

# Normandy

*Love the land. Live the life.*



*Normandy Tourist Board  
Educational Resource Pack*

*Part Three*

## *THE D-DAY LANDINGS & THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY*

# NORMANDY *The D-Day Landings*

## IMAGINE being part of the largest invasion 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, more than 10,000 Allied casualties killed, wounded or missing.

## Countdown to D-Day

After an unsuccessful raid, back in 1942, on the Normandy port of **Dieppe**, the Allies were determined not to fail again. So, a command team met in December 1943, to arrange Operation Overlord and work out the new air, sea and ground attack on Northern France.

British General Bernard Montgomery was in charge of the ground forces.

As the Germans were heavily guarding the ports, Montgomery planned the invasion for five other points along a sixty mile stretch of the Normandy coast. The landing beaches for D-Day were code-named: Omaha and Utah (US), Gold and Sword (British) and Juno (Canadian).

## Axis or Allies?

World War II 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 world's history as the conflict quickly spread around the globe. Two groups of nations, which became known as the Axis and Allied Powers, struggled to gain control.

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, United States and China.



## 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.





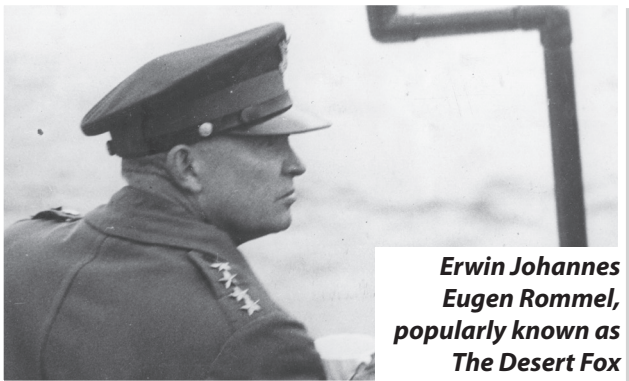
## Submarines and Secret Messages

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

And France was doing its bit too. Despite the fact that the country was occupied by the Germans, there was a strong **French Resistance** movement, made up of a hundred thousand 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.

## Atlantic Wall



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

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

So, how were you going to get soldiers, heavy laden with equipment, across the Atlantic Wall?



**A tourist visits the Batterie de Longues situated between the landing beaches Omaha and Gold, one of the major constructions built by the Germans in the Atlantic Wall in 1944. The German crew of the battery surrendered on 7th June 1944.**

## New Technology

To help the vehicles and troops land by sea, the British designed two concrete landing jetties called **Mulberries**.

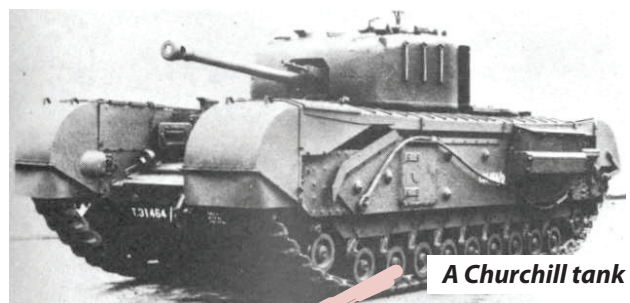


**Remains of the concrete Mulberry harbour constructed at Arromanches**

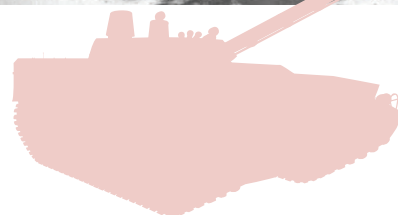
Other innovations included new tanks. The D-D (Duplex Drive) tank had a propeller, so it could travel on the water as well as land. The front of the Crab tank had revolving steel chains, attached to the front, to detonate the German mines and clear the barbed wire. A tank called the Bobbin was fitted with a mat for the ground, to prevent other vehicles from sinking on the beach. Churchill tanks even had napalm flame throwers which could 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 invasion 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 5-6 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 and help to deter the 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 06 June 1944 of the Allied Naval forces engaged in the Overlord Operation of landing while Allied forces storm the Normandy beaches on D-Day*



*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 are landed 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 **bombard** the German defences too.

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

By nightfall, though, 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 Ste-Mère-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 have 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 fighting, lose their lives.

But Operation Overlord marks a turning point for the Allies. They are on their way to victory.



## Today

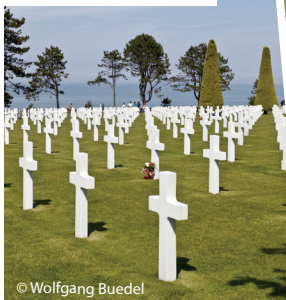
If you look at a map of Normandy, you will see that beaches still have their invasion code-names. Streets nearby are even named after the troop units that fought there.

As well as the beaches and other landmarks, such as the Pegasus bridge, you can visit war museums, memorials and cemeteries in Normandy. 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 fighting of the Battle of Normandy took place in the Falaise pocket from 12 to 21 August. The battle was a strategic victory for the Allies.



Musée Airborne at Ste-Mère-Église



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 - Click the links below to discover more about D-Day.

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

NORMANDY MÉMOIRE ASSOCIATION [www.normandiememoire.com/?lang=en](http://www.normandiememoire.com/?lang=en)

D-DAY MUSEUM, PORTSMOUTH [www.ddaymuseum.co.uk](http://www.ddaymuseum.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 were: Great Britain, United States, France and the Soviet Union

**BOMBARD** - attack, open fire on

**BUNKER** - 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** - explosive device, 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 these key events in 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 to 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 and activities in Normandy, and 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. But by the end of the day, the allies have succeeded in breaking through the German Defences.

5,000 ships with 60,000 troops begin the 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 and 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.

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

Germans construct the Atlantic Wall to defend the north coast of France and all along the coast to Scandinavia.

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

In 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

# D-Day - Map of Key Events

## ACTIVITY B: LOCATING SITES OF KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS

### Can you locate the sites of important key 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 in the Second World War 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

Falaise Pocket

Gold Beach

Utah Beach

Sword Beach

Omaha Beach

### EVENTS

Can you work out happened where?

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

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

The battle of Falaise Pocket raged from 12th to 21st August. Victory here ensured the Allied Forces success in Normandy and Paris was liberated two days after this battle was won.

The first town to be liberated by the Allies on 7th June. The Germans left without a fight.

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 and German troops were killed and over 70% of the city was destroyed.

The bridge over the Caen Canal was the first strategic point to be taken by the allies in the early hours of June 6th. 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 central of the five landing beaches, 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. 25,000 men and their equipment landed here.

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 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 high.

The eastern most landing site, where the British 3rd Infantry Division landed. It was a 3km stretch and the most strategically important as it was nearest to Caen.

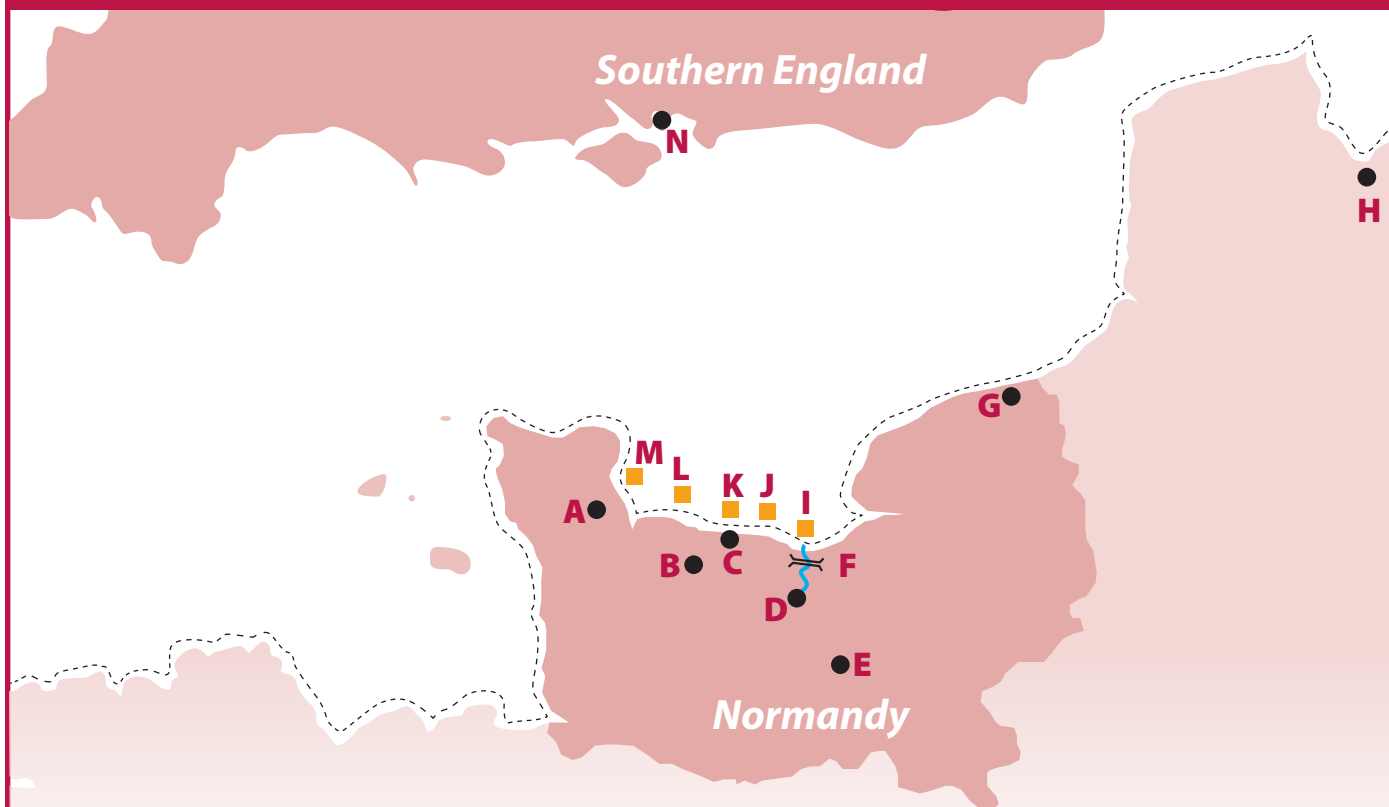
The most western of the landing beaches, where American troops landed by luck slightly further south than they intended but they met less resistance here.

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

American paratroopers landed in this village in the early hours of June 6th. It was strongly defended by the Germans and many 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

	.....
--	-------

**A****B****C****D****E****F** **G****H****I****J****K****L****M****N**

## 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 there about the event.

The D-Day landings took place almost seventy years ago and there are veterans of the battle still alive. (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 history-changing military operation in Normandy, what would you want to find out about?

### Task 1

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

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

These are the questions the First News journalist 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 wanting to find out 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

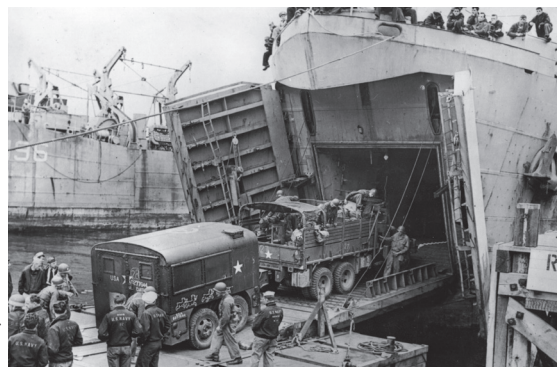
**Arthur Smith with his DUKW in 1944**

**Veteran, Arthur Smith took part in Operation Overlord in 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.**

### 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.



© Getty

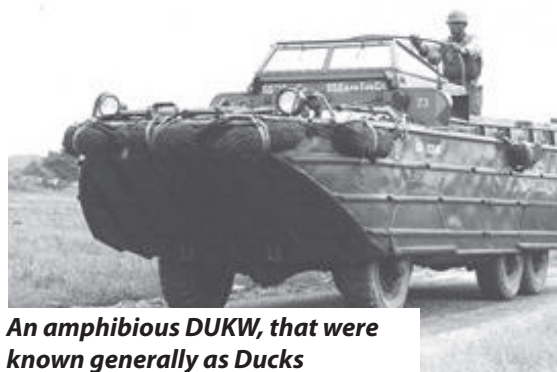
**An LST (Landing Ship-Tank being loaded up in preparation for the landings.)**

### 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.

### 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



**An amphibious DUKW, that were known generally as Ducks**

© Wikimedia Commons

## D-DAY - Sources of Historical Evidence

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.

### 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 read more stories of D-Day veterans, visit the websites of the following organisations:

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

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

**The D-Day Museum:** <http://www.ddaymuseum.co.uk/d-day/d-day-links>

**Travelling to Normandy:** Brittany ferries - [www.brittanyferries.co.uk](http://www.brittanyferries.co.uk)