

70th Anniversary of End of World War II
Proclamation Signing
September 1, 2015 – 2:00 PM
North Dakota Heritage Center – Missouri River Events Center

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here today as we honor North Dakota's heroes who served in World War II - heroes who represented our nation's Greatest Generation - a generation that quite literally saved the world.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, a war that directly involved more than 100 million people from over 30 countries, and resulted in an estimated 50 to 85 million fatalities, making it the deadliest conflict in human history.

The stakes were extremely high as our nation plunged into war, and millions of Americans left their families, their communities and their lives to stop the spread of tyranny and persecution.

Young men and women – some leaving the family farm – some having just graduated from high school – fighting in countries they only read about in textbooks – fighting political conflicts they knew nothing about.

And yet they went - proudly and honorably serving this great country - carrying the fate of mankind on their shoulders.

In June 1944, before the D-day invasion at Normandy, General Dwight D. Eisenhower sent a message to the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force illustrating the gravity of what they were about to do.

He wrote, “You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you...The free men of the world marching together to victory.”

And that is exactly what they did - marched to victory - valiantly preserving freedom, defeating tyranny, and changing the course of history.

North Dakota has a long, rich legacy of patriotism and military service, and the Second World War was no exception. More than 60,000 North Dakota men and women served in the U.S. military

during World War II, contributing to the historic victory of the Allied Forces.

They faced hardship and loss. They endured great obstacles and challenges. They risked their lives at every turn. And yet, they persevered – driven by their love of freedom and country, and guided by their North Dakota ideals and heritage.

Throughout all theaters and campaigns, North Dakota's heroes fought valiantly alongside our Allies and took part in several of the war's most pivotal battles.

A great example is the North Dakota National Guard's 164th Infantry Regiment that became the first U.S. Army unit to offensively engage the enemy when it landed on the shores of Guadalcanal in October 1942 to reinforce the 1st Marines. As a result of their heroism, the unit earned the Navy Presidential Citation and was nicknamed the "164th Marines."

The 164th example is one of many. North Dakotans who engaged the enemy, won the battles, and advanced the Allies' position. Ordinary people performing extraordinary acts. That is who we

honor today and every day – those who did the impossible – heroes by every definition of the word.

So because of the gravity of their sacrifice and the significance of their victory, we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who served in World War II, ensuring that the precious liberties of this great country would be preserved for future generations.

Would all of our World War II veterans here today please stand if you are able or raise your hand if you are not so we can recognize you for your noble service to our state and nation.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the North Dakota heroes who gave their lives for a greater cause. Their service and sacrifice will never be forgotten and their ultimate act of devotion will forever define who we are as Americans and North Dakotans.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill summarized best the extent of gratitude the world owes the Greatest Generation when he said, “Never was so much owed by so many to so few.”

Today, we honor those few – the heroes who faced incredible odds and persevered, ensuring that liberty and justice would prevail for all.

A single generation determined the fate of all mankind.

Truly extraordinary.

Thank you for your service, thank you for your sacrifice, and God bless you for the heroes you are.