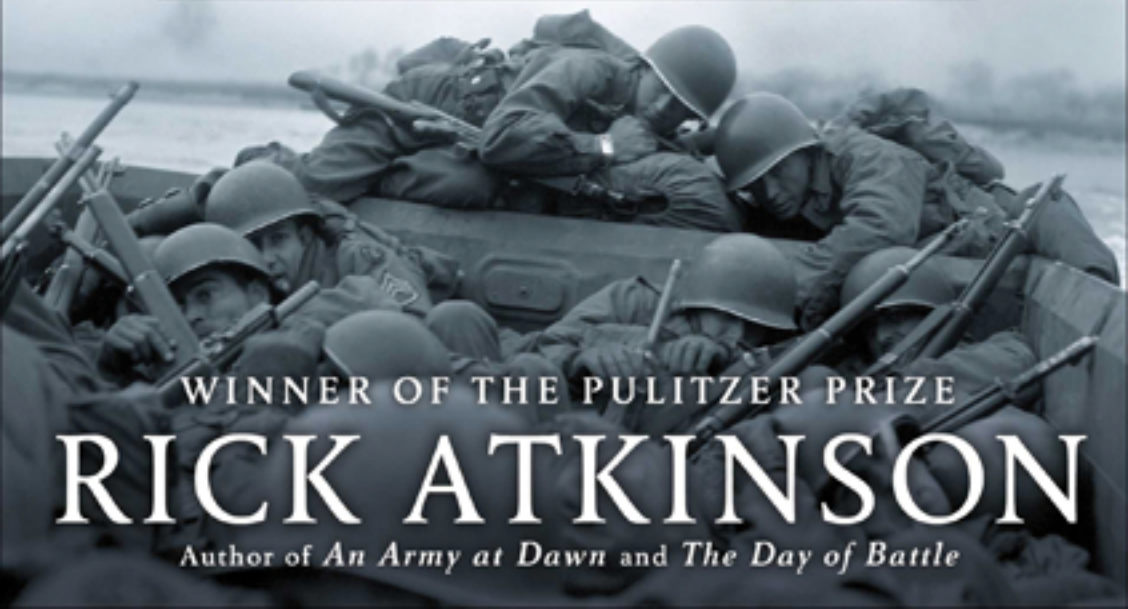


# THE GUNS AT LAST LIGHT

THE WAR IN WESTERN EUROPE, 1944-1945

VOLUME THREE OF THE LIBERATION TRILOGY



WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE


**RICK ATKINSON**

*Author of An Army at Dawn and The Day of Battle*

# The Guns at Last Light

*THE WAR IN WESTERN EUROPE,*

1944-1945



VOLUME THREE OF THE LIBERATION TRILOGY

Rick Atkinson



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Maps by Gene Thorp

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*To those who knew neither thee nor me,  
yet suffered for us anyway*

But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France?

Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Prologue

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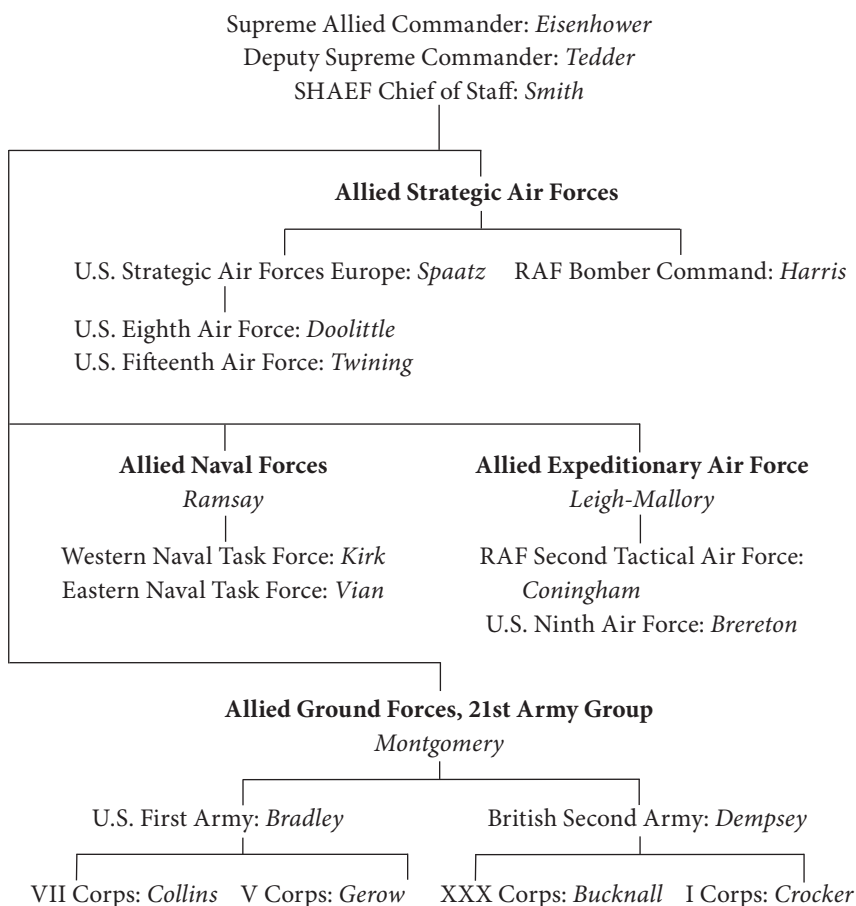
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# MAP LEGEND

	River/stream		
	HIGHWAY		
	MAJOR ROAD		
	MINOR ROAD /TRAIL		
	RAILROAD		
	WOODED		
	SWAMP		
	TERRAIN		
	HILL/MOUNTAIN		
	City/town/village with urban area		
	Capital city		
	Airfield		
	Landmark		
	Clash		
	<b>UNITED STATES</b>		
	<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>		
	<b>CANADA</b>		
	<b>GERMANY</b>		
	<b>FRANCE</b>		
	<b>USSR</b>		
		<b>AXIS</b>	<b>ALLIED</b>
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
		I	Company
		II	Battalion
		III	Regiment
		X	Brigade
		XX	Division
		XXX	Corps
		XXXX	Army
		XXXXX	Army Group

# ALLIED CHAIN OF COMMAND

ASSAULT FORCES, OPERATION OVERLORD, JUNE 6, 1944



# The Guns at Last Light

## PROLOGUE

A KILLING frost struck England in the middle of May 1944, stunting the plum trees and the berry crops. Stranger still was a persistent drought. Hotels posted admonitions above their bathtubs: “The Eighth Army crossed the desert on a pint a day. Three inches only, please.” British newspapers reported that even the king kept “quite clean with one bath a week in a tub filled only to a line which he had painted on it.” Gale winds from the north grounded most Allied bombers flying from East Anglia and the Midlands, although occasional fleets of Flying Fortresses still could be seen sweeping toward the Continent, their contrails spreading like ostrich plumes.

Nearly five years of war had left British cities as “bedraggled, unkempt and neglected as rotten teeth,” according to an American visitor, who found that “people referred to ‘before the war’ as if it were a place, not a time.” The country was steeped in heavy smells, of old smoke and cheap coal and fatigue. Wildflowers took root in bombed-out lots from Birmingham to Plymouth—sow-whistle, Oxford ragwort, and rosebay willow herb, a tall flower with purple petals that seemed partial to catastrophe. Less bucolic were the millions of rats swarming through three thousand miles of London sewers; exterminators scattered sixty tons of sausage poisoned with zinc phosphate, and stale bread dipped in barium carbonate.

Privation lay on the land like another odor. British men could buy a new shirt every twenty months. Housewives twisted pipe cleaners into hair clips. Iron railings and grillwork had long been scrapped for the war effort; even cemeteries stood unfenced. Few shoppers could find a fountain pen or a wedding ring, or bedsheets, vegetable peelers, shoelaces. Posters discouraged profligacy with depictions of the “Squander Bug,” a cartoon rodent with swastika pockmarks. Classified advertisements included pleas in the *Times* of London for “unwanted artificial teeth” and cash donations to help wounded Russian war horses. An ad for Chez-Vous household services promised “bombed upholstery and carpets cleaned.”

Other government placards advised, “Food is a munition. Don’t waste it.” Rationing had begun in June 1940 and would not end completely until 1954. The monthly cheese allowance now stood at two ounces per citizen.

Many children had never seen a lemon; vitamin C came from “turnip water.” The Ministry of Food promoted “austerity bread,” with a whisper of sawdust, and “victory coffee,” brewed from acorns. “Woolton pie,” a concoction of carrots, potatoes, onions, and flour, was said to lie “like cement upon the chest.” For those with strong palates, no ration limits applied to sheep’s head, or to eels caught in local reservoirs, or to roast cormorant, a stringy substitute for poultry.

More than fifty thousand British civilians had died in German air raids since 1940, including many in the resurgent “Baby Blitz” begun in January 1944 and just now petering out. Luftwaffe spotter planes illuminated their targets with clusters of parachute flares, bathing buildings and low clouds in rusty light before the bombs fell. A diarist on May 10 noted “the great steady swords of searchlights” probing for enemy aircraft as flak fragments spattered across rooftops like hailstones. Even the Wimbledon tennis club had been assaulted in a recent raid that pitted center court; a groundskeeper patched the shredded nets with string. Tens of thousands sheltered at night in the Tube, and the cots standing in tiers along the platforms of seventy-nine designated stations were so fetid that the sculptor Henry Moore likened wartime life in these underground rookeries to “the hold of a slave ship.” It was said that some young children—perhaps those also unacquainted with lemon—had never spent a night in their own beds.

Even during these short summer nights, the mandatory blackout, which in London in mid-May lasted from 10:30 P.M. to 5:22 A.M., was so intense that one writer found the city “profoundly dark, like a mental condition.” Darkness also cloaked an end-of-days concupiscence, fueled by some 3.5 million soldiers now crammed into a country smaller than Oregon. Hyde and Green Parks at dusk were said by a Canadian soldier to resemble “a vast battlefield of sex.” A chaplain reported that GIs and streetwalkers often copulated standing up after wrapping themselves in a trench coat, a position known as “Marble Arch style.” “Piccadilly Circus is a madhouse after dark,” an American lieutenant wrote his mother, “and a man can’t walk without being attacked by dozens of women.” Prostitutes—“Piccadilly Commandos”—sidled up to men in the blackout and felt for their rank insignia on shoulders and sleeves before tendering a price: ten shillings (two dollars) for enlisted men, a pound for officers. Or so it was said.

Proud Britain soldiered on, a bastion of civilization even amid war’s indignities. A hurdy-gurdy outside the Cumberland Hotel played “You Would Not Dare Insult Me, Sir, If Jack Were Only Here,” as large crowds in Oxford Street sang along with gusto. London’s West End cinemas this month screened *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, starring Gary Cooper and Ingrid

Bergman, and *Destination Tokyo*, with Cary Grant. Theater patrons could see John Gielgud play Hamlet, or Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, now in its third year at the Duchess. At Ascot on Sunday, May 14, thousands pedaled their bicycles to the track to watch Kingsway, "a colt of the first class," gallop past Merchant Navy and Gone. Apropos of the current cold snap, the Royal Geographical Society sponsored a lecture on "the formation of ice in lakes and rivers."

Yet nothing brightened the drab wartime landscape more than the brilliant uniforms now seen in every pub and on every street corner, the exotic military plumage of Norwegians and Indians, Belgians and Czechs, Yorkshiremen and Welshmen and more Yanks than lived in all of Nebraska. One observer in London described the panoply:

French sailors with their red pompoms and striped shirts, Dutch police in black uniforms and grey-silver braid, the dragoon-like mortar boards of Polish officers, the smart grey of nursing units from Canada, the cerise berets and sky-blue trimmings of the new parachute regiments . . . gaily colored field caps of all the other regiments, the scarlet linings of our own nurses' cloaks, the electric blue of Dominion air forces, sand bush hats and lion-colored turbans, the prevalent Royal Air Force blue, a few greenish-tinted Russian uniforms.

Savile Row tailors offered specialists for every article of a bespoke uniform, from tunic to trousers, and the well-heeled officer could still buy an English military raincoat at Burberry or a silver pocket flask at Dunhill. Even soldiers recently arrived from the Mediterranean theater added a poignant splash of color, thanks to the antimalaria pills that turned their skin a pumpkin hue.

Nowhere were the uniforms more impressive on Monday morning, May 15, than along Hammersmith Road in west London. Here the greatest Anglo-American military conclave of World War II gathered on the war's 1,720th day to rehearse the death blow intended to destroy Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. Admirals, generals, field marshals, logisticians, and staff wizards by the score climbed from their limousines and marched into a Gothic building of red brick and terra-cotta, where American military policemen—known as Snowdrops for their white helmets, pistol belts, leggings, and gloves—scrutinized the 146 engraved invitations and security passes distributed a month earlier. Then six uniformed ushers escorted the guests, later described as "big men with the air of fame about them," into the Model Room, a cold and crepuscular auditorium with black

columns and hard, narrow benches reputedly designed to keep young schoolboys awake. The students of St. Paul's School had long been evacuated to rural Berkshire—German bombs had shattered seven hundred windows across the school's campus—but many ghosts lingered in this tabernacle of upper-class England: exalted Old Paulines included the poet John Milton; the astronomer Edmond Halley; the first Duke of Marlborough, John Churchill, who supposedly learned the rudiments of military strategy from a school library book; and the diarist Samuel Pepys, who played hooky to watch the beheading of Charles I in 1649.

Top secret charts and maps now lined the Model Room. Since January, the school had served as headquarters for the British 21st Army Group, and here the detailed planning for Operation OVERLORD, the Allied invasion of France, had gelled. As more senior officers found their benches in rows B through J, some spread blankets across their laps or cinched their greatcoats against the chill. Row A, fourteen armchairs arranged elbow to elbow, was reserved for the highest of the mighty, and now these men began to take their seats. The prime minister, Winston Churchill, dressed in a black frock coat and wielding his usual Havana cigar, entered with the supreme Allied commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Neither cheers nor applause greeted them, but the assembly stood as one when King George VI strolled down the aisle to sit on Eisenhower's right. Churchill bowed to his monarch, then resumed puffing his cigar.

As they waited to begin at the stroke of ten A.M., these big men with their air of eminence had reason to rejoice in their joint victories and to hope for greater victories still to come. Nearly all the senior commanders had served together in the Mediterranean—they called themselves "Mediterraneanites"—and they shared Eisenhower's sentiment that "the Mediterranean theater will always be in my blood." There they had indeed been blooded, beginning with the invasion of North Africa in November 1942, when Anglo-American forces had swept aside feeble Vichy French defenders, then pivoted east through the wintry Atlas Mountains into Tunisia. Joined by the British Eighth Army, which had pushed west from Egypt after a signal victory at El Alamein, together they battled German and Italian legions for five months before a quarter million Axis prisoners surrendered in mid-May 1943.

The Anglo-Americans pounced on Sicily two months later, overrunning the island in six weeks before invading the Italian mainland in early September. The Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini collapsed, and the new government in Rome renounced the Axis Pact of Steel to make common cause with the Allies. But a death struggle at Salerno, south of Naples, foreshadowed another awful winter campaign as Allied troops struggled up the Italian boot for two hundred miles in one sanguinary brawl after



another with entrenched, recalcitrant Germans at places like San Pietro, Ortona, the Rapido River, Cassino, and Anzio. Led by Eisenhower, many of the Mediterraneanites had left for England in mid-campaign to begin planning OVERLORD, and they could only hope that the spring offensive—launched on May 11 and code-named DIADEM—would break the stalemate along the Gustav Line in central Italy and carry the long-suffering Allied ranks into Rome and beyond.

Elsewhere in this global conflagration, Allied ascendancy in 1944 gave confidence of eventual victory, although no one doubted that future battles would be even more horrific than those now finished. Command of the seas had been largely secured by Allied navies and air forces. A double American thrust across the central and southwest Pacific had steadily reversed Japanese gains; with the Gilbert and Marshall Islands recouped, summer would bring assaults on the Marianas—Saipan, Tinian, Guam—as the American lines of advance converged on the Philippines, and captured airfields provided bases for the new long-range B-29 Superfortress to bomb Japan's home islands. A successful Japanese offensive in China had been offset by a failed thrust from Burma across the Indian border into southern Assam. With most of the U.S. Navy committed to the Pacific, along with almost one-quarter of the Army's divisions and all six Marine Corps divisions, the collapse of Tokyo's vast empire had begun.

The collapse of Berlin's vast empire in eastern Europe was well advanced. Germany had invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 with more than 3 million men, but by the beginning of 1944, German casualties exceeded 3.5 million even as Soviet losses quadrupled that figure. The tide had turned, red in all senses, and Soviet campaigns to recapture the Crimea, the western Ukraine, and the territory between Leningrad and Estonia chewed up German strength. The Third Reich now had 193 divisions on the Eastern Front and in southeastern Europe, compared to 28 in Italy, 18 in Norway and Denmark, and 59 in France and the Low Countries. Nearly two-thirds of German combat strength remained tied up in the east, although the Wehrmacht still mustered almost two thousand tanks and other armored vehicles in northwestern Europe. Yet the Reich was ever more vulnerable to air assault: Allied planes flying from Britain in May 1944 would drop seventy thousand tons of high explosives on Axis targets, more than four times the monthly tonnage of a year earlier. Though they paid a staggering cost in airplanes and aircrews, the Royal Air Force and U.S. Army Air Forces had won mastery of the European skies. At last, after wresting air and naval superiority from the Germans, the Allies could make a plausible case for a successful invasion of the Continent by the ground forces currently gathering in England.

In 1941, when Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union first

formed their grand alliance against the Axis, “the only plan was to persevere,” as Churchill put it. Perseverance had brought them to this brink: a chance to close with the enemy and destroy him in his European citadel, four years after Germany overran France and the Low Countries. The Americans had long advocated confronting the main German armies as soon as possible, a muscle-bound pugnacity decried as “iron-mongering” by British strategists, whose preference for reducing the enemy gradually by attacking the Axis periphery had led to eighteen months of Mediterranean fighting. Now, as the great hour approached, the arena would shift north, and the British and Americans would monger iron together.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man: at ten A.M. that Monday, Eisenhower rose to greet the 145 comrades who would lead the assault on Fortress Europe. Behind him in the cockpit of the Model Room lay an immense plaster relief map of the Normandy coast where the river Seine spilled into the Atlantic. Thirty feet wide and set on a tilted platform visible from the back benches, this apparition depicted, in bright colors and on a scale of six inches to the mile, the rivers, villages, beaches, and uplands of what would become the world’s most famous battlefield. A brigadier wearing skid-proof socks and armed with a pointer stood at port arms, ready to indicate locales soon to achieve household notoriety: Cherbourg, St.-Lô, Caen, Omaha Beach.

With only a hint of the famous grin, Eisenhower spoke briefly, a man “at peace with his soul,” in the estimate of an American admiral. He hailed king and comrades alike “on the eve of a great battle,” welcoming them to the final vetting of an invasion blueprint two years in the making. A week earlier he had chosen June 5 as D-Day. “I consider it to be the duty of anyone who sees a flaw in the plan *not* to hesitate to say so,” Eisenhower said, his voice booming. “I have no sympathy with anyone, whatever his station, who will not brook criticism. We are here to get the best possible results.” The supreme commander would remain preoccupied for some weeks with the sea and air demands of *OVERLORD*, as well as with sundry political distractions, so he had delegated the planning and conduct of this titanic land battle in Normandy to the soldier who would now review his battle scheme.

A wiry, elfin figure in immaculate battle dress and padded shoes popped to his feet, pointer in hand. The narrow vulpine face was among the empire’s most recognizable, a visage to be gawked at in Claridge’s or huzzahed on the Strand. But before General Bernard L. Montgomery could utter a syllable, a sharp rap sounded. The rap grew bolder; a Snowdrop flung open the Model Room door, and in swaggered Lieutenant General George

S. Patton, Jr., a ruddy, truculent American Mars, newly outfitted by those Savile Row artisans in bespoke overcoat, bespoke trousers, and bespoke boots. Never reluctant to stage an entrance, Patton had swept through London in a huge black Packard, bedizened with three-star insignia and sporting dual Greyhound bus horns. Ignoring Montgomery's scowl, he found his bench in the second row and sat down, eager to take part in a war he condemned, without conviction, as "goddamned son-of-bitchery." "It is quite pleasant to be famous," Patton had written his wife, Beatrice. "Probably bad for the soul."

With a curt swish of his pointer, Montgomery stepped to the great floor map. He had just returned from a hiking and fishing holiday in the Highlands, sleeping each night on his personal train, the *Rapier*, then angling for salmon in the Spey without catching a single fish. Even so, he was said by one admirer to be "as sharpened and as ready for combat as a pointed flint." Like Milton and Marlborough, he had been schooled here at St. Paul's, albeit without distinction other than as a soccer and rugby player, and without ascending above the rank of private in the cadet corps. Every morning for four years he had come to this hall to hear prayers in Latin; his office now occupied the High Master's suite, to which he claimed never to have been invited as a boy.

Glancing at his notes—twenty brief items, written in his tidy cursive on unlined stationery—Montgomery began in his reedy voice, each syllable as sharply creased as his trousers. "There are four armies under my command," he said, two comprising the assault force into Normandy and two more to follow in exploiting the beachhead.

We must blast our way on shore and get a good lodgement before the enemy can bring sufficient reserves to turn us out. Armored columns must penetrate deep inland, and quickly, on D-Day. This will upset the enemy plans and tend to hold him off while we build up strength. We must gain space rapidly, and peg out claims well inland.

The Bay of the Seine, which lay within range of almost two hundred fighter airfields in England, had been designated as the invasion site more than a year earlier for both its flat, sandy beaches and its proximity to Cherbourg, a critical port needed to supply the invading hordes. True, the Pas de Calais coastline was closer, but it had been deemed "strategically unsound" because the small beaches there were not only exposed to Channel storms but also had become the most heavily defended strands in France. Planners under the capable British lieutenant general Frederick E. Morgan scrutinized other possible landing sites from Brittany to Holland

and found them wanting. Secret missions to inspect the OVERLORD beaches, launched from tiny submarines during the dark of the moon in what the Royal Navy called “impudent reconnaissance,” dispelled anxieties about quicksand bogs and other perils. As proof, commandos brought back Norman sand samples in buckets, test tubes, and Durex condoms.

Upon returning from Italy five months earlier, Montgomery had widened the OVERLORD assault zone from the twenty-five miles proposed in an earlier plan to fifty miles. Instead of three seaborne divisions, five would lead the assault—two American divisions in the west, two British and one Canadian in the east—preceded seven hours earlier by three airborne divisions to secure the beachhead flanks and help the mechanized forces thrust inland. This grander OVERLORD required 230 additional support ships and landing vessels such as the big LSTs—“landing ship, tank”—that had proved invaluable during the assaults at Sicily, Salerno, and Anzio. Assembling that larger fleet had in turn meant postponing the Normandy invasion from May until early June, and delaying indefinitely an invasion of southern France originally scheduled to occur at the same moment.

As he unfolded his plan, Montgomery meandered across the plaster beaches and the tiny Norman villages, head bowed, eyes darting, hands clasped behind his back except when he pinched his left cheek in a characteristic gesture of contemplation, or when he stressed a particular point with a flat stroke of his palm. Often he repeated himself for emphasis, voice rising in the second iteration. He was, one staff officer observed, “essentially didactic by temperament and liked a captive audience.” No audience had ever been more rapt, the officers perched on those unforgiving benches, bundled in their blankets and craning their necks. Only Churchill interrupted with mutterings about too many vehicles in the invasion brigades at the expense of too few cutthroat foot soldiers. And was it true, he subsequently demanded, that the great force would include two thousand clerks to keep records?

Montgomery pressed ahead. Hitler’s so-called Atlantic Wall now fell under the command of an old adversary, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. German divisions in western Europe had nearly doubled since October, from thirty-seven to almost sixty, one reason that Montgomery had insisted on a heftier invasion force. He continued:

Last February, Rommel took command from Holland to the Loire. It is now clear that his intention is to deny any penetration. OVERLORD is to be defeated on the beaches. . . . Rommel is an energetic and determined commander. He has made a world of difference since he took over. He is best at the spoiling attack; his forte is disruption. . . . He will do his level best to “Dunkirk” us—*not* to fight the armored battle on

ground of his own choosing, but to avoid it altogether by preventing our tanks landing, by using his own tanks well forward.

Some officers in SHAEF—Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force—believed that German resistance might collapse from internal weaknesses, with the result that OVERLORD would quickly become an occupation force. Montgomery disagreed, and he ticked off the expected enemy counterpunch. Five German divisions, including the 21st Panzer Division, would oppose the invaders on D-Day; by dusk, two other panzer divisions could join the fight, reinforced by two more at the end of D+1, the second day of the invasion, for a total of nine German divisions battling eight Allied divisions ashore. “After a sea voyage and a landing on a strange coast, there is always some loss of cohesion,” Montgomery said, swatting away the understatement with his palm. A death struggle to amass combat power would determine the battle: OVERLORD’s plan called for Allied reinforcements to land at the rate of one and one-third divisions each day, but a bit more than a week into the fight, two dozen German divisions could well try to fling eighteen Allied divisions back into the sea.

Montgomery envisioned a battle beyond the beaches in which the British and Canadian Second Army on the left grappled with the main force of German defenders, while the American First Army on the right invested Cherbourg. Three weeks or so after the initial landings, Patton’s Third Army would thunder into France, swing through Brittany to capture more ports, and then wheel to the river Seine around D+90, three months into the operation. Paris likely would be liberated in mid-fall, giving the Allies a lodgement between the Seine and the river Loire to stage for the fateful drive on Germany.

Precisely how that titanic final battle would unfold was difficult to predict even for the clairvoyants at SHAEF. The Combined Chiefs of Staff—Eisenhower’s superiors in Washington and London, whom he privately called the Charlie-Charlies—had instructed him to aim northeast from Normandy toward the Ruhr valley, the German industrial heartland. SHAEF believed that loss of the Ruhr “would be fatal to Germany”; thus, an assault directed there would set up a decisive battle of annihilation by forcing the enemy to defend the region. Eisenhower also favored an Allied thrust toward the Saar valley, a subsidiary industrial zone farther south; as he had cabled the War Department in early May, a two-pronged attack “would oblige the enemy to extend his forces.” To agglomerate power for that ultimate war-winning drive into central Germany, some forty-five Allied divisions and eleven major supply depots would marshal along a front south of Antwerp through Belgium and eastern France by D+270, or roughly early March 1945.

# ASSAULT ON NORMANDY

JUNE 1944

### Assault forces

- U Utah
- O Omaha
- G Gold
- J Juno
- S Sword

### Follow-up forces

- B Omaha follow-up
- L Gold follow-up

### Convoy route



But that lay in the distant future; the immediate task required reaching the far shore. If OVERLORD succeeded, the Normandy assault would dwindle to a mere episode in the larger saga of Europe's liberation. If OVERLORD failed, the entire Allied enterprise faced abject collapse. It must begin with "an ugly piece of water called the Channel," as the official U.S. Army history would describe it. Known to Ptolemy as Oceanus Britannicus and to sixteenth-century Dutch cartographers as the Engelse Kanaal, this watery sleeve—only twenty-one miles wide at its narrowest—had first been crossed by balloon in 1785, by passenger paddle steamer in 1821, and by swimmer in 1875. Yet for nearly a thousand years invading armies facing a hostile shore across the English Channel had found more grief than glory. "The only solution," one British planner had quipped, "is to tow the beaches over already assaulted." The U.S. War Department had even pondered tunneling beneath the seabed: a detailed study deemed the project "feasible," requiring one year and 15,000 men to excavate 55,000 tons of spoil. Wiser heads questioned "the strategic and functional" complexities, such as the inconvenience of the entire German Seventh Army waiting for the first tunneler to emerge. The study was shelved.

Montgomery closed with his twentieth and final point, eyes aglint. "We shall have to send the soldiers in to this party seeing red," he declared. "Nothing must stop them. If we send them in to battle this way, then we shall succeed." The bravado reminded Churchill's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Hastings Ismay, of the eve of Agincourt as depicted in *Henry V*: "He which hath no stomach to this fight, / Let him depart."

None departed. In quick succession other senior commanders laid out the naval plan for the invasion; the air plans in both the battle zone and across the Reich; the logistics plan; and the civil affairs scheme for governing Normandy. Staff officers scurried about after each presentation, unfurling new maps and swapping out charts. At 1:30 p.m. the assembly broke for lunch in the St. Paul's mess. Patton sat across from Churchill, who asked if he remembered their last meeting in the Mediterranean. When Patton nodded, the prime minister ordered him a tumbler of whiskey to commemorate their reunion. Of Patton a comrade noted, "He gives the impression of a man biding his time." In fact, he had revealed his anxiety in a recent note to his wife: "I fear the war will be over before I get loose, but who can say? Fate and the hand of God still run most shows."

At 2:30 the warlords reconvened in the Model Room for more briefings, more charts, more striding across the painted Norman terrain, this time by the commanders who would oversee the landings, including the senior tactical U.S. Army officer in OVERLORD, Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley. Then they were done. Eisenhower stood for a few words of thanks, noting that Hitler had "missed his one and only chance of destroying with

a single well-aimed bomb the entire high command of the Allied forces.” Churchill gave a brief valedictory, grasping his coat lapels in both hands. “Let us not expect all to go according to plan. Flexibility of mind will be one of the decisive factors,” he said. “Risks must be taken.” He bade them all Godspeed. “I am hardening on this enterprise. I repeat, I am now hardening toward this enterprise.”

Never would they be more unified, never more resolved. They came to their feet, shoulders squared, tramping from the hall to the limousines waiting on Hammersmith Road to carry them to command posts across England. Ahead lay the most prodigious undertaking in the history of warfare.

Shortly after six P.M., Eisenhower sped southwest through London in his chauffeured Cadillac, drawing deeply on a cigarette. In these fraught times he often smoked eighty Camels a day, aggravating the throat and respiratory infections that plagued him all spring. He also suffered from high blood pressure, headaches, and ringing in one ear; he had even begun placing hot compresses on his inflamed eyes. “Ike looks worn and tired,” his naval aide, Commander Harry C. Butcher, noted in mid-May. “The strain is telling on him. He looks older now than at any time since I have been with him.” The supreme commander was fifty-three.

As the drear suburbs rolled past, the prime minister’s final confession at St. Paul’s gnawed at Eisenhower. *I am now hardening toward this enterprise.* The tentative commitment and implicit doubt seemed vexing, although Churchill had never concealed either his reluctance to risk calamity in a cross-Channel attack or his dismay at the cautionary experience of Anzio, where four months after that invasion a large Anglo-American force remained bottled up and shelled daily in a pinched beachhead. Yet for OVERLORD the die was cast, spelled out in a thirty-word order to Eisenhower from the Charlie-Charlies: “You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other united nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.” Now was the time, as Eisenhower put it, for “ramming our feet in the stirrups.”

For years he had pondered just how to successfully enter the continent of Europe—first as a War Department planner, next as the senior American soldier in London in the spring and summer of 1942, then as the general superintending those other invasions in North Africa, Sicily, and mainland Italy, and now as SHAEF commander. No one knew the risks better. No one was more keenly aware that three times the Germans had nearly driven Allied landings back into the sea—on Sicily, at Salerno, and at Anzio.



Planners had even coined an acronym for the task at hand: PINWE, “Problems of the Invasion of Northwest Europe.” Many PINWE issues had been aired at St. Paul’s, but countless others required resolution. Some were petty—“folderol,” Eisenhower said—yet still demanded the supreme commander’s attention: for instance, a recent complaint from the U.S. Army chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, that motion picture coverage of the invasion could unfairly favor the British under a proposed “Joint Anglo-American Film Planning Commission.” Of greater weight on the long PINWE list: a plan code-named CIRCON that ordered military and civilian police to arrest hundreds of absent-without-leave troops wandering across Britain. Also: a “fog dispeller,” inspected by Eisenhower personally, that blew flames into the air to burn off mist from British airstrips, though it required sixty thousand gallons of gasoline an hour. Also: military replacements for civilian workers hired to assemble military gliders, which were critical to the invasion plan. The civilians had so botched the job that fifty-one of the first sixty-two gliders were deemed “unflyable”; another hundred, improperly lashed down, had been badly damaged by high winds.

For every PINWE item resolved, another arose. At Oxford, officers now studied Norman town construction to determine “what parts would burn best,” a knowledge useful in dispensing scarce firefighting equipment. Intelligence officers were compiling a list of eighteen “leading German military personalities now in France [and] particularly ripe for assassination,” Rommel among them. Given the stout security protecting such eminences, a top secret SHAEF edict instead gave priority to disrupting enemy transportation networks through the “liquidation of senior German civilian railway officials.” A suitable target list, with addresses and phone numbers, would be smuggled to Resistance groups, with instructions “to concentrate on this particular class of person.”

As the invasion drew nearer, anxieties multiplied. One intelligence source warned that German pilots planned to drop thousands of rats infected with bubonic plague on English cities; Allied authorities now offered a bounty on rat carcasses to test for signs of infection. Another agent, in France, claimed that German scientists were producing botulinum toxin in a converted Norman sugar-beet plant, as part of a biological warfare plot. An officer recently sent to London by General Marshall informed Eisenhower of both the top secret Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb and of new fears that Germany could use “radioactive poisons” against OVERLORD. SHAEF consequently stockpiled Geiger counters in London; earlier in May, military doctors were told to report “photographic or X-ray film fogged or blackened without apparent cause” and to watch for “an epidemic disease . . . of unknown etiology,” with symptoms that included nausea and a sharp drop in white blood cell counts.

Perhaps less far-fetched were concerns that Hitler might use poison gas when Allied troops were most vulnerable: in embarkation ports or on the Normandy beaches. Although a SHAEF consensus held that “Germany is unlikely to begin chemical warfare,” never far from mind was the grim experience of World War I, when the warring powers—beginning with a German chlorine attack at Ypres in April 1915—used more than two dozen kinds of gas to inflict more than a million casualties.

Fifteen hundred British civilians had been trained in decontamination procedures. The United States alone stockpiled 160,000 tons of chemical munitions for potential use in Europe and the Mediterranean. A secret SHAEF plan, to be enacted only with Eisenhower’s approval, called for retaliatory air strikes by Allied planes that would drop phosgene and mustard gas bombs. One target list, described as “involving risk to civilians,” included telephone exchanges from St.-Lô to Le Mans, as well as fortified French villages used as German garrisons and rail junctions at Versailles, Avranches, and elsewhere. A second list, intended to minimize civilian casualties, targeted half a dozen German headquarters and many bridges across northwest Europe. Storage bunkers at two British airfields now held a thousand mustard bombs and five hundred more filled with phosgene.

“Everybody gets more and more on edge,” Eisenhower had recently written a friend in Washington. “A sense of humor and a great faith, or else a complete lack of imagination, are essential to the project.” He could only ram his feet deeper into the stirrups.

Thirty minutes after leaving St. Paul’s, the supreme commander’s Cadillac eased past a sentry box and through a gate in the ten-foot stone wall girdling Bushy Park, an ancient royal preserve tucked into a Thames oxbow. Majestic chestnut trees swept toward nearby Hampton Court Palace in a landscape designed by Christopher Wren, with rule-Britannia charms that included the Deer Pen, the Pheasantry, and Leg-of-Mutton Pond. An entire camouflage battalion ministered to this site with garished nets and green paint, but the shabby, tin-roof hutments on brick piers and a warren of slit-trench air raid shelters proved difficult to hide. Code-named WIDEWING, the compound served as SHAEF’s central headquarters.

Here hundreds of staff officers, including countless colonels wearing World War I service ribbons and described by one observer as “fat, gray, and oldish,” puzzled over PINWE issues great and small. Plastic window sheeting, cracked linoleum, and potbelly stoves proved no match for the river-bottom damp; most officers wore long underwear and double socks.

A general officers' mess in Block C provided amenities to major generals and above. For others, French language classes at a nearby night school offered hope for a better day in a warmer clime.

Eisenhower's office, designated C-1 and guarded by more Snowdrops, featured a fireplace, a pair of leather easy chairs on a brown carpet, and a walnut desk with framed photos of his mother, his wife, Mamie, and his son, John. His four-star flag stood against one wall, along with a Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. Visitors sometimes found him putting an imaginary golf ball across the floor, but now he sat in his swivel chair at the desk. A brimming in-basket and the maroon leather logbook of cables and intelligence digests occupied him into the evening as the furrows deepened on his brow and the mound of butts grew higher in the ashtray.

Vernal twilight lingered in the west when at last he let himself be driven down Kingston Road to a slate-roofed five-room Tudor bungalow. The ten-acre property came with a bomb shelter near the front gate, where a one-armed Great War veteran stood vigil. This, Telegraph Cottage, was the only place in the United Kingdom where Ike Eisenhower could relax, slipping on the straw sandals he had worn as a young officer in Manila under Douglas MacArthur. Here he played bridge and badminton, or thumbed through his Abilene High School yearbook, class of 1909. In nearby Richmond Park, amid purple rhododendrons and the cuckoo's cry, he occasionally rode horseback with Kay Summersby, his beautiful Irish driver and correspondence clerk. Such outings fueled so much salacious gossip about them that she sardonically referred to herself as "a Bad Woman." In the cottage this evening a stack of cowboy pulp novels awaited Eisenhower; stories of gunslinging desperadoes entranced him, he told Summersby, because "I don't have to think."

But how hard *not* to think, particularly in the late hours after a very long day. "How many youngsters are gone forever," Eisenhower had written Mamie in April. "A man must develop a veneer of callousness." British Empire casualties in the war now exceeded half a million; the sixteen divisions to be committed under Montgomery, including Canadians and Poles, amounted to Churchill's last troop reserves. British casualty forecasts, calculated under a formula known as Evetts' Rates, projected three levels of combat: Quiet, Normal, and Intense. But the anticipated carnage in Normandy had led planners to add a new level: Double Intense. According to a British study, enemy fire sweeping a two hundred-by-four hundred-yard swatch of beach for two minutes would inflict casualties above 40 percent on an assault battalion, a bloodletting comparable to the Somme in 1916.

American casualties, projected with an elaborate formula called Love's

Tables, would likely reach 12 percent of the assault force on D-Day, or higher if gas warfare erupted. The 1st Infantry Division, the point of the spear on Omaha Beach, estimated that under “maximum” conditions, casualties would reach 25 percent, of whom almost a third would be killed, captured, or missing. The admiral commanding bombardment forces at Utah Beach told his captains that “we might expect to lose one-third to one-half of our ships.” Projected U.S. combat drownings in June, exclusive of paratroopers, had been calculated at a grimly precise 16,726. To track the dead, wounded, and missing, the casualty section under SHAEF’s adjutant general would grow to three hundred strong; so complex were the calculations that an early incarnation of the computer, using punch cards, would be put to the task.

Recent exercises and rehearsals hardly gave Eisenhower cause for optimism. Since January, in coves and firths around Britain, troops were decanted into the shallows, “hopping about trying to keep our more vulnerable parts out of the water,” one captain explained. A British officer named Evelyn Waugh later wrote, “Sometimes they stood on the beach and biffed imaginary defenders into the hills; sometimes they biffed imaginary invaders from the hills into the sea. . . . Sometimes they merely collided with imaginary rivals for the use of the main road and biffed them out of the way.” Too often, in exercises with names like DUCK, OTTER, and MALLARD, the biffing proved clumsy and inept. “Exercise BEAVER was a disappointment to all who participated,” a secret assessment noted. “The navy and the army and the airborne all got confused.” When 529 paratroopers in 28 planes returned to their airfields without jumping during one rehearsal, courts-martial were threatened for “misbehavior in the presence of the enemy,” even though the enemy had yet to be met.

The imaginary biffing turned all too real in Exercise TIGER on April 28. Through a “series of mistakes and misunderstandings,” as investigators later concluded, troop convoy T-4 was left virtually unprotected as it steamed toward Slapton Sands on the south coast of Devon, chosen for its resemblance to Normandy. At two A.M., nine German E-boats eluded a British escort twelve miles offshore and torpedoed three U.S. Navy LSTs with such violence that sailors on undamaged vessels nearby believed they had been hit. Fire “spread instantly from stem to stern,” a witness reported. Two ships sank, one in seven minutes, disproving latrine scuttlebutt that torpedoes would pass beneath a shallow-draft LST.

Survivors on rafts sang “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” at first light, but sunrise belied that too. Hundreds of corpses in GI battle gear drifted on the tide until salvage crews with boat hooks could hoist them from the sea. Forty trucks hauled the dead to a cemetery near London, where all twenty-three licensed British embalmers—their practice was not wide-

spread in the United Kingdom—agreed to help prepare the bodies for burial behind a tarpaulin curtain in a cedar grove. Drowned men continued to wash ashore for weeks; the final death toll approached seven hundred, and divers searched the wrecks until they could confirm the deaths of a dozen missing officers deemed “bigoted,” which meant they had been privy to OVERLORD’s top secret destination. For now the Slapton Sands calamity also remained secret.

Eisenhower grieved for the lost men, and no less for the lost LSTs: his reserve of the vital transports now stood at zero. “Not a restful thought,” he wrote Marshall.

The supreme commander often quoted Napoléon’s definition of a military genius as “the man who can do the average thing when all those around him are going crazy.” Less than eighteen months earlier, even before the debacle at Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, Eisenhower had expected to be relieved of command, perhaps even reduced to his permanent rank of lieutenant colonel. Equanimity had helped preserve him then and since. Growing in stature and confidence, he had become the indispensable man, so renowned that a Hollywood agent had recently offered \$150,000 for the rights to his life (plus \$7,500 each to Mamie, his mother, and his in-laws). “He has a generous and lovable character,” Montgomery would tell his diary before the invasion, “and I would trust him to the last gasp.” Other comrades considered him clubbable, articulate, and profoundly fair; his senior naval subordinate, Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay, asserted simply, “He is a very great man.” Franklin D. Roosevelt had chosen him to command OVERLORD as “the best politician among the military men. He is a natural leader who can convince other men to follow him.”

Yet he had not convinced everyone that he was a Great Captain, a commander with the ability to see the field both spatially and temporally, intuiting the enemy’s intent and subordinating all resistance to an iron will. Montgomery, whose sense of personal infallibility and ambivalence toward Eisenhower’s generalship would only intensify, offered private complaints as well as praise: “When it comes to war, Ike doesn’t know the difference between Christmas and Easter.” And on the same evening that Eisenhower thumbed absently through his pulp westerns at Telegraph Cottage, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, chief of the Imperial General Staff, confided to his diary an assessment of the supreme commander’s role at St. Paul’s:

No real director of thought, plans, energy or direction! Just a coordinator—a good mixer, a champion of inter-allied cooperation, and in those respects few can hold a candle to him. But is that enough? Or can we not find all the qualities of a commander in one man?

Eisenhower sensed such doubts, and perhaps harbored a few himself. In his own diary he lamented the depiction of him in British newspapers as an administrator rather than a battlefield commander. “They dislike to believe that I had anything particularly to do with campaigns. They don’t use the words ‘initiative’ and ‘boldness’ in talking of me,” he wrote. “It wearies me to be thought of as timid, when I’ve had to do things that were so risky as to be almost crazy. Oh, hum.”

He needed sleep. Tomorrow would be hectic, beginning with morning meetings at Bushy Park; later he would decamp for another inspection trip aboard *Bayonet*, the armored rail coach he used for extended journeys. (Two adjoining boxcars, known as Monsters, carried five sedans, two jeeps, and a small arsenal of tommy and Bren guns, while the dining car could seat thirty-two.) By the end of the month he intended to visit more than two dozen divisions, a like number of airfields, and countless warships, depots, and hospitals. With luck, he would encounter another soldier from Kansas—such meetings always made him smile.

He had indeed taken risks, crazy risks, but more lay dead ahead. Eisenhower was neither philosopher nor military theorist. But he believed that too few commanders grappled with what he called “subjects that touch the human soul—aspirations, ideals, inner beliefs, affection, hatreds.” On such broken ground during the coming weeks and months his captaincy and his cause would be assayed. For more than any other human enterprise, war revealed the mettle of men’s souls.

By the tens of thousands, souls in olive drab continued to pour into Britain. Since January the number of GIs had doubled, to 1.5 million, a far cry from the first paltry tranche of four thousand in early 1942. Of the U.S. Army’s eighty-nine divisions, twenty now could be found in the United Kingdom, with thirty-seven more either en route or earmarked for the European theater. Through Liverpool they arrived, and through Swansea, Cardiff, Belfast, Avonmouth, Newport. But most came into Glasgow and adjacent Greenock, more than 100,000 in April alone, 15,000 at a time on the two *Queens*—*Elizabeth* and *Mary*—each of which could haul an entire division and outrun German U-boats to make the crossing from New York in five days.

Down the gangplanks they tromped, names checked from a clipboard, each soldier wearing his helmet, his field jacket, and a large celluloid button color-coded by the section of the ship to which he had been confined during the passage. Troops carried four blankets apiece to save cargo space, while deluded officers could be seen lugging folding chairs, pillowcases, and tennis rackets. A brass band and Highland pipers greeted them on the dock; Scottish children raised their arms in a V for Victory. Com-

bat pilots who had fulfilled their mission quotas, and were waiting to board ship for the return voyage, bellowed, “Go back before it’s too late!” or “What’s your wife’s telephone number?” Each arriving unit was listed in a master log called the Iron Book, and another manifest, the Forecast of Destination, showed where every company would bivouac, momentarily, in Britain. As the men fell four abreast into columns and marched from the dock to nearby troop trains, no one needed a forecast to know that they were headed for trouble.

“You are something there are millions of,” the poet Randall Jarrell had written without exaggeration. Just over eight million men had been inducted into the U.S. Army and Navy during the past two years—eleven thousand every day. The average GI was twenty-six, born the year that the war to end all wars ended, but manpower demands in this global struggle meant the force was growing younger: henceforth nearly half of all American troops arriving to fight in Europe in 1944 would be teenagers. One in three GIs had only a grade school education, one in four held a high school diploma, and slightly more than one in ten had attended college for at least a semester. War Department Pamphlet 21-13 would assure them that they were “the world’s best paid soldiers.” A private earned \$50 a month, a staff sergeant \$96. Any valiant GI awarded the Medal of Honor would receive an extra \$2 each month.

The typical soldier stood five feet eight inches tall and weighed 144 pounds, but physical standards had been lowered to accept defects that once would have kept many young men out of uniform. A man with 20/400 vision could now be conscripted if his sight was correctable to at least 20/40 in one eye; toward that end, the armed forces would make 2.3 million pairs of eyeglasses for the troops. The old jest that the Army no longer examined eyes but instead just counted them had come true. A man could be drafted if he had only one eye, or was completely deaf in one ear, or had lost both external ears, or was missing a thumb or three fingers on either hand, including a trigger finger. Earlier in the war, a draftee had had to possess at least twelve of his original thirty-two teeth, but now he could be utterly toothless. After all, the government had drafted a third of all the civilian dentists in the United States; collectively they would extract 15 million teeth, fill 68 million more, and make 2.5 million sets of dentures, enabling each GI to meet the minimum requirement of “masticating the Army ration.”

A revision of mental and personality standards also was under way. In April 1944, the War Department decreed that inductees need have only a “reasonable chance” of adjusting to military life, although psychiatric examiners were advised to watch for two dozen “personality deviations,” including silly laughter, sulkiness, resentfulness of discipline, and other

traits that would seemingly disqualify every teenager in the United States. In addition, the Army began drafting “moderate” obsessive-compulsives, as well as stutterers. Men with malignant tumors, leprosy, or certifiable psychosis still were deemed “nonacceptable,” but by early 1944, twelve thousand venereal disease patients, most of them syphilitic, were inducted each month and rendered fit for service with a new miracle drug called penicillin.

But what of their souls? What of those ideals and inner beliefs that intrigued Eisenhower? Few professed to be warriors, or even natural soldiers. Most were “amateurs whose approach to soldiering was aggressively temporary,” one officer observed. An April survey in Britain polled enlisted men about what they would ask Eisenhower if given the chance; at least half wanted to know what even the supreme commander could not tell them: When can we go home? A paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division wrote, “I never will get used to having some other person do my thinking for me. All of these months and I am still a civilian at heart.” And thus would he die, a few months hence, in Holland.

Skepticism and irony, those twin lenses of modern consciousness, helped to parse military life. A GI who saw *As You Like It* at Stratford-on-Avon pasted a quotation from Act II into his scrapbook—“Sweet are the uses of adversity, / Which, like the toad . . . / Wears yet a precious jewel in his head”—along with an annotation: “Sums up my attitude to the Army.” Soldier slang, always revealing, grew richer and more profane by the week. “SOL” meant “shit out of luck”; the U.S. military had become “Sam’s circus”; infantrymen were simply “feet”; and “SFA”—borrowed from the Australians—stood for “sweet fuck-all.” The amphibious force was the “ambiguous farce.” As one officer wrote, “If it’s not ironic, it’s not war.” Most tried to keep their cynicism in check. “I expected the Army to be corrupt, inefficient, cruel, wasteful, and it turned out to be all those things, just like all armies, only much less so than I thought before I got into it,” wrote a Signal Corps soldier and novelist named Irwin Shaw. Another novelist-soldier, Vernon Scannell, found that among those who had fought in North Africa or Sicily, “a kind of wild hilarity would explode in the ranks of the veterans . . . so irrational as to verge on madness.”

“War is all foreground when you’re in it,” the fighter pilot Samuel Hynes observed. Even soldiers who sensed that “history grew near and large,” in the phrase of the glider infantryman and poet Louis Simpson, would undoubtedly share Simpson’s feeling that “no more than a hod-carrying Egyptian slave do I see the pyramids of which my bricks will be part.” Few voiced enthusiasm for yet another American intervention in northwestern Europe—“that quarrelsome continent,” as one GI called it in a letter home. A recent Army survey in Britain found that more than



one-third of all troops doubted at times whether the war was worth fighting, a figure that had doubled since July 1943 but would rise no higher.

Certainly they believed in one another. Camaraderie offered a bulwark against what Scannell called “this drab khaki world” with its “boredom, cold, exhaustion, squalor, lack of privacy, monotony, ugliness and a constant teasing anxiety about the future.” Like those at Kasserine and Cassino—or, for that matter, at Gettysburg and the Meuse-Argonne—they would risk all to be considered worthy of their comrades. A Japanese-American soldier who had fought in Italy and would fight again in France told his brother, “I have been greatly affected by the forces of love, hate, prejudice, death, life, destruction, reconstruction, treachery, bravery, comradeship, kindness, and by the unseen powers of God.” Here indeed was the stuff of the soul.

And so four by four by four they boarded those troop trains on the docks to be hauled to 1,200 camps and 133 airfields across the British Isles. “This country reminds one constantly of Thomas Hardy,” an over-educated lieutenant wrote his mother, but in truth it *was* a land of white swans and country folk who bicycled to ancient churches “in the old steady manner and unsmilingly touched their caps,” as the journalist Eric Sevareid reported. Prayers tacked to parish doors in 1940 still pleaded, “Save our beloved land from invasion, O God,” but no longer did the Home Guard expect to battle the Hun at Dover with decrepit rifles or with the pikes issued to those without firearms. Even some road signs, removed early in the war to confound enemy parachutists, had been put back after complaints that lost American truck drivers were using too much gasoline.

Nearly 400,000 prefabricated huts and 279,000 tents had been erected to accommodate the Yank horde, supplementing 112,000 borrowed British buildings and 20 million square feet of storage space. GIs called this new world “Spamland,” but the prevailing odor came from burning feces in U.S. Army School of Hygiene coal-fired incinerators. Despite improving logistics, confusion and error abounded: the American juggernaut included 23 million tons of matériel, most of it carried across the Atlantic in cargo ships that arrived days if not months after the troops on their fast *Queens*. Truck drivers were separated from their trucks, drummers from their drums, chaplains from their chalices. Thousands of items arrived with indecipherable bills of lading or without shipping addresses other than GLUE (the code for southern England), or BANG (Northern Ireland), or UGLY (unknown). The Ministry of Transport allocated 120 berths for U.S. Army ships in May, but an extra 38 had arrived. Despite negotiations that reached the White House and Whitehall, almost half the cargo from these orphan vessels eventually was dumped outside various ports—including

five thousand tons of peanuts and fifty thousand portable radios—and was subsequently lost “due to exposure to weather.” Wags asserted that the Army was cutting red tape, lengthwise.

No alliance in the war proved more vital or enduring than that of the English-speaking peoples, but this vast American encampment strained the fraternal bond. “You may think of them as enemy Redcoats,” each arriving GI was advised in a War Department brochure, “but there is no time today to fight old wars over again or bring up old grievances.” Detailed glossaries translated English into English: chemist/druggist, geyser/hot water heater, tyre/tire. Disparities in pay caused resentment; a GI private earned triple what his Tommy counterpart drew, and the American staff sergeant’s \$96 was equivalent to a British captain’s monthly salary. The Army tried to blur the difference by paying GIs twice a month. But British penury was as obvious as the pubs that required patrons to bring their own beer glasses, or the soap shortage that caused GIs to call unwashed Britain Goatland, or the fact that British quartermasters stocked only 18 shoe sizes compared to 105 provided by the U.S. Army. American authorities urged tolerance and gratitude. “It is always impolite to criticize your hosts,” *A Short Guide to Great Britain* advised. “It is militarily stupid to insult your allies.” Not least important, British producers stocked the American larder and supply depot with 240 million pounds of potatoes, 1,000 cake pans, 2.4 million tent pegs, 15 million condoms, 260,000 grave markers, 80 million packets of cookies, and 54 million gallons of beer.

The British displayed forbearance despite surveys revealing that less than half viewed the Americans favorably. “They irritate me beyond words,” one housewife complained. “Loud, bombastic, bragging, self-righteous, morals of the barnyard, hypocrites.” *Meet the Americans*, a manual published in London, included chapters titled “Drink, Sex and Swearing” and “Are They Our Cousins?” An essay written for the British Army by the anthropologist Margaret Mead sought to explain “Why Americans Seem Childish.” George Orwell groused in a newspaper column that “Britain is now Occupied Territory.”

Occasional bad behavior reinforced the stereotype of boorish Yanks. GIs near Newcastle ate the royal swans at the king’s summer palace, Thomas Hardy be damned. Paratroopers from the 101st Airborne used grenades to fish in a private pond, and bored soldiers sometimes set haystacks ablaze with tracer bullets. Despite War Department assurances that “men who refrain from sexual acts are frequently stronger, owing to their conservation of energy,” so many GIs impregnated British women that the U.S. government agreed to give local courts jurisdiction in “bastardy proceedings”; child support was fixed at £1 per week until the little Anglo-American turned thirteen, and 5 to 20 shillings weekly for teenagers.

Road signs cautioned, “To all GIs: please drive carefully, that child may be yours.”

Both on the battlefield and in the rear, the transatlantic relationship would remain, in one British general’s description, “a delicate hothouse growth that must be carefully tended lest it wither away.” Nothing less than Western civilization depended on it. As American soldiers by the boatload continued to swarm into their Spamland camps, a British major spoke for many of his countrymen: “They were the chaps that mattered. . . . We couldn’t possibly win the war without them.”

The loading of invasion vessels bound for the Far Shore had begun on May 4 and intensified as the month wore away. Seven thousand kinds of combat necessities had to reach the Norman beaches in the first four hours, from surgical scissors to bazooka rockets, followed by tens of thousands of tons in the days following. Responsibility for embarkation fell to three military bureaucracies with acronyms evocative of the Marx Brothers: MOVCO, TURCO, and EMBARCO. Merchant marine captains sequestered in a London basement near Selfridges department store prepared loading plans with the blueprints of deck and cargo spaces spread on huge tables; wooden blocks scaled to every jeep, howitzer, and shipping container were pushed around like chess pieces to ensure a fit. Soldiers in their camps laid out full-sized deck replicas on the ground and practiced wheeling trucks and guns in and out.

In twenty-two British ports, stevedores slung pallets and cargo nets into holds and onto decks, loading radios from Pennsylvania, grease from Texas, rifles from Massachusetts. For OVERLORD, the U.S. Army had accumulated 301,000 vehicles, 1,800 train locomotives, 20,000 rail cars, 2.6 million small arms, 2,700 artillery pieces, 300,000 telephone poles, and 7 million tons of gasoline, oil, and lubricants. SHAEF had calculated daily combat consumption, from fuel to bullets to chewing gum, at 41.298 pounds per soldier. Sixty million K rations, enough to feed the invaders for a month, were packed in 500-ton bales. Huge U.S. Army railcars known as war flats hauled tanks and bulldozers to the docks, while mountains of ammunition were stacked on car ferries requisitioned from Boston, New York, and Baltimore. The photographer Robert Capa, who would land with the second wave at Omaha Beach, watched as the “giant toys” were hoisted aboard. “Everything looked like a new secret weapon,” he wrote, “especially from a distance.”

Armed guards from ten cartography depots escorted 3,000 tons of maps for D-Day alone, the first of 210 million maps that would be distributed in Europe, most of them printed in five colors. Also into the holds went 280,000 hydrographic charts; town plats for the likes of Cherbourg

and St.-Lô; many of the one million aerial photos of German defenses, snapped from reconnaissance planes flying at twenty-five feet; and watercolors depicting the view that landing-craft coxswains would have of their beaches. Copies of a French atlas pinpointed monuments and cultural treasures, with an attached order from Eisenhower calling for “restraint and discipline” in wreaking havoc. The U.S. First Army battle plan for OVERLORD contained more words than *Gone with the Wind*. For the 1st Infantry Division alone, Field Order No. 35 had fifteen annexes and eighteen appendices, including a reminder to “drive on right side of road.” Thick sheaves of code words began with the Pink List, valid from H-hour to two A.M. on D+1, when the Blue List would succeed it. Should the Blue List be compromised, the White List would be used, but only if the word “swallow” was broadcast on the radio. A soldier could only sigh.

Day after night after day, war matériel cascaded onto the wharves and quays, a catalogue Homeric in magnitude and variety: radio crystals by the thousands, carrier pigeons by the hundreds, one hundred Silver Stars and three hundred Purple Hearts—dubbed “the German marksmanship medal”—for each major general to award as warranted, and ten thousand “Hagensen packs,” canvas bags sewn by sailmakers in lofts across England and stuffed with plastic explosive. A company contracted to deliver ten thousand metal crosses had missed its deadline; instead, Graves Registration units would improvise with wooden markers. Cotton mattress covers used as shrouds had been purchased on the basis of one for every 375 man-days in France, a formula that proved far too optimistic. In July, with supplies dwindling, quartermasters would be forced to ship another fifty thousand.

Four hospital ships made ready, “snowy white . . . with many bright new red crosses painted on the hull and painted flat on the boat deck,” the reporter Martha Gellhorn noted. Each LST also would carry at least two physicians and twenty Navy corpsmen to evacuate casualties, with operating rooms built on the open tank decks—a “cold, dirty trap,” in one officer’s estimation—and steam tables used to heat twenty-gallon sterilization cans. All told, OVERLORD would muster 8,000 doctors, 600,000 doses of penicillin, fifty tons of sulfa, and 800,000 pints of plasma meticulously segregated by black and white donors. Sixteen hundred pallets weighing half a ton each and designed to be dragged across the beaches were packed with enough medical supplies to last a fortnight.

A new *Manual of Therapy* incorporated hard-won lessons about combat medicine learned in the Mediterranean. Other lessons had still to be absorbed, such as how to avoid both the morphine poisoning too common in Italy and the fatal confusion by anesthesiologists of British carbon dioxide tanks with American oxygen tanks—both painted green—which

had killed at least eight patients. Especially salutary was the recognition that whole blood complemented plasma in reviving the grievously wounded; medical planners intended to stockpile three thousand pints for OVERLORD's initial phase, one pint for every 2.2 wounded soldiers, almost a fourfold increase over the ratio used in Italy.

But whole blood would keep for two weeks at most. As the last week of May arrived, there could be little doubt that D-Day was near. The blood—in large, clearly marked canisters—had landed.

On Tuesday, May 23, a great migration of assault troops swept toward the English seaside and into a dozen marshaling areas—Americans on the southwest coast, British and Canadians in the south—where the final staging began. March rates called for each convoy to travel twenty-five miles in two hours, vehicles sixty yards apart, with a ten-minute halt before every even hour. Military policemen wearing brassards specially treated to detect poison gas waved traffic through intersections and thatched-roof villages. Soldiers snickered nervously at the new road signs reading “One Way.” “We sat on a hilltop and saw a dozen roads in the valleys below jammed with thousands of vehicles, men, and equipment moving toward the south,” wrote Sergeant Forrest C. Pogue, an Army historian. Pogue was reminded of Arthur Conan Doyle's description of soldiers bound for battle: a “throng which set the old road smoking in the haze of white dust from Winchester to the narrow sea.”

Mothers held their children aloft from the curb to watch the armies pass. An old man “bent like a boomerang” and pushing a cart outside London yelled, “Good luck to yer all, me lads,” a British captain reported. On tanks and trucks, the captain added, men chalked the names of sweethearts left behind so that nearly every vehicle had a “patron girl-saint,” or perhaps a patron girl-sinner. Almost overnight the bright plumage of military uniforms in London dimmed as the capital thinned out. “Restaurants and night clubs were half empty, taxis became miraculously easier to find,” one account noted. A pub previously used by American officers for assignations was rechristened the Whore's Lament.

By late in the week all marshaling camps were sealed, with sentries ordered to shoot absconders. “Do not loiter,” signs on perimeter fences warned. “Civilians must not talk to army personnel.” GIs wearing captured German uniforms and carrying enemy weapons wandered through the bivouacs so troops grew familiar with the enemy's aspect. The invasion had begun to resemble “an overrehearsed play,” complained the correspondent Alan Moorehead. Fantastic rumors swirled: that British Commandos had taken Cherbourg; that Berlin intended to sue for peace; that a particular unit would be sacrificed in a diversionary attack; that the German

Wehrmacht possessed both a death beam capable of incinerating many acres instantly and a vast refrigerating apparatus to create big icebergs in the English Channel. The military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* tried to calm jumpy soldiers with an article promising that “shock kept the wounded from feeling much pain.” Another column advised, “Don’t be surprised if a Frenchman steps up to you and kisses you. That doesn’t mean he’s queer. It just means he’s emotional.”

Security remained paramount. SHAEF concluded that OVERLORD had scant chance of success if the enemy received even forty-eight hours’ advance notice, and “any longer warning spells certain defeat.” As part of Churchill’s demand that security measures be “high, wide, and handsome,” the British government in early April imposed a ban that kept the usual 600,000 monthly visitors from approaching coastal stretches along the North Sea, Bristol Channel, and English Channel. Two thousand Army counterintelligence agents sniffed about for leaks. Censors fluent in twenty-two languages, including Ukrainian and Slovak, and armed with X-acto knives scrutinized soldier letters for indiscretions until, on May 25, all outgoing mail was impounded for ten days as an extra precaution.

Camouflage inspectors roamed through southern England to ensure that the invasion assembly remained invisible to German surveillance planes. Thousands of tons of cinders and sludge oil darkened new road cuts. Garnished nets concealed tents and huts—the British alone used one million square yards—while even medical stretchers and surgical hampers were slathered with “tone-down paint,” either Standard Camouflage Color 1A (dark brown) or SCC 15 (olive drab). Any vehicle stopped for more than ten minutes was to be draped with a net “propped away from the contours of the vehicle.”

Deception complemented the camouflage. The greatest prevarication of the war, originally known as “Appendix Y” until given the code name FORTITUDE, tried “to induce the enemy to make faulty strategic dispositions of forces,” as the Combined Chiefs requested. Fifteen hundred Allied deceivers used phony radio traffic to suggest that a fictional army with eight divisions in Scotland would attack Norway in league with the Soviets, followed by a larger invasion of France in mid-July through the Pas de Calais, 150 miles northeast of the actual OVERLORD beaches. More than two hundred eight-ton “Bigbobs”—decoy landing craft fashioned from canvas and oil drums—had been conspicuously deployed beginning May 20 around the Thames estuary. Dummy transmitters now broadcast the radio hubbub of a spectral, 150,000-man U.S. 1st Army Group, notionally poised to pounce on the wrong coast in the wrong month.

The British genius for cozenage furthered the ruse by passing misinformation through more than a dozen German agents, all discovered, all

arrested, and all flipped by British intelligence officers. A network of British double agents with code names like GARBO and TRICYCLE embellished the deception, and some five hundred deceitful radio reports were sent from London to enemy spymasters in Madrid and thence to Berlin. The FORTITUDE deception had spawned a German hallucination: enemy analysts now detected seventy-nine Allied divisions staging in Britain, when in fact there were but fifty-two. By late May, Allied intelligence, including Ultra, the British ability to intercept and decipher most coded German radio traffic, had uncovered no evidence suggesting “that the enemy has accurately assessed the area in which our main assault is to be made,” as Eisenhower learned to his relief. In a final preinvasion fraud, Lieutenant Clifton James of the Royal Army Pay Corps—after spending time studying the many tics of General Montgomery, whom he strikingly resembled—flew to Gibraltar on May 26 and then to Algiers. Fitted with a black beret, he strutted about in public for days in hopes that Berlin would conclude that no attack across the Channel was imminent if Monty was swanning through the Mediterranean.

As May slid toward June, invasion preparations grew febrile. Every vehicle to be shoved onto the French coast required waterproofing to a depth of fifty-four inches with a gooey compound of grease, lime, and asbestos fibers; a vertical funnel from the exhaust pipe “stuck up like a wren’s tail” to keep the engine from flooding. A single Sherman tank took three hundred man-hours to waterproof, occupying the five-man crew for a week. SHAEF on May 29 also ordered all eleven thousand Allied planes to display three broad white stripes on each wing as recognition symbols. A frantic search for 100,000 gallons of whitewash and 20,000 brushes required mobilizing the British paint industry, and workers toiled through Whitsun weekend. Some aircrews slathered on the white stripes with push brooms.

Soldiers drew seasickness pills, vomit bags, and life belts, incidentals that brought the average rifleman’s combat load to 68.4 pounds, far beyond the 43 pounds recommended for assault troops. A company commander in Dorset with the 116th Infantry, bound for Omaha Beach, reported that his men were “loping and braying about the camp under their packs, saying that as long as they were loaded like jackasses they may as well sound like them.” On June 2, the men donned “skunk suits,” stiff and malodorous uniforms heavily impregnated against poison gas.

“We’re ready now—as ready as we’ll ever be,” Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., of the 4th Infantry Division, wrote on May 30 to his wife, Eleanor. “The black bird says to his brother, if this be the last song ye shall sing, sing well, for you may not sing another.” Each soldier placed his personal effects into a quartermaster box twelve inches long, eight inches

wide, and four inches deep, for storage at a depot in Liverpool. Like shedding an old skin or a past life, troops bound for France would fill five hundred rail boxcars with such accoutrements of peace every week for the rest of the summer.

“I am a free man, so I pull no punches,” a British gunner in a Sherman tank crew told his diary. “I’ve earned my place.” The warriors began to sing, and they sang well: one soldier whose song would cease in Normandy wrote his family, “If I don’t come out of this thing, I want my people (especially my father) to know I gave every ounce of my strength and energy for what I believe I am fighting for.” Another young captain, who would instead survive to reach old age, told his parents back in Waco: “The destiny of life is an elusive thing.”

Eisenhower left Bushy Park on Friday, June 2, for his war camp, code-named SHARPENER. Trailers and tents filled Sawyer’s Wood, a sylvan tract of partridge brakes, dog roses, and foxglove five miles northwest of Portsmouth harbor. Eisenhower’s personal “circus wagon” featured a bunk and a desk, with the usual stack of pulp westerns and three telephones, including a red one to Washington and a green one to Churchill’s underground Map Room in Whitehall. A mile distant down a cinder path stood a three-story Georgian mansion with a bowed façade and Ionic columns. Originally requisitioned by the Royal Navy for a navigation school—nautical almanacs still stood in the bookcases—Southwick House now served as Admiral Ramsay’s headquarters and a convenient redoubt from which the supreme commander could watch OVERLORD unspool.

“The intensity of the burdens,” as Eisenhower conceded in his diary, had only grown in the past week. Harry Butcher on June 3 noted that his boss had “the pre-D-Day jitters.” There was much to be jittery about. Each morning, intelligence officers scrutinized new reconnaissance photos and sent to Southwick House revised assessments of the beach obstacles sprouting along the Norman littoral, with every bunker and minefield plotted on a large-scale map. More alarming was intelligence from Ultra that another enemy division had reinforced the western rim of the invasion zone. A May 26 memo from the SHAEF operations staff noted that three German divisions now occupied this vital Cotentin Peninsula, plus sixty tanks and a parachute regiment, with perhaps a full additional division entrenched at Cherbourg.

Such a robust force, positioned to ambush the two lightly armed American airborne divisions planning to float into the peninsula, in turn spooked the senior air commander for OVERLORD, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Described by one British officer as “a pompous nincompoop” and by another as a man with “a peculiar knack for rubbing



everybody up the wrong way,” Leigh-Mallory petitioned Eisenhower on May 29 to cancel the combat jumps of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions or risk losing at least half the paratroopers and one-third of the accompanying gliders. A day later, in an appeal tête-à-tête, the air marshal upped the ante by warning the supreme commander that “this very speculative operation” could cost 70 percent of the glider force in a “futile slaughter.” Leigh-Mallory added, “If you do this operation, you are throwing away two airborne divisions.”

Here was the sort of crazy risk for which Eisenhower felt unappreciated. Alone he retired to chain-smoke in a tent and ponder what he called a “soul-racking problem.” Canceling the airborne drop would require either scrubbing the seaborne landings at Utah Beach as well, or condemning that assault force to possible evisceration, since the paratroopers were intended to disrupt German counterattacks against the beaches of the eastern Cotentin on D-Day. Airborne calamities in North Africa and Sicily had left some officers skeptical of war by parachute, but Eisenhower still believed in the shock power of vertical envelopment, particularly if the troopers could be better concentrated. In recent days the 82nd Airborne drop zones had been shifted a dozen miles eastward, cheek-by-jowl with the sector to be occupied by the 101st. This consolidation would amass thirteen thousand men in six parachute regiments closer to Utah Beach.

Emerging from his canvas hideaway, Eisenhower issued orders worthy of a battle captain. After phoning Leigh-Mallory, he dictated his decision: there was “nothing for it” but to proceed with a plan two years in the making, even as commanders were told to review “to the last detail every single thing that may diminish the hazards.

“A strong airborne attack in the region indicated is essential to the whole operation,” Eisenhower added. “It must go on.”

A leafy hilltop near Southwick House offered a stunning panorama of the thousand-ship fleet now ready for launching from Spithead and the Solent, a sheltered strait separating the Isle of Wight from the English mainland. Thousands more—the *OVERLORD* armada numbered nearly seven thousand, including landing craft and barges—filled every berth in every port from Felixstowe on the North Sea to Milford Haven in Wales, with others moored in the Humber, the Clyde, and Belfast Lough. Late spring warmth had returned, and fleecy clouds drifted above the gray sea-walls and church steeples. The scent of brine and timber creosote carried on a brisk breeze that straightened naval pennants and tossed quayside poppies, reminding the veterans of Tunisia. Semaphore lights winked from ship to shore and back to ship. Silver barrage balloons floated over the

anchorage, sixty-five in Falmouth alone, and destroyers knifed hither and yon across the placid sea in an ecstatic rush of white water.

Soldiers still braying and bleating under their combat loads tramped up gangplanks or through the yawning bow doors of LSTs grounded on concrete pads at the water's edge. "Have a good go at it, mates," the leathery stevedores called. Others crammed into lighters for a short, wet ride out to troopships turning on their chains. "If any of you fellows get any closer," one soldier warned, "you will have to marry me." Tommies heated cocoa and oxtail soup on the decks; a British platoon commander marveled at being served "real white bread, which we hadn't seen in years." In Plymouth, where Drake played bowls before embarking to fight the Spanish Grande y Felicísima Armada and whence the *Mayflower* beat for the New World, so many vessels stood lashed gunwale to gunwale that "a man could have jumped from one deck to another and walked a half-mile up the Tamar River," an American lieutenant reported. Aboard the S.S. *Clara Barton*, swabs finished painting several buxom figureheads on the prow; an artillery officer scribbled in his diary, "I didn't ask which was Clara."

As always where land met sea, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy found reason to bicker. Each service had different numbers for the LSTs, so a perplexed GI could board both *LST 516* and *LST 487*, which were one and the same. A sixty-one-page booklet, "Preparation for Overseas Movement: Short Sea Voyage," instructed every unit to furnish forty copies of embarkation rosters, a requirement honored more in the breach than in the observance. Eighteen LCTs—landing craft, tank—were so overloaded that at the eleventh hour Navy officers demanded cargo be shifted. Sailors laboriously explained to soldiers that an LST had an immersion rate of one inch per thirty-three tons of weight; to load eight hundred tons rather than the maximum five hundred would force the crews to off-load vehicles in the surf through ten extra inches of water, drowning engines if not men. The ships were overloaded anyway. VII Corps, bound for Utah Beach, tried to board six hundred men on LSTs built to carry four hundred.

The deadweight included forty war correspondents, "an annoying and mysterious band of roving gypsies," as the reporter Don Whitehead described his tribe, summoned in great secrecy from various London alehouses. The most celebrated among them was Ernie Pyle, "sparse and gray of hair, kind and tired of face, dressed in coveralls that threatened to engulf him," in Forrest Pogue's description, "a short scarecrow with too much feet." His kit bag carried eleven liquor bottles, assorted good-luck trinkets, a Remington portable, and notice of the Pulitzer Prize he had won a month earlier for brilliant reporting in the Mediterranean. "All I do is drink and work and wait," he had written a friend. Now the wait was

almost over. Omar Bradley, whom Pyle had made famous in Sicily, had offered him a berth on the headquarters ship U.S.S. *Augusta*; Pyle, wary of “too much brass,” chose instead to wade onto *LST 353* in Falmouth harbor, endearing himself to the aft gun crew by autographing an antiaircraft barrel with a paintbrush.

“I’m no longer content unless I am with soldiers in the field,” he confessed, but added, “If I hear another fucking GI say ‘fucking’ once more, I’ll cut my fucking throat.” Already plagued by hideous nightmares and given to signing his letters “the Unhappy Warrior,” Pyle listened to a briefing on the *OVERLORD* attack plan and then lay awake, wide-eyed, until four A.M. “Now you were committed,” he later wrote. “It was too late to back out now, even if your heart failed you.”

In claustrophobic holds and on weather decks the troops made do, wedged like sprats in a tin. “I love my fellow man,” one miserable soldier informed his diary, “but not in the mass.” The click of dice and the slap of playing cards could be heard across the fleet, including “a long session of a wild, distant derivative of poker called ‘high low rollem’ using five-franc invasion scrip for chips,” the correspondent A. J. Liebling reported. On *Augusta*, sailors sang “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling” around a piano, while the junior officers’ mess watched, improbably, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat*. Without fanfare beyond an extra twinkling stutter of semaphore signals, convoys that had farthest to travel cast off and made for the open sea. For those who had sailed to Africa, or Salerno, or Anzio, the deep gnaw of ships’ screws stirred what one veteran called “the old uneasiness.”

More than five hundred weather stations were scattered across the United Kingdom, most reporting hourly. Eight U.S. Navy ships also took meteorological readings in the western Atlantic, and reconnaissance planes packed with instruments flew every day from Scotland, Cornwall, and Gibraltar. British beach watchers at fifty-eight wave observation stations thrice daily noted the height of every breaker during a three-minute interval, then sent their reports to a Swell Forecast Section. Six esteemed forecasters in England conferred twice each day by phone to discuss, often fractiously, the mysteries of wind, cloud, surf, and swell.

Each Allied invasion constituent had particular weather demands. Amphibious forces needed offshore surface winds not greater than Force 4—thirteen to eighteen miles per hour—for three consecutive days, as well as apposite tides. Pilots wanted a cloud ceiling of at least 2,500 feet for transport planes, with visibility of no less than three miles, and, for heavy bombers, no overcast thicker than the partly cloudy condition designated 5/10. Paratroopers required surface winds below twenty miles an hour, without gusts, and illumination of not less than a half moon at a

thirty-degree altitude. The odds against such conditions aligning on the Norman coast for seventy-two hours in June were placed at thirteen to one.

Eisenhower had never been fortunate with his weather, despite ardently rubbing the seven lucky coins he had long kept in his pocket. Storms bedeviled the invasions of both Morocco and Sicily, and another now threatened OVERLORD. Cyclonic disturbances stretched as far back as the Rocky Mountains. Four low-pressure centers—roughly fourteen hundred miles apart and said by forecasters to be “full of menace”—had begun to drift east across the Atlantic. A great high-pressure collar around the Arctic Circle extruded cold air from the north. “The weather forecast is bad,” Kay Summersby wrote in her diary on Saturday, June 3. “E. is very depressed.”

At 4:30 A.M. on Sunday, June 4, in the high-ceilinged Southwick House library, a somber E. sat with Montgomery, Ramsay, Leigh-Mallory, and half a dozen other senior officers on two couches and a clutch of easy chairs. Beyond a set of French doors blanketed in blackout drapes, an immense map of southern England and Normandy covered one wall, with convoys and divisions depicted by pushpins and cabalistic symbols, which two uniformed clerks periodically adjusted from a stepladder. Standing ill at ease before the supreme commander was a tall, pigeon-breasted officer with a long face descending from his widow’s peak to his cleft chin. Group Captain J. M. Stagg, a specialist in terrestrial magnetism and solar radiation, regretted to say that as SHAEF’s chief meteorologist he was altering his grim forecast for the worse.

“A series of depressions across the Atlantic is moving rapidly eastward,” Stagg reported. “These depressions will produce disturbed conditions in the Channel and assault area.” Weather charts resembled conditions typical of midwinter rather than early summer; depression L5, now skulking toward the Shetland Islands, would produce the lowest atmospheric pressure recorded in the British Isles during June in the twentieth century. In a few hours complete overcast would blanket southern England, with a ceiling as low as five hundred feet and westerly winds up to thirty miles an hour at Force 6. Conditions for D-Day on June 5 had deteriorated from “most unpromising” to “quite impossible.”

Eisenhower polled his lieutenants. “No part of the air support plan would be practicable,” Leigh-Mallory told him. Even Ramsay, his mariner’s face carved by gales, concurred; at Force 6, waves could be six feet or higher. Eisenhower nodded. “We need every help our air superiority can give us,” he said. “If the air cannot operate, we must postpone.” Only Montgomery disagreed. Conditions would be severe, but *not* impossible. He for one was willing to gamble.

At that moment the lights failed. Aides hurried in with guttering can-

dles that limned the exasperation in Eisenhower's face. "Jesus!" he snapped at Montgomery, according to a subsequent account by Air Vice Marshal E. J. Kingston McCloughry. "Here you have been telling us for the past three or four months that you must have adequate air cover and that the airborne operations are essential to the assault, and now you say you will do without them. No, we will postpone OVERLORD twenty-four hours." The conference dissolved. Eisenhower stalked back to his caravan to read the Sunday papers between fitful naps.

Banks of gray cloud blustered in by midmorning, with pelting rain and gusts that tossed treetops and barrage balloons alike. At Southampton "the spindrift was flying scuds across the roadstead," a medical officer on the *Princess Astrid* reported, and the Portland Race was described as "a chaos of pyramidal waters leaping up suddenly." The coded radio message for a one-day postponement—HORNPIPE BOWSPRIT—reached many British troop convoys before they weighed anchor. Forces out of Falmouth had traveled only half a mile beyond the antisubmarine nets when frantic blinking from shore brought them back.

But bombardment squadrons from Belfast and the Clyde were forced to countermarch up the black, squally Irish Sea. Worse off yet were the ships from Force U—Utah—that had put out from Cornwall and Devon the previous night to sail east down the Channel. Word passed from deck to deck that a "three-quarter gale" was blowing, a term foreign to landlubbers but quickly elucidated when the convoys came about into the teeth of a short, steep sea on the port bow. Miserable as men felt on the cold weather decks, they were fortunate compared to those below, who suffered in a green miasma of vomit and clogged toilets. Convoy U-2A, steaming at six knots with 247 vessels, failed to hear the recall signal and turned back only when apprehended halfway to France by two destroyers dispatched from Plymouth. Not until nine P.M. would the last stragglers punch through the head sea to find shelter in Weymouth Bay. Force U, the Navy reported, was "scattered and somewhat out of hand."

As anchors dropped and engines died, taut nerves led to bickering and a few fistfights. Officers tried to keep their men occupied by distributing *A Pocket Guide to France*, a War Department tract that explained the worthiness of the nation to be liberated. Soldiers also learned that "Normandy looks rather like Ohio," that a hectoliter equaled twenty-two gallons, and that the French were "good talkers and magnificent cooks." Troops studying an Army phrase book murmured the hopeful "*Encore une verre du vin rouge, s'il vous plaît, mademoiselle*," that last often being pronounced "*mama-oiselle*." Many GIs attended Sunday church services belowdecks. In the main mess aboard U.S.S. *Bayfield*, soldiers and sailors bellowed out "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name," while a chaplain in Weymouth took his

text from Romans 8: “If God be for us, who can be against us?”—an unsettling theological presumption at the moment. Dice and cards reappeared. A combat surgeon described playing “blackjack for twenty dollars a card with officers from headquarters company. I either go into this fight loaded or broke. What’s the difference?” A 1st Division soldier reading *Candide* complained, “Voltaire used the same gag too often. The characters are always getting killed and then turning out not to have been killed at all.” British paratroopers watched *Stormy Weather*, with Lena Horne and Fats Waller, while an American airborne artillery unit saw the bandleader Ted Lewis in *Is Everybody Happy?* Combat engineers debated whether the “D” in D-Day stood for “death.”

The strange, tempestuous Sunday grew stranger and stormier. At 4:30 p.m., the Royal Marine sentry at the Southwick House gate snapped to attention upon being confronted by the prime minister, who stomped into the mansion flushed with rage at General Charles A. J. M. de Gaulle, whom he denounced as an “obstructionist saboteur.” Churchill’s color was also deepened by the “large number of whiskeys” he had tossed down in a bootless effort to calm himself.

The sad story was this: De Gaulle, head of the self-proclaimed provisional French government-in-exile, had recently arrived in London from Algiers and this morning had been driven to Droxford, north of Portsmouth, where Churchill had parked his personal train on a siding to be close to the great events unfolding. Although he greeted De Gaulle on the tracks with open arms and then offered him an elegant lunch in his coach, the prime minister found the Frenchman resentful at various snubs from the Anglo-Americans, notably his exclusion from the invasion planning and the refusal by Washington to recognize De Gaulle’s regime. The conversation took a choleric turn: Churchill, who was said to speak French “remarkably well, but understands very little,” subsequently proposed sending De Gaulle “back to Algiers, in chains if necessary.” De Gaulle, who at six feet, six inches towered over the prime minister even when they were sitting, pronounced his host a “gangster.”

No sooner had Churchill stormed across the Southwick House foyer than he was followed by De Gaulle himself. Deux Mètres, as the Americans called him for his metric height, was “balancing a chip like an epaulette on each martial shoulder.” Only vaguely aware of their contretemps, Eisenhower received his visitors in the war room, where he revealed to De Gaulle for the first time the OVERLORD locale, battle plan, and date, now postponed for at least twenty-four hours. De Gaulle grew even huffier upon recognizing that most Gallic phenomenon, the *fait accompli*. He objected to “your forged notes”—the Allied invasion scrip, now being gam-

bled away on many a troop deck—which he decried as “counterfeit money” and “a violation of national sovereignty, a humiliation to which not even the Germans had subjected France.” He also declined to allow several hundred French liaison officers to embark with the Allied invaders until their duties and a chain of command were clarified. Nor did he care to record a radio broadcast urging Frenchmen to obey their liberators, particularly upon learning that Eisenhower had already recorded his liberation message—in Dutch, Flemish, Norwegian, and Danish as well as in French and English—without acknowledging De Gaulle’s sovereign legitimacy. After declaring, “I cannot follow Eisenhower,” he stamped from the mansion to motor back to London, *deux mètres* of umbrage folded into the backseat.

Churchill, ignoring his own maxim that “there is no room in war for pique, spite, or rancor,” returned to his train outraged by such “treason at the height of battle” and mentally composing black notes for what he called his “Frog File.” One British wit observed that a staple of De Gaulle’s diet had long been the hand that fed him. “Remember that there is not a scrap of generosity about this man,” the prime minister would write to his Foreign Office. Eisenhower in his diary lamented the “rather sorry mess.” He had hoped De Gaulle would shed his “Joan of Arc complex,” but now he told his staff, “To hell with him and if he doesn’t come through, we’ll deal with someone else.”

At 9:30 P.M., the supreme commander again repaired with his lieutenants to the library, where a fire crackled in the hearth and momentous news from Stagg brightened the day’s gloom. “There have been some rapid and unexpected developments,” the meteorologist reported. H.M.S. *Hoste*, a weather frigate cruising seven hundred miles west of Ireland, reported in secret dispatches that atmospheric surface pressure was rising steadily. The offending Atlantic depressions, including the lugubrious L5, had moved quicker than expected, suggesting that a brief spell of better weather would arrive the following day and last into Tuesday. “I am quite confident that a fair interval will follow tonight’s front,” Stagg added.

Eisenhower polled his subordinates once more. Further postponement would likely delay the invasion for nearly two weeks, when the tides next aligned properly. Leigh-Mallory remained skeptical. Bombing would be “chancy,” and spotting for naval gunfire difficult. Ramsay reported “no misgivings at all.” The SHAEF chief of staff, Lieutenant General Walter Bedell “Beetle” Smith, said, “It’s a helluva gamble, but it’s the best possible gamble.” Eisenhower turned to Montgomery, alert and lean in corduroy trousers and thick sweater.

“Do you see any reason for not going Tuesday?”

Montgomery answered instantly. “I would say go.”

For a long minute the room fell silent but for rain lashing the French

doors. Eisenhower stared vacantly, rubbing his head. “The question is, how long can you hang this operation on the end of a limb and let it hang there?” The tension seemed to drain from his face. “I’m quite positive we must give the order,” he said. “I don’t like it, but there it is. I don’t see how we can possibly do anything else.” They would reconvene before dawn on Monday, June 5, to hear Stagg’s latest forecast, but the order would stand. “Okay,” Eisenhower declared. “We’ll go.”

Outside the library, he turned to Stagg and said with a broad smile, “Don’t bring any more bad news.”

Across the fleet majestic the war cry sounded: “Up anchor!” In the murky, fretful dawn, from every English harbor and estuary spilled the great effluent of liberation, from Salcombe and Poole, Dartmouth and Weymouth, in tangled wakes from the Thames past the Black Deep and the Whalebone Marshes, all converging on the white-capped Channel: nearly 200,000 seamen and merchant mariners crewing 59 convoys carrying 130,000 soldiers, 2,000 tanks, and 12,000 vehicles. “Ships were heaving in the gray waves,” wrote Alan Moorehead. Monday’s early light revealed cutters, corvettes, frigates, freighters, ferries, trawlers, tankers, subchasers; ships for channel-marking, for cable-laying, for smoke-making; ships for refrigerating, towing, victualing. From the Irish Sea the bombardment squadrons rounded Land’s End in pugnacious columns of cruisers, battleships, destroyers, and even some dreadnoughts given a second life, like the U.S.S. *Nevada*, raised and remade after Pearl Harbor, and the ancient monitor H.M.S. *Erebus*, built to shell German fortifications in the Great War with two 15-inch guns of dubious reliability. From the *Erebus* mast flew the signal Nelson had hoisted at Trafalgar: “England expects every man to do his duty.” The heavy cruiser U.S.S. *Tuscaloosa* replied, “We are full of ginger,” and swabs on *Bayfield* huzzahed Royal Navy tars on *Hawkins* and *Enterprise*, passing close aboard near Eddystone Light.

By midmorning the heavy skies lightened and the wind ebbed, recoloring the sea from pewter to sapphire. A luminous rainbow, said to be “tropical in its colors,” arced above the wet green English fields, and dappled sun lit the chalk cliffs of Kent, turning them into white curtains. A naval officer on U.S.S. *Quincy* wrote, “War, I think, would tend to increase one’s eye for beauty, just as it should tend to make peace more endurable.” Braced against a bowsprit, a piper skirled “The Road to the Isles” down the river Hamble as soldiers lining ship rails in the Solent cheered him on. Nothing brightened the mood more than reports from the BBC, broadcast throughout the armada, that Rome had fallen at last, at long last.

Leading the fleet was the largest minesweeping operation in naval his-



tory. Some 255 vessels began by clearing Area Z, a circular swath of sea below the Isle of Wight that was ten miles in diameter and soon dubbed Piccadilly Circus. From here the minesweepers sailed through eight corridors that angled to a German minefield in mid-Channel, where a week earlier Royal Navy launches had secretly planted underwater sonic beacons in thirty fathoms. Electronically dormant until Sunday, the beacons now summoned the sweepers to the entrances of ten channels, each of which was four hundred to twelve hundred yards wide; these channels would be cleared for thirty-five miles to five beaches on the Bay of the Seine in Normandy. Seven-foot waves and a cross-tidal current of nearly three knots bedeviled helmsmen who fought their wheels, the wind, and the sea to keep station. As the sweepers swept, more boats followed to lay a lighted dan buoy every mile on either side of each channel, red to starboard, white to port. The effect, one reporter observed, was “like street lamps across to France.”

As the invasion convoys swung toward Area Z, the churlish open Channel tested the seaworthiness of every landing vessel. Flat-bottomed LSTs showed “a capacity for rolling all ways at once,” and the smaller LCI—landing craft, infantry—revealed why it was widely derided as a Lousy Civilian Idea. Worse yet was the LCT, capable of only six knots in a millpond and half that into a head sea. Even the Navy acknowledged that “the LCT is not an ocean-going craft due to poor sea-keeping facilities, low speed, and structural weakness”; the latter quality included being bolted together in three sections so that the vessel “gave an ominous impression of being liable to buckle in the middle.” Miserable passengers traded seasickness nostrums, such as one sailor’s advice to “swallow a pork chop with a string, then pull it up again.”

For those who could eat, pork chops were in fact served to the 16th Infantry, with ice cream. Aboard the *Thomas Jefferson*, 116th Infantry troops—also headed for Omaha Beach—ate what one officer described as “bacon and eggs on the edge of eternity.” Soldiers primed grenades, sharpened blades, and field-stripped their rifles, again; a Navy physician recommended a good washing to sponge away skin bacteria, “in case you stop one.” Some Yanks sang “Happy D-Day, dear Adolf, happy D-Day to you,” but Tommies preferred “Jerusalem,” based on William Blake’s bitter poem set to music: “Bring me my bow of burning gold.” Sailors broke out their battle ensigns, stripped each bridge to fighting trim, and converted mess tables into operating theaters. In watertight compartments belowdecks, crewmen aboard the resurrected *Nevada* stowed “dress blues, china, glassware, library books, tablecloths, office files, brooms, mirrors.” A Coast Guard lieutenant noted in his diary, “Orders screeched over the PA system

for Mr. Whozits to report to Mr. Whatzits in Mr. Wherezits' stateroom." Rear Admiral Morton L. Deyo, aboard U.S.S. *Tuscaloosa* as commander of the Utah bombardment squadron, hammered a punching bag in his cabin.

To inspirit the men, officers read stand-tall messages from Eisenhower and Montgomery, then offered their own prognostications and advice. "The first six hours will be the toughest," Colonel George A. Taylor of the 16th Infantry told reporters on the *Samuel Chase*. "They'll just keep throwing stuff onto the beaches until something breaks. That is the plan." Brigadier General Norman D. Cota, who would be the senior officer on Omaha Tuesday morning, told officers aboard the U.S.S. *Charles Carroll*:

You're going to find confusion. The landing craft aren't going in on schedule and people are going to be landed in the wrong place. Some won't be landed at all. . . . We must improvise, carry on, not lose our heads. Nor must we add to the confusion.

A tank battalion commander was more succinct: "The government paid \$5 billion for this hour. Get to hell in there and start fighting." Standing on the forecastle of *Augusta*, Omar Bradley, described by one colonel as "alone and conspicuous," flashed a V-for-victory to each wallowing LST before retiring to an armchair in his cabin to read *A Bell for Adano*.

"We are starting on the great venture of this war," Ted Roosevelt wrote Eleanor from the U.S.S. *Barnett*. "The men are crowded below or lounging on deck. Very few have seen action." Roosevelt, who at fifty-six would be the senior officer on Utah Beach for the first hours in both age and rank, had seen enough—in France during the last war, and in the landings at Oran and Gela during this one—to have premonitions:

We've had a grand life and I hope there'll be more. Should it chance that there's not, at least we can say that in our years together we've packed enough for ten ordinary lives. We've known joy and sorrow, triumph and disaster, all that goes to fill the pattern of human existence. . . . Our feet were placed in a large room, and we did not bury our talent in a napkin.

Back on deck he told men from the 8th Infantry, "I'll see you tomorrow morning, 6:30, on the beach."

Far inland, at more than a dozen airfields scattered across England, some twenty thousand parachutists and glider troops also made ready. Soldiers from the British 6th Airborne Division blackened their faces with teakettle soot, then chalked bosomy girls and other graffiti on aircraft

fuselages while awaiting the order to emplane. “I gave the earth by the runway a good stamp,” one private reported.

American paratroopers smeared their skin with cocoa and linseed oil or with charcoal raked from campfires along the taxiways. A few company clowns imitated Al Jolson’s minstrel act and joked about the imminent “\$10,000 jump”—the maximum death benefit paid by government insurance policies. When a chaplain in the 101st Airborne began to pray aloud, one GI snapped, “I’m not going to die. Cut that crap out.” Every man was overburdened, from the burlap strips woven in the helmet net to the knife with a brass-knuckle grip tucked into the jump boots. Also: parachute, reserve chute, Mae West, entrenching tool, rations, fragmentation and smoke grenades, blasting caps, TNT blocks, brass pocket compass, dime-store cricket, raincoat, blanket, bandoliers, rifle, cigarette carton, and morphine syrettes (“one for pain and two for eternity”). Carrier pigeons were stuffed into extra GI socks—their heads poking out of little holes cut in the toe—and fastened to jump smocks with blanket pins. Some officers trimmed the margins from their maps in order to carry a few more rounds of ammunition.

“We look all pockets, pockets and baggy pants. The only visible human parts are two hands,” wrote Louis Simpson, the poet-gliderman. “The letter writers are at it again,” he continued, “heads bowed over their pens and sheets of paper.” Among the scribblers and the map trimmers was the thirty-seven-year-old assistant commander of the 82nd Airborne, Brigadier General James M. Gavin, who confessed in a note to his young daughter, “I have tried to get some sleep this afternoon but to no avail.” The impending jump likely would be “about the toughest thing we have tackled,” added Gavin, whose exploits on Sicily were among the most storied in the Mediterranean. In his diary, he was more explicit: “Either this 82nd Division job will be the most glorious and spectacular episode in our history or it will be another Little Big Horn. There is no way to tell now. . . . It will be a very mean and nasty fight.”

The prospect of “another Little Big Horn,” particularly for the two American airborne divisions ordered to France despite Leigh-Mallory’s dire warning, gnawed at Eisenhower in these final hours. After watching British troops board their LCIs from South Parade Pier in Portsmouth, he had returned to SHARPENER to pass the time playing fox-and-hounds on a checkerboard with Butcher, then sat down to compose a contrite note of responsibility, just in case. “Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops,” he wrote. “If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.” Misdating the paper “July 5”—symptomatic of exhaustion and anxiety—he slipped it into his wallet, for use as needed.

Just after six P.M., Eisenhower climbed into his Cadillac with Kay Summersby behind the wheel and the four-star bumper insignia hooded. Leading a three-car convoy, the supreme commander rolled north for ninety minutes on narrow roads clogged with military trucks. "It's very hard really to look a soldier in the eye when you fear that you are sending him to his death," he told Summersby. At Greenham Common airfield in the Berkshire Downs, outside the eleventh-century town of Newbury, he bolted down a quick supper in the headquarters mess of the 101st Airborne, then drove to the flight line. Hands in his pockets, he strolled among the C-47s, newly striped with white paint. Troopers with blackened faces and heads shaved or clipped Mohawk-style wiggled into their parachute harnesses and sipped a final cup of coffee. "The trick is to keep moving. If you stop, if you start thinking, you lose your focus," Eisenhower told a young soldier from Kansas. "The idea, the perfect idea, is to keep moving."

At aircraft number 2716, he shook hands with the division commander, Major General Maxwell D. Taylor, who was careful to conceal a bad limp from the tendon he had injured playing squash the previous day. Eisenhower wished him Godspeed, then returned to the headquarters manor house and climbed to the roof for a final glimpse of his men. "The light of battle," he would write George Marshall, "was in their eyes." To Summersby he confessed, "I hope to God I know what I'm doing."

Red and green navigation lights twinkled across the downs as the sun set at 10:06 P.M. Singing voices drifted in the gloaming—"Give me some men who are stout-hearted men / Who will fight for the right they adore"—punctuated by a guttural roar from paratroopers holding their knives aloft in homicidal resolve. Into the airplane bays they heaved themselves, with a helpful shove from behind. Many knelt on the floor to rest their cumbersome gear and chutes on a seat, faces bathed by the soft glow of cigarette embers and red cabin lights. "Give me guts," one trooper prayed. "Give me guts." Engines coughed and caught, the feathered propellers popping as crew chiefs slammed the doors. "Flap your wings, you big-assed bird," a soldier yelled.

From the west the last gleam of a dying day glinted off the aluminum fuselages. "Stay, light," a young soldier murmured, "stay on forever, and we'll never get to Normandy."

The light faded and was gone. Deep into the Channel, fifty-nine darkened convoys went to battle stations as they pushed past the parallel rows of dim buoys, red to starboard, white to port. "Our flag bridge is dead quiet," Admiral Deyo wrote on *Tuscaloosa*. An officer on *Quincy* noted, "This is like trying to slip into a room where everyone is asleep."

Small craft struggled in the wind and lop. "Men sick, waves washed

over deck,” an LCT log recorded. “Stove went out, nothing to eat, explosives wet and could not be dried out.” Short seas snapped tow ropes, flooded engine rooms, and sloshed through troop compartments. Some helmsmen held their wheels thirty degrees off true to keep course. Several heaving vessels blinkered a one-word message: “Seasick. Seasick. Seasick.”

Down the ten channels they plunged, two designated for each of the five forces steaming toward five beaches: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, Sword. Wakes braided and rebraided. The amber orb of a full moon rose through a thinning overcast off the port bow, and the sea sang as swells slipped along every hull bound for a better world. Hallelujah, sang the sea. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

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