



My Normandy Invasion

Memoirs of SSgt. Rocko Gedaro, Company C, 357th Infantry, 90th Division.

Today it is November 7, 2002 and it is 3:00am and I can't sleep so I am writing about "My Normandy Invasion."

On June 08, I was aboard a troop ship anchored off the coast of Normandy, France. We were waiting to disembark into landing crafts.

At about 1200, we were ordered to start climbing down the rope ladders into to landing crafts. We were crowded together and soon the boat headed toward the beach.

The boat hit a submerged obstacle and they lowered the front ramp and told us to jump off the sides of the ramp because it could not be lowered any further.

My buddy, a tall Texan, jumped in front of me and then I jumped. The water was a little over my head and my buddy grabbed me and pulled me toward shore.

I am 5'4" tall and he was over 6" tall. If he hadn't pulled me toward shore, I would have drowned for sure, because I had an 80-pound pack on my back, an ammunition belt full of bullets, canteen, and bayonet, two bandoleers strips full of clips and two grenades along with a rifle and a steel helmet.

I was really weighed down. Thanks to my buddy, I made it to shore.

As I neared the beach I had to go around dead bloated American soldiers, and on the beach was dead bloated horses and cows. The stench was sickening, as was the sight of dead soldiers.

From there on, I had to crawl, run zig-zag, crawl and run zig-zag until I reached the sand dune. All the while, a German machine gun was raking the beach with bullets.

At the sand dune, I was next to a captain and we looked over the sand dune and could see coiled barbed wire and through the wire we could see the German pillbox that was firing at the soldiers arriving at the beach.

The captain called for a "bangalore torpedo," (this is a long hollow tube filled with explosives). It soon reached the captain and he pushed it through the opening in the barbed wire and blew a large hole in the wire.

He told me to crawl through and the rest of the men followed us into a gully and we crawled up the gully until we were aside of the pillbox.



The captain then called for a "satchel charge." (a satchel full of explosives) and that soon arrived and he told me to take off my back pack and take the satchel charge and run to the front of the pillbox and set the charge and run back as fast as I could. I ran as fast as I could both ways.

The charge went off and blew a hole in the wall and the men captured or killed the stunned German soldiers inside the pillbox.

This pillbox would no longer machine gun our troops still coming ashore.

A pillbox has a long slit in the front of it and this is where the Germans fire out the front to anything that is in front of them. They have no vision out of the sides of the pillbox.

We advanced through the town of Sainte Mere–Eglise that was freed by the 101 Airborne. Here we saw a man in a parachute. His parachute was caught on a barn with him just hanging there. We yelled to him that we were Americans. There was no movement from him. We assumed that he was dead. The Captain ordered two men to get up there and cut him down.

We continued on to the hedgerows where we met the German soldiers and our fighting begun.

My stories sound as though all an infantry man does is kill the enemy.

That is his job.

Remember, an infantry man sees who he's shooting at before he squeezes the trigger on his rifle.

An artillery man fires his big guns and hopes he will kill the enemy, the same as a sailor firing from a ship, or a bombardier, dropping bombs. None of them see the enemy - they hope they hit the enemy.

An infantry man arrives at a basic training center and the last thing he is told after orientation is, "Kill the enemy or he will kill you." Famous words from our platoon Sergeant Johnson.

You hear this every day of the 16 weeks of training, by the time your training is over, this is instilled in you, so deep, you will never forget it.

Sergeant Johnson would remind you, "If you don't kill him(the enemy), you're dead."