

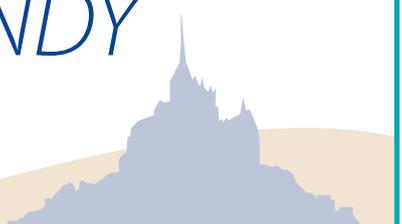
# NORMANDY



Normandy Tourist Board  
Educational Resource Pack

Part Three

## THE D-DAY LANDINGS AND THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY



# NORMANDY *The D-Day Landings*

**IMAGINE** being part of the largest invading force in history.

It's 6:30am on 6 June, 1944. You're about to come ashore at Normandy to liberate France and the rest of North West Europe from German **occupation**.

Here are the words of your Supreme Commander:

**"Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!**

**In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms... you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of the Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe.**

**Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well-trained, well-equipped and battle hardened. He will fight savagely."**

**General, Dwight David 'Ike' Eisenhower**

Code-named **Operation Overlord**, this invasion will become known as D-Day.

By the end of the day, 150,000 soldiers will have landed, and there will be more than 10,000 dead, missing, or wounded Allied soldiers.

## Countdown to D-Day

Back in 1942 a previous raid on the Normandy port of Dieppe had been unsuccessful due to poor planning. This raid was known as Operation Jubilee and was carried out mostly by Canadian men. Out of the 6,000 personnel who had taken part in the landings, 4,384 were killed, wounded or missing in action – a loss of 73%. All the equipment that landed on shore during the Dieppe Raid was lost. The Royal Navy lost 550 men and 34 ships. The RAF, in what was the largest single-day air battle of the war, flew 2,617 sorties and lost 106 planes.

## Axis or Allies?

World War 2 began in September 1939, when the German leader, Adolf Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland. It was the start of the most violent period in the history of the world. Two groups of nations, which became known as the Axis and Allied Powers, struggled to gain control of the globe.

Germany, Italy and Japan were the main partners in the Axis alliance. Their aim was to expand their empires (the territories they had control over) by military invasion and conquest.

The Allies were nations from around the world that joined forces to defend and repel the military advances being made by the Axis Powers. The main countries in this alliance were Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, the United States and China.



Nevertheless, vital lessons were learnt from the Battle of Dieppe which enabled the Allies crucial preparations to ensure the success of D-Day:

1. Assaults against heavily defended ports such as Dieppe were a bad idea. As a result, the D-Day invasion targeted less-fortified points along the Normandy coast.
2. Proper enemy and area intelligence was essential to success; the Dieppe Raid only had patchy intelligence.
3. Communication on the battlefield, between headquarters and military forces had to be improved. During Dieppe, the Canadian Major General Roberts could not see what was going on in the battle because of a smoke screen laid by Ally ships to support landings. As a result, acting on incorrect information and unaware of the chaos on the beaches, he made the mistake of sending in more troops even though the battle was already lost.
4. Heavy firepower from air and sea raids to support ground troops was vital; supporting fire by naval destroyers had been far too light during the Dieppe Raid.
5. Aerial bombardments before the battle to destroy enemy defences were also necessary. Consequently, on D-Day the coastal gun emplacements of the Germans were heavily attacked before the beach landings took place.
6. Better technology and tanks were needed to get the job done. Dieppe led to the development of better armoured tanks, known as Hobart's Funnies. During the Dieppe raid, the treads on most of the older Churchill tanks got caught up on the pebble beaches they landed on. Due to this, on D-Day the Allies planned to land on beaches with appropriate terrain for their vehicles.
7. The Allies learned that the seizure of a major port by a necessary bombardment would leave it unusable. As a result, a prefabricated harbour codenamed 'Mulberry' was constructed instead.

### What does the 'D' in D-Day stand for?

The 'D' comes from the word 'Day'. D-Day means the day a military operation begins. Now we just use the term for the Allied landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944.



## How the Mulberry Harbour Worked

The Mulberry Harbour was built in June 1944 in preparation for D-Day. It was intended to help speed up the unloading process of the 7,000 tons of vehicles and goods that the Allied troops needed each day.

Mulberry was made up of two artificial harbours: Mulberry A and Mulberry B (nicknamed 'Port Winston'). They were built in England and towed across the English Channel. Mulberry A was put together at Omaha Beach and Mulberry B was constructed off Arromanches at Gold Beach.

Each of the two artificial harbours consisted of six miles of flexible steel roadways that floated on steel and concrete pontoons. These roadways were code-named 'Whales', and the pontoons were called 'Beetles'.

By June 18th, both harbours were in use. When a terrible storm on 19<sup>th</sup> June 1945 wrecked Port Winston, parts of it were used to repair Mulberry A, which would go on to land 2.5 million men, 500,000 vehicles and 4 million tons of goods.

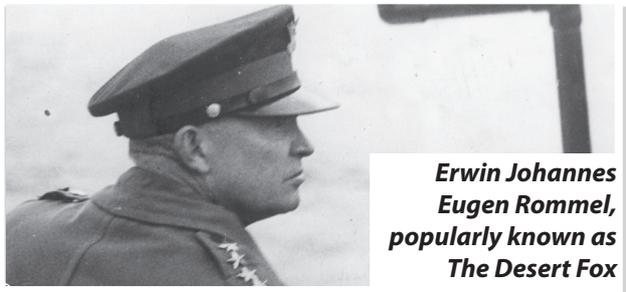
## Submarines and Secret Messages

Did you know that pre-war holiday photographs helped the Allies to prepare the invasion and make detailed maps and models of Normandy? Submarines also secretly surveyed the beaches and German defences.

In December 1943 the allies fed misinformation to the Germans to make them think an invasion would occur in a different location to what was planned in a plot called Operation fortitude.

France did its bit too! Despite the fact that the country was occupied by the Germans, there was a strong **French Resistance** movement, reportedly made up of 100,000 men and women.

In May 1944 alone, the French Resistance secretly messaged over 3,000 reports about the Germans to the Allies. Between April and May, the resistance destroyed 1,800 railway engines, making it more difficult for the Germans to transport troops, weapons and other supplies.



**Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel, popularly known as The Desert Fox**

## Atlantic Wall

The Germans, under the command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, had built defences along the north coast of France and beyond. These defences were called the **Atlantic Wall** and comprised of thousands of **pillboxes, bunkers and gun emplacements**. Additionally, over six million mines were buried along the beaches all the way up to Scandinavia.

So how were the Allies going to get all their soldiers and equipment across the Atlantic Wall?



**Tourists visit the Batterie de Longues located between the landing beaches Omaha and Gold. This was one of the major constructions built by the Germans in 1944 as part of the Atlantic Wall. The battery's German crew surrendered on 7th June 1944.**

## New Technology

Alongside the two **Mulberries** built by the British, there were many other innovative vehicles constructed for the landings.



**Remains of the concrete Mulberry harbour constructed at Arromanches**

The **D-D (Duplex Drive) tank** had a propeller, so it could travel on water as well as land. The front of the **Crab tank** had revolving steel chains to detonate German mines and clear barbed wire from the path of the vehicle. Another tank called the **Bobbin** was fitted with a mat to be laid on the ground. This prevented other vehicles from sinking on the beach. **Churchill tanks** were even fitted with napalm flame throwers to shoot fire at the enemy.



**A Sherman DD (Duplex Drive) amphibious tank with waterproof float screens. When in the water the float screen was raised and the rear propellers came into operation.**



**A Churchill tank**



## D-Day: 5 June, 1944

The invading force is made up of different Allied nations. Most of the troops are from the US, Britain and Canada, but there are also French, Polish and Commonwealth soldiers.

Despite bad weather and stormy seas, 5,000 ships, full of 60,000 troops, leave England to begin the 17-hour cross-Channel trip to Northern France.

On the night of 5 June, 9,000 aircraft take part in the invasion, including fighters and bombers. These include planes transporting over 6,000 British and 12,000 American **paratroopers**. Ready to glide or parachute into Normandy, their job is to seize bridges, gun batteries and roads to help deter German troops.

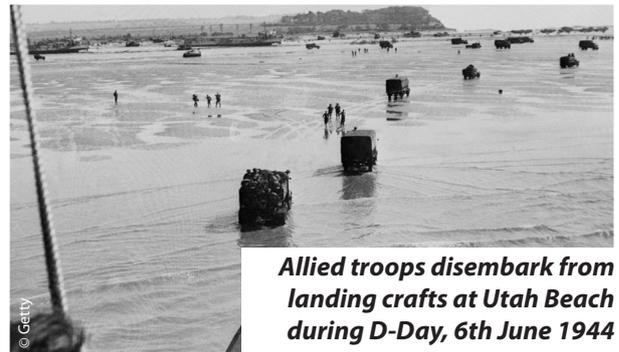
The **French Resistance** begin to **sabotage** the German response to the invasion by blowing up railway lines and telephone exchanges.



**Aerial view taken 6 June 1944 showing the Allied Naval forces engaged in the Overlord Operation of landing**



**Allied soldiers storming the beaches in Normandy**



**Allied troops disembark from landing crafts at Utah Beach during D-Day, 6th June 1944**

## 6 June, 1944

At 12:20am, six gliders land near two bridges (code-named Pegasus and Horsa) over the Caen Canal and the River Orne. Paratroopers capture these vital bridges; the invasion has begun.

From 6:30am, beginning with Utah, soldiers and their equipment land along the D-Day beaches. These soldiers have to contend with fierce enemy fire from the air and on the ground. However, Allied planes dominate the skies overhead and provide some protection. Allied warships also **bombard** the German defences.

Omaha beach sees the worst Allied casualties that day; 1,000 American soldiers are killed.

However, by nightfall, D-Day has succeeded. The Allied troops have broken through the German defences.



**Juno Beach, 6th June 1944**



**Utah Beach, 6th June 1944**



**Paratrooper monument at Sainte-Mere-Eglise**

## Beyond D-Day

The Battle of Normandy is the name given to the fighting in Normandy between D-Day and the end of August 1944.

By the end of June, more than 850,000 troops had landed in France.

On 25 August, 80 days after D-Day, Paris is **liberated**.

Over 425,000 Allied and German troops are killed, wounded or go missing during the Battle of Normandy. Aside from the troop casualties, around 20,000 French civilians caught up in the conflict lose their lives.

But Operation Overlord marks a turning point for the Allies. They are on their way to winning World War II.

## Today

If you look at a map of Normandy you will see that the beaches still have their invasion code names. Streets nearby are even named after the troop units that fought there.

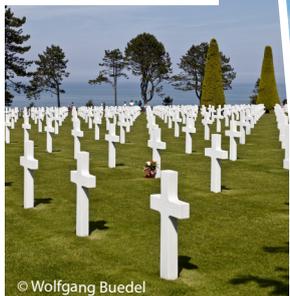
As well as the beaches and other landmarks in Normandy, you can visit war museums, memorials and cemeteries. They commemorate all those who were part of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy.

The cemeteries honouring the troops who died include: the American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, the British Cemetery in Ranville, the Bayeux War Cemetery and La Cambe, the German War Cemetery.

At the Bayeux Memorial, you will see the Latin words, *Nos a guliemo victi victoris patriam liberavimus*. This means: *We, once conquered by William, have now set free the Conqueror's native land*.



### The American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer



Arromanches where the remains of the Mulberry Harbour can be seen.



The last of the fighting at the Battle of Normandy took place in the Falaise pocket from 12-21 August. The battle was a strategic victory for the Allies.



Tourists at the La Pointe du Hoc – a clifftop location situated between Utah Beach to the west and Omaha Beach to the east. The guns in the Atlantic Wall here threatened Allied landings on these beaches. The US Army Ranger Assault Group were given the task of destroying battery here early on D-Day.

## Find Out More

NORMANDY TOURISM WEBSITE: [www.normandy-dday.com](http://www.normandy-dday.com)

D-DAY MUSEUM, PORTSMOUTH: [www.ddaymuseum.co.uk/](http://www.ddaymuseum.co.uk/)

TRAVELLING TO NORMANDY: <http://www.brittany-ferries.co.uk>



La Cambe is the German Cemetery near Bayeux. Over 21,000 German soldiers are buried here.

## GLOSSARY

**ALLIES** – the major allied powers in World War II: Great Britain, the United States, France and the Soviet Union

**BOMBARD** – attack, open fire on

**BUNKER** – a defensive military fortification

**CIVILIANS** – non-military people

**FRENCH RESISTANCE** – these men and women from different anti-German groups in France played a vital part in the success of the invasion.

**GUN BATTERY** – an army fortification with guns

**GUN EMPLACEMENT** – a position where a gun is placed for firing

**LIBERATED** – set free

**MINE** – an explosive device that is hidden on or under the ground

**MULBERRIES** – portable harbours used to offload vehicles, troops and supplies onto the beaches at Normandy

**OCCUPATION** – when a country is under military control by a foreign power

**PARATROOPER** – a soldier or marine trained in parachuting

**PILLBOX** – a concrete building for machine guns and anti-tank weapons

**SABOTAGE** – disrupt and destroy

# D-Day - Timeline of Key Events

## ACTIVITY A: UNDERSTANDING CHRONOLOGY

### Operation Overlord Timeline of Key Events

**Can you work out the order in which these key events from Operation Overlord took place?**

**i)** Using your detective skills, can you work out the order in which these key events took place?

**ii)** Add them to the timeline to find out the date the event took place. You could cut and stick them, or write them on the timeline.



**Soldiers land on Juno Beach, 6th June 1944**

© Getty

The French Resistance secretly message the Allies to inform them of the German presence's activities in Normandy. They also destroy rail engines to make German movements more difficult.

Soldiers and equipment land on the beaches. 1,000 American soldiers are killed in the first day of the battle. However, by the end of the day the Allies have succeeded in breaking through the German Defences.

5,000 ships with 60,000 troops begin their journey across the Channel. As do 9,000 aircraft with 18,000 British and US paratroopers.

The fighting in Normandy during this time will become known as the Battle of Normandy. Over 465,000 Allied troops, German troops, and French civilians are killed or wounded.

Allied forces attempt an unsuccessful raid on the Normandy port of Dieppe.

By the end of June, more than 850,000 allied troops have landed in France.

Paris is liberated.

The air, sea and ground attack on Northern France named Operation Overlord is planned.

Germans construct the Atlantic Wall to defend the north coast of France.

Six gliders land on bridges over the Caen Canal and River Orne. The invasion begins.

During Operation Fortitude, misinformation is fed to the Germans to make them believe the invasion is likely to be in a different location to Normandy.

# D-DAY - Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
1942	
Dec 1943	
First half of 1944	
April and May 1944	
5th June 1944	
6th June 1944 12.20am	
6th June 1944	
30th June 1944	
June - August 1944	
25th August 1944	

**NORMANDY**

# D-Day - Map of Key Events

## ACTIVITY B: LOCATING SITES OF KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS

### Can you locate the sites of important events in Operation Overlord?

- i) Use the text provided and an atlas to find the names of the places marked on the map of Normandy. Write them in the map's key.
- ii) Find out key events that happened at these places during the Battle of Normandy.
- iii) Can you locate the sites of other important events during this military initiative and add these to your map and key?

**NEED SOME HELP?** The following place names and event clues will help you to create your map.

## PLACES

Can you locate these places on the map of Normandy?

Juno Beach

Caen

Atlantic Wall

Sainte-Mère-Eglise

Pegasus Bridge

Arromanches

Dieppe

Bayeux

Omaha Beach

Gold Beach

Utah Beach

Sword Beach

## EVENTS

Can you work out what happened where?

The line of defences built by the Germans along the coast of northern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway.

The Allies attempted a raid on this Normandy port in 1942. They were unsuccessful.

This bridge over the Caen Canal was the first strategic point to be taken by the Allies in the early hours of 6 June. Three gliders carrying soldiers from the British 6th Airborne division landed very close by, enabling them to launch a surprise attack in the dark and secure the bridge within minutes.

The original plan had been for the Allies to secure this city on D-Day. However, it took over a month for the allied forces to gain control of the city. In the fierce fighting that took place thousands of French civilians, allied troops, and German troops were killed, whilst over 70% of the city was destroyed.

The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division were tasked with securing this stretch of the coast that included the villages of Vaux, Courseulles-sur-Mer, Bernières-sur-Mer and St-Aubin-sur-Mer.

The central beach of the five that were landed on. 25,000 British troops landed here at 7.25am. The battle was fierce and the Allies eventually broke through at Arromanches enabling the British to advance to Bayeux.

The eastern most landing site where the British 3rd Infantry Division landed. It was a 3km stretch and the most strategically important due to its close proximity to Caen.

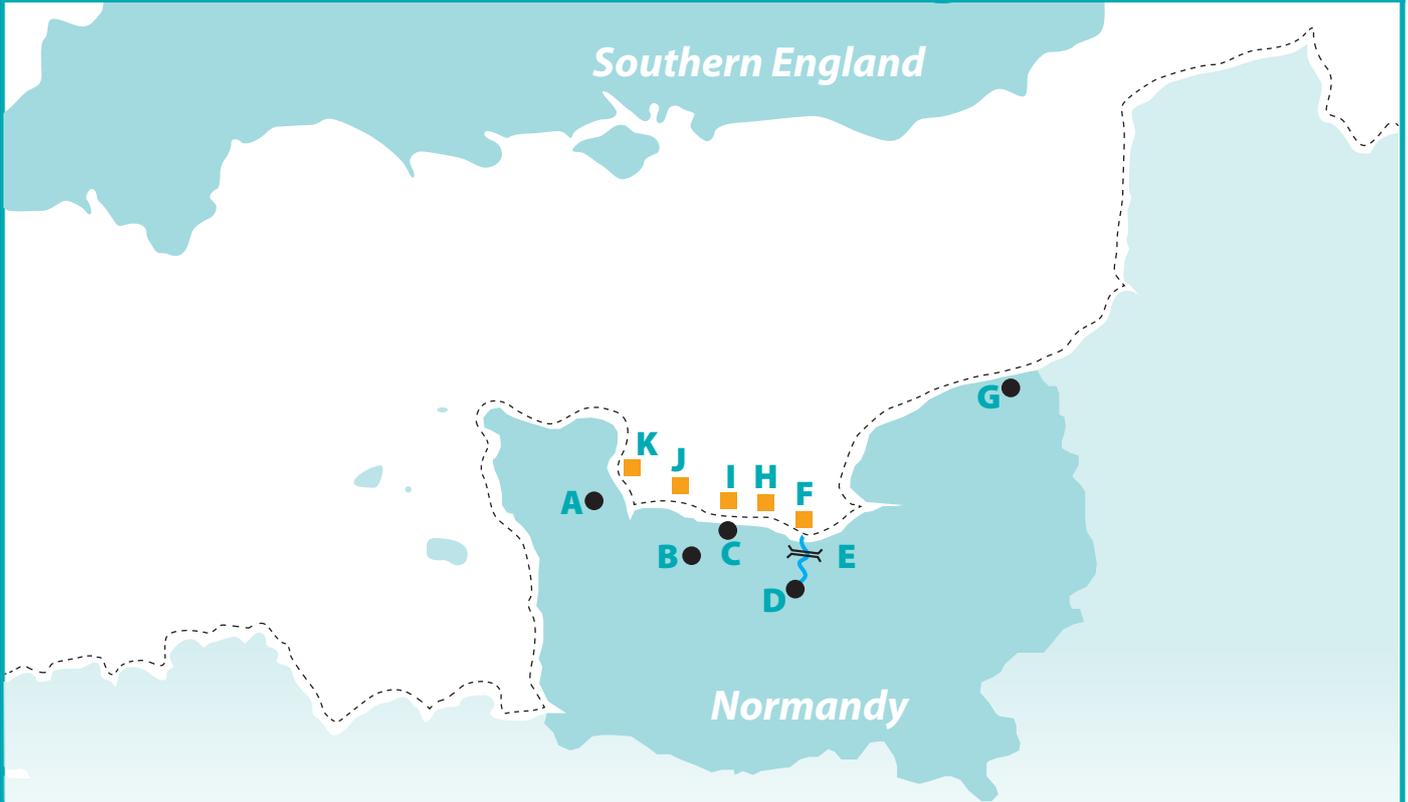
The five-mile stretch of Beach from Sainte-Honorine-des-Pertes to Vierville-sur-Mer that the US Army troops were responsible for capturing. The fighting here was fierce and the loss of life was high.

The seaside town where British forces landed. The Mulberry landing jetties were built here.

The most western of the landing beaches. American troops landed here slightly further south than they intended. They were luckily met with less resistance.

American paratroopers landed in this village in the early hours of 6 June. It was strongly defended by the Germans and many individuals lost their lives. The American army liberated the village later that morning. Paratrooper John Steele's parachute got caught on the church tower. There is a memorial statue on the church roof today.

# D-DAY - Map of Key Events



## KEY

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## D-DAY – Sources of Historical Evidence



© Arthur Smith

### Can you find out historical information from primary sources of evidence?

One of the most reliable ways of finding out about recent history is to ask someone who was present at an historical event.

Even though the D-Day landings took place almost seventy years ago there are veterans of the battle still alive today. (A veteran is someone who has served in the armed forces.)

If you had the opportunity to ask a D-Day veteran about their experiences in the military operation in Normandy what would you want to find out about?

### Task 1

Write a set of interview questions to ask a D-Day veteran.

### Do the above task before you read on.

These are the questions a journalist for *First News* asked:

- What was your position and roles in your unit?
- What made you 'join up' and how old were you?
- What training did you have for Operation Overlord?
- What were you told about the mission before it began?
- When and how did you cross the Channel?
- Were you scared or apprehensive in those early hours of 6th June 1944?
- Which beach did you land on and how did you get ashore?
- What were the conditions like? Was it cold, dark, noisy, etc?
- What was your unit's duties on landing and what did you do?
- What role did you then have in the following weeks as the Battle of Normandy progressed?
- How did the local people in Normandy greet you and the invading allied troops?
- What are your feelings when you reflect back on your involvement in that history-changing military campaign?

### Task 2

Compare the two sets of questions.

Do you have any that are the same?

Do you have questions about different information?

You can read the interview with Arthur Smith on the next page to find out about his experiences in the Battle of Normandy.

## BIG INTERVIEW - Arthur Smith, D-Day Veteran



© Arthur Smith

Arthur Smith on the 60th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings



© Arthur Smith

Arthur Smith with his DUKW in 1944

**Veteran, Arthur Smith took part in Operation Overlord during the Second World War. He was aboard one of the five thousand ships that crossed the Channel early in the morning on June 6th 1944. He has been awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the French government.**

### What was your position and roles in the unit?

I was in the Royal Arms Service, Regiment 297. We drove one of the ducks – the heavy goods vehicles that could swim in the sea. Our role was to support the landings by supplying and maintaining the vehicles. The DUKWs (an amphibious transport vehicle, commonly known as duck) themselves were so wonderfully built – they were American. The Americans actually made 28,000 of them. The English army had 2,800. This eleven-ton vehicle had special tyres that had the ability to go right down flat for when you come off the big LSTs (Landing Ship-Tanks) into the sea. They were very slow on the water, travelling at a speed of eight miles an hour. You had to learn how to anchor yourself to the big ships. They had their engines running just enough to keep the turbines spinning just enough so that the ship kept in the same position so that we could come alongside it. You had to be careful not to get caught at the back where the turbines were.

Once we were anchored to the ship, the rest of the duck's crew would offload – food, ammunition – anything that the army wanted, they let it down.

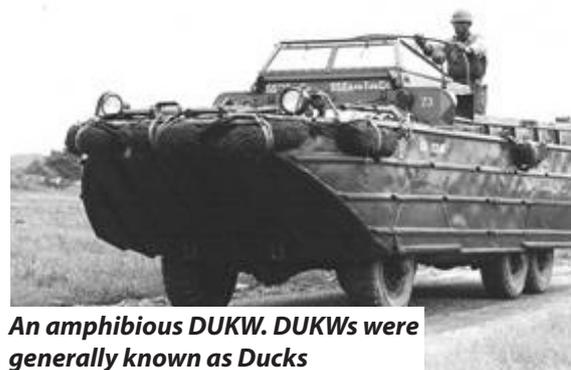
### What made you join the Navy and how old were you?

Like everyone else, the Government just made you join the army at eighteen years old. 30th December that was my birthday. I was called up to join the army in 1943.



© Getty

An LST (Landing Ship-Tank) being loaded up in preparation for the landings



An amphibious DUKW. DUKWs were generally known as Ducks

© Wikimedia Commons

## D-DAY - Sources of Historical Evidence

### What training did you have?

I learnt how to drive the vehicles. Then we learnt about this famous Amphibian, so we had a lot of training to do there. We were trained in the West of Wales to drive the DUKW to a ship anchored out to sea and we had to learn to go up to this thing, turn round and come back in. On top of that, we had training for driving the DUKW on land. They made you go over the hills or dunes, so that we could be taught how the vehicle could make its way over unusual ground and how to go downhill, without overturning. It was a brilliant vehicle.

### What were you told about Operation Overlord?

We were told roughly where we were going and that we would be working on the beach for quite a long time to transport the supplies.

### When and how did you cross the Channel?

We were supposed to cross opposite the Isle of Wight on the 4th June. We actually started to sail out and had to turn back at the last minute. An officer said it was too dangerous and that some of the vessels/vehicles wouldn't be able to cross, so we stopped and went the next day. We had a priest giving us a ceremony on the big ship, which was very nice actually.

Going across from England, the first thing we saw at around 5am was 140 small ships – they were fishing ships from England that had been brought over to drag the mines out of the water that the Germans had planted. They did a marvelous job.

We went over on the big LST ships. There were fifteen of them actually – three columns of five, with an escort of the Royal Navy. It was cold. The first thing we heard was the massive sound of the big navy bombs going off. We were determined to get ashore. We were determined to get going and do our job the best we could.

Because of the mass of people and equipment on the beach, we could not rest on ground the first night. So we were put back on the ducks and sent back out on to sea for the night which was a terrible thing because the Germans were gunning the area and their submarines dropped mines along into the water, too. It was pretty rough the first day, looking back over the years. We didn't panic though.



Arthur Smith on the 60th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings

### Were you scared?

No, not at all. What you must remember is that before we left, the whole of England had been bombed by German aircrafts practically everyday since the start of the war. When I was fifteen years old to eighteen, I was actually part of the fighting cadets of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade which basically meant we learnt the basic measures taken to save anybody's life, so we felt ready.

To discover more stories of D-Day veterans, visit these websites:

**The British Legion:** <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

**The D-Day and Normandy Fellowship:** <http://www.ddnf.org.uk/memories/>

**Interviews with Veterans:** <https://www.youtube.com/user/NormandyTourism>