

D-Day June 6, 1944

Posted by Bob Abate rpa63@bestweb.net on Sunday, June 1st 2014:

As a two year old at the time, I have absolutely no recollection of D-Day. However, over the years, I have had the opportunity and privilege to meet and interview many World War II Combat Veterans, several of whom were at Omaha Beach that day.

One was a Navy Coxswain whose job was to guide teams of UDTs - Underwater Demolition Teams - in the predawn hours to attach explosive charges and mines to the German defense obstacles that criss-crossed the length and breadth of the beaches as far as the eye could see.

Another was an Army scout in the first or second wave who was pinned down in the sandy surf for hours. The men on either side of him were dead, so he put his poncho and blanket over their remains. He eventually was able to advance but was declared dead that day as his name and serial number were stenciled on his gear.

A third was a Coast Guardsman whose job was to deliver GIs from their troop carriers, far off-shore, up to the beaches under continuous fire and then return for the next group hours-on-end. In the late afternoon, it then became his job and that of the Navy coxswain to return to Omaha Beach in a rescue and recovery mission - to pick up the wounded and to recover the dead.

For each of these men, D-Day - the Sixth of June - was truly their Longest Day and one they would relive, in many and varied ways, everyday for the rest of their lives.

I'd like to share one of their stories from a 1998 interview ...

MIKE M_____ (last name omitted to respect family's privacy) - Boatswain Mate Second Class - U.S. Navy - Amphibious Assault Landings - D-Day - Omaha Beach - France - Belgium - Luxembourg - Germany

JUNE 5TH, 1944 ...

"Leading up to D-Day, we were getting 50 caliber machine-guns mounted on our landing craft. D-Day was supposed to be the 5th of June.

We were part of Task Force One-Two-Three, the spearheads of the amphibious assault on Normandy on D-Day. On the 5th of June, of course, they alerted us to stand-by. It was raining and we were laying out there on the docks, in a rainstorm, sleeping in the rain, getting ready to go. Finally, that morning, we were going for breakfast and all of a sudden, over the loudspeaker we got the call: "ALL LCM CREWS REPORT TO YOUR LANDING CRAFTS IMMEDIATELY !!!"

There were sixteen of us - sixteen LCM landing barges (Landing Craft - Mechanized). We each loaded up with troops - Army Ranger and Navy demolition teams, a ton-and-a-half of TNT and fifty Gyrene cans of high octane gas. Our mission was to get the demolition crews into Omaha Beach so they could blow a fifty yard-wide path through the landing obstacles on the beach and up to the base of the cliffs. Then the LCVPs and the troops - the second wave - coming in behind us could cruise right up to wall and have an easier time getting up and over the cliffs.

D-DAY MORNING ...

We were in our barges all day and at dusk we started out. The English Channel was ninety miles wide and it took us all night to ride across. The (USS) Corry was a destroyer and we followed her across. She took us in as far as she could and then turned off. She later hit a mine, lost her steering and beached. Then the 88s hit her from up on the hill.

About four o'clock that morning we headed in for Omaha. It was so dark that they had an old bombed-out church steeple burning on the hill at Saint Mere-Eglise. That was the beacon to take us in - to show us where we were supposed to land.

H-Hour was set for 5:30 am. That was to give the LCVPs (Landing Craft - Vehicles and Personnel) and the rest of the first wave that was coming in behind us, time to get further up on the beach for protection.

We came in at 4:30am. It was low tide and complete mist but we could see the mines - about the size of large dinner plates - just laying there on the wet sand and in the shallow water. The tide kept washing us up further and further into the beach toward the barbed wire. As we were being pushed up, we could see the iron stanchions stretching across the beach with the mines - sitting on top of them. We got so close we could reach out and touch them. Of course there was no protection that morning because the hill was up there and the Germans were waiting on top for us.

When we landed (voice quivering and choked with emotion) ... ah ... they just blew the living hell out of us on Omaha Beach. The tide started coming in and the water kept pushing us further in and up on the beach and we got trapped on the

sand bars. The barge started to broach sideways and the water started coming in. We dropped the ramps. As soon as we did, the Germans opened fire on us. Some of the demolition team members were machine-gunned right in my barge and it was just devastating. We ordered the rest of the guys over the sides to avoid the fire. The Rangers tried to get off and of course, the Germans just raked the whole beach with deadly machine-gun fire. They were just massacred. We landed with sixteen boats and we came off with six. That's a lot of guys.

We were told when we went in that if anything happened to us we were to go with the Army - leave the barges and go with the Army because we were the spearhead. There were barges behind us. There were troop transports behind us - LCVPs, LSTs (Landing Ship - Tanks and Troops). The whole first wave was coming in behind us.

We got the hell off the beach. we took our wounded out to another ship where they could get some treatment. We got back out to the transports to load up again and came back in for the second run. But we couldn't get back in again. They waved us off because all hell was breaking loose on the beach. It was a disaster. They couldn't take the beach.

Because we landed at low tide, we had a lot of beach in front of us. When the first wave came in behind us. the tide was in and they rolled right over the barbed wire and lnded on top of the mines and it just blew them all to hell - blew hell out of everything that came in after that. The Germans were just waiting for us up there on top of the hills and opened up with heavy machine-gun fire, 40 milimeter anti-aircraft and German 88s. They just looked right straight down on the beach - looking right down our throat and knocking us off. You could see the barges going up where where they were being hit with the 88s. Ah ... we could see the guys trying to get off - trying to get up to the beach for protection. Of course, they were ... just about wiped out ... because they were just being butchered. And that's exactly the word you would use ... BUTCHERED!

The water of course was blood-red. THE BEACH WAS A DISASTER! It was just ... just a disaster. The Germans were hitting everything that came into the beach. That morning they butchered us. On the map it was called "EASY RED" but after we landed and were there for a while, it was called "BLOOD RED."

D-DAY AFTERNOON ...

I went back in later on that afternoon to pick up some wounded men who were hit really bad. When I got off the amphib to get to somebody, I saw a fellow from Philadelphia I knew very well. he was just lying there - dead. That's when I saw the arms ... the heads ... the legs ... half of bodies (long pause ... deep sobs ...) just laying there and there wasn't a damn thing you could do for them because if

you tried to move 'em, it would have made it worse for them. If you've seen THE LONGEST DAY, just imagine a beach twenty times worse and then you'll know what happened on that beach.

I think the whole Goddamn invasion was screwed up. To send guys in to that beach with seventy-five pound packs on their backs, to jump off into that barbed wire and that current was ridiculous. How the hell could they survive? They couldn't. That beachhead was a disaster when I saw it in the afternoon. I would say we lost 6000 killed there that day between Omaha and the cliffs alone and don't let anybody kid you. That's an awful lot of guys we left behind to get to the top of the hill. That's my opinion from what I've seen. You better believe it.

But we got through it, we got through D-Day. And finally we took the bank and the troops started moving in, they started moving in. Actually, that afternoon, we were gonna pull the troops off ... because we couldn't take Omaha. Omaha was just a hot spot.

We were all eager for D-Day. We didn't know what we were getting into. Once you got in there and saw all those guys getting blown up alongside you, then of course it hit us. It really hit home that this was something we didn't really want to be part of. I prayed. Boy, Oh Boy, was I praying. We were all praying that day.

And ... ah ... every June 6th - D-Day, that time of the morning ... ah ... we call back-and-forth, a few of us guys call back-and-forth to each other. And, ... ah, ... not too many of us left ..."

Mike died the year after this interview.