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-glĕz), establish and hold the northern and western edges of the airhead, and seize bridgeheads over the Mérderet (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 (cä^{n}) 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 form 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.

On D-Day, it would be the First Division's 16th Regimental Combat Team and the 29 the Division's 116th Regimental Combat Team that would combine in the first wave to hit Omaha. Both RCTs contained a medical, artillery, and engineer unit and were supported by 32 duplex-drive tanks.

Due to winds and waves, 27 of the 29 tanks that were launched to move in with the 16th RCT sank. Two remained in the water and made it to shore. Three more were landed later. On observing the fate of the 16th Combat Team's tanks, the 116th put theirs on the beach only to fall prey to German artillery fire. Heavy seas took a toll on artillery pieces which the Allies were bringing to shore.

Men of this first wave sought whatever cover they could find. Engineer demolition men braved enemy fire to try and destroy the beach obstacles. It appeared that the V Corps would never attain its mission of securing the beachhead and linking up with the adjacent British and American units.

By H-Hour plus 30 minutes, the rest of the two assault regiments and two Ranger battalions were to arrive; an hour after that, engineer and artillery special brigades were due to land.

Units already ashore were fragmented due to the shifting effect of the coastal current and the heavy enemy fire. Only 3 of the 16 tank dozers were working. The minutes passed and with them the opportunity to blowup many of the obstacles, because the rising water soon was too deep. Still the demolition men did what they could, and by 7:00 A.M. six gaps had been marked when the second wave arrived. So heroic were the demolition men in the face of enemy fire, that 15 of them were later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Many of you remember when Mel and Jane Turner lived in O'Fallon, Illinois, before they moved to Arizona. Jane's uncle, Raymond E. Lanterman, was a member of the 146th Combat Engineers Battalion. In an essay written in March 1984, Lt. Lanterman documents many of the things we are learning in our study of Omaha Beach:

The 146th Combat Engineers Battalion arrived in the British Isles in 1943, and in early 1944 was stationed at Barnstable Bay in Dévonshire, southwest England. Lúndy Island, of pirate notoriety, was on the horizon. Our mission was to maintain, and to repair the damage done to, the nearby training area where troops who would take part in the invasion of France were trained in realistic rehearsals.

We watched unit after unit go through the rugged course, and were smugly congratulating ourselves on our relatively safe situation as the maintenance crew, when, to our consternation, early in May we learned that we were the next unit on the list and that another Engineer outfit would be cleaning up after us.

As engineers who would be landing early on D-Day, we concentrated on the demolition, using explosives, of obstacles, similar to those the Germans had erected on the coast of Normandy. Landing barges were to take us across the English Channel to France, and we invented a little song: "Coming in on a barge with a charge," to the tune of, "Coming in on A Wing and A Prayer."

Our training completed, we were isolated a few days before the invasion in a fenced enclosure—no passes outside for anybody–and briefed very thoroughly on that part of Normandy Beach we'd be landing on. For the briefing, we had low- and high-altitude aerial photographs provided by the Air Force's 34th [Photo] Reconnaissance Squadron. There was also an extremely accurate scale model of Omaha Beach, complete with natural features, trees, houses, and other buildings, and even such German military installations as were known to be in the vicinity. We memorized the landing site and studied the obstacles in the photographs until we knew everything backwards and forwards. Later, when we did land, we discovered just how accurate the model had been; the coast looked just like it, right down to the last detail.

About the first day of June we were taken to Plymouth Harbor on England's south coast where we were aboard LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) commanded by Coast Guard officers and moored cheek by jowl all over the place. Each LST assigned to combat engineers carried a tank-dozer in addition to its complement of troops. The vessels were equipped with galleys, and a stocky lieutenant from Arkansas who inhabited the one that tied to our port side was a baker by profession; it wasn't long before we had a row of freshly baked pies laid out along the rail to cool.

On the evening of June 4, we sailed out into the English Channel. As far as the eye could see in all directions the sea was filled with landing craft, navy vessels, supply vessels, and other types of military shipping.

We woke up on the morning of June 5th–back in Plymouth! Eisenhower had been compelled to order the armada to turn around and go back because the weather had turned foul and any attempt to land in France would have been foolhardy if not impossible. I still marvel that that vast fleet could be controlled in so efficient, orderly, and precise manner.

That evening, the 5th, we sailed again, and consoled one another by saying this was probably another dry run.

It wasn't.

Before dawn on the 6th, we rendezvoused with a fleet of small landing craft—LCPs (Landing Craft Personnel)—each just large enough to hold a platoon of men, steered by a coxswain from the Coast Guard. We transferred to our LCP at sea, leaving the larger LST with its tank-dozer to come in on its own mission, and began the run to shore. For a few minutes, the LCPs ran side-by-side, so close together that we could converse with the people in the neighboring boats; we gradually drew apart, however, spacing out to the prescribed intervals for landing.

Our course took us past an enormous battleship whose big guns were blasting away in a softening-up mission. Great balls of fire and clouds of black smoke belched from her guns as she fired in rapid succession, sending shells screaming over our heads to explode on the mainland of Europe.

As we drew near Omaha Beach in the early morning light, we easily recognized the landmarks and features we had seen on the scale model and were beginning to receive fire from shore. At this distance, shells from German 88s, a very sleek and efficient weapon, were plopping into the sea around us, sending up geysers of spume as they exploded in the water. Some boats, of course, were hit; one unfortunate craft blew up when a shell dropped into it and set off the explosives aboard.

The timing of each phase of enormously complicated OPERATION OVERLORD had been carefully worked out to the last minute: at H-Hour, M-Minute, the first infantry units were to go ashore; at H-Hour plus five minutes we demolition engineers were to land. As thus scheduled, the infantry would have engaged the enemy, hopefully pushing him back, leaving us free to proceed with our mission without the necessity of defending ourselves.

Ah, *the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men* …. It happened that we arrived first in our particular sector, at H-Hour, M-Minute, at lowest tide, about 6 or 6:30 A.M. The LCP went aground before we touched shore, and the coxswain told us he could go no further; he was stuck on a sand bar. He lowered the ramp and we saw that we'd have to wade a distance of perhaps 50 or 70 yards to get to the beach.

I gave the order to disembark and jumped off the end of the ramp. Loaded with explosives, carbines, binoculars, primer cord, and what-all, we sank like stones. Fortunately, the water was only up to our necks; fortunately, also, there was very little wave action, and we started to wade in.

The spatter pattern of a cone of machine gun fire was hitting the water's surface off to our right, and we detoured to the left in order to give it as wide a berth as possible. That cone of fire never moved closer to us, to our relief, and we all made it to the beach intact, where we immediately set to work amid the THUNK of exploding mortar shells and the whistle of small arms bullets.

The intensive training grind we had gone through so recently tended to make robots of us; we could think of nothing but the tasks we were assigned to carry out and working under withering fire was something we had never experienced before. It was all very unreal.

One of our men had been a goof-off and a thorn in our flesh throughout his time in the outfit; he had even tried to climb over the fence in the sealed-off final briefing area to go to town. But here, when the chips were down, he was as calm as if he were in his own backyard at home, going about his assigned duties completely ignoring the danger, as if it were a commonplace thing to work under desperate conditions.

The obstacles we demolished were wooden poles standing upright in the sand; each pole was taller than a man, for tides are deep on that coast, and many had Teller anti-tank mines secured to their tops, which, at high tide, would be awash or perhaps just slightly under water; any boats coming in at high tide, then, would strike the mines and be disabled or destroyed. Our mission was to cut down the poles with explosives, detonating the mines as well, to create a passage through which landing barges coming in could navigate without danger.

For the demolition work, each of us carried a quantity of a pliable explosive substance stuffed into ordinary cotton stockings. We were to wrap these around the poles, close to the ground, then connect them all with primer cord, a kind of explosive rope. A fuse was then attached to the network of cord—fuses which had been kept waterproof by being sealed in condoms.

Just when we had made ready and were about to fire the charge, an infantry detachment landed. We yelled at the colonel leading them to keep his people back, for they'd be blown to bits if they came forward through the poles just then. He and his men flattened themselves out on the sand and we pulled the fuse. We must have done something right, for we got a successful blow, the blast of the charge ringing each pole pinched it in two and they all toppled.

The first part of our mission was now completed; we had felled the posts, and the tank-dozer could clear them away to create a path through the obstacles, which, in addition to the posts, consisted of may X-shaped iron constructions which were about two feet high, fashioned from short lengths of railroad rails. They resembled the jacks children play with.

The next task was to search for mines in the sand. The man who carried the mine detector had soon been killed, and I picked up the instrument and began to use it. By now the tank-dozer had arrived and was beginning to clear away the fallen poles and "jacks." I happened to be a few yards in front of the dozier when some unfriendly soul on the *Wehrmacht* side got a bead on me; I dropped, hit presumably by machine-gun fire.

"That tank-dozer is going to run over me," I thought, and tried to move out of its way without much success. (Later, in the hospital in England, I saw the driver and he assured me he'd seen my fall and wasn't about to run me down.)

The medic came up—a terribly young-looking boy—and knelt beside me to help. He was burdened with so much gear that he apologized for not being able to reach behind himself to get out medications and bandages. I told him to turn around, tell me what to look for, and I'd fish it out of his bulging knapsack. While we were doing this he muttered, "Lieutenant, I'm scared (defecation)-less."

I assured him he wasn't the only one.

The tank-dozer was put out of commission, so there was no more worry about being run over, but lying flat on my back, I felt water at my feet and realized that the tide was coming in. Now there was a new danger: I could drown here. I tried to scooch up higher, but the tide was faster than I could move; I owe my life to a couple of the men who sized up the situation and helped me to a position above the high-water line.

Now, it looked as if I might survive, and I wished that I had my movie camera with me, since it was impossible to get up and do anything useful. The morphine which the medic had administered made me groggy, although still quite aware, and I didn't know how long I was there—maybe an hour—before friendly hands put me on a stretcher and carried me to a big landing barge which had just disgorged its load and was taking wounded aboard.

A missile hit its superstructure and splattered fragments around, but we backed out safely and drew alongside a destroyer far out to sea, which took us wounded on and put us in sick bay bunks. Again, I could only marvel at the clockwork precision of the whole operation: if you needed something , say a destroyer for instance, there it was, waiting for you!

Today, forty years later, an invasion of this sort would simply be impossible, for a single modern nuclear weapon could wipe out such a fleet. The Allies were lucky Germany didn't have an atomic bomb.[1]

NOTE: Raymond E. Lanterman died on January 23, 1994 after a lengthy illness. He was 77.[2]

Why was the defense of Omaha Beach so much more intense and effective than the other beaches at Normandy? Unknown to the Americans, landing on what was soon to become known as "Bloody Omaha," German positions along the beaches were almost unscathed.

Before the invasion, Allied intelligence had completely lost track of the German 352nd Infantry, which was commanded by Maj. Gen. Dietrich Kraiss (Krys). The unit contained conscripts among its more than 12,000 men. But these green troops were stabilized by a cadre of seasoned combat veterans who had honed their skills in Poland and France and on the Russian Front. The unit had been moved to Normandy coast in March.

Kraiss, age 55, was a veteran of World War I and had been a company commander in that war. On November 6, 1943, be became commander of the 352nd Infantry Division in Normandy. Facing the Allies at Omaha Beach was the 916th Grenadier Regiment, an element of the 352nd. Reinforcing the 916th at Omaha was the 2nd Battalion of the 915th Grenadiers, as well as engineer units and antiaircraft detachments.

The 352nd was a new unit, and Kraiss trained his men hard; what the young recruits among his troops lacked in experience, Kraiss attempted to make up for in training.

Kraiss' immediate superior was Lt. Gen. Erich Marcks, also a World War I veteran. He was assigned to the 84th Corps in Normandy in August 1943, with headquarters in Saint Lo (sānt-lō). The area under his control included 240 miles of coastline, an area that encompassed the Allied landing of June 6.

The corps consisted of four divisions—plus two that were added on D-Day, one of which was the 21st Panzer based at Caen.

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[1] Raymond E. Lanterman, "D-Day 1944." Personal manuscript dated 20 March 1984, Honolulu, Hawaii.
[2] See the excerpt, "Nazi Party" in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 8:570–71, which is inserted here at the end of lesson 3's notes: MD19-C-03, p. 25.

