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**Destroyers at Normandy
Naval Gunfire Support at
Omaha Beach**



By William B. Kirkland, Jr.

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Destroyers at Normandy

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Contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vii
Prologue	ix
I. Ships and Men	1
II. DESRON 18 and OVERLORD	11
III. Assault in the Morning	21
At Pointe du Hoc	27
With the 116th RCT	29
With the 16th RCT	35
With the 18th RCT	52
IV. Breakout in the Afternoon	57
V. The Days That Followed	71
VI. The End of the Line	75
VII. Ex Scientia Tridens	81

Foreword

As the 50th Anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy is observed, most of the commemorative events and historical reminiscences are concerned with the experiences of the troops that fought their way ashore and then regrouped to begin the drive across France to the Rhine that gave the Allies victory in Europe. That is understandable. Europe has always been considered as the Army's main theater of operations in World War II, just as war in the Pacific was considered the U.S. Navy's victory. Because of these generalizations, attention to the key contributions of the "subordinate service" can all too easily be diminished. The role of the U.S. Navy in the Normandy invasions is an important example of this kind of oversight. The landings in Normandy and the defeat of the German army were the Army's tasks and clearly among its finest hours. Nevertheless, the military victory could not have happened without the naval forces to move the armies across the Channel, to put the troops ashore on the assault beaches, and then to provide the naval gunfire that, with close air support, enabled the assault forces to break out of the beachhead.

This monograph provides firsthand accounts of Destroyer Squadron 18 during this critical battle upon which so much of the success of our campaign in Europe would depend. Their experience at Omaha Beach can be looked upon as typical of most U.S. warships engaged at Normandy. On the other hand, from the author's research it appears evident that this destroyer squadron, with their British counterparts, may have had a more pivotal influence on the breakout from the beachhead and the success of the subsequent campaign than was heretofore realized. Its contributions certainly provide a basis for discussion among veterans and research by historians, as well as a solid, professional account of naval action in support of the Normandy landings.

Captain Kirkland's manuscript was edited and prepared for publication by Sandra J. Doyle and Wendy Karppi. John C. Reilly Jr. reviewed it in detail, consulting the original sources and inserting annotations and emendations as necessary, and selected photographs and maps.

JAMES L. HOLLOWAY III

Preface

In the summer of 1944 the Allied armies invaded Europe by crossing the English Channel to Normandy. The story has been told many times. The writings of the senior commanders give the overview of the planning, the decisions, and the execution from the high perspective. From military and naval historians we learn about operational details, and the successes and failures of combat units. Still other writers, especially those who were there, tell us of the individuals who fought, and some who died, and of their heroism and fears, joys and sorrows, on those desperate days between 6 and 9 June 1944.

Thirty-three American and three British destroyers were engaged at the Normandy beaches, backed up by six destroyer escorts (DE) and high-speed transports (APD). Eight ships of Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 18, with the three British destroyers, were in the front line at Omaha Beach. Destroyer Division (DESDIV) 34 and DESDIV 20 were on the line at Utah Beach. Before the first troops went ashore *Corry* (DD 463) struck a mine and sank. After the first hour the three British "cans" withdrew on schedule, and the ninth ship of DESRON 18, *Frankford* (DD 497), joined the others near the surf line.

This story reports the events at Omaha Beach as seen from afloat and ashore, integrated as well as the unit records permit, and illuminated by eyewitnesses. The purpose is to show the intimate relationship between the soldiers of the 1st and 29th Divisions and DESRON 18, a relationship that helped make victory possible at this key landing beach called Omaha.

The assault on Omaha Beach can be divided into three well-defined engagements, which took place simultaneously on adjacent landing beaches. At the west end of Omaha the battle for Pointe du Hoc occupied the 2d and 5th Ranger Battalions, supported by *Satterlee* (DD 626) and *Thompson* (DD 627). In the center, on beaches called Dog and Easy Green, the 116th and 115th Regimental Combat Teams (RCT) of the 29th Infantry Division landed, supported by *Carmick* (DD 493) and *McCook* (DD 496). On Easy

Red and Fox beaches, to the east, landed the 16th, 18th and 15th RCTs of the 1st Infantry Division, supported by *Emmons* (DD 457), *Baldwin* (DD 624), *Harding* (DD 625), and *Doyle* (DD 494). *Frankford*, DESRON 18's flagship, cruised the landing area and demonstrated the aggressiveness needed from these destroyers in their first major battle.

The sequence of all three engagements followed a similar pattern: minesweeping, debarkation from transports, prelanding bombardment, and assault landings in three successive waves. After the assault waves went ashore, the destroyers fired at targets of opportunity to help the infantry break out of the landing beaches. Call fire, directed by fire control parties ashore, led to the final clearing of the landing beaches allowing armor and transport move inland. The progress of each phase of the action was quite different; none followed the prepared script.

After three days of battle, nearly three thousand soldiers from the 1st, 4th and 29th Divisions were casualties. Three destroyers, a destroyer escort, a heavily laden troopship, and numerous amphibious craft had been sunk. These losses attest to the ferocity of the battle for the Normandy beaches.

William B. Kirkland Jr.
Captain, USN (Retired)
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Prologue

On the morning of 6 June 1944 James E. Knight, a soldier in the 299th Combat Engineer Battalion of the 1st Infantry Division, found himself pinned down on the rocky shoreline at Omaha Beach by German artillery and machine guns dug in on the bluffs overlooking the beach. He and hundreds of other American soldiers were trapped between the murderous fire of the defenders and the rising tide behind them.

Late in the morning Knight saw a destroyer come into the shallows behind him and fire over his head at the German strong points. Soon he and the others were able to leave the beach and move inland. He remembers the ship as *Frankford*, and suggested that someone research the facts and see if *Frankford*, by herself, might have turned the tide of the Omaha landing—and, possibly, the whole Normandy invasion. (Knight, 124–26)

Frankford, however, was not alone. She was flagship of Destroyer Squadron 18, commanded by Captain Harry Sanders, and more than one destroyer nearly put her bow in the sand to break the German wall at Omaha Beach. The author, gunnery officer of *Doyle*, has undertaken the research suggested by James Knight, and believes he is right in his assumption that naval guns were instrumental in turning the tide. Eight ships of DESRON 18, plus *Emmons* and three British destroyers, backed up the heroic efforts of the soldiers of the 1st and 29th Divisions, and had a large share in starting them on the road to victory.

* * *

In his action report Commander W. J. Marshall, commander of Destroyer Division 36, writes: "At 0617 (H minus 13 minutes) LCT(R)s [British landing craft converted to fire bombardment rockets] commenced firing rockets, drenching the area just inland from the beaches. Fire from this beach was temporarily silenced and the entire area covered with heavy smoke and dust. Troops landed and proceeded up the beach into the smoke."

The action report of *Baldwin* (DD 624) records:

0619-0637: "Closed beach ahead of boat wave, firing guns 1 and 2 [the two forward 5-inch guns] in assigned target area and ahead of troops landing. Minimum range to beach 1,800 yards."

And from *Doyle* (DD 494):

0630: "'H' hour. Commenced indirect fire on target . . . to aid in clearing beach exit now completely obscured by smoke and dust."

The deck log of *Carmick* (DD 493) records:

0647: "German Shore Battery opened fire on this ship."

0650: "German Shore Battery silenced by Main Battery of this ship. No damage resulting from enemy fire."

This seemed a promising opening, but within the half-hour things started to go wrong. Confused by loss of visibility in the smoke, about half the landing craft coxswains lost their way. Pushed along by the strong eastward set of the tidal current, many landed east of their designated objectives; some troops came ashore outside the landing area entirely.

German gunners, defending the five beach exits [so-called five draws or openings in the bluffs facing the beaches between Vierville and Cabourg], pounded the first wave. Demolition teams suffered from German fire and were hampered by the tangled condition of the beaches. The destroyers went dutifully into the second phase of their work, firing at targets behind the beach. It was nearly 0900 before it became clear to the destroyer skippers that something was wrong.

Doyle fired on a German gun overlooking the eastern exit to Colleville. *Carmick* saw American tanks stalled in the Vierville draw and, in cooperation with the tankers, knocked the first hole in the defenses. Landing craft from follow-on boat waves began milling around off the beach as their coxswains looked for places to land.

When *Frankford*, with Captain Harry Sanders aboard, closed the beach about 0900 things began to happen. All destroyers were ordered to the beach to help break through the defenses. This was the hour of crisis. *Satterlee* was picking off enemy gun emplacements at Pointe du Hoc.¹ *McCook* reported that she knocked one enemy gun off the edge of the cliff, and that another "flew up in the air."² Vierville was taken by 1100.

At the eastern end of Omaha Beach *Frankford*, *Doyle*, and *Emmons* were hitting hard at three exits while *Baldwin* blasted away at German guns near Port-en-Bessin. *Baldwin* was hit twice by light artillery, with no casualties. At 1043 *McCook* reported picking up a radio message saying that American troops were advancing. *Harding* was leading their way, dropping salvos up the draw toward Colleville. By 1600 St. Laurent-sur-Mer was occupied by 29th Division troops. Colleville was in a vice, set up by 1st Division troops approaching from two draws. The Germans here surrendered the next morning.

How this team of destroyers arrived at this particular place in history, and made the landings at Omaha Beach succeed, is the story to be told.

1. Often incorrectly identified as Pointe du Hoe in many publications and documents.

2. There was no artillery at Point du Hoc on D-Day. Six 155mm guns had been mounted there to command Omaha and Utah Beaches, making its capture an essential feature of the assault plan. When the Rangers fought their way onto the point, they found the battery empty; the guns had been moved inland and replaced by wooden dummies. *McCook's* gunners would have had no way of knowing this.

I

Ships and Men

In the years after World War I the United States Navy gradually wore out the several hundred four-stack, flushdeck destroyers built to keep the sea lanes open during World War I. Very few of these destroyers had been completed in time to see active service before the Armistice.

Early classes of destroyers, authorized in 1898 and commissioned in 1902–1903, had weighed in at 408 to 480 tons. Early service demonstrated the value of the new type and the need for more displacement for satisfactory operation with the fleet. By the time the United States entered World War I, the Navy had 67 destroyers in commission, with seven more on the way. All had raised forecastles and ranged from 720 tons to 1,000. The war prompted rapid construction of the 1,090- to 1,190-ton “flushdeckers.” Two hundred and seventy-three of these were laid down between 1917 and 1919. By the Armistice 37 were in service; five were canceled after World War I ended. The remaining ships were in commission by 1922, though postwar budget cuts soon sent most into reserve.

These early destroyers were built for speed, endurance and seaworthiness, designed to keep pace with the battleships and cruisers of their day and to launch massed torpedo attacks at an enemy's battle line. Main battery guns—4-inch 50-caliber in all but a few of the “flushdeckers”—were secondary armament to their torpedo tubes. Destroyers were fitted with underwater sound gear and depth charges during World War I to fight submarines, and in the postwar years they were called on to screen the battle line from submarine attack. These 1,100-tonners were the heritage that led to the 1,620- to 1,630-ton *Benson* and *Gleaves* classes and the 2,100-ton *Fletchers* of World War II.

By the beginning of the 1930s it was clear that new destroyers of improved design were needed. Despite their speed, the "four-pipers" were notorious for lack of cruising radius and for wet decks in even moderate seas. In rough weather the forward gun could not be manned. The torpedo tubes on the main deck were often made unserviceable by salt water. There was no adequate submarine detection equipment on board, with no room for the newer underwater sound devices, and limited stowage for antisubmarine weapons. Thus began a design evolution and limited construction of new destroyer classes.

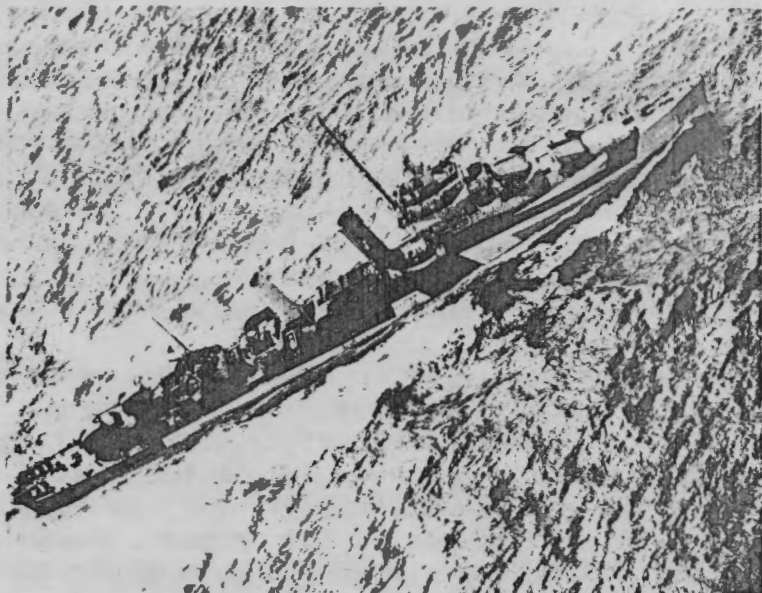
In each year after 1931 a few ships were laid down, initially limited by the 1,500-ton standard displacement ceiling imposed by the London naval limitation treaty. "Standard displacement" was a legal concept established by the Washington Treaty in 1923; it measured the displacement of a warship fully manned, armed, supplied, and ready for sea, but without fuel or reserve boiler feed water. The first of the new destroyers were eight *Farraguts*, 1,365-tonners completed in 1934–35 with two stacks and new dual-purpose 5-inch 38-caliber guns. Sixteen 1,450-ton *Mahans* and eight 1,850-ton *Porter*-class "leaders" came into service during 1936–1937. In 1937 two *Dunlaps*, near-sisters to the *Mahans*, appeared with two single-stacked 1,500-ton *Gridleys* and eight similar *Bagleys*. Between 1937 and 1939 five single-stacked *Somers* class 1,850-tonners with improved steam plants went into commission. Two more *Gridleys* appeared in 1938, followed in 1939–1940 by ten single-stacked *Benhams* and twelve ships of the *Sims* class on a slightly enlarged displacement of 1,570 tons to permit improvements. To improve dryness forward, a problem with the earlier flushdeckers, the new ships were built with raised forecastles. Torpedo tubes were placed above the main deck in the later destroyers for the same reason. Boiler uptakes were trunked into one or two stacks to gain valuable centerline deck space. In the earlier destroyer classes the four boilers were grouped together in two firerooms, with the engine room—two engine rooms in the *Sims* class—aft. Keeping the firerooms together and combining the uptakes allowed more deck space topside, but a hit in the right place could disable both firerooms, or both engines, and leave a ship dead in the water.

The fiscal 1938 program included the first eight of what would become two large classes of two-stack destroyers, 1,620-tonners with their two firerooms and two engine rooms arranged in alternating sequence and so connected that a ship could operate on either half of her engineering plant. This "split-plant" arrangement meant added weight, but also gave a better chance of surviving a torpedo hit. These ships were designed to carry five 5-inch guns and three quad torpedo tubes, with .50-caliber antiaircraft (AA) machine guns, and became the beginning of the *Benson* (DD 421) class.

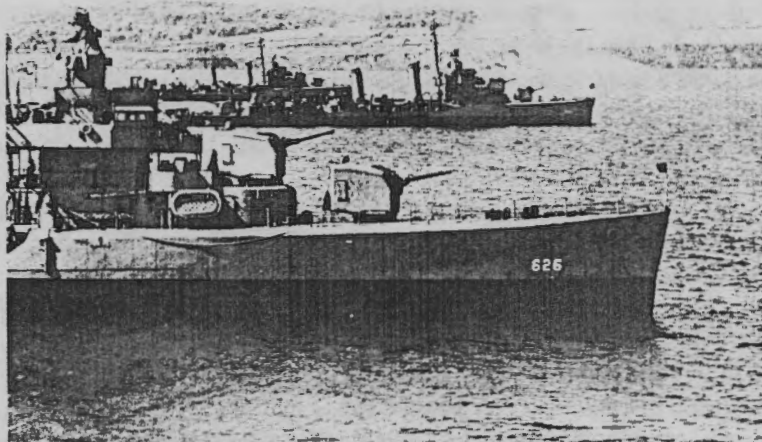
Eight more *Bensons* were funded in fiscal year 1939. Designers added more AA machine guns, put light armor around the bridge and gun director, and replaced the quad torpedo tubes with two new quintuple mounts. This arrangement seemed better than the original design, and the Navy decided to incorporate these changes in the first eight ships. Meanwhile, a new high-temperature steam plant had been selected for the 1939 destroyers, and it was retroactively included in two 1938 ships being built by Bath Iron Works. The new two-stackers now began to fall into groups, some built with the new high-pressure machinery and others with lower-temperature plants.

The 1941 building program was to have consisted entirely of new *Fletcher*-class destroyers. By 1940 the pace of war was heating up in Europe and in China, and 72 more *Benson*-pattern ships were ordered during 1940 and early 1941. Beginning with *Bristol* (DD 453), later ships of the class were built with four 5-inch guns instead of five to make room for new topside weights. Combinations of building programs, armaments, and engineering plants led to some confusion in class designations during the war years. Ships of the original 1938 design were called the *Benson* class. The high-temperature ships of the 1939 program were first called the *Livermore* (DD 429) class; since DDs 423 and 424 were built to the same standard, they eventually came to be called the *Gleaves* (DD 423) class. The early four-gun ships were originally called the *Bristol* class; as time went on, all the five-gun ships lost one gun to improve stability and make room for anti-aircraft guns, and the *Bristol* distinction lost its meaning. The 96 ships built to the basic *Benson* concept eventually came to be known as the *Benson* and *Gleaves* classes, the difference lying in their machinery. As the war went on they all became tactically alike and operated together. It was from the *Gleaves* class that DESRON 18 was selected. (Friedman, 95–107)

In 1940 two shipbuilding contracts were let to the Seattle-Tacoma Shipbuilding Corporation. The first, on 9 September 1940, called for five *Gleaves*-class ships with hull numbers 493–497. The second, on 16 December, called for five more numbered DDs, 624–628. These 1,630-ton destroyers were originally manned by 18 officers and 220 men who served the four 5-inch 38-caliber dual purpose guns, 40mm and 20mm automatic AA guns, and five 21-inch torpedo tubes, with side-throwing K-guns and stern tracks for depth charges. The ships weighed 2,500 tons at full-load displacement and were 348 feet long with a beam of 36 feet and a maximum draft of 17 feet 5 inches. They had four superheated oil-fired boilers that delivered 825-degree steam to two geared turbines producing 50,000 horsepower to drive them at trial speeds of 37 knots. They were equipped with sonar as well as search and fire-control radar. (Fahey, 20–27)



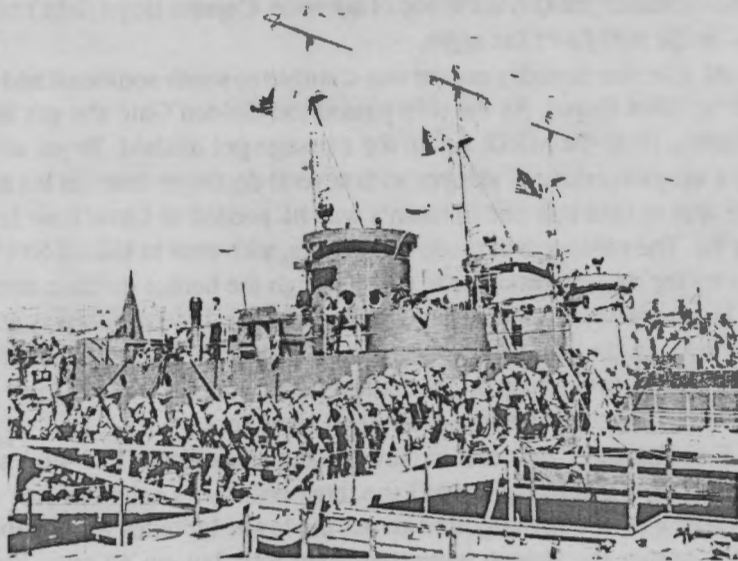
McCook (DD 496) in February 1945. Her two-tone color scheme has been replaced by pattern camouflage, but otherwise she looks as she did off Omaha Beach.



Satterlee (DD 626) at anchor in Belfast Lough, 14 May 1944, with *Baldwin* (DD 624) and *Nelson* (DD 623).



Thompson (DD 627) refuels from battleship Arkansas (BB 33) during rehearsal operations, 21 April 1944. Like her DESRON 18 sisters, she is painted dark blue to the height of the main deck, haze gray above that.



As D-Day approached, landing craft like these LCI(L)s assembled and loaded in English ports. DESRON 18 would soon be helping many of these craft fight their way ashore.

The first of DESRON 18's ships to join the fleet was *Carmick* (DD 493), commissioned on 28 December 1942. It was a dreary, gray day when she set her first watch; it had been raining. Those of us in the precommissioning details of the remaining ships watched with envy. We were eager to get going also. The other ships followed *Carmick* into commission, at intervals of about a month, until *Thompson* (DD 627) was commissioned on 10 July 1943. These nine ships were assigned to the Atlantic Fleet, and became Destroyer Squadron 18.

Doyle (DD 494) was commissioned on 27 January 1943. It had been snowing in the Pacific Northwest for a week or more. Seattle was not accustomed to snow, and public transportation was almost at a standstill. Still, the full crew turned out when the commissioning pennant went to the masthead and Lieutenant Commander Clarence E. Boyd assumed command. On 2 February *Doyle* departed Bremerton for San Diego.

There are about 1,040 sea miles from Cape Flattery, on Washington's northwest coast, to Point Loma at San Diego. This is a 48-hour run at 22 knots cruising speed. But Clarence Boyd had other ideas. Captain A. L. Gebelin, then *Doyle's* executive officer, recalls that once the ship had reached Cape Flattery, Boyd ordered Chief Engineer Sam Rush to put on the turns.

Doyle passed Cape Flattery abeam to port at about 1730. It was already dark. By about 2345 Cape Disappointment and the mouth of the Columbia River were abeam and the Western Sea Frontier's Movement Report Office (MRO) challenged *Doyle's* speed of advance. Captain Boyd didn't hear too well in the middle of the night.

At 1300 the next day course was changed to south-southeast and *Doyle* cleared Point Reyes. As the ship passed the Golden Gate she got another challenge from the MRO. Again the message got mislaid. Boyd, after all, was a very experienced skipper with several destroyer tours in his record. If he was to take this one in harm's way he needed to know how fast and how far. The passage was made in 30 hours, with time to kill off San Diego waiting for daylight in order to pass through the harbor defense nets.

February days were intense shakedown times. It was underway at 0700, pass through the nets, and proceed with exercises until dark. There was seldom a day to catch up on the endless paperwork. In March *Doyle* sailed from San Diego for Panama, enroute to New York.

Carmick and *Doyle* met in New York, and *Endicott* (DD 495) arrived shortly afterward. In April 1943 the three destroyers sailed as part of the screen of a slow convoy bound across the lower latitudes for Casablanca. In that harbor the French battleship *Jean Bart* lay, on an even keel but badly wrecked by the main battery of the battleship *Massachusetts* (BB

59) the previous November while landing the Army in North Africa. This was the first sure sign that we were at war.

We were back in New York by early June, and turned around with another convoy for Londonderry, Northern Ireland. We made four round trips across the Atlantic before the year was out. It was dull duty. We picked up sonar contacts, and chased around in circles dropping depth charges, but usually to no avail.

McCook (DD 496) and *Frankford* (DD 497) eventually found us, and DESDIV 35, the first half of DESRON 18, began to shape up. The squadron commodore, Commander W. K. Mendenhall Jr., occasionally rode *Doyle* or one of the others.

The small squadron staff was a tight fit. The captain moved into his small sea cabin to make room for the commodore in his stateroom. The staff members bumped us around in wardroom country. Despite the inconvenience, we and the commodore got to know each other.

On board *Frankford* crowding and discomfort went with the duty, since she was the designated squadron flagship. The small irritations which the rest of us suffered from time to time were endemic in the leader. Commodore Mendenhall was a "hard driver" who aimed to have the best destroyer squadron in the Atlantic Fleet. We all rose to his challenge; *Frankford* rose a little higher.

* * *

The Division scattered as we helped shake down new major warships in the sheltered waters off Trinidad in the British West Indies. *Doyle* screened the cruiser *Quincy* (CA 71) and did plane guard duty for the carriers *Bataan* (CVL 29) and *Wasp* (CV 18). The other ships of DESDIV 35 did likewise. We learned fast, steaming and stationkeeping with the big boys.

While operating with *Bataan*, *Doyle* played target for her small air group. One day a Grumman TBF torpedo bomber dropped a practice "fish," which would have been a sure killer. It hit *Doyle* between frames 130 and 132 on the port side, leaving a big dent in her hull plating, then dove under the keel and hit the starboard propeller. *Doyle* shook pretty hard before the "black gang" got her stopped. That ended that cruise.

It took four days to get *Doyle* into drydock at the Charleston, South Carolina, Navy Yard. By the end of February she was back in Casco Bay with a new propeller. Here, on 24 March 1944, the nine ships of DESRON 18 mustered together for the first time since leaving the builder's yard in Seattle.

All of the squadron's commanding officers were Naval Academy graduates; their class year and ultimate rank are shown.

DESRON 18 CAPT Harry Sanders, USN '23 (VADM)

Frankford (DD 497) CDR James L. Semmes, USN '36 (CAPT)

DESDIV 35 CAPT Harry Sanders, USN

Carmick (DD 493) CDR Robert O. Beer, USN '32 (RADM)

Doyle (DD 494) CDR Clarence E. Boyd, USN '28 (CAPT)

Endicott (DD 495) CDR Wilton S. Heald, USN '27 (RADM)

McCook (DD 496) LCDR Ralph L. Ramey, USN '35 (CAPT)

DESDIV 36 CDR Wm. J. Marshall, USN '25 (VADM)

Baldwin (DD 624) LCDR Edgar S. Powell, USN '34 (CAPT)

Harding (DD 625) CDR George G. Palmer, USN '30 (RADM)

Satterlee (DD 626) LCDR Robert W. Leach, USN '33 (RADM)

Thompson (DD 627) LCDR Albert L. Gebelin, USN '34 (CAPT)

Captain Harry Sanders had served as aide to Admiral Ernest J. King in 1941 when King was Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet. Sanders went to sea after Pearl Harbor when King became Commander in Chief, United States Fleet (COMINCH). He had only recently departed the Mediterranean after commanding Destroyer Squadron 13 from September 1943 until February 1944, including the landings at Salerno and Anzio. Captain Sanders relieved Commander Mendenhall as COMDESRON 18 in mid-March 1944. On 26 March Commander James G. Marshall relieved Commander Clarence Boyd of command of *Doyle*. During the preceding six months all of DESRON 18's commanding officers, except Commander Palmer in *Harding* (DD 625), had been replaced.

Nineteen forty-four brought other important changes. Most of the lieutenants who became department heads at commissioning had been ordered to newer destroyers and replaced by last year's ensigns, now lieutenants (junior grade). In *Doyle*, for example, the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander A. L. Gebelin left to take command of *Thompson*. He was relieved by Lieutenant E. J. "Ted" Sweeny. Where the commissioning complement included six lieutenants and two lieutenants (jg), it now stood at three lieutenants and eight lieutenants (jg). Of the original eight ensigns, four remained as lieutenants (jg), and ten new ensigns were on board. The wardroom, which had been crowded at 18 souls, now held 21 officers. At commissioning four of *Doyle's* officers on board were Naval Academy graduates; by 1944 she had two. This type of officer turnover happened in all nine ships of the squadron. Changes among the enlisted men were just as dramatic. In *Doyle* Walter Foley was promoted from

shipfitter first class to Warrant Carpenter and moved to wardroom country. Jack Gwin, from Texas, was a machinist's mate second class in *Doyle's* commissioning crew, and was now a chief petty officer. Ed Miller came aboard as a torpedoman's mate second class and made first class the hard way, by taking BuPers [Bureau of Naval Personnel] promotion exams. With only a few exceptions the sailors were reserves called up from Kansas, Illinois, North Carolina and the Bronx. Few had seen salt water, but they became outstanding Navy men who learned their jobs well and gave superb performance when it was due.

On 18 April 1944 DESRON 18 departed Boston as part of Task Group 27.8 under Rear Admiral Morton L. Deyo (Commander Cruiser Division 7) in the heavy cruiser *Tuscaloosa* (CA 37), with the veteran battleship *Nevada* (BB 36), bound for England.

II

DESRON 18 and OVERLORD

DESRON 18 came to Devonport by way of Plymouth, in southwest England, on 28 April 1944. None of the officers or men, save perhaps the commodore, had any idea what they were to do that summer; but these were now a skilled and well-schooled group of young men. The nine ship captains were 34 years of age, plus or minus a few years. Not many others were over 30.

By twos and fours the ships sortied daily for drills and high-speed maneuvering off the coast in the area of Eddystone Light. At day's end, back in the narrows of Plymouth Sound, each would pick up a mooring buoy and often take alongside a British counterpart. This thoughtful gesture, no doubt justified as a means of getting allied crews acquainted before sharing a battle, had a keen side effect.

No sooner were mooring lines secured than our "Brit" opposite numbers were on board for coffee and a quick tour. There followed a return visit to splice the mainbrace, courtesy of His Majesty George VI. After dinner we gathered in the American ship for ice cream and a movie. When the "flick" was done the non-watchstanders again visited the Brit for more honest Scotch. And so passed some pleasant days of Anglo-American camaraderie when shore leave was limited.

According to one story there was an exception to the "pick up the buoy" routine. *Frankford*, with COMDESRON 18 embarked, was always assigned a pierside berth. Commodore Sanders assumed this was in deference to his rank and position. Lieutenant (jg) Richard Zimmerman, (USNA '43) *Frankford*'s CIC [Combat Intelligence Center] officer, thought otherwise. This young bachelor made the acquaintance of a lovely British

WREN (Women's Royal Navy Service), Phyllis Saunders, who was posted to the Port Director's Office. She had much to say about day-to-day berthing assignments. She also knew that Dick could hit the beach much sooner from pierside than from any mooring buoy in the river. And so it was.

Three of the British DDs berthing with DESRON 18 were *Melbreak*, *Talybont*, and *Tanatside*, "Hunt Type III" class of "escort destroyers" of 1,087 tons, 264 feet long at the waterline with four 4-inch guns and light AA guns, designed as fast antiaircraft and antisubmarine escort ships. Their 19,000 horsepower gave them about 25 knots. (Lenton & Colledge) They operated with DESRON 18 at Omaha Beach.

* * *

Before the first of May, the squadron shifted to Weymouth Bay, behind Portland Bill. On the night of 3 May DESRON 18 was underway for Phase I of Exercise Fabius I, screening transports of the 11th Amphibious Force heading for Slapton Sands. Five days earlier this had been the scene of a tragedy.

During an invasion rehearsal in the early hours of 28 April, the day we arrived at Plymouth, German motor torpedo boats, called "E-boats" by the Allies, torpedoed two LSTs of the Utah Beach landing force whose British escort had become disabled and could not leave port. Because of a command foulup Rear Admiral Don T. Moon, the Utah force commander, was never notified of the gap in his screen. This raid cost us *LST-507*, *LST-531*, and 638 American soldiers and sailors. (Morison, XI, 66-67) To keep this from happening again, DESRON 18 now escorted 16 transports and 21 LSTs of the Omaha Beach landing force. (Doyle war diary)

Early on 5 May DESRON 18, less *Thompson*, formed up off Plymouth to escort nine transports north to Scotland. The Officer in Tactical Command (OTC) was Commander Transport Division 3 in the attack transport *Charles Carroll* (APA 28). The convoy also included *Henrico* (APA 45), *Samuel Chase* (APA 26), *Anne Arundel* (AP 76), *Dorothea L. Dix* (AP 67), *Thomas Jefferson* (APA 30), *Thurston* (AP 77), and British troopers *Empire Anvil* and *Empire Javelin*.

On 9 May DESRON 18 was again underway for Slapton Sands for shore bombardment drill. On the 12th *Carmick* and *Endicott* escorted the ammunition ship *Nitro* (AE 2) to Dunoon Bay, Greenock, Scotland.

After Slapton Sands the rest of DESRON 18 went north to Scotland for shore bombardment practice and got acquainted with our Shore Fire Control Parties (SFCP), each made up of one Navy and one Army officer, with a small team of Army radiomen.

DESRON 18 was based in the River Clyde. Sometimes we moored in Dunoon Bay, Greenock, in Kilbrannan Sound off Sanda Island, or across the North Channel in Belfast Lough, Northern Ireland. The squadron exercised at every conceivable evolution. We practiced defense against E-boats in something called "video" exercises. We fired AA practice at towed sleeves off Black Head, Northern Ireland. We practiced shore bombardment with our Shore Fire Control Parties, and escorted the "big boys" while they did their practicing.

On 25 May DESRON 18 was ordered south as escort for twelve transports. At 1100 the squadron, less *Frankford*, departed Belfast Lough and joined the convoy. We found Destroyer Division 119 in company. These were new *Allen M. Sumner*-class ships: *Barton* (DD 722), *Walke* (DD 723), *Laffey* (DD 724), *O'Brien* (DD 725), and *Meredith* (DD 726), all commissioned between the end of December 1943 and mid-March 1944. Captain William L. Freseman (USNA '22), COMDESRON 60, took charge and formed us in tight columns on either flank of the column of troopers. The commodore led the pack in *Barton* from a station about 2,000 yards ahead of the formation; the rest of DESDIV 60 deployed on either bow. DESDIV 35 took station to port of the convoy, while our DESDIV 36 deployed to starboard.

Down the Irish Sea we went, southbound in the swept channel at about 25 knots. Around 0400 the watch had just changed as we passed St. Goven's Lightship abeam to port and prepared to take the formation 90 degrees left into the Bristol Channel. Suddenly a blip showed on *Barton's* radar screen, identified as a ship northbound in the center of the narrow channel. We intercepted right at the turning point.

The "loner" was the American Export Line steamer *Exhibitor*, who had no idea she was confronting a fast 25-ship naval convoy and maintained course and speed in the center of the channel. The destroyermen, at least, had radar and could sense the real world of racing ships around them as we whipped through the left turn while crowding into less than half the channel width. Sleeping destroyer captains, suddenly called to the bridge, had to quickly grasp the tactical situation and judge if the OOD [Officer of the Deck] had made the correct move.

I recall that, when my boss in *Doyle* suddenly realized I was steaming parallel to the nearest transport at a distance of about 100 yards, his heart must have jumped, but he left the conn to me as he watched *Endicott* and the freighter slip by about 150 yards on the port side.

Doyle's war diary says *Exhibitor* passed down our starboard side, which would have placed her between *Doyle* and the line of troopers. I was Officer of the Deck (OOD), and remember it as told above. This is confirmed by correspondence from Jim Arnold, who was OOD of *McCook*.

Endicott, ahead of us, fared poorly. Captain Heald found his way onto the very dark starboard bridge wing. He took one look at the troopship close aboard, called for left full rudder—and cut across *Exhibitor's* bow. It was a good clean hit. *Endicott* lost her bow; the freighter survived. The rest of us raced on down channel, heads-up for German E-boats rumored to be about. *Endicott* hove to and estimated damage, and then limped into Milford Haven, Wales, escorted by *Carmick*. On 28 May *Endicott* transferred ammunition, and her secret orders for Operation Neptune [the naval part of Overlord] to *Emmons* (DD 457), commanded by Commander Edward B. Billingsley. Our squadron mate, *Endicott*, missed the action at Omaha Beach.

We delivered our transports to Weymouth Bay, behind Portland Bill, on 27 May and anchored at 0132 in dense fog. On the night of the 28th Portland was the target of a heavy German air raid. DESRON 18 hove to short stay, ready to up anchor and sortie if necessary, fearful the Germans would see the crowd of ships anchored in the bight of Portland Bill. We held our fire and watched as the guns ashore blazed away at the bombers held in the searchlight beams. We heard the bomb explosions and saw the flashes, followed by flames of things ashore burning. *McCook* took a near miss that knocked the SG surface-search radar antenna off the foremast and jammed the 5-inch gun director's FD fire-control radar and optical rangefinder against the stops. We never fired a shot, but knew we were now in harm's way.

* * *

The Western Task Force (Task Force 122), under Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk in the heavy cruiser *Augusta* (CA 31) and carrying Lieutenant General Omar Bradley's U.S. First Army, included over 200 naval vessels of all types. TF 122 was organized into TF 125, Assault Force "U," aimed at Utah Beach under Rear Admiral Don P. Moon. TF 124 was Assault Force "O," headed for Omaha Beach under Rear Admiral John L. Hall, with Major General L. T. Gerow's V Army Corps. Admiral Hall and General Gerow were in the command ship *Ancon* (AGC 4), a sophisticated amphibious headquarters ship whose very existence was classified. Rear Admiral C. F. Bryant's Bombardment Group included the battleships *Texas* (BB 35) and *Arkansas* (BB 33), with four light cruisers—the British *Glasgow* and *Bellona*, with the French *Montcalm* and *Georges Leygues*—and the eight remaining ships of DESRON 18 with their three British teammates. The Escort Force, which provided the screen, included three more U.S. and two British destroyers, with three American destroyer escorts and two French frigates.

DESRON 18, less the damaged *Endicott* with *Emmons* added, was assigned to provide fire support for landing the V Corps on Omaha Beach. To allow the minesweepers time to get in and out before the scheduled 0550 start of the naval bombardment, we left Portland at 1300 on the 4th, heading into a rough and windy sea rising in the Channel. After weeks of quiet summer weather a storm blew down from Greenland, and nearly crippled the invasion. General Eisenhower made his last-minute decision to delay the landings for 24 hours. In the middle of the night, as we neared Point Z, the turning point to head for Normandy, we received an urgent recall. We did a turnabout to get back to Portland before daylight; just another exercise.

The invasion force included a number of Rhino ferries, pontoon barges powered by big outboard motors. These could only make 5 knots when the wind was aft. They had been dispatched early, and were to turn south toward Normandy by mid-afternoon. A new ensign on the DESRON 18 staff had the watch during the night of 4 June when the Supreme Headquarters message ordering the 24-hour delay was received. He was reluctant to wake the commodore. Captain Richard Zimmermann, *Frankford's* CIC officer at the time, remembers that when Captain Sanders, up early on the 5th, read the message board he realized the Rhinos were about to turn southward. He urgently ordered *Frankford* and another destroyer to work up to flank speed, intercept the ferries, and turn them back.

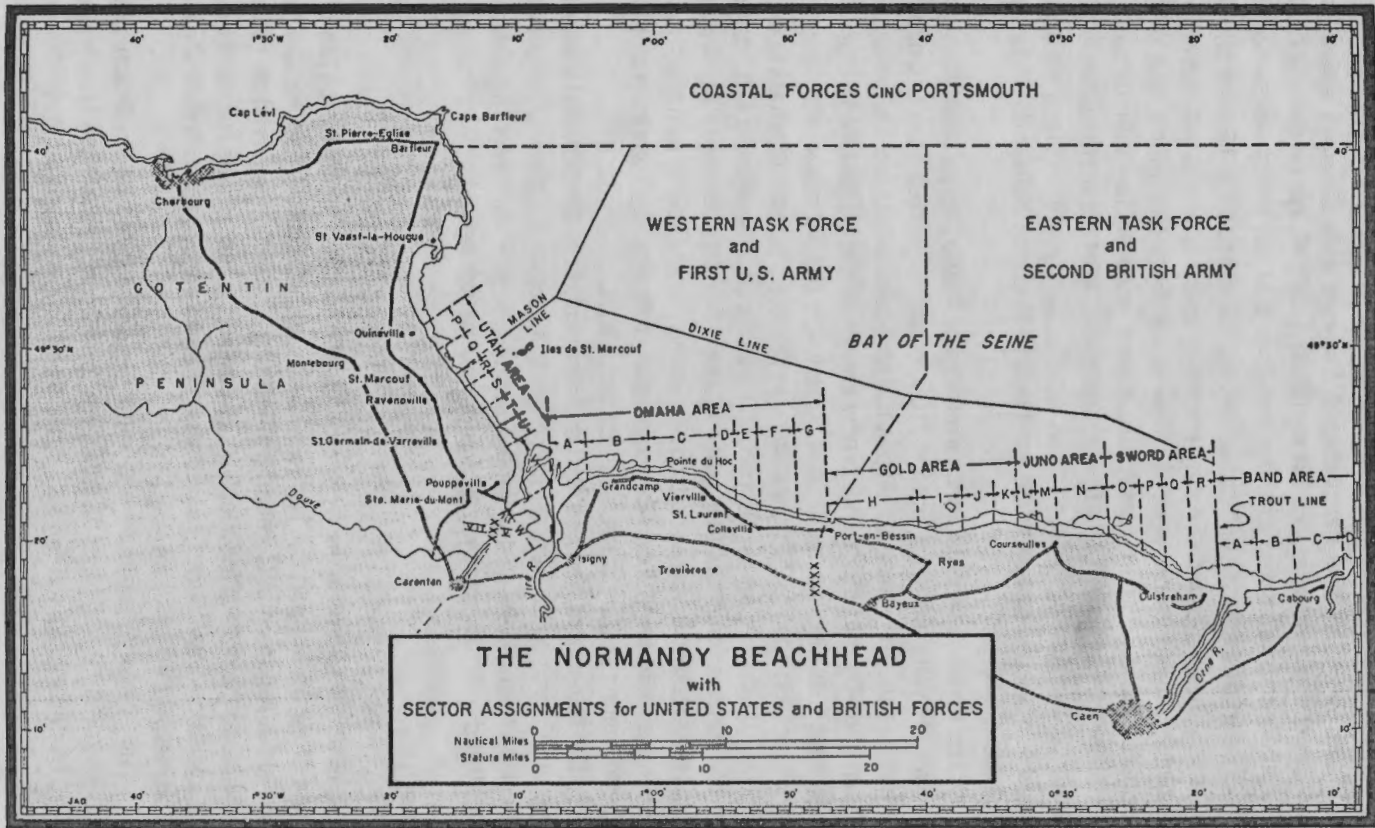
The movement was repeated during the night of the 5th, and this time we didn't turn back. General Eisenhower's meteorologists had detected a clear spot behind the first weather front, and he gave the order to go ahead. We fitted into that narrow gap and put the armies ashore.

* * *

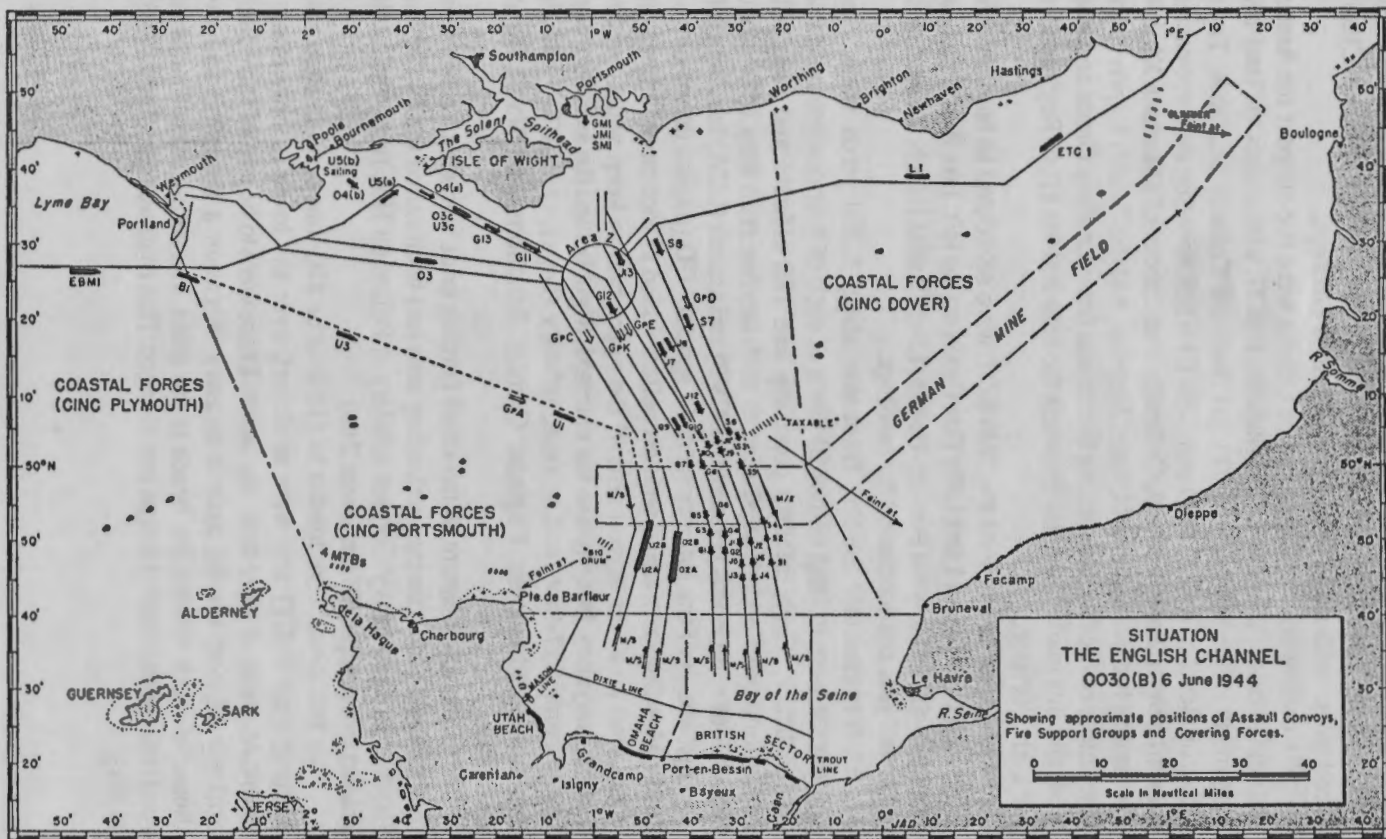
Five destroyers on the western flank of the main Omaha Beach landing gave close fire support to Captain W. O. Bailey's Assault Group 0-2, landing the 116th Regimental Combat Team of the 29th Infantry Division, taking position to the right of the boat lane. The assault group included the American attack transports *Charles Carroll* and *Thomas Jefferson*, with their British equivalent, *Empire Javelin*.

The Pointe de la Percee was at the western end of Omaha Beach, with the grim Pointe du Hoc a further three miles away. Pointe Du Hoc was to be taken by the 2d and 5th Ranger Battalions, supported by *Satterlee* and HMS *Talybon*.

The units of the 116th to land on beaches Dog Green, Dog White, and Dog Red were, in order, Companies A, G and F; Company E was to land



Cap Lévi, Cape Barfleur, St. Pierre-Eglise, Barfleur, Cherbourg, St. Vaast-la-Hougue, Cotentin Peninsula, Quinéville, St. Marcouf, Ravenoville, St. Germain-de-Varreville, Poppesville, Ste. Marie-du-Mont, Carentan, Deule, Vire, Grandcamp, Vierville, St. Laurent, Colleville, Tréviers, Pointe du Hoc, Omaha Area (A-G), Gold Area (H), Juno Area (I-R), Sword Area (S), Band Area (A-C), Trout Line, Port-Lan-Bessin, Courseulles, Ryes, Gabaux, Caumont, Cabourg, Caen, Orne R., D-Day, Magon Line, Dixie Line, UTAH AREA, PLOUHAIR, ST. JULIEN, Iles de St. Marcouf, XXXX



on Easy Green. These units were to seize two of the beach exits, one leading to St. Laurent and the other to Vierville-sur-Mer. A company of Rangers went ashore on Charlie beach, just west of Dog Green; most of Charlie faced steep cliffs and was not scheduled for landings.

Six destroyers at the east end of Omaha were fire support for Assault Group 0-1 under Captain E. H. Fritzsche, USCG, with orders to "land 16th Regimental Combat Team (RCT), 1st Division, Colonel George A. Taylor USA, on Beaches EASY RED and FOX GREEN, covering the three eastern [beach] exits to Saint-Laurent, Colleville and Cabourg." (Morison XI, 130) Transports included *Samuel Chase*, *Henrico*, and the British *Empire Anvil*. The center of the Omaha landing beach was between Easy Green and Easy Red, and this marked the line between the 16th and the 116th Regiments of the 29th Division.

Companies E and F of the 16th RCT were scheduled to land on Easy Red, with Companies I and L for Fox Green on the left. Fox Red Beach lay farther to the left toward Port-en-Bessin. Like Charlie Beach, it faced steep cliffs and was not scheduled for landings.

Each regimental landing front was about 3,000 yards wide. Two companies were to land within 50 yards of each of four designated points on the beach. Each infantry company had 180 officers and men with supernumeraries added; at 32 men to each landing craft they filled six of the 36-foot vehicle and personnel (LCVP) and assault (LCA) landing craft.

Just ahead of the infantry went 64 special "DD (duplex drive) tanks," Army M-4 Sherman tanks with propellers added to locomote through the water, and a canvas screen around the upper hull to keep water out and furnish buoyancy. Imaginative but untested. Right behind the assault groups would come 157-foot landing craft, infantry (large), or LCI(L), with the Division Headquarters, Engineer Combat Battalions, and Naval Beach Battalion.

The line of departure of the small landing craft was set 11 miles from the beaches. This transport unloading area had been called for by General Bradley to keep heavy German artillery at Pointe du Hoc from hitting the loaded troopships. (Eisenhower, 269)

The DD tanks were loaded in 112-foot or 120-foot open-decked tank landing craft (LCT) and were to debark over the lowered bow ramp a thousand yards or more from the beach. These were to be part of the critical artillery support for the assault infantry. Between a thousand and two thousand yards behind the beach is the main Vierville-Colleville coastal road linking the coastal towns and villages. This road was the objective for D-Day.

* * *

The shoreline behind the beaches at Omaha is quite varied. To the west, toward the Pointe de la Percec, a hundred-foot cliff rises vertically behind the beach, and rocks appear off shore. East of this, along Charlie Beach, the beach widens somewhat and the cliffs become rugged bluffs. Just east of Charlie Beach was the first exit, designated D-1. A paved road goes some 600 yards from the beach up a shallow draw to the village of Vierville-sur-Mer on the coastal road. At the entrance to D-1 the paved road from Vierville turns eastward and runs for a mile along Dog Green and Dog White beaches. Along this stretch the seawall at the high water line is 4 to 8 feet high. Along the paved road villas are spaced 50 to 100 yards apart; this group of houses is called Hamel-au-Pretre. Behind the villas the ground slopes easily to about 75 feet above sea level and continues, more gently, to level ground at about 120 feet.

A mile and a quarter east of D-1 was Exit D-3, at the dividing point between Dog Red and Easy Green. A village in the mouth of the draw is called Les Moulins. A paved road goes up the shallow draw to join the coast road at St.-Laurent-sur-Mer. The third exit, E-1, is another three-quarters of a mile eastward. This leads up the valley of a shallow stream called the Riviere Rouquet. The draw rises to a plateau about halfway between St.-Laurent-sur-Mer and the village of Colleville-sur-Mer. In this area the flatter ground above the beach is about 150 feet high, but the bluffs are not too steep. The bottom of the E-1 draw is wooded. A dirt road climbs from the beach along the west side of the draw into the outskirts of St.-Laurent. This exit served Easy Red beach.

About a mile east of Exit E-1 is a much larger, gentler, valley with a wide mouth at the beach and a paved road following its right side for three-quarters of a mile into the center of Colleville-sur-Mer. This was Exit E-3. Except for the last few hundred yards into Colleville, the road grade is very gentle. Because this little valley is such a natural route inland from the beaches, it was heavily defended by the Germans. This exit served Easy Red and part of Fox Green.

Continuing east from Exit E-1 to the next draw, the bluffs are rather steep and lead to cultivated fields between Colleville and a smaller village, Cabourg. There were a few buildings along this stretch. This exit draw was designated F-1, and served the eastern half of Fox Green. It was a short, steep climb for about 550 yards to an elevation of 165 feet above mean sea level. This is a slope of about 14 percent, difficult for heavy vehicles though a dirt road of sorts ran along the west side of the draw to Cabourg.

From the eastern end of Fox Green to Port-en-Bessin the bluffs are very steep, rising about 200 feet above sea level. A little draw, about three miles east of F-1, leads inland toward Ste.-Honorine-des-Pertes, but it has no beach.

The morning of 6 June was wet and windy; seas were 3 to 6 feet. Launching and loading the landing craft started just after 0400. It was rough going; some boats got dropped or smashed. Some men were dumped into the ocean, and others got fouled in the cargo nets that the troops used to climb down the sides of the transports to the landing craft. Soldiers got very seasick after being in the rough-riding small craft for over two hours.

The beaches at Normandy are very flat, and the tidal range quite large, and these conditions had a dramatic effect on events. The approximate tide levels at Port-en-Bessin, from action reports and correlation with recent tide tables, were as follows:

	Low	High	Low	High
Time	0552	1052	1810	2306
Height (ft.)	+3.1	+22.9	+4.1	+22.9

(Above chart datum, extreme low water; Spring Range 19.8 ft.)

As the tide would rise about 20 feet between 0600 and 1100 on 6 June, by 0900 it would be going up at more than an inch every minute. This was helpful for retracting landing craft, but dangerous for soldiers taking cover on the beach from German gunfire.

From the tide levels it is clear the initial landings would beach several hundred yards below the high water mark. Shoreward was a seawall of sorts; beyond it the ground rose toward the fields and hedgerows of Normandy. Heavy smoke and dust from the bombardment had settled over the landing beaches by H-hour, 0630. To this was added a planned smokescreen in the 2-mile area between the landing craft line of departure—the “jumpoff” point from which they began their final assault run—and the beaches. The boat coxswains could not see landmarks after leaving the line of departure. Some were good at compass steering, but not well briefed on the strong tidal current running west-to-east along the beach. Others simply followed the boat ahead. The problem of smoke was worse on the eastern beaches. The destroyers were not much bothered; they had radar and a dry place from which to navigate.

III

Assault in the Morning

About 1800 on 5 June *Doyle* and *Emmons* escorted the Canadian sweepers of Minesweeping Flotilla 31 into the Seine estuary. Sunset was at 2206. The force was keeping Zone B Time, British Double Summer Time. After dark the small dan-buoys marking the swept channel showed feeble white lights to guide the amphibious vessels toward the beaches. At about 0400, after the minesweepers had cleared Fire Support Area 4, *Harding* and *Baldwin* (DD 624) joined, with British destroyers *Tanatside* and *Melbreak*. To the right of the boat lane in Fire Support Area 3 *McCook*, *Satterlee* (DD 626), and *Carmick* screened British sweepers of Minesweeping Flotilla 4; *Thompson* and HMS *Talybont* protected the rear. When the sweepers finished, the destroyers took station in Area 3.

Harding's first log entry for 6 June 1944 read: "0000. Ahead of USS ANCON, guide."

Carmick, close to the beach, noted that "by midnight the seas were calm, the wind force 1, visibility four to six thousand yards, sky partially overcast, with a rising full moon." Captain Beer announced on the 1MC public-address system: "Now hear this. This is probably going to be the biggest party you boys will ever go to. So let's all get out on the floor and dance." (Ryan, 162)

On board *Doyle* a visiting reporter from *Yank*, the Army news magazine, wrote that "since midnight we had watched the prelude to the big show. . . First came the Pathfinders [lead planes that marked target areas with flares]. . . . I watched five separate air attacks, each lasting not more than ten minutes." (Bernard)

- 0230: On board *Thomas Jefferson*, about 12 miles offshore, assault troops began climbing down into LCVPs, 36-foot plywood-hulled landing craft. "The process . . . was rendered difficult by the choppy seas, which caused some minor delays . . . *Thomas Jefferson* was able to unload all its craft in 66 minutes." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 38)
- 0430: *Thomas Jefferson's* landing craft departed for Omaha Beach. *Thompson* noted "intense aerial bombardment of Point[e] du Hoc area taking place." At 0500 a "plane exploded and crashed. . . ."
- 0515: Norwegian Destroyer *Svenner*, in the British beachhead area, tried to turn into a German E-Boat torpedo spread but didn't quite make it. She was one of the first naval casualties; more would come later.¹

Just after 0530 the surface-ship war started. The French light cruiser *Montcalm*, anchored about 7,500 yards off the beach, opened fire first. It was both fitting and sad, for the French sailors were firing at their own homeland. *Doyle* and *Emmons* came under fire from enemy artillery around Port-en-Bessin and promptly fired back, with *Harding* and *Baldwin* joining in. And the *Yank* reporter in *Doyle* wrote, "German 155mm rifles, far on the left flank, were pumping shells around the pre-invasion task force, raising towers of foam ominously close." (Bernard)

Doyle identified the German guns as 75mm or 88mm, and located the battery west of Port-en-Bessin. *Emmons*, on the other hand, reported it to the east of the port. *Harding* reported that the guns were 155mm. The hand-drawn chart enclosed with *Doyle's* action report showed batteries in both places. These guns fired again later in the day, and the destroyers returned fire.

- 0530: "One of the control vessels for Dog Beach drifted off station, which may explain some of the later troubles of approach in that sector. The fact that all the mislanded craft were east of their targets points to the tidal current as a contributing factor." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 40)

There were no casualties among the British and Canadian minesweepers, nor among the Omaha Beach destroyers.

* * *

1. The first Allied naval casualty of Operation Neptune was the American minesweeper *Osprey* (AM 56), lost to a mine in the Channel on 5 June.

The scheduled prelanding shore bombardment, for which DESRON 18 had trained so intently, started on schedule at 0550. The ships were not in close formation. They were strung out in a loose column, slowly steaming west against the tidal current flowing parallel to the beach.

0548: *Satterlee* reported: "Commenced firing . . . (on) targets in the vicinity of Pte du Hoc, range approximately 5,000 yards."

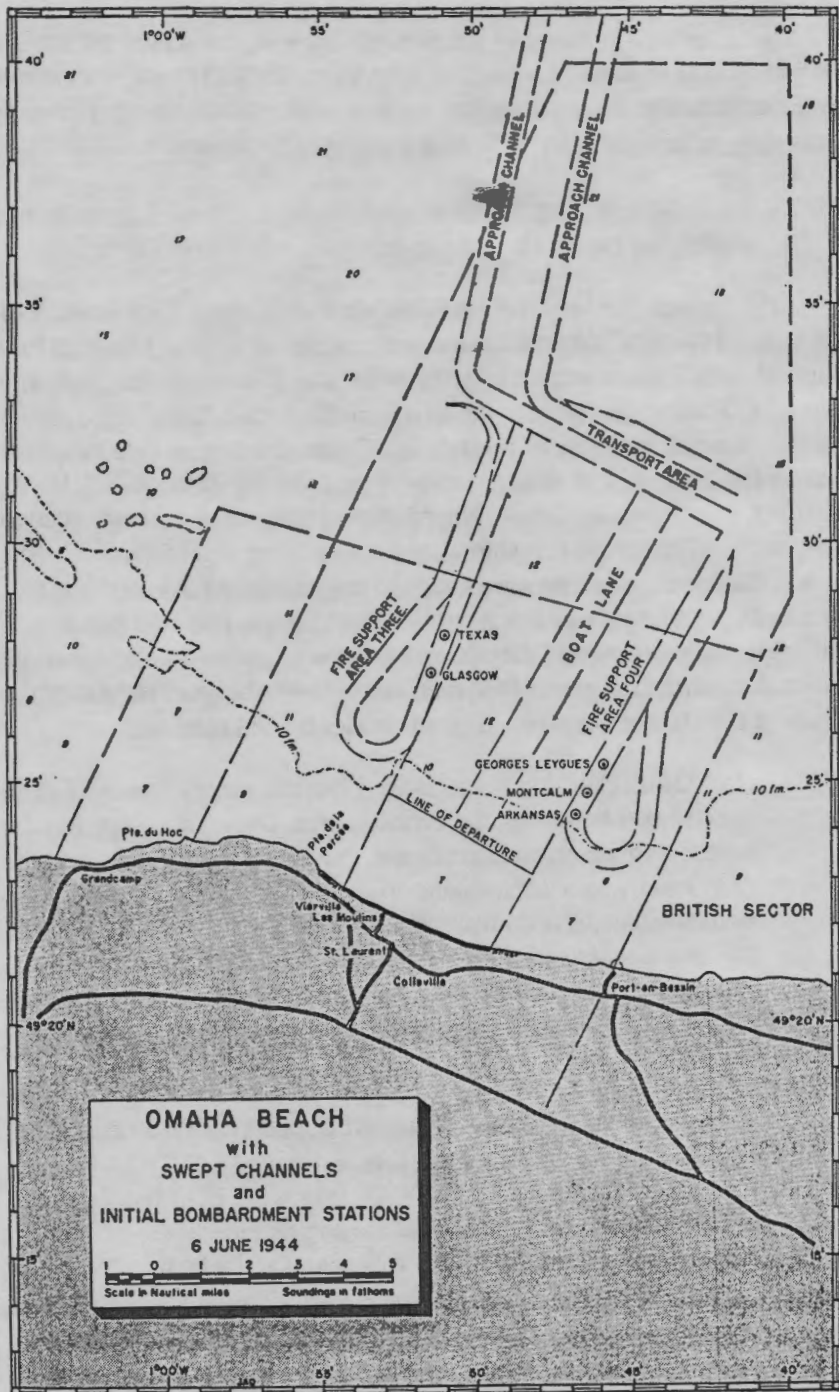
Satterlee and *Talybont* were at Pointe du Hoc to support the landing of the U.S. 2d and 5th Rangers. On the western end of Omaha Beach in Fire Support Area 3, from west to east, the order was *Thompson*, *McCook*, and *Carmick*. Their targets were in the area from the Pointe de la Percee across the Dog beaches to the bluffs behind Easy Green. On the east side *Tanatside* was in the lead off Fox Green, followed in order by *Emmons*, *Baldwin*, *Harding*, *Doyle*, and *Melbreak*. The positions of the ships corresponded to their assigned targets so one ship would not be firing across another's line of fire. The first four ships were assigned targets along Easy Red and Fox Green; *Doyle's* target was in the cliff overlooking the Fox Red beach exit, and *Melbreak* was assigned the crossroads in the village of Sainte Honorine. *Texas*, *Arkansas*, *Glasgow*, *Montcalm*, and *Georges Leygues* fired over the heads of the DDs at German artillery batteries behind the beach.

0555-0614: 329 Eighth Air Force B-24 Liberator heavy bombers drop over 13,000 bombs on the invasion area. Overcast compelled the bombers to attack on instruments, guided by Pathfinders, and the drop zone was shifted inland to avoid hitting the landing craft. Bombs fell in the rear areas, and had little effect on beach defenses. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 42)

Baldwin somehow found herself in the boat lanes at 0617, leading the charge for the beaches, and "firing guns 1 and 2 in assigned area and ahead of troops."

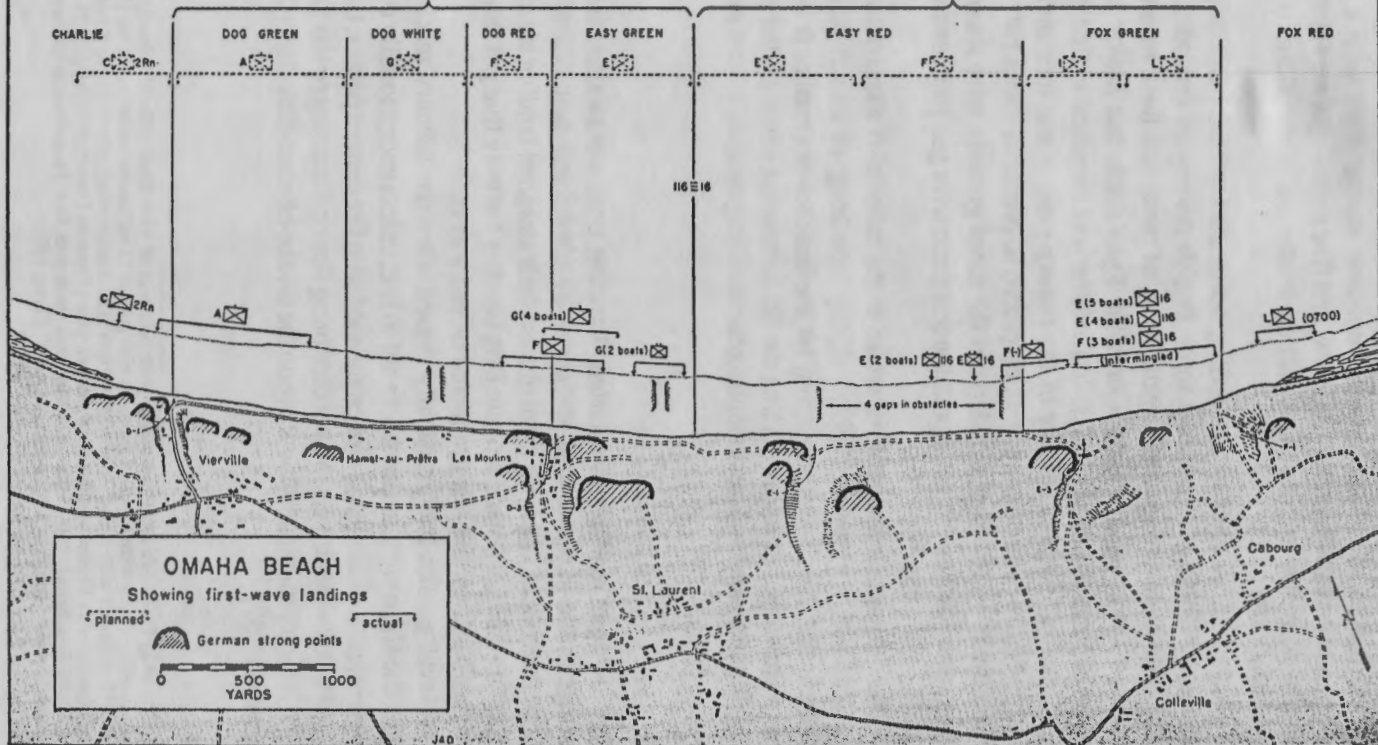
At 0625 bombardment ceased as planned. Support craft—British LCTs converted to fire salvos of 5-inch rockets and called LCT(R)—sent off their barrages. The seagoing Sherman DD tanks were right behind them, and by 0630 48 troop landing craft were closing the beaches.

The infantry companies in the first wave came in by boat sections, six boats—LCVPs or LCAs—to a company, with company headquarters sections due to land at 0700 in the next wave. The landing craft carried an average of 31 men and one officer, with a section leader and five riflemen in the bow. They were followed by a wirecutting team of four men to clear



Assault Group O-2, Capt. W. O. Bailey
16th RCT, Col. C. D. W. Canham

Assault Group O-1, Capt. E. H. Fritzsche, USCG
16th RCT, Col. G. A. Taylor



the way through beach entanglements. Behind these were two BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) teams of two men each, two bazooka [light antitank rocket launcher] teams, a four-man mortar team with a 60mm mortar, a two-man flamethrower crew, and five demolition men with TNT charges. A medic and assistant section leader sat in the stern. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 43)

During 35 minutes of prelanding bombardment the battleships and cruisers, DESRON 18, and the three British destroyers unloaded about 3,000 rounds on designated targets. Most of these had been located and identified from aerial photos. Cornelius Ryan notes that Major Werner Pluskat of the recently arrived 352d Division was surprised to find that the heavy shelling had not hit any of the twenty guns of the four divisional artillery batteries he commanded, emplaced in positions about half a mile behind the coast. Pluskat wondered if the naval gunners were shooting at observation posts under the impression that these were gun positions. (Ryan, 200)²

The only action reports that spoke to the scheduled aircraft bombing was *McCook's* entry at 0447, "Heavy bombing of beach defenses commenced." None of it, however, hit the beaches at Omaha. It is clear, from the events that followed, that the 35 minutes of naval artillery firing at intelligence- and reconnaissance-generated targets didn't work either.

* * *

At H-hour real trouble started. Landing craft coxswains lost their bearings in the morning mist, deepened by smoke and dust kicked up by the bombardment. Many of them missed their assigned landing sectors. Of the 64 DD tanks, 27 made it to the Dog beaches but only five got ashore on the Easy beaches; the rest foundered on the way in.

"Naval gunfire had practically ceased when the infantry reached the beach; the ships were under orders not to fire, unless exceptionally definite targets offered, until liaison was established with fire control parties. Lacking this liaison, the destroyers did not dare bring fire on the strongpoints through which infantry might be advancing on the smoke-obscured bluffs." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 57)

2. The 352d Division's artillery batteries were only part of what Ryan calls "the deadly guns of Omaha Beach": "There were 8 concrete bunkers with guns of 75 millimeters or larger caliber [75mm to 88mm]; 35 pillboxes with artillery pieces of various sizes and/or automatic weapons; 4 batteries of artillery [presumably Pluskat's]; [about] 18 antitank guns [37mm to 75mm]; 6 mortar pits; 35 ["About 40" (*Omaha Beachhead*, 25)] rocket-launching sites, each with four 38-millimeter [32-centimeter] rocket tubes; and no less than 85 machine gun nests" (Ryan, 199n).

The Special Engineer Task Force, made up of Navy underwater demolition teams and the 299th Army Engineers, methodically went about their business of blowing holes in the beach obstacles, but lost nearly half their numbers to German gunfire. The Army's narrative notes that "casualties . . . ran to 41 percent for D Day, most of them suffered in the first half-hour." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 42)

0633: A mine exploded under the forward engine room of *Corry* (DD 463), of the Utah Beach Fire Support Group.

When the second wave hit Omaha at 0700, Hell broke loose again. Here is what the record shows:

At Pointe du Hoc—

0708: "Second Ranger Battalion landed at Pte du Hoc." (*Satterlee* action report)

0710: "... machine gun fire directed at this ship. Commenced firing . . . at pillbox in vicinity of Pte du Hoc." (*Satterlee* action report)

0710: "... the first boat of the 2d Rangers . . . to attack Pointe du Hoe [*sic*] landed . . . to the east of the point. These boats were forty minutes late in arriving . . . due to . . . additional distance of transports . . . and . . . slow progress by the heavily loaded boats into wind and sea. Wind . . . from . . . West force . . . (10-15) knots, sea . . . from the west waves (2-4) feet high and moderate swells from North North West. Five . . . or . . . six out of the ten . . . boats foundered . . . between one . . . and two . . . hundred yards from the beach. Most of the Rangers . . . reached the beach." (COMDESDIV 36 action report)

0715: "The fortifications at Pointe du Hoe [*sic*] had been under heavy fire . . . to H minus 05 minutes. However this fire had been lifted according to schedule and when the Rangers landed fortyfive [*sic*] minutes later the Germans had filtered back into the fortifications and were waiting for them with machine guns, mortars, rifles and hand grenades. . . . As the Rangers landed they found themselves pinned under the cliffs and were being rapidly cut to pieces. . . . I immediately ordered SATTERLEE to close the point and take the cliff tops under . . . fire. . . . Her fire control was excellent and the

Rangers were enabled to establish a foothold on the cliff top. [Satterlee established communications with the Ranger shore fire control party at 0728.] As their Shore Fire Control Party advanced inland the remainder of the Rangers established communication with SATTERLEE by light and were thus enabled to rapidly call for close support fire. By this means SATTERLEE and later THOMPSON and HARDING were able to repel several enemy counter-attacks which otherwise would have wiped out this Ranger Battalion. . . . The gallant fight of . . . our Rangers against tremendous odds and difficulties was an inspiration to all naval personnel fortunate enough to witness this phase of the battle. The Rangers were magnificent." (COMDESDIV 36 action report)

0732: "Commenced firing on targets designated by SFCP, initial range 2,600 yards." (Satterlee action report)

Meanwhile—

0720: Companies A & B, 2d Ranger Battalion, landed at their alternate objective on Dog Green behind the 1st Battalion Landing Team of the 116th Infantry Regiment, and were soon in trouble.

These Ranger units were awaiting orders to back the assault at Pointe du Hoc. When nothing was heard after 15 minutes they followed their alternate orders to land at Charlie Beach and proceed up Exit D-1 toward Vierville. Approaching the beach, Lieutenant Colonel Max F. Schneider, 2d Ranger Battalion, saw conditions on the beach—Companies A and B of the 116th were scattered and taking losses—and ordered the Ranger boats to move further east. Even so, the boats carrying these Rangers came in on the east edge of Dog Green, and two landing craft were lost.

The two Ranger companies totaled about 130 officers and men; 62 reached the seawall. "Only a few hundred yards further east . . . 13 out of the 14 craft carrying the 5th [Ranger] Battalion touched down close together, in two waves. . . . The 450 men of the battalion got across the beach and up to the sea wall with a loss of only 5 or 6 men to scattered small-arms fire." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 53)

0729: *Corry*, her back broken, sank off Utah Beach. Twenty-two of her crew were lost, 33 more were wounded. (Roscoe, 349-50)

0730: "HMS TALYBONT departed [the beachhead area] (for screen duty) in accordance with previous instructions." (COMDESDIV 36 action report)

With the 116th RCT—

0630: The 743d Tank Battalion landed. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 42)

The 743d brought its M4 tanks to the beach in LCTs. Company B landed on Dog Green at the mouth of the Vierville draw and was hit by German artillery. The battalion commander's LCT was sunk off the beach, and all other officers but one lieutenant were killed or wounded. Eight of Company B's 16 tanks landed and opened fire on the German defenses. Tanks of Companies A and C landed in good order to the east on Dog White and Dog Red. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 42)

0630: "Word received from OTC that some ships were firing into our own troops and for these ships to cease fire." (*Carmick* action report)

0636: Company A of the 116th Infantry Regiment landed as planned on Dog Green. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 45)

Under fire within a quarter-mile of the shore, the infantry met their worst experiences just after touchdown. Small-arms fire and artillery concentrated on the landing areas. The worst was from converging fires from automatic weapons. Survivors reported hearing the fire beat on the ramps of the landing craft before they were lowered, and then seeing the hail of bullets whip the surf. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 44)

Several hundred yards of bluff west of exit D-3 (Dog Red) were obscured by heavy smoke from grass fires, apparently started by naval shells or rockets. Because of smoke, enemy guns were unable to deliver effective fire on that end of Dog Beach. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 45)

"One of the six LCAs carrying Company A foundered about a thousand yards offshore, and passing Rangers saw men jumping overboard and being dragged down by their loads. At H+6 minutes the remaining craft grounded in water 4 to 6 feet deep, about 30 yards short of the outward band of obstacles. Starting off the craft . . . the men were enveloped in accurate and intense fire from automatic weapons. Order was quickly lost as the troops attempted to dive under water or dropped over the sides into surf over their heads. . . . In short order every officer of the company . . . was a casualty, and most of the sergeants were killed or wounded. The leaderless men gave

up any attempt to move forward and confined their efforts to saving the wounded, many of whom drowned in the rising tide. . . . Fifteen minutes after landing, Company A was out of action for the day. Estimates of its casualties range as high as two-thirds." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 45-47)

0638: "First landing craft containing men and material made landing on beach. Enemy fire severe from unknown points." (*McCook* action report)

0640: Company E of the 116th came ashore. This company missed the assigned beach—Easy Green and the western half of Easy Red—entirely and came ashore far to the eastward, some of its landing craft intermingled with units of the 16th RCT on Fox Green. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 47)

Company F landed, almost on target, on Dog Red and Easy Green. They came ashore in front of the strong defenses of Exit D-3, the Les Moulins draw. Part of the company was screened by smoke, but lost their officers getting ashore; others, unprotected by smoke, took 45 minutes to get across the beach under heavy fire, losing half their numbers. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 47)

0647: "German Shore Battery opened fire on this ship. 0650 German Shore Battery silenced by the main battery of this ship." (*Carmick* deck log)

0650: "Instead of coming in on Dog White, Company G landed in scattered groups . . . [on Easy Green, leaving an unplanned thousand-yard gap between them and Company A]. The . . . boat sections nearest Dog Red, where smoke from grass fires shrouded the bluff, had an easy passage across the tidal flat. . . . Further east on Easy Green, the other sections of Company G met much heavier fire as they landed, one boat team losing 14 men before it reached the embankment." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 47)

0700: The first assault wave had failed. By this time Company A had been cut to pieces at the water's edge. Company E was lost, and finally landed in the 16th RCT zone. Company F was disorganized by heavy losses, and scattered sections of Company G were trying to move along the beach to their assigned sectors. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 47)

The later waves did not come in under the conditions planned for their arrival. The tide began flowing into the obstacle rows at 0700 and covered them by 0800 after the tide rose 8 feet. Obstacles were gapped in only a few places. The defense was not neutralized, and no advances had been made beyond the shingle. Mislandings continued. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 49)

Company B of the 116th was scheduled to land on Dog Green. One section of Company B landed behind Company A and came under the same destructive fire that had wrecked Company A. Remnants of both companies mingled and struggled to survive. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 50)

Company H landed, badly scattered. The 1st Machine-Gun Platoon and two mortar sections landed on Easy Red. Other segments of the company landed on Dog Red and Easy Green with heavy casualties. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 51)

0700: Headquarters of the 2d Battalion of the 116th landed under heavy fire on Dog Red.

The Battalion Commander was among the first ashore, and set to work trying to organize leaderless troops on the beach. Until about 0800 he had no radio and could not communicate with the scattered elements of his battalion. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 51)

0710: Company C, scheduled for Dog Green, landed on Dog White.

0716: "Field gun observed firing on beachhead from approximately [map coordinates] 636928 [Pointe de la Percee]. Commenced firing. . . . 0755 Ceased fire on above target. Target destroyed." (*Thompson action report*)

0730: Company D, scheduled to land at 0710 on Dog Green, landed in scattered fashion and at various times on Dog Green and Dog Red. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 50, Map VI)

To complete the disaster, the Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion Landing Team, and Beachmaster unit for Dog Green, landed on Charlie Beach and lost from a half to two-thirds of their strength to small-arms fire crossing the tidal flat to cover under the cliffs. Sniper fire pinned them there most of the day. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 50)

0730: Assault units were now lined up along the whole of the 116th Infantry Regiment's portion of the landing beach. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 53)

"Five of the eight companies of the 116th RCT had landed with sections well together and losses relatively light. . . . The weakest area was in front of Exit D-1; Dog Green, the zone of the 1st BLT, had almost no assault elements on it capable of further action." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 53)

0730: "Regimental command parties began to arrive. The main command group of the 116th RCT came in on Dog White. . . . From the standpoint of influencing further operations, they could not have hit a better point in the 116th zone. To their right and left, Company C and some 2d Battalion elements were crowded against the embankment on a front of a few hundred yards, the main Ranger force [5th Ranger Battalion] was about to come into the same area, and enemy fire from the bluffs just ahead was masked by smoke and ineffective. The command group was well located to play a major role in the next phase of action." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 53)

The entire 3d Battalion of the 116th landed together about 10 minutes late, and east of their intended beaches. Only a handful of troops from the first wave had landed on Easy Green and the west half of Easy Red, part of the 16th RCT's zone. With the 3d BLT ashore the beach was now fairly crowded. German small-arms fire was light. Despite few casualties, men tended to become immobilized after reaching shelter and reorganization was delayed because boat sections were mixed up. Sections landed on top of different units. Company M landed together, further east on Easy Red, but troops were tired after spending time in the cramped landing craft. Enemy fire was more intense from the strong points above Exit E-1. The company made the move toward the embankment as a body. Said one survivor, "the company learned with surprise how much small-arms fire a man can run through without getting hit." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 52)

0740: LCI(L)-91, approaching Dog White, is struck by artillery fire.

Disaster struck LCI(L)-91, carrying the backup headquarters unit of the 116th RCT. Hit by artillery fire as she tried to get through the beach obstacles, she backed off and tried again. As she dropped her ramps a shell, or incendiary rocket, hit forward, killing everyone in the forward compartment. A sheet of flame went up. Five minutes later LCI(L)-92,

approaching the same beach area, had her fuel tanks set off by an underwater explosion. The two LCIs burned for hours. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 56)

0750: Company C started toward the bluff between Exits D-1 (Vierville) and D-3 (Les Moulins). (*Omaha Beachhead*, 59)

The first penetration on Dog White was made by Company C, of the 116th, and the 5th Ranger Battalion. Reorganization was spurred by Brigadier General Norman D. Cota, deputy commander of the First Infantry Division. Between Exits D-1 and D-3 the bluffs were steep and bare, but the climbing men found small folds and depressions for protection against small-arms fire. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 60)

Smoke gave protection. Empty trenches were found along the crest, and the troops then went ahead into flat, open fields and stopped as they took scattered machine-gun fire at some range from their flanks. Captain Berthier B. Hawks, the company commander, had a foot crushed coming ashore, yet climbed to the top of the bluffs with his men. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 62)

0810: Rangers advanced across the beach road at Dog Green.

The first groups up, a platoon of Company A and some men of Company E, went straight inland on a front of less than 300 yards. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 62)

0810: "SFCP contact, asked for fire in area of T5. Ranging salvo was fired at a range of 17,000 yards, then unable to [hold] contact [due to] transmitter trouble on their part." (*Carmick war diary*)

0830: *Carmick* breaks the cease-fire order that had suspended supporting gunfire at H-Hour.

"Early in the morning a group of tanks were seen to be having difficulty making their way along the breakwater road toward Exit D-1 [the Vierville draw]. A silent cooperation was established wherein they fired at a target on the bluff above them and we then fired several salvos at the same spot. They then shifted fire further along the bluff and we used their bursts again as a point of aim." (*Carmick action report*)

0830: Rangers reached bluff top; last elements of assault troops left the sea wall.

Other platoons were on top of the bluffs by 0830 and stopped to organize. Company D platoons had to clean out a few Germans from the trenches along the edge of the bluff, knocking out a machine gun. German mortars began to range in on the slope, knocking down General Cota and his aide and killing two men nearby. Just east of Dog White the beachhead was widened before 0900 by small parties from Companies F and B. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 62)

0830: Elements of Company G arrive on Dog White.

Four boat sections of Company G had arrived in fair condition on Easy Green at about 0700. Moving around other troops as they slowly headed westward under fire toward Dog White, units gradually got scattered and lost cohesion. Only fragments of Company G finally reached Dog White after the main action on that beach was over. The 2d BLT commander, Major Sidney Bingham, got some 50 men from Company F across the beach to attack Les Moulins. Their M1 semiautomatic rifles had gotten clogged with sand, and the troops could not put enough rifle fire on the German defenses. Bingham managed to get a squad most of the way to the top of the bluff east of Exit D-3, just across the mouth of the draw from Les Moulins, but they were unable to knock out a machine gun nest at the top of the bluff and had to withdraw. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 52)

0839: "Commenced firing on pillbox which was delivering fire against beach. 0852 Ceased firing on pillbox - range fouled by Patrol craft. 0854 Commenced firing. 0858 Ceased firing. Pillbox demolished by direct hits." (*McCook* action report)

0850: "HMS TANATSIDE left Fire Support Area (previous orders to return to the screen)." (COMDESDIV 36 action report)

An explanation is in order to account for the British "Hunt" class DDs being ordered to the outer screen so early in the assault. The reader will recall they were 1,087-tonners with 4-inch main battery guns, excellent ships for anti-E boat work and for ASW [antisubmarine warfare]. However, they lacked the modern fire-control computers and radar-equipped, gyro-stabilized gun directors that the *Gleaves* class had. The Brits had to be able to see their targets, while the Americans could deliver blind fire on map coordinates given by the shore fire control parties. This was an important distinction after the initial bombardment was completed.

0900: Elements of Companies K, I, and L advance to the top of the bluff between Exits D-3 (Les Moulins) and E-1 (Vierville).

Sections of Companies K and I were together on Easy Green; L and M were more scattered and to the east, on Easy Red.

"Since each boat team was supposed to make its own way past the bluffs to a battalion assembly area about a mile inland, no attempt was made to organize the companies for assault, and forward movement was undertaken by many small groups starting at different times, acting independently, and only gradually coming together as they got inland by different routes and with different rates of progress." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 63)

No resistance was met at the top of the bluff, where troops came out in open ground extending toward the village of St.-Laurent. Some took shelter behind a hedgerow some 200 yards from the bluff. Company K lost 15 to 20 men getting to the top shortly after 0900. Most of Company M's boat sections landed together near the Exit E-1 strongpoints and came under heavy fire. They set up four machine guns and two heavy mortars in a gully and engaged German gun emplacements near Exit E-1. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 65)

* * *

It is clear from this record that by 0900, two hours after the third assault wave landed in the 116th RCT half of Omaha Beach, many units of infantry had reached the top of the bluffs and penetrated inland between Vierville and St.-Laurent. The destroyers had held their fire, as ordered, except when clearly seen targets were attacked with 5-inch fire, usually in response to some indication of need from the troops ashore. It was also becoming clear, however, that the overall situation on the beach was difficult. While the infantry moved inland, the support troops were bogged down with wrecked and damaged vehicles, tanks and artillery. The beachmaster would not have matters under control until later in the afternoon. Two LCIs were ablaze.

* * *

With the 16th RCT—

0630: "Commenced indirect fire on target No.2 intended to aid in clearing beach exit [Exit E-3, Fox Green] now completely obscured by smoke and dust." (*Doyle* action report)

741st Tank Battalion landed on Easy Red and Fox Green.

"In the 16th RCT zone, only 5 of the 32 DD tanks (741st Tank Battalion) made shore; of Company A's 16 standard tanks, 2 were lost far off shore by [sic] an explosion of undetermined cause, and 3 were . . . put out of action very shortly after beaching. The surviving third of the battalion landed between E-1 and E-3 draws and went into action at once against enemy emplacements." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 42)

0650: "Ceased fire. Total ammunition expended to present time —364 rounds of 5"/38 caliber common" [common projectiles were general-purpose shells, capable of penetrating light armor and designed to attack shore and surface targets by blast and fragmentation]. (*Doyle* action report)

Five sections of Company F, scheduled for Easy Red, landed on Fox Green intermingled with Company E of the 16th and Company E of the 116th.

These five boat sections were scattered from Exit E-3 to a point 1,000 yards east. Two sections landed together in front of the E-3 strongpoints. Mortars and machine guns downed about a third of the men before they could get as far as the shingle. Further east, the other three sections did no better; seven men from one landing craft made it to the shingle. Two of Company F's officers survived the landing. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 48)

0700: Company G, in the second wave, landed on Easy Red on target.

The company landed in good order, but suffered most of its 63 casualties between boats and the shingle bank. They came in on top of three sections left from the first wave, one from Company E of the 16th RCT and two from Company E of the 116th. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 54)

0700: Company K, in the second wave, landed on Fox Green.

Elements of five companies were already ashore on Fox Green, scattered except for Company L. Company K, arriving at 0700, added to the mix with six sections, bunched in two groups that were not in contact with each other for some hours. Company K took 53 casualties on the beach.

0705: Company L, scheduled for Fox Green, landed on Fox Red.

Company L's landing craft were carried eastward by the current, and landed 30 minutes behind schedule on Fox Red instead of in front of Exit

E-3 (Colleville). One craft foundered offshore; artillery inflicted some casualties as the troops landed and destroyed another craft just after its men had gone ashore. Machine gun fire caused more losses as men crossed 200 yards of beach to get to the shingle. One section kept well spread out and got through without casualties; the other sections lost 34 men. The company regrouped in the shelter of a steep, cliff-like rise to the bluff, and moved to the right to attack the heights. Company L was the only one of the eight infantry assault wave companies to get across the beach able to operate as a unit. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 49)

0710: "Observed gun flashes from battery west of Port-en-Bessin. Fired four salvos. Target obscured by smoke. Changed course to eastward standing toward target." (*Doyle* action report)

"Smaller . . . pieces, including entrenched French 75s, barked from the coast dead ahead. . . . One dropped 200 yards ahead of the DOYLE's bow." (Bernard)

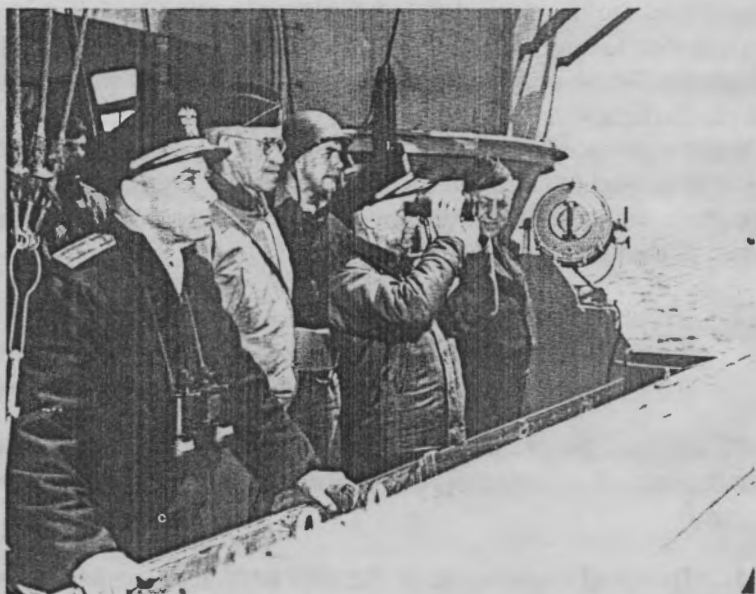
0715: Troops of Company E of the 16th RCT and Company E of the 116th break out of Fox Green and cut wire for an assault on the bluffs.

A section of E of the 16th blew a gap in the wire above the shingle, started up from the beach, and were held up, under "intense" fire, by mines in the marshy ground at the foot of the slope. They found a way past the mines and began to work their way up the slope under cover of a small draw. Further west, two sections of E of the 116th cut the wire and approached the slope, but ran into mines and took shelter in a ditch. One man tried to clear a way through the minefield with an explosive charge, but he was killed by a mine. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 67)

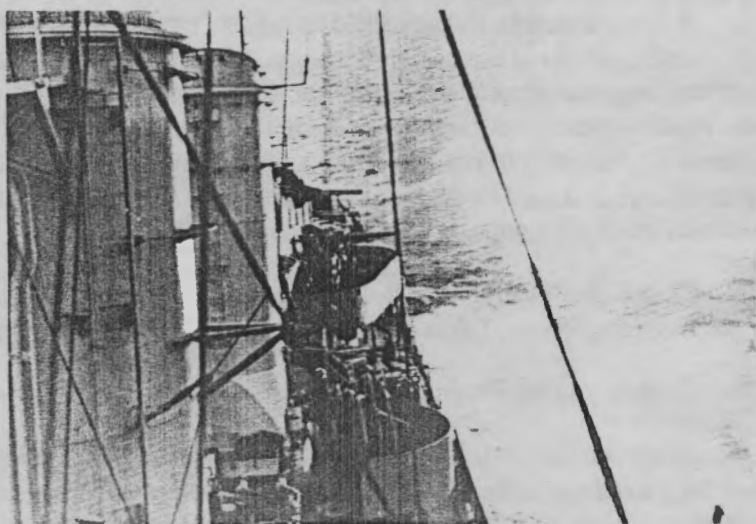
0724: "Same shore battery [west of Port-en-Bessin] seen to fire again. Fired four salvos. Target obscured by smoke." (*Doyle* action report)

0730: Company G breaks through barbed wire on Easy Red.

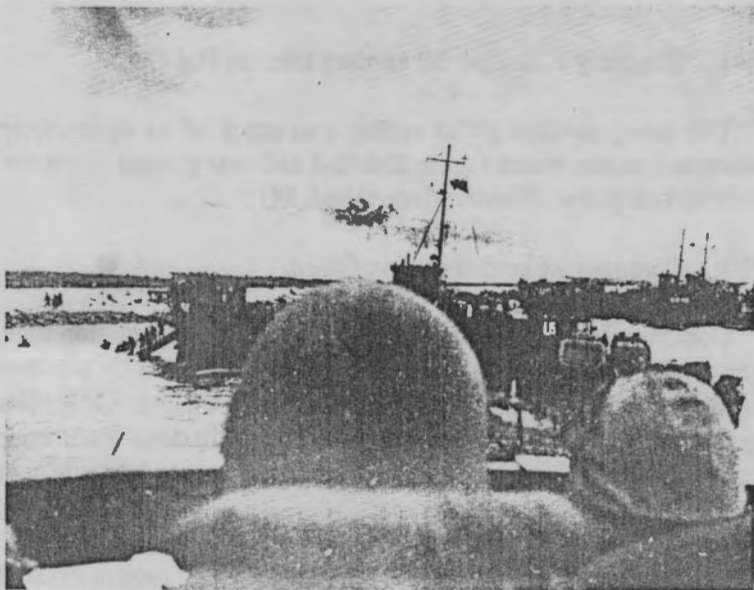
Company G landed at 0700, got to the embankment in good order, and set up their machine guns. When 1st Battalion landing craft came under fire from positions along the bluff as they approached the beach at 0730, Company G's machine guns gave them heavy covering fire. A few minutes later, men of Company G blew gaps in the elaborate barbed-wire entanglement beyond the shingle with the help of combat engineers. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 68)



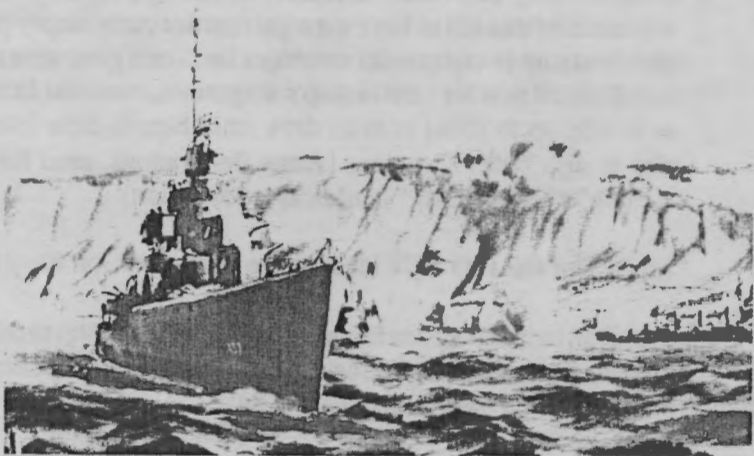
Rear Admiral Alan Kirk (left) commanded the American invasion task force carrying Lieutenant General Omar Bradley (second from left) and his U.S. First Army to the Normandy beaches.



An unidentified *Gleaves*-class destroyer fires at close range on the morning of D-Day.



LCI(L)-553 and LCI(L)-410 land troops on Omaha Beach. LCI(L)-553, hit by artillery fire, did not survive D-Day. Smoke and haze over the beach made navigation difficult for landing craft coxswains.



"Target of Opportunity" by Dwight Shepler.

0730: Company H landed, 20 minutes late, on Fox Green.

This company lost all its radios, and much of its other equipment, getting across the beach facing Exit E-3 and was pinned down for some hours by heavy fire. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 54)

0730: Company M landed on Fox Green.

Company M, a weapons company [each infantry battalion included a "heavy weapons company," armed with .30-caliber heavy machine guns and 81mm mortars], landed scattered between 0730 to 0800. One boat capsized offshore, and the others had to unload in deep water under fire. They succeeded in getting enough equipment ashore to be ready to support the rifle companies.

0730: "Departed fire support area enroute to patrol station in swept channel . . . in accordance [with] . . . Operation Order. . . 0810. . . Stood out to USS ANCON to receive Rear Admiral [Arthur B.] COOK and Major General [Thomas T.] HANDY [observers from Washington headquarters]. (*Harding* action report)

0740: "Checked fire [temporarily suspended firing]. Watching for targets of opportunity and renewed activity at strong points. Advantage was taken of this lull to have the repair parties carry empty powder cases and cans [metal powder cartridges for 5-inch guns were stowed in individual powder cans in ship's magazines, removed from cans to be sent up to guns] to main deck amidships to clear guns, and also to distribute 'K' rations [Army field rations, used for battle feeding in Navy ships]." (*Baldwin* action report)

1st BLT of the 16th RCT lands in the third wave, on Easy Red.

This battalion landed between Exits E-1 and E-3 (Colleville) to reinforce the first assault companies, suffering fewer casualties than earlier units landing on this beach. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 54)

0750: "Observed fire from same target [battery west of Port-en-Bessin], elevation 150 feet, set back about 25 to 50 feet from edge of cliff. Commenced firing full salvos, rapid fire, with both air and impact burst. That target was not observed to fire again until about 1900." (*Doyle* action report)

0750 (approximately): Companies G and E start up the bluff between Exits E-1 and E-3.

Company G fought its way up a small draw, knocking out three machine guns. On reaching the top of the bluff, they began to move inland. Their covering fire helped a section of Company E get to the top on G's right. As G moved south, E turned west at about 0800 and moved along the crest of the bluff to capture or neutralize the strongpoint defending the eastern side of Exit E-1 with the help of naval guns. Other troops now began to move up the small draw opened by Company G, and reinforcements began to land in front of the E-1 exit. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 68-71)

0759: "... returned fire with main and secondary battery [5-inch and 40mm guns] on enemy battery to eastward and westward of Port-en-Bessin." (*Emmons deck log*)

0800: "Observed machine gun fire from nest at outer end of righthand breakwater Port-en-Bessin." (*Doyle action report*)

Company I of the 16th RCT, from the first wave, finally lands on Fox Green an hour and a half late and behind the second wave.

This company, pulled by the current, went almost as far as Port-en-Bessin before they corrected their navigational error. They finally landed on their assigned beach after having two boats swamped. One of the four remaining boats hit a mine coming in to the beach, and all were hit by shells or machine-gun fire, and casualties were heavy. The company commander found himself the senior surviving officer on Fox Green, in charge of the mingled troops of the 3d BLT on that beach. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 54)

0800: LCI(L)-85, landing on Fox Green, is hit by artillery fire.

Company A of the 1st Medical Battalion, attached to the 16th RCT, was embarked when the Coast Guard-manned ship grounded on a beach obstacle and took a shell hit forward. Listing from a hole below the waterline and on fire amidships, LCI(L)-85 pulled off the obstacles and backed away to make another attempt to beach. This time she got into shallow water and put her landing ramps down. A few men got ashore before her ramps were shot away and new fires were ignited. The LCI backed away from the beach, put out her fires, and transferred her many casualties to another ship before she sank. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 56; *Morison*, XI, 139-40)

- 0805: "Opened fire with 40MM guns on target [machine-gun position on Port-en-Bessin breakwater]. Numerous direct hits scored. Expended 40 rounds." (*Doyle* action report)
- 0810: "Contacted Shore Fire Control Party. No targets yet sighted by them." (*Doyle* action report)
- 0810-0901: "Steaming various easterly courses about 1500 yards off shore between Colleville and Port-en-Bessin at 8 knots." (*Doyle* deck log)
- 0815: Colonel George Taylor, 16th RCT, lands on Fox Red, organizes patrols, and sends them inland to begin penetrating the defenses in this sector. (Morison, XI, 140)

The first part of the 16th RCT command group had landed at 0720; the regimental executive officer and 35 men were lost coming ashore. Colonel Taylor arrived at 0815 "and found plenty to do on the beach. Men were still hugging the embankment, disorganized, and suffering casualties from mortar and artillery fire. Colonel Taylor summed up the situation in terse phrase: "Two kinds of people are staying on this beach, the dead and those who are going to die—now let's get the hell out of here.'" (*Omaha Beachhead*, 71)

- 0820: "When about 3000 yards offshore received two shell hits in close succession from shore battery east of Port-en-Bessin of 88 or 105mm caliber. . . . First shell hit port whaleboat in after starboard quarter. . . . Various hits of shrapnel pierced uptakes, main deck, blower intake. . . . Second shell hit after port bit[t] on forecandle . . . and exploded just above main deck between bits and gun one [over the forecandle], blowing 8" x 12" hole in main deck, with shrapnel damage to . . . gun mount and severing a hydraulic line in gun one, putting this gun out of automatic operation. There were no personnel casualties and all damage was repaired by ship's force in a short while." (*Baldwin* deck log)
- 0822: "Opened counter battery fire with No. 3 and No. 4 - 5" guns and port 40 mm Mount on casemated gun in strong point east of Port en Bessin. Battery ceased firing. 0825 Continued deliberate 5 inch fire with all guns on Port en Bessin strong point. 0839 Checked fire on strong point. . . . Resumed lookout for targets of opportunity and renewed activity at strong points." (*Baldwin* action report)

0830: Navy beachmaster orders vehicle landings stopped on western Omaha beaches due to lack of movement off the beaches. (Morison, 140)

Larger landing craft—LCI(L) and LCT—had been unable to penetrate the offshore obstacles. At 0830 LCT-30, commanded by Lieutenant (jg) Sidney W. Brinker, USNR, rammed its way through to beach on Fox Green off Exit E-3 (Colleville) and engaged a German strong point with her 20mm guns. LCI(L)-554 did the same with the help of a covering destroyer, landed her troops and withdrew unharmed. Other landing craft followed where these two had led, and troops began to flow ashore. (Morison, 141)

0830: Other infantry units began to leave cover and move toward the bluffs.

“The outstanding fact about these first two hours of action is that despite heavy casualties, loss of equipment, disorganization, and all the other discouraging features of the landings, the assault troops did not stay pinned down. . . . At half-a-dozen or more points . . . they found the . . . drive to leave . . . cover and move . . . over the open beach flat toward the bluffs. Prevented by circumstance of mislandings from using . . . rehearsed tactics, they improvised . . . methods to deal with what defenses they found. . . . In nearly every case where advance was attempted, it carried through the . . . beach defenses. . . . Various factors . . . played a part in the success of these advances. Chance was certainly one; some units happened to be at points where the . . . defenses were weak, where smoke . . . gave concealment, or where dangerous strongpoints had been partly neutralized by naval fire or by the tanks. At one or two areas . . . , notably Fox Green, destroyers’ guns and tanks were called on . . . and rendered good service.” (*Omaha Beachhead*, 58)

“On Easy Red a lieutenant and a wounded sergeant of divisional engineers stood up under fire and walked over to inspect wire obstacles. The lieutenant came back and . . . looked down disgustedly at the men lying behind the shingle bank. ‘Are you going to lay there and get killed, or get up and do something about it?’” (*Omaha Beachhead*, 58)

One feature of early penetrations influenced actions for the rest of the day. Penetrations were not made up the strongly defended draws, but up the bluffs where German defenses were thin. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 59)

0830: The commander of the 7th Naval Beach Battalion suspends landing of vehicles.

Draws exiting the beach were still strongly defended, and engineers had not yet been able to clear openings in the shingle for vehicles. Arriving vehicles found themselves hemmed in at the water's edge; obstacles and German gunfire channeled many landing craft to Easy Red and Easy Green, which was becoming jammed with vehicles unable to get any further. Through the next few hours a large number of landing craft milled about off Easy Green and Easy Red as they waited to land. Two batteries of antiaircraft guns attempted to land, but all but two guns were sunk. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 79)

The Cannon Company of the 16th RCT got its halftracks ashore but could not move through a traffic jam of disabled vehicles on the beach. Its six 105mm howitzers were loaded on DUKWs ["Ducks," Army 2.5-ton amphibian trucks] which swamped, losing the pieces and 20 men. Elements of two self-propelled antiaircraft battalions landed, losing men and vehicles but putting their surviving halftrack-mounted multiple .50-caliber machine guns to good use supporting the infantry in attacks on German positions.

The commander of the 741st Tank Battalion came ashore to find his radio soaked with seawater. He and his command group had to go to each tank individually to direct its operation, losing three men out of five in the process. The commander of another tank battalion was killed while walking up to one of his tanks to direct its fire. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 79-80)

0835: "... left the screening area north of transport area . . . and proceeded . . . to a position about 1200 yards off Easy Red Beach. . . . The ship remained in this area for seven . . . hours patrolling off Easy . . . [and] Dog . . . beaches. . . . [A]n attempt was made to establish communications with the assigned shore fire control party but contact could not be made. Consequently, all fire, with one exception, was made on targets of opportunity." (*Frankford* action report)

"Throughout morning and afternoon rendered direct fire support at targets of opportunity on beach "DOG RED" and DOG WHITE." (*Frankford* war diary)

0901: "Observed firing from directly inside lefthand breakwater [Port-en-Bessin]. Sighted small German patrol boat tied up inside breakwater. . . . Opened fire with main battery, full salvos rapid fire, air and impact bursts. Bursts on breakwater and over target. No hits observed because of breakwater obscuring target. 0914 Opened fire on same target with 40MM, expended 60 rounds. (*Doyle* action report)

0905: Air alert. 0912: All clear. (Doyle action report)

The only German air offensive on the morning of the invasion was a strafing pass along the beach by two Focke-Wulf 190s flown by Colonel Josef Priller, commander of the 26th Fighter Wing, and Sergeant Heinz Wodarczyk. "They hurtled down toward the British beaches at over 400 m.p.h., coming in at less than 150 feet. Priller had no time to aim. He simply pressed the button on his control stick and felt his guns pounding. . . . On Juno . . . [a Canadian soldier] . . . saw them 'coming in so low that I could clearly see the pilots' faces.' He . . . was amazed to see one man 'calmly standing up, blazing away with a Sten gun [British 9mm submachine gun].' On the eastern edge of Omaha, Lieutenant (jg) William J. Eiscmann of the U.S. Navy gasped as the two FW-190s . . . zoomed down 'at less than fifty feet and dodged through the barrage balloons.' And on H.M.S. *Dunbar*, Leading Stoker Robert Dowie watched every antiaircraft gun in the fleet open up. . . . The two fighters flew through it all unscathed, then turned inland. . . . 'Jerry or not,' said Dowie, unbelievably, 'the best of luck to you. You've got guts.'" (Ryan, 212)

Other assault elements landed between 0700 and 0800 with the infantry. These included a chemical weapons battalion, combat engineers, naval shore fire control parties, advanced elements of artillery and antiaircraft units, and medical detachments. Many of these units landed on the wrong beaches, and this continued to snarl the assault plan. "Engineer units with special assignments to carry out in clearing exits or marking beaches found themselves hundreds or even thousands of yards away from their targets, sometimes separated from their equipment or losing it in the debarkment. . . . On most of the beaches no gaps had been cleared. Landing craft, including now the larger LCI's and LST's, had to find a way through and avoid the mines affixed to the [obstacles]. Some craft bumped on sandbars in the middle of obstacles and hurried to drop their ramps in deep water; others maneuvered somehow through the surf and got all the way in. There are not many recorded instances of craft sunk by the obstacles before getting their troops off. . . . However, crippling damage was inflicted on many craft, often in their efforts to retract after touchdown, or as a result of . . . artillery and mortar hits while the craft were delayed in the obstacles. . . . Bunching of landings had intermingled sections of several companies on crowded sectors like Dog White, Easy Green, and Fox Green." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 54-57)

* * *

By 0900 about 5,000 men had landed on the 6,500 yards of Omaha Beach. By this time it was becoming clear to the destroyer captains that the landings were not going according to plan. Except for the one clear target afforded *Carmick*, and outside-the-zone shooting by *Thompson* and *Doyle*, the destroyers had held their fire over the beaches as ordered. The surf line was crowded; vehicles had no room to move or maneuver. Troops could be seen crouching among them, trying to take cover. When jeeps, trucks, and halftracks managed to avoid the deep water, they found themselves on the beach taking artillery rounds. Landing craft milled about in the waters off the beach, some loaded, some empty, some just drifting. Equipment losses were heavy. Ammunition and heavy weapons had to be jettisoned when men debarked in deep water. Losses in radio equipment were particularly serious; three-fourths of the 116th RCT's radios were destroyed. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 56)

Survivors of the beach crossing, many under fire for the first time, had seen heavy losses among their comrades. Behind them the tide was drowning wounded men; bodies were being washed ashore. Disasters to the later landing waves were still occurring. Crossing the beach under enemy fire was a fearsome ordeal. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 57)

However, it was also true that by this time infantry units had scaled the bluffs between the beach exits and had moved inland. On the west side of the beachhead Company C of the 116th RCT and parts of the 2d and 5th Ranger Battalions were inland at Dog Green. Elements of Companies K, I, and L of the 116th were on top of the bluffs at Easy Green. On the east side Companies E and G of the 16th RCT had reached the crest between Exits E-1 and E-3 behind Easy Red. At Exit F-1 Company L was organizing for an assault up the steep draw toward Cabourg.

Commander Marshall, COMDESDIV 36 in *Satterlee*, was preoccupied with events at Pointe du Hoc, out of sight of the main beachhead. *Carmick* was particularly alert when, at about 0830, she saw "... a group of tanks ... having difficulty making their way long the breakwater road toward Exit D-1 [the Vierville draw]. A silent cooperation was established wherein they fired at a target on the bluff above them and we then fired several salvos at the same spot. They then shifted fire further along the bluff and we used their bursts again as a point of aim. This continued as they slowly advanced along the breakwater." (*Carmick* action report)

0900: Captain Sanders, COMDESRON 18 in *Frankford*, arrived off the beachhead just before 0900. Concerned about the increasing casualties on the beach, he ordered all destroyers to close the beach as far as possible and support the assault troops. (Morison, 143)

* * *

- 0915: "In another instance a group of infantry men were seen held down behind a house in the Dog Green Area. Fire was placed at the point on the bluff above where they were evidently directing rifle fire. They then appeared willing and able to advance up the face of the bluff. An enemy medium caliber gun was so placed that it could command the length of Dog Beach and was intermittently firing into the landing craft. We attempted to locate the gun. . . . Every possible mound or emplacement and everything that looked like a hole in the cliff was taken under fire for about half an hour. Results are not known but fire from this . . . gun was not seen any longer." (*Carmick* action report)
- 0930: "H.M.S. MELBREAK departed in accordance with previous orders [to take position in the antisubmarine screen]." (COMDESDIV 36 action report)
- 0933: "Commenced firing on two guns which were set into cliff and were enfilading beach. . . . 0946 Ceased firing. Batteries appeared destroyed. One gun emplacement plunged from cliff, other flew into air." (*McCook* action report)
- 0950: TBS [tactical voice radio] message to DESRON 18 from Rear Admiral Carleton F. Bryant, commander of the Omaha Beach bombardment force: "Get on them, men, get on them. We must knock out those guns. They are raising hell with the men on the beach, and we can't have any more of that. We must stop it." (Sommers, 98)
- 1000: "The American commanders still offshore had little idea of what was going on, but by 10 A.M. they could see the congestion at the beaches and [Major General Leonard] Gerow's reports were 'mostly confirmation of trouble.' . . . Omar Bradley, aboard . . . *Augusta*, dispatched Major Chester Hansen to take a look." (Eisenhower, 270)
- 1002: "The first target was a clump of trees on the Vierville-sur-[M]er to Formigny road [Dog Green]. . . . There appeared to be a light artillery battery or an anti-tank gun emplaced in these trees. Four salvos were fired commencing at 1002. Results were indeterminate but no more firing was observed from that sector." (*Frankford* action report)

- 1024: "Resumed firing. Commenced moving in close to beach [Dog Green] at Vierville sur Mer. Distance from beach now 1,300 yards." (McCook action report)
- 1100: Vierville-sur-Mer taken by troops of the 116th RCT. (Harrison, 326; Morison, 150)
- 1115 (estimated): "Anti-tank gun on ridge east of les Moulins [Easy Green]. No apparent damage," but "no more firing seen from this area." (Frankford action report)

* * *

The following tale of hard fighting behind Fox Green and Fox Red beaches clearly describes one incident. Yet the Army's history (*Omaha Beachhead*) has it occurring between 0800 and 0900, while the ships' deck logs and action reports place it between 1100 and 1200. That the incident didn't happen between 0800 and 0900 is made evident by an absence of entries in the destroyers' logs. Indeed, there was almost no firing activity by the DDs between 0800 and 0900 on that morning.

The accuracy of recording time on board the ships may be better appreciated when it is realized that the quartermaster of the watch, on the bridge, had the task of writing down important events, with the bridge clock right over his writing desk. This same man assisted the navigator; recording of time by a ship's navigator is critical and continuous.

That Army units may have misstated the time is understandable. The company clerk had the duty of recording events in the unit's daybook. In many instances the clerk was not with his unit. Company commanders were often casualties. And the record of the day's events were probably not written until later. Finally, how many soldiers' watches were still keeping time after a dunking in the ocean?

The times shown below are those recorded by the respective ships' petty officers or company noncoms, but the author believes the 1100-1200 time frame is correct.

0800: Elements of seven assault companies were ashore on Fox Green.

Behind the shingle bank sections from Company E of the 116th RCT and Companies E and F of the 16th RCT were intermingled with units of the 3d BLT of the 16th. Most of the landings had been costly. Despite difficulties, by 0800 the assault was underway. Its main power came from Company L of the 16th. Elements of Companies I and K of the 16th and E

of the 116th shared in the advance. Heavy weapons of Company M were used in support, and both tanks and destroyers gave noteworthy assistance. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 73) At one or two points of penetration, notably on Fox Green, destroyer guns and tanks were called on for support during the assault. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 58) Fox Green included two beach exits. E-3 was a fairly large valley winding to Colleville, while F-1 was a shallow, steep draw. Strong points at these draws commanded the beach. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 73)

0830: Four sections of Company L reorganized under the bluff at the west end of Fox Red. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 73)

Company L of the 16th landed fairly well together. When the company commander was killed, 1st Lieutenant Robert R. Cutler Jr. took command and moved west, out of the shelter of the cliff just below the strong point commanding the F-1 draw. Two tanks were called in for fire support. Cutler sent three sections and the company headquarters up the draw to the west of the strong point. The troops worked their way to the top; one section took position behind the strong point, while the rest set up a defensive position inland. Other units came to their help. Another section of L, reduced to 12 men, had landed near Exit E-3, the company's scheduled objective. This attempt did not succeed. The section commander moved his small unit down the beach, gathered in some men from Company E of the 116th, and prepared to attack the strong point at F-1.

This unit was now combined with men from Companies I and K by Company I's commander, Captain Kimball Richmond, who had just reached the beach to find himself the senior officer of the 3d Battalion. Richmond now took his mixed formation straight up the slope toward the strong point, supported by mortars, heavy machine guns, tanks, and naval gunfire as the Company L section already in place behind the strong point kept it under BAR (Browning automatic rifle; each rifle squad had one of these light weapons) fire. The attackers had to stop short of the objective until a supporting destroyer was signaled to lift her fire; they then stormed and took the strong point. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 74-75)

1000: Two destroyers closed Easy Red Beach.

"Between 1000 and 1100 two destroyers closed to within a thousand yards to put the strongpoints from [L]es Moulins [Dog Red] eastward under heavy, effective fire. All along the beach, infantry pinned at the sea wall and engineers trying to get at the draws to carry out their mission were heartened by this intervention." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 82)

Frankford fires at 1021, again at 1036 and 1045 and at 1100 departs to the westward. *Harding* fires at 1050; *Doyle* fires at 1100 and remains in the area until 1630; *Thompson* enters the area at 1100, fires at 1151, then leaves to the west. *Baldwin* enters the area at 1104, fires on Fox Green at 1200, then moves to the east.

- 1021: "Fire was commenced [at a pillbox in the River Ruquet valley, Exit E-1, Easy Red] . . . and the target destroyed." (*Frankford* action report)
- 1025: "Fired 64 rounds of 5"/38 common, deliberate fire, at Port en Bessin strong point." (*Baldwin* action report)
- 1036: "Troops on Easy Red were being held up by a mortar battery located on ridge by River Ruquet. . . . After close observation the exact location of the battery was noted at 1032. At 1036 commenced firing on the battery using direct fire, range about 1200 yards. On the fifth salvo a direct hit was obtained, a large cloud of green smoke was noted and the mortar battery ceased firing. Our troops then advanced and a number of German troops were seen to surrender." (*Frankford* action report)
- 1045: "At 1044 two machine gun nests were spotted covering the road leading from the River Ruquet valley to St.-Laurent-sur-[M]er. . . . Commenced firing at 1045. Ceased fire at 1057 having effectively stopped all machine gun fire from nests." (*Frankford* action report)
- 1050: ". . . observed enemy pill box . . . which was firing on our troops down [the] draw north of Colleville [E-3], thereby delaying operations on the beach. Opened fire on pill box and demolished it." (*Harding* action report)
- 1100: "Stopped 800 yards off beach Easy Red. Observed enemy machine gun emplacement on side of steep hill at west end of beach Fox Red, enfilading landing beach. Fired two half [two-gun] salvos. Target destroyed. Shifted fire to casemate at top of hill, fired two half salvos, target destroyed. Army troops begin slow advance up hill from beach. Maneuvering ship to stay in position against current which is running west at 2.8 knots. Flood tide." (*Doyle* action report)

"USS HARDING about 500 yds. to west clearing guns behind Dog Red Beach." (Doyle action report)

"On receiving word of difficulties in landing at Easy Red beach, this vessel moved into the boat lanes to a position directly in front of the beach and less than a thousand yards offshore. The visible troops already on the beach were dug in behind a hummock of sand along the beach and the boats of the second wave were milling around offshore constantly threatening collision with the ship. Under these circumstances the enemy very naturally ceased firing and it was impossible to spot the guns that were causing the trouble. Neither could we be sure just how far the troops had advanced. We followed what seemed to us the only reasonable course of action, in picking out spots that seemed to be machine gun emplacements or likely positions, ascertaining as best we could that own troops were clear, and then firing at the spots selected. That this was effective, was demonstrated by the fact that after about an hour the troops advanced to the top of the ridge and the boats resumed landing, but it is felt that time and ammunition would have . . . been saved, had the ship had better information. Four methods of doing this are suggested.

"(a) Assign to each ship an experienced infantry officer who by his knowledge . . . could advise the ship as to the best . . . targets.

"(b) Provide some personnel in the first wave with a . . . signal lamp.

"(c) Provide each ship with a . . . radio with a frequency for each beach to be covered. Send [similar] sets . . . with the first wave, to be operated from the beach itself. Several in order that at least one may be operable. Let the senior officer, or any officer . . . , direct the ship to the targets . . . giving him trouble. Provide these same sets in the early waves of landing craft. . . Many of these were hopelessly stranded but could have given us good information as to the needs of the beach for fire. . . .

"(d) Make greater use of colored smokes [to designate targets or to signal one's own position].

"Previous consultation and association with the Shore Fire Control Party, and . . . commander of the battalion to which this ship was assigned

for fire support, was of inestimable value. It was unfortunate that the forward observer should have been separated from the battalion for over twenty-four hours after landing as this greatly affected our opportunities for supporting fire." (Doyle action report)

1100: Colonel George Taylor, commanding the 16th RCT, ordered all available tanks into action at Exit E-3. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 82)

Captain W. M. King was ordered to collect the tanks and take them to the entrance to the E-3 (Colleville) draw. He ran down the beach, ordering each tank to move toward the draw. He found the last tank commander wounded, took charge and drove eastward. At one point he circled into the water to avoid casualties and debris. The tank hit a Teller mine [a widely used German antitank mine] and was crippled. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 82)

1000: Strongpoint on east side of Exit E-1 neutralized.

"The decisive improvement along the beach came at E-1 draw. The strongpoint on the east side had been neutralized. . . . The unfinished strongpoint on the other side was still partly in action, but was being contained by fire. . . . Engineers . . . were able to bulldoze their first gap through the dune line, just east of this draw, about 1000. [Other engineers] made another gap to the west. The destroyers' intervention speeded up the progress; in the next two hours the antitank ditch was filled, mines were cleared, and the approach to the draw was made ready for vehicles. During the same period major infantry reinforcements were landing in front of E-1, and the last remnants of enemy resistance at that draw were about to be overpowered." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 82)

With the 18th RCT—

1000: 2d Battalion, 18th RCT, began landing just west of Exit E-1.

"The 18th RCT had been scheduled to land on Easy Red . . . beginning about 0930. After passing the line of departure, the first wave (LCVPs and LCMs) ran into difficulties in maintaining formation and steering a straight course; there was so much congestion of traffic toward shore, with craft of all descriptions maneuvering in every direction. The 2d Battalion began landing just west of E-1 shortly after 1000." The troops saw that "the beach shingle was full of tractors, tanks, vehicles, bulldozers, and troops—the high ground was still held by Germans who had all troops on the beach pinned down—the beach was still under heavy fire from enemy small arms,

mortars, and artillery." Only one narrow gap had been made in the underwater obstacles; troop casualties getting ashore were light, but 28 landing craft were lost to obstacles and mines. (*Omaha Beachhead*, 82-83)

* * *

1130: "[Major Chester] Hansen returned [to General Bradley on board *Augusta*] with a firsthand report of what appeared to be a disaster in the making. The second, third, and fourth assault waves were stacked up behind the first. OMAHA Beach was a scene of disorganization, with most of the troops pinned behind obstacles under enemy fire, surrounded by flaming vehicles, dead and wounded. Hansen could report no progress in scaling the bluffs between the strongpoints where just about then a handful of men under makeshift leadership, braving enemy fire and mine fields, had started up the relatively undefended slopes. Indeed, the many accounts of OMAHA would tell of the countless instances of courage under fire, which gradually turned the tide sometime after 11 A.M. . . . Small groups of six to ten men, motivated by the example of a handful who under . . . fire . . . stormed past enemy positions, began to inch forward in single file through mine fields toward the bluffs with heavy weapons, tanks, jeeps or other equipment. Meanwhile General Clarence Huebner, commander of the 1st Division, ordered the destroyer gunships back into the line to direct fire against the enemy gun emplacements [General Huebner did not have command authority over naval forces]. As the morning haze began to lift, the naval bombardment honed in accurately on German targets to provide relief." (Eisenhower, 270)

* * *

The 2d BLT of the 18th RCT found a pillbox still in action on the right side of Exit E-1. Tank fire supported an infantry assault, but this was unsuccessful at first. The naval shore fire control party contacted a destroyer off the beach, and coordinated its action with the soldiers' attack. "The affair was very nicely timed; the destroyers' guns, firing only a few yards over the crowded beach, got on the target at about the fourth round and the pillbox surrendered. . . . Thus, at about 1130, the last enemy defenses in front of E-1 draw were reduced." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 83-84)

Frankford fires at pillboxes in E-1 draw at 1021, 1036, 1045, and 1100 before moving west. *Doyle* fires on targets in E-3 at 1100, delivers call fire requested by SFCP at 1124 and 1145, fires on an observed machine gun emplacement at 1205. *Thompson* fires on targets on Easy Red at 1151 and 1155, then turns to the west.

- 1109: A damaged landing craft sank near *Harding*. Four wounded men were taken on board.
- 1124: "Contacted Shore Fire Control Party. Ordered to fire on German troops . . . 9,590 yards. Fired two salvos, cease firing ordered by SFCP." (*Doyle* action report)
- 1145: "Ordered to fire at Command Post by SFCP. Fired three 2 gun salvos. Ordered to cease firing." (*Doyle* action report)
- 1151: "Commenced firing on suspected fortified house at 'Easy Red' beach. 1155 Ceased fire. . . . Shots observed to hit, effect unknown." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1155: "Rocket Guns [320mm rocket launchers] observed firing on beachhead from [a road junction behind Easy Red]. Shifted fire to that target immediately. 1213 Ceased firing. 30 rounds ammunition expended. Target completely silenced." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1200: Engineers clearing mines from the E-1 draw. This became "the main funnel for movement off the beach." (*Omaha Beachhead*, 84)
- "Spotted enemy machine gun in pit at top of cliff . . . harassing beachhead. Commenced fire with 20's, 40's and 5"-range 2600 yards. Target eliminated." (*Baldwin* action report)
- 1205: "Observed firing from machine gun emplacement on side of hill in beach Easy Red about 100 yards from beach. Fired three salvos, target destroyed." (*Doyle* action report)
- 1215: "Landing force attempting to use Dog Green Exit apparently stopped by unlocated snipers or batteries. THOMPSON moving over toward Dog Green Exit [D-1, the Vierville draw]." (*Thompson* action report)

- 1217: "Commenced firing on numerous houses and emplacements in gully leading seaward from Vierville sur Mer church. Destroyed 6 houses (one three story) and stone wall housing snipers and beach guns." (*McCook* action report)
- 1223: "Commenced demolition of all houses and structures commanding Dog Green Exit." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1250: "Ceased fire. Effect of fire indeterminate. Tanks still refusing to use Dog Green Exit." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1304: "Opened fire on possible machine gun emplacement at top of hill . . . about 500 yards from [Easy Red] beach." (*Doyle* action report)
- 1308: ". . . communication was established with the assigned shore fire control party. The SFCP . . . designated a target at the road junction of Formigny . . . [about 2.5 miles inland]. At 1320 fired one salvo. Received orders from the SFCP to cease firing due to their inability to observe fall of shot, target requiring air spot. Immediately after receiving orders to cease firing, contact was lost with the SFCP and was never regained." (*Frankford* action report)
- 1311: "Established contact with SFCP. . . Ordered to standby [*sic*]. Lying to off Dog Green beach." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1355: "Observed guns firing from trees on hill top to eastward of landing area [Fox Red]. . . Fired four full salvos. All shots burst in vicinity of target area." (*Doyle* action report)

IV

Breakout in the Afternoon

1330: General Eisenhower, on the basis of reports by Navy observers of the critical situation on Omaha, authorized the Allied air forces to bomb through clouds and haze close behind the beaches. The proposed attack did not take place. (Eisenhower, 271)

At the same time, General Bradley reflected:

“Our communications with the forces assaulting Omaha Beach were thin to nonexistent. From the few radio messages that we overheard and the firsthand reports of observers in small craft reconnoitering close to shore, I gained the impression that our forces had suffered an irreversible catastrophe, that there was little hope we could force the beach. Privately, I considered evacuating the beachhead and directing the follow-up troops to Utah Beach or the British beaches. . . . Then at 1:30 P.M. I received a heartening message from [Major General Leonard T.] Gerow: ‘Troops formerly pinned down on beaches . . . advancing up heights behind beaches.’ . . . The situation everywhere on the beach was still grave, but our troops had forced one or two of the draws and were inching inland. Based on their report, I gave up any thought of abandoning Omaha Beach.” (Bradley, 251)

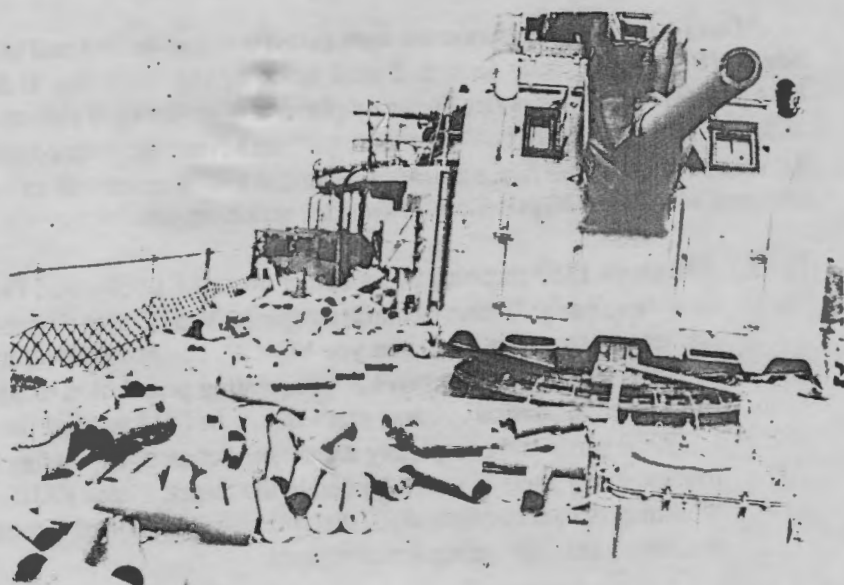
1355: “Observed guns firing from trees on hill top to eastward of landing area [Fox Red]. Fired four full salvos. All shots burst in vicinity of target area. . . . Fired two 2 gun salvos at German infantry [on Fox Green] at request of SFCP.” (*Doyle* action report)



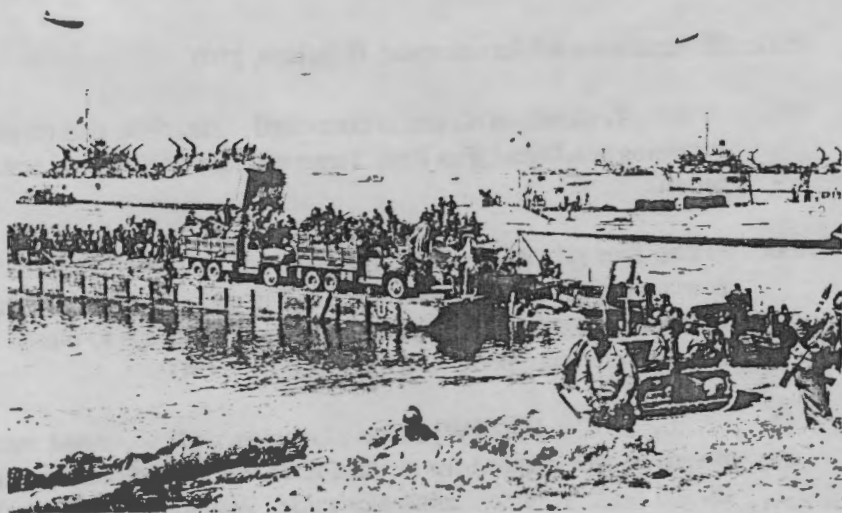
Army "medics" treat a casualty on Fox Green beach. Heavy casualties to the assault troops would have been much higher but for DESRON 18 and other fire support ships.



Troops land from an LCVP on Omaha Beach as loaded DUKWs carry supplies and halftracks tow light guns. By this time the fighting has moved inland, and files of troops head for the bluffs above the beach.



Gunfire support leaves the deck of *Hobson* (DD 464) littered with 5-inch cartridge cases.



Four days after D-Day, landing craft and a "Rhino" ferry pour troops and vehicles across the landing beaches. This massive buildup of strength during the early weeks of the invasion tilted the balance toward the Allies and led to the eventual breakout from the beachhead.

"During the early afternoon we were called down to the left end of the beach [Easy Red] near Exit E-3 and in company with the U.S.S. FRANFORD [*sic*] took under fire an emplacement on the right side of the valley which seemed to be holding our troops from advancing. After covering the side of the hill with fire, our troops advanced and in about half an hour returned with about 20 prisoners." (*Carmick* action report)

1350: "At about 1350 received . . . message from LCI 538 . . . : From info shore party: 'Believe church steeple [at Vierville] to be enemy artillery observation post, can you blast it'. . . HARDING then called . . . Forward Observers . . . requesting permission to open fire. . . [P]ermission . . . was granted. . . At 1413 opened fire at . . . 3200 yards and completely demolished church, expending 40 rounds, every shell of which landed in the target. Major REED of the Rangers later confirmed . . . that this target contained 4 enemy machine guns." (*Harding* action report)

1555: ". . . this ship was detached from the Fire Support Group and proceeded in accordance with . . . the operation plan to assume flagship duties of Commander Area Screen." (*Frankford* action report)

1600: St.-Laurent-sur-Mer occupied. (Morison, 150)

1612: "Fired 142 rounds of 40 mm at concealed . . . machine gun on cliff harassing beachhead [Fox Red]. Target neutralized. (*Baldwin* action report)

1635: "Fired four salvos . . . into cliff positions. . . . German soldiers coming out of cliff . . . showed white flag and . . . signal[ed] ship by flashing light and semaphore. . . . Ordered troops to march to eastward and surrender." (*McCook* action report)

1715: "Army DUCK [DUKW] came alongside with wounded men. Received them aboard for medical attention. 1745 Landing craft loaded with wounded came alongside. Wounded men brought aboard for medical attention. Boat included survivors from LCI 487, LCI 93, and U.S. Army personnel." (*Doyle* action report)

1740: "Two landing craft came alongside in succession and transferred 6 wounded men aboard. Three are given transfusions by medical

officer. All are given medical aid. All . . . were transferred to [another landing craft] at 2025 for further transfer to a hospital ship or transport." (*Baldwin* action report)

- 1750: COMDESDIV 36 shifted his command from *Satterlee* to *Harding*. (COMDESDIV 36 action report)
- 1812: "Commenced firing at church concealed in gulley [*sic*] behind 'Easy Red' beach." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1822: "Shifted target to red roof building to the right of Vierville church. 1827 Target blew up." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1836: "Shifted fire to slot on Point[e] de la Percee cliff face. 1848 Ceased fire. Slot caved in." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1839: "Ordered . . . to exchange stations with USS SATTERLEE off Point[e] du Hoe [*sic*]." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1854: ". . . received orders to . . . fire for two minutes on Colleville Church, range 3500 yards, which was [*sic*] complied with. At 1857 ceased fire, church badly battered. . . . At 1935 again received orders . . . to . . . fire again . . . on Colleville Church and to spread fire around area. At 1937 opened fire again . . . at . . . 3800 yards, scoring numerous hits on church and area. . . . It is believed that this church was being used as an observation post for mortar fire since the beach at this time was being bombarded apparently from inland." (*Harding* action report)
- 1900: 1st Infantry Division command post established ashore. 29th Infantry Division CP had gone ashore at 1705. (Morison, 152)
- 1913: "Fired one four-gun five-inch salvo at damaged church spire of . . . Colleville, also under fire by EMMONS. Army ordered cease firing on Colleville as target of opportunity." (*Baldwin* action report)
- 1930: "Received visual dispatch from Ranger group on Point[e] du Hoe [*sic*] requesting boat to evacuate wounded. Relayed same to CTF-124 [Commander Task Force 124, the Omaha assault force command] by radio." (*Thompson* action report)

- 1954: "Commenced firing at . . . (fortified house), Chateau de M. le Baron. First salvo a direct hit, target destroyed." (*Thompson* action report)
- 1957: "Observed enemy soldiers manning abandoned machine gun nest on hill to eastward of landing beaches. Fired three salvos, men and gun emplacement destroyed." (*Doyle* action report)
- 2000: Combat Engineers completed a fifth exit from the beach, a new road from the end of Fox Red on the east, and started a road from the Fox Green draw (Exit E-3) to Colleville. By this time traffic was moving inland from the beach. (*Morison*, 151)

General Gerow left the command ship *Ancon* to establish V Corps headquarters on the beach. His first message to General Bradley read: "Thank God for the United States Navy."

- 2053: "Changed course to westward. . . . *Emmons* about 500 yards ahead observed firing at possible gun emplacements on top of cliff about 3,000 yards eastward of landing beach. Several splashes seen ahead of *Emmons* and close aboard. Opened fire with main battery and 40MM to assist *Emmons*. Fired 11 salvos. No further . . . firing was seen from target area." (*Doyle* action report)

"We had our first narrow escape. . . . One of the others [*Emmons*] opened up on . . . a pillbox when suddenly, from an undetermined position, 88mm shells started bursting astern of her. . . . At this point the enemy battery turned its attention to us [*Doyle*]. . . . Its first salvo fell astern but it soon obtained more accurate range. For a frightening two minutes it pumped shell after shell within bare yards of us. Two screamed between the DOYLE's stacks and crashed into the water 25 yards off our starboard beam. Others whistled overhead in a nerve-wracking whine. Our guns continued to fire." (*Bernard*)

- 2109: "Splashes, probably from 75MM shells, seen on both bows close aboard, about 25 to 50 yards. Gun flashes seen from German Patrol boat inside [*Port-en-Bessin*] breakwater previously fired on. Opened fire with full salvos, covered area around boat. Direct hits impossible because of sea wall. . . . Enemy troops . . . in vicinity of boat seen abandoning positions." (*Doyle* action report)

2100-2230: "(Darkness). During this time fired deliberate five inch salvos on . . . harbor defenses of Port en Bessin (also spotted [battleship] ARKANSAS main battery on same target), machine gun pit on cliff . . . concrete shack topped by radar . . . Semaphore tower . . . pillbox . . . retractable anti-aircraft gun emplacement." (Doyle action report)

2120: "Emmons straddled by four gun salvo. Source of gun fire unknown." (Doyle action report)

2206: Sunset. (Doyle action report)

* * *

DESRON 18 had trained hard with the assigned Shore Fire Control Parties. We had worked together at Slapton Sands and again in Scotland. These brave teams were to land with the troops in the early waves, move out with the point squads, and call out target coordinates to the destroyers.

The DESRON 18 action reports and other writers have tended to minimize the success of call-fire operations [missions fired at the request of observers ashore or in aircraft]. We have noted several call-fire missions carried out by *Frankford*, *Carmick*, *Doyle*, and *Thompson*; more such missions were fired later. Note especially the initiative of the Rangers on Pointe du Hoc in planning ahead with targets and calling for fire by flashing light. The men in these teams risked their lives, and some gave them up, to make this effort a success. We owe them special recognition.

1710: "[SFCP] asked for fire at a battery shelling the beach at Exit E-1 on Fox Green Beach. . . . Considerable time was lost because the target . . . was in an area believed to be occupied by our own troops. The ship opened fire shortly after the SFCP had repeated the target coordinates twice. Repeated spots . . . were given. The fire was evidently of little effect. The SFCP said finally that they could not see the target clearly and they were more or less guessing in regard to the spots. The ship was able to fire on the target directly and the SFCP furnished . . . an accurate description of it. After a few salvos of direct fire . . . rapid fire was requested and delivered for two minutes. Cease fire was given by the SFCP and they signalled that they were closing down and moving forward." (Carmick action report)

- 2030: "Commenced firing on SFCP target . . . Pillbox. Fire not effective. 2033 Shifted fire to . . . Pillbox [at Pointe du Hoc]. . . . Fire effective." (*Thompson* action report)
- 2045: "Answered Assault Force Commander's request for emergency fire support for Shore Fire Control Party . . . on enemy concentration at . . . range 6200 yards. Mission successful." (*Baldwin* action report)
- 2230: "Received visual dispatch from Point[e] du Hoc [*sic*] Rangers giving coordinates of 7 targets to be called for by blinker during night." (*Thompson* action report)

* * *

The *Luftwaffe* had been in hiding all day, except for the single two-plane fighter sortie at 0900. Each night, once it got dark, Goering's boys got brave. On the night of 6 June we got some action.

- 2316: "Observed a flare dropped on water about 200 yards on the port bow. Attempted to sink it with rifle fire. Numerous flares also dropped in direction of transport area." (*Doyle* action report)
- 2320: "Enemy planes sighted flying low heading toward transport area. Ships in transport area opened fire with machine guns. About 2327 one low flying enemy plane dropped a stick of bombs 150 yards on starboard beam." (*Doyle* action report)
- 2330: "Heavy air raids in vicinity of Force "O" transport area; counted two ships hit by bombs, five aircraft shot down in flames." (*McCook* action report)
- 2337: "Observed enemy plane crash in flames." (*Doyle* action report)
- 2340: "One JU88A [Junkers Ju.88A medium bomber] sighted about 2000 yards away making direct run on this ship from dead ahead. Elevation about 2000 feet. Fire was not opened but the LCG(S) [British landing craft converted for fire support and designated LCG(L) and LCG(M); there was no LCG(S)] opened fire. The plane changed its course to its left and dropped three . . . bombs . . . nearby or straddling the LCG(S). No damage was sustained by this ship. . . . Various runs by enemy aircraft were made over bay. Many craft opened fire and three planes, assumed to be enemy,

were shot down. Intermittent tracer fire from enemy shore batteries, bombing and shelling of beaches continued throughout the night. Contact was maintained with . . . Shore Firecontrol Parties who said they would let us know if they needed us." (*Baldwin* action report)

"Light air raids over the transport areas took place the night of D/ D+1. No enemy planes approached close enough to take under fire. One German pilot was picked up from the water, but died within an hour of severe internal injuries." (*Emmons* action report)

As the midwatch relieved on board *Doyle* the quartermaster of the watch wrote: "2359 ammunition expended during previous 24 hours, 558 rounds of 5" A.A. common, 156 rounds of 5" common dye loaded ammunition [projectiles carrying a colored dye for use in spotting fall of shot]. No casualties to personnel or to any of ship's equipment." (*Doyle* deck log)

"By nightfall, the situation had swung in our favor. Personal heroism and the U.S. Navy had carried the day. We had by then landed close to 35,000 men and held a sliver of corpse-littered beach five miles long and about one and a half miles deep. To wrest that sliver from the enemy had cost us possibly 2,500 casualties. [No exact accounting has ever been arrived at.] There was now no thought of giving it back." (*Bradley*, 252)

* * *

As D-Day came to an end most of the five regiments of the 1st and 29th Divisions (V Corps) were ashore. Some Army artillery has been landed by late afternoon, but saw little action that day. Troops were on a line that varied from a few hundred yards to a mile or more. Vierville had been occupied before noon; St.-Laurent, where the Germans had fortified individual houses, was taken at 1600. Colleville was taken, but Germans held onto strong points until the next day. (*Morison*, 150-151) Rangers were dug in at Pointe du Hoc.

It was reported that not one Eighth Air Force bomb had landed on the beach. Owing to the low morning cloud layer, the Air Force had ordered a 30-second delay in instrument-controlled bomb drops to ensure that they would not hit the landing craft closing in on the surf line. (*Morison*, 124)

The fierce opposition came from the German 352d Division, a regular army unit under Lieutenant General Dietrich Kraiss, ordered to the Caen area to "beef up" the Coastal Divisions a few weeks earlier. At about noon General Kraiss had reported to Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt that the

invasion beach was under control and sent his reserve regiment to counterattack the British beachhead. By midnight, though, he reported that his whole division was committed and might be able to hold another day, but needed reinforcements.

Clearly, the near tragedy at Omaha was mostly confined to the eastern end of the landing beaches; more precisely, to Fox Green and to Fox Red, which had not been scheduled for landings but wound up being used anyway. On Fox Green and Fox Red the boats piled up on the beach. Assault companies were scattered as they came in under the cliffs, and the Germans had these well defended.

Jim Arnold, *McCook's* gunnery officer, wrote down his recollections of one event, probably at Exit D-1 on Dog Green: "As I scanned the cliff, I thought I saw smoke coming out of what appeared to be swallow holes in the face of the cliff. I obtained permission from the Captain to fire into the cliff and we did just that—two 4-gun salvos. The cliff exploded to reveal a honeycombed interior and German soldiers, guns and supplies cascaded down the remainder of the cliff into the sea."

Owen F. Keeler Jr., gunnery officer in *Frankford*, recalls that his skipper, James Semmes, decided to take the ship in for a closer look. With the tide in his favor, and navigating by fathometer, he took his ship in so close the optical rangefinder was against the stops [at maximum elevation] at 300 to 400 yards. Here was an American light tank, sitting at the water's edge, that fired at something on the hill. We immediately followed up with a 5-inch salvo. The tank gunner flipped open his hatch, looked around at us, waved, dropped back in the tank, and fired at another target." This event, reported in *Frankford's* action report at 1036, took place near Exit E-1 on Easy Red.

I was *Doyle's* gunnery officer, and recorded one event that took place at 1100: "Stopped 800 yards off beach Easy Red [the deck log says Fox Red, which I believe is correct]. Observed enemy machine gun emplacement. . . . Fired two half salvos. Target destroyed. Army troops begin slow advance up hill from beach." The half salvos were from 5-inch mounts 1 and 2 [*Doyle's* forward gun mounts], fired almost straight over the bow, one shot at a time. The first antiaircraft projectile hit the face of the concrete casemate just below the narrow slit opening and chipped the concrete. The second went straight through the slit and detonated in the German gun room. At the top of the hill was a sandbagged machine gun. It also went quickly.

Thompson spent the morning in the Charlie beach area, firing at giant radar antennas, recalls Captain A. L. Gebelin, USN (Ret.), then her commanding officer. Her deck log notes that while firing at a nearby

building, at 1043, it exploded and set off a series of detonations toward the edge of the cliff, as though an ammunition dump had been hit. At 1052 Captain Gebelin took his ship eastward looking for targets. Just before noon, fire was laid on a "suspected fortified house" on Easy Red. This fixes *Thompson's* position at about 1100. By noon she was back at Dog Green attempting to demolish all the houses around Exit D-1.

Emmons was firing at targets in Port-en-Bessin from about 1000 until noon. *Baldwin's* deck log reports that at 1104 she was ordered to close the beach in the area of Fox Red and Easy Green to engage snipers harassing the assault troops.

From these records we can fairly well place the destroyers of DESRON 18 during the most critical part of the battle, between 0900 and 1600. The record is also clear that *Carmick* and *McCook* opened the Dog Green beach exit by 1000, and that *Vierville* was taken by 1100. The exit from Easy Red was opened by *Frankford*, and others, by 1140. *Doyle* reports that Exit F-1 from Fox Red was opened at about the same time. All the ships present of DESRON 18, with *Emmons*, fought to make this possible.

General Bradley wrote that "by the end of the day, 23,000 men had been landed at Utah Beach. The 4th Division had pushed six miles inland. Casualties were gratifyingly light: 197. Utah Beach was a piece of cake. Omaha Beach, however, was a nightmare. Even now it brings pain to recall what happened there on June 6, 1944." (Bradley, 248-49)

Once the wall was breached, the ships of DESRON 18 turned to serve the wounded and survivors of wrecked landing craft. *Harding* was first, at 1024, when her medical officer, Lieutenant (jg) E. P. McKenzie (MC) took her gig to attend wounded men in a drifting landing craft. He returned at 1515 with two of the most serious. *Frankford* took five wounded on board at 1050. *Harding* took four more at 1109. At 1600 *Emmons* took six wounded and 18 survivors from LCI(L)-93. At 1745 *Baldwin* picked up six wounded.

At 1715 an Army DUKW came alongside *Doyle* with 12 wounded; at 1740 an LCVP brought 24 survivors from two LCI(L)s. The men in the boat were suffering. The wounded went to the wardroom, where the mess table served as the operating table. The ship's doctor, Lieutenant (jg) D. T. Rendel, was a pediatrician. He had only two corpsmen to assist him, but the survivors from a sunken LCI included Army medics. They helped "Doc" Rendel as he operated, and bandaged the wounds of others. These injured fellows spent the night in the officers' bunks.

* * *

There were churches, with steeples, at Vierville, St.-Laurent, and Colleville. The destroyers avoided shooting at them under the orders of General Eisenhower. But, late in the day, Admiral Bryant ordered the ships to shoot since the Germans were not only using the towers to observe the beaches, but placing mortars and machine guns in them as well. Jim Arnold, from *McCook*, remembers that one actually blew up, probably from stored ammunition.

At about 1400 *Harding*, at Dog Green, fired at the Vierville church and severely damaged it. At about 1812 *Thompson* shot behind Easy Red at the church in St.-Laurent. The church at Colleville took the brunt; it was fired on four times by three different ships off Fox Green. *Emmons* fired first, at 1815. *Harding* was next, at 1855. At 1913 *Emmons*, with *Baldwin*, struck again. Samuel Eliot Morison says that this was a "surgical" job on the steeple as seen by French eyewitnesses.

It must be said, in fairness, that some Germans held out in Colleville until the morning of 7 June, and they must have used that church steeple as much as they could.

V

The Days That Followed

D+1

As D+1 started, the air raid that had begun before midnight on the 6th was still in progress, and lasted until about 0100. *Doyle* recorded a tremendous explosion at Port-en-Bessin at 0022, and wondered whether our bombers had scored a hit or if the Germans were blowing up an ammo dump.

Carmick ran out of ammunition before midnight and retired to the antisubmarine screen, replaced at sunrise by *O'Brien*. From 0440 *Thompson* handled one call for fire after another from the Rangers at Pointe du Hoc. By 0600 her ammunition was almost gone, and she was replaced by *Harding*. *Thompson* raced for Portland to replenish, and *Plunkett* (DD 431) came in to fill the gap.

COMDESDIV 36 ordered *Harding* to send a motor whaleboat [26-foot general utility boat carried by destroyers and many other ships] to the beach to evacuate Ranger casualties; the boat was wrecked on the rocks. The commodore pressed passing landing craft to the task, as well as to deliver ammunition and supplies. At 1429 *Harding* hit an unmarked obstruction and damaged both her propellers.

At 1642 *Doyle* got a call-fire order from the SFCP on a target, said to be German troops, a thousand yards inland on the road from Colleville to Vierville. At about 1740 the LCI survivors, on board since the day before, were transferred to LCI(L)-487, found riding at anchor and recovered from

yesterday's damage. The wounded were taken off by *LST-285*, the medical guard ship. By 1930 *Doyle* was out of ammunition, was relieved by *Murphy* (DD 603), and went out to the screen.

Shortly after dark the transport *Susan B. Anthony* (AP 72), loaded with troops, struck a mine off Utah Beach and sank. Most of her people were saved.

D+2

The next day, 8 June, started with another air raid. COMDESDIV 36 saw two planes shot down. *Doyle's* 40mm machine gun officer warned of two planes passing close aboard at 0140.

About 0150 *Meredith*, in the screen at Utah Beach, struck a mine. She was towed clear in the morning, but early on the following day a German bomb would shake her so badly she would sink; destroyer victim number two. On D+2 *Thompson* and *Satterlee* returned from England.

McCook ran short of ammunition and left for England at 0540; she was relieved by *Ellyson* (DD 454). At 0803 *Glennon* (DD 620) struck a mine off Utah Beach. Two days later she became destroyer victim number three when she was sunk by German artillery.

Between 0920 and 0925 the destroyer escort *Rich* (DE 695) triggered three German mines while coming in to assist *Glennon*, and was torn to bits. Her lost and injured totaled 162 of the 215 souls on board. This was destroyer victim number four, the last casualty for Destroyers, Atlantic Fleet, at Normandy.

Doyle was scheduled to sail for Portland, but was sidetracked by orders to anchor near the flagship *Ancon* and take on passengers. At 0923, as *Rich* was blowing up, Rear Admiral Cook and Major General Handy came aboard. *Doyle* closed the beach between Port-en-Bessin and Pointe du Hoc before departing for South Weymouth. These were the same visitors from Washington who had been on board *Harding* on D-Day.

Later on this day *Harding* was called on for some special shooting at Grandcamp-les-Bains, and again later on the town of Maisy. *Baldwin* went out to the screen at 1930, low on ammunition. As night fell, the destroyers in the screen anchored to avoid running over mines dropped by planes in the night.

* * *

D+4

This day, 10 June, opened with yet another air raid. *Thompson* was nearly hit by a bomb at about 0400 and fired back, claiming a kill with an assist from other screen destroyers. *Doyle's* war diary says that a German plane passed close aboard at 0435 and was taken under fire with 20mm guns. *Carmick* reports four separate attacks starting at 0400, with two medium bombs and two glider bombs [Henschel Hs.293, radio-controlled air-launched weapons first used in 1943 in the Mediterranean] landing within 1,000 yards. One of these, heading directly for the ship, was given extensive jamming and it was seen to suddenly dive into the ocean. At 0440 *Carmick* opened fire on an HE 177 [Heinkel He.177 bomber], got a hit on the second salvo, and had to unload the third through the muzzle toward a clear spot on the water. The German crashed 500 yards astern; one crewman was picked up by a patrolling PC [submarine chaser] and taken to *Ancon*.

Early in the day *Satterlee* returned from England. COMDESDIV 36 shifted his pennant to her and sent *Harding* back to the dockyard at Plymouth for attention to her damaged propellers.

D+5

As 11 June began, another E-boat attacked. *Thompson* helped to repel this by firing star shells to brighten the night for British steam gunboats [small patrol ships armed with torpedo tubes and light guns]. After that, things were quiet for the ships of DESRON 18.

D+6

Thompson recorded some notoriety on this day. During the afternoon of the 11th she had been ordered to Portsmouth, England, and a special party came aboard at 0630 on the 12th. The guests were Admiral Ernest J. King, General George C. Marshall, General Eisenhower, and General "Hap" Arnold, accompanied by Colonel Jimmy Gault of Eisenhower's staff. *Thompson* took them to Omaha Beach for lunch with Generals Gerow and Bradley, and returned them to Portsmouth by supper time.

The story is told by Captain Gebelin, then *Thompson's* commanding officer. "On the way back Admiral King seemed in a great hurry. Seated in the captain's chair on the bridge, King wondered aloud how fast these new destroyers could go. I took the hint, called the forward engine room, and

said to the chief engineer, 'Pour it on, Chief. You ring up the turns; we'll answer from the bridge.' We worked *Thompson* up to 42 knots and made Portsmouth in jig time."

According to King's biographer, the hurry came because the Admiral had a dinner appointment with Churchill on the special train back to London that evening. King was on time; the Prime Minister was not. He and the British chiefs had visited Sword, Juno, and Gold beaches in a British DD at the same time that *Thompson* was similarly engaged. The delay on the British side was a diversion at Churchill's request; he wanted to get in a personal lick at the Germans. He ordered his destroyer captain to find some enemy along the coast and run in for a quick shoot. This done, the British DD headed for Portsmouth but wasn't up to *Thompson's* record run. (Buell, 456)

VI

The End of the Line

While DESRON 18 stayed on the line off Normandy during June and July, the heavy action was over. In August the squadron moved into the Mediterranean and engaged in Operation Anvil, the landings in Southern France. By September we were back on convoy duty. DESRON 18 got scattered, never again to operate as a combat unit. These nine ships survived submarine torpedoes in the Atlantic when others didn't, gun-dued the Germans on the Atlantic wall, and avoided mines and aircraft weapons when others hadn't, but didn't get the honor of going against the Japanese together.

Before 1944 was out *Harding* was in a shipyard being converted to a high-speed minesweeper with a new hull number (DMS 28). This meant removing the aftermost 5-inch gun and installing winches and other clutter of massive sweeping gear. Fast ships for this mission were needed in the Pacific, and DESRON 18 was picked to provide some of them. *Carmick*, *Doyle*, *McCook*, and *Thompson* soon followed; *Doyle* went under the knife in May 1945. Captain Harry Sanders was on well-deserved shore duty in Norfolk by April of that year. Destroyer Squadron 18 was no longer.

* * *

Several commanders spoke for history by saying how difficult it was for destroyer captains to know where their own troops were in a situation like that of 6 June. We expressed our concern to General Handy in our wardroom during the voyage from the beachhead to South Weymouth. He patiently explained that this lack of critical knowledge has plagued

artillerymen down through history. I wondered if smoke or flares might be used to communicate, and he answered that troops were already overburdened with equipment.

One of the more serious matters was the lack of communications between the beaches and the chain of command. General Bradley wrote that "the whole of D-day was for me a time of grave personal anxiety and frustration. I was stuck on the *Augusta*. Our communications with the forces assaulting Omaha Beach were thin to nonexistent. From the few radio messages that we overheard and the firsthand reports of observers in small craft reconnoitering close to shore, I gained the impression that our forces had suffered an irreversible catastrophe." (Bradley, 251) SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces) received a report at 0800, "Two destroyers ahead of the landing craft"; this event had happened at 0400. By 0815 the beachmaster had stopped vehicle landings on Fox Green and Easy Green. News of this apparently reached General Bradley, on board *Augusta* just off the beachhead, at 1000.

Doyle's deck log, at 1102, recorded that "Army troops seen to begin slow advance again" after she had fired on defenses that had been pinning the troops down. Eisenhower, 270, remarks that General Huebner wanted the destroyers ordered "back into the line." We had never left the line, and we were still firing at everything in grey-green that moved. By this hour the commanders of the 16th and 116th Regimental Combat Teams were ashore in command of their troops, and had been for three hours. Vierville had been taken at 1100.

At about this time, General Bradley admitted he was giving serious thought to pulling out of Omaha Beach and sending the followup troops to other beaches. He later told Field Marshal Montgomery that "someday I'll tell General Eisenhower just how close it was those first few hours." (Bradley, 251)

A curious event was the trip, at 1000, by Major Hansen to the beach in a landing craft on orders of General Bradley, to find out how matters were going and report back. Recall that it was 11 miles from the line of departure to the beach, and *Augusta* was even farther out. An hour and a half later Hansen returned and reported that "disaster lies ahead." After assessing this report, Bradley reported to Eisenhower that the situation was still critical. (Eisenhower, 270) We thought that sending dispatch riders had gone out with the Spanish-American War.

I suggest that, from the record, it can be seen that Captain Sanders (COMDESRON 18) knew, by about 0900, that there was trouble on the beach. Once *Frankford* closed the beach he could see more, and could better report conditions to Admiral Kirk and General Bradley, than could a

major bouncing around at water level in a landing craft. Possibly no one thought to ask him.

We had been under radio silence, and there was a reluctance to get on the radio, but why this serious breakdown happened isn't explained in any of our sources. It does seem clear that message traffic was to travel along the chain of command, and there were no short cuts to be taken.

A real tragedy would have happened if the Allied air forces had been able to carry out Eisenhower's 1330 order to bomb the beaches.

The landings started at 0630 and stalled about 0800. Captain Sanders was on the scene by 0900. It was 0950 before Rear Admiral Bryant in *Texas* issued his TBS radio call in a clear voice that all could hear. By this time the DDs were taking a hit—*Corry* had gone down. Major Hansen returned from his boat trip at 1130, and General Huebner "ordered" the DDs "back into the line." Is it possible that the breakdown was right on board the command ship *Ancon*, where Admiral Hall and General Huebner shared space?

* * *

Sergeant James E. Knight of the 299th Combat Engineer Battalion wrote to the crew of *Frankford*: "There is no question, at least in my mind, if you had not come in as close as you did, exposing yourself to God only knows how much, that I would not have survived the night. I truly believe that in the absence of the damage you inflicted on the German emplacements, the only way any GI was going to leave Omaha was in a mattress cover or as a prisoner of war." (Knight, 126) Sergeant Barton Davis, 299th Combat Engineers, wrote to say: "How well I remember your ship coming in so close. I thought then as I do now that it was one brave thing to come in so close. . . . Your ship not only knocked out the pillbox but also the mortar positions above us. . . . I always thought how great it would be to tell the Captain of that ship how grateful I am. . . ." (Personal letter to Captain James Semmes, CO of *Frankford*)

General Bradley later wrote that "here I must give unstinting praise to the U.S. Navy. As on Sicily, the Navy saved our hides. Twelve destroyers moved in close to the beach, heedless of shallow water, mines, enemy fire and other obstacles, to give us close support. The main batteries of these gallant ships became our sole artillery. . . . When he got ashore that night to establish his V Corps command posts, [General] Gerow's first message to me was emotional: "Thank God for the U.S. Navy." (Bradley, 251)

Colonel S. B. Mason, USA, chief of staff of the 1st Division, wrote the following letter to Rear Admiral Hall after an inspection of the German

defenses at Omaha. They should, he said, have been impregnable: "But there was one element of the attack they could not parry. . . . I am now firmly convinced that our supporting naval fire got us in; that without that gunfire we positively could not have crossed the beaches." (Morison, 149)

Mason went on to note that the Omaha landings differed from those the 1st Division had made in North Africa "in that we were met on the beach. I looked over the destruction of German pillboxes, fortified houses and gun positions, and in all cases it was apparent that naval guns had worked on them. . . . If ever we have to do another of these jobs, we will all hope for the good fortune of being teamed with the XI Amphib[ious Force, the American portion of the Normandy landing force] for planning and execution. . . . General Huebner concurs in the above. . . ." (Morison, 149)

The German generals were not grudging in their praise of naval artillery. Field Marshal von Rundstedt said that "the fire of your battleships was a main factor in hampering our counter-attacks. This was a big surprise. . . ." General Blumentritt, his chief of staff, said that the Allied officers who interrogated him "did not seem to realize the serious effect naval gunfire had on the German defenses." Field Marshal Rommel, on 10 June, reported that "our operations in Normandy are tremendously hampered . . . by . . . the . . . superiority of the enemy air force . . . [and] the effect of the heavy naval guns." (Morison, 169)

* * *

A few Bronze Star medals and some letters of commendation went to the commanding officers, executive officers, and other ships' officers. The gunnery officers received commendations almost a year later.

Of thirty-six Navy Unit Citations issued to DDs and DEs during World War II, only six went to the Atlantic Fleet. Three of these were for work at Anzio, one for action off the Italian coast, and another off the Algerian coast. *Woolsey* (DD 437) was the sixth destroyer, honored for North Africa, Salerno, Anzio, and Southern France. There were no Navy Unit Commendations for Normandy.

Of twenty-one Presidential Unit Citations to DDs and DEs, two went to four-pipers who ran troops ashore in North Africa, and seven went to hunter-killer task units in the Atlantic. The others were all for service in the Pacific. There were no Presidential Unit Citations for Normandy.

Ten years after D-Day, Admiral Kirk told Samuel Eliot Morison that his greatest asset had been "the resourcefulness of the American sailor."

The destroyers had risked grounding and shell fire to support the troops on the beaches. "Courage there was in plenty; but," as the Admiral said, "it was the resourcefulness of young sailors, coxswains, junior boat officers, and the skippers and gunnery officers of the 'cans' that made courage and training count." (Morison, 152)

* * *

VII

Ex Scientia Tridens

The record makes it clear that DESRON 18 punched holes in the Atlantic Wall behind the most difficult landing beaches ever encountered during the war. It wasn't failure of the destroyers that left Omaha Beach littered with the wreckage of landing craft and tanks. Nor was it a failure of the destroyers that left so many of our young men dead and wounded on the beaches. That no Allied destroyers were lost off Omaha, as happened at Utah Beach where four were sunk, does not mean that they were not attacked by bullets, bombs, torpedoes, and heavy artillery shells. The destroyers had the same mines to beware, and the same shallow water and super tides to compound the risk of stranding. They worked together and helped each other; the record is clear on this.

DESRON 18 never failed in its duty at Normandy or Omaha beach might have been lost, and it wasn't. It is hard to say how many more graves would have been filled, and how the invasion of Fortress Europe would have fared, without the efficient and effective performance of these nine destroyers. There is no doubt that DESRON 18 cracked the German wall at Omaha Beach in actions above and beyond the call of duty. The ships and sailors who manned them deserve to be better remembered.

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In addition to my personal experiences as Gunnery Officer *Doyle*, I have also referred to letters or personal interviews from the following:

Arnold, Jim, Gunnery Officer *McCook*.

Davis, Barton A., Sergeant, 299th Combat Engineers.

Gebelin, Albert L., CAPT, USN (Ret.), Executive Officer *Doyle* and later Commanding Officer *Thompson*.

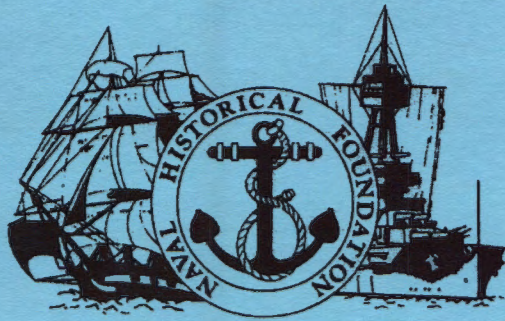
Holt, Richard J., Asst. Gunnery Officer *Satterlee*.

Keeler, Owen, Gunnery Officer *Frankford*.

Knight, James E., Sergeant, 299th Combat Engineers, whose article in the *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, August 1989, inspired me to write the story of DESRON 18.

Sweeney, E. J. "Ted", Executive Officer *Doyle*.

Zimmermann, Richard, CAPT, USN (Ret.), CIC Officer *Frankford*.



Over seventy-five years ago, Commodore Dudley Knox wrote in the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* about the “glaring deficiencies” in collecting and preserving the Navy’s written records. Knox’s article on “Our Vanishing History and Traditions” gave birth to the Naval Historical Foundation in 1926 under the sponsorship of the Secretary of the Navy. From its initial focus on safeguarding the material culture of the Navy, the NHF has developed into a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the full range of naval history. Today, in addition to providing much needed support to the Naval Historical Center and the Navy Museum, the NHF collects oral histories of Navy veterans from World War II through the Cold War, and publishes articles and sponsors symposiums on important naval history topics. To provide increased access by the public to the Navy’s historical collections of art, artifacts, documents and photographs, the NHF provides historical research and photo reproduction services through its Historical Services Division.

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