

Site of the planning of the D-DAY Landings, 6th June 1944

PLANNING D-DAY

This was the original site of St Paul’s School in 1939. Soon after World War Two began, the school was evacuated to Easthampstead Park, near Crowthorne in Berkshire. In July 1940 its buildings became the headquarters of the Home Forces, while General De Gaulle’s Free French were headquartered nearby in Olympia.



With thanks to St Pauls’ School for this image

It later became the headquarters of the 21st Army Group under the command of General Bernard Montgomery. An old pupil of the school, it is said he took great pleasure in occupying the High Master’s office.



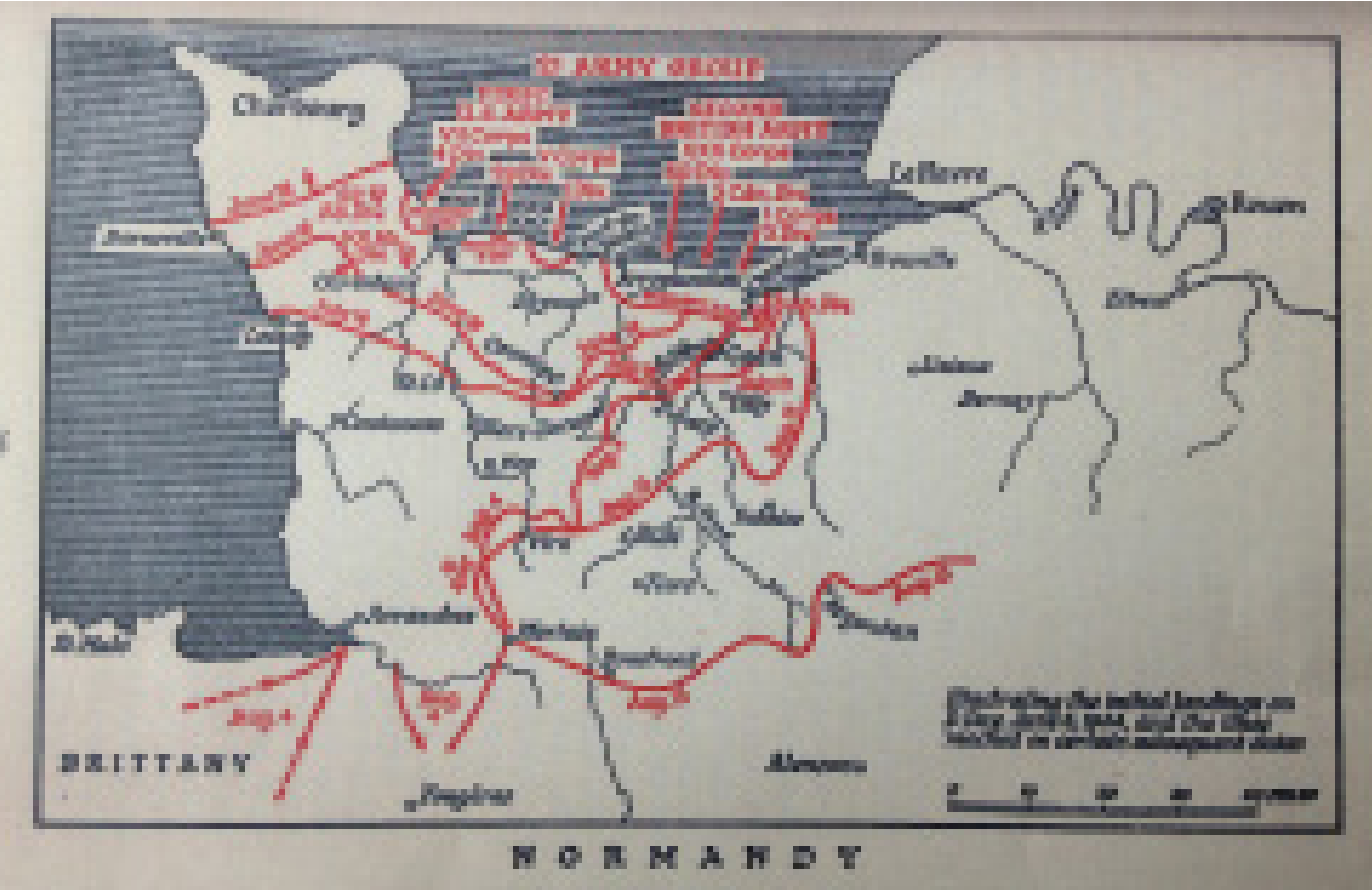
With thanks to St Pauls’ School for this image
Around the table at invasion Headquarters, London, 1 February 1944. Chiefs of Allied Liberation Forces meeting London. L-R, front row: Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder [Deputy Supreme Commander], General Eisenhower [Supreme Commander], General Sir Bernard Montgomery [British Forces], L-R, back row: Lietennant General Bradley [U.S. Forces], Admiral Ramsay [Royal Navy], Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh Mallory [Air C-in-C], Lieutenant General Bedd!! Smith [Chief of Staff].

It was in the boardroom that the Allied commanders, led by General Dwight Eisenhower and Montgomery planned the invasion and liberation of German-occupied Europe, including the D-Day landings. King George VI and the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, visited them here to approve the plans on the 15th May 1944. Operation Overlord started on the beaches of Normandy, on the 6th June.

OPERATION NEPTUNE

Codenamed Operation Neptune and often referred to as D-Day, it was the largest seaborne invasion in history. The operation began the liberation of German-occupied NW Europe, and laid the foundations of the Allied victory on the Western Front.

This map, from volume six of Winston Churchill’s The Second World War, shows the Normandy beaches on which the D-Day landings took place. The British landed at Sword and Gold, the Canadians at Juno beaches (all near Arromanches), while the Americans headed to Omaha and Utah.



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With thanks to St Paul’s School for this image

BACK TO SCHOOL

In September 1945, the school buildings were returned to St Paul’s. The boys had to do a bit of tidying up, including removing the maps from the board room. These treasured possessions are now displayed in the school’s Montgomery Room at its present location in Barnes across the river from Hammersmith.

A NARROW ESCAPE

On the evening of Sunday 16 July 1944, over a month after D-Day, a German V1 flying bomb landed on St Mary’s church next door to the school, completely destroying it. Church member William Jackman, in the church only shortly before it was hit, recorded later:

‘With... the congregation departed. The churchwarden and myself remained to clean the communion vessels. The [air raid] sirens had already sounded and we felt strongly impelled to leave the task we were doing and return home, locking the silver vessels away partially clean. Within fifteen minutes the tragedy happened, reducing the church to ruins. In the mercy of God our lives had been wonderfully preserved. The silver vessels suffered no harm, being locked away in a strong iron safe (which was undamaged), and they are still in use in the new church.’

You can see the ‘new’ church on the far side of St Paul’s Hotel.



Image care of Peter Bird