

Remarks on the 50th Anniversary of D-Day at Pointe du Hoc in Normandy, France

June 6, 1994

General Downing, Mr. Hathaway, honored leaders of our military, distinguished veterans and members of the armed services, family and friends, my fellow Americans. We stand on sacred soil. Fifty years ago at this place a miracle of liberation began. On that morning, democracy's forces landed to end the enslavement of Europe.

Around 7 a.m., Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder, 2d Ranger Battalion, United States Army, led 224 men onto the beaches below and up these unforgiving cliffs. Bullets and grenades came down upon them, but by a few minutes after 7, here, exactly here, the first Rangers stood. Today let us ask those American heroes to stand again. [*Applause*]

Corporal Ken Bargmann, who sits here to my right, was one of them. He had just celebrated his 20th birthday out in the Channel, a young man like all the rest of them, cold and wet, far from home, preparing for the challenge of his life. Ken Bargmann and the other Rangers of Pointe du Hoc and all the other Americans, British, Canadian, and Free French who landed, were the tip of a spear the free world had spent years sharpening, a spear they began on this morning in 1944 to plunge into the heart of the Nazi empire. Most of them were new to war, but all were armed with the ingenuity of free citizens and the confidence that they fought for a good cause under the gaze of a loving God.

The fortunate ones would go home, changed forever. Thousands would never return. And today we mourn their loss. But on that gray dawn, millions, literally millions, of people on this continent awaited their arrival. Young Anne Frank wrote in her diary these words: "It's no exaggeration to say that all Amsterdam, all Holland, yes, the whole west coast of Europe talks about the invasion day and night, debates about it, makes bets on it, and hopes. I have the feeling friends are approaching."

The young men who came fought for the very survival of democracy. Just 4 years earlier, some thought democracy's day had passed. Hitler was rolling across Europe. In America, factories worked at only half capacity. Our people

were badly divided over what to do. The future seemed to belong to the dictators. They sneered at democracy, its mingling of races and religions, its tolerance of dissent. They were sure we didn't have what it took.

Well, they didn't know James Rudder or Ken Bargmann or the other men of D-Day. They didn't understand what happens when the free unite behind a great and worthy cause. For human miracles begin with personal choices, millions of them gathered together as one, like the stars of a majestic galaxy. Here at this place, in Britain, in North America, and among Resistance fighters in France and across Europe, all those numberless choices came together, the choices of lion-hearted leaders to rally their people, the choices of people to mobilize for freedom's fight, the choices of their soldiers to carry on that fight into a world worn weary by devastation and despair.

Every person in the democracies pitched in. Every shipbuilder who built a landing craft, every woman who worked in a factory, every farmer who grew food for the troops, every miner who carved coal out of a cavern, every child who tended a victory garden, all of them did their part. All produced things with their hands and their hearts that went into this battle. And on D-Day, all across the free world, the peoples of democracy prayed that they had done their job right. Well, they had done their job right.

And here, you, the Army Rangers, did yours. Your mission was to scale these cliffs and destroy the howitzers at the top that threatened every Allied soldier and ship within miles. You fired grappling hooks onto the cliff tops. You waded to shore, and you began to climb up on ropes slick with sea and sand, up, as the Germans shot down and tried to cut your lines, up, sometimes holding to the cliffs with nothing but the knives you had and your own bare hands.

As the battle raged at Juno, Sword, and Gold, on Omaha and Utah, you took devastating casualties. But you also took control of these commanding heights. Around 9 a.m., two Rangers discovered the big guns hidden inland and dis-

abled them with heat grenades. At the moment, you became the first Americans on D-Day to complete your mission.

We look at this terrain and we marvel at your fight. We look around us and we see what you were fighting for. For here are the daughters of Colonel Rudder. Here are the son and grandson of Corporal Bargmann. Here are the faces for whom you risked your lives. Here are the generations for whom you won a war. We are the children of your sacrifice. We are the sons and daughters you saved from tyranny's reach. We grew up behind the shield of the strong alliances you forged in blood upon these beaches, on the shores of the Pacific, and in the skies above. We flourished in the Nation you came home to build.

The most difficult days of your lives bought us 50 years of freedom. You did your job; now we must do ours. Let us begin by teaching our young people about the villainy that started this war and the valor that ended it. Let us carry on the work you began here. The sparks of freedom you struck on these beaches were never extinguished, even in the darkest days behind the Iron Curtain. Five years ago the miracle of liberation was repeated as the rotting timbers of communism came tumbling down.

Now we stand at the start of a new day. The Soviet empire is gone. So many people who fought as our partners in this war, the

Russians, the Poles, and others, now stand again as our partners in peace and democracy. Our work is far from done. Still there are cliffs to scale. We must work to contain the world's most deadly weapons, to expand the reach of democracy. We must keep ready arms and strong alliances. We must have strong families and cohesive societies and educated citizens and vibrant, open, economies that promote cooperation, not conflict.

And if we should ever falter, we need only remember you at this spot 50 years ago and you, again, at this spot today. The flame of your youth became freedom's lamp, and we see its light reflected in your faces still and in the faces of your children and grandchildren.

We commit ourselves, as you did, to keep that lamp burning for those who will follow. You completed your mission here. But the mission of freedom goes on; the battle continues. The "longest day" is not yet over.

God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. William A. Downing, USA, commander in chief, U.S. Special Operations Command, and D-Day veteran Richard Hathaway, president, Ranger Battalions Association of World War II, who introduced the President.

Remarks on the 50th Anniversary of D-Day at Utah Beach in Normandy *June 6, 1994*

Thank you. Thank you very much, General Talbott, Secretary Perry, Secretary Brown. Let me begin by asking all the veterans here present, their families, their friends, the people from France who have been wonderful hosts to us, to acknowledge those who worked so hard to make these D-Day ceremonies a great success: General Joulwan, the SAC here, and his European command, 2,700 members of the Armed Forces who worked to put these events together; and the Secretary of the Army's World War II commemorative committee, General Mick Kicklighter and all of his committee. Let's give them a big hand; they have done a wonderful job. *[Applause]*

My fellow Americans, we have gathered to remember those who stormed this beach for freedom who never came home. We pay tribute to what a whole generation of heroes won here. But let us also recall what was lost here. We must never forget that thousands of people gave everything they were, or what they might have become, so that freedom might live.

The loss along this coastline numbs us still. In one U.S. company alone, 197 of 205 men were slaughtered in just 10 minutes. Hundreds of young men died before they could struggle 20 feet into the red-tinged tide. Thousands upon thousands of American, Canadian, and British