Ike's Decision

Eisenhower's call to proceed with D-Day was anything but inevitable

By Michael Korda

IT HAS BEEN 65 YEARS since D-Day—the early June day when the United States and its allies launched a massive attack on the shores of Normandy in a bid to liberate western Europe from the Nazis. It's been long enough for most people who still remember the date to have come to think of its success as natural and foreordained.

But of course it was neither of these things. Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower himself gave it no better than a 50-50 chance of success, even if the weather was good and everything went right. As it turned out, the weather was so bad that he had to postpone the invasion by 24 hours once the troops were already aboard the ships and boats. Battalion after battalion was forced to land miles from where they were supposed to be, facing terrain totally unlike what they had trained for. High seas and nervous coxswains under fire for the first time faced the question of whether to postpone the invasion once more, they seem—in these days when placing 40,000 combat troops somewhere is a huge political and military decision—overwhelming; he had never had a million men, 5,000 vessels of all sizes, including battleships, and 10,000 aircraft. On the morning of June 6, if he decided to go on that date, he would land 73,000 Americans, 66,000 Britons, and 20,000 Canadians on the shores of Normandy.

These were big numbers, but facing them was a German army still better trained, more experienced, better armed, and motivated by a high degree of fanatical zeal, an overwhelmingly strong armored force that could reach the invasion beaches in 24 to 48 hours; formidably...
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