

June 10, 1944

Stalin's conversation with Averill Harriman

Citation:

"Stalin's conversation with Averill Harriman", June 10, 1944, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Harriman, W. Averell, and Elie Abel. Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin, 1941-1946 (New York: Random House, 1975), 314 and 329-330.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/219904>

Summary:

Stalin and Harriman discuss the success of D-day, and future Soviet offensives.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

When Harriman called on Stalin to deliver the President's several messages on June 10, he took along a map showing exactly where the Allied troops had landed in Normandy and the depth of their bridgeheads. This was a different Stalin, unstinting in his praise for the achievements of the Allied armies in France had Harriman described the landings. The ambassador pointed out that they had been "less difficult than originally feared." The Allied troops had succeeded in destroying Rommel's underwater obstacles by going ashore at low tide. Although bad weather had slowed the second phase of the operation, more troops and supplies were being landed every day. "Taking the good news with the bad," Harriman said, "events were moving satisfactorily."

Stalin was filled with admiration. "We are going along a good road," he said. He spoke of "the vast scale of the operations with entire armies being landed" in France, adding that "he believed that it was sufficient to seize eight kilometers in depth and then build up."

It was Stalin's turn this time to explain that the Soviet summer offensive had been delayed, in spite of his assurance to Roosevelt and Churchill at Teheran that he would try to launch it in coordination with the Normandy invasion. A smaller offensive had been launched that very day against the Finns on the Karelian Peninsula, north of Leningrad. "They are a serious, stubborn, blunt people and sense must be hammered into them," Stalin said. In ten or fifteen days another offensive would be launched elsewhere. But the general offensive against the Germans would not be at its "full force" until July, because the clearing of the Crimea had taken longer than expected.

Oblivious to the bitter recriminations of the past, and his own accusations at the time of the Churchill-Harriman visit in 1942 that the British were too cowardly to fight, Stalin at last acknowledged the tremendous achievement of Allied arms in successfully crossing the Channel. He said to Harriman:

"The history of war has never witnessed such a grandiose operation. Napoleon himself never attempted it. Hitler envisaged it but he was a fool for never having attempted it."

[...]

When Harriman saw Stalin on June 10, there was more talk of the Normandy landing than of Poland. He raised the subject with the appearance of hesitation, saying that he knew Stalin did not like to talk about the Poles. "Why not?" Stalin responded in obvious good humor. Harriman had never seen Stalin in a more agreeable mood. The success of the Second Front doubtless affected his attitude, although he was cordial even in discussing Poland. Stalin expressed gratitude for the President's reaffirmation of his statements at Teheran, adding that he fully realized how difficult it was for the President to speak out during the election campaign. He also undertook to keep Roosevelt informed of any new development in Polish-Soviet relations. Harriman remarked that the President was puzzled about the status of Lwow but believed it was a matter to be worked out between Russians and Poles.