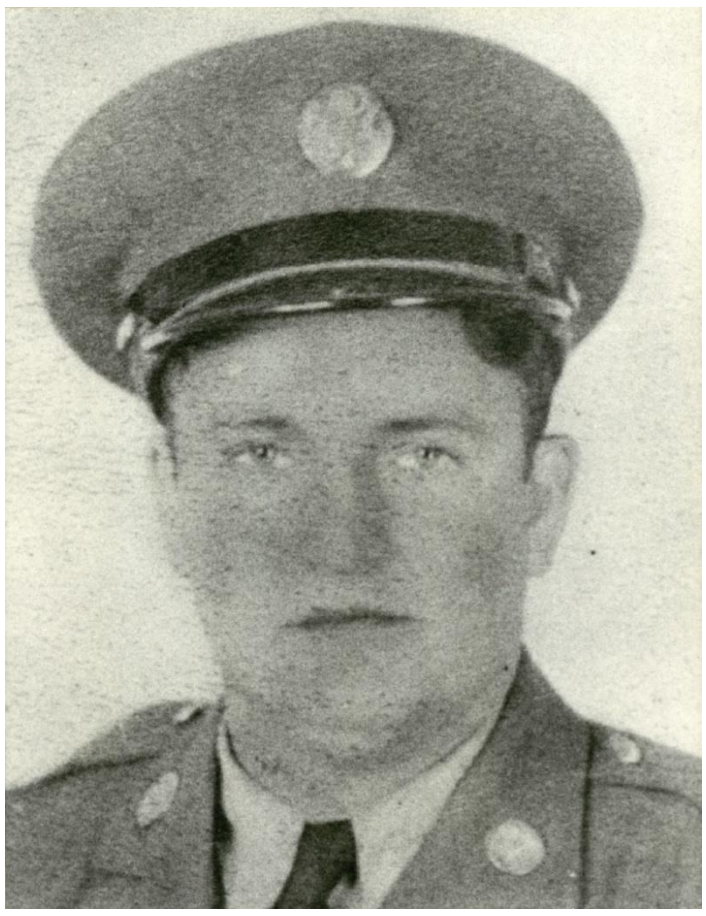
The History of our Namesakes
Dana – Howard – Weekley
American Legion, Post 130

Technician Fifth Class Homer S. Howard, US Army, a native of Hendry County, FL, was assigned to the 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Infantry Division, during Operation Avalanche, the first assault on Salerno, south of Naples, Italy, in September of 1943. During Operation Avalanche, over 80,000 allied troops conducted amphibious invasions along the coast of southern Italy in order to dislodge the Germans and Italians, to gain a foothold in the southern theater.

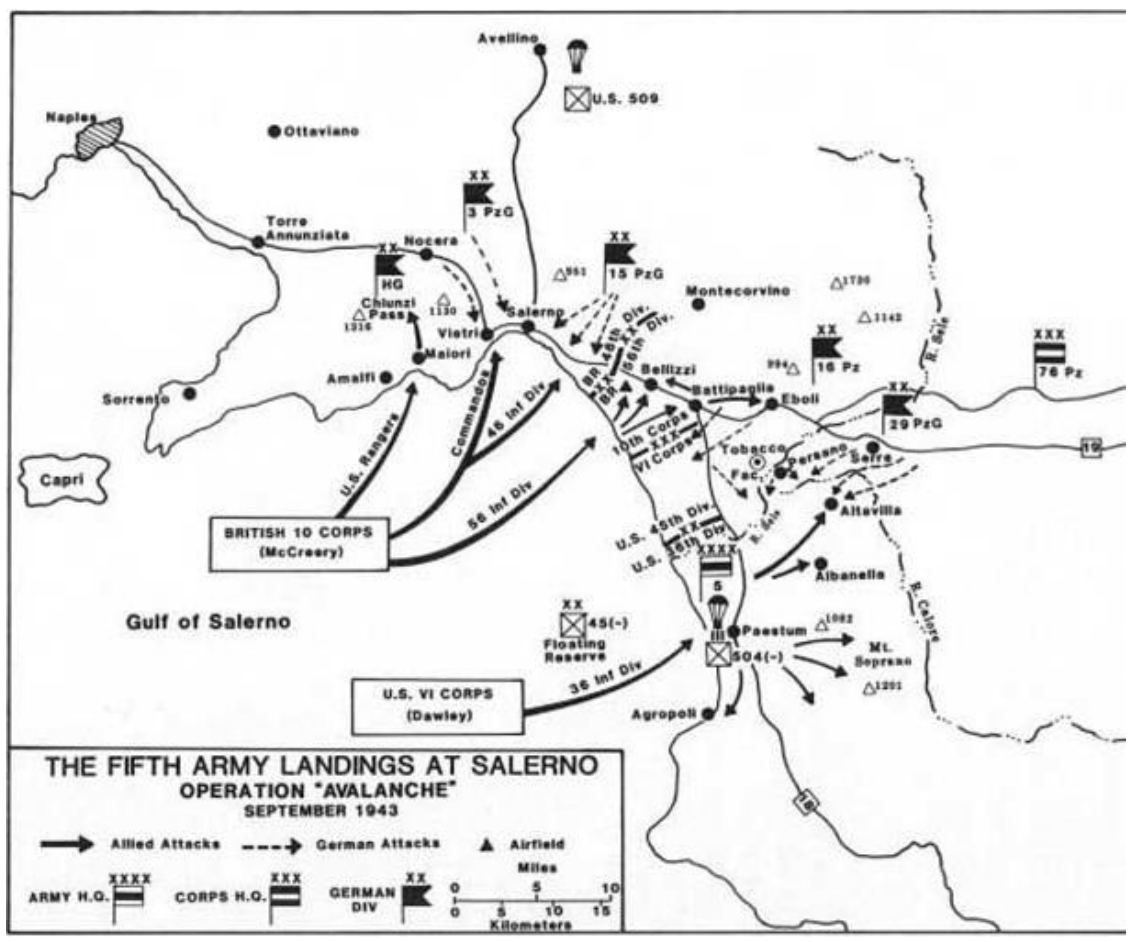


Up to the start of the operation, British forces had conducted raids within Italy under the command of British General Bernard Montgomery in order to destroy bridges and other infrastructure so that once the main American forces started their assault, German response with their Panzer Corp would be slowed enough to prevent them from fully defending the American landings. The British were so successful, albeit taking large casualties, that the Italian government surrendered to the Allies on 8 Sep 1943. However, the Germans remained in their strong defenses poised to repel an Allied foothold, which would open the ground war to another front.

Pictured: View of the Salerno Invasion from the beach-head

The main American invasion of Operation Avalanche began on 9 Sep 1943 under American General Mark Clark. Surprise was not achieved, and as the first wave forces came ashore at 0400 hours, German defenders announced over loud speakers to the assault force in English "come on in and give up, we have you covered." Over the next four hours German artillery, assisted by over 450 Luftwaffe attack planes, destroyed 18 landing crafts, and hit 85 other Allied vessels in open water.

The initial invasion, first wave, was nearly defeated by German defenders, which pushed the first assault back to the sea shore. Tech 5 Howard was one of the infantrymen assigned to the second wave force that assaulted the beach-head, and saved the decimated first wave forces that were pinned down. By the end of the day on 9 Sep, the Allies had ferociously assaulted only 5 miles inland.

Not much is known about the exact details of Howard's actions, but he was killed in action (KIA) when his Division took up a defensive posture, after running out of reserve forces, against the German 29th Panzergrenadier Division, which launched a counter-attack and overran the 1st Battalion of the 142nd on 12 Sep 1943.

Howard was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and is buried at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery, in Nettuno, Itlay, outside of Anzio, which is about 160 miles north of where he died, at Plot I, Row 15, Grave 36.