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TOP SECRET D-DAY BIGOT MAPS USED BY BEACHMASTER COMMANDO REDEVERS MICHAEL PRYOR

[D-Day Bigot Maps and other personal effects of Commando Redevers Michael Pryor].

Author
PRYOR, Commando Redevers Michael

Publication date
1912-1945.

Publisher

Publication place

Physical description
Two lithograph maps, one lithograph chart; [together with] concertina photograph album; [together with] midshipman’s journal; [together with] a naval sword; [together with] a set of miniature medals.

Dimensions

Notes
Top Secret ‘Bigot’ D-Day maps, and other personal effects, from the estate of Commando Redevers Pryor, Beachmaster for the ‘Juno-Mike Red’ sector, as part of Operation Overlord, and a veteran of five Second World War beach assaults!

Operation ‘Overlord’

Operation ‘Overlord’, was part of a large plan designed to bring about the defeat of Germany by heavy assaults on German-occupied Europe from the United Kingdom, the Mediterranean and Russia. The outline of the plan was completed in July 1943, and the particular assault on the Normandy beaches from the UK and the English Channel elaborated under the title of Operation ‘Neptune’ in February 1944. It involved preparatory aerial and naval bombing of German coastal positions, before the historic landings of D-Day itself: the largest amphibious operation in history, and a pivotal moment in the course of the Second World War which eventually resulted in the liberation of western Europe from German occupation.
The coastline was divided up into sectors, code-named by their main beaches, ‘Utah’, ‘Omaha’, ‘Gold’, ‘Juno’, ‘Sword’ and ‘Band’ (though the assault on ‘Band’ was cancelled at the last moment). Utah and Omaha beaches were by far the bloodiest areas of conflict, largely due to their positions either side of inland passage towards the Route Nationale. The Germans ensured that the inlet between the two sectors was strongly defended with machine guns during the assault. As a result, the Allied forces suffered extremely heavy casualties, with thousands of U.S., British, Canadian and French soldiers killed or wounded. Many of the men were shot down or scattered as soon as they reached the sand, or even while still in the water, meaning that by mid-morning the situation was so bad that President Eisenhower considered recalling the mission. Largely thanks to individual acts of bravery by certain soldiers, however, the troops were able to attack some key German strongpoints from the side or the rear, and eventually overturn their defences. By the end of the day, the battle had been won by the Allies at a terrible cost.

The BIGOT classification
Two of the maps in the collection are marked “BIGOT MOST SECRET”, and “BIGOT TOP SECRET”. Introduced during the Second World War, BIGOT was the highest-level military security classification, above Top Secret. Some sources suggest that it was an acronym for “British Invasion of German Occupied Territory;” others, that it was a “backronym” for “To Gib,” the code stamped on the papers of officers headed to Gibraltar in advance of the 1942 North Africa invasion.

Whatever the origins of the term, extraordinary efforts were made to protect BIGOT-level material. When for example a practice landing (“Operation Tiger”) on the Devon coast was ambushed by U-Boats, Eisenhower himself ordered the recovery of the bodies of the ten known victims with BIGOT clearance. This was necessary to prove that they had not been captured alive, as their capture would have compromised the invasion plans and necessitated its cancellation.

Commander Redevers Michael Pryor (1893-1964)

Commander Redevers Michael Pryor DSO, DSC, M.P., RN (known as Michael Courtenay Holland-Pryor until 1924) had served as a submariner in the Great War, and was a veteran of five wartime beach assaults. He first served aboard HMS ‘Neptune’ as midshipman between 1912 to 1914, when was promoted to acting sub-lieutenant, making full lieutenant in 1916; he would be promoted to lieutenant commander in 1924. He left the service by the late 1920s.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, he rejoined the Royal Navy, first in charge of the anti-submarine trawler Angle, and then the trawler Ruby. At the end of May 1940, he saw action at the Dunkirk Evacuation, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. He was promoted to Royal Navy Beach Commando on the unit’s foundation in 1942, and acted as beachmaster to the Canadians in the raid on Dieppe. He was severely wounded during the raid, and taken prisoner. However, he managed to escape – from the train transporting him to the P.O.W. in Germany – near the Belgian-German border. From there he made his way along the north French coast, viewing the construction of the Atlantic Wall – the extensive series of defences that the Nazis constructed along the French coast, and which would be one of the greatest obstacles to D-Day’s success. Heading south he made it to Paris, in late 1942, where he made contact with the local resistance. His plan

was to continue south and make his escape through Marseille. However, he was recaptured and imprisoned in Grenoble. By early 1943, with the help of Donald Caskie, he had made his escape, and by March he was back in England, where he was made Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, for his troubles.

Remarkably, the same year, he stood successfully as the Conservative candidate in the Birmingham Aston by-election, and gave a notable speech to Parliament on the subject of the war, and his experiences of the Nazis, which earned him praise from Churchill and a role supplying information to Naval Intelligence. In 1944, he returned to the Commandos in time for the D-day landings, and was appointed Beachmaster to 'Mike Red' Sector on Juno Beach. He also led the Commandos ashore at Flushing for the assault on Walcheren in November 1944, and was duly awarded a second Distinguished Service Cross. After the War he stood down as M.P. but continued his work with the intelligence services during the beginnings of the Cold War.

The collection consists of:

1. [THE WAR OFFICE]. Calgary. BIGOT MOST SECRET. [London], based on an edition of Jul. 1943, [but printed] March, 1944.

Lithograph map, printed in colours, overprinted in red to mark military hazards, with manuscript annotations.

Dimensions: 490 by 610 (19.25 by 24 inches).

Top Secret BIGOT map detailing the Calgary Section of Juno Beach. To the right of the map are manuscript annotations: 'Mike, Green/Red', and 'Nan, Green/White'. Pryor was in charge of Mike Red. Coded place names, defence positions, and remarks on the terrain are overprinted in red.

Scale: 1:25,000.

2. [THE WAR OFFICE]. Cairo. BIGOT TOP SECRET. [London], Based on Edition of Jul. 1943, [but printed] March, 1944.

Lithograph map, printed in colours, overprinted in red to mark military hazards, with manuscript annotations.

Dimensions: 495 by 618mm (19.5 by 24.25 inches).

Top Secret BIGOT map detailing the Cairo Section of Juno Beach. To the left of the map are manuscript annotations: 'Nan. Red', a continuation from the Calgary map. Coded place names, defence positions, and remarks on the terrain are overprinted in red.

Scale: 1:25,000.

3. THE ADMIRALTY. "Juno Area". Beach Chartlet. [London], The Admiralty, 18th Feb. 1944.

Dimensions: 580 by 480mm (23 by 19 inches).

Lithograph chart, overprinted in red.

Chart of the whole of the Juno section, providing information on the approaches to the beach. Although not labelled Top Secret, a note to the upper right states: 'For Official Use Only… Its contents are not to be communicated either directly or indirectly, to the Press…'. The chart is

numbered F.1016B, the code for the area of Juno Beach. The areas Mike – Green/Red/White and Nan – White/Red, together with “conspicuous objects”; Pryor was in charge of ‘Mike Red’.

Scale: 1:37,500.

4. I[NTER] S[ERVICE] T[OPOGRAPHIC] D[EPARTMENT] France North Coast [Photographic panorama of the French northern coast from Haut Lion to La Riviere]. [Oxford], I[nter] S[ervice] T[opographical] D[epartment], March 1944.

Panorama consisting of 21 plates, each plate made from three or four joined photographs, annotated with numbers and place names, some minor wear to joints, folding into blue buckram covers, with photostat typed label to upper cover, lettered “J”, with title and notes.

Dimensions: (approx.) 200 by 7000mm (8.25 by 275.5 inches).

This photographic coastal profile was produced by the Inter Service Topographic Department, a military and civilian department based in Oxford, and tasked with gathering topographical information on the continent in the lead up to D-Day. In 1942, ISTD made an appeal on BBC radio for postcards and photographs that British people might still have from pre-war holidays on the continent. In the first post, 30,000 letters were received, and in the end over ten million photographs were sent in. As well as analysing and gathering information, they also produced these profiles of the French coast, which were carried by D-Day commanders to insure that their landing craft disembarked in the correct location. The note to the cover states: “the silhouette is intended as an aid to coastal recognition and is NOT intended for navigational purposes” and that “due to the overlap of photographs and divergences in scale, the background is repeated in some cases”.

5. HOLLAND-PRYOR, R[edevers] Journal for use of Midshipmen. 12th January, 1912- 8th May, 1914. London, Waterlow & Sons, 1911.

Folio (310 by 200mm), 98 page journal, printed title-page with manuscript insertions, document appointing Holland-Pryor as Acting Sub-Lieutenant in May 1914 bound in before title, illustrated with 50 well executed pen and ink sketches, diagrams and maps, several with water colour, some folding, modern half cloth, preserving original red morocco label, lettered in gilt.

A midshipman’s journal, kept by the then 19 year old Redevers Holland-Pryor (he would change his name by deed poll in 1924). Just before the outbreak of World War One, Pryor served aboard the dreadnought battleship Neptune: the most modern battleship when she was launched in 1911, she would become the flagship of the Home Fleet, and saw extensive service during the War. As well as numerous maps, and other illustrations, Pryor painted a fine profile of the ‘Neptune’ at the beginning of the journal. Pryor clearly acquitted himself well during his time aboard, as a document, dated May 1914, promoting him to Acting Sub-Lieutenant, is bound in before title.

6. Royal Navy Regulation Pattern Naval Officers Sword, dated to 1827.

The sword was presented to Redevers Holland-Pryor, the blade with etched frosted details for the maker Henry Wilkinson and the recipient ‘R.M.G. Holland-Pryor’, the reverse of the blade with the recipient’s unique issue number ‘44360’, shagreen grip with brass guard and fouled anchor device, leather scabbard with all brass fittings and sword knot, contained in canvas sword bag.

7. Group of Redever Pryor’s miniature medals.

The set comprises nine medals, all housed in a black leather display case.

List of Medals: Distinguished Service Order; Distinguished Service Cross, G.V.R. with second award bar; 1914 Star; British War Medal; Victory Medal with M.I.D. oakleaves; 1939-1945 Star; France and Germany Star; Defence Medal; War medal 1939-45 with M.I.D. oakleaf.

Bibliography

Provenance

Price: £35000

Inventory reference: 23238

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