

WOOLVERSTONE PARK AND HALL - WORLD WAR TWO

Observation staging on the roof of the Hall



Woolverstone had a small but important part to play during the Second World War 2, especially in the run up to D-Day.

After the Hall was sold to Oxford University in December 1937, it lay empty for over a year. Along with many other large country houses, it was commandeered by the government in 1939 for the war effort. Alterations were made to the Hall. WRNS quarters were erected. Initially it housed troops. First there were the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire regiment. They were followed by Liverpool Scottish, 2nd battalion in 1940 and then various groups of both the Royal Artillery and also Engineers regiments.

Between October 1942 and May 1943, the concrete road from Main Road down to the river was constructed as well as the concrete hard and pier. Oil storage tanks were installed further up the hill. Also, in 1942, staging was erected on the roof of the Hall for the Royal Observer Corps, whose post had previously been in the field behind the Post Office at No 24 Main Road since 1926.

From late 1942, Woolverstone Park was, among other things, a landing craft base and training establishment for Combined Operations. Combined Operations was a department of the War Office whose purpose was to harass the occupying German forces in Europe. They utilised all three service arms: the Royal Air Force, the British Army and the Royal Navy. The main focus of the operations were the Commandos.

Staff had to plan operations and develop ideas and equipment to harass the enemy. It also incorporated all those who worked with landing craft up to and including landing ships that were used in the various amphibious operations. During this period many different classes of landing craft were stationed on the river Orwell: LCT (Landing Craft Tank), LCM (Landing Craft Mechanised), LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel) and LCA (Landing Craft Assault). There were around 70 of these smaller craft based at Woolverstone.

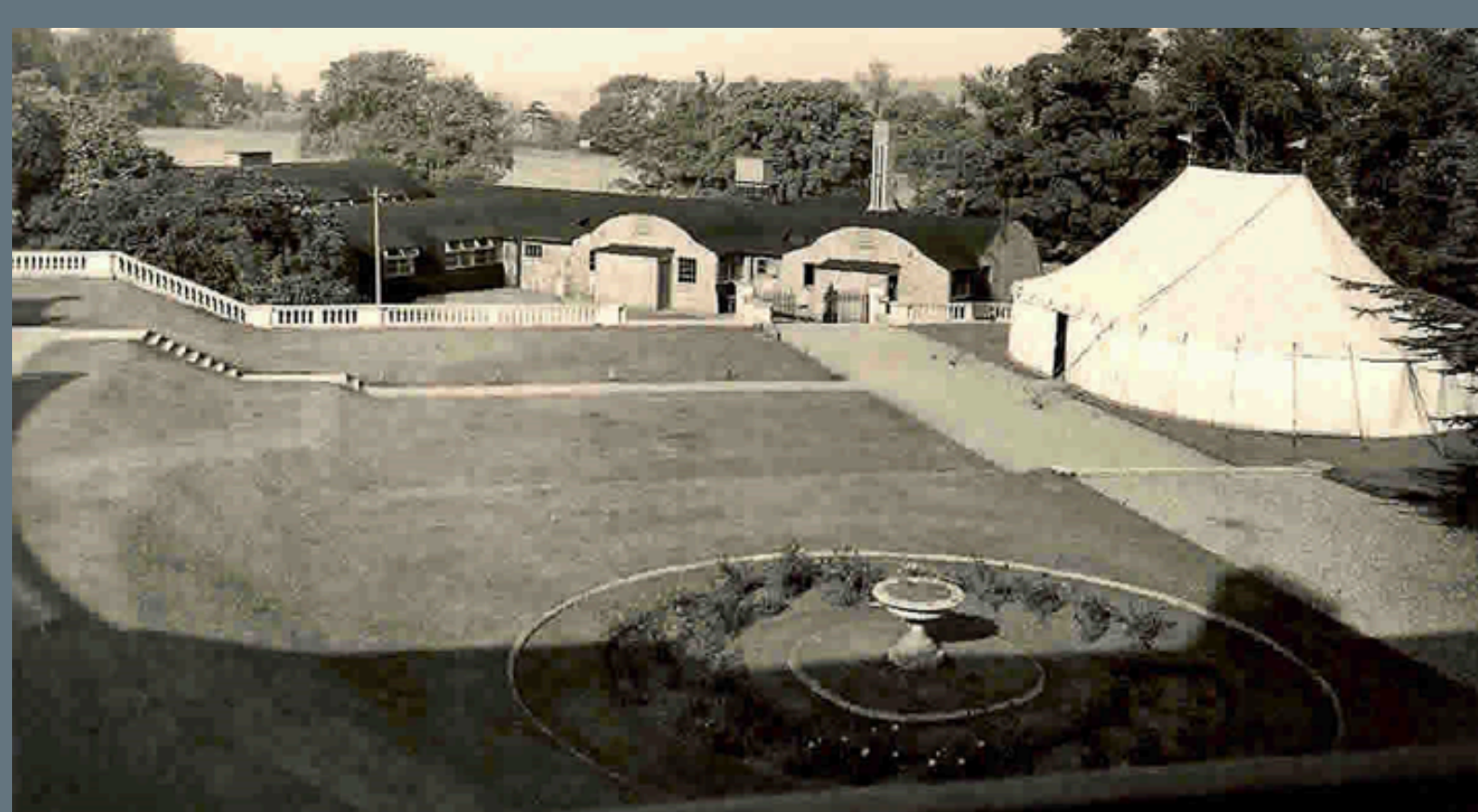
HMS Woolverstone - a stone frigate - was commissioned by the Admiralty in 1943. The base was commissioned on 1/1/1943, care and maintenance from 9/7/43, re-commissioned on 15/10/43 and paid off on 20/2/46



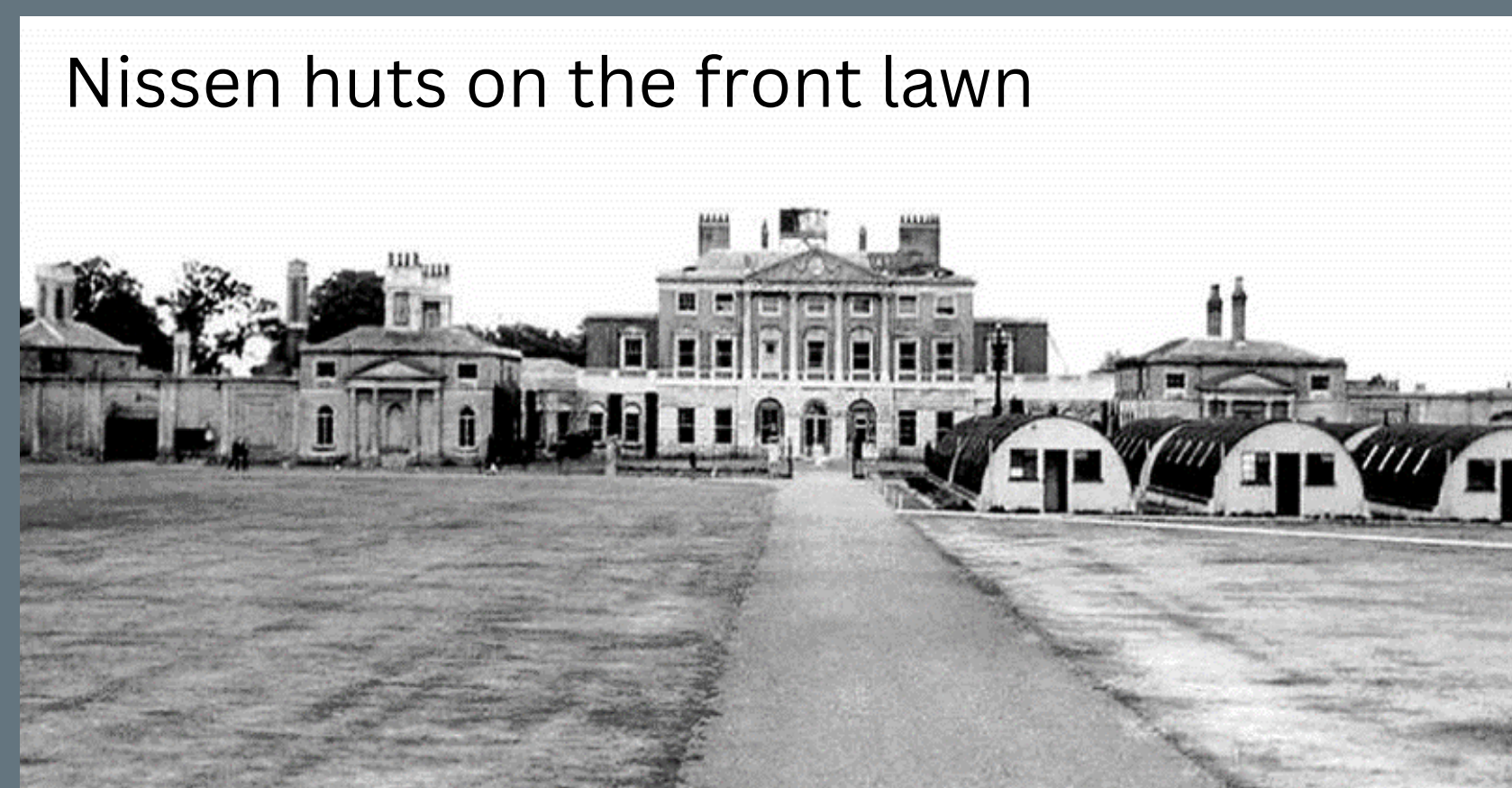
During the Autumn of 1943 several days of loading experiments and tests were carried out from the Cat House hard. These tests were carried out in great secrecy, tanks (Churchills, Crusaders and Shermans) and other vehicles were loaded onto the landing craft in several different orders the craft and tested on the river for stability.

Not only were landing craft anchored here before going south and on to Normandy, but also Woolverstone was part of the deception force working under the auspices of Operation Quicksilver where a fleet of dummy landing craft were assembled before being put out on the river to confuse the Nazis.

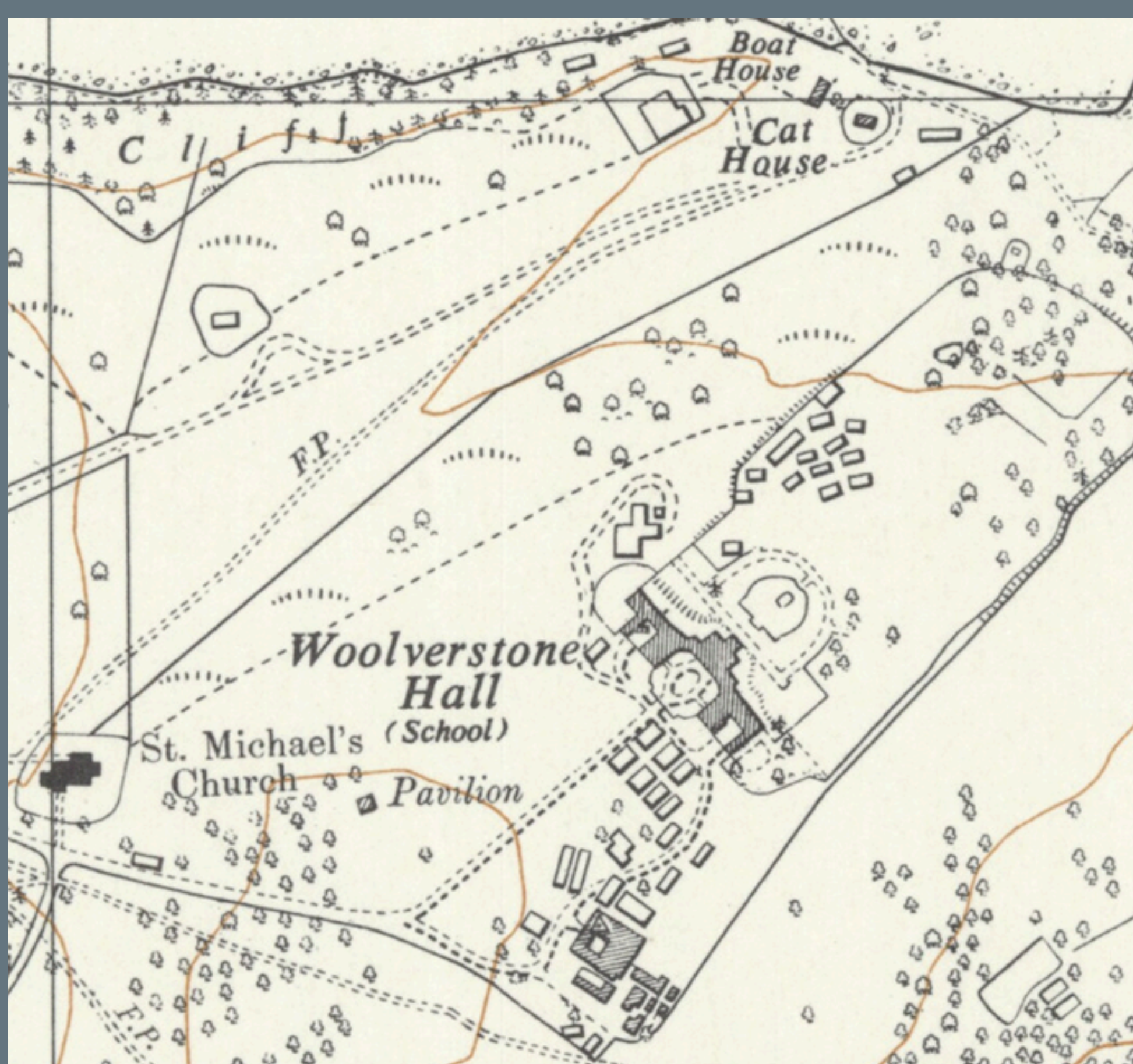
Officers were housed in the Hall, other ranks in Nissen huts dotted around the grounds. Stables used for stores.



Nissen huts on the front lawn



Nissen huts to the side of the western balustrade



St Michael's church was used by the Navy for worship.

There were over 1000 personnel present at HMS Woolverstone during the "lock down" month preceding D-Day on 6th June 1944.

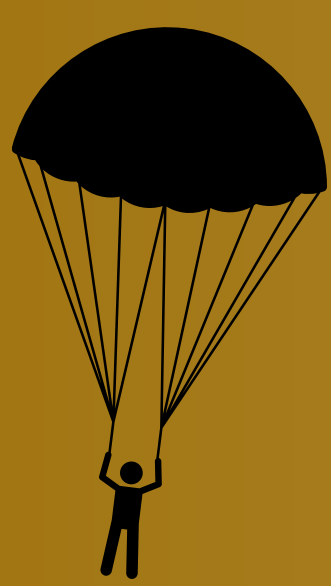
In one poignant account from WRNS officer, she described going to Woolverstone church on the morning of Sunday 4th June 1944 and on her return from the service she found the landing craft had slipped off down the Orwell on their way to Normandy.



Aerial photograph of Woolverstone Park - March 1944

On the morning of 5th June 30 fully loaded landing craft left the Cat House Point for the Normandy beaches. These had been loaded with troops and vehicles at Felixstowe on 2nd June and came up the river waiting for the signal to go which had been delayed by a day because of poor weather in the channel.

HMS Woolverstone continued to play a part in Operation Quicksilver and the construction of dummy landing craft after the Normandy landings. Later in the war, receiving landing craft for repair or decommissioning.



WOOLVERSTONE WORLD WAR TWO - TIMELINE



- War with Germany was declared on Sunday 3rd September 1939. Woolverstone Park, including the Hall, was requisitioned by the War Office.
- In late 1942 Landing Craft began to train in the rivers Orwell and Stour.
- Woolverstone Park a Combined Operations base.
- 1st January 1943 HMS Woolverstone commissioned by Admiralty.
- March 1943, plans debated to expand the base.
- 9th July 1943, HMS Woolverstone downgraded to a maintenance, repair and loading base
- 15th October 1943, HMS Woolverstone recommissioned
- Harwich Landing Ship Tank (LST) base comes under HMS Woolverstone command (early 1944, 17 LSTs on the Stour
- Landing Craft Assault (LCA) manned by Royal Marines
- Operation Neptune – Invasion of Normandy. “Force L” – to carry 7th Armoured Division “Desert Rats (based at Orwell Park)”, part of 51st Highland Division and HQs of 1st and 30th Corps to the invasion beachheads as immediate follow up to D-Day landings. D+1.
- Force L’s HQ at St Felix school, Southwold. Planned ship-loading, convoy mustering and routing, timetabling and security.

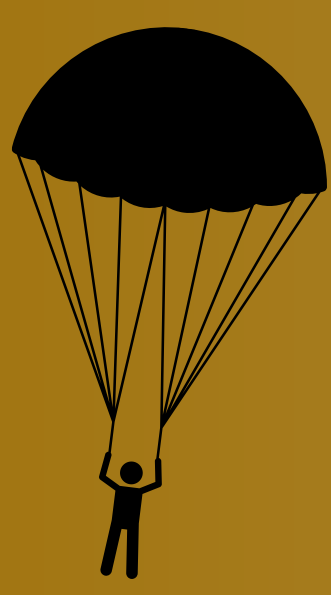


- Landing Craft divided into 3 fleets: L1 at Harwich, L2 at Lowestoft L3 on the Thames
- April 1 1944, whole East Coast for 1 mile inland was closed to all outside civilians, save someone on official business. All servicemen’s mail read by censors
- May 1944, L2 moved from Lowestoft to the Orwell. HMS Woolverstone temporarily took charge.
- L1 and L2 sheltered underneath Harwich/Ipswich AA barrage. One part of this was located at Freston, another at Erwarton
- 31st May 21,000 troops and 3,600 vehicles moved in convoys to the outskirts of loading ports. 22nd Armoured Brigade with 200 tanks and 1,600 men commenced loading at Ipswich docks. Now called Sailing Group 2
- 2nd June, Desert Rats embark at Felixstowe

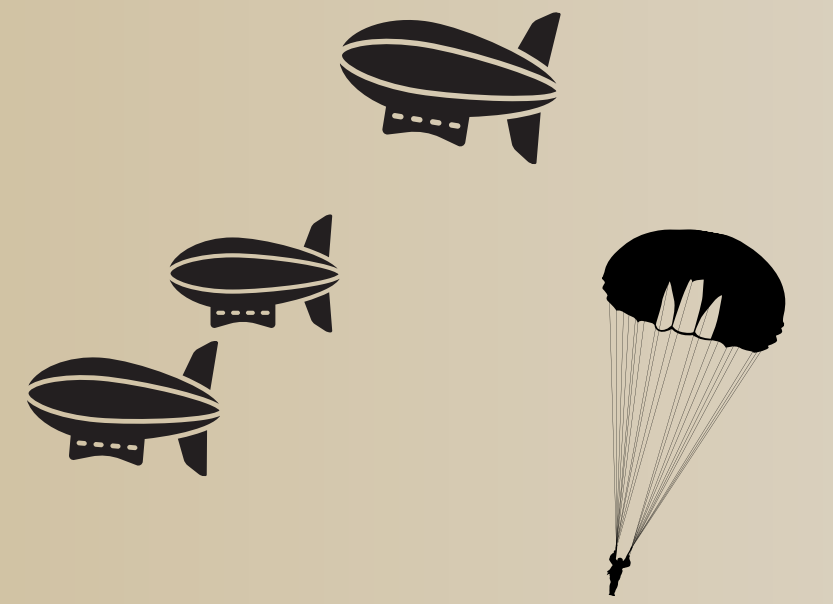
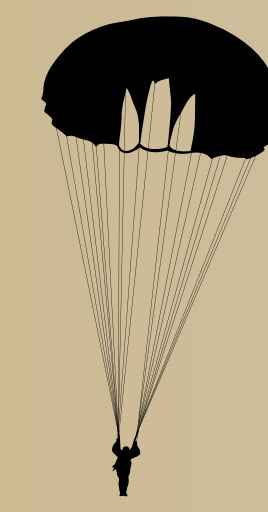
Desert Rats on the Orwell

- Morning of June 5th all craft ready to leave for France. Bad weather meant a 24- hour postponement. Troops and their armour sat in boats on the Orwell, rocking on the swell, Troops got edgy and weary.
- Night of 5th June 1944, planes from RAF Bomber Command headed to France to bomb Normandy in advance of the invasion. First wave on invasion forces closing in on the beaches.
- Same night, Force L left Stour and Orwell and Harwich harbour. 65 major landing craft and ships, escorted by destroyers and corvettes.
- Simultaneously, more dummy landing craft assembled at Woolverstone and set afloat to maintain deception that the Normandy invasion was a feint.
- All sections of force L unite on morning of 6th June at Knock John Fort – 9 nmi off the coast of Essex. Some 280 vessels headed for France later that night .
- Morning of 7th June 1944, troops and vehicles discharged onto the beach heads. D+1
- At HMS Woolverstone, dummy LCT continue to be built until 12th June. Total 63.
- Dummy fleet maintained for a further three weeks until the beginning of July, then recovered and dismantled.
- HMS Woolverstone continued as a depot and repair base, as well as a training base. It absorbed HMS Bunting (Ipswich) Many LCTs laid up there.
- Tuesday 8th May, 1945, German forces unconditionally surrendered. Victory in Europe was declared.
- HMS Woolverstone decommissioned on 20th Feb 1946.





XX



EMBARKATION HARDS UK



Even as battle raged in the skies over Britain in 1940, Winston Churchill was planning the invasion of Europe. When the United States entered the war after Pearl Harbour in 1941, Churchill persuaded Roosevelt to work with him. At the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, Roosevelt committed the United States to Operation Overlord – allied invasion of occupied north-western Europe - planned for 1944, an idea developed further at the Trident Conference in May.

To invade Europe from the sea required a huge flotilla of 7,000 vessels including 4,000 landing craft and 130 warships to land personnel and their equipment on the beaches. These personnel also needed to be resupplied. It was clear that to assemble such a huge force new, embarkation points needed to be constructed around the south and east coast of Britain.

In October 1941, Churchill summoned Lord Louis Mountbatten back to England from his command of HMS Illustrious in USA “by the fastest possible means” to meet him at Chequers. Mountbatten was appointed Combined Operations Adviser. Six months later, in April 1942, he was appointed Chief of Combined Operations and promoted to acting rank of Vice-Admiral, Lieutenant-General, and Air Marshal. The form of operation was “combined” in the sense that it placed equal demands upon all three arms of the services. His tasks were: firstly, to take charge of Combined Operations; secondly, develop a programme of Commando raids; and lastly, to prepare for the reinvasion of Europe. Combined Operations were to plan for offensive raids when much of the military was on the defensive.

A seaborne invasion would require a huge number of landing craft to ferry soldiers onto the beaches. These would require special “hards” over which they could be loaded and unloaded. In May 1942, Mountbatten ordered the construction of special hards around Britain’s south and east coasts. By March 1943, 68 such hards had been built. They were designed to load two types of landing craft, Landing Craft Tank (LCT) and Landing Ship Tank (LST). The cost was shared between the Admiralty and the War Office.

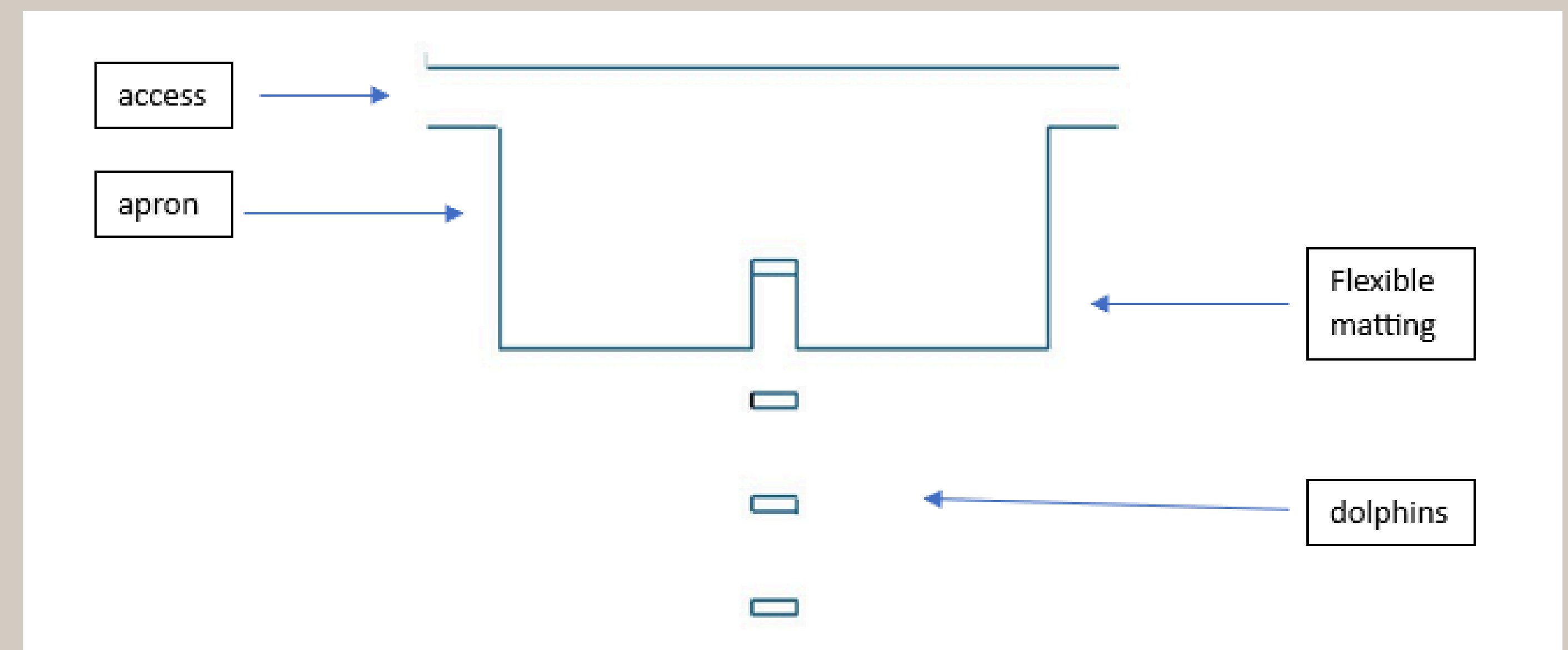
From 9th June, 1942, reconnaissance groups looked for suitable sites; beach defence sector commanders being warned in advance. Sites earmarked by grid reference subsequently received more detailed ground surveys. Construction took place in two phases. Phase 1 along the south coast. Phase 2 included the east coast. All 68 embarkation hards were to be complete by 31 March 1943.

There were two types of embarkation hard. A smaller one for Landing Craft Tank (LCT), usually 4-berth. A larger one for Landing Ship Tank (LST), between 1 and 4 berths.

Each hard required the following:

- a concrete weightbearing access road
- a concrete apron above the high-water mark
- pre-cast concrete beach hardening mats – “chocolate blocks” - in the intertidal area to enable loading of ships at all states of the tide
- Wood and steel “dolphins” for securing vessels during loading
- Accommodation, fuel supplies, and mains electricity

The hard aprons were generally built first, often in parallel with associated access road linking to the public highway. The public roads had been assessed for the ability to carry huge volumes of traffic that would be required. The hards were quite simple structures, constructed in similar ways and conforming to a limited design pattern.



“Dolphins” made of wood and steel, located in the water, acted like hand rails to guide the landing craft onto the beach. Flat bottomed landing craft were not easily manoeuvred in the best of conditions but once moored alongside the dolphin would be aligned to make loading and unloading more efficient. These dolphins formed the basis of a central jetty extended from the shoreline to beyond the low water mark. This allowed vessels to tie-up alongside for loading and unloading as well as re-fuelling. Large steel fair-leads (bollards) were situated to the sides of each hard for tying up.

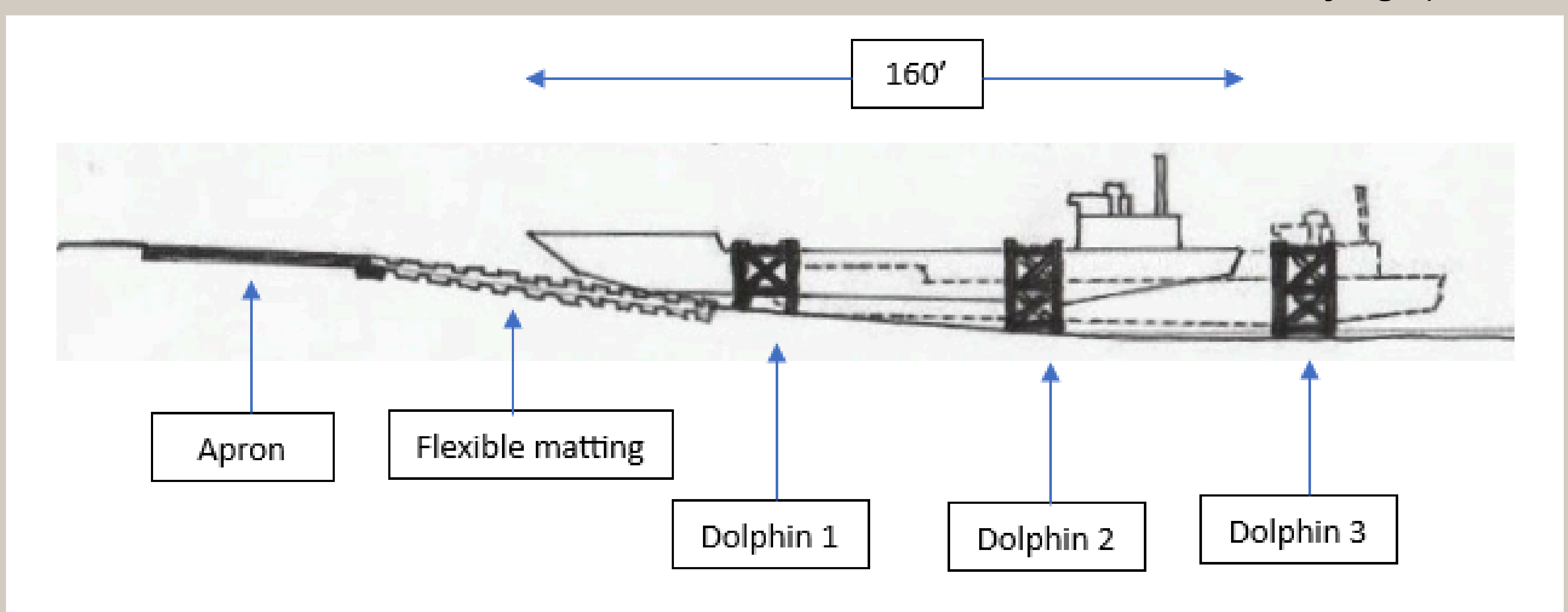


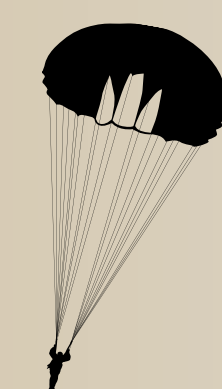
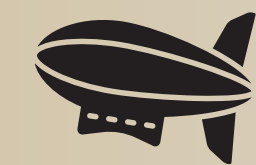
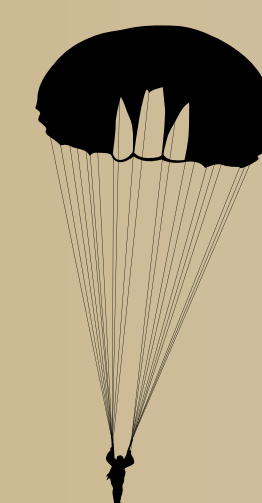
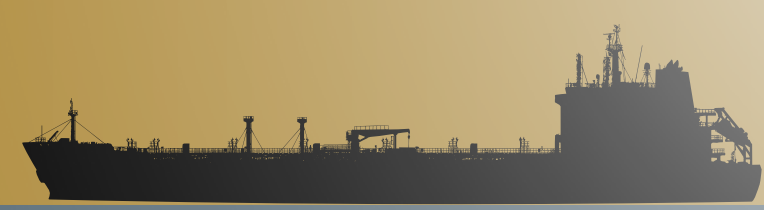
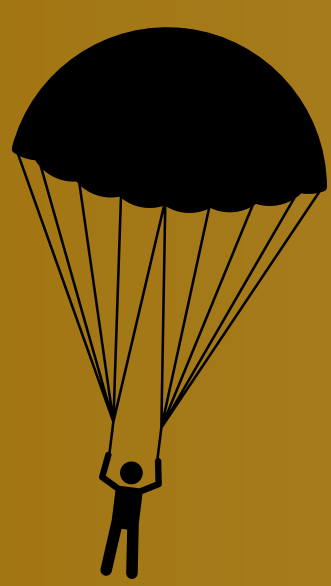
Woolverstone hard. N.K. showing apron, intertidal matting and dolphins



Mat laying on the South Coast at Leppe Bridge

The rectangular, reinforced concrete apron was, in general, around 8in (244cm) thick and around 200ft (60.9m) wide with a depth to suit the local topography. The surface sloped slightly downwards towards the water at an angle of around 10%. The system of flexible concrete matting, blocks 5in (152cm) thick, hinged with steel hooks at the joins, were hung from a lip formed along the edge of the apron.





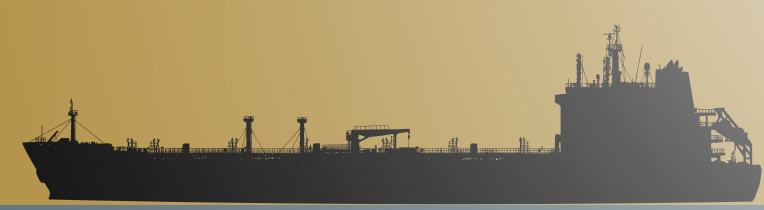
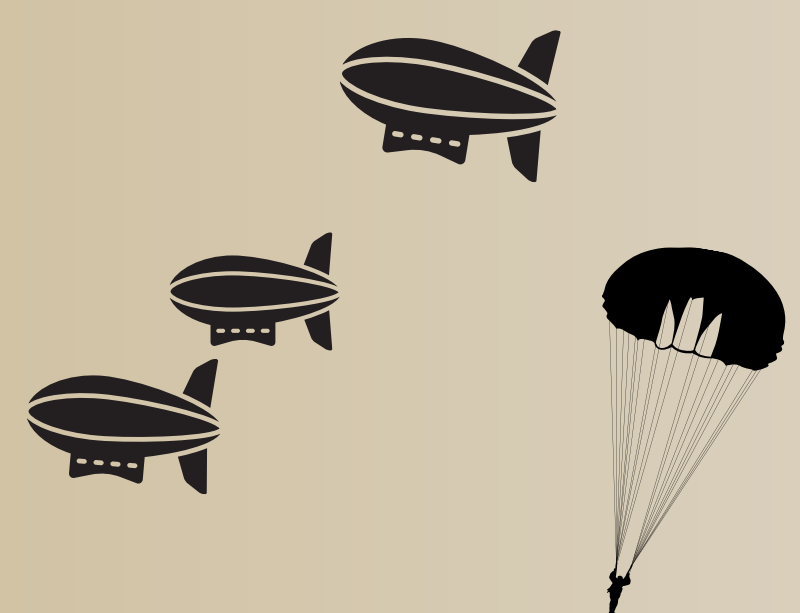
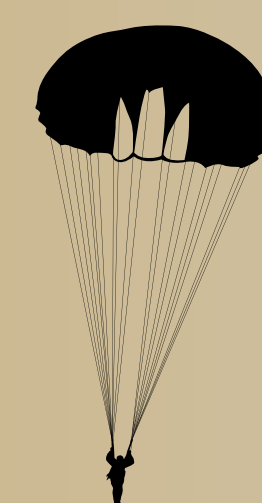
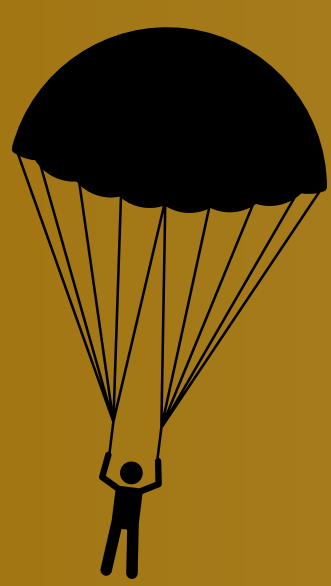
WOOLVERSTONE FROM THE AIR - 1944

2nd March 1944 - Photo taken 2nd March 1944

The photograph was taken by RAF 541 Squadron, formed as a photographic reconnaissance squadron in WW2. This image shows the entirety of Woolverstone Park and some of the village.



- Various arrangements of Nissen huts in front and behind the Hall
- Base for two new Nissen huts
- Woolverstone beach and Cat House, embarkation hard. N.K.
- Some indication of tents having been pitched alongside the footpath to Chelmondiston
- 4 small landing craft at the "hard"
- Oil storage tanks, camouflaged with irregular boundaries
- Note: no lower road from the Hall
- B1456 – High Road. Mid right to top left.
- The full length of "Tank Road", now Cat House Lane
- Walled garden complex
- Building in the middle of Forty-acre field, which is made up of smaller fields
- Tradesmen's track running parallel to Nelson's Avenue, adjacent to forty-acre Field
- Guard House tucked into the trees, 100m south-east of St Michael's



EMBARKATION HARDS. CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE. SITE N.K.

Cat House, Woolverstone was chosen after the period of assessment as one of the 68 Embarkation sites to be constructed around the south and east coast for several reasons.

Firstly, Cat House sits on the south bank of the river Orwell, a broad, heavily wood fringed, tidal river close to Harwich and Felixstowe. The south bank is more shady, perhaps more hidden, than the north bank. Secondly, Woolverstone Hall was close by. The Hall had lain empty since its sale to Oxford University in 1937. The Hall and park offered an ideal space for accommodation, training and command organisation. Thirdly, Woolverstone was served by a good, wide road from Ipswich, the High Road, which could take a high volume of heavy traffic quite easily both from road and rail connections.

Work on Cat House hard, site N.K., began in late summer of 1942 and was completed by 7th May 1943, although the target date had been 31st March. Cat House hard was designed for Landing Craft Tank and constructed to take four 4 craft.

A long, re-enforced concrete access road was built from the High Road down to the river, known until recently as "Tank Road" by local people. This is over half-a-mile long. There is a carefully designed entrance which allows heavy vehicles turning off the High Road, a sweeping turn rather than tight corner. Immediately afterwards there is a passing place. Tank Road continues down to the river. There are seven passing places along its length. Two thirds of the way down there is a large turning circle where vehicles could off-load their secret cargoes, to be hidden under the trees and covered in camouflaged netting.

An apron fronting the river was constructed 64m (70yds) in total width. It varies in depth between 13.8 m (15 yds) and 16.5 m (18 yds).

A concrete retaining wall, three lengths of concrete tall, was required to retain the base of the cliff and built along the rear of the apron.

A jetty, or pier, comprising three square, wooden dolphins and two, smaller intermediate supports between 1st and 2nd dolphin, was constructed in the centre of the hard.

There were a further three wooden and steel dolphins built slightly further up the river. These can be seen in a photograph taken in late 1940s. They were used for tying up ships and off-loading diesel oil to the storage tanks.

Then there were ancillary buildings as well as use of the old Berner's boat house and Cat House. Four Nissen huts were erected close to the hard.

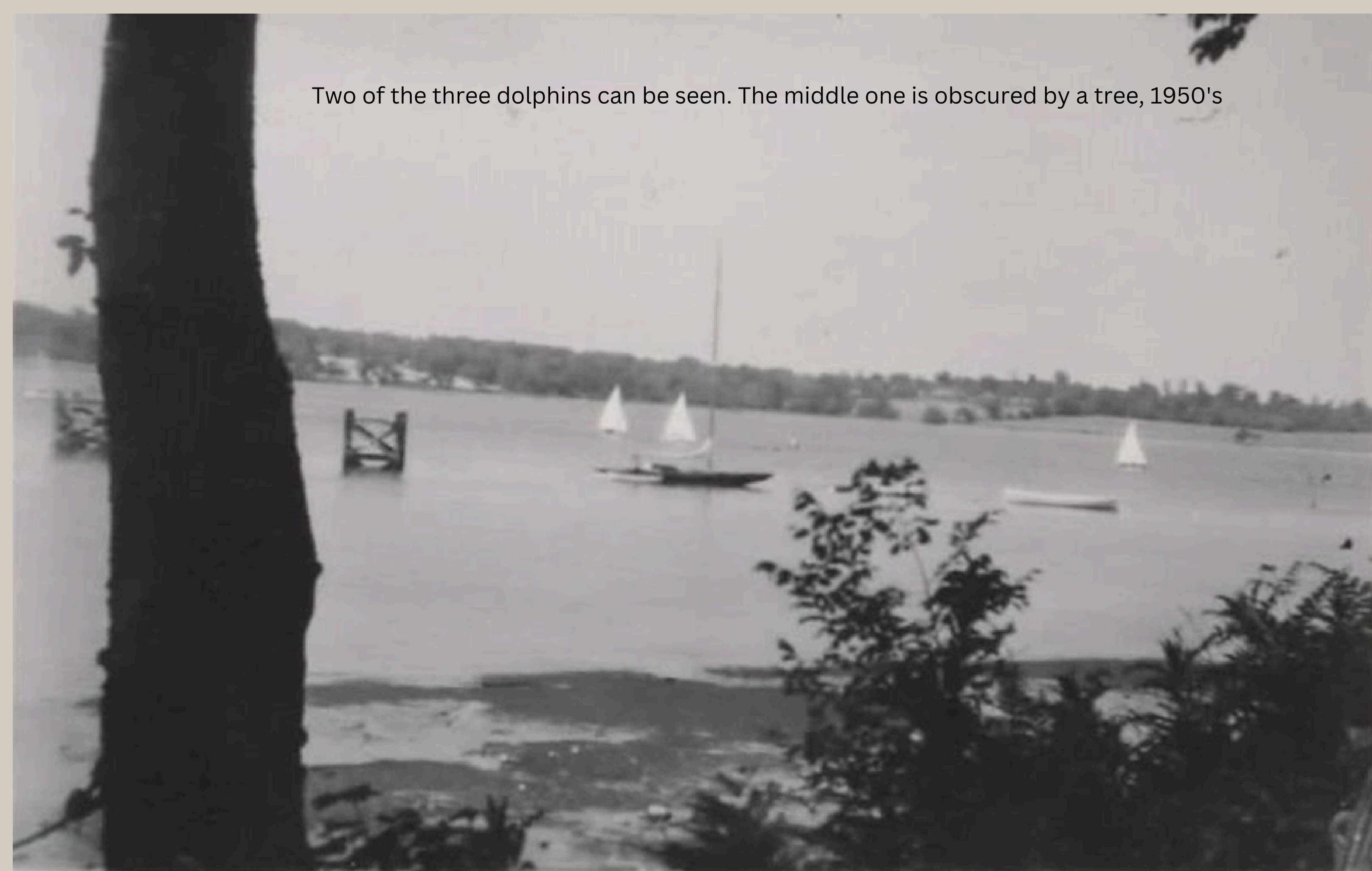
Two where the site of the RHYC now exists, plus two Nissen huts behind the retaining wall to the west of the jetty beneath the cliff and one small Nissen hut on top of the cliff that looked out across the river and to the embarkation hard below.

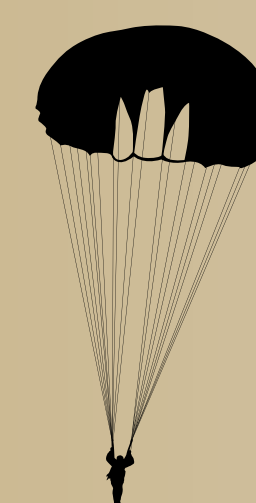
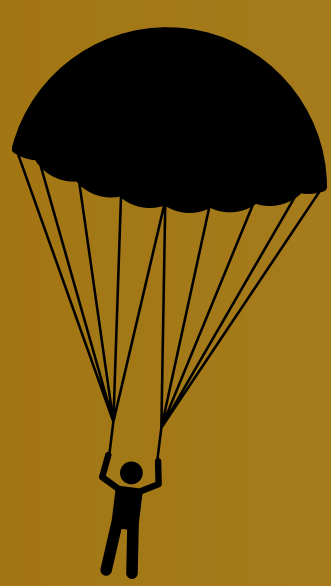
There was also a guard hut, control room, watch hut, workshops, stores, winches and latrines.

Two diesel storage tanks were built, one close to the cliff, a second one further up the site, close to where the football pitch is today.

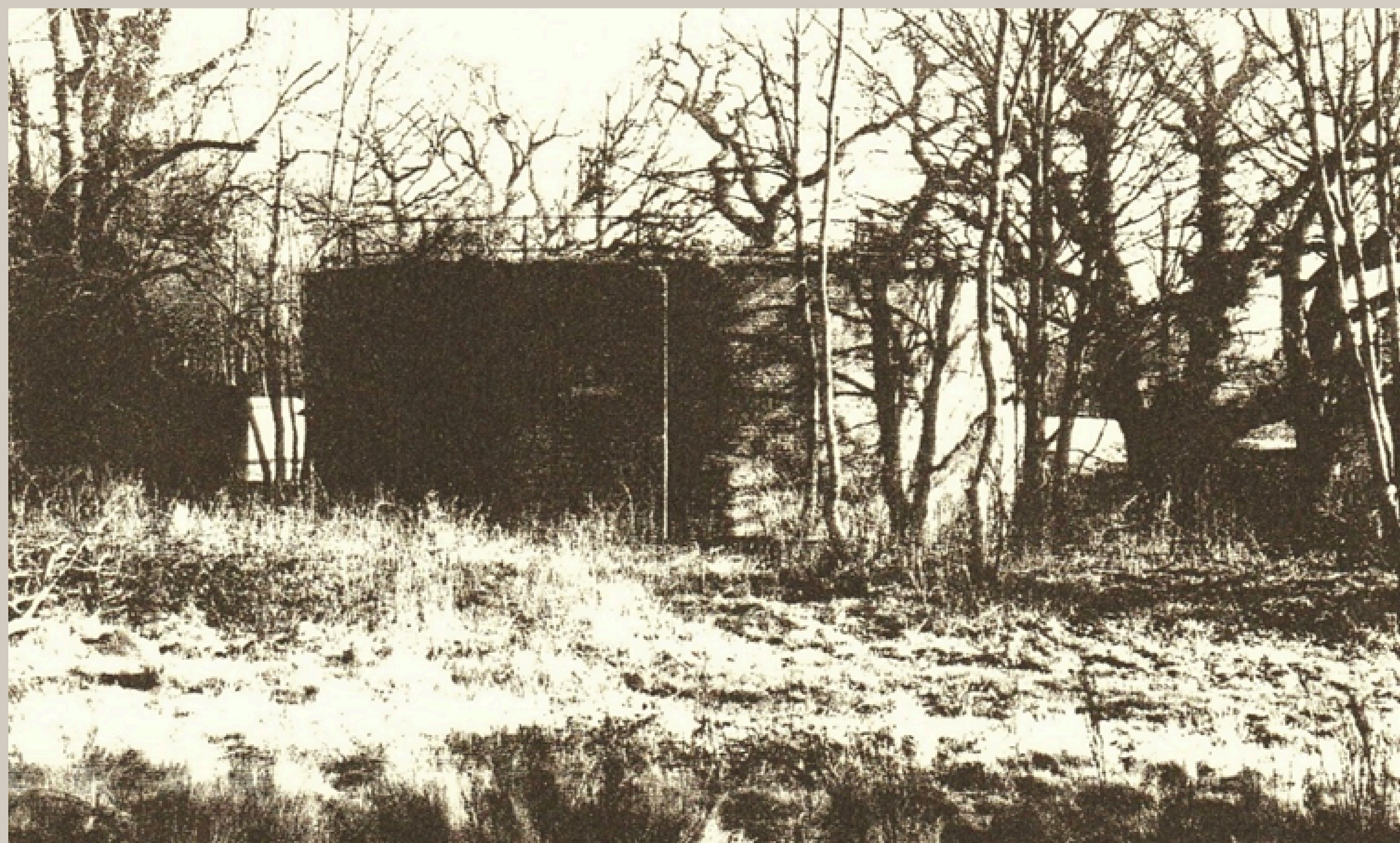


The intertidal zone was completed with flexible matting. This reaches down a further 11.8 m (13 yds) into the river giving a total depth of 27.3 m (30 yds). The mats were designed to provide a stable surface that could support the weight of heavy vehicles, even on sandy or uneven terrain, whatever the height of the tide.





EMBARKATION HARDS. CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE. SITE N.K.



Upper diesel storage tank in 1972



Lower diesel storage tank c. 1950

These storage tanks supplied diesel, fed by gravity, through 6in cast iron pipes to LCT moored against the jetty. The Army was responsible for the construction on land above the high water mark and the Navy on the intertidal area. In addition to Cat House hard, there was also use of the Slumpy Lane wharf, which was extended, at Freston.



The whole area along the river Orwell became a restricted zone from April 1, 1943. Heavy security was put in place. Guard houses were placed at Freston crossroads, Woolverstone, Hollow Lane in Chelmondiston to ensure secrecy and safety.

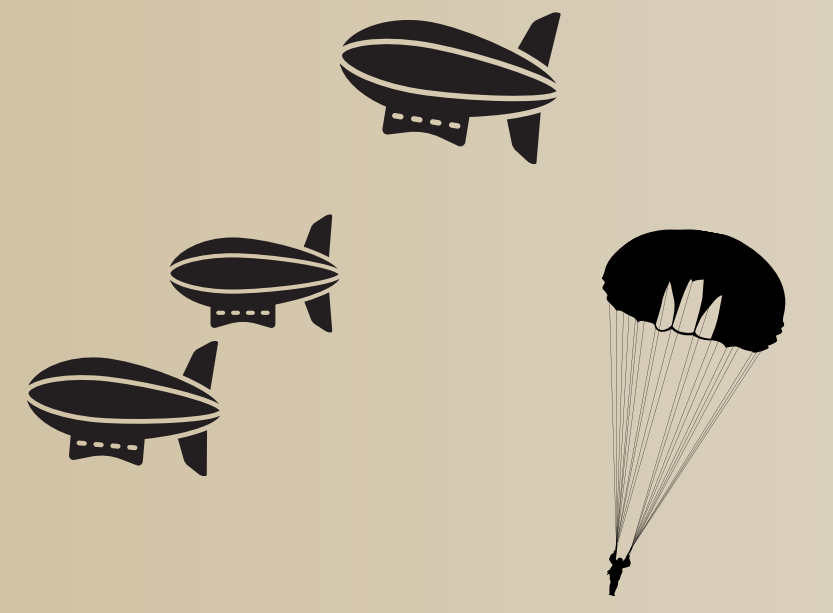
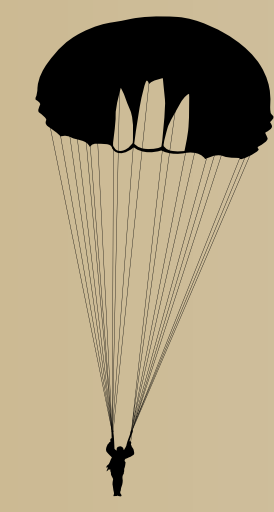
During the autumn of 1943, several days of loading experiments were carried out from Cat House hard. These tests were carried out with utmost secrecy. The tests were to find the optimum loading arrangements.

Tanks, including Churchill, Crusaders and Shermans, were loaded and unloaded in different configurations and tested on the river.

Much of Woolverstone site N.K. embarkation hard can be seen today and is a reminder of the effort and sacrifice made by civilian workforce and the armed forces.

In the end, Woolverstone was not used to embark troops destined for Normandy but it had an important role to play in the success of Operation Overlord – the deception plan Operation Quicksilver.





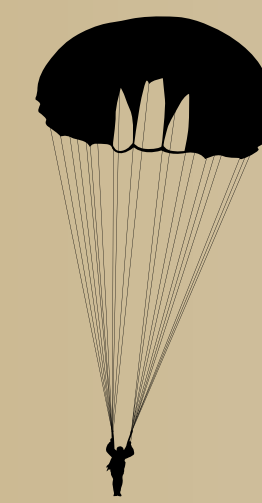
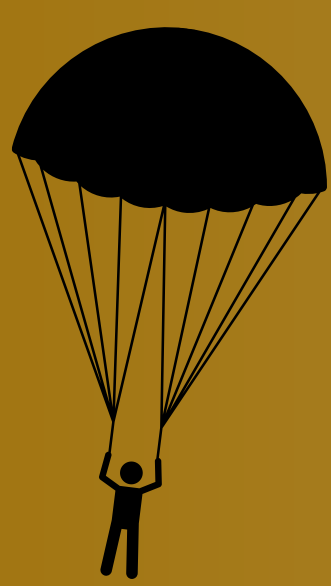
WOOLVERSTONE FROM THE AIR - 1944

26th March 1944 - Photo taken 26th March 1944

This photograph was taken at the end of the embarkation hard building programme and shows Cat Hose Hard, site N.K. has been completed. It was taken by RAF 542 Squadron, formed as a photographic reconnaissance squadron in WW2



- String of moored LCTS. Potters reach and Buttermans Bay
- Numerous unidentified craft beached upstream from Pin Mill.
- Mark IV and Mk V LCTs moored on river Orwell. The Mk V are the smaller ones. These must be genuine LCTs as the dummy craft programme has not started yet
- Large fuel tanker moored at Dolphins.
- Much greater tented area (See P. Tooley's sketch map)
- Camp between Woolverstone and Pin Mill
- Landing craft, possible LCA, on embarkation hard
- Increased path markings between building suggesting greater usage



OPERATION QUICKSILVER MAY AND JUNE 1944

“All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.” Sun Tze 771–256 BC

Operation Bodyguard was the codename given to the overall deception strategy in preparation for **Operation Overlord**, the invasion of western Europe in 1944 which culminated in **Operation Neptune**, the Normandy Landings on D-Day, 6th June.

The single, most important part of Operation Bodyguard was **Operation Fortitude**, the largest, most elaborate, most carefully planned, most vital, and most successful of all Allied deception operations. It was pursued in utmost secrecy.

Fortitude was divided in two parts. **Fortitude North** simulated a massive assault on Norway. **Fortitude South** simulated a massive attack on the Pas-de-Calais, which the Germans thought was the most likely location for an assault being the closest point to England. Both required the realistic presence of phantom field armies, presenting a genuine threat. The First United States Army Group (FUSAG), a phantom army, was at the centre of the deception, led by General Patton, with double agents convincing German High command that it would lead the main assault. And that the Normandy invasion force was a feint, with the main invasion taking place six weeks afterwards at Pas de Calais. Furthermore, this had to disguise the mustering of massive troops number and equipment in the south of England. Visible preparations had to be seen in Eastern England where there was “neglect of concealment”, whereas in the leafy lanes and fields of Hampshire there was a maximum concealment area. For any deception to work there had to be perfect security along the south coast of England. A coastal strip was “closed” from April 1 1944.



SUBJECT Dummy Craft Indication
GHQ Home Forces
1. The following is the proposed layout of dummy craft in Eastern and South Eastern Comds.

SERIAL	PLACE	QUANTITY OF CRAFT	SUGGESTED STORAGE PLACE	LAUNCHING HARD	AREA OF BERTHING
1	YARMOUTH ref OS 1 st to Mile. sheet	50 67	PITCHERS QUAY 986256 and Rly Yard 985258	PITCHERS QUAY and Rly Yard	BREYDON WATER
2	LOWESTOFT ref OS 1 st to 1 mile sheet 77	20	CHAMBERS YARD	CHAMBERS YARD	WATER 992105 - 996105
3	WALDRINGFIELD R. DEBEN ref. OS 1 st to 1 mile sheet 87	66	WALDRINGFIELD	WALDRINGFIELD R. DEBEN	
4	WOOLVERSTONE CAT HOUSE R. ORWELL ref. OS 1 st to 1 mile sheet 87	70	WOOLVERSTONE PK.	CAT HOUSE WOOLVERSTONE PIN MILL	R. ORWELL
5	DOVER ref OS 1 st to 1 mile sheet 117A	40	To be found by SECO	BEACH 760590 Hard below Castle	DOVER HARBOUR
6	FOLKESTONE ref OS 1 st to 11 mile sheet 117A	20	To be found by SECO	BEACH to EAST of Fish Market. Hard at Pier	FOLKESTONE HARBOUR

2. The above details have been drawn up as the result of a recce carried out by this HQ in conjunction with Naval officers in command of the areas concerned, as well as the Comd reps. Whilst the berthing areas might be slightly amended to conform with revised Naval berthing plans, the above are sufficiently firm for planning purposes. It is requested that this HQ may be informed as soon as possible as to the final craft storage areas for each launching site in order that the delivery of craft may commence as soon as possible.

3. The following data is given to assist in the selection of storage areas:
1 Bigbob occupies 100 square yards. Craft cannot be stored one on top of the other. If possible they should be stored in separate groups in order to facilitate assembly.

4. Please acknowledge receipt of the attached AF A16.

HQ 21 Army Group.
No 1 APDC
LONDON W1.
2 April 44.

(SGN) D. I. Strangeways Lt Col
(For General C-in C)

The six principal elements in the Fortitude South deception were codenamed **Quicksilver**.

Operation Quicksilver

Quicksilver I – fiction that main Allied assault would be directed at the Pas-de-Calais several weeks after the Normandy landings

Quicksilver II - radio deception through simulated radio traffic

Quicksilver III – display of landing craft around the east and south-east coast of England

Quicksilver IV – bombing of the Pas de Calais beaches and of communications in the area to suggest imminent assault

Quicksilver V – increase activity in Dover to suggest embarkation preparations.

Quicksilver VI – misleading and protective lighting schemes along the South Coast

Woolverstone had a part to play in Operation Quicksilver: Quicksilver III.

The idea was to construct a fleet of dummy landing craft which would be moored along the South-East and East coast. Woolverstone, Cat House hard, had been constructed two years previously. Access to the River Orwell and with a heavily wooded fringe was an ideal location for the secret construction of dummy landing craft.

To be successful, this part of the deception plan had to demonstrate that the means existed to carry assault troops from FUSAG to the Pas de Calais. Abundant signs of Landing Craft in the quiet rivers and estuaries of the East Coast would support this idea. As would the appearance of mustering points and encampments.

This deception programme, Operation Quicksilver, was masterminded by Colonel David Strangeways, DSO OBE.

Much of the information we have on Operation Quicksilver III comes from the experiences of a young Naval officer, **Peter Tooley**, who was tasked with the building and launching of Bigbobs from Cathouse hard, Woolverstone, onto the Orwell. His book, Operation Quicksilver (1988), takes the reader through the genesis of the plan, the secret trials and mounting the deception itself.

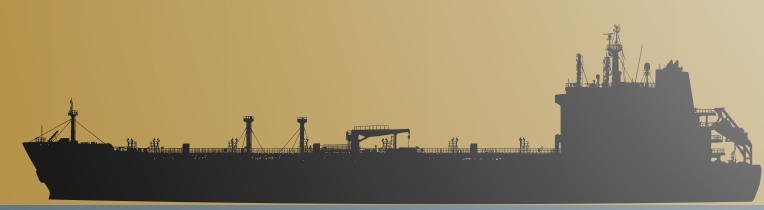
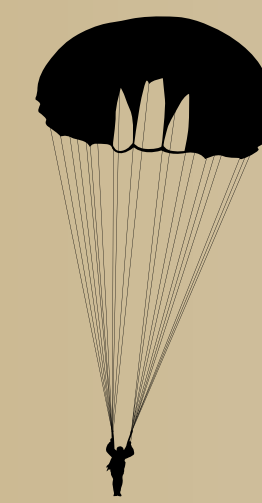
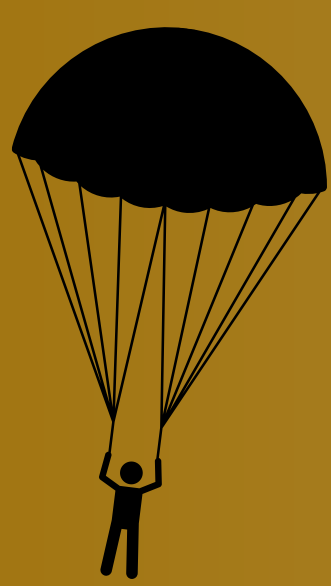
TOP SECRET
Appendix 'A'
"BIGBOB" – PHASE PROGRAMME

	Number to be launched each day						Sailing movements of real LCTs					
	Yarmouth	Lowestoft	River Deben	River Orwell	Dover	Folkestone	BUILD UP	Yar'h./Lowestoft	Yar'h./Deben	Yar'h./Orwell	Deben/Dover	Dover/Folk'n
May	20	4					4					
	21	4					8					
	22	4		4			16		4			
	23	4		4			24		4	4		
	24			4	4		32	3	4	4	5	
	25	4	3	4	4	5	52	3		4		
	26	4	3		4		63		4	4	5	
	27	4		4	4	5	80	4	4		5	4
	28		4	4	4	5	97		4	4		4
	29	4		4	4		113				4	5
	30	4		4	4	5	126		4	4	5	4
	31	4		4	4	5	147		3	4	5	4
June	1	4		3	4	5	159		3	4	2	2
	2	3		3	4	2	173		3	3		4
	3		3	3			183	2	3	4	4	
	4	2	2	3	4	4	198			4	4	
	5			4	4		206	2	3	4		
	6		2	3	4		215	3	3	4		
	7		3	3	4		225		3		5	
	8			3		5	233		3	4	2	
	9			3	4	1	241		2	4		
	10			3	4		248			4		
	11			4			252			3		
	12				3		255					
Total	49	20	59	63	46	18	255					



Sub-Lieutenant Peter Tooley RNVR





OPERATION QUICKSILVER III - BIGBOBS PART 1

Part of Col David Strangeways' Quicksilver plan required the limited display of dummy landing craft, which simulated the new Mark 4 Landing Craft Tank (LCT). Sites for these were chosen at the end of March 1944. 255 "Bigbobs", as they were known, were to be set out on rivers between Great Yarmouth and Folkestone between 20th May and 12th June. 70 were set out on the river Orwell. From 1st April 1944 there was a ten-mile exclusion zone along the South and East coast up to the Wash. Woolverstone and the Shotley Peninsula must have been literally sealed off. This zone was enforced until 15th August 1944.

The Dummy craft or "Bigbobs", as they were known, officially "Device 36" were designed by Chris Toon at Cox and Co (Watford) Ltd, an engineering company specialising in tubular furniture. The design had been trialled at Virginia Water and then Beaulieu and was successful. A decision was taken to make several hundred "kits". Parts were ordered in Dec 1943 for delivery in March 1944. A training base for construction was located at Waldringfield on the river Deben.

"First of all, we were to go on a course, a common enough event, as any ex-service chaps will know, only in this case whole companies at a time. My Company found itself at Waldringfield near Woodbridge, in a field with piles of metal tubes welded together to form a type of assembly kit, each sub-assembly had to be memorised and broken-down time and time again until we could do it all blindfolded. At this stage we practised in the dark until we could do it perfectly." Lance-Corporal Yardley

The Army was responsible for construction. "A" Company of 10th Worcestershire battalion, under Capt. J. G. Hayes, were assigned to Woolverstone. They were billeted on the Church Field, near St Michael's church.

Building at Woolverstone started on 22nd May. The weather was calm and dry. There was little moonlight. In early summer the hours of darkness were short, between 5 and 6 hours. It took a group of 30 trained men divided into three teams approximately six hours to assemble one Bigbob. Time was tight. An incomplete craft would have to be disassembled and hidden away. The first finished craft was run down the slipway into the river on its wheeled undercarriage at 03:00.

The Bigbobs arrived as kits. Each kit required 7, 3-ton lorries, 6 covered and 1 open, and was accompanied by a motorcycle despatch rider. After off-loading their cargo, the drivers spent the night asleep in their lorries before returning to Watford.

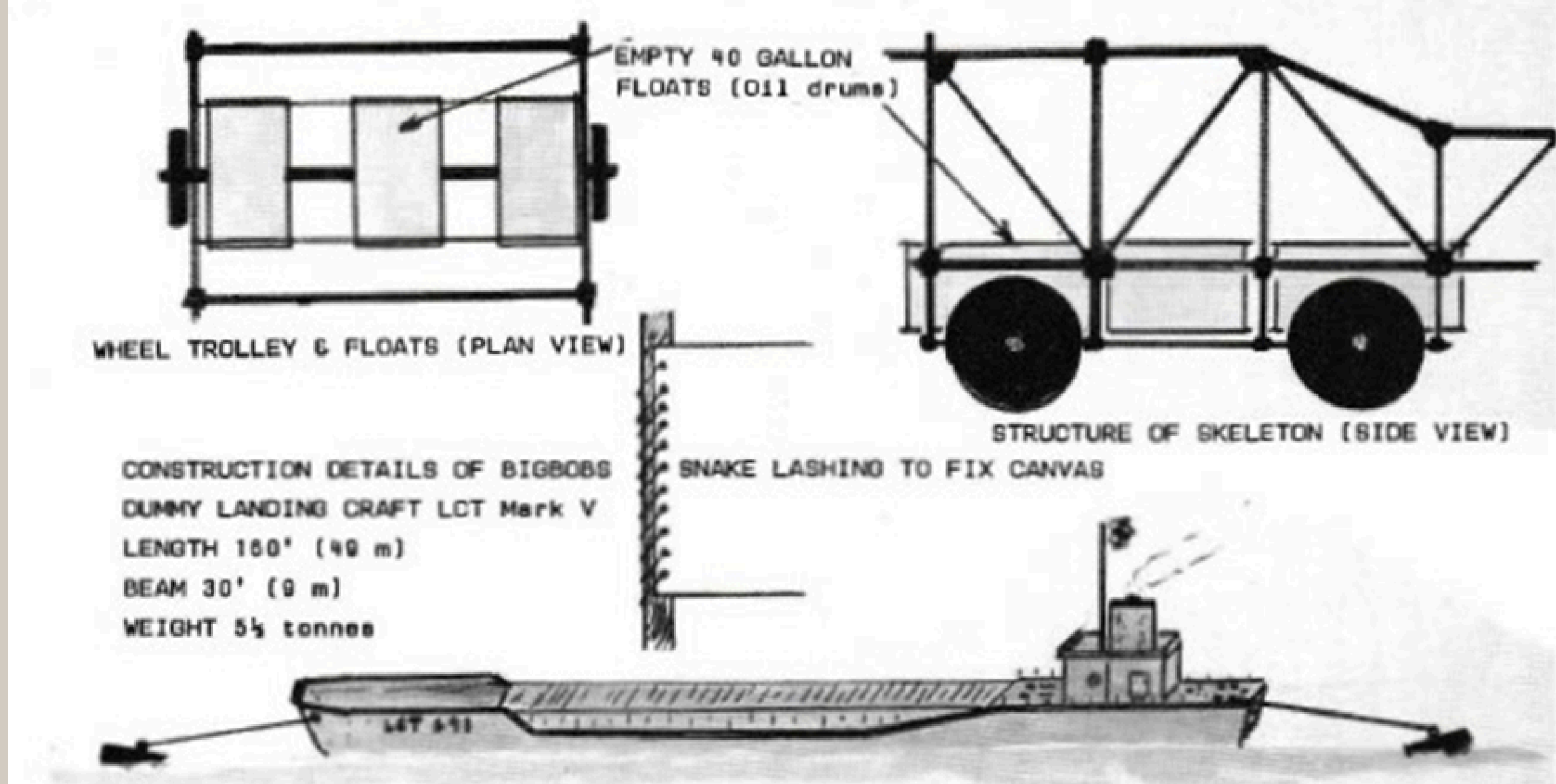
"Final stage of the route to (Woolverstone) was via country lanes and eventually ended in a wooded area. Here lorries were unloaded and the contents put out of sight under the hedgerows in the woods...In the morning, the completed LCT would be afloat and all that could be seen was a jeep towing a harrow over the field to erase all tell-tale activity." Driver. Mr R J Noyce

The construction area was **"an expanse of open parkland bounded by a line of trees close to the river banks, where the ground sloped steeply down to the water."**

The kit consisted of 500 different pieces and had to be assembled in the dark and in near silence. For each Bigbob a construction area of roughly 100 m² was required.

Their skeleton was made of light weight 3 1/4" tubular steel held together by fish-plates and cotter pins. Light, steel pre-fabricated plates were bolted to the sides, bow and stern to achieve the exact shape. The frame was assembled in three sections - an articulated construction - which gave it some flexibility on entering the water. Canvas was then stretched over this and tied onto the frame by lacing. The final LCT was 49m (160 ft) long, beam 9 m (30 ft). She weighed around 5 1/2 tonnes. * A system of 30 wheels was attached to the base so the finished craft could be run down to the river's edge. They floated on an assemblage of around 30, 40-gallon oil drums.

Peter Tooley, Operation Quicksilver. 1988



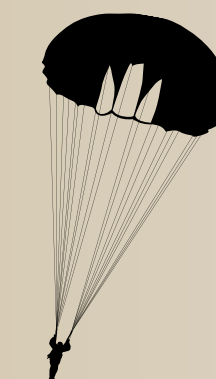
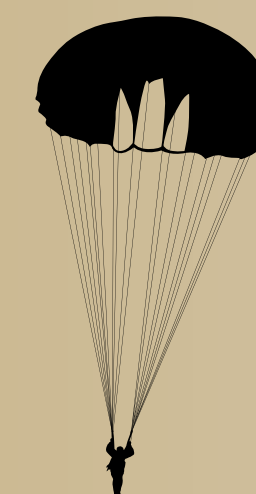
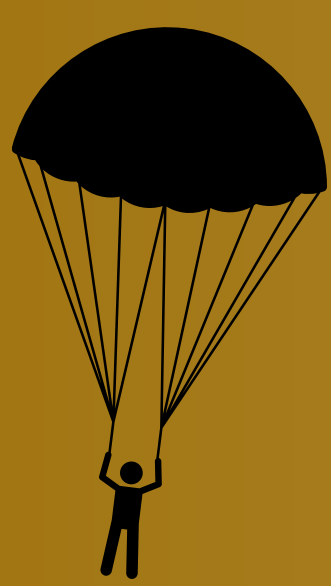
Bigbobs on the river Orwell



Once the basic craft had been completed the superstructure had to be added, wheelhouse, funnel, bow doors of the correct angle and a bridge, fashioned out of duck boards, were added. Coils of rope were placed on the decks. An ensign and halyards for the mast were included. "The completed LCTs were indistinguishable from the real thing at 25 yards." R J Noyce

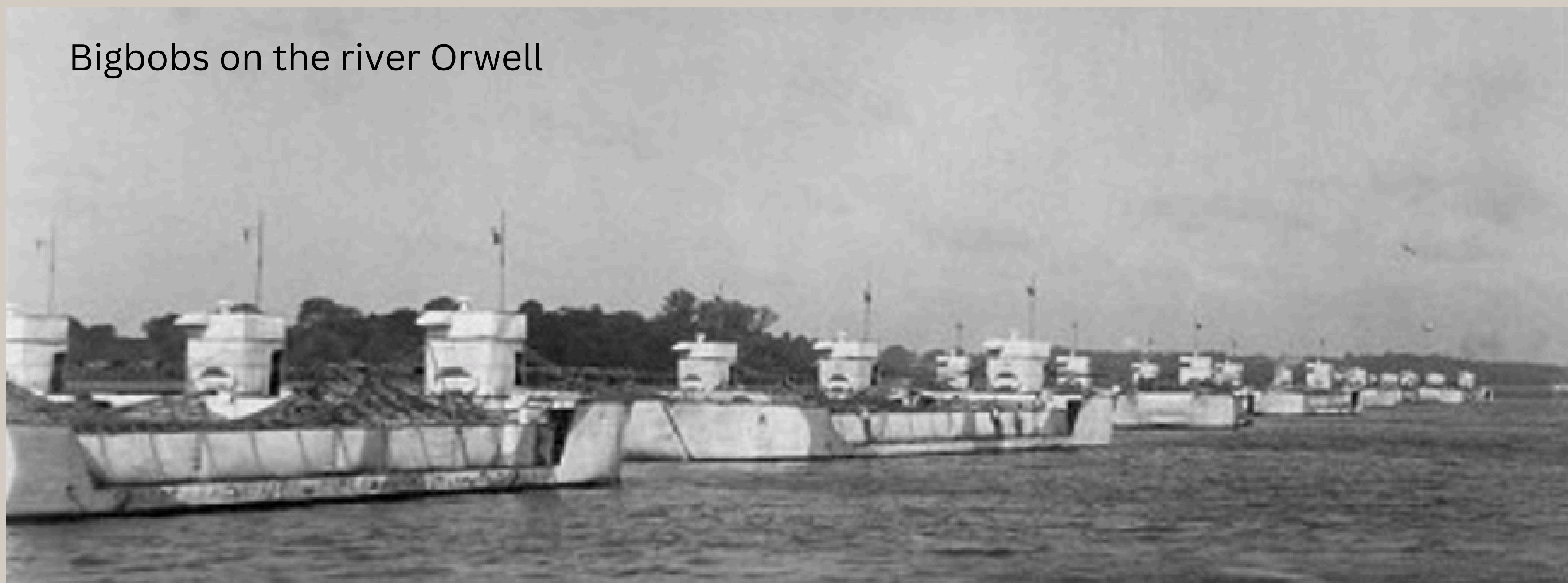
*There seems to be some discrepancies in accounts of the size of Bigbobs constructed and moored on the river Orwell. In essence, there were two types of LCT in production at this period of the war: Mk IV and Mk V. The Mk IV was 57m (187 ft) in length. Beam 11.5 m (38ft). Weight 13 1/2 tonnes. The Mk V was 35.8 m (117 ft) in length. Beam 9.8m (33ft) Weight 5 1/2 tonnes. Clearly, the Mk IV is much the larger craft. Neither fit the dimensions given by Lt. Peter Tooley. It appears that the dummy LCTs moored on the river Orwell were type Mk V. Genuine LCTs of both types can be seen on the Orwell in March 1944 but only type Mk V in July. Therefore, it is the Mk V dummy LCTs that were built at Woolverstone.





OPERATION QUICKSILVER III - BIGBOBS PART 2

Bigbobs on the river Orwell



Once the dummy LCT reached the water, the Army operation was handed over to the Navy. The Bigbob had to be guided out to its mooring. She had no engine, was light and had a shallow draught. This made her difficult to manoeuvre. Any wind or strong tide made the job even more challenging.

The articulated structure of the LCT made entry to the water slightly easier as the bow then mid-section could lift horizontally on the water as the remainder of the craft descended the angle on the sloping hard.

Each Bigbob had to be accompanied to its mooring by 4 small, agile craft, LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel) manned by Royal Marines. Two LCVPs, with Royal Marine coxes to steer them, were tied either side of the bow by hand lines on entry to the river, one at each corner. A Naval officer stood precariously on the duckboard bridge between 20 and 30 feet above the water giving directions. With the Army team pushing from the stern and the Royal Marines tugging from the bow, the craft entered the river where two more LCVPs tied onto the stern. The LCVPs acted as the Bigbob engine and required skill to manoeuvre.

“There were no rudders, so if we wanted to turn to starboard then I had to get starboard craft to put their engines astern and the port craft to go full ahead.” Peter Tooley.

With deft instruction the newly completed Bigbob was steered to the trots of orange buoys moored along Potter’s Reach, and tied fore and aft about 64m (70yds) apart, in pairs or threes.

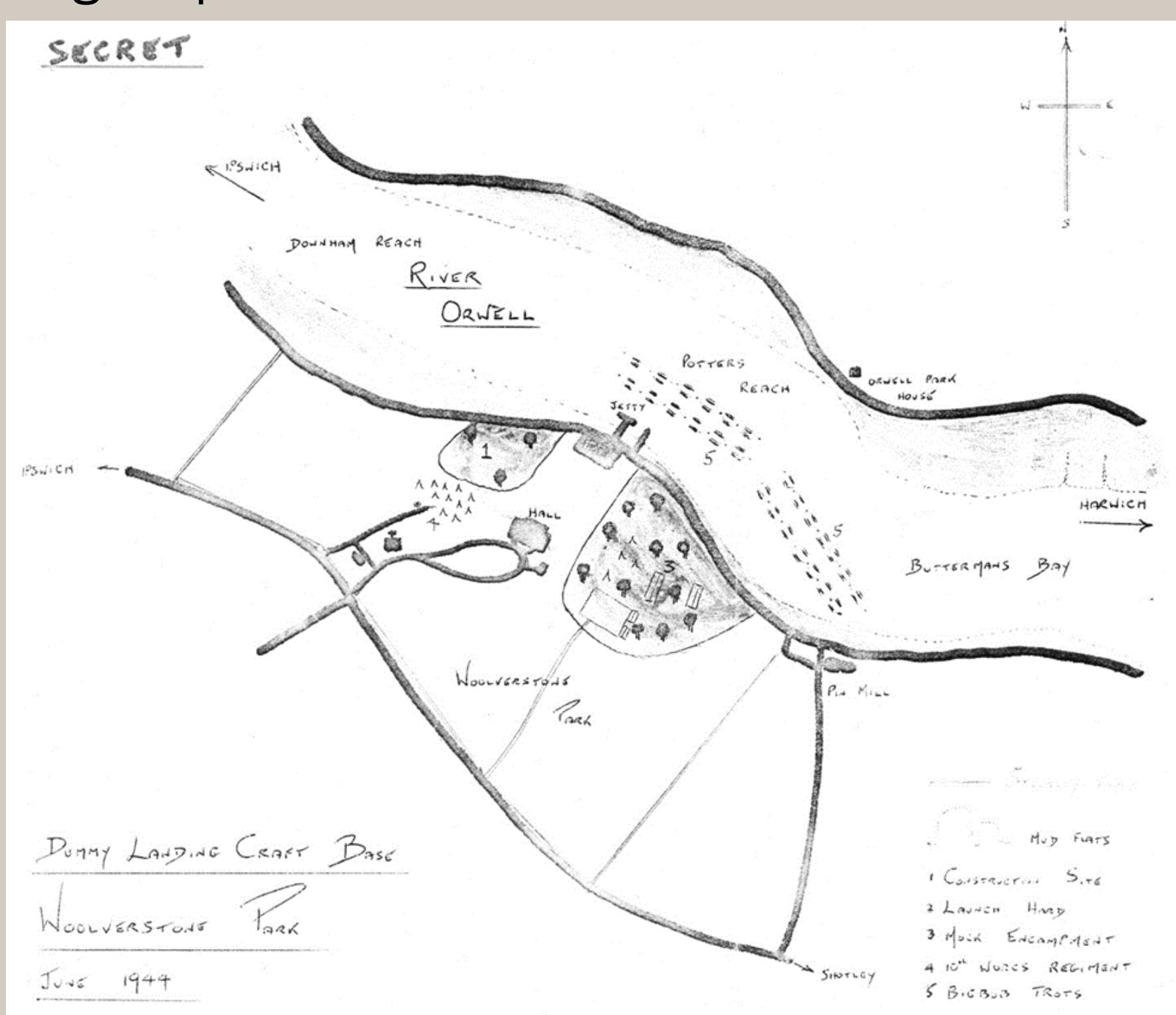
Great care had to be taken not to run the craft onto either river bank or mud bank. The articulated nature of the frame would have distorted the shape of the craft and shown it to be a dummy.

The vehicle hold was covered with camouflaged netting poked up with poles to simulate a cargo of tanks or lorries.

The Bigbobs themselves were serviced by a small number of personnel members of 446 Flotilla of Royal Marines who were camped in tents just outside the main gates leading to the rose garden in the Park grounds. The Bigbobs were moored with a White Ensign raised during the day and manned by skeleton crews who carried out a range of tasks, even fishing over the side. Laundry was hung out to dry. Specially designed oil burners were lit to produce puffs of smoke. Aldis lamps blinked signals ashore. Small boats delivered ammunition, mail bags and other essential stores. Liberty boats took men to and from the craft. Fuel Lighters moved up and down the line of craft, laying out oiling hoses to simulate re-fuelling. The mooring patterns were varied. And all the time, real LCTs chugged up and down the river, mingling with the dummies .

Four launches took place each night with 50 Bigbobs moored by June 6th. 13 further craft were added the following week.

While all this subterfuge was taking place, real landing craft and larger invasion ships were using Woolverstone for training. Some of the landing ships were so large that the only way they could turn about was to place their strengthened bows onto Cat House Hard and push the stern around under engine power.



Operation Quicksilver maintain the deception throughout June, only coming to an end in early July. On 10th June General Guingand, signalled to Colonel Wills, commanding the 10th Worcesters, as follows:

The Chief-of-Staff is anxious that the threat created to N. France by the dummy landing craft under your control be continued as long as possible. It is during the next fortnight that we may well obtain most benefit from these craft.

While it is realised that the launching and maintenance of the craft is an extremely arduous task it is requested that every possible effort be made to ensure that as much life and animation is given to them as possible.



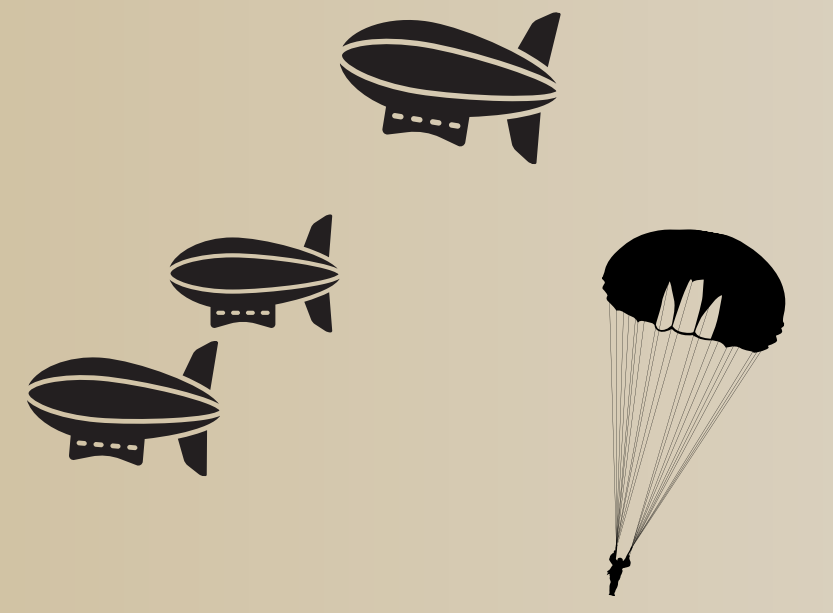
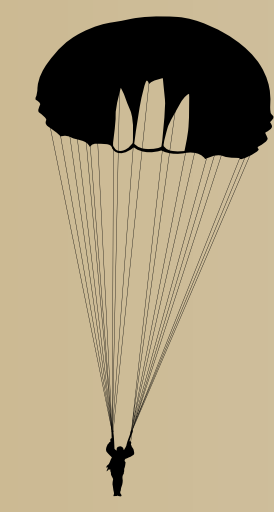
You should explain to all ranks that they are playing an extremely important part of the plan, and that in view of this they are required to make as great an effort as battalions deployed in the battle areas.

To maintain the deception a fake Army camp was constructed between Woolverstone and Pin Mill. Among other things, this had a Guard house, a parade square, tents, dummy equipment, smoking field kitchens, phantom convoys of army lorries delivering supplies and even fake wireless chatter to moored Bigbobs.

The German High Command was convinced that the Normandy landings were a distraction from the main invasion force. They believed an invasion force, including 500 landing craft, was massed in southeast England. This kept Panzer Divisions near Pas de Calais in readiness, thus keeping them away from the battle for Normandy. The Quicksilver deception was successful in its aims.

“These deception measures continued as planned after D-day and events were to show that they achieved outstanding results and in fact played a vital part in our successes in Normandy.”
Normandy to the Baltic Field-Marshal Lord Montgomery





WOOLVERSTONE FROM THE AIR - 1944

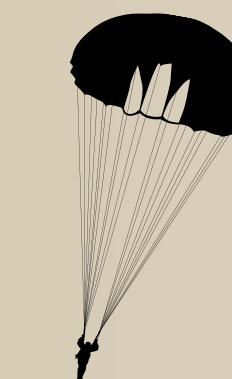
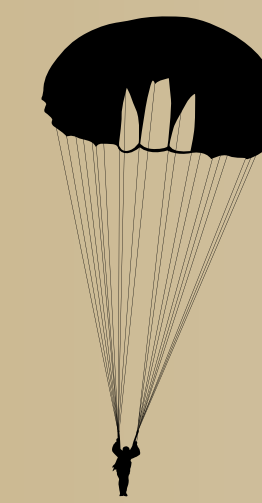
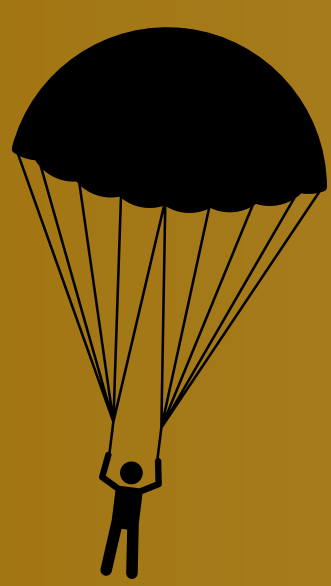
6th July 1944 - This photograph taken one month after D-Day invasion commenced, by 309 Squadron. This was a reconnaissance group made up of Polish - Land of Czerwien - pilots. The deception plan, Operation Quicksilver, was being maintained but in the next few days the operation would be wound down and the dummy craft recovered and dismantled. They had achieved their purpose.



We can see:

- 39 x Landing Craft, Tank Mk V dummy vessels moored along Potters Reach. Most are moored in threes, some in twos and occasional single craft.
- 3 x small landing craft on Woolverstone beach
- 5 x small landing craft moored to Dolphins and jetty
- Cat House
- Nissen hut on top of the cliff
- Lower of the two diesel storage tanks
- Irregular outline and bank for camouflage netting
- Nissen huts, where RHYC Club House would be established

- Paths between Woolverstone Hall and Cat House are various and well worn, especially below the block of Nissen to the west of the Hall
- Evidence of where tents had been pitched
- Observation tower on the Hall roof
- 2 x slit trenches, zig-zag lines, to the east of the stable block. Perhaps these were for training purposes, unlikely to be defensive.
- a clear white squiggly mark that appears in all three photographs at the same place. Could this be connected with the site of the Obelisk which had been demolished in 1943?
- Clear view of vista from the Hall.
- Note that the area is more wooded today.



LCT 7074 - LAST SURVIVOR OF D-DAY LANDINGS



LCT 7074 is the only surviving Landing Craft Tank that took part in the D-Day landings. She was given her orders to sail to Normandy from HMS Woolverstone.

A flotilla of 7000 ships and amphibious craft brought the Allied armies to the beaches of France on 6th June 1944. Of these, over 800 were LCTs.

Landing Craft Tank were designed to bring tanks and their personnel onto beaches. They had flat bottoms and a shallow draught. A front-loading ramp allowed the vehicles to drive off. High sided double hull kept vehicles hidden from sight and protected from the weather. Aft were the engines, wheelhouse and living accommodation. LCT 7074 was a modified Mark III design.

LCT 7074 was ordered in late 1943 and built by R & W Hawthorn, Leslie and Co Ltd, in Hebburn yard, just outside Newcastle-on-Tyne. Her yard number was 677. She was equipped with the American Sterling Admiral petrol engine. Her body was rivetted rather than welded. She was launched on 4th April 1944. She had a crew of 10 ratings who often slept aboard in cramped conditions on the mess deck. Two officers had their own cabin in the corner of the armoured wheelhouse. There was a small galley, shower and toilet. Small wardroom for the officers. She was armed with two 20mm Oerliken anti-aircraft guns. There was no radio and no radar. Crew reported terrible condensation that meant they had to sleep under waterproof clothing.

LCT 7074 was commanded by Sub-Lieutenant John Baggot RNVR. He was 20 and a trainee solicitor. His deputy was Sub-Lieutenant Philip Stephens. They were stuck on Tyneside for the first month due to problems with the engine.

On 9th May, LCT 7074 finally left for Great Yarmouth to join the 17th LCT Flotilla. On Monday 22nd May, the flotilla sailed around the coast to the river Orwell and anchored. 10 days later, Friday 2nd June, she sailed to Felixstowe to embark her cargo of tanks, belonging to the 7th Armoured Brigade, the famed Desert Rats. On Monday 5th, they set sail for Normandy. She carried seven Stuart light tanks, two unarmed "Observation Post" tanks, and one Cromwell tank.

The 17th Flotilla was one of five flotillas that made up Assault Group L2. This was part of the naval Force L providing follow up support on Sword, Juno and Gold beaches. They intended to land their troops on the evening of 6th of June but tide and weather delayed until dawn on 7th. - D+1.

60 embarked soldiers, along with their tanks, slept on the tank deck. There were only two toilets and wash basins. The tank's engines were regularly started to ensure they were in working order. The air was thick with fumes. Poor weather meant the sea was rough with a heavy swell. Soldiers clung to the gun turrets and the sides. Many were violently seasick. Little sleep was had.

"Seldom could there have been an invasion force so eager to leap ashore" Lieutenant John Liverman.

LCT 7074 unloaded her tanks and crews into 6 feet of water at 9:30 on the morning of 7th June on their designated beach, Jig Green, Gold beach. Only one Stuart tank failed to make the shore sinking into deep water.

EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
SHUTTLE SERVICE—MAJOR LANDING CRAFT—continued.

12 L.C.T. Flotilla				17 L.C.T. Flotilla				
"V" L.C.T. Squadron { Forward—Dover. Main—H.M.S. Woolverstone. (Administered by H.M.S. Woolverstone)				"V" L.C.T. Squadron { Forward—Dover. Main—H.M.S. Woolverstone. (Administered by H.M.S. Woolverstone)				
State	Unit	Equipment	20 L.C.T. (3)	State	Unit	Equipment	22 L.C.T. (3)	
A	"	341	Dover.	A	L.C.T. (3)	7035	Dover.	
A	"	345	Harwich.	A	"	7038	Harwich.	
A	"	399	Dover.	A	"	7040	Southampton.	
A	"	429		A	"	7043	Dover.	
A	"	430		A	"	7045		
A	"	432		A	"	7046		
A	"	433		A	"	7048		
A	"	444		A	"	7049		
A	"	453		A	"	7051		
C	"	454		Harwich.	A	"		7055
C	"	463		Southampton.	A	"		7061
A	"	474		Harwich.	C	"		7062
A	"	475	Dover.	A	"	7066		
C	"	7012	Harwich.	A	"	7071	Southampton.	
				A	"	7074	Dover.	
				A	"	7076	Dover.	
				A	"	7079		
				A	"	7080	Shoreham.	
				A	"	7081	Dover.	
				A	"	7083		
				C	"	7084		Southampton.



Stuart tank from LCT 7074 on beach beyond repair.

Task achieved, 7074 had to wait until the tide returned to get off the beach – "drying out". This provided an opportunity to do some running repairs. Some of the crew went inland and were treated to champagne in a restaurant at Asnelles-sur-Mer.

LCT 7074 was expected to return to England with 200 prisoners of war. However, with only a crew of 12 this was considered unwise and they were transferred to a larger craft, an LST, Landing Ship Tank. She returned on 8th June, having lost her convoy and having more engine troubles. From this point, on until March 1945, LCT 7074 made numerous crossings of the channel with troops and supplies, only suffering a major engine fire on 15th June.

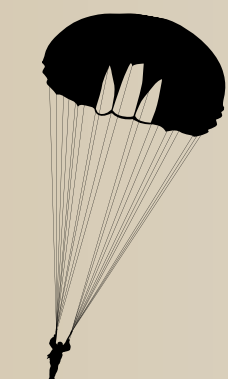
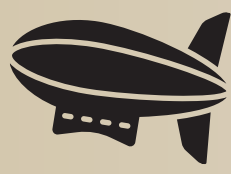
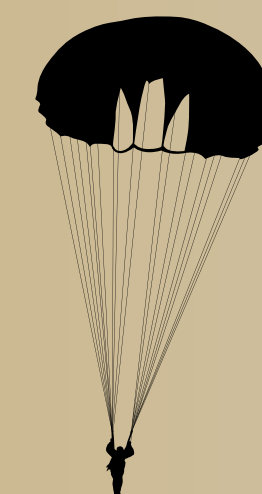
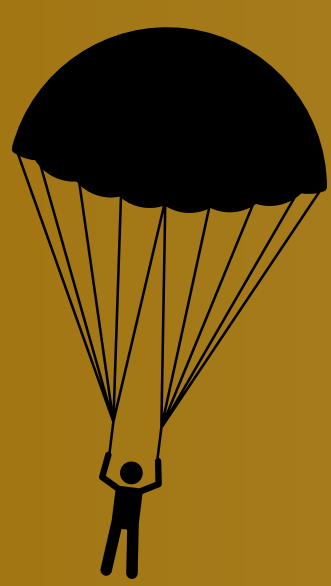
One of her last tasks was to carry a pair of mobile cranes to Antwerp on 3rd March, 1945. She was then moved to Liverpool for modifications. After the war, she was bought in 1947 by the Master Mariners' Club as a permanent Clubhouse. She was converted in 1948 and renamed "Landfall". The engines were removed and the deck divided into rooms.

Two decades later, in 1968, she became a nightclub. At the end of the 1990s, she was bought by the Independent Warship Preservation Trust. They set about returning her to her original state. In 2006, the WPT closed and LCT 7074 was abandoned. She she sank in 2010.



Towards the end of 2013, LCT 7074 was designated part of the National Historic Fleet and rescued. In October 2014, she was refloated and taken to Portsmouth where she has been completely restored and saved for the Nation.





DAME MARION KETTLEWELL DBE

1914 - 2016

Dame Marion Kettlewell DBE served as Unit Officer in the WRNS at HMS Woolverstone in the months leading up to D-Day. This was during the period when Bigbobs were being constructed beside the river Orwell as part of a massive deception plan known as Operation Quicksilver. Her period at HMS Woolverstone through her own words:



"I was the Unit Officer at HMS Woolverstone, which is on the Orwell just outside Ipswich. This was an "assembly and briefing" establishment for Landing Craft. It had been a lovely estate with a very elegant house which was the Wardroom. There were Nissen huts all around in which we lived and the sailors lived.

There was a cricket ground and tennis courts. It was very lovely and the Nightingale sang under the trees. You walked down to the "hard" and there were all these small Landing Craft and they were in training. Eventually, all the ships from Harwich and all the personnel came to Woolverstone to be briefed on the D-Day landing before they moved South. There were Royal Marine Majors in charge of the landing craft and we had some Women's Royal Navy boat mechanics who worked on them. There were about 200 WRNS there; writers and different sorts of jobs.

It was a very good place to start being Unit Officer because there was a very nice captain, James Mansfield, who had been retired but only recently and brought back. He was a natural leader and very friendly, I mean he had very high standards but he was a lovely person and he knew that I was as green as grass...He taught me in a most splendid way how to do all these things.

We were confined just before D-Day for about a month. Nobody was allowed to go ashore and so we had to arrange all sorts of entertainments: sports, cricket matches and bingo to keep everybody going. There were a number of cooks, stewards and writers as well as the mechanics and one girl maintained a gun in case an enemy aircraft came over."

Landing craft were anchored in the river. I remember we had a party the night before they were supposed to go and when we woke up in the morning they were still there. Everything was delayed because of weather. I went out early next morning to watch them all go. It was quite a sight.

A regiment of Warwick's came and built dummy landing craft and moored them outside. One or two people were seen to walk about on them as if there were more to come. We used to go down and watch them making these under the trees by day and then they launched them at night.

We knew about D-Day before it happened. Some of the WRNS officers were right in the middle of it; secretarial and operational but very much part of it.

One of the Royal Marine officers was, in civilian life, a keen ornithologist. He took several of us, who were interested, bird watching in the estate. I remember particularly the woodlarks. He got me completely hooked and it has been with me ever since.

We used to go over to Ganges and Harwich to share some of their concerts and ENSA. (Entertainments National Service Association). My job was to see the WRNS were doing their work to the best and were happy doing it. I think it came naturally.

There was one married WRNS whose husband, I think, was in the Guards. She was an MT driver. We weren't allowed to go ashore but she managed to slip out in a Tilly. She stuffed her bed with pillows.

The Duty Officer had been very "with it" and had discovered, when she did rounds, that this bed didn't look as if it had been slept in. When she returned, I mean I can understand she wanted to see her husband before he went off on D-Day, she was up in front of the Captain and he was very good to her. She pretended to faint. I think she said she was pregnant. He said you're going to sit down and I'll see you again in 10 minutes. He didn't turn up but she got her leave stopped.

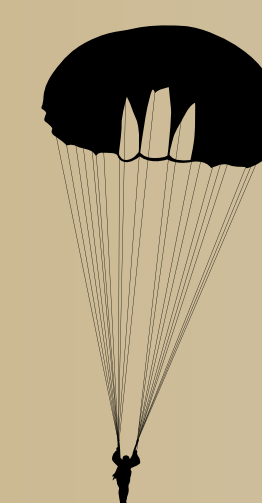
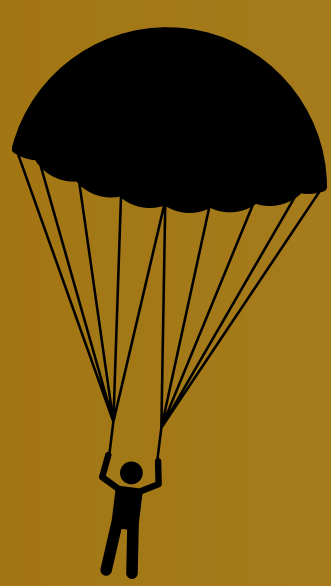


Dame Marion Kettlewell on her 100th birthday

D-Day was quite emotional, in particular the morning when we got up. I think it was a Sunday and we'd gone to church and they had all gone. The establishment went on for a little while after D-Day with these camouflaged boats being put out. The one place we could go to was still in the estate, it was a lovely little pub down at the end of the park. We used to go down there but then the locals weren't allowed to come in, it was Naval territory, but otherwise the locals were very friendly. We went for several meals with the local farmers and others around.

It was a lovely part of the world and I was very happy there."





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.

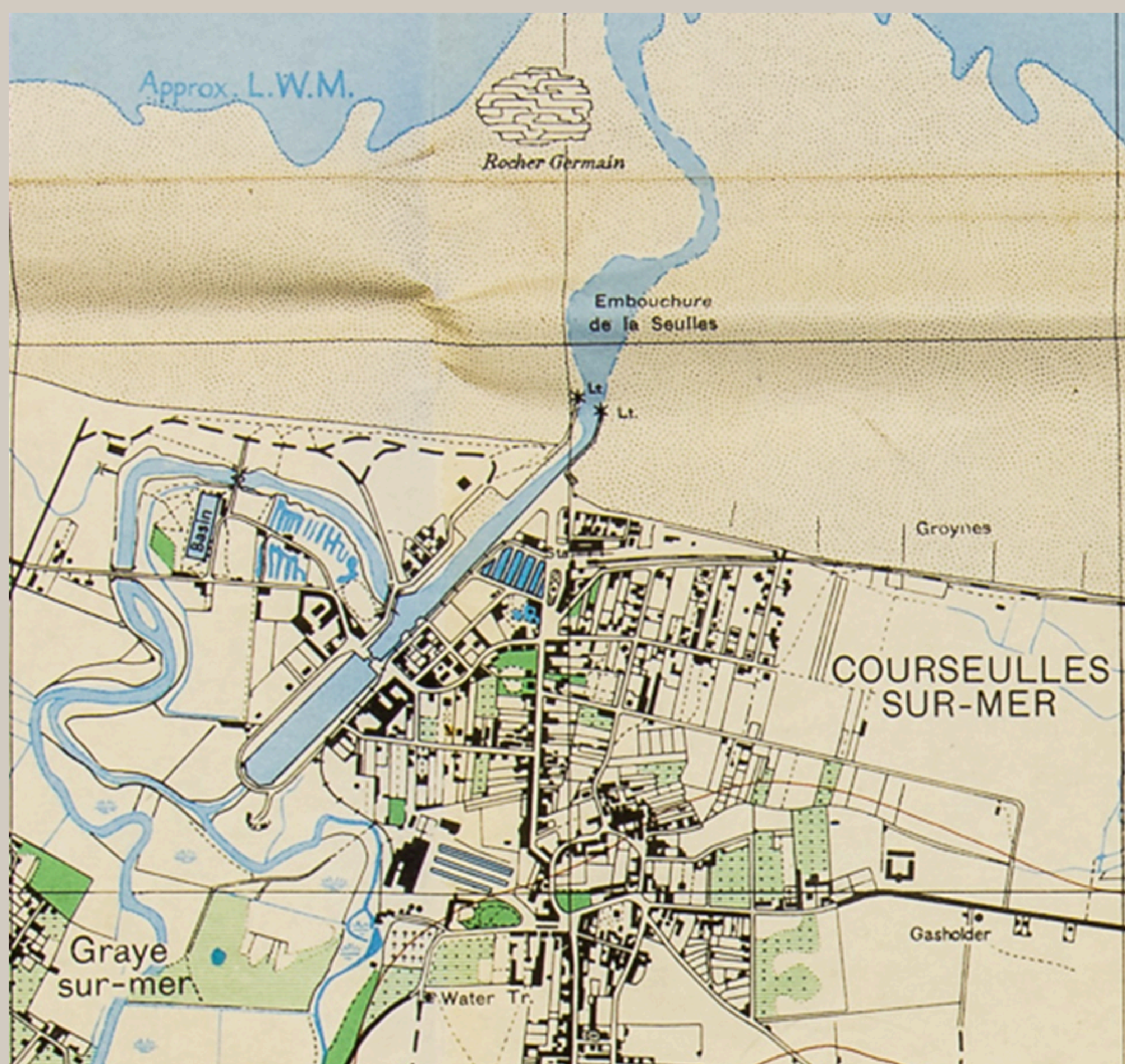
On 20th January 1944, Roy was sent to HMS Mylodon, a shore base. Roy's first posting was to Lowestoft where, under great secrecy, trawlers were being converted into minesweepers. Next, he went to Great Yarmouth and was posted to the crew of an LCT (Landing Craft Tank) which moved on to the River Orwell 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.

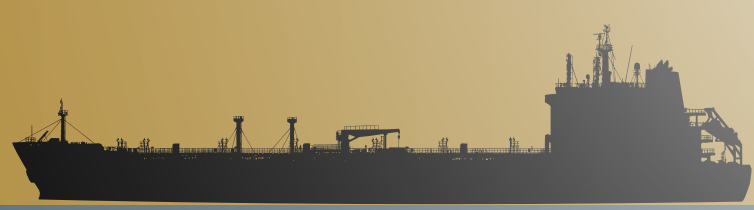
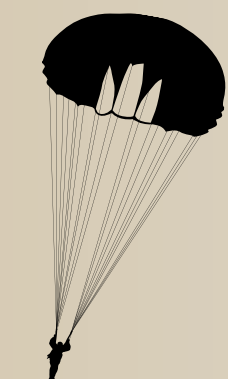
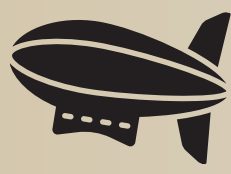
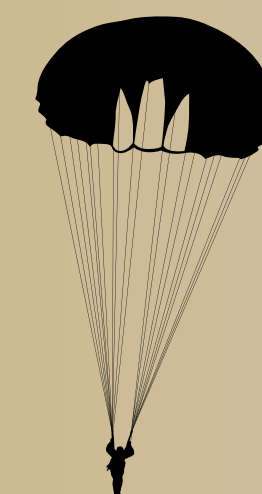
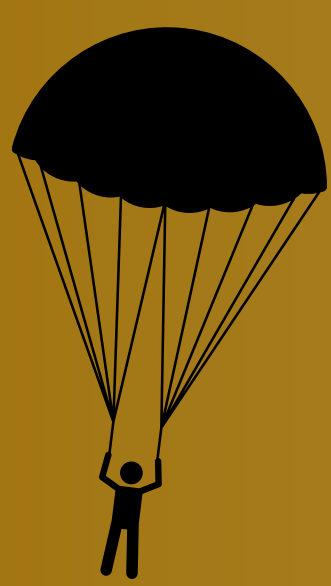
He hung on to the gun-turret of a tank as the LCT ramp went down and dipped its nose into the sea. The scene was crowded with soldiers, and German prisoners of war who were all engaged in frantic activity. Roy just stood on the beach aghast at what he was witnessing. The shoreline was a continuous assembly 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.





SGT. GERALD "GERRY" SOLOMON RAC 1916 - 2015



Gerald Solomon enlisted in the Royal Armoured Corps in 1939, aged 23 years, reporting to Tidworth Barracks on Salisbury Plain on 29th December. After six weeks, he was selected for driving and maintenance.

Then followed months of training; first on cars, then 3-ton lorries and finally Bren gun carriers, tracked vehicles. After further training, he was posted to the 5th Royal Tank Regiment. In October 1940, Gerald was posted abroad to Egypt and took part in the Siege of Tobruk (1941) and later the Battle of El Alamein (1942).

He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. The 5th RTR moved on to Italy in September then back to Britain during January 1944. More training followed in Manchester, Bovington and Thetford on the American Sherman 'Firefly' and British 'Cromwell' tanks.

Finally, on 9th May, 5th RTR left Brandon, Suffolk, for camp R5 – a marshalling camp at Orwell Park, Suffolk, as part of the 7th Armoured Division. The Battalion strength was: 39 Officers and 776 Other Ranks, a total of 815 Troops. These "Desert Rats" were to be part of follow up force 'L' which landed on the British Gold Beach in Normandy in the days after D-Day. (D + 1)

At Orwell Park the tanks were prepared for a beach landing with waterproofing: weld seams with "Bostick" and tape, exhausts raised. This was completed by 20th May. Sgt Solomon was given a Firefly with 17lb gun and five crew, including a co-driver. They received some Day Leave in London.

From the 25th May the Battalion was confined to camp. On 1st June, the entire Battalion left Orwell Park and marshalled on the Ipswich to Felixstowe Road at Trimley Heath. Each tank had a numbered space. Sgt Solomon picks up the story on 2nd June:

"We drove onto the old Felixstowe Road, down Garrison Lane and Langer Road and into the RAF Seaplane base. Going down the seaplane ramps, we loaded onto the LCTs. Pulling out, we moored in the river Orwell alongside other LCTs. When we got close up, we could see a lot of them were dummies."

The flotilla sat at anchor on the Orwell awaiting favourable weather. At 8:15 on 5th June the Flotilla moved out into the North Sea and joined other craft off Harwich. The sea was choppy and there was some seasickness.

"We eventually sailed down the North Sea into the English Channel. Each craft had a cargo of 3 tanks, an AA gun, three field guns, a signal van, a RE van and an ambulance. There were also crews for each Unit."

"We arrived off the Normandy coast in the evening of 6th June 1944, and it was decided we should wait until dawn of 7th. As it was, we landed comparatively easily, very little opposition and completely dry."

Sgt Solomon took part in continuous action over the next two months. On 3rd August, his tank was hit by a Panzerfaust – a German hand-held single shot anti-tank weapon. Solomon was badly injured and invalided home. Some shrapnel stayed in him for the rest of his life. Gerald died in Stutton in 2015.

My thanks to Vic Scott this information

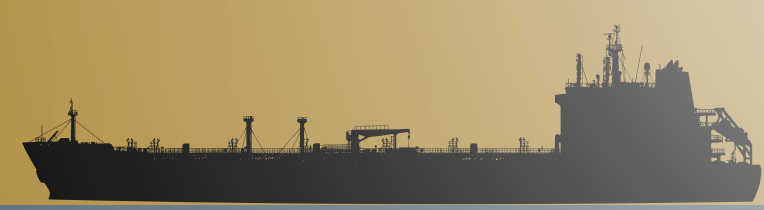
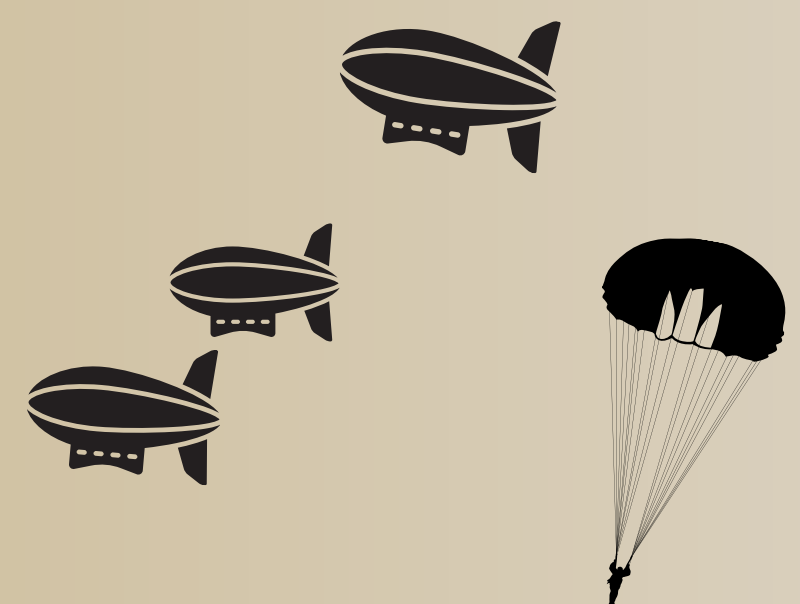
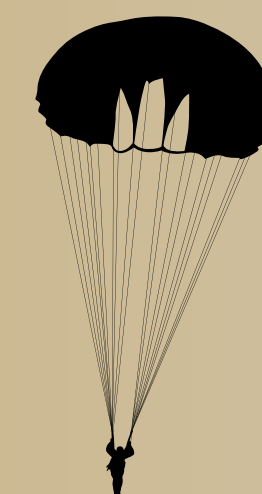
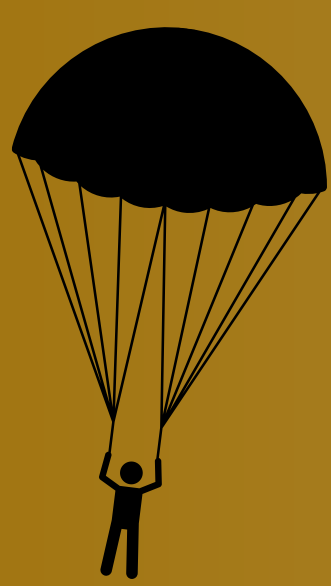


Sherman *Firefly* tank



Gerry Solomon (r) meets an old comrade Harry Findlayson (l) in 2008





S/M LES EASTWOOD RN 1918 - 2003

My job was a landing craft wireman, in charge of the electrics on the LCT I was on. Prior to D-day, we were based at Yarmouth and Lowestoft until eventually we moved down to Woolverstone.

We were told that the craft had been sealed on the Thursday morning, 1st of June. Nobody was allowed on or off, and that later during the day we would be going up to Felixstowe to load up. We took on some of the 7th Armoured Division, the ex-Desert Rats.

After we had loaded up and we were back in our trots, of course the skipper called us all together and actually told us what the plan was; that we were going to sail for Normandy. Prior to that we had no knowledge of where we were actually going to go to.

We were going to Normandy where we going to make for Gold Beach, King's sector. We were part of force L, a follow-up division or second wave sort of thing.



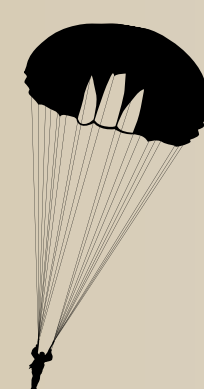
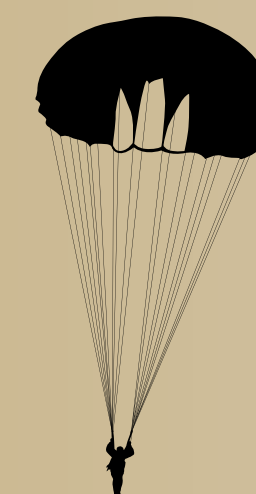
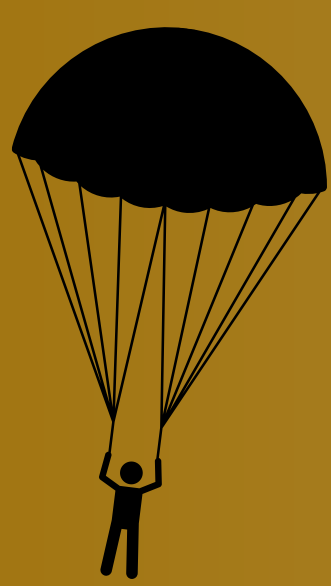
LCT on river Orwell June 1944

On the journey, the trip across to the other side, we were amazed at the calmness of them (Desert Rats).

Obviously, they had been through the desert and to them this was just another job of work. They'd also been through Italy and they just thought of it as another job of work.

Les on "Anglia at War" - 1995





THE DENNIS YEATS WHEATLEY THE WOOLVERSTONE CONNECTION



Joan was the sister of “Bino” Johnstone - full name Robin Talbot Vanden-Bempd -Johnstone whom Wheatley had taken in an attempt to find more rich and aristocratic customers. Bino was a great charmer, very well connected and extraordinarily lazy. His father, the Hon. Louis Vanden-Bempd -Johnstone, was Land Agent for Charles Hugh Berners of Woolverstone Hall. His mother, Gwendoline Mary Elizabeth, was great granddaughter of Captain Hugh Berners RN. There is a brass memorial to her grandfather H.C. Talbot in St Michael’s church. For many years she lived at “Woolverstone House” but not the Woolverstone House we know, which wasn’t built until 1902. It seems likely that the Johnstone family lived at The Homestead from their marriage in 1891.



Dennis Yeats Wheatley, prolific and successful author, was born in Brixton on 8th January 1897.

His father owned a wine business, “Wheatley and Son” in South Audley Street, Mayfair. During WW1, he served with the Royal Field Artillery, City of London Brigade.

During his training he developed pneumonia on Salisbury Plain, suffered severe bouts of bronchitis, which were later worsened by the effects of Chlorine gas. After serving in Flanders and France, he was invalided home in May 1918. Between May 1915 and August 1916, he was stationed in Ipswich.

After the war, Wheatley took over the management of his father’s wine business. He married his first wife, Nancy Robinson, in June 1922. Sadly, after the birth of their son in 1923, with few interests in common, they drifted apart with and began to lead separate lives.

In March 1929, a captivating young woman, Joan Pelham Burn, came into the office to order champagne for a ball.

In 1915, Joan married her first husband, Sir William Younger. They had four children before divorce in 1923. She secondly married Capt. Hubert Pelham Burn by who she had a son. Hubert was killed in a car accident in 1927.

Joan and Dennis’ relationship developed slowly while he was still married. Joan persuaded Dennis to leave Nancy in the February 1930 and they were divorced in July. The couple married in St Ethelburga’s, Bishopsgate on 8th August 1930. Dennis and Joan often spent weekends at Woolverstone with Gwendoline, the Hon. Louis Johnstone having died in 1922.

Joan persuaded Dennis to take up writing after the failure and sale of the wine business in 1931, following the Depression years. He excelled. By 1936 Dennis was giving talks at local literary festival in Felixstowe where his work was described as futuristic. Writing rescued them from a difficult financial situation. Then WW2 intervened.

In May 1940, Sir Lawrence Darvall KCB MC gave Dennis a mission to find all the different defence systems Great Britain should have if an invasion was to come from Hitler. The results were impressive and he thought of many things that had not occurred to the top brass.

A year later, Dennis found himself part of a team called the “London Controlling Section”, led by a brilliant military strategist, Colonel John Bevan. He was promoted to the rank of Wing Commander, non-active. The team worked directly under Winston Churchill who is reputed to have said:

“Our intentions must be surrounded by a bodyguard of lies.”

Dennis Wheatley now worked on the deception plans for the invasion of Europe, Operation Overlord. He was part of the team that planned Operation Mincemeat, where a body with false papers was placed in the sea off the Spanish coast.

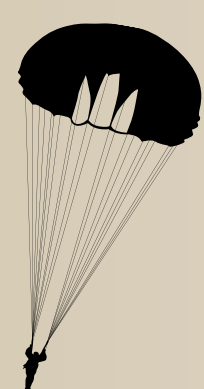
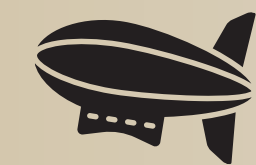
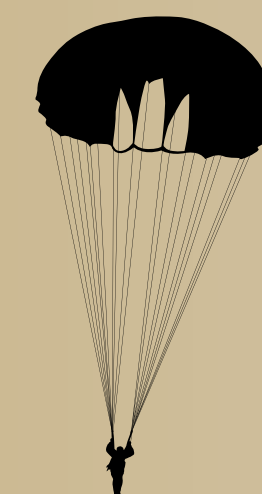
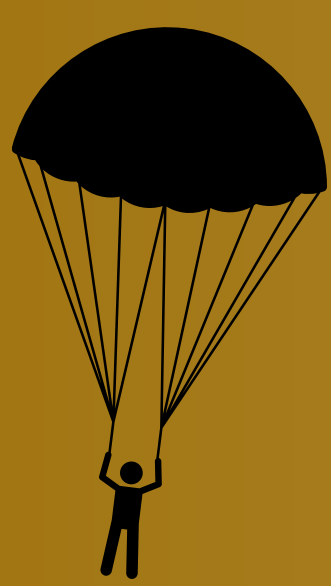
In the War Cabinet Rooms there is a portrait of Dennis with the inscription underneath reading: “His work included a plan, code named “Bodyguard” to deceive the Germans about the place and date of the Allied D-Day invasion of Europe.”

Planning started in 1943. The purpose was to lead the Germans to believe the invasion of Europe would target, in particular, the Pay de Calais in France. The main features were the creation of a fake army in Kent led by Gen George Patton, 1st US Army Group (FUSAG); hundreds of fake landing craft on the East Coast showing a powerful army mustering, use of double agents, radio traffic providing misinformation, a fake Montgomery appearing in Gibraltar.

The Germans believed the Pay de Calais was the most likely place for invasion and so was heavily fortified. The deception had to be maintained so the Normandy landings were considered a feint. Success for even a few days would allow reinforcements. In fact, the deceit lasted for three weeks. The fake landing craft, Bigbobs, moored along the rivers Orwell and Deben, were part of the deception plans that persuaded the Germans that the main invasion was still to come.

Dennis Wheatley’s imagination helped maintain the deception.





MAJOR GEORGE MOONIE

1914 - 2002



Here's a character with a little-known connection to Woolverstone: George Moonie. George Moonie was born in Dundee in 1914 and joined DC Thomson as an office boy in 1930.

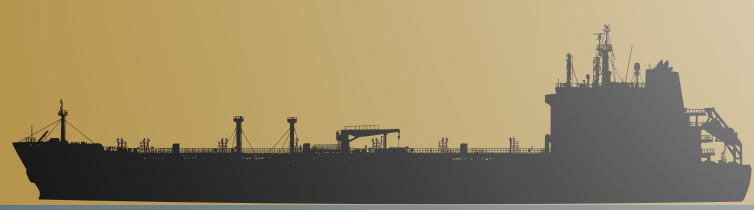
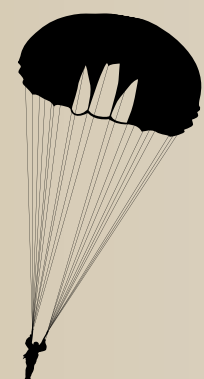
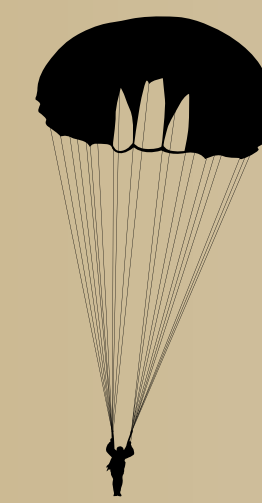
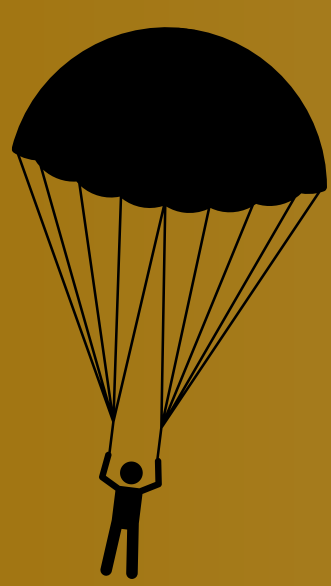
He transferred to editorial, where he began his career on the story paper *The Rover*, later becoming chief sub-editor on *The Wizard* and, in 1937, *The Hotspur*. **The following year he was appointed the first editor of *The Beano*.**

He joined the Royal Marines in 1941 as signals officer in the 5th Battalion, later promoted to Captain. He was in command of 537 Landing Craft (Assault) Flotilla during the Normandy Landings of 1944, and was sent to the Pacific to train the Americans in landing techniques. At the end of the war, he became training officer of HMS Woolverstone at Ipswich, and finished his military career as a Major.

On demobilisation in 1946, he resumed editing *The Beano*, also writing scripts. He is said to have got the idea for "The Bash Street Kids" from the playground of the High School of Dundee, which he could see from *The Beano* offices, and Bash Street's Teacher is a caricature of him. He was succeeded as editor of *The Beano* by Harold Cramond in 1959, and went on to launch *Judy* in 1960 and *Diana* in 1963. In the late 1960s he moved into management, becoming managing editor of children's publications in 1974. He retired in October 1983, but would continue to submit story ideas, particularly for "The Bash Street Kids".

He died in March 2002, aged 87, after a long illness, survived by his wife Muriel, whom he had married in 1943. Their son Peter predeceased him in 1996.





HAROLD SOUTHGATE B.1932 -



Supply lorries waiting to embark

Harold was born in one of four cottages, Tower Cottages”, beside Freston Tower, on 28th May 1932. When he was nine years old, his family moved to Woolverstone to live with his uncle Alex. Harold has lived in the same house ever since, for over eighty years. Even though he moved to Woolverstone, he continued to attend Freston village school and later Holbrook school. On leaving school he went to work at the old shipyard “Fox’s” at Bourne Bridge. With a short break for National Service at 18, Harold continued to work in ship building, at Fox’s, later at Woolverstone shipyard for several years, and then as a self-employed carpenter until his retirement. Here are some of his boyhood memories of events leading up to D-Day:

"My earliest memory of the war would be 1940. When at the start of the coastal defences a gun was stationed behind Monkey Lodge. And by walking along the shore, we children wandered into the camp unchecked. Of course, the first thing was this big gun. They also had a machine gun there and one day, they opened fire on a familiar old plane that flew around here every day, mistaking it for a German bomber. I remember seeing the red tracer bullets going up and a green flare from the plane to show that they were friendly. It was a research plane testing radio equipment from Martlesham airfield. We thought it was very exciting. One day, in the distance, we could see German planes bombing Martlesham airfield."

“As part of the D-Day deception a number of what appeared to be landing craft appeared near Cat House. They look very realistic but close up, by going along the shore, it was possible to see they were made of canvas. “

“For some days before D-Day, the roads were closed to civilian traffic so we had to walk along to Holbrook school and were surprised to see hundreds of numbered pegs in the banks, a vehicle length apart. The pegs were about a foot high and pinned to them were a white enamel sign with black numbers on. And one day, the roads were full of vehicles, chock full, and parked nose to tail. They were mostly supply lorries with some Bren carriers. Their crews were with them in battledress, some involved in waterproofing. Next morning they were gone; it was D-Day.”

Note:

“The whole area along the Orwell from Ipswich (Bourne Bridge) to Shotley was sealed off, and no unauthorised person was allowed within half a mile of the river. Special passes were required by residents.”

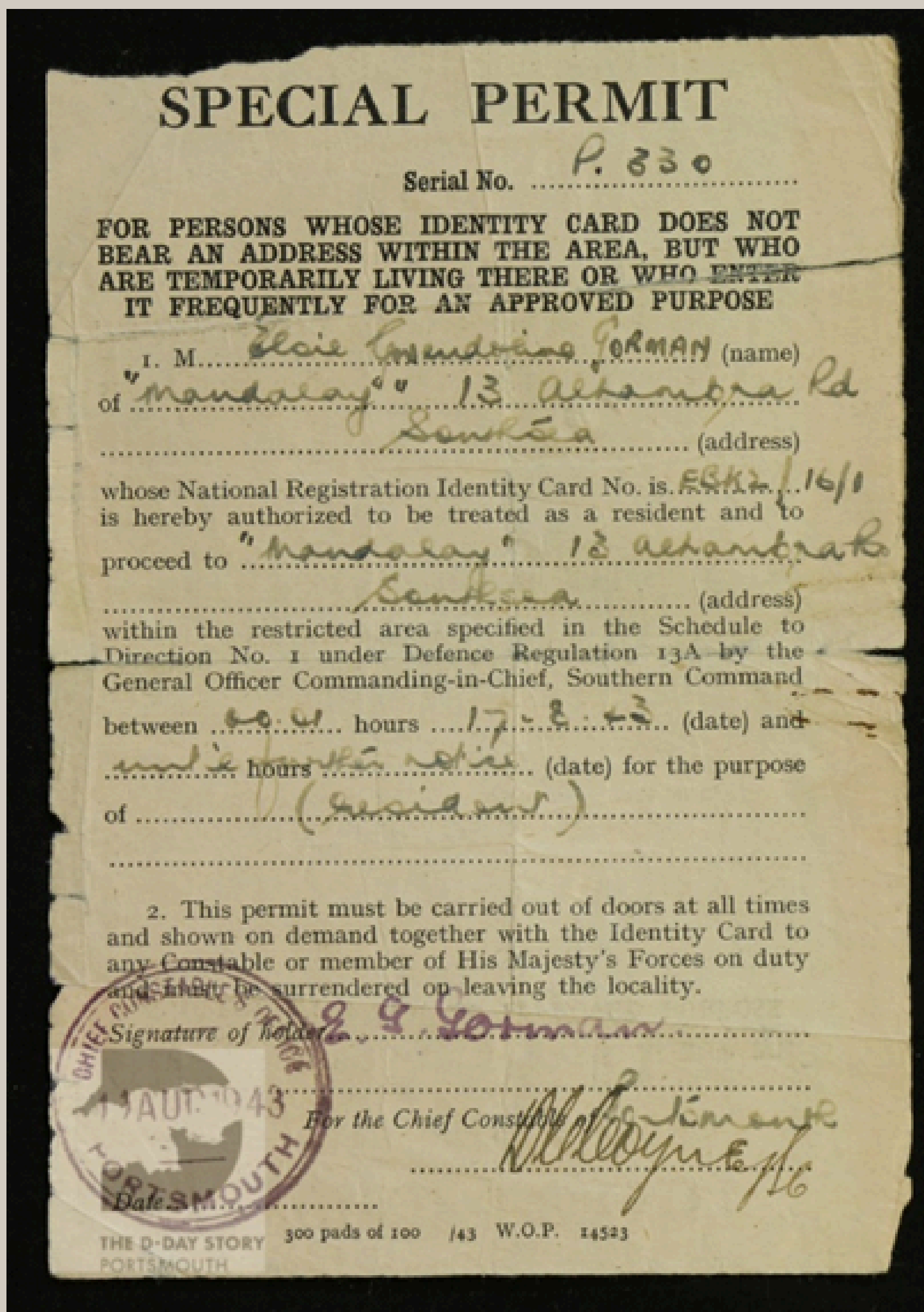
“Guard posts were set up at various places to prevent access by roads or lane...The road along the “Strand” From Bourne Bridge to Woolverstone was filled with tanks, lorries and other vehicles. No civilian traffic was permitted to use these roads, and cars and buses to and from Ipswich were diverted through Tattingstone, Stutton, Holbrook and Harkstead entering Chelmondiston by Lings Lane.” Chelmondiston, Suffolk – War Diary. H.A.R. Edgell. O. St. J., A.K.C.

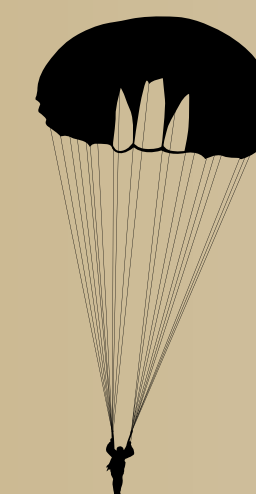
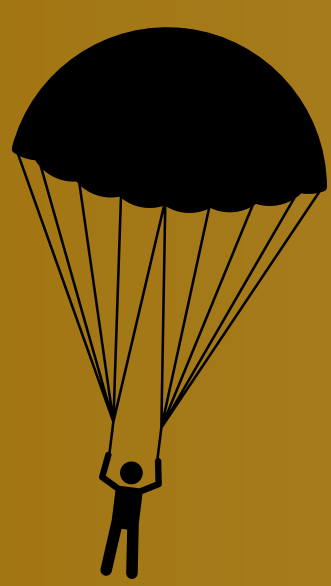


Bren Carrier, Mk 1

“The scariest thing was the V1 flying bomb. The teacher at Holbrook school had just told us it had been announced that the Germans were using these and tried to describe the noise they made and what to do if we heard it. We were just getting into the bus to go home that afternoon when we heard this noise, very loud. The teacher said, “Down!”

And just then I saw and it fly past above the trees and went down towards Woolverstone where it exploded in a field near White House farm.”





FATALITIES AT HMS WOOLVERSTONE

Despite being a stone frigate, there were four deaths notified at HMS Woolverstone during its period under the Admiralty.



Petty Officer Stoker Thomas Joyce, RN aged 37. - 22nd July 1944

C/KX76508

Son of Patrick and Mary Ann Joyce and husband of Jane Barclay Joyce of Rainham, Kent.

“SWEET IS THE MEMORY THAT NEVER FADES OF ONE WE LOVED BUT COULD NOT SAVE”

He is buried at Shotley Royal Navy Cemetery.



Motor Mechanic Jack Lindill, RN aged 18 – 8th May 1944.

HM LCT1068
C/MX 503375

Son of Clarence and Hilda Lindill, of Bramley in Leeds.

“YOU ARE FOR EVER IN OUR THOUGHTS. R.I.P.”

Jack is buried at Shotley Royal Navy Cemetery.



Leading Seaman Reginald Parker, RN aged 21 – 25th December 1944.

HM LCT444
C/JX 315242

Son of Wilfred Thomas and Emily Parker of Cannock, Staffs.

“IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR SON REGGIE. GOD BE WITH YOU TILL WE MEET AGAIN.”

Reginald is buried at Shotley Royal Navy Cemetery.



RM Joseph Leahy, aged 20 – 11th January 1945

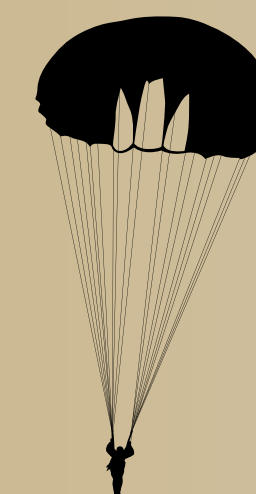
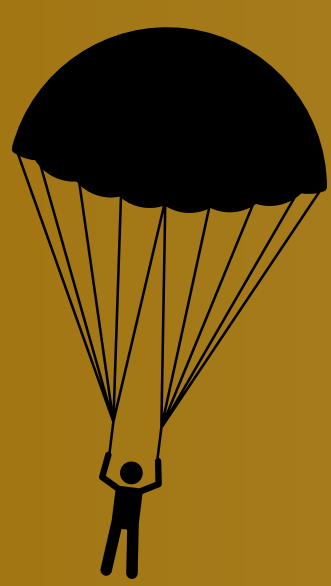
PO/X 120521

Son of Michael and Mary Leahy of 40 Pym Street, South Bank.

ON WHOSE SOUL SWEET JESUS HAVE MERCY. R.I.P.

Joseph is buried in Eston Cemetery, Middlesbrough, Yorkshire.





EMBARKATION HARD CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE SITE N.K. TODAY

Grid ref: TM 19461 39061

The hard remains at the site and is used as a berthing area by a sailing club. It covers an area of approximately 992m² (or 1,084 yards²). The mooring 'dolphins' up stream have not survived. Vic Scott records that as timber was in short supply after the war, they were dismantled, the timber was cut out, transported up to the saw mill in the estate yard at the top of Tank Road and then cut into planks for use in Woolverstone ship yard, which was leased from Oxford University after the war by Austin Farrar.

If you take a walk from the junction of the B1456 down to the foreshore there are many features visible today:



1. Splay entrance to Cat House Lane or "Tank Road" 21.5m (23 yds) wide, to make it easier for large lorries and military vehicles to turn off the Main Road

2. Tank Road is 1119 m (1,084 yds) total in length to the river. Re-enforced access road, with 7 passing places.

3. The road itself is 3.7m (4 yds) wide, made in sections 4.5 m (5 yds) deep. It is between 45 cm (18in) and 20 cm (8 in) thick.

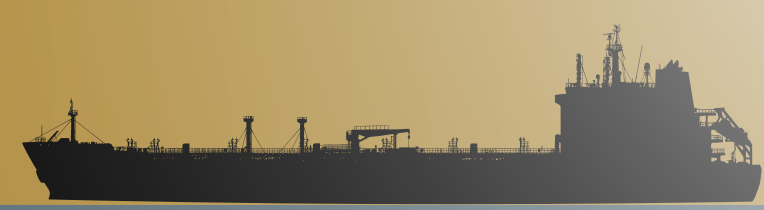
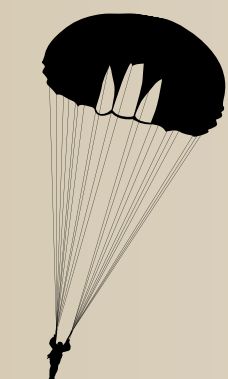
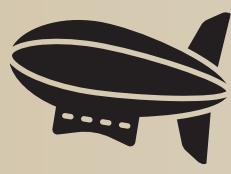
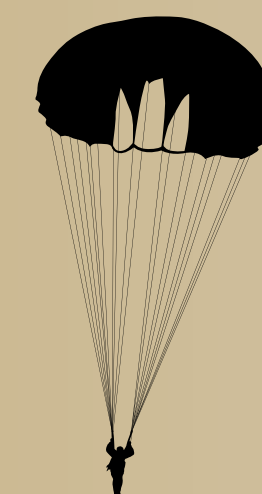
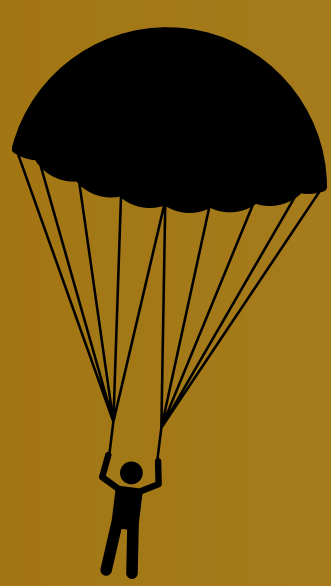


4. Re-enforced concrete turning circle for offloading supplies



5. Re-enforced concrete apron, with retaining wall.





EMBARKATION HARD CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE SITE N.K. TODAY

6. Concrete block retaining wall, built of three layers of separate blocks. Each section 30 cm (1ft) high and approx. 6m (6.6 yds) long.



7. Channel, now concreted over, for diesel pipe to dolphins.



8. The retaining wall constructed of three sections with slight angles to each other. It is broken in to three sections by steps. First set of steps to the Berners Boathouse, now demolished. Second steps towards a concreted area behind the retaining wall that housed a Nissen hut. Third steps to a concreted area above the retaining wall that also housed a Nissen hut.



9. The apron measures 64m (70yds) in total width. It varies in depth between 13.8 m (15 yds) and 16.5 m (18 yds). Total area of apron is 960 m² (1050 yd²).

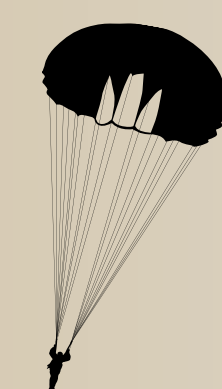
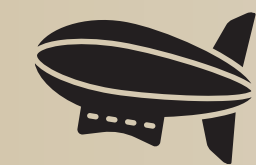
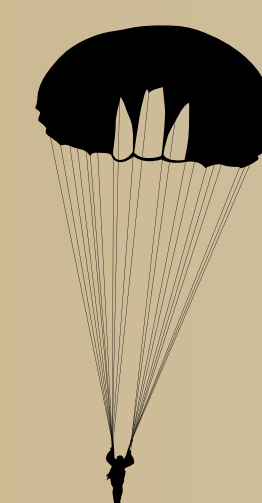
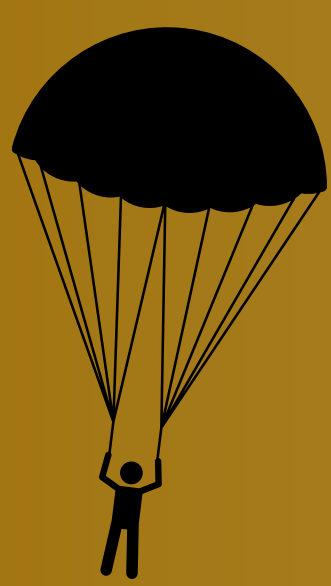


10. The river edge of the apron has a lip of 12.7 cm (5 in) deep, and 61 cm (24 in) wide to which the flexible matting was fixed.

11. Flexible matting – chocolate blocks - in the intertidal zone. Much of the matting has disappeared as it no longer reaches to low tide. The matting was mostly laid in 15 block sections, 3 x 5. 62 cm (24 in) x 102 cm (40in). The mats are 12.7 cm (5 in) thick. Each block is of a similar design of moulded concrete.

Some remains of the metal hooks to secure this can still be seen.





EMBARKATION HARD CAT HOUSE, WOOLVERSTONE SITE N.K. TODAY



12. The jetty we see today is not the original. This pencil sketch by Leonard Squirrell in 1949 shows the heavily structured wooden dolphins. However, the stumps showing above the mud are likely the remains of the original dolphins.

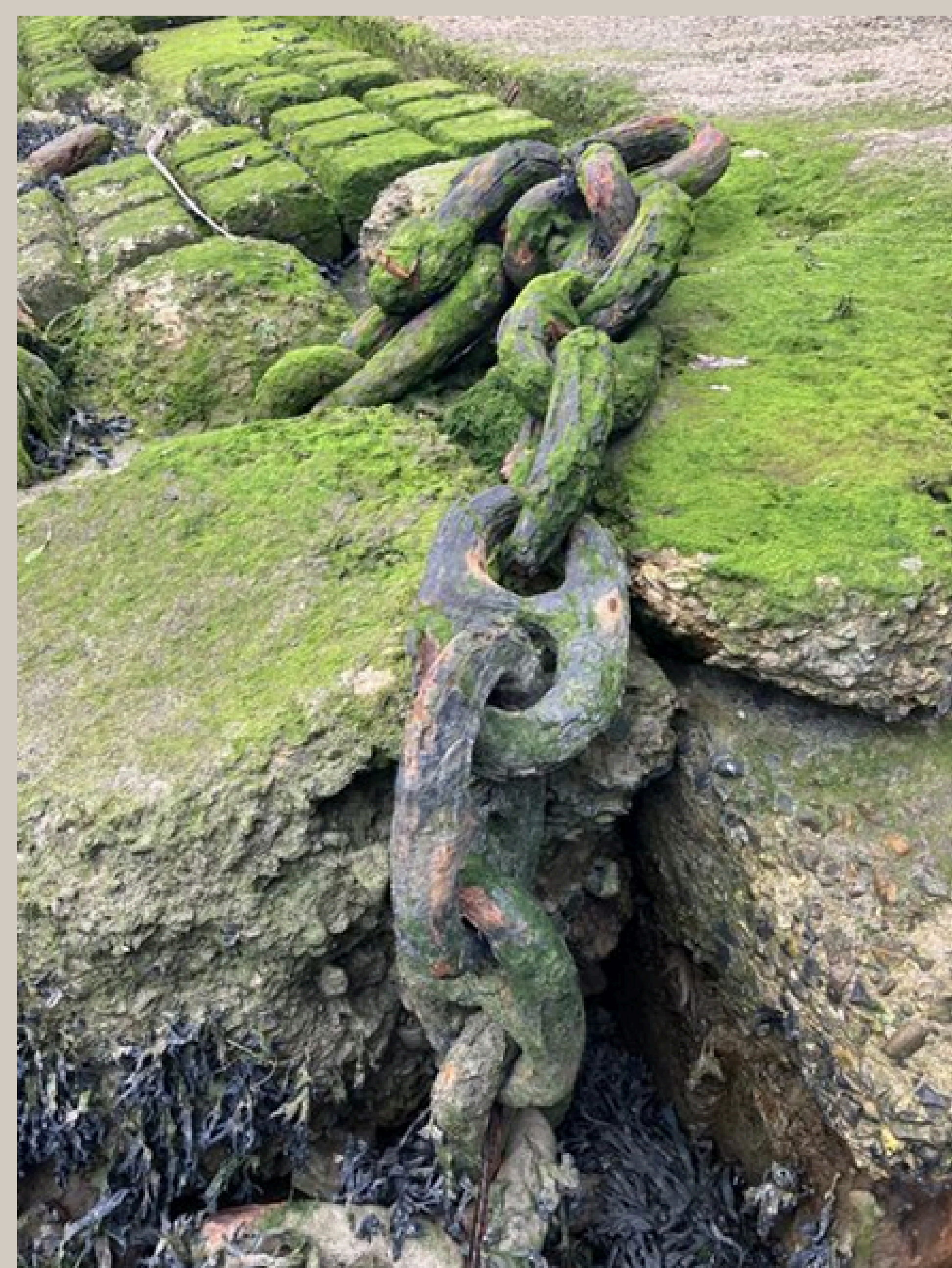
13. A small square Nissen hut was constructed at the top of the cliff. It measures 5.1 m (5 ½ yds) by 5.1m (5 ½ yards). It is still there beneath the trappings of a rural hut. This originally had a thatched roof.

The hut was created around the Nissen hut so that it did not have to be demolished at the end of the war when Austin Farrar leased this area. The curved corrugated roof of the original Nissen hut can be seen in places.



14. The two diesel oil storage tanks can no longer be seen, although brick rubble near the two sites remains an indication of their presence. One feature that can be seen is the 15.2 cm (6 in) pipe to take the oil down to the embarkation hard.

There may be more evidence to be found



15. There are various attachment points to be seen within the apron and further back up the access road.

