

Sir Alexander Stanier.

Sir Alex and Lady Stanier lived in 'The Manor' on Back Lane, East Farndon, in the 1960s and early 1970s. Most of the village knew that he had played a part in the Normandy campaign after D-Day, but maybe not exactly what his role had been. While on a camping holiday in Normandy in 1983, my family and I went to the D-Day museum at Arromanches and there on the map explaining the allied invasion was the name of Sir Alexander, in a prominent position. Later we parked in a square in a small town called Asnelles and we saw, to our surprise, that the square was called 'Place Alexander Stanier'. It was obvious that his role in the liberation of the area had been crucial. The memorial below was erected in Arromanches after his death in 1995.



Alexander Stanier was born in Shropshire in 1899. His father was titled Baron Stanier of Peplow Hall, a title which, as Sir Alexander, he inherited in 1921 but seems not to have used. Sir Alex was commissioned into the army in 1917 and was awarded the Military Cross 'for conspicuous gallantry and able leadership' at the second Battle of Cambrai in October 1918.

He continued his service in the army after the war, holding a number of posts including Military Secretary to the Governor of Gibraltar. He was promoted to lieutenant-colonel in 1939.

In 1940 he was sent in command of a force which was to cover the retreat of forces from Dunkirk. After the two-day operation in which losses were sustained, he and his remaining forces were able to get back to Britain. He was awarded the D.S.O. for this operation.

During 1942 and 1943 he remained in Britain, in charge of training troops for combat. He lost an eye in an accident with a grenade, but was allowed to continue in his role. He was promoted to colonel at the end of 1943.

In June 1944 as part of the D-Day landing, he commanded a force tasked with capturing the western end of Gold Beach. The force moved westwards and, despite numerous setbacks,

his forces captured Arramanches, essential as that was to be the site of the Mulberry harbour for further landings. He also led the capture of Asnelles and le Hamel, and was consequently regarded by the inhabitants of these towns and villages as their liberator. They joined up with the American forces and Sir Alex said he was the first of the British forces to shake hands with one of the American soldiers. The photo below shows Sir Alex (right) with General Montgomery and American General Omar Bradley.



Sir Alex's 50th division later staged a rear-guard action after the failure of Operation Market Garden. For this action against German counter-attacks he was awarded a bar to his D.S.O. For his war service, he was also awarded the French Legion d'Honneur, the Belgian Croix de Guerre and Order of Leopold II and the American Silver Star.

Sir Alex retired from the army in 1948 and returned to Shropshire, where he served as a county councillor and in 1951, High Sheriff of the county. It is not clear why he left his native county and moved to East Farndon in the early 1960s. Sometimes the village fete was held in the grounds of the Manor, as on the occasion shown below, probably from 1963.



Sir Alex is on the right, his wife Lady Dorothy with the dog, the Rector, James McCloghry is on the left, next to Mrs Cowen of East Farndon Hall. The lady in the hat is a visitor who has come to open the fete. Lady Dorothy, known as a breeder of poodles, died in 1973. Soon after, Sir Alex left the village. His final address when he died was in Ludlow, back in Shropshire.

Sir Alex and Lady Dorothy had two children, Sir Beville, who inherited the title, and Sylvia, a famous expert on horses. She trained horses for the 1964 and 1968 Olympics, wrote a

number of books on techniques for various equestrian events and coached the Queen in riding side-saddle for Trooping the Colour. She died in 2019 at the age of 91.

To find out more about Sir Alexander Stanier's military campaigns, it might be possible to find a copy of 'Sammy's War', his own account under his army nickname. Also there is an Imperial War Museum website with recordings of interviews with Sir Alex, in which he talks about his war service. The address is

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80006989>

Alan Langley
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MEMORIES OF SIR ALEXANDER STANIER by CAMERON FRASER.

The following thoughts only reflect time I spent with Sir Alec back in the middle 1970's.

In those days the village Fete was held in The Manor Gardens. Sir Alec Stanier had visited Sonya and myself on a few occasions when we started an A4 newsletter on behalf of the Village and Church (up until then it was just a slip of paper from the then Rector inserted into a Diocesan publication).

Thus when we had the Fete I spent time between the house and the Fete activities.

Sir Alec was always keen to share with me his artefacts from WW2 - many of which were of his involvement with leading the assault onto the westward end of Gold Beach.

This was called JIG BEACH. = which subsequently linked him with ASNELLES – where a town square is named after him. This was close to the end where the Mulberry Harbours were to be established I think!

The papers he showed to me (and no doubt to others as I subsequently discovered) were copies of the assault details for D-Day preparations; attack; landings and securing ground!. Hearing Sir Alec talk and explain to me the processes and execution of the plans he would be leading was riveting to hear about - especially as the information was not second-hand.

He did not talk about the actions themselves as the memories of people I have known who were involved in the evacuation of Normandy Beaches and D-Day landings were still too raw.

But what Sir Alec did do was to give me an understanding of the planning and the execution of those plans to achieve the success by his men (and everyone else involved!)

When he moved from East Farndon he dropped in to say goodbye and "wondered if I happened to have his papers referred to above as in his move he had <lost> them".

And that was the last time I saw him!

Detailed accounts of his war records (his Infantry Brigade; his Command in Malta: plus other theatres of campaign!) are to be found in various reference books as well as his family history although he did not inherit the Family title (that went to his brother- I think).

Cameron Fraser

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