

ENGLAND - Cpl. Jack Coggins, YANK staff artist, was in the dining saloon of a U. S. Liberty ship, the *George E. Pickett*, drinking coffee when the news came over the radio that landings on the beaches of Normandy had begun. Principal reaction of the men of the crew - it was mostly live cargo the *Pickett* was carrying - was relief that it was not another dry run. Throughout the action that followed Coggins was perched at a vantage point on the upper deck with his sketch book, making drawings of the scenes about him. The impressions which he recorded with his drawing pencil on D-Day and D plus One, when his ship reached the beachhead, are reproduced on these two pages. His verbal description of the scenes, which goes as a companion piece to the drawings, follows:

"Our cargo was a varied one; a battery of 105s, an ambulance company, one bulldozer, a truck loaded with a dismantled Piper Cub, members of a port Company, a Counter Intelligence Corps detachment, one platoon of a reconnaissance outfit with their jeeps and M-8s, and some infantrymen. Reaction of most of the GIs to the news that battle had begun was one of curiosity. They were not the least bit excited, but a fit and solid bunch of men. They took their briefing quietly, and seemed more interested in the money they'd just received for use in France than in where they were going. I got the impression that except for local knowledge contained in their detailed maps, most of them had no idea of the operation as a whole....

"Our fleet was a terrific sight-ships as far as one could see, big ones and little ones, Liberty ships and LCTs, cruisers and tugs. DUKWs and smaller landing craft scurried about like water beetles.

"Inshore, Allied cruisers and battleships slowly and deliberately rolled out great billows of bright-orange flame, marking the departure of tons of high explosive aimed at German defences inland. Our ship shook to the heavy concussion of the big guns. Once in a while, a Jerry shell would raise a waterspout close to the big ships but the enemy's return fire was negligible in its effect. The ship just astern of us, in another column, got a bit of damage and farther astern one of our own convoy was down at the stern and belching great clouds of smoke and flame amidships. As we approached our anchorage, bows and sterns of wrecked ships, the funnels and mast of an American destroyer jutting from the water, were testimony to the effectiveness of German fire on D-Day....

“WHAT struck me most was the absence of enemy planes. I saw only one, an ME-109 which zoomed out of the overcast one afternoon, took violent but unsuccessful evasive action from the blast of light flak that flew up from every ship in sight, then went into the drink with a mighty splash. A few planes were over the anchorage at night, visible only through the suggestion of dotted lines of tracer fire drifting lazily skyward to mark their progress. The Navy guns on our ship got their first chance to fire at the enemy on one of those night forays - and the men loved it. Our ensign had drilled them not to fire until they could see their plane and they never did, which was more than could be said for the gun crews on some of the other ships.

"Among other things, we had a load of TNT and dynamite aboard, an uncomfortable cargo at any time, and particularly so with Jerry's 20-mm. shells dropping aboard, as they did on many occasions. It was a relief when our cargo was finally landed....

"I went ashore with a load of jeeps and found the beachhead remarkably quiet and orderly. Smashed German guns and pillboxes marked the passage of our troops inland, but our engineers had done a good job of cleaning up most of the wreckage. My hat is off to the members of our port company who unloaded us; they had been so thoroughly trained that they emptied the ship without a hitch, despite air alerts and occasional shells from 88s inland. The shells were landing on the beach or in the water every once in a while and there was considerable gunfire inland. Otherwise, the scene, just in from the beach, was like a peaceful bit of England. Swarms of meadowlarks hovered overhead as I returned to the beach later, and I felt a little cheated - this was my first battlefield - and I thumbed a ride in a DUKW back to the *Pickett*....

"We changed position in a hurry that afternoon. Jerry had gotten our measure and his 88s were falling uncomfortably close with a most unpleasantly threatening sound. After a couple that fell short, and a near miss off our port bow, we went searching for a safer anchorage....

"The Channel was lively when we came back. We were at action stations most of the night. What with the shells and bombs and the strain of no sleep we were all glad to get back. It felt good to take your boots off for a change."