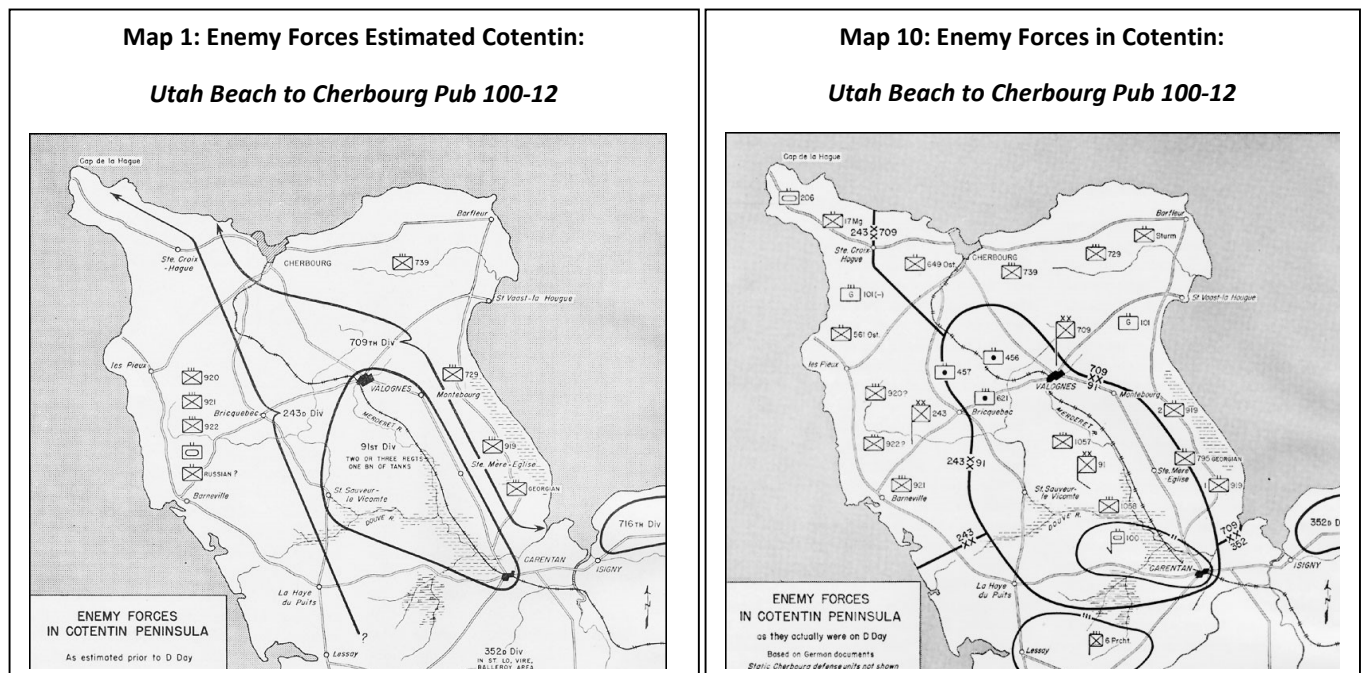


Vol V (1) LAUNCHING D-DAY 1944 June 6 – 9 Combat Forces – Specific Forces and Battles Imn

E. D-Day UTAH Beach to Cherbourg (6 June – 27 June 1944)¹; American Forces in Action Series Historical Division War Department, 1



October 1947 xyza

1. **Underground Miscues.** *Utah Beech to Cherbourg* demonstrates an obvious point, which was the Allies had little knowledge of the actual German forces they would find at first light of D-Day. Not well-described in “official” histories, other sources consistently state Allied intelligence concerning Normandy was abysmal. We are told the Germans exercised extraordinary security along the coast. Carrier pigeons were allegedly spotted and shot in flight. The French underground barely existed in this area of Normandy. Here, miscues “were a given” since the French Resistance was incapable of assisting the Allies. The histories of pre-Day special operations are very sparse because resistance was sparse. Histories mention strong French resistance forces in the Brittany Peninsula and in south France east in

¹ The authors are the Army Historical Division, 1947 as part of the “American Forces in Action” series, 20 September 1945.

the Alps and southwest in the Pyrenees. Yet, for all of the *hoopla* raised about the FFI in France, it was little evident the first weeks in Normandy.

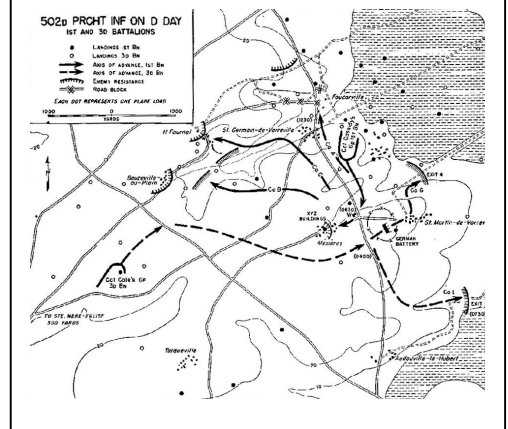
Doubly so in Normandy where it is impossible to find any “underground” intelligence activities reported to Allied officials. Thus, while not stated, the apprehension surrounding D-Day 6 June was incredibly heightened since the Germans had done such an excellent job of hiding (or camouflaging) their intentions. Reflecting on other Allied invasions in Europe, the most likely comparison was the invasion of North Africa where the U.S. simply did not know when the French would capitulate and switch allegiance to the Allies side, which common sense then dictated.

Map I makes clear the Allies had no real idea where German forces were stationed. The 243rd Division is shown somewhere on the Cotentin west coast as the 709th Division is roughly on the east coast with the 91st Division with about eight combat units, when there were at least five divisions in the area with closer to 16 combat units. Comparing Maps 1 and 10 makes graphically clear the extent of Allied “mis-knowledge” of German defenses – a factor not fully or openly admitted in WWII histories. *(Comment: This is a bit sad, since the effort to surmount required for victory was much greater under these more revealing circumstances).*

1. The Airborne Assault. *(The AAF bombardment history comes later).* An intensive RAF bombardment at midnight, 5 June, struck German coast batteries. Before dawn Ninth Air Force mediums dropped 100 bomb tons on UTAH Beach followed by the “largest use of airborne troops up to that time” -- over 13,000 flew in 925 C-47's and 4,000-glider infantrymen in 500 gliders arrived late D-Day and on D+1. At 2215 June 5, 432 C-47's took off with 6,600 101st AID soldiers to drop at H-5 hours with glider troops landing at dawn and then at dusk. Led by 20 “pathfinder aircraft” that dropped teams to mark landing zones with ‘hooded lights’ and radio beacons. Paratroops flew **(Map No. 2)** south from England to the Cotentin west coast, turned east to fly across it to drop zones on the peninsula east side. Clouds banks “loosened the formations” and “flak scattered them further.”

In general, the division did not have a good drop. About 1,500 troops were either killed or captured and approximately 60% of the equipment ... was lost ... (in) swamps or into fields covered by enemy fire. Only a fraction of the division's organized strength

Map 3: 502nd PIR; D-Day: Utah Beach to Cherbourg

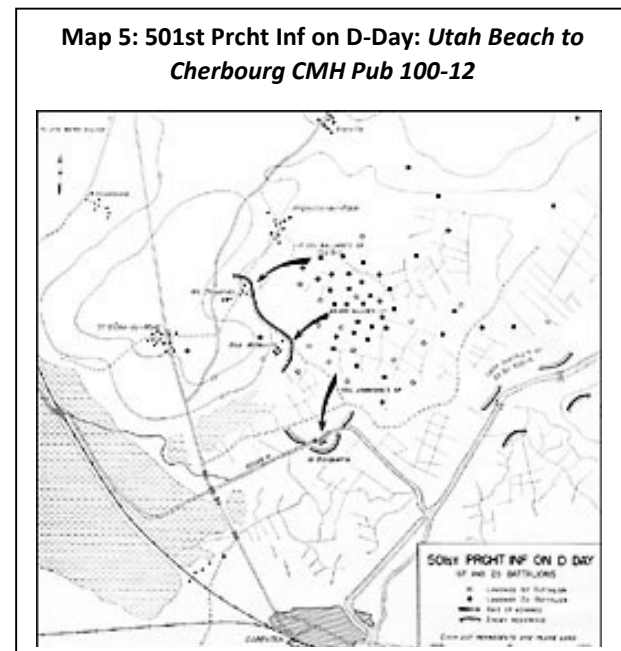


could **14** be employed. The 51 Waco gliders of command personnel and antitank weapons had many wrecked, killing many, including Gen Pratt (Asst. Commander, 101st AID). In general, however, losses were not excessive, and the mission was a success.

At 2100 hours, 32 Horsa gliders landed. A seaborne echelon of the glider infantry joined on D+1. The unintended, dispersion of the 101st had highly confused Germans who failed to grasp the size of the attack. "Uncertainty ... (was) duplicated ... (for) subordinate units ... (who were to leave) prepared defenses to attack ... (and) by dint of considerable improvisation, the 101st... (accomplished) most of its initial missions." The unexpected, scattered nature of the attack gave defenders "the excuse" to stay inside their bulwarks -- a natural tendency not realized in invasion planning.

a. Fighting for the Northern Beach Exits. The 101st main tasks east were four causeway exits west from UTAH, plus south two bridges over the Douve River, and the vital la Barquette lock. This flank would extend south for Carentan but also east over Insigny bridges to link with OMAHA forces. **16** The 502nd AIR and 377th Parachute Artillery Battalion guarded north Beach Exits 3 and 4. The 2nd IB had to capture the St. Martin-de-Varreville battery. As 3rd IB held this it would extend right toward the 506th AIR. The 71st IB would clear German quarters to man the north facing flank and await the 82nd AID. This plan and results differed.

The four 502nd AIR (Parachute Infantry Regiment) serials dropped on time but 8 kilometers apart. The 2nd AIB (Airborne Infantry Battalion) with regimental HQ was lost and "took no part in the D-Day fighting." LTC Cole's 3rd AIB faced confusion when it hit east of Ste. Mère-Eglise. Cole could not orient himself, but his group correctly headed to two north UTAH exits expanding with 75 men. At St. Martin-de-Varreville, a reconnaissance party **17** its assigned battery destroyed by bombs, empty with guns gone. Cole split his force between Exits 3 and 4 with a patrol to find the 506th AIR. At 0930 hours, Cole struck Germans retreating from UTAH Beach killing 50-75. At 1300 hours he met the 4th ID leaving the beach.



The 1st AIB, 502nd AIR of Col Cassidy had a stiff D-Day fight when it landed just one mile from the "WXYZ" military compound. Cassidy gathered up and left for the crossroads to join Col. Chappuis, defend the St. Martin-de-Varreville intersection and defeat Germans leaving both beaches and the WYXZ compound. At Foucarville, 45 men (Lt. Swanson) destroying a German convoy. Then Sgt. Summers single handedly launched a one-man fight against the WXYZ barracks. Only a few aided him, as most watched Summers and another work through German barracks to kill or capture 50 enemy to add to another 100 killed or captured before that.

When Col. Michaelis **18** arrived with his 200 men, Cassidy moved his 1st north to his D-Day line. Co. C went to Beuzeville-au-Plain in three platoons. A fight at Fournel stalled them until midnight when they

subdued the threat. The Germans “put up the flag” when mortar fire convinced **19** them they faced a huge force (which was untrue), but 87 men surrendered as another 50 were shot by just been freed POWs. So ended clearing north UTAH beach exits.

b. Capture of the Southern Beach Exits. Col Sink’s 506th AIR had to seize Beach Exits 1 and 2 and defend the Douve River southward. They were to capture the bridges to hold bridgeheads. A scattered drop ruined the plans. The 3rd AIB was close to its target, but the 2nd AIB was far off when only 10 of 81 planes dropped on target. In two hours, Col Sink found 40 men. Col Turner’s Battalion with 50 men could not capture and hold both bridges, so he took one – Exit 1 at Pouppeville. Gen Taylor sent Col Ewell with the 3rd AIB, 501st AIR to **20 21** Pouppeville at 0600 hours to meet Gen McAuliffe (the 101st Artillery Commander) and 18 officers.

Pouppeville held 60 -70 Germans of the *91st Division*. Ewell's men attacked but were too small forcing three hours of house-to-house fighting until the Germans quit at noon. Ewell's battalion suffered 18 versus 25 enemy casualties, but Germans who escaped to the beach were trapped by the 4th ID coming from there. The 4th ID and 101st AID met at Pouppeville. Gen Taylor then wheeled the 101st AID south to the Douve bridges to guard the south flank. Turner’s 506th AIR only reached Pouppeville after Ewell had it, so Turner's force returned to their Culoville post. The 506th AIR 2nd Battalion (Col. Strayer) had a large, mixed force at Foucarville and by 0430 Strayer commanded a disunified, *ad hoc* regiment that skirted XYZ areas to reach south Causeway Exit 2 at 1330 hours. “By that time, however, elements of the 4th Division and tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion had already crossed the causeway and were proceeding inland!”

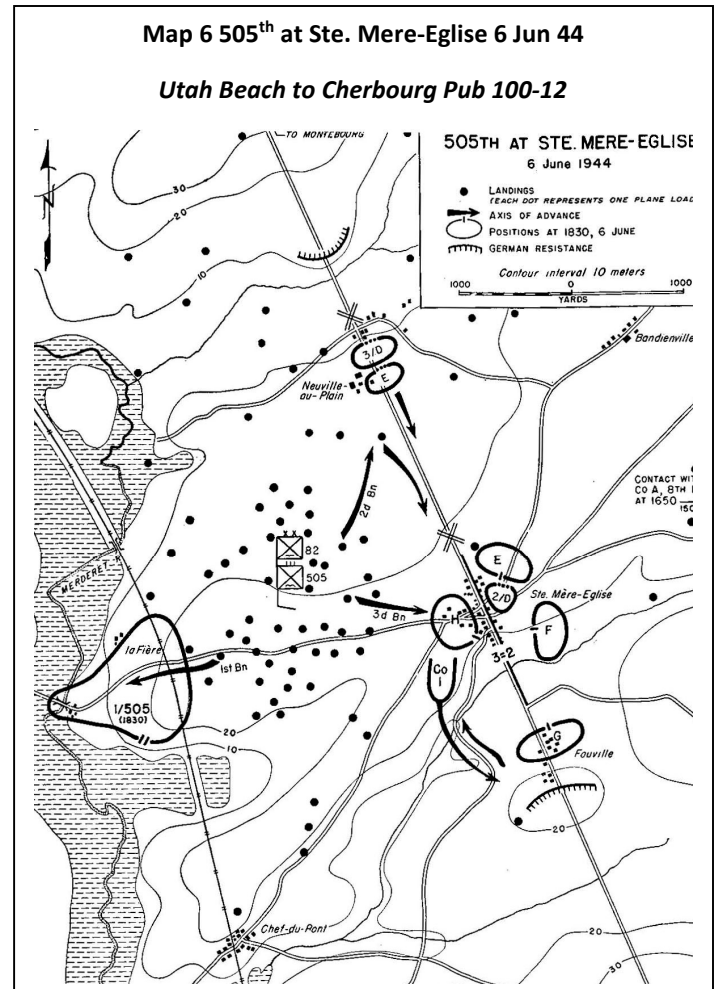
The 506th AIR HQ at Culoville was isolated having no contact with its 2nd or 3rd Battalions. **22** Col Sink was in a “basic confusion.” As patrols sought enemy; action developed. At Holdy, 70 - 506th AIR and some 82nd AID men hit a German 105-mm. battery. Col Sink found 75 men and sent them under Capt. Patch and Capt Raudsgtegin, Company C. Germans fought from the gun revetments as the 101st attacked from two sides to overrunning it. Patch next hit Ste. Marie-du-Mont from the west just as the 4th ID hit from the east to “squeeze out the enemy” toward Patch's men.

c. **Securing the Southern Flank.** Col Sink believed his post vulnerable to mount two “all hands” defenses on German attacks from all sides. But by evening, he had 650 men but had no contact with his 3rd AIB as the situation south to Carentan was “vague”. Gen Taylor and Gen McAuliffe made morning plans. Sink’s 3rd AIB (then a platoon in size) had to seize le Port bridges (**Map No. 4**). The enemy **23** set a building on fire lighting their drop so the troops both received heavy machine-gun and mortar fire and ended in a swampy bog east of Angoville-au-Plain. Capt Shettle found just 12 men but headed to the lock – his objective. He arrived at 0430 at the le Port bridge with 33 men at both ends. He tried for the next bridge but lost after a 2-hour fight to await reinforcements. Col Johnson (502nd AIR) held the vital la Barquette dam but could not aid Shettle. Then came “fortuitous assistance” as 40 men dropped far to the south “walked-in”. **24** German timidity saved Shettle small force, which anchored the left of the southern line.

Col Johnson’s 1st and 2nd AIB, 501st AIR captured the vital lock, bridges and St. Côme-du-Mont, plus blew up a railroad bridge west. But the lock was most important. Closing it flooded vast areas of Carentan --- **25** a potent German weapon, but a threat if they counterattacked from the south. Flood threats meant much the 4th Army perimeter was defended with small forces. **26-27** Sadly, the 501st PIR drops here were abysmal. Many “sticks” landed in enemy territory to head straight into POW camps. The 1st AIB lost many officers. Col Johnson rounded up 150 men to send fifty to the objective, the rest formed a defense. They bolted across the lock to dig in, but Johnson stayed put to await a larger force to blow Douve River bridges. He took 50 men north to Bse. Addeville to find Maj. Allen who had 100 men, but little information. All were heartened by a BBC London newscast touting Allied success! Maj Allen and Col Johnson moved south for the bridges to **28** get heavy artillery fire from Carentan and St. Côme-du-Mont. But Maj Allen had a Lt. Farrell, a naval shore fire control officer, who radioed the fleet. “Within a few minutes the first 8-inch salvo was delivered ... (and) Lieutenant Farrell’s adjustments brought a remarkably accurate concentration on enemy positions around St. Come-du- Mont!”

Col Johnson could not capture Douve River bridges due to heavy German fire so he focused upon lock defenses east and west, the highway north and 100 yards south of the lock. His small force of 250 men held position as night patrols searched for other U.S. units.

Col Ballard’s 2nd IB drew from three rifle companies. He planned to attack St. Côme-du-Mont while capturing the Douve bridges, but du-Mont held more than one German platoon. An early morning



attack by three tiny “companies” was halted by orders to la Barquette. The companies were stopped at swamps. Changing direction, they hit another enemy force in 400 yards. **29** The 501st AIR had the lock, but not St. Côte-du-Mont and railroad and highway bridges north of Carentan were not destroyed. The east shore and south boundary were not firmly held.

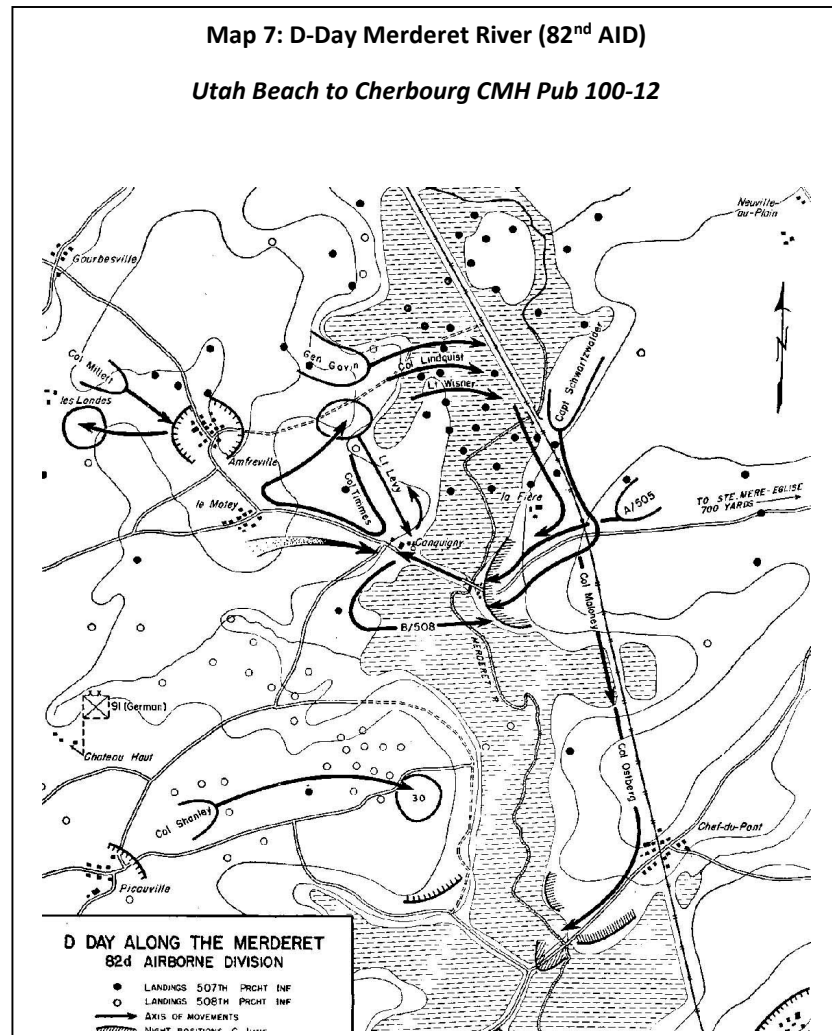
d. The 82d Airborne Division Astride the Merderet. Events next turn to flooded area west border of the north-south Merderet River near Ste. Mère-Eglise. The flood gave the river massive width. Later discussions mention large numbers of paratroops believed to have drowned at night in huge flood zones. Men walking waist deep would drop into a hole, channel or runnel and drown under the weight of their equipment. Losses were also terrific storming over causeways. “Seizing the crossing a la Fièvre and Chef-du-Pont was one of the most heroic and tragic actions of the UTAH campaign. Facing almost certain death, men kept crossing the causeway.” (Comment: Interestingly, another famous river assault in WWII also involved the 82nd AID crossing the Waal River at Nijmegen, Holland on 20 September 1944 in Market-Garden.)

Map 7 (below) shows the challenge. Ste. Mère-Eglise was on the far-right border. The towns of la Fièvre and Chef-du-Pont lay directly west and southwest of Ste. Mère-Eglise on the edge off the flooded Meredith River. The bottom shows the flooded Douve River the 101st Airborne attacked. The flooded swamp at the base of the Cotentin was a liability on D-Day, but an asset after the Allies crossed the Meredith River. The Allies controlled the flood dams and, thus, could use these to maintain a water barrier protecting their south flank.

e. **The Capture of Ste. Mère-Eglise.** The 82nd had to capture the southwest flank on both sides of the Douve River ready to charge west to cut the base of the Cotentin. The 505th AIR would land east of the river to gain Ste. Mère-Eglise, secure river crossings north near la Fièrre and Chef-du-Pont, and the line to the north through Neuville-au-Plain to meet the 101st Airborne to the east along on the coast. The 507th and 508th AIR were to land on the other (west) side of the river to secure two bridgeheads at la Fièrre. Both would attack westward. Gen Gavin, the assistant division commander, dropped at midnight, Gen Ridgway was due at dawn by glider. All gliders would land over 36 hours to assist the 508th AIR at the Douve bridges. A seaborne force of artillery, tank destroyers, and special units under Gen Howell landing at Utah would join the assault west. Sadly, the 82nd drop was as bad as the 101st AID. The regiments for the west of the Merderet **30** suffered the worst drops of operation.

The 507th AIR had Drop Zone T north of Amfreville but were scattered all over. The 508th PIR was "slightly better". Many sticks landed east of the Merderet to fight with the 101st. Only the 505th landed northwest of Ste. Mère-Eglise close to the plans meaning 1,000 of the 2,200 men hit the drop zones --- others were scattered. Luck, not aiming, landed most in areas devoid of enemy so the 505th IR ran its mission to create a base at Ste. Mère-Eglise and then seize bridgeheads on the west (opposite) bank of the Merderet River. Instead, the most significant 82nd AID action was capturing the town. The 82nd planes hit clouds and were disoriented out of the clouds most saw the pathfinder beacons for corrective turns for drops. The 505th AIR was to set up roadblocks and defensive lines to the north. **31 32**

The 1st PIB had Merderet River crossings at la Fièrre and Chef- du-Pont. It headed to the la Fièrre bridge, not to Chef-du-Pont as 3rd IB with just two companies moved to Ste. Mère-Eglise. They attacked with knives, bayonets and grenades – no guns! Because anyone firing a gun was an enemy! By 930 the town was cleared, then the Germans counterattacked.



The 3rd PIB had trouble, until the PIB arrived. **33** A German “squeeze play” was nullified by 3rd Platoon, D Co. whose 42 men, outnumbered 5 to 1, held for 8 hours with just 16 surviving. The defense held the north prong while two battalions met a stronger southern attack. Companies G and H at barely platoon strength survived with two companies in reserve in the town. The Germans built up 1,500 yards south to set up artillery. Col Krause launched a disastrous 80-man Company I counterattack at the German western flank, because soldiers got lost in hedgerows to emerge in front of the enemy. Instead, the blew up a convoy with Gammon grenades. It was so bizarre Germans south of Ste. Mère-Eglise overestimated American strength to withdraw! U.S. forces then defended the Ste. Mère-Eglise perimeter. At dusk men gathered equipment strewn around from crashed gliders for a tidy food and ammunition supply. Germans probed half-heartedly that night.

f. Along the Merderet. These positive signs were offset by the critical situation at the Merderet River where “well-laid plans miscarried with a far-reaching impact ...” **34** Capturing the la Fièrre and Chef-du-Pont bridges was a 1st AIB mission, and A Co. had an excellent drop with rapid moves to its objective. Opposite, the 507th and 508th AIR had to clear the river west bank. **35-36** The drop found paratroopers unable to assemble on the west bank. Pathfinders could not mark drop zones as they were amidst German forces. Pilots overshot dropping large numbers into flood waters. Aerial photos were misinterpreted believed to show slight flooding. It was “deadly wrong”! Leaves on trees were massive reed and lilies fields outside of river channels in 6 to 10 feet of flood water. Large numbers of parachutist drowned. The two regiments on the west Meredith bank were isolated in a “circle the wagons” defense.

The whole problem of assembly and recovery of equipment was ... complicated ... Part of the 508th Parachute Infantry dropped east of the Merderet ... (to fight) with the 101st Airborne Division. The 507th ... (was) east of its assigned zone, but personnel were found ... in the entire peninsula. Small groups held out ...for several days ...

... (There) was a noticeable gravitation to the la Fièrre bridge ... (as) elements of four regiments (took that) ... bridgehead ... This convergence ... (was caused by) the tendency ... to ... move toward the railroad ... (where the) embankment rose prominently ... and ... was the only railroad ...

Capt. Schwartzwalder led the first group of the 507th AIR who followed the railroad to the la Fièrre bridge drawing fire at daylight from houses east. Rushing the houses brought casualties, but the noise drew participants. Next, the 507th and 508th (Col Lindquist) gathered 100 men with another 30 who would follow the railroad to cross at la Fièrre. At dawn A Company, 505th IR joined, but **37** 300 yards from the bridge they were “pinned down”. Lt. Wisner found another 300 (507th IR) men following rails. These met Gen Gavin’s group moving at dawn to get fire from the west bank. At la Fièrre, the first attempt to cross was, but west bank Germans were not “strong” as the U.S. group grew to 600 troops. One went south with Col Maloney; Gen Gavin took 75 north to the Chef-du-Pont bridge. Col

Waiting to Blow Holes in Sea Wall

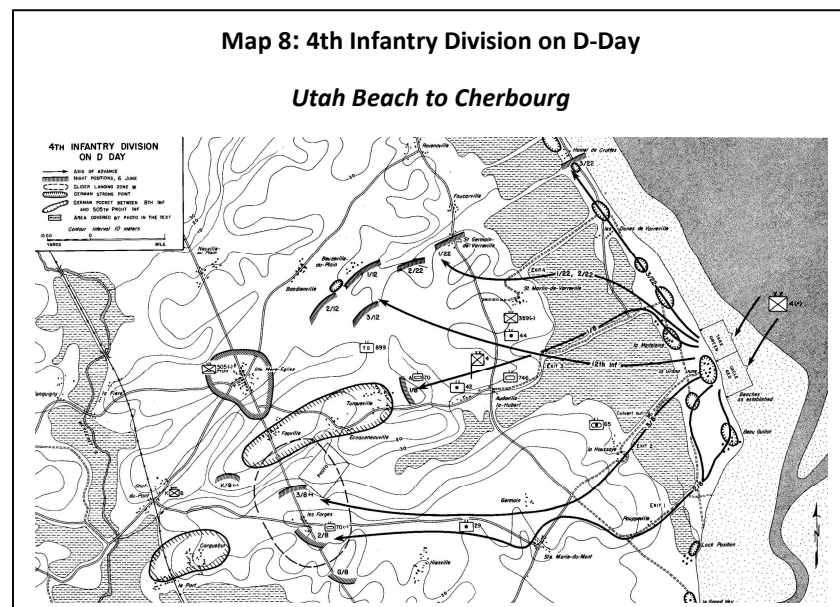


Lindquist had 400 men at la Fièvre from everywhere. G Co. did cross to meet 507th AIR LTC Timmes also “trapped” on the far (west) bank, but all seemed good. Then the bridge was lost; Germans lobbed in artillery and sent infantry and tanks. Capt Schwartzwalder **38** took 80 men to Amfreville leaving “the bridgehead in the hands of four officers ... and eight enlisted men ... (who) fought off the enemy and even succeeded in disabling two enemy tanks with Gammon grenades, but they finally had to withdraw ...”

Co B, 508th AIR belatedly crossed to meet the Germans head and were driven south while survivors swam back to the east bank. The critical bridge was lost “through failure to consolidate rapidly the west bank position ... (because) groups participating ... had only a vague idea of what neighboring units were doing ... (since) each unit (was) in its separate field of action.” The bridge was lost, “but the enemy ... (had) isolated the force under Colonel Timmes (with Capt Schwartzwalder’s men) from the units at la Fièvre.” Its defense in an Amfreville orchard was attacked by Germans headed the bridge. This force of two hundred was isolated for two days.

At la Fièvre, after the retreat of B Com 508th AIR, the 507th and 508th AIR were relieved on the left, as the 505th AIR, 1st AIB took over. But the 505th AIR received heavy mortar and artillery from German defenders. Two tanks crossed the causeway, but bazookas got both. Gen Gavin arrived from at la Fièvre from Chef-du-Pont late in the afternoon. It was serious as Gavin ordered a force from Chef-du-Pont to la Fièvre at once. The 200 more troops arrived at dusk to stabilize the defense by night. Yet, the 82nd AID HQ west of Ste. Mère-Eglise remained unclear of the beach invasion. Ridgeway thought to withdraw his defense of Ste. Mère-Eglise. Col Lindquist spread his 250 men to prevent Germans **39** from severing the la Fièvre to Ste. Mère-Eglise connection.

Besides la Fièvre an attempt to the south did secure a Merderet River crossing at Chef-du-Pont by 75 men under Col Ostberg who were also stopped at the river bridge. At 1700 the force of 300 was reduced to a platoon and the rest sent north to le. The enemy withdrew from the town and the eastern approaches to the bridge but dug in along the causeway and on the west bank. Though apparently not numerous, the Germans fought tenaciously. Col Ostberg’s men were stopped at the bridge. The seventy-five reinforcements who arrived later under Colonel Maloney could do nothing to break the deadlock. At about 1700 the Chef-du-Pont force was stripped to a platoon to reinforce la Fièvre. These 34 were quickly cut to 20 by enemy artillery. Their Capt Creek requested reinforcements, which arrived quicker than anticipated in the form of new glider landings including a 57-mm gun that eliminated the offending enemy artillery. When the reinforcements returned from la Fièvre, the group assaulted the crossing to form a bridge head.



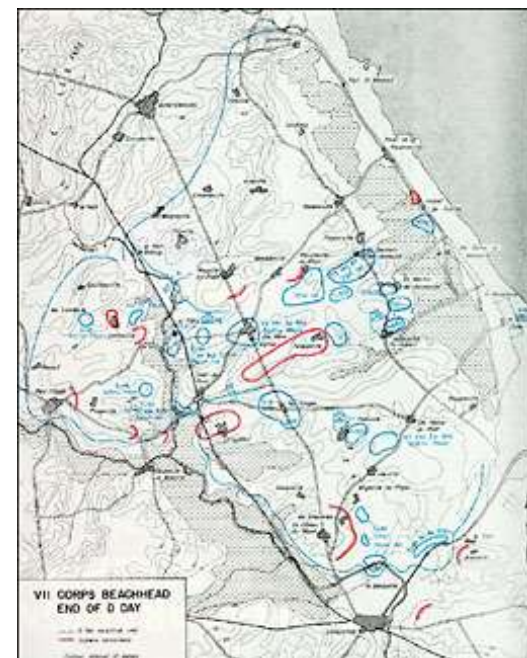
The capture of Ste. Mère-Eglise, and the Merderet River crossings fights at la Fièrre and Chef-du-Pont, were the 82nd AID main D Day activities, although many isolated groups existed on the west bank of the Merderet that continued to independently fight in battles for survival, not for planned objectives.

Forces under Col Millet, Col Timmes, Lt. Guillot and Capt. Adams had series of skirmishes west of the Merderet but did not join the 82nd until between 2 and 5 days after D-Day. They had one skirmish after another but survived to join the regiment on D plus 5. Col Shanley, 508th 2nd Battalion was near Picaudville who made radio contact with a Lt. McVicar with 60 men. They marched toward each other to find a group **40** led by Maj Warren, Jr. By night the Shanley, Warren, and McVicar forces joined, but Col Shanley was altered to Hill 30 at the Chef-du-Pont causeway. At 2300 the entire force, organized into two companies, moved there and improvised an all-around defensive position.

g. The Airborne Divisions at the End of D Day. A hard fight had been fought on D Day by the 82nd and 101st – not per plans with heavy casualties and with between 15 to 20 battles. The scattered drops confused Americans **and Germans** (who could not decipher American plans because the Americans were trying to figure out what to do next!) The Airborne portion of UTAH must rank as the most thoroughly planned operation in the history warfare yet was so totally unplanned in its execution! Both divisions had scattered drops, with varying losses all aggravated by Normandy terrain. Hedgerows made assembly, coordination and directions difficult. Units were unaware of others just a hundred yards away. Soldiers from different units fought together for the first time for objectives not assigned nor studied. For reasons never foreseen, airborne operations succeeded. Small groups disorganized the Germans to quickly grab objectives. The 101st succeeded when the 4th ID moved inland. North Foucarville was controlled by the 502nd, but the south on the Douve River was weak. The le Port bridgehead was lost, but la Barquette lock held. South units were “in peril” with just three companies against a tenacious enemy. In St. Côme-du-Mont the 501st PIR was pinned on swamps with no troops to take Douve bridges. The weakness was offset by German timidity and confusion. The worst problem was no communication between U.S. forces. “Not knowing” caused confusion and timidity. **41**

The 82nd Airborne was more serious. In holding east and west banks of the Merderet plus continue the 101st north boundary west, **it never functioned as a division.** It captured Ste. Mère-Eglise and moved the Germans north. It captured the la Fièrre bridgehead which it lost – a costly result. Gen Ridgway was alarmed and consolidated his hold at Ste. Mère-Eglise. The 101st and 82nd commanders had little satisfaction. Of 6,600 101st troops, only 2,500 worked in units. Reinforcements coming from the beach were critical. The good news was the 4th ID landed with few problems and slowly progressed inland to aid the two beleaguered airborne divisions. **42**

Map 9: VII Corps Beachhead End of D Day



2. The Seaborne Assault

Knocked out DD Tank Exit 2



a. Task Force U Moves In. At 0430 detachments of the 4th ID landed on the Iles St. Marcouf to capture a German outpost. Four men swam in - a first D-Day victory of sorts: no Germans were there. All 132 men successfully “occupied” the island by 0530. Loading for the assault proceeded as at H minus 40 minutes (0550) warships fired at shore batteries and 276 Marauders dropped 4,404 250-pound bombs on 7 beach objectives – its effectiveness was unknown. Assault craft left while fire support (33 smaller craft) did “beach drenching” with rockets when assault craft were 600 yards out. A Red Beach control

vessel fouled her screw, another and an LCT hit mines. Green Beach control vessels brought craft closer for discharge with **43** tanks at 3,000 yards out to “swim in”. The first 20 LCVP's had 10 for Tare Green (les Dunes de Varreville) and 10 for Uncle Red plus 8 LCT's with 40 duplex drive tanks. Second wave had 32 LCVP's carrying 2 assault battalions. engineers and navy demolition. Third waves (plus 15 minutes) had 8 LCT's with dozer tanks, and fourth wave (plus 17 minutes) with Combat Engineer Battalions to clear beaches.

The first wave was on time. Bombarding stopped with vessels 300 yards out. The first wave waded in at 600 hours yelling: "Goddam, we're on French **44** soil". The 8th IR troops missed their aim by a mile due to strong tidal currents, but Gen Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., 4th ID asst. commander, said **“it was the right place to invade, so it was!”** **45** It was “a great accident” since there were few Germans until forces got inland (middle photo). **46**

b. Clearing the Beaches. Engineers blew gaps in obstacles and concrete barriers as the Navy cleared below the water mark. All obstacles were above low tide; gaps were not needed as at OMAHA! **47** “There was ... little excitement ... not much confusion ... Army and Navy demolition teams ... (blew) all three bands of obstacles at once. Only a few mines were found ... The entire beach was cleared in an hour ... beach operation ... (began) before noon ... (with 6) killed and 39 wounded. **48-49** Engineers removed mines and “dozed” roads inland. A trail was made south to the road paralleled with the coast to Exit 2 south of la Madeleine. Many fields back of the beach marked “Miner”, were not mined.

c. The 4th Division Pushes Inland. Roosevelt sent his troops in. Utah had only two minor fortifications captured by less than a company. Coast batteries were demoralized by bombardment, “some did not fire at all”. After “two or three hours” 1st IB left via Exit 3 north, 2nd IB via Exit 1 south. **50** Traffic jams here were problems. Three south causeways were undefended, but north Exit 4 was. Six infantry battalions had landed by 1000 hours. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 22nd IR went took on Exit 4 north. The 22nd and 12th IR waded through. UTAH suffered from congestion. Exit 3 was closed to vehicles. Enemy fire jammed Exit 2. **51** The beach had perfect row of lined-up vehicles as “targets”. Gen Barton ordered it cleared for antitank guns. There was no attack – just confusion. Conversely, **nothing explained why the 4th ID, after an unopposed assault, was delinquent getting inland only to Turqueville by night.**

Glider Landings in Small Fields



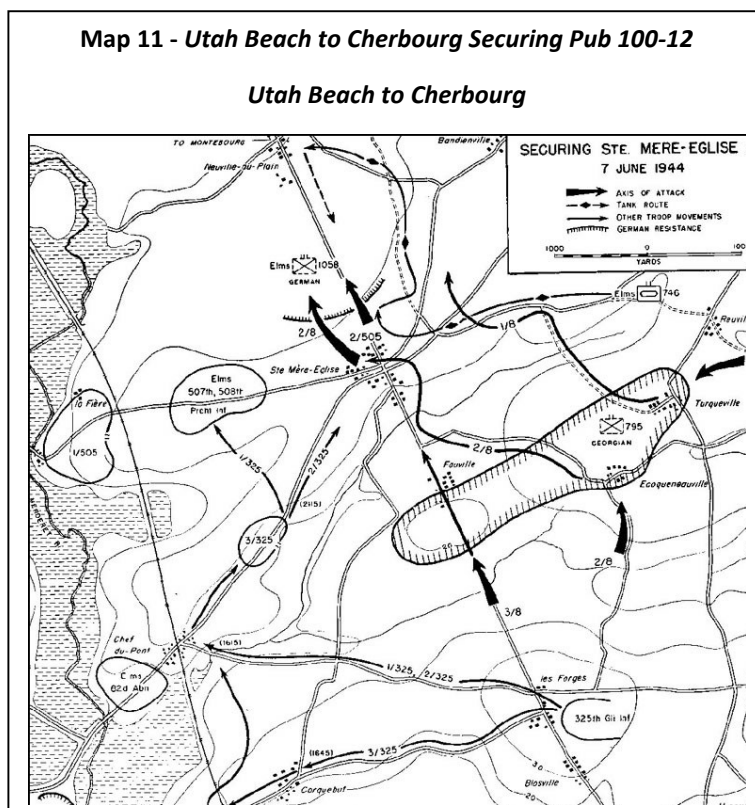
The 3rd IB cleared Exit 2 but missed enemy located north of Ste. Marie-du-Mont at Germain with **52** four 88-mm. guns. A short fire fight killed 50 enemy and netted a 100 POWs. The 3rd IB stopped north of les Forges (south of Ste. Mère-Eglise) to meet the 82nd AID. The 2nd IV Corps, Col Mac Neely, got E Co. past south of flooded areas. G Co wrestled with artillery and a few mines, but relieved the 3rd AIB, 501st AIR skipping past Germans south of the inundated area. This included the Grand Vey lock required to drain all. Others captured it with 12S prisoners.

The 8th IR gained had its D-Day objectives: relief of 101st AID men near Pouppeville against slight resistance on Fauville to Turqueville ridge and cut the les Forges-Ste. Mère-Eglise highway. Germans consolidated at Fauville. Later "Howell Force" of the 82nd AID arrived by ship to join up at Ste. Mère-Eglise. The 8th IR did find German defenses north as Col Raff had to clear glider artillery landing areas by 2100 hours. Two tank and infantry strikes were halted. As a result, **53** Germans met 60 C-47's trailing gliders released over them. Some landed in German lines; most crashed -- high casualties. Col Raff had very few for a defensive line. Two other 4th ID units did not get objectives. The 12th IR met the 502nd AIR near Beuzeville- au-Plain instead. The 22nd IR, 1 and 2 IB's were held at St. Germain-de-Varreville at night, but the 22nd IR did open the Beach Exit 4 road to Hamel de Cruttes. **54**

d. The Landing in Retrospect. The ease of UTAH Beach "gave the lie to the touted impregnability of the Atlantic Wall." The 4th ID losses "were astonishingly low": 197 casualties (60 lost at sea of a 29th FAB). Speed in landing was critical as the entire 4th ID was ashore in 15 hours. "A total of over 20,000 troops and 1,700 vehicles ..." by midnight 6 June." **55** While VII Corps HQ sent Gen Landrum's HQ to Audouville-la-Hubert at 1900 it "had little contact with most of the units ... the battle remained ... completely decentralized." Corps' Gen Collins decided to stay on the ship for radio contact with Gen Bradley and V Corps at Omaha.

(Comment: It rings of "rationalization" Omaha began as a disaster but improved. Utah had a spectacular start that slowed. One has the overall sense here a "sense of urgency" was lacking. Having started the morning "with a bang", nothing more is heard about Gen Roosevelt. Gen Collins remained shipboard. The 4th ID did not aggressively exit the undefended beaches that were undefended. The fiasco at the la Fièvre bridge was looming.)

Among the commanders ... in contact with the enemy there were uncertainty and anxiety ... lack of information about other units. This uncertainty ... affected ... many commanders ... most



keenly felt by the airborne units, particularly the 82d Airborne Division, which had little or no knowledge of the course of the battle ...

... (This) anxiety ... **was not as keenly felt at higher headquarters ... (with a) broader picture of the operation ...** Some assuring reports had reached *Bayfield* ... Gen Collins (knew) ... the 101st had taken St. Martin-de- Varreville ... contact (was made) ... between the 4th ID and the 101st ... (The) inundated area had been crossed ...

... (On) *Bayfield* ... things were going well ashore, except for the lack of information about the 82d Airborne ... (but) **with favorable reports from both the 4th and 101st Divisions, General Collins saw no need for any changes ... confident that the veteran 82d possessed the leadership and fighting ability to take care of itself ...** 56

e. German Reactions to the Landings. Success here may be partly attributed to delays in building defenses due to bombing. Defenses done were north of the Seine River. (*Comment: The former is questionable, the latter more accurate*). The much larger, stronger *Fifteenth Army* remained in their fortresses waiting.

The Germans ... (knew) failure to repel the invasion ... would rapidly unbalance both their tactical and strategic positions. Given a foothold, the ... (Allies could) win the race for the build-up of men and supplies ... (to) make it impossible to dislodge ... (them). But if the landings could be pushed back into the sea at once ... **Germany would then have a large part of the sixty western divisions for use as reserves against the Russians.**" 57

It is interesting how little the *Luftwaffe* was used. Germany could not risk its existence to defeat the invasion. Losing fighter planes left just U-boats and small patrol boats for defense. Germans knew nothing of artificial ports, so grossly underestimated 58 the Allied build-up speed. 59 Hitler learned four hours after airborne troops landed and UTAH was not known until much later. *Seventh Army* assumed coast forces would cope with known landings, to fear Allied attacks north between the Somme and Seine Rivers. Except for the unknown *352d Division*, German positions were as expected. Their unprepared ground and air defenses, indecision and miscalculating his and Allied capabilities were important. **The weaknesses, exploited by air power, insured the Allied invasion forces had come to stay.** 60

F. THE OPERATIONS; Navy Heritage Command U.S. Naval Admin WWII² xyza

(Comment: In relating the different histories by the different services each had different starting points. The intent in this portion is to consolidate the activities of D-Day -4 to D-Day. Thereafter, the

² www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/o/operation-neptune-invasion-normandy.htm

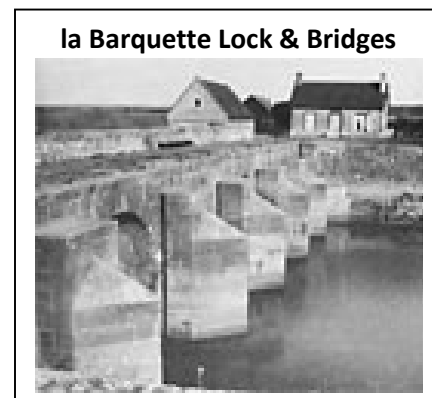
history proceeds through all historical sources twice each month. It is, in effect, an expanded version of Cornelius Ryan's epic film: "The Longest Day" (1959).

1. The D-Day Passage and Results

a. The Approach and False Start of Force U. Force U ("UTAH") crossed through the English Coast zone to the SPOUT -- a buoy lit passage with Channels 1 and 2 lanes for fast and slow traffic then being swept as the armada left. Force U sailed 3 June and early 4 June. The 14th and 16th Minesweeping flotillas explored ahead getting the postpone signal at 0840 hours, 4 June. The 14th Flotilla was into mines but had stopped due to foul weather. 437 The activity destroyed the belief the area was not, in fact, mined. However, they found only five random mines, not fields. Four were destroyed. The U.S.S. *Osprey* found the fifth and sunk. Sweepers dragged wire cable nets above the ocean floor to cut mine anchor cables or exploded them with contact. Seaman could feel the tug of the net when it contacted a mine was "caught". If there was no explosion, the cut mine bobbed up to be exploded with rifles or ship's guns. Boring duty, except that "lighting off" mines beat the best 4th of July firecrackers! The Navy made 10 "swept" paths for each of the five assaulting forces from 400 to 1,200 yards wide. The far end was a "transport area" 4 to 6 miles long and 2 miles wide. The Germans did not encumber their coastal waters.

Four minesweeping launches cleared paths for minesweepers to open a main channel. "LL" trawlers followed to sweep magnetic mines and then motor launches set large buoy channel markers 438 pre-marked for position by underwater sonic buoys laid that had marked the edge of German minefields. These activated on D-1! The channels plotted were within 100 yards of planned positions! The sweeps did cut 29 German mines in channels 2,6 and 7. 439 The five "transport areas" had no mines that close to the shore.

Then a massive movement of men, machine and arms anchored at the Third Reich's front door. "Company had arrived". 440 The sweeps cleared movement areas for bombarding ships; lateral channels between the approach lanes and widened channels. By dawn hundreds of ships were anchored only two miles off the Normandy shore. The sweeps then widened the 10 approach channels. 441 By D+12 there were no mines in the waters to France – a total of 78 were destroyed.



b. The Enemy's Minelaying Counterattack on D-Day. "In the first month after the assault, the laying of ground mines by aircraft by night was the enemy's chief weapon for impeding the Allied Build-up." It inflicted casualties and slowed shipping with but a negligible effect. On D+1, 30 ground mines were detonated near the CARDONNET shoal in north UTAH Beach. "The field claimed seven casualties including two U.S. destroyers, the *Glennon* and the *Meredith*, the U.S. Destroyer Escort *Rich*, and the U.S. Fleet minesweeper *Tide*. In the eastern area ... air mining effort ... (produced 15) casualties, three vessels sunk and twelve damaged ... by D-plus 16 ... (with) ninety mines ... swept."

On 20 June the Allies found a secret, unsweepable pressure mine. Steps were taken to limit the damage, including bombing German mine plane airfields, 443 night fighter planes patrolled, channel

widths were reduced, sweeping increased, speed limits reduced a ship's water pressure, tugs were used for some to avoid pressure, acoustic actuations were applied, and sweeping of anchorages increased. We are not told how effective the measures were.

2. AIR COVER FORCES FOR NEPTUNE

a. *Coordination of Coastal Air Command and Naval Operations.* Coastal Command, R.A.F. "assisted", but 449 no special arrangements were made with the navies, so their efforts were not terribly effective. Coastal Command operations used improvised methods 450 that omitted U.K. Aircraft and Coastal Command's six Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Squadrons and also the U.S. Navy Fleet-Air-Wing Seven. Number 19 Group held most of the RN and USN anti-U-boat planes that flew to the south and southwest patrolling Plymouth and the Western Approaches. Number 16 Group had a formidable force of anti-shipping aircraft. Number 18 Group in the north patrolled against movements from northern enemy ports. Coastal Command NEPTUNE support began in Norwegian waters on 16 May by assuming the *Kriegsmarine* would send U-boats south to Normandy. The 18 Group hunting got 22 sightings, 13 attacks and 6 kills by D-Day. By 30 June, they had 44 sightings, 28 attacks and 13 probable kills.

By 6 June most U-boats were in the Biscay area attempting to get between assault forces and their British Bases to attack the Build-Up shipping. After D-Day, U-boats moved closer to the assault area. 451 Coastal Commands patrols in "CORK area" of the western approaches meant "every spot in CORK came under observation every thirty minutes." The CORK was so wide, that U-boats had to surface several times to remain under surveillance. Few subs made the channel undetected. By then planes had radar to spot surfaced craft. "On the night of 6/7 June, 11 U-boats were sighted and 6 attacked ... After thirty days, the score ... was 96 U-boats sighted, 59 attacked, 6 certainly sunk, and a great many probably or possibly sunk." U-boats made submerged passage using their "SCHNORKEL" to motor. This hurt speed and morale. Subs "arrived in an exhausted condition". No invasion forces were lost to U-boats through July 1944. 452

German surface raiders came from Brittany sub-bases. On 6 July four destroyers left for Normandy. Three were sunk! They lost 30 E-boats also. From 15 to 29 June Coastal Command sunk a merchant, auxiliary, three minesweepers and tanker. 453 Plus, 353 bombers hit le Havre with 1,026 tons to destroy over 25 vessels and 297 bombers hit Boulogne.

b. Air Defense by Combined Allied Air Forces.

The enemy had 1,515 planes with 340 heavy bombers, 75 recon bombers, 75 fighter-bombers, 560 twin-engine fighters, 390 single-engine fighters, and 75 coastal aircraft. These were distributed with: 185 in Normandy, 360 Pas de Calais, 135 Holland, 375 in north-west Germany, and 100 in Scandinavia. They were opposed by 454 Allied air forces of 2,300 planes! Allied fighters had five squadrons (16 planes each) on convoy lanes, five squadrons on call; 10 over beaches, with a reserve of ten and 8 squadrons on call. Until airfields were built in Europe, fighters only had fuel for a 20-30 minute-patrol! AAF (Army Air

German E-Boat – 50 m.p.h. – 100 feet long



Force) had a single point fighter control at AEF Uxbridge plus 455 three direction tenders in LST's with all of the gear and elaborate air operations rooms for tracking flights. Uxbridge dispatched to contact LST operations to be vectored to targets. Plans for Ground Control Intercept (GCI) parties to direct planes over battlefields were mauled in the D-day landings. It was postponed and did not return until D + 6. *(Comment: Recall that WWII radios used "crystals" to broadcast on one wavelength. Radios held about four crystals, so pilots had 4-channel radios with two required for take-off, landing and plane to plane communications!)*

The *Luftwaffe* was so sparse, the greatest danger Allied pilots faced was being shot down by Allied anti-aircraft gunners! Thus, plans were laid for Allied naval and shore gunners to drive German fighters to high altitudes where U.S. fighters would take over. **It did not work as 456 Allied guns claimed most Allied planes shot down!** The *Luftwaffe* reaction to NEPTUNE "was unexpectedly small". Their first sortie on NEPTUNE was 1500. At night 85 planes, mainly mine layers, flew over the beaches and shipping. On D+1, 59 German planes appeared with 15 lost. These ceased by mid-July. 457-

3. Naval and Air Bombardment. The primary object were 25 casemated batteries. The enemy had unknown amounts of mobile artillery. 458 Bombing was to destroy obstacles, explode mines, cancel beach defenses and batteries (See: Graham Report on "Fire Support of Sea-Borne landings against a Heavily Defended Coast"). Casemated batteries could not be bombed but could be *stunned* until captured. "Beach drenching" sent defenders underground numbing minds and nerves. Aimed fire was less effective. NEPTUNE used all three services:

Coordinate and assign bombing targets by the three C's-in-C on those that interfered with the landing; 459

NEPTUNE targets would be air bombed only once. The pre-dawn heavy night bomber effort "was to be concentrated on ten selected batteries in the assault area, this number being the limit of availability of night bombing aids." (Yet, AAF history indicates its purposes was carpet bombing intended to stun.)

During first light ... medium bombers were to concentrate on six particularly dangerous German batteries. (*Likely Utah with medium bombers*). During the last 40 minutes before H-hour, Naval Bombarding would engage all German batteries with maximum fire. Thereafter, they would receive counter battery naval fire to keep them silenced. Fighter bombers post H-hour ... (did) counter battery bombardment.

Then 40 minutes before H-hour came an all-bomber effort of beach drenching, 460-461 to put "dangerous batteries out of action before allied ships came within their ranges". Delaying German concrete construction before D-Day was partially achieved, but there were more concrete emplacements than ships could engage since the AAF did not focus on coastal batteries except once for Bay of the Seine batteries – (I.e., a lukewarm positive). On D-Day, 1,136 heavy bombers of RAF Bomber Command dropped 5,853 tons on the 10 most dangerous batteries. 462

As daylight came 1,365 heavy bombers of the 8th U.S. Army Air Force took over. In the 30 minutes preceding H-hour, they were scheduled to drop 4,200 tons of bombs in a "beach drenching effort" on ... all beaches, although ... no bombs at all were dropped on Omaha beach. Their total effort was 1,365 bombers, with 2,796 tons of bombs. **The failure of the U.S. Army Air Force to carry out its assigned task at Omaha ... made the assault there much more difficult and costly than at the other beaches.**

Medium and light bombers hit six targets and through the day hit inland and coastal defenses. Later the U.S. Eighth Air Force sent out another 2,627 heavy bombers with 1,347 escorts to drop another 1,746 tons of bombs at army targets. 463 *(Comment: ONE MUST CONSIDER THE DAMAGE that the sum of these 11,892,000 pounds of bombs should have done but did not do. This is one justified, criticism of AAF's failures at OMAHA.)*

Conversely, Naval bombardment was by 106 battle ships, monitors, cruisers, gun boats and destroyers plus another 228 amphibious fire support craft 464-465-466-467 against 25 heavy and medium German batteries. Each target was apportioned among ships while aircraft corrected fire. Eastern Task Force bombardment began 40 minutes before sunrise to H-hour (130 minutes). Western Task Force was the same but continued to fall on flank batteries and strong points. 468 The task of blasting obstacles and defenses, and its shortcomings are mentioned later. The Navy's "Beach Drenching was ... (for) numbing and demoralizing the defenders." The authors note "aimed fire ... was impracticable ... smoke ... made accurate observation impossible." *(Comment: It was, in truth, a "Well, do something" operation.)*

4. Post H-Hour Aimed Bombardment and Results. Gunships stood by to fire "on call" on targets as recovered batteries, strong points or obstacles, and inland strong points. Three spotters avoided Allied casualties: (1) Shore Fire Control Parties (SFCP); (2) Air Spotters; (3) Air Observation Posts (Air OP). 469 There was one Shore Fire Control Parties team per battalion or 27 U.S. parties (9/division). There were nine naval gun spotting teams (One officer and two enlisted men) dropped by parachute. Shore fire control parties had an Army and Naval officer, 12 enlisted men, a Jeep and half-track. The British had 39 F.O.B. Parties -- one per battalion. A Naval gun fire officer was at each regiment fire control center plus a Naval gunfire officer at each divisional headquarters. Shore Fire Control Parties left for beaches at H+30 minutes, but their equipment was mostly wrecked. The Germans had great 470 D/F ("Direction/Finding") equipment to target radio locations in seconds. Air spotting used 104 single seater RAF planes, because "two-seaters" were too vulnerable. Spotting was not perfect but succeeded. Working in pairs, one plane spotted, the other protected. Each had a list of targets but took "requests". Since planes had more success spotting for themselves that procedure prevailed. 471-472 Second were Navy air spotters. Third, were the nimble Army "Piper Cub" spotters. Fourth, each gunship had an Army plotting (or attempted plotting) of Army unit positions. "The value of the latter once fighting began is questionable." 473

"Naval bombardment results are hard to give." Prisoners said the terror of navy guns drove them out. Yet, "there is no evidence that naval gun fire caused great destruction to enemy guns." "Naval gunfire neutralized rather than destroyed enemy batteries." "The long periods of silence of flanking batteries ... was considered to be the result of the moral effect of H.E. on the defenders rather than of its destructive effect ..." "All Navy and Army reports ... agreed that the close supporting fire delivered by

small ships, immediately preceding H-hour, was of the greatest assistance in enabling the Infantry to make the first break across the open beaches." 474

Still, the Navy history glowingly states: "German reports on the effect of Naval bombardment are equally eloquent concerning the damage which it did to the German defenders." They quote a German article that notes a "Torpedo Boat for instance had the fire power of approximately a Howitzer Battery, a destroyer that of a Battery of Artillery." A "...

cruiser may be compared with a regiment of artillery. Battleships ... (exceed land batteries)." 475

Field-Marshal von Rundstedt wrote: "Facts must be emphasized ... The enemy had deployed very strong naval forces ... These can be used as quickly mobile, constantly available artillery ... skillfully directed by plane observers ... The movement of tanks by day, in open country, within the range of these naval guns is hardly possible". 476 *(Comment: Missed in all of this was the irreplaceable value of Navy destroyers who violated fleet orders to close to the beaches for point blank fire at hardened German beach defenses. Several sources give these destroyers as the prime reason D-Day at Omaha succeeded. See next section.)*

5. Radar Countermeasures. Here the Navy sheds new light on D-Day with information not located in other histories with its "just in time" technology. The Germans had a well-integrated chain of radar sweeping and gun control stations for 1) early warning of invasion forces; 2) plotting vessels movements; and 3) getting accurate range and bearings for coastal artillery. These had to be eliminated since 80 minesweepers had to cruise just off the coast before the warships. A COSSAC committee that accumulated information became the military staff of ANCXF responsible for a November 1943 a joint Navy-Air R.C.M. Plan (Radar Countermeasures). 477-478- 479 Bombing enemy radar and networks was the main action of destroying stations and unnerving operators at others against turning on radar signals. Over 1,400 air sorties were flown. There were 12 critical sites Cap d'Antifer to Cap Levi with 44 German sets made temporarily inoperative. On D-Day it appeared 20 of 44 sets were operative. Pre-assault bombardment reduced this to only eight radar stations transmitting.

A second method was an R.C.M. screen between the radar and invasion forces by routing diversionary forces to pass in a westerly direction (see next section) "Window" (aluminum foil strips) laid on the East Flank added confusion bolstered by window filled rockets and shells of bombarding ships and towing reflector balloons to multiply echoes. 480 A third trick was an inshore screen using 240 low power sweeping and locking jammers in LCT(A)s and LCG(L)s crafts that put jammers right onto the beaches. So, 60 medium power jammers were installed in minesweepers and destroyers off the beaches. Bombarding ships had R.C.M. (Radio Counter Measures) as standard equipment plus 120 more high powered hand tuned jammers were used to protect the ships. Balloons with radar reflectors imitating ships silhouettes were towed. Headquarters ships monitored German radar emissions R.C.M. screening vessels closed to jam them.

Such cunning plans and sophisticated electronics of June 1944 are quite impressive. Overall, is a picture of an enemy massively attacked and ignorant at the same time. 481 Production of much equipment was novel. U.S. Navy provided 250 sets, Royal Navy 350 sets and 603 electronic radar jammers were used.

Fitting and tuning was a problem as the system was only 85% complete before sailing. A special school gave 86 radar and radio men a 5-day cram course in a last-minute miracle! 482

Allied casualties on land were very large, but not at sea among vessels. Why were so few Allied ships hit or sunk at Normandy? Next is a little told, not well-known version of these events.

6. Naval Diversions. Another task was diversionary invasions which threatened to, but did not, land troops. Small naval forces with special equipment approached other beaches simulating landings with radio radar, radar counter measures, sonic devices and smoke to cause the enemy to pause. Feints included:

GLIMMER a simulated one-division Pas de Calais hit by six H.D.M.L's (70-foot motor launches). 483

TAXABLE a one division feint on Cap d'Antifer by eight H.D.M.L's operating under Dover with Force S.

BIGDRUM had four H.D.M.L.'s Force U to pass west of the real Force U to screen near Barfleur.

ACCUMULATOR was a two-destroyer 12 – 13 June after D-Day diversion on the west Cotentin Peninsula.

Likely not well known, since they were not very successful, but the creativity and imagination are fascinating. Other methods included 484 "moonshine" using hand turned transmitter receivers to seem like a radar search for an amphibious force; sonic speakers to emulate large naval forces; radio deception of a force breaking radio silence! 485

"What did you do during the war, Daddy?" "Oh, I pretended I was fighting!"

G. Chapter 11 Operation Neptune and the Assault Plan: THE NEPTUNE ASSAULTS (D-DAY) 6 June; Navy Heritage Command U.S. Naval Admin WWII³ xyza

1. The Success of the NEPTUNE Operation.

Still, "the attack was bitterly contested, and the success ... was achieved primarily by the determined gallantry of the assaulting forces, particularly the soldiers." For the Navy movements were by the plan. Yet, the weather was bad, so:

- a. Many suffered severely from seasickness.

³ www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/o/operation-neptune-invasion-normandy.html

- b. Some L.C.T.s had to drop astern--L.C.T. (Armoured) were badly affected ... failing to carry out their role in the close fire support plan. **487**—
- c. There were issues lowering L.C.A., and L.C.V.P., some had “unpleasant trips”, damage with many needed tows.
- d. The operation of DD Tanks did not go according to plan.

Yet, almost complete surprise was achieved. Admiral Ramsay described it as:

" ... strategical surprise was always hoped ... As our forces approached ... the realization ... almost complete tactical surprise had been achieved slowly dawned. This astonishing feat cannot be explained by any single factor ... (but include) cover and deception ... air superiority ... bad weather (with no) boat patrols ... and finally the radio countermeasures ... **488** left the enemy in doubt as to the points at which we would land even when he had become aware that the invasion was in progress."

German Adm Krancke was unconcerned until paratroop landings at 0130, but they were not large. At 0209 large vessels were off Port-en-Bassin and more airborne, but he questioned why in such terrible weather. **489** It “wrong-footed” the enemy. British Adm Ramsay knew the Germans could damage the fleets. Planes were downed. Artillery spotted. **490** Underwater beach obstacles were “the greatest enemy”. Weather, obstacles, and mines were 50% of the casualties. After H hour landings fell behind allegedly for lack of exits and signage, which is questionable. By drying out, LCT and LCI(L) Assault Forces were cleared by 1500. Unloading of LST’s was hampered from lost **491** Rhino tows on passage.

The Navy revisits the presence of the *352nd Infantry Division* by “mischance ... unknown to allied intelligence, a first-class German Field Division was ... in the OMAHA ... (to) impeded the “O” landing force ...” The history incorrectly says: “In fact, when it (the 352nd) arrived all the other static beach defense units shifted both to the east and west to make room for its forces ... (at) OMAHA beaches. The Americans did not attack a force of ‘partial soldiers’ ... but a well-trained and disciplined regular Wehrmacht division. This mistake resulted in the incredibly high fatalities at OMAHA ... “**492** This is not related in other WWII histories due to their narrow focus on one country or one military service. Only when the histories of all services are combined, as if preparing a time-date scenario for trial, does the full impact of the error become clear.

(MORE CURRENT U.S. HISTORIES FOCUS UPON THE IMPACT OF THE GERMAN 352nd Infantry Division – a secret force hidden from disclosure for many decades after D-Day.)

2. Western Task Force: FORCE U at UTAH. Western (US) Naval Task Force had a more difficult time in NEPTUNE than did the Eastern (British) sections.

a. *Several factors contributed to Naval problems:*

The weather postponement affected the W.T.F. (Western Task Force), especially Force U due to its longer journey ... (so) many ships were at sea when the postponement came.

The transport areas of the W.T.F. (Americans) were located several miles further to seaward ...

Beach obstacles were particularly difficult at OMAHA Beach.

The terrain at OMAHA beach was more difficult than elsewhere.

The pre-H-hour air bombardment scheduled for the OMAHA sector, was not delivered.

(Comment: Here again official histories claim the AAF failed to bomb OMAHA when we know the entire Eighth Air Force did bomb OMAHA ... just too far inland to be useful.)

The Force U assault expected to be the most contested but was the least and most successful ... characterized by a) an exceedingly difficult crossing; b) the achievement of complete surprise; c) a lightly opposed and highly successful landing; and d) trouble with minefields. 493

The following is a condensed version of the histories concerning Force U:

Assault Force U landed on the southeast coast of the Cotentin. Adm Moon commanded 865 ships and craft 494 495 for the 4th ID (Gen Barton) with a 1st Engineer Special Brigade and 2nd U.S. Naval Beach Battalion. It landed in columns of regiments on a two-battalion front. 1st Battalion (8th IR) on Tare Green Beach and 2nd Battalion on Uncle Red Beach, while Rangers stormed the Isles de St. Marcouf ... (for) batteries thought to be there. 496

Force U had 12 convoys that rearranged ... 497 for proper landing order. It went further than others. 498 Its slow convoys ... (left) June 3rd before Gen Eisenhower postponed on June 4. All convoys reversed, except U-2A. It was 25 miles offshore when a destroyer and a plane had it turn without being detected by German radar. U-2 convoys backtracked 12 hours while 250 small craft descended on Weymouth Bay to refuel.

It was uncertain Force U would be ready June 6. Adm Kirk, with verve, announced “ready” when 250 gunships waited for fuel. Adm Hall (on the *U.S.S. Ancon*) made sure all were fueled. These were joined by the Belfast (Northern Ireland) section and others. At 0229 June 6th, *Bayfield* anchored in the assault area, 22,500 yards off Utah Beach. By 0430, only one hour behind schedule, all of Convoy U-2 arrived.

b. The Assault on UTAH Beach. Force U’s position on western edge had atrocious westerly weather, but as it came in it found a calmer lee shore out of the wind. 500 The assault LST's had Navy Demolition Units. Behind these were LCT's with DD tanks, Fire Support craft and LCM's. Next was a convoy of LCT's and then were the LCI(L)'s (infantrymen) at H-hour. All except DD tanks moved on time and fairly free of enemy interference. 501 Green Primary Control dispatched her Secondary Control to lead the red waves. “Naval gunfire was so successfully placed” only a few craft were lost ... (and) drenching fire of the rockets and fire of the LCO's and LCS were effective.” If these plans were valid for UTAH, one wonders why they were not so for OMAHA?

Rangers stormed the Isles de St. Marcouf to find no enemy. All seemed well until ...

Upon landing the officers found they were on the wrong beach. It was a rookie mistake that turned out well because obstacles and defenses were very few.

By 0945, 15 waves had landed, and the beaches had been cleared ... By 1030, the three transports ... were unloaded ... By late afternoon, the 4th division was completely ashore ... **By 6 o'clock in the evening, 21,328 men, 1,742 vehicles and 1,695 tons of stores had been landed.**

The beaches were almost free of shelling. **503** Sea mines were the greatest enemy. An undetected mine on Cardo net Shoals sank five landing craft, then Destroyers *Corry* at 0710, *Meredith*, *Glennon* and *Rich*. **504** Mines were most effective with 221 ground and moored mines. **505** By midnight D-day, forces were near St. Mere Eglise. Force U's invasion, which started the worst, ended with the least challenges of the five major amphibious landings. **506**

3. Eastern Forces Western Task Force: ASSAULT FORCE O at OMAHA Beach. *Note: As between OMAHA and UTAH, UTAH (4th Division) was the Western Force and OMAHA the eastern force, but as between the British and Americans, OMAHA (1st and 29th Divisions) was the Western Force.*

a. Organization and Assembly TASK FORCE O. Force O suffered little in crossing the Channel, but landings had heavy seas. Force U had no resistance, while Force O's very existence was at stake. Navy Force O had 1,500 ships and craft **507 508** in 13 Task Groups. **509** The landing was V Corps the 1st and 29th ID. The navy history is a bit confused on who landed where. **510** The Shore Party held two-thirds of the 6th and one-third of the 7th Naval Beach Battalion, the rest of the V Corps and Engineer Special Brigade Group, and the 6th and 7th Naval Beach Battalions. Terrain favored the German defenses who had concealed emplacements, nests, pillboxes, slit trenches, tank traps, anti-tank ditches, rows of underwater obstacles of hedgehogs, tetrahedrons, Element "C", and pole ramps with barbed wire all thickly sown with mines. Obstacles were much more numerous than Intelligence had indicated. German artillery and machine guns were **511** set to enfilading fire on troops on the beaches parallel to the shoreline with some concealed from seaward view by blast walls and smokeless powder that concealed the guns. German fire was focused upon reaching beaches, but not seaward against invasion craft. There were four German regiments. One was a weak coastal defense regiment. **The other three regiments were from the 352nd Field Division of the German Army with "troops are generally rated among the best in the world."** **512 513**

It began with a 40-minute Naval bombardment. **"A (air force) bombing attack was scheduled ... (but) failed to materialize."** *(Comment: Another "official" history that condemns the air forces.)* Tanks in LCT(A)s fired in the last 3,000 yards as did 105-mm. artillery in LCTs. Plus, LCT(R)s and LCS(S)s launched rockets while gunfire craft and destroyers continued after firing landing.

Three items are noteworthy.

First, this is one of the very few histories that mention "the secret" German division at Omaha and does so with the correct identification and its significance.

Second, it describes the Air Forces claims of participating in D-Day as: **“A bombing attack ... failed to materialize ...”** It is a bit uncomplimentary when the U.S. Navy states the U.S. Air Force failed to perform its major D-Day duty!

Third, it lays bare any suggestion the Army Air Force slightly overshot the beach with its bombs. None of these histories discuss the bombing, presumably since it was so far inland nobody heard the bombs, saw the blasts or even any smoke. Worse, research failed to uncover any credible record where the bombs landed. Several thousand tons of bombs from the entire Eighth Air Force landed somewhere. Yet, the statement is made: “On D-Day, over 2,300 sorties were flown by Eighth Air Force heavy bombers in the Normandy and Cherbourg invasion areas, all aimed at neutralizing enemy coastal defenses and front-line troops.” So where are bombs in Normandy?

b. Assault Force O: Organization, Assembly, and Passage.⁴ Force O assembled at five ports: PORTLAND, POOLE, EXMOUTH, FALMOUTH, and BELFAST. 514 Most all ships and craft were loaded or finished on 3 June evening.

Force O had five convoys O-1 to O-5 with O-1 and O-2 in the assault. Night 3-4 June was clear with rising wind. Then D-Day was delayed 24 hours. Convoy O-2 reversed course, but a large Force U landing craft convoy was unable to “beat its way back to westward against the wind ... gale force, and ... (took) refuge in PORTLAND HARBOR and WEYMOUTH ROAD.”

Sub-Convoy Group O-1 cleared PORTLAND HARBOR the afternoon of 5 June. The movement was uneventful. 515 In Convoy O-2, several towed LCP(L)s were cast adrift and two LCT(A)s foundered (sunk). There were four “all stop” delays. Finally, Group O-1 passed by the Bombardment Group for the Transport area where Bradley’s *Ancon* was anchored. The remaining ships followed. 516 517 The weather was unfavorable, but landings were possible. The trip of the L.C.V.P.s from the Transport Area 10 miles offshore hit fresh wind and choppy sea, neither easy nor pleasant. Two L.C.T.(A)s foundered (sunk), one strayed into the Force U area, two more missed the landing. Thus, five of the 16 L.C.T.(A)s scheduled for the first wave were missing.

c. The Assault on OMAHA Beach. The pre-landing naval bombardment was carried out, “but the air bombardment ... on OMAHA Beaches between H minus 30 minutes and H-hour did not materialize for reasons unknown to the Force Commander. Its absence was felt severely when the landing commenced.” During naval bombardment the enemy was silent. The landing order of the first four waves was:

1. DD tanks between H minus 10 and H minus 5 minutes.
2. L.C.T.(A)s carrying tanks and tank dozers for obstacle clearance at H-hour;
3. Infantry at H plus 1 minute; and
4. Demolition parties at H plus 3 minutes.

⁴ //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighth_Air_Force.

DD tanks were launched 6,000 yards (4 miles) offshore. The launch decision was made by senior tank and naval officers in the L.C.T.s. **All but three on the left flank foundered (i.e., sunk).** “Responsible officers” on the right better gauged the sea conditions so DD tanks launched when the craft hit ground. “All the DD tanks for 116th R.C.T. (29th ID) reached the shore.” (Comment: This is a questionable conclusion.)

The first landings on EASY RED and DOG GREEN were at 0635 ... Due to the sea state, the loss DD tanks, absence of five L.C.T.(A)s and damage to others ... **the order of landing was somewhat mixed** ... (The German fired) from artillery, mortars, machine guns and small arms ... (It) was heavy and accurate and casualties were numerous. Many of the tanks ... were knocked out and losses to the infantry advancing ... were severe. A considerable portion of the (demolition) equipment was lost ... The limited time ... before (obstacles) were covered by the rapidly rising tide and the devastating fire further reduced ... demolition ... (efforts). Only five gaps were cleared all the way ... and three part-way in, instead of the 16 planned. Most ... were inadequately marked ... (During the incoming) tide ... the only opening ... was one lane on EASY RED beach. 518-519-520

At the request of the ... V-Corps ... Assault Group O-2, was directed at the H-hour to land troops of the 115th R.C.T. (29th ID) at H-plus 4 hours⁵. Thus, all the landing force embarked in Force O were committed from the beginning of the assault. After the initial waves, landing continued throughout the forenoon and afternoon of D-day. Due to the failure of the demolition parties to clear and mark gaps through the underwater obstacles, and to the heavy enemy fire, great difficulty was experienced in getting anyone or anything ashore. Some craft carrying infantry and elements of the shore party managed to land their personnel, but the bulk of the craft proceeding shoreward was stopped between the seaward row obstacles ... With the strong tide, fresh wind and choppy sea ... (it was) a mass of craft in which all semblance of wave organization was lost until the Deputy Assault Group Commanders arrived ... (and) took charge ... and reformed the waves as best they could.

Most of the tanks that made shore were knocked out or caught in the obstacles and flooded by the tide. Personnel, assault and shore parties were pinned by enemy fire; few, if any, troops actually crossed the beach during the early hours. Destroyers and gunfire 521 craft sailed as close as possible to engage enemy guns. Little progress was made before 1100 hours. The condition was critical. Enemy strong points held. U.S. troops could not move inland. 522 The first encouraging news came at 1100 that German defenders were surrendering. G.I.s were going up the slope at EASY. By 1330 a general advance began. Then EASY and DOG were cleared. Beaches received observed artillery and mortars where craft landed – “a few quick salvos, usually right on the target”. Neither enemy observers nor batteries were found. 523 524 Huge number of craft were lost.

⁵ These loaded landing craft were full and unusable for 4 hours.

At 1715, First ID staff arrived. At 1730, hostile action ceased. All rifle companies were ashore by 2100. Between 2320 and 2340 came an ineffective German air attack with three planes hit. This ended D-day”
525

d. Ranger Assault. Three companies of the 2nd Ranger Infantry Battalion attacked German batteries at Points du Hoe thought to have the heaviest caliber guns (six 155 mm) on a high cliff over OMAHA approaches. The assault followed a heavy battleship U.S.S. *Texas* bombardment to land at 0630. Instead, they came to shore the Raz de la Parce to be very late in reaching the assault cliffs. The bombardment had worn off. Scaling the cliff was hard with wet ropes and grappling hook rockets failed to carry the water-soaked ropes over the cliff edge. Men climbed amidst machine gun fire and hand grenades. **526** The U.S.S. *Satterlee* (DD) closed to take the Germans under fire as Rangers reached cliff tops at 0930 to begin fighting toward the Vierville - Grandcamp Road where they were stuck until D plus 2, when at "about 1100 the 5th Ranger Battalion" reached them from OMAHA beach. Repeated requests for boats to evacuate wounded, ammunition and reinforcements went to the V Corps commander – nothing resulted. Gunfire support ships did their best with supporting, but the Ranger situation was desperate. Finally, on D + 1 two boats with 25 Rangers, ammunition, food, and medical supplies landed to evacuate wounded. **527**

The enemy battery “upon which all this heroism was expended was found to be empty”. It later developed four guns were moved to a lane and Texas, using air spot, knocked out the new position on D-day. **528** (Comment: This is not supported by evidence and contrary to the better record that the soldiers spiked the guns.)

e. D-Day Evening. By 6 pm 18,772 men, and 1,033 vehicles were landed, the cliffs were conquered and Colleville captured. Shortly after midnight (0045 of D plus 1) "the Commanding General, V Corps, informed ... that his line was generally along the road from Vierville through St. Laurient to about a mile south of Colleville ..." By noon on D plus 1, the Vth Corps reached the Bayeux-Carentan Road, its D-day objective. The next day they advanced another three miles. By D+3 they had contacted the British.

Assault Force O was singularly immune from losses to German minefields. As of D plus 22 no mines had been swept in the OMAHA and no ships had been mined. By 1600 on D-day, losses to **529** ships and craft in Force O were:

- a. sunk: LCT 294, and Dispatch Boats 350;
- b. damaged LST 375; LCI's 487, 553, 85; LCT's 2043, 210, 25, 2041, 2037, 538, 2307; Dispatch Boats 320; LCA's 25, 418; and an unknown number of LCVP's. **530** Naval personnel casualties were 624. **531**

OMAHA Beach was the

... most difficult of all the five assaults. The cumulative effect of many adverse factors had conspired to defeat or nullify the plans ..." "The air bombardment of the beaches was not delivered, presumably because of the low cloud ceiling ... Sea conditions caused the loss of a considerable portion of the tanks and ... (others) were soon knocked out ... The obstacles were

more numerous ... and casualties from enemy fire were heavy - so that demolition parties, despite a gallant effort, failed to breach the obstacles ... (in) the most elementary form of amphibious attack; Infantry landing and attacking supported by Naval gunfire." A Deputy Assault Group Commander ... attributed the success ... to three factors; (1) the gallantry of the crews of the landing craft ... (2) the stark courage of the soldiers who worked their way shoreward through obstacles ...; and (3) to the support provided by the Naval gunfire ... **but in the last analysis, it is (the rifleman) and the floating batteries supporting him who win or lose the battle.** 532

(Comment: This is perhaps a bit of blatant self-promotion!)

4. **British Eastern Forces and Task Force: ASSAULT FORCE G, J and S⁶⁶** 533

a. **The Channel Passage:** Each British Assault Force had 16 or 18 convoys or groups based on the time of arrival. The passage was complicated by the English Channel currents (2½ knots) and heavy weather. At 0900, 5 June, the first landing craft left to sail in a constant stream. The wind was west, Force 5, slackening to Force 3 to 4, and veering to W.N.W. In the evening, the sea was Force 4, swell + 1. These conditions were severe for the landing 534 craft crews. "Their spirit and seamanship met the greatness of this hour -- they pressed forward ... in high heart and resolution; there was no faltering even when many smaller landing craft drove on until they foundered." The Reserve Group of Force S had a steady beat of 33 miles into a head sea and Force G had a strong flood stream. At 1630 Adm Vian closed near position E, but once turned south, conditions were harder for L.C.P.(L) and L.C.A. (H.R.). Leading groups arrived in Area Z without incident to head for the entrances to the channels across the German sea mine barrier. 535

b. **The Approach.** Forces had little difficulty finding swept channels. A few mistakes occurred due to tides wagging tails. and the lead of Assault Group G.1 was jostled out of their Channel 5 but at midnight the tide turned, and the tail wagged the other way. Casualties were only two by enemy: HMS *Wrestler* was mined at 0545 and then an L.S.T. 536-537 Force G and J arrived with little trouble --- "only a torpedo attack on Force S" on the east flank 538 smokescreen:

Unfortunately, three German torpedo boats (made) a torpedo attack, and ... (escaped) in the smoke. Two torpedoes passed between H.M.S. *Warspite* and H.M.S. *Ramillies*, and at 0530 one hit H.Nor.M.S. *Svenner* close on the port beam of H.M.S. *Largs*. Another torpedo was seen approaching H.M.S. *Largs*; her engines were put emergency full astern, and the torpedo passed ... ahead of her... 539

⁶⁶ An accurate and comprehensive narrative of the action of the Eastern Task Force is being prepared at the British Admiralty. The following accounts of the adventures of the Eastern Task Force are extracts from a draft of this narrative.

The *Svenner* ... lifted out of the water ... broke her back and sank ... (most) ship's company was picked up. The *Warspite* ... (sunk a) torpedo boat... The *Mauritius* ... (claimed) one trawler sunk and one damaged ...

German coast batteries were ineffective. In "GOLD" the Longues battery shot at *Bulolo*, missed, and was then silenced. Two main batteries against Force J were neutralized and captured. 540 The *Warspite* was straddled -- no damage. By 0930 main German guns were silenced leaving difficult to find mobile batteries. Destroyers were on the assault flanks as B.Y.M.S. swept waters. "Hunts" (destroyers) closed the beaches to engage pre-arranged targets until landing craft touched ground producing more calls. 541 Landings were within 15 minutes of the scheduled times and except "UTAH" and at correct positions. At "SWORD" and "JUNO" the lights of mini-submarines X.23 and X.20, after 64 hours dived, were found. Leading ships were two miles out when "desultory and inaccurate" fire came in.

5. The Assaults - General Narrative. Assaults were per plans and tactical surprise was achieved everywhere except one (?). There was a strange immunity enjoyed by the Allied shipping lying in the anchorages from interference either by coastal batteries or air attack. 542 So that part of the operation was easier, but enemy troops "put up a most stubborn resistance." Weather was border line for "swimming" DD – tanks into shore; they arrived late and with varying success. At SWORD and UTAH, they were of great value; OMAHA's were knocked out. Obstacle clearance was the greater difficulty with little done in initial assaults. Major craft smashed through obstacles, L.C.A. threaded between them. By forenoon East beaches were secured except GOLD. Empty craft left JUNO about 1300. 544 545

a. Force G. GOLD Area. West British area- from Port en Bessin to the River de Provence in 4 sectors with the two eastern most - JIG and KING were initial assaults. Port en Bessin and others were later. H-hour was 55 minutes after OMAHA. Two assaults near Ver-sur-Mer 546 had accurate timing, but weather forced DD tanks to land at shore. Obstacle removals were first working unaided! Obstacles were heavy, little clearance was done as landing craft were damaged. Boat crews forgot Kedge anchors (dropped before touchdown to pull a boat off the beach when empty) causing craft to broach, fill with water and clutter the beaches. Le Hamel and La Riviere had enfilading fire and strong resistance. Not until 1600 with planes and destroyers bombing was it captured.

No. 47 R.M. Commando at 0930 lost all but two L.C.A.'s and radios but had Port en Bessin. Adm Vian cruised the coast observing from two miles out. At GOLDS he fired 40 rounds to assist. Forces were fully committed by noon,

b. Force J: JUNO. J attacked the British Empire middle near Courseulles with the 7th and 8th Canadian Infantry Brigades on Nan White and Red. 548 The assault was delayed too long; it hit beach obstacles as troops and craft were hurt. Yet, "the unexpectedly feeble effort of the enemy coast" offset light shore damage. 549 Submarine X.20 marked lanes for DD tanks which did not swim in since so little fire hit landing craft. The moderate to heavy swell were a problem as Mike Red and Nan Green centers had the heaviest defense. 550 Batteries at Béný-sur-Mere and Nan White were hit by two warships; three destroyers tackled Mike and Nan Green defenses. Four ships and seven LCG's with 4.7" guns fought from 1,000 yards as right and middle Mike and Nan Green were hit from 3000 yards. Left Nan

White and Red beaches had fire from five warships and seven L.C.G.'s as 8 L.C. Flak and S.P. Artillery boats hit strong points from 9000 yards. Rocket launching craft destroyed all targets and a low flying RAF Typhoon! Nine 9 LCA's swamped being towed. No. 48 Royal Marine Commandos LCI's were shredded by obstacles with heavy casualties. The delays in opening exits was from flooding and German tenacity. 551 Still, by 1400 hours the beach was ready for unloading.

c. **Force S- SWORD Area.** SWORD – was furthest east -- most vulnerable to attack from Havre batteries and light craft there. So, the east flank had powerful bombarding forces, but these threats were groundless. Opening stages were unbelievably unopposed. The enemy was obviously stunned by the sheer weight of support “we were meting out”. 553 DD tanks launched from 5,000 yards out -- so 9 of 40 were lost! But the tanks did knock out 18 guns that were hidden “defiladed” from a sea view. Just 23 DD tanks survived as most others flooded out in the beach battle. 554 L.C.T.'s came in on the flanks firing. They took heavy mortar and machine guns from 3,000 yards out – only one L.C.T. Hedgerow survived. 555 Considerable opposition was encountered. At 0750 Free French and A.O.4 Commandos had casualties from anti-tank guns and mortars. By 0906 two exits were secured on White Beach, but shelling congestion was a problem along with wrecked vehicles and soft sand. Landing craft had considerable damage.

The spirit in which these crews saving craft makes good reading. Many were caught by the tide and dried out but fired their guns while stuck on the beach. A large number of the were saved. 556 At 1535 Adm Talbot landed and was struck by Ju.88's planes as over 24 major craft were stranded by congestion as was blocked on the Ouistreham - Lion-sur-Mer beaches. Men were exhausted. Just before 2100 hours, 6 June, 300 troop-carrier planes and towed gliders with the 6th Airborne Division arrived at "SWORD" to land on the Orne River right bank 4 miles south of Ouistreham. At 2250 orders were given to smoke the anchorage for fear of a dusk air attack. “Most unfortunately this attack occurred immediately prior to the arrival ... (of the) last wave of airborne troops.” 557 Friendly fire shot down two transport planes. 558

6. **THE ASSAULT ENDS: THE SITUATION AT H PLUS 24 HOURS.** At the end of D-Day, five Allied spearheads were established with reinforcements landing all to brace against German counterattacks. The Allied situation was:

In the Sword the British 3rd was inland 4 miles, capturing Ouistreham and ... with the British 6th Airborne ... (at the) Benouville bridges. The 3rd had contact with the Canadian 3rd. 559 Canadian Force J was 5 miles inland with the British 50th right from Benny to Cruelly. In G sector the British 50th was inland 5 miles east of Bayeux (taken on) the 8th (D plus 2) ... and the 9th for connecting (with) U.S. V-Corps from OMAHA.

By D-Day night (U.S.) V-Corps advanced “scarcely a mile off the OMAHA Beach” ... (but) by mid-day on the 7th reached Bayeux-Carentan Road 5 miles inland. They had contact with 9th, with the VII Corps and the 10th (D+4) ... (and) contacted 560 VII Corps (4th ID) at UTAH to consolidate a 4000 yards long beachhead inland some 5 miles. The 4th had joined the 101st Airborne and also the 82nd Airborne near St. Mere Eglise. They captured the Douvre River crossing and stopped flooding of the Vire marshes. 561--

In the air the enemy failed in “disturbing: the invasion.” In the first day only 85 aircraft appeared, mostly mine- layers. Mines were swept, shipping moved closer inshore. Half-hearted (German) boat attacks were defeated.

Summarizing D-day, Admiral Ramsay said: “The outstanding fact ... was ... in every main essential the plan was carried out as written. Tactical surprise ... was achieved and greatly eased ... getting ashore ... except at OMAHA. Losses of ships and landing craft ... were much lower ... but damage was higher ... By the end of D-day immediate anxiety was felt on only one count - whether the weather would improve sufficiently quickly to enable the build-up to start as planned.” 562

H. POINTE DU HOE 2d RANGER BATTALION 6 June 1944; American Forces in Action Series, Small Unit Actions⁷ xyza



(Comment: These history details the two-day battle involving the 2nd Ranger Battalion at Pointe du Hoe – one of the worst struggles fought in the first few days of forging a French bridgehead. Today, Pointe du Hoe is well preserved, but the story is not fairly told. Yet, this retelling is different – brutally factual; both edifying and not edifying at one time. At the end one feels: “something is missing!” Yet, in retrospect is that not what war is all about? Yes, one side wins – but still “something is missing”. Did the Rangers win this two-day battle? What defined “winning”?)

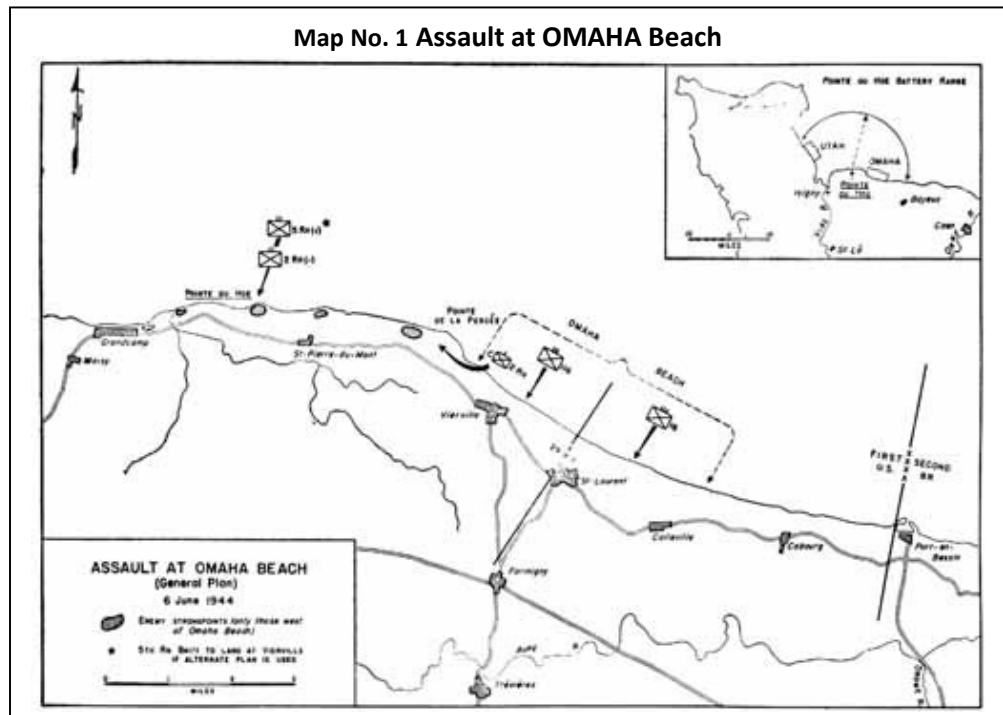
1. Introduction. On 6 June 1944, V Corp assaulted a 6,000-yard stretch ("Omaha" Beach) for a D-Day beachhead with the 1st and 29th ID. Their right (west) flank had an Army Ranger force with a mission to destroy six 155-mm French howitzers – four in open and two in casemented emplacements. It was a most dangerous battery with a 25,000-yard range (14 miles) threatening ships at UTAH and OMAHA since guns were on top of 75' – 100' high cliffs that made them impregnable from sea attack. **1** (**Map #1**). They were, thus, protected from a landward attack with a self-contained fortress, mined and wired with flanks covered by machine and antiaircraft guns (**Map # 2**). Manned by 210 soldiers 716th Infantry Division soldiers, largely non-Germans of limited fighting value. The 726th Regiment had Vierville to Grandcamp along widely spaced cliff positions ending one mile west and two miles east of Pointe du Hoe. The batteries were protected, but the 716th Division had 30 **2** miles of shore to cover. The author wrote “Some 10 to 12 hours away was the 352d Infantry Division in the St-Lô.” (Note: this

⁷ Located at: <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/smallunit/smallunit-fm.htm>. In small unit actions as part of the Army Military History main web site. The author's name was not located.

was in error. It reflects imperfect historical efforts post-WW2 as the German 352nd Division was fully engaged in defending the area.)

The Rangers were led by LTC James Rudder who attacked Pointe du Hoe with two battalions of 2nd Rangers under Rudder and 5th Rangers under LTC Schneider. Three companies (D, E, and F), 2nd IB would land to assault the cliffs while other Ranger forces (5th IB plus A and B Companies 2nd IR) would land after them. The Rangers were to attack south to cut the east-west coast highway and hold until the 116th IR

from OMAHA came west to Grandcamp and Maisy. In case of trouble, Ranger follow-up forces would land east at OMAHA to march west to Point du Hoe. C Co. would land at Omaha Beach to knock out the Pointe de la Percée strongpoint flanking OMAHA. The Pointe du Hoe battery was hit by air and naval bombardments



beginning 15 April to soften the area and harass attempts to enclose the guns in concrete. Air attacks were such as to not tip off the D-Day plans. It was hit 22 May, 4 June and D-Day eve. On June the guns were prime targets for the Texas battleship's big guns. At H-20 minutes (0610), 18 Ninth AAF medium bombers made a last strike at 0630, the 2d Rangers, led by Col Rudder, were to assault the cliffs with 225 men.

2. Assault Plans. The three companies selected had intensive training with special equipment. Main reliance was ropes shot over cliff edges by rockets and extension ladders in British landing craft (LCA's) with trained British crews. Ten LCA's could haul three small Ranger companies at 21-22 men/boat each with bow, center and stern rocket mounts to fire: 1) ropes; 2) ropes with foot - hand holds; and 3) rope ladders with 2' rungs. The rockets had grapnels to dig in and anchor. Then were extension ladders: 1) 112 feet of tubular-steel in 16-foot lengths. A man would climb the first 16'; attach the next 16'; and on to the top. Finally, four DUKW's had 100' fireman's ladder with machine guns. 4

Speed was essential as the boat force planned short, "shock action". Each had D-bar rations, two grenades, a weapon and some had pistols or carbines. Heavy weapons were just four BAR's and two light mortars, 10 thermite grenades for each company. Two supply boats (LCA's) would arrive with

packs, rations, ammunition, mortars, demolitions, etc. E and F Companies would scale the east side, D the west (**Map No. 2**). On top each team had objectives to then head south to capture the main east-west road between OMAHA and UTAH and hold for OMAHA forces -- optimistically "noon on D-Day" when all 8 Ranger companies had landed. A Naval Shore Fire Control Party (12 men) and a forward observer of the 58th Armored FAB were in E Company craft.

3. The Landing. D-Day weather was unfavorable, Rangers had navigation and landing errors, LCA's flat bow was not seaworthy so eight miles out LCA 860 swamped in only 4-foot waves -- then a supply LCA sank -- with one survivor **5 6** as many jettisoned packs and supplies along with "helmet bailing". Then wet ropes were much heavier to fire upward onto cliffs. Nine LCA's were in line, but the guide was three miles east for a 30-minute delay that impacted every future event for two days. The main Ranger force landed at OMAHA to await the Ranger success signal. If not given by 0700, Col Schneider's force would detour to Vierville beach. The 5th Rangers with A and B Companies of the 2nd landed at 0745 at OMAHA to secure that beach to then fight 8 miles cross-country to reach Col Rudder's three companies west.

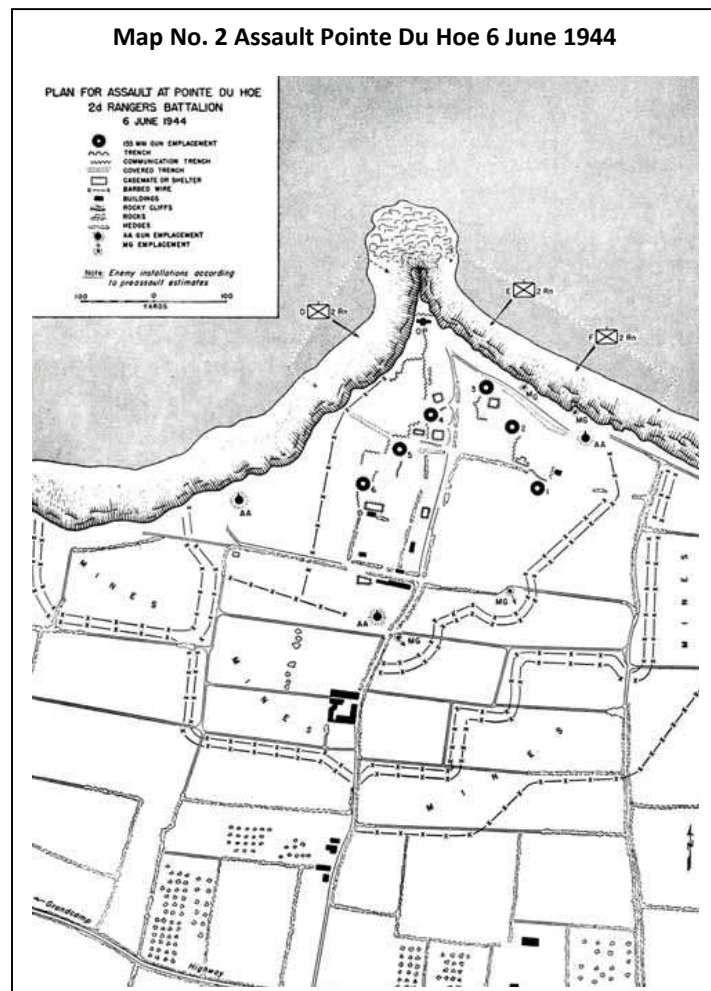
Second, Rudder's flotilla navigational error had them steering west to Pointe du Hoe parallel to the Germans to "run the gauntlet of fire" for three miles. A DUKW was sunk with 9 men lost or wounded. Now the landing at the Pointe changed since craft came from the east, not north. D Co. could no longer attack the west side of the cliffs for a synchronized attack. All nine came in together on the east side (**Map No. 3**). Of course, naval gun fire intended to keep German heads down lifted 40 minutes before the Rangers landed to need protection. **7** German fire greeted the craft, but not artillery. At 0710 the first craft landed with radio silence broken to notify Col Schneider at Vierville. Interestingly, the British destroyer *Talybont* quickly saw the errors in process, since the Battleship *Texas* was bombarding the Point, but the Rangers were headed eastward! Perhaps the lack of navy shells landing to their bow should have alerted Rudder's fleet. (No one comments upon the fact that Col Rudder steered a wrong course!) So *Talybont* closed range for 15 minutes (0645-0700) to rake German batteries with 4-inch and 2-pounder shells. Meantime, the U.S. destroyer *Satterlee*, 2,500 yards from Pointe du Hoe, could see enemy troops assembling on the cliff, and opened with main battery and machine-gun fire. **8**

4. The Cliff Assault. The nine LCA's touched down over 500 yards east as each tackled the escalade and enemy. The 30-yard strip of sand beach was obliterated with bomb craters making DUKW's useless and kept craft from getting close. But bombardment made huge rock piles that made ladders taller! **9** Although exposed to fire from cliffs above, once the men cleared the rock piles to the base, they had protection in crevices and folds. The naval support fire came to their aid via the destroyer *Satterlee* who had watched and used **10** its 5-inch guns and 40-mm machine guns with "fire (that) was decisive in enabling the Rangers to get up the cliff," but he saw men cut down at the base of the cliff (which did not happen) and only 4 of 120 soldiers interviewed even recalled the *Satterlee*'s presence. One was Col Rudder who "had living hell scared out of him" by explosions that brought down a cliff just over his head. The author concludes: "The probability is that the destroyer's fire on the cliff top, at the moment when the Rangers were starting their assault, did a great deal to prevent effective enemy opposition at the decisive moment." For all of the issues, with just 15 casualties, in 10 minutes the Rangers were on top. The story continues on a boat team basis right to left as they landed.

LCA 861. Carrying Company E (1st Lt. Lapres, Jr.) hit 25 yards from the bottom of the cliff with 3 or 4 Germans shooting, but stern rangers drove them off. Rocket ropes fell short. They were so wet some ropes only 50% discharged from the box. German "potato-masher" grenades caused two casualties. Hand-rockets with ropes and grappling hooks were carried out, fired and caught. Pfc. Harry W. Roberts started up the 80-degree angle handline, bracing to have his rope cut. He made it up in 40 seconds, but then he was marooned alone. A third rope came up so Roberts lay on it **11** until he had five up. The six Rangers went for their objective 10 minutes after touchdown. A huge explosion buried men on the bottom, but soon five more were on top.

LCA 862. This craft with 15 Rangers and NSFC personnel, landed 100 yards left and had no trouble, but were hit by machine-guns with one killed, three wounded. A 1st Lt Leagans, Tech. 5 Aguzzi, and S/Sgt. Cleaves with two others were up and a left with a 5-man team.

LCA 888. Col Rudder's craft, first to the beach, had 15 Co E men and 6 headquarters personnel. A few enemy troops were seen on the cliff edge, but when Sgt. Dominick B. Boggetto shot one German off the edge with a BAR, the others disappeared. The Rangers had trouble in getting through **12-13** beach craters; neck deep water; and slick clay bottom. A few grenades came over the cliff without causing casualties. Rockets were fired 35 yards from the cliff base. No wet ropes reached the top. Two Rangers free-climbed without ropes but were stopped by slippery clay that refused knife-holds. Bombs and shells



made a huge mound of wet clay from the cliff top, so a 16' extension ladder was put on top; a Ranger climbed, cut a foothold, stood to hold the ladder for a second man to climb 16' feet. The top man repeated this and Tech. 5 Putzek reached the edge. Then lying flat with the ladder that he held another climbed up.

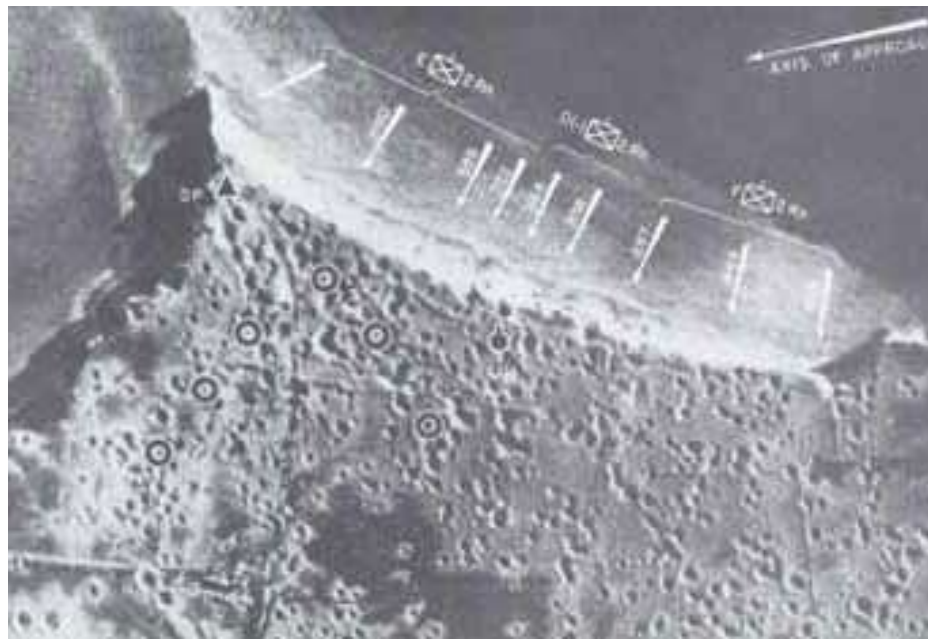
From there it was easy. As men moved up and out, they found plenty of bomb craters and no enemy. In 15 minutes, all of E Co. men from LCA 888 were ready to move. Col Rudder and HQ men stayed in a shallow cave. By 0725, 1st Lt. James W. Eikner had his signal equipment working to announce Rudder's force landed and code for "men up the cliff".

LCA 722. Twenty yards left LCA 722 landed with Co. E Rangers, 5 headquarters men, a *Stars and Stripes* photographer, and Commando officer who had trained the Rangers. Touchdown was made the edge of a crater, and the men could not avoid it in debarking. Enemy grenades were ineffectual. The craters and debris gave cover as craft came in. The only casualty was Pfc. John J. Sillman, wounded three times and then twice on the beach, but destined to survive. A good deal of equipment came, including the SCR 284 radios, two pigeons, a 60-mm mortar with ammunition, and some demolitions. All were ashore, though it took maneuvering to avoid the deep water in the crater. Tech. 4 C. S. Parker and two other communications men hefted the big radio set on a pack board and managed to get it in and working before the first climbers from 722 reached the top.

The rockets were fired just before landing. One ladder and a plain rope were up and held. The ropes were comparatively dry. The single rope lay in a slight crevice, but the ladder came down on **14** an overhang exposed to the flanking fire - hard to climb. Tech. 5 Edward P. Smith tried the plain rope to easily "walk it up." On top he saw a group of Germans to his right throwing grenades over the cliff. Sgt. Hayward A. Robey joined Smith with a BAR. Robey lay in a shallow niche at the cliff edge and sprayed the enemy 40 or 50 rounds. Three dropped; the rest disappeared. Pfc. Frank H. Peterson, lightly wounded, joined and three Rangers went off on their mission without waiting more climbers.

The mortar section in this boat team remained below, according to plan, with the purpose of setting up their 60-mm on the beach to deliver supporting fires. But the beach was too exposed. Time was consumed in getting ammunition. About 0745 the mortar team went on top without having yet fired.

Map No. 3 Assault Landing Pointe du Hoe



LCA 668. D Co was to land on the west but ended center left of E Co. The LCA grounded off the beach on boulders as the men swam 20 feet. The 1st Sgt Lomell was wounded swimming in the rope and rocket launch. Surprisingly, three ropes caught on the ledge but in effect they had two plain ropes and a toggle. Sgt Lomell called for a ladder to find they could reach the top with one more 20" extension. Two men had got up and the rest quickly used the ladder. Soon, 12 men were up fighting.

LCA 858. Shipping water, the LCA made it late. The men were all dunked over their heads but lost just one bazooka and then three were wounded by machine guns. Only one hand line reached the cliff top. **15** The rest essentially free-climbed the cliff in a gentler area in 15 minutes. Here too men became split and the boat as a "team" was gone.

LCA 887. Company D's center landing pushed F Co east. They were not bothered by water, guns, or equipment but had two wounded. LT Arman decided the ropes and firing gear had to be hauled closer, a ten- minute chore. Tech/Sgt. Cripps had to hand fire all four, but ropes worked and up they went when two expert climbers tried free and had failed.

LCA 884. It was a German target that fired back landing to in a deep shell hole for **16** three were wounded. The rockets got 4 ropes up and over the cliff – all four full exposed to German fire. They muddled up their plain ropes and Pvt. Anderson did not get up free climbing. Lt Hill finally used other ladders.

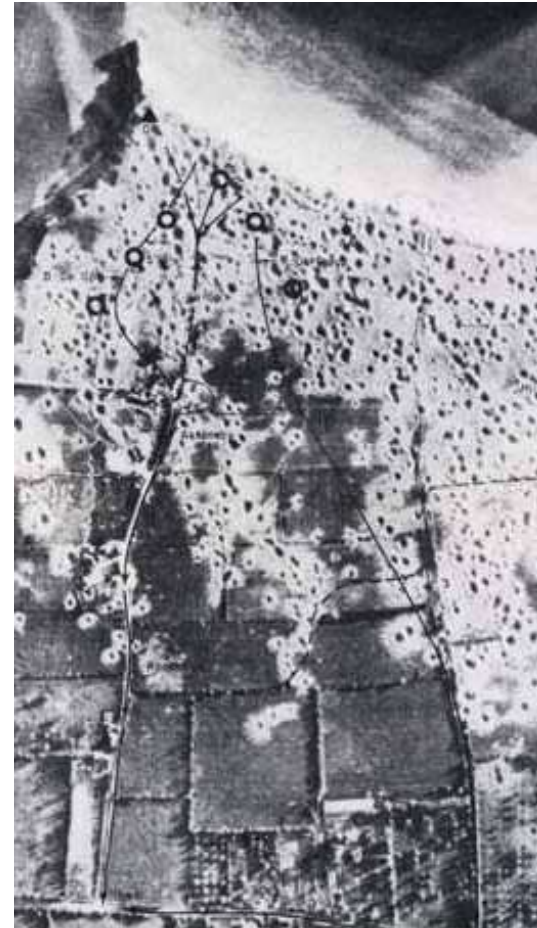
LCA 883. The last was farthest out -luckiest protected by a cliff "jut". All six rockets landed ropes. their climb just like it was rehearsed. A beat Lt. Wintz still got his men moving just fine. **17**

5. Summary. The historian wrote the challenge of getting inland was surmounted.

"Enemy resistance ... had been weak and ineffective except ... from the machinegun position just east of Pointe du Hoe. The equipment and training ... met the test ... hand-projectors and extension ladders had been useful ...

The assault met unforeseen circumstances ... (that) were not always ... (a) disadvantage ... Craters ... gave some cover ... Damage done to the cliff ... by bombardment ... helped ... (as) debris ... gave cover ... (and) reduced the height ... The top of the cliff was much cut back ... reducing the ... sheer slope and providing cover ... at the top.

Map No. 4-Advance to Highway (2 Black Arrows)



... (They went) ahead with speed, determination, and resourcefulness, ready to improvise **18** ... within 30 minutes ... (the) attacking force was on top except for casualties ... (30 to 40 Rangers out of about 190).

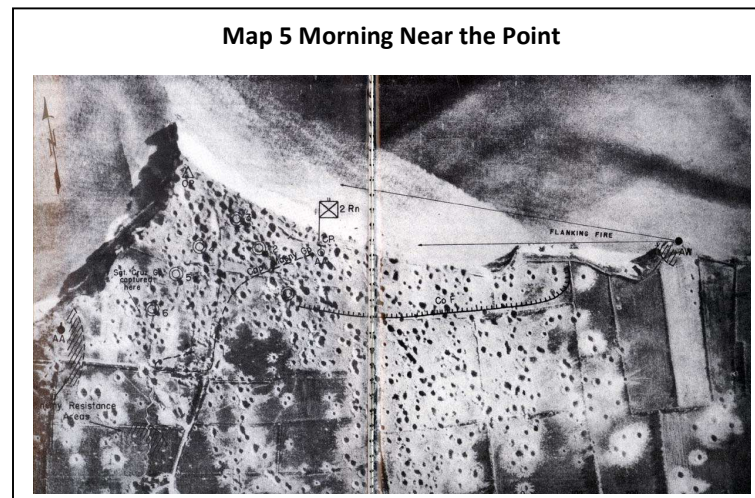
6. Capture of the Point. Omaha Beach forces were ticked at no evidence of Navy bombardment. “No such complaint could be made by the 2d Rangers at Pointe du Hoe” who found a “bewildering wasteland of ground literally torn to pieces by bombs and heavy naval shells. Expected landmarks were gone ...” Being lost was a major danger. **19-20**

A "confused" nature soon arose, but from unexpected events ... Men gained the ledge and “took off” without even waiting for the rest ... They did not organize ... (but went) straight to the tasks. As later climbers reached the top ... men just left! The author estimates at least 20 parties took off, but ... **no one can retrace where everyone was.** Yet ... the attack followed a definite plan ... action without clear pattern in detail, but with very clearly defined results.”



First were gun emplacements and ... OP at the end of the Point. Co E had the OP and No. 3 ... Co D west guns (4, 5, and 6); Co F guns 1 and 2 and cliff edge ... Then they would assemble south of the fortified area while D, F and E hit the coast highway south to block German moves west to east to OMAHA Beach ... Deviations were a given ... The plan used small “pick-up groups” ... At first most Rangers saw no Germans! **21** ... (Then) **no guns! The big 155-mm long artillery were gone!** ... (Map No. 4).

... Point LCA 861 was 20 feet from a massive, undamaged concrete OP. S/Sgt. Charles Denbo and Pvt Roberts crawled toward ... (it) took fire to throw four grenades at the slits -- three went in. The machine gun stopped ... Lt. Lapres, Sgt. Yardley, Pfc. Bell, and Tech/Sgt Gunther fired a bazooka ... (and) raced to the other side ... “they found corporal Aguzzi, watching the main entrance ...” **22**



The story continues over the next day as multiple men on different missions showed up, but three men guarded command complex, two of whom did not know the other was there. After one day of watching and bombardment the three sentries suddenly had 8 Germans emerge to surrender. **23** (Comment: In the end, the Point was not a major threat– no command; no guns! Yet, evidence grew Germans were there as anti-aircraft guns west fired with sniping near gun No. 6 which was a major threat to Rangers!) Company D’s “story is known only from the one survivor ...” Pfc Cruz guarded the concreted German CP meeting TSgt Mains and Spleen whose nine men planned to attack an anti-aircraft gun. A German trick

raised a helmet from a hole to draw U.S. fire for German artillery to pummel. Mains and Spleen's group "took the bait" to be e pummeled. "Ten Rangers had simply disappeared ... the abandoned weapons as the only indication of their 24 25 fate ..." Cruz's report was notice to Col Rudder of "... a source of serious difficulty for the next two days."

7. Advance to the Highway. German Point resistance had a "revival" unseen by Rangers. Disparate enemy grouped on the axis of the north-south exit road from the Point to the highway per **Map No. 4**. In time, small groups of Co E (LCA's 888) and Co D (LCA 858) joined for about 30 men. They struck off down the exit road searching out German artillery and small arms on fire to the left front to fast incur 15 killed and wounded, 26 but their size increased. They aimed at farm buildings halfway to the east-west highway. U.S. ships were as men two-at-a-time crossed 40 open yards to another trench. 27 A Ranger bayoneted himself diving into a trench on a buddy's rifle. Three Germans fled as Rangers silenced machine-gun fire – the last resistance the Lapres' advance party had before the east-west blacktop road their objective at 0815.

Most of F Co. stayed near the Point to defend the east flank. A party from LCA 887 (Lt Arman and Sgt Petty) had walked through a known mined area so some speculated the navy shells destroyed the fields. The second group also saw no Germans as the 12 men worked crater to crater finding Sgt Lang with three E Co. men. Lt. Arman led one group down land -- Petty scouted toward a Chateau -- as all returned to the highway to go west to UTAH. Fire at Au Guay was quelled dispatched with two enemy. "Beside the two main groups ... (described) smaller parties reached the same objective ... One ... (is) followed in detail ... illustrating other aspects of a "confused" action ... (as) furnished by Private Anderson."

Exit Road Ruins - Enemy Resistance Begins



Pvt Anderson landed in LCA 884 to climbing up at the extreme left where three men set off to capture a German cliff emplacement on the east raking the landing beach not knowing that 883 men did the same (they never saw them). Along the cliff top hedgerow, they located the guns. Anderson, Pfc Bacho and S/Sgt Fulton went south to the blacktop to meet Lt Hill with 884 Rangers, but no signs of Germans beyond sniper fire. At the first hedgerow they turned west, lost touch and joined Lt Arman near the highway.

Lt Hill, however, worked west seeking a machine-gun. They crawled through a stubble wheat field after receiving fire from Pointe du Hoe not finding the gun until 25 feet from the exit road. 29 "Hill stood up ... and ... shouted, "You couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle!" It drew German fire, Hill dropped back as Anderson tossed him a grenade which he tossed to stop the machine-gun!"

A few minutes later, Lt Lapres arrived with E Co and Four Co F men to advance on the exit road, one row to the left of Lapres. Fifty rangers would halt Germans on the coast highway to await 116th IR and 5th Rangers, so thy set defenses (**Map No. 7**). The highway south side had narrow fields leading to an east-west hedgerow above orchards with fox holes dug in. E and F took four fields. An outpost went to watch a farther valley. A dugout became Lts' Arman, Lapres and Leagans HQ. D Co had 20 men covering

west on both roadsides with a BAR, 6 riflemen and grenade launcher between the Rangers and Grandcamp. The rest D Co watched north and south. Seaward fields were likely mined easing a defense. Still unclear were the missing 155-mm guns from Pointe-du-Hoe. They existed -- key to the entire operation at the Pointe, but where were they?

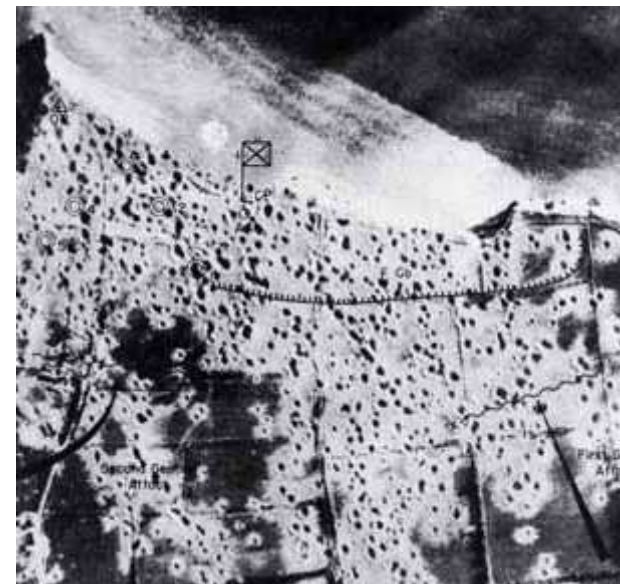
They had not been found ... About 0900, a two-man patrol from D went down the double-hedgerowed lane 250 yards out. **Sgt Lomell and S/Sgt Kuhn found camouflaged guns with five of the enemy 155's missing from the Point. They could hit Utah or Omaha Beach.** 30 (There were) no recent firing and no Germans ... All ... were destroyed with thermite grenades and sights bashed. 31 32-33. A runner went to the Point bearing word that the missing guns ... were found ... Why they were undefended and unused is still a mystery ... (The Germans never used the most dangerous battery near the assault beaches ...

There were two groups: 1) those at the east-west highway and 2) those who stayed on the fortified Point. This is the story of the latter and LT Wintz. Two of three F Co. teams hit resistance near the cliffs east (**Map No. 5**). LCA's 883 and 884 beached there. LT Wintz (883) sent six men into hedgerows with "no firing" orders. LCA 884 came up as Wintz sought his Captain who was east of the Point north of shelled fields in hedgerows, with occasional artillery, sniping and an unlocated German automatic 34 weapons -- Wintz F Co. objectives with five men. Wintz was the third attempt at the guns along with 1st Sgt Frederick leading S/Sgt Youso and Pfc Kiihnl. They trailed an east-west hedgerow one field inland when Youso was shot and crawled 75 yards to Wintz. Wintz's force of five were spotted and ordered back as Capt Masny had Wintz then neutralize machine guns at the point. 35 Wintz began a second cliff edge effort (a fourth attempt to outflank the machine gun). Col Rudder stopped to let

... the Navy to have a go. Wintz's men observed (and enjoyed) ... A destroyer pulled close and with seven salvos blew the cliff into the sea ending that problem from the east cliff. It was between 1100 to 1200 hours when this "worst difficulty on the east flank" was cured. It "illustrated the difficulties of coordinating action among the scattered Ranger parties." The troops of LCA's 883 and 884 slated for the highway, spent their time at the Point in a right-angle hedgerow Lt. Wintz had adopted at the start. "And so ends that lesson ...!"

8. Morning at the Point: The CP Group. Col Rudder went up the cliff at 0745 to his CP in a crater. His forces were off, but he had problems as Germans returning 36 37 for sniping. Not numerous, yet calm was interrupted by German anti-aircraft fire 300 yards west. Capt Masny, F Co., formed the perimeter defense of the HQ plus an *ad hoc* seek and destroy force of eight men. Lt Lapes, LCA 722, set up a mortar firing point that had gone inland west of the exit road on the lane leading to the German strongpoint. They received fire from ahead and the left and a fire fight began with a mortar

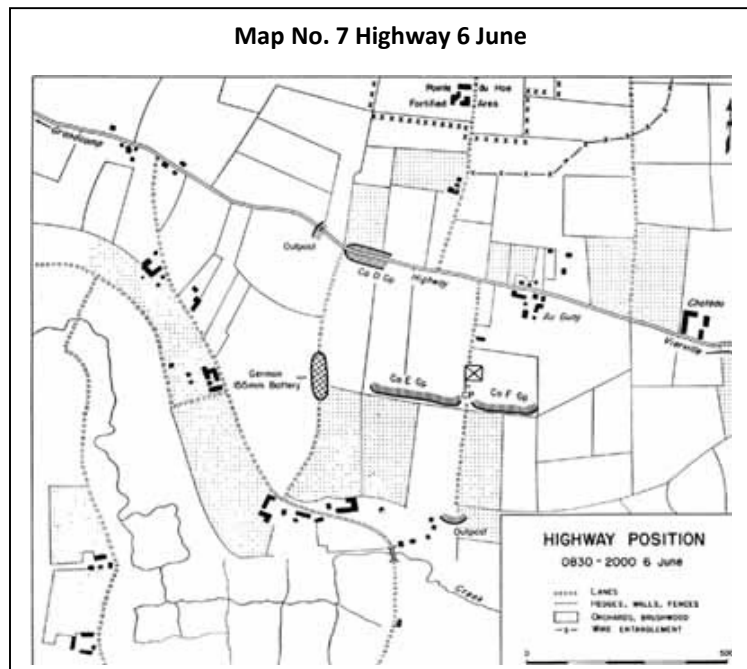
Map No. 6 Two (Faint) Arrows Show German Attacks



to the rear. A white flag appeared. Two Rangers **38** right near gun position No. 6 stood up; Masny's yell did not save them from the machine-guns. The fight resumed as German artillery "from somewhere inland" joined. Capt Masny called it: "the prettiest fire I ever saw." Four men died in the attack as a wounded Masny shouted: "Withdraw! Every man for himself!". Two more fell to snipers, ammunition was lost, the mortar abandoned in the last attempt to capture the German anti-aircraft emplacement. It cost 15 to 20 casualties. Even *Satterlee* had futile efforts – it "was just too far from the edge of the cliff to be blasted off ... (the cliff)".

At 0728 with *Satterlee* in support naval fire began. When the CP went to the cliff top, the radio drew German fire. Lt. Eikner began using Navy signal lamps that day. Later Navy fire control parties landed to make request to the SCR 536 radio on the point relaying to the ships. Targets included: inland assembly areas, road junctions, strongpoints and anti-aircraft to the west. By 1723 *Satterlee* spent 70% of its ammo with 164 salvos. Barton and Thompson relieved *Satterlee*.

There was "little success" contacting 5th Rangers or the 29th ID. The author suggests both Lt. Eikner, and Col Rudder were trapped **39 40** because they did not provide "authentication". So, "Col Rudder thus was in complete ignorance of the progress of the great assault at Omaha Beach, for the naval vessels ... did not send it to the Point." Between noon and 1300 Col Rudder messaged by all means: SCR 300, SCR 284 (through the *Satterlee*), and pigeon with:



"Located Pointe du Hoc—mission accomplished—need ammunition and reinforcements—many casualties." At 1500 the 116th replied and then a brief message "from the 1st Division commander, General Huebner: No reinforcements available." "The Rangers' noon message was the only word received from Pointe du Hoc on D Day by higher headquarters ... (causing) considerable anxiety as to the Rangers' situation."

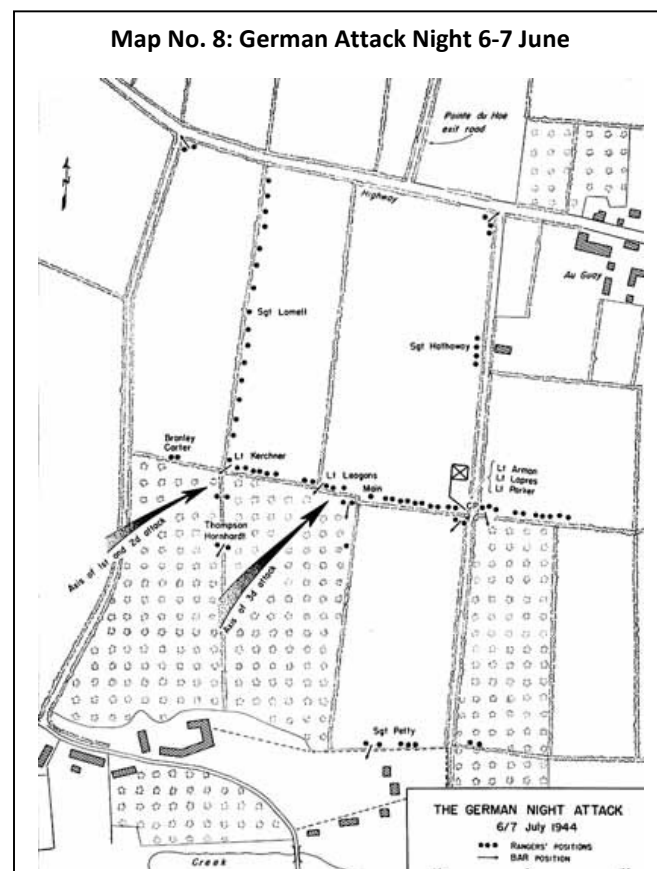
(Comment: One need realize how "primitive" radios were in 1944. The proximity fuze for artillery was such "big deal" because it involved a 1) miniature radio transmitter, that 2) withstood the shock of riding on the tip of an artillery shell! In the U.S. radios (there were no TV's) were the size of suitcases and required 30 seconds to "warm up" before any sound was heard).

The medical section had a busy morning with Capt. Block and five enlisted. Block had an 81-mm mortar shell case for supplies. He **42** left one man for wounded Rangers on the beach until aid men and British LTC Trevor got supplies and wounded up on extension ladders. An attempt to evacuate wounded failed. Block left seriously wounded Rangers overnight on the beach, in a cave.

9. Afternoon Counterattacks. There were two German attacks on Lt Wintz's force from south and west (**Map No. 6**). The first was over fields from St-Pierre-du-Mont of riflemen in craters with a machine-gun. A hedgerow one field south had a one-hour fire fight as Co F had a mortar (little ammunition), no BAR's and navy could not assist. The enemy finally quit. At 1600 a more dangerous attack the right of Company F's thin line as Germans were close before discovery. S/Sgt Stein and Pfc. Manning saw a dozen as S/Sgt Elder with a mortar spotted Germans in craters. Sgt Stein's BAR yards drove some back. A wounded Ranger said mortars stopped them. **43** The German line extended went beyond F Company flank, but eight riflemen came over. Sgt Elder's mortar drove the enemy back and the Germans were unable to set up again as Elder fired 75 mortar rounds. A night patrol found no enemy.

F Co (LCA's 883 and 884) lost 15 of 40 men the first day. In the afternoon, Hill and Pvt Bacho went back to the CP where 300 yards away they found a German machine gun. Two attacked 12 hand grenades that were duds and stirred a "hornet's nest". Hill was shot through the chest. Bacho threw **44** him grenades but a bullet in Bacho's helmet let him "play dead". The Germans left. Bacho crawled to a crater; to make the Point at dark.

10. The Advance Group During D Day. By noon 60 Rangers forward near the road at one-half mile from the edge. (**Map No. 7**). Vigorous patrols (6 to 7 men) were the activity, but found no strong German forces. A few who tried to evade back were killed or captured. Men investigated when someone yelled "Kamerad" from a ditch as three Germans came out. Shots into a hedge produced two more POW's as 40 were taken to the CP. Sgt Petty's men snared enemy that wandered into range on roads to Grandcamp ostensibly fleeing OMAHA. **45** Petty shot 30 enemy who variously surrendered. Larger German groups were south and southwest who made little effort to counterattack. At 1600 Sgt. Lomell glanced over a stone wall spotting 50 Germans in an orchard heading to the Point. **46** He prayed his scattered men would not fire upon the larger group. The Germans just marched on through. Casualties were light. The U.S. Navy was a greater threat! **47** All trips back to Rudder's HQ risked German snipers who were not silenced.



About 2100 hours (two hours before dark), A Co, 5th Ranger Battalion arrived from OMAHA led by 1st Lt. Charles Parker, Jr. and their **"fight from Omaha Beach to the Point is one of the sagas of D Day."** Parker's platoon had walked inland to the Vierville assembly area which was empty. A miffed Lt. Parker assumed the others already left to set out west. After two hot firefights he made St-Pierre-du-Mont to walk into 2d Ranger highway positions to learn his own 5th Rangers had not yet arrived. So, Parker's men joined the forward highway group.

11. The German Night Attack: First Phase. _ With no word from OMAHA, Col Rudder had a tough decision since one-third of his 200 men were casualties with ammunition low; Germans held favorable antiair positions west; were in force east; communications with his highway group was precarious; and one-half of the Rangers liable to be **48 49 50** cut off. British Commando Col Trevor remarked "never have I been so convinced ... as that I will be either a prisoner of war or a casualty by morning." Rudder left his highway force on the Vierville road to bet the entire 5th Rangers "were probably just behind them." **He ruled blocking the main highway was the greatest task.** But second was finding the blasted German 155-mm guns. Lt Lapres left had to hold highway positions. (**Map No. 8**). Germans were south and his 85-man force faced them. Co D men drew in as the main Ranger position was a hedgerow south from the highway to E Co fox holes. Lt Kirchner and a BAR man had the angle joint of E and D Co's. Sgt Lomell had the center of D's thin 300 yards long line. E's 30 men held the hedge line east toward the CP. Six 5th Rangers were south of the corner. **Map 8. 51**

The main Ranger line was a right angle southwest, 300 yards long on two fields. The east had three men with a BAR near the highway with six 5th Rangers on a lane. The 5th Ranger's 23 men were scattered – not a tactical unit as the 5th Lt Parker and Lt. Zelepsy, were at the main CP. Ranger command had four officers of four companies. D, E, and F parties cooperated via their four Lieutenants: Kirchner (D), Leagans and Lapres (E), and Arman (F). Arman was senior and seems to have made decisions. The decision to shorten and tighten defenses came after seeing Germans in some strength who worried over lack of ammunition, **52** especially BAR. Grenades were low, but they had "potato-mashers" and a few German guns. E and D had six Tommy, E three German machine guns. They ate **53** nothing except D-bars.

Wrecked Emplacements June 1944



Officers were apprehensive. At the hill bottom, a country road paralleled their lines. It could not be watched at night and Lt Kirchner saw German activity there at dusk. About 2330 hours men at the D-E corner heard German whistles and shouts. Machine gun tracers were right, 25 yards from D Co's angle. South were more 50 yards from E's line. Neither saw nor heard Germans. E's men at the angle fired the BAR. Carty and Branley went to the corner; Carty was killed. Branley was wounded and hid. At Co E's outpost, Thompson saw silhouettes to fire point-blank to get three enemy. Others threw grenades and cut Thompson's face.

Then an immense sheet of flame erupted as something set off the ammo dump -- outlining the Germans. **54** Night fighting continued. Thompson and Hornhardt thought all pulled back (they had not) and went north to the Co D hedgerow passing but not seeing, others in their holes under hedgerow. Lt Kerchner and Sgt Fate were there as firing began near Kerchner's angle. Kerchner wanted to collect his D platoon, then circle around to hit the Germans in the flank. Kerchner called his men – only two joined. That plan was done and weakened the angle as the Germans hit. Two 5th Ranger men said Lt Arman

ordered them to withdraw. No one knew at Lt Arman's CP. No one strengthened the depleted corner or checked it.

The East had no firing as first platoon of E (Lt Lapres) nor the F Co were involved. Near the creek Sgt Petty's men could not locate the fire. Petty heard "clinking" west. A machine gun bounced bullets off Petty's wall. **55** Petty went up the slope to the CP as he and a BAR man Dix reinforced the CP. Lt Arman was there, but knew no details of Co E or D. For Co F he stayed put.

12. Night Attack: Second Phase. At 0100 the enemy launched stronger attacks from south and southwest to the right of Co E, 50 yards with whistles and shouts. Their fire was high, but beyond this, survivors' recollections are confused. Lt Arman, at the CP saw two attack stages: intense but wild; whistles, shouts, and an assault. The main attack was at the angle; nobody knew what happened. Tech. 5 Burnett was about 25 yards east. Branley (wounded) crawled 30 yards north to hear **56** Tech 5 Stecki's BAR fire; grenades exploded; the BAR fired; more grenades and Germans spoke.

Burnett changed his view to insist the BAR man (Stecki) was still shooting after the second attack. Lt. Zelepsky (5th Ranger officer) heard that Germans broke the Ranger lines. CP men thought the angle lost. Lt Arman concurred. Evidence suggested Germans had captured the angle holding two soldiers, but nobody knew, and just 25 yards east were Burnett and Sgt Rupinski -- who did not check. The CP thought Co D's-hedgerow was overrun but did not get word of their proposed plan to any Rangers. The 5th Ranger platoon's Parker and Zelepsky do not recall hearing of it.

13. Night Attack: Finale. The third German attack was about 0300 hours with whistles and roll calling, heavy fire with machine and burp guns, but was further east in the wheatfield south of the CP. A CP officer felt machine-gun fire came from inside Rangers' positions (this fits the theory the Germans had the angle earlier). It was a great deal but indirect, which **57** confused defenders. Yet, the west half of Company E's line was overrun, and little is known from the survivors. The main penetration was in the middle of E's hedgerow trying to roll up the Ranger positions to the angle. Wounded Pfc. Main heard Germans close in the wheat just beyond the hedgerow who attacked to his right; Crook's BAR went silent. Main heard Germans talking and crawled under vines and briars to hear S/Sgt. Simmons surrender.

Burnett, 25 yards east, confirmed this decisive action. Near Burnett the Germans were close as their automatic fire ripped the hedgerow. Rangers fought back with German grenades. He thought the fight lasted an hour (it was only minutes). Sgt Boggetto's BAR stopped. German fire swept the Ranger side. Burnett and the man next to him were wounded. He heard Sgt Rupinski arguing whether to fight or not, and then shout "Kamerad." The Germans took survivors, including Burnett and 20 Ranger POWs. Lt Leagans was dead.

Relief D+2 – U.S. Flag to Stop U.S. Tanks from Shooting



From the varied, sometimes irreconcilable stories, one gets a fair reflection of the confusion. Arman reports that after opening fire he, Lapres, and 5th Ranger officers 58 went to withdraw. He had no idea if Leagans (D Co.) knew. Burnett escaped by killing a guard. With the French Underground help, he reached Rouen in August. Per Lt Zelepsky (5th Rangers), men reported the Germans broke into E's position and a hasty decision to withdraw. Sgt Lare remembered a man reporting D Co wiped out. Smith and Tech. 5 Dunlap reported no Rangers left between them and the CP. Some 5th Ranger men with E Co. said 2nd Rangers "pulled out and left them there."

There were new Rangers with Sgt Petty and his BAR, S/Sgt Dix with a German machine gun and F Co riflemen. A German party came east. Dix gave point blank to fire with the German machine gun. It jammed. Dix heard Petty yell "Down!" as he used the BAR on Germans. Sgt Robey's BAR joined to halt the attack near the CP. There was no assault.

(Comment: To be clear, this was a defeat as Rangers fell back to the edge with the author attempting to discern why a U.S. force was "wiped out".)

But German fire from south and west led to hasty measures. Some Rangers were left. Others went to the point. Petty and Robey brought up the rear. Once begun, it was fast. S/Sgt Hathaway, 5th Rangers found out when men ran by northward. He stuck his head through the hedgerow to shout "Hey! What's up? Where are you going?" He got a rifle in his face and demand for the password. Hathaway barely remembered. Told 59 "Get out quick to the Point!" he went north. "There could be no question of bringing back the prisoners." *(We do not know what happened to them).* But at the blacktop, there was no sign of a German pursuit.



A hasty check showed most of Co F present, not all of E, and none from D. Lt Arman figured the Germans infiltrated. So, the force returned via three different routes, according to no known plans. 60 All told, 50 men returned to the Point around 0400 to wait for daylight. Col Rudder was told that the rest of the force was destroyed. "Neutralized" was the likely word. All Co E Rangers from Main's foxhole to the angle had been killed or captured. But from about 30 yards north of the angle and on to the highway, the rest of D's contingent (some 12 men) stayed in positions in those 250 yards of hedgerow. They did not hear of withdrawal but could not move with Germans so close. The 12 men stayed in the deep drainage ditch under heavy vegetation hoping they were not spotted. 61

On the east-west hedgerow three Rangers were left hiding. Main was one. Tech 5 Theobald was guarding prisoners. He went to a hedgerow near Main "to help out." He heard German voices and hid. Pfc. Wadsworth was 75 yards away to hide under a tangle of briars. Both were trapped for two days.

Wadsworth was spotted next morning. Theobold ran to hide again the next night, but early D+2 firing was close --- it was the 116th IR. **62** Moving south he was captured. Main spent D+1 watching German patrols and a machine gun near him. At night he crawled out, threw a grenade at the machine gun, and "lit out for the Point".

Co D men lay under hedgerows all day. Navy guns were their main danger. Then came four Shermans on the highway to Grandcamp. They did not stop. U.S. tanks came and went. Germans reappeared at dusk with machine-guns as isolated Ranges spent another night waiting to be freed next morning by the 116th IR. On D+1 Col Rudder's had 90 men able to bear arms on a few acres. He expected heavy German artillery and enemy attack. With strong naval fire, they held that day with craft landing food, ammunition, and men. At night they contacted relief patrols at St-Pierre-du-Mont. Relief came next morning, D+2. **63**

**Leaving the Point D+2 Col Rudder (Arrow)
Wounded Three Times Remained**



I. CHAPTER 15: The Landings on OMAHA and UTAH: The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany; Extracts from Army Technical Services Histories. xyza

(Comment: A topic ignored were the combined efforts of Army and Navy engineers to develop teams and techniques to blow gaps through the mine tipped wooden stakes that covered OMAHA Beach. A similar effort occurred at UTAH Beach, but the circumstances at Utah were not so adverse. OMAHA was different, complex, confusing, unorganized, and involved too much Army-Navy jurisdictional rivalry leaving both dissatisfied. The Army story is in Chapters 14 and 15 of The Technical Services THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS: THE WAR AGAINST GERMANY, Green Book, CHH Pub 10-25 (1985).⁸ The Navy has a "technical report" covering the effort. Both are cited in the above footnote.)

(The failure to address and mutually cooperate reflected poorly on both services. Unblemished is the heroism of the UDT men who brazenly, in a foolhardy fashion exposed themselves to murderous German fire as they wired and then exploded German beach obstacles at OMAHA all while fighting to escape enemy fire and keeping American soldiers from being blown up who unwisely hid behind obstacles the Engineers Beach (or Gap) Teams were ready to explode!).

1. OMAHA Beach Engineer Beach Teams. Five thousand ships hid in the darkness of the English Channel plowing toward Normandy. Force O for OMAHA; and Force U for UTAH arrived 10 ten miles offshore just after midnight. Starting 3.5 miles offshore tanks would "swim" to the waterline at Dog White and Dog Green to engage German beach guns five minutes ahead of the infantry. At H-hour, 0630, another wave of Shermans and tankdozers would land on Easy Green and Dog Red one minute

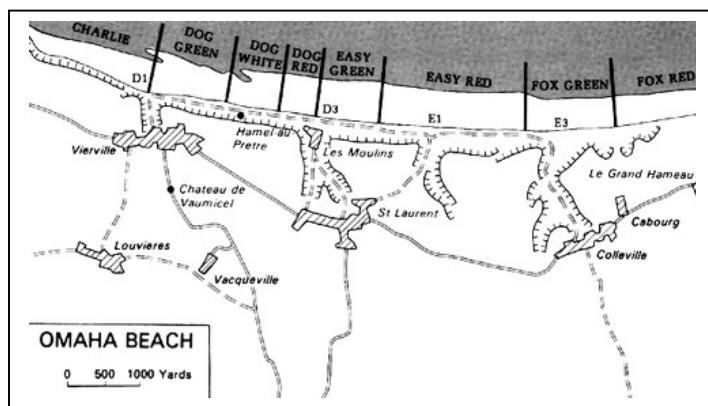
⁸ See html extract at: <https://history.army.mil/html/reference/normandy/TS/COE/COE15.htm>. For the U.S. Navy see <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/d/d-day-the-normandy-invasion-combat-demolition-units.html>.

ahead of infantry in LCVs and LCAs. At 0633, 16 assault gapping teams would land with tankdozers having 30 minutes to blow gaps, clear beach exits and aid assault troops inland.

a. Engineers on OMAHA. The 11 OMAHA demolition support teams **319** were on ships, but beach gapping teams who rode in LCTs and LCMs, were miserable: one broke down; several swamped; all held drenched, seasick *passengers*. Demolition crews were overburdened with 40-pound Hagensen packs, wire cutters, gas mask, cartridges, life belt, a canteen, rations, and a first aid packet plus rifles, bangalore torpedoes, mine detectors, heavy wire reels with 800 feet of primacord, and bags of fuses in coveralls impregnated against gas, and a fur-lined jacket. Each LCM had two rubber boats of 500 pounds of explosives, extra Bangalores, mine detectors, gap markers, buoys, and 100 cans of gasoline.

Things went wrong from the start. The eight assault teams on east OMAHA with the 16th RCT had Navy control boats herd them into correct lanes. At 0600 bombers arrived with 1,300 tons of bombs. The men in misery cheered this air gift of blowing foxholes for them. British ships loosed 9,000 rockets. Hope was: "There will be nothing alive on the **320** beaches when you land." This illusion quickly faded.

... Only two sticks of bombs fell within four miles of the shore defenses ... The British rockets ... (went) over the cliffs ... The naval barrage ... was also more effective inland ... The combined power of the air and naval bombardment did much to isolate the battle area. But the German shore batteries on OMAHA, located in bunkers and enfilading the beach ... remained mute ... Offering no muzzle flashes ... intact when the first wave of engineers, tanks, and infantry hit the tidal flat.



OMAHA was "an epic human tragedy which in the early hours bordered on total disaster." Mist and smoke hid landmarks as tide crosscurrents carried boats over **321** a mile too far east. Machine-guns whipped craft. Ramps dropped as German artillery and mortar rounds ripped apart the first wave. Dead men dotted the flat; wounded drowned in the surf. An infantry line at the shingle bank swelled with fearful, disabled, leaderless men and in the carnage, the gapping teams, suffering their own losses as they fought to blow up the obstacles. Lt. Wood thought H-hour was 0620, not 0630. He arrived early. His team was alone.

... **322** Wood and his team dragged their explosive-laden rubber boat into waist-deep water under a hail of machine-gun fire. No one was on the beach. The lieutenant charged toward a row of obstacles ... an artillery shell (hit a) craft ... detonating the contents of the second rubber boat and killing most of the Navy contingent of his team ... Wood's crew ... managed to wire a line of obstacles to produce a gap, but here the infantry ... frustrated their attempt ... (as they) huddled among the obstacles ... for cover, and Wood finally gave up ... (His) team, now only about half ... strength ... assumed firing positions with the infantry concentrated at the shingle.

... Team 13's naval detachment also fell when an artillery shell struck its boatload of explosives ... The Army ... found the infantry ... preventing the team from setting off charges. Team 12 ... (cleared) a thirty-yard gap ... A German mortar shell ... (set) off the charges strung about one series of obstacles, killing six Army and four Navy demolitions men and wounding nine ... Team 11 ... lost over half its men ...

Only two teams, 9 and 10, accomplished their missions ... Team 9 ... a fifty-yard path ... Team 10's ... men demolished enough obstacles in spite of heavy casualties to create two gaps, one fifty yards wide and a second a hundred yards across. They were the only gaps blown on the eastern half.

The remaining teams had dismal results and the failure of the assault gapping was evident. **323**

Team 8 (western OMAHA) blew one gap before infantry stopped them. Teams 3 and 4 were too shot up. Teams 5 and 7 were blocked by infantry. Teams 1 and 6 each opened fifty-yard gaps on Dog White and Dog Red. Team F lost 15 men; put 4 ashore. "Team D got a partial gap opened ..." **324**. Only one tankdozer helped where 6 of 16 bull-dozer blade tanks made shore, but the enemy "picked off five of them". Instead, teams removed German mines from stakes. After 1000 hours destroyers closed to 1,000 yards where their 5-inch gunfire solved problems tanks could not. Two landing craft simply rammed through. So began the ramming of obstacles that worked.

Engineer gapping team members were often bitter. Most equipment was useless; the rubber boats drew heavy fire; mine detectors were useless (there were no mines), bangalore torpedoes were a waste, overloaded their heavy coveralls assured drowning. Engineers should have landed 30 minutes earlier. **325** Otherwise, engineers had no complaints! The Army lost 34% to 41% of its gap team men, the Navy lost 52% of their men.

In one half hour 3,000 Americans who assaulted lay in small clumps, isolated. They sought small defiles on flanks with no forward motion. The west Vierville (16th IR) zone had the heaviest toll. Co. A crumbled. Reinforcements were slow, off course and to the left. Remnants of two more 116th IR (29th ID) companies lay between beaches, confused but safer as grass fire smoke shielded them. Four different companies landed at Fox beaches to huddle. Only between the Exits E-1 and E-3, was some safety: German posts there were unmanned there. Troops and vehicle had to get inland.



b. Opening the Exits. The second phase **326** began when 5th Engineer Special Brigade created order. Engineer combat battalions were a core: DUKW's, quartermaster, medical, ammunition, maintenance, and bomb disposal led by gap teams who instead were riflemen at the shingles. Co. C, 149th Engineer dug a path in the dune to the beach road. Another cut barbed wire to the cliff base. Enemy fire forced them back. Two 147th Engineer companies with 45 men lost their equipment to make

“the shingle and sheltered”. Co. A had Exit E-3 but landed at E-1 losing 2 hours. A shell killed many Co. C men. **327** By the fifth wave OMAHA was to be clear but was crowded by first four waves.

After three hours of hell (0930), infantry got above the beach when only a few scaled up the heights. Rangers and the 116th IR had high ground at D-1 and D-3 by 0800 hours eliminating Germans. Between St. Laurent and Colleville, companies had heights. One raked a German trench at E-1 draw to capture 21 enemy. F-1 Fox Red draw resistance ended by 0900. Beyond the shingle Easy Green and Red had barbed wire, minefields. Sgt. Simon, 37th Engineers took his detector crew to mark a small defile. Hit twice, but infantry followed. Another gapped a minefield with bangalore torpedoes. Detector crews widened lanes, but tanks were stuck at the shingle bank and antitank ditch. Bulldozer operators Pvt. Doze and Pvt. Shoemaker cleared a **328** road through the shingle, pulled out roadblocks and filled the antitank ditch to win the Distinguished Service Cross. Co C's Lt. Ross won a medal by hitting a German position over Exit E-1. He took a leaderless company up a hill to eliminate 40 Germans and two machine-guns to open E-1 exit. The 37th Engineer Combat Battalion had heaviest casualties -- **329** 24 killed. Exit E-3 resisted until 1630 hours, but by 1700 they cleared mines. Capt. Drnovich went after an annoying 88-mm gun. His body was found three days later near his start.

Far east F-1 bluffs dominated Fox Red where a east current lamed many at Exit F-1, but without engineers until 1200 hours who landed on Easy Red E-3 (by mistake) and had to march east to Fox Red. Their dangerous trek took time. Heavy fire drove two Company C LCT's far off their Fox beaches. Artillery hit one; a sandbar grounded the other off Dog beaches (between Les Moulins and Vierville) at a strong point area of stone summer villas that hid German machine guns and snipers. Cliffs on the west at Pointe de la Perce held German artillery observers.

Engineer battalions suffered. Survivors of the 147th Engineer hit Dog White at 0710 to either capture Vierville or climb cliffs with the Rangers. The commander, seeing congestion, ordered blowing up the Exit D-1 concrete revetments. Men collected explosives from the dead and the vessels. With **330** the mis-landed 121st, they opened an exit that was not usable until 2100 hours. At Exit D-3, Les Moulins, the 112th IB did not open D-3 until 2000. At Dog Green, 1,500, troops of the 336th Engineer Battalion marched two miles to Fox Red with a D-7 tractor towing explosives trailer. They ***“witnessed the awful panorama of D-day on OMAHA”***. Destroyers knocked out an Exit D-1 strongpoint at noon.

E-1 fire faded but congestion increased. The beach was jammed with vehicles in a line up the hill to St. Laurent. DUKWs with 105-mm. howitzers arrived, their only artillery mission was at 1615. Worst was Exit E-3 still under fire. The 336th IR ran a machine-gun gauntlet - two men at a time. Then a bulldozer caught fire; smoke fogged out the German gunners. As they went down the beach to their position, they saw a tank nose over the dune line firing into a machine-gun nest. The "memorable and terrible" march over OMAHA had two dead, 27 injured, but engineers were at F-1 area at 1700. Then machine-gun nests were gone. Mine clearance and filling **331** antitank ditches and working up hills were underway. Tanks started the climb at 2000, to hit mines and halt until 2230 hours when 15 tanks passed through Colleville. At the night troops, vehicles and cargo began the long trek up beach slopes “on the road to Berlin”.

2. UTAH Beach Engineer Beach Teams. Engineers came with 101st Airborne, Company C, 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion. **332** Compared with OMAHA, UTAH was “a walkover”. Landing in the wrong area they “**fortuitously struck a shoreline far less heavily defended**”. Underwater obstacles above low tide line were blown by eight, sixteen-man naval teams with Army engineers. Eight of 12 available 26-man Army demolition teams then landed with dozer tanks. The Navy-Army teams had 8 x 50-yard gaps blown for waves 2 and 3 who cleared 8 X 50-yard gaps for fourth and fifth waves. The plan came apart when Army and Navy teams landed together before 0645. The

... enemy fire was so much lighter ... landing seemed to be almost an anticlimax. Except for six Army engineers, who were killed when a shell hit their LCM all the demolition men got ashore ... (to) immediately began to blast gaps in the obstacles. About half were steel and concrete stakes, some with mines attached to the top; the rest were mostly hedgehogs and steel tetrahedrons ... a few Belgian gates ... **333**

The work went on under artillery fire that increased ... (Many) were deeply impressed by the heroism ... but casualties were light compared to ... OMAHA. The Army teams had 6 men killed, 39 wounded; the Navy teams, 4 killed and 11 wounded. The initial gaps were cleared ... 0715. Then the demolitionists worked northward, widening cleared areas and helping demolish a seawall. By 0930 UTAH Beach was free of all obstacles. ... Army teams were ready to assist ... opening exit roads.

The 237th Engineer Combat Battalion blew gaps in the seawall, removed wire, and cleared paths through dunes as roads were bulldozed and causeways cleared -- seven, mostly underwater. T-5 was paved. and U-5 was above water and V-1 was dry. **334 -335** A 30-foot treadway bridge covered a culvert so shortly after noon, UTAH troops met the 101st Airborne northeast of Pouppeville. **336** Engineers defended the locks. Next day they won a strongpoint at Le Grand Vey to capture 59 prisoners and 17 tons of ammunition. The task was getting the 101st AID over the Douve River, plus fixing causeways and the beaches. **337** By D-day night engineers opened Sugar Red and Exit T-5 road. Beaches were cleared of vehicles and mines; roads were improved with chespalings (wood and wire mats) and markers were set. Military police moved traffic. The entire 4th ID was ashore in 15 hours with 20,000 men and 1,700 vehicles. Fighting was battalion-size, scattered, led by airborne. The Allied forces had a strong grip; German counterattacks were feeble.

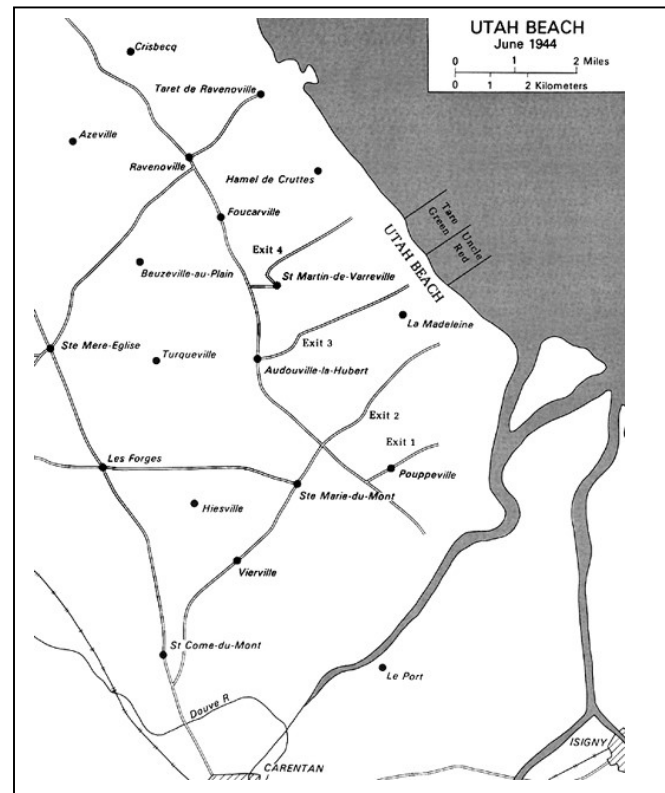
3. Appendix to Corps of Engineers History – Navy Report of Demolition Teams. Appended is a 16-page report on demolitions done Navy team members. It is fascinating in its detail, challenges, solutions and unsolved problems. It is a story of a “hob-gobbled” mission without high level vision where primarily NCPs developed systems in England with little leadership and no command direction. Demolition men scooting up 18-foot angled log poles to set charges on the teller mines. Excerpts include:

Almost all units proceeded at once to lay charges; and they were ready to fire in a maximum of 20 minutes ... Six complete gaps, through all bands of obstacles, were blown during the assault low-tide ... Three partial gaps, through either the seaward or the landward bands, were also blown ...

Four additional clear gaps were made as the tide receded ... (later) morning gaps were being widened leftwards ... (with) 13 gaps ... 70 yards each that afternoon.

Of the Teams who failed to fire, at least five Army or Navy units were prevented from setting off charges ... by the presence ... of either assault or later waves of infantry, and even vehicles ... Death prevented three other Navy units from firing. (Men killed by explosions) ... another was eliminated, after setting its charges, by well-placed mortar fire. The third was blown up after bringing in its rubber boat, when a direct hit set off the auxiliary explosives in it ...

A freak accident caused the failure ... when a bit of shrapnel cut the two fuses and (the officer's) finger as well. The enemy ... managed somehow to set off the primacord and all the charges!



(Comment: The topic is fairly covered elsewhere, but the heroics are not. What kind of men would wall on a beach under fire trying to blow thins up before they were shot?⁹)

J. AIRBORNE OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II, EUROPEAN THEATER – Parts I and II, Dr. John C. Warren, USAF HISTORICAL STUDIES: NO. 97¹⁰ xyza

Dr. Warren wrote the major paratroop histories for the three major assaults of WWII in Europe: 1) D-Day Normandy, 2) Market-Garden (the Netherlands) and 3) Varsity (Rhine River). He described both the air transport and airborne battle phase of these three major operations at the regimental level. Its

⁹ Memo to Commander-in-Chief, Unites States Fleet; From: Commander Task Force ONE TWO TWOQ; Subject: Naval Combat Demolition Units; report of Lt. (Jg) H.L. BLACKWELL, Jr., D-V(G), USNR with ltr. A16-3 of 15 July, 1944 with attached report. *The Corps of Engineers: The War Against Germany*; Omaha Landing Extracts from the Army Technical Services Histories. Appendix.

¹⁰ USAF Historical Division Research Studies Institute Air University September 1956, available at: [://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a438105.pdf](http://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a438105.pdf).

detail far exceeds the space available here but gives insight into the operations of two airborne divisions. It records courage, creativity, competence, carnage, and cowardice. Readers are encouraged to read Military Historian SLA Marshall's "Regimental Unit Study, Number 4: THE FORCING OF THE MERDERET CAUSEWAY AT LA FIERE, FRANCE -- An Action by the Third Battalion 325TH GLIDER INFANTRY."¹¹ This covers Parts I and II of Warrens': *The Airborne Invasion of Normandy*. (COMMENT: Dr. Warren wrote the premier "official" history, some 200 pages, on the three major airborne missions of WWII in the European Theater which were: 1) OVERLORD; 2) MARKET and 3) VARSITY.)

1. The Assault - The Pathfinders. Pathfinders were first to mark six drop zones for the 82nd and 101st AID with three planes (13 paratroops each) for each drop zone. Drop Zone C put 101st finders within a mile of the zone with large panels, holophane lights, two Eureka and two BUPS beacons, and the team. The 101st AID began at 0020 and the 82nd at 0121 with jumps set 30 minutes later. Surely, at least one of the three pathfinders for each drop zone would mark the targets. Pathfinder C-7 cargo planes used the SCR-717 (radar) to miss German anti-aircraft guns on Alderney and Guernsey Islands. Over land they used Gee, dead reckoning, SCR-717 and visual recognition. But clouds hung over the mainland that bedeviled the mission. Jumps put pathfinders within one mile of their target with time to march to the location and set up. **33 34** Some drops were close; some off one-half mile and some off one mile. The center planes for the 101st near St. Germain-de-Varreville (DZ C) had two of three "sticks" jump on time, one overshoot, one stick was close, the other was a half mile southeast. The third DZ C plane overshoot two miles, yet troops rendezvoused. For DZ D (southernmost 101st zone) the planes recovered from a major mistake after the C-47 flew to the east over the bay to circle back over land for an accurate drop.

Three 82nd AID planes for DZ O (St. Mere Eglise) accurately dropped with ground fire. Two of 82nd zones were on the west Merderet River. North was DZT and south was DZN, but most of the next two groups landed on the east (wrong side) of the river a mile off. So, the bulk of the 82nd Airborne was on the east Merderet Riverbank not on the west bank target. It led to fierce fighting to cross the 500-yard exposed causeway to rescue the small forces actually stranded because they were in the "right locations". The author's consolation was: "However, other factors besides Gee should be considered ... (including) the brisk northwest wind ... and slight delays in jumping. At any rate ... all teams were put near enough ... to perform their missions in spite of ... (the fact) weather ... might easily have caused the pilots to lose their way completely had they not had Gee to help ..." (Comment: One now knows this history is not totally "unbiased".)

2. ALBANY Mission and The Paratroop Operations of the 101st Division. Drops began one half hour later. ALBANY had 432 aircraft carrying the 101st Division and BOSTON had 369-planes for the 82nd Division as 800 planes flew over the Germans. There were so many, 36 to 45 -plane "serials" in "Vs of V's" formations spaced six minutes apart or 1,000 feet between the first and last planes. The airborne troops were notified 20, 4 and 2 minutes before the drop. The lead plane used a signal light through the plexiglass "astrodome" for C-47-star navigation. Pilots would drop to 700 feet at 140 mph and down to just 110 mph for the jumps. Over the site the leader showed a green light for all planes.

¹¹ //history.army.mil/documents/WWII/LaFiere/325-LaF.htm

But each plane had heavy para-packs in the doorway to be pushed out first. These often jammed as planes overshot. After the jump, pilots would “dive down onto the deck” and fly out over the coast to the St. Marcouf Islands at 100 feet to avoid antiaircraft and ground fire. Both troops and planes were over-loaded. “Some paratroops ... weighed as much as 325 pounds ...” Overloading men overloaded planes as much as 5,850 pounds. (35 36) D-Day eve weather was not a problem, until the planes flew over the Cotentin Peninsula hitting heavy clouds inland 10 to 12 miles on the 20-mile-wide peninsula. Worse, Pathfinders knew of the problem, could not break radio silence to warn troop planes flying wingtip to wingtip into clouds. Clouds quickly disheveled the mission. Some flew straight ahead, others went high. others dove under clouds. But engine exhaust flames made planes visible to enemy gunners. The miracle was why such large group did not collide. German artillery and machine guns were ready after pathfinder planes alerted them. 37-38

Some reported “accurate and compact” drops. Some dropped troops over the ocean who drowned. A few landed to become POW’s. Col Donaldson dropped the 2d Battalion, 502nd AIR three miles south of their zone. Many “serials” hit close; many did not. The second serial had the 377th Parachute Field Artillery, 12 of its guns, a planeload of medics, and 5 supply planes all off target. The first two missed by 3 miles, the next was 5 - 7 miles off. The last four were very lost. How it happened and why it was not caught “is anybody's guess.” 39 Landing was the first problem. The second made each locate where they were, and third the figure where they had to go. Plus, they either were to find or to avoid Germans. The 4th ID was landing at UTAH defined the east boundaries of the landing area.

Most flights swerved north -- five sticks were dropped beyond Valognes - 10 to 20 miles northwest; 21 loads were 5 to 10 miles north; 2 were lost; just 8 were in a 5-mile radius on a small peninsula. The comment made was: “If the 2 pilots delivering them knew ... where they were, they were the only ones in the serial who did.” The DZ A mission had north Causeways Exits 3 and 4 from UTAH Beach. The 101st AID would build a north flank from the shore marshes inland to Beuzeville-au-Plain. 39 Perfect drops were impossible given hedgerows. Soldiers saw nothing for bearings as planners simply missed the hedgerow mass, height and troubles. Troopers only knew -- there were no Germans in that field. They were isolated, frustrated, lost. The 101st LTC Cole’s groups had to seize the causeway coming off UTAH Beach, but he landed miles away at Ste Mere Eglise to head the wrong direction before correcting himself.

On the way he picked up about 75 men including some from the 82nd AID and many who did not belong to his battalion. They reconnoitered the coastal battery ... (and found) the 2nd battalions and a dozen of his men waiting ... Cole decided to attack the causeways. He divided his men into groups, one to take Exit 4, another for Exit 3, and another to go to DZ C and meet the 506th AIR. ... Cole led the assault on Exit 3 and took it easily before 0730 ... (Later when) German forces ... (were) retreating across that causeway, they were easy game for ... paratroops, who killed over 50 ... At 1300 the first American patrol from the beaches arrived ...

The 1st Battalion of the 502nd... (had) to destroy the German troops quartered on the outskirts of St. Martin-de-Varreville and ... (build a) defensive line on the northern flank ..., LTC Cassidy ... marched on St. Martin. By 0630 he ... sent about 15 men to attack the German quarters ... (where) this handful of men with tommy guns, bazookas and grenades took the massive stone buildings in which the Germans had barricaded themselves ... (By) 1530 they had killed or captured over 150 of the enemy. Meanwhile some 45 men of A Company had ... seized the village of Foucarville ... outnumbered them, but ... (a later) arrival of 200 more paratroops at Cassidy's CP enabled him to move reinforcements ... (he) hastily dispatched B Company ... (but) low quality and morale of the enemy ... saved the day. The German forces facing A Company lost their nerve ... 137 of them hoisted the white flag ... (The) 22nd IR ... spent seven hours wading ... into St. Germain-de-Varreville ... the 502nd ... (was done in) 24 hours.

The next three ALBANY serials had 45 planes with 506th AIR, 2nd AIB and 45 planes with the 501st AIR, 3rd AIB with Col. Sink (506th AIR) and Gen Taylor (101st AID) and artillery commander, (Gen McAuliffe). Hitting the cloudbank Col Young climbed on instruments to descend through a chole 11 miles inland to the drop zone using his Gee and Rebecca RDF (Radio Direction Finders). Pathfinders had a Eureka beacon on but no lights. Young missed them but recognized his landmarks to make an accurate drop. Most of Col Young's planes had lost him as his two other serials disintegrated when pilots lost sight of other planes. They reacted differently: some flew stubbornly ahead; others climbed up, others dove under clouds. The latter took light flak and moderate small arms fire the last eight miles.

Colonel Young's serial ... (had) a fairly good drop ... as 14 pilots put their loads ... almost on, DZ C. Another 13 bunched their sticks within ... (1.5 miles) east and southeast ... The rest straggled. Six dropped troops from three to five miles north ... another ... seven miles north, and four ... about five miles south on the (wrong) side of the Douve river ... (One was) 17 miles to the north and a three ... (were) 21 miles to the northwest ... (40-41

Many were far south at St. Germain-de-Varreville; 14 prematurely dropped at Ste Mere Eglise as pilots mistook DZ 0 for DZ C (or simply gave in to paratroop demands to drop). The 439th Group carried 1,357 troops dropping all but 35 men (3 planes shot down, 1 wounded man and 1 refused to jump!) The 435th carried 677 and dropped 626 paratroops with 36 shot down, 13 with a lost pilot and 2 had equipment issues.

DZ-C paratroops had UTAH causeway Exits 1 and 2 from the 506th AIR, but these were way west at Ste Mere Eglise so at 0430 they marched to the causeways – they did not arrive until 1330 hours after it was captured by UTAH forces. Col Young's 506th battalion could not assemble until two hours when 95 men arrived. 42 At dawn Col Sink sent what he had to Exit 1, but they arrived too late -- mid-afternoon. The 501st, Col. Ewell and 60 of HQ force, including Gen Taylor and Gen McAuliffe, sent forces mis-laned at Ste Marie-du-Mont several miles to attack Exit 1. As 60 paratroops, 25 from headquarters, left, Taylor

to remarked **“dryly that never were so few led by so many.”** Although they collected another 60 men at 0900 at Poupeville they held by *1058th Grenadier Regiment, 91st Division* for a house-by-house battle. Back at DZ C, things were difficult and dangerous. By noon 320 paratroops had gathered in Hiesville. Col Sink's CP at Culoville was reinforced. Yet, these: “... seemed all too few. The enemy were swarming around ... the Germans had ... an entire battalion ... (at) Ste Marie-du-Mont. Many paratroops ... (were) shot before they could get free ... The rest gave a good account ... (it was) after 1420 when ... the 8th Infantry Regiment pushed into the town that the issue was decided ...”

Late afternoon the 506th AIR came back from the causeways. Sink had 650 men with his first task done. But they had not sealed the Douve River as Gen Taylor ordered a reconnaissance no-man's land next morning. **42-43**

Next was the 501st AIR, 101st AID landing south of Ste Mere Eglise, east of St. Come-du-Mont and a smaller 3 X 1 mile zone. Less than 5% were downed, but Pathfinders could not light their zone! One plane was lost when it was hit by an equipment bundle from a plane above! **45** The men built a south block on a water barrier. The 1st AIB, 501st AIR was to capture the key la Barquette lock half a mile south of DZ D, 1.5 miles north of Carentan for a crossing and prevent the Germans from flooding low Douve marshes. The 501st had “a partially satisfactory drop” – just 19 planes were close to DZ D. “Those troops who did come down near the zone were involved in fighting from the start. The battalion commander was killed ... his executive officer was captured. None of the company commanders were on hand ... (as a) regimental commander, Col Johnson, was present ...” to gather 150 men to capture the undefended lock, but not the adjacent road bridges. **46** A later attempt at the bridges using a Navy fire-control officer calling in fire from ships offshore failed to congeal a defense with the lock.

The 2nd AIB, 501st AIR also faced a seemingly fruitless day. LTC Ballard had 250 men for St Come-du-Mont, but his attempts there and to join Johnson were repelled. Still, he likely prevented a German attack on la Barquette locks. The 3rd AIB, 506th AIR dropped into a German “deathtrap” as oil-soaked buildings were flamed as enemy machine guns and mortars mowed troopers down removing chutes. Capt Shettle rushed off with just 30 men to get the bridge west end of bridges 0430s lacking ammo and forces to hold the east end. Another 40 men to help repel a 0200-hour German attack on the bridge. By dawn of Day #2, Shettle and Johnson had the lock and one end of two bridges for the landing zone. P-47's arrived at 0430 to bomb the U.S. end of the bridges that were supposed to remain intact! At noon Shettle laid signal panels for P-47's to bomb Germans across the river. The planes came at 0430 to instead strafe the Americans and then blew up both bridges with very accurate skip bombing before panel waving got them to the other Douve bank! **47**

DZ D, the south flank and Douve bridges were not sealed and were controlled by Germans. The German 6th Parachute Regiment struck Ste Mere Eglise, but it was too small. They turned south next morning to hit la Barquette locks as astonished paratroops found Germans at their rear. Yet, the 800 Germans

paratroops were defeated by 250 U.S. paratroops under Johnson plus 100 under Shettle.” *(That story is described elsewhere).*

Gen Taylor ordered Col Sink’s 506th AIR to attack south June 7th with 600 men. They joined Col Ballard against the well-defended les Droueries. On 7 June Gen Bradley ordered VII Corps to capture Carentan. Col Sink’s 506th AIR, reinforced, began at 0500 hours 8 June with four battalions to finish that afternoon. *(The authors state the 101st attack to join V Corps (OMAHA) on 10 June and capture Carentan on 12 June was “made as a ground unit striking out of an organized beachhead” (and not as paratroops). Thus, it is not mentioned in the paratroop history.)*

3. BOSTON Mission and the Paratroop Operations of the 82nd AID. The 82nd AID BOSTON mission was flown by the 52nd Wing at 2300 hours. The first group, the 505th AIR, was near DZ 0 northwest of Ste Mere Eglise on the Merderet River. The planes were above a cloud bank shielding them and “achieved a degree of surprise”. Enemy fire was “was sporadic and ineffectual”. But the clouds were a hindrance. The pathfinders Eureka signal was received 15 miles out. Three serials had 36 planes and 47 planes (with Gen Ridgway). **48** The first was too high as many overshot, the second and the third dropped on the “T” area. *“Of 1,276 and 844 troops on the planes, all but 6 jumped.”* It was the best drop with 31 sticks on target, 29 sticks within one mile, 20 in 3 miles, 17 within 5 miles. But several were missed.

(Comment: Thus, was “precision” jumping defined! MISSING IS THE NUMBER OF PARATROOPS WHO DROWNED IN FLOODED RIVERS AND MARSHES OR THAT AIRMEN ASSUMED THE RIVERS WERE NOT FLOODED WHEN A LARGE AREA WAS FLOODED DEEP ENOUGH THAT PARATROOPERS DROWNED. REEDS GREW WHAT APPEARED TO BE FIELDS OF LAND WERE “FIELDS OF WATER”. Maps elsewhere show the inundated areas.) **49**

Yet, these were the best of any in NEPTUNE. “Among the factors ... (were) climbing over the cloudbank and descending to the DZ without losing formation, the absence of intense enemy fire ... and the lighted T. This last was an aid not available on the other zones ...” The 505th AIR had the area west of the Merderet River from les Forges north to Neuville-au-Plain with Ste Mere Eglise in the center and the most important objective. The 2nd AIB, 505th AIR had to defend the north perimeter from Beuzeville to the river. The 3rd AIB had Ste Mere Eglise; the 1st AIB had to seize the Merderet crossings at la Fiere, 2 miles west of Ste Mere, and at Chef-du-Pont. The rest of the battalion was reserve.

Against no opposition at DZ 0, the well-concentrated troops were quick. By 0820 hours, 32 officers and 303 men were ready. They waited three hours to hear the 3rd AIB had Ste Mere Eglise but were being attacked from the south. The 3rd Battalion, LTC Krause, met a Frenchman who **50** snuck them into Ste Mere Eglise before dawn to grab key points with 30 POW’s, 10 killed, and other enemy fleeing. These 300 men were hit at 0930 as two companies of Vander Voort’s battalion arrived. By 1130 the attack was over.

Gen Ridgeway opened his HQ opened at 0600. A Co went north for the la Fiere crossing to find the 507th and 508th AIRs stopped short of the bridge by enemy machine-guns. An afternoon charge on the bridge failed as Germans shelled it all day with mortars and artillery, and twice attacked losing two tanks to U.S. bazookas. The second attack overran the 1st PIB CP. At 1500 hours 200 men joined at la Fiere to push the Germans back. **51 52**

The day of June 6th “was a day lost” but June 7 it was won so by “noon 8 June the Germans south were no major threat.”

On 7 June the enemy counterattacked north of Ste Mere Eglise with 1058th Grenadiers, Seventh Army Sturm Battalion, 3 artillery battalions and tanks. VII Corps sent a 4th ID tank company to drive off German tanks and guns, but infantry remained. By D + 2 the bridgehead was solid except **53** west of the (north-south) Merderet River the situation was bad as isolated paratroops “were in danger of destruction.”

The idea was capturing a two-mile section of the two major rivers (Douve and Merderet) to control the main area with 96 planes dropping the 507th and 508th AIR west of the Merderet, but there were only a few bridges across and seemingly narrow river from the air was a mile wide with one major 500-yard causeway at la Fiere. *(Comment: Troops on the west bank of the river were actually “cut-off” from the main U.S. forces – potentially in a self-imposed trap!)*

The 508th AIR in 86 planes were supposed to hold the southern half of the bridgehead the 508th and 507th created west of the Merderet. The 508th AIR area was just south of the one main bridges over the Merderet at la Fiere, but 96 plane loads were scattered **53** - as “all four serials had disintegrated leaving only a small minority in formation behind the leaders.” So. “a large part of the men and materiel landed far away ...” on what ... became the wrong side of the river!”

Then a huge **“20 sticks went unaccounted for.”**

(Comment: Their location is disputed. A reasonable “guess” on the actual drop patterns has not been possible. Other commentaries are highly critical of large numbers feared to have drowned landing in reed covered deep water!). Dr. Warren wrote:

One-fourth of the 508th AIR landed within one mile of the target, another 25% were in 2 miles, another 25% hit the wrong side of the river and the final 25% were completely lost (many drowned) ... The only important event on the west bank of the river was LTC Shanley’s effort to increase his force from the 30 men he gained after the jump. They did not succeed. Plus. a

battalion of the German 91st Division was also on the west bank. Both sides “were blind and hesitant.

Shanley took defensive positions on Hill 30, a partially wooded rise that overlooked the Merderet River between the la Fièrre bridge and Chef-du-Pont. The one-mile trek took about six hours. Here he found 200 leaderless, bewildered paratroops. 54-55. Shanley defended Hill 30 for the next three days with a “rag-tag” force. He at least had radio contact to get some artillery support, but for three days this force was on an island stuck on the west bank with nowhere it could move to escape. Rescue required attacking across the causeway which was a horrendous and costly mission.

The last BOSTON phase had the 507th AIR landing on the east side of the Merderet River. Its pathfinders hit a “bullseye” landing, which turned out to be too near the river and Germans. They could not use all of their signals. 56 The 507th AIR had to hold the north half of the 82nd AID bridgehead over the Merderet on a curving line west two miles north of the la Fiere causeway – a battalion was supposed to capture it. The battalion had too many land on the east bank, not west bank. By dawn a fight began at the bridge east end for its approaches reinforced with 40+ sticks of the 507th and 508th coming out of Merderet marshes east of DZ T. Most made the north-south raised rail bank, which was the main means of finding each other in the dark. Midmorning had 600 paratroops near la Fiere as Gavin sent 75 troops to take the lightly defended Chef-du-Pont bridge covered by accurate German artillery.

Col Lindquist at la Fiere planned to cross. but Capt Schwartzwalder had left the captured west end to join Col Timmes and, in so doing, he let the Germans retake the west end. It set up “one of the most horrendous assaults of the ... campaign ... (Thus) the 82nd AID d Division lost its bridgehead west of the Merderet ... (as) paratroops on that side of the river were cut off. Some 300 of them were with Shanley and 120 with Timmes and Schwartzwalder.”

Meanwhile, Col Millett’s 507th AIR was growing to 400 men but lacked artillery, was pinned in hedgerows and it could not join Timmes a mile distant. The Germans pressed Millett who radioed he would not last to the next day, June 9.

Timmes was pressed and Shanley “was nearing the end of his resources.” “Prospects west of the Merderet looked dark indeed.” Drops were at fault; only a third of the 507th and 508th AIR's landed as assigned. But the German 1057th Grenadier Regiment 57 could not group up. Miscues cost 82nd AID a bloody assault crossing delaying relief of encircled paratroops and the Allied Normandy advance. On 7 June the Germans failed to gain the east end of the bridge.

On ... the 8th Ridgway decided to ... rescue his encircled men. He had available about ... (1,350) tired (men so he) picked for his assault fresh troops of the 325th Glider Regiment ... (that) arrived by glider on D plus 1.

... (They) crossed ... (at) midnight on 8/9 June ... and attacked toward the la Fiere bridge, picking up Timmes' force on the way. Half a mile from the bridge they ... fell back. Millett's group ... (tried) to fight its way east and join Timmes ... (but) half his men were captured or killed. The rest filtered north ...(to) the east side ...

... Gavin ordered the (3rd AIB. 325th GIR) to rush the la Fiere bridge ... hazardous business, since ... (the bridge had) long, narrow causeway completely exposed ... The attack jumped off ... (as most of) a company (got) across ... Then some men faltered, and a jam developed; a tank ... slewed sideways across the causeway ... After an hour of strenuous efforts in which Ridgway ... participated, the ... 3rd Battalion of the 325th crossed in spasmodic rushes ... with ... (some) 507th AIR ... (then a) heavy weapons platoon and three Sherman tanks ...

Throughout the afternoon ... (of) hard fighting ... contact was made with Timmes ... 3rd Battalion ... reached Shanley's positions on Hill 30. By evening the 82nd AID had a bridgehead two miles wide ... (over) the Merderet.

Still, the mauled *1057th Grenadiers savagely* counterattacked almost to the river. **58** The rest of the 507th AIR, 350 men “stabilized” the situation. Casualties were heavy. Dawn 10 June had two 90th ID regiments relieve the airborne.”