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Commemorating the 38th Anniversary of Normandy Invasion,
D-Day

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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Versailles, France)

For Release at 12:00 P.M. Paris Time
and 6:00 P.M. EDT
Saturday, June 5, 1982

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
RECOGNIZING NORMANDY
D-DAY

THE PRESIDENT: I bring to France greetings and best wishes from the American people. I carry their hopes for continued Western unity to secure a prosperous and lasting peace, and I've come to express our commitment to policies that will renew economic growth.

But today touches French and American memories in a special way. It brings to mind thoughts quite apart from the pressing issues being discussed at the Economic Summit in Versailles. On this day, 38 years ago, our two peoples were united in an epic struggle against tyranny.

In 1944, as World War II raged, the allies were battling to regain their foothold in the continent. The French resistance fought valiantly on, disrupting communications and sabotaging supply lines. But the Nazis held Europe in a strangle hold, and Field Marshal Rommel was building his Atlantic wall along France's coast.

Late the night of June 5th, as fog enshrouded the Normandy coastline, over 2,000 planes took off from English fields to drop soldiers by parachute behind enemy lines. By the early hours of June 6th, the massive allied armada, 5,000 ships, had begun to move across the cold and choppy water of the English Channel. D-Day had begun.

The code names, Omaha, Utah, Gold, Juno, and Sword, are now indelibly etched in history by the blood spilled on that 100 mile stretch of beach. More than 150,000 allied troops stormed Normandy that day, and by dusk they had established beachheads at each of the five invasion points. The toll was high. More than 10,500 of our young men were either dead, wounded or missing.

Today, endless rows of simple white crosses mark their seacoast graves. The rusty helmets still buried in the sand, and the ships and tanks still lying off the shore are testaments to their sacrifices.

By the end of World War II, more than 60,000 Americans had been buried in France. Today, we remember them, honor them and pray for them, but we also remember what they gave us.

D-Day was a success and the allies had breached Hitler's sea wall. They swept into Europe liberating towns and cities and countrysides until the axis powers were finally crushed. We remember D-Day because the French, British, Canadians and Americans fought shoulder-to-shoulder for democracy and freedom and won.

During the war, a gallant, French leader, Charles de Gaulle, inspired his countrymen organizing and leading the free French forces. He entered Paris in triumph liberating that city at the head of a column of allied troops, a victory made possible by the heroes of Normandy. "Nothing great will ever be achieved without great men, and men are great only if they're determined to be so," de Gaulle said.

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Ours was a great alliance of free people determined to remain so. I believe it still is.

The invasion of Normandy was the second time in this century Americans fought in France to free it from an aggressor. We're pledged to do so again if we must.

The freedom we enjoy today was secured by great men and at great cost. Today, let us remember their courage and pray for the guidance and strength to do what we must so that no generation is ever asked to make so great a sacrifice again.

Thank you very much.

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