



ABLE SEAMAN ROY WALKER RN

1926 - 2017

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

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

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

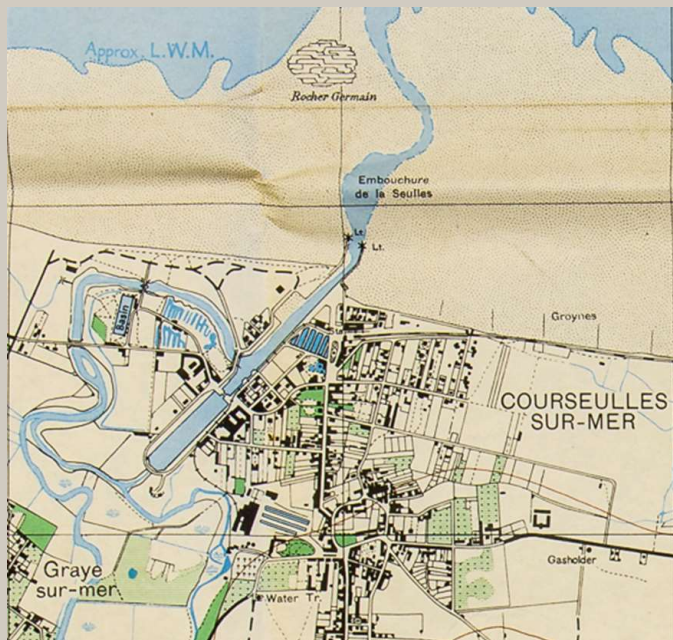
On 20th January 1944, Roy was sent to HMS Mylodon, a shore base. Roy's first posting was to Lowestoft where, under great secrecy, trawlers were being converted into minesweepers. Next, he went to Great Yarmouth and was posted to the crew of an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) which moved on to the River Orwell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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

