

George Edward "Ted" Owens (1924-). Royal Marine Commando Pembroke Dock.

Written by Greg Lewis.

Early Years

Ted Owens was born on 12th August 1924 in Pembroke Dock. His family kept a public house called The Olive Bar. Ted's grandfather lived with the family and would take Ted into the countryside to hunt. They did not hunt for sport but to put extra food on the table and to exchange food with other families. Ted learned what food could be found in hedgerows, and how to track and understand wildlife. In the early years of the war Ted joined the fire brigade as a teenage messenger. He was on duty during the Pembroke Dock oil fire of August 1940, when German aircraft bombed the oil tanks and the blaze burned for 18 days.

Royal Marines

Ted was called up at 18 and found himself at a Royal Marine training camp. While he was there an order came through for all those with the highest grades in their training to be selected and told to pack their kit and board a train. Because of the survival skills taught to him by his grandfather and his very high scores as a marksman, Ted had been chosen for a new unit – the Royal Marine Commandos.

The recruits were detained ten miles from their destination – Achnacarry Castle – and told to make their way across the mountains of their own accord. Training was tough, with expectations very high. It used live ammunition and made use of the inhospitable terrain which surrounded the remote castle. Ted's proficiency on exercises in the mountains led to a sergeant dubbing him, 'Taffy, the Welsh goat'. It was a nickname which stuck throughout his training.

D-Day: 6th June 1944

Ted was assigned to 41 Royal Marine Commando and, in the early summer of 1944, was posted to Littlehampton in West Sussex. The Allied high command was moving its forces onto the south coast of England ahead of D-Day, the invasion of France.

When Ted boarded a landing craft, he was still not certain that the invasion was the 'real thing' – he had taken part in so many training exercises.

"The sea was rough, and everyone was being sick over the side. I was fine until the message came that we had to eat. We had these self-heating tins of oxtail soup. I had some of that and I was sick over the side too. I've never eaten oxtail soup since."

41 Commando was to land at Lion-Sur-Mer on the extreme eastern sector of the invasion force. The beaches here were given the codename Sword. Once ashore 41 was to fight its way to a meeting point with another unit at a Petit Enfer.

Ted and his unit landed at 8.40 am. It was high tide, and the narrow strip of beach was crowded with men.

Ahead of Ted was a German unit occupying a fortified bunker. Ted fired several shots before a shell or mortar bomb struck the tank which Ted was sheltering behind. Ted was showered with pieces of hot metal – many of which are still in his body to this day.

“I was lying face down and the medics thought I had had it. But when one of them turned me over, my eyes moved, and he realised I was alive.”

Ted was sent home by ship and spent many weeks in hospital. He was sent back to the front in August 1944 but, because of his injuries, he was excused all kit, except his rifle.

He caught up with his unit in the town of Pont l’Évêque, and then fought his way along the coast to Dunkirk.

On 1st November 1944, Ted took part in the landings at Walcheren in the Netherlands to help clear the route for shipping into the port of Antwerp. Two of his friends were killed by a landmine, and Ted was injured, but he fought on into central Holland.

Shortly before Christmas 1944, Ted was wounded for the third and final time when a bullet ricocheted off a wall and went through his throat.

He spent several weeks in hospital and was demobbed after VE Day.

After the War

On his return to Pembroke Dock Ted re-joined the fire brigade and later worked for many years on boats on Milford Haven waterway. He also married Laurie, who had worked as a plotter for the RAF during the war.

It was not until after Laurie died that Ted began to talk publicly about his wartime experiences. In 2019, he starred in a three-part television series called *Lest We Forget*, which followed Ted as he retraced his wartime footsteps in the company of two young friends – aged just 10 and eight.

Ted was also proud to receive the *Legion d’Honneur* from the French Government for his service in the liberation of France.