

NORMANDY LANDINGS

D-DAY 6TH JUNE 1944

THE VOICES OF VETERANS

Ron Mayes

2nd Battalion,
King's Shropshire Light Infantry
Place of Birth: Haverhill
Wounded

Ron Mayes was born in Haverhill on 6th December 1924. Apart from the 5 years he served in the army during WW2 he has lived in the town all his life. After leaving school he had several jobs, the first at the Hovis Mill, followed by a stint in the Laundry, and finally helping to build West Wratting Airfield. As he approached his 18th birthday he decided to volunteer and travelled to Cambridge to do so. Ron was given a reprieve to enjoy what may have been his last Christmas at home and on 3rd January, 1943, he joined the Royal Sussex Regiment at Colchester. Ron hoped that being in Colchester he may have been able to get home for weekends but no such luck! During his 16 weeks training there was no leave.

In the run up to D-Day, the army presence near Newhaven increased. Ron's battalion was under canvas near Haywards Heath and had leave for 6 or 7 weekends on the trot. During the last couple of weeks they moved nearer the coast and weren't allowed off camp. If they went on a route march they were under escort.

Right: Troops board at Newhaven

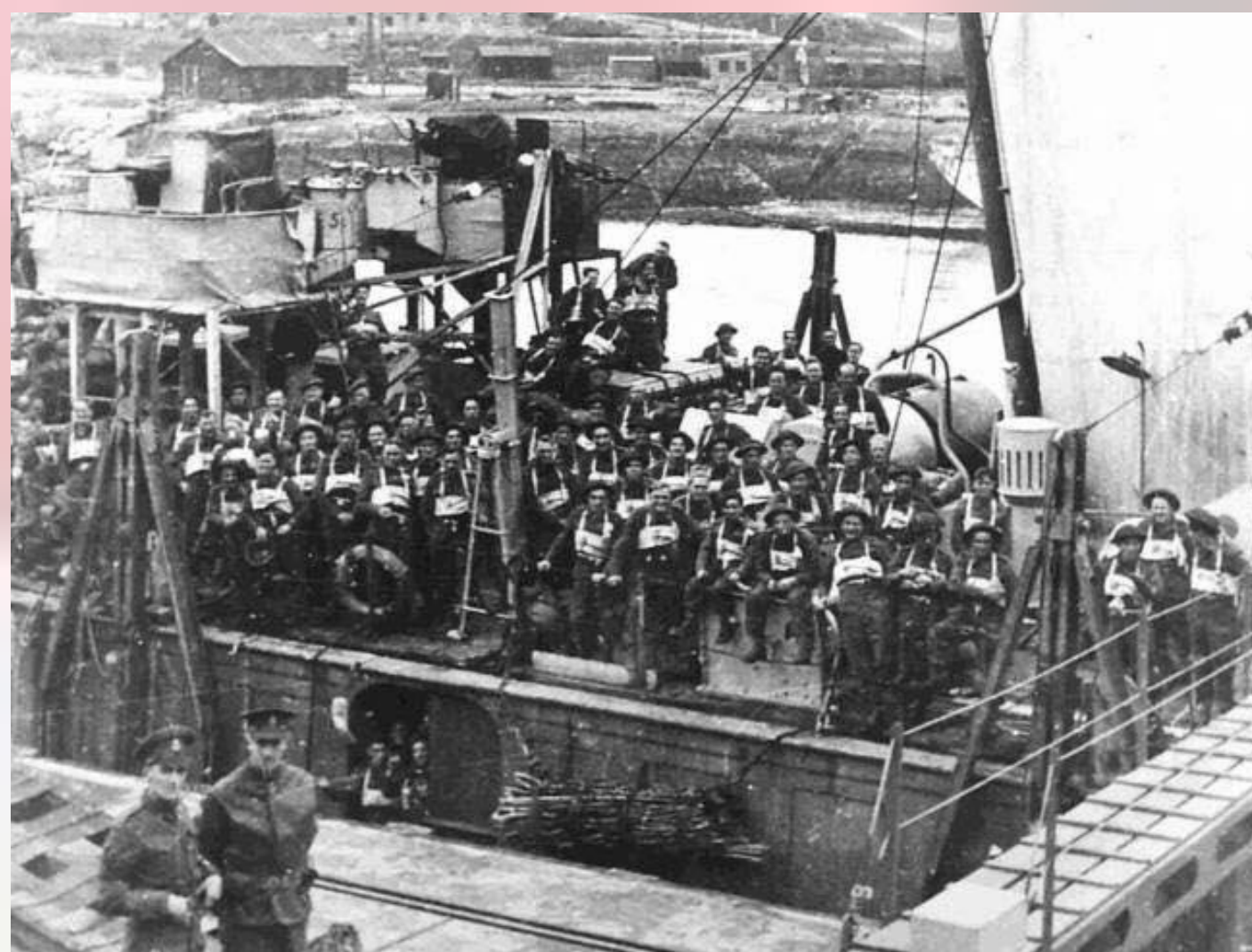
Due to the atrocious weather they spent all of Sunday and Monday on board not knowing when they would finally get under way. Even today Ron can remember the smell of the diesel. "We just wanted to get going. We had no idea of what was waiting for us. We thought it was an adventure!".



Ron spent 11 weeks in a Canadian hospital. After a further 5 weeks in hospitals back home, Ron had 10 days home leave before re-joining his regiment. By the end of November 1944 he was back in France. Before long they had advanced to Belgium and Holland.



Ron was transferred to the 2nd Battalion King's Shropshire Light Infantry which had returned from the West Indies in 1942. He joined them in Berwick on Tweed and then moved with them to Lockerbie. Unbeknown to Ron, another Haverhill man was also in this regiment. Albert Robert Barber had left Haverhill for London some years earlier and had settled in Acton. Pte Barber lost his life some 6 weeks after the D Day landings.

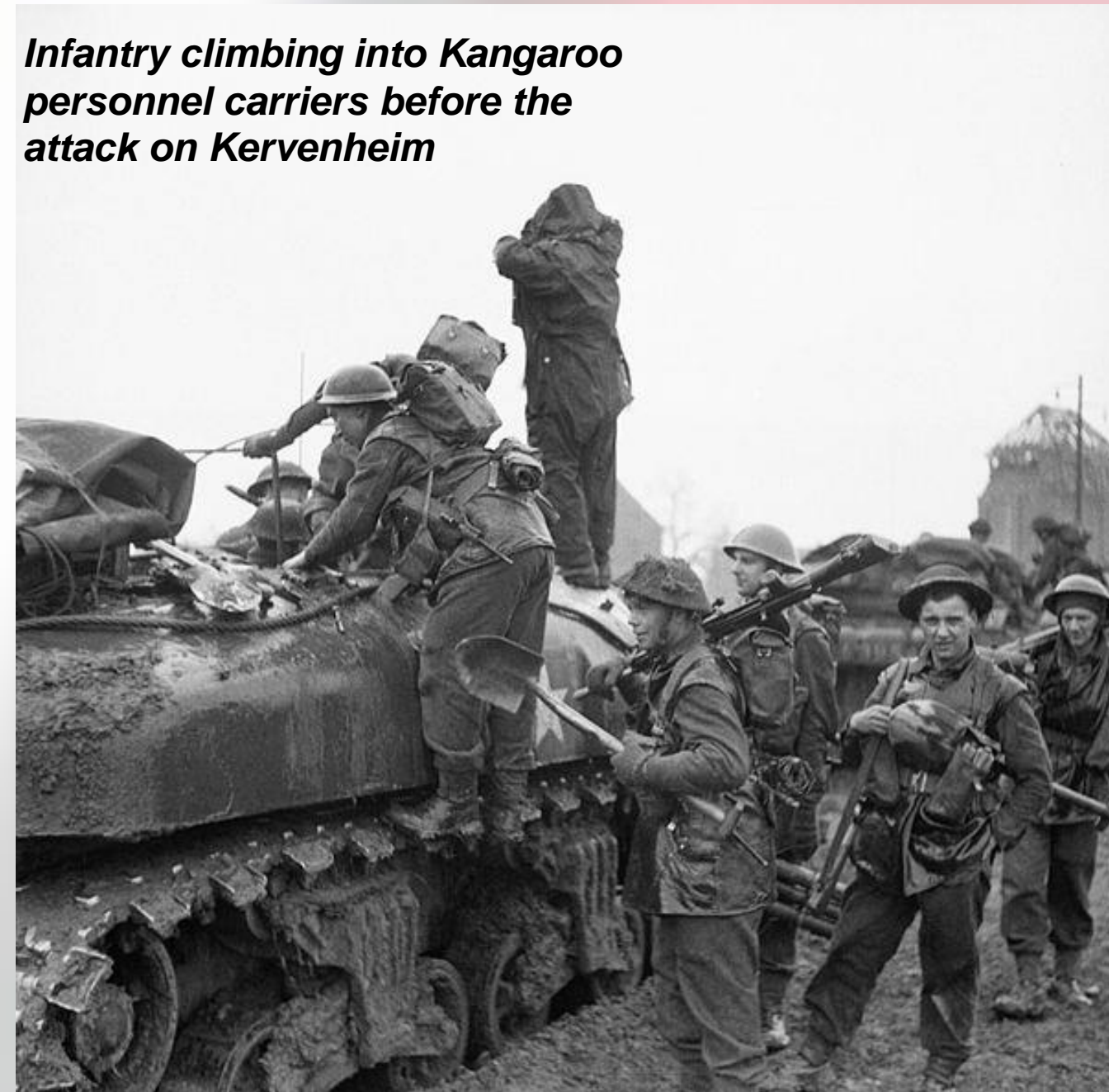


On Sunday 4th June Ron boarded the LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) that would take him to Normandy. These were large vessels capable of carrying almost two hundred fully equipped troops, the equivalent of an infantry company or more.



Ron was just 19 when he landed on Sword Beach. He disembarked by catwalks that were lowered from either side of the bow, into over 4 feet of water. He was carrying his rifle and a backpack in which he carried two or three pairs of clean socks – an infantryman always thinks of his feet!

By 1pm, three hours after landing, Ron was wounded by shrapnel.



Infantry climbing into Kangaroo personnel carriers before the attack on Kervenheim

AFTER D DAY:

1 March 1945; The Battle of Kervenheim

Ron served alongside Pte Stokes who was later awarded a VC for his part in this action.

In October 1945, Ron was posted to Egypt and Palestine before spending the final year of his army service in Cyprus. The journey home was by ship from Port Said to the South of France, overland to Calais and then by ship to Liverpool. Ron was demobilized in 1947 and returned to Haverhill.



In 2014 Ron was awarded the National Order of the Legion of Honour. This is France's highest distinction and is awarded in recognition of both military and civilian merit.