



20 things you need to know about D-Day.

1. **D-Day** is a term traditionally used by the Armed Forces for when an operation, such as an attack begins. The 'D' just stands for day - the day before D-Day was known as "D-1", and the day after D-Day was "D+1". Prior to June 1944, there would have been lots of D-Days. Now it is generally just used to refer to the allied attack in Normandy on **6th June 1944** and the start of Operation Overlord.
2. **Operation Overlord** was the codename given to the whole invasion of North West Europe. Governments and Armed Forces use code words to describe plans and operations to try and keep them secret or to stop different plans from being confused. Included in Operation Overlord was **Operation Neptune** which was the main part of the attack lasting from 6th June to 30th June 1944.
3. D-day was originally planned for 5th June but the weather was too bad, with high winds and rain. The invasion was planned according to certain weather conditions and tides.
4. All along the west European coast, the Germans had built fortifications. Some of the defences were built as early as 1940, in particular in the Pas de Calais which was strongly fortified because it was the area closest to Britain. After the Battle of Britain (summer 1940) many of the key ports along the western coast of Europe were protected by batteries with long range guns. From 1942 the Germans began to construct the **Atlantic Wall**, which was to be an unbreakable line of defence stretching from Norway to Spain.
5. Plans for an allied attack into France had been developing for years, however the detailed preparation for D-Day started in 1943 after the meeting in Tehran between the allied leaders **Winston Churchill, F D Roosevelt** and **Joseph Stalin**.
6. **Normandy** was viewed by the Germans as the most unlikely point for an attack. To make a successful attack from the sea, the attacking army and its equipment would need to get swiftly onto land. The equipment would be needed not just for the attack but for the days and weeks afterwards. Fresh military equipment would be needed as soon as an attack began because the equipment the landing forces brought would be quickly used up. They would also need new medical supplies and new stocks of food. That meant the best place to attack would have been a port - the most likely place for an attack was considered to be Pas de Calais. This was because it was a huge port and the shortest distance from Britain. Normandy had one of the furthest crossing times and the port of Caen was considered too far in for an attack.
7. Normandy was chosen because it was the most unlikely spot. Although there were German beach defences there, they were not as strong as those at other areas. To get round the problem of attacking via a port, the Allies invented and then built temporary harbours – called Mulberry Harbours.
8. The **Mulberry Harbour** was actually two artificial harbours. They were towed from the south coast of England and put together off the coast of Normandy. One,

- known as Mulberry A, was put together at Omaha Beach and the other, known as Mulberry B (nicknamed 'Port Winston'), was put together off Arromanches at Gold Beach. The construction was like a jigsaw puzzle. The Mulberry Harbours were made up of flexible steel that floated on steel or concrete pontoons (supports). They were capable of moving 7,000 tons of vehicles and goods each day.
9. The Germans knew an invasion was planned because their spy plans were able to see activity on the south coast in Britain. **Operation Fortitude** was the Allies plan to deceive the Germans about where an Allied invasion would take place. Fortitude North was designed to confuse the Germans about an allied attack on Norway and operation Fortitude South was to confuse them about when and where the Allies would attack in France. The Allies leaked faked plans, set up fake camps and carried fake coded messages across the radio as part of Operation Fortitude. Confusing the German enemy, to make sure they were not prepared for Normandy, was crucial. One of the most important parts of the deception was for the Germans to believe that the attack in Normandy was not the real attack so that they would not send huge amounts of German reinforcements, even when the attack began. Overall Operation Fortitude was a huge success.
 10. In Britain, in the build-up to D-Day (code named **Bolero**), the whole of the south of England resembled one large army camp. Civilian travel was restricted in some areas, as was diplomatic travel. Journalists were monitored and most troops were under constant training.
 11. Diversion and blocking tactics continued right up to and throughout the invasion – planes were sent to bomb **Calais** the night of the 5th June and on the morning of the 6th, to continue the idea that the attack would be there and not in Normandy. The French resistance set about cutting all the telephone lines and communication systems to stop news of the actual invasion reaching the Germans and the German High Command.
 12. The first part of the attack was not on beaches but by air – British and American Airborne divisions. Army units, trained to parachute from aircraft to take specific targets, landed behind German lines in Normandy. The men of D Company, 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry who were part of the 6th British Airborne Division, landed at Ranville-Benouville in Normandy, arriving by glider. They captured the Caen Canal Bridge, later renamed **Pegasus Bridge** in honour of the cap badge (a winged horse – Pegasus) of the 6th Airborne Division. The bridge was vital to allow passage of allied supplies and to stop German reinforcements.
 13. "**H-Hour**" is the term used for the time during the day for a military operation to begin. For D-Day the key H-hour was at 6.30 am when the attacks on the beaches began.
 14. The Allied Forces landed troops along the Normandy coast, stretching approximately 25 to 30 miles in length. The area was divided up into 5 sections and given the codes of **Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno** and **Sword**. The US troops landed at Utah and Omaha, the British at Gold and Sword and the Canadians at Juno.

15. On D-Day, the **Allies** landed around 156,000 troops in Normandy. The Americans landed approximately 73,000 (23,250 on Utah Beach, 34,250 on Omaha Beach, and 15,500 airborne troops). On the British and Canadian beaches, 83,115 troops were landed (61,715 of them British): 24,970 on Gold Beach, 21,400 on Juno Beach, 28,845 on Sword Beach, and 7900 airborne troops. Other Allied troops also took part on the day and in the days and weeks that followed as part of the Battle for Normandy, these included forces from Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Poland.
16. The Americans invented specialist landing craft for the troops to be carried on (**LCVP** standing for Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel but often simply called the Higgins boat). These crafts each had a ramp that dropped down into the sea so that troops would not have to clamber over the side of a boat before getting to the beach.
17. Throughout the first hours of D-Day, Allied ships bombarded the French coast to try and destroy the German guns and defences of the Atlantic Wall. Allied troops were also assisted in their attack by **amphibious tanks** that were landed to destroy German resistance.
18. **Anne Frank** wrote about D-Day in her diary on 6th June 1944 after hearing the news on a secret radio.

"This is D-Day, came the announcement over the British radio. The invasion has begun! According to the German news, British parachute troops have landed on the French coast. British landing craft are in battle with the German Navy, says the BBC.

Great commotion in the 'Secret Annexe'! Would the long-awaited liberation that has been talked of so much but which still seems too wonderful, too much like a fairy-tale, ever come true? Could we be granted victory this year, 1944? We don't know yet, but hope is revived within us; it gives us fresh courage, and makes us strong again."

19. The human cost of D-Day and the Battle for Normandy was enormous. There are now **27 war cemeteries** in the area containing the remains of over 110,000 dead from both sides: 77,866 German, 9386 American, 17,769 British, 5002 Canadian and 650 Poles.
20. D-Day the 6th June 1944 was the largest amphibious (sea to land) invasion in the history of warfare. There hasn't been any operation as ambitious either before or since. In the months that followed D-Day, the Allies became bogged down in battles and German counter-attacks, but they were never forced back into the sea or removed from Normandy, making D-Day and the invasion of Normandy a huge success.