

Text of Bush's Memorial Day Speech

Text of President Bush's Memorial Day speech in France at the Normandy American Cemetery, home to the graves of 9,387 Americans killed in World War II. The cemetery sits near the beaches of Normandy, from which U.S. troops launched the June 1944 D-Day invasion.

President and Mrs. Chirac, Secretary Powell and Secretary Principi, members of the United States Congress, members of the American armed services, veterans, family members, fellow Americans and friends, we have gathered on this quiet corner of France as the sun rises on Memorial Day in the United States of America.

This is a day our country has set apart to remember what was gained in our wars and all that was lost. Our wars have won for us every hour we live in freedom. Our wars have taken from us the men and women we honor today and every hour of the lifetimes they had hoped to live.

This day of remembrance was first observed to recall the terrible casualties of the war Americans fought against each other. In the nearly 14 decades since, our nation's battles have all been far from home. Beyond the continent of Europe were some of the fiercest of those battles, the heaviest losses and the greatest victories.

And in all of those victories, American soldiers came to liberate, not to conquer. The only land we claim as our own are the resting places of our men and women. More than 9,000 are buried here. And many times that number have--of fallen soldiers lay in our cemeteries across Europe and America. From a distance, surveying row after row of markers, we see the scale and heroism and sacrifice of the young.

We think of units sustaining massive casualties, men cut down crossing the beach or taking a hill or securing the bridge. We think of many hundreds of sailors lost in their ships.

War correspondent Ernie Pyle told of a British officer walking across a battlefield just after the violence had ended. Seeing the bodies of American boys scattered everywhere, the officer said in sort of a hushed eulogy spoken only to himself, "Brave men, brave men."

All that come to a place like this feel the enormity of the loss. Yet for so many there's a marker that seems to sit alone. They come looking for that one cross, that one star of David, that one name.

Behind every grave of a fallen soldier is a story of the grief that came to a wife, a mother, a child, a family or a town. A World War II orphan has described her family's life after her father was killed on the field in Germany. "My mother," she said, "had lost everything she was waiting for. She lost her dreams."

There were an awful lot of perfect linen tablecloths in the house that never got used - so many things being saved for a future that was never to be.

Each person buried here understood his duty but also dreamed of going back home to the people and the things he knew. Each had plans and hopes of his own that parted with him forever when he died.

The day will come when no one is left who knew them, when no visitor to this cemetery can stand before a grave remembering a face and a voice. The day will

never come when America forgets them. Our nation and the world will always remember what they did here and what they gave here for the future of humanity. As dawn broke during the invasion, a little boy in a village off of Gold Beach called out to his mother, "Look, the sea, it's black with boats." Spread out before them over the horizon, more than 5,000 ships and landing craft. In the skies were some of the 12,000 planes sent on the first day of Operation Overlord.

The battle of Normandy would last many days, but June 6, 1944, was the crucial day. The late President Francois Mitterand said that nothing in history compares to D-Day. The 6th of June, he observed, the sound of the hour when history tipped toward the camp of freedom.

Before dawn, the first paratroopers already had been dropped inland. The story is told of a group of French women finding Americans and imploring them not to leave. The trooper said, "We're not leaving. If necessary, this is the place we die."

Units of army rangers on shore in one of history's bravest displays scaled cliffs directly into gunfire, never relenting, even as comrades died all around them. When they had reached the top, the rangers radioed back the code for success: Praise the Lord.

Only a man who was there charging out of a landing craft can know what it was like. For the entire liberating force, there was only the ground in front of them, no shelter, no possibility of retreat. They were part of the largest amphibious landing in history and perhaps the only great battle in which the wounded were carried forward.

Survivors remember the sight of a Catholic chaplain, Father Joe Lacy, lifting dying men out of water and comforting and praying with them. Private Jimmy Hall was seen carrying the body of his brother Johnny, saying, "He can't, he can't be dead. I promised mother I'd look after him."

Such was the size of the battle of Normandy - 38 pairs of brothers died in liberation, including Bedford and Raymond Hoback of Virginia, both who fell on D-Day. Raymond's body was never found. All he left behind was his bible discovered in the sand. Their mother asked that Bedford be buried here, as well, in the place Raymond was lost, so her sons would always be together.

On Memorial Day, America honors her own. Yet, we also remember all of the valiant young men and women from many allied nations, including France, who shared in the struggle here and in the suffering.

We remember the men and women who served and died alongside Americans in so many terrible battles on this continent and beyond. Words can only go so far in capturing the grief and sense of loss for the families of those who died in all our wars.

For some military families in America and in Europe, the grief is recent, with the losses we have suffered in Afghanistan. They can know, however, that the cause is just. And like other generations, these sacrifices have spared many others from tyranny and sorrow.

Long after putting away his uniform, an American G.I. expressed his own pride in the truth about all who served, living and dead. He said, "I feel like I played my part in turning this from a century of darkness into a century of light."

Here, where we stand today, the new world came back to liberate the old. A bond was formed of shared (inaudible) scattered the life from these shores and across France. It spread to all of Europe in time, turning enemies into friends and the pursuits of war into the pursuits of peace.

Our security is still bound up together in a transatlantic alliance, with soldiers in many uniforms defending the world from terrorists at this very hour.

The grave markers here all face west, across an ageless and indifferent ocean to the country these men and women served and loved. The thoughts of America on this Memorial Day turned to them and to all their fallen comrades in arms.

We think of them with lasting gratitude. We miss them with lasting love. And we pray for them.

And we trust in the words of the almighty God, which are inscribed in the chapel nearby: "I give unto them eternal life, that they shall never perish."

God bless.