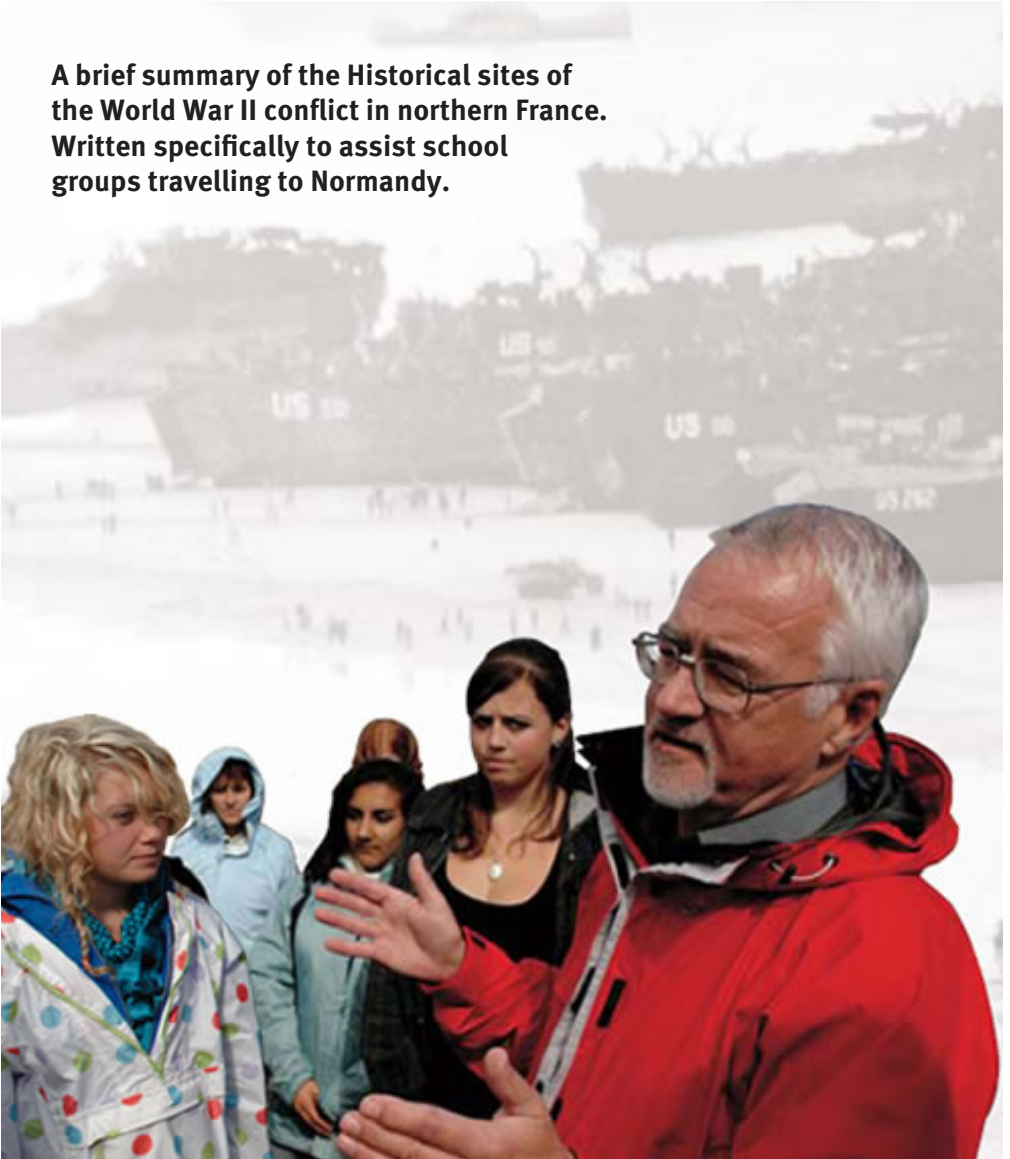


A brief summary of the Historical sites of the World War II conflict in northern France. Written specifically to assist school groups travelling to Normandy.



World War II—Normandy



D-Day Timeline

1944

May

June

July

6th - 12th June

25th - 29th June

8th - 10th July

Landings

EPSOM

CAEN

May 15th 1944
Final presentation
of Overlord

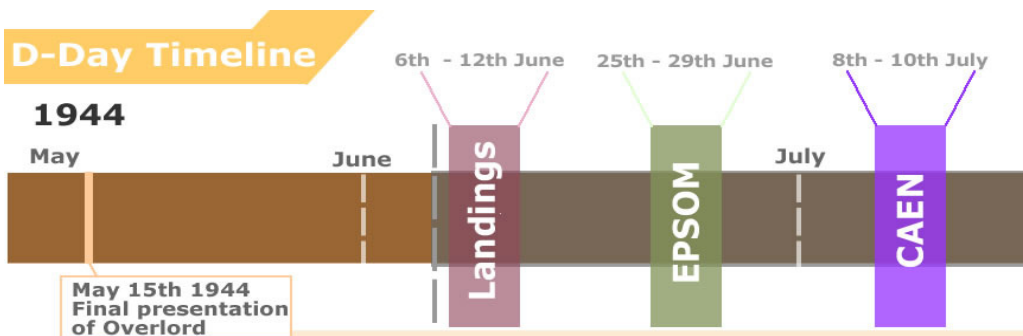
World War II—Normandy

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This guide is designed primarily as a planning resource for staff, whilst NST holds the copyright feel free to photocopy and issue the maps and information sheets as you think appropriate. The guide is intended to be a brief guide to some of the events of D-Day and the Battle for Normandy and locations where you are likely to visit.

It is not a complete gazetteer of all sites available (see "selection" below) and many well known and dozens of lesser known sites are omitted. If you wish to make visits other than those listed, it is hoped that the bibliography provided will be of use. It does not provide an exact itinerary, but rather gives you information on a number of sites from which to make your own selection. This is partly because the area covered by the Battle of Normandy is huge, the beaches alone stretching for some fifty miles, and the visits that you choose will partly be dictated by the location of your accommodation and by your point of entry/exit to and from the region. There is a slight bias in favour of the eastern/British sector because this is where most groups tend to stay, but the guide covers sites throughout the area. It is also partly because different groups can have very different requirements. Some will be primarily language groups, or groups studying medieval history who will only want to visit one or two key sites. Others will be following events in detail and going on, possibly, to study the Battle of Normandy in greater depth than that covered by this guide. It is hoped in all cases that the site rating section is helpful when it comes to selecting the right visits for your group.

It does not set out suggested coursework exercises again as the range of groups booking to go to the region and using this guide varies so enormously, not only in age and ability, but also their historical requirements. It does, though, seek to present each site not just as a specific location but as an illustration of broader points relating to the invasion as a whole, and to suggest topics for further discussion with your group at many of the sites.

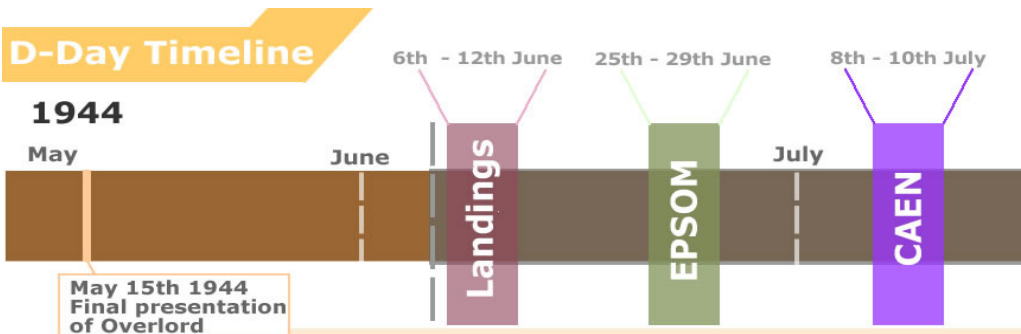


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Chapter 2 - A Historical Context of the Site Visits

There are two problems posed by the type of site which you are likely to visit which, while not necessarily affecting your chosen itinerary, do at least need to be borne in mind. One is that the majority of the best surviving evidence, eg the big coastal batteries, the Mulberry, the beaches with their monuments and information boards, etc tend to focus the mind on the landings as opposed to the ensuing ten week long battle. Most pupils tend to come to Normandy with a preconception that once the landings had been successfully made that there was an inevitability to the Allied victory. This booklet does not set out to be a comprehensive guide to the Battle of Normandy. The events are complex, the sites spread over a huge area and with a few notable exceptions little other than the odd monument or isolated cemetery remains as witness to what occurred there. It is hoped that the visits to Tilly and Caen, as well as a discussion of the bocage and good verbal briefings (see next section) will be enough to make the point that D-Day was followed by a prolonged and bloody struggle that could, for many weeks~ have gone either way.

The other potential problem is the impression that may be conveyed by visiting several of the spectacular small action D-Day sites. Three of the best preserved sites, Pegasus Bridge, Merville, and Pointe du Hoc tell the story of incredible acts of bravery by small groups of men. Each is well worth a visit and each can be used to make broader points - Pegasus Bridge as an opportunity to discuss the whole of the Airborne landing plan, for example - but care needs to be taken that by concentrating on these small scale actions involving a handful of troops that you are enhancing and not distorting the broader picture. It is the sheer scale of the event, 155,000 men landing along a 50 mile front in the first 24 hours of the invasion that is not only the most important, but also the most difficult aspect to convey successfully. Used carefully, with great stress on why they were attacked and why the Allied planners thought them so important, the above mentioned sites can help in this, but seen out of a broader context they can distract from it.



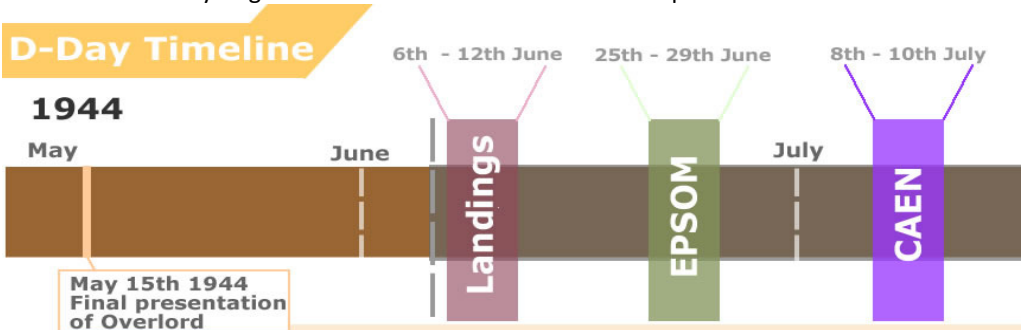
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Chapter 3 - Suggestions for pre-tour briefings

The depth in which you approach this will obviously depend on the level of your group and your coursework requirements. However, the following suggestions as to pre-tour preparations are based on experience of working with many different types of group and are, hopefully, more or less applicable to all. They seek partly to correct certain commonly held assumptions and more importantly to begin to set down an overview, a pattern of events within which the individual site visits will be set and which the site visits will seek to reinforce. It might be useful to issue and to discuss *maps 1 and 2*.

Map 1 is intended to show the coast of France as it appeared viewed from the Allied perspective. The following points are worth drawing out in discussion:

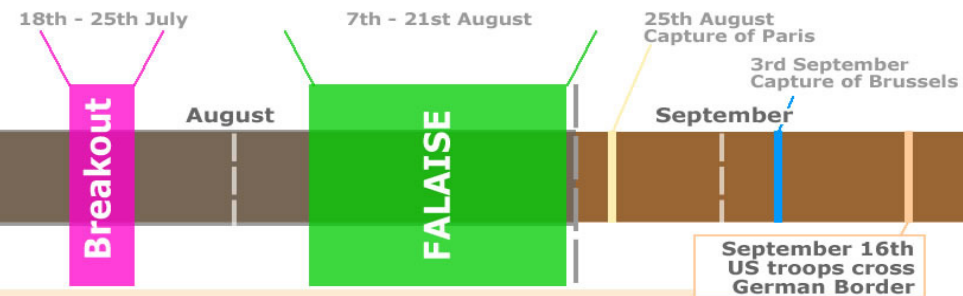
- the sea route Dover/Calais is obviously the shortest and easiest route to mainland Europe.
- more obviously from this perspective it is also much nearer to the eventual intended target, ie the German border.
- the above facts were as obvious to the Germans as to your pupils, hence the much greater concentration of German infantry divisions in the Pas de Calais than elsewhere. The first task facing the Allies was to get ashore and that was more easily done where German coastal defences were lighter, which in part explains the choice of Normandy for the invasion.
- given the almost total Allied naval and air supremacy by the summer of 1944 a longer sea crossing did not pose as many dangers as it would have done earlier in the war.
- looking at the map some pupils will inevitably ask why the Low Countries were not chosen. The reason is partly geographical - the huge defensible river barriers and the low lying, easily flooded land made it a less than ideal choice as an area in which to try to get an initial foothold in mainland Europe.



MAP 1: the Atlantic Wall as seen from England



- the disastrous Dieppe raid had taught the Allies that a frontal attack on a port was out of the question. Once ashore they would need huge amounts of supplies. This dilemma was solved partly by the Mulberries and partly by landing directly onto the beaches. Both the landings and the follow-up required an area devoid of a big port with its strong defences, and as sheltered as possible from disruption due to bad weather. The Bay of the Seine provided both these. The Bay of the Seine did give the Allies the chance to capture a port without having to make a frontal attack from the sea. Cherbourg could be captured by cutting across the neck of the Cotentin Peninsula, isolating the port and then laying siege to it from the landward side, which is, of course, what the Americans succeeded in doing.



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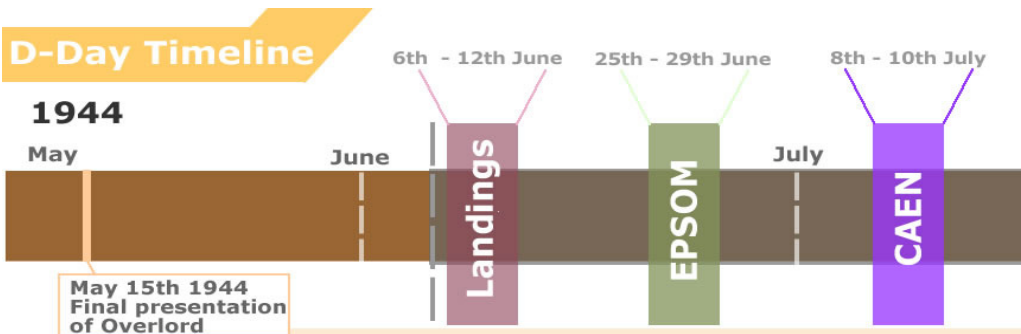
Chapter 4 - D-Day and the Battle for Normandy - A Chronology

1943

- August Churchill and Roosevelt meet at the QUADRANT conference in Quebec, Canada, and agree upon initial plans for a cross channel invasion. The codename OVERLORD is chosen.
- December Roosevelt appoints General Eisenhower as Supreme Commander for Overlord. Hitler appoints Field Marshall Rommel to command the Atlantic Wall defences.

1944

- 15 May Final presentation of the plan for Overlord by Montgomery at St Paul's School, London.
- 3 June D-Day rescheduled from 5-6 June.
- 6 June D-Day midnight - 02.00 parachute and glider landings begin on both flanks of the invasion beaches.
- 05.50 - Naval bombardments begin.
05.55 - Dawn.
06.00 - Heavy air raids begin.
06.30 - First US troops land on Omaha and Utah beaches.
07.30 - First Anglo-Canadian troops begin to land at Juno, Gold and Sword beaches.
- 7 June Capture of Bayeux.
- 8 June US and British armies meet near Porte-en-Bessin.



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Chapter 5 - The Landings

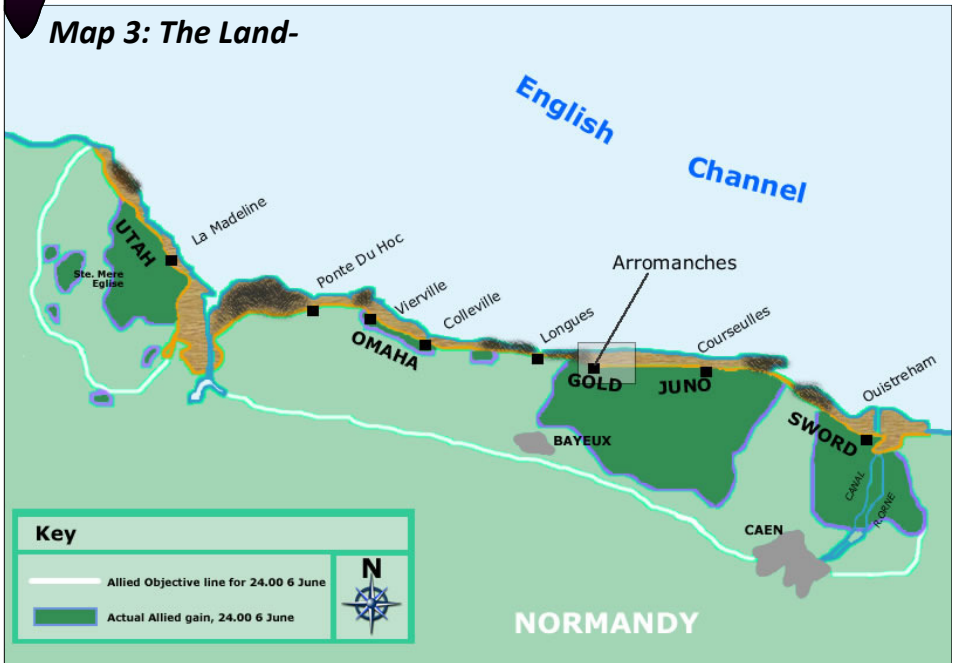
ARROMANCHES

Arromanches was at the western extreme of the area attacked by the British and Canadians on D-Day, and lies more or less at the centre of the landings as a whole, with the British beaches stretching off to the east (to your right as you face the sea) and the American beaches off to the west (to your left). It was the site of the British Mulberry Harbour, one of two enormous prefabricated ports built in the UK and towed across the Channel in the days following 6th June.

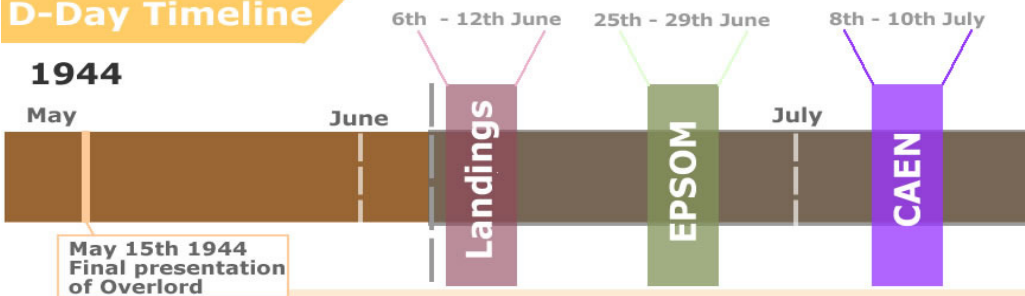
THE CAPTURE OF THE TOWN

Arromanches was not attacked directly from the sea, but it was shelled by naval guns in the early hours of D-Day and captured that evening by British troops

Map 3: The Land-



D-Day Timeline



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Chapter 6 - The Airborne Landings

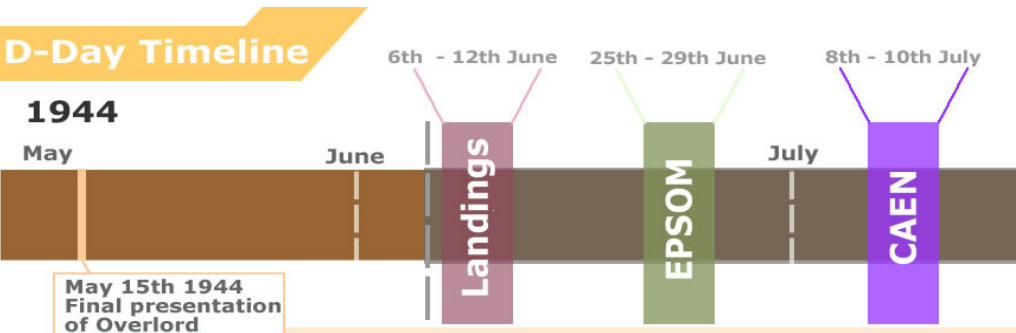
THE AIRBORNE PLAN

In the early hours of D-Day, under cover of darkness, thousands of airborne troops were landed, by glider or parachute, at the extreme ends of the invasion beaches. Their most important job was to seal off the area of the landings from German counter-attacks from the flanks (sides), The British landed on the eastern flank (see Pegasus Bridge/Ranville sections) and the Americans here on the western flank, at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. The US troops of the 82nd and 101st Airborne who landed that night had three main tasks:

1. to secure the west flank of the landings.
2. to clear the beach exits from Utah beach and so ensure the success of the landings there.
3. to capture and block the N13 road. This is the main road onto the Cotentin Peninsula and to the port of Cherbourg and the only major road on the eastern side of the peninsula. It runs through an area of low lying marshes at the base of the peninsula which the Germans had flooded. The N13 provided the only route through the floods.

THE AIRBORNE LANDINGS

About 13,000 US troops were landed in this area in the early hours of D-Day. The result was near catastrophe. In thick cloud and bad weather conditions the pathfinder aircraft, whose job it was to lay marker flares to guide the main force, became confused and many flares were dropped in the wrong places. German anti-aircraft fire was relatively light but most of the US pilots were fairly inexperienced. Many broke formation and flew higher and faster than planned. The result was that the parachutists in particular were scattered in small groups over a huge area. Conditions on the ground made the situation even worse. The area was more waterlogged than the Allied planners had realised and many troops drowned. Those that survived found it more or less impossible to get their bearings or find their units among the thick hedgerows of the Normandy countryside.



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Chapter 7 - Caen and the later fighting

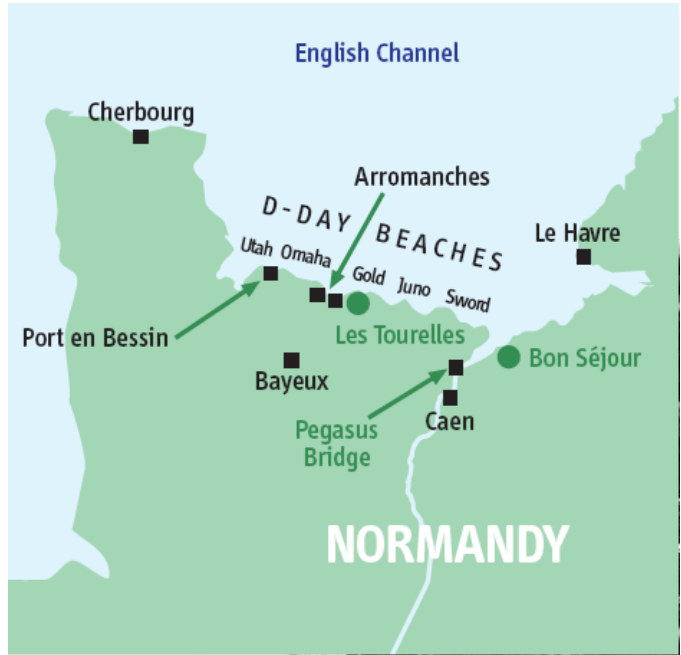
CAEN

The people of Normandy remember the events of 1944 with very mixed feelings. It was inevitable that wherever the Allies chose to make their landing and to fight their way back

into mainland

Europe, huge numbers of civilians would be caught up in the fighting. While the rest of France celebrated the news of the landings, the people of Normandy took what shelter

they could as their towns and villages were destroyed around them. In the years since the war, the city of Caen has come to symbolise the suffering of the region during the Battle of Normandy.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CAEN

Caen, the capital of Basse Normandie, is the biggest city in the area. It was vital that the Allies capture it because:

It provided a huge ready defensive position for the Germans. The vast area of tightly packed medieval buildings surrounded by low hills could easily be made into a German stronghold.

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