

A missile hit its superstructure and splattered fragments around, but we backed out safely and drew alongside a destroyer far out to sea, which took us wounded on and put us in sick bay bunks. Again, I could only marvel at the clockwork precision of the whole operation: if you needed something, say a destroyer for instance, there it was, waiting for you!

Today, forty years later, an invasion of this sort would simply be impossible, for a single modern nuclear weapon could wipe out such a fleet. The Allies were lucky Germany didn't have an atomic bomb.<sup>1</sup>

**NOTE: Raymond E. Lanterman died on January 23, 1994 after a lengthy illness. He was 77.<sup>2</sup>**

Why was the defense of Omaha Beach so much more intense and effective than the other beaches at Normandy? Unknown to the Americans, landing on what was soon to become known as “Bloody Omaha,” German positions along the beaches were almost unscathed.

Before the invasion, Allied intelligence had completely lost track of the German 352nd Infantry, which was commanded by Maj. Gen. Dietrich Kraiss (Krys). The unit contained conscripts among its more than 12,000 men. But these green troops were stabilized by a cadre of seasoned combat veterans who had honed their skills in Poland and France and on the Russian Front. The unit had been moved to Normandy coast in March.

Kraiss, age 55, was a veteran of World War I and had been a company commander in that war. On November 6, 1943, he became commander of the 352nd Infantry Division in Normandy. Facing the Allies at Omaha Beach was the 916th Grenadier Regiment, an element of the 352nd. Reinforcing the 916th at Omaha was the 2nd Battalion of the 915th Grenadiers, as well as engineer units and antiaircraft detachments.

The 352nd was a new unit, and Kraiss trained his men hard; what the young recruits among his troops lacked in experience, Kraiss attempted to make up for in training.

Kraiss' immediate superior was Lt. Gen. Erich Marcks, also a World War I veteran. He was assigned to the 84th Corps in Normandy in August 1943, with headquarters in Saint Lo (sānt-ló). The area under his control included 240 miles of coastline, an area that encompassed the Allied landing of June 6.

The corps consisted of four divisions—plus two that were added on D-Day, one of which was the 21st Panzer based at Caen.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond E. Lanterman, “D-Day 1944.” Personal manuscript dated 20 March 1984, Honolulu, Hawaii.

<sup>2</sup> See the excerpt, “Nazi Party” in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 8:570–71, which is inserted here at the end of lesson 3's notes: MD19-C-03, p. 25.



Commander in Chief of Germany's western force at the time of the invasion was 69-year-old Field Marshal Karl von Rundstedt. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was in charge of inspecting and bolstering the Atlantic Wall defenses; his tactical credo was to stop the Allies on the beaches, where, he said, the war would be won or lost.

Under Rommel's direction, more than a million mines were set and thousands of obstacles consisting of concrete crossbeams, underwater barriers, and barbed-wire entanglements were put in place. Omaha, the most obvious landing site, received the lion's share of those impediments.

The desperate impact these preparations had on the invading forces at Omaha is the subject of the following quote by Stephen E. Ambrose, Professor of History at the University of New Orleans and Director of the Eisenhower Center and President of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans. The following excerpt is from his book, *D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*:

**No tactician could have devised a better defensive situation. A narrow, enclosed battlefield, with no possibility of outflanking it; many natural obstacles for the attacker to overcome; an ideal place to build fixed fortifications and a trench system on the slope of the bluff and on the high ground looking down on a wide, open killing field for any infantry trying to cross no-man's-land.**

**The Allied planners hated the idea of assaulting Omaha Beach, but it had to be done. This was as obvious to Rommel as to Eisenhower. Both commanders recognized that if the Allies invaded Normandy, they would have to include Omaha Beach in the landing sites; otherwise the gap between Utah and the British beaches would be too great.**

**The waters offshore were heavily mined. Rommel had placed more beach obstacles here than at Utah. He had 12 strong points holding 88 and 75 mms and mortars. He had dozens of machine-gun pillboxes, supported by an extensive trench system.**

**Everything the Germans had learned in World War I about how to stop a frontal assault by infantry Rommel put to work at Omaha. He laid out the firing positions at angles to the beach to cover the tidal flat and beach shelf with crossing fire, plunging fire, and grazing fire, from all types of weapons.**

**He prepared artillery positions along the cliffs at either end of the beach, capable of delivering enfilade fire from 88s all across Omaha.**

**The larger artillery pieces were protected to the seaward by concrete wing walls. There was not one inch of the beach that had not been presighted for both grazing and plunging fire.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Other sources for the chapter, "Omaha Beach: 'Just Plane Hell,'" include: William M. Vogt, "Remembering Omaha's Ordeal," *World War II*, May 1994, 42–49; Thomas E. Griess, "Omaha Beach," in *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean* (Wayne: Avery Publishing Group, 1989), 297–299; David Irving, "Invasion," in *The War between the Generals* (New York: Congdon and Lattes, 1981), 146–160 passim.



## **Heroes at Normandy: Eisenhower's Mighty Men: Omaha Beach**

**Sun-Tzu:** When you plunder a district, divide the wealth among your troops. When you enlarge your territory, divide the profits.<sup>4</sup>

**1 Chronicles 11:10** Now these are the heads of the mighty men who David had, who gave him strong support in his kingdom. Together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

Four things gave the Allies the notion that they could successfully assault this all-but-impregnable position. First, Allied intelligence said that the fortifications and trenches were manned by the 716th Infantry Division, a low-quality unit made up of Poles and Russians with poor morale. At Omaha, intelligence reckoned that there was only one battalion of about 800 troops to man the defenses.

Second, the B-17s assigned to the air bombardment would hit the beach with everything they had, destroying the bunkers. Third, the naval bombardment would finish off anything left alive and moving after the B-17s finished. The infantry from the 29th and 1st Divisions going into Omaha were told that their problems would begin when they got to the top of the bluff and started to move inland toward their D-Day objectives.

The fourth cause for confidence that the job would be done was that 40,000 men and 3,500 motorized vehicles were scheduled to land at Omaha on D-Day.

The intelligence was wrong; instead of the contemptible 716th Division, the quite capable 352nd Division was in place. Instead of one German battalion to cover the beach, there were three. The cloud cover and late arrival caused the B-17s to delay their release; not a single bomb fell on the beach or bluff. The naval bombardment was too brief and generally inaccurate.

The Overlord plan for Omaha was elaborate and precise. It has the 116th Regiment of the 29th Division going in on the west, supported by Company C of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. The 16th Regiment of the 1st Division would go in on the east. It would be a linear attack, with the two regiments going in by companies abreast. There were eight sectors, from west to east named Charlie, Dog Green, Dog White, Dog Red, Easy Green, Easy Red, Fox Green, and Fox Red. The 116th Regimental Combat Team's sectors ran from Charlie to Easy Green. The 16th Regiment's RCT ran from Easy Red to Fox Red.

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<sup>4</sup> Sun-Tzu, 198.



The first waves would consist of two battalions from each of the regiments. Assault teams would cover every inch of beach. Ahead of the assault teams would be tanks, Navy underwater demolition teams, and Army engineers. Each assault team and the supporting units had specific tasks to perform, all geared to opening the exits. Demolition teams would blow the obstacles and mark the paths through them with flags, so that as the tide came in the coxswains would know where it was safe to go.

Next would come the following waves of landing craft, bringing reinforcements on a tight, strict schedule designed to put firepower into the battle when needed, plus more tanks, trucks, jeeps, medical units, headquarters, communication units—all the physical support and administrative control required of infantry conducting an all-out offensive.

Nothing worked according to plan.

In the lead Company A boat, Capt. Taylor Fellers and every one of his men were killed before the ramp went down. It just vaporized. No one ever learned whether it was the result of hitting a mine or getting hit by an 88.

All across the beach, the German machine guns were hurling fire of monstrous proportions on the hapless Americans. Because of the misplaced landings, the GIs were bunched together which allowed the Germans to concentrate their fire. German artillery fired at will.

About 60 percent of the men of Company A came from one town, Bedford, Virginia; for Bedford, the first fifteen minutes of Omaha was an unmitigated disaster. Companies G and F were supposed to come in to the (east) of Company A, but they drifted a half mile further east before landing, so all Germans around the heavily defended Vierville draw concentrated their fire on Company A.

When the ramps on the (landing crafts) dropped, the Germans just poured the machine-gun artillery, and mortar fire on them. It was a slaughter. Of the 200-plus men of the company, only a couple of dozen survived, and virtually all of them were wounded.

By 6:40 A.M., only one officer from Company A was still alive; Lt. E Ray Nance, and he had been hit in the heel and the belly. Every sergeant was either dead or wounded. On one boat, when the ramp was dropped every man in the thirty-man assault team was killed before any of them could get out.

Company A had hardly fired a weapon. Almost certainly it had not killed any Germans. It had expected to move up the Vierville draw and be on top of the bluff by 7:30, but at 7:30 its handful of survivors were huddled up against the seawall, virtually without weapons. It had lost 96 percent of its effective strength.



When Sgt. Warner Hamlett of F Company of the 116th RCT made it to the shore, he found that the weight of his clothes, sand, and equipment made it difficult to run. He could hear men shouting, “Get off the beach!” and realized, “our only chance was to get off as quick as possible, because there we were sitting ducks.”

By short leaps and advances, using obstacles for protection, he worked his way toward the shingle.<sup>5</sup>

From the beach, to the GIs, that shingle looked like the most desirable place in the world to be at that moment. But when they reached it, they found [coiled barbed wire] covering it, no way to get across without blowing the wire, nothing on the other side but death and misery. And although they were now protected from machinegun and rifle fire coming down from the German trenches on the bluff, they were exposed to mortar fire. The few who made it had no organization, little or no leadership, only a handful of weapons. They could but huddle and hope for follow-up waves to bring in torpedoes to blow the wire.

E Company, 116th, landed farthest from the target. Scheduled to come in at Easy Green, it actually landed on the boundary between Easy Green and Fox Green, a half-mile off and intermixed with men from the 16th RCT, 1st Division. Pvt. Harry Parley was a flamethrower, so far as he is aware “the only flamethrower to come off the beach unscathed.”

“As our boat touched sand and the ramp went down,” Parley recalled, “I became a visitor to hell.” Boats on either side were getting hit by artillery. Some were burning, others were sinking. “I shut everything out and concentrated on following the men in front of me down the ramp and into the water.”

He immediately sank. “I was unable to come up. I knew I was drowning and made a futile attempt to unbuckle the flamethrower harness.” A buddy grabbed his flame thrower and pulled Parley forward, to where he could stand.

He had 220 yards to go to the beach. He made it exhausted. Machinegun fire was hitting the beach. “To this day, I don’t know why I didn’t dump the flamethrower and run like hell for shelter. But I didn’t.” He was behind the other members of the team. “Months later, trying to analyze why I was able to safely walk across the beach while others running ahead were hit, I found a simple answer. The Germans were directing their fire down onto the beach so that the line of advancing attackers would run into it and, since I was behind, I was ignored. In short, the burden on my back may well have saved my life.”

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<sup>5</sup> “Course, rounded detritus [rock debris] or alluvial material, as on a seashore, differing from ordinary gravel only in the larger size of the stones” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 2d ed. [1953], s.v. “shingle”).



When Parley reached the shingle, he found chaos. “Men were trying to dig and scrape trenches or foxholes for protection from the mortars. Others were carrying or helping the wounded to shelter. Most of us were in no condition to carry on. We were just trying to stay alive.

Nineteen-year-old Pvt. Harold Baumgarten of B Company got a bullet through the top of his helmet while jumping from the ramp, then another hit the receiver of his M-1 as he carried it at port arms. He waded through the waist-deep water as his buddies fell alongside him.

Baumgarten had drawn the Star of David on the back of his field jacket, with “The Bronx, New York” written on it, that would let Hitler know who he was. Shells were bursting about him. “I raised my head to curse the Germans when an 88-shell exploded about twenty yards in front of me, hitting me in my left cheek. I felt like being hit with a baseball bat only the results were much worse. My upper jaw was shattered, the left cheek blown open. My upper lip was cut in half. The roof of my mouth was cut up and teeth and gums were laying all over my mouth. Blood poured freely from the gaping wound.”

The tide was coming in. Baumgarten washed his face with the cold, dirty Channel water and managed not to pass out. The water was rising about an inch a minute, so he had to get moving or drown. He took another hit, from a bullet, in his leg. He finally reached the seawall where a medic dressed his wounds.

Baumgarten was wounded five times that day, the last time by a bullet in his right knee as he was carried on a stretcher to the beach for evacuation. He went on to medical school and became a practicing physician.

At 7:30 the main command group of the 116th began to come in, including the regimental commander, Col. Charles Canham, and the assistant commander of the 29th Division, Brig. Gen. Norman Cota.

“Dutch” Cota moved among the men, galvanizing them into action-particularly when he coined what became a battle cry. As the 5th Ranger Battalion moved ashore at 8 A.M., it was he who yelled, “If you’re Rangers, get up and lead the way!”

Cota was an expert in amphibious assaults and infantry warfare. He had decided that they probably would die that day anyhow, and that if he survived, he would be a hero, but that either way, he would put his mission first. He and his brigade headquarters hit Omaha Beach at about 7:00 A.M. Omaha Beach would rank with Saratoga, the Alamo, and Gettysburg as a great display of American fortitude and determination. “Dutch” Cota provided the fire and heart that finally got the troops off that ill-fated beach.

**(End MD19-C-03. See MD19-D-04 for continuation of study at p. 31.)**



**Nazi Party**, byname of National Socialist German Workers' Party, political party of the mass movement known as National Socialism. Under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, the party gained power in Germany in 1933 and governed by totalitarian methods until 1945.

It was founded as the German Workers' Party by Anton Drexler, a Munich locksmith, in 1919. Hitler attended one of its meetings that year, and his energy and oratorical skills soon enabled him to take over the party. He ousted the party's former leaders in 1920–21 and renamed it the National Socialist German Workers' Party. In 1920 Hitler also formulated a 25-point program that became the permanent basis for the party. These appeals were accompanied by a strident anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Under Hitler the Nazi Party grew steadily in its home base of Bavaria. It organized strongarm groups to protect its rallies and meetings. These groups drew their members from war veterans groups and paramilitary organizations and were organized under the name *Sturmabteilung*

The Nazi Party's membership grew from 25,000 in 1925 to about 180,000 in 1929. Its organizational system spread through Germany at this time, and the party began contesting municipal, state, and federal elections with increasing frequency.

However, it was the effects of the Great Depression in Germany that brought the Nazi Party to its first real nationwide importance. The rapid rise in unemployment in 1929–30 provided millions of jobless and dissatisfied voters whom the Nazi Party exploited to its advantage. From 1929 to 1932 the party vastly increased its membership and voting strength; its vote in elections to the Reichstag<sup>6</sup> (the German Parliament) increased from 800,000 votes in 1928 to about 14,000,000 votes in July 1932. By then big-business circles had begun to finance the Nazi electoral campaigns, and swelling bands of *Sturmabteilung* [Shtoom'-äp'-tī-loong] (SA)<sup>7</sup> toughs increasingly dominated the street fighting with the communists that accompanied such campaigns.

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<sup>6</sup> “Reich. Literally, ‘empire’; used specifically in: First Reich, the Holy Roman Empire, from the crowning of Otto I in Rome, 962–1806; Second Reich, the German Empire, 1871–1918, established by Bismarck; Third Reich, the German totalitarian state, 1933–1945, under the dictatorship of the chancellor (known also as the *Führer*) with a consultative cabinet and a single political party (see Nazi)” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “Reich.”)

<sup>7</sup> “Assault Division”), byname Storm Troopers, or Brownshirts, in the German Nazi Party, a paramilitary organization whose methods of violent intimidation played a key role in Adolf Hitler’s rise to power. The SA was founded in Munich by Hitler in 1921. The SA men protected Party meetings, marched in Nazi rallies, and physically assaulted political opponents” *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 10:273, s.v. “SA.”



Hitler's shrewd maneuvering behind the scenes prompted the president of the German republic, Paul von Hindenburg, to name him chancellor on January 30, 1933. Hitler used the powers of his office to solidify the Nazi's position in the government during the following months. The elections of March 5, 1933, gave the Nazi Party 44 percent of the votes, and further unscrupulous tactics on Hitler's part turned the voting balance in the Reichstag in the Nazis' favor.

On July 14, 1933, his government declared the Nazi Party to be the only political party in Germany. On the death of Hindenburg in 1934 Hitler took the titles of Führer ("Leaderr"), chancellor, and commander in chief of the army, and he remained leader of the Nazi party as well. Nazi Party membership became mandatory for all higher civil servants and bureaucrats.

Hitler's word was the supreme and undisputed command in the party. The party came to control virtually all political, social, and cultural activities in Germany. Its vast and complex hierarchy was structured like a pyramid, with party-controlled mass organizations for youth, women, workers, and other groups at the bottom, party members and officials in the middle, and Hitler and his closest associates at the top wielding undisputed authority.

There have been minor Nazi parties in other countries (such as the United States), but after 1945 Nazism as a mass movement was virtually nonexistent.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., "Nazi Party," 8:570-71.

