

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 6, 1984

The House met at 2 p.m.

● (1405)

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF ALLIED LANDINGS IN NORMANDY

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, forty years ago today, at dawn, about 14,000 young Canadians landed on the beaches of Normandy with their British, American and French allies, as part of the most impressive amphibious operation in history. They came from all parts of this country. Many belonged to military units with such evocative names as: The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, the Régiment de la Chaudière, The Fort Garry Horse, The Regina Rifle Regiment... Canadians at home celebrated their victory and, at the same time, mourned the fallen. On the first day, 1,000 soldiers were killed in combat.

The success of D-Day paved the way for the celebrated campaign in Northwestern Europe which, less than a year later, would make it possible for the Allies to meet Soviet troops in Germany. It is then that one of the most violent periods in history finally ended. But at what price! During the war, the Canadian Forces lost 48,000 troops, of whom 12,500 lost their lives in this campaign.

Today, when commemorating D-Day, we can look back with satisfaction on what has been achieved during the last forty years. The sacrifice made by those young Canadians gave our country the right to make itself heard in the councils for peace that shaped the postwar world, as well as in councils which today discuss the same vital issues, those of world peace and security. In Western Europe, the conquerors and the conquered have come to terms and are now working together within the European Economic Community, for instance, and, another example, with their North American allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. After being the scene of two horrendous armed conflicts in this century, Western Europe has known nearly forty years of peace, an unprecedented phenomenon.

[English]

Any tendency towards self congratulation must, however, be muted. Around the world today, four million people, we are informed, are engaged in 42 wars, rebellions, or civil uprisings. Horrifying as these figures are, they are dwarfed by the

hundreds of millions who are suffering from hunger or who are being denied basic human rights, inequities which themselves can give rise to war.

Bitterest irony of all, the relations between the two major architects of the Second World War victory, the United States and the Soviet Union, are as bleak as they have ever been. East and West have arsenals sufficient not only to devastate one another, but, as a well-known American scientist reminded us this week, potentially to destroy the human race itself in a catastrophic "nuclear winter". Yet there are no serious nuclear arms negotiations going on at this time, and little progress is being made in other forums such as the Stockholm Conference or the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction talks in Vienna.

The differences between East and West are, unfortunately, real, and require us to take part in a strong defensive alliance for our own security. But we must constantly look beyond defence. The search for peace must be a constant preoccupation of our Government and of each one of us singly. We have to explore constantly how East and West can work together in the pursuit of common goals, to avoid war, contain crises, to increase mutual confidence, to achieve balanced disarmament and arms control, to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and to promote the prosperity not only of our own country but of the Third World which looks to us for help.

Today leaders of allied countries, Members of this House, and Canadian veterans have returned to the beaches of Normandy. They have done so to commemorate the valour which young people displayed there 40 years ago. It is fitting, Mr. Speaker, that we in this House, and Canadians across the land, pause for a moment to recall their sacrifices and to rededicate ourselves to their legacy, the legacy of peace and freedom.

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, this is a day unique. Forty years ago today I never thought for a moment that I would be standing here in this place and participating in the way in which I am about to, in commemorating the 40th anniversary of D-Day. Other Members are absent, notably the Hon. Member for Medicine Hat (Mr. Hargrave), who is in Normandy today where he was on the beaches 40 years ago today.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: The Hon. Member for Swift Current-Maple Creek (Mr. Hamilton), who is there today, was flying over the beaches on that day.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: The Hon. Member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) was languishing in a German prisoner of war camp.