

## A Brief History of the 2nd Ranger Battalion in World War II

The 2nd Ranger Battalion was activated on April 1st, 1943, with Headquarters at Camp Forrest, Tennessee. After additional training in Florida, the Battalion embarked for the European Theater and arrived in England in December of 1943.

At Bude, Titchfield, and Folkestone, the 2nd Rangers trained for the coming invasion of France and were given the "impossible" mission of scaling the high cliffs four miles west of Omaha Beach at Pointe du Hoc to destroy a fortified battery of six 155mm Howitzers which were trained on the main landing sites. This would be the 2nd Rangers most famous and daring action.

On June 6th 1944, D-Day, the 2nd Ranger Battalion made assault landings on Normandy in two separate elements. Three Companies were assigned to take the guns and landed below the cliffs. The remainder of the Battalion landed with the 5th Rangers near Pointe de la Percee a few miles to the east.

While at this beach General Norman Cota of the 29th Division came up and said "We're counting on you Rangers to lead the way" And they did.

It was at this time that the motto "Rangers lead the way" was born. In spite of the loss of two of their 11 landing craft and most of their supplies, the lead companies of the 2nd overcame enemy resistance and climbed the 10 story high cliffs at Point du Hoc to find that the emplacements were empty of guns. Advancing inland to cut off German routes to the landing areas, the Rangers continued to search for the missing guns and finally located five of them two miles from the beach area -- completely unattended but ready to fire! After destroying the sights of all the guns and placing thermite grenades on two others, the Rangers had accomplished their primary mission within two hours of landing and then continued to hold the ground they occupied against a series of German counterattacks.

Three days later when the remainder of the Battalion and other troops reached the lead companies, less than 75 of the original 225 Rangers who landed at Pointe du Hoc were fit for duty. The 2nd rested, mopped up, and patrolled through the remainder of June and then participated in the Avranches breakthrough and helped clear the Le Conquet Peninsula.

After capturing Kerlogue on September 10th, the Rangers advanced to Landerneau and captured LeFret taking 1600 prisoners and freeing 400 Allied prisoners of war.

The Rangers moved through Belgium and Luxembourg and entered into the fighting for the Huertgen Forest on November 14th, and on December 7th captured Hill 400 near Bergstein which overlooked the German positions at Schmidt and the Roer Dams.

On December 16th, the Battalion occupied and held defensive positions against German counterattacks on the northern flank during the Battle of the Bulge.

On January 8th, 1945, the Battalion resumed the attack, advanced into the Siegfried Line at Schmidthof, and destroyed enemy fortifications and equipment before being given a brief rest.

On March 2nd, the Rangers crossed the Roer River south of Schmidt and participated in the drive across the Cologne Plains reaching Maychoss on March 7th and engaged in mopping up operations until March 26th when another attack was launched.

The Battalion advanced and crossed the Rhine River pursuing fleeing German units to Landgrafroda, and then mopped up enemy remnants through April 15th.

After moving to Kassel, the Rangers searched and cleared the wooded area near Ostramona and reached Munich on April 25th where they rested for a few days. They then advanced to and crossed into Czechoslovakia on May 6th, when the final German surrender ended the war in Europe. After participating in five campaigns, the Battalion performed a short tour of occupation duty before returning to the United States where it was inactivated on October 23rd, 1945, at Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia.

*“Rangers lead the way!”*