



Ron and Marjorie Thomas on their wedding day
Photo courtesy of Marjorie Thomas

D-Day bride

By Marjorie Thomas

My late husband was with the first contingent at Aromanchies, Gold Beach. After serving in the Middle East, El Alamein, Tobruk, and the landings on Crete, Sicily and Italy, he had returned to England in November 1943, as one of *Monty's* seasoned troops.

We planned to marry in the middle of 1944.

In May, troops were massed around the south coast, which for three miles inland was a forbidden area to anyone not resident there. My husband was at Beaulieu, Hampshire, near his home. He was sealed in barracks, but managed to get special permission to come to Royston, Hertfordshire, to get married.

Wedding day

On Thursday 18 May, I had a telegram, saying, "Get special licence. Marry tomorrow Friday 19th." My superstitious mother would not let me marry on a Friday, so our vicar arranged the ceremony for 8.30am on the Saturday. My husband had to report back that evening, and I returned with him, his mother

and two sisters.

Everyone getting off trains in the closed zone had to show their identity cards, and I very self-consciously showed my new marriage lines. This caused a few grins and knowing looks from the soldiers on guard. I was only allowed in the 'forbidden area' because it was my mother-in-law's home.

After reporting back, my husband was allowed out that night, as he was so near his home. I stayed there for a week, and must admit that he did sneak out once or twice, but after Thursday 25 May they were all completely sealed in barracks – even escorted to the loo.

Gold beach

The whole forest area around Beaulieu, down to the coast, was

packed with vehicles – tanks, guns, heavy-duty trucks and 'ducks' (jeeps that could float).

Outside my mother-in-law's house were American troops. Everywhere were notices telling civilians not to communicate with the troops in any way, and there was a heavy penalty if you did, but we left them jugs of tea by the gate.

It was three or four weeks after the first landings before I got a letter from my husband, and he didn't return until March 1945.

He was looking forward to the 50th celebrations in 1994, but sadly it was not to be. His ashes were scattered on Gold Beach by Brigadier Nelson-Smith, the commanding officer of 1st Battalion Royal Hampshires on D-Day.

Recording your wartime memories

Anyone – and that means anyone – with wartime memories is invited to contact Peter Hart, archivist at the Imperial War Museum, through THE ARCHER.

Peter, who lives in East Finchley, is willing to visit interviewees at home. Interviews would probably last for a couple of hours, and would be taped.

Whatever your role – combatant, production worker, bringing up children or a child yourself – you have a story to tell, and Peter would like to record it. THE ARCHER will be happy to put you in touch.

Memories of WW II

By Mr T J Cremin (aged 80+)

I went into the services in 1942 and was "called up" to go to Yorkshire for training at Fulford Barracks with the Kings Royal Rifles and Rifle Brigade. After about ten weeks training I was sent to an Artillery Regiment.

After a while I saw on the notice board that 100 troops were needed to join the Royal Navy so I put my name down. While on a shoot at Barnard Castle with the army I was told, "You're no longer in the army, you're in the navy"!!

After a little training as a Chatham rating I was sent to a very old battleship, HMS Malaya. It only did about 15 knots, but we were involved in the bombardment of St Malo in France with Wellington Bombers. Later I was moved to another battleship, HMS Anson, and left for the Far East.

When the Japanese war ended we were sent to take Hong Kong harbour where our job was to round up Japanese prisoners and stop the looting. During this time I was stationed at Happy Race Course and before my duties ended I managed to go on a short cruise up to Japan to see some of the damage caused by the atom bomb to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

At the end of my duties we sailed to Australia for a short stay and eventually came back home on a cruiser, HMS Gambia, to be demobbed.

Sixty years ago...

On Tuesday, 6 June 1944 Operation Overlord began with the first paratroops landing on French soil. Seven hours later the main assault began as the first landing craft hit the beaches of Normandy. This was just part of the largest seaborne invasion that had ever been mounted and involved 5,000 ships and 150,000 men.

6 June 1944 was not just about the troops on the Normandy beaches, it was also two days after the liberation of Rome; in the Pacific the Americans were still island hopping towards Japan and Londoners still had to face the terror of the V1 and V2.

Dixie's Tale

By Francis Coulson

Dixie wasn't at the D-Day Landings on 6 June 1944. He was otherwise engaged, helping the Americans to liberate Rome.

He had landed in Algiers in 1943 from the troopship *Samaria*. Dixie was a signaller with the 5th Battalion, Grenadier Guards. He recalls sharing a slit trench under a mortar barrage with his Adjutant, Capt. Lord Stanley, discussing the miners' – or was it dockers' – strike at home. They agreed that it wasn't a clever time to strike.

On the road to Rome

The Anzio landing was on 22 January 1944. Dixie went in a week later with the transport echelon of the 5th Battalion as part of the 1st Infantry Division and the US 5th Army. They didn't attack the prepared German positions in the Alban Hills behind Rome but turned up Route 6 for the Eternal City itself.

On the way, Dixie's unit was detailed to take a bridge over the Tiber. Off they went in the 3-tonners, sitting up top in the sun – and ran into a US roadblock. The White-Cap manning it said, "You cain't go up thar". The British column commander in a jeep called, "Come on, Charles, keep going" – Charles was the company commander – and the squaddies all cheered. The White-Cap pulled a pistol – "You cain't go up thar!" Faces fell. The CO – later in life Lord de Lisle & Dudley – wrote out an order



Dixie, Ted and Curly Photo by courtesy of EJ 'Dixie' Dean

to the Yank to let the column through. They duly moved on, only to find that another unit had already taken the bridge.

I asked Dixie whether the Grenadiers had any officers who were not members of the aristocracy. "Oh yes," he said, "Later on."

Rome fell on 4 June 1944 and Dixie's lot went through in the night. He remembers rows of US troops lining the streets, backs to the wall, one foot up against it – eyeing up the local talent.

Bloody lucky

Dixie's last anecdote concerns the time when he and his

mate Curly were told to "take the P.I.A.T. ("Projectile Infantry Anti Tank") up there and watch that road." They dug themselves in, setting up the P.I.A.T. and settling down to a quick roll-up. There was the roar of armour on the road. Back to the P.I.A.T. and take aim. Round the corner comes a South African armoured column, led by its commander in an armoured car. Dixie and Curly stand up and show themselves. "You were bloody lucky we didn't shoot there, mate," they say. The South African looks over his shoulder at the tanks behind him; "My friend," says he "so were you!"

EAST FINCHLEY ARTS FESTIVAL 2004

Friday June 25th - Sunday July 4th

Friday June 25th *Concerto Concert for Organ & Strings*
Jennifer Bate

Saturday June 26th *London Mozart Players*

Sunday June 27th *Youth Music Centre Orchestra & Choir*

Monday June 28th *Art Exhibition Open Evening*

Wednesday June 30th *Faronell Baroque Music*

Thursday July 1st *Fidelio Piano Quartet*

Friday July 2nd *Theatre Roundabout*

Canterbury's Burning

Saturday July 3rd 2pm *Cemetery Walk*

7.30pm *London Ripieno Opera Group*

The Virgin Crown

Sunday July 4th *Finchley Children's Music Group*

Details and booking information on website

<http://eastfinchleyartsfestival.org.uk>

Brochure from Coral Travel 50 High Street N2

All events (except Cemetery Walk)

at All Saints' Church, Durham Road, N2 at 7.30pm