

**MEMORIES OF
HYTHE
IN WORLD WAR II**



**PUBLISHED FOR ITS MEMBERS
BY
HYTHE CIVIC SOCIETY**

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HYTHE CIVIC SOCIETY

OBJECTS

To promote high standards of planning and architecture in Hythe

To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history, and architecture of Hythe

To secure the preservation, protection development, and improvement of features of historic or public interest in Hythe

HYTHE IN WORLD WAR 2

After the exhibition which was mounted for the 50th anniversary of VE Day, the committee decided to try to collect memories of Hythe during the period 1939-45. What follows is a selection from the letters of reminiscences which were sent after advertisements were placed in several national periodicals. Letters came from all over Britain, as well as from France, Canada, America and Australia. Most came from ex-service people and they give a fascinating glimpse into Hythe at that time. Letters are mainly quoted as written, to preserve the individuality of each incident described. Sometimes, to add 'colour' to a story, the writer's background material is also included. It is obvious from the letters that, even after the passage of so many years, the writers each have vivid and highly individual memories of that time. Originals of all letters are now in Hythe Civic Society Archive. These reminiscences may stir people's memories. The collection is still open for any more which can add to our knowledge of Hythe in World War 2. (HPS, Editor.)

Mr Ronald C. Browne

My father was transferred to Hythe in 1925 from the Royal Military College at Sandhurst to be an instructor at The School of Infantry, later to be known as The Small Arms School Corps. We lived originally in the old barracks off Hythe Hill until father found accommodation over Mr Churcher's Gunshop. We then moved to the Married Quarters on Dymchurch Road, firstly at No 5 and then at No 14. The Ashworths or the Holts were our neighbours.

At age 4 I went to the kindergarten school and then the elementary school just off Hythe Green. Also adjoining Hythe Green was the 1st Hythe Scouts and Cub Packs run by Mr and Mrs Sherwood. I joined these in due course and was a patrol leader. At 10 years of age I won a scholarship to the Harvey Grammar School in Folkestone. An ex RAF officer, Mr Howard, was the sports teacher and he organized a squadron of Air Defence Cadet Corps in the school which many of us joined.

When war was declared the Small Arms School took over the defence of the whole area and barbed wire fences started springing up. Six inch gun emplacements were located along the promenade; even trains from the Hythe/Romney miniature railway were armoured and fitted with guns taken from crashed aircraft in the zone. Travel restrictions in and out of the area were introduced.

The Army School with Colonel Vicory, Commandant, Lt Colonel Thornton as Chief Instructor, Captain Browning (later Lt General Browning commanding all Airborne Forces and the husband of Daphne Du Maurier) as Adjutant, together with my father, now Regimental Sergeant Major, were all working 20 hours a day 7 days a week setting up the defences, plans for Germans invading by sea, and paratroops dropping into the zone and all the paraphernalia of security.

In the Married Quarters, my mother was in charge of the First Aid and Gas Casualty Station. Various observation posts were set up in our area and in the event of an alert I went to the one located at the corner of the Hockey Field, connected up the Field Telephone and rang through to HQ to confirm the post was manned.

Mrs Ethel Stanford

Memories of Hythe-November 1939-November 1940
(How it was in the eyes of a 20/21 year old A.T.S. girl)

I have very happy memories of Hythe, mixed with some sad ones. I came to Hythe in November 1939 with two other members of the A.T.S. (we were Territorials) to work in the offices of the Small Arms School. Work was easy and we were made very welcome in comfortable homes for a few months until a 'battle-axe' from Shorncliffe wafted us up to Napier Barracks. The Q.M. rescued us as 'it was uneconomic to run an open-backed truck (in winter of 39/40!) twice a day'. Back to Hythe to Mr and Mrs Williams, Kennie, Ronnie and Eileen in Dymchurch Road until Turnpike Camp opened in the Spring. Mrs Williams was a real mother to us.

During the winter, life in Hythe ran as normal as could be expected with so many soldiers around-public dances in the Institute, Sergeants Mess dances in the Canal hall -cycling, walking, swimming in the sea in early summer. The School increased the number of students and many were billeted in the town and all spoke highly of their grand landladies. When the Camp opened, many more A.T.S. joined us as cooks and orderlies. They loved the town and the people, and a very plucky, hard-working and cheerful lot they proved to be -coming from all walks of life.

Mr R. Eaglen

I knew Hythe since childhood in the late 1920's and early 30's, as my father had a weekend bungalow at Greatstone. I was delighted when I heard that my Royal Artillery Battery was to move to Hythe in about September 1940. This was the 7th Super Heavy Battery R.A. with 12 inch railway mounted guns, located above the town on the Hythe and Sandgate railway line. During our time there (about six weeks) we were billeted in the Golf Club House.

It was at that time that we saw an enemy plane drop a bomb over the town. We hurried down to see if we could help and found that the bomb had landed on the North side of the High Street. It was thought that people were trapped under the rubble, and I understand three women were killed. I distinctly remember that there was some smoke and the smell of a meal cooking in an oven under the debris.

After our time in Hythe we moved first to Lyminge and a short time afterwards to Elham where I stayed until being posted overseas in February 1942. During our stay in Elham we occasionally came to the musketry ranges at Hythe to practise firing rifles, Lewis guns and Bren guns which were to be used in the defence of our gun perimeter in the event of an invasion. At one stage as a Battery Surveyor, I stayed for several days in an observation post above Hythe. The idea was to 'flash spot' the German guns which were firing on Folkestone and Dover. By taking readings with surveying equipment from three observation posts it was hoped to locate the guns on the French coast. During my stay the weather was so bad that we did not make a single observation! I used to visit Hythe as often as possible during my stay in Elham.

Mrs Lena Pepin

I lived in Hythe for many years and was still there until invasion was almost imminent and we were advised to leave if we had somewhere to go. I had relatives in Cheshire and was offered accommodation and a job as Chauffeur. The Cab-Co where my husband worked along with other places closed down, so he was out of work, so really much to our regret we left Hythe.

I have remembered something that really was the beginning. The first siren that was sounded was on a Sunday morning, just after I believe War was declared. My son was in the choir in the little tin church in Stade Street, of course I ran down the road to be with him, but was told on the way it was a false alarm.

We did however experience the bombing of the High Street, in fact I was in a little Pet Shop right opposite the Arcade when the bomb was dropped there, with Stebbings etc. The only shelter we had was rather a very old but wide door jamb.

I along with others had a few experiences. One I remember. We were coming through The Grove, we had just crossed the Canal bridge when a German fighter swooped down firing at us. We hid behind a very big tree with a thick trunk, and the bullets were going into it which I am sure saved our lives. Even while putting out washing they would suddenly swoop down and fire at us.

One day a German fighter came swooping down Stade Street very low firing at anything. The man at the News Agents shop had a bullet in his wooden leg. However, the plane was brought down in the sea. I also experienced one day when I was going to the post in Park Road, a plane came over very low and when I looked up and saw the big black crosses under the wings that it was a German, then lo and behold the Bomb doors opened so I fell flat on the floor with my dog. The Bombs landed on the Canal Bridge and one in the Canal.

Another time I was in the allotment when they came over and were dropping bombs all round, which, when they had gone, I thought I would take a piece home, but I very quickly dropped it because it was too hot to handle.

I didn't like the shelling at all. I was along with others when they started one day and one just didn't know where to go. In a street opposite Lynton Road where I lived, I can't just remember the name, a dive Bomber dropped a Bomb near a Coal Cart where one man was delivering a bag of coal and the other man about to take one, he dived under the cart but got a very nasty gash in his leg and a bag of Coal landed the right way up beside a chimney stack. I'm afraid the man had a very nasty gash in his leg. Despite it all we were very sorry indeed to leave Hythe. I am now 90 years old and I don't think I have missed a year since the war ended without taking a visit to Folkestone and Hythe and still have one or two friends not too far away.

Mr Walter Woodward

In the early spring of 1940 I spent a fortnight at St. Mary's Bay, and part of our training involved marching in single file along the coast road, with rifles at the ready (but not loaded) pausing at intervals to fire at imaginary aircraft strafing the road.

The army transported us from Dover Station to the camp. After that we had to rely on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway for local travel. I remember going on the RH&DR to the cinema in Hythe also to visit a 'local', naturally everything was blacked out.

Mr Ronald C. Browne

continuing from earlier reminiscences.

Sunday mornings usually meant marching with the Colour Party of the Boy Scouts for the regular services at St Leonard's Church. Escaping there we clattered down a little winding alleyway, remembering to hammer on the high board fence on our right wherein lived a large number of English Bulldogs. Having safely achieved their awakening and subsequent furious barking it was back home to the Married Quarters along Dymchurch Road and then after changing, onto our bicycles and up the "E" Range Road to the partially demolished Martello Tower located on the seashore. The initial object was the gathering of driftwood used, after drying out, for lighting the coal fire in our range at home. With "E" Boats and "U" Boats about however, many more mysterious objects were washed up. One of these consisted of large wooden containers containing a mass of wet dark powder-like substance. Gathering handkerchiefs full of this and pedalling frantically back home, our parents advised the material was in no way dangerous but was in fact, tea. Upon explaining there were cases all along the shore, there ensued a complete exodus of the houses as everyone strove to rescue as much of the precious tea as they could before the tide rose and washed it all

away. There was a whole procession of bicycles, pushchairs, perambulators loaded with sacks and pillow cases of this precious cargo. Then there came the careful drying out in the range oven and the gas stove oven, followed by grading and blending until it was in "drinkable" form. Many of the instructors had served overseas and so for weeks there were discussions as to whether it was from Ceylon, India or China. All very good education for us discoverers of the bounty of course.

A not quite so funny episode some time later came when three of us older boys discovered the very low tide had left a large black round object marooned between two sandbanks. Enough water was left to keep it floating and when we approached closer we could see the glass like covers protruding from what was now obviously a mine. Discarding the suggestion of throwing a few rocks at it, we retreated behind a breakwater only to discover that none of us was equipped with our customary catapults. (This area was home to rabbits and many of these succumbed to our accurate shooting.) In the end we decided discretion was the better part of valour, so while my two friends kept guard, I pedalled furiously homeward. I recollect bursting into the house and asking my father if he could come with us, bringing his rifle, to destroy the mine. He promptly dispatched me to Headquarters to get a team of Engineers and Explosives to the mine whilst he looked after it. Furthermore, I was then to return home and stay there. I heard the explosion some while later which shook all the doors and windows. Perhaps it was fortuitous that we left our catapults at home that day! From that day on, nothing strange was to be touched along the shore until checked by an adult.

A few days after Dunkirk, Mr A.B. Downing, and his staff and all the pupils were advised that in 2 days we were to report to Folkestone Railway Station fully dressed in school uniform and bringing with us one suitcase, school satchel and of course the inevitable gas mask in its cardboard box. We finally arrived at Merthyr Tydfil in Glamorgan, South Wales after a long and tedious journey. I remember at every stop we were offered tea, lemonade, milk, biscuits etc. by the local organizations who had just looked after the soldiers and sailors who had escaped from Dunkirk. At Merthyr we were met by the townspeople who took us into their homes with true Welsh hospitality. We were to remain there until the end of our school years. The school we went to was the Cyforthfa Castle School and we had turns at a morning shift for us and an afternoon shift for the Welsh students. They taught us the favourite local game of Rugby and we reciprocated with football and field hockey.

The Air Cadets initially joined the L.D.V.(Home Guard) but after an inspection by an officious Brigadier we were told we were "too young for this sort of thing." We were mostly 14, 15 and 16 years of age and I often wondered about his mentality. Especially when coming up against the Hitler Youth not much later.

Mr Harold Michaels

I can tell you a little of our short stay in Hythe, around July/August 1940. We were called up on Jan 18th, and placed in the 5th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment, and stationed there. The 43rd Wessex Division was the only division that was fully trained and equipped, and we were on our way to France (or Europe) when Dunkirk came into being. We were shunted from pillar to post and finally sent to Small Arms School in Hythe-up to that date we had lived like pigs; at said school we had spring beds, running water, good food, and I believe a NAFFI. It was civilisation again, hence our short stay of a few weeks.

We had twin Bren guns in an emplacement in the camp (brick built). One day, a German plane came in machine gunning the camp (from the sun of course); the two soldiers had not experienced being fired at, and dithered, but the Cpl/Sgt picked up the guns and fired in front of the plane as taught, and shot the plane down. The info. came from the Coastguard. We were told the Cpl/Sgt was awarded the M.M. for his action, but it was not so; perhaps it was recommended but not passed.

As you'll know, to the right of prom.on the beach nearest the sea was a gas works, camp just inland of it. One night I was on guard duty. The guard sgt. said he'd be out and about, but we were not to see him, not to look and certainly not to talk to him. Once we heard him and then he returned to guard room. (We'd already passed some coarse remark, we didn't want to speak to him anyway). A little later he was about again, this time running, and started to climb gasometer ladder, he grabbed being on said ladder and yanked him down, complete with signalling lamp, he was the caretaker and a German spy. Hitler had spies all along the South Coast.

Mr Geoffrey A. Coates

I was in the Navy, had just left HMS Hood in 1940, and became part of a Landing Party to man shore mounted Naval 6 inch guns that ringed the coast from Mablethorpe in Lincs. to Poole in Dorset. I was drafted as a Gunlayer to the Hythe Battery. We occupied two houses on the sea front and had two 6 inch guns on the shore line. I understand that the row of houses were Admiralty property.

In June 1940 the Royal Navy contingent arrived in Hythe. A fully equipped landing party with full packs, rifles and hammocks. They took up residence in the corner terrace house of Marine Parade. Tubular scaffolding had been erected in the bedrooms for the slinging of hammocks. The two 6 inch Naval guns mounted on the grass across the road from the terrace were not quite ready for action. The concrete roof of the casemate built over the guns had not completely dried out. So the first night, shore leave was granted to most except for security personnel.

On returning from the town late in the evening, we were prevented from crossing the canal bridge by the Home Guard. They wanted to see passes. Not having any passes, but with true inebriated naval coercion we were able to resolve the situation. One of our number opened his wallet and meticulously and reverently, as only an intoxicated sailor can, unfolded a piece of paper revealing the cover of a recent magazine showing a large coloured picture of the King and Queen. I think they were glad to get us on our way. Passes or no passes.

On other occasions the sailors went ashore (as is their wont) unarmed; this was not popular with the army who soon issued orders for the naval ratings on shore leave to carry rifles and ammunitions. This directive did not sit too well with the sailors, so various ploys were instigated to divest this latest inconvenient appendage. One depository was the manager's office at the cinema. This was frowned on by the army and so was promptly banned. The sailors responded when passing along the rows of seats by inadvertently contacting other patrons feet with their rifle butts. Hence the sailors, by popular demand, could deposit their rifles in the manager's office once more. No matter what performance they watched, no rifles were collected until the last performance was over. Another ploy was to pay the entrance fee at the dance hall and deposit the rifle in the cloakroom. There were always many more rifles there than there were sailors dancing. But they all appeared before the last dance.

We did learn that the canal was full of barbed wire, and in the event of the enemy landing the canal bridges would be demolished, which was not very reassuring for our predicament at the sea front. In the back garden of the corner house a hole had been dug, and a small packing case put in the bottom. In the event of the battery being over run we were to remove the firing mechanism from the guns, place them in the packing case and fill in the hole

The house next door but one from the corner was taken over. On the ground floor front, my gun's crew on camp beds, the rear room for the R.A.F. crew of the searchlight, which was on the grass a little to the right of the guns. The upstairs was the Wardroom and the Officers quarters. Barbed wire surrounded the whole area, guarded by armed sentries. The junction of the road was the site of a sandbag enclosure housing the A.A. Machine gun. The sea shore was also festooned with barbed wire. An extension was built to the basement of the corner house and fitted as a magazine and filled with ammunition. So we were definitely living over a powder keg. The upstairs front room was made into the control room for the battery and a range finder was on a platform outside.

The verandas of Marine Parade were adapted so there was a walkway between the control room and the wardroom. The guns were manned from Dusk to Dawn, as was the searchlight. During a visit by General Ironside, who was in command of the area, the control officer was reporting to the

Captain by tapping on the window of the Wardroom. The Captain said he would be right out, which he was, without opening a window. A Doctor was sent for, but when he arrived, the sentry at the barricade who was unaware of the situation, threatened to shoot the doctor if he did not leave. Fortunately all was finally resolved without gunplay.

The gun crews standing down at dawn left a sentry in the gunbay. (The reason for a sentry was because one of the other coastal batteries had been sabotaged.) Then he went to get a few hours sleep before breakfast.

A ship was sunk in the Channel and the deck cargo of Pit Props were washed ashore and were tangled in the barbed wire. The crews were awakened to assist in salvaging the Pit Props. A huge pile very soon developed in Marine Parade. Fortunately a contractor with a lorry was procured and speedily loaded with Pit Props at fourpence a piece. The money went to swell the canteen funds.

Then Marine Parade had to be cleaned up, although "Keep off the Grass" was strictly adhered to, and the grass regularly watered so it would look normal from the air. The gun barrels etc. were covered by camouflage netting. The houses as well as the surrounds had to be ship shape for inspection by King George VI.

The King arrived in Army Uniform and was quite surprised to see the Navy in residence. He inspected all hands, the armament and accommodation, and spent some time in the Control Room, the first floor of the corner house. As the King left he ordered "Splice the Main Brace." This was the directive for all hands to be issued an extra tot (1/8 pint) of rum.

To the dismay of all concerned, the battery was victualled by the army which did not include the daily rum issue.

It came time for the Navy to be relieved by the Army, and an advance party came and took over. The Captain mustered all hands and said "The King ordered Splice the Main Brace. So splice it we will, even though it will take us a long time." He had decided to broach the supply of Action Rum, and so the ratings could finally toast the King in true naval fashion. "The King, God Bless Him." Then all were happy, and this made a fitting closure of the naval occupation of Marine Parade, Hythe.

The next day a fully equipped Naval Landing Party left Hythe to the capable hands of the Army.

So ended the visit of the Royal Navy to Marine Parade, Hythe.

Mrs Ethel Stanford

continuing from earlier reminiscences.

May '40 saw us all in active service doing many jobs besides our usual duties all hours of the day and night. All civilians carried on with their jobs despite dog-fights and air raids. At first when the warning sounded we belted for Mac's shelter (cellar!) (if we were out of Camp) but the C.O. soon put paid to that and it was 'get back to Camp-and duty'.

Going to the pictures was an experience as every serving man carried a rifle and 50 rounds of ammunition plus, of course 'tin hat' and respirator. The sights of rifles stood up by most seats. A.T.S. had tin hat and respirator too, so it was quite a performance unloading and getting settled in-woe betide anyone wanting to move.

The day the Parade and Bank were hit the Admin. officer and I had just collected the pay for students and staff and were turning the corner when the bomb crunched behind us. We were signalled to move off so, being thankful we were early that day we sped back and reported in. A fire bomb on the guard room (and ammo store) was ably put out by the R.S.M. who complained bitterly of the marks on his trousers. When a German pilot was taken prisoner he had to be kept under strong armed guard for his own safety. He had been machine gunning at low level-lynching seemed to be the main idea.

Things were getting a bit 'hot' and a plan was put forward to replace the A.T.S. with men. We did NOT think much of that idea-we were part of Hythe by then-and when an impromptu concert was arranged the girls lined up and sang a song:

"Please don't send away the A.T.S. you'll need us bye and bye,
Members of the A.T.S. are ready to do or die.

Remember what Dame Helen said 'You're next to the WRENS of the sea'
So if you send away the A.T.S. where will the Small Arms be?
They'll be far better of in the mush.....doing the Palais Glide".

The C.O. laughed so much he relented and we stayed on until moving with the School to Bisley in November 1940.

When we were in billets with no bathroom, the QM arranged for us to have a bath once a week in the White Hart Hotel. The room was huge with two baths so my friend and I enjoyed a bath each at the same time-much to the horror of the landlord. As we had to share a double bed and were very modest, and had endured the hardships of Shorncliffe Camp it was luxury to us. It was essential to know the password, (changed daily) when returning from Folkestone as the bus was boarded by armed guards very much on the alert.

Does anyone remember the loos at the bottom of Hospital Hill opposite the

Fountain pub? One needed 2 ha'pennies not 1 penny, to 'go' and no hope of getting in without those two precious coins. Some very red faces until we got the hang of it.

My first encounter with racial/religious discrimination was at the Catholic Church Hall. Everyone invited -we checked before going in- to the Social Evening. All was going quietly when the priest came up to my friend and I and said 'I think you are not of our faith. Would you please leave'. We just picked up our tin hats etc, and left. My friend was a Jewess but I was C of E. When the other girls heard about it they did NOT go there again. I have never forgotten how it felt, but Peggy shrugged her shoulders and said 'Shades of Hitler'

When we stayed in a house on the Marine Parade the sea came over the road making it impossible to use the front entrance. I think the sea wall has been improved now.

Just before we were due to move out-everything in the cookhouse and dining room clean, and polished like mad-a bomb hit the top "spider" and muck came down through both roofs. The language was awful-someone came up with a bottle of gin. One small girl, one small broom and huge lump of concrete was a sight to behold. Corned beef and salads were served at 1 pm as the Staff came in to lunch!

The night before we left Hythe a party was held at Stade Court. The weather turned wet and windy as we went off to Bisley the next morning.

(Taking part in the White Cliffs Parade and celebrations in Dover in September 1994 I spent a day in Hythe during that week. Old billets still there but a posh housing estate in Turnpike Camp, a plaque to show where the Small Arms School was. How lovely the Canal looked without the red tin huts. I called for a pub lunch at Stade Court and said 'I should apologise for that night in 1940-we could not do so next morning.' I had a lovely lunch.)

At that time, Lord Carrington was a 2nd Lieutenant in charge of the Guards Demonstration Platoon nearby. I remember him as a very good officer who looked after his men and stood up for their rights.

Following Mrs Stanford's letter, and correspondence with Lord Carrington, he gave permission for this extract from his memoirs "Reflect On Things Past".

"When I was rusticated from the 2nd Grenadiers I was sent to Grenadier Training Battalion at Windsor and from there to command a demonstration platoon at the Small Arms School at Hythe in Kent. I was at Hythe when, in the summer of 1940, the 'phoney war' of those early months was succeeded

by the astonishing German successes of May and June as the Wehrmacht broke through the Allied line, sent the British reeling back to Dunkirk and forced capitulation on the French in a brief, brilliant campaign that we all supposed would culminate in the invasion of England. At Hythe, we had a grandstand view of the aerial dogfights out at sea, the bombing of convoys passing through the Dover Straits. The summer of 1940 was especially beautiful, and there was a curious unreality in watching, without danger or involvement, the ships steaming slowly along the Channel with German bomb-bursts bringing up columns of water around them, overhead, Spitfires fought it out with Messerschmitts and occasionally a pilot drifted down by parachute towards the cliffs of Kent or the Hythe marshes.

My demonstration platoon -composite,with men drawn from all the regiments of Foot Guards- had responsibility for part of the beach defences in case of invasion. We gave demonstrations of skill at arms by day to the School students, and by night we went to the beach- our line of responsibility, I remember, extended for three and a half miles- and waited for the invasion. We were confident that if the Germans landed they would suffer appallingly. I almost pitied them. I commanded forty eight men with three light machine guns and forty five rifles. Personally, I had a pistol. I suppose we might have made sense of a frontage of a few hundred yards: we had three and a half miles. Nevertheless, I felt for the Germans who in their rashness might come our way: and they never did. I spent my 21st birthday on the Hythe beaches. I came of age."

Mr A.E.Broad.

113th Field Regiment RA 1941

Our battery of guns was positioned in the sandy hills near Boltolphs Bridge, facing the sea and just inland of the Military Canal. The armament position must have been bad at the time because we were using WWI French 75mm howitzers which we had to drag up wooden ramps into 3 ton trucks to move around the countryside because they had wooden wheels, and iron rims- being so old, but were quite efficient. I remember the Sergeant in charge of the gun had to do some conversion into English for ranges and angles of elevation etc. by writing in chalk on the trail of the gun carriage.

At Hythe we had to fill hundreds of sand bags to build our gun pits, with a retaining wall at the rear of the pit to stop it collapsing and more sand bag walls at the front to protect us in the event of enemy shelling or strafing. The local soil was very sandy so there was no shortage to fill the bags. The observation post, to record fall of shot and direct our fire was based in one of the old Martello towers on the beach and housed our O.P. staff and signallers. Other batteries in our regiment were at other places and villages along that stretch of coast. Occasionally we were able to go into town but not very often.

At one time during our time there, which must have been about 5 or 6 months, we were taken to the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway to

collect some ammunition which was being delivered by the railway, threading its way through miles of metal scaffolding erected to deter the enemy from landing. Some of our men were billeted in a brewery (disused) and I remember seeing an old barn there built on stone and brick posts about 18" off the ground, but I am not sure exactly where.

I think there was a pub at Botolphs Bridge of that name. It was near our gun positions that I stroked a new born lamb through a fence and was surprised how coarse its coat was.

Lympne Airfield was on the high ground behind our site, about a mile away, and now and again it was shot up by German fighters which made it very exciting. There was a road in front of our gun positions which started at the base of a hill by some cottages and ran alongside the military canal through to the Botolphs Bridge pub where it curved and carried on to the coast I believe. Our Division spent a lot of time training in Kent prior to 1942-Sittingbourne during the Battle of Britain, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Wrotham, before moving to Ipswich from where we went overseas. Kent is a beautiful county and I well remember the hop fields and orchards and oast houses.

Mr Frank Penn

My artillery regiment moved to Kent, the Botolph's Bridge area, in June 1940 and left early 1942.

One evening at dusk, 12 German planes came over. We thought they were our own until they started shooting up Lympne aerodrome.

A young Cockney mistook the rising full moon, and called out the Guard. He thought it was one of Hitler's secret weapons.

Kent to us Sussex boys was like a foreign country, the dart boards had no doubles or an inner on them, and to see hundreds of acres of fruit trees without barbed wire or wall round them was a novel experience.

The following comes from the history of the 2/7 Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment History sent by Mr Penn.

'On 23rd February 1941 the battalion moved to Hythe, where we took over part of the old small Arms School and Turnpike Camp. Almost immediately tragedy hit the battalion when on 24th February three beach mines exploded as a working party, guided, or rather misguided by an RE sergeant, was crossing a minefield near Hythe. Ten men were killed outright, and five injured, two of them so seriously that they subsequently died.'

Another entry in the history dated just after June 1st 1941 reads:

'A few days later there was another incident in the beach minefield when

over 100 anti-personnel mines exploded, possible due to a chain reaction after one mine had been exploded by field firing in the area. The only casualty was a small bird which, apparently, died from shock, although the explosion was such that most of the inhabitants of Hythe nearly followed suit.

Mr W. Griggs

Land Mine Incident 24th February 1941 11.30 a.m. Witness Account

I was 16 years old at the time, and a fisherman. A lot was happening in February 1941. A sea mine field had been laid in Hythe Bay, also a boom defence system. Land Mines had been sown on the seaward side of Hythe Gas Works, which were situated at the end of Range Road. This mine field was heavily wired with 'gannet' barbed wire.

Another anti-invasion system was being erected right along the coast, consisting of metal scaffold poles, forming a gantry, with mines bolted on them at set distances. At high water this defence system could not be seen. I am sure these mines were never primed. A lot of these poles and fittings were stored in the gas works yard.

On the morning in question, a group of soldiers - I can't remember if they were in the Pioneer Corps or the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (both regiments being in this area at the time) - marched along the foreshore stopping outside the wire directly in front of the gas works yard. Presumably, an entrance was made through the wire, for there was a loud explosion. I ran along the safe passage that had been left between the wall of the gas works yard and the wire. One soldier lay dead outside the wire and another could be seen holding a white handkerchief up in the air, from the crater.

An officer - of what rank or regiment I do not know - ordered that a long plank be brought over to him. I did not witness his action as I was sent to get grappling irons and rope, but was told that he cut the wire and laid a long plank from the wire to the lip of the crater. He refused to let any man come with him as he went to get the four injured men out. The bodies left were removed by the use of grappling irons. As far as I remember there were ten killed and four injured.

PS The mine field was swept and declared free of mines soon after the war in Europe was finished. A Hythe civilian walking across in 1946 was blown up and killed.

Mr F.N. Looker

I was at New Romney in 1941. I was in the 9th Battalion Royal Fusiliers in the Regimental Band. In action of course we were stretcher bearers.

I used to come to Hythe many times on the miniature railway. I think the RE's used to run it at that time. One of our officers used to drive it sometimes; he was a young officer then-he did it for pleasure. He became a Lieut. Colonel in the Italian campaign after our C.O. was wounded and taken P.O.W. I am still in touch with him today.

When at Hythe, I played with the local Salvation Army Band. On Sunday evenings we used to play outside The Red Lion - is it? Sometimes the three Services being there Navy, Army and Air Force friends in Hythe. The S.A. were very good to me.

Mr Raymond J. Pinchin

I was at that time a Cpl. serving with the 17 Battn. D.L.I. This Battalion was part of an Infantry Brigade made up of the 17 Battn. D.L.I., 14 Battn. D.L.I., and the 10 Battn. Green Howards. The Brigade moved into the Folkestone area in late 1940. Our duties were coast defence mostly. This was very hard work indeed.

However in April or early May 1941 each Battalion in the Brigade was required to form an Anti-Tank gun team. I was selected to lead the 17 D.L.I. team. Our team was then amalgamated with the teams from 14 D.L.I. and 10 Green Howards and were then know as the Brigade Anti-Tank Platoon.

We were then moved to and billeted in Hythe where we took over three 6 Pounder Anti Tank guns from the 67 Anti-Tank regt. R.A. They also handed over their billets and gun positions. As we knew very little about Anti-Tank guns the R.A. left three senior N.C.O's with us for a week or so to give us instruction.

No. 1 gun was sited close to the lifeboat station right at the end of the promenade. Our field of fire was straight down the beach towards Dungeness. Our billets and platoon HQ were in the first house on the right looking up towards the canal. On the opposite side of the road was an empty bungalow with a large garden. The whole of the garden was laid as a model railway. It was a lovely set-up with bridges and tunnels. I would have loved to have seen it working.

All the houses along the prom. were empty, some of them had been fortified. The beach side of the prom. was one solid mass of barbed wire. On the beach itself was a continuous Anti-Tank trap- it seemed to go on for miles. It was built with iron scaffolding and looked very impressive.

At the far end of the prom. was a cafe "Dr Syns Parlour". When time permitted we would nip along for a quick cuppa. There was a lovely girl worked there-her name was Carrol. She used to favour me with extra sugar.

Life was not all work at Hythe. We played a lot of cricket. Our Platoon could field a side capable of beating the Battn. teams. And swimming-we had access to the beach and weather and time permitting we would be down there. And another thing-there always seemed to be plenty of beer in Hythe.

A couple of fishermen still went about their business working from in front of the lifeboat station. They fished mostly with long lines laid out at low water. Several times they gave us a share of the catch. As I remember it was mostly flatties.

No. 2 Gun was sited in the garden of an empty house overlooking the railway. Their field of fire was to cover the marsh looking towards Dymchurch. This gun was however taken from this position and moved on to the quay at Folkestone harbour.

No. 3 Gun was just outside a pub. by the canal covering the bridge and the road leading to (I think) Saltwood. There was no doubt about it, Cpl. McDermott and his team had the best spot. The publican and his wife looked after them very well indeed. Having said that I must add that the gun team kept the area in a very clean and tidy condition.

As the threat of invasion grew less so our duties were eased off and in October the Anti-Tank Platoon was disbanded and we all returned, rather reluctantly to our Battalions.

I think I can safely speak for all members of the platoon and say we were happy at Hythe and very sorry to leave.

Lt. Col. Chris Pittam

In mid 1941 my battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment in which I was a young 2nd Lieutenant was sent to help defend Hythe. We had nothing other than the usual infantry Battalion weaponry, and I remember my platoon digging slit trenches near the beach in West Hythe as our contribution to stop Hitler's expected hordes. I was soon fortunate enough to meet a young and beautiful farmer's daughter, my present wife. But things moved all too quickly in those days, and within weeks I was off to India and Burma. My adventures and narrow escapes there are another story. My wife, to be, meanwhile finished the war with the Army in Italy, but the main point, amazingly, is that we did meet again after the war and were married in Hythe in 1947, more than 50 years ago.

Mr Syd Goodsell

The booking of tanks damaging the streets of Hythe
Whilst on the pay-roll of Hythe Borough Council, one of my tasks was to log damage done to roads and foot-paths by the Army. When sitting in an office at Oaklands, Stade Street, I was always involved whenever I heard the

distant rumbling of the approach of tanks. I would immediately drop anything I was doing and with a pencil and notebook, station myself at a very severe road corner, for example by the former Nelson's Head public house. (Rampart Road, Bank Street, and Prospect Road junction). This was a very severe left hand corner where invariably the tank tracks used to damage not only the road surface, but the adjoining kerb-work as well.

The identification numbers of the tanks damaging same were duly recorded by me and eventually a claim would be submitted by the Council, for the repairs and reinstatement, to an organisation called the Claims Commission, an off-shoot of the War Office. Their local offices were at Forge Cottage, Elham, (an early 1920's type bungalow on the Folkestone side of Elham) and Church Road, Ashford. I can still see these chaps on those tanks looking down wondering what on earth I was doing-it may seem strange after nearly 50 years, but that was how it was done.

The Army Bath Book

During late 1941 or early 1942, a scheme was organised whereby the A.R.P. Service Decontamination Centres could and were used by the local Army units for the purposes of giving "Baths" to army personnel. In fact, although the term 'bath' was used, they were showers installed in the centres at the outbreak of the war for decontamination purposes, obviously virtually dormant practically all the time.

At the Corporation Yard in Portland Road, Hythe, (later pulled down and replaced with housing), this scheme was in full swing for many years. The main basis of it being a Bath Book, in which the various units used to record the date, the name of the unit, the number of bathers, and of course, a signature of who was in charge of the bath party. Each bath cost one penny (in old Christian money!!). Once a month the book was returned to the Council Offices across the way in Stade Street, and bills duly prepared, and made out to the individual units addressed to them at Home Forces. In the fullness of time, they all seemed to pay up.

However, on one occasion a unit was addressed in error, as say for example, 109th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery, when, in fact, it should have been 109th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, R.A. The former unit, the Regiment, eventually got the account for so many baths in Hythe. They were actually in the Western Desert in North Africa and had never set foot in Hythe. Their letter returning the account was written in a most humorous vein, saying that they would have greatly appreciated a hot or even a warm shower once or twice a week where they were.

Mr Vincent R. Wilson

This is Vin Wilson who was in the Royal Engineers at the R.H. and D. Rly from April '41 to November '42, after paying a visit in 1940 to see about an armoured train. The 95 Transportation Coy HQ at Great Chart covered us

and the railway conveyed big guns near Canterbury. I was a boiler maker looking after the locos which ran the trains to Hythe every day for the troops in the area. The station tearoom at Hythe was very popular especially with our staff between trains and one or two families nearby made some of the train staff welcome.

I made regular visits to Hythe for the two cinemas, one called The Grove and then called in the Snack Bar near the Red Lion Square, where I also caught the bus for Folkestone sometimes. My father and I used a public house near the station and opposite the site of the barracks. There was also quite a good restaurant in Red Lion Square perhaps over a shop. Looking left from the upstairs window you looked straight onto the Red Lion Hotel. I used to buy cosmetics for the girl friend from a small chemists shop opposite the brewery (Mackesons or Whitbreads.) I used some clothing coupons too once to buy items from a shop in the main street on the right hand side before the later removed, Congregational/United Reformed Church. Just before we ran into Hythe we could see the large concrete Sound Locator on top of a hill.

I never managed to get down to the front where at one time there was a Holiday Fellowship Guest House. Beyond the second cinema before Seabrook there was a Garden Nursery with a very old cottage and nearby on the other side of the road up an incline was I think a convent. When the London Irish Rifles moved from Romney to Hythe district for a short while some of us paid several visits as we had been attached to them for billets and rations.

One Sunday morning, whilst a loco, one carriage and staff were checking telephone lines between stations, an M.E.109 appeared and started shooting them up not far from Hythe towards Burmarsh. No one was hurt after they had dived out of the vehicles. "Gert and Daisy" the two Spitfires who came over now and then were not about.

My wife in uniform was stopped by a policeman at Sandling Junction because the SR train could not get to Folkestone so she walked into Hythe, spent some time there, then caught a bus to Romney. My wife and I spent part of our honeymoon near the R.H.& D. station in October '42 and bought our wedding and engagement rings in Hythe.

Sometimes there was quite a time to spend between trains at Hythe as bringing troops down at weekends just after lunch times and waiting to take them back in the evening, involved killing time at the station cafe or other entertainment in Hythe. I noted that Hythe of course was thinly populated during the war owing to evacuations and certainly not a great many children about. No holiday camps open and bungalows deserted in the area. I might have been one of the longest serving soldiers in that area with a total of 20 months because there was quite a turnover of companies that we were attached to. The Somerset Light Infantry started running the railway before the R.E.'s who carried on till the war finished. The 5th Battalion Royal West

Kents had a short stay till the R.E.'s in January 1941 took over running the railway. There were reports that some old hopper wagons were used as road blocks at Hythe in 1940.

Mrs Bridget Chamberlain, nee Jarman.

I was born in Hythe in 1930 - father Russell, mother Biddy, and lived on Barrack Hill until 1946 when we moved to Castle Road, Saltwood. I went to Seabrook School, but when war was declared in 1939 it was decided that it would be safer for me to go to boarding school in Hertfordshire. I did not return home to Barrack Hill for holidays until 1942 and they proved to be quite an experience.

"Hit and Run" raiders came over and on one occasion I was in the garden and suddenly saw this German plane at rooftop level machine gunning anything that moved-I flung myself flat on the ground under an apple tree and fortunately received no injury, although the roof of the bungalow had a few bullet holes! I could see the pilot quite clearly, grinning all over his face-he knew just what he was doing. Of course, with Turnpike Barracks at the end of the garden it was not one of the safest places to live.

Mr N.E. Poulter

I was stationed in Hythe for 3 to 4 weeks with the 129 LAA Regt.RA in 1942. Although memories fade with time, I can well remember we had a Quad Lewis gun up on the roof of a grocer's shop in the High St. I believe it was Sainsbury's, the roof of which was flat, faced out to sea, and the Quad Lewis gun had 4 machine guns on a special frame, each gun capable of firing 100 rounds, a mix of ball -that's ordinary- and tracer bullets. It had two triggers and the 4 guns fired at the same time.

We also had 40mm Bofors guns situated at different sites around the town, one particular one was on an allotment which was about 300yards up from the main road which ran through the town, and behind some houses.

It was a Thursday morning at about 11 o'clock when a German plane flying at low level over the sea, roared up over the town, and near this Bofors which opened fire. The plane was hit and crashed killing the pilot and crew. The following week on the Thursday morning, at approximately the same time, 11 o'clock, a German long range shell fired from across the channel, landed on this Bofors gun site and killed the gun team. We young soldiers at the time said 'Tit for Tat'.

We assumed at the time that the German plane was looking for some oil tanks which were hidden in trees near the site. We were told that the tanks were there to flood the sea in the event of a German invasion at that part of the coast, and would have been ignited.

Mr A.W.Farrand

I served around 1942 in the 'Hotel Imperial' which was on the Front Parade of Hythe, and it was our Winter Billets for a period, and then the Battalion moved down the coast to Dymchurch and my Company was based at the bungalow village of St Mary's Bay. I remember the 'Hotel Imperial' was a gorgeous hotel with highly polished floors and lovely gardens, and we were walking about in hob nail boots on the floors, and very nice tennis courts and running transport and track vehicles all over the place. My unit which was based at the Imperial was the 4th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry, 129 Infantry Brigade, 43rd Wessex Division and our task was to defend Hythe in case of invasion.

Mr Victor Purcell

The sea-front was then a residential area with detached and semi-detached houses, 1930's vintage. Then a "restricted area" all the residents had been evacuated with the exception of a middle-aged couple who had been permitted to stay and who occupied the house next to the one in which we (a gun team of about eight) were lodged. A friendly couple; the reason for their being allowed to stay in-situ - during an earlier sneak low-flying raid (Messerschmitts I think) their house had been strafed and the man hit by a cannon shell, I think he had lost a foot.

Adjoining "our house" was a Martello tower (that should place the spot!) which had been converted into flats. Enormously thick walls! We used the roof of this as an observation post with a Bren gun. The Bofors was on the promenade in a sand-bagged surround.

The beach below, pebbled and steeply shelving was thick with anti-invasion stuff-barbed wire and tubular steel arrangements with mines attached. I remember it being eerie at night, on guard duty, and alone, one imagined the b***** were approaching in landing craft. (And I didn't drink in them days!)

With one or two other RC's I attended Mass at the local Catholic church and I remember Hythe as a lovely unspoilt place.

Mr A. Bibby

It was 1943, about August time, I was serving with the 409 Battery H ACK-ACK mobile 136 Regiment, 'A' Troop. We camped on Romney Marsh about two miles west of Hythe, taking the first right hand turn from the coast road. At this junction, there was a big concrete fortification.

Every time the shell warning was sounded, the Dymchurch Light Railway armoured train came out on patrol. All of Kent was cordoned off with road blocks etc, and all mail was censored. This was for about six to eight weeks. The GHQ was at Ashford. I do not know the name of this operation, but I do

know that there was a large number of aerodromes built by the simple method of strong wire mesh in grass fields for the use of fighter aircraft. I remember the Typhoons setting off for France from the aerodrome at Lymgne sweeping down the hillside "hedge hopping" our Radar Aerials.

Mr George Blunt

I was stationed in Hythe in 1943/44 serving in the 4th Battalion The Northamptonshire Regiment. I was eighteen at the time and was a member of 'D' Company. The Headquarters of the Company was in a very large hotel on the seafront- I forget the name. My platoon (17) was billeted in a Martello tower on the seafront. At the far end of the promenade was a large tin building formerly a life boat station. I believe we had a ridiculous two pounder Hotchkiss gun taken from a World War I destroyer with which we were supposed to keep the Germans at bay. I remember too the Parish Church. After heavy rain bodies used to reappear from the graveyard. (*Apocryphal? H.P.S.*)

Mr Alan Dracup
Adventures in Kent

I was posted to the 38th (Welsh) Independent Squadron Reconnaissance Corps based on Shorncliffe Barracks, This would be early May 1943. After a period of "settling in" we began nightly patrols from Shorncliffe with a Light and Heavy armoured car, commencing at 19.30 hours, and calling in at Home Guard posts, Customs posts, Lighthouses, and so on, up to thirty of these, arriving back at Shorncliffe around 07.30 hours. (On one occasion I slept the whole way round!) We were in the Belisha Barracks (circa 1938) which were wooden structures with concrete floors, and of course, while we were 'sleeping' during the day, the rest of the lads were in and out with their army boots, rifles, mess tins etc., all day long!

After about a month, we moved to Lyminge and used this as a base to take two cars down to an estate somewhere in Hythe, where we had a forty foot aerial in the garden of one semi, while we had the use of the kitchen in the house next door. I sat in the front room of one house, with a No.11 set and a telephone. I was supposed to keep in touch with the heavy car as it did a similar tour to the Folkestone patrol. If it met trouble, I had a code word to give through the telephone, which would, in effect raise the entire anti-invasion force! I would point out that we had been told that when this chore had been carried out by the infantry, they had lost a sergeant and six men one night. (This was when we were raiding the enemy coast with Commandos.) This was quite stressful for an eighteen year old, especially after about twenty minutes one lost contact every night, and it seemed ages before you received a reply to your constant signals. One night, the period when I had expected to resume contact had lapsed, and more time went by, I kept reaching for the telephone, but then wondered if I should give the codeword, or attempt an explanation. Finally, well overdue, I heard the roar of the

Heavy Humber in the street. I ran out to meet them! It seemed they were at a Home Guard post when a bomb was dropped alongside, which removed the 11 set aerial from its socket!

When we eventually, after about a fortnight packed up, I was taken back to Lyminge by 15 cwt truck, having helped to dismantle the aerial, and the following day was put on a charge.

Mr Dracup went on to explain that he wasn't in charge of the dismantling of the equipment, but nevertheless was called to account. However, through a series of events which can only happen in war time, and which didn't happen in Hythe, he 'got away with it' as he put it.

Mr Albert W. Trivett

In April 1943 my Division, The 59th Staffordshire Infantry Division were deployed in the various areas of Kent, after our working up periods in the North East of England and Northern Ireland, along with other Divisions preparatory for the coming Invasion. Three Artillery Field Regiments had 25 pounders, my Regiment the 61st Field was deployed around Hythe. My battery and 242 battery were billeted in empty private houses in Saltwood, and during our six months stay we did many final tuning up exercises which involved manhandling our guns by dragropes over and through obstacles in the sand dunes. We practised climbing down rigging nets suspended from high scaffolding whilst carrying full kit, to simulate climbing down nets from a ship. We also did a dummy invasion run by embarking onto landing craft and going so far across the channel and as we turned to return, we could see the French shore at the Pas de Calais.

We left the area of Hythe on October 31st 1943 to go to Ramsgate where we eventually water-proofed our vehicles and equipment, proceeded to Tilbury docks, embarked on military troop ships HOUSTON CITY and INDIAN CITY and sailed for Southend to form a convoy then proceeded to the invasion beaches. I have only a few memories of my stay at Saltwood, due to sustaining a leg injury during an exercise in the area of Lewes, which resulted in having to be hospitalized in Benenden Girls School, that had been converted to a military hospital. So whilst recuperating during my return to Saltwood, I think I only ever walked down to Hythe once.

However, my very first memory of Saltwood was of wonderment at seeing almond nuts growing on trees in the gardens of the houses, and of the heady smell of lavender and other flowers. The various places that I had been stationed in the north and north east coast and Northern Ireland each had their own kind of scenic beauty, but alas, with damp and cold conditions. So you can imagine how we all felt with the different climate.

Another memory is of how I was taken in over a game of darts. One of my army mates and I went to the working mans club (or British Legion?) to have a quiet drink. We started to play darts, when an old chap who was wearing his WWI medal ribbon on his jacket approached us and asked if one of us

would give him a game. Him being rather dodderly and four foot nothing, me being a six footer, and secretly feeling sorry for him, I volunteered. The first two games I tried hard to lose but somehow won them. The third game he asked if I was willing to have a little wager on it and suggested it to be a quart of beer and twenty cigarettes. Being that it happened to be a week that I had been paid five shillings (pay was five one week and seven the next) and I had still to buy some blanco and brasso for kit inspection, I thought that I had better play the third game serious. I never got a look in and I had not seen darts thrown so accurate, resulting in my mate and I both having to contribute money and cigarettes, and I never went in that place again.

Another memory is of a lovely old white haired lady who lived in the house next to the one that some of us were billeted in. Because I could not walk very much due to my leg injury, most of my off duty time I sat on my kit playing a harmonica mouth organ. Playing the tunes that were in the vogue at the time, but mostly Scottish tunes and the heel tapping reels. One day a knock came on the door, I went down the stairs and on opening the door was confronted by a little old lady. She had a plate full of scones and said would I give them to the Scottish boy, so I asked which one, she said the one who is always playing the Scottish tunes, and how much she liked to hear them and how sorry that he was so far from home. I felt embarrassed to have to tell her that it was me and I was not Scottish but had taken to the tunes whilst we were stationed up North. For the short time that we were in Saltwood I enjoyed a beautiful friendship with that lady who really cried when I said that we were leaving to go elsewhere, and I didn't even know her name.

I remember having to go on an NCO's course at Hythe Small Arms School, where I was given instructions on a new weapon that turned out to be the PIAT (Projector Infantry Anti Tank)

Mr F. Worrall

Our unit of the 59th Staffordshire Infantry Division was billeted in a Girls School, which I am sorry to say, I cannot remember the name of, but I do recall that it was on a hillside overlooking Romney Marshes, You wish to know about our stay in Hythe. The one thing I always remember is doing Guard Duty on the wagon lines which were at the top of the hill behind the school, and in the hedge-row I heard nightingales singing, in spite of us marching up and down in hob nail boots.

After the war there was a programme on the wireless about nightingales, and they said how difficult it was to record them, as things had to be so quiet, and yet not one, but two or three, were singing most of the night while we marched up and down doing our guard duty. By the way, I hope you still have nightingales, and I am sorry to say I haven't heard any since that time.

Mr Thomas H. Brooks

In 1943 I was for some three months stationed at Shorncliffe Camp near Folkestone. I was a Wireless Operator in the Royal Signals. I was in a Signal Section attached to a Royal Artillery Regiment, but the signal section was entirely separate from the Artillery Regiment. (A Signal Section comprised 32 Personnel:- 12 Wireless Operators, 8 Telephone Linesmen, 2 Dispatch Riders, 6 Drivers, 2 Electricians, plus one Sergeant and one 2nd Lieutenant.)

I had been on leave when I arrived back at Exeter. I found that the Section had already departed for Shorncliffe Camp. An all black American Transportation Company was in possession of the Exeter Barracks. We had been doing all their signal and telephone requirements.

I spoke to their officers (all white) - they told me that they had been given permission to retain me at the Barracks for a period of ten days to man the large telephone exchange and to train some of the black Americans in its use. I was not allowed to sleep in their huts. I was given a small room in the American Officers Billets. In the daytime I manned the exchange solely, being relieved by one of the Negro G.I.'s I was training. At 5 pm I routed the outside lines to the American Officers Mess. My biggest work load was taking down messages from women to the black G.I.'s.

At the end of the ten days I packed my gear and went to the R.T.O. at Exeter Railway Station and was given a ticket to Folkestone. I arrived at Folkestone in the afternoon. I was picked up by one of our Signal trucks and taken to Shorncliffe Camp.

As a Signal Section we were still training. Our Officer hit on the good sense to make each Signal Tradesman learn the basic skills of each other's trades. I being one of the young operators was sent out with the Telephone Linesmen; in a sense it seemed an exercise in futility. We laid out telephone cables along the Sandgate - Hythe road. Then the next day, we would reel all the miles of cable up, then lay them out once again. We went through the back streets of Hythe. To cross roads or streets we simply used to tie the cables to house gutterings and down pipes. The house owners made a fearful row. In Sandgate we had criss-crossed the main street with cables using guttering. An RAF truck with a bomber's wing came through. The wing was too high for our cables and pulled all the gutterings down. All the residents who had lost their guttering gave us a hard time. We simply retorted with the ubiquitous phrase "Well, there's a War on." I remember an old lady who snapped at us "Well, stop aiding the Germans then!"

In the Gymnasium at Shorncliffe, we were given a lecture by an elderly officer; he droned on and on about the War and the BOCHE. When he had concluded, he asked if there were any questions. I asked "The Boche seem to be doing very well, but how are the Germans doing?" He just looked at me with disdain and went off to the Officers Mess.

Two weeks later all the soldiers were lined up on the Parade Ground. A

young woman accompanied by two Police Officers walked down the lines of soldiers. It seemed that she had been raped by three young soldiers the previous night. She stopped in front of me. I felt a feeling of guilt. The Police Officer asked me to speak the phrase "Come for a walk darling." Then the lady said "No, it is not him - he has a Welsh accent." But I had to be interviewed by the Police. I told them that I had been to a cinema in Folkestone. One police officer asked me what film was showing. I still remember the film now, it was "You Were Never Lovelier" with Rita Hayworth. Back in Camp I became a sort of celebrity. Soldiers would ask me "Was she nice?" "Did she struggle?" "Who was with you?". In a sense, I had the notoriety but not the pleasure. I was totally innocent. We left Folkestone for Dorchester.

Mr F. Green

I remember I was stationed in a large hotel, right by the sea, and other companies were in surrounding houses and buildings. While there, my pal and I used to go to Hythe Salvation Army. To get to this, it was, if I remember right, quite a distance, as most of this area had been emptied of people. I should say we had a 20 minutes walk from my billet to the Army, and had to walk along side of a canal.

We had to do patrols all along the coast, and were called to 'stand to' quite a few times, as they said the Germans had tried an invasion, but a lot of their boats were sunk. We also heard that bodies had been washed ashore; whether this was true I don't know.

Part of our training involved marching in single file along the coast road with rifles at the ready (but not loaded) pausing at intervals to fire at imaginary aircraft strafing the road.

Mr Brian Guy

Just prior to D Day

The area where we were was a large camp site with standard army bell tents, the area was grassed and had a few trees, somewhere near Hythe. We were not allowed to speak to anybody local, come to that, we could not talk to anyone! Full Stop! The whole camp was guarded so that we could not communicate with anyone at all. Very strict guarding!

We were allowed to queue up at the back door of the local Pub, but only if we had our own "jam jars". No jam jar, no beer!! Even then we were not allowed to speak to the landlord, only to order our jam jar of beer. We were then marched back under guard to our field. I can remember that one day we were all paraded and issued with French Invasion money; previously there had been a story going round that we were off to Africa to set up a training centre. That was just wishful thinking. At the time I was just nineteen and as green as they come. I had spent some time during the blitz in Southampton so knew all about war. But still an innocent young man.

I can remember while there, the thoughts that ran through our heads at night.

Will I be killed in the morning? Will I be brave on the morrow and not show I am frightened in front of my mates? Sadly, a great many of those young men were killed or wounded!

As to the place where we were at? Well, I cannot help! We were not allowed to talk to anyone and had only been told we were near Hythe.

Mr C. B. J. Feltham

Memories of Hythe - Summer 1944

1 The pleasant evening stroll from Lympne Castle, passing cottage gardens full of arum lilies, along the canal road to Hythe for a 'cuppa' and a warm welcome.

2 The interminable line of Red Cross ambulances, some with the Canadian maple leaf, which appeared one night shortly before D Day, and which stretched, nose to tail, along the canal road as far as the eye could see. They disappeared one night a day or two before DDay.

3 The amazing barrage put up by rocket launchers sited on Romney Marsh, whenever a doodle-bug appeared from over the French coast. Only a few got through, many fell in the sea. One landed on the copse below Lympne Castle, demolishing a heronry-and nearly myself.

4 Watching, with horror, a mid-air collision between two aircraft, one a trainer plane. The pilot, I believe is buried in Lympne churchyard.

5 Listening, late one June evening, to distant gunfire from Dover and the French coast accompanied with the melodic notes of a nightingale's song.

Mr H.R.Wallett

I served in the RNVR and we were stationed at the Sutherland House Hotel as a detachment from HMS Lynx in Dover. I think that we were called Party X2. We remained in the hotel for several months prior to and after the Normandy landings. We were also in possession of the Imperial Hotel, Stade Court Hotel, and one other house whose name I have forgotten. It could have been "Lyndhurst".

I remember very well Princes Parade and especially the Hards. Church services were held at the church on the top of the hill. We explored the region and countryside on foot, such names as Saltwood and Romney come to mind.

Looking back, I do not think that those days were very happy. We were in the middle of a world war that was going to cost and result in the loss of 50 million lives.

Mr Wallett sent a second letter of memories.

When I arrived in Hythe in 1944 the first thing I noticed was that it seemed to be a quiet, undisturbed little town, where lots of the houses had been closed down. Being based at the Sutherland House Hotel, we were for the most of the time working along the Sea Front. The first thing I noticed there were the The Hards, and yet during my stay can only remember having seen one landing craft on the beach, no doubt having returned from D Day operations. It was also in 1944 that I saw the flying bombs and rockets on their way to London, some of them being actually chased by the RAF.

Mr Douglas Palmer

I was a young RAF ground crew member on No 3(F) Squadron stationed at Newchurch through April-August 1944. Our living conditions were very spartan, just tents in a field, but we were young and it did not worry us. Our main job was to deal with the V1 flying bombs, and our wing, consisting of three squadrons, successfully downed 638 bombs, regrettably many on parts of the beautiful Kent countryside.

The V1 campaign started just after the D Day invasion on June 6 and more or less ended in September, when our invading armies over-ran the launching sites in northern France and Belgium. The defence against the flying bombs was in three parts. Firstly, RAF fighters were charged with shooting the V1's down if possible over the sea. But the RAF only had one type of fighter which could fly as fast as the V1, the Hawker Tempest, and this was only marginally faster, so it was often a long chase from the coast inland, often resulting in the bomb being shot down over Kent. The second line of defence was barrage balloons which were strung out over northern Kent but did not have the success as the fighters.

The third line of defence was an anti-aircraft barrage, moved into place, I believe in mid July. Along the coastal areas some sixteen hundred guns of various sizes were set up. Many of these were manned by the Woman's Auxilliary Service (the ATS). I think some of the guns were very close to Hythe, as we used to visit the gun sites watching the crews shooting, mainly through the night, but I think the main attraction was the canteen they brought with them! One site I recall being south of the Newchurch-Hythe road and north of Burmarsh. This gun barrage stretching along the south coast was, I have read, the largest anti aircraft barrage ever assembled. As the gun barrage became more effective the work for the RAF fighters diminished, so some of the RAF boys visited the gun sites to add to the cheering when a gun was successful in blowing a V1 out of the sky!

It was a very busy time and often difficult to get away from the airfield, but on odd occasions I visited Hythe, recalling one afternoon walking from Newchurch to Hythe to visit the Odeon cinema, and walking back again with my friends! That day not one lorry or truck passed us until the outskirts of

Hythe. Transport was difficult to arrange due to the allocation of petrol supplies. On the odd occasion I visited the cinema only a few bodies were scattered among the seats, all service people and always in the afternoons. But we were directed to the seat by an usherette, a young lady in uniform, who I seem to remember had to stand a lot of "chatting up" from the Army and Air Force lads!

Not very far from the Odeon site there was a Forces canteen, where tea and cake was always very welcome. I think it was manned by ladies of the WVS who did such stirring work for us, standing behind their large tea urns, always ready to serve and give us a smile. The WVS tea ladies were worth their weight in gold! I found them in Margate, Ramsgate, Dover, Folkestone, Hythe, Dymchurch, Littlestone and various other places. Wartime rations in the RAF were such that whenever we managed to get away from the airfield it was straight to the WVS canteen. I must also pay tribute to the British Legion Canteens. My wife, in the WAAF at this time also recalls visits to various canteens run by the lady volunteers.

I recall Hythe as being very quiet, only a few people in the streets, not many shops, I suppose the population of the town was very small in those days, as it was a wartime restricted area, I believe. Of course, there were no cars, only a few service trucks. Many shops were closed, but was there a small Woolworths in Hythe during the war days? If so I can recall wandering between the counters, perhaps only five or six other people around and a few girls on the low counters, all very subdued and quiet, so different from today's stores. I was there at times during the shelling. I cannot remember any pub being open, but I expect there was, probably only serving beer due to the severe restriction or shortage of spirits. I can recall walking from the cinema towards the canal, it did not seem far, and not seeing any other person. Occasionally an Army lorry would trundle through the town. Dymchurch appeared to be more active with many army units in tents along the coast road from the sea wall and I believe most of the holiday chalets and bungalows were used by service personnel. There were of course the Woman's Land Army girls. There must have been some on the many farms around the Hythe area.

Thinking back to those days I always wonder why the Romney Marsh part of Kent appeared so quiet, although there were fourteen airfields operating in 1944, spread over Newchurch, Ivyhurch, Brenzett and other places.

Mrs Bridget Chamberlain

continuing from earlier reminiscences.

I remember the "doodle bugs" and how our lives used to revolve around how much we could get done between each one! Mother and I slept in a Morrison shelter - father away on Service - as their flight path went right over us and how we used to hold our breath when the engines cut out. Actually, there wasn't a lot of sleep because of the noise of the ack ack fire coming from Romney Marshes - as they tried, and often succeeded, in

shooting them down.

The Morrison shelter was named after Herbert Morrison, Minister of Home Security in 1940. Winston Churchill described the shelter in Volume II of 'The Second World War'. "The Morrison shelter was developed, which was no more than a heavy kitchen table made of steel with strong wire sides, capable of holding up the ruins of a small house, and thus giving a measure of protection. Many owed their lives to it."

Mr C. Bundy

I was in Hythe in the Heavy Ack Ack trying to skittle the flying bombs, I must say we were very successful. We were stationed in a tented camp in a field where we could see bathing huts on the beach, or perhaps it was a holiday camp. Whilst there we also put up a diving board so that we could bathe in the nearby canal. I must add that I have fond memories of the locals who were very good to us.

Mr C. Coffin

I remember three events which occurred while I was at Hythe when the V1's were coming over.

I was an 18/19 year old in the Royal Artillery Heavy Anti-Aircraft, and when the doodle-bugs began coming over, we left the Portsmouth area where we had covered the invasion forces and deployed to Headcorn in Kent. We were a mobile battery and as we did not have much success there, we moved to Hythe to deal with them before they came inland.

I recall on one afternoon, we were visited by the G.O.C. A/A Command, and the usual big brass (I think Churchill's son or son-in-law.) While they were on the site we destroyed six V1's in the air. Quite a good performance we provided for them.

On another occasion I remember a damaged V1 circling above the gun site, and as we weren't equipped for this, we could only wait for the fuel to run out for it to come down. Luckily it didn't land close by.

Another time I was leaving the gun site and managed to hitch a lift with a G.I. in a jeep. As we travelled along the coast towards Folkestone, out of the sky from the opposite direction appeared a doodle bomb heading straight at us. We could do nothing. There were some light guns firing from our left and over our heads, and just as I thought my time had come the V1 sheared off and exploded on the beach, below the level of the road, which protected us. A very lucky escape.

Mr R. Kirley

Before and after D Day I was stationed in Ashford on Recovery. A couple of weeks or so after D Day we were sent to Hythe every day for about a week. A ship carrying a Canadian Engineers Regiment was beached on the Goodwins. Their equipment, including lorries and road building gear such as road-rollers, bulldozers and stone crushers, was being brought ashore by landing craft at a concrete hard at Hythe. We had the job of unloading the equipment from the landing craft and moving it along the road to a transit camp a few miles away.

We were interrupted from time to time by buzz bombs coming over the Channel in groups of four or five. These were fired on by anti-aircraft guns sited behind Hythe, aimed at bringing down the buzz bombs while still over the sea. This was fairly successful (in) bringing down one or two out of every group. We observed this while lying under the Scammel Recovery truck, sheltering from the quite large amount of shrapnel coming down from the guns.

Miss Janet E. Brown

During a misty weekend in September 1944, at the age of 11, together with my parents, I stayed at the Station Master's house at Sandling Junction - my mother's uncle Albert Langford, was Station Master at that time and wore a smart uniform and hat. I remember they also had a spaniel.

The weekend was the last of the shelling from France and I remember all of us walking through the lanes (no lights anywhere) down to Saltwood in the evening. In Hythe, hoping to see the sea which I had last seen in Margate in 1939, coils of barbed wire prevented any access to the beach because of mines- and I remember being disappointed not being able to collect sea shells.

During VE commemoration week in 1995 and with no family surviving, I felt I just had to spend a few days in Hythe. I called at the Station Master's house - Mike and Pauline Sullivan opened the door. They invited me in and very kindly showed me the little room I had slept in during those noisy nights from the shells and there too, I was having tea in front of the fireplace I hadn't seen for 51 years. My diary of 1945 shows that we also spent VJ day at Sandling Junction.

Mrs Grace Cudby, nee Copson.

I was in Hythe during World War 2. My Mother and Father came to Hythe in 1944. They were the owners of the Bell Inn Public House. They used to be very busy then with soldiers billeted in Hythe. I myself used to go down when I had my time off. Their names were Mr and Mrs Copson known to all the residents as Alf and May.

When I got bombed out in London I went down and joined them. I used to help them in the bar during that year; we had the Americans who were stationed on the Sea Front. Next to the Pub was an allotment. I met my husband in Hythe that year, and in March 1945 I walked out of The Bell to go to my wedding at St Leonards Church. We held our wedding reception at the Hythe Light Railway. I was in Hythe until August 1945.

Transcript of tape from Mr Gordon Copson, Mrs Cudby's brother, who served in the Royal Navy in WW2 and who recalls visits to Hythe during his parents' tenancy of The Bell. Some direct quotes, other parts paraphrased. Mr Copson's connections with Hythe started in February 1944 when on leave from the navy he visited Hythe with his father, who on doctor's advice had been advised to leave London. They came down by train, and went to look at the Bell 'at the end of town'. Mr Copson continued:

'Having looked at it, he decided he liked what he saw and we then went back to town. I then went back to my ship. Father and Mother carried on with negotiations to take over the tenancy. The Bell was owned by Mackeson's brewery and the man in charge at that time was a Commander Finlay. Everybody was satisfied and at Easter 1944 they took over the tenancy. Their names were Alfred and May Copson.

The pub was different then. Three bars. RH from road, the lounge. At the front a small snug, and an L shaped bar round the side. The present car park was a garden, on the opposite side of the lane was a nursery run by Elaine and her son, Wiltshire.' Regulars included a retired policeman 'large and stately' called Peerman, and an actor Leo ??? who in a 'flamboyant style sported a broad brimmed hat'. Another regular was Babs Tattersall, a bank manager's wife who was 'great fun'. Another couple were the Savages who kept a fruit shop in the High St. He was in the RAF. There was an 'old rogue', nicknamed 'Cocker', whose face was like 'uncooked liver' and who was so objectionable that he was permanently banned from the pub. A day time regular was a 'lady' who came in. Mr Copson believed she was one; she had a 'couple of snorters' each day and always finished with a peppermint. Described by Mr Copson as 'a rather charming lady'.

There were British (AA gunners) and American soldiers as well, who were 'frequent visitors' and there was never any trouble between them, and 'quite a pleasant time was had' The Americans were generous and open handed, and at Thanksgiving provided turkey. When Mr Copson was coming on leave a parcel 'full of exotic foodstuffs, which had not been seen since before the war' appeared.

After D Day 'when quite a few of our American friends had gone away we were sad to hear that some we had known and liked had not made it, and we owed them quite a debt of gratitude. The Americans, as my memories go, made a very good impression on Hythe as a town'. After the invasion during

a week-end leave, Mr Copson and his girlfriend watched for something like 24 hours while the flying bombs were being attacked. First by fighter planes over the sea, then by the enormous battery of AA guns which were sited near Hythe, and those that got past were attacked again by aircraft. Quite an impressive and frightening episode and in some ways I would have been safer at sea. If one walked through the street there was such a quantity of anti-aircraft shell splinters coming down that it was almost mandatory that you wore a steel helmet. Otherwise you were in physical danger of being injured by the pieces that came down.

Christmas 1944, on leave after a Russian convoy Mr Copson joined a very good family reunion. His girlfriend had leave from the ATS and also an uncle who was in the army and a cousin from the marines. After a good Christmas lunch, as restrictions had been relaxed, they walked down Twiss Road and then along Princes Parade to Seabrook before retracing their steps back to the Bell.

Boxing Day. 'Girl friend, and cousin had to go back,' and father and uncle went to Folkestone to see the traditional football match, while he stayed 'quietly' with his mother at the pub, 'celebrating well if not wisely'. Next morning at 4.00 he took Newman's coach up to Sandling station to return to his ship in Scotland. Unfortunately, in his post Christmas haze he picked up an empty suitcase and left all his kit in Hythe -until he came back in March of 1945.

March 1945. Mr Copson was best man at his sister's wedding to an RSM at St. Leonard's Church, the service taken by Canon Newman. He walked with his future brother-in-law, Chris, to the church. The reception was held at the Light Railway Hotel and then back to the Bell for further celebrations.

April 1945. On leave Mr Copson became engaged to his wife, Dorothy. They bought her ring in Folkestone, having travelled there by East Kent bus with wooden slatted seats, which made 'quite an impression'. Family celebrations, as spirits were in short supply, were in new local brew known as PA1 Bitter.

On various visits, walks through the town took Mr Copson to two other hostelrys, the Red Lion, (publican Lilian Rudguard) or the Duke's Head (Dot and Bob Gifford), over the Bailey Bridge back along the canal bank to The Bell. There was dancing at the Institute, to a 'small live band' (no drink there), and the pictures at the Ritz, a 'fairly modern cinema' at the bottom of Station Road, or, down a 'back road' to the wooden building (called the Essoldo?) which didn't show pictures every day, but 'it made a change from going to the Ritz, or into Folkestone'. Other walks took him to 'the paper shop on the left hand side' of the High Street, or to 'other places of refreshment of which Hythe was definitely not short'.

August 1945. Mr Copson's parents moved to the Guildhall Hotel in

Folkestone. 'With a certain amount of sadness we spent an afternoon and evening packing into tea chests and boxes.' His parents belongings were going into storage. 'I was going to the Far East. The following morning with a bit of a hangover and some sadness I said Farewell to Hythe'.

June 1946. 'Equipped with a very heavy sun tan and a lot of gifts' he returned to Folkestone to be demobilized. He married and lived with his wife in Folkestone until 1951, when they moved to London. Since leaving the area they have visited Hythe frequently. Mr Copson concluded, 'Hythe always has a soft spot in my heart but I can't get used to the changes which have taken place. It's not the Hythe that I knew.'

This poem was sent anonymously

With the 1/6th South Staffordshire Regiment, Hythe, Summer 1943

Here- within sight of the cliffs of Calais,
Butterflies out and Summer come,
To chase the Hun from his white sea chalet,
Our lads from Gloucestershire, chaps from Brum.

Green grass again, and English faces,
Bat on ball as the shadows fall,
Cricketers come from a score of places,
Soldiers and sailor men, comrades all.

Englishmen over the world remember,
The rise of heat the May month brings,
The long June days till soft September,
Are ones for cricket-and other things.

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(See them in Hythe Bookshop)
- ▶ it works with the Tree Restoration Campaign
- ▶ it produces a NEWSLETTER free to Members, 6
times a year

*If you have no further use for this Booklet,
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