

D Day Landings

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D Day

Purpose

To learn about an historical example of teamwork and bravery

Entrance of Pupils

A thought provoking slideshow introducing the theme of XD Day for the pupils to enter assembly to (10 minutes)

Introduction

At the start of summer 1944, Nazi controlled Germany had occupied and ruled over huge areas of Europe. Their leader Adolf Hitler was aware that after initially being on top in the war that came to be known as the Second World War, the allied countries of UK, USA and Canada were desperate to fight back and drive the Germans out of the countries they had invaded just five years earlier.

The Allied countries were keenly aware, that to wrestle back Europe from Hitler's control, they would need to cross over the English Channel - a very large sea at the south of England, with huge numbers of troops and equipment - the likes of which had never been seen before.

For years they planned for that day. The day that went down in history as D-Day.

The nearest German occupied country to England was France and it was obvious that the landing zone would need to be a French beach. But the coast of France is very long and very varied - so the exact location the Allies would choose remained a tightly held secret



Allies

Across 1943 and 1944 vast numbers of Allied troops went into training for a battle like no other. Nothing as ambitious, huge or daring as this had ever been attempted by an armed force before that time or since.

To be successful, the Allied troops would need to get many thousands of troops, their equipment, their food, their transport and their fuel across the sea called the English Channel, land on heavily defended beaches, fight with the German Troops that were set to repel the attack at all costs and move inland - to face thousands more German troops.

They would need to battle their way through Europe and drive the formidable German Army back to their own country.



To many this task seemed impossible - and for good reason. The scale and difficulty of it was enormous and would involve numbers of troops and casualties running into many thousands. No military leader had ever tried anything so outrageously enormous before.

Before the Allied troops could even begin to win back Europe they had to land at the right beach at the right time with the right equipment and with the training, skill and determination to fight against German defences that would be spraying them with machine gun bullets, grenades and missiles.

To the leaders of the Allied troops - that is exactly what they were preparing for.



Diversion Tactics inc Calais / Normandy

The coastline of France being very long and facing out into the English Channel and the Atlantic was a tricky place to work out the destination. The German leaders were absolutely convinced that the Allies, whom they knew would strike at some point, would use the shortest possible crossing, which would mean they would arrive at Calais, just about 25 mile crossing from the English coast. They were determined to meet the Allies with huge force and violence and send them back into the sea.

They also knew they couldn't be absolutely *cert*ain about this and therefore they had to defend the entire coastline. Nevertheless, the Germans defended Calais more carefully and with their best troops. They were determined to be ready to drive back the Allied troops back and stop them in their tracks.

The Allied leaders wanted to keep the Germans guessing. They had secretly decided to make their huge landing at a series of beaches in an area called Normandy - but they wanted to fool the Germans into thinking they *were going to pounce at Calais*.



The journey to Normandy would be much longer and more treacherous for the Allied troops - a much more complicated process than the short crossing to Calais, but the Allied leaders strongly believed that if Germany defended the beaches at Calais with all their might and they landed there, that they wouldn't be able to overcome such dug in defences and would ultimately lose the battle



meaning the war would go on for many more months and even years.

The Allies started to try to trick Germany into thinking the landing would arrive at Calais so that they would position their very best trained and equipped soldiers there and leave Normandy less well defended.

To help with the process of fooling the Germans, the Allies even stationed large numbers of troops close to Calais and also arranged dozens of tanks in rows ready to invade at that location. They knew that German spy planes would be looking out for the build up of equipment such as this.

They put dozens and dozens of tanks in holding areas in Kent - the English county closest to Calais. But here's the thing - they weren't real tanks - they were inflatable tanks made to look from the air like the real thing.

Meanwhile they pressed forwards with their real plans to invade at Normandy

D Day had been carefully planned by the Allies most senior military leaders. In over all charge was General Dwight Eisenhower. There were only certain days which would be suitable for the landings since the combination of the moon cycle, the tides times at the beaches and the weather all had to fall in line. The date was set. The 5th June 1944 was due to be like no other day in military history.



Dwight D Eisenhower



Unfortunately for Eisenhower, the weather was not at all helpful. A large storm occurred in the waters between England and the landing beaches and the opportunity for that date was lost. In those days - there wasn't a particularly reliable way of forecasting the weather. They had no computers to help them with their predictions.

Disappointed about not being able to proceed at that time, with all the information that Eisenhower had before him - he had to make a decision about the following day. This was the only time that month which would be suitable for the tides and he knew that as each week went by, the German defences all across France were getting stronger. He desperately didn't want to delay until July.

His team received some information that the storm which had prevented the go ahead the previous day was easing a little. The decision was made. It was GO! GO! GO! The operation to free Europe was officially underway.

Tens of thousands of Allied troops were briefed about the mission. Not even they had known about the location of the landing until the last minute since Eisenhower had to keep the deceit of the beaches going and keep the German army guessing about where they would land.

The troops boarded transport ships and sailed out to meeting points in the English Channel to await their opportunity to get into the landing boats - which had ramps that would allow them to step out directly onto the beaches.



The troops were a mixture of terribly excited and terribly nervous. They all knew



they had a vital mission ahead - a huge battle - and they also knew that there was a very realistic chance that they could be injured or even killed over the next few hours. Particularly those who were chosen to land first.

Can you imagine how that must have felt? To know that they would take part in the most important battle ever - to start freeing Europe from the terrible leadership of Hitler and his Generals - but it might be something which might well end their lives.

Beaches

The destination had been chosen. It was decided that the beaches of Normandy in France would be where the huge battle would commence. There were five main beaches that were at Normandy and different teams of armies each had their allocated landing point.

At Utah and Omaha Beaches - the American army would be landed.

The Canadian army was set to land at Juno Beach.

The British troops were all set to land at Gold Beach and Sword Beach.



D-Day started with a series of crack teams of paratroopers who were dropped into France slightly further away from the beaches. A British team was required to land with their equipment at an important bridge which they needed to capture and then hold. The bridge was vital for the success of the operation. It was called Pegasus Bridge. They dropped late at night and with huge courage fought and won over the bridge. They took many casualties - but the bridge was theirs. They then had to hold until the troops landing at the beaches joined up with them.

Meanwhile, thousands of American paratroopers were dropped behind the beaches to help with the battles that would take place.

A movement of men in their homeland called the "Free French Forces" were contacted with a secret agreed code, which indicated the invasion was going ahead. They started doing whatever they could to disrupt the German defences. They had waited five years for the liberation of their country and were delighted the operation was underway.

At first light, the German defences at the five beaches looked out into the dawn. Just emerging into their sight was the incredible sight of hundreds of Allied ships and boats and thousands upon thousands of Allied troops heading towards them.

The German army that were stationed at Normandy desperately sent messages to Hitler and his Generals for back up because they could see what was about to happen.



Unfortunately for them - Hitler was asleep in bed and nobody dared to wake him up. Hitler was a fiery man whom they were afraid of. Many of his advisers thought that this was a decoy, a dummy run to disguise what was their real



destination - Calais - and they were terrified of the fury of Hitler if they disturbed him for no good reason.

The trickery of the Allied leaders had succeeded!

The German defences in Normandy sprang into action. They sprayed the boats with machine gun fire and missiles. There were mines in the water and many water based obstacles that were designed to make invasion difficult or even impossible.

The German army had many fox holes where powerful machine guns were stationed. As soon as the landing craft front hatch was lowered they blasted the oncoming men with their powerful weapons.

Hidden just off the beach at Longues were four huge cannons. They were guided by a look out post ahead of them and they fired large missiles towards the invading ships.

The Canadians, British and Americans found the initial stages really, really tough. They struggled to get off the beaches and were held back for a long time.

After several hours the British and Canadian troops started to fight back against the German defences. All the time more and more Allied troops were dropped on the shore faced with the same robust and deadly response.

The Canadian and British troops found that their beaches were reasonably flat and they eventually managed to make some headway against the Germans.

The Americans found their beaches were very long and made of very soft sand - it was really hard to move and they were carrying lots of heavy equipment. They were pinned down for many hours. For a while they weren't sure they would succeed.

The tides started to come back in leaving them nowhere for cover in the sandy beaches. Ahead of them were steep cliffs and all the time they were being bombarded with gunfire and missiles.

The Americans really struggled to get a foot hold - but eventually after many



hours and hundreds and hundreds of casualties - thousands of casualties - they started to push the German troops back.

At last the mission to free Europe was underway. At last - they would be able to start freeing the European countries from the German Army rule. But it had come at a terrible price in terms of loss of life and injury.



American Cemetery at Omaha Beach

The Bible Says

Proverbs 21:15

“When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.”

Let’s Pray

Father in heaven. We pray for the soldiers who were placed in a position where they had to fight for freedom and righteousness during the second world war. May those who lost their own lives for the sake of others find true peace in you.

Putting It Into Practice

Conflict happens in every life. Try to find one person with whom you have



experienced conflict, disagreement or argument. Whatever the rights and wrongs of what has happened try to resolve to forgive that person and put the conflict behind you.

Exit of Pupils

A thought provoking slideshow of the key issues raised in the assembly about the theme of D Day for the pupils to exit assembly to (10 minutes)

Collective Worship and Putting it into Practice for the Rest of the Week

Day 2

Dear God. There are soldiers positioned in countries all over the world. Please allow their work to be about maintaining peace and improving lives rather than having to engage in fighting.

D Day is over. You have landed on a beach in Normandy and survived the first day's battle. Write a letter to your loved ones at home to tell them about your experience and to reassure them that you are safe.

Day 3

Father in heaven. We pray for the families of those who have been forced to fight in wars all over the world. Let them find true peace as conflict comes to an end. Let their renewed fight be a fight for justice and freedom

The British Government want to do a leaflet drop into Germany to persuade the German people to stop fighting the war. Design and create the leaflet.



Day 4

Dear God. We pray for the United Nations. They were set up after the end of the second world war to help bring peace to the world. We pray for the success of their work and for world leaders to find alternatives to fighting.

During the war the people of the United Kingdom had to survive off rationed food. Research and find out what each person was entitled to. What would you miss most from what you enjoy eating today?

Day 5

Dear God. We pray that we might recognise when we feel injustice and annoyance in our own hearts. Let us understand our feelings and try to manage them without resulting in violence or aggression. Let us try to find forgiveness.

You are a soldier landing at Normandy on 6th June 1944. You have to bring with you everything you will need to survive and thrive for at least two days. Make a complete list of what you need to bring. Compare it with your friends. Did you miss anything out?

