

PRELUDE TO D-DAY

Devon's Role in the Storming of Hitler's Europe

Gerald Wasley

Over twenty years of original research lie behind the author's remarkable retelling of the last months of the Second World War in Devon. Following the Allied agreement on a strategy to reclaim Europe from Nazi occupation, Devon's beautiful coast became the crucible from which was forged the mighty forces that were to be unleashed on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944. From official British and American records, and through the inclusion of over 250 photographs, maps and other illustrations, Gerald Wasley reveals the detailed military planning and months of training undertaken by thousands of troops that brought success on D-Day. And yet at what cost to those who were forced to move from their homes to make way for the US Army? In November 1943 the authorities announced that an area of over 30 000 acres in South Devon was to be evacuated to allow realistic battle training, throwing over 3000 residents out of their homes just five days before Christmas that year.

In *Prelude to D-Day* the author portrays life in Devon before the war and changes brought about during the early war years up to the arrival of the US Forces leading to the evacuation of the South Hams. He examines the reasoning behind the choice of training areas, the logistics involved in their operation, elements of training, live firing, and experimental weapons. New light is thrown on the circumstances surrounding Operation Tiger, a training exercise in which over 700 troops lost their lives. The D-Day landings themselves are covered, as are the lessons learned, with rare photographs and maps making this a significant and important book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Gerald Wasley is a retired Medical Laboratory Scientist who lives in Surrey. He is the author of several books on medical laboratory science and scientific papers, including 'Naval Medicine and Surgery at the time of the Armada'.

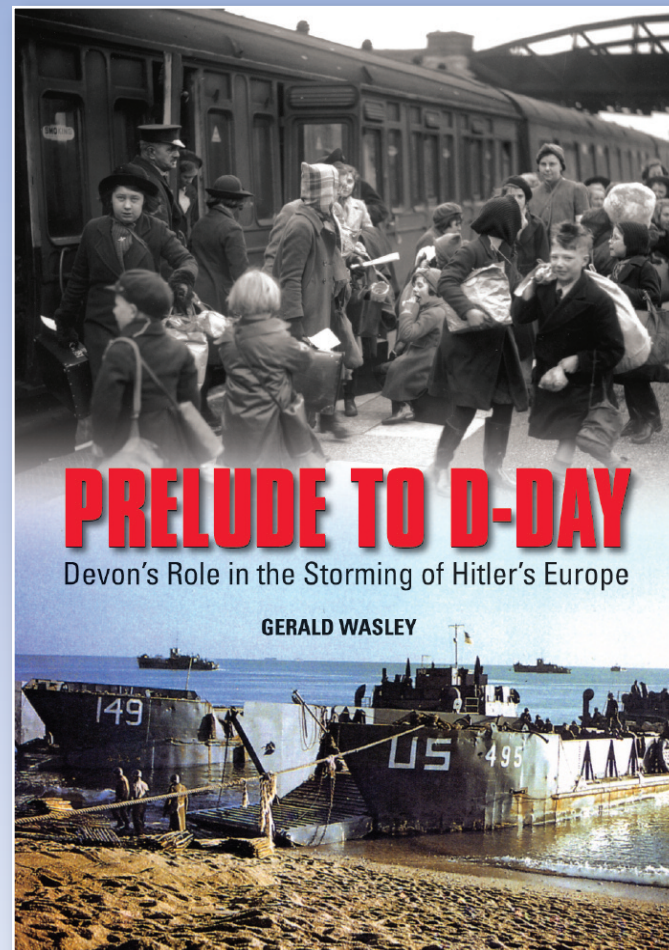
More recently he completed his postgraduate research in History at Kingston University, London, and was awarded an MA and PhD, with the following commendation: "Gerald's investigation into local and national archives is assiduously leading to a rich depiction of local responses to the challenges of total war on the Home Front. His study of local communities in time of war will add much to our understanding of civilian morale; a very important issue in current scholarship on the Second World War"

The author has close connections with the Westcountry; his wife was born in Plymouth and, as a schoolboy, he was evacuated from Acton, Middlesex to Dartmouth, an episode that later inspired him to write history books on Devon. These include, *Blitz: An Account of Hitler's Aerial War Over Plymouth*; *Mount Batten: The Flying Boats of Plymouth*; *Devon in the Great War*; *Devon in the 1930s*; *Devon at War 1930-1945*; and *Plymouth a Shattered City*, all published by Halsgrove.

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PRELUDE TO D-DAY – DEVON'S ROLE IN THE STORMING OF HITLER'S EUROPE



Troops of the US 4th Infantry Division embarking on to a landing craft. Notice the large painted letters that spells out 'Dartmouth' on the embankment wall that should have been deleted at the time of the expected invasion of England.

Below: Amphibious exercises on Woolacombe Beach. Troops emerging from the open bow of a landing craft, watched by observers to the left of the picture c.1943.



9 Departure for D-Day

THE MONTHS OF exercises and rehearsals had come to an end with the completion of Exercise Falaise. Whatever the consequences of the disaster Tiger Force may have been, the Allies were confident that their invasion plans had not been compromised. At the end of May 1944 General Eisenhower moved from Wokingham, his headquarters at Bully Park, Teddington, to Southwick Park, near Portsmouth, to prepare for the departure of the greatest armada that was ever to sail. The massive effort of men and materiel was to be the crowning of the expected invasion by the Allies was not far off. However the German High Command was still unsure as to when and where exactly the main Allied landings would take place.

After exercise Tiger and Falaise the troops did not return to their base camps but went to their marching areas, there to wait for almost a month before they departed for Normandy. For many of these men D-Day would be their last home. For the soldiers who after all their training to open to speculation the 4th Infantry had never experienced combat before. However the troops were not worried about Operation Overlord until the last week in May. What had been a cause of concern to the commanding officers was the troops that had completed their training were not sufficient to fill the ranks of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122nd, 123rd, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, 135th, 136th, 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