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June 6, 1982 (Talking Points)

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(PARVIN)

MRS. REAGAN: NORMANDY CEREMONY  
JUNE 6, 1982

--I am deeply honored to be here in Normandy on this very moving and emotional day. As I flew over the peaceful Normandy countryside this morning, it was hard to imagine that 38 years ago there was not calm, but violence. Sadly, many of those who fought soon found calm in the rows of crosses and Stars of David that stretch before us. Today we honor those whose sacrifice is as lasting as the stone of this Memorial.

--Although the official ceremony is here, I can't help but think of the private remembrances and tears of those at home who've lost a loved one on the beach below us. A mother who lost a son, a wife who lost a husband, a child who lost a father--their tender moments today are a personal memorial to the individual heroes of Normandy.

--We, on the other hand, can honor these heroes by speaking of what their courage accomplished for freedom. A few days ago in America we celebrated Memorial Day, a day when we honor those who've died for our country. After my husband attended a ceremony at Arlington--our national cemetery, the newspapers carried a picture of him wiping a tear from his eye. That tear was an entire nation's tear really, one that all Americans felt.

For it was a tear of gratitude, respect, and, yes, regret that young men have had to give their lives to protect the values we hold dear.

--If my husband were here today, he would tell you how deeply he feels the responsibilities of peace and freedom. He would tell you how we can best ensure that other young men on other beaches and other fields will not have to die. And I think he would tell you of his ideas for nuclear peace. Certainly he would speak of Normandy's message to all who love liberty.

--Thirty eight years ago today, General Eisenhower also had a message, a message to the soldiers who were about to come ashore. He said to them, "The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you." Well, to the boys who rest beneath the crosses and stars on this peaceful cliff, those words still hold true. To the gallant young men who have their lives here, let me say the eyes of the world are still upon you. And the hopes and prayers and hearts of liberty-loving people are with you now and forever.