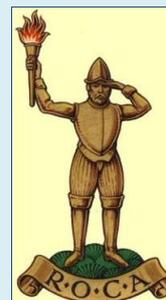




OBITUARY

Observer L A Leney, 19 Group Victor 4 Post,
Claygate

PJ/S 3010 Petty Officer Aircraft Identifier L A
Leney, USAT Excelsior, Belfast & Normandy



Died 07 Oct 2014, funeral at Charing, Kent 20 October 2014

This eulogy was given at his funeral by **Terry Giles**:-

Les was passionate about the ROC and vociferous about the lack of recognition of its role during the war. He would call me to say that he had spoken to someone and told them all about it but if they wanted more information then to contact the Chairman of No 1 Group ROC Association. I arrived home one evening to find a message that Kent Police who wanted to speak to me about Mr Leney. Les had visited their Museum in Chatham and told them they had missed a critical part of their history. The role of Special Constables and the Observer Corps

Les didn't just talk. He also wrote letters and his niece Vivien Rudolph came across an article he wrote in November 2011 titled Front Line on the Home Front that appeared in the Oldie Magazine. He starts with the history of the 1924 trials carried out here in Kent by Major General Ashmore using Special Constables reporting in to a room above the Post Office in Cranbrook, trials that led to the formation of the Observer Corps the following year. What was more interesting was when he goes on to relate his involvement with the Observer Corps that starts in November 1940. Just as the Battle of Britain has come to a close and the Blitz on London is increasing in ferocity.

Les says that *".....from the age of 19 I was in the Observer Corps and was part of a volunteer force at posts connected by telephone through the Home Counties – and eventually throughout the country. We were watching (From his post on the North Downs in Surrey) for aircraft. You may think of one, two, maybe half a dozen aircraft coming in but there were hundreds: in layers, wingtip to wingtip, like birds in a flock, but considerably louder. Hitchcock might have got his idea from them for his horror film. We watched and identified and passed the information down the wire to London where, though we couldn't hear it, we saw the docks burning and the Thames on fire. Later we were watching for aircraft coming in under the radar and from 1944 we were watching for V1 flying bombs the doodlebugs"*.

He proudly states that he could identify any aircraft at 3,000 feet, 15 miles away a skill that led to the next chapter in his story. He goes on to say *"...the Royal Navy then recruited us as Seabornes – still volunteers, of course. I became a temporary Petty Officer at £1 a day, was taken to Belfast and transferred to the US army transport ship **Excelsior**. We sailed for D-Day and landed some 2,500 troops on Utah Beach as part of the Normandy Landings. My job was to distinguish 'ours' from 'theirs' in the overhead battle, and get the gunfire right. Before the Seabornes arrived, the targets were haphazard, but I believe we saved the lives of a good few of our pilots."*

"On Remembrance Sunday, we go to the Cenotaph and lay our wreath but the BBC doesn't notice us. King George VI did though, so now we are the Royal Observer Corps and we are depicted on the Battle of Britain Monument by the Thames at Westminster."

There were many who wanted to say their fare wells to Les:

Edwina Holden, ROC Heritage Team Leader wrote:

I am so sorry to hear the sad news Les was just such a character. I had many conversations with him over the years and he kindly sent Seaborne memorabilia to us, he appears on a 'Spirit of the Corps' poster that is on our display so will certainly not be forgotten.

Paddy Malone No 31 Group ROC Association Secretary, Northern Ireland

I am really saddened to hear of the passing of Les he was such a really nice person and wonderful company. Many of our Members remember Les so well. The 2004 D-Day Commemoration Parades were an incredible experience both in Bangor and next day in Belfast. Les was indeed a real hero and so welcome here at any time.

Les Leney was a character that was larger than life

Les, dear friend you may be gone – but you will not be forgotten



Terry Giles

Deputy Chairman & Secretary
Royal Observer Corps Benevolent Fund