

D-Day Remembered - The Captain wore a skirt!

I spent some time on HMS Ramillies, an old battleship which, early in the war was famous for two things: (1) HRH Duke of Edinburgh served on her, and (2) the Captain was given a grass skirt (pui pui) by the Maoris when the ship visited New Zealand. He was told that no harm would come to the crew while he wore the skirt. On D-Day he wore it over his trousers! Did the charm work? You decide.

The ship was off the Normandy coast to silence the massive coastal guns threatening our troops and to assist with other targets. Our shells were 15" diameter and weighed 1 ton each. We didn't have it all our own way because we were attacked by the large guns - they missed. E-boats launched three torpedoes which also missed! They went either side of the ship but unfortunately they sunk a Polish-manned destroyer which lay aft of us. Sailors are quite superstitious and many on board believed that it was the skirt that saved us. Or was it an excellent helmsman?

These thoughts came to mind while I was watching the television programmes on 6 June as well as the images I recalled of the armada of small craft on its way to Sword Beach and the swarm of gliders going further inland. I thought that the BBC productions were excellent with just the right balance between Remembrance of those who gave their lives and the camaraderie displayed by the veterans. They were clearly delighted to chat with the Queen and Prince Philip and vice versa. It was a grand occasion for the Normandy Veterans who gave so much 60 years ago.

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