

Short Comments on the 75th anniversary of D-Day

6 June 2019

Gary Heartsill



Ever Forward¹

“In commemoration of the determined efforts by the soldiers of the 29th Division’s 116th Infantry Regimental Combat Team who landed the morning of June 6, 1944 on this section of Omaha Beach...”

This memorial depicts the landing of A Company, 116th Regiment, on Dog Green (right side) of Omaha Beach at 07:00 – they were the first to land: and the first to pay in blood (as most movies depict), and they had a 96% casualty rate.

In my Air Force class (G. Heart Country) the question below was asked in the pre-test on Day I:

8. Out of the 40,000 troops that landed on Omaha Beach during the D-Day invasion, the number of casualties were:

- A. 2,200
- B. 12,000
- C. 22,000
- D. 32,000

What is your answer?²

Maybe this is the part of Omaha Beach where they landed at DOG GREEN (between CHARLIE, and DOG WHITE? The stretch A Company landed was just a bit over a quarter of a mile. This sand is beautiful in the picture – mainly because the blood has been washed away. Some of the dead are buried not far from here in the Normandy American Cemetery.³

¹ 10 Top Normandy D-Day Beaches and Memorials

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1SQJL_enUS800US800&q=normandy+beach+memorial&tbm=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwisuf3n68riAhUNCKwKHR6eB7kQ7Al6BAGDEA0&biw=1101&bih=919#imgrc=yg0hlaF5jJbHdM:

² Ambrose, Stephen E. (1994). *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The climactic battle of World War II*. New York, NY: Touchstone. Page 541.



³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lgyaukSwKE>

This page will show the real reason for talking about sandy beaches

Jim and I spent some time going to Tulsa to visit with John and shoot at the Zink range. These trips meant a lot to both of us and we were rewarded with some good times trying to shoot 600 yards. John took care of us at the range and cordially took care of his cousins at his home while we talked guns, steak, rifles, reloading, and wearing uniforms – to include a little history.

Back in these dark days beginning in about 2008, John surprised both of us with some gifts he had brought back from Europe – specifically from Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France.

Jim and I were both speechless (and teary eyed) as he gave us some sand from Omaha Beach...



On the 75th anniversary of D-Day it will be a good moment to say thanks, say a prayer, and think of the 9,380 graves⁴ of our military dead near this sandy beach.

⁴ <https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/normandy-american-cemetery>



Photo from Jim's collection.

My thanks to Jim who adds: "29th Inf. Div....The Blue and Gray Division. Army NG units in Virginia, Maryland, Florida, North Carolina, Kentucky, South Carolina and West Virginia. HQ. Ft. Belvoir, Va."

A. The main reason for my asking the Omaha Beach Causality question is to beat down the god-awful first 15 minutes of "Saving Private Ryan." Yes, we all know how terrible it was on D-Day and especially on Omaha beach for the first hour or so on DOG GREEN with A Company. The movie suggested a blood bath for the invasion and it was for that half mile or so but not for the whole D-Day beaches.

Ambrose says the casualties (killed, missing, captured, or unfit for combat due to wounds – p. 33) were 2200 at Omaha and 1200 at Juno. This means the first hour/first wave was a Mike Fox (Utter Chaos) but 'overall' it was not that bad for the ~60 miles from Quinéville to Cabourg (see map pp. 78-79). Yes, we all know there are other numbers from the likes of Google, Firefox, DuckDuckGo, but I like Ambrose. Some of you have his book(s) in your library and if you don't this one is available at Amazon.com for \$14.58 – you could have it by the 6th – D-Day!

B. In the meantime let me quote some pithy lines that hold the grit of some of the players. These are from chapter 17 (by its self, worth the price of the book...) titled "Visitors to Hell: The 116th Regiment at Omaha" (pp. 320-345).

"If the Germans were going to stop the invasion anywhere, it would be at Omaha Beach" (p. 320).

"With the exception of Company A, 116th, no unit landed where it was supposed to" (p. 324).

"In the lead Company A boat, LCA 1015, Capt. Taylor Fellers and every one of his men were killed before the ramp went down. It just vaporized" (p. 326).

One German gunner "at strong point 62 fired 12,000 rounds that morning" (p. 326).

"About 60 percent of the men of Company A came from one town, Bedford, Virginia; for Bedford, the first fifteen minutes at Omaha was an unmitigated disaster...When the ramps on the Higgins boats dropped, the Germans just poured the machine-gun, artillery, and mortar fire on them. It was a slaughter. Of the 200-plus men of the company, only a couple of dozen survived, and virtually all of them were wounded" (p. 328).

Company A had hardly fired a weapon. Almost certainly it had not killed any Germans. It had expected to move up the Vierville draw and be on top of the bluff by 0730, but at 0730 its handful of survivors were huddled up against the seawall, virtually without weapons. It had lost 96 percent of its effective strength" (p. 331).

“On the command boat for B Company, the CO, Capt. Ettore Zappacosta, heard the British coxswain cry out, ‘We can’t go in there. We can’t see the landmarks. We must pull off.’

Zappacosta pulled his Colt .45 and ordered, ‘By God, you’ll take this boat straight in.’

The coxswain did. When the ramp dropped, Zappacosta was first off. He was immediately hit. Medic Thomas Kenser saw him bleeding from hip and shoulder. Kenser, still on the ramp, shouted, ‘Try to make it in! I’m coming.’ But the captain was already dead. Before Kenser could jump off the ramp he was shot dead. Every man on the boat save one (Pvt. Robert Sales) was either killed or wounded before reaching the beach” (p. 337).

“Sgt. Slaughter’s boat was bracketed by German artillery fire. At 100 meters from shore, the British coxswain said he had to lower the ramp and everyone should get out quickly. Sgt. Willard Norfleet told him to keep going: ‘These men have heavy equipment and *you* will take them all the way in.’

The coxswain begged, ‘But we’ll *all* be killed!’

Norfleet unholstered his .45 Colt pistol, put it to the sailor’s head and ordered, ‘All the way in!’ The coxswain proceeded” (p. 343).

C. A couple of pictures from the movie; for sure, the only things you don’t have is the feel of the bullets or the smell of vomit and blood – have to give Hollywood credit.⁵

About two minutes into the clip...course, the ramp just fell.



⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSKerypwUDM>

(5:43)

From the German bunker one each MG 42 firing at 1200 rounds per minute of 7.92x57mm Mauser – “Hitler’s Buzz Saw”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhOrY88MGbM> (2:30)

or

See the Gunny change the barrel in seven seconds...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GL09sLcKW4M> (4:18)

(Think I will see the movie again this week.)

Gott segne Amerika

g ♥