

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM ACKROYD RM

D-DAY & NORMANDY 1944

William Ackroyd (1924 – 1999) served in the Royal Marines from 1943 until 1946. He trained on Landing Craft and on 6 June 1944 he was serving as a Divisional Officer with 807th L.C.V.(P) Flotilla as part of the Force 'G' Build Up Squadrons, charged with taking stores to Gold Beach and then working on and around the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches.

807th L.C.V.(P) Flotilla comprised 16 x Landing Craft Vehicle (Personnel)¹ based at HMS Mastodon at Exbury House near Beaulieu. Its primary function was to victual, arm and fuel landing craft in the build up to D-Day. The CO was probably Major D Burge RM and the adjutant Captain Parker RM, in so far as can be ascertained.

The orders for the Flotilla were to RV off the Nab Tower² in the eastern Solent at 0530 6 Jun 44³ and after crossing to France, operate as despatch and work boats unloading MT and personnel under the control of the Senior Officer FC (MT) in conjunction with the 805, 806, 808 and 809th L.C.V.(P) Flotillas – a total of 80 craft. Command and control was provided from the depot ship, SS Thysville⁴ (Mr Hewin Tengels, Master, Merchant Navy) and the embarked Naval Party 1659 (Acting Commander A B Russell DSO RN) and supported by HMS Adventure⁵ (Acting Captain A M Sheffield RN). Thereafter the task was to operate in and around Arromanches in building Mulberry 'B' Harbour.

¹ LCV(P) Nos 1160, 1162, 1164 – 1169 & 1172 – 1178.

² Construction of the Nab Tower began in 1918 in Shoreham Harbour, where they became known as the 'Mystery Towers', for though 5,000 people were employed on their construction; very few knew what the towers were destined for.

By the time the war ended in 1918, only two towers had been completed, and after much discussion the first was named the Nab Tower and floated out to act as a navigation mark off Selsey Bill. Her sister tower was demolished. ☒ ☒ The 100ft steel cylindrical tower stands on an 180ft x190ft circular concrete base created from a series of hexagonal shapes which rise like a cake in stepped stages. Its height is currently being halved to 11 metres.

The concrete structure was designed to float and be scuppered once in position. The Nab Tower settled on the bottom at an angle, and has the appearance of the nautical equivalent of the 'leaning tower of Pisa'. It is located approx 10 miles off Selsey Bill.

³ Sunrise at 0556; Sunset at 2204.

⁴ SS THYSVILLE completed 1922 - 8,300 gross tons, length 459ft x beam 57ft, one funnel, two masts, twin screw, speed 14 knots. Later renamed Empire Test and used as a troopship. Accommodation for 178-1st and 136-2nd class passengers. Built by John Cockerill, Hoboken for Cie Belge Maritime du Congo, she was launched as the THYSVILLE and commenced her maiden voyage from Antwerp to the Belgian Congo on 2nd Oct.1922. In 1930 the company was merged into Cie Maritime Belge (Lloyd Royal) and in 1940 on the invasion of Belgium by the Germans, she was operated by the Belgian Government on charter to the Allies. Used as Depot ship on Operation Neptune and shown as 'S.O.F.B' (? Senior Officer Ferry Barges). in WA's notebook. Acquired by the Ministry of Defence in 1947 for relief trooping, she was renamed EMPIRE TEST, and was painted white with a blue band round her hull, yellow funnel and cream masts. There was capacity for 800 passengers/troops. Her final trooping voyage was in Oct.1952 and arrived at Faslane on 19 June 1954 for scrapping.

⁵ HMS ADVENTURE was a Cruiser Minelayer built in Devonport and launched on 18 Jun 24. After being converted to a repair ship she was then employed as a Landing Ship Emergency Repair (LSE) before being scrapped at Briton Ferry in July 1947.

Since a young age WA had kept a diary and this continued throughout most of his life although increasingly the detail became more sparse. He favoured an appointment style diary and so it was during 1944. In the months leading to D-Day the entries show that he was at Beaulieu and frequently going to meet 'Anne' (a Wren) at the Montague Arms before going on leave to home near Nottingham on 22 May, returning on the 27th. The last entry is on 29 May when he was OOD⁶.

Thereafter he kept a diary of sorts in that he wrote a brief daily account in a small, loose-leaf notebook, which is held together by three treasury tags. The writing is in either pencil or fountain pen.

The diary begins with a nominal as below:

'B' Squadron
L.C.V.(P)

Lieut	W Ackroyd	RM
S/Lt	Racham	RNVR
S/Lt	Mercer	RNVR
Sgt	Hadden	
Cpl	Harding G	
Cpl	Bradburn G	
Cpl	Gard VA	
Cpl	Wells G	
Cpl	Hemsley G	
Mne	Wilmot VA	
Mne	A Brown G	
Mne	Mulburn G	
Mne	L B Brown VA	
Mne	Needham G	
Mne	Price G	
Mne	Wheeler VA	
Mne	Balnaves VA	
Mne	Smith T	
Mne	WH Brown VA	
Mne	Hutchinson G	

['G' & 'VA' presumably refer to tasks, duties or skills and are not name initials]
On another page the distribution of personnel between the craft is shown thus:

1160	1162	1163	1164
Harding	Gard	Hemsley	Needham
Jones	Dorr	Barrett	Laird
Balcomb	Mather	Simpson	Hutchinson
Bostock	Taylor		CSM
1165	1166	1167	1168
Hadden	Wells	Bradburn	Rackham
Annable	Goldsmith	Chidgey	Wilmot
Woods	McDonald	Hill	Bell
Lodge			Coverdale
1169	1172	1173	1174
Godbe	Sullivan	McKenzie	Britnell

⁶ Officer Of The Day

<i>Aldridge Adams Finch Hughes</i>	<i>Fruen Smith M/M Green</i>	<i>Lacey Green HQ Clerk</i>	<i>Freeman Fletcher</i>
1175	1176	1177	1178
<i>Sealey Pew Cross HQ Clerk</i>	<i>Forbes Wilson Loughland Jordan</i>	<i>Price Diaper Townsend</i>	<i>Mercer Thompson Balnaves Brown Lowbridge</i>

Monday 5th

2100 Sailed.

Tuesday 6th

0300 Anchored off Brack⁷. for night

0400 Lost Sqn in gale. Very heavy weather. Wind 60 mph. Waves 12'!

0600 Nab Tower. Picked up Sqn around midday

2000 Sighted French coast

2330 Anchored. Weather still very bad. Raid no damage or casualties.

Wednesday 7th

Weather bad till about 1300 then sea down & sun out.

Work all day. Ashore 2100 – waded.

Heavy raid from 2330

0230 Four wounded. Laird badly, McDonald & Goldsmith fair and Chidgey slightly⁸. 1166 sunk – others holed by M/G fire.

Thursday 8th

Reported casualties.

Noisy night.

Moved back into Thysville.

Friday 9th

General day.

Improvement in weather midday.

Visit to Haslemere⁹ & all round. Shelling inland.

Noisy night.

Sat 10th

Weather improving.

Haircut & shave for first time.

⁷ Bracklesham, a village to the east of Chichester Harbour and close to Selsey Bill.

⁸ On another page there are given further details of injuries as follows:

Cpl Laird – bad thro' head

Goldsmith – Fair. Leg & body.

McDonald. Head. Fair

LST 530.

1166

Chidgey – nose –ok. 280.

⁹ HMS HASLEMERE [756T/1925] (Commander R K Silcock RN). Southern Railway Vessel. HM Mulberry Control & Receiving Ship. Arrived Gold 7 June in Follow Up Convoy L5/ETM1.. Control ship at Mulberry B for Bombardons, Phoenix and Whales. Also HQ for Plankers and Sappers.

*Laid sinkers.
Went onboard Adventure
Monitor¹⁰ & cruisers shelling inland.
Noisy night.*

Sun 11th

*Weather as usual.
General day.
Shelling from Rodney¹¹ & Monitor
Haslemere 3 times.
Apparent blast from Burge for not being there yesterday although spent most of
day on L.I.H¹²!*

Mon 12th

Weather much improved.

Tuesday 13th

*Wrote home afternoon.
Rough sea
Pretty nasty night.
Letter from (?)*

Wednesday 14th

*1177 broke away from Adventure in early hours of morning – not informed until
1450. High sea?
Ordered to find her in Juno at 2100 but didn't go.
1162 going badly & something round screw¹³.
1167 Came (?) off beach.*

Thursday 15th

*Usual day – saw Parker in morn – went to Adventure with Brian, picked up 1162.
No sign of 1167.
Fair sea – fair day.
Sun lovely.
Letter from Dad & Mick.
Had minor operation on left index finger in morn.*

¹⁰ *Either HMS EREBUS or HMS ROBERTS.*

¹¹ *HMS RODNEY. Nelson class capital battleship launched in 1925. 9 x 16 inch main armament.
Scrapped in 1948 at Inverkeithing.*

¹² *Acronym not recognised.*

¹³ *Amongst WA's papers is a statement written by Marine L B Brown dated 13 Jun 44 as follows:
'We were all ready for going of (sic) the Beach. High tide come up, and still we could not come of
(sic) the Beach, so I went to report to the Beach master to see if I could get a craft to pull us off. A
little later a bulldozer come and with that the Beach master come on Board and gave me orders to
take him to another craft that was lying right in the middle off (sic) the obstacles. I said that we
would hit something there, But he said it was all clear there. We got him aboard. Then he said take
me to the L.C.T. So as we were coming out, said he, go astern all the way and then go strait (sic)
ahead, as we were coming out we hit one of the obstacles. He said, that, that's, nothing. So I come
back to this ship, the thysville to report the craft in good working order, and Sergeant Major Link
tould (sic) me to report to Mr Ackroyd on the Haslemere. As we were going to report our Engine
started Banging So we reported to the LBE And had order to Beach the craft and report to the LBE
On shore as they could not prop repairs on LBE afloat.'*

Friday 16th

Fair swell all day – craft ordered to Mulberry.
No sign of 1167.

Saturday 17th

Went to Haslemere & then spent rest of morning looking for 1167, which I found on the beach.

Adventure and back in afternoon.

Went down to Haslemere in evening.

Took over one Yankee L.C.V(P).

Sunday 18th

Had intended going to Port en Bassin in afternoon.

Poor weather in morn. 1167 came off beach to Adventure.

1177 returned to Adventure.

OOD

Heavy night.

Monday 19th

All craft ordered to Mulberry. Wind Fore 8. Sea 14' – 18'.

1930 1165 reported submerged on beach – crew safe.

OOD – wrote ? & Gran.

Tuesday 20th

Wind & sea still bad.

OOD.

Wrote home & Anne.

Wednesday 22nd

Wind & sea still v.bad.

Thursday 22nd

Wind & sea abating.

1163 & 9 came alongside at 1745.

Racham reported broken bone in foot. Standish went down to relieve him.

Friday 23rd

Changed crews at 0830.

Had a good look round & find we have 13 craft remaining, which is good considering the bad weather. Four or five require packing up.

Had look for 1165 on Mulberry beaches with no luck. Went into Arromanches.

Received 4 (sic) letters (3 Mum & 2 Dad).

OOD.

Fairly noisy night.

Saturday 24th

Stood captain's rounds.

In control room all afternoon as Adj¹⁴ away.

Down to Mulberry at 2100.

1177 came in A1 from Adventure.

Noisy night.

¹⁴ Adjutant

1162 beached & had new prop put on by 1100.
1168 engine out & prop badly bent at 1600 – sent 1167 in place.
Went onto Mulberry as duty officer – had a fairly near miss with bit of shrapnel.

Sunday 25th

Up to Thysville in morn.
Slept most of aft as was very tired.
1168 all right now.
Letters from Mum & Dad dated 13th & 15th.
Haslemere about 1800.
Came off Block Ship at 2030.

Monday 26th

Capt Parker came up in morning.
Spent afternoon on beach going over 1165. Her hull is completely wrecked but engine can be salvaged. Took off grapnel, lifebuoy & other odds & ends.
Wrote home.

Tuesday 27th

Capt Parker up again.
Spent whole day going round countryside in search of survivors' kit. Went into Crépon¹⁵ & Mauville with moderate success.
Duty officer on Mulberry – very quiet night. Letters from Dad & Mick 16th & 11th.

Wednesday 28th

Up to Depot ship in morn. Stayed for lunch as had to see coxswains.
1167 found on King Red¹⁶ damaged prop will be on for another two days.
1162 beached in eve with holes in port qtr.
1163 holed – beached.
Sent cards home & Anne.

Thursday 29th

1162 & 63 off beach.
1164 with bent prop shaft being beached tomorrow morning.
Saw beachmasters in morn & early afternoon.
Went to Haslemere round teatime.
Letter from Mick.
Wrote home, Jean & station Chichester.

Friday 30th

Saw 1167 on beach. Should be ready to come off on Sunday. Bent rudder was trouble. Thysville moved nearer Mulberry.
Prepared to go ashore.
Went round Mulberry with Capt Parker.
Letters from Mum, Dad, Mick, Anne, Canfordian and parcel from Mum.

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¹⁵ Approximately 2.5 miles inland from Gold Beach. 'Mauville' may in fact be Meuvaines, which is 1.5 miles inland.

¹⁶ Most eastern sector of Gold Beach.

NOTES

1. In so far as can be discovered WA remained at Arromanches, working on and around the Mulberry Harbour, until September 1944 when he returned to UK. His diary was not resumed until 1945.

2. Included in his papers is a draft will, written in pencil and dated 3 Jun 44 in which he appointed his father to be executor and trustee and gave all his personal possessions to his younger brother Michael, together with one quarter of his other assets and the remainder going to his parents. His address is given as The Vicarage, Oxtun in Nottinghamshire.