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John Curtin: A war casualty if there ever was one

Public lecture presented by JCPML Visiting Scholar Dr Michael McKernan on 20 October 2005.

In February 1993 I was appointed to a five-person Committee of Inquiry into Defence and Defence Related Awards by the Federal Government. The Committee invited submissions from the community and spent most of a year studying the submissions, interviewing some of those who had written to us and preparing recommendations for the Government. One submission came from former members of the Australian Women's Land Army who told us that though they worked as a formed group throughout Australia during the Second World War, with discipline and determination, to keep Australian farms productive for the homefront and the troops they had never received any recognition or thanks from the Government and people of Australia. Belatedly we recommended the creation of an Australian Civilian Service Medal 1939-1945 which members of the Women's Land Army and other formed groups became eligible to receive in 1995. Fifty years after the end of the war.

Australia we discovered has a poor record of rewarding and commemorating those of its citizens who have served the nation in war outside what is termed 'active service'. This lecture is a discussion of that statement, applied, in particular to Australia's greatest war leader, John Curtin. This is not a plea for the special recognition of one man; it is a plea for a wider view of what constitutes service to the nation in time of war. In fact, of course, John Curtin did travel through war zones on his trips to America and the United Kingdom. Those in uniform who travelled with him may have been able to count their time in these war zones to their entitlement for the Pacific Star, for example. But let us not make this a discussion about medals, an arid

enough topic. Let us see it as an argument for an inclusive view of those who have served Australia in time of war for it would seem, sadly, that war is not going away.

John Curtin was born on 8 January 1885 and died on 5 July 1945; he was, therefore, three days short of his 60th year, half-birthday, 60 years and six months. For a male child born in the period 1901-1910 the life expectancy was 55 years and two months. But infant mortality accounted for the relatively low life expectancy in the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed the life expectancy of children who survived to five years in the early twentieth century improved by 14 years to 69 years. On that basis alone we can say that John Curtin died early.

But among Australian prime ministers he died significantly early. Almost every one of them lived to a good old age; Barton, the first, was 71 years of age when he died; Watson 74, Hughes 90, Scullin 77, Chifley, 66. Alfred Deakin alone, of the early prime ministers, died prematurely at 63. John Curtin, only one of three Australian prime ministers to die in office, was in fact the oldest of these incumbents; Harold Holt, dying by misadventure, was just a year younger than Curtin when he died, the earliest death of an Australian prime minister at 59 years and four months. Joe Lyons was 59 years and five months when he died. Prime ministers in the second half of the twentieth century have all enjoyed long lives. There might be some reasons for this, including, I suspect, the very close monitoring of their health at least while they hold office.

If we move beyond prime ministers we should ask whether politicians, on the whole, live longer than the average in Australia? This is too big a question for me to answer here but one way of looking at it would be to consider the life spans of members of the Scullin government, most of the ministers were born in the same era as John Curtin. Scullin, as we saw lived, to 77, his Treasurer, Ted Theodore, born a week before John Curtin, died in 1950; the Attorney-General, Frank Brennan died aged 70; the minister Trade and Customs, James Fenton, was 86; the minister for Home Affairs, Arthur Blakeley was also 86 when he died; Frank Anstey was 75, Chifley was 66; the minister for Defence, Albert Green was 71; Parker Moloney was 82; only one

minister in Scullin's government, John Joseph Daly, formerly a South Australian lawyer, died younger than John Curtin; he was 51 when he died.

Forgive this recital of numbing statistics, please, but I needed to establish that John Curtin died younger than life expectancy, the national average, might have suggested and significantly younger than his fellow prime ministers, and politicians from his same age range and social background. Geoffrey Serle, in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, immediately he tells the reader of John Curtin's death, writes that Curtin was 'a war casualty if ever there was one'. This is an astonishing claim with interesting implications that will form the centre-piece of this lecture. First, though, we need to discuss the causes of Curtin's death.

Curtin became prime minister on 7 October 1941 but let us not for a second believe that his deep personal responsibility for the security of the nation at war commenced only on that date. He had been leader in all but name long before then but naturally, as prime minister, he was now the focus of all attention. And the press concentrated on his many ailments.

Curtin's known illnesses after he became prime minister included psoriasis, pneumonia, gastritis, high blood pressure, neuritis, a heart attack and fatally a lung complaint. Clearly not all these matters affected the prime minister at the same time. That must have been the misery of his ill-health; as one thing cleared up another came to trouble him. Nor is it easy to determine in what degree Curtin suffered from his various ailments. The point is that all were either caused by, or heightened by, stress and worry. Psoriasis, for example, can be an awful and painful skin complaint, leading in its worst forms to arthritis, indeed it can be fatal; alternatively patients can suffer in a lesser degree. Psoriasis can have several causes, but a worried, anxious person might be more susceptible.

In November 1944 Curtin was in hospital for two months following a heart attack. His doctors cannot have been much surprised by this sad turn of events given the medical history they had been charting for at least three years. Curtin's fatal lung condition was almost certainly linked to his heart condition. He died from slow, congestive cardiac failure. From November 1944 onwards, in all probability, unless

he completely removed himself from the causes of stress and anxiety, John Curtin was a marked man.

Curtin's recent biographer, David Day, concludes that the heart attack of late 1944 was 'the culmination of years of stress, heavy smoking, alcoholic binges and a simple but poor diet'. Even if David Day's statement stands, and I think there are many reasons to discount it, it is still necessary to apportion weight to each of the factors he suggests. There are, however, elements within that statement that need further consideration. It is true that John Curtin smoked around 40 cigarettes a day. Possibly, it might be fair to say, Curtin used tobacco as a means of allowing himself to cope with the stresses and pressures of his life. The alcoholism and binge-drinking to which Day refers, almost certainly ceased to be a factor in Curtin's life ten years before his death. While heavy drinking may have done some damage to his body, he was never a man significantly overweight. It would hardly be useful to tell a man thinking of restricting his use of alcohol that even after ten years of abstinence, the effects of heavy drinking might still prove fatal.

Curtin's diet can only be a matter for conjecture, although it might be reasonable to say that he was not a man who seemed to take a great interest in food. Still, living at the Lodge, Curtin had staff attentive to his dietary needs and requirements. The simple fact is that prime ministers are pampered and fussed over. It is inconceivable that a cup of tea did not appear at Curtin's elbow at regular intervals, with an enticing biscuit or a slice; that staff did not coax him into eating regularly and well; that they were supremely concerned to do their bit for a man who was so clearly vital to the Australian war effort, and working so hard for his country.

Striking off, or at least down-playing, the various causes of ill health that David Day ascribed to John Curtin, that leads us inexorably to stress as the main component for John Curtin's awful health record as prime minister. Any leader in a world war would suffer stress. That is a given. For Curtin, there is the scene, best told, I think, in Peter Fitzsimmons book, *Kokoda when the Clerk of the House of Representatives*, and neighbour, Frank Green finds John Curtin anxiously pacing the grounds of the Lodge after midnight. Curtin said that he could not sleep. 'How can I sleep', he asked Green,

‘when I know that our men are out there on transports on the Indian Ocean, with all those Japanese submarines looking for them’.

These were probably the worst days of Curtin’s prime ministership. He had argued painfully with Winston Churchill, first over naval and military reinforcements for Singapore, then for the return of the two Australian divisions not yet involved in the Pacific war. At the height of this controversy, and possibly ever thereafter, Churchill treated Curtin with near contempt. The decision to evacuate the Australians from Tobruk incensed him; not to mince words, Churchill thought the Australian action cowardly. These momentous decisions that Curtin needed to make were taken in the full knowledge that Australia risked alienating a world power closer to this country than even the closest ally. Curtin received strong support from his Australian military leadership, but if things had turned out differently the large and catastrophic loss of Australian soldiers might have been placed squarely on his shoulders. The trashing of the one enduring Australian myth, the Anzac legend, might have been sheeted home solely to him.

The loneliness of command, they call it, and it strikes various leaders in different ways. A military leader treads a fine line between concern for his troops and getting the job done. We look at generals of the First World War and marvel that they could seemingly so blithely contemplate and plan for casualty numbers such as the world had never known or can even now understand. We warm to Australia’s brigadier-general ‘Pompey’ Elliott mourning the loss of five and a half thousand Australians at Fromelles in July 1916, looking, in the words of Charles Bean, ‘like a man who had just lost his wife’. Most senior British officers would have looked at Elliott at that moment, if they had been close enough to the battlefield to see him, with something like contempt. Military plans and strategies cannot be allowed to unravel because of some misplaced sentimentality. That is a fact of war.

But what if these troops became known to a general, as individuals? Surely the stiff upper lip would waver a little then. And that is what a general must not allow to happen. What a military leader might try to cultivate is the appearance of warmth while preserving the necessary remoteness from men over whom he has ultimate

control, the power of life and death. The noted war historian, John Keegan, has called it 'the mask of command'.

Politicians, too, need to create the aura of engagement and involvement with their public while retaining for themselves a remoteness from the people as a form of protection. Politicians need the 'mask of command'. Look at the story of an Australian soldier of the First World War, so badly damaged by a gas attack on the battlefield that he lost his outer skin cover. This poor man lived the rest of his life in the repatriation hospital at Concord in Sydney in a bath of liquids that would give him the protection against infection that our skin is designed to provide. Telling this story on radio in Adelaide, I later took a call from a deeply engaged listener. She told me of her father, a doctor in the Australian army in Papua New Guinea in the Second World War who, through a series of misadventures, became deeply psychologically scarred and in the 1950s and beyond, to the great distress of his family, on several occasions attempted suicide. He had lost, she told me in a compelling phrase, his 'psychological skin cover' just as the soldier I was telling of had lost his physical skin cover. Generals and politicians cannot afford to lose their 'psychological skin cover'.

Let me now argue that John Curtin, as prime minister, may have lost his psychological skin cover. To put my argument at its most simple, stress is a given for all national leaders, particularly in time of war. But if that stress becomes personal it may well become more debilitating, even fatal.

In researching for my book *This War Never Ends: the pain of separation and return* I learnt of the intimate relationship between John Curtin and his people. Looking for evidence of the suffering and anxiety of those on the homefront waiting for years for news of their sons and daughters as prisoners of the Japanese I began to see the call that these people made on their prime minister. John Curtin had projected himself somehow and quickly as the father of his people in a way that I cannot believe that other Australian leaders had. I do not believe that the people would have written to Mr Menzies as he was always called as they wrote to John Curtin. They had taken Curtin into their homes and into their hearts; they could unburden themselves of their problems to him. Maybe he couldn't solve them, they reasoned, but he would listen, and in the listening they would feel better.

All kinds and manner of people write to ministers and prime ministers. Sincere people, deluded people, clear thinking people, confused people. Every letter receives a reply. 'Ministerials' they are called and they take up a lot of time. What I found in the John Curtin prime ministerial correspondence was something of a different order. Let me give you some examples from my book on the prisoners of war and their families: Mrs Wallace of Glenbrook in New South Wales told her prime minister that all her four boys were in the armed forces, one of them a prisoner in Thailand. She had received a couple of cards from him, had been writing regularly but had no idea if he was receiving her letters. 'I am alone' she told the prime minister, 'and greatly worried about my son in Japanese hands, who is my best boy'. Mrs Grace Harrison of South Melbourne, while conceding that the prime minister must be 'very busy' wrote that she had, what she called, 'a great worrie'. 'My son is missing in Malaya and I am a very sad mother. If only I knew what has become of him'. 'Again', she concluded, 'please forgive me taking the liberty and may Our Lady of Good Council help you in a task that is very great'. Other correspondents suggested that as John Curtin was himself so clearly suffering on account of the war, that he would, therefore, best understand, their own suffering. And they almost always wished him well: 'I realise what a tremendous burden you carry in these strenuous days', wrote Mrs J.A. Lyons of Fullerton, South Australia, 'wishing you all the best'. Mrs Elsie Salter of Epping, Sydney, wrote to Mrs Curtin, the prime minister's wife, noting that she too had a son in the forces: 'you will be able to help us through your husband'. You understand, you do understand, Australia seemed to be telling the Curtins. 'I have a baby daughter who was born two months after the fall of Singapore'; if I could only just let my husband know her name, 'it would be very comforting to my husband'. All the prime minister had to do was to arrange it.

Fearing that these letters relating to prisoners of war were somehow an aberration I randomly searched other parts of the prime ministerial correspondence. The personal appeal to the prime minister is again a striking feature of this correspondence. A TPI in Tasmania wants an increase in the petrol ration for men like himself who cannot get around easily, 'so I am asking you to see if you can do anything further for me'. A soldier has been away from home (Victoria) for three years and wants a local posting 'now that the invasion danger has passed'. 'I was thinking of seeking an

interview with you but have no doubt that you would be over-run with such requests, have put the case in writing'. Mrs Crowther needed her soldier son back to help her on the farm: 'I would not ask you only I need him so. If you would stand by me and help me I would be very thankful'. A soldier son got himself into a spot of bother by mixing with older and dubious army types: 'you will remember I wrote about [it] a couple of months back'. Things had turned out well for the boy: 'Mr Curtin the wife, the lad and myself are very grateful to you for the trouble you went to'. A dairy farmer only has his youngest daughter at home and needs his son back to help: 'I am writing to you to see if you could do me a favour'. Another simply wrote to tell John Curtin that he was doing a good job. 'I had written' he said when Curtin had entered office, 'at that precarious time for us all. I told you I had a feeling of contentment and security with you at the helm'.

But at what cost to the helmsman? There were literally thousands of Australians writing to the prime minister each year reminding him that they believed he alone would stand with them, look after them, solve their problems. He was the national father of us all. If in addition to the strains and burdens of national leadership in time of war; of fighting hard for a minor allies' quarter; of striving to keep some focus on the Pacific war in the face of the 'Beat Hitler First' strategy; of arguing for resources and troops in the face of the terrible situation Australia faced in 1942; and of the day-to-day management of a government at war; if in addition to all this John Curtin felt the personal burden for the manifold and manifest sufferings of his people, if the mask of command simply could not protect him, then the strain, worry and the intensity of the pressure might well have led to the diseases and illnesses we have already discussed. Every single one of these illnesses, potentially at least, related to stress and anxiety. 'A war casualty if ever there was one', Geoffrey Serle had written with much insight.

Now I wish to turn to the implications of Serle's statement. Australia has a national Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra with the names of all our war dead. Should John Curtin's name be there? Walking the battlefield at Pozieres, that giant sausage mincing machine, as Charles Bean described it, the future war historian realised that Australians would never understand the true nature of warfare

there, 6000 bullets a minute on some sectors on the first day of the Somme, unless helped. A war museum would show the people what had happened, with great art, artefacts, dioramas, models of the battlefields, and the letters and diaries of the soldiers themselves to make it more personal, more easily understandable. To this mighty insight Bean attached a commemorative feature. Visitors would come to his great museum, to understand; they would learn what war was like; and then they would visit a commemorative pavilion or area listing the name of every single Australian who had died in war; the national Roll of Honour.

But what is death in battle? Do we mean only the man shot through the head as he leaves his trench? Or do we also mean the man who is recovered by stretcher-bearers, brought to the casualty clearing station, transferred to hospital, who lingers for some months, only to die without ever seeing his homeland and family again. Of course we mean that man. But do we also mean the man who is moved onto a hospital ship for the long trip back to Australia, who is transferred to a military hospital in Perth, or Adelaide, who lingers for a few months or years, only eventually to die of his war injuries and wounds. Of course, said Charles Bean, we also mean that man. Like the man in the bath of liquids at Concord Hospital, without his outer skin cover, who lingered, I understand, into the late 1940s. And so the Australian War Museum, as it was first called, to be opened under the prime ministership and in the presence of John Curtin in November 1941, began collecting the names not only of those who had died in battle, or soon after in a foreign hospital, but the names of those who died years later in Australia, directly of war causes. The names of those whose deaths were 'directly and exclusively attributable' to the effects of war, in Charles Bean's words.

But the names of none of this last group ever made it to the Memorial's eventual Roll of Honour. In the end the job became impossible; how to draw the line, how to know if any death, ten years or so later, was 'directly and exclusively attributable' to the war. But a man who died during the course of the war itself. Surely there was an easier case to be made there? The War Memorial now says that the Roll of Honour lists the names only of those who died on active service. But that in itself is a slippery concept. On the Second World War Roll of Honour there is the name of a cadet at

Duntroon killed in a Canberra motor car accident. The soldier had enlisted in the AIF and had fought abroad, being returned to Australia for officer training in Canberra. He was deemed to be on active service when he was at Duntroon. But a road accident victim?

And were merchant seamen on active service? Take William Angus Todd, first officer on MV Hauraki, a ship of the Union Steam Ship Company. Hauraki left Fremantle on 7 July 1942 en route to Colombo; on war service, was intercepted by ships of the Japanese navy in the Indian Ocean and Bill Todd, with all the other crew, became a prisoner of war. Bill Todd died in captivity on 19 April 1944 after nearly two years working from a prison camp in Japan. His name is not on the Roll of Honour. The military-minded men on the Memorial's Board of Trustees in 1967 decided that the Roll would be limited to those who had died 'on or as a result of active service' and that, therefore, there should not even be a plaque at the Australian War Memorial to merchant mariners who had died at war. Nurses and patients on the hospital ship Centaur, lost off the Queensland coast, would be on the Roll but not the merchant mariners who crewed the ship. General Thomas Daly explained that merchant seamen could not be regarded as 'servicemen in the true sense of the word'. They were paid higher wages, he said, by way of 'danger money and penalty rates of one kind or another'. And so they were forever excluded.

In that context, then, you can see why it would be unlikely that John Curtin's name would be included on the national Roll of Honour. But what of some subsidiary commemoration for one who had given his life for his country at war. John Curtin said repeatedly in the dark days of 1942 and 1943 that Australia needed an 'all in war effort'. That the war for Australia would be won as much in the factories and on the farms, as in the jungles and the skies. A woman in Murrumbeena in suburban Melbourne, and let her stand for the millions of others, had lost her husband to the war. She still had her family to care and provide for. Breakfasts to be made, lunches to be cut, dinner to cook, clothes to wash, house to clean. All of that. But she also worked for the war effort. At seven each morning she rode her pushbike to the Murrumbeena station for the first leg of her trip to a factory in Fitzroy where for eight hours on the factory floor she sliced onions, before they were dried and packed for

the frontline troops. She did this month in, month out, one of John Curtin's 'all in' warriors. And at the end of her shift she went home to care for her family.

When the war was over she might have thought that she too could march on Anzac Day as one of millions of willing war workers. But in Australia we honour only those who enlisted, and then we honoured only those who saw active service outside Australia. The men who defended Darwin had to wait until 1994 for the creation of a medal that would acknowledge their theatre of war, so restricted has been our understanding of who won the war for Australia and where.

Again policy at the Australian War Memorial gives us some indication of the thinking about who played a part in war and who did not. It was suggested to Charles Bean that there might be portraits painted of both Billy Hughes, wartime prime minister, and George Pearce, wartime minister for Defence. Bean would have nothing of it. Indeed the suggestion horrified him. There should be an absolute bar, he said, against including any person in the Memorial's galleries who had not been 'under fire'. (Although, of course, it is arguable that Hughes had been under fire). Any departure from such a rule would 'turn our grand collection into a laughing stock', he wrote. Into the 1970s the Memorial maintained an authorised but quaintly named 'hanging list' of portraits so that no general, admiral, soldier or sailor who had not been 'under fire' would be honoured with a portrait hung in the Memorial's galleries. In this context there was no possibility that John Curtin would be honoured in any way that would associate his death with Australia at war.

Perhaps Australians would say that our greatest wartime prime minister has been sufficiently honoured in other ways and that the Australian War Memorial must be reserved for those in uniform in the fighting forces on the frontline. But I am using the War Memorial as a metaphor for how we think of the commemoration of war in this country. Increasingly remembering only front-line troops will be a difficult and limiting approach to the commemoration of war when even combatants on the ground will rarely be in contact with their enemy. Australians have thought in a narrow and excluding way about war, the security of this nation, and the proper telling of our national story. In the Second World War in Australia it was necessary that every citizen play some role when Australia itself was under threat. But when we

came to celebrate the victory, to commemorate the war dead, and to thank and remember for all time those who played a part we looked exclusively to those in the defence force only, who had served overseas. John Curtin is our greatest war leader and a true casualty of war but he has no place, it would seem, in the remembrance of those who gave their lives for Australia.

Notes

Note 1. Further detail about Curtin's ailments and illnesses

Curtin's known ailments included psoriasis, pneumonia, gastritis, high blood pressure, neuritis, a heart attack and fatally a lung complaint. Clearly not all these matters affected the prime minister at the same time. That must have been the misery of his ill-health; as one thing cleared up another came to trouble him. Nor is it easy to determine in what degree Curtin suffered from his various ailments. Psoriasis can be an awful and painful skin complaint, leading in its worst forms to arthritis, indeed it can be fatal; alternatively patients can suffer in a lesser degree. Psoriasis can have several causes, but a worried, anxious person might be more susceptible. Pneumonia, which Curtin experienced in 1941, was a vastly more common condition in the 1940s than it is today. Without access to penicillin doctors were limited in managing the condition to sulphur-based drugs which were slow working and not highly effective. It was an older person's disease, possibly exacerbated for John Curtin by the winters that he necessarily had to endure in Canberra. It would be a disease found more commonly in a tired and worried person.

In February 1942 Curtin was hospitalised, briefly, with gastritis, an inflammation of the stomach. Gastritis is a catch-all term that in its more benign manifestation might imply gastro-enteritis, that is, vomiting and diarrhoea. It is possible, but you would think unlikely, that a prime minister with the facilities of The Lodge at his disposal, and its staff, would be hospitalised at this level of the illness. More likely, the gastritis for which John Curtin was hospitalised, might have involved a gastric ulcer, a relatively common complaint then, now known to occur as the result of infection, in a weakened system, but exacerbated, too, by worry.

In Washington in mid 1944 John Curtin was again hospitalised, this time with high blood pressure and neuritis. Neuritis is an inflammatory condition of the nerves, clearly linked to anxiety and worry. High blood pressure may have many causes but stress would be one cause that most doctors would look for. Returned from the United States, no doubt made more anxious by his morbid fear of flying, in November 1944 Curtin was in hospital for two months following a heart attack. His doctors cannot have been much surprised by this sad turn of events given the medical history they had been charting for at least three years. Curtin's fatal lung condition was almost certainly linked to his heart condition. Simply put, his heart was not now working at sufficient strength to remove the water from his lungs. He died from slow, congestive cardiac failure. From November onwards, in all probability, unless he completely removed himself from the causes of stress and anxiety, John Curtin was a marked man.

Note 2. Further thoughts on prime ministers and alcohol

Alcohol, on the evidence, is a given of Australian political life. Dame Beryl Beaurepaire, through her parents who were neighbours in Kew of Robert and Pattie Menzies in the years before he became prime minister, kept up a somewhat distant friendship in Menzies's later years. He treated her with an avuncular affection. Invited to lunch with the prime minister and his wife at the Lodge in the mid 1950s, Beryl was astonished to discover that the prime minister's lunch consisted of a 'scone-like thing' (her words) and 'a jug of martini' (her words again). Thus fortified the prime minister would go back to the House for Question Time. His biographer, Allan Martin, somewhat shyly suggests that Menzies's late night sessions with selected colleagues in the Cabinet room owed their length and their frequency, to some extent anyway, to the prime minister's disinclination to face what another lawyer has called 'she who must be obeyed'. Whatever of that, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that Menzies drank heavily. As did Churchill. To an extent that could and did send lesser men under the table. For Churchill this was an everyday occurrence, as it was for Menzies. Of course some will cope better with alcohol than others, but it is worth noting that Menzies and Churchill lived into long and venerable old age.

Note 3. More on leaders and the loneliness of command

The loneliness of command, they call it and it strikes various leaders in different ways. The coolest of the second world war leaders was undoubtedly George C. Marshall. Chief of the United States Army from 1939 to 1945, Marshall never set foot on a battlefield, indeed he exercised his command only from the Pentagon in Washington. His routine was never disturbed even in the worst days of the war. Rising at 6.30 he exercised, arrived at work at 7.45, took lunch alone with his wife at home, left work at 5, exercised again, ate his dinner and retired at 9. Outside of office hours he answered the phone only to the President or the Secretary of State for war. He believed that no-one had an original idea after 5 pm. When President Roosevelt once called him 'George' the frigidity of Marshall's reply meant that the President never took that liberty again.

The architect of 'D-Day', Dwight D. Eisenhower had some three million troops at his disposal and the liberation of Europe as his responsibility. All nicely parcelled off into the lower levels down the chain of command, you would think. But for one dreadful moment it all came down to Eisenhower. The landings could only succeed if the Allies maintained the element of surprise. Rommel wanted to mass his forces precisely where Eisenhower would send his massive force, but Hitler had over-ruled him. As the Allied force grew to staggering proportions the chance of discovery was very real indeed. But for these landings, whether at Gallipoli or Normandy the most difficult thing an army can do, the weather had to be just right. Delayed already, 6 June was the last moment in the cycle of the moon, that would allow for the invasion for a matter of weeks. If delayed, discovery would be almost certain. Yet as day turned to evening on 6 June the weather deteriorated and the forecasts suggested worse conditions to come. Then a weather man gave Eisenhower the news that the weather might be improving. There was a break, it might be possible. The decision was Eisenhower's alone. 'Ok, let's go', he said, and at that moment Eisenhower was the most powerful soldier the world had ever known. Consigning huge numbers of men to terror, casualty and death and, ultimately, victory.