

COPY

DETACHMENT 'P'
162nd SIGNAL PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPANY
HQRS. 5th ENGINEER SPECIAL BRIGADE

APO 230
21 JUNE 1944

SUBJECT: Report of Unit activities on 6-7 June 1944. (D Day and D plus 1)

TO: Director, Army Pictorial Service, APO 887, U.S.Army.

1. Attached herewith is a report which covers this unit's activities on the day of the invasion of France and the day following. Also enclosed is a photograph of the men of our unit.

2. It would be greatly appreciated that your office prepare a letter of commendation for this entire unit in regards our photographs, which we understand have been used by newsreels and newspapers throughout the world. A letter of this sort would serve two functions. First it would greatly boost the morale of our men. And secondly it would be used in the recommendation of this unit for an award that I intend to submit to the 5th Engineer Special Brigade. This award would cover the meritorious way they went about shooting pictures under machine gun and shell fire during the first phases of the assault.

3. You will undoubtedly be very happy to know that Headquarters of the 5th Engineer Special Brigade have been very appreciative of the way we have covered their operations in all its various phases.

Inc. Report (1)
Photograph (1)

S/gd GEORGE A STECK.
1st Lt. Sig. Corp.
Commanding

Engineer Special

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APO 230.U.S.ARMY
21 June 1944

SUBJECT: Report of Unit Activities on 6,7 June.(D Day, D+1.)

TO:

The invasion started for our unit at about 3 A.M., "D" Day morning, 6th June 1944, when we were all awakened for the hurried sandwich and cup of black coffee that was our breakfast. A quick visit to the upper deck showed us that our air force was already at work softening up the beachhead. For those of us who were through the London blitzes, the pattern was very evident. First, the flares by the pathfinders, and then the bombing run. The deck crews getting their LCVP's ready, added to the confusion of the moment. And this is when the first picture was made. A slow exposure which hoped to catch the ever widening circle of fire that our air corps was beginning to fashion.

The first wave of assault troops climbed down the rope ladders into the blackness of the waters below. The ship's commander kept calling out the number of the boat teams just as he had done many times before on the countless maneuvers. Only this time his voice had that extra tinge which meant the real thing. When the first assault team was loaded into their boats, the order that started the invasion came through. "Cast off, coxwains. And good luck to you, men of the First Division".

The night was still blacker than ink, and the flashbulbs we had held in case of emergency could serve no function. The smallest light would have given our position away. Our APA-2, USS HENRICO, was well within the line of fire of any of the 88's on shore. So it was a matter of waiting for dawn to break through with enough light for us to start shooting pictures. We paced the ship from one end to the other, trying to figure out in advance possible camera angles, and probable pictures that would arise. For this camera team, it was the first invasion. Needless to say, there were many things we hadn't anticipated.

Our team was slated to go in on the second assault wave. And so we had to wait for those LCVP's to come back, before we could go in and make our bid for the shore. The minutes seemed like hours. But the light came, and with that the activity. Men of the 5th Engineers Special Brigade, commanded by Colonel Doswell Gullatt, were waiting to go in and get that beach set for the multitude of fighting men who were to follow. And so we started to photograph. Pictures of men waiting to go into battle. Men getting their equipment ready, saying the last farewell to friends who were getting ready for their baptism of fire.

And then the war came home to us. The wounded started returning. First five men who had been rescued out of the freezing channel after five hours of submersion. They were the crew of a D-Day tank which had been sunk going in. And then the wounded off the shores of France. Men who had been caught by machine gun fire just as they left their landing craft.

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The boat crews tied them down to planks so that they could be raised to the level of the deck. The keynote was speed, and time couldn't be taken out for fancy methods. These men had to be taken to the medics and quick. It was this that we photographed then. And then as it always is with the American Army, the comradeship of the boys began to show. Wounded fighters helping each other. One man with an arm shot through, wrapped the other around a man shot through the side, in order to support him along the deck. And so it went. First the wounded out of the boats, and then a hurried command for our boat teams to enter these boats and take off.

We finished photographing the wounded, and made shots of our men getting into the boats. Our team was assigned to an LCT which had already delivered its firstload to shore, and had returned to give our APA-2, USS HENRICO, a hand in unloading its human cargo. With camera in hand, we climbed down the rope ladder into the LCT which was pitching like mad in a very rough sea, and then started the second phase of the invasion. The trip going in .

Our landing time was H plus 210 minutes. But we were scheduled for the toughest beach of them all, and we didn't get into shore until that afternoon. The Germans were still on the beach, and we were having a tough time getting them off.

The men on the LCT were very lighthearted and one would think that it was but another maneuver. Apparently, priceless energy wasn't going to be wasted in premature worrying about the job ahead. So we photographed the men on this little LCP. Laughing joking, and generally quite happy, they all understood that the road home lay through Berlin.

We cruised around in front of the beach waiting for the orders to go on in. There wasn't a man who didn't want to be in there giving a hand. Finally the call came through, and we went in. Here it was a job for the skipper, whom we had photographed before at the little bridge of his ship. He hadn't been asleep for what seemed like ages. The lines around his eyes testified to that. He'd landed D-Day tanks long before H Hour, and had been at the bridge ever since. The sea was full of mines, and it took all the niceties of his trade to guide us in safely.

We hit the land, and we started photographing like mad.. 88's would make large plumes of water shoot up into the air around us. We photographed the boys getting off the boats, and running on to the land. We made pictures of the medics working ceaselessly in their job of saving lives. We photographed the first captured Nazi prisoners. Two apes who threw the lie of superman back into Hitler's teeth.

The Nazi secret weapon showed itself when a medic whom we were photographing was hit by a bullet. First the Nazi's took their spite out on women and children in occupied countries. Now they were practicing their superman tactics by shooting at unarmed medics. We photographed our dead, many whom were caught before they had a chance to get out of the water. And then we decided to go to the edge of the fighting zone. For at that time the Nazi's had only been thrown back a 100 yards from the water's edge.

We joined our troops in their hastily dug fox holes, and made pictures of them as they went about their job of killing Nazi's. Every once in a while patrols of them would come back with a couple of Nazi prisoners. We heard that some Germans had killed their officers because they wouldn't allow them to surrender. And so we worked, trusting to providence to keep the bullets away from our hides, since you can't make pictures with your head buried in a foxhole. We worked ceaselessly, photographing all the various activities going on about us. The engineers trying to take out the mines, the Navy assault teams who were helping with the wounded as well as with their own work.

Night started to fall, and we didn't have time to dig foxholes since it was more important that we write our captions. And there in a small ravine, we took out our notebooks and tried to give our caption men back in London, some semblance of an idea of what our pictures tried to show. We hurriedly wrapped our film and then started on our way to find a boat which would take it back to England for us. It had to get back to where it could do some good. We wandered on until we found the chief of an LCP who promised to get it back to London for us immediately. With that load off our minds, we returned to the slit trench for a few hours of rest. Work for us must start again as soon as the dawn broke through. Unfortunately the German's had different ideas, and their planes broke through the stillness of the night with the raucous noise of their bombs.

Life is stranger than fiction, and in spite of the bombs and the strafing German planes we managed to catch a few hours of sleep. When we awoke we saw the first threads of the giant cocoon that was the beachhead, take shape. The men who were landed in the nightmare of D Day went to their appointed places. Long hours spent in the briefing tent had given every man a job.

We put on our packs and equipment and started off on a tour of the beach. We wanted our cameras to capture the overall picture of the morning that followed D Day. It wasn't a pretty picture. War never is. There were many dead. And in spite of the heroic work of our aid men and the Medical Corps, there were still wounded on the beach who were waiting to be evacuated. But in spite of all the horror and desolation, we could see signs of activity that was beginning to spell the end of Fascism. LCT's were being unloaded. Roads were being built. Bulldozers, which often seem to be the most awkward vehicles in the whole world, acted the jack of all trades. The soft grayel and sand seemed to be our worst enemy. Several layers of beach track had to be set before any headway could be made by the many trucks waiting to unload. And all this we photographed. Our heroic dead, the wounded who had been alone on the beach all through the night, the soldier workers who struggled waist deep in water in order to get the supplies through to the men at the front. And among all this the occasional plop of an 88, landing without rhyme or reason anywhere along the beach.

It was about 1000 hours that morning, that an act of heroism was performed that we shall always remember. A shell had hit an LCV and she was left sinking about 200 yards out at sea. Those on deck who had managed to survive the shell, held on for dear life to the hull of the boat which was all that was left afloat. A raging sea pounded the hell out of them, and it was quite evident that they would all go ^{under}/unless some quick help from shore was forthcoming. It was a cold blustering day. More like January than June. Two Lieutenants of the 348th Engineer Combat Bn. wandered down the beach and saw the goings on. In a minute they were both stripped nude. And disregarding the freezing weather, and the still cold water, they got a rope, had some men hold one end on the shore, and swam the other end out to the men on the hull. The life line was a swell idea, except for one thing. The men on the hull were too cold and exhausted to be able to pull themselves in. Enjoining them to hold on but a bit longer, the two Lieutenants swam back to shore. Noticing a big black rubber life raft a little way down the shore, they had two men fetch it. They tossed it into the water, and swam it down to the sinking hull. All this among waves which towered 5 feet high. On the shore we couldn't understand how they had the energy to do it again. But that's the wonder that is man. Towing the raft, they brought it out to the hull, and loaded the men into it. It was quite a job. The men on the hull nowhere near had enough energy to help themselves. It was a job of treading water and lifting 170 pounds of water soaked man into a bobbing weaving life raft.

How they did it will always remain a mystery to those who witnessed it. And I'm sure that everyone's faith in human nature was reaffirmed forever by this heroic deed.

We filmed the whole action both in stills and movies. Close-up's, long shots, anything which would convey the feeling of what was going on. In order to make sure that we got everything, the two still men worked as a team. There was only one movie man along since the other was covering another part of the beach-head's activities. But we photographed like mad. The sequence wasn't ended when the boat returned to shore. First aid had to be given to the water logged men, who were more dead than alive.

And still the two lieutenants wouldn't relent. Helping those who were waiting on shore, they delivered first aid. With measured strokes, they ground all the salt water out of the lungs of these half drowned men. In the meanwhile stretchers were brought along. And it was only when the men were off to the first aid station, that they started to dry out and put on some fresh clothing. The ages of these officers? Yes, we asked them that too for our captions; 22 and 23. How can Hitler win against men such as these! The myth of aryan supremacy is based on the slogan of each for himself and devil take the hindmost. It is cooperation such as this that will win the war.

Of course the story has an ending. At least it did for us. We shared the enthusiasm of those on the beach who watched the men being saved from the surging sea. But what about our pictures.

Our job was to convey what we had witnessed to the millions upon millions of people back home whose sons were taking part in this war. We had failed our job as soldiers unless we had accomplished this task 100%. In long moments with ourselves we sweated it out. Yesterday word came through our headquarters in London (ARMY PICTORIAL SERVICE) that our pictures were fine and were used by newsreels and newspapers throughout the world. The moments of joy that followed that news was all the reward we wanted for our job.

But life didn't stop for us with that episode, and so we continued along the beach. A couple of shells landed close enough to all but cross the t's of our names on our gravestones. But a miss is as good as a mile. We stopped for a quick lunch of K rations, and I'm afraid we disregarded the manufacturer's instructions of eating the food slowly. We had too much work to do.

By this time the beach had been cleared of small arms fire except for snipers. So we were reasonably surprised when we heard some rifle shots coming from a little hill directly behind us. This was no time to jump into a foxhole. With all the Yanks around us, this was the time for the Jerry to start worrying. When we got to the top of the hill we quickly got the story.

It seemed a young Signal Corps captain saw something suspicious going on in one of the pillboxes which our infantry had bypassed. He called to a squad of men, and they went in to investigate. Paving their way, off course, with liberal doses of hand grenades. It seems that about 18 Germans were hiding out in several pill boxes which were so cleverly hidden away that our forces hadn't stumbled on them as yet.

Working in teams of three men, with grenades, carbines, and M1's, the men rounded up these 18, and quickly dispatched them to a Prisoner of War Camp. Those who resisted were quickly dispatched to the hell that is especially reserved for good Nazi's who fight to the end.

Since we were there from the very beginning we were able to get a complete sequence. The boys rounding up the German's. The small circle of captured prisoners getting ever larger. The swell relationship between the men and the Captain, as they chided him about the Leuger he eventually wound up with. For here, in miniature, was a little war. It even resembled the wild western movies we've grown accustomed to. Especially in regards the ending. The good guys won.

It was just about then that the 88's which were hitting the beach were all silenced. And when they quieted down, another phase of our work ended. For as we were attached to the 5th Engineers Special Brigade, the combat phase of our mission was over. Now we were to record the changing of this plain strip of sand, into a tremendous port where an ever increasing flow of supplies could reach our fighting forces.

Roads had to be built, beach track to be layed, mines had to be cleared from the sand. The multitude of beach obstacles that the Nazi's had lined their shore with, all had to be removed, so that our incoming boats would face no danger. It seemed that the Nazi's had planted every square inch of ground, from the sand dunes to the furthest hill with all types of mines. All these had to be removed. The many boats had to be unloaded, communications had to be set-up.

And that was what we photographed then. Blood and guts make fine pictures and excellent stories. But here is the backbreaking work, the slow and tedious jobs, which consolidated the victories of our assault troops.

And so it goes on. Square mile after square mile is captured by our troops. And Hitler reads the handwriting on the wall. If our pictures have given some indication of the heroism of our fighting forces, if they give the public some semblance of an idea of the sacrifice, the suffering, the unending toil that is going into our war effort, then we have not been here in vain. Then we are fulfilling the function of the photographer in war time. We mirror the war for those who are not here to see.