Remarks at the American Cemetery in Manila, Philippines

November 13, 1994

President and Mrs. Ramos, Secretary Christopher, Ambassador Negroponte, Mr. Perrine, Mr. De Ocampo, Colonel Barth; Mr. Quashan, thank you for that wonderful introduction; distinguished members of the Philippine Government, distinguished members of the diplomatic corps, especially to the young students and to the Peace Corps volunteers that are here, and most especially to the Philippine and American veterans here in attendance: Hillary and I are deeply honored to be with you today. I was told this morning that I am the first sitting President since President Eisenhower to visit this hallowed site, and it is a profound honor for me and for our entire party.

We gather to honor and to remember. In this place, only a few miles from the ocean named for peacefulness, we always remember the fury of war, the 17,206 American and Philippine men and women who are buried here, arrayed in the long arcs I saw this morning as if still deployed in our defense, the 36,281 more whose names are engraved on these magnificent marble walls. Nowhere else outside the United States are so many American heroes honored and interred.

Some of their brethren, heroes from American units and Filipino units, thankfully are still here with us today. Time has diminished none of our pride in them. They are among the finest people our nations have ever produced. Their presence here reminds us of the meaning of courage and determination. Their example will inspire us for ages to come. On behalf of a grateful nation and an increasingly free world, I thank them, and I ask all the Philippine and American veterans of World War II who are here to stand and receive the thanks of all of us. [*Applause*]

We can hardly imagine today the perils that met these young men in the full bloom of their lives. They left families and loved ones and home to go to places they never heard of to confront dangers they never imagined. They had to liberate territory bit by bit, enduring constant fear of ambush in island jungles. At sea they stayed on course in the face of a new terror, the suicide dive bomber. On American carriers, our pilots took off never knowing if they would find their ships again. This ordeal engulfed the Philippines, our oldest friend in Asia, a nation that has done so much to enrich the United States.

On the same day that Pearl Harbor was bombed, the American garrison in the Philippines was attacked. Troops under General MacArthur dug in for battle not far from here on the Bataan Peninsula and on Corregidor. Our joint forces in Bataan resisted for 4 months. Then, low on ammunition, weakened by hunger, reduced by sickness, they could fight no more. Their nightmare was just beginning. A death march to prison camps and a horrifying internment claimed the lives of about 25,000 Filipinos and Americans. Corregidor became the last bastion.

Just before coming here, I had the honor of touring the island with the President and with a group of our veterans, including a man named Bill Martin who is with us here today. His road in the war was long, from Bataan to Corregidor to a prison camp in Manchuria. Today marks the first time Bill Martin has been on the rock since he was captured there 50 years ago, the first time he has seen this place where so many of his friends and comrades lie at rest. Welcome back, Bill Martin, and thank you.

I saw on Corregidor the remains of many evidences of Americans and Filipinos sharing the familiar diversions of everyday life, the fields where the games were played, the remnants of three movie theaters. But the most important thing they shared was a ferocious love of freedom. When a shell fragment cut the halyard on the embattled garrison's flagpole, it was a Philippine civilian named Panorio Punongbayan who braved the shelling with two Americans to catch the flag before it touched the ground and, under fire, to retie the line and raise the flag again. Their commander, General Wainwright, said what they had done was not only courageous but helped the battered rock's morale beyond any words.

A month after Bataan fell, time ran out for Corregidor, as the sky over the island turned to lead with 16,000 shells a day. Relief was impossible; freedom's last foothold seemed lost.

AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Soon—we forget this now—Japanese forces controlled land and water stretching from Alaska's Aleutian Islands to Wake Island near Hawaii. From New Guinea, they menaced Australia. With our fleet devastated at Pearl Harbor and Hitler ruling Europe from the English Channel to the Russian heartland, free people everywhere stood in fear.

In this, one of our Nation's darkest hours, our troops and our leaders might have given up, but their spirits never failed. An enlisted man who survived the fighting and hunger, the death march, and 3 years in prisoner of war camps gave voice to that spirit and to its ultimate source. Almost incapable of walking when he was liberated, he was still unbowed and said, "When a man allows God to sustain him, he can go through hell if he has to. That's what I did. Yes, sir, I refused to die." That man, Corporal Ishmael Cox, is still unbowed and refusing today, living in Missouri.

After the occupation, tens of thousands of Filipinos and a handful of Americans fought the most valiant guerrilla effort in the Pacific theater. Meanwhile, American forces, with Australians and New Zealanders, began the agonizing crawl, island by island, back across the Pacific. They fought their way through the Solomons, the Admiralty Islands, Palau; their battles at Midway, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima are now legends.

Driven by General MacArthur's determination that our friends in the Philippines should not have their freedom delayed, Americans put to shore at Leyte in 1944, with an invasion force larger than that of the opening phase of Normandy. In the surrounding gulf, more than 800 United States ships stretched across the horizon and there fought and won the largest naval battle of all time. General MacArthur did return, and so would freedom. Countless horrors still lay in the way, including the butchery of house-to-house fighting in Manila. The savagery turned the Pearl of the Orient into another Warsaw. But the tide turned once and for all.

When he returned to Corregidor, General MacArthur saw the now-famous old flagpole still standing, and he ordered, "Hoist the colors to the peak, and let no enemy ever haul them down."

These heroes, those who rest here and those still among us, gave everything so that all of us might be free. Here in the Philippines, one million people, one in every 17, gave their lives. But the spirit of Bataan and Corregidor did not die. The defense of democracy, the determination to spread freedom, the refusal to bow before aggression are principles at the core of our identities as nations today.

Those who were once our foes, Japan, Germany, and Italy, are now our friends because they, too, now embrace these ideals. These same principles saw us through the long ordeal of the cold war, and today, they unite us with our allies, including our friends here in the Philippines, who stand with us in the constant march of freedom and democracy.

It is fitting that we commemorate these heroes today not only because of the common cause that joined our peoples 50 years ago but because the great wave of democracy that has swept the world in our time began here in the Philippines. Eight years ago, when President Ramos and others stood up bravely, they, too, showed the defiant courage of Bataan. So did the crowds that filled the streets here when people power blossomed and Corazon Aquino led the Philippines into a new era. What happened here, all of you in the Philippines should know, strengthened the magical current of democracy that was then sweeping all around the world. It encouraged events in countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Russia.

We mark now the fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall just this past week. A new generation of democracy has come into the world in South Africa, South America, much of Asia, parts of the Middle East. What you did here encouraged the spirit of freedom for the world, just as surely as your defiant courage in World War II buoyed the forces of freedom then. We thanked you then; we thank you now.

Like those we honor today, we must still stand against aggression and cede to no country the right to dominate its neighbors, its region, or its hemisphere. The United States looks to the Pacific not as an ocean that separates us from Asia but as a body of water that unites us with Asia. To fulfill the vision of those who fought here, we must, and we will, remain engaged with the Philippines and elsewhere. We will make the most of peace and partnership and, as President Ramos said, the opportunities for prosperity. But if threats arrive, we will confront them as well.

On the Korean Peninsula, there has been such a threat in the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The agreement we

reached with North Korea to freeze and then to dismantle North Korea's ability to build nuclear weapons was achieved in concert with South Korea and Japan. But it furthered the cause of security in the Philippines and, indeed, throughout all of Asia.

Our final responsibility is to remember what those young people did here a half a century ago and to remember that it is undying. Today, when I got out with Hillary at the cemetery, the first grave I visited was that of a soldier from my home State. He came from a town where I have spent many happy days, a town like so many little towns that dot our wonderful country and form the backbone of America. Private First Class William Thomas, on April 22d, 1945, was not quite 23 years old when his unit entered the Zambales Mountains, 85 miles from here. They were assigned to help clear the enemy from Luzon. He was a long way from his hometown of Wynne, Arkansas, that day.

The enemy was well dug in when his company attacked along a ridge, and he was hit by an explosion that blew off both his legs below the knees. But he refused medical help and instead continued firing until a bullet knocked out his gun. Still he kept on fighting, throwing his grenades. His heroism allowed his unit to capture that position. The price of his unit's victory was William Thomas' life. For his valor, he received the Medal of Honor, America's highest military honor, one of 28 recipients so remembered here.

William Thomas, for your sacrifice and for that of all others here laid to rest, your Nation remembers you and is forever grateful. And you serve us still, as do all the names and graves of those here commemorated serve us still, for nothing, nothing protects us and our freedom like the vigilance of memory.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 1:30 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to John D. Negroponte, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines; World War II veterans Paul Parrine, who gave the invocation, and William H. Quashan; Col. Emmanuel De Ocampo, president, Veterans Federation of the Philippines; and Col. Wayne M. Barth, USA, Director, Joint Military Assistance Group.

Remarks at a State Luncheon in Manila

November 13, 1994

President and Mrs. Ramos, former President Macapagal, former President Aquino, distinguished members of the Philippine Government, members of the business community here, members of the diplomatic corps, my fellow Americans who are here: Let me begin by thanking President Ramos and Mrs. Ramos for making Hillary and me and all of our delegation here feel so very welcome on our all too brief but very enjoyable and very important visit to the Philippines.

One hundred thousand Americans call the Philippines home, and now about 1½ million Filipinos call the United States home. Indeed, I was trying to count up all the Philippine-Americans I brought with me on this trip, and I lost count. But we have people here from the Agency for International Development; we have three of my Navy stewards; my personal physician, Dr. Connie Mariano; and of course, the executive with the Export-Import Bank, a long-time friend of yours, Mr. President, Maria Louisa Haley. We're all glad to be here, but those with roots here in the Philippines are the happiest of all to be home. You have made us all feel at home, and we thank you for that.

We have worked together in many ways over a long period of time. President Ramos just described the 50th observation of our partnership in the Second World War. I have heard a very moving account of the events of last October from Secretary of Defense Perry and General Shalikashvili. General Ramos' Philippine soldiers also fought side by side with Americans in Korea and in Vietnam. And you were there, sir, in both conflicts. We thank you for that individually and for your country.

During the cold war, the United States led an effort to stand against the tyranny of communism. You were our partner then. In the last several years, you have led the world in the sweeping resurgence of democracy, beginning