

LECTURE TRANSCRIPT

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OPERATION OVERLORD

and

D-DAY

6 JUNE 1944

Presented by: Major General [Ret] Albert H. Smith, Jr.
The Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky
18 April 1985

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OPERATION NEPTUNE, D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944

Cast of Characters, Allied Forces

General Eisenhower - Supreme Commander
 General Montgomery - Ground Forces Commander
 LTG Bradley - CG, First Army (U.S.)
 MG Collins - CG, VII Corps
 MG Gerow - CG, V Corps
 MG Huebner - CG, 1st Inf. Div. (Reinf)
 BG Bill Wyman - ADC, 1st Inf. Div.
 BG Dutch Cota - ADC, 29th Inf. Div.
 COL George Taylor - CO, 16th Infantry
 Father Larry Deery - Regimental Chaplain
 MAJ Ed Driscoll - CO, 1st Bn, 16th Inf.
 CAPT Al Smith - XO, 1st Bn, 16th Inf.
 CAPT Hank Hangsterfer - CO, Hq Co., 1st Bn, 16th Inf.
 PVT Arnold Miller - Hq Co., 1st Bn, 16th Inf.
 2d LT John Spalding - 1st Section, Co.E, 16th Inf.
 CAPT Joe Dawson - CO, Co. G, 16th Inf.
 1st LT Bob Cutler - Acting CO, Co. L, 16th Inf.
 1st LT Jimmie Monteith - 2d Section, Co. L, 16th Inf.
 CAPT Kim Richmond - CO, Co. I, 16th Inf.
 -- and all of the other leaders and soldiers who participated in
 the D-Day assaults, 6 June 1944 --

GERMAN LEADERS

Field Marshal von Rundstedt - Commander-in-Chief, West
 Field Marshal Rommel - Commander, Army Group B
 General von Salmuth - CG, Fifteenth Army
 General Dollman - CG, Seventh Army
 General Marcks - CG, LXXXIV Corps

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Draft Transcript of a Guest Lecture

OPERATION OVERLORD

by

Major General [Ret] Albert H. Smith, Jr.
at the

Armor School, 18 April 1985

I am pleased to be here again with Advanced Classes of the Armor School.

My subject matter is 41 years old. It's lessons, however, are current and applicable to today's Army. I shall cover Operation Overlord plans, preparations and events from the standpoint of a survivor and eyewitness.

You can help me tell the story of what happened on D-Day, 6 June 1944, if you will remember that I was a 25 year old Captain -- Executive Officer of the 1st Bn, 16th Infantry, one of the two assault regiments which landed at daybreak on Omaha Beach.

Forget General Smith -- active and retired -- he didn't exist then. By all odds he should not have survived the fighting on that memorable day. Please consider me one of hundreds of good infantrymen who fought that battle. I was not special, but I shall speak of some very special soldiers who distinguished themselves in the fighting.

My goal in coming to Fort Knox is to interest you in the military history of World War II. I especially wish to qualify each of you as an expert on Operation Neptune and the assault on the beaches of Normandy. As you may recall, this past June President Reagan visited Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc and Utah Beach to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of D-Day. This year, 6 June 1985, I hope you will help our leaders remind Americans of that greatest one-day battle. You'll be able to describe what happened and answer questions about our Allied landings.

Let's first set the scene. During the first 5 years of World War II, Hitler and the Axis Forces were almost completely successful. However, Operation Overlord and D-Day signaled the beginning of the end for the Nazi regime.

In covering Operation Overlord I'll start at the top, with high level plans and preparations. It will be almost as if I were a senior SHAEF briefer outlining key aspects of the operation for President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

Following this broad picture, we'll focus down and move in with the troops. We'll get into the landing craft and hit the beaches. We'll follow our assault forces -- especially observing the fighting on Omaha Beach.

Finally, we'll trace our way back to higher headquarters and check out their operation maps at 2400 hours 6 June 1944. We shall also summarize the German reaction.

THE MISSION -- General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, was given the following mission by the Combined Chiefs of Staff: "You will enter the continent of Europe and undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."

OVERLORD was the plan for the invasion of northwest Europe. It covered the first ninety day period, starting with D-Day.

NEPTUNE was a plan within a plan -- the blueprint for the initial phases of the amphibious assault, starting D-Day.

OVERLORD strategy, simply put, was to gain a toehold in Normandy; then build up forces and supplies; and, finally, break-out of the lodgement. The early capture of Cherbourg and the establishment of artificial harbors were essential to the operation.

From your readings you already know the basics of the plan. On the other hand, I believe it will be worthwhile to review some of the major challenges and decisions faced by General Eisenhower and his Supreme Headquarters planners.

There were ^{six} feasible areas for an invasion of the European continent. All had advantages and disadvantages, but the Normandy beaches held the most promise of success and were therefore chosen. Planners avoided enemy strength and attacked enemy weakness.

In any estimate of the situation a key element is the number of troops available for the operation -- generally the more the better. Invasion forces increased from three divisions in the beginning to more than eight -- including three airborne divisions. An army group headed by General Montgomery controlled two armies -- each of two corps. There was no shortage of higher headquarters.

What about the enemy? Well, the major consideration was Hitler's concept of the Allied threat. He sought advice from von Rundstedt, Rommel and OKW, but in the end relied on his own estimate and intuition. Until well after the battle for Normandy was decided in favor of the Allies, Hitler believed that the main attack would come in the Pas de Calais area -- and he kept the bulk of his forces in reserve there, ready for that attack.

In German defensive deployments, static divisions were charged with coastal defenses -- especially the fortified ports. Troops assigned to these static divisions were a varied lot. Russians, Poles and other former enemy soldiers had chosen duty with the Wehrmacht instead of POW camps or worse. They were disbursed among older German soldiers, many of whom had survived bitter fighting on the eastern front. These static divisions had no motor transportation.

The mobile infantry divisions and the Panzer divisions were another story. Battle-wise veterans and fanatic storm troopers filled the ranks of these first-class fighting organizations.

Those of us who had faced the Afrika Korps in Tunisia were well aware of the fighting ability and tenacity of the individual German soldier. As we discovered again in Normandy, their organizations were superior in firepower, fully equipped and ready to fight.

According to SHAEF intelligence estimates, our divisions in the area of the landings would outnumber combat units immediately available to General Dollman, the German Seventh Army Commander. He had two static divisions (the 709th and the 716th) manning coastal defenses from Cherbourg east to Caen. In addition, his 352d Infantry Division and the 21st Panzer Division were deployed in depth within easy striking distance of the Normandy beaches.

Now, a word about "Fortress Europe" -- Clever German propaganda plus American and British magazines almost convinced us that enemy coastal fortifications were impregnable. Massive concrete forts, large caliber guns and endless obstacles faced us from the low countries to the border of Spain. Some called this Hitler's Atlantic Wall.

Reading about the disaster at Dieppe in August 1942 didn't help our morale either. That unsuccessful Canadian-British amphibious raid foretold similar disasters during our big invasion.

However, there were major enemy weaknesses. What we didn't know then -- and it would not have made much difference at the troop level -- was how badly Hitler had fragmented his military resources. For example, von Rundstedt and Rommel lacked authority to move mobile reserves. Air and Naval forces committed to the overall coastal defense answered to separate commanders. In a word, there was no unity of command on the Axis side as there was in SHAEF across the channel. Also, the Allies had broken the German code and were reading communications between Hitler and his commanders.

Fortunately for us, the German intelligence organization had been shattered by fierce in-fighting for control between the Wehrmacht and the SS. Hence, while the allies were aware of almost every detail in the Normandy area, von Rundstedt and Rommel -- and their subordinate commanders -- were essentially in the dark concerning our plans, dispositions and capabilities.

So that you will have an appreciation for the combat capabilities of the 16th Infantry and the 1st Division -- and of the 116th Infantry and the 29th Division -- a bit of history is in order. Let's back up for a minute and look at what the two assault regiments had been doing over the past few years to get ready for Omaha Beach.

Most officers of the 16th Infantry had been training and then fighting together since the summer of 1941. There was at least one officer per company who had been in the regiment since 1940. This meant the chain of command -- officers and NCO's -- knew each other very well.

Having trained in England and Scotland August through October 1942, those wearing the 1st Division patch went to the Mediterranean to participate in two invasions and three campaigns -- first in North Africa and then in Sicily. They returned to England in October 1943 hardened, professional fighters. During the fall and winter and into the spring, tough training and a series of rehearsals sharpened their fighting spirit. If you will permit me a football analogy, the Big Red One was like a veteran NFL team going into the playoffs. They were ready!

The 116th Infantry and other organizations of the 29th Division were of the same potential as counterparts I've just described. However, the regiment had not been in combat and the troops had not heard a shot fired in anger. From a positive standpoint, they had been in England since the fall of 1942 and had been exposed to a broad range of hard training. The regiment and Division had participated in realistic landing exercises. In a word, these infantrymen were well trained, but untried in battle.

On 7 May 1944, the happy and proud soldiers of the 1st Division were all sent to "concentration camps" in the south of England near the harbors from which they would embark for Normandy. These were called "holding areas" by SHAEF, but in reality there were austere tent camps, surrounded by barbed wire fences and guarded by theater military police.

On 3 June, all of that changed for the better as battalions of the 16th Infantry embarked on the CHASE, the HENRICO and the EMPIRE ANVIL in Weymouth harbor. My transport -- the USS SAMUEL CHASE -- was a "love boat" if there ever was one in World War II. It was manned by Coast Guard personnel, exceptionally clean, and full of the stateside food we missed so much. Here, for the first time, our officers and men were briefed on our assault landing. Excellent sand tables showed all the details of the Normandy coast. Most enemy defenses were pinpointed for us. Perhaps you may have seen photos taken of company commanders and platoon leaders wargaming their attacks as they crowded around these terrain models.

We expected to sail the night of 4 June and land at daybreak on 5 June. As it turned out, we sailed only to return to Weymouth harbor the same night. Foul weather had caused General Eisenhower to postpone D-Day for 24 hours.

The story of that postponement and the weather which caused it is to be found in "Forecast for Overlord" by Group Captain Stagg, SHAEF's chief weatherman. Reading the final chapters you can relive those moments when the decision was made to land on Tuesday, 6 June -- based on Stagg's forecast that the storm would clear, and there would be several days of fairly good weather. Historians have noted that Germany did not have the same weather forecasting capabilities as the Allies.

Before hitting the beaches, let's review the final Operation Neptune plan. Starting from the west and moving east, we find the Yanks landing on Utah and Omaha beaches and the British and Canadians landing on Gold, Juno and Sword. The 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions have drop zones behind Utah Beach and the 6th British Airborne Division drops along the Orne River south of Sword Beach. All navy ships and landing craft pass through a central control area of the English Channel code-named "Piccadilly Circus."

A preliminary word is in order concerning deception -- sometimes referred to as the "Dummy D-Day." You'll find an excellent, brief account of intelligence, counterintelligence and deception pertaining to Operation Overlord in Jock Haswell's book "D-Day," published by Times Books of New York.

British and American intelligence experts went all-out to convince the Germans that the 1st U.S. Army Group, commanded by General Patton, was assembled in southeast England across the channel from Calais, France. Realism and credibility were enhanced by dummy vehicles and guns, large scale movements of jeeps and tanks and continuous fake radio traffic. As a result, Hitler and many of his commanders were convinced the Allies would invade France through the Pas de Calais area. Safeguarding the secret of artificial harbors -- the Mulberry Harbors -- was also vital to this major deception.

These activities did not cease once the invasion was underway. While Allied divisions were heading for Normandy beaches, two decoy

fleets accompanied by British air squadrons were crossing the channel from Dover toward Calais. The decoy ships carried electronic devices that amplified and returned the pulses of the German radar equipment, and the air squadrons overhead released strips of metal foil. Both maneuvers gave the illusion on the German radar screens of a massive air and sea attack.

Another deception -- Operation Titantic -- also assisted our assault forces. In this case, dummy paratroopers (equipped with recordings of gun fire and soldier's shouts) were dropped in areas behind the beaches away from actual airborne drop zones.

These fake airborne assaults caused German commanders to spread their troops -- sending them out to answer false alarms. For example, The Commanding General of the 352d Infantry Division dispatched his reserve regiment to deal with what he thought were allied airborne troopers well south of Omaha Beach. Thus engaged with dummy drops, the reserve regiment was unavailable for a major counterattack against the 1st Division landing on Omaha Beach.

Terrain at Utah and Omaha -- The two beaches were quite different. In the first instance, Utah was mostly flat and backed by causeways which bridged inundated areas.

At Omaha, a three mile crescent shaped beach was backed by commanding bluffs. Rocky cliffs were to be found at both ends of the sandy beach. Coming ashore at low tide a soldier would cross several hundred yards of rather firm footing -- then, a narrow strip of difficult soft sand leading to a seawall or shingle embankment. Immediately south of the shingle and seawall was a beach road. Thereafter, one found himself crossing a swampy beach flat. Traversing several hundred yards of this muck brought him to the base of the bluffs. These varied in height from 100 to 170 feet.

Beach exits at Omaha were essentially deep north-south draws. There were also quite a number of small north-south ravines which provided defilade protection from most German weapons.

German defenses took full advantage of the bluffs -- especially the east and west sides of the draws. German flanking fire was possible against landing craft and assaulting troops from weapons emplacements which could not be seen directly from the north.

So much for the enemy and terrain -- what about the weather?

Stormy weather on the 4th and 5th of June caused a 24 hour delay in Operation Neptune. Then, during the night of 5-6 June conditions improved, but only to marginal levels. The sea was classified as moderate, with waves ranging from 4 feet to 8 feet. Winds from the northwest were gusty, often up to 20 mph. Skies had cleared sufficiently for parachute assault operations.

We knew that daylight on D-Day would last from 0600 until about 2200 -- some 16 hours of good visibility. All landing areas would be affected by an easterly tide. As will be seen later, the combination of wind and tide caused many units to land well east of their target beaches.

Organization for combat - To defeat German concrete fortifications it was decided that each assault rifle company would be organized into 5 assault sections, instead of three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon. Each section -- totaling 1 officer and

29 men -- would include rifle teams, a wire cutting team, bazooka team, flame-thrower team, BAR team, 60-mm mortar team and demolition team.

During the landing and subsequent attacks on pill boxes and gun emplacements this assault organization proved quite effective. The one planning mistake was to include the flame thrower. That 70 pound piece of equipment never got across the beach. Most flame throwers sank when the teams hit the water.

What about Ranger organization? The 2d and 5th Ranger Battalions each consisted of 6 lettered companies - A thru F. Each company was lean and mean -- consisting of 3 officers and 63 men. A 1st Sergeant and two junior NCO's assisted their Captain in controlling two platoons of 1 officer and 30 men each.

So much for basics. Now let's return to our transport, the SAMUEL CHASE. On 3 June, after embarking, officers and men learned all about their D-Day missions. Weapons were cleaned, and assault sections repeatedly inspected and briefed. Company commanders and their lieutenants rehearsed planned attacks on a terrain model in the hold of the ship. Everything possible was done to ensure success.

When not eating, sleeping or preparing; we wrote letters, read, played cards and rolled dice. Strangely, no one really wanted to win at the gambling. They didn't want to be lucky at cards and unlucky on D-Day. Accordingly, most winnings were turned over to the regimental chaplain to be used for charitable purposes.

Speaking of chaplains, the 16th Infantry had about the best Catholic padre there was in the Army. When Father Deery spoke, soldiers paid attention -- and when he gave absolution on the fantail of our transport everyone -- Catholic, Protestant and Jew -- turned out for the blessing. As far as I could tell, there no atheists aboard.

Sea passage from Weymouth Harbor to the transport area 12 miles north of Omaha Beach was routine and relatively smooth. After the evening meal and brief final meetings, most of us sacked out -- or tried to. Colonel George Taylor, the regimental commander, stopped by our cabin to wish us good luck. No "pep talk" was needed.

I don't remember how long Ed Driscoll and I slept; but we were awake according to plan at 0200. After last minute checks with company commanders, we went to the Mess for breakfast at 0300. The menu was complete; everyone could have anything he wanted to eat. I ate steak and eggs with pancakes on the side.

Even the mess stewards were kind and solicitous that morning. I guess they were glad they could remain aboard.

Our 1st Battalion troops were rail-loaded into LCVP's. Crossing a narrow gangplank into a waiting LCVP is a far better procedure than climbing down cargo nets. For the record, we hit the English Channel at about 0430.

People often ask me to describe an LCVP -- Well, I think of an LCVP as an oversized metal shoe box. It is certainly no sleek motor launch. 45 feet long by 14 feet wide, it holds some 30 infantrymen and their assault equipment. In the case of our craft, we had a total of 36 headquarters personnel aboard. There is a steel ramp instead of a sharp bow.

With a speed of somewhere around 5 knots through 4 to 8 foot waves, it would take our craft almost 3 hours to go from the trans-

port area to Omaha. In charge of this shoe box was an ordinary seaman. A dozen of these low ranking skippers answered to a Navy lieutenant who was responsible for maintaining us on the correct ship-to-shore course.

Those of you who have been on real or practice landings know that these small craft assemble in circles, head for the shore, then reassemble in circles before crossing the line of departure and dashing into the beach.

Our LCVP had not been in the water 10 minutes before we were all soaking wet and cold. Most of us were seasick. These miserable conditions persisted for the next 12 miles. I learned years later that British Admiral Ramsay had recommended our transports be anchored 8 miles off shore. However, Admiral Kirk, USN, rejected the recommendation because a few coastal guns might somehow engage the transport fleet.

Finally, Omaha Beach and its bluffs were visible to those of us in the front of the LCVP. There was some distant noise, but we were not aware of heavy gunfire. Some smoke from beach flat grasses reduced visibility off of Easy Red. I had the impression at this time all was going according to plan.

About 500 yards off shore I began to realize we were in trouble. Because of numerous beach obstacles, we now had 5 LCVP's going in abreast and very close together. Intervals between craft were inches rather than in tens of yards as prescribed by amphibious doctrine.

As its bottom scraped the sand bar, our LCVP shuddered to a stop. Simultaneously, German machine gun fire hit the steel ramp. I yelled to the seaman not to drop the ramp-- and, for once, the Navy obeyed the Army. Then, as the German gunner swept down the line of five landing craft I had the ramp dropped and 34 of us raced safely into waist deep water.

Swinging back, the machine gun hit Arnold Miller and another communicator -- the last two men -- just before they could exit the LCVP. During the question and answer period, I'll be happy to tell the story of their evacuation to a hero's welcome. However, for now, let's get on with the assault.

The channel bottom was firm under our feet, but the going was tough because of the surf and our heavy loads. Wet woolen clothing didn't help our mobility either.

The nearer we got to the beach line, the more certain I was that the landing was a disaster. Dead and wounded from the first waves were everywhere. There was little or no firing from our troops. On the other hand, German machine guns, mortars and 88's were laying down some of the heaviest fire I'd ever experienced.

Somehow, Hank and I were able to get our half of battalion headquarters across the soft sand and into the defilade afforded by the shingle embankment. I don't recall any casualties. Then, observing some movement off the beach farther to the east, we managed to move in that direction.

Enroute I met Brigadier General Wyman, our Assistant Division Commander, who had landed minutes earlier. He was trying to re-organize scattered forces. As we learn at the Infantry School, a combination of fire and movement is the best way to advance against

the enemy. However, at around 0800 hours, 6 June 1944, when General Wyman asked whether we were advancing by fire and movement, I replied, "Yes sir, they're firing and we're moving."

Until late morning, all reports reaching General Huebner and General Gerow on the ANCON and General Bradley on the AUGUSTA indicated a disaster on Omaha Beach. There was no good news coming their way!

At 0950 General Wyman reported too many vehicles on the beach and requested more combat troops be sent in immediately. Shortly thereafter the 115th Infantry was sent in to reinforce the right portion of the beach and the 18th Infantry was landed near the E-1 exit to pass through and take over the missions of the 16th Infantry.

Naval fire support -- 12 destroyers supported the OMAHA landings from Pointe du Hoc on the west to Port-en-Bessin on the eastern flank. Their mission was to fire on designated targets before H-hour and to deliver close supporting fire on targets of opportunity during and after the landings.

Initially, these destroyers were stationed 5000 to 7000 yards off the beach. However, at 0950, Admiral Bryant ordered them to move in as close as possible to support the troops. "Get on them, men! Get on them!" he urged his commanders.

Immediately, destroyers closed to within 1300 yards of the shoreline -- sometimes scraping their bottoms in the process. Their continuous 5-inch fire, from mid-morning onward, replaced that of the Army artillery which never made it to the shore. German gun emplacements were knocked out one-by-one, silencing the devastating fire which caused so many casualties among early assault companies.

By the end of D-Day, each destroyer supporting the OMAHA landings had fired some 500 to 900 rounds of 5-inch ammunition. In addition, cruisers and battleships hurled many rounds of 8-inch to 14-inch ammunition at enemy fortifications and reserves. The whole Naval story is very well told by Samuel Morrison in Volume XI, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II.

OMAHA BEACH, H-HOUR

Starting at 0630 the 16th RCT landed on Easy Red, Fox Green and Fox Red beaches with three assault companies abreast -- E, F and L. Company I, also scheduled to land in the first assault wave had gone off course to the east. Of its 6 landing craft launched from the transport, 2 had swamped. Finally, coming into Fox Green, about 0800, the remaining 4 craft suffered heavily in the last yards of their approach. Casualties were very high.

In the 2d Battalion sector, we find assault sections of E and F companies scattered, and intermingled with E Company of the 116th RCT -- which had landed several thousand yards east of its target beach. Initial casualties were 50% and more. The lead echelon of Regimental Headquarters was wiped out as its LCV hit the beach. The Executive Officer and S-4 were among the KIA.

Only two 2d Battalion units remained intact as they crossed the beach and headed towards the slopes leading to Colleville. The 1st Section of Company E, led by 2d Lt John Spalding blew a gap in the wire above the shingle; made its way past a stone beach house; and then was held up by mine fields at the foot of the bluffs. 3 men had been lost to this point.

Landing at 0700 Company G, commanded by Captain Joe Dawson, crossed the beach and reached the shingle embankment in good order. The company's machine guns, set up behind the rocks, found no targets until LCVP's of the 1st Bn, coming toward the beach, drew enemy fire. Then, as their heavy weapons built up a volume of supporting fire a few men from each assault section blew gaps in extensive barbed wire obstacles beyond the shingle. Four bangalores were required to cut one lane.

When G Company's advance elements reached the slopes they came in contact with Lt Spalding. From there on, it was agreed that his section would operate on Company G's right. Both attacking forces found routes through the mine fields. In the case of Company G, their path led over the dead bodies of two first-wave soldiers who had tried to penetrate the area earlier.

On the left, bothered more by the mine fields than enemy fire, Captain Dawson and a sergeant went on ahead to scout out a small draw. Half way up the slope an enemy machine gun forced the group to take cover.

Dawson sent his companion back to bring up the company while he crawled on from one patch of brush to another toward the machine gun. Circling to his left and just beyond the gun emplacement, he got within 30 feet before the Germans spotted him and tried to swing their weapon around. Joe threw several fragmentation grenades which killed the crew. This opened the way up the draw for his company and many other units of the Division.

Meanwhile, Spalding's force was beginning to work up the slope helped by covering fire from Company G. In getting past an enemy machine gun on the bluff side 3 more men were lost, reducing their section strength to 23.

The gun was operated by a lone soldier who was captured and found to be Polish. He informed Spalding that there were 16 enemy in trenches to his rear. The Company E section got to the trenches, sprayed them with fire and found the Germans had withdrawn. Spalding turned west along the bluff crest, losing contact with Company G as that unit headed south.

Moving through the hedgerowed fields and wooded areas, the Company E section came up on the rear of the strongpoint guarding the E-1 draw. Germans were manning trenches overlooking the beach, and attack from the high ground caught them by surprise. In two hours of confused fighting Spalding's men got through the outworks of this strongpoint and overcame opposition by close-in work with grenades and rifles. Naval fire, hitting in the parts of the strongpoint below the bluff top, helped to demoralize the resistance. Twenty-one prisoners were taken, and several enemy killed, without loss to the attackers.

Although the fortified area was too extensive to be thoroughly cleaned out by Spalding's small force, the strongpoint east of E-1 had been effectively neutralized by mid-morning, just when important reinforcements for the assault were beginning to land in front of the draw.

About 1100 Spalding's section was joined by some other elements of Company E, which had come up from further east. They brought word from battalion to head south for Colleville.

BACK TO H-HOUR

Except for Company L on the extreme left flank of Omaha Beach, and a small Ranger force on the extreme right and Lt Spalding's section in the center, the first waves of tanks and infantry were decimated by enemy fire. Hardest hit was A Company of the 116th Infantry which landed opposite Vierville exit (O-1). This Virginia National Guard company, exposed to the most intense enemy fire of the day, lost 96% of its strength in the first 10 minutes of the assault.

Company C, 2d Ranger Battalion on the far right also suffered heavy casualties. However, about 30 men survived the ordeal of crossing the beach and found shelter at the base of a 90 foot cliff. Somehow climbing the steep slopes, that small fighting force was able to get around and behind western enemy defenses.

As with Lt Spalding's section in the center, a series of small attacks by Ranger survivors neutralized some of the emplacements causing heavy casualties on the Dog beaches. By mid-afternoon, reinforced by sections of Co B, 116th Infantry, the Ranger force ended German resistance west of the Vierville exit.

BACK TO FOX BEACHES

Company L, 16th Infantry, was the only one of the 8 rifle companies in the first assault wave which was ready to operate as a unit after crossing the beach. Its story deserves telling.

Company L landed on Fox Red instead of Fox Green at 0700. Heavy seas and poor visibility caused assault waves to land 30 minutes late.

The company consisted of the 1st, 2d, 3d and 5th assault sections and a company headquarters section. The 4th assault section's craft had capsized in heavy seas shortly after debarking from the transport.

Assault craft touched down just short of several rows of under-water obstacles, and personnel waded ashore -- crossing 200 yards of open tidal flat under intense enemy fire. This brought the company into the comparative shelter of a vertical cliff, where leaders quickly reorganized their sections. Losses had reduced the company's strength to 123.

Assault on beach strongpoints was begun immediately, and the company began to push inland from the beach around the west edge of the cliff. Captain Armellino was seriously wounded as he repeatedly exposed himself to direct tank fire in support of his company's advance. Lt Cutler, Executive Officer, assumed command.

The 2d assault section, under Lt Monteith, was ordered to push up a small draw and engage pillboxes on the left strongpoint. The 3d section was to advance on the right of this section, with the 5th following it.

The 1st section, under Lt Klenk, passed around the right flank and made contact with elements of the 116th Infantry; together they assaulted the right strongpoint. In this action the 1st section was out of contact with the remainder of the company.

The other three sections of Company L and company headquarters pushed forward as planned. Light machine guns were employed to cover the advance, and Lt Monteith enlisted and directed the support of two tanks.

At the head of the draw, the 2d section took up a hasty defensive position and covered the advance of the 5th section and company headquarters. Two open emplacements were silenced by BAR and rifle fire during the advance up the draw.

Having reached first high ground, the 3d section made contact by runner with the 2d section on the left. The two sections then advanced together, crossed a heavily mined road, and took up defensive positions to await orders of the company commander.

At 0900, under the CO's directions, a perimeter defense was set up on the initial high ground. The 5th section was assigned the mission of securing the right flank and the 3d section covered the left flank. The 2d section, in reserve, protected the company rear.

The 5th section sent a 3-man patrol, led by Pfc Milander, to Cabourg; but it failed to return. (Later it was learned they had been surrounded by 52 of the enemy. During the night, Pfc Milander talked the Germans into surrendering and took them prisoner.)

A patrol from the 3d section was sent to cut the main road between Cabourg and Hameau. The patrol encountered enemy resistance. In the firefight which ensued one German was killed, but the patrol was forced to withdraw.

Captain Kim Richmond of Company I had reached Fox Green at 0800 to find himself the senior commander present. The battalion commander and his party had been mislanded far to the west, and were unable to rejoin until much later in the day.

Captain Richmond started to reorganize the follow-up of Company L's advance. Successfully directing remnants of the first waves in a supporting attack, he was able to join forces with Company L on the high ground shortly after 0900.

At about 1300 a small enemy counterattack of about one platoon, supported by light mortars and machine guns developed against the left flank and rear of the 3d Battalion perimeter. Lt Monteith was killed while exposing himself to direct effective fire against the counterattacking forces. One other defender was killed, and 4 were wounded during this attack.

Shortly thereafter, Captain Richmond decided to send a strong combat patrol to Hameau, and followed it up with the remainder of his combined force, which totaled 104 men -- 79 from Company L and the remainder from I, K and M. Enemy sniper and machine gun fire harassed the advance, but did not slow its progress. Hameau was secured by 1600 and successfully defended through the night.

Company L and a few survivors from other 3d Battalion units -- all under the command of Captain Richmond -- thus secured the left flank of the Omaha Beach landing.

Footnote: First Lieutenant Jimmie Monteith of Virginia was awarded the Medal of Honor for his conspicuous gallantry on D-Day.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS 0800-1200

Between the St. Laurent exit (E-1) and the Colleville exit (E-3), our troops were advancing single file across the beach flat, through mine fields and up the slopes. This was a beautiful sight -- the most encouraging event of the day so far. By good fortune, we found Captain Merindino and B Company towards the end of the column.

Having made it across the English Channel and through the surf without any water problems, I must report a near drowning in the swampy grass between the shingle and the bluffs. Impatient with a temporary halt of our advancing column, Hank and I tried a double-bank maneuver through uncharted swamps. The water was higher than we thought, and to save ourselves we inflated our Mae West life preservers unused until that time. Old movie buffs among you can imagine why this inner tube around the chest and under the armpits was nicknamed a Mae West.

Near the top of the bluffs on a small flat grassy knoll, I can recall the most pleasant 5 minute break of my military career. With our column at one of its temporary standstills, Hank and I moved to the side to sit down and eat apples provided by the ship's mess. We also had time for a wee nip of Scotch whiskey -- my farewell gift from a little old English lady.

This is where I first established the 1st Battalion CP that D-Day morning. I had no idea whether the battalion commander was operational -- and he was equally unaware of my status. Happily, he was with lead elements of C Company -- closely following the 2d Battalion's advance towards Colleville. He also had B Company under his control. Remnants of A Company, in my vicinity, provided a measure of security for the right flank of our regimental penetration.

A Company had been badly mauled as it tried to assault the east side of the E-1 exit. The company commander and 2 lieutenants were badly wounded, and only two assault sections were still operational. However, they were the only combat troops immediately available.

Experience and instinct warned me of the threat from St. Laurent. In the past, German forces had always counterattacked when key terrain was lost. An infantry-armor attack now from the west astride our CP road would hit the 16th's advancing forces in the flank and rear. Accomplishment of our mission would be in jeopardy.

Accordingly, I ordered the acting company commander to attack west towards St. Laurent with what was left of A Company. Should he encounter enemy strength, he was to deploy his assault sections so as to block any counterattack which might come from that direction. As it turned out, after an advance of 600 to 800 yards, he hit strong enemy fortifications which could not be penetrated. He was forced to go on the defensive.

About this time a telephone line reached me from regimental headquarters at the base of the bluffs. Colonel Taylor asked about our situation -- and what he could do to help. I told him we could use tanks -- the sooner, the better. He promised to do everything possible since he also expected an early German counterattack.

FOOTNOTE: Colonel George A. Taylor, CO, 16th Infantry, arrived on Easy Red at 0815 with the second echelon of regimental headquarters. He found plenty to do on the beach. Men were still hugging the shingle embankment, disorganized, and suffering casualties from mortar and artillery fire. Colonel Taylor summed up the situation in a few words: "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." Small groups of men were collected without regard to units, put under the charge of the nearest NCO, and sent on through the wire and across the beach flat.

OTHER BEACHES

So much for the advance up the bluffs from OMAHA during the period from 0800 until about noon. Let's go back and see what was happening on other beaches from west to east.

Landing about a mile south of designated beaches, 4th Division units found themselves advancing easily against very light enemy resistance. Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., after conferring with the two assault battalion commanders, made a great decision: land the remainder of the division on the new Utah Beach. It suffices to report that by the end of D-Day some 20,000 troops were ashore, with leading elements E miles inland -- and in contact with our airborne forces. Total D-Day casualties at Utah Beach were less than 200.

Parachute assaults by the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions greatly assisted the 4th Division's advance inland. Although most airborne battalions experienced badly scattered drops, their presence confused and immobilized German reserves. Of special importance, the 101st within a few hours of landing had secured the western edge of the inundated area inland from Utah Beach, thus ensuring a rapid consolation of the VII Corps lodgement. However, there were problems; both Airborne Commanders -- Generals Ridgway and Taylor -- experienced control problems, with more than half of each division unaccounted for at the end of D-Day.

At Pointe du Hoc, Companies D, E & F of the 2d Ranger Battalion landed almost an hour late. Despite German machine gun and mortar fire, about 100 Rangers were able to scale the cliffs and rapidly seize the central fortification area. Fire support from Naval destroyers greatly assisted Ranger advances and their subsequent defense against German counterattacks.

The feared German 155mm gun battery was nowhere to be seen. Gun emplacements on the Pointe were empty. However, aggressive patrols from two companies located and sabotaged the dangerous 155mm guns about a mile inland. Although the weapons were completely operational, with plenty of ammunition, no gun crews were to be found.

The heroic saga of Ranger operations during the period D-Day thru the morning of D-plus 2 is well described by Army historians. May I especially recommend a recent reprint of "Small Unit Actions," originally published by the War Department 4 April 1946.

Skipping past Omaha Beach, we find that the 50th British Division made a successful landing on Gold Beach -- and advanced inland almost to Bayeux. However, Marine Commando units attached to the Division were not able to enter Port-en-Bessin and contact American forces west thereof until D-plus 1.

At Juno Beach the 3d Canadian Division landed after a 2-hour naval bombardment of German defenses. Even with this massive support, the initial going was tough, with advances measured in hundreds of feet rather than yards. Then, once the German defensive crust was breached, rapid advances carried reserve units to key terrain 5 to 6 miles inland.

At Sword Beach, again after a long and heavy naval bombardment, the 3d British Division advanced rapidly toward its objectives. Advance elements of this force and the 6th British Airborne Division faced the threat of Panzer counterattacks. As it turned out, the

21st Panzer Division attacking well behind schedule almost made it to the water between Juno and Sword beaches.

This brings us to the operation of the 6th British Airborne Division. Through aggressive action almost all major objectives were achieved, including the seizure of key bridges across the Orne River and the Caen Canal. Especially noteworthy was the successful attack by a small airborne task force to neutralize a German gun battery at Merville -- overlooking Sword Beach. Incidentally, this is one of the few times that Allied intelligence missed the mark. Instead of large caliber naval-type guns, the battery consisted of 4 antiquated French 75's captured earlier in the war.

British Commando units distinguished themselves in fierce fighting on the flanks and between assault British and Canadian divisions. Their assistance during D-Day was invaluable to the 6th Airborne.

REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE

The 18th RCT started landing just west of E-1 shortly after 1000 hours, led by the 2d Battalion. The beach shingle was full of vehicles and troops; and the beach was still under heavy fire from enemy small arms, mortars and artillery. Underwater obstacles caused great difficulties for the landing craft. Nevertheless, personnel losses in the 18th Infantry were light.

Shortly after the first companies of the 18th RCT had come ashore, landing craft of the 115th Infantry began to touch down almost on top of them. The result was further congestion and confusion in that sector; both regiments experienced considerable delays in getting off the beach.

It was noon before the 2d Battalion, 18th, got off the beach; and the 3d and 1st Battalions of the 18th were not able to land until about 1300. As the 2d Battalion moved out, General Wyman ordered it to take over the mission of the 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry.

REPORTS

As we now know, a number of companies from reserve battalions of the 16th and 116th had seized key portions of the bluffs by 0900. However, that information did not reach division headquarters until late morning. It was an hour or so later before General Bradley was aware of the progress.

Entry No. 155 (at 1341 hours) in the 1st Division G-3 Journal carries the following report from the Navy: "Beaches Dog Green, White and Red are entirely clear of opposition and ready for landing troops. Easy Green and Red are waiting for the landing of infantry reinforcements. All fire support ships are waiting on the Army for target assignments."

Thus, except for the threat of a major counterattack, which never materialized, the success of Omaha Beach landings was clearly predictable from early afternoon on. Certainly there were major logistical problems for the Navy beachmaster and the Army Special Engineer Brigade. However, their efforts in breaching obstacles and clearing exits were well underway.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS NOON TO MIDNIGHT

Although I can recall some important events, my feel for exact timing is gone.

Following establishment of the battalion CP and the advance of A Company towards St. Laurent, I recall testing German defenses south of the hedgerow along our dirt road. Several rifle teams attempted an advance across the hedgerows -- only to receive heavy small arms fire from three directions. Somewhat later, a helmet raised on a stick just above the hedgerow vegetation drew immediate sniper fire. It was not difficult to conclude the enemy was in strength just to the south -- in fact, right next door.

Farther east, nearer the route of advance of G Company and the remainder of our 1st Battalion, there was some harassing fire. However, its intermittent nature and minimal volume did not impede progress toward Colleville. Apparently, some enemy defenders could see the advance, but did not wish to take on our strength.

Towards late-afternoon I was happy to see Lt Colonel Joe Sisson and his 3d Battalion, 18th Infantry, approaching our location. It was a great feeling to know reinforcements were at hand.

I passed along what little I knew about friendly and enemy dispositions. Shortly thereafter, two lead companies were deployed from east to west along our dirt road; bayonets were fixed; and men charged south across the hedgerow.

That bayonet charge -- to the best of my recollection -- was made sometime around 1700. Initially, German small arms fire was heavy; then, it seemed to fade as attacking companies moved farther south to other hedgerows and fields.

Obviously, the security of our small headquarters echelon and the remainder of A Company was strengthened for the night. We would be tested by some individual German infiltrators and stragglers. However, at this point, most were ready to give up the fight.

As darkness approached, we were all a bit numb; it had been a long two days, with only a couple hours sleep the previous night. Maybe numb isn't the word; I felt like a zombi.

Curled up against our hedgerow, a lieutenant and I shared the warmth of his raincoat. Our clothes were still damp and the temperature had dropped into the 50's. We knew the Allies had it made -- and that German defenses had been breached. However, the loss of good buddies and the horrors of the day made sleep almost impossible.

To have survived was good fortune beyond belief. Perhaps, Father Deery's blessing had provided cover when there was none.

RESERVES ADVANCE INLAND, AND HEADQUARTERS COME ASHORE

Reserve regiments were given the mission of enlarging the beachhead. Their battalions took over the objectives of assault battalions which, by this point, had run out of "steam." Continued advances through the night would enable more troops and supplies to come ashore -- and that reinforcement was critical to future operations.

By 1800, the 16th Infantry had advanced south of the 16th, but progress was slow.

The 26th Infantry was ashore by 2100. Its 2d and 3d Battalions moved south of St. Laurent, with orders to attack towards Formigny in the morning. 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry was sent east to help secure the left flank of the beachhead.

General Huebner and the 1st Division Command Group landed on

Easy Red at 1900. They joined General Wyman, locating the Division CP near the entrance of the E-1 draw.

General Gerow and the advance headquarters of V Corps left the ANCON for Omaha Beach at 2030.

During the evening, 17 tanks came up to reinforce the 3d Battalion, 16th, in defending Hameau and blocking the coastal highway in that area.

Parts of Colleville -- while virtually surrounded by companies of the 2d Battalion, 16th -- still remained in enemy hands. Everywhere, 1st Division units were harassed by sniper fire and small enemy groups trying to withdraw southward. Sharp, brief firefights continued through the night.

AND SO D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944, BECAME HISTORY

A FINAL OBSERVATION

D-Day actions on Omaha Beach can only be covered in a one hour talk by using examples and summarizing. I apologize for not giving more coverage to the regiments of the 29th Division -- the 116th and 115th -- and to the Ranger Battalions led by Lt Colonel Rudder and Lt Colonel Schneider. Their accomplishments, their heroic deeds and their problems parallel those of our 1st Division units.

In one case, the 1st Platoon of Company A, 5th Ranger Battalion did what no other unit accomplished on D-Day. Led by Lt Parker, it landed on Omaha Beach, crossed the obstacles; climbed the bluffs; passed through the outskirts of Vierville; and then advanced some 3 miles cross-country to join in the Ranger defense of Pointe du Hoc. This penetration of enemy defenses is even more amazing when one recalls that it was not until the morning of D-plus 2 that a relief column from the 29th Division finally linked up with LTC Rudder's Ranger force.

My goal in these brief remarks has been to interest you in one of the greatest of all single-day battles. Lessons learned are applicable to today's Army because small unit actions have not changed that much. Individuals, squads, platoons, and companies can emulate World War II counterparts in training to defeat enemy defenses. The qualities of small unit leadership are still current. Initiative and good old American ingenuity remain strong weapons against a determined professional enemy.

In short, I urge you to consider this brief exposure to Operation Overlord as a prologue -- a beginning of your further research and study of the Normandy fighting.

EPILOGUE

The SHAEF operations map at 2400 hours, 6 June 1944 showed 5-6 mile forward advances from Utah, Gold, Juno and Sword beaches. However, south of Omaha Beach, the Allied beach-head was only a mile inland of the shore line.

From the standpoint of D-Day casualties, there were less than 12,000 WIA and KIA. At Omaha Beach 3,000-plus casualties were distributed equally among the 16th Infantry, the 116th Infantry and all others. Following WW II, historians discovered that a closely held SHAEF analysis predicted as many as 75,000 casualties, including 10,000 KIA.

Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery on Utah Beach and Lt Monteith was so decorated for his heroism at Omaha. General Wyman, Colonel Taylor, Captain Joe Dawson, Captain Kim Richmond and Lt Spalding received the Distinguished Service Cross for their gallantry -- as did several dozen other officers and NCO's who led the advance across the beaches and onto the bluffs. However, many sacrificed their lives in the battle with no recognition -- for example, the two unknown men from the first wave who died breaching the mine fields off of Easy Red.

One noted war correspondent put it this way: "There were medals aplenty, but for every medal, there were scores of men whose heroism went unsung or unnoticed in the smoke and dust and bloodstained waters of D-Day."

All D-Day and through the night the Allies poured reinforcements onto the Normandy countryside -- 36,000 in the Utah sector; 34,000 at Omaha and 83,000 on the British-Canadian Beaches and airborne areas. Fortunately for the Allies, a breakdown in the German high command and Hitler's conviction that the Normandy landings were only a diversion precluded the expected Panzer counterattacks. At the end of D-Day von Rundstedt, Rommel and other German commanders were unaware of the magnitude and success of Allied landings.

Two weeks later the number of troops ashore was over 600,000, and the number of vehicles almost 100,000. The Allied advance by mid-June had reached Caumont, some 23 miles south of Omaha Beach.

Two key requirements of the OVERLORD strategy had been fulfilled. We had a foothold in Normandy, and our build-up was almost complete. All that remained was to penetrate German defenses and breakout. That phase of the war was initiated on 25 July and by the end of August the Allies were beyond Paris and well on their way to the German border.

The dash across France was the most exciting period of World War II, but I hope we shall always remember that our victory in Europe was made possible by the fierce fighting on the beaches, 6 June 1944. That was the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany.

This concludes my lecture. Please take a ten-minute break before we continue with the question and answer period.

Thank you.



HONORARY COLONEL
THE 16TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

Major General Albert H. Smith, Jr.

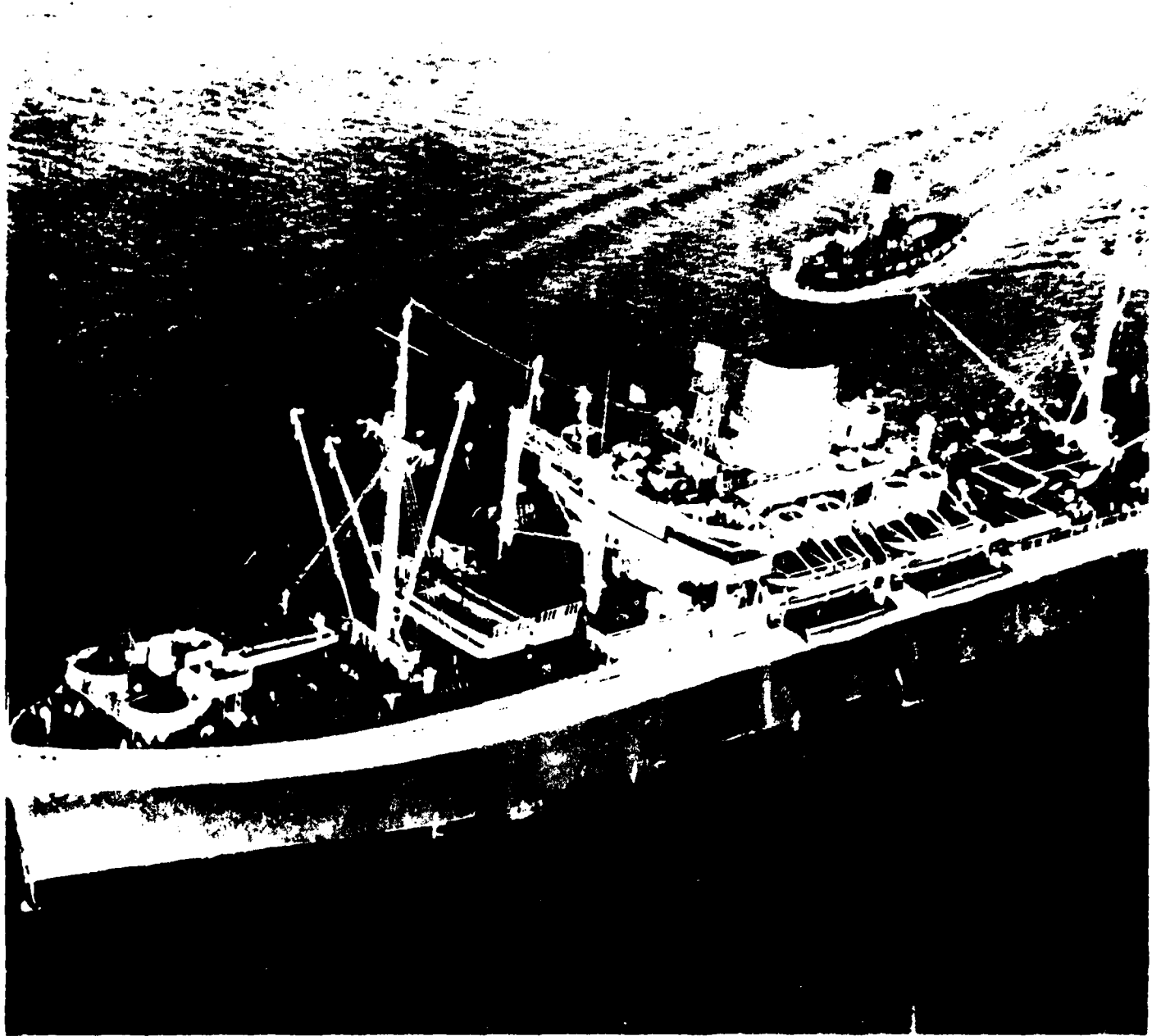
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U.S. ARMY, RETIRED

TRANSCRIPT ANNEX

PERTINENT
PHOTOGRAPHS
&
QUOTATIONS



USS SAMUEL CHASE TRANSPORTS HQ, 16th INFANTRY AND 1st
BATTALION, 16th INFANTRY FROM WEYMOUTH, ENGLAND TO
OMAHA BEACH, NORMANDY, FRANCE 5-6 JUNE 1944.



ASSAULT TROOPS OF THE 16th INFANTRY RAIL LOAD THEIR LCVP
FROM THE DECK OF THE TRANSPORT, USS SAMUEL CHASE

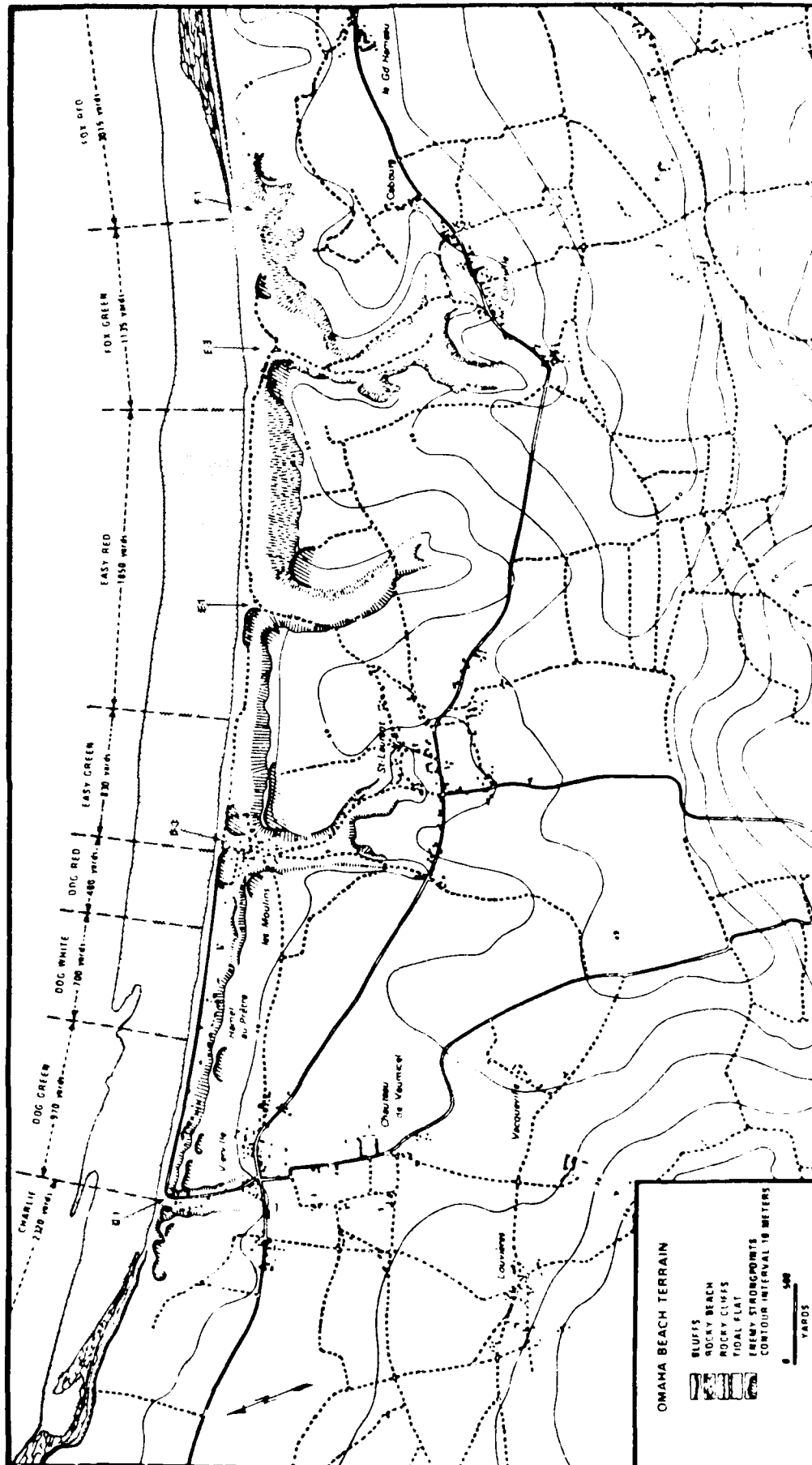


LCVP

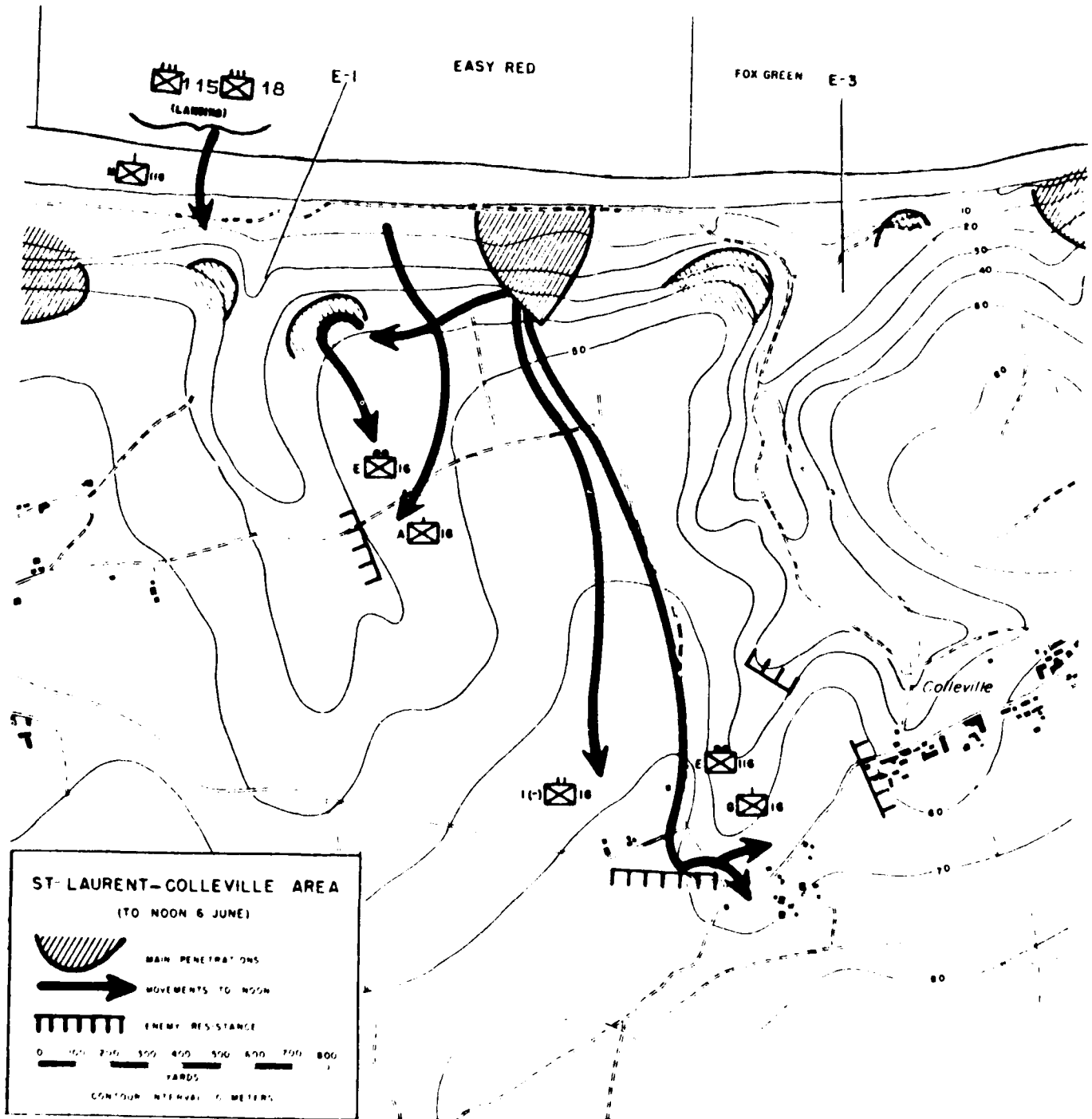
BATTALION COMMANDER AND ONE-HALF OF HEADQUARTERS, 1st
BATTALION, 16th INFANTRY APPROACH OMAHA BEACH, 0715
hours, 6 JUNE 1944.



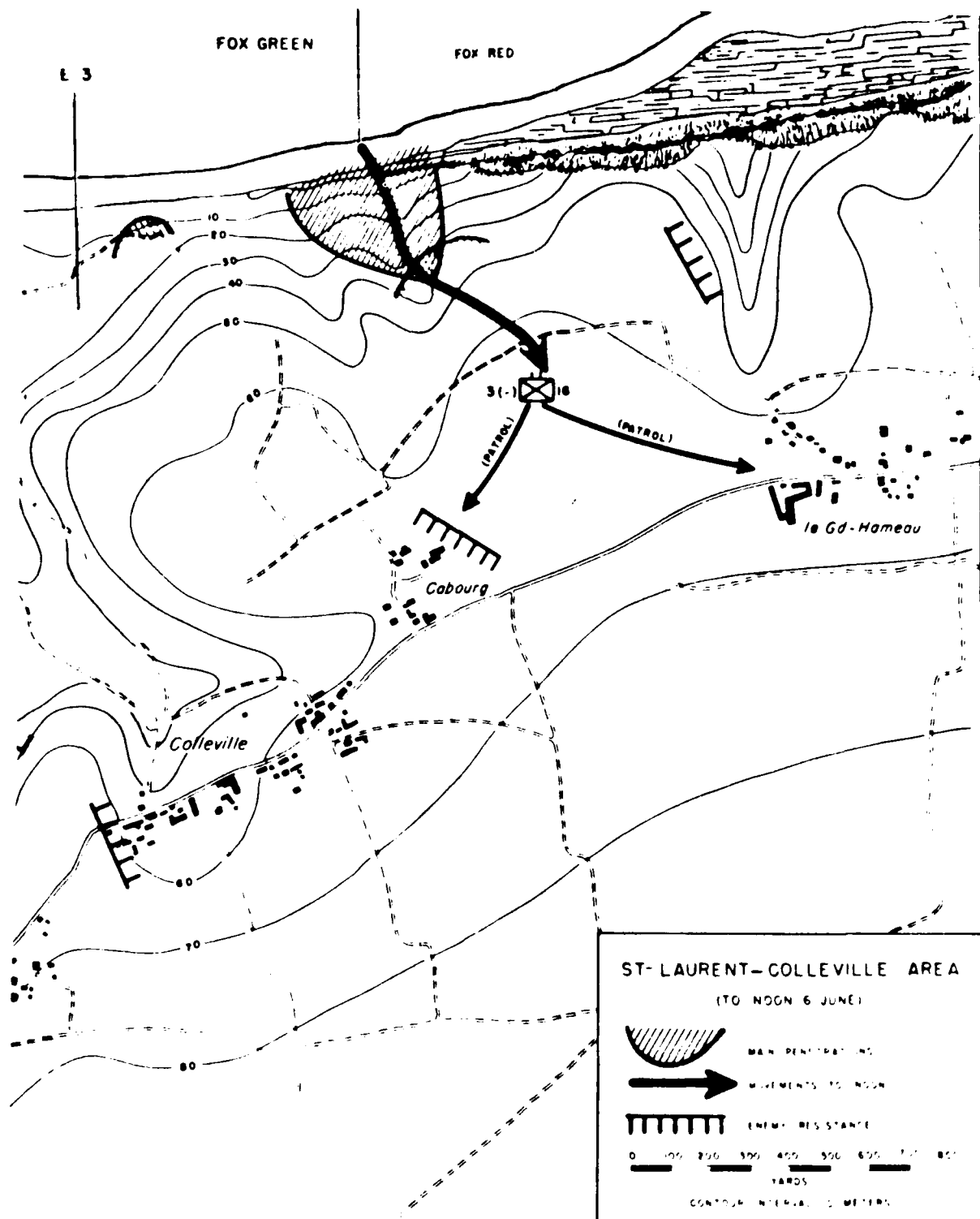
LCVP - RAMP DOWN
ONE ECHELON OF HEADQUARTERS 1st BATTALION, 16th INFANTRY
HITS THE WATER OFF OMAHA BEACH 0730 hours, 6 JUNE 1944.



OMAHA BEACH



OMAHA BEACH



OPERATION OVERLORD

OPERATION OVERLORD: The over-all strategic plan for the invasion of France and for operations up to D+90. Also, the actual campaign.

THE MISSION: Enter the continent of Europe and undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.

THE STRATEGY: First, gain a TOEHOLD; second, BUILD UP troops and supplies; then, BREAKOUT of the lodgement and defeat the German armed forces.

OPERATION NEPTUNE

OPERATION NEPTUNE: The first phase of "Overlord." It included the mounting of the invasion forces in England, the crossing of the English Channel under naval escort, and the fight for the beaches in Normandy.

ASSAULT TACTICS: "The first six hours will be the toughest," Colonel Taylor said. "That is the period during which we will be the weakest. But we've got to open the door. Somebody has to lead the way -- and if we fail well then the troops behind us will do the job. They'll just keep throwing stuff onto the beaches until something breaks. That is the Plan." Colonel George Taylor, CO, 16th Infantry

EPILOGUE - Omaha Beach

"Omaha Beach, however, was a nightmare. Even now it brings pain to recall what happened there on June 6, 1944. I have returned many times to honor the valiant men who died on that beach. They should never be forgotten. Nor should those who lived to carry the day by the slimmest of margins. Every man who set foot on Omaha Beach that day was a hero."

General Omar N. Bradley (From A General's Life)

EPILOGUE - June 1944 Normandy Landings

To: Winston Churchill - - - June 11, 1944

The history of war does not show any such undertaking so broad in concept, so grandiose in scale, so masterly in execution.

Joseph Stalin

ALLIED ASSAULT ROUTES

6 June 1944

