

WESTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: D-DAY

The importance of air power on D-Day

An extract from the log of a RAF squadron involved in D-Day

Catalogue ref: AIR 27/1879

Extract a

Today was the "Big Day". In conjunction with the landings of Allied Forces on the northern coast of France, our squadron attacked a number of gun positions just behind the proposed beachhead at Courseulles. This squadron, led by S/L Worsworthy, dropped 24 x 1000 lb. bombs in direct support of the assault landings of the Third Canadian Division. Red Flight struck at one German Battery position, while Blue flight struck at another one only a short distance away. When the bombs struck, both batteries were believed to be "a long distance removed". The actual bombing attacks were made through billowing clouds of smoke and confusion to the tune of an intense sea to land bombardment by heavy naval guns. Tanks were observed landing on the beach and aircraft of all descriptions were present in every corner of the sky. No resistance appeared to be offered to the invaders in these early stages of the attack. All our aircraft returned safely.

Extract b

Briefed to search for enemy Armoured vehicles near Caen. W/L Dadson led the squadron unexpectedly over a large north bound armoured column just south of Caen, in France. The column believed to be a part of the 21st Panzer Division en route to assemble near Caen. The squadron attacked the column with 500 lb. bombs and cannon inflicting heavy damage on a score of vehicles. Bombs were dropped over various parts of the column on individual attacks. None of our aircraft were damaged. All returned safely.

What is this source?

This is an extract from the log of an RAF squadron involved in the D-Day campaign.

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By late 1943 and early 1944 the Allies had built up a commanding position in terms of air power. It was to prove a key element in the success of the D-Day campaign.

What's the background to this source?

By late 1942 the tide began to turn against Germany. From 1943 to 1944, British Empire and US forces began a build up of troops and equipment to drive the Germans out of the lands they had invaded in 1940. The landings took place in June 1944.

One key area in which the Allies were stronger than the Germans was in air power. They had more aircraft, more different types of aircraft suitable for different jobs and also well trained pilots.

It's worth knowing that...

The Allies enjoyed almost complete air superiority on D-Day. This was a huge advantage as it meant Allied aircraft could focus on attacking German forces and not have to worry about enemy aircraft.

Another key role of the air forces was reconnaissance. Aircraft could spot enemy defences and troop movements and alert troops on the ground.

How does this source help us to understand why D-Day was successful?

1. How do you think the actions of the pilots helped the troops on the ground?
2. Does this source support the evidence provided by the film "Special Invasion" in the source box?
3. Is it possible to say whether the role of the air forces was more or less important than the role of the naval forces on D-Day?
 - o Will you include this source (or part of it) in your storyboard?
 - o If you do use it, what are the main points you will make in your caption?

Use the framework to plan your storyboard.