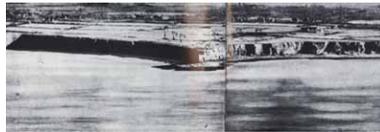


## SMALL UNIT ACTIONS



### POINTE DU HOE 2d RANGER BATTALION 6 June 1944



POINTE DU HOE CLIFFS *before bombardment show as almost vertical walls.*  
*Composite photo, taken 1943, marks enemy gun positions.*

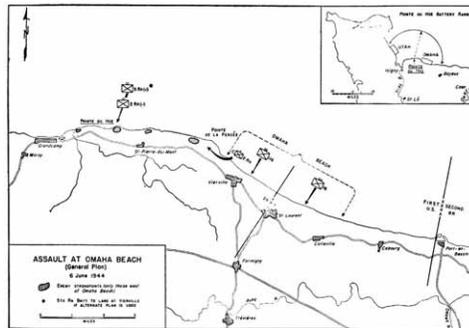
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On 6 June 1944 the V Corps of U.S. First Army assaulted German coastal defenses on a 6,000-yard stretch ("Omaha" Beach) between Vierville and Colleville. Their aim was to establish, on D Day, a beachhead three to four miles deep extending from the Drôme River to the vicinity of Isigny. The attack was made by two divisions, the 1st and 29th, with strong attachments of armor and artillery. On their right flank, a separate mission of unusual difficulty was assigned to a special assault force ([Map No. 1](#), page 2).

At Pointe du Hoe, four miles west of Omaha Beach, the Germans had constructed a fortified position for a coastal battery of six 155-mm howitzers of French make; four guns were in open emplacements and two were casemated, with further construction work on casemates reported under way in April and May. This battery was one of the most dangerous elements in the German coastal defenses of the assault area. With a 25,000-yard range, the 155's could put fire on the approaches to Omaha Beach and on the transport area of V Corps; in addition they could reach the transport area from which VII Corps, to the west, would unload for assault at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula ("Utah" Beach).

The position at Pointe du Hoe was strongly protected from attack by sea. Between Grandcamp and the Omaha sector, the flat Norman tableland terminates abruptly in rocky cliffs. At Pointe du Hoe, these are 85 to 100 feet high, sheer to overhanging; be-

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MAP NO. 1

low them is a narrow strip of beach, without the slightest cover for assaulting troops. Aerial photographs indicated what was later confirmed by French civilians: that the enemy regarded the position as nearly impregnable from seaward attack and were more concerned with defending it against an enemy coming from inland. The battery was part of a self-contained fortress area, mined and wired on the landward side ([Map No. 2](#), page 6). Its flanks were protected by two supporting smaller positions mounting machine guns and, on the west, an anti-aircraft gun. These positions were sited to put enfilade fire on the beaches under the Point, and to aid its defense against any inland attack. Enemy troops at Pointe du Hoe were estimated at 125 infantry and 85 artillerymen, included in the sector of enemy coastal defenses, from the Vire to the Orne, held by the *716th Infantry Division*. This unit contained a high percentage of non-German troops, and was regarded as of limited fighting value. Elements of the *726th Infantry Regiment* held the sector from Vierville to Grandcamp, in which, because of the continuous stretch of cliffs, coastal strongpoints were widely spaced. Those nearest Pointe du Hoe were one mile distant on the west and two miles to the east. The Germans -had made no preparations to defend this part of the coast in depth. The *716th Division* was

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stretched thinly along 30 miles of shore; behind it, but believed 10 to 12 hours away, the *352d Infantry Division* in the St-Lô-Caumont area was the nearest mobile reserve.

The Ranger Group, attached to the 116th Infantry and commanded by Lt. Col. James E. Rudder, was given the mission of capturing Pointe du Hoe and neutralizing the dangerous German coastal battery. The Group was made up of two battalions: the 2d Rangers, under direct command of Colonel Rudder, and the 5th Rangers, under Lt. Col. Max F. Schneider. Three companies (D, E, and F) of the 2d Battalion were to land from the sea at H Hour and assault the cliff position at Pointe du Hoe. The main Ranger force (5th Battalion and Companies A and B of the 2d) would wait off shore for signal of success,

then land at the Point. The Ranger Group would then move inland, cut the coastal highway connecting Grandcamp and Vierville, and await the arrival of the 116th Infantry from Vierville before pushing west toward Grandcamp and Maisy.

An alternate plan was ready if the support force of Rangers had not received word, by H+30, of success in the attack on the cliffs at Pointe du Hoe. In this event, the larger Ranger force would land on the western end of Omaha Beach (Vierville sector) behind the 116th Infantry and proceed overland toward the Point, avoiding all unnecessary action en route to its objective.

Company C, 2d Rangers, had a separate mission of its own at Omaha Beach. It was ordered to land with the first assault wave of the 116th and knock out German strongpoints near Pointe de la Percée, immediately flanking the Omaha landing beaches.

Special attention was given the Pointe du Hoe battery in the preparatory air and naval bombardments. As early as 15 April, medium bombers of the Ninth Air Force had begun attacks to soften up the position and to slow enemy efforts to construct further casemates. In order not to tip off the invasion plans, these early attacks could not be made too often and were combined with wide-ranging missions directed at other points on the French coast from Brittany to Belgium. On 22 May and 4 June, Ninth Air Force bombers struck again and on the night of

TIP OF POINTE DU HOE. *Photo taken from east side (1945).*



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5/6 June RAF heavies included the Point in a major attack on batteries along the whole invasion coast. Naval bombardment of the Omaha sector and its flanks began at 0550 on 6 June; particular attention, especially by the main batteries of the battleship *Texas* (14-inch guns), was paid to Pointe du Hoe in this fire. At H-20 minutes (0610), 18 medium bombers of the Ninth Air Force made a last strike on the Point.

At H Hour, 0630, the three companies of the 2d Rangers, led by Colonel Rudder, were scheduled to touch down at the foot of the cliffs and deliver their assault. They totaled about 225 men,<sup>1</sup> including a headquarters detachment.

### *Assault Plans*

The three companies selected for the mission at Pointe du Hoe had received intensive training and had developed special equipment for the operation. During April and May, at Swanage on the Isle of Wight, the personnel had been conditioned by hard practice in rope and ladder work on cliffs like those of the French coast, combined with landing

exercises in difficult waters. Personnel of British Commando units gave all possible help, based on their experience in coastal raids. As a result of experiment with all types of equipment for escalade, main reliance was placed on ropes to be carried over the cliff tops by rockets; in addition, the assault wave would take along extension ladders. British landing craft (LCA's) with British crews were used both in the training and in the actual operation.

Ten LCA's would be sufficient to boat the three small Ranger companies and headquarters party, including signal and medical personnel, with an average of 21-22 men on a craft. Each LCA was fitted with three pairs of rocket mounts, at bow, amidship, and stern, wired so that they could be fired in series of pairs from one control point at the stern. Plain H -inch ropes were carried by one pair of rockets, affixed to the rocket's base by a connecting wire. A second pair was rigged for rope of the same size fitted with toggles, small wooden crossbars a few inches long inserted at about one-foot intervals (see illustration, page 13) ; the third pair of rockets was attached to light rope ladders with rungs every two feet. The rockets were headed by grapnels. The rope or ladder for each rocket was coiled in a box directly behind the rocket mount. Each craft carried, in addition to the six mounted rockets, a pair of small, hand-projector-type rockets attached to plain ropes. These could be easily carried ashore if necessary.

Extension ladders were of two types. One, carried by each LCA, consisted of 112 feet of tubular-steel, 4-foot sections weighing 4 pounds each; these ladders were partly assembled in advance in 16-foot lengths. For mounting the whole ladder in escalade work, a man would climb to the top of a length, haul up and attach the next 16-foot section, and repeat this process until the necessary height was reached. As a final auxiliary for climbing, four dukws would come in close behind the first wave, each carrying a 100-foot extension ladder, fire-department type, with three folding sections. Two Lewis machine guns were mounted at the top of each

1. The Ranger companies averaged 65 men.

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of these ladders, which would be particularly useful for getting up supplies.

Speed was essential for this operation, and the small assault force was equipped for shock action of limited duration, with a minimum load of supplies and weapons. Dressed in fatigue uniform, each Ranger carried a D-bar for rations, two grenades, and his weapon, normally the M-1 rifle. A few of the men selected for going first up the ropes carried pistols or carbines. Heavier weapons were limited to four BAR's and two light mortars per company. Ten thermite. grenades, for demolition, were distributed within each company. Two supply boats (LCA's) would come in a few minutes after the assault wave, with packs, extra rations and ammunition, two 81 -mm mortars, demolitions, and equipment for hauling supplies up the cliff.

The tactical plan provided for Companies E and F to assault on the east side of the Point, and Company D on the west ([Map No. 2](#), page 6). On reaching the cliff top, each boat

team had a series of specific objectives, beginning with the gun emplacements and other fortifications on the Point. With these first objectives taken, most of the force was to push out immediately to the south, reach the coastal highway which was a main communications lateral for German defenses of the Grandcamp-Vierville coast, and hold a position controlling that road to the west until the arrival of the 116th Infantry from Vierville. If the assault at Omaha went according to schedule, the 116th would be at Pointe du Hoe before noon. Long before then, the main body of Rangers (eight companies) should have followed in at the Point to strengthen the foothold won by the initial assault.

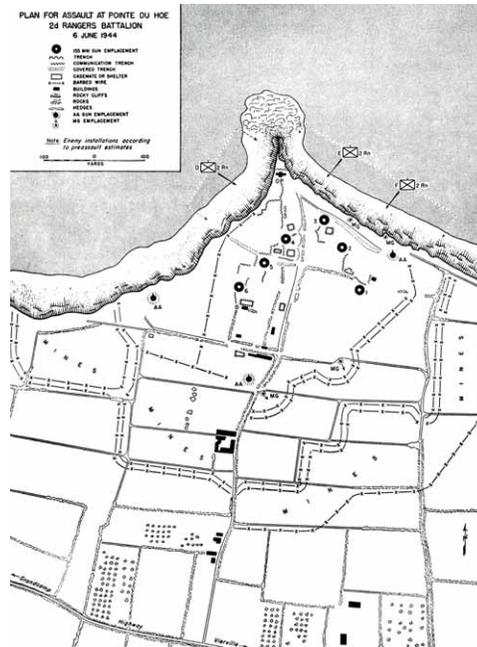
As a final feature of the plans, fire support after the landing would be available on call from supporting naval craft and from artillery landing after 0800 near Vierville. A Naval Shore Fire Control Party (12 men) and a forward observer of the 58th Armored Field Artillery Battalion were attached to Colonel Rudder's headquarters, which was distributed among the four LCA's carrying Company E.

### *The Landing*

D-Day weather was unfavorable for a landing assault, with rough seas that imperiled small landing craft during their approach to the beaches. Early visibility along the coast was poor, and an eastward-setting tidal current helped to produce errors in navigation. The results, on the Omaha Beach sectors, were delays in reaching shore and enough mislanding of assault craft to interfere seriously with the early schedule for the attack. The Ranger force did not escape these difficulties.

Shortly after leaving their transports (the LSI's *Ben Machree* and *Amsterdam*), the craft began to suffer from the results of the heavy going.<sup>1</sup> Eight miles from shore LCA 860, carrying Capt. Harold K. Slater and 20 men of Company D, swamped in the 4-foot choppy waves. The personnel were picked up by rescue craft and carried to England, eventually to rejoin their unit on

1. The LCA's had been designed with shallow draft and for relatively slow speeds; under D-Day conditions they proved less seaworthy than the LCVP's, although their draft permitted them to make drier landing.



MAP NO. 2

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D+ 19. Ten minutes later one of the supply craft sank, with only one survivor. The other supply craft was soon in trouble and had to jettison all the packs of Companies D and E in order to stay afloat. The other craft survived, with varying degrees of trouble; several shipped so much water that the men had to ball with their helmets to help the pumps. From the start, all the Rangers were soaked with spray. In one respect they enjoyed exceptional luck: there were very few cases of seasickness, in contrast to the general record at Omaha. Despite being wet, cold, and cramped by the three-hour trip, personnel of the three Ranger companies reached the shore in good shape for immediate and strenuous action. The most serious effect of the wetting was to soak the climbing ropes and rope ladders, making them heavier.

The leading group of nine surviving LCA's kept good formation, in a double column ready to fan out as they neared shore. Unfortunately, the guide craft lost its bearings as the coast line came in sight, and headed straight for Pointe de la Percée, three miles east of the target. When Colonel Rudder, in the lead LCA, realized the error he intervened and turned the column westward. But the damage had been done. The mistake cost more than 30 minutes in reaching Pointe du Hoe; instead of landing at H Hour, the first Ranger craft touched down about H+38, a delay that determined the whole course of action at the Point for the next two days. The main Ranger flotilla, eight companies strong, was following in from the transports, watching anxiously for the signal of success at Pointe du Hoe (two successive flares shot by 60-mm mortars). By 0700, if no message or signal had come, Colonel Schneider's force was scheduled to adopt the alternate plan of action and land at the Vierville beach. They waited ten minutes beyond the time limit and then received by radio the code word TILT, prearranged signal to follow the alternative plan.

So Colonel Schneider turned in toward Vierville, where the 5th Rangers and A and B of the 2d landed at 0745. Pending the outcome at Omaha Beach, and the success of Colonel Schneider's force in fighting cross country to the Point, Colonel Rudder's three companies would fight alone.

The error in direction had further consequences. The correction headed Colonel Rudder's column of LCA's back toward Pointe du Hoe, but now on a westerly course, roughly paralleling the cliffs and only a few hundred yards offshore. The flotilla thus had to run the gauntlet of fire from German strongpoints along three miles of coast. Fortunately these were few, and their fire was wild and intermittent. The only serious casualty was a dukw, hit by 20-mm fire as it neared the target area. Five of the nine men aboard were killed or wounded.

The plan for landings had to be changed as a result of the misdirected approach. Since the column of LCA's was now coming at the Point from east instead of north, Company D's craft would not be able to swing out of column and reach the west side of the promontory in time to assault with the other units. Therefore, to effect synchronized attack, the nine assault craft deployed and came in on line together at the east side ([Map No. 3](#)).

A final result of the delay was apparent as they reached the goal. Naval fire had halted just before H Hour, and the enemy on

## 7



WESTERN HALF OF FORTIFIED AREA, *photographed in February 1943 by aerial reconnaissance. The farm lane inland is the route followed by Company F group to reach the highway on D Day.*

Pointe du Hoe had 40 minutes to recover from the effects of the bombardment. As the LCA's neared the Point, they received scattered small-arms and automatic fire, and enemy troops were observed moving near the edge of the cliff. There was, however, no indication of artillery in action from the enemy positions.

At 0710, as the first craft were grounding under the cliffs, radio silence was broken to send Colonel Schneider the order for landing at Vierville. The message was acknowledged.

The small assault force was not entirely alone as it came in to a hostile shore. The British destroyer *Talybont*, which had taken part in the early bombardment of Pointe du Hoe at range of 2.7 miles, saw the flotilla heading in on a wrong course, and found it difficult to

understand, "as Texas' fall of shot on Pointe du Hoe was obvious." As the Rangers corrected course and came under fire from the cliff positions, the *Talybont* closed range and for 15 minutes (0645-0700) raked enemy firing positions with 4-inch and 2-pounder shells. Meantime, the U.S. destroyer *Satterlee*, 2,500 yards from Pointe du Hoe, could see enemy troops assembling on the cliff, and opened with main battery and machine-gun fire.

## 8

### *The Cliff Assault*

The nine LCA's touched down on a front of about 500 yards, the right-hand craft just under the tip of Pointe du Hoe, and the others spaced fairly evenly. No great distance separated some -of the boat teams, but according to plan they went into action as separate units, each facing its particular problems of escalade and opposition.

In certain general respects, their problems were similar. The 30-yard strip of beach between water and cliff had been completely cratered by bombs. The craters were to handicap the unloading of men and supplies and were to render the dukws useless after landing, for these craft were nowhere able to cross the sand and get close enough to the cliff to reach it with their extension ladders. The cliff face showed extensive marks of the naval and air bombardment; huge chunks of the top had been torn out, forming

*BOMB AND SHELL HOLES in the narrow strip of rocky beach, at the foot of the cliffs, slowed the Rangers in getting to the shelter of the cliffs after landing. This photo, taken on D+1, shows a boat bringing in first supplies for the beleaguered Rangers.*



## 9

talus mounds at the base. A few grenades were thrown down or rolled over the edge as the first Rangers crossed the sand, and enemy small-arms fire came from scattered points along the cliff edge. Particularly dangerous was enfilade fire, including automatic weapons, from the German position on the left flank of the beach. Once at the foot of the cliff the Rangers were better off, for the piles of debris gave partial defilade from the flanking fires, and the enemy directly above would have to expose themselves in order to place observed fire or to aim their grenades.

Naval support came to the aid of the Rangers at this critical moment. The destroyer *Satterlee* watched the craft reach

MAP NO. 3-The Assault Landings at Pointe du Hoc



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shore, and saw the enemy firing from the cliff above. The *Satterlee* immediately took the cliff tops under fire from its 5-inch guns and 40-mm machine guns. Fire control was excellent, despite attempts of enemy machine guns and a heavier gun to counter the destroyer's effort. Comdr. J. W. Marshall, commanding the *Satterlee*, believed this fire was decisive in enabling the Rangers to get up the cliff. However, his impression that the assault force "was pinned under the cliff and being rapidly cut to pieces by enemy fire" is not confirmed by the speed with which the escalade got under way, or by other details of the landing. Curiously enough, only three or four men out of 120 survivors interviewed remembered noticing naval fire after touchdown. One of these was Colonel Rudder, who "had the living hell scared out of him" by explosions which brought down a section of cliff just over his head, and which came from an unknown source. Both impressions—the Rangers', that there was no fire support worth mentioning, and the *Satterlee's*, that the Rangers were pinned down—are easily understandable under the circumstances of battle and the difficulties of observation. The probability is that the destroyer's fire on the cliff top, at the moment when the Rangers were starting their assault, did a great deal to prevent effective enemy opposition at the decisive moment.

In any event, the assault went forward without check. Ranger casualties on the beach totaled about 15, most of them from the raking fire to their left. In something less than ten minutes from landing, the first Ranger parties were getting over the cratered edges of the cliff top. The story of the boat teams will be given in order from right to left, roughly the order of landing.

*LCA 861*. Carrying a boat team of Company E, commanded by 1st Lt. Theodore E. Lapres, Jr., this craft grounded about 25 yards from the bottom of the cliff. Three or four Germans were standing on the cliff edge, shooting down at the craft. Rangers near the stern took these enemy under fire and drove them out of sight. At the instant of touchdown the rear pair of rockets was fired, then the other two pairs in succession. All the ropes fell short of the cliff edge, as a result of being thoroughly soaked. In some cases not more than half the length of rope or ladder was lifted from the containing box.

As the Rangers crossed the strip of cratered sand, grenades were thrown down from above them, or rolled over the cliff edge. These were of the "potato-masher" type, with

heavy concussion effects but small fragmentation. They caused two casualties. The hand-rockets were carried ashore, and the first one was fired at 15 yards from the cliff. It went over the top and caught. Pfc. Harry W. Roberts started up the hand-line, bracing his feet against the 80-degree slope. He made about 25 feet; the rope slipped or was cut, and Roberts slithered down. The second rocket was fired and the grapnel caught. Roberts went up again, made the top (he estimated his climbing time at 40 seconds), and pulled into a small cratered niche just under the edge. As he arrived, the rope was cut. Roberts tied it to a picket. This pulled out under the weight of the next man, and the rope fell off the cliff, marooning Roberts. However, a 20-foot mound of clay knocked

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off the cliff enabled Roberts' team to get far enough up the side to throw him a rope. This time he lay across it, and five men, including Lieutenant Lapres, came up. Roberts had not yet seen an enemy and had not been under fire. Without waiting for further arrivals, the six Rangers started for their objective, the heavily constructed OP at the north tip of the fortified area. About ten minutes had elapsed since touchdown.

Just after Lapres' group got up, a heavy explosion occurred above the rest of 861's team, waiting their turn on the rope. Pfc. Paul L. Medeiros was half buried under debris from the cliff. None of the men knew what caused the explosion, whether a naval shell, or the detonation of a German mine of a peculiar type found later at one or two places along the cliff edge. The enemy had hung naval shells (200-mm or larger) over the edge, attached by wire to a pull-type firing device and fitted with a short-delay time fuze.<sup>1</sup> The explosion had no effect on the escalade. Medeiros and four more Rangers came up quickly, found Roberts' party already gone and out of sight, and followed from the cliff edge toward the same objective.<sup>2</sup>

*LCA 862.* This craft, carrying 15 Rangers and NSFC personnel, landed about 100 yards left of the flank LCA. The men had no trouble in disembarking, but once on the sand they found themselves exposed to machine-gun fire from eastward of the landing area. One man was killed and one wounded by this fire; two more injured by grenade fragments.

The forward pair of rockets had been fired immediately on touchdown, followed by all four others together. One plain and two toggle ropes reached the top, but one toggle rope pulled out. Tech. 5 Victor J. Aguzzi, 1st Lt. Joseph E. Leagans (commanding the team), and S/Sgt. Joseph J. Cleaves went up the two remaining ropes, arrived at the top almost together, and fell into a convenient shell hole just beyond the edge. There they paused only long enough for two more men to join; then, following standard Ranger tactics, the five moved off without waiting for the rest of the team, who came up a few minutes later.

*LCA 888.* Colonel Rudder's craft, first to hit the beach, had 15 men of Company E and 6 headquarters personnel, including Lt. J. W. Eikner, communications officer. A few enemy troops were seen on the cliff edge as the LCA neared shore, but, when Sgt. Dominick B. Boggetto shot one German off the edge with a BAR, the others disappeared. The Rangers had trouble in getting through

1. If, as French civilians later reported, many such shells had been hung, they were probably neutralized by naval fire. No other Ranger party saw them. They may have been planned for dropping to the beach rather than for explosion at the cliff edge.

2. The photograph on page 13, taken a year later, shows the cliff at the point where 861's men climbed. Two ropes, one of them a ladder type, are still in place. This suggests that later climbers brought up a rope ladder to supplement the first rope, but the point cannot be settled by available evidence.

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*LAST LAP OF THE CLIMB. This may be the area where the men from LCA 888 managed to get up by use of an extension ladder, placed on a great mound of debris knocked out of cliff top. This photo was probably taken on D+2, when route was being used for supplies. A toggle rope and two plain ropes are seen below ladder.*



## 13

the beach craters; neck deep in water, they found it hard to climb out because of the slick clay bottom. A few grenades came over the cliff without causing casualties.

The rockets were fired in series, at 35 yards from the cliff base. None of the waterlogged ropes reached the top. When two Rangers, best of the group at free-climbing, tried to work up the smashed cliff face without ropes, they were balked by the slippery clay surface, which gave way too easily to permit knife-holds. Bombs or shells had brought down a mass of wet clay from the cliff top, forming a mound 35 to 40 feet high against the cliff. A 16-foot section of the extension ladder, with a toggle rope attached, was carried to the top of the mound and set up. A Ranger climbed the ladder, cut a foothold in the cliff, and stood in this to hold the ladder while a second man climbed it for another 16 feet. The top man repeated the process, and this time Tech. 5 George J. Putzek reached the edge. Lying flat, with the ladder on his arms, he held on while a man below climbed the toggle rope, then the ladder.

From there on it was easy. As the first men up moved a few yards from the cliff edge to protect the climbers, they found plenty of cover in bomb craters, and no sign of an enemy. In 15 minutes from landing, all the Company E men from LCA 888 were up and

ready to move on. Colonel Rudder and headquarters personnel remained for the moment below, finding shelter from enfilade fire in a shallow cave at the bottom of the cliff. By 0725, 1st Lt. James W. Eikner had his equipment set up and flashed word by SCR 300 that Colonel Rudder's force had landed. Five minutes later he sent out the code word indicating "men up the cliff"; the "Roger" that receipted for this message, again on SCR 300, was Eikner's last communication of D Day on the Ranger command net. When he sent the message PRAISE THE LORD ("all men up cliff") at 0745, no response was forthcoming.

*LCA 722.* Twenty yards left of Colonel Rudder's craft, LCA 722 hit shore with IS Company E Rangers, 5 headquarters men, a *Stars and Stripes* photographer, and a Commando officer who had assisted the Rangers in training. Touchdown was made at the edge of a crater, and the men could not avoid it in debarking. Enemy grenades were ineffectual, and the craters and debris on the beach gave sufficient cover from enfilading fire from the left. The only casualty was Pfc. John J. Sillman, wounded three times as the craft came in, hit twice on the beach, and destined to survive. A good deal of assorted equipment came on this craft, including the SCR 284, two pigeons, a 60-mm mortar with ammunition, and some demolitions. All were got ashore without loss, though it took maneuvering to avoid the deep water in the crater. Tech. 4 C. S. Parker and two other communications men hefted the big radio set on a pack board, and managed to get it in and working before the first climbers from 722 reached the top.

The rockets had been fired just before landing. One ladder and one plain rope got up and held (LCA 722 had experienced no trouble with water, and the ropes were comparatively dry). The single rope lay in a slight crevice, but the ladder came down on

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an overhang where it seemed exposed to the flanking fire and would be hard to climb. Tech. 5 Edward P. Smith tried the plain rope and found he could easily "walk it up." On top three or four minutes after landing, he saw a group of Germans to his right throwing grenades over the cliff. Sgt. Hayward A. Robey joined Smith with a BAR. Robey lay in a shallow niche at the cliff edge and sprayed the grenadiers with 40 or 50 rounds, fast fire. Three of the enemy dropped and the rest disappeared into shelters. Pfc. Frank H. Peterson, lightly wounded on the beach by a grenade, joined up and the three Rangers went off on their mission without waiting for the next climbers.

The mortar section in this boat team remained below, according to plan, with the purpose of setting up their 60-mm on the beach to deliver supporting fires. But the beach was too exposed to make this practicable, and time was consumed in getting ammunition from the one surviving supply craft. About 0745 the mortar team went on top without having yet fired.

*LCA 668.* Company D's craft had been scheduled to land on the west side of the Point. As a result of the change in angle of approach, the two surviving LCA's came in to the left of Company E, and in the center of the Ranger line.

LCA 668 grounded short of the beach strip, as a result of boulders knocked from the cliff by bombardment. The men had to swim in about 20 feet. While 1st Sgt. Leonard G. Lomell was bringing in a box of rope and a hand-projector rocket, he was wounded in the side by a machine-gun bullet but reached shore and kept going. Despite the unusual distance from the cliff, and the very wet ropes, three rockets had carried the cliff edge with a toggle rope and the two rope ladders. However, the grapnels on the ladders just made the top; since the lead rope connecting grapnels with the top of the ladders was 40 feet long, the Rangers had, in effect, two plain ropes and a toggle. Sergeant Lomell put his best climber on the toggle while he tried one of the ladders. All ropes were on an overhang, and only the toggle line proved practicable. Even on it, climbing would be slow, so Lomell called for the extension ladders. Picking a spot high on the talus, his men found that one 16-foot section added to a 20-foot section reached the top of the vertical stretch, beyond which a slide of debris had reduced the slope enough to make it negotiable without ropes. Two men had got up by the toggle rope; the rest used the ladder and made the top quickly. Grenades caused some annoyance until the first men up could cover the rest of the party. Twelve men moved off from the edge with Sergeant Lomell and 1st Lt. George F. Kerchner.

*LCA 858.* Shipping enough water all the way in to keep the Rangers busy, this craft nevertheless kept up fairly well and was only a minute or two behind the others at the beach. The men were put out into a crater and went over their heads in muddy water. Despite the wetting, a bazooka was the only piece of equipment put out of action. Three men were hit by machine-gun fire from the east flank.

The rockets were fired in series, the plain ropes first. All the ropes were wet, and

## 15

only one hand-line got over the cliff. It lay in a crevice that would give some protection from enemy flanking fire, but the direct approach to the foot of the rope was exposed. The Company D Rangers worked their way to the rope through the piles of debris at the cliff base. While one man helped the wounded get to Colonel Rudder's CP, where the medics had set up, all the party went up this one rope and found it not too hard going. They could get footholds in the cliff face, and a big crater reduced the steepness of the climb near the top. The group was up within 15 minutes. As in most other cases, the first few men on top had moved off together, and the boat team did not operate as a unit after the escalade.

*LCA 887.* As a result of Company D's unscheduled landing in the center of the line of craft, the three LCA's carrying Company F were crowded eastward, all of them touching down beyond the area originally assigned them. Few of the Rangers realized this at the time.

LCA 887 had not been much bothered by either water or enemy action on the trip in. The craft grounded five yards out from dry beach, and the shorter men got a ducking in the inevitable crater. No equipment trouble resulted; even Sgt. William L. Petty's BAR, wet

here and muddled later when he slipped on the cliff, fired perfectly when first needed. Some enemy fire, including automatic weapons, came from either flank. Two Rangers were wounded.

Just before hitting the beach the two forward rockets were fired. Only one of the plain lines carried, and 1st Lt. Robert C. Arman, commanding the team, figured the heavier ropes had no chance. So, all four of the mounted rockets, together with the boxes carrying toggle ropes and ladders, were taken out on the sand—a matter of ten minutes' heavy work, while the coxswain of the LCA did a notable job of holding the craft in at the beach edge. When the rockets were set up for firing, the lead wire for making the firing connection was missing. Tech/Sgt. John I. Cripps fired all four in turn by touching the short connection, three feet from the rocket base, with his "hot-box." Each time, the flashback blinded Cripps and blew sand and mud all over him. The other Rangers saw him clean his eyes, shake his head, and go after the next rocket: "he was the hell-of-a-looking mess." But all the ropes went up, and made it possible for the party to make the top. Sergeant Petty and some other expert climbers had already tried the plain rope and failed; it was on a straight fall, requiring hand-over-hand work with no footholds possible, and the men had trouble with their muddy hands and clothes on the wet rope.

Sergeant Petty started up one of the ladders, got 30 feet up, and then slid all the way back on the cliff face when the grapnel pulled out. Tech. 5 Carl Wunsch was going up the other ladder when fire from somewhere on the flanks began to chip the cliff all around him. Petty went up after Wunsch, and found him, unwounded, in a shell hole at the top. Here Petty waited for two more Rangers and then they set out for their objective.

*LCA 884.* This craft, the target for considerable enemy fire from cliff positions on the way to the Point, had replied with its

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Lewis guns and the BAR's of the Rangers. Touchdown was made on the edge of a shell hole, in water shoulder-high. Three Rangers were hit by fire coming from the left flank. When rockets were fired in series, front to rear, four got over the cliff, but every rope lay in such position as to be fully exposed to the continuing enemy small-arms fire. Moreover, the Rangers were so muddled in getting through the craters on the beach that the plain ropes would have been unusable after the first climber went up. The only rope ladder that reached the top was caught below on beach boulders and hung at an awkward angle. Several men tried the other ropes without success, and Pvt. William E. Anderson got only part way up in his attempt at free-climbing. 1st Lt. Jacob J. Hill finally took the group over to the left, where they used the ladders of 883's boat team.

*LCA 883.* Last in the column of approach, this craft was last to reach shore, nearly 300 yards left of its planned position and considerably beyond the edge of the main fortified area on Pointe du Hoc. Just to their left, a jut in the cliff protected the boat team from the flanking fire that caused so much trouble for the other landing parties. They made a dry landing, and had a perfect score with the six rockets. This gave an opportunity to use the

climbing assignments on a full schedule, using every rope. Nevertheless the going was hard, even on the ladders. 1st Lt. Richard A. Wintz, on a plain rope, found it impossible to get any footholds on the slippery cliff. The wet and muddy rope made it difficult for hand-over-hand pulling, and at the top Wintz was "never so tired in his life." He found six men together and started them out immediately.

*CRATERED GROUND hampered the Rangers in moving cross country through the fortified area, and made it difficult to spot enemy snipers. This photo, looking inland, was probably taken on D+1.*



17



*WRECKED EMPLACEMENTS on the Point. Photo taken June 1944.*

*Summary.* The first great difficulty, landing and getting up the cliff, had been surmounted. Enemy resistance, despite the delayed landing, had been weak and ineffective except for the enfilade fire from the machinegun position just east of Pointe du Hoc. The equipment and training for escalade had met the test. On only two craft had the mounted rockets failed to get at least one rope over the cliff top. The hand-projectors and extension ladders had been useful as supplementary equipment where the ropes failed, and only one boat team found it necessary to use the ropes of another party. The three dukws, stopped at the water's edge by craters, could not bring their mechanically operated extension ladders into play. One of them made the trial, only to have the ladder rest on the cliff side at a considerable angle, short of the top and unbalanced by the motion of the surf.

The assault met unforeseen circumstances, but their effects were not always to the disadvantage of the enterprise. Craters in the beach had made the landings slower and wetter than expected, had neutralized the dukws, and had impeded unloading of ammunition and supplies; on the other hand, they gave some cover from enemy fire. Damage done to the cliff face by bombardment seems, on the whole, to have helped the escalade work, for the piles of debris not only gave cover from the enfilade fire but reduced the height of the climb, particularly for use of extension ladders. The top of the cliff was much cut back by craters, further reducing the areas of sheer slope and providing cover for the first arrivals at the top.

The climbing parties had gone ahead with speed, determination, and resourcefulness, ready to improvise when necessary.

## 18

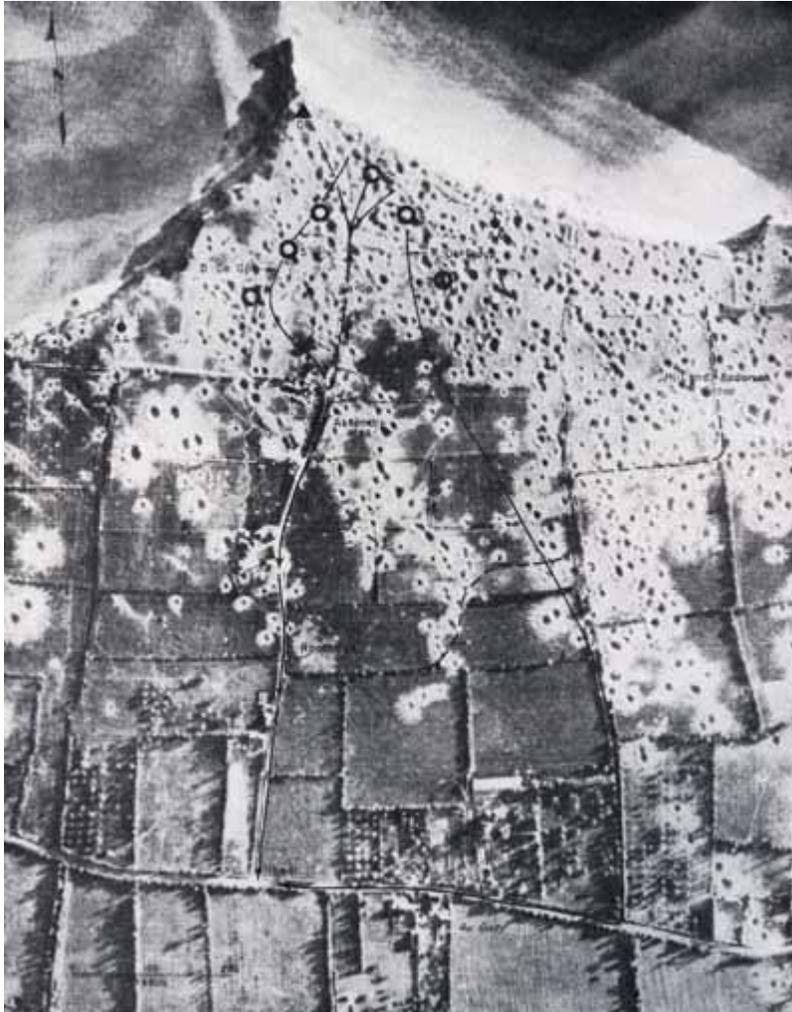
This was the main reason for their success, and for the fact that within 30 minutes from touchdown all the attacking force was on top except for casualties, headquarters personnel, and some mortar men (30 to 40 Rangers out of about 190).

### *Capture of the Point*

Troops landing at Omaha Beach on D Day have frequently registered, in records and interviews, their disappointment at finding little visible evidence of the preliminary bombardment, which was expected to "make the beach a shambles." No such complaint could be made by the 2d Rangers at Pointe du Hoe. As they came up from the ropes they found themselves in a bewildering wasteland of ground literally torn to pieces by bombs and heavy naval shells. Expected landmarks were gone; craters and mounds of wreckage were everywhere, obscuring remnants of paths and trenches. The Rangers had studied these few acres for months, using excellent photographs and large-scale maps that showed every slight feature of terrain and fortifications. Now, they found themselves in danger of losing their way as soon as they made a few steps from the ragged cliff edge into the chaos of holes and debris. Obtaining cover was no problem, but maintaining contact within groups as large as a squad would be almost impossible during movement.

WRECKAGE ON THE POINT *caused by bombs and naval gun shells. Photo taken February 1945, looking Inland toward casemates.*





MAP NO. 4-Advance to the Highway

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There were other causes for the "confused" nature of the action that took place on the Point, characterized as it was by infiltration of many and separate groups of Rangers through all parts of the enemy defenses. The prearranged tactics of the Ranger force emphasized movement with the greatest speed and by small groups. As the first few men on a rope reached the top at any point, they moved off at once for their objectives, without waiting for the rest of their boat group, and without taking time to form an organized section or platoon, or attempting to make contact with neighboring parties. In the climbing phase, so intent were the men on their own work that only in exceptional cases was any Ranger party aware of what other boat groups were doing, or even that other boat teams were on the beach. As the later climbers gained the cliff top, they too went off in small groups; over a period of 15 to 30 minutes a series of these parties was forming at the cliff edge and fanning out in all directions. At least 20 of them could be distinguished, but it is as impossible to trace their movements in exact order or timing as it must have been difficult for the Germans to spot the lines of the attack and organize to meet it.

Yet in essence the attack followed a definite plan and order. As first objectives, each platoon (whatever number of groups it split into) had a limited part of the enemy defensive system to reach and deal with. Every man knew what this mission was, and where to go. The outcome was an action without clear pattern in detail, but with very clearly defined results.

The first and chief objectives were the gun emplacements and the OP near the end of the Point. Company E had the OP and No. 3 position as its assignment; Company D, the western gun emplacements (4, 5, and 6); Company F, guns 1 and 2 and the machine-gun position at the edge of the cliff, just east of the main fortified area. Once these objectives were taken, the plan had been to assemble at a phase line near the south edge of the fortified area. From here, D, F, and most of E would strike inland for the coastal highway about 1,000 yards south, cross it, and establish a road block against enemy movement from the west. A platoon of Company E was to remain on the Point with the headquarters group and arrange for perimeter defense of the captured fortifications.

There were, inevitably, deviations from this plan. Some Rangers of Companies D and E failed to reach the assembly area in time for the next phase of movement, or were kept on the Point to meet unexpected developments. On the eastern flank, two boat teams of Company F became involved in an action that lasted most of the day. But, by and large, movement went very nearly according to plan, a plan based on confidence in the ability of small, pick-up groups to work independently toward main objectives. This confidence was rewarded by success.

As the first Ranger elements left the cliff and started for their objectives, they met no opposition except near the OP. Most of the Rangers saw no enemy, and were hardly aware of sporadic fire coming from along the cliff to the west of the Point. Their main



TOP OF GERMAN OP POSITION, *looking toward sea (12 June 1944).*

trouble was in finding and identifying the gun positions in the wreckage of the fortified area. One party after another reached its allotted emplacement, to make the same discovery: the open gun positions were pulverized, the casemates were heavily damaged, but there was no sign of the guns or of artillery equipment. Evidently, the 155's had been removed from the Point before the period of major bombardments. The advance groups moved on inland toward the assembly area ([Map No. 4](#), page 20).

The only fighting took place at the tip of the Point. Here, the first men up from LCA 861 found themselves about 20 feet to seaward of the massive and undamaged concrete OP. As S/Sgt. Charles H. Denbo and Private Roberts crawled five feet toward a trench, small-arms fire, including machine guns, started up from slits in the OP. The Rangers threw four grenades at the slits, and three went in. The machine gun stopped firing, but Denbo was wounded by a rifle bullet. Lieutenant Lapres, Sgt. Andrew J. Yardley, Pfc. William D. Bell, and Tech/Sgt. Harold W. Gunther joined up in the trench. Yardley had a bazooka, and his first round hit the edge of the firing slit; the second went through. Taking advantage of this, the group left Yardley to watch the embrasure and dashed around the OP without drawing enemy fire. On the other side of the structure they found Corporal Aguzzi, watching the main entrance from the landward side.

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Lapres' party pushed on toward gun position No. 4 and points inland.

Aguzzi had come up from LCA 862, southeast of the OP, with Lieutenant Leagans and Sergeant Cleaves. As they started away from the edge, joined by Tech. 5 LeRoy J. Thompson and Pfc. Charles H. Bellows, Jr., they saw a German close to the OP, throwing grenades over the cliff from shelter of a trench. The OP was not their job, but the party decided to go after the grenadier. Bellows crawled over to No. 3 gun position to cover the advance of the party. They threw grenades at the German and moved into the trench when he ducked under the entrance to the OP. Aguzzi found a shell hole from which he could watch the main entrance, while three Rangers tried to skirt the OP on the east and get at it from the rear. Cleaves was wounded by a mine - the only casualty from this cause during the day. Thompson got close enough to hear a radio working inside the OP, looked for the aerial on top, and shot it off. After throwing a grenade through the entrance Lieutenant Leagans and Thompson decided to let the OP wait for demolitions, and went off on their original mission farther inland. Aguzzi, staying to watch the entrance, was surprised a few minutes later by the appearance of Lieutenant Lapres' party, coming from the rear of the OP. Two small groups of Rangers had been attacking the OP from opposite sides, neither aware of the other's presence.

This was not the last group to pass Aguzzi from the tip of the Point. After Lapres' men had moved past the OP, four more Rangers from LCA 861 came up the single rope. As they joined Yardley in the trench facing the embrasure, enemy small-arms fire opened up again. The five Rangers talked it over. They had further missions on the other side of the OP, but there were still enemy in the structure, who could not be left free to bring fire on the men still down on the beach. Medeiros and Yardley considered going down to get

demolitions, but decided they couldn't give enough covering fire to get a Ranger close to the embrasure with the explosive. Finally, it was decided to leave Yardley and Medeiros in position to "button-up" the seaward side of the OP while the others went past. With Yardley and Medeiros watching to cover their movement with fire, the three Rangers went along the trench to pass the OP on the west side. Near the end of the trench, small-arms fire came at them from some position on the top of the OP which Medeiros could not spot, and Pfc. George W. Mackey was killed; the two others made it safely to the inland side.

For the rest of D Day and through the following night, Yardley and Medeiros stayed in their trench on one side of the OP while Aguzzi watched the main entrance. Neither guard knew the other was there. Demolitions could have been used on Aguzzi's side, but nobody bothered to bring them up for use; there was no sign of action from the enemy in the OP.<sup>1</sup>

1. On the afternoon of D+1 the nest was finally cleaned out. Two satchel charges of C-2 were thrown in the entrance, and Aguzzi, still on guard, figured the enemy must be wiped out. But eight unwounded Germans swarmed out with their hands up, and only one body was found inside. The Rangers were never sure how many enemy had been in the post, for the OP, like most positions in the fortified area, was connected with underground passages which the Rangers had neither numbers nor time to investigate fully. These underground routes, connecting shelters with each other and with a maze of ruined trenches, probably contributed to troubles on the Point during D Day.

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Except at the OP, the first Ranger groups had crossed through the fortified area without seeing an enemy. The last parties to arrive from the beach began to get some evidence that there were still Germans close by. The antiaircraft position just west of the Point put bursts of automatic fire on any Rangers who exposed themselves, and sniping started from the area near gun position No. 6. A group from Company D (LCA 858) was working through that vicinity; their story is known only from the one survivor of the action.

Pfc. William Cruz, slightly wounded on the beach, came up just after Colonel Rudder had moved his CP to the cliff top (about 0745), and Cruz was assigned to guard the CP. He and Ranger Eberle went after a sniper near gun position No. 4, and in doing so drew machine-gun fire from the antiaircraft position to the west. Somebody ordered them to "go after it." When they started out, sliding from cover of one crater to another, they came up with Tech/Sgt. Richard J. Spleen, Tech/Sgt. Clifton E. Mains, and a group of eight or ten Rangers, in cover just west of No. 6 position. This party was considering an attack on the antiaircraft position, but hesitated to open fire for fear of drawing German artillery shells, which were beginning to hit near the fortified area from positions somewhere inland. After a time the Rangers started to crawl through shell holes toward the antiaircraft position, slowed by fear of mines. A German helmet came up out of a crater ahead; the Rangers near Cruz saw the stick under it and knew enough to avoid fire, but somebody just behind them took the bait. Almost immediately, artillery and mortar shells began to search the area. Bunched too closely in a row of shell holes, the Company D party took off in all directions to spread out.

Private Cruz moved back toward No. 6 emplacement, and found himself completely alone in the maze of craters. Yelling to locate the others, he heard Sergeant Mains call "OK." After a 15-minute wait, with enemy fire diminishing, Cruz began to crawl back toward the Point. Just as he reached a ruined trench near No. 6 position, he saw Sergeant Spleen and two other Rangers disappear around the corner of a connecting trench. Without warning, intense small-arms fire started up, not only from the antiaircraft position to the west but from German machine pistols close by. As he hugged the bottom of the trench, Cruz could hear men moving. A few Germans passed by on his limited horizon, but without noticing him. Then, only a few yards from his hole, guns were thrown into the air; Cruz thought they came up from the trench where Spleen's party had been. Cruz kept quiet, the burst of firing died away quickly, and no one else came in sight. After a considerable wait, Cruz crawled back toward the CP, only 200 yards away. Near the wrecked No. 6 emplacement, he passed a pile of American weapons lying on the ground—8 or 9 rifles, and some revolvers and Tommy guns. He figured these were left there when the Rangers surrendered.

Observation on the Point was so limited that no one else had seen the action or any part of it. Ten Rangers had simply disappeared, with Cruz's report and the abandoned weapons as the only indication of their



*RUINS ON EXIT ROAD, halfway from the Point to the highway. Ranger advance parties began here to encounter scattered opposition from enemy groups near the next farmhouses. (Photo taken June 1945.)*

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fate. The best guess was that the Germans had attacked by filtering into the area through wrecked trenches connecting the fortified zone with the anti-aircraft gun; as another possibility, they may have emerged from underground shelters on the Point.

Cruz's report served notice at Colonel Rudder's CP that trouble could be expected from the west flank of the Point. In fact, enemy opposition based on the anti-aircraft position was to be a source of serious difficulty for the next two days.

### *Advance to the Highway*

The revival of German resistance at the Point was unknown to the Ranger parties which had been first to cross it, drawing only scattered fire from the western flank. As they passed beyond the fortified area, some artillery and mortar shells began to drop near

them, and they were aware of light small-arms fire from ahead (south). This slowed down the leaders, and the original parties of two and three men began to merge in larger groups. The Rangers from Companies E and D (less elements detained on the Point) tended to come together on an axis of advance along the north-south exit road from the Point to the highway. Somewhat to their east, the one boat team of Company F that left the Point area struck south on a course through fields. The early advance inland can best be followed in terms of these two main groups ([Map No. 4](#), page 20).

The bulk of the group that started down the exit road was made up of Rangers from LCA's 888 (Company E) and 858 (Company D). The party from 888 had come up, after some delay, on extension ladders and started out with 15 men under 1st Sgt. Robert W. Lang. After finding No. 3 casemate a junk-pile of broken steel and concrete, Lang's group moved south. They began to meet artillery fire, coming in salvos of three, and shifting toward the Point with each salvo. Lang stopped for a moment to try for a contact on his 5 3 6 radio, with the idea of warning the fire-support party that his men were moving out of the fortified area. He could not make his connection. When he started forward again, artillery fire was falling between him and his men ahead, so Lang turned left into the torn-up fields, where he picked up three stray Rangers of Company E, and then joined a group under Lieutenant Arman of Company F.

The Company E Rangers meanwhile were reaching the assembly area, near the start of the exit road. Here they met up with a dozen men of Company D, who had checked gun positions Nos. 4 and 5 and had left Sergeant Spleen with a few men near No. 6 to deal with enemy who were firing from the anti-aircraft position.

The D and E group now amounted to about 30 men. Without waiting for others to arrive, they started along the exit road, taking as much cover as possible in a communications trench along its edge, and keeping in a single file. German artillery, estimated as light guns (75's or 88's), were searching the area with time fire, and from the assembly area onward the Rangers began to meet machine-gun fire from the right flank, and small-arms fire to their left front. They suffered serious casualties in the next few hundred yards: seven killed and eight

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wounded. Despite these losses, the total size of the force was increasing as it caught up with small advance parties who had left the Point earlier, or as latecomers tagged on to the rear of the file.

The first objective was a group of ruined farm buildings, almost halfway to the highway. German snipers who had been using the building pulled out before the Rangers got there. Fire from destroyers' guns as well as enemy shells was hitting around the farm, and the Rangers made no pause. Ahead, the ground was open, and the trench used thus far in the advance came to an end at the buildings. The next cover, 35 to 40 yards south, was a communications trench that crossed the exit road. To reach it, men were sent out one or two at a time, moving fast

FARM BUILDINGS ON EXIT ROAD *about 200 yards from the highway, reached by Rangers about 0800 on D Day. Opposition ceased beyond this point. (Photo, looking south, taken June 1945.)*



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and taking different routes across an area exposed to machine-gun fire. The only casualty was a Ranger who fell on a comrade's bayonet as he jumped into the trench.

Beyond the trench a pair of concrete pillars flanked the exit road, with a crude roadblock between the pillars. Three Germans came straight down the road toward the Point, spotted the Rangers, and ducked behind the block. BAR fire failed to flush them out, but after one round (a dud) from a bazooka the Germans fled. The Rangers resumed their advance down the exit road. Some machine-gun fire had been coming from the next farm; Lapres reached it with his four men to find the enemy had left. For a few minutes Lapres was isolated there, as machine-gun fire from the flanks pinned down the main Ranger party. Some friendly support fire, which the Rangers could not trace, apparently silenced the machine guns.

This was the last of German resistance, and Lapres' advance party made the final stretch to the blacktop<sup>1</sup> without any trouble. As they came to it they saw Tech. 5 Davis of Company F coming through the fields on their left, and a few minutes later a larger party of Company F men came along the highway from the east. At 0815, barely an hour since the landing, the Rangers had reached their final objective-good time, even though enemy opposition had clearly suffered from disorganization. As the survivors of the group put it later, the reason for the speed of their advance was simple: enemy artillery fire seemed to be "tailing them all the way," and this discouraged any delay.

Most of Company F's parties had stayed near the Point, drawn successively into a fight on the eastern flank. The party that reached the highway was from LCA 887, led by Lieutenant Arman and Sergeant Petty. Petty and three men had left the cliff edge first, found No. 2 gun position destroyed and empty, and then started south on a course about 200 yards east of the exit road. When they reached the outskirts of the fortified area, Lieutenant Arman joined them with five more Rangers, and decided to push toward the blacktop without waiting for the rest of his platoon.

Their course led through what had been marked on their maps as a mined area, wired and dotted with posts set against air landings. The bombardment, which had churned up the ground even this far from the Point, may have detonated the mines or buried them in debris, for they gave the Rangers no trouble. Lieutenant Arman's men could see shells hit along the exit road to their right; for their own part, they saw no enemy. Enemy mortars somewhere to the south put down pattern fire in fields near them, but the fire was apparently unobserved and caused no casualties. The group of a dozen men worked forward in squad column, covering the distance from crater to crater in short bounds. As they came to the ruins of a farm lane, running north-south between hedgerows, Sergeant Lang and three Company E men came over from the east and joined the advance.

Lieutenant Arman led the party straight down the lane, while Petty went left across fields to scout toward the Chateau. There was no sign of enemy on this flank and Petty

1. The Rangers' term for the paved highway.

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rejoined at the intersection of the lane with the blacktop highway, where the Rangers turned west, moving along the edges. As they reached the cluster of houses forming the hamlet of Au Guay, a machine gun opened up about 100 yards ahead, somewhere near the road. The enemy had delivered his fire too soon; the Rangers scattered without suffering casualties and began to work around the south edge of the hamlet to reach the enemy gun. Sergeant Petty, with two men, was startled by the sudden appearance of two Germans apparently rising out of the ground, not ten feet away. Petty dropped flat and fired his BAR as he fell. The burst missed, but the Germans were already shouting "Kamerad." They had come out of a deep shelter hole which Petty's men had not spotted. The Rangers found no other enemy at Au Guay, and the machine gun had disappeared when they reached the west side of the hamlet. Within a few minutes Arman's party met the Rangers who had come out to the highway along the exit road.

Beside the two main groups whose course has been followed to the highway, several smaller parties reached the same objective on their own. One of these can be followed in detail; this is worthwhile as illustrating other aspects of a "confused" action. The continuity in this story is furnished by Private Anderson. Landing in LCA 884, he went up on the ladders of the next craft to his left, at the extreme left of the landing zone. On top, he and two other 884 men decided on their own to go after the German emplacement, somewhere near the cliff edge to their east, which was still raking the landing beach with automatic weapons. (They were unaware that some of 883's men had already started on

the same mission, nor did they see them during their own effort.) Moving fast along a hedgerow that skirted the cliff, they got to within a hundred yards of the enemy emplacement, could not locate the position of the guns, and decided these must be out of reach below the cliff top.

Reversing course back to the ladders, Anderson left the other two Rangers and joined Pfc. John Bacho and S/Sgt. James E. Fulton, who were just starting south through the fields to make the blacktop. The three men followed along hedgerow lines, using the "Buddy" system, one man covering as two moved, in a leap-frogging advance. Within a hundred yards they caught up with Lieutenant Hill and two other Rangers from 884, going in the same direction. The only sign of enemy was occasional sniper fire. At the first lateral hedgerow they turned west; Bacho and Fulton went through the hedgerow to guard the flanks and lost touch with the others, eventually joining Lieutenant Arman's group near the highway.

Hill's party, now four men, worked west to reach the double-hedgerowed lane, picking up a willing prisoner from the field on their right. Machine-gun fire to the west, near the exit road, drew their attention, and the four Rangers started angling in that direction. As they were passing through a field of stubble wheat, automatic fire came at them from the direction of Pointe du Hoe, and forced them to crawl. So far the gun they were after had not spotted them and was not firing in their direction. About 25 feet from the exit road, Lieutenant Hill and Anderson reached the cover of a low embankment. The

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machine gun was just beyond the road ahead of them. Hill stood up to look at the position and to Anderson's amazement shouted, "You ... .. you couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle!" This drew enemy fire; as Hill dropped back into cover, Anderson tossed him a grenade, Hill threw it, and the machine-gun fire stopped. A few minutes later, Lieutenant Lapres came down the exit road with the advance group of Company E, and Hill's action may have saved this party from surprise fire. The four Company F men now served as flank patrol for the further advance along the exit road, moving one hedgerow to the left of Lapres. Anderson, as he neared the blacktop, fired at somebody to the west near the road intersection, but was not sure (later) whether it was a German or Sergeant Lang.

The Rangers at the highway numbered about 50 men, with all three companies represented. Their mission was to block movement along the coastal highway; expecting to see the 116th Infantry and the 5th Rangers arrive at any moment on the Vierville road, their main concern was the highway west, toward Grandcamp. Such enemy resistance as had been met seemed to come from west and south, so they made their dispositions accordingly ([Map No. 7](#), page 46). Bordering the south side of the highway near its junction with the exit road, a series of narrow fields ended in a hedgerow that ran east-west, overlooked orchards sloping down to a creek, and gave some observation across the small valley of the creek. Along the hedgerow they found enemy dugouts and fox holes conveniently prepared on the north side of the hedge. The contingents from Company E

and Company F occupied this line for a distance of four fields, two to each side of a lane that ran from the highway down to the creek. An outpost of Company F men went down the gentle slope toward the creek and took position where they could watch the farther side of the little valley. A German dugout near the lane was picked for a CP, used by Lieutenant Arman (Company F) and Lieutenants Lapres and Leagans of Company E. Except for two stragglers picked up in the fields, there was no sign of enemy in the neighborhood.

The 20 men of Company D were given the assignment of covering the west flank toward Grandcamp. Sergeant Lomell placed his men along both edges of the highway, with a combat outpost at the western end of his line consisting of a BAR man and six riflemen with a grenade launcher. This outpost could cover the road and had good observation toward the valley between the Rangers and Grandcamp. The rest of the Company D men could watch the fields north and south of the highway. Toward the sea, the fields were believed to be mined, and this would simplify defense on that side.

Active patrolling was started at once on all sides of the thinly-held positions. About 0900, a two-man patrol from D went down the double-hedgerowed lane that ran south from the highway near Company D's outpost. About 250 yards along the lane, Sergeant Lomell and S/Sgt. Jack E. Kuhn walked into a camouflaged gun position; there, set up in battery, were five of the enemy 155's missing from the Point. They were in position to fire toward Utah Beach, but could easily have been switched for use

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against Omaha. Piles of ammunition were at hand, points on the shells and charges ready, but there was no indication of recent firing. Not a German was in sight, and occasional sniper fire from a distance could hardly be intended as a defense of the battery. So effective was the camouflage that Lomell and Kuhn, though they could later spot the guns from the highway, had seen nothing until they were right in the position.

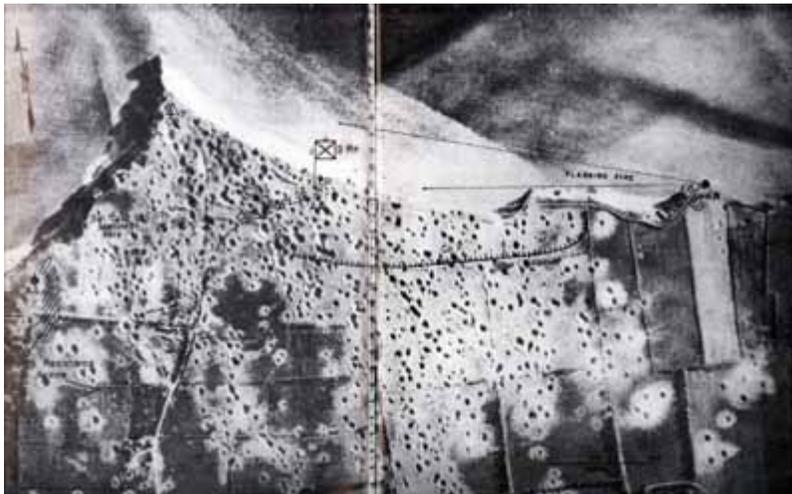
With Kuhn covering him against possible defenders, Sergeant Lomell went into the battery and set off thermite grenades in the recoil mechanism of two guns, effectively disabling them. After bashing in the sights, of a third gun, he went back for more grenades. Before he could return, another patrol from Company E had finished the job. This patrol, led by S/Sgt. Frank A. Rupinski, had come through the fields and (like Lomell

*LANE LEADING SOUTH from highway, along east side of fields held by advance group of Rangers during D Day. CP of this group was about 300 yards down this trail.*

*(Photo taken June 1945.)*



[31]



MAP NO. 5-Morning Near the Point

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and Kuhn) were in the gun position before they saw it. Failing to notice the fact that some disabling work had already been done, Rupinski's patrol dropped a thermite grenade down each barrel, and removed some of the sights. After throwing grenades into the

powder charges and starting a fire, the patrol decided the guns were out of action and withdrew. A runner was sent off at once to the Point, bearing word that the missing guns, primary objective at the Point, had been found and neutralized.

Just why the German guns were thus left completely undefended and unused is still a mystery. One theory, based on the fact that some artillerymen were captured that day on the Point, was that bombardment caught them there in quarters, and they were unable to get back to their position. All that can be stated with assurance is that the Germans were put off balance and disorganized by the combined effects of bombardment and assault, to such an extent that they never used the most dangerous battery near the assault beaches but left it in condition to be destroyed by weak patrols.

### **Morning at the Point: Action on the Left Flank**

The D-Day fighting at Pointe du Hoe can be followed in terms of two main groups: the force that reached the highway and took positions there, and the Rangers who stayed in or near the fortified area at the Point itself. Some stayed according to plan; others were diverted from going inland by circumstance and, above all, by the revival of German resistance near or in the fortified area. Two of the three boat teams of Company F were stopped by this resistance in carrying out their first assignments, becoming involved in a series of actions that held them all day near the cliffs just east of the fortified zone ([Map No. 5](#), page 32).

LCA's 883 and 884 had beached on this flank, several hundred yards to left of their planned touchdown. Lieutenant Wintz, in command of 883, failed at first to realize that he was facing the cliff s outside the fortified area, and thought bomb damage must be the reason for the unfamiliar look of the terrain. When the first half-dozen men were up the ropes, Wintz sent them out to occupy hedgerows meeting at the southeast corner of the first field inland. Ducking in and out of craters, the men reached the ruined hedgerows without drawing fire; Wintz sent out the rest of the boat team as they came up, except for the mortarmen. Men from LCA 884 were beginning to come up on 883's ladders, as Wintz went along the cliffs to the west looking for the company commander, Capt. Otto Masny. But Masny had gone over to the Point, and Wintz was not to see him until the end of the day.

Lieutenant Wintz had now oriented himself. His men, plus some from 884 (a few others from 884 went off on their own, inland), were just east of the base of the Point. South of them were shell-ploughed fields stretching toward St-Pierre-du-Mont and crossed by only a few hedgerows. Occasional artillery fire and some sniping began from this direction, forcing the Rangers into cover and costing them one rifleman. To the east, about 200 yards along the cliffs from the Company F position, the German automatic

weapon (variously described as a machine gun or a light antiaircraft gun) which had caused so much trouble during the landing was now firing toward the Point over the

heads of Wintz's men. Except that the gun was somewhere close to the Cliff, its position could not be located.

This enemy emplacement, sited to cause trouble for the Rangers still along the beach, was included in the original Company F objectives, and Lieutenant Wintz decided to "go after it" with five men. Sgt. Charles F. Wellage had set up his mortar in a crater near the cliff, ready to fire once the enemy's position was fixed. A hedgerow skirted the cliff edge eastward; using a drainage ditch on the inland side of this hedgerow, the party worked slowly along, making every effort to stay under cover.

As far as Wintz knew, this was the first attempt to get at the troublesome gun east of the Point. Actually, it was the third—a fact that brings out again the scattered and impromptu nature of the early fighting near the Point, and the difficulties of maintaining control or observation in the cut-up terrain.

By the time Wintz started (somewhere between 0800 and 0830), two other groups had gone east to reach the German gun position. Almost immediately after getting up, Private Anderson and two other Company F Rangers had started out, failed to locate the gun, and returned (see above, page 29). Captain Masny, before he went over to the Point, had sent out a three-man patrol consisting of 1st Sgt. Charles E. Frederick, S/Sgt. Robert G. Youso, and Pfc. Herman W. Kiihnl. They started along an east-west hedgerow one field inland, with Frederick covering the other two for the first move. Someone brought up an order for Frederick to report back to Captain Masny; the other two went on, thinking Frederick was following. They got to within 20 yards of where they thought the gun position must be, and as Youso half rose to throw a grenade he was shot by a German rifleman. Kiihnl went back to find Frederick, while Youso crawled toward safety on the seaward side of the cliff-skirting hedgerow. The two leading Rangers of Wintz's party met him there after he had made about 75 yards.

Wintz's small attacking force was strung out along 200 yards of the cliff hedgerow, with Wintz near the rear, bringing up four more riflemen and an observer for the mortar. The enemy had spotted their movement, and small-arms fire was covering an open space along the route, wounding one man and slowing progress. Nevertheless, the advance was still continuing when an order came from the rear to pull back.

The order had come from some distance and was based on a misapprehension. Sergeant Frederick, called back earlier to report to Captain Masny, had gone as far as No. 1 gun position without locating him. Here, Frederick received the order by word of mouth for bringing Wintz back. Frederick relayed the message, but was worried by it and went further into the fortified area to find Masny and verify the order. When Frederick located his captain, Masny explained that he thought Wintz's party was starting south toward the highway, and the purpose of his order had been to keep them near the Point. Captain Masny did want the German machine gun neutralized, so Ser-

geant Frederick sent a messenger at once, revoking the recall order and telling Wintz to push the attack. It was too late; Wintz and his party were back in their starting positions, having brought their two wounded in.

Lieutenant Wintz reorganized for another effort, again along the cliff edge. It was the fourth attempt at the flanking gun position. just after movement started, orders came to halt the attack. The message came on SCR 300, one of the few times that a radio order got through from the CP on the Point to any of the scattered Ranger parties. Colonel Rudder had decided to try naval fire on the cliff strongpoint. Wintz's men were well situated to observe (and enjoy) the results. A destroyer pulled close in,<sup>1</sup> and, according to the Rangers' recollection, seven salvos were used: they blew the top of the cliff into the sea, and that ended the Rangers' troubles with automatic fire from the eastern cliff position, though German snipers continued to operate from that sector.

It was now well along in the morning (time estimates vary from 1100 to 1200). Before naval fire solved the worst difficulty on the east flank, several hours had been spent in action which illustrated the difficulties of coordinating action among the scattered Ranger parties. Most of the troops from LCA's 883 and 884, originally scheduled to move on to the highway, had become thoroughly involved near the Point and were now kept in the right-angle hedgerow position selected by Lieutenant Wintz at the start of his action. It was suitable for protecting the east side of the Rangers' position from attack.

### *Morning at the Point: The CP Group*

Colonel Rudder had gone on top at 0745, and established his CP in a crater between the cliff and a destroyed anti-aircraft gun emplacement. Most of the assault parties had left the fortified area on their several missions, and Colonel Rudder could only wait for reports. Observation in the churned-up wasteland left by the bombardment was very limited, and for the moment there was little that he could do to exercise control. However, there was some work to do near at hand, as the enemy gave disturbing signs of reviving his resistance close to the Point.

1. According to testimony by the communications section, this was a British destroyer, with spotting done by Lieutenant Johnson, observer of the 58th Armored Field Artillery Battalion.

*COL. RUDDER'S CP was set in a cratered niche at the edge of the cliff. German artillery searched for it, but most of the enemy shells were "overs" into the sea. Lt. Eikner, in charge of the communications section, is near the center, drinking from his*

*canteen.*



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Enemy snipers were active, some of them operating inside the fortified area, and steps were immediately taken to eradicate them. Some of the last parties up the cliff, together with headquarters personnel, were sent out to hunt them down. These efforts, repeated many times, were never entirely successful. Through the rest of D Day, the CP and the whole Point area were harassed by snipers who came out of tunnels and trenches, to find plenty of cover in the cratered debris. Patrols combed over the maze of underground positions, but it seemed impossible to clean them out with the small force available. At no time were the snipers numerous, and there were periods when the Rangers could move in the open with impunity, anywhere on the Point. But these intervals of calm would be broken at any time by scattered small-arms fire from every direction, or by bursts of automatic fire from the German antiaircraft position, 300 yards west on the edge of the cliff. Colonel Rudder sustained a thigh wound from this fire during the morning.

Within a half hour after Colonel Rudder's arrival on top, a first attempt to knock out this western strongpoint had ended with the destruction of Sergeant Spleen's small attacking force (see above, page 24). This made it clear that the antiaircraft position was the main center of enemy resistance near the Point, and the most dangerous because it afforded a base either for attack into the Rangers' foothold on the Point or for efforts to cut off the parties that had gone inland.

Captain Masny, after helping to set up Company F's positions on the left flank, had come over to find Colonel Rudder and was impressed into service at headquarters. He was given the mission of forming a perimeter defense for the CP, using headquarters personnel and any Rangers who had not gone inland. As he was organizing this defense, fire opened up again from the antiaircraft position. Like Sergeant Spleen earlier, Masny collected the nearest men at hand and went out to attack. Starting with eight men, the group picked up a few more Rangers as it went through the fortified area toward the exit road, planning to swing west. Among the additions was a mortar section from LCA 722. Much earlier, this mortar had been set up to deliver supporting fire for the Company E group moving inland under Lieutenant Lapres. S/Sgt. Millard W. Hayden had

accompanied the group, taking with him a sound power phone and half a mile of wire. No calls for fire had come, and communication had been broken off, so the mortar section decided to move inland and join Hayden. Before they had gone far, they were recalled for support of Masny's group, which also had a 30-cal. machine gun, taken off a dukw.

Masny's force turned west where the exit road met the remains of a lane that led toward the enemy strongpoint. They had made only a hundred yards progress when rifle, machine-gun, and mortar fire opened up, from their left flank as well as from the strongpoint. Scattered among craters, the Rangers started a fire fight, the mortar set up in a hole about 50 yards to the rear of the riflemen where Masny directed its fire. When a white flag showed over the German emplacement, the men with Masny were wary and stayed under cover. But two Rangers

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on the right of the skirmish line, near gun position No. 6, stood up in the open. Masny's yell of warning was too late to save them from a burst of machine-gun bullets, and the fire fight resumed. German artillery came into action, from somewhere inland. The first rounds were over; the next rounds began to "creep" back until they bracketed the hedgerow-marked lane which was the axis of the Rangers' attack. There the fire held, right on the lane, "the prettiest fire I ever saw" (Captain Masny). His attack was smashed in short order; four men were killed and nearly ever), Ranger in the group was hit. Masny, wounded in the arm, shouted "Withdraw! Every man for himself!" after the second burst, and the remnants crawled back to the exit road and over to the CP, with snipers killing two more on the way. All its ammunition shot away, the mortar was abandoned at its firing position.

That was the last effort of the day to assault the anti-aircraft emplacement; the two ill-fated attempts had cost 15 to 20 casualties. Several attempts were made to knock out the anti-aircraft position by naval fire, with the *Satterlee* expending many rounds in futile bombardment. The position was just too far from the edge of the cliff to be blasted off by undercutting fire (such as destroyed the emplacement on the other side of the Point), and yet was too close to the cliff to be reached directly by the flat trajectory of the destroyer's guns, from their lower firing level.

Naval supporting fires nevertheless gave the Rangers inestimable aid, and from very early in the assault. At 0728, the *Satterlee* made its first contact with the Naval Shore Fire Control Party, and was immediately given target requests followed by spotting reports from the shore observers. However, radio transmission was uncertain (SCR 284), and a new difficulty arose when the signals party moved to the CP on top of the cliff. Attempts to communicate by radio drew enemy artillery fire immediately, suggesting that the Germans were picking up the transmission and using it to register on the CP. Lieutenant Eikner then turned to other means, and made successful contact by signal lamps. These were used with good results during the rest of the day, though radio transmission for fire control was resumed in the afternoon! Personnel of the fire control party observed results not merely from the Point but from positions inland, sending spotting data back to the

Point by SCR 536 for relay to the ships. Targets given the *Satterlee* included inland assembly areas at St-Pierre and Au Guay, road junctions, strongpoints toward Grandcamp, and, especially, the anti-aircraft position west of the Point. By 1723 the *Satterlee* had expended 70 percent (the prescribed maximum) of her ammunition, having fired 164 salvos, plus six minutes of fire for effect, in support of the Rangers since H Hour. The *Barton* and *Thompson* moved in near the Point to relieve the *Satterlee*, and before dark the NSFCP transmitted data for night fire on road junctions and other targets.

Little success was had in communicating with friendly ground forces, either the 5th Rangers or 29th Division units. Apparently

1. The *Satterlee*, in its report, placed special emphasis on the excellence of its communication with the shore party, and the effectiveness of the system of fire control. The NSFCP had been on board the destroyer and worked with it in several drills and an exercise, before D Day.

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D+2photo

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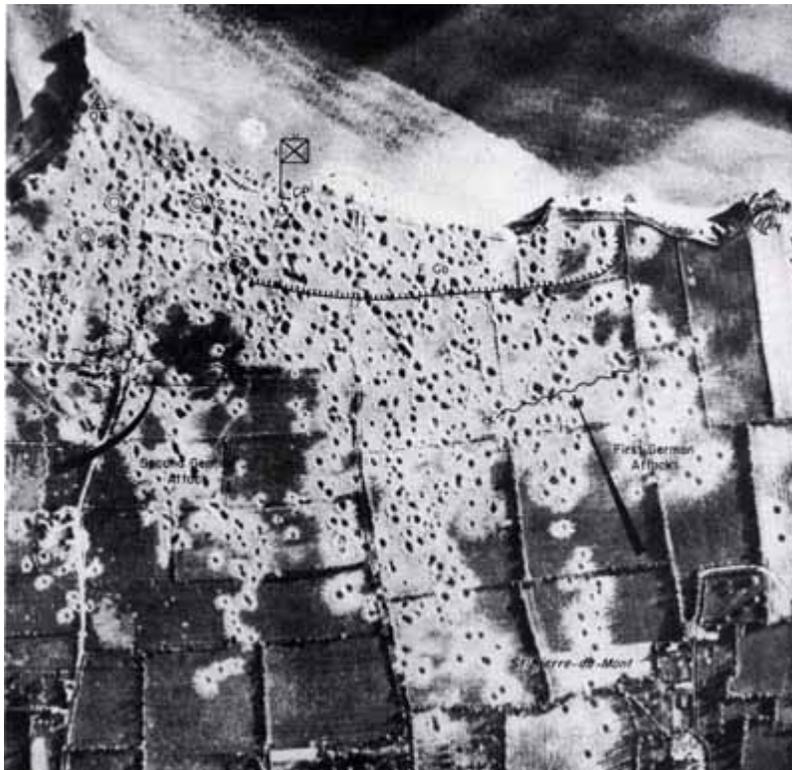
the SOI had been changed just before D Day without notification to Colonel Rudder's communications section; though Lieutenant Eikner more than once contacted friendly units ashore at the main landing beaches, he was unable to get any answers or to stay in touch. He attributed this to his inability to give proper authentication to his messages. Colonel Rudder thus was in complete ignorance of the progress of the great assault at Omaha Beach, for the naval vessels, if they had any information, did not send it to the Point. Between noon and 1300 Colonel Rudder sent out a message by all available means, SCR 300, SCR 284 (through the *Satterlee*), and pigeon: "Located Pointe du Hoe—mission accomplished—need ammunition and reinforcements—many casualties." By 1500 the 116th Infantry replied, stating its inability to decipher the message, which was repeated. About the same time, the destroyer relayed in reply a brief message from the 1st Division commander, General Huebner: "No reinforcements available." The Rangers' noon message was the only word received from Pointe du Hoe on D Day by higher headquarters (V Corps had it by mid-afternoon), and was the cause for considerable anxiety as to the Rangers' situation.

The medical section with the Ranger assault force passed a busy morning. Capt. Walter E. Block and two of his enlisted personnel came in on LCA 722; three aid men were distributed in other craft. The aid men



*AFTER RELIEF ON D+2, when American flag had been spread out to stop fire of friendly tanks coming from inland. Some German prisoners are being moved in after capture by the relieving forces.*

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MAP NO. 6-Afternoon Counterattacks

X-Area reached by German counterattacks.  
Y-Enemy resistance areas.

had pack carriers with 50 feet of rope coiled on top, so that if enemy fire made necessary a quick crossing of the beach the packs could be left behind and pulled over later. The two men with Captain Block carried aid kits, and Block himself lugged an 81-mm mortar shell case, waterproofed to serve as a container for medical supplies. All the equipment was got to the cliff base in good condition. When the CP moved to the top, Block

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left one man to care for some seriously wounded Rangers who could not be moved from the beach. Later in the morning one of the aid men and Lt. Col. Trevor, British Commando officer who had accompanied the assault, assembled sections of an extension ladder on the beach and got it mounted conveniently for service in moving wounded and getting supplies up the cliff.

Colonel Rudder and Captain Block were concerned over the problem of caring for the considerable number of wounded, many of whom needed to be evacuated. At 1350, by signal light communication, the destroyer *Barton* was asked to send in a boat to take off the casualties. At 1430, a small motorboat from the *Barton* made the attempt, towing a rubber boat astern. Enemy machine-gun fire from along the cliff s east of Pointe du Hoe harassed the *Barton's* motorboat, wounding one of the crew and preventing a landing. Block had to leave several of the seriously wounded Rangers overnight on the beach, in a cave at the base of the cliff.

### *Afternoon Counterattacks*

The Germans made two efforts against the Point during the afternoon, both of them hitting Lieutenant Wintz's force from south and west ([Map No. 6](#), page 42).

The first attack came over the fields that stretched toward St-Pierre-du-Mont, where Lieutenant Wintz's Rangers spotted riflemen coming through the craters, with at least one machine-gun section. When the enemy reached the hedgerow one field south of Wintz's line, they set up the machine gun and started a fire fight that went on for an hour. Some artillery and mortar fire supported the effort, but most of the enemy shells went over into the Point area. Company F had a mortar in position, but it was short of ammunition and held its fire. They had no BAR's on the flank facing the attack, and naval fire could not be called on against the Germans so close to the Ranger lines. The attack was met and stopped by well-sustained rifle fire; after a time the German fire weakened and men could be seen drifting back. Wintz's force sustained no casualties.

The next German effort came shortly after 1600 and was much more dangerous. It hit the right end of Company F's thin line. Two BAR's as well as the mortar section were on this wing, but only a few riflemen, and the right flank (toward the antiaircraft position) was "in the air." Moving near the exit road, the Germans were close in on this flank before

they were observed. S/Sgt. Herman E. Stein and Pfc. Cloise A. Manning were near gun position No. 1, changing craters after a close burst of enemy shells, when they saw a dozen Germans, with a machine gun, almost due west and moving fast toward the Point.<sup>1</sup> About the same time S/Sgt. Eugene E. Elder, at the mortar, spotted some enemy to the south, close by and crawling through craters. Sergeant Stein opened with surprise fire from his BAR at 40 yards, hit a couple of men in the group to the west, and scared the others into a short withdrawal.