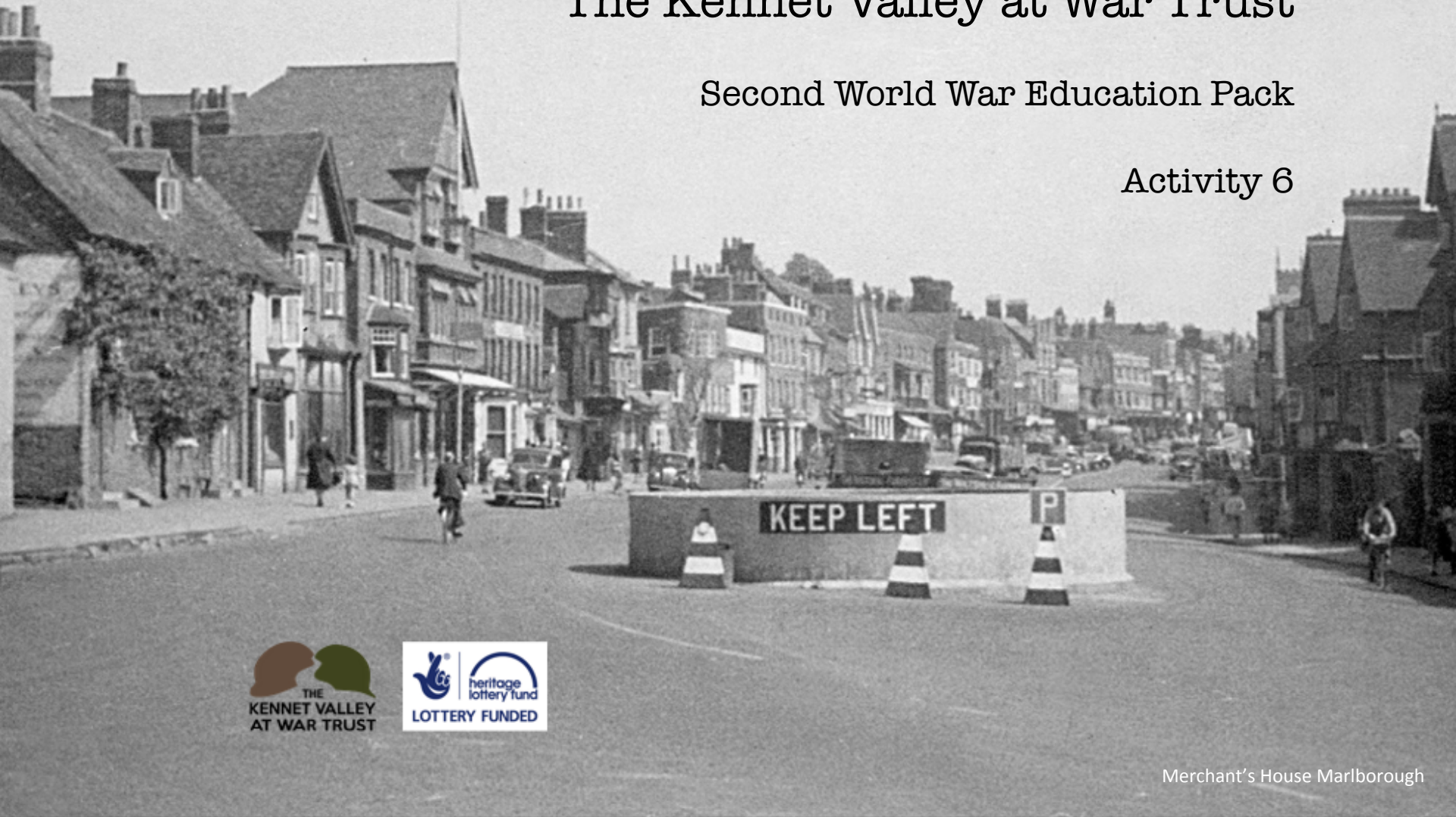


The Kennet Valley at War Trust

Second World War Education Pack

Activity 6



Note to teachers...

This basic slide pack has been prepared for you to use with the Kennet Valley at War Trust's Second World War Education Pack.

Please adapt it to meet your own needs.

How to use the Education Pack

The Education Pack is in two parts: background information and a set of classroom activity plans for teachers; and original images and texts, to be used with those plans.

The activities, which are principally designed for pupils aged between 9 and 14, can be adapted to suit older or younger students who are studying the history of their local area. Each activity includes background information, helpful ideas, and links to curriculum subjects and additional online resources. These can be used in lessons or as part of a larger cross curriculum project.

Slide packs, for use with each activity, can be downloaded from: www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

The activities show what can be achieved with the resources provided, and should be used to develop your own ideas and lesson plans.

As you do so, remember that the pack is about the men and women of the Kennet Valley and those British and American soldiers, airmen and airwomen who were based there, and who lived through the momentous events of the Second World War, and whose sacrifices helped to make the Allied victory possible.

This is their story.



British fighter pilots running for their aircraft,
1940



(© IWM HU 49253)

Activity 6: D-Day

Age range: 9-14

Curriculum links: English and History

Learning objectives: use research skills to learn about the experiences of those who trained for and took part in D-Day, the Allied invasion of Nazi occupied Europe; write a diary entry describing the imagined experience of a soldier or civilian based in the local area.

On the evening of 5th June 1944 Jenny Atkins was disturbed by the drone of aircraft and, as she looked skyward, she was surprised to see massed formations of Allied bombers heading south. Whilst this was nothing unusual, she couldn't remember ever seeing so many aircraft before, and she wondered what was going on.

In the days that followed, Jenny realised that she had witnessed the start of the largest air and sea invasion in history, code-named 'OVERLORD'. Many of the American paratroopers based in the Kennet Valley left early on the morning of D-Day, 6th June 1944, bound for France in gliders towed by C-47 transport aircraft.

Using sources K, L, M and N, ask your pupils to investigate the experiences of the American soldiers based in the Kennet Valley who took part in D-Day. Get them to discuss their findings.

Using the sources as inspiration, ask them to write a diary entry describing the imagined experience of a soldier parachuting into Normandy, or a civilian who watched them depart.

Background image: C-47s from the 437th Troop Carrier Group, freshly painted in their distinctive black and white invasion stripes, line up on Ramsbury Airfield on 6th or 7th June 1944 (D Bolce)



US Paratroops arrive in Normandy by glider

National Museum of the US Air Force



D Bolce

C-47s from the 437th Troop Carrier Group, freshly painted in their distinctive black and white invasion stripes, line up on Ramsbury Airfield on 6th or 7th June 1944

*US Paratroops
arrive in
Normandy by
glider*

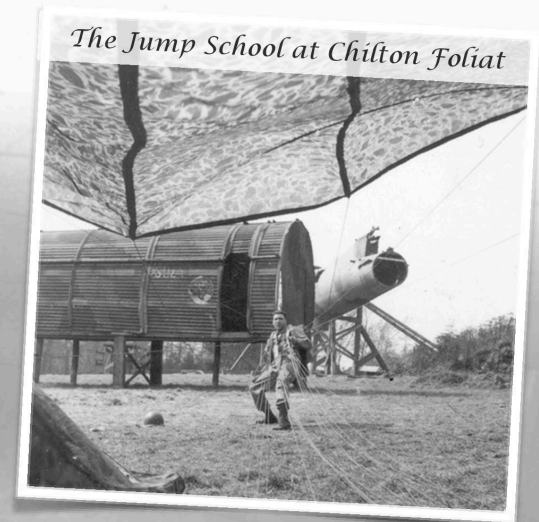


Source K: training for D-Day

The Americans and their British allies soon settled into a long period of intensive training in preparation for the long-awaited invasion of Europe.

The Kennet Valley proved to be an ideal training area, as the countryside resembled, in many ways, that of northern France. Exercises took place day and night, and locals were often surprised to find soldiers running through their gardens and hiding in sheds and outbuildings.

Doreen Ramsden, who worked as a Land Girl, recalls walking through an area of woodland: “I heard some rustling and suddenly soldiers came out of the woods and squatted besides the road. It gave us quite a fright. One morning a little while later we reached the same spot and found the road covered with strips of black foil. I believe it was called ‘Window’ and dropped by aircraft to interfere with radar”.



(J Beyrle II)



Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower visit troops at RAF Welford, March 1944

Background image: soldiers from HQ Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, about to board a C-47 at RAF Ramsbury (J Reeder)

On 14th March 1944 Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower watched a demonstration parachute drop by the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment to the east of RAF Welford, and later inspected the troops.

Soldiers from the area also participated in major exercises across the south of England, including a full-scale rehearsal at the Slapton training area, Devon.

The troops finally moved to their D-Day marshalling areas in late May 1944. Those about to go into battle wondered what lay ahead, and whether they would survive.

Links to articles about D-Day

www.ddaymuseum.co.uk

www.combinedops.com



Soldiers from HQ Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, about to board a C-47 at RAF Ramsbury

*Jump
School at
Chilton
Foliat*





*Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower
visit US troops at RAF Welford, March 1944*

Source L: the plan

Planning for the Normandy landings began in 1943. The initial aim was to land some 13,000 Allied airborne troops in the early hours of 6th June 1944 to protect the amphibious landing sites.

At 6.30am the paratroopers were followed by the main assault; a seaborne invasion of 143,000 soldiers, carried in 5,000 ships and landing craft, onto Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches. This was the largest amphibious invasion in history and by the end of June some 875,000 troops, together with their tanks, artillery, transport and supplies, had crossed the English Channel.

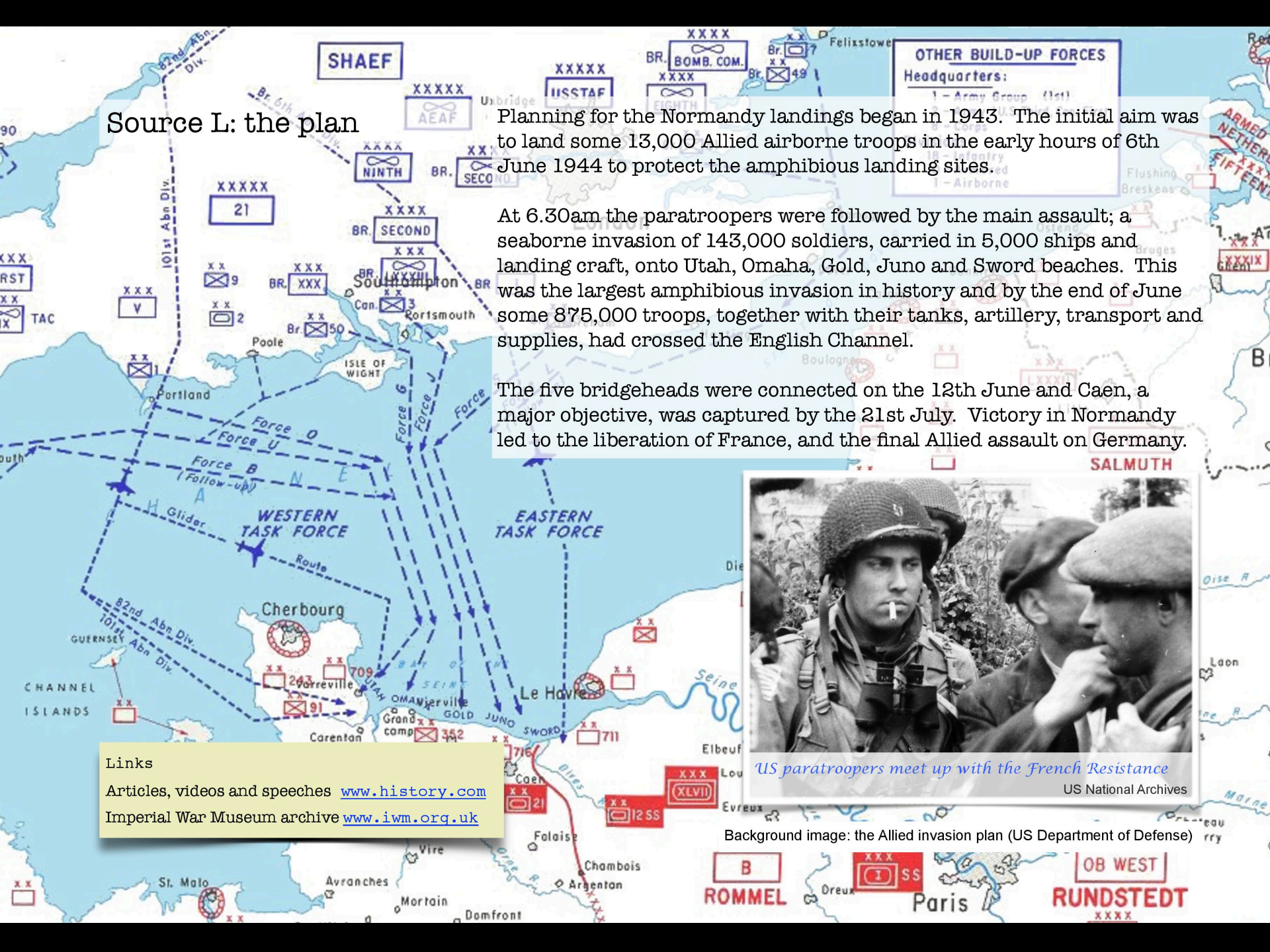
The five bridgeheads were connected on the 12th June and Caen, a major objective, was captured by the 21st July. Victory in Normandy led to the liberation of France, and the final Allied assault on Germany.

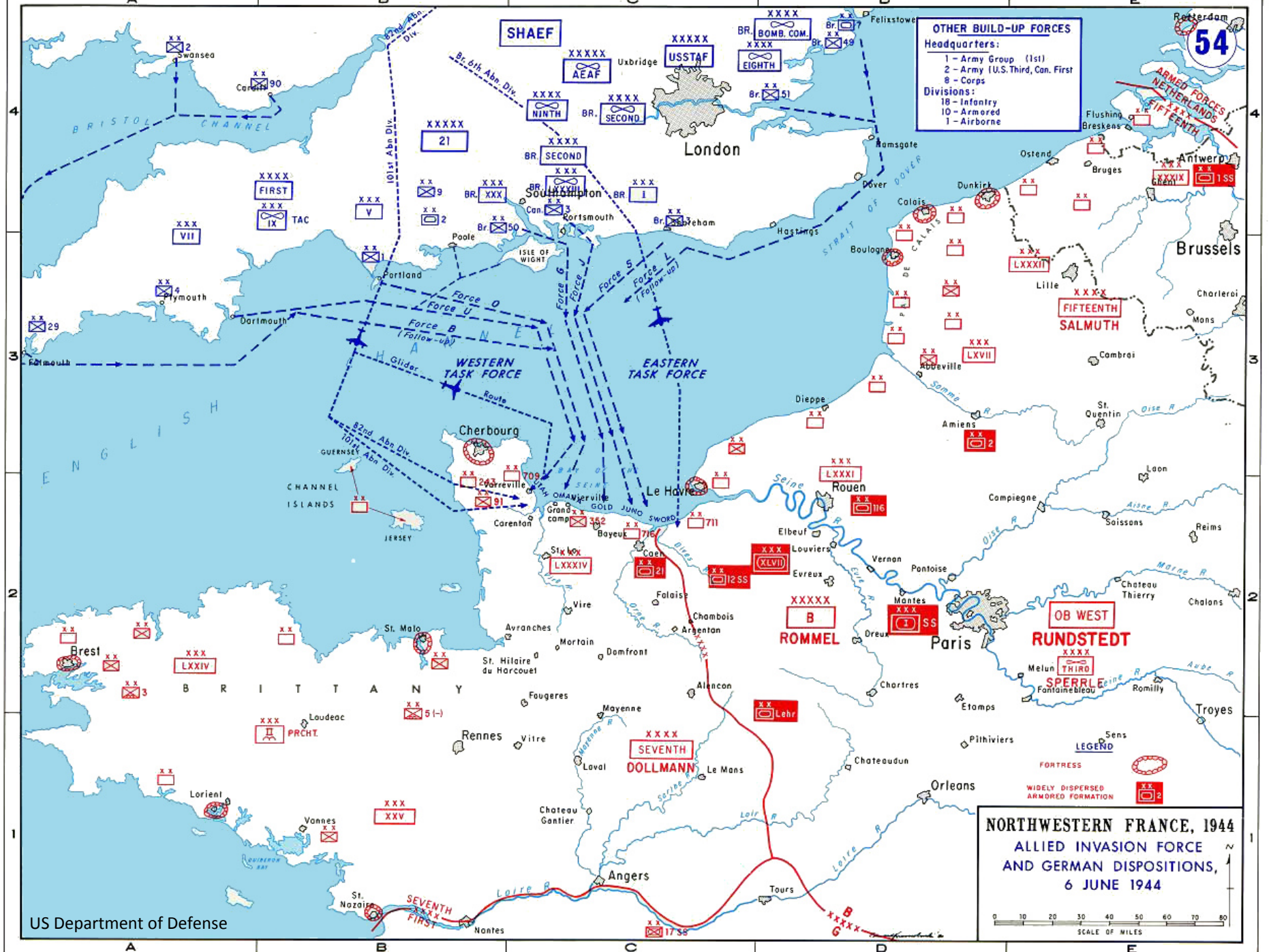


US paratroopers meet up with the French Resistance
US National Archives

Links
Articles, videos and speeches www.history.com
Imperial War Museum archive www.iwm.org.uk

Background image: the Allied invasion plan (US Department of Defense)





OTHER BUILD-UP FORCES
Headquarters:
 1 - Army Group (1st)
 2 - Army (U.S. Third, Can. First)
 8 - Corps
Divisions:
 18 - Infantry
 10 - Armored
 1 - Airborne

NORTHWESTERN FRANCE, 1944
ALLIED INVASION FORCE
AND GERMAN DISPOSITIONS,
6 JUNE 1944





US paratroopers meet up with the French Resistance

“David came from West Virginia where his family ran a ferryboat service over the Ohio River.

He would come to visit my family at Newbury Road for tea and would be dropped off and collected by his friend, a regimental chaplain. We saw David many times during the Spring of 1944 until late May when suddenly all the American visitors simply seemed to disappear. I went into Newbury one Saturday but the place seemed deserted, and I sensed that something momentous was happening. It was at this time that all paratroopers had been moved out to the airfields from which they would depart for the invasion of Europe.

I vividly remember the night of June 5th 1944 as if it were only yesterday. From about 11.00pm onwards the sky seemed filled with hundreds of aircraft, some pulling gliders as they headed out for Normandy. It seemed to go on for hours, the last wave going over at 3.00am as I watched from my bedroom window.

David parachuted into France on the morning of June 6th 1944.

He survived the campaign and returned to visit once more, to tell me that he had a difficult choice to make but that when his tour of duty was over he would return to his girl in the States. I was very upset by this news, although mother always suspected that this would happen one day. David went on to serve in Holland, Belgium and Germany. After the war he returned safely home.

We wrote to each other and exchanged Christmas cards for a number of years.”

Source M: a civilian's story

In 1944, Joan Greenwood was an eighteen-year-old, living in a terraced house on the Newbury Road, Kintbury. Like many girls of her age, she attended dances held by the American troops billeted in the local area; including the concert by the famous bandleader Glen Miller, held at the Corn Exchange in Newbury.

Joan met David, a US medic serving with the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, at one of these dances.



In this account, she remembers the events of 1944.

Useful links


Glen Miller and wartime entertainment www.mtholyoke.edu

The 306th Airborne Medical Company www.med-dept.com

Background image: medics helping an injured soldier in France, 1944 (US National Archives)



Joan Greenwood

A black and white historical photograph showing two medics in military uniforms and helmets tending to an injured soldier lying on the ground. One medic is kneeling and working on the soldier's arm, while the other stands nearby. The scene is set in a sandy, outdoor environment, likely a battlefield. The text "Medics helping an injured soldier in France, 1944" is overlaid in blue cursive on the right side of the image.

*Medics helping
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soldier in
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Source N: an airman's story



American airman, Roger Airgood, was based at RAF Membury in 1944. In this account, written in 1992, he describes his experience as a C-47 pilot flying paratroopers into Normandy early on the morning of 6th June 1944.

Useful links

The history of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment www.ww2-airborne.us

The Airborne Museum, Sainte-Mere-Eglise, Normandy www.airborne-museum.org

Background image: C-47 aircraft dropping paratroopers, 1944 (IWM BU1162)



"I was a twin engine pilot flying C-47s as a second lieutenant. In January 1944, after flying training, I moved to Membury Field in Berkshire. We had several practice missions with airborne, both paratroopers and glider infantry.


About June 4th, we were restricted to base and briefed on the pending missions. After the briefing, all flight personnel were segregated from the non-flying personnel, and black and white paint was used to paint the invasion stripes on the aircraft. Later that day, the mission was postponed.

On June 5th ... all crews and airborne reported to their aircraft at 2200 hours. This provided about 40 minutes to help load the paratroopers and check out the aircraft. All had leg packs tethered to their waists. These packs would be lowered after the jump so that the sacks weighing 40 to 80 pounds would hit the ground first. The airborne were usually cocky, unruly characters but this time they were very serious.

We started the engines at 2240 and taxied into take-off position so we could get the planes up and in a V of Vs formation very quickly. Take-off was at 2300. We had a very precise route to follow over the Channel and across Normandy. This was the most complex and ambitious mission we ever faced.

I had very few glimpses of the ground and had to keep the outline of the plane in front in sight. Shortly after getting the 4 minute warning (stand up and hook up) from the lead aircraft I got a glimpse of a church steeple about half a mile ahead. Assuming this to be St. Mere. Eglise, I felt we were on course and that Drop Zone 'A' lay straight ahead. When we got the green light we were flying at about 105 mph and pulling a lot of power. The paratroopers went out in a terrific propeller blast, which was the last thing we wanted to happen. We dropped our troopers at 0102 on June 6th. As soon as the paratroopers were out we dove to get down to 100 feet.

Coming back across the Channel at 3000 feet, the planes and gliders at 500 feet lit up a continuous column going to Normandy. I didn't envy those glider pilots having to fly and land in the dark."



*C-47 aircraft
dropping
paratroopers,
1944*

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