



The reinforced bunkers could withstand hits by 500lb bombs, but special armor-piercing bombs could cause penetrations. This is the interior of one of the ammunition bunkers after a partial penetration and wall collapse. (NARA)

high explosives smashed up virtually everything but the bomb-proof shelters. Few trenches or roads escaped, and the entrances to many of the personnel shelters and ammunition bunkers were buried. The number of German casualties in the raid was never recorded; many of the survivors were deafened from punctured eardrums or other concussion injuries. The air raid had a debilitating effect on the morale of the survivors. The fire control team in the bunker at the tip of the promontory received a message that the gun crews stationed back away from the main position had located a farmer's wine cellar and had gotten thoroughly drunk. One veteran interviewed years later recalled that his shell-shocked gun crew simply said "screw this" and walked away from their position. The number of German troops still located in the strongpoint after the air raid included the fire control party in the command bunker, most of the machine-gun crews from Werfer-Regiment 84 along the cliff edge, the anti-aircraft bunker on the west side of the position, which had escaped serious damage, and scattered groups of troops digging

their way out from the bunkers. There were a few dozen German troops still active on Pointe-du-Hoc by the time dawn arrived, but many had abandoned the site, or had been buried or killed. There were also a number of construction workers on the site, including some Italian prisoners-of-war.

The attacking RAF bombers did not escape unscathed. In the early morning hours of D-Day, *I./Schnellkampfgeschwader 10*, a ground-attack "fast bomber wing" with Fw-190 fighter-bombers, was alerted to intercept Allied transports that were dropping paratroopers near Carentan. The 3.Staffel (a *Staffel* was equivalent to an Allied squadron) led by Hauptmann Eberspächer finally got airborne from Evreux airfield two hours late with four fighters, and was instructed to head for the coast and report on the situation. In the dim early morning light, the four fighters encountered the bomber stream from 5 Group as it was finishing its bomb-run over Pointe-du-Hoc. Eberspächer led the attack, claiming two Lancasters over Isigny and another over Carentan; another fighter claimed a Lancaster over Carentan. The air battles took place around 0501 to 0504hrs and were the first aerial engagements of D-Day. The German claims of four Lancasters were only slightly overstated; actual losses were two Lancasters from 97 Squadron and one Lancaster from 50 Squadron; three other Lancasters were damaged by Flak or fighters, but returned to base.

To further savage the strongpoint, Pointe-du-Hoc was listed as Target No. 1 for the US Navy's Bombardment Force C, which included the battleships USS *Texas* and *Arkansas* as well as a number of cruisers and destroyers. At 0550hrs, USS *Texas*, flagship of Rear Adm. C. F. Bryant, began

## JAMES EARL RUDDER

James Earl Rudder was born on May 6, 1910 in Texas. He attended Tarleton Agricultural College in 1928–1929 before completing his degree in industrial education at Texas A&M in 1932; he was a member the Corps of Cadets and commissioned a second lieutenant in the US Army Reserves on graduation. He was first employed as a teacher and football coach at Brady High School until 1938 when he moved on to similar positions at Tarleton. He married in 1937 and his family eventually included five children. Like most army reservists, he was called to active duty in 1941. Rudder attended Infantry School at Ft. Benning in the autumn of 1941 and was assigned as a battalion executive officer with the 83rd Division in Indiana. His talents led to his dispatch to the Army's Command and General Staff School at Ft. Leavenworth for the fall-winter class of 1942–43 after which he returned to the 83rd Division as assistant division G-3 (operations). The newly formed 2nd Ranger Battalion was originally led by its 41-year old founder, Lt. Col. William Saffarans, followed by a string of acting battalion commanders. Major "Big Jim" Rudder was finally assigned to command the battalion and arrived on June 30, 1943. Rudder's vigor, intellect and leadership skills made him well suited to the demanding task, and he was a lieutenant colonel by the time of the D-Day operation.

Rudder was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart for his actions at Pointe-du-Hoc. The 2nd Rangers recuperated from their heavy losses and were sent back into action in August during the Brittany campaign, including the savage fighting for Brest in September. After another period of recuperation, the battalion was committed to the fighting in the Hürtgen forest in November 1944. Rudder was unhappy that his unit was assigned a minor but costly defensive role and in early December, the 2nd Rangers were assigned to take Hill 400 "Castle Hill" during the final push. Nearly half the 2nd Rangers were casualties after their capture and defense of the hill. While the 2nd Rangers were pulled off the line for yet another reconstruction, Rudder was promoted and assigned to command the 109th Infantry Regiment. This regiment was part of the 28th Division which had been decimated in the Hürtgen forest fighting and had been sent in December 1944 to a "quiet" section of the



James Earl Rudder © (NARA)

front in Belgium for rebuilding; the division was commanded by another D-Day hero, Maj. Gen. Norman Cota who had uttered the legendary "Rangers-Lead the way!" command on Dog White beach. The 28th Division was directly in the path of the German Ardennes offensive and fought a desperate rearguard action on the approaches to Bastogne. Rudder's distinguished service during the 1944–45 campaigns led to numerous decorations including the Silver Star, Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster and many other awards.

Rudder was released from active duty in April 1946 with the rank of colonel and went back to civilian life in Texas; he remained active in the Army reserve becoming a brigadier general in 1954 and major general in 1957, taking command of the 90th (Reserve) Infantry Division in 1957 and finally retiring from army service in 1967. He was mayor of Brady, Texas from 1946 to 1952 and later went into business. In 1955 he was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, a state position of considerable importance due to its role in oil leases, and a post previously embroiled in scandal. Rudder's reforms led to his election to the position in 1956 and he served through 1958. He was ultimately appointed president of his alma mater, Texas A&M in 1959 and helped to transform it into one of America's premier university systems. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal by fellow Texan, President Lyndon Johnson in 1967, the highest peacetime service award. Rudder died in 1970 at age 59.