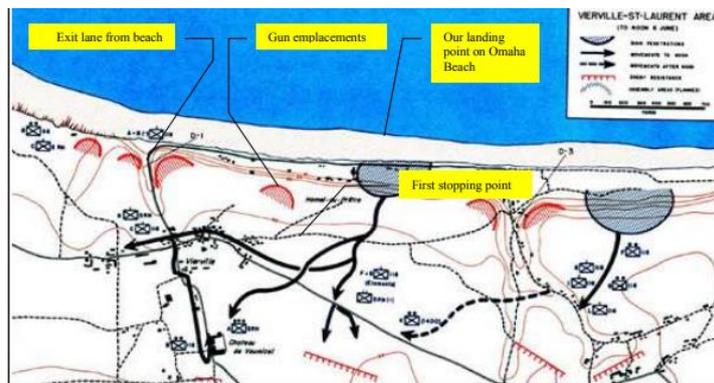
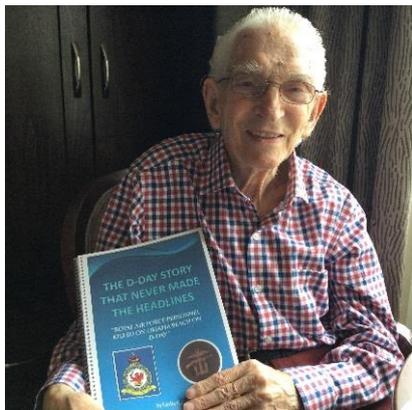


The D Day story that never made the headlines



One of our respite residents, Leslie Dobinson, disclosed to us that he was the last surviving British veteran of the D Day operation in respect of the landing on Omaha Beach. He served as one of a dozen Radio/Radar Technicians who formed the advance echelon of a Mobile Signals Servicing Unit (MSSU). This was a centrally located unit to provide specialised support for the wide range of mobile communications and surveillance units in event of equipment failure.

It was always planned for his Echelon to come ashore with 15082CGI, (ground-controlled interception unit) then to deploy near to Cherbourg to serve the many mobile signals and radar units that would occupy isolated sites throughout the American Sector. Meanwhile, 15082GCI were to make their way towards Paris to contribute towards the air defence of the American liberation troops. The remainder of Les' MSSU was planned to arrive from England some weeks later to serve in the British and Canadian Sectors as the battlefield broadened and many more Mobile GCI and Signals units became operational throughout France.

After receiving presidential invitations to attend the 60th and 65th D-day Anniversary ceremonies, in 2004 and 2009 respectively, at the Normandy American Cemetery, where Les was horrified to discover that no-one from military or political circles, neither British nor American, was aware of the service that the 84 RAF had rendered here on D-day, nor that some of his comrades lost their lives here and many more were gravely wounded. This was a situation that Les vowed to remedy. Thus, as possibly the last British veteran of this operation, it was left to him to see that the vital role that the mobile radar and signals units of the RAF played in the air defence of the Omaha beachhead, and thence throughout the battle of Normandy, through Belgium and Holland, into Germany, received just and proper recognition.

This objective was achieved by a joint unveiling by the retiring Mayor, Monsieur Jean-Marie Oxeant and the British Defence Attaché, Air Commodore J Maas, of a substantial memorial plaque at Vierville-sur-Mer (Omaha Beach), so that those comrades who rest forever in the Bayeux cemetery, and the others whose remains are yet to be recovered, are always remembered. The memorial is donated by the French "Deep Respect" Association its consecration has been performed by the Staff Chaplain of the RAF on behalf of the Chaplain in Chief. Its erection marks the conclusion of the many projects sponsored by the retiring Mayor to recognise the sacrifice by individual units of the liberating forces, with the recent support of Monsieur Tenno Dogger and Madame Carole Duval of Deep Respect. Its installation is brought to a conclusion thanks to Deep Respect Association, to the retiring Mayor, the Mayor, his Council, and the citizens of Vierville sur Mer.

History of the memorial on Omaha Beach for RAF Mobile Signals and Radar personnel. In the words of the author Leslie Dobinson:

The open ended project that I embarked upon in 2004, to seek to erect a memorial in honour of the signals and radar personnel of the RAF's second tactical Air Force (2nd TAF) who were killed on Omaha Beach on 'D' day was instigated following an invitation for me to participate in a ceremony in Vierville-sur-Mer to commemorate the 60th anniversary of D-Day. Next day during a visit to the Normandy American cemetery it was clear that none of the senior military and political leaders I met there was aware of the debt they owed to the RAF in defending American troops against air attack on Omaha beach on D-Day and subsequently through the Battle of Normandy. The total absence from within our National archives of operational record books for our unit seems to confirm the deliberate concealment of our operational role, perhaps to play down Americans reliance upon non-combatant RAF ground forces to defend US combat troops. The invitation of high-ranking RAF officers holding senior appointment to perform the unveiling and dedication of an advantageously sited memorial was seen as a means of drawing the attention of British and American Military authorities to this injustice. Bilingual Versions of the following narrative were distributed at this ceremony which took place in 2012 on the 68th anniversary of D-Day

"Some people will be familiar with the fact during the whole of World War II a total of 10,386 military crosses were awarded. A few people will know that of these just 69 were awarded to officers of the Royal Air Force. But just a privilege few are aware that four of those 69 military crosses together with two military medals and the Croix de Guerre were awarded for the bravery of our chaplain, our medical Officer, the commanding officer, the chief technical officer and others of the 140 or thereabouts radio/radar technicians of the RAF who were serving in the RAF radio radar unit that disembarked from tank landing crafts onto Omaha Beach on D-Day at 17:00 hours together with their 27 specialised vehicles that were fitted with radar and radio communications equipment. They were met with heavy fire from German 88 mm artillery and heavy machine guns as well as mortar fire. From then on for many hours our medical officer and chaplain, both wounded, continually toured the beach under fire to bring Aid and comfort to be American wounded and the last rights to those nearing death

This RAF unit is identified as 15082GCI (ground-controlled interception unit). Its function was to protect the American beachhead and the American troops from Air Attack by using its radar equipment to locate the position and altitude of enemy aircraft and by means of direct radio contact to direct RAF fighter aircraft to intercept and engage them. This was a facility that the US military were unable to provide for their own assets at the time. An attempt to Land non-combatant unit at its planned 11:30 hours was aborted for lack of space on the beach.

The damage to the RAF vehicles during the landing was such that only 6 of the 27 that disembarked were sufficiently serviceable to be driven off the beach when, many hours later, an exit had been cleared by a bulldozer that, still under fire, had managed to negotiate a passage between the hundreds of dead and wounded American troops and damaged vehicles.

The brave RAF technicians of this mobile radar unit and its supporting mobile signals units, having themselves sustained 47 casualties including 1 Officer and 9 other ranks killed and one missing, spent the night, still under fire, attending to their own casualties as well as many of the wounded GI's, and in burying their dead comrades on the beach.

Having also survived a bombing raid by Junker 88's during the night with the approach of dawn attempts were made to salvage damaged equipment from the beach and the sea, sufficient for the unit to become operational on D day + 2 from a temporary site hastily chosen by the US General Timberlake, the planned designated site being still in enemies hands.

With the element of secrecy that surrounded mobile radar and signals units at that time, and their close proximity to the front line, documented records of individual active service units are minimal and such information as exists depends largely upon the individual testimonies of surviving veterans.



**THE FINISHED MEMORIAL
UNVEILED BY THE BRITISH DEFENCE ATTACHÉ AIR COMMODORE J MAAS
AND DEPUTY MAYOR OF VIERVILLE SUR MER M. JEAN-MARIE OXÉANT 6th JUNE 2012**