



## GUSTAV: THE FIRST BIRD BACK FROM THE BATTLE

### The D-Day Landings, Second World War, northern France, 1944

Special pigeons travelled on aeroplanes, and others were parachuted into enemy territory with secret agents or went into battle with journalists whose job it was to report on how the war was going.

The pigeons were vital because in wartime it isn't always possible to report the news by telephone. Also military secrecy meant reporters had to

maintain 'radio silence' so that pigeons like Gustav often provided the only way to get an all-important report back from the front line.

In the whole of the Second World War, D-Day was one of the most important military operations, a huge naval, army and air force campaign to cross the **D-Day was one of the most important** English Channel and recapture France from the Germans. Involving the largest invasion **military operations** force ever assembled – hundreds of thousands of British, American and Canadian troops, and thousands of ships and aircraft – it had to be conducted in conditions of absolute secrecy.

If it was successful it could help end the war at last, so none of the reporters wanted to miss it. Because it was so hazardous only a few of them were given permission to travel with the troops. The pigeons were provided so that they could send brief reports back to their newspapers in London, describing what they could see and how the battle was progressing.

Gustav was one of those birds, and he travelled with a war correspondent called Montague Taylor. Taylor had four birds with him because he knew the battle to liberate France would be a long one. Gustav was the best of them, however, and had already completed several missions carrying top secret information back from agents in Belgium.

This time he was released from a battleship carrying troops to France. His message read: *We are just twenty miles or so off the beaches. First assault troops landed 0750. Signal says no interference from enemy gunfire on beach. Passage uneventful. Steaming steadily in formation. Lightnings, Typhoons, Fortresses [aircraft] crossing since 0545. No enemy aircraft seen.*