

D-DAY AND WORLD WAR TWO

The Second World War lasted from 1939 to 1945. Two opposing military alliances, the Allies and the Axis Powers, fought against each other, involving more than 100 million people from more than 30 countries. It was the deadliest conflict in human history and has shaped the world as we know it today.

3 SEPTEMBER 1939

Britain and France declare war on Germany.

26 MAY 1940

Dunkirk: the evacuation of Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk, France, after they were cut-off and surrounded by German troops.

7 DECEMBER 1941

Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, is bombed and America declares war on Japan.

JULY - SEPTEMBER 1943

The invasion of Sicily by the Allies to take the island from the Axis, and the Italian campaign.

8 SEPTEMBER 1944

The first V2 bombs fall in London.

MARCH 1945

Allies cross the Rhine into Germany.

8 MAY 1945

German forces surrender - Victory in Europe.

2 SEPTEMBER 1945

Japan surrenders, ending WW2.

SEPTEMBER 1939 - MAY 1940

The Phoney War: a period of limited military action at the start of the war.

JULY - OCTOBER 1940

The Battle of Britain, in which the British Royal Air Force defended against German air attacks.

AUGUST 1942 - MAY 1943

The North Africa campaign sees fighting between the Allies, many with colonial interests in Africa, and the Axis Powers.

6 JUNE 1944

D-Day: Allied forces storm the beaches of Normandy.

DECEMBER 1944

The Battle of the Bulge, where Allied soldiers, mostly American, fought back against a 50-mile incursion by the Germans.

30 APRIL 1945

Death of Adolf Hitler.

AUGUST 1945

Atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

D-DAY

D-Day, the opening assault of Operation Neptune, was the largest seaborne invasion in history and laid the foundations of the Allied victory in Europe. By this point of the war, the Allies had managed to slow down German expansion and now prepared to make their long-awaited strike into North West Europe. Britain and America gathered troops and equipment in Britain and increased their bombing of German forces across the continent; over 1000 bombers a day were hitting German targets in the run up to the operation.

The Germans knew an attack was coming, but not where it would happen. The Allies successfully misled German commanders into believing the attack would happen north of Normandy at Pas de Calais, where the English Channel is at its narrowest. General Eisenhower, the commander of the operation, initially selected the 5 June 1944 for the attack, but a prediction of bad weather on that date caused a 24 hour delay.

By dawn of the 6th June, thousands of paratroopers had already landed to secure bridges and beach exit roads, while off the coast more than 7,000 ships and landing craft prepared to strike from the sea. British and Canadian forces landed at beaches codenamed Gold, Juno and Sword, whilst Americans troops landed at Utah and Omaha beaches. By the end of the day, approximately 156,000 Allied troops had landed in Normandy.

Over the following days, troops pushed inland. More men and vehicles arrived from Britain and by the 17 June, over half a million Allied troops were in the Normandy countryside and beginning to push the Germans out of France.

SOUTHAMPTON

Just as in the First World War, Southampton played an important role in the movement of troops overseas. The first troop convoys sailed from Southampton to Cherbourg on 9 September 1939; just seven months later they returned with the help of the 'Dunkirk Little Ships'. Troops left from the city for postings all over the world, and the wounded, refugees and German POWs came in on the returning ships.

On D-Day, two thirds of all British forces left from Southampton, and from then on, American replacements would continue to sail from the city for the remainder of the war. Even after V.E. Day, when Southampton welcomed back returning troops, it also waved goodbye to over 70,000 women and children in Operation War Bride, who went to join their GI husbands and fathers in America and Canada.



Top: troops from the first contingent of the British Expeditionary Force embarking for France at Southampton in September 1939.
Bottom: French ships carrying sailors in Southampton, 1940. Image courtesy of the IWM © IWM (F 4671A)



War Brides

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