

# Storming Ashore at Red Beach

---

In this crescendo of exploding bombs, rockets and shells, *Horace A. Bass*, the control ship for Red Beach, gave the signal for assault. Coxswains in the eight LCVPs of the first wave gunned their engines and coned their boats across the line of departure. Corsairs strafing the beach rained 20mm shell casings on the sailors and Marines in the landing craft.

The assault forces welcomed all of this extra firepower. The causeway on the right flank of Red Beach reminded Marine Captain Francis I. "Ike" Fenton, Jr., Commander of Company B, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, of the bloody World War II battle of Tarawa. Fenton considered the worst-if the enemy occupied the causeway "we were going to have a tough time making that last 200 yards to the beach."

At 1731, the first LCVP hit the sea wall just ahead of the others in the boat wave. Coxswains skillfully used their engines to hold their boats in place as Marines tossed grenades over the wall. Amidst the explosions, ladders clattered against the rocks and riflemen scrambled "over the top." NKPA machine gunners in the few bunkers still unscathed sprayed the top of this rampart, cutting down some leathernecks and pinning others near the sea wall. The Marines had landed, but just barely.

Nearby, a Navy coxswain rammed his LCVP into a

breach in the sea wall. The Marines stormed ashore right under a machine gun, fortunately silent, which protruded from a pillbox. This platoon from Company A quickly grenaded the position and six wounded Koreans stumbled out to surrender. They rapidly cleared nearby trenches, advanced into town and secured the massive Asahi Brewery on the flank of Cemetery Hill. At the base of the Wolmi Do causeway, Company E occupied the Nippon Flour Company compound.

Not everything at Red Beach went so well. Most of Company A was pinned down and the second wave troops crashed in amongst them. First Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez silenced one pillbox and moved to attack a second when an enemy burst hit him. Lopez fell on the grenade he was about to throw, sacrificing his life to save his men. The NKPA gunners continued to fire, killing two more Marines. Company A finally destroyed the pillbox, but above them loomed Cemetery Hill. Then, the platoon at the brewery attacked the back side of the hill and captured several dozen dazed enemy infantrymen. These victories had a cost; eight Marines lay dead on the little flat in front of the graveyard knoll and Navy corpsmen tended another 28 wounded leathernecks.

Although the 5th Marines held Cemetery Hill, the NKPA still threatened Red Beach. Observatory and

British Consulate hills remained in enemy hands and until they fell, Communist troops could fire directly into the landing area. It was especially critical that the Marines on Red Beach take the high ground, because the assault waves would be followed by the LSTs loaded with ammunition, vehicles and supplies. Without this resupply, it was unlikely that the Marines could hold their positions overnight.

The consolidation of Red Beach continued, but in ragged fashion. One passenger in the fifth wave, New York *Herald-Tribune* reporter Marguerite Higgins, remarked on the scene. She described a "strange sunset combined with the haze of flaming docks" which created a panorama "that a movie audience would have considered overdone." Poor visibility contributed to a breakdown in coordination. The LCVPs of the fourth and fifth waves became intermingled and many touched land in the wrong areas. These boats carried the two infantry companies that were to seize the most important position in Inchon. Observatory Hill. Hindered by battle smoke and a late afternoon drizzle, it took the two companies several minutes to reorganize ashore. One platoon and a mortar section, however, almost immediately struck out for their objective.

Meanwhile, the eight LSTs destined for Red Beach maneuvered offshore. Each ship had embarked

---

only 500 tons of supplies to lighten their loads and thus prevent grounding in the mud flats. All of the LSTs carried the same proportion of food, water, ammunition,

fuel and vehicles, ensuring that the loss of any one ship would not be catastrophic. Doyle's staff calculated that the Marines needed a minimum of 3,000 tons of

material to hold during the night. The planners also figured that because of the hostile environment of Inchon harbor and expected enemy opposition, two of the

---

## Baldomero Lopez, A United States Marine

**1**st Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez represented the best of the Korean War-era Marine Corps. Lopez displayed dedication to the Marine Corps, concern for his men, dynamic combat leadership, personal bravery and a willingness to sacrifice his life for his fellow leathernecks.

The son of an orphaned Spanish immigrant, Lopez enlisted in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He served with distinction until the service discovered that he was underage, which mandated his discharge. Undeterred, Lopez applied for and was admitted to the U.S. Naval Academy. Graduating in Class 1948-A on 6 June 1947, 2nd Lieutenant Lopez entered the Marine Corps. Because he had boxed at the Academy, he earned the nickname "Punchy." He served with the Marines in North China and then joined the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California.

Lopez was scheduled for schooling at Quantico, Virginia, when the Commandant of the Marine Corps ordered the Marine Brigade at Pendleton to ship out for Korea. In the words of a fellow Marine officer, Lopez "couldn't stand it. Before the brigade sailed, Punchy swore he would move heaven and earth and get out to us." Sure enough, Lopez was among the replacements from the States when the brigade returned to Pusan after the Naktong battles to refit for Inchon. The eager officer, now a 1st Lieutenant, took command of the 3rd Platoon, Company A, 5th Marines.

Company A made one of the initial assaults at Red Beach. Since Lopez was the only platoon leader without combat experience, the company commander placed the other two rifle platoons in the first wave and his in the second. Despite this precaution, two of the three platoons, including Lopez's, were soon pinned down just over the sea wall. Automatic weapons fire from two pillboxes crisscrossed the area. With other waves coming in, Lopez knew that the situation called for decisive action.

In the face of enemy fire, Lopez led a fire team in



NA 127.GK-2341,-A3190

**First Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez, USMC, scales the sea wall at Red Beach. Minutes after this photo was taken, Lopez sacrificed his life to save his own men and earned the Medal of Honor.**

an attack on the two positions. The intrepid officer silenced one bunker with a grenade. Just as he pulled the pin of another grenade, a burst of machine gun fire hit him in the chest and right arm. Badly wounded, he dropped the grenade and its arming handle flew off. The entire fire team was now at risk. Shouting "Grenade!" the lieutenant swept the live ordnance against his side. Lopez smothered the explosion with his own body, sacrificing his life for the lives of his men.

In recognition of this selfless act, the Navy Department awarded 1st Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez the Medal of Honor. His courage and self-sacrifice are remembered by fellow Marines when they serve with USNS **Baldomero Lopez**, a maritime prepositioning ship named in his honor in 1985 by the Secretary of the Navy.



Navy corpsmen treat wounded Marine Gerald E. Beck at Inchon.

NA 80-G-420224

in an attempt to stop the enemy fusillade.

Ashore, the 2nd Battalion's Weapons and Headquarters companies came under intense "friendly" fire from the LSTs. These units, which had not yet suffered casualties, soon counted 1 killed and another 23 wounded. The platoon on Cemetery Hill abandoned the crest and harbor face for the Inchon side, preferring to confront the NKPA heavy machine guns on Observatory Hill rather than the LSTs' weapons. Some Navy LST gunners, however, were on target, destroying a North Korean automatic weapon firing at the men on Cemetery Hill.

Despite some disorganization and both enemy and friendly fire, the 5th Marines continued to move forward. Company E took British Consulate Hill at 1845 as the lone rifle platoon and mortar section seized a portion of Observatory Hill. By 2000, and after a sharp fire fight, Fenton's Company B secured half of the hill. Company D occupied the rest of the position, even though a Communist machine gun killed 1 Marine and wounded 4 others, including the unit's medical corpsman. This sailor refused evacuation until he had treated the wounds of his comrades and ensured their safety.

eight ships would be lost.

At 1630, in the wake of the assault waves, *LST 859* crossed the line of departure. She was followed at five-minute intervals by her seven sisters. The LST skippers knew this would be a difficult approach, even in a nonbattle situation, and what they saw ahead of them heightened their anxiety. Gun flashes from the battle at Cemetery Hill dominated the north end of Red Beach. Large groups of Marines hugged the waterfront in the center of the beach, apparently unable to advance inland.

By the time the second ship, *LST 975*, crossed the line, *LST 859* was already

taking fire. Communist gunners on Observatory Hill sprayed the landing ships with heavy machine gun rounds, and rifle bullets clanged on their superstructures. NKPA mortars firing from within the city quickly struck several ships. A fire began to blaze among the ammunition trucks on board *LST 914*, but alert sailors and Marines put it out with CO! canisters and fog dispensers. A burst of automatic weapon fire holed eight drums of gasoline on *LST 857*, and the deck ran with the volatile fuel. In response, the LSTs wildly swept the beachhead with their three-inch, 40mm and 20mm guns