

The Portsmouth Water Company



WAR AND WATER

A Record of Events prior to and during
the European War of 1939 – 1945

26 & 28 Commercial Road,
Portsmouth
1945

Original text from a Portsmouth Water Company publication titled "War and Water" published 1945 and illustrated with photos and associated material from our archives





Invasion of France. As the risk of invasion “inwards” receded, so the preparations for invasion “outwards” gradually developed. It was fully expected that “D-Day” for the invasion of France, when it came, would provoke a violent enemy reaction. Most of the precautions taken to meet the air-raid contingencies were therefore kept in being and the Company’s employees took part in local exercises organised by the Garrison Commander, primarily to ensure uninterrupted troop movements. A large number of military transit camps were set up in the woods and copses in the outlying districts for which temporary water supplies were installed; numerous roadside water points were also provided.

The Service authorities estimated that during the critical period extra water would be required ranging up to nearly 1 million gallons per day and an assurance was required that this quantity would be available. The situation was one of some anxiety, because owing to the exceptionally low winter rainfall of 1943-44 the prospects were that during the following summer the yield of the springs would be much below normal and would approach the low yield experienced during the great drought of 1933-34, which was the worst drought for nearly a century in this part of the Country. Moreover, the consumption of water in the district was much above normal, partly on account of the high demand of HM Dockyard and other Service establishments and partly on account of the high demand from the lack of labour to repair defective pipes and fittings. The reserve surplus yield of the springs to meet any extra demand was therefore much less than in normal years.

“
...military transit camps were set up in the woods and copses in the outlying districts for which temporary water supplies were installed; numerous roadside water points were also provided.

The conditions were rendered still more uncertain because for security reasons the actual date of “D-Day was strictly secret and moreover no information could be given as to how long the critical period would last, once it had commenced.

From the water-supply standpoint the reserve surplus would be adequate during the early months of the year, but this quantity would diminish steadily throughout the following summer and autumn; the critical date was therefore of prime importance.

In this connection the Company’s long records of local hydrological information (yield of springs and well levels) proved invaluable and it was ultimately possible to report that the required extra quantities would be available, provided that no undue amount was lost owing to damage by enemy action. To ease the position, the Service authorities issued strict orders for water economy and arrangements were made to restrict temporarily the civil consumption, if necessary, during the critical period. Also, on the anticipated approach of “D-Day”, meetings were again called of local officials and the principal water consumers, at which the reasons for a possible need for these restrictions were given.

Notwithstanding these apprehensions, however, when “D-Day” (June 6th 1944) eventually arrived the anticipated extra demand for water proved much smaller than was forecast and much to the general astonishment enemy air raids were completely absent, apart from a few flying bombs.