

# D-DAY: STORIES FROM THE WALLS

**American Troops in  
WWII Southampton**



# CONTENTS

<b>About the Project</b>	2
<b>The D-Day Wall</b>	3
<b>Mr Webb, Champion of the Bricks</b>	5
<b>99th Infantry Division</b>	8
<b>WWII &amp; D-Day</b>	9
<b>WWII Southampton</b>	11
<b>Southampton's D-Day</b>	15
<b>Map of Southampton Sites</b>	19
<b>The Vessels</b>	21
<b>Reinforcements</b>	25
<b>The Soldiers</b>	27
<b>The End of the War</b>	39
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	43
<b>More Information</b>	44

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

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The D-Day: Stories from the Walls project explores the stories of some of the American soldiers that passed through Southampton during the Second World War, and the city's crucial role in the war. Though their passage was comparatively fleeting, the legacy of these soldiers remains in the form of graffiti etched into walls near the docks.

Just one section of wall bearing this graffiti now remains, and in 2019-2020, the Maritime Archaeology Trust made a digital record of the wall and its inscriptions in order to preserve it for future generations.

The project commemorated the 75th Anniversaries of D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge and VE day. Through a programme of fieldwork, research, exhibitions and outreach, it engaged volunteers and communities in the discovery of Southampton's crucial role during the Second World War (WWII) and the stories behind the men who carved their names on the wall. A plaque has now been added to the wall to raise awareness of its significance.

*One of the Wall's inscriptions, 'Ken Colby Mass.'*



## THE D-DAY WALL.

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Southampton played a vital role throughout WWII, serving as a key port for the transport of Allied personnel and goods. On D-Day alone, two thirds of the British taskforce sailed from Southampton. By the end of the war, more than 3.5 million Allied troops had passed through the city, some of them sought to leave their mark before they left for an uncertain future. Of the inscriptions identified and researched so far, all but three of the men survived, whereas many of the other troops who passed through the city would not be so fortunate.

The 'D-Day Wall' or 'American Wall' as it has become known, is a 19 metre length of brick wall at the lower end of Western Esplanade in Southampton. The wall, built c1910, is all that remains of the boundary wall of the old town mortuary and Southampton Borough Council Disinfecting Station.

When this area of Southampton was re-developed in 1993, a section of graffitied wall was allowed to remain in situ as a memorial, and a number of bricks from the demolished section, together with bricks saved from the demolished houses across the road, were built into a smaller wall behind the original wall, while others remain in the collection of Southampton Museum Service. The wall is recorded on the Southampton Historic Environment Record (MSH4692). It is also registered with the Imperial War Museum as a war memorial (Graffiti Wall WW2 21636).

Today the wall forms part of the boundary of the Grand Harbour Hotel car park. There is much local concern for the future of the wall: some of the bricks are crumbling due to weathering and some of the inscriptions are starting to erode.

You can explore the online archive and 3D model of the wall here:  
**[www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/ddaywalls](http://www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/ddaywalls)**



Top row, left: the small wall behind the main wall, inside the hotel car park.  
Top row, right: the location of the wall.  
Bottom: the main wall, looking north up Western Esplanade.



# MIR WEBB, THE CHAMPION OF THE BRICKS

The significance of the soldiers' inscriptions was first realised by local resident Mr Norman G Webb, a lithographic corrector working for the Government, who passed by on his way to work every day. In May 1973, a row of terraced houses further up Western Esplanade, on the opposite side to the wall, were marked for demolition. Mr Webb wrote to the City of Southampton Museums Service and highlighted the historical importance of the bricks. At the same time, he wrote to American newspapers in an attempt to trace the men or their relatives. It is not certain how many names Mr Webb identified, but his file contains a list of addresses for thirteen men that he wrote to. Five of the men replied back – Misters Moore, Breech, Wells, Groth and Harvey. By July he had secured agreement with the City Council that the best-carved bricks would be preserved. By September 1973, the site had been cleared and was being dug by archaeological students. Construction of the new residential development did not begin until January 1981.



*Left – Forest View, opposite the wall, which remains relatively unchanged today. Right – These houses were demolished and replaced by flats. The arrow marks the position of the bricks recorded by Mr Webb.*





Part of the demolished wall. Photograph by Cyril Foster.



Three American newspapers took up the individual stories of Wells, Harvey and Groth. When interviewed they were asked what they remembered about carving their inscriptions:

*Wells laughingly admits scratching his name and Cleveland Miss in walls and bricks all over England, France and Germany during his service as a line sergeant during the war. “We did that for (soldiers) coming behind us. A lot of times when we would be behind (other outfits) we would see the same thing – names and towns inscribed in the wall” (The Bolivar Commercial).*



Left – Photograph of Walter Wells, 1945, and his brick in the wall of a house.





*“While waiting for the ship to leave a group of young soldiers passed their time away by sightseeing around the city. One of these young soldiers was Wayne Harvey. On one of these walks some of the soldiers got the idea of writing their names and addresses in the crumbly old bricks of one of the houses” (Ravenna News July 19 1973).*



*Above: Wayne Harvey, California. 11th Armoured Division, and his inscribed brick.*



*Groth told the Times Democrat reporter “This is really unbelievable that someone would find my name there after all these years”.*

*Ralph LeRoy Groth 1915-2013 Davenport Iowa. 88th Engineers Heavy Pontoon Battalion / 3rd Army, and his inscribed brick.*





Sadly, the whereabouts of Wells, Harvey and Groth's bricks is currently unknown. Of the thirteen men named in Mr Webb's files, six of their bricks were saved: Breech, Christensen, Draper, Helmling, Moore and Greenwald (see page 27). The latter is in the care of Southampton Museums and the rest were built into the small wall behind the main section. The stories of these men are told on our website: [www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/ddaywalls](http://www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/ddaywalls)

Cliff Moore sent Mr Webb a roster of veterans belonging to his unit, the 799th Ordnance Company, dated 1971. On the roster were five other names found on the houses: John Helmling (Ohio), Daw Draper (Tennessee), Jules Dransert, Frank Sabo and Robert Breech (all Pennsylvania). Several of these bricks are dated 4 November 1944; this ties in with records of the 99th Infantry Division sailing from Southampton. Mr Moore and his wife continued to correspond with Mr and Mrs Webb up to and after Mr Webb's death in 1982. Mr Webb's files are kept in the Southampton City Heritage Services archive and were digitised as part of this project.

## 99TH INFANTRY DIVISION



The 799th were part of the 99th Infantry Division, nicknamed the 'Checkerboarders' after their insignia and also 'The Battle Babies' due to their young ages (average 20). 3,000 of the men were college boys, recruited from the Army Specialised Training Programme (ASTP). The division sailed from Boston on the 29 September 1944 arriving in Liverpool and

Scotland, and on to camps at Piddlehinton and Puddletown in Dorset. They moved to Southampton on the 2 November and embarked to Le Havre by landing craft between 3-7 November. Their first combat was at the Battle of the Bulge, fighting through to Bavaria by the end of the war, liberating prisoner of war camps on the way.

# WWII

The Second World War lasted from 1939 to 1945. Two opposing military alliances, the Allies and the Axis Powers, fought against each other, involving more than 100 million people from more than 30 countries. It was the deadliest conflict in human history and has shaped the world, as we know it.

## D-DAY

D-Day, the opening assault of Operation Neptune, was and remains the largest seaborne invasion in history and laid the foundations of the Allied victory in Europe. By this point in the war, the Allies had managed to slow down German expansion and now prepared to make their long-awaited strike into North West Europe. Britain and America, supplemented by other countries, gathered troops and equipment in Britain and increased their bombing of German forces across the continent; over 1,000 bombers a day were hitting German targets in the run up to the operation. The Germans knew an attack was coming, but not where it would happen. The Allies successfully misled German commanders into believing the attack would happen north of Normandy at Pas de Calais, where the English Channel is at its narrowest. General Eisenhower, the commander of the operation, initially selected the 5 June 1944 for the attack, but a forecast for bad weather resulted in a 24-hour delay. By dawn of the 6 June, thousands of paratroopers had already landed to secure bridges and beach exit roads, while off the coast more than 7,000 ships and landing craft prepared to strike from the sea. British and Canadian forces landed at beaches codenamed Gold, Juno and Sword, whilst American troops landed at Utah and Omaha beaches. By the end of the day, approximately 156,000 Allied troops had landed in Normandy. Over the following days, troops pushed inland. A constant flow of men and vehicles arrived from Britain and by the 17 June, over half a million Allied troops were in the Normandy countryside and beginning to push the Germans out of France.

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- 3 SEPTEMBER 1939**  
Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- 26 MAY 1940**  
Dunkirk: the evacuation of Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk, France, after they were cut off and surrounded by German troops.
- 7 DECEMBER 1941**  
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, is bombed and America declares war on Japan.
- JULY - SEPTEMBER 1943**  
The invasion of Sicily by the Allies to take the island from the Axis, and the Italian campaign.
- 8 SEPTEMBER 1944**  
The first V2 bomb falls on London.
- MARCH 1945**  
Allies cross the Rhine into Germany.
- 8 MAY 1945**  
German forces surrender - Victory in Europe.
- 2 SEPTEMBER 1945**  
Japan surrenders, ending WWII.
- SEPTEMBER 1939 - MAY 1940**  
The Phoney War: a period of limited military action at the start of the war.
- JULY - OCTOBER 1940**  
The Battle of Britain, in which the British Royal Air Force defended against German air attacks.
- AUGUST 1942 - MAY 1943**  
The North Africa campaign sees the Allies (many with colonial interests in Africa) fighting the Axis Powers.
- 6 JUNE 1944**  
D-Day: Allied forces storm the beaches of Normandy.
- DECEMBER 1944**  
The Battle of the Bulge, where Allied soldiers, mostly American, fought back against a 50-mile incursion by the Germans.
- 30 APRIL 1945**  
Death of Adolf Hitler.
- AUGUST 1945**  
Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

## WWII SOUTHAMPTON

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Just as in the First World War, Southampton played an important role in the movement of troops overseas. The British Expeditionary Force sailed from Southampton to Cherbourg on 9 September 1939; just seven months later, they returned, many rescued by the 'Dunkirk Little Ships'. Troops left from the town for postings all over the world, and the wounded, refugees and German prisoners of war (POWs) came in on the returning ships.

Early on in the Second World War, Southampton was identified as a pivotal port for the launch of the invasion. The South Western Hotel was requisitioned and became the headquarters for Combined Operations Military Movement Control, HMS *Shrapnel*. Churchill and Eisenhower met here on at least one occasion. Frequent bombing had forced the closure of the docks during the early part of the war, but they reopened after the last major raid in June 1942. The invasion plans required the construction of two artificial harbours to be towed to Normandy immediately after the landings to facilitate the unloading of supply ships. Secret construction of the codenamed 'Mulberry Harbours' began in the dry docks in spring 1943, with component parts built at locations along the south coast. A pipeline under the ocean (PLUTO) running from the Isle of Wight to Cherbourg was even designed to supply fuel for allied vehicles until the continental harbours were captured and safe to use by tankers.

In the summer of 1943, the US Army Transportation Corps took over Southampton docks and it was designated the US Army 14th Major Port. Their first task was to discharge the lend-lease cargoes from America. As part of Operation Bolero, the United States supplied the UK and other allied nations with food, oil, vehicles, locomotives, aircraft and warships. These arrived in Southampton between August 1943 and April 1944. The 14th Port was then responsible for the embarkation of troops and equipment destined for Normandy from D-Day through to the end of the war, as well as receiving war casualties



and German prisoners, the repair and salvage of vessels, and finally for the repatriation of troops, equipment and war brides to America and Canada. At its peak in November 1944, US Port military personnel numbered 6,641 with around 700 civilian personnel.

The whole of Southampton effectively became a military camp. Southampton and the surrounding area as far as Romsey and Winchester were identified as Area C. With both British and US forces using the port and marshalling and transit camps, great coordination was required. One-way systems were established on the roads and many areas sealed off from the public. British civilian and US Military Police worked together to ensure the roads were kept clear and the military areas secure. Military vehicles lined the streets, stretching from the waterfront up through Southampton to the Common and beyond, and the side streets in-between. Camouflage nets strung between trees hid them from the air.

*1995/69/3: Operation Overlord Administrative map for Area C, covering Southampton and the surrounding area, dated 1.5.1944. Reproduced by kind permission of Portsmouth Museum Service, Portsmouth City Council.*



Camps for British and American soldiers radiated out into the surrounding countryside, many in the grounds of the big houses, Chilworth, Broadlands, Hursley, Breamore etc. Canadians were camped at Bassett Wood, Bassett Green and Stoneham Golf Course. Half of The Common was left clear for the British Army on foot to marshal, and many private houses in Shirley were requisitioned as bases.

At this time, American recruitment practised segregation of black and white troops who did not normally mix. They had separate duties, billets and even recreational facilities. The black American soldiers were mainly dockworkers, drivers and stretcher-bearers. Their quarters were in London Road, in the old Ordnance Survey buildings and a church. Many of the men, including the 512 Port Battalion, slept in camps outside the town. The 399th Truck Company needed 100 buses and trucks to bring the 2,000 stevedores into the town every day. The people of Southampton did not agree with segregation, and sometimes inadvertently caused trouble by paying no heed to colour.

White officers were billeted in the Polygon Hotel and in private houses in Highfield and Bassett with the troops billeted at many of the schools following their evacuation of staff and pupils (Ascupart Road, King Edward's, Swaythling Junior, and Taunton's school) and the Blighmont Barracks at Millbrook. Camps were set up in open spaces on The Common and the parks. The US Army control centre was set up in the Civic Centre, while the US Naval Advance Amphibious base operated from The Star Hotel. The US 28th and 46th Field Hospitals set up facilities at the wharfs to receive the most seriously wounded soldiers returning after D-Day. The Royal Victoria Hospital and YMCA at Netley were taken over by the US Navy.

The American Red Cross occupied seven buildings in Southampton. Figures for the 'white club' alone record that they provided 30,000 meals per week and accommodated 450 men every night in the dormitories. These were mainly men on leave and US Navy based in the town. At the Red Cross clubs, men could access laundry and repair services, barbers and enjoy recreational activities, sports, movies and

four dances a week. The American Red Cross women in the docks were very popular, with their endless supply of tea and donuts. The residents of Southampton enjoyed the company of all the Americans. They entertained the children, played in the streets and gave them chocolate, comics, rides in their Jeeps and even Christmas parties. The young women of Southampton enjoyed being invited to dances or the movies and they relished the treat of a pair of stockings. The children's cries of "got any gum chum" were often met by the retort "got a sister mister?" Homes were left open for the troops to use their facilities. New sports such as baseball and basketball were seen for the first time. Residents were used to seeing the men move off for military manoeuvres, so when D-Day came, it was not until the news broadcast at 10am, that they realised their military friends had really gone this time.

*Troops and locals on Rockleigh Road. Image from a private collection.*



# SOUTHAMPTON'S D-DAY

Southampton, part of the eastern task force, was home to invasion Force G, and part of Force J. Troops embarked from four separate hards (constructed 1942/3) to the Normandy coast.

**S1 Western Dock** (Mayflower Park) was for larger vessels such as Motor Transport Coasters, Motor Transport Ships and Stores Coasters.

**S2 Town Quay/Red Funnel Terminal** had three separate points for landing craft to load personnel and smaller vehicles. On D-Day, it was the main embarkation point for the Canadian troops.

**S3 Eastern Docks** (Ocean Terminal) was for personnel and larger vessels such as Motor Transport Ships, Motor Transport Coasters, Stores Coasters, hospital carriers and Train Ferries.

**S4 Northam Chessel Bay** (near the St Mary's football stadium) had two berths for Landing Craft Tank to load personnel and smaller vehicles. Hards at Lepe, Stanswood Bay and Lymington were also used to embark troops for Gold Beach, under the control of the 14th Port.

During a full-scale invasion rehearsal, Exercise Fabius 2, in May 1944, troops sailed from these hards for a practice invasion of Hayling Island which was considered representative of Gold Beach. During practice, the port of Southampton proved capable of loading 50,000 troops and 7,000 vehicles in a day.

Loading of the invasion fleet began on the 31 May, supplies first, followed by men from the 4th June. As vessels filled, they moved out to anchor in the Solent. The 24-hour weather delay meant many troops spent an uncomfortable extra night at anchor.





*Southampton 4 June 1944. Credit Frank L Duberville Canada Dept of National Defence Library and Archives Canada PA-137130*

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, the 4/7th Dragoon Guards with their tanks (embarked Lepe) were the first to land on Gold Beach at 07:25, followed throughout the day by units of the 50th Infantry Division (ID). By the end of the day, 25,000 men (two thirds of the British invasion force) had landed on Gold Beach. 89 landing craft had been destroyed in the process. As a constant supply of British troops marshalled in Southampton from the outlying camps, landing craft plied back and forth between Southampton and Gold Beach for the next five days until all units of the 50th ID had landed. Many of the troops who sailed on D-Day suffered terrible seasickness due to the rough sea conditions.

Force J, destined for the Canadian Juno Beach and British Sword Beach, embarked jointly from Southampton and the four hardts at Stokes

Bay, Gosport. The Canadian 3rd Infantry and 2nd Armoured Divisions embarked from Town Quay to Juno Beach. The 'Bérets verts', 177 Free French troops, led by Philippe Kieffer embarked from Southampton to Sword Beach. British Royal Marine Commandos sailed from the River Hamble at Warsash to Juno, Sword and Gold Beaches. Among them were the 1st Commando led by Lord Lovat and Piper Bill Millin. The Commandos faced many obstacles and by the end of the day, half of the No. 48 Royal Commandos headed for Juno were recorded wounded, missing or killed.

Vessels returning from Normandy were loaded with casualties and German prisoners of war (POWs). On arrival, POWs were marched by US military policeman to a compound at Dock Gate 8 where they were processed before being distributed to camps around the UK. By October 1944, 58,588 German POWs had passed through Southampton.

The American Forces O(maha) and U(tah) embarked from the West Country ports on D-Day. A few specialist units, including the 2nd platoon 603rd Quartermaster Graves Registration Company and the 51st General Field Hospital did embark from Southampton later that night and in the days following. The first big US unit to sail from Southampton was the US 9th Infantry Division (already veterans of North Africa and Sicily). The 9th Division moved from their camps around Winchester to Southampton on the 7 June and landed on Utah Beach on D-Day +4 (10 June). Advance parties of General Patton's 3rd Army landed at Omaha on D-Day +6, with the majority following from the 5 July. Among them were Glen Bunker, Ralph Groth and Eddie Meyer, all with the 88th Engineers Heavy Pontoon Battalion, who had carved their names on the wall.

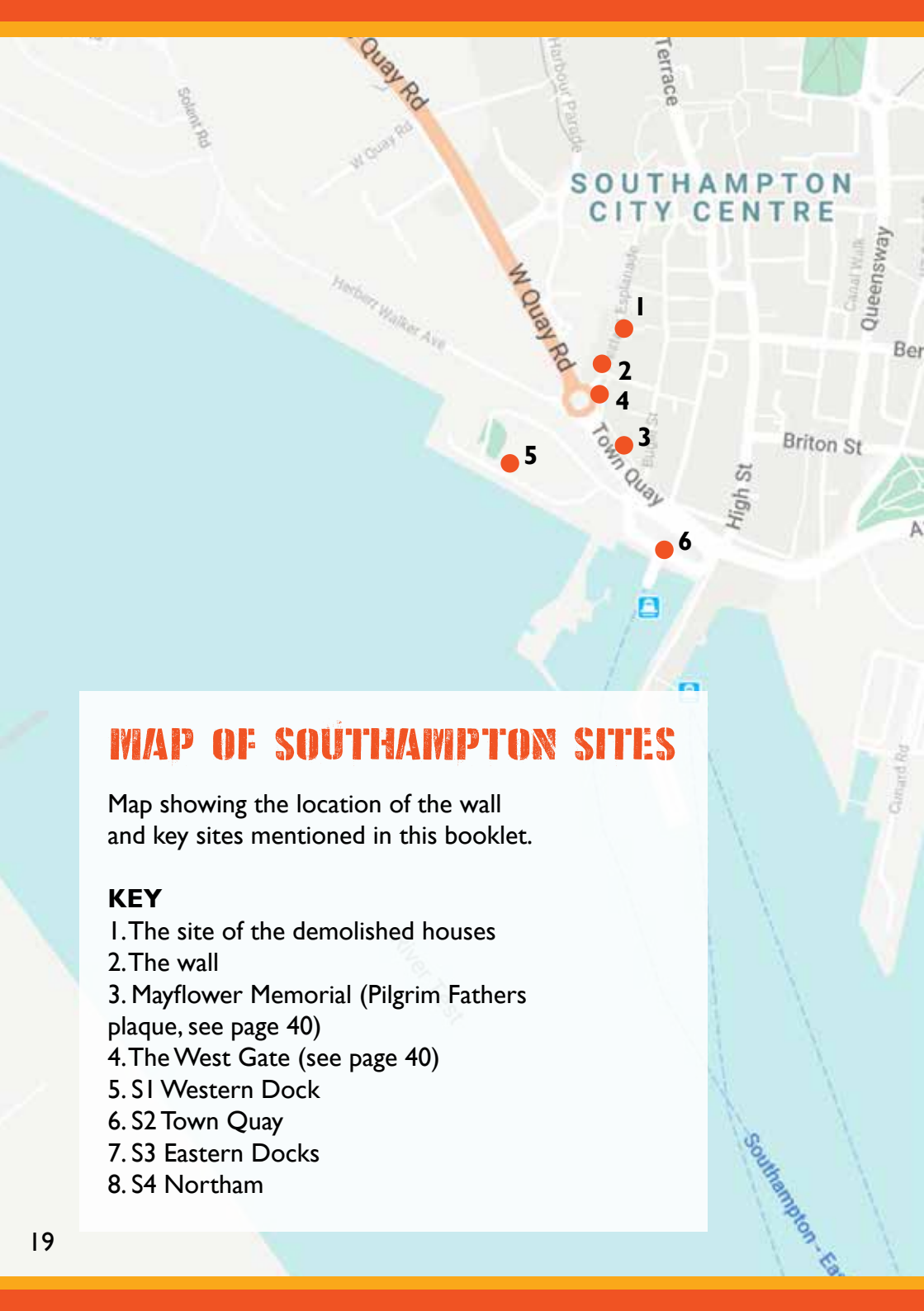
Between 6 June and 6 September 1944, 686,868 men and 140,303 vehicles had embarked from Southampton on 3,517 vessels. Additional supplies were transported on 34 coasters and 13 tankers between 11-30 June. On the 27 October 1944 alone, port records reveal that 22,465 men embarked in a single day.

ROBERT Eugene CHRISTENSEN  
JOE HAMMOND ALDLIN  
NN



Soldiers at the wall.

Painting by Mike Greaves, [greaves2connections.com](http://greaves2connections.com)



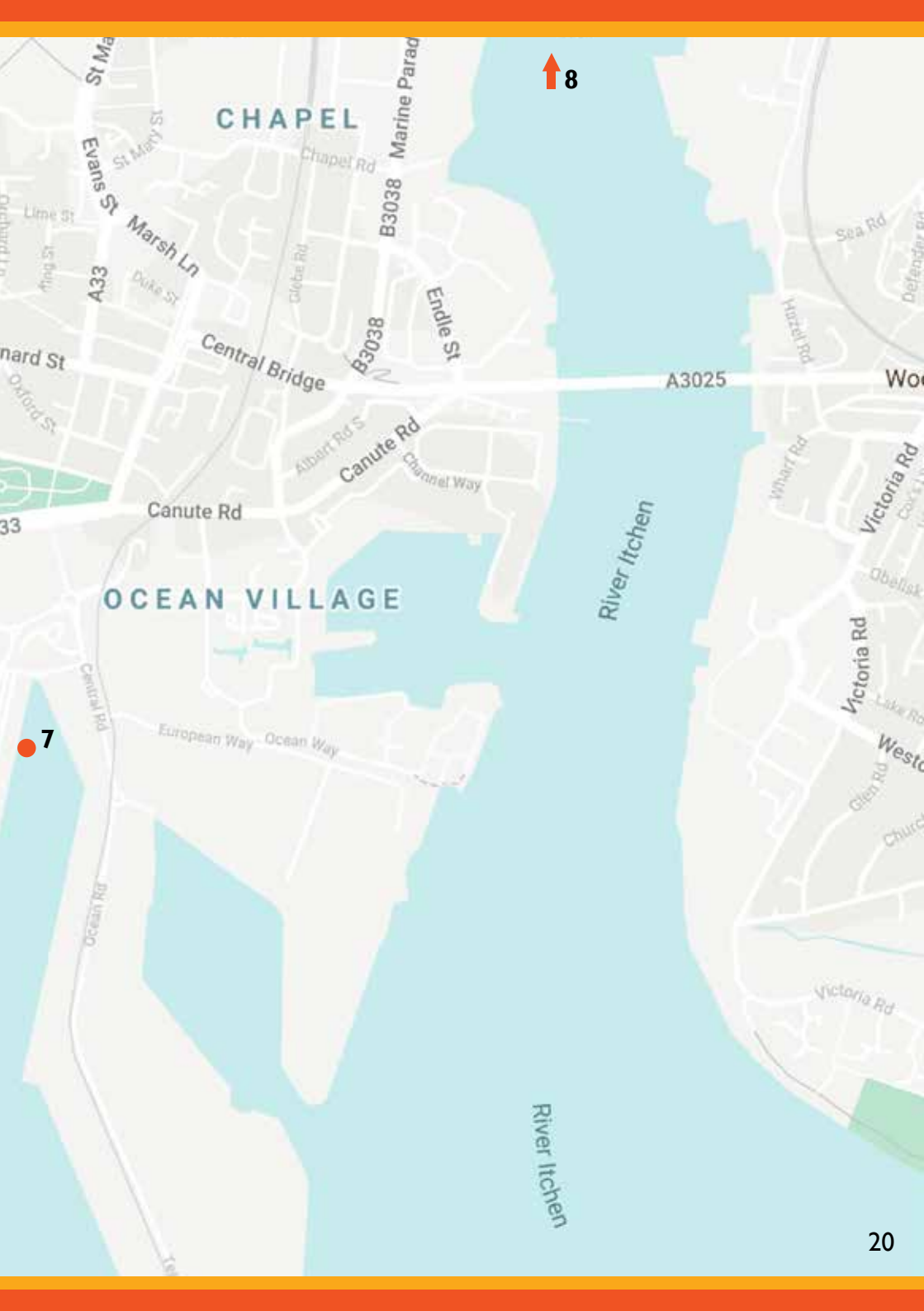
## MAP OF SOUTHAMPTON SITES

Map showing the location of the wall and key sites mentioned in this booklet.

### KEY

1. The site of the demolished houses
2. The wall
3. Mayflower Memorial (Pilgrim Fathers plaque, see page 40)
4. The West Gate (see page 40)
5. S1 Western Dock
6. S2 Town Quay
7. S3 Eastern Docks
8. S4 Northam





7

8

## THE VESSELS

These vessels illustrate the types of vessels involved in D-Day operations out of Southampton.



### Troop Transports/Hospital Ships - *HS Frances Y. Slanger*


Originally the USAT Troop Transport *Saturnia*, the ship was converted in 1944 to a hospital ship with capacity for 1,600 patients and 500 crew. Other liners such as the RMS *Queen Mary* and the RMS *Queen Elizabeth* were also converted into troop ships, with similar capacities.

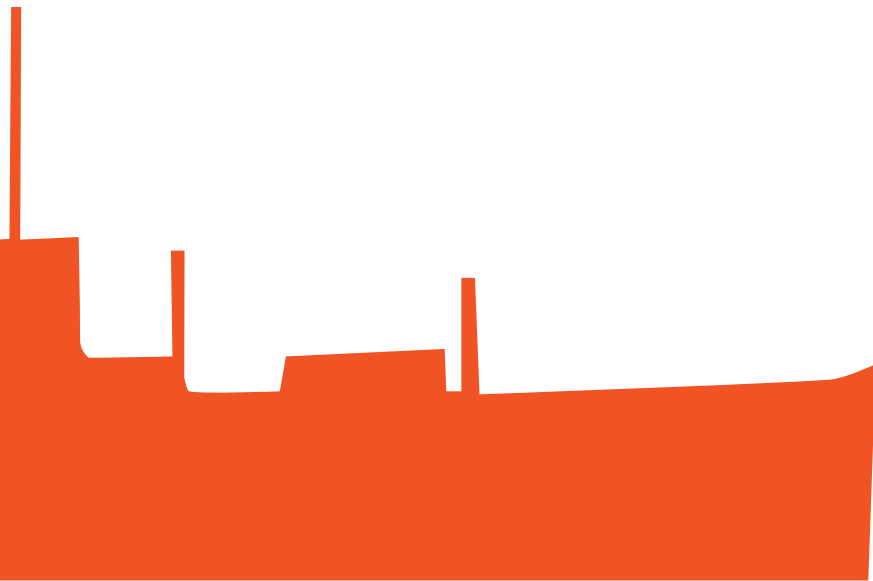


### (LCT, Mk3) Landing Craft, Tank

Designed to carry tanks and other heavy vehicles, the last remaining LCT, 7074, has been restored and is on display in Southsea. Though not leaving from Southampton on D-Day, it did operate out of the port at other times.

**Capacity:**

 10  160



### **(LCA) Landing Craft Assault**

Originally designed by John I. Thornycroft in Woolston, they were built to ferry troops from transport ships to enemy-held shores.

**Capacity:**

 **36**



### **(DUKW) Amphibious Truck**

DUKWs were so good at maneuvering on land that they continued to be used in various capacities well after the war.

**Capacity:**

 **25**



## (LST) Landing Ship, Tank

Although nicknamed 'Large Slow Target', the LST was one of the most significant ships of the war, and only 26 of the 10,520 built were lost.

### Capacity:



## (LCI) Landing Craft Infantry

250 of these LCIs participated in the Normandy landings. They were the largest of the troop transport ships. One soldier commented that sailing onboard them was like the combined movements of 'a roller coaster, bucking bronco, and a camel'.

### Capacity:

 388



## Liberty Ships (Example shown - *Jeremiah O'Brien*)

Liberty ships were simple and low-cost to produce, so were built during the war on an unprecedented scale. The *Jeremiah O'Brien* was built in just 56 days, and is one of three still operational.

**Capacity:**

👤 550



## Tugs - *Calshot*

Built originally as a tug and tender for the great liners at Southampton, the *Calshot* was later selected to be the Headquarters ship for the Juno Beach sector of the Normandy landings.



## REINFORCEMENTS

The first American troops arrived in the UK on 26 January 1942. From then on a steady flow of troops arrived from the States right through until the end of the war. On arrival, usually at Greenock on the Clyde, Liverpool or Southampton, they were billeted throughout the UK for further training and preparation. In the days and months following D-Day, American troops steadily embarked from Southampton to Le Havre or Omaha. Often they were unable to land on arrival in France due to the weather. Sometimes they lay at anchor for several days until the seas were calm enough for the troops to be able to clamber down the scramble nets and into the smaller craft that would ferry them to shore.

The American replacement system saw men sent individually to units, as opposed to the British way of withdrawing and replacing whole units. However, several whole US divisions were activated in the months after D-Day, such as the 106th (see page 34). By the end of the war, over 2 million American troops had passed through Southampton, 3.5 million Allied troops in total. A counter on the gangplank recorded the millionth Yank: Paul Shimer Jr from Pennsylvania who embarked on the 25th October 1944. A short ceremony commenced as he boarded the ship. Sadly, Sergeant Shimer was killed in action in Germany in April 1945. When Southampton Mayor Reginald Stranger heard of his death, he set up a trust fund for Shimer's young daughter. This began a long association between the town and the family. The two millionth American Pvt. Walter F. Richl of Maryland passed through on 16 January 1945.

Crossing the channel was always a danger due to mines and U-boats. Vessels sailed at night and in convoy and with escorts as protection against the U-boats that hunted in the channel. The greatest tragedy was the loss of the Belgium troopship *SS Leopoldville* on Christmas Eve 1944, on its 35th channel crossing. *SS Leopoldville* and *SS Cheshire* left Southampton carrying soldiers of the US 66th Infantry Division.

Despite zig zagging and a four-ship escort, a torpedo fired by U-486 struck SS *Leopoldville*, 5.5 miles off the coast of Cherbourg. 763 American soldiers were killed, 493 of whom were never recovered. Survivors were forbidden to mention it and documents about the incident remained classified until 1996. Only four days later, on the 28 December, the SS *Empire Javelin* struck a mine and sank mid-channel with 1,483 men of the US HQ Co 15th Army on board. Fortunately, the death toll was less at 11 soldiers and 6 crew.

*Canadians boarding in Southampton Docks.*  
Credit: Lt Gilbert Alexander Milne / Canada. Dept. of National  
Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-136991



## THE SOLDIERS

The following stories of men who carved their names on Southampton's D-Day wall have been researched by volunteers using online sources.



### SIDNEY GREENWALD

Sidney Greenwald's inscription is the earliest we can date, and the most intricate. The brick is one that was rescued from the demolished houses, it is kept safe by Southampton Museums.

Sidney Greenwald was born Zsigmond Grunwald in Czechoslovakia in 1913. His parents and three siblings emigrated to New York in 1934. Sidney worked as a glazier. His petition for naturalisation was granted in July 1940. A year later, aged 27, Sidney enlisted as a Private with the combat engineers of the US 3rd Army, and landed in Normandy on D-Day+6 (12 June). Combat engineers built pontoon bridges to enable the army to advance from Normandy all the way through to Germany. Awarded five battle stars, Sidney returned to America in 1946. He married and a large family grew. A devout Jew, and pillar of his local community, Sidney was much missed when he passed away in May 2011, aged 98, leaving behind 30 great grandchildren.



Local resident Pauline Natividad saw Sidney's brick on display in Southampton Art Gallery for the 60th anniversary of D-Day. Having traced her own GI father in 1988, Pauline was compelled to discover more about Sidney and eventually made contact with him. When he died, his son Allan, told Pauline:

*“During the mourning period, I looked at the brick that you were so kind as to share with us. I realised then that his inscription on the brick was really a tombstone. He never expected to return from Europe. He was army infantry and an engineer to boot. Almost nothing would have been left of a young man at 28 years old except his name and dog tag number. ...All of this cannot be written on one brick”.*



## BILL URBAN

William Paul Urban was a Sergeant serving with the 24th Armoured Engineer Battalion, 4th Armoured Division. Born in 1915 in Illinois, he enlisted in 1942 at the age of 25. At the time of enlistment Bill was working at the Phoenix Metal Cap Company in Chicago. The 4th Armoured Division left Boston on

the 29 December 1943. They arrived in Wales and were stationed in Wiltshire for six months, undertaking further training on Salisbury Plain. In early July, they sailed from Southampton to Utah Beach in landing craft. They took part in Operation Cobra and fought their way through France, attacking the Germans in Bastogne and relieving the encircled American troops. It was during the next phase, as the division left Luxembourg to cross the Rhine, that Bill received a fatal chest wound. He is buried in the American Cemetery in Luxembourg. He was awarded the Bronze Star for heroic achievement and the Purple Heart for his fatal wound. Bill's three brothers also served in the US Army and survived.

Lorie Coffey, the volunteer who researched Bill Urban, first made contact with his nephew on Thanksgiving Day 2019, telling them of the discovery of his brick. His nephew, who was named after him, replied *“Today is Thanksgiving and we the Urban family are saying thank you for this special gift”*.

Lorie placed a cross on Bill Urban’s grave during a personal trip to the Battle of the Bulge commemorations in December 2019.



## CAL AVERY

Richard Calvert Avery was born in Yonkers, New York in November 1910. During the 1930’s he worked as a chemist at the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research. The 1940 census shows him married with two children and working at the Leake and Watts Home School at the orphanage in Tivoli. By 1943, Cal had joined the American Red Cross at Fort Hancock as a Field Director. Field Directors were recruited

from men who did not meet the usual military requirements but had social or educational backgrounds. Attached to military units, camps and medical facilities, their role was to provide practical and emotional support to soldiers. Their uniform was the same as a US Army officer’s uniform with the military insignia replaced by American Red Cross patches. The Poughkeepsie newspaper 20 July 1944 mentions Cal attended his brother’s wedding so it must be after this date that Cal arrived in Southampton. Unfortunately, we are unable to trace any further details of Cal’s war service, or his life after the war, except that he died in St Thomas in the Virgin Islands in July 1987. In nearly every American family, someone was a Red Cross volunteer, donor or blood donor, or received Red Cross services.





*The inscription reads CALAVERY N.Y. AMER RED +*

## **BLACK AMERICAN TROOPS**

Black Americans were recruited for specialised segregated service units. These men were involved in construction, unloading ships, road and railway maintenance, medical services and as drivers. These men were a common sight in Southampton and were well liked by the local people, but regrettably, their war contribution is largely unrecognised.

### **703rd Sanitary Company**

Black American soldiers of the 703rd Sanitary Company would unload wounded soldiers returning from Normandy at Town Quay. The 703rd comprised 4 officers and 120 enlisted men, initially accommodated in tents at Millbrook Medical Camp. They were one of 16 'non-white' companies based in Southampton during the war, and the first unit to receive the Meritorious Service Award. Between D-Day and VE day, they unloaded more than 120,000 battle casualties at Southampton. Records show they had a very successful basketball team, The Panthers, and hosted an annual dance attended by black troops from all over the UK.

By the end of August 1944, there were at least 17 non-white companies of the Transportation Corps in Southampton.

## 449th Quartermasters Gasoline Supply Company

Ten of the names on the wall belong to black Americans with the 449th Quartermaster's Gasoline Supply Company 1st Platoon: James Henley, Joe N Jones, Laurence Mathis, Robert Golden, Samuel McDonald, Robert Smith, Jefferson Lawrence, James Words, James Dodd, and Joseph Mason (father of Harlem Globe Trotter, Bobby Joe Mason). These men were recorded on the passenger list for the USS Landing Ship Tank 262 which sailed from Southampton to Rouen on the 25 December 1944. The Quartermaster companies provided services to the troops: truck companies, salvage, bakery, graves registration, baths and in this case, gasoline. Their job was to ensure the army had a constant supply of fuel by decanting from tanks arriving by rail or road and moving supplies forward to fuel dumps and supply points.

James Henley was born in Washington, Wilkes County, Georgia in October 1920. His enlistment card, dated April 1943 records that he was married to Daisy, had a two-year-old son and worked at the Hotel Richmond. After the war James returned to employment at the hotel. Census records and street directories chart his career over 30 years, from bellhop to storekeeper and finally to cook. James died in 1991.

James Henley is a fascinating example of where a comparison between handwriting on the draft card and the carving on the wall can confirm identity.

It was not until 1945, when General Eisenhower faced a desperate shortage of replacement troops, that volunteers were accepted to form segregated infantry units. Between March 1945 and the end of the war 125,000 black Americans had been deployed overseas and served in separate companies with ten infantry and armoured divisions.

*Left: James Henley's inscription (top)  
and draft card (bottom, credit: Fold3.com).*

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)

SERIAL NUMBER T. 364	1. NAME (Print) JAMES HENLEY	ORDER NUMBER T. 10424
	(First) (Middle) (Last)	

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)  
1008 Gwinnett St. Augusta, Ga.

(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)  
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]

3. MAILING ADDRESS  
Same

[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]

4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS 21	6. PLACE OF BIRTH Washington Ga
	DATE OF BIRTH Oct. 9 1920	(Town or county) (State)
(Exchange) (Number)	(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	WILKES CO. (State or country)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS  
DAISY HOLLINS 1550 TWIGGS ST.

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS  
Hotel Richmond.

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS  
Broad St. Augusta, Richmond, Ga.

(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

# THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

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Many of the soldiers who carved on the wall would find themselves at the Battle of the Bulge – nine of them belonged to the last new US division: the 106th Infantry.

Following the success of D-Day, the tide was turning against Nazi Germany. In order to halt the Allied Advance, Hitler launched the Ardennes Counter Offensive on 16 December 1944 with the intention of pushing through the Allied lines to retake Antwerp.

The Ardennes forest was considered a quiet sector, and at that time it was used by the US Army to assemble the replacement divisions entering Europe. On the 16 December 1944, the Allies were caught by surprise with a relentless shell attack that signalled the start of the Battle of the Bulge - a fierce battle that would rage until the 25 January 1945. Hitler had amassed 30 infantry divisions and 12 Panzer divisions across the Ardennes, and proceeded to punch a 50-mile bulge-shaped advance through Allied lines.

The battle was hard: both sides suffered from a lack of resources and the harsh winter weather, and incurred major losses. However, Allied reinforcements arrived quickly, and the Americans defended vital road junctions, which halted the German advance. As the fighting continued, the Allies gained the upper hand as the terrain favoured the defenders and weather conditions cleared to enable air attacks on German forces and supply lines. By the end of January, the front line was restored to its former position, and the Allied counterattack was able to advance into the heart of Germany and ultimately end the war. Over 600,000 American troops were involved, and it remains the largest and deadliest land battle ever fought by the US Army, with over 81,000 Americans killed, wounded or missing.





## The 106th Golden Lions

The 106th Division was an 'all-draftee' division formed in March 1943. It was made up of three infantry battalions, the 422nd, 423rd and 424th, together with other specialist units. None of the men or officers had previous military experience. They trained for eight months at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, before 60% of the division were sent to the Pacific or ahead to Europe as replacements, in the spring of 1944. New men were drafted in to bring the division back up to strength; many were reassigned from the Army Air Corps, non-combat units and college students on the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP).

In October 1944, the division sailed on three ships (the *Queen Elizabeth*, *Aquitania* and *SS Wakefield*) from Boston to the Gourock in Scotland and then by train to be billeted in villages in the Cotswolds while they reequipped and continued training.

Sergeant Ralph Wyss' account ([indianamilitary.org](http://indianamilitary.org)) details how the 424th Regiment boarded the *SS Aquitania* at New York on the 20 October 1944, arrived in Gourock and were taken by train to a camp at Chipping Norton where they arrived on the 30 October. He recalls that on the 2 December at 01:00 they boarded trains bound for Southampton. The trains arrived at 05:00 and the men walked down through the town to the docks where they waited until 09:00 before boarding the ships. It must have been in these few hours while men of the 106th passed by or waited at the wall that at least seven of them decided to carve their names, a little part of them that would remain in England. We have not found Ralph Wyss's name on the wall, but his account has been invaluable in piecing together the story.

From Le Havre, they drove through France and Belgium to the Schnee-Eifel region in the Ardennes, which was deep in snow with sub-zero temperatures and thick fog. The Division had little winter clothing, ammunition or food. The 422nd and 423rd Regiments were quickly encircled. 10,671 men killed or captured. The 424th managed to hold

their lines until reinforcements broke through and relieved them. All of the 106th men identified so far from their inscription on the wall, survived. The remainder regrouped and spent the rest of the war on occupational duties before returning to New York in October 1945.

### 424/M Company Roster

Research into the 106th produced a photograph of Company M and several rosters. Checking names on the wall against these rosters enabled the identification of nine men from the 424th Regiment, Company M. Six are confirmed as drivers or transport corporals with the 3rd Platoon. It is likely their vehicles were queued here waiting to embark.

1. D.W. SMITH  
MISS
2. J. C. KELLEY
3. BILL KELLY  
LOUISVILLE Ky.
4. WILSON HALL
5. MCBILL-ALABAMA  
RALPH ODOM







6. KEN COLBY  
MASS

7. W<sup>M</sup> MUELLER  
NEW YORK

8. CURT HODGES  
CHICAGO ILLINOIS

9. W.E. SHIRK  
PENN



## DELBERT SMITH

The discovery of Delbert Smith's inscription is particularly poignant. The inscription D W Smith Miss was recorded by volunteers. Research revealed this was Delbert Wayne Smith, a 20-year-old who worked on his family's farm in Itawamba, Mississippi. Contact was made with Delbert's family through their Ancestry family tree, revealing photos of Delbert with his siblings and with his wife Ethel and daughter Nina.



Remembering that several female names had been recorded, another trip to the wall revealed that they were indeed part of this inscription: Delbert had also carved 'wife Ethel' and 'Da(ughter) Nina'. Clearly, his family were at the forefront of his mind as he stood in Southampton, apprehensively waiting to board the ship.

Delbert served with the 424th Regiment, Company M, 3rd Platoon as a driver. After the war, he returned home and raised three more children with Ethel. Sadly, he died on their 64th wedding anniversary. Their joint grave bears the inscription 'Love never ends'.



## BILL MUELLER

Bill or 'Wimpy' as he was known (after the Popeye character), was a driver/mortar man with the 3rd Platoon of the 424th. In an interview with Newsday 13 August 2015 Bill recounts the Battle of the Bulge and tells how his friend since boot camp, Maurice Fuhr, was killed beside him in a foxhole. A shell exploded in the trees above them and shrapnel hit Maurice in the head, killing him instantly. Bill is quoted "The incident left him wondering whether his life as an infantry soldier would have any meaning if he were to be killed".



Bill fought through to the end of the war and was awarded a Bronze Star for meritorious service. In September 1989, he was among a group of 106th veterans who travelled to Spineux in Belgium to unveil a memorial erected by the villagers in thanks to the 424th Infantry Regiment for the liberation of their village in January 1945. President of the Long Island Battle of the Bulge veterans, Bill also attended several reunions of the 106th Infantry Division. After the war, Bill studied aeronautical engineering at New York University and worked on the lunar landing module and the F4 Tomcat fighter plane.

Bill Mueller passed away in 2020. He left his mark 'Wm Mueller, New York' close to his friend Curt and surrounded by other men in the unit. Bill and John 'Curt'(is) Hodges remained close friends until Curt's death in 2017.

W<sup>M</sup> MUELLER  
NEW YORK

# THE END OF THE WAR

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## Repatriation

As the end of the war neared, preparations began for Operation Magic Carpet. Southampton was to be the chief port for the repatriation of all American and Canadian troops. The docks were dredged to allow the RMS *Queen Mary*, RMS *Queen Elizabeth* and SS *Aquitania* to be in port together.

## War Brides and Children

Many British women had formed relationships with the American and Canadian troops while they were in the UK. Operation War Bride saw the first shipment of 452 wives and 173 dependents board the SS *Argentina* from Southampton on the 26th January 1946, bound for new lives in America. In total, 70,000 British women and children would travel to America and Canada: some were greeted by unhappy families and returned, while others remained. Several children of GI fathers still live in Southampton.

The Provost Marshall of the port, Dalton Newfield, was a keen photographer and left behind a fantastic archive of his photos showing the Americans around the town. Dalton met his future wife in Southampton; Eleanor Clauson from Ealing followed Dalton back to America on the RMS *Queen Elizabeth*, arriving in New York on 23 May 1947. They were married six days later and spent the rest of their lives in Dalton's home town of Sacramento, California. Dalton was a great admirer of Churchill and became the senior editor of the International Churchill Society Journal. They even named their son Randolph. Keen to see for himself the effects of the war in Europe, Dalton followed the Allied route through Europe, making a photographic journal 'Jeeping with Pete' to record what he witnessed. Eleanor and Dalton repeated this journey together in 1978.

## Major Accomplishments

On 11th September 1945, the Port of Southampton was awarded the Meritorious Service Plaque. This was followed on the 29 October 1945, by the “Freedom of the Southampton” awarded by Southampton City Council. At a press day given by the 14th Port on the 1 December 1945, just prior to the US Army leaving Southampton, the major accomplishments were outlined: for the period D-Day to date. These included:

3,640,165 men embarked overseas

229,016 casualties received

194,606 POWs received

10,918 vessels loaded and discharged

23,138 total number of US military personnel assigned to the 14th Port.

The 14th Port presented four bronze plaques in memory of the US troops at four key locations: Dock Gate 8, The Polygon Hotel (demolished 1999), the Civic Centre and the Pilgrim Fathers memorial. The wording of the Pilgrim Fathers plaque (below) is a reminder that the Pilgrim Fathers left from almost the same spot (West Gate) to fight for freedom, and how during WWII their descendants returned to fight for freedom in Europe.





# CONCLUSION

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Little remains today to tell the story of the Americans in Southampton during WWII, except the American wall and three plaques.

So why did the US troops write on the wall? Military graffiti has been a tradition since at least Roman times. It seems WWII graffiti exists in most places where the US troops stopped in the UK! On arrival at Gourock and Greenock in Scotland, US troops graffitied in the warehouses on the quayside. Whilst billeted in the Cotswolds, graffiti and even murals were left by the 6th Armoured Division at Sarsden House and in Churchill village. More murals were recently discovered at a care home in Bristol. Arboglyphs (names and places carved into trees) are found at Kingsbridge (Devon), Broadmayne (Dorset) and Lockerly (Hampshire). At Weymouth Harbour, US graffiti can be found on the walls of the guest houses along the Esplanade, near the Pavilion Theatre. At the Victory Pub in Hamble (Southampton), men carved their names into the top of a table, now displayed on the wall. Of the men who have been identified to a unit, many were drivers or part of a vehicular crew. Perhaps, as they queued in their vehicles waiting to load, they stopped alongside this wall, saw the graffiti and decided to add their own.

This project has undertaken a digital preservation of the wall, to photographically capture the inscriptions and to tell the stories of the men and make them available online. This enables people to take a virtual tour of the wall if they are unable to visit in person. It is hoped this will be of use to people researching their family tree and WWII researchers around the world. Viewers can see a close up image of the inscription, the story of the man, and all the related documents that have been found (photographs and draft cards etc.)

Physical preservation is much more difficult. Any remedial work to the wall, such as inserting a new damp course or re-pointing, risks damage and will not protect against surface erosion. Plastic screens would



trap moisture and enhance the growth of moss and offer an attractive surface for modern graffiti. Covering the bricks would keep the bricks dry, but the best time to see the inscriptions is when the bricks are holding water, some are barely visible when dry. If the bricks were moved to a museum, they would lose their context and visitors would not have the sense of proximity to the waterfront and the trepidation these men felt.

The Stories from the Walls project is helping commemorate the soldiers through adding an interpretation panel at the wall. The wall is now a stop on the city walking tours, with thousands of Americans visiting from cruise ships every year. An education booklet has been sent to every school in the city and a series of schools workshops, exhibitions and public talks given to promote knowledge and understanding of both the wall and its inscriptions, and the role of the US military forces in Southampton during WWII.

On 31 May 2019, Southampton was honoured to welcome WWII veterans with The Greatest Generations Foundation on the first stop of their D-Day 75 European tour as they arrived in Southampton on *Queen Mary 2*.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks must go to our dedicated volunteers who have devoted so much time and passion to this project. Volunteers have helped with the recording of the bricks, the research of these men and the wider topics and with education and outreach activities: Helen Antrobus, Jeannie Antrobus, Valerie Archibald, Sandra Beavis, Emma Bennett, Michael Bennett, David Bond, Ron Brading, Martin Brisland, Roger Burns, Elizabeth Chase, Pauline Christie, Lorie Coffey, Ian Cooper, Mary Davenall, Jez Dodington, Viv Dover, Geoff Dover, Emily Elliott, Maggie Fogg, Matt Garner, Michelle Gibbs-Jefferson, Mike Greaves, Jane Hands, Sarah Hanna, Linda Hebdige, James Macdonell, June Mikulski, Tim Mitchell, Mel Mullane, Richard Myers, Laura Nagler, Pauline Natividad, Penny Orme, Rosemary Owen, Rachel Patten, Christine Pattison, David Pattison, Michelle Price, Rachael Rogers, Martin Sanger, Kerry Sayers, Ian Shankland, Robert Steer, Jane Thakker, Joanna Tonge, Joey Van Meesen, Karen Wardley, Matthew Williams, Richard Wyatt

The level of detail would not have been possible without help from a number of sources: Southampton City Archives, The Maritime and Local History Museum collection, Southampton Archaeology Unit, Southampton Historic Environment Record and Southampton City Library. Thanks also to Southampton Mayor Peter Ballie, SEE Southampton and the Leonardo Royal Grand Harbour Hotel for their support. Online sources include NARA, The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Ancestry, Fold 3, Footsteps Researchers, Jim West and the indianamilitary.org website, the 106th Infantry Division Association, The 99th Infantry Division Association. Lonesentry.com. And last but not least, sincere thanks to the families of the men who have provided photos and information.

JEWETTA CALLAWAY  
MIAMI FLORIDA

{ DOOLING }  
BEVERLY  
MASS

## MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information on the wall or other aspects of the project, try these links:

### Stories from the Walls Webpage and Online Viewer

The D-Day Stories from the Wall webpage gives information on the project and links to the 3D model of the wall where you can explore the names in more detail. It also links to our D-Day Wall quiz and our other Second World War resources:

[www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/dday](http://www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/dday)

### Visiting the Wall

Visiting the wall yourself is easy (see page 19 for location map). Why not download a wall tour and quiz sheet from our website to enhance your visit?

### D-Day

The D-Day story in Portsmouth is a great place for the family to discover more about D-Day. [www.theddaystory.com](http://www.theddaystory.com)

There are many videos on YouTube containing archive footage of D-Day and the build-up - many feature Southampton – search Southampton WWII or D-Day.



*From top to bottom: the D-Day Wall 3D viewer, the Cambridge American Cemetery, the Darnmouth memorial, findagrave.com.*

## **Photogrammetry**

Creating your own 3D models can be an easy process and can be undertaken with any camera (including mobile phones) and free software. Search online for a how-to.

## **Memorials and Graves**

There are numerous memorials and cemeteries for American soldiers across the world. In the UK, the Brookwood Cemetery has graves from the First World War, and the Cambridge American Cemetery has graves from the Second World War: the latter is home to over 3,800 graves and a further 5,127 names recorded as missing in action. There are also two memorial stones in Dartmouth: like Southampton, it was a focus of American activity during WWII. To find out more, visit the American Battle Monument Commission: [www.abmc.gov](http://www.abmc.gov)  
You can now also undertake a walking tour of the WWII memorials of Southampton, available from the D-Day: Stories from the Walls webpage.

## **The Hollybrook Memorial**

For more about WWI Southampton and memorials, please visit: [www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/hollybrook-war-memorial](http://www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/hollybrook-war-memorial)

## **Family Research**

There are lots of resources available online to help research family history. The Imperial War Museum has a good guide to tracing military ancestors available here: [www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history](http://www.iwm.org.uk/research/tracing-your-family-history)  
If you are searching for a particular military unit, information can usually be found via a search engine and links to regimental associations. War diaries provide a lot of useful information, they can be found at The National Archives. Familysearch.org is a good free genealogy website while Find A Grave ([www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)) is useful for finding graves of all dates around the world.

# ABOUT THE MAT



The **Maritime Archaeology Trust** is a registered charity with 30 years' experience in research, investigations and pioneering techniques for the study and promotion of marine cultural heritage. The MAT has grown from regional roots to be an internationally renowned authority on maritime archaeology. Our key objectives are to:

- **Investigate:** maritime, coastal and underwater archaeology,
- **Engage:** people, communities and schools through involvement, enjoyment and education,
- **Promote:** hard to reach and inaccessible maritime heritage,
- **Protect:** through supporting heritage management for current and future generations.





The D-Day: Stories from the Walls project explores the stories of some of the American soldiers that passed through Southampton during the Second World War, and the city's crucial role in the war. Though their passage was comparatively fleeting, the legacy of these soldiers remains in the form of graffiti etched into walls near the docks.

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