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REMARKS
VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE
VE DAY COMMEMORATION
AMERICAN CEMETERY,
UK
May 6, 1995

A half century ago, on a morning bursting with spring, Hitler’s Thousand Year Reich had collapsed in dust and ashes and eternal infamy. Tens of millions perished, their names known but to God.

Americans and Britons fought side by side in the fight to break Hitler's military machine in North Africa which followed the great victory of El Alamein; They fought together in Sicily, on the stark slopes of Cassino in Italy, and at Anzio and Salerno. Our young men shed their common blood on beaches called Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha, and Utah, and in the hedgerows that laced the country beyond in Normandy; on the bitter road to Arnheim; in the snowy forests of the Ardennes, in the frosty seas of the Atlantic, and in the skies over Europe where together we dissolved the Nazi Blitz into smoke and destroyed Germany's industrial ability to equip her armies.
Time will not heal the scars. Some remote places that lived in innocent obscurity before Hitler came to power will be eternal nightmares in the darkest memories of the human race -- Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec.

But at last, in May, 1945, the killing stopped, and a silence of exhaustion settled down over these ancient lands.

We are here today in the fens of East Anglia -- those fields that gave shelter to the mightiest wartime air force ever assembled -- because brave men and women rose to fight back against a greater savagery than this world had known since creation.

More than 8,000 are remembered in these quiet slopes of Madingley, the bodies of some lying here in the earth, the names of others, missing forever in action, inscribed on these walls before us. And around the world in the vast cartography of death that was the Second World War lie gallant souls who brought victory not merely for the Allied powers but for humanity itself.

The living and the dead who won this victory gave us our world -- a world which buzzes with life, with stunning creativity -- with invention and technology, and progress that moves in the unpredictable, exhilarating, and sometimes painful ways that progress occurs.

Because they died, freedom lives.
Here in this green place -- amid these trees and flowered grounds, before these rows of white stones that mark the last resting place of our honored dead, and in solemn reverence we can reflect on the lives they gave for liberty.

The dead who lie here in the mysterious silence of eternity were once like us.

They were children wakened to a world that grew morning by morning in a radiance of light and discovery.

They heard stories that drew them like a gentle stream into the great current of human life.

They laughed. They were hurt and they cried. They were loved. Fathers and mothers, wives and children loved them, and they loved in return. They knew the heat of summer, the cold of winter, the softness of rain, the brightness of snow.

Before they were names on these stones, they were names in a neighborhood, or a school, and to call their name was to summon up their faces, their voices, their place in the world.

Leaving homes and peaceful days, they went to war.

These dead here at Madingley flew in B-17 flying fortresses, in B-24 Liberators, and P-51 Mustangs into skies not unlike the firmament they had gazed at as boys, seeing changing
faces in clouds.

They were the bombardiers, the pilots, the navigators who chanced life and death in black bursts of flak and the freezing cold of high altitudes, and the warm blood that turned to ice on the leather of flight jackets.

They were the brave and gallant mechanics, the ground crews, and air crews, the medics and nurses, the clerks and drivers and radio operators who were victory’s unsung authors.

Had they lived, some would be among you, gathered here with us to honor the living and the dead.

Some would have written books that now the world will never read.

Some unelected President of the United States might lie here, some unknown Prime Minister of Great Britain.

But most would have been ordinary people, living life with its quiet pleasures, its disappointments, its families, its jobs, its pubs, its churches, its synagogues, its cycles of birth and death.

At rare, unpredictable moments, they would have had experienced moments of love or beauty, or triumph, or simply understanding.
But most of the time, their days would have been ordinary --
the slow turning of a wheel of time in space.

On a war memorial far away, for soldiers long fallen, there
are words that still speak to us across the miles and the
decades:

When you go home,
remember us and say,
for your tomorrow,
we gave our today.

How do we honor these dead? And how do we best
remember them?

Not by words alone. Our remembrance must be more
profound and more enduring.

We must strive with all our collective might to fulfill the
promise of that great architect of victory, Franklin
Roosevelt, in words he died before he could utter them.
Our task is to want more than an end to war, but, he said, to
“want an end to the beginnings of all wars”.

We the living stand in the presence of the dead to look for a
world that someday will fulfill the Biblical prophecy that
nation shall not rise against nation, that neither shall they
learn war any more.
These simple common stones in their orderly rows remind us that though whole nations do fight -- it is individuals who die.

And the great tradition that Americans have inherited from Britons holds that something perishes in every one of us when any one of us dies by famine, sword, and fire.

Our two peoples, Britons and Americans, share a conviction running like a golden thread through our common history. That gleaming thread was woven in part at Runnymead in 1215 when King John signed the Magna Carta, in part in 1588 when England stood alone against the Invincible Armada, in part in 1776 when Americans called up the principles of John Locke, and supported by Edmund Burke, asserted the right of all men to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is not a conviction that has been given to us. It is a conviction that has been won for us by brave and bold men and women through hard centuries of time -- men and women not only brave and bold in battle -- but also brave and bold in books and in voices, brave and bold in forging on the anvil of experience and in the fires of imagination those ideas that make the battle worthwhile and success a triumph for humankind. We honor these men and women today because they defended with their lives that conviction that the individual is born free and that tyranny is a
monstrous affront to nature itself.

It is a conviction that binds both nations. The Americans here came from Memphis and Topeka, Spokane and St. Louis, New York and New Orleans, from hamlets and farms, from city streets and remote valleys, and they lie together in this field. They did not want to die. But fate had called them to valor and to death, and so it was.

From their deaths we have learned an enduring lesson. If we do not heed them, the 21st century, so near to us now, will be a descent into a darker age of barbarism than the world has ever known.

The most important of these lessons is that government without the consent of a free people is tyranny, and that tyranny thrives on war and rumors of war.

The tyrant -- like Hitler -- always struts on a stage built upon human suffering, surrounded by legions of soldiers, bolstered by the machinery of battle, and adored by flatterers always ready to cheer.

He lashes out against both neighbor and citizen alike.

He craves legitimacy that can only come from the consent of the governed, and when he dares to look into the faces of his people, searching for their true feelings, he is seldom reassured that all is right with the world. They stare back at
him, and he, sustained only by their false admiration, does not see the sullen and vacant eyes of oppressed people everywhere.

Part of his defense is to imprison the imagined enemy within. His tools are secret police, midnight knocks on the door. The informer. And he still fears. Still he knows no rest.

Often he lashes out in conquest, turning the hatred of his people from him to their neighbor. The tyrant is not sated until his evil metastasizes in cycles of expansion and violence. Only in the roar of artillery and blitzkrieg can the tyrant drown out the accusing and fearful voices of the citizens he commands into silence.

For centuries, it has been part of the British and American tradition to believe that a free people and its leaders are more likely to seek peace than war -- a free people, able to write and speak without restraint. In a democracy, citizens have a stake in their society. They own their lives, their freedom, and their property. They do not belong to their government, their government belongs to them.

And as the Second World War proved so convincingly, when a free nation is persuaded to go to war to fight for interests as its people define them, it will fight on to inevitable triumph no matter what the cost.
We have also learned that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. We must always be on our guard against the enlargement of tyranny -- so that no Hitler ever can rise again.

And we have learned, above all, that as Americans and Britons joined to resist the monster of Nazism, so must all democracies recognize that the ideals that unite us are for more powerful than the issues that divide us.

In the Second World War, the teamwork of a successful mission was amazing to behold -- 18 to 21 planes per group, with many groups merged into formation, all flying as one; pilot and co-pilot swapping-off, holding in formation bravely through storm and turbulence, flak and fighters, all aiming at one target and turning as one to come home again.

Crews came from every part of the country, from every kind of family, from every ethnic background -- Polish, German, Mexican, Choctaw, Irish, Scottish, English, and more. And for every man in the sky, there were nine on the ground to keep him flying.

But this teamwork was not just of warriors -- it was of nations and peoples whose bonds could not be broken by tyranny's awesome weight.

Britain and the Commonwealth led the way in forging a unity of purpose that was an example to the world. For
desperate months as Hitler’s blitzkrieg had overrun the Continent, Britain stood defiantly alone against the Nazi barbarism.

And when Hitler was gathering ships to spring across the channel to invade England in 1941, Winston Churchill broadcast this message to his people and the world: that “neither the sudden shock of battle, nor the long-drawn trials of vigilance and exertion will wear us down.”

In America, Winston Churchill’s bulldog tenacity made us see that here was a man.

In his words we heard our duty defined.

First we rolled up our sleeves and sent the tools he asked us to send; and then we sent our men and women, and we fought together, side by side, with the men and women of Britain and the Commonwealth, and we died together, and our nations and our ideals were victorious together in that spring half a century ago when after the winter of Nazism, the flower of liberty bloomed again.

Churchill himself pronounced his judgment on the grand alliance between Britain and America. He said when victory had been won:

“It would be an ill day for the world and for the pair of
them if they did not go on working together and marching together and sailing together and flying together whenever something has to be done for the sake of freedom.

For fifty years we have held onto the course that Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt set for our ships of state.

Now, we live in a world unimaginable in 1945. We breathe the air of freedom. Hatreds have cooled into a memory of common suffering. Old enemies have become enduring friends.

Now, not only is the Nazi flag with its twisted cross a relic in museums, but the hammer and sickle is also gone as a symbol of power and fear.

Now, a free and united Germany rebuilds the wreckage of the dictatorship of communism, and Germans East and West look back at the horrors of Hitler and say “Never Again”.

And through it all, Britain and the United States still join hands across the sea, united by history, by language, by ideals, and by hope.

In honoring these dead, let us, the sons and daughters of those who lie here, and those who survive here, rise to the
vision proclaimed by President Roosevelt: to seek a moral basis for peace -- not only here in Europe but far beyond.

Let us build democracy and freedom in a world governed by just laws, respectful of human rights, accepting the obligation each one of us has to his neighbors and to all those men and women everywhere who are bound to us by the common ties of the human condition and the yearning for decency and dignity.

It will not be easy. The voices of evil did not die with Nazism, nor with communism, nor with apartheid.

We have seen it in our midst. It lurks like a viper in unexpected places, striking suddenly, viciously -- as Ambassador Crowe, a son of Oklahoma, can attest in grief and shock today.

Let us not let those furious voices have their way.

Let us stand, united, against this enemy.

The men and women who lie in this quiet place did not die for hatred.

No, these men and women at Madingley -- and in all the other places where their comrades also lie -- died for a future of hope for the best that might be for those they left behind.
Their lofty vision, grand as the sky in which they flew, was of fellowship in danger and something else good to come when the danger was over and peace returned.

Their spirits command us in our imperfect efforts to give substance to their dreams. Let us reason together; let us find our duty and do it.

The bodies of these men and women rest in the bosom of the earth, their souls in keeping with God. But their spirits are with us to the ending of the world, and what they did for us can never die.

To them, through the reverent memory that we hold of them in our hearts, is given the promise of the prophet Isaiah, as we pray for lives of our own to live that will be worthy of their deaths.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

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Remarks
Vice President Al Gore
Berlin
May 8, 1995

Fifty years ago, in the advance headquarters of the Supreme Allied Commander, that great architect of victory, General Dwight David Eisenhower gathered a group of reporters around his desk to reflect on the triumph over Nazi tyranny, "The success of this operation, will be judged fifty years from now. If at that time Germany is a stable democracy, we will have succeeded."

Today, we who are the heirs of history's grandest success, gather to remember that victory of soul and spirit, and recall the sacrifice of those glorious men and women who were its author.

We gather to celebrate the triumph of good over evil, and recovery and reunion over defeat and division.

We celebrate here a victory not of any one nation, nor of any one people -- but a victory of humankind; we celebrate not just Victory in Europe -- but Victory for Europe.

Even in General's Eisenhower's boldest dreams, few could foreseen that May 8, 1945 would be the starting point for an
unparalleled era of prosperity and democratic stability in Germany and beyond.

In the Europe of mid-century, villages and great cities alike lay in smoldering heaps of stone and dust. The ash of destruction was everywhere. Here in Germany, forty percent of its homes were destroyed. The German people could feel little more than hunger, fear, and disease.

When President Truman arrived in Berlin to attend the Potsdam Conference, he spoke of the war's bloody wake:

A more depressing sight than that of the ruined building was the never-ending procession of old men, women, and children wandering aimlessly... carrying, pushing or pulling what was left of their belongings. In that two hours, I saw evidence of a great world tragedy.

A half century later, we meet in another Berlin: a dynamic, magnetic city at the heart of a Europe that is pulsing with possibility and prosperity -- a Europe growing together in a renaissance of liberty, and of progress; of technological prowess, and irrepressible ingenuity.

It is altogether fitting that we recall this victory here in Berlin, gathered now as friends and allies. There will be commemoration of the war's conclusion and of the Allied Victory in other cities, but this gathering in Germany's capital has special significance. For the Germans, May 8, 1945 was not a victory in any ordinary military sense. It
meant defeat for Nazi policies of conquest, and Nazi dictatorship at home.

The allied triumph established the basis for Germany's own liberation, as it did for the countries that Nazi armies had conquered. Allied victory gave Germans the chance to remake their institutions, to restore political decency, and finally institute a robust democracy that had earlier evaded them.

We meet now in a Germany united not only by geography, but by faith in the virtues of man, and where all German can look back at the horrors of Hitler and say “Never Again”.

Germany today is alive with promise. She sits at the councils of state in dignity and equality. Her industries burst with productivity -- her theaters and museums and universities with creativity and life.

Like the engineers at the former submarine factory of Bochumer Verein who literally beat old instruments of war into enormous silvery bells of alloy steel -- Protestant bells with one particular distinctive tone, Catholic bells with another, the genius of Germany been recast to serve not the causes of death and destruction, but of peace and faith.

There is another reason that our meeting here is special. Here in Europe’s very center -- the Mittlag (MIHT-TEL- AHG) -- where the Armies of liberation once converged, and through which cut the deep fault line dividing East from West, we can
best recall the generations of leaders -- in my country and yours -- whose courage sowed the seeds of prosperity and freedom which now bloom across the vast landscape of Eurasia.

A year after President Truman saw the devastation in this city, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, speaking in Stuttgart, opened the door to Germany’s rehabilitation and re-entry to the community of democratic nations.

Scarcely another year had passed when his successor, George Catlett Marshall, announced at Harvard University the famous plan which bears his name. It opened the way for German, and ultimately European, recovery.

General Marshall's plan, and the men and women who gave it form, offered the world for the first time a profoundly new vision of the relationship between the vanquished and the victor in war.

By rejecting out of hand the bitter path of retribution that was followed after the First World War, we were able to transform the conquered enemy into treasured friend.

We enabled the peoples of Germany to secure and deepen the victory of World War Two when they themselves rejected the evil pattern of thinking which was the true enemy of all humankind, and gave them the opportunity as a free people to build the institutions of peace.

We carry the lessons of the Marshall Plan with us today, as
we strive to bring to our work of Post-Cold War reconstruction the same wisdom and energy of those who rebuilt Europe after the Second World War. General Marshall taught us we must not listen to the muses of stinginess and isolation which lurk in the embers of victory.

In 1945, The promise of democracy and freedom in Europe would not flourish in Europe unless it was nourished by both victor and vanquished alike. And so it is today.

But most of all, we demonstrated through the Marshall Plan that the United States would not turn its back on Europeans, that we would remain vitally involved as we worked together to reap the harvest of democracy and prosperity across these war-torn lands.

A few years later, with the support of President Eisenhower, who as General had commanded the forces of the Western allies against Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO.

In Europe, meanwhile, enlightened leaders of Germany’s neighbors helped it become a founding member of what is now the European Union.

In 1963, President Kennedy was able to say that the proudest boast of a free man was “Ich bin ein Berliner”.

When the first fissures of freedom were traced into the cement barrier that divided this city, President Reagan turned a resolute eye eastward and demanded the wall of communist dictatorship
be torn down.

And here, last June at the Brandenburg Gate, as Berlin’s last occupying Allied troops furled their flags and prepared to go home, President Clinton proclaimed in three simple words the Cold War’s epitaph: “Berlin ist Frei”.

Through it all, hundreds of thousands of America’s finest men and women in uniform stood watch across Europe.

Joined shoulder to shoulder with their allies in NATO -- these men and women of our armed forces remain the steel in freedom’s sword. They are the living proof of our promise that Europe’s destiny is our own.

All Americans join in this vision of a Europe whole and free. And we pay tribute today to the bipartisan spirit that has lifted the United States Congress to moments of greatness in defending our nation and our Alliance. For half a century, the farsighted deeds of leaders like Arthur Vandenberg and William Fulbright taught us time and again that the ideals that unite us are far stronger than the issues that divide us.

When some would call leadership an ugly burden and seek America’s retreat from Europe and the world, these men and women knew we had no choice but to remain engaged. Because of them, the American aid and support that nurtured a broken Europe flowed generously. Because of them, America’s military forces have helped stand guard across Western Europe. Their vigilance helped shake loose tyranny’s tight grip on half a
continent.

Today, we celebrate the enduring friendship that we have forged with Germany over the decades, and reaffirm the partnership which grew from the ruins of war.

Together with Germany, the nations gathered here today have a unique and historic opportunity to preserve and extend our mutual partnership for security and prosperity in a Europe that for the first time in its history is united by the sturdy twine of democracy.

During the Cold War, the European scene was all too often characterized by division and exclusion. The great ideological gap separating east and west itself served as a guarantor of stability in the balance of power that kept war cold and peace uneasy.

In 1983, Richard Von Weizsacker called each of us to “our most important task” of building enduring bridges of security to span West and East. It is a task that has been consecrated in the work of a great succession of Germany’s leaders -- from Chancellors Adenauer to Kiesinger; from Chancellors Brandt to Schmidt, and now to Chancellor Kohl to whom all of Europe owes so much.

Now, let each of us complete this noble task of creating a European order based not on the once inevitable cycles of division, and war -- but on a new paradigm of openness and inclusion.
Let us continue to build an order open to commerce, to ideas, to peoples, and to the fruits of freedom, of the marketplace, and technology and progress.

Let us continue to build an order of an ever expanding circle of democracy embracing all of our peoples -- east and west, north and south, and given focus by a belief in individual liberty, anchored in human dignity.

Already, all of Europe is electric with the exhilaration of this new moment. Freedom now stretches from Vladivostok to Rostok -- from Tallinn to Tirana. Fifty years ago, as young soldiers at war’s end reached out across the Elbe as warriors to clasp hands in peace -- now whole nations reach out across oceans as democracies to help build a better future for our children.

Consolidating these gains will not be easy. Even in our midst, the bacillus of nationalism still pockmarks corners of these ancient lands. And as Germany’s eminent author Gunter Grass reminds us, tyranny “is a sediment that cannot be washed away by fine words.”

We have learned from the sacrifices of the millions who brought victory to Europe fifty years ago that freedom’s costs can be great -- and often final.
So today -- united in peace -- we recall the young men and women who marched and died so that we may live, and with a strong voice and steady resolve, proclaim that we shall not reverse the achievement of 1945. For us Americans as for you Europeans, for the former victors as for the one-time foes, and now our partners, May 8 was a liberation and a beginning, the promise of which we pledge ourselves continually to advance.

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