

Remarks on the 80th Anniversary of D-Day in Colleville-sur-Mer, France
June 6, 2024

The hour had nearly come. Monday, June 5, 1944.

The evil of Hitler's Third Reich was devastating the world. Nazi Germany had subjugated the once-free nations of Europe through brute force, lies, and twisted ideology of racial superiority.

Millions of Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Millions of others killed by bombs, bullets, bloody warfare.

Hitler and those with him thought democracies were weak, that the future belonged to dictators.

Here, on the coast of Normandy, the battle between freedom and tyranny would be joined. Here, on that June morning, the testing was at hand.

President Macron, Mrs. Macron, Secretary Austin, Secretary Blinken, distinguished guests; most of all, our honored veterans, who met that test to the ages—a test of ages to that moment 80 years ago, 80 years ago today: On behalf of the American people and as Commander in Chief, it's the highest honor to be able to salute you here in Normandy once more—all of you. God love you.

Winston Churchill called what happened here, quote, "the greatest, most complicated operation ever," end of quote. After years of planning, Operation Overlord was ready to launch just as soon as the weather turned. Across the choppy English Channel, the Supreme Commander of the Allies, Dwight D. Eisenhower, waited. The largest force ever of its kind, built by 12 nations—men, guns, planes, naval craft of every description—waited. The world, captive and free, waited.

Finally, Eisenhower's forecasters said there was a window in the weather. It would open briefly on Tuesday the 6th of June. The general weighed the options and gave the order: At dawn, the Allies would strike. The "Great Crusade" to free Europe from tyranny would begin.

That night, General Eisenhower drove to the English town of Newbury to visit paratroopers of the 101st Airborne. They were men from all over America. It was estimated that 80 percent of them would be killed within hours. That was the estimate. But they were brave, they were resolute, and they were ready.

One soldier told General Eisenhower, quote: "Don't worry, sir. The 101st is on the job. Everything will be taken care of." That's what he said. And because of their courage and their resolve, because of the courage and resolve of their allies, it was taken care of.

From the sea and sky, nearly 160,000 Allied troops descended on Normandy. Many, to state the obvious, never came home. Many survived that "longest day," kept on fighting for months until victory was finally won. And a few, a notable band of brothers, are here with us today.

Kenneth Blaine Smith is here. On that day, under heavy artillery fire, he operated a range finder and radar on the first American ship to arrive at Normandy's coast, providing direct gunfire support for the Rangers scaling the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc on their daring mission to take out the German batteries.

Bob Gibson is here. He landed on Utah Beach about 10 hours after the invasion began. Bullets flying everywhere. Tracers lighting up the sky. Bob drove an M4 tractor with an anti-aircraft gun mounted on top, providing critical protection for the infantry against the German air force. On that day and for many days after, he continued.

Ben Miller is here. A medic with the 82d Airborne. At 3 a.m. on June 6, he and 13 other medics flew over the Channel in a rickety glider. Its wings were ripped off by giant poles that the Germans buried halfway in the ground to stop them from landing. They crashed, but they survived. And they did their duty: dragging injured soldiers to safety, treating wounds, saving lives while the battle raged.

Every soldier who stormed the beach, who dropped by parachute, or landed by glider; every sailor who manned the thousands of ships and landing craft; every aviator who destroyed German-controlled air fields, bridges, and railroads: all—all—were backed by other brave Americans, including hundreds of thousands of people of color and women who courageously served despite unjust limitations on what they could do for their nation.

Louis Brown is here. Part of the "Red Ball Express," a truck convoy made up mostly of African American drivers. They landed at Normandy in the wake of D-Day. They rushed supplies to the rapidly advancing frontlines.

Woody Woodhouse is here. Members of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen, who flew over 15,000 sorties during the war.

Marjorie Stone is here. She enlisted in the women's branch of the Naval Reserve, became an aircraft mechanic, spent the war keeping American planes and pilots in the air.

Theirs has always been the story of America. Just walk the rows of this cemetery, as I have. Nearly 10,000 heroes buried side by side, officers and enlisted, immigrants and native-born. Different races, different faiths, but all Americans. All served with honor when America and the world needed them most.

Millions back home did their part as well. From coast to coast, Americans found countless ways to pitch in. They understood our democracy is only as strong as all of us make it, together.

The men who fought here became heroes not because they were the strongest or toughest or were fiercest—although they were—but because they were given an audacious mission knowing—every one of them knew the probability of dying was real, but they did it anyway. They knew, beyond any doubt, there are things that are worth fighting and dying for.

Freedom is worth it. Democracy is worth it. America is worth it. The world is worth it—then, now, and always.

The war in Europe didn't end for another 11 months. But here the tide turned in our favor. Here we proved the forces of liberty are stronger than the forces of conquest. Here we proved that the ideals of our democracy are stronger than any army or combination of armies in the entire world.

We proved something else here as well: the unbreakable unity of the Allies. Here with us are men who served alongside the Americans that day, wearing different flags on their arms, but fighting with the same courage, for the same purpose.

What the Allies did together 80 years ago far surpassed anything we could have done on our own. It was a powerful illustration of how alliances—real alliances—make us stronger, a lesson that I pray we Americans never forget.

Together, we won the war. We rebuilt Europe, including our former enemies. It was an investment in what became shared and a prosperous future.

We established NATO, the greatest military alliance in the history of the world. And over time—[*applause*]. You've got it; it is. And over time, we brought more nations into NATO—the NATO alliance, including the newest members: Finland and Sweden.

Today, NATO stands at 32 countries strong. And NATO is more united than ever and even more prepared to keep the peace, deter aggression, defend freedom all around the world.

America has invested in our alliances and forged new ones, not simply out of altruism, but out of our own self-interest as well. America's unique ability to bring countries together is an undeniable source of our strength and our power. Isolationism was not the answer 80 years ago, and it is not the answer today.

We know the dark forces that these heroes fought against 80 years ago. They never fade. Aggression and greed, the desire to dominate and control, to change borders by force—these are perennial. And the struggle between a dictatorship and freedom is unending.

Here, in Europe, we see one stark example. Ukraine has been invaded by a tyrant bent on domination.

Ukrainians are fighting with extraordinary courage, suffering great losses, but never backing down. They've inflicted on the Russian aggressors—they've suffered tremendous losses, Russia. The numbers are staggering: 350,000 Russian troops dead or wounded. Nearly 1 million people have left Russia because they can no longer see a future in Russia.

The United States and NATO and a coalition of more than 50 countries standing strong with Ukraine. We will not walk away, because if we do, Ukraine will be subjugated. And it will not end there. Ukraine's neighbors will be threatened. All of Europe will be threatened.

And make no mistake, the autocrats of the world are watching closely to see what happens in Ukraine, to see if we let this illegal aggression go unchecked. We cannot let that happen.

To surrender to bullies, to bow down to dictators is simply unthinkable. Were we to do that, it means we'd be forgetting what happened here on these hallowed beaches. Make no mistake: We will not bow down. We will not forget.

Let me end with this. History tells us freedom is not free. If you want to know the price of freedom, come here to Normandy. Come to Normandy and look. Go to the other cemeteries in Europe where our fallen heroes rest. Go back home to Arlington Cemetery.

Tomorrow I will pay respects at Pointe du Hoc. Go there as well and remember: The price of unchecked tyranny is the blood of the young and the brave.

In their generation, in their hour of trial, the Allied forces of D-Day did their duty. Now the question for us is: In our hour of trial, will we do ours? We're living in a time when democracy is more at risk across the world than any point since the end of the World War II, since these beaches were stormed in 1944.

Now, we have to ask ourselves: Will we stand against tyranny, against evil, against crushing brutality of the iron fist? Will we stand for freedom? Will we defend democracy? Will we stand together?

My answer is yes. And it only can be yes.

We're not far off from the time when the last living voices of those who fought and bled on D-Day will no longer be with us. So we have a special obligation. We cannot let what happened here be lost in the silence of the years to come. We must remember it, must honor it, and live it.

And we must remember: The fact that they were heroes here that day does not absolve us from what we have to do today. Democracy is never guaranteed. Every generation must preserve it, defend it, and fight for it. That's the test of the ages.

In memory of those who fought here, died here, literally saved the world here, let us be worthy of their sacrifice. Let us be the generation that when history is written about our time—in 10, 20, 30, 50, 80 years from now—it will be said: When the moment came, we met the moment, we stood strong, our alliances were made stronger, and we saved democracy in our time as well.

Thank you very much. And may God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:01 p.m. at the Normandy American Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : 80th anniversary of D-Day in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

Locations: Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

Names: Austin, Lloyd J., III; Blinken, Antony J.; Brown, Louis; Gibson, Bob; Macron, Brigitte; Macron, Emmanuel; Miller, Ben; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Smith, Kenneth Blaine; Stone, Marjorie; Woodhouse, Woody.

Subjects: D-Day, 80th anniversary; Finland, North Atlantic Treaty Organization accession; France, President; France, President Biden's visit; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Secretary of Defense; Secretary of State; Sweden, North Atlantic Treaty Organization accession; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes.

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