

Memoir of D-Day by Philip Sharplin
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Again, it was back to base, this time to be dispatched to Barry Docks in Wales where I was allocated to a dirty old collier, where like all the ships I could see she had a great big number up on their boat deck. Little did we guess what part we were to play in forth coming events.



Two days later things started to happen in a hurry. Lines of trains loaded with Americans started to arrive at the docks, and straight away they were hustled on board their respective ships, and now we could begin to understand what those numbers on every ship meant to somebody.

As we were loaded, we cast off and moved out through the locks to the open sea where we dropped anchor to await orders. Whilst we waited a small craft came alongside and handed over a barrage balloon that was already way up in the sky. Soon most of the ships had a balloon strung up over head.

During the night we all had orders to be ready to move in the morning but come morning the weather had deteriorated, and the orders were canceled. So, there we were all ships crammed with soldiers and no room to move. But at long last by means of flag signals we were ordered to get under way, and we now knew by the immense number of ships around us that we would be having fun before very long.

In a constant stream we moved down the Bristol Channel, around Land's End into the English Channel, and we were gathering more ships and tank landing craft as we went along. It had to be seen to be believed. We made our way up the English Channel in a never-ending convoy that was getting bigger by the minute.

By evening we had arrived off St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight, where to our amazement we could see a continuous line of ships coming out of the Solent. Having arrived at this point we now followed in carefully marshaled columns a course to starboard which would take us straight across the channel to France, and now we had to make certain that we did not stray for we had to get out through our own minefield and later on

through swept channels in the enemy mine fields, and of course by now it was dark and not a light to be seen anywhere. As it began to get light we passed through a line of battleships at anchor, and then we could see France getting closer all the time, and when we got really close to the French shore we passed a control ship at anchor, and again we found out what an important part our number was playing in our destiny, for as we drew level with him he called out our number and told us to turn to starboard and keep going until directed into the shore. This we did under a perpetual stream of large shells from our battleships passing just over head, and shell bursts from the German shore batteries adding to the din, and before very long we were hailed by a beach master in a motor launch who told our skipper that we should now turn and head straight for the beach.

Within a few minutes we were well and truly grounded. Immediately we had ducks [ed: DUKW amphibious vehicles] come alongside and start to take most of the soldiers who were the reinforcements for the 82nd Airborne who had dropped on France during the night. Then as the tide went out the ships' derricks were brought into use to unload their jeeps and trailers onto the beach, and from the stern holds we unloaded ambulances and all the medical staff.

Having got rid of all our troops and transports there we were stuck for two or three days until the bulldozer could dig a channel for us to move back off.

Back to Wales where we had to load up with ammunition and explosives of all sorts, 3500 tons of the stuff. Much to our disgust the Welsh dockers went on strike for 24 hours to get extra pay for handling a dangerous cargo, but at long last we were loaded so off we went for France again.

Normally it was a crime to not have your life jacket on at all times, but this time the skipper said not to bother for if we were hit we would not need them. Anyhow we carried on running to and fro carrying all sorts of stores for the Americans until after the breakout, and then after a last run up to Rouen we said goodbye and returned to normal duties.