

The Second World War

Assemblies for D-Day 65th Anniversary

DAY 3: AIR FORCE AND PARACHUTISTS

Script

Yesterday we learnt about the important role that the Navy played for D-Day – can you remember what that was?

What other group do you think might have been important in the build up to the day and to start the attack?

The Air Force was very important – members of the Air Force carried out a number of essential jobs that day.

Flying a plane and being part of its crew was very dangerous in wartime. Even though you are up in the air, that does not mean you are safe. If someone sees an enemy plane approaching, they can use very powerful guns on the ground to fire at it. If that plane is then hit, it might crash and all the people on board could die or be captured if they parachute out.

In the early hours of 6th June 1944, the planes from Britain carried out bombing raids along the coast from Normandy to make the Germans think that the attack would be there and to divert their attention from the real attack.

Another key role of the Air Force was drop parachutists in France behind German lines, away from the beaches so that they could prepare or defend areas for the men arriving on the beaches to get to. This was very risky for the Air Force and the Parachutists.

There was also another job:

William Stoneman

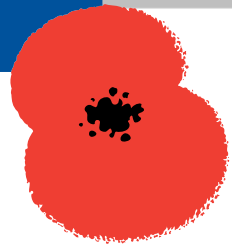
Royal Air Force, rear gunner – flew covert (secret) missions behind enemy lines.

Squadron Leader W J Stoneman DFM, who enlisted in the RAF aged 18 in 1942, was involved with clandestine operations at the rear of the fighting zone during the D-Day Landings. He was a rear gunner and his mission on D-Day was to fly missions behind enemy lines dropping decoy parachutists as part of a strategy to confuse German troops.

“The idea was to confuse the Germans,” says Stoneman. The decoy men exploded on impact with the ground and left the enemy uncertain about what was happening.”

The decoys were very successful and all part of the plan to help land the real parachutists down safely as well as divert the Germans attention to other events that were happening.

As the invasion progressed, the Air Force also dropped supplies to troops and provided information and cover. Some pilots and their air crews also lost their lives in the invasion of D-Day after their planes were shot at and hit.



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Show Photograph - A model of an American paratrooper hangs from the church at Sainte-Mère-Eglise as a reminder of D-Day

Moment of reflection:

We see planes and boats as something exciting and to get us around from place to place. But let us remember that in times of war and conflict, the men and women that serve on boats and planes risk their lives. Without their service in the Second World War we would not have the freedom we have today.

Poem or Prayer

David Bourne was born in Meopham, Kent in 1921. After being educated at Cranbrook, he joined the Royal Air Force as a pilot officer in July 1940. He was killed in 1941.

Parachute descent by David Bourne (1921-1941) written in 1940

Snap back the canopy,
Pull out the oxygen tube,
Flick the harness pin
And slap out into the air,
Clear of the machine.

You knew that you must float
From the sun above the clouds
To the gloom beneath, from a world
Of rarefied splendour to one
Of cheapened dirt, close-knit
In its effort to encompass man
In death.

Show Photograph - British Paradummy "Rupert" at Merville D-Day Bunker Museum, France