



D-DAY: STORIES FROM THE WALLS

Self-guided wall tour

WHAT IS THE AMERICAN WALL?

During WWII more than 3.5 million men passed through Southampton to France and beyond. On D-Day itself, two thirds of the British task force, together with Canadians, embarked from Southampton to beaches codenamed Gold, Juno and Sword on the Normandy coast. In the weeks and months following until the end of the war, more than two million American replacements sailed from Southampton's embarkation hards (the closest are just around the corner Mayflower Park and Town Quay/Red Funnel). More than 70 American soldiers added their names and hometowns to walls in this area. This section of wall was allowed to remain as a memorial when the area was redeveloped. The inscriptions were digitally recorded by the Maritime Archaeology Trust's Stories from the walls project in 2019/20, thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

LOCATION

The American Wall forms part of the perimeter of the Leonardo Royal Grand Harbour Hotel in Western Esplanade. It is only a short walk from the city centre. Parking is available opposite (SO14 2AZ).



IDENTIFYING MILITARY UNITS

By researching WWII documents, it was possible to identify which units many of the men served with. Three distinct groupings of inscriptions were found. Seven of the men were all found to be drivers with the 106th Infantry Division. They passed through Southampton on the 2nd December 1944 and would unexpectedly find themselves on the frontline of the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes two weeks later.

The 106th 'Golden Lions' Infantry Division

1. D.W. SMITH
MISS

2. BILL McELY
Louisville Ky.

3. W^M MUELLER
NEW YORK

4. KEN COLBY
MASS

5. W.E. SHIRK
PENN

6. CURT HODGES
CHICAGO ILLINOIS

7. RALPH ODOM
3. MOBIL- ALA BAMA

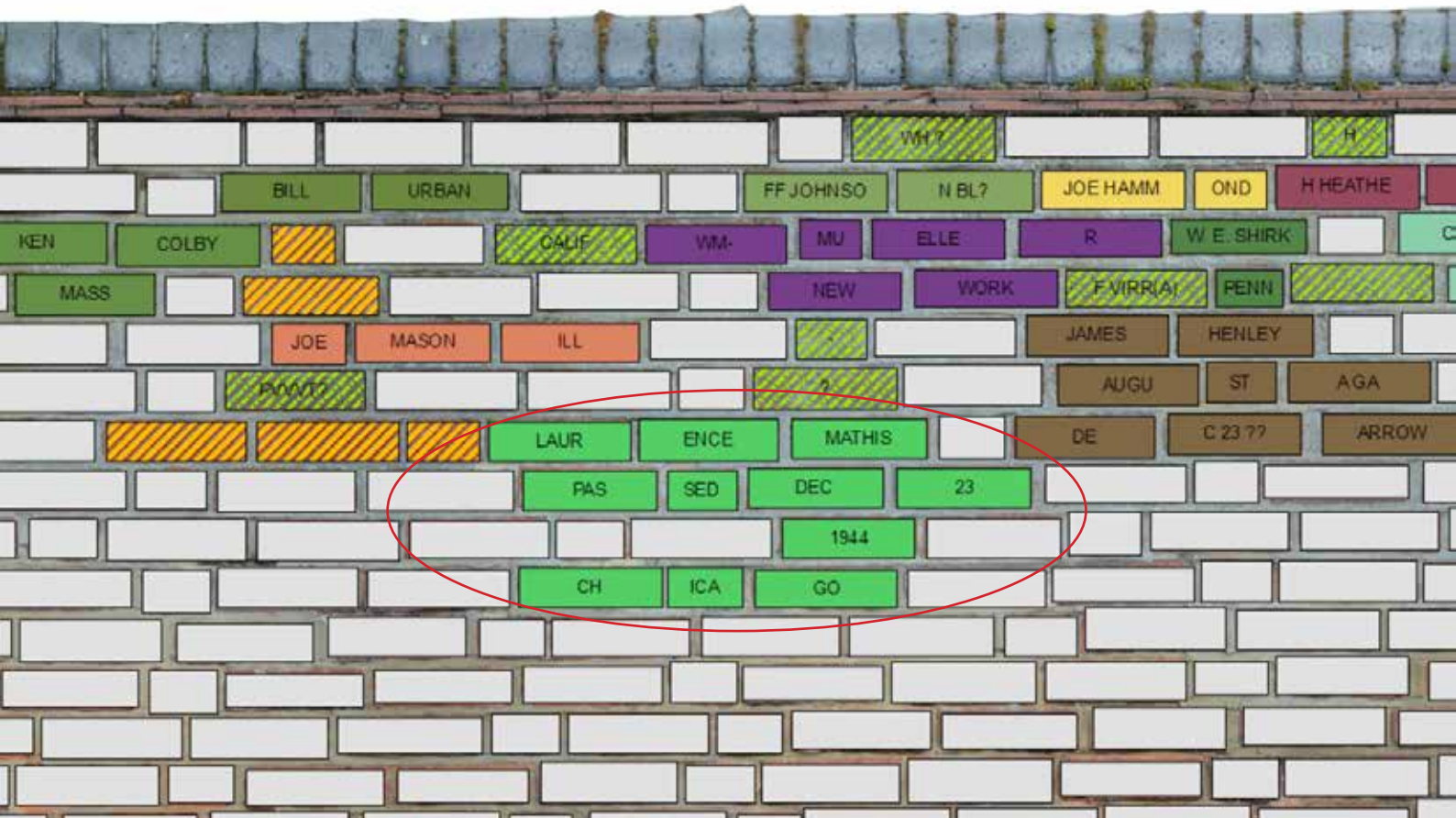


One of these men was Delbert Smith, a 19 year old farmer from Mississippi. You can find his inscription nearest the end pier. Delbert carved not only his name, but also 'wife Ethel' and 'Da Nina'. Clearly Delbert had his family at the forefront of his mind as he stood at the wall, within sight of the ships that would carry them to France and whatever may lie ahead.

The visibility of the names is greatly affected by the weather. In dry bright conditions it can be hard to see them, they are most visible in overcast conditions and when the bricks are wet.

449 Quartermasters Gasoline Supply Company

A group of nine names were discovered on the passenger roster of LST 262 sailing Southampton to Rouen 25th December 1944. This was a segregated unit of Black Americans, their records have been much harder to trace. Can you find the inscription left by Laurence Mathis? It is spread over 11 bricks! (look to the right of the lamp post). Nearby you will find the other names: James Henley, Robert H Smith, J (Jefferson) A Lawrence, Joe N Jones, J (Joseph) L Mason, Robert Golden, S (Samuel) McDonald and James Dodd.



Cal Avery – American Red Cross

An unusual discovery was made when researching Cal Avery. His brick can be found to the right of the lamp post, between Shirk and Hodges, one row below (see 106th photo). In good conditions, it is possible to see AMER RED + under his name. Cal served as a Field Director providing pastoral care to the American troops, a role not often recorded in WWII histories.



The Small Wall

You may enter the hotel car park to see the small section of wall built directly behind. This was built from bricks recovered during the demolition of houses across the road (where the red flats are now) in the 1970s, and a section of this perimeter wall that continued down towards the roundabout. Two of the names on the small wall belong to men of the 799th Ordnance Company, Robert Breech and John Helmling. Other names from the same unit can be seen on photographs of the houses. This unit was part of the 99th Infantry 'Checkerboarders' division, also known as the 'Bulge Babies' due to their young ages. They sailed from Southampton on the 4th November 1944.



R.D. Breech
Catawissa
Penna

JOHN HELMLING
ELYRIA OHIO
11 - 44



Eddie Meyer from Illinois, on the left hand edge, seems to have carved his inscription within the outline shape of a landing craft.

MORE INFORMATION

More information on the inscriptions and the stories of these men and Southampton's role during WWII can be found on our website, both in the interactive 3D model and in the freely downloadable resources at

www.maritimearchaeologytrust.org/ddaywalls