In mid-May 1944, the US Chiefs of Staff decided to meet with their British counterparts in London shortly after D-Day, which then was planned for June 5. The Chiefs sent their operations and planning deputies ahead to observe D-Day preparations, make arrangements for the meetings, and have first-hand reports on the progress of the invasion when the Chiefs arrived. The Army was represented by Maj. Gen. T. J. Handy and Col. George A. Lincoln; the Navy by Rear Adm. C. M. Cooke, Jr., and Capt. D. R. Osborn; the Army Air Forces by Maj. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter, Assistant Chief of Air Staff for Plans, and Col. Fred M. Dean. The group left by DC-4 from a remote corner of National Airport in Washington on May 28 under elaborate secrecy cover.

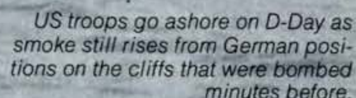
The following excerpt is from notes written by General Kuter after his return to Washington on June 23, 1944. The excerpt covers only the period from May 29 to June 7 (D+1). The latter part of General Kuter's notes covers the Combined Chiefs of Staff meetings after D+1 and his subsequent visit to the Mediterranean Theater.

—THE EDITORS

Thirty-five years ago, the greatest amphibious assault in history was launched against Nazi-occupied Europe. The author, who participated in D-Day air operations, describes preparations for the invasion and air support for the 176,000 assault troops who stormed the Normandy beaches on . . .

D-DAY: JUNE 6, 1944

BY GEN. LAURENCE S. KUTER, USAF (RET.)



US troops go ashore on D-Day as smoke still rises from German positions on the cliffs that were bombed minutes before.

TWENTY-FOUR hours and eleven minutes after leaving Washington, we arrived at Bovingden, our southernmost heavy bombardment station in England. At Bovingden, we were met by all of the official transportation reserved by the European Theater of Operations for their high-level visiting firemen. My baggage was loaded into one seven-passenger Packard limousine, vintage about 1938, which followed me as I joined Brig. Gen. Ted Curtis, Lt. Gen. Carl A. "Tooey" Spaatz's Chief of Staff at US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, who had come to meet me in his car, and drove with him to Park House in London to have dinner with General Spaatz and his official family.

Dinner was very pleasant, filled with references to the time wives had last been seen in Washington. Warm, clear days had permitted many heavy bombers to initiate the campaign against the synthetic oil establishments deep in Germany. At about 11:30, I was driven in to Claridges, where a suite had been reserved for us.

Our first day was largely consumed by making an appointment with, finding, and talking to the Chief of the

Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke. He presides for the British Chiefs of Staff as Admiral Leahy presides for ours. We explained that our Chiefs planned on arriving at about D+3, and described the limited agenda that was proposed for discussion. "Brookey" seemed to be remarkably genial and amenable to the American suggestions. He spoke of the coming invasion with general confidence, but some concern over the airborne aspect.

I spent that afternoon and evening again with Tooey Spaatz, Maj. Gen. Fred Anderson, and Ted Curtis, telling them and no one else of the impending arrival of General Arnold and of the subjects he wished to discuss with them.

The next morning, we had a long and interesting discussion with General Eisenhower and his Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. W. Bedell Smith. They also expressed a somewhat reserved confidence in the plan for the invasion but concern over the airborne portion. There had been rather widely divergent views on the employment of the airborne force. Real concern was expressed over the possible losses that might result. All factors considered, however, General Eisenhower had decided that the ends he expected to gain were well worth the losses (up to thirty-three percent) he feared he might have to take, and so had ordered the operation.

In General Spaatz's headquarters, there also was concern over the employment of his command. General Spaatz had believed that he should go all-out to destroy German sources of both aviation and motor fuel. The RAF school of thought maintained that the strategic effort should be used to disrupt French rail communications and thereby prohibit the rapid movement of German reserves and achieve a more immediate effect on the battle, although many Frenchmen would undoubtedly be killed in the attack on rail transportation. The RAF school of thought prevailed, and orders had been so issued. One will never know which was the better course of action, as the war will undoubtedly be won.

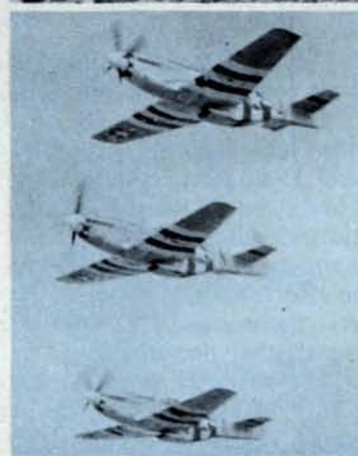
I think it is worthy of note that in the great tenseness prior to the invasion, with the widely varying types of forces involved, some of which (notably the airborne force) were brand new in their application, and the great differing national temperaments involved, there were no more serious differences of professional and national opinion than did exist at that time.

During the next couple of days, General Handy and Admiral Cooke visited ground and naval units in their concentration areas along the south coast of England, while I visited air bases. We also worked in calls on the Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Charles Portal, and the First Sea Lord, Admiral Cunningham. While visiting the units, each one of us arranged to participate in the D-Day operation, each in his own medium.

I naturally arranged to fly with my old unit, the 1st Bombardment Division, whose targets fortunately were in the center of the beachhead for the Zero-Hour attack.

Preparations for D-Day

In visiting the air units prior to D-Day, my initial impression was of a lack of Air Force interest in the D-Day operation of the surface forces. In contrast to the high



Above, a Normandy beach on D+2, with a few of the 4,000 ships, needed to move the invasion force across the Channel, lying offshore. Left, these Mustangs, wearing invasion stripes, encountered no Luftwaffe opposition on D-Day. Below, Ninth Air Force B-26s had done a thorough job of isolating the battlefield by bombing bridges, roads, and rail lines.

state of tension in the ground and naval units, the air units seemed almost indifferent. To one who did not know these units, that atmosphere would have been alarming. The facts in the case are very simple, however. This air crowd had been fighting its battle day in and day out for a couple of years. Its role in connection with the actual invasion was only a little more of the same, except this time against very much softer, less-heavily defended objectives. There was, of course, no indifference. Interest in the success or failure of our units on the ground was very deep and very real.

In visiting Jimmy Doolittle's (Eighth Air Force) headquarters, I learned from Maj. Gen. Pat Partridge of an action that impressed me as very sound preparatory thinking and operating. Anticipating that this great force of heavy bombers might have to bomb the beaches of Normandy through an overcast when our own troops were very close to the beach line, two bombing missions involving large forces were executed against the beaches near Calais where, through broken clouds, bombing was done on instrument.

Observers in fighters at low altitudes watched the points of impact of the bombs. It was determined at just what point on the beach one might aim his bombs to be sure of not hitting boats approaching the beaches. Then, to be sure that these instruments for blind bombing would not show densely packed landing craft as a false beach, the entire formation returned over the Portsmouth area, which was teeming with ships, to get some practice in differentiating between a ship line and a shore line. This foresightedness was not in vain.

A couple of days before D-Day, our party reformed and, as a group, went to advance headquarters to call on General Montgomery and on Admiral Ramsey. Neither was present. Montgomery's Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Freddie de Guingand, whom I had known well in the Western Desert Campaign, and Admiral Ramsey's Chief of Staff discussed the situation with us. In Montgomery's headquarters, there was again great general confidence but doubt as to the airborne effort.

In Ramsey's headquarters, there was grave concern lest the same naval antiaircraft that had destroyed so many of our troop-carrier transports in Sicily should shoot down great numbers of the vast swarm of transports that would be returning over units of our Allied fleet after dropping their gliders and paratroopers. His concern was truly justified. In total darkness, particularly when attacks from German bombers were to be expected, the problem of avoiding firing on our own low-flying aircraft was very great. As a result of this deep concern, no doubt, I know no instance of any gun aboard a naval vessel firing at a transport on the night of D–1.

Our party went to Stanmore to visit Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory at his headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces. While there, his American Deputy Commander, Maj. Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, was our principal guide. In Leigh-Mallory, we found a bubbling, effervescent confidence in the air effort as a whole, but a very grim, all-pervading doubt as to the efficacy of the airborne effort. General Vandenberg's views were gloomy, though not so gloomy as Leigh-Mallory's.

About two days before D-Day, the sailors and soldiers in our party went to the port to get aboard their little boats, but my group had plenty of time to visit more air units. After visiting Hq., Ninth Air Force, I went with Lt. Gen. Lewis Brereton to visit his IX Bomber Command and hear his final "address to the troops."

At that headquarters, Brig. Gen. Sammie Anderson, bursting with confidence and pride in his splendid medium and light bombardment wings, had assembled his wing and group commanders. Brereton passed on to the commanders Eisenhower's words of satisfaction in their training, pride in their accomplishments, and confidence in their achievement in the invasion. Brereton added a few very well chosen thoughts of his own, with exactly the right amount of the dramatic and exactly the right amount of American swearing. It was very pleasant to listen to the tribute he paid to the planning, training, and logistics support which we, in the States, had given to make, as he said, their great effort possible.

Sammie Anderson handed me five photographs as soon as we met and kept pressing until I went over them in detail. They showed five bridges across the Seine. His medium bombers had destroyed those bridges with far higher accuracy than any of us had ever believed medium bombers could achieve. His climax picture was of a large steel railroad bridge, the central spans of which were lying in the water. There were no bomb craters visible in this picture. Every one of his bombs had hit the bridge or gone into the water alongside. That is, without doubt, the finest example of precision bombing I have ever seen.

Sammie's medium and light bombers normally operated above the 9,000-foot altitude to avoid excessive losses to German light flak. For the zero-hour operation, however, they were prepared to go in as low as 2,500 feet if a low ceiling forced them down. They would have taken very heavy losses at that altitude, but they would have done their business also.

To avoid disclosing the area of the intended invasion, none of the bombers had been permitted to fly close enough to the invasion beaches to see or to know them. Consequently, detailed relief maps had been built. They portrayed the country exactly as it was expected to be seen from 9,000 to 12,000 feet at early daylight on D-Day. Each crew was thoroughly briefed on its specific target on these detailed relief maps. Here again was excellent preparatory thinking carried out to the last detail.

Among the fighter-bombers of the Ninth Air Force, there was no cold indifference. These boys were keyed up. They had spent months and months escorting bombers and doing other fighter chores, and rarely finding German airplanes. When the invasion began, they were sure they would find plenty of German planes and, furthermore, they could get down into the battle area and on the roads and railroads and bomb and strafe enemies that they could see. They were itching for it.

The Bombardment-Fighter Team

On the afternoon of June 4, I went up to my old headquarters at Brampton Grange to visit Brig. Gen. Bob Williams at the headquarters of the 1st Bombardment Division. I found there the full flowering of a very large, very strong, very able heavy bombardment force which I had had a hand in developing during the lean, bitter, and painful days of late 1942.

I arrived at Brampton Grange at about dinner time on June 4. I then learned that D-Day would not be June 5 as planned, because of bad weather. After a very pleasant

dinner with this group of old friends, I went to Molesworth to visit the 303d Heavy Bombardment Group, which had been in my command a year and a half earlier. I believe that there are no military units in our history that have lost their complete fighting complement as many times as these original heavy bombardment groups in this 1st Bombardment Division. The 303d Group was commanded by an old friend of mine, Col. Hal Bowman. The unit showed not the faintest adverse effect of the enormous attrition it had experienced during the past year and a half.

We found all of the officers assembled in the club for a show by some entertainers from a London night club. Over the platform was a large sign reading "Welcome, Lieutenant Carnes." We learned that about a month earlier the group had been on a difficult mission deep in Germany. Four Messerschmitt 410s had formed in the rear of the group in echelon, preparatory to launching a heavy rocket barrage. The Me-410s dropped back out of the range of our guns, assuring that everything was perfect before they fired into the group. A P-51 approached from the rear of the Messerschmitts. It formed at the tail of the echelon and very promptly, neatly, and cleanly shot down those German airplanes one by one from rear to front before any of them fired a round at the group.

Hal Bowman had not been leading his group on that mission. He did come into their interrogation, however, and shortly found it would be necessary to find the pilot of that P-51 before order could be restored in his organization. "CD-6" was painted in large characters on the tail of the P-51, and Lieutenant Carnes was the pilot of Charlie-Dog 6.

That evening the 303d Group belonged to Lieutenant Carnes and they told him so by presenting a bottle of Napoleon brandy to him—source very carefully concealed.

That story is a far cry from the touchy relations existing between the fighters and the bombers a year and a half ago when the fighters maintained that if they closed in on the bombers, the bombers' careless firing and indif-

AAF B-17s (above) and B-24s, along with RAF bombers, had prepared the way for the invasion by continuous attacks on war-production plants and oil refineries. On D-Day, more than 1,800 heavies bombed the beachheads five minutes before Zero Hour. Left, two US airborne divisions were dropped behind the beaches to facilitate later linkup of forces on Omaha and Utah beachheads.

ferent identification of aircraft resulted in our fighters being shot down by our own guns. The bombers maintained that our fighters stayed so far away they provided no protection from the Germans at all. Fighters and bombers are much better acquainted now than they were then.

On June 5, which proved to be D–1, I drove north through Peterborough and Nottingham to visit our troop carriers. I wanted to find how far down the echelon of command the higher command's doubt about effectiveness of the airborne plan had permeated. I knew that Brig. Gen. P. L. Williams was one who doubted its effectiveness. If the commander doubts the ability of his unit to carry out its mission, the situation naturally is very serious.

When I reached the headquarters, P. L. Williams was absent, but I found the Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff and the Operations Officer, Col. Jack Sprague. Far from doubt, I found the highest order of confidence and esprit conceivable. This unit had worked itself up to a fighting pitch at precisely the right psychological moment.

The staff of the IX Troop Carrier Command did have one very great worry—that D-Day might be postponed another twenty-four hours. Throughout the barracks mild fights were breaking out. One man would playfully push another and would suddenly be clipped on the jaw. His squad would immediately hunt up the fellow who clipped their member on the jaw and squad, platoon, company, and battalion fights were in the making.

The fighting spirit that was breaking out in both the airborne and troop carrier units was being kept in hand by a major effort on the part of all commanders, down through the corporals. The IX Troop Carrier Command staff did seriously doubt their ability to hold this fighting spirit in check for an additional twenty-four hours. That was their one and only worry. This unit had obviously been keyed to an intense high in fighting spirit at precisely the right moment. This item in morale leadership was one of the very many unrecorded contributions to the success of the invasion on D-Day.

Zero Hour

Upon returning to Brampton Grange, I found that instructions for the Zero Hour, D-Day mission had been received by teletype from the Eighth Air Force. By about 10:00 o'clock, all details of the field order were completed. This order had been prepared in outline by the few officers in the top staff echelon of the bombardment division who knew the details of the D-Day operation several days previously. When the order was issued to the division's four wings, it was eleven feet long on teletypewriter paper.

At about 11:00 p.m., when Bob Williams and I were assured that all had been done that could be done, we went to bed to be awakened at 3:00 a.m. After a hurried breakfast, Williams, Bart Beaman, and I drove to Chelveston, where Williams's special B-17 was parked.

We took off just after the last airplane of the B-17 group stationed at Chelveston. While the squadrons, groups, wings, and air divisions were maneuvering into their separate assemblies, we flew singly to the south coast of England and out over the Channel to get an advance look at the weather, and to be sure to be there when the first units crossed their prescribed lines of departure for the attack.

We found broken clouds extending down to about 1,000 feet beginning at the English coast. Further across the Channel, clouds became thicker and the tops higher. It appeared that at mid-Channel the overcast would be solid with a smooth top at about 12,000 feet, extending down to an irregular ceiling at about 1,000 feet.

This weather condition was the one that had been most feared. German bombers or fighter-bombers might fly singly through smooth clouds over our densely packed ships in the Channel, protected by the weather from our vast superiority in fighters. It would have been possible for single German aircraft to dip down at almost any point, drop its bombs on a ship (they were so close together it would have been hard to miss), pull back up into the cloud, and proceed home for more bombs to get more ships.

If Göring and all of the meteorologists of the Luftwaffe had prescribed ideal weather for the German Air Force to operate against our invading fleet, they could not have set up more favorable conditions than what actually existed from the center of the Channel to the invasion beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

However, at that time the 1,864 heavy bombers had a bit of a problem of their own. They were scheduled to cross a line only about thirty miles long on the south coast of England during a precise twenty-minute interval, so timed that the last bomb would be released on the invasion beachhead precisely five minutes before Zero Hour for the first wave of troops to land.

The leading elements of each of the three heavy bombardment divisions approached the line of departure no more than ten seconds earlier or ten seconds later than prescribed.

We joined the last group in the bombardment division, in the center of the line. That enormous swarm of heavy bombers proceeded steadily across a solid unmarked overcast to an invisible point in space. Bombs were released into the solid clouds below as the bombers turned right and proceeded in their enormous column along the prescribed route of withdrawal, back through prescribed lanes to points where divisions, wings, and groups broke off, each to return to his own airdrome to reload for the second mission.

During all this time, no German fighter was seen. This seemed especially ominous to us, as we believed the smooth cloud layer below us was swarming with fighters carrying bombs and dipping down to get the ships in the Channel.

The only hostile action we saw was a moderate amount of heavy-caliber antiaircraft fire that burst sporadically, poorly aimed, among the heavy bombers, doing no dam-

Gen. Laurence S. Kuter was graduated from West Point in 1927. During World War II, he commanded an Eighth Air Force bomb wing, served as Deputy Commander of the Northwest African Tactical Air Force, and was Deputy Commander of the AAF in the Pacific. Between operational tours, he was General Arnold's Assistant Chief for Plans. After the war, General Kuter commanded MATS (now MAC), Air University, PACAF, and NORAD. He retired in 1962 to become Executive Vice President of Pan American Airways. He and Mrs. Kuter now live in Naples, Fla.

age. We did, however, see six large antiaircraft rockets come up through the clouds near us. At the end of their spiraling trajectory they burst in a very large explosion. Although this rocket fire was heavier than had ever been observed before, it was wholly ineffective.

A Miracle of Science and Training

In returning across the Channel, we could see through holes in the clouds that there were ships in every visible spot of water. Each was leaving the crooked wake of a ship doing an antisubmarine zigzag or irregular maneuver to avoid bombers. Each glimpse of the Channel presented a picture of vast numbers of ships diving about through the water, much like cockroaches in a closet when the door is suddenly opened.

We returned uneventfully to Chelveston. There was very little conversation. Each of us was thinking of the field day the Luftwaffe might be having, darting out of that cloud cover against our shipping. We felt the toll might be heavy indeed, but trusted that it was not prohibitive.

I left Bob Williams at Brampton Grange and drove back to Hq., Allied Expeditionary Air Forces. At about noon, I met General Vandenberg. My concern undoubtedly showed in my expression. It was quite some time before I could believe his statement that no Luftwaffe aircraft—fighter, fighter-bomber, or bomber—had as yet appeared on the scene. Throughout June 6, the remnants of the Luftwaffe missed the greatest opportunity any air force could ever have to do an enemy maximum damage with minimum exposure. The total failure of the Luftwaffe was a wholly unexpected contribution of the greatest magnitude to the success of that cross-Channel invasion.

To Van, I described the heavy bomber effort as a miracle of science and training. Those 1,864 heavy bombers were manned by more than 20,000 officers and men. As a general statement, every one of those 20,000 Americans had been in the cornfields, behind the ribbon counters, or in the schoolrooms only a year and a half ago. As a general statement, any one of those 20,000 men might have pushed the wrong button or bumped into an emergency release and dumped a load of high explosives into the densely packed Channel below them.

Those 20,000 men proceeded above a solid overcast to a shoreline that could be seen only through instruments that were themselves inventors' dreams but two years ago and which not one of the men had ever seen until nine months ago, continued on to assigned targets which none had ever seen, dropped all of their bombs successfully, and returned to their bases. There is no record of even one man releasing one bomb that so much as scratched one boat. That such great numbers of recent farm boys, school boys, and ribbon clerks could aim bombs precisely at a wholly invisible target is truly a scientific miracle. This combination of things is something that happens in war but surely never happens in peace.

The Airpower Payoff

I spent most of the rest of D-Day with Van, watching the great control board at Allied Expeditionary Air Forces. On the board, the P-38 fighters I had seen sweeping the Channel high above the bombers were shown by their markers still patrolling the Channel for the Luftwaffe that had not yet appeared. A record on a blackboard showed that all of the heavies had bombed at the proper time and place and returned to their bases with a loss of two airplanes. I had seen one B-24 go down burning in about mid-Channel. The cause of this accident was unknown, but it surely was not due to enemy action.

On D+1, we learned of the first of spasmodic, unsuccessful Luftwaffe efforts to operate against the invasion. A torpedo bomber unit appeared on the night of D-Day. This particular unit had been training for some time in night torpedo work—obviously to meet the cross-Channel threat. Approximately thirty of their aircraft showed up on the radar screen. Several went down over German-defended points, apparently from German antiaircraft artillery. More went down when our night fighters met them. A small number reached some of our ships, launched torpedoes, and scattered. One torpedo hit one of our command ships with apparently no serious damage as the ship reported it had been hit but was proceeding with its mission, which it continued for the next three days. It became evident on D-Day, for the first time, that the Luftwaffe was a soundly defeated air force. The cumulative effect of several years' bombing by the RAF and a few months' full-strength precision heavy bombardment by the B-17s and B-24s of the AAF, together with the work of our fighters, brought forth their full fruits on the day of the invasion.

The destruction of aircraft factories had deprived these units of reserves. The shortage of combat-type aircraft had denied the crews the training needed to meet the invasion. Destruction of synthetic aviation gasoline refineries had created a shortage of gasoline to further restrict the training and operations of the aircraft that were left.

In addition, the fighters and the fighter-bombers had moved from their permanent bases in Germany to temporary bases in France. Frequently on arriving they found their forward airdrome had just been attacked by our bombardment or fighter-bomber forces, the airdrome was postholed, and they had to scatter and land at unscheduled fields. Inadequate motor transportation and gasoline (all due to bombing attacks on factories as well as recent strafing and bombing on the roads) made delivering fuel to the scattered airdromes most difficult.

Having landed at their scattered airdromes, they found that the bombing of communications centers prohibited calling each other and finding where to reassemble. Regardless of morale, esprit, or fighting heart, this was a defeated air force. It could obviously, however, regain its strength if its sources were left too long undisturbed.

It is most significant that the afternoon of D-Day saw an order issued from United States Strategic Air Forces to the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy stating in substance: "From this day on you need spend no further effort in the battle area. We will handle it here. You go back and keep working on the sources of military strength, particularly air strength, deep in Germany."

Fears of the air strategists that the invasion would terminate the employment of heavy bombers deep at the sources of German strength in favor of barrage bombing in the battle area were allayed before the sun set on the first day of the invasion. The high command had been much better educated on the employment of airpower than the Air Force enthusiasts had appreciated. ■