

Assemblies for D-Day 65th Anniversary

There are five assemblies for Key Stages 1 and 2. (Please note they may need some adaptation of language for different levels). There is also one assembly for Key Stages 3 and 4.

The five primary assemblies are designed to be run over a whole week, although Assembly for Day 5 can be used as a stand-alone assembly. At the end of each assembly is a suggested poem – please feel free to choose an alternative or to substitute with a prayer.

If you want to use visual materials for this assembly, please go to the dedicated Legion website for D-Day www.dday65.org.uk and use pictures of the veterans or images of Remembrance. Alternatively you could use some of the materials in The Royal British Legion's free educational resources (you can request these via the [Legion's website](#) if you do not have it already).



The British 2nd Army assembling on SWORD beach at 8.30 am on 6 June while under intermittent enemy mortar and shell fire. In the foreground are Sappers Jimmy Leask (left) and Cyril Hawkins of No. 1 Platoon, 84 Field Company RE, who both survived the war.
(photo Imperial War Museum B 5114)

Assembly for Day One (Key stages 1 and 2)

The Second World War

Has anyone heard of the Second World War?

Well it is a war that lasted from 1939 to 1945 – and that probably seems like a long time ago now. This war took place all around the world, involving many countries and people. It affected the lives of lots of people - men, women and children.

The war started in Europe in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded the country of Poland and then went on to invade nearly all of the countries of Western Europe as well as many in Eastern and Southern Europe. In the end, the only countries of Europe that continued to fight Nazi Germany so that they wouldn't be taken over, were Britain and Russia.

All across the world, other countries and peoples were also fighting, either to prevent being invaded by Nazi Germany and its supporters, or to help nearby countries or the Allies (Britain, her Empire and the Commonwealth). After the end of 1941, one of the countries fighting alongside Britain was the United States of America. They joined the war after being attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour.

There was fighting in North Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East – everyone was affected.

As part of the plans to defeat Germany and the Axis Powers (Germany's supporters) Britain and its Allies needed to invade Europe to free or liberate those countries that had been taken over by Germany.

The people in the British Armed Forces fighting for Britain and the Allies were mainly men and some women aged 17 to mid forties (although some older men and women were involved in other roles). The women were not allowed to actually fight on the front line but were involved in many dangerous supporting roles such as nursing and driving vehicles.

How many of you have relatives and friends who are that age or nearly that age?

Those who we say 'served' with the Armed Forces would have done very brave things. They fought all across the world and many were killed or injured.

One of the biggest battles to free Europe was the invasion of France, known as D-Day. The anniversary of **D-Day** is at the end of this week – it will be 65 years since it was fought. So over the next week we are going to learn about some of the people who served and risked their lives by invading France to free Europe from war.

The first one we will learn about is:

John Adlam

Army, Coldstream Guards, Gold Beach – a fitter who got tanks ready for action.

Sergeant John Adlam of the Coldstream Guards survived the D-Day invasion through several strokes of luck and his own strength of character. Having been woken abruptly at 4.00 am on 6 June 1944 and told to mobilise at once, Adlam made the journey to Gosport in Hampshire to meet his regiment and travel across the Channel to Bayeux. A humble man, he says he was determined to just do his job and take it all in his stride.

Adlam's luck may have had something to do with his positive and determined attitude. When talking about his fellow soldiers he says, "*I met some rogues, but never met a bad man.*"

Moment of Reflection:

We remember anniversaries of wars so that those men and women who served, and all those affected by war (including children) will always be remembered. Many of those who fought all across the world were young. They gave their futures so that we can live in peace



Soldiers crossing the Channel on D-Day
(photo Imperial War Museum BU 001181)

Poem or prayer

Anthem for Doomed Youth

by Wilfred Owen

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, --
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.



Night in Al-Hamra

by Saadi Youssef

A candle on the long road
A candle in the slumbering houses
A candle for the terrified stores
A candle for the bakeries
A candle for the journalist shuddering in an empty office
A candle for the fighter
A candle for the doctor at the sick bed
A candle for the wounded
A candle for honest talk
A candle for staircases
A candle for the hotel crowded with refugees
A candle for the singer
A candle for the broadcasters in a shelter
A candle for a bottle of water
A candle for the air
A candle for two lovers in a stripped apartment
A candle for the sky that has folded
A candle for the beginning
A candle for the end
A candle for the final decision
A candle for conscience
A candle in my hand



Assembly for Day Two (Key stages 1 and 2)

The Navy

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 recalls. "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!

"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.



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.



Assembly for Day Three (Key stages 1 and 2)

Air Force and Parachutists

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.



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.



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

Assembly for Day Four (Key stages 1 and 2)

Doctors and nurses

Over the last two days we have learnt about the Navy and the Air Force and some of the work they did in the build up to D-Day and on the day itself. Another group that is part of the Armed Services (military) is a group of people who don't fight but are there to try save lives.

What people have you heard of that work to save lives and treat people who might be injured?

Doctors and nurses – well doctors and nurses also work during wars, even during battles and attacks. They are not there to fight, their job is to help those that get injured in the fighting and to try and save their lives.

On D-Day, lots of medical staff landed on the beaches with the fighting soldiers so that they could help those hurt from the very beginning. Medical staff also landed by parachute to help the men fighting there. Everywhere that soldiers go, there are doctors and nurses supporting them – do you think that is dangerous?

Absolutely – doctors and nurses still get shot at and killed even if their job is not actually fighting.

Dennis Kenwood

Army, Royal Army Medical Corps, Sword Beach – attended casualties in an operating tent.

Mr Dennis Kenward was trained as a nurse before the war and called up to the army at the age of 19. The 40th Field Surgical Unit set up medical camp near Hermanville (France) after landing on Sword Beach. During the night of June 6, Kenwood and his team worked until the small hours dressing wounds, dosing patients with morphine, and reassuring the soldiers where they could.

"I couldn't believe it when, at about 4 am, the corporal shook my shoulder and told me that the lorry with the operating tent had arrived," he says. "We had to get up, pitch the tent and start operating on people straight away. We were all so tired, but knew we just had to keep going."

Raymond Daeche

Army, Royal Army Medical Corps, Pegasus Bridge – treated dying and wounded soldiers.

On D-Day Raymond Daeche landed in a glider at Pegasus Bridge in Normandy. It was his regiment's job to hold the Eastern flank for the period

of the landing.

He was also a medic, treating soldiers and civilians after the carnage at Normandy. On one occasion he spent one hour searching through blood drenched clothes for a cutting of the Tottenham Hotspurs, just to make a wounded soldier smile.

Without the doctors and nurses that were part of the D-Day invasion, many more men would have died from the injuries they received. Even in war and conflict, they are able to save lives.



Beach casualties being helped to sick bay on HMS Frobisher
(photo IWM A 24104)

Moment of Reflection

Sometimes we don't know about all the different jobs that people do to make our lives safer. Doctors and nurses work at all times to try and make a difference and to help those that are ill and injured. In times of war, it's the doctors and nurses who have to try and save lives when so many others are being killed. It is important for us to remember them and the work and service that they give to those affected and caught up in war.

Poem or a Prayer

This poem was written by a Canadian doctor, John McCrae, who had been in the First World War and saw the poppies growing in France. The Poppy inspired people who believed that those who had fought should not be forgotten and they started to wear a poppy at the time of the anniversary of the end of the war.

In Flanders' Fields

by John McCrae

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders' fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders' fields.



Assembly for Day Five (Key stages 1 and 2)

D-Day - the invasion

Over this week we have learnt about some of the people that contributed to the D- Day invasion, a highly significant part of the Second World War.

Does anyone know what D-Day means?

Well D-Day doesn't really mean anything. It just means the day that something will happen. But now D-Day usually means the invasion of France and Western Europe by Britain and her Allies on 6th June 1944.

To free Europe after a long and difficult war, the Allies attacked a 30-mile stretch of the Normandy coast. All parts of the Armed Forces took part (as we have learnt this week): the Navy fired at the German positions defending the beaches and brought troops and supplies across the Channel, the Air Force bombed enemy positions and flew in some of the parachute regiments and the Allied Armies launched their attacks on the beaches and as parachutists.

On D-Day, the Allies landed around 156,000 troops in Normandy.

Charles Jackson

Army, Lincolnshire Regiment, Sword Beach – a Bren gunner, one of the 3-inch mortar crew.

D-Day veteran Mr C W Jackson will never forget the horrors of D-day. The shrapnel that has remained in his body since 1944 is a constant reminder of his participation in WW2. Private Jackson was part of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment on D-Day and as a Bren gunner, it was his job to cover the soldiers as they poured on to the Normandy beaches.

"I try not to think about the D-Day landings too much," he goes on to say. "There were so many terrible sights; soldiers drowning and dying as they went up on to the beach."

John Kite

Army, Special Forces, Juno Beach – attacked specially selected German targets.

Sergeant John Kite, was a true D-Day hero, commanding thirty troops into battle to liberate France. Before the assault, Kite was briefed by the ship's commander and was tasked with asking his men to write their last will and testament. They were under no illusions that they would all come back alive.

As the ramp lowered to allow the troops to wade through the blood-swamped sea onto the beach, Kite describes how he felt: "*The butterflies began to wobble in my stomach. All the bones in my body were shaking. I told myself to keep calm to set an example for the men, come what may.*"

We call D-Day the 6th June 1944, the largest amphibious invasion in the history of warfare – that means it was the largest invasion that went from sea to land ever. It still took the Allies another 11 months to free the whole of Europe and many more people, soldiers and civilians, such as children, were killed in that time. But overall, the D-Day invasion was a success and it meant that Europe could be free again.

To achieve that freedom, thousands of men fought and many were killed or injured. They were killed not only on D-Day but throughout the battles for Normandy that followed over the days and weeks after 6th June. There are now 27 war cemeteries in the area, containing the graves of over 110,000 dead from both sides: 77,866 German, 9386 American, 17,769 British, 5002 Canadian and 650 Poles.

Moment of Reflection:

Let us remember the huge amount of effort, dedication, invention and lives that went into the attack that led to the liberation of Europe. Those men and women who were asked by their countries to fight in the Second World War will always be remembered because they fought so that we would know the value of peace.

**"When you go home, tell them of us and say,
for their tomorrow, we gave our today"**

Kohima Epitaph

Poem or prayer:

At the British War Cemetery, Bayeux

by Charles Causley (1917 – 2003)

I walked where in their talking graves
And shirts of earth five thousand lay,
When history with ten feasts of fire
Had eaten the red air away.

'I am Christ's boy,' I cried. 'I bear
In iron hands the bread, the fishes.
I hang with honey and with rose
This tidy wreck of all your wishes.

'On your geometry of sleep
The chestnut and the fir-tree fly,
And lavender and marguerite
Forge with their flowers an English sky.

'Turn now towards the belling town
Your jigsaws of impossible bone,
And rising read your rank of snow
Accurate as death upon the stone.'

About your easy heads my prayers
I said with syllables of clay.
'What gift,' I asked, 'shall I bring now
Before I weep and walk away?'

*Take, they replied, the oak and laurel.
Take our fortune of tears and live
Like a spendthrift lover. All we ask
Is the one gift you cannot give.*



Bayeux Memorial, CWGC Cemetery, Bayeux

Stand-alone Assembly (Key Stage 3 and above)

Notes: adjust the date if you are presenting this assembly earlier in the week. If you want to use visual materials for this assembly then go to the website The Royal British Legion has set up (www.dday65.org.uk) and use the pictures of the veterans or images of Remembrance.

Assembly

Today is June 5th and tomorrow will be June 6th: a day known to many as the anniversary of D-Day.

D-Day was one of the turning points of the Second World War – something that seems very far away now but actually still has importance for today.

The Second World War was a global conflict with fighting taking place in many countries and continents. It had started in Europe 1939 with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland and then Western Europe, Soviet Russia, and through the Balkans. The collapse of the countries in Western Europe had also resulted in Nazi Germany and the Axis powers such as Italy and Japan moving into Africa and Asia.

By the end of 1940, the only European country not occupied but still fighting Germany was Britain. For the next three and a half years, Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth fought with Germany around the globe - in North Africa, South East Asia and many other places. However, they needed time, technology and large military numbers to launch a major attack into mainland Europe.

In December 1941, the United States entered the war on the side of Britain and her Allies after it was attacked by Japanese forces. Together the two nations led the planning for the invasion and liberation of Europe.

In preparation, smaller scale invasions were launched into Italy at the start of 1944. However to really bring the Germans to the point of defeat, the Allies needed to attack into Western Europe – specifically France. The big problems were:

- Creating a large element of surprise
- Logistically getting the troops and resources needed to an invasion place
- Dealing with German defences and then a counter-attack

After months of planning and development, the following solutions were found:

- Months of subterfuge with false information leaked to the Germans so that the Germans would think the wrong things about a forthcoming Allied invasion.
- A site of attack was chosen that was neither typical nor ideal as it did not have a useful harbour for unloading follow-up troops and supplies. They overcame this by inventing and then building floating harbours!

- Choosing Normandy meant that the German defences were not at their strongest. By meticulous planning, the Allies dropped parachute regiments in strategic places, just before the main invasion, to help destroy German positions and preserve routes for Allied troops once in France.

In the end, the Allies attacked a 30 mile stretch of Normandy coast. All parts of the Armed Forces took part – the Navy fired at the German positions defending the beaches and brought troops and supplies across, the Air Force bombed positions and flew in some of the parachute regiments and the Allied Armies launched their attacks on the beaches and as parachutists. The task was still huge and many were killed or injured - on D-Day, the Allies landed around 156,000 troops in Normandy.

These men were there:

Charles Allan

Army, Royal Artillery, Gold Beach – anti-tank gunner who engaged with enemy tanks.

During the war Charles Allen was a gun layer in the 17lb Anti-Tank Gun Crew. Coming off the boat he wondered what was going to happen when the front door went down. The noise on the beaches was deafening and it took them 20 minutes to get off the beach and get the waterproofing off the tank and gun.

Arriving on the beaches, Mr Allen said they were presented with a chaotic scene: "*The Navy were having a go, bombers were having a go... when I saw the bodies on the beach I wondered what I was doing there... but we did the job.*"

Charles Jackson

Army, Lincolnshire Regiment, Sword Beach – a Bren gunner, one of the 3-inch mortar crew.

D-Day veteran Mr C W Jackson will never forget the horrors of D-Day. The shrapnel that has remained in his body since 1944 is a constant reminder of his participation in WW2. Private Jackson was part of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment on D-Day and as a Bren gunner, it was his job to cover the soldiers as they poured on to the Normandy beaches.

"*I try not to think about the D-Day landings too much,*" he goes on to say. "*There were so many terrible sights; soldiers drowning and dying as they went up on to the beach.*"

D-Day the 6th June 1944 was the largest amphibious (sea to land) invasion in the history of warfare. No Armed Force has launched 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 in to the sea or removed from Normandy, making D-Day and the invasion of Normandy a huge success.

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.

Moment of Reflection:

Let us remember the huge amount of effort, dedication, invention and lives that went into the attack that led to the liberation of Europe. Those men and women who were asked by their countries to fight in the Second World War, will always be remembered because they fought so that we would know the value of peace.

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Kohima Epitaph



Ranville War Cemetery, Normandy

Poem or prayer:

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by Charles Causley (1917 – 2003)

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