



## M1 CARBINE FROM OMAHA BEACH, JUNE 6, 1944 by John Ewing

The invasion of continental Europe on June 6, 1944, was one of the most massive military undertakings in history. Considering the size and scope of men, material, and planning involved, the individual contributions are often overlooked. However, to bring this event into focus, it is good to put a face and a name to individual events that were a part of the whole. To this end, the personal narrative of Wil Staub, a Coast Guardsman serving on the *USS Samuel Chase*, will describe the events that caused him to retrieve an M1 carbine from Omaha Beach on that eventful day.

The soldiers on the *USS Samuel Chase* were in the 16th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) of the First Division; also known as “The Big Red One”. This division had seen its first action in North Africa and then in the invasion of

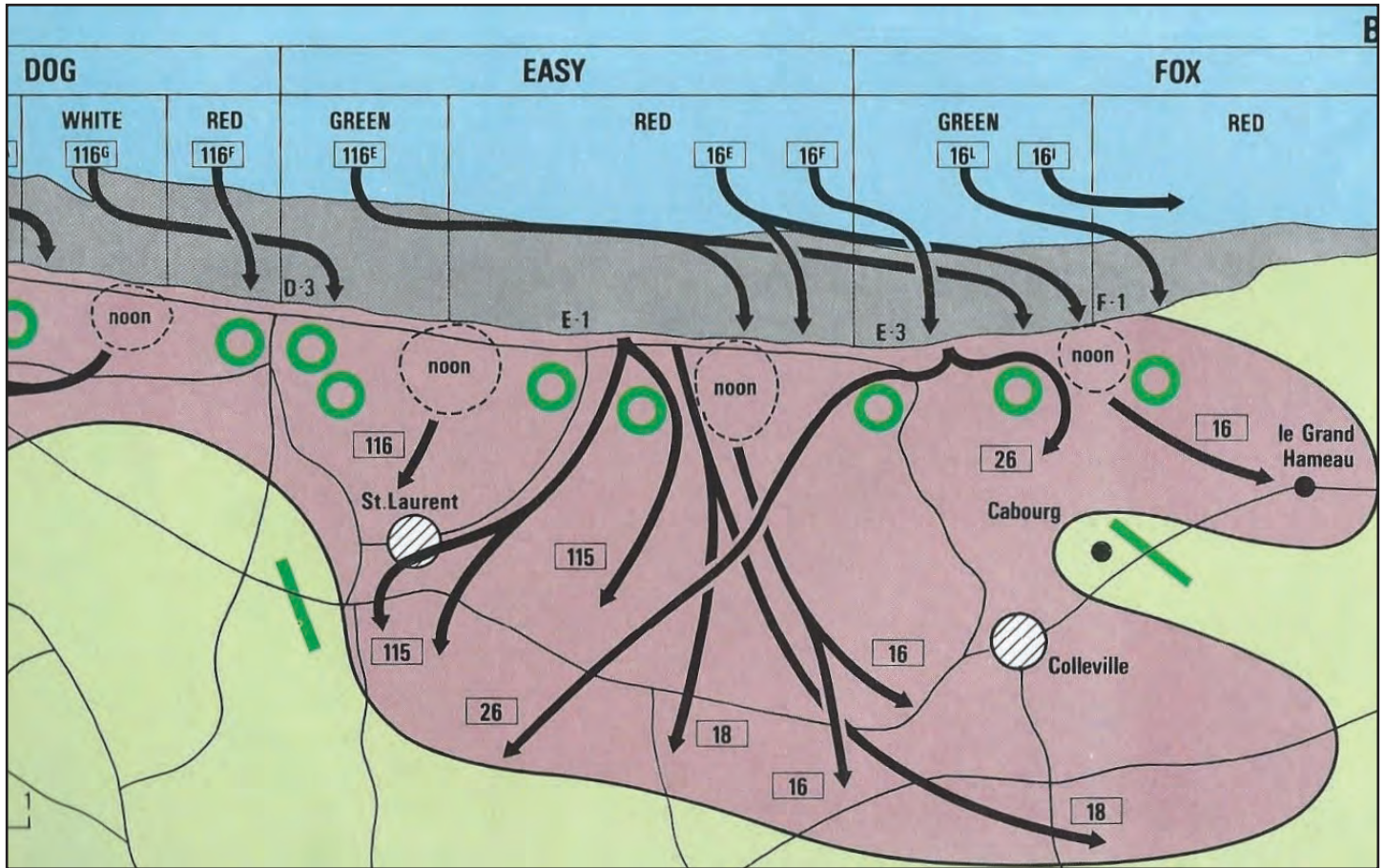


Sicily. It was then transferred to England to prepare for D-Day. Three infantry regiments, the 16th, 18th, and 26th, along with four field artillery battalions and support units (medical, signal, ordnance, engineering, etc) made up the First Division of approximately 15,000 men.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary terms, an RCT was made up of an infantry regiment and any support units deemed necessary for the mission. The *USS Samuel Chase* carried 1200 men of the 16th RCT.

The attack transport *USS Samuel Chase* (APA 26) was commissioned in June of 1942 and served at Algiers in November 1943, Sicily in July 1943, Salerno in September 1943, and Normandy in June 1944. After D-Day, the *Chase* served in the Mediterranean, including landings in the south of France. The ship was then transferred to the Pacific and sent to Okinawa. The *USS Samuel Chase* was decommissioned in February 1947.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2 Wil's photo of the  
*USS Samuel Chase*



**Figure 3 Landing sites of the 16th Regimental Combat Team<sup>3</sup>**

The assigned landing site for the 16th RCT was the Easy Red section of Omaha Beach. Due to the overall confusion, heavy seas, and the drift of the currents, some of the units made Easy Red, but many drifted on to Fox Green. This scattering of the elements of the 16th RCT caused a loss of cohesion and command.

Wil Staub was a 21-year-old Coast Guardsman assigned to the USS Samuel Chase, APA 26. A native of Sandusky, Ohio, he enlisted at age 18. Along with his usual duties aboard ship, he was assigned to LCVP 26-26 as the ramp man for the D-Day invasion. He assisted in launching and loading the LCVP 26-26 for the run onto the beach. Once there, he helped unload the troops and take stretchers onto the beach, retrieve any wounded at hand, and return them to the ship. As a side activity, Staub was a drummer in a dance band that performed frequently for the troops when his ship was in port.<sup>4</sup>

The Inland M1 carbine of interest is an early gun, made in the first 4 months of production.<sup>5</sup> Its serial number is 25551 (Figure 6) and barrel date is September 1942 (Figure 7). Upon examination, the carbine shows the features of an early gun. There is an "I" oiler slot and "high wood" on the operating



**Figure 4 Coast Guardsman Wil Staub**



**Figure 5 Inland M1 Carbine SN 25551**

slide opening (Figure 5).<sup>6</sup> It has a 2-rivet hand guard with the wide sight groove (Figure 9). The marks “IO” (Inland production) and the flaming bomb Ordnance mark are found on the underside of the hand guard (Figure 10).<sup>7</sup> On the pistol grip is a “P” in a circle proof mark that has the letter “W” carved over the top, likely the initial of the dead soldier (Figure 11). Inside the sling well are the marks “IO,” a flaming bomb, and the “crossed-cannon” cartouche (Figure 8).<sup>8</sup> On the bottom of the operating rod mortise is carved the letter “W” (Figure 13).

The hardware found on the carbine is made up of early-style parts. It has a milled steel front sight, a flip 2-leaf rear sight, and a type-1 barrel band with a stamped sling swivel with a .25-inch opening (Figure 5).<sup>9</sup> Internally the parts are all early with a type-1 trigger housing that is marked with a flaming bomb, an Inland stamp, a checkered safety, and an unmarked “long-faced” magazine release (Figure 12).<sup>10</sup> The hammer is a type-1, as is the operating slide.<sup>11</sup> The finish on all the parts is uniform and there is no sign of repair or replacement. The stock has not been sanded or refinished and there are no re-work stamps. This carbine appears to be as issued with wear consistent with use.

Wil Staub arrived in England in February, 1944, serving as a seaman aboard the USS Samuel Chase, APA-26. They then sailed to Glasgow where they unloaded troops and material. The next few months were spent plying the channel coast and in maneuvers practicing for the invasion of France. Then Staub recounts:<sup>12</sup>

*On the 5th of June, 1944, we were alongside the dock in Portland Harbour waiting for the word to go, just one*



**Figure 6 SN 25551**



**Figure 7 Barrel date**



Figure 8 Marks in sling slot



Figure 9 Early hand guard



Figure 10 Marks under hand guard



Figure 11 Proof 'P' and 'W' on pistol grip



**Figure 12 Trigger housing with Inland mark (L) & “Flaming Bomb” (R)**

*of the many ships of Task Force 124, Assault Force “O” (“O” for Omaha) bound for Omaha Beach. The Chase was combat loaded with approximately 1200 men of the 16th Regimental Combat Team of the First Infantry Division-“The Big Red One”-freshly re-fitted and mission-trained after extensive combat in the North Africa and Sicily Campaigns.*

At 03:15 the Chase was anchored in the transport area, 10 miles off the Normandy Coast. Launching the LCVPs and loading the troops commenced at 05:00. Seas were rough and this increased the difficulties of the process. Staub was on the way:

*As I recall, I was assigned to LCVP #26(APA 26-26) that morning, part of a crew of four, assigned the du-*



**Figure 13 ‘W’ carved in operating slide**

*ties of ramp man-the others were the coxswain, a motor-machinist and a crewman. As the ‘ramp man’ it was my job to raise and lower the ramp by means of a hand-turned crank in the rear of the boat. ... Ready we circled a short distance from the Chase until all the boats in our wave were in a loop and awaiting the signal to start the long trip to the beach.*

Heading into the beach, APA 26-26 was fighting rough seas, and the 10 mile run took about 45 minutes. Ships around them were providing support fire, including the USS Texas. Staub recounts:

*Our mission was to land our troops on the “Easy Red” sector of Omaha Beach. Red, yes-Easy-no. I will always consider it an honor to be associated with those 1st Division men for their incredible bravery and sacrifice that allowed them to finally rally to secure the beachhead under almost impossible conditions.*

*I should mention that Robert Capa, the well-known Life Magazine photographer, was aboard the Chase, and to my knowledge took nearly all the Omaha D-Day Invasion pictures that morning. The most famous and repeated are those in which he rode to the beach in one of the Chase’s LCVPs, snapping the G.I.’s crowded shoulder-to-shoulder prior to landing, and then a*

**Figure 14 An LCVP with men of the 16th Regimental Combat Team**



**Figure 15 Men of the 16th RCT moving onto Omaha Beach**

*subsequent photo from the same boat, ramp down and troops in the water, wading into their fate.*

With his LCVP on the beach, Staub went about his duties under heavy fire and a tremendous amount of confusion. The crew was responsible for unloading stretchers onto the beach to a point above the high tide line. After completing this task, they were to get the LCVP off the beach and back to the Chase. Staub then describes what happened:

*That task done, I only wanted to regain the boat and leave the beach behind. Returning after the stretcher "throw", I trotted past a trooper lying face down, sprawled on the beach where he had fallen. I didn't stop to see if he was dead, but there wasn't much doubt in my mind-no one would stay on that beach, exposed to the fire, unless ... therefore, I assumed he was.*

*No wound was evident nor do I recall noticing his rank, or whether officer or enlisted, for I only glanced. But something else caught my eye-there, just to his left, next to him on the sand and gravel of Omaha, lay his M1 Carbine ... To this day I don't know why I did it. Perhaps it was because as Coast Guard personnel, we were not armed. Perhaps it was the inclination of a young man just wanting a weapon, and there lay one, mine for the taking, obviously no longer needed by the man to whom it was issued back in the States. But more I think it was just an impulse. Something done at that moment. Whatever the reason I reached down and picked it up from the beach. It was 07:30, give or take.*

When he picked up the carbine there was no magazine in the arm and it was unloaded. Upon returning to the LCVP, he stored the carbine in a small compartment in the rear of the boat. The Chase headed back to England that evening. Staub continues:

*The following morning we were once again dockside, where we off-loaded 322 dead and wounded. The carbine remained on the LCVP for the next 3 or 4 days, stowed as I left it. Late one night I went down and retrieved it, placing it in my sea bag for safe keeping.*

After re-fitting, the USS Samuel Chase sailed for the Mediterranean to take part in the invasion of the south of France. Staub served on the Chase until the end of the war. He recalls his trip home:

*At this point I should mention that aside from my regular duties, I was also a drummer in a show and dance band that toured camps and hospitals in England, Scotland, Italy, and Africa whenever we hit ports in those places. I had a gunners mate clean the carbine for me, packing it thickly in cosmoline and canvas. When we detached from the ship in New York in December, 1944, I took the head off the bass drum, put the carbine inside, replaced the head and carried it furtively off the ship-as so many other sailors and G.I.'s had done in keeping their issued weapons as well.*

*Incidentally, that first day in New York we appeared on the old "March of Time" radio show-gun, drum and all.*



**Figure 16 Drummer Wil Staub performing with the band**

After his discharge in 1946, Staub returned to Sandusky and left the carbine, still wrapped in cosmolene, in the basement of his mother's house. It stayed there until the early 1980s, when he moved his mother to a care facility. While cleaning out the basement he found the carbine. Taking it back home to California, he had the carbine cleaned, found a magazine and shot it. In his own words:

*Since the memory of picking up the gun is not a very pleasant one, I preferred that someone else have it who could appreciate it in a detached, historical way. Thus, I sold it in 1987, to Dr. John Ewing of Fort Lupton, CO.*

*But I'll remember it  
For Inland Carbine 25551 was there...and so was I  
There...on that sixth day of June in 1944  
At a place called Omaha Beach<sup>ii</sup>*

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1st Infantry Division Composition, 2013. Available at: [www.history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/11D-ETO-OB.Ltn](http://www.history.army.mil/documents/ETO-OB/11D-ETO-OB.Ltn).
- 2 U.S. Coast Guard, USS Samuel Chase, APA 26, 2013. Available at: [www.uscg.mil/history/webcutters/Samuel.Chase.pdf](http://www.uscg.mil/history/webcutters/Samuel.Chase.pdf)
- 3 Nalty, Bernard C., Editor: *D-Day, Operation Overlord*, (New York, NY: SMITHMARK Publishers, 1993), p. 89.
- 4 Staub, Wil, *A Personal Narrative of the D-Day Landing*, Unpublished, 1997.
- 5 Ruth, Larry L.: *War Baby! The U.S. Caliber .30 Carbine*, (Toronto, Canada: Collector Grade Publications, Incorporated, 1992), p.362.
- 6 Riesch, Craig: *U.S. M1 Carbines Wartime Production*, (Tustin, CA: North Cape Publications, 1994), p. 70.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 84-85
- 8 Ibid., p. 71.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 16, 33, 36.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 46-47, 62, 66.
- 11 Ibid., p. 58.
- 12 Staub, Wil, *A Personal Narrative of the D-Day Landing*, Unpublished, 1997.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ambrose, Stephen E.: *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*, (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
- Miller, Nathan: *War at Sea-A Naval History of World War II*, (New York, NY: Scribner, 1995).
- Canfield, Bruce: *Complete Guide to the M1 Garand and the M1 Carbine*, (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mobraj Publishers, 1998).
- Atkinson, Rick: *Guns at Last Light-The War in Western Europe*, (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2013).
- Riesch, Craig: *U.S. M1 Carbines Wartime Production*, (Tustin, CA: North Cape Publications, 1994).
- Ruth, Larry: *War Baby! The U.S. Caliber .30 Carbine*, (Toronto, Canada: Collector Grade Publications, Incorporated, 1992).