

THE MEMORY PROJECT

AN INITIATIVE OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

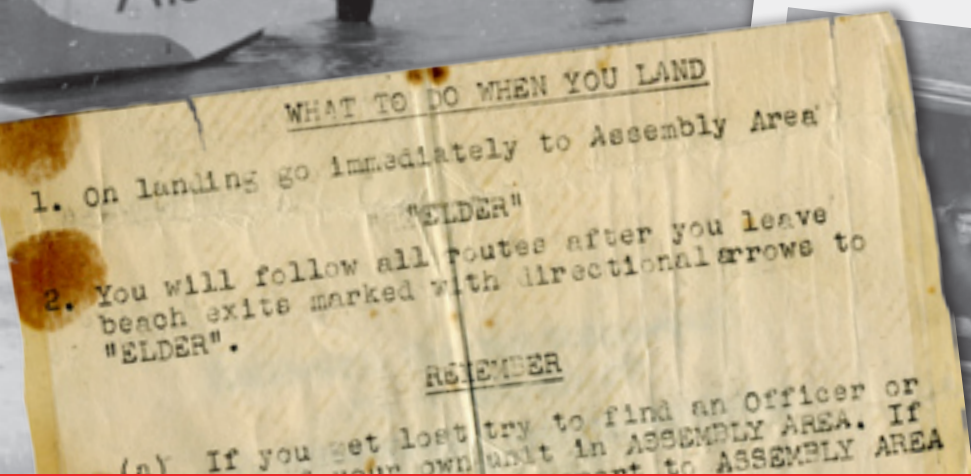
REMEMBER. HONOUR. CONNECT.

D-DAY

Brief History by Ted Barris

In 1942, midway through the Second World War, members of the Allied side grew desperate for victory over Nazi Germany. The Russians had successfully launched a counter-offensive to clear the Caucasus of Axis (German and Italian) armies. British and Canadian navies had turned the tide against German U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic. Allied offensives had broken the stalemate in North Africa. Pressure now mounted for Britain, Canada and the U.S. (just months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor) to begin a full-scale assault – an invasion – against Hitler’s Fortress, Europe.

The big question remained, however. Where should the Allies land?



D-DAY

Brief History by Ted Barris

The U.S. wanted an all-out attack across the English Channel. The Canadians had learned at Dieppe in 1941 that a frontal assault on fortified French ports could not succeed. British Combined Chiefs of Staff considered the French Mediterranean, the Brittany coast, the serviceable ports of Belgium and Holland, Le Havre at the mouth of the Seine, the Cotentin Peninsula and the Pas-de-Calais coast. Ultimately, they decided on the Calvados coast of Normandy. A landing there would enable the Allies to take advantage of the natural flat beach terrain, have it look like just another diversionary raid, and ultimately allow Allied forces to land, fortify a beachhead and advance inland before German defenders could react in strength. "Operation Neptune" depended upon the element of surprise.

It worked. The Allies successfully completed the greatest amphibious landing in military history. In less than 12 hours, nearly a million members of the British, American and Canadian armed forces went into action on sea, in the air and on land to deliver 150,000 men ashore. They landed at five code-named beaches – the Americans at "Utah" and "Omaha," the British at "Gold" and "Sword," and the Canadians at "Juno." Hitler's advisors characterized the Allied Normandy assault as a mere diversion from a larger attacking force they expected from Dover to Calais, which never materialized.

June 6, 1944, was the beginning of the end of the Nazi occupation of Europe. Total victory came nearly a year later when Germany capitulated on V-E Day, May 8, 1945.

To read the stories of more than 1,000 Canadian veterans, including those who experienced the events of June 6, 1944, please visit: www.thememoryproject.com/digital-archive//index.cfm



D-DAY

General Timeline

- August 19, 1942** "Operation Jubilee," a hit-and-run raid against German occupied seaport of Dieppe, France, inflicts heavy Allied casualties — 3,367 of 5,000 Canadians are casualties "in the bloodiest nine hours in Canadian military history."
- April 1943** First Canadian Army assembled in England, fully enabled for battle as a great national force.
- July 10, 1943** "Operation Husky," 26,000 members of the 1st Canadian Infantry Division and the Tank Brigade land on the Pachino peninsula of Sicily; they invade Italy in August.
- April 1944** "Pious Dream," a training exercise near Scotland, has Royal Canadian Navy troopships, minesweepers and motor torpedo boats rehearsing D-Day naval operations.
- May 1, 1944** It is decided that "Operation Neptune," a five-division amphibious frontal attack against 50 miles of Norman beach will be the D-Day objective
- June 4, 1944** RCAF aircrews conduct sweeps over the English Channel from Holland as far south as the Spanish-French border. Bad weather forces Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEP) to postpone D-Day 24 hours.
- June 5, 1944** **Before midnight**, 171 squadrons of RCAF and Allied fighter and bomber aircraft, 7,016 ships (including 110 Royal Canadian Navy warships) launched from England to begin largest amphibious operation in military history.
- At midnight**, 600 members of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion join British and U.S. Airborne divisions in drops into Normandy to secure bridges, roads and eventual beachheads against German counterattack.
- June 6, 1944** **At 6:50 a.m.**, heavily armed battleships, cruisers, destroyers and corvettes of Britain, Canada, and other allied forces, begin bombardment of shore defenses. 15,000 Canadian assault troops wait in land craft inbound for the beaches.
- At 7:50 a.m.**, tanks and artillery come ashore at Juno Beach against 8,000 German troops. By evening, the Canadians have penetrated six miles inland, farther than any Allied force that day.
- Mid morning**, Canadian radio and newspaper war correspondents as well as No.2 Canadian Film and Photo Unit send out first reports of Allied landings in Normandy.
- By late afternoon**, the Allies have a toehold on the continent. More than 57,000 U.S. troops and 75,000 British Commonwealth troops are ashore. Nearly 15,000 Canadians have landed — of those, 47 were captured, 574 were wounded and 340 killed.



D-DAY

Bruce MacKenzie

Royal Canadian Air Force

The outbreak of war put his dream of an education at the University of Alberta on hold for six years. But oh, how those six years changed his life. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1941. At 18, he graduated as a sergeant pilot in the RCAF. His first combat service involved flying Hawker Hurricane fighter aircraft. His targets were German U-boats attacking east coast shipping. The Hurricanes' limited range, minimum radio effectiveness and bad weather off Newfoundland made his patrols nerve-wracking, but exciting.

That excitement grew greater as the tide of the war put the Allied air forces on the offensive over Europe. By January of 1944, MacKenzie and his fellow fighter pilots were stationed in England. The first major step into Europe occurred on June 6, 1944. On D-Day, his Spitfire squadron provided cover in the skies over the British army units landing on the Normandy beach code-named "Gold Beach," near the French town of Arromanches. He flew two sorties and had a bird's eye view of the greatest amphibious invasion in military history.

Classroom Activity Questions

- 1 Read **Bruce MacKenzie's Digital Archive profile**. He uses the word "prepped" to describe how he helped prepare occupied France for the coming invasion by destroying German fighters and bombers. Why do you think Mr. MacKenzie chose this word to describe his actions? Do you think his choice of words is reflective of how he perceives his role?
- 2 Bruce MacKenzie refers to "sorties" in his story. Rooted in the French verb sortir ('to go out'), what does Mr. MacKenzie describe as the role of "sorties" during the invasion?
- 3 In pairs, pretend one of you is Mr. MacKenzie and the other is a friend he's talking to upon returning home. Describe your bird's eye view of the D-Day invasion. What do you see? How do you feel? What might be your most vivid memory of those days? As the friend, what questions might you ask?



Invite a Memory Project speaker like Bruce MacKenzie into your classroom.

www.thememoryproject.com

D-DAY

Doug Vidler
Canadian Army

Becoming a soldier in the Canadian army during the Second World War meant training to improve physical fitness, preparing for the shock of warfare and learning an entirely new vocabulary about weapons and battle. Remember, Doug Vidler was a volunteer, one of nearly a million other Canadian men and women who joined up to fight Nazi Germany. At 19, Vidler enlisted in Toronto. He didn't know what a mortar was ("I thought I was going to learn to lay bricks;") but he learned it was a muzzle-loading gun that fired explosive shells a short distance. He trained on a Bren-gun carrier, an armoured vehicle with an open top and five men aboard, including Vidler, the 3-inch-mortar gunner.

In August 1943, when he landed in England, Vidler was assigned to the eastern Ontario regiment – the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. The SD&G Highlanders were assigned the job of landing on the beaches of Normandy in the second wave. They landed on JUNO Beach at about 10:30 a.m. on June 6, 1944. On D-Day, Canadian assault troops penetrated deeper into German-occupied France than any other Allied troops.

Classroom Activity Questions

- 1 In **Doug Vidler's Digital Archive profile**, he states that, he "didn't really know what a three inch mortar was." In the middle he remembers being inspected by the King and that he saw "who all the guys were who were foolish enough to go and do all this." At the end of his story, he comments, "that's when we found out what war was really about." In looking at these comments, how do you think Mr. Vidler's feeling about war would have changed during his service?
- 2 Take a look at the primary source resource on **Doug Vidler's Digital Archive profile** entry which asks "Are Canadians Cowards?" After reading Mr. Vidler's story, how would you respond to this? How much of do you think that this type of propaganda would have effected Canadians who read it? Would it have gained the desired results?
- 3 Read **Doug Vidler's Digital Archive profile** and you'll learn that he and his comrades received a very important letter as they prepared for the D-Day landings. Who was it from? What did it say? Imagine you had received a similar letter, how would this have impacted how you felt about the invasion?



Invite a Memory Project speaker like Doug Vidler into your classroom.

www.thememoryproject.com

D-DAY

Gordon Hendery
Royal Canadian Navy

From the beginning of 1944, everybody in the Royal Canadian Navy stationed in the British Isles knew he would soon become part of the major offensive that would put thousands of Canadian, British and American troops onto the coast of Europe to push back the occupying German Army. The navy conducted what were known as “work-ups” or rehearsals to prepare every RCN destroyer, minesweeper, corvette, troopship and landing craft for the invasion. Gordon Hendery served aboard the troopship *HMCS Prince Henry*. D-Day was originally scheduled for June 5, 1944. But bad weather postponed the operation by 24 hours.

On the eve of D-Day, *Prince Henry* carried troops of the Canadian Scottish Regiment and the North Nova Scotia Regiment across the English Channel to France. At 3 a.m. the troopship’s crew gave the Canadian assault troops a big breakfast; it would be their last hot meal for some time. Then, *Prince Henry*’s crew lowered the Canadian troops into landing craft for the four mile trip to the beaches.

Classroom Activity Questions

- 1 Look at the fifth picture on **Gord Hendery’s Digital Archive profile**. After reading his story, how does this scene make you feel about what these boys were about to experience? With a partner, pretend the two of you are sitting beside each other in the ship. What might you say? How might you act?
- 2 How do you feel about the role of the reporter in Mr. Hendery’s account of the D-Day invasion? If you were reporting on the events, how would you judge what was happening from your view point? How would you feel watching the boys leave the ship?
- 3 If you met Gordon Hendery today, 65 years after that fateful campaign, what three questions would you ask him? How do you think his recollections and/or perceptions of the D-Day events have changed over the years?



Invite a Memory Project speaker like Gordon Hendery into your classroom.

www.thememoryproject.com