Air support

On 6 June 1944, American, Canadian and British troops and their allies landed on the French coast to fight German troops who had occupied France during the Second World War. This was known as D-Day. The D-Day landings began with a wave of aeroplanes to assess and prepare the way.

Start your trail in AirSpace (marked 1 on your map). Go straight ahead of you and into the main exhibition space. Continue going straight ahead until you come to the Lancaster bomber.

Lancasters were used to bomb the German anti-invasion defences before D-Day.

How much does the biggest bomb weigh?

How many people would have flown in a Lancaster? Can you find out what the different roles of the crew were?

Spy in the sky

Next to the Lancaster you will find a Spitfire. This one is post Second World War, but earlier marks of Spitfire were used for reconnaissance and photography before the D-Day beach landings in 1944.

What would the pilot be looking for on a reconnaissance or spying mission over the beaches do you think?

Circle the ones which you think would be the most important to know:

American air power

Go into the American Air Museum. American bombers were heavily involved in the air attack on the D-Day beaches. A well-known American bomber is the B-17 Flying Fortress.

Can you find it?

How many guns does a B-17G have? It was not a fighter aeroplane so why do you think it has so many guns?

Imagine you were in the ball turret for hours on a dangerous mission. Take a close look at the space you would have and the position you would be in.
Treating the wounded
Although only men would have fought in the Armed Forces on D-Day, there were jobs which were undertaken by women. Can you find the nurse who is looking after a wounded soldier?
What type of vehicle is she in?
Why do these vehicles have distinctive markings?

On the other side
Walk across the landing craft and through the film-show area to find the German tank destroyer. German troops were waiting for the Allied troops as they arrived on the beaches.
What is the tank destroyer called?

Clever codes
The Allied Forces did not want people to find out about their plan for invasion so they used code words to describe their operations. The ‘D’ in D-Day doesn’t stand for anything other than ‘the day’, so that anyone picking up messages about it did not know where the attack was planned to take place. The beaches were given code names so that no-one knew where the attack was planned. The whole operation was codenamed “Overlord”.
Can you find the names of the five D-Day beaches?
What would your code name be for the operation?

Raining parachutists
Look up at the aeroplane suspended above the B-17. Many troops were dropped by parachutes from aeroplanes like this Douglas C-47 (also known as the Dakota or the Skytrain). Paratroopers would fight inland from the beaches while other troops arrived by boat.
What equipment would they need to carry do you think?
You might like to find out more about Airborne Forces before you leave today, in the Airborne Assault museum in AirSpace.
Now walk down to our main D-Day exhibition in Land Warfare (8). Walk through the building until you reach the Normandy Experience.
Feel the weight

Find the handling collection area in the Normandy Experience (look for the sign saying ‘What was it like to be a soldier on D-Day?’). Try holding some of the weapons and equipment which soldiers carried as they ran or crawled up the beaches.

That’s the end of the quiz trail. We hope you enjoyed your visit to IWM Duxford.

Motorcycle messages

Messages were carried in many ways on D-Day. There were radios, but sometimes messages had to be carried for long distances by hand. Despatch riders would use motorbikes to get across difficult ground quickly.

Find the despatch rider. What message do you think he might be carrying?

When you get home why not create old looking paper by brushing cold tea on to it and letting it dry. Then write an important message you might send from the battlefield.

Home from home

Field Marshal Montgomery was the most important British Officer on D-Day (the overall commander was the American Dwight D. Eisenhower).

Can you find his caravans in the display? Look through the windows to see how he lived during the operation.

Do you think that all of the soldiers lived in caravans?

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Do you think that all of the soldiers lived in caravans?

Answers:

AirSpace: 7 men in a Lancaster bomber. Roles would be pilot, flight engineer, bomb aimer, wireless operator, navigator, top turret gunner and rear turret gunner. The role was reconnaissance-looking for anything of military importance such as enemy airfields, V-1 & V-2 dumps.

American Air Museum: 13 guns on a B-17, to defend itself against enemy fighters. Paratroopers would have carried ammunition, weapons, food, water, spare clothes, steel helmet, parachute and personal items such as photographs.

Land Warfare: The beaches were known as Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. It’s Abner’s tank. Ambulances are marked with red crosses so that enemies don’t shoot at or bomb it. Other roles needed to support the war would include mechanics, engineers, cooks, drivers and laundry personnel. Very few soldiers had caravans – most lived in tents or trenches.