

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Connie Dow
Current home town: Not given
Age: Not given

*This is an excerpt from *Some Reminiscences of World War II** by Frank David Bergstein (Trafford, 2010, published posthumously). Frank Bergstein, of Cincinnati, commanded Headquarters Company, 115th Regimental Combat Team (RCT), 29th Division, when it landed on Omaha Beach.*

**Excerpt published with permission from the Bergstein Family*

Copyright 2010 Frank D. Bergstein

CHAPTER 7 D-DAY/OMAHA BEACH

When we sailed out of Plymouth Harbour, the weather was still bad. So we went into Portland Harbour, about 100 miles east of Plymouth, a famous old British naval base, for the night. Early the next morning we sailed for France.

The sight of this huge armada was one I'll never forget. Our little LCI was, by chance, somewhere near the center. Someone pointed out an American cruiser not too far from us, which was headquarters for the whole landing operation. In any event, there were warships, troop carriers, tank carriers, landing craft, etc., from horizon to horizon in all directions—a staggering spectacle!

We understood that the entire armada sailed across the English Channel toward the channel ports of Le Havre, Calais, etc., to confuse the Germans, and then sailed along the French coast till we arrived opposite the coast of Normandy, very early on the morning of June 6.

Unfortunately, the sea was very rough. The landing craft—some of them LCVPs holding around 30 men each, had been lowered into the sea, and others like our LCI—were all circling into prearranged groups. Unfortunately, a lot of the troops got seasick, circling like we were about five miles offshore. For the men of the 29th, this was to be their first actual combat experience—and being sick was not the best way to go into your first fight.

The British sector was to the left on Omaha Beach. In the American sector, the 1st Division (a veteran combat unit that had fought in Africa and Sicily) was next to the British, with us on the right of them. Navy Seals and engineers had landed first to clear paths through the underwater mines and obstacles for the landing craft, and to mark with colored tape the cleared lanes.

The two arrangements on the craft as far as command was concerned were that: (1) the Navy was in charge until a craft touched shore, thereafter, the army officer in charge of the troops was in charge;

and (2) the senior line officer on the ship—not necessarily the senior officer, was army boat commander. Since I was then company commander of headquarters company, and the troops in our LCI were mostly my company, I was army boat commander. This was so, even though the forward regimental command post (CP), including Colonel Slappey—Regimental Commander—and most of his staff, were on the ship.

As we came in, we were under heavy artillery fire from shore batteries, and shells were landing all around us. Our navy skipper picked out a line of tapes to make his landing, but at the end of the tapes lay an abandoned LCI like ours, which had been knocked out by enemy fire. He pulled as close to it as he could get and then told me that this was it, and we should jump across from our boat to the stranded LCI. We were all carrying around 70 pounds of food, ammo, weapons, etc., and he wanted us to jump around 10 feet. I said "No Way!" I requested that he circle around and come as close to the shore as he could, next to the wrecked boat. This was risky because that would take us out of the cleared lane and because the shelling was intense. But he did it.

As we circled around, the shelling intensified and we also came under fire from machine guns and mortars. I didn't think we were going to make it, and I thought to myself, "My first combat decision and I'm afraid it's going to be a disaster." Miraculously, we came pretty close to the shore without receiving serious hits. I ordered one man ashore with a rope and I went next. We were still in about five feet of water, but everyone in the boat managed to get safely ashore.

By one of those strange quirks of fate, I found myself lying on the sand, trying to make myself as small as possible, right next to Colonel Slappey, our Regimental Commander, who was doing the same thing. He had been my Regimental Commander at Ft. McClellan, Alabama, and he had called me into his office after I was there around three months. He told me he was being transferred to the 29th Division and could take a couple of officers with him and wanted to know if I wanted to go with him. I said "Yes" at once for two reasons: (1) you never said "No" to a request like that in the army, and (2) I was getting tired of training camps by then and anxious to get into a combat outfit. So here we were, side-by-side, on Omaha Beach.

Colonel Slappey remarked, "This isn't at all like the plan. Someone is going to catch 'Hell'." We had been told that the pre-landing naval bombardment and rocket firing would probably knock out most of the shore batteries and would make lots of natural foxholes in the beach, but the part of the beach where we were was as smooth as glass. When I oriented myself, and as my company came ashore, my second odd thought as I stood up and realized I was not only under shell fire but also small arms fire (rifle fire) was, "Now I know just how George Washington and his men felt."

My mission was to assemble my company near a German pillbox and prepare it to move forward and establish a regimental command post. We soon discovered that we had landed around 2,000 yards west of where we're supposed to be. In fact, we were very much in the 1st Division zone and not too far from the British.

So I started moving my company along the beach toward our objective. There was a little gravel "shingle" running along the beach about 20 feet in from the water's edge. This stuck up about 10 inches

above the sand and was the only protection there was. The beach was a mess; lots of dead American soldiers, disabled vehicles, etc., and a steady falling of shells. (There were so many shells flying through the air that I thought I could actually see some of them.) Also, I found out right there how terribly affected one was by the sight of a dead American soldier. This feeling never left me all through the rest of the war. And here, water lapping on the shore was red with American blood.

(End of excerpt from Chapter 7)