

## **Commander Henry Curry**

(courtesy of Audlem Online - <http://www.audlem.org/newsroom/commander-henry-curry.html>)

Commander Henry Curry was heavily involved in what was almost certainly the most important weather forecasting sequence of the Twentieth Century.

In May and June 1944, he was the senior meteorologist stationed on a corvette way out in the Atlantic Ocean, sending back the data that would help establish if the D-Day landings could go ahead.

The invasion planning involved the phase of the moon, the tides, and the time of day ideal for the landings. Favourable conditions would be satisfied on only a few days in each month one of which the commander of the Allied forces, General Eisenhower, had tentatively selected. 5th June was slated as the date for the assault.

However, on 4th June, conditions were unsuitable for a landing. High winds and the resulting heavy seas would make it near impossible to launch landing craft, and low clouds would make the aerial assault for paratroopers and bombers more difficult.

The meteorological team forecast that the weather would improve enough for the invasion to go ahead on 6th June. It was a very narrow window of opportunity. The next available dates with the required tidal conditions would be two weeks later, from 18th to 20th June. Postponing the invasion would mean recalling men and ships already in position to cross the Channel. This meant the chances that the invasion plans would be detected would be so much higher and surprise was essential.

After much discussion, Eisenhower decided that the invasion should go ahead on the 6th. As it happened, a major storm battered the Normandy coast from 19th to 22nd June, which would have made any postponed beach landings impossible.

So, with vital information from Commander Curry in mid-Atlantic playing a key role, the landing went ahead on 6th June 1944 when the largest amphibious attack in history was launched on to five beaches on the Normandy coast — code-named Juno, Sword, Gold, Utah and Omaha. The rest, as they say, is history.

Five years ago, Henry agreed to be interviewed by AudlemOnline. This was broadcast as a podcast on the website and was a fascinating insight to his experiences in the war, including two amazing and potentially fatal encounters with snakes, one in South Africa and the second in India after a night of celebration on VE Day.

Henry, in his interview, also told the story about how, as the weather was so warm that summer of 1944, he and some colleagues decided to go for a swim in mid-Atlantic. Their corvette steamed onwards on a zig zag course as the radio signals meant their presence was probably known to U-Boats, with the captain promising to pick them up on a return leg!

Henry said he was reassured and puzzled when a petty officer swimming with him said: "Don't worry sir, we are only five miles from land" before adding: "Only trouble is, it's five miles down!"

Born in 1919 in Ireland, he became a political refugee at the age of three when many Anglo-Irish had to leave the new Irish Free State. He was educated at Kings School, Macclesfield. After University and his war service, Henry Curry became a teacher and then a headmaster before moving to Buerton after his retirement. He was an enthusiastic member of Audlem Voices well into his nineties.