

9.4 Pointe-du-Hoc

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(6 kilometers west of OMAHA Beach, on D514. Or, 22 kilometers northwest of Bayeux via N13 to Longveville, 18 kilometers. North on D125, 5 kilometers to D514, then west 2 kilometers)

The American Monuments Commission maintains Pointe-du-Hoc. The battle site retains its character of 1944 although the addition of grass and erosion around the craters has diminished its starkness.

The six 155mm gun battery with a 17 kilometer range housed inside concrete bunkers threatened the invasion fleet, OMAHA Beach, 6 kilometers east, and UTAH Beach, 14 kilometers to the northwest. This was the most lethal battery in the invasion area. The battery had to be neutralized as quickly as possible in the early hours of the invasion. The battery was bombed April 15, May 22 and June 4 resulting in the six 155mm howitzers being moved temporarily to an orchard one kilometer south. Substitute telephone poles, under camouflage netting disguised the precautionary move. Andre Farine, the café owner in Letanville (3 kilometers southwest), in seeking wood for baking would visit M. Fouche's farm overlooking the Pointe du Hoc battery site and secure intelligence he transmitted to England. He discovered the German ruse but the ships had sailed under radio silence. His own observations and what he gleaned from the labor building the Atlantic Wall eating in his café saved many lives. He was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

The 8th Air Force bombers cautiously held their bomb loads a few seconds longer to avoid hitting the assault wave. The bombs landed harmlessly inland. At 6 a.m. the battleships Arkansas and Texas commenced their bombardment. Before lifting their shelling a half-hour later they had fired 600 12 to 14 inch shells. The 10,000 tons of explosives

equaled the destructive power of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. One battleship shell exploded inside an empty bunker collapsing the rear wall.

The plan called for the 2nd Ranger Battalion (Companies D, E and F) to land east and west of the Pointe at 6:30 a.m. The rangers, using British LCPs (Landing Craft Personnel) manned by British coxswain had one of their 10 boats swamped shortly after leaving the mother ship. The company commander and platoon were rescued but returned to England. A 20mm cannon shell fired from the cliff top sank one of the four DUKWS (amphibious truck). In error the coxswains headed for Pointe de la Percee, 5 kilometers east. Colonel James Earl Rudder seeing the error ordered a course change that brought the 9 landing craft, 3 DUKWs and one supply boat (a second had swamped) back to Pointe-du-Hoc along a route paralleling the coastline. A German machine gun nest on the cliff edge 300 meters east of the Pointe raked the passing attack force. All the craft landed east of the point forty minutes late and long after the USS Texas bombardment had lifted. (The delay caused the reinforcement 5th Ranger Battalion to believe the rangers on the Pointe had not been successful and diverted to OMAHA Beach.) The Germans rushed to the cliff edge firing and throwing hand grenades down on the invaders. Two navy destroyers, the HMS Talybout and the USS Satterlee moved in close firing their machine guns and antiaircraft pompom guns into the German ranks. From the landing craft grappling hooks with rope ladders attached were fired to the top of the 35-meter high cliffs. Many of the ladders heavy with seawater fell short. On each hook a burning fuse terrorized the Germans attempting to cut the attached rope. From one of the DUKWs a ladder borrowed from the London Fire Department rose to overview the cliff top. Sergeant Bill Stivinson with his machine gun climbed the ladder. The DUKWs unsteadiness on the rocky beach combined with

Stivinson's weight caused the ladder to sway back and forth 45 degrees. Each time the sway brought Stivinson past the cliff top he fired on the Germans along the edge.

Within five minutes a number of rangers had climbed to the top. In another ten minutes the remaining 120 of Rudder's 225 men were slithering over the edge and into the welcome protective shell craters. The platoons moved off to seize their pre-assigned bunkers ignoring the machine gun and 20mm fire from the large strongpoint on the cliff edge. Determining they had captured empty bunkers containing only telephone poles the rangers moved south to D514. Although the bunkers had been taken the battery area was still not cleared. The enemy would unpredictably appear from their elaborate tunnel structures, fire a burst from an automatic weapon or throw a grenade then disappear. The machine gun east of the Pointe that had harassed the landing craft now poured fire over the heads of the rangers in the shell holes. The navy and army fire control team had been knocked out with a short shell and the radios damaged. A visual Morse code blink light signaled the USS Satterlee to knock out the machine gun nest. A few rounds tumbled the nest and occupants down the cliff face onto the beach. No one survived.

Colonel Rudder himself wounded set up his battalion headquarters in a large shell hole near the still active German strongpoint and observation post. It was overcome when fuel was poured into the exhaust ventilators and ignited consuming the oxygen and asphyxiating many of the occupants.

The intact battery bunker nearest the point became the medic's aid station. The Germans had pulled back south of D514. The rangers set up defenses. Sergeant Leonard Lomell and Jack Kuhn followed a dirt road, suspicious it might be the track created by the Germans hauling out the six-gun battery. Two hundred and fifty meters south of

D514 in an orchard they found the guns and ammunition unmanned.

The German gun crews had cautiously pulled away from their ammo dump. The Americans blew up the ammo, destroyed several guns and incapacitated the remaining gunsites.

By 9 a.m., in less than two hours, the rangers had achieved their objectives. Only 50 of the original 200 were still standing. A request for reinforcements was minimally answered. Three misdropped 101st Airborne Division paratroopers found their way into Rudder's lines. 20 rangers from the 5th Battalion were ferried over from OMAHA Beach. The Germans counterattacked from the west, twice in the afternoon and three times that evening. Rudder's force of 90 men were squeezed back to a 200-meter defense arc around the point. The next day 23 more returned on the landing craft ferrying wounded to OMAHA. German attacks persisted. The defending German 1st Battalion, 914th Regiment, 352nd Division was tough and experienced. Throughout June 7 a sizeable force of troops from OMAHA Beach moved west along the axis of D514 arriving in the St. Pierre-du-Mont hamlet (1 kilometer south-east) by evening.

Colonel Rudder's force was relieved at noon, June 8, by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 116th Regiment, elements of the 5th Ranger Battalion, and two companies of the 743rd Tank Battalion. The tanks came up the access road to today's parking lot positioning themselves between the Germans to the west and Rudder's men on the northern tip.

Within hours of its capture the orchard that contained the six-gun battery became FUSAGH (1st US Army Group Headquarters) under Lieutenant General Omar Bradley. The exact location is the thinned out orchard northeast and adjacent to Criqueville. Construction on Advanced Landing Grounds, A-1, Ste. Pierre du Mont (1 kilometer

east) and A-2 Criqueville (2 kilometers south) commenced on June 9th and 10 respectively by the 9th Engineer Command. Both fields became active within a few days for fighter support and wounded evacuation.

Today the observation post on the cliff edge is intact with a minor structural addition. An obelisk memorial to the 2nd Ranger Battalions stands on the fortification complex. Several bunkers are but giant blocks of concrete blown apart in the barrage. A few of the communication trenches are visible. Underground, the ammunition push-cart railroad still exists including a large turntable.

Colonel Rudder was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. He returned several times to anniversary events before passing away.

General Eisenhower visited the site in 1963 in preparation for the 1964 20th Anniversary events.

The "Longest Day" movie was filmed here. Tommy Sands was filmed throwing a satchel charge into the observation post through the seaward side slit.

As a small unit action site Pointe-du-Hoc is exemplary of success in the face of bad luck and adversity. The Germans engaged here were unavailable to reinforce the defenses at OMAHA.