

**Remarks of a Cabinet Official
at the
60th Anniversary of the Invasion of Normandy
Utah Beach
Republic of France**

Today we gather to honor those who liberated this great land. Many of you were with us just a few hours ago as President Bush and President Chirac met at Omaha Beach to speak of the bonds borne in battle.

Here amid these windswept dunes of Utah Beach, we remember that the price of Freedom is often exacted with the costly coin of sacrifice ... and that Liberty is a legacy no debt can encumber.

“Darkness enveloped the whole American armada. Not a pinpoint of light showed from those hundreds of ships as they surged on through the night toward their destiny, carrying across the ageless and indifferent sea tens of thousands of young men ...”

Journalist Ernie Pyle wrote these words to describe the start of the unparalleled endeavor to defeat a challenge unprecedented in America’s history—to defeat an enemy that, one by one, had imprisoned our friends and allies behind the seemingly impregnable walls of ‘Fortress Europe.’

Sixty years have now come and gone, and for Frenchmen and Americans everywhere, Ernie Pyle’s words evoke, still, the ominous and heavy anticipation ... the chaos and confusion ... and the horror and heroism that would soon come to be bywords of the historic date— June 6th 1944.

“Heroism,” has been called, *“the brilliant triumph of the soul over flesh ... the dazzling and glorious concentration of courage.”* On this day, six decades past, blood ran as ink from a journalist’s pen to consecrate this hard-won soil and to chronicle great deeds of young Americans as they massed here in a *glorious concentration of courage* ... to decide nothing less than the fate of Freedom.

As part of the greatest liberation force in human history ... you, America's heroes of that ordeal ... united your strength, and your strength of purpose ... on the beachhead, just beyond, to accomplish your monumental mission.

On these shores, you '*triumphed*' beyond our Nation's deepest, most fervent hopes ... and vanquished our most terrible and darkest fears. For a brief moment in history, you held America's destiny ... and the destiny of the world in your hands. And you did not fail us!

As June 6th dawned gray and stormy, the roar of thundering guns and exploding bombs came together to herald a clash of mighty armies, giving substance to the irresolvable conflict between tyranny and freedom.

The whirlwind of war rent the ground ... the sea ... and the skies in a furious struggle—an epic battle in which America's heroes pitched into the dark sea ... and, loaded down with gear, struggled ashore to face, head-on, an entrenched enemy.

Heroes who dropped from a sky aglow with anti-aircraft fire, onto grassy fields filled with land mines. Heroes who scrambled over the lifeless bodies of their comrades to overrun enemy machine gun nests. And who doggedly punched through walls of barbed wire ... and blew up bunkers of concrete and steel.

Heroes who, in blood and suffering, persevered to secure the deadly beaches of Normandy in a *heroic triumph of courage*. When officers fell, sergeants took the lead. When sergeants fell, corporals led the way. When corporals fell, privates fought on. Those who survived were forever changed. Those who died stayed forever young. And for the people of Europe and America, those who served Freedom's cause will be forever honored.

The rhythmic sound of surf ... and the now silent dunes ... belie the death and destruction of 60 years past. Then, this strip of beach must have looked terrifying to those of you who fought here ... the 17-, 18-, and 19-year olds of yesteryear, who lost your innocence on this and other fiery battlefields of this beleaguered continent.

All those who came ashore at Normandy did so in a *glorious concentration of courage*. You did not cut and run ... you did not shirk from your duty. You did not allow fear to overwhelm you, though great fear there was. With one objective in mind you proceeded to take this beach, yard by yard. With one goal squarely before you, you faced your challenges and overcame them.

The day's end was witness to demonstrations of valor, perseverance, and devotion the likes of which the world has never seen ... and which, perhaps, will never be bested. Each of you—each veteran of that historic campaign—is a living affirmation of America's deep and abiding heritage ... a living testament to the enduring legacy of patriots who stood to the last man, if necessary, to defend Liberty.

Today, we commemorate the anniversary of the '*longest day*,' whose passing minutes were counted in suffering and sacrifice ... and whose passing hours were measured in mud, heartache, and pain. That '*longest day*' knelled out the '*beginning of the end*' of World War II.

For another 335 days, the sun would rise on the fields of war before the guns fell silent. And during that time, across the forests and farms ... and the towns and cities of Europe ... the steel of America's heroes would be hardened by the fires of adversity, again and again, from Bayeux to Berlin.

Where each day of combat was reduced to its simplest terms—fight the enemy while separated from him by no more than a stone wall ... a pile of rubble ... the length of a bayonet—the simplest measures of battle spanning the narrow bridge-way between life and death.

On this day ... in this place ... as in so many other places across America and France, people struggle—as I do now—to find words that can give proper honor to your lives and to the memory of your lost brothers-in-arms ... knowing full well that words alone will never be enough.

This hallowed ground memorializes the remarkable spirit and great deeds of ordinary Americans who served their country in the most extraordinary ways. My humble efforts to describe your bravery in a desperate moment in history, will inevitably fall short.

As it is a day of solemn remembrance, June 6th 2004 is also a day for celebration. A day of thanksgiving for lives of great accomplishment in the six decades that followed the mighty crucible that was Normandy.

America's beloved '*Greatest Generation*'—the generation of Normandy and Iwo Jima ... of Anzio and Midway—by the sheer magnitude of its larger-than-life achievements emblazoned itself across America's consciousness as none other than, perhaps, that of our Founding Fathers.

By the sterling example of your lives, you remind us who tread in your footsteps, of our Nation's bedrock values and quiet virtues ... of our basic sense of decency and fairness. And you remind us that the righteousness of America's principles, ideals, and values overarch the anguish of our grievous losses to Liberty's cause.

It is fitting that, today, we who enjoy the fruits of your sacrifice should honor you, the heroes who toiled so long and suffered so much on these shores.

And while sixty years have passed since the dawn of that long-ago day when Good confronted Evil on this proud and ancient coastline—not one day in those six decades has gone by that France and America have not been thankful you were there to protect us ... to defend us ... to preserve all that we hold dear.

Men of Normandy—patriots of historic ... '*dazzling ... and glorious courage*'—I salute you!