

Remarks at Pointe du Hoc in Cricqueville-en-Bessin, France
June 7, 2024

John, how are you? Please, sit down.

At last, the hour had come. Dawn, 6th of June, 1944. The wind was pounding, as it is today and always has against these cliffs.

Two hundred and twenty-five American Rangers arrived by ship, jumped into the waves, and stormed the beach. They could see—all they could see was the outline of the shore and the enormity of these cliffs. And I'd like to look—I know I'll get in trouble with the Secret Service if I go to the edge and look over, but—[laughter]—think of those cliffs, as my host just showed me. That's what we're standing on top of.

They could hear—all they could hear was the crack of bullets hitting ships, sand, rocks—hitting everything. All they knew was time was of the essence.

They had only 30 minutes—30 minutes—to eliminate the Nazi guns high on this cliff, guns that could halt the Allied invasion before it even began. But these were American Rangers. They were ready.

They ran toward the cliffs, and mines planted by Field Marshall Rommeny—Rommel exploded around them. But still, they kept coming.

Gunfire rained above them. But still, they kept coming.

Nazi grenades thrown from above exploded against the cliffs, but still they kept coming.

Within minutes, they reached the base of this cliff. They launched their ladders, their ropes, and grappling hooks, and they began to climb.

When the Nazis cut their ladders, the Rangers used their ropes. When the Nazis cut their ropes, the Rangers used their hands. And inch by inch, foot by foot, yard by yard, the Rangers clawed—literally clawed—their way up this mighty precipice until at last they reached the top.

They breached Hitler's Atlantic Wall. And they turned, in that one effort, the tide of the war that began to save the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, yesterday I paid my respects at the American Cemetery just a few miles from here, where many of those Rangers who died taking this cliff are buried. I spoke of what the—about what the fallen had done to defend freedom.

Today, as I look out at this battlefield and all the bunkers and bomb craters that are—still surround it, one thought comes to mind: My God. My God, how did they do it? How were these Americans willing to risk everything, dare everything, and give everything?

They were Americans like Sergeant Leonard—Sergeant Leonard Lomell from New Jersey. He was one of the first Rangers to jump off his ship and run toward the cliff. He almost was shot right above the hip initially, and he didn't—wasn't sure, but he was. He kept going.

At one point, he was scaling the cliff, and another Ranger yelled, "I'm not sure I can make it." And Lomell yelled back with every ounce of strength he had in him, "You've got to hold on." And he did, and they did.

Americans like Sergeant Tom Ruggiero from Massachusetts. A German shell hit his boat as he was approaching the shore. Everything exploded. The sergeant was knocked into the freezing

water, and, as he told it, he began to utter a prayer: "Dear God, don't let me drown. I want to get in and do what I'm here and supposed to do."

Americans like Lieutenant Colonel James Rudder of Texas. When the military asked for a battalion for this daring mission, he raised his hand and said, "My Rangers can do the job." He knew their capacity. He knew the strength of their character.

And, a few days after they scaled this cliff, he wrote a condolence letter to a mother of one of the Rangers who gave his life here. And that letter said, "A country must be great to call for the sacrifice of such men." "A country must be great to call for the sacrifice of such men."

And Americans like John Wardell from New Jersey. And John is here. John, we love you, man. Thank you for all you've done. *[Applause]* You deserve that and a lot more, John.

Just 18 years old, he deployed to this cliff to replace the surviving Rangers on that D-Day invasion. He would go on to fight across France and Germany. In early December of 1944, during one of those battles, shrapnel pierced his skull. But by Christmas, he was back, fighting with his unit.

And here is what he said about—what—the notes he kept at that time. He said, "Knowing that my buddies and I always looked out for one another"—that's why he came back. That's why he fought so hard to get back. He always looked out, and his buddies looked out for one another.

When we talk about democracy—American democracy—we often talk about the ideals of life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. What we don't talk about is how hard it is, how many ways we're asked to walk away, how many instincts are to walk away—the most natural instinct is to walk away, to be selfish, to force our will upon others, to seize power and never give up.

American democracy asks the hardest of things: to believe that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. So democracy begins with each of us.

It begins when one person decides there's something more important than themselves; when they decide the person they're serving alongside of is someone to look after; when they decide the mission matters more than their life; when they decide that their country matters more than they do. That's what the Rangers at Port de—Pointe de Hoc did. That's they decided. That's what every soldier and every marine who stormed these beaches decided.

A feared dictator had conquered a continent, had finally met his match. Because of them, the war turned.

They stood against Hitler's aggression. Does anyone doubt—does anyone doubt—that they would want America to stand up against Putin's aggression here in Europe today?

They stormed the beaches alongside their allies. Does anyone believe these Rangers would want America to go it alone today?

They fought to vanquish a hateful ideology in the thirties and forties. Does anyone doubt they wouldn't move heaven and earth to vanquish hateful ideologies of today?

These Rangers put mission and country above themselves. Does anyone believe they would exact any less from every American today?

These Rangers remembered with reverence those who gave their lives in battle. Could they or anyone ever imagine that America would do the same—wouldn't do the same? They believed America was the beacon to the world. And I'm certain they believed that it would be that way forever.

You know, we stand today—where we stand was not sacred ground on June the 5th, but that's what it became on June the 6th. The Rangers who scaled this cliff didn't know they would change the world. But they did.

I've long said that history has shown that ordinary Americans can do extraordinary things when challenged. There's no better example of that in the entire world than right here at Pointe du Hoc.

Rangers from farms and cities in every part of America, from homes that didn't know wealth and power, they came to a shoreline that none of them would have picked out on a map. They came to a country many of them had never seen for a people they had never met. But they came, they did their job, they fulfilled their mission, and they did their duty.

They were a part of something greater than themselves. They were Americans.

I stand here today as the first President to come to Pointe du Hoc when none of those 225 brave men who scaled this cliff on D-Day are still alive. None.

But I'm here to tell you that with them gone, the wind we hear coming off this ocean will not fade. It will grow louder.

As we gather here today, it's not just to honor those who showed such remarkable bravery on that day, June 6, 1944. It's to listen to the echoes of their voices, to hear them, because they are summoning us, and they're summoning us now.

They ask us: What will we do?

They're not asking us to scale these cliffs, but they're asking us to stay true to what America stands for. They're not asking us to give or risk our lives, but they are asking us to care for others and our country more than ourselves.

They're not asking us to do their job. They're asking us to do our job: to protect freedom in our time, to defend democracy, to stand up aggression abroad and at home, to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

My fellow Americans, I refuse to believe—I simply refuse to believe—that America's greatness is a thing of the past.

I still believe there is nothing beyond our capacity in America when we act together.

We're the fortunate heirs of a legacy of these heroes, those who scaled the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc. But we must also be the keepers of their mission—the keepers of their mission—the bearers of the flame of freedom that they kept burning bright. That—that—is the truest testimonial to their lives: our actions every day to ensure that our democracy endures and the soul our Nation endures.

To come here simply to remember the ghosts of Pointe du Hoc isn't enough. We have—need to hear them. We have to listen to them. We need to listen to what they had. We need to make a solemn vow to never let them down.

God bless the fallen. God bless the brave men who scaled these cliffs. May God protect our troops. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:43 p.m. at the Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument. In his remarks, he referred to Scott Desjardins, Superintendent, Normandy American Cemetery; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Pointe du Hoc in Cricqueville-en-Bessin, France.

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