A LEAP IN THE DARK Street

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We Can't Afford to Fail

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A LEAP IN THE DARK

"Plans are everything before the battle; useless once it's joined" (Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander Allied Forces in Europe, World War II, June 6, 1944, 1:45 a.m., Ste. Mère Église, Normandy, France).

Pvt. Ken Russell of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division tied firmly to a heavy parachute drifted helplessly downward toward the alerted German garrison. He looked right and, "I saw this guy, as instantaneously he was blown away. There was just an empty parachute coming down." Pvt. Russell frantically looked left and found his friend, Pvt. Charles Blankenship, being sucked toward a blazing hay barn below them. "I heard him scream once, then again before he hit the fire, and he didn't scream anymore." Russell took a bullet to the hand. Tracer bullets filled the sky around him, illuminating three more friends getting caught on telephone poles where they were shot to death as they hung helplessly above the village streets.

Behind him, crossing the English Channel in every imaginable type of boat, were nearly 200,000 men coming to join the inferno. Russell grabbed his trench knife and cut the straps of his parachute and crashed to the ground. Leaping up he "dashed across the street, and the machine gun fire was knocking up pieces of earth all around me, and I ran over into a grove of trees on the edge of town and I was the loneliest man in the world. Strange country, and just a boy, I should have been graduating from high school." Why didn't those men know what they were getting into? Many had heard from their commanding officers but believed the message was for someone else.

There are a lot of people swinging down in the dark toward an endless night, unconcerned and unafraid. Warnings whistle past their ears; flashes sometimes ignite the darkness ahead. You're not one of them. Are you?

But planners back in England weren't careless, unconcerned or sloppy. They had poured their lives into every detail possible. Eisenhower led the way, living for months on only four hours of sleep a night. Every waking moment was poured into the undertaking of preparing the 2 million U.S. troops and millions more from Britain, Canada and other nations. Reconnaissance aircraft had threaded their way through an intricate maze of anti-aircraft fire for months snapping over one million photos of every foot of coast line.

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Special agents had been dropped behind the lines or crept ashore from mini subs. Risking Gestapo torture, they had smuggled out coded information on gun emplacements, troop strengths, enemy morale and communication hubs. Sometimes the information was incredibly detailed. Lt. Richard Winters of the 101st Airborne knew that the Ger-

man commander of his objective took his dog for a walk every day at 5:00 p.m. A farmer, furious that he had lost his fields to a massive battery of four 155 mm guns, paced off the distance between each bunker, the surrounding cliffs and the entrenchments. He stored the message in the mind of his blind nine-year-old son and sent it off to the French underground for shipment to England. Planners did all they could to peer across the misty English Channel into the blackness and terror that lay ahead.

What have you done to prepare for the blackness and terror that might lie ahead of you? What have you done to prepare for the blackness and terror that might lie ahead of you? God's Word, the Bible, describes an eternity spent far from the presence of God as **"the blackness of darkness forever"** (Jude 13). Pvt. Russell and Lt. Winters didn't complain that their commanders were using scare tactics when they unrolled vast rubber scale models of the terrain they were about to enter. The maps were filled with German pillboxes,

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machine gun emplacements, troop barracks and mine fields. Thousands of men spent countless hours memorizing them and double checking the maps they were putting in their packs to take with them. Have you studied God's map of what's ahead — the Bible? It lays out clearly the minefield of sin, rebellion against God, and the only way to cross it. Perhaps you've read, **"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 6:23). Have you studied that map? Have you taken to heart what it says?

The horror that Russell and Winters jumped into wasn't caused by their carelessness. Their training

was intense but imperfect. Their pilots hit a heavy cloud cover they didn't know was coming and strayed off course. Then they panicked when they faced anti-aircraft fire for the first time in their lives and began a futile attempt to bank, dive, roll and wildly strew their men into the air scattering them across vast swaths of Normandy. Human intelligence, knowledge and preparation are never quite enough. The men that night needed certainties—there were none to be had. Pvt. Russell and Lt. Winters were leaping in the dark.

But you don't need to leap into an eternal darkness. God offers, not the best intelligence available, but rather certainty. You'd do well to study the complete map He's laid out of what's ahead in His Word, the Bible. Here's one of God's delightful certainties: **"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). It's possible to take a leap in the light. Are you ready for that?

But some people don't take warnings seriously. Right preparation when a warning comes in is essential. *We Can't Afford to Fail* presents the risk Winters and others faced and how they prepared for it.

We Can't Afford to Fail 🛛 😄

We Can't Afford to Fail

"If you're wounded, I can take care of you. If you're dead, I can't" (medic on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, June 6, 1944, 4:00 a.m., Ste. Mère Église, Normandy, France).

Lt. Col. Ed Krause of the 101st Airborne CPI managed to gather together 180 men and get on the road to their predawn objective of Ste. Mère Église. As his men approached the town in the predawn darkness, the blazing hay barn that had illuminated Pvt. Russell's descent was extinguished. No sentries hidden in

Krause reached the edge town with out knowin if he had crept into an ambus or not. the hedgerows leading into town sounded the alarm. No sniper selected a target and silently pressed the trigger as paratroopers armed with artillery, machine guns, rifles, .45 service revolvers and knives crept slowly along toward the garrison. Krause reached the edge of town without knowing if he had crept into an ambush or not.

General Eisenhower had been preparing for this moment since he'd taken command in January. Upon taking command, he immediately moved his headquarters from a mansion in London, where interruptions were frequent and the nightlife tempting to the staff, to a small country home. He'd announced, "We are approaching a tremendous crisis with stakes incalculable" and his life showed he meant it. Every morning he was up at 6 a.m. and on the run. There was no time for tea with King George VI or an afternoon ramble with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He ate field rations on the run while inspecting the training of his men and conferring with the commanders. It was well after midnight before he would normally allow himself to go to sleep. How could those night drops with men like Lt. Winters be made more secure? What intelligence rolling in could be trusted? On January 23 he told his bosses, "Every obstacle must be overcome, every inconvenience suffered and every risk run to ensure that our blow is decisive. We cannot afford to fail."

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You and I face a crisis with "stakes incalculable," but there are lots of distractions from it. There are plenty of men and women who'd love to ignore what comes after death. Casual "preparations" with the occasional visit to some sort of religious event are sufficient to distract from the looming realities. Meanwhile, there's a lot to distract from God's statement, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

There are three levels of thought for a soldier facing action in war. Some start out with the idea that "It can't happen to me" because I'm too smart, fast, alert or well-trained. Sometimes as men get **66** Is death closer to the action, their attitude some distant shifts to "It can happen to me" but I'll reality not avoid it by working harder, cleanworth worrying my gun, sharpening my knife or keeping my head down. Then the ing about? Or men arrive at "It's going to happen to an unavoidme." Where are you in your thoughts? able reality to Is death some distant reality not be seriously worth worrying about? Something embraced? to be staved off by health food, doctor's visits and regular exercise? Or an unavoidable reality to be seriously embraced? God says, "The soul that sinneth, it

shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Then what? Lt. Col. Krause's men reached the edge of town in total silence. He sent half of his men forward as quietly as possible to blockade the far side of town where he expected to face a strong German counterattack. After half an hour of silence to give the men

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the chance to reach their objectives, he moved in with the remainder of his troops. Guided by a drunken Frenchman to the homes where the Germans were stationed, they rooted the 40-man garrison out of their beds. With dead American paratroopers hanging from the light poles, they had gone to sleep in their cozy French homes. Ten who fought back were killed, and the rest were taken prisoner. They'd mistaken the invasion that day of nearly 200,000 men for a "little

raid" that they had proudly conquered.

Will you listen to the Lord Jesus when He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18)? Or will you drift back into a cozy spiritual sleep with the confidence that you've done all that's needed to take care of your spiritual need by yourself?

So who's able take care of the spiritual need? You'll find the vital answer along with what happened to Lt. Winters in *He's Done All He Can*.

He's Done All He Can

"I've done all I can; now it is up to you" (Dwight D. Eisenhower to Capt. Johnson of the 101st Airborne, June 5, 1944, 7 p.m., England).

In late May 1944, the naval vessels and transports were being loaded for the vast invasion of

the Normandy coast. Winston Churchill, prime minister of England, wanted to go but Eisenhower backed by King George VI forced him to sit home. Eisenhower and all the other top staff had to stay home with him.

But 101st Airborne Lt. Richard Winters took off in his C-47 transport. Ten seconds later another C-47 lifted off, ten seconds later another and another until the air was black with them. When the last one lifted off, Eisenhower's eyes were glistening with tears. "Well, it's on," he said softly as he turned away and headed for his cottage.

In a manger outside of Bethlehem, the Creator of the universe reached the front line. He wasn't too valuable to risk losing, too old to go, too afraid to die. He had full authority to stay home, but love led Him to become a man and enter His creation. **"Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins"** (Matthew 1:21).

At 12:01 a.m. Lt. Richard Winters of the 101st Airborne was winging through the darkness toward Normandy. The whole flight over he had prayed he'd live and wouldn't fail. Before his boots hit French soil, he'd be more than 5 miles from his objective and his commanding officer would be dead. It would be hours after dawn before he finally arrived at his objective with surprise and the cover of night stripped away. When he arrived with his 11 men, they found themselves facing a battery of 105 mm artillery guns guarded by 50 German soldiers. These men were dug in to a system of interconnected trenches and supported with plenty of mortars and machine guns.

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Winters had one light mortar, two light machine guns, two submachine guns and five rifles—he attacked immediately. Some of the courage came from the fact they had no idea what they were heading into. This was their first combat experience. As one man said, "I was sure I would not be killed. I felt that if a bullet was headed for me, it would be deflected or I would move." He would never take those chances again.

But Jesus Christ knew exactly what He was headed into when He became a Man on the front line of combat with sin and Satan. Facing the Roman commander Pilate, who was about to unjustly condemn Him to death, Jesus said, **"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear**



witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice" (John 18:37). His wasn't the courage of a mere man fighting for a great cause. Jesus Christ was about to carry out the unmatched masterstroke of love and sacrifice to honor God and put away sin.

At 8:30 a.m. Lt. Winters and his men launched a quick flanking attack led personally by Winters, while some of his men provided suppression fire with the machine guns and mortars. In the heavy fighting, Winters' men suffered heavy casualties, including 4 men killed. By the end, the four huge 105 mm artillery pieces aimed at the American landing force lay in ruins and the surviving paratroopers withdrew. Hours later two Sherman tanks rolling up

from the beach would finish the job of clearing out the position.

Just outside Jerusalem after darkness had covered the hill of Golgotha for three hours in the middle of the day, Jesus cried out from the cross, **"It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost"** (John 19:30). The full job of suffering the penalty for sin from a holy God had been completed. No one was required to come and finish the job for Him. Instead He holds out an invitation to all who will believe on Him and His work. Now He offers a just forgiveness for sin to all who will believe on Him as their only escape from the horrible penalty for rebellion against God. **"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16).

At 12 midnight, June 6, Lt. Winters wrote in his diary that he "did not forget to get on my knees and thank God for helping me to live through this day and ask for His help on D plus one." Will you bow your heart in submission to God? "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). You can simply thank the Lord Jesus for what He's done for you. Or, like so many on June 6, 1944, you can assume there's no great personal danger, no need for being prepared for eternity and let your conscience go back to sleep. The options are to receive God's salvation through faith in Christ Jesus or neglect it and head into the blackness of eternity trusting in your own goodness. Which will it be?

He's Done All He Can

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved Acts 16:31

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