

D-Day and Hamble

In the build up to D-Day many camps of troops who were to take part in the Normandy invasion were set up in the river valley. The main naval bases on the river that specialised in landing craft were HMS Tormentor at Warsash and HMS Cricket at Bursledon.

Prior to D-Day Hamble's Oil Terminal was taken over by the Army and the jetty was extended. Hundreds of troop carriers and torpedo boats were re-fuelled for the crossing to the Normandy. On 5th June 212 vessels were bunkered at the Hamble jetty. The jetty was used for both refuelling ships on the spot and loading small tankers that plied between the Solent and the actual invasion beaches.

Hamble's Air Service Training was the country's largest Spitfire repair base and its ATA women ferry pilots were in the ideal position to see the build up to D-Day but had to keep the details to themselves. On the 5th June pilots returned with stories of a great assembly of boats and aircraft having black-and-white strips painted on their wings (special D-Day identification markings).

The evening before D-Day the river emptied of troops and boats as they went to the Normandy beaches, many not to return.

At 11 a.m. on the morning of D-Day, the first Spitfire, fresh from the battle over France, landed at Hamble, which was to become one of the forward repair units. It was designated a 'prang-patch' for aircraft coming back in trouble from the front in Normandy, just 80 miles or so across the Channel.

Immediately after D-Day Hamble foreshore was taken over by the United States Army Water Division and infilled with rubble from bomb damaged Southampton to build a repair depot. A large amount of gravel was also dug and transported from the grounds of the Royal Victoria Hospital at Netley. On the foreshore the US Army built workshops and slipways for the maintenance and repair of its small vessels.

To supply the armed forces in France after the invasion a pipeline called PLUTO was laid under the English Channel and its fuel supply passed through the Hamble Oil Terminal. By 24th March 1945 Hamble Oil Terminal had shipped half million tons of petroleum products to France.

During the Second World War many service personnel used Hamble pubs, particularly prior to D-Day. There are two mementos in the Victory pub from those days. On a wall is a table top with the names carved in it by the men who left Hamble for Normandy and some girls names who they left behind.

The other is an illustrated list of boat crew signatures, headed "Hamble Circus 'D' Day 1944" with the Victory's sign underneath the title. For many years this memento was a mystery, until a Southampton Tourist Officer solved the problem. Hamble Circus was a top secret back up mission for the Pluto pipeline. A number of small craft from Hamble were to be used to take fuel to Normandy under the cover of darkness.

During the Second World War local boat builder Luke Brothers maintained the Solent Patrol for the Royal Navy, as well as building and repairing landing craft.

Major Corwin (Slim) E. Hein, who was in command of the U.S. Army Transportation Corps Water Division repair depot on the foreshore, gave a set of pictures of his time at Hamble to the village. They can be viewed in Hamble's old photograph collection which is held at the Parish Council's Office.