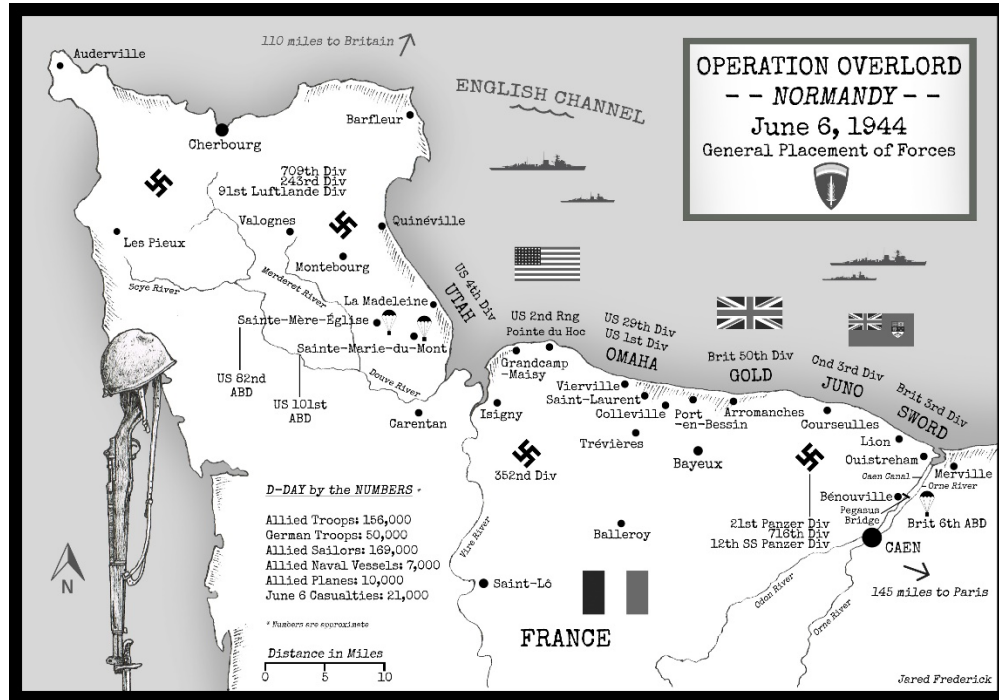


# "The Great Crusade": Ike and the Men of D-Day

## Activity F: Soldier Background Guide

Using the information below, find your soldier's name and unit, and read the short description about their role on D-Day.



### *146<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion, Omaha Beach*

Private Howard Nutt

Private First Class Alfred Augustine

Landing at H-Hour +3, men of the Special Engineer Task Forces arrived at Omaha Beach. This timing allowed them to arrive after the first wave, which would provide covering fire, and gave them time to clear obstacles prior to the second wave. These teams, comprised of both Army as well as Navy personnel, attempted to clear obstacles that would impede the coming waves of assault troops. Crossing the channel on the *Princess Maude*, a pre-war British cruise ship, the engineers prepared for their mission. Strwn across the beach were wooden posts with Teller mines attached, rows of barbed wire, and steel hedgehogs designed to tear boats open. Two soldiers in the 146<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion were PFC Alfred Augustine and Pvt Howard Nutt, both Pennsylvanians. At some point during the fighting, they were killed as they tried to clear paths so the troops of the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions could succeed.

*1st Infantry Division, Omaha Beach*

Tec/5 William Copeland

Private First Class Frank Kvasnosky

Private First Class Forrest Rice

Private Elmer Warman

The 1st Infantry Division was slated to assault the eastern portions of Omaha Beach. Unlike the 29th Division, many men of the 1st Division had seen combat before. The division had landed in North Africa in November 1942 and fought eastward, forcing German units into submission. Additionally, they had taken part in the successful amphibious assault of Sicily in July 1943. Stumbling ashore as early as 6:30am, Pennsylvanians in the 1st Division did their best to crack open Hitler's "Fortress Europe." 27-year-old Tec/5 William Copeland served in the cannon company of the 18th Infantry Regiment, manning 105mm artillery. His enlistment prior to Pearl Harbor likely means that he was a veteran of previous campaigns. PFC Forrest Rice of Reading, PA had been with the division since the Sicily invasion, and Pvt Elmer Warman, Jr. of Wilkes-Barre was also a veteran. PFC Frank Kvasnosky served in the Division's Military Police unit, and worked to guide vehicles ashore. For his deeds on D-Day, Kvasnosky would have a building named in his honor at Fort Gordon and receive the Bronze Star Medal. All four were killed on June 6, 1944, and later returned home to their native state.

*Companies A and B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Omaha Beach*

Private Richard Brandtonies

Private First Class Clairus Riggs

Private First Class Byron Stanton

Private First Class George Hawn

Staff Sergeant William Laffin

First Battalion of the 116th Infantry, 29th Infantry Division was assigned to assault the Dog Green sector of Omaha Beach, the second furthestmost west sector. Although the division had spent months training, D-Day would be their first combat experience. Woken up at 2am aboard the SS *Empire Javelin*, 1st Battalion nervously dined on their breakfast of steak, gravy, bread, and coffee, listed to Ike's Order of the Day over the loudspeaker, and then received a printed copy. Later, they climbed down into their landing crafts that would take them the rest of the way across the channel. The seas were choppy, and soldiers began to bail water out of the craft using their helmets. At H+1, Company A landed at Omaha Beach. They were cut to pieces, taking 120 casualties of about 200 men in only 15 minutes, and dozens more by the end of the morning. One of these casualties was Pvt Richard Brandtonies, a 19 year old from Washington County, Pennsylvania. Among the other casualties in the company were many of the "Bedford Boys" from Bedford, Virginia, who had enlisted together prior to the war as a National Guard unit.

Company B was scheduled to land around H+30 to reinforce Company A. When they arrived, they found that their comrades had been torn to shreds. They fared little better. Company B was scattered across the beach, suffering 90 casualties of 120 men. Entire boat teams were wiped out. Among those killed were SSgt William Laffin of Clinton County, PFC Clarius Riggs of Cambria County, PFC Byron Stanton of Shamokin, and PFC George Hawn of Allegheny County.

Reinterred in 1947 and 1948, these five brave Pennsylvanians of 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry Regiment now rest in Gettysburg National Cemetery.

## *29<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Utah Beach*

Tec/5 Joseph Fedish

Battery B, 29th Field Artillery Battalion, was scheduled to land on Utah Beach around 8:20AM. Rather than traditional field artillery in the form of 105mm guns that had to be pulled by vehicles, Battery B had been equipped with M-7 Priests. These armored vehicles were essentially 105mm artillery pieces placed on top of a tank chassis so that they could easily maneuver and reposition. Upon landing, these vehicles would enable them to navigate the sands and provide supporting fire for the men of the 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, that had begun landing on Utah Beach around 6:30. The four M-7s assigned to the battalion were loaded aboard LCT-538 and began the journey to Utah. Twenty-year-old Tec/5 Joseph Fedish was the driver of one of the vehicles.

Around 8AM, LCT-538 hit a mine. Over two thirds of the 29th FAB's casualties during the entire war occurred in that single moment. Of 60 men of Battery B, 37 died, and 22 were wounded. Most of the naval crew assigned to the craft were killed as well. Joseph Fedish was initially reported as missing, but he was ultimately one of the few casualties recovered from the choppy surf of the English Channel.

A native of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Fedish had been heavily involved in his local community through Boy Scouts of America. When the news of his death reached the town, there was a three day display of flags to commemorate the loss of such a promising young man. At 2pm, February 1, 1949, he was reinterred at the Gettysburg National Cemetery.