



D DAY 1944 remembered

Dear Sir

During World War II I was allocated to the Ministry of War Transport and sent to work in the London Docks. From the commencement of the Blitz in September 1940 until the capture of the V2 rocket sites in April 1945 those docks were subject to enemy attack almost every day, often four or five times.

Hitler knew that if he could sink the food ships coming into London Docks, the capital city would starve and Germany would win the war. Hence, those who worked getting the ships unloaded and the food transported were in constant danger.

About six months before D Day we noticed a difference in both the shipping and the personnel in dockland, although we had no idea what its significance was. Security was very strict!

Strange craft began to appear in channels and bays that would not block the main stream of the tidal Thames. These were deftly camouflaged. Then we became aware of new personnel in the docks, military men each wearing a blue flash at their shoulders bearing the initials "VP" meaning Vulnerable Point.

This meant that they had to live on board the boats to which they were allocated and could not move outside a strictly confined area – on one side of the river in Stepney and on the other side in Rotherhithe. Gradually we realised that these soldiers were not all English, they included Commonwealth Personnel and, ultimately, American GIs.

The Church

The Methodist Church had accepted me in 1942 as a candidate for their ministry and had asked me to spend any time I could deputising for the Southwark Park church minister who had been sent to be an army Chaplain. I had a bicycle and could travel between my office (in Stepney) and the church through the Rotherhithe Tunnel several times a day.

The church opened a club and reading room for the troops and provided a forces' canteen. The organist produced Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and I played in *The Mikado*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Neither in the docks nor at the church did we ever hear that these men and their shipping were preparing for the invasion of Europe. Early in June, however, we became aware that there were less of them about. The forces' club was practically deserted and the food ships coming into the docks were flowing more easily.

D Day dawns

We became aware that something was happening. No announcement was made in the newspapers or on the wireless. Everything that was happening was extremely 'hush hush'.

On the Saturday afternoon, I had to take the scouts' cricket team to play at Blackheath. We had to wait to cross the road at Lewisham because a long convoy of military vehicles of many different kinds monopolized the roadway. I remember the exact spot and the excessive heat of the lovely June Day when one of the small boys, with a truly cockney accent said, "Cor, the invasion must 'ave started". It took that simple phrase from an 11-year-old to inform me of the truth of the situation.

Ronald W Frost
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The Secret Islands

By Daphne Chamberlain
Harold Perkins spent D-Day on the Cocos Islands, in the Indian Ocean, south of Sumatra. In World War II, these tiny coral islands became a vital air-base, an emergency stop for flying-boats and a secret cable radio link between Australia and London.

Harold was on Direction Island, in the air/sea rescue team. He was supposed to spend three months there, which became six months, and then a year. He was a duty fitter and repairer, which came easily to a motorbike enthusiast with a family background in engineering. He had started his war service as a flight mechanic with 248 Squadron, but in the Cocos most of his time was spent in the workshop, sometimes reconstructing engine parts from blueprints.

Flying boats

He was flown between the islands for different jobs, once to Home Island, which was generally out of bounds. That was "where the Governor drank his gin and tonic" and Gracie Fields paid a flying visit. Supplies came by Catalina flying-boat from Sri Lanka (an 18-hour journey).

There was a royal family of the Cocos, mostly of Javanese stock, but descended from the first king – a Scottish trader who had settled there in the 1820s. Until then the islands had been uninhabited, but he turned them into a socialist monarchy, with bungalows, jobs and pensions for all.



Harold Perkins today Photo by John Dearing.

Inset: Harold Perkins in the Cocos Photo courtesy of Harold Perkins



Rescue team

In 1942, the Japanese had attempted to bomb out the cable station on Direction Island. Deceived by decoy fires, they never realised that it went on working till the end of the war. Later on, as the battle focus turned to the Far East, the islands became a base for bombers, as well as for photographic reconnaissance missions to Malaya, Java and Sumatra. On their return journeys from Singapore, the bombers were met by boats from the rescue

team. "You wouldn't want to ditch in that water. It was full of sharks."

"We heard of D-Day, but we didn't even have a drink," he remembers. They made up for it the following year, when the Japanese surrendered. He saved a bottle of brandy for the flight home, which was just as well. Their plane landed on one wheel.

Find out about the Cocos in *Operation Pharos*, by Ken Rosam. Pub. Woodfield 2001. ISBN 1-873203-586.

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