



Bill Hannay's Remarks on Memorial Day 2019

Today we join together, as we always do on this day, to honor the sacrifices that have made our nation free and strong. All across our nation, in big cities and in small towns, Memorial Day ceremonies are being held. Proud veterans are pinning on their medals. Children are laying wreaths. Men and women in uniform everywhere stand a little bit taller today as they salute the Colors.

Here at Evergreen Cemetery, row after row of headstones stand in silent formation to remind us of the high cost of our freedom. Americans are buried here ... Americans whose names are not famous, whose lives were not legend, but whose deeds were the backbone that secured our nation's liberty. Today we honor them. We honor them all as heroes -- those who are buried here and those who are buried all around the nation and the world.

Seventy-five years ago, the world learned just what Americans are capable of when we joined in common cause in World War II. A few days from now ... on June 6, 2019 ... we will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the World War II campaign begun in Normandy on D-Day ... a campaign that freed Europe from the heel of Nazi oppression.

World War II was an era of sacrifice unequalled in our own history. Over 400,000 Americans died in the service of our nation. On D-Day alone, over 5,200 were killed or wounded in Normandy. But the battles that were fought there were not just between two armies; it was ... as clearly as any conflict in all of human history ... a battle between two ways of life ... between good and evil.

Today, too many of our youngest Americans know too little about what the heroes of that war did. The children and grandchildren of that generation have not been taught enough about the meaning of Normandy ... or of Anzio or Guadalcanal or Midway. And that's why the commemorative ceremonies this year are so very important to all of us ... in order to honor, we must remember.

Today, somewhere in America a curious child, rummaging through an attic will stumble upon his grandfather's insignia patches, a pocket guide to France, a metal cricket, a black and white photo of a smiling young man in uniform. But learning about those times and those deeds must be more than accidental.

Fortunately, many of our fellow Americans understand that. Every year the VFW and the American Legion march down the streets of Barrington and lead friends and neighbors to this cemetery to remember those who gave their lives in America's wars.



In the 1950s, dozens of World War II veterans from Barrington swelled the marching ranks and taught their children to remember D-Day and the other World War II battles. Our local VFW Post included four D-Day veterans who survived but are now gone:

John Speck who was a member of the 101st Airborne Division that landed behind Omaha Beach in the predawn hours of D-Day. He was later wounded and captured at the Battle of the Bulge.

Bob Johnson who was in the 4th Infantry Division that landed at Utah Beach on D-Day. He won a Bronze Star for his actions.

Bob Kroc ... who is buried here at Evergreen ... drove one of the landing crafts that ferried soldiers to the beach, brought back the wounded, and then ferried more troops to the beach ... again and again.

Don Johnson served as a bomber pilot in the Army Air Force ... flying repeated sorties over the Normandy area before, during, and after D-Day to attack the German defenses.

And one veteran who is still with us ...

Burnell Wollar who came ashore on Utah Beach on D-Day Plus Two, as part of the successive waves of U.S. Army reinforcements ... with mortar and artillery shells still dropping around them ... seeing the wreckage and carnage still on the beach. He fought through France, crossed the Rhine at Remagen, and fought into Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Burnell, we salute you.

America is as good as it is today because of what people like John and Bob and Don ... and Burnell and their lost comrades gave up 75 years ago. That is the lesson we must all remember, not only for the veterans of World War II, but for all our veterans on Memorial Day, on Veterans Day, and every day.

In the words of poet John Barr from his poem about D-Day, titled "The Hove":

The business of the flag is never done.

It fills in the wind and fails, but never the same

akimbo twice. Each snap a fresh report

from acres of tended lawn

rankled by crosses perfectly plumb.



On this day, we honor those who died for our country. But let us also hold a special place for all of America's veterans who survived. We owe them a lasting debt of gratitude and their well-being must always be the cause of our common concern.

Every one of our veterans -- no matter what war they served in or what battlefield they died on -- every one of them helped to build the nation we love. Let us remember them. Let us pray for their souls and those of their families ... and resolve to carry on the never-finished work of freedom.

Thank you and God bless America.