

RONALD REAGAN INSTITUTE

The Boys of Pointe du Hoc *Senator Tom Cotton*

Introduction

When describing major military undertakings, writers often emphasize their immensity. Shakespeare in *Henry V*, for example, invites his audience to imagine the king’s massive fleet embarking on its invasion of Normandy in 1415. “You stand upon the rivage and behold,” the chorus intones, “A city on the inconstant billows dancing, / For so appears this fleet majestic.”¹

Nearly 600 years later, the British military historian John Keegan described what he beheld as a 10-year-old schoolboy on June 5, 1944, when the night sky pulsed with the noise of prop engines.

Its first tremors had taken my parents into the garden, and as the roar grew I followed and stood between them to gaze awestruck at the constellation of red, green and yellow lights, which rode across the heavens and streamed southward across the sea. It seemed as if every aircraft in the world was in flight, as wave followed wave without intermission . . . [W]e remained transfixed and wordless on the spot where we stood, gripped by a wild surmise of what power, majesty, and menace the great migratory flight could portend.²

Keegan did not know at the time that he was witnessing the Allies’ “great adventure” in Europe, as his nation’s General Bernard Montgomery called it. Somewhat more memorably, General

¹ Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*. Act 3, Prologue. <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/henryv/henryv.3.0.html>

² Quoted in Gilbert, Martin. *D-Day*. 2004. Pg. 126.

Dwight Eisenhower dubbed it the “Great Crusade.” Operation Overlord had begun, and with it the fight to liberate Europe from Nazi tyranny.

Both Keegan and Shakespeare stressed the massive scale of these cross-Channel invasions. But another perspective is that of the soldier on the ground, huddled against the English weather, wondering when his unit will embark and what awaits him on French soil.

That is how Ronald Reagan chose to commemorate the Allied invasion of Normandy on its 40th anniversary in a speech atop the imposing cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. There, Reagan told the story of 225 soldiers of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. Sixty-two of the survivors were in the audience for the speech.³ These “boys of Pointe du Hoc,” as Reagan called them, embodied the courage of the 100,000-strong invasion force that day. As he did so often and to such success, Reagan told the story of the young Rangers who climbed, fought, and bled for a just cause, rather than dwelling on the sweeping but impersonal plans, logistics, and strategy behind D-Day. Their stories of valor resonated deeply in America’s heart in a way no statistic could.

Today, as it was on June 6, 1984, Reagan’s speech is accepted as among the greatest from one of the greatest orators to serve as president. But why was it great, and what can we learn from it?

Like explaining a joke, it can be hard to put our finger on why a speech is great. Still, comparing Reagan’s address to other great speeches produces some important insights about their power. Like other great orators, Reagan extolled the sacrifice and courage of the Allied soldiers to motivate people for the challenges of the present. He had to remind his audience back home and in Europe how the Allies held together that day to deal a crushing blow to Nazi Germany, so they would hold together once again to defeat the Soviet Union. Further, Reagan’s Normandy speech fixed our national memory of World War II in the triumph of American arms in Europe, rather than the tragedy of Pearl Harbor. This national understanding about America’s victory in World War II and the mid-century greatness that followed is a powerful source of our national

³ Brinkley, Douglas. *The Boys of Pointe du Hoc: Ronald Reagan, D-Day, and the U.S. Army Second Ranger Battalion*. 2006.

identity and solidarity. It shaped a whole generation's conception of our country, our cause, and our destiny in the world.

Normandy & Pointe Du Hoc

The significance of the Normandy invasion needs little explanation today, thanks in no small part to President Reagan and the many tributes that his speech inspired, such as the masterful *Saving Private Ryan*. "Here in Normandy," as Reagan said, "the rescue began."

The invasion's success resulted from a monumental effort to train, supply, and ship 100,000 Allied soldiers on D-Day alone. By D+4, 325,000 Allied soldiers were ashore and thousands of Allied planes swarmed above France.⁴

The amphibious invasion benefitted from an equally impressive campaign of aerial and naval bombardment, sabotage, and strategic deception. These efforts proved vital. As the historian Martin Gilbert noted, Allied bombers cut every bridge across the Seine by D-Day, seriously complicating Nazi efforts to reinforce their beleaguered coastal divisions.⁵ Meanwhile, the Allies' attempt to deceive Hitler about the true location of the invasion proved successful beyond all hopes; days after the initial invasion, as the Allies were constructing artificial harbors off the beaches of Normandy to support the influx of troops and supplies onto the continent, the German high command was still warning its divisions in Calais and Scandinavia to wait for the real invasion elsewhere.

D-Day was such a massive operation that one is tempted to downplay the contribution of the individual soldier on the beach and his initiative and valor. "Dash and doggedness alone no longer make a soldier," General Erwin Rommel once wrote, lamenting the Anglo-American forces' technologically advanced armies.⁶

⁴ Gilbert. 174.

⁵ Ibid. 99.

⁶ Ibid. 92.

The Desert Fox notwithstanding, no amount of technological superiority can plug a deficit of boldness, audacity, and courage—all on rich display during the Normandy invasion. Reagan recalled the British bagpiper Bill Millin, who led reinforcements to embattled soldiers on Sword beach to the tune of “Highland Laddie.” There were the hundreds of sappers who went ashore ahead of the main invasion force to clear the German’s three million mines and beach obstacles. Three in four died on the beaches.⁷ And there was Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who at age 56 was the oldest combatant to come ashore on D-Day.⁸ He arrived with the first wave of American troops on Utah beach, leaping into the tide with his cane held high, like the Roman standard-bearer who was first ashore during Julius Caesar’s cross-Channel invasion of Britain in 55 B.C.⁹ Roosevelt died of a heart attack weeks after the invasion, but earned the Medal of Honor posthumously.

The American raid on Pointe du Hoc was perhaps the most heroic event in a day marked by heroism. It provided dramatic fodder not only for Reagan’s speech but also *The Longest Day*, a Hollywood blockbuster starring John Wayne and Sean Connery.

Visitors to the Pointe rarely fail to comment on its imposing terrain—a sheer white cliff that juts dagger-like into the sea. The German battery atop the Pointe was no less imposing. Pointe du Hoc was a stronghold of Hitler’s Atlantic Wall, a series of fortifications and obstacles built by slave labor to repel an Allied invasion of Europe. Neutralizing Pointe du Hoc was a key American objective in the run-up to the invasion, both because it was the most powerful gun battery in Normandy and because of its critical placement directly between the American landing sites. If the six German guns had roared on D-Day they could have multiplied American casualties on Utah and Omaha beaches.

⁷ Ibid. 132.

⁸ Bruce, K.S. “Teddy Roosevelt Jr.: The Toughest Old Man in World War II.” RealClearLife. <http://www.realclearlife.com/history/teddy-roosevelt-jr-toughest-old-man-wwii/>

⁹ Caesar, Julius. “Caesar’s Commentaries on the Gallic and Civil Wars.” Book IV, Chapter XXV. (“And while our men were hesitating [whether they should advance to the shore], . . . he who carried the eagle of the tenth legion, after supplicating the gods that the matter might turn out favorably to the legion, exclaimed, ‘Leap, fellow soldiers, unless you wish to betray your eagle to the enemy. I, for my part, will perform my duty to the commonwealth and my general.’ When he had said this with a loud voice, he leaped from the ship and proceeded to bear the eagle toward the enemy.”)

In the run-up to D-Day, Allied bombers subjected the German positions to withering assault, dropping 10 tons of ordnance on every acre.¹⁰ This saturation bombing gave the point its other notable feature: A “moonscape” surface that remains visible to this day—and that provided invaluable cover to the American invaders on D-Day. The Allied bombing succeeded in weakening German resistance on the point. Several artillery soldiers deserted their posts, cursing their superiors.¹¹ More important from the Allies’ standpoint, though they did not know it at the time, the six big guns were removed from their casements on the point and moved inland.

The Second Ranger Battalion, led by Commander James Earl Rudder of Texas, was chosen to lead a frontal assault to destroy the guns of Pointe du Hoc—a mission that would require them to climb the point’s sheer face fiercely contested by the Germans on top. A naval intelligence officer offered his grim assessment of their chances of success: “Three old women with brooms could keep the Rangers from climbing that cliff.”¹²

That sailor underestimated Rudder’s Rangers. After months of preparation scaling cliffs in England, the 225 Rangers stormed the point in the early morning of June 6, 1944. The Rangers pressed ahead despite immediate and grave setbacks. The icy waters of the Atlantic claimed two vessels, reducing the assault force from 225 to 180¹³; mortars, grenades, and enfilade fire from machine-guns claimed yet more souls in the landing crafts and on the hard shingle of the beach.

Still the Rangers pressed forward to the cliffs and then upward, straining to climb wet ropes attached to the top of the point by grappling hooks. The Rangers established precarious control of the cliffs after a morning of heavy fighting in the craters and concrete dugouts of the point.

¹⁰ O’Donnell, Patrick. *Dog Company: The Boys of Pointe du Hoc*. Pg. 58.

¹¹ O’Donnell. 59.

¹² Johson, Megan. “Rudder’s Rangers and the Boys of Pointe du Hoc: The U.S. Army Rangers’ Mission in the Early Morning Hours of 6 June 1944.” National Museum of the United States Army. 17 October 2016.

<https://armyhistory.org/rudders-rangers-and-the-boys-of-pointe-du-hoc-the-u-s-army-rangers-mission-in-the-early-morning-hours-of-6-june-1944/>

¹³ Brinkley.

Not long afterward, a two-man scouting party composed of First Sergeant Leonard Lomell and Staff Sergeant Jack Kuhn located the six big guns unattended in a grove. They destroyed the guns with thermite grenades within eyesight of 150 German soldiers massing for a counterattack. At 8:30 a.m., Rudder's Rangers became the first Allied unit to complete its mission. They endured a staggering 70% casualty rate before being relieved.¹⁴

Preparing the Speech

President Reagan's Normandy speech compressed this history into a brisk 400 words, powerfully communicating the stakes ("Jews cried out in the camps ... and the world prayed for its rescue"), the Ranger mission ("to climb these sheer and desolate cliffs and take out the enemy guns"), and the terrible cost it exacted in American lives ("two hundred and twenty-five men came here. After two days of fighting, only 90 could still bear arms"). The language is moving, but the remainder of the speech dwelt not on history, but on the president's three political and strategic objectives for the speech.

First, Reagan wanted to honor the "boys of Pointe du Hoc" and all the Allied soldiers, using their amazing stories to reinforce lessons about patriotism, valor, and preparedness for war. Second, he wanted to link America's righteous struggle against Nazi Germany to the ongoing struggle against the Soviet Union, so that Americans would see the two conflicts not as separate events but as a natural unfolding of America's battle against totalitarianism. Third, Reagan wanted to shore up support for his political agenda and re-election campaign against Democratic candidate Walter Mondale. On all three counts Reagan succeeded.

The speech's incredible setting—"a lonely windswept point on the northern shores of France"—was one of the first things to be decided by Reagan's team. Reagan was the first president to speak at Normandy. President Eisenhower released a characteristically modest statement on the tenth anniversary of the invasion.¹⁵ Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon both

¹⁴ Ibid. 92.

¹⁵ Beschloss, Michael. "Why Ike Wouldn't Celebrate the D-Day Anniversary." New York Times. 19 May 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/20/upshot/why-ike-wouldnt-celebrate-the-d-day-anniversary.html>

considered traveling to Normandy for the 20th and 30th anniversaries, but didn't go through with the trip.

Reagan's Normandy speech was the capstone of a multi-country swing through Ireland, Great Britain, and France. The Irish leg of the journey was essentially political, as admitted by Reagan's chief of staff, James Baker III.¹⁶ The trip gave Reagan an opportunity to publicize his Irish heritage, strengthening his support among the large and proud Irish-American community. He then flew to meet with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher before the Normandy anniversary. On the eve of the ceremony they flew to Normandy together, just as 40 years earlier hundreds of American and British bombers flew side-by-side to pummel the Nazis' coastal defenses.

While the speech is today viewed as a record for the ages—like all great speeches, almost as a thing outside time—the Reagan team also viewed the occasion as an important political opportunity, more so than even the trip to Ireland. “I knew it would be our backdrop for the year,” recalled Reagan's deputy chief of staff, Michael Deaver.¹⁷ Footage from the speech figured prominently at the Republican National Convention in Dallas and in televised campaign ads.

While everyone agreed with the setting of the speech, the content yielded more disputes. Peggy Noonan, the junior speechwriter assigned to write the address, describes wrestling first with herself and then with other members of the Reagan team to produce a memorable draft. She admits the speech's most famous line came to her after reading Roger Kahn's famous book on baseball, *The Boys of Summer*. (“O happy steal,” she later quipped.)¹⁸

Like so many projects in the executive branch, the Normandy speech was caught in a tug of war between the White House, career bureaucrats, and other interested parties. At issue was how much policy the speech would contain and how stern Reagan would be toward the Soviet Union.

¹⁶ Brinkley. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Noonan, Peggy. *What I Saw At the Revolution*. Pg. 87.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=Ff8oVlxKcSoC&q=normandy#v=snippet&q=normandy&f=false>

The State Department, unsurprisingly, wanted Reagan to speak about arms control, and to avoid antagonizing Russia and Germany. But Noonan and Deaver resisted. Noonan summed up her perspective colorfully years later: “This isn't a speech about arms negotiation you jackasses, this is a speech about splendor.”¹⁹

While the two sides clashed over policy, they had a more fundamental dispute about the intended audience for this speech. The State Department—again unsurprisingly—thought the main audience was foreign dignitaries, including the Soviet leaders sniping about Reagan’s trip in *Pravda*.²⁰ The Reaganites, and, more important, the president himself, knew better. They knew the main audience for this address was the American people—the most important audience for every major foreign policy decision of the United States. That audience included Ike’s D-Day veterans, who would hear themselves honored as never before. And it included, Noonan wrote, “kids watching TV at home in the kitchen at breakfast” who may never have learned about D-Day in school.²¹ Those Americans were the proper audience for this speech and any speech a president delivers, as the liberators of Europe and citizens in a self-governing republic.

The Reaganites had the stronger arguments, and the speech reflects Reagan’s skillful handling of these inter-agency conflicts. The State Department got its clause about arms control, but only in the context of Reagan’s belief in peace through strength. Likewise, Reagan honored “the Russian people”—20 million of whom perished in World War II—who fought honorably and who themselves were the first and worst victims of Soviet tyranny. So the Reaganites had thrown “a fish to the bear,” in Noonan’s words, but without compromising the core of the Normandy address, which is a bracing call to arms against the “uninvited, unwanted, unyielding” Soviet invaders in eastern Europe. Ultimately, it was still a speech about splendor.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. 177.

²¹ Ibid. 175.

Reagan as Orator

The Normandy address is triumphant, but not arrogant. Nationalist, but not chauvinist. It captured the healthy patriotism of a mighty nation that looked back on World War II for what it was: a costly but righteous achievement. Reagan was the perfect orator to deliver such a speech, as a man whose demeanor and even speech could have been plucked out of mid-century America. To channel his thinking, Noonan would sit in an armchair and read speeches by FDR, another great orator and Reagan's idol from his days as a union leader.²² There was a rhythm to their speech that flowed triumphantly onward like a victory march, or the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Both FDR and Reagan had mastered the "grammar of the presidency," as Noonan put it.²³

Reagan's speech is part encomium for the living, part eulogy for the dead. It shares notable characteristics with other great speeches of those genres, starting with its sense of place. The ground on which the president stood was no ordinary ground. It was, in Reagan's telling, "where the West held together," watered by the blood of American patriots. This was sacred ground, giving the speech deeper meaning than if Reagan had delivered it from a Rose Garden podium. The great Daniel Webster made this point in his famous address at Bunker Hill, reminding his audience that they stood "among the sepulchres of our fathers. We are on ground, distinguished by their valor, their constancy, and the shedding of their blood." And of course President Abraham Lincoln delivered our nation's famous eulogy on the rocky Pennsylvania soil that serves as the final resting place for thousands of soldiers—Union and Confederate alike.²⁴

The solemn character of eulogies affords the speaker an opportunity to "examine the cause for which they fell," in the words of the great speechwriter, William Safire.²⁵ In Pericles' funeral oration, he extolled not just the excellence of Athens' fallen soldiers but the excellence of Athenian democracy. Pericles described Athens as a shining city on a hill that enlightened the

²² Noonan, Peggy. "Confessions of a White House Speechwriter." *New York Times*. 15 October 1989. <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/15/magazine/confessions-of-a-white-house-speechwriter.html>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Gettysburg Casualties." *History Net*. <https://www.historynet.com/gettysburg-casualties>

²⁵ Safire, William. *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*. Pg. 32.

Greek city-states around it by its example. Athenians, he said, “are happy in a form of government which cannot envy the laws of our neighbors—for it has served as a model for others.” Likewise, Webster, in a line that will sound familiar to students of Reagan, said that “the last hopes of mankind” rest with America’s experiment in self-government. Indeed, he spoke of the American system as so far superior to competing forms of government that in foreign lands “Where men may speak out, they demand it; where the bayonet is at their throats, they pray for it...” And Reagan, in the Normandy address, contrasted America’s democratic system of government—“the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man”—with the tyranny of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Nazis conquered, the Allies liberated, and yet the Soviets “did not leave when peace came.” In that way the Soviets accepted the torch of conquest and occupation from the Nazis, resulting in the Cold War and America’s “long twilight struggle” to win that war, as President John F. Kennedy called it in his inaugural address.²⁶

Great eulogies also invoke the righteousness of their nations’ causes to claim *universal* as well as national esteem for their soldiers. In this manner, great speakers drape the nation, its form of government, and its particular interests in the garments of all mankind. Pericles, speaking long before the abstract universalism of recent times and even before Christianity, stated that Greek soldiers were entitled to “universal remembrance” for their “virtue in action.” Reagan himself noted “the men of Normandy had faith that they were doing what was right, faith they fought for all humanity.” In using those words, Reagan was not implying that American GIs had embarked on some kind of United Nations peacekeeping mission devoid of national interest—to the contrary, America aggressively pursued its interests during World War II, from Lend-Lease through the defeat of Imperial Japan. Instead Reagan was stating, in the tradition of great orators, that his country’s particular cause redounded to the benefit of all the world, because it was just. Given the savagery of German fascism and Japanese militarism, how could any civilized person disagree?

Finally, great eulogies use the sacrifices of the dead to exhort the living about their duty to preserve, and if necessary die for, the nation and its cause. Pericles ended his funeral oration with

²⁶ Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/inaugural-address>

such an exhortation, urging his audience to achieve the “greatness of soul” that Athens’ fallen soldiers exemplified: “As for you, who now survive them ... [it is] your duty also to preserve the same spirit and warmth of courage against your enemies.” Lincoln exhorted his audience in a similar way, stating that “from these honored dead we take increased devotion” to the cause of saving the Union. And Reagan exhorted his audience as well—both those gathered before him, but also the more important audience of millions watching in their living rooms back home. “Here, in this place where the West stood together,” Reagan said, “let us make a vow to our dead. Let us show them by our actions that we understand what they died for.” And what actions were required, exactly? Preparedness for war and coordinated action with our allies to defeat the Soviet Union.

Reagan in this address delivered a strong rebuke to those who urged America to accommodate the Soviets, effectively ceding vast swathes of the world to communist tyranny, even in our own hemisphere. The contested ground in Reagan’s day was Afghanistan, Nicaragua, and eastern Europe. One generation earlier, it had been Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Hitler’s swift subjugation of Europe showed why timid inaction can never guarantee our safety, and only serves to make defeat more likely in the long run. The better strategy is to resist the enemy at every step, pressing so that any confrontation occurs as close to the enemy’s home and as far away from one’s own as possible. “It is better to be here ready to protect the peace than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost,” Reagan said of America’s military presence in western Europe. The Soviet Union, as a crusading communist power, would only creep closer to our shores the more room we surrendered before its path. Which is in fact what history bore out, evidenced by the Soviets’ growing footprint in Latin America during the 1970s.

After the Speech

Perhaps the best testimony to the speech's impact came from William Galston, then the issues director on Walter Mondale's presidential campaign.²⁷ "While the tectonics of the race had been moving steadily in Reagan's direction since the beginning of the year," Galston recalled, "we still had some prospects ... or so I thought until his speech that day." There was dead silence in the Mondale press room as Reagan described the Rangers' dogged climb up Pointe du Hoc. And when the camera pulled back to reveal the 62 "boys" seated around him—some wearing garrison caps and old uniforms—Galston began to tear up, so moved was even this partisan operative by the great president's speech. "This isn't a fair fight," he recalls thinking. "The man I'm working for honorably represents a great American political tradition. The man we're working against represents the memory of America at its best." Michael Barone agrees with Galston's assessment. He says the 1984 election ended on June 6th.²⁸

The full impact of Reagan's Normandy speech would become obvious in the decade or so that followed. The speech led to an outpouring of patriotism and respect for members of the Greatest Generation, who had resisted the spotlight, and who consequently had been neglected by elite journalists and politicians during the countercultural decades of the 1960s and '70s. During this period it was more common to commemorate Pearl Harbor Day than D-Day—a sneak attack on America, rather than the Allies' daring assault on Fortress Europe. Reagan effected a subtle but profound shift in national memory about World War II by emphasizing the triumph at Normandy over the tragedy at Pearl Harbor. Both tragedy and triumph have the potential to bind a nation more closely together, as our nation knows too well from the 9/11 attacks. Both teach the nation lessons. But Reagan knew that in his age the lessons of Normandy needed to be spoken more loudly. America needed heroes.

The historian Douglas Brinkley refers to this outpouring as the "New Patriotism," but I'm not sure how new it was. The old patriotism was there even in the tough times of the '60s and '70s,

²⁷ Galston, William. "How Ronald Reagan Taught Me My Most Unforgettable Political Lesson." Brookings Institution. 6 June 2013. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2013/06/06/how-ronald-reagan-taught-me-my-most-unforgettable-political-lesson/>

²⁸ Brinkley. 11.

residing in the hearts of aging veterans and so many others, including millions of men who volunteered to fight in the Vietnam War. It just took an eloquent spokesman to remind the nation that patriotism is a virtue, not a refuge of scoundrels, and to bring it back to the fore where it belonged.

After Reagan's speech, every newspaper seemed to carry interviews with D-Day veterans, a trend that would continue for years. Celebrities like Tom Hanks emerged as spokesmen for the World War II generation, raising funds for a monument in Washington, D.C., a museum in New Orleans, and starring in *Saving Private Ryan*. Sensing a good thing, three subsequent presidents (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama) traveled to Normandy to deliver their own addresses on D-Day. Each one bears the distinct imprint of the speech that started the trend. "O happy steal."

Conclusion

Words are not enough; action is necessary in the course of human events. But words matter—a lot. As Winston Churchill once said, in a line later paraphrased by Reagan, "When great causes are on the move in the world, stirring all men's souls ... we learn we are spirits, not animals."²⁹ Can there be any doubt that Churchill's dogged radio broadcasts stirred the spirits and steeled the spines of ordinary Britons in 1940, the period of maximum danger from the Nazis? Similarly, can one doubt how Lincoln's speeches helped to midwife a new birth of freedom in America? So too did Reagan's address at Normandy make its mark in the hearts of millions.

In our own day, America faces a crisis of purpose and authority similar to the crisis we faced in the 1960s and '70s. There is declining public trust in all our institutions save the military—and who can blame the doubters? It is hard to point to an unambiguous victory, here or abroad, in the last few decades. Americans watch with trepidation as rising powers build vast cities, military bases, and trading networks. Meanwhile the barest infrastructure project seems beyond our

²⁹ Churchill, Winston. Radio Broadcast to America. 16 June 1941.

<https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1941-1945-war-leader/the-birth-throes-of-a-sublime-resolve-the-old-lion/>

power. We struggle to adequately fund and supply our military, or deliver basic services to American seniors, veterans, and the needy. More troubling, growing numbers express doubt about America's role in the world—and not because they doubt the common soldier but because they doubt the political leaders who send, or refuse to send, him to war.

Ronald Reagan spoke persuasively to these concerns 35 years ago. He reminded the people that the alternative to American military and industrial strength is a world ruled not by benign but savage powers. He reminded the people that their ancestors were heroes who fought for a just cause, and that subsequent generations were called to follow in their footsteps. He reminded them that the answer to bad leaders is better leaders, and that the best leaders can be found among the ordinary people, from whose ranks Reagan himself rose to celebrity and then high office. Overcoming the self-doubt that prevails in the capital today will require similar reminders from capable leaders. Like Ronald Reagan before them, these leaders must appeal to the greatness in America's history and the "old patriotism" that smolders in Americans' hearts, waiting to be rekindled.