

# THE STARS AND STRIPES magazine

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WEEKLY SUPPLEMENT

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NORMANDY.

## One Year Later And Weeds Have Grown Over Pointe du Hoc

Pointe du Hoc, NORMANDY.

THIS one is for the men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. It's for the 258 of them who climbed the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc in the early morning hours of June 6, 1944. It's for the 62 of them who were able to walk away under their own power, three days later. It's for officers like Lt. Col. James Rudder and Capt. Walter Block, and Capt. Otto "Big Stoop" Massney. And for men like Bob Youso and Alvin White and Perry and Johnson. Most of all, it's for those men of the 2nd Ranger Battalion who landed at Pointe du Hoc, and never left it alive.

Pointe du Hoc looks different now. A whole year has passed since those big shell holes were made, and now those shell holes are full of weeds and grass and flowers. There is a lot of wild mustard, and daisies, and even some poppies. Those flat places off to the left are covered with grass, and grass is growing on top of the pillboxes. The wind and the rain have smoothed out some of the rough spots, too. It looks flatter than it did during those three days we were there.

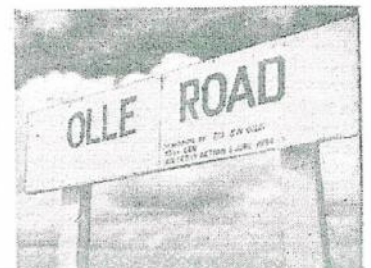
REMEMBER that house halfway down the road on the right flank of the point? The house where all the Jerries were congregating that day and we called for naval fire? And when the sailors, God

Bless 'em, made three direct hits, the Jerries started running for the fields again, and you men picked them off like ducks on a pond? That house is gone now. There's nothing left but a small pile of rubble where the foundations used to be.

Nature has restored the beach below the cliffs, too. The morning we came in it was pitted with shell holes and piled high with rocks and huge clods of dirt that had tumbled down the cliffs. It's all smoothed out, now, nice and level. That's the way it should have been when we came in. That's the way we figured it would be. Remember those four "Rube Goldberg" Ducks, with the extension ladders, the ones that ran into the holes that morning and floundered on the rubble. You can still see three of the Ducks, washed up high and dry against the cliffs, rusty and battered and looking not at all like they did that day we left England. Not far away is the naval whale boat that floundered when it tried to bring us supplies the second day.

Col. Rudder's command post behind the Jerry air raid shelter is still there, but you'd never recognize the place now. The rain has washed mud down into it, and all

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G. K. Hodenfield, Stars and Stripes Staff Writer, who covered D-Day, June 6, 1944, returned to the beaches this week and came back with two stories, the picture of the beaches as they look today—and one for the Rangers with whom he landed. The anniversary



under several feet of water following the flooding.

“...Even the cliffs have changed at Pointe du Hoc where the Rangers landed. The rain and the wind have changed their looks. They're smoother now and, if possible, steeper than before. . .”

## Weeds Have Grown...

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the litter and mess that made it seem like home for three days is buried under the silt. If you dig around you can find a few rusty shells and a few tin cans. There's a K-ration box under one of those over-hanging rocks and a rotted gas cape along the side of the cable where one of the rope ladders was attached.

Of all the rope ladders that went whooshing over the cliffs at H-Hour, trailing behind their rockets, only two are left. One is the fancy two-rope one that fell straight down from the command post to the beach where we took our 17 prisoners. The other dangles over the cliff just to the left of the point. The single rope ladders have all disappeared.

**E**VEN the cliffs have changed. The rain and the wind have changed their looks. They're smoother now and, if possible, even steeper than before.

That little field off to the left, where seven men were panned down by snipers and machine-gunners, is all covered with grass. The corner of the hedgerow, where McKittrick got a bullet right through the helmet without getting a scratch himself, has been knocked about a bit, probably by some farmer who wants to put a gate through there.

“Doc” Block’s “hospital,” the air raid

shelter in front of the command post, is still there; it still has that musty smell from the mud and water inside. Right in the entranceway is a weatherbeaten sign with the words “Achtung Minen.”

In a shell hole right in front of the hospital there’s a ruined German ack-ack gun, and next to it there’s a Jerry helmet, half-buried in the mud. Scattered about in other shell holes there are ammunition boxes, pieces of barbed wire and one or two broken rifles.

**A**S YOU come away from the point, heading toward the Vierville-Grandcamp road, you pass the entrances to the tunnels where the Jerries used to hide. And you can still see where the Jerry ammo dump was before Massney’s gang sent it sky-high with bangalore torpedoes. And, of course, that dugout used by the Jerries for a P-K is still there, but like the tunnel entrances, you can hardly see it for weeds.

That’s the way it is now. In another five or ten years it will probably look about the same, just a little smoother, a little more civilized.

It has been a long time. How do you measure that sort of time? Is it a year ago? Seven hundred miles ago? Or just 409 casualties ago?