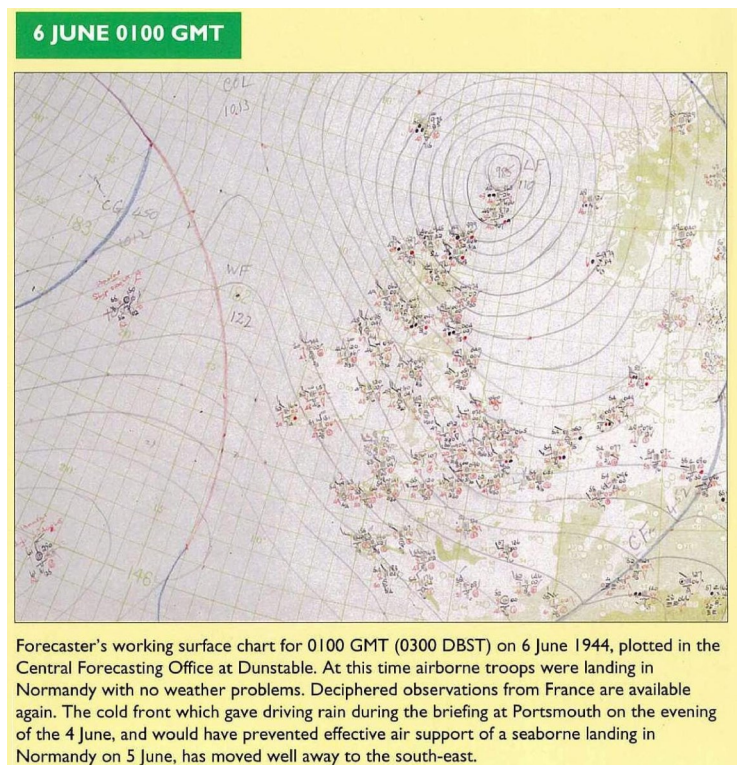


The Role of the Houghton Regis Meteorological ('Met') Office in the D-Day Landings 6th June 1944



The D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy, France at 6.30am on 6th June 1944 were the beginning of the end of the Nazi Germany occupation of Europe during World War 2. The landings comprised one of the largest flotilla of ships and men ever before assembled in wartime.

Before WW2 the Meteorological (Met) Office was based in Kingsway, London, but by February 1940 it had moved to Drovers Way, Upper Houghton Regis to avoid the bombing. This site was chosen as Post Office lines ran along the A5 and the Downs helped reception. It was also close to key partner organisations such as Stanbridge, Leighton Buzzard (RAF Central Communication Centre) said to be the largest telephone exchange in the world, and the now famous Bletchley Park.

The Met Office at Drovers Way (Central Forecasting Office Code Name ETA), whose radio masts were heavily camouflaged, was surrounded by a high, chain-link fence topped with barbed wire and patrolled by military police. Motorcycle despatch riders, armed with service revolvers, regularly ferried messages between Drovers Way and the secret code-breaking station at Bletchley Park. One of the riders died when he accidentally shot himself with his own weapon.

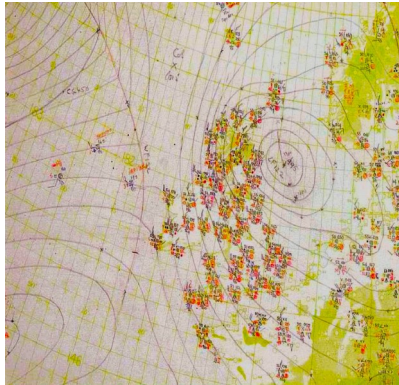


Drovers Way Central Forecasting Office buildings
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The invasion of Europe - Operation Neptune as part of the overall Operation Overlord) - had been planned for some time under the direction of the Allied Commander, US General Dwight D Eisenhower. In early June 1944, a massive armada was at sea, poised to launch thousands of troops on to the Normandy beaches.



General Dwight D. Eisenhower (Ike)
Commander Allied Forces in Europe
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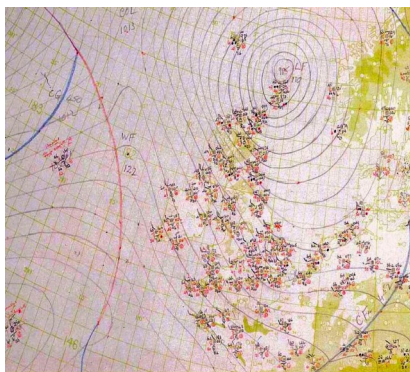


D-Day Weather Forecast
for 5th June 1944

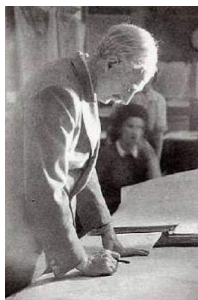
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Met Office weather forecasters housed in buildings off Drovers Way, predicted that a storm brewing in the English Channel would be so bad that it could wreck the invasion. Very unsettled weather in early June 1944 brought a series of weather fronts across the UK. The allied invasion of Europe, originally planned for the 5th June, had to be postponed due to bad weather with a frontal system bringing strong winds and heavy cloud across southern England and the Channel Coasts.

D-Day Weather Forecast
for 6th June 1944



A brief settled period was predicted for 6th June with a high pressure system moving in from the north west. In the event the conditions improved more slowly than expected. Winds were higher and cloud thicker than was ideal however accurate forecasting of the brief quieter weather period enabled the invasion to go ahead.



CKM Douglas
Senior Weather
Forecaster at
Drovers Way

Their assessment persuaded General Eisenhower to take a huge and risky decision. He ordered the invasion to be delayed from June 5 to June 6, even though it increased the risk that the D-Day fleet might be spotted by the Germans.

Upper Houghton Regis was transferred to Dunstable in the 1953. Dunstable's Weatherfield Academy school is now on part of the old Met Office site. The Dunstable station closed in 1961 and houses have now been built on its field.

Dunstable and Houghton Regis were also sites of Y Stations during WW2 where they intercepted German radio signals and passed them the Bletchley Park, where the famous Enigma Code Breakers, such as Alan Turing, worked. There was a lot of "hush hush" activity in Houghton Regis during the war, all carefully kept quiet under the Official Secrets Act. Lysanders landed and took off in the fields with supplies and SOE Operatives to drop behind enemy lines.



Wireless operators working at the Drovers Way, Upper Houghton Regis, Central Forecasting Office



A water colour painting by Colin Bird depicting an installation of radio aerials in a field in Sundon Road, Houghton Regis during WW2. ([1939 - 1945 Watercolour Painting of an Installation on Sundon Road Houghton Regis by Colin Bird - Houghton Regis Heritage Society \(hrhsarchive.org.uk\)](#))

This extract is from a story submitted to the People's War site by the Dunstable At War Team on behalf of the author and has been added to the site with her permission.

“My first contact with the Met office was at Stonehouse in Gloucester where part of it had been evacuated. Stonehouse had previously been a boy's private boarding school. I was only there for about 9 months before moving to Dunstable. I believe the whole of Stonehouse moved because of security and the positions needed for the masts for the radio operators, because information came in via the radio to Dunstable. The Met office in Dunstable consisted of a collection of huts, all of them under camouflage nets. People knew it was there but you didn't talk about it. You were made very conscious of security. When I met my husband, he was allowed to come as far as the camouflage nets if he met me after late duty, but he couldn't come in.

We had to go into digs; I lived in Borough Road with a nice family. Before I was involved in work in the actual office I attended a course in London for about 3 months in 1942. I went to London on the train every day to what remained of the Met Office. We were trained in meteorological observations, heights of clouds, how to read thermometers and rain gauges.

The draughtswomen prepared the observations of the weather over England. There weren't many reports from the Atlantic. We relied on about 8 weather ships in that area; there were no satellites in those days. The weather reports came in from wireless operators in Europe. There must have been people broadcasting weather reports but we didn't know who the reports came from.

It was all in code and my first job was to de-code it. I then went into the surface section where we prepared the big charts of

weather across the world, as far as we knew it, and then I went into the upper air section before I went into the forecasting side.

The codes had to be broken — decoded, they were in sets of numbers, about eight numbers in a group. You didn't know where they came from, you accepted what you were given and worked on it. The reports were garbled sometimes. You had, when you were plotting the chart, to read from a list of 8 figure numbers telling you various things, 8 was high cloud, 16 was 61; we worked in centigrade then. We had charts and tables to help. The humidity was another number. Because you were plotting a chart, you knew the pattern, so when you were decoding, if you hit a garbled patch you were able to slide numbers along until you could perhaps place it and decode it.

I moved to plotting — a short spell on surface plotting and then I went into the upper air section and we plotted the radio sondes. That's a balloon with an apparatus hanging from it, that was sent 30,000ft up into the air to take the temperature, windspeed and humidity. Changes in the weather happen in the upper air before they're too obvious on the surface. Both sections worked together. I found the upper air work interesting and was there for a long time."

Acknowledgements

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We also thank John Buckledee, Dunstable Historical Society, for providing some information contained in this Booklet.

Booklet compiled by Roger Turner

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