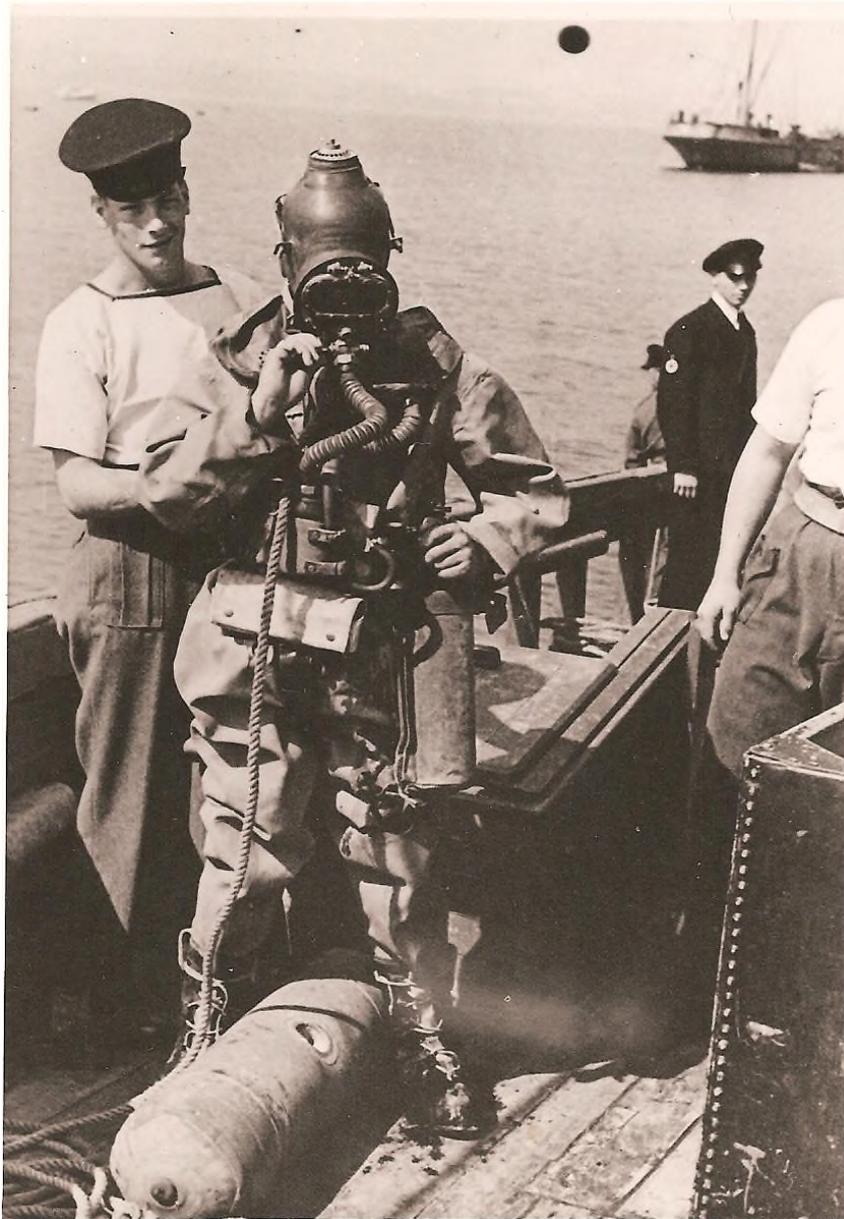


# A WARTIME TRIBUTE

WILLIAM BAILEY CBE, DSC, GM and Bar  
1918-1985



Written for the British Historical Society of Portugal

(There are many marked references to quotations and a bibliography  
appears on page 54)

## **WILLIAM BAILEY CBE, DSC, GM and Bar 1918-1985**

### **A WARTIME TRIBUTE: Andrew Bailey**

William "Bill" Bailey was born in Santos-o-Velho, Lisbon, in 1918 in a house which today is the home of the *Entidade Legalizadora para a Comunicação Social*. It is a large yellow building on the western side of Largo de Santos and at the time overlooked the Lisbon Electric Tramways (LET) power station on the riverside (later to become a Lisnave workshop), where his father John T. Bailey, a mechanical engineer, worked to ensure that Lisbon's trams were never short of power. John T. Bailey was recruited by the LET in 1914 and came to Lisbon where he met and married Nellie King in 1915.

Her father, William Duff, a naval architect, hailed from Greenock on the Clyde and was invited by King D. Luís I to oversee the smooth running and maintenance of Portuguese flagged vessels, mostly built on the Clyde, plying their trade between Lisbon and the Portuguese colonies in the late nineteenth century.

They lived in a house which was shared with another family and overlooked the Tagus. It was later to become an annex of York House and today the Hotel das Janelas Verdes.

Bill's father, 'Jack' Bailey, was well known locally for his love of animals and overcame himself one day by releasing all the dogs contained in a Lisbon municipal mule drawn box-cart whose workers had just completed their day's duty of collecting all stray dogs in downtown Lisbon to be put down. He beat a hasty and noisy retreat pursued by grateful dogs and angry municipal workers!

The sea, the Navy and engineering featured strongly in Bill Bailey's family, a course he came to follow after schooling as a boarder at Oporto British School (OBS) under Canon d'Albertanson and later Highgate School in north London. After qualifying as an electrical engineer at Faraday House Electrical Engineering College, London in 1940, he immediately joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (RNVR), aged 22, and was sent to HMS Vernon for training at the school of torpedoes and mines.

At his interview for the RNVR by a board of senior captains and commanders, William Bailey was asked what he noticed on entering the room. He replied 'the amount of gold braid at the table, sir; this raised a chuckle from the seniors, and he was then asked if he had noticed any decoration on the wall behind him as he entered the room. Looking ahead he noticed some shelves with bric-a-brac and assuming the wall behind would be similar replied accordingly. The interviewing officer asked him to turn round: the wall was bare. Clearly the RNVR was looking for officers with imagination since he was accepted as Temporary Electrical Sub-Lieutenant.

After training at HMS Vernon in mines, he was given command of an armed trawler HMS Prospects Ahead which, together with other trawlers, carried out minesweeping duties, pair trawling, between the northeast coast of Scotland, Orkney and Shetland. His crew were mostly seasoned fishermen and seemed to smell their way around their home waters finding, and destroying, German mines laid to cripple and sink Allied shipping.

On one occasion, they were a sitting target for a Luftwaffe Stuka dive bomber which strafed and missed on its first attack. The second approach came with the usual fearful

screaming as the Stuka dived, but failed to drop a bomb or fire a shot, the pilot waving as he headed home. A lucky day for HMS Prospects Ahead and her crew.

In the early part of the war, the Luftwaffe were dropping mines by parachute on land targets and estuaries which placed additional strain on the Naval Render Mines Safe Officers (RMSO), some of whom were formed into the Land Incident Section (September 1940), which when on standby could be rushed to any part of the country to deal with the unexploded menace.

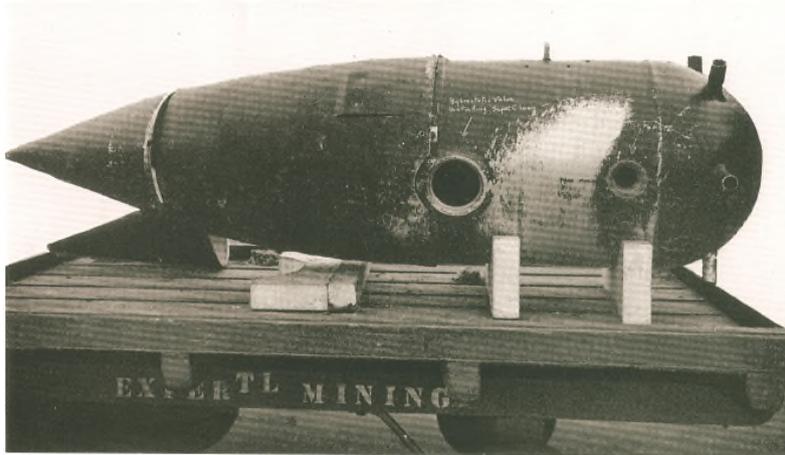
The magnetic mine, 'Hitler's secret weapon', was devised to cripple Britain's shipping and thereby starve its people into submission, by being placed in the estuaries of major rivers and ports which awaited vital food supplies and materials.

The first German magnetic mine was rendered safe by Lt. Commander John G.D.Ouvry DSO, RN in November 1939 at Shoeburyness. His son David became a close personal friend after a chance meeting in Lisbon in 1991, and both our fathers were part of the Land Incident Section rendering safe those German mines which had been dropped on land.

In four years, 876 enemy mines were dealt with of which over 75% were rendered safe.

There was a period when one in fourteen mines were ingeniously booby-trapped, so vastly increasing the risks facing the officers engaged in rendering them safe.

Bill Bailey, part of this section, rendered safe his first such magnetic mine on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1940 near Spurn Head on the Humber. Over 2,000 enemy unexploded bombs and mines were rendered safe in September 1940.



*Hitler's secret weapon number one - Magnetic mine, the first of which was rendered safe by Lt. Commander John G.D Ouvry DSO, RN in November 1939.*

The bomb fuze (17 seconds), explosive gaine, detonator, primer and hydrostatic clock (haven for booby traps), had all to be successfully removed for the mine to be rendered safe. Each of these components, if not handled correctly, could cause the mine to explode.

Only officers actually rendered mines safe. Ratings helped locate and make the mines more accessible before being evacuated to a safe distance, while the officer carried out the job for which he was trained.

A citation from the Admiralty read as follows: *'The splendid work by the officers and men of the Land Incident Section will long be remembered as an outstanding story of gallantry and devotion to duty. The risks run were great and the efforts of this Section have contributed materially to victory.*

*The death of those who lost their lives in operations is a measure of the hazards which must be faced in all cases of mine recovery.*

*I congratulate every officer and men on their job well done'.*

This specially selected and trained team of naval officers (originally twenty, later forty, of whom eight were killed), were all volunteers, young, single and having no doubts of the dangers involved. In the early stages of the War, life expectancy of these officers was four weeks, later ten weeks, and they were described as follows:

Ref.1

"They were thin men. It was surprising how thin they were. Tall or lean or slight or angular or lanky; one or another; they were almost all the same. Churchill had said they were different from ordinary men; not just the few Australians; the English, too. They were gaunt, said Churchill, and haggard.

Their eyes were bright and their faces were blue. The handful who lived put on flesh afterwards, or some did; others hung onto their skin and bone. In uniform they were distinguished. Women adored them. Men considered them with awe and astonishment. Out of uniform, stripped, they looked half starved and gutless. Nerves leaned them down.

To each other they were known as Red or Dicky or Gilbert or Ronnie or something else. They were sized up by each other; tabulated, liked, disliked or tolerated. They got along together much as any other group of men would get along together.

They laughed, drank, loved. They argued. Sometimes they got in each other`s hair and flared with irrational temper. They were the most patient of men and the most impatient; the most temperate and the most intemperate; the clearest

of mind and the most exhausted. When they slept they died. When they died they flashed into eternity in a thousandth part of a second, and flesh, blood, and bone were never laid to rest. They had graves, but no bodies"

A citation from the Prime Minister to the First Lord of the Admiralty reads as follows:

"I have been much impressed with the report you sent to me indicating the fine work performed by the Land Incident Section since its inception. The work of these Officers and Ratings, and the cold-blooded heroism with which they performed it, have been of the highest quality, and have been the cause of saving many lives and homes"

Initialled W.S.C., (Winston S.Churchill) dated 10.1.1946

There were 35,000 mines laid around Great Britain and only in 1972 was it considered that clearance had been complete. WW II mines, bombs and discarded ordnance still appear on Britain's beaches and in fishermen's nets from time to time, sufficient to keep the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) personnel busy.

A break came when an RN armed steam trawler in Ponta Delgada, Azores, required a Commanding Officer to return the vessel to the UK.

Bill Bailey was given this task and having been flown to Ponta Delgada joined the vessel which was duly bunkered and then set sail with instructions to show no lights at night for fear of attracting the attention of German U-boats.

The coal dust loaded in the Azores was, as is custom, sold by weight but had been contaminated with excessive moisture for financial gain.

The result was that at night the sparks coming out of the funnel were more like Blackpool Illuminations, so all navigational lights were shown on the pretext of being a neutral fishing vessel.

The vessel and its crew arrived safely in the UK, but with no thanks to the supplier of adulterated coal dust.

## **Gibraltar**

In September 1941 Bill Bailey was trained as a helmeted diver (Admiralty pattern diving suit, heavy gear) at HMS Maidstone to work at depths of up to 20 fathoms or 120 feet.

He was promptly sent to Gibraltar as Senior Diving Officer, Render Mines Safe Officer (RMSO) where Italian frogmen saboteurs were attaching bombs to Allied ships which would suffer damage and either sink in Gibraltar or shortly after sailing.

Part of a diver's training course (Admiralty pattern, heavy gear) included diving in strong currents with low or nil visibility. In Bailey's case this took place at Wapping (London) in the winter, on the fast flowing tidal Thames, with centuries of silt which when disturbed immediately reduced visibility to nil. After this experience, diving in Gibraltar with a sandy bottom and sixty feet of visibility almost became a pleasure. Nevertheless, it was excellent training for D-Day which was to come later.

Bill Bailey called for volunteers to be trained in shallow water diving and built up the nucleus of an Underwater Working Party (UWP) with three NCOs.

The **Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus** (DSEA) breathing set, basically an external lung, was designed to save the crews of sunken submarines. The supply of oxygen was limited to a few minutes to allow survivors to reach the surface.

Bailey converted these breathing sets to allow divers to stay underwater for twenty minutes to be operationally useful when searching vessels hulls for bombs and mines.

Ref.3

"He even acknowledged that the Italians had far better equipment, far better facilities, and far better training than even the British could muster.

He also explained how defenders had to dive around the clock, wearing only swimming trunks, and any old top they could find for protection against barnacles and other underwater obstacles.

Bailey was very inventive though and somehow managed to borrow sixteen sets of Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus (DSEA) from a submarine depot ship, that had been employed in crew rescue and practice escapes from submarines. He claimed that although they were not ideal for this operation they were better than nothing at all.

The equipment allowed divers to operate more easily, and to breathe freely underwater. The divers breathed in pure oxygen and exhaled carbon dioxide, which became absorbed by a canister of soda lime.

If the breathing became difficult, the diver had to turn a small valve which allowed more oxygen to flow.

They had to be very careful, however, that the maximum oxygen content was available; otherwise they could quickly inhale CO<sub>2</sub> gas, and could suffer a horribly quick death from toxic fumes".



*Three members of the Gibraltar 'Underwater Working Party', (then Lieutenant LKP Crabb in the centre) clearly showing the DSEA breathing gear with oxygen bottle at the bottom. Goggles and a nose clip were also worn.*

Divers were taught to rigorously maintain their own equipment and wore weighted plimsolls to remain upright while diving.

By contrast, the Italian frogmen used specially designed breathing apparatus, rubber suits and flippers.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 1941, Italian frogmen attacked and seriously damaged the battleships HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Valiant with mines in Alexandria harbour; they now had turned their attention to targets in Gibraltar.

Many Allied ships were being lost at sea shortly after visiting Gibraltar and it was presumed at the time that they had fallen prey to German U-boats, until it was discovered that daring Italian frogmen were operating from Spain and just over the frontier from Gibraltar.

They successfully carried out their missions against Allied shipping in Gibraltar at the cost of many lives with fourteen ships (totalling almost 100,000 tonnes) either sunk or damaged over a period of fifteen months.

While the British divers searched Allied vessels for mines mostly during the day, the Italians operated under the cover of darkness using two-man human torpedoes, best described as follows:

Ref.2

"It was cigar-shaped, 22 feet long with a 21 inch diameter. The war-head, which was detachable, contained 500 pounds of high explosive. Its two propellers were driven by batteries, and it contained compressed air tanks to regulate its depth.

Two men sat astride it, and so that they might not be swept off their seats, it travelled at only three knots. It was awkward and unreliable, and well deserved the nickname of 'pig' which the operators gave it"



*'Maiale' pig, Italian human torpedo that carried two frogmen and a war-head bomb of five hundred pounds of high explosive. Dry land practice.*

The Italian frogmen, riding their human torpedo 'Maiale' would approach their targets with their heads just above the surface and dive to attach their warhead to the vessel's bilge keel or fix smaller limpet mines, secured by magnets to the hull.

The warhead was usually set to explode within two and a half hours. They would then return to their base on their human torpedo, less warhead, to prepare for the next operation.

British defence against the Italians' nocturnal activities was to drop depth charges at irregular intervals and use searchlights to deter any incursion into the areas where Allied ships were anchored: this met with some success.

On 7<sup>th</sup> December 1942, on a cold night, an attack on Allied shipping by six Italian frogmen on three human torpedoes resulted in three killed and captured while the sixth Italian was able to return to base.

Ref.2

"Their bodies were recovered and buried at sea with naval honours. A wreath was dropped on the waters of the bay from Lt. Bill Bailey and Lt. 'Buster' Crabb"

Such was the respect that these adversaries had for each other. The next issue was to discover from where the Italians were operating, in the meantime a new form of mine was being used against Allied shipping.

Ref.2

"One July morning the silence of the Bay was broken by a loud explosion just under the surface of the water. This was something new, and Lieutenant Bill Bailey and his assistant, Leading Seaman Bell, donned their breathing apparatus and dived in to see what was happening.

Pressing up hard against the bottoms of ships they found air-filled balloons, like inner tubes, and set in the centre of the ring was a new type of mine.

Both men slashed the rubber rings with their knives and the mines sank to the bottom, where they exploded harmlessly in due course.

The mines were also fitted with a hydrostatic fuse which cause them to explode when the weight of water was reduced about ten feet below the surface.

The premature explosion was caused by one of the mines being washed from under a ship and rising to the surface.

Each mine contained a charge of about five pounds, enough to blow a four-foot hole in the ships plates"

Ref.8

"Bill Bailey was then called by the Defence Security Officer, Colonel Medlam, to comment on some information received by a Spanish agent that might lead to the discovery of where the Italians were operating from on the Spanish side between La Linea and Algeciras.

It was agreed that he would meet the Spanish agent in La Linea in a covert reconnaissance operation to establish the possible location of the Italian base.

The Spanish agent led him to various places in and around La Linea including a military barracks which they entered illegally and narrowly escaped detection.

There were containers in the barracks that the agent believed might have held components that made up the human torpedoes"

On his return to Gibraltar, Bill Bailey reported on his visit to La Linea saying that no evidence existed as to the location of the Italian base and that he suspected the agent of being a double agent.

This latter point was refuted by the Senior Intelligence Officer at the time, but later proved to be correct.

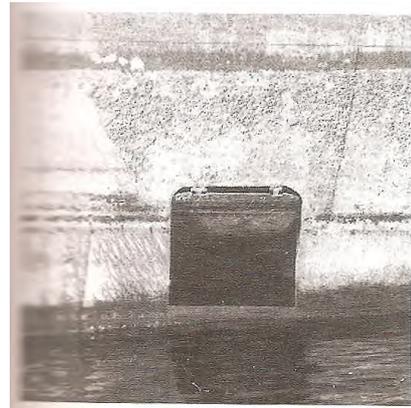
It was later discovered that the Italian 4,900-ton tanker *Oltterra*, berthed in Algeciras under the guise of Spanish neutrality, was the well-prepared base for the Italian frogmen.

*Oltterra* was Visintini's masterpiece. The original idea of turning an old tub at Algeciras into a special instrument of war was not his alone; but it was he who transformed the battered tanker into a jumping-off base, entirely unsuspected by the British, for the assault forces which were to operate against Gibraltar.

The Italians transported ammunition, diving equipment and supplies to the ship which had been prepared with a four-foot escape hatch cut into the side of the ship just below the water-line, allowing their human torpedoes or chariots to move freely towards their prospective targets which were plainly visible on the surface and in close proximity.



*The Italian tanker Olterra at Gibraltar in September 1943 following the armistice.*



*The hidden trapdoor in Olterra's forepeak used by Maiale to leave and re-enter the tanker. The trapdoor would normally be below the waterline.*

The *Olterra* was manned by relaxed Italian seamen during the day who at night donned their diving gear and mined Allied ships.

In November 1942 Bailey was joined by Lt. Lionel Crabb, as Bomb Safety Officer in Gibraltar, freshly out from England after attending bomb and mine disposal courses at Naval shore establishments.

Bailey trained Crabb to dive and in the methods used to search vessels for mines.

Crabb was a welcome addition to the UWP which had now expanded to eight divers.

Recruitment was difficult, the ever present dangers very evident, and there was even one diver, 'Taffy' Thomas who was unable to swim but became an extremely proficient diver.

Many volunteers came forward, but few were found suitable for the demanding physical conditions and necessary skills.

In Gibraltar, the UWP were very hard pressed, even with freshly trained divers, to meet the demands of searching all Allied vessels anchored in the Bay for mines.

One notable experience Bailey had was an encounter underwater with an Italian frogman.

In the words of Dr. John Bevan, who very recently researched this incident:

Quote:

"Unfortunately, no record of this incident has been found in the official archives either in Britain or Italy, and the story has "improved" with the telling. In a later newspaper story, Bailey is alleged to have stated:

*Before he could resist, I drew the commando knife I carried in a sheath at my waist and stuck it in his chest, slitting the breathing bag of his suit. He collapsed and I dragged him to the surface by his shoulder buckle. They did their best to revive him, but he died soon afterwards.*

To be fair to Bailey, the wording of this item (such as an inaccurate description of the breathing set being a "breathing bag of his suit") suggests they are not actually Bailey's words and the account appears to have suffered from some creative writing on the part of the journalist.

Furthermore, had such a fatality occurred, the official archives would surely have recorded the incident, including a post mortem examination, and even an Inquiry.

The inevitable conclusion is that the Italian frogman was neither fatally injured nor captured and the damage inflicted was minimal.

Another clue as to how this incident actually played out is found in the National Archives. Lt Frank E Goldsworthy, Staff Officer (Intelligence) referred to one of the swimmers who attacked the ss *Ravenspoint* on 15 September 1942 "*had his leg injured by the propeller of one of the launches*". Italian records also refer to their Gamma Group swimmer Bruno di Lorenzi having his diving suit cut by a boat's propeller during that operation.

The Italian engineer on the *Oltterra*, by the name of Paulo Denegri provided supporting evidence when interviewed on 7 October 1943:

*The first of these two attacks (by shallow diving and launched from the beach) was made on a large scale by about a dozen men but was "not very successful". On the second occasion only three men went out, and he believes one of them was wounded.*

A British report of the incident stated:

*... the other two had been unable to use their bombs owing to the presence of Spanish fishing boats and British naval patrol launches. One of the two had his leg injured by the propeller of one of the launches.*

Bearing in mind that it was dark, visibility underwater would have been very poor. It is most unlikely that di Lorenzi ever saw Bailey or a boat's propeller. Di Lorenzi was not even wearing any goggles so he was virtually working blind.

It is perfectly reasonable for him to have assumed the cut in his leg had been caused by a launch propeller rather than a commando knife." - Unquote

This incident was to give Bill Bailey nightmares for the rest of his life. In those days there was no counselling or psychological help available.

Diving operations continued in Gibraltar: as the Italians became bolder, more ingenious mines were being used including units from Germany with four clocks.

One such device was found attached to the bilge keel of the SS Imber in May 1942 and rendered safe underwater by Bill Bailey.

Ref.2

"These mines were designed to explode when the ship was away from port.

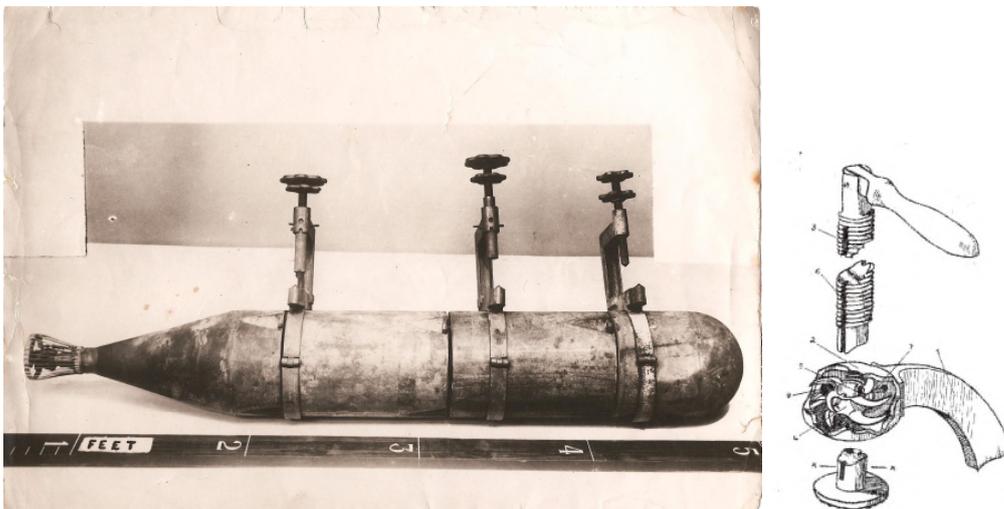
Some of the fuses were worked by vanes which were turned by the force of the water and, when they eventually fell away, set off the primer.

Every ship reaching Gibraltar had to be examined by the UWP, in case a limpet was underneath.

Their first big reward was clamped securely to the bilge keel of the SS Imber.

She arrived in Gibraltar from Seville, loaded with iron ore, and there were some good grounds for suspecting that she had been sabotaged either internally or externally whilst in Spain. Because of her cargo it was decided to examine her externally first.

At that time, Lieutenant Bailey's very efficient right-hand man was Able Seaman Ransomme. He was detailed to search the port side and Bailey went to starboard. Ransomme found it. As a precaution, the ship was towed from its very valuable berth inside the harbour to shallow waters in the bay, and the two of them successfully removed the bomb which contained four detonating clocks and a vane mechanism. After it had been rendered safe they found that the clocks had only a few hours to run before firing"



*Underwater bomb; clamped to ship's bilge keel; five feet three inches long, fired by the tail mechanism (vane/propeller) and by three clockwork fuses. The clamps were often booby-trapped as shown on the right.*

Being the first of a kind it was handed over to the naval scientists ashore for examination.

The following day Bailey was called for by a very white-faced and shaken scientist (boffins as they were known), who advised him that of the three essential mechanisms primed to fire the bomb, two had been successfully dealt with, but the third had failed to fire owing to a grain of sand or grit keeping essential contacts apart, hence saving him from oblivion.

Following the daring canoe raid on enemy shipping in the port of Bordeaux by ten Royal Marines early in 1942 (known as Cockleshell Heroes), the leader and one of the two survivors Lt. Col. Hasler DSO, OBE escaped through France and found his way to Gibraltar to await repatriation to the UK.

While in Gibraltar, and being a dedicated small boat enthusiast, Hasler was not idle and found a canoe. He planned a night paddle and asked Bailey if he was up to it, 'something less dangerous than diving'. They took off, Bailey in the bow and Hasler in the stern controlling the steering and began to enter Spanish waters when Bailey spotted an armed sentry silhouetted against the night sky, climbing into a sentry box.

Bailey suggested a rapid return to base when the sentry opened fire. Hasler's reaction, having been under fire before, was to paddle faster keeping his head down. Bailey had no option as Hasler was steering and the senior officer.

They returned safely, life was dangerous enough already in Gibraltar without looking for trouble!

Hasler was the founder of the Observer Single handed Transatlantic Yacht Race (OSTAR) in 1960 for a wager of two

shillings and sixpence and competed in a number of these races.

Ref.5

"Just before Christmas of 1942, Lt. W. Bailey was awarded the George Medal for his underwater work. Many believed that he had been decorated for diving armed with a fighting knife and slashing away at an Italian frogman's breathing gear.

Bailey was sustained in dangerous work by his highly developed sense of the ridiculous. His friends regularly suffered from it.

When the award was announced, an Army battery commander, who had often been Bailey's victim, invited him and Crabb to his mess to celebrate. It was Christmas, after all.

They arrived to find the battery commander apparently in an advanced stage of celebration. He was flushed and his words were swaying gently on their consonants. 'Bill' he said to Bailey, 'this is a wonderful thing, your George Medal. Must think of some special way of celebrating in style'

From time to time, at a given signal, every searchlight on Gibraltar searched and every gun responded to impress the Spaniards. This was known as Exercise Gehenna.

After much drinking and rejoicing, the Army captain drew Crabb aside and said 'Don't tell Bailey, but Exercise Gehenna is on tonight'. He spoke in a remarkably sober voice. At ten, the Captain said, 'Bill, I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll fire my guns'

'Don't be a fool'. 'I insist'. 'Sit down. Have another drink'.

At 10.55 the battery commander rose again, patted Bailey's arm and staggered out into the night. At eleven, every gun in Gibraltar sounded.

The bold Bailey fainted in his chair"

A change to the daily routine of searching ships bottoms for bombs was interrupted when a floating contact mine, that had come free from its sinker, was located off Cape Spartel (Atlantic W. Coast Morocco).

Bailey, as RMSO, was detailed to investigate and despatched in a launch from Gibraltar to deal with the mine.

Once located, the mine had to be secured. Having sent the launch to a safe distance Bailey, in a small rowing boat and a light chop on the sea, was able with one arm to secure a line to a safe part of the mine while the other arm ensured that the boat did not touch any of the evil horns which would cause the mine to explode.

The mine was towed offshore and, as was standard practice, exploded by rifle fire.

Ref.4

"On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1943 a Liberator carrying General Sikorski, his daughter, several military officials and service colleagues crashed into the sea on take-off from Gibraltar shortly after 11.00 pm.

General Sikorski was the Commander-in-Chief of Poland and Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile; he and all other occupants perished in the accident except the Czech pilot Edward Prchal who was rescued by an RAF launch. The aircraft was on its way to London from the Middle East"

Bill Bailey was called to dive at first light together with four or five other divers, and recover all bodies and important documentation contained in General Sikorski's briefcase of which there were no copies.

As diving began machine-gun fire was directed at the divers from a Spanish sentry post believing that the aircraft and divers were in Spanish waters! As a result an official complaint was made to the Spanish authorities.

General Sikorski's daughter's body was never found.

The aircraft controls were removed for the Air Ministry's Accident Investigation Board to examine without altering the final position of the levers.

It was clearly a gruesome job for all the divers to recover seriously damaged and mutilated bodies from the murky waters polluted with aircraft fuel.

Accusations of sabotage were made and that the Liberator's controls had been tampered with.

However, the Court of Enquiry ruled accident with no blame being placed on the pilot.

Shortly after this, Bill Bailey broke his ankle accidentally on a flight of stairs and handed over command of the UWP to Lieutenant Lionel Crabb before returning to England.

Over twenty bombs and many more limpet mines and explosive devices had been rendered safe.

Ref.2

"Of L.K.P. Crabb, who served under Lt. Bailey before taking over, he wrote, 'he was a remarkably fine diver and his

courage, devotion to duty and quiet, confident manner and pleasing personality assured the success of anything he attempted".

As a result of the measures taken to protect Allied shipping anchored at Gibraltar in 1941 the number of ships sunk or crippled diminished considerably; nevertheless the Italians continued their attacks and remained a very serious threat.

Lieutenant, later Commander Lionel 'Buster' Crabb went on to carry out very successful work in mine and bomb clearance in Italy, working with Italian divers in Venice after Italy's capitulation.

Ref.3

"In April 1956 Crabb disappeared during a secret mission under the hull of a Russian warship moored in Portsmouth harbour.

The ship had brought Soviet leaders Krushchev and Bulganin to Britain on a sensitive state visit at the height of the Cold War.

After Buster Crabb failed to return, the Press got hold of the story, Anglo-Soviet relations hit an all-time low and the Establishment closed ranks.

A year later Crabb's decapitated and handless body was found, sparking a major row between the government, the secret services and the Admiralty that still smoulders today"

Government papers on this case will not be made public until 2057.

In 1958, a film 'The Silent Enemy' was premiered in London covering these wartime activities in Gibraltar featuring Laurence Harvey, Michael Craig, Dawn Adams and Sidney James.

## **D-Day Preparation and Execution**

As plans for D-Day were being put together, the Royal Navy worked hard on the development of improved diving suits, breathing mixtures suitable for divers to work freely at depths of 120 feet and called for volunteers for 'Special Service in Hazardous Operations'. Volunteers were to be paid an additional salary of five shillings per day.

In order to ensure the safety and working capacity of divers, the RN rapidly pursued the optimum balance for breathing pure oxygen at different depths over measured time.

This involved placing the diver with his breathing gear in a tank (known as the 'wet pot') where the top was then sealed and pressure applied to simulate increasing depths. The diver was asked to hammer on the side of the tank at regular intervals to prove he was conscious.

When a diver lost consciousness he was immediately removed from the pressure chamber and revived with oxygen.

This happened on many occasions to the unfortunate volunteers, including Bill Bailey who described it as a 'chilling experience, not recommended for one's health'.

The findings of experimental work on oxygen and Nitrox mixtures done at the time are still in practice today for deep diving.



*Unconscious diver, under supervision of the medical officer, being removed from the 'wet pot' during tests on breathing mixtures before D-Day Normandy Landing.*

These tests were carried out at HMS Vernon under the supervision of scientists, RN surgeons, doctors and diving experts and resulted in specifically designed diving suits and breathing apparatus for special purposes.

The 'P' (or Port) Party suit was developed for bomb and mine disposal work in the ports of Northern Europe. All components were non magnetic and divers breathed a mixture of enriched air (i.e. a greater proportion of

oxygen than is contained in ordinary air, which could be varied according to the diver's needs) supplied by two large cylinders strapped to the diver's back. The breathing mixture allowed divers to work for up to one and a half hours at depths of sixty feet and reduced the risk of oxygen poisoning and 'the bends'.

These bottles were originally made in Germany, and were the oxygen bottles recovered from German aircraft shot down over the UK.

They were beautifully made of aluminium alloy, very strong and still carried German markings! On the front of this suit (clearly visible in the photograph) is the Protosorb canister containing soda lime which absorbed carbon dioxide from exhaled breath.



*'Port' Party diving suit with self contained breathing apparatus, specially developed for D-Day operations. All non-magnetic.*

Ref.7

"The Normandy landing was approaching and experience in the North Africa campaign had revealed that German thoroughness extended to the sabotage of ports and dock installations before surrendering them.

All sorts of ingenious explosive devices were placed so that berths for supply ships were rendered impossible to use unless searched and cleared by divers. Speed in such a search was essential, and teams of divers who could work rapidly over the bottom of a dock or basin, ten or more at a time, were required.

These became known as the famous 'P' Parties or 'Human Minesweepers"

Four 'Port' or 'P' Parties were formed, each with specific objectives for D-Day and the following months, clearing the ports of Cherbourg in the west to Ouistreham (at the mouth of the Caen canal) in the east.

Bill Bailey was given command of Naval Party 1574 which comprised initially of six divers (later eight) their D-Day objective being to clear the harbour basin at Ouistreham and ensure operation of the lock gates that gave access to the Caen canal (10 km) which had to be cleared to provide safe passage for supply vessels to reach Caen.



*'P' Party diver on experimental test dive wearing "clammy death" suit.*

Training of divers was kept at a brisk pace to ensure total readiness for the D-Day landing on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944 of 133,000 Allied troops on the Normandy beaches from the east side of the Contentin Peninsula to the mouth of the River Orne below Caen.

A further 23,000 men parachuted and landed by glider to secure the flanks of the invading force.

*Ref.6 (Chapter 9)quote - excerpt page 26 to 38*

"We left Bill Bailey on D-Day minus ten disappearing with his small Party n° 1574, into the silence of a security camp. It was situated in the midst of the pleasant countryside of Suffolk, but the camp could have been anywhere for all the Party cared. They were a lively band, determined to go places and restive at having to wait for their first chance of action.

Bailey himself had picked his six divers – keen young men, highly trained and eager to show what they could do. Bailey, with his persuasive charm, his efficiency and dash, had just the right sort of temperament to get the best out of them during what was to prove something of a freelance operation.

He had already been briefed about their first tasks. These were to be the clearance of Ouistreham, the little Normandy port at the mouth of the Caen Canal; then the stretch of the canal up to Caen and, finally Caen itself.

He had, of course, been furnished with some of Judge Wright's excellent plans and notes of this area. These

provided a good working knowledge of what was to be expected. From Wright, too, he learnt that the *Maquis* had reported the presence of a mine, with clock pocket, alongside the lock-gates at Ouistreham.

On hearing of this, Bailey paid a visit to a Royal Air Force station and asked if a reconnaissance plane could be sent over to Ouistreham to take some photographs at low water. This was done, and although the prints did not disclose the mine they gave a helpful picture of the general layout of the port and some of the obstructions and damage.

In the security camp Bailey saw to it that his men and their equipment were maintained in first-class order. They were kept very much on their toes, for they were to go in with some of the early forces on Sword Beach. This was the most easterly of the five landing beaches. Here, on D-Day, both British and Canadian troops were to land north and north-west of Caen.

British airborne troops, too, were to be dropped east of the Caen canal a few hours ahead of the first seaborne forces.

The port of Caen was an extremely important D-Day objective of the British Army. As we know, it did not in fact fall until some weeks later and then only after hard and bitter fighting. Although only a comparatively small inland port, Caen was very well equipped to handle large quantities of supplies, hence Party 1574's early preparations to clear the port and the canal leading up to it as soon as it had been taken.

But Caen was important to the Allies for other reasons too. Besides having good ground to the east for airstrips, it

was most vital because from here the American forces were to make a left wheel. Until Caen had been captured by the British troops, therefore, the advance was held up.

Caen was important to the Germans as well, and they were stubborn in its defence. Its loss was to open the way to Paris.

At last Party 1574 received orders to go to Portsmouth for embarkation. After the usual infuriating delays and the expected hazards and discomforts of the crossing, they reached Sword Beach.

They sailed in the same convoy as another naval Party, n° 1502, whose business was to get certain captured ports working again.

They, too, were bound for Ouistreham, but were not, of course, going to take any part in underwater clearance of mines, which was Party 1574's special care. Their duties would be salvage and general reorganisation of the port's facilities.

Party 1502 were well equipped and the 'P' Party members looked with envy at their lorries. Bailey had only been able to scrounge a box-cart to carry their gear! But he cared nothing for dignity; he was concerned only with getting their equipment to Ouistreham in the shortest possible time.

The excitement of going ashore amidst the remains of wreckage of landing-craft, tanks, desolate relics of the first assault forces, was enhanced by the sound of firing. Not far away Royal Marine Commandos were still engaged in mopping up behind the beaches while the armies pressed inland against fierce enemy resistance.

They got the box-cart ashore and loaded all their gear into it; the diving-suits, the breathing-mixture cylinders, the Protosorb canisters, the tools, the kit replacements, etc.- no mean amount of luggage for their one piece of so-called transport!

Then they manhandled the box-cart off the beach and on to the road. Looking a little like a bunch of tramps, they set out, turning left on the assumption that this seemed to be in the general direction of Ouistreham.

It seemed very much a private expedition, and less hardy spirits might well have been daunted. Not Bailey and his men. They were determined to make a go of it and pushed on at a brisk pace.

There were grim reminders of war all around them: corpses distorted and mangled; transport vehicles in a shambles; tanks battered into immobility and even occasional enemy fire and distant sounds of more continuous fighting. Fortunately, they were too occupied with their own affairs to feel the full impact of all these horrors.

They came to some crossroads and were relieved to see a Military Policeman standing at the door of a sort of *bistro*. Bailey went over to inquire the way to Ouistreham and learnt that it was only half a mile further on. Inside the *bistro* he found the other naval Party, who had got well ahead in their motor vehicles. They all thought that Ouistreham had not yet been captured.

Some brandy had been unearthed, so 'P' Party members joined them in a much-needed tot all round. Then, ignoring the possibility of enemy troops in Ouistreham, Bailey and his men went on their way. They duly found Ouistreham but no signs of the enemy. The port was, however, still under fire

from a mobile mortar on the River Orne. Regarding this as an inevitable part of the daily round, they began at once to prepare for work.

The first job was to be the underwater examination of the lock-gates, whose safety was essential to preserve the water level at the canal.

Bailey dived on the gates and, sure enough, found a mine complete with clock pocket, just as the *Maquis* had warned. With superb courage he took his tools and dived again to render the mine safe in spite of the enemy fire which made it dangerous for any diver to be in the water.

He learnt afterwards that these lock-gates had been built by a Scots firm of engineers. Details of their construction were still on the files, so in case the 'P' Party had been unable to render safe any mines found round the gates, or in case the enemy had blown them up before they left, a duplicate set of lock-gates had been built and towed out from Scotland.

There were some drifters moored at the seaward end of the lock. The divers went down and found that the enemy had fitted some charges to them in the hope that the vessels would be sunk and serve as block ships.

But Bailey managed in the nick of time to deal with these charges before Party 1502 arrived with their imposing convoy of vehicles in a swirl of dust.

This telltale cloud did not pass unnoticed by the Germans, who responded with heavy fire and some vicious dive-bombing. In consequence, everybody was ordered to dig slit-trenches and take shelter.

By the next night they had found some underground billets to sleep in and there they were well protected. Bailey relates how he settled himself under his mosquito net (Party 1574 had been issued with this refinement of comfort but had been unable to get suitable transport for their gear). At first the others had laughed at him for acting so civilised under bombardment. Soon, however, they were glad enough to follow his example, for the mosquitoes became a maddening pest.

On that first evening, when work was over. Bailey went out with another naval officer to look at an observation post he had noticed on the way from Sword Beach to Ouistreham. As he had passed it he had thought what a lot of trouble it could still have caused if it had been properly manned.

Now they had a good look round but could see no movement anywhere. Amongst the debris they found a dead body- the poor devil had been shot in the back. This gave them a nasty reminder of how easy it would be for a sniper to pick them off.

Perhaps, after all, they were being watched from inside, but there were no signs of life even when they tried to force open the heavy door. They could make no impression, for it was apparently locked on the inside. This did not necessarily indicate the presence of Germans inside as they might well have escaped by an underground passage.

Before leaving that night, Bailey and his companion collected a wireless set and a bicycle which they found lying around, on the principle that they might come in useful.

Next morning Bailey went back again to the post, this time with a beehive charge to blow in the door. Outside he found members of the Pioneer Corps clearing up wire. Then just as he was moving towards the door, it opened and a German soldier came out. Like an automaton he moved stiffly, threw down his rifle and surrendered to Bailey. There followed a procession of Germans in single file until a total of forty more had emerged and surrendered. Evidently the sight of Bailey's powerful beehive charge had been too much for their nerve and they preferred to give in without any trouble. Recalling his visit of the previous evening, Bailey thought how lucky for him and his fellow officer that the Germans had not been in the mood for shooting.

Except when the enemy firing was too heavy and made diving too dangerous, Party 1574 pressed on with their underwater search of the port. Another look round the lock-gates produced nothing further. They also made a thorough search of the lock as far as the end of Ouistreham Quay. Here again they found neither mines nor explosive charges, but – a point that cannot be too much stressed – the importance of their technique lay not in what they found underwater but in the fact that once they had searched an area, they could give a guarantee of absolute safety from mines and booby-traps.

Among the first vessels to pass this way (after the capture of Caen) were some minesweepers. They would not have been able to do so without risk but for the work of the 'P' Party. In so confined a space, their own sweeps could not have been used effectively.

The divers also helped the Royal Engineers to do some essential repairs, notably to replace parts of the lock equipment which had either been damaged by the Germans or had become worn.

The main quay at Ouistreham on the landward side of the gates was then searched and nothing found, much to everybody's regret.

After this the young divers were greatly cheered when they discovered three fifty-pound charges in the new lock. Bailey dived and disposed of these quickly and effectively.

In between whiles, when they had time to spare, the Party helped with a little salvage work. Two sunken lighters and a tug, which had been sent to the bottom by the enemy in an attempt to block the channel, were located, plugged and buoyed ready for raising by the salvage party. They did the same for a canal dredger.

Aground against the West Quay was a tender to French lightships, the *Quinette de Rochemond*. This vessel, too, had been sunk by the enemy in the hope that she would prevent the Allies from using the quay.

The divers made a search underwater of the vessel's hull. They found a charge secured to one of the blades of the propeller and equipped with a pull-igniter. The idea was that as soon as the engines were started and the propeller turned, the charge would be fired. To make doubly sure, all the firing parts had been waterproofed with bitumen. Bailey rendered it safe underwater and then removed the charge. The vessel was pumped out and refloated at high water.

Underwater demolition charges were also found in several other craft and were safely withdrawn.

In Party 1574 was a leading seaman, George Steele, who had a knack of knowing everything that was going on around him, and particularly if it was something that could be turned to the Party's advantage.

One day, soon after they had reached Ouistreham, he came to Bailey with a request. He told his officer that everybody else in the Navy, and in the Army too, for that matter, in the district was getting his daily tot of rum. Couldn't Bailey do something for the Party?

Bailey could, and did with his customary speed. He borrowed a jeep and drove to Arranches. There he told the corporal in charge of supplies that his Party was not getting their rum ration.

When the corporal had been persuaded that the rum ration must come from his stock, Bailey decided to ask for a good supply in case poor old 'P' Parties had their usual trouble in getting enough stores next time they were short. He therefore requested – and got – enough for six officers and ninety-eight men!

The jeep could hardly carry the load, but Bailey somehow managed to get it back to Ouistreham in safety. The supply was carefully hidden away and lasted the Party for months – right up to the end of October when they went in to help clear Antwerp.

Not that thoughts of their rum ration ever put the Party off work! On the contrary, they were much too keen to see that Party 1574 had as good a record as possible.

Naval Party 1502 had already left Ouistreham. Now, as it was not expected that Caen would fall for a while, Bailey and his men were ordered back to England for a well-earned rest and for re-equipment.

After seven days in this country they started out again. This time the Party had been made up to full strength.

Casey joined Bailey from Barrow as his junior officer and fitted in perfectly. He was very young, but that did not prevent him from becoming one of the toughest and most self-reliant of 'P' Party officers.

Caen at last fell to the British forces. It was captured on July 10<sup>th</sup> after a final attack had been launched a couple of days earlier. The port was desolated and scarred by the long and bloody struggle.

This was the signal for Party 1574 to press on with the rest of their task of clearance in this area.

They started work on the six miles of canal from Ouistreham to Caen. This narrow stretch of water could so easily have been mined. The havoc to be caused amongst the urgently needed supply ships on their way up to Caen made it seem certain that the enemy would have taken so good an opportunity.



*Controlled explosion of a damaged German mine that could not be rendered safe.*

The method of search adopted was unique in 'P' Party experience. First, two lorries were driven slowly along the canal banks, dragging between them a snag-line, which swept the canal bottom. As soon as the line met any obstruction the lorries were halted and the divers went down to examine the catch.

This work was very much to the men's liking. It was a challenge to their ingenuity; there was more than a spice of danger; they had a chance to use their skill, and they were performing a vital task extremely well. It was a real pioneering job. There were hazards, obstacles along the banks as well as at the bottom of the canal. Trees and bushes had to be cut down, fences negotiated or breached, and at least one cow and one goat disentangled from the tackle.

Following behind this circus act came the small mine - sweepers, which carried out a full magnetic and acoustic sweep.

This painstaking search produced nothing in the way of mines, booby-traps, etc., but it was nevertheless a very good job well done. By it the approaches to Caen were opened up to traffic.

At Caen they proceeded on the by now familiar underwater search of the docks and basins. The port was in wild disorder through demolitions and devastation. The enemy, however, had left in too much of a hurry to sow his usual crop of mines as was proved by the 'P' Party search which brought to light no infernal machines.

Their next job was to examine the lock-gates and the barrage, both of which had been badly damaged by the enemy.

The purpose of this barrage was to store a sufficient supply of water to feed the canal.

While working in Caen the Party were allocated accommodation in a small ex-enemy tanker, the *Gravdal*. It was brand new but had been sunk by a demolition charge which had pierced and flooded one of the tanks. The accommodation remained above water and, apart from a thirty-degree list to starboard, was extremely comfortable. But party 1574 found that living on a slope left room for improvement. In any case, they regarded it as a challenge. So in their spare time they made an underwater search and discovered the cause of the trouble. By filling compensating tanks they soon had her on an even keel. Their next move was to repair and clean the auxiliary machinery. Soon the living quarters were made even more like home with such refinements as electric light and heat and plenty of hot water for showers.

Looking back on the whole campaign, Bailey considers that this was the best accommodation ever occupied by an operating 'P' Party; particularly as they had five Royal Marines to look after them and to act as sentries.

Naturally, these luxurious quarters became the envy of the Allied Army living ashore in all sorts of shattered billets. Bailey felt that they should share their blessings. Accordingly, he extended a general welcome to the army to sample the benefits of civilisation.

They came in their hundreds (the top figure was 250 in one day!) while Party 1574 were busy at work. The Royal Marines waited on them and as one was a barber he was able to offer a haircut after the hot shower. What more could they want?

There was even a colonel one day seeking to enjoy the excellent service.

There now remained only a few jobs to complete the Party's work here. They moved down the canal examining small basins, testing depths of water under bridges and generally assisting the port authorities to get the canal plant in full working order.

On one occasion Bailey was asked by a Canadian officer if he could send down a diver to recover his weasel which had run into the canal. At first Bailey was tempted to give a facetious answer because he had not then caught up with that particular type of army vehicle (operational name for a special cable-laying tractor).

It was a simple manoeuvre, says Bailey. A diver quickly located the weasel. They shackled a line to it and the vehicle was hauled out.

The Party were now running low in supplies and their work in the Caen and Ouistreham area was finished.

Arrangements were made for them to have another spell of rest in the United Kingdom. They were warmly thanked for their valuable service, after which they embarked in a motor fishing vessel for home.

But they were not to get away so easily. Off the port of Arromanches they received an urgent signal to land again and proceed into camp to await the fall of Boulogne. Bailey delayed only long enough to make a signal to Woodcock asking for supplies to be forwarded.

Then, in his persuasive way, Bailey coaxed sufficient transport out of the port authorities at Arromanches to carry his Party and their gear. Off they went and found themselves quartered in a farmhouse not far from Boulogne.

Here, impatiently, they had to wait."

Shortly after Caen had fallen to Canadian and British Forces, a month after D-Day, Bill Bailey was approached by an Army Officer whose soldiers had found a large safe in what was left of the Town Hall. The safe had to be opened in case it contained German Military plans or documents of importance.

Bailey said that it could be blown open and the safe was duly placed in the Town square, explosives attached and then covered with sandbags and debris, of which there was no shortage after the heavy bombardment.

The charge was fired with a loud explosion only to reveal that there was little left of the safe let alone any content, leaving Bailey having to report to the senior Army Officer that the safe was empty! Bill Bailey was clearly as generous with his explosives as he was to his friends. As the Allied troops advanced, 'P' Party 1574 was sent to Boulogne and then Calais to carry out their hazardous duties.

Naval 'P' Party 1574 was an extraordinary group of enterprising, resourceful and efficient young men who demonstrated their natural skills, as well as those obtained after joining the Navy. It was made up of one officer and eight seamen divers (AB's and OS), also three hands specialised in the routine maintenance of their diving equipment. A detachment of five Royal Marines (one Sergeant, one Corporal and three Marines) provided protection, as most of the time the enemy was not far away.

One diver reported finding the body of a male civilian on the bottom of one of the dock basins. When asked how he

knew the body to be that of a civilian, he replied that "his trousers had turnups"! Another seaman called Scully, of Irish origin, often disappeared into the night of the war-torn countryside and invariably would return in the early hours with eggs, rabbits, chickens and other forms of food which came as a welcome supplement to the divers and Royal Marines rations.

Ref.6

"Bailey and his Party we had left waiting to go into Boulogne. They started work there on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. The port was in chaos, with twenty-six block ships across the harbour entrance and twenty-five wrecks in the harbour itself.

These wrecks made the 'P' Party method of search difficult. But Bailey was not easily discouraged. They pressed on: all the wrecks were searched as well as the harbour bottom. They found ten demolition charges, six other charges, three depth-charges and three mines electrically controlled. One of the mines was almost completely buried in the mud.

Boulogne was particularly important because here it was intended to carry out another Operation Pluto. The first, consisting of four petrol pipelines, had already been laid from the Isle of Wight to Cherbourg. (There 'P' Party divers had helped by searching in fan-shaped formation the last quarter-mile stretch of sea bed over which the pipelines were to pass. The object of this was to ensure that there were no mines or other obstructions which could damage the pipelines).



*Picture taken at Boulogne showing devastation in the harbour and dock areas. The port was finally cleared on 22<sup>nd</sup> September.*

The Boulogne Pluto was to be altogether a much more ambitious affair, with some sixteen lines across the Channel.

The Party stayed a week at Boulogne. During this time there was a shortage of fresh water. The dearth of this necessity was offset to a minor degree by a corresponding plenty of all kinds of wine.

This flow of wine encouraged Casey to savour the exotic experience of cleaning his teeth in champagne.

Whether his dentist would have approved Casey neither knew or cared.

Party 1574 now hurried on to Calais, entering the port immediately behind the advanced troops. On the way there

they called at a Canadian camp to know if Calais had fallen.

The Canadians said no, but Bailey seldom took any notice of replies that he did not like. Unimpressed, he pushed on and found that Calais had fallen two hours before their arrival. The port had obviously been a supply centre as there were large quantities of stores, very tempting to the victorious forces.

Bailey and Casey chose as their billet for the first night in Calais the gorgeously appointed headquarters of the late German commandant. They had had more than enough discomfort of late and looked forward to enjoying the luxury. They each chose an enormous room in which to sleep. But sniper fire and the rattle of machine guns were discouraging (a clock in Bailey's room was hit by a bullet) so they both took refuge in a small bathroom where there were no windows.

Their work at Calais was difficult, and the search for controlled mines had to be abandoned because of the strength of the tide. By this time, in any case, the men and their gear were at a low ebb and they clearly needed to return to England for their postponed rest and re-equipment.

Their journey home was not without incident. They had received a letter from base asking them to bring back a few souvenirs for the officers' mess. With squirrel-like enthusiasm they had collected Nazi ensigns, photographs of Hitler, German bayonets, etc.

Bailey was taking all these and had included for himself the clock with the bullet mark as a reminder of one lucky escape.

At the British port of disembarkation they were asked by a Customs official if they had anything to declare. Thinking only of their diving gear, they said no. Hardly had they spoken when Bailey's clock struck the hour, its chimes reverberating. Mercifully, the Customs officer was well disposed and turned a deaf and kindly ear"

The clock in question continues to work well today and strikes every fifteen minutes, despite the lead bullet embedded in the pendulum!

Further advances by Allied troops took 'P' Party 1574 to Le Havre, Flushing, Breskens and Antwerp, Bremen and Hamburg.

The latter three ports were cleared of bombs, mines and booby traps by all four 'P' Parties who had met there and worked in unison. At the time Antwerp was the third largest port in the world, with thirty miles of wharves and many miles of river quays.

It is important to relate that this specialist group of four 'P' Parties comprising of no more than forty bomb and mine disposal divers, only one man was killed. This ironically happened when an Able Seaman was off duty in an Antwerp cinema which received a direct hit from a V1 rocket bomb.

Ref. 6

"In Antwerp the water was icy and the visibility was nil. No diver could stay down for more than about ten minutes at a time. In one basin the mud came well over the divers'

heads, choking the outlet valves and making it almost impossible for them to breathe"

Much credit to the 'P' Parties' success must go to the thorough training in both diving and mine disposal techniques which prepared these 'human minesweepers' daily, and for long periods at a stretch, to dive often in nil visibility, identify and while under water render safe mines and booby traps.

Divers risked a filthy death in the mud and slime as they worked by touch at the bottom of captured ports and harbours in order that the transports and supply ships, so necessary for the advancing troops, could berth in safety.

The mission to clear all ports from Cherbourg to Hamburg and open them to shipping was complete by March 1946.

Ref. 6

"In the course of this work by the 'P' Parties, more than six hundred days were spent by the Parties in actual diving; a total area of more than twenty million square feet was searched; the divers travelled under water more than one thousand three hundred miles; one hundred and fifty nine mines, fifty teller mines, a hundred and twenty one charges and one V2 rocket bomb were found and dealt with"

## **Post D-Day**

'P' Parties then all returned to their base HMS Vernon (Diving) at Brixham, where many, including Bill Bailey, trained divers, many of them Dutch, for operations in the Far East after VJ Day in August 1945.

While 'P' Parties were based in Brixham, the officers' mess was at the Northcliffe Hotel where the welcome, the food and comforts were soon found to be as near pre-war as possible. A welcome change to the conditions recently experienced from Cherbourg to Hamburg, parties held in the mess and the spirited antics carried out by its members were legend.

Commander J.S. Mould G.C. G.M. RANVR ('Mouldie') was one of the most senior members of the mess, had been a leader in the Land Incident Section and done much to develop the diving suits and self contained breathing apparatus used by 'P' Parties, as well as being one of the most experienced of Allied mine disposal officers. He had rendered safe magnetic and acoustic mines, many of them booby-trapped, both on land and underwater.

One evening he found himself delayed in Brixham Harbour, with no transport to take him several miles up the hill to the Northcliffe Hotel where a farewell party was to take place. Typically he jumped into the dockside mobile crane and headed for the mess at a steady pace to receive a rapturous welcome on arrival from his messmates.

Only on leaving the crane's cabin did he notice the considerable decoration at the end of the boom, comprising of telephone and power lines collected on his voyage up the hill, having left behind him a trail of sparkling destruction!

The Commanding Officer of this special group of men turned a 'blind eye' to such activities, knowing full well the risks and pressure under which they had worked and their need to let off steam.

'Mouldie', an Australian from Sydney was Bill Bailey's best man at his wedding. After all the risks he had taken in bomb and mine disposal he tragically died of a burst appendix at home in 1957. He was sadly predeceased by his young son who drowned in their swimming pool while emulating his father's exploits using a mask and snorkel. Once Mould was asked by a journalist if his work was dangerous. Drawing the teeth of mines he replied, while wearing a diving suit, is, "not dangerous at all, merely a difference between life and death".

Ref. 6

"The last signal received in HMS Vernon (D), located at Brixham, came from the First Lord of the Admiralty and read as follows:

*"On closing down your establishment at Brixham, I should like to express to you and your staff my admiration of the splendid work done by "P" Parties. The ingenuity shown and the courage displayed has contributed materially to the success of the operations of the United Nations.*

"The work of these men was known to only a few during the war; their light was effectively shielded by the black-out curtain of "security", but nobody can deny that they played a major part in maintaining the vital supply lines of the armies of liberated Europe"

In addition to his being awarded the George Medal for his work at Gibraltar, Bill Bailey was awarded the DSC for his work in connection with the Normandy landings and a Bar to his GM (of which sixteen were awarded during the Second World War) for mine recovery work in France and the Low Countries.

He was promoted to Lieutenant-Commander RNVR in March 1945 at the age of twenty-six, an exception since this level of promotion at the time rarely took place before the age of thirty.



*Fernando Pessa, the BBC Portuguese Section, interviewing Lieut. W. Bailey DSC, GM\*, RNVR of HMS Nelson, Flagship of the Home Fleet, after returning from her first visit to Portugal since the war on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1945. The interview was relayed by the Emissora Nacional de Lisboa.*

Ref.2

"To place shallow water diving, or the first 'Frogmen' into context, it is interesting to record the recruiting and training methods adopted by the various countries involved.

While the Italian Tenth Flotilla (Gamma Group) was made up of elite athletes from all three forces, by contrast the German SS Underwater Swimming and Assault Group was initially drawn from volunteers, but also convicted criminals who, providing they served to the end of hostilities, would be considered as free and honourable Germans.

The Royal Navy called for volunteers who were subjected to rigorous selection before specialised training"

In November 1944, Bill Bailey married Joan Mary Gorddard in London, where she worked under the Ministry for Aircraft Production on components for Lancaster bombers. They met on Christmas Day 1943 and discovered that they had met by chance a few months earlier, but that is another story.



Shortly before they married when in a restaurant in London a curious story was to unfold. Two uniformed RAF officers at the bar seemed to be paying more than normal interest in Bill Bailey, to the point that he approached the officers and introduced himself.

It turned out that they all knew each other. The pilots had been shot down and interned in occupied Holland. They escaped with a Dutch pilot and followed the escapees route via safe houses, through France, over the Pyrenees to

Barcelona and finally arrived at Gibraltar to await repatriation to England.

While in Gibraltar, the three escapee pilots were accommodated in Bill Bailey's quarters. The two RAF pilots explained about their safe return to their squadrons and expressed their gratitude for Bailey's hospitality.

On enquiring of the Dutch pilot, Bailey was told that he had been shot. On arrival in England suspicion surrounded the Dutchman and it emerged that he had been a 'quisling' and planted by the Nazis in the internment camp to discover the escape route used by the Allies.

Before leaving Gibraltar the Dutchman, in appreciation of Bailey having provided accommodation, offered him his knife that he claimed had secured his escape from the POW camp in Holland, a gesture which Bailey refused to accept, suggesting he keep the knife for his son one day.

Bill Bailey had twin sisters, Elizabeth (Betty joined WAAF) and Anne (Nancy), who were a year older and both married in London. Nancy married Michael Hallett in 1940, who at the time was serving in the Irish Guards. In 1943 Betty married Charles Schatz, a British national who ran a clock factory in the Black Forest in Germany which had been started by his grandfather. Charles Schatz, after education in England, returned to Germany before the War but was soon back in England as the situation deteriorated.

The clock factory was commandeered to become part of Germany's war machine making all types of timing devices, and by an ironical twist of fate, clocks, timers and fuses for mines and bombs.

When Bill Bailey was called to Buckingham Palace to receive the Bar to his George Medal on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1945, he borrowed his brother in law's car so that Joan, his heavily pregnant wife could accompany him. He approached the Palace gates and after a check by the sentries, the gates opened.

The car then stalled and the embarrassed Bailey had to pull out the starting handle to try to bring the engine back to life, while his wife uncomfortably pressed the accelerator. The sentries were overheard to comment, "hope the Navy perform better at sea than they do on land"!

Bill Bailey returned to Portugal in 1949 aged 31 as Assistant Representative for the Metropolitan Vickers Export Co. in the Iberian Peninsula.

He had not been long in Lisbon when he was summoned by the Portuguese Army to present himself for military service and to undergo a medical.

Having suffered and survived underwater explosions he had been discharged from the Royal Navy in September 1946 with a 40 per cent disability, duodenal ulcers and nerve deafness, which papers persuaded the Portuguese Army officer that he was unfit for service in the Army.

In the early 1950s Bill Bailey was contacted by an Italian who wished to meet him in Lisbon. He had also been a frogman in Gibraltar, the two one-time enemies exchanged experiences of their times in Gibraltar, each with enormous respect for the other's activities.

The meeting took place in the Aviz Hotel restaurant under the watchful eye of the 'maitre d'hôtel' Ripetti, who had ironically been an Italian agent in Lisbon during the war.

Bill Bailey, like so many who had faced the horrors of war, was extremely reluctant to talk of his personal experiences, other than those of a lighter nature.

On a number of occasions he was asked to write a book or at least record in some way his wartime experiences. Not being allowed to keep a diary he never did, other than always carry the names and addresses of next of kin of the 19 men in this 'D-Day' detachment and a record of diving times at some locations.

If he were alive today I hope he would not be disappointed at my respectful compilation of anecdotes, some comical, others ironical, while all other incidents referred to are quoted in books as indicated.

He looked on himself as a very lucky survivor; the real heroes, he believed, were those whose story often went untold and had made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives: just one young man, like so many, making his contribution to the collective war effort in search of peace and a free world.

Bill Bailey died in Lisbon in 1985 aged 66 after a successful business career in Portugal. His obituary in *The Times* of London, written by Sir John Colville, wartime Private Secretary to Sir Winston Churchill, read as follows:

'Few men have equalled the exceptional gallantry of William Bailey, CBE, DSC, GM and Bar, formerly Lieutenant Commander, RNVR, who died in Lisbon on March 11. He was a leading member of the British community in Portugal, bilingual in English and Portuguese.

As a qualified engineer, he represented Metropolitan Vickers during their construction of three major hydroelectric power stations, and later he was managing director of the British-owned company, Caima Pulp Co, which produces and exports pulp made from eucalyptus trees. He was twice chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce.

Such was his modesty that only under pressure would he admit to his notable exploits in the war. In 1941, as a naval frogman, he fought and vanquished a hostile intruder at Gibraltar.

For this he was awarded the George Medal to which he received the rare distinction of a Bar for a further act of gallantry in 1944.

He was also one of those who dived to salvage the bodies and the evidence from the wreck of the aircraft in which General Sikorski was killed.

In addition to these two outstanding decorations, he was awarded the DSC, and in 1982, in recognition of lifelong service to the British community in Lisbon, he was created CBE.

British colonies abroad have always sought to serve both their own and their adopted countries: Bill Bailey was a glowing example of this tradition'.

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3.	The Last Dive	Don Hale
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5.	Commander Crabb	Marshall Pugh
6.	Open the Ports	J. Grosvenor & L.M. Bates
7.	Deep Diving	Robert H. Davis
8.	Underwater Warriors	Paul Kemp

##### Others:

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