

The U.S. Coast Guard at D-Day: Quentin Walsh

Tenacious by nature, Quentin Robert Walsh established himself as a leader while attending the Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. In September 1942 Walsh received orders to the staff of Commander U.S. Naval Forces in Europe. There he learned of Phase Neptune, the amphibious operation associated with Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Europe and the largest amphibious operation in world history.

Walsh received orders to form Navy Task Unit 127.2.8 out of fifty Navy Sea Bees. The Sea Bees, men from the Navy's Construction Battalion units, came equipped with combat training in addition to their expertise in construction. Walsh's mission was to secure the harbor and prepare the port to receive shipments of troops and supplies as soon possible. The unit entered Cherbourg on Monday, 26 June under heavy fire. By Tuesday, 27 June, Walsh's men had reached Cherbourg's harbor where they quickly moved to occupy strategic parts of the port and take control the harbor. During the assault, the men in his unit experienced a twenty-five percent casualty rate. By the end of the day, They had advanced to the city's old naval arsenal, where Walsh accepted the surrender of 400 German troops.

After capturing Cherbourg's port facilities, Walsh learned that the Germans held American paratroopers in the city's old citadel at Fort du Homet. Walsh and one of his officers put themselves in harm's way to save the lives of the Americans. The two officers entered the fort under a flag of truce and met with the commanding officer of the German garrison. By greatly exaggerating the numeric strength of his small force of Sea Bees, Walsh convinced the commanding officer to surrender the stronghold. With the surrender of Fort du Homet, Walsh and his men disarmed another 350 German troops and liberated over fifty American prisoners. For his achievements and selfless devotion to duty, Walsh received the Navy Cross, the Navy's highest recognition for heroism beside the Medal of Honor.

Left: Quentin R. Walsh
Below: German prisoners in Cherbourg
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