

The Second World War

Assemblies for D-Day 65th Anniversary

DAY 2: THE NAVY

Script

Yesterday we started to learn about the Second World War and D-Day, and we heard the story of one man who served (do you remember what that means?) during the invasion.

Today we are going to learn about some of the jobs that the British Royal Navy carried out to help support the invasion.

Who can tell me where France is? How can we get there?

We can fly, we can even go by tunnel now, but back in 1944, the most successful way of getting there and getting large amounts of troops there was by sea – on ships and boats.

The Germans knew that Britain and the Allies would have to come by sea if they were to invade, so they set up lots of defences along the coast and in the water. It was the job of the Navy to try and destroy some of the defences including mines (floating bombs) in the water.

This work had to be done because the main way of getting the soldiers to France was for them to travel on boats and then be dropped on the beaches. From the beaches, the soldiers had to fight their way up past the Germans – that is why the Navy had to try and destroy the defences in the water and at the top of the beaches, to protect the vulnerable soldiers landing in the water.

Fred Matthews

Royal Navy, (HMS Jude) 18th Flotilla Fleet Sweepers, Gold Beach – marked and cleared mines in the Channel.

Mr Matthews was called up in 1943 to join the Royal Navy 18th Flotilla Fleet Sweepers, or 'Algerines', as they were commonly known. He vividly remembers the night of 5 June 1944.

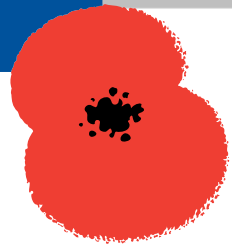
"As a minesweeper, my job was to drop buoys onto the mines," he recollects. "The buoys had flags on them so the troops could see where they were. The night before D-Day there were ten flotillas of sweepers that swept along Gold Beach and then formed outer perimeter defences between the beach head and Le Havre. I think of the soldiers who lost their lives going up onto the beaches. I think we were all proud to be there, doing our bit, no matter how big or small. We all had an important role to play."

Alexander Heggie

Royal Navy, Utah Beach – on minesweeping flotilla clearing a safe path to the beaches.

Working aboard HMS Shippigan (Leaver 16th Minesweeper Flotilla), Alexander Heggie witnessed some harrowing sights following the D-Day invasion, as the ship was often called on to collect the dying and the dead.

But the most frightening moment was coming up on deck one afternoon and walking the length of the ship not seeing a soul. When he eventually found the crew they told him they pulled up a mine and everyone on the ship was moved – everyone except him!



The Second World War

Assemblies for D-Day 65th Anniversary

“I couldn’t believe I was left alone next to the mine! It was certainly a lucky escape”.

Even after the invasion had begun on the 6th June 1944, the Royal Navy carried on looking for mines (or sweeping as they call it). They also had the job of bringing across fresh supplies of food and equipment for the British and Allied soldiers in France. Without the Navy, the invasion would not have been possible, no matter how many soldiers there were.

Show Photograph - A fleet of Landing Craft passing a landing ship during exercises prior to the invasion of Normandy(photo Imperial War Museum A 23595)

Moment of reflection

It is important to remember all the men and women that risked their lives to ensure that D-Day was successful, and that the soldiers that went on to fight to free Europe were able to land as safely as possible on the beaches.

Prayer or Poem

Where are the War Poets? by Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972)

They who in folly or mere greed
Enslaved religion, markets, laws,
Borrow our language now and bid
Us to speak up in freedom’s cause.

It is the logic of our times,
No subject for immortal verse –
That we who lived by honest dreams
Defend the bad against the worse.