

SOLDIERS FROM THE SKY

HERITAGE EDUCATION PACK

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WHAT'S A PARATROOPER?

A paratrooper is a soldier brave enough to jump from a plane by parachute to take the enemy by surprise.

Let's learn about paratroopers from Britain, America and Poland who gathered in South Kesteven in 1944, why it mattered, and who flew them into Europe to fight.

Thousands trained here and flew from local airfields to change the course of WW2 during:

- **D-Day, 6 June 1944:** the turning-point of the war when Allied troops landed in Normandy and began the liberation of western Europe. American Pathfinder paratroops flying from South Kesteven spearheaded the American airborne assault, setting up beacons to guide the main US airborne force. American aircraft from local airfields then dropped more than 6,300 paratroopers of the US 82nd Airborne Division into battle.
- **Operation Market Garden (Arnhem) 17-26 September 1944.** This was the largest airborne operation of WW2 (watch the film 'A Bridge Too Far?'). US aircraft flying from local airfields dropped more than 8,600 British, US and Polish paratroopers, and towed more than 3,000 US glider troops to their landing zones in the Netherlands.

See our maps showing where American C-47 Skytrains (Dakota) flew from Lincolnshire to drop paratroopers.

And the historic places locally (See Airborne Forces Trail map)

Where is the closest to you and can you visit?



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HOW DID THE BRITISH FIRST AIRBORNE DIVISION PREPARE FOR BATTLE?

British paratroopers had already fought in North Africa, Sicily and Italy before they came back to the UK.

(See map to find those countries).

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Many British First Airborne soldiers were based in South Kesteven, staying in big houses, stately homes and properties across the district.

The symbol of Britain's Airborne Forces - the Pegasus winged-horse insignia (Bellerophon) - was everywhere.

South Kesteven became an airborne battle training area, with parachute drops, long distance route marches and mock village captures.

Men underwent general battle drills, street-fighting, reorganization after night landings, night attacks, setting up defensive positions, escape and evasion skills, weapon handling, camouflage and concealment, fire and manoeuvre.

They had to be fit and went on long-distance route marches.

All soldiers had to be able to cover 30 miles (48 km) carrying a pack weighing 99 lbs (45 kg)

And finally, on 17 December they flew to Holland as part of Operation Market Garden ([web link](#))

What does Bellerophon mean?

How far will 30 miles take you from your school?

What does your school bag weigh?

See separate Worksheet ???



British troops preparing to leave from RAF Barkston Heath.



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WHY WERE POLISH FORCES TRAINING HERE TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE THE BRITISH

In the build up to Operation Market Garden around 1,000 men of the Polish 1st Independent Parachute Brigade were stationed in the Stamford area.

Many had escaped their country's German and Russian occupation via Hungary or Romania or the Balkan states - all determined to fight for the freedom of their country

How did they get here!

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Many of those who fled to France joined French forces until France collapsed. Then they came to Britain, initially gathering around the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, and starting to learn how to jump from height and land safely.

In July 1944, the Brigade was attached to the British 1st Airborne Division and it moved to Stamford, using Stamford School and many buildings for training and accommodation.

They completed their training by jumping from the C-47 Skytrain (Dakota) aircraft of the United States Army Air Force 9th Troop Carrier Command.

The Brigade flew to Arnhem from RAF Saltby and Spanhoe on 21 September 1944.

Poor weather had badly delayed their departure, the enemy was waiting and many Poles were killed as they landed

Sadly, they had already experienced tragedy two months earlier with a training flight collision that killed 26 Polish paratroops and 8 American air crew.

Like many soldiers, they adopted a dog - Smokey - found in London and brought back to Stamford as their mascot. He even had his own parachute.



Parachute practice.



Polish forces about to leave for Arnhem



Polish mascot Smokey.



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WHY DID AMERICAN TROOPS COME HERE TO GET READY FOR WAR?

Until December 1941, America had remained neutral. But an attack by the Japanese on the US naval base at Pearl Harbour saw them enter the war - and eventually arrive in Britain to help free Europe from German occupation.

Many troops took up residence in South Kesteven, together with the transport crews and aircraft of the US 9th Troop Carrier Command.

Thanks to them we discovered bubble gum, baseball, big band swing music and jive dancing!

Many English girls met and married American servicemen and many went to live in America after the war.

Strict food rationing was in place here to help us survive our wartime isolation. Ration books had coupons for sugar, meat, fats, bacon and cheese.

At its lowest level, weekly rationing in Britain was: butter 4oz, bacon and ham 4oz, loose tea 4oz, sugar 8oz, meat one shilling-worth, cheese 1oz, and preserves 8oz a month.

Imagine how welcome it was when American forces shared their far more generous rations! They even collected money to support local children in need.

Together with their paratroop allies from Britain and Poland, their training was relentless in the build up to, first, D-Day and then Operation Market Garden (Arnhem).

What could you cook on wartime rations?

And what other food could you find in wartime to help feed a family?

What was the weekly rationing in metric units?

What is a shilling worth today?

How D-Day Was Fought From The Air | Imperial War Museums



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WHICH AIRCRAFT CARRIED PARATROOPERS?

Let's recognise the bravery of America's 9th Troop Carrier Command transport air and ground crews. They were among many unsung heroes of WW2.

Troop Carrier Command occupied giant air bases surrounding Grantham at:

■ **Fulbeck** ■ **Folkingham** ■ **Barkston Heath** ■ **Saltby** ■ **North Witham**

Missions in unarmoured planes and gliders took them deep into enemy territory, often under 1,000 feet, to deliver men and equipment to targets usually defended by enemy troops.

Thousands of miles from home, Troop Carrier Command air crew and ground crew all played their part, flying thousands of sorties.

C-47 Skytrain (Dakota) transport aircraft were parked ready for action and used to train paratroopers to jump - plus carry troops and equipment into battle.

Look how many were at RAF Folkingham!

They also towed gliders packed with men and equipment - and evacuated the wounded back home with nurses on board home the aircraft.

Seeing a C-47 in the skies was a daily occurrence in our local area, and seeing waves of aircraft that took off for the big battles would have been unforgettable.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_C-47_Skytrain

How big was the aircraft?

Are there any still flying?



C-47 aircraft at RAF Folkingham.



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HOW THE D-DAY AIRBORNE INVASION GOT OFF THE GROUND

Let's look at the risks that airborne forces took with one example.

On June 5, 1944, a top secret and highly dangerous American mission was launched from RAF North Witham (now Twyford Wood) near Colsterworth on the evening before D-Day.

At 21.54hrs, aircraft began taking off to spearhead the allied airborne D-Day invasion. The airborne invasion of Normandy was underway

On board were specially trained American Pathfinder Paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions

Paratroopers had to land in enemy territory and set up visual aids and signalling beacons guiding the following aircraft to drop zones

Within an hour of their departure hundreds more C-47 aircraft followed from airfields around Grantham, carrying thousands of troops. More paratroopers and gliders left from bases in southern England.

The aircraft carried special Rebecca radar navigational equipment, helping to drop paratroopers to where Eureka beacons had been placed on the ground.

Each plane was valued at \$100,000 and its special equipment was worth \$500,000 .

You can still walk the runways at Twyford Wood, and there is an information board by the car park.

What would \$500,000 be worth today?

How does Radar work?

How did the Rebecca and Eureka signalling work?

Rebecca/Eureka transponding radar | Military Wiki | Fandom -

And see where they dropped behind enemy lines in France (look at flight map to France).

What time is 21.54hrs on your watch (See where that time sits on your classroom clock)



Information board at Twyford Wood



Pathfinder troops about to board.



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WHAT WAS THE HOME GUARD?

.. and it wasn't like Dad's Army – the TV and film version of the Home Guard!

Unpaid armed citizens supported the 'Home Forces' of the British Army.

Many joined from 'Reserved Occupations' like farmers, agricultural workers, schoolteachers and doctors. They were no less brave but their jobs were essential for the war effort and so were excused from joining the military.

Men between 17 and 65 years could join. They had proper uniforms, were entitled to the Defence Medal and trained in bomb disposal and basic German phrases (in case they met the enemy!)

South Kesteven had two Home Guard battalions

- 3rd Kesteven (Grantham and Spittlegate) Battalion
- 4th Kesteven (Bourne and Stamford) Battalion

Major General Roy Urquhart, Commander British First Airborne Division oversaw the stand-down in 1944 of 1,000 men of the Grantham and Spittlegate Home Guard (picture right).

What's German for

Hands up! Come with me!!!

Were any of your great grandparents or grandparents in the Home Guard (ask your parents?)

Watch Dad's Army

BBC series

Dads Army - Series 3: 6. Room at the Bottom - BBC
iPlayer / Dave Channel

2016 film Dad's Army - Official Trailer 2



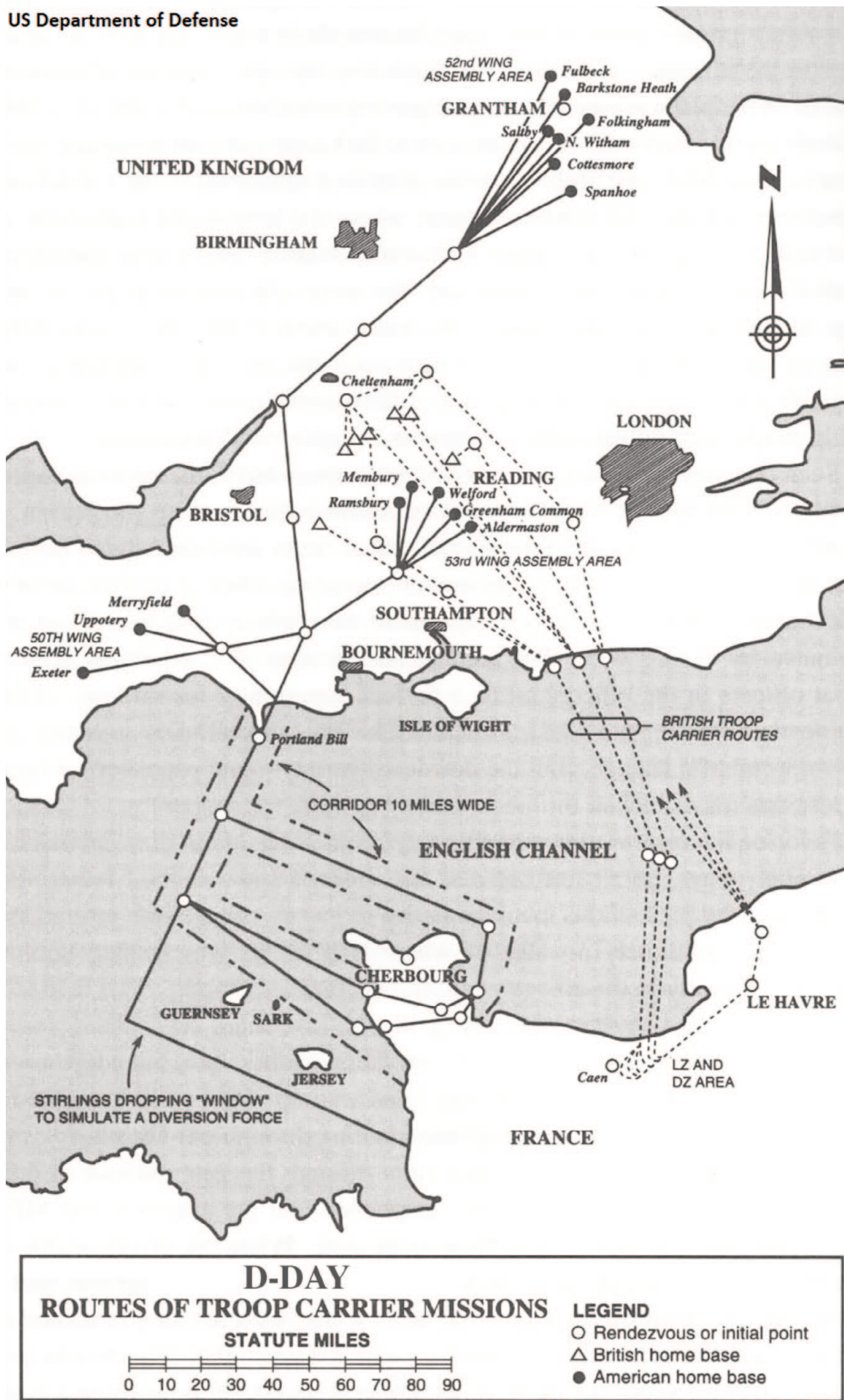
'May I as a senior soldier thank you for the work you have done over the past years and the confidence you have given us, particularly when we were overseas. We knew that our homes in the country would if necessary be defended with the utmost determination'.

Major General Roy Urquhart



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This heritage education pack has been developed by South Kesteven District Council as part of its Soldiers from the Sky project – made possible by National Lottery players through the National Heritage Lottery Fund and telling the story of British, American and Polish paratroopers in the district in 1944.



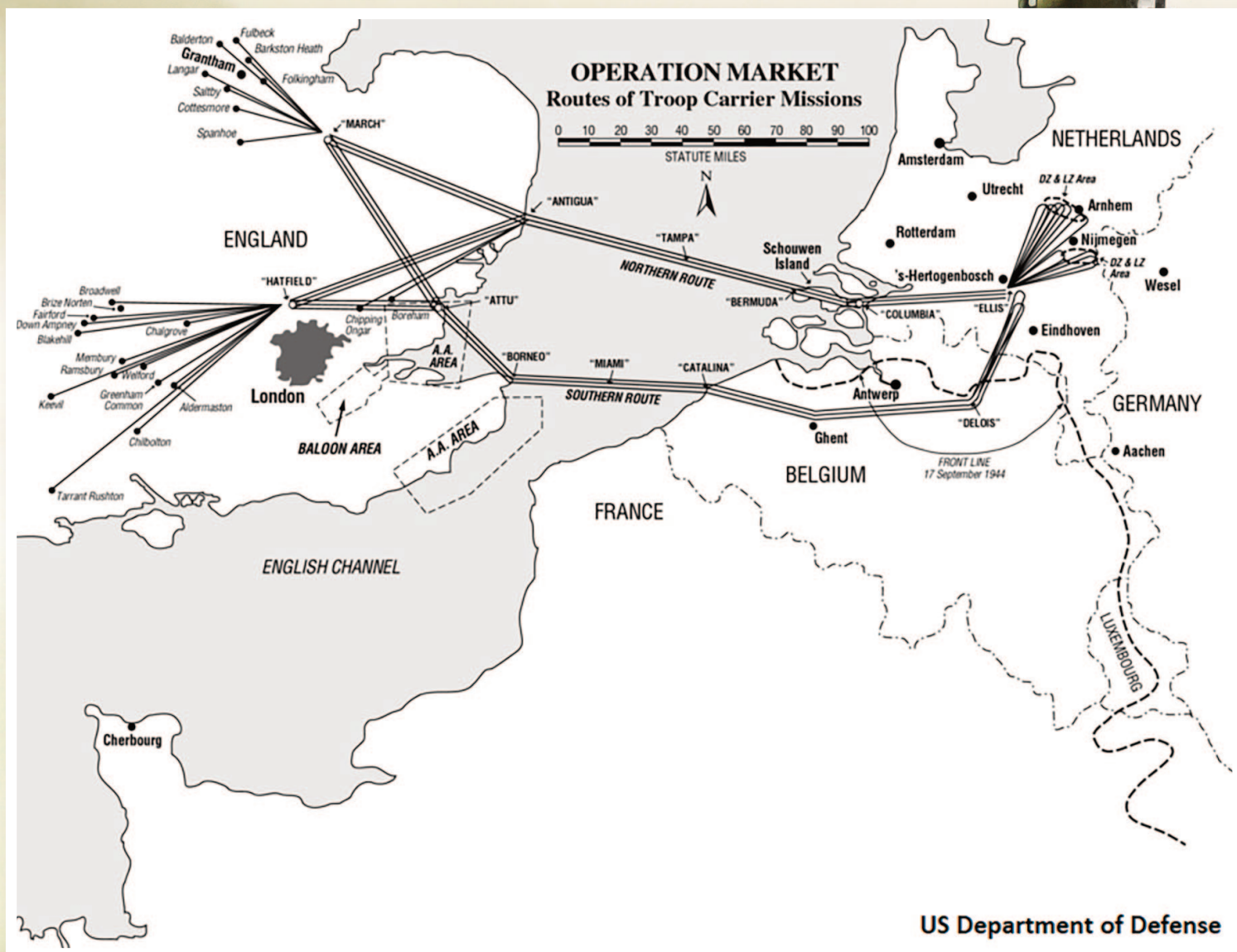
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