

Quentin R. Walsh

His biography reads like a spy novel — secret meetings, hand-picking a reconnaissance party, cracking enemy codes. A Coast Guardsman during World War II, he was a “Bigot A.”



PA3 Eric Eggen

Quentin R. Walsh

Quentin Walsh was born in Providence, R.I., and graduated from the Coast Guard Academy, New London, Conn., May 15, 1933. He served aboard the *USS Herndon* until 1934, cruising for rum runners along the Atlantic coast and aiding U.S. citizens during the 1933 Cuban revolution.

But the highlight of Walsh's career was his World War II experience.

About five years ago Walsh wrote a book entitled *Little Known Facts of a Well Known War*, in which he describes his wartime experiences.

“I did it for the family,” he said, referring to his three grown children and their families.

The book chronicles his duties from reporting to the staff of the commander of U.S. Naval Forces, Europe, to the formation of Task Unit 127.2.8, to the reconnaissance of Cherbourg, Brest and LeHavre, France.

“The name of the game in Normandy was Cherbourg,” he said.

The worst storm in 40 years hit Normandy June 19, 1944, destroying the artificial port at Omaha Beach, wrecking hundreds of landing craft and many large ships. The landing of men, equipment, ammunition and supplies stopped for about four days, emphasizing the need to capture the deep-water port quickly, Walsh said. Allied forces could no longer depend on the beaches alone to sustain the invasion.

“We had to have Cherbourg to sustain the invasion,” he said, “and the Germans knew it.”

CG expertise requested for invasion

In May 1943 he was ordered to London. Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe ADM Stark requested a Coast Guard officer be assigned to his staff to deal with matters pertaining to the ports to be captured after the invasion.

Walsh was then cleared by British and Navy intelligence to be a “Bigot A,” the highest security clearance at the time,



Quentin R. Walsh was awarded the Navy Cross for his “heroism and conspicuous bravery” in World War II.

Courtesy Quentin R. Walsh

used for the security protection of documents and discussions dealing with Operation Overlord/Phase Neptune — the plan for the Normandy invasion.

Although Army forces had been designated to capture Cherbourg, the Navy was to be responsible for clearing and operating the harbor. Walsh said he realized they would need to have the earliest information possible on the condition of the harbor, the location of mine fields and so forth. Commander, Advance Bases, Navy CAPT Norman Ives was Walsh's direct superior.

Walsh said he remembers telling Ives, "If we want to find out what's left in Cherbourg, we had better put in our own reconnaissance party, let them find out, then they can send the reports directly to the Navy command, and we don't have to depend on the Army for anything."

After Ives ran the suggestion through the chain of command, Walsh was ordered to Base 2 in Roseneath, Scotland, to form a reconnaissance party.

He arrived in Roseneath in April. He told the commanding officer and the executive officer of the base he needed three large tents for quarters, about 55 men, four motorcycles, two 2 1/2-ton trucks, nine jeeps, rifles, pistols, bazookas, hand grenades and a communication truck. He told them he was on a special mission concerning the invasion.

"I couldn't tell them what I was going to do because they were not Bigots," he said, "so they looked at me as if I'd come off the moon."

The commanding officer then called ADM Patrick Flanagan in London.

"I don't know what he told them, but I got everything I wanted after that at Base 2."

Walsh and his men arrived in the Southampton, England, area May 25. The next day he reported to Navy ADM Don Moon for his final orders. Walsh reported May 28 to Army GEN Lawton Collins, 7th Corps, who directed him to carry no written orders, keep no war diary and allow no cameras in his command.

The division departed Southampton June 4 for the marshalling area near the waterfront.

Walsh briefed his men on their mission and objectives. Maps of Normandy and charts of Cherbourg were opened for the first time.

While in the marshalling area, the men put on wax-impregnated clothing for protection against possible gas attack. They wore those clothes until after Cherbourg's capture.

"We got soaking wet going over the beach," Walsh said. "It was like walking around in a steam bath all day when the weather was warm, but like your clothes were full of ice at night."

The men boarded the liberty ship *James A. Farrell* that was headed for Normandy, along with 250 Roy-

al Marine commandos, paratroopers and assorted Army personnel.

"I look back nostalgically on that roll call and muster," Walsh said. "The morale and esprit de corps was excellent. The Red Cross ladies gave us tons of doughnuts and gallons of coffee. We joked and talked as if we were going on a picnic. It never occurred to any of us that some of us might not be coming back."

From Walsh's unit of 52 men, three died and 10 were wounded.

Task Unit 127.2.8 arrived over Utah Beach with the U.S. Army 7th Corps June 10.

Unit hides in farmhouse; avoids gunfire

On June 22, Walsh took 21 men to a small hamlet north of Montbourg to await the outcome of a surrender ultimatum that had been delivered to the Germans. The Nazis refused to surrender at noon that day. Walsh and his men hid in a small, stone farm house. Early that morning, American planes machine-gunned the area, which was full of German stragglers.

"We scattered," Walsh said. "I ran alongside the house and threw myself to the ground around the corner, but slammed into a dog house where I found a hen's nest with about 12 eggs. We had not seen a fresh egg in months."

After the planes left, the men boiled the eggs in water from jeep radiators. Each man received a small portion.

Walsh's unit fought its way into Cherbourg June 26 alongside troops of the 79th Division. They fought the Germans in the streets until about 8 p.m.

"The machine guns never stopped," he wrote. "Dead and wounded from both sides littered the streets. German machine guns were placed at sidewalk level in the basements of the building fronting on the street. We would capture the upper part of the structure but the Germans had to be dug out of the basements ... German guns under the caves at Fort du Roule, which had not been silenced by the satchel charges, fired into the rear of our American troops."

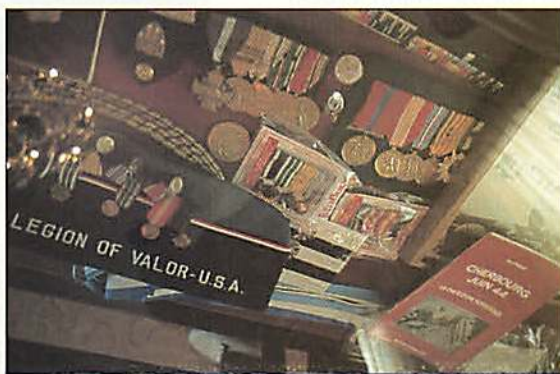
The next day his heavily-armed force cleared out the last of the German resistance in the naval arsenal at Cherbourg, using hand grenades and bazookas to blow open the steel doors of the underground bunkers. They took about 400 German prisoners.

For "heroism and conspicuous bravery" during the assault on Cherbourg, Walsh was cited and awarded the Navy Cross. The citation was signed by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal.

Walsh is taking his wife, Ann, to France for the World War II commemoration.

"After 50 years," he wrote, "our thoughts should be not only of memories but also the sacrifices made by the dead and the living. Proud of our victories, we should always remember the cost of their bitterness and sorrow."

PA1 Dave Oney,
5th Dist.



PA1 Dave Oney

Walsh's World War II Medals

★ ★ ★ ★
COMMANDANT'S
Bulletin

The United States Coast Guard

June 1994



**Work-force
reductions
explained**