

Routine Proceedings

The efforts of 50 years ago set the foundation for peace and unity in Europe and the democracy that we experience in our country today.

[Translation]

Our way of life, our prosperity, our pride in being Canadian, our being ranked first among all countries in the world, our individual and collective freedom, our sense of international community were built on the determination of all those soldiers who had to land in the icy waters of the English Channel on June 6, 1944. Thanks to them, the Gaudreaults, the Baldwins and the Clancys, thanks to them, we have made tremendous strides in the past fifty years and forged solid ties of friendship with other peoples.

[English]

The great danger is the belief it could never happen again. The sad reality is that today in many places throughout the world forces of great evil are in control and are continuing to slaughter innocent people. Hundreds of millions of human beings on our earth remain deprived of the most basic human rights.

[Translation]

Hundreds of millions of human beings in this world are deprived of the most basic human rights. Hundreds of millions of our brothers and sisters live under tyrannical and murderous regimes.

[English]

The vigil for peace must be constant. We pay true honour to our heroes only if we use the lessons of the past to guide us into the future. We pay true honour to our heroes only if we understand that liberty and freedom can never be taken for granted.

We pause today for a few moments of reflection out of respect, but our obligations remain for a lifetime. Our duty is to pass on to coming generations the principles for which our armed forces fought on D-Day.

Throughout Canada today children prepare for their summer vacations and their trips to the beach without a care because 50 years ago soldiers, barely older than children, put their lives on the line on the beaches of Normandy. People gave up their youth to safeguard the future of young people.

We say prayers for those who lost their lives and we offer thanks to those who survived. However, we remember that the soldiers at Normandy did not fight just so that we could say a few words of thanks. They fought to give us a chance to build a better world. Our true thanks can only come through our actions in offering future generations the same opportunities that they gave to us.

We can best pay tribute for the sacrifices made 50 years ago if we keep faith with the ideals that inspired those sacrifices.

[Translation]

Sometimes democracy hurts.

[English]

Sometimes democracy and free speech hurt. Sometimes they hurt people who are concerned about the future of their country, but the reality is that what Normandy gave us 50 years ago is the opportunity to stand in this place and fight for the survival of our country or for its breakup. The reality of what those soldiers did on D-Day was to bring to Canada a real sense of liberation that says: "Whatever your views, whatever your opinions, whatever your agenda, we welcome them" because that is the democracy for which they fought.

• (1510)

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the ceremonies taking place here today and elsewhere are an expression of the gratitude we feel as well as an opportunity for us to reflect on the meaning of June 6, 1944, and on the lessons to be learned from that fateful day on which the largest military operation of all time unfolded.

The word gratitude does not begin to convey the full measure of the debt we owe to the 5,000 Canadians of all origins and to the tens of thousands of allied soldiers who selflessly made the supreme sacrifice during the battle of Normandy.

Words can never express the debt we owe to those lying silently in the cemeteries dotting the coast along the landing beaches, their graves marked by white crosses and bearing inscriptions which tell the tale of 20-year-old boys who died in the name of democracy and freedom.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to their fellow soldiers who survived the fury of battle. They returned home to their families carrying with them the memory of their fallen comrades. How can we not think of the mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, widows and betrothed, and orphaned sons and daughters left to grieve for those buried on foreign soil? Their pain, sacrifices and selfless actions were made greater by the reasons that inspired them. On this day, we must also remember the nurses who worked in the hospitals on the front, as well as all those who toiled in the factories and plants.

The importance of the Allied landings in Normandy cannot be overstated. The invasion marked the beginning of the final assault by the Allied forces on Berlin. Forced to defend itself on two fronts, Hitler's army surrendered less than one year later, shortly after our troops linked up with Soviet divisions.

The success of the landing in France clearly demonstrated the combined industrial might of the United States, Great Britain and Canada. Above all, it was an expression of democratic solidarity. Hearts and minds were mobilized in the quest to