

A Distinct Loss to the Nation

The landing boats carrying the 112th Infantry Regiment toward its D-Day landings were off course. Due to the smoke and chaos of battle and the perplexing coastal tides, the landing craft were coming in about two kilometers south of their intended landing points on Utah Beach. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., assistant commander of the 4th Infantry Division, signaled the boats to land anyway.

Roosevelt, among the first wave of soldiers to reach Utah, greeted the regiment's commander at the top of a dune.

"Red," Roosevelt yelled to Colonel Russell "Red" Reeder in his deep bass voice, "the causeways leading inland are all clogged up." American vehicles attempting to move inland were backed up bumper to bumper along the causeway that extended through the flooded fields behind the beach. Rather than add to the congestion on the causeway, Reeder "gave an arm signal and three thousand heavily armed infantrymen walked into the man-made lake."

Allied aerial reconnaissance had discovered the areas flooded by the Germans to make it more difficult to move inland. Intelligence estimated the depth of the water to be only about a foot. In truth, the water was waist deep and when the soldiers stepped into the submerged irrigation ditches, they often dropped in over their heads. Captain Jason Cornelius Hardee, commanding officer of the 112th's Company G, was among the leaders exhorting his soldiers through the water.

Hardee was an agronomy major from Loris. A member of Clemson's Class of 1940, he was a second lieutenant in the Cadet Brigade and was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 1st Regiment. As a first-year cadet, Hardee marched with the Freshman Platoon, composed of the best-drilled cadets in his class. He was a member of the Grange, Future Farmers of America, and Kappa Alpha Sigma, the local chapter of the American Society of Agronomy. In the summer before his senior year, he traveled to Fort McClellan, Alabama and completed ROTC training camp there. Following graduation, Hardee took a job with the US Census Bureau in Washington, DC. He was called to active duty in July 1941.

Hardee was assigned to the 112th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Benning, Georgia. The division participated in the Louisiana maneuvers in August 1941 and the Carolina maneuvers that October. In December, the division moved to Camp Gordon, Georgia and once again traveled to the Carolinas for large-scale exercises in the summer of 1942.

The division remained on the move for much of 1943, going first to Fort Dix, New Jersey, then to battlefield maneuvers in Florida and training exercises at Fort Jackson. In January 1944, the division shipped out of New York for England, arriving on the 26th.



After wading across those flooded fields on D-Day, the 112th Infantry Regiment reached its objective of Sainte-Marie-du Mont and linked up with both the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. Remarkably, the 4th Infantry Division's casualties on D-Day were *less* than the casualties it suffered during training for the invasion.

On June 9, the 4th Infantry Division was holding the far-right shoulder of the Allied invasion near the French village of Montebourg. In hard fighting, Captain Hardee was cited for gallantry in action, initiative, and courage, which resulted in the awarding of the Silver Star.

After the Allies cut off the base of the Cherbourg Peninsula, they reoriented their attack toward the south. By early July, one million Allied soldiers had come ashore in Normandy. The Allies needed maneuver room to put them into action against the Germans. The invaders were hampered by the distinctive hedgerows that separated each Norman field and pasture from its neighbor. The Germans used the mounded hedges and the sunken lanes that ran behind them as defensive barriers. Only slowly did the Americans, through trial and error, trial and success, devise tactics for overcoming the hedgerows and their defenders. On July 6, with the division operating near Carentan, Captain Hardee was seriously wounded. He was evacuated to a hospital in England, where he died on July 15.

Jason Cornelius Hardee's death was described by a local newspaper as "a distinct loss to the nation" where his leadership would have been "needed in peace as well as in war." Hardee was survived by his parents, two sisters, and four brothers, two of whom were in the military. In addition to the Silver Star, he was awarded the Purple Heart. After the war, Hardee's remains were returned to Loris and buried in the Twin City Memorial Garden.



See also *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* by Rick Atkinson, 2013, and: *D-Day June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* by Stephen Ambrose, 1994.