D-Day

What was D-Day?

- D-Day was an important day during World War 2. It was the day on which the Allied forces set out to recapture France.
- France was one of several countries in Europe that had been invaded and taken over by German leader Adolf Hitler's army. Germany, Italy and Japan (the Axis powers) had all signed an agreement to help each other during the war.
- The day is remembered as one of the turning points of World War 2, and played a major part in the Allied forces winning the war.

> The codename for the plan to recapture France was called Operation Overlord and D-Day was the codename for the date that it would take place.

When did it take place?

- D-day took place on 6th June 1944.
- It was originally planned for 5th June 1944 but bad weather meant it was delayed.
- Thousands of ships, carrying over 175,000 troops, set out from Plymouth, Torquay, Exmouth, Southampton, Southsea and Eastbourne across the English Channel.
- They planned to land on the northern coast of France, on five beaches in Normandy.

> There were only two or three days during a month when the attack could take place – there had to be a Spring tide at sea and the Moon had to be full.

Where did it happen?

- The Nazi Generals thought that, if any invasion happened, it would be around Pas de Calais in France, where the distance between France and Great Britain was shortest. Instead, the troops landed in Normandy in northern France, where the beaches were not as well defended as the ports.
- The troops landed at five beaches along an 80km stretch of the Normandy coast, which were given the codenames **Omaha**, **Utah**, **Gold**, **Sword** and **Juno.**
- The beaches called Omaha and Utah were landed by the American army and the beaches called Gold and Sword by the British army. Juno beach was landed by the Canadian army.

> Allied commandoes went on secret missions to Normandy to inspect the beaches and check on German defences. They found that the German army had put metal stakes under the sea near the beach, to block boats from landing.

What happened on D-Day itself?

- Over 24,000 paratroopers were flown to France shortly after midnight on 6th June. They parachuted into France, a few miles from the beaches where the invasion would take place. It was their job to fight Hitler's army and take control of important bridges, roads and railways, to stop the enemy troops from being able to bring in reinforcements and supplies.
- The ships carrying the troops sailed across the Channel at night then, at 5.30 in the morning, the orders were given for the attack to begin. The soldiers used amphibious vehicles – which can be driven on land or water – and many soldiers waded or swam from their ships to the shore.
- The US troops landing at Utah beach came under heavy fire from machine guns but only two hundred were killed or injured. The worst fighting took place at Omaha beach, with over 2,400 US soldiers wounded or killed.
- The British troops landing at Sword beach had to take cover when they were attacked by German tanks. There were 630 men injured or killed on Sword beach, and 400 on Gold beach.
- On Juno beach, 1,200 of the soldiers were hurt or killed.
- By night time on 6th June 1944, the Allied soldiers were winning and had taken control of the beaches. However, they still had many more battles to fight before the war was finally over on 15th August 1945.

> When the Allied forces captured the German troops they found that many of them were very young, just 16 or 17, and had been conscripted (forced) into the army from countries that had been taken over by the Nazis.

Who took part?

- The Allied forces included thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen from Britain, America and Canada, as well as smaller numbers of soldiers from many other countries.
- The ground troops were commanded by British General, Sir Bernard Law Montgomery and the navy by British Admiral, Sir Bertram Ramsay. The invasion was led by American General, Dwight D Eisenhower.

> The French Resistance (the men and women living in France who were secretly fighting against Hitler's army) helped the Allied Forces by sabotaging railways and damaging the Germans' communication links.

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