We were at 5320-feet under a heavy overcast sky and this was 7000-feet below our usual reasonably safe bombing altitude — this location was not our favorite place in this war (Now, readers may want to know why the altitude of 5320 is so precise — rather than saying “about 5000-feet.” My memory suggested 4500-feet and my wartime notes made no mention of altitude. So, decades later, I communicated with Col. George Eldridge who was our bombardier. Back came a message with the casual comment that our altitude was 5320. Not “I think it was” or “it was about this high” — just the simple statement of 5320. Knowing his ability to retain details and that as bombardier he would had to have been monitoring the altitude for use with his sighting operation if needed, I accepted this figure as FACT. What a memory!).

Our sturdy Marauder was too slow for low-altitude work. During the tense mission briefing, we were told that there was a chance the weather would be clear over the target and we could go in at our usual altitude of 12,500-feet, But if clouds did not break, we were to go down to whatever altitude was necessary to bomb visually. Under no condition were we to abort or delay — no matter how we personally felt about the situation. Shortly after leaving our base and climbing above the cloud deck, Bomber Command radioed to proceed below the cloud deck.

It was now D -20 minutes and we were to drop our bombs at D -10 on the beach at Normandy identified as Utah. Our 20 250-pound bombs had to be dropped before the ground troops landed. The bombs were to blow enough holes in the beach to give some little necessary protection for the ground troops. This didn’t seem like much, but it was all we could do for the men in green as they pushed ashore under enemy fire.

What an experience! The largest military operation in history, and we were a part of it (whether we wanted to be or not). Hours earlier, paratroops had landed on the Cherbourg peninsula and we hoped were assembling and moving toward the sea to meet thousands of troops storming up the beaches.

As we walked to our aircraft on the morning of the D-Day mission, I looked up at the sky and in the semi-darkness and partial cloud cover I could hear “a sky full of airplanes.” An occasional navigation light would appear momentarily, then disappear behind a cloud. I thought to myself, “How many mid-air collisions will we have today?” But there was nothing I could do about it so as we often said, C’est la guerre. And, so far as I know, there were no collisions, thanks to the advanced planning, careful scheduling of flights, and skill of the pilots.

The sky was literally alive with aircraft — thank goodness most were ours. As one soldier said later, “I would not take a million dollars for the experience, but it would take more than a million to make me go through it again.” Those were my exact feelings.

Flying deputy lead to our Group Commander, we were number