixed one and girls shot down a Dornier. Girls also took over the telephone exchange. Wrens were doing clerical work at the camps. Women were working as bus conductors. All over Hampshire, similar changes were happening to local populations. Men who were not in uniform were in short supply.

In the country, some of the big houses were requisitioned. People were working all hours, trying to fit in Home Guard duties and civil defence with a day job. Hampshire was full, early on, of Home Guard detachments drilling - actually with broomsticks. Yes, they really did, because rifles were, at first, scarce. And evacuees were sent into the country for safety.

I offer my sincere thanks to all the people who have shared their memories with me, either by taping them or writing their stories. I have approached Hampshire museums for evidence of what was really going on which was “so secret” and have been lent a lot more stories.

Thank you, too, to those of the media who have helped by

publishing my requests for information, particularly the editors of *The Hayling Islander*, *The Portsmouth News* Ltd., *The Soldier*, *Navy News*, *The Legion Magazine*, *Kedgehook* and the magazine of the Hampshire Women's Institute. Thanks too to the County Library, particularly the branches at Havant and Hayling Island, who have been most helpful. And I have enjoyed meeting the people with whom I have chatted. I hope you enjoy these stories as much as I did.

I came to Hampshire with my husband, John, who is a Hampshire man. I was at school during the war in Yorkshire. We had tanks in our suburban lane soon after the war started, and I served with my mother in two canteens for the services and joined the International Red Cross. But the effects of war were much less concentrated where I was, near Hull, than here. We spent a lot of time in our air raid shelter, as Hull was Blitzed, but although my father fire-watched Hull, where he worked, Hull was not bombed as often nor so severely as Portsmouth, which is believed to have been bombed more than any city other than London. We lived on the outskirts, so just watched fires and searchlights in the sky as we went to our air raid shelter. I planned to join the Wrens when I was old enough, because I liked the uniform, but the war was over before I left school. I know now how hard some of these girls worked, and at jobs for which I was hardly fitted.

I have enormous respect for those who are represented in these pages. Some said they were not afraid because they were so well trained and they just had a job to do. Others were just plain scared and admitted it. And I am aware that they remember with respect those whom they knew who failed to survive, and whom many have said they recall "at the going down of the sun and in the morning …"

I began recording Hayling Island history as my own personal millennium project and have compiled much of this account with reference to the experiences of those who have lived and worked here. I am grateful to all those who have contributed their advice, memories and photographs, and to Captain Derek Oakley, MBE, RM for reading the first version of the manuscript and for writing the Foreword to what has grown into a very different book!

Hayling lies east of the City of Portsmouth on the south coast of Hampshire, England. Between it and Portsmouth is Langstone Harbour. The waters of Chichester Harbour lap its eastern shore. Close to the Portsmouth Royal Naval Dockyard and the city's naval establishments, and with accommodation already present in the form of holiday homes, hotels and holiday camps, the Island was used throughout the Second World War to accommodate large numbers of Royal Navy and Royal Marine

personnel, particularly those in training. Hayling's creeks and harbours were ideal for mooring a growing number of the minor landing craft used in the invasion of continental Europe in 1944 and for training those who manned them.

Hayling's wide sandy beach was used for a large-scale invasion rehearsal and prior to this, the Island was the starting point for secret raids on Occupied France. It provided a base for secret training of COPP personnel (Combined Operations Pilotage Parties) who were to survey possible landing places for Allied invasion forces both on European and Mediterranean shores.

I feel privileged to have been the recipient of many recollections of Hayling Island from those who were here during the period 1939 to 1945. Where authorised, taped memories have been deposited in the Wessex Film and Sound archive and letters received will be offered to the County Record Office. Telephone conversations were recorded in note form at the time they were made and extracts from as many contributors as possible have been included in the text. As time went on, I extended my research to the rest of Hampshire. Here I present a number of snapshots of the time from the memories of those who experienced it.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed conversations with many charming elderly folk who were young then, but only a little older than me. Some of the ladies were able to man gun-sites and administration offices to release men for other essential work. Now I know, to some extent, what I missed. It is only recently that some of the information collected here has become available. I realise that I was living through much more history than anyone managed to teach me in school.

During the time I was preparing the Hayling material it became clear to me that this was just the kernel of something potentially much larger, a book that could actually encompass the experience of the war-time years throughout Hampshire as a whole and indeed beyond its county boundaries, and although incorporating this additional material has obviously proved a much, much longer task than the production of the originally planned volume would have been, we feel that the overall result has been a much better narrative, and one that still retains the Hayling Island material, but now set in its wider context.

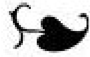
The material in this book has been loosely grouped in broad categories, covering such obvious areas as the Army, the Navy, the Home Front, etc. However, it is not always possible to be so clean-cut about people's reminiscences, which inevitably will overlap artificial boundaries in some cases. I hope the reader will forgive these instances where we have felt it is more important to let someone carry on telling a fascinating story,

rather than cut them short and try and “shoehorn” their tale into a specific category. Similarly, some of these interviews were done in a format which identifies the interviewee and interviewer by initials, and where this has been done, I have left it in place, as an added aid to understanding who was speaking at the time.

The ranks mentioned in people’s contributions are usually the rank they held at that time, although not always. Some of them of course went on to obtain higher ranks through promotion, both during and after the War.

THANKS AND PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Captain Derek Oakley, MBE, RM, for checking through the first draft of my work. Also to: David Lee, Wessex Film and Sound Archivist, for help and advice; Dr John Stedman, Portsmouth Museums Service; the Curator and Staff of Havant Museum; Havant and Waterlooville Urban District Council; the Royal Marines Museum, Portsmouth; Portsmouth D-Day Museum; Emsworth Museum; Aldershot Museums; Hampshire County Record Office; John Badley, Langstone RSPB Reserve; Mr L. Cairns, Coastal Defence Engineers, Havant Borough Council; Mr R. Miles, author of *Miles Aweigh*, for insight into what the training he received on Hayling Island led to; Beryl, Lady Mackworth, for permission to quote from personal memoirs; W.D. Jarman, author of *Those Wallowing Beauties - the Story of Landing Craft in World War II;* Mr Ron Dunham, for putting me in touch with Peter Frampton, author of *The Royal Marines 803 LCV (p) Flotilla Combined Operations Force*; the editors of *The Hayling Islander, Portsmouth Evening News, Navy News, The Globe and Laurel* and *Kedgehook;* Hampshire Library Service, especially at Hayling Island (Maggi Davies) and Havant; to Cllr Victor Pierce Jones for introducing me to ladies who helped to man local gun-sites; HISC and HIHS archivists; Billy Swift; Mr D. Newton, Hayling Post Office; Hampshire Record Office, Winchester; Mr Bob Dance for his plan of *Deathwatch*; to E. A. Sharples for the loan of his D-Day Pocket Book, and to all who have contributed their memories and photographs. Also to Mr Steve Benz of SB Publications for permission to use his OS map of Hampshire in order to map Hayling Island in war-time.



THE ARMY

The British regular Army went into the second world war with essentially the attitudes and equipment of the 20s and 30s. Inevitably the army had been scaled down after the massive conscript forces of the first world war, and those "regulars" who had chosen to make it their billet in life were relatively comfortable at the outset.

It was only when the British Expeditionary Force came up against the mechanized Blitzkreig tactics of the *Wehrmacht* in France and the Low Countries in 1940, leading up to the debacle that was Dunkirk, that those in charge of Britain's land forces had a sharp awakening to the realisation that this war would be different, perhaps.

With France fallen and the remnants of the BEF snatched off the beaches under the withering fire of the victorious Germans, the defence of the coastline against the invasion which many thought would be inevitable, sooner or later, became a top priority. Even a pre-war idyll such as Hayling Island had to be defended.

Late 1940 to 1941 - invasion threat, Hayling bombed, the defence of Hayling.

A secret memo of August 1941 to the Defence Committee outlined a possible picture of the expected invasion as intense bombing followed by attacks by parachute and airborne troops, then invasion by sea. It said that the Military Plan was that there would be no withdrawal, and that roads must be kept clear of craters, debris, fire or refugees to facilitate movement of troops.

The Ministry of Information, War Office and Ministry of Home Security issued a helpful pamphlet which said that where the enemy landed, or tried to land, there would be most violent fighting and the fewer civilians or non-combatants in these areas the better - apart from essential workers,

who must remain. Everyone must stand firm. If fighting were to break out nearby, people were instructed to put their cars out of action, give help to our troops, defend themselves, their families and their homes, and not to help the enemy in any way. Churchill said we would never surrender. But many Hayling Islanders were essential workers on farms. I have not spoken to anyone who contemplated leaving, except on call-up or to follow a serving husband.

A committee was formed to prepare for the scenario that the enemy would land and Hayling would be cut off from mainland services. Sources of fresh water were catalogued - wells, springs, pools and lakes. It was to be ensured that they were fit to use. Stagnant water was treated and tank reservoirs were set up.

Colonel T.C.H. Macafee, CBE, Royal Marines, from near Winchester, was Captain (A) and responsible for advising the Commander of the Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation (MNBDO) on discipline matters, from late 1940 to 1941. The MNBDO were anti-aircraft batteries and coast defence artillery.

His troops lived in holiday camps in the east of Hayling, the officers mostly in large houses. At Seacourt, the former home of Jack Marshall, the Marshall & Snelgrove heir, they used the indoor real tennis court as a gym. Other officers had a mess in the west. He says they were comfortable and well fed as the services had special rations and there were not the shortages of later years. Neither had the MNBDO any shortage of equipment, as Churchill gave them strong backing. Macafee's formation eventually went to the Middle East and took part in the invasion of Sicily and Italy.

Seacourt, Hayling Island.

During his time on the Island, the Colonel recalls that although he and colleagues were free to go to London, few did, as the city was being Blitzed. They were busy most of the time but played tennis at some of the homes in the west of Hayling and met a number of local people who kindly entertained them. They also had visits by the Entertainments National Service Organisation (ENSA) who performed in the Seacourt tennis court. He says that afterwards, a meal and drinks were given for the ENSA performers in the officers' mess and an impromptu dance was organised, and that the ENSA girls were attractive.

Men of 219 Battery (57th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment) at Sinah

defended Hayling Island and Portsmouth from enemy aircraft. A Hurricane aircraft was shot own in January over what became Northwood Farm. The Polish pilot, Jan Salkowski, had flown over British Ack-Ack guns while chasing a German plane, was caught in friendly fire and landed by parachute.

A plaque to the memory of the six men of the Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Sinah who gave their lives on 17th and 18th April 1941 was erected in July 1994 at the gun-site (now a quiet picnic area) where they died.

Eventually, of course, the tide of the war changed in the allies' favour, and with the entry of America into the war, the victory in the Battle of the Atlantic over the U-Boat menace, and the triumphs in North Africa beginning at El Alamein, a process began which inevitably led to the massive build up of troops and material which culminated in D-Day. Hayling, too, played its part in this springboard to victory.

What was going on in and around Havant? The Borough of Havant information brochure lists the following local part of what it calls The Ultimate Invasion Plan. From *D-Day: A Day to Remember* published by the Borough of Havant, June 1994, for the 50th anniversary of D-Day and used here by courtesy of Mrs Marshall:

The King's Stone in Rowlands Castle marks where King George VI inspected D-Day troops. Rowlands Castle Green was used as a repair area for tanks and armoured vehicles and at nearby Stansted House, Free French and Canadian troops were billeted in transit camp A. Free French troops were based around Hollybank House and Emsworth Common was transit camp A2 for British and Canadian troops. A mine development team, HMS *Vernon*, was based at Leigh Park House. Carrells Yard was a billet for troops. A service canteen occupied the United Reformed Church Hall in Havant. The cinema in North Street, now demolished, was the soldiers' mess. Merchistoun Hall in Horndean was headquarters for an armoured unit known as 30 Corps. Stakes Hill had a tented camp for the King's Own Scottish Borderers and Queen's Enclosure was a tented camp, A6. Then there was all the activity on Hayling Island, described elsewhere. The discretion of residents all along the Hampshire coast must indeed have played a large part in the information blackout which allowed the invasion to take place with total surprise. Although Hampshire was the focal point for planning and embarkation, all along the south coast similar discretion must have been observed, for troops gathered in other south coast counties too.

In order to keep the massive buildup secret, there needed to be close co-operation between the civil powers and the military, who were often

unwelcome "squatters" in their back yard.

Memories of **Mr Cyril Lumb,** a member of Gosport Town Hall staff, 1944, from a Gosport D-Day tape, courtesy of Gosport Museum:

"You were involved with the work of the invasion committee before D-Day, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was Committee Clerk for the Invasion Committee from the time it was formed. That was a committee of leading members of the council - and it was served by the officers of the council and also in close cooperation with the military authorities, and with the police and fire services."

"So you must have known a lot about the preparations for D-Day. Before many people?"

"Yes. We were not told too much in detail as to what was happening, but we were made very clearly aware that the invasion of the continent was imminent and preparation would be made to that effect. I don't think it was other than common knowledge, that it was bound to take place. The Russians were getting very angry that Britain was not making any direct move to invade the continent and that *they* were taking all the brunt, but I think it was no secret that an invasion was being planned. So far as Gosport was concerned, it became clear from things that were happening that the area was going to be very closely involved. We were asked to co-operate in preparing the roads in the town to receive heavy traffic and a number of roads on various indicated routes were strengthened so that they'd be able to bear the weight of the heavy tanks and other military equipment that was going through. One particular development was the completion of Jellicoe Avenue which at that time was a planned road and it had only been laid out and not surfaced from Privett Road down to Western Way - that surfacing was completed quickly and across the former Dell, between Western Way and the Stokes Bay, the direct road across was completed so that there was a direct road from Privett Road, straight down to Stokes Bay for all the traffic that needed to come."

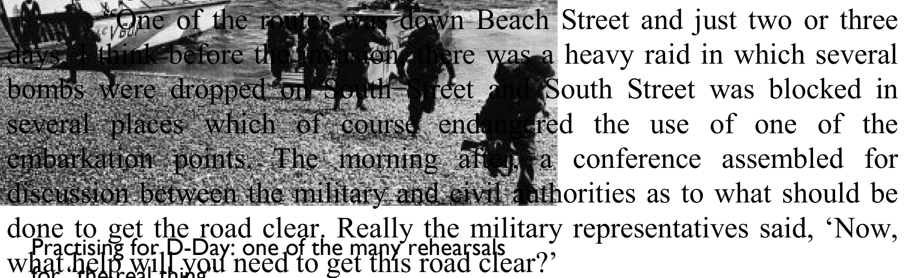
"Who was involved in policing the troops in the town?"

"The armed forces provided their own military police to control the traffic and the military traffic throughout the town. Another route was through the town and down South Street to Beach Street where the slipway, that's the floating bridge, was used as an embarkation pier. And Hardway, where there had been special provision made for a strengthened slipway from Priory Road down to the northern part of the Harbour for the third embarkation point.

"Can you remember when you first realised that D-Day was close, there was bombing very soon before the invasion, wasn't there?"

“Yes, but we knew before that, that the invasion was close. The knowledge had been building up because we knew that the beaches at Stokes Bay and at Lee on Solent were being used for some construction that everyone was quite sure had something to do with the war. The two beaches were closed to the general public and, for instance, we were only allowed by courtesy to come to our own home in Village Road here. We couldn’t go any further down except with a special permit for service purposes. But it was very clear that invasion was in the minds of the armed forces. The preparations being made to strengthen the roads, for instance, were going on for several months.

“One of the routes was down Beach Street and just two or three days, I think, before the invasion, there was a heavy raid in which several bombs were dropped on South Street and South Street was blocked in several places which of course endangered the use of one of the embarkation points. The morning after, a conference assembled for discussion between the military and civil authorities as to what should be done to get the road clear. Really the military representatives said, ‘Now, what help will you need to get this road clear?’



Practising for D-Day: one of the many rehearsals for “the real thing”

“After discussion, the matter was left that the military would bring in their heavy equipment to help clear the roads, because whatever we had was certainly inadequate for the immediate job. We could have done it in a week, but not in days. Within 24 hours, I think, they had cleared the whole of the rubble and restored the freeway through Sand Street to get down to that embarkation beach.”

“Do you remember the point when you knew that the invasion had actually started?”

“Well, we knew it two or three days before the original D-Day, because we were invaded by hordes of vehicles and men on their way to the embarkation beaches. They moved into Gosport and down the prescribed routes of the strengthened roadways right the way to the beach. The foremost vehicles, with their men, moved through right to Stokes Bay, ready to move off immediately the time was ripe, and other groups of vehicles formed up right there. We had strengthened points right through the town so there could be a constant flow and when the thing started, as one group of vehicles moved on to the launchers, everything else moved up one point. So they moved on to keep the flow of vehicles on to the boats as quickly as they could be moved away.”

“What was the atmosphere like in the town?”

“It was very tense. Everyone knew what was afoot, but remained remarkably calm. I don’t remember seeing anyone panic-stricken by it all. One of the amazing things was the way in which the local populace helped

the men who were on the way. They brought them out meals … in some cases I think they actually asked them into the house for meals, whilst the vehicles and crews were waiting outside their houses. Some of them even took a chance of letting them have a bath before they embarked. And there was a great friendship and many of those friendships were maintained a long time after the war. Folk who had been helped got in touch and friendships resulted...” (Mr Cyril Lumb, Gosport Town Hall employee, from Gosport D-Day tapes, courtesy of Gosport Museum.)

Operation Fabius

Operation Fabius was a final rehearsal for D-Day by Force G, the British 50th Northumbrian Division, which subsequently landed on Gold Beach on D-Day. The force landed at South Hayling beach, opposite the Royal Hotel, on 4 May 1944.

Assault troops who took part were from the 2nd Wales Borderers, 2nd Battalion Gloucesters, 2nd Battalion Essex, 6th, 8th and 9th Durham Light Infantry, 2nd Battalion Devonshires, 1st Battalion Hampshires, 1st Battalion Dorsetshires, 5th Battalion East Yorkshires, 6th and 7th Green Howards, 1st Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, 4/7th Dragoon Guards. It is believed that Churchill and Eisenhower watched from the top of the Royal Hotel, Hayling Island. Of course, one positive aspect of the war years for many people in Hampshire, especially women, was the way in which it opened up opportunities to them which would have been undreamed of in pre-war England. Despite the privations and dangers they often faced, nevertheless it remains a fact that many women saw much more of the world than they ever would have under different circumstances. One such was **Mrs Barrie Knight.**

Mrs Barrie Knight (née Peggy White) was posted to Ceylon, from where she wrote to her mother in England, who kept her correspondence. With permission, part of a letter from 1945 is reproduced here. The prisoners of war in Burma and Japan were beginning to reach Ceylon on the way home in a variety of warships and merchant ships. Ships stopped in Burma to refuel, and for ex-prisoners this was an opportunity to do some shopping and generally to experience an unaccustomed way of life. Many of them were in a very poor state of health both physically and mentally and also many had not been in touch with their wives or families.

“So we used to ... We took them out for lunch and took them out shopping. We couldn’t believe how dreadful they looked. They thought it was wonderful to see all the people. They wanted to buy lipsticks and things to take home. It was all …you know, very moving. They were dreadfully thin. And they were just in rags and you had to be very careful

as to what you gave them to eat if they came to the mess, because they weren't used to much food.

"But the main thing was them wanting to shop all the time. I expect they would be given money on the ship. But we had the officers' club, we had ... the NAAFI, they put on a wonderful show, dance, and we were terribly hot, in September, and we were in uniform and they provided chocolates and cigarettes, and a lovely lunch. And they were so grateful, just pathetic, and they looked like very old men; they can't have been more than in their forties. They all wanted to talk about the camp, although they also asked thousands of questions. They had kept up with the news remarkably well. Four years is a long time and so some of the things they asked us about seemed very odd.

"They were terribly hopeful and talked as though everything would be just as they left it at home. They said their last letters were two years old. It worried us that they seemed to think that their wives and girlfriends would be just as they had been in October 1943. I only hope they were able to find them. One man didn't know where his wife was: three years ago she was in South Africa. He had hoped to find a cable at the bank but there was nothing for him. He was sure he would find a letter waiting for him when he got back. One wanted to know how to buy a lipstick. He said he had almost forgotten the taste of it, but thought it wouldn't be long before he found out.

"This shopping: we walked miles and bought material for their fiancées, wives, sisters, mothers and babies, sent cables, changed money, looked for mail, bought fountain pens, had lunch and did some shopping. Then we saw them to the jetty. I then had to go to the office and do my day's work. The officer's club had an orchestra playing the whole time. After lunch, in the height of the heat, I danced round and round the floor on my flat feet for about half-an-hour. The men were thrilled. They wanted to make sure they knew how to dance before they got back to their beloveds. It really was an awful sight to see them and we had some lovely letters afterwards, from the ones we'd looked after. But we didn't follow it up; they would have found their lovers waiting for them all."

When war broke out in 1939, for many there was the patriotic rush to join up to the colours, as there had been in 1914. In some cases this happened within days of Neville Chamberlain's famous broadcast on the outbreak of war, and in some cases it is clear that the declaration of war caught those in command "on the hop", as **Mr Rouse**'s experience proves.

Mr Rouse of Chandler's Ford had lived in Eastleigh all his life. (This interview, for Wessex Film and Sound Archive project 'Hampshire's War', is used courtesy of the Archive.)

"When war began, I was in Eastleigh. I was working on the railway. I was an apprentice at that time. In the local works itself. I was only a lad of 19. People didn't marry as young in those days." He lived at home, with "just my mother. My father died when I was eight. And my sister, she was seven years younger than I am. She was still at school then.

"The day war broke out - of course the week preceding the war, TA [Territorial Army] members were being called out. We knew all this of course being in the RAOC [Royal Army Ordnance Corps]. And strangely enough, we didn't hear a thing on the Friday. They never bothered to warn us, so I finished work at five o'clock - another chappie who was with me in the TA lived round the corner - we used to walk to work together. Then when I came home I was met at the front gate by my mother who said, 'It's come over the radio this afternoon you've got to be called immediately - general mobilisation.' 'Cause then we realised ... so we reported to the Depot. We were then sent home again - we stayed the night, and we reported various stages the following day. I left home and had to be in Southampton before eleven o'clock. They were in King Edward's School, which was opposite the Civic Centre. What was the Police Station area. And we were issued with one blanket, no palliasse, no mattresses, no nothing; so you were bedded down overnight - you put the blanket on top of you. Your mind was turning all ways, all night long. Nobody could sleep. And of course, eleven o'clock the next day was the Declaration of War. But that was my experience of the lead up to it. From then you didn't know what the future held or anything else. So you went straight to the services.

"There was one strange experience - it don't matter what time I arrived home (on leave), whether it was during the night, my bed was made and that happened right through the war." His mother would say, 'Reg is coming home on leave today' and people would say, 'Have you heard from him?' and she'd say, 'I know. I know he's coming.' They'd come round, and find that I was home. It's strange.

"We were allowed to write home, once the beach-head was established. It had to be in a censor envelope, and not sealed down. Just that you were fit and well, and that things were OK. You weren't allowed to say where you were. You weren't allowed to mention places or things like that."

"You actually went on D-Day?"

"Yes. 'Course, it was cancelled for twenty-four hours. Everybody was sort of… our postings came through. I was nine posting, so our reporting point was Frinton-on-Sea, and the station master at Frinton must have had the key to everything there was going on in that vicinity, because

when we arrived at Frinton, there was two of us, and the station master said, 'What are you looking for?' and we said 'So-and-so'. 'Oh, all right," he said, "Go and get a cup of tea and come back here in an hour'. When we arrived back, there was transport waiting to take us to the secret destination. From that time on, you weren't allowed to send letters or anything. You just disappeared from the world."

Eric Haynes, born 1920 was another one who reported for duty, only to find that duty wasn't quite ready for him. His experience also highlights the wonderful informality with which it was seemingly possible to move between units and services in those early days, before the massive bureaucracy that eventually governed all apects of the war-time armed services, had come into being. In his case, a casual request for a transfer took him all the way from Portsmouth to the Straits of Messina, and then back to Bognor Regis!

"I did a PTI [Principal Training Instructor] course at Eastney Barracks and was billeted in the Cumberland Ballroom, Portsmouth. We slept on mattresses on the floor for three weeks, going daily to the barracks for our meals and training, then back to Hayling. We also went to Whale Island for a pistol course and practice fire-fighting on a dummy ship.

"Fed up with my job as Corporal Instructor with the 20th RM Training Battalion, I had requested a draft to Sea Service. An officer going to Eastney made enquiries for me and came back with the information that I should go to Portsmouth docks where I would find BPC I [Beach Protection Craft I] which had just taken part in the Dieppe raid, and this was the type of craft I could expect to go to . It was a Mark III tank landing craft converted to a gunship with twin 4.7 guns. I was also told to go to Eastney Barracks and contact two sergeants who would give me further info. This project was being kept quiet at this time and was known as Y Group. I liked the idea and applied for the draft.

"Meantime the 20th RM Training Battalion was moved to Devon to become the RMITC." After a few weeks there, "My draft came through to report to Eastney Barracks. My group was Y7. We did the full naval gun course at the gun battery, 6 inch, etc. I was pleased to be awarded the gunnery medal, which was presented to me by Admiral Sir Roger Keyes. Things were getting a bit more advanced, I was promoted from corporal to sergeant and a crew was formed of 50 marines, six corporals, two sergeants, two officers to each craft, now to be known as LCGLs (which was equipped with Oerlikons and pom-poms, the 'L' standing for 'Large'). Later Mark IV TLCs [Tank Landing Craft] were used, to be converted. These were wider in the beam. The flat bows were retained, just welded up, flat bottom and drawing three foot for'ard and six foot aft, rather

shallow and not very sea-worthy, but getting near the beach was the object. I was glad of the shallow draught, for when in the Messina Straits, Sicily, a daft MTB [Motor Torpedo Boat] fired two torpedoes at us, mistaking us for Germans. I watched them pass underneath us and heard the propellers. They exploded ashore.

"Our crew was to go the LCFs [Landing Craft Flak] and we did ack-ack instruction at the gun battery, Eastney, where there was a special dome which threw attacking pictures of planes round the inside of the dome. The trainee would fire at the targets with a dummy gun, the tracer being visible, clever stuff. One day at stand-easy, when we were outside, Jerry decided to dive-bomb us for real. Lucky for us the bombs sailed over us and landed just outside the barracks. I don't know what damage they did.

"We also went to Bognor Regis where Oerlikon and pom-pom [guns] were mounted at the end of the pier. The RAF kindly trailed a drogue for us to fire at. If the tracer got too near the plane, the pilot dropped the drogue and pushed off home!

"Up to now, sometimes we were billeted privately in homes and sometimes in barracks, but my opposite number and I took over several of the hotels opposite Southsea Pier for billeting the crews. The WRNS were also billeted in some of the hotels and used to drill along the front Parade. I also used to drill my crew there and our heavier tread used to send the WRNS step haywire. The PO Wren did not think this was funny!

"Now the crew had to do a seamanship course, this was done on the Old Monitor, HMS *Marshal Soult*, which had been taken out of service. It had seen service in the '14 -'18 war. (My father, a Royal Marine, served on her then and he served in the last war, World War II, at HMS *Ganges*, Shottey, Suffolk, a training establishment for boy seamen.) I had to march my crew daily to the dockyard, where the *Marshal Soult* lay. They were victualled on board. After this training, we went to Fort Gomer, where we did route marches and other keep fit. German planes meanwhile had been over, dropping pamphlets and photos of the Dieppe raid and Lord Haw-Haw was also telling us what a failure it was, so Lord Louis Mountbatten, now made Chief of Combined Operations (which is what we were now called) decided to visit us with a pep talk. The usual thing - a soap box appears from nowhere, Lord Louis on top, 'break ranks and gather round'. Then to get things going he told us a story, I still recall it. He said that a Royal Marine posted to the Far East wrote to his girlfriend in England, breaking off their engagement. She wrote back asking what this girl had got that she had not. His reply was, 'Nothing, dear, but what she has, she has out here.' Lord Louis could certainly put it over, a real leader.

"When I last visited Portsmouth for a reunion it was the Royal Sailors' Home. There appears to be a housing estate where Fort Gomer stood. While at Eastney and Southsea I used to go to the King's Theatre. Vivian Dunn, then a captain, was the bandmaster and used to conduct the RM orchestra there. I recall seeing Elsie and Doris Waters perform there.

"The draft arrived, our craft was ready and we went to King George V dock, London, where it was built. We took over and had sea trials, afterwards sailing to Portsmouth. We called on our way to get degaussal. Behind it was Sheerness. This called for a cable to be passed round, outside our craft, to demagnetise as a protection against magnetic mines. Our craft by the way was LCF(L) II.

"From Portsmouth we patrolled the Channel; also did ship-to-shore firing at the Isle of Wight. The targets were on the cliffs near the Needles, dummy guns and tanks. Before we started firing we could see a road going along the top of the cliffs and this was blocked off to traffic, opening again when we finished. There was a signal station we could see on top of the cliffs, to the right, just above the Needles. We were told to be careful as there had been one occasion when it had been hit by a stray shell. I don't know if this was true or just to make us a bit more careful.

"Finally, we left Portsmouth and sailed to Plymouth, where a convoy of us was forming, again going in the Channel for firing practice. After one such practice we were at a buoy just in front of the bridge at Saltash when the corporal on the for'ward pom-pom accidentally had left a round in the breech and fired it either through, over or under the bridge.

"Our next orders were to sail to Falmouth where in convoy with other craft we sailed to the Med and, based at Malta, carried out the invasions of Sicily and Italy, sailing back November to prepare for D-Day.

"It had been a very rough trip and just off the Bristol Channel our engines broke down - had to be towed to Barry Island. After a short while we were told that we had to hand over our craft to the Americans who seemed to want it to support their own landings, so it was off to HMS *Westcliff* at Southend. After that, to HMS *Robertson* at Sandwich. Here I was detailed to take a party of Marines to HMS *Mastodon* which was at Exbury House estate near Beaulieu. Nevile Shute's book, *Requiem for a Wren* used *Mastodon* as the base for his story. He did a good job.

"We were to be casualty replacements for Fs and Gs, which were all stationed up the river. My accommodation was to be a bell tent. On entering I found that it was only occupied by one acting sergeant who did not seem too pleased to see me. I guessed why when next morning the tent flap opened and a Wren appeared with a mug of tea. I did not get one. This happened every morning and all I got was a glare, I wonder why?

"The camp was sealed off, no-one allowed out for several weeks. I had to post sentries at various places. The gardener went berserk one day when he found that one night a sentry, a bit bored, did a bit of bayonet practice on a tree, which he said was a very rare specimen. I wonder if it survived?

"Dieppe had taught us about security. Although different units mixed at evenings, at the canteen, everyone was tight-lipped about their job. During the day, groups were all over the place getting instruction, these men were all the spear-head of the invasion and would be the first to land.

"The secrecy was to be proved one morning. When I woke, the bed opposite was empty, the sergeant and his gear had slipped away during the night, the tent flap did not open and there was no mug of tea. I went out and the place looked deserted. I reported to the orderly room where I was given a map reference and told to take a party of Marines to a camp which had been vacated. A lorry was provided for transport and I had to mount guard until relieved, food would be brought from *Mastodon*.

"I duly arrived at the camp, which was Nissen huts, etc., and found the place completely deserted. The keys to the huts were in the guard room and I discovered them full of equipment and stores, all packed away. I made out a guard roster and I forget how many days we were there until some lorries arrived with naval personnel who took an inventory of everything, loaded up and left the place empty. So it was back to *Mastodon*. The craft had all gone off on D-Day. I did see an officer that I knew, about getting on his craft before D-Day. This would've given him an extra sergeant. He saw the CO of *Mastodon* who would not agree, as I was the only sergeant he could call on if needed.

"After *Mastodon*, it was to HMS *Robertson* at Sandwich, Kent. There was a new type of craft being built, not a conversion but a purpose-built one, the armour being 25-pounder or 17-pounder guns in separate turrets on each craft. It had been found that after the troops had landed, further support was needed to give accurate supporting fire, further inland. To do this a howitzer was needed to give a high trajectory over any buildings, etc., that were in the way. The 25-pounder was a howitzer, the trajectory being governed by adjusting the charge.

"I was drafted to North Wales for a course on 25- and 17-pounders, which I completed. This also included a bit of climbing over Cader Idris, etc., just to keep fit. Barmouth was the nearest place to get a bit of recreation; we had to cross the toll bridge to get there. Servicemen were charged to cross. I think it was a halfpenny. This was different to Hayling Island where servicemen were not charged to cross the bridge; we also had this concession at Sandwich. When we had to cross the bridge at Barmouth

on a route march, the officer in charge had to fork out for about 30 men!

"After this course it was back to *Robertson* to wait for a craft. So far only two had been built, LCG(M) 101 and LCG(M) 102. This was now the time of the Walcheren landings. Some chaps went from *Robertson*. Apparently the visibility was bad at the time and the six-inch gun emplacements were not knocked out and caused heavy losses in landing craft. Both LCG(M)s were sunk. Some survivors were picked up from 101 but there were no survivors from 102. However a landing *was* made successfully.

"Soon after my craft was ready and we went to Hull where it was built, and after sea trial sailed to Poole and then to Plymouth. Here was HMS *Highway*, which was a dockship. It could lower itself in the water, take three of us LCG(M)s inside, get chocked up and rise again leaving the craft high and dry, the crews living aboard *Highway*. We then anchored off Plymouth and this was VE Day. We could watch the celebrations, fireworks, etc., ashore but were not allowed to leave, as we sailed next morning for the Far East.

"One thing I did not mention earlier was that before sailing to the Med on LCF II, we called at Calshot at the RAF Sea Rescue base. Here we went into their dry dock to have the bottom of the F cleaned. We went ashore while this was being done and were the guests of the RAF - more comfortable than the F which had rather a small galley to feed 75 men. When bread ran out, which we got ashore, it was hard tack biscuits. Still, we did get hard lying money, 9d a day for marines and ABs, a shilling for corporals and leading seamen and 1s. 3d. for POs and sergeants; a tot of rum a day, one pound of tobacco a month, also a pound of yellow soap."

The exploits of Mr Haynes illustrate once more how much the ordinary soldier, seaman or airman of the day could expect to travel, and not just to far away places with strange sounding names. The Army of course relied very heavily on landing craft, especially on D-Day, but also in the many other lesser operations which led up to the invasion of mainland Europe.

John Cook was another who ended up gravitating towards this particular method of troop transport.

Many landing craft personnel were stationed at the Royal Hotel on Hayling Island, in relative comfort, including Marine John Cook of Tintinhull, who was sent from there to Sicily and Italy. While he was at the Royal, two of his flotilla craft went down in bad weather on their way back from Belfast. He and colleagues had to pack up personal possessions of the crew - young men with whom they had served - and send them back to their families. They were in LCTs (Gun) and he was in LCTs (Flak) armed

with Oerlikons and then pom-poms. There were about 40-50 Royal Marines to a dozen Royal Navy personnel on craft of 400-500 tons, about 200 feet long and 30 feet wide. LCGs had two 4.7-inch guns and Pom-poms on the bridge, used for bombarding, as protection for other craft, or before a landing.

He had done normal training when he volunteered for the Special Boat Servce. Using three or four LCFs, they went to Salerno and Italy, successfully crossing Atlantic waters in their small craft. On the way back, they were attacked in error by an American Liberator. Women were extremely important to the home front, throughout the war, but many also found themselves actually involved in a more operational role, especially in the massive enterprise that became D-Day. Witness, for instance, the experience of **Dr F. Southey-Watson**, a British Army nurse. In common with other people interviewed for this book, she had no inkling where her commitment to the calling was to take her.

"When did you first learn that you were to participate in the invasion of Europe?"

"In a roundabout sort of way. One day, just as I was about to go on duty, I was handed a very small package which arrived for me in the post, and I unwrapped it." Inside was her father's rosary, which was given to his mother when he was a very young man. "This very beautiful thing he had carried through the First World War, through Jutland, Dardenelles... And its arrival through the post with no message - anything - threw me into a state of fright. I assumed, this being war-time, that he had been killed. So I took it back to my room. I was no use that day as a nurse at all. There's no duty I remember.

"And as soon as I decently could, the following morning, I rang home and I said, 'Mother, is father dead?' She said, 'My dear, I don't *think* he's dead. I've just been doing his breakfast. It's terribly difficult to *tell* with your father!' And she came back a few minutes later and said 'No. He's *not* dead. He's eaten his egg!' So I made my excuses and got off the phone. She must have thought I was drunk. I learned afterwards that he had learned that I was going to be sent from Aldershot...

"The first official news that I had, came just before the end of May. I was called and asked to prepare a list of the nurses serving under me, whom I thought would be suitable to be taken on actual nursing service with the armed forces. One realised at once, with all this talk of the second front, that this was actually going to be it. And I think I must have danced out of the office ... I compiled my list and I couldn't tell anybody - strictest secrecy. I had a very stressful time, packing ..."

"What was the atmosphere like in Aldershot, which was a major

garrison town, in the days before the invasion?"

"Absolute bedlam. Men coming down with things everywhere, packing - unpacking - orders - counter-orders. Everything seemed to be terribly disorganised. And out of this disorder - jumble - came ... it was wonderfully organised. It was *quite* astonishing.

"We in fact were not directed to an urban area, closed camp. We were driven down in lorries into Gosport on D + 8. We went through very very quickly. People called things to us. You know, people joked - man power shortages?', gave us some tea. It was very encouraging. Some of us, I think, were very near to tears. We went over on an LST - it was just a boat. I can remember the moving part of this was ... them singing for us 'For those in Peril on the Sea'."

Nursing in a Field Hospital, "I actually hit Europe before my husband. We were immediately processing wounded for transporting on hospital ships. The pressure of work was very much, despite our enormous desire to go. Provision for war wounded? - they were not treated at the forward medical stations, field hospitals, where we were.

"We did very little surgical nursing. We were mostly involved in doing surgical nursing for prisoners of war, but they had to be transported back to rear dressing stations, and some of the men were in desperate physical condition. Because, apart from being wounded, they were trapped in the back of a lorry and were driven hundreds of miles. We had very few doctors."

"How did you feel, getting so close to men who were, after all, the enemy?"

"I was a nurse. And, it sounds a cliché to say such things. We didn't have control, in the end. One felt enormous pity. One never thought about it. Some we couldn't get on ships and they died. It was a very busy time. Sometimes the emotional aspect really drained you."

"How did you find your nurses, many of whom were very young girls, coped under fire?"

"I think they did very very well indeed. I think they showed tremendously - these girls - I don't think you can touch England at all."

"The American forces [nurses] were very... Some of them had not even touched England. They had just come straight through. They had never come under fire at all. And some of them really were ... an enormous number were hysterical. It was absolutely terrible. In fact, with hindsight, we British girls were too harsh with them, but it was the fact they hadn't had this experience (of domestic bombing)."

"Did your attitude towards the Germans change when you were involved in evacuating and treating and caring for the wounded and

malnourished from Ravensbruck concentration camp?"

[Long pause.] "I find it very *very* difficult, in rationalising that at all. It was - terrible. And I suppose in hindsight, yes. One's attitude did change. Seeing Germans and then seeing the Ravensbruck... was catastrophic. We were ... girls who had coped perfectly well (previously) just couldn't cope - with the stench, we were in hell. They were barely human. Half mad, many of them. Ingrained dirt in this place, it was terrible, terrible. We didn't know what to do." [She mentions the gas chambers.] "It was only the men, doctors ... the women just cried. I still have nightmares. Guilt. Terrible state they were in. After all this long time, the terror... They had been left, simply dumped, even the rations... nothing. Absolutely dreadful."

(Interviewed for the Gosport D-Day tapes and used courtesy of Gosport Museum)

Of course, for many soldiers, wherever they were stationed, the basics of life were the same. Shelter or cover from enemy fire, food, comradeship, and letters to and from home.

Mr Rouse of Eastleigh was in the Army. These extracts, from a 'Hampshire's War' project by the Wessex Film and Sound Archive, are used courtesy of the Archive.

Asked how long it went on for, Mr Rouse replied, "Probably a month, or something like that. Our destination finally turned out to be Southend-on-Sea. But of course we were then put inside camps, behind wire, and we had our own troops guarding between the two perimeter fences, to stop us mentioning or getting anything through to civilians. Then the order came to move and that was cancelled for 24 hours, and then we moved off and left from Tilbury. And then we unloaded on the landing craft .

"We left Tilbury in a liberty boat. They put us onto the landing barge, off the Normandy Coast. 'Cause I was Beach Recovery Unit and we were on the beach. It was a question of getting on shore and then you saw the vehicles off the landing craft. Coming down, if somebody lost their nerve, felt the water coming up off their bodies, they used to put their foot down and they used to just keep going and that jammed up the landing craft."

[The interviewer remarked that this must have been scary.]

"If you'd got to stand and watch I suppose technically it would be hell, but as long as you're involved in doing something, I mean you didn't take much notice of what was happening."

"The advance was to Dieppe and Le Havre."

"I was on the *Courseilles*, landed at Arromanches."

"That's where the Mulberry was?"

"Yes, the concrete ships as they called them, but it wasn't there then."

"Did you have any prior knowledge of the Mulberry Harbour?"

"No. Because, actually, we didn't know where we were going. Montgomery came - he visited the invasion forces beforehand. He took over Southend football ground. And the troops were marched … when you marched with guards either side of you, then you went to Southend football ground."

"What did you know at that stage that could have been of use to a fifth columnist?"

"Well it wasn't so much that, it was planned not from the civilians getting to you but to keep you from passing a letter saying where you were. Montgomery told you exactly what was going on and what was likely to happen. We were told when we landed you were going to be on such and such. You had a card which gave you a marshalling area. When the initial assault was on, the craft then came back to the ships to take off the liberty boats to go in and do a job where a job was necessary - it was obviously you were all going to get split up, so you had marshalling areas - and the military policemen were there for directions, there probably before we were. So you knew such and such an area was Sword, say, and you had this card with your marshalling area on. And I don't know how they did it really, because the marshalling area was only a tenth of the field. You had your destination and ours was this beach and that's all you were ever told. Normally, the only briefing we had was on the beach itself.

"I came out of the forces 1946. We went to Dieppe, because we went as a workshop - when the ports were released - and were withdrawn there and sent to Marseilles. We were attached to the Canadians. They brought the Canadians to join the Western Front. They shipped these Canadians across via Marseilles. I went off to Brussels and stayed there until I was demobbed. VE Day, we had a victory parade in Marseilles. British forces were represented, strangely enough, by the Pioneer Corps. There were only 30 of us down there. Because we were from Dieppe, we went down through Paris and then on to Marseilles and we stayed there overnight and from Paris south… We were the first British troops to go south of Paris, so every time we pulled up to make a brew or anything, there were people out with wine."

For many in the Army, D-Day fulfilled a long-felt want: the chance to hit back at an enemy that had, up to then, largely had things their own way. The payback for many months spent guarding their home shores, scanning the horizon for any sign of the invasion which they thought must

come, even after Hitler's strange decision to turn his attentions eastwards and attack Russia. So who were the people who expected at almost any time to have to repel the enemy if they landed on Hayling?

William Sandham of Erith, Kent, was formerly a corporal in the 12th Battalion Royal Marines and the 48th Commando. He recalls that invasion could have occurred at any time during the early months of 1941 and feels that available weapons were insufficient for the possible task ahead. Their P14 rifles were obsolete, and but for a few Bren guns they were no better off than the average Home Guard. But there was a spirit in the ranks that he never knew to be greater, and that included his time in the Commandos. They didn't need telling to fight on when surrounded: that went with the uniform. They would have died if called upon to do so, defending Hayling Island. He was twenty.

He recalls that early in World War II, local dances were held in West Town, Hayling. As the months passed, the threat of invasion subsided and some of the marines began to court local girls. The Barley Mow and the Brickwood Arms were visited but the fish-and-chip shop was their best bet, he recalls, if they had money. Bill was always hungry. During the late summer of 1941, the battalion had a football team.

Marine Jack Sinclair of Waterlooville was twenty in the summer of 1941 when he arrived on Hayling Island. He loved Hayling, having only had day trips to the seaside previously, and was billeted on Eastoke Corner in Anne's Cottage, an old house where he was allocated a bed and space for his kit. Close by was an opening in the beach defence fortifications, through which a local lady went for a daily dip in the sea. The Marines swam there too, when free. He and colleagues were drivers in the Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation. When promoted to corporal (temporary), he was paid as a junior non-commissioned officer, adding 9d a day to his pay as a physical training officer.

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Harris, RM, of Henley-on-Thames was a regular subaltern when he arrived on Hayling for tactical training. His group were stationed in huts to the east of the island. On one exercise, it poured with rain all night. He recalls that he strapped himself into his officer's valise, head and all, and slept. Phoning home was a major occupation as one usually had to wait all evening for a three-minute call. He says he met a nice girl on Hayling, who was friendly.

1942 began with a particularly cold winter. **David Lewis,** of Calgary, Alberta, Canada**,** of the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve, who shared a room at Gafsa House with **Sub-Lieutenant Bill Sinclair**, recalls that they were so unbelievably cold they went to bed in their full uniforms and greatcoats. Matters improved when they used large beer bottles as hot water bottles.

Bill Sinclair was later Commanding Officer, Landing Craft, Infantry (known as LCI(L)) and much later, First Chief Justice of Alberta Canada.

Marine John J. Cook of Tintinhull, Yeovil, whom we met earlier, describes his arrival on Hayling from Portsmouth in early 1942, having marched with full kit from Eastney Barracks. Service iron beds were brought to the Royal Hotel from Eastney for the Royal Marines. Most of their kit and uniforms were kept in kitbags. They were expected to keep all the rooms clean and tidy and trained on an assault course in front of the hotel and also on the beach, which had eight-foot high barbed wire defences.

Surgeon Lieutenant Commander J. W. Rae of Edinburgh was a young RNVR medical officer who had already served at sea and in two naval hospitals when he was appointed to the Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation II (MNBDO II) in November 1942, in response to Churchill's idea that Royal Marines could provide the complete services for a captured port which could be used as a naval base. His group headquarters was at Alton, Hampshire from where he moved to Hayling Island to be joined by the rest of forty medical officers who were to staff a tented hospital. During a talk from Colonel (later Major General) V. D. Thomas, they were shown an illustration of the Royal Marine badge, the globe and laurel, and told that this was where they would serve: the motto reads "all the world". They were on Hayling a short time before moving to the Midlands to prepare to go overseas.

Lieutenant Commander David J. Lewis, RCNR writes from Calgary, Alberta, Canada of taking landing craft training in Chichester Harbour while stationed at HMS *Northney*. He says he read small books of Shakespeare's poetry as he and the crew braved the chilly winds and spray of what was said to be the worst winter this part of England had ever had. He spent little off-duty time on Hayling during the January and February in which the first two Canadian landing craft flotillas were in training on the Island, since it was easy to reach London by train.

A.B. [Able Seaman] Miles of Brackley, drafted to HMS *Northney* in 1942, lived in a flimsy wooden chalet furnished with a single iron bed and a Valor oil heater. His own hammock was used for bedding. There were communal ablutions. Before the doorways was a large field enclosed by a grass embankment with a string of LCAs (assault landing craft) at anchor beyond. The camp was used for training in LCAs and unarmed combat. He recalls that the former entailed leaving Chichester Harbour and reaching the point opposite, seemingly endlessly. It was very cold, wet work in January. It was impossible to get dry or warm in his chalet unless he went to bed. It should not have surprised anyone that he developed a sore throat.

Doctors suspected diphtheria and sent him to Haslar Hospital by ambulance. Luckily the complaint proved less serious.

The men were also taught to use Thompson sub-machine guns and to strip down Lewis guns. They were given a basic signals course. They worked with American R boats, known as Eureka, equipped with radios, direction-finding gear and other signalling equipment. The conversations between boats were such, he recalls, that complaints often came from the Women's Royal Air Force girls on Thorney Island. AB Miles was drafted to an LSI (Landing Ship, Infantry).

D. Roberts of Birmingham, a Marine sent to *Northney*, says that during the day they would march to the causeway to build gun-pits. People gave them apples. At night, the men would patrol the seafront, armed with rifles and five rounds of ammunition, in case there was an invasion. He was 18 and regarded this as a bit of excitement.

He recalls an incident in early 1942 when a guard at the entrance to HMS *Northney* heard a noisy motorbike and challenged its rider. It was his Commanding Officer, who failed to hear, failed to stop, and was shot at. The shot missed. The officer referred to the guard rudely and ordered him off the gate forthwith, but having realised the poor lad had made an understandable mistake, he took no further disciplinary action.

Another former marine says they attended dances at the Sinah Battery. He was courting the manageress at the dairy in West Town at the time. She lived in Magdala Flats in a lane leading to the Shades. He was billeted in Seager House, a girls' preparatory school.

Former Royal Marine corporal **Bob Sollars** of Sparsholt, Winchester, was in Hayling with MNBDO I in 1940. He considers himself fortunate in getting to know Mr and Mrs Percy Thistleton of 4 Magdala Flats and their family, Hazel, Jean, Eric, Vera and Brian. He recalls that this family were very good to him.

Floss Carter let a bedsit to Leading Seaman **Arnold Sharples** of Southport and his young wife, at 18 Northney Road, where they remained for the birth of their baby. Three bombs fell just behind these houses, he recalls.

Doug Walters and family, of Ham and Manor Farm, were kind and hospitable to the late Lieutenant Commander **Alan Love** of Mount Royal, Quebec, Canada. When he came back to the UK after over a year in the Mediterranean, he recalled in a letter to me, he visited them again and they could not do enough for him. By then he was 60 lbs. lighter than when they had originally met. He and his wife visited again in 1970, when Mr Walters' son Christopher ran the farm.

Leading Seaman R. Carford of Blyth, Worksop, and colleagues

used to visit Mr and Mrs Burt who put his sister up when she visited him on Hayling Island. He remembers their delightful daughter, Ivy. Her father had a beard and salted beef in a barrel.

Three local ladies, the late **Misses Rouse** of Northney, set up the Meadowsweet canteen for servicemen at their bungalow at the corner of Clovelly Road, North Hayling. Many of my correspondents remember with gratitude its home-cooked food and peaceful sitting room for letter-writing and relaxation. A neighbour, Mrs Hedges, did most of the cooking, helped by local lady volunteers.

In 1942, food was supplied to Royal Marines at the Royal Hotel from the Shades (now the Royal Shades) until the hotel kitchens were usable.

During the war, **Mrs Voller** (née Mary Alice Tickner) used to help her parents, owners of a local guest house, to run the NAB Club at Eastoke Corner for service personnel. It later became Millers Nightclub.

Sailors at the NAB Club

Herbert Spencer of Kirton in Lindsey, near Gainsborough, was billeted near the NAB Club soon after call-up in 1943, aged 18. The NAAFI used to sell little round cakes with butter for their stand-easy. **AB Bob Cheeseman RN** remembers a café opposite his base at the Royal Hotel where he and colleagues would go for a cup of tea and a jam sandwich, which cost 1s. 1½d. The café was a wooden shack with tables and benches.

When he was 18 in the summer of 1942, **W. L. Kirley** of Penryn was taught Morse, semaphore and some basic radio procedures on Hayling Island. He recalls that everything was done in a rush and courses which in peace-time would have taken months were condensed into a few weeks. His unit was using an LCA (Assault Landing Craft) which, having been on the Dieppe raid, had bullet holes in it. One of the LCAs was rigged with a metal four-bladed windmill which was rotated by hand. In it, trainees used to run up and down the coast, rotating the windmill and hoping the signal would be picked up by a receiver on shore. He believes this to have been a primitive form of direction finding, possibly connected with the development of radar. The course completed, those who took part were classed as STN - Signal Trained, Northney. However, such a rushed course did not make the men experts, he says: they soon found out that the regular Royal Navy signalmen were more expert than they were.

He had been on a tank landing craft (LCT) which he picked up on the Tyne or Tees, brought to Lowestoft for practice landings then to Havant/Hayling Island. He and his group of 30 - 40 went to the landings of North Africa. The Battle of El Alamein, 30 October 1942, was the turning

point of the war there. On 15 November, across the British Isles church bells were rung in celebration. Previously they had remained silent, to be used only as a signal that Britain was being invaded.

Lieutenant Joseph Stalker Robinson, RNVR, of Mundesley, Norfolk, lived in holiday camp huts on Hayling Island, he recalls, but he and colleagues used a house owned by a Mrs Burdon, or called Burdon House, as a wardroom plus accommodation. Their scant spare time was spent at cards, at the pub and going for walks. He recalls that enemy aircraft flew over Hayling to attack Thorney Island. He also remembers that one Sunday morning, while those in the wardroom were having a drink, the siren sounded and the local AA battery opened fire. They saw a single German aircraft fly over, very high. Four shells burst round it and the fifth hit; one wing fluttered down.

These and other recollections point to the fact that Hayling in war-time must have been a strange patchwork of those tasked with defending the home soil, and those actively working towards the day when they would once more set foot on the coast of France. Women, too, played a full part, as they did in other areas.

Dot Watson

Those at Sinah gun-site did not get out of the camp much. During training, the ATS girls had been encouraged to learn to perform shows because there was not much other entertainment on gun-sites. **Dot Watson** recalls that she was persuaded to walk on, at one of them, with a push-bike, to sing "Daisy, Daisy" and was furious because she was congratulated on her imitation cockney accent. The accent, of which she was proud, was her own.

She says the men with whom the girls worked respected them and treated them like their daughters or their sisters, but they had fun together and danced. There were some single ones but they were all very disciplined. The ATS worked hard. They would be up on the guns all night and come off in the morning to go on fire picket, fatigues or on the gate.

Mrs Norah McKenzie, born in Birmingham in 1921, was called up in 1942 and posted to Hayling Island in the January of 1943. She found herself at 602(M) HAA Battery as Private Norah Flynn W/209907 of the ATS. Her gun battery was at North Hayling near the southern end of the road bridge, over which the girls would walk to Havant when off duty. Close to their camp at Northney she remembers the ladies who made

wonderful scrambled egg from powdered eggs at the Meadowsweet canteen.

Joseph Robinson kept farewell dinner menus from 1942 and 1943 for Captain Michell (Northney II) and Lieutenant Mariner RCNVR and Lieutenant Commander Besemer. Copies sent to me display wry naval humour.

Inevitably there were times when the jumpiness of the defenders led to false alarms, and in some cases, to actual action.

RM **John J Cook** of Tintinhull, ex-PO **Dennis Murrell** of Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada and **E. Stott** of Heywood, Lancashire each mention reports that a German submarine tried to land men, 1942-3. Marines were mustered in search of Germans but nothing was found. It was believed the submarine was intercepted in deep water, preparing to land possible spies, and sunk by a Royal Navy warship. Marines were also mustered at HMS *Northney* when the officers' mess was set on fire by the cooks.

By and large, though, the forces gathered on Hayling tried their best, as human beings do the world over, to adapt to the circumstances in which they found themselves.

Mr F. C. Adams of Loughton, Essex, recalls that his unit, of the Anti Motor Torpedo Boat Battery, billeted at the Royal Hotel in 1942, trained mostly at Fort Cumberland, Eastney, Portsmouth. He and a friend noticed some sergeants had their wives with them on Hayling Island and were told they could do so too, surreptitiously. So they each booked a chalet on Seafront Estate at 12 shillings a week and wrote to their wives to bring the children. They had comfortable beds - though minus sheets - and the men stayed there with their families for three weeks. The other Marines helped them by saving them some of their butter ration and bread, and the cooks gave them sausages, tea and coffee, which made living relatively cheap.

When their unit was ordered to the Middle East without embarkation leave, the friends got their families to the station en route for London while kit was being packed. That December night, a bomb was dropped on the Seafront Estate.

Dieppe, 1942

Before D-Day could be accomplished, it was necessary for the Allies to try out several scenarios, including large scale raids on the enemy coast, from which lessons could be learned which would eventually save lives, and lead to the success of the final invasion plan. Hampshire, indeed the whole south coast, was heavily involved in the planning and execution of the Dieppe raid.

On 19 August 1942, several thousand British, Canadian, American and Free French troops landed in Nazi-occupied Europe at Dieppe. They remained ashore for nine hours and destroyed an ammunition dump, a six-gun battery and a radio location station in what was described by Mountbatten's headquarters as a planned reconnaissance to gain experience in mounting an amphibious attack against coastal positions. The Allies were met by very fierce opposition and there were many casualties in what the Germans described as a foiled full-scale invasion.

Ron Miles describes, in his autobiography *Miles Aweigh*, how his flotilla was briefed to take Canadian soldiers of the Royal Regiment of Canada to the beach at Puys, east of Dieppe, then to wait off the town and at a given time to return to Puys beach to collect them and bring them home. A motor launch guided the assault landing craft from their mother ship to the landing place. On the way, they lost minutes while their destroyer escort engaged a German convoy also bound for Dieppe. The landing craft crews knew they had been seen when they arrived off the town 20 minutes later. It seemed odd that there was no gunfire.

The boats landed their passengers along the edge of the tide and the soldiers had begun to scale a narrow cleft between the cliffs when shells, mortar bombs and bullets rained down from a cliff-set pillbox and they could do nothing but run to the slight cover at the cliff base. The crew of Ron's LCA (Assault Landing Craft) managed to drag three of the many wounded men on the beach into their craft before they withdrew to deeper water, as planned. However, one of their engines had faltered and they could not get their radio to reach their headquarters ship to ask them to fire at the pillbox. German aircraft flew round them and were shot at by a Lewis gun from the LCA. Aerial dogfights raged above. Ron dressed the wounds of the injured soldiers and draped a blanket over the most seriously hurt. Eventually, the wounded were passed to a Polish destroyer for expert medical attention.

The remaining engine of Ron's LCA stopped and the stoker mended it under cover of a destroyer-spread smokescreen. Engines of landing craft were very vulnerable to infiltration by sand. The flotilla returned to the beach under intense enemy fire and the LCA crews shouted and waved to the soldiers who sheltered under the cliffs. It was obvious, recalls Ron, that it would have been suicide for them to have broken cover in order to re-embark, although his LCA had been brought far up the beach and remained there for some time. One of the LCAs sank having suffered a direct hit, and the beach was strewn with bodies.

Landing Craft at sea: note the barrage balloons
for protection against air attack

Reluctantly, Ron and the rest of his LCA crew withdrew into the water and lay about 100 yards off the beach, still under fire, while the stoker-driver attempted to revive the engine, which again needed attention. They were glad to be towed off by another boat which then let them go, further out to sea. The stoker successfully got the engine going and they sailed slowly back to the UK when ordered to withdraw. The men's repetitive training at HMS *Northney* had fitted them well for keeping their cool under fire, even with a spluttering engine, but nothing could have prepared them for their feelings of utter despondency at having to leave their soldiers behind.

Canadian **Lieutenant Commander David Lewis** recalls that he was pleasantly surprised to be greeted warmly by his warrant officer on the old London and Paris Hotel jetty, on his return from Dieppe: he had thought the officer had a heart of stone.

A former Royal Marine posted to the Royal Hotel fresh from initial training recalls his first job on Hayling Island was to help sort the personal effects of Royal Marines of his own flotilla killed on the Dieppe raid, and to return them to their families. It was routine to leave behind letters and photographs, when embarking on hazardous operations, in case such things gave information useful to the enemy.

From some of the accounts of D-Day, it would seem that some of the lessons of Dieppe went unnoticed by the powers that be.

Lionel Evans, born 17 March 1920, took part in the D-Day landings in June 1944. This interview was conducted in the D-Day Museum at Southsea.

"I was a regular soldier. Joined the army at 16 and was abroad at 17 and home again aged 23. I went to Normandy aged 24. It was really terrifying, especially when those heavy shells were coming towards us. They were all round us. I was in the Hampshire Regiment - infantry. We left from Southampton on D-Day, left on a LCT. I was never seasick. Quite a few were. They provided us with bags, but they didn't go that far …

"Prior to the invasion, we had been in camps in the New Forest. Ours was at Beaulieu. There were NAAFI girls in the camp too. We were all very polite. We were in camps … not all that long really: Gorley first, then in camps for about two months.

"The D-Day embroidery, yes. You never think of it. Now and again I

think of something. I lost a lot of friends. Normally … it was a young man's war. We never met any locals. I was a front-line soldier. When they saw us coming, with guns, they kept out of the way."

Joan Malthouse, NAAFI: Mrs Joan Malthouse remembers being under canvas in the New Forest. When Joan joined up, aged 18, in 1940, she was encouraged to join the NAAFI - the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (British) which runs canteens for service personnel and their families. Her home was in Liverpool and she served with the Royal Navy at HMS *Wellesley, Burscough, Wetherby* and *Ariel*, with the RAF at Ringway and Fazackerley, and with the Army at Cucheth, Freshfield and the Brockenhurst D-Day camps.

"We used to get drafted for a couple of years. I wanted to go overseas but my mother didn't want me to go. The NAAFI served in all areas of war but never get included at the Royal Albert Hall or cenotaph memorial services. Pay was poor, as was most of the accommodation. There were no such things as travel warrants for free trips home. I thought to begin with that I was to join the RAF but it turned out to be the NAAFI - the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes and canteen work. We all wore the khaki uniform. We were even issued with tin helmets. During the D-Day camp period, we were advised to use trenches dug in our compound during air raids. Needless to say, sitting out in trenches during the night was not to our liking. We thought staying under our canvas beds was safe and much better.

"When a supervisor came to say, 'Can we have some volunteers to go under canvas?' I volunteered. I suppose they had to wait until they got enough girls. We went to a big house. I didn't know where we were. It was *so* dark. It was near Brockenhurst Station, camp B-4. They had to make a path through all these woods. They were American and British boys. Soldiers, all soldiers. We were there to give them their tea and their coffee, etc. and to listen to their woes. We stayed there until the invasion. One morning we woke up and there was a skeleton staff in charge of the camp - a handful of American boys and British boys, just packing up."

She says both American and British boys were "quite good" to the NAAFI girls. They were the only women in camp.

"You know, in the middle of one night there was an almighty scream. Next day, everyone was saying, 'Who was that, screaming in the night?' and one of the girls said she thought there was someone standing in the tent beside her. Maybe there was or maybe she was dreaming, but the Americans arranged a guard of four men to guard us. They really did take care of us. They arranged a guard for us to take showers, too. We were only young. So were they. They did their training every day and there was

no time to talk in their break periods, but it was only in the evenings that they ever had time to talk. They talked about their mums and dads, home and girlfriends. They all liked to talk about home.

"We had the Intelligence Officer come to see us to say we were not to say where we were in letters, so I was unable to tell my mother where I was stationed. During a walk, we came across a very little old church called St Michael's. I could only say we had visited a church. Mum wrote and said, 'What are all these blue lines?' But it [censorship] left very little left to say. I mean, we just wanted to write where we were and what we were doing - you know, an ordinary letter!"

She thinks the girls often forgot what the Intelligence Officer had told them. They didn't see why they had not got to say where they were. So there were still blue lines on their letters home. She adds: "I always thought it unfair that the NAAFI (as far as I am aware) has never been represented at the Albert Hall or the ceremony at the Cenotaph or, even although we served the forces, we did not qualify for the Defence Medal."

In fact the invasion camps were in an area of tight security. Just before the invasion, should the enemy have got wind of where they were, and how many troops were concentrated in them, they might have guessed that invasion would be soon and also to some extent where it would be. Part of the success of the invasion of Europe was due to surprise. The south coast at the time was packed with troops, and all service personnel were routinely asked not to reveal their whereabouts when writing to those out of camp. Civilians had had drummed into them the slogan "Careless talk costs lives". There were exclusion zones along the coast which people had to observe and only enter if they had relatives or business there.

Anthony Colgon, born 1920, left Southampton on D-Day.

"At D-Day there were nets for scrambling ashore or to go to the beach in small boats. I looked out of the landing craft at the beach and thought, 'You won't get out of that!' But we'd been to Sicily, so we thought we knew what to expect. We came … we trained down at the Red Sea, but they couldn't risk damaging the landing craft [on exercises]. But when it was Sicily, it was the real thing. Eventually, when we went up to the beaches in Sicily, we didn't get much opposition: 29 miles before there was any.

"Then we went through Sicily, fighting all the time. Heavy casualties all the time. Got to Messina. After two or three weeks they invaded Italy, but our brigade landed at the toe of Italy to try and get behind the Germans. When we landed, this was the third time [third attempt to land]. We were ahead of the Commandos. I was in three-inch mortars. We set up in the dark and didn't see we were alone - no mine-clearing had been done, etc."

By contrast, landing on D-Day was much more organised but more terrifying. They all knew what to do and where they were to do it. Mine-sweeping had usually been done and there were beach marshals to organise who went where.

Glider parts, stacked ready for transport by sea, in the aftermath of D-Day