

In Their Own Words: The Americans at D-Day

(A section of a chapter)

OMAHA BEACH

“Omaha Beach was a nightmare. Every man who set foot on Omaha Beach that day was a hero. Much as I disliked subjecting the 1st to still another landing, I felt that as a commander I had no other choice... I felt compelled to employ the best troops I had, to minimize the risks and hoist the odds in our favor in any way that I could.”

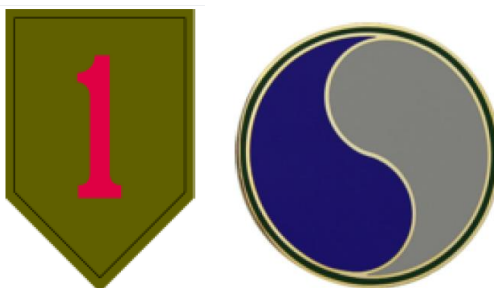
Lt. General Omar Bradley, Commander First U.S. Army

The primary objective of the American landing at Omaha Beach at Normandy, France was to establish and hold a beachhead initially five miles wide and deep in order to eventually link with British forces that had landed to the east at Gold Beach and to link with the American forces which had landed at Utah Beach to the west thus developing a continuous defensible lodgement on the Normandy coast of France.

V Corps: Major General Leonard T. Gerow

1st Infantry Division: Major General Clarence R. Huebner

29th Infantry Division: Major General Charles H. Gerhardt



1st and 29th Infantry Divisions

June 6, 1944, Photographer Robert Capa [*Medal of Freedom*]: (Diary) On Board Attack Transport U.S.S. *Samuel Chase*, English Channel. “Our pre-invasion breakfast was served at 03:00 a.m. The mess boys of the U.S.S. [*Samuel*] *Chase* wore immaculate white jackets and served hot cakes, sausages, eggs and coffee with unusual zest and politeness. But the pre-invasion stomachs were pre-occupied, and most of the noble effort was left on the plates...”



Photographer Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Cyrus Aydlett, coding officer: On Board Attack Transport U.S.S. *Bayfield*, off the Coast of Normandy, France. (Loading the landing craft) “I as suddenly filled with emotion. I could not restrain this inevitable feeling of being completely choked up with compassion for these bronzed and drill hardened soldiers – standing there tense with painful uncertainty nervously adjusting their packs... puffing on cigarettes as if that would be their last.” (1)

(U.S.S. *Bayfield* would serve as headquarters for 4th Infantry Commander Major General Raymond O. Barton’s headquarters before going ashore.)



Disembarking to the landing craft
(Photo: Imperial War Museum)

June 6, 1944, John Ford, Office of Strategic Services, Photographic Unit Head: (06:00 a.m.) On board the U.S.S. *Plunket*. Off Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Watching the first wave go in.) “They didn’t have a chance; neither did the LCMs bringing in bulldozers and more tanks. They really caught hell.” (11)

(Later) “Later I heard that only three bulldozers out of 30 or 40 made it. I also remember seeing landing craft swing out of control and smash against obstacles where they touched off a mine and blow sky high. I remember watching one colored man in a DUKW loaded with supplies. He dropped them on the beach, unloaded, went back for more. I watched, fascinated. Shells landed around him. The Germans were really after him. He avoided every obstacle and just kept going back and forth, back and forth, completely calm. I thought, ‘By god, if anybody deserves a medal that man does. I wanted to photograph him, but I was in a relatively safe place at the time so I figured, ‘the hell with it. I was willing to admit he was braver than I was. My staff and I had the job of ‘seeing’ the whole invasion for the world, but all any one of us saw was his own little area... In action, I didn’t tell my boys where to aim their cameras. They took whatever they could... There was no panic or running around.” (11)

On the way In

June 6, 1944, Private Harold Baumgarten, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [Purple Heart]: Off Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “At 3:30 a.m., we left the [U.S.S. *Empire*] *Javelin* on British LCAs (Landing Craft Assault). It was pitch black, and the Channel was

rough. The huge bluish-black waves rose high over the sides of our little craft and batted the boat with unimaginable fury. Broke our front ramp and the boat began to fill with icy Channel water. The water reached my waist, and things looked black for us as our little boat began to sink. But the lieutenant rammed his body against the inner door of the ship and said, 'Well, what the hell are you waiting for? Take off your helmets and start bailing the water out.' All our equipment as well as ourselves were wet. Our TNT was floating around the boat. We were dead tired from pumping hand pumps and bailing out water with our helmets. Our feet were frozen blue." (4)

(The 116th Infantry Regiment was a unit from the Virginia National Guard.)

June 6, 1944, Seaman First Class Jim Clark: Liberty Ship U.S.S. Frederick W. Wood, off Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "Up on the bridge, I felt an awful jolt as we were within sight of land. Men were thrown into the water with their legs blown off. We transferred the survivors to LSTs, and they stormed ashore." (18)

June 6, 1944, Private Harry Parley, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: First Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "In the landing craft, I cowered with the others as we circled, waiting for our signal to approach. I remember looking back and seeing the Navy coxswain at the controls of our boat standing high above us completely exposed to enemy fire, doing his job as ordered. As our boat touched sand and the ramp went down, I became a visitor to hell. Some boats on either side of us had been hit by artillery and heavy weapons. I was aware that some were burning and some were sinking." (4)

June 6, 1944, Correspondent Ernest Taylor Pyle [*Purple Heart*, *Distinguished Service Medal*, *Medal of Merit*, Pulitzer Prize]: Off Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "The best way I can describe this vast armada and the frantic urgency of the traffic is to suggest that you visualize New York City on its busiest day of the year and then just enlarge that scene until it takes in all the ocean the human eye can reach clear around the horizon and over the horizon. There are dozens of times that many."



Higgins boat hit by Machine-gun fire as it comes into Omaha Beach.
Coastguardsman Delba Nivens saved the craft, landed the troops and returned for another load.
(Photo: U.S. Coast Guard)

June 6, 1944, Roy Stevens, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: First Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "We were in the first wave of the assault. We [Roy and his twin brother

Ray] rode in different landing craft. I think Ray was hit by machine gun fire. My boat struck a metal pipe put there by the Germans, and it sank in 20 minutes.” Later: “I looked down [at Ray’s temporary grave] and asked myself, ‘Why him and not me?’” (6)



Landing craft from 1st Division approaches Omaha Beach

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Sidney Saloman, 2nd Platoon leader, C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “So far so good.” “There was a wooden bench on either side of the [landing] craft. The men sat on either side facing into the center. Then, in the center of the boat, there was also a bench that went from bow to stern. The men straddled it facing forward. Some were brown-bagging it, nausea had taken over, and brown paper bags... were being filled. From some it was mainly dry heaves. They had been too nervous and tense to eat the early morning breakfast served on board the [RMS] *Prince Charles*. There were a few forced chuckles, as the platoon chowhound not only filled his brown bag, but also his steel helmet. (1)

Hit the Beach

June 5, 1944, Private First Class Gilbert Murdock, A Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [Purple Heart]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The beach... had cliffs of about 170-200 feet high. The beach itself consisted of stone called shingle, which was the tidal shelf at high-water line. At the cliff there was a seawall... made out of concrete, about 12 feet high, rounded at the top so that nothing, certainly not a grapple on a line, could catch on the other side. In the water itself, they had... Belgian gates, which were... about 8-10 feet high, 12 feet long. They had angled logs with mines on top facing seaward so that the under part of the landing craft would hit the mine and explode. They had hedgehogs which were three crossed steel rails which in some cases had mines on top. Ashore there were mines and barbed wire.” (1)

“[One man] ran off at the right side and he was immediately cut in half by machine-gun fire. At the same time that [he] jumped, I jumped from the left side... of the ramp and found myself in about nine feet of water. I remember floundering in the water with my hand up in the air... trying to get my balance, when I was shot... through the left hand and suffered from a broken knuckle. And I was shot through the palm of my hand.” (1)

(PFC Murdock had lost his glasses and could not see very well.)

June 6, 1944, Private John Barnes, A Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Suddenly, a swirl of water wrapped around my ankles, and the front of the craft dipped down. The water quickly reached our waist and we shouted to the other boats on each side. They waved in return. Our boat just fell away below me. I squeezed the CO² tube in my life belt. The buckle broke and it popped away. I turned to grab the back of the man behind me. I was going down under. I climbed on his back and pulled myself up in a panic. Heads bobbed up above the water. We could see the other boats moving off toward shore.... I couldn’t keep my head above the surface. I tried to pull the release straps on my jacket but I couldn’t move. Lieutenant Gearing grabbed my jacket and used his bayonet to cut the straps and release me from the weight. I was all right now, I could swim.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Thomas Valance, A Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “As we came down the ramp, we were in water about knee-high and started to do what we were trained to do, that is, move forward and then crouch and fire. (11)

“I abandoned my equipment, which was dragging me down into the water. It became evident rather quickly that we weren’t going to accomplish very much. I remember floundering in the water with my hand up in the air, trying to get my balance, when I was first shot through the palm of my hand, then through the knuckle.” (11)

“I was hit several times, once in the left thigh, which broke a hipbone. I remember being hit in the pack a couple of times, feeling a tug, and my chin strap... was severed by a bullet. I worked my way up onto the beach and staggered up against a [sea]wall. (1)

“One problem was we didn’t quite know what to fire at. I saw some tracers coming from a concrete emplacement which to me looked mammoth. I never anticipated any gun emplacements being that big.” (11)

“There was no way I was going to knock out a German concrete emplacement with a thirty-caliber rifle. (1)

“Essentially my part in the invasion had ended by having been wiped out as most of my company was. The bodies of my buddies were washing ashore and I was the one live body in amongst so many of my friends, all of whom were dead, in many cases very severely blown to pieces.” (11)

*[A Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division
was nearly wiped out landing at Omaha Beach.]*



"Into the Jaws of Death": Photographed by Coast Guard Chief Photographer's Mate Robert F. Sargent
1st Infantry Division off Higgins landing craft, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France

June 6, 1944, Private Harold Baumgarten, 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "At about 6:30 a.m., I saw the beach with its huge seawall at the foot of a massive bluff. An 88-mm shell landed right in the middle of the LCA [to] the side of us, and splinters of the boat, equipment and bodies were thrown into the air. Bullets were passing through the thin wooden sides of our vessel. The ramp was lowered, and the inner door was opened. A German machine gun trained on the opening took a heavy toll of lives. Many of my 30 buddies went down as they left the LCA. I got a bullet through the top of my helmet first, and then as I waded through the deep water, a bullet aimed at my heart hit the receiver of my M-1 rifle. The water was being shot up all around me. Clarius Riggs, who left the assault boat in front of me, went under, shot to death. About 8 or 10 ft. to my right, as we reached the dry sand, I heard a hollow thud, and I saw Private Robert Dittmar [from Fairfield, Connecticut] hold his chest and heard him yell, 'I'm hit! I'm hit!' I hit the ground and watched him as he continued to go forward about 10 more yards. He tripped over a tank obstacle, and as he fell, his body made a complete turn, and he lay sprawled on the damp sand with his head facing the Germans, his face looking skyward. He seemed to be suffering from shock and was yelling, 'Mother, Mom,' as he kept rolling around on the sand." (4)

“There were three or four others wounded and dying right near him. Sergeant Clarence Roberson, from my boat team, had a gaping wound on the left side of his forehead. He was walking crazily in the water, without his helmet. Then I saw him get down on his knees and start praying with his rosary beads. At this moment, the Germans cut him in half with their deadly cross fire. I saw the reflection from the helmet of one of the snipers and took aim, and later on, I found out, I got a bull’s-eye on him. It was my only time that rifle fired – due to the bullet that hit my rifle. It must have shattered the wood, and the rifle broke in half, and I had to throw it away.” (4)



1st Infantry Division, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France
Photographed by Coast Guard Chief Photographer’s Mate Robert F. Sargent

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant John Spaulding, E Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division (*Distinguished Service Cross*): (06:30 a.m.) Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “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. (Bad radio) I should have thrown it away, but training habits were so strong that I carefully took the antenna down as I had always been taught to do and put the 536 [radio] back on my shoulder. Your training stays with you even when you are scared. We could still see no one to 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 Company. Back in the water boats were in flames. I saw a tank ashore, knocked out. After a couple of looks back, we decided we wouldn’t look back anymore. We fired but couldn’t hit them. We were getting terrific small-arms fire ourselves but few were hit.” (11)

(08:00 a.m.) “Coming up along the crest of the hill Sergeant Clarence Colson began to give assault fire from his BAR as he walked along, firing the weapon from his hip. He opened up on the machine-gun to our right, firing so rapidly that his ammunition carrier had difficulty getting ammo to him fast enough.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Frank Chesney, 37th Combat Engineers [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “He [his battalion commander] happened to be lying on the dune line looking

over with a pair of binoculars to see where the fire was coming from, and... he got hit. I could see blood gush from his head and just down he went. He was killed almost instantly.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Photographer Robert Capa [*Medal of Freedom*]: (06:35 a.m.), Second Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (‘Easy Red’ with the 16th Infantry) (Diary) “The men from the barge waded in the water. I paused for a moment on the gangplank. The boatswain who was in an understandable hurry to get the hell out of there, mistook my picture-taking attitude for explicable hesitation, and helped me make up my mind with a well-aimed kick in the rear. The water was cold and the beach still more than a hundred yards away. Bullets tore holes in the water around me and I made for the nearest steel obstacle. A soldier got there at the same time, and for a few minutes we shared its cover. He took the waterproofing off his rifle and began to shoot without much aiming at the smoke-ridden beach. The sound of his rifle gave him enough courage to move forward. I tried to move away from my steel pole, but the bullets chased me back every time. Fifty yards ahead of me, one of our half-burnt amphibious tanks stick out of the water and offered me my next cover. Between floating bodies I reached it, paused for a few more pictures and gathered my guts for the last jump to the beach. Behind the human cover of the last two guys, I reached the beach. I threw myself flat and my lips touched the earth of France. I had no desire to kiss it” (14), (16)

“I found myself nose to nose with a lieutenant from our last night’s poker game. He asked me if I knew what he saw. I told him no and that I didn’t think he could see much beyond my head. ‘I’ll tell; you what I see. I see my ma on the front porch, waving my insurance policy.’” (11)



E Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division lands in second wave
at Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach
Photograph by Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Corporal Robert Miller, 6th Engineer Special Brigade [*Purple Heart*]: (07:00 a.m.) Easy Red, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “A destroyer ahead of us [in the LCT] with heavy smoke pouring from its stack. It seemed to be out of control and heading right for the beach. I thought, my god, they’re going to run aground and be disabled right in front of the German emplacement, when the ship made a hard left turn pulling parallel to the beach, blazing away with every gun it had point-blank at the position. Puffs of smoke and mounds of dirt flew everywhere on the hillside as the destroyer passed swiftly by.” (11)

(Landing) “[I] saw another LCT with the skipper standing at the tower receive a blow from the dreaded German 88; after the smoke cleared both the skipper and tower had disappeared. [Our] skipper decided to pull back to dump off the halftrack, transfer the wounded, and repair the ramp. As this was being done a Navy officer in a control craft pulled alongside and raised hell with the skipper, saying we should not be sitting there and to get our ass into the beach where we belonged.” (In the water) “It was a very tough swim. The weight of the soaked clothes, boots, gas mask, and steel helmet made it near impossible but I did reach hip-deep water finally and attempted to stand up. I was near exhaustion. At last I reached shore and was about fifteen feet up the beach when a big white flash enveloped me. The next thing I knew I was flat on my back looking up at the sky. I tried to get up but could not and reasoned, my god, my legs had been blown off since I had no sensation of movement in them and could not see them for the gas mask on my chest blocked the view. I wrestled around and finally got the gas mask off to one side. I saw my feet sticking up and reached my upper legs with my hands, and felt relieved that they were still there, but could not understand my immobility or lack of sensation.” (11)

(Corporal Miller had been hit in the spine and would never walk again. The last steps he had taken had been on “Bloody Omaha”).



E Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division lands in second wave
at Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach
Photograph by Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Private John Zmudzinski, 5th Engineer Special Brigade: (07:30 a.m.) Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Our job was supposed to be to bring in our heavy equipment and cut the roads through the beach and bring the cranes and bulldozers in. [I] saw a GI just lying there calmly taking his M-1 [rifle] apart and cleaning the sand out of it, he didn’t seem to be excited at all.” (Dropping down at the seawall next to his CO Captain Louis Drnovich) “He was trying to get things moving. He sent me down the beach to see if one of our bulldozers got in. I came back and told him nothing that heavy was getting in at that time. There was a half-track par way up to the exit road and Captain Drnovich sent me there to see what was holding him up. I went and hid behind it; it was all shot up and under heavy fire. When I got back to report, Captain Drnovich was gone.” (11)

(Captain Drnovich who had been an all-American football player at USC in California had gone to acquire ammunition had been killed on his way back to the seawall.)

“It was a matter of Russian roulette. I didn’t know whether to stay where I was or go down the beach. It was just a matter of chance, whoever got hit.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Walk, Assistant Beachmaster, 6th Engineer Special Brigade: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (08:00 a.m.) “One thing they spent a lot of time teaching us in the Army was how to dig foxholes. That is wasted time. It is a natural instinct when you’re under fire to dig a hole as fast as you can even if you have to do it with your fingernails. No one has to teach you how to dig a hole.” (11)

(Remembering the condition of his commanding officer) “He was really just not at all in control of himself. He had gone completely berserk.” (11) (The man had to be evacuated.)

June 6, 1944, Colonel Paul Thompson, 6th Engineer Special Brigade [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (08:30 a.m.) “Some of the engineer personnel were trying to blow it with Bangalore torpedoes, and of course I had conducted that exercise hundreds of times in training and it seemed to me they were going about it kind of clumsy.” (11)



In the surf, heading ashore

June 6, 1944, Sergeant John Robert Slaughter, D Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [*Bronze Star*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I was soaking wet, seasick and scared to death. The artillery and mortar shells were thick, and guys were getting cut down as we hit the surf. I was just a boy. We let the tide carry us to shore, then rushed behind the sea wall. There were 400 yards of sand, then a promenade, then 400 more yards until the bluff. It’s hard to say how vulnerable you feel. Across the beach a lieutenant colonel had secured refuge. We were trying to summon the courage to run, when our company leader, Colonel [Charles D.] Canham came rip-roaring up the beach. His right arm had been shot and it was in a sling, but he ran right up to the lieutenant colonel and yelled, ‘Get those damn men off the beach!’ That lit a fire under me. He must have been in horrible pain, but if he could do it, we could do it.” (17)

“There were dead men floating in the water and there were live men acting dead, letting the tide take them in.” (1)

“I watched the movie *The Longest Day*, and they came charging off those boats and across the beach like banshees but that isn’t the way it happened. You came off the craft, you hit the water, and if you didn’t get down in it you were going to get shot. This turned the boys into men. Some would be very brave men, others would soon be dead men, but all of those who survived would be

frightened men. Some wet their britches, others cried unashamedly, and many just had to find it within themselves to get the job done. This is where the discipline and training took over. Getting across the beach to the shingle became an obsession. The first thing I did was to take off my assault jacket and spread my raincoat so I could clean my rifle. It was then I saw bullet holes in my raincoat. I lit my first cigarette. I had to rest and compose myself because I became weak in my knees. Colonel Canham came by with his right arm in a sling and a .45 Colt in his left hand. He was yelling and screaming for the officers to get the men off the beach.” (11)

(Later that evening) “After dark an enemy ME-109 fighter plane flew over the entire Allied fleet, from right to left and just above the barrage balloons. Every ship in the English Channel opened fire on that single airplane, illuminating the sky with millions of tracer bullets. The heroic Luftwaffe pilot defied all of them – not even taking evasive action. I wondered how he ever got through that curtain of fire.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private Felix Branham, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I’ve heard people say we were lucky. It wasn’t luck. When we landed on Omaha Beach, we were well trained, we had good leaders... Each one of us had our own little battlefield. It was maybe forty-fifty yards wide. You might talk to a gut that pulled up right beside of me, within fifty feet of me, and he got an entirely different picture of D-Day.” (11)



E Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division lands in second wave
at Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach
Photograph by Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Private George Roach, Assistant Flamethrower, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “We went down the ramp and the casualty rate was very bad. We couldn’t determine where the fire was coming from, whether from the top of the bluff or from the summer beach-type homes on the shore. I just dropped myself into the sand and took my rifle and fired it at this house and Sergeant Wilkes asked, ‘What are you firing at?’ and I said, ‘I don’t know.’ (11)

(Interview in 1990) “Over the years I don’t think there has been a day that has gone by that I haven’t thought of those men who didn’t make it.” (11)



Gap Assault Team 10, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France
Photograph by Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Joe Pilck, G Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “We couldn’t move forward because they had a double apron of barbed wire in front of us, and to our right it was a swampy area we couldn’t cross and to the left they had minefields laid out so we couldn’t go there.” (11)



A cold walk into hell

Photographed by Coast Guard Chief Photographer’s Mate Robert F. Sargent

June 6, 1944, Private Harry Parley, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: First Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I shut everything out and concentrated on following the men in front of me down the ramp and into the water. I stepped off the ramp into a deep pocket in the sand, and went under completely. With no footing whatsoever, and with the weight of the 80-lb. flamethrower on my back, I was unable to come up. I knew I was drowning, and made a futile attempt to unbuckle the flamethrower harness. Inadvertently, I had raised the firing arm, which is about 3 feet long, above my head. One of my team saw it, grabbed

hold, and pulled me up out of the hole to solid sand. Then slowly, half-drowned, coughing water and dragging my feet, I began walking toward the chaos ahead.” (4)

“During that walk – I was unable to run – I got my first experience with enemy fire. Machine-gun fire was hitting the beach, and as it hit the wet sand, it made a ‘sip sip’ sound like someone sucking on their teeth. Ahead of me in the distance, I could see survivors of the landing already using the base of the bluffs as shelter. Due to my drowning and exhaustion, I had fallen behind the advance. To this day, I don’t know why I didn’t dump the flamethrower and run like hell for shelter. But I didn’t. What I found when I finally reached the seawall at the foot of the bluffs is difficult to describe.” (4)

“Men were trying to dig or scrape trenches or foxholes for protection against incoming fire; others were carrying or helping the wounded to areas of shelter. We had to crouch or crawl on all fours when moving about. Most of us were in no condition to carry on. All were trying to stay alive for the moment. Behind us, other landing craft were attempting to unload their equipment and personnel in the incoming tide and were coming under enemy fire as well. I realized that we had landed in the wrong beach sector and that many of the people around me were from other units and were strangers to me. What’s more, the terrain before us was not what I had been trained to encounter. We could see nothing above us to return fire to. We were the targets.” (4)

“Once or twice I was able to control my fear enough to race across the sand to drag a helpless GI from drowning in the incoming tide.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Captain Joe Dawson, Commander, G Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “As I landed I found nothing but men and bodies lying on the shore. Utter chaos reigned because the Germans controlled the field of fire completely. There was nothing I could do on the beach except die.” (11)

“A minefield lay in and around a path extending to my right and upward to the crest of the bluff. After blowing a gap in the concertina wire I led my men gingerly over the body of a soldier who had stepped on a mine in seeking to clear the path. I collected my company at the base of the bluff and proceeded on. Midway toward the crest I met Lieutenant Spaulding. I proceeded toward the crest, asking Spaulding to cover me. Near the crest the terrain became almost vertical. This afforded complete defilade from the entrenched enemy above. A machine-gun nest was busily firing at the beach, and one could hear rifle and mortar coming from the crest. I tossed two grenades aloft, and when they exploded the machine-gun fell silent. I waved my men and Spaulding to proceed as rapidly as possible and I then proceeded to the crest where I saw the enemy moving out toward the E-3 exit and the dead Germans in the trenches. To my knowledge no one had penetrated the enemy defenses until that moment. As soon as my men reached me we debouched from that point, firing on the retreating enemy and moving toward a... wooded area and this became a battleground extending all the way into town.” (11)

(1993) “The Battle of Omaha Beach was first: deadly enemy fire on an exposed beach where total fire control favored the defender and we were not given any direct fire support from the Navy or tanks. Second; the poor German marksmanship is the only way I could have made it across the exposed area because I could not engage the enemy nor even see him until I reached the machine-gun. Third: the fortunate ability to control my command both in landing together and debouching up the bluff together as a fighting unit. Forth: our direct engagement of the enemy caused him to cease concerted small-arms, machine-gun and mortar fire with which he was sweeping the beach below.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private John Robertson, F Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Our guys started jumping out in water up to their necks. I just lay there wondering what I was going to do. It wasn’t long when I made a quick decision. Behind me, coming at me, was a Sherman tank with pontoons wrapped around it. I had two choices; get run over by the tank or run through the machine-gun fire and the shelling. How I made it, I’ll never know. But I got to the shingle and tried to survive.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Warner Hamlett, F Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Our only chance was to get off as quick as possible, because there we were sitting ducks. Private Gillingham, a young soldier, fell beside me, white with fear. He seemed to be begging for help with his eyes. I said, ‘Gillingham, let’s stay separated, ‘cause the Germans will fire at two quicker than they will at one.’ He remained silent as I jumped and ran forward again.” (A shell landed between these two men.) “It took Gillingham’s chin off, including the bone, except for a small piece of flesh. He tried to hold his chin in place as he ran toward the shingle. He made it and Bill Hawkes and I gave him his morphine shot. We stayed with him for approximately thirty minutes until he died. The entire time he remained conscious and aware that he was dying.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Ugo Giannini, Military Police, 29th Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The water filled my ears and nose. It was cold, dark and silent below. I clutched my rifle. Should I let it go – to free my hands? The sea was all around. Fifty, sixty yards ahead was the land. A worm’s view – my body instinctively moved towards it.” (20)



Landing under intense fire

June 6, 1944, Walter A. Smith, E Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “One of the episodes I remember the most was debarking from

the landing craft and trying to take shelter from enemy fire behind one of their obstacles. Captain [Lawrence] Madill came up behind me and others, ordering all that could move to get off the beach. I looked up at him and his left arm appeared to be almost blown off.” (11)

(Going for more ammunition Captain Madill was hit again mortally. Before he died he ordered “Senior noncom, take the men off the beach.”) (11)

June 6, 1944, Captain Charles Cawthon, HHC Commander, 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The embankment was strewn with rifles, Browning automatics and light machine guns, all similarly fouled except for one tank that was blasting away from the sand toward the exit road. The crusade in Europe at this point was disarmed and naked before its enemies.” (14)

(Moving up the beach he heard a man cry out “I’m hit!”) “The white face, staring eyes, and open mouth of the first soldier I witnessed struck in battle remains with me. The image of no one... remains more vivid.” (1)

(Later) “This time, I did not hear the explosion or see the flash, but there was another jar to the side of the face... and again I started leaking blood. My injuries, though much less serious than most at Les Moulins, were spectacularly visible.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Major Stanley Bach, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Scribbled notes) “Navy men go flying through the air into the water. They never come up... flames everywhere, men burning alive. Direct hit on 2-1/2-ton truck gasoline load; another catches fire... men’s clothes on fire... attempt to roll in sand to put out flames.”

June 6, 1944, Staff Sergeant Harry Bare, F Company, 116th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “As ranking noncom I tried to get my men off the boat and make it somehow to get under the seawall. We waded to the sand and threw ourselves down and the men were frozen, unable to move. My radioman had his head blown off three yards from me. The beach was covered with bodies, men with no legs, no arms – god it was awful. I tried to get the men organized. There were only six out of my boat alive. I was soaking wet, shivering, but trying like hell to keep control. I could feel the cold fingers of fear grip me.” (11)

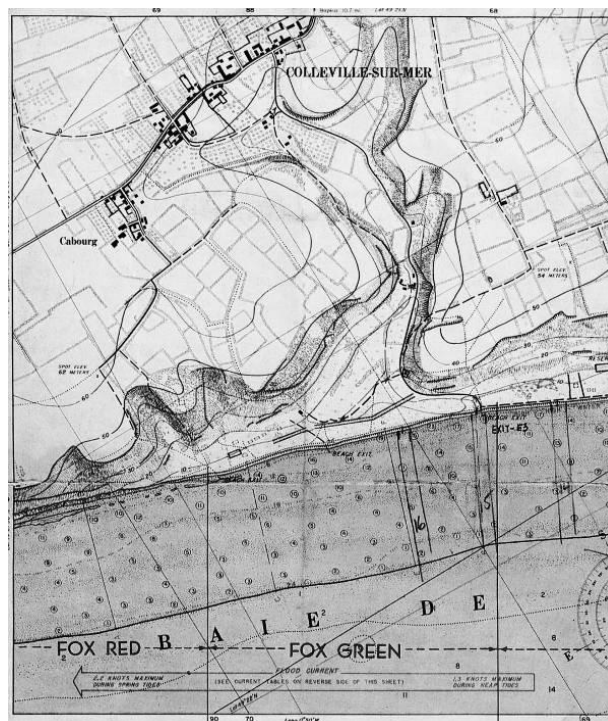
June 6, 1944, Private First Class Dom Bart, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [Purple Heart]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “With a stream of led coming towards us, we were at the mercy of the Germans. I floated around in the water for about one hour and was more dead than alive. Tried to land at several places, but always had to withdraw. It was impossible to get ashore. I lost all hopes and said my last prayer to the good lord.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Henry Seitzler, Forward observer, 9th Air Force: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Even after all these years I can see it again in my mind, just like it was happening right now. I went to the seawall and stuck my head up between machine-gun bursts to see what was going on. I looked right in the eyes of a young American. He was dead. His eyes were wide open. He was blond, crew-cut. I thought about his mother. Jerry would deliberately shoot the medics. I think that the hottest place in hell is reserved for the man that would do that.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private Harry Parley, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “A few men had already gone through. I

could see them picking their way up the slope. As I started up, I saw the white tape marking a safe path through the mines, and I also saw the price paid to mark that path. A couple of GIs had been blown to death and another was being attended to by a medic. As I passed, I could see that both his legs were gone and tourniquets were being applied. In the weeks that followed, I was to see much worse, but that particular memory remains with me still. I remember foolishly standing about forty feet below and watching in amazement the power and accuracy of the Navy fire landing just above me. It was like sitting in the very first row of a movie looking up at the screen.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Lee Polek, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Infantry bailing with helmets.) “We yelled to the crew to take us in, we would rather fight than drown. As the ramp dropped we were hit by machine-gun and rifle fire. I yelled to get ready to swim and fight. We were getting direct fire right into our craft. My three squad leaders in front and others were hit. Some men climbed over the side. Two sailors got hit. I got off in water only ankle deep, tried to run but the water was suddenly up to my hips. I crawled to hide behind a steel beach obstacle. Bullets hit off it; others hit more of my men. Got up to the beach to crawl behind the shingle and a few of my men joined me. I took a head count and there was only eleven of us left, from the thirty on the craft. As the tide came in we took turns running out to the water’s edge to drag wounded men to cover. Some of the wounded were hit again while on the beach. More men crowding up, and crowding up; more people being hit by shellfire; people trying to help each other. While we were huddled there, I told Jim Hickey that I would like to live to be forty years old and work forty hours a week and make a dollar an hour. I felt, boy, I would really have it made at \$40 a week. Jim Hickey still calls me from New York on June 6 to ask, ‘Hey, Sarge, are you making forty bucks per yet?’” (11)



Section of Top Secret 'Bigot-Neptune' map of Omaha Beach East, Colleville-sur-Mur

June 6, 1944, Second Lieutenant Charles DeSpain, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “You see guys fall on your right and on your left, but you just keep going. My story is probably just a small sentence in the history books with the 16 million other men who served in World War II.”

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Barnett Hoffner, 6th Engineer Special Brigade: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The sight of the waves breaking onshore choked us up. It seemed like thousands of homeless were floating in a long line all around us. When our ramp dropped and we charged out into the water wading towards the beach; we went through what looked like hell itself. On the fifty or so yards of sand between the seawall and the water line lay blasted tanks, trucks, tractors, dozers, tangles, anything, blazing trucks filled with gas, everything was blown up. Of the sixteen teams we had trained for the demolition, only five came in for their assignments and three of them had nothing with them. All their equipment was gone. And only three bulldozers out of sixteen were left and they couldn’t maneuver because the infantrymen were taking cover behind them.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Corporal Vincent Ciccarello, Mortarman, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, ‘Easy Red’, Normandy, France. “The water was deep, our equipment was heavy, waves were four feet high, many of our guys drowned, and we were all pinned down on the beach. Our big guns were shelling the shore, and the Germans were answering from the bluffs above the beach, and the whole sky lit up like fireworks.” (18)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Gerald Heaney, 2nd Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “[We] worked our way towards shore, doing our best to keep our weapons dry. All around me men were being killed and wounded. I remember being so exhausted when I reached the shore that I had all I could do to make it the short distance from the shore to the seawall.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Corporal Thomas R. McCann, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “When I think about leadership, the person who comes to mind is Carlton Barnett. He was a private and a little-bitty fellow just about five feet tall. Boy was he fearless. A few days before D-Day, he volunteered to act as a guide for our division. That meant he’d go in with the 16th [Regiment], figure out where our division was supposed to go and then lead us across the beach once we arrived. That was a very dangerous job. I mean, there are some things you don’t volunteer for. Before the invasion, everyone knew what job they were assigned to do. But this being war, everything went awry. When Carlton landed, there were hundreds of casualties from the first few ships. Men would be stepping off a ship into the surf and immediately shot. Even though it wasn’t his division, that boy spent the morning helping the wounded. He got them out of the water and ferried them to an evacuation boat offshore. There was artillery fire everywhere. He risked his life with each man he saved, but he must have saved at least 200.” (17)

June 6, 1944, Corporal Samuel Fuller, 3rd Battalion, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division [*Silver Star*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “There were bodies and blood all over. How was I supposed to run? I had a horror of stepping on corpses. But I finally reached him 200 yards away. Then [Regimental Commander Colonel George A.] Taylor did an amazing thing. He stood up and shouted, ‘Two kinds of people are staying on this beach, the dead and those who are going to die. Now let’s get the hell out of here.’ And then he led us off.” (15)



June 6, 1944, Captain Charles Murphy, 1st Engineer Special Brigade, 1st Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “My radio operator and my runner were killed. I felt like I’d been kicked by a mule and I went out. I came to with the water rushing the back of my neck and I couldn’t move my left arm and my left leg. Initially I was scared to death. I was afraid to reach and feel how big a hole was back there.”

June 6, 1944, Private First Class John Amendola: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “(Pinned down on the edge of the beach.) “Two men from my section got down behind a tetrahedron to escape the bullets. An artillery shell hit the tetrahedron and drove the steel back into their bodies. I tried to pry the steel loose from the men but couldn’t do it. Then I figured they were dead anyway. They looked just like... wax. I felt like I was seeing some kind of show. I felt this really can’t be happening.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Private Charles Thomas: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Navy coxswain killed and Platoon leader had his arm shot off.) “As I was getting off I stopped to pick up a smoke grenade, as if I didn’t have enough to carry. They guy running the boat yelled for me to get off. He was in a hurry, but I turned around and told him that I wasn’t in any hurry. My helmet fell back on my neck and the strap was choking me. My rifle sling was dragging under the water and I couldn’t stand. (On shore) There I crawled in over wounded and dead but I couldn’t tell who was who and we had orders not to stop for anyone on the edge of the beach, to keep going or we would be hit ourselves. [The seawall] was crowded with GIs all being wounded or killed. It was overcrowded with GIs. I laid on my side and opened my fly, I had to urinate. I don’t know why I did that because I was soaking wet anyway and I was under fire, and I guess I was just being neat. I ran into a bunch of my buddies from the company. Most of the m didn’t even have a rifle. Some bummed cigarettes off of me because I had three cartons wrapped in waxed paper. The Germans could have swept us away with brooms if they knew how few we were and what conditions we were in.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Captain Fred Hall, S-3, 2nd Battalion, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “It was every man for himself crossing the open beach where we were under fire. We opened our map case wrapped in canvas, containing our assault maps showing

unit boundaries, phase lines, and objectives. I remember it seemed a bit incongruous under the circumstances. And the noise – always the noise, naval gunfire, small arms, artillery, and mortar fire, aircraft overhead, engine noises, the shouting and the cries of the wounded, no wonder some people couldn't handle it. It was a matter of survival. I was so busy trying to round up the Cos to organize their men to move off the beach that there wasn't much time to think except to do what had to be done.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant J. T. Shea, aide-de-camp to Brigadier General Cota, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Letter ten days later.) “Although the leading elements of the assault had been on the beach for approximately an hour, none had progressed farther than the seawall at the inland border of the beach. [They] were clustered under the wall, pinned down by machine-gun fire, and the enemy was beginning to bring effective mortar fire to bear on those hidden behind the wall.” (11)

“Exposing himself to enemy fire, [Brigadier] General Cota went over the seawall giving encouragement, directions, and orders to those about him, personally supervised the placing of a BAR, and brought fire to bear on some of the enemy positions on the bluff that faced them. Finding a belt of barbed wire inside the seawall, [Brigadier] General Cota personally supervised placing a Bangalore torpedo for blowing the wire and was one of the first three men to go through the wire. At the head of a mixed column of troops he threaded his way to the foot of the high ground beyond the beach and started the troops up the high ground where they could bring effective fire to bear on the enemy positions.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private First Class Norbert N. Peters, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “In front of us, blocking our way to the cliffs was a 15-foot-high fence. In all of our training for this moment, no one had ever mentioned a barbed-wire fence. It was too high to scale, and anyone who tried would be nailed. After hiding behind the rocks for an hour, I saw four or five engineers with Bangalore torpedoes. Each man slid his torpedo under the wire and linked it with the ones in front and in back. Hundreds of us, hiding behind the rocks, cheered them on. When they lit the fuse and the fence blew up, it was like a touchdown. Everyone was ecstatic. We flew across the sand to the bluffs. If they hadn't blown up the wire, me, and about 2,000 other men would have been continually under fire. Two of the engineers were killed while they were working.” (17)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Barton Davis, 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “A headless torso flew a good 50 feet through the air and landed with a sickening thud.” (18)

June 6, 1944, Private Kenneth Romanski, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “There were already men there, some dead, some wounded. There was wreckage. There was complete confusion. I didn't know what to do. I picked a rifle from a dead man. As luck would have it, it had a grenade launcher on it. So I fired my six grenades over the cliff. I don't know where they went but I do know that they went up on enemy territory. I'll never forget. There was a body rolling with the waves. And his leg was holding on by a chunk of meat about the size of your wrist. The body would roll, then the leg would roll. Then the leg would roll back and then the body would roll back.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Debs Peters, 121st Engineer Combat Battalion [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (On board LCI-92 approaching Dog White.) “We lost headway and turned sideways in the waves and were parallel to the beach for a few seconds. We were hit directly mid-ship and blew up. Those of us on deck were caught on fire with flaming fuel oil and we just

rolled overboard. I fell into the water and went down like a rock. The Germans were raking the whole area with machine-gun fire. I held onto one of those poles until I could get my breath, then moved to another one. I finally got within about fifty yards of the shore. Now the tide was in full, it almost reached the road. I was loaded so heavy with water and sand that I could just stagger about.” (11)

(Sergeant Peters was one of the few men who survived the sinking of LCI-92.)

June 6, 1944, Captain Robert Walker [Purple Heart]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (On board LCI-91 approaching Dog White.) (Hit by Teller mine.) “I could see that even the soles of his [the man who had carried the flamethrower hit by enemy fire] boots were on fire... with horrendous drooping face blisters. Here I was on Omaha Beach. Instead of being a fierce, well-trained, fighting infantry warrior, I was an exhausted, almost helpless, unarmed survivor of a shipwreck. I saw dozens of soldiers, mostly wounded. The wounds were ghastly to see.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Major Sidney Bingham, Commanding Officer, 2nd Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I noticed explosions and thought that they were from the engineers blowing up the beach obstacles. It then occurred to me that [machine-gun]... bullets were kicking up that sand [at my feet]. From then on there was no doubt in my mind. I was scared, exhausted. I finally crossed the beach and got to the shingle... where about 100 men from F Company were seeking what little shelter that... afforded.” (1)

“...in E Company there were some fifty-five killed out of a total of something just over 200 who landed. [Feeling] complete futility. Here I was, the battalion commander, unable for the most part to influence action or do what I knew had to be done. The individual and small-unit initiative carried the day. Very little, if any, credit can be accorded company, battalion, or regimental commanders for their tactical prowess and/or their coordination of the action. Seasickness occasioned by the three or four hours in LCVPs played havoc with any idealism that may have been present. It markedly decreased the combat effectiveness of the command.” (11)

(Later) “I might just as well have been in the States for all the good I did the outfit that day. Everything... was done by small groups, led by the real heroes of any war. Very few were decorated chiefly because no one was left to tell about what they did.” (1)



1st Infantry Division, First wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France

June 6, 1944, Private John MacPhee, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Our life expectancy was about zero. We were burdened down with too much weight. We were just pack mules. I was very young, in excellent shape. I could walk for miles, endure a great deal of physical hardship, but I was so seasick I thought I would die. In fact, I wished I had. I was totally exhausted. (Hit three times.) I fell and for what seemed an eternity I lay there. That did it. I lost all my fear and knew I was about to die. I made peace with my maker and was just waiting.” (11)

(Private MacPhee was dragged to the seawall and eventually evacuated.)

June 6, 1944, Chuck Hurlbut, 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, 1st Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Pulling a small raft from the landing craft to the beach) “All of a sudden, boom! A mortar came over and it hit the raft, and it just went all over. It hit all our demolition stuff. I was knocked head over heels. I guess I blacked out. When I came to, I was on my hands and knees. I was spitting blood.” (1)

“Just pure chaos... all these dead guys, buddies. That’s hard to cope with. It hurts. It gets you. About 60 yards away comes a guy staggering along the beach. His backpack is tattered, his clothes are in shreds. One arm is dangling. He turns and half his head is blown away. And something told me I know that guy, something about his stature, his walk. And he turned toward me and looked at me, and through all that gore... I saw the tie. (On board ship Hurlbut had seen the man and remarked that it was “the ugliest, gaudiest, and most outlandish necktie I ever saw in my life.”) I wanted to cry out to him; I couldn’t. I didn’t have any voice. He just staggered away [and died].” (1)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant-Colonel John Williamson, Commander, 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The beach was loaded with men, tanks, DUKWs. I was surprised that nobody had moved off.” (2)

June 6, 1944, Major Frank Colacicco, Executive Officer, 3rd Battalion, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “It was like a theatre. We could see it all, we knew that something was knocking the tanks out, but we kept asking, ‘Why don’t they clear the beach? Why aren’t our people getting off?’” (2)

June 6, 1944, Corporal Samuel Fuller, 3rd Battalion, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division [*Silver Star*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “You’re out of control. You shoot at anything. Your eyes hurt. Your fingers hurt. You’re driven by panic. We never looked at the faces of the dead, just at their feet – black boots for Germans, brown for G.I.s.”

June 6, 1944, Private Albert Mominee, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (100 yards off shore.) “The craft gave a sudden lurch as it hit an obstacle and in an instant an explosion erupted followed by a blinding flash of fire. Flames raced around and over us. The first reaction was survival; the immediate instinct was the will to live. Before I knew it I was in the water. About fifty yards from shore the water was shallow enough for me to wade. Thirty yards to go and then twenty. I was exhausted and in shock. I heard a voice shouting, ‘Come on, Little One! Come on! You can make it.’ It was Lieutenant Anderson, the exec, urging me on. It seemed like someone had awakened me from a dream. I lunged toward him and as I reached him, he grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the water, then practically dragged me to the cover of the seawall. Only six out of thirty in my craft escaped unharmed. Looking around, all I could see was a scene of havoc and destruction. Abandoned vehicles and tanks, equipment strung all over the beach, medics attending the wounded, chaplains seeking the dead. Suddenly I had a craving for a cigarette.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Corporal George Ryan, Gunner, 105mm howitzer: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “He was just gone. We lowered the ramp. Everybody in the first M-7 took a deep breath and they gave it the gun, down the ramp they went and into the water. The thing almost disappeared from sight, but the driver gave it the gun and broom, right out of the water it came. He did it so fast. I wasn’t so much afraid of them bullets or the shells as I was of the cold Channel water. I cannot swim. Some German opened up on the side of the LCT with his machine-gun, blblblblang. That convinced me. Into the water I dove. I pushed with all my might and then I started going. I’m swimming and I’m swimming. Somebody taps me on the shoulder and I look up. I was in a foot of water, swimming. You talk about the will to live. If they hadn’t stopped me I would have swam two miles inland.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private Al Littke, Engineer Special Brigade: First Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I let go of my suitcase [with demolition charges] and I hit bottom. I pushed myself off; it was a good thing I had my life preserver on. I did a little dog paddle-breast stroke until my knees hit solid ground, then I got up and started to walk in. [At the seawall] it was pretty crowded there... about a foot in front of me little puffs of dirt flew up, about a dozen. I thought I’d better go up and look for mines. I had a roll of tape that brought it to my attention. I tied a stick around the tape and I took off again.” (11)

(Later) “All of a sudden there was a flash on the portside [of an incoming LCI]; it hit right where the GIs were coming down the ladder. GIs fell into the water screaming and hollering for medics. I thought that if I ever got out of this alive, I would never miss going to church on Sundays again.” (11)

(Later that day a brigadier general asked him how they could get to the top of the bluff. Private Littke said “I just pointed toward my white tape.”) (11)



Gap Assault Team 10, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France
Photograph by Robert Capa

June 6, 1944, Private H. W. Shroeder, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Third Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “We were hearing noises on the side of the landing craft like someone throwing gravel against it. The German machine gunners had picked us up. Everybody yelled, ‘Stay

down!’ The coxswain backed it out, relocated, and came in again, and I noticed the lieutenant’s face was a very gray color and the rest of the men had a look of fear on their faces. All of a sudden the lieutenant yelled to the coxswain, ‘Let her down.’ The ramp dropped and we could get a look at the beach and it was sickening. We were supposed to have tanks. There were two tanks there. One was knocked out and the other was out of ammo, and the only good they were doing was the GIs were piling up behind them to get out of the fire that was coming down and looked like a red snowstorm, there were so many tracers coming from so many different directions. There were GIs piled two deep. I started checking my .30-cal machine-gun and it was full of sand and water. [I] stayed there for an hour or so.’ (11)

(Later) “So the first man, he started out across, and running zigzag he made it to the bluff. So we all felt a little better to see that we had a chance, we were going to get off. And the minefield was already full of dead and wounded. And finally it came my turn and I grabbed my heavy .30-cal and started up over the shingle and across the minefield, trying to keep low. Finally I got to the base of the bluff. It was just the three of us there; we couldn’t find our platoon leaders or our platoon sergeants or anybody.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private J. C. Friedman, 747th Tank Battalion: Third Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, and trucks being blown up by mines. The noise of gunfire and gun powder as well as the smell of death seemed to be all around us. Everyone in my tank was praying. I kept thinking: Is this the end of me? Constant shelling and shrapnel flying off the tank seemed to indicate an unleashing of the powers of hell. I wondered if all this was worth the lives taken and if we would see the next day.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Gerald Heanet, 2nd Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “There was no one on the beach in front of us and we were going to touch down in a sector that had not been invaded by other American soldiers. All around me men were being killed and wounded. I ran as hard as I could toward shore, and I remember being so exhausted when I reached the shore that it was all I could do to make it to the cliff.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Captain Ralph Goranson, Commander, C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. Going across the beach was just like a dream with all the movement of the body and mind just automatic motion.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Donald Scribner, 2nd Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I was carrying a radio, my rifle, my grenades, my extra ammunition, my bedroll, all my gear, and I started sinking in the Channel. I didn’t think I was ever going to stop going down. I remember dropping three different times. Each time I did, machine-guns burst in front of my face in the sand. I didn’t stop because I knew what was coming; I dropped because I was so tired. I looked back, and I saw [Sergeant] Walter Geldon lying out on the beach with his hand raised up asking for help. Walter never made it. He died on his third wedding anniversary.” (11)

“[Sergeant Golas] had about half his head blown away by a grenade and he was still standing at the bottom of the cliff firing his weapon, hollering at the Krauts up above to come out and fight.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Sidney Salomon, Leader, 2nd Platoon, C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Bodies lay still, where they had fallen, trickles of blood reddening the sand. Some of the wounded were crawling as best they could, some with a look of despair and bewilderment on their tortured and pain-racked faces. Others tried to get back on their

feet, only to be hit again by enemy fire, Bodies rolled back and forth at the water's edge, the English Channel almost laughing as it showed its might over man and played with the bodies as a cat would with a mouse.” (11)

“Up until noon D-Day I thought the invasion was a failure and I wondered if we could make a successful withdrawal and try the invasion some time again in the near future.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Paul Radzom [Purple Heart]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “We were not supposed to be in more than eight feet of water. They dumped us off in fifteen feet. Our track didn't go anywhere but down. I had the boys elevate that barrel straight up in the air, as high as it would go. There was about six inches of that barrel up above the water, when the swells weren't hitting it. I lost everything including my helmet. I swam back and got back on that [LCT] ramp and the rest of the crew did too, except old 'Mo' [Carl] Dingledine, who couldn't swim. Last time I saw Mo he was clinging to that barrel. Never found out what happened to old Mo.” (11)

(Carl Dingledine was picked up by LCT 200 as it was returning to the transport ship.)

“There was supposed to be a road cleared out for us. Then we were supposed to go in about five miles and secure a position. We couldn't have gotten five yards [as the track vehicle was hit]. I saw a first louie laying there dead. There was the neck of a bottle sticking out of his musette bag. I snatched it. It was a bottle of Black & White scotch. That was the first time and the only time in my life that I drank scotch. I never felt a thing.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Jerry Eades, Crew Chief on an M-7: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “All of a sudden, shells hit the water around us and we knew we were back in the war. We came alive. It was a feeling of, well, I don't know how to explain fear, a feeling that went over you that you knew that the next breath could be your last. Of course, we were continuing to do our job. Us guys on the guns, at least we felt like we were doing something, shooting back. As long as you were shooting, you felt like you were in the war. But as for me, I would think, Let me hold my control, not let the guys see how scared I am, not lose control. That was my biggest fear, being caught afraid.” (11)



Continuing the landings

June 6, 1944, Captain Al Smith, Executive Officer, 1st Battalion, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: (07:45 a.m.) Easy Red, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “About 500 yards offshore I

began to realize we were in trouble. The nearer we got to the beach-line, the more certain I was that the landing was a disaster. Dead and wounded from the first waves were everywhere. There was little or no firing from our troops. On the other hand, German machine-guns, mortars, and 88s were laying down some of the heaviest fire I'd ever experienced." (11)

(Later) "Near the top, I can recall the most pleasant five-minute break of my military career. With our column at one of its temporary standstills, [Captain Hank Hangsterfer, CO of HHC] and I moved to the side to sit down and eat apples provided by the ship's mess. We also had time for a wee nip of Scotch whisky – my farewell gift from a little old English lady." (11)

June 6, 1944, Major Charles Tegtmeier, Regimental Surgeon, 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: (08:15 a.m.) Easy Red, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "Face downward, as far as eyes could see in either direction were the huddled bodies of men living, wounded and dead, as tightly packed together as a layer of cigars in a box... Everywhere, the frantic cry, 'Medics, hey, Medics,' could be heard above the horrible din. I examined scores as I went telling the men [medics] who to dress and who not to bother with." (Soldier who lost a leg.) "He was conscious and cheerful, but his only hope was rapid evacuation, and at this time evacuation did not exist. An hour later he was dead." (11)



Gathering at the sea wall

June 6, 1944, Photographer Robert Capa [Medal of Freedom]: Second Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Diary) "The men around me lay motionless. Only the dead on the water line rolled with waves. I did not think and I didn't decide it. I just stood up and ran toward the boat. I stepped into the sea between two bodies and the water reached up to my neck. I climbed aboard. The skipper was crying. His assistant had been blown up all over him and he was a mess. The barge brought us to the U.S.S. *Samuel Chase*, the very boat I had left only six hours before. On the *Chase*, the last wave of the 16th Infantry was just being lowered, but the decks were already full with returning wounded and dead. The mess boys who had served our coffee in white jackets and white gloves at three in the morning were covered with blood and were sewing the dead in white sacks." (16)

(During his time on Omaha Beach under heavy fire Capa had reportedly shot 106 images. Due to a darkroom error all but 8 images were destroyed. These images were first published in *Life* Magazine on June 19, 1944. Robert Capa was later killed in Indochina on May 25, 1954 in Thai Binh Province, Vietnam when he stepped on a land mine.)

June 6, 1944, Coast Guardsman Charles Jarreau: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Spotted Robert Capa in the water) “Poor fellow, he was there in the water, holding his cameras up to try to keep them dry, trying to catch his breath. He was really grateful to get out. He came aboard. He took pictures on our ship, which appeared in *Life* magazine.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Admiral Charles Cooke, War Department Observer: Destroyer U.S.S. *Harding*, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Visiting the beach) “The beach was strewn with wrecked landing craft, wrecked tanks, and various other vehicles. It was also strewn with dead and wounded.” (After two hours on the beach) “The shelling was getting very much heavier, increasing the casualty toll and it appeared highly desirable to leave.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Private Jack Keating, A Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “[U.S.S. *Texas* was firing] right over our little old boat, and every time she fired it almost lifted our boat out of the water.” “The first few minutes in the water I will never forget as long as I live. There were machine-guns, rifle fire, mortar fire, 88s, and god knows what else. And it felt as though every German was aiming at me. It’s not like in Hollywood. The actors jump into the water and in three seconds they’re charging up the beach. Well, it isn’t like that. We got behind the engine [of a tank] to get some heat back into our bones and had our first cigarette on French soil. I got my wits, as most everybody did, and realized now there’s only one way to go, baby, and that’s you gotta go in.” (Musette bag hit by machine-gun fire) “It ruined my cans of plums and peaches, my bars of candy, my K rations, cigarettes, everything was ruined. (Found a wounded captain on the beach) “And he was still alive. He asked me if I would take him to the aid station down the beach. I said, ‘There’s only one way I can do it: I’ll crawl. You get on my back and I’ll crawl.’ It was about 100 yards down the beach. I finally got him there.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Dawson, D Company, 5th Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (07:45 a.m.) “The skipper made an abrupt turn to the left and a tremendous wave hit the craft and we were lifted over several obstacles. Then the ramp opened and I was out. Five days on ship had taken its toll on my legs. After standing for several hours with the sea pounding, my legs just would not move fast enough.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Jay Mehaffey, 5th Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (07:45 a.m.) “I had the impression that the invasion had failed and that all other Americans had been killed or captured. At that moment on Omaha Beach the invasion of France had ceased to exist and it was in effect a military disaster. The grand design of battalions achieving D-Day objectives had collapsed completely.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Corporal Gale Beccue, B Company, 5th Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “There was little or no apprehension about going through the wire and up the hill. We had done that in training so many times that it was just a matter of course. The German forward positions had been pulling back to prepare rear positions.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Victor Fast, Translator, 5th Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I picked the youngest timid-looking, lowest-ranking Kraut I could find.” (To the German.) “You are going to tell me what I want to know. For you the war is over. You have three choices. Tell me nothing at all and I’ll send you over to the Russians. Give me information and if you leave any doubt in my mind that you’re telling the truth I’ll turn you over to my Jewish buddy [Herb Epstein] standing here next to me and he’ll take you behind that bush over there. He [Epstein] had not shaved for a couple of days, he was big and burly, I remember he had a .45 on his hip and a ranger knife in his boot, and an automatic tommy gun. Third, if you tell me what you know and convince me you are telling the truth I’ll send you to America and you will have a good life until the war is won and then you’ll get to go home.” (11)

(The German decided to tell the sergeant what he wanted to know.)

June 6, 1944, Edward Gurney: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Any man standing was a German sniper’s target. So I retrogressed back to the days of my childhood and ‘mud-crawled’ my way to the shore. I had to stop to catch my breath three times while crossing the sandy area. Each time I knelt down to take a breath, two mortar shells landed near me. A German machine-gunner took an intense interest in me. He tried to use his gun to cut away the stones protecting me.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Private Devon Larson, Combat Engineer: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Lying on the beach, I saw only two steel obstacles in front of me. Both with Teller mines atop of them. I wrapped a composition C pack around the base, piled about a foot of sand on my side so that the explosion would be away from me, pulled a fuse lighter from my helmet, yelled, ‘Fire in the hole!’ and pulled the fuse. I heard several more shouts of ‘Fire in the hole!’ to my left. I rolled to the right. The explosion rolled me a bit farther, but my two steel posts were gone. No more obstacles were in front of me or on either side, so I headed for the seawall.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Francis Dawson, D Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, VII Corps: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The [sea]wall was crowded. The men from the 29th Division were there, and you just had to push in for space. The wall was probably four feet high, made of wood. Being six-foot-four, I had to keep my head down.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Sid Salomon, 1st Platoon, C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, VII Corps [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. (Seeing the carnage all around him.) “I was of the opinion that the invasion had been a failure.” (2)

June 6, 1944, Private Ray Moon 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Easy Red, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I looked back at the beach. The view was unforgettable. The beach was a shooting gallery for machine-gunners. The scene below reminded me of the Chicago stockyard cattle pens and its slaughter house. We could see the men in the water and those huddled along the seawall. There was little movement and all those below were sitting ducks for any trained marksmen and artillery observers.” (11)



Wounded at Omaha Beach
(Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant John Ellery, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I had to peer through a haze of sweat, smoke, dust, and mist. I told them that we had to get off the beach and that I’d lead the way. I scurried and scratched along until I got within ten meters of the gun position. Then I unloaded all four of my fragmentation grenades. When the last one went off, I made a dash for the top. The other kids were right behind me and we all made it. I don’t know if I knocked out that gun crew, but they stopped shooting. Those grenades were all the return fire I provided coming off that beach. I didn’t fire a round from either my rifle or my pistol. After the war I read about a number of generals and colonels who are said to have wandered about exhorting the troops to advance. That must have been very inspirational! I suspect, however, that the men were more interested and more impressed by junior officers and NCOs who were willing to lead them rather than having some general pointing out the direction in which they should go. I didn’t see any generals in my area of the beach, but I did see a captain and two lieutenants who demonstrated courage beyond belief as they struggled to bring order to the chaos around them. When you talk about combat leadership under fire on the beach at Normandy. I don’t see how the credit can go to anyone other than the company-grade officers and senior NCOs who led the way. It is good to be reminded that there are such men, that there always have been and always will be. We sometimes forget, I think, that you can manufacture weapons, and you can purchase ammunition, but you can’t buy valor and you can’t pull heroes off an assembly line.” (11)

09:45 a.m. Radio report by Major General Leonard T. Gerow to Lieutenant General Bradley
“Obstacles mined; progress slow. 1st Battalion, 116th, reported 07:48 being held up by machine-gun fire – two LCTs knocked out by artillery fire. DD tanks for Fox Green swamped.”

June 1944, General Omar N. Bradley, Commander, 1st Army [*Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Presidential Medal of Freedom*]: Southern England. “[It was] a grave personal anxiety and frustration. I gained the impression that our forces had suffered an irreversible catastrophe, that there was little hope we could force the beach. Privately, I considered evacuating the beachhead... I agonized over the withdrawal decision, praying that our men could hang on. It would have been impossible to have brought these people back.” (11)

(1974) Normandy, France. “Omaha Beach was a nightmare. Even now it brings pain to recall what happened there on June 6, 1944. I have returned many times to honor the valiant men who died on that beach. They should never be forgotten; nor should those who lived to carry the day by the slimmest of margins. Every man who set foot on Omaha Beach that day was a hero.” (11)

09:50 a.m. Radio report to Major General Clarence R. Huebner 1st Division

“There are too many vehicles on the beach; send combat troops. 30 LCTs waiting offshore; cannot come in because of shelling. Troops dug in on beaches, still under heavy fire.”

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Warner H. Hamlett, F Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [*Purple Heart* (3)]: First Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “We decided to run between the pillboxes and enter the trenches that connected the boxes. We entered those trenches, slipped behind the pillboxes, and threw grenades into them. After the explosion, we ran into the boxes to kill any survivors. Rows of pillboxes stood between us and the top of the bluff. Slowly, one by one, we advanced. The bravery and gallantry of the soldiers was beyond belief.” (Wounded) “Sergeant England told me to go back to the beach and get a medic to tag me so I could be transported back to a hospital ship. As I painfully walked back to the beach, thousands of parts of bodies lined it. They were floating, heads, arms, legs. I realized what being in the first wave was all about. I was in the hospital in England for two months. I was then sent back to the front lines. In all, I saw seven months of combat and was wounded twice more. I would do it all over again to stop someone like Hitler.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Steve Kellman, L Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “After falling down twice, I looked at my leg and saw that there was blood coming through the legging. I crawled against the bluff and tried to put a bandage on to cover the wound.” (1)

June 6, 1944, Master Sergeant Raymond Summers, 58th Armored Field Artillery Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I could see countless figures sprawled on the beach. Machine-gun fire was coming from several points over the beach. Mortars and shells began bursting on the beach and on the edge of the water. The men weren’t getting off the beach as planned.” (1)



Tending to the wounded at the Omaha Beach bluff.

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant William Dillon, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “I knew that the Germans had to have a path up the hill that was clear of

mines. I looked around. When I was younger I'd been a good hunter and could trail a rabbit easily. I studied the ground and saw a faint path zigzagging to the left up the hill, so I walked the path very carefully. Something blew up behind me. I looked back and a young soldier had stepped on a mine and it had blown off his foot up to his knee. I brought the others up the path. At the top we saw the first and only Russian soldiers I have ever seen." (11)

NBC Radio news report of the Normandy invasion D-Day.

[03:00 a.m. Eastern War Time *"Berlin radio has just said that combined British and American landing operations against the western coast of Europe from the sea and air are stretching over the entire area between Cherbourg and Le Havre. There is no confirmation of this report."*] (WEAF New York) (19)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant William Bostick: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "I counted about a thousand dead soldiers." (6)

June 6, 1944, Captain Robert Walker, Headquarters Company, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "The cliff-like ridge [in front of Vierville] was covered with well-concealed foxholes and many semi-permanent bunkers. The bunkers were practically unnoticeable from the front. Their firing openings were toward the flank so that they could bring flanking crossfire to the beach as well as all the way up the slope of the bluff. The bunkers had diagrams of fields of fire, and these were framed under glass and mounted on the walls beside the firing platforms." (11)

June 6, 1944, Staff Sergeant Harry Bare, F Company, 116th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "Fire rained down on us, machine-gun, rifle, rockets from the bunkers on top of the cliff. The men went over the sides of the boats to avoid the fire. My radioman had his head blown off three yards from me. The beach was covered with bodies, men with no legs, no arms – god, it was awful. It was absolutely terrible. I could feel the cold fingers of fear grip me." (1)

"I tried to get my men off the boat and make it somehow to get under the seawall. We waded to the sand and threw ourselves down and the men were frozen, unable to move." (11)

(A short while later) "A burst of machine-gun fire made us duck behind [the] ridge. I crawled forward, circled wide, and came down between the bunkers, and destroyed both with grenade in the gun slots. I was very lucky. My canteen was torn to pieces by at least six rounds. Why I wasn't killed god only knows." (1)

11:00 a.m. Radio report by Major General Leonard T. Gerow to Lieutenant General Bradley

"Situation beach exits Easy still critical at 11:00. 352nd
Infantry Division [German] identified... Fighting continues on beaches."

June 6, 1944, Sergeant Charles Semchuck, 2nd Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "I was worried as all hell on top of the cliff just waiting for the Jerries to push us back into the Channel. They had the chance to do it. D-Day night, when we made contact with our A and B companies, my spirits and morale rose a hundred percent... I felt like doing handsprings for I was so happy. I knew then that the Jerries had muffed their one chance for victory. I never again want to be in another D-Day." (11)

June 6, 1944, Private Sam Ricker, 4th Engineer Combat Battalion, 4th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Some of the mines... were relatively new to us. There was one... antipersonnel mine... that could be detonated by stepping on it with your foot... and you could trip what we called a ‘bouncing betty.’ It would jump up in the air about waist and shoulder high and it exploded. It was loaded with ball bearings.” (1)

11:10 a.m. Radio report by Colonel Benjamin Talley

“Infiltration approximately platoon [strength] up draw midway between exits E-1 and Easy-3... Men advancing up slope behind Easy Red, men believed ours on skyline.”

June 6, 1944, Private Carl Weast, 5th Ranger Battalion: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “It was simple fear that stopped us at that shingle and we lay there and we got butchered by rocket fire and by mortars for no damn reason other than the fact that there was nobody there to lead us off that goddamn beach. Like I say, hey man, I did my job, but somebody had to lead me.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Sergeant William Lewis, 116th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “Lieutenant Leo Van de Voort said, ‘Let’s go, goddamn, there ain’t no use staying here, we’re all going to get killed!’ The first thing he did was to run up to a gun emplacement and throw a grenade in the embrasure. He returned with five or six prisoners. So we thought, hell, if he can do that, why can’t we? That’s how we got off the beach.” (11)



Coming in to the beach around noon, June 6, 1944
(Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps)

NBC Radio news report of the Normandy invasion D-Day.

[03:32 a.m. Eastern War Time “*Ladies and gentlemen we may be approaching a fateful hour. We now go to London... The text of communiqué number one will be released to the Press and radio of*

the United Nations in ten seconds from now... (Read by Colonel Ernest Dupuy, press aid to General Eisenhower.)

Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France. The communiqué will be repeated. Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France. This ends the reading of communiqué number one from Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.

Ladies and gentlemen this is New York NBC news room again. Men and women of the United Nations this is a momentous hour in world history. This is the invasion of Hitler's Europe... D-Day is here; H-Hour has struck."] (WEAF New York) (19)

June 6, 1944, Private Raymond Howell, Engineer attached to D Company, 116th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division [*Purple Heart*]: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "That's when I said, bullshit, if I'm going to die, to hell with it, I'm not going to die here [at the seawall]. The next bunch of guy's that go over that goddamn wall, I'm going with them. If I'm gonna be infantry, I'm gonna be infantry. So I don't know who else, I guess all of us decided well, it is time to start." (11)



Moving over the seawall and inland from the beach

June 6, 1944, Captain Oscar Rich, artillery observer, 5th Artillery Battalion, 1st Division: (13:00 p.m.) Easy Red, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "I'd like to give you first my impression of the beach, say from a hundred yards out till the time we got on the beach. Looking in both

directions you could see trucks burning, tanks burning, piles of I don't know what burning. Ammunition had been unloaded on the beach. I saw one pile of five-gallon gasoline cans, maybe 500 cans in all. A round hit them. The whole thing just exploded and burned. I've never seen so much just pure chaos in my life. But what I expected, yet didn't see, was anybody in hysterics. People on the beach were very calm. The Seabees were directing traffic and bringing people in and assigning them to areas and showing them which way to go. They were very matter-of-fact about the whole thing. They were directing traffic just like it was the 4th of July parade back home rather than where we were." (11)

"So there I was with an airplane, no mechanic, no help, and no transportation." (Seeing the beachmaster) "He couldn't have been over twenty-five years old. He had a nice handlebar mustache and he was sitting in a captain's chair there on the beach, and he had a radio and a half dozen telephones and a bunch of men serving him as runners and he was just keeping everything going. People came up to him and wanted to know this or that, or the other. He never lost his temper. He never got excited. He would just tell them and they'd go away. He was only a lieutenant, but these Army colonels and generals would come up and demand this and demand that and he'd say. 'I'm sorry, I haven't got it. You'll just have to take what you've got and go on with it.' They would shake their heads and go off and leave him." (11)

13:09 a.m. Radio report by Major General Leonard T. Gerow to Lieutenant General Bradley

"Troops formerly pinned down on beaches Easy Red, Easy Green,
Fox Red advancing up heights behind beaches."

June 6, 1944, Correspondent Ernest Hemingway [*Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Pulitzer Prize, Nobel Prize*]: Seventh Wave, Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. "Those of our troops who were not wax-gray with seasickness were watching the [U.S.S.] *Texas* with looks of surprise and happiness. Under the steel helmets they looked like pikemen of the Middle Ages to whose aid in battle had suddenly come some strange and unbelievable monster. [The *Texas* guns] sounded as though they were throwing whole railway trains across the sky. Slowly, laboriously, as though they [the infantry] were Atlas carrying the world on their shoulders, men were [climbing]. They were not firing. They were just moving slowly... like a tired pack train at the end of the day, going the other way from home. Meantime, the destroyers had run in almost to the beach and were blowing every pillbox out of the ground with their five-inch guns. I saw a piece of German about three feet long with an arm on it sail high up into the air in the fountaining of one shell-burst. It reminded me of a scene in *Petroushka*. It had been a frontal assault in broad daylight, against a mined beach defended by all the obstacles military ingenuity could devise. The beach had been defended as stubbornly and as intelligently as any troops could defend it. But every boat from the [U.S.S. *Dorothea*] *Dix* had landed her troops and cargo. No boat was lost through bad seamanship. All that were lost were lost by enemy action. And we had taken the beach." (11)



Landing at Omaha Beach around 2:00 p.m. June 6, 1944
(Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, Commander, First Army [*Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Presidential Medal of Freedom*]: Southern England. “The situation everywhere on the beach was still grave, but our troops... were inching inland. I gave up any thought of abandoning Omaha Beach.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Vince Schlotterbeck, 5th Engineer Special Brigade: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “The underwater obstacles could be seen plainly, since the tide was not all the way in. The wreckage on the beach and in the water was greater than anything I had ever imagined. Tanks were strewn along the beach, some half submerged. We could see that there were only two or three tanks on which we could depend. We headed for a likely spot but ran onto a sandbar and had to back off because the water was too deep. Just as we cleared, a shell threw up a spray in the exact spot where we had been grounded.” (11)

(Later) “Everyone was in favor of going in as soon as possible because we did not like the idea of hitting the beach after dark, so we kept on trying. And at about 20:00 [8 p. m.] we found the right spot. My mind had already been made up to the fact that a horrible sight would greet me, and it is a good thing that I had prepared myself because the number of casualties was appalling. The number of dead was very great, but what struck us hardest was the boys who had been wounded and were trying to hitch rides back to the transports. Wounded were walking along the beach trying to pick up a ride. Those who were more severely wounded came in pairs, supporting each other, when they rightfully should have been stretcher cases.” (11)

(Walking on the dead up the slope.) “At one point I was ready to walk on a body face up when the soldier opened his eyes and I almost twisted myself out of shape to avoid him. Luckily, I missed him.” (11)

June 6, 1944, Captain James Roberts, Aid to Major General Leonard T. Gerow, V Corps: (17:00 p. m.) Easy Red Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “As we approached, we were hit with artillery fire, fragments were knocking us around. Several people were hit, including the skipper of our LCI. He was killed. Simultaneously we hit a sandbar and we were still a hundred or so yards from shore. There was mass confusion and fear and frankly I was in a panic. It is very difficult to dig a hole in a steel deck, and there isn’t much cover on an LCI. The beach was just a complete shambles. It was like an inferno. There were bodies everywhere and some wounded being attended to. As I went by a tank I heard people screaming for morphine. The tank was on fire and they were burning to death. There wasn’t a thing that I could do about that and it was pretty nerve-shaking.” (11)

(Later) “Around midnight when things seemed to be fairly quiet I remember thinking. Man, what a day this has been. If every day is going to be as bad as this I’ll never survive the war.’ (11)

June 6, 1944, Lieutenant Henry Seitzler, Forward observer, 9th Air Force: Omaha Beach, Normandy, France. “My biggest problem was to try to stay alive. My work didn’t really start till D plus three, and here I’d gone in at H plus two hours on D-Day and I had been in the thickest and hottest part of it, and I had no real work to do, no assignment, except as far as I could see to stay alive, because I had no replacement.” (11)

(Later) “So we went out and climbed on a burned-out LCI. We broke into the pantry. Boy that was really something. It hadn’t been damaged. We brought a lot of stuff out and ate it on the beach under the seawall. The Navy really lived fine. We had boned chicken, boned turkey, boned ham. We had everything you could think of, and we made pigs out of ourselves because we were half starved by that time.” (11)