

Whilst work was going on preparing the landing craft for D-Day, the 6th and 7th Beach Battalions practised landings on beaches within the estuary such as Fishermen's Cove and also at the Slapton Sands Training Area in Start Bay.



In the Devon countryside troops of the 4th Infantry Division were assembling in their marshalling areas and by the end of May 1944 long lines of vehicles began filling the Devon lanes. Civilian movement became heavily restricted and all US personnel were confined to their ships or bases to ensure complete security.

After seven months of intensive activity, the order to commence Operation Neptune – the

amphibious phase of Operation Overload – finally came. Between 3rd-5th June 1944, a U.S. Navy Amphibious Force of 66 ships and 6 Royal Navy escorts sailed from Salcombe to join Assault Force U of the Western Task Force. Their task was to land the 4th Division, VII Corps U.S. Army on Utah Beach, Normandy and to support the landing and subsequent operations. Fifteen year-old local lad, Peter Pearce, witnessed their departure:

“The decks of all these ships could be seen swarming with troops. They were very cramped for space and to add to this discomfort a strong south-west gale blew up. The hearts of the Salcombe people went out to the thousands of troops, out there in this miserable weather, rolling and pitching in those bull-nosed craft, many possibly sea-sick and with the obvious worry of what tomorrow might bring when they came face to face with the mighty fortress of Northern France. Many we had seen embarking were little older than myself at that time and quite possibly straight from the States. We did not know the destination, of course, but we did know that, once on their way, all these lads would become men.”

Roger Barrett

