



UTAH BEACH by Joseph Gary Sheahan, 1944.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ALLIED 21ST ARMY GROUP D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944

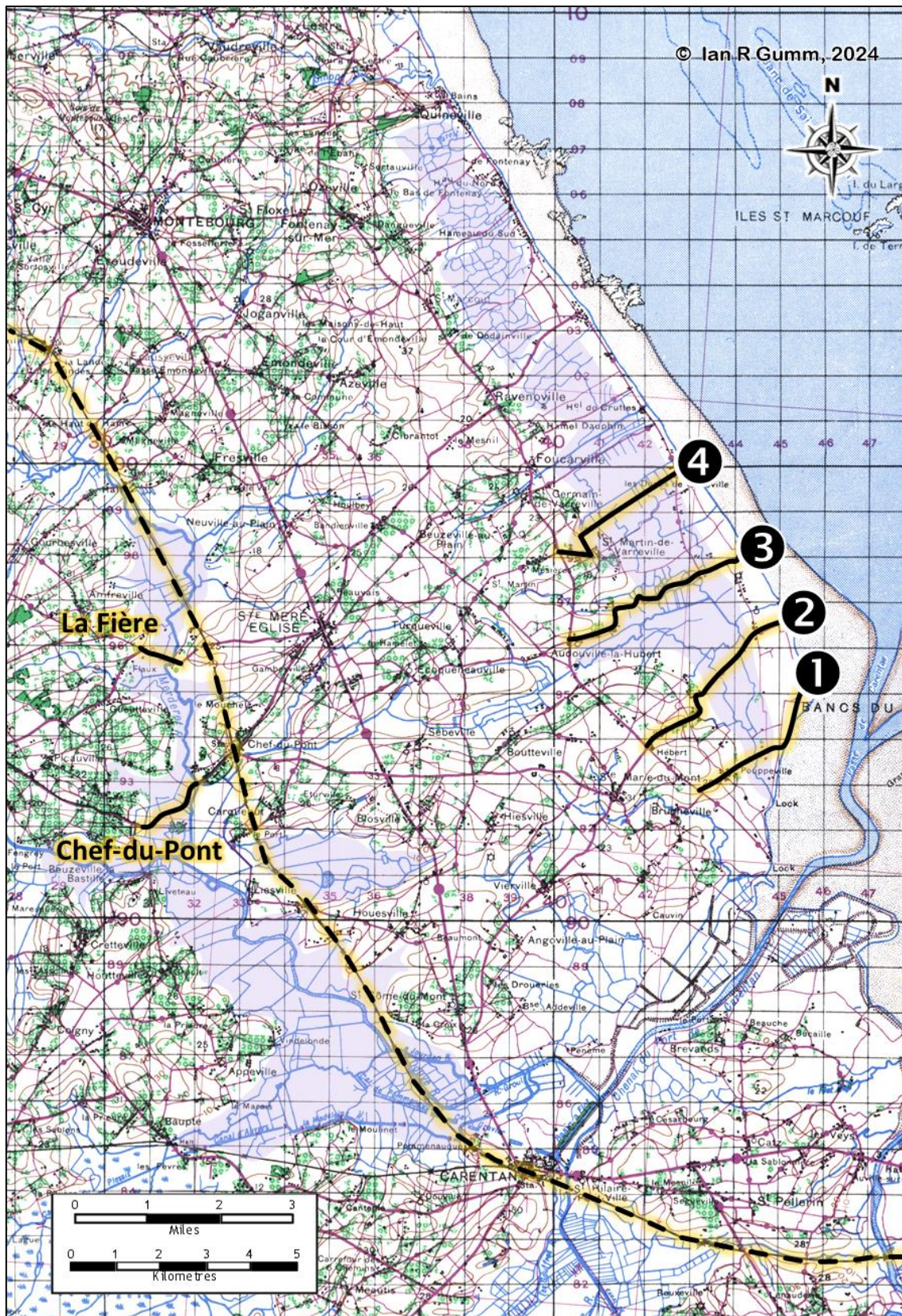
THE GREATEST SEABORNE INVASION THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

by Ian R Gumm MSTJ TD VR BSc (Hons)

PART FOURTEEN – THE 4TH INFANTRY DIVISION AT UTAH BEACH

UTAH Beach was the most westerly of the Allied landing beaches. It was located towards the base of the Cotentin Peninsula on the eastern seaboard close to where the Vire estuary joins the English Channel. The Canal du Port le Carentan and River Vire run inland from the Vire estuary to join the River Taute and River Douve just south of Carentan. The River Douve flows from the west out of the peninsula and the River Merderet flows south down the peninsula to join the River Douve west of Carentan. These rivers flood naturally with the seasons and the Germans had turned their floodplains into a swamp by closing the lock at La Barquette. The low-lying pastureland to the rear of the beaches, between the Vire estuary and Quinéville, had also been turned into a marshy area by destroying and blocking the

drainage ditches. The flooding made causeways out of the raised road surfaces across the inundated area, and the four causeways behind the beach towards the Vire estuary were destined to become the beach exits. The causeways were vital to the Allied invasion and their subsequent movements and, as such, were major objectives on D-Day. Also raised above the inundated floodplain was the Caen to Cherbourg railway that ran south to north through the area.



The inundated areas, railway, River Merderet causeways, and four beach exits. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

Once clear of the inundation, the countryside was typical Normandy bocage, a patchwork of small irregular fields bounded by raised earthen-covered banks topped by thick hedgerows. The raised banks were due to a thousand years of piling stones at the field boundary as they were cleared, resulting in a solid immovable base. Orchards dotted the area, and many hedgerows overhung the narrow dirt tracks and roads.

Running south to north up the Cotentin Peninsula was the N13, the old Roman road that ran from Caen through Bayeux to Carentan and onward to Cherbourg. This runs briefly parallel to the railway near Carentan before heading northwards onto the ridge of higher ground at Sainte-Côme-du-Mont. It then crosses the gently sloping ridges and valleys to Sainte-Mère-Église to continue northwards onto the considerable ridge that extends southwest to le Ham and east to Quinéville. The highest point of this ridge, at 108 metres, is Mont Castre just to the north of Montebourg. This road was vital to the Allied invasion and their subsequent movements and, as such, was a major objective on D-Day.

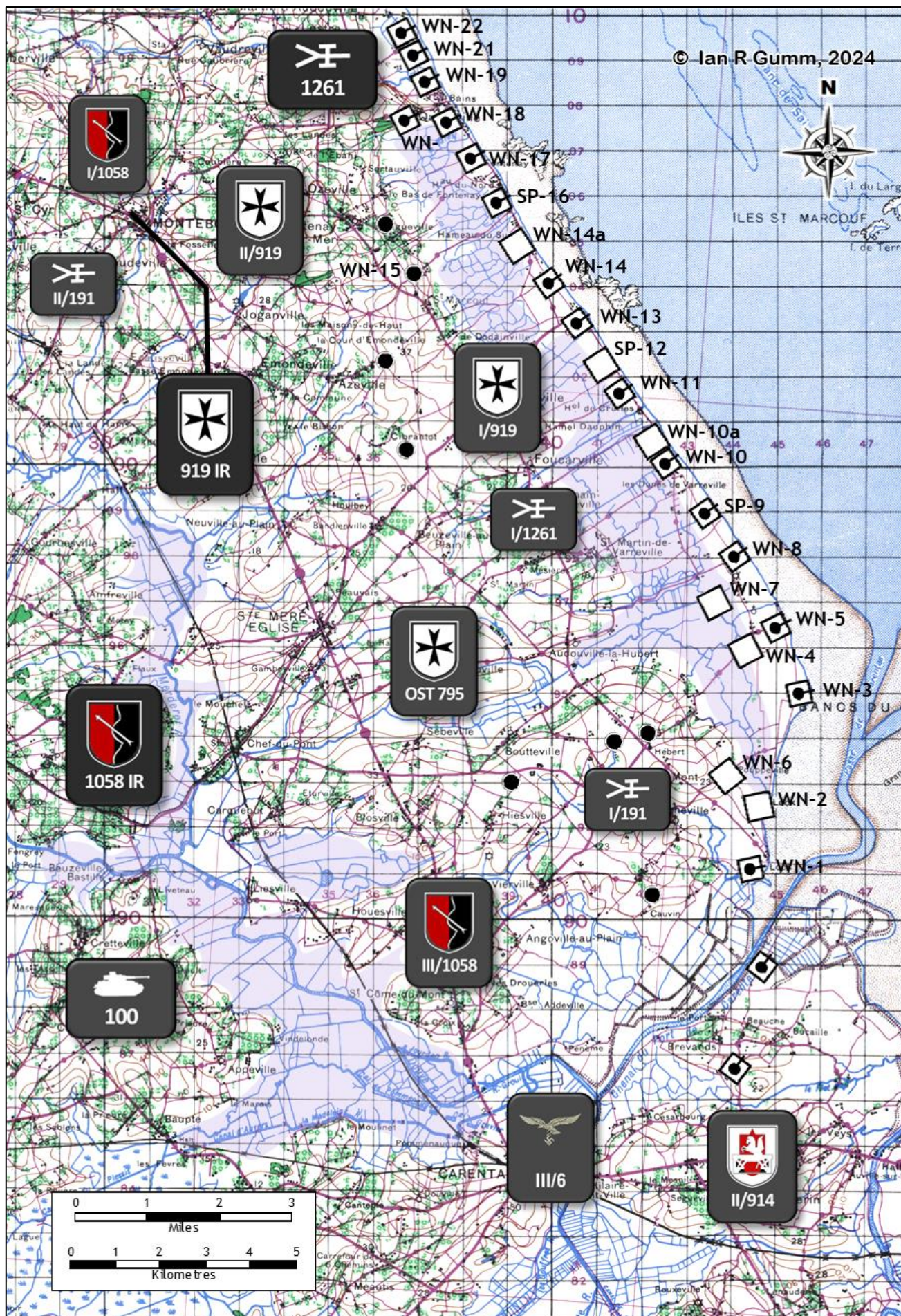
The beaches along the eastern seaboard of the Cotentin Peninsula shelved gently with a gradient of between 1:50 to 1:100. At low tide the expanse of sand exposed was in places over 700 metres wide. Two small islands lay off the coast where the bank of offshore shallows broke the surface. Together these form the Îles St-Marcouf and it was not known if the Germans had fortified and occupied them as part of their Atlantic Wall defences.

Popular belief would have it that the landings at UTAH Beach were easy, a cakewalk that consisted merely of coming ashore and mopping up a few feeble German troops before pushing inland to meet up with and relieve the beleaguered paratroopers. Whilst there may be some truth in assessing the enemy's resistance as not as strong as elsewhere, it was far from as easy as many would have you believe.

German Forces

Elements of General der Artillery Erich Marcks GE LXXXIV Corps defended the Cotentin Peninsula. To the west was Generalleutnant Heinz Hellmich's 243rd Infanterie Division, to the east was Generalleutnant Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben's 709th Infanterie Division, and towards the base of the peninsula in an anti-airborne landing capacity was Generalleutnant Wilhelm Falley's 91st Luftlande Division. Attached to the 91st Luftlande Division was Major Friedrich-August von der Hytte's Fallschirmjäger (Parachute) Regiment 6. Also, in the area was Oberst Hermann von Oppeln-Bronikowski's Panzer Ersatz-und-Ausbildungsabteilung 100, a Panzer Training and Replacement Battalion.

Generalleutnant Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben's 709th Infanterie Division defended the eastern seaboard of the peninsula. They had moved into the area in early 1943 and, as a 'Static Division' intended for Atlantic Wall defensive duty, they lacked any motorised transport but were relatively strong in artillery. Their strength just before the invasion was 12,230 officers and men, many of whom were considered too old or unfit for combat. Three of its eleven infantry battalions were Ost-Battalions recruited from Eastern Europe, many of whom were ex-prisoners of war. A high proportion of the remainder were Volksdeutsche, German speaking but not originating from within the borders of pre-war Germany.



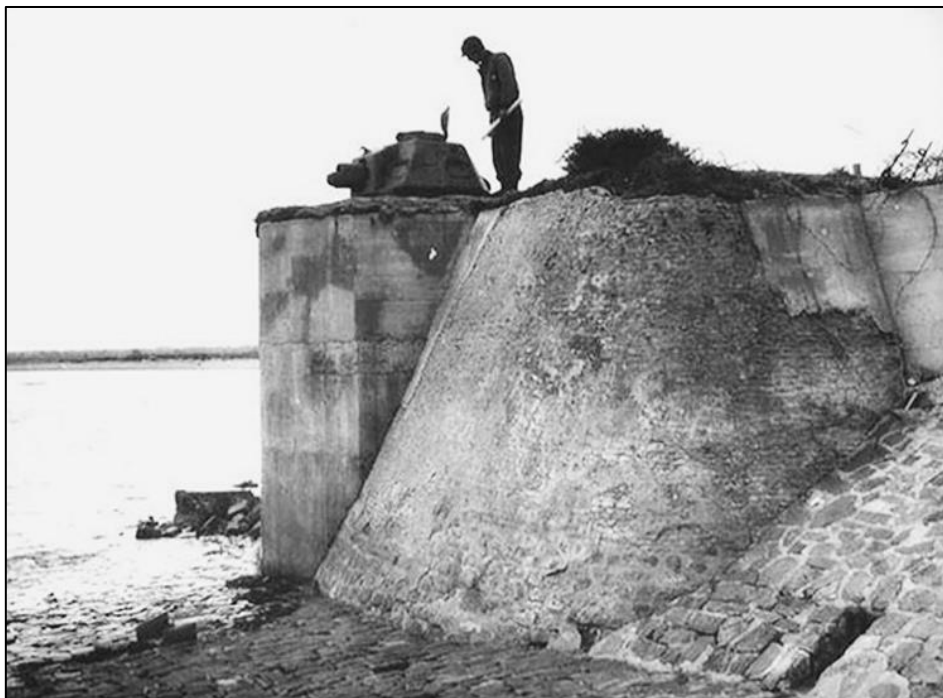
German dispositions in the UTAH Beach area of operations before D-Day. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

On D-Day, 6 June 1944 Oberleutnant Günther Keil's Grenadier Regiment 919, whose command post was at Le Mont Lestre at Montebourg, was responsible for the security of coastal defences in the UTAH Beach area. Hauptmann Fink's 1st Battalion [I/919] was responsible for the eastern seaboard between the River Vire estuary and Quinéville. The battalion headquarters was located near Foucarville and the Companies with Oberleutnant Gluba's Company 1 [1/919] in reserve at Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, Leutnant Hans Rohweder's Company 2 [2/919] covered the coastline between Pouppeville and la Madeleine, Oberleutnant Matz's Company 3 [3/919] between la Madeleine and les Dunes de Varreville, and Oberleutnant Werner's Company 4 [4/919] between les Dunes de Varreville and Quinéville.

The coast to the north of Quinéville was held by Major Hadenfledt's 2nd Battalion [II/919] and Hauptmann Berg 3rd Battalion [III/919] was held as the divisional reserve to the northwest of Quinéville. A battalion of the Grenadier Regiment 729 and Hauptmann Willi Hümmerrich's Panzerjäger-Abteilung 709 (Anti-tank Battalion) were held in reserve to the northwest of Quinéville.

Inland from UTAH Beach between Exit 3 and the main Carentan to Cherbourg road was Major Hugo Messerschmidt's Sturm-Bataillon AOK 7. This was an Ost-Battalion recruited in Eastern Europe and was detached from the Grenadier Regiment 739. Sturm-Bataillon AOK 7 was minus one company that was deployed elsewhere. The inter-divisional boundary to the south with the 716th Infanterie Division ran along the River Taute, though across the river next to the boundary was the 2nd Battalion, the Grenadier Regiment 914 [II/914] from the 352nd Infanterie Division.

Built into the coastline along the eastern side of the Cotentin Peninsula were the Widerstandnester [WN] (resistance nests) and Stützpunkte [StP] (strongpoints) of K.V.Gruppe Cotentin Ost (East), that was responsible for this section of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. The Americans numbered these consecutively from the south.



The Vf58c ringstand Tobruk at WN-01 with a captured French R35 3.7cm KwK 144(f) tank turret mounted on top.

WN-01 was located at Le Grand Vey to the southeast of Pouppeville and looked across the Vire estuary. It was part of the UTAH Beach defences manned by elements of Leutnant Rohweder's 2/919, whose headquarters was at WN-06. The site consisted of one captured Belgian 7.5cm Feldkanone 235(b) mounted in a Regelbau H612 gun emplacement, two 5cm KwK 39 L/60 guns in open ringstands, a captured French R35 3.7cm KwK 144(f) tank turret mounted on top of a Vf58c ringstand Tobruk, one Vf4a machine gun Tobruk, one R501 headquarters bunker, one R607 ammunition bunker, two Vf2a personnel bunkers, three Vf58c Tobruks, and one KSB cable connection box. A Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank wall protected WN-01, and a network of trenches connected these elements. Close protection was provided by a 50mm Granatenwerfer (light mortar) 203(f) mortar and seven machine gun positions.



German soldiers manning the Atlantikwall. In the foreground, is a Granatenwerfer and beyond that, a machine gun in the sustained fire roll.

WN-02 was located at Le Taret to the east of Pouppeville near the Houseville sluice gate. It guarded the important sluice gate and could fire into the Vire estuary. Elements of Lieutenant Rohweder's 2/919 under the command of Leutnant Ritter manned WN-02. Its main armaments were two 5cm KwK 38 L/42 guns in open ringstands, several machine guns and bunkers connected by trenches for local protection.

WN-03 was located near the mouth of the Vire estuary at Beau Gillot and was manned by elements of Oberleutnant Matz's 3/919, whose headquarters was at WN-7. Its defences were just above the high-water line and consisted of one 7.5cm Feldkanone 38 gun in a Geschützstellung (gun emplacement), one 5cm KwK 39 L/60 gun in an open ringstand, one 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun, one Renault FT-17 turret fitted with an MG 311(f) machine gun mounted on top of a Panzer Drehturm FT tank turret Tobruk, one Feldmäßig (a defensive structure with walls and roofs 0.3–0.6 metres thick), one Vf1a personnel bunker, three Vf2a personnel bunkers, and five Vf8 ringstand bunkers connected by a network of trenches.

WN-04 was still under construction and located at Les Dunes to the rear of the beach on the road from la Madeleine to Pouppeville.

WN-05 was located at the beach end of Exit 2 at la Madeleine. It covered the road to Sainte-Marie-du-Mont (Exit 2) and was manned by elements of Oberleutnant Matz's GE 3/919 under the command of Lieutenant Arthur Jahnke.



Lieutenant Arthur Jahnke.

Arthur Jahnke was a 23-year-old German Regular Army (Heeres) Leutnant in 1944. He was already a veteran of the Eastern Front and had seen action with the German 302nd Infanterie Division. He had been badly wounded on the Eastern Front and awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross in recognition of his leadership on 20 April 1944. He commanded the 75-man strong garrison at WN-05 that covered the beach between La Grande Dune and La Madeleine.



An air photo of WN-05 before D-Day. The Chapelle de la Madeleine is in the circle, the Red House is in the square, and Exit 2, the road running west to St Marie-du-Mont is highlighted.

WN-05 was protected by a Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank wall and had a 50mm KwK L/60 gun mounted on top of a Regelbau H667 casemate. A 7.5cm Feldkanone 38, a 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun, two further 50mm KwK L/60 guns mounted in ringstands, and a French 37mm FT 17 tank turret on top of a Vf58c bunker. It had a R501 Headquarters Bunker, two Vf1a, two Vf2a, one Vf7b, and three more Vf58c bunkers. Close protection was provided by an 81.4mm Granatenwerfer 278(f) mortar mounted in an IC125 mortar Tobruk and three machine gun nests. A network of trenches connected several ammunition bunkers and shelters.



The 50mm KwK L/60 gun mounted on top of a Regelbau H667 casemate at La Madeleine.

WN-06 was located to the rear of the beach at Pouppeville and served as the command post of Leutnant Hans Rohweder's 2/919.

WN-07 was located northwest of Exit 2 at la Madeleine and was the command post of Oberleutnant Matz's 3/919.

WN-08 was located on the former site of the French redoubt at La Redoute d'Audouville at Exit 3 on UNCLE RED Beach and was protected by a Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank wall. It had a 7.6cm Feldkanone 36(r), two 5cm KwK 38 L/42 guns in two open ringstands, and a 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun. The site was surrounded by barbed wire and several minefields and had a Regelbau R501 personnel shelter, a Regelbau H622 twin personnel shelter, and two Vf2a, two Vf58c and two Vf6 circular observation posts: one north of the site and the other to the south. Close protection was provided by an 81.4mm Granatenwerfer 278(f) mortar mounted in a IC125 mortar Tobruk and seven machine guns, connected by a network of trenches.

StP-09 was located on the beach northeast of Saint-Martin-de-Varreville between Exit 3 and Exit 4 and was protected by a Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank wall. It had two 8.8cm Pak 43/41 anti-tank guns mounted in Regelbau H677 casements providing enfilade fire along the beach to the north and the south. There were four R35 3.7cm KwK tank turret Tobruks and one S35 3.7cm KwK tank turret Tobruk, three along the beach and two behind the strongpoint.

There was also a 150cm Sw7 searchlight in a protective concrete shelter. Close protection was provided by a 50mm M19 mortar and four machine gun nests connected by a network of trenches.

WN-10 was located at les Dunes de Varreville and was manned by elements of Oberleutnant Werner's 4/919. It consisted of one 8.8cm Pak 43/41 anti-tank gun in a Regelbau R612 casemate and two 4.7cm Pak 36(t) Skoda anti-tank guns mounted in casements. These guns provided enfilade fire to the north and the south along the beach. WN-10 also had two 5cm KwK 38 L/42 guns, a 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun in an open fire position and two French 3.7cm FT 17 tank turret Tobruks. Close protection was provided by two 81.4mm Granatenwerfer 278(f) mortars, 12 automatic flame-throwers and 10 machine gun Tobruks, four Vf6 observation posts, ammunition bunkers and personnel shelters connected by an extensive network of trenches. WN-10a was sited to provide WN-10 with flank protection.



The 8.8cm Pak 43/41 anti-tank gun in a Regelbau R612 casemate at WN-10.

WN-11 was located north of Hamel des Cruttes at Hamel Mauger and was manned by elements of Oberleutnant Werner's 4/919 and was protected by a Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank wall. Its main armaments were a 5cm KwK 39 L/60 anti-tank gun in a ringstand, and one 3.7cm KwK 144(f) tank turret and one MG 311(f) machine gun mounted on top of a Panzer Drehturm FT tank turret Tobruks. Close protection was provided by an 81.4mm Granatenwerfer 278(f) mortar in a Vf58c Tobruk and five machine guns. There were belts of barbed wire and mines located north and south of the site. An observation post was built in the heart of the seafront position, in addition to various personnel shelters and ammunition bunkers connected by a network of trenches.

StP-12 was located on the waterfront at Châlet de Ravenoville and was again manned by Oberleutnant Werner's 4/919 and was protected by a Panzerabwehrmauern anti-tank seawall. Its main armaments were one 8.8cm Pak 43/41 anti-tank gun in a Regelbau R612 casemate and a 5cm KwK 38 L/42 gun in a Regelbau H667 casement. The orientation of

these guns made it possible to fire enfilade fire north and south along the beach. There were three R35 3.7cm KwK 144(f) co-axle M.G.311(f) tank turrets and one S35 4.7cm KwK 173(f) co-axle M.G.311(f) tank turret in Panzer Drehturm Bf67 Tobruks and a 150cm Sw7 searchlight in a protective concrete shelter. Several machine guns provided close protection, and several concrete bunkers, minefields and a network of trenches.

WN-13 was located at Grand Hameau des Dunes and was manned by elements of Oberleutnant Werner's 4/919 plus an additional Pioneer company. It protected the beach entrance that was used to gain access to the beach through the seawall, which was used by fishermen and by a company of Seenotdienst (Luftwaffe sea rescue service) to launch their boats and engineers to gain access to the Îles St-Marcouf. The D15 runs inland from the exit off the beach and thus this was identified as a good place for the Allies to land. The main armaments of WN-13 were a 5cm KwK 39 L/60 anti-tank gun mounted within a SK/Doppelschartenstand and a 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun. It was protected by an 81.4mm Granatenwerfer 278(f) mortar Tobruk in a Vf58c Tobruk and several machine guns and had two Vf2a concrete personnel bunkers and a network of trenches.

The WNs to the north of WN-13 were manned by elements of Major Hadenfledt's II/919 Gren and were of similar strength to those already detailed.

The Îles Saint-Marcouf

The first obstacle, or problem, that Major General Collins' troops assaulting UTAH Beach had to face was the Îles Saint-Marcouf, two seemingly insignificant small islands just off the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula. These had been fortified in the past; the larger of the two, the Île du Large, had a large Napoleon III-era fortification and was less than two miles from the intended lanes that the Navy were to use to ferry the 4th Infantry Division ashore. Whilst they did not appear to be occupied, they could not be ignored as the enemy could easily have placed artillery or observers on the islands. There was nothing for it, the Îles Saint-Marcouf would have to be secured before the main landings came in.



A 1950s postcard of the Île du Large Saint-Marcouf.

Normally this would have been a job for the US Rangers, but those available for the invasion were already tasked with securing Pointe-du-Hoc and OMAHA Beach. Instead, securing the îles Saint-Marcouf was assigned to the 4th Cavalry Group. Elements of Troop A, 4th Squadron, and elements of Troop B, 24th Squadron, were formed into a task force under Lieutenant Colonel Edward C Dunn and specially trained for this operation. They were to land two hours before the main invasion force.

At 04:30 on 6 June 1944, as the waves of bombers and gliders swept overhead towards the Cotentin Peninsula, Lieutenant Colonel Dunn's men climbed into their landing craft and set off for the islands. The two LCAs carrying the men of Troop A, 4th Squadron, headed for the smaller of the two islands, the île de Terre, and the two LCAs carrying the men of Troop B, 24th Squadron headed for the île du Large. As they approached the islands the LCAs hove to and waited as four of their occupants, Sergeant Harvey S Olsen and Private Thomas C Killoran of Troop A and Sergeant John W Zanders and Corporal Melvin F Kinzie of Troop B, slid over their sides into their rubber dinghies. They paddled through the mines around the islands to within 100 metres before destroying their craft with their knives and swimming ashore. In doing so, they became the first members of the seaborne landing forces to set foot on French soil. Armed only with knives, they proceeded to clear the islands that were strewn with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. The two islands were found to be unoccupied, and the two teams signalled the assault force and marked the beach with lights. Sergeant Harvey S Olsen recalled:

"After manoeuvring in the States, we went to Europe, and we were stationed in Sherwood Forest near Chichester in England but manoeuvred all over. We practiced landing. They asked me to volunteer for a hazardous mission and asked if I was a good swimmer. I said yes and a buddy, Thomas C. Killoran, went, too. We spent a lot of our time on Navy boats swimming in and landing on mock-up enemy beaches.

When we got ready to land in Normandy in June 1944, we were aboard the Bayfield flagship for General Collins at Utah Beach. The first day was cancelled on account of the weather. 6 June, at 04:30, two hours before H-Hour, the Reconnaissance, just me and Tom, went aboard a scout craft. We went in about 500 yards off the beach that we could barely see on account of the waves.

*We landed on Iles Saint Marcouf and gave flashing signals to the troops that were coming in. Tom and I were the first to land on Normandy. They hit the beach, and I handed John Onken his rifle. He went past me, and I heard a land mine go off and a couple of guys yell. I looked back. Onken stepped right on it and I saw him blown sideways. It was early in the morning and dark, but I saw him by the light of the explosion."*¹

Lieutenant Colonel Edward Clare Dunn later wrote:

"Upon the arrival of the task force at a position approximately 1500 yards east of the islands, the scout section was dispatched toward shore to mark beaches. Lt Tripson

maneuvered his scout craft noiselessly to a position approximately 500 yards offshore. From there the four scouts proceeded in two 2-man rubber boats, one pair of scouts headed toward each island. About one hundred yards from their respective beaches, the scouts sank their rubber boats by puncturing them with knives and swam the rest of the way to their objectives. Armed only with knives, the scouts crawled ashore in the darkness at approximately 0415 and marked the limits of the beaches with flashlights--red for Île de Terre, green for Île du Large. Sgt Harvey S. Olson and Pvt Thomas C. Killoran, 4th Sq, were the first Americans to land on Île de Terre; Sgt John W. Zander and Cpl Melvin F. Kinzie, 24th Sq, the first to land on Île du Large.

Immediately upon receiving a signal from shore, the four LCAs headed for the beaches at full speed. 4th Sq Detachment, with Capt Paul R. Bengé in command, and 1st Lts George Thomas and Barney E. Toms as platoon leaders, landed on Île de Terre. 24th Sq Detachment, with Capt Wales Vaughn in command and 1st Lts Alfred Rubin and Harry R. Haverstick as platoon leaders, landed on Île du Large. Both detachments swept inland in the dark, at a dead run toward their objectives--in each case an old Napoleonic fort sited on the high ground in the center of each island. There were several loud explosions on each island as the troops ran over and detonated land mines. Sgt John C. F. Gnken, Troop A, 4th Sq, was the first to fall, killed instantly by an "S" mine. Both Lt Toms and Lt Thomas fell, seriously wounded, while leading their platoons in the assault. On the Île du Large there was less initial difficulty with mines, but a wide moat had to be crossed to reach the fort on that island. This was done by use of grappling hooks, ropes and a scaling ladder.

Shortly after the initial assault, the command group landed on Île de Terre. While the executive officer, Capt Thomas W. Hill directed the evacuation of wounded and clearing of mines, CO, Det, 4th Cav Gp made a personal reconnaissance of Île de Terre, meanwhile receiving by radio an "all clear" report from Capt Vaughn on the other island. It was apparent that there were no Germans on either island. Therefore, the 4th Cavalry's first message to HQ VII Corps was dispatched: "Mission accomplished."

Before evacuating, the Germans had sown every square foot of ground on both islands with anti-personnel mines and had heavily booby-trapped both forts. Hence it was impossible to move safely except by stepping from rock to rock. At daylight, lanes were cleared and marked on each island to prevent further mine casualties, and both positions were organized for all-around defense. The detachment CO proceeded by rubber boat to Île du Large to inspect Capt Vaughn's position. The fort on that island was found to be so heavily booby-trapped with large bombs and mines as to prevent its complete occupation by the 24th Sq. Moreover, the rocky terrain outside the fort made digging-in almost impossible, but the 24th was found doing its best to secure the position and provide cover

for its men.

As the detachment commander returned to Île de Terre, the main invasion forces were passing both islands, enroute to Utah Beach. Suddenly enemy artillery fire (estimated 170 cal.) opened up from the mainland, directed at the two islands. One of the first rounds cut the 24th Squadron's ladder across the moat, and killed one of Capt Vaughn's men, PFC Anton J. Elvasaater. The 24th was in a particularly vulnerable position because of the difficulties cited above.

Accompanied by radio operator, Sgt Richard C. Johnson, CO, Det, 4th Cav Gp proceeded immediately to the high ground on Île de Terre, located the enemy shore battery, and by radio requested counter-battery fire from VII Corps on the map coordinates of the target. A few minutes later, the big guns of the US battleship Nevada fired overhead, and after several rounds, scored direct hits on the enemy battery, silencing the latter. By that time five casualties had been sustained from the enemy fire – all of them from the 24th on the Île du Large. Total casualties for the operation were nineteen, the other fourteen having been caused by mines.

The rest of the period spent on the islands was uneventful. Relieved by a friendly anti-aircraft unit in the early morning hours of 7 June 1944, Detachment, 4th Cav Gp, morale high, proceeded by LCT to the main beach to receive orders for its next mission.”²

Thus, the Îles Saint-Marcouf were taken without opposition, but not without cost as two men were killed and seventeen wounded.

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944, Sergeant Harvey S Olsen was awarded a Silver Star. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Sergeant Harvey Sigurd Olson (ASN: 37023123), United States Army, for gallantry in action against the enemy while serving with Troop A, 4th Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized), on 6 June 1944, in France. On that date Sergeant Olson with one companion, displaying the highest courage in the face of unknown dangers, became one of the first American Soldiers of the ground forces to land on French soil. He volunteered for the mission of the landing on D-DAY on the Îles De St Marcouf, a strategically placed island commanding the beach where the assault was to be made. Sergeant Olson and his companion paddled through heavy surf and mined waters in a small two-man rubber boat to within 100 yards of the island. Sergeant Olson then destroyed his craft by slashing it open and swam the remaining distance armed only with a knife. Once on the island, which was heavily covered with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, Sergeant Olson and his companion signalled the assault forces and marked the beach with lights.”³



Major General Lawton Collins presenting Sergeant Harvey S Olsen with the Silver Star.

The Main UTAH Beach Landings

Major General Raymond O Barton's 4th Infantry Division carried out the main landing on UTAH Beach and the initial wave came ashore in four groups.

The first group consisted of 20 Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel (LCVP), commonly called Higgins boats, each carrying a 30-man assault team; ten were to land on TARE GREEN Beach, opposite the strongpoint at Les Dunes de Varreville, and the other ten were to come ashore at UNCLE RED Beach about 1,000 metres further south. The entire operation was timed against a touchdown at 06:30.

Eight Landing Craft Tanks (LCT), each carrying four amphibious DD Tanks from Lieutenant Colonel John C Welborn's 70th Tank Battalion, were to land simultaneously or as soon as possible after that.

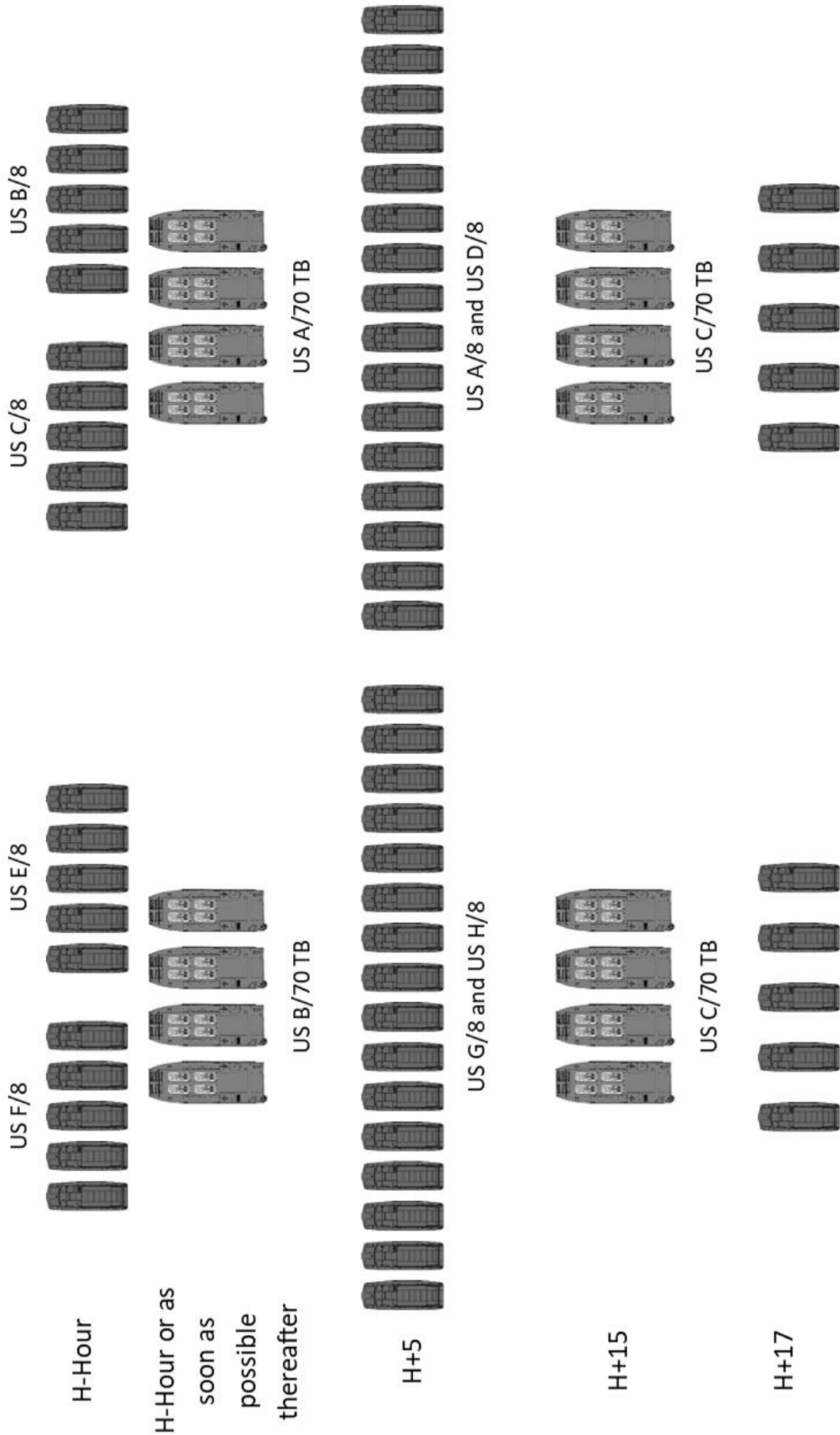
The second group of 32 LCVPs, carried additional troops from the two assaulting Battalions, plus some combat engineers and eight naval demolition teams who were to clear the beach of underwater obstacles.

The third group, timed to land at H+15 minutes, contained eight more LCTs with the dozer tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion.

This third group was to be followed within 2 minutes by the fourth group. This fourth group consisted of detachments of the 237th Combat Engineer Battalion and 299th Combat Engineer Battalion tasked to clear the beach between the high and low watermarks.

UNCLE RED

TARE GREEN



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The first group assembled at the line of departure and all twenty LCVs fanned out line abreast. The support craft to their rear fired their machine guns on the way in, possibly with the intent of exploding mines. Each sector had two designated control crafts to guide the LCVs in.

As these control craft left the Transport Area the secondary control craft for UNCLE RED fouled her screw on a dan buoy and was unable to proceed. On the way in the patrol craft PC-1176, the UNCLE RED primary control craft, hit a mine whilst still more than 6,500 metres from the shore. Shortly thereafter, the primary control craft for TARE GREEN also struck a mine and sank.



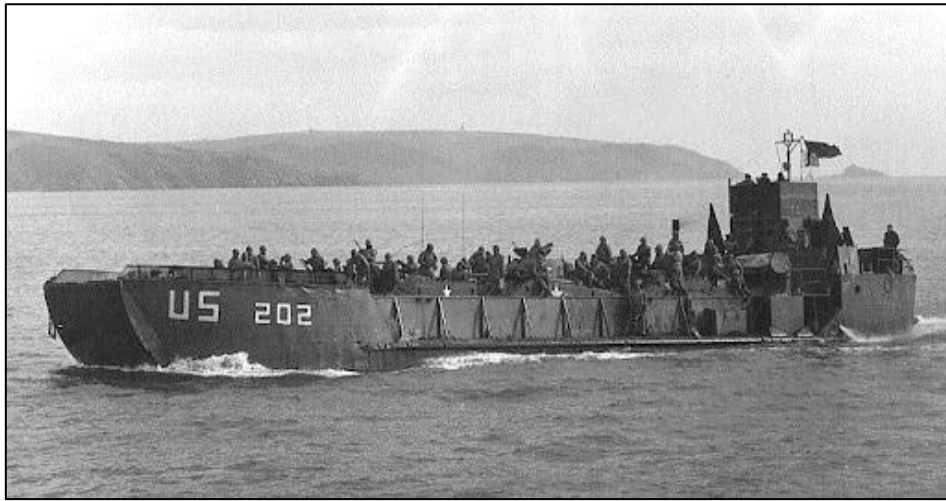
PC-1176, the primary patrol craft for UNCLE RED.

The run-in was already behind time as the LCVs slowed down their approach. The secondary control craft for TARE GREEN tried to shepherd the LCVs in, but they got caught in the offshore current and drifted to the southeast. The TARE GREEN secondary control craft left the LCVs before they reached the beach and went back to guide the LCTs.

During the approach to UTAH Beach, a German ME109 Messerschmitt fighter dropped out of the clouds to attack the LCVs but a Spitfire, that was covering the area, saw its approach and dropped out of another cloud. The Spitfire opened fire and Captain George L Mabry Jr recalled what happened:

“As we reached a position approximately 800 yards from the beach, a German ME 109 appeared out of the clouds and headed for the LCV in which I was riding. Then from out of another cloud appeared a British Spitfire plane which opened fire and caused the ME 109 to explode in mid-air. The prop from the ME 109 fell to the water approximately 100 yards directly in front of our LCV.”⁴

The LCTs approached within 3,000 metres of the beach to launch the first 32 tanks of Lieutenant Colonel Welborn's 70th Tank Battalion. This should have been 4,500 metres but they were behind schedule and brought in closer to make up the lost time.



An LCT(6) loaded with tanks.

The 16 Sherman DD Tanks and 40 tankers of Captain J Stewart Williams' Company A, destined for TARE GREEN, were conveyed in four US Navy LTC Mark 6s: LCT(6)-592, LCT(6)-593, LCT(6)-594 and LCT(6)-595. The 16 Sherman DD Tanks and 40 tankers of First Lieutenant Francis Songer's Company B, destined for UNCLE RED, were conveyed in four US Navy LCT(6)s: LCT(6)-596, LCT(6)-597, LCT(6)-510, and LCT(6)-531. Their initial role was to protect and provide intimate support to the 8th Infantry Regiment as they fought their way off the beach.

US Navy Signalman Sydney Garner recalled the run into the beach of the LCTs:

"Due to foul weather, we were called back to Weymouth. The next night, as the weather improved, we began again to cross the channel. This time for real. It was June 5th, 1944.

Overnight, the seas made it a rough, bumpy night. As we came near to the landing sites, we put on clothing that was treated to protect us from poison gas if the Germans might use it as a last resort, but thankfully, it was not used.

As we neared UTAH Beach, our guide, a small British patrol boat, struck a mine. That caused us to miss the designated beach for almost a mile. We proceeded to the beach when LCT-593 struck a huge mine. I was told that no one, neither army nor navy, survived.

The sea was too rough to launch the tanks at sea, as the plan was to have the tanks swim ashore and surprise the German defenders and smash the seawall to aid the infantry as they came ashore. We were required to bring the tanks close to the beach.

While the tanks were being discharged, a German pill box with an 88mm cannon, began to fire at the oncoming landing crafts. An LCT equipped with rockets began to fire over our

heads, making us anxious to get away from the beach.

We, along with the five other tank-carrying LCTs, withdrew and began to proceed to the anchorage where the cargo ships were waiting to be unloaded. Then LCT-596 struck a mine. I never knew about survivors.”⁵

First Lieutenant John Ahearn's Company C, in addition to their 16 Sherman medium tanks had inherited five dozer tanks (with bulldozer blades in front). Assigned to both TARE GREEN and UNCLE RED sectors, these tanks had a force of 60 tankers, including three demolition engineers per tank. The engineers were assigned to blow holes in the seawalls; the dozer tanks would then enlarge the holes, allowing them to pass through the seawall. They were conveyed to the beach in eight Royal Navy LCT(A)s: LCT(A)-2310, LCT(A)-2402, LCT(A)-2454, and LCT(A)-2478 to TARE GREEN and LCT(A)-2488, LCT(A)-2282, LCT(A)-2301, and LCT(A)-2309 to UNCLE RED. Each Royal Navy LCT(A) towed an LCM(3) which conveyed the detachments of the 237th and the 299th Combat Engineers.

LCT(A)-2402 lost two engines because of saltwater in the fuel. Although a minesweeper was sent to tow her, the towing was unsuccessful; and the minesweeper was forced to abandon the attempt. A US Coastguard cutter rescued the Royal Navy crew and tankers, but LCT(A)-2402 and the three Sherman medium tanks were lost.

LCT(A)-2301 lost power about halfway across the English Channel. The Royal Navy crew and tankers were transferred safely to an English subchaser, and LCT(A)-2301 subsequently rolled over and sank off Juno Beach with the loss of all three Sherman medium tanks.

At 05:30, LCT(A)-2310 lost power in her starboard engine and began to list from an inability to pump her bilges. Unable to maintain speed, she slipped behind the rest of the flotilla. The crew made temporary repairs and she proceeded to UTAH Beach independently. LCT(A)-2310 beached at 06:50 and successfully disembarked its tanks under heavy gunfire from the beach. The accurate gunfire from shore batteries resulted in ten hits, the loss of the middle engine, generator and steering control, and injuries to the coxswain and throttle man. LCT(A)-2310 continued with one engine and while reversing away from the beach the rudder failed to function and the radio was dead.

At 05:47, LCT(6)-593 struck a mine at 05:52 and sank, the four Sherman DD Tanks Company A 70th Tank Battalion were lost. Only three US Navy crewmen and three tankers survived.

The heavy seas caused LCT(A)-2282 to lose large sections of its starboard bulkhead and this eventually collapsed. Despite pumping continuously, this vessel could not pump out all the water and unable to maintain speed due to the additional weight of the water, she fell behind the flotilla. The crew made temporary repairs and proceeded independently to the beach. LCT(A)-2282 beached at 06:55 amidst considerable shelling and blasting by the Demolition Unit. A shell penetrated its ramp as it was being lowered it but LCT(A)-2282 still managed to unload its three tanks successfully.

After disembarking their tanks, the LCT(6)s retracted and headed for the transport area, dodging the incoming LCVPs and LCT(A)s. LCT(A)-2282 managed to get a tow and LCT(6)-597 struck a mine and sank whilst heading seaward.

First Lieutenant Gordon Brodie's Company D were to land their light tanks at H hour plus 260 minutes. Their role was to protect Major General Collin's VII Corps in their link-up with the 101st Airborne.

At 05:50, the warships of Rear Admiral Morton Lyndholm Deyo's Bombardment Group A began firing. This consisted of the 15-inch monitor HMS EREBUS, the 14-inch battleship USS NEVADA, the 8-inch cruiser USS TUSCALOOSA, the 8-inch cruiser USS QUINCY, the 7.5-inch cruiser HMS HAWKINS, the 6-inch cruiser HMS ENTERPRISE, the 5.25-inch cruiser HMS BLACK PRINCE, and the Royal Netherlands Navy 5.9-inch gunboat SOEMBA.



The USS NEVADA's 14-inch guns firing on D-Day.

A few minutes later, 276 B-26 Marauders of the Ninth Air Force dropped 4,404 250-pound bombs on the beach defences between Les Dunes de Varreville and Beau Guillot. Les Dunes de Varreville seems to have received the most attention, possibly because the conspicuous anti-tank ditch surrounding the area persuaded pilots to unload their bombs on it when unable to locate their designated targets.

At La Madeleine, Leutnant Arthur Jahnke was in his headquarters just behind the dunes and had to dig his way out due to a near miss by one of the 250-pound bombs. The 7.5cm Feldkanone 235(b) was smashed and the 4.7cm Pak 181(f) anti-tank gun was damaged. Two ammunition bunkers were blown up and machine-gun nests were badly damaged. Then rocket-firing aircraft attacked causing more damage and, at 06:00, the Destroyers started shelling WN-05 as well.

When the LCVs were about 300 to 400 metres from the beach, the assault company commanders fired special smoke projectors to signal the lifting of naval supporting fire. Almost exactly at H Hour, the assault craft lowered their ramps and six hundred men of the 8th Infantry Regiment waded through the waist-deep water of the last 100 metres or so to the beach.

The actual touchdown on the beach was a few minutes late, but this was negligible and had no effect on the phasing of the succeeding groups. Enemy artillery had fired a few air bursts at sea but, despite being substantially off course, the leading elements of the 4th Infantry Division had landed at UTAH Beach with relatively little resistance. The first troops to reach the shore were from Lieutenant Colonel Carlton O MacNeely's 2nd Battalion [2/8], and Lieutenant Colonel Conrad C Simmons' 1st Battalion [1/8] landed a few minutes later. Both Battalions came ashore well to the south of their designated landing areas. The 2/8 should have hit at UNCLE RED Beach opposite Exit 3, and the 1/8 was supposed to land directly opposite the strongpoint at Les Dunes de Varreville. They came ashore, however, at La Madeleine which was astride Exit 2 about 1,500 metres further south.



Men of the 8th Infantry regiment coming ashore on D-Day.

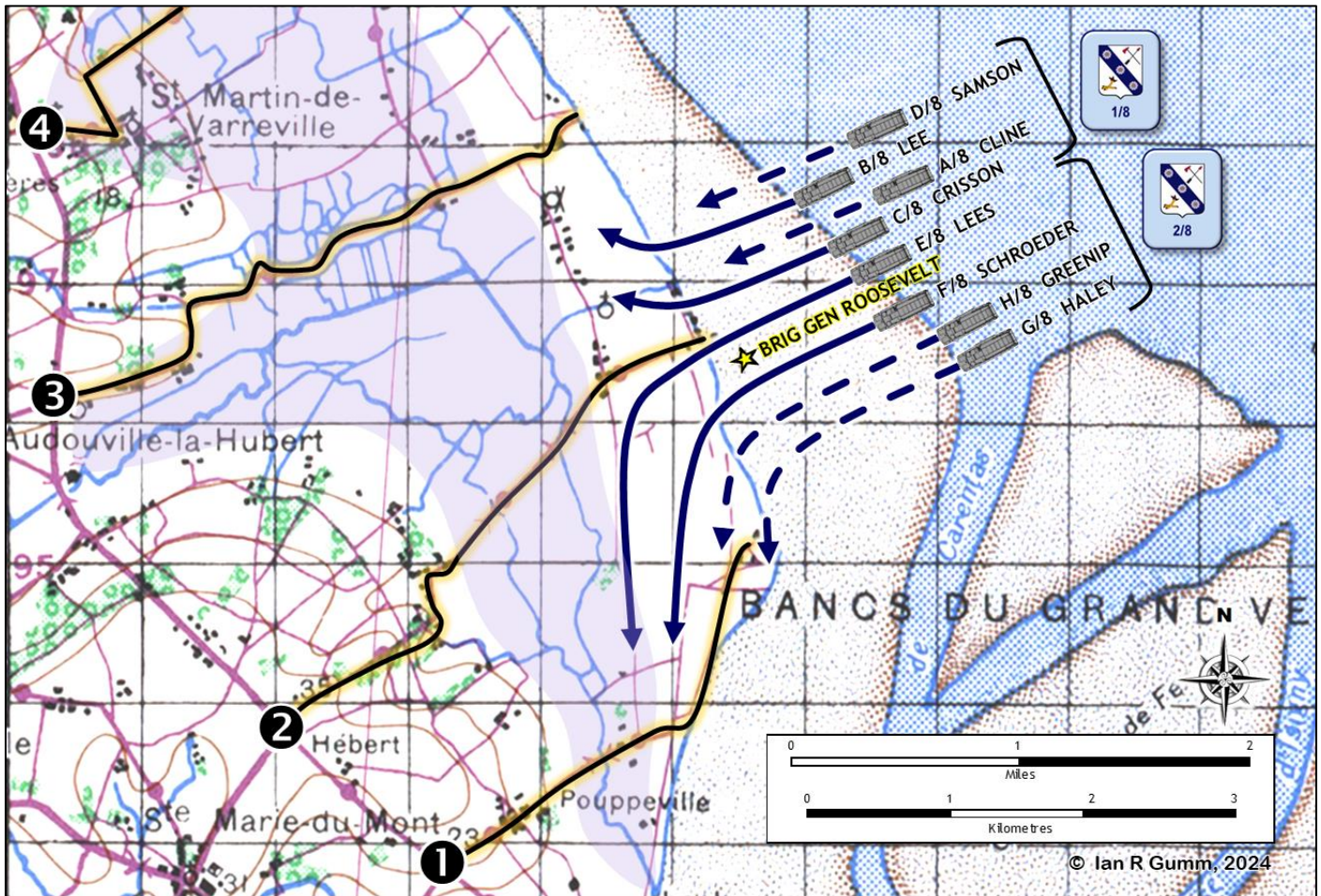
The men of the 8th Infantry Regiment exited their LCVs and hurried across, what seemed, an endless stretch of sandy beach. Artillery and small arms fire were all around as the heavily laden infantrymen ran as best they could towards the seawall and dunes. Staff Sergeant Harry Bailly, who was in Captain Howard Lees' Company E, recalled:

*"Artillery and small arms fire were all about the beach. My first scout, Douglas Mason from Michigan, was the first to reach the sand dunes and I ran and dropped down beside him to look to see which way to go. He was immediately killed by a hit to the head by a sniper's bullet. I knew I had to move fast, or I would be next, so I ran forward as fast as I could go. The rest of the Platoon followed."*⁶

Private Robert Wolfram, who was Captain Lees' runner in Company E, recalled:

"As soon as the Germans saw us coming over the seawall, they started firing mortars and

88s at us. ... We deployed out: Scouts were out ahead, and I was with the CO. Two houses just ahead of us had snipers in them, but we took these Germans with BARs.”⁷



The initial UTAH Beach landing. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

The landing at a different place than originally planned could have been serious, however, Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr, the son of the former President of the United States and cousin of the current one, had volunteered to go in the first wave and he immediately took control. The fifty-six-year-old Brigadier-General was the Assistant Divisional Commander of the 4th Infantry Division. He had commanded the 26th Infantry Regiment as a Lieutenant Colonel and been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in the First World War, where he had been wounded in the knee. As a result of the wound and severe arthritis, he walked with the aid of a walking stick.

After the First World War, Theodore Roosevelt Jr pursued a political career. He had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Governor of Puerto Rico and Governor-General of the Philippines. In 1940 Theodore Roosevelt Jr attended a military refresher course offered to many businessmen as an advanced student and was promoted to Colonel in the Army of the United States.

In April 1941, Theodore Roosevelt Jr returned to active duty and was given command of the 26th Infantry Regiment, the same unit he fought with during the First World War, which was part of the 1st Infantry Division. Late in 1941, he was promoted to the one-star general officer rank of Brigadier-General. He led the 26th Infantry Regiment in an attack

on Oran, Algeria, on 8 November 1942, as part of Operation TORCH, and was appointed Assistant Divisional Commander of the 1st Infantry Division in 1943, which, at that time, was commanded by Major General Terry Allen. He took part in Operation HUSKY, the Allied Invasion of Sicily, as the Assistant Divisional Commander of the 1st Infantry Division landing at Gela and when Major General Allen was replaced as GOC 1st Infantry Division on 7 August 1943, following clashes with Lieutenant General George S Patton Jr, Brigadier-General Roosevelt was also relieved as Assistant Divisional Commander.



Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr.

In February 1944, Brigadier-General Roosevelt was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division as the Assistant Divisional Commander and reported for duty in England. While the build-up to the invasion was taking place, he expressed his desire to go ashore with the first wave to steady the men of the division in their first taste of combat. Major General Raymond O Barton initially denied his request, but Brigadier-General Roosevelt would not be put off. He subsequently made a written request, in which he wrote:

*"The force and skill with which the first elements hit the beach and proceed may determine the ultimate success of the operation. ... With troops engaged for the first time, the behaviour pattern of all is apt to be set by those first engagements. [It is] considered that accurate information of the existing situation should be available for each succeeding element as it lands. You should have when you get to shore an overall picture in which you can place confidence. I believe I can contribute materially on all of the above by going in with the assault companies. Furthermore, I personally know both officers and men of these advance units and believe that it will steady them to know that I am with them."*⁸

Major General Barton approved Brigadier-General Roosevelt's written request despite a considerable amount of misgiving and later said that he did not expect to see Theodore Roosevelt Jr alive when he came ashore later in the

day. Brigadier-General Roosevelt was the only officer of general rank to land by sea with the first wave of troops on D-Day. He was the oldest man in the invasion, and his son, Captain Quentin Roosevelt II, also came ashore in the first wave on D-Day being one of the soldiers that landed at OMAHA Beach. With his walking stick in hand and revolver strapped to his waist, Brigadier-General Roosevelt came ashore with Captain Howard Lees' Company E, 8th Infantry Regiment. He recalled:

*"The little boats were now going full speed, slapping the waves with their blunt prows. ... Then with a crunch we grounded, and we jumped into the water waist-deep and started for the shore. We splashed and floundered through some hundred yards of water while German salvos fell. Men dropped, some silent, some screaming. Up the 400 yards of beach, we ran – Grandfather puffed a bit – then we reached the seawall. The company CO with whom I was, Lees, a great tower of a man, led his troops splendidly. He with his men started into the dunes."*⁹



Men of the 8th Infantry Regiment coming ashore in front of the Red House on D-Day.

It was not long before Brigadier-General Roosevelt realised that something was amiss.

*"There was a house by the seawall where none should have been, were we in the right place? It was imperative that I find out where we were in order to set the manoeuvre. I scrambled up on the dunes and was lucky in finding a windmill which I recognized. We'd been put ashore a mile too far to the south."*¹⁰

Brigadier-General Roosevelt moved into the dunes and carried out a quick reconnaissance of the area immediately to the rear of the beach. He located two of the causeways, Causeways 1 and 2, but they should have been abreast of Causeway 3. They had come ashore in the wrong place and were further to the south than they should have been.

Returning to the beach, Brigadier-General Roosevelt called in the two Battalion Commanders. On the beach, he held an impromptu orders group to coordinate the attack on the enemy positions that confronted them. At this orders group, Brigadier-General Roosevelt famously uttered the words: *"We'll start the war from here!"*

Brigadier-General Roosevelt's plan avoided the confusion that landing in the wrong place could have caused and got the landings at UTAH Beach back on track. He decided they should reduce the defensive strongpoints to their front and proceed inland to their original objectives. Orders issued, Brigadier-General Roosevelt walked the length of the seawall exposed to enemy fire urging the 4th Infantry Division's men to move off the beach and get on with their initial tasks. Major Robert P Tabb, the Executive Officer of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, recalled:

*"The outstanding bravery and example of General Roosevelt who walked the length of the seawall exposed to all fire, urging the 4th Division infantry to move off the beach and on to their initial objectives."*¹¹

The German strongpoints sighted to cover the causeway roads were not formidable and were all taken by company-sized groups or less against light opposition. Other troops cleaned out houses along the road running parallel with the beach.

The air and naval bombardment that had preceded the landings had pulverised the belt of German soldiers defending UTAH Beach. Cut off from their comrades by the American Airborne, they were isolated and alone. They watched as the American infantrymen began streaming over the dunes, blowing holes in their barbed wire entanglements with Bangalore torpedoes and firing bazooka rounds into their defensive bunkers. They were already demoralised, and some gave up without fighting at all.

By 07:00, just thirty minutes after hitting the beach, the two forward battalions of Colonel Van Fleet's 8th Infantry Regiment went forward over the seawall, climbed the steep dunes and began to take the battle to the enemy. Two or three hours were spent eliminating opposition in the beach area and reorganising for the advance inland.

Captain James Haley's Company G and Captain John F Greenip's Company H landed five minutes after the leading two Companies of 2/8. Captain Haley seeing a large group of confused and disorganised troops taking cover behind the seawall calmly organised them while under shell fire and successfully led them across the beach.

Captain George L Mabry Jr, S-3 (Operations Officer) of the 2/8, seeing men of the Battalion pinned down by heavy enemy fire, moved to the forward elements and organised a group of his men that he led in a successful assault upon the enemy. He was at the forefront of the hand-to-hand fighting, killing two and capturing eighteen.



American soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division coming ashore at La Madeleine on D-Day.

Coming ashore, with the leading wave of infantry, was Colonel Eugene M Caffey, the Deputy Commander of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade. The Engineer Special Brigades were large organisations of between 15,000 and 20,000. They were responsible for ensuring that the men and equipment got off the beach quickly enabling the following waves to come ashore. Colonel Caffey had come ashore with Company B, 8th Infantry Regiment, and he met with Brigadier-General Roosevelt on the beach and realised that the Engineers would also have to revise their plans to achieve their mission. He recalled:

“I undertook to get word to the Navy that we were completely out of position and induce them to continue the landing at the place where we were instead of trying to conform to the original plan. This, as events proved, was a good decision because we were in the weakest part of the German lines and astride the only road that led inland across the inundated areas just back of the dune lines. I think it was greatly to the credit of the 4th Division and the 1st Engineer Special Brigade that the officers and men immediately affected were not perturbed by this rearrangement of the planned battle but went right ahead with the war as if this was the way they had always intended to do it.”¹²

Major Herschel E Linn, of the 1106th Engineer Combat Group, commanded the force assigned the task of clearing the beach obstacles. They had to clear four 45-metre-wide gaps on each beach from the high-water mark seaward. Naval demolition teams were to destroy the underwater obstacles while Army engineer teams were responsible for dealing with those above the water. A detachment of eight tank dozers from the 612th Light Equipment Company and 70th Tank Battalion was attached to aid in the task.

The plan was for eight Naval teams to land at H plus 5 minutes to clear eight 45-metre gaps in the first band of obstacles. They were to be followed 10 minutes later by 8 LCTs carrying, in addition to other tanks, the eight tank dozers. Immediately behind the tanks came the eight Army engineer combat demolition teams. Three naval teams and four Army engineer teams formed a reserve and were included in the fourth and fifth groups.



A landing craft mechanised (LCM) conveying an engineering tractor to the beach.

Like many other D-Day operations, things did not go according to plan. Two LCTs were sunk while approaching the beach. One landing craft mechanised (LCM), with an engineer demolition team, was hit by shell fire just as it lowered its ramp on GREEN BEACH and six men were killed. Both Army and Navy demolition teams beached almost simultaneously, together with the four Army reserve engineer teams which landed on GREEN BEACH, but this did not seriously hinder the operation.

The demolition teams exited their LCVPs and LCMs in water about one metre deep and waded ashore. Each man was carrying sixty pounds of explosives. Aerial photos indicated that there were three bands of obstacles at UTAH Beach. As H Hour was scheduled to take place on a rising tide favourable for landing craft, it was expected that the first band of obstacles would be either in or near the water's edge. This did not prove to be the case and all obstacles were found to be above the water. The Navy teams, however, proceeded as instructed to fix explosives on the seaward band and the Army engineers moved to the next band. After the first gap at the junction of the beaches was blown, it was decided to commence the task of clearing the entire beach. The landing craft heading for the initial gap were bunching so dangerously, and the obstacles were so much more sparsely distributed than expected, that the original plan of clearing only 45-metre gaps was abandoned.

The obstacles consisted mainly of steel and concrete pikes, some steel tetrahedra and hedgehogs. The tank dozers worked effectively, pushing obstacles up the beach and removing some piling, but hand-placed charges accounted for most of them. Belgian Gates were found in small numbers, a few on the beach and a few blocking the roads leading from the beach. The four Army reserve teams which landed on GREEN BEACH blew these gates and assisted in blasting additional gaps in the seawall.

The entire beach was cleared in an hour and, by that time, elements of the 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion, the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment, and the 3rd Battalion of the 22nd Infantry Regiment were moving across the beaches, while engineer units were arriving to organise the beach operation. The Beach Obstacle Task Force was occupied with odd jobs for several hours more but before noon had completed its task and reorganised. Of the 400 men involved, 6 were killed and 39 wounded.

Colonel Van Fleet's 8th Infantry Regiment's immediate task was to clear the five German strongpoints, Widerstandsnester (WN), arranged in a chequerboard pattern near La Madeleine and Pouppeville. Three of these strongpoints were directly behind the dunes and the other two were around 650 metres further inland. The two leading companies of Lieutenant Colonel MacNeely's 2/8, Captain Lees' Company E and Captain Leonard Schroeder's Company F had landed south of the small cluster of buildings at La Grande Dune. Immediately to the front of Lieutenant Colonel Simmons' 1/8 was WN-05 at La Madeleine.

They spent the next hour and a half eliminating the German opposition in the beach area while Lieutenant Colonel Erasmus H Strickland's 3rd Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment [3/8] and Lieutenant Colonel Arthur S Teague's 3rd Battalion of the 22nd Infantry Regiment [3/22], attached to the 8th Infantry Regiment for the landings, came ashore.

By 08:00 Colonel Van Fleet had four battalions ashore and started pushing inland. Lieutenant Colonel Simmons' 1/8 and 2/8 had begun to diverge. The 1/8 had moved north and west onto the causeway of Exit 3, and, despite enemy artillery fire, it crossed the inundated area to reach the vicinity of Turqueville by evening.

Lieutenant Colonel MacNeely's 2/8 moved south down the coast to Exit 1 and the village of Pouppeville. Captain Lees' Company E had found a path through the minefield behind the dunes and followed it under artillery fire without losing a man. Captain Schroeder's Company F was moving in to reduce the German strong point confronting it. Lieutenant Colonel MacNeely sent Company E behind Company F and set them off down the road along the eastern edge of the inundations.

Captain Haley's Company G moved south hugging the seawall. They encountered continuous small-arms fire further down the coast and were shelled by artillery as they approached WN-03 at Beau Guillot. Before reaching WN-03, they ran into a minefield and Captain Haley decided to push through. With his men seemingly frozen into position and hesitant to advance, Captain Haley cleared a path and led his men through the obstacle. Pushing onwards, Company G was met by withering machine guns and rifle fire from the defenders of WN-03. Captain Haley again led his men forward to overcome this resistance and secure the position.



An aerial photograph of the landing at UTAH Beach taken on D-Day.

Lieutenant Colonel MacNeely's Battalion subsequently assembled at the road junction northeast of Pouppeville before advancing into the village and making the first contact between the seaborne and airborne forces when they met up with the paratroopers of Lieutenant Colonel Julian Ewell's 3/501.

Lieutenant Colonel Strickland's 3/8 moved into the gap between them. The original plan was to move inland along Exits 2 and 3, but because of the nearness of enemy positions to the north, all the vehicles coming ashore were directed along Exit 2.

Lieutenant Colonel Strickland's 3/8, supported by tanks of the 70th Tank Battalion and engineers of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, moved down the causeway of Exit 2. About halfway down the causeway, a culvert over a small stream had been blown. This obstacle was covered by an anti-tank gun off to the right and held up their advance. The first tank to advance along the road was stopped by a mine and a second was knocked off the road by the anti-tank gun. The third tank, however, silenced the German anti-tank gun and the column moved forward to ford the stream.



Men of the 8th Infantry Regiment and a tank of the 70th Tank Battalion moving up Exit 2 on D-Day.

Major Robert Tabb, XO of the 237th Engineer Combat Battalion, brought up a platoon of engineers and they soon had a small treadway bridge over the blown culvert. The delay resulted in vehicles building up in the areas behind the beach. An anti-aircraft halftrack had taken up position on the road, the Engineers had unloaded bridging equipment, and a Signals truck was slowly laying line. The road on the Exit 2 causeway was narrow, and by noon it had become jammed with trucks. The enemy shelling intensified during the morning, but fortunately, this did not hit the parked vehicles.

Major General Barton, concerned about the potential threat posed by enemy tanks, ordered the road to be cleared to allow anti-tank guns to be brought forward. This included pushing other vehicles into the inundation along the causeway if necessary. There was still considerable congestion east of the bridge late in the day as trucks manoeuvred to recover those pushed off the causeway.

Lieutenant Colonel Strickland's 3/8 met little further opposition until just north of Sainte Marie-du-Mont where, at Germain, it encountered enemy dugouts, underground shelters, three or four 8cm guns, and several smaller calibre weapons. After a short firefight, the battalion closed in, and 50 Germans were cut down as they broke and ran; a further 100 were taken prisoner. Moving onwards, they encountered stiff enemy resistance north of Les Forges and requested artillery but did not intend to advance farther that evening.

Lieutenant Colonel Teague's 3/22 had touched down on GREEN Beach at 07:45 and moved north along the coast to begin neutralising the beach strongpoints. They advanced north past les Dunes de Varreville and the Exit 4 road to reach the southern edge of Hamel de Cruttes by nightfall.

At 10:00 the remaining two battalions of Colonel Hervey A Tribolet's 22nd Infantry Regiment came ashore. These two battalions were supposed to march inland through Exit 4, but, as the landings had come in further south, and the eastern end of Exit 4 was still covered by enemy fire, they were compelled to wade two miles through the inundations. Colonel Tribolet's 22nd Infantry Regiment's objective lay northwest towards St Germain-de-Varreville. They had to cross the Exit 3 road and wade through the swamps. In doing so they crossed the rear of the 8th Infantry Regiment that was moving west on the road, this was the only congestion that resulted from the landings coming ashore in the wrong place. They bivouacked for the night at St Germain-de-Varreville.



American infantrymen crossing the inundated area behind UTAH Beach on D-Day.

The leading elements of Colonel Russell P Reeder Jr's 12th Infantry Regiment, which came ashore shortly after noon, also waded through the flooded area. The water was, for the most part, only waist-deep but was criss-crossed by ditches and full of holes. The men frequently stepped into these unseen obstacles and found themselves in water over their heads. They subsequently came up on the left of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment south of Beuzeville-au-Plain and remained there for the night.

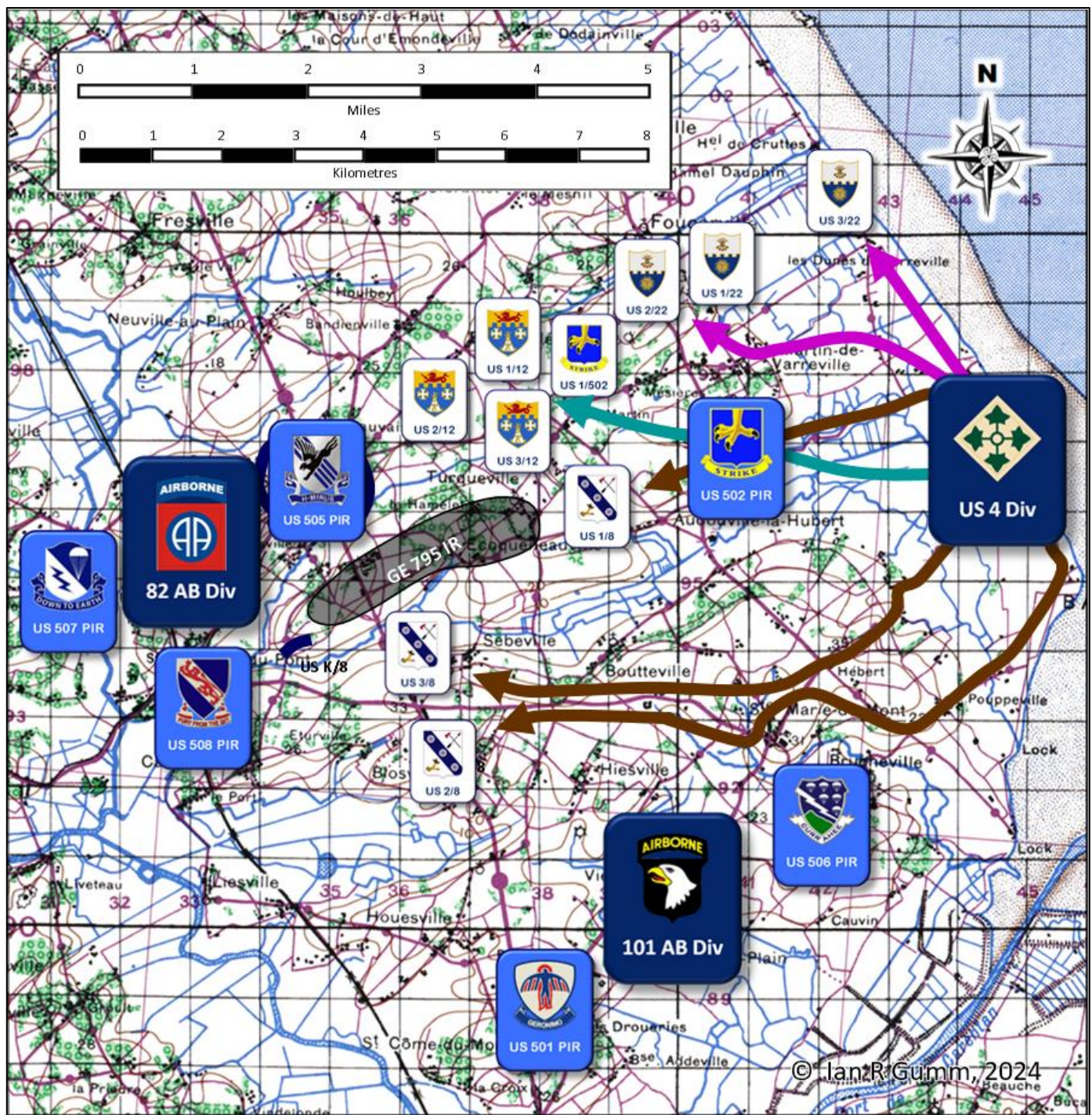
Late in the afternoon the advance elements of Colonel Edison D Raff's "Howell Force", consisting of one platoon of the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, one company of the 746th Tank Battalion, and ninety riflemen of the 325th Glider Infantry, followed Lieutenant Colonel Strickland's 3/8 along the Exit 2 causeway. Colonel Raff considered it necessary to attempt forcing his way through the enemy north of Les Forges to accomplish his mission. He was also concerned about this enemy force interfering with the landing of gliderborne artillery units of the 82nd Airborne Division scheduled to come in at 21:00.

Twice they attacked the Germans on the high ground with tanks and infantry and twice they were turned back. One tank was disabled in the first attempt and two were destroyed in the second. When the sixty C-47s appeared over the area with gliders in tow on schedule at 21:00, the enemy still held the heights. The gliders were cast loose over the German positions, and some came down in enemy lines while others drifted farther south, most crash-landed with high casualties. Colonel Raff was only able to gather miscellaneous personnel to help set up a defensive line against enemy counterattack, and it was in the vicinity of les Forges that Howell Force spent the night.

The 8th Infantry Regiment had reached most of its D-Day objectives. It had relieved elements of the 101st Airborne Division in the Pouppeville area and was able to protect the southwest flank of the 4th Infantry Division. It encountered difficulties north of les Forges, where the Germans had established a strong defensive position on the finger of high ground that extended through Fauville to Turqueville. Here, the entrenched enemy on the ridge cut the les Forges to Sainte-Mère-Église road preventing liaison between the 8th Infantry Regiment and the main body of the 82nd Airborne Division at Sainte-Mère-Église.

The 4th Infantry Division's losses for D-Day were astonishingly low. The 8th and 22nd Infantry Regiments, which landed before noon, suffered a total of 118 casualties on D-Day, 12 of them fatalities. The division suffered only 197 casualties including the 60 men missing through the loss (at sea) of part of Battery B, 29th Field Artillery Battalion.

The speed at which the 4th Infantry Division came ashore was noteworthy and apart from the 20th Field Artillery Battalion the entire 4th Infantry Division landed in the first fifteen hours of the invasion. In addition to the 4th Infantry Division's troops, one battalion of the 359th Infantry Regiment, the 65th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion, the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less two companies), the 70th Tank Battalion, the 746th Tank Battalion, components of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade, Howell Force the seaborne elements of the airborne divisions, and many smaller units also came ashore on D-Day. A total of over 20,000 troops and 1,700 vehicles landed at UTAH Beach by the end of 6 June 1944.



UTAH Beach at the end of D-Day. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

Several factors contributed to this success at UTAH including: -

1. The effective pre-invasion bombardment that destroyed the known German positions, such as the coastal battery near Saint-Martin-de-Varreville.
2. The DD tanks were launched close to the beach and were able to steer into the current more effectively to avoid swamping in the rough seas.
3. The point at which they made landfall was opposite Exit 2, which proved to be the least heavily defended of all the UTAH Beach exits.

4. The most significant contributory factor, however, was the part played by the two US Airborne Divisions in capturing the inland end of the causeways of the four beach exits, securing the area immediately to the rear of the beach and preventing any significant German counterattack developing against the UTAH landings.

One can say, therefore, that the true cost of the UTAH Beach landing was the heavy casualties borne by the two American Airborne Divisions.

For his actions at UTAH Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

*"The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (ASN: O-139726), United States Army, for gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, while serving as a commander in the 4th Infantry Division in France. After two verbal requests to accompany the leading assault elements in the Normandy invasion had been denied, Brigadier General Roosevelt's written request for this mission was approved and he landed with the first wave of the forces assaulting the enemy-held beaches. He repeatedly led groups from the beach, over the seawall and established them inland. His valor, courage, and presence in the very front of the attack and his complete unconcern at being under heavy fire inspired the troops to heights of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. Although the enemy had the beach under constant direct fire, Brigadier General Roosevelt moved from one locality to another, rallying men around him, directed and personally led them against the enemy. Under his seasoned, precise, calm, and unfaltering leadership, assault troops reduced beach strongpoints and rapidly moved inland with minimum casualties. He thus contributed substantially to the successful establishment of the beachhead in France."*¹³

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Colonel Eugene M Caffey was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Colonel (Corps of Engineers) Eugene Meade Caffey, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Colonel Caffey landed with the first wave of the forces assaulting the enemy-held beaches. Finding that the landing had been made on other than the planned beaches, he selected appropriate landing beaches, redistributed the area assigned to shore parties of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade, and set them at work to establish routes inland through the seawall and minefields to insure the rapid

landing and passage inshore of the following waves. He frequently went on the beaches under heavy shell fire to force incoming troops to disperse and move promptly off the shore and away from the water sides to places of concealment and greater safety further back. His courage and his presence in the very front of the attack, coupled with his calm disregard of hostile fire, inspired the troops to heights of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice. Under his experienced and unfaltering leadership, the initial error in landing off-course was promptly overcome, confusion was prevented, and the forces necessary to a victorious assault were successfully and expeditiously landed and cleared from the beaches with a minimum of casualties. He thus contributed, in a marked degree, to the seizing of the beachhead in France. Colonel Caffey's intrepid actions, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."¹⁴

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Colonel James Van Fleet was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Colonel (Infantry) James Alward Van Fleet (ASN: O-3847), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while Commanding the 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces from 6 to 8 June 1944, in France. In the initial landing and assault upon the European continent, Colonel Van Fleet quickly organized his troops and pushed them rapidly across the beach in an orderly and determined manner, brushing aside resistance and thereby greatly expediting the early establishment of the Division beachhead. Colonel Van Fleet was always well forward and on numerous occasions personally went up to check his battalions. His superior leadership and personal example of courage aided in clearing the beach with a minimum of casualties and substantially contributed to the rapid advance of the division to its D-Day objective. On 7 June 1944, while the enemy was using observed fire to vigorously shell the highways and avenues of approach in the vicinity of his unit, he displayed cool leadership and skill in maintaining order under severely trying conditions, and did so to encourage and inspire confidence in all members of the Combat Team that they followed his example and advanced with no hesitation, and with minimum losses of both men and equipment. This was at a critical time when a failure to procure advanced positions would have endangered the success of the operation. On the morning of 8 June 1944, while visiting his front-line battalions, with disregard for his personal safety, he captured an enemy guard and procured important information from him which aided the Regiment in successfully advancing against the enemy's strongly entrenched successive

positions. The cool fearlessness, personal bravery, and leadership displayed by Colonel Van Fleet were an inspiration to his men and exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States, reflecting great credit upon himself, the 4th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹⁵

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant Colonel Carlton O MacNeely was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Lieutenant Colonel Carlton O. MacNeely, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Lieutenant Colonel MacNeely's intrepid actions, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 4th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹⁶

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Captain James W Haley was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Captain (Infantry) James W. Haley (ASN: O-24244), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while Commanding an Infantry Company of the 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. On D-Day, Captain Haley braved withering enemy artillery, machine gun and rifle fire to reach a large group of confused and disorganized troops who congregated behind a seawall. He calmly organized them while shells were falling in the immediate area and successfully led them across the beach. As leading elements of his own company moved forward, they encountered a mine field which caused heavy casualties. When the balance of his men froze into position and hesitated to go forward, Captain Haley, with complete disregard for his own life, courageously cleared a path and personally led his men through the obstacle. Continuing its advance, the company was pinned down by a hail of machine gun and small arms fire from a stubborn enemy group in a strongly fortified position. Displaying great personal audacity and conspicuous leadership, he once again defied intense fire and, after preparing his company for an assault, he personally led it in a vicious hand-to-hand and bayonet fight, overpowering the resistance and continuing on to reach his objective. The unswerving devotion to duty, determination and valor displayed by Captain Haley

exemplify the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 4th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹⁷

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Captain George Lafayette Mabry Jr was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Captain (Infantry) George Lafayette Mabry, Jr., United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 2d Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Observing that his battalion was pinned down by heavy enemy fire, Captain Mabry moved to the forward elements, organized a group of his men, and personally led them in a successful assault upon the enemy. He was at all times in the forefront of the fight and killed two of the enemy and captured eighteen in hand-to-hand combat. Captain Mabry's outstanding leadership, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 4th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹⁸

Look Forward

In Part Fifteen of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I look at the action at Pointe-du-Hoc on D-Day.

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