General Cota directed the placing of a Browning machine gun nest on top of the seawall. Then he supervised the blowing of the barbed wire fence. Then he sent troops to break through bluffs. Cota himself went next and the rest followed him unharmed. They dropped thankfully into slit trenches dug by the enemy.

Norman Cota penetrated inland on this day, D-Day, to a point the American front line as a whole would not reach until two days later. He would get a silver star and the Distinguished Service Cross from the Americans, the Distinguished Service Order, the highest British medal, from Montgomery.

Heroes at Normandy: Eisenhower's Mighty Men: Utah Beach

One of the most inspiring stories of bravery and leadership came from Utah Beach and the exploits of President Theodore Roosevelt's son, Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Here is his story as told by Stephen Ambrose from his book, *D-Day*:

General Omar Bradley gathered nearly a thousand officers in a vast aircraft hangar, the general officers on the platform, the colonels on the front-row benches, the lieutenants at the rear. Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., son of the late president, was assistant division commander of the 4th Infantry Division. Because of his age, fifty-six, and his physical condition (he had a bad heart), Roosevelt had been forced to obtain a stack of dispensations and special orders, then plea for permission to go ashore on Utah with one of the first waves. He sat on the platform grinning. (p. 168)

The *USS Bayfield*, an attack transport, served as headquarters for Maj. Gen. Raymond O. Barton, commander of the 4th Infantry Division. Its decks were jammed with troops and sailors. Barton's deputy commander, Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, moved among the men, speaking softly and soothingly. Countless members of the 4th Division recall the words of reassurance that Roosevelt, the oldest man going ashore that day, said to them. They remember, too, that he began singing and urged them to join in. Lt. John Robert Lewis described the scene: "During the cruise across, we all assembled on the deck of the *Bayfield* and sang 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers.' This was a very sobering time to sing the words, 'As God died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.'" (p. 258)

E Company of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, 4th Division, was the first Allied company to hit the beach in the invasion. The tidal current, running from north to south, had carried their craft farther east so they came in a half-mile south of where they should have been.

General Roosevelt was in the first boat to hit the shore. Maj. Gen. Barton had initially refused Roosevelt's request to go in with the 8th Infantry, but Roosevelt had argued that having a general land in the first wave would boost morale for the troops. "They'll figure that if a general going in, it can't be that rough." Roosevelt has also made a personal appeal, saying, "I would love to do this." Barton had reluctantly agreed. (p. 276)

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Capt. Howard Lees, commander of E Company, led his men over the seawall to the top of the dunes. "What we saw," Sgt. Melvin Pike remembered, "was nothing like what we saw on the sand table back in England. Roosevelt joining them, working calmly up to their position, using his cane (he had had a heart attack), wearing a wool-knit hat (he hated helmets), ignoring the fire. About this time (6:40 A.M.) the Germans to the north began shooting at 2nd Battalion with 88mm cannon and machine guns, but not accurately. Roosevelt and Lees conferred, studied their maps, and realized they were in the wrong place.

Roosevelt turned to the beach. By now the first Sherman tanks had landed and were returning the German fire. Commodore James Arnold, the Navy control officer for Utah, was just landing with the third wave. "German 88s were pounding the beachhead," he recalled. "Two U.S. tanks were drawn up at the high-water line pumping back." Arnold found a shell hole and made it his temporary headquarters.

"An Army officer wearing the single star of a brigadier jumped into my 'headquarters' to duck the blast of an 88.

"'Sonsabuzzards,' he muttered, as we untangled sufficiently to look at each other, 'I'm Teddy Roosevelt. You're Arnold of the Navy. I remember you at the briefing at Plymouth.'"

Roosevelt was joined by the two battalion commanders of the 8th Infantry, Lt. Cols. Conrad Simmons and Carlton MacNeely. As they studied the map, Colonel Van Fleet, CO of the regiment, came wading ashore. He had landed with the fourth wave. (p. 278)

"Van," Roosevelt exclaimed, "we're not where we were supposed to be. I figure we are more than a mile further south." Van Fleet reflected that ironically, they were at the exact spot he had wanted the Navy to land his regiment, but the Navy insisted it was impossible because the water was too shallow. (pp. 278–79)

"We faced an immediate and important decision," Van Fleet wrote. "Should we try to shift our entire landing force more than a mile down the beach, and follow our original plan? Or should we proceed across the causeways immediately opposite where we had landed?" Already men were crossing the seawall and dunes in front of the officers, while Navy demolition men and engineers were blowing up obstacles behind them.

Roosevelt became a legend for reportedly saying at this point, "We'll start the war from right here."

The important point was … the decision … was made without opposition or time-consuming argument. It was the right decision and showed the flexibility of the high command. First, however, they needed to get their men through the seawall and over the dunes.

The engineers and naval demolition teams came in right after the first wave. The demolition teams consisted of five Navy Seabees (combat demolition units) and two or three Army engineers. There were ten teams. (p. 279)

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The Seabees personnel tended to be older than most D-Day men; most of them were trained by miners from the western United States who were explosive experts. (pp. 279–80)

The Seabees were responsible for the outermost set of obstacles, the ones that would be the first covered by the tide.

The Army engineers simultaneously went after the next set of obstacles, closer to the beach. (p. 280)

Next, the 237th[1] went to work blasting holes in the seawall. Tank dozers from the 70th Tank Battalion cleared the debris after the blasts. All the while 88 shells were coming in, but most of them were splashing into the water as the Germans continued to concentrate, not very effectively, on the wave after wave of landing craft. (p. 281)

The men from the 237th ECB followed the dozers through the holes in the seawall, climbed over the dune, and saw signs saying, "*Achtung Meinen*" [Danger Mines]. The pressure from behind of men and tanks trying to get off the beach to move inland was such that the engineers were more or less forced to move forward. "Those were the first men inland," Sgt. Vincent Powell of the 237th said. "And suddenly they started stepping on mines, S-mines, Bouncing Betties. These mines bounced up and exploded. These men began screaming and running back to the beach with the blood just flowing. And that's when the tanks started in. (pp. 281–82)

Col. Russell "Red" Reeder was CO of the 12th Infantry scheduled to land at 1030. The 12th was supposed to land north of the 8th, but the coxswains followed the orders from Roosevelt to bring the follow-up waves in behind the 8th Regiment, which put the 12th two kilometers south of where it expected to be.

"It doesn't matter," Colonel Reeder declared when he discovered the error. "We know where to go!"

Reeder led his men through a hole in the seawall to the top of the dune, where he saw Roosevelt.

"Red, the causeways leading inland are all clogged up," Roosevelt yelled. "Look at it! A procession of jeeps and not a wheel turning." To Reeder, "Roosevelt looked tired and the cane he leaned on heightened the impression."

Reeder's immediate objective was St.-Martin-de-Varreville, where he hoped to affect a linkup with the 82nd Airborne. He could move his regiment right to the causeway, then use it to cross the flooded fields. But if he did that, his men would be exposed and under observation. Using causeway 2 was out of the question; it was jammed with jeeps, tanks, trucks, and troops. His option was to cross the inundated area to reach St.-Martin-de-Varreville.

Reeder made the decision. "We are going through the flooded area," he yelled.

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[1] Engineer Combat Battalion or ECB.

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He saw Lt. Col. Charles "Chuck" Jackson, CO of his 1st Battalion, and gave him an arm signal. Jackson had just made the same judgment and set off immediately. (p. 286)

Sgt. Charles Sorenson was with Jackson. He recalled that "aerial reconnaissance had estimated that the flooded area was maybe ankle deep, except in the irrigation ditches, which they estimated they were about eighteen inches deep. Well, they made a big mistake. That flooded area was in some places up to your waist and the irrigation ditches were over your head. Some brave souls would swim across the irrigation ditches and throw toggle ropes back and haul the rest of us across. So much for aerial reconnaissance."

The battalion marched through the inundated fields for nearly two kilometers. "And we waded and waded and waded," Sorenson said. "An occasional sniper shot would be fired and didn't hit anybody. We were mostly interested in keeping from drowning because the bottom was slick and the footing tricky. You could slip down and maybe drown with all that equipment.

"I was so angry. The Navy had tried to drown men at the beach, and now the Navy was to drown me in the flooded area. I was more mad at our side than I was at the Germans, because the Germans hadn't done anything to me yet."

It took time, three or four hours or more, to get across, but it was accomplished without loss. When the battalion reached the high ground, Reeder signaled Jackson to turn right and proceed to St.-Martin-de-Varreville. He did. The battalion reached a crossroads, where it received some artillery fire that sent the men scattering for cover. General Roosevelt came up; he had hitched a ride on the hood of a jeep that had brought him on causeway 2. Roosevelt spotted Colonel Jackson.

"Well, Chuck, how are things going?" he asked. Jackson explained the situation.

"Let's go up to the front," Roosevelt suggested.

"We are at the front," Jackson replied. "See those two men [about 50 meters away]. They are the leading scouts of Company A"

"Let's go talk to them," Roosevelt said. They did, got their scouts moving, and the battalion forward. By late afternoon, the 8th Infantry and its supporting regiment, the 22nd, had hooked up with the 82nd Airborne at St.-Martin-de-Varreville and St.-Germain-de-Varreville. There they bivouacked for the night, somewhat short of the D-Day objective but pleased to be inland and in contact with the 82nd. (p. 287)

D-Day was a smashing success for the 4th Division and it attached units. Nearly all objectives were attained even though the plan had to be abandoned before the first assault waves hit the beach. By nightfall, the division was ready to move out at first light on June 7 for its next mission, taking Montebourg [mȯ^{n}-'bür] and then moving to Cherbourg [sher-'bür].

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It went on to fight battles far more costly than the one it won in the Cotentin [kō-tä^{n}-'te^{n}] beach on June 6, distinguishing itself throughout the campaign in northwest Europe, especially in taking Cherbourg, in holding the German counteroffensive at Mortain [mȯr-'te^{n}], in the liberation of Paris, in the Hürtgen Forest, and in the Battle of the Bulge. (pp. 292–93)

There were many reasons for the success of the 4th Division on D-Day, not least being the German reliance on mines, flooded areas, and fixed fortifications instead of high-quality troops to defend the supposedly impregnable Atlantic Wall. As important was the air and sea bombardment, and the naval shelling through the day. Credit belonged, too, to General Roosevelt and his colonels, men like Van Fleet, Reeder, and Jackson, for making quick and correct decisions. Junior officers, men like Captains Ahearn and Mabry, made indispensable contributions.

But most of all, the 4th's success was thanks to the airborne troopers behind the German lines. The paratroopers held the western exits. They confused the Germans and prevented any concentrated counterattacks aimed at the seaborne invaders. They put out of action batteries that might have brought heavy artillery fire down on Utah Beach.[2] (p. 293)

The End of the Day

As full darkness came to Normandy at about 10:00 P.M., unloading at the beaches ceased. Nearly 175,000 American, Canadian, and British troops had entered Normandy, either by air or by sea, at a cost of some 4,900 casualties.[3] **From the American airborne on the far right to the British airborne to the far left, the invasion front stretched over ninety kilometers [56 miles].** (p. 576)

It is estimated that American losses–killed, wounded, and missing–at Bloody Omaha numbered just over 2,000. Of the 29th Division's 1,000 casualties, the vast majority–850–were suffered by the 116th Regimental Combat Team.

There was little depth to the penetration, nowhere more than six miles at Juno and at Omaha about a mile. But everywhere the Allies had gone through the Atlantic Wall.

The Germans had taken four years to build the Atlantic Wall. They had poured thousands of tons of concrete, reinforced by hundreds of thousands of steel rods. They had dug hundreds of miles of trenches. They had placed millions of mines and laid down thousands of miles of barbed wire. They had erected tens of thousands of beach obstacles. It was a colossal construction feat that had absorbed a large percentage of Germany's material, manpower, and building capacity in Western Europe.

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[2] Steven E. Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 168, 258, 276, 278–82, 286–87, 292–93.

[3] No exact figures are possible, either for the number of men landed or for casualties, for D-Day alone.

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At Utah, the Atlantic Wall had held up the U.S. 4th Division for less than one hour. At Omaha, it had held up the U.S. 29th and 1st Divisions for less than one day. At Gold, Juno, and Sword, it had held up the British 50th, the Canadian 3rd, and the British 3rd Divisions for about an hour. As there was absolutely no depth to the Atlantic Wall, once it was penetrated it was useless. Worse than useless, because the Wehrmacht troops manning the Atlantic Wall east and west of the invasion area were immobile, incapable of rushing to the sound of the guns.

The Atlantic Wall must therefore be regarded as one of the greatest blunders in military history. (p. 577)

What Hitler regarded as the greatest German assets—the leadership principle in the Third Reich, the unquestioning obedience expected of Wehrmacht personnel from field marshal down to the private—all worked against the Germans on D-Day.

The truth is that despite individual acts of great bravery and the fanaticism of some Wehrmacht troops, the performance of the Wehrmacht's high command, middle-ranking officers, and junior officers was just pathetic. The cause is simply put: they were afraid to take the initiative. They allowed themselves to be paralyzed by stupid orders coming from far away that bore no relation to the situation on the battlefield. Tank commanders who knew where the enemy was and how and when he should be attacked sat in their headquarters through the day, waiting for the high command in Bérchtesgärden to tell them what to do.

The contrast between men like Generals Roosevelt and Cota, Colonels Canham and Otway, Major Howard, Captain Dawson, Lieutenants Spaulding and Winters, in adjusting and reacting to unexpected situations, and their German counterparts could not have been greater. The men fighting for democracy were able to make quick, on-site decisions and act on them; men fighting for the totalitarian regime were not. Except for a captain here, a lieutenant there, not one German officer reacted appropriately to the challenge of D-Day. (p. 579)

Sgt. John Ellery, 16th Regiment, 1st Division, Easy Red sector of Omaha, recalled: "The first night in France I spent in a ditch beside a hedgerow and thoroughly exhausted. But I felt elated. It had been the greatest experience of my life. I was ten-feet tall. No matter what happened, I had made it off the beach and reached the high ground. I was king of the hill at least in my own mind, for a moment. My contribution to the heroic tradition of the United States Army might have been the smallest achievement in the history of courage, but at least, for a time, I had walked in the company of very brave men."

One soldier who did not forget to thank God was Lt. Richard Winters, 506th PIR [Parachute Infantry Regiment], 101st Airborne. On June 6, he had been in a C-47 headed to Normandy. He had prayed the whole way over, prayed to live through the day, prayed he wouldn't fail

He didn't fail. He won the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross] that morning.

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At 2400 on June 6, before bedding down at Ste.-Marie-du-Mont, Winters (as he wrote in his diary) "did not forget to get on my knees and thank God for helping me to live through this day and ask for His help on D plus one." And he made a promise to himself: if he lived through the war, he was going to find an isolated farm somewhere and spend the remainder of his life in peace and quiet. In 1951 he got the farm, in south-central Pennsylvania, where he lives today. (p. 582)

General Eisenhower, who started it all with his "OK, let's go" order, gets the last word. In 1964, on D-Day plus twenty-three years, he was interviewed on Omaha Beach by Walter Cronkite.

Looking out at the Channel, Eisenhower said, "You see these people out here swimming and sailing their little pleasure boats and taking advantage of the nice weather and the lovely beach, Walter, and it is almost unreal to look at it today and remember what it was.

"But it's a wonderful thing to remember what those fellows twenty years ago were fighting for and sacrificing for, what they did to preserve our way of life. Not to conquer any territory, not for any ambitions of our own. But to make sure that Hitler could not destroy freedom in the world.

"I think it's just overwhelming. To think of the lives that were given for that principle, paying a terrible price on this beach alone, on that one day, 2,000 casualties. But they did it so that the world could be free. It just shows what free men will do rather than be slaves."[4] (p. 583)

Eisenhower's D-Day Postmortem

The period from D-Day to our decisive breakout on July 25 was a definite phase of the Allied operation and has received the name "Battle of the Beachhead."

Interest in battles of the past, for soldier and civilian alike, often centers around points that were either of no great moment at the time of their happening or did not impress the actors as being so. An extraordinary amount of research and analysis, to say nothing of charge and countercharge, frequently concerns the originator of an idea; the detail in which developments conformed to preconceived plans; the inspiration for given decisions and the influence of particular individuals upon particular actions.

The Battle of the Normandy Beachhead proved no exception to this rule. A deal of froth and fury, was well as much painstaking and objective research, have been devoted to the support of individual theories concerning matters which, had they been recognized at the time as of special later value, might have been settled for all time by the maintenance of written record. (p. 255)

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[4] Ambrose, *D-Day, June 6, 1944*, 576–77, 579, 882–83.

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Fortunately, most soldiers in war become very objective and the judgment of history does not seem as important, in the midst of battle, as does victory. Moreover, the lack of time and the demands upon the attention of all commanders and staff officers preclude the keeping of day-to-day and minute-by-minute accounts of everything that happens. (pp. 255–56)

Many significant actions are initiated by verbal contact, and frequently no record is kept. Battle orders, even for large formations, are often written after instructions have been issued in an exhaustive conference. Notes of the actual discussions do not exist. Moreover, later curiosity so often concerns itself with responsibility for thought and idea, rather than with events and results, that possibly even the most painstaking amanuensis could not leave any clear and unchallengeable account of all the occurrences that go to make up a campaign.

Concerning the origination of plans and decisions: it is my conviction that no commander could normally take oath that a particular plan or conception originated within his own mind. Preoccupation with the concerns of his command are such that it is impossible for any person later to say whether the first gleam of an idea that may eventually have developed into a great plan came from within his own brain or from some outside suggestion. One of his problems is to keep his mind open, to avoid confusing necessary firmness with stubborn preconception or unreasoning prejudice.

Another point: there is a vast difference between a definite plan of battle or campaign and the hoped-for eventual results of the operation. In committing troops to battle there are certain minimum objectives to be attained, else the operation is a failure. Beyond this lies the area of reasonable expectation, while still further beyond lies the realm of hope—all that might happen if fortune persistently smiles upon us.

A battle plan normally attempts to provide guidance even into this final area, so that no opportunity for extensive exploitation may be lost through ignorance on the part of the troops concerning the intent of the commander. These phases of a plan do not comprise rigid instructions, they are merely guideposts. A sound battle plan provides flexibility in both space and time to meet the constantly changing factors of the battle problem in such a way as to achieve the final goal of the commander. Rigidity inevitably defeats itself, and the analysts who point to the changed detail as evidence of a plan's weakness are completely unaware of the characteristics of the battlefield. (p. 256)

The Battle of the Beachhead was a period of incessant and heavy fighting and one which, except for the capture of Cherbourg, showed few geographical gains. Yet it was during this period that the stage was set for the later, spectacular liberation of France and Belgium. The struggle in the beachhead was responsible for many developments, both material and doctrinal, that stood us in good stead throughout the remainder of the war.[5] (pp. 256–57)

[5] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), 255–57.

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Medals of Honor (Asterisks (*) indicate "killed in action.")

Carlton W. Barrett: Private, U.S. Army, 18th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. Near St. Laurent-sur-Mer [san-lo-rán-sūr-mér, France, 6 June 1944. *Birth*: Fulton, N.Y.

***Citation*:** For gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, in the vicinity of St. Laurent-sur-Mer, France. On the morning of D-Day Pvt. Barrett, landing in the face of extremely heavy enemy fire, was forced to wade ashore through neck-deep water. Disregarding the personal danger, he returned to the surf again and again to assist his floundering comrades and save them from drowning. Refusing to remain pinned down by the intense barrage of small-arms and mortar fire poured at the landing points, Pvt. Barrett, working with fierce determination, saved many lives by carrying casualties to an evacuation boat lying offshore. In addition to his assigned mission as guide, he carried dispatches the length of the fire-swept beach; he assisted the wounded; he calmed the shocked; he arose as a leader in the stress of the occasion. His coolness and his dauntless daring courage while constantly risking his life during a period of many hours had an inestimable effect on his comrades and is in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army.

***Jimmie W. Monteith, Jr.:** First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. Near Colleville-sur-Mer, France, 6 June 1944. *Born*: 1 July 1917, Low Moor, Va.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, near Colleville-sur-mer, France. 1st Lt. Monteith landed with the initial assault waves on the coast of France under heavy enemy fire. Without regard to his own personal safety he continually moved up and down the beach reorganizing men for further assault. He then led the assault over a narrow protective ledge and across the flat, exposed terrain to the comparative safety of a cliff. Retracing his steps across the field to the beach, he moved over to where 2 tanks were buttoned up and blind under violent enemy artillery and machinegun fire. Completely exposed to the intense fire, 1st Lt. Monteith led the tanks on foot through a minefield and into firing positions. Under his direction several enemy positions were destroyed. He then rejoined his company and under his leadership his men captured an advantageous position on the hill.

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Supervising the defense of his newly won position against repeated vicious counterattacks, he continued to ignore his own personal safety, repeatedly crossing the 200 or 300 yards of open terrain under heavy fire to strengthen links in his defensive chain. When the enemy succeeded in completely surrounding 1st Lt. Monteith and his unit and while leading the fight out of the situation, 1st Lt. Monteith was killed by enemy fire. The courage, gallantry, and intrepid leadership displayed by 1st Lt. Monteith is worthy of emulation.

***John J. Pinder, Jr.:** Technician Fifth Grade, U.S. Army, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. Near Colleville-sur-Mer, France, 6 June 1944. *Birth*: McKees Rocks, Pa.

***Citation*:** For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty on 6 June 1944, near Colleville-sur-Mer, France. On D-Day, Technician 5th Grade Pinder landed on the coast 100 yards off shore under devastating enemy machinegun and artillery fire which caused severe casualties among the boatload. Carrying a vitally important radio, he struggled towards shore in waist-deep water. Only a few yards from his craft he was hit by enemy fire and was gravely wounded. Technician 5th Grace Pinder never stopped. He made shore and delivered the radio. Refusing to take cover afforded, or to accept medical attention for his wounds, Technician 5th Grade Pinder , though terribly weakened by loss of blood and in fierce pain, on 3 occasions went into the fire-swept surf to salvage communication equipment. He recovered many vital parts and equipment, including another workable radio. On the 3rd trip he was again hit, suffering machinegun bullet wounds in the legs. Still this valiant soldier would not stop for rest or medical attention. Remaining exposed to heavy enemy fire, growing steadily weaker, he aided in establishing the vital radio communication on the beach. While so engaged this dauntless soldier was hit for the third time and killed. The indomitable courage and personal bravery of Technician 5th Grade Pinder was a magnificent inspiration to the men with whom he served.

(End MD19-D-04 See MD19-E-05 for continuation of study at p. 41.)

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