

Friday 5th June 2020

To learn about key historical events

On June 6th 1944, during the height of World War II, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, France, as part of Operation Overlord. It was an ambitious invasion that helped to end World War II and is regarded as one of the greatest military achievements ever. Tomorrow, 6th June, marks the 75th Anniversary of this important event. Read the information below to find out more about the event.

D-Day Facts

- 6th June 1944 was D-Day.
- Allied forces landed in Normandy (France).
- It began the liberation of Western Europe from the German occupation.
- The British commander in charge of the attack was called General Bernard Montgomery.
- The American general was called Dwight D. Eisenhower.
- The invasion of Normandy was the largest land and sea attack ever launched with over 150 000 troops, over 7000 ships and 11 000 aircraft.



Why Did It Take Place?

D-Day had been planned by British forces before the United States joined the war. German troops had taken over huge parts of Europe and were planning to invade Britain from France. For some time, codebreakers had been able to break the coded messages that the Germans were sending to each other. Their plans were to attack but Britain was planning to do so first. The Germans didn't think that an attack would come from the sea but that's just what was being organised.

D-Day was originally planned for 5th June but a sudden storm made the invasion too dangerous and General Eisenhower postponed it for a day.

What Were the Plans?

The first planned attack was on 1st May 1944, but the operation was postponed for a month to allow more time to collect troops and equipment. The timing was essential to allow for the right weather, a full moon, and high tide conditions.

In order to keep the location of the landings secret, a trick plan, Operation Fortitude, was arranged. This led the Germans to believe the main target was at Calais, much closer to the south coast of England.



The Attack

The attack was planned in great detail.

The first part of the attack began with paratroopers.	These were the men who jumped out of planes using parachutes. They jumped at night in the pitch dark and landed behind enemy lines. Their job was to destroy important targets and capture bridges so that the main invasion force could land on the beaches. Thousands of dummies were dropped to make the enemy think that many more men were parachuting down.
The next stage of the battle involved thousands of planes.	They dropped bombs on German defences.
Shortly after that, warships began to bomb the beaches from the water.	
While the bombing was going on, members of the French Resistance spoiled the German communications by cutting telephone lines and destroying railways.	
Finally, the main invasion force of over 6000 ships carrying troops, weapons, tanks, and equipment approached the beaches of Normandy.	

Did You Know?

- To plan for the D-Day landings, the BBC ran a competition for French beach holiday photographs. It was really a way of gathering information on suitable beaches for landing troops and tanks.
- The weather forecast was so bad in early June that the German commander in Normandy, Erwin Rommel, went home from France to give his wife a pair of shoes on her birthday. He was in Germany when the news reached him.
- The German air force, the Luftwaffe, was outnumbered 30:1 on D-Day and didn't shoot down any Allied planes in air to air combat.

Questions

1. In which part of France did the Allied forces land?

2. What does the word **liberation** mean?

3. Who were the British commander and the American general in charge of the attack?

4. How did the codebreakers help the Allied plans?

5. How do you think '**the right weather, a full moon, and high tide conditions**' would help the invasion plans?

6. If you had to make a name for the trick '**Operation Fortitude**' what would it be and why?

7. As well as soldier paratroopers, what else was dropped from the aeroplanes during the attack? Why did this happen?

8. How did the BBC holiday snaps competition help the invasion plans?

9. Why do you think Erwin Rommel went home if the weather was bad?

10. What does the word '**outnumbered**' mean?

Answers

1. In which part of France did the Allied forces land?
The Allied forces landed in Normandy.
2. What does the word **liberation** mean?
Liberation means to free from captivity.
3. Who were the British commander and the American general in charge of the attack?
The British Commander was General Bernard Montgomery and the American in charge was called Dwight D Eisenhower.
4. How did the codebreakers help the Allied plans?
The codebreakers could read the coded plans from the Germans and then send false plans back to trick them.
5. How do you think '**the right weather, a full moon, and high tide conditions**' would help the invasion plans?
The weather had to be good so that the troops, ships and planes could move without being stopped by bad weather such as wind or rain. The moon needed to be full so the invasion could take place at night without using lights and the tide high so that the ships could land on the beaches easily.
6. If you had to make a name for the trick '**Operation Fortitude**' what would it be and why?
Various responses that are appropriate to the theme of the text and the importance of the events.
7. As well as soldier paratroopers, what else was dropped from the aeroplanes during the attack? Why did this happen?
Dummies were dropped from the aeroplanes to give the impression that more soldiers were parachuting in.
8. How did the BBC holiday snaps competition help the invasion plans?
The BBC holiday snaps competition meant that the generals could see the beaches that they wanted to land troops on without having to send anyone to photograph the area during the war.