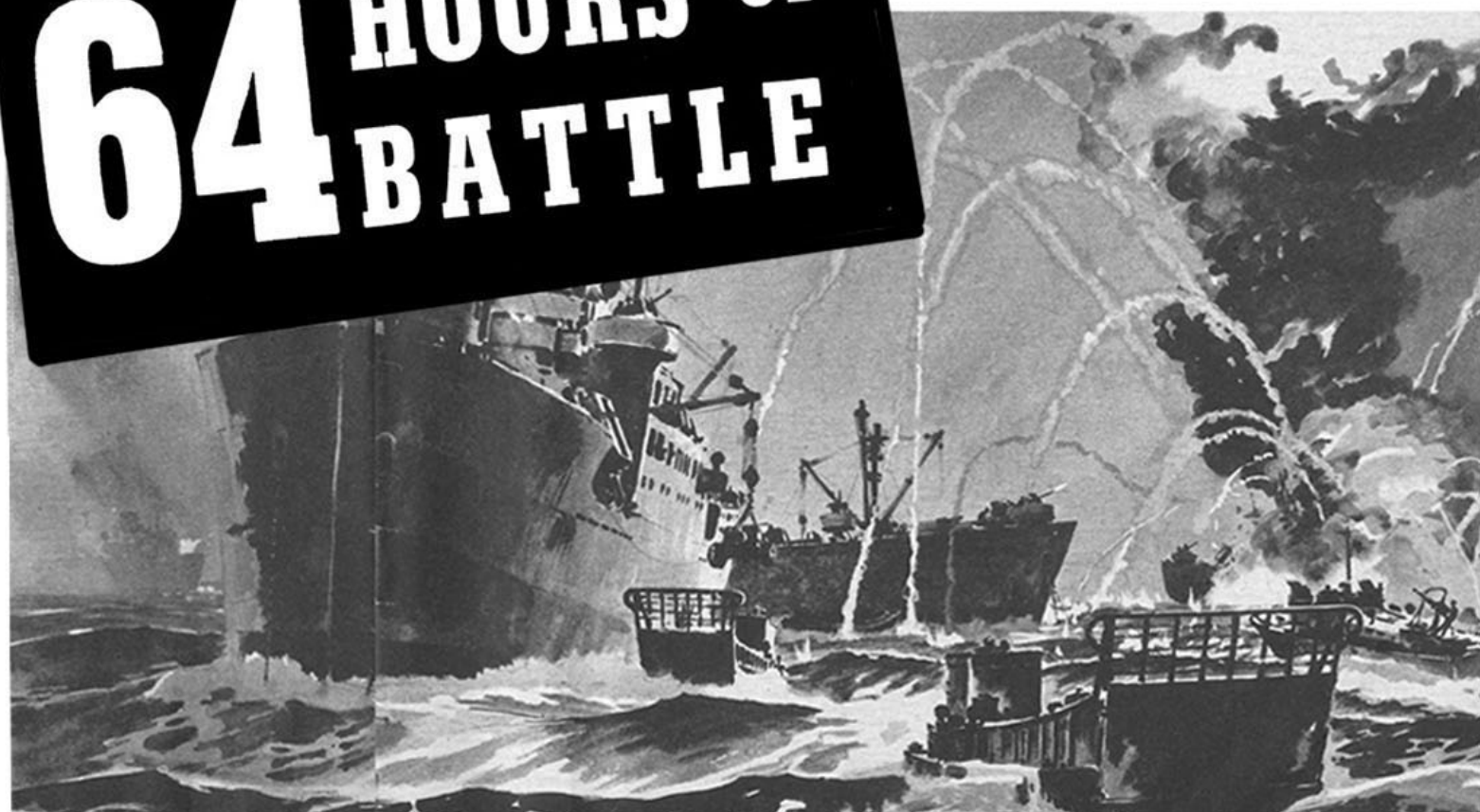


64 HOURS of BATTLE



From a point off the center of the beachhead it was impossible to look to sea in any direction and see the horizon. The ships were a solid mass.

By **TOM BERNARD, Sp.(x)1c USNR**
YANK Navy Correspondent

From the deck of the destroyer USS Doyle, this reporter watched for nearly three nights as the grim drama of D-Day unfolded on the American beachhead. Minesweeping, shelling of enemy positions, landings, air raids, torpedoes—he saw them all. It was only when the Doyle began running short of ammunition that the crew returned to England, and a few hours of rest.

SOMEWHERE IN THE CHANNEL—She was the USS Doyle, a 1650-ton American destroyer with a combat record as unblemished as that of a San Diego boot. And there she was—two-and-a-half hours before H-Hour of D-Day—steaming at five knots along the Normandy coast, escorting a flotilla of minesweepers that were clearing the way for the vast armada of landing craft yet to come. She was a prime target for coastal batteries, but she drew no fire—then.

Since midnight we had watched the prelude to the big show from the Doyle's bridge. First came the Pathfinders. Then, for a few minutes until the bombers went to work, chains of flak ripped the sky. I watched five separate air attacks, each lasting not more than ten minutes. By the time they were finished, there was not a single burst of anti-aircraft fire—just the brilliant glow of roaring flames consuming enemy positions.

The Channel having been safely swept and the sweeps having moved back out to sea, the Doyle—with the Emmons, the Harding, the Corry and others of their class—formed in a line abreast and moved slowly towards shore again. This time they were moving in to attack. Behind them were a pair of French cruisers and those venerable American battleships, the Arkansas and the Texas, all ready to thunder an announcement of freedom to the French who, for four years, had been under the Nazi heel.

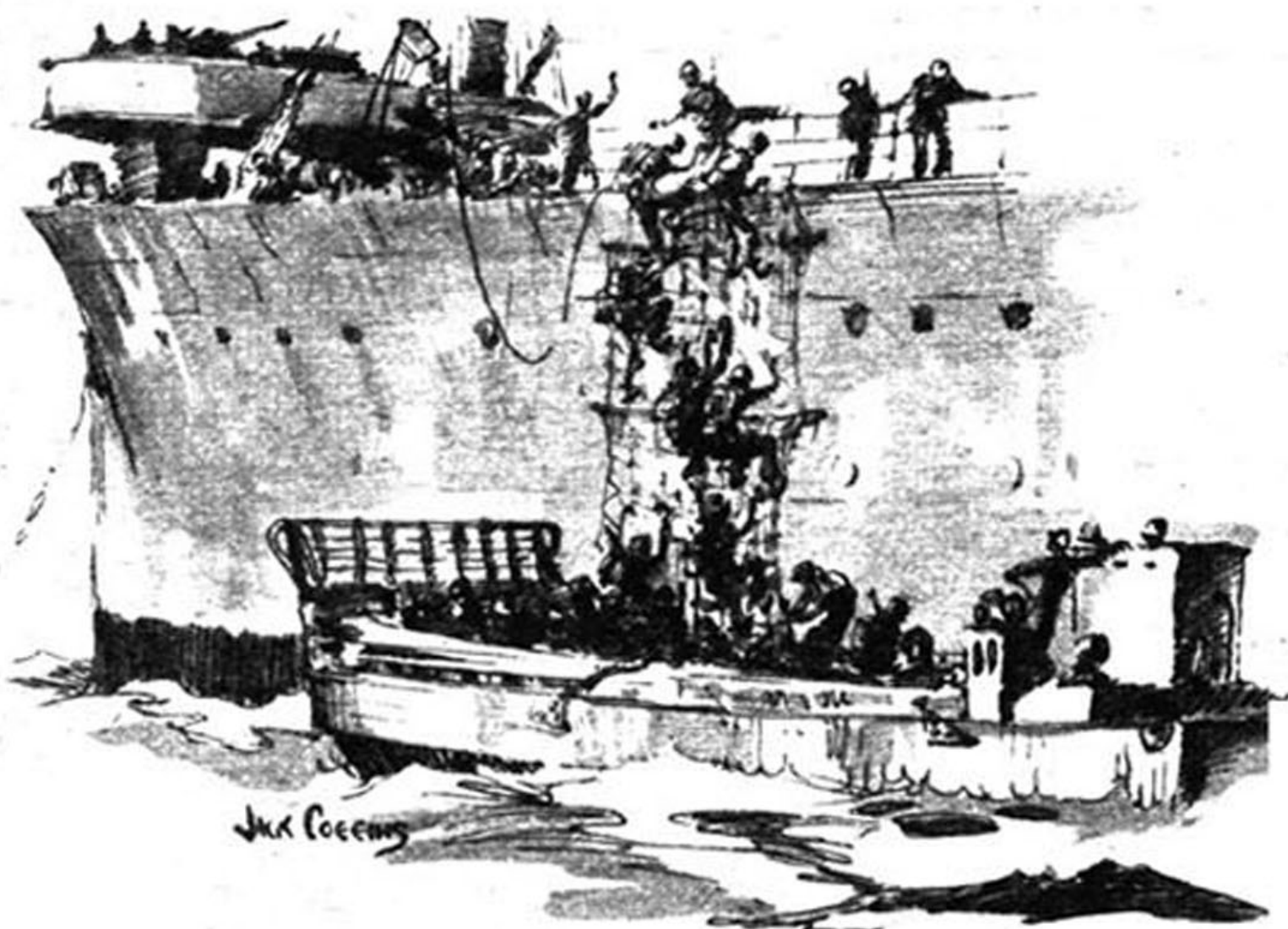
Layers of orange streaked the pre-dawn blue of the sky, giving the enemy enough light by which to aim. He aimed and fired. Fittingly, one of the French cruisers returned the first salvo. Then the invasion was on.

The Doyle had been assigned two targets—the first a 125-yard stretch of cliff on which were ensconced five pillboxes, two machine gun nests, and two concrete shelters probably containing 88mm. guns all of which she must neutralize before H-hour; the second another strongly fortified position up a winding draw. But these assignments had to wait. German 155mm. rifles, far on the left flank, were pumping shells around the pre-invasion task force, raising towers of foam ominously close.

The Doyle's five-inch guns were silent for twelve minutes, and then they started smashing away at the casemated 155's. Smaller shore pieces, including entrenched French 75's, barked from the coast dead ahead. Although heavy, the enemy fire was generally inaccurate and short. One dropped 200 yards ahead of the Doyle's bow; others fell closer to other ships. I saw only one ship hit—a destroyer which took a light shell on its No. 2 gun mount. Its other guns fired a few more rounds, and then it turned and went out to sea.

Because the 155's were the worst menace to the forthcoming landings, the Doyle ignored her primary targets until the big guns seemingly were silenced. Then she went to work on her first objective, scoring repeated direct hits and putting the position out of action.

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SQUADRONS of medium bombers roared overhead, dropping their high explosives on deep woods and on the beach. One stick fell short and raised towers of water almost out to the line of ships.

A little fishing village was directly ahead as we moved in to a mile and a half, firing all the way. The Arkansas and the cruisers swung around to port and started belching flaming broadsides.

Rocket craft flashed salvos toward a hillside where they burst in a dancing carpet of flame.

By twenty minutes before H-Hour, a great curtain of smoke completely hid the assault beaches. Only the rocket flashes broke through. Lines of tiny landing craft moved in towards the beach and disappeared under the smoke to our right. That was all we saw of H-Hour of D-Day.

The 155's had suddenly returned to life and were proving stubborn opponents. The Doyle opened up on them again, and again silenced them for a little while. Because she would have to steam along in front of the line of bombardment ships and in the path of incoming landing craft to reach her second target, the Doyle gave it up to another destroyer farther to the right. Instead, she searched for targets of opportunity in her immediate area.

Reports came over the inter-ship communication system of the first ship casualty of the battle.

They were the song of death of a sister ship. Within a few minutes she was sinking slowly. Even the cruiser which had rushed to her aid could not help. HMS Beagle, a British destroyer, picked up the survivors.

While the Doyle was shelling pillboxes on the hillsides surrounding the fishing village, the men on the beaches were catching hell.

German troops had just started anti-invasion exercises in the area immediately behind this beach-head. That their maneuvers developed into the real thing undoubtedly surprised them, but it also made difficulties for the Americans landing.

On the beach nearest us, about a mile to the right towards the Cherbourg peninsula, we could see through the glass the assault troops being punished by machine guns enfilading the beach from the cliffs. Heavier guns were trained on tanks, which burst into flame. The Doyle was ordered to that beach to wipe out the counter-attack.

When we reached the beach there were burning tanks and fallen dead littering the sands. Several hundred men and some vehicles had moved along to the left under the shelter of cliffs. All landing craft but those damaged by shells had been withdrawn to sea.

By 11 a.m., we had moved to the right along the shore to another beach where more resistance was being met. First snipers and 88mm. guns drilled holes in LCIs and LCMs as they scraped on the sand. Infantrymen pouring from the ramps of the LCIs were cut down almost as they stepped ashore. Then, from well-concealed positions, the mortars started to work, looping medium and heavy missiles into the beachhead and turning the sand into a shambles.

From the Doyle's decks I could see the shells strike with the naked eye. First there would be a flash and then a puff of smoke which billowed into the sky. Several tanks and landing craft were burning at the water's edge. Through glasses, I watched troops jump from their boats and start running up the beach.

Evacuation of the wounded started. Two pharmacist's mates who had been aboard a Coast Guard LCI—Charles F. Mudgett, 24, PhMlc, USCGR, of Vineyard Haven, Mass., and Robert V. Miller, PhM3c, USNR, 18, of New Cumberland, W.Va.—brought a boatload aboard the Doyle.

"I hope and pray we can stay on here," said

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Mudgett.

Their LCI had reached the beach, but the Germans had opened fire just at that moment, hitting the ship with mortar shells on the conning tower, amidships, and at the water line.

"We were hit seven times before we abandoned her," said Miller. "Our mess cook had a leg blown off. A soldier took five pieces of shrapnel and I guess he'll lose an arm."

Mudgett and Miller assisted Lt. Donald T. Rendel, MC, USNR, of New York and Hammond, Ind., the ship's surgeon, dress the wounds of the casualties in the wardroom.

ON the bridge we listened to an Admiral who was commanding naval support gunfire. Over the inter-ships communications system he barked orders and pleaded with ships' captains to find the mortars and wipe them out. Hidden positions prevented the American ships from finding the enemy guns all that day, and the firing went on. Not until the next morning, when information came through from night reconnaissance parties, were the batteries silenced by the ships. One strong point, a German heavy piece mounted on a railway car, was destroyed by the battleship Arkansas.

We had our first narrow escape that afternoon. While searching for targets with the Emmons and the Harding, the Doyle moved east of the beachhead towards the scene of the morning's scrap. One of the others opened up on what appeared to be a pillbox when suddenly, from an undetermined position, 88mm. shells started bursting astern of her. The Doyle hastened in to assist. Her five-inch batteries were turned on other concealed pillboxes which had been previously attacked but which might have been refortified. At this point, the enemy battery turned its attention to us.

Its first salvo fell astern but it soon obtained more accurate range. For a frightening two minutes it pumped shell after shell within bare yards of us. Two screamed between the Doyle's stacks and crashed into the water 25 yards off our starboard beam. Others whistled overhead in a nerve-wracking whine. Our guns continued to fire.

The three destroyers worked slowly along the shore, plastering every grove of trees, every battered emplacement, every visible gully and hole in the cliffside—everything that might conceivably hide enemy guns.

The Doyle drove two men across a field with shells bursting mere yards from their tails. With her 40mm. guns she knocked out a 90mm. gun emplacement near the fishing village. She repeatedly hit several pillboxes which had been bombarded earlier in the day. She hurled several rounds into the town proper.

The men of the Doyle were weary. They had been at General Quarters for 28 hours without sleep. That night they hoped to get a few hours "sack duty" at least. But it was not to be.

Just before midnight, low-flying enemy planes sneaked through the fighter screen and made a harassing but ineffective attack on the beach and the mass of ships. They dropped 500-pounders among the ships and at least two sticks along the sand.

One ME110, scooting along barely over the ships' masts, aimed a 500-pounder at the Doyle but missed by 125 yards. The ship shuddered and rolled but suffered no damage.

Jerry came over again just before dawn, but again did little more than annoy the men and ships.

D-plus-one was an entirely different matter. The ships opened up at dawn and by noon had the enemy reeling. There were few strong points left, and troops, tanks, and supplies were moving into the beachhead in force. Infantry units were fanning out over the higher land back of the beach, mopping up the Germans "on maneuvers."

The Doyle regained contact with her Shore Fire Control Party, which consisted of one Army and one Navy officer and twelve EMs and whose purpose was to select inland targets and to radio range and bearing to the ship. The party had not been heard from for twelve hours. We thought they were dead.

SFCP had not reached its intended position, but it could still call targets. Three times the Doyle opened fire, twice on German troop concentrations, once on a command post. Each time the word came back: "Mission completed."

By nightfall the Doyle had fired double the amount of ammunition she had fired the day before, hitting mostly at targets which impeded the advance of troops. Again she pounded the fishing village, assisted by dive bombers which roared down on enemy troops quartered in the town.

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THAT night will probably go down as the most hectic in the Doyle's career. It started with another air raid, as the destroyer put out to sea on orders to patrol the Channel. Then came a "positive underwater contact" and the Doyle raced off to investigate a possible submarine. It turned out to be the sunken hull of a bombed ship.

GQ was relaxed and half the crew was permitted to sleep where they could—on the decks, curled around stanchions, under gun mounts, any place. But the respite lasted only twenty minutes. The raiders came again.

A warning was shouted over the inter-ship. There was a huge splash nearby. Opinion was divided as to whether it was an aerial mine or a glide bomb.

For an hour and 40 minutes the Doyle cruised quietly off shore. Then the enemy struck again.

The port bridge wing lookout yelled: "Torpedo wake!" Then he almost screamed it. We took evasive tactics, and watched three fast wakes coming down the path of the rising moon. The Doyle paused as they passed, as if expelling a huge sigh of relief along with her men.

The rest of the night was uneventful. The Doyle went out to sea and picked up a convoy, bringing it into the beachhead at dawn. From a command ship, the Doyle picked up a rear-admiral and a major general who had been on a special mission up to the front lines. They wanted to see the beachhead and the destroyer gave them a Cook's tour, starting on the easterly end and working up towards Cherbourg.

As the Doyle neared the beachhead, she found progress more difficult. She had to thread her way cautiously between ships and small craft constantly streaming back and forth. From a point off the center of the beachhead it was impossible to look to sea in any direction and see the horizon. The ships were a solid mass.

After the tour, the Doyle headed through the transport area and out into the Channel, where her engines rushed her along at more than 30 knots. She was going back to England for more ammunition—and for rest after 64 hours of battle.

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