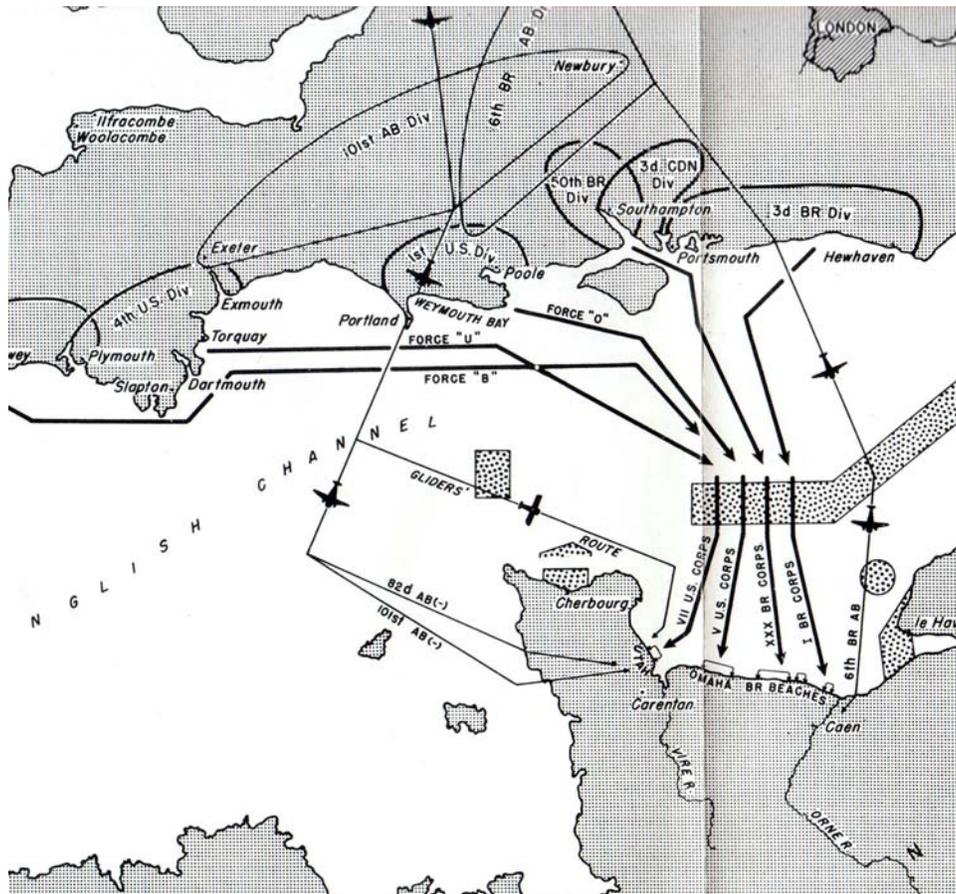


# 4th Infantry Division D-Day Actions

by  
Ceilia M. Stratton, Director/Curator  
4th Infantry Division Museum



## Key Personnel:

VII Corps Commander: MG J. Lawton Collins

4th Infantry Division CG: MG Raymond O. Barton

4th Infantry Division Assistant Div Commander: BG Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.

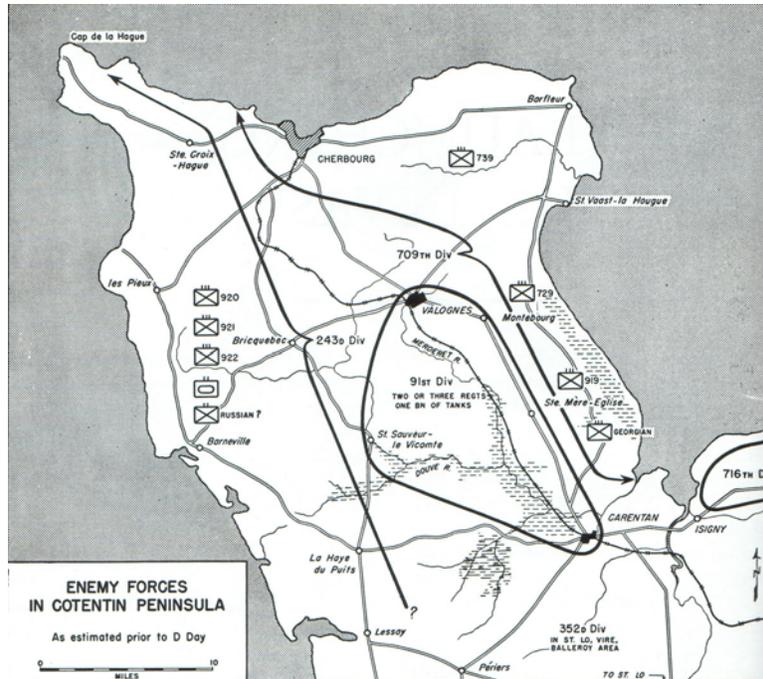
8th Infantry Regimental Combat Team: COL James A Van Fleet

12 Infantry Regimental Combat Team: COL Russell P. Reeder  
LTC James S. Lockett (11 Jun)

22 Infantry Regimental Combat Team: COL Hervey A. Tribolet

**Division Organization:**

8th Infantry Regiment  
12th Infantry Regiment  
22nd Infantry Regiment  
HHB Division Artillery  
    20th FA Bn (155mm)  
    29th FA Bn (105mm)  
    42nd FA Bn (105mm)  
    44th FA Bn (105mm)  
4th Eng Combat Bn  
4th Med Bn  
4th Counter Intelligence Corps Det  
4th Reconnaissance Troop (M)  
704th Ordnance Light Maintenance Co  
4th Quartermaster Co  
4th Signal Co  
HQ, Special Troops  
HHC, 4th Inf Div  
Military Police Platoon  
Attached units:  
    70th Tank Bn  
    377 AAA Auto Weapons Bn (attached 14 Jun 44)  
    1106th Eng Group (49th Eng Bn, 237 Eng Bn, Co B, 299th Eng Bn, 238th  
Eng Bn, 582nd Dump Truck Co, 991st Eng Treadway Bridge Co, 612th Eng Lt  
Equip Co, 501st Lt Pontoon Co)  
    359th Combat Team  
    746th Tank Bn  
    65th Armored FA Bn  
    87th Chem Bn  
    Btry B, 980th FA (155mm)  
    Btry A, 13th FA Observation Bn  
    899th Tank Dest Bn  
    801st Tank Dest Bn (attached 14 Jun 44)  
    9 Naval Shore Fire Control Parties  
    2 Air Support Parties<sup>1</sup>



## VII Corps Plan & Objectives:

Critical areas identified by the planners of Operation NEPTUNE (later designation for Operation OVERLORD) in the Cotentin Peninsula were (1) the area around the town of Carentan, (2) the dry ground that ran along the western side of the peninsula and (3) the shallow marshes that ran along the eastern side of the peninsula. Gaining control of all three areas was considered essential for the success of the landing. To accomplish the objectives, VII Corps plans called for airborne landings by the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions into critical areas in the interior of the peninsula (101st near St. Mere-Eglise and 82nd near St Souveur le Vicomte) and an amphibious assault by the 4th Infantry Division on the eastern side of the peninsula. With this three division plan, VII Corps hoped to effectively cut the Cotentin Peninsula in half so the Corps elements could then march on the port of Cherbourg. <sup>ii</sup>

Access from the beach to the interior involved crossing the flooded area just west of the beach along causeways designated Exits 1-4 on the map. The northern exits were to be secured by the 101st Airborne's 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, the southern exits by the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Because these units were badly scattered during their night drops, neither was able to achieve their objectives prior to the landings of the 4th Infantry Division. <sup>iii</sup>

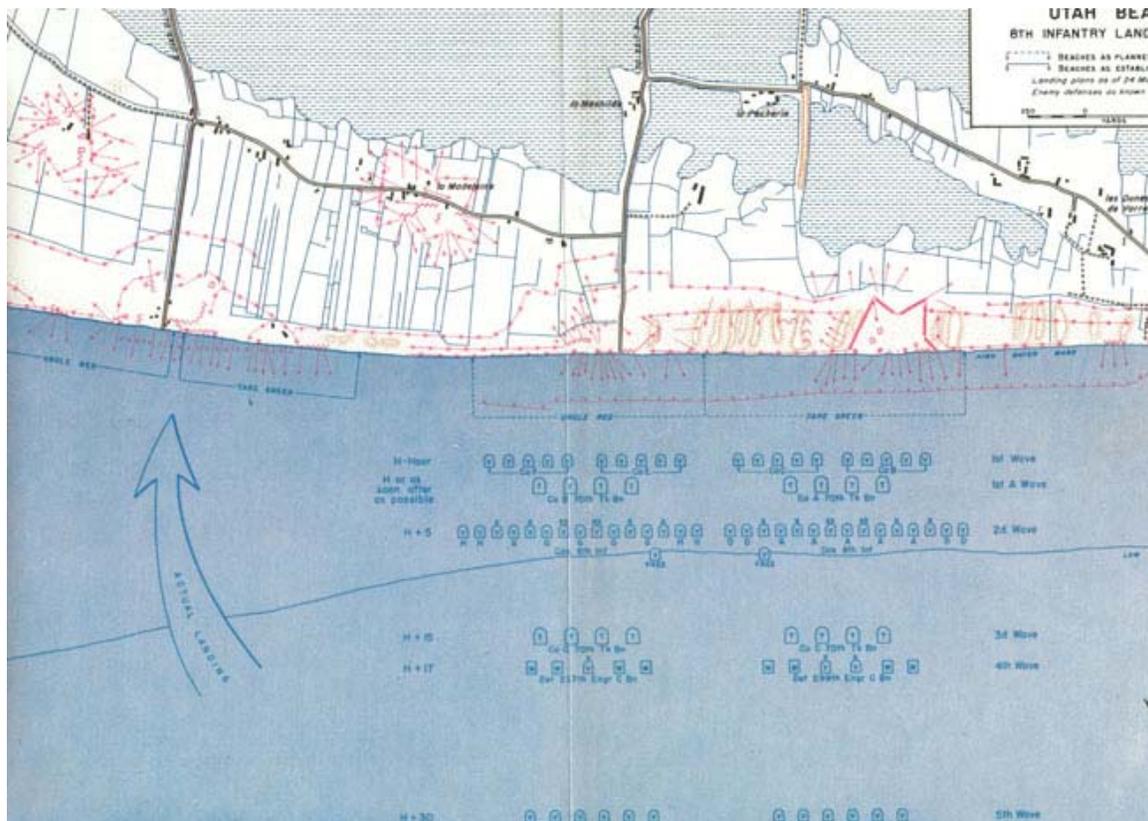
## 4th Infantry Division Mission:

The mission of the 4th Infantry Division in the invasion of the continent was to land at Beaches Tare(Green) and Uncle(Red) on Utah Beach at 060630 June 1944 and move inland to link up with units of the 82nd Airborne and 101 Airborne Divisions to

secure key terrain features. Then, in conjunction with the follow-on divisions (90th Infantry, 9th Infantry, and 79th Infantry) to seize the port of Cherbourg.<sup>iv</sup>

## Task Force U:

Task Force U, which contained all of the assault and support elements of the 4th Infantry Division, had originally departed ports in England on 3 June 1944. A 24-hour delay had caused them to return to port and launch once again on the 5th. Task Force U contained 865 vessels in 12 separate convoys. By 0229 on 6 Jun the troopships *Barnet* and *Bayfield* (holding troops for Red Beach) and the *Dickman* and *Empire* (holding troops for Green Beach) were in place. H Hour was set for 0630.<sup>v</sup>



The map above shows the plan that the 8th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (CT8) had developed for the initial landings. Companies E & F were to land on Red Beach while companies B & C were to land on Green. Each of the two companies had a company of the 70th Tank Bn. following closely behind. The map shows the intended units and designated waves for each succession of landings.

The first troops ashore were Companies E and F, 8th Inf. They hit the beaches at H-Hour 0630. Companies B and C were about 15 minutes late landing at approx 0645. The actual landing was about 1500 yards south of the point planned. A change was made at the last minute because the fire was so heavy on the planned landing beaches. The

assault elements had no notice of this change and for a few minutes after landing were confused. This included officers and men. Extremely detailed plans had been made prescribing the initial objectives of each assault section and all officers had studied the maps carefully for identifiable landmarks. The most obvious landmark was the road. The planned beaches were approximately astride road T7. The actual landing was approximately astride U5. All units, on first landing, supposed the road that they saw was T7 and started trying to place the German strong points in relation to it. When they could not find the fortified areas where they were supposed to be, they began looking for landmarks. The old windmill was very useful--fortunately it was still standing. Several of the officers knowing that this windmill should be on their left were able to see it far away on the right and thus were able to orient themselves.

Included among the first men landing on Utah Beach was the Assistant Division Commander, BG Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. It was here that he made his most famous quote of the war. Upon being informed that the landing was 1500 yards south of the original objective, he said "Gentlemen, our war starts here!" According to eyewitness accounts he also said "Go inland any way you can, we'll worry about those bastards another day!" He then personally led the way to the seawall.

Another little know fact is that in order to protect the secrecy of radio traffic, the 4th Infantry Division used Comanche code talkers for messages between shore parties and personnel still on the ships. The Comanche's had been recruited early in 1942 and were part of the 4th Signal Company.



Due to the change in landing position, the original detailed plans were worthless and all the assault elements had to attack positions nearest to them. These impromptu plans worked with complete success and little confusion.<sup>vi</sup>

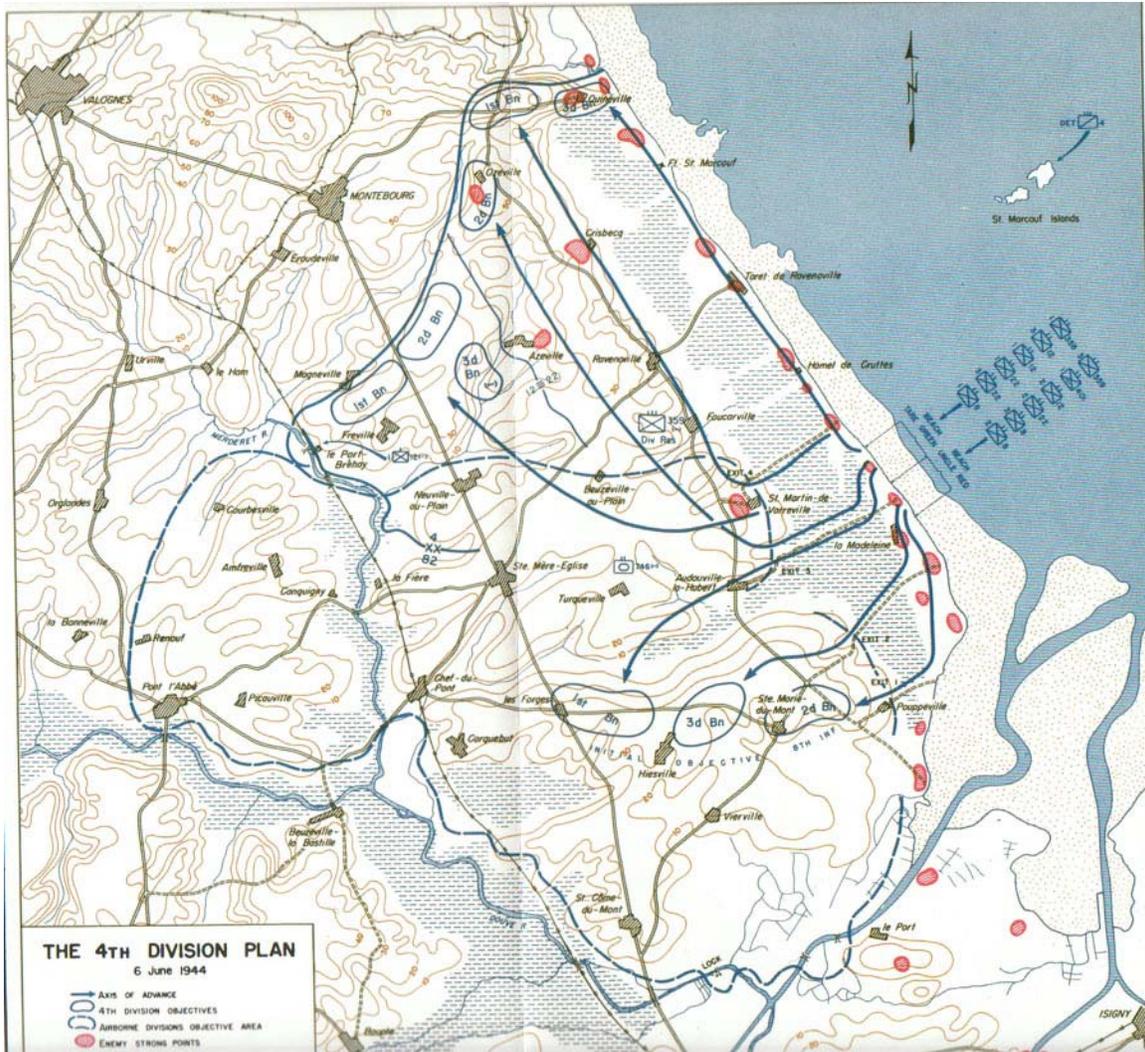


*"The waves were about ten feet high and the LCVPs were bouncing up and down. Some men got hurt getting into the assault boats. We got loaded and shoved off, joining many assault boats. We circled for about one hour and then in a line we headed for the beach, which was about 12 miles away. At about 0545 we passed the rocket boats that were firing thousands of rockets on the beach that burst like artillery. Just then, the B-26 bombers bombed where we were heading. . . Then the sailor on the assault boat dropped the ramp and we hit the water which was about waist deep, and headed for shore. Artillery and small arms fire were all about the beach. My first scout, Douglas Mason from Michigan, was the first to reach the sand dunes and I ran and dropped down beside him to look to see which way to go. He was immediately killed with a hit to the head by a sniper's bullet. We tried to move to where we thought the causeway was but got pinned down by machine gun fire. We finally got moving and had to cross a minefield. I lost*

*two or three men. My medic got his foot blown off." Harry Bailey, E Company, 2-8th Infantry<sup>vii</sup>*



Following closely behind the 8th Infantry Regiment was a task force of engineers. One of their missions was to clear 50-yard openings in the obstacles on each beach. Naval demolition teams were to clear any underwater obstacles. Each army engineer carried 60 pounds of explosive as they came ashore. Because the obstacles were not as numerous as expected, the engineers were able to clear the beaches of all obstacles by noon. Another mission was to open breaches in the seawall and clear paths inland through the sand dunes.



Meanwhile the 8th continued with its original objectives of clearing enemy opposition on the beach. 1-8 then moved north and went inland at Exit 3, while 2-8 moved south and inland through Exit 1. At 0745 additional waves of infantry landed--3-22 Infantry originally attached to the 8th Infantry came ashore on Green Beach and moved north along the beach to reduce enemy strong-points. 3-8 Infantry landed at the same time on Red Beach and moved inland across Exit 2. At 1000 two more battalions landed--1-22 on Green Beach and 2-22 on Red Beach. Since there was now considerable congestion at the exit points, some of the 22nd Infantry units had to wade the two miles through the inundated areas. 12th Infantry Regimental units began landing shortly after 1200 and were also forced to wade the inundated areas.



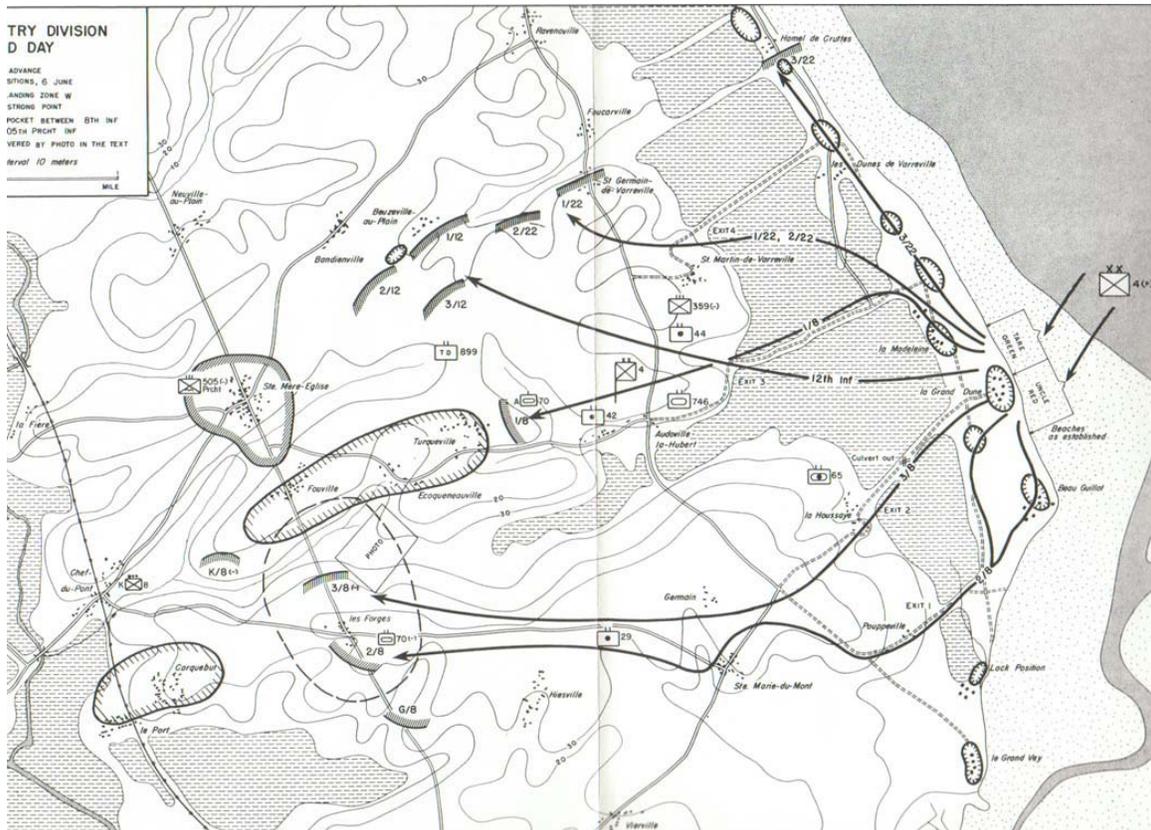
*22nd Infantry soldiers wade through the inundated areas, 6 June 1944.*

The inundated areas were generally from ankle to waist deep although there were deeper holes and men frequently dropped into water over their heads.

The 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry moved west on Exit 3 and reached the vicinity of Turqueville by evening. 3-8 Inf moved west beyond Exit 2 until it was in a position just north of Ste. Marie-du-Mont where they encountered German opposition. Over 150 Germans were overcome during a short fire fight and the battalion moved to an area north of les Forges confronting the high ground south of Ste. Mere-Eglise. The 2-8th Inf moved straight south towards Pouppeville, then west to the south edge of les Forges. The 8th Infantry had reached all of its D-Day objectives .

The 12th Infantry Regiment ran into strong German resistance from the 502d Parachute Infantry south of Beuzeville-au-Plain and remained at that location through the night of the 6th. The 1st and 2nd battalions of the 22nd Infantry were forced to wade the inundated areas and lost valuable time reaching their objectives. They dug in for the night near St. Germain -de-Varreville. The 3rd of the 22nd moved north past Exit 4 and reached the southern edge of Hamel de Cruttes by nightfall.

So ended the first day for the 4th Infantry Division in combat in World War II. They had been successfully completed one of the most demanding and dangerous maneuvers-an amphibious landing in hostile terrain. The entire division was ashore within fifteen hours of the first units landing. Casualties had been relatively light especially when compared with the landings taking place on other Allied beaches. The 4th Infantry Division, however, was to find itself tested repeatedly throughout the next year as they fought and many times, led, some of the most important campaigns to take place within the European Theater of Operations.



<sup>i</sup> After Action Report, 4th Infantry Division, 22 July 1944, pp. 2-3.

<sup>ii</sup> Utah Beach to Cherbourg, Historical Division, Dept of the Army, 1984

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>iv</sup> After Action Report, 4th Infantry Division, 22 July 1944, p. 2.

<sup>v</sup> Utah Beach to Cherbourg, Historical Division, Dept of the Army, 1984

<sup>vi</sup> Combat Interviews, LT William T. Taylor, Lane Control Officer, 4th Infantry Division, 1944.

<sup>vii</sup> Babcock, Robert, War Stories, 2001, Saint John's Press, Baton Rouge, LA, pp 44-45.