

Reflections on World War II

Dwight D. Eisenhower: One little item shows the difference between foresight and hindsight. All of us who supported the theory or concept of the Overlord Operation had a very great case to prove and often we had to prove it against our British friends. They had from their experience in World War I visions of Vimy Ridge, of Passchendaele, of those places where literally hundreds of thousands of British and Canadian men lost their lives and often with not a single thing to show except maybe a few yards of territory. They had that kind of vision and they could not stand the idea of starting another operation like that by invading Northern France.

The Americans believed somewhat different. We believed that didn't have to be true, particularly as we were building up a bomber force that was going for us to soften defenses and make very difficult the maneuvers of the opponent. Now, as so far as predictions were concerned, along these many months before even I went to Overlord, and from there on down to late May there were many predictions that we would probably have another Anzio or we'd be penned in the beach. We'd never get out. And I heard this expression: the tides would flow red with the blood of American and British youth and the beaches would be choked with their bodies.

Now, you had to have a degree of confidence, maybe here and there rashness, but I will say this: all of the people in my staff, British and Americans, began to believe this. We began to believe we could win in a reasonable time. The lowest prediction I ever heard from any political figure on either side of the water was two years after we landed. Indeed, I heard one of the most prominent figures of the war say that if we were able to acquire, capture Paris by Christmas 1944, the operation that we had then started would be known in history as the greatest of military operations of all time up to that moment. Well we insisted that we were going to be on the borders of Germany at Christmas and if they had any sense, they'd surrender. Well they didn't and I lost 5 pounds, but that's what we believed, all of us.

Now, after that war was ended eleven months from the day we landed, as I say the most optimistic prediction was two years, from that moment now there became many, many critics who showed how much more quickly we could have won and possibly it could have been. The only answer I can give you is we'd won.

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