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**THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND BATTALION  
8TH INFANTRY (4TH INF. DIV.)  
IN THE LANDING AT UTAH BEACH, 5-7 JUNE 1944  
(NORMANDY CAMPAIGN)  
(Personal experience of a Battalion S-3)**

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the 2nd Bn., 8th Inf, 4th Inf Division from 5 June through 7 June 1944 to include loading of personnel on assault transports in English ports to seizure of the French town, Ste. Mere-Eglise. (1)

In order to better understand the background and training of this battalion, it will be necessary to go back to 1 June 1940.

Once again war clouds gathered over Europe and it became necessary to increase the size of the armed forces of the United States. As a part of this expansion the 4th Division was reactivated on 1 June 1940 at Fort Benning, Georgia. It was composed initially of the following units: the 8th, 22nd, and 29th Regiments; the 20th, 29th, 42nd, and 44th Field Artillery Battalions; the 4th Quartermaster Battalion; the 4th Signal Company; the 4th Reconnaissance Troop; and the 4th Headquarters and Police Company. (2)

In August 1940 the Division was selected as an experimental unit for the development of tactics demonstrated by the German blitz through Belgium and France, and designated the 4th Division (Motorized). Later in 1941 and after sufficient equipment had been secured the Division was redesignated as the 4th Motorized Division. (3)

In the fall of 1941 the 12th Inf Regiment replaced the

Georgia. Here they experienced intensive training for almost two years. During one of its field exercises in the Carolina maneuvers the Division experienced its first alert for overseas movement. This was the first in a series of false alarms which kept all men aware of the necessity for intensive training.

The Division experienced its second false alert for overseas movement on 25 December 1942, after landings were made in Africa in the preceding month. In April 1943 a permanent change of station was ordered--Fort Dix, New Jersey. It was here the Division was reorganized as the 4th Infantry Division, in which form it remained.

Early in September 1943 the Division was sent to Camp Gordon Johnston, Carabelle, Florida. Here realistic amphibious training was undergone. (5)

Once again alerted for overseas movement, the Division shifted to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where final administrative adjustments were completed. (6)

As the year 1944 opened the Division moved to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, a staging area of the New York Port of Embarkation. This alert was the "real thing" and on the morning of 18 January 1944 the Division put to sea; on 29 January the convoy landed at the port of Liverpool, England. Immediately upon decking troops were loaded aboard trains which carried the Division to scattered villages in Devonshire. The 8th Regiment was stationed around Honiton. (7)

Before unloading of equipment had been completed, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his deputy, Air Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder, visited the 4th. This was but the first of many inspections by distinguished British and American high Commanders. (8)

In anticipation of amphibious landings on German-held French soil the Division welcomed additions to her family in the form of the 70th and 74th Tank Battalions, the 88th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 1106th Engineer Group, the 377th Anti-Aircraft Artillery (Automatic Weapons) Battalion, 87th Chemical Battalion Motorized, and the 501st and 599th Tank Destroyer Battalions, which would be with us during the assault and in some cases for months thereafter. For the actual assault the 1st Engineer Special Brigade would support the Division. (9)

#### GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The geographical features of the French Cotentin peninsula over which the assault elements were to operate are as follows:

Dominant terrain features of the South Cotentin is the Douve River which along with its principal tributary, the Merderet, drains the major portion of the peninsula flowing south and southeast to the Bancs du Grand Vey. The two rivers broaden out into flat bottom lands and marshes near their mouths. (10)

Along the east coast is a belt of flat bottom land several miles wide, and from the Bancs du Grand Vey to Quineville is an inundated area parallel to the beach, created by blocking of seven or eight small streams with exits about 50 yards in rear of the beach. This resulted in shallow flooding of an area of one or two miles in width.

Therefore, the main terrain feature of the South Cotentin were the swamp areas and inundated areas behind the beach. (11)

Through the inundated area along the coast, travel was restricted to six built-up roads or causeways which were

the flooded area by approximately one foot, but which could be easily obstructed by road blocks or demolitions. (12)

The beach itself between the Bancs du Grand Vey and Quineville is composed of compact gray sand between high and low water marks and is a smooth beach with a shallow gradient. Direct access to the beach is hindered only by the Isles of Marcouf. The beach is backed for nearly 10,000 yards by a masonry sea wall from four to eight feet high. Strong winds have driven sand against the sea-wall face in many places forming an earthen ramp to the top, which had a wire fence. Behind the wall, sand dunes, 10 to 20 feet high, extended inland from 500 to 1,000 yards and beyond them begin the inundated lowlands. (13)

East of the inundated area towards Ste. Mere-Eglise the ground rises gradually and is divided into small fields bound by hedgerows approximately 3 feet high and 4 to 8 feet thick of rock and earth construction.

Utah Beach differed from Omaha in that the terrain along the shore was not high; there was no dominating ground to assault and secure. The biggest problem was the inundated area. (14)

#### ENEMY SITUATION

Taking advantage of natural terrain obstacles, the Germans had constructed along the coast man-made defenses of various forms. Since the beginning of 1944, construction activity had increased tremendously in the defensive belt. (15)

On the beach itself rows of artificial defense obstacles had been constructed at a distance of 50 to 150 yards to the seaward. These obstacles included stakes or piles slanted seaward, steel hedgehogs and tetrahedra, and Belgian Gates,

(13) A-2, pp. 6-11; A-7, pp. 320-321; (15) A-2, pp. 14-20;  
A-14, pp. 1-5

barricade-like gates constructed of steel angles and plates which were mounted on small rollers. Scattered throughout and anchored to these obstacles were anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. These obstacles were designed to prevent landing craft from approaching the beach during high tide as well as causing casualties to those who dared try removing the obstacles in order to allow landing craft to beach successfully. (16)

Defenses immediately behind the beach along the sea wall consisted of pillboxes, tank turrets mounted on concrete structures, firing trenches, and underground shelters connected by trenches and protected by barbed wire, mines, and anti-tank ditches. Concrete infantry strong points provided mutually supporting and interlocking fire over beaches and exits. Some strong points were armed with four fixed and mobile field artillery pieces which supported fires of the infantry's automatic weapons. Such a strong point was located at St. Martin de Varreville. Increased activity along the west in this area may be contributed to Field Marshall Rommel's inspection in December 1943 and January 1944. Aerial photographs disclosed new casemated gun emplacements being constructed as well as open field battery emplacements being prepared. (17)

Distances between fixed infantry defenses were greater on Utah Beach than Omaha Beach to the east, probably because the enemy relied on the natural obstacles provided by the inundated area directly behind the beach. At and near the exits from the beach, the defense consisted of a linear series of infantry strong points armed largely with automatic weapons. About two



artillery batteries, the most formidable being those of Cricbeacq and St. Martin de Varreville. Here the heavy and medium caliber guns were protected by concrete forts and sighted to cover the beach approaches and the beach areas.

(18)

Material gathered by Intelligence indicated that the German 709 Division was known to contain a large percentage of foreigners and was disposed generally along the east coast of the peninsula, some of its units manning the beach defenses. In addition to the organic Field Artillery of the Infantry Division, the enemy had various naval coast artillery and flak battalions, and the coastal units were thought to have been strengthened by elements of the 17th Machine Gun Battalion at Carentan. (19)

Due to absence of Panzer units, larger than battalion size, it was not anticipated that armored counterattacks would impede the advance of assaulting troops. Based upon intelligence material, the enemy was estimated to be capable: first, of a rigid defense of the beaches, manning the coastal fortifications and obstacles with the 709 Division and various artillery and flak units; second, of reenforcing the 709 Division with elements of the 243 Division which was located in the vicinity of La Haye du Puits, east of Utah Beach; and third, of the piecemeal counterattacks by a maximum of four individual battalions and a battalion combat team on D-Day.

(20)

Less than ten days prior to D-Day, it was learned that the enemy had shifted its 91 Division into the Calvados--St. Sauveur le Vicomte--Valeignes area. The 91 Division was

(20) A-2, pp. 14-20.

composed of six infantry battalions, one motorized, and possibly one battalion of tanks. The 91 Division occupied positions to the rear of the 909 Division. Its mission apparently was the defense of routes of approaches to the French port of Cherbourg. Both the 91 and 901 Divisions were part of the LXXXIV Corps. (21)

With added enemy defensive strength of the Peninsula, it became more important than ever for the seaborne elements to secure rapidly a deep beachhead to hold against counterattacks in force. Of equal importance was the need for a swift drive through Carentan to prevent the enemy from destroying the dams in the area controlling the inundations along the Douve River. (22)

#### 4TH INFANTRY DIVISION PLAN

Major General Raymond O. Barton, Commanding General of the 4th Division, received the VII Corps order assigning the 4th Division the mission of assaulting Utah Beach on D-Day at H-Hour to establish a beachhead. He then directed that the Division would land in a column of regiments with the 8th Infantry reinforced, landing on D-Day, H-Hour, followed by the 22nd and 12th Infantry Regiments, respectively. (23)

#### 8TH INFANTRY ASSAULT PLAN

Upon receipt of the Division order Regimental Commander, Colonel James A. Van Fleet (now Major General), directed that the 8th Infantry Regiment reinforced would land on D-Day, H-Hour, with two battalions abreast.

The 1st Battalion on the right was to land on Beach Tare Green. It was to reduce beach obstacles, drive inland and go over Causeway #3 and capture Turqueville. (24)

The 2nd Battalion on the left was to land H-Hour on Beach Uncle Red and reduce beach defenses, then turn south and destroy all enemy installations parallel to the beach to Causeway #1. Upon seizure of Causeway #1, drive inland and capture Le Bout de la Ville and protect the left flank of the regiment. (25)

The 3rd Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment, which was attached to the 8th Regiment for the landing, was to follow the 1st Battalion and land on Beach Tare Green, turn north and reduce beach defenses parallel to the beach and capture Quineville. (26)

The 3rd Battalion of the 8th Regiment was to follow the 2nd Battalion landing on Beach Uncle Red abreast the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, and drive inland over Causeway #2 and capture Les Forges. (27)

#### ASSAULT PLAN AND BRIEFING OF THE 2ND BATTALION

The day, 21 May 1944, found the 2nd Bn., 8th Inf., inclosed in a sausage-shape marshalling area at Torquay, England, with a strict security seal around it, which would remain until the battalion departed for the embarkation point. (28)

Since the 2nd Bn. had been increased in size by many attachments, it was now designated as the 2nd Battalion Landing Team (BLT2), consisting of the following: 2nd Bn., 8th Inf. Regiment; Co. B (4.2), 87th Chemical Mortars; Co. A, 237th Engineers; Co. B and a detachment of Co. C, 70th Tank Bn.; 65th Armored F. A. Bn.; two (2) Naval Shore Fire Control Parties, consisting of one officer and four enlisted men each.

(25, 26, 27) A-2, pp. 148-151; (26, 27) A-10, p. 5; (27) A-6, pp. 43-55; (28) A-1, pp. 27-28.

The briefing of company and attached unit commanders was about to begin. BLT2 Commander, Colonel Carlton O. MacNeely (now retired, then Lt. Colonel) along with the Battalion Executive Officer, S-3, S-2, and Operations Sergeant had been briefed by higher headquarters three weeks prior to entering the marshalling area. With this advance information Lt. Col. MacNeely had formulated his assault plan and was now ready to issue his order and at the same time brief his subordinate commanders. Under his supervision a war room had been established within the marshalling area by the S-2 and Operations Sergeant. This room was equipped with aerial photographs, map overprints (with detail enemy defenses), and a sponge rubber relief map. All information concerning enemy troops and activity along the west wall was also available for their use. (29)

Upon order of BLT2 Commander a meeting was called for the following personnel: members of the Battalion Staff, Artillery Liaison Officer, officers of Naval Shore Fire Control Parties, commanders and executive officers of companies organic within the Battalion, and commanders of attached units. (30)

After issuing aerial photographs and maps of Utah Beach, Lt. Col. MacNeely spent approximately two hours in briefing the group on the enemy information and geographical features of Utah Beach and surrounding area. This being completed, he turned his attention to his plan of attack and issued the order, which in substance was as follows: (31)

(29, 30, 31) Statement, Lt. Col. Carlton O. MacNeely, Battalion Commander, 21 May 1944; Eye witness, self, May 1944; (29) A-2, pp. 23-24.

This Battalion landing with Battalion Landing Team No. 1 1,000 yards to its right will land D-Day, H-Hour, on Beach Uncle Red with two companies abreast and seize Le Bout de la Ville. Co. E on the right with 1st Platoon, Co. H (HMG) attached, and one Naval Shore Fire Control Party landing in five LCVP's will reduce beach resistance and move directly inland. Upon reduction of strong points #1, #3, and #5, the company will move south to secure and cross Causeway #1, and continue advance inland and capture Le Bout de la Ville. (32)

Company F on the left with 2nd Platoon, Co. H (HMG) attached, and one Naval Fire Control Party landing in five LCVP's will reduce beach resistance and move directly inland. They will assist Co. E by fire in reduction of Strong Point #2, reduce #4 and #6, and then move south following Co. E to secure and cross Causeway #1. Continue advance inland and assist in capture of Le Bout de la Ville.

Companies G and H (-) with 1st and 2nd Platoon, Co. A, 237th Engineers, in fifteen LCVP's will constitute the 2nd wave landing H + 3. Co. G move south along sea wall and reduce all strong points along water front to Causeway #1, then follow Co. E over Causeway to the battalion objective. (33)

81 MM mortar Platoon, Co. H, will support attack of battalion from initial position east of Causeway #2. 1st and 2nd Platoon, Co. A, 237th Engineers will breach two gaps in sea wall east of Causeway #3 and clear path through mine field to Causeway #3, #2, and #1. (34)

Eight DD tanks of Co. C, 70th Tank Bn., loaded on LCT's will be launched 5,000 yards off shore landing at H + 3, or

as soon thereafter as possible and assist assault companies in reducing strong points. Upon crossing Causeway #1, assemble in Pouppeville and await further orders from BLT2 Commander. (35)

Bn. Hq. Co. (-) and Co. B, 70th Tank Bn., in four LVP's and eight LCT's constituting the third wave will land at H + 15. Communications Platoon, Hq. Co., will lay wire line from beach inland over Causeway #1 to Bn. objective. Initial Bn. CP to be established east of Causeway #1. Two men from Battalion Intelligence Section will be attached to Co. E and F, respectively, with mission of contacting and informing BLT2 Commander of progress made by assault companies upon his landing. (36)

Upon landing Co. B, 70th Tank Bn., will proceed inland and assist Companies E and F in reducing strong points #2, #3, #4, and #5. Cross Causeway #1 and assemble in vicinity of Pouppeville. Be prepared to continue attack to the east on order and assist in capture of battalion objective. (37)

When landing craft of assault companies are within 200 yards of beach, company commanders will fire black smoke rockets as signal for naval gun fire to lift from beach targets. (38)

BLT2 Commander with two staff officers (S-3, S-2) and their enlisted assistants riding in the Free boat will land H + 5 or as soon thereafter as possible. Upon landing BLT2 Commander will follow advance of Company G. (39)

Each rifleman of Co. G will carry ashore one clover leaf of 81 mm mortar ammunition and one 4.2 inch mortar.

(35, 36, 37, 38, 39) Statement, Lt. Col. Carlton O. MacNeely, Battalion Commander, 70th Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division, May 1944.

En. Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon will collect this ammunition and make it available to the 81 MM Mortar Platoon.

With the first phase of orientation completed, the briefing continued down through the chain of command until each soldier knew every detail that might influence his action as an individual or as a member of his group. Briefing was so thorough squads had selected the specific ditches or other covered routes of advance it would use in reducing certain strong points. (40)

#### MOUNTING THE OPERATION

From January through May 1944, the intensive training schedule of the 2nd En., 8th Inf., included a two-week period at an assault training center and a series of full scale operations on Slapton Sands, England. During all training new techniques of landing and assaulting fortified positions were learned and applied in succeeding exercises. (41)

Each move to the ports for these rehearsals had been made under complete security restrictions. The final move during the third week of May differed in no essential feature from those made previously. Yet, every man realized this time he would not make a "dry run." (42)

On the third day of June 1944, BLT2 of the 8th Infantry Regiment had completed issue of special equipment to all assault team personnel to include: pack and pole charges, flame throwers, assault jackets, and impregnated clothing. Finishing touches had been applied to waterproofing of all communication equipment and vehicles. Years of intensive

(40) Statement, Lt. Col. Carlton O. Macneely, Battalion Commander, 21 May 1944; Eye witness, self, May 1944;

(41, 42) Ibid., p. 17.

training together as a fighting team under the capable guidance of the Battalion Commander combined with the thorough briefing of the coming operation caused each man to feel that nothing could prevent BLT2 from accomplishing its assigned mission. (43)

The morning of 4 June 1944, BLT2 began the march from its marshalling area to the loading berths in Torquay. Here troops and vehicles were loaded aboard the APA Barnet, which was one of four APA's assigned the task of transporting assault troops. Simultaneously, in other South England ports BLT3, 8th Inf., began loading on APA Bayfield, BLT-1, 8th Inf., on APA Dickman, while BLT3, 22nd Inf., climbed aboard APA Empire Gauntlet.

With BLT2 completely loaded by 1700, 4 June, both officers and enlisted men began to wonder when the signal to sail would be given. During this anxious wait word was passed that the date tentatively set had been 5 June but this was contingent on early morning light and tidal conditions. It had been decided that the approach should be covered by darkness, but that the landings were to be made in daylight to give assault troops visual bombing and observed naval fire support. (44)

Poor visibility and a heavy sea made the invasion attempt too risky and D-Day was, therefore, postponed 24 hours.

Task Force convoys, having further to sail than the other assault forces, had dispatched some of its smaller craft to join the convoy before change of D-Day was announced.

(40, 41) Statement, Lt. Col. C. O. MacNeely, Battalion Commander, 6 June 1944; (44) A-2, pp. 30-32; A-9, p. 6; A-9, pp. 1-12.



However, these craft were contacted, recalled, and anchored in Weymouth Bay and Portland Harbor. (45)

At approximately 2100 hours 5 June, APA Barnet sailed for the transport area, 20,000 yards off Beach Uncle Red. Sweepers of the 14th and 16th Minesweeper Flotillas had cleared a boat lane across the field on Cardonnet Bank and had marked the channel with red and green lighted dan buoys. (46)

At 0200, APA Barnet passed the marker ship at the entrance to the transport area and dropped its anchor in its assigned position. LCT's for both beaches--Tare Green and Uncle Red--were anchored a little further out.

The long awaited invasion had begun with H-Hour for assault troops being set for 0630, 6 June 1944. (47)

#### BOMBING OF COASTAL DEFENSES

While APA Barnet and other craft of the Task Force was approaching the transport area the first blows to the west wall came from the air. In order to deceive the enemy concerning the area to be invaded concentrated bombing was delayed until D minus 4 and then was deliberately scattered. Not until D-Day itself did the allies finally show their hand by a concentrated bombardment of the coastal defenses at the points where landings were planned.

At approximately midnight 5 June bombers of the RAF ranged up the entire invasion coast, centering their attacks on known enemy coastal batteries.

Shortly before H-Hour, 320 medium bombers of the Ninth Air Force attacked seven coastal batteries at Utah Beach and batteries to the east, dropping 606 tons of bombs.

target area. Between these bombings came the still more telling attacks from the air by airborne infantry. (48)

#### THE AIRBORNE ASSAULT

Part of the mission assigned the 101st Airborne Division which had a direct bearing on the assault from the sea was generally as follows: 101st Airborne Division would begin dropping at H - 5 hours, seize the four exits...that is, the western ends of the causeways...from the inundated area west of Utah Beach between St. Martin de Varreville and Pouppeville, thus destroying the enemy's secondary beach defenses. After being relieved by the 4th Inf. Division, the 101st Airborne Division would seize Carentan. (49)

Part of the mission assigned the 82nd Airborne Division that had a direct bearing on the assault from the sea was to begin dropping at H - 5 hours and assist in sealing off the peninsula from the southeast by destroying bridges at Pont L'Abbe and Beuzeville la Bastille and securing bridgeheads across the Merderet--openings through which the 4th Division infantrymen would pass and jump off to the northwest. (50)

#### AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS BY ASSAULT FORCES

Beginning at 0200 hours one standing on deck of APA Barnet could see a maze of anti-aircraft fire going skyward. It was the Germans greeting the 101st and 82nd Paratroopers.

In the meantime, unloading of troops from APA's into assault landing craft had begun. From the Barnet the leading wave, consisting of F and E Companies, was climbing down landing nets into beaching LCVP's. The second and third waves, consisting of G Company, H Company, and a Free boat

injection and pp. 1-2. Summary and General Comments, pp. 10-12. (49) A-2, pp. 42-43; A-1, pp. 20-21. (50) A-2, pp. 88-89.

with the Bn. Commander and his party, followed. After the transfer, LCVF's circled the transports awaiting the order to rendezvous. Each man huddled in his tiny space in that little craft feeling sick and more uncomfortable as the rough sea made the boat rise and fall with the surging waves. The cold salt spray had drenched him to the skin.

At H - 40 (0550), warships of the bombardment group began firing on enemy shore batteries. A few minutes later 286 Marauders of the Ninth Air Force dropped 4,404, 250-pound bombs on seven objectives on the beach extending from St. Martin de Varreville to Beau Gillot. As assault craft started for the beach, 5 fire support craft units, consisting of 33 variously equipped landing crafts, began the process of beach drenching. Seventeen of these crafts mounted rocket launchers and discharged their rockets when the first waves of assault craft were still 600-700 yards from shore. (51)

One of the earliest mishaps caused the immobilization of one of the control vessels. At approximately 0455, Green Beach Primary and Secondary Control Vessels left the transport area for the beach. The Secondary Control Vessel for Red Beach fouled her screw on a dan buoy and was unable to proceed. An hour later, while still more than 7,000 yards from the beach, Red Primary Control Vessel was hit by a mine and sank. Green Secondary Control Vessel therefore turned about to bring the landing craft in closer to the beach and announced that it would lead all amphibious tanks in. The LCT's carrying DD Tanks were to launch the tanks 5,000 yards; but to save time they were brought to within 3,000 yards of the beach and then discharged. (52)

(51) A-11, pp. 2-4; A-12, pp. 10-12. (52) A-2, pp. 125-126

The first wave consisted of 20 LCVP's, each carrying 30-man assault teams from the 8th Infantry. The 10 crafts on the right were to land on Tare Green while the 10 crafts on the left (and 1,000 yards further south) carried troops of BLT2 intended for Uncle Red Beach. The entire operation was timed against the touchdown of the first assault wave, which was scheduled to take place at 0630. (53)

Wave No. 1 arrived at the line of departure on time and was dispatched towards the beach. When LCVP's were about 2,000 yards from shore, enemy artillery took them under fire. A few enemy planes appeared over the area but were quickly destroyed or chased off by our alert air cover. With the first assault wave approximately 500 yards off shore two LCT's with rockets mounted opened fire upon beach defenses and continued until landing craft had touched down. Such close support caused some rounds (falling short of their mark) to land among our assaulting troops. Within 200 yards of the beach assault company commanders fired their black smoke rockets as a signal for naval fire to lift. However, enemy anti-aircraft guns were firing air bursts which prevented assault troops from determining definitely that naval observers could distinguish signal rockets from AA fire. This fact had a definite demoralizing effect upon the assaulting troops. At 0630 the first wave of assault craft of BLT2 lowered their ramps and 300 men plunged into chest-deep water to wade and fight through underwater obstacles the last 100 yards to the beach. Crossing the smooth beach was a slow and painful process. Troops having been chilled to the bone by cold channel water found it impossible to move

faster than a slow walk. This physical handicap combined with enemy artillery fire began raking the beach and sea wall. Enemy troops manning machine guns, rifles, and anti-tank guns had recovered from the terrific aerial bombardment and naval gun fire and now lay down their curtain of defensive fires over the beaches. These fires took their toll in casualties but did not stop the determined assault companies. Assault teams of Company F quickly reduced two pillboxes guarding an exit through the sea wall leading towards Causeway #2, while other teams scaled the sea wall and neutralized pillboxes. (54)

At this point it was apparent that BLT2 had landed considerably south of the planned beach. BLT2 should have hit Uncle Red Beach opposite Exit #3. The first BLT was supposed to land directly opposite the strong point at St. Martin de Varreville. The landings, however, were made astride Exit #2 about 1,500 yards south. (55)

Company E, moving abreast of Company F, scaled the sea wall and quickly reduced strong points to its front and pushed inland. So rapid was the advance many enemy tankettes were captured before they could be employed against the on-rushing infantrymen. (56)

As Company F began its turning movement south towards Causeway #1, the Company Commander was wounded and the Executive Officer immediately assumed command. (57)

During this time Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., (4th Division Assistant Division Commander) who had landed with Company E assisted greatly in keeping the beaches as clear as possible by directing troops to keep separated

131; Eye witness, self. (56) Eye witness, self; A-14, p. 6.  
(57) A-2, p. 131; A-14, p. 6.

and push inland.

Company G landed at H + 5 but its progress was slower than that of Companies E and F due to increased accuracy and volume of enemy artillery fire along the beach. In spite of this Company G began its attack south along the sea wall towards Causeway #1. (58)

The Engineers Platoons landing with Company G lost no time in clearing a 50-yard gap in the bands of beach obstacles and blew a gap in the sea wall to allow tanks to push inland in support of the infantry. (59)

DD tanks launched 3,000 yards off shore were slow in arriving due to the heavy sea and poor maneuverability. By H + 15 seven of the eight tanks were ashore and engaging enemy pillboxes. One tank was sunk en route to the beach. (60)

Lt. Col. MacNeely (BLT2 Commander) with his boat team landed at H + 7. He realized immediately that the BLT had landed south of the designated beach; therefore, he contacted Brig. Gen. Roosevelt. Upon discussing the situation the decision was reached to reduce all pillboxes facing the battalion and continue with the original mission. Lt. Col. MacNeely then pushed inland, contacted Companies E and F, and directed a coordinated attack south towards Causeway #1. (61)

Battalion S-3, parting with the Battalion Commander after landing, began his advance south just west of the sea wall, hoping to gain contact with Company G. After advancing approximately 50 yards he saw seven killed men of Company G

SP-4 A-2; pp. 135-137. (58, 59, 60, 61) Eye witness,

and was about to call to them when a terrific explosion occurred, killing three of the men and wounding the others. It was apparent that one of these unfortunate individuals had stepped on a mine which caused a number of additional mines to explode simultaneously. Realizing that more mines were probably scattered about the area, the S-3 began a circular movement and advanced about 50 yards when small arms fire from an enemy group (estimated to be a squad) pinned him to the ground. From the crack of bullets passing inches above his head, he was able to locate the enemy dug in on a sand dune about 100 yards to his front. Making a hasty survey of his position, he could see mines that had been uncovered by strong winds and shifting sand. He now knew that he was in a mine field. A definite decision must be made and quickly! Would it be advantageous to try a withdrawal to the beach with the possibility of hitting a mine or should he continue the advance towards the enemy position and accomplish his mission. Based upon previous training and remembering the necessity of contacting Company G, he elected to push through the mines and engage the enemy. The first rush forward directed at a shell hole was begun with good progress in spite of small arms fire; but, upon the last leap for the inviting shell hole, his foot set off a mine. The explosion slammed him against the ground with a tremendous thud--no injuries from it--just shaken up a bit. He looked around quickly and hopefully toward the beach in search of a comrade who might help him reduce the enemy to his front. It so happened a 1st Lt. of Company F had seen him and was working his way forward. The S-3 called a warning to watch for mines, but it could not be heard above the noise of battle. The

lieutenant crumpled under the explosion of a mine. The S-3 sprang up and rushed towards the dug-in Germans, stopping once to deliver a few rounds of fire before closing in. The last rush of 25 yards carried him to the enemy foxholes. The first German encountered was quickly exterminated and immediately the remaining six surrendered. At this point a Sgt. of Company G, who had been wounded in one hand, was seen making his way back towards the beach. The S-3 signaled for the Sgt. to join him, which he did. The prisoners were turned over to him and he marched them off towards Beach Uncle Red. A short time later three men of Company G, having learned from the wounded Sgt. that the Bn. S-3 was by himself, joined the S-3 and informed him Company G had been held up by a mine field and machine gun fire some 200 yards back. Therefore, the S-3 was leading Company G rather than following its advance. Since he had met with success thus far, he decided to push on and try to reach Causeway #1 as quickly as possible. This group of one officer and three enlisted men crawled down ditches and along hedgerows, bypassing pillboxes until discovered and taken under fire by a very large pillbox which guarded the entrance to Causeway #1. One enlisted man was dispatched to contact Company G and the DD tank for assistance. After a thirty-minute wait a platoon of Company G plus two tanks arrived and brought fire to bear upon the pillbox. The battle raged for about 20 minutes before the Germans surrendered. Thirty-two walking prisoners and four wounded were extracted from their concrete strong points. (62)

(62) Eye witness, Lt. Col. [redacted], Statement, Capt. Haley, C. O., Co. G, 6 June 1944; Statement, Sgt. West, Plt. Sgt. [redacted]



Immediately thereafter the Bn. S-3 with one enlisted man made their way towards Causeway #1. By crawling along a ditch half-filled with water they were able to advance to within 10 yards of the important bridge of Causeway #1. Upon reaching this point two Germans were seen running towards the bridge. Fire was withheld until they stopped just short of the bridge and then cut down by rifle fire. It was discovered later that explosives had been placed to destroy the bridge but was not accomplished since the two Germans were killed before demolition charges were touched off. (63)

Under the direction of Lt. Col. MacNeely, Companies E and F with tanks supporting had completed their turning movement and were driving south reducing strong points and annihilating small groups of enemy. By 1030 hours Company E began crossing Causeway #1 followed by Company F. At this point (the west end of Causeway #1) American rifle and machine gun fire was heard in Pouppeville. This fire indicated that elements of the 501st Parachute Infantry were engaged in a fire fight. (64)

Company E moved towards Pouppeville and assisted in killing and capturing 70 Germans which were caught in the nut-cracker action of the 3rd Bn., 501st Parachute Infantry, and Company E, 2nd Bn., 8th Infantry. (65)

It was 1105, 6 June 1944 at Pouppeville that Lt. Col. Carlton O. MacNeely (2nd Bn., 8th Inf.) and Lt. Col. Julian Ewell (3rd Bn., 501st Parachute Inf.) established first official contact between seaborne and airborne forces.

Company G, with tanks supporting, continued its advance south hugging the sea wall and succeeded in reducing strong

(63) Eye witness self. (64-65) Lt. Col. MacNeely, Bn. Commander, 6 June 1944; Eye witness self. (65) Lt. Col. Ewell.

points down to Causeway #1. Company G followed Company F into Pouppeville.

Lt. Col. MacNeely now had his battalion regrouped and ready to push inland to the battalion objective. (66)

AMH BOM COMPLETES LANDINGS

Battalion Landing Team No. 1, 8th Inf., landing on the right of BLT2 touched down on Beach Tare Green at 0645, fifteen minutes later than BLT2, and began its attack on fortified positions to its front. Two hours were consumed in eliminating opposition in the beach area and in reorganizing for the advance inland. BLT-1 then moved northwest on Exit #3. Despite enemy artillery fire it crossed the inundated area and reached the vicinity of Turqueville by 1900, where it dug in for the night. (67)

At approximately 0745 (H + 75) the 3rd Bn., 8th Inf., with tanks supporting, landed on Uncle Red Beach and marched on Exit #2. (68)

Halfway down the causeway, an enemy AT gun opened fire destroying two tanks and causing some casualties in the 3rd Bn. before infantry maneuvering through the inundated area could surround and destroy them. The 3rd Bn. then moved west toward Ste. Maire-du-Mont. (69)

The 3rd Bn., 22nd Inf. (initially attached to the 8th Inf.), landed abreast of the 3rd Bn., 8th Inf., on Green Beach at 0745 and moved north along the coast reducing beach strong points towards St. Martin de Varreville. (70)

Four battalions of infantry thus landed by 0800. Two more came in at about 1000 hours--1st Bn., 22 Inf., on the

(66) A-2, pp. 149-150; A-1, p. 25; Statement, Lt. Col.

MacNeely, BLT2 Commander, 6 June 1944. See also

101, 102, pp. 40-44.

northern beach and 2nd Bn., 82nd Inf., on the southern beach. These two battalions according to plan marched inland over Causeway #4, then northwest towards Ravenoville.

#### 2ND BATTALION, 8TH INFANTRY, CONTINUES ATTACK

By 1130 hours the 2nd Bn., 8th Inf., had relieved the 3rd Bn., 501st Parachute Inf., at Pouppeville and began its advance towards Le Bout de la Ville in a column of companies with Company E leading. Just east of Ste. Maire-du-Mont contact was made with the 3rd Bn., 8th Inf., and the 8th Inf. Regimental Commander, Col. James A. Van Fleet (now Major General) with the two battalions abreast drove through Ste. Maire-du-Mont against light opposition. The 2nd Bn. then pushed on and reached Le Bout de la Ville about 1900, where it dug in for the night.

As the 3rd Battalion approached Les Forges, strong enemy resistance halted their advance and the Battalion dug in for the night. (71)

The 8th Infantry had reached its D-Day objective. It had relieved elements of the 101st Airborne Division in the Pouppeville area and was in position to protect the south flank of the Division. (72)

#### ENEMY HOLDS OUT AT LES FORGES

The central sector of Utah Beachhead, however, was still not secure by the end of D-Day. A finger of strong enemy resistance thrust east from the Merderet at Gamboville and Les Forges to Turqueville. The enemy entrenched along this ridge, cut the crossroads at Les Forges, preventing contact between the 8th Infantry and the main body of the 82nd Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise. (73)

Witness, self. (73) A-2, pp. 153-154.

THE FIGHT TO REACH AND HOLD STE. MERE-EGLISE (D + 1)

Colonel James A. Van Fleet, Regimental Commander of the 8th Infantry Regiment, realizing the necessity of piercing the enemy salient and establishing contact with the main body of the 99th Airborne Division at Ste. Mere-Eglise called a Battalion Commanders meeting the night of 6 June. Orders were issued for a coordinated attack to be launched at 0530, 7 June and secure Ste. Mere-Eglise, thereby relieving the hard-pressed 505th Parachute troops. (74)

The 2nd Battalion was dug in for the night of 6 June with Company E on right, Company F on left, Company G in reserve, and Company H and Hq. Company in the center. At 0530 the morning of 7 June the battalion began its attack to the north with Co. E leading, followed by Co. F, Co. G, Co. H, and Hq. Co. The leading elements of Co. E had advanced 2,000 yards and reached the outskirts of Ecoqueneauville when enemy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire descended upon them. Shortly thereafter, well camouflaged enemy infantry attacked Co. E with rifle fire and hand grenades. Co. F was committed to the left of Co. E while Co. G deployed one platoon on the battalion's right flank. The battle raged for over one hour before supporting fires from all available weapons combined with the aggressive action of infantrymen proved to the Germans that the 2nd Battalion could not be stopped. Ecoqueneauville fell to the 2nd Battalion at 0700 hours. During this action 26 Germans were killed and 17 prisoners taken. The remainder of this force withdrew towards Ste. Mere-Eglise. The 2nd Battalion suffered 7 casualties. The battalion quickly reformed into its original formation

(74) Statement, Lt. Col. MacNeely, Commander, 2nd Bn  
8th Inf., eye witness, etc.

and began the pursuit towards Ste. Mere-Eglise. Rapid progress was made until leading elements of Co. E reached a point just south of Ste. Mere-Eglise where heavy concentration of artillery fire caused the Battalion Commander to circle to the east and approach on the northeast side of town. As the Battalion entered the edge of town, enemy artillery fire worked up and down the column causing casualties to include the Commander of Co. E. (75)

Lt. Col. MacNeely (2nd Bn., 8th Inf.) contacted Lt. Col. Vandervoort (2nd Bn., 505th Parachute Inf.) and learned that the Parachute Battalion had captured Ste. Mere-Eglise the night of 6 June but had been counterattacked several times; however, all counterattacks had been repulsed. It was also pointed out that the enemy's main position was to the west of the Montebourg highway. In view of this the two commanders planned a coordinated attack. The 2nd Bn., 505th Parachute Inf., was to move up astride the road and attack with tanks while the 2nd Bn., 8th Inf., would cross behind it and attack on its left. (76)

The 2nd Bn., 8th Inf., with Co. G on the right and Co. F on the left and Co. E echeloned to the left rear, jumped off abreast of the 2nd Bn., 505th Parachute Inf. at about 1300 hours. The attack was met by concentrated artillery, mortars, machine gun and assault gun fire. Progress was slow but steady and continuous pressure by the attacking battalion soon brought them within 100 yards of the enemy's main line

along a smaller road with an open field in rear. The enemy's flanks were located and rolled up before they realized that

(75, 76) Statement, Lt. Col. MacNeely, Commander, 2nd Bn.,

they were caught in a "Y" shape trap. As the trap drew tighter, a disorganized withdrawal was attempted under cover of tank fire but ended in total disaster for the Germans. To put it mildly--both artillery observers and infantrymen had a field day! (78)

During this critical phase of this attack an armored force of the 746th Tank Battalion near Reuville entered Ste. Mere-Eglise from the east in response to a request by the 82nd Airborne Division for tank assistance. As they entered the center of town, they encountered about 300 or 400 yards away a column of enemy armor of about five tanks and a few other vehicles. They destroyed 4 tanks, 1 anti-tank gun, and took 60 prisoners; also freed 19 American parachutists and forced the German armored column to retreat northward.

After over-running the enemy position and mopping up was completed, the 2nd Bn., 8th Inf., prepared to dig in along the sunken road formerly held by the Germans. In order to find room to dig in, the German dead had to be stacked two deep. It is estimated that there were 200 killed and at least 150 prisoners taken.

Meanwhile the 1st Bn., 8th Inf., attacking Turqueville late in the morning eliminated the tip of the enemy salient south of Ste. Mere-Eglise and captured 174 prisoners upon entering Turqueville.

The 3rd Bn., 8th Inf., attacking astride the Garentan-Montabourg highway pierced the enemy salient in the early evening and reached the south edge of Ste. Mere-Eglise where it remained as regimental reserve during the night. (79)

(78) Statement, Lt. Col. MacNeely, Commander, 2nd Bn., 8th Inf.: Eye witness, pp. 1-3, pp. 172-181, (78) 1-2.

## ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation it will be seen that the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, was assigned a most important mission. It was given a leading role in the amphibious assault against a fortified position and at the same time the mission of fighting to and relieving elements of two separate Airborne Divisions (101st and 82nd) as well as protecting the left flank of the 8th Infantry Regiment.

The preparation and orders for carrying out the mission assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, were full and complete.

Some points worthy of comment are:

1st: Thorough briefing prior to D-Day contributed greatly to the success of the operation. Supervised briefing through the chain of command permitted commanders to familiarize subordinates with the general plan and at the same time emphasize specific missions of smaller units. As a result, each soldier understood where he and his assault team fitted into the big picture. This type of briefing assisted greatly in regrouping assault teams which had become separated during initial landings.

2nd: Landing 1,500 yards south of the intended beach could have resulted in disaster. Potentially this was a very serious error for it might have caused great confusion. However, due to the aggressive action of Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and the prompt and effective action of Lt. Col. Carlton O. Mackesy, the attack progressed without a flaw.

3rd: Employment of DD tanks was highly successful.

They were used to great effect and assisted greatly in reducing enemy defenses.

Without tank support, assault companies could not have reduced beach strong points without suffering tremendous casualties.

4th: The combined attack by airborne and seaborne forces was clearly demonstrated in this action. Such an attack can be decisive when both forces work in harmony and bend every effort to assist each other.

5th: There was a definite necessity for capable small unit commanders. It will be easily seen that the success of the battle during the initial phase of assaulting beach defenses was in the hands of the subordinate commanders. Until assault teams were regrouped into company formation, the company commander could exercise little control over them.

6th: When visual signals are used, they should be a definite color easily distinguished. When assault company commanders fired their black smoke signal flare for naval gun fire to lift, black puffs of enemy anti-aircraft fire in the same area caused assaulting troops to doubt that naval observers could detect their signal.

#### SUMMARY

Upon the successful conclusion of this phase of operation, the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, made the initial landing on Utah Beach and within two days advanced over seven miles against enemy resistances. In conjunction with elements of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, it succeeded in establishing part of a firm beachhead which was the basis for future operations. The establishment of a junction with the 82nd Airborne Division in the vicinity of Ste. Mere-Eglise was one of the critical



features in the success of the 2nd Battalion's initial operation.

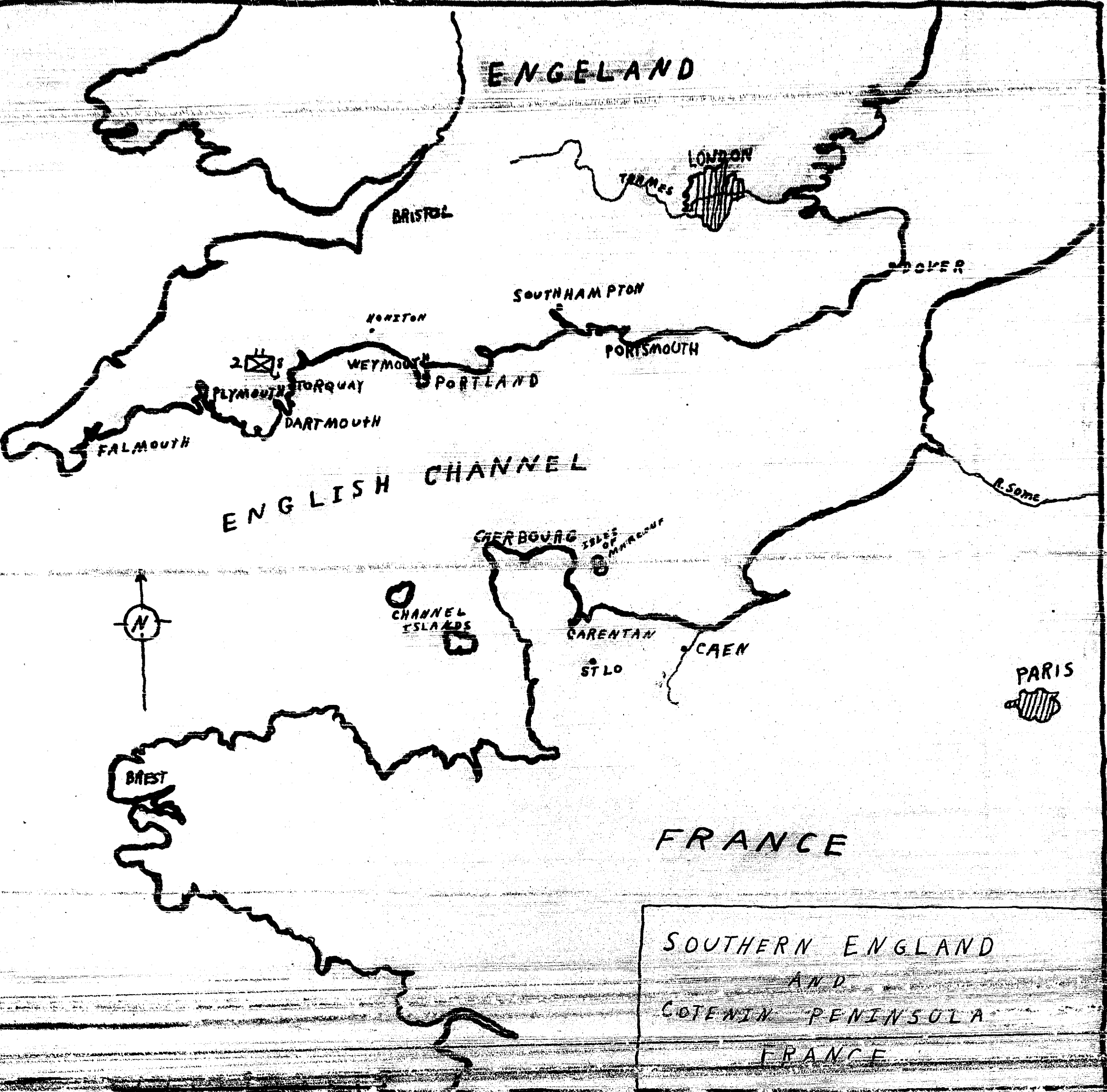
The number of enemy killed and captured during these two days cannot be accurately determined since prisoners taken by elements of the 101st Airborne Division on D-Day were turned over to the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, while on D + 1 some prisoners taken by the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, were turned over to the airborne units for safe keeping. We may be assured, however, that the number of enemy losses would run into hundreds.

The total number of casualties sustained by the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, during the action, 6-7 June 1944, totaled 12 officers and 158 enlisted men.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Weather and tide must be considered prior to attempting an amphibious landing.
2. Troops who are not combat veterans can make a successful amphibious landing, if they have received proper training.
3. Troops must be trained to cross exposed beaches rapidly.
4. Aggressiveness is an essential element of a successful amphibious landing.
5. Bombing and naval gun fire reduce fighting efficiency of an enemy but will not destroy him completely.
6. A fortified position is as strong as its weakest points.
7. Well coordinated tank-infantry teams can render concrete pillboxes untenable.



ENGLAND

LONDON

THAMES

BRISTOL

DOVER

SOUTHAMPTON

HONITON

PORTSMOUTH

WEYMOUTH

PORTLAND

PLYMOUTH

TORQUAY

DARTMOUTH

FALMOUTH

ENGLISH CHANNEL

R. SOUVE

CHERBOURG

ISLES OF RHÉ  
OUessant

CHANNEL ISLANDS

CARENTAN

CAEN

ST LO

PARIS

N

BREST

FRANCE

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

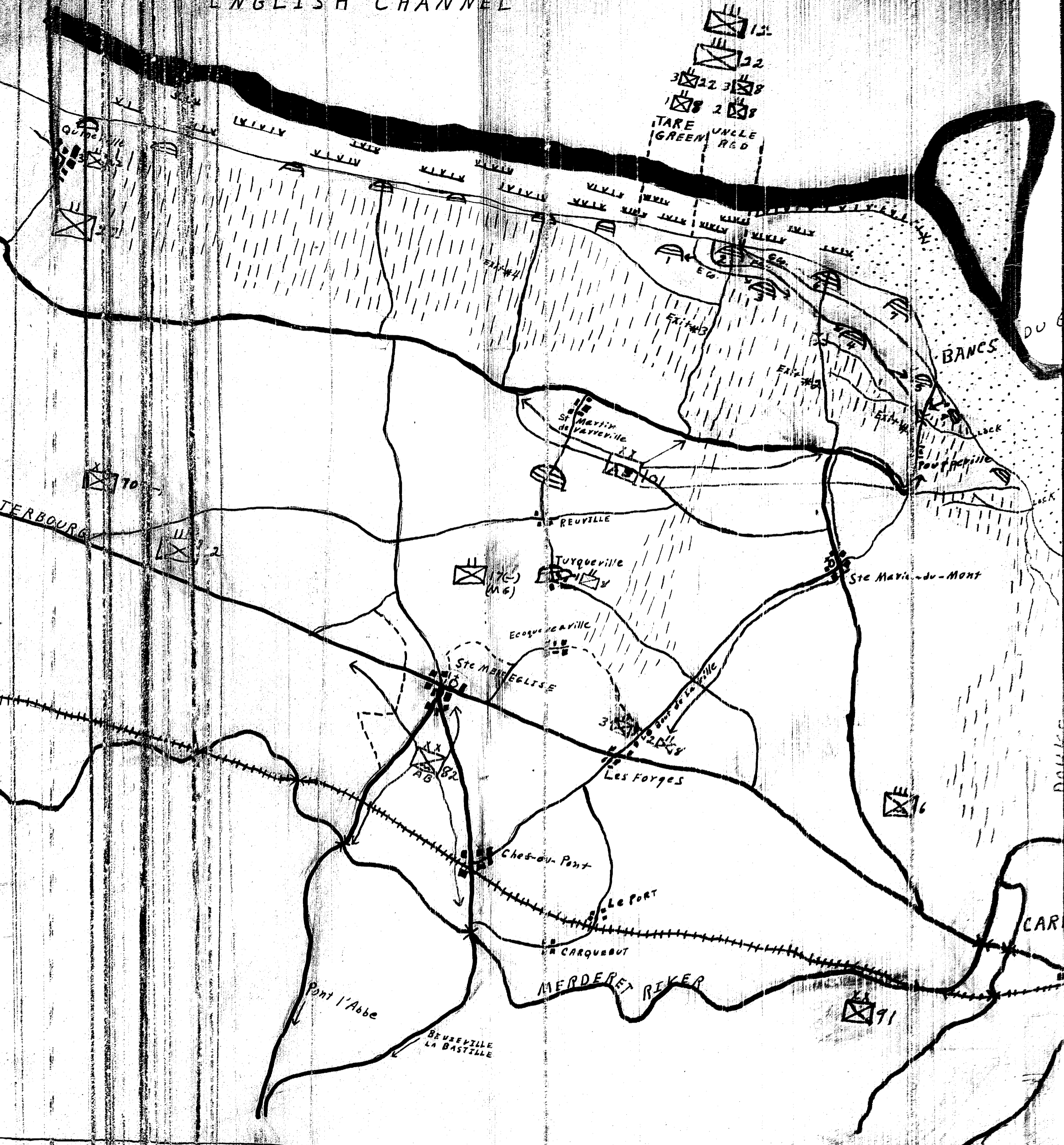
AND

COTENTIN PENINSULA

FRANCE

MILES

ENGLISH CHANNEL

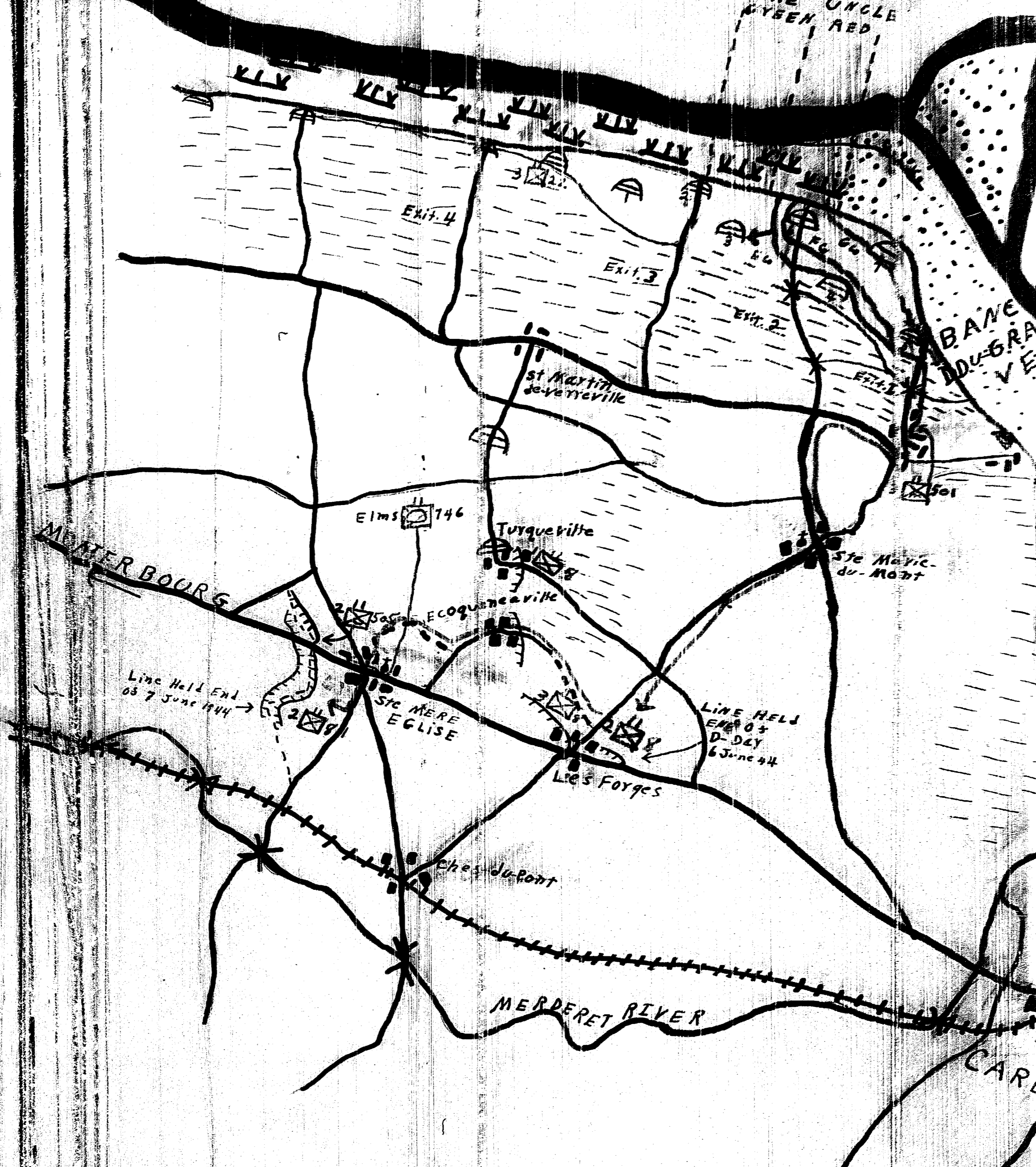


	MINE BOES
	ENEMY STRONGPOINTS
	INUNDATED AREA
	SEA WALL
	MUD BANK
	ROUTE OF ADVANCE
	OBJECTIVE
	GERMAN UNITS

ASSAULT PLAN  
 UTAH BEACH  
 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 8<sup>th</sup> INF, 4<sup>th</sup> INF DIV.  
 6 JUNE 1944



ENGLISH CHANNEL



- XXXX Hedge Hogs
- ⊗ Enemy Strong points
- Industrial Area
- Sea Wall
- Mud Bank
- Route of Advance
- Friendly Lines
- Enemy Lines

ASSAULT LANDING  
 UTAH BEACH  
 2<sup>nd</sup> BN. 8<sup>th</sup> INF 6 JUNE 1944  
 AND  
 ACTION 2<sup>nd</sup> BN. 8<sup>th</sup> INF  
 7 JUNE 1944

