



JOHN MADDEN-GASKELL



The series of articles commemorating the actions of Glamorgan cricketers in the D-Day Landings, starts with a feature on John Madden-Gaskell, a debonair batsman, who played for the Welsh county during 1922 before – as an Army Major - being one of the key figures in the provision and dispatch of troops from ports across Southern England as part of Operation Overlord.

Born in Pontypool and raised in Newport, John had served in the Great War with the Second Battalion of the Welch Regiment as a Second Lieutenant in charge of training and logistics. After being demobilized, the bespectacled amateur returned to live and work in Penarth, where his success for the town's cricket club led to his selection for Glamorgan during 1922. John subsequently moved to Taunton where he set-up an electronics business, besides playing for Somerset on nine occasions between 1928 and 1930.

The highlight of his county career came in his first season for the West Country side as he played a pair of accomplished innings against Nottinghamshire at Taunton, scoring 42 and 63 against an attack which boasted both Harold Larwood and Bill Voce, with the Welshman repeatedly driving the England fast bowlers on the up through mid-off and mid-on.

On the outbreak of the Second World War, John joined the Royal Artillery and his skills as an electrical engineer and business acumen saw him swiftly promoted in 1942 to a position as Staff captain at the Artillery's headquarters in Hounslow. He subsequently became elevated to the rank of Major and Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General, and in this capacity in 1944 he was one of the military team who oversaw the provisioning of food and equipment for Operation Overlord.

His top secret actions during the Spring of 1944 came at a time when Allied commanders were still trying to convince Adolf Hitler that their plan was for a main attack across the Straits of Dover with the Normandy landings merely being a diversionary tactic. In fact on D-Day itself the deception was maintained by heavy bombers (as part of Operations Glimmer and Taxable) flying in highly precise patterns over the Straits of Dover, dropping radar-reflecting aluminium strips which created a picture on German radar of an invasion fleet moving across the straits, precisely at the same time as the "real" invasion fleet was heading to Normandy.

John's outstanding efforts as part of the team planning and executing D-Day duly saw him being awarded the MBE in the New Year Honours in 1947.