



Composite photograph of Pointe-du-Hoc, 1943. [US Air Force 84515AC]

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)

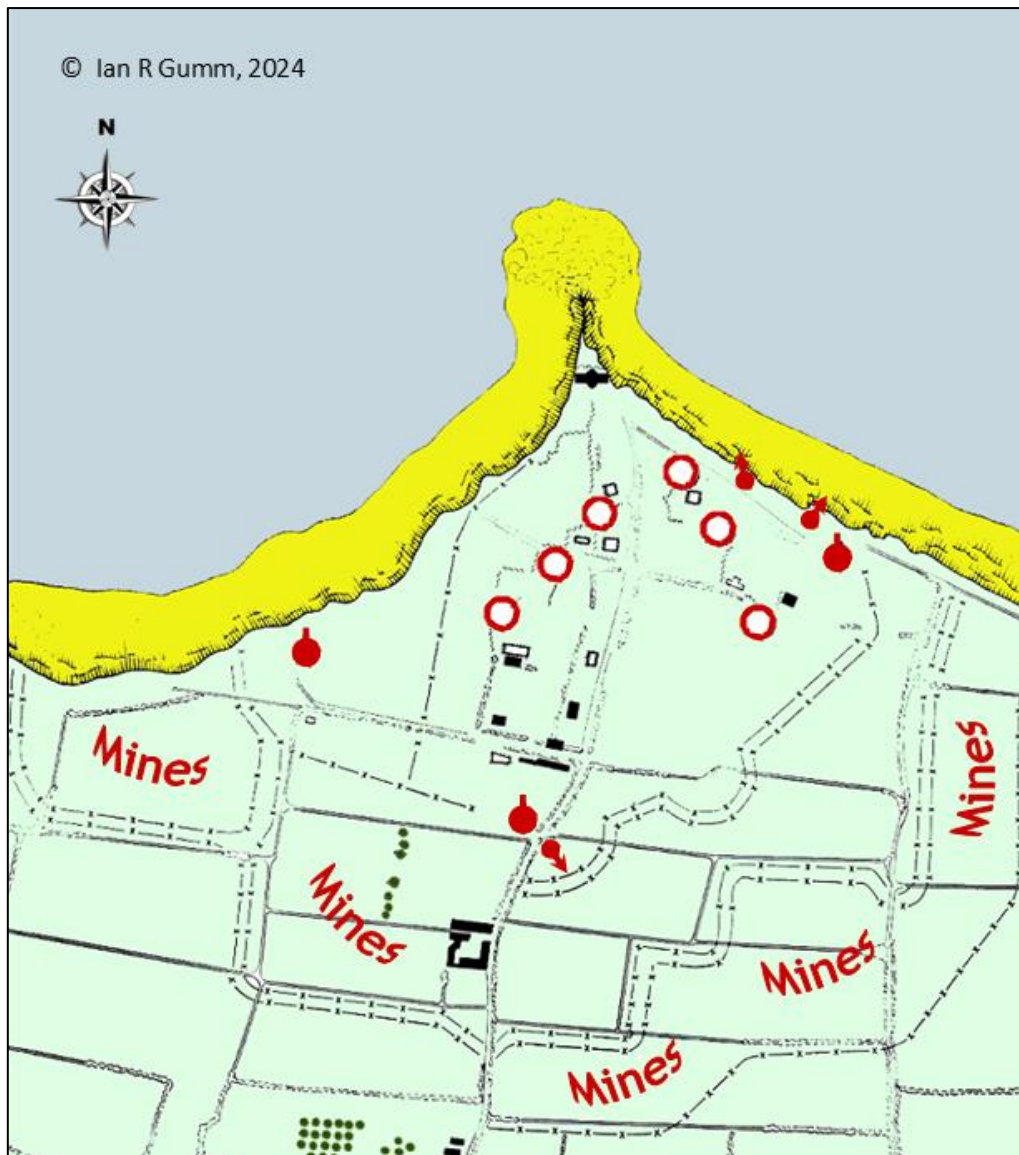
PART FIFTEEN – RUDDER’S RANGERS AT POINTE-DU-HOC ON D-DAY

On 6 June 1984, Ronald Reagan, the President of the United States, stood at the Ranger Memorial at Pointe-du-Hoc and said:

“We stand on a lonely, windswept Point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft, but 40 years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men, and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon. At dawn, on the morning of the 6th of June, 1944, 225 Rangers jumped off the British landing craft and ran to the bottom of these cliffs. Their mission was one of the most difficult and daring of the invasion: to climb these sheer and desolate cliffs and take out the enemy guns. The Allies had been told that some of the mightiest of these guns were here and they would be trained on the beaches to stop the Allied advance.”

The Rangers looked up and saw the enemy soldiers — the edge of the cliffs shooting down at them with machine guns and throwing grenades. And the American Rangers began to climb. They shot rope ladders over the face of these cliffs and began to pull themselves up. When one Ranger fell, another would take his place. When one rope was cut, a Ranger would grab another and begin his climb again. They climbed, shot back, and held their footing. Soon, one by one, the Rangers pulled themselves over the top, and in seizing the firm land at the top of these cliffs, they began to seize back the continent of Europe. 225 came here. After 2 days of fighting, only 90 could still bear arms.”

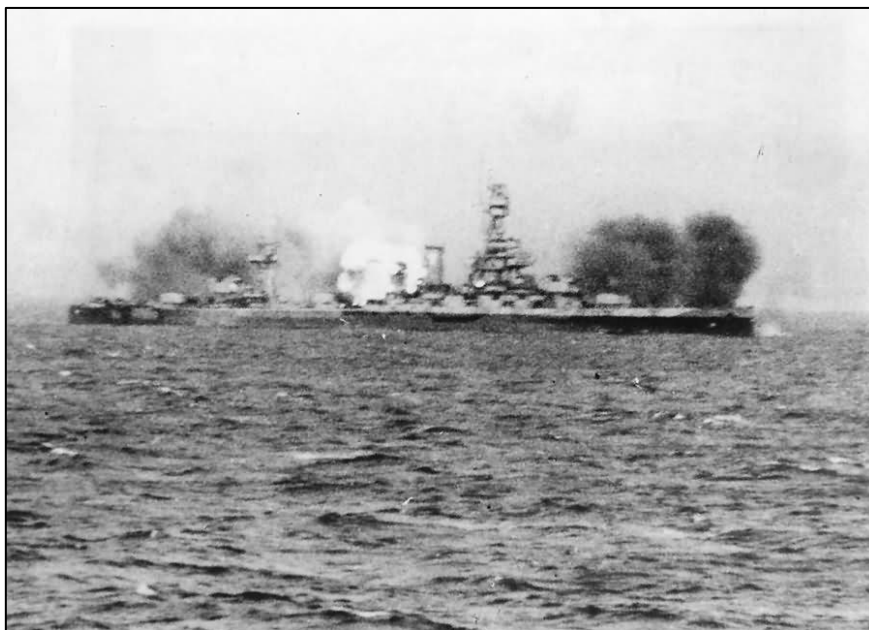
Pointe-du-Hoc is a promontory jutting out into the English Channel to the west of OMAHA Beach and, in 1944, was the site of a formidable German Coastal Artillery Battery. The Germans had constructed gun emplacements to house six captured French 155 mm guns, which from their commanding position on the clifftop were able to bring artillery fire directly onto the approaches of both UTAH and OMAHA Beaches. Because of this the Pointe-du-Hoc position posed a significant threat to the American seaborne assault and had to be neutralised.



A sketch map of the Pointe-du-Hoc position. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

As early as 15 April 1944, the US Ninth Air Force had begun attacks to soften up the position and slow enemy efforts to construct casemates to house the guns. In order not to tip off the invasion plans, these early attacks could not be made too often and were combined with wide-ranging missions directed at other points on the French coast from Brittany to Belgium.

On 22 May and 4 June US Ninth Air Force bombers struck again and on the night of 5/6 June RAF Heavy Bombers included Pointe-du-Hoc in a major attack on batteries along the whole invasion coast. Naval bombardment of the OMAHA sector and its flanks began at 05:50 on 6 June, and particular attention, especially by the main 14-inch gun batteries of the battleship USS TEXAS, was paid to Pointe-du-Hoc.



The battleship USS TEXAS (BB-35) In action off OMAHA Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

At 06:10, H-20 minutes, 18 medium bombers of the US Ninth Air Force dropped their bombs on the Point.



The pre-invasion bombing of Pointe-du-Hoc by A-20 Havoc bombers.

Intelligence reports assessed that the fortifications were too strong to be destroyed by aerial bombing and naval bombardment, and the only way to effectively neutralise the guns was to assault them using ground forces. A detailed study of the coastline on either side of the Pointe-du-Hoc location revealed that attacking the Battery from either flank would not silence the guns quickly. This was considered an operational imperative to prevent significant losses among the Naval vessels supporting the invasion. The study also revealed that the defences all pointed inland, the Germans were relying on the sheer cliffs for protection on the seaward side. If the attacking force could climb these cliffs they would be inside the landward-facing defences and amongst the captured French 155mm guns. Consequently, a plan was drawn up for the Provisional Ranger Group attached to the 116th Infantry Regiment to assault the Battery by scaling the cliffs early on D-Day. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H Trevor, the British Commando advisor to the Provisional Ranger Group, recalled:

“The right and left attacks having been ruled out, if the battery was to be quickly silenced, there remained only the centre which, as already mentioned, consisted of high vertical cliffs. A plan was produced to scale the cliffs to the East and West of the battery at selected places between the strong points which were sited at regular intervals along the clifftop, and then attack the battery from the East and West by means of a pincer movement.

This plan offered every prospect of success, if the assault could scale the cliffs under fire. However, when they had done so – no easy task – the defences of the battery still had to be reduced, and these in themselves were formidable.”

Force A, comprising Companies D, E, and F of Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder’s 2nd Ranger Battalion [2 Ranger], would assault from the sea and scale the 100 ft cliffs to capture the Pointe-du-Hoc position.



Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder, CO 2nd Ranger Battalion.

Force C, comprising Lieutenant Colonel Max Schindler's 5th Ranger Battalion [5 Ranger] with two of the remaining three companies of the 2 Ranger not carrying out the initial assault, would follow up and reinforce the assaulting Rangers on the Battery location.

Force B, Captain Ralph Goranson's Company C 2 Ranger, had a separate mission. Company C was ordered to land on OMAHA Beach with the first assault wave and destroy the German defences and radar station at Pointe de la Percée, immediately to the west of the landing beach.

The plan called for the three companies of Force A, Companies D, E and F 2 Ranger, to be landed by sea at the foot of the 100-foot cliffs, scale these cliffs using ropes, ladders, and grapnels, all under enemy fire, and engage the enemy at the top of the cliff. Force C (5 Ranger and Companies A and B 2 Ranger) would wait offshore for the signal of success, then land at the Point.

Once the battery had been captured, the Rangers would move inland to cut the coastal highway between Grandcamp and Vierville-sur-Mer. There, they would await the arrival of the 116th Infantry Regiment from Vierville before pushing west toward Grandcamp and Maisy.

An alternate plan was put in place if Force C did not receive word of a successful assault by Force A by H+30, they were to land on the western end of OMAHA Beach in the Vierville sector behind the 116th Infantry Regiment and proceed overland toward the Point, avoiding all unnecessary action to reach their objective.

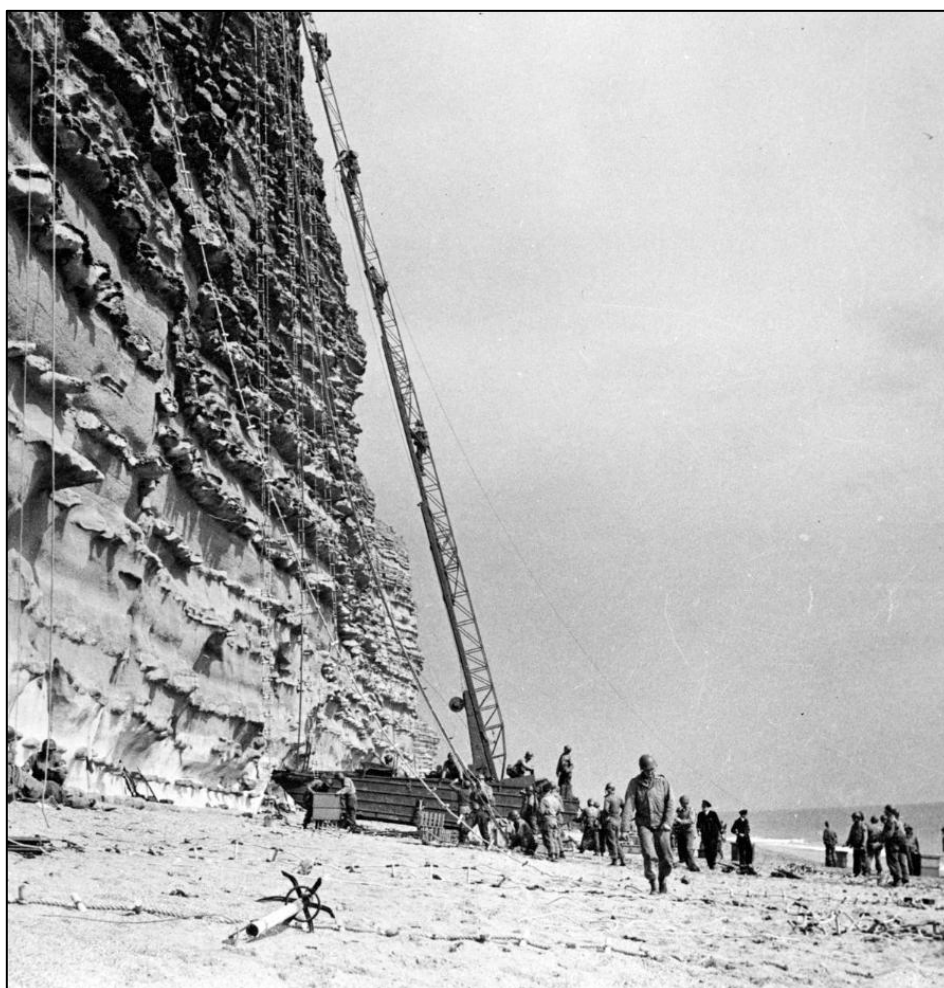
During April and May 1944, the Provisional Ranger Group carried out a series of landing exercises in the difficult waters along the Dorset coast and the Isle of Wight to train for the assault. The Rangers prepared themselves through repetitive and hard practice in rope and ladder work on cliffs like the ones they would have to climb on the French coast. British Commandos assisted the Rangers in this training passing on their experience gained during their coastal raids. The same British landing craft [LCAs] with their Royal Navy crews were used in the training and on D-Day.



The LCAs firing their grapnels during training.

Experiments with all types of equipment for escalade determined that the best method of climbing the cliffs was with ropes carried over the clifftop by rockets. Three different ropes were employed: plain ¾-inch ropes without any modification; ¾-inch ropes fitted with toggles (small wooden crossbars) each a few inches long and inserted in the rope at one-foot intervals; and light rope ladders with rungs every two feet. Each of the ropes had grapnels attached to the end which would be used to bite into the ground to secure them. In addition, the assault wave would take lightweight 112-foot extension ladders constructed using 4-foot tubular-steel sections each weighing 4 pounds. These ladders would be assembled by adding a new section to those already in place as Rangers already at the top of the cliff pulled them up using ropes and repeating this process until the necessary height was reached.

As an additional aid for climbing, four DUKW Swans driven by Royal Army Service Corps [RASC] drivers would come in close behind the first wave, each carrying a 100-foot fire-department-type ladder acquired from the London Fire Brigade. Lewis machine guns were mounted at the top of each of these ladders to provide intimate support to the climbing troops, and one Ranger would be in place to fire these as the ladder was extended.



A DUKW Swan during the training for the Pointe-du-Hoc assault at cliffs along the Dorset coast.

Ten LCAs from the Royal Navy's Assault Flotillas 520 and 522 would convey the 225 men of the three small Ranger companies and headquarters party, including signal and medical personnel, for the initial assault. The LCAs of Lieutenant R E Dobson RNVR's Flotilla 522 from LSI(H) BEN MY CHREE would convey Captain Harold K Slater's Company

D in LCA-860, LCA-668 and LCA-858, and First Lieutenant Joseph E Leagans' Company E in LCA-861 and LCA-862. LCA-888 would carry Lieutenant Colonel Rudder with half of his tactical headquarters and the Communications Officer First Lieutenant James W Eikner, in addition to one of Company E's assault teams. LCA-722 of Lieutenant C W R Cross RNVR's Flotilla 520 from LSI(H) AMSTERDAM would convey one of Company E's assault teams, the remainder of Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's tactical headquarters, a Stars and Stripes photographer, and Lieutenant Colonel Tom Trevor a Commando officer who had assisted the Rangers in training. Captain Otto Masny's Company F would be conveyed in LCA-883, LCA-884, and LCA-887 from Flotilla 520. The Fairmile B Motor Launch ML-304, commanded by Lieutenant Colin Beevor RNVR, would guide them. This was fitted with a large radar antenna for navigation duties.

Each LCA was fitted with three pairs of rocket mounts, at bow, amidship, and stern, wired to be fired in pairs from one control point at the stern. Each pair would have a set of ropes of the three different types. The rope or ladder for each rocket was coiled in a box directly behind the rocket mount. Each craft carried, in addition to the six mounted rockets, a pair of small, hand-projector-type rockets attached to plain ropes. These could be easily carried ashore if necessary.



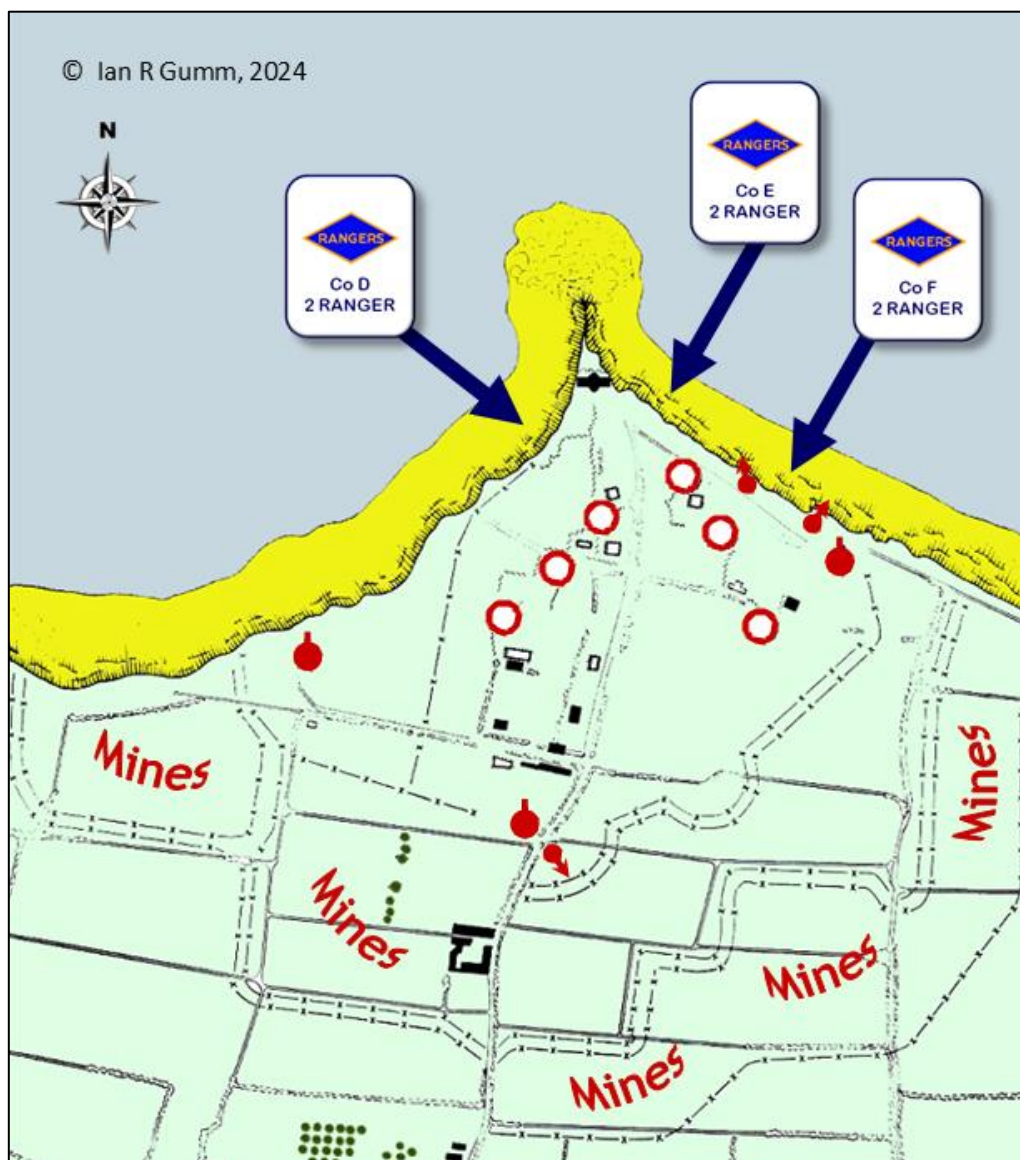
LCA's with three pairs of rocket launchers about to be lowered from their mother ship during the training for the Pointe-du-Hoc assault.

Two LCA supply boats would come in a few minutes after the initial assault wave, with packs, extra rations and ammunition, two 81-mm mortars, demolitions, and equipment for hauling supplies up the cliff.

Speed was essential and the assault force was equipped for shock action of limited duration. The Rangers were dressed in fatigue uniform and carried a D-bar for rations, two grenades, and their weapon, usually an M-1 rifle. A few selected to be the first up the ropes carried pistols or carbines. Heavier weapons were limited to four BARs and two light mortars

per company. Ten Thermite grenades, for demolition, were distributed within each company. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled what a Thermite grenade was:

“When you opened it and aerated its contents chemically, it turned like to solder, and you could just pour it out of the can, and that would go over the gears, the traversing mechanism or the elevation mechanism to raise the gun barrel, or tube as they call them. Because as that flowed out like solder on top of the gears, whether flat for traversing, or elevation, or on the hinges of the breech blocks where the projectiles go in, it seeped down and when it cooled off, it cooled off like a weld, it was all welded together and you couldn’t move these things. You could fire them, but it would all be in one spot. and if I could get the breach block firmed up, you couldn’t do that either.”



The tactical plan for the Pointe-du-Hoc assault. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

The tactical plan called for Company D to assault on the western side of the Point and Companies E and F to assault on the eastern side. On reaching the clifftop, each assault team had a series of specific objectives, beginning with the gun emplacements and other fortifications on the Point. With these first objectives taken, most of the force was to push out immediately to the south, reach the coastal highway, which was a main communications lateral for German defences of the Grandcamp to Vierville sector, and hold a position controlling the highway to the west until the arrival of the 116th Infantry Regiment from Vierville. If the assault at OMAHA went according to schedule, the 116th should be at Pointe-du-Hoc by noon. Long before then, Force C should have followed in at the Point to strengthen the foothold won by the initial assault.

As a final feature of the plans, fire support after the landing would be available on call from supporting naval warships and artillery landing after 08:00 near Vierville-sur-Mer. Lieutenant Kenneth Norton USN's Naval Shore Fire Control Party of 12 men and Captain Jonathan Harwood a forward observer of the 58th Armored Field Artillery Battalion were attached to Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's tactical headquarters specifically for this purpose.

At 04:00 on 6 June 1944, the Rangers of Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's Force A began climbing into their assigned LCAs from LSI(H) BEN MY CHREE and LSI(H) AMSTERDAM. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

"We loaded up on the LCAs off the transport, the steamers, at 4:00 in the morning, in these LCAs manned by the British navy. It took a few hours to get from that point to the beaches, wherever you are going to land."

The LCAs gathered in the transport area ready to be led towards Pointe-du-Hoc and shortly after 04:30, Lieutenant Colin Beevor's ML-304 began guiding them towards the French coast. Lieutenant Beevor reported:

"At H-120 (0430B) I proceeded in accordance with previous instructions and left the transport Area with LCA Flotillas from LSIs "BEN MY CHREE" and "AMSTERDAM" formed up astern."

The LCAs soon began to suffer from the results of the heavy going. The bad weather, poor visibility, and the tide pushed Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's men further to the east than intended. Lieutenant Beevor reported:

"Course was set for Pointe-du-Hoc and this was checked by QH2 and Radar Type 970. The DR [Dead Reckoning] position was not considered reliable owing to the slow speed of advance, the relatively strong effect of the wind and tide and the difficulty in steering an accurate course in the sea which was running."

As the light increased and the coastline became more visible, the problem of identifying Pointe-du-Hoc arose. This promised to be difficult since the coast was being bombarded heavily by the Gunfire Support Group and cliffs and many places obscured by thick clouds

of smoke.

At this point, H-60, both the radar and QH appeared to be jammed. Subsequently, this was found to be due to a faulty power supply, but from this time onwards they gave no assistance, and it was necessary to rely on DR and visual recognition. It was thought that the heavy gun battery on Pointe-du-Hoc would disclose its own position, but the battery was not firing.

At about three miles from the headland that was thought to be Pointe-du-Hoc the problem of identification became especially difficult. The Point was smothered in smoke and the bombardment was causing the cliffs to crumble and collapse in many places. The silhouette of Pointe-du-Hoc appeared different from the photographs supplied as a result of this bombardment, but a little further to the eastward another headland which it resembled closely, and course was modified to reach it.”



ML-304.

Eight miles from shore LCA-860, carrying Captain Slater and 20 men of Company D, swamped in the 4-foot choppy waves. Sergeant Tom Ruggerio, who was in this LCA, recalled:

“When we started off it was rough, the water was rough and it was cold. As everyone knows the water was terribly terribly choppy. We could almost see the guys trying to get up the cliff when we went down, the boat just went like that [turned over]. On our boat our captain and two officers went down with their men, sunk.

After two hours a Navy gunboat, which was not too big, we could see it heading towards us. We started screaming. We kept drifting, drifting, but this gunboat was coming closer and closer. When it was close enough, they spotted us and picked us up. There were

eleven of us that they picked up, the rest were gone.”

The personnel were picked up by rescue craft and returned to England. Lieutenant Beevor’s report continues:

“At 4,000 yards the LCT was instructed to stop and the “DUKWs” were launched.”

One supply craft sank with only one survivor. The other supply craft was soon in trouble and had to throw the packs of Companies D and E overboard to stay afloat. This second supply craft survived, with varying degrees of trouble. Most LCAs shipped so much water that the men had to bail with their helmets to help the pumps keep them afloat.

The leading group of nine surviving LCAs kept good formation, in a double column ready to fan out as they neared shore. Unfortunately, as the coastline came in sight, it was realised they were heading towards Pointe de la Percée, three miles east of the target. Sergeant Frank South, one of 2 Ranger’s medics, recalled:

“We got off the ship, circled in the rendezvous, then headed in. We were following a Royal Navy lead boat, who was supposed to guide us, but their navigation system was faulty, was out for some reason or other, but the lead boat tried to use dead reckoning but the dead reckoning was off, he didn’t account for set and drift properly, and we were heading towards Pointe de la Percée instead of Pointe-du-Hoc. Rudder noticed the error and ordered them to correct the heading. That meant that we would have to go alongside the cliff of the Channel and on the way in we picked up small arms fire and machine guns.”

Lieutenant Beevor’s report stated:

“At 1,000 yards, when the LCAs were about to go in, it became apparent that this point was not Pointe-du-Hoc, since although the appearance coincided with the photographs, there were no concrete emplacements visible. Accordingly, course was modified to reach the original point from which we had steered.”

The error in direction caused the flotilla to run the gauntlet of machine gun fire from the German strongpoints along the three miles of coast. Fortunately, these were few and their fire was wild and intermittent, ML-304 engaged them with its Oerlikon and the LCAs with their .50-inch machine guns. The only serious casualty was a DUKW, which was hit by fire from a 20 mm gun as it neared the target area. Five of the nine men aboard were killed or wounded.

The navigational error resulted in more than 30 additional minutes for the assault force to reach Pointe-du-Hoc and instead of landing at 06:30, H-Hour, the first Ranger craft touched down at 07:08, H+38. The Rangers had lost the element of surprise, and this delay determined the course of action at the Point for the next two days. First Lieutenant Eikner, the Communications Officer, recalled:

“So we had to flank right and parallel the coast for about another three or four miles down to Pointe-du-Hoc. We had lost the element of surprise.”

First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

“Unfortunately, they made a mistake and went to the wrong cliffs, which delayed us about 40 minutes, I think, landing time, which is important when you have game plans such as we had that required accuracy in our planning and so forth. So, we landed then about 7:00 - 7:10 a.m. D-Day morning, June 6, 1944, on a little ledge, 50-foot-wide, below the 100-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc.”

Travelling in the DUWKs was First Lieutenant Amos P Potts Jr command a Photographic Assignment Unit, he recalled:

“The DUWKs all got off the LCTs without incident but as we approached the coast it was obvious that the pathfinders were leading too far to the east. We altered our course paralleling the coast within the range of small arms and proceeded to Ponte-du-Hoc, our assigned sector. Even the exposure to small arms fire did not bother me.”

Fire support was provided by the USS TEXAS (BB-35), USS SATTERLEE (DD-626) and HMS TALYBONT (L18). USS SATTERLEE provided support until relieved by USS THOMPSON (DD-627) whose Naval gunfire helped keep the defending Germans back from the clifftop as the Rangers began their climb. The preinvasion Naval bombardment at Pointe-du-Hoc ended at 06:30 and, thereafter, the warships engaged opportunity targets as they presented themselves.

When the Rangers corrected their course away from Pointe de la Percée, they came under fire from German positions on the cliffs. To help combat this, HMS TALYBONT closed range and for 15 minutes between 06:45 and 07:00, it raked the enemy's positions with its 4-inch and 2-pounder shells. Meantime, the USS SATTERLEE, 2,500 yards from Pointe-du-Hoc, could see enemy troops assembling on the clifftop and opened fire with its main battery and machine gun fire.

The main Ranger force, Force C comprising eight Ranger companies, followed Force A in from the transports, watching anxiously for the signal of success at Pointe-du-Hoc (two successive flares shot by 60-mm mortars). By 07:00, if no message or signal had come, Colonel Schneider's force was scheduled to adopt the alternate plan and land on OMAHA Beach at Vierville-sur-Mer. They waited an additional ten minutes before they received the codeword TILT by radio, which was the prearranged signal to follow the alternative plan. So, Force C headed eastwards toward Vierville, where they came ashore at 07:45. Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's three companies of Force A would have to fight alone until relieved.

With most grapnels failing to reach the top, the Rangers had to use their toggle ropes and hand grapnels to finish the climb. Once on top the three companies set about capturing the position. Irvin C Klimas who served on the USS THOMPSON recalled:

“We appeared off the coast of France about 3:00 in the morning and we could see the Air Force, the flashes of the Air Force bombing the beach. Plane after plane crossing the beach, you could see the sticks of bombs exploding on the beach. We took a position off Pointe du

Hoc, the position there was to support the invasion on OMAHA Beach and to keep the gun battery down on the flat land on Pointe-du-Hoc.

We were ordered not to open fire until 5:30 in the morning, which we did and knocked out targets of opportunity we saw. At 6:30, we ceased firing when the invasion fleet was already moving in toward the beach, obviously, we didn't want to hit our own people. During the day on D-Day, we hovered off the beach and picked off targets of opportunity. At one point in time, the Rangers had some difficulty, and we moved in close to the shore to help them and take some of the wounded off. We also made sure the German gun battery at the top of the cliff was pinned down so they could scale that cliff."

First Lieutenant James W Eikner, the Communications Officer, recalled:

"We had a couple of battleships backing us up, we had our Air Force flying over dropping bombs."

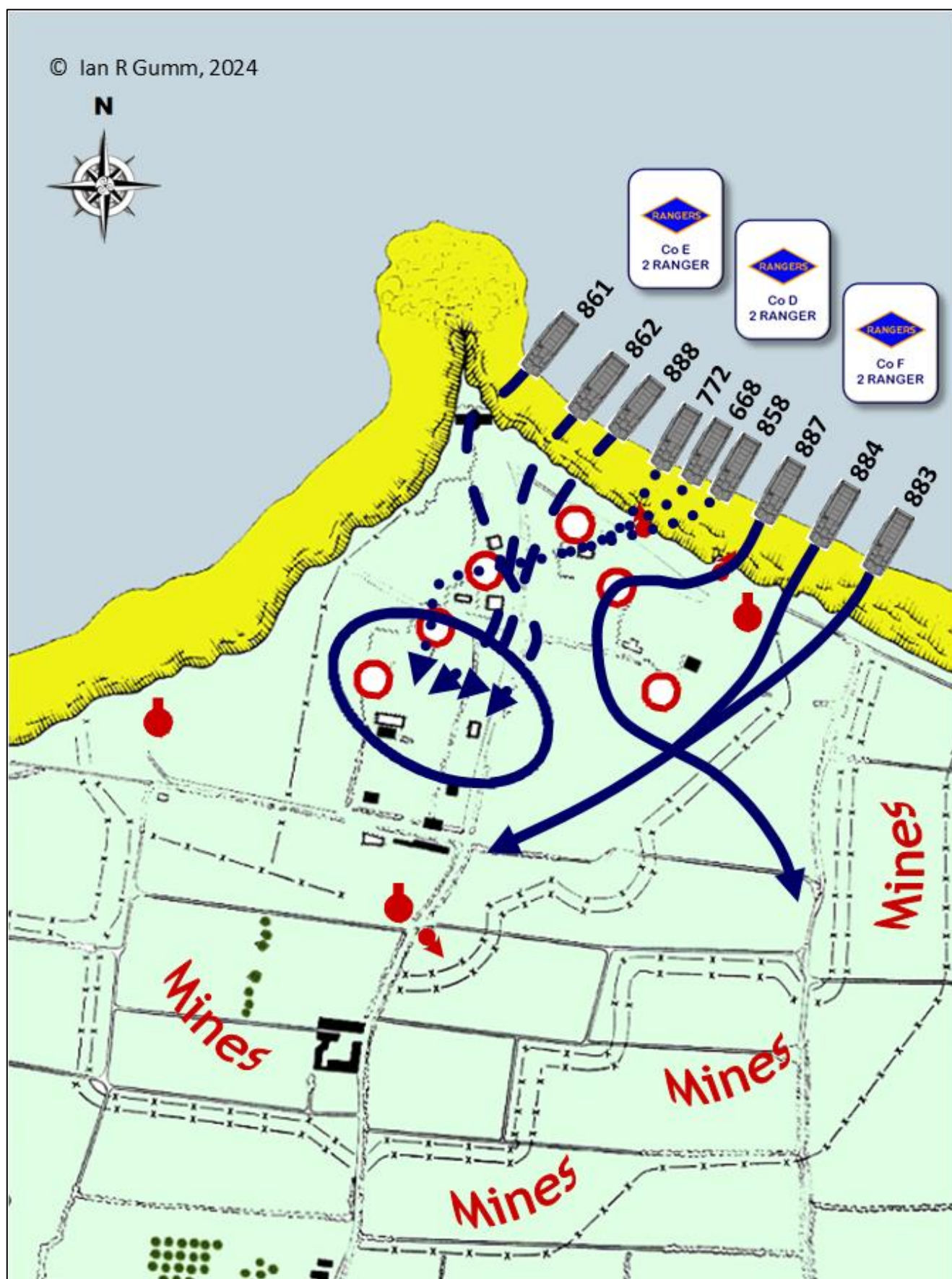


USS THOMPSON (DD-627)

The craters formed by the bombardment were not only a handicap to unloading men and supplies but rendered the DUKWs useless. The extension ladders could not reach the clifftop as the DUKWs could not cross the cratered beach and get close enough to the cliff face. German mortars and machine guns fired on them as they approached, and one was sunk. First Lieutenant Potts of the Photographic Assignment Unit recalled:

"All our study of aerial photos, stereos, and models of the cliffs was for nought because the four-hour aerial bombing and the 25- 16-inch naval shells had completely changed the appearance of the cliffs and had covered the beach with so much debris that it was

impossible to get the DUWKs out of the water. In fact, to get ashore I had to swim, getting all my extra film wet.”



The 2 Ranger landings at Pointe-du-Hoc on D-Day. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

As the LCAs closed on the beach, they began receiving scattered small arms and automatic fire, and German troops were seen moving near the edge of the cliff. There was, however, no sign of any artillery in action from the Pointe-du-Hoc location.

Despite being off course, wet, and cold, the three Ranger companies survived the three-hour trip and reached the shore in relatively good shape. The LCAs of Force A approached Pointe-du-Hoc from the east and Company D's assault on the western side of the Point was changed and they landed in between the other two companies to the east of the Point.

The nine LCAs deployed in line abreast and headed towards the cliffs. They touched down on a front of about 500 yards with LCA-888 carrying Lieutenant Colonel Rudder being the first to hit the beach at 07:08. The right-hand LCA touched down just under the tip of Pointe-du-Hoc, and the others spaced fairly evenly. No great distance separated the LCAs and according to plan, each section went into action as separate units. They each had their objective and experienced the particular problems that climbing the 100-foot cliffs presented to them.

Exiting their LCAs, the Rangers dashed for the cliffs. Grenades were thrown down or rolled over the edge as the first Rangers crossed the rocks, and enemy small-arms fire came from scattered points along the cliff edge. Particularly dangerous was enfilade fire, including automatic weapons, from the German position on the left flank of the beach. Once at the foot of the cliff, the Rangers were better off, for the piles of debris gave partial defilade from the flanking fires, and the enemy directly above would have to expose themselves to place observed fire or to aim their grenades.

First Lieutenant Leagans' Company E landed closest to the Point. LCA-861, carrying First Lieutenant Theodore E Lapres Jr's assault team, grounded about 25 yards from the bottom of the cliff just after LCA-888 touched down. Three or four Germans were standing on the cliff edge, shooting down at them. The Rangers near the stern of LCA-861 returned fire and drove the enemy back out of sight. As soon as the LCA touchdown, the rear pair of rockets were fired followed by the other two pairs in succession.

All LCA-861's ropes fell short, because the ropes were thoroughly soaked, and in some cases, less than half the rope's length or ladder was lifted from the containing box. As First Lieutenant Lapres' men crossed the strip of cratered beach, the enemy rolled or threw grenades over the cliff edge. These were of the German "potato-masher" type with a heavy concussion effect but small fragmentation, and they resulted in two casualties.

The hand rockets were carried ashore, and the first one was fired at 15 yards from the cliff. It went over the top and caught. PFC Harry W Roberts started up the hand line, bracing his feet against the 80-degree slope. He made about 25 feet; the rope slipped or was cut, and PFC Roberts slithered down. The second rocket was fired, and the grapnel caught. PFC Roberts went up again and, in 40 seconds, made the top and pulled into a small, cratered niche just under the edge. As he reached the top the rope was cut but PFC Roberts tied it to a wire picket. This pulled out under the weight of the next man and the rope fell off the cliff, leaving PFC Roberts stranded. However, a nearby 20-foot mound of debris enabled another Ranger from the team to get far enough up the cliff to throw him a rope. This time he lay across it, and five men, including First Lieutenant Lapres, came up. PFC Roberts had not seen any of the enemy, nor had he been

under fire. Without waiting for further arrivals, First Lieutenant Lapres led his small group towards their objective, the heavily constructed Observation Post at the northern tip of the fortified area. About ten minutes had elapsed since their touchdown.

Just after First Lieutenant Lapres' group moved off, there was a large explosion on the cliff above the rest of LCA-861's assault team waiting their turn on the rope, and PFC Paul L Medeiros was half buried under debris. None of the men knew what caused the explosion, whether a naval shell or the detonation of a German mine of a peculiar type found later at one or two places along the cliff edge. The explosion did not affect the escalade, and PFC Medeiros and four other Rangers quickly reached the clifftop. They followed First Lieutenant Lapres' group toward their objective.

LCA-862 carrying First Lieutenant Leagans' assault team and the Naval Shore Fire Control Party, landed about 100 yards left of LCA-861. The men had no trouble in disembarking, but once on the beach, they found themselves exposed to machine gun fire from the eastern end of the landing area. One man was killed and one wounded by this fire and two more were wounded by grenade fragments. The forward pair of rockets had been fired immediately on touchdown, followed by the other four together. One plain and two toggle ropes reached the top, but one toggle rope pulled out. T5 Victor J Aguzzi, First Lieutenant Leagans, and Staff Sergeant Joseph J Cleaves went up the two remaining ropes, arrived at the top almost together, and fell into a convenient shell hole just beyond the edge. They paused long enough for two more men to join them before the five moved off. The rest of the team came up a few minutes later.

LCA-888 had a 15-man team of Company E, in addition to Lieutenant Colonel Rudder, First Lieutenant Eikner the communications officer and five headquarters personnel. A few Germans were seen on the cliff edge as LCA-888 neared shore, but, when Sergeant Dominick B Boggetto shot one of them off the edge with a BAR, the others quickly disappeared. First Lieutenant Eikner recalled exiting the LCA:

"I was the last man off of my boat. Bullets were zipping by but none hit me, thank God. I got a hold of the rope right in front of me and started up and I got about two-thirds of the way up and this hellish explosion. The last thing I saw was all of this mud, dirt, and rock coming down the cliff and I was knocked out. The next thing that I recall was I was buried up to about my waist. And I looked up and I could see this German up there looking down like that and he could have shot me right there if he wanted to but I guess he figured I was gone, you know. So I looked around for my rifle, I had a Tommy gun, and it was some feet away and I managed to squirm around and finally pull it out, and this fellow was still up there and looking round the other way and I took a shot at him, and pulled the trigger and it snapped, my gun was clogged up with mud. And there I was and I remember saying to myself, "Ain't this a hell of a note, here I am in the damndest war in history and I don't have a gun."

The Rangers had trouble crossing the cratered beach, often in water neck deep, and found it hard to get out of the craters due to the slick clay bottom. A few grenades were tossed over the cliff, but these did not cause any casualties.

The rockets were fired in series, at 35 yards from the cliff base, but the waterlogged ropes did not reach the clifftop. When two Rangers, the best of the group at free climbing, tried to work up the smashed cliff face without ropes, they were baulked by the slippery clay surface, which gave way too easily to permit knife holds.

Bombs or shells had brought down a mass of wet clay from the clifftop, forming a talus mound 35 to 40 feet high against the cliff. A 16-foot section of the extension ladder, with a toggle rope attached, was carried to the top of the mound and set up. A Ranger climbed the ladder, cut a foothold in the cliff, and stood in this to hold the ladder while a second man climbed. Raising the ladder another 16- feet, the first Ranger held the ladder while the second man continued up the cliff face. The second man then cut another foothold and this process was repeated until T5 George J Putzek reached the clifftop. Lying flat holding the ladder in his arms, T5 Putzek held on while another Ranger climbed the toggle rope and the ladder to the clifftop. From there on it was easy. As the first men up moved a few yards from the cliff edge to protect the climbers, they found plenty of cover in bomb craters, and no sign of an enemy. Within 15 minutes of landing, the Company E team were up the cliff and ready to move on.



The talus mound at the base of the Pointe-du-Hoc cliffs used by Company E. [80-G-45718]

Lieutenant Colonel Rudder and the headquarters personnel remained on the beach and set up the Tactical headquarters in a shallow cave at the bottom of the cliff. By 07:25, First Lieutenant Eikner had his equipment set up and flashed word by SCR-300 that Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's Force A had landed. Five minutes later he sent out the code word indicating "men up the cliff", and the message was acknowledged. When the message 'PRAISE THE LORD', meaning "all men up cliff", was sent at 07:45, there was no response.

LCA-722 came ashore twenty yards left of LCA-888 at 07:09. It conveyed a team of 15 Company E Rangers, the 5 remaining men of Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's headquarters, a Stars and Stripes photographer, and Lieutenant Colonel

Tom Trevor the British Commando officer who had assisted the Rangers in training. LCA-722 touched down at the edge of a crater and the men could not avoid it when debarking. German grenades lobbed over the cliff were ineffectual, and the craters and debris on the beach provided cover from the enfilading machine gun fire from the left. The only casualty was PFC John J Sillman, wounded three times as the craft came in and hit twice on the beach, miraculously he survived.

There was an assortment of equipment on this craft, including the SCR-284, two pigeons, a 60mm mortar with ammunition, and some demolitions. This was unloaded without loss, though it took manoeuvring to avoid the deep water in the crater. T4 C S Parker and two other communications men hefted the big radio set on a pack board and managed to get it in and working before the first climbers from LCA-722 reached the top.

The rockets on LCA-722 had been fired just before landing. One ladder and one plain rope got up and held. LCA-722 had not taken on much water and the ropes were comparatively dry. The single rope lay in a slight crevice, but the ladder came down on an overhang that seemed exposed to the flanking fire and would be hard to climb. T5 Edward P Smith tried the plain rope and 'walked up' to the top. There, three or four minutes after landing, he saw a group of Germans to his right throwing grenades over the cliff. Sergeant Hayward A Robey joined PFC Smith with a BAR and, taking up a position in a shallow niche at the cliff edge, sprayed the enemy grenadiers with 40 or 50 rounds. Three of the enemy dropped and the rest disappeared. PFC Frank H Peterson, who was lightly wounded on the beach by a grenade, joined them and the three Rangers went off on their mission without waiting for the next climbers.

The 60mm mortar section remained on the beach to provide supporting fire. However, the beach was too exposed, and time was consumed in getting ammunition from the one surviving supply craft. Without firing a round, the mortar team climbed up the cliff at 07:45.

LCA-668 came ashore to the left of LCA-722 and grounded short of the beach strip due to the boulders knocked from the cliff by bombardment. This LCA conveyed First Lieutenant George F Kerchner's assault team from Company D and First Sergeant Leonard Lomell. It was supposed to land west of the Point but due to the direction of approach Company D came ashore between the other two Companies. As Captain Slater's LCA-860 had sunk on the way in, First Lieutenant Kerchner assumed command of the company.

As the LCA-668 grounded, the specially adapted rocket launchers were fired sending their grapnels soaring skywards. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

"As our LCAs landed, and the ramps went down, we pushed buttons on a switchboard that we had at the gunwale, and that set off these rockets that had launchers along the gunwales of the LCAs. And those rockets would sail up there, 150 feet, these are all 100-foot cliffs, and fall behind the lines, grab into the earth, and we would pull on them down on the beach, and that would secure them, so we could, hand over hand, climb the 100-feet straight up.

Well, the Germans, had everything gone right, the Germans would have been dead when we did this, it was so early. but because we were so late, they didn't know the invasion was coming at this place. It gave them enough time to get out there to welcome us, such as it was, and they cut our ropes as we were trying to come up climbing, and they dropped grenades on top of us or shot us off the ropes. it became almost impossible to climb those ropes to get up there and find the guns."



LCAs firing their grapnel rockets during a training exercise.

The men had to swim in about 20 feet and while First Sergeant Lomell was bringing in a box of rope and a hand-projector rocket, he was wounded in the side above his right hip by a machine gun bullet. He recalled:

"I was the first one wounded when we landed. The ramp went down and I caught a machine gun bullet through my right side over my right hip, through the fleshy part, what little fat I had in those days. But it did not hit the joint or any important organs, it just burned and was sore. I was the first one wounded, but it did not disable me that I could not do my duty."

First Lieutenant George Kerchner recalled:

"The British Naval personnel that manned our LCAs assured us that they would beach the craft so we could step ashore on dry land. When my LCA touched down and the ramp was dropped I dashed out first into what I believed was only a few inches of water.

However, we came up against the edge of a deep crater from a large aerial bomb and the next thing I knew I was on the bottom in about 10 or 12 feet of water. I forgot to inflate my life preserver and being loaded down with a radio, grenades and other necessities I

had a real job getting ashore. The ground was clay and chalk, and wet and slippery. Every time I thought I was ashore another wave would knock me down and roll me around and pull me back into deep water.

The rest of the men seeing me disappearing under the water realised how deep it was and walked around the edge of the crater and most were ashore and dry before I was. I was so angry at everything and everybody that I wasn't aware of the enemy fire until some men next to me were hit."

Despite the unusual distance from the cliff and the wet ropes, three rockets carried the cliff edge with a toggle rope and two rope ladders. First Sergeant Lomell put his best climber on the toggle while he tried one of the ladders. All ropes were on an overhang and only the toggle line proved practicable. Even on it, climbing would be slow, so he called for the extension ladders. Picking a spot high on the talus, his men found that one 16-foot section added to a 20-foot section reached the top of the vertical stretch, beyond which a slide of debris had reduced the slope enough to make it negotiable without ropes. Two men had got up by the toggle rope; the rest used the ladder and made the top quickly. Grenades caused some annoyance until the first men up could cover the rest of the party.



Two Rangers climbing the cliffs during training. They are using light rope ladders; toggle ropes, and plain ropes can be seen to the left of the picture.

LCA-858 was shipping enough water on the way in to keep the Rangers busy, but it maintained station with the other LCAs and touched down slightly behind the others at the beach at 07:10. LCA-858 dropped its ramp into an unseen crater and the men on exiting found themselves in muddy water over their heads. Despite the wetting, the only piece of equipment put out of action was a bazooka. Three men from LCA-858 were hit by the German machine gun fire from the east flank while crossing the beach.

The rockets of LCA-858 were fired in series, the plain ropes first. All the ropes were wet, and only one plain rope got over the cliff. It lay in a crevice that would give some protection from enemy flanking fire, but the direct approach to the foot of the rope was exposed. The Company D Rangers worked their way to the rope through the piles of debris at the cliff base. While one man helped the wounded get to Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's command post, where the medics had set up, the rest went up this rope. As they could get footholds in the cliff face and a big crater reduced the steepness of the climb near the top, they found the going not to be too hard and were on the top within 15 minutes.

As a result of Company D's unscheduled landing in the centre of the line of craft, the three LCAs carrying Captain Masny's Company F were pushed to the east, all touching down beyond the area originally assigned to them.

Captain Masny and First Lieutenant Robert C Arman's assault team in LCA-887 had not been affected by the water or enemy on the way in and grounded five yards from the dry beach at 07:08. The shorter men got a ducking in the inevitable crater but none of the equipment was affected. Sergeant William L Petty's BAR despite getting soaked and covered in mud when he slipped on the cliff, fired perfectly when first needed. Some enemy fire, including automatic weapons, came from both flanks and two Rangers from LCA-887 were wounded.

The two forward rockets were fired just before hitting the beach. Only one of the plain lines carried, and First Lieutenant Arman decided the heavier ropes had no chance. He had all four of the remaining mounted rockets, with their boxes carrying toggle ropes and ladders, removed from the LCA and set up on the beach. This took about ten minutes and the LCA's coxswain did a notable job of holding the craft at the beach edge.

When the rockets were set up for firing, Tech Sergeant John I Cripps fired each in turn by touching the short connection, as the lead wire for making the firing connection was missing. This he did from about three feet from the rocket base and each time, the flashback blinded him and covered him in sand and mud. The other Rangers watched on as he wiped the dirt from his eyes, shook his head, and moved to the next rocket. All the ropes made it up the cliff and allowed First Lieutenant Arman's team to climb to the top. Sergeant Petty and some other expert climbers had already tried the plain rope and failed; it was on a straight fall, requiring hand-over-hand work with no footholds possible. The men had trouble trying to climb this rope due to their muddy hands and clothes on the wet rope.

Sergeant Petty started up one of the ladders, got 30 feet up, and slid back on the cliff face when the grapnel pulled out. T5 Carl Winsch was going up the other ladder when fire from somewhere on the flanks began to chip the cliff around him. Sergeant Petty went up after T5 Winsch, and found him, unwounded, in a shell hole at the top. Here Sergeant Petty waited for two more Rangers and then the four set out for their objective.

Captain Masny on reaching the top, sent a three-man patrol consisting of First Sergeant Charles E Frederick, Staff Sergeant Robert G Youso, and PFC Herman W Kiihnl to neutralise the German automatic weapon firing from the eastern end of the Battery position, which had caused so much trouble during the landing. This has been variously described as a machine gun or a light anti-aircraft gun.

They started along an east-west hedgerow one field inland, with First Sergeant Frederick covering the other two for the first move. Someone brought up an order for First Sergeant Frederick to report back to Captain Masny and the other two continued unaware that First Sergeant Frederick was no longer behind them. They got to within 20 yards of where they thought the gun position must be, and as Staff Sergeant Youso half rose to throw a grenade he was shot by a German rifleman. PFC Kiihnl pulled back to find First Sergeant Frederick, while Staff Sergeant Youso crawled toward safety on the seaward side of the cliff-skirting hedgerow.

LCA-884 became the target for considerable enemy fire from cliff positions on the way to the Point and First Lieutenant Jacob J Hill's team had replied with its Lewis guns and the BARs. Touchdown was made at 07:08 on the edge of a shell hole, in water shoulder high. Three Rangers were hit by the enfilading fire coming from the left flank. The rockets were fired in series, front to rear. Four ropes got over the cliff, but each lay in such a position as to be fully exposed to the continuing enemy fire. The Rangers were so wet and covered in mud scrambling through the craters on the beach that the plain ropes would have been unusable after the first climber went up. The one rope ladder that reached the top hung at an awkward angle caught below on beach boulders. Several men tried the other ropes without success and Pte William E Anderson got only part way up in his attempt at free climbing. First Lieutenant Hill decided to use the ladders of LCA-883's team and they moved to the left.

LCA-883 was the last in the column of approach. This LCA carried First Lieutenant Richard A Wintz's team and was last to touchdown at 07:11. It was nearly 300 yards left of its planned position and considerably beyond the edge of the main fortified area on Pointe-du-Hoc. Just to their left, a jut in the cliff protected the assault team from the flanking fire that caused so much trouble for the other landing parties. They had a dry landing and their six rockets fired successfully, carrying their ropes over the clifftop. This allowed them to use every rope, but it was still hard going, even on the ladders. First Lieutenant Wintz, ascending using a plain rope, found it impossible to get any footholds on the slippery cliff. The wet and muddy rope made it difficult for hand-over-hand pulling, and at the top, he was "*never so tired in his life.*" Reaching the top, First Lieutenant Wintz went along the cliffs to the west looking for Captain Otto Masny, but he had already gone to the Point.

Orientating himself, First Lieutenant Wintz realised that he was just east of the German defensive perimeter of the Point. South were the shell-torn fields stretching toward St-Pierre-du-Mont that were crossed by just a few hedgerows. There was occasional German artillery fire and some sniping from the south and, about 200 yards to the east along the cliffs, the German automatic weapon that had been causing so much trouble was firing toward the Point over the heads of First Lieutenant Wintz and the Rangers who were gathered around him. Even though he did not know the enemy's precise location, First Lieutenant Wintz decided to go after the gun and led his small group of Rangers forward leaving Sergeant Charles F Wellage to set up his mortar in a crater near the cliff, ready to fire once the enemy's position was fixed.

A hedgerow with a drainage ditch on the inland side skirted the cliff edge eastward. First Lieutenant Wintz's group worked slowly forward, using the drainage ditch to keep low and stay undercover. As they advanced, the two leading Rangers of First Lieutenant Wintz's party met Staff Sergeant Youso.

By this time, First Lieutenant Wintz's small attacking force was strung out along 200 yards of the cliff hedgerow, with First Lieutenant Wintz further back with four Rangers and an observer for the mortar. The Germans spotted their movement and small arms fire covered an open space they had to cross along their route. One of the Rangers was wounded while trying to cross the gap before an order relayed from First Sergeant Frederick told them to pull back.

First Sergeant Frederick, when called back to report to Captain Masny, had gone as far as the No 1 gun position without locating him. There he received an order, by word of mouth, to bring First Lieutenant Wintz's party back. First Sergeant Frederick had relayed that order but concerned by it he had pushed on to find Captain Masny. When he finally located his captain, Captain Masny explained that he thought First Lieutenant Wintz's party was starting south toward the coastal highway and the purpose of the order was to keep them near the Point. Captain Masny did want the German position neutralised, so First Sergeant Frederick immediately sent another messenger revoking the recall order and telling First Lieutenant Wintz to push on with his attack. But it was too late; First Lieutenant Wintz and his party were already back at their starting positions, having brought their two wounded in.

First Lieutenant Wintz reorganised his men for another effort to neutralise the enemy position along the cliff edge, but as this attempt began an order was received by SCR-300 radio to halt the attack. Lieutenant Colonel Rudder had decided to try naval gunfire to neutralise the German strongpoint. That had not been tried earlier because Lieutenant Kenneth Norton USN's Naval Shore Fire Control party had been put out of action by a short shell. First Lieutenant Eikner was on top of the cliffs and had set up the Battalion's command post. He had brought an old First World War signal lamp with him and thought he could get in touch with the USS SATTERLEE, which was offshore. Lieutenant Colonel Rudder told him to try. First Lieutenant Eikner recalled:

"It was tripod-mounted, a dandy piece of equipment with a telescopic sight and a tracking device to stay lined up with a ship. We set it up in the middle of the shell-hole command post and found enough dry-cell batteries to get it going. We established communications and used the signal lamp to adjust the naval gunfire. It was really a lifesaver for us at a very critical moment."

First Lieutenant Potts of the Photographic Assignment Unit recalled:

"We finally linked up with the CP and since I was a signal officer, temporarily without portfolio, I assisted as best I could in the communications section. The radios were not working, but a Lieutenant we called Ike ... his name was Eikner or something like that, he always answered when you called "Ike" ... had insisted on bringing a signal lamp with which to communicate with the navy. The lamp was equipped with a "scope" to aim it at the vessel intended to receive the message since it was rather narrow. I aimed the light."

With comms established, the USS SATTERLEE pulled close inshore and fired seven salvos. According to some of the Rangers who watched on as the Naval gunfire came in, 'they blew the top of the cliff into the sea.' That ended the trouble from the German automatic weapon at the eastern cliff position.



USS SATTERLEE (DD-626).

Despite the delayed landing, the German resistance, except for the automatic weapon on the eastern flank, had been weak and ineffective. The Ranger's training for escalate and their equipment had met the test with only two of the LCAs failing to get at least one rope over the clifftop from the mounted rockets. The hand projectors and extension ladders had proved adequate where the ropes failed, and only one assault team had found it necessary to use the ropes of another party. The three DUKWs, stopped at the water's edge by craters, could not bring their mechanically operated extension ladders into play. One attempted to do this, but the ladder rested against the cliff at a considerable angle, short of the top and unbalanced by the motion of the surf. The RASC drivers joined the Rangers in the assault and fought alongside them.

Corporal Joseph Good and Private Colin Blackmore climbed the cliff and joined the Rangers as riflemen. When ammunition was running low, they went back down the cliffs and recovered machine guns from the DUKWs, which were under fire. They then returned up the cliff and brought the machine guns into action. Private Colin Blackmore was wounded in the foot, but after receiving first aid returned to the fighting where he rescued a wounded Ranger under machine gun and mortar fire. He then volunteered to carry ammunition to the Rangers at the clifftop from the beach and repaired weapons until he was evacuated on 7 June. Corporal Good remained in action manning his machine gun with the Rangers until they were relieved by the 116th Infantry Regiment on 8 June. Private Colin Blackmore was recommended for a Distinguished Conduct Medal, the second-highest British Medal for Gallantry, but it was downgraded to a Military Medal. Corporal Joseph Good was also awarded the Military Medal.

The assaulting parties had gone up with speed, determination, and resourcefulness, ready to improvise when necessary and this was the main reason for the success. Within 30 minutes from touchdown, the attacking Rangers were on top of the cliff, all except for casualties, headquarters personnel, and some mortar men – 30 or so Rangers out of a force of 225.

As the Rangers reached the clifftop, they found themselves in a wasteland where the ground had been torn to pieces by the aerial bombardment and heavy naval shells. All expected landmarks were gone, replaced by craters and mounds of wreckage that were everywhere. The Rangers had studied these few acres on the coast of France for months, using

excellent photographs and large-scale maps that showed every slight feature of terrain and fortifications. Now, they found themselves on a landscape devoid of any trace of those features and fortifications. Obtaining cover was not a problem, maintaining liaison within their groups and between each group was almost impossible.

The Ranger's tactics emphasised movement with the greatest speed in small groups. As the first few men on a rope reached the top, they moved off immediately for their objectives without waiting for the rest of their team. They did not wait to form an organised section or platoon or attempt to link in with the neighbouring teams and, within 15 minutes of landing, they had fanned out in all directions. Yet the attack followed a definite plan. The first objective for each platoon was to a limited part of the enemy's defensive system. Every man knew what his Platoon's mission was and where to go.

The first and chief objectives were the gun emplacements and the Observation Post near the end of the Point. Company E was assigned the Observation Post and No 3 position. Company D was assigned the western gun emplacements Nos 4, 5, and 6. Company F the gun emplacements No 1 and No 2, and the machine gun position at the eastern end of the main fortified area. Once these objectives were taken, the plan had been to assemble at a phase line near the south edge of the fortified area. From here, Companies D, F, and most of E would strike inland for the coastal highway about 1,000 yards south, cross it, and establish a roadblock against enemy movement from the west. One platoon of Company E was to remain on the Point with the headquarters group and arrange for perimeter defence of the captured fortifications.

The first Rangers up the cliff met little opposition, most saw none of the enemy and were hardly aware of the small arms and machine gun fire all around them as they went about their assigned tasks. Apart from the automatic weapons position at the eastern end of the Battery location, the only other significant fighting took place at the massive and relatively unscathed concrete Observation Post on the tip of the Point.

First Lieutenant Lapres' group from LCA-861 had arrived at the top of the cliff about 20 feet from the Observation Post. Staff Sergeant Charles H Denbo and PFC Harry W Roberts crawled five feet toward a trench as small arms fire, including machine guns, erupted from the embrasure at the front. The Rangers threw four grenades at the embrasure, three of which went in. The machine gun stopped firing, but Sergeant Denbo had been wounded, hit by a rifle bullet, during this short engagement.

First Lieutenant Lapres, Sergeant Andrew J Yardley, PFC William D Bell, and Tech Sergeant Harold W Gunther joined them in the trench. Sergeant Yardley had a bazooka and fired it at the embrasure. His first round hit the edge of the slit – the second passed through into the chamber beyond. Leaving Sergeant Yardley to watch the embrasure, the remainder of First Lieutenant Lapres' men dashed around the Observation Post without drawing enemy fire. On the far side, they found Corporal Aguzzi in a shell-hole covering the main entrance from the landward side.

Corporal Aguzzi had come up from LCA-862, southeast of the Observation Post, with First Lieutenant Leagans and Sergeant Cleaves. They were joined by T5 LeRoy J Thompson and PFC Charles H Bellows Jr as they started away from the edge. They saw a German near the Observation Post, tossing grenades over the cliff from the shelter of a trench.

The Observation Post was not their objective, but First Lieutenant Leagans decided to go after the German grenadier. PFC Bellows crawled over to the No 3 gun position to provide fire support for the group who threw grenades at the German and charged into the trench. The German retreated into the Observation Post's entrance.



The embrasure at the front of the Observation post.

Corporal Aguzzi crawled into a shell hole from where he could watch the main entrance while First Lieutenant Leagans, Sergeant Cleaves, and T5 Thompson tried to skirt the Observation Post on the east and get at it from the rear. Sergeant Cleaves was wounded in this manoeuvre when he stepped on a mine, the only casualty from this cause during the day. T5 Thompson got close enough to hear a radio working inside the Observation Post, looked for the aerial on top and shot it off. After throwing a grenade through the entrance Lieutenant Leagans decided to leave the Observation Post for others to deal with using demolitions, and he and T5 Thompson continued with their original mission. Corporal Aguzzi was left behind to watch the entrance, and he was surprised a few minutes later when Lieutenant Lapres' group appeared. The two small groups of Rangers attacked the Observation Post from opposite sides, neither aware of the other's presence.

After First Lieutenant Lapres' men had moved past the Observation Post, four more Rangers from LCA-861 came up the single rope. They joined Sergeant Yardley in the trench facing the embrasure and the Germans opened fire with small arms fire again. The five Rangers talked it over. They had further missions on the other side of the Observation Post, but there were still Germans in the structure, and they could not be left free to bring fire on the Rangers still down on the beach. Sergeant Yardley and PFC Paul L Medeiros considered returning to the beach for demolitions but doubted they could get a Ranger close enough to the embrasure with the explosive. Instead, Sergeant Yardley and PFC Medeiros remained in the trench to cover the seaward side of the Observation Post while the three other Rangers moved along the trench passing the Observation Post on the west side. Near the end of the trench, small arms fire

came at them from a position on the top of the Observation Post that Sergeant Yardley and PFC Medeiros could not spot, and PFC George W Mackey was killed; the two other Rangers made it safely to the inland side.

For the rest of D-Day and through the night, Sergeant Yardley and PFC Medeiros stayed in their trench on one side of the Observation Post while Corporal Aguzzi watched the main entrance. Neither knew the other was there; throughout the night, there was no sign of the enemy within the Observation Post.

It was not until the afternoon of D+1, 7 June, that the Observation Post was finally cleared. The Rangers finally brought up some demolitions and two satchel charges of C-2 were thrown into the entrance after which, eight unwounded Germans came out with their hands up. The Rangers were never sure how many Germans had been in the post, for, like most positions in the fortified area, it was connected by underground passages to shelters and a maze of ruined trenches. Only one German soldier was found dead in the Observation Post when the Rangers finally entered.



The top of the Observation Post at Pointe-du-Hoc.

On reaching the clifftop, Company D set about taking their objectives on the western side of the battery position, gun positions Nos 4, 5, and 6. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

“And we got up there and fought our way through the Germans to the gun positions. D Company, my company, was assigned gun positions four, five, and six on the west flank. We’re the only ones assigned to missions on the west flank on Pointe du Hoc.”

First Lieutenant Kerchner, now commanding Company D sent a group of his Rangers from LCA-858 to the No 6 gun position. The remainder checked the Nos 4 and 5 gun positions and discovered that the 155mm guns were not there; they had been moved, possibly due to the air attacks during the build-up to the invasion. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

“When we got to the positions where our three guns were supposed to be, these big coastal

howitzers, they weren't there. And there were nothing but telephone poles sticking out of these immense emplacements. And, of course, we trained for this mission only from aerial photographs. We did not know whether... We later found out that those guns had been removed before D-Day to an alternate position. We went to the gun positions they were not there. We checked quickly and could not find any guns on Pointe-du-Hoc at that point."

The Company D men sent to check the No 6 gun position were badly harassed by the antiaircraft position to the west of the Point, and whenever a Ranger exposed themselves, a burst of automatic fire would fly across the shattered terrain. They were also subjected to sniping from close to the No 6 gun position and tried to work their way through the area under enemy fire.

PFC William Cruz was one of this group and he had been slightly wounded on the beach. He came up the cliff just after Lieutenant Colonel Rudder had moved his command post to the clifftop around 07:45. He and PFC Eberle were assigned to guard the command post and they went after a German sniper shooting from near the No 4 gun position. In doing so, they drew machine gun fire from the antiaircraft position and ordered to "go after it". They began sliding from one crater to another, linking up with Tech Sergeant Richard J Spleen, Tech Sergeant Clifton E Mains, and a group of eight or ten Rangers taking cover just west of the No 6 gun position. This group was already considering an attack on the antiaircraft position but was hesitating to open fire for fear of being targeted by German artillery shelling the Pointe-du-Hoc location from positions somewhere inland. After a time, they began to crawl through shell holes toward the antiaircraft position, slowed by fear of mines. A German helmet was raised in a crater ahead of them, but the Rangers with PFC Cruz saw the stick under it and did not fire. However, another Ranger just behind them fell for the trick and fired. Almost immediately, artillery and mortar shells began to fall around them. The Company D Rangers were bunched too close in a row of shell holes and took off in all directions to spread out.

PFC Cruz moved back toward No 6 emplacement and found himself alone in the maze of craters. Yelling to locate the others, he heard Sergeant Mains call "OK." After a 15-minute wait, with enemy fire diminishing, PFC Cruz began to crawl back toward the Point. Just as he reached a ruined trench near the No 6 position, he saw Sergeant Spleen and two other Rangers disappear around the corner of a connecting trench. As they did so, intense small arms fire, not only from the antiaircraft position to the west but also from German machine pistols close by, engaged them. PFC Cruz dropped to the bottom of the trench as a few of the enemy passed by without noticing him. The other Rangers were not so lucky and after a short firefight, those still alive were taken prisoner. After a considerable wait, PFC Cruz crawled back toward the command post only 200 yards away. Near the wrecked No 6 gun emplacement, he passed a pile of American weapons lying on the ground — 8 or 9 rifles, a few revolvers and Tommy guns. These, he guessed, were left there when the Rangers surrendered. On reaching the command post he reported what had happened to Lieutenant Colonel Rudder.

German resistance started to stiffen as the enemy emerged from their underground shelters and infiltrated from the outer fringes. This reduced the speed with which the Rangers were moving through the shattered area and disparate

groups began to merge to form larger more cohesive units. The Rangers of Company E and Company D began to move along the exit road towards the coastal highway.

A group of 15 Rangers under First Sergeant Robert W Lang of Company E from LCA-888 had come up the cliff and moved into the No 3 gun casemate. Finding a pile of tangled steel and smashed concrete, First Sergeant Lang led his group south. They began to be shelled by artillery fire coming in salvos of three that pushed them toward the Point with each salvo. First Sergeant Lang stopped momentarily to try and establish comms on his SRC-536 radio with the fire-support party to inform them that his men were moving out of the fortified area. Unable to get through, he started forward again. Artillery fire was falling between him and his men ahead, so First Sergeant Lang turned left into the cratered fields. Here, he picked up three stray Rangers of Company E before meeting Lieutenant Arman's group of Company F.

Meanwhile, the Company E Rangers from whom First Sergeant Lang had been separated, reached the assembly area at the start of the exit road where they met a dozen Company D men that had checked the Nos 4 and 5 gun positions. Without waiting for others to arrive, this enlarged grouping started down the exit road in single file, using a communications trench along its edge for cover. The German artillery was searching the area with speculative fire, and from the assembly area onward the Rangers began to receive machine gun fire from their right flank and small arms fire from their left front. In the next few hundred yards, they suffered serious casualties with seven of their number killed and eight wounded. Despite these losses, the total size of the force was increasing as it caught up with small advance parties who had left the Point earlier, or as latecomers tagged on to the rear of the file.

Their first objective was a group of ruined farm buildings almost halfway to the coastal highway. German snipers had been using the buildings, but they pulled out before the Rangers got there.



The group of ruined farm buildings halfway between the battery and the coastal highway.

Naval gunfire from destroyers and enemy artillery shells were falling around the farm, but the Rangers pushed onwards. The communications trench along which the Rangers had moved ended at the farm buildings and the ground beyond was open. The next cover, a communications trench that crossed the exit road, was 35 to 40 yards further south. The Rangers crossed this open ground in pairs to avoid the enemy fire and the only casualty was a Ranger who fell on a comrade's bayonet as he jumped into the trench. Beyond the communication trench was a pair of concrete pillars flanking the exit road. Here, a crude roadblock had been erected between the pillars. Three Germans, coming down the exit road toward the Point, spotted the Rangers and ducked behind the roadblock. The Rangers fired at them with a BAR but failed to flush them out. They fired a bazooka at the roadblock, but this was a dud. It did, however, serve its purpose as the three Germans fled.

The Rangers resumed their advance with First Lieutenant Lapres and four men in the lead. Some machine gun fire had been coming from the next farm but when First Lieutenant Lapres' men reached it the enemy had left. For a few minutes, First Lieutenant Lapres' men were isolated as machine gun fire from the flanks pinned down the main group of Rangers, but some friendly support fire, which the Rangers could not trace, silenced the machine guns. This was the last of the German resistance along the exit road, and First Lieutenant Lapres' small party made the final stretch to the roadblock without any trouble. As they came to it, they saw T5 Davis of Company F coming through the fields on their left, and a few minutes later Lieutenant Arman's group from LCA-887 of Company F approached the roadblock along the coastal highway from the east.

Sergeant Petty and three men from First Lieutenant Arman's Company F assault team from LCA-887 had left the cliff edge before the rest of the team had come up. They found the No 2 gun position destroyed and empty and continued south on a course about 200 yards east of the exit road. When they reached the outskirts of the fortified area, First Lieutenant Arman joined them with five more Rangers and decided to push toward the coastal highway without waiting for the rest of his platoon.

Their course led through what had been marked on their maps as a mined area, wired and dotted with posts set against air landings. The bombardment, which had churned up the ground even this far from the Point, may have detonated the mines or buried them in debris, for they gave the Rangers no trouble. First Lieutenant Arman's men could see shells hit along the exit road to their right, but, for their part, saw no enemy. Enemy mortars somewhere to the south put a few rounds in fields near them, but this was unobserved and caused no casualties. First Lieutenant Arman's dozen men worked their way forward from crater to crater in short bounds. They came to a farm lane running north-south between hedgerows, where they were joined by First Sergeant Lang and the three Company E Rangers.

First Lieutenant Arman's group followed the farm lane, while Sergeant Petty moved left across fields to scout toward the Chateau. There was no sign of the enemy on this flank and Sergeant Petty rejoined First Lieutenant Arman where the farm lane joined the coastal highway. First Lieutenant Arman's group turned west, moving along the road's edges. As they reached the cluster of houses forming the hamlet of Au Guay, a machine gun opened fire from a position about 100 yards ahead. The enemy had fired too soon, and the Rangers scattered without suffering casualties. They began to work around the south edge of the hamlet to reach the enemy gun. Sergeant Petty, with two men, was startled by the

sudden appearance of two Germans rising out of the ground, not ten feet away. Sergeant Petty dropped flat as he fired his BAR. The burst missed, but the Germans were already shouting "Kamerad." They had come out of a deep shell hole that Sergeant Petty's men had not spotted. The Rangers found no other enemy at Au Guay, and the machine gun had disappeared when they reached the west side of the hamlet. Minutes later, First Lieutenant Arman's group met First Lieutenant Lapres' Rangers who had advanced along the exit road.

It was 08:15, barely an hour since their landing, and the Rangers had reached the coastal highway.

Besides these two groups, other Rangers reached the place where the exit road and coastal highway joined. These smaller groups and individuals soon swelled the number of Rangers at the junction to around 50 and they came from all three companies to climb the cliffs. The mission now was to deny the enemy movement along the coastal highway until relieved by the 116th Infantry Regiment and the Rangers from OMAHA Beach. Their main concern was any enemy advancing from the direction of Grandcamp to the west and they made their dispositions accordingly.

Bordering the south side of the coastal highway near its junction with the exit road, was a series of narrow fields that ended in a hedgerow running east-west. This overlooked orchards that afforded some observation over the small valley of the watercourse running along the bottom of the sloping ground. They found several enemy dugouts and foxholes along the coastal highway on the north side of the hedge. The Rangers from Company E and Company F took up defensive positions along this line, for a distance of four fields, and on each side of the lane running from the coastal highway down to the watercourse. An outpost, manned by Company F, was set up further down the slope in a position from which they could watch the far side of the little valley. A German dugout near the lane was picked for a command post and this was occupied by First Lieutenants Lapres and Leagans of Company E and First Lieutenant Arman of Company F. Except for two stragglers picked up in the fields, there was no sign of the enemy in the neighbourhood.

The 20 men of Company D were given the assignment of covering the west flank toward Grandcamp. First Sergeant Lomell placed his men along both edges of the coastal highway, with an outpost at the western end of his line consisting of a BAR man and six riflemen with a grenade launcher. This outpost could cover the road and had good observation toward the valley between the Rangers and Grandcamp. The remainder were positioned to watch the fields north and south of the road. Toward the sea, the fields were believed to be mined, and this simplified the defence on that side. First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

"By 8:30 a.m., Sergeant Kuhn, my acting platoon sergeant, the 2nd Platoon of D Company, and I had been through landing and climbing the cliffs and fighting the Germans and going into position and finding the guns, we had this section of our platoon set up a roadblock on the shore road from Pointe-du-Hoc to Grandcamp and man that roadblock to keep the Germans from getting up the road or down the road to help each other or send us off or whatever they would do."

Active patrolling was started at once on all sides of the thinly held positions.

While the Rangers of Company D set about consolidating their gains, First Sergeant Leonard Lomell and Staff Sergeant Jack Kuhn began to check the area nearby. They followed a dirt track leading south from their defensive position on the coastal highway. About 200 yards along this track, they found five of the French 155mm guns and their ammunition set up in an orchard ready to fire towards UTAH Beach.



First Sergeant Leonard Lomell and Staff Sergeant Jack Kuhn sat on one of the Pointe-du-Hoc guns after D-Day.

First Sergeant Leonard Lomell of Company D recalled:

“Sergeant Kuhn and I went looking for the guns. And we just happened upon this little road that ran from the coast road along the English Channel. It ran inland, and it looked like wagon marks or something on the dirt road between these mammoth hedgerows, nine feet tall. The hedgerows in Normandy are not like here in America, where they’re three or four, maybe five feet from time to time. These were giant, tanks couldn’t get through them. Sergeant Kuhn, my platoon sergeant and I leapfrogged, that is to say, I would run up 50 feet and look over the hedgerows and see whether I could find any evidence of any guns, I’d hold that position, he’d run up and catch up, and take over the position while I ran the other 50 feet. And we kept doing this, protecting each other, never knowing if we’re going to run into a machine gun nest or something.

But, as luck would have it, within the first couple hundred feet, we came to this hedgerow and it was my turn to peer over it and examine what lay on the other side, and there were the guns. So, by 8:30 in the morning, we had destroyed those guns, so they could not be used. ...

... We were lucky. We were in the right place at the right time, and we watched over each other. Jack got up on top of the hedgerow, while I went into the position and destroyed the gun sights. There were only five of them, the other was destroyed in an earlier bombing

mission. And we saw that there were about 100 men ... this is like 8:00 in the morning. They were completely surprised, they never knew there was going to be an invasion to begin with, and certainly they believed that anybody would be foolish enough to climb hand over hand up a 100-foot rope on like a 12-story skyscraper and get in there and destroy those guns.”

First Sergeant Leonard Lomell and Staff Sergeant Jack Kuhn destroyed the firing mechanisms of the guns with thermite grenades.

The costliest part of the battle for the Rangers came after the cliff assault. Determined to hold the high ground, yet isolated from other assault forces, over the next two days, they fended off several German counterattacks mounted by Grenadier-Regiment 914, which was part of the 352nd Infanterie Division. It was not until late on the evening of 7 June that a small relief force broke through, and a larger relieving force arrived the following morning (D+2) consisting of all three battalions of the 116th Infantry Regiment.

At the end of the 2-days action, the landing force of 225 was reduced to about 90 men who could still fight.

For his part in the assault at Pointe-du-Hoc Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder 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 (Infantry) James Earl Rudder (ASN: 0-294916), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Lieutenant Colonel Rudder, commanding Force "A" of the Rangers, landed on the beach with his unit which was immediately subjected to heavy rifle, machine gun, mortar and artillery fire. Devastating fire was also directed from the cliffs overlooking the beach. Completely disregarding his own safety, Lieutenant Colonel Rudder immediately scaled the cliffs in order to better direct the attack. By his determined leadership and dauntlessness, he inspired his men so that they successfully withstood three enemy counterattacks. Though wounded again he still refused to be evacuated. Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's heroic 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 and the United States Army.”

For his part in the assault at Pointe-du-Hoc Captain Otto Masny 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)

Otto Masny (ASN: 0-1283639), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while Commanding Company F, 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Captain Masny led his company in the face of heavy enemy fire on to the beach at "H" hour on D-Day. Although wounded in this initial landing, he refused to be evacuated and remained with his company on the narrow and insecure beachhead. Captain Masny's action was an example to his men and inspired them to put down three enemy counterattacks. A few days later, still refusing to be evacuated, he voluntarily, despite continuous enemy machine gun fire, led a patrol which destroyed an enemy ammunition dump. Captain Masny'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."

For his part in the assault at Pointe-du-Hoc First Lieutenant George F Kerchner was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.



First Lieutenant Kerchner receiving his DSC from Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder in June 1944.

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 Second Lieutenant (Infantry) George F. Kerchner (ASN: 0-1309569), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with an Infantry Company of the 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. When the Company Commander and other company officers became casualties from the heavy enemy rifle fire, machine gun and artillery fire upon landing on the coast of France, Second Lieutenant Kerchner assumed command of the company in the successful assault upon and captured the 155-mm enemy gun positions. While engaged in this operation, Second Lieutenant Kerchner and fifteen members of his organization were surrounded and cut off from the main body for two and one-half days. He tenaciously and courageously held his position until relieved and was a constant inspiration to his troops. The outstanding heroism displayed by Second Lieutenant Kerchner during the initial assault and subsequent operations 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.”

For his part in the assault at Pointe-du-Hoc First Sergeant Leonard Lomell 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 First Sergeant Leonard G. Lomell (ASN: 32269677), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company D, 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. First Sergeant Lomell led a patrol of men through the heaviest kind of automatic weapons fire to destroy an enemy machine gun nest. Later, on the same day, while leading another patrol, he penetrated through the enemy lines to the rear and discovered five enemy 155-mm. guns which were shelling the beachhead. Though these guns were well-guarded, nevertheless he gallantly led his patrol against the enemy and successfully destroyed the guns as well as the ammunition supply. First Sergeant Lomell’s bold and outstanding leadership in the face of superior numbers is in keeping with the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.”

For his part in the assault at Pointe-du-Hoc First Lieutenant Theodore E Lapres Jr was awarded the 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 First Lieutenant (Infantry) Theodore E. Lapres Jr. (ASN: 0-1307833), United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving

with the 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, V Corps, in action on the coast of France on 6 June 1944.”

Look Forward

In Part Sixteen of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I look at the actions of the 5th Ranger Battalion and the other three companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion that landed at OMAHA Beach.

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