

All these successive moves with possible alternatives were the subjects of long discussions but the general plan approved as the outline of the operation we intended to conduct was:

1. Land on the Normandy coast.
2. Build up the resources needed for a decisive battle in the Normandy-Brittany region and break out of the enemy's encircling position.
3. Pursue on a broad front with two army groups, emphasizing the left to gain necessary ports and reach the boundaries of Germany and threaten the Ruhr. On our right we would link up with forces that were to invade France from the south.
4. Build up our new base along the western border of Germany, by securing ports in Belgium and in Brittany as well as in the Mediterranean.
5. While building up our forces for the final battles, keep up an unrelenting offensive to the extent of our means, both to wear down the enemy and to gain advantages for the final fighting.
6. Complete the destruction of enemy forces constantly seeking bridgeheads across the river.
7. Launch the final attack as a double envelopment of the Ruhr, again emphasizing the left, and follow this up by an immediate thrust through Germany, with the specific direction to be determined at the time.
8. Clean out the remainder of Germany.

This general plan, carefully outlined at staff meetings before D-Day, was never abandoned, even momentarily, throughout the campaign.¹⁰

Now that the plan had been decided upon, the next question was the timing. In order to take advantage of good spring and summer weather, the earlier the attack could be launched the better.

Weather conditions in the channel prohibited any attempt before May. This was the earliest that the required favorable combination of tides and sunrise would occur. Thus, early May was the original and tentatively selected target date.

Weather, Tides, Moonlight, and Sunrise

Sun Tzu: The army is established by deceit, moves for advantage, and changes through segmenting and reuniting. Thus, its speed is like the wind, its slowness like the forest; its invasion and plundering like a fire; unmoving, it is like mountains. It is difficult to know as the darkness; in movement it is like thunder.¹¹

¹⁰ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 228–29.

¹¹ Sun-Tzu, 198.



Matthew 16:2 But Jesus answered and said to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'

v. 3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is read and threatening.'"

Success of *Overlord* would be impossible without the right combination of weather, tides, moonlight, and sunrise. **Darkness** was essential to keep the Germans from knowing the strength and specific destination of the invasion prongs. **Moonlight** was necessary to reveal bomber targets. **Timing** of the attack had to be accurate enough to allow forty minutes of daylight to finish softening up bombing missions. **The tide** had to be low enough to disclose near-shore and beachfront obstacles for hurried removal. The biggest element, the most-fickle imponderable, was something Eisenhower couldn't control: **the weather**. If stormy, it would conceal targets, rile the waters, and create conditions making beach landings treacherous to impossible.

The right combination of moon, tides, and sunrise would come together on June 5, 6, and 7. After two weeks, some conditions would be right again, but the moon would be wrong.

Thus, the importance of meteorology was obvious, and a search was conducted to determine who should head up the staff.

When Operation Overlord was all over in retrospect it can be determined that the key to the Allied victory was its commanders' access to accurate weather forecasts and the courage to confidently act upon them.

But the appointment of the right man for the job came dangerously close to being bungled because of military and governmental politics.

The United States had always left the details of weather forecasting to each branch of the military. If one man was to be placed over meteorology, then it should be an American and he an officer.

For the British, the opposite was true. Their military had always depended upon the civilian British Meteorological Society for its weather forecasts.

In the end, the British prevailed, but their solution still struck a negative chord with the Americans. The British appointed James Martin Stagg, superintendent of the Kew (Kyu) Observatory in Surrey, London.

Americans didn't like taking orders from British officers in the first place, but they were even more adamant about doing so from a civilian.

(End MD19-A-01. See MD19-B-02 for continuation of study at p. 11.)



The British condescended by placing Stagg into the Royal Air Force as a group captain, but without a commission. Thus, Stagg was as much a “paper” officer as the First Army Group was a “paper” army. This led to difficulties even within the British armed forces. Finally, the American officer who was Stagg’s superior, Gen. Harold R. Bull, relieved Stagg as group captain on March 29, 1944.

Realizing the need for Stagg’s expertise, the British Air Ministry finally commissioned him a Royal Air Force group captain. Stagg was restored to duty on April 8, barely two months before D-Day.

If the Lord and His angels take care of the weather, then it is very important that you have the Lord’s man firmly in place to interpret the divinely designed meteorological data to be provided by Him. It turns out that Stagg was the best man available. In order for freedom to be triumphant over the evil empire of Hitler’s Third Reich, then very tough assignments lay ahead for the Allies.

Outnumbered three to one, the Allies were at a distinct disadvantage on the battlefield. Surprise was critical if they were to be successful in flanking the German defenses.

Two of Hitler’s best were in command of the Germans in France. **Field Marshal Karl R. von Rundstedt** was Commander in Chief of the Western Front and **Field Marshal Erwin J. Rommel** was commander of Army Group B which contained the 15th army deployed at Calais and the 7th army stationed in Normandy.

Under the principle that Jesus Christ controls history, it is obvious that the ultimate Field Marshal was our Lord Himself. Aware of the circumstances, options, and variables, Jesus Christ knew the only way the superior forces of Germany could be breached was by surprise attack. And the only way the advance of such a large armada could be kept secret would be by means of a raging storm system.

The Lord produced the only kind of weather in which such an invasion could have been successfully accomplished and right in the middle of it He installed a high-pressure system designed to provide fair enough weather to accommodate the D-Day landing force.

Yet, forecasting this would lie in the hands of **Group Captain James M. Stagg**. Forecasting Channel weather had always been difficult. An added complication was that the best invasion weather for one service was not so good for another.

Tides were, of course, predictable, but air cover required that cloud cover could not exceed 6-tenths of the night sky and with a base of over 3,000 feet. Gliders and paratroopers need winds aloft to be an average of 20 miles per hour, but never over 30 miles per hour.

The dates of June 5–7 insured the light of a full moon and a sunrise which would coordinate with the invasion’s timetable.



Further, the forecasts had to be accurate not only for D-Day, but also for a period three days prior and four days following. It was a meteorological nightmare into which was thrown the uncertainties of a seasonal storm in the Channel.

On May 28, 1944, Supreme Headquarters for Allied European Forces—known as SHAEF and with Dwight Eisenhower as supreme commander—moved its meteorological officers from Surry to Portsmouth.

By June 1st, all phases of the invasion were ready—all but the weather. Beginning that night, Eisenhower began to hold two daily conferences, one at 9:30 P.M., and the other at 4:00 A.M. They were to be held at a three-story country mansion called Southwick House located a mile away from SHAEF headquarters.

On June 2nd, Captain Stagg stood before his weather charts unable to hide his pessimism about the succession of low-pressure areas bringing in gusty winds, choppy seas, and a low cloud cover.

After meeting with his commanders, Eisenhower decided to allow some of the most distantly based bombardment ships to sail. By the next day the seas were rising, and winds were blowing stronger as other bombardment ships set out of port.

On the evening of Saturday, June 3rd, Captain Stagg addressed the 9:30 meeting with news of another low-pressure area bringing stormy weather for at least 48 hours. “There’s little likelihood that a benevolent high will move in for 24 hours beyond that.”

This was drastic news. If true, then the weather would successfully kill off the prime invasion dates. Earlier that day Eisenhower had sent a memorandum to his Allied commanders discussing his views on the weather:

The weather in this country is practically unpredictable. For some days our experts have been meeting almost hourly and I have been holding Commander-in-Chief meetings once or twice a day to consider the reports and tentative predictions.

Success or failure might easily hinge upon the effectiveness, for example, of airborne operations. If the weather is suitable for everything else, but unsuitable for airborne operations, the question becomes whether to risk the airborne movement anyway or to defer the whole affair in the hope of getting weather that is a bit better.

My tentative thought is that the desirability for getting started on the next favorable tide is so great and the uncertainty of the weather is such that we could never anticipate really perfect weather coincident with proper tidal conditions, that we must go unless there is a real and very serious deterioration in the weather.

Eisenhower decided that he would hold off the final decision for postponement until the 4 A.M. meeting on June 4th.



By the next morning, weather in the Channel had deteriorated to the worst in 40 years. Gale force winds swept the invasion routes and Stagg's crew was trying to interpret the movement of two depressions in the North Atlantic. One was northwest of Scotland; the other south of Greenland. They were creating force 5 and 6 winds ranging from 17–27 knots. These were enough to produce large waves and spray. This was significant. If the ground troops were violently seasick when they hit the beaches, their combat effectiveness would be impaired.

Stagg informed the commanders that he could no longer predict the weather more than 24 hours in advance. His current report was not good: low clouds, high winds, and formidable wave action would make handling small boats difficult, landings hazardous, naval bombardment inaccurate, and air support hopeless.

Eisenhower consulted with general staff: Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsey said, "We can handle the mechanics of landing, but adjusting gunfire would be difficult. I am neither for nor against going."

General Sir Bernard Montgomery said, "I favor going. Otherwise, we risk the loss of security and the high morale of the troops."

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder disagreed. "Air dominance has always been essential to success of the overall plan. Under the circumstances, there could be no air support at all on June 5th.

With this, General Eisenhower made the decision to postpone the invasion for 24 hours. D-Day was moved to Tuesday, June 6th and his point of no return for launching the assault would be at 9:30 meeting that night, Sunday, June 4th.

No break was reported by Stagg at that night's meeting. Admiral Ramsey spoke up and said that the decision could not be postponed for another weather report. For his ships to be in position for the June 6th attack, sailing orders for the U.S. task force had to be issued within 30 minutes. If the order went out and had to be recalled, the ships could not be prepared for another invasion attempt on the 7th. Therefore, if the order was given and then recalled, the invasion would have to be postponed until June 19th.

Eisenhower felt that the secrecy of the invasion would be sacrificed because astute observers in the U.S. and in England would deduce that an invasion attempt had been attempted and then recalled. To launch in mid-June meant that airborne drops would have to be made without benefit of moonlight.

Again, Eisenhower consulted his commanders. Following dialogue took place between Ike and Montgomery:



- Eisenhower: “Do you see any reason for not going Tuesday?”
- Montgomery: “I would say – Go!”
- Eisenhower: “The question is just how long can you hang this operation on the end of a limb and let it hang there. I’m quite positive we must give the order. I don’t like it, but there it is. I don’t see how we can possibly do anything else.”

Eisenhower’s decision meant that H-Hour for U.S. troops would be at 6:30 A.M. on June 6th. As the invasion could be canceled, a final meeting was scheduled for 4:00 A.M., Monday, June 5th.

When they met again the next morning, the wind was blowing hard and rain pounded on the windows of the meeting room at Southwick House. The foul weather predicted by the meteorological committee for the Normandy coast had materialized. If the Allies had made June 5th D-Day, a major disaster would have occurred.

At about 4:00 A.M., Captain Stagg entered the room with his latest weather forecast and opened with an astonishing announcement, “Some rapid and unexpected developments.”

Without benefit of glossary, the commanders intently listened as Stagg translated meteorological jargon into the language of the invasion.

Off the coast of Spain, a stationary high-pressure area was moving in a northwesterly direction. Stagg forecasted that this should result in gradually clearing skies and moderation of winds, over both the Channel and assault areas, for probably 36 hours. He added that a partly cloudy condition should prevail on the morning of June 6th, leading to cloudiness by noon and more wind and rain by June 7th.

There was reason for encouragement but what if the first troops landed successfully and stormy weather prevented a buildup? Troops cut off from reinforcements would be driven back into the ocean. This was exactly the plan which von Rundstedt and Rommel had developed, and foul weather would play into their hands.



All commanders wanted more reassuring details, but Stagg would offer no guarantee. He said, “We have provided only a summary of probabilities—not of certainties. It would be as impossible to say with certainty what kind of Channel weather will develop within 36 hours as it would have to forecast the break in the weather that is about to occur.”

Eisenhower listened to remarks made by both the weather experts and his commanders. After thinking for a time, he realized only he could make the D-Day decision for June 6th.

Turning to his commanders, Ike said loudly and decisively, “Okay, we’ll go!”

The order went out at about 4:15 A.M. on Monday June 5th. D-Day had gone from the drawing board to full-blown reality. The Normandy invasion was underway. In a little over 26 hours, the fate of the free world would hang on the outcome of Operation Overlord.

Meanwhile, on the French side of the Channel, German meteorologists were interpreting virtually the same data as the Allies and they forecast that rough weather would *persist* in the English Channel.

Because the Allies had detected and destroyed German weather stations in the Arctic and onboard ships sailing in the Atlantic, von Rundstedt was deprived of the type of long-range weather information which was available to Eisenhower.

Four hours after the invasion started, von Rundstedt refused to believe it was actually underway. Rommel, because of the 7th Army’s forecast, had returned to Germany to celebrate his wife’s birthday. General Friedrich Dollmann, commander of the 7th Army, scheduled a map exercise for June 6th in Rennes, France, 60 miles south of the Normandy coast. At H-Hour, when the Allies began landing, the highest-ranking officers in the invasion area commanded units no larger than battalion strength.

In his book, *Eisenhower Declassified*, Virgil Pinkley reveals a little known but tremendously important fact about General Eisenhower’s preparation for the Normandy invasion. He picks up the story as Ike leaves Southwick House following his early-morning order to initiate the attack:

As General Ike stepped into the blackness toward his car, wind-whipped rain lashed at him. He could not get the weather out of his mind. The Mark Twain witticism that had been worn into a cliché came to him: “Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.”

Nobody? An idea lit up his mind, as he told me many years later. Why hadn’t he thought of it earlier? There was *Somebody Who* could do something about the weather! General Eisenhower fell to his knees, closed his eyes, and clasped his hands in prayer: “God, Creator of the world and all things, grant us good weather and protection for Allied troops.”



He hesitated for an instant. “God, I’ve done the best I can. You are my Commander in Chief. I now turn the command over to You!” (pp. 182–83)

The Supreme Allied Commander’s prayer had already been answered. The bad weather over which he was concerned was the divine provision designed to protect the Allied troops. And that coastal high-pressure system off Spain was bringing the window of good weather necessary for a successful invasion. This was realized by Eisenhower following the war. Pinkley concludes by writing:

Long after the Normandy invasion, when the whole picture of German conduct just before and during D-Day was pieced together from intelligence data, General Ike realized that not only his prayers had been answered. The Allies had actually experienced a modern miracle.

The weather that he feared would defeat the Allied invasion had, in reality, helped to defeat the Germans.¹

Never before in warfare had so much hung in the balance on the accuracy of a weather forecast. But what Captain Stagg accurately predicted was, in reality, delicately structured weather patterns which God had predestined to secure the success of Operation Overlord.

The Invasion: June 6, 1944

Sun-Tzu: In general, the *Tao (dau)*² of an invader is that when one has penetrated deeply [into enemy territory] the army will be unified, and the defenders will not be able to conquer you. When the soldiers and officers have penetrated deeply, they will not be afraid. Where there is nowhere to go, they will be solid. When they have advanced deeply, they will cling together. When there is no alternative they will fight. If there is no escape from death, the officers and soldiers will fully exhaust their strength.³

Deuteronomy 20:3 ‘Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid or panic, or tremble before them,

v. 4 for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’

¹ Virgil Pinkley, *Eisenhower Declassified* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1979), 182–83, 190.

² “Tao: the path of virtuous conduct; the art or skill of doing something in harmony” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* [2014], s.v. “Tao”).

³ Sun-Tzu, 114–15.



Once the invasion was officially underway, a number of people appealed to Eisenhower for permission to board the naval ships in order to witness the attack. Among those who were refused permission was the Prime Minister of England Winston Churchill. Here is Eisenhower's account of this incident from his book *Crusade in Europe*:

(Churchill's) request was undoubtedly inspired as much by his natural instincts as a warrior as by his impatience at the prospect of sitting quietly back in London to await reports. I argued, however, that the chance of his becoming an accidental casualty was too important from the standpoint of the whole war effort and I refused his request. He replied with complete accuracy, that while I was in sole command of the operation by virtue of authority delegated to me by both governments, such authority did not include administrative control over the British organization.

He said, "Since this is true it is not part of your responsibility, my dear general, to determine the exact composition of any ship's company in His Majesty's fleet. This being true," he rather slyly continued, "by shipping myself as a bona fide member of a ship's complement it would be beyond your authority to prevent my going."

All of this I had ruefully to concede, but I forcefully pointed out that he was adding to my personal burdens in this thwarting of my instructions. Even, however, while I was acknowledging defeat in the matter, aid came from an unexpected source. I later heard that the King had learned of the Prime Minister's intention and, while not presuming to interfere with the decision reached by Mr. Churchill, he sent word that if the Prime Minister felt it necessary to go on the expedition he, the King, felt it to be equally his duty and privilege to participate at the head of the troops. This instantly placed a different light upon the matter and I heard no more of it.⁴

The assault on Normandy began at 12:15 A.M., when the pathfinders for the American airborne units left their planes and parachuted to earth. Five minutes later on the other side of the invasion area, the British pathfinders made their jump. The pathfinders were specially trained to find and mark the drop zone. The main airborne assault was to commence within an hour.

Because of stiff winds and evasive action by transport pilots to avoid anti-aircraft fire, some paratroopers missed their drop zones by as much as twenty miles.

By 3:30 A.M., when the last trooper was down, units were organizing and setting out toward objectives. The mission of the 101st Airborne Division was to seize the area behind Utah Beach, including causeways over flooded areas, in order to facilitate the 4th Infantry Division's advance.

The 82nd Airborne was to take Sainte-Mere-Église (san-ta-mèr-aye-gléz), establish and hold the northern and western edges of the airhead, and seize bridgeheads over the Mérdret (mér-dur-ā') River to facilitate an attack to the west designed to cut the peninsula.

⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 251.



To complicate matters, the troopers had to contend with hedgerows—earthen dykes almost four feet high and covered with hedges and trees. Enclosing areas smaller than football fields, they made excellent defensive positions.

To the east, near the Orne (ōrn) River, members of the British Sixth Airborne Division began landing shortly after midnight. The division's mission was to seize two critical bridges over the Orne and parallel Caen (cān) Canal and hold the left flank of the beachhead. They encountered some of the same problems as their American counterparts by being widely dispersed on landing.

One pathfinder team dropped onto the lawn in front of the headquarters of the German 711th Infantry Division and was promptly captured. When taken before the division commander and questioned, one paratrooper replied: "Awful sorry, old man, be we simply landed here by accident."

To take critical bridges, the British had created a special task force of volunteers which landed in six plywood gliders, all but one within 150 yards of the bridges. Capitalizing on surprise, the force captured the bridges in a few minutes and tenaciously held them against several German attacks throughout the next six hours. Thus, the Allies were assured of blocking a major east-west route which the Germans needed in order to move reinforcements.

Eisenhower gives some interesting details regarding the battle for the city of Caen:

On the eastward flank, the city of Caen did not fall to our initial rush as we had hoped, and we were consequently unable to gain the ground south and southeast of that city where we had planned to make early exploitation of our tank and combat air strength. But the battling in that area reached a sustained and intensive pitch: Rommel defended tenaciously, and as the fighting progressed it became clear why it was necessary for him to do so.

To support the divisions in the attack area, the enemy first drew into the battle zone all the troops he could spare from the Brittany Peninsula. Next, he brought up divisions from the south of France and others from the Low Countries. His only remaining major reserves in northwest Europe not committed to the fighting were in and about Calais, in the German 15th Army.

To maintain connection with these troops he had to hold Caen. If he lost that city his two principal forces would be divided and could thenceforth operate together only if both executed a long withdrawal. So, to Caen he hurried his strongest and best divisions, and made every possible preparation to hold it to the end.

As quickly as it became certain that the enemy intended at all costs to hang onto Caen as the hinge of his operations, it instantly became to our advantage to keep him so preoccupied in that region, that all other Allied operations would be facilitated.⁵

⁵ Ibid., 257–58.



As the airborne units struggled to achieve their goals, the great fleet made its way across the Channel to its appointment on the beaches of Normandy. The Allied fleet assembled first at Area Z, nicknamed Piccadilly Circus, approximately 10 miles southeast of the Isle of Wight. From there the individual invasion forces sailed in a southwesterly arc toward their assigned beaches. Leading this grand armada were the minesweepers. Behind them followed a vast array of naval vessels of every conceivable type.

Never in warfare had such a fleet been assembled before. Including the landing craft carried on board, the combine Allied invasion armada numbered up to 5,000 ships. Approximately 150,000 men were to cross the Channel and land at assault beaches code-named “Utah,” “Omaha,” “Gold,” “Juno,” and “Sword.”

Regardless of how meticulously a military plan is devised, inevitably unanticipated problems or natural difficulties arise in its execution. Overlord was no exception. Due to adverse weather, minesweepers had difficulty in doing their jobs; as a result, some ships in the following convoys hit mines that had been missed.

Weather conditions also affected the embarked troops, for seasickness was rampant. The great effort made to serve good food to the troops during their journey unfortunately backfired, because many of them could not keep it down.

Some of the men had been on board a week were all packed tightly together. Many sanitary facilities could not take the load and malfunctioned, adding to the misery.

Due to anticipated fire from enemy guns the Americans lowered their landing craft some 11 miles out. This 11-mile distance meant that a three-hour ride in a landing craft on choppy seas had to be endured.

Men could be seen exchanging addresses before they left their ships so that if something happened to one, the other could contact the bereaved family. Many prayed. Due to the unsettled seas, a number of the assault troops were injured before they could even get into the boats.

Weather conditions prevailing at the time of H-Hour were a little better than had been predicted, but far from ideal. The maximum wind was 15 knots and visibility was 3 miles.

Due to overcast conditions, bombing was by instrument at Omaha Beach. To prevent bombs from falling on the initial waves of assault boats, Eisenhower had approved a 30-second delay in release time. This resulted in all bombs impacting inland of the coastal defensive positions. These bombs did detonate many mine fields, which would be beneficial later, but that was of little comfort to the assault troops at this time.



The Allied plan called for elements of a corps to land on each of the two American beaches.

Utah Beach would be assaulted by the VII Corps, commanded by Major General J. Lawton Collins who had led the 25th Infantry Division at Guadalcanal.

Major General Leonard T. Gerow, who was one of the earliest planners of Overlord, commanded the V Corps which would land on Omaha Beach.

At Utah Beach, the principle that Jesus Christ controls history came into play once more. When the assault craft encountered a strong southerly current, it caused them to land in the wrong sector. Shore defenses that would have contested a landing in the original area would undoubtedly have taken a heavy toll. The landing in the new sector was virtually unopposed.

If enemy resistance was relatively light at Utah Beach, such was not the case at Omaha.⁶

Omaha Beach: “Just Plane Hell”

Sun-Tzu: Cast them into positions from which there is nowhere to go and they will die without retreating. If there is no escape from death, the officers and soldiers will fully exhaust their strength.⁷

1 Samuel 17:45 David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.

v. 46 “This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

v. 47 and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord’s and He will give you into our hands.

(End MD19-B-02. See MD19-C-03 for continuation of study at p. 21.)

⁶ Sources for this chapter, “The Invasion: June 6, 1944,” include: David R. Jennys, “D-Day’s Mighty Host,” *World War II*, May 1994, 26–32; Dwight D. Eisenhower, “D-Day and Lodgment,” in *Crusade in Europe*, 253–65, passim, and Thomas E. Griess, “Taking the Dare: The D-Day Assault,” in *The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean* (Wayne: Avery Publishing Co., 1989), 292–96).

⁷ Sun-Tzu, 221.

