



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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President Commemorates 60th Anniversary of V-J Day

Naval Air Station North Island
San Diego, California

 [In Focus: Veterans](#)

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Thanks for the warm welcome. It's good to be back in California. Good to be here at North Island. This is the birthplace of naval aviation, and I want to thank you for making this son of a naval aviator feel right at home. (Applause.)

This morning our hearts and prayers are with our fellow citizens along the Gulf Coast who have suffered so much from Hurricane Katrina. These are trying times for the people of these communities. We know that many are anxious to return to their homes. It's not possible at this moment. Right now our priority is on saving lives, and we are still in the midst of search and rescue operations. I urge everyone in the affected areas to continue to follow instructions from state and local authorities.



The federal, state and local governments are working side-by-side to do all we can to help people get back on their feet, and we have got a lot of work to do. Our teams and equipment are in place and we're beginning to move in the help that people need. Americans who wish to help can call 1-800-HELPNOW, or log on to RedCross.org, or get in touch with the Salvation Army. The good folks in Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama and other affected areas are going to need the help and compassion and prayers of our fellow citizens.

As we deliver relief to our citizens to the south, our troops are defending all our citizens from threats abroad. In the war on terror, all of you gathered here today are playing a critical role. Our naval aviators are displaying their fantastic skill in bringing justice to our enemies. Our sailors on Navy ships are patrolling the high seas. You're maintaining those ships and keeping them ready for battle. You're serving on special operations teams that are hunting the Taliban and al Qaeda fighters in the mountains of Afghanistan. And our Marine units are bringing the terrorists to justice in Iraq.

However you are serving, each of you is defending our nation and bringing honor to the uniform, and

your Commander-in-Chief, and your country is proud of your service. (Applause.)

I'm also proud to stand with those whose achievements we commemorate today, the military veterans of World War II. (Applause.) In war, America called you from your farms and your schools and your factories to defeat two of the most ruthless armies the world has known. In victory, America counted on you to extend a helping hand, to lift up a defeated foe. And in a lasting peace that has been your greatest legacy, America confirmed the power of freedom to transform the bitterest of enemies into the closest of friends.

Your victory came at great cost. And many of the heroes who fought by your side would not live to make the return journey home. More than 400,000 Americans gave their lives in that war, and some of them are buried a few miles from here at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. At a funeral sermon delivered after a battle that had taken the lives of thousands of Americans, a rabbi said, "Out of this, and from this suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this, will come, we promise, the birth of a new freedom for the sons of men everywhere."

Today, your hair is whitened. Your steps have slowed. Yet you have seen in your lifetime the rabbi's promise come true. The freedom that was born of your sacrifice has lifted millions of God's children across the Earth. This freedom is your monument to your fallen friends, your gift to their children and grandchildren, and your sacred bond with generations of patriots past and present who have worn the nation's uniform.

As we look into your faces, we see the same quiet resolve that defeated our enemies. And we count it a privilege to be the citizens of the country that you served. We pray that your comrades you have lost found peace with their Creator, and we honor your sacrifice by recommitting ourselves to the great ideals for which you fought and bled.

I'm honored today to be traveling with the First Lady of the United States, Laura Bush. (Applause.) I want to thank Admiral Zortman, the Commander of the Naval Air Force U.S. Pacific Fleet, for his introduction. And thank you for your service, Admiral.

I'm proud to be here today with a man who is doing an excellent job for the United States military, the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. (Applause.) On V-J Day in 1945, Secretary Rumsfeld was selling newspapers at the Coronado Ferry, Coronado, California. He went on to be a Navy pilot. And today, he's a trusted advisor in my Cabinet. Mr. Secretary, proud to have you here. (Applause.)



I want to thank the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Duncan Hunter. Congressman Hunter is with us today. (Applause.) Congressman Duncan Hunter is, today, here with his dad, Robert Hunter, who served in World War II. And he has a son who is a proud Marine in Iraq. (Applause.)

I want to thank Secretary Tom Johnson of the California Department of Veteran Affairs. I want to thank Mayor Tom Smisek and his wife, Peggy. He's the mayor of Coronado. I appreciate you, Mr. Mayor. I want to thank Vice Admiral Barry Costello, Rear Admiral Mike Miller, Read Admiral Len Hering, Captain Tim Alexander. I want to thank Command Master Chief Mick Fulton, Chief Petty Officer Swisher. I want to thank all the men and women who wear the uniform for greeting us today. (Applause.)

We're proud to be in the company of Medal of Honor recipients -- Robert Modrzejewski, Jay Vargas, Red Millett, John Finn, John McGinty. Thank you for coming. Thank you for your courage. (Applause.)

Finally, I want to thank Sybil Stockdale, the wife of Admiral James Stockdale, for being with us today. (Applause.)

Sixty years ago this Friday, General Douglas MacArthur accepted the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. With Japan's surrender, the last of our enemies in World War II was defeated, and a World War that began for America in the Pacific came to an end in the Pacific. As we mark this anniversary, we are again a nation at war. Once again, war came to our shores with a surprise attack that killed thousands in cold blood. Once again, we face determined enemies who follow a ruthless ideology that despises everything America stands for. Once again, America and our allies are waging a global campaign with forces deployed on virtually every continent. And once again, we will not rest until victory is America's and our freedom is secure. (Applause.)



In the midst of this struggle, we have confidence in our cause because we know that America has faced down brutal enemies before. We have confidence in our cause because we've seen the power of freedom to overcome the darkness of tyranny and terror. And we have confidence in our cause because we know the character and courage of those who wear the uniform of the United States military. (Applause.)

Fifty years ago we saw that character and that courage in men such as Leon Stone, who was a young Navy sailor aboard the battleship West Virginia, supporting the Marines at Iwo Jima. We saw that courage in men such as Jim Simpson, who was one of those Marines. They didn't know each other,

but they came together to fight for America's security. They came together to join a mighty force that defeated the Japanese empire. Jim Simpson and Leon Stone did finally meet one day when Leon's son and Jim's daughter got married.

And today, their grandson, Captain Randy Stone, carries on a proud family tradition. Captain Stone is a Marine officer now serving in Iraq. He knows that he and his generation are doing the same vital work in this war on terror that his grandparents did in World War II. He also knows how this struggle will end. Randy says, "I know we will win because I see it in the eyes of the Marines every morning. In their eyes is the sparkle of victory." (Applause.)

Captain Stone proudly wears the uniform just as his grandfathers did at Iwo Jima. He's guided by the same convictions they carried into battle. He shares the same willingness to serve a cause greater than himself. Many of you grew up with dads and granddads who have similar stories about their World War II service. They're the modest sons of a peaceful country. And a grateful nation thanks them for their sacrifice that preserved our freedom and our way of life. (Applause.)



The men and women who served in World War II belonged to a generation that kept its faith even when liberty's ultimate triumph was far from clear. When America was attacked at Pearl Harbor, our country was just emerging from a depression. More than half a dozen nations had large armies than we did. In Asia and Europe, country after country had fallen before the disciplined armies of the militaristic regimes. These events led many to conclude that freedom had seen its day, and that the future belonged to the hard men in Berlin and Tokyo.

Franklin Roosevelt refused to accept that democracy was finished. His optimism reflected his belief that the enemy's will to power could not withstand our will to live in freedom. He told the American people that our liberty depended on the success of liberty in other lands. And he called on Americans to defend that liberty, and millions answered the call. Within four years, America would recover from the devastation of Pearl Harbor. Within four years, we would fight and win a world war on two fronts.

Our victory in Asia was a particular triumph for the United States Navy. After Pearl Harbor our Pacific Fleet was nearly destroyed and the enemy appeared invincible. Those were dark days for freedom, but the darkness would not long prevail. From the daring first attack on Japanese soil led by Jimmy Doolittle and launched from the deck of the USS Hornet, to the Battle of Midway, to the flag-raising of Iwo Jima, our troops in the Pacific gave Americans back home reason to believe that President Roosevelt was right, that democracy was the most unconquerable of all forms of human society.

President Roosevelt was guided in victory in World War II by certain timeless principles. First, President Roosevelt believed that free nations could muster the resolve to defend themselves. In his day that belief was sorely tested by a ruthless and determined enemy. Our troops in the Pacific found themselves up against a ferocity they had never before encountered -- kamikaze pilots on suicidal missions, soldiers who fought to the last man, commanders animated by a fanatical belief that their

nation was ordained to rule the Asian continent. This enemy took many lives and left many grieving families. Yet, in the end, they were no match for the forces of the United States and our allies. In the end they were defeated by Americans who only months before had been farmers and bank clerks and factory hands. And in the end, the victorious children of democracy would help their defeated enemies rebuild, and bring the taste of freedom to millions.

One of the first to recognize this truth was a member of Japan's surrender delegation aboard the USS Missouri. He went to the ceremony expecting to hear how the allies intended to take their vengeance on the defeated. Instead he heard General MacArthur speak about a future of freedom for Japan, and he realized the true source of America's military might. He wrote, "We weren't beaten on the battlefield by the dint of superior arms; we were defeated in the spiritual conquest by virtue of a nobler idea." (Applause.) In World War II, wherever our troops raised the flag of victory, they would also sow the seeds of liberty, and as a result, the world is better off. (Applause.)

Secondly, President Roosevelt believed that the call to freedom is universal. Many of our closest allies did not agree with him about this, and the political map of Asia seemed to confirm their skepticism. At the beginning of the war, the Pacific had only two democracies: Australia and New Zealand. Even in nations where the rule was not harsh, the best that most Asian people could expect was benevolent colonialism. The Japanese claimed they were ridding the continent of foreign colonialism. But millions of Chinese and Burmese and other Asian people soon learned that Tokyo had simply replaced Western colonialism with a version that was often more harsh and repressive.

President Roosevelt, and later President Truman, wisely resolved that we would not make that mistake in our treatment of a defeated Japan. They understood that the sacrifices of allied forces would mean nothing unless we used our victory to help the Japanese people transform their nation from tyranny to freedom. There were many doubters. American and Japanese experts claimed that the Japanese weren't ready for democracy.

In a letter to a friend back home, one of our soldiers on the ground offered a different view. Sergeant Richard Leonard's brother had been killed in fighting the Japanese, but after being stationed in Japan and meeting Japanese people, he found he could not hate them. He wrote, "Sure, we've got to occupy their country and watch them. But at the same time, we've got to help them and do everything possible to reconstruct them as a peace-loving nation." Sergeant Leonard was right. And America did just what he thought we should do. And as we look at what he and his generation accomplished in Japan, we know it is a mistake to believe that some people are not fit for equality and freedom our Creator intended for all. (Applause.)

Third, President Roosevelt believed that free nations are peaceful nations that would not threaten America. He knew that it was the lack of democracy in Japan that allowed an unelected group of militarists to take control of the state, threaten our neighbors, attack America, and plunge an entire region into war. And he knew that the best way to bring peace and stability to the region was by bringing freedom to Japan.

Democracy takes different forms in different cultures. Japanese democracy would be different from American democracy. The Japanese constitution would guarantee the universal freedoms that are the

foundation of all genuine democracies, while, at the same time, reflecting the unique traditions and needs of the Japanese people. It allowed for both an electoral democracy and a hereditary monarchy. It set Japan on the path to a free society.

With every step toward freedom, the Japanese economy flourished. With every step toward freedom, the Japanese became a model for others in the region. With every step toward freedom, the Japanese became a valued member of the world community, a force for peace and stability in the region, and a trusted and reliable ally of the United States of America.

I've experienced this transformation in a very personal way. During World War II, my dad was one of the Navy's youngest pilots and was shot down over the Pacific. At the same time, an official named Joonya Koizumi served in Japan's legislative assembly. Today, their sons serve as the elected leaders of two free nations. Prime Minister Koizumi is a respected leader and one of my best friends in the international community. Our two democracies are among the world's closest allies. And all Americans are safer and more secure because the Japanese people are free. (Applause.)

Today we must not forget the lessons of the past, and the lesson of this experience is clear: The most powerful weapon in the arsenal of democracy is the spirit of liberty. In the 20th century, the spirit of liberty worked to spread freedom from Japan and Germany to Eastern Europe and Latin America and Southeast Asia and Africa. And the spirit of liberty is at work today. Across the broader Middle East, we can see freedom's power to transform nations and deliver hope to people who have not known it. In Afghanistan and Iraq and Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories, people have gone to the polls and chosen their leaders in free elections. Their example is inspiring millions across that region to claim their liberty, as well -- and they will have it. (Applause.)

In Iraq, people have come together to write a constitution that guarantees freedom for all Iraqi citizens. The document they have produced protects fundamental human freedoms, including freedom for women, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, and freedom of expression. This constitution is the result of democratic debate and compromise, and the Iraqi citizens can be proud of what they have accomplished. (Applause.)

As freedom advances across a troubled part of the world, it is once again opposed by fanatical adherence of a murderous ideology. And once again, the stakes are high. Now, as then, our enemies have made their fight a test of American credibility and resolve. Now, as then, they are trying to intimidate free people and break our will. And now, as then, they will fail. (Applause.)

They will fail because the terrorists of our century are making the same mistake that the followers of other totalitarian ideologies made in the last century. They believe that democracies are inherently weak and corrupt and can be brought to their knees. They looked at our response after the hostage crisis in Iran, the bombings of the Marine barracks in Lebanon, the first World Trade Center attack, the killing of American soldiers in Somalia, the destruction of two U.S. embassies in Africa, and the attack on the USS Cole. They concluded that free societies lack the courage and character to defend themselves against a determined enemy. Hear the words of Osama bin Laden that explain why he believed he could get away with the attacks of September the 11th, 2001: "We've seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier, who is

ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars... After a few blows they ran in defeat... [They forgot] about being a world leader..." End quote.

After September the 11th, 2001, we've taught the terrorists a very different lesson. America will not run in defeat, and we will not forget our responsibilities. We have brought down two murderous regimes. We're driving terrorists from their sanctuaries. We're putting the terrorists on the run all across the world. (Applause.)

The terrorists and insurgents are now waging a brutal campaign of terror in Iraq. They kill innocent men and women and children in the hopes of intimidating Iraqis. They're trying to scare them away from democracy. They're trying to break the will of the American people. Their goal is to turn Iraq into a failed state like Afghanistan was under the Taliban. If Zarqawi and bin Laden gain control of Iraq, they would create a new training ground for future terrorist attacks; they'd seize oil fields to fund their ambitions; they could recruit more terrorists by claiming an historic victory over the United States and our coalition.

Our goal is clear, as well. We will defeat the terrorists. We'll build a free Iraq that will fight terrorists instead of giving them aid and sanctuary. A free Iraq will offer people throughout the Middle East a hopeful alternative to the hateful ideology being peddled by the terrorists. A free Iraq will show that when America gives its word, America keeps its word.

That choice -- this is the choice we face: Do we return to the pre-September the 11th mind-set of isolation and retreat, or do we continue to take the fight to the enemy and support our allies in the broader Middle East? I've made my decision: We will stay on the offensive. We will stand with the people of Iraq, and we will prevail. (Applause.)

We will prevail because this generation is determined to meet the threats of our time. We will prevail because this generation wants to leave a more hopeful world for our children and grandchildren. We will prevail because the desire to live in freedom is embedded in the soul of every man, woman and child on this Earth. And we will prevail because our freedom is defended by the greatest force for liberation that humankind has ever known, the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. (Applause.)

In this war, some of our best citizens have made the ultimate sacrifice. We mourn the lose of every life. We pray for their loved ones. And we will honor their sacrifice by completing the mission and laying the foundation for peace. (Applause.)

Sixty years ago, American forces made the same type of sacrifice and helped liberate two continents, and made our world a more peaceful place. The men and women of World War II brought honor to the uniform, and to our flag, and to our country. With each passing day their ranks thin, but the peace they built endures. And we will never let the new enemies of a new century destroy with cowardice what these Americans built with courage. (Applause.)

Sixty years after V-J Day, our military veterans can take heart from the example they see right here in San Diego. Those of you who wear the nation's uniform today are every bit as selfless and dedicated

to liberty as the generations that came before. And when we will look at you we know our freedom is in good hands. (Applause.)

It is men and women like you who keep us free. It is the spirit of liberty that keeps you strong, and it is the history that gives us confidence to know that in the vital work of spreading liberty, America, and those of us who love freedom will prevail.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless America. (Applause.)

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