



Soldiers of the United States 1st Army seen here in dress uniform at Youngs Park, Paignton, in 1944.

Credit : TORQUAY MUSEUM

Remembering the Americans on D-Day 79th anniversary

Obituaries

WILTSHIRE Andrew John

Died peacefully at home on Monday 22nd May 2023, aged 73.

Beloved husband to Janine, much loved father to Hannah, Jack and Sam. Devoted "Pampa" to Tilly, Alice, Harry, Hettie and loving brother to Janet.

Respected and admired throughout his industry, Andrew stood as the bedrock of Wiltshires for almost six remarkable decades. His influence was far reaching, and his absence will be felt deeply by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

The funeral service will take place at All Saints Church, Babbacombe, Torquay on Wednesday 14th June at 11am.

All are welcome

Family flowers only please.

Donations if desired to The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity or Rowcroft Hospice which may be given on-line via our tribute page on our website

K. J. Lack Family Funeral Service,
Tel: 01803 313200

Tuesday, June 6, marks the 79th anniversary of D-Day, probably the most significant event in the history of the 20th century in western Europe.

It is without doubt the most important historical event that Torbay has ever been a part of.

Much of South Devon's coastline has a great similarity to the landing beaches of Normandy and local towns were selected as embarkation points for the American forces. Torbay was, of course, among this select group.

The arrival of the Americans to train and prepare for the invasion of Europe created some of the biggest changes seen in South Devon during the Second World War.

The social scene boomed, friendships were forged and chewing gum became available to all!

Full-scale rehearsals for the landings took place at Slapton Sands near Dartmouth. It was selected due to its resemblance to Utah beach on the Cherbourg peninsula. Around 3,000 people were evacuated from the South Hams, many coming to Torbay.

On April 28, during a night exercise codenamed 'Tiger', nine

Barry Chandler, Torquay Museum

German E-boats penetrated the navy screen and sank two landing crafts, killing over 700 men; more than were killed on Utah beach on D-Day. This event was kept secret until long after the end of the war.

The invasion was postponed for 24 hours due to bad weather. When D-Day, the invasion day - June 6, 1944 - finally arrived, the Americans of Force U suffered the longest crossing of over 60 hours in rough seas.

They were fortunate to land on the wrong part of the beach which proved to be less well defended than the intended zone. Utah was to be the easiest of all the Allied beachheads. This was some compensation for the loss of life at Slapton Sands.

Last year, Torquay Museum told the story of one of these GIs. William (Bill) E. Neilson JR was an American soldier who was shipped to England in 1942 to train for battle in a rifle unit. In May 1943, his division (the 29th) moved to the South West and in Bill's case Torquay.

During his training, Bill lived at 38 Princes Road, Torquay, with Dick and Jessie Hayward with whom he developed a close bond that lasted a lifetime.

Bill most likely left for France through Trebah Beach, Cornwall, and landed as part of the second wave on Omaha Beach.

Torquay Museum has been collecting and commemorating Torbay's contribution



Brixham Harbour, June 1944, loading the Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs). These were the largest of the Allied landing craft, 236 were used in the Normandy landings.

Credit : TORQUAY MUSEUM



A column of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division march through Torquay past the Clock Tower, June 1944.

Credit : TORQUAY MUSEUM

to D-Day for over 25 years now and has created a comprehensive collection relating to the people who were involved in this world-changing event.

If you have any local items relating

to this momentous day, the museum would love to see them. Next year will be the 80th anniversary and the museum is planning an exhibition to mark it. The museum team would love to see new items.

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