

# WW2 People's War

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## D-Day as a Child

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Location of story: Gosport Contributed on: 02 November 2003

Article ID: A1951940

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/38/a2301238.shtml>

I was born in 1933. My parents had a little fish and chip shop in Gosport, Hampshire. During World War Two, unbeknown to us, Gosport was designated a major jumping-off point for troops and supplies for D-Day, the event in which the allies were going to re-invade Europe.

Of course we didn't know this at the time. It was highly secret, although folk in Gosport had an inkling that something was going on. During the run-up months, as a boy of about ten years old, I noticed big — for me at least — pyramid, concrete bases being erected in streets near to our shop. A giant — to me — metal girder could be fixed to those blocks to prevent traffic flow.

### The tanks turn up

Then one day we were told that we could not leave the town without a special pass. Soon other strange things also began to happen.

First, tanks began arriving in our road and in many others around about. They parked at intervals and, to our surprise, didn't proceed. They remained immobile for weeks, the crews sleeping in their tanks. Parked at intervals between the tanks were what we called smokestacks.

A smokestack was a towed oil-burning trailer with a tall chimney that produced thick, oily smoke, which acted as a smokescreen. The acrid smoke would penetrate our little shop every night.

Only gradually did it dawn on us, increasingly, that something big was in the offing.

### 'Chip boy'

Every evening, my mother would make up dozens of packets of fish and chips. It was my job to carry them in a big basket on our sack trolley and hand them out to soldiers who wanted them. The soldiers were not allowed to leave their tanks, but we knew they could smell the lovely fish and chips.

'Take no money,' my mother said to me. 'I think those boys are going off to fight.' I think they had no way to pay.

For some weeks I distributed the fish and chips, and became known as the 'chip boy'. The soldiers were always pleased to see me. I would entertain them with a tune on my mouth organ, which was my signal that I had arrived.

### **A midnight procession**

Then one night, about midnight, there was a sudden roar, a shuddering that filled the air and rattled the streets. Our little house shook, as dozens of tanks started their engines and proceeded to churn off up the road towards Stokes Bay, a beach where, in those days, we were not allowed to go.

People poured out to their front doors, in pyjamas, and waved to the passing, thunderous, midnight procession of tanks and lorries.

'I reckon they are off to France,' said my step father, who had been a soldier in World War One, and still, 20 years after, needed to prise out pieces of shrapnel from his wounded left leg.

### **All quiet by morning**

In the morning there was not a vehicle to be seen. Only in retrospect did I guess that we were probably among the first ordinary people in the world to witness the onset of D-Day.

The following evening we heard on the BBC news: 'Today an invasion force...'

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