

Crossword 1944—solution

to 11 Across: June 6

ON May 2, 1944, the word "Utah" was included in THE DAILY TELEGRAPH crossword puzzle. Three weeks later, on May 22, "Omaha" crept in, and MI5 began to take an interest.

They knew that the D Day landings on Utah and Omaha beaches were now only days away. Operation Overlord, so long in the planning, was about to be launched.

MI5 interest understandably grew when, on May 27, the clue appeared requiring the answer "Overlord," followed closely by "Mulberry" on May 30 and "Neptune" on June 1.

Was it an uncanny coincidence? For years it was more or less written off as that, but then, when I re-told the story in the "Peterborough" column recently, a reader, Ronald French, a Wolverhampton property manager, came forward with a plausible new explanation of the mystery. He has described how it may have been he, as a 14-year-old school-boy, who wrote the secret words into the crosswords.

It is impossible to prove anything conclusively now, because the man who compiled the crosswords, a schoolmaster called Leonard Dawe, died in 1963. All the same, French's story deserves to be told.

French was, at the time, a pupil at the Strand School, which had been evacuated from Tulse Hill in south London to Effingham in Surrey. Dawe was, by then, the school's headmaster.

11—but some big-wig like this has stolen some of it at times (8)

Clue to 11 Across on Sat. May 27 (above) and the answer given on June 2 (below).

The prime solution was: ACROSS: 1, Well done; 3, Staff; 9, Not known; 10, Common; 11, Overlord; 13, Corps; 14, Key; 16, Ordinal; 19, Servant; 20, Advice; 21, Asp; 26, Denote; 27, Half-time; 28, Cherry; 29, Training; 30,

According to French it was Dawe's occasional practice on wet afternoons to invite favoured pupils into his study where, as a mental exercise, he would encourage them to help him fill in the blank puzzles he was making up for the TELEGRAPH. Later Dawe would think up the clues.

French claims that during the weeks running up to D Day he knew the five code words. He had gleaned them from Canadian and American soldiers who were camped, awaiting the invasion, near the school. He insists that in the final days before the landings those words were common currency and that the only real secret

In the days before the Normandy landing its code words were used in this newspaper's clues to its crosswords.

PETERBOROUGH,
(Peter Birkett),

offers a solution to a
mystery for MI5



Dawe, the crossword compiler: "They decided not to shoot us."

was where the assault would take place and, of course, when.

Like many boys of his age, French was fascinated by the prospect of an invasion and found the presence of soldiers nearby exciting.

There can be little doubt that the opportunities for a determined boy to gain some kind of overall picture of impending events existed. In fact French says he kept notebooks of the information he obtained.

He cannot now recall actually writing the code words in the crossword blanks (which he says were drawn up by Dawe on LCC graph paper). But his memory is vivid on one detail which, if accepted, does most to give credence to his account.

Soon after D Day, Dawe sent for me and asked me point blank where I had got the words from. I told him all I knew and he asked to see my notebooks. He was horrified and said that the books must be burned at once. He confiscated them and I suppose they were.

He then gave me a very stern lecture about national security and made me swear on the Bible that I would tell no one about the matter. I have kept to that oath until now.

Dawe had every reason to be concerned. He had been visited by the officers from MI5.

His position was further embarrassed by the fact that in the weeks before D Day his brother-in-law, Peter Sanders, who occupied a senior position in the Admiralty, was sharing his house.

Years later Dawe said in a BBC television interview: "They turned me inside out and collected Naval intelligence and grilled my brother-in-law. They went to Bury St Edmunds where my senior colleague Melville Jones [the paper's other crossword compiler] was living and put him through the works. But they eventually decided not to shoot us after all."

Only now has the possibility emerged that Dawe either pacified MI5 by telling them of French's enterprise or that he misled the officers, believing his duty was to protect a naive but merely misguided pupil.

French agrees that people will obviously find it hard to accept that he knew as much detail as he did, but, he says, it was not difficult to acquire.

And, remember, I was totally obsessed about the whole thing. I would play truant from school to visit the camp and I used to spend evenings with them and even whole weekends there, dressed in my Army Cadet uniform. I became a sort of dogsbody about the place, running errands and even, once, driving a tank.

I became particularly friendly with one officer, Bud Shulman, and I used to take the colonel's dog for a walk.

Everyone knew the outline invasion plan and they knew the various code words. Omaha and Utah were the beaches they were going to and they knew the names but not the locations. We all knew the operation was called Overlord.

They talked about it openly in front of him "because I was obviously not a German spy. Hundreds of kids must have known what I knew."

11 This bush is a centre of nursery revolutions (8)
12 It is no use ask-

Clue to 11 Across on Tues. May 30. The answer was Mulberry, the floating harbour for the D-Day beaches.

Full corroboration of the story is, of course, impossible to obtain. One former pupil I have traced confirms that Dawe, "an aloof and distant man," probably did invite boys to try to fill in the crossword blanks.

Cyril Loveday, now a Surrey chartered surveyor, who was in the same form as French at the school, says: "It certainly rings a bell. I heard about it at the time but I was not asked to try my hand."

Loveday also confirms French's version of the D Day fever which overtook the school at the time and the fact that French often wore his Cadet Force uniform. "Some of the things we got up to at that time," he says, "would have earned us Borstal training if they happened today."