



Troops in an LCVP landing craft approaching Omaha Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944. [NARA SC-320901]

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 TWENTY – THE LANDING OF THE 16TH INFANTRY REGIMENT ON D-DAY

The landings at OMAHA Beach are too big to tell in a single article and I have split the story into suitable chunks. I covered the actions of the 116th Infantry Regiment [116 IR] and the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions in the preceding articles. In this Fifth chunk, I concentrate on the actions of Colonel George A Taylor's 16th Infantry Regiment [16 IR] of the 1st Infantry Division [1 ID] that came ashore at the eastern end of OMAHA Beach. It should be remembered that the D-Day landings were a combined arms battle of not only infantry and tanks, but also the US Navy and Royal Navy getting the infantrymen and tanks onto the beach, the Air Forces securing the sky over the beach, and the engineers

clearing the beach. It was conducted in a series of waves and while this article concentrates on the initial waves, its success was due as much to those of the subsequent waves.

The shoreline on which the 1 ID landed differed from that on which the 29th Infantry Division [29 ID] came ashore. The latter was a paved and promenaded holiday beach whilst towards the eastern end of OMAHA Beach, where the 16 IR would touch down, there were fewer signs of human habitation. There was no man-made seawall, and the rocky shingle defined the line between the beach and the bluffs that lay beyond.

Colonel Taylor's plan was simple: Four Infantry Companies, totalling 750 men, would be landed on the beach from 24 landing craft. Twelve of the landing craft would come from APA-45, the USS HENRICO, and 12 would be drawn from the British troopship HMT EMPIRE ANVIL. The tanks of Lieutenant Colonel Robert N Skaggs' 741st Tank Battalion [741 TB] were to be landed from Landing Craft Tank [LCT] to support the infantry.



Colonel George A Taylor.

The American Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel [LCVP] from the USS HENRICO would carry Company E and Company F of Lieutenant Colonel Herbert C Hicks Jr's 2nd Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment [2/16], and the British Landing Craft Assault [LCA] from HMT EMPRESS ANVIL would convey Company I and Company L of Lieutenant Colonel Charles T Homer Jr's 3rd Battalion 16th Infantry Regiment [3/16] ashore as the 1 ID's leading wave. The remaining companies of 2/16 and 3/16 would follow them in subsequent waves onto the beach.

The 741 TB's Company B and Company C had Duplex Drive [DD] swimming tanks. The plan was to launch four DD-tanks from each of the eight LCT(6) approximately 6,000 yards from the beach. Company A was to land directly on the beach from variants of the LCT(5), each LCT conveying two Deepwater Fording tanks and one Dozer tank. The two Deepwater Fording tanks were raised on ramps at the front of the LCT to provide fire support on the way in.

Unlike the 743rd Tank Battalion [743 TB] that supported the 29 ID, the 741 TB's DD tanks of Captain James G Thorton Jr's Company B and Captain Charles R Young's Company C launched at sea as intended. The 741 TB's After-Action Report records:

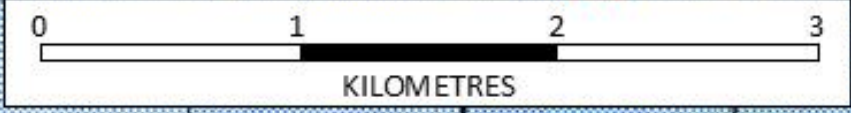
“At approximately H -60 on D-Day the LCF bearing the DD tanks of companies B and C were in position of Beach OMAHA at a distance of approximately 6,000 yards from the beach. Company B was commanded by Capt. JAMES G. THORNTON, JR., Company C was commanded by Capt. CHARLES R. YOUNG. Capt. Thornton succeeded in contacting Capt. Young by radio and the two commanders discussed the advisability of launching the DD tanks in the heavy sea. Accordingly, orders were issued for the launching of the tanks at approximately H -50.”¹



Launching a duplex drive (DD) tank from an LCT during training.

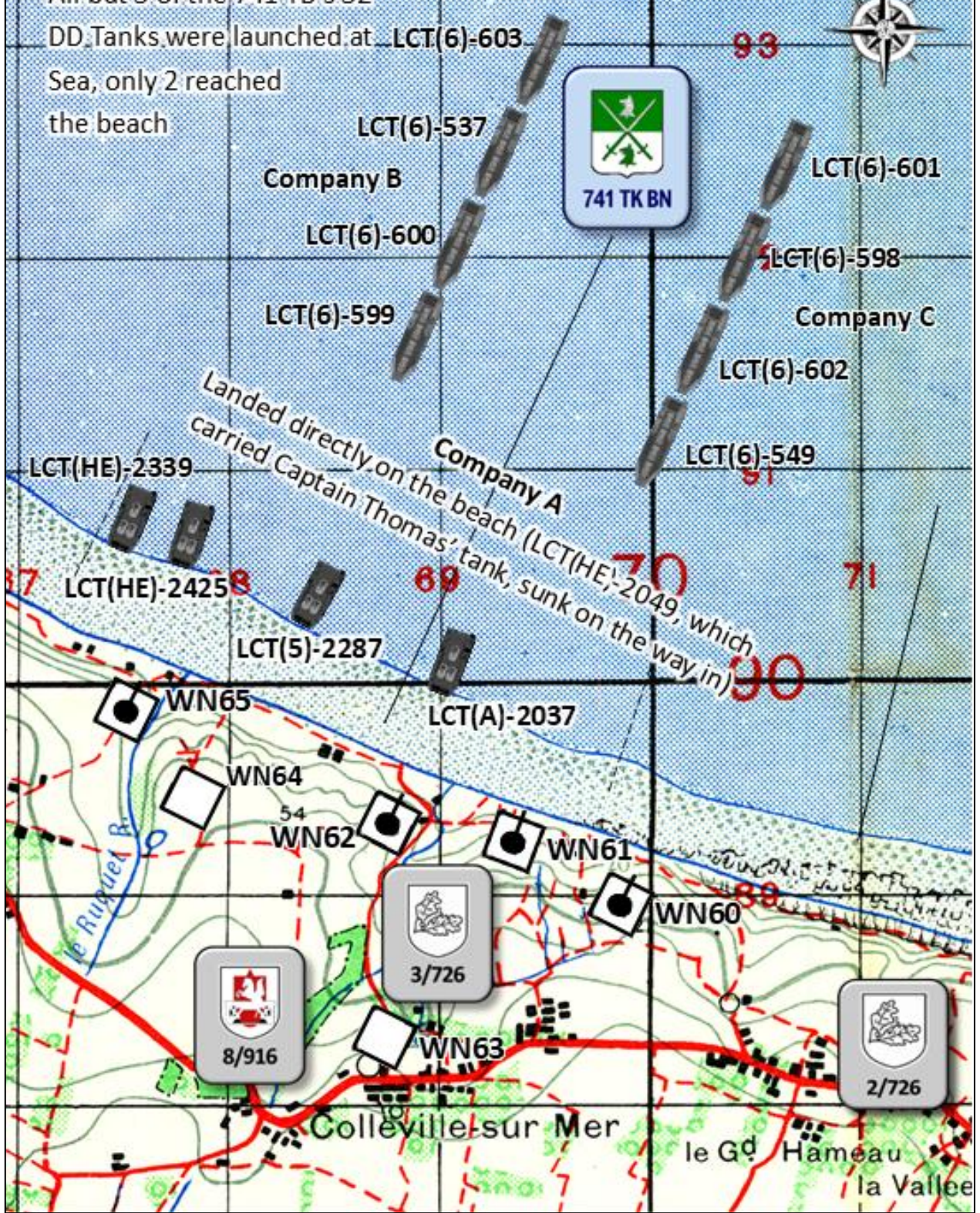
Several of the LCTs were not in their assigned position when the order to launch was given and the DD tanks exited their LCTs without visual contact having been established between the Company Commanders and their Platoon Leaders. Ensign Henry Sullivan's LCT(6)-600 carried the tanks of Second Lieutenant P O'Shaughnessy's Platoon and when the first tank was launched it sank almost immediately. Staff Sergeant Paul Ragan of Company B 741 TB, who was aboard LCT(6)-600, recalled:

“I saw the yellow flags go up, which meant to start launching. The ramp went down, and the first tank went off. I watched it clear the ramp and turned my head to start giving instructions to the other ones and at that time there was a big explosion near our craft, and all the tanks were pushed against each other and tore the screens. ... [I saw] that the only tank that went off the LCT had sunk. The water was very rough. I went to the skipper and said that we must pick the men up. ... We picked them up, and I also noticed a lot of others who were in life rafts, but we had to go on to the beach to drive our tanks off; this we did.”



Company B and C

All but 3 of the 741 TB's 32 DD Tanks were launched at LCT(6)-603 Sea, only 2 reached the beach



The 741 TB landing at the eastern end of OMAHA Beach. [© Ian R Gumm, 2025]

The first tank leaving LCT(6)-600 damaged the ramp when it was launched and recognising that launching the three remaining DD Tanks at sea was untenable, Ensign Sullivan decided to take them in and deposit them directly on the beach.

The seven other LCTs carrying the DD tanks of 741 TB launched their tanks as ordered. Most sank in the rough sea. On some, the struts holding up their canvas screen broke. Several suffered from torn canvasses and others had their engines swamped by seawater. All 16 of Captain Young's Company C tanks sank and eleven of Captain Thorton's Company B tanks also went under before reaching the beach. Just two of the Company B tanks launched at sea made it ashore under their own steam. Most tank crews escaped from their floundering tanks and were rescued by passing craft. Out of the 32 DD tanks of the 741 TB intended to support the 16 IR, just five made it ashore. On reaching the shoreline, these five tanks began engaging the entrenched enemy.

Captain Cecil D Thomas' Company A landed astride the boundary between EASY RED and FOX GREEN at H-hour. LCT(HE)-2049, which carried Captain Thomas' command tank, was sunk by a mine on the way in and only eight of their Deepwater Fording tanks and four Dozer tanks were landed directly on the beach.

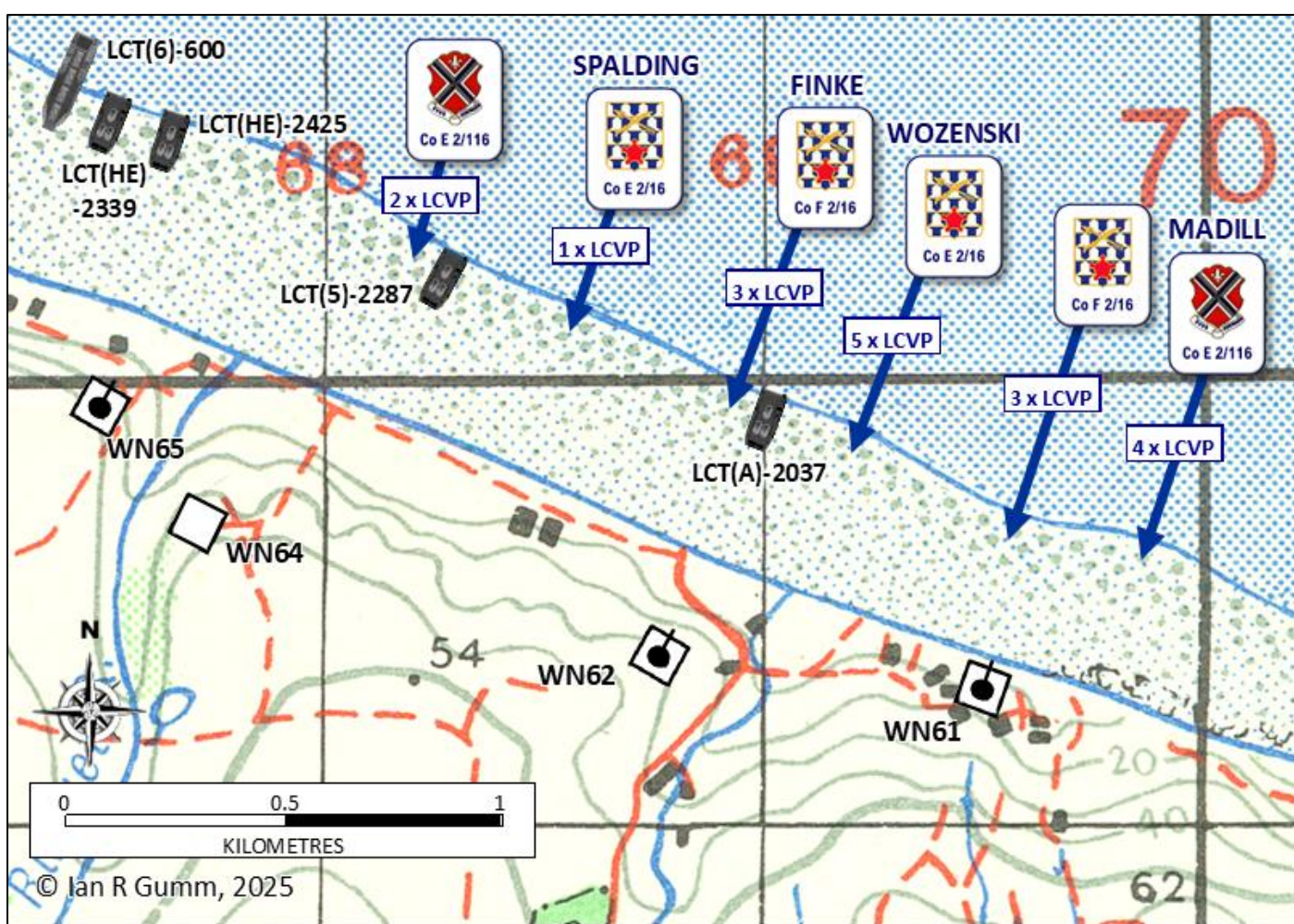


Tanks of Company A 741 TB on board an LCT(A)5 in early June 1944. [USA C-724]

Of the 56 Sherman tanks intended to support the 16 IR, just 17 arrived at the eastern end of OMAHA Beach at the beginning of the assault.

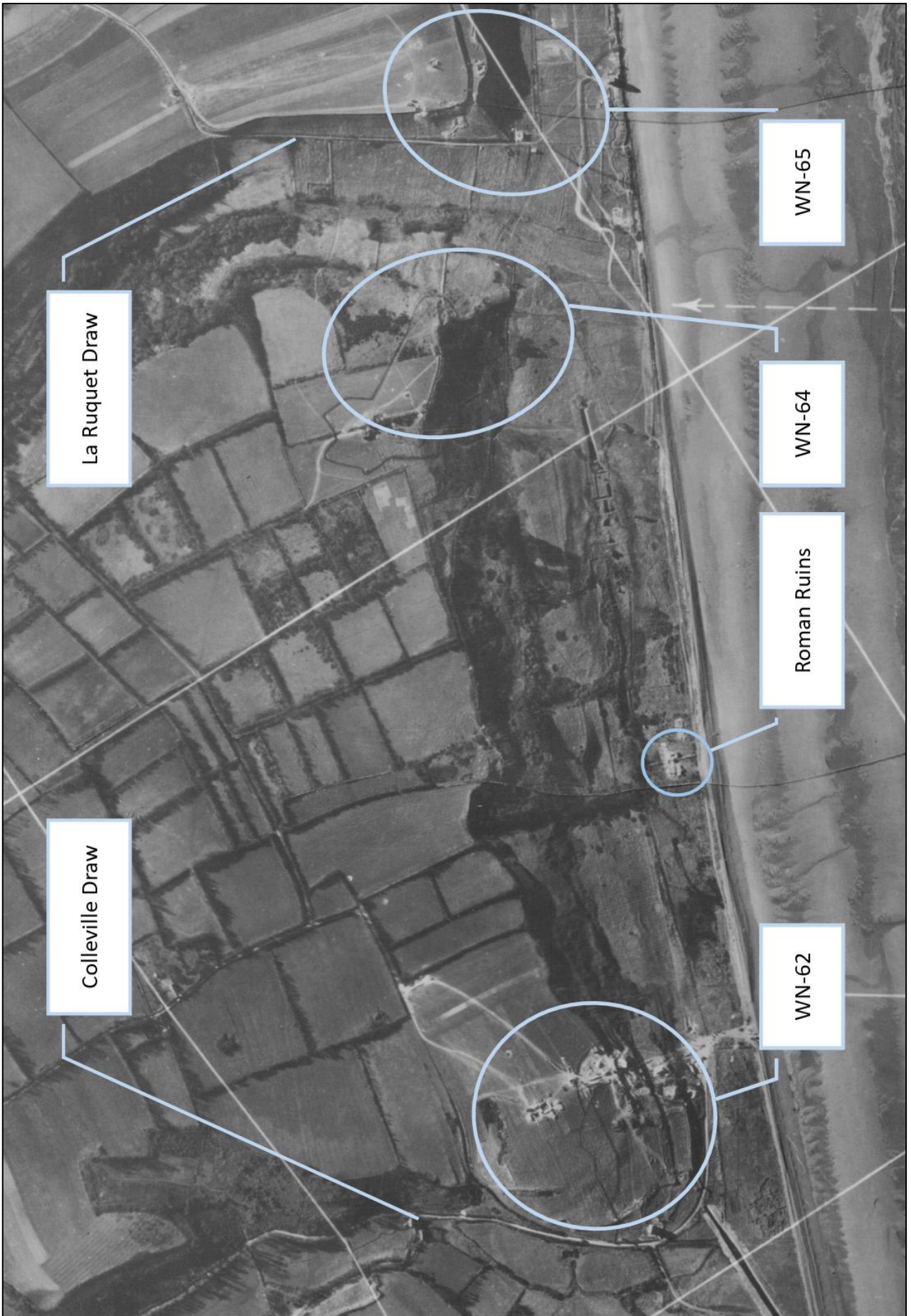
By the time the LCAs and LCVPs carrying the leading wave of the 16 IR began approaching the beach, the strong current swept them eastwards and, with their view obscured by the onshore grass fires and smoke, many of the naval coxswains failed to compensate sufficiently. The 1 ID's leading wave touched down just after 06:30 in scattered clumps rather than evenly spread along the landing zone's length.

The LCVPs from USS HENRICO carrying the men of Captain Edward F Wozenski's Company E and Captain John Finke's Company F 2/16 touched down on the beach shortly after 06:30, along with the LCVPs carrying the men of Captain Lawrence A Madill's Company E of the 2nd Battalion 116th Infantry Regiment [2/116] that had gotten mixed in with them. Two LCVPs of 2/116 were on the right closest to the E-1 La Ruquet draw; To their left was a solitary LCVP of E 2/16 carrying Second Lieutenant John M Spalding's 1st Section that had become detached from the rest of E 2/16; To Second Lieutenant Spalding's left were three LCVPs carrying Captain Finke and half of F 2/16 which touched down in front of WN-62 and the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw; To their left was the rest of Captain Wozenski's E 2/16 that landed between WN-62 and WN-61; Left of them was the second half of F 2/16 coming ashore in front of WN-61; and to their immediate left was Captain Madill and the remainder of E 2/116 that touched down in the 3rd Battalion's sector. When they hit the beach, the LCAs conveying Company I and Company L of Lieutenant Colonel Homer's 3/16 were still plying their way through the heavy sea.



The landing of 2/16 just after 06:30 at OMAHA Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944. [© Ian R Gumm, 2025]

The German machine gunners on the bluffs overlooking the beach had a field day. The bunched-up, narrow pockets of landing craft meant they could concentrate their fire rather than having to traverse over a wide area. A hail of lead met the assaulting American soldiers as they exited their landing craft and stepped onto OMAHA Beach. All was confusion between the E-1 La Ruquet and E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draws. Alongside the infantrymen were three Sherman tanks from Company A 741 TB that were landed directly on the beach by LCT(5)-2287 at 06:30.



The area between the E-1 La Ruquet and E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draws. [© Ian R Gumm, 2025]

The three tanks were: Sergeant Robert Coaker's tank A13 of the 3rd Platoon's 1st Section; Sergeant Lloyd Ball's tank A3 of the 1st Platoon's 2nd Section; and First Lieutenant Frank A Klotz's Tank Dozer. The exit ramp of LCT(5)-2287 was too narrow for two tanks to exit at the same time and Sergeant Coaker's tank disembarked first and turned right, followed by Sergeant Ball's tank which turned left. These two Shermans engaged the enemy at the E-1 La Ruquet draw, firing around ten rounds on the first pillbox before putting its gun out of action.



A DD tank and two Deepwater Forging tanks of 741 TB on OMAHA Beach.

About 50 yards from where it disembarked, Sergeant Coaker's tank A13 was hit by an anti-tank gun that knocked out one of its bogie wheels. This disabled the Sherman, though the tank could still move very slowly.

Sergeant Ball's tank A8 continued to move by bounds to the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw which he entered. The enemy fired a mortar at this tank but Sergeant Ball could not locate it to return fire and thus proceeded to move up E-3 toward Colleville-sur-Mer followed by Sergeant Shepard's DD tank from Company B which was soon knocked out by an anti-tank gun. Sergeant Ball located a 57mm gun which he destroyed, before realising that he could not make it up the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw and thus turned around and headed back towards the E-1 La Ruquet draw. As his tank crossed the beach once more, it was swamped in the surf and Sergeant Ball and his crew abandoned the tank under mortar fire.

The LCVP carrying Second Lieutenant Spalding's 1st Section from E 2/16 had become detached from the remainder of the Company on the way in. It touched down on OMAHA Beach to the right (west) of WN-62 approximately halfway between the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer and E-1 La Ruquet draws close to a solitary house nicknamed "Roman Ruins" at the bluff's base. Second Lieutenant John Spalding recalled:

"About 06:30 we hit the line of departure, someone gave the signal, and we swung into line. When we got about 200 yards offshore the boat halted, and a member of the Navy

crew yelled for us to drop the ramp. Staff Sergeant Fred A Bisco and I kicked the ramp down. Shortly before this, a Navy man had mounted the machine gun on the rear of the LCVP and had started to return fire. We were now not only receiving MG fire but also mortar and some artillery fire.

We had come in at low tide and the obstacles were noticeable. They stuck out of the water, and we could see tell-mines on many of them. No path had been cleared through them, so we followed a zigzag course in. It is difficult to know if the navy could have taken the boats in further. It is possible that they would have stuck on the sand bars. I am in no position to know whether they could have done any better.

Because we were carrying so much equipment and because I was afraid, we were being landed in deep water, I told the men not to jump out until I had tested the water. I jumped out of the boat slightly to the left of the ramp into the water about waist deep. It was about 06:45. Then the men began to follow me. We headed ashore and the small-arms fire became noticeable. We saw other boats to our left, but nothing to our right. We were the right line of the 1st Division. We had seen some tanks coming in, but didn't know what they were.”²

Second Lieutenant Spalding and his 32 men had landed in a less heavily defended part of the beach, a lucky break he and his senior NCO, Technical Sergeant Philip Streczyk, were quick to exploit.



Second Lieutenant John M Spalding Sr.



Technical Sergeant Philip Streczyk.

Like their comrades, they dashed across the 200 yards or so of beach under enemy rifle fire. 12 of their men became casualties as they raced across the sand. Second Lieutenant John Spalding recalled:

“By this time, I noticed a number of my men on the beach, all standing up and moving across the sand. They were too waterlogged to run, but they went as fast as they could.

It looked as if they were walking in the face of a real strong wind. We moved on across the shale to a house, which was straight inland.”³

Sergeant Clarence J Colson’s section of E 2/16’s weapons platoon was attached to Second Lieutenant Spalding’s 1st Section for the D-Day assault, and in the same LCVP. He swam in from the LCVP under the heavy enemy machine gun fire. Despite the intense enemy fire, Sergeant Colson moved about his section from one man to another encouraging and aiding them shoreward. Sergeant Colson recalled:

“The assault boat hit a sandbar and dumped us. “Well, let’s get out.” We had these belts on and you’re in the water clear up to your neck trying to get in. One of my gunners from the mortar section, said, “I can’t make it.” And I said, “Dump the gun!” I said, “Come on! Get in alive! Come on!” So he dumped it. Guys couldn’t make it with the load, you know, that’s quite a load to carry.

So, we got into shore, get everybody spread out as far as we could. You don’t bunch up you want to get them spread out. ‘Course they were firing, but there was one pillbox way over and there was nothing coming from that.”⁴

Reaching shore, Sergeant Colson and Private Richard Sims, one of his gunners, crossed the fire-swept beach to the Roman Ruins. Sergeant Colson recalled:

“There was a minefield in front of us where we landed, but there was an old house with a stone wall. Sims was one of my main gunners. He was a good man. We got behind this wall, two of us got there. A lot of them laying back there was wounded, and we pulled some of them up behind the wall.

This Phelps [indicating the section roster] got wounded on the beach. We pulled him up behind that wall.”⁵

Sergeant Colson scanned the area for a way forward and saw a pillbox and wires strung across the marsh. Realising that the area was mined, he looked for a route through the minefield. There was a path that looked clear of wire and he decided that would have to do. Sergeant Colson recalled:

“But then there was a path. When I looked and seen that path...there was this pillbox way over here wasn’t manned. They didn’t have nobody manning that pillbox. Enemy fire was all coming from this way. So, when I seen that path and all these wires, I knew there’s minefields there.

I told Sims. We got a BAR from a guy that was wounded. ... And we got a few magazines. I brought the extra magazines, and we got some bandoliers of ammunition that we carried. And I said, “I’ll head for the hill.” Quite a steep hill. So, I went up the path.

There was no wires across the path, that's what I was looking for, and running as fast as I could run. 'Course I was young then, I could move pretty good. And when I got over there then I motioned him to come. And Sims came up. And he had some more bandoliers. So we got top of the hill, and that's where all the trenches were. And here this one guy was, running back and forth in that trench and I hollered at him and he threw a potato masher, a German hand grenade. I ducked down, put my hands up, my head down. It didn't go off right quick and I kind of glanced and I see he hadn't unscrewed the back and pulled the string. So, I nailed him.”⁶

While Sergeant Colson was crossing the minefield, Second Lieutenant Spalding tried to talk to Captain Wozenski on his radio but found it had been damaged when he was crossing the beach. He and Technical Sergeant Streczyk decided the best way off the beach would be over the bluffs rather than along one of the draws. Taking Private First Class [PFC] Richard J Gallagher with him, Technical Sergeant Streczyk began to look for a route through the marsh. Second Lieutenant Spalding recalled:

“I tried to get E Co with my 536 radio. I took the 536 off my shoulder, worked the antenna out as I walked across and tried to get contact, but it didn't work. I looked down and saw the mouthpiece was shot away. ... When we got up to the rubble by the demolished house we were built up as skirmishers and we were returning what fire we could. Streczyk and PFC Richard J Gallagher went forward to investigate the minefield. They decided that we couldn't cross it.”⁷

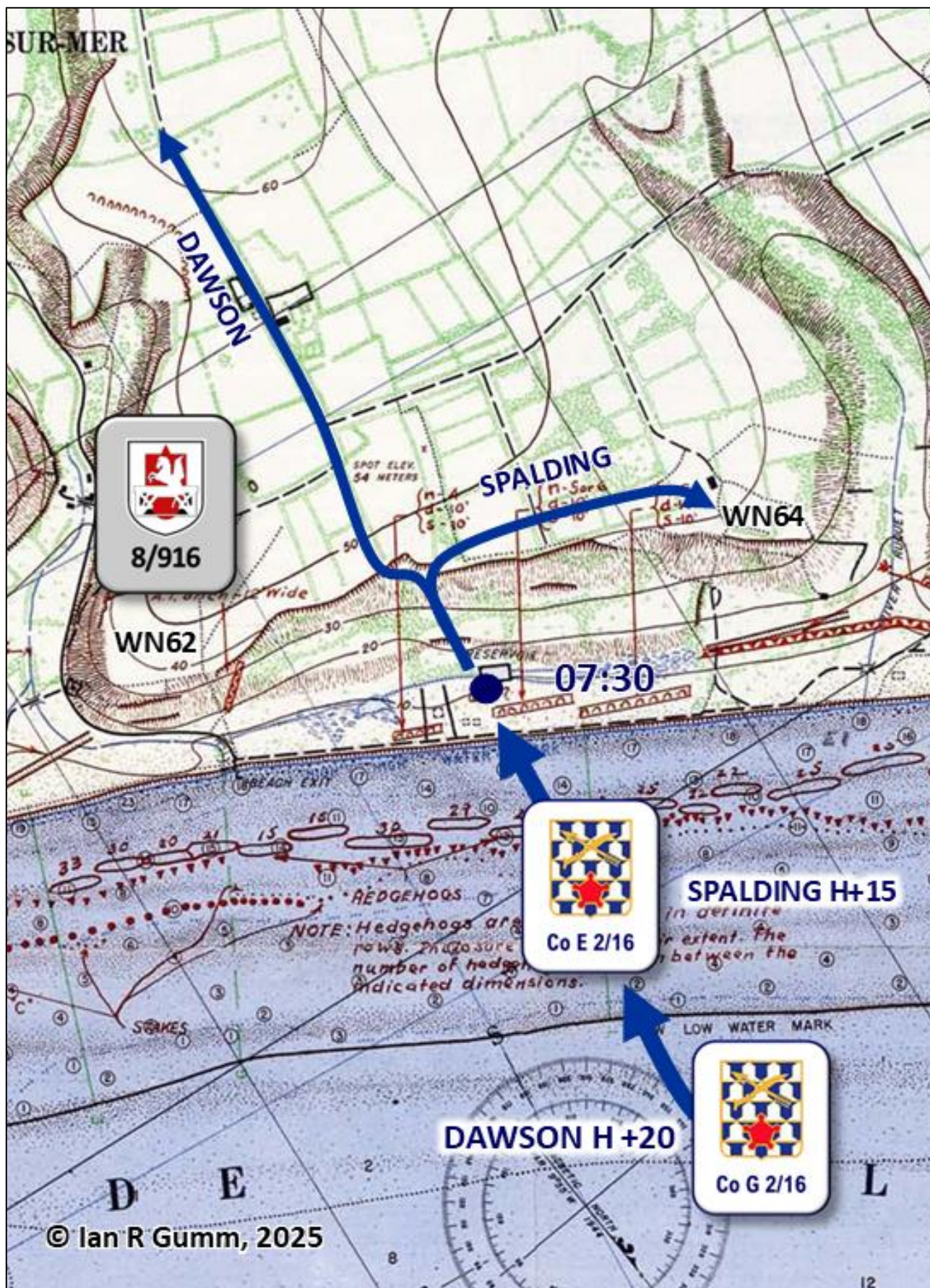
The nearest machine gun emplacement was firing at Second Lieutenant Spalding's men and holding them up. Seeing this, Sergeant Colson and Private Sims set up the BAR and started firing upon the enemy position. Sergeant Colson recalled:

“But the one that was holding the company up, the pillbox, down there. I could shoot right down the back end. The pillbox had a door that goes downstairs, then you have your gunner slots, see. So, I got the BAR. It had a tripod on it and I got it set right up and started spraying that back door. I told Sims, I says, “Just as soon as I kick that magazine out, put another one in.” There was 20 rounds, I think, in those magazines. So, we shot about three or four of them. Maybe more, maybe less. I know it was more than three. We shot quite a few rounds.

All of sudden a white flag came out and we quit firing, and they came out. I motioned for them to come on up and they came up. I don't know how more many was dead in there or anything.”⁸

Technical Sergeant Streczyk and PFC Gallagher crossed the minefield under heavy enemy fire. Positioned on the slope above them was an enemy machine gun nest that was pinning their section down. PFC Gallagher, undeterred by the

intense enemy fire, attacked the machine gun nest throwing grenades and firing his rifle.



The routes taken by Second Lieutenant Spalding's 1st Section of Company E 2/16 and Captain Dawson's Company G 2/16. [© Ian R Gumm, 2025]

Having dealt with the machine gun, he returned to Technical Sergeant Streczyk, and together they returned to Second Lieutenant Spalding's position and informed him of the situation.

Probing forward once more, Technical Sergeant Streczyk and PFC Gallagher began looking for another way up the bluffs. After several minutes, PFC Gallagher returned to Second Lieutenant Spalding to report that they had found a route along a defile in the ravine. Following behind PFC Gallagher, Second Lieutenant Spalding led his 1st section forward. Second Lieutenant Spalding recalled:

“On the left, we had by-passed a pillbox, from which MG fire was coming and mowing down F Co people a few hundred yards to our left. There was nothing we could do to help them. We could still see no one on the right and there was no one up to us on the left. We didn't know what had become of the rest of E Co. Back in the water boats were in flames. I saw a tank ashore about 07:30 – 07:45. After a couple of looks back we decided we wouldn't look back anymore.

About this time Gallagher said to follow him up the defilade, which was about 400 yards to the right of the pillbox.”⁹

As they ascended the ravine, the machine guns continued to fire intermittently, but less accurately because of the ravine's undulations that offered Second Lieutenant Spalding's men a degree of cover. The machine gun fire seemed to be coming from a trench near a strong point that guarded the western edge of the EASY RED sector, the unfinished WN-64. Sergeant Hubert Blades fired a bazooka at the machine gun but missed. In doing so, he took a bullet through his left arm just above the wrist. PFC Raymond Curley and Sergeant Joseph Slaydon were also both hit. Sergeant Grant Phelps, who had picked up PFC Virgil Tilley's Browning Automatic Rifle [BAR] on the beach, was wounded in both legs as he got into a position to fire at the machine gun. When Sergeant Phelps fired, Second Lieutenant Spalding's men charged. As they surged forward, the loan machine gunner threw up his hands and yelled “Kamerad!” in surrender. He was Polish and Technical Sergeant Streczyk, who spoke Polish fluently, questioned him about the whereabouts of other German soldiers nearby. He learnt that sixteen of the enemy were currently manning WN-64 overlooking the E-1 La Ruquet draw about 700 yards to their right.

Just after 07:00, twenty minutes or so after Second Lieutenant Spalding's men had come ashore, Captain Joseph T Dawson's Company G 2/16 touched down in the same area. They too came under heavy small-arms fire as they dashed across the open beach. Company G sustained 63 casualties from mortar, machine gun and enemy rifle fire as they crossed the open stretch of sand. Despite these casualties, however, they were relatively intact and made their way inland along roughly the same route as Second Lieutenant Spalding's 1st Section. Captain Dawson personally cleared an enemy machine gun nest during their advance up the bluffs where he briefly met Second Lieutenant Spalding. Second Lieutenant Spalding recalled:

“At this point, Lt. Blue of G Co came up and contacted me. He had come up our trail. His company had landed in the second wave behind us. Just a few minutes later Capt.

Dawson of G Company came along. We still saw no one on the right. Capt. Dawson asked if I knew where E Co was, and I told him that I didn't know. He said that E Co was 500 yards to my right, but he was thinking in terms of where they were supposed to land; they were actually 500-800 yards to our left. I later found out that they had lost 121 men. Dawson said that he was going into Colleville and told us to go in to the right. He had about two sections. Said he had just seen the battalion commander. This was about 08:00.”¹⁰

The two officers discussed the situation and agreed that Captain Dawson and his men would make for Colleville-sur-Mer, while Second Lieutenant Spalding would turn west and head toward WN-64, the strong point overlooking the E-1 La Roquet draw. Both officers knew that the gains they had already made were tenuous and vulnerable to counterattack; especially as most of their comrades coming ashore were still pinned down on the beach. They parted and the two groups resumed their separate advances. Second Lieutenant Spalding's 1st Section advanced in the direction of Saint Laurent-sur-Mer; he recalled:

“I went over and talked to Lt. Blue about the information we had gotten from the prisoner. I asked him to give us some support where the 16 Germans were supposed to be. As we went up in this direction we hit a wooded area. We found a beautifully camouflaged trench which ran along in zigzag fashion, but we were afraid to go in. We went along the top of the trench spraying it with lead. We used bullets instead of grenades since we had very few grenades and thought that the bullets would be more effective. We did not fix bayonets at any time during the attack. We turned to the right and hit a wooded area; got no fire from there, so we yelled to Lt. Blue to shove off and he started for Colleville. There I stood like a damn fool waving him a fond farewell. We were headed for St. Laurent; G Company went on to Colleville-sur-Mer. H Co came up next under Lt. Shelley.”¹¹

Second Lieutenant Spalding's 1st Section was on top of the bluff by 09:00. They were probably the first of the 16 IR units to reach the top and were now down to about 20 in strength. As they began pushing inland, they heard rifle and machine gun fire off to their right. Second Lieutenant Spalding recalled:

“Streczyk and Gallagher volunteered to check on the situation. Our men were spread out over an area 200-300 yards. They located a machine gunner with a rifleman on either side of him. Streczyk shot the gunner in the back and the riflemen surrendered. The two prisoners were German and refused to give us any information. With them in tow, we continued to the west. We still saw no one to the west. We were now in hedgerows and orchard country. We were watching our flanks and to the front and scouring the wooded area. We tended to send a sergeant with 3-4 men to check up on suspicious areas. We usually set up someone with an automatic weapon to cover them, we did not have any MGs at this time, however. We crossed through two minefields — one had a path through

it, which looked like it had been made for a long time. When we got through it, we saw the Achtung Minen sign. No one was lost; we still had an angel on each shoulder.” ¹²

Once through the minefield, they found a construction shack near WN-64. Second Lieutenant Spalding recalled:

“We were about to go on when I spied a piece of stove pipe about 70 yards away sticking out of the ground. I formed my section into a semi-circular defensive position. We were now getting small arms fire again. Sgt. Streczyk and I went forward to investigate. We discovered an underground dugout. There was an 81mm mortar, a position for a 75 and construction for a pillbox. All this overlooked the E-1 draw. The dugout was of cement, had radios, excellent sleeping facilities, dogs. We started to drop a grenade in the ventilator, but Streczyk said, “Hold on a minute” and fired three shots down the steps into the dugout. He then yelled in Polish and German for them to come out. Four men, disarmed, came up. They brought 2-3 wounded. I yelled for Colson to bring 5-6 men. We began to get small arms fire from the right. I yelled for Piasecki and Sakowski to move forward to the edge of the draw. A firefight took place. The navy now began to place time fire in the draw; this was about 10:00. Piasecki deployed 6-7 men; shot several Germans and chased a number down into the draw where they were taken care of by navy fire.”

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With the concrete dugout secure, Second Lieutenant Spalding’s 1st Section began moving along the communication trenches, he recalled:

“When Colson came over, I started down the line of communications trenches. The trenches led to the cliff over the beach. We were now behind the Germans, so we routed 4 out of a hole and got 13 in the trenches. The trenches had teller mines, hundreds of grenades, and numerous machine guns. They were firing when we came up. We turned the prisoners over to Streczyk. We had a short fight with the 13 men; they threw three grenades at us, but they didn’t hit anyone. We found one dead man in the trenches, but don’t know if we killed him. If we did, he was the only German we killed. Several of us went to check the trenches. I did a fool thing. After losing my carbine in the water I had picked up a German rifle, but found I didn’t know how to use it too well. When I started to check on the trenches I traded the German rifle to a soldier for a carbine and failed to check it. In a minute I ran into a Kraut and pulled the trigger, but the safety was on. I reached for the safety catch and hit the clip release, so my clip hit the ground. I ran about 50 yards in nothing flat. Fortunately, Sgt. Peterson had me covered and the German put up his hands. That business of not checking guns is certainly not habit-forming.” ¹⁴

Near the edge of the draw was an anti-tank position. It was here that Second Lieutenant Spalding headed next. He recalled:

*“We next took out an AT gun near the edge of the draw. There was little resistance. We now had the prisoners back near the dugout. We had split the section into three units. We got a little ineffective machine gun fire from the draw to the right at this time. We tried to use the 81mm mortar, but no one could operate the German weapon. For the first time, I saw people across the draw to the right. I supposed that they were from the 116th. They seemed to be pinned down.”*¹⁵

With the anti-tank gun position captured, Second Lieutenant Spalding’s 1st Section began the task of ensuring their gains were secure. While doing this, two stragglers, probably from the 116 IR, came up and Second Lieutenant Spalding absorbed them into his band of men. He sent the German prisoners they had taken back towards the beach, under the guard of two men, along the route they had come up the bluff. Second Lieutenant Spalding told them to hand over the prisoners to anyone who would take them and ask about the situation regarding Company E 16 IR.

First Lieutenant Robert A Huch of Company E came up to their position and informed Second Lieutenant Spalding that an enemy sniper was nearby and Second Lieutenant Spalding pointed out the minefield. The timed naval gunfire was getting close, so Second Lieutenant Spalding used the yellow smoke grenade he was carrying to communicate his location was occupied by Americans.

At about 10:45 Captain Wozenski reached the top of the bluff and came into Second Lieutenant Spalding’s position. He informed Lieutenant Huch and Second Lieutenant Spalding that their mission had changed; there were to be no patrols into Trévières that afternoon, instead, they were to combine their forces and head to Colleville-sur-Mer to report to Major William Washington, the 2/16’s Executive Officer. Lieutenant James McGourty had also come with Captain Wozenski, the other three section leaders of Company E had been killed on the beach.

Lieutenant Huch then took charge of the combined group of about 30 men, and they set off towards Colleville. They met Major Washington and the remnants of the 2/16 near Colleville. Second Lieutenant Spalding, Technical Sergeant Streczyk and their men continued the fight to the south of Colleville and later at the crossroads west of the town. It was due to their superb small-unit leadership that they were able to accomplish so much with so few men. Both Second Lieutenant Spalding and Technical Sergeant Streczyk were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for their actions on D-Day, and this was presented by General Dwight D Eisenhower on 2 July 1944.

Second Lieutenant John M Spalding Sr’s citation reads:

“The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to John M. Spalding (ASN: O-1317433), Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, near Colleville-sur-Mer in France. Upon reaching the beach in the initial landing on the coast of France, Second Lieutenant Spalding, completely disregarding his own personal safety, led his men up the beach to

the slight cover of a shale shelf. Having suffered numerous casualties, he hesitated only long enough to reorganize his unit. He then led his men over an embankment, through barbed wire and across a thickly sown minefield. Second Lieutenant Spalding led his men in the attack on a series of enemy strongpoints and successfully destroyed them. Constantly ignoring heavy enemy fire, he at all times continued in the advance and personally destroyed an anti-tank gun which had been firing on beach targets with deadly effect. The personal bravery and superior leadership demonstrated by Second Lieutenant Spalding exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”

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Technical Sergeant Philip Streczyk's 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 Phillip Streczyk (ASN: 32182713), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944 near Colleville-sur-Mer, France. In the face of vicious enemy fire, Sergeant Philip Streczyk led his section across the beach. He cut through the enemy wire, led his platoon through a minefield and up a steep hill overlooking the beach and by this action opened a beach exit. He then led his section in an attack on an enemy emplacement, the fire from which had prevented the establishment of a vitally needed beachhead in that sector. In a vicious fight, Sergeant Streczyk set the example for his men in leading the attack. The destruction of this enemy strongpoint contributed materially to the success of the invasion effort. The valor, initiative and disregard for his own safety exhibited by Sergeant Streczyk exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*¹⁷

Technical Sergeant Philip Streczyk had already been awarded the Silver Star on four separate occasions and for his valour on D-Day, he was also awarded the Military Medal by the British. His citation reads:

“For gallantry in action against the enemy on 6 June 1944 near Colleville-sur-Mer, France. Technical Sergeant Streczyk was one of the first men to enter the maze of trenches and dugouts, and in desperate hand-to-hand fighting cleared out compartment after compartment. In this fighting, he captured an officer and 20 enemy soldiers. He then, with complete disregard for his own safety and without assistance, assaulted and destroyed an enemy machine gun nest. The heroic and courageous actions of Technical Sergeant Streczyk were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United

States.”

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Sergeant Clarence J Colson of Company E 2/16 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 Clarence J. Colson (ASN: 12022782), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces at Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. When the landing craft carrying Sergeant Colson and his squad had grounded some 400 yards offshore, the men were forced to swim in under heavy enemy machine gun fire. Sergeant Colson, despite the enemy fire moved from one man to another encouraging and aiding them shoreward. Reaching shore, Sergeant Colson was determined to continue the attack. He moved across the fire-swept beach, locating and organizing his scout section. He then took up a firing position in clear view of the enemy and directed his fire at the nearest machine gun emplacement while some of his men cut a gap in the wire. Firing as he advanced, Sergeant Colson then led his squad through an uncharted minefield to assault the enemy machine guns. Despite enemy hand grenades thrown at him, Sergeant Colson reached the gun position and leaped into it with his rifle blazing. In this daring action against overwhelming odds, Sergeant Colson killed several enemy and force the surrender of seventeen. The courage, initiative, and leadership exhibited by Sergeant Colson exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*¹⁸

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Sergeant Kenneth F Peterson of Company E 2/16 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 Kenneth Francis Peterson (ASN: 32569088), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces at Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. Sergeant Peterson, armed with a Bazooka, exhibited utter disregard for his own safety by constantly exposing himself to enemy fire while leading assaults on enemy emplacements. He, alone, charged and destroyed the emplaced enemy in at least two pillboxes. He continued in the advance of the assault in the face of intense enemy fire until he reached the top of a hill. From his exposed position on the hill, he covered the advance of his company. The determination, personal bravery

*and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant Peterson exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*¹⁹

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 PFC Richard James Gallagher of Company E 2/16 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 Private First Class Richard James Gallagher (ASN: 32899808), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces at Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. While his company was still pinned down by the heavy enemy fire, Private First Class Gallagher left his partially protected position and advanced across a minefield toward the enemy emplacements. Undeterred by the intense enemy fire, he continued up a slope toward a machine gun nest which had been inflicting heavy casualties on his company. Using hand grenades and his rifle, Private First Class Gallagher wiped out the machine gun emplacement. He then returned to the beach and led part of his company through the minefield. Once more he moved up the slope of the hill to the top. Here, he discovered an enemy machine gun in a wooded area. Private First Class Gallagher not only captured the man who had been firing the machine gun but also captured an enemy rifleman who was sniping from the cliff. The tenacity of purpose, skill and personal bravery demonstrated by Private First Class Gallagher exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*²⁰

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Sergeant Edwin F Piasecki 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 Staff Sergeant [then Sergeant] Edwin F. Piasecki (ASN: 36607190), United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against the enemy in Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. His gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.”*²¹

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 PFC Alexander J Sakowski 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 Sergeant [then Private First Class] Alexander J. Sakowski (ASN: 31274631), United States Army, for gallantry in action while serving with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against the enemy in Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. His gallant actions and dedicated devotion to duty, without regard for his own life, were in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.”²²

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Captain Joseph T Dawson was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:



Captain Joseph T Dawson being presented with the Distinguished Service Cross by General Dwight D Eisenhower.

“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) Joseph T. Dawson (ASN: O-452348), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer, Company G, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Captain Dawson, in the initial landing on the coast of France, disembarked under a hail of enemy machine gun and rifle fire and, with utmost calmness, proceeded to organize a large group of men

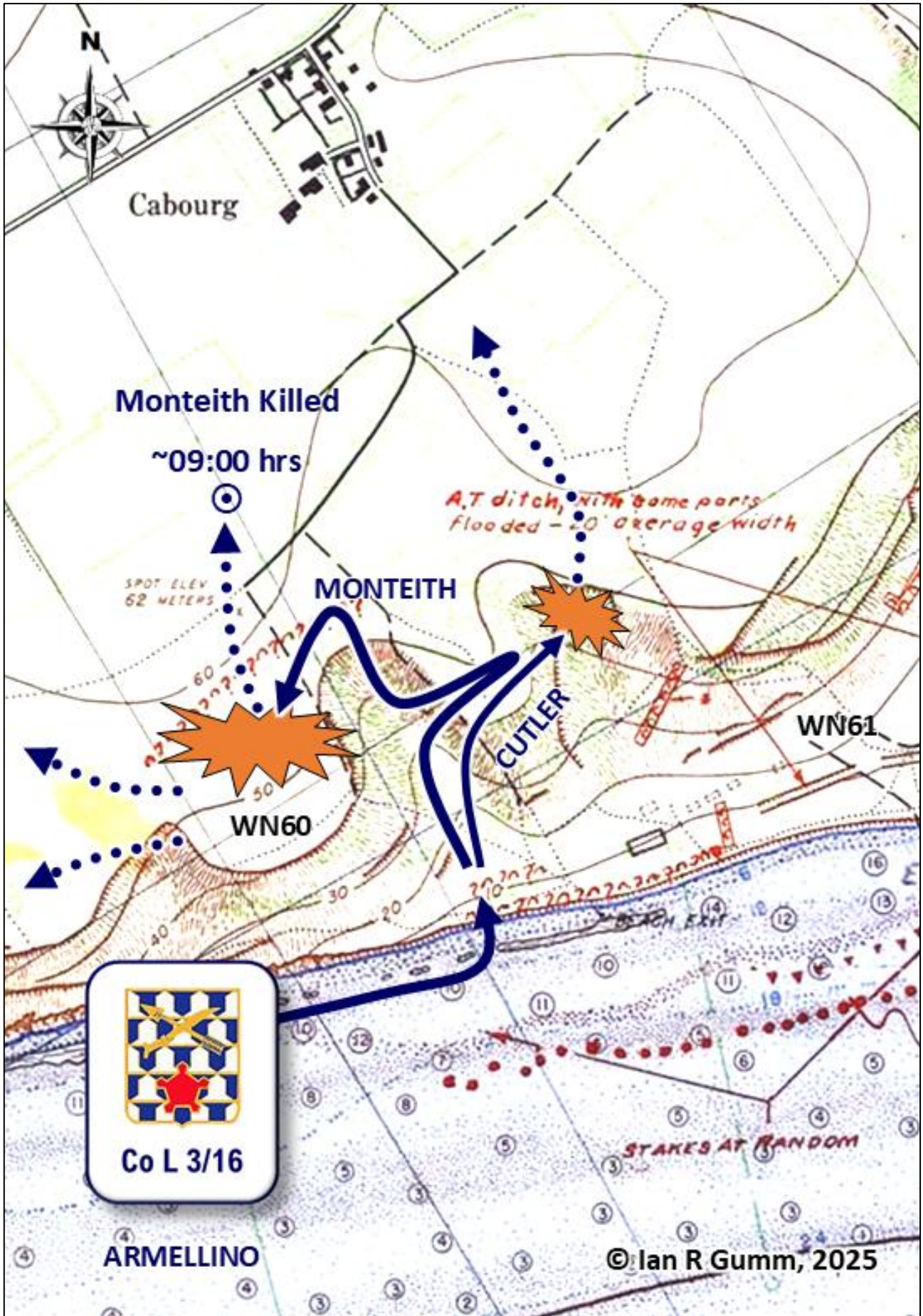
who were floundering near their bullet-riddled craft and led them ashore. However, upon reaching the beach, he found that his company was pinned down by direct fire from three enemy machine guns which were placed in an enemy strongpoint in a cliff immediately beyond the heavily mined sands. With absolute disregard for his own personal safety, Captain Dawson moved from his position of cover on to the mine field deliberately drawing the fire of the enemy machine guns in order that his men might be free to move. This heroic diversion succeeded, and his combat group crossed the beach to move into the assault on the enemy strongpoint. During this action, Captain Dawson was wounded in the leg. In a superb display of courage in the face of heavy enemy fire, Captain Dawson although wounded, led a successful attack into the enemy stronghold. Captain Dawson's outstanding leadership, gallantry and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”²³

The strong current also swept the LCAs from the HMT EMPIRE ANVIL carrying the men of Company I and Company L 3/16 eastwards. One of the six LCAs carrying Captain John R Armellino's Company L foundered about two miles out and the other five made slow progress in the heavy seas as they approached the shoreline. They touched down approximately 30 minutes late around 07:00 and a lot further east than intended at the F-1 Cabourg Draw rather than opposite the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer Draw. James H Jordon, a soldier in Company L 3/16 recalled:

“Once all landing crafts were online, the order for the invasion to begin was given and we headed for the beach. To both my right and left and as far as I could see, landing crafts were headed at full speed to the Normandy coastline. With the sun rising, it was a remarkable sight. Almost immediately, we came under fire.

Within minutes, for some reason, our boat started to take on water and we began to lag behind the other landing crafts. About seventy-five yards from the shore, with our boat sinking, our Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Kenneth Klink, gave the order to abandon ship. Just as he gave the order, we took a direct hit by an artillery shell to the middle of the craft, killing a number of men instantly. The ramp was dropped and those who were able began to get out. Several more men were killed or drowned as they exited the front of the boat. Some men climbed over the side. I had been seated in the back of the boat and attempted to get out the front. In order to make it to the exit ramp, I had to step over the bodies of my fellow soldiers and friends who were now lying dead on the floor of the boat. As I got close to the ramp, I was hit by a large wave that knocked me all the way to the back of the boat. Again, I made my way to the front and managed to leave the boat just as it was sinking behind me. I was the last man off.”²⁴

Stepping off the LCA, James Jordon was hit by a large wave that pushed him under the water. He later described his struggle to survive and cross the fire-swept beach. He recalled:



The initial action at the Cabourg Draw on the morning of D-Day. [© Ian R Gumm, 2025]

“As I stepped off, another large wave hit me, and I went completely under the water. With the weight of all the gear on my back, I began to sink fast and knew that I was about to drown. Fortunately, I was able to get my pack off and reach the surface of the water. I then swam to shore. As badly as things had begun for me, once I made it to the beach, it got worse.

The entire beach was a killing field. Artillery and machine gun fire were exploding all around me. Men were lying dead and wounded on the beach. Since I had lost my rifle along with my gear, I picked up a rifle lying on the beach and began running forward with the aim of reaching a three to four-foot-high sea wall about two hundred yards inland. Because I no longer had the heavy pack on my back, I was able to cover a lot of ground fast. As I was running across the beach, machine gun bullets began whizzing past me and hitting the ground just inches from my feet. Thinking that a German machine gunner had me as a target, I hit the ground. I laid there motionless, hoping the German machine gunner would think he had killed me and stop firing in my direction. It must have worked because the bullets that had been landing right next to me stopped. After a few seconds on the ground, I got up and continued running. Just as I got to within about twenty feet of the sea wall, an artillery shell passed over my head and landed about fifteen feet behind me. As I heard the shell pass over my head, I immediately hit the ground again. The shrapnel from the explosion passed over me but hit five men who had just reached the sea wall in front of me. Two of the men were killed instantly and three were wounded, including our company commander, Captain John Armellino, who subsequently lost his leg as a result of the explosion. I got up again and ran the remaining distance to the sea wall and the minimal shelter that it offered. Somehow, I had made it across the beach. Of the thirty men from my landing craft, only twelve were now left. The invasion had been underway for about an hour.”²⁵

The six LCAs from the HMT EMPIRE ANVIL carrying the men of Captain Kimball Richmond's Company I 3/16 reached the shoreline more than a mile east of their intended spot. Captain Richmond noticed the error and had the naval coxswains turn west along the coast towards their intended landing place. As they beat back along the coast Captain Richmond informed his Battalion Commander of the situation, and Lieutenant Colonel Horner sent Captain Anthony Prucnal's Company K 3/16 to take over Company I's mission. This meant that in the initial landings, the only 3rd Battalion company to touch down at the far eastern end of OMAHA Beach was Captain John R Armellino's Company L 3/16.

Company L 3/16 ran aground on the sand bars just to the east of the F-1 Cabourg draw about half an hour late at 07:00 under the guns of WN-60. In front of them were several rows of obstacles and about 200 yards of open beach. The infantrymen waded ashore under intense enemy fire and many of them were killed or wounded before they got out of the surf. Those who crossed the beach took shelter under the near-vertical cliffs below WN-60. Captain Armellino

recalled:

“Few of the landing craft were able to make a dry landing. Most of them grounded on sand bars 50 to 100 yards off the beach. The water was neck deep. Some men climbed over the sides of the landing craft trying to avoid enemy fire. We lost some of these men because in the excitement they failed to open their garrison belts, and the weight of their equipment took them underwater. Some of these men drowned while others shed the equipment and swam to shore. The water was loaded with obstacles to which mines were attached. Those who reached shore started running across the beach through heavy machine-gun crossfire, mortars, and artillery fire. We headed towards a bluff to give us cover. I lost many of those young soldiers who joined my company right before the invasion in England. They had no fear and failed to hit the ground after every few yards running directly for cover. The more seasoned men hit the ground very often as a result avoided being hit by enemy fire. After reaching the cover of the bluff, I began to reorganize my Company. I had approximately 125 men left of the 200 I started with. I directed my Lieutenants to organize their sections for the start of the attack to knock out the pillboxes and to advance to and capture our objective, Colleville-sur-Mer.” ²⁶

In the lee of the cliffs, the men of Captain Armellino's Company L 3/16 had been relatively sheltered from the enemy's fire, but if they were to have an impact they would have to push to the west and cross the earthen bank at the Cabourg Draw. This draw, unlike the others, was little more than a semi-circular indentation in the bluffs with a rough track leading inland. The major factor prohibiting Company L's movement, however, was not the lay of the land, but WN60 perched on the cliffs to the east of the draw. Captain Armellino ordered Lieutenant Jimmie W Monteith Jr to move up the draw with his section to deal with the strong point whilst the other sections moved up on his flank towards the village of Colleville-sur-Mer.

With his men moving forward, Captain Armellino went over to one of the four tanks that were nearby and directed their fire to support his men. As he was doing this an enemy antitank round struck the tank, detonating on impact. The premature explosion of the round caused a piece of shrapnel to rip into the captain's right leg severing the main artery.

A medic was quick to attend to his wound, applying a tourniquet to stop the bleeding and treating the wound with penicillin, before wrapping it with a bandage. Unable to walk he spent the remainder of the day at the base of the cliffs near the Cabourg Draw waiting for evacuation. As a result of his injuries, Captain John Armellino lost his right leg and retired from active duty as a Major in 1946. For his actions on D-Day 6 June 1944 Captain John R Armellino 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) John R. Armellino (ASN: O-442775), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as

Commanding Officer, Company L, 3d Battalion, 16 Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Upon landing initially on the coast of France in the face of heavy enemy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire, Captain Armellino quickly moved his men behind the slight cover afforded by a three-foot shelf of shale. However, the constant and accurate fire from the cliff pinned his company down. Captain Armellino then exposed himself to this heavy enemy fire and moved up the beach to a group of four tanks which had been rendered immobile by enemy shells. Upon reaching the tanks, he placed himself before them and from this fire-swept position directed their fire on the enemy strongpoints. For forty-five minutes he continued to move from his company to the tanks coordinating their action. On one of the trips back to his company, he was severely wounded by enemy fire. Captain Armellino's inspiring leadership, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”²⁷

Upon receiving his orders from Captain Armellino, Lieutenant Monteith gathered his men and then led them off. Their first obstacle was a layer of barbed wire behind an earthen embankment. Lieutenant Monteith organised a Bangalore torpedo group which he led over the embankment to make a breach. Through the breach in the wire, Lieutenant Monteith led the way up the draw but was soon held up by two belts of German mines that were swept by enemy machine gun fire from a couple of enemy pillboxes.



Lieutenant Jimmie W Monteith Jr.

Realising the need for assistance to cross the mined area Lieutenant Monteith returned to the beach to two of the tanks. There he banged on their sides and then directed the tank commanders to follow him and led the way back to

the minefield. The tanks put the two pillboxes out of action and Lieutenant Monteith led his men forward to seize the positions. With the immediate way clear, Lieutenant Monteith was ready to lead his men against the Germans holding WN-60.

Lieutenant Monteith spoke to Lieutenant Robert Cutler who had assumed command of Company L when Captain Armellino had been wounded. Lieutenant Cutler informed Jimmie Monteith that the other sections of Company L were closing on the enemy. Coordinating his attack with Lieutenant Kenneth Klenk's men Lieutenant Jimmie Monteith led his men forward. They secured WN60 thereby eradicating the greater part of the enemy's fire at the eastern extremity of OMAHA Beach. James H Jordon recalled:

“Lieutenant Klink, who had also successfully crossed the beach, took charge of what was left of our platoon, and we began climbing a hillside in an attempt to accomplish the mission. After proceeding a short distance, we had to retreat back to the beach because the hillside was on fire and there was no way forward. As we were returning, I pointed out an area to Lieutenant Klink where I had seen Lieutenant Monteith’s 2nd Platoon, also of L Company, go to get off the beach. Lieutenant Klink decided that we would proceed in the same direction.

As we started to climb the hillside, we were blocked from advancing by a heavy mass of barbed wire. I went back down to the beach where I was able to find a bandoleer torpedo and returned with it to our position. We then used the torpedo to detonate the obstacle and, with our path cleared, continued our advancement.

Soon after we began to move forward again, we became engaged in a hand grenade battle with the Germans at the top of the ridge. Because of the steepness of the hill, most of the grenades the Germans were throwing would roll down the hill past me before exploding. Unfortunately, one didn't. One grenade rolled to within less than ten feet of me and the explosion blew me completely off the ground. I was thrown about five feet in the air and landed hard on my back.

As I was getting up, I heard Lieutenant Klink give the order to fix bayonets. We then continued up the hillside and a short time later knocked the Germans out and secured the area. It wasn't until then that I realized I had been wounded by shrapnel in my left leg from the grenade. A medic treated my wounds and that night I was evacuated off the Normandy beach to a hospital ship.

At the start of the day, my company consisted of 187 men. By nightfall, only 79 were left. For me, the day had been frightening, exhausting and painful in many ways. Yet, I was more fortunate than many others - I had survived.”²⁸

With WN-60 in his possession, Lieutenant Monteith consolidated the area and waited for further reinforcements.

Before these reinforcements arrived, however, the Germans counterattacked, trying to dislodge Lieutenant Monteith's men. A large group of enemy soldiers set up machine guns on Lieutenant Monteith's flanks and rear and began their attack. The Germans then shouted at Lieutenant Monteith to surrender, by way of an answer he moved toward the sound of voices and launched a rifle grenade at them from 20 yards, knocking out one of the machine gun posts.

An even larger force of the enemy tried to break into Lieutenant Monteith's defensive perimeter setting up two machine guns and firing at the defending American soldiers from the hedgerow. Getting a squad of riflemen to give covering fire from the right flank of the machine guns he stalked the enemy, closing on them to throw some hand grenades that knocked them out. He then came back and crossed a 200-yard stretch of open field under fire to launch rifle grenades at the other machine gun position, either killing the crew or forcing them to withdraw.

On the other flank enemy riflemen opened fire on them again. This time as Lieutenant Jimmie Monteith started across the open field to control his defence, he was killed by fire from a light machine gun that had been brought up to his rear. Lieutenant Jimmie W Monteith Jr is buried in the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial on the bluffs above OMAHA Beach. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant Jimmie W Monteith Jr was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

*“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to First Lieutenant (Infantry) Jimmie W. Monteith, Jr., United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, while serving with 16 Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action near Colleville-sur-Mer, France. First Lieutenant Monteith landed with the initial assault waves on the coast of France under heavy enemy fire. Without regard to his own personal safety, he continually moved up and down the beach reorganizing men for further assault. He then led the assault over a narrow protective ledge and across the flat, exposed terrain to the comparative safety of a cliff. Retracing his steps across the field to the beach, he moved over to where two tanks were buttoned up and blind under violent enemy artillery and machinegun fire. Completely exposed to the intense fire, First Lieutenant Monteith led the tanks on foot through a minefield and into firing positions. Under his direction, several enemy positions were destroyed. He then rejoined his company, and, under his leadership, his men captured an advantageous position on the hill. Supervising the defence of his newly won position against repeated vicious counterattacks, he continued to ignore his own personal safety, repeatedly crossing the 200 or 300 yards of open terrain under heavy fire to strengthen links in his defensive chain. When the enemy succeeded in completely surrounding First Lieutenant Monteith and his unit and while leading the fight out of the situation, First Lieutenant Monteith was killed by enemy fire. The courage, gallantry, and intrepid leadership displayed by First Lieutenant Monteith is worthy of emulation.”*²⁹

As Captain Richmond's Company I 3/16 made their way back along the coast, two of their LCAs foundered and the men had to be taken off by one of the control boats. It was around 08:00 that the four remaining boats finally landed, by which time Company K was already in action. Shortly after the arrival of Captain Richmond's Company, the Regimental Commander, Colonel George A Taylor came ashore.

When Colonel Taylor landed at 08:15 he found his Regiment no closer to achieving their mission than they had been at Zero Hour. Those of his men in the killing fields of the Colleville-sur-Mer Draw were being slaughtered as they sought shelter from the enemy's artillery and mortar fire.

The E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw lay between Second Lieutenant Spalding and Captain Dawson's men from 2/16 and Captain Armellino's Company L 3/16. WN-61 nestled at the foot of the bluffs close to the beach to the east of the draw and on the spur of rising ground to the west sat WN-62. Coming ashore in front of the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw was a mixed group of fifteen LCVPs, many of whom were touching down in the wrong place. The bulk were from Company E and Company F of Lieutenant Colonel Herbert C Hicks Jr's 2/16, but mixed in with them were four LCAs of Captain Lawrence Madill's Company E of Major Sidney V Bingham Jr's 2/116. These four LCAs were well off course and nearly two miles east of their designated landing place.

WN-61 was wreaking havoc among the men of Captain Kinke's Company F 2/16 that touched down immediately in front of it. This, unlike many of the enemy's Widerstandsneester, was close to the beach rather than perched up on the higher ground and as such was vulnerable to direct assault. With his section pinned down by the fire from a pillbox in WN-61, Staff Sergeant Raymond F Strojny realised that if they were going to survive drastic action was required. Picking up a Bazooka from a nearby wounded soldier he made his way across the fire-swept beach and took up a position in the minefield within 250 yards of the enemy strong point. From there he repeatedly fired the Bazooka until his ammunition was exhausted. The enemy pillbox guarding the position remained intact, so, he returned across the beach to find more ammunition. With the ammunition in his possession, he crossed the beach once again and took up the same position from where he fired until the pillbox was knocked out. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Staff Sergeant Raymond F Strojny 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 Staff Sergeant Raymond F. Strojny (ASN: 31069497), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company F, 2d Battalion, 16 Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. When his company was pinned down by the heavy and intense enemy fire, Staff Sergeant Strojny, with complete disregard for his own safety, picked up a Bazooka from a wounded soldier who had been pierced by shrapnel. He then crossed the fire-swept beach and took up a position in a minefield within 250 yards of an enemy machine gun pillbox. He put the pillbox under his fire until his ammunition was exhausted. Braving the small arms fire that was being directed at him, he moved back across the

beach to find more ammunition. Securing the ammunition, he again took up the same position and fired until he knocked out the pillbox. Staff Sergeant Strojny's intrepid actions, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.” ³⁰



An aerial photograph of the E-3 Colleville-sur-Mer draw. WN-62 is in the centre. [NARA 195953021]

WN-62, perched on the spur of rising ground to the west of the draw, afforded its defenders excellent views and fields of fire onto the beach below. It was manned by 27 members of Leutnant Edmund Bauch's No 3 Kompanie [3/726] of the 1st Battalion Grenadier-Regiment 726, which was part of the 716th Infantry Division, and 13 members of Feld-Batterie 1 Artillerie-Regiment 352 [1/352] from the 352nd Infantry Division.

WN-62 had one 7.5cm Pak anti-tank gun, two captured Belgium 7.5cm Feldkanone 235(b), one of which was in a

Regelbau R669 casement, a 5cm KwK L/42 in a field position and an 8cm Granatenwerfer mortar in a Vf69 bunker. There was a second Regelbau R669 casement and a Regelbau R667 casemate under construction, two Vf61a bunkers, a machine gun anti-aircraft ringstand, two SK bunkers, one Vf2d bunker, and an observation bunker. The bunkers were connected by an extensive trench system and were protected by barbed wire and minefields.

Two German soldiers at WN-62 were Oberleutnant Bernhard Frerking and Gefreiter Heinrich Severloh of Feld-Batterie 1 Artillerie-Regiment 352 [1/352]. These were not part of the static infantry defending WN-62, but artillerymen deployed forward to direct the fire of the four 10.5cm FH18 guns of 1/352 located north of Houtteville. Oberleutnant Frerking and Gefreiter Severloh were stationed towards the centre of the Widerstandsneester at the Artillery Observation bunker overlooking OMAHA Beach.



Oberleutnant Bernhard Frerking.

Bernhard Frerking was born in Hanover on 1 December 1912, the son of Bernhard and Marie Frerking. On 1 May 1933, he joined the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei [NSDAP] in the Gau Südhannover-Braunschweig. Between 1933 and 1935, he studied to be a teacher at the University for Teacher Education in Dortmund where he became a member of the local Sturmabteilung [SA]. Bernhard Frerking completed his studies as a primary school music teacher. He then worked as a teacher and organist in Latferde, Lower Saxony. In June 1936 he became the part-time choirmaster of a choral society. On 1 August 1936, he married Marlies Marckmann and during the next eight years, they had three

children. That same month, Bernhard Frerking was drafted into military service and joined the Field Artillery in Fallingbostal.

In the years leading up to D-Day, Bernhard Frerking was deployed in Artillerie-Regiment 216, first on the Western Front, and later between 1942 and 1943 on the Eastern Front. On D-Day, Oberleutnant Bernhard Frerking was the Gunnery Control Officer directing the fire of the four 10.5cm FH18 guns of 1/352 in the artillery observation bunker overlooking OMAHA Beach.



Gefreiter Heinrich "Hein" Severloh.

Heinrich Severloh was born into a farming family in Metzingen in the Lüneburg Heath area of North Germany on 23 June 1923. He was conscripted into the Wehrmacht on 23 July 1941 and assigned to the 19th Light Artillery Replacement Division in Hanover. In August 1941, he was transferred to France to join the 3rd Battery 321st Artillery Regiment, where he trained as a dispatch rider. In December 1942, he was sent to the Eastern Front where he was assigned to drive sleighs, and it was whilst there Heinrich Severloh suffered from frostbite and fatigue due to the harsh weather conditions.

In October 1943, Heinrich Severloh was sent for non-commissioned officer training before rejoining his unit, which was now part of the 352 ID stationed in Normandy. On his return, he was assigned to be Oberleutnant Bernhard Frerking's orderly. On D-Day, Gefreiter Heinrich Severloh manned a machine gun, said to be an MG-42, in a horseshoe-shaped machine gun position close to the artillery observation bunker. He was not a trained infantry machine gunner, but an artilleryman who, on D-Day, manned one of the 1/352's machine guns. In his book, WN-62, he claimed to have killed more than 2,000 Americans coming ashore on D-Day morning earning him the nickname of the 'Beast of Omaha'. This figure is a lot higher than the total casualties on OMAHA and we can determine, therefore, that Heinrich Severloh's claim is an exaggeration. It does, however, highlight that the beach in front of WN-62 was a killing field.

Another German soldier at WN-62 was 18-year-old Gefreiter Franz Gockel, an infantryman serving in 3/726. Franz Gockel was born in Niederense on 30 December 1925 and was the eldest son of seven children. His father, also Franz, was a roofer and he followed his father into the trade, becoming an apprentice roofer in Rhynern at the age of 14. In 1943, Franz Gockel was drafted into the Wehrmacht, and, after training, he was posted to Infantry Regiment 726 of the 716th Infantry Division in Normandy. On D-Day, 6 June 1944 Gefreiter Gockel was manning a captured First World War Polish water-cooled MG-1908 machine gun overlooking the entrance to the E-3 draw.



Gefreiter Franz Gockel.

At around 01:00 on the night of 5/6 June 1944, the defenders of WN-62 had been roused from their beds and ordered to man their defences. Franz Gockel recalled:

“We had been kept busy digging the trenches and keeping the guns in order. We had two-hour watches throughout the night, and I had been on duty from 10 pm until midnight on 5 June and was not due to go back on watch until 4 am.

But at 1 am we got the alarm call. We had had many of these before and we threw out the guy who had brought it to us, but he came back and said this time it was for real - the Americans had been landing by parachute about 30 kilometres from us.

At dawn American bombers flew over, although they didn't bomb us because they didn't want to endanger their own boats which were coming in. There were about 25 of us in our nest but we had hardly any contact with each other. The next person to me was 15 metres away. Of course, there were breaks in the noise and chaos, and because it was cold, and we were freezing the cook came and gave us mulled wine. Apart from that no one came until the shooting started at about 4 am.

During the wait I was concentrating very hard on my weapon, checking it over and over again. I was also saying lots of short prayers, the ones I had said with my family while in the cellar when the bombs were dropped, kind of getting myself into a trance.

It was about 6 am when lots of them [Americans] started up the beach towards me. They came at low tide when we had expected them to come at high tide.”³¹

Captain Wozenski’s Company E 2/16 was one of the two 16 IR Companies that touched down in the vicinity of the E-3 Colleville draw. He recalled:

“We just resigned ourselves to the fact that we were going on land at daybreak, 0600. We preferred to land at night but once the decision was made, we had to go with it.

So, you’re always ticked off about that and say you hope to God it never happens again.

We had a very conspicuous aiming point toward which our landing craft could shoot. There were very strong cross tides coming in there. And at one point I threatened to shoot our coxswain because I wanted him to go in toward this point and he was allowing the whole thing to drift off.”³²

Approaching the shoreline, Company E 2/16 was about 1,000 yards east of their intended touchdown point. Captain Wozenski recalled:

“Nearing the shore, to a point where it is possible to easily recognise landmarks, it became obvious that the company was being landed approximately 1,000 left of the scheduled landing point. How anyone who had been briefed could make such an error, I will never know, for the loan house which so prominently marked (the St Laurent draw) was in flames and clearly showed its distinctive outline.”³³

When Company E 2/16 finally touched down, they had 400 yards of open beach to cross to reach the shingle, all under the murderous fire coming from the German defenders of WN-62. Captain Wozenski recalled:

“The beach was bloody awful. We landed, per the navy’s request, at low water and that meant approximately 400 yards of struggle over the sand. So, there was 400 yards, and we were horribly overloaded. Just before the landing we were taking all of our web gear. Standard web gear, issued gear, fine, battle proven gear. It was taken away from us because some theorist figured that it would be far easier and much more practical to carry a hunting-type jacket. So, at the last minute, we were issued these canvas jackets with these fantastic pockets all over the place and we transferred all of our gear into these pockets.

So, picture: You hit the beach and you’re up and down, you’re in water and then you’re

ducking, small arms and everything's flying all around, so you duck down. You're terrified as anyone would be. And every time I got up I thought that it was pure terror that was making my knees buckle until I finally hit the shale and I realized I had about 100 pounds of sand in those pockets that had accumulated on top of the maybe 50 or 60 pounds that we were all carrying in. So, it wasn't just pure terror that was making our knees buckle. Our pockets were full of sand. As I recall when I finally got up the shale, I asked my first sergeant, who was right with me, "For God's sake, get a pack of cigarettes out." And then he had to dig out handfuls of sand before he could get a pack of cigarettes for me.

*But it was bloody awful really. The first time is rough anytime, but this was our third landing. Most of us had seen the intelligence reports on what the Germans had on the beach. It seemed impossible just from the reports. And again, our basic reliance on our own communications is finally what saved me and the remnants of my company."*³⁴

Gefreiter Franz Gockel fired his water-cooled MG-1908 at the American soldiers as they crossed the sand in front of the E-3 Colleville draw. He recalled:

"They [the Americans] had a long way to go up the sand and hardly any cover. It was a beautiful sandy beach, and they had to run all the way up it. Many were lying on the sand, killed or wounded. You could see when the tide rose some would move, crawling up the beach to get out of the water.

At about 8 am my machine gun failed and I had to use my pistol to protect myself - it just fired single shots. I stayed there until about midday on my own until a commander called Siegfried came and asked me to go up to the bunker and get him something to eat from about 100 metres up the beach.

I crawled up the beach and to the bunker, and two others came up to me and I got them to give me cover as I went for the bunker. We all ate together and then I had to go to the toilet, and in doing so I tore my trousers. I went back 30 or 40 metres to an anti-tank position and they gave me some trousers.

*I wanted to go back to Siegfried, who had asked for the food, but the Americans were already there. They had taken the position. I went back to the pair I had eaten with and then a shot came in and went through my hand. That was my 'home shot'."*³⁵

As PFC George H Bowen, E company's medical assistant, reached the shore and waded through the waist-deep water he saw several of the men were wounded and in danger of drowning. Disregarding his own safety, PFC Bowen halted his race across the sand to wade through the fire-swept water and dragged a wounded man to shore. He then proceeded to administer first aid to the numerous casualties on the beach whilst under fire. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 PFC George H Bowen, Company E 2/16's medical assistant, 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 Private First Class George H. Bowen (ASN: 35643671), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as a Medical Aidman with Company E, 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces at Normandy, France, on 6 June 1944. As the men in the initial assault on the coast of France waded through the waist-deep water, a number were wounded and were in grave danger of drowning. Private First Class Bowen, disregarding his own safety, stopped in his efforts to reach the shore, waded through the mined and fire-swept water to go to a wounded man who was drowning and dragged the man to shore. He then proceeded to the fire-swept areas to administer to the numerous casualties. During the attack men were wounded in an assault on an enemy machine gun nest high on the slopes of a cliff. Private First Class Bowen, to reach these men, crossed an uncharted minefield and moved through vicious enemy fire to within fifteen yards of the enemy’s machine gun nest to render first aid to the stricken men. Private First Class Bowen’s extraordinary heroism, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army.” ³⁶

Another of the medical staff that came ashore was Major Charles E Tegtmeyer, the Regimental Surgeon of the 16 IR. On coming ashore, he found the assault bogged down and stalled along the shingle. Seeing the wounded in the shallows and strewn across the beach, Major Tegtmeyer repeatedly waded into the sea or returned across the beach to drag wounded soldiers to the comparative safety of the shingle. With his medical section, he worked tirelessly throughout the day, under heavy enemy fire, to render aid and succour to the wounded. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944, Major Charles E Tegtmeyer 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 Major (Medical Corps) Charles E. Tegtmeyer (ASN: O-335197), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Regimental Surgeon, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. When Major Tegtmeyer landed with his Medical Section, the assaulting troops were still pinned down on a narrow beachhead. Due to the devastating fire of the enemy, numerous casualties had been sustained. With complete disregard for his own safety, Major Tegtmeyer covered the length of the beach, administering aid to the wounded lying all along the shore. Time and gain, he went into the mine-strewn waters and pulled the wounded in to comparative safety behind a shale

barrier. Major Tegtmeyer, heedless of the heavy fire, worked unceasingly in rendering aid to the wounded under the most hazardous conditions. Major Tegtmeyer's fortitude, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 1st Infantry Division, and the United States Army."³⁷

As the landing craft carrying the second wave hit the beach Captain Wozenski looked back and saw the effects of the murderous machine gun fire coming from WN-62. He recalled:

"Personally, I could not move out of my place. I just was pinned down. Everybody around me was being shot and I was willing to believe it [that we couldn't move]. You'd stick your head up and they would just hose you right down. My executive officer, I'm talking to him, and he had one drilled right through his forehead. Lt. Duckworth married an English girl just a week or so before the landing.

And so, we're absolutely stymied, and I was just praying for smoke, any kind of smoke, to act the same as nightfall would so we could get up through this wire. There were automatic weapons trained on us and heroics have nothing to do with it: people cannot advance in daylight against automatic small arms weapons.

It's just impossible to predict and so allocate your forces that everything will come out according to the needs as they arise. Obviously, somebody had realized that there would be a heavy need for medical types, and they were scheduled to come in. They came in and there was nothing you could do to stop them. We were a thin screen on the beach. We had not gotten up to the tops up the bluffs yet. Looking back, I could look at these Landing Craft Infantry, there must have been at least two of them that I saw there, with their ramps down, and these people just running like mad, almost lock step down the ramps on both sides of the Landing Craft Infantry, down toward the beach and they were being shot down just as fast as they came. The Germans had machine guns trained right on those ramps, and they were just bowling them off just as fast as they ran down.

So, it was very tragic. It was real sad to see the number of bodies that were in the water. Wave action will normally distribute logs or bodies or anything else head to toe along any given length of beach. But there were so many bodies that I saw a number of areas where they were two and three deep, just rolling in the waves."³⁸

As the fog of war began to drift across the beach and obscure the view, Captain Wozenski's men began to move forward. He recalled:

"Finally, we made a lateral movement, but even that lateral movement would have been impossible if it wasn't for the development of this battle smoke that began to cover the

area.

There were some tanks burning, some landing craft caught fire, and the general smoke and haze of a battlefield began to develop. This gave us enough masking so that we could get up the cliffs. It never would have happened if we didn't have that smoke, that battlefield smoke. And then through all this, off on the flank, I saw a yellow smoke flare.

This was one of our basic signals. All platoon leaders and platoon sergeants had yellow smoke flares. I said, if all else fails, the first son-of-a-gun that gets up on top of that bluff will set off a smoke flare.

And down off to the right there, maybe a thousand yards or so, I saw a yellow smoke flare. We all had trench knives, and I said, I'll try to assemble as many people, alive ones, as I can. Move down to a point, about where I thought that yellow smoke flare went off and make a move up there. Because somebody got up there and I knew that I couldn't get up where I was.

So, I remember distinctly taking my trench knife and pressing it in people's backs to see if they were alive. If they were alive, I'd kick 'em or roll 'em over and say, Let's go. And I picked up a half dozen people this way and we'd move on down. But I didn't realize that terror could be so great that a man, a live man, would not turn around to see who was sticking a knife into him. And I didn't [jab hard] I just did it as a quick test, see if he's alive he'd better come, you know, we need him. Then later on it dawned on me, after I checked two or three, that some of them were alive but they wouldn't turn around, just absolute terror. Now I could be in the same boat but at that particular time I was standing.

We assembled maybe a dozen people about opposite this point where I saw the yellow smoke flare. Then I worked my way up along with the half a dozen, I'd say maybe ten people, and I ran into this sergeant who had sent up the smoke flare.

I think that he's the greatest unsung hero of World War II: Sergeant Streczyk, one of my platoon sergeants. Because he was the first one off the beach. To the best of my knowledge, he was the first one off the beach and it was the path that he took that I picked up. The rest of our battalion followed, 2nd Battalion 16th Infantry, and then later I think almost the whole corps went up that path.

We got up to the top of the cliff and we found one of our weapons that would fire. I had a head count. I landed with 180 men and eight officers, I was counting myself, we were over strength two officers, and I had a head count, and I counted thirteen men, one other officer, and myself. And one weapon, one M-1 rifle would fire. So, we put that man on guard and the rest of us sat down and cleaned our weapons. First echelon maintenance,

right on top of the bluff.

Shortly thereafter I ran into John Finke, I think he had come up and gone off to my left toward his goal, and somebody had winged him through the helmet. He had blood streaming down all over the side of his helmet and I remember my telling him to get his backside back to the beach. Then we worked our way in from there.”³⁹

Coming ashore to the left of WN-62 was radioman Technician 5th Grade [T5] John J Pinder Jr, he too found himself in the thick of it under tremendous enemy fire. Only a few yards from the landing craft, he was hit and gravely wounded but refusing to take cover he continued forward with the vitally important radio he carried. Delivering his precious cargo, John Pinder returned across the fire-swept beach on three more occasions, each time to gather more of the vital radio equipment including another serviceable set. Weakened by loss of blood he refused to give in and aided in setting up the communications position on the beach. Whilst doing this, T5 Pinder was hit a third time, this time, his wounds were fatal.



Technician 5th Grade John J Pinder Jr.

For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944, T5 John J Pinder Jr was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pride in presenting the Medal of Honor (Posthumously) to Technician Fifth Grade John J. Pinder, Jr., United States Army, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, while serving with 16 Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action near Colleville-sur-Mer, France. On D-Day, Technician Fifth Grade Pinder landed on the coast 100 yards offshore under devastating enemy machine gun

and artillery fire which caused severe casualties among the boatload. Carrying a vitally important radio, he struggled towards shore in waist-deep water. Only a few yards from his craft he was hit by enemy fire and was gravely wounded. Technician Fifth Grade Pinder never stopped. He made shore and delivered the radio. Refusing to take cover afforded, or to accept medical attention for his wounds, Technician Fifth Grade Pinder, though terribly weakened by loss of blood and in fierce pain, on three occasions went into the fire-swept surf to salvage communication equipment. He recovered many vital parts and equipment, including another workable radio. On the third trip he was again hit, suffering machine gun bullet wounds in the legs. Still this valiant soldier would not stop for rest or medical attention. Remaining exposed to heavy enemy fire, growing steadily weaker, he aided in establishing the vital radio communication on the beach. While so engaged this dauntless soldier was hit for the third time and killed. The indomitable courage and personal bravery of Technician Fifth Grade Pinder was a magnificent inspiration to the men with whom he served.”⁴⁰

Along the eastern end of OMAHA Beach, the men of the US 16 IR began to inch forward, as their commanders frantically urged them on. Colonel George Taylor coming upon one group of his soldiers bunched up on the beach unable to go forward famously said: *“There are two kinds of people staying on this beach, the dead and those who are going to die – now let's get the hell out of here.”*

Colonel Taylor also sent a message to Major General Clarence Huebner, the commander of the 1 ID, that there were too many vehicles on the beach and requested that only infantrymen be landed. Major General Huebner immediately responded by sending the 18th Infantry Regiment [18 IR] ashore. Upon landing they crossed the shingle and barbed wire towards the Colleville-sur-Mer exit where the 16 IR was already fighting a fierce battle.

On reaching the shore the men of Colonel George Smith Jr's 18 IR soon became embroiled in the battle. Like the 16 IR before them, the men of the 18 IR had to cross the open beach under heavy and effective enemy fire. When his landing craft touched down Private Carlton W Barrett stepped off to find himself in water neck deep. Reaching the edge of the surf, he saw some of his comrades struggling to keep their heads above the water so returned on numerous occasions to assist them to the water's edge. Thereafter seeing an evacuation boat just offshore he picked up the wounded and waded out to deliver them to the waiting sailors. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Private Carlton W Barrett was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private Carlton William Barrett, United States Army, for gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, while serving with the 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, in action in the vicinity of St. Laurent-sur-Mer, France. On the morning of D-day Private Barrett, landing in the face of extremely heavy enemy fire, was forced to wade ashore through

neck-deep water. Disregarding the personal danger, he returned to the surf again and again to assist his floundering comrades and save them from drowning. Refusing to remain pinned down by the intense barrage of small-arms and mortar fire poured at the landing points, Private Barrett, working with fierce determination, saved many lives by carrying casualties to an evacuation boat lying offshore. In addition to his assigned mission as guide, he carried dispatches the length of the fire-swept beach; he assisted the wounded; he calmed the shocked; he arose as a leader in the stress of the occasion. His coolness and his dauntless daring courage while constantly risking his life during a period of many hours had an inestimable effect on his comrades and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army.”⁴¹



Private Carlton W Barrett.

Gradually small groups of surviving infantrymen that had initially been pinned down on the beach sheltering behind the seawall or the edge of the shingle for cover began to create their own exits off the beach. They abandoned the original plan to move up through the defined beach exits in favour of direct action and assaulted up the steep bluffs. They worked their way through the minefields and between the bunkers to achieve the first breakthrough. Several Allied destroyers helped turn the tide of the battle in favour of the American infantrymen by making improvised sweeps towards the beach to fire their guns on the German positions at close range. Many of these ships scraped their bottoms in the shallow water as they blasted the German fortifications at point-blank range.

Once off the beach, the infantrymen began to assault the German trenches and pillboxes from the rear and by midday the German fire had noticeably decreased. One by one the exits off the beach began to open. Second Lieutenant H Smith Shumway recalled:

“On June 6, 1944, I was a Second Lieutenant. and an infantry platoon leader in the First Infantry Division, 18th Regiment, Company B. My unit was assigned to land on OMAHA Beach, in the section called "Easy Red", in the second wave. We rushed down the ramp of the LCI into water about knee-deep and ran up to the beach to reassemble there. There were dead bodies floating in the water and many on the beach. Some tanks had been hit by artillery. The confusion on the beach made it impossible for me to get my bearings. Death and wreckage were everywhere. German mortar shells were still hitting the beach. The noise from the planes, boats, artillery explosions and gunfire were almost unbearable.

There was a red-headed fellow with a very white face looking up at me in a kneeling position on the beach. I stepped back from the sight and was given a push by a man kneeling on the ground behind me. He yelled, "Do you want to get us both killed?" He was in the process of disarming a land mine. I gestured and muttered something about the red-headed fellow in front of me. The soldier exclaimed, "Don't worry about him, he's dead! Just watch where you put your feet." I then came out of my daze and was very alert to everything around me.

We all lined up and started up the hill, one after another, following the soldiers that were removing the mines. There were explosions all around us, but I couldn't see anyone firing guns at us. There were uncovered land mines on both sides of the path, so we knew we had to watch our step. It seemed to take a couple of hours to get up the hill.

Before we went over the top of the hill, I looked back and contemplated the scene before me. Hundreds of ships and boats were circling in the Channel. LCI's and LST's were landing men and tanks. With planes soaring overhead, big shells bursting on land and sea, and the beach littered with men and machines, I thought of the millions of dollars and thousands of lives being spent to wage war and the tragic cost and horror of it all. At the top of the hill, we had to cross a minefield, after which we dug in for a counterattack, which never came.”⁴²

The official record of the US 1st Infantry Division states:

“Within 10 minutes of the ramps being lowered, the leading company had become inert, leaderless and almost incapable of action. Every officer and sergeant had been killed or wounded ... It had become a struggle for survival and rescue.”

Casualties per unit varied widely. Squads landing directly in front of the most fortified German positions were wiped out as the landing craft ramps dropped. Other units, lucky to land between bunkers or on portions of the beach obscured by smoke, made it onto the beach with few losses. Another factor was the skill and courage of landing craft coxswains. Some emptied their boats too far off the beach after hitting sandbars, and the soldiers had to drop their

weapons and equipment or drown in the surf. Other coxswains made every effort to land the troops onto the beach with multiple attempts and risking their craft.

By nightfall the 1st and 29th Divisions held positions around Vierville-sur-Mer, Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer and Colleville-sur-Mer. They had not achieved anything close to their planned D-Day objectives, but they had gained a toehold. The Americans suffered 2,400 casualties at OMAHA on 6 June, but by the end of D-Day, they had landed 34,000 troops. The German 352nd Infantry Division lost 20 per cent of its strength, with 1,200 casualties, but unlike the Americans, it had no reserves coming to continue the fight.

Look Forward

In Part Twenty-One of D-Day, 6 June 1944 — The Greatest Seaborne Invasion the World Has Ever Known, I return to the British Airborne landings east of the Caen Canal.

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¹ 741st Tank Battalion After-Action Report dated 19 July 1944.

² Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account, Eisenhower Foundation.

³ Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account, Eisenhower Foundation.

⁴ War Chronical, edited from recorded conversations with Sergeant Clarence J Colson in July 2000 and May 2002.

⁵ War Chronical, edited from recorded conversations with Sergeant Clarence J Colson in July 2000 and May 2002.

⁶ War Chronical, edited from recorded conversations with Sergeant Clarence J Colson in July 2000 and May 2002.

⁷ Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account, Eisenhower Foundation.

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- ⁸ *War Chronical*, edited from recorded conversations in July 2000 and May 2002.
- ⁹ *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
- ¹⁰ *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
- ¹¹ *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
- ¹² *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
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- ¹⁴ *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
- ¹⁵ *Second Lieutenant John Spalding's account*, Eisenhower Foundation.
- ¹⁶ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
- ¹⁷ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
- ¹⁸ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
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- ²⁰ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
- ²¹ *Headquarters, 1st Infantry Division, General Orders No. 39 (July 16, 1944)*
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- ²³ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
- ²⁴ *James H Jordan's account at <http://www.6juin1944.com/>*.
- ²⁵ *James H Jordan's account at <http://www.6juin1944.com/>*.
- ²⁶ *Captain John R Armellino's account at <http://www.americandday.org>*.
- ²⁷ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
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- ²⁹ *General Orders: War Department, General Orders No. 20 (March 29, 1945)*.
- ³⁰ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (July 1, 1944)*.
- ³¹ *The Guardian, Sunday 9 May 2004*.
- ³² *Edward F Wozenski television interview recorded in 1972, part of the Imperial War Museum's oral history collection*.
- ³³ *OMAHA Beach*, by Joseph Balkoski, Stackpole Books, 2004, pp136.
- ³⁴ *Edward F Wozenski television interview recorded in 1972, part of the Imperial War Museum's oral history collection*.
- ³⁵ *The Guardian, Sunday 9 May 2004*.
- ³⁶ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 45 (August 9, 1944)*.
- ³⁷ *Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 31 (1 July 1944)*.
- ³⁸ *Soldiers (The Official US Army Magazine), June 1984, Volume 39, No. 6, Victory on the Beach by Steve Hara, pp9*.
- ³⁹ *Soldiers (The Official US Army Magazine), June 1984, Volume 39, No. 6, Victory on the Beach by Steve Hara, pp9*.
- ⁴⁰ *General Orders: War Department, General Orders No. 1 (January 4, 1945)*.
- ⁴¹ *General Orders: War Department, General Orders No. 78, October 2, 1944*.
- ⁴² *Second Lieutenant H Smith Shumway's account at <http://www.6juin1944.com/>*.