

60th Anniversary of D-Day

Premier Gordon Campbell

June 6, 2004

Check Against Delivery

There are times when the path of the world is turned by the smallest events – a single idea, a single choice, or the actions of a single person.

And then there are times when our path is turned by the raw courage of thousands. The Allied campaign on D-Day was one of those times.

60 years ago today, a massive wave of men and machines swept onto the beaches of Normandy and turned the tide of human history.

And every moment of freedom, peace and prosperity that we have enjoyed since, we owe to D-Day veterans like those with us here today, and to their comrades who rest forever in the land they liberated.

D-Day was not the end of the war. But when the Allied forces arrived on the coast of France, the long-absent light of freedom followed them ashore. It would be another 11 months before that light would cast all the shadows out of Europe. But, without question, freedom landed there at Normandy 60 years ago today.

And in the vanguard were the 15,000 Canadians that swept onto Juno Beach, most little older than boys, each with a name, a family and a story. They were ordinary Canadians cast into extraordinary circumstances – the pride of their generation and of generations to come – and they fought with uncommon courage, bravery, and valour.

Six decades later, it is hard for us to even imagine what they experienced. But on days like today, you can see the memories of that battle in the eyes of our veterans. Memories that do not fade – tempered by time, but no less vivid and no less real.

You were there. You felt the cold sting of the ocean and the chill hand of fear. You fought and struggled and fell amidst the chaos of battle. You lost friends and brothers, and tasted the bitterness of war.

But look around you here today. Young and old, all of us here today and all across Canada are the living legacy of your sacrifice. Whatever each one of us achieves in our lives, we know it is possible because of your courage.

And so, while only you can truly remember what it was like on Juno Beach, it falls to the rest of us to remember what you achieved that day and in the months after.

It falls to each of us to preserve the ideals of democracy, liberty and humanity that you so selflessly stepped forward to defend.

And it falls to each of us to recognize your courage, to honour your sacrifice, and to uphold the peace for which you offered up your lives.

We are the heirs to your legacy of valour – a legacy we embrace with equal measures of humility, gratitude and pride.

That is why the Province has proudly proclaimed today, June 6, to be Juno Beach Day in B.C. – because 60 years ago Canadian soldiers stepped into the cold water at Juno Beach in defence of freedom and in pursuit of peace, and they triumphed.

Today, there are no words that can adequately convey the depth of our enduring gratitude.

But to those of you who came back to us, on behalf of all British Columbians I simply say: thank you, thank you, thank you.

And I renew our pledge to you, and to the memory of those who did not return: we shall never forget.