



USS TEXAS firing on OMAHA Beach at Vierville-sur-Mer on D-Day.

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)

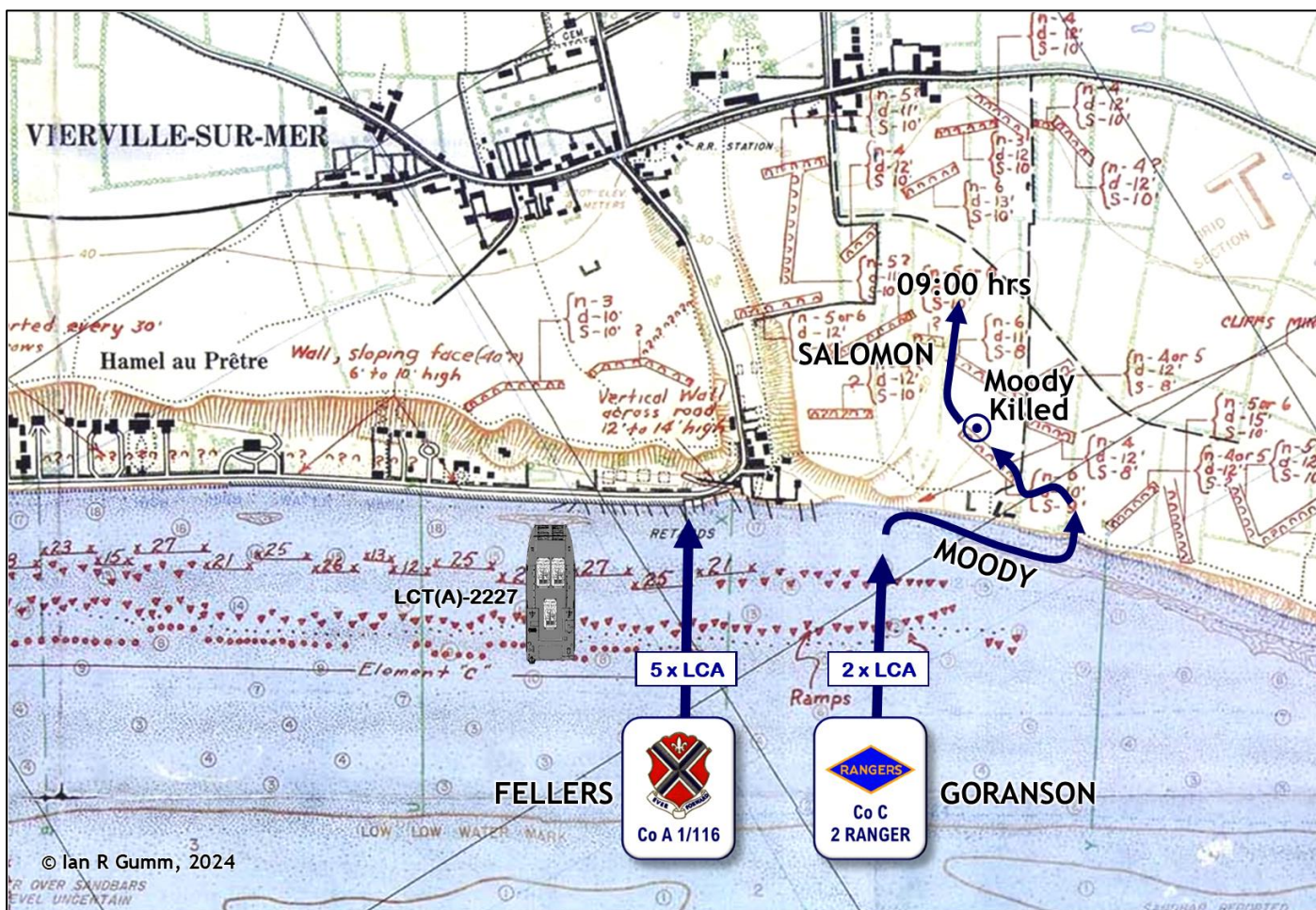
PART SEVENTEEN – COMPANY A 116 IR AND COMPANY C 2 RANGER

Major General Leonard T Gerow's V Corps carried out the seaborne invasion at OMAHA Beach and it assaulted with two Divisions. To the west was Major General Charles H Gerhardt's 29th Infantry Division [29 ID] and to the east was Major General Clarence R Huebner's 1st Infantry Division [1 ID]. The objectives for Major General Gerow's V Corps were very ambitious; the 1 ID and the 29 ID, supported by the 5th Ranger Battalion [5 Ranger], were to capture the three coastal villages of Vierville-sur-Mer, Colleville-sur-Mer and Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer. They were then to push inland to cut the Bayeux to Isigny-sur-Mer road before advancing westwards to link up with the 2nd Ranger Battalion [2 Ranger] at Pointe-du-Hoc. They were also to push further to the west to link up with the US VII Corps that landed at UTAH Beach and eastwards to link up with the British coming ashore at GOLD Beach. The principal objective of V Corps on D-Day was to secure the line between the Vire River and Port-en-Bessin to facilitate a push south towards Saint-Lô.



Major General Gerhardt's 29 ID came ashore at the western end of OMAHA Beach with Colonel Charles D W Canham's 116th Infantry Regiment [116 IR] as its first wave. At the eastern end of OMAHA Beach, Major General Clarence R Huebner's 1st Infantry Division [1 ID] landed with Colonel George A Taylor's 16th Infantry Regiment [16 IR] as its first wave. This was the 29 ID's first seaborne assault, and they were untried and untested, having not seen any previous action. On the other hand, this was the 1 ID's third amphibious assault of the war, having already taken part in the Allied landings in Africa and Sicily. Also coming ashore in the first wave at the western end of OMAHA Beach was Captain Ralph E Goranson's Company C 2 Ranger [C/2 Ranger], which had a separate mission.

The landings at OMAHA Beach are too big to tell in a single article and I have split the story into suitable chunks. In this second chunk, I concentrate on the actions of Company A 116 IR [A/116] and C/2 Ranger at the extreme western end of OMAHA Beach near the coastal hamlet of Vierville-sur-Mer.



The assault at the extreme western end of OMAHA Beach near the coastal hamlet of Vierville-sur-Mer on D-Day, 6 June 1944. [© Ian R Gumm, 2024]

The American soldiers who landed in the first wave at the western end of OMAHA Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944 were conveyed ashore in eight British Landing Craft Assault [LCA]; six from the Royal Navy's 551st Assault Flotilla from the LSI(L) HMS EMPIRE JAVALIN and two from the Royal Navy's 501st Assault Flotilla from LSI(S) HMS PRINCE CHARLES.



LSI(L) HMS EMPIRE JAVELIN.

The eight LCAs were under the command of Lieutenant George (Jimmy) Green RNVR who recalled:

*“I was the leader of the first wave, and it was my task to land A Company of 116th Infantry Regiment at Vierville sur Mer at 05:30 on 5 June. We were referred to in the flotilla as 'The Suicide Wave', something that we felt with pride represented the danger we faced rather than the prospect of casualties. We had trained day and night, including fog. Many of the men in 551 Flotilla had taken part in earlier landings in the Mediterranean. Like so many men on D-Day, we felt we simply had a job to do and that we were ready for it — ready for the war to end and ready to get on with it. When troops were aboard the JAVELIN, it was very cramped and the bar was closed, so we were ready to get the troops off the ship too.*

*I had six craft of 551 Flotilla under my command plus two LCAs from HMS PRINCE CHARLES carrying two platoons of C Company 2nd US Rangers. They were to come to the JAVELIN and tag on to my right column then come into line abreast on my signal so that we all landed at the same time 05:30 on 5 June.*

...

*The JAVELIN sailed from Portland harbour on the evening of the 4 June 1944 in the teeth of a gale. A few hours later we were recalled to Portland harbour as the invasion had been postponed for 24 hours. H Hour was amended to 06:30.”*



The LCA was a small landing craft 12.5 meters long, 10.1 meters wide, and weighed 15,000 kilograms. It was the British equivalent of the American LCVP, Higgins Boat, and could carry up to 35 soldiers depending upon their mission and equipment.



LCA-1377 carrying American troops during preparations for the Normandy invasion. [USA C-1087]

Lieutenant Jimmy Green described the LCA as:

*“The LCA had a crew of four — a coxswain, two seamen and a stoker in the engine room responding to a telegraph and voice pipe operated by the coxswain. The LCA had two petrol engines fuelled by 100 per cent octane, which it gobbled up rapidly giving a comparatively short range. It was also not designed to go round for a long time in circles and I was made aware of the discontent of the crews, particularly the stokers who had bells constantly ringing in their ears as coxswains tried to maintain station.”*

### Captain Taylor Fellers’ Company A 116 IR at Vierville-sur-Mer

Captain Taylor Fellers’ A/116 was the descendant unit of the old Virginia National Guard regiment that had been raised in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Bedford, Virginia. It had a proud and distinguished lineage dating back to Thomas Jackson and his Stonewall Brigade in the American Civil War. The National Guardsmen had been mobilised into active duty on 3 February 1941 and by June 1944 only 35 of the Bedford men mobilised remained with the company. However, most of the company’s key commanders including Captain Fellers, the XO Lieutenant Ray Nance and its First Sergeant John Wilkes were all Bedford men.

A/116 had been conveyed across the English Channel in the British Troop Transport SS EMPIRE JAVELIN.

In the early hours of 6 June 1944, A/116 climbed aboard the six LCA of the Royal Navy's 551 Assault Flotilla. Lieutenant Jimmy Green RNVR recalled:

*“Captain Taylor Fellers and 31 of his men were waiting at the davits opposite LCA-910 and were soon taken on board to be launched in the pitch dark into unfriendly sea. The lowering into the water was a bit of a nightmare as the heavy block and tackle was moving around and had to be secured against one’s body before the hook could be released from the ring of the LCA. The aft hook had to be released first while the LCA maintained position until the forward hook (my responsibility) could be released. My coxswain was Leading Seaman Martin of Newfoundland (How I blessed those Cabots from Bristol for discovering a land which produced such an excellent seaman). Instead of my normal sternsheetsman (the sailor at the back) I had been given at the last-minute Signaller Webb to work a brand-new signal set — also given to me at the last minute. Webb was delighted to be given the opportunity to see action instead of manning the signal station in the JAVELIN. As LCA-910 was being unhooked we were hit in the stern by LCA-911, and the stoker told the coxswain through his voice pipe that we were taking in water in the engine room. I had to clamber through the troops to the engine room only entered through the stoke hole on the after deck. After a discussion with the stoker and Webb we thought we could keep afloat if Webb, sitting at the open stoke hold, used a hand pump at its maximum.”*

At around 04:00, A/116 began the run into DOG GREEN Beach and their appointment with destiny.



Smoke rising from the end of the D-1 Vierville Draw on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

A/116 sustained very heavy casualties even before they reached the beach. During the run-in, LCA-911 foundered and sank about 1,000 yards out. All but one of the men survived and would be picked up by Lieutenant Green's LCA and taken back to the EMPIRE JAVELIN on their return from the beach. PFC Jim Padley, the radio operator, was the American soldier who drowned being dragged under by his heavy equipment.

Lieutenant Jimmy Green RNVR recalled:

*"It was approaching the time to form a line abreast and make our dash for the shore. I turned round to see how the other craft were coping. I was just in time to see the bow of LCA-911 dipping into the sea and disappearing below the waves. I believe 911 had been damaged during the collision with 910, whilst lowering the boats from the JAVELIN. All the crew and soldiers had life jackets, and I could only hope they would keep everyone afloat until I returned. It goes against the grain for a sailor to leave his comrades in the sea, but LCA-910 had no room, and our orders were explicit that we were to leave survivors in the sea to be picked up later. It was essential to land on time."*

As the LCAs got to within about 7-800 yards of the beach the Germans opened fire with their artillery and mortars. Shells began falling amongst A/116's LCAs and as they reached within 50 yards of the sand, one of the LCAs was struck by an artillery shell killing two men and the remainder quickly jumped into the water.

As the four remaining LCAs touched down on the beach a crewman kicked open the door and dropped the bow ramp into the surf. Captain Fellers and his National Guardsmen disembarked, emerged from the water and flopped down in the prone position on the beach as the LCAs backed off to return to the EMPIRE JAVELIN. They had landed on time at 06:30, almost exactly where Captain Fellers had wanted to be, and all they had to do now was cross the 300 yards or so of beach between them and the Vierville Draw. So far, the enemy's only response had been some inaccurate mortar fire. Lieutenant Jimmy Green RNVR recalled:

*"Now we were alone, at the right beach at the right time. Taylor Fellers wanted to be landed to the right of the pass and the other 3 boats in the port column just to the left of the pass. We went flat out and crunched to a halt some 20 or 30 yards from the shoreline. The beach was so flat that we couldn't go any further, so the troops had to go in single file up to their waists in water and wade to the shore through tidal runnels. Taylor Fellers was gone as soon as the ramp was lowered before I could wish him luck, followed by the middle file, then the port file and the starboard file as practised and in good order. They all made the beach safely and formed a firing line at a slight rise. At this time there was a lull in the German firing. They had been plopping mortar shells around us and firing an anti-tank gun but suddenly they ceased fire. A German veteran told me recently that they had been ordered to preserve ammunition. They had been ordered to wait until they had a clear target within range."*

Before Company A reached the sand the ground should have been cratered by shells and bombs, but the men had landed on an unblemished beach devoid of any signs of the preparatory bombardment. The first man off LCA-910 was Captain Taylor Fellows quickly followed by the remaining 31 National Guardsmen. They made it to a small rise in the sand where they dropped flat and formed a firing line. After quickly taking stock, Captain Fellows rose and began to lead his men forward. As the men of A/116 started across the beach, the waiting Germans on the bluffs on either side of the Vierville Draw opened fire. Company A was met by withering enemy machine gun fire - it was carnage.



Captain Taylor N Fellows.

The After-Action Report of Company A, prepared from an interview with seven survivors of the Company, best describes what happened. It reads:

*“When the company was still 5000 yards out, the men saw the barrage from the rocket boats striking the water about 1000 yards to their right front. They saw nothing hit on their beach or anywhere near it. “A” came on in 6 assault boats. As they drew to within 700-800 yards of the beach, arty and mortar fire began to fall among the boats. There had already been loss; one boat foundered 1000 yards out from shipping too much water; one man had drowned, and the others had been picked up by naval craft. At first, the enemy shell fire was ineffective but as the first boats drew to within 50 yards of the sand, one was struck by an arty shell and two men were mortally hit, the others taking to the water.*

*The men recognized that they were coming straight into the designated landing point. They were at the sides looking toward the enemy shore. What they saw was an absolutely unblemished beach, unpacked by arty or bomb fire and wholly barren of shingle or any other cover. The first ramps were dropped at 0636 in water that was waist-deep to over a man’s head. As if this had been the signal for which the enemy waited, the ramps were instantly enveloped in a crossing of automatic fire which was accurate and in a great*

volume. It came at the boats from both ends of the beach. "A" had planned to move in three files from each boat, centre file going first, then flank files peeling off to right and left. The first men tried it. They crumpled as they sprang from the ship, forward into the water. Then order was lost. It seemed to the men then that the only way to get ashore with a chance for safety was to dive head-first into the water. (Pvt Howard L. Grosser) A few had jumped off, trying to follow the SOP, and had gone down in water over their heads. They were around the boat now, struggling with their equipment and trying to keep afloat. In one of the boats, a third of the men had become engaged in this struggle to save themselves from a quick drowning. (Pfc Gilbert G. Murdock) That many were lost before they had a chance to face the enemy. Some of them were hit in the water and wounded. Some drowned then. Others, wounded, dragged themselves ashore and upon finding the sands, lay quiet and gave themselves shots, only to be caught and drowned within a few minutes by the on-racing tide. (Murdock) But some men moved safely through the bullet fire to the sands, then found that they could not hold there; they went back into the water and used it as cover of underwater obstacles. Many were shot while so doing. Those who survived kept moving shoreward with the tide and in this way finally made their landing. (Murdock and Pfc Leo J. Nash) They were still in this tide-borne movement when "B" came in behind them. (Pvt Grosser) Others who had gotten into the sands and had burrowed in, remained in their holes until the tide caught up to them, then they, too, joined the men in the water. (Grosser)

Within 7-10 minutes after the ramps had dropped, "A" had become inert, leaderless and almost incapable of action. The company was entirely bereft of officers. Lieutenant Edward N. Garing was back where the first boat had foundered. All of the others were dead, except Lieutenant Elijah Nance who had been hit in the heel as he left the boat, and then in the body as he reached the sands. Lieutenant Edward Tidrick was hit in the throat as he jumped from the ramp into the water. He went onto the sands and flopped down 15 feet from Private Leo J. Nash (Pfc). He raised up to give Nash an order. Nash saw him bleeding from the throat and heard his words: "Advance with the wire cutters!" It was futile. Nash had no wire cutters, and in giving the order, Tidrick had made himself a target for just and instant, and Nash saw MG bullets cleave him from head to pelvis. German machine gunners along the cliff directly ahead were now firing straight down into the party. Captain Taylor N. Fellers and Lieutenant Benjamin R. Kearfott had come in with 30 men from "A" aboard LCA 1015, but what happened to that boat team in detail will never be known. Every man was killed; most of the bodies were found along the beach.

In those first 5-10 confused minutes when the men were fighting the water, dropping their arms and even their helmets to save themselves from drowning, and learning by what they saw that their landing had deteriorated into a struggle for personal survival, every



*sergeant was either killed or wounded. It seemed to the others that enemy snipers had spotted their leaders and had directed their fire so as to exterminate them. A medical boat team came in on the right of Tidrick's boat. The Germans machine-gunned every man in the section. (Nash) Their bodies floated with the tide. By this time the leader-less infantrymen had foregone any attempt to get forward against the enemy and where men moved at all, their efforts were directed toward trying to save any of their comrades they could reach. The men in the water pushed wounded men ahead of them so as to get them ashore. (Grosser and Murdock) Those who had reached the sands crawled back and forth into the water, pulling men to the land to save them from drowning, in many cases, only to have them shot out of their hands or to be hit themselves while in these exertions. The weight of the infantry equipment handicapped all this rescue work. If left unhelped, the wounded drowned because of it. The able-bodied who pulled them in stripped themselves of equipment so that they could move more freely in the water, then cut away the assault jackets and the equipment of the wounded and dropped them in the water. (Grosser, Murdock and Cpl Edward M. Gurry.) Within 20 minutes of striking the beach, "A" had ceased to be an assault company and had become a forlorn little rescue party bent on survival and the saving of lives. Orders were no longer being given by anyone; each man who remained sound moved or not as he saw fit. The leading hand in the rescue work, by the account of all survivors, was a first-aid man, T/5 Tom Breedin.*

*It is estimated by the men that one-third of "A" remained by the time "B" hit the beach. One hour and 40 minutes after the landing, six men from the boat which had landed on the far-right flank (Boat No 23) and six men from "A" had worked up to the edge of the cliff. They saw no others from the company who had advanced as far. (Nash) Two of the men, Pvts Shefer and Lovejoy joined a group from the Second Rangers, who were assaulting over the cliff to the right of "A" and fought with them through the day. Otherwise, "A"'s contribution to the attack appears to have been a cypher. The few survivors stayed at the cliff bottom during the afternoon and joined the Battalion that night."*

Of the 155 National Guardsmen of A/116 IR that had come ashore as part of the first wave onto OMAHA Beach approximately 100 were killed and virtually all the rest were wounded. Those few that survived the maelstrom retreated into the surf and took shelter behind the tanks landed by Ensign Victor Hicken's LCT(A)-2227.

The 116th Infantry Regiment suffered 341 casualties on D-Day, including the soldiers from Bedford-based Company A, a community which proportionally had the highest D-Day losses in America. The National D-Day Memorial was erected in Bedford, Virginia to honour that loss.

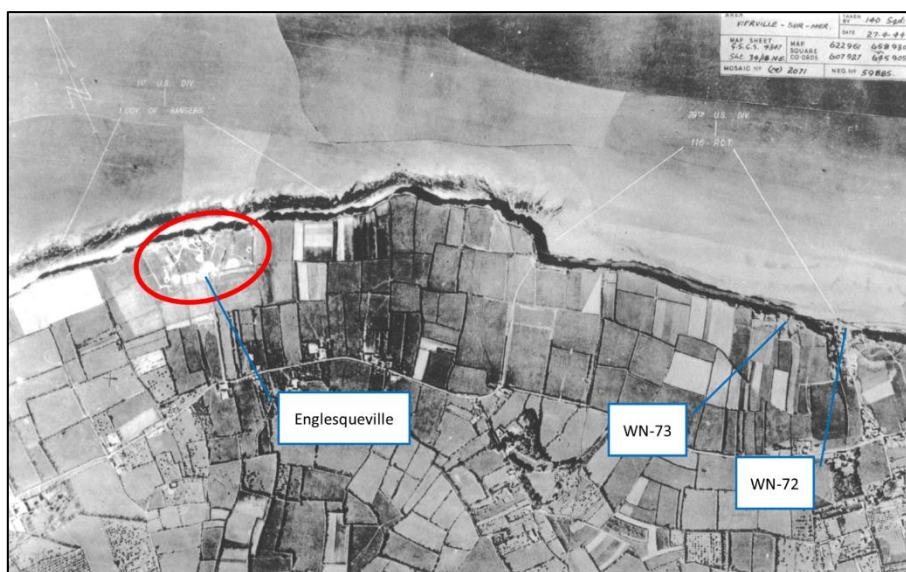
## Captain Ralph E Goranson's Company C, 2 Ranger



Captain Ralph E Goranson, Officer Commanding Company C, 2 Ranger.

Captain Ralph E Goranson's Company C 2 Ranger formed Force B of the 2 Ranger's assault and had a separate mission from the rest of the battalion. They were conveyed to CHARLIE Sector of OMAHA Beach in LCA-418 and LCA-1038 of Lieutenant R D Turnbull RNVR's 501st Assault Flotilla from the LSI(S) HMS PRINCE CHARLES. Company C was to land at CHARLIE Sector on OMAHA Beach, west of DOG GREEN, at 06:30 coming ashore alongside A/116 IR, and Company B of the 743rd Tank Battalion [743 TB]. Captain Goranson had two alternate plans:

Plan A – Follow Company A 116 IR in their attack on Vierville-sur-Mer, pass through the village to attack a German strongpoint at Point et Raz de la Percée, destroy the radar station at Englesqueville two miles from DOG GREEN, and then head west along the coast and join Lieutenant Colonel Rudder's Rangers that had assaulted Pointe-du-Hoc.



The Widerstandsneester locations and the Englesqueville radar station. [© Ian r Gumm, 2024]

Plan B – The alternate plan to be followed, if the passing of Captain Goranson’s Company C through Vierville was unviable. This plan called for Company C to climb the cliffs at CHARLIE Sector, assault the Point et Raz de la Percée strongpoint, and destroy the radar station 2 miles from CHARLIE Sector, after which they would join Lieutenant Colonel Rudder’s Force A on Pointe-du-Hoc.



CHARLIE Sector of OMAHA Beach. [A6722 OBL-152]

At 03:30 on 6 June 1944, the 70 men of Captain Goranson’s Company C boarded two British LCAs of Lieutenant Turnbull RNVR’s 501st Assault Flotilla from the LSI(S) HMS PRINCE CHARLES, LCA-418 and LCA-1038.

They rendezvoused with A/116 which had boarded their LCVPs from HMS EMPIRE JAVELIN and headed towards OMAHA Beach. Captain Goranson recalled:

*“We were over the side at 03:30 hours. Prior to that, we attended Church services. Men talked quietly among themselves. Because of their training, they were ready, and a good bit of their time was spent checking equipment, thinking of home and what it might be like on the beach. We had a last-minute review of two plans of action in my company, an original and an alternate. Each man knew everything because if all the officers and non-comes were casualties, a private had to be ready to lead the company and fulfil its missions.”*



LCA-418 carried Captain Goranson and First Lieutenant William D Moody's Platoon and LCA-1038 carried First Lieutenant Sydney Salomon's Platoon. The rough seas caused many of Captain Goranson's Rangers to become seasick during the ten miles to the beach.

Coming ashore immediately behind Company A 116 IR, Captain Goranson's Company C touched down on OMAHA Beach around 06:45. Both of their LCAs were raked by machine gun fire and subjected to shelling from the enemy's mortars and artillery as they lowered their ramps.

As it approached the beach, LCA-418 was raked by machine gun fire and artillery. It touched down on the far right of the line. LCA-1038 touched down to the left of LCA-418. The Royal Navy crews had done their job well and delivered Company C on time and in the correct place. Captain Ralph Goranson recalled:

*"I was fortunate to have, in my humble pride, the best damn group of Rangers in the 2nd Battalion. I also felt that the Royal Navy and its landing craft were the very best. They beached us on time in the best place — exactly per our instructions. And they paid dearly for it."*

By the time Ralph Goranson exited LCA-418, its ramp had been blown off. Lieutenant Moody's Platoon exited the LCA as fast as they could and dashed across the beach towards the comparative safety at the foot of the cliffs; they lost 12 men. Shortly after discharging its cargo of Rangers, LCA-418 was completely wrecked by more artillery rounds. Captain Ralph Goranson recalled:

*"I told the men to get from the water's edge under the overhang of the cliffs as fast as they could because that's where safety will be ... Right after we landed, we took at least three or four rounds of 88s. The first was wide, but number two took the landing ramp off. Number three hit in the rear, and number four amidships."*

First Lieutenant Sydney Salomon was the first man off LCA-1038. Staff Sergeant Oliver Reed followed as First Lieutenant Salmon hit the waist-deep water. As he jumped left, Staff Sergeant Reed was hit falling and started to slide under the ramp. First Lieutenant Salomon, seeing Staff Sergeant Reed disappearing under the ramp, grabbed his collar and dragged him clear. First Lieutenant Salmon's Platoon lost 15 men.

On reaching the beach, a German mortar round burst just behind First Lieutenant Salomon knocking him off his feet. With the puff of bullets in the sand all around him, First Lieutenant Salomon gathered himself, got to his feet, and ran as fast as he could across the beach to the comparative safety of the shingle at the base of the cliffs. First Lieutenant Sydney Salomon recalled:

*"After going a short distance, a mortar shell landed behind me, killing or wounding my mortar section, the concussion knocking me forward and on the ground. I thought that I was dead. ... Just then sand was kicked in my face; I assumed that an enemy machine*

*gunner was getting me in range and decided that I had better move. I got up and ran to the base of the cliff.”*

The Rangers of Company C found it hard to run in their waterlogged uniforms and weighed down by their equipment across the soft sand of OMAHA Beach. PFC Nelson Noyes recalled:

*“We went out onto the beach and the Germans had us zeroed in. We waded in about a foot of water. ... All of us ran across the beach as fast as we could. I ran about 100 feet before hitting the ground when we ran into enemy crossfire from the right and in front.”*

Staff Sergeant Marvin Lutz recalled:

*“Going across the beach was like a horrible nightmare, so many of my buddies were killed or wounded.”*

Within a short space of time, C/2 Ranger had sustained almost 50% casualties. Many fell under the withering machine gun and rifle fire of the German soldiers on the clifftop. Among them was First Sergeant Henry S Golas. Seeing men cringing under the fire, he paused at the water’s edge to help and encourage them. He shouted, *“Get your asses off this beach!”* and led the men forward. In his book *“Rudder’s Rangers”*, Ronald Lane wrote:

*“Golas was still at the water’s edge when suddenly he was hit by machine gun bullets. He raised his rifle and started charging across the sand, determined and in pain. The German machine gunner continued to fire, hitting Golas with every step he took. He fell to his knees, tried to raise his rifle but couldn’t, and then fell forward as though with his last breath he wanted to continue the charge.”*

But even sheltering at the base of the cliff the Rangers were still not safe, Captain Goranson recalled:

*“After we had crossed the beach, we lay flat under the cliff overhangs and I heard this voice hollering, “Captain, mashed potatoes, mashed potatoes.” It was Mike Gargas, the messenger from the second platoon, warning me that there was a potato masher grenade between my legs. I managed to creep ahead enough so when it went off, it did not hurt me. The name “mashed potatoes” stuck with Mike the rest of the war.”*

Unable to establish comms with A/116, and deciding Plan A was not feasible, Captain Goranson implemented his contingency plan, Plan B. Lieutenant Moody, Staff Sergeant Richard Garrett, Sergeant Julius W Belcher and PFC Otto K Stephens pushed 350 yards westwards along the beach, passing below WN-73, to a narrow cut in the cliff face below the Gambier farmhouse. Using his bayonet to gain successive holds, PFC Stephens began to climb. First Lieutenant Moody, Sergeant Garrett and Sergeant Belcher followed; bringing four sections of toggle rope with them that they anchored on the clifftop so the rest of Company C could follow.



Looking westward from WN-72. The ruins of the farmhouse and WN-73 are above the white sign to the left.

Whilst First Lieutenant Moody's small team made their climb, T5 Robert Lambert dug the shrapnel from First Lieutenant Salomon's back. Corporal Randolph Rinker made repeated trips back onto the beach to bring in and treat wounded under the cliff overhangs. With his wounds dressed, First Lieutenant Salomon moved along the base of the cliffs and climbed up the narrow cut. Reaching the top, he found just nine of his Platoon were still fit to fight.

Once on the cliff top, the men of C/2 Ranger set up a defensive position. While this happened, First Lieutenant Moody, Staff Sergeant Garrett, Sergeant Charles Flanagan, PFC Brownie Bolin, PFC Thorpe T Cooper, PFC Stanley Moak, and PFC Stephens began clearing the enemy from the fortified Gambier farmhouse. As they approached the farmhouse, First Lieutenant Moody was shot and killed by an enemy sniper.

With First Lieutenant Moody dead, First Lieutenant Salmon took command of the remnants of both platoons. Within minutes of Captain Goranson giving the order to scale the cliff, most of those from C/2 Ranger still fit to fight were on the cliff top, and no other unit had a better claim to be the first to get off the beach.

Captain Goranson's men spent many hours clearing the fortified Gambier farmhouse and the nearby WN-73 overlooking the Vierville Draw in the ensuing fighting. Although not part of their mission, clearing the enemy from the farmhouse and trenches of WN-73 on the cliff top was necessary and reduced the German firepower that could be brought to bear on OMAHA Beach at the Vierville-sur-Mer exit.

With the Gambier farmhouse and WN-73 cleared Captain Goranson's Company C could continue westward along the cliff top to clear the enemy radar station at StP 74a on the Point et Raz de la Percée. On reaching Englesqueville, Captain Goranson's Rangers found that the preinvasion bombing and Naval gunfire had destroyed the radar station.





The ruined Gambier farmhouse and trenches of WN-73.

By the end of the day Company C, which had landed 70 men, had suffered 23 killed and all but a dozen of them were seriously wounded. Captain Goranson recalled:

*“Out of a total of 70 men, 23 were killed and all but a dozen of the remaining were not wounded seriously.”*

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 in the vicinity of Vierville-sur-Mer Captain Ralph Einer Goranson 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) Ralph E. Goranson (ASN: 0-1299035), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer of Company C, 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 and 7 June 1944, at Vierville-sur-Mer, France. Captain Goranson landed with his Ranger company at "H" hour on D-Day with the initial assault wave in the invasion of France, in the face of heavy automatic enfilading fire from three different directions and mortar and artillery fire from cliffs overlooking the beach. In spite of extremely heavy casualties, Captain Goranson calmly and courageously reorganized his company and led them in a successful assault upon the enemy positions. He then led his company in an*

*advance to force a junction with the main body of the assault. Though it took ten hours of the heaviest kind of fighting to reach the main body, his men, inspired by his outstanding leadership, continuously advanced until the mission was accomplished. Captain Goranson's heroic 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 actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 in the vicinity of Vierville-sur-Mer Lieutenant William Moody was posthumously 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 pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to First Lieutenant (Infantry) William D. Moody (ASN: 0-1300357), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 2d Ranger Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. On D-Day, First Lieutenant Moody led his platoon, in the face of heavy and intense enemy fire, across the beach to the comparative safety of the cliffs overlooking the beach. He then climbed the cliffs and secured ropes to the top for the ascent of the remainder of his platoon. Without waiting for his men to reach the top, First Lieutenant Moody valiantly moved to attack and clear the enemy out of his trenches in this vicinity. He was advancing upon an enemy position when he was killed by a sniper. The extraordinary heroism and courageous leadership displayed by First Lieutenant Moody were an inspiration to the men of his platoon and exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States, reflecting great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army."*

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 in the vicinity of Vierville-sur-Mer PFC Otto K Stephens 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 pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to PFC Otto K. Stephens, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company C, 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 and 7 June 1944, in France. PFC Stephens' 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 actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 in the vicinity of Vierville-sur-Mer Sergeant Julius W Belcher 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 Sergeant Julius W. Belcher (ASN: 33213927), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company C, 2d Ranger Infantry Battalion, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Vierville-Sur-Mer, France. Upon landing with the initial assault Ranger Battalion on the coast of France, Sergeant Belcher immediately moved up the beach under heavy machine gun, mortar and sniper fire, and scaled a 100-foot cliff to secure toggle ropes to barbed wire on top of the cliff. Though under constant fire on top of the cliff he remained at his position and cleaned out six snipers. Following this he charged an enemy pillbox and mortar position and destroyed it with grenades. Sergeant Belcher'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 and the United States Army.”*

## Look Forward

In Part Eighteen of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I look at the actions of Lieutenant Colonel Max Schindler's 5 Ranger at OMAHA Beach on D-Day.

Published by In The Footsteps®

In The Footsteps Tours Limited, 5 Abbotts Close, Greytree, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 7GQ

Website: [www.inthefootsteps.com](http://www.inthefootsteps.com) | email: [info@inthefootsteps.com](mailto:info@inthefootsteps.com)

If you are interested in a tour following in the footsteps of The Allied 21st Army Group on D-Day, please visit <https://www.inthefootsteps.com/d-day-tour.html>.

If you are interested in a tour following in the footsteps of an individual, or indeed any specific Allied formation or unit, that took part in the Battle of Normandy that followed, please contact us via our Tailor-made Tours page, <https://www.inthefootsteps.com/tailor-made-tour-service.html>, telling us where you want to go, when, for how long, and the standard of hotel you would like, and we will put together a proposal for your consideration.

© Ian R Gumm, 2024