



The first wave at OMAHA Beach on D-Day. [NARA 26-G-2337]

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

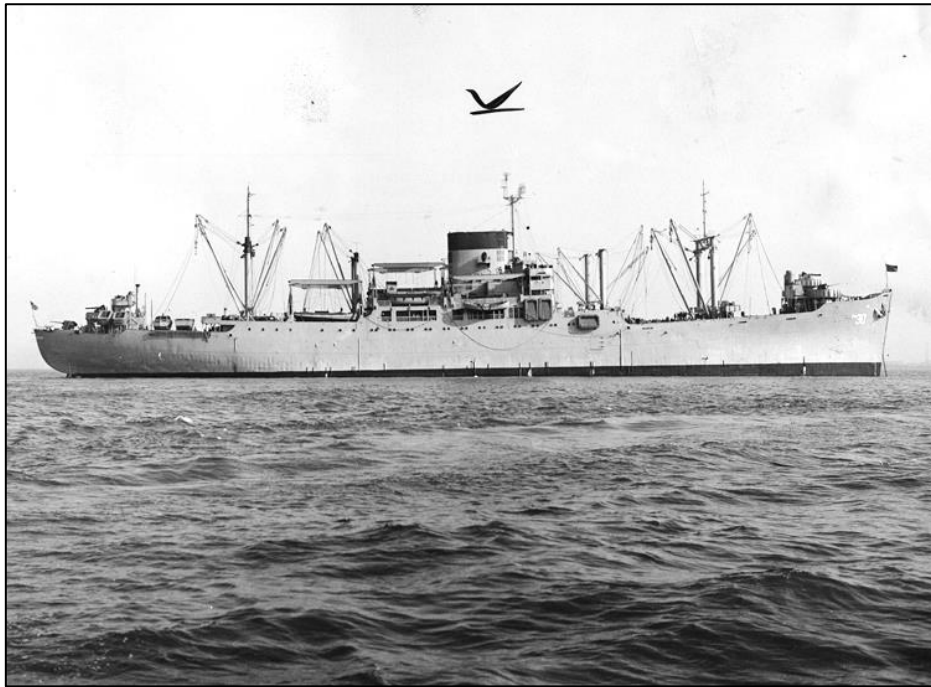
THE GREATEST SEABORNE INVASION THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

by Ian R Gumm MSTJ TD VR BSc (Hons)

PART NINETEEN – THE LANDING OF THE 116TH INFANTRY REGIMENT TO THE
EAST OF VIERVILLE-SUR-MER

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 Company A 116th Infantry Regiment [116 IR] and the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions in preceding articles and in this Fourth chunk, I let the actions of the remaining elements of the 116 IR that came ashore to the east of Vierville-sur-Mer tell their own story.

Company E, Company F and Company G 116 IR came ashore to the east of Company A at the Vierville Draw in the first wave of the landing. They had boarded their eighteen LCVPs from APA-30 the USS THOMAS JEFFERSON in which they had crossed the English Channel.



USS THOMAS JEFFERSON.

After circling to gather before setting off towards the beach, the eighteen LCVPs headed for the shore. The naval bombardment had set the grass on fire between the Vierville-sur-Mer and St Laurent-sur-Mer draws obscuring the coastal landmarks and a strong offshore current pushed the advancing LCVPs to the east. Consequently, the LCVPs carrying Company E, Company F and Company G 116 IR became mixed up and reached the shoreline further east than intended.

On their way to the beach, the LCVPs carrying the men of the 116 IR came under heavy German artillery fire. Several were hit including the one carrying PFC William C Riggs. The LCVP began to sink in the rough seas and PFC Riggs, with complete disregard for his own safety, dived into the turbulent sea, swam about 500 yards to another landing craft and directed it to the sinking LCVP. This action undoubtedly saved the lives of his comrades and for his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 PFC William C Riggs 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 PFC William C. Riggs (ASN: 34499006), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. When the landing craft on which PFC Riggs was coming ashore was struck by enemy shell fire, it began to sink in the rough sea. With complete disregard for

his own safety and despite the intense enemy small arms and artillery fire, PFC Riggs plunged into the turbulent sea and swam about 500 yards to another landing craft and directed it to the sinking craft. This act permitted the men to reach the beach and engage in the firefight against the enemy. The courage, initiative and heroism displayed by PFC Riggs exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹

As the LCPV carrying Technician Fourth Grade Elmer G Shindle headed towards the beach it took a direct hit from an enemy artillery shell and quickly sank. Technician Fourth Grade Shindle aided several of his comrades helping them to reach the beach. He then set about getting them into cover. In doing so he crossed the fire-swept beach on numerous occasions rescuing the wounded and near-drowned soldiers. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Technician Fourth Grade Elmer G Shindle 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 Technician Fourth Grade Elmer G. Shindle (ASN: 33494073), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. When the craft in which Technical Fourth Grade Shindle was coming ashore in the initial assault on the coast of France received a direct hit from an enemy shell, it quickly sank. Men were forced to abandon ship under heavy enemy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire in water too deep to wade. Technician Fourth Grade Shindle, as he swam to shore, aided others to reach the beach. Without regard for his own safety and despite the intense enemy fire, Technician Fourth Grade Shindle made numerous trips across the beach to the water to rescue many wounded and drowning soldiers and took them to the most available cover on the beach where he treated their wounds. The gallantry and personal bravery displayed by Technician Fourth Grade Shindle exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”²

The pre-invasion Allied air bombardment had been largely ineffective, with most of the bombs falling too far inland, and the initial naval bombardment, which lasted only 40 minutes, made little impact. The German defences were largely intact when the first assault waves hit the beach and many of them received a similar reception to that of Captain Taylor Feller's Company A 116 IR. The assaulting American infantrymen had little cover or very few of the craters they expected to find while crossing the 400-yard-deep beach. PFC Harold Baumgarten of Company B 116 IR recalled:

“As we approached the beach, the bullets started hitting our LCA. The Company B boat on our left was hit by a shell and blew up. The splintered wood, metal, and body parts

were raining down on us from about fifteen feet above. Our young British sailor wanted to drop the front ramp in the twenty-foot-deep water and motor away. Lieutenant Donaldson pulled out his Army Colt 45, pointed it at the frightened seaman, and bellowed, "Take us all the way in." The sailor's fear was well founded. He saw the boat explode on our left, heard all the explosions and gunfire around us and saw the teller mines attached to the wooden pilings in front of us.

Finally, the boat stopped, and the front ramp went down in neck deep water. German MG 42s were trained on our ramp opening, as I stepped forward to leave the craft. The water was bright red, from the blood of some of those who had been in front of me. Lieutenant Donaldson was killed immediately, Clarius Riggs was machine gunned on the ramp and then fell headfirst into the bloody water. I jumped into the neck-deep water (for my height) with my rifle above my head. On leaving the ramp a bullet creased the top of my helmet.

About 300 yards straight ahead was a 20-25-foot-high cobble (shale) stone seawall. There was barbed wire on its top. Looming above this wall was a bluff that rose up another 75 feet and had enemy positions (trenches) hidden in it. There was about 200 yards of dry sand leading before it with "ramps" and "hedgehogs," which were all mined. The ramps were logs at 45-degree angles facing the water. The hedgehogs were composed of three beams welded together and cemented in the sand. These obstacles plus the two I had already passed in the water, the element C (Belgium Gate) and angled stakes, were all placed to destroy the assault boats at high tide. The Belgium gates were made of metal, 10 feet wide and 7 feet high, and cemented down.

Some of the fellows, who were able to exit the boat without getting machine gunned, were being dragged under by the wet combat jackets and heavy equipment. Their life preservers were of no value. The water was over the head of the average man in my boat. German snipers were also picking them off. The water was being splattered up by bullets, as I ran through it. It was surreal. About 20 feet to my left front were two of our Dual Drive Amphibious medium army tanks, with their rubber sides down. Where were the other fourteen that were supposed to be here? Six 29ers were clinging to the one first to my left and seven were clutching to the one closest to me. The distal tank had a dead soldier hanging from the turret. It had been knocked out. While the tank closest to me was actively firing its 76mm cannon at the enemy.

About 200 yards from the wall, we were now running in ankle deep water. Robert Dittmar was ten feet in front of me to the right, and another of my boat team was behind me on my left. A burst of machine gun bullets came from above the wall and slightly to our right. I heard a thud from Dittmar's direction. Then instantaneously my rifle, which was carried at port arms across my chest, was hit and vibrated in my hands. My rifle had a clean hole

in its receiver, in front of the trigger guard. The seven bullets in the receiver had stopped the German bullet from penetrating the rifle to hit my chest. I had heard another thud behind me at the same instant, and my other boat team member had been gunned down.”³



PFC Harold Baumgarten, Company B 116 IR.

Landing on the beach Sergeant Howard W Rogers got separated from his platoon and found himself with a mixed group from various platoons of the 116 IR at the seawall. Nearby was an enemy pillbox that was pouring its deadly fire into the beleaguered American soldiers across the beach. Gathering the mixed group of men, he organised them for the attack. Leading the way Sergeant Rogers led these men against the pillbox which they successfully put out of action. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Sergeant Howard W Rogers 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 Technical Sergeant [then Sergeant] Howard W. Rogers (ASN: 33047696), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Soon after landing on the coast of France with the initial assault wave of troops, Technical Sergeant Rogers became

separated from his unit and found himself in a group of other soldiers who were also separated from their organizations. Upon discovering an enemy pillbox from which devastating machine gun fire was being directed, he quickly organized this group of soldiers into a raiding party. With complete disregard for his own safety, he fearlessly, despite intense enemy fire, led the raiding party in an assault upon the pillbox and destroyed this enemy gun position. Technical Sergeant Rogers' initiative, 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 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”⁴

Similarly, Second Lieutenant Leonard Alton Anker, finding himself and his platoon pinned down by withering enemy machine gun fire, charged the enemy's position.



Second Lieutenant Leonard Alton Anker.

Throwing hand grenades into the strongpoint he successfully neutralised the enemy killing 16 and capturing 5. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Second Lieutenant Leonard Alton Anker 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 Second Lieutenant

(Infantry) Leonard Alton Anker (ASN: 0-529110), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Platoon Leader in an Infantry Company of the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. At the time of the landing of Second Lieutenant Anker's platoon, the beach was under withering fire from enemy artillery, automatic weapons and small arms. After proceeding about 200 yards, all troops in the vicinity of Second Lieutenant Anker were pinned down by the devastating fire. Second Lieutenant Anker located an enemy machine gun that was inflicting heavy casualties. With complete disregard for his own safety, Second Lieutenant Anker, aided by an enlisted man whom he inspired to action by his own gallantry, fearlessly charged and destroyed the enemy strongpoint with hand grenades, killing 16 and capturing 5 of the enemy. Second Lieutenant Anker'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 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”⁵



The first wave at OMAHA Beach on D-Day. [NARA 26-G-2337].

Staff Sergeant Ozias Dorse Ritter came ashore with his machine gun section as part of the first wave and led his men across the beach to set up their gun. From their position he directed their fire onto the enemy and on at least one occasion exposed himself to draw the enemy's fire to aid in identifying the target. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Staff-Sergeant Ozias Dorse Ritter 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 Technical Sergeant [then Staff Sergeant] Ozias Dorse Ritter (ASN: 20365297), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Technical Sergeant Ritter led his machine gun section ashore in the first wave of troops to attack the coast of France. With complete disregard for his own safety, he fearlessly, despite devastating enemy fire which inflicted heavy casualties, led his men into position and coolly placed fire on the enemy positions. In one instance, he purposely exposed himself to draw enemy fire to provide his section with positive locations of the enemy guns. Another time, he entered a sector of observed enemy mortar fire to carry out the wounded. The gallantry, leadership and outstanding courage of Technical Sergeant Ritter exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”⁶



Landing craft approaching Omaha Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944. [NARA 44-4754-13].

Coming ashore with the leading wave was Major Sidney Vincent Bingham Jr Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion 116 IR [1/116]. As his men became pinned on the beach by the intense enemy fire Major Bingham sought what cover he could find. From his position, he noticed an enemy machine gun that was causing heavy casualties among his men. Gathering a small group of five of them, he led the way across the beach to the cliffs. There, with his small band, he climbed the cliffs and tried to find the enemy's position. Major Bingham was unable to reach the machine gun's nest but had discovered its exact location. Returning to the beach, he issued quick battle orders to his men, and they

attacked the enemy position from the flank and rear clearing the way for the Battalion to advance. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Major Sidney Vincent Bingham Jr was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

*“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Major (Infantry) Sidney V. Bingham (ASN: 0-23267), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. When his battalion was pinned down on the beach by the heavy and intense enemy fire, Major Bingham gathered together five of his men and personally led them across the beach and up a cliff in an attempt to seek out an enemy machine gun that had been inflicting heavy casualties on his unit. Though unable to reach the machine gun, he was, nevertheless, able to discover its location. He returned to the fire-swept beach and organized a flank and rear attack which succeeded in taking the enemy position, thereby permitting his unit to advance. Major Bingham's superior 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 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*⁷

Coming ashore behind the leading wave Colonel Charles Draper William Canham the Commanding Officer of the 116 IR found that the withering German fire had stalled his Regiment's attack. Although wounded shortly after stepping ashore, he continually tried to reorganise his men and get them moving forward. His actions eventually paid off and the 116 IR began to break through and get off the beach. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Colonel Charles Canham was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

*“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Colonel (Infantry) Charles Draper William Canham, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as Commanding Officer, 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Colonel Canham landed on the beach shortly after the assault wave of troops had landed. At the time, the enemy fire was at its heaviest and had completely arrested the attack. Though wounded shortly after landing, Colonel Canham, with utter disregard for his own safety, continued to expose himself to the enemy fire in his efforts to reorganize the men. His personal bravery and determination so inspired and heartened the men that they were able to break through the enemy positions. Colonel Canham'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 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”*⁸



Colonel (later Major General) Charles Draper William Canham.

Whilst coming ashore First Sergeant William Marvin Presley Jr of Company B 116 IR became cut off with a small group of men from the rest of their Company. Whilst trying to regain liaison with them First Sergeant Presley located an enemy Artillery Observation Post on the bluffs overlooking the beach. Leaving his small group to engage the enemy, he returned to the beach to find one of the Naval Shore Fire Control Parties. He subsequently led them to a position where they could direct Naval Gun Fire onto the enemy position all the time exposing himself to the defending enemy whilst covering them as they directed the fire. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 First Sergeant William Marvin Presley was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to First Sergeant William Marvin Presley (ASN: 33147994), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company B, 1st Battalion, 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. As First Sergeant Presley, whose small unit had been cut off by the heavy enemy fire, was attempting to make contact with the main body, he encountered an enemy strong point and artillery observation post on the top of a cliff. Placing his men where they could bring fire on the enemy, Sergeant Presley set out for the beach to contact the Naval Shore Fire Control Party and led the

Party to a position from which they could direct their fire. First Sergeant Presley remained in an exposed position to cover the Party while they were directing their fire. The gallantry, initiative and leadership exhibited by First Sergeant Presley exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”⁹

Another of those on the beach was Second Lieutenant Forest King Ferguson Jr a Platoon Leader in the Anti-Tank Company of the 116 IR.



Second Lieutenant Forest King Ferguson Jr [University of Florida yearbook 1941].

Seeing that the assault riflemen were pinned down by heavy enemy rifle and machine gun fire and their further advancement was blocked by an extensive belt of barbed wire, Second Lieutenant Ferguson dashed forward. Under this intense enemy fire, Second Lieutenant Ferguson made his way to the wire obstacle, inserted a Bangalore torpedo into it and blew a gap in the wire. As the dust created by the explosion subsided, he rose from his position and led the way through the gap. During this action Second Lieutenant Ferguson was severely wounded and, although evacuated to England and patched up, he never fully recovered and died a decade after the landing. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Second Lieutenant Forest K Ferguson 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 Second Lieutenant (Infantry) Forest K. Ferguson (ASN: 0-1322014), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as a Platoon Leader in the Anti-Tank Company of the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry

Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. When Second Lieutenant Ferguson reached the shore, he observed that the initial assault units were pinned down by the intense and heavy enemy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire, and that further advance was also blocked by an extensive barbed wire obstacle. With complete disregard for his own safety, Second Lieutenant Ferguson bravely moved forward under this heavy fire with a Bangalore torpedo with which he blew a gap in the barbed wire. He then rose from his position and, while leading his troops through this gap to the enemy positions, was wounded. The personal bravery, initiative and superior leadership of Second Lieutenant Ferguson exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹⁰

It wasn't just the Infantry who distinguished themselves during the landing, the artillery, engineers and medical staff were also in the thick of things. One such artilleryman was Lieutenant Colonel Thornton Loquett Mullins the Commanding Officer of the 111th Field Artillery Battalion [111 FAB].



Lieutenant Colonel Thornton Loquett Mullins.

Arriving on the beach under intense enemy fire Lieutenant Colonel Mullins found the infantrymen in his vicinity pinned down and unable to move. Knowing that he had to get them moving or they would be killed, he walked back to the

surf and began urging the infantrymen to cross the beach. When they began moving, he turned his attention to the enemy positions. Crossing to two tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion [743 TB] he directed their fire onto the enemy defences. However, when the tank fire proved ineffective, he organised a group of infantrymen and led them in an attack against the enemy positions. Wounded a second time during this attack he was forced to withdraw, but undaunted he refused to give in. He reorganised the infantrymen and went forward again, but this time Lieutenant Colonel Mullins was killed. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant Colonel Thornton L Mullins was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America, authorized by Act of Congress, July 9, 1918, takes pride in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross (Posthumously) to Lieutenant Colonel Thornton L. Mullins (ASN: 0-299488), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 111th Field Artillery Battalion, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, in France. Lieutenant Colonel Mullins landed on the coast of France with the initial assault wave under intense enemy small arms, machine gun, mortar and 88-mm. fire. The infantry was pinned to the beach and was apparently unable to move forward. Advancing to the end of the beach, Lieutenant Colonel Mullins then turned and, though exposed to the enemy fire, walked back to the water line, urging troops to move forward and off the beach. While accomplishing this, Lieutenant Colonel Mullins was wounded but continued in his efforts until finally the assault wave of the infantry moved forward. He then took command of two tanks and directed their fire on enemy strong points overlooking the beach. Observing that the tanks were unable to neutralize all the strong points, he organized a party of infantrymen and led them in the face of intense enemy fire up a hill to assault the strong points. Though again wounded and forced to withdraw, he refused to be deterred. Undaunted, he organized another party and while leading this group in an assault, Lieutenant Colonel Mullins was killed by enemy fire. The extraordinary heroism, initiative and personal bravery displayed by Lieutenant Colonel Mullins exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.” ¹¹

Another to distinguish himself on OMAHA Beach on D-Day was Captain John J Cotter a Medical Officer of the 116 IR who had come ashore early during the assault. Throughout the day he selflessly moved up and down the beach administering medical attention to the wounded American soldiers. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Captain John J Cotter 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 (Medical Corps) John J. Cotter (ASN: 0-429492), United States Army, for extraordinary heroism in

connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving as a Medical Officer of the 116 Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces on 6 June 1944, at Normandy, France. Captain Cotter landed early in the assault upon the coast of France as part of the Regimental Medical Detachment. At this time the beach was subjected to intense enemy rifle, machine gun and artillery fire and numerous casualties had been inflicted. With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Cotter administered medical attention to the wounded under this heavy fire. His fortitude and devotion to duty in rendering aid to the wounded under such hazardous and difficult conditions inspired those who saw him to a more determined effort in meeting the enemy. Captain Cotter's intrepid actions, personal courage and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 29th Infantry Division, and the United States Army.”¹²



Captain John J. Cotter.

Not all of those to land on the beach in the early hours of the invasion were from the Army; some like Lieutenant (JG) Frank Martin Hall USNR were US Navy personnel. Lieutenant (JG) Frank M Hall USNR was In charge of a naval beach party medical team. When the LCVF in which he was coming ashore sank, he swam three miles to the beach. There, using the meagre supplies he was able to salvage from the dead and wounded, and completely unmindful of the danger, he worked tirelessly under heavy enemy fire to treat the wounded. When it was established that the medical

officer in charge was missing in action, Lieutenant Hall assumed command of all medical work on an additional beach and skilfully covered both beaches without relief until the afternoon of D-day-plus-two. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant (JG) Frank M Hall USNR was awarded the Navy Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant (MC), [then Lieutenant, Junior Grade] Frank Martin Hall (NSN: 0-110137), United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Medical Officer in charge of the 7th Beach Battalion, Naval Beach Party Medical Team, during the invasion of the Coast of France, on 6 June 1944. Forced to swim three miles to shore when his own landing craft was sunk during the initial assault, Lieutenant Hall gallantly carried on his mission with such meager supplies as he was able to salvage from the dead and wounded. Completely unmindful of his own danger, he labored with untiring zeal under the terrific fire of the enemy, resolutely assuming command of all medical work on an additional beach when it was determined that the officer in charge was missing in action and, despite the extreme hazards and the grueling strain, skilfully covered two beaches without relief until the afternoon of D-plus-two day. His splendid example of leadership and courage and his valiant devotion to the fulfilment of a vital and perilous mission reflect the greatest credit upon Lieutenant Hall, his high professional integrity and the United States Naval Service.”¹³

Lieutenant (JG) Grant Gibbs Andreasen USNR was a scout boat officer during the invasion.



Lieutenant (JG) Grant G Andreasen USNR.

Lieutenant Andreasen successfully located the beaches and went in close to the beach to act as a guide for the approaching wave of DD tanks. From an advanced position, he fired rockets from his craft, at target objectives and rendered close fire support to the infantry assault waves. Later he rescued wounded personnel from burning landing craft under heavy enemy fire and carried them to safety. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant (JG) Grant G Andreasen was awarded the Navy Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant, Junior Grade Grant Gibbs Andreasen (NSN: 0-231795), United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Officer in Charge of an LCT Scout Boat during the amphibious assault on the Normandy Coast of France on 6 June 1944. Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Andreasen embarked in one of the first craft to approach the strongly defended Normandy coast and succeeded in the highly important mission of locating the beaches to be assaulted. Despite heavy surf and harassing enemy fire, he went in close to the beach to act as a guide for the approaching wave of DD tanks. While he was in this advanced position he fired the rockets from his craft at target objectives, moved in closer to the beach, and rendered close fire support for the infantry assault waves. In addition to his assigned duties, without regard for his own personal safety and under heavy enemy fire he rescued wounded personnel from burning landing craft and carried them to safety. The outstanding devotion to duty and courage under fire displayed by Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Andreasen were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”¹⁴

Lieutenant (JG) William Maxwell Jenkins USNR was the officer-in-charge of a naval combat demolition unit during the invasion. He and his crew accomplished the difficult task of blowing a 50-yard gap in beach obstacles even though the LCT to which he was assigned sank before H hour. When the party's Chief Petty Officer was killed while preparing a demolition charge, Lieutenant Jenkins completed the task himself and personally placed several charges. For his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant (JG) William Maxwell Jenkins was awarded the Navy Cross. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lieutenant, Junior Grade William Maxwell Jenkins, United States Naval Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and devotion to duty in action against the enemy while serving as Officer in Charge of Naval Combat Demolition Unit FORTY-THREE (NCDU-43), during the amphibious assault on the Normandy Coast of France on 6 June 1944. Although the LCT to which he was attached sank prior to H-Hour, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Jenkins salvaged his vital equipment and, directing his crew skilfully and with aggressive determination despite hostile gunfire, successfully accomplished the extremely difficult mission of blowing a fifty-yard gap through the enemy seaward band of beach obstacles. When one of his men was killed while preparing a demolition charge, he unhesitatingly completed the task himself and personally placed a number of charges, subsequently

supervising his crew in helping other groups to clear the inward band of obstacles. The conduct of Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Jenkins throughout this action reflects great credit upon himself, and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”¹⁵

Lieutenant (JG) Joseph V Amendolara USNR was the Naval Gun Liaison Officer to the 29th Infantry Division. The LST in which he was to land was prevented from beaching by hostile gunfire and he commandeered a passing LCVP. In this, he made his way ashore and began to organise the Naval Shore Fire Control Parties thereby making it possible for the Naval guns to support the troops on the beach. This was done despite the heavy enemy fire in the vicinity and for his actions on D-Day, 6 June 1944 Lieutenant (JG) Joseph V Amendolara was awarded the Legion of Merit. His citation reads:

“The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Legion of Merit to Lieutenant, Junior Grade Joseph V. Amendolara (NSN: 161162), United States Navy, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services to the Government of the United States as Naval Gunfire Liaison Officer attached to the Commanding General, 29th Division Artillery during the assault on the coast of Normandy, France, and subsequent advance inland, 6 June through 30 June 1944. Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Amendolara was largely responsible for the organizing, training and equipping of the Shore Fire Control Parties of the 29th United States Infantry Division. During the assault he was charged with their overall direction and was successful in effecting the reorganization at a time when enemy gunfire had caused severe casualties to equipment and personnel. When the LST on which he was embarked was prevented from beaching by hostile gunfire, Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Amendolara commandeered an LCVP and made his way ashore. Working under enemy fire and against heavy odds, he succeeded in reorganizing the Shore Fire Control Parties and restoring the designated arrangements, thereby making possible the directing of naval gunfire and the furnishing of much needed fire support to the troops during their occupation of the beachhead. The able leadership, devotion to duty and initiative displayed at all times by Lieutenant, Junior Grade, Amendolara reflects great credit on himself and the United States Naval Service.”

¹⁶

Throughout the landings, the German gunners in their defensive positions poured deadly fire into the ranks of the invading Americans. The bodies of the American dead lay strewn across the beach and floated in the water. The men that survived sought refuge behind the beach obstacles pondering the deadly sprint across the beach to the seawall, which offered some safety at the base of the cliff. Destroyed landing craft and vehicles littered the water's edge and the beach, and by 08:30 hrs the landings at OMAHA Beach had virtually come to a standstill.

The stories recounted here are just a few of the many that took place on OMAHA Beach that day when ordinary people did extraordinary things. Their heroism, courage and determination to get the job done saw them fight their way off the beach and begin heading inland. The first two hours were a bloody baptism of fire for the 29 ID, but the men of Colonel Charles Canham's 116 IR proved that they were up to the job. As their efforts to get inland became apparent, the landings recommenced and by nightfall the 29 ID held positions inland around Vierville-sur-Mer and Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer. They had not achieved anything close to their planned D-Day objectives, but a vital toehold had been gained.

To their east, the men of Colonel George A Taylor's 16th Infantry Regiment [16 IR] led the 1st Infantry Division [1 ID] ashore as they had done in Operation TORCH and Operation HUSKY.

Look Forward

In Part Twenty of D-Day, 6 June 1944 — The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I look at the landings of the 116 IR of the 1 ID on D-Day.

Published by In The Footsteps®

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

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¹ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

² *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

³ *Extract from account by Harold Baumgarten who served in Company B 116 IR.*

⁴ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

⁵ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

⁶ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

⁷ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

⁸ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

⁹ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

¹⁰ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

¹¹ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 42 (August 6, 1944).*

¹² *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*

¹³ *Commander 12th Fleet: Serial 10552 (October 30, 1944).*

¹⁴ *Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin No. 334 (January 1945).*

¹⁵ *Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin No. 334 (January 1945).*

¹⁶ *General Orders: Headquarters, First U.S. Army, General Orders No. 29 (June 29, 1944).*