



D-DAY LANDING AT SAINT AUBIN-SUR-MER WITH 48 COMMANDO

JUNO BEACH

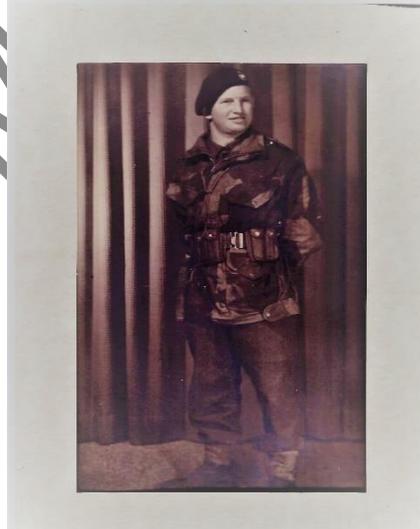
THE 1st WAVE WITH ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY BEACH COMMANDO

**CHEVALIER IN THE ORDRE
NATIONAL de la Legion D'honneur
CITATION**

Royal Marine PO/X109887 GEORGE AILWYN STEPHENS



1944



2018



Background

The overall Objective of D-DAY "Operation Overlord" for those troops landing on Juno beach was, to form a link between Juno and the adjacent beaches of Sword and Gold; and to cut the Caen to Bayeux road, and seize Caen-Carpiquet airport which was (west of Caen).

The detailed Objective for 48 Commando which is the Commando Ailwyn was in and also (the latest and last Commando to be formed) was to land at Saint Aubin-sur-Mer at H Hour 8.10 am on the 6th of June 1944, before swinging east to attack and capture the strongpoint at Langrune-sur-Mer; while 41 Commando who were to land at Lion-sur-Mer on Sword beach and had a similar strongpoint to capture, would proceed west. After completion of their appointed tasks the two Commando units were to meet, and the gap between Juno and Sword beaches would be closed. 41 Commando was the Commando that Ailwyn's brother Herbert was in. They met 2 days after the initial landings and Ailwyn wished his brother a Happy Birthday!! Herbert had sustained a bullet ricochet wound to the head.

"Juno" beach was the codename given to the 10 kilometre (6 mile) stretch of Normandy invasion coastline on which 48 Commando were to land. The beach was divided into two designated assault sectors by Allied command - "Mike" between Graye-sur-Mer and Courseulles to the west, and "Nan" between Courseulles and Saint Aubin in the east. The landing beach at Saint Aubin was designated "Nan Red".



'A' Troop RM Commando

The Operation

A fortnight before D-Day, 48 Commandos were stationed at a sealed camp in Swaythling, near Southampton under canvas. At 17:00 on the afternoon of 5th June 1944 the Commandos departed Warsash on the River Hamble. Overnight they crossed the Channel, arriving off Juno beach at Saint Aubin the following morning. The crossing had been quite rough, with a heavy swell, and many of the Commandos experienced seasickness. H-Hour was set for 07:45 but strong currents, reefs and submerged German obstacles delayed the landing until approximately **08:10**. As the Royal Marines neared the coast, naval ships bombarded the shore defences in a deafening barrage of shell fire.



RM Commandos approach "Fortress Europe"

Viewing the Normandy coast from their Landing Craft, the Commandos' plan was to land on the beach just to the right of the church spire in Saint Aubin (towards Bernieres).

The tide was rising and on approaching the beach some Landing Craft became caught in German sea defences, constructed of spiked metal stakes with mines attached -approximately 30% of the Landing Craft were damaged or destroyed. Some Commandos decided to wade ashore from their stricken landing craft but, weighed down with 100lb packs, they were tragically swept away and drowned under the weight of their equipment.

It was planned that the Canadian 8th Infantry Brigade, the North Shore Regiment would land first, secure the beach-head and be followed ashore by 48 Commando. It is true to say, in the confusion, that Ailwyn Stephens and 48 Commando' Landing craft touched French soil first.

The forces had been briefed that there would be two exits from the beach but discovered that in reality there was only one. Canadian tanks of the 10th Armoured Regiment (better known as the Fort Gary Horse -formerly a Cavalry unit) experienced great difficulty manoeuvring on the soft sand. In the confusion and melee, as the tanks advanced up the beach with turret lids down they even ran over Commandos and other troops lying injured on the beach. Wanting to protect the casualties, a senior Commando Officer who was clearly angered by what he was witnessing, pulled the pin from an anti-tank grenade and hurled it at a Canadian tank.

Extreme resistance was encountered from the soldiers of the German 716th Infantry Division who were afforded excellent observation and firing positions from the seafront houses they had commandeered.

With little cover from the floating tanks which had raised skirts around them (many of which had sunk before coming ashore), 48 Commando had to "rush" the sea wall, but the Royal Marines were under fire all the way up the beach. In securing the Beach Head, the first wave of Canadian Troops and the Commandos suffered very high casualties.



Commandos breach Hitlers Atlantic Wall

The battle to advance to Objective was also to prove incredibly fierce. Leaving the beach behind them, the Commandos dumped surplus kit in the garden of a house directly off the beach. In close quarter, house-to-house fighting, they moved through the centre of the village, encountering streets blocked with thick meshes of barbed wire.



Canadian troops at St. Aubin

The objective was for 48 Commando to move east and attack Langrune-sur-Mer, while 41 Commando who had landed at Lion-sur-Mer on Sword beach and had a similar strongpoint to capture, would proceed west. The two Commando units were to meet after completion of their respective tasks, and the gap between Juno and Sword beaches would be closed. If German tanks had exploited that gap, both Juno and Sword beach-heads could have been wiped out.

Naval ships off the coast were requested by the Commandos to cease their support after one salvo of shells fell among one of the Commando Sections, killing the Officer and one Marine and wounding several others. Safe from friendly fire, the Commandos were then able to proceed onwards towards Langrune.



48 RM Commando move towards Lagrune

On 8th June, having secured Langrune, 48 Commando moved onto Douvres-la-Deliverande. Three days later on 11th June, orders were received for them to proceed to Pegasus Bridge (which spans the Caen Canal near Ouistreham) where they were to assist the Parachute Regiment in efforts to hold this strategic point.

D-Day, the 6th June 1944, was probably the most significant day in World War II, and a crucially important contribution had been made to the success of the operation by 48 Commando Royal Marines (with the support of the Canadian Infantry Division).

The strongpoint of Langrune had been secured and a continuous link established between the beaches of Sword, Juno and Gold. Securing Juno Beach allowed 22,000 troops and their equipment to come ashore on D-Day, albeit at a cost of 340 dead and 574 wounded.





OFFICERS' GROUP "D-3"—SOUTHAMPTON

Captain Godkin, Lieutenants Curtis, Goodlet, Aldworth, Ford, Square, Yates,
Lieutenants Mackenzie, Smedley, Grant, McLean, Fouché, Captain Lennard, Lieutenant Winser, Captain Hoare,
—Second-Lieutenant Rubinstein, Lieutenant Rigby,
Captains Linnell, Reynolds, Majors de Stacpoole, Sanders, Lieutenant-Colonel Moulton, Captain Flunder,
—Rev. J. Armstrong, Major Freeman, Captain Perry.



On behalf of the French people they offer their warmest congratulations on this high honour, which recognises your military engagement and steadfast involvement in the Liberation of France during the Second World War.

Therefore in deep gratitude for your services, the President of the Republic has appointed you the rank of Chevalier in the Ordre National de la Legion d' Honneur by decree on the 27th January 2018, which I bestow on you today.

Colonel R.G.H. Herriot. OBE.DL

HM The Queen's Representative

18th March 2018

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