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**THE U.S. ARMY FROM THE NORMANDY
BEACHES TO THE BULGE TO THE
SURRENDER OF GERMANY
JUNE 7, 1944 TO MAY 7, 1945**



CITIZEN SOLDIERS

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE

AUTHOR OF D-DAY AND UNDAUNTED COURAGE



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CITIZEN

The U.S. Army
from the Normandy Beaches
to the Bulge
to the Surrender of Germany
June 7, 1944–May 7, 1945

SOLDIERS

Stephen E.
Ambrose

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the Civil War, America's leading Civil War scholar James M. McPherson compares the motivation of Billy Yank and Johnny Reb to that of the GIs. He argues that the Civil War soldiers fought for cause and country even more than they fought for comrades and that it was just the opposite for the GIs. Now it is certainly true that unit cohesion, teamwork, the development of a sense of family in the squad and platoon, are the qualities most World War II combat veterans point to when asked how they survived and won. That is the theme of almost all my writing about the military, from Lewis and Clark to George Armstrong Custer to Eisenhower to D-Day. It is the theme of this book.

But I think unit cohesion was as important to Billy Yank and Johnny Reb as to the GIs. Further, I think cause and country were as critical to the GIs as to the Civil War soldiers. The differences between them were not of feeling, but of expression. Civil War soldiers were accustomed to using words like duty, honor, cause and country. The GIs didn't like to talk about country or flag and were embarrassed by patriotic bombast. They were all American boys, separated by eighty years only—but that separation included World War I. The Great War changed the language. It made patriotic words sound hollow, unacceptable, ridiculous, especially for the next set of young Americans sent to Europe to fight over the same battlefields their fathers had fought over. Nevertheless, as much as the Civil War soldiers, the GIs believed in their cause. They knew they were fighting for decency and democracy and they were proud of it and motivated by it. They just didn't talk or write about it. They speak with their own voices and in their own words.

They were, overwhelmingly, high school or college students when America got into the war. They were drafted or enlisted voluntarily in 1942, 1943, 1944. They entered France beginning on June 6, 1944. From June 7 to September, they came in over Omaha and Utah Beaches; from September to the spring of 1945, they came in at Cherbourg and Le Havre. They came as liberators, not conquerors. Only a tiny percentage of them wanted to be there, but only a small percentage of these men failed to do their duty.

My sources begin with the men of D-Day. As far as possible I follow the GIs quoted in my book on the invasion through to the end of the war, men like Dutch Schultz, Dick Winters, Bob Slaugh-

ter, Len Lomell, Sid Salomon, Ken Russell, Jack Barenfeld, and others. In that sense this book is a sequel.

But there are many new voices in this book, of men who came into the campaign from June 7 onward. The Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans, under the leadership of Director Doug Brinkley and Assistant Director Ron Drez, has been collecting oral histories and written memoirs from the veterans of ETO on a continuing basis. They now number in the hundreds and they form the base of this book. To every veteran who has contributed his oral history or written memoir to the Eisenhower Center, my heartfelt thanks. It is not possible to quote all of them, but all of them contributed to this book.

In addition, the fiftieth anniversaries of D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, the crossing of the Rhine, and V-E day brought forth a flood of books by veterans about their own experiences, their squads, their companies. Among the best of these are Bruce Egger and Lee Otts, *G Company's War: Two Personal Accounts of the Campaigns in Europe, 1944-1945*; Harold Leinbaugh and John Campbell, *The Men of Company K: The Autobiography of a World War II Rifle Company*; Paul Fussell, *Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic*; John Colby, *War from the Ground Up*; David Kenyon Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir*; and Kurt Gabel, *The Making of a Paratrooper*. There are too many others to name here; they are in the bibliography. The fiftieth anniversaries also prompted the publication of numerous oral history books; among the many that I use, Dorothy Chernitsky, *Voices from the Foxholes* (110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Division) and Gerald Astor, *The Mighty Eighth: The Air War in Europe as Told by the Men Who Fought It* stand out. Of course I used all the standard histories, old and new. As always, Russell Weigley's *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* was my guide and fact checker. I also stole material profitably if shamelessly from Michael Doubler's *Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945*, and Joseph Balkoski's *Beyond the Beachhead: The 29th Infantry Division in Normandy*.

On May 7-8, 1995, the Eisenhower Center (with invaluable support from David Craig) sponsored a conference on the war in Europe. Among those who participated were Andy Rooney, Kurt Vonnegut, and Joe Heller. Rooney gave me a front-line reporter's

view of the war; Vonnegut and Heller gave me a novelist's view. The funny thing was, none of these guys was funny when he talked about his personal experiences in the war. They were moving and vivid.

I wanted more German voices for this book than I had in *D-Day*. I wanted to know more about what it was like for them, and even more how they viewed my subject, the GIs. On March 5-8, 1995, my son Hugh and Hans von Luck's son Alexander ("Sasha") joined me, Ken Hechler (author of *The Bridge at Remagen*), some veterans of the U.S. 9th Armored Division, and a group of German veterans who had been at Remagen on March 7, 1945, to talk about what happened there. Afterwards, Hugh and Sasha took off for a two-month tour of Germany, interviewing German soldiers. Sasha's father provided them with names and introductions, as did Captain Dieter Kollmer of the historical section of today's German army. Altogether Hugh and Sasha did sixty oral histories; when he got home to Helena, Montana, Hugh translated and transcribed them for me. Hugh also did the photo research.

Alice Mayhew, Elizabeth Stein, and the entire production team at Simon and Schuster were outstanding, as they always are.

The dedication is to the one I love.

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE
Bay St. Louis, Mississippi
February 13, 1997

Prologue

FIRST LIGHT came to Ste.-Mère-Eglise around 0510. Twenty-four hours earlier, it had been just another Norman village, with more than a millennium behind it. By nightfall of June 6, it was a name known around the world, the village where the invasion began and now headquarters for the 82nd Airborne Division.

At dawn on June 7, Lt. Waverly Wray, executive officer in Company D, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), who had jumped into the night sky over Normandy twenty-eight hours earlier, was on the northwestern outskirts of the village. He peered intently into the lifting gloom. What he couldn't see, he could sense. From the sounds of the movement of personnel and vehicles to the north of Ste.-Mère-Eglise, he could feel and figure that the major German counterattack, the one the Germans counted on to drive the Americans into the sea and the one the paratroopers had been expecting, was coming at Ste.-Mère-Eglise.

It was indeed. Six thousand German soldiers were on the move, with infantry, artillery, tanks, and self-propelled guns—more than a match for the 600 or so lightly armed paratroopers in Ste.-Mère-Eglise. A German breakthrough to the beaches seemed imminent. And Lieutenant Wray was at the point of attack.

Wray was a big man, 250 pounds with “legs like tree trunks.” The standard-issue Army parachute wasn't large enough for his

weight and he dropped too fast on his jumps, but the men said hell, with his legs he don't need a chute. He was from Batesville, Mississippi, and was an avid woodsman, skilled with rifles and shotguns. He claimed he had never missed a shot in his life. A veteran of the Sicily and Italy campaigns, Wray was—in the words of Col. Ben Vandervoort, commanding the 505th—"as experienced and skilled as an infantry soldier can get and still be alive."¹

Wray had Deep South religious convictions. A Baptist, each month he sent half his pay home to help build a new church. He never swore. His exclamation when exasperated was, "John Brown!" meaning abolitionist John Brown of Harpers Ferry. He didn't drink, smoke, or chase girls. Some troopers called him "The Deacon," but in an admiring rather than critical way. Vandervoort had something of a father-son relationship with Wray, always calling him by his first name, "Waverly."

On June 7, shortly after dawn, Wray reported to Vandervoort—whose leg, broken in the jump, was now in a cast—on the movements he had spotted, the things he had sensed, where he expected the Germans to attack and in what strength.

Vandervoort took all this in, then ordered Wray to return to the company and have it attack the German flank before the Germans could get their attack started.

"He said 'Yes Sir,'" Vandervoort later wrote, "saluted, about-faced, and moved out like a parade ground Sergeant Major."

Back in the company area, Wray passed on the order. As the company prepared to attack, he took up his M-1, grabbed a half-dozen grenades, and strode out, his Colt .45 on his hip and a silver-plated .38 revolver stuck in his jump boot. He was going to do a one-man reconnaissance to formulate a plan of attack.

Wray was going out into the unknown. He had spent half a year preparing for this moment but he was not trained for it. In one of the greatest intelligence failures of all time, neither G-2 (intelligence) at U.S. First Army nor SHAEF G-2, nor any division S-2 had ever thought to tell the men who were going to fight the battle that the dominant physical feature of the battlefield was the maze of hedgerows that covered the western half of Normandy.

One hundred years before Lieutenant Wray came to Normandy, Honoré de Balzac had described the hedges: "The peasants, from time immemorial, have raised a bank of earth about each field,

forming a flat-topped ridge, two meters in height, with beeches, oaks, and chestnut trees growing upon the summit. The ridge or mound, planted in this wise, is called a hedge; and as the long branches of the trees which grow upon it almost always project across the road, they make a great arbor overhead. The roads themselves, shut in by clay banks in this melancholy way, are not unlike the moats of fortresses."²

How could the various G-2s have missed such an obvious feature, especially as aerial reconnaissance clearly revealed the hedges? Because the photo interpreters, looking only straight down at them, thought that they were like English hedges, the kind the fox hunters jump over, and they had missed the sunken nature of the roads entirely. "We had been neither informed of them or trained to overcome them," was Captain John Colby's brief comment.³ The GIs would have to learn by doing, as Wray was doing on the morning of June 7.

Wray and his fellow paratroopers, like the men from the 1st and 29th Divisions at Omaha and the 4th Division at Utah, and all the support groups, had been magnificently trained to launch an amphibious assault. By nightfall of June 6, they had done the real thing successfully, thanks to their training, courage, and dash. But beginning at dawn, June 7, they were fighting in a terrain completely unexpected and unfamiliar to them.

The Germans, meanwhile, had been going through specialized training for fighting in hedgerows. "Coming within thirty meters of the enemy was what we meant by close combat," Pvt. Adolf Rogosch of the 353rd Division recalled. "We trained hard, throwing hand grenades, getting to know the ground. The lines of hedges crisscrossing one another played tricks on your eyes. We trained to fight as individuals; we knew when the attack came we'd probably be cut off from one another. We let them come forward and cross the hedge, then we blew them apart. That was our tactic, to wait until they crossed over the hedge and then shoot."⁴

The Germans also pre-sited mortars and artillery on the single gaps that provided the only entrances into the fields. Behind the hedgerows, they dug rifle pits and tunneled openings for machine-gun positions in each corner.

Wray moved up sunken lanes, crossed an orchard, pushed his way through hedgerows, crawled through a ditch. Along the way he

noted concentrations of Germans, in fields and lanes. A man without his woodsman's sense of direction would have gotten lost. He reached a point near the N-13, the main highway coming into Ste.-Mère-Eglise from Cherbourg.

The N-13 was the axis of the German attack. Wray, "moving like the deer stalker he was" (Vandervoort's words), got to a place where he could hear guttural voices on the other side of a hedgerow. They sounded like officers talking about map coordinates. Wray rose up, burst through the obstacle, swung his M-1 to a ready position, and barked in his strong command voice, "*Hände hoch!*" to the eight German officers gathered around a radio.

Seven instinctively raised their hands. The eighth tried to pull a pistol from his holster; Wray shot him instantly, between the eyes. Two Germans in a slit trench 100 meters to Wray's rear fired bursts from their Schmeisser machine pistols at him. Bullets cut through his jacket; one cut off half of his right ear.

Wray dropped to his knee and began shooting the other seven officers, one at a time as they attempted to run away. When he had used up his clip, Wray jumped into a ditch, put another clip into his M-1, and dropped the German soldiers with the Schmeissers with one shot each.

Wray made his way back to the company area to report on what he had seen. At the command post (CP) he came in with blood down his jacket, a big chunk of his ear gone, holes in his clothing. "Who's got more grenades?" he demanded. He wanted more grenades.

Then he started leading. He put a 60mm mortar crew on the German flank and directed fire into the lanes and hedgerows most densely packed with the enemy. Next he sent D Company into an attack down one of the lanes. The Germans broke and ran. By mid-morning Ste.-Mère-Eglise was secure and the potential for a German breakthrough to the beaches was much diminished.

The next day Vandervoort, Wray, and Sgt. John Rabig went to the spot to examine the German officers Wray had shot. Unforgettably, their bodies were sprinkled with pink and white apple blossom petals from an adjacent orchard. It turned out that they were the commanding officer (CO) and his staff of the 1st Battalion, 158th Grenadier Infantry Regiment. The maps showed that it was leading the way for the counterattack. The German confusion and

subsequent retreat were in part due to having been rendered leaderless by Wray.

Vandervoort later recalled that when he saw the blood on Wray's jacket and the missing half-ear, he had remarked, "They've been getting kind of close to you, haven't they Waverly?"

With just a trace of a grin, Wray had replied, "Not as close as I've been getting to them, Sir."

At the scene of the action, Vandervoort noted that every one of the dead Germans, including the two Schmeisser-armed Grenadiers more than 100 meters away, had been killed with a single shot in the head. Wray insisted on burying the bodies. He said he had killed them, and they deserved a decent burial, and it was his responsibility.

Later that day, Sergeant Rabig commented to Vandervoort, "Colonel, aren't you glad Waverly's on our side?"

The next day Rabig wasn't so sure. He and Wray were crouched behind a hedgerow. American artillery was falling into the next field. "I could hear these Germans screaming as they were getting hit. Lieutenant Wray said, 'John, I wish that artillery would stop so we can go in after them.'

"Jesus! I thought, the artillery is doing good enough."

Before the battle was joined, Hitler had been sure his young men would outfight the young Americans. He was certain that the spoiled sons of democracy couldn't stand up to the solid sons of dictatorship. If he had seen Lieutenant Wray in action in the early morning of D-Day Plus One, he might have had some doubts.

Of course, Wray was special. You don't get more than one Wray to a division, or even to an army. Vandervoort compared Wray to a sergeant in the 82nd Division in World War I, also a Southern boy, named Alvin York. Yet if the qualities Wray possessed were unique, others could aspire to them without hoping or expecting to match Wray's spectacular performance. Indeed they would have to if the United States was going to win the war. Victory depended on the junior officers and NCOs on the front lines. That is the spine of this book.

The campaign in Northwest Europe, 1944-45, was a tremendous struggle on a gigantic stage. It was a test of many things, such

as how well the Wehrmacht had done in changing its tactics and weapons to defend the empire it had seized in blitzkrieg warfare; how well the assembly lines of the Allies and of the Axis were doing in providing the weapons; the skill of the generals; the proper employment of airplanes on the defense and on the offense; and much more. The test this book looks at is how well General George C. Marshall and that relative handful of professional officers serving in the U.S. Army in 1940 had done in creating an army of citizen soldiers from scratch. Weapon selection and quantities, how many divisions, and a myriad of other problems demanded decisions because of the explosive growth of the Army—from 160,000 in 1939 to over eight million in 1944—and only Marshall and a handful of officers were capable of making those decisions.

All the problems were important, most critical. But the one that mattered above all others was human. America had the numbers of men and could produce the weapons for a mass army, and transport it to Europe, no question about it. But could she provide the leaders that an eight-million-man army required—the leaders at the people level, primarily captains, lieutenants, and sergeants?

Hitler had thought not, and even U.S. Army Chief of Staff George Marshall had his doubts. At the end of the first year of expansion, General Marshall reported that junior officers lacked experience, had little confidence in themselves, and hence failed to assume or discharge their responsibilities.⁵ Marshall had put his prodigious talents into an effort to overcome these problems and all the others. He had created the U.S. Army of World War II with a campaign in Northwest Europe in mind. He had designed the Army to take on the Wehrmacht in France, to defeat it in battle, to drive it out of France and destroy it in the process. How well he had done was to be discovered.

The success of D-Day was a good start, but that was yesterday. The Allies had only barely penetrated Germany's outermost defenses and had engaged only a tiny fraction of the German army in France. The Wehrmacht was not the army it had been three years earlier, but it was an army that had refused to die, even after Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk.

That the Wehrmacht kept its cohesion through the course of these catastrophes has been attributed to the superior training of its junior officers. They were not only grounded in detail and doctrine, but were encouraged to think and act independently in a battle situ-

ation. They also made a critical contribution to the primary bonding—the *Kameradschaft*—that was so strong and traditional in the German army at the squad level.

Could the American junior officers do as well? Could the U.S. Army defeat the German army in France? The answer to the second question depended on the answer to the first.

Part One

THE BATTLE FOR FRANCE

On D-Day, the Allies put some 175,000 men ashore in Normandy. Hundreds of thousands in Britain and the States were set to follow. These reinforcements began coming in at dawn on June 7, 1944. This is the story of how they teamed up and overcame determined German resistance to broaden the beachhead, then to overrun Normandy, then to overrun France and drive to the German border.

Expanding the Beachhead

June 7–30, 1944

SHORTLY AFTER DAWN on June 7, Lt. Horace Henderson of the Sixth Engineer Special Brigade landed on Omaha Beach. Going in on his Higgins boat,* “I noticed that nothing moved on the beach except one bulldozer. The beach was covered with debris, sunken craft and wrecked vehicles. We saw many bodies in the water. . . . We jumped into chest high water and waded ashore. Then we saw that the beach was literally covered with the bodies of American soldiers wearing the blue and gray patches of the 29th Infantry Division.”

Although the fighting had moved inland, sporadic artillery shelling and intermittent sniper fire from Germans still holding their positions on the bluff hampered movement on the beach. Henderson’s job was to distribute maps (a critical and never-ending process—eventually in the Normandy campaign, the U.S. First Army passed out 125 million maps), but because the front line was just over the bluff at Omaha, only men, ammunition, weapons, and gasoline were being brought ashore, so he had no maps to hand out. He and his section unloaded jerry cans of gasoline, the first of millions of such cans that would cross that beach.

*Named for its inventor and producer, Andrew Higgins of New Orleans. The Navy designated it Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP).



FRONT LINE AS OF:

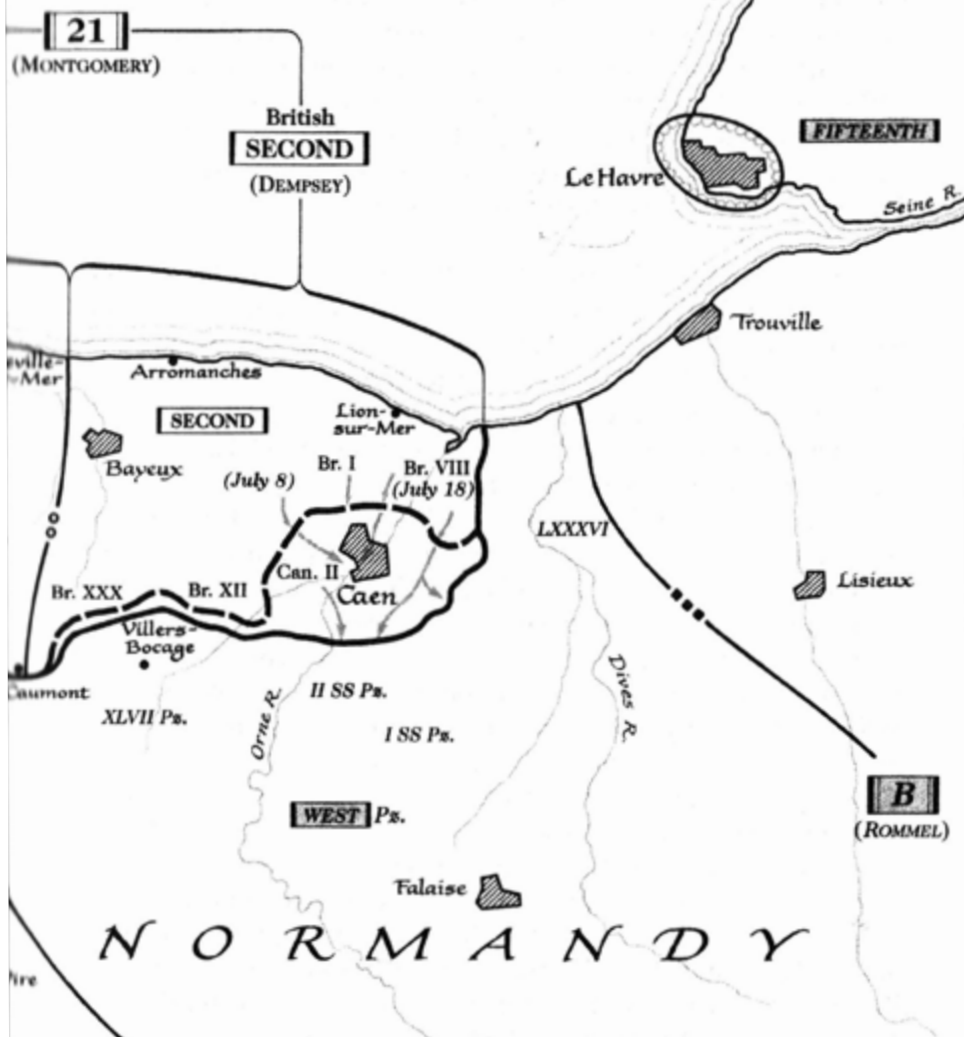
- July 1
- July 24
- (July 3) Date of advance

- [21]** Allied army group
- FIRST** Allied army
- VII Allied corps
- o—o— Allied army boundary

- [B]** German army group
- SEVENTH** German army
- XLVII German corps
- - - - German army group boundary
- · - · German army boundary
- German fortified area



English Channel

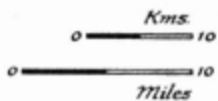


N O R M A N D Y

**EXPANDING
THE NORMANDY
BEACHHEAD**

July 1-24, 1944

Domfront



Sometime that afternoon, Henderson recalled, "before the bodies could be removed, the first religious service was held on Omaha Beach. We prayed for those who had been lost and thanked the Lord for our survival. I promised God that I would do all in my power to help prevent such a terrible event ever happening again."*

That evening, toward dusk, Henderson dug in at the foot of the cliff opposite the Vierville draw. Just as he lay down, four German bombers appeared. "A sea of ships began to fire hundreds of anti-aircraft guns with a noise that was terrifying." That was the lone Luftwaffe foray against Omaha Beach that day.¹

To the west, inland from Utah Beach, on the morning of June 7, Lieutenant Wray's foray had broken up the German counterattack into Ste.-Mère-Eglise before it got started. But by noon the Germans were dropping mortar shells on the town. Pvt. Jack Leonard of the 82nd was in a foxhole that took a direct hit. His stomach was blown away. His last words were, "God damn the bastards, they got me. The hell with it."²

That afternoon E Company, 505th PIR, moved out to drive the Germans farther back. Those who participated included Sgt. Otis Sampson, an old cavalry soldier with ten years in the Army, by reputation the best mortarman in the division, something he had proved on D-Day; Lt. James Coyle, a platoon leader in the 505th PIR; and Lt. Frank Woosley, a company executive officer in the 505th. In some ways the experience they were about to have—fighting in the hedgerows—typified what others were going through that same day, or would be experiencing in the days to follow; in other ways they were atypically lucky.

The company had two tanks attached to it. Lieutenant Coyle's order was to take his platoon across the field and attack the hedgerow ahead, simple and straightforward enough. But Coyle had been in Normandy for a day and a half, and he knew this wasn't Fort Benning. He protested. He explained to his CO that the Germans dug into and hid behind the hedgerows and they would exact a bloody price from infantry advancing through a field, no matter how good the men were at fire-and-movement.

*Henderson went on to become a director general of the World Peace Through Law Center, and was appointed by President Eisenhower as a member of the U.S. Delegation to the United Nations.

Coyle figured there had to be a better way. He received permission to explore alternate routes. Lieutenant Woosley accompanied him. Sure enough, Coyle found a route through the sunken lanes that brought the Americans to a point where they were looking down a lane running perpendicular to the one they were on. It was the main German position, inexplicably without cover or observation posts on its flank.

The paratroopers were thus able to observe an unsuspecting German battalion at work. It had only arrived at the position a quarter of an hour earlier (which may explain the unguarded flank) but it already had transformed the lane into a fortress. Communication wires ran up and down. Mortar crews worked their weapons. Sergeants with binoculars leaned against the bank and peered through openings cut in the hedge, directing the mortar fire. Other forward observers had radios and were directing the firing of heavy artillery from the rear. Riflemen at the embankment also had cut holes through which they could aim and fire. At the near and far corners of the lane, the corners of the field, German heavy machine guns were tunneled in, the muzzles of their guns just peeking through a small hole in the embankment, with crews at the ready to send crisscrossing fire into the field in front.

That was the staggering firepower Coyle's platoon would have run into, had he obeyed without question his original orders. Because he had refused and successfully argued his point, he was now on the German flank with his men and two tanks behind him. The tanks did a ninety-degree turn. The men laid down a base of rifle and machine-gun fire, greatly aided by a barrage of mortars from Sergeant Sampson. Then the tanks shot their 75mm cannon down the lane.

Germans fell all around. Sampson fired all his mortar shells, then picked up a BAR. "I was that close I couldn't miss," he remembered. "That road was their death trap. It was so easy I felt ashamed of myself and quit firing. I felt I had bagged my quota."³

The German survivors waved a white flag. Coyle told his men to cease fire, stood up, walked down the lane to take the surrender. Two grenades came flying over the hedgerow and landed at his feet. He dove to the side and escaped, and the firing opened up again. The Americans had the Germans trapped in the lane, and after a period of taking casualties without being able to inflict any, the German soldiers began to take off, bursting through the hedgerow

and emerging into the field with hands held high, crying "Comrade!"

Soon there were 200 or so men in the field, hands up. Coyle went through the hedgerow, to begin the rounding-up process, and promptly got hit in the thigh by a sniper's bullet, not badly but he was furious with himself for twice not being cautious enough. But he had great self-control, and he got the POWs gathered in and put under guard. He and his men had effectively destroyed an enemy battalion without losing a single man.

It was difficult finding enough men for guard duty, as there was only one GI for every ten captured Germans. The guards therefore took no chances. Corp. Sam Applebee encountered a German officer who refused to move. "I took a bayonet and shoved it into his ass," Applebee recounted, "and then he moved. You should have seen the happy smiles and giggles that escaped the faces of some of the prisoners, to see their Lord and Master made to obey, especially from an enlisted man."⁴

Sergeant Sampson saw another NCO shooting directly down with his BAR. He was the only man shooting. On investigation, Sampson discovered that he was shooting disarmed prisoners who were standing in the ditch, hands up. The GI was blazing away. "There must have been some hate in his heart," Sampson commented.⁵

E Company's experience on June 7 was unique, or nearly so—an unguarded German flank was seldom again to be found. But in another way, what the company went through was to be repeated across Normandy in the weeks that followed. In the German army, the slave troops from conquered Central and Eastern Europe, and Asia, would throw their hands up at the first opportunity, but if they misjudged their situation and their NCO was around, they were likely to get shot in the back. Or the NCOs would keep up the fight even as their enlisted men surrendered, as Coyle discovered.

Lt. Leon Mendel was an interrogation officer with Military Intelligence, attached to the 505th. He did the interrogation of the prisoners Coyle's platoon had taken. "I started off with German," Mendel remembered, "but got no response, so I switched to Russian, asked if they were Russian. 'Yes!' they responded, heads bobbing eagerly. 'We are Russian. We want to go to America!'

"Me too," Mendel said in Russian. "Me too!"⁶

The Wehrmacht in Normandy in June of 1944 was an international army. It had troops from every corner of the vast Soviet empire—Mongolians, Cossacks, Georgians, Muslims, Chinese—plus men from the Soviet Union's neighboring countries, men who had been conscripted into the Red Army, then captured by the Germans in 1941 or 1942. There were some Koreans, captured by the Red Army in the 1939 war with Japan. In Normandy in June 1944, the 29th Division, according to historian Joseph Balkoski, "captured troops of so many ethnic backgrounds that one GI blurted to his company CO, 'Captain, just who the hell are we fighting, anyway?'"⁷

Ethnic Germans also surrendered. Even veterans of the Eastern Front. Corp. Friedrich Bertenrath of the 2nd Panzer Division explained, "In Russia, I could imagine nothing but fighting to the last man. We knew that going into a prison camp in Russia meant you were dead. In Normandy, one always had in the back of his mind, 'Well, if everything goes to hell, the Americans are human enough that the prospect of becoming their prisoner was attractive to some extent.'"⁸

By no means were all the enlisted German personnel in Normandy reluctant warriors. Many fought effectively; some fought magnificently. At St.-Marcouf, about ten kilometers north of Utah Beach, the Germans had four enormous casements, each housing a 205mm cannon. On D-Day, these guns had gotten into a duel with American battleships. On D-Day Plus One, GIs from the 4th Infantry Division surrounded the casements. To hold them off, the German commander called down fire from another battery of 205 cannon some fifteen kilometers to the north, right on top of his own position. That kept the Americans at bay for more than a week while the German cannon continued to fire sporadically on Utah Beach.

The casements took innumerable direct hits, all from big shells. The shells made little more than dents in the concrete. The casements are still there today—they will be there for decades if not centuries, so well built were they—and they bear mute testimony to the steadfastness of the Germans. For eight days the gun crews were confined in their casements—nothing to eat but stale bread, only bad water, no separate place to relieve themselves, the ear-shattering noise, the vibrations, the concussions, the dust shaking loose—through it all they continued to fire. They gave up only when they ran out of ammunition.

■

Among other elite German outfits in Normandy, there were paratroopers. They were a different proposition altogether from the Polish or Russian troops. The 3rd *Fallschirmjäger* Division came into the battle in Normandy on June 10, arriving by truck after night drives from Brittany. It was a full-strength division, 15,976 men in its ranks, mostly young German volunteers. It was new to combat but it had been organized and trained by a veteran paratroop battalion from the Italian campaign. Training had been rigorous and emphasized initiative and improvisation. The equipment was outstanding.

Indeed, the *Fallschirmjäger* were perhaps the best-armed infantrymen in the world in 1944. The 3rd FJ had 930 light machine guns, eleven times as many as its chief opponent, the U.S. 29th Division. Rifle companies in the FJ had twenty MG 42s and 43 submachine guns; rifle companies in the 29th had two machine guns and nine BARs. At the squad level, the GIs had a single BAR; the German parachute squad had two MG 42s and three submachine guns. The Germans had three times as many mortars as the Americans, and heavier ones. So in any encounter between equal numbers of Americans and *Fallschirmjäger*, the Germans had from six to twenty times as much firepower.⁹

And these German soldiers were ready to fight. A battalion commander in the 29th remarked to an unbelieving counterpart from another regiment, "Those Germans are the best soldiers I ever saw. They're smart and they don't know what the word 'fear' means. They come in and they keep coming until they get their job done or you kill 'em."¹⁰

These were the men who had to be rooted out of the hedgerows. One by one. There were, on average, fourteen hedgerows to the kilometer in Normandy. The enervating, costly process of gearing up for an attack, making the attack, carrying the attack home, mopping up after the attack, took half a day or more. And at the end of the action, there was the next hedgerow, fifty to a hundred meters or so away. All through the Cotentin Peninsula, from June 7 on, GIs labored at the task. They heaved and pushed and punched and died doing it, for two hedgerows a day.

No terrain in the world was better suited for defensive action

with the weapons of the fourth decade of the twentieth century than the Norman hedgerows, and only the lava and coral, caves and tunnels of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were as favorable.

The Norman hedgerows dated back to Roman times. They were mounds of earth to keep cattle in and to mark boundaries. Typically there was only one entry into the small field enclosed by the hedgerows, which were irregular in length as well as height and set at odd angles. On the sunken roads the brush often met overhead, giving the GIs a feeling of being trapped in a leafy tunnel. Wherever they looked the view was blocked by walls of vegetation.

Undertaking an offensive in the hedgerows was risky, costly, time-consuming, fraught with frustration. It was like fighting in a maze. Platoons found themselves completely lost a few minutes after launching an attack. Squads got separated. Just as often, two platoons from the same company could occupy adjacent fields for hours before discovering each other's presence. The small fields limited deployment possibilities; seldom during the first week of battle did a unit as large as a company go into an attack intact.

Where the Americans got lost, the Germans were at home. The 352nd Division had been in Normandy for months, training for this battle. Further, the Germans were geniuses at utilizing the fortification possibilities of the hedgerows. In the early days of the battle, many GIs were killed or wounded because they dashed through the opening into a field, just the kind of aggressive tactics they had been taught, only to be cut down by pre-sited machine-gun fire or mortars (mortars caused three quarters of American casualties in Normandy).

American Army tactical manuals stressed the need for tank-infantry cooperation. But in Normandy, the tankers didn't want to get down on the sunken roads, because of insufficient room to traverse the turret and insufficient visibility to use the long-range firepower of the cannon and machine guns. But staying on the main roads proved impossible; the Germans held the high ground inland and had their 88mm cannon sited to provide long fields of fire along highways. So into the lanes the tanks perforce went. But there they were restricted; they wanted to get out into the fields. But they couldn't. When they appeared at the gap leading into a field, pre-sited mortar fire, plus panzerfausts (handheld antitank weapons), disabled them. Often, in fact, it caused them to "brew up," or start

burning—the tankers were discovering that their tanks had a distressing propensity for catching fire.

So tankers tried going over or through the embankments, but the hedgerows were proving to be almost impassable obstacles to the American M4 Sherman tank. Countless attempts were made to break through or climb over, but the Sherman wasn't powerful enough to break through the cementlike base, and when it climbed up the embankment, at the apex it exposed its unarmored belly to German panzerfausts. Further, coordination between tankers and infantry was almost impossible under battle conditions, as they had no easy or reliable way to communicate with one another.

Lt. Sidney Salomon of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, one of the D-Day heroes, found that out on June 7. He was leading the remnants of his battalion, which had come ashore on the right flank at Omaha and been involved in a day-long firefight on D-Day, westward along the coastal road that led to Pointe-du-Hoc. Three companies of the 2nd Rangers had taken the German emplacement there, and destroyed the coastal guns, but they were under severe attack and had taken severe casualties. Salomon was in a hurry to get to them.

But his column, marching in combat formation, began taking well-placed artillery shells. To his right, Salomon could see a Norman church, its steeple the only high point around. He was certain the Germans had an observer spotting for their artillery in that steeple. Behind Salomon a Sherman tank chugged up, the only American tank to be seen. It was buttoned up. Salomon wanted it to elevate its 75mm cannon and blast that steeple, but he couldn't get the crew's attention, not even when he knocked on the side of the tank with the butt of his carbine. "So I ultimately stood in the middle of the road directly in front of the tank, waving my arms, and pointing in the direction of the church. That produced results. After a couple of shots from the cannon and several bursts from the .50-caliber machine gun, the artillery spotter was no more."¹¹

Salomon's daring feat notwithstanding, it was obvious that the Army was going to have to work out a better system for tank-infantry communication than having junior officers jump up and down in front of American tanks. Until that was done, the tanks would play a minor supporting role to the infantry, following the GIs into the next field as the infantry overran it.

The U.S. First Army had not produced anything approaching a doctrine for offensive action in the hedgerows. It had expended



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