

ASSAULT ON POINTE DU HOE BATTERY

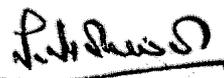
1. The Battery dominated the OMAHA and UTAH beaches and shipping. It was essential, therefore, that the guns be destroyed at the earliest possible moment.
2. The outline plan at the time that I started to work on the project was to land the Rangers on OMAHA beach in the second wave, pass them through the forward troop and then for them to advance along the coast line for 4-5 miles and attack the Battery from the landward (South-East) side. This plan was identical with the plan used to attack the POINTE MATIFOU battery at ALGIERS. There it was demonstrated that even against light opposition it is impossible to reach and reduce the Battery quickly enough to prevent it engaging our shipping to considerable effect. The plan was, therefore, partially abandoned and a landing was sought nearer the objective. That this was right was demonstrated by the fact that neither the balance of the Ranger Group nor the assault Battallions landed at OMAHA, in spite of most violent exertions, covered the 4-5 miles and reached POINTE DU HOE before the evening of D+2. During which time if the damage done at MATIFOU in a few hours is any criteria much of our shipping would have been sunk.
3. The search for a nearer landing was complicated by the topography of the coast which, Westward of OMAHA to POINTE DU HOE and on to GRAND CAMP, consists of 90 - 100 ft high cliffs.
4. The second plan consisted of a landing at GRAND CAMP, some two miles to the East of the Battery, and then attacking the Battery from the East. Here, however, there was a large artificial inundation which restricted the line of advance and forced the attack over open country up hill on ground dominated by prepared positions on commanding ground. A careful study of photographs convinced everyone that not only had the enemy foreseen this attack, but that he had made very elaborate preparations to meet it, and had prepared a "killing ground". The object of the inundation being solely to canalise the attackers' advance over this prepared ground. This plan was abandoned. Inspection of the ground and defences later showed that the enemy had, in fact, made the most careful preparations on the above lines and many hitherto unsuspected positions commanding the line of approach were discovered.
5. The right and left attacks having been ruled out, if the battery was to be quickly silenced, there remained only the centre which, as already mentioned, consisted of high vertical cliffs. A plan was produced to scale the cliffs to the East and West of the battery at selected places between the strong points which were sited at regular intervals along the cliff top, and then attack the battery from the East and West by means of a pincer movement.

This plan offered every prospect of success, if the assault could scale the cliffs under fire. However, when they had done so - no easy task - the defences of the battery still had to be reduced, and these in themselves were formidable.
6. A study of these defences showed that they all faced inland and that the enemy were relying for defence of the battery to seaward on the sheer cliffs. If the assault force had to climb the cliffs under fire it was obviously better to do so and get right into the objective without having to overcome any additional obstacles, rather than climb the cliffs and then have to deal with the prepared defences. An additional inducement was the vital importance of obtaining a quick decision, coupled with the economy of supporting fire which resulted from combining the supporting fire for the attack with the neutralising fire necessary to keep the battery silent during the approach. The final deciding factor was that it was a very bold conception and it is an old dictum that "bold conception and cautious execution leads to quick and favourable decisions". This plan was adopted but unfortunately they hedged by providing for part of the Ranger Group to land at OMAHA and carry out the original plan if the assault of the Battery had not succeeded by H+30. It was, however, the original plan that failed and this "insurance" policy only resulted in the success of this operation not being fully exploited for lack of the necessary follow-up, since the assault did not land until after H+30.

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7. The plan of attack having been decided and the route of approach having been chosen, there only remained the technical problem of how to waft two hundred or more men up a vertical cliff. When that problem had been solved a short eight minute film explaining how it was to be done was made, and is included as part of this report.
8. The most prominent event in the execution was that the Rangers were put ashore about 70 minutes instead of 3 minutes after the bombardment ceased. At the time I considered that this alone was enough to render the operation abortive. However, so great was the tactical surprise and such the verve and dash of the troops that it made no difference, the first men being up in about 3 - 4 minutes and the guns captured and destroyed in thirty minutes.
9. The great accuracy of the preliminary bombardment, both by air and sea - the very considerable devastation and the large craters so created were very impressive, but it was of great interest that in spite of this accurate and intensive concentration of heavy bombs and shells, only one-third of the guns were badly damaged, one-sixth slightly damaged, while half were in perfect order which strikingly confirms the old doctrine that vital objectives must be assaulted if they are to be destroyed with certainty.
10. Throughout the 3 days holding battle that followed the destruction of the guns the supporting fire given by the destroyers was by its weight and extreme accuracy often the deciding factor it is rather remarkable that much of this fire was controlled from a forward O.P. by Aldous lamp direct to the ship; the wireless sets having become casualties.
11. When the battle was prolonged food and water, both of which we were in need of, were landed by the destroyers in their ships' boats.
12. The lack of landing craft delayed the evacuation of wounded and the value of unit M.Os having blood Plasma and the necessary facilities for blood transfusion was apparent and should never be neglected where there is any likelihood of delayed evacuation.
13. The unseaworthy qualities of the L.C.A. were abnormally apparent in the short lop that there was during the run in, two out of twelve sank, due to stress of weather, the others were only kept afloat by working all the pumps and every available man bailing with his helmet. Having been for long voyages in the Channel and up the Africa coast in bad weather aboard these craft, without experiencing similar circumstances, I can only suppose that on this occasion the length of the seas was peculiarly unsuited to L.C.A. But it would appear desirable, in view of the above, to consider before employing these craft in the falsely named Pacific.
14. In conclusion I feel that it should be stressed that an operation of this sort against a strongly defended coast is only suitable for bold and skillful troops who have had long and careful preparation. Their leaders must combine a courageous spirit in the conception of the plan, with the ability to take infinite pains over minor details of the execution.

12th July 1944


Lt. Colonel.