

WAR

Poetry Unit

Lesson 1

What was it like being a soldier in World War II?



Read this information to your pupils as a group. It will help them understand what being a young soldier in World War II was like as the scene setter is based on a real soldier's experience.

Jack - 1927-2018

Jack was born and raised in North London and had spent his early teens living through The Blitz.

Jack joined the British Army in 1943, aged just 15, as a Private in the Border Regiment. He lied about his age as he believed it was his duty to fight for his country. He was one of 2.2 million men who were in the British Army in World War II.

Jack arrived in Normandy on 9th June 1944, 3 days after the D-Day landings. He was originally there to unload supplies from ships onto the beaches. A month later, he joined the 15th (Scottish) Division and was sent to the front line to join the fierce fighting in Normandy against a very determined enemy. His unit took prisoners of war as young as 13.

D-Day was the largest invasion ever assembled. 156,000 Allied troops landed by sea and air on five beaches in Normandy: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword.

The D-Day landings were much more than just invading 5 beaches, they were missions as part of Operation Overlord, which was to invade France and drive the enemy back to end the war in Europe.

D-Day was a terrifying experience. Soldiers were shot at as they got off the boats. For boats stopped by the rocks, soldiers plunged into the cold sea, weighted down by their packs and uniform. As they came ashore, they moved across the open beach full of ridges and water-filled holes, with no cover and were surrounded by enemy gunfire and explosions. The Atlantic Wall defences were another challenge, as they had to make their way around man-made seawalls covered in barbed wire and hidden mines buried in the sand. These obstacles were known as 'Hitler's Atlantic Wall' – a course of 'impenetrable' defences stretching 1,670 miles from Norway to Spain.

The cost of life from the Normandy campaign was high for the Allied forces; 226,386 casualties: 72,911 killed/missing and 153,475 wounded, and many were under 20 years old.

Jack survived. He was one of the wounded; he had been injured by shrapnel. He was recovering from his injuries in France, when he started to retrain to be sent to Myanmar to fight the Japanese army. Jack hadn't fully recovered from his injuries and he was discharged from the British Army in July 1945 as unfit for service.

The D-Day landings were the start of Allied operations which led to the liberation of Europe, defeated Nazi Germany and ended World War II. Jack was now 17.

Task - Discuss The Scene Setter Images

Here are some question suggestions to help you discuss with your pupils: (Write down your pupils' responses on the board to build a word bank for writing their poems in a later lesson.)

1. How do you feel after hearing Jack's story?
2. What do you think it would have been like to grow up during The Blitz?
3. Choose one of your senses to describe D-Day. E.g. hearing gunfire.
4. How do you think Jack felt on the boat?
5. How do you think Jack felt when injured?
6. How do you think he felt when the war ended?
7. Invite your pupils to ask any questions they may have.

You'll find these on the next page!

