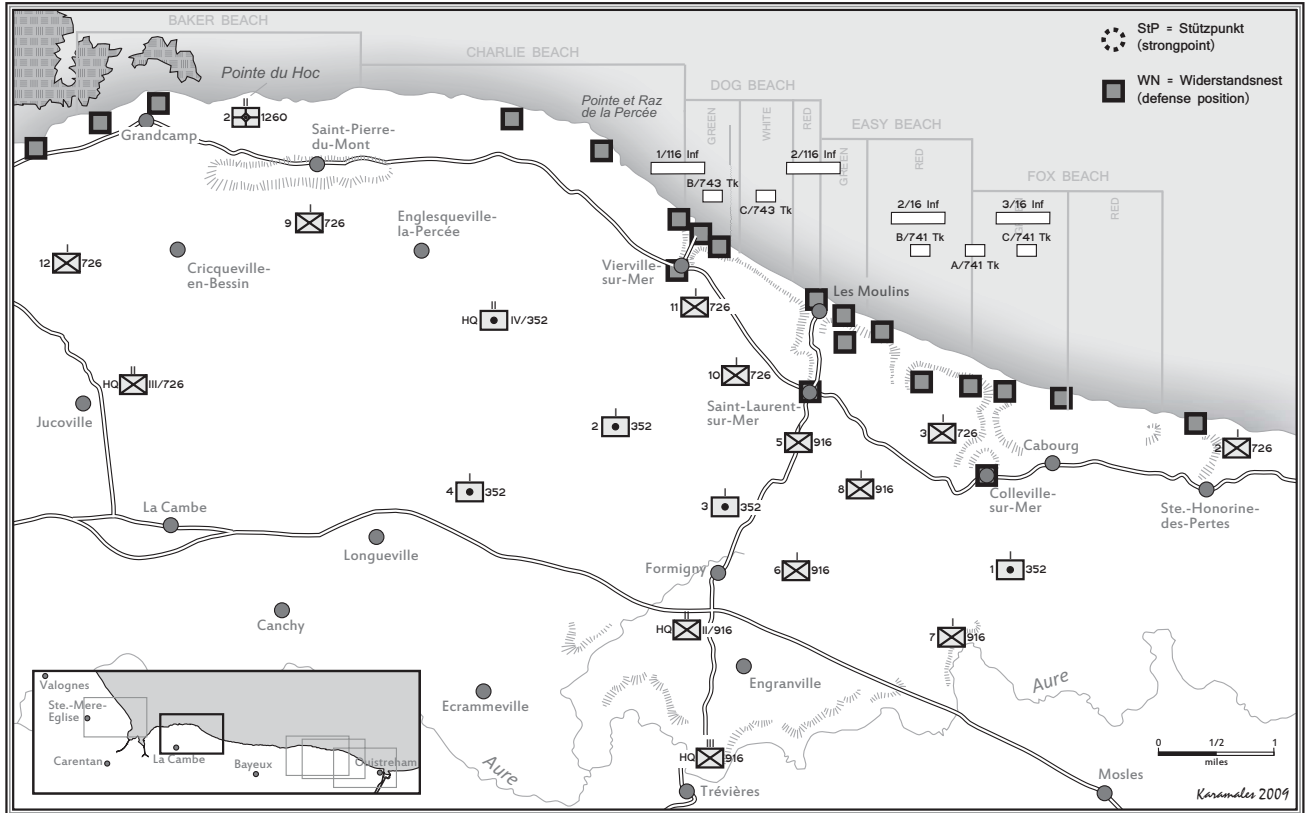




CHAPTER 8

Assault Force Omaha: The U.S. 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions

WHAT OCCURRED ON THE BEACHES of Omaha on D-Day has become the stuff of legend and, unfortunately, a bit of myth as well. That what occurred there was so different from all the other beaches is undeniable, but recognizing that it was different gives little clue as to why it was different. Furthermore, accounts of what happened are innumerable—and too many of those are at best woefully inaccurate or at worst simple mythology. This sketch is not intended to be a complete record of events, but is rather an outline so that what happened and why it happened may be discerned. The four best accounts of what occurred on Omaha—although they conflict in a few points—are used for this overview. They are the classic *Cross-Channel Attack* by Gordon A. Harrison, which itself built on the earlier *Omaha Beachhead (6 June–13 June 1944)* prepared by the 2nd Information and Historical Service of the First Army; Joseph Balkoski's *Omaha Beach: D-Day, June 6, 1944*; and Steven Zaloga's *D-Day 1944, Omaha Beach*. These authors and the anonymous authors of the 2nd Information and Historical Service have done much to eliminate some of the confusion and mythmaking surrounding the events on Omaha, and I am deeply indebted to their scholarship.



The assault on Omaha.

THE GAPPING TEAMS

Of the sixteen gapping teams that landed initially, most were able to make some progress preparing charges, but only five of them are known to have managed to detonate their charges with complete success. Few records remain of what happened to the teams, given the heavy casualties they suffered, so only a partial picture of the events can be given.¹

Team 16 disembarked near the E-3 Draw on Fox Green, apparently at 0633. However, just as the team cleared the boat, a shell struck it, destroying the LCM and taking most of the team's explosives with it. Nevertheless, the few remaining unwounded set what charges they had only to have mortar fragments cut the primacord. The rising tide prevented the team from making repairs and trying again.

Team 15 landed on Fox Green about ten minutes late at 0640, so it had little time to attempt to set charges as the tide came in. In any case, a mortar round struck their explosive-laden rubber boat, killing three men and wounding several. Only four team members were left combat effective when they reached shore.²

Team 14 had a rough passage, but was actually the first reported to touch down, landing on Easy Red about 25 yards to the left (east) of a large fortified house and about 150 yards to the right (west) of

WN 62 at 0625—well before the infantry or tanks since the commander of its LCM thought that H-hour was 0620. The army team members got off the LCM just as a shell hit the rubber raft loaded with explosives, destroying the LCM and killing three of the navy team and leaving another four missing and presumed dead. The remaining team members were unable to set charges as more infantry and wounded sheltered behind the obstacles.³

Team 13 also had a rough passage in their overloaded LCT(A). Most of the explosive packs were soaked from the sea washing over the sides and couldn't be dried out. They landed about 30 yards to the right (west) of Team 14 on Easy Red. Its LCM was hit by artillery or mortar fire as they were unloading and suffered heavy casualties. Enough army team members survived to set the few remaining charges, but arriving infantry prevented them from being set off.⁴

Team 12 landed shortly afterwards, also on Easy Red. They wired the sector they were in but, when finished, found it was impossible to set off the charges because of the infantry sheltering behind the obstacles. They began to make for shore when a shell set off the primacord, setting off the charges, killing ten members of the team, wounding nine

Fox Red just east of the Colleville (E-3) Draw at 0730. A few of the troops that landed here can be seen as well as possibly three tanks. The Cabourg (E-1) draw is at bottom center, and WN 60 is at lower right. NARA





Heading inland for Easy Red. These are men of the 16th Infantry in an LCPV. NARA

others, and killing or wounding many of the infantrymen. Staff Sgt. Bertram Husch of Team 12 was interviewed on 16 July:

Craft came in with its MG blasting away at shore installations. 0630 [midway between] E-1 and E-3, As soon as ramp down, MGs opened up. First group to get off. Ten men tried to get the pre-loaded rubber boat off the LCM but couldn't move it. The 6-man demolition crew took off for the beach and rest of the crew went to work on obstacles. In the first band [of obstacles] were saw horse ramps 10 feet high. It was necessary for one man to boost another on his shoulders to get the mine at the peak off (3 belts of obstacles). Men managed to bring up charges to blow a gap of about 30 yards using ring main with a 3-minute fuse. Tetrytol was used since the C-2 had been left in the rubber boat. Fire heavy—work was done spasmodically. As the men were taking off for the protection of the shin-

gle pile, a mortar shell came over, struck the primacord, and set off the charges. Six Army team members were killed, 2 wounded. Four Navy team killed, 2 wounded. A number of infantry killed and wounded 0700. Explosion left few obstacles standing. Room for boats to come in, and many did. About 0800 the infantry managed to start moving out.⁵

Team 11 had a rough crossing. The LCT(A) carrying them and towing their LCM began to take in water about 20 miles off the beach and was abandoned. They managed to transfer to their LCM but lost most of their Tetrytol (22.5-pound high-explosive) packs and all their bangalore torpedoes in the process. They landed on the far left of Easy Red at 0635 without any infantry support and were immediately suppressed by German fire. By the end of the day, over half the team had been lost, killed, or wounded.⁶

Team 10 landed on Easy Red and managed to open a gap nearly 100 yards wide but was slowed by

casualties and the continued arrival of landing craft and infantry.

Team 9 landed in the center of Easy Red, but their LCM took a hit just as the ramp was drawing. One man was killed and three wounded, but the remainder set their charges and after two attempts at setting them off managed to clear a partial gap.

Support Team H, with Capt. William J. Buntline of the 299th Engineers aboard, landed on Fox Green just to the west of the bluffs. The heavy German fire prevented any gapping attempts until the infantry began working up the hillside between 0800 and 0900.⁷

The LCM carrying Gapping Support Team F was hit by several shells. The first struck on the ramp, blowing three men into the water and throwing the craft out of control. The second burst in the bow, killing most of the men aboard. A total of fifteen of the twenty-five men aboard were killed, and only five members of the army team reached shore.⁸

Two more teams meant for the 116th Infantry sector landed on Easy Green, directly in front of the defenses at Les Moulins. Despite suffering heavy casualties, Team 8 managed to open a gap nearly fifty yards wide.

Team 6 landed on Easy Green, east off Les Moulins draw. They were faced with only two rows of ramps and a single row of hedgehogs that were sparsely distributed in this sector. They too had problems clearing infantrymen from their area, but succeeded in clearing an effective gap fifty yards wide. Later, as the tide rose, two LCT's missed the few markers indicating the clear lane, struck mined obstacles, and sank, blocking about half the lane.

Team 7 was about to set off its charges when an LCM loaded with infantry crashed into the stakes. The landing craft set off at least seven Teller mines on the obstacles, wrecking it and killing many of the infantrymen aboard. The explosion also cut the primacord to the team's demolitions, preventing them from clearing the gap. With the rapidly rising tide making another attempt impossible, they moved ashore.

Teams 2 through 5 all had little success. Team 2 arrived late on Dog Green, and the rising tide made work impossible. Team 3 landed on Dog White on time, but was hit by artillery fire as the ramp was lowered, detonating all the explosives in the LCM, and killing or wounding all but one man. Team 4 suffered heavy casualties and was unable to set

GAPPING IN THE 16TH INFANTRY ZONE

	Team 6	Team 8	Team 9	Team 10	Team 11	Team 12	Team 13	Team 14	Team 15	Team 16
Landed					0635	0630	0630	0625	0640	0633
Gap Open	0650	0700	Partial	0700	Failed	0700	Failed	Failed	Failed	Failed
	Support E		Support F		Support G		Support H		Command 2	
Landed	0640		0700		0650		0710		0714	

GAPPING IN THE 116TH INFANTRY ZONE

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5	Team 7				
Landed	0635	0730	0630	0630	0630	0630				
Gap Open	0650	Failed	Partial	Failed	Partial	Failed				
	Support A		Support B		Support C		Support D		Command 1	
Landed	UNK		UNK		UNK		UNK		UNK	



Above: What the Americans saw. An LCVP from the USS *Samuel P. Chase* landing men of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry on Easy Red at 0730. The vehicle directly ahead on the beach is Tank A-9 of A Company, 741st Tank Battalion, which was knocked out by a Teller mine that blew off the left center bogie assembly. NARA

This surrealistic scene is a detail from one of Robert Capa's famous photos taken on Easy Red on 6 June 1944. NARA

enough charges to clear a gap. Team 5 arrived on time on Dog Red and managed to set its charges by 0655, but arriving infantry taking cover behind the obstacles forced them to delay setting them off. When they finally managed to clear the area, they were only able to get an incomplete detonation that only partially cleared the gap.

Team 1 landed at 0635 at the boundary of Dog White and Dog Red well east of their planned landing on Dog Green. They worked rapidly to set its charges. After about fifteen minutes of work, they set them off, clearing an initial gap that they worked to widen in the afternoon. However, the team reported

that no craft used the gap on D-Day, even though they managed to widen it to 150 yards before night-fall.

Gapping Support Team B landed with C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion, and elements of the 116th Infantry at the extreme western end of the beach at 0710. They prepared their charges within fifteen minutes of landing, but for an unknown reason, the detonation failed.

The other five gapping support teams—A, C, D, E, and G—all landed considerably later than scheduled because of difficulties in transferring from their LCT's to the LCM's for the trip into the beach.

Their landings were between 0640 and 0745. The turning tidal current pushed them all farther east than the assault teams they were intended to support. All were reportedly met by heavy machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire and suffered heavy casualties. The LCM of Team F was hit at 0700 hours and promptly sank; only four of the team members eventually made it to shore.

The two command craft also landed late. Command Team 1, leading the teams supporting the 116th Infantry on the western end of the beach, landed at 0700 hours after being bracketed by gunfire.

Command Boat 2, leading the teams supporting the 16th Infantry on the eastern end of the beach, was swept eastward and had to reverse course to come in on Easy Red as intended. Maj. Milton Jewett, commander of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion, was in command of the Special Engineer Task Force teams on the eastern end of the beach supporting the 16th Infantry. He was interviewed on 16 July:

Considerable difficulty in landing LCMs, causing delay. Went in too far west—FOX Beach—and had to pull along shore. Had to estimate beach—got in 0711. Water just coming up to the hedgehogs in inside of sandbars. Water waist deep. Easy Red Beach at point designated. Infantry and men from 37th C

Bn on shingle. Two assault tank and 1 dozer. AA guns and vehicles coming in and one of their LCTs beached and blocked the beach.⁹

The sixteen tank dozers intended to support the teams, one per gap, also fared poorly. Only six were known to have gotten ashore, where they did yeoman service, earning high praise from the engineers, but eventually, all but one were disabled.

The sixteen assault teams managed to clear five complete (the navy report says six) and three partial gaps by 0700. However, none of the gaps was adequately marked and one was not even used on D-Day. Later in the afternoon, four more gaps were opened, and the three morning gaps were completed, and all were widened.¹⁰

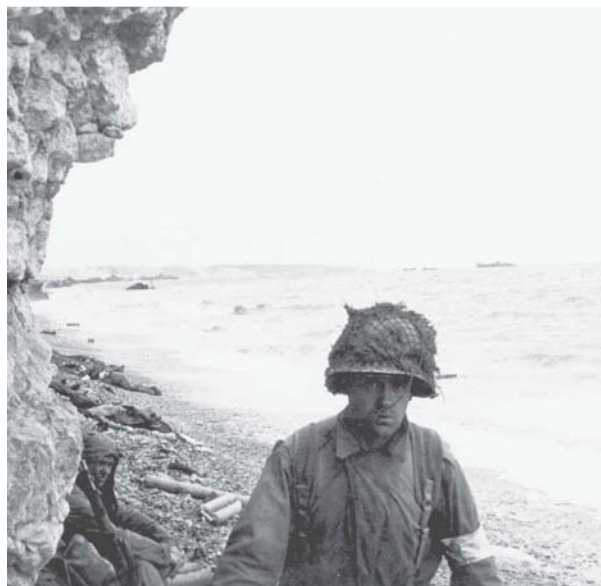
Even that partial result had been incredibly costly. The men of the Special Engineer Task Force suffered some of the highest casualties of any unit on D-Day. The navy teams lost 4 officers and 20 enlisted men killed, 3 officers and 29 enlisted men wounded, and 15 enlisted men missing—a total of 71 casualties of the 126 officers and men that were the nominal strength of the 21 N.C.D.U.'s present.¹¹ The 146th Engineers reported estimated losses of 31 killed, 79 wounded, and 3 missing on 10 June, but later a total of 145 casualties. The 299th Engineers reported 50 wounded and 52 missing in their estimated loss report of 19 June, but it seems clear that all the missing were in fact killed.¹²

THE ASSAULT BY THE 16TH REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

On the left (east) end of Omaha, the landing by the 16th Infantry RCT began to unravel early. As on the Commonwealth beaches, the final decision on launching the DD tanks had been left as a joint decision between the naval commander of the LCT group and the army commander of the DD tanks embarked in the LCT. The decision to launch was made by Captain Thornton, the ranking officer of the 741st Tank Battalion, with the tacit concurrence of Lt. (Junior Grade) J. E. Barry, the commander of the LCT flotilla. At 0535, the tanks of B and C Companies began driving off the ramps of the

LCT's some 5,000 to 6,000 yards from the beach.¹³ The result was catastrophic. Of the twenty-nine DD tanks launched, twenty-seven were sunk in the run-in to the beach. On one, LCT-600, the first tank into the water immediately sank and the other three aboard aborted their launch. C Company was annihilated, losing all sixteen of its tanks. All five of the survivors were from B Company, but the company fared little better, losing eleven tanks during the swim in. The two remaining operational DD tanks landed at 0630 and were joined a few minutes later by the three from LCT-600, which were landed directly onto the beach.

The five tanks did yeoman service trying to support the initial waves of infantry, but they were too few to make a significant difference against the weight of German fire. Another was knocked out by an antitank gun early in the morning and another was lost to unknown causes, quickly reducing the survivors of B Company to just three tanks. Worse, the strong lateral currents off Omaha made a shambles of the infantry and obstacle-clearance team landings they had been intended to support.



Above: A medic among the wounded under the bluff below WN 60. A tank, probably a DD, can be seen in the water center left while to the left of that is the stern of LCI(L) 83. NARA

LCI(L) 83 lands Company B, 20th Engineers. WN 60 was immediately up the slope to the left, just west of where LCI(L) 83 landed. NARA



Two battalions of the 16th Infantry were intended to land abreast on the eastern end of Omaha Beach, the 3rd on the left and the 1st on the right. Each led with two assault companies, with the third assault company, weapons company, and battalion headquarters following thirty minutes later—theoretically after the gap clearance teams had done their work.

On Fox Green, the first wave of the 16th Infantry was supposed to consist of L Company on the left (east) and I Company on the right (west). Instead, L Company—minus one of its six LCA's that had been swamped—landed on the right edge of Fox Red directly in front of WN 60, where no landings had been intended. I Company was swept over a mile eastward toward Port-en-Bessin and had to work their way back, landing four of six boat sections—two of their LCA's had swamped and the men had been taken back to the assault ship by rescue boats—at 0800 hours, an hour and a half late.

Where L Company landed on Fox Red, they had a 200-yard wade under heavy fire from WN 60, which caused heavy casualties. What they were then confronted with was a narrow strip of beach along the edge of twelve-foot-high cliffs, above which was WN 60. Fortunately for the men of L Company, the steep cliffs prevented the Germans from getting a direct shot at them, so they were reduced to lobbing occasional grenades at the Americans. But otherwise, the Americans were equally unable to get to grip with the Germans—and the tide was coming in, inexorably shrinking the beach they stood on.

The actual landing on Fox Green turned into chaos. Elements of three infantry companies in fifteen LCA's and LCVP's—none of which was supposed to be there, including six boatloads of E Company, 116th Infantry, which had come ashore more than 3,000 yards east of its intended landing site—were intermingled under the fire of WN 60, 61, and 62. About 465 men landed there, and it is impossible to know how many fell. In a report that included all casualties incurred up to 1200 hours 8 June, E Company, 16th Infantry, accounted for one officer and six enlisted men killed, one officer and seventy-eight enlisted men wounded, one officer missing, presumed dead, and forty-two enlisted men presumed to be stragglers. F Company, 16th Infantry,

fares little better; they also had one officer and six enlisted men reported killed, two officers and sixty-four enlisted men wounded, no less than four officers missing, presumed killed, and thirty-six enlisted men missing, presumed to be stragglers. It may safely be presumed that most of the dead and wounded were incurred on Fox Green.

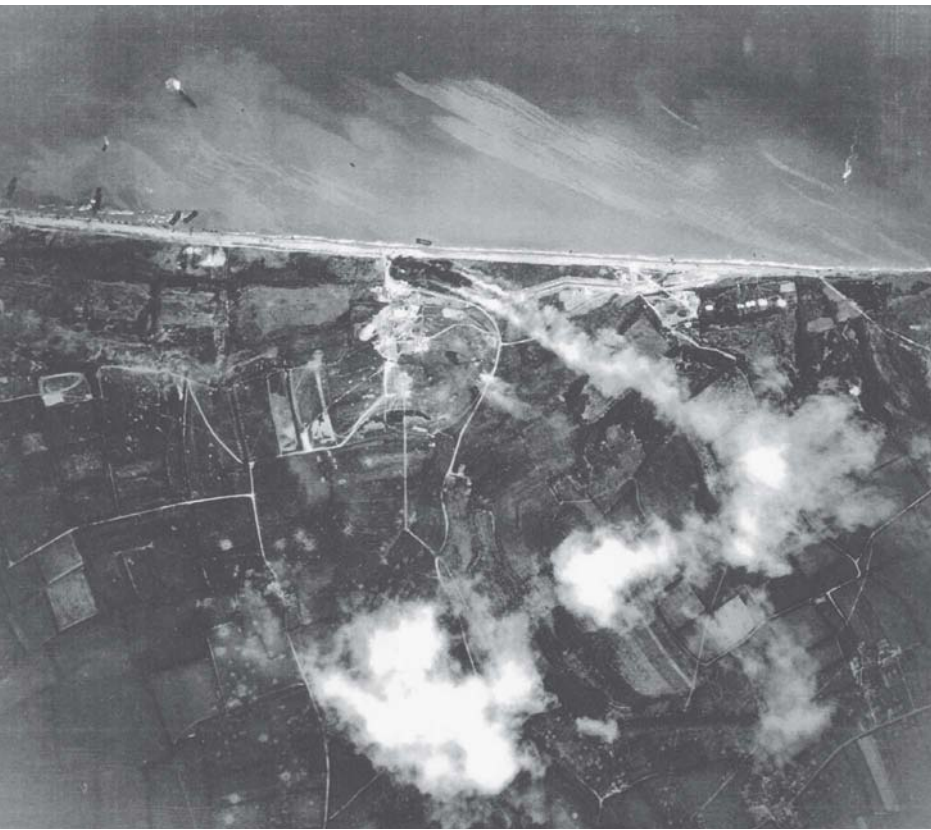
On Easy Red, only slightly less chaotic conditions reigned. Just one boatload from E Company, 16th Infantry, and two more errant LCA's from E Company, 116th Infantry, landed there. The section of E Company, 16th Infantry, under Lt. John Spalding, lost twelve of its thirty-two men crossing the beach, but managed to find a sheltered position among some demolished beach houses and then, almost immediately, began to explore ways of getting up the bluffs and behind the German positions dominating the beach exits.

At 0640 hours, the troops and five operational tanks on the beach were joined by twelve more tanks and six tank dozers of A Company, 741st Tank Battalion. One A Company LCT(A) had struck a mine and sunk at 0200, taking two more tanks and a tank dozer down with it, while yet another had broken down and was unable to land until D+3, also taking two tanks and a tank dozer out of the fight.

Of the six tank dozers landed, one was hit and destroyed within minutes, reportedly by the 88-millimeter gun in WN 61, another had its bulldozer blade blown off by the explosion of a mine, and two others were lost to unknown causes. The remaining two, with the help of the gapping teams, managed to enlarge the four partial lanes into a single large gap nearly 600 yards wide later in the morning.

One LCT(A) of the 741st Tank Battalion landed on Easy Red just east of the E-1 Exit at 0635 hours, and Sergeant Coaker's and Ball's tanks and Lieutenant Klotz's tank dozer immediately began engaging WN 64 and WN 65. Sergeant Beetson, commanding Klotz's tank dozer, reported:

At 2,000 yards from shore, we began firing, expending about 50 rounds, HE Amm [high-explosive ammunition]. Landed on beach at approximately 0630 hours continued firing at definite targets approximately ten, both large gun and machine gun emplacements, using



A panorama of the Colleville-sur-Mer area taken at about noon on 6 June. At upper left is Easy Red, upper center is Fox Green, while upper right is Fox Red. The large white blotch in the center is the heavily pummeled WN 62, with WN 61 to its right at the end of the antitank ditch. WN 60 is at the far right edge of the frame. NARA

Below: Easy Red later in the morning. The bend in the road at left is at the juncture with East Green. In the center is a damaged and smoking LCT, with the wreckage of what is probably an LCVP next to it. The many whitecaps in the water are caused by the waves breaking over the obstacles. NARA



A damaged and smoking LCVP from the USS *Samuel P. Chase* heads toward Easy Red at 0700 hours on 6 June. NARA



At the juncture of Fox Green and Fox Red, two sunken LCVP's are crowded with men attempting to get to shore while men on shore attempt to rig a lifeline. NARA

Below: The raft reaches shore with at least seven men. NARA



about 90 rounds HE amm. It is reasonably sure that hits were scored. During this time, we were also engaged in the removal of beach obstacles. At about noon, we reloaded with amm. in order to continue our work. At this time Lt. Klotz became casualty due to enemy fire. The remainder of the crew continued the work of clearing the beach. It was necessary for the crew to dismount under fire

to facilitate the removal of obstacles which were dragged by means of cables. From time to time the crew assisted in the evacuation of wounded to the landing boats also while under fire. In the early afternoon, Sgt. Daum became a casualty due to enemy fire. The remainder of the crew continued operating the tank dozer clearing the beach of obstacles, and the removal of wrecked and burning vehicles, in order to expedite the movement of traffic. This work was continued until the tide rendered further operations impossible.¹⁴

At 0700 hours, the reserve companies of the assault battalions began to land. The usual plan was that the reserve rifle company landed first, followed ten minutes later by the weapons company and battalion headquarters.

On the left, K Company landed just slightly west of WN 60 and was caught in the crossfire between it and WN 62. Its losses as reported on the morning of 8 June were three officers and seven enlisted men

killed, another thirty-eight enlisted men wounded, and twenty-two missing, most of those almost certainly being incurred during the assault. With nearly half the company down, it was out of the fight as an organized unit. However, M (Weapons) Company was more fortunate, landing farther east, where they were somewhat less exposed. They reported no one killed and just twenty wounded, with another twenty-four missing but believed to be stragglers. The 3rd Battalion Headquarters also landed intact, with none killed and just a few wounded and missing.

Farther west, G Company arrived nearly intact and close to where Lieutenant Spalding's small group from E Company had landed. It suffered some wounded getting off the landing craft and across the beach, but was the largest organized body of troops that had landed in that quiet area. The weapons company, H, was also fortunate, suffering just three enlisted men killed, with one officer and twenty-two enlisted men wounded, and eight missing. The 2nd Battalion Headquarters was even more fortunate, losing no killed or wounded and just twelve enlisted men missing.

Meanwhile, also at around 0700 hours, under the inspired leadership of two officers, Capt. John Armellino and Lt. James Monteith, L Company,



A soldier being given artificial respiration. NARA

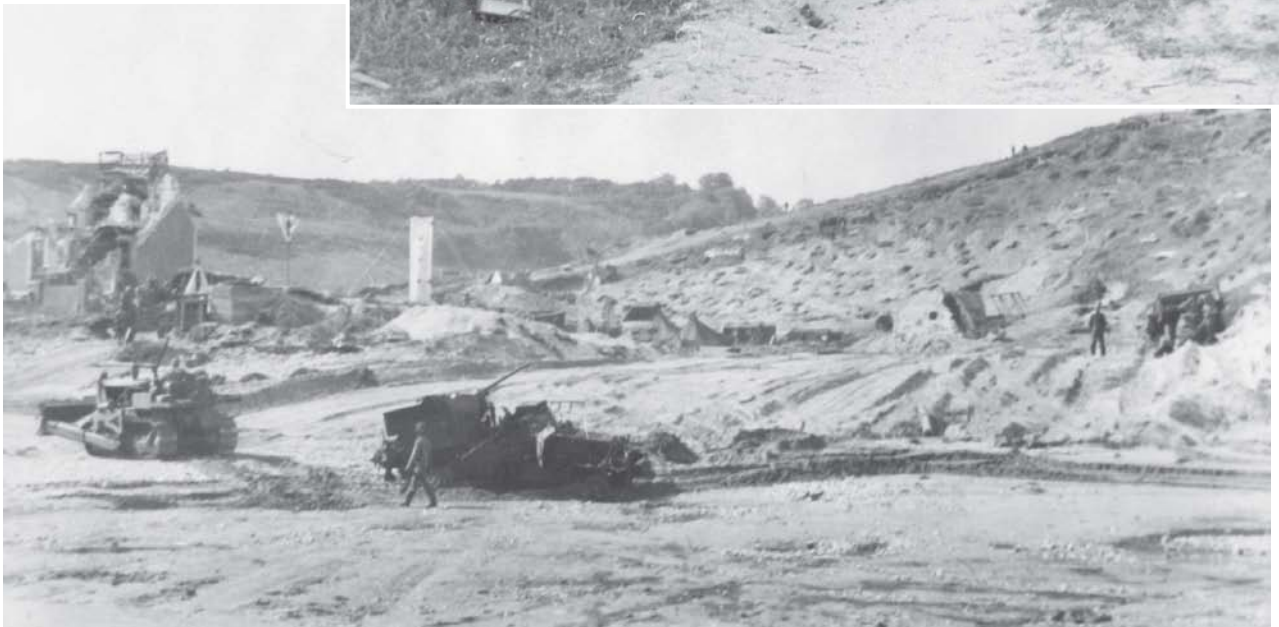
16th Infantry, on Fox Red slowly began to work its way into the E-1 Exit. Armellino was wounded early on, but Monteith was able to contact the two DD tanks of B Company that had swum ashore and directed them to open fire on the German strongpoint. One, commanded by Sergeant Geddes, was credited with knocking out the two 75-millimeter guns in WN 60 and effectively suppressing its fire at around 0745 hours. The other, commanded by Sergeant Sheppard, claimed to have knocked out a "75mm or 88mm gun" that may well have been the one in WN 61; Colonel Ziegelmann's account states that it was reported to have been silenced at 0720 hours.¹⁵ Sergeant Sheppard's tank was knocked out a few minutes later.

Monteith then scrambled up the cliff side with bangalore torpedoes, blew a hole in the wire entanglement, and personally led an assault that seized the German position at around 0900 hours. It was the first of the German strongpoints on Omaha to fall to the American assault. The loss of WN 60 drove a wedge into the German defenses at the eastern end of Omaha and began the unraveling of the German position. For his part in the action, Lieutenant Monteith was awarded the Medal of Honor, one of only two awarded on Omaha Beach.

Farther west, on Easy Red, Lieutenant Spalding's twenty men had started to gnaw away at the German defenses at the Colleville Draw. S/Sgt. Curt Colwell managed to blow a small gap in the wire entanglement at the base of the bluffs just west of WN 62 with a bangalore torpedo. Then, a lone man, Sgt. Philip Streczyk, exploited the gap, guiding Lieutenant Spalding and the rest of the tiny group through the gap and up the bluffs, where they seized one of the machine-gun positions and captured their first prisoner, a Pole. Spalding's men were supported by frontal attacks on WN 62 by the remnants of Company F, 16th Infantry, which knocked out one of the pillboxes and by one of the tanks, probably from B Company, 741st Tank Battalion, which knocked out one of the antitank guns on the bluff. Then G Company, under Capt. Joseph Dawson, joined the fight, penetrating the wire just east of Spalding's gap and fighting their way to the top of the bluffs. By about 0845, the group of perhaps 200 men, joined by the misplaced men from E Com-

The 4.2-inch mortars of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion attached to the 1st Division firing on D-Day. They are firing toward the east from positions somewhere on Easy Red between WN 62 and 64. NARA

Below: Fox Red and Fox Green, with one of the half-tracks of the 467th Anti-Aircraft Battalion standing parallel to the beach. The prominent fortified house in front of WN 65 is easily seen. NARA



pany, 116th Infantry, was poised to exploit the narrow opening they had opened in the German defenses between Colleville and St. Laurent.

Between 0740 and 0800 hours, the small groups on Easy Red received a powerful reinforcement when the reserve 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, began to land. It landed nearly intact as an organization, although not without casualties. After assembling on the beach, the companies began to follow the torturous paths blazed by Spalding and Dawson's men, and by 0930, they were formed at the top of the bluff, ready to exploit the breach in the German line.

Although it did not appear so at the time, the situation had already tipped in the favor of the beleaguered American assault teams. WN 60 had fallen, WN 61 had been isolated, and its heaviest weapon, the 88-millimeter antitank gun, had been knocked out. The defense of the Colleville Exit was still holding, as WN 62 continued to resist attacks to front and flank, but the penetrations by L Company to the east, Spalding's and Dawson's gallant bands, and the 1st Battalion to the west had effectively isolated it.

At 1030 hours, the 2nd Battalion, 18th Infantry, was landed in LCVP's on Fox Red just west of WN

Easy Red just east of the E-1 Draw at 1100 hours after the landing of the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 115th Infantry. Tanks of the 741st Tank Battalion are lined up on the shingle firing inland. LCI(L) 553 is to the left.

NARA

Below: The crew of an LCI(L) watching a large explosion on Easy Red. It is likely the explosion was part of the engineer operations to clear the beach obstacles. NARA



65. Supported by two tanks of the 741st Tank Battalion, some half-track mounted guns of the 467th Antiaircraft Battalion,¹⁶ and the destroyer USS *Frankford* standing close offshore, the battalion overwhelmed the position, opening Exit E-1, the St. Laurent Draw, at about noon. The 2nd Battalion was followed by ten LCI(L)'s that landed the bulk of the

18th Infantry on Fox Red at about 1100 hours.¹⁷ That finally ended the stalemate in the 16th Infantry sector, although it was the next day before the last German strongpoints surrendered.

The fate of the 741st Tank Battalion well illustrates the strength of the German position. Of twelve gun tanks reported landed by A Company, one was swamped on the beach as the tide came in, and five threw tracks in the heavy going on the shingle. Three more were lost to antitank gun fire, two to mines, and one to unknown cause, leaving none in action at the end of the day. B Company landed five tanks and quickly lost two more, but at the end of the day, just one was operational; two of the three surviving tanks were knocked out attempting to finally subdue WN 62 around 1100 hours. C Company was lost at sea. Four of six tank dozers landed were lost. Four more reserve 741st Tank Battalion tanks landed between 1300 and 1630 hours, but by the end of the day, just five tanks and two tank dozers were left operational ashore with the battalion of the twenty-three that had landed, while thirty had been lost at sea.¹⁸

THE ASSAULT BY THE 116TH REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM

On the right (west) end of Omaha, the 743rd Tank Battalion initially fared somewhat better than the 741st to the east. The commander of the LCT flotilla, Lt. D. L. Rockwell, decided that the sea was too rough for the DD tanks and decided to land them directly on the beach.¹⁹

C Company landed with eight tanks on Dog White and eight on Easy Green, instead of on Dog Green as had been intended, at 0624 hours in “unusually rough water.” When the tanks began to cross the beach, they also encountered considerable fire from German antitank guns, but only one tank was disabled when it lost a track in the heavy shingle. It appears that observation from WN 68 may have been obscured by a grass fire that had been caused by the naval bombardment, while the guns of WN 70

apparently concentrated on B Company on Dog Green. However, the infantry the eight tanks on Dog White had expected to team up with, G Company, 116th Infantry, didn’t appear—they had been swept eastward to the far eastern boundary of Easy Green. The swiftly returning tide was forcing the tankers steadily inland, so they shifted westward in search of infantry to support. Eventually, the fifteen operational tanks concentrated near the D-1 Exit where they joined the survivors of B Company in hammering WN 68, 70, and 71 in turn with gunfire. In return, the life raft stowed on one of the DD tanks was hit and caught fire, eventually setting the tank ablaze and destroying it. But by the end of the day, fourteen tanks were still operational and only one officer and four enlisted men had been wounded.²⁰

This is Dog Green Beach at about 0930, with the tide nearly in. Eleven DD tanks of the 743rd Tank Battalion can be counted along the beach promenade road and on the beach. The multitude of small black dots on the beach are men of the 116th Infantry sheltering among the beach obstacles. NARA



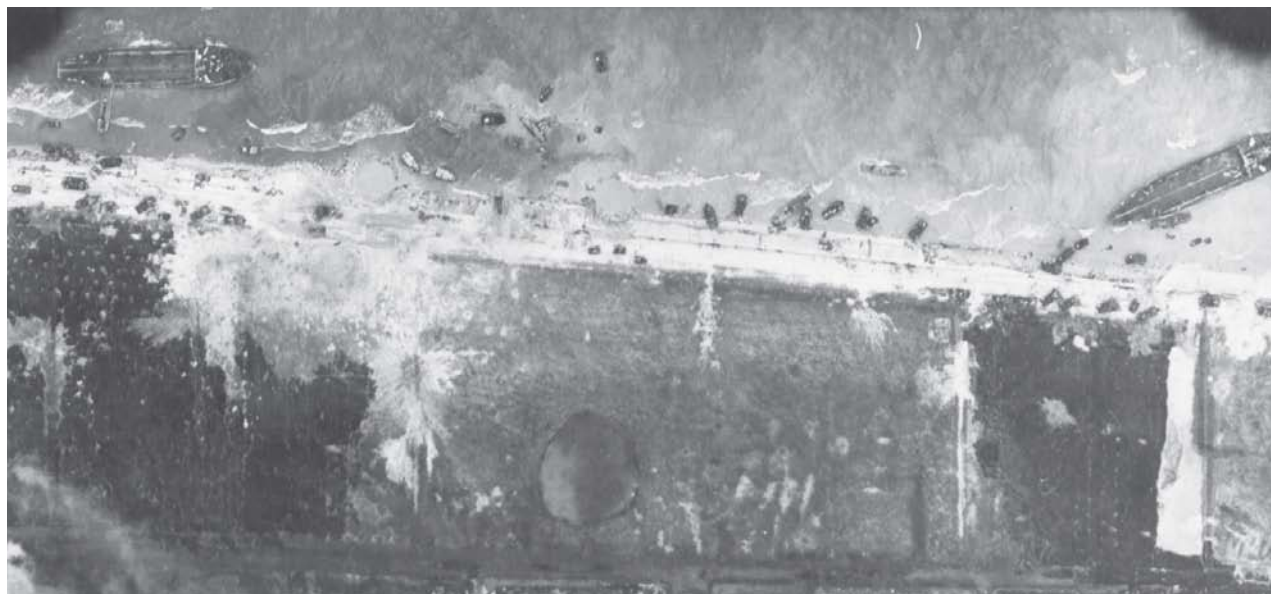
B Company landed intact on Dog Green at 0630 with all sixteen tanks, but was met by a storm of fire from the 88-millimeter and 50-millimeter guns at WN 72 and the two 75-millimeter guns in WN 70. Within a few minutes, tanks began to get hit, and by the end of the day, seven had been lost, with three officers and six enlisted men killed and one officer wounded.²¹

A Company, 743rd Tank Battalion, with the wading tanks landed at about the same time as the DD Companies, on Dog Red, directly in front of the defenses at Les Moulins. Two of the LCT(A)'s were hit by German gunfire before beaching. As a result, only one M4 tank they carried was able to get to shore; three other M4 tanks and two M4 tank dozers were lost. The remaining thirteen tanks and six tank dozers attempted to advance through Exit D-3, but failed, so they shifted west toward Exit D-1 and the other two companies of the battalion. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. John S. Upham, landed at H+90 with six reserve and headquarters tanks. He was mortally wounded after dismounting from his tank in an attempt to direct fire on the 88-millimeter gun at WN 72. By the end of the day, another five tanks and all but one of the tank dozers had been swamped or lost to unknown causes, five enlisted

men were wounded, and two officers and fifty-eight enlisted men were missing.²²

The infantry landings that commenced at about the same time were as confused as those of the 16th Infantry. On Easy Green, none of E Company was present as planned. Instead, G Company, intended for Dog White, and F Company, intended for Dog Red, landed there. Even though both units landed intact, confusion was inevitable as the landings of the two companies became intermingled, two boatloads of G landing on the far left, then two boatloads of F to their right, four more of G to their right, and then four of F on the far right, straddling Easy Green and Dog Red.

No troops landed initially on Dog White, while, on Dog Green, only A Company landed more or less as intended, but unsupported. Twelve to sixteen tanks of B Company, 743rd Tank Battalion, were supposed to be there as well as two LCA's with C Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. However, the tanks had drifted eastward, while the Rangers had deviated slightly westward, leaving A Company alone. Their five remaining LCA's—one had foundered in the heavy seas during the run in—grounded nearly astride the Vierville Exit and about 300 yards offshore. The troops gallantly filed off the



A detailed low-level shot of Easy Green Beach at about 1000 hours. Vehicles are crowded along the beach unable to go forward, but there are few troops visible. By this time, men of the 116th Infantry had begun to work their way inland over the bluffs. NARA

LCA's and were mercilessly machine-gunned into oblivion by the concentrated fire from the intact and nearly unengaged defenses of WN 71 and 72. Of the roughly 160 men in the five craft, it is estimated that nearly 100 died and most of the rest were wounded—a casualty rate of nearly 100 percent. Nineteen of the dead, including two brothers, were from the tiny town of Bedford, Virginia, which is now the site of the U.S. D-Day Memorial.

Despite fifty-one medium tanks landing on the beaches with the 116th Infantry, the situation was, if anything, worse than in the sector of the 16th Infantry farther east. Only one complete and one partial gap in the German obstacle belt had been cleared for the landing of the follow-on forces. The tanks were unable to maneuver effectively on the narrow beach and were under constant fire that slowly whittled away their strength. Nonetheless, the reserve companies of the assault battalions began to land at about 0700 hours.

On Easy Green, Dog Red, and Dog White, the 2nd Battalion, consisting of E, F, and G Company, Headquarters Company, and H (Weapons) Company were to land at 0700 hours, neatly aligned with their leading waves. Instead, none of the waves was where it was supposed to be, and the reserves became scattered as well. At H+50, the 3rd Battalion was to land, also dispersed between the beaches, but for once, the tendency to drift east was to their advantage. The entire battalion was landed at about 0730 hours between the E-1 Exit at St. Laurent and the D-3 Exit at Les Moulins, a position that was partly sheltered by smoke from grass fires.

The rest of the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry—A Company Headquarters, B, C, and D (Weapons) Company, and Battalion Headquarters—were supposed to follow A Company onto Dog Green in three distinct waves at H+30, H+40, and H+50. Instead, they were scattered along the length of the 116th Infantry sector. The current, the smoke obscuring reference points, and a simple desire by the landing craft coxswains to land at a point where there was a reasonable chance of some of the infantry aboard getting ashore all added to the confusion.

Three boatloads from B Company, one with A Company headquarters, and three with battalion headquarters landed more or less in the same spot as



Dog Green looking west. A knocked-out DD tank of B Company, 743rd Tank Battalion, can be seen in the distance. A number of unrecovered American dead are also visible, 7 June 1944. JULIUS SHOULARS



The DD tank of B Company, 743rd Tank Battalion, that was knocked out trying to cross the shingle and seawall on Dog White. This view is looking east toward Les Moulins, 7 June 1944. JULIUS SHOULARS

A Company—and met much the same fate. The boat section carrying company commander Capt. Ettore Zappacosta was wiped out; only one man, Captain Zappacosta's radioman, Pvt. Robert Sales, managed to reach shore alive.

One LCA from B Company veered right away from Zappacosta's group and landed near C Company of the 2nd Rangers, where they were a welcome reinforcement. Three other LCA's of B Company, 116th Infantry, turned left (east) and landed on Dog White. More importantly, C Com-



The landing of the 5th Ranger Battalion and 116th Infantry just west of the D-3 Draw, looking toward Dog White and Dog Red, at about 0900. Drowned vehicles from earlier waves can be seen in the water while in the background a Rhino ferry prepares to land engineer equipment. In the background is a large white beachfront house that was a prominent landmark. Many of the beach obstacles are still intact. NARA

Tank C-13 (*Ceaseless*) of C Company, 743rd Tank Battalion, on Dog White amid other debris on the evening of 6 June. NARA



pany, 116th Infantry, landed nearly intact just to their left, with D (Weapons) Company, 116th Infantry, to their right; somewhat later, the entire 5th Ranger Battalion and Company A and B of the 2nd Ranger Battalion followed in behind them.

As a result of some good fortune, the reserves had landed in some strength, with fewer losses, and a more intact organization, right where they were needed, if not where they were planned. Between St. Laurent and Les Moulins, the 3rd Battalion, 116th Infantry, and scattered elements of the 2nd

Battalion began to work their way up the nearly undefended bluffs between WN 65 and WN 68. By 0830 hours, they were moving inland, and by noon, they were on the outskirts of St. Laurent.

Farther west, the mass of troops from the 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions between WN 68 and WN 70, east of Vierville, had also gotten organized under the steady hand of the assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Norman Cota, and the commander of the 116th Infantry, Col. Charles Lanham, and began to work



What the Germans saw looking east from the 88-millimeter bunker in WN 72 at the E-1 Draw on Dog White. In the immediate foreground is the remaining rubble from the antitank wall that was blasted by the 121st Engineers on the afternoon of D-Day. NARA



Outside the bunker at WN 72, looking southeast, with the muzzle of the 88-millimeter gun in the foreground. Just beyond it can be seen the remnant of the antitank wall left after it was cleared. NARA

their way up the bluffs against scattered German resistance. By 0830, they too had begun to crest the bluffs and turned westward toward Vierville, overrunning WN 70 from the flank and rear. By 1000 hours, Vierville had fallen, and at about noon, General Cota and a small party of men approached the Vierville Draw—from inland—only to be nearly killed by American naval gunfire.

A little after WN 70 fell, at about 0900 hours, C Company of the 2nd Rangers and the single boat section of B Company, 116th Infantry, also began to work their way inland. The Rangers had moved west to clear the line of fire of WN 73 and then began to stealthily climb the cliff face. In a hard-



A close-up of the embrasure. "Doc" Hall was a member of the 7th Naval Beach Battalion. JULIUS SHOULARS

fought action, about thirty Rangers managed to clear WN 73 and then, reinforced by the men from B Company, forced the Germans to withdraw from WN 72. At about 1000 hours, the defenses at both German positions had collapsed.

Thus, by 1100 hours, the situation at the western end of Omaha had stabilized, at about the same time as it had farther east. Although neither the 16th or 116th Infantry had reached their assigned D-Day objective line, they had achieved the primary goal of Operation Neptune; they had established a beachhead in France, however tenuous, that could be exploited by the follow-on forces of the V Corps. The 26th Infantry of the 1st Division, in corps reserve, began landing at 1830 hours at Colleville. The 175th Infantry of the 29th Division began landing at Les Moulins at 1200 hours on 7 June and were followed shortly thereafter by the entire 2nd Infantry Division. By midday on 7 June, Omaha Beach was secure.

The final coda to the Omaha assault occurred at the Vierville Draw and, appropriately enough, was orchestrated by the engineers. One of the thorns in the side of the 116th Infantry and 743rd Tank Battalion had been the massive antitank wall abutting WN 71 that extended nearly the width of the draw and left only a narrow chicane open for vehicles to carefully back and fill through. At 1300 hours, the position was finally silenced, and two platoons of engineers of C Company, 121st Engineers, went to work demolishing the wall. For nearly an hour, 1,100 pounds of explosive, in the standard twenty-pound satchels, were carefully positioned against the eight-foot wall. At 1400, Colonel Ploger, the commander of the 121st, gave the order to fire. The resulting explosion cleared the entire wall from WN 72 to its end, leaving a two-inch depression in the roadway. The Vierville Exit was open.²³

OMAHA ASSESSED

Losses in the 16th Infantry were simply horrific. The initial reports counted 36 officers and 935 enlisted men as casualties out of the 185 officers and 3,475 enlisted men who were present for duty on the morning of 6 June—more than 26.5 percent. Later reports filed with the regimental combat report for June were nearly identical, as was a report filed by the regimental medical detachment.²⁴ The losses in the units attached to the combat team were nearly as bad. Of the 9,850 men embarked, at least 1,697 were casualties—a loss of 17.2 percent.

The 116th Infantry as a regiment did not suffer as severely as the 16th Infantry. However, the losses

in the combat team as a whole were just as staggering. Of the 10,497 officers and men recorded as having embarked as part of the 116th RCT and Ranger Reserve force, at least 1,799 were casualties—over 17 percent of the total force embarked.

There is simply no way to avoid the conclusion that Omaha was a fiasco that was saved from becoming a complete disaster by the bravery and initiative of the officers and men that were dumped into that maelstrom. There is also much to be criticized in some of the decisions made during the Neptune planning process that had such dire results on Omaha. However, as has been seen, many of those

CASUALTIES OF THE 16TH INFANTRY RCT AND ATTACHED UNITS ON D-DAY

	Killed		Missing Believed Killed		Missing Believed Straggler		Wounded		Total	
	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.
16th Infantry	5	44	9	26	3	354	19	510	36	934
7th Field Artillery Bn.	1	1	1	32	0	0	3	3	5	36
A Co., 1st Medical Bn.	0	5	0	0	0	6	0	11	0	22
	Missing									
					Off.	Enl.				
741st Tank Bn. ²⁵		45 ^a			0		60			105
62nd Armored										
Field Artillery Bn. ²⁶	0	2		0	0		2	11	2	13
1st Engineer Combat Bn. ²⁷		4			6		27			37
20th Engineer Combat Bn. ²⁸		3			0		10			13
197th AAA Bn. ²⁹		5			0		12			17
Provisional Btry 397th										
AAA Bn. ³⁰		9			35		16			60
A and C Co., 81st										
Chemical Weapons Bn. ³¹		5			0		10			15
5th Engineer Special										
Brigade ³²		13			59		106			178
299th Engineer Combat Bn.										
(SETF) ³³		0			52		50			102
6th Naval Beach Bn. ³⁴	4	14		0	10		4	34	8	58
Naval Demolition Units ³⁵	3	16		0	12		2	23	5	51
Total		179			605		913			1,697

a. Except for the 16th Infantry; 7th Field Artillery Bn.; A Co., 1st Medical Bn.; 62nd Armored Field Artillery Bn.; 6th Naval Beach Bn.; and Naval Demolition Units, casualty figures are not broken down by officers and enlisted and include both categories.

CASUALTIES OF THE 116TH INFANTRY RCT AND ATTACHED UNITS ON D-DAY

	Killed		Missing		Wounded		Total	
	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.	Off.	Enl.
116th Infantry ³⁶	341 ^a		26		241		668	
111th Field Artillery Bn. ³⁷	3	11	1	13	1	3	5	27
112th Engineer Combat Bn. ³⁸	3	5	0	64	1	29	4	98
121st Engineer Combat Bn. ³⁹	2	30	1	65	6	56	9	151
5th Ranger Bn. ⁴⁰	30		18		70		118	
2nd Ranger Bn. (-)	23		9		70		102	
743rd Tank Bn. ⁴¹							70	
467th AAA Bn. ⁴²	8		0		31		39	
Provisional Btty, 397th AAA Bn. ⁴³	8		16		36		60	
B and D Co.,								
81st Chemical Weapons Bn. ⁴⁴	5		0		10		15	
58th Armored Field Artillery Bn. ⁴⁵	2	7	1	9	5	14	8	30
6th Engineer Special Brigade ⁴⁶	23		111		70		204	
146th Engineer Combat Bn (SETF) ⁴⁷	1	30	0	3	8	71	9	110
7th Naval Beach Bn. ⁴⁸	0	23	1	6	4	23	5	52
Naval Demolition Units ⁴⁹	1	4	0	3	1	6	2	13
Total	560		347		756		1,799	

a. Casualty figures for the 116th Infantry; 5th Ranger Bn.; 2nd Ranger Bn.; 467th AAA Bn.; Provisional Btty, 397th AAA Bn.; B and D Co., 81st Chemical Weapons Bn.; and 6th Engineer Special Brigade are not broken down by officers and enlisted men and include both categories.

LANDING CRAFT IN THE OMAHA ASSAULT

Total Craft Engaged in Assault	Number Known Sunk	Number Lost or Damaged	Percentage Lost or Damaged
268 LCVP & LCA	55	25	29.9
24 LCS(S)	1	0	4.2
166 LCM	8	?	?
54 LCP(L)	0	0	0
148 LCT (all types)	11	35	23.6

same decisions were made on the Commonwealth beaches and on Utah without consequences so dire.

Some were a consequence of inadequate resources, although it is difficult to see how additional resources would have changed things very much. For example, the lack of sufficient LCT's led to the 7th and 11th Field Artillery Battalions going ashore with towed howitzers in DUKW's. However,

as it turned out, conditions on Omaha were such that even the two armored field artillery battalions that were deployed had problems. At 0830 hours, the decision was made to close the beach to landing craft carrying vehicles, so the two battalions were delayed some two hours in landing. That led to one of the LCT's carrying the 58th Armored Field Artillery striking a mine and sinking, taking four of

Easy Red on the afternoon of D-Day. On the crest of the ridge is WN 64, which was taken by E Company, 16th Infantry, attacking from left to right (east to west) through the tree line. The opening of the St. Laurent (E-1) draw is just to the right.

NARA



Omaha Beach, looking west from the E-1 Draw onto Easy Red on the afternoon of D-Day. A deep-wading tank is disabled on the right, having lost its left track. The three trucks in the center all appear to be burned out. Note that few of the beach obstacles have been cleared.

NARA

the battalion howitzers down with it, but that was *not* a consequence of the lack of LCT's.

On the other hand, it seems to be clear that additional LCT's carrying additional tanks in to support the assault in its initial stages might have been beneficial. However, that is a subject that is better left to the general conclusions that may be drawn from the experience of D-Day.

One thing that is noticeably different between the Omaha and the Commonwealth beaches is the number of LCT's reported sunk. The total for all three Commonwealth beaches was just eight, three fewer than the number lost at Omaha alone.⁵⁰



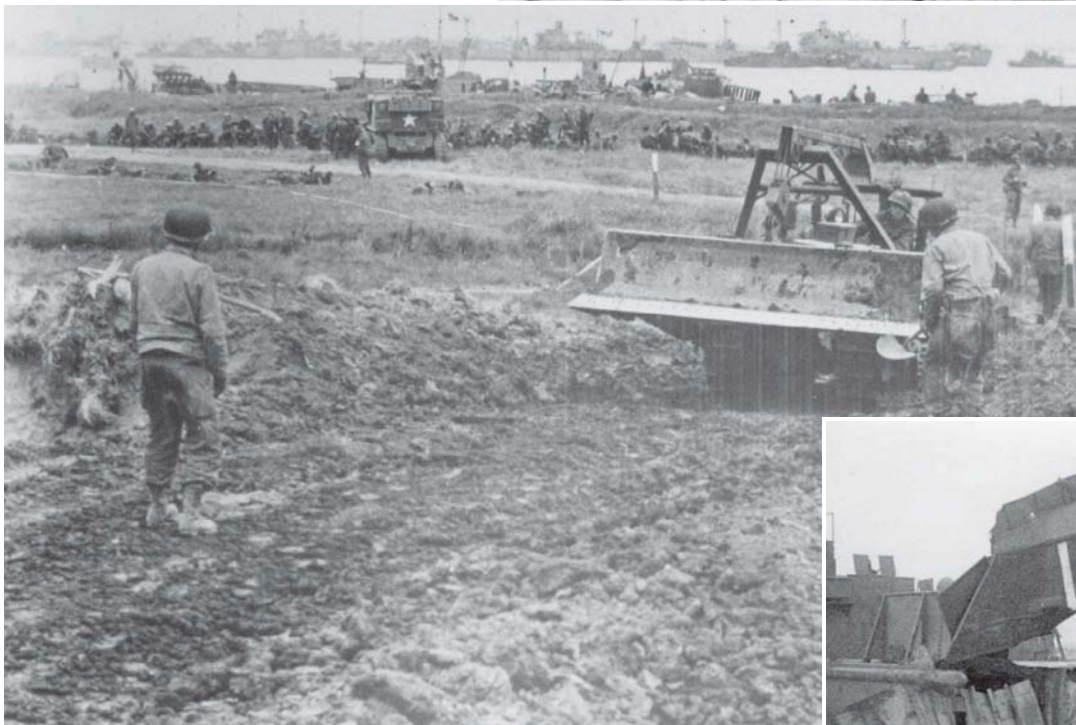
Easy Red as seen from the bluffs where WN 65 was. The LCT in the center is LCT-305 of Flotilla 18. NARA



Exit E-1 between WN 64 and 65 looking inland. NARA

Exit E-1 looking seaward. NARA

Below: The work at improving the exits at Exit E-1 went on for some time. This photo of a D7 bulldozer improving the road was taken 15 June. NARA



The result of striking a mined obstacle. This is LCT-332. The mine has torn the loading ramp and right front bow off.

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