



World War II Remembrance Week, 1989

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Fifty years ago, on September 1, 1939, the proud nation of Poland was invaded by forces from Nazi Germany, marking the end of its independence and the beginning of World War II. Poland suffered a second devastating blow 16 days later, when Soviet forces invaded from the East. In a secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed the previous month, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had plotted the conquest and partition of Poland and the Baltic States.

While many of the events that took place during the fateful month of September 1939 and the 6 turbulent years that followed might seem remote today, it is our duty—to future generations and to those who bravely defended the cause of freedom—to remember them. By recalling these events, we remind ourselves that real and lasting peace can be won only when the rights and dignity of all human beings are cherished and protected.

During World War II, the United States and its allies were engaged in nothing less than a life-and-death struggle for the fate of millions of people. Totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan—intent on regional hegemony and even world domination—posed a threat to all free and sovereign nations. The imperialist aims and racist policies of the government of Nazi Germany and some of its allies resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent men, women, and children—including six million Jews. By the end of the 6-year-long war, more than 15 million combatants and 24 million noncombatants had been killed. Many of these casualties occurred among the people of the U.S.S.R., whose sacrifices were instrumental in securing the Allied victory. The enormous costs of this fight against tyranny can never be forgotten.

Today, the principles that motivated the Western Allies during World War II continue to demonstrate their undeniable appeal. The history of the Federal Republic of Germany is now a moving testament to the power of democratic ideas, the wisdom of West Germany's post-war leaders, and the talent and resilience of the German people. Today the Federal Republic is among America's closest allies, and a champion of human rights, democracy, and freedom.

The people of Eastern Europe have continued to struggle for freedom and their right to self-determination. With courage and persistence the Polish and Hungarian people have begun a democratic transition in their countries.

The United States welcomes positive changes in Poland and Hungary—and in the Soviet Union itself. Nevertheless, we realize that the goals fought for during World War II have not been fully won. We stand with those peoples who continue to struggle for representative government and complete and lasting guarantees of their God-given rights. We look to a Europe whole and free.

Today, as we recall the grave events of September 1, 1939, and the years of bitter conflict that followed, let us pause to salute our Nation's veterans, the hundreds of thousands of Americans who gave their lives, and the millions of civilians who rallied to support the cause of freedom. Their courage and selflessness—reflected day after day in acts of great personal sacrifice—led the way to victory. Let us also rededicate ourselves to promoting freedom and respect for human rights around the world, for they are the only sure foundation for lasting peace.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the Congress, by House Joint Resolution 221, has designated the week beginning September 1, 1989, as "World War II Remembrance Week" and has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of this occasion.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE BUSH, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate the week beginning September 1, 1989, as World War II Remembrance Week. I ask all Americans to join in remembering and reflecting upon this conflict, which changed forever the history of mankind. I also call upon government officials and private organizations to observe this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of August, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and fourteenth.

George Bush