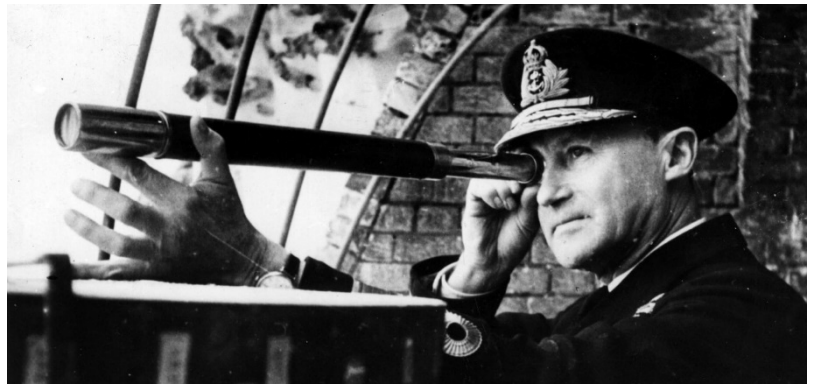


Admiral Ramsay – a family perspective. by Will Ramsay, grandson

I thought it might be apt to add some human, family moments to the well known stories of Dunkirk and D-Day.

Bertram Ramsay was born in 1883, the son of Brigadier General W. A. Ramsay, 4th Hussars, who was Commanding Officer of a young subaltern Winston Churchill. A confident young Churchill wrote home to his mother “Colonel Ramsay now takes my advice on most matters”. Ramsay’s grandparents were Captain Francis Ramsay, Royal Horse Artillery, and Georgina Home of Paxton House, Berwickshire. It was when visiting his Home relations that he met Helen



Margaret Menzies, of Kames House, Berwickshire, who he married in 1929. In 1938 they bought Bughrig House, less than a mile from Kames, hoping to retire there.



On 24th August 1939, Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay was appointed Flag Office Dover. Having served as part of the Dover Patrol in WW1, he knew the Channel well. Shortly after his arrival in Dover he wrote to his wife, my grandmother, that he “had no stationary, books, typists or machines ... maddening communications, and nothing but long retired officers or volunteers”. 8 months later, 845 vessels, (including over 500 civilian boats) which he had assembled, in 9 days evacuated a third of a million British and French soldiers.

He received many letters of congratulation, including from Churchill and Lort Gort, the general in charge of the British

Expeditionary Force, who wrote “We in the BEF can only say thank you and in doing so, we shall never forget an achievement which will live forever in the annals of the sea”. perhaps the most succinct and apt was from his brother in law: “thousands of men, women and children will be grateful to you and your men for the rest of their lives”, while a soldier’s wife wrote to him “...even if you had time, please do not answer this, but I felt I must thank you for rescuing my old boy...”

3 days after the evacuation ended, Ramsay sent a telegram to my grandmother: “Lady Ramsay, I am proud to be the first to congratulate you on your new title”. His Majesty had given him a knighthood.

Skipping four years on, it was fitting that he was chosen to send the Allies back to France in 1944, after bringing them back in 1940. For D-Day, he led the largest amphibious operation the world had ever seen, and probably will ever see, with 4,126 vessels which also in 9 days landed half a million men and 77,000 vehicles.

Throughout the war he was able to catch snippets of leave at their new family home. He would be flown to Charterhall Airfield, 3 miles away. My Uncle David remembers a visit just prior to D-Day, when he was so shattered that he had to spend the first 24 hours in bed, and the doctor was called. He recovered, but then received a telephone call and had to return immediately, having hardly seen his wife and two young sons.

One evening, a week before D-Day, my grandfather and his driver pulled over to the side of a road on a promontory overlooking Portsmouth, where they could see the convoys passing and the ships loading in the distance. Admiral Ramsay looked on pensively for what seemed a long while, then remarked “It is a tragic situation that this is a scene set for terrible human sacrifice, but if out of it comes peace and happiness, who would have it otherwise?”

On the evening of 5th June he wrote in his diary "I am under no delusions as to the risks involved in this most difficult of operations, and the critical period around H-Hour when, if initial formations of landing craft are held up, success will be in the balance. We shall require all the help that God can give us." His role in D-Day is analysed here: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/d-days-forgotten-man>

By way of relief, my grandfather wrote on 12th June to his wife "No doubt it is natural to congratulate the head of the concern, but it only serves to remind me of the many people on whom success depended quite as much if not more than on myself. At the same time, I realise that in the event of failure it would equally be all attributed to me."

That he was killed in January 1945 in a plane crash near Paris was a terrible tragedy for his wife and their two young sons (my uncle David and my father, later Major General Charles Ramsay), but also a cruel curtailment of a great leader's life.



Eisenhower called Ramsay "a most competent commander of courage, resourcefulness, and tremendous energy." Some years ago, my uncle was told by David Eisenhower (the late President's grandson) that after his grandfather had retired as President, Freeman Gosden – a well-known actor of those days – asked him at a dinner party if he would name the seven most impressive men he had met during his career. Apparently, he had no hesitation in including my grandfather as one of those seven.

Eisenhower paid Ramsay the ultimate tribute by saying that ONLY he could have organised such a large-scale landing. But, this museum is not just about him. Operations and wars are won by team effort; this museum will help future generations to remember the huge sacrifices in WW1 and WW2 of every single soldier, sailor, airman, wife, mother, father, sister, brother and child.