

OBJECT ID	1998.38.1
OBJECT NAME	Photograph
OBJECT COLLECTION	Angelos's Collection (is part of)
DATE CREATED	11/1944, 1944
OBJECT ENTITIES	Chatas, Angelos (is related to)
RELATED ITEMS	Photograph, 1998.38.2 Photograph, 1998.38.3 Photograph, 1998.38.4 Photograph, 1998.38.5
ACCESS POINTS	navy photocopy photograph WWII

OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Angelos Chatas in US Navy attire after returning fom France and preparing for Pacific duty. Angelos Chatas was part of the Naval Combat Demolition Unit, US Navy, during WWII.
Recipient of the National Merit Cross from the French Government

ORIGIN

Donated by Angelos Chatas. The original picture was taken November 1944 after returning from duty in France and before returning to duty in the Pacific.

INVASION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE - Recollections of Angelos Chatas

"Naples and Salerno served as the marshaling area for the Naval Demolition Units, where final training and briefing for the Invasion were completed. We were transported to the Invasion sites by an LSD (LASALLE). Enroute we were hit a mistral, a ferocious Mediterranean storm - the worst I''ve ever experienced. We all got very seasick!

"Our initial objective, involving my unit (NCDU 25) was to destroy a submarine net blocking the harbor of Agay Cove, where the 36th Division was to land. It was like movies: In the stealth of night, during predawn hours of 8-15-44, we swam in with our explosives. The net was made with one-inch cable designed in an 8-inch matrix. It was held up by buoys, which looked like oversize oil drum, placed about 10 meters apart, and was anchored at each end. We place charges on the buoys and on the anchors, by which time we were spotted and subjected to enemy fire. Nevertheless, we destroyed the submarine net, allowing the 36th Division to proceed with their landing.

"Let me digress a moment to mention that last September (1999) a monument was dedicated near the Dallas City Hall to the 36th Division. It honors all the GIs of the 36th, who among other deeds, helped liberate Southern France. I was invited to attend the ceremony, which acknowledged the role that we, Frogmen, served as vanguard to the 36th Division at Agay Cove.

"Later that day, while securing Agay Cove and preparing for another beach assault, I witnessed a tragedy. Nearing twilight, a sole German bomber dropped a single bomb, which hit an LST that had just beached. It blew up all night, killing most of the troops on board. The next morning we passed by the ship to see charred bodies of GIs and destroyed equipment.

"The next morning (8-16-44) most of our demolition force proceeded west of San Rafael to secure Green Beach. We immediately encountered enemy resistance, and a mini-battle ensued, which we won, taking 27 prisoners. (I captured 3 of them.) Later in the day, we were subjected to rifle fire from what we thought were German troops. Not so! They were American GIs who had circled behind the Beach from a landing to the east. Evidently, none of us were sharpshooters, and we discovered each other before any casualties occurred.

"A couple of days later (about 8-18-44), a German jumbo sea mine broke loose from its sea mooring and began floating towards shore. Our Navy opened fire to destroy the mine before it hit one of our ships. They missed! When the mine reached 300 meters from shore, the Navy command ordered our commander to sink it with manually placed charges.

"Myself plus a young seaman from Chicago, Casper Ciszelski, both members of NCDU 25, volunteered for the mission. We used a 2-man kayak. Ski manned the forward paddle rowing to port, while I manned the stern paddle, rowing starboard and also steering the kayak with foot pedals connected to the rudder. We rowed out, found the mine, draped 3 blocks of Tetratol connected with Prima Cord over the mine''s horns, set the 3-minute fuse and ignited it. We then headed with great alacrity towards shore, with me setting the rowing speed. Witnesses told us later that we were going through the water like a motorboat. Indeed, we passed some small boats on the way to shore before the explosion occurred.

"After spending several more days cleaning landing beaches of obstacles and mines, we boarded the flagship of the invasion, the USS BAYFIELD, which also served as the flagship of Utah Beach at Normandy. I still remember the roast turkey dinner, including ice cream and Coca Cola. A sumptuous meal after existing on short rations, including one day with no food at all. While aboard the BAYFIELD, I participated in a Naval funeral service with burial at sea, a somber experience.

"I then also learned that Admiral Donald Moon, a giant of a man, the naval commander of Utah Beach, was dead and stored in the ship''s freezer. He had committed suicide; ostensibly because of personnel losses his command had suffered. (Editor: I remember how we, on the BUTLER, were shocked when we heard of Admiral Moon''s suicide. He committed suicide just a few days after the start of the Normandy Invasion.) At the time, I remember wondering why (?), because our fatal casualties at Utah beach were comparatively light. Then in 1994, when secret Navy documents were released, the real reason became manifest. During a training operation in the English Channel about April 1944, while practicing for the Normandy Invasion, serious Snafu''s occurred which allowed German naval forces, consisting mainly of E-boats, to attack. One serious flaw bears mentioning: Communications between elements of our forces broke down because the respective radio frequencies were not known. After the smoke cleared, we lost almost as many men in that training operation as at Utah Beach in the real thing. This was indeed a case where the left hand knew not what the right hand was doing. Evidently, this preyed on the mind of the admiral and finally led to his demise.

"In summary, Operation Dragoon, the Invasion of Southern France, was one of the most successful campaigns of WWII. The battle began with the invasion on 8-15-44, and concluded when Gen. Patch''s 7th Army, supported by the French 1st Army, connected with Gen. Patton''s 3rd Army on 9-11-44. A total of 27 days. It involved 350,000 Allied combatants. Nearly 1,000 ships were deployed, including 5 American battleships, one of which was the USS TEXAS. The U.S. 12th Air Force provided 2,100 aircraft. Allied casualties totaled 8,346, including 1,395 KIA (killed -in-action), about half of which were Americans.

(Editor: As a reminder, our squadron of destroyers traveled with the USS TEXAS from Plymouth, England to the Mediterranean. The TEXAS, underway, refueled us, gave us ice cream and traded movies with us. Imagine the TEXAS, a big ship towering over a lot smaller tin can sent the can holding the movie film crashing onto our deck. One of our boatswain mates, Giles, shouted up at the TEXAS, "You big floating boot camp.")

“Opposing enemy forces consisted of 6 divisions of the 19th German Army, totaling about 100,000 men. German naval forces were limited to a handful of small units plus a few U-boats. The Luftwaffe had only 70 fighters and 130 bombers, outnumbered by the Allies 10:1. This explains why, at a fraction of the cost in men and materiel, Allied forces in Operation Dragoon liberated more French territory and freed more French people than at Normandy.”

CITATION

Photograph, 11/1944, 1944, Angelos's Collection, *National Hellenic Museum*, https://collections.nationalhellenicmuseum.org/Detail/objects/.

Accessed 11/10/26.