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D-Day 80: Navy wife remembers the Normandy landings

A newlywed whose husband left their honeymoon to take part in the D-Day offensive has been reminiscing ahead of the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings.

Mary Holley revealed her husband Roy's ship was torpedoed during the Allied invasion of northern France, which commenced on 6 June 1944. She had married him just a few weeks earlier.

The D-Day assault marked the start of the successful campaign to liberate Western Europe from Nazi occupation.

Mary, 99, now lives at Royal Star & Garter in Surbiton, which provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia. The charity also has Homes in Solihull and High Wycombe, and runs new services reaching out into the community.



Mary at Royal Star & Garter and (inset) with Roy on their wedding day in 1944, shortly before D-Day

Mary had met Roy shortly before the start of WWII. The couple were courting for a year before he was called up to the Navy in 1941. Following a three-year posting to the Far East, they married in April 1944, after Roy returned home on a week's leave.

The newlyweds honeymooned in Weston-super-Mare, but within days they were separated again.

Though she did not know at the time, Mary later learned Roy had left to prepare for D-Day, on the cruiser HMS Frobisher. She said: "During the Allied invasion, his ship bombarded Gold Beach, in preparation for the landings. However, his vessel was hit by an enemy torpedo, and fearing it would sink, the crew were given orders to abandon ship. But when the Frobisher remained afloat, the men were able to clamber back on board."



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The crew remained in place for several days, despite swallowing substantial amounts of oily sea water while in the Channel, and later Roy was one of a party sent ashore to establish a signal station at the strategically important city of Caen.

Mary said: "I did not know Roy was involved in the landings at the time, but I assumed he was. And I stayed positive, I didn't fear the worst, I expected the best."

Thankfully, Roy did survive D-Day and the war. He left the Navy in 1946, and the couple went on to have three children.

Looking back on Roy's service during WWII, Mary added: "When he was called up to the Navy, I felt very proud. Everybody was called up, so you were no different to everyone else. I knew there was a war going on and I would not have seen him again for a long time, but that was that... All I focussed on was that he was coming home and we were getting married."

The last D-Day veteran cared for at Royal Star & Garter lived at the Surbiton Home, and died in November 2023, just a month before his 100th birthday.

Wellbeing Teams will be hosting events and activities to mark D-Day in each of its three Homes on 6 June.

Royal Star & Garter is welcoming new residents into its Homes. For more information on this, the new services provided, or to work at for the charity, go to www.starandgarter.org

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About Royal Star & Garter

Our charity provides loving, compassionate care to veterans and their partners living with disability or dementia.

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