

STORIES FROM THE WALLS

Between D-Day 6th June 1944 and the end of the Second World War, 3.5 million troops passed through Southampton and into France. 2 million were American, the rest British and Canadian. Around 100 of these men, mainly Americans, etched their names and hometowns on walls in Western Esplanade near the waterfront.

The Maritime Archaeology Trust, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund is digitally preserving these inscriptions. Volunteers are helping to record the wall using photographic techniques and researching the stories behind the names. The results are available online in an interactive 3D model.

WWW.MARITIMEARCHAEOLOGYTRUST.ORG/DDAYWALLS

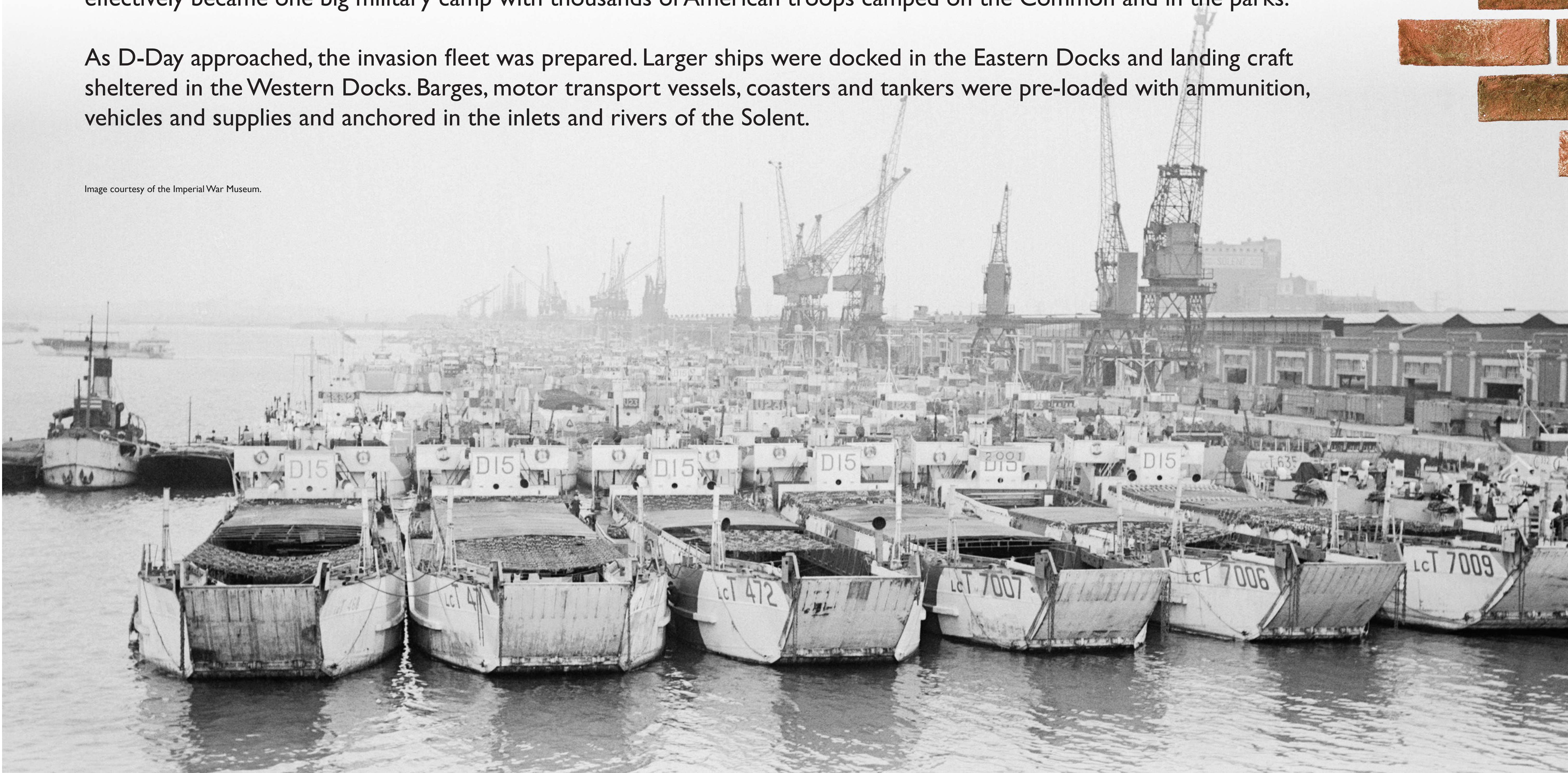
D-DAY SOUTHAMPTON

Southampton had been identified as an ideal launch-pad for a seaborne invasion in 1940. Preparations began in 1942. The South Western Hotel was requisitioned by the Combined Operations Military Movement Control and the Royal Navy. Landing craft, American Lend-Lease cargoes, and stores are gathered in Southampton. Construction of the Mulberry harbours and PLUTO began in 1943. Three separate embarkation points were created at Town Quay for troops to board.

In February 1944, the port was designated the 14th Major Port of Transportation Corps of the US Army. Southampton effectively became one big military camp with thousands of American troops camped on the Common and in the parks.

As D-Day approached, the invasion fleet was prepared. Larger ships were docked in the Eastern Docks and landing craft sheltered in the Western Docks. Barges, motor transport vessels, coasters and tankers were pre-loaded with ammunition, vehicles and supplies and anchored in the inlets and rivers of the Solent.

Image courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.



AMERICANS IN SOUTHAMPTON

In July 1943, control of Southampton Docks passed to the United States 14th Major Port Transportation Corps. They coordinated the shipments of American troops, equipment and stores through the port. Offices were set up at the Civic Centre and the Bargate. After D-Day they also dealt with the incoming wounded and prisoners. The 14th Port remained until November 1946. More Americans arrived the following spring.

The Americans were segregated, with separate duties, billets and recreational facilities. Officers were billeted in the Polygon Hotel with the troops at Ascupart Road School and the Blighmont Barracks and in camps around Southampton, including the Common and Hoglands Park.

Between D-Day and VE Day 2 million American troops passed through Southampton. A ceremony was held to mark the millionth Yank - Paul Shimer from Pennsylvania - as he boarded the ship. Sadly Sergeant Shimer was killed in action in Germany in April 1945. The two millionth Yank passed through on the 16th January 1945.

The residents of Southampton enjoyed the company of the men – especially the Americans with their gum and tights! They entertained the children in the streets and danced with the young ladies in the evenings. Homes were left open for the troops to use their facilities. New sports were seen for the first time. Naturally relationships flourished and on the 26th January 1946, 452 British women and 173 children left Southampton on the SS *Argentina* for new lives in America. This was only the first batch; Operation War Bride sent 70,000 women and children to America.



Image courtesy of ABP Southampton Archive Service.

THE WALL.

The brick wall which once formed the perimeter of the old town mortuary used to stretch much further to the south. The most heavily graffitied section was allowed to remain, whilst bricks from the demolished section were saved and used to build the small brick panel behind.

A small section of the wall, rebuilt with original bricks, behind the main wall section.



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