

THE RARE WW2 D.S.M. GROUP AWARDED TO A COMMANDO FROGMAN OF THE LANDING CRAFT OBSTACLE CLEARANCE UNIT, THE 'LOCU BOYS'. D.S.M. FOR THE LANDINGS IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE AND D-DAY AS L.C.O.C.U. NO.1, "A" SECTION LEADER; HE SURVEYED THE BEACHES AND DESTROYED UNDERWATER OBSTACLES AND MINES IN THE BAIE DE CAVALLAIRE, HAVING PERFORMED SIMILAR SERVICES IN THE NORMANDY LANDINGS, AND ASSISTED IN THE RESCUE OF WOUNDED AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHOSE LANDING CRAFT HAD BEEN MINED AND SUNK



**DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL, G.V.I.R. 'P.O., H. C. GORE. R/JX.209374'
OFFICIALLY ENGRAVED NAMING; 1939-45 STAR; FRANCE AND GERMANY
STAR; DEFENCE AND WAR MEDALS 1939-45, MOUNTED AS WORN**

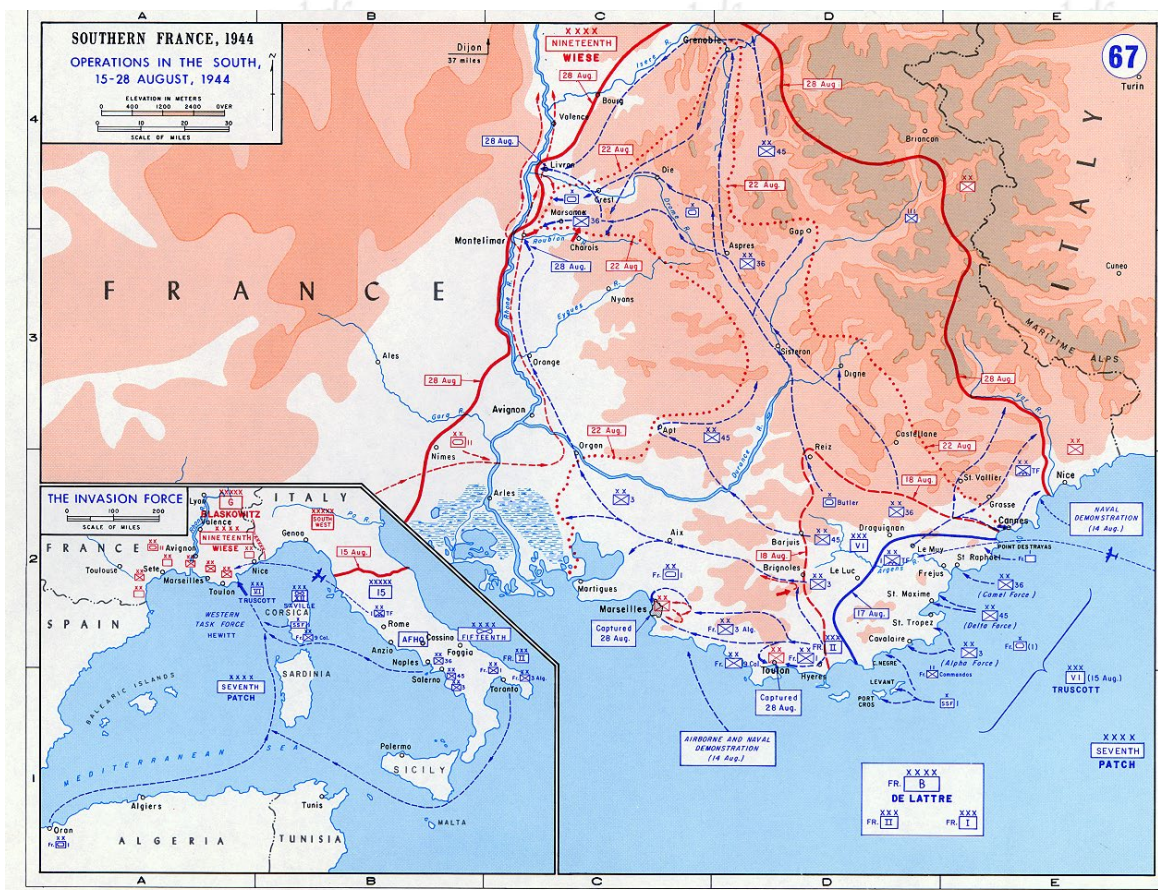
Petty Officer Henry Charles Gore was a frogman in a Landing-Craft Obstruction Clearance Unit No 1, one of 120 such men engaged on D-Day, two of whom were killed and ten wounded; six of them were awarded the D.S.M. Just two L.C.O.C.U. units subsequently participated in the landings in the South of France, making Gore's award of the D.S.M. most unusual. Being a Petty Officer, Gore would have been senior rating in his unit, which consisted 1 Officer, 1 Petty Officer and 16 other rating. His recommendation specifically lists him as Section Leader, 'A' Section, Unit 1. Details on the L.C.O.C.U. Frogmen, including a Pathe News film, can be viewed here:

<https://www.commandoveterans.org/book/export/html/10860>

D.S.M. *London Gazette* 6 November 1945:

'For bravery, skill and great devotion to duty in the reconnaissance and destruction of unknown obstacles and mines, and in the rescue of survivors whose craft had been destroyed in a

minefield, during the landing in the Baie de Cavallaire in the South of France, June to August, 1944., and for similar good services in the landings in Normandy.'



The recommendations for this batch of awards are in Admiralty Honours and Awards file H&A 940/45 in the National Archives under reference ADM1/30497 which reads:

'The Honours and Awards Committee has considered the good services of certain ratings in the destruction of underwater obstacles and mines during the invasion of the South of France and submits that the King may be asked to approve the Awards set forth below. During the landings in the Baie de Cavallaire in the South of France these ratings successfully carried out under fire, the initial reconnaissance of unknown obstacles and mines and achieved their destruction. They also did good work in helping to save the lives of wounded soldiers of the United States Army when the craft in which they were embarked struck mines and sank.'

The individual recommendation for Petty Officer Gore adds to this:

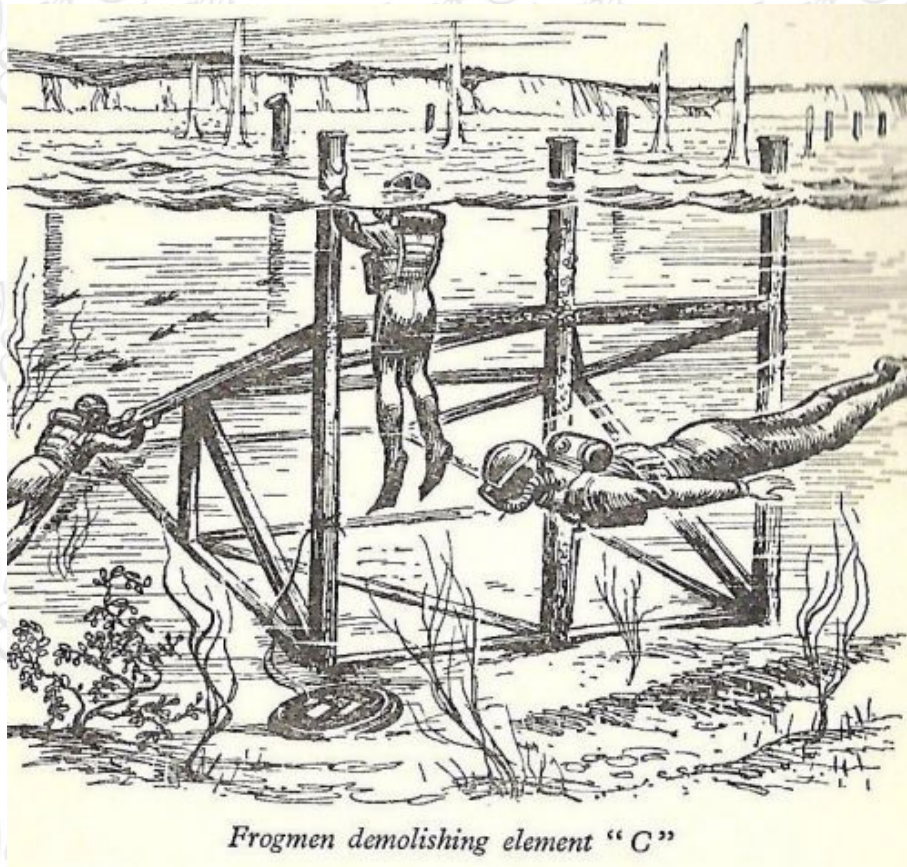
Gore, Henry Charles, Petty Officer, R.N.

"For Gallantry and Devotion to Duty as Section Leader of "A" Section L.C.O.C.U. Unit No:1 in that, during the landings in the "Baie de Cavallaire" South of France, he did on arrival at the beach carry out the pre-arranged plan without further orders, and 1. Did successfully carry out the initial reconnaissance of unknown obstacles and mines in his area.

2. Did work continuously throughout the day on the destruction of the obstacles and mines until the job was completed.
3. Did assist in the saving of the lives of wounded soldiers of the U.S. Army 1st Division when the craft in which they were embarked struck mines and were sunk.

Remarks of the Immediate Authority, Naval Officer in Charge, Appledore:

“Forwarded for favorable consideration. Although a long time has elapsed since the occurrences leading to the recommendation, it is understood that no such recommendation was forwarded by the Force Commander, and there is no doubt that much coolness and courage under fire was displayed in the course of the operations which are described.”



Frogmen demolishing element "C"

Petty Officer Gore's recommendation is signed by Lieutenant R.E. Billington, D.S.C., who was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his gallant service in the Normandy Landings, and a Bar to the D.S.C. for similar service in the Landings in the South of France whilst in specific command of L.C.O.C. Unit No. 1 and in overall charge of all four L.C.O.C. Units of Force "J". The recommendation for Billington's Bar to the D.S.C. is supported by an extract from a letter from Vice Admiral H.K. Hewitt, U.S.N. Commander United States Eighth Fleet, which describes the hazardous work of this L.C.O.C. Unit:

'For distinguishing himself by heroic and meritorious achievement as officer in charge of a Naval Combat Demolition Unit on 15th August 1944. Lieutenant Billington, displaying the utmost skill and energy, organized and trained his unit in the hazardous procedure of clearing underwater

obstacles, beach obstructions and reinforced defence positions to enable the initial boat waves to land and discharge assault troops, equipment and supplies over the selected beaches. Despite the experimental nature of demolitions in amphibious warfare and the heavily obstructed approaches encountered during the assault operations, he successfully led his unit to the assigned beach and by means of hand placed charges, cleared the approach channels of obstacles and shallow mines for the early and relatively safe passage of assault traffic. His expert and fearless action in clearing and widening their approaches contributed materially to the expeditious launching of the assault and the prompt establishment of the beachhead.'

Four Other L.C.O.C. frogmen were similarly decorated with the D.S.M. for both landings; the PO 'B' Section Leader, a Riggers Mate, a Leading Seaman and an Able Seaman.

BOOM COMMANDOS, LATER LANDING CRAFT OBSTACLE CLEARANCE UNITS

More details on the L.C.O.C.U.'s can be found here:

<https://d-dayinfo.org/en/blog/frogmen-d-day/>

Assuming Gore had served with Unit 1 in both landings, this would mean he was landed to clear mines at Juno Beach with the Canadians

The Landing Craft Obstacle Clearing units had previously been known as the Boom Commandos. Given his position as a section leader, it is likely Gore had served with this unit from near its inception. However his full service will require further research. A most interesting Thesis can be downloaded here below and a great deal of information on L.C.O.C.U.'s can be found on the online:

<https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/2929338/521594.pdf>

Regarding the landing in Southern France, this will require more research. What is known is since Gore's recommendation states his gallantry took place at "Baie de Cavallaire", we can see this was the area that the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division landed, part of VI Corps, not the 1st Infantry Division, which was a Division that landed at Normandy. His duties will have been the same for both the Southern France and D-Day landings, worth of which form part of his recommendation and since D-Day is far more widely written about, the following experiences at D-Day by other members of the L.C.O.C.U.'s are pertinent:

Able Seaman Andrew Henderson, Landing Craft Obstacle Clearance unit;

"The Germans erected obstacles at low tide, approximately ten meters from the beach with Teller mine on top of each. These obstacles were two pieces of steel in the shape of a diagonal cross with an upright pole to stabilize them. The Teller mines were attached to the diagonals.

Of course, these obstacles were hidden at high tide and would be devastating to landing craft. Our equipment for the job was a two-piece Dunlop wetsuit, flippers, weights, a belt of TNT and cortex fuses and detonators. We had Davis escape apparatus for breathing, this consisted of an oxygen tank for one hour, an emergency oxlet for ten minutes and a buoyancy oxlet. We were taken to the beach one hour before H-Hour on D-Day in an assault landing craft, followed closely by the Royal Navy Commandos. The ramp went down. Because we were breathing pure oxygen we had to get all the air out of our chests before we connected to the Davis apparatus.



We went straight out into twelve to fifteen feet of water. It was pitch darkness under the water and impossible to see. I had a watch with a light to tell me when the hour was up. After fifteen to twenty minutes, I found my first obstacle. I could feel along it to find the Teller mine. I attached the TNT from my belt to the mine with a cortex fuse and then swam on. I found eight obstacles before my time was up, the unit found a hundred mines.

The most difficult part as a frogman was the feeling of loneliness and isolation. You were in complete darkness and on your own, handling your own fate. After the charges were in position you had two places to go, back to your landing craft or onto the beach. As far as I know, most of us made it back to the landing craft where we detonated all the fuses and the obstacles exploded with a muffled bang.”

Another frogman would tell how:

“The first landing on D-Day was at Sword beach at 06.30 hours. We awakened at 03.00 hours, breakfasted and got into our wetsuits.... We cruised around for a bit to let the Americans bomb the beach. We were about half a mile offshore when the bombs landed. We blew the obstacles as the tide came in... We had worked for about two hours when the troops and the tanks came in.. Later, the Germans must have seen us on the beach, because they opened up with shrapnel shells that exploded in the air. I was standing with my mate Michael Austin about four feet away from him when a shell came in and we dived for the sand. When the shelling stopped I got up but my mate was dead in front of me...”

BRITAIN'S "FROG-MEN": A HUSH-HUSH BAND OF SPECIALISTS WHO WRECKED GERMAN DEFENCES.



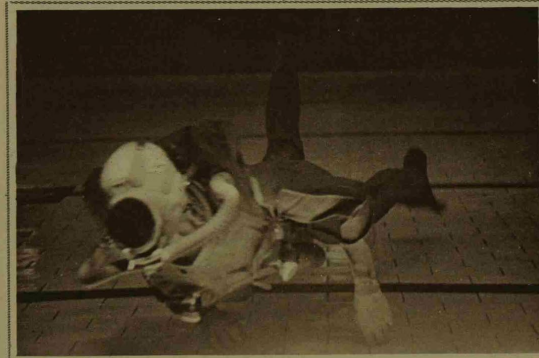
A GROUP OF "FROG-MEN" SETTING OUT IN THEIR PNEUMATIC DINGHY, WITH DEMOLITION CHARGES: NEARING THEIR OBJECTIVE, THEY SWIM UNDERWATER, TOWING THE DINGHY ON THE SURFACE.

ONE OF BRITAIN'S "FROG-MEN" HELPING ANOTHER TO FILL ON HIS WEBBED-FOOT GOOGLES. THIS BAND OF UNDERWATER SPECIALISTS BREACHED THE GERMAN DEFENCES BARRING OUR D-DAY LANDINGS.

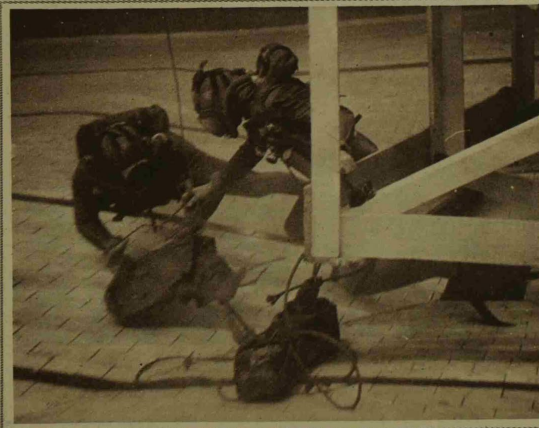
WHEN the newspapers headlined the story of German "frog-men" swimming underwater in an attempt to demolish Nijmegen Bridge, people asked why the Allies hadn't thought of it first. They had. At that time, Britain had a greatly superior band of fully-trained "frog-men." Only now has their existence been revealed, and with it the news of one of their greatest feats—the wrecking of the German underwater defences off the coast of Normandy during the hours preceding the D-Day landings. Wearing their skin-like rubber diving-suits, "frog" goggles, and streamlined breathing-helmets, this army of submarine commandos swam underwater, towing on the surface pneumatic dinghies packed with explosives, and placed their demolition charges so skillfully that 3000 otherwise indestructible underwater steel obstacles blew up under the nose of the waiting Germans, opening a path to the beaches for our flat-bottomed landing-craft. These same British "frog-men," swimming underwater in an arrow-head formation which kept them constantly in touch with one another, also successfully cleared the mine-fields laid off the invasion coast. Had it not been for the "frog-men's" magnificent secret achievement, the D-Day operation might have failed completely. (Our photographs of Britain's "frog-men" are reproduced by courtesy of the British Army magazine "Soldier," for which they were taken by Sergeant M. Berman, a cameraman who helped to film "Desert Victory.")



THE SMOOTH POSTURE OF A "FROG-MAN": WEARING HIS SPECIAL EQUIPMENT, HE CAN STAY BELOW FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF. (Drawn by our Special Artist, G. H. Davis.)



A HEAD-ON PHOTOGRAPH OF A "FROG-MAN" SWIMMING UNDERWATER: THESE SPECIALISTS, WORKING AS A TEAM, SHOUT MESSAGES TO EACH OTHER BY PRESSING TOGETHER THE CIRCULAR GLASS FACE-PIECES OF THEIR HELMETS.



"FROG-MEN" PLACING DEMOLITION CHARGES AT CAREFULLY-SELECTED POINTS OF A GERMAN UNDERWATER OBSTRUCTION REPRODUCED FOR PRACTICE PURPOSES: THEIR SKILL RESULTED IN THE WRECKING OF 3000 OF THESE OBSTACLES OFF THE D-DAY BEACHES.

D-Day Feats Of Our "Frogmen"

CLEARED APPROACHES FOR OUR LANDINGS

By Our Own Reporter

MUCH has been heard about the German "frogmen" who attempted to blow up Nijmegen bridge, but little about their counterparts in the British Forces, yet evidence revealed to-day shows that in this branch of amphibious warfare we

were as far advanced, if not more so, than the enemy.

The story can now be told of the few score naval commandos who became human fish so that the underwater obstructions lining the Normandy coast could be broken down to permit our landing craft an easy or relatively easy approach to the shore.

90 MINUTES BELOW

Wearing thin rubber suits, and special breathing apparatus which enabled them to remain below the surface for 90 minutes and fitted with webbed paddles, about 120 of them went into action on D-Day.

The enemy had created formidable steel barricades with a frontal area of ten feet square metal pyramids, more than five feet high steel hedgehogs made in the form of a six pointed star, stump piles, and wooden ramps with mines fitted.

These had to be levelled before our landing craft could reach the shore.

ONE DAY'S WORK

By nightfall on D-Day they had cleared an entire beach a thousand yards in length, removing 2,400 obstacles, ninety-five per cent, of which were fitted with mines or booby traps.

The "frogmen" approached the shore in small assault craft and when near the land took to the water, swimming below the

surface with never a ripple to be seen.

ONLY 12 CASUALTIES

Charges were fixed to the obstructions by magnetic clips and these were later exploded by the detonation of a still larger charge.

If an enemy shell arrived in the neighbourhood before the work was completed it was just too bad for the "frogmen," but out of the 120 employed only two were killed and ten wounded.

A similar diving suit was designed for work with our midget submarines when employed against targets in heavily protected areas.

SANK CRUISER

The submarine would edge its way up to the protective netting and one member of the crew donning the diving suit would emerge on to the bows, and with special clippers sever the wire, enabling the submarine to get through.

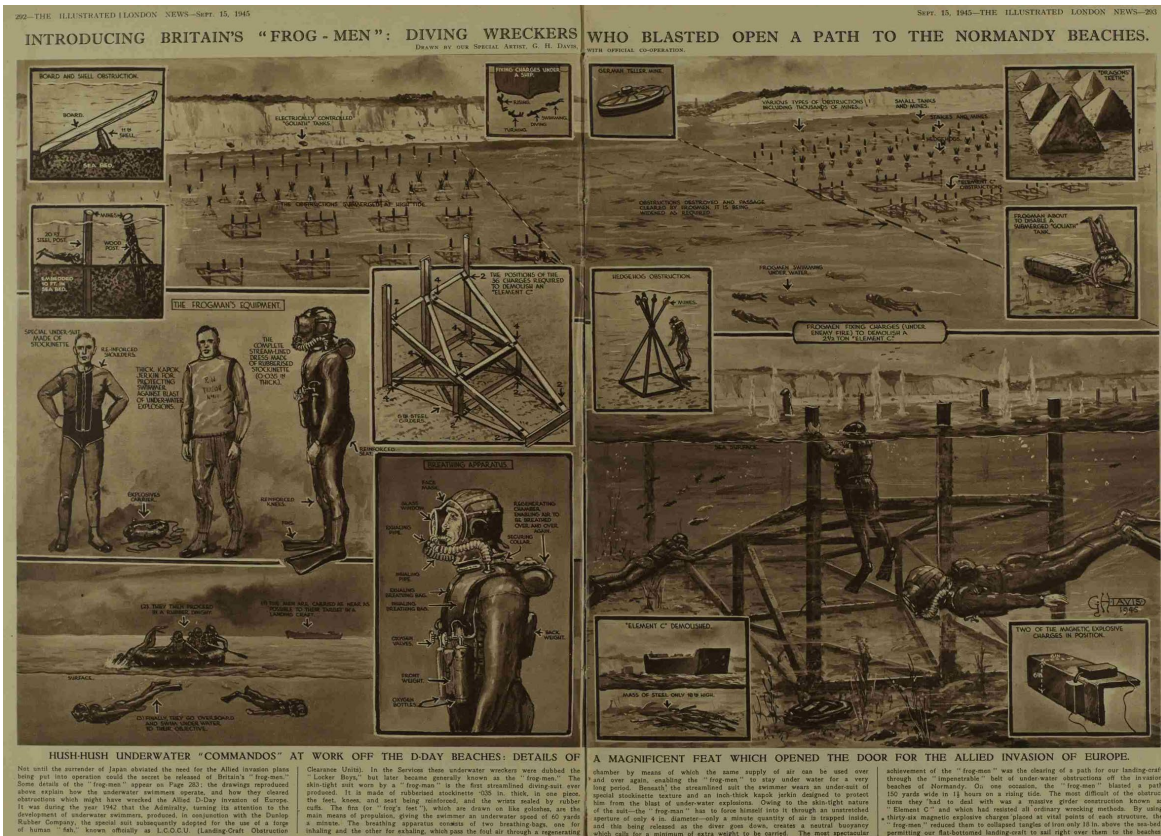
The diver then returned inside the submarine to help in the work of sinking enemy shipping.

One of their major successes was the sinking of a Jap cruiser between Singapore and the Johore mainland, three days before the war ended, the divers emerging from the submarines to attach the explosives to the underside of the cruiser.

Seedies roll lists a total of only 10 D.S.M.s, 3 D.S.C.s, and one D.S.C. and Bar to L.C.O.C. Units during the Second War, mostly for the landings in Normandy and the South of France. For two other examples of D.S.M.s awarded to frogmen in L.C.O.C. Units see Dix Noonan Webb May 2017 (Lot 52, £16, 200) and July 2019 (Lot 81, £9.750). These latter specifically for D-Day, Gore's for both landings:

<https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/past-catalogues/495/catalogue/345429/?offset=80>

<https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/past-catalogues/461/catalogue/290829/?offset=40>





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A rare and quite outstanding Royal Navy Commando Frogman's group